

HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

(Registered with the Civic Trust)

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NEWSLETTER No. 50.

SPRING 1983.

A VERY SPECIAL EDITION.

We celebrate the fiftieth issue of our Newsletter with this edition. As Chairman (or person) it gives me great pleasure to thank and congratulate all those members and organisations who have contributed material and helped to publish it over the years. It has established a considerable reputation as a good example of its kind, combining, as it does, serious comment on local matters of concern with a sense of fun.

We remember our first cartoonist, the late Jim Cottrell, with great affection. His work could only be followed by equal talent, and we have been delighted and amused by the pen of Krystyna Barrow, who has helped us since the sad loss of Jim. We must also thank other local artists, and especially Eric Fowler, for their great help in enlivening our pages with attractive drawings of local scenes and buildings.

A final vote of thanks to those stalwarts who are responsible for assembly and distribution, and not least to our typists and printers.

I, personally, look forward to the next fifty issues!

Ted Kearney.

Examination in Public - Extra Housing in High Wycombe?

During early February there was a detailed examination at the Aston Hall, Aylesbury, into proposals to amend the County Structure Plan, the principal one being the additional provision to be made for the supposed need of 7.500 people in South Buckinghamshire. Although conducted in a civilised manner, the Examination was a fierce struggle between a variety of would-be house builders, aided by local manufacturers, and an equally determined mixture of those who believe it is vital to save valuable farmland and open countryside in the A.O.N.B., and who most of all realised that the future of our town is being threatened.

The main concern was a battle about Hazlemere and the Grange and Terriers Farms - an area which has been fought over many times. The various Residents' Associations and Amenity Societies worked in partnership with the N.F.U. and Parish Councils, and of course our District Council also resisted the extra population. The County's role was necessarily neutral and they held the ring admirably.

The developers relied heavily on a vast array of statistics, which could be manipulated to show that Wycombe needed additional population beyond that proposed by the Secretary of State. They were designed to intimidate and weaken our resolve, but we were able to retain our deep suspicion of the figures and our belief that they were perhaps nothing more than a bumper edition of Old Moore's Almanac.

We now await the decision of the Panel and the Secretary of State. Extra housing and population of the numbers proposed could impose enormous problems at a time when the town is having serious difficulties in grappling with current problems.

Jack Scruton.

The Bucks Free Press published a map of the town centre on 4th March showing what they believed to be the Council's plans for redevelopment. This publication followed a Press Conference given jointly by Wycombe Council and Hillier Parker, the estate agents hired to produce ideas. Hillier Parker, it will be remembered, were thought to be the prime movers behind the sale of the land at Cressex for the new Asda Superstore.

It is largely due to the imminent arrival of Asda that any plans at all for Wycombe's town centre have been mooted, and during the last 4 years, whilst we have all been waiting for the overdue District Plan to come out, the rape of Wycombe has occurred in the form of many thousands of square feet of new offices. Shopping, car parking, pedestrianisation (except for one brief foray) and other improvement schemes (e.g. at Frogmoor) were all shelved, and are only now being brought out and dusted off. Whether that is because the Council have changed their minds about the impact Asda will have - they and Hillier Parker having insisted two years ago that it would not be serious - or whether it is due to the local elections in May, is unclear.

However, the Free Press produced a very creditable map, with several interesting suggestions. If British Home Stores and C & A Modes bite the biscuit and take up the offer of a lease on the present Bus Depot, then the Octagon will be up-graded and two extra retail units on the Tuesday market square, the remainder of the square being laid out with trees and seats. Up-grading the Octagon might mean better lighting, illuminated show cases on some of the blank walls, Muzak, seats and a fountain à la Brent Cross outside Murrays, softer flooring and locked doors at each entrance after shop hours. The hated Bus Depot would go, and Wycombe would have better shopping facilities. So far so good. A new Bus Depot on similar lines is not envisaged. The most likely possibility is to build a new servicing and repair depot on the Council's Brook Street depot, due to be relocated at Booker, and have a pick-up/set-down point south of the High Street to help revitalise the retail factor there. If they go for this, they will need to compulsorily the Prudential's land holding there, and if they do that, they may consider very seriously the idea of building an Arts Centre there too.

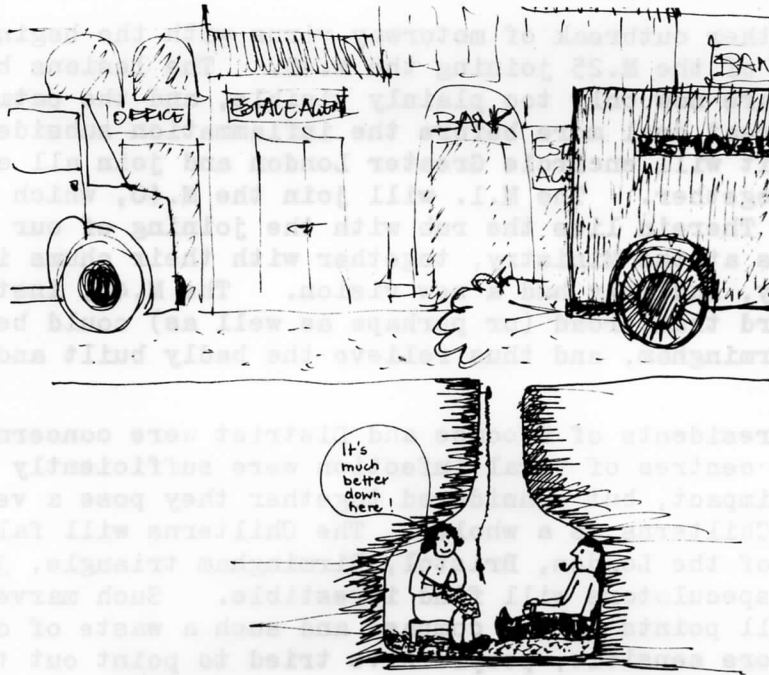
In theory, this could link up nicely with the library, but since the map under discussion was published, the County Council have expressed a desire to build a new library (after the new Asda library) at the hub of things, in the Western part of the town centre. Quite where the writer cannot envisage, but thinks a library and Arts Centre would be happy bed-fellows. It is unlikely that the Council will want to build their Arts Centre on Bridge Street Car Park as they have been tipped off that its greatest financial value would be found in office development.

Sainsbury's are pressing ahead with their negotiations to buy GH and S Keen's site behind the Dovecot car park, having been given the green light by the Planning Committee for a new store, and Boots are thought to be eager to take over their existing shop in the Octagon. There is now a planning application in to redevelop the Palace Cinema as a department store plus 16 retail units, and it is to be earnestly hoped that the whole Frogmoor area will be given a facelift before much longer. The Council has earmarked in the region of £90,000 for this, and it is long overdue. If all the proposed development, including the restoration of the Intimate Theatre building, goes ahead, Frogmoor may once again be a pleasant place.

British Rail are on the look-out for a developer to undertake a massive redevelopment of their land around the station, hoping that the developer will "throw in" a new station as part of the package. How seriously they are searching must be in doubt until their future policy over passenger services into Marylebone is settled.

Pedestrianisation will ever be a controversial subject in Wycombe. The Free Press sees Frogmoor and the entire High Street becoming traffic-free, but the main traffic conflict for shoppers must be Church Street, Queen Square and White Hart Street. Would it be possible to send the traffic away and pedestrianise these street as well?

Anna Birks.



Planning Gains or Public Losses?

The above title appears at the head of an article in the January/February 1983 issue of Heritage Outlook, the Civic Trust Journal.

The article raises the serious question of the legality, and, indeed, the morality of the growing practice of some developers offering promises to do something of "benefit" to the local community in exchange for planning permission, which may or may not be related to the offer made. The reverse practice of a local authority seeking to "sell" planning permission for similar reasons is also considered.

There is increasing concern over these practices on the part of Government, local authorities, developers, lawyers and other parties whose concern is land development. Members of the public, not least the High Wycombe Society, have also been expressing their concern.

We have had a number of instances lately of this practice locally, and the issues involved have already been seriously debated in Committee when planning applications have been revealed. It is obvious that the discussions between the local authority and the developer take place behind closed doors, and as the article states, planning permission can be given for proposals which are not strictly in accord with the new Local Plans. Statutory local participation can therefore be thwarted since there is no statutory obligation on the part of the officers concerned or the applicants to give publicity to their discussions.

The present situation is succinctly summed up in the article, where it is stated that "With the present system, that which may well affect the public interest can be signed, sealed and delivered before the public is aware of the facts, or indeed the existence of the situation".

There is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. The Department of the Environment's Property Advisory Group has prepared a report on the subject which has been widely circulated. The report asks two basic questions: first "What is and is not valid 'planning gain'?", and second, "Is bargaining for planning gain a legal and socially acceptable part of the planning process, and should it be controlled (either by statute or Government policy) more vigorously than it is at present?"

We will watch developments with interest.

Another threat to the Chilterns?

There has been another outbreak of motorway virus with the beginnings of the Denham section of the M.25 joining the M.40. The lesions being suffered by the land are now only too plainly visible, and the patient will inevitably suffer a great deal more before the inflammation subsides. When the M.25 is finished it will encircle Greater London and join all of the radiating motorways together. The M.1. will join the M.40, which will join the M.4. and so on. Therein lies the rub with the joining of our "local motorways". The boys at the Ministry, together with their chums in the road-building industry, suddenly had a new vision. The M.40, instead of being the new Fishguard trunk road (or perhaps as well as) could be extended north of Oxford to Birmingham, and thus relieve the badly built and knocked about M.1.

Now as far as the residents of Wycombe and District were concerned it seemed that these new centres of viral infection were sufficiently far away to have little local impact, but considered together they pose a very serious threat indeed to the Chilterns as a whole. The Chilterns will fall in the South Eastern corner of the London, Bristol, Birmingham triangle, just outside the M.25 loop, which speculators will find irresistible. Such marvellous communications with all points of the compass and such a waste of development potential! Other, more sensible, people have tried to point out that the Birmingham M.40 extension is not necessary, since any existing traffic problems could be solved by some bye-pass building at a fraction of the cost. We would also be spared the chaos of widening the local sections of the M.40 to three lane use.

The C.P.R.E. has prepared a case against the Ministry's M.40 proposals, in which they detail professionally considered alternatives. Let us hope that it receives the consideration it deserves. Our thanks are due to both the C.P.R.E. and the Chiltern Society for bringing to our notice yet another threat to what remains of our beautiful County.

Ted Kearney.

WYCOMBE DISTRICT ARTS ASSOCIATION.

The Wycombe District Arts Association (WDAA) is a "pressure group" whose main aim is to "further the establishment of a charitable arts centre in the district" - to quote from the constitution. To this end we have the support of other organisations, including the High Wycombe Society. Last year we distributed a questionnaire to find out just what the people of Wycombe and District really felt about arts provision. Overwhelmingly they do want improved facilities - i.e. an Arts Centre! The Council have set up a Committee to look into the possibility of an Arts Centre and have already visited a number of existing centres to see how they work and what is required.

Over the years we have worked closely with the Bucks Arts Federation who have supported us with advice and information for specific presentations. Earlier this year we were pleased that the B.A.F. should recognise us by asking us to handle the allocation of grant aid from B.A.F. to the societies in the Wycombe area affiliated to the W.D.A.A. The B.A.F. will disappear later this year, to be replaced by the Bucks Arts Association, which will work with the East Midlands Arts Association to ensure a flow of cash into the County to enhance and encourage arts activity here. No longer shall we be the nation's "black hole" in the provision of arts.

If you would like to join us, please contact our Secretary - David Sleet, 138 Deeds Grove, High Wycombe. Tel. number: H.W. 24260

Elizabeth Dean.
Vice Chairman - WDAA.



TREES AND WATER INTERESTS GROUP (TWIG).

TREES AND WATER INTERESTS GROUP (TWIG).

There has been a great deal to concentrate the minds of members of T.W.I.G. since the last Newsletter.

Pann Mill. The survey, commissioned by the Society, has been completed by Millwrights International and handed to us. The cost of this survey created something of a hole in the Society's funds, but there is general agreement that the survey will be the invaluable basis for the planning now being undertaken. The intention is to re-create a working mill structure on the Pann Mill site, incorporating the machinery already "in situ", but mechanically overhauled, and supplemented (hopefully) by a Hurst Frame and grinding stones that are available, held in store, having been rescued from other mill demolitions.

Our greatest enthusiasm is for the educational and heritage aspects of the scheme, since the re-created mill would be available to school parties, and the general public at regular and specific times, as a vivid illustration of the importance of the River Wye water mills, in various guises, to the local economy before the furniture industry became so firmly established in Wycombe.

Our main potential benefactor has now been revealed in the local press, as Marks and Spencer PLC, whose management and staff at their Church Street store have displayed an interest and enthusiasm which matches our own. The Centenary of the M and S retail chain is to be celebrated in 1984, and stores throughout the country have been asked to submit to their head office suggestions on local projects that would benefit the community, and would be supported financially as part of the Centenary Celebrations. The Wycombe store has agreed to give the Pann Mill project their primary consideration.

The phasing of the various aspects of the scheme will be influenced by the amount of finance that is available, since the probable outlay is far greater than anything that we would have envisaged twelve months ago. The first priority is to obtain planning permission for a re-created mill structure. It is pleasing to record that Wycombe District Council, who own the Pann Mill site, have been closely involved in the preparatory discussions. The Council Officers' past cooperation, in allowing us to turn the Pann Mill water wheel, has been of prime importance in the initial conception of the project.

T.W.I.G. are now actively considering how local commerce and industry could be requested to participate, both financially and/or with the provision of skills, in the re-creation of a working mill, so that this exciting scheme can be firmly established for an early completion!

Talk by Mr. L.J. Mayes. We were extremely fortunate in having Mr. L.J. Mayes to come to speak to T.W.I.G. and friends, on the "Mills of Wycombe", since the Warden of the Parsonage Close retired persons accommodation, off Duke Street, had kindly allowed us to hold the event in their excellent Common Room. Mr. Mayes was in sparkling form and we were delighted that our friends-in-residence at Parsonage Close were able to join us for the evening. Mr. Mayes succeeded in convincing all of us that the working mills of Wycombe had indeed made a great contribution to the life and economic well-being of this town, since early settlement times.

Exhibition at the Guildhall.

The District Council has kindly given permission for the Society to hold an Exhibition during May. The period will probably be in the first three weeks, but all depends on whether the contractors are finished or not and whether we have succeeded in finding enough people to look after the Exhibition at such short notice.

In view of the current T.W.I.G. preoccupation with water mills, readers will not be surprised to learn that "The Mills of Wycombe" is a likely title.

If we are able to stage the Exhibition it will mean a welcome return to the Guildhall after the decision by the Festival Committee to stage an exhibition of Australian prints, in place of our relevant local exhibition. If we do succeed we hope that many of our members and friends will find time to visit the Guildhall between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

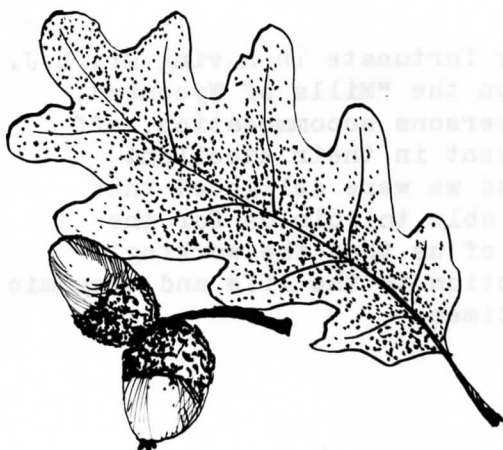
Roger Lawson.

Tree Planting. On Saturday, 12th March, 1983, to celebrate her successful year as Town Mayor, Mrs. Kathleen Peatey was invited by the High Wycombe Society to plant a tree of her choice on the Rye. Undaunted by the cold, Society members gathered to watch her firm in an oak, the first to be deliberately planted on the Rye. "We must plant now for future generations" said Mrs. Peatey, who also helped to plant a hornbeam in memory of the mother of Mrs. Tordoff, another member of the Society.

We would like to draw attention to the great help received from David Frost and colleague of the District Council. Their careful preparations ensured the success of the plantings.

When next you go on the Rye, have a look at the two trees - they are on the side of the path by the Waterworks.

Myra King.



HISTORIC BUILDINGS GROUP.

Survey of Historic Buildings. The survey mentioned in our last Newsletter met with a ready response from members invited to help, and we now have a great deal more information as a result. It would seem that the condition of most of our listed buildings in the town and in West Wycombe is satisfactory, but there is a small number which appear to be at risk. We will draw the attention of the District Council to them, including several which are owned by the Council!

From the mass of information received we hope to create a proper index of listed buildings which will be of use to the Society and others. In the next issue of our Newsletter we hope to provide a summary of our findings.

One of the purposes of the County Survey is to discover buildings worthy of listing, but which have been overlooked. Many of them lie in the countryside, but undoubtedly there are some in High Wycombe worth considering, especially those of the Victorian period. Any suggestions from members would be welcome.

One of our members, Louise Scull, who lives in West Wycombe and helped with the Survey, realised once again the destructive effect of heavy traffic on this historic village, and included these remarks in her report:

"Many buildings, even those decorated in the last year, are now filthy as a result of the heavy flow of cars and numerous lorries (which pass through the village to reach the transport cafe at Studley Green-if they used the motorway they'd have to double back about three miles). The south side is most seriously affected, since traffic is allowed to park on the north side and therefore the south side gets a double dose - it takes the burden of traffic travelling in both directions for much of the time. The building of the mini roundabout at the junction to the turn off to Aylesbury (the pedestal) has exacerbated this problem. Every working day there is a huge tail back of stationary traffic from the pedestal through the village, mostly on the north side, often extending as far as the Chorley Road, the junction to Radnage. Exhaust fumes help to blacken the buildings and foul the air - this build up also reduces the privacy of the residents who live so near the road. There has been a welcome conversion of some buildings to residential use - notably the Oast houses, previously redundant and the Pavilion Cafe - now a house".

We have raised this problem with the County Engineer from time to time, but 'no solution' has always been the response. We realise that a bye-pass is out of the question, but something could surely be accomplished, especially with regard to heavy lorries. Perhaps the cafe at Studley Green could be reached or left, using the motorway instead of the A.40, and thus avoiding West Wycombe.

Visit of Mr. Horsfield.

On 31st March at the Friends' Meeting House Mr. Horsfield of the Marlow Society spoke to a deeply interested meeting of our members about the buildings of Marlow and district, and the interesting people who had lived there in times past - poets, writers, soldiers, Royalty, domineering ladies, and a sprinkling of colourful and rather shady characters. Marlow became a different place when linked with Shelley, Jerome K. Jerome, the Prince Regent, and the famous Hoby family. Mr. Horsfield illustrated his delightful account with his superb slides and fascinated us with his anecdotes and phenomenal memory for dates and incidents. The evening was a fitting companion for the most interesting walkabout we shared a little while ago with the Marlow Society, with Mr. Horsfield as our guide.

Perhaps we will be able to invite the Marlow Society to join us in a High Wycombe walkabout later this year.

Janet Tully.

The long awaited public participation meeting - North Town were having a separate meeting - took place at the Crendon Hall on Friday, 31st March, with a good attendance of approximately 100. The meeting was taken by Councillor Ken Ross, Chairman of the Housing Services Committee, ably supported by Mr. R. Nagle and Mr. P. Ricketts, Environmental Health Officers, and in the wings a bevy of Councillors, Chairmen of Committees and Ward Councillors.

The meeting was reminded of the objects of the G.I.A. with its £3½m budget over 5 years, to retain and improve existing housing areas and improve the environment, that 80% of the houses could benefit and property with a rateable value of £225 or less could qualify for 90% grants. The area is bounded by London Road to the Pheasant P.H., including the river area from Pann Mill to Rye Mill, Queens Road, the railway line, Saffron Road and Railway Place. The Council has made a start by surfacing the Easton Street (Railway Place) Car Park and providing and planting flower beds. It was intended to landscape a formal flower garden to the Old Quaker Burial Ground. The opportunity had been taken to extend the G.I.A. to take in part of the River Wye and to include the Children's play area, where the local authority have plans to fill in the paddling pool on the grounds that it is unhygienic, and thereby able to improve the river bank.

A lively question time followed, covering topics as diverse as the loss of habitat for the butterflies in any improvements to the Quaker Burial Ground and nesting sites for the ducks in river improvements, to heavy lorries and early morning noise from container vehicles; the discrimination against higher rated properties and the loss of housing in providing new parking areas. Great concern over the proposed removal of the paddling/boating pool; did replacement of lead pipes qualify for grant; will rates increase; earlier consultation would have been welcomed.

In reply, the local authority were proposing putting high quality housing to the front of Easton Street (Railway Place) Car Park and in small area in Saffron Road, with rear access for Easton Terrace. Where properties are improved rates would go up. The G.I.A. funding was made up of 90% H.M. Government and 10% local authority. The Council wishes to respond to the needs and desires of the residents - the message is clear, let your local Councillors and Council Officers have your views on what you want to see done in this area.

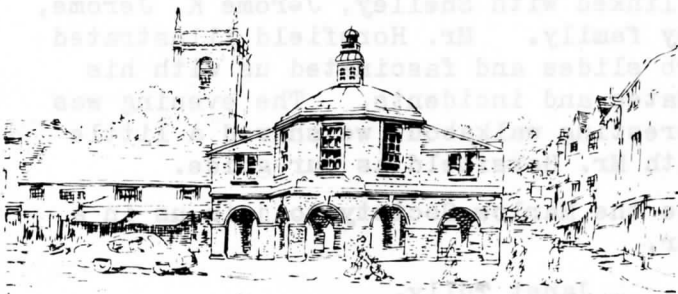
It is hoped that there will be a follow up meeting at a later date.

The Society's Trails.

Evelyn Roe.

This is the time when we emerge from hibernation and begin to use our legs again. It is possible that some of our members and friends have not yet experienced the delights of using the two trails published by the Society - A Walk through the Conservation Area, and A Water Trail round the River Wye in High Wycombe. They are little gold mines of interesting information and illustrations, and cost only 15p. They can be obtained at the Council Offices, the Crendon Street Craft Shop, the Museum, the Castle Street Bookshop, and W.H. Smith. Please help the Society and your state of health by buying copies and by persuading your friends to do likewise.

Marjorie Nash.



A friend of the Friends.

It was with some difficulty that I managed to leave the fireside recently on a miserably cold evening to attend an open meeting of the Friends of the Earth. The speaker was Mr. Steve Billcliffe, the National Campaign Director. The effort was well worth it!

The general policy of the F.O.E. was outlined, with details of forthcoming campaigns. Current issues are the protection of the countryside and all the animals and plants in danger of extinction, less pollution, energy conservation and the recycling of waste. Over the 10 years since its formation the F.O.E. has become a most effective non-party political pressure group. The aim is to change public opinion.

Re-usable bottles, the provision of more cycle ways, and the removal of lead from petrol are also of major concern.

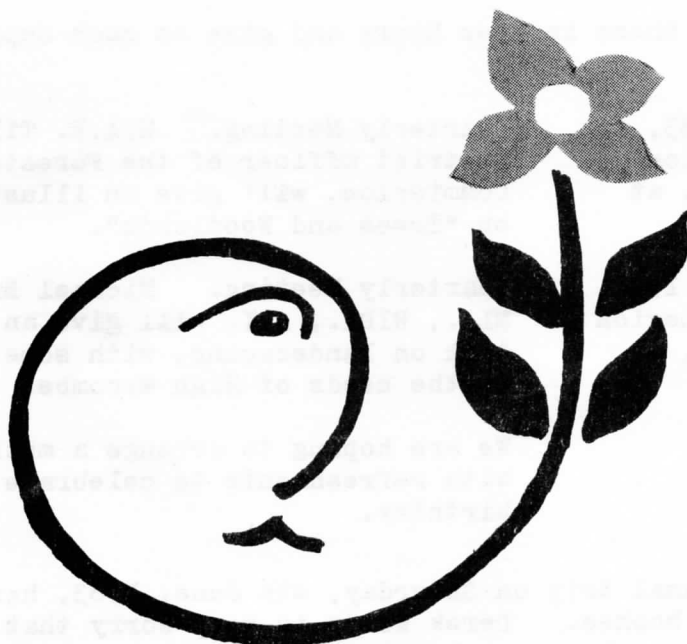
The F.O.E. is opposed to nuclear power stations, favouring greater investment in renewable sources of energy. A fraction of the cost of nuclear research is spent on alternative energy research. The next generation alternatives (geothermal heat, tidal, solar and wind power) need greater investigation. The F.O.E. is playing a major part in the Public Inquiry into the proposed construction of the Pressurised Water Reactor by the C.E.G.B. at Sizewell in Suffolk. The cost of building a nuclear power station is equal to the cost of insulating half the homes in Britain. The 200% increase in the use of nitrate fertilisers in recent years and the risk of stomach cancers, resulting from nitrates in the water supply, is seen by the F.O.E. as the great health threat of the future.

Local groups of the F.O.E. are involved in waste paper collection, home insulation and bottle recycling.

The national efforts of the F.O.E. are most commendable and entirely compatible with the conservation aims of our Society.

However, I left the meeting feeling that individual effort is perhaps the best contribution I could make to the work of the F.O.E. I am inspecting my light bulbs with the intention of changing to the low energy variety. I am also wondering whether we really do need all those chemical insecticides and pesticides on the shelves of the garden shed. I think you should too!

Ann Woodward.



BARN DANCE - 19th MARCH.

We twirled, we stomped, we leapt and pranced, each to our own style with uninhibited panache. Did you see the tightest white trousers in town? - the bare feet? - the mad hats? We enjoyed it and hope you did too. Very special thanks to Myra King and Co and Mr. and Mrs. Crook and Co, who together sold nearly half the tickets. The evening was well sold out and well attended, and thank you all. See you next year, same time, same place, on St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, and we'll do it all again.



Barbara Rippington.

FUTURE EVENTS.

Please make a note of these in your Diary and give as much support as possible:

Tuesday, 7th June, 1983, in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street, at 8.m.m.

Quarterly Meeting. H.A.E. Tilney-Bassett, District Officer of the Forestry Commission, will give an illustrated talk on "Trees and Woodlands".

Tuesday 11th October, 1983, in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street, at 8 p.m.

Quarterly Meeting. Michael Brown, MLA., RIBA., ALI, will give an illustrated talk on landscaping, with some reference to the needs of High Wycombe.

November, 1983.

We are hoping to arrange a musical evening with refreshments to celebrate our 15th birthday.

Please note: The Canal trip on Saturday, 4th June, 1983, has been fully booked. Derek Woods is very sorry that some of our members may be disappointed but he does thank everyone concerned for their support.