

High Wycombe Society

Newsletter No 74



Merry Christmas to you all!



Winter 89

21st Birthday Celebration

The Society celebrated its coming of age in style in the Oak Room on 10 November with 120 members and guests. (All tickets had been sold, and we apologise to those members who wished to come but were unable to obtain tickets. We should have booked the Town Hall!)

Many of the town's leading citizens were there to wish the Society well. We were pleased to see our former President, Connor Willson, Vice-President Marjorie Nash, and the Editor of the Bucks Free Press, Timothy Blott and Mrs Blott. Ray Whitney MP, in proposing a toast to the Society, commended its watchdog role and humorously referred to "Nimbyism". He knew of one keen conservationist, though, whose principles were not so strong when it came to an offer for part of her garden. She sold it to a developer because the gardening had become too much for her! Needless to say she was not a High Wycombe Society member. The Mayor, Cllr Jim Tanner, in support, paid tribute to Jack Scruton's tireless devotion to the cause of conserving and improving what is best in Wycombe. Our President, L John Mayes, in responding, recalled old Wycombe characters he had known in the '30s, and appealed to members to video or tape-record present day characters for the Museum to keep for posterity. Cllr Kathleen Peatey, one of our Vice-Presidents, in her role as this year's Chairman of Wycombe District Council, presented Chairman Roger Lawson with an engraved glass goblet on behalf of the Council. She recalled her days as a planning watchdog for the Society. She commented on the massive increase in planning applications in recent years, but noted how much less secretive the planning system had now become.

The 21st anniversary cake was cut by Jack and Olive Scruton. This magnificent cake in the shape of a key to the door had been made by Diana Stone, and was decorated with panels depicting the Rye campaign, Pann Mill and the swan logo. The Chairman then presented Jack Scruton with a pen on behalf of the members.

The evening had begun with a delicious buffet. There was a fine choice of sweet and savoury items prepared with much care and effort by Lottie Kearney and her team of helpers. The fine floral centrepiece was the work of Dorothy Tozer, and it was decided this should be the prize in a raffle to be held in support of the Mayor's Appeal for aid to stroke victims. The total sum raised was £120-40, and this has now been sent to the Mayor. The evening was rounded off with music and dancing to Frank Toms' "Hot 5" jazz group.

So ended a memorable evening: many thanks to all who made it such a success.

The Heritage Group.

The Falcon Hotel.

After a lengthy struggle the battle to retain the Falcon has been lost and the only Town Centre Hotel will become retail stores and offices. The developers, using a feasibility report, persuaded the Planning Committee to overturn the earlier decision to refuse the application. The Councillors were intimidated by the figures which placed a question mark over the hotel's viability. It was as if the hotel had no previous history of continued success over a period of over 600 years.

This is a most serious blow in view of the acute need for a town centre hotel/restaurant, and the loss of another large slice of local history. The situation is most discouraging for all those who care about our town and these include a fair number of our Town Councillors. They must be wondering, as we do, if it is worth striving any more to retain what is left of the town's character and history.

1/1A High Street and 6 Church Square.

These two listed buildings which occupy a most important position near the Little Market House have been empty for some time. An application has now been received from a London developer to convert them to a single shop with offices above. This seems to be yet another 'tidying up' job, leaving just a shell and sweeping away all the interesting idiosyncrasies inside. Many of our historic buildings have been ravaged in this way. We have opposed this application very strongly and we hope the District Council will resist this latest assault.

The Old Grammar School, Easton Street.

This fine Victorian building is still threatened. The County Council would like to demolish the building, leaving fragments of the facade, and in its place construct a large office block. The District Council has opposed the application, which may become the subject of a Public Inquiry. The Chiltern Society and the High Wycombe Society have opposed the application for a number of valid reasons. High Wycombe has been afflicted with far too many office blocks and the increased traffic which they generate. We are also worried about the effect of the plans on this important part of the Conservation area.

We have been informed that the County Council has agreed to allow a period of 6 months before proceeding with the application. During that time the District Council is expected to explore various ways in which the building could be used for the benefit of the local community. We would be pleased to hear the views of members.



Drawing by Lorna Cassidy

"..so they've killed it after 600 years!"

No. 34 High Street. Has the tide turned?

This listed property was occupied in recent years by Granada Television. It was "refurbished" later and placed on the market. The Portman Building Society in Easton Street applied to move there, but this was opposed by the District Council and the Society. The Council was particularly anxious to keep these retail premises in view of the serious losses which have occurred in recent years, with changes granted to Building Societies, Banks, and other similar uses. The character of the High Street has suffered as a result.

The Council was very pleased when the Inspector refused the change of use and it was apparent that our contribution was helpful. Perhaps this decision will "stop the rot" and can be used as a precedent against further attempted changes.

Conservation Area - Priory Road District.

This has now been extended by the District Council to embrace Priory Avenue and Benjamin Road. Although many of the houses are a good mixture of Victorian and Edwardian dwellings, the area has suffered a great deal of neglect, and looks forlorn. One of the greatest problems is the difficulty of extensive on-street parking. It is hoped by the District Council that the designation as a Conservation Area will help to improve the appearance of the area, including the protection of trees. The Heritage Group hopes to complete its survey of the area and this has been welcomed by the District Council.

21st Birthday Exhibition.

This was shown in the Library from 4th to 23rd September and seemed to arouse much interest in the work of the Society. The Exhibition displayed some aspects of our activities but could not show all that we get up to because of space restrictions. We are indebted to members of the Heritage Group and Dr. Elsa Woodward for their efforts. As usual, Alan Cleaver came to our aid with his fine posters and attractive calligraphy.

~ Planning Group ~

Redfords Playing Fields, Totteridge.

The battle for these extremely important playing fields continues. The District Council has refused the County Council application to develop the site for housing and the matter has now gone to appeal. No doubt there will be a Public Inquiry. The Society and many others consider this to be a most damaging application. This playing field is an absolute necessity for the local community and the District Council can be assured of the maximum possible support.

The Bus Station.

An application has been submitted to convert the Bus Station to retail use and to use the existing open car parking area at Newlands as a Bus Station, without the servicing of buses. The proposals are in their early stages and will obviously lead to much further discussion. No doubt many people will welcome the disappearance of the very unpleasant Bus Station, which has been the target for much justified criticism.

Tesco.

Tesco have submitted a proposal for an additional Superstore at Hancock's Yard, Loudwater. The outline application is almost completely lacking in information and the District Council has asked for much more. It seems that there could be an extremely difficult traffic situation. We will keep a very close watch on future developments

Roads, roads, roads.

Have you noticed in recent weeks, among the increasing number of "green" issues being raised in the Press, how often the subject of roads appears. Consider a few examples.

Los Angeles Usually thought of as the city where the car is king, where there are 8 million cars for a 12 million population, where 1/3 of the area is covered by roads, 1/3 by car parks, with just 1/3 left for everything else, and where there is, of course, also a killer smog from vehicle exhaust gases, LA has at last decided that enough is enough. Life must be made more tolerable for people; car usage must be cut. To start with, large firms are being made to organise car sharing schemes for their employees; next a limit is to be placed on the number of cars per family; and, in the longer term, petrol and diesel will be phased out in favour of electricity and cleaner fuels.

Sweden The boss of Volvo, the car manufacturer, has voiced the opinion that cars will have to be banned from city-centres within the next ten years, because of snarl-ups and pollution.

Britain In what seems to be contrary to world trends, our Department of Transport is reckoning on a traffic increase of between 83 and 142 percent by the year 2025, and plans to spend another £12 billion on new and improved roads and motorways. This announcement has led nine leading environmental organisations, including the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Ramblers' Association, the Worldwide Fund for Nature, Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000, to join in a campaign against the plan. They hold the view that more road space encourages more cars, and causes more pollution and loss of rural land; and who can dispute this? More must be done, they say, to curb the car and encourage public transport. No political party would want to risk losing votes by taking a stand against the

car, and none of us would want to give it up without a good alternative, but for the sake of the community some tough controls will eventually have to be imposed.

High Wycombe Nearer home, Wycombe District Council and Bucks County Council still seem to be set on a course of road building and consequential damage to our town's environment, which they think will solve Wycombe's traffic problems. The roads in question are the northern relief road from Temple End to the Law Courts via Priory Avenue and the railway station, and the A404 diversion from Inkerman Farm, Hazlemere to Temple End via Hughenden Valley. All this expense and permanent upheaval is an attempt to ease some of the snarl-ups which occur only at peak times, when it will be observed that about 7 out of 10 cars are occupied only by the driver, or by the driver and child.

The High Wycombe Society urges the Councils to take note of the views of the Inspector who conducted the Public Inquiry into the High Wycombe Area Local Plan. He commented that these and other road proposals were "based on very old studies, and the solutions were arrived at when less was known of the impact of new roads on the built environment". He recommended new studies.

We think Britain ought to follow LA's example and take some action to break out of the more roads/more cars/more pollution cycle. Here are some ideas to pursue:

- * get firms to organise car sharing for their workers
- * reduce car perks for employees, and car parks for that matter
- * get schools and PTAs to organise minibuses to ferry children to and from school
- * organise park-and-ride schemes for shoppers and tourists
- * make more use of chicanes and ramps in town-centres where it is not

possible to ban traffic altogether
 * encourage more home deliveries by shops.
 Have you any more ideas that we can
 put to our District and County
 Councillors?

Somehow, public transport must be made
 more attractive, more readily
 available and cheaper than personal
 transport for the majority if we are
 to save our environment from the
 menace of the motor vehicle.

John Gore

*Come and hear what Stephen Joseph of
 Transport 2000 has to say about
 traffic and roads at our next
 Quarterly Meeting on Thursday 18
 January 1990 at 8pm in the Royal
 British Legion Hall. If you would
 like to help form a Roads Group in the
 Society please contact the Hon Sec on
 HW26671.*



Marjorie Nash: Vice President

It was at the High Wycombe Society's Annual General Meeting of 1977 that I proposed Marjorie Nash as a Vice President. I reckoned as a Wycombe woman born and bred, and as a person who loved and cared for our town, she was eminently suited to be one of the Society's VPs.

Lady Nancy Hall tapped me on the shoulder after I had made the proposal and the meeting had approved, and said 'What a very good choice!'

Marjorie has filled the rôle to the manner born. She still lives in the same house in Pinions as she has done since she was a child. She will still write a letter to the council if a listed building is under threat. She still is vitally involved in many, many activities in and around the town. She goes to most of the High Wycombe Society's meetings, and will praise and enthuse in a most vice-presidential manner.

And in August she celebrated her 85th birthday. Most of the month was given over to her birthday celebrations in one way and another! A veritable triumphal progress for a redoubtable woman.

Marjorie, dear, every member of the High Wycombe Society joins me in congratulating you, and wishing you many more happy birthdays!

Frances Alexander

Canal trip

This year the almost annual Society canal trip to Hungerford on the Kennet and Avon took place on a perfect June day, when we assembled on the pavement by Stewart & Arnold, with bare arms, bulging picnic bags and not a brolly in sight to await the coach which was to take us to the canal at Kintbury for our journey in a horse-drawn boat.

On our arrival there, those of us who cannot resist a derelict property went to look over the old lock-keeper's cottage, for sale. It was a sad case of neglect and unsympathetic modernisation and would take much effort to restore, and so we decided to leave this one alone. Besides, it was outside our manor...

The boat had arrived. We embarked and arranged ourselves into comfortable lunching positions (Derek Woods had told me that the first thing most people did when they were in the boat was eat, and he was right). The captain's mate welcomed us to the hazards of canals and the pleasures of the bar. We would hardly think we were moving, she knew, but would we please wait until the boat stopped before leaving it, and if we ignored this request there would be much wailing and gnashing of teeth on her part. We did and there was, but we rose above it. The bos'n and his mate were splendid. (The captain was presumably avoiding us by staying away from the boat.) They navigated the canal with a skill and cooperation which were a pleasure to watch (particularly as it was so hot). Their party piece was turning the boat around with a pole and a rope, impeccably.

Apart from having to conform to Kennet and Avon safety regulations, it was an occasion to do as you please. We could stroll in the shade along the bank, peer into locks, encourage the horse, and some of us even jumped from the moving boat when we thought no-one important was watching. We felt quite



separated from normal existence - a bridge carrying cars over our route seemed an affront to our pace and style. Somehow, we didn't quite reach Hungerford, but it didn't seem to matter.

Thank you, Derek, for arranging a very enjoyable and unforgettable summer day. ~Judy Vince.

AS WE WERE - FROM THE NEWSLETTER FILE

10 YEARS AGO (NO 38) AUTUMN 1979

The local authority takes drastic action and demolishes a large part of the Old Chequers on the grounds of public safety. The Society considers it would have been possible to make the building safe without demolition. Copies of the Water Trail are now available at 10p each; hundreds sold at Pann Mill during Wycombe Show. Social events: visit to Hatfield House and Poolside Revels at Holywell Mead swimming pool.

20 YEARS AGO (NO 3) NOVEMBER 1969

Draft plans for Conservation Areas published; Society presses for expansion. Three Tuns reprieved from redevelopment, but fight goes on to retain Old Chequers. Society publishes report on improving Railway Place and Quaker burial ground, which have become terrible eyesores. Society suggests derelict Pann Mill site should become a museum. Competition launched for Society symbol.

The Chiltern Society Small Woodland Project Ltd

The Chiltern Society Small Woodland Project was set up in August 1983 following persistent reports of the threat to Chiltern woodlands - the threat of woodland devastation, arising from the neglect by owners over many years. The Project objective was, and is, to persuade owners to take up management, and, as an encouragement to owners, to undertake some woodland work ourselves by way of demonstration of the techniques advocated.

Initially, the Project team was composed of Community Programme workers, and only the Project Officer, John Morris, had forestry experience. He had been recruited from Dorset County Council where he had been doing conservation work. Small beginnings! But nowadays the team is made up of five trained and experienced men under the supervision of Pete Whipp, himself an experienced forestry graduate. Over the past six years, John has advised more than 200 owners; the team has worked in more than 100 woods, and 34 000 trees have been planted, 12 000 of them last year.

With the end of the Community Prog-

ramme last September, the Project became wholly dependent upon the Chiltern local authorities and the Countryside Commission. To meet the new circumstances, the Project became a Company, limited by guarantee, known as the Chiltern Woodland Project Limited. Twelve directors have been appointed; six from the local authorities, one from FWAG and six from the Chiltern Society. John Morris and myself, who have been associated with the Project from the start, are both directors. There are no shareholders, but instead there are members.

The Project is having a good year. We are more efficient than at any time in the past. Currently we are involved in felling 1500 dead or dying conifers - a job we could not have tackled at one time - and we have won our first award, in a competition organised by UK2000.

For the future? Clearly this must depend on the local authorities continuing support. We now make a small charge for our work, and this year will earn £2000, but it will be some time before we can be self-supporting. We have plans to develop the Project, but always with our basic objectives in mind.

Anyone wanting further information about the Project can be sent a copy of the 5th Annual Report by writing to the Project Office, Forestry District Office, Upper Icknield Way, Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, HP22 5NF. Please enclose a large SAE.

Charles Mills

Charles Mills is Chairman of Chiltern Woodland Project Ltd. He is also a member of our Society. One of the projects covered in the 5th Annual Report is management work in Castlefield and Rowcliffe Woods off New Road, Booker. These ancient woods are owned by Wycombe District Council. The Project makes a plea that the Council will organise clearance of rubbish in the woods, to improve their attractiveness as an area for quiet recreation near the centre of High Wycombe.



The Future of leisure in High Wycombe

Neil Roberts, Chief Leisure Officer, Wycombe District Council, spoke on the future of leisure in High Wycombe at the Society's June Quarterly Meeting. Barbara Rippington reports..

Mr Roberts' launch into his excellent talk can, in retrospect, be called euphoric. That same evening the Wycombe District Council Entertainment Centre Panel were to meet to view the architect's new plans for the proposed Leisure Centre. The revised programme for its construction was expected to be two and a half to three years. Besides a 1000-seat capacity theatre, a studio theatre and much else, we were to look forward to the refurbishment of the Town Hall to a standard of high quality by the same architectural team responsible for the highly-praised refurbishment of Missenden Abbey.

Mr Roberts is not to blame for the lack of progress or agreement on this venture. His enthusiasm for this, and all aspects of leisure in Wycombe, for what he had achieved, and hoped to achieve, was infectious. We were treated to delightful slides of croquet at Bassetsbury; a great range of activities on the Rye; bowls,

weight-lifting, swimming, ball-games at the Sports Centre - and the sauna and jacuzzi there. This last attraction motivated one of our lady members to try to organise an evening for members to try it out - it is emphasised, the sexes are segregated - names to Annie Woodward, please.

We learned about the Hilltop Community Centre, the new Tourist Information Centre (too small but better location), the Court Garden Leisure complex at Marlow, and plans to extend the Museum with further, not alternative, accommodation in the new High Wycombe Leisure Centre. Those disappointed at the failure of George Suter's attempts to create a golf course in the Hughenden Valley might be encouraged by the Town Farm Golf Centre (pay as you play) at Loudwater, completion date May 1990.

Mr Roberts has done well with the £2m improvement money he had to spend this financial year. If there were, as he anticipated, brickbats awaiting him from the audience, his demonstration of care and consideration for all sections of the community seemed to allay them, for there were none.

Barbara Rippington

New Members :-

We warmly welcome the affiliation of the newly-formed Totteridge Residents' Action Campaign.

The success of recent publicity has resulted in the following new members joining the Society. We are delighted to welcome them and hope they will be able to play an active part in our work.

Mr R F Swains, Kingsmead Road, High Wycombe

Mr & Mrs J W Beaumont, Upper Stanley Road,

Sands

Miss C Pyle, Watchet Lane, Holmer Green

Mrs S G Bowles, Brackley Road, Hazlemere

Ms T Warren, Balmoral Court, Wycombe Chase

Mr S M Howe, Terryfield Road, High Wycombe

Mr & Mrs P Dennison, Trees Road, Hughenden Valley

Mr & Mrs J L Carr & family, Amersham Road, High Wycombe

Mr S Alexander, Chestnut Ave, High Wycombe

Mr F Brunner, Station Road, High Wycombe

M I Connell, White Close, High Wycombe

Mr P Lewis, Cock Lane, High Wycombe

We also welcome the return to the area of Miss E Robin, Windsor End, Beaconsfield

A brighter Octagon

After many months of dust and noise and much hassle for the shopkeepers, the Octagon is reaching the end of its refurbishment programme. Denise Lindsay gives her impressions....

I have a car sticker on my fridge which states "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping". And it has been pretty tough shopping in the Octagon over the past few months (if not the past twenty years). However, it has been worth putting up with all the noise and mess, for now that disreputable Sixties-styled shoppers' Hades has at last been totally transformed. In fact, in my humble opinion, I would say that this new-look centre is now worthy of the title "arcade".

Somehow, the very word "precinct" conjures up a picture of concrete, run-down squalor, graffiti and gloom, while "arcade" seems to imply elegance, style and civility. At least, that's how I see it.

At the time of writing, the work is still unfinished, though that's hardly surprising when you consider the enormity of the task. However, that ugly old concrete staircase has gone, replaced by a much friendlier-looking type, and the overall impression of the arcade is one of lightness and brightness, thanks to improved lighting, tiled-patterned flooring and a glass roof. Who would have thought that the sun could ever shine in the Octagon!

These days, no shopping mall worth its salt is without a water feature, and our Octagon is no exception. There is one of these under the Octagon itself, along with an escalator. Let's hope that the yob element in the town keep well away from it!

The upper floor has been made much

more inviting, and will include a new cafe, a welcome addition as the town has been short of pleasant eating and meeting places for a long time.

So, all in all, I think the design team and the workmen have done a good job. The ugly concrete precinct has been magically transformed into a glamorous arcade, and we'll all shop happily ever after!

Denise Lindsay



Wycombe Sinfonia

During the past 21 years, the High Wycombe Society has had the affiliation and support of many local groups, such as residents associations, political organisations and Women's Institutes. There are currently 32 affiliated societies. It is very unusual for an Amenity Society to have so many local contacts, which is a tribute to Jack Scruton's vision and persistence in involving so many people, even from the early days of the Society. We are now delighted to welcome the affiliation of a local orchestra, the Wycombe Sinfonia. The orchestra, comprising mostly local teachers, is five years old and performs two concerts a year, the biggest being last June with Iris Loveridge. With John Dunnett as

conductor and Pam Abbott as leader, the orchestra has developed a tradition of special Christmas concerts, aimed at children (of all ages!). Previous concerts, with narrated items, have included Peter and the Wolf, The Snowman and The Three Bears. This year's family concert, with narrator, has space and time as its themes, including Mars and Jupiter from The Planets suite and the Clock Symphony. Due to the popularity of the event, this year there will be two performances of the concert - on Saturday December 2nd at 3.30pm, and on Sunday December 3rd at 3pm at St John's Hall, Desborough Road, High Wycombe. Tickets are available from Percy Prior's Music Shop, The Octagon, High Wycombe. They deserve our support!

Annie Woodward

Dates for your diary

Saturday 25 November -
Sunday 3 December 1989

Thursday 18 January 1990 8pm
Royal British Legion Hall

Thursday 15 March 1990 8pm
Oak Room, Town Hall

Thursday 19 April 1990 7.45pm
Royal British Legion Hall

Saturday 28 April - Monday
7 May 1990

National Tree Week

Roads and Transport Stephen Joseph
of Transport 2000

Wycombe Arts Festival Lecture
Vernacular Architecture Professor
Roger Scruton

AGM followed by Chiltern Woodland
Project Limited Charles Mills,
Chairman of the Project

Environment Week 1990

