

HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

(Registered with the Civic Trust)

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Annual General Meeting.

A successful A.G.M. was held on Tuesday, 17th April at the Royal British Legion Hall. Reports from the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer were circulated and accepted by the members present.

The following Officers were elected:

President	Mr. Connor Wilson
Vice-Presidents	Miss Marjorie Nash
	Councillor Mrs. Kathleen Peatey
Chairman	Mr. Ted Kearney
Vice-Chairman	Mr. R. Lawson
Hon. Secretary	Mr. Jack Scruton
Hon. Treasurer	Mr. Tony Flint

The following were elected to the Committee:

Mr. Malcolm Barnett	Mr. Roger Rippington
Mrs. A. Birks	Mrs. Evelyn Roe
Mr. John Gore	Mr. Ron Sims
Mr. Brian Honess	Mrs. Janet Tully
Mrs. Myra King	Mrs. Annie Woodward

After the business was concluded, the members present were able to question a panel composed of Councillor Sydney Goulborn (Chairman of Planning), Councillor Peter Cartwright (Chairman of Housing), Councillor D. Green (Vice-Chairman of Leisure and Amenities), and Mr. W. Roberts (Chief Executive), all of Wycombe District Council. This was a very interesting session, with many questions about town problems in general, and we are indebted to members of the panel for taking part.

The New Town Mayor.

We would like to offer our congratulations to Councillor Betty Barratt on becoming our Town Mayor. Betty has given long and valuable service to the community, both as a teacher and as a Councillor, and the honour is richly deserved. Betty and her husband James have been members of the Society since 1969, and we have always valued their support. This is the second time one of our members has been honoured, and we hope that Betty's term of office will be as successful as that of Kathleen Peatey's. We feel sure that she will be supported by the whole community.

A Sense of Place.

The practice of architecture and urban design have best been described as "the art and technology of place making", and above all else it is surely the sense of place which a development engenders which most determines its degree of acceptability. Although one cannot be specific about what exactly constitutes a sense of place, (it is more of an emotional response than a functional requirement), one can at least point to certain determining factors critical to the creation of sense of place. In my view these would be basically as follows:-

- * The design brief
- * The scale of the development
- * The massing or form of the development in relation to the surrounding buildings and infrastructure
- * The hierarchy of space (from public external space to private internal space)
- * The use of materials

Matters such as elevational treatment, architectural style, vehicular access, decoration etc., although important, are secondary to the likely success of a development in terms of "place". Land values, local authority structure plans and highway engineers' requirements are totally irrelevant.

Consider the multi-storey car park/bus station proposals to the south of High Wycombe's High Street. This is commonly being referred to as "the new bus station", when it is predominantly a new multi-storey car park with a bus/passenger interchange on the ground floor.

The fact that the Planning Committee has approved this development in principle, subject to constraints relating to such relatively minor items as detailed design, landscaping, and highway access, should give cause for great concern to all those who are concerned custodians of this town. The real failure of the proposals lie in such primary matters as the design brief, the scale and the massing.

The brief is ill-conceived in as much as to propose a multi-storey car park and bus station on a prime town centre site, slap bang in the middle of a Conservation Area, is the kind of lunatic prairie planning that prevailed in the 1960s. Bus Station maybe, but multi-storey car park, never. This site should be developed as a mixed use multi-purpose facility, incorporating small retail outlets, cultural, recreational and leisure facilities. Only by diversity of use can this part of the town be kept alive. It would also provide the opportunity to use that section of the river Wye which runs to the south of the site for amenity purposes. Only with this kind of brief can a sense of place, so vital to this part of the town centre, begin to emerge.

The scale of the proposals bear no relation to the scale of any of the surrounding buildings, largely because of the nature of the brief, and not because of insensitive architects. No amount of detailed design can rectify this. Multi-storey car parks by their very nature are large scale monolithic structures.

The essence of a Conservation Area is not that it contains architectural masterpieces, or that it has large numbers of listed buildings, but that the collective effect of all the buildings and spaces between buildings, is one of a sense of place. The proposed car park, occupying almost the entire site and rising to five storeys in height and breadth, does nothing to add to the sense of place in this Conservation Area. It is stark evidence that our elected representatives, guided by professional planning officers and estate agents, cannot distinguish between that which is crucial to sensitive development and that which is incidental.

Malcolm Barnett.

Abstract

With glorious colour slides
F.W.I.G. took up his invitation
in May.

us a fascinating tour. A
and gently examined. The flora
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and readers who have not been to th
and if they can arrange a booked
modest fee.

R.M.B.
1984

Pann Mill Museum.

The Construction.

The Pann Mill Project is now so far advanced that the colourful notice board, painted by Myra King, and erected in a Rush at the request of Marks and Spencer PLC, now joyfully announces "Pann Mill Museum". The primary contractor, T.J. Bateman and Co. Ltd., is a local company which has completed the building with justifiable pride, and we endorse their choice of the joinery sub-contractor, ADW Joinery.

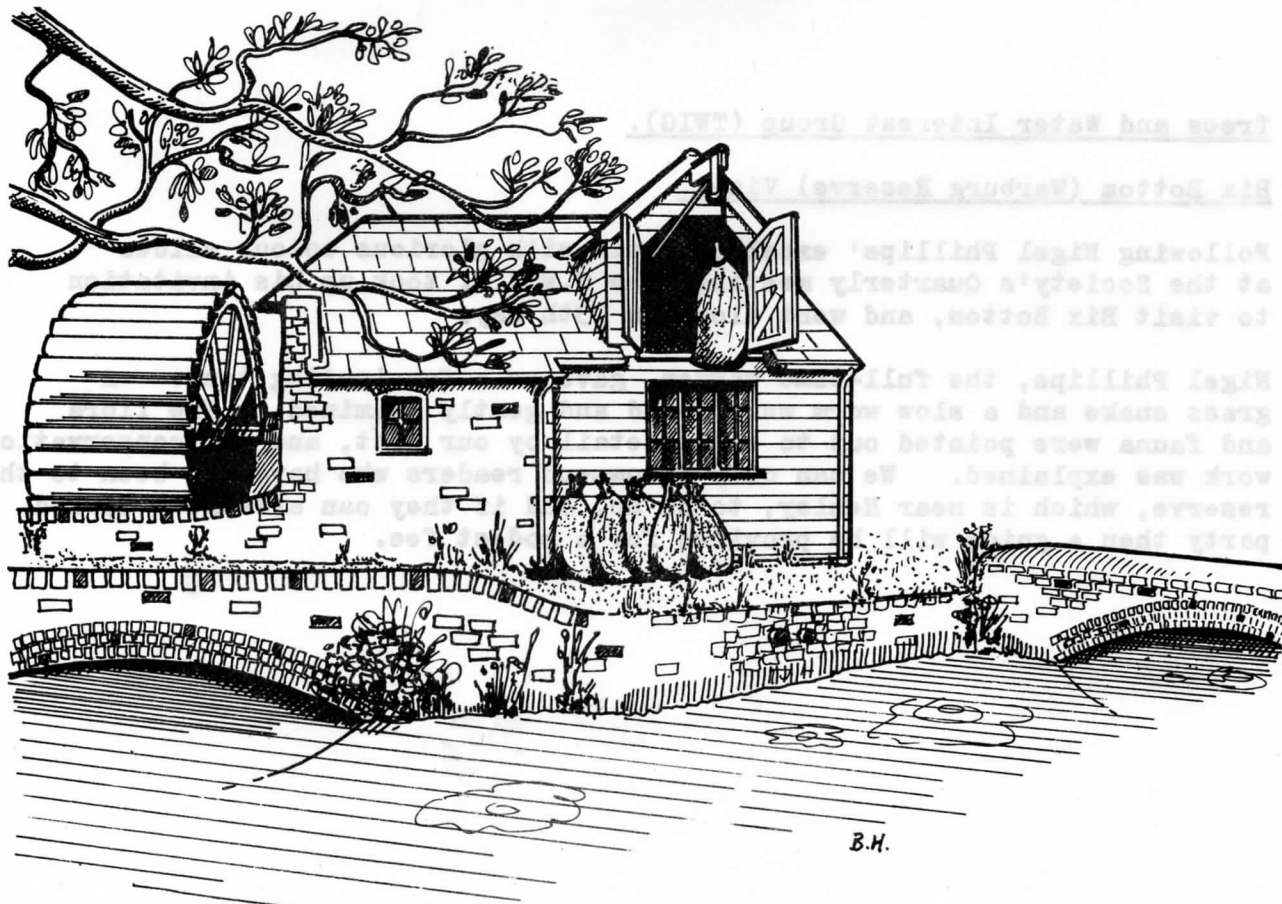
The roof is now complete, and the existing Pann Mill machinery is well protected by a very substantial building. Members of T.W.I.G. are making good progress in the de-scaling of the water wheel, and Brian Honess, with Chris Wallis, Chairman of the Chiltern Society Historic Buildings Group, has commenced the renovation work on the machinery.

The exterior wooden cladding has been totally weather-proofed in all areas by the application of a preservative stain, which was skilfully brushed on by T.W.I.G. with gusto, assisted by three willing volunteers from the 1st High Wycombe (Trinity Reform Church) Boys Brigade Company. The oak window frames have now been oiled.

The brown timber preservative has already mellowed the building into its pleasant surroundings, and many enquiries and interest forthcoming from passers-by on the Rye.

The High Wycombe Society's contribution has been inspiration, co-ordination, the Architect, the original cost of the Mill survey, two exhibitions on the mills of the River Wye, and the history and geography of the River, and not least undiluted enthusiasm. The Pann Mill Fund has already paid for tools and timber preservative.

Next the machinery!!



The Official Opening Ceremony.

This took place on the evening of Wednesday, 13th June, at the mill site. Marks and Spencer arranged a reception for the Chairman of Wycombe District Council, Councillor Sydney Goulborn, the Town Mayor, Councillor Betty Barratt, Chairmen of Committees, Officers of the Council, M and S Staff, and representatives of the High Wycombe Society, including those who had worked on the building.



The Manager of the Wycombe Store, Mr. A.J. Turner, summarised the involvement of M and S in their Centenary Year, and presented a large cheque to the Chairman of the Council, who responded with kind words about M and S and the High Wycombe Society's contribution to Pann Mill. There followed the presentation of a framed certificate from the Wycombe District Council to the Vice-Chairman of the Society to mark the timely and valued contribution from the Lottery Fund to the building's completion.

Roger Lawson replied for the Society with appropriate thanks to M and S and the District Council, and with praise to the contractors. It does indeed seem to be just a little while ago that members of T.W.I.G. arranged to turn the wheel at Pann Mill for members of Marks and Spencer on a Sunday morning in October, 1982. This was due to the helpful publicity in the Star newspaper, which recounted the wheel turning on Wycombe Show day that year. It is gratifying to realise how much has been achieved in such a short time.

Visit to Wycombe Abbey Grounds.

On 16th June members of T.W.I.G. with friends were conducted round the grounds of Wycombe Abbey School by Mrs. Amanda Wright, a biology teacher at the School. As with many former private estates, the native species and common immigrant shrubs and trees are complemented by rarer types such as Sweet Gum, Turkey Oak, Indian Bean Tree and Oriental Plane. These were introduced to provide interest and uniqueness style to the property.

The wooded areas are considerable, and intensive husbandry, which is required, is not possible. The grassed and open areas are well cut and the estate has many pleasant visual aspects. It may come as a surprise to know that a local farmer has cattle grazing alongside Marlow Hill, in a large field.

T.W.I.G. is grateful to Mrs. Wright for her kindness in revealing the splendours of the grounds, which are on our doorstep but not normally revealed to us.

Roger Lawson.



Wycombe Abbey Lake

Discovering Thame.

Thame has much to be proud of as we found out during a walkabout of the town. Our guide, Mr. Norman Waters met us near the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, and gave a brief resume of the town's history. He mentioned the flooding of the River Thame, which served as a natural defence for the Saxons against invaders.

Mr. Waters took us first to the Church, pointing out the shot marks pitting part of an outside wall. These were caused by gunfire when the Royalists fought to take Thame from the Cromwellians during the Civil War. Inside the Church we were shown the tomb, complete with effigies, of Lord William and his Lady. Lord William, one of Thame's greatest benefactors, founded the old Grammar School, where John Hampden became a pupil. In his later years, John Hampden was to die in Thame, from wound suffered at the battle of Chalgrove Field. A plaque recording these events is situated in the High Street. Unhappily the old Grammar School stands empty, a victim awaiting its fate ... possibly a change of use to offices!

Closely following Mr. Waters so as not to miss a word he said, we arrived at the High Street to find some of the loveliest timber framed buildings to be seen anywhere. The varying height of their roof tops gives a skyline unsurpassed in any other part of the country. The buildings are well maintained and used as residences or for commercial purposes. One house in particular was of particular interest. On the roof was a tiny figure in stone of a sheep, depicting the fact that this was where the shepherds lived. Soft colour wash on the outside of these graceful old buildings added a touch of elegance. Even the Post Office has abandoned its Reckits Blue image in favour of an -up-market coat of cream wash!

At the top of the High Street the road divides and a cluster of buildings huddle together in the middle to form an island. Centuries ago, squatters set up camps here and despite a complaint from the Monarch at the time, they retained "squatters' rights". Eventually the site was built on and one of the buildings survives today - the Bird Cage Inn. Three storeys high, it used to house lepers on the top floor. They were fed by food put on to long poles and pushed through a hole in the floor! There are many old inns in Thame, some with vast cellars that run underneath the road.

Sympathetic development has occurred in some instances, notably to the old brewery. This has been transformed into a collection of delightful residences. Thame is to be envied in possessing so many beautiful buildings as yet untouched by the bulldozer. Our grateful thanks to Derek Woods for arranging the walkabout which proved to be of such absorbing interest.

Elsie Fowler.



The town centre is a grand old muddle of buildings from different periods. Timber-framed buildings nudge against Victorian bricks; Georgian stucco in multicolours blend with brick buildings of the same period. Perhaps the proximity of different periods and styles offends the purists, but few people would want to change this friendly jumble of buildings each with its own personality and history, for a neat, tidy but uniform modern design.

(Reproduced from "Thame News")

The Changing Face of the Town Centre.

It is quite remarkable how much our shopping and spending habits have changed over the last 10 or so years. For it is within this period that the appearance of the town centre has changed so dramatically. Gone completely are the grocers where you could get $\frac{1}{2}$ lb bacon and a bag of sugar, though thankfully there are still two outlets selling fresh fruit and vegetables and a hot crusty bread shop that always smells divine.

And although we are generally agreed that estate agents and building societies have taken over the High Street, has anyone noticed what has really taken over from the grocer? The TAKE-AWAY! Have 90% of the population given up that quaint old custom of buying raw food and taking it home and cooking it?

It happens so frequently now that as soon as retail premises become vacant in the town centre, a planning application is submitted for change of use to food take-away. In the last year or so, seven or eight additional establishments have opened, with a further two in the pipe-line right now. The most frequently voiced complaint about take-aways is that they create litter because of all the packaging needed to enable hot food to be carried out. Litter, of course, is not a problem in a community where civic pride exists, but it does seem that the people who patronise take-aways are often careless with the associated packaging. Do we in Wycombe suffer more than the next town in this, or is it a national disease?

From the howls of anguish heard just after the last Budget from take-away proprietors about the addition of VAT to their prices, you would expect these places to be closing down and boarding up, but not at all. They seem to be thriving on it!

We know changes must take place as society develops, and it is difficult to try and imagine any town centre in 20 years time; it would be nice to dream that a packet of tea could be bought in the town without having to go and get swallowed up in a supermarket.

Anna Birks.

Quarterly Meeting - Talk by Arthur Percival.

On 5th June, 1984, Mr. Arthur Percival, MBE., FSA., a prominent member of the Civic Trust responsible for local societies, came to High Wycombe for an afternoon trail of the town in the company of our Hon. Secretary, and in the evening to address members and friends assembled for the Society's Quarterly Meeting at the British Legion Hall.

The Civic Trust is an independent organisation set up in 1956 by Duncan-Sandys (now Lord Duncan-Sandys) then Minister of Housing and Local Government. From an office in Carlton House Terrace, with a staff of 20, it represents the environmental movement nationally, and gives support and guidance to all local amenity societies registered with it. Mr. Percival told us that there were over 1000 local amenity societies in the country, with a total membership of 300,000 - greater than the membership of any of the political parties, except the largest, which he did not name.

Mr. Percival spoke for more than hour, illustrating his talk with many fine slides. Space does not permit a full report, or even an adequate summary. All that can be given here is a selection of a few significant points.

The heritage of a town consists largely of its buildings, old not so old, and modern. Mr. Percival urged members of societies to make an effort to get to know the buildings of their town, and thus to become aware of its character. When he helped in the setting up of a Heritage Centre in his home town of Faversham, he realised how much he had yet to learn. He attributed much dismal development not to ill will, but to lack of awareness, and to a feeling that nobody really cared. If members of societies became involved, and showed that they cared, they could persuade others to care also.

He stressed the importance of societies being positive by taking the initiative. The Civic Trust seeks to encourage initiative by awards, commendations and nominal grants. Finance, in Mr. Percival's experience, need not be an insuperable obstacle. The problem was, usually, taking the first step. Once this had been taken, finance could often be provided through the normal forms of fund raising.

Of course, great efforts have to be made. The same applied to other difficulties, such as County Council and District Council not speaking to each other, and the local society breaking through the barrier of silence.

Much improvement of the urban environment can be brought about by a little landscaping, especially of neglected sites, and local amenity societies can often take the initiative. Many slides shown by Mr. Percival demonstrated what had been done in this field. His talk was most encouraging and we must thank Mr. Percival for coming to see us.

Walter Kraft.

The Annual Report of the Civic Trust.

Heritage Outlook is the bi-monthly journal of the Civic Trust, and excellent reading for those concerned about their environment and other related matters. Enclosed with the latest issue was the Annual Report for 1983.

The Report is an interesting document; it is concerned with the way the Trust itself and its registered societies (such as ours) are the Cinderellas of the 1980's, and the way the work we promote is often derided. "The well-being and seemliness of our surroundings is not a negligible matter - an optional extra to be applied when we are feeling flush, to be forgotten when times are difficult". How true!

But in the race for funds to carry out schemes, the cherry on the cake is often left off; tree planting on a housing development isn't done, the derelict site isn't improved, traffic continues to intrude, shoddy design rampages on, and toxic wastes are still dumped. 1983 has seen the Green

Belt threatened; strategic planning is dismissed as outmoded; normal planning controls are circumvented by Ministerial use of the Special Development Order procedures; local authority cuts are cutting into Architects and Planning Departments and Environmental and Civic Design units. The underground services of some cities reached a state of collapse.

The Report laments the low esteem in which environmental matters are held and how, by the work of self-interested "lobbies" they are continually pushed into second place. The Trust lists some of the work they have been involved in over the last year, and puts a first-class continued existence, but funds are low!

The Civic Trust does a lot of worthwhile work and it is sad to read that unless their income improves noticeably over the next three years, many of their projects will have to be cut. This would be bad for the individual areas affected, bad for the people directly involved in the axed project, and bad for the nation as a whole. The Trust's main income derives from Heritage Outlook and other publications, and if you want to keep abreast of events and help the Trust in a meaningful way, please use the subscription form reproduced on page 10.

To deny self-interest as a motive and to disdain "lobbying" is all very laudable, but one wonders if the Trust can afford to be so high-minded. Life can be cruel, and if "lobbyists" achieve their aims, (47-ton lorries?) should they not reconsider the old adage, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em"?

The Branded Image.

Have you ever stopped when out shopping to look searchingly at any High Street or precinct? I don't just mean our local town, but almost anywhere up and down the country. Don't you experience a sort of déjà vu, a feeling of intense familiarity? I want a newspaper or magazine - how about Smith's? I want a chemist - how about Boots? And all those others - I can get that in Marks or Woollies, and so on.

What is it that makes us think instantly of a particular shop or store, even when we are away from home, perhaps on holiday, in an otherwise unfamiliar place? Is it something that has been with us since childhood, an unconscious conditioning brought about by the "Branded Image"?

This image encompasses facades, fascias, window dressing, interior layouts and merchandise. Wherever we are we have the deep sense of familiarity, of non-strangeness, of being immediately at our ease. I have heard it said that we are surrounded by holograms, ethereal images of these establishments that we can walk round or through and still perceive all the familiar trappings, even though they exist only in the imagination. Perhaps slightly far-fetched imagery - or is it? Just think about any place you have visited - can you see the holograms?

Is it more important to retain this sense of ease and be subjected to the boredom of every shopping place looking identical, or do you think that the multiples should be encouraged to develop their sites to reflect their locations? In other words, should the brand image become subservient to the local image and thus make all our towns and cities show a more individual character. We may then be forced to ask, when in a strange place, for Woollies or Boots or instead of saying "I'll just pop over to Woollies".

I don't know the answer. In the meantime I'll just illuminate those holograms with my laser!

Ted Kearney.

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Future Programme.

The following meetings have been arranged and we hope you will make a note of these in your diary.

Thursday, 20th September, 1984, in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street, High Wycombe, at 8 p.m.

Wednesday, 23rd January, 1985, in the Guildhall, High Wycombe at 8 p.m.

Tuesday, 23rd April, 1985, in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street, High Wycombe, at 7.45 p.m.

Tuesday, 11th June, 1985, in the Royal British Legion Hall, St. Mary Street, High Wycombe, at 8 p.m.

Jonathan Porritt, Director of the Friends of the Earth, will talk about the work and aims of the Friends of the Earth.

Mike Farley, Field Officer, Bucks County Council, will give an illustrated talk about Archaeology in Buckinghamshire, with a title of his own choice.

Annual General Meeting of the Society. Details later.

Brian Williamson, Field Officer of B.B.O.N.T. will give an illustrated talk about B.B.O.N.T. and its reserves.

Ron Sims.

HERITAGE OUTLOOK

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