

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

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Modern Wycombe

HIGH WYCOMBE in 2013 will be very different from the Wycombe we know today. There will be a great new housing area where Wycombe Sewage Works now stands. Project Phoenix – or at least an attractive new shopping centre whatever its name – will have risen from the ashes of the Western Sector, and people will no longer flee our town to do their serious shopping.

The urgent issue however is that without some more brave decisions, some aspects of life may be too much like today. Will people still have no alternative to jumping in their cars for most of their journeys? Will London Road still be clogged with cars during the rush hours? Fortunately, things are starting to move on the public transport front too. As we describe inside this Newsletter, the District and County imagination, and are keen offered by information reasonable cost tailored to “demand responsive boringly called!

But will Ultra-Light Rail transport mix? Might it South transport links ment’s Thames Valley are signs that ULR could



Councils are showing real to seize the opportunity technology for transport at individuals’ needs – transport” as it is rather

in public transport throughout Europe. Not the hugely expensive super-trams that are to be seen in Manchester and Sheffield, but neat vehicles with clean hybrid power systems, no more expensive than buses and far more economical with fuel, that can use city streets and, with their diesel engines turned off, even go inside buildings.

also be part of the help fill the gap in North-found by the Govern-Multi-Modal Study? There be a big new growth area

We don’t expect the County Council to take their tattered cheque books out of their pockets just yet. But our elected representatives have already decided to protect the line of the old High Wycombe to Bourne End railway line for future public transport use. The next step needs to be a proper feasibility study, which takes forward the engineering work that our Society has done, adds on the all-important assessment of passenger demand, and then sees how it will all fit in to the new High Wycombe of the 21st century.

Chris Woodman

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and future

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Transport

ULR and DRT

ON 14 AUGUST, the Transport Group was grateful to have a meeting with Cllr Peter Cartwright, now the District Council Cabinet member responsible for the transport portfolio (among others). Cllr Cartwright's knowledge and experience of Wycombe's public transport services are encyclopaedic, and by the end of our enjoyable meeting he was even retrieving railway timetables from many years ago for our perusal. One of the most interesting facts to emerge from our meeting was the remarkable drive now behind the development of Demand Responsive Transport in the Wycombe area.

The "Cressex Express" (hitherto referred to as the "Cressex Shuttle") is expected to be launched in January. But more interesting than that, Bucks County Council are to make a bid under the Government's Urban Bus Challenge, and Cllr Cartwright has been putting forward a series of "routes" for DRT services. These will have fixed end points, but there will be provision for deviations on demand from potential passengers. This was indeed very encouraging and we congratulate both Councils on the vigour with which they are pursuing these developments. We are pleased that our Transport Group may have played some role although, as we have said in previous issues of the *Newsletter*, DRT is now becoming a bandwagon around the country and it was bound to reach Wycombe sooner or later.

Our main aim for the meeting, however, was to discuss information that we have recently received about Ultra-Light Rail, which the Society has advocated for the restoration of the 9km-long disused High Wycombe to Bourne End railway line (HBL). Indeed, the Transport Group has recently produced a further report, *"Light Rail to Light the Way to Popular Public Transport in and around Wycombe"*, which includes costings and information about the engineering works that our engineers have assessed will be required.

Like DRT, ULR looks to be a development that may sweep the country in the coming years, replacing buses on a large scale. One of the leaders in the field, Sustraco, ran a very successful 2½ year trial in Bristol where the City Council have now adopted a major extension to the route in their Local Transport Plan. The vehicles and their economics are astonishing. Gone is the problematic belt drive of the early "Parry People Movers". The units carry up to 100 passengers at speeds of 5-50mph depending on the track and the situation. The hybrid power system depends on batteries that are recharged from the mains at termini or from an onboard diesel engine that is turned off in urban situations (where they can operate in pedestrian areas or even indoors), and the vehicle cost is comparable to a conventional bus. The total cost, *including vehicles*, is typically between £1m and £2m per route-kilometre, one-

tenth that of the Manchester super-tram. The low friction of rail systems means fuel consumption is typically one-third that of a bus. And of course, all rail systems are far more effective than buses in attracting passengers. This technology could revolutionise the Society's proposal, because it means the trams would not have to stop at the railway station, but could press on into the town centre, Phoenix and perhaps beyond.

The Transport Group's latest report suggests that the top priority should now be a feasibility study, looking both at the engineering aspects and the potential passenger demand. An important factor is the Government's development policy for the South-East, which points to the need for new north-south links between Aylesbury, the M4 corridor and Heathrow Airport. Cllr Cartwright believes this may result in a welcome new heavy (conventional) rail link using the Chiltern Line via High Wycombe and Denham. We see no conflict between this and the HBL ULR proposal. ULR is very inexpensive and there is a desperate need to offer alternatives to cars taking the congested London Road to Bourne End and Maidenhead.

Special Meeting on Transport

There's more to transport than DRT and HBL! Despite the Transport Group's impressive work on these topics, other important issues keep coming to the fore, and the Executive Committee is keen that the Society should address them, especially when they link to planning. So, following on the success of our meetings on planning and, most recently, heritage, there is to be a special meeting about transport for all members, in the Friends Meeting House at 7.30pm on 21 October. The Executive Committee wants your views about what transport issues the Society should be getting into and how we might organise it. One possibility is that the Transport Group could have two "arms", the first having engineers and transport experts to work on HBL and specific projects, and the other being a more general group to work closely with the planning group on transport issues in the town.

Frances Presland

Planning This Quarter

WHILST MANY are on holiday the pressure on the Planning Group continues with development and consultation meetings being high on the list, all of which are interesting and important to the Society.

Wycombe Marsh Paper Mill & Sewage Work Site This development continues apace with drilling to Little Marlow, levelling of the site and more recently the preparations to develop the road structure on London Road opposite the Mickfield junction. Further variations and conditions to the approved plan have been received by Wycombe District Council and have been examined by the Planning Group in detail to ensure the environment and approach are in keeping with the area.

16 Lucas Road Success! The Planning Inspectorate turned down an appeal to erect a 24-bedroom residential home on this site. The Society was represented by Mrs A. Simone and Mrs E. Roe who contributed to the points made against such a development.

Project Phoenix You will all have seen the reports in the Bucks Free Press that the Society has objected to Stannifer's planning application for this development. The Planning Group split into two subgroups to look at the application in detail. I express my sincere thanks for the time and hard work they put into this. Comments were also received from the public, amenity groups and most importantly from members of the society.

This is not the end but only the beginning, as Stannifer have already requested a meeting to discuss our objections. Other factors now entering the scene are of course the sale of the college site to Tesco's and the resiting of the college to the CompAir (BroomWade) site.

Urban Design Recently at the instigation of the Planning Authority a meeting has been held with Ms Penelope Tollitt, the Head of Urban Design at Wycombe District Council. This was a very useful and informative meeting with an exchange of ideas from both sides taking place.

The question of a "Town Design Statement for High Wycombe" was raised as to whether the High Wycombe society would be interested in taking part or possibly leading such a project for the Town Centre.

Rail Station development was also discussed with some ideas being tabled with a possible meeting with the Developer Transcend being arranged. (This will now take place on the 9th of September with the Planning Group.) Other

potential sites for development in the Town Centre were also mentioned for information to the Society (see p.11) and will be discussed at our Executive and Planning Group meetings.

Planning Aid Tony Fooks and Trevor Carter attended a seminar, "*Planning Aid - Reaching Out to Communities & Groups*", presented by the Royal Town Planning Institute South East Region. There was wide representation from Planning Authorities, SEEDA, the Countryside Agency, the Civic Trust and amenity groups from across the South-East. Topics discussed included "*The community's involvement in planning*", "*Do authorities assist in community visioning?*", "*The new planning system*" and "*Who understands the planning system?*" It was extremely informative and interesting, especially to hear the status of other planning authorities and how well advanced Wycombe are both in communication and in preparing for the new system.

Tony Fooks

An Invitation to All Members – The Environment Centre on Holywell Mead

I should like to invite members of the High Wycombe Society to visit the Environment Centre on Saturday, October 18th at 3.30pm. It will be an opportunity to see the beautiful exhibition hall – and its exhibition! – together with the meeting room upstairs (lift available) with its working hive of bees, which both children and adults find fascinating.

I'd like to tell you about the aims of the Trustees of the Centre, what we hope to achieve – and how we are working towards our goals. I'll also answer any questions you may have. There will be a cup of tea, and an opportunity to chat.

Please park your car in either Railway Place or Easton Street Car Park, and walk across the Rye for your visit – our guidance to all visitors!

I've been a member of the High Wycombe Society for some 30 years now, and hope you will agree that the Environment Centre on Holywell Mead is a fine new addition to High Wycombe's amenities!

And if, on your visit, you find one small thing to encourage you to live a more sustainable lifestyle, then your visit will have been really worthwhile.

Frances Alexander

The First Aeroplane to Land in Downley

THIS YEAR commemorates one hundred years since the first successful powered flight by the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, which took place in America on the 17th December 1903. At the time, their achievement was considered as just another crackpot claim. It would not be until 1908 that this achievement was fully appreciated. It would be three years after the brothers' first flight before powered flight would be seen in Europe. In the years that preceded these events, others had tried to find a way to get airborne and a few had been successful using balloons and gliders, but not in a truly controlled and sustainable way. During those early times it was a hazardous occupation and many of the pioneers paid the ultimate price for their endeavours. Today flying is as popular as any other form of transport and now we certainly take it for granted.

In England the first man to make a powered flight was Samuel Franklin Cody, who achieved this at Farnborough on the 16th of October 1908, with his first aircraft known as the British Army Aeroplane No. 1. At the time, Farnborough was the site of the Royal Engineers Camp and Balloon Factory, where for some time he had been employed as Chief Kite Instructor. He had developed a series of man carrying kites that could haul a man aloft to provide an observation platform. Somewhat



This photograph, from Mrs Oliver of Lacey Green, shows the Cody Biplane at Mannings Field on 14th or 15th September 1912. The man in the boat is Mrs Oliver's father, Mr Greenway, who owned a grocery store in Hughenden Road.

older than most of the early flying fraternity (he was 48 when he made that first flight), he was often known then as Papa Cody and later was considered to be the Father of British Aviation.

Colonel Cody (as he was often known though he never held the official military title), was to cause a great deal of excitement in the High Wycombe area on Saturday 14th of September 1912, when his aircraft, the Cody No.V, landed in Mannings Field at Downley. This lies to the west of Downley towards Cookshall Farm and the field is still known by this name today. He had set out early that morning from Farnborough to travel to Cambridge where he was to take part in army manoeuvres the following week. According to information given by his son Leon Cody, who flew with him as a passenger, they had been travelling at 1,000 feet in cold and gusty conditions. Having reason to suspect a faulty compass, they decided to fly lower and to settle (land) as soon as possible. This they did, just before eight o'clock, having flown (as the crow flies), a distance of 27 miles from Farnborough. Many people had observed his flight over the valley of High Wycombe. Alerted at first by the sound of its engine they were able to obtain a fine view of the large biplane as it soared above

them in the direction of Downley. It soon became generally known that the aviator was Cody and he would be stopping there for some hours. This caused a great influx of sightseers to the field to view the large biplane. For most this would be their first close up encounter of such a strange machine. The Mayor of High Wycombe, Mr. R T Graefe, had arrived early on the scene and was to entertain this distinguished guest during the weekend. Later that morning Cody travelled to Highbury Hill to give a talk to the Islington

Boy Scouts, telling them of his many sided life and how he felt it necessary to retain a determination to succeed in all that you set out to do. He certainly set a good example of this himself.

His son Leon was left in charge of the biplane until he returned on the Sunday, apparently sleeping there overnight. The area had been roped off to protect it during this time and Mr. William Field, owner of the field had been charging admission to allow the public to see the aeroplane, 2d (less than today's 1p) and 1d for children. The Mayor, on learning of this, and ever mindful of charitable opportunities, let it be known that he hoped the proceeds would be donated to the Wycombe Cottage Hospital. It had been expected that Cody would resume his journey on the Saturday evening and many more people had arrived in hope of witnessing the departure, but in fact this did not occur till about 5.30pm on the Sunday. Just before his departure Cody addressed the large and enthusiastic crowd that had gathered there to see the take off. He thanked the Mayor for his kindness, and the spectators for their good behaviour throughout his stay. He then asked them to stand clear and promised to give them a

good view of the biplane as it departed. Then with a roar from the engine the biplane moved forward along the ground and rose gracefully into the air, setting off in a northerly direction with the cheers of the spectators following them. The brave aviator Samuel Cody and his son Leon were soon lost from sight. So ended that eventful weekend, indeed the people of Wycombe had been privileged to see at close quarters one of those very early aircraft flown by one of the finest pilots of the time.

He landed safely later that evening at Hardwick Camp, just outside Cambridge, in plenty of time for the army manoeuvres starting the following day. During the manoeuvres Cody was introduced to the King (George V) who had requested that Cody should demonstrate his flying machine to him. While thus in conversation, the King addressed him several times as Colonel Cody, mistakenly



The clump of trees in Mannings Field as they stand today.

maybe, but you did not tell the King he was wrong. From then on "Colonel Cody" it was: even the local paper the following Friday, which gave a full account of the whole episode, titled him as Colonel Cody. Unfortunately, less than a year later (7th of August 1913) this resolute man was killed with his passenger in a tragic accident

when he was seen to fall from his latest, No.VI Waterplane as it broke up in mid air. Later investigation seemed to indicate that the propeller had shattered, severely damaging the aircraft structure.

The biplane that landed at Downley, the Cody No.V, along with another identical machine, was later sold to the Royal Flying Corps and amazingly this one is still in existence today preserved at the Science Museum in South Kensington.

Ian Simmons

Hon. Sec's Cuttings

Gardens as nature reserves English Nature reports that domestic gardens make up the biggest nature reserve in Britain, covering 270,000 hectares. Species such as the song thrush and some solitary bees and wasps increasingly use gardens as a refuge.

Second hand homes It appears that most of us prefer to buy second-hand homes, as new homes are perceived as being built to second-rate standards. An article by Wayne Hemingway in the Civic Trust magazine, Civic Focus, (summer 2003) argues that the way housing is built today has resulted in housing estates that look more like soulless amorphous car parks.

Hopefully the standard of housing design will improve now that bodies such as the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and Building for Life exist to drive up standards.

Moss rustling A report on the attempted theft of moss from Hinckley Common (Surrey) describes how a van was discovered on the common with about 60 bags of moss inside. Two suspects who were seen in the distance carrying sacks escaped across the common.

It is most likely they were stealing the moss for the hanging basket trade.

I'm sure that most of us would be delighted if someone came and gathered up moss from our lawns, but it is actually very serious for the

wildlife on the Common, as the moss is an important part of the flora. The removal of any plant without permission of the landowner is an offence which can lead to a fine of up to £20,000.

New travel group for High Wycombe People in High Wycombe have a greater than average rate of car ownership, 86%, as against the average for England of 73%. To try to promote the use of public transport, and other ways of reducing car travel, Cressex link and Centre Link Town Centre Travel have now amalgamated to form Wycombe Link.

Keeping safe – crime prevention in the home. An event is being organised by the Community Safety Partnership in the Octagon (near Littlewoods) on Saturday October 18th from 10.00am to 4.00 pm, to provide help and advice on avoiding distraction burglaries, together with other crime prevention advice.

The rise of the pre-fabricated house

Palaces for people: *Prefabs in Post War Britain*. Greg Stevenson. B T Batsford £12.99.

This book describes the story of how factory-built homes eased the need for desperately needed homes at a time of a shortage of both bricks and skilled builders. It also examines the possibility of their being revived in the form of modern pre-fabs.

Frances Presland

GAG's Day in Court

IT'S A bright Spring morning in the Strand and the imposing facade of the Royal Courts of Justice is looking its best. Inside, the cathedral-like building is even more impressive, the walls hung with stern portraits of past justices who watch over the throng of lawyers, officials, claimants and mere tourists scurrying to and fro across the marble floor.

In a less imposing courtroom at the back, lawyers and clerks bustle around sorting out huge piles of paper relating to the case in hand. At ten-thirty a peremptory shout of "Court rise!" announces the arrival of The Honourable Mr Justice Sullivan. Once seated, he removes his wig and invites the barristers present to do the same. They thankfully comply, and the day's business – a judicial review – begins.

A row of seats at the side is occupied by members of the Grange Action Group (GAG), tacitly supporting Bucks County Council in defending its decision to declare three fields between Widmer End and Hazlemere a Village Green, a decision that is being challenged by the owners of the land, Laing Homes Ltd. The Government also is an 'interested party': Laing claims its 'human rights' are under threat and that the Commons Registration Act of 1965 is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, now part of English law.

The Background

To understand this case, we must go back a few years. The population explosion after the Second World War resulted in a huge demand for new housing, and the 1960s and '70s saw an enormous expansion of several villages to the north of High Wycombe. By 1970, Penn, Tylers Green, Hazlemere, Holmer Green and Widmer End formed a continuous arc of suburbia, separated by the merest of green belts from Wycombe, itself rapidly expanding along and above the valleys.

A plan to develop the square mile or so of countryside bounded by Hazlemere, Widmer End and Terriers, designated Housing Area 7 or 'H7' at the time, galvanised local residents into action. While many of us were only too glad to have acquired the new homes in which we now lived, we appreciated the open space beyond our back fences. Still a pleasant mixture of cultivated farmland, rough pasture and woodland, this formed part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), but had largely been bought up by developers looking for a quick profit. Some residents formed the Northern Action Group (NAG), and successfully opposed numerous applications for housebuilding projects, one of

which went as far as a public inquiry. Under its new name of GAG the group is still active, having successfully persuaded Wycombe District Council not to include H7 in the recent Local Plan, a decision only partially upheld by the Inspector at the ensuing inquiry and still being fought over – but that's another story.

In 2000, we realised that one way to fend off the threat of development permanently was to get the land registered as a village green. Criteria for such registration are strict. The land must have been used for 'lawful sports and pastimes' for at least twenty years, such use being effectively ignored by the landowner. We reckoned this applied to three fields used in previous years for pasturing cattle and for haymaking, but now reverting to rough grassland and small bushes, making a good habitat for skylarks and other wildlife. GAG applied to Bucks County Council for such registration, which was provisionally granted. Naturally, Laing lodged an objection, and a public inquiry was held in November 2001 at Widmer End Village Hall (*see Newsletter 123*).

To our delight and a little to our surprise, the Inspector came out in our favour (*Newsletter 124*), recommending that the Council should indeed declare 'Widmer Fields' a village green, which it dutifully did. Laing saw their hope of building houses on the land vanishing into thin air, and sought judicial review.

The Legal Arguments

The familiar figure of Charles George QC once again presented Laing's case. No longer contesting the evidence put forward at the inquiry, he claimed the Inspector came to the wrong decision based on it. He argued that people had been walking along the numerous footpaths rather than using the fields as a whole. Until the idea of the village green came up, he claimed, residents would have been quite happy to see the land farmed rather than left in its natural state, and in any case the 'entire land' had been farmed for 14 years out of the relevant 20-year period. Moreover, the criterion of 'locality' required by the Act was not properly fulfilled – a village green should have a coherent 'village' to relate to. Registration of the land as a village green



would have 'draconian consequences' for the landowner', making farming impossible and depriving Laing of its 'human right' not to see the value of its land dwindle to nothing.

All this was hotly disputed by Bucks CC's barrister, Stephen Morgan. The Inspector's report had been "very thorough, conscientious and fair". He had stated that "there is abundant evidence of continuous use by local people of the whole surface of these fields for at least the 20-year period required", and that the ecclesiastical parish of Hazlemere was "the best and most appropriate way of identifying the relevant 'locality'".

Further support came from James Maurici, representing the Secretary of State for the Environment, who argued that Parliament knew what it was doing and acted consistently as regards the two acts in question. Regarding Laing's submission that small-scale farming – cattle grazing and haymaking – were incompatible with village green usage, he pointed out that these contrasting activities had been happening simultaneously for much of the 20-year period, without noticeable mutual interference. Laing Homes could still 'profit' from ownership of the land even if they were not allowed to build on it.

Soon the court was bogged down in lengthy discussions on the difference between dog walking and dog training, whether fields have addresses, and whether walking along a path through a field means that you are 'using' the field as a whole. Cases were quoted dating from 1795 onwards. Complex and apparently conflicting decisions had been made in similar, more recent village green cases, and the question of what rights people had once a village green was so registered had still, after nearly 40 years, not been resolved by Parliament. The judge wouldn't find it easy!

Officially, GAG had no part to play and were merely interested spectators. However, during the five days of proceedings our advice was sought informally several times by the Bucks team. On small matters of fact such as, for example, the location of some allotments that were mentioned in evidence at the inquiry, it proved useful to have at least one person with local knowledge in the courtroom.

The verdict

The court reassembled on Tuesday 8 July to hear Mr Sullivan deliver his judgment. It was bad news for GAG: Laing's appeal had succeeded on three of the four grounds claimed, and the Council's registration of Widmer Fields as a village green was quashed.

The judge praised the Inspector's report as "a model of its kind: detailed and comprehensive", but concluded it had failed to draw the correct conclusions from the evidence. Crucially, the

fact that the land had been farmed for its hay for much of the 20-year period invalidated its function as a village green. He drew a distinction between grass cutting for the benefit of local residents – e.g., mowing it to provide a football pitch – and the whole process of harrowing, rolling, fertilising, sowing, cutting and baling that took place to provide an annual hay crop, described by the farmer at the public inquiry. The Inspector himself had said that "the resolution of the present application stands or falls ... on this point". It fell.

Furthermore, the judge claimed, GAG had failed to prove that any substantial proportion of local residents had made use of the whole of the designated area for any appreciable part of the 20-year period – dog walking and blackberry picking on or near the footpaths didn't count. He correctly surmised that GAG's main aim was to stop Laing building on the land, and if this aim were successful it didn't matter too much whether the land reverted to its natural state or was once again farmed for profit. However, he agreed entirely with the Inspector that it was right for GAG to name the ecclesiastical parish of Hazlemere as the 'locality' required under the relevant legislation.

Mr Sullivan refused to pass judgment on the human rights issue. He had been awaiting the outcome of a House of Lords case, but as it failed to appear he lost patience and decided that it was irrelevant since Laing's had already won their case on domestic grounds.

What Now?

All is not lost. The Local Plan Inspector has recommended that building should not be allowed on the Grange Farm/Widmer Farm area, and Wycombe District Council have happily accepted this recommendation. Moves are afoot to extend the Green Belt to cover this land. Meanwhile, what would have been the largest village green in England continues to be enjoyed by walkers with or without dogs, children on bicycles, horse riders, occasionally teenagers on motorcycles (something we do disapprove of!) and people just out to admire the wild flowers and listen to the birds singing. The wire fences put up by Laing in panic when the village green application was first made are falling into disrepair. Skylarks have returned and the occasional red kite can be seen.

Was it worth it? Yes, I think so. It galvanised the village and made people more aware of the threat of creeping development that threatens to engulf the South East. It clarified legal issues on which other village green applications will be fought. And it stimulated people's appreciation of the countryside, whether open to access or farmed, that remains an indispensable aspect of the quality of life in these busy and uncertain times.

Ian Guy

Society Outings

Bucks (well, almost) Trip No.5

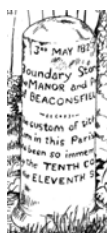
INITIALLY BILLED as "Bucks Tour No 5" and including a visit to Stoke Poges, the High Wycombe Society's outing on Sunday 29th June ventured beyond the current Buckinghamshire borders as far as Eton College. 14 members of the society set off from Duke Street car park in 4 cars, with sunglasses, hats, sun cream and supplies of drinking water for what promised to be a very hot day.

En route to Stoke Poges, we stopped in North Drive, just off the A40 at Holtspur to take a look at an interesting "Boundary and Tithing Stone", inscribed with the words:

"3RD May 1827

Boundary Stone of the Manor and
Parish of Beaconsfield

The custom of tithing corn in this
parish is (and has been so
immemorially) by the TENTH COCK and
the ELEVENTH SHOCK"



The stone commemorates the outcome of a law suit brought by the then rector, Reverend John Gould, against a local man, John Rolfe, who was refusing to pay the standard "one in ten" tithe for corn produce. In court, John Rolfe successfully argued that stacking corn into shocks incurred extra labour and increased the value of the produce so a more appropriate tithe payment would be "one in eleven". By winning his case he became a local hero.

Our next stop was St Giles' Church in Stoke Poges. The verger, Dennis Hartley, greeted us on our arrival and gave us an introduction to the main points of interest. Members who had done their homework already knew that they were looking at the churchyard immortalized in Thomas Gray's *"Elegy written in a Country Churchyard"*. A tablet on the side of the church explains that Thomas Gray is buried in the same tomb as his mother and her sister. The inscription on the tomb itself was composed by Thomas Gray and describes his mother as "the careful, tender mother of many children one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her".

The church exhibits architectural features of four periods: Saxon, Norman, Early Gothic and Tudor. We were privileged to be shown the private entrance from the Manor House: a passage or cloister opposite the porch, panelled with oak, which leads to a small vestibule with interesting glass. A small part of the Elizabethan manor house building can be seen on adjacent land to

the North of the church. There are many memorials inside the church, including flat tombstones, unusual memorial windows, brasses and hatchments. Members were particularly impressed with the timber construction and the preservation of the boxed pews.

Adjacent to the churchyard are the memorial gardens that are currently undergoing restoration. One area within these is formally laid out with trellis-covered walkways and a fountain feature; while the remaining areas are more informal. From the edge of the memorial gardens there are views over a lake to the mansion which replaced the old manor house. In a separate meadow, now the property of the National Trust, there is a monument to Gray, erected by John Penn. The guidebooks warn that it is "unsightly". We agreed!

From Stoke Poges, we proceeded to Eton for lunch. There were plenty of pubs and cafes within easy walking distance of the college where we reassembled at 3 p.m. for a guided tour. Our guide was very knowledgeable about the history of Eton College, from its foundation in 1440 by Henry VI, through to current day developments. Originally intended to provide accommodation and education for 70 poor scholars, it now charges fees in the region of £20,000 p.a. for 1,280 fee-paying pupils.

We sat on the school benches in the earliest college building to hear about Henry VI's ambitious never-to-be-realized plans to build a cathedral at Eton, of which the chapel was only the first stage. We saw the legendary "Wall" of the "Wall game" fame. We visited a hall which was once used as a classroom for 200 pupils and learned about the ill behaviour of the pupils in the 18th



The motley crew outside the church of St. Giles.

century, a far cry from the reputation that the school has today. We were taken to the chapel where we were told that the apparent fan-vaulted stone ceiling is actually reinforced with concrete, and we studied in detail the very rare grey wall-paintings that have been preserved

through the centuries despite various attempts to destroy them.

Our tour ended with a video of Eton college as it is today, and a chance to look around the college museum. Members were impressed with the breadth of curriculum which included practical subjects like cookery and metalwork, and a broad spectrum of musical activity in addition to the expected academic subjects and sports.

It is customary for boys on leaving to be presented by the headmaster with a copy of Gray's poems in which they will surely find Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" as well as the "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard".

Thanks go to Ann Simone for her thorough preparation and planning of this most enjoyable day trip.

Jackie Kay

...and in August to Greys Court (Oxon.)

WHAT WOULD I choose to do on one of the hottest days of the year? Sit at home, next to the electric fan, complain, drip and dream of winter.

I was not allowed to, as a visit had been organised to Greys Court, near Henley. Described by the National Trust as "a treasure tucked away in the Oxfordshire countryside," it was well worth braving the heat. About fifteen members met, sporting an interesting assortment of protective headgear and umbrellas / parasols.

Although only the downstairs of the house was open to view, the rooms were fascinating – 18th century plaster ceilings, Swiss furniture

and porcelain, and homely touches in the kitchen. There was a feeling that the occupants had just popped out for the afternoon while visitors looked around.



The Jacobean House is believed to stand on the site of the mediaeval manor's great hall.

A Tudor building housed a donkey wheel to draw up the water. The Cromwellian stables housed the tearoom and bookstall. Within the walled garden, other gardens had been created including a wisteria "room". It was well worth climbing three steep flights of stairs to the top

of the tower to see the whole area laid out below. This vantage point afforded a rare view of the top of the Chairman's head, as well as that of the Editor peering into the pond to admire the water lilies.

The house and gardens were a lasting tribute to the Brunner family who had spent much effort on their restoration.

We returned home pleased to have made the effort, but in our case with permanent mulberry stains on our clothing, indelible evidence that we had misbehaved by sampling the delicious fruit.

Annie and Mick Woodward

The Gardener's Statue, carved by Jacqueline Geldart, commemorates Charles Taylor, Head Gardener from 1937 to 1955, who helped Lady Brunner restore the garden from dereliction.



With a brief pause for Planning, Tony Fooks set out to boldly negotiate the archbishop's maze.



Heads and headgear were still on display when the editor mounted the tower.



Quarterly Meeting

“Prescott’s Concrete Countryside”

THAT HEADLINE in the Daily Mail’s two page article on July 31st was how the press in general reported the government’s plans for 300,000 new homes in the South East.

At the High Wycombe Society’s quarterly meeting on July 17th we were fortunate to hear some of the arguments for this policy and how they would affect our own county at first hand from Chris Kenneford, the Strategic Planning Manager for BCC. Also invited as a speaker was Ian Fletcher, a Senior Planning Officer with Wycombe DC.

Chris Kenneford outlined how planning strategy was changing. The Local Plan system whereby local authorities have to produce a local strategy covering all aspects of the planning system in their area every 5 years is being replaced by a new regional strategy which in our case groups Bucks with Berks, Oxon, Hants, IoW, Surrey, Sussex and Kent, with a Regional Assembly based in Guildford. Of the 11 members of the assembly, 77 will be Councillors and the remainder made up of economic, business, social and environmental partners. Bucks for some reason apparently has only 2 members, both Councillors, in total. Within the larger region, smaller sub-regions will be established with the possible grouping of Wycombe and Chiltern Districts, but few of these possibilities are agreed yet.

So it seems that large and far-reaching changes are afoot so far as the planning system is concerned, but not untypically in this age of increasingly obsessive bureaucracy the situation is complicated by a South Midlands scheme which incorporates the north of Bucks with Northants and Bedfordshire, and there is of course still in place the existing County Structure Plan for Bucks, adopted in June. These two schemes show considerable overlap, with Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes identified as major growth areas together with significant expansion in places like Corby, Northants. The proposals for Aylesbury would result in an extra 19,600 new homes plus a business park and relocated railway station, all by 2016. 60% of this would be on brownfield sites and initial plans indicate much of this expansion to the south of the town. These developments would double the population of Aylesbury and have traffic implications throughout the County.

Outside Bucks, the other big sites for development are Stansted, Ashford in Kent and the so-called Thames Gateway – the estuarine Thames east of London. What is perhaps the most surprising aspect of the entire strategy is that there is currently no national land use strategy. The areas away from the south-east where development or

redevelopment is most needed seem to be ignored by the Government.

After a break for refreshments, Ian Fletcher spoke on our own District Council’s Planning Service. He explained how the system works and its scope. Some people, many in fact, would be surprised to discover that planning policies cover most aspects of our lives, for instance employment and shopping as well as the more obvious housing and transport. The Government has inevitably set up a test for Local Authority Planning Departments which results in them achieving either one, two or three stars, or none at all. Wycombe has two stars and is described as “a good service that has promising prospects for improvement.” Certainly our own Council does consult with the people it represents and through Planning Forums etc. at least puts in place a means for local individuals and amenity groups to express themselves. In the future, local Parish and Ward Plans may be possible where local residents work with Planning Departments to produce these.

Linking with Chris Kenneford’s presentation, Ian Fletcher speculated that Wycombe District may be linked to a wider Thames Valley sub-region with whom we share certain characteristics and problems – supposedly Chiltern and South Bucks would also come into this area.

Of considerable interest was the fact that Bucks CC intends to propose that Grange Farm and land at Lane End Road should be included in the Green Belt. This would have to be confirmed at an inquiry next year when no doubt developers and their agents will object most strongly, but it could mean the protection of the land against housing is guaranteed. Terriers Farm is not included in this proposal.

Ian also spoke about the Wycombe Marsh development. The tunnel to carry the sewer to Little Marlow Works has started and at the time of writing was over 200m into the hillside below Flackwell Heath. Work has started on the carriageway on London Road but the final plans for the housing are still in abeyance.

Tony Fooks concluded the talk with a vote of thanks when he praised both speakers for their

Reg Williams

MANY GATHERED on 21st August for the Service of Thanksgiving and Requiem Mass for the life of Reginald Victor Williams, who died on August 9th. Family including four children, grandchildren and friends from many walks of High Wycombe's life were present.

Reg was born in Fulham in 1918 shortly before the Armistice, the son of a furniture packer, and went to school in Hammersmith, before eventually moving to High Wycombe in 1961. In April 1939 he had volunteered for the Territorial Army. He served with distinction as an architectural draughtsman in the Royal Engineers, being posted to Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine. His son, Paul, told how Reg took advantage of the opportunity to learn to drive:

"Being the last to board an army truck full of troops one day, he found that the only seat remaining was the driver's seat. Not knowing how to drive would not have been an acceptable excuse, so he proceeded to transport the troops twenty miles across the scorching desert. Comments were made about the journey taking slightly longer than usual and also that the engine seemed to be straining somewhat. All became clear at the end of the journey when it was discovered that Dad had left the hand brake on the entire time. The truck never saw active service

again."

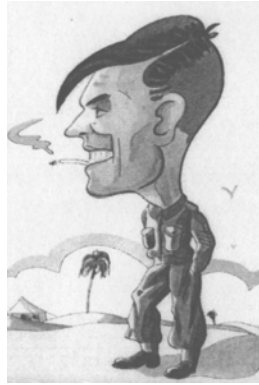
With such experience, Reg. had no difficulty in gaining the post of Chief Architect of High Wycombe Borough Council. He joined the High Wycombe Society in 1984 after his retirement, doubtless being influenced by living next door to Jack Scruton!

He was described as a true gentleman, and all who knew him would vouch for the perfect portrait here. The charming smile and old-fashioned courtesy captivated many. However, Reg had a more steely side, an integrity and consciousness of the rights and wrongs of town planning and environmental issues. He served for a short time on the Society's Executive

Committee and remained interested and very supportive of the Society's work.

Reg is laid to rest in High Wycombe Cemetery just a few yards from his neighbour in life, Jack Scruton, looking out over the town they both loved and strove to improve.

Annie Woodward



(continued from page 10.)

clear and distinct interpretation of complex subjects.

Commentary

One questioner at the meeting asked why more housing was needed when there were predictions of a stable population for the foreseeable future. The stock reply to this for the last thirty years has been that household sizes are decreasing, but as was pointed out this can't really be an acceptable argument indefinitely. Mr Prescott has said that he wants the children of people living in the south-east to have a chance to buy a home here. Well, don't we all, but fuelling the economy in one part of the country at the expense of the rest makes that prospect unlikely as higher earners originating from outside will simply move in. A National Strategy which benefits all areas seems so obviously desirable and in the long term sustainable that one can be forgiven for being suspicious about the whole process of Strategic Planning and who it really benefits.

Bucks is a prosperous county near London and its proximity makes it desirable especially to people from London. Housing is usually cheaper, and access to the capital is relatively easy. It was difficult not to notice that in Mr Kenneford's presentation there was no

mention of London at all. In the early sixties, Nicolaus Pevsner noted that the importance of what happens in London cannot be underestimated in its impact on South Buckinghamshire.

So why are London and its problems not seen as part of our own Planning Strategy? Why is it treated as a separate "country"? How does our regional strategy relate and integrate to London?

Personally I felt that too many "big" questions seemed to be unanswered and I wasn't reassured that future Planning was in the hands of people who either cared very much or were particularly adept at providing workable long term solutions. That doesn't reflect on the speakers at our meeting in any way, but I would like to feel that progress means improvement and not simply a developer's charter endorsed by an urban and blinkered Government.

Colin Dobinson

Fire Station – your views please!

*The District Council have told us that before the end of the year, they will issue a draft Design Brief for the Fire Station site, including the Liberal Club and the Royal British Legion, for public consultation. If **you** have views and ideas about how the site might be used in the future, please contact Tony Fooks on (01494) 526580.*

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mr N D Levin of Beech Close, Stokenchurch
Mr D I Peckett of Park Farm Rd., High Wycombe
Mrs M Pipe of Fern Lane, Haddenham
Mr & Mrs P Sawney of Talbot Ave, Downley

Obituaries

We regret to announce the death of:

Mr Reg V Williams

We extend our condolences to his family and friends. (*Please see page 11.*)

Congratulations!

...To our first centenarian. Our oldest member, Mr Lance Thornton of Fox Lane, Holmer Green was 100 years old on August 26th.

Lance worked for many years as a colour retoucher at Harrisons, Coates Lane. He reached a very high level of proficiency in the skilled artistic work, which balanced the colours of stamp production. He was presented to HM The Queen during both her visits to the factory.

In retirement he has enjoyed painting and learning languages.

I spoke to Lance on the phone a couple of days after his birthday. Although his hearing has deteriorated, he was hale and hearty, saying he had been overwhelmed with flowers, good wishes and of course that special message of congratulations from YOU KNOW WHO.

Annie Woodward

Thank you, Ann

Ann Simone has led the Programme and Membership Group for six years. In the words of her successor, Angela Rees, "she has under-

taken a varied and responsible role with enthusiasm and efficiency and has ensured that all events ran smoothly. Members received their programme of events regularly, and quarterly meetings, outings and special events were interesting and well organised." One of her special contributions has been to organise visits to parts of the county, inspired by Jean Archer's book, *Hidden Bucks*.

Most recently, we visited Greys Court at Stoke Poges, and Eton College. Very little cost to participants has been involved, but a great amount of time and effort on Ann's part has been needed. Ann says that she is hanging up her tour guide's clipboard and hopes someone else will take over.

We do thank you, Ann, very sincerely for all your hard work, especially in rousing us all to enjoy many places we might never have managed to see on our own.

Roger Lawson (Chairman)

– and Karen

Another recent loss to our PM Group has been Karen Roberts, our Publications Officer who has moved to Penn and Tylers Green. Margaret Simmons comments: "The publicity stand at Pann Mill Open Days has lost some of its *joie de vivre*. Karen Roberts took the Pann Mill Group minutes and helped in a dozen different ways. Our loss is Penn and Tylers Green's gain. We wish her well in the Society there and hope she will keep in touch and drop in when possible."

Keep them Coming

Once again, thank you to all who sent us such interesting contributions for this newsletter. Material for the next issue should reach me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 November**, please.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

Put these in your diary **now!**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2003

Tuesday 14th October 7.30pm
The Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: "*Waste Matters – Recycling.*" Speaker: Sally Wright, Wycombe District Council.

Saturday 18th October 3.30pm
The Environment Centre

Invitation to Society members to visit the Environment Centre on Holywell Mead (*see p.3*).

Tuesday 21st October 7.30pm
Friends Meeting House

Special meeting for all members to consider the Society's work on Transport (*see p.2*).

2004

Thursday 15th January 7.30pm
The Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: "*Disraeli – Hughenden Squire!*" Speaker: Arthur Taylor, WEA Lecturer.

Tuesday 20th April 7.30pm
The Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: Annual General Meeting followed by a talk, "Wildlife of the Chilterns". Speaker: Maurice Young, Voluntary Reserve Officer, BBOWT.

Our quarterly meetings are now held in the Guildhall and not as indicated on your membership card.