

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 106

WINTER 1997/98

Chairman's jottings: Do we get our Society's purpose across to members?

IN ESSENCE, THE SOCIETY'S ROLE in local environmental concerns and happenings can best be summarised as 'Protecting the town of High Wycombe and its environs from thoughtless, and sometimes deliberate, despoiling of the town's buildings, streets and town character by a few who do not consider the needs of the many living in this area'. Alternatively, 'Helping to make Wycombe a better place with a civic pride in its old established buildings, community history and surrounding natural beauty' is a simplification that many may find easy to accept.

Essentially, as a civic society with a proven track record of well-fought planning battles against corporate and municipal vandalism in the past, we are fortunate to have a sizeable 'paid-up' membership that will happily stump up their annual subscriptions (without too much prompting), attend Quarterly Meetings (regrettably often in disappointing numbers) and loyally participate in our events and excursions. In response, the Membership & Publicity Group on behalf of the Executive Committee endeavours to arrange a calendar of events that are directly relevant to our conservation aims, and are also socially

beneficial. Individual committee members are also spearheading the Society's constituent groups such as Planning, Heritage, Transport, Pann Mill Restoration and Membership & Publicity that are continually beaver away at pertinent issues or organising events.

However, I was recently brought up sharp by two letters to the Editor of the two local weekly newspapers, the Bucks Free Press and the Star, written by two long-standing members of the Society. One was castigating the mess caused by the pedestrianisation of the High Street and the

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limiting of car usage in the town centre; the second correspondent was reiterating views that he had held in 1964 that the then proposed A40 diversion road slashing across The Rye behind the waterworks had been valid, and suggesting that
(continued overleaf)



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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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(continued from front page)

Chairman's jottings

Jack Scruton and the founding members of The Rye Protection Society were largely motivated by the desire to protect the scenic view across The Rye from their respective London Road houses!

Now both of these members were in fact expressing opinions that were in 1964 and are in 1997 diametrically opposed to official High Wycombe Society policy and practice. So these letters made me think: could it be that the Society's active members are not "getting the message across" on local (and national) environmental issues to the rather more laid-back subscribing members? My immediate answer to my own question is that maybe we are better at communicating with other amenity societies and with the County and District Councils than we are with our own members.

Accordingly, I propose to write briefly in the next Newsletter about the work, past and pres-

ent, of the (very positive) Transport Group. Elsa Woodward is the pro-active leader (and some Group members have to don running gear in order to keep up with her!). Elsa would be far too modest to write about her role. As a retired scientist, she would (correctly) stick to hard facts, whereas when I write I will wish to express my own support for this Group, and emphasise the central role it plays in High Wycombe Society policy and practice. Hopefully, this contribution will be followed by summaries from the other Groups to describe their purpose, aims and interests.

As we enter 1998, the High Wycombe Society must remain vigilant and concerned about the well-being of our local community and the environment of our town and countryside, as we have endeavoured to do in the past.

Roger Lawson
Chairman

A pub by any other name

Denise Lindsay is frustrated that nothing seems to be being done about the modern disease of renaming traditional pub names, and appeals for some action to be taken.

I AM SURE that many Society members share my concern about what is happening to the town's pubs. Either they are having their names changed or they are disappearing altogether.

Recently, in and around Wycombe, the old Three Tuns, The Angel, The Turnpike and The Morning Star have been given silly new names (you might know some more) while The Gate is under threat of demolition, and at the time of writing this, The Bell in Frogmore is closed with no sign of renovation going on. It's enough to drive you to drink!

This name changing is particularly annoying when an historic association is lost, as in the case of The Turnpike at Cressex (now The Hungry Horse), which stands at the corner of Turnpike Road, where, presumably, there was once a turnpike. Pubs and their names are deeply entrenched in our culture. I bet even people who never watch Coronation Street or Eastenders have heard of the Rovers Return and the Queen Vic!

Dumbing down is a phrase we hear a lot these days, and it seems to me that this is exactly what many of the large brewery chains want to do to our old pubs – kick out local associations, forget the past, erode individuality and character and

attract younger drinkers. It is patronisingly assumed that these younger drinkers are not interested in their local history: maybe, when they are full of lager this is true. But we all grow up eventually, and the significance of the past should not be thrown out like flat beer.

This problem is nationwide, of course, and growing. There can hardly be a town untouched by a gaudily decorated Slug and Lettuce/Rat and Carrot/Firkin and Something-or-other. If the pub is a Victorian or Edwardian building, the true original name can often be spotted carved in the stonework at the top, and I always look for it if I find such a pub.

So, what is to be done? As individuals, we can keep writing to newspapers, MPs, breweries; anything which keeps the problem in the public eye. I once wrote in the Newsletter that I believe that if a pub has had its name for 50 years or more it should be kept, and I wish somebody in authority would implement this rule. If so, when the newly-opened Hogshead pub in Oxford Road (not a real pub in my opinion) turns into The Pig's Ear halfway through the next century, there will be a storm of protest from our successors. Cheers!

Heritage

Extracts from a Scrapbook

Navarino House

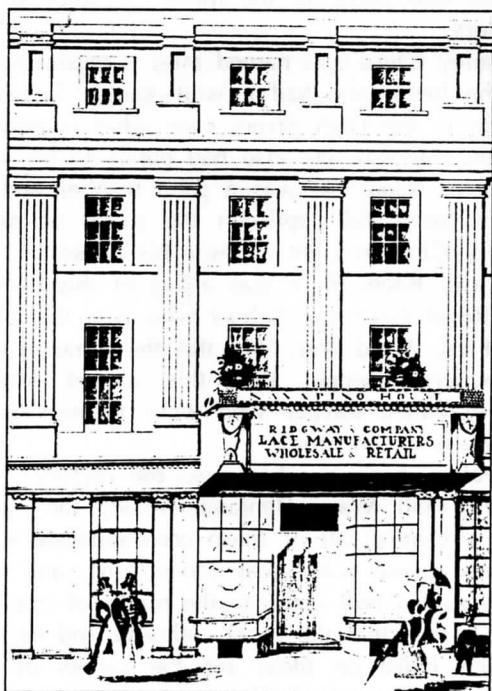
Thanks to the good offices of Mr Jack Cox and Mrs Isabel Becket, the Society has come into possession of five scrapbooks containing a wealth of information on High Wycombe's recent and distant past. The scrapbooks were compiled by the late Mr Malcolm Law, who clearly spent much of his spare time assembling and classifying information from books, newspapers etc about the town, its history, its buildings and its people. The Heritage Group is now studying the scrapbooks, and from time to time we hope to publish extracts. The first of these on Navarino House has been prepared by Pauline Cauvain.

IN 1502, the meadow behind the Catherine (sometimes Katherine) Wheel Inn between the High Street and the river was leased at 10d(4p) per year. By 1560, the yearly rent had only gone up to 12d(5p).

"King Charles II, with his Queen, Catherine, the Duke and Duchess of York, and Prince Rupert, also the Duke of Monmouth and many other nobility as well did lodge in Wickcombe on the 30th day of September in the year 1663, and it is known that the King and Queen did lodge at the Catherine Wheel Inn.

The King did go out to town between 5 and 6 of the clock next morning, and was at his Palace before 9 o'clock in the morning."

The Catherine Wheel was on the site of the present W H Smith & Son. It was burned down by an arsonist, a private in the Oxford Blues, in 1803.



Navarino House

Navarino House, an elegant town house, was built on the same site, reputedly by Daniel Hearn circa 1837, for use as a lace depository. The house was later called Buckingham House, but locally it was known as Bobbin House (or Castle) because of its connections with the lace industry in the town.

St Catherine was the patron saint of lacemakers, and apparently the Saint's Day (25 November) was observed as a holiday in Wycombe, with Cattern cakes being made for the occasion.

Local Books

Buckinghamshire: A Century in Photographs

Published by the Buckinghamshire Federation of Women's Institutes and Countryside Books at £6=95, this book contains a selection of photographs dating from 1900 up to the present, all submitted by WI members. There are pictures of people, scenes and events from all over the county, supported by text, recording life throughout the 20th century. High Wycombe is well represented, with our culverted river as the cover picture, and if you look carefully through the book you should be able to spot some High Wycombe Society members!

Around High Wycombe

The Archive Photographs Series

This is a collection of over 200 old photographs again from over the last 100 years, many of them taken from a fascinating collection of old postcards belonging to the compiler, Dennis Edwards, and not seen in earlier publications of this type. It is unfortunate that a number of historical and other errors have crept into the text. Published by The Chalford Publishing Company Ltd of Stroud at £9=99.

October Quarterly Meeting

Environment Agency needs help

THE OCTOBER QUARTERLY MEETING heard Jackie Outhwaite describe the numerous responsibilities which the Environment Agency (EA) took over when it was created in April 1996. The list seemed endless, and it is no wonder they need assistance from the public to help them find out if and when something has gone wrong in the local environment.

Although they can (and do) prosecute polluters, their first step is to liaise with and give advice to local authorities, industry and other environmental groups to try to prevent problems from occurring. Jackie gave an example of the EA working with the Fire Service to contain contamination by the foam used to control oil spillages – as is often the case the solution to one problem can cause another!

When the EA was formed it took over the responsibilities of the National Rivers Authority, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, the Waste Regulation Authorities and several other smaller units (see table). With such wide ranging tasks, no wonder the EA needs our help!

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

Water Management

Water resources

Recreation & navigation

Fisheries & conservation

Flood defence

Pollution Prevention & Control

Water quality

Pollution control including

radioactive substances

Waste regulation

High Wycombe and the River Wye lie within the Thames Region of the EA, which is responsible for the whole of the Thames catchment area from its source to the Thames Barrier and the Greenwich Millennium site. Containing one fifth of the nation's population, demands on natural resources, particularly water, in the Thames Region are greater than elsewhere in England and Wales.

Jackie told us we can find the number to ring to report pollution incidents 'in Yellow Pages'.

I'm afraid all the fish would have died before I could find the number in any of my yellow books, so you may like to make a note of the 24-hour emergency Freefone hotline for reporting all environmental incidents, such as flooding and pollution, relating to air, land and water:

0800 80 70 60.

Ann Simone

Questions & Answers

We have had no answers to date in reply to the questions in our last issue about buildings in Sands, but Olivia Price has some more questions for those of our readers who claim to know their High Wycombe.

Some of you will think it is a pleasant notion to name roads and places and buildings after well-known local people, especially those who have given valuable service to the community in their time. Gomm Road, Tucker Close and Arnison Avenue are examples here in High Wycombe which will come to the minds of some of our readers.

Bailey Close was named after a music teacher in the town who had a well-known School of Music in the High Street over what is now the Abbey National. He also had pupils to his house in Lucas Road. He was a good teacher and had many successful pupils in the world of music. Bailey Close is right opposite his house.

Fraser Road: there was a boy of this name at the Royal Grammar School who won the VC in the First World War. Was this the same Fraser?

Rayners Avenue: Was this named after a family called Rayner who were farmers in the Wooburn Green area?

Rectory Avenue: where was the rectory?

John Hall Way, Benjamin Road, the Reggie Goves Centre: all of these commemorate well-known people with local connections, and many more names will come to the minds of readers.

Is it true that the local authority and the Post Office liaise on ideas for the names of new roads, buildings etc? If so, why do we not put forward 'Scruton Avenue' as a suggestion?

Transport

Integrated Transport Policy

Last August the Government invited the country to submit views on how to achieve a better, more integrated transport system to tackle the problems of congestion and pollution on the roads. Our Transport Group, believing that an integrated transport system would have benefits locally, responded on the Society's behalf.

We believe that achieving a sustainable environment should be top priority, in order to conserve vital finite resources, such as land, water, soil and air, and to stabilise the climate.

O Land conservation Even if cars become 'greener', unless numbers are reduced there will be an ever-increasing take-up of land for roads and carparks, causing relentless urban sprawl.

O Energy efficient transport Light rail systems are more efficient and use less land than conventional road transport. We say that the former High Wycombe-Bourne End line should be protected for possible future light rail use, which could take thousands of cars off the road each day.

O Reclaiming land from carparking There should be a nationwide policy to reduce parking provision, coupled with the provision of first-class public transport. Reclaimed land could be used for housing, schools, employment, woods, open spaces etc. Car-free housing development, with car-sharing clubs, as on the Continent and now in London and Edinburgh, should be encouraged. Park-and-ride should be abandoned as it does very little to reduce mileage and takes up valuable greenfield sites.

O Bespoke public transport Where population is dispersed and it is not economical to run frequent regular bus services, the idea of 'bespoke' public transport to match people's individual travel needs is proposed. This uses a computer programme and travellers' postcodes to plot the best route for a minibus, say. This system could be used for journeys to school, work, rail station, sporting events etc.

O Reduction of car-dependent shopping Super-store developments on edge-of-town and out-of-town sites have destroyed vast greenfield sites and force shoppers to use their cars to take the shopping home. The average store generates an annual shopping mileage of eight million miles! Stores should introduce delivery services (and some are doing so) so that people can visit the store by bus, or phone in their order, and so cut down on their car mileage.

Planning

Local Plan progress

The results of last summer's public consultation have been published by Wycombe District Council. Over 2000 written comments were received, expressing *inter alia* concern over the number of houses required, over the use of greenfield sites, particularly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and about overloading the infrastructure. Many suggestions for alternative housing sites were made, which are being investigated. Statutory consultees such as Bucks County Council and the Countryside Commission opposed the use of AONBs, and we hope the Council will take note.

The next stage is the production of a Deposit Draft Local Plan for putting out for public consultation from July to September 1998.

Letter to the Editor

I have just read the Autumn Newsletter. Jack Scruton did a wonderful job. I spoke to him many times about the road cutting across the Rye, and I myself wrote letters to the Bucks Free Press pointing out that 11,000 people were against the road – and we won!

I am now going to tell you about the toilet in Abbey Barn Road. Going back several years, many times a car would pull up and ask where there was a toilet as they had children sadly wanting to go. I 'phoned the Council, and they said they would see about it – and in the end we did get one! My wife said it should be called 'The Cop' – after me!

Parts of Wycombe never get a mention – Wycombe Marsh for one. We have no shops such as a baker, a butcher etc. Shopping means going into High Wycombe, Loudwater or Beaconsfield. We did have a chemist until recently when Tesco bought it, but it has now been moved to Loudwater.

Please excuse the writing, but I was wounded and I am now 86. All the best to the High Wycombe Society.

A Copping

Meadway, Wycombe Marsh

Wycombe Woodland Strategy

We reported on the first five years of the Wycombe Woodland Strategy in our last issue. It has been pointed out that we failed to mention the leading role in initiating the strategy played by Councillor Kathleen Peatey MBE JP, the then Chairman of Wycombe District Council.

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new member:

Mrs L E Horne, Rye View

We look forward to meeting new members at our next event. Please introduce yourself!

Wycombe at War

Did you live or work in the High Wycombe area during the 1939-45 War? If so, the Heritage Group invite you to get in touch to help them with their project 'Wycombe at War' which hopes to record ordinary people's impressions. Please telephone Frances Presland on 01494 440216 for more information.

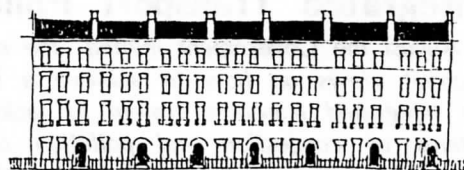
Obituary

Charles Mills 1914-1997

WE WERE SORRY to learn of the death in November of Charles Mills, a long-standing member of the Society and a member of the Executive Committee in the early-1980s. Charles worked in the Civil Service in what is now the Department of Social Services, where he contributed to the setting up of the post-war social service system. He loved the countryside, and, when he retired, his concern about the state of many Chiltern beech woods led him to study woodland management prior to setting up the Chiltern Woodland Project under the auspices of the Chiltern Society. Thanks to his initiative many Chiltern woods are now in a far healthier state. Charles was at one time a Vice-Chairman of the Chiltern Society, and more recently one of its Vice-Presidents.

We would like to express our sympathy with Mrs Barbara Mills and her family in their bereavement.

January Quarterly Meeting



You are warmly invited
to an illustrated talk
on

Georgian Houses

by John Neale
of the Georgian Group

at The Reggie Goves Centre
on Wednesday 14 January 1998
at 7.45pm

Light refreshments will be available

Membership & Publicity

WE HAVE GROWN! No – we haven't all put on weight, but our numbers increased when Gladys Pearson and Shirley Koster joined our Group. A much needed input of fresh ideas will help us produce an interesting programme for members.

What would you like to see on our 1998 Programme? We are about to finalise our plans, so now is your chance to put forward suggestions for speakers, events and trips. Please contact a member of the Group.

One member missed a meeting recently – which serves her right, because, in her absence, the others decided they needed an official Chairman, so I sign myself off as

Ann Simone
Chairman, M & P Group

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Have you paid your 1997/98 subscription yet? If you are not sure, please contact Annie Woodward on 01494 527978.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

1998

Wednesday 14 January 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

Tuesday 14 April 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

Saturday 25 April–Saturday 30 May

January Quarterly Meeting: *Georgian Houses*
Speaker: John Neale, Georgian Group

AGM followed by talks by Society Groups on their activities

Wycombe Arts Festival