

# THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

## *newsletter*

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### **Airing Our Views**

LIVE BROADCASTING is not for the faint-hearted. But when Wycombe Sound invited us just before Christmas to take part in a discussion on the future of our town, there was only one acceptable answer! And so it was that I found myself sitting in the temporary radio studio in Eden alongside Charles Brocklehurst, Head of Major Projects from WDC, being quizzed about planning, transport, and other topical issues, including the new household recycling bins. Hosted by Colin Maitland, the programme was one of a series of hour-long discussions on local issues. Philippa Sawyer, Programme Director for Wycombe Community Radio CIC has since written to say that "We would certainly love to invite you back again, perhaps to take a closer look at the work of the High Wycombe Society, its aims and objectives."

The digital age provides many opportunities to air our views to new audiences. Work has started on transforming our website, and our social media posts are also reaching a growing number of High Wycombe people. But many of the things we do are still best achieved by more conventional means. Much of our effort is currently focussed on determining our formal response to the recently-published Local Plan. "We need your help." says WDC in its literature, and so do we! Make no mistake - this plan affects us all. There is still time for you to express your views either directly to WDC or to our planning group. (see p2 ).

With our AGM approaching, now is also a good time to air your views about the Society. Are we doing a good job? Or could we do better? Several trustees are standing down from the Executive Committee in May. To sustain our programme, we need more people to come forward both as trustees and as volunteers for our events. So please think about what you would like us to be doing, and what you could do to help make it happen.

In particular, do you think you know what's WHAT where heritage is concerned? Our Hon Treasurer, Paul Meek will soon be stepping down from his role in representing the Society on the



Wycombe Heritage and Arts Trust. WHAT is entering a new phase as it takes over responsibility for all aspects of Wycombe Museum. The official opening on its new site in Queen Victoria Road is scheduled for mid-2016. If you would like to be the Society's representative on WHAT, please first consider standing as a trustee of the Society at our AGM.

*Jackie Kay*

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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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## Planning This Quarter

WITH THE FESTIVE SEASON over, the Group began to focus most of its effort on the new District Local Plan. Meeting the Government's centrally-dictated housing requirements threatens several cherished areas on the outskirts of our town, and this is not a matter of our elected Councillors being unwilling to stand up to the Government: because without the right arguments the absolutely inevitable result is that they would be overruled by Planning Inspectors *and* would lose any local control over where development goes. At the same time there has been the usual flow of lesser applications to be examined. As we go to press, the saga of RAF Daws Hill is still not complete and no satisfactory solution to the transport issues in that area has yet emerged. The Group remains smaller than we would like and more volunteers to share the effort would be welcomed.

**Local Plan** Following up on the very welcome and frank briefing received from WDC in November, several Group members duly attended the 'Stakeholders' Briefing' session on 29<sup>th</sup> January. The Council launched their consultation with a 12-page booklet, sent to every household in the District, and a series of exhibitions and meetings began on 11<sup>th</sup> February. A noticeable omission from the booklet was the element of *force majeure* from central Government via the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Inspectors whose job is to reject any Local Plans that they deem non-compliant. That said, the consultation material is of a high quality – detailed (on the website) and readable. It has also been our pleasure to welcome back, as the new Director of Planning & Sustainability, Penelope Tollitt (once WDC's Head of Urban Design), taking over from Jerry Unsworth who served us well over a very long period but has now moved on to private consultancy.

Members should read the consultation booklet for themselves (and we hope that by the time you read this some of you have let the Planning Group have your views). The salient facts are that the Council has assessed that the house-building rate needs to rise from its current 400-450 dwellings per year to around 500-700. In the front line are the long-standing 'reserve sites' – Abbey Barn South (mainly proposed for housing and commercial development but with some parkland retained), Abbey Barn North at the foot of the hill (much of it to be left as a nature reserve), Terriers Farm (for full development including a possible Park & Ride site), Gomm Valley (mostly to be undeveloped and to remain a nature reserve) and Slate Meadow at Bourne End.

The one major area of the District that is neither in the AONB nor in the Green Belt is west of Princes Risborough. The Council think there is scope for a big new development here on 'Garden City' lines. We think that is a good idea (well, we would, wouldn't we?) but it is important that it has its own facilities and does not overwhelm the cosy intimacy of Princes Risborough. 'Garden city principles' would seem to be along the right lines, although perhaps they should go over the border into

Oxfordshire to achieve a development that is truly self-sufficient. (The NPPF approves of 'cooperation with neighbouring authorities'!)

The most contentious policy area concerns the Green Belt. On the one hand, the Government says they will respect the Green Belt and will not allow building on it. On the other hand, they say that Planning Authorities must 'review' their Green Belt if necessary to accommodate their assessed 'housing need', and Planning Inspectors have been throwing out Plans where this has not been done. WDC have not announced where areas might be taken out of the Green Belt, but the obvious area is in the south-east around Wooburn Green and Wooburn.

Forward planning is not limited to housing. Space has to be found for commercial development too, and WDC have suggested Wycombe Air Park, land near Heath End Road beside the M40, and the Buckmaster Playing Fields at Booker.

Needless to say, 'brownfield sites' and 'intensification' within the District's urban areas will continue to have a part to play.

The consultation period ends on Friday 4 April, and all members are encouraged to send their views to [planning@highwycombesociety.org.uk](mailto:planning@highwycombesociety.org.uk) or to the Planning Group at 29 Maybrook Gardens, HP13 6PJ, as soon as possible.

**Daws Hill** As previously reported Taylor Wimpey's planning application was approved by WDC's Planning Committee on 20<sup>th</sup> November. Well, not quite! Some details remained to be sorted out by the officers in coordination with the Committee Chairman and that left the way open for our local MP, Steve Baker, to ask the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, to "call in" the application for his own decision, on various grounds including the unresolved transport issues in the area. If Mr Pickles grants the call-in, there will be a public inquiry to provide the facts that he needs to take his decision. We have also heard about another kind of 'call-in', where Bucks County Council have been required by their own Select Committee, to review their decision to send a bus route along Daws Lea.

Some cases take a very long time to be resolved.

**Chris Woodman**

## Poacher AND Gamekeeper? or the road to hell is paved with potholes!

A LEADING NATIONAL transport journal (Local Transport Today, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013), reported serious criticism of Bucks County Council's transport operations. The criticism was in a report initiated by a group of dissatisfied county councillors, who believed the Council's contract with Ringway Jacobs (also known as Transport for Buckinghamshire or TfB) to provide both the planning and the services for transport operations county-wide, was not being properly supervised and did not offer value for money.

This Society's Transport Group saw it first, and from the outset expressed disbelief that a single contract for both planning and services could work. We have had many years' experience of failings by the County, including poor maintenance of road surfaces and storm drains, and omitting to carry out simple works already agreed, such as improving traffic flow by adjusting traffic light intervals. The contract has a 'thin client' management team, which is a euphemism for insufficient staff to check the work properly.

The Ringway/Jacobs contract was set up in April 2009 to run for 8 years, but has had extensions up to 2019; the report suggests that with better monitoring of efficiency and results the extensions may not have happened.

The full 66-page Select Committee report is published on the BCC website along with the agenda and minutes of the Cabinet meeting at which it was discussed in January 2014. A key section within it reads:

'The County Council may only just be realising the nature of the contract it is in. There needs to be recognition that in a commissioning environment all the normal day-to-day activities within a service are outsourced. The client role is one of contract management/commissioning rather than being the gatekeeper/reviewer of requests for service. In line with this approach the client has passed over all responsibility to the contractor including self-assessment of the KPIs [*Key Performance Indicators*], and therefore has no in-house audit/compliance function. Ultimately, we are not convinced that TfB are fully delivering as the



*A patchwork of potholes*

*Photo: Jackie Kay*

contract requires. Given that the contractor has full responsibility for delivery, we question why we continue to make payment contributions and contract extensions, if required services and processes are not being delivered.'

Like we said, a poacher cannot also be a gamekeeper.

Road maintenance is a costly business. A recent newspaper article trumpeted over 50Km (31 miles) of road resurfaced for £31million. Is £1million a mile good value for money? Are we happy with the quality of workmanship when expensive recently-repaired road surfaces break down?

Ringway/Jacobs were also responsible for the report comparing the Coachway with re-opening High Wycombe to Maidenhead as a light rail route. It concluded that the coachway would be cheaper but the railway better. This obvious conclusion set the idea of re-instating the railway back several years, but we are encouraged that the Local Enterprise Partnership has now put it back on the agenda.

Can we hold out any hope for the future? BCC will be employing more resources to monitor the work, and review the role of the Local Area Technicians (LATs) who are supposed to go round checking on lighting, drains and potholes. These LATs are obviously a key element in actually getting things done.

We live in hope, and with the added impetus from the Councillors, we trust our constructive comments will be acted upon in the future.

**Nigel Phillips**

## Talking Transport

Back in December, Chris Watson, Elsa Woodward and I met with Ryan Bunce, the officer at BCC who is responsible for the Transport Strategy for High Wycombe, for a wide-ranging discussion on planning and transport matters during which we also reviewed the various communications channels open to us. These include responding to consultations such as that on the Local Area Plan. Since then, we have also corresponded with Martin Tett, Leader of Bucks County Council, and, at his suggestion, Arnie Parr and I recently attended a Local Community Partnership meeting at which we received a written answer to a question submitted in advance. Arnie's work continues! The BCC has well-established channels for reporting issues such as potholes and we would encourage all our members to use these.

**Jackie Kay**

## Transport Opportunities

MORE RAIL CONNECTIONS; less road congestion; better support for the economy; and environmental benefits: these are all matters which challenge the minds of our Transport group, and on which there are emerging opportunities for positive progress. In the last few years growing numbers of rail passenger journeys have produced serious overcrowding on many routes, prompting huge new investment in expanding the railways. It was recently announced that £30bn would be spent over a period of 5 years. This is to include large and small projects, like re-opening some of the branch lines closed after the 1963 Beeching Report. In this new railway age, and with so much daily congestion on the roads between High Wycombe and Maidenhead, there is a strong case for reinstating the 5-mile link between High Wycombe and Bourne End stations (HBL) which was closed in 1970. It is good news to read that the HBL is included for consideration in the new **Strategic Economic Plan** prepared by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in the Bucks Thames Valley area.

**Reinstating the HBL** with light rail could open up a frequent through service between High Wycombe and Maidenhead. This would be quiet and unobtrusive, and free from road traffic, and could serve a very large area with rail, because at Maidenhead it could make many daily connections with three major rail networks. These would include Chiltern Railways from High Wycombe (where there are services to London and Birmingham, and also Oxford starting in 2015), plus the Great West Main Line running between London and Penzance with several branch lines, and in 2018 Crossrail will also arrive at Maidenhead, with future connections to Heathrow.

**Reducing road congestion by shared journeys.** Even with the above valuable new rail connections, further measures to cut congestion by reducing the number of car journeys are needed. In the Summer 2012 Edition of the

Newsletter we reported that an innovative taxi firm operating a private vehicle hire service, which requires pre-booking, had adapted their system to facilitate journey-sharing. Their subsequent studies have found journey sharing to be popular and successful, cutting the number of vehicle journeys with safe, shared, demand-responsive transport, that can be quickly requested by mobile phone. The fast booking permits large numbers to be processed quickly, creating opportunities to match journeys for convenient sharing, and thus cutting carbon emissions while deploying a fleet of hire vehicles so that each can be constantly located, and with a known driver and passengers. An even faster booking system has just been installed, but even in an early study, during the hours of 6 – 9 on Monday to Friday, 60 riders shared journeys in one week.

*Elsa Woodward*

## Day Opportunies

DAY CARE PROVISION is not usually a matter which we consider to be part of our Society's remit. But several Society members attended an exhibition on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> January (billed as a "meet the architects" event) in the County Council offices in Easton Street where we were shown plans for a new Day Opportunities Centre in High Wycombe. As part of a three-year modernisation plan, day care facilities formerly provided by 22 day centres throughout Buckinghamshire are being replaced with six larger day opportunities centres and more community-based services. Individuals in need of day care facilities receive a 'personal budget' and can decide where it is spent. An interesting aspect is the possibility that the High Wycombe centre might include a pool for hydrotherapy.

BCC propose to build this extensive new centre in the Hughenden Corridor at the Southern End of the CompAir site and extending on to the Jewson's site. It seems to be a good location, alongside the Hughenden Stream, and next to the Star & Garter Care Home planned for the immediately adjacent plot to the north. However, Planning Group members felt the proposed architecture was rather bland and institutional and that something better could have been done within the budget.

Of greater concern was that BCC want to build upper storeys on the block to relocate their Area Office now in Easton Street. This seemed to the Planning Group to be wasteful in two ways. First, no justification was given for moving out of

the existing building – there have been rumours of noise next to the railway station (surprise, surprise) but that could surely be dealt with by cheaper refurbishment. Second, could not the upper storeys, if there were to be any, be used for much-needed housing? And where does the relocation of the Area Office stand when there is widespread talk of more cooperative working between County and District, and even of a Unitary Authority?. A letter was sent to BCC making these points and we are now studying the reply, which addresses the question of alternative use for the upper storeys but fails to make any case for the move from Easton Street.

*Chris Woodman*

## Why Park & Ride is Doomed to Fail

IN MY EXPERIENCE as a professional transport manager and consultant, “transport” is a subject which many people reckon they know something about. Everyone knows the simple ‘solutions’ – build more roads, enlarge a junction, make parking cheaper, make parking more expensive, put in more bus lanes, scrap the bus lanes we’ve got, help bus operators to deliver a better bus service, scrap conventional buses and replace them with ‘demand-responsive taxi-buses’.

By and large such debates are characterised by the certainties advanced by their advocates, and the ignorance on which such advocacy is based. One ‘solution’ aired locally on occasion is to develop more Park & Ride sites around High Wycombe to reduce traffic congestion by causing a modal shift from car to bus.

There is no doubt that Park & Ride works well in certain towns and cities. Oxford is a very good example. Like High Wycombe, Oxford found itself plagued by rising car ownership and traffic congestion in the 1960s. Plans to accommodate it by laying down tarmac and demolishing buildings were met with firm resistance. Oxford’s planners and councillors looked for other methods to control and manage the rise in private car ownership and use. They settled on a range of ‘soft’ transport measures as an alternative to the ‘civil engineering’ approach which had become common elsewhere.

The first Park & Ride in the UK was established in Oxford in 1973 as part of a ‘Balanced Transport Policy’, which gave buses exclusive access to the main city centre shopping streets, introduced bus priority measures on other main bus routes, started a bus-based Park & Ride system and discouraged the use of private cars for travel to the city centre.

From a modest start from a site attached to a motel on the A34 at Pear Tree Interchange, to the north of Oxford, the Oxford Park & Ride model expanded, with further sites opening until there was a ring of five park and ride sites around the city’s periphery. There is no doubt that this ring of “park & ride” sites makes a major contribution to keeping unnecessary car journeys out of Oxford city. The park & ride sites thereby reduce traffic congestion, noise, and air pollution, and avoid valuable city centre space being used for car parking.

So why could such a scheme not work for High Wycombe?

Park & Ride schemes work where they intercept incoming motorists’ car journeys, and do so far enough out of the town centre that the car driver is not tempted simply to carry on in the car and park centrally. There is an inevitable time penalty attached to finding a space at the Park &

Ride and getting the bus. Even with a dedicated bus every 10 to 15 minutes some waiting is involved. If the bus is then caught in traffic congestion, or is required to stop every 250 metres to pick-up other passengers, then the car-driver who tries the park & ride is unlikely to be impressed by the experience. Unless the likelihood of finding a parking space in the town centre is also remote, or expensive, then the park & ride will not attract people to use it.

Effective Park & Rides work:

where there is a frequent, limited-stop bus service which gets into town faster than other traffic thanks to the provision of effective and enforced bus priority measures;

where town centre car parking is limited, and expensive;

where a large number of workers and shoppers heading for the centre are from places *outside* the urban area of the town;

and where large areas of vacant land are available on the edge of the town, suitable to be turned into car parks.

None of the above apply in High Wycombe!

A large part of the traffic in High Wycombe at peak times is heading *out* of the town – these are commuters heading to Reading, Uxbridge, Oxford, London, Aylesbury, etc.

Many journeys are through traffic, people from for example, Princes Risborough, heading through Wycombe on their way to another town on the other side of Wycombe.

Of those people who work or shop in the town, many live within the urban area. They are hardly going to drive away from the town centre in order to get to a park & ride site, only to come back into the town centre again on the bus!

Bus priority measures in High Wycombe are far too limited.

Car parking in High Wycombe is far too plentiful, and far too cheap.

Potential park & ride car park sites on the edge of High Wycombe are in sensitive landscapes, and likely to be vociferously opposed.

For these reasons, I think that more Park & Ride would be doomed to fail in High Wycombe.

**Neil Timberlake BSc CMLT**



High Wycombe’s single Park & Ride.

Photo: Malcolm Connell

## Margaret and her Garden

On Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January, Stuart King dedicated his talk to the memory of Margaret Simmons. Margaret had been looking forward to receiving a spoon which Stuart had carved for her. It was her choice of gift, commissioned with money collected on the occasion of her retirement. Sadly she never got to hold it.



Two of the gardeners who now tend Margaret's garden wrote in to say:

The first time this year we visited Margaret's garden ("Mags" to us) was sad, as we missed her kneeling down among the plants and giving us her words of wisdom. We soon cheered up when we saw how many flowers were coming through:- winter aconites, jasmine, snowdrops, periwinkle. We tidied up and we will try and garden as Mags did, always removing all dead matter from around the plants etc.

Our first planned gardening session in February was stopped by heavy rain, but we did tidy up and have a good look round at the plants coming through - the earlier ones now being joined by crocus and primroses. We were sorry to see that the willow tree had had to come down but it has opened up a lovely view of the church opposite.

The downside to our visit was cleaning up dog excreta and unfortunately human which we found very upsetting but we do know that it was something that Mags often dealt with and so will we.

**Julie Hopton and Wendy Thomas**

The family of Margaret Simmons have asked us to relay their thanks to those who attended the funeral or sent messages of condolence. The following are representative of the very many tributes we have received.

"We have many happy memories of Margaret, from years ago when she looked after our garden through to more recent tales of her collecting the coffee grinds from Costa! Best of all was her enthusiasm for life, tenacity in her garden, and the way she kept up with friends "

**Michelle, Phil, Charlotte & Monty Robins**

"I was so sorry to learn of Margaret's passing.

I used to work for Thames Water testing the quality of water from the area. One of my daily calls was to Pann Mill Water Treatment Works, where Margaret and I sometimes met each other and had a chat (over the boundary fence!).

On one occasion, she was very excited and as always, modest, about an award she had been given in recognition of all her hard work at Pann Mill over the years. In typical Margaret spirit, rather than spend the money on herself, she chose instead to buy and plant a tree in her beloved garden. The next day I saw her and she was devastated, (as was I when she told me), that on the first night after planting, some moronic souls had snapped the tree in half. You cannot get much lower than that. I was so incensed that I phoned the Bucks Free Press to advise them what had happened to this wonderful elderly and selfless lady. I had hoped they might print a story to show that she was appreciated (as I know she was by very many people). Unfortunately, a story did not appear, but Margaret was soon back in form, on her knees, in all weathers tending the garden.

I remember her excitement as a few years ago she unearthed the floor of the old, presumably Victorian or Edwardian, WCs which existed on the boundary of the public footpath, but within the garden and immediately adjacent to the Water Works' entrance. I think I was as excited as her, by her enthusiasm.

I know Margaret moved to be with her family in Hampshire and I am sure that she enjoyed the albeit relatively short time she was there, close to family.

I was forever amazed how she used to turn up and work in all weathers, many times when I used to want to shelter in the confines of my van! I will always remember her and I am so pleased that the garden is now officially known as 'Margaret's Garden'. She was a dear and inspirational lady and may she now Rest in Peace."

**Charlie Broadbridge.**

"I have seen the beautiful garden that Margaret created surrounding Pann Mill, and it will be a lasting legacy of her time and commitment over 30 years in transforming a green space into a magical imaginative garden."

**Rosemary Hewitt**

## Quarterly Meeting

# Secrets of the Wildwood

THE WILDWOOD – *this other Eden, this demi-paradise* – lies in the Chilterns above the Misbourne Valley. With these words, Stuart King engaged his audience at the start of his talk about a familiar landscape which holds the secrets of human settlement over thousands of years. “Wildwood” is a term to describe the first woodlands in the UK landscape. Sponges and sea urchins (the local name was heart urchin) tell of the time when this part of the countryside was under the sea. At the end of the Ice Age the ice melt carved out the Chiltern Hills. As the climate warmed, vegetation and then animals arrived including mammoths, their tusks being found in a chalk quarry at Pitstone.

Early man, as all local gardeners know, had a ready supply of flints for their axes and scrapers: flints formed from the deterioration of those sponges 150+ million years ago. The production of flint tools and iron smelting were the early crafts of the Chilterns. One corner of the wood, Slag Corner, tells of the site’s history of smelting iron. There is no iron ore in the Chilterns but we do have charcoal. A coleman was a medieval charcoal burner and this is indeed Coleman’s Wood. One of the first artefacts Stuart found was the top of a bronze socketed axe, evidence of bronze working, but again there are no copper mines locally and the nearest tin is in Cornwall. Early man enjoyed widespread trading.

Sponsored by the Chilterns Conservation Board, Stuart has had a resistivity survey made, familiar to followers of Time Team. This survey helped reveal a medieval enclosure, a bank enclosing a platform with a surrounding ditch. Once thought to have been a medieval house platform, the first manor house of Holmer Green, it is now considered to be a palisaded animal enclosure. But remains of a medieval spur and belt buckle plate with lion’s head, both reasonably high status objects, fly in the face of this being an animal enclosure. Excavations can throw up many more questions than answers!

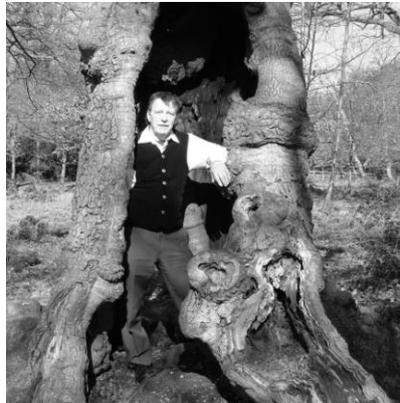
Another enclosure, this time Romano-British, has revealed some high status treasures, silver denarii minted in Rome. What were these doing in a Chiltern Wood? The site has yielded barrow-loads of pots, some from the late Iron Age, deposited over a period of 150 years in a long straight ditch. Where did they come from – a villa not yet found down in the valley?

And what of the bodgers? There is no evidence that bodgers worked in the Wildwood. Metal objects such as a wood-turning gouge shown by Stuart are difficult to date. A tool like this could have belonged to a bodger, but our Iron Age ancestors would have recognised it.

All around the Wildwood we have a big bank and ditch lined with mature hornbeams. One

may be at least 300 years old. Once these would have been woven or layered, to make a fence to keep the wood or the fields stock free. Part of the Wildwood was clear felled 300 years ago by a man called Griffiths. He sold the timber and put it to the plough. It has since returned to woodland and supports a rich variety of plant life.

The UK has 20% of the world’s bluebells with the Chilterns holding 20% of those. Not a Spanish bluebell in sight yet says Stuart! With these we have yellow archangel, dog’s mercury and the green hellebore – quite rare in the Chilterns with just one plant in the 42 acres of the Wildwood. The shy wood sorrel was used in the past instead of rennet. Foxgloves appear after there has been some felling.



The trees are a mixture of oak, ash, some rowan, wild cherry and some witch elm. The latter is the last to drop its leaves when they leave a bright yellow carpet on the woodland floor. Of course there is beech. This

has been a good ‘mast’ year with a plentiful supply of beech nuts, a favourite with pigs. Commoners once had the right of estover – to collect firewood – and of pannage – to allow pigs and other animals to forage in the wood.

Last year was also good for butterflies, and Stuart was charmed by the dance of the speckled-wood, so difficult to photograph. An infra red camera gave us sight of the shy animals, the badgers, foxes, squirrels, pheasants, muntjac and roe deer.

For those of us unsure whether the depressions in the woods are sawpits or dells: Stuart explained. Dells cover a large area, magnificent features of which there are three in the Wildwood each with a wagon way out. Who dug them and what for is as yet unknown.

Stuart has known the Wildwood since he was a boy of twelve, since he was old enough to trespass! For him it is a magical place where nature and history combine. We thank him for sharing some of its magic with us.

**Damon M Arwoy**

## Wycombe in Bloom

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL Society's 'Britain in Bloom' campaign is coming to High Wycombe! This is an initiative to get communities to work together to improve their local environment, generally through some form of horticultural endeavour. There is a competitive element at regional and national level. HWBIDCo, who sponsor the hanging baskets in the town centre, are leading the effort to get the town involved. The plan is to enter the Thames & Chilterns in Bloom regional round to see how we do.

A number of sites have been identified that would benefit from attention including the

overgrown area at the end of the old Brunel Railway shed by High Wycombe station. HWBIDCo have sponsored a competition to find an image to be displayed on the shed end. This competition has now closed and as we go to press we await the results with interest.

Ann Simone represented the Society at the inaugural 'Wycombe in Bloom' meeting, but there is time for others to get involved. The Society will continue to support and report on this initiative, and you can find more information on the HWBIDCo web site.

**Malcolm Connell**

## Calling Historians & Garden Lovers!

IN THE AUTUMN edition of the newsletter we highlighted a volunteering opportunity with the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust which is undertaking the Local Listing of Historic Parks and Gardens. Society member Christine Clark responded and has since been trained. She is now eagerly awaiting the opportunity to put her skills into practice. The Trust has received Heritage Lottery funding and is looking to train more volunteers in research and recording.

The pilot project will run for a year commencing in May 2014 and will study fifteen gardens in the Wycombe district, before its extension - over the coming years - to cover parks and gardens in the rest of the County. If you think you could spare some time and would like to be involved, there will be an opportunity to train in May. The Project Co-ordinator, Claire de Carle, can be contacted directly via email: [claire@decarle.plus.com](mailto:claire@decarle.plus.com)

## Things to be found in a hedge.

DO YOU EVER go for a walk in the country, or even round the many open spaces around the Town, and enjoy some of nature's bounty from the hedgerows? There is much to find in a hedge such as blackberries, sloes (ahh the gin), damsons, crab apples, medlars, etc. The old law was that you could pick freely what you could reach so long as you did not damage the hedge in any way. So long as you are not trespassing to reach the hedge and are not picking for commercial purposes this still holds today. Some other things that you may find in hedges round the Rye are interesting old railings (see p11) and cans of beer!

The railings are very easy to see at this time of year if you know where to look, and if you are round that part of the Rye they are worth diverting from the path to see. But cans of beer? Yes, every couple of weeks at Pann Mill we check the hedges and always find a number of beer cans and bottles (and sometimes even



*The War Office Railings*

*Photo: Malcolm Connell*

less savoury objects) many of which are still half full of beer. The photo shows a recent haul. We always get the general littering of cans thrown on or over the hedge but can only surmise that since the Mill is in an alcohol-free area people park their cans in the hedge when they see police



*A Recent Haul from the Pann Mill hedge*

*Photo Malcolm Connell*

approaching and then forget what they did. We wish that they would collect the cans as they play havoc with hedge trimmers, and the robins and dunnocks nesting in the hedge get very upset. And in case you are wondering, no, we do not use the beer for refreshment, it's emptied on the flower beds and the cans go for recycling.

**Malcolm Connell**

## *Behind the Scenes*

### Inside the Gurdwara Amrit Parchar Dharmik Diwan

ON 6<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, Society members were welcomed to the Gurdwara, Sikh Temple, in Brook Street by President Mr Sarup Singh Seehra together with Giani (Priest) Mr Surjit Singh and community member Mr Joga Singh Bains. (Sikh men adopt the name Singh and women Kaur.) In accordance with the custom of serving food and drink to all, we were provided with tea and snacks as we arrived.

Mr Seehra outlined the history and philosophy of Sikhism, the major tenets of which are to love God and to serve humanity. For Sikhs the whole human race is a united family, a brotherhood under one God. They believe in equality of race, caste, gender and creed. Sikhs respect the faiths of others, seeing them as following different roads to the same eternal destiny. Events taught Sikhs that they have to stand up for their beliefs. Pictures around the walls of the langar (the lower room and communal kitchen) show some of the gruesome methods of torture meted out to Sikhs who refused to deny their religion. In response to such oppression, 10<sup>th</sup> Guru Gobind Singh (1666 – 1708) introduced ‘saint soldiers’ to fight not only for their own rights but also those of others. Sikhs are ‘doers’; the contemplative life is not for them. In India, although Sikhs represent only 2% of the Indian population their work ethic results in a contribution many times that to the economic and sporting life of the country.

Formerly a warehouse with offices above, the Gurdwara, on the corner of Brook and Westbourne Streets, is outwardly a particularly grey, dull building. Perhaps this adds to the surprise when one goes upstairs to the Darbar Sahib, the large light room where services are held. There the ceiling is adorned overall with brightly coloured metallic chains and balls such as most of us associate with Christmas. The Manji Sahib (Guru’s seat) shines with gold and other bright colours lit to emphasise the glow. The effect is quite breathtaking. An area beside the Manji Sahib is designated for the singers and musicians who contribute an important part to Sikh services. Teaching is based on the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh scripture. Largely compiled and edited by the fifth Guru Arjan Dev (1563 – 1606), the writings were updated and assigned the status of Guru by Guru Gobind Singh, the last human Guru. Written in the form of verse, the Guru Granth is unique in including texts from other faiths. Although the language of the text

is primarily Punjabi, the Guru Granth includes verses in languages such as Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic.

Sikhs welcome visitors of any religion or none to the Gurdwara which is open throughout most of the day on Sunday. On other days, for security reasons, access can only be by appointment.



*Mr Seehra explaining the tenets of Sikhism.*

*Photo: Chris Woodman*

On behalf of the High Wycombe Society, Chris Woodman presented a gift of 5 bags of Pann Mill flour to be used in the communal kitchen.

Our thanks go to Messrs Seehra, Singh and Bains for making us so welcome and to Mary Woodman for organising this event. This was a truly ‘behind the scenes’ experience.

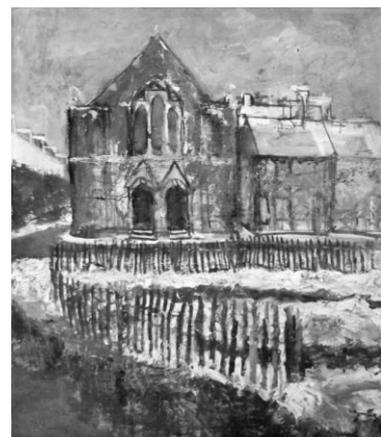
The tucked-away position of the Gurdwara makes it likely that some members were unaware of its existence before this visit was organised. We can expect this to change when/if the new road scheme comes into being. The planned use of Westbourne Street to cut through to Oxford Road will ensure that the Gurdwara is tucked away no longer.

**Roberta Wilson**

### Westbourne Street Chapel

Member Lorna Cassidy had her own gift for our Sikh hosts – a picture of a chapel in Westbourne Street which she explained used to be very close to the current Sikh temple site, reproduced here with the artist’s permission.

Those of you who would like to see more of Lorna’s work should look out for her entry in the Bucks Open Studio booklet due out in June.



*Behind the Scenes*

## Through the (Main) Abbey Gates

ON TUESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 20 Society members made their way past the traffic or through the pedestrian tunnel to gather on the pavement outside Wycombe Abbey School. Provided with visitor badges, we proceeded to the main entrance where a warm welcome awaited us. The double-height entrance hall, with stucco plaster work decoration, had a calm atmosphere. A side corridor led us to the library where John Luke, the Bursar, gave a short presentation about the school.

Mr. Luke explained that the school was set up by Miss (later Dame) Frances Dove in 1896 for 40 girls. After 14 years as headmistress of a school at St. Leonards, in Fife, Miss Dove set out her new school's aims – to develop each girl's talents, fostering an awareness of God and an understanding of the needs of others. These aims remain the same today.

Initially the school bought only the main house and 30 acres of parkland from the Carringtons, who retained most of the grounds and remodelled Daws Hill House as their Wycombe residence. The driveway from the High Street was detached to create Queen Victoria Road. In 1928 the remainder of the land was purchased by the school and Daws Hill House was converted to boarding accommodation. Today there are 560 girls, most of whom are boarders. Their needs are met by 400 members of staff.

A major crisis in the school's history occurred when the buildings and grounds were requisitioned for the use of the US Air Force during the Second World War. By 1942 the Abbey had already taken in a hundred extra girls evacuated from St. Paul's Girls' School in London and no suitable establishment could be found to keep the pupils together. So they were dispersed to other schools across the country. However, the Headmistress remained at Wycombe Abbey and continued to run a "virtual" school, keeping in touch with the staff and pupils and recruiting new girls each year. In 1946 when the school re-opened 200 girls "returned" to school at Wycombe, of whom only about 20 had studied there before.

The military use of the site has had far reaching implications. As well as the permanent loss of land to RAF Daws Hill, the wartime bunker, code name PINETREE, continued in use after the end of the war. It was mothballed for certain periods, but not finally decommissioned until the 1990s and the land lease has only recently expired, allowing the school to take control of the area

again. The school's maintenance department will be moving into one of the former military buildings soon.

Expectations of staff and pupils have changed over the years and the school has had to adapt. At the start of the twentieth century married women were not employed as teachers, so staff accommodation did not cater for families. Dormitories were used to house the girls, whereas many current students expect to have their own room. The oldest girls now share a separate group of houses with more independent facilities to help them prepare for student life. We were shown photographs of the newer boarding houses, staff accommodation, the interior of Daws Hill House, the theatre and music centre and the sports block added in 2004.

Options for future expansion are limited by the steep contours of the site, the risk of flooding from the lake and the listing of the park and many of the buildings as of special historic interest. Ingenious solutions have been sought to these problems and much of the sports centre was built back into the hill to minimise its impact. Special care was taken to break up its roof line as much as possible, although this did not entirely silence its critics.

We were taken to see the school chapel, designed by W. D. Caroe, a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement. Built in the 1920s, it remains at the centre of school life today. The rows of empty chairs, clearly labelled and divided into separate houses, brought home to us the size of the school. We saw the corrugated iron roof of the "Big School" and then walked up the valley towards the Sports Centre. The original boarding houses, also designed by Caroe in a "Free Renaissance" style are impressive enough when seen from Marlow Hill, but from inside the grounds they are even more imposing.

The Sports Centre is a veritable Tardis, appearing much bigger on the inside than the outside. As well as two sports halls it houses a



*W.D. Caroe's designs: the chapel (above); and the boarding houses (below).*

*Photos by Roger Wilding*



swimming pool and squash courts. Busy notice boards reveal the wide range of sporting activities on offer.

The light was fading as we hurried back to the library for welcome refreshments. Animated talk continued over tea and cakes. There is no room here to explain the origin of Lavinia Way or to tell of the headmistress who was rumoured to sleep with a loaded revolver under her pillow! Fascinating stories abound about this school and its site.

Would it be possible to arrange another visit to see the listed features in the grounds,

including the Bunker, the 19<sup>th</sup> century ice house and the gates at Daws Hill House? The "Big School" also houses the Shelburne family pew removed from the Parish Church in the mid-nineteenth century. Could we see this?

Many thanks to the current head mistress, Mrs. Rhiannon Wilkinson, for allowing us to come. Particular thanks also to the Bursar, John Luke, and to Eileen for welcoming us so warmly and giving so freely of their time and knowledge.

**Val Hinkins**

## Time to restore the War Office Gates?

IN 1858 A War Office was established in town houses on the south side of Pall Mall. It incorporated Cumberland House (once known as York House) at 87-89 Pall Mall - a house which was built around 1761-63 and was the home of the son of George the Third; and next door, at no 91, Buckingham House, built around 1792-5, the home of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. These houses were fronted by gates and railings.

The War Office moved in 1906 to a newly completed building in Whitehall. Confusingly this newer War Office building is now known as the Old War Office and last year was put on the market by the Ministry of Defence. This Old War Office was partly built on the site of Carrington House. The first Lord Carrington had in 1807 leased the property from the Crown for 56 years, it being on the site of the former Palace of Whitehall. Lord Carrington died there on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1838 and was buried in All Saints' parish church in High Wycombe.

Carrington House was demolished in 1886 and construction on the Old War Office began in 1899. A mantelpiece from Carrington House somehow found its way to Bassetsbury Manor much later in the 1930s.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century gates and railings were bought by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Carrington in 1908 from the War Office. They were first erected locally in High Wycombe in 1909, just in front of the dam which closes the Dyke where they served as an entrance to the Carrington residence at Daws Hill House. They can just be seen on an old sepia postcard published in 1910. In 1924, however, they were moved 25 yards to the other side of the Dyke when Lord Carrington (by then Marquess of Lincolnshire) gave the Dyke and the path round it to the town, as a memorial to his son Viscount Wendover who had been killed at Ypres in May 1915. The Mayor named the new path around the Dyke, Wendover Way.

Wycombe Abbey became the owner of the gates and railings in 1929 when the school bought



*Cumberland House with railings*

Daws Hill and surrounding land. Sadly the gates were melted down in the Second World War and replaced by two dreary wooden doors. But the four gate piers with lamp supports, hollow piers with scroll work, four standards at intervals between the spear-headed railings, with wrought iron urn and fleur-de-lis

finials, in part by Robert Adam, still remain. They can just be seen, particularly in winter, through the hedge on either side of the wooden doors. The total length is 50 metres, of which 23 metres is from Buckingham House. The ensemble is described in detail in the English Heritage listing of 1996.

Today the wrought iron work is in a deplorable state and the wooden doors look like the entrance to a factory. It would be a huge enhancement to the Rye if the doors were replaced by wrought iron gates and the railings and piers restored to their former glory, perhaps in memory of Bob Wendover who was one of about 500 men from Wycombe who died in the First World War. This would not be a cheap project but perhaps the town, the Lottery Fund and the School could help. I am sure the Society would wish to give its support to such a noble project.

A service, organised by the British Legion on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> August in All Saints' will mark the hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War and remember those in our town who did not return from the trenches.

**David Snoxell**

## Notices

### New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs Meryl Kennedy  
Remy Osman  
Mr Eric Peddle  
Mr & Mrs Warhurst

### Obituaries

We regret to inform members of the deaths of:

Mrs Margaret Simmons  
Mrs Eve Watson

### New Affiliated Group

We are delighted to announce that the Grange Area Trust have affiliated to the Society.

#### \*\*\* IMPORTANT CHANGE \*\*\*

When you renew your membership at the AGM on 16<sup>th</sup> May you will be issued with a new credit card sized Membership Card. This will fit easily into your wallet or handbag but it will not contain any programme information.

With this newsletter you should receive a DATES FOR YOUR DIARY sheet, listing all the events planned for the forthcoming months. Please keep, and if possible, display this where it might be seen by others, on your fridge door or on a notice board for easy reference. In future years, this will come with your December newsletter and give forward events for the whole calendar year.

**Silver Anniversary** Wycombe Wildlife Group invite you to come to Pann Mill on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014 and mark their Silver Anniversary by embarking on an hour-long guided river walk optionally followed by an hour-long guided woodland walk. Either or both walks can be undertaken in either the morning or the afternoon (see below for times). Please also help spread the word about this event.

**NEW** Go *Behind-the-Scenes* Continuing our highly successful series of local visits, we are offering an opportunity on 4<sup>th</sup> June to Go *Behind-the-Scenes* at **High Wycombe Cemetery**. Numbers are limited to 20 on a first-come-first-served basis, so book early. The visit will provide insight into the history of the cemetery, some of its notable memorials, and a look at how a cemetery is run today. A glimpse of the green woodpecker cannot be guaranteed! Participants are advised to wear appropriate footwear for walking on uneven ground.

### Contributions Please.

Thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue of the Newsletter. Please send material for the next edition addressed to me, Jackie Kay, as The Editor at 19 Hepplewhite Close, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 6BZ (Tel: 01494 534876), or preferably by email to:

[newslettereditor@highwycombesociety.org.uk](mailto:newslettereditor@highwycombesociety.org.uk)

All contributions to the next edition must be received by **20<sup>th</sup> May 2014**.

You can also get in touch with the Editorial Team via the Society's facebook page.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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

2014	
Sunday, 27 <sup>th</sup> April Pann Mill 11.00 am-5.00pm Guided Walk start times (11.30, 12.15, 2.30 & 3.15)	A Wycombe Wildlife Group Event to celebrate their Silver Anniversary. A small exhibition and manned information desk will be at Pann Mill. River Walks (immediately followed by optional Woodland walks) start at 11.30 and 2.30; Woodland-only Walks at 12.15 and 3.15
Friday, 9 <sup>th</sup> May Trinity United Reformed Church 7.30 pm.	High Wycombe Society's contribution to the Wycombe Arts Festival: 'From the Electroscope to the Swan Theatre - The History of Entertainment in High Wycombe', an illustrated talk. Speaker: Mike Dewey.
Sunday, 11 <sup>th</sup> May Pann Mill 11.00am-5.00pm.	National Mills Open Weekend. Our first Pann Mill Open Day of the year Flour milling, flour sales, teas, stalls. Guided Water Trail at 2.30 pm
Friday, 16 <sup>th</sup> May Trinity United Reformed Church 7.30 pm.	AGM Official business, including the election of trustees for 2014-2015, will be followed by short presentations on subjects of topical interest.
Wednesday, 4 <sup>th</sup> June meet at 6.30pm by the gates in Priory Road.	<b>NEW!</b> Go <i>Behind-the-Scenes</i> to High Wycombe Cemetery To reserve your place phone Mary Woodman on 01494 528106
Saturday, 21 <sup>st</sup> June	Civic Day – The Society is planning to have a market stall on this day