



High Wycombe Society

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At the Executive Committee meeting on 17th September Mr. Scruton, Secretary, formally recorded with sadness the death of Mr. Ewart Steevens, Vice President of the Society and former Chairman - 'a man who had done more for the town than any other person'.

Only shortly before his sudden death while on holiday with his wife, Mr. Steevens had given evidence at the Old Chequers Inquiry and the same week as his death was being announced a local paper published a letter from him on this matter worded with the care and courtesy which were characteristic of him. It was to be his last, and fitting contribution to the debate.

The Reverend Jack Kaye has kindly sent us the following note:

"Arthur Ewart Steevens had an unrivalled knowledge of the town of High Wycombe and of its history. He was known and respected in all the surrounding villages as well, and was often approached for advice with local problems.

He had a fascinating collection of prints and pictures of old Wycombe and possessed an intimate knowledge of every local family of note, and of every building of historical or architectural interest. The lectures he conducted at Wellesbourne Adult Education Centre were a popular and fully-booked feature of the programme.

As a member of the Rye Protection Society he was an impressive key witness before the Select Committee of Parliament which ended the long battle to save the Rye.

Mr. Steevens was a local preacher for 46 years and was a Circuit Steward of the High Wycombe Methodist Church - the highest office open to a layman.

A local builder until his retirement, Mr. Steevens held a diploma in architecture and was a Fellow of the Institute of Builders. He was also Group Chairman of the Building and Environmental Group of the Royal Society of Health."

Concluding his personal tribute, Mr. Kaye writes:

"He had a fine eye for a beautiful building and was a lover of old treasures. He was essentially a humble man never satisfied with his own performance. He was very shy, more so than most people realised, but always responded warmly to offered friendship. A fighter for the things in which he believed, it must always have been at great personal cost" .

EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE YEAR

An immediate loss to the Society was felt by the EAHY committee who had been chaired by Mr. Steevens since their formation early this summer. Their work proceeds however, the aim being to prepare a report recommending specific action to be undertaken for European Architectural Heritage Year.

The designated Conservation Area is being combed by members (hunting in pairs) who have already compiled a two page list of suggestions for the St Pauls Row/White Hart St area alone'.

(Conservation Areas were instituted in 1967 under the Civic Amenities Act which required that Local planning authorities should specify those areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Wycombe's designated area extends from Queen Square in the town centre in the West, to the end of Bassetsbury Lane in the East, and bordered by Wendover Way (behind the Dyke on the far side of the Rye) and a line drawn along midway between Easton Street/London Road and the railway, following the Wye at Rye Mill)

PLANNING MATTERS (and how!)

The Society is keeping a close watch on the progress of the Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan and has sent a considered Statement to Mr. Fred Pooley, County Planning Officer, following the initial Statement and first four survey reports.

We have told the county that "as we see it, the first purpose of the County Plan must be to define policies for the environmental state of all the County to the end of this century".

On behalf of those the Society represents, we said that "we are all firmly of the opinion that the country around High Wycombe, and the pleasant environment which it creates, both will be spoiled by the expansion of the town, and indeed by new development anywhere in the Chilterns. In addition, we all consider that the town is sadly deficient in amenities, which have not been expanding commensurately with growth since over a decade.

The Society has asked the county to clarify certain points and has also asked that every town and village civic society be informed of the time of publication of the draft plan.

Many proposals for the plan have been made by the society and these include

A halt being made now to any further expansion of industry in and around High Wycombe.

Cutting back the net growth in the Wycombe district as rapidly as possible so as to be zero by 1976 if possible.

Allowing housing development at a rate only to accommodate the natural increase of population.

A single district plan subsequent to the County Plan to include Wycombe, Marlow, Beaconsfield and the associated settlements such as Naphill, Holmer Green, Bourne End and Lane End.

Green-belt areas being established even more closely to confine the existing settlement areas,

The desirability of providing a by-pass for High Wycombe in order to divert A404 through-traffic away from the town centre.

Finally, the Society urged that for all structure proposals for the Wycombe District consideration must be given to the need to redress the shortcomings of many amenities and for control in the balance of the environment both of the new developments and of existing areas.

H6 and H7 - TWO VITAL INQUIRIES

We expect you will have read the excellent coverage in the local press of the vigorous opposition made by the Society, Residents' Associations and other groups to the appalling H6 area proposals by developers at the 10 acre sites at Green Farm and Brands Hill Avenue which would result in the virtual destruction of Hughenden Valley. The matter now rests with the inspector.

What promises to be a bigger battle still is the inquiry now fixed for 11-18 December at which evidence will be heard on the massive proposed development on the H7 area at Widmer End/Hazelmere. Here some 346 acres of agricultural land are threatened by a scheme which the Society feels would crucify Wycombe if it were carried through. The RDC, the Chiltern Society, Hazelmere Residents' Association and CPRE will be among others supporting the Society in opposition against the developers consortium.

Please attend this inquiry if you can; public support on the day can add a great deal of weight to the case made out by local societies' representatives who are giving evidence.

WATER GROUP Anthony Smith writes:

The principal activity of the Water Group since the last newsletter has been river clearing. Two sessions have been held - one on the Wye between Pann Mill and Rye Mill and the second on the Wye at Kingsmead.

The latter clearance was ably and generously helped by the Loudwater Residents' Association Water Group with both operations removing a great deal of refuse from the river.

The state of the Wye by the Rye is causing a great deal of concern. The trouble here is not the result of the exceptionally low flow of the river but indeed is highlighted by it. This stretch has an exceptionally silty bottom and the depth of the silt is enough to be a hazard to children who might be tempted to paddle when the water is low.

Although, there seems no simple solution to this problem, we are having discussions with the borough council about the situation.

TREES GRCXJP Barbara Rippington writes:

A series of informative and enjoyable walks were undertaken during the summer, enjoyed by both human and dog members who seemed to come in equal numbers and find each other's company mutually entertaining.

While we have much to do in our local woodlands throughout autumn and winter such as clearing ivy and tackling rubbish, we are also engaged every Sunday morning when weather permits digging a nursery bed at Magpie Wood, Rayners Avenue, Loudwater.

This has kindly been lent for our use by the owner Mr. Reg Davies and, together with the Forestry Department from High Wycombe College, we plan a long-term project of planting, transplanting and tree care.

We shall be glad of any offers of seeds, fruit or seedlings especially of timber and forest trees. Any volunteers for this venture - sorry, no dogs here - are welcome and should telephone 26616.
TRAFFIC GROUP Ken Hooper writes:

The Traffic Group, reconvened after a short summer recess, is tackling the second Interim Report of the Wycombe Area Transportation Study.

The report is one of a series produced by the authorities to assist in the formulation of a land use and traffic plan for the Wycombe Areas. While the study contains many interesting items of a general nature regarding traffic, traffic patterns and car usage, little information is given at this stage from which many firm conclusions can be drawn.

It is clear however (and this will be no surprise to the public) that High Wycombe has once again major traffic problems. The relief roads that have been built in the past to relieve congestion are themselves becoming congested.

The group is seeking further detailed technical information from the county and it then hopes to be able to make constructive suggestions on how these problems should be tackled.

HISTORIC WORKS GROUP Jack Scruton writes:

The long battle over the Old Chequers is drawing to a close. Only one session remains, probably in November when the final submissions will be made by the two advocates.

The defence of this unique building has been a gruelling one, with the main burden falling on the shoulders of Walter Kraft, a solicitor and member of the Society. Without any payment of fees, he has carried on from the time when our barrister, Lionel Read, had to leave the case. The task has been formidable - the preparation of proofs of evidence, the general conduct of the case, the examinations and cross-examinations and constant alertness in the face of fierce opposition has meant a very great strain on Walter.

With regard to the financial position, with generous help from some of our members and affiliated societies and from the 213 amenity societies throughout the country, we have reached a total of nearly £1700.

It is now apparent that to pay all our bills we still need something in the region of £500 and we will try various fund-raising activities to reduce this debt. (As we went belatedly to press this quarter, an enjoyable film and social evening had been held at Bassetsbury Manor which raised considerable interest, a few spirits, and some appreciable money towards this cause - Ed)

We appeal to all those who have not contributed to help us reach our target. In this newsletter, a tribute has been paid to help us in this fight. If we manage to save the Old Chequers, it will be the finest tribute we could pay to his memory.

WYCOMBE BUILDINGS GET D.O.E. RECOGNITION

A new list of buildings of historic and/or architectural merit in the borough, including West Wycombe, has been compiled and published by the Department of Environment.

Much of the credit for the list belongs to the Society's Historic Buildings Group which began investigations more than three years ago into the need for a revised list. It was felt then that the tragic losses of historic buildings should encourage us to recommend other buildings of merit to take their place on the list. As a result, group

proposals were made to the D of E. A special investigator came to High Wycombe, consulted the Society and the local authority and made his own survey.

Now we have a magnificent new list embracing most of the Society's proposals and others suggested by the local authority and the investigator himself. The inclusion of buildings of the Victorian, Edwardian and modern eras illustrates the changing attitude. In particular, it shows that at long last our rich heritage of Victorian buildings is being appreciated.

The Historic Buildings Group are now using the list to carry out a survey, especially of the 121 new additions. They hope to compile a complete index to include photographs and other relevant details.

The Borough Librarian, Mr. Sparkes, has agreed to co-operate in this interesting task and we have also been promised the help of Alan Hutchinson who has already assisted the Society so much with his splendid photographs.

DON'T BELIEVE ALL YOU READ!

Contrary to reports in the press, a new amenity society joining together societies throughout the county, has NOT yet been formed.

At a meeting in Aylesbury in September, the question of a County Society was discussed and the High Wycombe Society was present.

Societies represented there are now discussing amongst themselves the question of forming such a society to protect the Bucks environment and it will not be until a further meeting due in a few weeks' time that a decision to form the society or not will be made.

MORE HELP NEEDED

Like most societies that rely on voluntary officers, the High Wycombe Society is "engineered" by a small proportion of its members.

Help and interest is always welcomed by the various groups and executive committee yet from time to time a very important post needs filling and the need for a Programme Secretary is one such occasion.

The job would be to organise the dozen Society meetings a year and would prove invaluable in relieving this important aspect of the Society's work from other officers.

The Programme Secretary will be an all-important cog in the well-running of the Society without being very taxing on time or energy.

It is an excellent opportunity for any member of the Society to become deeply involved in its running. The honorary secretary, Jack Scruton, will be pleased to hear from any volunteers.

A NOISY MEETING - AND A CHALLENGE

The Society was glad to see several members of the Wycombe Rural District Council who responded to invitations to the Quarterly Meeting of Affiliated Societies held recently at the Guildhall where the subject was Aircraft Noise, the guest speaker being Mr. Geoffrey Holmes, a Chief Public Health Officer and Chairman of the Federation against Aircraft Noise. Several officials of the Borough and Rural District Councils joined in the discussion later.

A horrifying picture of Wycombe in 20 years time was given by Mr.

Holmes if noise due to aircraft was to continue increasing at the current rate. (By ironic coincidence almost everyone in Wycombe was treated to such a prospect at first hand next day when by courtesy of Wycombe Air Park the town was overflowed for 3½ hours by all manner of low flying aircraft including Concorde herself!)

Geoffrey Holmes was optimistic that community pressure could avert this however, and made a strong plea for a local group to be set up which would join others already formed in pressing the Government to:

prevent increase in flights using Heathrow, particularly at night (curfews exist at many Continental airports, why not London?)

disperse traffic lanes as far as possible rather than merely divert aircraft to somewhere else. The Government had been against this policy of dispersal, hoping to keep the body of protesters small: there were now signs of this being reconsidered.

induce airlines to fit so-called 'hush-kits' to engines which were known to reduce noise appreciably with only little increase in operating costs.

Hope for achieving these aims against such formidable opposition and vested interests lay only in the formation of really active local groups, it was said. Considerable progress was being won in countries overseas in this way.

Here then is a clear opportunity for the High Wycombe Society to lead local movement against this most insidious form of pollution by the formation of an Anti-noise Group. A number of those present signed as wishing to take part in this. Will you? Contact Jack Scruton (telephone 25933).

ANOTHER YEAR ...

Derek Woods is again producing Christmas cards of interest to Society members. One shows a view of the Guildhall end of the High Street as it was in 1828 - and there is another of the Old Market House in the year 1880.

The cards are priced very reasonably at 40p per dozen. Any member who would like to buy these should contact Mr. Woods at 19, Adelaide Road, High Wycombe (or telephone H.W. 20284)

AND A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO YOU TOO!

Members of Executive Committee of High Wycombe Society
1973/74

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