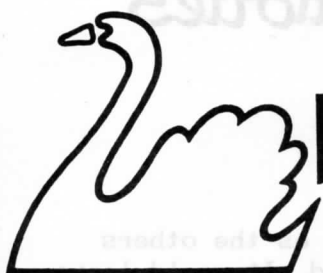


The High Wycombe Society

(Registered with the Civic Trust)



Newsletter

Your town is our concern

No. 77

Registered Charity No. 257897

Autumn 1990

New thinking on transport

In July, about 200 copies of the newly-published High Wycombe Society booklet *New Thinking on Transport* were sent to all County and District Councillors, to key County and District officials, to certain local firms and other organisations, and to the local Press. The 16-page booklet puts forward the Society's views on local road proposals and calls on the local planning and transport authorities to:

- (a) Abandon out-of-date plans for costly new roads, such as the destructive Northern Relief Road
- (b) Adopt an environment-friendly approach which conserves energy and makes the most efficient use of present roads for traffic and pedestrians
- (c) Develop the new thinking on transport which has already resulted in radical measures being implemented in many places around the world.

The Society has held strong views on the Northern Relief Road since it was first proposed over 10 years ago, arguing that it would not make much impact on the Wycombe's traffic problems, but that it would cause tremendous destruction of the town's environment.

The booklet refers to increasing world-wide concern about the effects of traffic as a major contributor to the greenhouse effect, and reviews action being taken in many other countries to reduce car usage and hence to reduce the pressure to build new roads. It is our sincere hope that, as a result of our initiative in publishing this booklet, the local authorities will institute fresh studies into traffic in High Wycombe and district, and move towards a more environment-friendly transport policy.

Our thanks are due to the Society's Roads Group who produced the booklet, and, in particular, to Elsa Woodward, the Group convenor, who has put in a tremendous amount of time and effort studying local traffic and researching international responses to traffic problems.

ROGER LAWSON

Some Ulycombe Memories

by

Thelma Elizabeth Vernon

Denis and I loved trains, and were conscious always of the closeness of the Railway Station. For a year or two at 9 and 10 years we went to Miss Maud North's Preparatory School on Priory Hill. When lunchtime came we fairly ran down Priory Avenue to get to the Station to see the sight of the day: the Manchester Express. It came in in grand style, and at ten to one, with tremendous noise, it started off on its long journey. It was absolutely the thrill of the day. I can just remember the first arrival of the Great Central Railway (this was in 1906). The engine had several flags folded on it, and there were the Mayor and Corporation, but I could not see well and was never sure if they travelled all the way from London. I was holding my Mother's hand.

We had a strict nursery upbringing, and had lunch with our parents one at a time, and were not allowed to speak unless spoken to until about ten years old. We had 1d (one old penny) per week pocket money, a little more for an outing. We used to get Nanny or later Miss Medcraft, our nursery governess (beloved Medi), to take us down to Crendon Lane (now Crendon Street) to spend it. We went to Mrs Varney's little shop, later taken over by Mrs Busbridge. They were good to us. I do not know how it was managed, but I would get a pink-covered "Books for Bairns" with tales of King Arthur's Knights, Robin Hood etc. and two boiled sweets. This was the the old bottle-neck Crendon Lane with many old houses, and Crendon Lane Chapel, where John Wesley was said to have preached all those years ago. I was sorry to see it demolished later on, but it was dangerous at the foot of Amersham Hill for cars and other traffic.

We wanted to see the cows come out of their pasturing on the Rye at about 3pm each day, but noone wanted to take us. Mr and Mrs Ralph Birch next door to us had a

cow. It was as clever as the others knowing where it lived. It would leave the little procession up Easton Street and turn into Crendon Lane on its own and slowly proceed up Amersham Hill until it came to the double gates of Hillside where it would stand and moo. Then Bates the gardener would come down, open the gate and escort the cow to its shed where it was milked, often we children watching behind our fence hidden by bushes.

Tremendous changes came after the First War. There was an enormous increase in population, many from Wales, who formed a glorious choir, and great building of small houses over many fields. I remember Bowerdean Farm at the foot of Totteridge Hill, long now a housing estate. We used to love going to Totteridge Wood to play and have a picnic. We would buy a bottle of Cherryade from Mrs Randall's shop. It was nectar to us, and then have a happy time among the beautiful beech trees, looking for beech nuts and any wild



Illustration by Elizabeth Beard

flowers. A special treat was to go at the top of the two-horse bus to West Wycombe: the cost was 2d(1p) each! We loved West Wycombe Hill, and loved climbing to the top and spending the whole afternoon there looking for *wagwantingtons* (quaking grass), and also visiting the front of the caves, which was very eerie to us: they were all locked up then. Another favourite spot was Hughenden Park and the stream, with two swans called Mr and Mrs Sydney Vernon! Three generations of Vernons were agents to the Disraeli's, who were kind to us children. Each Spring we went by the two-horse bus to the Old King of Prussia Inn, Wycombe Marsh (renamed King George V during the War), to search for cowslips in Kings Mead, a flower I find enchanting to this day.

Before the First War I used to be dressed up like a white sugar cake with hat to match to go out with much-loved Grandma Vernon in her victoria. James Haddock, the coachman, was on the box with top hat, very smart. We used to go slowly down the hill, through narrow Crendon Lane, and then trot along Easton Street to Loudwater, where we turned back. My godfather, Mr George Wheeler, and his wife had a similar carriage. They lived in a large, early 19th century house, The Limes, in Easton Street, long ago demolished. Mr and Mrs Daniel Clarke, who lived in Totteridge Road, near Borshams, also had a victoria. Our servants told us there had been an awful scene one afternoon just as Mrs Clarke was going out for a drive. A poor frightened stag and some hounds from the Drag Hunt burst into the place. Mrs Clarke stood up in her carriage flourishing her parasol and went for the hunt followers. Well done, Mrs Clarke!

As the years went on, I became more and more conscious of the beauty of the hills round Wycombe and how handsome was the long wide High Street, with many 18th century houses, and the Guildhall at the far end. I admired the Guildhall immensely and considered it the finest civic building in the South Midlands. These feelings have never left me, and whenever I am in Wycombe I never turn

into the High Street from Crendon Street without a feeling of great pleasure that I was born in such a town, in spite of the fact that so many unfortunate things have been done to it even since we left, rather sadly, on 1 September 1954.

(Editor's note: We are grateful to Miss Vernon for her delightful reminiscences of High Wycombe in her childhood. If any more of our members have similar memories which they think may interest our readers, please get in touch with the Hon Sec, John Gore.)

Write to:

John Gore
30 Woodworth Rd
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire



Quiz time:

In his book *The Buildings of England - Buckinghamshire*, published in 1960, Nikolaus Pevsner describes the following house in High Wycombe:

"...an interesting 17th century house with three gables, an oversailing upper floor, quoins, a rusticated ground floor, mullioned and transomed windows, two-canted oriels, and a bit of balustrading at the sill of the middle window. Inside some minor Jacobean fireplaces."

Where do you think it is? The answer is "Nowhere", for sadly the house has been pulled down. Next question: where did it stand? See page 7 of this Newsletter for the answer. Don't put yourself out looking for a superior replacement building now however because, having seen it, you would feel badly let down by the 1960s planners and architects, or lack of them!

Letters to the editor



Dear Editor

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY: IMPROVEMENT AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

The Environmental Strategy Consultative Draft for the Wycombe District contains many proposals aimed at improving our town and its environs. Having recently prepared a detailed response to the consultation document on behalf of the Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group, however, I can foresee considerable conflict between the proposals for improving areas of neglect and the proposals for green space within urban areas.

The talk by David Turner at the last Quarterly Meeting illustrated many ways of improving the appearance of the urban environment in relation to housing, industrial and recreational areas; and all seemed to promote the concept of tidiness. In order to adopt the suggested policy of improving habitats for wildlife conservation in urban areas, however, it would be necessary to leave sufficient unimproved areas. The creation of nature reserves within urban areas would certainly help to conserve wildlife, but such reserves tend to be enriched by a greater diversity of species when linked to each other and to the urban fringe by "wildlife corridors". Such corridors do not have to be created because they already exist in the form of roadside verges, footpath edges, trees and hedges, river banks, railway embankments, public parks and private gardens. All of these locations help to conserve urban wildlife: the extent to which they do so depends on their management, which can either be sympathetic towards wildlife conservation or can contribute towards its extinction.

In considering improvements to railway embankments, industrial areas, green spaces etc, the need to preserve their value as wildlife corridors must be taken into account. It is important when landscaping areas always to plant native trees and shrubs, and the subsequent management should be planned to complement rather than detract from the wildlife value of the site. My pet hate is to see grassland habitat mown just as the best of its flowers are about to come into bloom: this frequently happens on roadside verges and it even occurred on the Rye just as the fritillaries in the wildflower meadow near the waterfall were about to flower.

If any readers are interested in finding out more about urban wildlife conservation in High Wycombe, I would be pleased to hear from them: my telephone number is High Wycombe 438374.

Yours etc

Roger Wilding



WASTE COSTS THE EARTH

Wycombe Friends of the Earth have produced a booklet entitled "Waste Costs the Earth" on all aspects of recycling in Wycombe and district. If you would like a copy, please send a request to Lyn Jack, 349 London Road, High Wycombe, HP11 1EJ with a SAE and 30p in stamps.



The Heritage Group

On 19 June, at the Friends' Meeting House, Martin Andrew, the Council's Conservation Officer, gave an illustrated talk to the Heritage Group and Residents' Association representatives on the subject of Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas. He traced the development of legislation concerning their protection and stressed the need for continual vigilance. He provided a most interesting sequence of local historic buildings and Conservation Areas and showed examples of the way new buildings could enhance these areas. He expressed concern about the town centre of High Wycombe, which was once well known for its wealth of historic buildings. He pointed out that many of these were now merely facades as their interesting interiors had been swept away. He accused banks and building societies of being the main culprits.

It was obvious that Martin is deeply committed to his work and certainly there is enough to keep him fully stretched! The Society supports him entirely and we hope we will be able to provide help in one form

or another to retain what is left of our heritage.

JACK SCRUTON

If you would like to join the Heritage Group, please contact Jack Scruton HW25933. A secretary is urgently needed for the Group.

The drawing of the Little Market House has been reproduced by kind permission of Lorna Cassidy.

Visit to Pitstone

On Saturday 2 June, members of the Heritage Group and friends paid a visit to Pitstone, near Tring, where Jeff Hawkins, who farms Pitstone Green Farm, conducted us on a fascinating tour of local treasures. We began with a visit to the delightful church



The Society's quarterly meeting

The Society's Quarterly Meeting on 7 June took the form of a talk by David Turner of Wycombe District Council's Policy Planning Unit. David, who specialises in urban environmental enhancement, has been closely involved in the preparation of the draft environmental strategy for the Wycombe District, and his talk centred around three of the issues covered in the Council's consultation draft: neglect, heritage and design.

David commenced his talk by explaining the Council's intended policy of developing working relationships with others, both individuals and organisations, to enhance the environment, and their wish to publicise the range of the environmental services they provide. The Council plans to develop its strategy covering the next five years taking into account the views of the public.

Ways in which housing improvement areas can be enhanced by changes to street layout, improved car parking facilities and tree planting were illustrated with slides taken both in High Wycombe and elsewhere: Hughenden Road was used to show the need for improvement within certain housing areas within the town, and the Cressex Industrial Estate was cited as being in need of considerable improvement. The enhancement of White Hart Street illustrated steps already taken to improve the town centre. The possibility of improving the appearance of the railway approaches to the town in conjunction with British Rail was mentioned. This might include the cleaning and repointing of the brickwork on the Temple End viaduct and the landscaping of embankments.

Slides illustrating both urban and village conservation areas within the Wycombe District were used to stress the importance of preserving our local heritage and of ensuring that street furniture, building materials and shop frontages are as far as possible in keeping with their

of St Mary the Virgin, which is now in the care of the Redundant Churches Fund. The church has a number of treasures, including a beautiful Norman font and a splendid 15th century tower. The children present were delighted when Jeff gave them permission to ring the bells. Pauline Cauvain was equally delighted to find a collection of Penn tiles in the chancel floor.

We then visited Pitstone Windmill, an ancient post mill. Fully restored by local enthusiasts, it belongs to the National Trust. The mill is turned into the wind manually by the tailpole which is mounted on a cartwheel. We looked with awe and admiration at the size of the massive timbers and the ingenuity of those who created the mill.

Our final visit was to Jeff's own farm at Pitstone Green, which houses a Farm Museum. There are countless items of farming and country life from earlier times, when the whole community was involved in a multitude of tasks to do with farming and country crafts. The Museum occupies all the farm buildings, and, if Jeff is not careful, it is likely to burrow into his house any day now!

The visit to Pitstone was most rewarding, and this was due in large measure to the kindness and hospitality of Jeff Hawkins. We hope to pay another visit at some time to explore local earth works and the water mill at Ivinghoe.

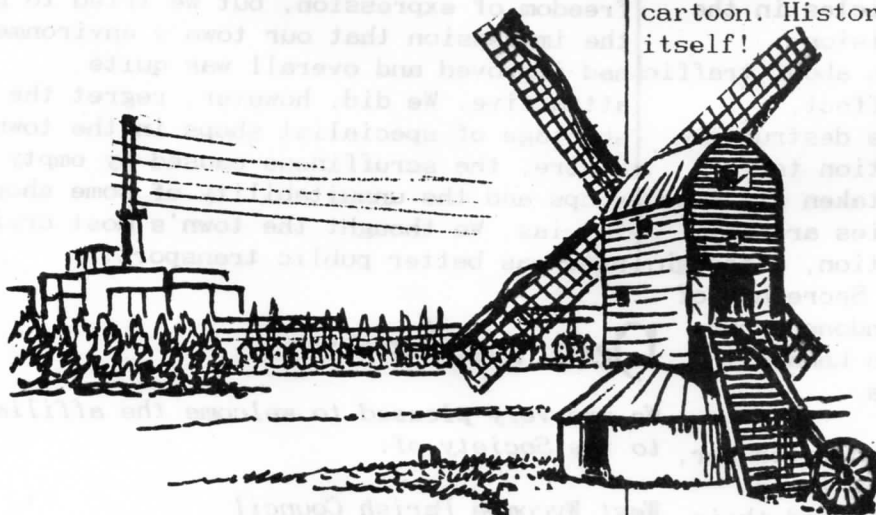
JACK SCRUTON

surroundings. Slides showing some of our local shop front eyesores were interspersed with examples of what has been achieved in some towns by the use of appropriate materials.

David Turner's third topic was the design of new developments ensuring a positive interaction with their surroundings. Illustrations of modern yet traditional design for a wide range of locations from London's Docklands to Yorkshire showed what can be achieved by property developers if they are encouraged to consider the quality of their design and materials. The problems of litter, vandalism, fly-posting and fly-tipping were referred to, and the effects of environmental improvements in reducing the extent of these problems were discussed.

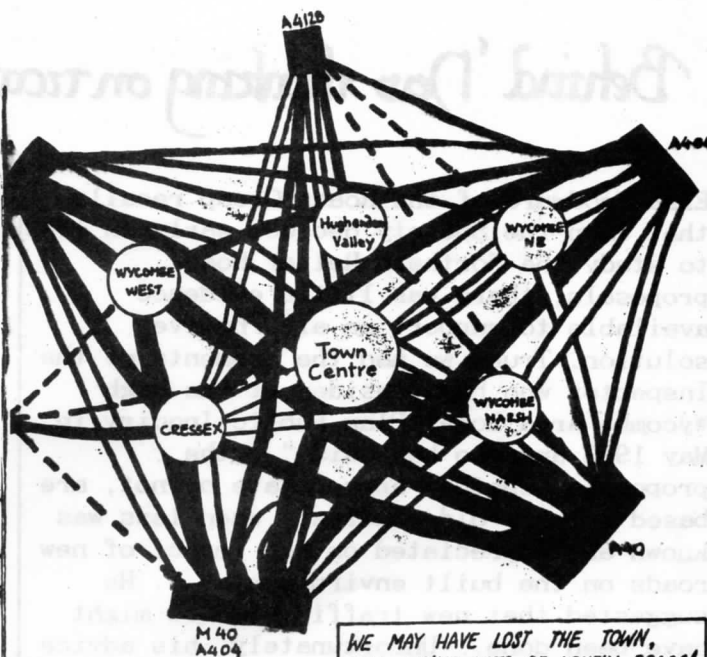
Following a lively question time, Frances Alexander gave a vote of thanks to David Turner for his interesting and thought-provoking presentation of a subject so closely related to our Society's raison-d'etre.

ROGER WILDING



In the distance:

the cement works:



WE MAY HAVE LOST THE TOWN,
BUT WE'VE LOTS OF LOVELY ROADS!

Ten years ago, Newsletter No 41 (Summer 1980) carried an item entitled ROADS, ROADS AND YET MORE ROADS by our late Chairman, Ted Kearney. This followed the issue of Wycombe Area District Plan Policy Document No 7 - Transportation. Ted wrote:

"Undoubtedly we have our traffic problems, as have most towns, but we need better solutions in all parts of the town, rather than massive and very expensive road works." The item was accompanied by this cartoon. History seems to be repeating itself!

MYSTERY BUILDING

Answer to the quiz on page 3. The building was 17 Easton Street, replaced by the British Telecom offices (now empty and up for sale) almost opposite the Army Recruiting Office.

Behind 'New thinking on transport'

Elsa Woodward of the Roads Group recalls that when the Society decided early in 1989 to study the Northern Relief Road proposals, there was little evidence available to support an alternative solution. True, we had the comments of the Inspector who had presided at the High Wycombe Area Local Plan Public Inquiry in May 1988 and who had said "...the proposals, whether appropriate or not, are based on very old studies...when less was known and appreciated on the impact of new roads on the built environment...". He suggested that new traffic studies might have been done. Unfortunately, his advice was ignored and the road stayed in the final Plan.

Then, last summer, the Pearce Report, sponsored by the Department of the Environment, was published. Professor Pearce insisted that a "positive economic value" should be allocated to any loss or damage to the environment when calculating the true cost of, say, a road-building project. If this were done then the balance could well be tipped against the project's viability. Since then, there have been countless news items and articles in the press and on radio and television expressing world-wide concern about traffic congestion, the greenhouse effect, atmospheric pollution and the destruction of the urban environment. Action to restrain car usage is being taken all over the world: many other countries are way ahead of the UK in taking action, although, even here, Mr Parkinson, the Secretary of State for Transport, has abandoned some destructive road proposals in London in order to have second thoughts.

In California, the land of the motor-car, it has been realised that even their massive road network has not cured their horrendous traffic problems: they have instituted measures to ensure sharing of vehicles and to reduce the number of car journeys. Since our booklet has been issued, it has been reported that California is about to double its petrol tax, and will devote the proceeds to improve the rail network!

High Wycombe really must learn from the rest of the world that the answer to the traffic problem is not more roads but less traffic!

JOHN GORE

Just a couple of weeks after being issued, our booklet seems to be arousing considerable interest, nationally as well as locally. We hope there will be some copies available for sale to members at the October Quarterly Meeting at £2 each.

A UK audit of the environment.

Along with more than 900 other amenity societies registered with the Civic Trust, the High Wycombe Society has taken part in a survey "UK Audit of the Environment" run by the Trust in association with Mortgage Express Ltd. As is often the case with such surveys, the questions did not allow much freedom of expression, but we tried to give the impression that our town's environment had improved and overall was quite attractive. We did, however, regret the shortage of specialist shops in the town centre, the scruffiness caused by empty shops and the unsuitability of some shop fascias. We thought the town's most crying need was better public transport.

New members:~

We are very pleased to welcome the affiliation to the Society of:

West Wycombe Parish Council

We also warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs J Greenwood, High Lea Avenue, Flackwell Heath

Mr G O Engel, Brackley Road, Hazlemere

Planning News

John North Playing Fields

Despite strong opposition from our District Council, supported by the Society, the Inspector in charge of the Public Inquiry gave permission for 120 houses on the playing field. Quite apart from the loss of yet another valuable recreational area, there will be a serious increase in traffic using the Handy Cross roundabout, which is already chaotic. Much pressure has been exerted on the County Council recently to alleviate the great problem, but it prefers to support housing development which will increase very considerably this very serious problem.

THE OLD LADY VERNEY SCHOOL

The County is in the dock again. The recent application to develop the school site at Benjamin Road is perhaps the most damaging of all the County's efforts. The site is an attractive feature of the Priory Road Conservation Area, with a very fine and prominent position and many beautiful trees, mainly limes. If the County succeeds it would mean a dense grouping of houses, the destruction of many fine trees, the loss of the original and interesting school building, and a great increase in traffic in an already congested area. The government and English Heritage have stressed repeatedly the need to protect and enhance Conservation Areas, but the County has totally ignored this advice. No wonder members of our District Council were incensed at the recent planning meeting when the application was discussed. The County authority has stressed recently in the County pamphlet

"Aims and Priorities 1990-94" that it is concerned about making Buckinghamshire a better place for all the inhabitants. Perhaps High Wycombe has been placed in some kind of exclusion zone!

Jack Scruton

Wycombe District Council's Woodland Strategy

One hundred guests were listed to attend the WDC Woodland Strategy launch at Court Garden Leisure Complex on April 24 1990 and most, plus others, were there - encouraging evidence of the interest in our woodlands (or prior knowledge of the excellent buffet provided). They included representatives of County, District and Parish Councils, Amenity Groups and local industry.

The purpose is to preserve the woodland character of the District, in sad decline due to persistent neglect and savaged by two violent storms in the past three years.

Most of the beechwood remaining is mature or over mature. To this end the Wycombe District Council commissioned the Economic Forestry Group to prepare a strategy for woodland management and rejuvenation of the 70 hectares in all of its 14 woodland sites - most of these are in residential areas. The project was carried out in association with First Interpreters, who provided recreational and

interpretational aspects of the study, co-operating closely with the landscape section of the leisure services department.

Mrs Alison Field of the Economic Forestry Group gave a positive and illuminating assessment of what could be done by replanting, coppicing and improving scrub and chalk grassland. Public use is to be encouraged by providing clear paths and signs. Help from voluntary groups is welcome - already many are involved, for example Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group have created a network of footpaths and trails, the Chiltern Small Woodland Project manages Bottom Wood, Young Poeples Watch Group clear scrub in Keep Hill wood, pupils from Kingswood Middle School plant trees in Kingswood and Lane End Conservation Group, Booker Common and Woods Protection Society, BBONT, 15th Wesley Scouts and High Wycombe Ramblers Club are all active.

The WDC have committed themselves to a 30 year Woodland Action Programme, and plan to spend upwards of £140,000 over the first three year period, and to appoint a Woodland Officer. They are looking to managing the woodlands economically, and to encourage revenue which can then be returned to the woods. Volunteer help is encouraged as is sponsorship from the business community and from grants. Details of the Wycombe Woodland Strategy and events programme can be obtained from WDC Leisure Dept, Outdoor Services, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe.

Enthusiasm this evening was strong and ideas were good. Most questions to the panel were left to Mrs Field to answer. Reluctance to answer by WDC representatives on the panel contributed to the feeling of scepticism in the audience. Now the talk is over will it happen? We hope so.

Barbara Rippington.

Diary Dates * DIARY DATES *

Sunday 7 October 1990 930am
Harrison's Car Park, Coates Lane

Thursday 25 October 1990 8pm
Royal British Legion Hall
St Mary Street

22 November - 2 December 1990

Thursday 17 January 1991 8pm
Royal British Legion Hall
St Mary Street

Thursday 14 March 1991 8pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

Thursday 18 April 1991 745pm
Royal British Legion Hall
Sy Mary Street

11 - 19 May 1991

Thursday 11 July 1991 8pm
Royal British Legion Hall
St Mary Street

Car Boot Sale in aid of Society funds: please contact Annie Woodward HW27978 or Barbara Rippington HW26616 if you have items for sale

Regeneration of Historic Towns
Roger Higman, Campaign Manager,
Civic Trust Regeneration Unit

National Tree Week

Archaeology in Buckinghamshire
Stanley Cauvain

Wycombe Arts Festival Lecture

AGM followed by a talk on Wycombe District Council's *Woodland Strategy*

Environment Week 91

Water Quality
Speaker to be announced