

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 103

SPRING 1997

Only Part of the Answer

A new west-bound bus lane along the London Road at peak hours and a special parking area in the centre of High Wycombe are due to be introduced on 3 March, but these measures are only part of the answer to the traffic problem.

THE peak-hour bus lane and restrictions on street parking are just part of the County and District Councils' Positive Public Transport Strategy, adopted some years ago with support from the public and from the High Wycombe Society. The objective of the strategy is to make a concerted effort to cut congestion and pollution by improving public transport and reducing car mileage. Our only fear about the bus lane is that, with its numerous breaks, buses will not have a clear run into town. We sympathise with those who are inconvenienced by the parking restrictions, but parking must be looked on as one of the many costs of motoring. The alternative to the Councils' strategy is to face ever-increasing pollution and risk of climate change, and see more and more of our precious land being taken up for roads, car parks and servicing facilities.

The Society's Transport Group have always advocated a multi-headed approach to tackling the traffic problem, arguing that a vastly improved and cheaper public transport system should accompany or precede the more restrictive aspects of the policy. The new and frequent easy-access buses on the Totteridge-Castlefield route are proving to be popular and show what can be done. A distinctly better and cheaper service is the only way to attract car users back to the buses.

Our Transport Group's suggestion for reinstating the High Wycombe-Bourne End rail link with a quiet, unobtrusive energy-efficient tram would certainly make a major impact on A40 traffic and open up the possibility of more extensive rail use by many more people. We hope the Councils can be persuaded of the long-term benefits of this link.

More also needs to be done to reduce car dependence for journeys to and from school, work, the rail station, and leisure and sports facilities by organising custom-designed minibus passenger services, and also for delivery services by superstores. The Transport Group have pointed out a promising way to achieve this using a computer programme to evaluate optimum routes for a first-class door-to-door service. Some firms on the Cressex Business Park are investigating such a scheme, and we wish it success.

The Councils have been courageous in the measures they have taken so far. We hope the benefits will soon begin to appear. However, much more needs to be done to free us from car-dependence without sacrificing its many conveniences. We look to our Councils to continue to lead us forward, remembering the needs of all sections of the community.



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

Registered Charity No. 257897

Honorary Secretary, John Gore, 30 Wordsworth Road, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 2UR. Tel: (01494) 526671

January Quarterly Meeting

"And Now – Our Mystery Guest Speaker"

Our planned speaker, John Neale of the Georgian Group, was regrettably laid low by a virus a few hours before our Quarterly Meeting on 21 January 1997. At very short notice, we succeeded in 'booking' a most competent replacement presenter, our own, our very own John Gore, Honorary Secretary, and, it would seem, a very polished archivist and speaker on the history of High Wycombe. The Executive Committee had known, of course, that John had frequently represented the Society in speaking to to WIs, Residents' Groups and special interest groups on the work of the High Wycombe Society and Wycombe's heritage. Well, now we have heard it for ourselves! John demonstrated immediately that he could easily be heard and understood. His confident presentation of facts,

dates, personalities and places, supported by his own library of excellent colour slides, without reference to written notes, was a fascinating journey for us all that evening. Indeed, some of our past speakers, coming from a professional background, had been a disappointment on occasion, due to their virtual inaudibility and hesitant command of their material. Not our John: he strode verbally forth on 'High Wycombe – Past and Present' holding the attention of the audience with no difficulty!

It was a good Quarterly Meeting, well attended, with a super speaker. Didn't we – and John – do well?

Roger Lawson

Wycombe Abbey Lake

Drawing by Eric Fowler



Postscript

This first meeting of the year was to have featured a talk on Georgian architecture by John Neale of the Georgian Group, but unfortunately he fell ill and was unable to attend. However, Hon. Sec. John Gore stepped into the breach, and showed members and visitors some marvellous slides on the theme of High Wycombe Past and Present.

The evening was well and truly rescued. I think it's safe to say that everyone loves to see pictures of old Wycombe; I know I do! In fact, I did get a pleasant surprise when, in one of the slides, not so old this time – circa 1990 – I spotted my husband and our daughter, then about seven years old, watching the weighing-in of the Mayor!

I like to think I know a lot about High Wycombe, but I did learn something new that evening, that the lake in Wycombe Abbey grounds is fed

from a spring in White Hart Street.

All in all, this was a very entertaining evening, a thought-provoking record of our ever-changing town. A vote of thanks was given by Linda Webb.

Denise Lindsay

John Gore comments: I had often wondered where the water in the Abbey Lake came from. White Hart Street seems an unlikely place for the source of the water supply, but I am assured that that is where it is. The pipe must be routed underneath the bed of the River Wye itself. The lake was created, along with The Dyke, in 1762–3 by the third Lord Shelburne. He is said to have employed Capability Brown as his landscape adviser, whilst the latter was working at Bowood, the Shelburne estate in Wiltshire.

The Chairman's Perspective

New Year 1997

A highly perceptive member of our Membership and Publicity Group had suggested that the Chairman should contribute some pertinent column-inches to our High Wycombe Society Newsletter on a regular basis. Naturally, I was flattered. Surely there is a hint here that my occasional meanderings across the pages of the Newsletter have been acceptable to at least one member! Maybe this member has been 'deluged' with favourable comments from fellow members about the Chairman's past contributions. I have my doubts!

It is true that past 'Perspectives' have dealt with topical issues in a sober and reflective mood. (Well, I like to think so, anyway!) But there is possibly a final conclusion that these literary (but short) masterpieces have all the impact of a cold, soggy rice pudding. Nevertheless, there must be some conclusions we can draw from our 1996 experiences that will give us all some guidance on where, as conservationists and civic-minded individuals, we should be going in 1997

It can reasonably be asserted that our Society continues to make a positive contribution to the civic and environmental concerns of our town and its citizens. Regrettably, our words and deeds are almost invariably the work of comparatively few of our more dedicated members. Admittedly, we are not all 'wordsmiths' and happy to write letters or to serve on committees, but unfortunately many of our events and meetings are sparsely attended.

There is a continuing and real need to recruit

new members, new blood, as we organise and run our business meetings and social excursions to places of interest.

Dear reader and member, if you are enjoying reasonably good health and mobility, would you consider putting forward your name before the AGM as a prospective Executive Committee member? How about asking to be put in contact with one of our specialist groups? Planning, Heritage, Transport, Friends of The Rye, together with Membership & Publicity are all deserving of your direct involvement. The conservation issues that absolutely demand our involvement are in most instances evolving from and allied to the same issues that prompted our founding members to establish our Society in the first place. The Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are continually under threat both from commercial developers and from national and local government planning for more housing in suburban fringes.

The unrestricted use of the motor car to fulfil the love affair of the British motorist is now becoming a critical topic of debate both nationally and locally. Do you have something to say on these issues? If not, why not? Do we have to wait to see High Wycombe joined to Beaconsfield as one huge suburban sprawl before we realise that we held back at the wrong moment?

Roger Lawson
Chairman

'Perspectives' on High Wycombe

The October/November 1996 edition of the magazine *'Perspectives on Architecture'* makes two references to High Wycombe, one of them, indeed, actually includes The High Wycombe Society!

Firstly, in an article on modern theatres, Wycombe Swan receives the thumbs-down as a 'poor performer' architecturally speaking, and an unfortunate example of a 'brick-box monster'.

Secondly, in his 'Under Scrutiny' column, Professor Roger Scruton praises his father, the late Jack Scruton MBE, our founding Honorary

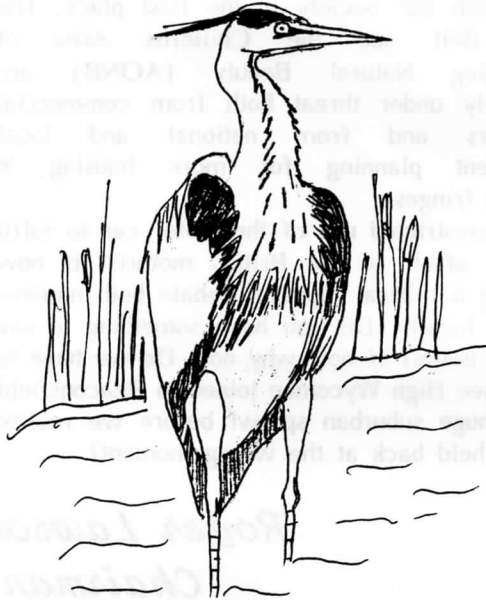
Secretary, for his stand over The Rye road proposals and for saving High Wycombe from excessive development in the '60s.

He uses his column to advocate a 'civil society' as a model for Britain to adopt, one in which private initiative and public spirit coincide. He sees hope for the future in 'little platoons of citizens who gather together in defence of their inheritance, and who seek to preserve the things of which they alone know the value'.

May Roger Scruton's high hopes come to fruition!

*I was on The Rye when***Heron and Kingfisher sighted on The Rye**

At 8.30am I looked over the Dyke waterfall and saw a heron about 75 metres away standing on the bank. After about two minutes it jumped into the stream and came out onto the bank with a long wriggling creature, presumably a fish. The heron attacked it for several seconds and it then lay still. As the 'thing' was taken from such a shallow, narrow stream, I was curious to determine whether it was indeed a fish. To get a closer look I started to walk along the path high above the stream, out of sight of the heron, as I thought, but the heron flew off leaving the catch on the grass. It was a pike exactly 19 inches (485mm) long (I broke a dead twig to size and measured the twig at home). In the minute it



took me to get back above the waterfall the fish was gone; presumably the heron had returned for its catch. This heron has been seen many times recently around the Rye, in Pann Mill waters, and of course flying over the Rye. Then I walked along the river towards Pann Mill via Rye Mill. Close to Pann Mill, at 8.50am a shining blue kingfisher flew past me skimming the water and landed 20 metres away on the downstream parapet of Pann Mill bridge. I stopped and stayed motionless waiting for the bird to make a move; it looked like a common brown bird, well camouflaged against the wall. After about two minutes it was disturbed and flew into the shrub

beside the mill steps. Looking down into the water from where the kingfisher had perched could be seen an 8-inch (250mm) trout, probably its prey.

Both sightings surely indicate healthy waters around the Rye; long may this continue.

Peter Hazzard

Sunday 22 December 1996

Etcetera**High Wycombe Lullaby**

In the last issue of the Newsletter (Winter 1996/97), Ron Sims mentioned a new stile on a footpath overlooking Fingest dedicated to the memory of 'Fieldfare', pen name of Henry Fearon, who for many years contributed articles describing weekend walks to the former 'Evening News'. Incidentally, this stile was designed and constructed by Christopher Wallis.

In the old files relating to The Rye Road Campaign of the 1960s which was organised by The Rye Protection Society, forerunner of The High Wycombe Society, are papers showing that 'Fieldfare' was a friend of The Rye and opposed the road proposal. He called The Rye 'one of the finest recreation grounds in all Buckinghamshire'. Three of his Chiltern walks published in 1963/64 featured The Rye as either the start or finish of the walk. In one of them he quotes an old nursery rhyme, which he said was sung by the good wives of High Wycombe, including his own mother, in the early years of this century. He said the verses were sung whilst dangling the child on the ground, and then throwing him or her upwards. The verses ran:

*Over the Wye and through the Rye,
And through the woods up to the sky.
Baby, Baby, bye, bye, bye!*

*Across the Wye, and over the Rye,
How does it feel to climb so high?
Baby, Baby, bye, bye, bye!*

Can any of our readers supply a tune or remember the rhyme being sung to them?

Pann Mill Restoration

Milestone Passed: Millstones Raised

Pann Mill volunteers have moved another step closer to their goal of grinding corn onto the historic site. The pair of French Burr millstones has now been lifted to the 'stone' floor, through a combination of brute force and fine calculation.

On a cold January Sunday morning, four helpers stood by with some trepidation, contemplating the task ahead: how to up-end a 13cwt/660kg millstone, move it along ten feet or so, before raising it through the floor on which it was to rest. Our local mill expert, Christopher Wallis, arrived with his van full of ultra-high-tech lifting gear (ropes, chains, block and tackle!) and a confident expression.

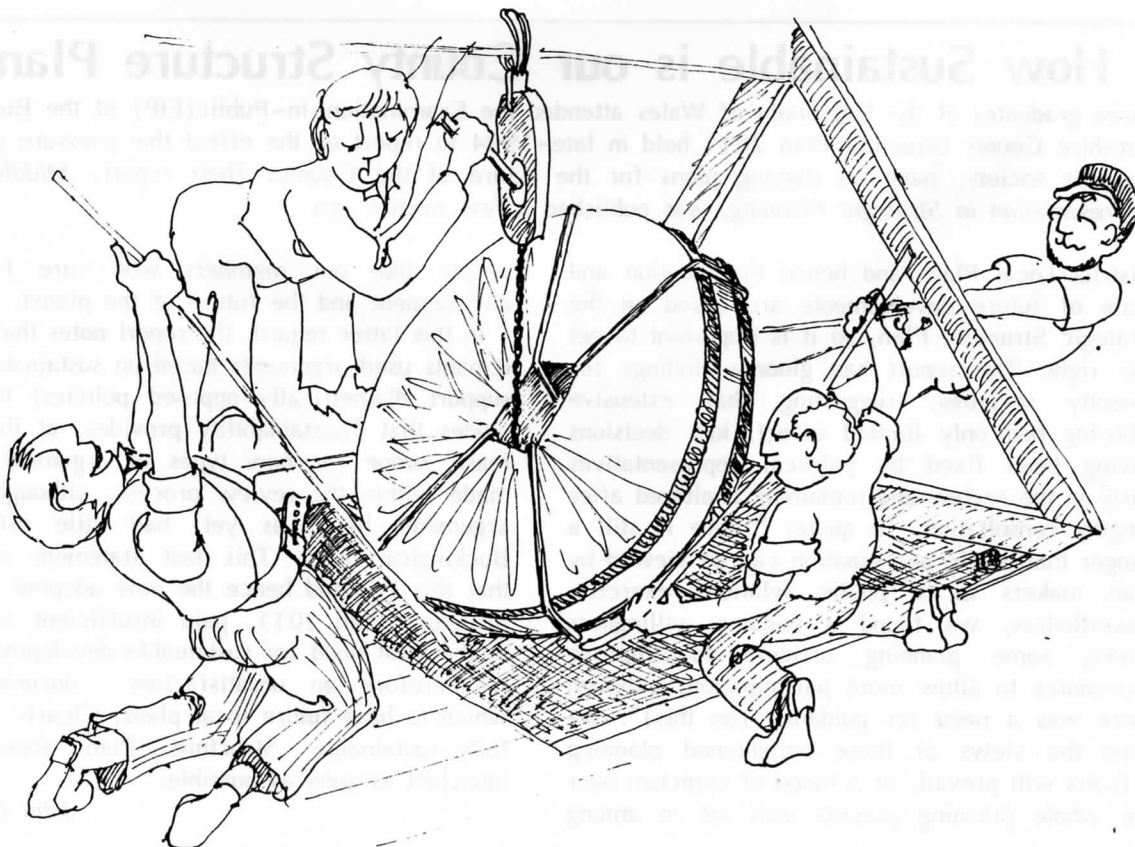
Ian Stone's sturdy A-frame did a magnificent job – supporting the millstone as it was very, very slowly winched up. After a total of ten hours spread over two Sundays, we had completed the most difficult of the tasks to be undertaken in the restoration project. There is no formula for such an operation, as no two mills or sets of machinery are ever the same. An enormous amount of grunting and straining went on, and yet the men were delighted to

pose for the camera!!! Herculean they may be, but too modest to allow their names to be mentioned in this article. It is a tribute to the team that gravity was defied with such good humour.

The Pann Mill Group now feel confident in opening the mill to the public for a special exhibition on Sunday 11 May from 11am to 5pm to celebrate the start of Environment Week and National Mills Day. The Society has now joined the Wind and Watermill Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). [Note: We have been members of the main section of SPAB since the early days of the Society.] This organisation arranges for hundreds of mills throughout the country to be open to the public on this one special day of the year.

Do come to see our progress, and if you have time, enjoy a guided tour of the River Wye from Pann Mill to the Bowden Lane springs and back. Finish your visit with tea and cakes in Pann Mill garden, surrounded by wild flowers and in pleasant company.

Myra King



Planning

Town Centre Enhancement

An exhibition of District Council proposals for the pedestrianisation and enhancement of High Wycombe town centre has been held, along with an invitation for public comment. The objective of the scheme is to create a safer and more pleasant environment for shoppers and visitors. You may be forgiven if you missed the exhibition, as it took place in the Chilterns Shopping Centre on just two days, Friday and Saturday 13 and 14 December (plus a few more days in the Council Offices), when most visitors to the town centre were busy with their Christmas shopping. Not the best time to seek public reaction! The consultation process was further discouraged by the virtual illegibility of the manuscript entries on the consultation leaflet.

Consultants Sir William Halcrow & Partners' proposals for the soon-to-be pedestrianised parts of High Street and Church Street are briefly:

- widen pavements and narrow carriageways using high-quality materials;
- introduce trees and street furniture, and provide for works of art by local craftspeople;
- create a town square between the Guildhall and Little Market House for entertainment etc;
- make Corporation Street two-way for buses and relocate the taxi rank to the centre of the High Street east of Corporation Street;
- introduce new double-sided market stalls; and
- convert the footpath through the churchyard into a road for funeral and wedding cars.

The Society commented that the design failed to

respect the fact that we have an 18th-century High Street, where a degree of formality would be expected. In particular, we said that the oval-shaped entertainment area ought to be rectangular and perpendicular to the axis of the High Street. We were concerned that the Denner setts, a traditional local form of paving, now outside the Guildhall and Falcon, should be incorporated into the design. We deprecated the idea of a road through the churchyard, which ought to remain a peaceful, fully-pedestrianised area. The relatively few wedding and funeral cars could be catered for by the proposed permit scheme for servicing vehicles to enter the pedestrianised area via the High Street.

The Council hopes to start work on the scheme by midsummer this year.

John Gore

How Sustainable is our County Structure Plan?

Three graduates of the University of Wales attended the Examination-in-Public(EIP) of the Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan 2011 held in late-1994 to report on the effect that pressure groups, like our society, have on shaping plans for the future of the County. Their report, *Middle-class Representation in Strategic Planning*, was published a few months ago.

District Local Plans and hence the location and scale of future developments are based on the strategic Structure Plan, so it is important to get this right. The report has gloomy findings for amenity societies, suggesting that extensive lobbying had only limited effect, key decisions having been fixed by political representatives early in the review and remaining unaltered after lengthy consultation. To quote: "There is still a danger that public participation can be viewed by plan makers as a public relations exercise. Nevertheless, we found a genuine willingness among some planning officers to improve procedures to allow more participation, although there was a need for guidance (on this)". We hope the views of these enlightened planning officers will prevail, or a mood of cynicism over the whole planning process will set in among

people like our members who care for our environment and the future of the planet.

In this latter regard, the report notes that participants used arguments based on sustainability to support diametrically-opposed policies! It concludes that "Sustainability provides, at the very least, scope for new types of argument to be made within the review process, although these arguments have, as yet, had little effect in Buckinghamshire". This last statement suggests that this EIP and hence the now adopted County Structure Plan 2011, paid insufficient attention to the vital need for sustainable development and is therefore an unsatisfactory document on which to base future local plans. Clearly, a new fully-sustainable Structure Plan should be launched as soon as possible.

John Gore

Transport Group

Transport: the Way Forward

Elsa Woodward, co-ordinator of the Society's Transport Group, accepted an invitation to participate in a seminar on transport organised by the Government Office of the South East and held in Brighton on 8 February 1997. Entitled 'Transport: the way forward', the seminar was arranged to discuss the Government's Green Paper of the same title published last year, which signalled the end of a transport policy dominated by road-building. The seminar was attended by planning and transport experts from industry and local government, and addressed by *inter alia* Sir George Young, Transport Secretary, Adrian Shooter, Managing Director of Chiltern Railways and Lilli Matson of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (who spoke at our 1995 AGM). Elsa's contribution to the discussion drew attention to a point missed by the main speakers: that of the massive contribution to CO₂ emissions and road congestion made by superstore shoppers' cars. An average out-of-town superstore, such as Asda at Cressex, attracts some 25,000 cars per week. Assuming an average round trip of 6 miles, the total amounts to almost 8 million miles per year or one car travelling around the Equator 32 times! This points to the urgent need to ban future out-of-town shopping centres, and to press for home deliveries by existing ones to reduce car mileage.

Should the private member's Road Transport Reduction Bill now before Parliament become law, local authorities will be obliged to set targets for traffic reduction. Cutting journeys to superstores, as well as to schools and workplaces, as the Transport Group advocates, would make a useful contribution here.

Membership & Publicity

Your Views Wanted

The Membership & Publicity Group have reported some profitable meetings working hard on your behalf drawing up the Society's programme for the coming year. They have aimed to produce a varied programme of events, walks, outings and talks on environmental and heritage subjects. Now they would like some reaction from members, so when you receive your programme card (after you have paid your 1997/98 subscription, of course!), please study it and let them know what you think. Suggestions for future topics and speakers would be most welcome. Annie Woodward on (01494) 527978 would be happy to pass on your ideas to the Group.

Heritage Group

Progress Report

Just a few lines to let members know what the Heritage Group has been up to lately.

For the past few months, we – that is, Pauline Cauvain, Annie Woodward, Linda Webb, Gladys Pearson, Frances Presland, Gita Szwerc, my husband Edmund and I – have been sorting out the Society's collection of photographs at the Museum. This task is virtually finished now, and the photos are neatly stashed in a filing cabinet. This has been an enjoyable job, made easier by the help and support we have had from Philip and the Museum staff – thanks!

However, just because one project is finished, doesn't mean that another one will not come along! If any other members would like to know what is going on, please 'phone me (Denise Lindsay) on (01494) 525948.

Incidentally, I would like to share my thoughts on the subject of pub names. I think there should be a law to state that if a pub has had its name for 50 years or more, then it should not be changed. What do other Society members think?

Denise Lindsay

Wanted

..... your UNWANTED bric-a-brac, craft work, toys, household goods, plants in fact, anything that can sell at our next Charity Market Stall under the Little Market House on market day, Saturday 7 June.

It's not a jumble sale, but we find that most donated items do sell – sometimes to our great surprise!

You can have a clear-out any time now, and Olivia Price has kindly offered to store items – call her on (01494) 527042 to arrange to deliver.

The stall is open from 8am until noon, so come along and see if someone else's 'unwanted' is actually just what **you** want! Perhaps you would like to help on the day? You may be approached to 'volunteer'.

Ann Simone

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mr & Mrs D H Sweeney, Bolter End Lane,
Bolter End

– and a special welcome to our youngest member, Monty, newly born son of Phil and Michelle Robins.

Obituary

It is with much regret that we record the deaths of the following members of the Society, and we would like to express our condolences to their family and friends:

Mr Jim Barratt
Mr M Stone

Copy Dates

Please send articles, drawings etc. for the Newsletter to the Hon. Sec. by:

Summer 1997 issue: 15 May
Autumn 1997 issue: 15 August
Winter 1997/98 issue: 15 November
Spring 1998 issue: 15 February

Canal Cruise

Enjoy a summer evening cruising and dining on the Grand Union Canal!



Saturday 21 June 1997

Coach leaves Temple Street bus stop
(ex-Stewart & Arnold) at 5pm

Canal trip from Marsworth 6pm – 9pm
with fish and chip supper

Total cost £14=50 per person

Canal trips have always been High Wycombe Society members' most popular outings, so please book early!

Ring Ron Sims as soon as possible on 440800

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday 14 April 1997 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

AGM followed by a talk by Colin Dawes, County Museum Officer

Saturday 10 – Sunday 18 May 1997
Sunday 11 May 1997

BT Environment Week
National Mills Day: Pann Mill open 11am–5pm for exhibition and refreshments
2pm Water Trail – meet at Pann Mill
2pm Heritage Trail – meet at Parish Church porch
Both trails finish at Pann Mill for tea.

Wednesday 21 May 1997 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

Wycombe Arts Festival: High Wycombe Society lecture
Hidden Bucks (Part 2) by Jean Archer
Come early for this popular speaker!

Saturday 7 June 1997 8am–noon
Little Market House

Charity Market Stall (see page 7 for details of how you can help)

Saturday 21 June 1997

Evening Canal Trip on Grand Union Canal
(see notice on this page)

Saturday 9 August 1997
Friends Meeting House

Coffee Morning