



High Wycombe Society

HON

SECRETARY: J SCRUTON 17 LONDON ROAD HIGH WYCOMBE BUCKS
Telephone 25933

NEWSLETTER NO 33 - AUTUMN, 1977

THIS ISSUE

We regret the absence of Jim Cottrell's cartoons in this issue, as we know how much they contribute to the Newsletter. Unfortunately, Jim is rather unwell at the moment, but he hopes to include some in the next Newsletter.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Our Treasurer tells us that we are heading for a financial crisis unless we receive overdue subscriptions. The steady rise in all the things we use has placed the Society in a very difficult situation. It would be tragic if we had to reduce our activities, which are now quite extensive, but we will have to do this unless we receive subscriptions from members and Affiliated Societies. If you haven't paid your due please help us by sending it as soon as possible. A reminder slip is enclosed with this Newsletter for those members and Societies who have not yet paid for the current financial year.

Evelyn Roe
Membership Secretary

PLANNING GROUP

County Structure Plan

The Examination in Public of the County Structure Plan is now over and the future strategy for the County over the next 15 years is now in the hands of the Examining Panel and the Secretary of State. We hope that the main proposals of the Plan with regard to this area are included in the final document. In partnership with the Chiltern Society and other Amenity Societies, we pressed for a policy of restraint in growth, for protection of the Green Belt and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for redevelopment with housing of derelict town sites, and made many proposals for traffic relief. We consider that Wycombe is big enough and that if it bursts its present boundaries there will be dire consequences for surrounding villages and the precious Chiltern countryside. Attempts

have been made to stampede the County authorities into believing that local labour shortages can be solved by providing large numbers of new houses. Past experience shows quite clearly that this sort of policy merely swells the army of commuters, and only a tiny proportion of new housing is occupied by local workers. The cost of new private housing is beyond the means of many who work locally, and residents who qualify for Council houses are often attracted to jobs with higher wages within commuting range.

There is certainly a local labour shortage, but other means should be sought to solve this. There should be restraint on new industry moving into the locality and by the encouragement of existing industry finding additional space for expansion in development areas.

Wycombe is extremely fortunate in having the lowest unemployment rate (2.9%) in the whole of the United Kingdom. Shouldn't we be thinking far more about solving the problems of places where it has reached 10% to 12%?

We would like to pay a tribute to Peter Mould of the Chiltern Society for the dedicated way in which he drew together the local Amenity Societies and working with them produced a forceful joint statement for submission to the Structure Plan panel. We would also like to thank our own members who represented the Society - Wzltter Kraft, Barbara Rippington, Jim Cottrell and Ian Stone.

H. 2. Cressex Area

Since the Inspectors report concerning the local enquiry was published, an interesting development has occurred, as the County Engineer has published findings at variance in places, with the inspector.

Briefly, the inspector recommended:-

- (a) Non adoption of the link road from Coronation Road
- (b) Existing planning permissions with this road, to be revoked
- (c) Marlow Road to be left open - temporarily at least.
(Despite general agreement to the contrary)
- (d) Road scheme 3 should be adopted
- (e) An investigation into a free flowing relief road across the M40 to the East of the Handy Cross roundabout.

The matter was referred to the County Engineer by the Highway sub committee of the County for a report in October which would include later comments.

Cressex Association submitted a detailed and closely argued analysis of errors and omissions in the report and it is interesting to note the County Engineer generally supported them on the following:-

1. The inspector had wrongly assumed the Assistant County Engineer suggested leaving Marlow Road open, experimentally.

2. The "Findings of Facts" omitted an important D.o.E. Letter from the Regional Controller on the addition of another access to the roundabout.
3. The inspector had failed to comment on whether 2 accesses to the roundabout should be left permanently open
4. The County Engineer advised that £1 million would be needed for any relief road over the M40 and it would not feature high on the road programme. Several objectors had queried its feasibility.
5. The County Engineer considered the inspector may well have overestimated the gradient effect at Handy Cross roundabout. (As a motorist and cyclist I say - "And How" - EWL)
6. The inspector had appeared mistaken over the volume of traffic on Coronation Road (he was wrong by a factor of 10), and this could have contributed to his conclusion concerning the limited benefit of the Link Road.
7. The County Engineer agreed with Cressex that the noise figures were erroneous but considered them of not great significance.
8. Additionally, Cressex had pointed out a number of items of evidence not included in the "findings of fact."

As a result of this, the County Sub Committee agreed to a spine road, but with the closure of Marlow Road experimentally, where connected to the roundabout.

Additionally, the Housing Layout should not prejudice the future construction of a link road from Coronation Road and a footpath should be laid there in the meantime.

The difference to scheme 1 (i.e. that already in the planning permission) is that the loop road from Holmers Farm Estate will not come to a roundabout junction, but a separate "T" junction on the "Spine" road from Turnpike to Handy Cross, further east to the site of the "Link" road.

It has been necessary to give some details of the conclusions reached by both the inspector and the County Engineer because in view of the detailed evidence presented at the local enquiry, the question which spring to mind is:- "Why did the inspector reach the conclusions he did?" and here dear reader, you must draw your own conclusions

Eddie Lewcock
Chairman
Planning Group

HISTORIC BUILDINGS GROUP

Old Chequers

It seems that progress is now being made. Donald Insall and Partners, Architects with an outstanding reputation in the restoration of historic buildings, have been instructed by Tisa Properties to prepare plans and tender documents with a view to work on the Old Chequers in the Spring of next year. We have been invited by Donald Insall to comment on the plans, and this is now in hand.

Walter Kraft

Chiltern Society Open Air Museum

After great efforts over a long period by the Chiltern Society the Bucks County Council has provided a beautiful 25 acre site of open grassland and wooded slopes at Newland Park to house a Museum of Buildings in the Chilterns. Here will be preserved buildings of historic interest and beauty which would otherwise have been destroyed. Old skills and crafts, the irreplaceable architecture and artisanship of times past will be retained. We congratulate Dick Amsden, the Museum's Chairman and his band of stalwarts for their enthusiasm and persistence, and we hope that they will be given massive support throughout the whole area of the Chilterns and beyond. Help is needed in many ways - financial and the provision of voluntary labour. Already a number of buildings are stored at Newland Park awaiting re-erection. The Old Toll House is also a candidate and we hope that the Sports Club will present this unique building to the Museum.

If any of our members of Affiliated Societies would like to help with this imaginative project, please get in touch with the Secretary.

Jack Scruton

Local Farmsteads

The appeal by Heather Hoare in our last Newsletter for volunteers to take an interest in Farmhouses and their protection has met with a nil response. We are naturally disappointed but in view of the importance of the subject we felt bound to make a second appeal. This importance was highlighted recently when Handy Cross Farm at Cressex was the subject of a planning application to demolish one of the barns. This typical Chiltern farmstead with its rectangular complex would have been seriously mutilated by the disappearance of a large barn and by the arrival in its place of a modern beef barn with asbestos roof. Planning permission by one vote was given despite advice from a Site Committee that the application should be refused. Fortunately the Department of the Environment intervened and spot listed all the buildings. The beef barn could be built in another place.

This listing of local farmsteads is obviously of great importance if they are to retain their character. We are not opposed to modern developments but we feel these can be achieved without sacrificing these pleasant buildings which do much to adorn the Chiltern countryside. If a farm is listed it also protects the buildings if it ceases to be a farm and is converted to another use. A number of examples have occurred recently where the listing of the building has ensured that the new owner has carried out conversions and restorations in a most sympathetic manner. So, we ask again for perhaps two volunteers to undertake this interesting and very worthwhile task. Enthusiasm for the Chiltern countryside and its farms is the main ingredient required. The area to be covered so far as this Society is concerned is that within the boundaries of the new High Wycombe District Plan. It stretches from Widmer End down to Hedsor and from West Wycombe to Loudwater. Any volunteers should get in touch with the Secretary.

Janet Tully

WEST WYCOMBE BAND HALL

Tucked away behind the North side of West Wycombe's High Street is the newly restored West Wycombe Band Hall. Recently visitors had an opportunity of looking round it, and both externally and internally it is now very pleasing and satisfying. When it was bought by the band for only £50 it was a very run down building. Earth outside had encroached and threatened to envelop it. The interior walls were very damp. However, nothing daunted the bandsmen and their friends. Funds were raised and these, with the help of a Government grant, plus their own labour, made possible the restoration of the building. A vital element was the professional advice of Lesslie Watson, the architect, who lives in the village. His beautiful drawings and plans laid a sure foundation for ultimate success and the building is perhaps even better now than when it was first built.

The grounds outside have been landscaped and the white walls inside bear several of Lorna Cassidy's drawings of the band hall and also Lesslie Watson's perspective illustration which won a place in this year's Royal Academy. The West Wycombe Band is a prize band with a final local reputation. We are sure their restored band hall will inspire them to even greater performances in the future

Jim Cottrell

Meeting on 9th September

On the 9th September, at the Friends' Meeting House, Mr. Arthur Newell gave a most interesting illustrated talk to members and friends on "Chairs and Chairmaking". His slides showed the development in design of chairs through the ages, culminating with the ever popular Wycombe Wheelback. The delightful collection of chairs shown in the slides are housed in a fine old Manor House at Brympton de Evercy near Yeovil. The House is open to the public for viewing.

Mr. Newell continued with a film re-enacting the hard life of the Chair Bodgers during the early part of the century. It showed the "Bodgers" at work in the Beechwoods around High Wycombe, first selecting their tree, felling it, sawing the trunk into lengths in a saw-pit, and then splitting the wood for fashioning into chair legs on their pole lathes. The bundles of chair legs were loaded on to a horse drawn waggon and transported to High Wycombe to be sold to the chair manufacturers for a pittance.

Mr. Newell compared the life of a chairmaker today with that of the Chair Bodger. He also said that the old sawpits can still be seen in some of the surrounding Beechwoods.

Elsie Fowler

TREES GROUP REPORT - NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

I am sure many of our members must have been out to appreciate the beauty of our trees and woodlands this glorious Autumn - such splendour accentuating the need to keep, improve and add to them. We were lucky to engage the District Council Arboriculturalist, Martin Ward, to talk to us at the Friends Meeting House on 21st October and show slides illustrating the use and abuse of trees. He explained his hope of keeping our Beech woods and improving them by thinning to allow light and space for regeneration and growth. This is now taking place in Castlefield and Rowcliffe Woods which have been untended for many years resulting in too many trees too close together, making thin and poor specimens. These can be contrasted with some of the finer trees growing elsewhere, such as Bradenham Woods and Stonor Park where space to grow and spread has provided mighty giants. Sadly Beech Bark Disease, attacking many of our Chiltern Woods can be seen in Bradenham Woods, readily recognised by a creosote-like excretion from the bark.

In reply to the District Council Plan the Group recommended that boundary lines of buildings and gardens should be situated far enough away from existing trees not to interfere with their growth or cause damage. Alas, this is exactly the situation at Hammersley Lane where building at Lyndhurst, the Wimpey development, is growing up into the trees bordering the site, necessitating lopping of branches - and now, application to fell. Why such plans are passed baffles us. The present council blame the Borough Council. We pray for a Planning Department that cares for trees.

National Tree Week

At the invitation of Martin Ward, 23 local schools took part in tree planting with the District Council Parks Department on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of that week at Pheasants Drive and Middlebrook Road fields, Downley, and at Tom Burts Hill. The schools

were enthusiastic, particularly after the success of the planting on the Rye last Spring, and were represented by well over a hundred children at each site. In addition Oakridge First School will be planting approximately 2 dozen trees, including 5 small Rowans from our nursery, this month, and Tinkers Wood School plan to plant 100 trees as soon as they can be obtained from the Forestry Commission through the Trees for Schools scheme.

The Parks Department will also plant an avenue of standard Oaks in Hughenden Park. This will be a special event to commemorate Jubilee Year and National Tree Week, and in view of the importance of oak to the furniture trade, invitations have been sent out to 26 local Furniture Manufacturers to sponsor a tree each, at a cost of £25 per tree. The response has been gratifying and the planting ceremony with the Chairman of the District Council and representatives from each firm will be held in Hughenden Park at 10 a.m. on Saturday 12 November.

Trees for Frogmoor is ever our theme and adhering to this we shall replace the Plane which unfortunately died in the late summer, and add a third, in more suitable containers, in National Tree Week. Please make note of our next talk, by Mr. Sale of the Forestry Commission, on Thursday ~~8 December at 7.30 p.m. (yet to be confirmed).~~

9 Feb at 8pm

Barbara Rippington

WATERGROUP

We were delighted to learn during last month that the first phase of the repair of the sluice gate to divert water to Pann Mill wheel had been completed by Wycombe District Council. We are most grateful for their help, both financial and technical.

The next phase of the operation was the clearance of the stream bed -- mostly nettles, and in particular the removal of a large willow trunk which was lying right across from one bank to the other. A power saw was hired for the occasion and one misty Sunday morning recently saw the members of the water group limbering up for the attack. The power saw was plied in a masterly fashion and the logs were soon being rolled up the bank, whilst the reapers swung their scythes through the nettles, rescuing frogs as they went. By the time the sun had broken through the job was complete. Our thanks in particular must go to the two stalwarts who used the power saw with such efficiency and safety.

The next phase of the exercise will, we hope, be the provision of planks for the sluice gate, also by Wycombe District Council, and these we eagerly await. Will the water flow? Will the wheel turn? Look out for the next instalment in your Newsletter.

Sheila Latimer

HERITAGE GROUP

Since our inauguration one of our main battlegrounds has been the lower end of Easton Street. Many letters have passed to and from the Post Office, Property Services Agency, Wycombe District Council and Estate Agents over the very poor state of some of the buildings in this area - in particular, Nos. 25/26 (Taylor's Sweets) and the Rye Hotel. Any visitor to the new Law Courts must certainly be surprised at the shabby appearance of the other side of the street. Of course, there are exceptions. The Tandoori Restaurant demonstrates that it is possible to restore the whole building of which Nos. 25 and 26 form a part. Allan Jane's and other buildings adjacent have set a very high standard and we hope that the neglected buildings will soon be taken in hand.

Talking of this area, you may have noticed in your travels the large expanse of brick wall adjacent to the Curry Restaurant and by the side of the Law Courts. The help of the Chiltern Venture Scouts has been enlisted to help smarten it up, and as young people are involved there is a good chance that the project will be supported by the County Jubilee Committee. The scouts hope to start early next year.

It is some reward for effort when one of our campaigns comes to a successful conclusion, as has happened in the High Street with the repair and redecoration of the Anglo Appointment/Granada TV building.

Rita Langton

QUARTERLY MEETING

At a crowded meeting on 12th October, Dr. Chris Smith, Senior Lecturer in Rural Studies at the Bucks College of Higher Education, gave a most interesting illustrated talk on the Natural History, Ecology and Conservation in the Chilterns. Dr. Smith took us on a fascinating journey through natural history and ecosystems, ranging from those of small scale to the Earth itself. He stressed the extraordinary determination of Nature to persist in ecological succession, colonizing first with plant life and working through to the climax vegetation, which in this country is largely deciduous woodland.

The first clearances of this forest cover began some 6,500 years ago when our Neolithic ancestors arrived from the Continent of Europe and has continued ever since. Dr Smith dwelt upon the vital importance of grasping this fact; virtually everything about our landscape not just the towns and roads and airports and factories but the fields and hedgerows and winding tracks of the most unspoilt countryside, is the result of man's interference. Even our beloved Chiltern beechwoods are very largely the consequence of deliberate planting and management. Only when we recognise this can we begin to talk sense about nature conservation.

Dr. Smith reminded us that our "wild places" are threatened by many agencies: by urban and industrial expansion, pollution, intensification of agriculture and forestry, increasing public pressures on the countryside for leisure, and by nature herself either through succession or by the effects of harmful aliens, such as the rabbit and grey squirrel. The most effective way of offsetting these threats is to create nature reserves, such as the Gomm Valley Reserve within the confines of Wycombe itself. No single reserve can cater for every need, however, and any reasonably "natural" areas, such as West Wycombe Hill and Keep Hill Woods, serve a valuable purpose in this respect.

Dr. Smith ended his talk by an appeal for more research, education and a change in attitudes. Much research is still needed in order to understand the workings of our natural ecosystems, and how to manage them. It is essential that these findings are effectively disseminated through colleges and schools, and to the community at large. Only then are informed and constructive attitudes likely to prevail, rather than disinterest, cynicism and outright vandalism. In this way, too, members of the community are more disposed to play an active part in conservation: for no amount of talking will cut the grass or clear the scrub'.

Ron Sims

Notes From The Latest Civic Trust News

These are quotes from other Societies about their "Causes For Concern" and could apply just as well to High Wycombe and District.

'The biggest irony is that while town centre dwellings are converted into business premises so that the main streets are depopulated and deserted after business hours, good agricultural land and attractive countryside are being annexed for housing development '

GUISBOROUGH SOCIETY

'Many town centre demolition and clearance sites are neglected and ignored to the extent that they become "eyesore areas"'

SPEN VALLEY CIVIC SOCIETY

'There are people in listed buildings and conservation areas who ignore the legal requirements There are also jobbing 'builders' who undertake such 'modernisations' as the installation of unsympathetic windows '

RAMSGATE SOCIETY

'The Society continues to be worried that the powers to compel negligent owners of listed buildings to keep them in repair are cumber some in execution so that prevention of demolition does not necessarily mean that they will be properly maintained afterwards '

BEDFORD SOCIETY

"Our biggest problem remains that of through traffic and its destructive effect on the town centre. We need pedestrianisation in the main shopping street."

THE WILMSLOW TRUST

"In theory all local authority departments are on an equal footing, but in practice the planning department often comes off worst because it is a 'non-spender' - it does not actually BUILD houses, CREATE public open spaces or LET CONTRACTS for road building or 'improvement'. We take the view that, on the contrary, the planning department should be paramount - with powers to control those responsible for housing, amenities and high ways. How else, after all, can anyone hope to ensure that new development OF ALL KINDS is considered in the context of a community as a whole."

TONBRIDGE CIVIC SOCIETY

ALAN WICKSTEED

The Society has suffered a severe loss in the death of Alan Wicksteed. Mrs. Ruth Herring has sent us this tribute to an outstanding person who will be sadly missed by many people.

"Anyone who has known Alan Wicksteed will think of him as tall and upstanding, always doing things, vibrating with a love of life which he enjoyed to the full, especially simple things - nature in all its glory at different seasons; walks in the woods and over the hills and fields of our lovely Buckinghamshire countryside; cycling - no cars for Alan! - and the fruits and vegetables of his garden - no meat for him either.

In August 1975, Alan Wicksteed and his wife, Nora, came to live at 25 London Road, High Wycombe, the Meeting House of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), to take up the joint wardenship. At that time, Alan Wicksteed was still teaching full time at Stone, commuting daily by train and bicycle, true to his basic principle of living the simple life. He retired in August 1976 and within a year he made his mark in the High Wycombe Society and on our town by his qualities of leadership and his capacity for hard work. He founded a local walking club with long all-day hikes for the really strong and half-day outings for the less sturdy; he became a leader in country dancing; he gave illustrated talks to local clubs and societies on his beloved Finland, whose difficult language he had learnt especially for the purpose of taking groups there on holiday two or three times annually over the last sixteen years. He took up the challenge of this Society to start an anti-litter campaign to clear up the roads and open spaces of our town. Great courage and his strong will-power enabled him to live an extremely active and adventurous life with the knowledge of a possibly mortal disease. In all he was, and did, he enjoyed the full support and complete devotion of a loving, faithful wife throughout 35 years of happy marriage. Norah heroically nursed her husband at home almost to the very end and the fatal illness which cut short his life prevented him from continuing with the positive things he started in this town. His life is an example to us all. Perhaps it will inspire one or two other members of the High Wycombe Society to carry on where he has had to leave off.

Ruth Herring

PROGRAMME OF COMING EVENTS

The following programme has been arranged for members, so please make a note of the dates in your diary. We hope that as many as possible will support these events, including members from Residents' Associations and Affiliated Societies.

Ron Sims

Wednesday, 25th January,
1978.

Quarterly Meeting in the Guildhall at
7.45 p.m. Hermione Hobhouse, Secretary
of the Victorian Society, will give an
illustrated talk on 'The Battle for
Victorian Buildings'.

Friday, 17th February,
1978.

'A Visit to Nigeria'. Illustrated talk
by Jim Cottrell in the Friends' Meeting
House at 8 p.m.

Thursday 23rd March,
1978.

'The Restoration of Widmer Farm'. An
illustrated talk by Mrs. Baker in the
Friends' Meeting House at 8 p.m.

Thursday, 27th April,
1978.

Annual General Meeting of the Society
at 7.45 p.m. in the Guildhall.
Illustrated talk by George Perkin, ARIBA,
on 'Buildings in Harmony'.