



THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

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Sheds

INSIDE THIS edition of the *Newsletter* is a short account of where the vast new Wycombe Marsh development, overseen by Thames Water, now stands. While some people have argued that the Sewage Works should remain undeveloped, the Society as a whole has not taken that view because we believe that, without the housing that this site can accommodate, there would have been overwhelming pressure on the Local Plan Public Inspector to release Green Belt land for development, such as the Gomm Valley and Grange Farm. Government policy says “previously developed land before green fields”, which is right. And, on the whole, while we are very concerned to ensure high quality urban design and adequate protection of the water corridors (a kingfisher habitat), we are encouraged by much of what we see of the plans so far. There is scope here for a handsome “urban suburb” with sustainable transport links to the centre of Wycombe.

However, the whole site is, in our view, compromised by the retail warehousing park that is planned for the Eastern end. The developers appear to have heeded our view, and that of Council officers, that the still elegant approach to Wycombe along London Road should not be defaced by a huge retail park fronting on to the A40. But the fact remains that on current plans, people having entered the new development from the East will be confronted almost immediately by the “open mouth” of a large car park between bulky goods stores.

It would be foolish to oppose retail warehousing as a feature of modern life. They can be pleasant places to visit and are a great improvement on old-fashioned town-centre “gas showrooms”. But it is the location that is sensitive, and it seems to us that Government policy on this has got itself tied in knots. Back in the 1990s, the old Department of the Environment realised that out-of-town shopping was eating the heart out of historic towns (and adding to greenhouse gases), and planning guidance was issued to favour town centre locations for general shops. The difficulty was that only a grudging distinction was drawn between general shops and bulky goods stores. Developers seeking consent for new “sheds” can score points by saying how easy they are to walk to from the town centre or catch a bus to, and the result is that retail warehouses are now springing up in unsuitable locations such as Wycombe’s gasworks site.

We see no easy solution to this, but we encourage our planners to be sensitive to the problem, to reject inappropriate sites for retail warehouses where it is feasible to do so, and to do all they can to mitigate the ugliness of such development in inappropriate locations such as the entrance to the Wycombe Marsh site.

Chris Woodman

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Planning

Planning This Quarter

There has been plenty for the Planning Group to consider this quarter, although most of the pressure has been concentrated towards the latter end of the period with the arrival of the planning application for the massive Wycombe Marsh (Sewage Treatment Works and Paper Mill sites) redevelopment. But first a look at some of the more routine applications.

Former Brunel Railway Station Last quarter we referred to a planning application for change of use of Brunel's original High Wycombe railway station, later called the Goods Shed and now a tyre depot. This was withdrawn, but then a new one was submitted, this time for temporary use for three years as a skateboarding or snooker venue. We again objected, saying that it would be preferable for the building to be used for railway purposes in a major station redevelopment, possibly as a terminus for a Bourne End – High Wycombe light railway. We are pleased to report that the Council has refused this second application.

Housing at Wooburn Green Also with a possible light rail link to Bourne End in mind, we objected to an application to extend the time limit for permission to build houses on the track bed of the former railway. The District Local Plan calls for this route to be protected for possible future public transport use, so it would be short-sighted to allow building on it at this stage.

GMT Garages, Hamilton Road Following the Development Control Committee's refusal of the first application to demolish the garage and build some 30 flats, a second and very similar application was submitted. It differed from the first in that there was a slight increase in amenity space and parking provision. We again objected on the grounds of excessive density (147 dwellings per hectare) and height of up to four storeys in a predominantly two-storey area. Opinion was almost evenly split at the Development Control Committee meeting at the end of May, but finally permission was granted with a majority of just one vote.

Millfield Farm, Four Ashes Over the past few months, local residents have become concerned about work being done at this farm to convert it into an equestrian centre, with new stables and a ménage visible from the Hughenden Valley, and with a significant increase in road traffic. When a retrospective planning application for the work, including intrusive security lighting, was submitted, we decided to join local residents and other amenity societies in objecting.

Adams Park Having failed to convince the Council that all that was needed for the playing of rugby by Wasps RUFC at Adams Park was a certificate of lawfulness, Wycombe Wanderers Football Club submitted a full planning application to allow the playing of both types of football. A special meeting of the Development Control Committee was called to decide this and two more outstanding applications involving Adams Park. Objectors, including ourselves, Sands Residents' Association and other amenity and environmental societies, drew attention to the extra traffic and parking problems that Sands' residents would have to endure with another 18 or so matches per year. The Director of Planning implicitly acknowledged this, but suggested that if the clubs accepted a Green Transport Plan with enforceable targets aimed at significantly reducing the number of car-borne spectators then they should be allowed a two-year trial. We had suggested that there should be a trial before the extra matches were allowed to make sure it worked, but eventually the committee voted to permit the application with one brave councillor voting against.

Bucks County Structure Plan All Bucks' residents should have received a newspaper from the County Council inviting comments on various suggestions on how to meet the Government target of building an extra 6,100 houses in the county by 2016 on top of the 13,500 already planned between 2001 and 2011. We slanted our response towards making the best use of previously developed land, and favoured reduction of growth pressure on the south of the county. We were against any suggestion of building on playing fields and open spaces, and thought we should keep a broad-based local economy. A draft County Structure Plan based on the results of this survey should be available for comment towards the end of this year.

Wycombe Marsh As we go to press, details of Thames Water's planning application for the comprehensive redevelopment of the Wycombe Marsh Sewage Treatment Works and former Paper Mill sites with the transfer of sewage treatment to Little Marlow are coming through. The supporting documents accompanying the application (environmental assessments etc) are some 15cm (6in) thick, so some concentrated study will be needed. Fortunately, an exhibition of the proposals is to be held at Bassetsbury Manor before comments are due. The site occupies an area of approximately 20 hectares (48 acres), and permission is being sought for

up to 450 dwellings, over 11,000 square metres of retail warehousing, up to 10,000 square metres for business, a pub/restaurant and a community hall, together with new roads, road junctions, footpaths and cycleways. Part of the River Wye would be deculverted and an open space provided. This development would certainly help to reduce pressure for housing on green field sites, but what will it do for the already traffic-congested London Road? A High Wycombe-Bourne End light rail link would certainly help here: the former track runs just along the southern boundary of the site. The effect on wildlife is also of great concern.

Phoenix Project Yet another massive project is becoming resurgent! The design brief for the former Western Sector was approved by the Council's cabinet in April as a first step in the redevelopment of what Jack Scruton so presciently called the Western Desert perhaps 20 years ago. Hopefully as well as new retail and leisure facilities (including active leisure), there will be a new public library and a new conveniently-located bus interchange, plus housing. Will we also see our own River Wye brought up from its conduit under the Oxford Road? This would be a worthwhile achievement!

John Gore

...and Updates-Ed.

Thames Water have now published their "Illustrative Master Plan" to support their outline planning application for the Wycombe Marsh site, and have held their exhibition at Bassetsbury Manor (which we were able to advise some of you about by e-mail). Much of the detail is encouraging, but we remain concerned about the clearance on either side of the watercourses, the retail warehousing element and passage for the High Wycombe-Bourne End Ultra-Light Railway which we hope will be built in due course. And we do hope that the many promised trees will include some of a really good size, in keeping with the town's traditional environment.

On *Project Phoenix*, after encouraging early contacts, we have still not managed to arrange a meeting with Stannifer, new owners of the Octagon and selected developers of the Phoenix Project. The District Council are firmly committed to an exhibition and consultation on the proposals fairly soon, and they are "endeavouring to bring forward the project initially by agreeing a way forward with both Tesco and Stannifer." If that is not possible, they will "be bringing forward a different form of development, leaving the current Tesco store in situ."

Annual General Meeting 2002

The Society's 2002 AGM took place at the Reggie Goves Centre on 18 April, and was followed by a talk by Helen Ireland from the Soil Association (*see p.10*).

Frances Presland, Hon. Sec., presented her Annual Report on the Society's work and activities. There were 427 members, slightly more than a year earlier, and 22 affiliated organisations. The Society's groups had been very active during the year. The Planning Group had been occupied with the Local Plan Public Inquiry, the Sainsbury's Redevelopment plan, Project Phoenix (formerly the Western Sector Redevelopment), the Government's Planning Green Paper and the Wycombe Marsh development. The Transport Group had been very active in promoting the case for the proposed High Wycombe to Bourne End light railway, in holding a meeting on the local authorities' Corridor Study, and in boosting awareness locally of the need for Demand Responsive Transport. The Pann Mill Group had had a series of highly successful Open Days. The Membership and Publicity Group had organised the Society's quarterly meetings and other events including the fund-raising Charity Market Stall. The Heritage Group had staged its displays for the national Heritage Open Days and at the Wycombe Show, and the Friends of the Rye

Group had kept a watchful eye on potential threats to our unique open space. Four newsletters had been produced, and a new version of the Society's Water Trail was almost complete.

Nick Giles, Hon. Treasurer, presented Accounts for the year to 28 February. On the General Account, income (mainly from subscriptions, donations, sales of publications and refreshments and the fund-raising events) amounted to £2,202, just exceeding expenditure. On the Pann Mill Account, income (from the Open Days) exceeded expenditure because major restoration items had not fallen within the financial year.

The Society's officers were re-elected. The Presidency remains vacant, and the Vice-Presidents are Mr John Gore, Mrs Myra King, Mrs Kathleen Peatey and Mrs Olive Scruton. Executive Committee members are Roger Lawson (Chairman), Frances Presland (Hon. Sec.), Chris Woodman (Vice-Chairman), Ron Sims (Minutes Secretary), Tony Fooks, Evelyn Roe, David Turner, Robert Turner and Annie Woodward.

Hazlemere and Widmer End win their village green (provisionally!)

Residents of Hazlemere and Widmer End have been thrilled by the outcome of a recent public inquiry. The Inspector, Alun Alesbury, has recommended that three fields at Widmer Farm, Widmer End, should be registered as a village green. Bucks County Council has accepted the recommendation, though the case may still go to appeal.

As reported in our last issue, the inquiry took place last November at Widmer End Village Hall and lasted six days. The resulting 103-page report makes fascinating reading for those who attended the inquiry. After outlining the history of the application, the geographical details and the legal framework, Alesbury summarises the principal issue for decision, which is that the land in question – dubbed ‘Widmer Fields’ by local activists – has been used for ‘lawful sports and pastimes’ for at least twenty years, such use being effectively ignored by the landowner. He continues with a detailed synopsis of the evidence given by all the witnesses, then summarises the arguments used by both proposing and opposing counsels – representing the Grange Action Group (GAG) and Laing Homes respectively – in their opening and final submissions.

The nub of the report lies in the Inspector’s own conclusions. He dismisses as “wholly without merit and wrong” the argument that the whole application was invalid because of some alleged errors made on the original application form. Nor is he persuaded that there is any conflict between the Commons Registration Act 1965, on which the application is based, and the Human Rights Act 1998 which brought European practice into English law. However, he does allow Laing’s contention that the case should be decided on the basis of the law as it was in August 2000, when the application was made, rather than on the amendment that came into force in January 2001 and modified the ‘locality’ requirement. He then addresses two questions that required considerable discussion:

- How does the application square with the 1965 Act’s requirement for a specific ‘locality’? In other words, what ‘village’ would Widmer Fields be the village green of?
- Would any farming that had taken place on the land during the 20-year period affect its eligibility to be registered as a village green?

The three fields straddle the boundary between Widmer End and Hazlemere parishes, and at the inquiry Laing’s QC had argued strongly against GAG’s proposal that one ward from each parish should together be taken as the ‘locality’. GAG’s counsel then suggested the ecclesiastical parish of Hazlemere, which dates

from 1845 and neatly encompasses most of Hazlemere, all of Widmer End and, crucially, Widmer Fields. Having compared the parish boundaries and their changes over the years, the Inspector accepts the ecclesiastical parish as “the best and most appropriate way of identifying the relevant ‘locality’”.

The question of farming had taken up much of the debate at the public inquiry, with little concrete evidence available and many witnesses – including the farmer himself – drawing heavily on their hazy memories of what might have happened several years ago. On the balance of probabilities, the Inspector concludes that 1979 was probably the last year that cattle were kept on Widmer Fields to any significant extent, although they would still occasionally pass through one of the fields up to about 1982. Haymaking began there in 1980 or earlier and continued till the early 1990s. He goes on to state his opinion that “there is nothing inherently incompatible between village green use and either a moderate level of grazing or the cutting of the grass for hay”. In the Inspector’s judgment, the application stands or falls on this point.

Finally, Alesbury concludes that the 20 years’ substantial recreational use of Widmer Fields ‘as of right’ required for registration has indeed been established as a fact, and that the application should be approved. It is, of course, possible – indeed, probable! – that Laing will appeal, but in the meantime people, dogs and the local songbirds are all enjoying the use of this land and have high hopes of being able to continue to do so into the indefinite future.

Ian Guy

Rye Environment Centre – Trustees Needed

The Rye Environment Centre is now under construction. While many remain concerned about this new development on our unique open space, it is important it is a success (an unsuccessful REC could bring new threats). The Trust has been registered as a company limited by guarantee and has applied for charitable status. If you are interested in hearing about the responsibilities of trustees and their role, please phone James Donald on 01494 637877.

Pann Mill Report

"I've lived in High Wycombe all my life and never been inside the mill before. It was wonderful!"

"It was surprising to see how much restoration work had been done. I would never have realised. Driving past in the car, you have to concentrate on the traffic."

WE ARE getting used to the idea that Pann Mill is a continuing success: the best shop window that the Society could have, which attracts attention and goodwill from a wide range of townspeople. But this is not won without a great deal of hard work by very many people – not only all the members of our Pann Mill Group, but also all those people from our Membership and Publicity Group who capitalise on the public's interest in the Mill to run a Bring & Buy stall and sell publications and raffle tickets.

Speaking of our National Mills Day open day on 12 May, Robert Turner, Executive Committee member and leader of the Pann Mill Group, says, "Credit must go to *everyone* who made the day such a success, especially the young ladies selling teas and the even younger ones selling flour, all of whom excelled themselves. Many helpers put in very long hours." (And that's just the Mill Group – there were also umpteen members who manned the sales stalls and the long-suffering stalwarts who organised the goods and the rotas!—Ed.) The takings for the day amounted to £655, which is all needed. Robert has passed us the following notes on the latest work:

New pit wheel teeth

Following sterling work by Owen Rush and John Mumford, the new teeth were finally completed on the weekend before the open day. John's work in profiling the teeth was so good that they meshed first time and no further adjustment was needed. They look particularly impressive in their new coat of linseed oil against the new black-painted iron wheel.

Replacement bearings and motor

Immediately prior to the damage to the pit wheel teeth in May 2001, it was planned to renew badly worn bronze bearings on the horizontal shaft that drives the stone nut. This has now become urgent, and the Executive Committee has approved expenditure of £675 for this work.

The winnower

Following an unsuccessful search for a second-hand unit, the Group now plans to purchase a new electric motor, costing around £100, to complete the restoration of the winnower to operational condition. This will enable the Group to demonstrate the separation of the wheat from the chaff (literally!)

Once the winnower is finished, the Group plans to restore the boulder, a machine for separating the white flour from the bran (Doesn't reading the *Newsletter* expand your vocabulary! – Ed.), and it is possible that both these machines can share the same motor.



Transport

A Vision for Public Transport

Last summer I spent a week in Switzerland, staying with a friend Caterina who lives in Zurich – a city famed for its superb public transport, in a land renowned for such excellence nationwide. Since transport has now moved up the agenda in this country, I thought I would offer Newsletter readers a short report about what good public transport can be like.

For example, one evening we decided to make a trip to the mountains the next day, so Caterina consulted the Internet and soon announced our itinerary. It involved two different rail lines, two different mountain railways, and a lake steamer, plus the excellent Zurich trams to get us to and from the station. What impressed me was her total confidence that all these systems would be there and on time – and they were.

We caught the 13.07 train, which was an international express going to Italy. It took us to Zug – a town surrounded by mountains about 15 miles south of Zurich – where we immediately changed on to a mountain railway, and so up to a 6000 foot summit. We stayed for an hour, enjoying the views and drinking coffee, before descending by a different railway to the side of a large and beautiful lake. There we took a swim and a walk by the lake, before catching a steamer for a half-hour voyage across the lake, to where we picked up a train back to Zurich. A bus met the boat for the short trip to the station – of course!

The ticketing arrangements were equally impressive. Caterina is one of the 25% of the population that buys a 'General ticket'. It costs about £1100 per year, but for that she can travel as much as she likes all over Switzerland, on trains, buses, trams, steamers. Only the mountain railways require a supplement, being privately owned. A second member of a household can get this yearly ticket much more cheaply, and children go free. As a visitor I could also get a ticket that I could use for the whole round trip except the private railways, where I had to pay a supplement.

Before I arrived in Zurich, Caterina had decided to arrange for me to see somebody about transport, so one afternoon we found ourselves in the foyer of a large building, waiting for the 'somebody' to come and fetch us. At this point she mentioned we were going to meet the Deputy Director of Zurich's transport. Help I thought. Whatever had she told them? He was probably expecting a top level transport specialist, so going up in the lift I decided I had better own up quick. I rehearsed a short speech about misunderstandings and apologies for wasting his time, and prepared to make a rapid exit.

When I confessed to not being a transport professional a curious look flitted across his face, but he nobly decided to soldier on in spite of this. The Society's Transport Group had

apparently equipped me to ask some of the right questions, because we left two and a half hours later after an animated discussion. Zurich's high quality public transport is cheap because it is heavily subsidised. Years ago its citizens decided that good public transport would bring business to the city, whereas congestion and pollution would drive it away. Experience has proved them right.

I felt particularly privileged to have been shown the Control Room for Zurich's wonderful trams. The position of every tram is always known. Screens show where they are, and whether a tram is running late or early. Direct communication with the drivers means that small errors are immediately corrected. I asked how long the system had been operating? Since 1971 was the answer. What have we been doing about public transport during that time? A beautiful workshop and rigorous maintenance ensure trams don't break down.

When I left Zurich I travelled by taxi to the station at 8.15.a.m on a weekday morning but I saw no sign of a traffic delay. "Goodness," I exclaimed, "Is this the rush hour?" – but to Caterina it was just the normal thing. At the station we caught a train right into the Airport.

Elsa Woodward

Wycombe's Busway – the Latest

The projected hugely expensive (£5m+) busway from Spring Gardens to the Railway Station continues to sow discord between County and District. On 11 June, angry District Councillors complained that their opposition at a previous Joint Panel meeting was not recorded in the minutes. One Councillor described the busway as "flawed" and "madness" and asserted the Wycombe District Cabinet shared this opinion. There will, however, be further public consultation on the proposals before submission to the DfT, now not until 2003.

The Society's position is that the financial case for the busway cannot be made until there is a proper passenger survey and forecast, and that there are far more worthwhile transport projects (including the ultra-light railway to Bourne End) on which such large sums of money could be spent. There are also alternative routings for buses to the eastern town centre which could be much more cost-effective.

Adams Park and Travel Plans

*"Trouble from spectators is seldom associated with non-league clubs."
– Planning Inspector, 1 March 1988*

IN OUR last issue, we said that Demand Responsive Transport was an idea whose time had come. Little did we realise how quickly it would surface as a significant element of a local planning decision.

When Wycombe Wanderers submitted their batch of planning applications to allow their ground-sharing proposal with Wasps RUFC, it was clear that District Councillors had a tough decision on their hands. The town is proud of its football club, and to turn down a proposal to improve its viability would not be popular with the local electorate. The misuse of the Green Belt and AONB had been decided by the Planning Appeal Inspector (against the wishes of the District Council) in 1988. But since then, the key issue for Sands residents has been traffic and nuisance: they have a hard time on Winter Saturdays from inconsiderate fans, and perhaps also from fans who would like to be considerate but just can't find somewhere better to park.

So, when the District Council's Development Control Committee came to consider WWFC's applications at a tense meeting on 20 May, measures to reduce the impact of private car parking took centre stage. The Club had submitted a detailed "Travel Plan", including paying the cost of traffic wardens to enforce new Traffic Regulation Orders (*will this include towing vehicles away, we wonder!*), a Good Neighbours campaign to encourage thoughtful behaviour by fans, regular meetings with Sands residents, Park & Ride arrangements from Booker or Cressex Island, financial inducements to encourage car-sharing by supporters and staff and a wide range of other incentives to people to come to Adams Park by public transport. Councillors and objectors (including ourselves) were not easily convinced and there were probing questions about forcing the Club to achieve the best that it could, but in the end, the Travel Plan played a central role in deciding Councillors to agree the applications. During the course of the debate, the District Council's Director of Planning offered a series of changes to tighten up the commitment, and one of these was to add an undertaking by the Club to consider the role of Demand Responsive Transport for Adams Park visitors. Some of us shifted awkwardly in our seats at Mr Swanwick's reference to our Society, because we opposed the applications, and remained opposed to them. But DRT is important: if Adams Park is the trigger for its introduction in Wycombe, so be it.

Following the planning decision, the Society's Transport Group has been assisting the chairman of Wycombe's "Centre Link" (a

transport-oriented partnership of Wycombe's local authorities, town centre businesses and transport operators, which complements the longer-established "Cressex Link" for Cressex employers), to arrange a workshop at Adams Park to begin work on *all* the potential applications of DRT that could benefit Wycombe town. While the most pressing applications will be for WWFC (who must make convincing progress with their Travel Plan by 17 August), there is keen interest on the part of Wycombe Hospital, the Wycombe Swan, local retailers and other local employers, as well as BAA (for travel to and from Heathrow). We are confident that a number of local Councillors will attend, and a key participant will be Mobisoft, the pioneer of computer systems for DRT whom we featured in our Spring issue. We do not know what will come out of this, but it sounds like a good start in acquainting Wycombe's decision-makers with what will become an important part of the town's way of life during the 21st century.

NOT THE WYCOMBE SHOW!

There will be no display of classic fire engines.

There will be no funfair.

There will be no motorcycle stunts.

No goats, no rabbits.

No caged birds.

The Chairman of the High Wycombe Society will not parachute into the main arena.

We are as sorry as anyone to learn that there will be no Wycombe Show this year.

However, we *can* offer you a splendid Open Day at Pann Mill on 1st September.

The water wheel will turn.

Corn will be ground.

Flour will be produced.

Restoration will be on view.

Crafts will be demonstrated.

A Guided Water Trail will take place.

Teas and cakes will be available.

Plants and souvenirs will be on sale.

PLEASE SUPPORT US.

BRING YOUR FRIENDS.

ENJOY A DAY OUT ON THE RYE.

Frances Presland
Hon. Secretary

The Rye – Some Personal Memories

THE RYE. Yes, “the Rye”. How many times have I, politely, and with some humour, I hope, corrected those who speak about “going to the Park”. My local grandchildren have always known and used the right name, and my visiting grandchildren know that if they should err, Gran will ask, “What did you call it?” and the right answer will come up.

This preamble is to emphasise the uniqueness of this great stretch of green grass, with the wonderful backdrop of countless trees – a river along one side of it and a man-made dyke along the other. It is hard to speak about the Rye without including Holywell Mead, which is in effect a continuation of the Rye but has its own boundary.

I want to speak about this whole area as I and my family have experienced it since 1953. I first saw it from the top of a bus. I had been to Langley to have a fitting of my wedding dress, and came into High Wycombe to visit my fiancé, George. I remember the impact it had on me, and was overwhelmed by the size of it. I imagined everyone else on board would be reacting like me, but they had all seen it before! I could scarcely wait to ask George about it. “It is the Rye,” he replied. Somehow, that was enough.

Over the years we and our growing family grew to love the place and welcomed any suggestion that we might go there for a walk, or go to the children’s playground. Shall I ever forget the great height of the slide down which they would come? It has long since disappeared to be replaced by a shorter one with suitable safety material underneath it. Less hair-raising for the grown-ups, but not so exciting for the adventurous young.

On Sunday afternoons following “Children’s Church,” we would go as quickly as possible to hear the West Wycombe band playing under the trees at the western end, before going home to tea. It became a tradition to go for a walk on the Rye every Boxing Day. In our memory it nearly always snowed on Boxing Day, which was a great delight to us all, and especially to the family dog, Gyp.

One year we decided to spend a week of our Summer holiday at home, going on days’ outings. I suggested we spend a whole day on

the Rye. So armed with rugs and a large picnic we made our base somewhere in the centre of the green. We played ‘catch’ (we never went anywhere without a tennis ball) and cricket, we read stories, visited the playground, the Dyke and the river, picnicked, and as a grand finale ended the day at the open-air pool. We all felt it had been a great day out.

My introduction to the Rye was when George took me for a walk and when we reached the Mead we saw the end of a “dig”, where the pool now stands. The Roman remains had been uncovered, examined and were being covered over again. We walked further on to see the watercress beds, which looked so healthy; alas they were soon to be lost to us. Things change.

However, what has not changed is people’s enjoyment of the Rye and the Mead. Today people come at all times of the year just to enjoy the freedom and space. There is organised football in Winter, schools’ and other sports in Summer, and many just like sitting on the grass, relaxing.

It is rather sad that the days of factory cricket matches have long ceased. Now most of the cricket one sees is played by Asians. No wonder Pakistan produces great national teams!

Last year, 2001, had so many events on the Rye, that it is difficult to remember them all. To mention a few there was the happy Caribbean Carnival, the wonderful Asian “Mela” festival and the annual Half Marathon. Then of course there were various fairs, the motor show and the annual ‘Wycombe Show’. Two more unusual events were the visit of the superlative Moscow Circus, and the Ladies’ International Lacrosse Competition. Though the latter took place in Wycombe Abbey Grounds, each of the eight competing countries was allotted a prepared area on the Rye and the Mead for daily training. It was fascinating to watch, from our windows. Also enjoyable to see is the daily



parade of dogs and their owners. Such happy creatures when let off the lead! Another joy is the swirling flocks of seagulls which add wonderful movement during the winter months. My last appearance on skates was on the Dyke in the cold winter of 1961/62; I found it quite exhilarating.

George had earlier memories of the Rye which I did not share. He and his brother used to dip into the Dyke to swim, as did many another young person: there was, I believe, an allotted area for this. He also remembered the cows

coming slowly up the High Street by themselves, after a day's grazing on the Rye. Each would find her own stall at milking time.

George very often would rise really early to watch the sunrise; standing with his back to the Dyke he would await that magic moment on a Summer's morning when the burning globe burst above the hills. He loved the Rye so much that he requested that his ashes should be scattered there. What better place could there be?

Elizabeth Rolfe

The Desborough Road I Remember

The reason my family moved to Wycombe in the 1960s was that my Dad bought a shop in Desborough Road, a grocer's and deli named C.W.Green. I recall lettering (possibly tiled) on the shopfront saying something like "Purveyors of Fine Foods"! As we all know, Desborough Road has changed a lot over the past few decades, and everyone will have their own memories of this once vibrant shopping street. I would like to share the memories I have from the '60s and '70s.

Next door to Dad's deli was a sweet shop named Abbott's. On the other side (I think) was a shop named Hickman's, selling (not too sure here!) radios and sheet music. There was a workshop at the back for repairing radios and TVs, run by a man named Les. Also along the road was a butcher (Ted Stevens?), a baker's, a newsagent (Freeman's), a jeweller's and another corner shop grocer's, Collins and Baker.

Going in the other direction I seem to remember a shop selling baby clothes, a ladies' dress shop, a stationer's run by Mr. and Mrs. Watts, and a greengrocer's on the corner, Rockell's. There was also Thatcher's, a well-

known lighting shop. I have a hazy recollection of a row of shops on the opposite side of the road, including a dry cleaner's.

There were many changes taking place in the town at this time, and as many of the old terraced streets and factories disappeared, so did customers. Supermarkets were booming, the Octagon (in its first hideous incarnation) had been built, and most of the small traders began to call it a day. My Dad changed his shop into a china and fancy goods outlet, but this didn't work out, and it was time to move on.

It would be interesting to read about other Society members' recollections of Desborough Road, and I do hope some of you will write in. I am aware that some of the above information may be inaccurate, and I would like to fill the gaps!

I believe that Freeman's Newsagent is the only surviving business from those days. My Dad's old shop has become a purveyor of mobile phones – a real sign of the times!

Denise Lindsay



Desborough Road - 2002

Quarterly meeting

Working with and not against Nature

Following the business of the AGM (p.3), there was a talk by Helen Ireland of the Soil Association.

Helen is Information and Support Services Officer for the Soil Association, and has worked for the concern for three and a half years, during which time the number of staff has grown from 30 to 150. The organisation began in 1946 as, after the Second World War, many farmers, scientists and nutritionists became concerned about the trend towards intensive agriculture, and questions were raised about animal welfare and possible effects on the environment.

The Soil Association at that time was based on a farm in Suffolk, and carried out its research by dividing the farm into three parts: traditional, intensive and a mixture of the two. By the early 1970s, public interest and demand for organic produce took off, and the Certification Scheme was introduced. By the mid 80s, organic products had begun to appear on supermarket shelves and even characters in *The Archers* took up the cause! In the 1990s, the Organic Aid Scheme was set up to help farmers who wanted to convert, a process which takes two years.

The term "organic" is actually defined by law, and food described as organic must conform to certain standards. Farmers must avoid using artificial fertilisers and pesticides, they must rotate their crops and animal health must be carefully managed. For example, animals must not be given antibiotics.

Helen outlined the benefits of organic farming: environmental enhancement (there may be twice as many skylarks on an organic farm), better health for farm animals, and food which contains more vitamins and minerals but no pesticides.

The market for organic food has grown by 33% in the last year, and there are now 3,500 organic farms. All these farms must conform to the regulations before they are given their Soil Association Certificates.

The Organic Movement seems to be going from strength to strength and the Soil Association, currently based in Bristol, plans to open regional offices. Other ideas for the future include an education programme, with farms open to the public, especially children, and publicising the benefits of buying locally produced food.

From a personal point of view, I enjoyed this talk because Helen did not ply us with

gruesome scare stories, so often a feature of this subject in the media!

There were some questions from the floor, and a vote of thanks was offered by Tony Fooks.

Denise Lindsay

Coming up at Wycombe Museum

Museum Revisited

This special exhibition marking the Museum's 70th anniversary runs until 21 July, entrance free. Selecting one object the Museum has acquired since opening, the staff have created a 'Cabinet of Curiosities' including everything from a Babylonian inscription to a uniform worn at RAF Naphill!

Romeo and Juliet

You're spoilt for choice! On 28 July, Heart-break Productions return after their successful debut last year for an evening performance. Tickets are available from *The Swan*. On 24 August, the Swan Youth Theatre give a matinee performance in the grounds. Details from *The Swan*.

Asian Design Event

This will take place during August and September, as part of a Southern Arts project. Watch for further details in the press.

Bird-Spotting

There will be a bird-spotting trail in the grounds, for children and adults, during the summer holidays.

You can phone the Museum direct on 01494 421895.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST, the Museum is seeking more volunteers, both permanent and "as and when needed". Angela Rees comments that it is very interesting work. Phone her on 01628 850522, or contact Grace Wilson at the Museum.

Garden Furniture

If you are replacing your garden furniture this summer, please remember Pann Mill. We would love your cast-offs. Small folding tables and chairs can be recycled to give pleasure to our visitors, sitting under the trees with friends as the water twinkles on the turning wheel.

From the postbag

Well, a sort of postbag! One of the by-products of running a web site is that we get e-mails from people all over the world. We refer most enquirers to the long-suffering Wycombe Museum, but if any readers have information for Mr Payne or Ms Erb, please contact the Editor, or write a letter or e-mail (chriswoodman@onetel.net.uk) for these columns!

I grew up in High Wycombe in the 1950s and remember Frogmoor as a bleak asphalted space rather more like it is now than in the picture with the trees! Indeed I was most impressed to see it with trees!! As is the way of these things it looks smaller than I remember it.

We used to buy our bread from a baker just on the far side of the railway bridge, and our sweets from "the old Welsh woman" who also had a shop on the far side of the bridge.

As we say in the part of the country where I live now, "It fair takes you back"!

Gillian Stunell

In further e-mails, Mrs Stunell said she couldn't remember the name of the baker, but he brought a selection of his bread round to the houses in Priory Avenue in a huge flat basket looped over his arm. Mrs Stunell's family got their greengroceries from a Mr Farr, who had a horse and a flat cart. He would park the horse with a "noseful of oats", which the children found entertaining. Mrs Stunell's mother, aged 91, lives in Chester and has a signed Lorna Cassidy of Pann Mill on her wall. It emerged that the family knew our founder, Jack Scruton, and his family very well. They knew what is now Wycombe Museum as "the posh house at the bottom of Greenway" where the Union Baptists' Summer Garden Party was held.

* * *

Just wondering if you had any information on the school, Shirley, in High Wycombe. If I remember, it was a Government-run residential school. It was operating during the 1930s. Any information you have would be greatly appreciated.

John Payne

* * *

I would like to know if you can tell how we can find some information on a Samuel Ball longcase Grandfather clock we inherited. We cannot find any info on it other than it was made by Samuel Ball of High Wycombe.

**Jean Erb
Randolph, Virginia**

Beauty and the Planning Beast

"First let's kill all the lawyers"

Henry IV Part 2

One of the most eminent architects of the 1950s and '60s recently died at the age of 91. The late Richard Seifert made it his business to know the details of the Planning Acts, and the loopholes in them, so thoroughly that the schedules became known as Seifert Schedules.

Planning is a matter of law, regulations, law, planning guidance, law, and yet more law.

That is where it all goes wrong. It is, or should be, primarily an artistic process.

It is unfair to blame the lawyers. They simply help their clients negotiate the minefield. Among developers the biggest tend to employ the best. (That is one reason why they became big.) Inevitably the best are the most expensive. Napoleon commented that God is on the side of the big battalions. That applies to planning applications and appeals, just as much as to any other battle. Sometimes it does seem that those charged with planning are mesmerised by the technicalities, and fail occasionally simply to stand back and look. Prince Charles struck a chord with many when he asked, "What are we doing to our towns and cities?"

Much can be done to relieve the horror of past mistakes. Tower blocks are being blown up and few tears are shed. Trees and flowers often provide a cheap and attractive option to soften horrors in stone. There should be room in the local authority budget to put up an occasional prize for the most original and cost-effective way of masking some of the ugliness that has been created. We have a local university which is strong on design. Why not give some of the students a shot at it? Their own Lubyanka would make a prime candidate.

A recent issue of the Newsletter included a picture of the G-Plan site. There is no need to go so far afield.

Next time you take the flyover between the fire station and Tesco, look at the prospect on each side.

Just look at it.

Spectator

(name and address supplied)

A good point! Well, as far as one side of Abbey Way is concerned, it's all up to the District Council troika now running Project Phoenix, and Stannifer. Cross your fingers!-Ed.

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Miss E J Fleeman of Kingsmead Rd, HW
Mr C Hartgroves of Garratts Way, HW
Mr and Mrs D R King of Lucas Rd, HW
Ms M F Kirkness of London Rd, HW
Mr C F Turner of Chalk Farm Rd, Stokenchurch

Obituaries

We regret to announce the deaths of:

Miss Peggy Howlett

Cllr Les Taylor

We extend our condolences to their families and friends.

Chilterns Water Festival

This is on 21/22 June. Pann Mill will be open both days, with Friday mainly dedicated to schools. The guided Water Trail on Saturday lasts approximately 1½ hours. If you've not done it before, it's an interesting, tranquil walk following our newly-published, updated "Water Trail around the Rye". Helpers are needed for teas on Saturday: please contact Eileen Walters on 01494 449902.

Historical Marlow

Following January's fascinating talk by Dr Rachel Brown, there is a guided walk led by members of the Marlow Society on 7th July. Convene at 2.30 at the entrance to Court Gardens car park (down High Street, turn right before bridge, car park on left). Please give a donation of £1 per head for

the Marlow Society to Ann Simone (01494 448773) before the walk.

Henley River & Rowing Museum

Our visit is on 4 August: meet at 2.00pm in the Car Park (4 hours free car parking) or at the ticket office if wet. Contact Angela Rees 01628-850522, or book in at our 11 July meeting, to arrange car-sharing, and for a leaflet with a map. Entrance (group rate) is £4.45, or £3.35 for the over-60s. The tour and exhibitions include: a 5-minute introductory talk; sights and sounds of the River Thames, exhibition on water consumption, thrills of rowing (see Steve Redgrave's boat), story of Henley (people and history), development of boat building (wood to high tech). Time for tea and cakes afterwards, and maybe a walk by the river.

Pann Mill, 1 September

Pann Mill will open as usual, even though the Wycombe Show is off. Can you help the Society at the stalls, or serving teas or making cakes? If you've not done this before and would like more details, phone Ann Simone on 01494 448773 or Annie Woodward on 01494 527978 to hear what it entails. **And please bring items for the Bring & Buy (good quality bric-a-brac, books, preserves, etc) directly to the Mill on the day.**

Just keep coming...

Many thanks to those of you who have submitted contributions for this newsletter. Material for the next issue should reach me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 August**, please.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

Put these in your diary **now!**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2002

Fri./Sat. 21/22 June

The Rye

Sunday 7 July 2.30–4.00pm

Thursday 11 July 7.45 pm

Reggie Goves Centre

Sunday 4 August

Sunday 1 September, 11.00 am to 5.00 pm

Fri.–Mon. 13–16 September

Watch for announcements of venue!

Tuesday 15 October 7.45 pm

Reggie Goves Centre

Chilterns Water Festival – Pann Mill open both days. Teas and cakes on Saturday.

Water Trail – 2.30pm (Sat. only), start and finish Pann Mill.

Guided Walk around Historical Marlow, led by the Marlow Society; approx. 1½ hours: Meet at Court Gardens Car Park.

Quarterly Meeting: "The role of the museum service in today's Wycombe." Speaker: Vicki Woods, Museum's Officer.

Members' Outing by shared cars to the Henley Rowing & River Museum. Contact Angela Rees on 01628 850522.

Pann Mill Open Day. Teas and Cakes, Bring & Buy, Plants. Water Trail, 2.30pm, start and finish at Pann Mill.

Heritage Weekend: Exhibition about Wycombe's pubs.

On Sunday 15th: Town Trail 2.30pm from Parish Church South Porch.

Quarterly Meeting: "Chalk Streams of the Chilterns."

Speaker: Sarah Bentley, Chiltern Chalk Streams Officer.