

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 187

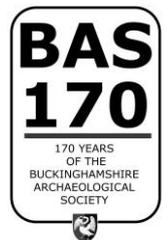
SPRING 2018

Don't say we didn't tell you!



YOU MAY NOT always have time to read your newsletter when it first arrives, but I am keen that you should not miss out on an exceptional opportunity. Please take action **TODAY** to secure your place at our Golden Anniversary Celebratory Event at Wycombe Abbey. Tickets formally go on sale in **April**. The event itself is not until **Sunday 5th August** – but for planning purposes numbers need to be determined much earlier. (If your time is limited please turn to page 7 NOW for further details!)

It's not the only exciting thing happening in the near future. There's a lot of interest also being shown in our planned event for April when we're joining forces with the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society to host an afternoon talk (see p6). And we are also looking forward to installing and unveiling the long-awaited Bridge Mill information board in Paul's Row soon. (see p9)



If you think all Pann Mill Open Days are much alike, then think again! On 13th May, at our first Open Day of the year, we've agreed to be featured in an all-day Outside Broadcast by Wycombe Sound radio. This is a really good opportunity to raise our profile as a Society and increase awareness of our town's heritage. Two Society members who are already involved with Wycombe Sound in other ways have contributed articles for this newsletter: Mick Lewis or "Traffic Mick" as he is known (when he's not volunteering at Pann Mill), has written about the controversial aspects of new road layouts which loosely fall under the umbrella term "Shared Space" (see pp4-5); while Andy Aliffe, who co-hosts a Wednesday evening show called "The Emperor's bits", has unearthed a little known association High Wycombe can claim with a celebrity of some notoriety. (see p8)

Earlier this year, the Trustees were delighted to welcome Colin Hingston to their meeting in January. Colin had expressed an interest in standing for election as Hon. Treasurer at the AGM in June. Following the meeting, the Trustees exercised their powers to co-opt, and invited Colin to become a Trustee with immediate effect. I am pleased to say that he has accepted. Malcolm Connell will continue in the role of Hon Treasurer until the AGM. I actively encourage more of you to consider standing for election as a Trustee in June.

Jackie Kay

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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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

Planning This Quarter

WITH WORK on the new Local Plan dormant as we await the papers and timetable for the Public Examination, the Planning Group was able to attend to several new and interesting areas, including the 'Bassetsbury Triangle' and the future of the Octagon Parade. At one of our monthly meetings it was very helpful to have a comprehensive update on town centre issues from Councillor Lesley Clarke, and in a similar, helpful vein, we hope to hear at ANTAS from Penelope Tollitt how WDC's Planning & Sustainability Department aims to maintain good service despite budgetary constraints. Meanwhile, Berkeley Homes staged an exhibition at Flackwell Heath about their plans for the Abbey Barn South Reserve Site, now the subject of a planning application which includes an ExtraCare retirement development, and the Abbey Barn Liaison Group awaits an imminent update on plans down the hill around the ecologically sensitive Abbey Barn North.

Queen Victoria Road and Easton Street It now seems that the Library Gardens are safe: we understand that when Queen Victoria Road is made two-way, the small additional width required to turn one traffic lane into south-flowing will be provided on the Post Office side by adjusting the road camber to avoid expensively disturbing the under-road services on that side. It became clear at a meeting that BCC and WDC held with the Group in December that very careful consideration has been given to the impact on total traffic flows, including on the Marlow Hill Gyratory ("magic roundabout") but we shall only see if there is a real improvement in travel times when the work is complete.

Opening up the River Wye We were pleased to be invited by Cllr Hugh McCarthy to attend, along with two other groups, (Revive the Wye and the Friends of the Wye), a meeting of the "Remaking the River Wye Task and Finish Group" which he chairs. The remit of that Group at present is fairly limited, dealing with the stretch of the River Wye which currently lies under Oxford Road in front of Sainsbury's between the Archway Roundabout and Westbourne Street. Nevertheless, there is great scope for improving that stretch, not merely by opening up the river but by improving its immediate surroundings, and we look forward to playing our part in welcoming this proposal, seeing it as just the next step in creating an environmental asset all the way from West Wycombe to Wycombe Marsh and beyond. And that is not to mention the Hughenden Stream which, we understand, is now thought of as being within range of Frogmoor.

Octagon Parade Overlooking the Archway Roundabout is a curved building, with some character, which over the past decades has variously been the town's main post office and a Night Club but now lies empty. We were pleased to be contacted in December by a firm called Golden Apple who plan to turn it into a modern office block and retail units. Yes, we too wondered whether the town centre needs more offices but it seems that office renters can be fussy and want higher quality than the vacant properties in the town can offer – and they do provide employment.



Proposed new building on Octagon Parade

The Planning Group were in two minds about the modern design, which has now been well-publicised (at our suggestion) in the *Bucks Free Press*. It is heavily constrained by the fact that it cannot be a complete rebuild – the new floors will be supported by the structure and foundations of the existing lower floors. Some of us had reservations, others didn't: this is not really a site that demands the town's traditional red brick. The most specific issue we had was over the flank that abuts awkwardly with older historic properties in Oxford Street and can be seen from Frogmoor. It is certainly a landmark site facing visitors approaching from the Oxford Road (see above), with the possibility of the Archway Roundabout being opened up to pedestrians and featuring the river through its middle.

Butterfly House In my report on the 2017 Quality Counts Tour (Autumn 2017 Newsletter), I described our visit to Kingswood Park, in the centre of which stands South Bucks Hospice's splendid new "Butterfly House", displaying a rather better architectural awareness than the houses that surround it! The Group was delighted to support a proposal that the High Wycombe Society should nominate Butterfly House for a Civic Voice Design Award. These "people's choice" awards for architecture and the built environment are an annual celebration of well-designed new-build, heritage and public realm projects, taking into account their impact on the local community. The shortlist will be published in May.



Park Homes are of light construction, typically transported on two trailers and then assembled.

'Bassetsbury Triangle' Perhaps the most controversial development during the quarter was WDC Property's proposals to develop the site which was once Bassetsbury Allotments, closed to gardeners some 10 years ago due to contamination (though no gardeners seemed to have died or even suffered!). Some even asserted at that time that one factor was that the Council, who of course owned the land, wanted to build on it!) It turns out that the site is not only contaminated (and it is hoped that 'capping' will make it safe) but is also structurally weak such that it can only support buildings classified as 'mobile homes' (though they can be much more attractive than mere caravans!). Ecologically, the site is classified by WDC as 'green

infrastructure' and it adjoins the adjacent Funges Meadow which is a 'green space' and protected against development. Some of our Society members in the area regard it as harmless and a sensible use of the land, whereas others are firmly against.

Gayhurst Road redevelopment On 13th December a number of us attended an exhibition by Red Kite Housing of their proposals to replace a block of flats in Gayhurst Road, not far from Hicks Farm Rise. The existing building is unoccupied and deserves to be demolished. The new development, as shown in the architect's plans and drawings, seemed an appropriate addition to the neighbourhood. However, there were still signs of a local store in the disused building and, after a walk around the neighbouring streets, it became quite clear that such a store ought to be part of the new scheme. The land around there is quite hilly, and there will be many who cannot even make it up to the top of Hicks Farm Rise to the new Tesco Express on the corner of Hatters Lane. We understand from a local Councillor that the old store failed because an appropriate lease was not offered. We commented accordingly.

Chris Woodman

The Air We Breathe

ON 22nd DECEMBER 2017, WDC declared two new Air Quality Management Areas (High Wycombe & Marlow) and amended another (for the M40). Following these declarations, WDC, along with BCC and key stakeholders, is required under the UK Regulations implementing the EU's 2008 Ambient Air Quality Directive to produce within 12 months an Air Quality Action Plan to reduce the main pollutants to compliant levels in as short a time as possible. WDC's aim is to produce a draft plan in May 2018, and a finalised approved version by the end of October.

Carl Griffin, who is in charge of Control of Pollution at WDC, invited The High Wycombe Society to send a representative to an inaugural meeting of the steering group on Tuesday 20th February, an unfortunate choice of date as it clashed with the Society's visit to the Trenchard Museum (see p9) but thankfully Chris Woodman agreed to attend.

The meeting included presentations by WDC Environmental Health Department and consultants SLH Environmental Ltd about the science, causes, health impacts and mitigation of poor air quality. At the national level, the statistics are alarming. A recent report by the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Paediatrics and Child Health concludes that outdoor pollution is contributing to about 40,000 early deaths a year in the UK. Wycombe does not have a problem with levels of ozone and other pollutants, so the focus is on reduction of nitrogen oxides (usually referred to as NO_x), whose largest single source is vehicle emissions. There followed group discussions on ideas for reducing NO_x. Many of the ideas related to ways to reduce vehicle use, particularly private vehicles.

In this context, Chris drew the meeting's attention to an excellent app on his phone, *Citymapper*, on which he was able to type in an address in Downley which called up a map telling him to walk down through the cemetery, catch a No.30 bus (at a given time) by the Beaconsfield Arms, alight at Cross Court and then walk along Sunny Croft to visit our former Society Chairman, all without adding to NO_x levels!

The Society's Transport group will be engaging with Carl over the ongoing issues. It's difficult to see what can be done, but our initial thoughts include synchronization of traffic lights, removal of pinch points and not leaving temporary traffic lights operating longer than necessary. All this would smooth traffic flow and gain greater economy. Other more strategic issues, such as a rail link to the Thames Valley, will also hopefully come up. The latest NO_x scare blames dirty diesels, but although swapping diesels for petrol will reduce this, it will increase CO₂. Frying pans and fires come to mind.

The Road to Hell is paved with Good Intentions

THE SPOTLIGHT has recently fallen upon proposed road layout changes in various parts of town including: Easton Street and Queen Victoria Road, recent changes to existing parts of Desborough Road and a new section of road which crosses the old Gas Works to connect with Queen Alexandra Road near the Hospital. The layouts proposed and those already constructed appear to be of a type commonly referred to as “Shared Space”. But what exactly is “Shared Space” and how does it work?

Let’s be clear from the start, there is no single agreed definition of “Shared Space”. Government guidance in the form of a Local Transport Note on the subject, published in 2011 describes it as “a street or place designed to improve pedestrian movement and comfort by reducing dominance of motor vehicles, enabling all users to share space rather than follow the clearly defined rules implied by conventional designs”. “Sharing” is thus also defined as “the ability and willingness of pedestrians, facilitated by sympathetic behaviour of motorists and others, to move freely around the street and use parts of it that in more conventional layout would be considered largely dedicated to vehicular use”.

Geraint Killa, Senior Engineer of Traffic Engineering at the Department for Transport (DfT) endorses the approach of “creating ambiguity, reducing sightlines and reducing signage that indicates vehicle priority”. In a nutshell, the theory at least is that making roads more difficult and dangerous encourages drivers to proceed more carefully. This approach may seem reasonable when dealing with drivers who have a responsible attitude, but critics point out that not all drivers have this attitude and even those who do can become confused or distracted by road layouts with restricted sightlines and start to make mistakes when markings and signs are unclear.

Where did it all begin? “Shared Space” streets were originally developed in Holland in the 1960s and called “Woonerfs” which roughly translated means “Yards for Living”. The idea was to take back residential streets to form a social place and provide a safe play environment for children. Interest in these designs started in Britain in the late 1990s and by 2007 the DfT had published its first guidelines for local authority planners, a publication called ‘Manual for streets’ or MfS for short.

MfS provided technical guidance and did not set out any new policy or legal requirements. It focused on lightly-trafficked residential streets, but many of its key principles may be applicable to other types of street, for example, high streets

and lightly-trafficked lanes in rural areas. It is the responsibility of users of MfS to ensure that its application is appropriate. The manual was never intended to apply, for example, to the trunk road network. The design requirements for trunk roads are set out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). MfS also only applies formally in England and Wales. The policy, legal and technical frameworks are generally the same in England and Wales, but where differences exist these are made clear.



*Before the one-way system – when Easton Street was two – way
Photo: Clifton Hughes*

The Chartered Institute of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) included a disclaimer in the preface to MfS and its sequel companion MfS2: “No liability for negligence or otherwise in relation to this document and its contents can be accepted by CIHT, the members of the steering group, its servants or agents or Managing Editors or contributors.”

By 2014 sufficient concern about “Shared Space” schemes, and particularly their safety for pedestrians, had built up to justify a review, so the Government commissioned a survey to be carried out by Lord Richard Holmes, which culminated in a report in 2015. Within the report, he commented on the lack of recording of incidents along this type of road.

The lack of evidence about the impact of these schemes ranges from an absence of accessibility audits, user experience analysis and accident data. For example, “courtesy crossings” or uncontrolled crossings, often introduced as part of shared space design, have no official category; thus, accidents on them are not recorded as such, making shared space accident data very unreliable.

The Lord Holmes’ Report concludes: “Regardless of their mode of transport, disability status or gender, this survey found an overwhelming majority of respondents did not enjoy using shared spaces. This survey also found a third of respondents go out of their way to actively avoid shared space schemes. Respondents who did use them described feeling intimidated, anxious and frightened, not only for their own safety, but also for the safety of

others. If the stated intention of shared space is to “improve pedestrian movement and comfort” and “enabling all users to share the space” the predominantly negative feelings towards such a vast number and varied assortment of shared spaces across Britain raises significant questions about how well local authorities are designing and evaluating the impact of these urban designs on their users.

“The pattern of non-reporting of accidents to the police seen in our survey, with very few respondents (11 percent) reporting incidents, calls into question the validity of a) the methodology recommended by the DfT on how to monitor operational safety of a shared space and b) previous evaluations of shared space using road accident statistics, if this under-reporting has not been taken into account.

“Taken together the results of this survey show that there is an urgent need for an immediate moratorium on shared space until there is more and better evidence about the impact of shared space schemes including an improved (central) record of accident data and a better understanding of the consequences of people literally designed out of these spaces.”

In January this year (2018) CIHT published a review document called “Creating Better Streets: Inclusive and Accessible Places”. It aimed to:

- Set street design within the overall context of the statutory requirements on local authorities set out in the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation;
- Set a framework of clear objectives that authorities can use to provide the basis for developing designs and the monitoring of completed schemes;
- Review a range of schemes identified as shared space and draw a number of conclusions around the typical benefits and impacts of such schemes;
- Suggest a classification of different street design types that might be helpful in developing approaches to future schemes;
- Recommend areas where further work is required by the profession and by government.

The review included three new definitions of types of Shared Space Streets:

1. **Pedestrian prioritised streets** where pedestrians feel that they can move freely anywhere and where drivers should feel they are a guest. Under current legislation, this does not give formal priority to pedestrians;
2. **Informal streets** where formal traffic controls (signs, markings and signals) are absent or reduced. There is a

footway and carriageway, but the differentiation between them is typically less than in a conventional street;

3. **Enhanced streets** where the public realm has been improved and restrictions on pedestrian movement (e.g., guardrail) have been removed but conventional traffic controls largely remain.

Locations exemplifying each of the above types were assessed against criteria related to the typical overarching objectives for such schemes: providing an inclusive environment, ease of movement, safety and public health, quality of place and economic benefit. The report finishes with numerous recommendations for action.

My thoughts

The enhancements that were carried out a few years ago to the area behind the Guildhall and St Mary Street fit the first definition above; but none of the major road layout changes required to implement the Wycombe Masterplan, including those already constructed in the Desborough Road area, fit the above definitions.

It seems to me that “Shared Space” is an approach which could be used to good effect in new developments and estates being designed from scratch with the motor vehicle in mind. It could also serve on streets that are gated and monitored, where entry is restricted to vehicles with a specific reason to be there. Its use on roads and streets that carry through-traffic, especially major routes, is undesirable.

Desborough Road is one such case, which will be required at some point in the future to handle the A40 traffic volume when the town flyover is closed. Conversions of existing streets developed in an earlier age, especially those designed initially to accommodate horses and carts, do not fit nicely into the idea.

The safety of pedestrians and cyclists relies on the skill and attitude of drivers, the best of whom may still encounter problems when vision is restricted, guidance unclear or pedestrians themselves are confused or disabled.

This article does not really do justice to the full explanation of “shared space”. The articles, reports and guidance documents referred to give fuller explanations of this subject.

Please note: my comments in this article are based upon my own thoughts and experiences as a driver and pedestrian. They do not necessarily reflect those of the Society or its Transport Group.

Mick Lewis

Note: No liability for the effects of any actions taken as a result of the above article can be accepted by the Editor, the Author or the High Wycombe Society!

Our Anglo-Saxon Heritage

ON 17th JULY 1901, workmen digging a ditch near Castle Hill House in High Wycombe interrupted the wedding celebrations of Fred Skull and Ellen Peace to announce that they had unearthed a skeleton and several other items. One of these, a delicate intricately decorated gold pendant, would ultimately find its home at the British Museum. A replica can be seen at Wycombe Museum, where it is one of the ten objects selected to tell the story of our town. The whereabouts of the skeleton and any of the other finds of that day are unknown.

Experts agree that the pendant dates from approx. 600 AD and the filigree work resembles examples found on similar articles in Kent. The centre may originally have held a precious stone. Over the century since its discovery, there has been much speculation about the identity of the missing skeleton and the possible connection with the Saxon burial in Taplow.

One person better qualified than most to join in that debate is Leslie Webster, former Senior Keeper of Anglo Saxon finds at the British Museum, who is coming to talk to the High Wycombe Society about the Taplow Burial on April 28th. The meeting will be jointly hosted by the High Wycombe Society and BAS, the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, now celebrating its 170th year. At the time of the pendant discovery, although it's not clear if the BAS had any involvement initially, a Wycombe resident, John Parker, held the role of Joint Secretary of BAS. He died while still holding that role in 1906. In his obituary it was noted that he had "died in harness after 22½ years of persevering and painstaking service on the Society's behalf in the face during much of that time of very great

discouragement" and it was said that it was "not an unlikely supposition that without him the Society would have collapsed". This John Parker was the son of the John Parker honoured as a Wycombe Pioneer in the Oak Room windows for his book, published in 1880 on the history of our town. The BAS journal 'Records of Bucks' reveals that both father and son joined BAS and one of the first contributions the son made long before he took office as Joint Secretary was to write a review of his father's book. To allow John Parker Senior, a prominent member of the Crendon Lane Chapel to join BAS, the Society must have relaxed its ecclesiastically based founding rules which required its members to be

full practising members of the Church of England.

Two other notable members of BAS at that time were: Miss Frances Dove, who joined in 1897; and Coningsby Disraeli, who would later serve as its Chairman from 1917 to 1936

Jackie Kay



Gold Pendant found in vicinity of Castle Hill House in 1901 – Image courtesy of Wycombe Museum.

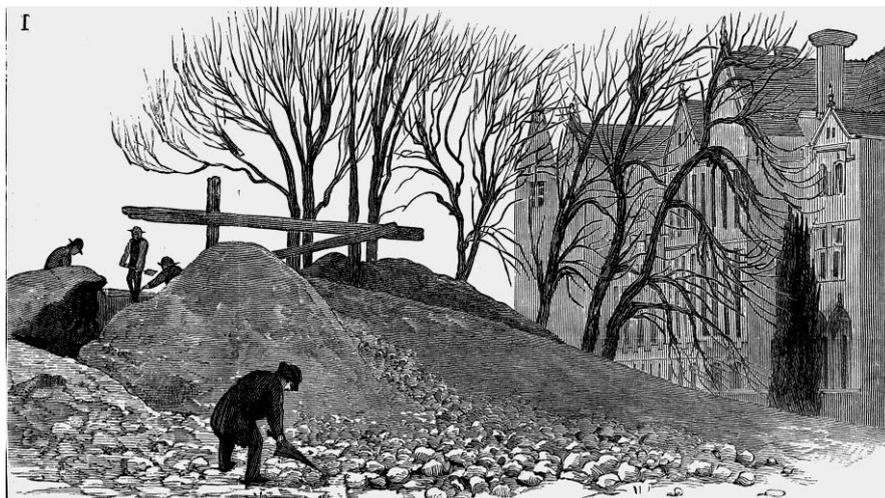
Buckinghamshire's Saxon Prince: The Burial at Taplow –

A talk by Leslie Webster

Saturday 28th April
at 2.30 pm

Trinity United
Reformed Church

Image: Illustrated London News





Sunday 5th August 2018

Golden Anniversary Event

Tickets: £25 (including lunch)

Venue: Wycombe Abbey

IN OUR Winter Newsletter we advised you to hold the date. Now, to avoid any disappointment we recommend that you reserve your places.

On Sunday 5th August, we invite you to join members of the High Wycombe Society for lunch and a relaxing afternoon at Wycombe Abbey.

If you wish to attend, and have not already registered with Eileen, please either: Email programme@highwycombesociety.org.uk

OR Phone Eileen on: 01494 449902 or 07396 140075 – and leave a message.

Payment can be made at our forthcoming events in April and May. Cheques should be made payable to “The High Wycombe Society”. Tickets can also be sent out to those who prefer to send payment by post with a Stamped Addressed Envelope.

Why Wycombe Abbey? In Spring 2014, there was a successful *Behind-the-Scenes* visit for Society members curious to know what lay behind the wall. Ever since, there have been calls to return to see areas not included on our tour. The August 2018 event will allow time to explore some of the buildings and grounds. We hope to put our 50-years of activity into the larger context of the story of our town’s development, a narrative in which successive occupants of Wycombe Abbey have played a major part. Now home to a prestigious girls’ school with an international reputation, Wycombe Abbey was so-named by the Carrington family who lived there in the nineteenth century. The “Big School” hall in which we hope to have our lunch, was built as a playroom for the Carrington children and decorated with unwanted items from the newly refurbished church in town. Previously known in the eighteenth century as Loakes Manor, the older building, which includes the School Reception and the Library, was home to three successive Earls of Shelburne including William, 2nd Earl of Shelburne of the 2nd creation, who became Prime Minister and Marquis of Lansdowne. Founded in 1896 by Miss Dove, the school acquired its own chapel in the twentieth century. Other notables associated with Wycombe Abbey in the twentieth century have included Glenn Miller and Gustav Holst.

From Rations to Fashions

ON A COLD afternoon in the middle of January, 92 people spurned the New Year Sales and signed the attendance sheet at The Riverside for our first gathering of the year. They included over 60 Society members, but also many newcomers, some of whom elected to join the Society on the day. It was my pleasure to introduce the guest speaker, Mike Dewey, Nostalgia Columnist in the Bucks Free Press and Project Manager of the SWOP project, well-known to many in the room. With seats in short supply, the audience settled in their places early for a prompt start to hear Mike talk about the shopping experiences in High Wycombe over the decades immediately following the War.

With many illustrations drawn from the SWOP (Saving Wycombe’s Old Photographs) collection, he soon had the rapport he sought, with attendees quick to shout out what they knew and could see on the screen.

From corner shops that have disappeared without trace, through the arrival of modest-sized supermarkets, to department stores whose fortunes rose and fell, Mike wove his narrative – with the occasional diversion prompted by other items in the pictures.

There were some people in the room who could remember using ration books and coupons to buy clothes, while others had worked in the

various stores featured. We all shared in the surprise and delight as one lady called out “That’s my mother!”, when Mike showed a slide with a number of shop assistants ready to serve their customers.

A lively question and answer session followed, and most were happy to stay talking over refreshments. It was a departure from our usual practice of holding talks in the evenings, but all present agreed it was an experiment that should be repeated.

Jackie Kay

Quentin's Interlude in Wycombe

IN SPRING 1929 a Mr and Mrs Pratt, with their youngest son, Denis, then aged 20, moved from their urban Battersea flat to a new four-bedroomed house in Flackwell Heath. Denis Pratt found their new life "luxurious" but later claimed that it was "beyond the family's financial means", his father having employed a live-in maid and a gardener and "abandoned all common sense". Denis was less keen on his new surroundings, describing Wycombe as being "like a desert on the edge of civilization". He claimed to dislike flowers and animals, yet regularly walked his mother's chihuahuas in Fennels Wood and was heard to declare: "A dog is a terrible thing to happen to anyone, we've got enough dumb friends without them!" The opinionated Denis would later find fame as the outrageous exhibitionist and gay icon: Quentin Crisp, author of "The Naked Civil Servant".

His father, Mr Pratt, regularly clad in a dark suit and bowler hat, commuted daily from Loudwater Station to his job in the City of London as a Solicitor. In the evenings, Denis and his mother would wait at the station to welcome him home. But Denis was never destined to follow in his father's footsteps.

Communications between father and son were not easy. In one memorable exchange, his father said: "The trouble is you look like a male whore!" At the time, this seemingly brought some relief to Denis as it was the first time that his father had acknowledged the 'problem'. In response, Denis promised that next time he went to London he would try not to come back!

Mrs Pratt protected her increasingly flamboyant son and thought he might become a Commercial Artist. So early in 1930, she enrolled him at the Wycombe Technical Institute in Easton Street. Now aged 21 Denis was older than the other Art Students, who were mostly female, and he behaved "like a Genius". Allowed to do as he pleased he tinkered at designing trade posters of an exotic nature!

The school specialized in furniture design, so he learnt to do mechanical drawings, but he was happiest when drawing the 'Human Form', disappointed only by the sitters' "lack of daring" which, as a future 'life model' himself, he "rectified in class by twisting and turning, climbing up the walls and rolling around on paint-daubed floors".

While otherwise bored in the leafy backwater of Flackwell Heath, he read Evelyn Waugh's 'Vile Bodies' describing it as the "the funniest book I have ever read", and he played the part of a 'Mad Man' in a local amateur dramatic society play.

His apparel and appearance became increasingly effeminate. In search of friendship, excitement and night-time social life, Denis walked around Wycombe with long dyed hair and painted fingernails, drawing comments from strangers.

Denis often ventured back to London, to visit the Black Cat Cafe in Soho's seedy Old Compton Street, a meeting place for male prostitutes and homosexuals. There he met a man of similar age, who was "class-conscious and poverty-stricken" but not overtly gay. Nicknamed 'Thumbnails', he was said to be in awe of Denis.

Persuaded by his parents, Denis invited 'Thumbnails' home to Flackwell Heath for a weekend. 'Thumbnails' was short with black hair ending in a staccato clipped manner at the back and his thumbnails were wider than they were long. According to Denis, when his mother saw them, she made "the special face people make when they hear a knife skidding across a tin plate".

Denis left High Wycombe at Christmas in 1930. With his "cosmetics tied up in a red handkerchief on the end of a birch stick" he headed first to Loudwater Station, and from there by train and Underground to London's Barons Court area, to share a rented flat with 'Thumbnails'.

Denis had now re-invented himself as 'Quentin Crisp'. Quentin says of 'Thumbnails' "He had visited my home in High Wycombe and seen that I was invincibly middle-class or worse" ... "Perhaps he thought one day something must come of all the talents I claimed by implication to possess." Never of a sexual nature, their relationship lasted throughout 1931, while they lived in a series of rooms, flats and houses around London, sharing notoriety on at least one occasion.

That night, in full 'Slap' make-up, Quentin took the 'Tube' to Piccadilly Circus, wearing a black silk dress with a velvet cape he had borrowed from a girl he knew in Wycombe. 'Thumbnails' sat beside him in a dinner-jacket. How he could afford such clothing was a mystery to Quentin but says a lot about his priorities! The evening ended in disaster. They were stared at, laughed at, and treated with humiliating disgust. Quentin never again 'Dragged-Up' until in old age he played both Lady Bracknell on stage and Queen Elizabeth I in a film.

Quentin's father died of Bowel Cancer in hospital in High Wycombe on 17th January 1931, less than a month after his son had left home. Quentin says in his autobiography "I felt nothing except irritation at the thought of having to go home to High Wycombe, attend the funeral and then come all the way back to London". Soon afterwards, Mrs Pratt sold the family house and moved away from the area. Quentin would never again return to High Wycombe or Flackwell Heath. Fame and fortune awaited elsewhere.

Andy Aliffe

Visit to the Trenchard Museum, RAF Halton

A GROUP of us visited the Trenchard Museum at RAF Halton, near Wendover, on 20th February. The curator gave a short introductory talk on how the museum came to be created and the RAF's presence at Halton since 1918 when the RAF was established.

In September 1913, the owner of the Halton Estate, Alfred de Rothschild, invited the Army to use his land for its summer manoeuvres. The soldiers were joined by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) with a handful of frail machines. The first recorded flight at Halton was on 18th September, when one of the squadron's aircraft landed on the area known today as Maitland parade square. At the outbreak of WW1, Rothschild offered his estate to Lord Kitchener for military training. By 1916, Halton was covered in tents and wooden huts accommodating up to 20,000 infantry troops.

In 1917 there was a pressing need to expand technical training in the RFC, and Halton became the main training unit for aircraft mechanics. Permanent workshops were constructed to house the RFC's many trade specialities, under the title The School of Technical Training (Men). The School population expanded rapidly and, by the end of 1917, some 14,000 air mechanics had been trained. At the end of the war, in November 1918 the station had under training 6000 airmen mechanics, 2000 women, and 2000 boys, supported by 1,700 instructors. An Australian Flying Corps unit also lodged at Halton. Training courses varied in length between a few weeks and a few months.

On Rothschild's death in January 1918, his nephew Lionel inherited Halton House and estate. The Air Board were keen to purchase the estate as an officer cadet college for the nascent Royal Air Force, which had been

formed on 1st April from an amalgamation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. Fortunately, Lionel was a willing seller and the estate, including Halton House, was purchased by the War Office in 1919 for £112,000.

Following the end of WW1, Hugh Trenchard (later Viscount), who was second in command of the RFC, was instrumental in founding a permanent RAF with a famous memorandum, which was endorsed by Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for Air, in December 1919. An RAF Apprentice Scheme based at Halton was a key thrust in the paper. Trenchard believed that the only way to recruit high-quality mechanics for the ever-more technical Service was to train them internally, and thereby enable them to complete their apprenticeship in three years, instead of the standard five years in civilian life.



Eileen Walters, HWS Events Manager, takes the pilot's seat
Photo: Jenny Bunce

The museum, which is open to the public on Tuesdays, houses a wide range of artefacts, uniforms, weapons, aircraft parts, simulators and even dental equipment. It provides a photographic history of the RAF at Halton including Halton House itself which can also be visited by arrangement. There are several retired RAF personnel on hand to talk about the equipment on display and put willing volunteers through a flying simulation experience. An enjoyable and stimulating visit.

David Snoxell

Bridge Mill Information Board

A YEAR AGO, we announced our hope that we would be able to place a board on the Round House in Paul's Row to inform the public about the river Wye and its mills (and Bridge Mill in particular).

Readers, some of whom in the meantime have visited the County Museum Resource Centre to view the Francis Colmer painting depicted in our design, may have wondered what became of the idea. Those who paid close attention to Planning This Quarter last year, will be aware that part of the reason for delay was the need to obtain Planning Permission (although many of our fellow Civic Societies seem blissfully unaware of such a need). Planning Group members and Trustees also suggested a number of improvements to the design. We are delighted to note that our revised proposal has now received planning permission. A full-scale printed version of the board has been produced and has met with approval of all involved, so we look forward to seeing it installed when the weather improves. Our thanks to Tony Hatton for his perseverance on this project.

JK

Footpaths – Find them or lose them

AS PART OF our undertaking to verify the Definitive Map of Rights of Way within the unparished areas of High Wycombe, and with Spring approaching, I will be organising some walks in a new area of High Wycombe. I am planning to look at those to the North of the A40 London Road and East of Amersham Hill next. This is a part of Wycombe which I don't know well, so it would be great to welcome any Society members who live in that part of town. We need your local knowledge, particularly to point out any well-used paths which may not already be recorded as Public Rights of Way.

We aim to have a pleasant walk and usually fit in a refreshment stop – at least a coffee and sometimes lunch. If you have already expressed an interest in these walks I will contact you with further information soon. I would welcome any more readers who would like to join us. Please contact me so that I can add you to my list of eager walkers.

I can be reached via e-mail at Val.Hinkins@btinternet.com (preferred) or telephone on 01494 534754. Please leave a message if I am not there.

Val Hinkins

We Need You!

VOLUNTEERS ARE IN short supply. Events don't just happen. And projects don't deliver unless people commit to them. Tasks are often more rewarding when people get together to accomplish them. As we approach our AGM, we are keen to encourage new people to help in steering the Society but we also need others to take on key support work, creating and maintaining our records, for example, or helping with publicity. We do, however, understand that not everyone wants to sit on committees. It is sometimes easier to volunteer to help with a single event, or a specific part of a project, or to lend a hand at a practical level. And all help is gratefully received.

Take our Golden Anniversary event as an example (see p 7). Our Events Manager has done a great job establishing the framework, but there's much more to do to make it an event to remember. Some of you will recall that at our 40-year anniversary, Ann Simone displayed a Timeline chronicling the events of the Society from 1968 through to 2007 against a backdrop of local, national and international headlines. One thing we'd like to do is extend this to the current day. Would you like to join a small team, trying to work out what has happened in the past 10 years? What are the top headlines you remember that have had an impact on our lives? It's not a big job (Ann researched the first 40 years on her own), there are no right or wrong answers, so it should be fun!

At the other extreme, the Society is sometimes approached to support much larger projects with more ambitious goals. The work Val and her walkers are doing to verify the Rights of Way on the Definitive Map (see above) is a very small part of a much larger National initiative promoted by the Open Spaces Society among others. In a similar vein, we have recently endorsed an application by Wycombe Museum and Bucks New University for funding for a collaborative project to raise awareness of our town's furniture heritage. We thought long and hard before doing so, to determine what we could realistically do to help. If the funding application is successful we will be encouraging any of our members with associations with Wycombe's furniture industry to assist.

We have also recently been approached by the Chilterns Conservation Board. Some of you may already have attended a workshop for the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs scheme or completed one of their questionnaires. This is very long-term scheme with many different possible project threads still being explored. Unusually for the CCB, they have been persuaded to extend the land area for the scheme to include a corridor through Wycombe along the course of the River Wye.

Jackie Kay

A WWI Outreach

Those of us who regularly travel to Aylesbury to access the County Archives will be particularly pleased to note that the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury, as part of its outreach programme, will be holding a WWI-related event in High Wycombe in May. Unfortunately, it's the same weekend as our first Pann Mill Open Day of the year, which makes it a busy weekend, but it is hoped that some of our members will have enough energy to support both events.

119 Plates

Thanks to the National Trust Wycombe Centre, we have taken over their stock of plates (Melamine – dishwasher-proof) and several sets of cutlery. The Society would be happy to loan them to Members who may be organising events. Please contact Ann Simone who is storing them (but hopes someone else may have a small space in their garage or spare room?) Call Ann on 01494 448773.

Walking with Willie

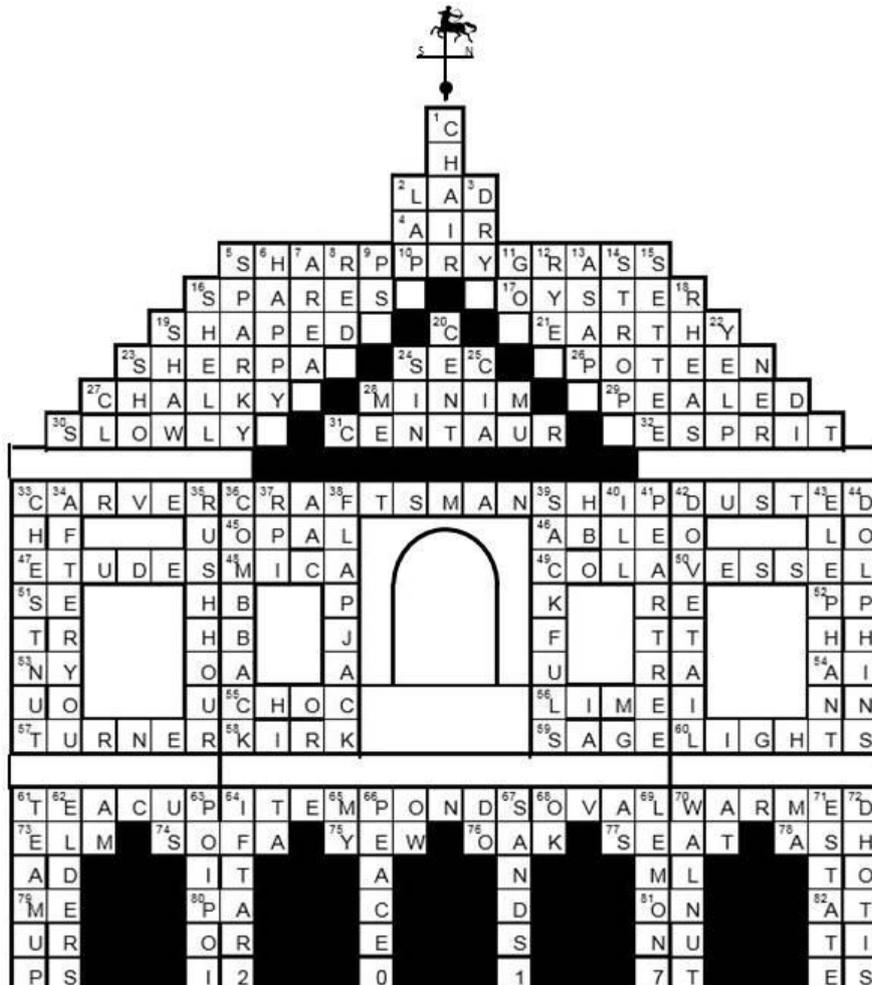
7 new dates to choose from ... and a new venture

WILLIE REID's guided walking tours are now an established feature in our town's calendar. Dates for 2018 are as follows: Sat 14 April; Sat 19 May; Mon 18 June, Sat 7 July; Sat 18 August; Sat 22 September; Sat 20 October. The free historical walks will start from Wycombe Museum in Priory Avenue at 10.15am. The distance is 2.5 miles and each walk will last 2.5 hours. There is ONE short steep climb. No need to book - just turn up. Group tours can be arranged separately for up to 20 people at reidsutd@btinternet.com Any donations will go to www.streetkidsdirect.org.uk

In celebration of 50 years of the Society, Willie is also inviting Year 6 primary children from local schools to join him on a free historical walk around the town during the summer term. The walks, which will last about an hour, will tell the story of famous and not so famous people who have made their mark, the industries that helped forge the town as well as highlighting some imposing buildings and institutions. They will start on The Rye and finish in Frogmoor. The aim of the walks is to try to get youngsters interested in their town's rich past.

Clarsach's Christmas Solution

Clarsach's Christmas Puzzle generated a number of obscure inquiries and correspondence, with appeals from some members to make it easier next time and appreciation of the compiler from others for helping to enlarge their vocabulary. For any of you still puzzling over the odd clue, the official full solution is below.



Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Carolyn Whitfield

Mrs Sylvia Smith

Mrs Jan Lancaster

Mrs P Bingham

Mrs P Kyani

Mrs Dorothy Coomer

Obituary

We regret to inform members of the death of:

Mrs B Campbell

Bric-a-Brac and Books

This regular stall at our three Pann Mill Open Days is always popular with visitors and helps with our finances too. Would you like to help on the stall? Could you take the remaining stocks and store them between events? We make sure the boxes are stackable, so quite a small space can accommodate quite a pile! Please contact Ann Simone on 01494 448773 if you'd like to know more

REMINDER

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

at the Riverside

on Friday 8th June 2018 at 7.30* pm

*Note: the start of the meeting may be delayed slightly to accommodate any unfinished business from the Special General Meeting of 23rd March.

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 2018**

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!!!**

2018	
Saturday 14 th April	1 st "Walking with Willie" event of the season – see p11 for other dates
Saturday 28 th April Trinity United Reformed Church 2.30 pm	Wycombe Arts Festival meeting. Co-hosted by Bucks Archaeological Society in their 170 th year. Talk: "Buckinghamshire's Saxon Prince: the Burial at Taplow" by Leslie Webster, former Senior Keeper of the Anglo Saxon and Viking Collections in the British Museum. (see p8)
Saturday 12 th May	The Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies is holding a WWI event at Arts4Every1 in Desborough Road (see p10)
Sunday 13 th May 11am-5pm	Pann Mill Open Day – Wycombe Sound Radio will be there doing an Outside Broadcast all day.
Friday 8 th June The Riverside 7.30 pm	AGM and demonstration of the WWI heritage trail.
Sunday 8 th July 11am-5pm	Pann Mill Open Day
Sunday 5 th August Wycombe Abbey Lunch/afternoon 12 noon-4.30 pm	50 th Anniversary Celebration. Tickets for this event will formally go on sale in April but you can reserve your place NOW (see p7).
Sunday 16 th September 11am-5pm	Pann Mill Open Day
Friday 12 th October The Riverside 7.30 pm	Talk – by Dave Scott on George Holt Thomas's contribution to aviation.
Monday 19 th November Trinity United Reformed Church	Co-hosted by Wycombe Wildlife Group. Guest Speaker: Ted Green MBE, Founder of the Ancient Tree Forum.