

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

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Phoenix and Coffee?

WELL, NO, it isn't Phoenix any more. It's the Town Centre Development, which is now seen in a much wider context than Phoenix was, and is part of the District Council's new Master Plan for the town centre area. On page 4 you can read of the dramatic changes in our District Council's vision. There were many factors that led to this shift – the critical report on the planning application by the Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment, the recognition by councillors that, this time, we need to take a longer term view to make the town fit for our grandchildren. Perhaps our Society's vigorous representations played a part. Whatever the cause, we can only welcome the revolution that is now afoot.

What about coffee? One of the features of the new town centre should be lively, vibrant open spaces. Perhaps it is too much to hope to match the ranks of tables that fill the piazzas in Venice, but the recent warm weather has shown that there is plenty of demand for outside eating and snacking, even in our existing town centre. Tables have been springing up on pavements, with dubious legality. In the new development, we need to build on this pent-up demand if we are to maximise the attractions and business fortunes of our town.

And while we're at it, there's Frogmoor. The big trees have gone, but the fountains are very jolly and there seem to be acres of space. How about a little encouragement to people to open cafés there and capitalise on their surroundings?

Chris Woodman



*The sun had gone by the time we got our camera out.
But Frogmoor was as equally devoid of café culture when the sun was shining!*

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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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AGM 2004

THE SOCIETY'S AGM took place in the Guildhall on 23 April. It was a businesslike affair, with the usual reading of the minutes of the last AGM, the Secretary's Report which covered the wide range of work that the Society has done over the past 12 months, and the Treasurer's Report indicating that following the increase in membership charges in 2003, the position is now healthy, at least by our standards!

Our Life President, Stuart King, continues without needing to be re-elected, and all three Vice-Presidents, John Gore, Myra King and Kathleen Peatey, were re-elected. Chris Woodman stood down as Vice-Chairman, and was replaced by Tony Fooks and Evelyn Roe as joint Vice-Chairmen. Nick Giles was re-elected as Hon. Treasurer and Frances Presland as Hon. Secretary. Trevor Carter was newly elected to the Executive Committee, and the existing members, Ron Sims, Robert Turner, Annie Woodward, Angela Rees and Margaret Simmons, were re-elected. There was a light moment as Margaret was presented with a memento of her recent 80th birthday. Then the AGM was pronounced over, and we moved on to our visiting speaker from the Wycombe Wildlife Trust (see page 9).

Since the meeting, some members have

suggested there was insufficient discussion of current issues. The Executive Committee has reflected and agrees with this. In fact, two of the group leaders, for Planning and Transport, had already given impressive accounts of their work at the meeting with Affiliated Associations on 2 April (see p.7), and this could certainly have been repeated for the AGM (at the expense only of boring people who attended both!).

For the past few years it has been our practice in alternate years to follow the formal AGM with reports by each of the Society's groups, instead of having a visiting speaker. That is what will happen in 2005. But in the light of the comments now received, the Executive Committee has decided since the AGM not to hire a speaker for 2006.

Planning This Quarter

WITH A slight, though certainly temporary, easing of the pace this quarter on the major town centre developments, the Society in general, and the Planning Group in particular, were busy providing input into a number of other initiatives.

Backland and Infill Development In a letter to Wycombe District Council, Tony Fooks raised our concerns that the policy of building housing on existing urban sites in preference to greenfield spaces leads to the possibility of indiscriminate and piecemeal development detracting from the quality of the local environment. The requirement for increased density of housing is also likely to have a deleterious effect, particularly on conservation areas characterised by a lower density of dwellings. Our concerns were heightened by the Bucks County Council Housing Potential Study which identified the potential for a further 6,080 houses in Wycombe District with over a third resulting from the sort of intensification of housing described above. Our fears were somewhat allayed by the Council's response, which provided reassurance that such applications would only be approved if they enhanced rather than detracted from the local environment.

Victoria Street and Green Street The Planning Group felt that this unique part of town warranted protection from plans to demolish Green Street School and redevelop The Rush

Works, Leigh Street and the G-Plan factory, and so an application was made on behalf of the Society to designate this a conservation area. We await the outcome with anticipation.

Local Development Framework It is a measure of the growing reputation of the Society and the professionalism of the Planning Group's leader that Tony Fooks was invited to make a presentation at the District Council's open workshop, 'Imagine the Future'. The presentations were followed by an interactive session in which participants were invited, in groups, to comment on the proposed vision for Wycombe District 20 years on, to consider what makes a good (and bad!) place to live and visit, and to prioritise the many development proposals for the town. Most groups agreed that the Town Centre Redevelopment was key and that it could not be separated from other proposals such as removing Abbey Way, deculverting the River Wye and redeveloping the Wycombe Swan frontage. The key message from this and the subsequent stakeholder meeting, to which representatives of the Society were also invited, was to get it right and do it soon!

Members of the Society's Executive Committee and Planning Group participated in a research project conducted by Oxford Brookes University into the public's perception of the environmental impact of planning applications. The group were pleasantly surprised by the minimal disruptive visual impact the proposed Town Centre Development may have when viewed from distant vantage points around the town. The hope is that, when the latest designs are unveiled, the vista is also pleasing in and around the site as well.

Ercol Site A second application for 265 flats and houses on this site was rejected by Wycombe District Council citing many of the grounds upon which the Society objected e.g. design, amenity space, security and car parking.

Improvements brought about by deculverting the Wye at the Wycombe Marsh Paper Mill Site are followed by deterioration in the form of the huge retail units. We can only hope that the efforts made by the group to ensure the developers finish the buildings to a high specification come to fruition and pay dividends.

Tony Fooks has had a run of ill health lately, exacerbated I am sure by the immense amount of time and effort he puts into managing planning matters on behalf of the Society. Writing the column for this Newsletter provides me, a member of the Planning Group, with the opportunity to thank Tony for his prodigious output and excellent leadership.

Garth Baxter

Hon. Sec's Cuttings

Science helps historians uncover new facts The spring edition of Conservation Bulletin features "Science and the Historic Environment" and illustrates how scientific techniques can assist historians. In one article, research on the skeletons from a mediaeval village gave a fascinating insight into the lives and deaths of the villagers. Isotope analyses of infant bones indicate that infants were breastfed until about 18 months old, and these children had developed to the same extent as modern day children. However, by the age of two, their development had started to fall behind, suggesting poor nutrition. Growth continued into the twenties, whilst in modern children growth ceases by the end of their teens. Osteoporosis was found in many skeletons of people who had died in their fifties and as these people certainly did not live sedentary lives or smoke, it appears that the "osteoporosis is caused by our modern lifestyle" theories may not be accurate.

A subtle difference... The Amersham Society hopes an old sign underneath the Market Hall, urging people to "Commit no nuisance", can be restored. At least it's more subtle than some High Wycombe signs that declare that performing certain bodily functions is not permitted – it makes you wonder what visitors to the town think.

No licence to act on behalf of local people The 2003 Licensing Act continues to vex many Societies, especially because the licensing of places of drink and entertainment is moved from the police and magistrates to Local Authorities. How they exercise control has been very tightly specified by Parliament, so that our Council cannot make arrangements for a particular locality, but must apply the rules to the whole of the Wycombe District.

Chilterns Board without the Chiltern Society?

The "Shadow Chilterns Conservation Board" is likely to have the "shadow" prefix dropped in the autumn, when it becomes the first Conservation Board to be ratified. You may have seen the advertisement in the Bucks Free Press for people to apply for the Secretary of State's approval to join the Board. However, your Hon. Sec. finds it surprising and disappointing that the Chiltern Society, who contributed so much in supporting the setting up of the Board, has no automatic right to a seat on it.

Impact versus need for visitors to the Chilterns

A very interesting article appeared in the winter edition of *Chiltern News* covering a debate about visitors to the Chilterns. This ranged over issues such as the need for a visitor centre on the one hand and the value of quiet areas on the other, and the problem that popularising an area can lead ultimately to its destruction versus the need for the Chilterns to succeed economically. It would seem that as with many things, moderation is the key, but I don't envy anyone attempting to find the right balance.

Frances Presland

Calling all Craftspeople!

Pann Mill Open Day on Sunday 5th September will again be hosting exhibitions/sales by our talented Members. The last two years have seen bee-keeping, wood-turning, embroidery and many other crafts. If you would like to exhibit/sell, please book early, as space is limited. We can supply a gazebo, in case of bad (or too hot!) weather, and a chair, but it would help if you could bring your own table.

To request a space, please phone 01494 448773.

Ann Simone

The Town Centre

IN THE Spring issue of the Newsletter, we included a one-page piece by Tony Fooks about the District Council's "Imagine the Future" exercise, and its relationship to the development of the Local Development Framework (LDF - which will supersede the Local Plan), the much wider-ranging Community Plan, and the Town Centre Master Plan. Tony's piece did a lot to clarify a complex web of activities, but having just spent some time studying the District Council's website, your editor admits that he remains a little befuddled!

However, so far as the town centre is concerned, things are starting to become clearer. The District Council has made a very impressive and commendable effort to develop all this work in consensus with all those involved in the District, whether individual citizens, local business leaders or other "stakeholders".

Just to give an idea of the scope of the exercise, one of the sessions called to look at economic issues considered whether High Wycombe should encourage industrial development across all sectors, or should try to become a hub for specific sectors such as the medical industry. Much of this work has been stimulating and interesting. For example, the pressure from Government to go for maximum industrial growth in the South-East, with all that this implies for housing and infrastructure, was frightening (a matter addressed by Paul Goodman MP opposite).

The high point for many of us in the development of town centre policy, however, was the Workshop held in the Town Hall on 20 April, which we advertised in our Spring issue and was well-attended by members of the Society. The event was chaired by Cllr Lesley Clark as Council Leader and Cabinet Chairman and she was evidently firmly in command of the whole exercise. There were presentations by council officers, by Bill Reid from the Priory Centre and by our own Tony Fooks about what they each sought from the LDF.

But the drama came in a presentation by Lawrence Revill of David Lock Associates, the District Council's Town Planning and Urban Design consultants. He painted a remarkably different and more exciting picture of what the town centre should eventually become. The Abbey Way flyover would be swept away, the Swan frontage would be opened up, the Oxford Road roundabout would disappear and become an open space, and there would be another open space near where the Abbey Way (Marlow Hill) "gyratory" now is.

To allow this to happen, the A40 would need to be diverted along a new alignment curving round from the present university site to join the Oxford Road west of Bridge Street. East of this point, the Oxford Road would become a single carriageway, giving scope for the river to

be opened up here and perhaps even all the way to the Swan frontage. Tesco would take over the University site and the University would move to the Compair and De La Rue sites north of the town centre beside Hughenden Road, where there would be a new "spine" road.

Although a great deal of work over quite a few years will be needed to make this vision come about, there is evidently a strong and genuine desire on the part of those leading our Council to make it happen in the timescale of the Master Plan (which looks forward 30 years). Thus the damning criticism of the earlier planning application by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), that what we used to call the "Phoenix Development" needed to be built into a strategic vision, has been successfully confronted. The biggest concern now must be that a way is found for each stage of the grand design to "stack up financially" - i.e. to pay for itself.

In the immediate future, we understand that Stannifer plan a fresh outline planning application. This will not extend much beyond the boundaries of what we came to call the "Phoenix" site, and the project is still aimed to be completed in the original timescale. However, we are assured that Stannifer now intend to "future-proof" it to ensure that it is compatible with the long-term vision for Abbey Way and the roundabouts, and that it will address CABE's other trenchant criticisms, of the monotonous "wallpaper-like" architectural style proposed last time around.

We are hoping we shall be able to arrange a small scale presentation by Stannifer of their proposals, to a limited audience of members. If you would like to take part in this, please let Tony Fooks know on 01494 526580.

Jean Archer

We note with sadness the death of Jean Archer, author of "*Hidden Buckinghamshire*" which was the basis of several successful outings by the Society a few years back.

Jean was born in Shardeloes Lodge and was once Mayor of Amersham. She wrote several other books, including "*Buckinghamshire Headlines*", "*Tales of Old Buckinghamshire*" and "*Hidden Berkshire*", all of which are still available.

Our elected representative speaks...

Some months ago, High Wycombe's Member of Parliament, Paul Goodman, indicated he would be happy to contribute to this Newsletter, if we could tell him when our print deadlines were. That was easily done, and we are very glad now to have received the following article. As MP for Wycombe, Paul represents the interests of all his constituents, whether of a Tory, LibDem or Labour persuasion (or anything else!), in the House of Commons. The High Wycombe Society is not a political organisation (as a charity we are not allowed to be), and therefore our columns are always open (unless we get overwhelmed!) to contributions that we judge relevant to the Society's aims, whether from our own members like Paul or from others, like our local councillors, who receive or read our Newsletter.

IT'S a great pleasure to be writing this article for the High Wycombe Society – both as the local Member of Parliament, and as a member of the Society. On which note, I want to write on a theme that's both Parliamentary and local.

When Chris Woodman last wrote to me about this article, he mentioned a recent meeting of ANTAS – the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies. At that meeting, he said, it was claimed (accurately, I believe) that the Government wants to see a growth rate of 3.6 per cent per annum in the south-east in the near future. "The meeting," Chris reported, "thought this was rather alarming."

He went on to give the main reason for concern: "There is enough natural pressure for economic growth in the south-east, leading to pressure on housing, transport and other infrastructure, without the Government seeking to ratchet it up." If I wanted to get into this argument, he said, "it would add interest for our members." Well, here goes.

First of all, I believe that growth is good. I realise, of course, that this point of view may be unpalatable to many members of the society. The High Wycombe Society members that I know value the local, the particular, the rooted, and the legacy that history has left us in High Wycombe. They are conservative in the strictly non-party political sense of the word: to them, real conservatism is closer to conservation than Conservatism-with-a-capital-C. For them, radical politics can sometimes, paradoxically, be the best means of conserving what is valuable. And economic growth can be the greatest threat to that work of conservation. I don't need reminding that the origins of the society lie in Jack Scruton's determination to defend the Rye from the consequences of growth.

But low growth or no growth means hard consequences. Wycombe Hospital, for example, is funded out of taxation raised from economic growth. No growth would mean fewer services: and I write as our local maternity services – the children's ward, the maternity department and the special care

baby unit – are under threat of closure. And what's true of hospitals is true of everything else: schools, pensions, social services, care homes, buses, nurseries, trains, the wages of teachers, doctors, nurses, policemen, those who work in the fire service – the costs and salaries of all these can't be paid if economic growth doesn't happen.



Paul Goodman MP

Nor is no growth a guarantee of green living. The old Soviet block had precious little growth in its last years. But it left the world a blasted legacy of polluted lakes and buildings crumbling away with acid rain. And people expect their standard of living to rise each year – to have better cars, larger houses, holidays abroad, more consumer durables. Perhaps they are wrong to do so. But they can't, surely, be forced to abandon that aspiration (not, at least, in a democracy) and, like it or not, most people still cling to just such a desire.

And yet, and yet. The pro-growth arguments still win on paper but, as one looks around at modern Britain, they fail to convince the heart. When it comes to raising the standard of living, growth may win hands down. But what about improving our quality of life? Can Buckinghamshire really take growth of 3.6 per cent, with all it implies for population growth, pressure on land, inflation, social disorder and public services which struggle to keep up? Isn't there, surely, a *via media* – a way of ensuring that growth is spread around Britain more evenly and that life is lived more humanely?

I think that there is. Big national government means big national planning. And big national planning means trampling on the local, the particular and the rooted in the south-east so that the region can grow at 3.6 per cent per annum. More local forms of government, on the other hand, would mean more local decision-making. Cities in the north, where growth is needed, might – if their government was more local – decide to go for the growth they require. Towns in the south, that have endured rapid and bewildering growth, might decide to lower their local growth rates. Without the massive programmes of house

building which are planned throughout Buckinghamshire, businesses might decide – eventually – to move north where unemployed people need work and where costs are lower. Nor, in such circumstances, would the south-east need large numbers of people to enter the area from abroad in order to raise that growth rate.

Of course, I could be wrong. People in the

south-east might plump for growth at all costs, and damn the consequences. People in the north might shy away from the economic reforms that would speed growth up there. But it would be their choice – and ours. It wouldn't all come about, as our present state of affairs does, from national government grown too powerful, wilful and arbitrary.

Paul Goodman

Sports for the Girls!

On our front page in the Spring issue, we railed against the impact on the landscape, as viewed across the valley from Amersham Hill, of the new Sports Centre at Wycombe Abbey School. We said it is not always easy, with the best will in the world, to get planning decisions right. This prompted a quick response from the District Council's Head of Urban Design, arguing strongly that we should not blame only the District Council for the result. Since coming to our town, Penelope Tollitt has done impressive work in developing a consensual approach to the decisions on the town's future. We are very grateful to her for now penning out her thoughts for us. Here is what she has to say.

Who's Responsible for Quality in our Built Environment?

IN THE spring edition of your newsletter, the front page carried a photo of the new sports centre at Wycombe Abbey School, with a piece asking who was responsible for allowing this 'incongruous intrusion'. I found the perception of the role of the client and the planning authority portrayed in the piece fascinating, and, after discussing it with your editor, he suggested I write a short piece for this edition. (Please note, I am not discussing the merits or otherwise of the particular case of the sports centre.)

The sentence that caught my attention read, "We cannot blame the school authorities: once a planning application is made, the onus for taking the right decision passes to the planning authority." It is quite right that the final decision rests with the planning authority, but are the client that commissioned the project, and the design team that advised the client, entirely without responsibility?

CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), in its publication *Design Review*, starts with the role of the client in setting out the objective of achieving quality, and of the advisors they employ to deliver it. However, even with a client committed to quality, you can still end up with the 'right building' in the 'wrong place', unless the issues of 'context' are addressed at the outset, and become part of the design brief.

The design team is paid for by the client, but that does not mean that their brief is only to address the client's requirements. They should also identify within their design statement the issues of 'context' to which the proposal must respond, and marry these with the client's brief. Design in the built environment is not like the design of 'consumer goods' because of this need to not only design from the 'inside out', but also site context from the 'outside in'. Most tensions in negotiation arise when a proposal that meets the client's requirements is put to the planning authority, and when,

although issues of context are identified, they are not properly absorbed and resolved within the design, but the original approach 'mitigated' to address the issues superficially.

The local planning authority has a crucial role to play in ensuring the correct issues are identified, and refusing those proposals that do not meet the grade. But if the client and their advisors are not interested in delivering all round quality, quality cannot be achieved.

In the end, if we want quality environments in which to 'live, work and play', we must recognise that achieving quality is a collaborative process that involves client, advisors and planning authority, who share the responsibility for success and for failure. Indeed, I would add to the list of those responsible the general public, because if the public are content to 'make do', the planning authority will not have pressure put on it to raise the game. So, folks, we are all in this together!

By the way, I am hopeful that this year's Quality Counts Tour will include the sports centre at Wycombe Abbey School – we are discussing the possibility with the school as this goes to press, for a date in July. (The Quality Counts Tour is the annual opportunity we take to review recently developed schemes.)

Penelope Tollitt

The HW Soc Goes Academic, or... the Project Phoenix Workshop

“WHAT?” YOU may say! Isn't Project Phoenix dead, and aren't we now supposed to talk, less picturesquely, just about the “Town Centre Development?” Yes, indeed! But Project Phoenix came briefly to life again at the Friends' Meeting House on 26 April, when researchers from Oxford Brookes University sought the Society's views on a new technique they have developed to measure the impact of a new development on the urban landscape, particularly when viewed from afar.

For 15 scenes of the town, we first saw an untouched photograph, and then on the screen there appeared the identical photograph with Project Phoenix superimposed. In each case we were asked to assess the quality of the view, the sensitivity of the view (a concept on which we all remained, to a greater or lesser extent, confused) and the impact of the new buildings on the view and whether it was adverse or positive.

The meeting seemed to reach the following conclusions (although we await OBU's official write-up). First, the ability to switch quickly from “without” to “with” views and back again is a powerful and useful way to consider the visual impact of a development on the landscape. Second, for the majority of the

views, the impact was small, although for some of the closer views – e.g. from Tom Burt's Hill and The Pastures – the impact was greater but to get a fair impression the project would have to be pictured in more detail than was available. Third, there was the sense that, for people who know the town (rather than day visitors) opinions on the remote views would be strongly coloured by impressions they had acquired close up. It would be either, “Look, there's that fine building just showing up over there,” or “You can even see that monstrosity from here.”

Overall, we were delighted that OBU had decided to test out their new methods on Society members, and we all came away with a greater insight into the importance of Phoenix (or the TCD!) to our local townscapes.

Hello, Affiliated Societies!

BESIDES OUR 400 or so individual and family members, the Society also has as members some 20 Societies who enjoy group membership, on special terms related to their membership levels.

We have regular dealings with these group members when issues crop up, especially in the planning field, that affect them in particular. Our Planning Group frequently adds its weight to local planning objections, when we are convinced that they have merit beyond mere nimbyism (and most of them do). We have been in close touch with Sands Residents Association about the ghastly problems they suffer on football match days, and we have been only too happy to support objections to inappropriate development in the Amersham Hill Conservation Area.

But some of us have wondered whether a more structured exchange of views might help to cement the relationship. So on 2 April, a meeting was held at the Friends Meeting House between members of the Executive Committee and representatives on the Affiliated Societies. We believe the Societies represented got very good value. Tony Fooks gave a splendid presentation on the latest planning developments in the town, and Elsa Woodward described, with a lot of background, the

Society's success in encouraging Demand Responsive Transport, and the need for more “modal shift” – getting people out of their cars and into public transport, whether buses, DRT services or light rail.

In return, we got helpful feedback from the societies about how widely the Newsletter is seen (affiliated societies can get extra copies if they ask for them), and about what interests them most. All were very interested in the Town Centre Development, and the Penn & Tylers Green Association had a very particular concern – to remain independent and not get “swallowed up” in the urban areas to the east (Amersham) or south and west (High Wycombe).

The question of a further meeting was left open, but the Executive Committee would be very glad to receive any views from our “affiliates”.

No Room for Doris

We promised that this issue of the Newsletter would contain the concluding instalment of the article “10½ Years of My Childhood in High Wycombe”, by the late Doris Rich.

Alas, no such luck! Our columns are full this quarter and you avid collectors of nostalgia will have to wait for our Autumn issue.

National Mills Day – 9th May

National Mills Day dawned grey and damp, confirming a decidedly gloomy weather forecast. However, the sun had other ideas and struggled to shine on one of the busiest open days for some time.

There was a steady stream of visitors throughout the day – even the usual lunchtime quiet period failed to develop. All of the stalls did a good trade, with refreshments and flour sales leading the way as usual, and as a result the society brought in record revenues for such an event. This will go partly to the Pann Mill account and partly to the general account to pay for meetings, newsletters etc. *(And Eileen Walters says A BIG THANK YOU to all the helpers and cake makers for the refreshments.–Ed.)*

As is becoming something of an open day tradition, the mill machinery threw an early afternoon tantrum. However, following a stern talking-to by John on spanners and Steve on hammers, it saw reason and performed perfectly for the rest of the day. It was generally agreed that the flour produced this time was the best yet, a good example of practice making perfect.

The next open day is 11th July, 11am to 5pm.

Robert Turner

Gathering it in...

On 30 May, Executive Committee Member and Society Gardener, Margaret Simmons, took delivery of a cheque for £500 from the Bucks Foundation to raise the walls of the flood relief channel so that her lovingly cared-for plants do not get washed away every time the water is high. Congratulations to Margaret for learning the bureaucratic ropes to apply for the grant.



From left to right: Tony Fooks, Frances Presland, Margaret Simmons, Peter Hazzard, Steve Philp, Les Sheldon (Outreach Officer for the Bucks Foundation) and John Mumford.

The Town Centre Heritage Project

I think it is about time that I put pen to paper and updated one and all on the Heritage Project. I have had a wonderful response from some of our members who have really put some time into it and I know they have enjoyed doing it. To those others of you who still wish to carry on, please let me know if there is a problem in any way and I am sure that we can sort it out. No one should feel bogged down and on their own. I will be calling a meeting of all concerned later this year at which time I trust many more of you will have completed your work. For those of you who have handed work in, if you would like to go further, please let me know – there is a lot to be done.

So far, we have a complete record of all the businesses in High Wycombe and the members' work is slowly checking this for accuracy. To this we are now adding the research and going back with each premises to see who was there before and what their trade was. We are also recording any features that we can find out about the premises. I had hoped to include a detailed example record in this *Newsletter* but the way I am having to put it on the computer, I can't pull off a complete record yet! However, to give you some idea, this shows what I hope to achieve:

Location: Church Street

Premises:

2003 Marks and Spencer
Retail clothes/food department store

1930 McIlroy
Retail clothing store
Also: G E Stevens, corn and seed merchant.

These are example entries as I intend to go back if possible every 5/10 years, and also where possible to date the premises, but all this will take some time.

This type of record has been compiled in the small village of Bucknall near Aylesbury, where researchers have recorded the occupants of each house. This was printed into a book, and they are now on their second book to see who and what was there before.

So you can see the value of what we are doing. If we don't record it now, it could be lost to history, especially with all the changes being made to the towns and villages.

Pauline Cauvain

Pauline's phone number is 01494 529224. Give her a call, you volunteers, to talk about the next stage of your project, or even the current stage!–Ed.

AGM Talk

“The Wildlife of the Chilterns”

After the conclusion of the Society’s business at this year’s AGM, those present enjoyed a return visit of Maurice Young, a local Reserve Co-ordinator for BBOWT (the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) and a Trustee of Wycombe Wildlife Group, who spoke about the wildlife of the Chilterns.

After explaining how he became involved with local wildlife reserves when he was a biology tutor at the former College of Further Education in High Wycombe, Maurice illustrated some of the rich diversity of flora and fauna that can be found on some of our local important wildlife sites such as Buttlers Hangings, Gomm Valley, Holtspur Bank and Homefield Wood. Some of the slides showed activities of the Wycombe WATCH Group (for 8-14 year olds) and mention was made of the planned involvement of members of Wycombe Wildlife Group in monitoring the wildlife on local Roadside Verge Nature Reserves. Some of the latter have been so designated because of the presence of the rare Striped Lychnis caterpillar that feeds on Dark Mullein.

Maurice spoke about the importance of management, whether by rabbits, sheep or human volunteers, and the need for this to be appropriate for the survival of some plants, insects and mammals. He explained the particular need of plants such as Basil, Thyme, Yellow-wort, Common Centaury and Wild Candytuft for short turf or even bare earth and mentioned the value of common plants such as Marjoram and the Common and Greater Knapweeds as

nectar plants, and of Cowslip, Common Bird’s-foot-trefoil and Horseshoe Vetch as food plants for the larvae of some of our less common local butterflies. We saw photographs of some of the butterfly species found on local reserves, including the Marbled White, Chalkhill Blue, Duke of Burgundy and Dark Green Fritillaries, the migrant Painted Lady and the rare migrant Clouded Yellow.



The Great Green Bush Cricket seen at Buttlers Hangings. If the Newsletter were in colour, you would see a rich, deep green!

Maurice told us how the discovery of dormice at Homefield Wood led to the provision of 100 dormouse boxes on the site and we were treated to a photograph of a dormouse found in one of the boxes when it was inspected. We saw pictures of slow worms and the Great Green Bush Cricket, regularly seen at Buttlers Hangings, and shrubs such as Guelder-rose and Wayfaring-tree, which produce berries providing food for birds in the late autumn and early winter.



Chiltern Gentian – in a beautiful mauve colour.

A talk on local wildlife is never complete without mention of our local orchids. As well as common species such as Pyramidal, Early-purple and Common Spotted orchids, we saw photographs of the Red Helleborine and Monkey, Fly, Greater Butterfly, Green-winged, Bird’s-nest, Military and Ghost Orchids. Other flowers mentioned were the nationally rare but locally common Coralroot, the very rare Pasqueflower, the Fringed Gentian and the Chiltern Gentian. The latter has since been chosen in a Plantlife poll as the county wildflower for Buckinghamshire.

Roger Wilding

Calling for Volunteers – The Society’s Transport Work

The Planning Group is fully occupied. The Transport Group is fully engaged on Light Rail, Demand Responsive Transport and Cycleways. But many other transport issues, such as the London Road, the “Western Access” from Aylesbury and Milton Keynes, the planned changes in Cressex, not to mention the huge implications of getting rid of Abbey Way and the moving of Bucks Chilterns University College (BCUC), need to be addressed.

So... a new group is being set up, provisionally called the Transport Infrastructure Group. Leading members have been appointed and more recruits are required. Please contact Roger Lawson on 01494 528047 if you are prepared to consider helping. And even if you are not, feel free to submit views to the group drawing their attention to local transport issues, so that they are not short of topics to cut their teeth on.

Quarterly Meeting

“The Golden Age of the River Thames”

MR JOHN Skuse, Chairman of the Middle Thames (Mapledurham to Old Windsor) section of the River Thames Society, talked in a most entertaining and interesting way about the River Thames. He briefly traced its history from the Saxons to the present day and talked in greater detail about its Golden Age.

From the start, goods that were too heavy to be carried by horse and cart were transported along the river by sailing boats and later by barges. At a later date the canal system was connected to the Thames and this provided a network of waterways throughout England. By the late eighteenth century, improvements in navigation and the building of the locks provided an efficient transport system.

Fishing, boat-building and its ancillary industries were flourishing well into the nineteenth century.

However, in 1840 the arrival of Brunel's railway system started the decline of the river, and by 1860 it had ceased to be the main commercial transport route. Industrialisation created an increase in London's population, which in turn produced sewage: this created 'the Great Stink' and cholera became rampant. By 1866 the Thames Conservancy, instigated by Royalty, cleaned up the river. The Golden Age had started!

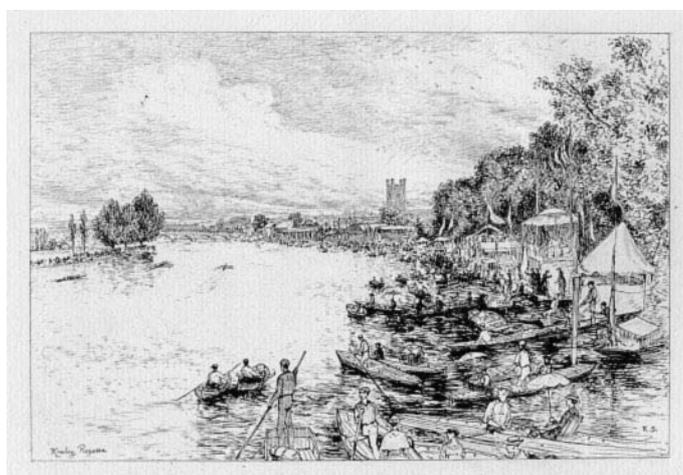
As people became more affluent because of industrialisation, they were able to spend leisure time by the river because they could travel from Waterloo or Paddington to Hampton Court, Sunbury, Reading, Maidenhead or Oxford. The Bank Holidays Act 1871 gave people more leisure time and the introduction of a comprehensive education system meant more people could read, and they became enthused by the exploits of the characters in *'Three Men in a Boat'* and wanted to emulate them. Boat-building came back to life, now

building rowing skiffs rather than barges. Trade returned to the riverside hostelrys and ale houses: skiffs and electric or steam launches carried the wealthy up and down the river: people picnicked by the river wearing their smart clothes. During the London Season, the wealthy attended various events. The Henley Regatta (started 1839) caused an eventual explosion of regattas all the way along the river (including Marlow). There were so many boats on the river at this time that a path had to be opened up for the rowers taking part in the various boat races. Houseboats were rented or bought by the wealthy and anchored on the Thames for the season. Camping and fishing were popular. The river was a busy and happy place for people to enjoy their leisure time.

The Thames slipped into decline between the two world wars. The arrival of the motor car took people further afield, even to the Continent. But later, with the gradual increase in affluence, and more leisure time, motor launches in ever-increasing sizes became a familiar sight on the beautiful river.

The River Thames Society has volunteer wardens who monitor the condition of the river, both its banks and water, in the tidal and non-tidal areas. Where necessary, they inform the landlord concerned, or the Environment Agency, of anything amiss. They also monitor planning applications – between 10,000 and 12,000 of them a year.

Angela Rees



Henley Regatta, 1886

Letters

Lady Terrington

As a member of the erstwhile Liberal Party, Lady Terrington has always been a heroine of mine, and it was interesting to read the reference to her in Doris Rich's article in the last newsletter.

When canvassing some years ago, I met the parlourmaid of the Mayor of High Wycombe at the time she was elected.

"She came into the room the day after she got elected," I was told, "all lit up and excited. And she sat on the rug in front of the fire! Nobody did that except children sometimes. She went round on her horse to all the villages around here. Some young men used to gallop up in front and shout "Lady Terrington is coming!" and then she'd arrive and make a little speech from her horse, and then they'd ride off to the next village."

I know Alf Plumridge has a picture of her in his cottage. She was indeed a beauty. She was one of the first women to be elected as an MP in this country. Are there any other recollections of her?

Frances Alexander

On tour with the Marlow Society

The Marlow Society have taken issue with our report in the last issue of the Newsletter on the District Council's "Quality Counts!" tour. It seems that the site visited (and photographed) in Marlow was not Portlands (which is still the subject of a planning brief) but "The Brewery Site". Our party was in no doubt, but the Marlow Society must know best about Marlow! We referred to "permeability" – the ability to transit the site so it is not a one-way ghetto. Here are Bob Savidge's comments.

Regarding permeability, access by the public is allowed between 7am and 10pm everyday. The gate from the High Street is closed each night due to difficulties with bad behaviour as a result of the number and popularity of the town's pubs. The Marlow Society was instrumental in gaining this access into the historic area where the Brewery buildings, cobbled courtyard and dray sheds have been preserved, and date from 1791 to 1905. This access gives an alternative route to Court Garden, Higginson Park and the housing and sports facilities surrounding Pound Lane. Certainly the two routes through the site, which is privately owned, are used constantly by the public and are an asset to the town.

We were pleased that our input into the density of accommodation and design of the site (e.g. the square, the landscaping, the podium to hide some of the cars and the innovative use of the garages to add another apartment)

contributed to the site winning a number of awards and commendations.

Bob Savidge

To pay...

To help raise funds for the Society, I have suggested that a small payment could be asked for from all members who come to quarterly meetings to listen to a speaker. Possibly the Arts Festival Meeting and the AGM would be free admittance. We cannot rely on a steady flow of cash from donations but I think charging, say, £1.50 could raise on average £300 per annum. We receive far less from donations. We have to pay for speakers and hall hire, and administrative costs increase from year to year. Whenever I have listened to speakers at Wycombe Library or other civic groups, there has always been a charge. This subject has been brought up at the Executive Committee when we decided to ask members to donate £1 if possible. This has not increased the amount raised. We would appreciate hearing your views. Please contact any executive committee member.

Angela Rees

...or not to pay

I would like to make the following points about charging for meetings.

For the last 36 years, the High Wycombe Society has managed to offer newsletters and meetings free to paid-up members. This is an admirable achievement and should continue.

Many members make additional generous donations when paying their subscriptions. These are gratefully received. We do stress that current rates are a minimum. More is very acceptable. There is a strong argument for raising subscription rates. I would suggest they be doubled. The minimum rate would then be £7.00 for a retirement pensioner. With four free newsletters, entry to four quarterly meetings a year and other low cost visits, we would still offer excellent value for money.

If members have particularly enjoyed a meeting, they can donate accordingly. Not in the reverse, however! No refunds for boring or long-winded talks! Perhaps the "begging bowl" should be circulated, as in church collections, so that all feel obliged to donate.

The fact that other organisations charge is of no consequence. From its inception, under Jack Scruton's guidance, the Society has always conducted its business with integrity and independence

Long may that continue! And double the subs!

Annie Woodward

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs & Mrs A Bluck of Kingsley Crescent, HW.

Mr K W Mobley of Desborough Ave, HW.

Mr C Rowe of Southcote Way, Penn.

Mrs M T Varley of Rochford Gardens, Slough.

Obituaries

We regret to announce the deaths of:

Mrs Sybil F Smith

Mr Syd Spence

We extend our condolences to their families and friends.

Tables and Chairs... (continued)

Following the last *Newsletter*, we are grateful to members who have donated chairs and tables for the Pann Mill Garden. We also thank eagle-eyed shopper Ron Sims who directed us to an excellent deal then offered by Safeway for new garden furniture at rock-bottom prices.

St John's Hospital, the Ridgeway and other Old Things

At our next Quarterly Meeting on 28th July (see *below*) Chris Welch should be able to update us on the state of the fabric of St John's Hospital, Easton Street. But there will be much more: Chris is a qualified geophysicist and archaeologist and an expert on the Ridgeway.

When all at once I saw a crowd...

Are you interested in the history of the town? Do you like talking to people? Perhaps you would like to become one of our volunteer guides for our town walks. There are three or four walks a year – you choose ones which suit you. They last about an hour and a half, starting at the Parish Church and ending at Pann Mill. We have information on the important buildings and of course you can add your own interesting snippets. You don't need a big voice – just the ability to talk to a small group clearly. Why not come on one of the walks to see what is involved? The walks for the rest of this year are on Sunday July 11th and Sunday September 5th. Or contact Mary Woodman on 01494 528106.

Contributors' Corner

Once again, thank you to all those who provided us (whether solicited or not!) with material for this *Newsletter*. We are glad that this month we received letters, printed on p.11, about the controversial question of charging for meetings. We *love* to get controversial letters about anything. Do *you* have views on this or any other topic, whether already raised in the *Newsletter* or not? You can be as provocative as you like, but please be polite! Material should reach me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 August**, please.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

Put these dates in
your diary **now!!!**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 11th July, 11.00am-5.00pm

Pann Mill Open Day. Pann Mill turns again and mills flour. Light refreshments, plants. Also Water Trail at 2.30pm, start and finish at Pann Mill; Town Trail, meet 2.30pm Parish Church, finish Pann Mill.

Sunday 25th July

Members' outing by shared cars: Guided walk around Princes Risborough. Meet 2.15pm. Contact: Angela Rees, 01628 532201.

Wednesday 28th July, 7.30pm
The Guildhall.

Quarterly Meeting: "*The Work of English Heritage*". Speaker: Chris Welch, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage.

Saturday 7th August, 8.00am-noon,
Little Market House.

Charity Market Stall. If you have any items for sale, please contact Eileen Walters on 01494 449902.

Sunday 5th September,
11.00am-5.00pm

Pann Mill Open Day, Crafts by Society Members, Bric-a-Brac, Plants, Teas and Cakes. Also Town Trail, 2.30pm, meet at Parish Church, finish at Pann Mill; Water Trail, 2.30pm, start and end at Pann Mill.

Wednesday 27th October,
7.30pm, The Guildhall.

Quarterly Meeting: "*Grandpa's Wheel*". Speaker: John Mumford. Society Member, Pann Mill Restoration Group.

Friday 12th November
7.30pm, The Guildhall.

Postmen's Cheese & Wine Evening: a thank-you get-together for members who save us all that postage by delivering Newsletters.

The first Quarterly Meeting of 2005 is on Friday, January 14th, and the AGM is on Friday, April 15th.