

HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

(Registered with the Civic Trust)

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NEWSLETTER No. 51.

SUMMER 1983.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Our Annual General Meeting was held in the British Legion Hall on 26th. April 1983, when our Annual Report and Balance Sheet were published and accepted. These have been distributed to all our members and Affiliated Societies.

The following officers and members of Committee were elected:

President: Mr. A. Conner Wilson.

Vice-Presidents: Miss M. Nash and Councillor Mrs. K. Peatey, J.P.

Chairman: Mr. E. Kearney. Vice-Chairman: Mr. R. Lawson.

Hon. Secretary: Mr. J. Scruton. Hon. Treasurer: Mr. A. Flint.

Committee Members: Mrs. A. Birks, Mrs. E. Roe, Mrs. J. Tully, Mrs. M. King, Mrs. A. Woodward, Mr. R. Rippington, Mr. R. Sims and Mr. B. Honess.

After many years of faithful service Mrs. Roe has given up the job of Membership Secretary and Mrs. Tully has taken over. A presentation was made to Mrs. Roe in recognition of her valuable services.

Mr. C. Mills, Mrs. A. Callow and Mrs. M. Pollicott resigned from the Committee owing to other commitments and we thank them for all the work they carried out for the Committee.

We are concerned about the four vacancies which now exist on our Committee and we are most anxious to fill these. If any member would like to help in this work, he or she would be most welcome.

The A.G.M. was concluded by a forum for aspiring candidates for the forthcoming local elections. We were blessed with a mixed bag of political opinions and members of both sexes (a much better ratio than the present House of Commons!). The panel also included the local SDP candidate for the General Election that was to hit us so shortly afterwards.

When the Secretary casually suggested that I might like to chair the meeting (regardless of whether or not I was re-elected Chairman of the Society), I must admit to feeling a twinge of trepidation. True, it was not the first time we had held a political forum, but then our much missed Ewart Steevens had been in charge and he was never an easy man to follow. So, should I try a sort of Robin Day or a bit of Ewart or just be me? I opted for the latter but decided to be firm and arm myself with a stop watch! The result seemed to please most people, including the candidates, and many very important local questions were raised and, in the main, well debated.

It is apparent that quite often local decisions are taken without those involved being always aware of all the facts in the case. If this could be overcome, then I am sure that party political dogma would often be put aside and good decisions arrived at. Perhaps a small lesson has been learned by those who took part.

My sincere thanks to all those candidates who gave of their time and energy to participate.

Ted Kearney.

ROAD THREATS.

On the 19th. May this year our Council's Highways and Transport Committee voted to request for detailed plans to be drawn up by the Bucks Authority for a town centre relief road "from the Law Courts to Temple End". Can it be that each of the Councillors, bar one, David Turner, has forgotten the enormous public outcry against this scheme when it was first mooted in Policy Paper No. 7 in July 1980? May we refer back and remind you of the massive feeling against the proposal which exploded at that time and has been maintained ever since.

Public meetings were called after the publication of Policy Paper No. 7 to allow the views of the people to be heard. The first was at Park School, Hazlemere, which was packed well beyond capacity and huge crowds had to be content to listen via loudspeakers from the grounds around the main school hall. Many spoke vehemently against the road plans. When questions were invited it became obvious that all present were against the four options listed.

At this meeting it was announced by Chairman Councillor Holland that the next venue for the public meeting was to be the Oak Room in High Wycombe. This brought enormous dissent because the District Council had underestimated the strength of feeling against the proposals and had chosen a relatively small hall for the next public meeting. The venue was changed, therefore, to the Town Hall which in the event was packed beyond capacity. Once again, question time revealed an overwhelming verbal condemnation of the road plans.

Over the public participation period seven hundred and eight letters were received by the Council officers totally rejecting all four options. It became evident that the main support for the so-called relief roads was from the engineers who had designed them. The High Wycombe Society still supports the view that to implement these road options would be a disaster. Better to proceed with the small scale road improvements, some of which have already been completed, and so improve our town's environment without creating major blight. Can you imagine the unsightly concrete structure which must inevitably be built to overcome the engineering difficulties in elevating a new road from the valley level of the Law Courts to the much higher level of Priory Avenue? And then continue to carve its way through one of the town's conservation areas!

We will object very strongly to this recent development, hopefully to prevent further blight on our town sadly depleted by previous planning errors.

Colin Adams.

CAR PARKING BY THE RIVER WYE.

To help overcome some of the car parking difficulties brought about by the new Council Offices, the Policy Committee made a series of planning applications during recent months to use a site by the river Wye by the Queen Victoria Road bridge. These applications were opposed by the Society as the site is the central feature of a Civic Trust Award given to the town in 1968. We carried out a vigorous campaign including lobbying all the Councillors and providing detailed information and plans. In this we had the support of the County Council, the landscape architect who designed the scheme and the important intervention of the Civic Trust. The Planning Committee acted in a sensitive manner and refused to allow the site to be used. This decision and the very fair report of the Planning Department gave us much encouragement. The result demonstrates that Amenity Societies have a useful role to play in controversial planning matters.

Jack Scruton.

OFFICE BLOCKS.

All those who are desperately keen to fill our town with office blocks ought to study the dismal situation which has arisen generally because too many have been built. A recent and devastating report in Business Observer revealed the following:-

More than 9 million square feet in Central London is standing empty.

Around the country many more suites and blocks are deserted in the worst rental property crash since the slump of 1974.

The chances of a substantial proportion of this space being occupied look poor in the aftermath of the silicone chip revolution. A computer terminal on a single desk can remove the need for large offices needing row upon row of desks for office workers.

In a national survey confined to buildings of 20,000 or more square feet, the figures show that 23 million square feet is in search of tenants. If the buildings of smaller size were also considered, there would be an almost unimaginable amount of empty space.

It seems obvious that there should be a general embargo on any more offices and an urgent need to think of a better use for land and other resources.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS.

The following remarks by Sir Hugh Casson appeared in the recent edition of the Heritage Outlook published by the Civic Trust:

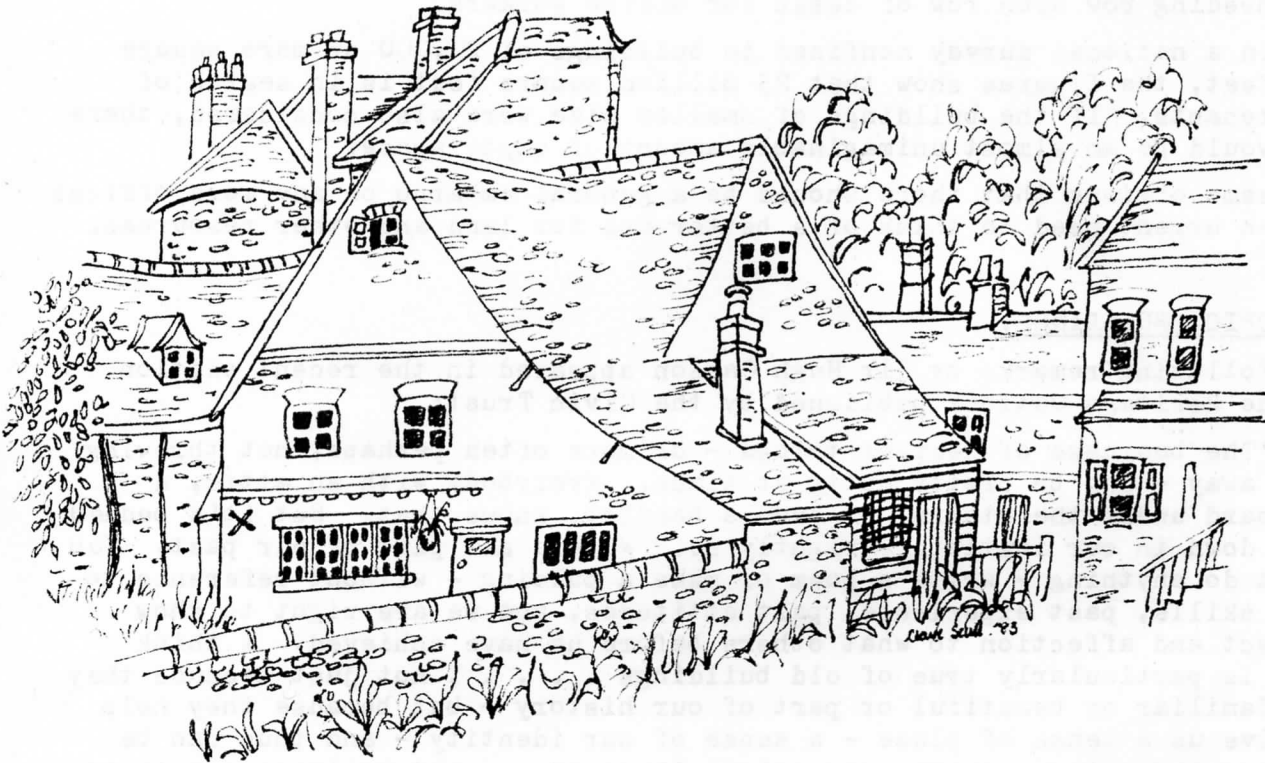
"The business of keeping things - or more often perhaps, not throwing them away - can be pretty dotty at times. Everybody with an attic, a cupboard under the stairs, or even a handbag, knows that. But it's bedded deep down in our instincts - rightly so. We are all part of our past. You can't do anything - write a poem or make a pudding - without reference to past skills, past experience, past attitudes, and we are right to show respect and affection to what others before us have achieved. I think this is particularly true of old buildings not just because they are familiar or beautiful or part of our history - but because they help to give us a sense of place - a sense of our identity - and thus can be mighty reassuring. That's why nobody likes to see old buildings empty or neglected or derelict. When they disappear we experience a sort of tiny death, and letting them fall to bits is not just a treachery to the skill and craftsmanship that created them, it nibbles away at our life-support system. Yet fall to bits they frequently do, and usually because nobody has the chance or the cash to restore them and put them back to work."

Over the years we have suffered many "little deaths" in High Wycombe, culminating in the Chequers calamity. But there are threats to our listed buildings quite apart from demolition. Although total losses are tragic, they are infrequent. What is perhaps more serious is the way listed buildings are added to or, even worse, altered, especially when they are taken over by commercial interests. It is often thought sufficient to retain the facade and pretend that the building is still there, intact, when really the character of the building has been destroyed and it is no better than an old Western film set. Another sad occurrence is when listed buildings are "tidied up", with the ruthless removal of the little idiosyncrasies which have accumulated over the centuries and which stand in the way of extra profit or because they do not conform. Recently, the listed buildings on the south side of Easton Street have lost many interesting features at the back, and they are now naked and exposed, awaiting the substitution of a large, speculative office block with all the usual problems. Lorries have taken away another slice of old Wycombe.

Even the elements conspire! Our distinguished Bassetsbury Manor was recently set on fire after being struck by lightning and saved only by the vigilance of a local resident. There were surely more suitable candidates - Colston House, or Thame House or Wilkinson Sword or even Bellfield House!

Here is one listed building, occupied by members of the Society, which has managed to retain its character. A timber framed cottage at 18 High Street, West Wycombe, and drawn by Clare Scull who often visits Louise, her sister, who lives there.

Jack Scruton.



A PLEA FOR HELP.

We are fortunate in our Society in having a majority of members who pay their subscriptions promptly and support us by coming to meetings. This is much appreciated and we thank them. On the other hand, there are those members who have to be reminded that their subscriptions are due and this costs time and money which could be put to better use. We need the income from our subscriptions, indeed we would not survive without it, but we also need to know that you do support us in our aims and endeavours. That signature on a cheque or application form is a morale booster. It is an affirmation that you are willing to support and help us to carry out further work by the Society on your behalf for the benefit of the town and the local community. This Society is the only one of its kind in Wycombe and we try to co-ordinate with the local residents' associations on issues that may affect them.

Some people pay by bankers order and it would be appreciated if those who

who do would check that they are up to date with the current subscription rates which are:

Family . . . £3.00 Individual . . . £2.00 O.A.P. . . . 50p.

Receipts will no longer be issued except to new members, people who pay by cash and on request.

Janet Tully.

QUARTERLY MEETING.

The heavy warmth of a June evening was considerably lightened by a very refreshing and enthusiastic talk by Mr. Tilney Bassett, District Officer of the Forestry Commission.

Although, as Mr. Tilney Bassett admitted at the outset, he has not held this position for long, and therefore is not yet ready to talk on the particular local problems of the Chilterns, his knowledge of Forestry Commission history and practice is profound and was conveyed to us in an engagingly practical manner.

Why the United Kingdom has become and remains the country in Europe with the smallest proportional acreage of trees is not easily explained - it seems we were slower than others in realising the devastation to our tree resources caused by wars and population growth. Now, with changed farming methods and ever increasing demand for 'development', pressure for economic use of land increases, and the Forestry Commission are ever accountable for their costs. Slides showed us how vast acres, promising a high yield after twenty years, can be wiped out by one fire, how order and method causes lumbermen to use spring loaded tape measures, saving them miles and hours of walking each week and resulting in higher productivity per man. We were impressed by the safety equipment illustrated, emphasising the danger of much of the work.

The barrage of questions after Mr. Tilney Bassett's talk was evidence of the interest he had aroused and how very stimulating his talk had been.

The meeting was held in the hall of the Royal British Legion in Wycombe - a welcome venue since the decor and the furnishings are pleasant. The bar was open at the end for those who wished to linger a while for a chat and refreshment - an easy and relaxed conclusion to a most enjoyable evening.

Barbara Rippington.

TREES AND WATER INTEREST GROUP. T.W.I.G.

'MILLS ON THE WYE' EXHIBITION.

The Group was very pleased with the positive response from the general public, and the Society members in particular, who visited the Exhibition from the 2nd. to the 14th. May in the renovated Guildhall.

We were able to portray the history of the mills along the river Wye, and bring to the attention of the visitor the importance that those mills have played in the local economy, prior to the establishment of the furniture industry in Wycombe, and up to the present time.

It was a privilege to have been allowed to be the first exhibitors in the Guildhall at its re-opening after the temporary closure, whilst it had been structurally repaired, weather proofed, and redecorated internally, to fine effect. We are grateful to the Wycombe District Council, and to Mr. Sparkes, for allowing us to stage the Exhibition and for the help and encouragement that we received.

The names and addresses of those who had expressed, at the exhibition, a desire to contribute in some way to the Pann Mill Project, have been retained for future reference. We will be contacting those concerned in the near future.

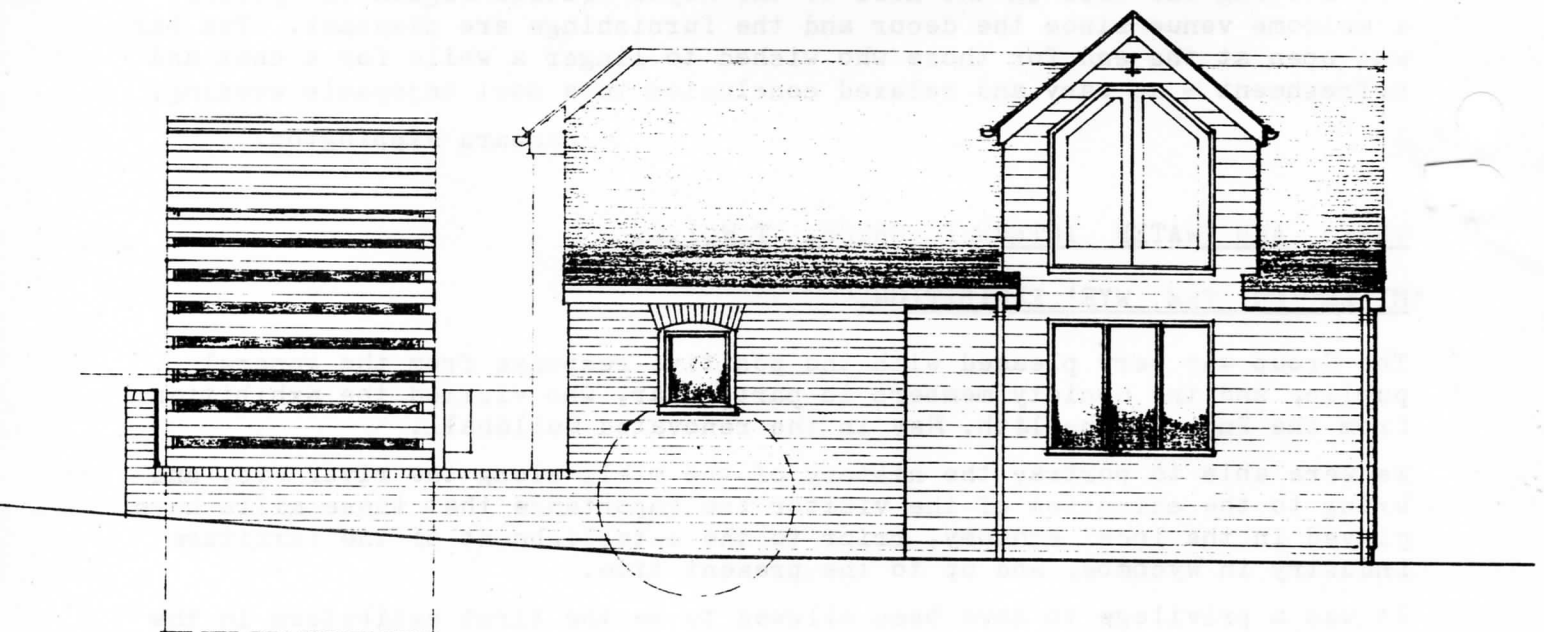
Pann Mill Project. "Recreating our Heritage."

Some 5 years ago, one of our Group members, Colin Kennedy, had drawn up the original, modest scheme to place a permanent housing around the original Pann Mill machinery. He has now surpassed his previous fine efforts by drawing up the design for the new mill building which, we expect, will rise phoenix-like from the ruins of the old, in 1984. The enthusiasm of Marks and Spencer Plc, has remained constant during the outline planning stage, and the Technical Services Officer of Wycombe District Council, Mr. Westgate, continues to aid and abet our endeavours. The resources of a very well known local engineering company are being offered to the project, and when firmer details are known, all will be revealed.

Evening Ramble.

The T.W.I.G. decided to take some time off from the serious business of water mills, and organised a gentle evening ramble in late June, from St. Lawrence Church, West Wycombe, along the ridge of the hill, through Hearnton Wood, past the grandly reconstructed Noble's Farm, and back to West Wycombe along the charmingly hedgerow'd thoroughfare beneath the Pipers Hanging Wood. The local flora engaged our attention and the exercise was good for all of us.

Roger Lawson.



Pann Mill. View of proposed building from the Rye.

CANAL TRIPS.

The trip along the Kennet and Avon Canal on June 4th. was a very enjoyable occasion. After a pleasant ride to Hungerford, we boarded the narrow boat about mid-day for four hours of cruising on this tranquil waterway. It was the perfect time of year. Hawthorn blooming on the banks scented the air and the fields were golden with buttercups, but the water lilies were only yet in bud. Some wild life was to be seen - ducks, coots, moorhens, swans and a family of Canada geese with five goslings. There was also a nest, high on a tussock of reeds in the water, with fluffy chicks in it. We saw this on our outward journey, but on our return the chicks were out of the nest, leaving a solitary egg waiting to hatch. Many people left the boat at a lock and walked along the bank to rejoin at a further lock. We went as far as Froxfield, and I'm sure we all appreciated the work which is being done by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust and similar bodies in other parts of the country to rescue and re-open these inland waterways. The boat is operated by volunteers working for the Trust as a way of raising money for their work.

Millie Wadsworth.



Another Canal trip has been arranged for Saturday, 24th. September 1983 on the same narrow boat, the Rose of Hungerford. This cruise will take five hours to cover the course between Hungerford and Crofton. It is open day at the Crofton Pump House (admission £1 adults, 50p for OAP/children), and we will be able to spend approximately 1 hour at Crofton. The coach will leave High Wycombe (Stewart and Arnold) at 9 a.m. for Hungerford, returning from Crofton at 4.30 p.m. The trip will be slightly longer than the cruise on 4th. June, so the cost of coach/boat is likely to be in the region of £4.75 per person.

If you would like to go on the trip, please contact me at 19, Adelaide Road, High Wycombe, or phone High Wycombe 20284.

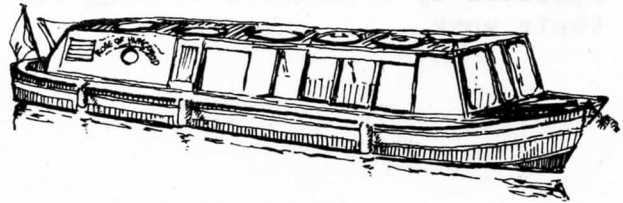
Derek Woods.



Crofton Beam Engines

(nr. Great Bedwyn, Wilts.)

Crofton Pumping Station on the Kennet & Avon Canal houses two early Cornish Beam Engines—1812 Boulton & Watt and 1845 Harveys of Hayle. Installed to pump water to upper levels of canal the engines have been restored and are the oldest working Beam Engines "in steam" in the world.



OUR BIRTHDAY!

High Wycombe Society is 15 years old this year! During this time we have fought many battles - admittedly we have lost some, but the victories we have achieved have been important and one can see that the value of the Society as a ginger group is vital to Wycombe's heritage.

To celebrate our achievements and our 15th. birthday, we will be holding an informal social event on 4th. November at the Oak Room, Wycombe Town Hall. There will be live entertainment with tasty refreshment being served between times. Make this a date for your diary and come and enjoy yourselves with us on 4th. November.

FUTURE EVENTS.

Please make a note of these in your diary and give us as much support as possible.

Saturday,
24th. September 1983

Canal Trip to Crofton. Details in Newsletter.

Tuesday,
11th. October 1983

Quarterly Meeting at 8.p.m. in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street when Michael Brown, MLA., RIBA., ALI. will give an illustrated talk on landscaping, with some reference to the needs of High Wycombe.

Friday,
4th. November 1983

Birthday Party in the Oak Room, Wycombe Town Hall. Further details to follow.

Saturday,
17th. March 1984

Barn Dance in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street, High Wycombe.