



# High Wycombe Society

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Registered with the Civic Trust

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NEWSLETTER No.45

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## PLANNING GROUP

### ADDITIONAL HOUSING IN WYCOMBE AND DISTRICT

The additional 1700 houses imposed on Wycombe and District by the Secretary of State has caused an enormous amount of controversy and given rise to much bitter feeling. There is a growing and very fierce determination in many quarters to resist using all legitimate means.

The reasons given for this increase now seen to be without any real substance. Local need will not be met - the houses will only swell the growing number of commuters. There is a very grave threat to the open countryside if precipitate action is taken, and there would be other serious consequences for the town. If for instance the H.7. area of Hazlemere was chosen, this would bring about the building of the A.404 Relief Road, which would be the ultimate in planning disasters.

If the Secretary of State remains unmoved we have suggested a cautionary approach and an alternative strategy. The extra growth would fall mainly in the period 1986 - 1991, and this gives a precious breathing space for good sense to prevail. The situation then may well be very different and other opportunities would have arisen to provide additional housing without devouring our very precious countryside.

Ted Kearney. Chairman.

### A SUPERSTORE IN CRESSEX ?

The District Council seems anxious to sell off a considerable slice of so-called 'decibel' land at Cressex in order to provide room for a Superstore. It seems that a number of organisations, including Sainsbury's and Tesco's, are anxious to establish a store there. The possibility has caused alarm among local traders, who fear, naturally about their livelihoods and the draining away of life from the town centre. We have supported them and we hope that the District Council will have second thoughts. Our own County Council is also unhappy about the proposal, as it cuts right across the provisions of County and Local plans.

Apart from the effects on the town centre trading conditions, we have also drawn attention to the probable disturbance of the equilibrium of shopping in local towns, the generation of cross-town traffic, the severe environmental impact of such a large store and huge car park, and the gradual monopoly situation which is now threatened throughout the country. It seems that 15,000 small shops close each year, with a small number of large empires gaining control, and with all of us reduced in the end to a vast army of zombies.

It would be interesting to hear the opinions of our members!

Jack Scruton.

## HISTORIC BUILDINGS GROUP

### A RIVERSIDE TOWN

There is more to Marlow than messing about in boats! We discovered this one Sunday in July as guests of the Marlow Society.

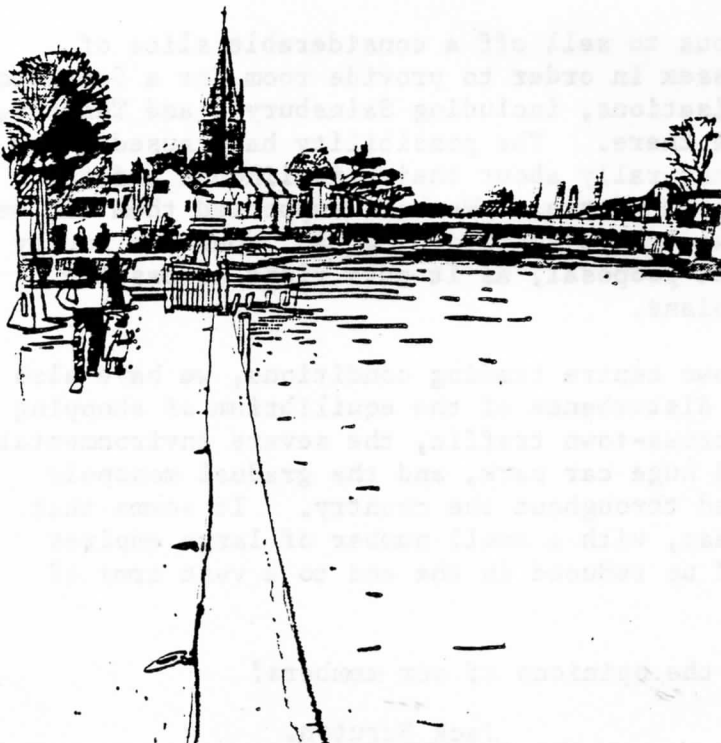
Our guided tour began in West Street with a look at the house in which the poet Shelley lived with his wife, Mary, and where she is reputed to have written the novel 'Frankenstein'. Close by was Sir William Borlase School with the old Grammar School building dated 1624 and opposite 'Remnants', an 18th century house with stables, clock and cupola of a much earlier date. Part of the Royal Military College was housed here in 1799 before moving to Sandhurst.

Down a narrow side turning we came to Higginson Park and Court Garden, the former home of General Sir George Higginson of Crimea fame who left the property to the town and now forms part of the Leisure Centre. On to the tow path beside the lovely Thames for a splendid view of the elegant Suspension Bridge - the pride of Marlow. Past the Parish Church of All Saints, rebuilt in the 18th century with its list of Vicars dating back to 1204 and into the Causeway. Here once stood the Stocks and the Whipping Post, a grim reminder of less happy times.

In the High Street our guide pointed out Cromwell House, a classical example of an 18th century town house, now the Post Office. Many of the old buildings lining each side of the street have been refronted and turned into shops. Duck Lane, now just a passage, took us into St. Peter Street. Once the main street in Marlow, it leads down to the river to the spot where the old wooden bridge used to span the Thames. Finally into Station Road where stands Marlow Place, a graceful 17th century house, with its magnificent flight of steps rising to the front entrance. It was to this house that George II, when Prince of Wales, brought his Court after a quarrel with his father.

Our minds filled with a wealth of fascinating information about Marlow, we were escorted to the Liston Hall for a sumptuous tea. We would like to tender our thanks and appreciation to the Marlow Society for a delightful afternoon.

Elsie B. Fowler



### THE HIGH STREET AND THE PRUDENTIAL

The Battle over the large site to the south of our High Street, which is owned by the Prudential Assurance Company, is still unresolved. The District Council refused earlier plans submitted by the Prudential, and we are convinced that the Council had every justification. Now the Prudential have submitted a new plan, which bears a close resemblance to the first one, and appears to be even worse! We do not oppose the disappearance of some of the rather poor buildings on the site, but the other features of the plan ought to be resisted. The site has great potential as an added attraction between our fine High Street and the River, but the Prudential can think only of a lifeless office block. Maximum profit is probably more important than anything else. We believe that a mixed development, to include specialist shops, craft workshops, and residential accommodation, would bring life to the area and would benefit the High Street. The office block would be speculative and against the provisions of the Structure Plan.

In order to carry out the plan the Prudential have suggested the mutilation of a listed building and interference with another, and in addition have proposed the culverting of part of the river near the Queen Victoria Bridge. The plan fails to make any use of the River.

We hope the District Council will maintain the strongest objections to the Prudential plan and insist on something far more imaginative, such as the King Edward Court scheme carried out jointly by the Prudential and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, in Windsor, which has rightly earned widespread praise.

### HAZLEMERE BARN

The result of the Public Inquiry held in May is that there are insufficient grounds for the demolition of the Hazlemere Barn. The Inspector emphasised the historic and architectural interest of the building, which lies in its age, the interesting timber structure and its position as a focal point of its surroundings. He felt that the building had been neglected and that no serious attempt has yet been made by the Parish Council to find a suitable alternative use which would secure the preservation of this listed building.

We are grateful to Stuart King for representing the Society in support of the District Council.

Janet Tully.

### STOP PRESS

We have just been advised that the District Council has now refused the planning application submitted by the Prudential to develop south of the High Street.

## MEETINGS OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS GROUP

Those of us familiar with the lucid and informative style of lectures by Mr. Ivan Sparkes found him in splendid form on September 24th, when he delighted his audience with a talk on Disraeli and the Wycombe Electorate. This was no dry analysis of Disraeli's attempts to woo a critical and suspicious populace - it was a revealing and original portrait of the man himself. Few conventional history books can provide us with the range of witty anecdotes which Mr. Sparkes supplied, and while it remains true that Disraeli was vain, outrageous and calculating, by the end of the evening it was easy to understand why Queen Victoria found him so endearing.

CARTOON.—JUNE 26, 1847.



Mr. Disraeli was first returned for Buckinghamshire at the General Election in 1847.

No. 4.

Another successful meeting was held on October 15th when Mr. Lawson-Smith of the Wycombe Camera Club gave us a dazzling display of sound and vision, in which he cleverly combined slides, speech and music. We were able to witness the reconstruction of the famous Marlow Bridge, go on a trip down the River Thames, study the beauties of Wells Cathedral, and have a peep at West Wycombe village. This was a new experience for most of us and we found it of great interest. Not least of course, we learnt something about photographic techniques!

Louise Scull.



## HERITAGE GROUP

### TRAFFIC AND THE TOWN CENTRE

The first Scheme - Scheme A - for restricting traffic in the High Street area, has now been started and we hope that it will be successful, and with Scheme B to follow, point the way to even better schemes in the future. There are bound to be difficulties and frustrations - and even angry denunciations - but time and patience should iron out the difficulties. Certainly the goal of a traffic-free High Street area is one which is worth striving for, and one which has been reached in so many towns.

In this context, it is interesting to read the latest Civic Trust Heritage News which features an article by George Perkin, an authority on the subject. Mr. Perkin has spoken to us on two occasions with great knowledge and enthusiasm. The following extract should be of interest to all those with the welfare of the town at heart:

"It is monstrous when you come to think of it - almost to the point of being comic - how pedestrians have been subordinated so cruelly to the demands of traffic with all those absurd (not to mention expensive) underpasses and overpasses - a legacy which forms the bleakest aspects of our towns today where people, permanently disorientated and sometimes frightened, struggle to find their way across roads and squares in tunnels full of water and graffiti. Have you ever tried to cross Birmingham on foot? Birmingham - a monument to a city torn apart by the motor vehicle, and now filled with forlorn underground pedestrian spaces. One of the bleakest of these is called 'Paradise Subway'.

Of course the pedestrianization of shopping streets has had, and still has its opponents - notably the shopkeepers, who fear they will lose money. Experience has shown however, that if anything, the reverse is true. Sometimes it makes no difference, but quite often a steady increase in sales has been chalked up, particularly once the landscaping works have been completed, the paving is down, the trees in leaf, the seats installed, when suddenly - and sometimes not until - everyone begins to see the whole point of the operation".

Our District Council is well aware of the need to carry out landscaping and other improvements in addition to improving the traffic situation. Without such improvements any scheme will have only limited success. To this end our Council plans to carry out environmental improvements in the High Street during the two years 1981 - 1983, to be followed by improvements to Frogmoor in the following year. This is good news and we hope that the schemes will be achieved despite the ever present financial difficulties.

Mike Hammet.



### MORE NOTES FROM THE DESERT

As a local resident I would like to congratulate the Wycombe District Council again concerning their splendid efforts to create a flourishing oasis in the Western Desert. The Green Street G.I.A. has, so far, proved most effective and restored both morale and the local environment in a run-down area with a proud past. The four new blocks of flats are all now happily occupied, bringing people into the town's heart, which had been dangerously bled. Landscaping and turfing are making it a pleasure to walk in the area, and one hopes the impetus will be continued with the proposed trees and garden areas. The use of Council provided rubbish skips and the many applications for grant aid, all show the willingness of local people to co-operate if the G.I.A. can continue its progress.

### ST. JOHN'S HOSPICE RUINS

The Heritage Group has been, for some time now, most concerned about the dilapidated condition of the St. John's Hospice ruins in Easton Street, which are of great historical importance. Imagine then our delight in the recent work instigated by Mr. Markcrow, the County Architect and his staff. The brick and stonework have both been admirably restored, and, after a temporary hiccup over spelling, the signboard is newly resplendent. All we need now is the return of the simple floodlighting, so effective in illuminating the ruins at night.

Bill Willson.

### NATIONAL TRUST, WYCOMBE CENTRE

Members of the National Trust, Wycombe Centre, had many opportunities in the summer to become directly involved in helping the Trust in its work. These included stewarding at the Cliveden Open Air Theatre, car parking at Hughenden Manor, recruiting at West Wycombe Park, and also many members came forward to help with the very successful Victorian Fete in Hughenden Park.

During the season of fetes and fairs and shows the Publicity Committee mounted several displays and recruited Trust members as a result, and also organised several publicity exhibitions in shop windows and in the Public Library. A number of social events took place to raise funds for the Trust.

The 1982 programme is complete and includes talks, outings to several Trust Properties and some fund raising social events.

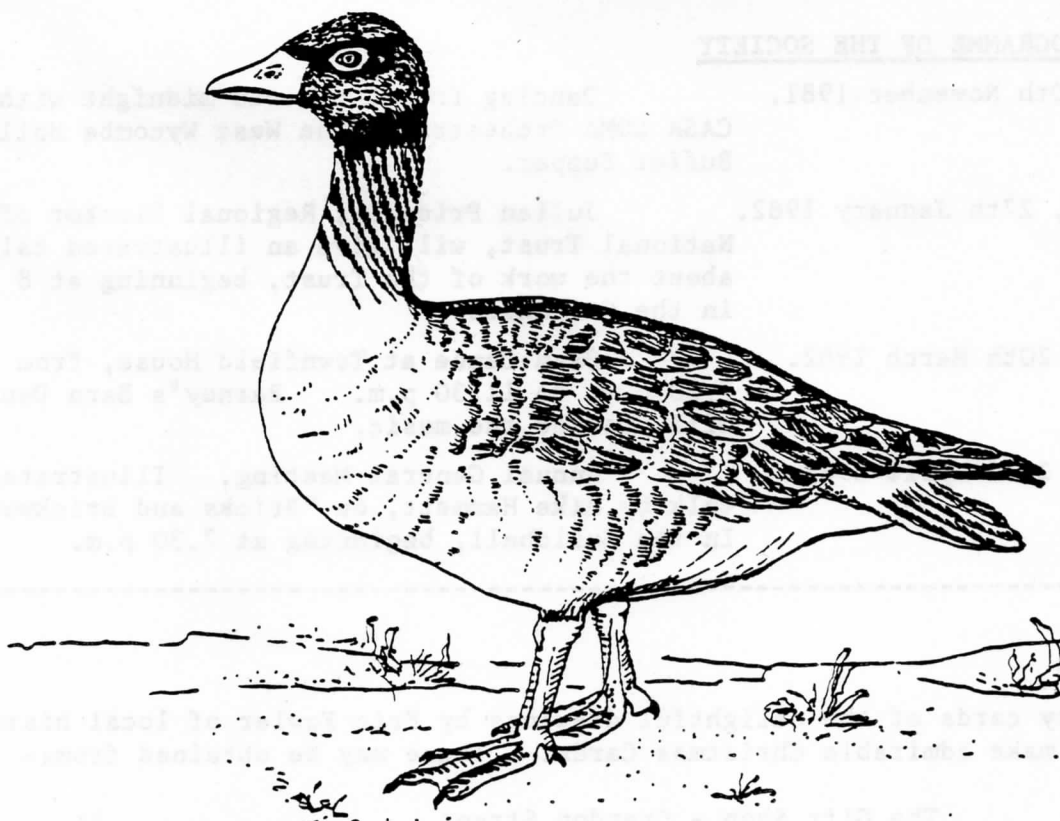
Olivia Price.

QUARTERLY MEETING, 7TH OCTOBER 1981

Denys Ovenden came to talk about his work as a naturalist and artist. He had recently provided the illustrations for a book on the Sea Shore, in conjunction with a writer who was similarly very experienced with the creatures and plants that are revealed "when the tide goes out". Milford Haven has the distinction of very low tides at certain times of the year, when the rock pools and beaches provide a wealth of interest for the marine biologist. Mr. Ovenden's descriptive colour slides were excellent, and after his talk we were able to admire his fine illustrations that were prepared and incorporated in the final published work.

It is relevant to state that the attendance of members was rather sparse on this occasion, although the welcome presence of BBONT members did disguise, to some extent, the disappointing support that members had given to this Quarterly Meeting. The Executive Committee has expressed the hope that our members will be more willing to attend in strength at future Quarterly Meetings, giving physical as well as moral support to the work and social contact of the Society.

Roger Lawson. Vice-Chairman



### T.W.I.G. (Trees and Water Interest Group)

On 22nd August, TWIG surveyed the Hughenden Stream to the source, in a small exclusive expedition through Hughenden Park. The fine trees of the park provided a most interesting diversion.

The Wycombe Show on 5th September gave TWIG the opportunity to turn the Pann Mill Wheel again, by diverting the fast flowing River Wye, with the approval of the Wycombe District Council. (This is a further welcome example of the good relationship which we in the High Wycombe Society have with our local Council Officers. Their co-operation is much appreciated). Chris Woodman had gathered together an interesting display of photographs and texts on the history of the Water Mills along the Rye. This small exhibition attracted members of the public to buy the water trails and illustrated cards that have proved to be very popular at all the Society's events.

TWIG are already considering how to stage a similar but better presentation next year, when the grand Ole' Wycombe public will (hopefully!) all come by through the one entrance to the Rye showground, near Pann Mill site.

Finally, TWIG organised a coach trip to Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire on the 24th October. The Arboretum is owned by the Forestry Commission, who have done a tremendous job in providing such an extensive collection of common and rare species from all over the globe. The 200 hectares (approx. 500 acres, of wooded walks revealed the most breath-taking Autumnal tints, and there was the most welcome opportunity to see species of bush and tree that are normally denied to us in the U.K. We also stopped at Bilbury Trout Farm on the way home! It is hoped to repeat this successful outing to the Arboretum next Spring and this will be publicised to all members.

Roger Lawson.

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### FUTURE PROGRAMME OF THE SOCIETY

- Friday, 20th November 1981. Dancing from 8 p.m. to midnight with the CASA LOMA Orchestra at the West Wycombe Hall. Buffet Supper.
- Wednesday, 27th January 1982. Julian Prideaux, Regional Director of the National Trust, will give an illustrated talk about the work of the Trust, beginning at 8 p.m. in the Guildhall.
- Saturday, 20th March 1982. Barn Dance at Townfield House, from 7.30 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. Barney's Barn Dance will provide the music.
- Thursday, 22nd April 1982. Annual General Meeting. Illustrated talk by Mike Hammett, on "Bricks and Brickwork". In the Guildhall, beginning at 7.30 p.m.
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### XMAS CARDS

The Society cards of the delightful drawings by Eric Fowler of local historic buildings make admirable Christmas Cards. These may be obtained from:-

The Gift Shop - Crendon Street  
Information Desk - Municipal Offices  
Chair Museum - Priory Avenue  
Hon. Secretary

Price: 6 Cards & 6 Envelopes 60p