

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

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Strength in Numbers And Security Glass?

IT IS ENCOURAGING to see the strength of support for some of our events: it was standing room only for latecomers to our talk in January; our recent *Behind the Scenes* visits have been fully booked well in advance; and in our 'quiet season' we have seen a steady rise in membership and in numbers of fans on social media. We must be doing something right! Most recently we were pleased to see some newcomers in the public gallery when the (WDC) High Wycombe Town Committee reviewed progress on our town's Masterplan. Also tabled on that evening for the committee's consideration were sketches of potentially controversial projects to enclose the undercroft areas of both the Guildhall and Little Market House with glass screens and state-of-the-art lighting. Please let us know your thoughts!

Our charitable objectives enable us to contribute to the town in many ways and we are very grateful to our pool of members who volunteer to make things happen. There seems to be an ever-increasing demand for voluntary effort, and already, many good ideas fall by the wayside for want of volunteers with adequate time to champion them. At our AGM in June, we would very much like to increase the number of trustees to help address this. If you have a few hours to spare each month and would like to know more about what is involved in becoming a trustee, please contact me (or speak to any of the other current trustees most of whom have already indicated their willingness to serve again).

In the meantime all our established groups would also welcome additional new members; we hope to provide some insight into their work on the evening of the AGM but there is no need to wait for that to get involved. If you want to help but don't wish to make a regular commitment to a group, there are also opportunities inside this newsletter to contribute on individual projects.(see particularly pp10-11)

In the near future, we look forward to the Society Quiz, taking part in the Wycombe Arts Festival and hosting our first Pann Mill Open Day of the year.

Jackie Kay

Welcome to Wycombe Uptown!

The Park and Ride has transferred to its new location and the new Wycombe Leisure Centre (pictured here a week or so before it gained its Royal Seal of approval from the Duke of Kent) has opened. Plenty of plate glass in the design both inside and out! By the time this newsletter is distributed, its new neighbour, the long-awaited Waitrose store, will also have opened its doors to the public. With Next and John Lewis within easy reach, who needs to go into the town centre? Will the new car park prove to be big enough for the demand?



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

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Honorary Secretary: Tony Hatton, 41 Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 1QZ. Tel: (01494) 445071

Planning This Quarter

AS WELL as the usual run of planning applications to review, this quarter the Group has had more interaction than usual with our Planning Authority, Wycombe District Council. We submitted our response to important documents about housing allocations for the next Local Plan. We had a significant meeting with officers and a leading councillor to exchange views about enhancing our town centre, and we fired off letters to leading officers and councillors about planning applications which we considered contentious. Our monthly Planning Group meetings are lively occasions and we would still welcome some more volunteers to share the burden and add their own insights.

The Town Centre including the High Street and Frogmoor

As many *Newsletter* readers will be aware, last year, Planning Group member Heather Morley called for a new approach to our town centre, with the possibility of encouraging better-quality shops in the High Street – perhaps making it more like Amersham or Marlow High Streets – by allowing limited short-term parking and perhaps displacing the bus stops and taxi rank. This is potentially quite controversial but we note that the *Bucks Free Press* has also been bemoaning the state of the High Street with the broken Red Lion and garish shop fronts which are out of tune with its historical importance with more than a dozen listed buildings, some of them very elegant. The Group observed there may be some common ground with the Council's long-standing project to improve the town's 'public realm' generally, and some councillors have been asking for some time if there might be ways to keep the buses out of Church Street. Accordingly, the Group arranged a meeting with WDC officers and town centre ward councillors to take place in late February. This exchange is ongoing.

The next Local Plan We duly submitted (a few hours before the deadline of midnight on 13th December) our critique of the Council's assessment of the housing need which, in our view, goes beyond what is required by the Government's official guidance. Another key issue will be the review of the Green Belt, which is required by the Government's National Planning Policy Framework. It is important that this remains objective, based on proper criteria for where the Green Belt will be, and not such that the Green Belt can be redrawn wherever somebody decides that new development should be authorised.

The 'Hughenden Corridor' The development of the former CompAir site between Morrisons and Hughenden Avenue is continuing apace. Construction has begun of the Extra Care Hughenden Gardens Retirement Village, due to open in 2018. There will be an information day at the Town Hall on 2nd April for anyone interested in knowing more. The road that will service this area is now open to pedestrians although not yet to vehicles. It is part of a project adopted by WDC, with our support, several years ago to "bring the green of Hughenden Park into the town". There was a hiccup initially when BCC described the new

road as a 'link road' to by-pass Hughenden Road, with no realistic plan for getting the traffic back to the A4128 at the Hughenden Park end. But those ill-formed ambitions fell away and the road is now correctly referred to as a 'spine road'. There will however be some totally unnecessary traffic lights on Hughenden Avenue – my cynical view is that when you employ consultants to look after roads issues who are steeped in active traffic management and make income from designing and then servicing traffic lights, and a system which allows the costs to be imposed on the neighbouring developers, it is not really surprising that our town gets many more traffic lights than it needs.

The spine road will have the Hughenden Stream running alongside it for part of its length – when the stream exists. It seems odd that the Environment Agency, which is so concerned to protect the banks of our natural waterways for wildlife – see the successful work at the 'Wycombe Dene' development and at Grafton Street – is apparently unable to prevent over-abstraction of water by a Hertfordshire water company (wholly owned by merchant banks!) at Hughenden Valley which prevents that stream from even existing for most of the time.

As well as the Extra Care home for the general run of retired people, the 'Hughenden Corridor', which already contains a growing number of tower blocks for our University students, will also accommodate a Star & Garter home for disabled service people and their families. It should indeed become a lively and vibrant area, between the town and Hughenden Park, providing employment opportunities and helping to meet our housing targets. The Council said as much in a recent press notice. But we have been uneasy about the southernmost site in the corridor which was originally earmarked for a BCC Day Centre and a relocated BCC Area Office. We commented at that time that this seemed to be a missed opportunity to build more housing and more recently we have felt the need to express similar reservations about a project by Marstons Brewery to use the site for a 'family-oriented pub'. Community facilities are very important, but so is making the most of brownfield housing opportunities to reduce the amount of open countryside that needs to be concreted over to meet our ever-advancing housing targets.

CostCo We wrote to senior councillors and officers about the proposed CostCo store adjacent to Next on Cressex Island, expressing our concerns about the loss of another housing opportunity and the impact on the town centre of the ever-growing retail activity at Handy Cross and Cressex. David Johncock, the Cabinet Member for Planning, replied personally, reporting that the Council had retained the services of a 'retail impact assessor' to advise on the impact on the town centre and urged us to comment on the application when it was made, which is in hand.

Abbey Barn We attended a developer presentation about plans to develop the area at the top of the former ski slope, which is adjacent to the Abbey Barn South reserve housing site. We were persuaded that, provided the view across the valley aligned with the ski slope 'scar' is acceptable, this is a sensitive and well-judged proposal that could also improve the habitat management in Deangarden Wood.



The abandoned ski slope – a scar on the hillside

Pauls Row We have discussed with Wycombe District Council the possibility of the Society installing a board to explain the blue tarmac which marks the former route of the River Wye; this could help to increase public awareness of the history of the town centre. There are issues over precisely where a board can go, and the fading of the blue tarmac which will soon match the rest of Pauls Row, but we haven't given up yet!

Conservation Areas Conservation areas have special planning rules. All development must in principle 'preserve and enhance' the area. All work on trees must be notified in advance to the Council which can decide whether to impose a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). High Wycombe has several conservation areas as well as the Town Centre: the Priory Road, Terriers and Amersham Hill areas. Three years ago WDC's conservation officer produced admirable 'character statements' on all the areas. The rules put considerable power into the hands of the Planning Authority. A couple of years ago our Council insisted that a house in Priory Road that had fallen into neglect must be replaced by a building which in outward appearance was practically identical to the neighbouring buildings. A compliant application came forward which the Group supported. That building – internally a block of flats – is now nearing completion and it looks fabulous.

At a more mundane level, a flatholder at St Bernard's Court in London Road, near the outer

limit of the Town Centre Conservation Area, decided to replace her windows in a way which made a thorough mess of the harmonious appearance of an attractive building in the row that faces The Rye. Her retrospective application was rightly refused (the Group objected) and an appeal is now pending.

In the Terriers Conservation Area, Jansens submitted alternative proposals for using the land formerly occupied by Montgomery Watson behind Terriers House. Their original idea had been to build eight new dwellings but to convert an existing office block into flats, which unfortunately recent permitted development rules allow them to do without planning permission. WDC planners urged them to consider an alternative, coherent, all-new development of 20 dwellings, which they did. But Jansens eventually decided to submit both proposals and WDC Planning Committee felt obliged to allow both schemes (subject to the negotiation of planning obligations) at their meeting on 17th February. Jansens

will now have to decide which scheme to implement on commercial grounds – which presumably means cost and saleability.

The Alternative Route around the Town Centre.

The Westbourne St link to a new small roundabout in Oxford Road/West Wycombe Road is now complete. The link itself works well but the reduction in the number of traffic lanes has reduced the capacity of the A40 at the Bellfield Road and Desborough junctions. BCC's Cabinet Member for Transport hopes this will be improved when the two sets of traffic lights are linked, but will it? And incidentally, the Westbourne Street junction marks the point (and has done since the 19th century) where Oxford Road leads into the West Wycombe Road, which is not what the fancy new writing on the lamp standards says! Also, the intention was that the low central reservation, together with a 20mph speed limit, would not only make it easier for pedestrians to cross the road (it does) but could also be used by emergency vehicles, although in practice, because there are trees planted on it, this means that car drivers can pull out of the way on to it to allow ambulances to pass – but will they? These are unlikely to be the last issues with the ambitious alternative route project, but our Councils are rightly committed to seeing if it can be made to work because the prize of opening up the town – and the River Wye – by eventually removing the town centre flyover would be considerable.

Chris Woodman

Reserve Site News

FOLLOWING THE RELEASE last year of five 'Reserve Sites' on the Local Plan for potential development, volunteers have been representing the Society by participating in Reserve Site Liaison Groups set up by Wycombe District Council. In the coming months we hope to be able to bring you news from each of the Reserve Site Liaison Groups. Progress has been slow in all groups and is particularly frustrating for the so-called 'Infrastructure group' which has a remit which includes all of the sites. This time, however, Janet Tully gives us a brief insight into her experience in the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Liaison Group.

The Gomm Valley and Ashwells Liaison Group

The group has been meeting fairly regularly during the past year to monitor the developers' proposals for the site and to make sure that local residents' concerns are taken into account.

The site is not an easy one to develop. There are a number of constraints to be taken into consideration such as the topography of the land, the views into the site from across the valley and the views out towards West Wycombe and other places. Access to the site has thrown up a number of problems. Cock Lane has already reached saturation point where traffic is concerned. No one wants to see Cock Lane widened or at least not in its entirety. The proposal to build a spine road through the site as a continuation of Gomm Road seems to be the best solution but this has produced another problem. The residents of Ashwells and Tylers Green do not want a coalescence of their area with High Wycombe.

Another difficulty is the presence of ancient woodland, a local wildlife reserve and the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These all need protection from the development. It has been

said that less than half of the site will be built on and the rest of the land will be for some sort of communal use and remain undeveloped in perpetuity.



Janet Tully guiding Chris Woodman around the Gomm Valley.

Photo taken in 2015 by Jackie Kay

Hopefully, a Planning Brief will be issued shortly and the Liaison group will be able to judge if their concerns have been met.

Janet Tully

Hughenden Park

THE GREEN SPACES team at Wycombe District Council are this year focusing special attention on Hughenden Park. Many people mistakenly think this is wholly owned by the National Trust as it was all part of the Hughenden Manor estate at one time, but Coningsby Disraeli arranged to transfer the land nearest the town centre to the council, the transaction taking place shortly after his death in 1936 and it is now owned and managed by Wycombe District Council. It came with conditions attached which help ensure that it remains a green space in perpetuity.

WDC prepared a Management Plan and invited the High Wycombe Society as a recognised stakeholder to review it. We were impressed by the amount of care being shown to preserve and enhance this well-loved green space, regard being shown both to its natural assets and to its historical connections. A new car park off Coates Lane with spaces for 34 cars was created as part of the neighbouring De La Rue housing development and is likely to increase the popularity of the Park. As part of the plan, the children's play area is to be improved, and it is hoped to create a tree trail, drawing attention to specimen trees, some of which were planted during Benjamin Disraeli's tenure of the manor. There is also the possibility of a Friends of Hughenden Park group being set up

Jackie Kay

Friends of the Wye

DAVE SCOTT represents the Society on the Revive the Wye partnership and informs us that it has been decided to set up a new supporters' group for fundraising and other activities. Called the "Friends of the Wye"; its inaugural event is expected to be in the daytime at Trinity URC on 14th May. Look out for further details nearer the time.

Transport

Coachway - Is That It?

BACK IN 2009 when we were more optimistic about restoring a rail link to the Thames Valley – an engineering report had confirmed feasibility and BCC were interested – a report was commissioned by BCC from Ringway Jacobs. This broadly agreed the feasibility and indeed the costs, and concluded a Regional Coachway would not be as good at attracting passengers, but would be cheaper to supply the missing north-south links. The Department for Transport smelling money savings, rubber stamped it and seven years later here we are.

Well, we always doubted if an infrequent coach subject to the same traffic delays on the A404 would make any significant dent in the massive commuting mileage to the Thames Valley and Heathrow.

A visit last week showed what a disappointing solution it is. The Park and Ride isn't even signposted properly, and the bus I travelled on had to drive over the kerb to get out. Whoever designed that?

The car park is very nice, if you can find your way out, and although free at the moment, there is a suspicious covered area with cable ducts no doubt for a future ticket machine.

No coaches to anywhere were apparent, the waiting area had no information, and the metal seats looked like something from a child's playground – it was impossible to work out how to sit on them or how to get out again.



Vandal-proof metal seats for children to play on?

Photo: Jackie Kay

What a disappointment, all that money but no serious travel solution, and no easy way for High Wycombe to access Crossrail (or the Elizabeth line as it is now called).

Nigel Phillips

Fine Words Butter No Parsnips!

THESE MEMORABLE WORDS appeared in the introduction to our Transport Group's assessment of LTP4, the latest local transport plan to be put out to consultation by Bucks County Council.

Aiming to cover all aspects of transport in Buckinghamshire and looking ahead as far as 2036, it weighs in at 68 pages, covering 19 separate policies. From the very general "reducing the need to travel" and "increasing connectivity", through to such aspects as "road safety", "tackling crime", and "parking", it makes for interesting reading, but as a plan it is disappointing. Residents of Wycombe looking in it for solutions to their current transport woes are unlikely to find much solace within it.

The Transport Group concede that the document expresses many laudable aspirations, but it is not at all clear how these will be achieved. Even as an aspirational document, it seems to lack context on broader issues.

Sustainable Transport Exhibition

A NUMBER OF SOCIETY members were present at the opening of the current exhibition in the Wycombe Environment Centre. There is still time to go and see this if you have not done so already. Taking as its theme Sustainable Transport, the exhibition is very informative and forward-looking. Pictured here is Frances Alexander posing in front of Arriva's contribution to the exhibition describing their new Eco-friendly buses, one of which has been named "Frances".



Heritage

Inside The Castle Hill Tardis!

PROVINCIAL MUSEUM Curators and Society Newsletter Editors will always agree on one thing: there is never enough space! Following the decision not to move Wycombe Museum to new premises, but instead to adapt Castle Hill House to include disabled access, a café and a shop, Dr Catherine Grigg has been at the centre of the decision-making required to make best use of the remaining areas of the house to display as much as possible of the collection. With continued uncertainty over the exact timing of the transfer to Trust status, the various galleries have been gradually opening without much fanfare.

First to open after the refurbishment was a gallery outlining the history of our town 'in Ten Objects'. The gallery uses the rooms nearest the top of the staircase. "We wanted to do something different", Catherine explained when giving a recent talk on the subject up at Hughenden Manor.

As might be expected, the ten objects were chosen to illustrate different chronological episodes. They range from a stone-age hand tool found in a garden rockery, through to a modern Wycombe Wanderers' rosette. But each object is also accompanied by twenty to thirty other objects from the collection which have some connection to it (albeit in some cases quite a tenuous one). It's an interesting and thought-provoking approach and successfully demonstrates the interconnectedness of all things. Interpretation is gradually being added.

I was pleased to see Object Number 7 – the Red Lion – taking pride of place in the middle of the house, representing Georgian times. While the fate of its successor in the High Street still hangs in the balance, at least this one is receiving the attention it deserves even if some of the details of its pedigree are uncertain. (See p8)

Pann Mill also features within this gallery, although I feel it is cheating a bit to have a whole 'medieval mill' as Object Number 4. (We surely could have provided a gear tooth or two for the collection if anyone had asked?) Lorna Cassidy's picture of Pann Mill is one of a number of her works to appear in the museum.

Next to open, in one of the upper rooms at the front of the house was the art gallery. Here, the paucity of space is very apparent. It is nice to be able to examine closely the detail on some of the smaller paintings, but there is hardly enough room to stand back to appreciate the larger pictures such as the George Henry

Grenville Manton's "Isabella and the Pot of Basil", and Reynold's portrait of William, 2nd Earl of Shelburne". Perhaps one day High Wycombe will have its own art gallery distinct from the museum. In the meantime many paintings remain in storage.



No longer any room for a desk in the hallway, but a warm welcome nevertheless.

Photo: Jackie Kay

Most recently in another pair of upper rooms the furniture gallery has opened. Tough decisions have had to be made over what to exhibit here. The visitor is introduced to the bodgers, the history of industrial chairmaking and the tradition of building chair arches for special occasions. Walking through into the next room one encounters familiar chairs stacked from floor to ceiling. I felt like I was greeting old friends, as I recognised the various specimen chairs that were previously housed downstairs and which have been carefully cared for throughout the refurbishment.

Coming soon, but still under wraps is a new gallery which promises to give some insights into the various people who have come to live in High Wycombe. A number of volunteers have been involved in an oral history project. It will be interesting to see (or hear?) the results.

And I nearly forgot to mention the 1950's kitchen, a cheerful combination of nostalgia for adults and educative play for children, not to mention the mystery area to the left of the entrance door which last year held the World War I exhibition but is not yet open.

No visit to the museum is now complete without a good browse in the well-stocked shop, and at least a cuppa in the café. The volunteers and staff are still adjusting to their new environment and will be pleased to welcome you.

Jackie Kay

Talk

The History of Local Railways

MY INTEREST IN transport is well-documented. It has given me a BSc. Degree from Aston University, a PCV driving licence, and many years of gainful employment, not to mention countless hours of study and travel. I have found that my enthusiasm is not always shared by others, but members of the High Wycombe Society turned out in large numbers to hear John Gurney give a talk on "The History of Local Railways" in January. The large audience filled all the available seats in The Riverside's large upstairs hall leaving standing room only for the last dozen or so to arrive.

The 19th Century's railway-mania first touched south Bucks in 1846 with the passing of the enabling act that allowed the building of the first, broad gauge, line – connecting High Wycombe, via Bourne End, with Brunel's Great Western main line at Maidenhead - which opened with due fanfare on 1st August 1854.

The new railway had an immediate impact – allowing the town's furniture industries to transport their wares cheaply and efficiently around the country, and giving a marked boost to the prosperity of the area, as well as new mobility to its population. The impact of the railway on the local economy gave impetus to the foundation of the Bucks Free Press in 1856.



Loudwater Station

Photo courtesy of John Gurney

Had the newspaper existed before the railway, I wonder if the editor or his readers of the time would have campaigned against the new transport link as vehemently as their successors voice their opposition to HS2 today.

By 1867 the High Wycombe Railway Company had merged with the Great Western Railway and, later in the century, the entire nine miles of line from Maidenhead to High Wycombe was converted from Broad Gauge to Standard Gauge in just eight days!

Our Victorian forefathers didn't rest on their laurels – the branch line from Bourne End to Marlow was opened on 1st July 1873. John Gurney offered various suggestions as to how the line acquired its 'Marlow Donkey' nickname. One possibility is that it took its name from the little tank locomotives, known as donkeys, which pulled the trains on the line; another, possibly apocryphal, tale was that the train had once been raced, and beaten, by a man on a donkey!

Although much of the talk, and its illustrations, centred on this initial rail connection for south Bucks, there was time to

mention the building of the more direct route to London, a product of collaboration between the Great Western Railway and the Great Central Railway, taking a line through Beaconsfield and beyond to a new terminus at Marylebone. The building of this route cost lives – six men were killed when a tunnel collapsed at White House Farm on 6th September 1902. The inquest into their deaths was held at the 'Mother Redcap' pub, to where their bodies had been taken and laid out in the cellar, and their funerals held just three and five days after the accident, all six men being buried in High Wycombe Cemetery. A memorial to the 'Railway Six' still stands there to this day, having been restored in 2010.

The first train to Marylebone ran on 2nd April 1906. Since then the railways' fortunes have waxed and waned – but are currently experiencing a huge rise, with passenger use having broadly doubled in the twenty years since privatisation.

Alas this was too late to save the original route between High Wycombe and Bourne End, which closed on 4th May 1970, with steam having given way to diesel power locally in 1962. The Bourne End route closed for the want of a subsidy of just £60,000 and many, not least members of the High Wycombe Society's Transport Group, have bitterly regretted the lost opportunity that the closure represents to this day.

Attitudes to rail in the 1960s were very different – it was seen as an antiquated mode of transport; it was history, not worthy of investment, ill-fitted to the shiny new motor age where everyone would travel by car. Every morning's gridlocked traffic jams, and the noise and pollution and street-clutter are a testimony to the failure of that policy! Most people just haven't cottoned-on to it yet.

Neil Timberlake

A Small World

A LITTLE WHILE ago one of our members found himself in High Wycombe. You may well say “We all do that”, but this was the High Wycombe many thousand miles away in Western Australia. It seems to be the only other place of the same name in the world and is a district of Perth. Other districts around Perth include Hazlemere, Wembley, Crawley, Guildford and Maida Vale so our traveller felt quite at home.

It is not clear why these names are located around Perth as other districts have clearly indigenous names. Perth itself was named by Captain James Stirling, the first Governor in 1829, after Perth in Scotland at the behest of Sir George Murray, then Secretary of State for the Colonies. However, Perth was always a free settlement not a penal colony so it is likely that the early settlers who were granted land in the area named regions after places that they knew.

Soon, however, there will be another link between our town and Australia as the Homebase stores, of which there is one along the London Road, are being taken over by the Australian company Wesfarmers and will be re-branded Bunnings. The same company also owns the Coles supermarket chain shown in the picture. Small world!

Malcolm Connell



High Wycombe Supermarket, Perth, Western Australia

Photo: Brian Tranter

The Tail of our Red Lion

IT WILL NOT have escaped any BFP readers' attention that our beloved Red Lion statue in the High Street is in need of some tender loving care, and there seems to be a will to get something done about it. Our Mayor and Town Clerk have been in touch with the owners; the descendants of Frank Hudson (who carved it) have offered to repair it, and another local company has offered to paint it. While I am hopeful that a satisfactory solution to its current predicament will be found, it has triggered much detailed research which has proved most interesting in itself.

In 1992 the High Wycombe Society Newsletter carried an article by L J Mayes, originally written in the 1960s, in which Mayes confidently asserts that the new (Hudson-carved) lion is at least the third, casting doubt on any claim that the one in Wycombe Museum is the 'original'. What evidence did Mayes have for his assertion? I wonder.

We know that in 1772 the William Hannan print which can itself be seen at Wycombe museum, showed an inn sign, not a statue. Taking a close look at that sign, however, reveals that the lion was in the more usual 'passant' stance encountered in heraldry, its legs positioned as if walking and its tail curved back above the body. This may yet prove to be

a helpful clue in tracing the origin of the Red Lion inn.

In the newly-opened art gallery within Wycombe museum there is also a depiction of the High Street in 1848. The artist Niemann there shows a lion statue also with its legs clearly in a walking position but with a tail more naturally lowered. Did Niemann paint it this way from direct observation? If so this would be proof positive of a lion statue predating the one in the museum. Or perhaps, he just painted what he expected to see, perhaps even checking his work against an inn sign rather than returning to the High Street.

Jackie Kay

Behind the Scenes

Visit to RAF High Wycombe – at Walters Ash

ALTHOUGH IT was 60 years since I was last on an operational RAF base as a National Serviceman, my right arm still twitched at seeing an officer in anticipation of having to salute!

Thanks to the groundwork by Eileen Walters, car sharing minimised our effect on the limited car parking available. Prompt arrival by the 20-strong group meant that we were ahead of schedule as we boarded our coach having been issued with our event ID passes by Flt Lt Andy Keeley who was to be with us for the duration of the tour whilst Dave Brown, ex RAF, was our guide with a fund of tales and experiences as well as detail knowledge of the base.

A short coach ride took us to the Officers' mess where besides free hot drinks there was a bar available for those wanting something stronger and the cost was so, so cheap. The Commanding Officer, Group Captain Philip Lester arrived after a short delay to welcome us and give us some background to the camp's operations in WW2. He stayed with us for lunch, again very, very good value for money, and as Dave and Andy were also there, there was an opportunity to gain informal insights into the RAF in conversation. What a dramatic change that was from my memories of poor quality food served to 'other ranks' in the 50s which had to be supplemented with NAAFI snacks.

After lunch the coach took us back to the camp gates where under clear skies and bright sunshine Dave told us about the life size models of a Hurricane and Spitfire known as the Gate Guardians. I had always thought of them as being real relics of The Battle of Britain, so bang went another dream.

We then walked through the camp past the fire station which had been built to resemble a church. For it was back in 1936 with the formation of Bomber Command that a site for its HQ was required with the requisites of ease of camouflage and difficulty of access to the enemy. So it was designed to look like a village from the air with the Officers' Mess being the Manor House. Underground tunnels enabled uniformed personnel to move freely without being observed from the air. The Germans were never able to discover Bomber Command HQ thanks to the design and secrecy by the local population. When the Commanding Officer told us about the interaction of RAF bases at Benson, Medmenham and High Wycombe in photo reconnaissance for Bomber Command he commented that without the co-operation of the local populations their work might have been revealed.

Our walk took us to The Harris Room which was as it would have been when Bomber Harris was in charge of Bomber Command. Dave Brown was enthusiastic about memorabilia that had been donated or 'acquired' which included 1943 Daily Telegraphs. We had been warned that our group would contain the 1000th visitor to The Harris Room and as we were counted in Mary Woodman gained the honour and became the centre for the photograph session.



Official Visitor Number 1000 to the office used by "Bomber" Harris, Mary Woodman, rose to the occasion, donning the provided hat and posing for photos.

Photo: Chris Woodman

It seems that the 'Dambusters' film is to be remade in colour and scenes will be filmed in this room.

Finally it was back to the car park but through the derelict looking tunnels which evoked a sense of walking through history as indeed had the whole experience which overran to three hours.

Brian Murphy

Nissen Huts in Chairborough Road

WERE YOU IN Wycombe during the Second World War? Or do you have family or friends with good memories of that time? Last month the Society received an inquiry from Clifton Hughes, a one-time resident of the town who attended the Royal Grammar School; he wanted to know if anyone knew anything about the Prisoners of War held in High Wycombe.

On the Historic England website there is a report compiled in 2003 which lists all the known British PoW sites but he had observed that High Wycombe wasn't mentioned. His elder sister remembers Italian Prisoners of War based at a camp in Chairborough Road, but the site has long-since disappeared without trace.

Always alert to any local history at risk of being lost, I started to make inquiries and have since found a number of snippets of information but I would like to piece together a more coherent story of who the prisoners were and what is known about their stay in Wycombe.

Several people have mentioned to me that the prisoners could be identified by large yellow circles on their backs, and that, as the war progressed, they had increasing freedom and could be seen about town.

Is there a volunteer willing to assist me by trawling through some wartime records: local newspapers and/or council minute books? If so, please make yourself known! (No experience necessary – this would suit someone wanting to make a first contribution to a mini-heritage project) Otherwise it could be a while before you hear any more.

Jackie Kay

The Date Is Booked

What for? Our coach trip to Mary Arden's Farm.

When? Saturday 20th August 2016.

Cost – Adult £25 including entrance.
Child £15.

Who was Mary Arden?

She was the mother of William Shakespeare.

What can I expect to see?

This is a working Tudor farm so there are rare breed animals and all that goes with them. There is a blacksmith's demonstration, you can meet the shepherd, see a falconry display, see the staff prepare lunch in the Tudor style, have a go at archery (at an extra cost) walk around the nature trails and see the house where Mary lived as a child.

There is a café for a light meal or snacks.

How do I book? Email

programme@highwycombesociety.org.uk

phone 01494 449902 or

put your name down on the list at our AGM.

A one-off opportunity

The team who maintain Pann Mill are always seeking people to join them on a regular basis, but are mindful that there are many calls on people's time today. It has sometimes been suggested that people could help with a one-off project rather than an open-ended commitment. We presently have such a project in hand and if you think that you could help we would love to hear from you.

On Open Days a refreshment bar opens in the shed in Margaret's Garden and is well attended. It has a good food hygiene rating but would benefit from better washing up facilities. To this end we plan to install some kitchen units with 3 sinks and extend the existing plumbing as necessary. If you would be interested in undertaking this project then we would be very happy to hear from you and discuss it. Further details and contact information can be found on the Pann Mill web site www.pannmill.org.uk or via the Editor.

Malcolm Connell

Are you a Mrs Slocombe?

OR PERHAPS A Mr Selfridge? The Programme and Membership group are desperately seeking someone (you don't need to be called Susan!) to join our small and friendly group to be a "promotional goods merchandiser." Don't be put off by the title. All we need is for someone to come to Society meetings and Pann Mill Open days to sell a selection of the Society's cards, books and other goods and store them between times in the corner of a room. You would be part of the group so support and guidance would be available when needed. The group meet regularly every two months in someone's home to plan Society events, so it is quite informal and friendly, even fun! (Tea and biscuits provided). You would be assured of a warm welcome and would be helping to keep the programme of events rolling forward. If you feel you would like to give it a try (we don't require a lifetime commitment) please contact the Programme and Membership Group or the Editor who will put you in touch.

Eileen Walters

Wrights Meadow Centre – Our Quiz Venue

SOME OF OUR members have been making use of a lovely new community centre at Wycombe Marsh, built less than two years ago on what had become derelict land at the rear of the Marsh Primary School, in Wrights Meadow Road which serves the Wye Dene estate and the retail park.

In January they attended a Burn’s Night supper in aid of the Mayor’s Appeal which raised £400 for the One Can Hope and Rennie Grove Hospice, which was attended by Wycombe Mayor, Cllr. Mohammed Hanif, the leader of Beaconsfield council, the Lord Mayor of Oxford, and several other local dignitaries.

Also in February a small team of members took part in a quiz organised by the centre and had an enjoyable evening amongst a capacity crowd.

The centre is open to the public on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday between 10am and 4pm for tea, coffee and light lunches (Tuesday only) and snacks at reasonable prices. They have a small car park but if you are shopping at the retail park it is only a short walk away. (Behind Hobbycraft).

All the staff are volunteers and make visitors very welcome. Around the walls are photographs of east Wycombe in days gone by, complete with explanatory notes.

Why not see for yourself by coming along to the High Wycombe Society fund-raising quiz on



Just outside the Centre is an unusual bench designed by a BNU student and officially ‘opened’ last year.

Photo: Jackie Kay

Friday 15th April. Bring a few friends and make up a team. Tickets are now on sale from the programme group (tel. 449902) or from the centre and cost £12. This includes a fish and chip supper.

Eileen Walters

Almost Famous

Everyone, they say, will experience 15 minutes of fame in their lifetime. Clearly this does not extend to buildings. Pann Mill narrowly missed out on becoming famous on the 22nd February, 2016.

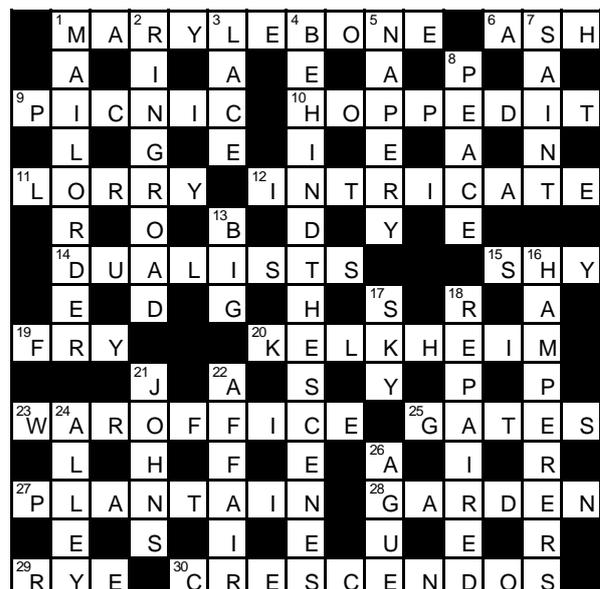
The presenters of the new BBC Top Gear programme were on their way from London to Blackpool via High Wycombe when one of their custom-painted Reliant Robins (the one in the stars and stripes scheme) broke down on the London Road just outside Pann Mill. It soon attracted attention and was photographed, along with the stars, for the Bucks Free Press. A report can be found on the BFP website. Unfortunately every photograph was taken facing away from the mill which was never mentioned. Still, look out for the mill when the programme airs!

Malcolm Connell

Solution to our Festive Fun crossword.

Many readers have expressed their appreciation of the puzzle set by Clarsach in our Winter Edition.

For those of you still puzzling over that final clue, we publish here the official solution.



Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mr S Chamberlin
Mrs S Kitchen
Mr M Blackwell
Mr W Sprigge
Mr I Biggs
Mr E Armstrong
Mr M Nicholls

Obituaries

We regret to inform you of the deaths of:

Mr Eric Alexander
Mrs Diane Stone
Mr Malcolm Walker

Do you have Eagle Eyes? Have you spotted any errors in this newsletter? Is a mis-spelling or misplaced apostrophe guaranteed to annoy you? If so, the Editorial team would like to hear from you. Our long-standing proofreaders do a terrific job at the eleventh hour before we go to print but we sometimes need an extra pair of eyes!

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

All contributions to the next edition must be received by **20th May 2016**

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!!!**

2016	
Saturday, 2 nd April 10.00-4.00 pm The (Old) Town Hall	Information Day - An opportunity to see plans for the proposed new Retirement Village in the Hughenden Corridor.
Friday 15 th April Wrights Meadow Centre 7.30 pm	Quiz Night Tickets £12 including fish and chip supper available at Wrights Meadow Centre or contact Eileen via email programme@highwycombesociety.org.uk or HW449902 to reserve places. Come individually or in pre-formed teams of up to 6 people.
Saturday 14 th May Trinity URC	The Friends of the Wye group, an organisation being set up to support the Revive the Wye initiative, is holding its inaugural event at Trinity United Reformed Church which some members may wish to support.
Sunday 15 th May 11.00-5.00 pm	Pann Mill Open Day. We have invited the Mayor Cllr Hanif to attend. Water Trail with Prudence Meek at 2.30 p.m.
Friday 20 th May The Riverside 7.30 pm	High Wycombe Society's contribution to the Wycombe Arts Festival. A selection of local films. Mike Nicholls has become the guardian of John Smithson's legacy of films about High Wycombe, and will be providing a programme of entertainment from the collection.
Saturday 11 th June Chesham 10.30 am.	ANTAS Spring meeting – Guest speaker: Dr. Andrew Brown BA PhD MCIFA Planning Director South East Historic England.
Friday 17 th June The Riverside 7.00 pm.	AGM and Eve of Civic Day. Please join us for our AGM followed by an opportunity to learn more about our various Groups' activities and a challenging Picture Quiz. How well do you think you know our town?
Sunday 10 th July 11.00-5.00 pm	Pann Mill Open Day Water Trail with Prudence Meek at 2.30 p.m.
Saturday 20 th August	Visit to Mary Arden's Farm – see p10 for details including costs. To take part, Email programme@highwycombesociety.org.uk , phone 01494 449902, or put your name down on the list at the AGM in June
Sunday 11 th September	Pann Mill Open Day
Friday 7 th October* The Riverside 7.30 pm	Talk – by Sean Kelly, Author of "Home Bases" (*note – this date will be confirmed nearer the time)
Thursday 17 th November Instron	NEW! <i>Behind the Scenes</i> visit to a local engineering firm.