

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 144

SUMMER 2007

Keep moving, please!



TO HIGH WYCOMBE people, Aylesbury will always be more remote than our own town centre. It is good (p.4) that Bucks County Council and the four Buckinghamshire Districts have joined together to apply to the Government to keep their separate identities, but with “enhanced two-tier working” which they estimate will save £5m of taxpayers’ money every year. If the application is successful, important planning decisions will still be taken by District Councillors who are directly accountable to the voters of Wycombe District.

Transport, of course, stays with the County Council. It is to them we must talk about roads, buses and public transport. For example, why do the new traffic lights at Sainsbury’s cause constant congestion when a mini-roundabout worked fine before? Why is there a forest of traffic lights around Eden? What will happen when they are turned on? Why was traffic along the West Wycombe Road brought to a halt last month while Thames Water were working on the road – or rather, *not* working – even in the evening rush hour?



At last (p.8), we have now established a dialogue with BCC about these things and have been getting some answers from the helpful people at Easton Street and, indeed, from the Portfolio Holder herself, Mrs Valerie Letheren. Traffic lights, *if* they are properly set and computer-controlled, will speed traffic more effectively than roundabouts, and can cater for pedestrian safety too. But the Bellfield Road and Bridge Street lights are being installed and paid for by Multiplex while the coordination between them is being looked after by Sainsbury’s contractors! The Thames Water works were carried out on a hot day and the tarmac didn’t dry!

However, when an Aylesbury officer was taken to task at a recent meeting of WDC’s Development Control Committee, his “explanations” sounded awfully like excuses. “Not me, Guv, just those incompetent engineers who are paid by someone else. They even lost the circuits!”

We have asked that the County take firm control of developers’ contractors, or even do the work for them, but are told that developers “*would not write a blank cheque*”. This really won’t do. Developers need planning permission, and conditions can be imposed. There *are* powers to deal with “statutory undertakers” who dig up our roads, even if using them to maximum effect is a real challenge.

In the end, the buck stops with the County Council, whom we all elect. So please, we don’t want to hear, “It’s not our fault.”

Chris Woodman

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

Registered Charity No. 257897

AGM 2007

THIS YEAR'S AGM took place in the Guildhall on 13 April. As usual, opening remarks from Chairman Roger Lawson were followed by formal reports from the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer.

The Hon. Secretary, Frances Presland, reported that membership had increased to 384 individual members. In addition there are 18 affiliated organisations for which we organise three meetings a year.

Frances listed the meetings held during the year: in May, Stuart Linford described how his furniture business had grown from a humble start; in October, Julia Elton talked about "Brunel – The Man Behind the Icon" in his centenary year, and in January, Marc Meltonville explained the evolution of High Wycombe from its beginnings to the present day. There had also been two special meetings, one on Transport Matters with senior members of the County Council, the other with Councillor Mike Appleyard explaining how the South East England Regional Assembly works.

The Hon. Treasurer, Nick Giles, noted an increase in the general funds of £1,992 arising primarily from an increase in subscription income and donations. Documentation for the reclaim of Gift Aid for the last 6 years had been submitted to the Revenue authority and should bring in about £1,000 in due course. Nick encouraged all members who pay income tax, and who had not already signed a Gift Aid declaration, to sign the relevant space on the membership form to ensure ongoing refunds. Income at Pann Mill was slightly down, mainly due to lower flour production because of last year's drought. However, there had been no major expenditure and funds had increased by about £50.

The formalities then moved to the election of officers and committee. The meeting confirmed in office the President, Stuart King, and the Vice-Presidents, John Gore, Myra King and Kathleen Peatey. Then the Chairman, Roger Lawson, the Vice-Chairmen, Evelyn Roe and Tony Fooks, Hon. Secretary Frances Presland and Hon. Treasurer Nick Giles were re-elected. Trevor Carter, Alan Furness, Angela Rees, Ron Sims, Margaret Simmons, Chris Woodman and Annie Woodward were elected to the Executive Committee. There remained a few vacancies and the Chairman encouraged members who felt they had something to contribute to come forward.

After the formal business of the evening, reviews of the Society's activities were presented by the Group Leaders. For the Programme & Membership Group, Mary Woodman reviewed some of the year's activities, noting particularly the trip to the Fawley Steam Railway museum and the Quiz Night, both of which were oversubscribed. Particular mention was made of Angela Rees, who had been responsible, as

Programme Secretary for the last seven years, for finding speakers for our Quarterly Meetings. Her successor, Jackie Kay, was introduced to the meeting. From the other activities listed by Mary it was clear that this is the 'behind the scenes' Group which ensures that the activities of the Society actually happen.

For the Friends of the Rye Group, Frances Presland outlined its aims as 'Keeping an eye on the Rye'. The Society's policy is that the Rye should be used for transient events only without the erection of any permanent structures. Continued vigilance is necessary as situations can develop very quickly. Last year there had been concern about a possible skateboard park but happily that now seemed likely to be accommodated on the Sainsbury site. A recent Wycombe District Council Tourism Workshop included the heading 'development of the Rye'. We wait to see what may develop from this.

The work of the Pann Mill Group was described by John Mumford. Several years of drought had resulted in difficulty in running the Mill on Open Days, with very little flour milled, but the recent wet winter offered better prospects for the coming year. Various minor maintenance items had been undertaken and a business plan was being prepared to assist in formalising tenure with the Council.

For Transport, Elsa Woodward paid tribute to Chris Wallis who had died during the year. She noted the group had gained two new members and was actively pursuing problems with the plethora of traffic lights sprouting up all over the District, as well as climate change issues.

On behalf of the Heritage Group, Trevor Dean showed a well-received presentation "*Mills along the Wye*", prepared for a meeting of the Bucks Local History Network in October 2006.

Finally Tony Fooks outlined some of the work of the Planning Group during a particularly busy year. Work on the new Sainsbury's site would commence within a few weeks and would include a new skateboard park. He showed a page from a booklet issued by Sainsbury's to developers noting the value of its consultations with our Society. A number of pictures, from various viewpoints, showed the progressive growth of the Eden Centre. Various issues had been raised with Multiplex who were reporting that the development is on schedule and on budget.

He was pleased that the proposed Ski Slope/Snow Dome in Abbey Barn Lane would include a green vegetation roof, but the Planning Group were pressing for more of the roof to be of this type and for outside lighting to be lower in both height and intensity.

For long-term planning the Group had been involved in the many local meetings organised by Wycombe District Council in their "Imagine the Future" series and had participated in the Examination in Public of the South East Plan.

Chairman's Miscellany

Congratulations!

First, my hearty congratulations to two members of our Executive Committee to whom I had the privilege to pay tribute at the end of our AGM in April. Evelyn Roe recently received an "*Unsung Heroes*" award from Bucks County Council, and Margaret Simmons received first prize in the Wycombe District Council Chairman's "*Inspiration*" Awards. Well done!

Wycombe Museum at 75

I represented the Society at the official opening ceremony of the fascinating 75th Anniversary exhibition at the Wycombe Museum. Our Executive Committee responded to an invitation from the Curator to choose an object or painting from the museum stock, to be included in the display. In fact with the ready assistance of a charming museum volunteer, Louisa, I chose two!

A set of six Guernsey Stamps published in 1999 to commemorate the Royal Military College, Sandhurst included one stamp commemorating the establishment of the Senior College at the Antelope Public House in High Wycombe High Street by General Le Marchant in 1799. (Regrettably the stamps were printed in 1998 by an Irish provider – and not by Harrisons in High Wycombe.)

The second item, nominally chosen on behalf of the Pann Mill Group (your Chairman is an honorary, non-working member of the Group entitled to wear the Pann Mill Polo Shirt with splendid insignia) was the oil painting by a former member of our Society, Mr Hale. It illustrates Pann Mill before demolition, viewed from the east along the Wye, and includes the miller's house.

This exhibition is so worth a viewing. Our two chosen items are adjacently displayed in the front downstairs room, on the left as you enter the museum. The stamps are in a display cabinet and the painting is on the wall nearby.

The exhibition was declared open by former

Museum Officer, Marc Meltonville, now known to us all as a Star TV Historical Archaeologist at Hampton Court Palace. Congratulations to manager, Zara Luxford, Curator, Dr Catherine Grigg, and her team on this fine exhibition!

It was also good to see the Revd James Rattue attending, resplendent in 17th century ecclesiastical "everyday" wear of black gown and white bow tie of that period.

A Sodden (yes!) Pann Mill Open Day!

A "Great Thanks" to all those Society members who worked hard, or attended loyally, the rain-soaked Pann Mill Open Day on National Mills Day, 13th May.

So great was the rain that, at one stage, we wondered if the Wye would break over the parapet at the mill!

The Pann Millers did a truly splendid job in milling so much flour, which was sought, and purchased, by the "baking" members and general public. The catering team appreciated the wonderfully level flagstone floor in the tearoom/workshop, and notched up good sales of tea, coffee and cakes despite a perforated roof which still allowed some dry areas in the working "back office".

Many thanks to our Hon. Secretary, Frances, for her generous donation to Society funds of her comestibles sales. This produce is excellent, and all her own work.

Commiserations to the Bric-a-Brac staff who laboured under a fine spray within their gazebo.

In the afternoon, we hosted the launch of a new book, "*The Water Mills of Buckinghamshire*" (reviewed on p.9-Ed.). I encourage all members to seek out and purchase their own copy of this book with its splendid original photographs.

Finally, for Mills Day, many thanks to Mary Woodman and John Gore for taking the Town Trail in the afternoon, for a select few who turned up. Sorry about the Water Trail – but it really was too inclement to run it.

"Telling people what we do..."

A Recruitment and Publicity Day

Our Programme and Membership Group designated Saturday 9th June as a recruitment and publicity day, to be undertaken where the public congregated.

Bill Pollard, Manager of the Chilterns Centre and a member of our Society, kindly loaned us a stand for the day (and even ensured that Society members manning it, who might be fatigued by an onslaught(?) of the general public, could retire for rest and sustenance when required).

At the time of writing the recruitment of new members, on the day, was a little slow. Stand

volunteers were exhorted to prove their skill at voluntary enlisting. The most successful recruiter would become an “apprentice” to the Chairman, who displays a carefree attitude when approaching the general public on Open Days. Maybe, on reflection, this prospect was a disincentive, but actually there was a consistent effort to interest the Saturday shoppers in our principles, events and activities, whilst encouraging consideration of completing one of our membership application forms, and filling in the Frogmoor questionnaire. There were attractive displays of Group activities, ranging from a summary of our recent planning application vetting and action, through to our proposal for the light rail link to reinstate the High Wycombe to Bourne End rail tracks (with attendant petition inspired by recent letters to the BFP editor), continuing with the history of water-powered mills on the Wye, on to the allegedly forthcoming refurbishment of Frogmoor, and the “hot potato” of a new fountain there.

Many members of the Saturday Shoppers stopped to study these displays, inspired by the content; happy reminiscences were exchanged, and several perceptive questions were answered.

All in all, a happy event which put our Society’s name before those local residents who had not heard of us.

Inevitably, a great number of the Saturday shoppers are only intent on getting to the next shop for more retail therapy, looking neither to the right nor to the left, whilst passing by.

Congratulations to Frances Presland and Mary Woodman who supervised the overall arrangements, and to Elsa Woodward, Chris Woodman, the Pann Millers and Frances Presland (again) who created inspiring visual displays and texts. Thanks also to Tony Fooks for the initial idea, and for liaising with the Chiltern Centre management, whose staff were so helpful.

Many thanks, too, to those members who manned the stand throughout the day. We must do this again some time!

Signed pseudonymously...

Reg Rowlason
(a long-serving member)

PETT and “Juicy Lucy”

On 8 May, the Executive Committee and representatives of the Planning and Transport Groups received a presentation from the Leader of Wycombe District Council, Cllr Lesley Clarke, on the joint application to the Government by BCC and all the Bucks District Councils for “Pathfinder” Enhanced Two Tier Working (PETT for short!).

This application has come about because the recent Local Government White Paper (LGWP) requires all Councils to come up with proposals either for a Unitary Council combining the functions of the existing County Council (including social services, education, transport and highways) with those of the existing District Councils (such as planning and waste disposal and off-street parking) or Enhanced Two-Tier working or “improvement and more efficiency within the current framework”.

The aims of these changes are twofold: (a) to be more efficient and save money, and (b) to promote joined-up working and service delivery to the public.

In their application document, our Councils assessed that a move to a single Bucks unitary authority would generate annual savings of £6.2m, but with transitional costs of possibly £11.4m and perhaps up to £23m. On the other hand, Enhanced Two-Tier working should offer savings of over £5m annually but with much lower transitional costs. These would come mainly from integrating the “back office” functions (finance, personnel, legal, property, IT and communications) of the four authorities, but also from combining strategic planning functions (e.g. by a single Local Development Framework) and in the social care/housing field. In so-called “front of house” services, the aim would be “to ensure customers can access the services they require without needing to understand which organisation provides those services”. And the Councils see big opportunities in the area of “Community Engagement”, combining the County’s “Getting Closer to Communities” initiative (GC2C, affectionately known, we hear, as “Juicy Lucy”) with local neighbourhood and community forums which some Districts have been seeking to develop.

The Government is due to announce its decision on this application in July. From the information we have seen and heard, we believe the application is well-founded. The option of a single unitary authority for Buckinghamshire, where all decisions are taken in, or overseen from, Aylesbury, is not attractive, and PETT seems to offer a reasonable balance of economy, efficiency and joined-up working. Even so, we have some nagging doubts over the idea of a single Local Development Framework for Buckinghamshire. The future of High Wycombe town needs to be firmly under the control of our own local District Council, accountable to local people.

Note: the Chairman would like to record his thanks to the Leader for finding time in her busy schedule to give our officers this briefing on this most important matter.

Planning This Quarter

THERE IS good and bad news for this quarter with a number of applications either in their final stage or about to be launched. The Group is fully occupied at all times with an increasing pressure to find new members to assist.

BCUC Town Centre Site The University College's architect recently requested a meeting to discuss the current phase of this development. Due to the changes in the size and area now being proposed, Wycombe District Council have insisted that a new application be submitted.

Whilst the view seen from Paul's Row has slightly improved, the overall impression of this application is still unsatisfactory. The proposals also include some radical thinking on the choice of materials to be used for the cladding of the new building. The Group have made strong comments regarding the design of the building from the Paul's Row aspect and have also requested that some Wycombe Brick be incorporated into the build. With regard to the new materials, we have requested a sample be supplied in order that a wider view may be obtained from members.

It should be noted that the new application was submitted prior to any consultation. At the time of writing, we were awaiting a formal response from the architect and a sample of the materials to be used.

Wellesbourne Campus In general there is no movement for this site at present, but at the time of going to press we have just received a request from a PR company acting for Wimpey to meet the Group to discuss the possibility of amended plans. Arrangements are now in hand to meet the company concerned.

Terriers Farm This has now become the subject of an appeal. The Society have written formally to the Inspectorate opposing this appeal on the grounds of overdevelopment and the transport implications.

Sainsbury's We were formally notified by GKA, Sainsbury's agent, that this development would commence on 21 May, and subsequently received a copy of the press statement released. We are assured that ongoing issues and phases will be notified to the Society for information.

De La Rue site, "Hughenden Corridor" A formal application has been made by P J Carey, Contractor, to develop this site with a total of 182 dwellings. The Group reviewed this application with total horror regarding the design and mass. A strongly-worded letter of objection has been sent to Wycombe District Council opposing this application.

Wycombe Summit/Snow Dome Further amended plans have been received from the

developer. Whilst these show improvements in the environmental issues, of the building, the lighting and the flora, there are still major concerns over the increase in traffic that this development will generate in the area. Proposals to direct visitors to the site only by Daws Hill Lane are, we consider, unacceptable. The travel plan proposals are vague and need to be discussed further. A formal letter of objection has been sent to Wycombe District Council.

Wycombe Development Framework The final round of this exercise, "IF4", has now been completed. Most of the presentations were good although the use of the "Harry Potter" theme (to bring out the modular form of the new WDF as compared to the single-volume Local Plan) appeared not to be appreciated by some representatives present. With regard to the following workshops, some were good but one or two were hijacked by particular groups leaving less time for discussion on other areas of importance: one such area was the Town Centre sites! During a follow-up meeting to review the pros and cons of this round of consultations, we requested that this subject be revisited before the document is completed and sent to the Government Office for the South East.

Applications The situation continues to be very busy, along with Appeals, and the Group are under constant pressure to respond where possible.

Tony Fooks

The Wise Inspector

In our last issue, we reported on a Public Inquiry into a proposal to replace one-and-a-half semi-detached pairs of houses in Desborough Avenue with a block of flats. The Inspector's report, received in March, dismissed the developer's appeal, saying, "Taking into account all I have read, seen and heard I am not convinced that it would be possible to accommodate a development for 14 flats on the appeal site without the overall scale and massing of the building appearing dominant in the street scene and within the surrounding area. The appeal proposal would be out of character and appearance with the more domestic scale development in the surrounding area."

Our congratulations go to the District Council for ably defending their decision to reject the application, and to those courageous residents of Desborough Avenue who decided to join the Council in the battle.

Wycombe's Cottage Hospital

THE FOUNDATION stone for Wycombe's cottage hospital was laid with great ceremony on March 31 1875 by the Right Honourable Lord Carrington. This was followed by a luncheon held in the Wellington Room of the Red Lion Hotel, which was attended by some 100 local dignitaries.

The need for a hospital had been under consideration for several years, and was brought to a head by an incident in 1873 when a man was injured in a gunshot accident. Amputation of the affected limb was necessary, a procedure which at that time would have taken place in the home of the injured person. But the doctor attending him decreed that his home was not a suitable place for such a procedure, so the patient was taken to the Infirmary at Aylesbury where the operation was undertaken.

As a direct result of this incident, the need for a hospital in Wycombe was championed by Alderman Turner, and following a public meeting it was decided to form a committee to raise the finance and find a suitable site. As was usual at that time, the money to erect the building was to be raised by public subscription, and Lord Carrington generously agreed to donate the land. This was in Cemetery Rd, now Priory Rd, adjoining land about to be used as a reservoir by the Wycombe Waterworks Co.

The committee decided that the hospital should be somewhat larger than was implied by the term 'cottage hospital', so as to be able to accommodate eight beds, four each for men and women, with an increase to 10 if the necessity arose. The local architect Arthur Vernon was retained to design the building, and he set an example for subscriptions towards the cost by agreeing to donate his fee. By April 1875 over £800 had been raised or promised, which included a 'considerable number of contributions from the working population'. The major contributors were the chair manufacturers Glenister and Gibbons, W. Skull & Sons, Albert Janes, Birch's, Pierce & Bartlett's, Hutchinson & Sons, and Goodearl & Sons, the paper-mill of Mr Henry Wheeler, Plumridge's saw-mill, and the mill at Wooburn of Thomas & Co.

The building contract was awarded to the local builder Mr Reuben Spicer in the sum of £1,320, but 'it was expected that this amount may be somewhat curtailed during the erection of the works'!

The hospital was to be equipped mostly with items which were donated. For example, Walter Skull, as the 'senior chair manufacturer present' at the luncheon following the laying of the foundation stone, had stated 'that there would be no need to buy a single chair',

and Councillor Young offered to fit the hospital 'with the cocoa matting required'. The proprietors of Soho and Snakely mills gave 'an ample supply of blankets', and a Miss Winslow promised 'to furnish the hospital with copies of the Scriptures and texts in large type, for hanging in the different wards'.

A Ladies' Committee was formed to organise various fund-raising activities for the purchase of disposables such as linen and bedding.

The hospital was formerly opened on August 24th 1875. The Bucks Free Press (BFP) began its report, 'The establishment of the Cottage Hospital, by voluntary effort, has afforded another evidence of the liberal spirit which exists in Wycombe, and may thus be contemplated with just pride by the inhabitants of our growing and prosperous town.' Unfortunately, it continued, 'the building operations are not quite finished', but 'it was deemed advisable not to delay the inauguration ceremony.' Only one ward had been completely furnished, and that due to the generosity of Mr A. Gilbey of Wooburn House (of the Gilbey's gin family). It had three beds 'and every other article for use and comfort. The room has been tastefully ornamented, and round the walls are hung a dozen beautiful chromo-lithographic pictures from first rate artists, giving the room an elegant and cheerful aspect.'

In his speech, the Mayor reported that donations actually received amounted to £821.12s.10d., plus interest of £21.10s., with several promises not yet fulfilled amounting to about £77, making a grand total of just over £900. The total sum required, including some £300 for furnishings and £100 for fencing, was about £1,600 (the construction cost was here stated to be £1,200, so a lower cost had been negotiated with the builder). The Mayor then asked the assembly to spend liberally at the Bazaar which was to follow the opening, in order to clear the deficit.

In the event a brilliant speech by Sir Philip Rose raised the necessary funds immediately – he proposed that if Lord Carrington would agree to accept responsibility for one third of the deficit, he would cover another third. He went on to say 'I cannot help thinking that there is somebody present (laughter and cheers), I won't name him, but I see you all anticipate whom I mean, who will take the remaining third. That would really be a very

good piece of business to do.’ Lord Carrington immediately consented, and Sir Philip then turned to the other gentleman he was referring to, and said, ‘Before I say another word, there is a gentleman present whose enterprize in business is only equalled by his largeness of heart and liberality..... Now Mr Gilbey.’ To which Mr Gilbey replied to more cheers and laughter, ‘You are such a very good auctioneer, sir, that I will give the nod.’

The hospital was not finally completed until October, when it was opened from 12.00 noon until 4.00pm on the 21st and 22nd for inspection by the public, and was ready for the reception of patients from Monday October 25 1875.

For some time after this, the progress of patients admitted to the hospital was regularly featured in the BFP. For example, in the edition of December 24th 1875 it was reported that: ‘The youth with the broken arm left the hospital this week, convalescent. The little boy W. Brommell, with diseased hip, still remains; and yesterday afternoon William Todd, with fractured leg and smashed hand, who has been under Dr. Hayden’s treatment at the Union House for some weeks, was removed to the Hospital.’

In the BFP of December 17 1875 a letter from a

very satisfied patient was published. John Wallis wrote:

“Allow me to convey my sincere thanks for the very kind treatment I received whilst an inmate of the Cottage Hospital. Whilst there I received every kindness and attention: my sincere thanks are due to the kind ladies and gentlemen who supplied me with books and papers (including the Free Press). From Dr. Ruckley I received very marked attention. Thanks to his skill and kindness I am in a fair way for recovery. The Matron treated me very skilfully, and with great kindness, she seems to thoroughly understand her work. The Hospital was kept beautifully clean and sweet; the food was good and wholesome; the wards are nicely fitted up; in fact it contains every requisite for the sick and wounded. The kind ladies and gentlemen who visited me tried to make it as much like home as possible, and in a great measure succeeded.”

This may be an early example of ‘spin’, but would a modern-day patient speak so highly of his stay in hospital?

Mike Dewey

Most of the information in this article has been obtained from editions of the Bucks Free Press, which in 1875 was known as The South Bucks Free Press and South Oxfordshire Gazette.



Traffic Signals in High Wycombe

SHOULD YOU have a few spare moments when shopping in High Wycombe, take the lift to the top of Newlands car park for a birds-eye view of the roundabout at the Abbey Way/Oxford Rd junction. You will see that there are 30 traffic signals (and three new pedestrian crossings) and some day soon the switch will be thrown to bring them all into operation which, we are told, will ensure the smooth flow of traffic into the Eden Centre. If the recent experience with the traffic signals at the Bellfield Rd/Oxford Rd junction is repeated then it is quite likely that the whole of High Wycombe will come to a grinding halt and the shop assistants in the Eden shops will wonder where all the customers have gone.

The proliferation of traffic lights, and the poor phasing of the signals at Wycombe Marsh and Bellfield Rd, prompted a meeting between the Transport Group and Bucks CC to discuss policy and plans with regards to traffic control. The meeting was more a presentation by the BCC Network and Strategy Team Leader, Mr Tony Blackmore, in response to the agenda submitted to him. His comprehensive explanations showed a detailed and thorough understanding of High Wycombe traffic control problems and revealed the considerable regulatory constraints placed on BCC. He explained that for any new development, the developer pays for new signals and remains responsible for both the installation and control of new lights for 2 years. In the case of the Eden centre, the agreement was for Multiplex to pay for the installation of the signals and Sainsbury to pay for the computer to link them together. The delay in the Sainsbury development has resulted in Bucks CC having to install an interim control system until the Sainsbury development is finished. In the case of Wycombe Marsh/Micklefield Rd the developer paid for the signals but then refused to accept responsibility to carry out remedial work to keep traffic flowing. BCC accepted that the removal of responsibility from the Highways Authority to the developer had been the cause of many of the problems and needs to be addressed.

Other items discussed included the proposal that the signals at the High St/Crendon St crossing should be removed. For the six-week period last Autumn, when these lights were out of action, there were few traffic delays. Now that these lights are back in operation, the traffic is subjected to long delays on the Amersham Hill and along Queen Victoria Rd. BCC know that the phasing of these lights needs adjusting, with the pedestrian crossing lights outside Roots linked in, but the signals cannot be removed because of the need to protect pedestrians crossing between Easton St and the High St. BCC were asked to consider making the lights at the top of Marlow Hill (School Close and Marlow Road) part-time so that they only operate at peak periods. Unfortunately legislation in the UK does not permit traffic signals to be switched off where pedestrian crossings are involved. Thus the Marlow Hill lights must remain operating day and night despite the unnecessary delays to

traffic and the consequential high pollution levels created.

The need for filter lights to allow traffic to exit Wycombe Marsh Retail Park and Abbey Barn Rd on to London Rd was discussed and accepted as necessary. Measures were said to be in hand to improve the flow and safety of traffic in this area. The need for the signals on Gordon Rd was questioned. These lights are very badly phased and often result in a tailback of traffic on to London Rd. Also the phasing of the lights at the Desborough Ave/Oxford Rd crossing allows very little traffic to exit Desborough Ave on to Oxford Road eastbound. The Eden development has resulted in a significant increase in the number of vehicles using Desborough Ave: at peak periods the section between Desborough Rd and Oxford Rd is often blocked. BCC is looking at measures to relieve this congestion. The need for some form of traffic control to improve traffic flow at the A40/Chapel Lane junction was also raised. The widening of the A40 will offer a temporary solution but BCC recognise that a longer term solution is needed to improve traffic flow at this major junction.

During the discussion on pedestrian crossings it was suggested that three zebra crossings – at the top of Desborough Ave, the top of New Rd and on Cressex Rd – need to be changed to pelican crossings to prevent the constant stream of school children stopping traffic for long periods during peak periods. Mr Blackmore explained that new technology will significantly improve the coordination between traffic and pedestrians at pedestrian crossings with new ‘intelligent’ crossings showing green to traffic when pedestrians have already crossed the road.

While the meeting was most instructive it did confirm that Bucks CC is committed to the use of traffic signals to control traffic despite the latest review from the Transport Research Laboratories, and successful trials in other countries, which show that traffic flow is improved with fewer signals. Although more sets of traffic signals are planned for High Wycombe they hope that the introduction of new control technology will significantly improve traffic flows along all congested routes.

Arnie Parr

The Watermills of Buckinghamshire

A 1930s account by Stanley Freese

Edited by Michael Farley, Edward Legg and James Venn

Published by the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 2007, £12.99.

Stanley Harmon Freese, a twin brother, was born in London in 1902, but later moved to Great Missenden and attended Dr. Challoner's School in Amersham. An artist and photographer, he toured much of England recording country life in the twenties and thirties. Amongst other writing projects, he worked on a comprehensive survey of the wind and watermills in Buckinghamshire. This was a time of change in the countryside, with many mills becoming disused or converted to alternative power sources, but Mr Freese was just in time to be able to meet many of the generation of millers who had worked the mills commercially and record their memories.

The manuscript for the book was substantially complete by 1939, but the outbreak of war put paid to publication at that time. A few additions and amendments were evidently made during or after the war as there are a couple of interesting references to camouflage and the blackout. However, it was not until the '50s that Mr Freese deposited a much amended typescript for a book covering wind- and watermills with Buckinghamshire County Museum, although the book was never published. It is the watermill section that has now been published, with some added notes by the editors.

Buckinghamshire rivers divide naturally into the Ouse and its tributaries flowing generally northward and the Thames and its tributaries flowing to the south; the book is similarly divided. A new index to the mills has been provided and this now makes finding a mill's description reasonably easy. If you want to find a mill on the ground then it may not be so easy, as the book is laid out in parishes, and locations of mills are in direction and distance from the church. Except, that is,

where the mill no longer existed, for there are many descriptions of watermills that were remembered or referred to in old documents but of which no remains could be found. There is a comprehensive bibliography, but it is, unfortunately, not cross-referenced to the text. Most comments on mills are backed by reference to the written sources or maps, but some rely on unsubstantiated observations by people interviewed. Usually this is obvious from the text and not a problem. However, it does mean that the book needs to be used carefully if it is ever to be quoted as source material. It certainly

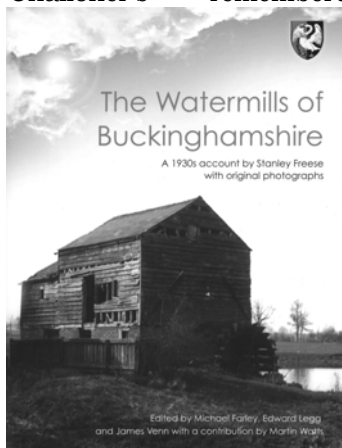
does not detract from the interest and readability of the book. And I found the book to be very readable. OK, it is short on plot, but the descriptions of locations are good, much like a historical travelogue.

Nearly 300 mills are referred to, and a good number are illustrated with photographs, including Pann Mill when it still had the white weather-boarding facing and looked quite handsome. Mr Freese refers to 30 mills on the Wye, many of which were gone, derelict, converted to other uses or power-driven factories. However, Pann Mill and Bowden Mill were still working as grain mills. Now it's just Pann Mill keeping history alive.

This is the sort of book that one may expect to find in a dusty second-hand book shop in Hay-on-Wye: something

written by an enthusiast documenting what he sees fast disappearing around him, except that, because it is published today, the paper is white, the text is easy to read and the photographs are clear. I recommend it for anyone interested in this area of countryside history.

Malcolm Connell



The book launch took place on 13 May, the wettest Pann Mill Open Day in memory (but appropriate considering that without rain, there would be no watermills!). From left to right (first four): Michael Farley, Chairman Roger Lawson, Bruce Alexander (celebrity actor, Insp. Mullet in "A Touch of Frost") and Prof. Bill Mead.

Wycombe Arts Festival

Drilling for the Trust

DENDROCHRONOLOGY AND geophysics were the key words on the evening of 25th May 2007 when members gathered to hear Gary Marshall, archaeologist from the National Trust Thames and Solent Region, give a talk about his work. The quarterly meeting was publicised as an event within the Wycombe Arts Festival programme.

We were soon to learn that "not all archaeology is about excavation work", as Gary gave a rapid overview of his 20-year career to date with the National Trust before homing in on three recent projects in which he had been involved: a major study of Grey's Court near Henley; a survey of Bradenham Woods; and some investigative work at West Wycombe Park.

2006 saw Grey's Court shrouded in scaffolding for renovation work, a disappointment for some visitors but an opportunity for the National Trust to access parts that are normally beyond its reach. English Heritage was commissioned to undertake an architectural study, and the results have necessitated a major revision of the guide book. There have been buildings around the site since the thirteenth century but some parts previously thought to be medieval in origin were found to date only from the sixteenth century. Making extensive use of dendrochronology (*that's counting the tree-rings.-Ed.*), a team from Oxford Archaeology also undertook a detailed analysis of every rafter in the complicated roof structure of the house, which was built in stages from the fifteenth century through to the eighteenth. It is now possible to say with confidence that when Queen Elizabeth I visited Grey's Court in 1574, the building work was not yet complete.

The Bradenham Woods project presented an entirely different type of challenge. Full of lumps and bumps, created and preserved over centuries, it was without a guide of any kind. Thanks in part to a grant from the Chilterns Conservation Board, a team from Oxford Archaeology were again engaged, this time augmented by an army of volunteers, to survey the land using geophysics equipment and other techniques. Early maps show the area in use as a deer park but some of the features may have much earlier origins. Many fragments of Iron Age pottery have been found. A raised mound with a ditch all around could perhaps be of Bronze Age origin but might also have been created much more recently as a base for a hunter's look-out tower. Many hollows, characteristic of the Chilterns area, provide lasting evidence of the activities of bodgers in the woods. So far, over 60 saw pits have been mapped. If you go

down to the woods today you may see some of the yellow markers used as reference points by the archaeologists.

There was little need for excavation at West Wycombe Park, as the water level in the lake fell dramatically in 1991 and again in 2006 to reveal brick and timber structures. The South Bucks metal-detecting club seized the opportunity to explore the whole area, their finds including a Bronze Age knife blade. While silt-filled ditches with Roman pottery fuelled speculation that there may have been a villa in the vicinity, other finds proved more mundane. Archaeologists have been able to trace the history of the landscaping in great detail.

A lively question and answer session followed in which we were assured that the activities of dendrochronologists were less destructive than those of the death watch beetle and that the outcome of the work at Grey's Court, currently contained in a four-volume report for archaeologists, might one day be presented in a more accessible manner for the general public!

Jackie Kay

Letters to the Editor

A few more details...

May I add a few details on the Earls of Shelburne, so well covered in David Snoxell's excellent article.

What happened to Wycombe's Commons seat when the second earl moved to the Lords? During my historical researches at the Public Record Office (*now the National Archives-Ed.*) I discovered this:

"Lord Shelburne (whom you may have heard of as Lord Fitzmaurice) has long been a good friend to me, and some weeks ago upon his father's death made me a most handsome offer of a seat in Parliament in his room. I have canvassed the borough and there is not a shadow of opposition." (*From letter of Isaac Barré to Jeffrey Amherst, 19 June 1761*)

Amherst was the general who completed the conquest of Canada after Wolfe's death at Quebec. Barré had been at Wolfe's side, losing an eye in the battle. His wound

evidently gave him a formidable appearance, which together with a powerful voice made our MP a notable figure in the Commons. There is more about him in the Dictionary of National Biography (both old and new versions). He and Shelburne had earlier been comrades-in-arms.

By virtue of his estate at Bowood, Shelburne was also patron of the Commons seat for Calne. He moved Barré there in 1774. When North's Government fell in 1782, Barré became Treasurer of the Navy, and then Paymaster-General under Shelburne.

The second earl had connections with many of the major figures of his time, including Benjamin Franklin, Jeremy Bentham and Joseph Priestley (who discovered oxygen at Bowood while employed as librarian). There are eighteen entries under Shelburne's name in the index of *"The Lunar Men"*, Jenny Uglow's account of the Midlands industrialists' group centred on Matthew Boulton and Josiah Wedgwood. A family visit to Birmingham in 1766 is one of the highlights of Lady Shelburne's diary, extracts of which can be found on the Web.

Eric Alexander

Another point of view

Having at last got round to reading the final page of the Spring newsletter, and seen Graham Thorne's capitalised suggestion that the river should be restored, I am wondering if this is indeed what we should be campaigning for? The small run that was landscaped by Safeway/Morrison's looked very good when first done but is now just another litter repository, and the area by the Police Station and Council Offices is not a great deal better. With the prospect of less water in our rivers in future, might it not be a mistake to open up the Wye and find it becomes a weedy, rubbish-filled channel?

Prudence Meek

Further views on this would be welcome. Do we think that something that would be a central feature of the middle of our town would be trashed by its own inhabitants? Would not the District Council, spurred by Eden shopkeepers, ensure that it was kept tidy – if nobody else did?

There are plenty of areas around the country that do not suffer this fate. What is it that makes some areas and features vulnerable to the uncaring in our midst? Is it that some places are perceived as uncared-for in the first place?—Ed.

Epic in a Column

"High Wycombe near Slough" – Impressions

The River of Wye was reason to compel Celts, Romans, Saxons, Normans – all to halt, choose, settle and sow.
A flood plain imbues the flatter scene with moist space for cultivating corn and water is drawn down from surrounding Chiltern Hills.

The Domesday Book confers timeless fame on 20 mills of corn along The Wye, milled grain is shipped to All Saints church gate, near the market for corn.
Just so, and this would endow and shape custom and building for a special market town.

With time, some mills were transfigured to succour the fulling and making of cloth: This place has a genius loci – a genius temporis too;
The mills hammered new cloth into a steady state, but in Virgin Elizabeth's reign's end, this stopped.

Paper mills carry on the race starting up where fulling ceased feeding the populace deep into the last recorded century minus some unruly Luddite-like souls who, exiled below, allow a careful mix of trading and still in uncultivated spaces.

Now, women at work reproduce clever lace to rival in quality the milled paper industry. Just when men were set aside by new tongued machinery, So very young, nubile girls are schooled in making lace just as they learn their letters

The town's beech copse had to form new material for commerce.
It inspires a new industry now winding sadly down.
The flaming trees take over suddenly, famed bodgers work the wood into lathed and crafted legs for factories new some near to Disraeli's manor home.

Handling change points to character and soul:
With one more great war, renewed industry helps to build some deadly insects: The Air Force's Mosquito and Tiger Moth.

Dear Reader, I call on you to thank The town's pattern of change,
Its history challenging us to re-form
The genius loci that well-loved beech woods
Show as forests of symbols, signs and memory.

Martin Grey

(Literary note: *genius loci* = spirit of place; *genius temporis* = spirit of the times = zeitgeist.—Ed.)

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs J Peddie of Wycombe Watch Ltd.
Mr D Reeves of Miersfield, HW.
Mr and Mrs P Trotter of Lacey Green

Obituary

We regret to announce the death of:

Mrs E Chad

We extend our condolences to her family and friends.

Regional Matters

Now that the Inspectors are considering their report on the South-East Plan, it is time to record our thanks to the members of the Planning Group, particularly, Tony Fooks, Trevor Carter, Chris Woodman and Evelyn Roe, for all the work they put in to enable Tony, as Leader of the Group, to make some very effective representations to the Examination in Public in Reading in April.

And at the same time, I would like to thank the Group for all the work they have put in to the Society's contribution to the consultation on the Wycombe Development Framework.

Roger Lawson

Ascott House

Our second shared-car trip this year is to Ascott House, a National Trust property near Wing, Aylesbury. Those with good memories will remember that Ascott was mentioned by Brian Edwards in his talk last July, "*Famous Buckinghamshire Families and their Treasure*

Houses". Ascott is a small property, originally a half-timbered farmhouse, transformed and enlarged by the Rothschild family. It houses an exceptional collection of fine paintings, Oriental porcelain and English and French furniture. There are extensive gardens, formal and natural, with specimen trees and shrubs, a herbaceous walk, lily pond, Dutch garden and remarkable topiary sundial. Cost for non-NT members is £8. Phone me on 01494 448773 if you want to join the party!

Ann Simone

We'll take a stand...

A slide projector or PowerPoint stand, in fact! At the moment we borrow one for our quarterly meetings. If a member has a suitable stand, preferably with two shelves, that they would be prepared to donate to the Society, please contact Mary Woodman on 01494 528106.

Save us £1.40!

The *Newsletter* costs us 35p per copy to print. Every member is entitled to a printed copy, but if you would like to receive it by email, as well as or instead of the printed version, please email the Editor at chris@thewoodmans.fsnet.co.uk.

Thanks...

... to all those who have contributed copy for this issue. Material for the Autumn edition 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

2007

Sunday 8th July
11.00am–5.00pm

Pann Mill Open Day. Refreshments, bric-a-brac, sale of flour. Family crafts with the Chilterns Conservation Board. Also Water Trail at 2.30pm, start and finish at Pann Mill.

Friday 27th July
7.30pm, Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: "*Birds, for people, for ever? The effects of climate change on our birds and wildlife.*" Speaker: David Nobbs, Community Talks Officer, RSPB. Guildhall, 7.30pm.

Sunday 12th August

Members' outing by shared cars to Ascott House (National Trust), Wing, Aylesbury (*see above*).

Sunday 2nd September
11.00am–5.00pm

Pann Mill Open Day, 11am–5pm. Crafts by Society Members, Bric-a-Brac, Teas and Cakes, sale of flour.

Water Trail, 2.30pm. Start and finish at Pann Mill.

Wednesday 24th October
7.30pm, Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: "*Georgian Style – What do we mean by this?*" Speaker: Andy Gunn, WEA and OU Lecturer.