



THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 112

SUMMER 1999

Buses, bikes and granite balls!

IN MARCH, Wycombe District Council issued, jointly with Bucks County Council, a 6-page brochure on "*The Wycombe Transport Strategy*". The strategy has changed our lives in High Wycombe, and there is more change on the way. The brochure includes a fascinating table showing what is already in hand, what is planned up to 2003, and what will happen beyond 2003. Besides Park and Ride (which the Society opposes on the grounds that it will not reduce total car mileage), there are more bus priority schemes, "Safer Routes to School", "New information systems to enhance public transport quality" and other changes to help pedestrians and cyclists. This is all very encouraging. Interestingly, it is indirectly a product of the dying days of the previous Government which encouraged local authorities to submit grant applications for "packages" combining road schemes with public transport measures.

But how do local people see this? Positive Parking has rid some of the streets around the town centre of bumper-to-bumper cars and has probably reduced the total amount of car travel and hence congestion and pollution. But it has scarcely been popular. It was very conspicuous that when councillors (the "old" Council, that is!) considered a Government consultation document in March on proposed powers for local authorities to charge vehicles entering designated zones, and for workplace parking, they were unanimous that next time Wycombe could not be out in front: any measures like this could only be supported on a regional basis so that there is no disadvantage to Wycombe traders over their neighbouring counterparts. And could the public's reaction to these developments have played a part in the rout of the Lib-Dem – Labour alliance in the town? Never mind that it's the County not the District that is formally responsible for most of this - "They were all in it together, weren't they?"

In fact, there have been real achievements. Between 1995 and 1998, bus usage went *up* by over 30%. Judging by the number of people in the High Street at weekends, pedestrianisation looks to have been a terrific success for shoppers at least – even if not everyone has been won over by granite balls and the Whirligig! Traffic monitoring shows that traffic growth recently has been surprisingly modest.

But the way ahead will not be easy. The Western Sector will remove 400 parking places from the town centre, while adding a huge number of retail outlets. If Park and Ride and other developments to help people come to Wycombe without their cars *don't* succeed, things just won't add up! In that case, traders will suffer, residents will be forced to use public transport whether they like it or not or to shop elsewhere, and our Councillors will start looking for a way out. There will still be a job for our Society!

Chris Woodman



...caring about our town: past, present
and future

Registered Charity No. 257897

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Annual General Meeting 1999

THE 1999 AGM on 13 April was John Gore's last as Hon. Secretary, and was marked by a presentation of gardening implements to John for even greater sustainability and a splendid bouquet to his ever-supportive wife Joan (see below). His successor as Hon. Secretary is Frances Presland (see p.4).

The Hon. Secretary's Report

In his final report, John Gore noted that over the year membership had fallen to 341 members (391 last year) and 23 affiliated organisations (29). (*A new membership drive is now being planned. – Ed.*) Highlights of the year from the work of the Groups were:

- Planning: the Society's input to the Western Sector Development proposals and the Local Plan 1991-2011.
- Heritage: the Group's exhibition in the Central Library in July 1998 entitled "Your Town".
- Pann Mill: continuing progress on restoration to lead to milling in 2000.
- Transport: the Group's advocacy of the HBL light railway and opposition to the Council's Park & Ride plans.
- Rye Protection: the campaign to ensure the proposed cricket pitch for juniors on Holywell Mead does not run counter to the principle of free access for all.
- Membership and Publicity: the 30th birthday party in June 1998, and many other events.

All the activities of the society have been chronicled in the Newsletter. John Gore thanked all those who have contributed.

The Hon. Treasurer's Report

Nick Giles reported that the Society had £3,103, £230 less than a year earlier. This was partly due to the lower membership, but in addition the Society had subsidised the 30th birthday party by £209 (much of it for special insurance for the marquees), and the party for postmen had cost £144. Donations to other causes totalled £273 (a record) and there was income from two charity stalls, the mayor's coffee morning, and sales of publications. Expenses remained at a realistic level. The small increase in subscriptions would ensure the Society continued on a sound footing for another year.

The Elections

Mr John Mayes remains Honorary Life President and Mrs Kathleen Peatey and Mrs Olive Scruton remain our vice-presidents. The

Executive Committee for the coming year is: Roger Lawson (Chairman), Myra King (Vice Chairman), Frances Presland (Hon. Secretary), Nick Giles (Hon. Treasurer), Pauline Cauvain, Ian Guy, Evelyn Roe, Ron Simms (Minutes Secretary), Gita Szwer, David Turner, Chris Woodman (Newsletter Editor) and Annie Woodward (Membership Secretary)

Subscriptions

The meeting approved the new subscription rates: £5.00 individual, £7.00 family and £2.50 for retirement pensioners. Affiliated organisations pay according to their membership.

John Gore – Hon. Secretary for 11 years – a tribute

Having been asked to pen a suitable and wholly deserved appreciation of John Gore's term of office as Hon. Secretary, I quickly realised that it would be wholly inappropriate to discuss John's splendid contribution to the HW Society entirely in the past tense.

John is still with us, as a committee member and as leader of the Planning Group. The latter operates mainly on an "ad hoc" basis of consultation between John and a small number of our members who investigate planning applications and report back on the facts as declared (and their implications) to John.

We are therefore fortunate, as a Society, that John has agreed to continue as Planning Co-ordinator for one more year. It means that all the experience, and knowledge of planning procedures, that John has acquired over the years has, thankfully, not gone away. It is still available to us. With regard to the main role of Hon. Secretary, that John has so adequately filled, it is sufficient to declare that John has consistently represented the Society's work and interests with a degree of diligence and skill that cannot be faulted in any way. When one considers the similar attributes of our founding Hon. Secretary, Jack Scruton, the conclusion must be that fortune smiled indeed on this Society when John Gore agreed to "take up the baton" from Jack. John has a real gift for quietly analysing any proposal or argument and then succinctly summarising it, allied to a plan of action to deal with those that are clearly against conservation principles, as we

see them. I have to say that I have enormously appreciated John's guidance and support in all aspects of our work as a responsible amenity society. I continue to enjoy his company, as we all do, and I know I shall seek his wise counsels when advisable. Inevitably, when I talk of John, I think too of Joan because she has greatly benefited the High Wycombe Society in her

continuing moral and practical support over the years to John's stewardship.

I know that I speak for all our members when I state that I earnestly hope that they will both be with us as committed members, for man, many years of good health and happiness.

Roger Lawson, Chairman

On 5 May, following the meeting, John Gore wrote to Roger as follows:

Dear Roger,

May I thank you and the Executive Committee, the Vice-Presidents and the Society as a whole for your kind words and gifts on the occasion of my retirement as Honorary Secretary. Joan was delighted with the flower arrangement, which after three weeks is still giving us pleasure. The fork and spade are really too good to use, being of the quality used for ceremonial tree planting, but I have already tried them out and they make a valuable addition to the tool kit.

Many thanks to you as Chairman and to the rest of the EC for all the support I received over the years. I am sure we will all wish to give Frances our best wishes and the same level of support as she takes over. There will be a role for the High Wycombe Society as a local heritage and environmental watchdog for the foreseeable future, so I hope it will go from strength to strength as we all work together.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN GORE

Planning

Local Plan

The Council's Planning, Environment and Transport Committee held a further discussion of the Local Plan on 22 March. Some 6,000 responses had been received, and plans are now underway for a Public Inquiry into the Plan, to begin in the New Year. The Inquiry is expected to run for at least 60 "sitting days" and the Council will appoint two inspectors, not one, to speed up the process. Major developers are expected to be represented by barristers.

Western Sector

Members will be aware that a further round of public consultation on the Western Sector is expected to take place once the compulsory purchase appeals are decided. Council officials have pointed out to us that the plans that have appeared in the Bucks Free Press belong to the developers, MAB, and formed part of their planning application. Following the council elections, it is not yet known what form this further round of public consultation will take.

Information

We are delighted to report that, following enquiries from us, the Council has offered to arrange for the Society to receive, free of charge, copies of all Council papers relating to Council Committees, together with all Press Releases. These will make a huge difference to

the ability of the Executive Committee to systematically monitor what the District Council is doing in our name. We greatly welcome this gesture by the Council. (We were also advised that individual residents can telephone the Council offices to request Council papers.)

Garden Visit – 25 July

Frances and Roger Wilding have been loyal members and good friends of the Society for many years. I was delighted a few weeks ago when Frances telephoned to suggest a garden visit for the Society.

127 Deeds Grove is not just any old garden! The Wildings' patch has been lovingly tended over the years, winning a local award recently, and is open from time to time for invited groups.

Knowing that Roger was a founder member of the WWG (see p.9), I am not expecting to see regiments of gladioli guarding the gnomes. But I may be wrong! I do know that Frances is very accomplished at art and craft work and look forward to being able to buy some of her handiwork.

We hope that as many members as possible will be able to accept this kind invitation and spend a pleasant Sunday afternoon enjoying the fruits of the Wildings' hard work.

Annie Woodward

Meet the Hon. Sec!

FOLLOWING Frances Presland's election as the new Hon. Secretary, we thought we should interview her for the Newsletter. Read on...

CW: Well, let's start with some background. I suspect that you're Wycombe born and bred, is that right?

FP: Yes, that's true.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Hatter's Lane School for Girls, as it was then.

Was it a good school?

It was. We had a very strict headmistress, Mrs Barford, who felt that just because we were a secondary school, we shouldn't behave at least to some degree like young ladies. It didn't always work, but she was a very dedicated headmistress, and although we all called her "Batty Barford", we were very fond of her. I think everybody respected her, and you know, she really did try for us.

Then when I left school I went on to do A levels at evening classes, I joined Searles, the pharmaceutical company and then, once I got my A levels, I went on to college and became a microbiologist. It's mainly been food microbiology but now recently I've changed jobs and I'm in clinical and food areas now, with a company called Oxoid, in Basingstoke.

So, you're a commuter? Quite a long distance commuter really?

Well, it is, but if I go 9 to 5, it's hell on earth, but because I do 8 till 4, it takes about three-quarters of an hour or so, it's no problem.

You're one of the beneficiaries of the Government's road building then, aren't you?

Yes!

And you live fairly near to where you've always lived, do you?

I've been within about a 2 mile radius, yes!

That's very good.

Environmental consciousness, does that go very far back, back to your schooldays?

I think I've always been very concerned. Even when I was a very young child, I would visit the woods and the fields, and I did enjoy nature to a very high degree, and I was always extremely worried at what I saw as the encroachment of houses on areas that I've lived and played on, and I found that a very upsetting experience at times. I also feel that maybe children don't have the freedom that I had when I was a child

and so now maybe they don't quite get the same feel for it as I did because they're simply not in contact with it as much as I was. It's because our lifestyles have changed and because of concerns for safety they don't get out in the woods and fields as I did. I think it must be very difficult to develop the same sort of affection. They're just not able to go out on their own, and wander for hours.

Yes, so that's something we have to encourage in adults even if they haven't enjoyed it as children.

Yes, I think there is still a large environmental awareness with people. I think they do care about their environment to a large extent, but I find it very depressing that people feel they can't do very much about it. I find that when I talk to people, it's "Oh well, they're going to do what they want to do anyway," which I find a very depressing attitude. Because people do listen, provided you've got enough people all saying the same thing.

Yes, I'm convinced that councillors do listen, they have to, because their seats depend on it.

Yes, and this is something that I would like to see, in the High Wycombe Society: not necessarily to push a particular view, but to actually try and make people more informed. There's nothing more depressing to me than somebody who sees something happening and then says to me, "What's going on over there?", and by that time, you know, it's too late.

So we do have a duty to inform?

I feel that that is one of the things we really should concentrate on, to get the message across: "This will happen. If you're for it, that's fine: if you don't like it, there's time to object to it." It's very important that people get that option.

Yes. You haven't actually been a member of the High Wycombe Society for that long, have you? Can you tell us about what made you join and, indeed, how you heard about us?

Primarily it was the issue of the leisure centre on the Rye. That was the thing that actually brought you to my attention, because I'd been firing off letters to various councillors, about how I thought that this was wrong.

Were you doing that completely as a lone citizen, without any support? You'd read about it in the paper, or something like that?

Yes. I think it first came up when they'd had outline planning permission, and I was just horrified by that, and wrote to my councillors.

And then?

It's all a bit hazy actually. I think that somebody mentioned the High Wycombe Society to me, and I went down to the library, found the address, and then wrote to Annie. That's how it all started!

Yes, good. But let's just consider that problem of the Holywell Mead recreation centre. A lot of people felt that it would have offered a lot of people in High Wycombe something that they wanted, which was organised and fit and healthy sport, in the centre of the town, which perhaps we don't have enough of. What is wrong with wanting to build for people who want organised recreation, squash courts, or whatever?

Well, I just feel that with places like Handy Cross – that area is still under-utilised, there's certainly room for those sort of activities there, whereas I feel that people who use the Rye are a different type of people altogether. These people tend to just like – and I feel that this is a concept that I can't ever seem to get over to councillors – they like to walk in a nice, open space, where there doesn't need to be any sort of organisation with it, they just like to wander around, and if you go there on a Sunday afternoon, and see what I mean, I just feel that you have to have facilities for these people. Life is a very stressful business, and if people just want to have a place to have their own thoughts and wander about, then their needs are just as legitimate as anyone that wants to play squash.

There is a problem for Councillors, isn't there? Somehow or other, they know that there'll be some people that hold a view and there'll be some people who hold another view. I don't myself see how they can reach a decision without having a referendum!

Well, there was some initial consultation, and again, I lost faith with them there, because they actually weighted their answers against the people who said, "No," they didn't want it. They took the view that the people who were local to the area were more likely to object to it, so that their actual objections meant less. That, I found most untrustworthy, I thought that was a very wrong thing to do. "If it's not going to give us the answer that we want, we'll bend it till it does!" Luckily it didn't, and we were extremely fortunate in that the Star – the free paper – was very much with us on this issue and gave us a lot of publicity and it was actually stopped through the combination of the two. Because, again, once people were informed about what was going to happen,

then protests started in earnest. I remember going to the meeting where it was going to be discussed, and the public gallery was packed. This is what I mean about people being informed. If the majority of people had wanted a leisure centre on the Rye, then I wouldn't like it, but I would bow to what people want. I don't like it when I feel that these things go ahead because people haven't been informed.

Yes. Which brings us on to the latest saga, the cricket pitch. Is this just a re-run of the arguments, or do you think it's a bit different?

Again, I was a bit concerned that this thing came up in one free paper: the fact that you can't get an agenda that may tell you what is going on until 2 days beforehand, so you've no time to prepare any sort of argument or to get people to write letters, and yet other people say that this is a democratic process. If you've got 2 days in order to organise a protest, how on earth can that be said to be informing the public?

Eventually in this case it became democratic because it did actually go to the full Council, didn't it?

It does have to go to the full council, in any case, but I was told that, really, that is just a rubber stamp, that they cannot actually stop it once it's been approved: all they can do is get them to review it, after a certain period of time.

So what do you think of the outcome?

Well, I think it was a sharp reminder to the Council, that they cannot just go around doing deals with other organisations, on an area of land which, all right, strictly they do own the Holywell Mead but, on the other hand, it's supposed to be a public amenity. To actually say last June, "Well obviously the public don't like it, we won't do it", and then for the same thing to come up with no information coming out, and for them then to turn round and say, "Oh, we've had a letter from the cricket club, we're going to do it," simply because this time there was no-one in the public gallery, which is what in my heart I feel happened, I feel is wrong, because, as I keep saying, these things are fine if people are informed. But if councillors take it amiss just because leaflets have been delivered, telling people what's going to happen, then I feel something is wrong.

• *Concluded in the next issue – Frances' aims for her first year, and her thoughts on Planning and Pedestrianisation.*

Naughty but nice!

NEW MEMBERS: look out for *your* invitation from Ann Simone to the New Members' Cream Tea on Saturday 17 July, where you can meet the Executive Committee and clog your arteries!

The right to change one's mind (by the Community and Leisure Committee!)

IN THE SPRING ISSUE, we published a letter to Councillors from our former Hon. Sec, John Gore, about the proposal to make part of Holywell Mead available for cricket. Since then, we have been piecing together what really happened. We are most grateful to the Council's officers for their assistance. There is also a letter about this matter on page 11 from Frances Alexander, former town mayor, and the issue is referred to in our interview with the new Hon. Sec.

In brief, what seems to have happened is that the CLC changed its mind! There *may* be nothing illegal about that, but it does amount to our representatives taking a second bite of the cherry in less than 12 months and some people might think it represents an unacceptable tilting of the scales in favour of councillors and officialdom and against residents. We wonder how the HW Cricket Club (HWCC) was able to bring about this unusual course of affairs. Furthermore, there was no further consultation of the public in advance of this second consideration. Even with the better arrangements that are now in place for the Society to be kept informed about council business, there would have been little time for us to digest the proposals, let alone campaign locally, before the decisive CLC meeting. In our view this represents poor conduct of local business and we hope it will not be repeated.

The detailed steps were as follows:

- On 8 June 1998 the CLC considered a revised Rye Management Plan (RMP). The supporting papers indicated a weight of views by respondents against any restriction on the public right to roam over the Rye and Holywell Mead and (in one case) against any sports development. The "officer response" said that in summer, giving preference to former sports "throughout the area" would be detrimental but concluded that use of part of the area for summer sports such as cricket should be encouraged as long as this is not detrimental to casual use. After discussion, the CLC approved the RMP subject to "the reference to cricket being deleted from the management plan."
- In July 1998, HWCC wrote to the Council asking the CLC to reconsider its decision, particularly with regard to youth games.
- On 25 January the CLC approved a fresh proposal from council officials that provision be made for use of part of Holywell Mead for playing cricket, such use being restricted to youth teams. The only cost was increased mowing frequency which would

be paid for out of income from bookings. Our publication, "The Rye, Our Priceless Possession", referring to cricket on the Rye in the 18th century, was cited. The official paper reminded the Committee clearly of the 1998 decision, and emphasised that any facility provided must not be for the exclusive use of a particular club.

- In February John Gore wrote to Councillors and Frances Presland dropped leaflets.
- On 2 March Cllr Preston, then Chairman of the CLC, wrote to the *Bucks Free Press* emphasising that the cricket square would not be enclosed and would be available for other young teams.
- On 25 March the Council decided to let the CLC's decision stand and in early April we issued our Spring Newsletter.
- On 12 April, Cllr Preston replied to a series of questions from Cllr Mrs Peatey who had asked what had changed since June 1998 to cause the matter to be brought forward again and agreed, what further public consultation there had been, what assurance had been given that there would be no restriction on informal usage, whether other clubs had been told of the possibility of using the new cricket square, and what progress had been made on the issue of "Town Green" status. Cllr Preston referred to the availability of the pitch to all young teams, and that it would not be enclosed. He added there would be no sight screens or covers and there was no intention to provide buildings. But the Council was "entitled to restrict access during hours of play and intended to do so". Town Green status would only serve to duplicate existing statutory protection and would unnecessarily constrain the Council in its management of its land.
- During May, we wrote to Council officials. The correspondence includes the statement by a council officer that "there was actually no change in the Council's position between June 1998 and January 1999. The premise was always to provide a grass cricket wicket that would be available to the public." Some people evidently thought that the deletion of cricket from the RMP in 1998 was not a rejection, but a decision to take no decision at that time! Their answers to our queries as to how (legally or physically) the Council intends to restrict access during the hours of play, and on what the seemingly self-contradictory statement on Town Green status means, need further investigation! ■

Hidden Bucks 2

“supposing him to be the gardener... she had seen the Lord” – John 20: 15, 18.

ANOTHER TOUR of South Bucks took place on April 24th when 12 people in three cars met outside Holy Trinity Church at Bledlow. We first walked down through the Lyde Garden to the lake at the bottom of a ravine, admiring the many plants and shrubs on our way. A gentle climb along the path above the River Lyde led us back to the Church, which was approached between banks covered with daffodils, primroses and cowslips. The main points of interest in the Church were the cup-shaped font, 13th century wall-paintings and the unique lectern with the head of an eagle turned towards the reader.

From here we visited the small All Saints church at Little Kimble, almost alongside the Princes Risborough–Aylesbury road but hidden by a modern building. Here we were especially interested in the excellently restored 14th century wall-paintings including that of St Francis of Assisi feeding the birds in a tree.

After passing Ellesborough Church high on its bank (the local church of many a Prime Minister staying at Chequers) we stopped for much needed refreshment before making our way to The Lee. Here we admired the fine dwellings, old and new, clustered around the green and found a group of “Sarsen Stones”. Then we came to a brick-built church having many interesting features notably the restored 14th century wall-painting of St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child. On an outside wall near the entrance we found traces of two Mass Clocks (sundials telling the times of Mass). The numerals on one of them are missing.

From here to Hampden House at Great Hampden originally the home of Griffith Hampden, John’s grandfather. It is said that when Queen Elizabeth I visited the house she was disappointed that the view from her bedroom was obscured by too many trees. So during the night Griffith ordered his workmen to cut down a wide swathe of trees right down

to Hampden Bottom road. This has now become a beautiful grassy drive, known as “The Queen’s gap”, at the bottom of which are the two original one-roomed lodges known as “The Pepperpots”. The couple living there were said to have taken their candles each evening and gone in their night clothes from one lodge to the other to sleep. The little buildings have been extended and may be seen through the hedgerow just before turning up into the road leading to the House. On making our way home we stopped to look at the stone memorial to John Hampden on which were carved his claims to fame. This stands beside the



The old church at The Lee.

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road to Prestwood.

This has described only a few of the features of a very memorable and happy trip and our thanks are due to the organisers and drivers.

Jessica Clark

Indeed: the organisers were Ann Simone and our resident classicist David Turner (whose wife Anita drew to our attention the prophetic reference in St John’s Gospel to our chance encounter in the wonderful and little-known Lyde Garden). This trip, so close to home, was a real gem. Ann has been persuaded to stage a re-run if there are enough takers – please phone her on 01494 448773 and suggest a date. – Ed.

Heritage Group

The Heritage Group, which represents the Society in the town forum and does much more besides, is always keen for new, active members. Phone Pauline Cauvain on 01494 529224.

More about their work, and an earthy contribution from the town’s archives, in the next issue!

National Mills Day, 9 May

SUNDAY 9TH MAY was set for the launch of our COUNTDOWN TO MILLING at Pann Mill. We have set ourselves the deadline of corn grinding in Millennium Year! After twelve years of preparation, involving one intense morning per fortnight, the restoration project is now in sight of completion. With strict planning we can succeed. I believe we have put Pann Mill "on the map" and left the public in no doubt about the importance of this piece of industrial heritage ... after all, this is the only water wheel that can work on the nine mile stretch of Wye stream which runs from West Wycombe to the Thames at Bourne End. We must remember Jack Scruton MBE who inspired and encouraged us to this end.

The grounds, tended by Margaret Simmons so lovingly over the years, looked absolutely glorious, with masses of simple pretty flowers, bluebells in profusion and a delightful herb garden. Visitors expressed surprise at our little haven so close to the town centre.

Wycombe District Council are to be thanked for organising a display of composting by the Henry Doubleday Institute. Free energy-saving light bulbs were given on completion of a form detailing the features of one's home for the Council's database on housing in the Wycombe District area: thanks to Sally Wright, Bob Stiff and Lesley Stonor. These conservation issues lend themselves to our green philosophy in the Society.

Other interesting features of open day were wood turning by Don Murray, a mill volunteer, and a display of painted ceramics by Gill Thornton.

Visitors took the opportunity to relax in the garden whilst enjoying a cream tea. I am grateful to all the Society members who donated home-made cakes, which are a must with the public. And my milkman donated ten pints of milk to boost our funds - how's that for doorstep deliveries?

A fine marquee was erected to insure against a rainy day. However the day dawned fine and sunny and by 11.00am the site was prepared for a crowd. We had raised the sluices, erected guard mesh around the machinery, oiled

and greased everything that moved, hung up our signs and generally tried to give the mill an "established" look.

Pru Meek took a group on the River Trail around the Wye stream, including Olive Scruton who had driven up from Kent with her sister for the occasion.

Cottage Plants of Ibstone set up a very attractive display, sold lots of plants and gave us a percentage of their profits.

We found the day a real pleasure. Our new signs were noticed and an article in the press had encouraged a few more who had never noticed the existence of a

water wheel hidden in the trees.

And now, dear members, with one more open day before the millennium event I feel almost guilty in asking you for your help and ideas to streamline our presentation. It's later than you think!!!

Myra King

And from the Gardener's perch...

On April 19th I was privileged to represent the High Wycombe Society in general, and Pann Mill in particular, at the WI's "Really Useful Day" in the Town Hall. It was a very good day although I was sorry to miss the talks - John Craven especially - not being able to be in two places at once though I do *try!* Myra asked me to make myself known to the Doubleday representative and to the Wycombe Council recycling

and environmental officers as we hoped they would be at the National Mills Day exhibition at Pann Mill on May 9th. I don't need an excuse to talk to anyone but it was good to have an introduction - that was the high point of the day - and an even greater pleasure to welcome them to Pann Mill. After the torrential rain on Friday and Saturday the river rushed through the culverts like a torrent and spread out over the garden. It was a relief to see a fine day - if a trifle muddy - on Sunday morning. Everybody had worked *very* hard to get the mill ready and I was *very* impressed to see how the machinery purred



TEAS & US



AND THE LADY FROM COTTAGE GDN
PLANTS THAT WAS HIDDEN
TILL MID AFTERNOON

so quietly more so than my sewing machine! But I'll leave the technical details of the progress to the experts and concentrate on the garden side because I am still floating two feet above the ground from all the compliments that came my way.

As you know, I am rather obsessed about composting and still struggling to get mine right. We do have rather a lot of trees on the site and most of them are sycamore which are *very* spiny, from autumn on I knew I would need a lot of household waste to mix with them for a good balance – so I am becoming almost as well known as Oxo Annie etc of the “good old days” as I wend my way down to the Mill with bags and BAGS of waste from so many varied venues. In December, Myra suggested I started a *new* compost bin to give Mr Doubleday an idea of our scope on “the day”. I think even *he* was impressed – “the leaning tower of Pisa” was *his* name for it – he took lots of photos – we could have Christmas cards made of the picture of the compost heap. A good mixture of leaves-weeds-household waste – particularly *tea bags* – think of the hundreds of cups of tea that helped from *that* monumental effort.

I think everyone will agree we had a good turnout and an even better atmosphere. I was overwhelmed how many people said that they had lived in Wycombe for years and passed hundreds of times and never seen the garden there – I hope they will come again and again. Bu the reaction of “Mr Doubleday” and Lesley from the Wycombe Council was the most

amazing. I gather that he travels all over the country promoting the advisability of recycling cans and bottles and paper etc and the composting of garden and household waste and he would like to set up centres at various points to demonstrate the system and if *we* had no objection and *if* he could get the funding he thought that Pann Mill would be an ideal site. Well – if that wasn't enough – would I like to go on a BTCV course to learn all about the principles. I know my methods leave a lot to be desired – primitive is a good description! It should be turned regularly but if I got up on to my huge bin I would most likely turn myself into it. But he has this idea of several rotating bins that would solve *that* problem – I would love to “have a go” and to learn to talk *others* into trying it – his suggestion *crowned* my super day.

Margaret



(And Margaret would particularly like to get in touch with the kind lady who donated some primroses and whom she was too distracted to thank properly on the day! - Ed.)

Wycombe Wildlife Group 10th Anniversary

CONGRATULATIONS to the Wycombe Wildlife Group on its 10th anniversary! It was our own Jack Scruton, founding Hon. Sec. of the High Wycombe Society, who, convinced of the merits of encouraging wildlife in urban areas, was one of those advocating the setting up of what was then called the Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group in 1989. Since then, the group has gone from strength to strength in pursuing its aims of surveying and conserving wildlife habitats. One of its earliest projects was to undertake practical conservation work in the Chairborough Local Nature Reserve to enhance its wildlife, and this earned them the first of Wycombe District Council's 'Your Environment' awards.

I went along to the Group's AGM at Bassetsbury Manor in April as the Society's representative. Guest of Honour was the Town Mayor, Cllr Frances Alexander, who praised the group for its work and cut the anniversary cake. There followed an illustrated talk by Ian Butterfield of the Council's Ranger Service, who reviewed the woodlands and nature reserves in the District, including Keep Hill Wood, Sands Bank and Kings Wood, as well as Castlefield. Much excellent work has been done by the Council in restoring our local woodlands, particularly since the damaging storms of

1987 and 1990. Nature trails have been set up in many of them, and a visit would be well worth while. Informative leaflets are available at Council reception.

To find out more about the WWG, contact the Chairman, Pat Morris, on 01494 529484.

John Gore

Don't forget to visit Frances and Roger Wilding's wildlife garden on 25 July – see page 3 and the Diary.

Transport

The HBL Rail Link

An article by John Gore in the Winter edition of the Newsletter described a meeting held in October 1998 under the auspices of the Wycombe District Council to present the Society's proposal that the former High Wycombe to Bourne End Rail Link (HBL), closed in 1970, should be reinstated as a light tramway. Elsa Woodward of the Society's Transport Group now brings us up to date on this project.

WE HAVE come to believe that flywheel trams (such as the Parry people mover) represent an innovation whose time has come, and one which would be very suitable for reinstating the HBL with an economic, frequent service. On present evidence, no other form of public transport has such low operating costs, generates less CO₂, creates less pollution (of air, land and water) or uses less land. It offers less environmental impact than any other surface public transport in terms of minimal visual intrusion, noise pollution, wild life disturbance and use of quarried resources. Also its capital 'track' costs are much lower than for a guided busway, supertrams or heavy rail.

A report based on last October's meeting was circulated early in 1999. Reinstating disused rail tracks with flywheel tram rails is not very expensive – much cheaper and less conspicuous than a guided busway – but along the HBL three short diversions would require some more costly engineering. Nevertheless the alternative economic and environmental costs of not restoring the environment friendly public transport link could be even greater. The exceptionally low operating costs should mean that a frequent service could provide an operating profit while keeping fares low. A copy of the report was sent to John Reid, when he was Minister for Transport. In reply we received a letter signed by Glenda Jackson (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the DETR) indicating that public sector finance to support the project might be available through a new funding source, the Rail Passenger Partnership, if a suitable business case were prepared by relevant local authorities. The Transport Group is now seeking ways to co-operate in the preparation of that business case.

Elsa Woodward

Speed Limits in the Chilterns

THE CHILTERN SOCIETY is campaigning for lower speed limits on roads in the Chilterns, with

the aim of 'improving safety on all rural roads, as well as to enhance quality of life and ease of communication within villages' and, it could be added, making cycling in the Chilterns safer and more pleasant. Derek Upcott, a Vice-Chairman of the Chiltern Society, has written to the four County councils which cover the Chilterns area (Bucks, Beds, Herts and Oxon) to ask what their current policies are. He has suggested that all local authorities in the Chilterns should adopt:

- a 40mph speed limit on all rural roads designated C and unclassified;
- a maximum 30mph speed limit within all villages and hamlets (exact definition to be agreed);
- a simple, non-expensive road marking system to repeat the limit signs displayed on entry to each village and shown on its name board; and
- a low-cost approach to make it feasible for villages to contribute to implementation costs, if really necessary.

It seems that there is currently a lack of consistency between the four counties' approach, and all counties plead lack of money. The Chiltern Society points out that consistency is needed to prevent confusion among road users, and calls for a co-ordinated plan of action, pending the availability of finance.

The Society would like everyone interested in the quality of life in the Chilterns to join in the campaign and write to their local parish or town council (if they have one – we haven't in High Wycombe town!), District Council and, especially, their county councillors asking them to support a Chilterns-wide plan for safer roads. If you do respond, Derek Upcott would be pleased to receive a copy of your letter, so that he can assess support for the campaign. His address is: Bluff Cottage, Blackthorne Lane, Ballinger, Great Missenden, HP16 9LN.

John Gore

Chilterns Woodland Project

On 13 April On 13 April John Morris, head of the Chilterns Woodland Project, gave a delightfully illustrative and informative talk on this valuable work to an enrapt audience. Evolving from the Chiltern Society Small Woodlands Project, which started in 1983, the current project became a registered charity in 1991. Their main purpose is encouraging owners of the importance of woodland conservation. This takes the form of free advisory visits by request, suggestions on woodland management, advice on regulations,
(continued opposite)

*"In My Opinion..."***Local democracy**

"Dear Chris...

I was pleased to hear you came to a council committee meeting. They are all similar: councillors are ordinary people who care enough to spend hours at meetings to make the decisions that will shape our districts future in many ways.

Then you spoil it by asking 'How much doesn't get openly discussed like this?' Why not ask?

There is to be another consultation about the Western Sector. It would be premature before the result of the compulsory purchase is known, and sensibly, it should be done when a new council has been elected, which will be taking the project forward. No mystery.

The Cricket Pitch documentation was there for all to see - if the press does not pick it up because they don't see it as controversial, it is hardly the fault of the council. There may well be controversial items on every agenda, so it is up to concerned citizens to read every agenda. Or to stand for election next time round.

Perhaps the High Wycombe Society would like to look at its own practice. The executive committee and the individual groups get on and do their own thing without reference to the whole membership. I took exception to a leaflet from a member of the Society that was delivered to my door telling me to write to my local councillor about the cricket pitch. (It won't be so much different from all the football pitches scattered across the Rye and Holywell Mead - and isn't it good for young men to use

Chilterns Woodland Project (cont.)

grants and other sources of help, and suggestions on markets or uses for the timber. Illustrations included the Chiltern Society flagship, Bottom Wood, Radnage, where sympathetic care has coaxed a wide variety of woodland plants and wildlife to flourish, the latter encouraged with nesting boxes in strategic places. Most of the present woodlands, especially beech, were planted early last century, and are reaching the end of their natural life. John stressed the need to replace now, encouraging mixed woodland, to ensure continuity of the rich tree cover for which the Chilterns are renowned. Many questions and warm applause at the end of the talk was clear evidence of the sincere appreciation felt by our members for this good work.

Barbara Rippington

up their energy in such beautiful surroundings for a short time during the week?)

I am a High Wycombe Society member, and I had not been consulted. I had asked to become a member of the Friends of the Rye group, but have not been told about meetings. Would it not be possible to list the meetings of the sub-groups in the newsletter?

Elsa Woodward and her team work hard on transportation issues. Surely, if they are to speak on behalf of the High Wycombe Society, the information should be shared and there should be a vote put to a general meeting to ensure the whole society is behind them.

What is the High Wycombe Society trying to hide? Or is it only councils that get blamed for being secretive?

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Mrs Frances Alexander"

Neighbourhood Schools

At the time of writing, Sands First School, opposite my home, is due to close for good in July.

This homely little red bricked school, with room for around 100 pupils, has been here since 1903, and almost everyone who lives in Sands probably has a connection with the building. My husband and his brother went to school there, as did our children. Our neighbours went there and, round about 1929-30, short-trousered schoolboys would have stood looking through the railings at the builders at work on our house.

Soon, this continuity will be broken. The loss of this school will leave a huge gap in the small community of Sands, and I know that this situation is being played out all over the country, as small schools are closed down and sold, usually for building.

Personally, I think Sands First School would make an excellent adult education centre, but I hear on the grapevine that the building will be demolished and the land used for housing, thus changing our view for ever, though it is not simply the loss of a view that concerns me, but the loss of a way of life for the young children in the community.

I wonder if those in authority who made the decision to close the school have ever given a thought to the impact on the surrounding area. I doubt it.

Denise Lindsay

Notices

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Revd P Bradley of All Saints Church
Mr and Mrs J Gowen of School Close Downley
Mrs E Hoskings of Wingate Ave
Ms L P Howe of Hunters Hill
Miss P E Howlett of Gerald's Rd

1999-2000 Subscriptions

The Membership Secretary is very grateful to those members who have already paid their annual subscriptions. If you are not sure whether you have yet paid, or whether you have paid the right amount, please phone Annie Woodward on 01494 527978.

Thanks, Ron!

Many thanks to Ron Sims who has donated a lapel microphone for use at our meetings. This was first used to great effect at the talk on pub signs on 19 May – report in next issue.

Planning Workshop

"Planning" has always been, to my mind, perhaps the most important part of the Society's commitments. (And a very big part of Wycombe District Council's budget, which shows its importance!) The Society puts forward its views ... but how are those views formulated? ... and who are the people who formulate them?

The Workshop for Society members at the Friends' Meeting House on 23 June will be the occasion to hear from the Planning Group, ask questions, and debate current issues.

If *you* feel this is important, we hope you will come along and participate in this new initiative.

Ann Simone

Many thanks for *all* your contributions, and apologies to those whose work has had to be held over to the next issue for lack of space. Material for the Autumn issue should reach the Editor at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 August**, please.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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| Wednesday 23 June 7.30 for 7.45pm
Friends' Meeting House, 25 London Rd | Planning Matters – a Workshop for Society Members.
We shall make a prompt start at 7.45pm. (See above.) |
| Saturday 10 July 8am–12noon
Little Market House | Charity Market Stall.
Contributions please to Olivia Price on 01494 527042. |
| Sunday 25 July 2.00–5.30pm | Garden visit, 127 Deeds Grove, High Wycombe, home of the Wilding family, Wycombe Wildlife Group. Crafts and refreshments for sale. Donations to the HW Society. (See p.3.) |
| Sunday 5 September 11.00am–5.00pm | Pann Mill Open Day.
Also Wycombe Show, all weekend – Society stall. |
| Thursday 14 October 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre | Community Policing in the Thames Valley. Robert Beckley, Superintendent & Area Commander, Thames Valley Police. |

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| Wednesday 19 January 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre | Mills and Milling through the Ages. Stanley Cauvain, Archaeologist and HW Society member. |
| Tuesday 13 April 7.30 for 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre | Annual General Meeting.
Housing and Green Belt Development. Tony Bosworth, housing campaigner for Friends of the Earth. |
| Wednesday 17 May 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre | Arts Festival talk.
A Social History of the Furniture Industry. James Rattue, Wycombe Local History and Chair Museum. |