

The High Wycombe Society

(Registered with the Civic Trust)



Newsletter

Your town is our concern

Hon Secretary:

John Gore

30 Wordsworth Road

High Wycombe

Bucks

HW526671

Registered Charity No. 257897

Summer 1991

No 80

WATER, WATER...

At the time of writing, the world is suffering a number of disasters, two of which are connected with water. The people of Bangladesh have been overwhelmed by a deluge of water following a cyclone, whilst Ethiopians are dying of starvation resulting from a second disastrous drought in seven years. Our hearts go out to them! Whether or not these disasters are purely natural or exacerbated by human abuse of the environment by destruction of tropical rain forests etc. is open to debate. In any event, we cannot live without water, but we need it in the right quantity, at the right time and of the right quality. We ourselves have had sufficient good quality water on tap for as long as we can remember, but it does not follow that this will always be so. We have had below average rainfall for the last two years, and have seen the Hughenden stream dry up and the River Wye reduced to a meagre flow. Apart from droughts, increased rates of abstraction by water companies to meet demand for modern industrial processes and population pressures are responsible. Water is a precious and increasingly rare commodity, and we must do all we can as individuals and as a community to conserve it.



RUNNING WATER FOR YOU

Water quality is to be the subject of our next Quarterly Meeting on Thursday 18 July at 8pm in the Royal British Legion Hall, St Mary Street. (Note the change of date from that given in the last Newsletter!) Janet Kent of Thames Water Customer Services, who serve much of this district, will be speaking on water treatment and the related and vital associated subject, sewage treatment, and will be showing a video. It should be an interesting and instructive evening. Questions will be welcomed. We hope to see you there! Bring non-members as well!

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OLD WYCOMBE

by L John Mayes

Our President, Mr L John Mayes, has kindly made available to the Society the texts of a number of articles which he originally wrote, some years ago, for the local US Forces Newsletter. We are very grateful to him, and feel sure that our readers will find the series of immense interest.

INTRODUCTION

It is a very common experience when you visit a friend that you are greeted with "What a pity you weren't here a few days/weeks/months /years ago because the house/garden /street was looking so much better then!" This is precisely the way I feel when I welcome overseas visitors to High Wycombe - what a pity you weren't here earlier before so much of the town was pulled apart to make room for modern developments. So, in these articles, I shall hope to pinpoint people, places and customs concerned with this ancient borough, and, if my remarks provoke inquiries, I shall try to provide the answers.

I shall not endeavour to follow a chronological pattern; that is the job of the historian and has been done for Wycombe in the form of a three-volume history of the town published in 1960. I wrote two of these three volumes and that, together with some 50 years of residence here during which time I have developed a considerable affection for the place, its people and its surroundings, must serve as my qualification for writing this series of articles. The early contributions will be on subjects concerning which I have already received regular inquiries from visitors, and the first will deal with the Norman remains in Easton Street opposite the Pann Mill entrance to the Rye.

SAINT JOHN'S HOSPITAL

About the oldest piece of "Old Wycombe" left visible in the town can be seen in Easton Street, almost opposite the Pann Mill entrance to the Rye. The remains of Norman arches and window tracery are there, all that is left of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem, dating from the 13th and possibly from the 12th century.



The Order of St John had an honoured place in the town, and had the profit of several privileges such as the holding of a fair without the need to pay the Borough any fees in respect of stallholders, and also had the benefit of sundry charitable legacies. With the income thus derived, the Order continued as a refuge for the poor and sick of the town until the Dissolution of the Religious Houses during the reign of Henry VIII in the 16th century. The Hospital buildings underwent several changes of ownership, but finished safely in the hands of the Mayor and Corporation as the town's first Grammar School, founded in 1551 or thereabouts, and quite certainly functioning in 1562. Funds were limited, and the first headmaster's annual stipend



was "£8, five loads of wood and the pleasure and profit of two cows on the common pasture, otherwise the Rye". The School's future was secured by the device of handing it over to the Queen, Elizabeth I, and receiving it back from her, confirmed as a school for ever. Over the years the old Hospital buildings were much restored, but by the 1870s they were proving utterly inadequate, and a new school was proposed to be built behind them. The proposal included the knocking down of the original building, but after much discussion, it was decided to preserve

at any rate the arches of the original hall and part of the walls of the chapel. This was done, but the "preservation" was of a very sketchy kind, and time and the weather have not dealt kindly with what are locally known as "the ruins". Still, there they stand, medieval work, genuine and fully documented.

L JOHN MAYES

It is the Royal Grammar School of the 1870s, which has recently and sadly been all but demolished, leaving only the facade.



CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM: TENTH ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to the Chiltern Open Air Museum which is celebrating its tenth anniversary on 4 May this year. The Museum now has 20 re-erected buildings, including High Wycombe's old Toll House from the Cricket Ground, London Road and Elliott's Furniture Factory. The Museum's opening hours are being extended this year: from Wednesdays to Sundays up to 3 November from 2 - 6pm. There is also to be a range of special events. For more information ring the Museum Office on Chalfont St Giles 71117. The Museum is at Newlands Park, Gorelands Lane, Chalfont St Giles. Admission: Adults £2; Children and Over-60s £1-50.

THE OPEN SPACES SOCIETY



We enclose a leaflet inviting you to become a member of the Open Spaces Society, and would like to commend the idea to you. The High Wycombe Society is itself affiliated, and has reason to be grateful to the OSS for its assistance to our Society over the years; in particular, for its help in the 1960s to the Rye Protection Society, our predecessor, during the successful fight to save the Rye from a relief road. Commons, village greens, footpaths and other open spaces all over the country are under threat, and the OSS needs many more people to support it in its important work.

More details can be obtained from: The Open Spaces Society, 25A Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. RG9 2BA.

AGM 1991

About 45 members attended the AGM on 18 April at the Royal British Legion Hall, St Mary Street, to hear reports on the previous year's activities and on the financial position, and to elect officers and committee members. The Chairman, Roger Lawson, referred to Jack Scruton's unfortunate absence due to illness, which had also affected the Society's response to planning applications. He appealed to members to come forward to help in this important part of the Society's raison d'être. The Secretary, John Gore, presented the Annual Report, commenting that although membership had increased slightly from 372 to 380, greater recruitment efforts were needed to enable us to make more impact. The Treasurer, Nick Giles, presented the accounts for the year ending 28 February 1991. At £378-98, the closing balance was down on the opening balance of £866-47. This was largely accounted for by the publication of the report "New Thinking on Transport", which was a major contribution to the debate on roads and road transport both locally and further afield, copies of which were sent to all County and District Councillors and leading officials.

A lively question time followed the reports, and the Chairman agreed that the aims and objectives of the Society needed fuller consideration in the near future.

In the subsequent elections, the following were elected:

President: Mr L J Mayes
Vice-presidents: Miss Marjorie Nash and Mrs Kathleen Peatey

Chairman: Mr Roger Lawson (HW 528047)
Vice-chairman: Mrs Evelyn Roe (HW 532575)
Secretary: Mr John Gore (HW 526671)
Treasurer: Mr Nick Giles

Committee:

Mr Colin Adams, Mr Peter Hazzard, Mrs Lottie Kearney (Publications), Mrs Myra King (Pann Mill Group), Mr Jack Scruton (Planning Secretary), Mr Ron Sims (Minutes Secretary), Mr Neil Timberlake, Mrs Janet Tully, Mrs Annie Woodward (Membership Secretary).

After the AGM, Miss Neridah Wyatt-Spratt was co-opted on to the committee.



TOWN AND WATER TRAILS

As usual in Environment Week, we walked the Town and Water Trails. Fifteen or so people joined Prue Meek and Roger Lawson in looking at points of interest around the Rye, and a similar number meandered around the town centre conservation area with Barbara Rippington, Annie Woodward and John Gore. There was a welcome cup of tea and an exhibition provided by Myra King and her team awaiting us at Pann Mill. Altogether a very pleasant afternoon!

ENVIRONMENT FAIR

The Guildhall was the venue for an Environment Fair organised by Wycombe District Council to launch this year's Environment Week. Environmentally conscious groups were invited to set up stalls to promote their aims and attract new members. Lottie Kearney, Peter Hazzard and Syd

Spence planned and set up our stall, with some excellent photographs of local scenes taken by Syd forming the centrepiece. In spite of Wycombe Wanderers' attracting a lot of people to Wembley on that day, there was a steady flow of visitors and some new members were recruited. Many thanks to all who manned the stall from 10 till 4.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



This was the title of a one-day symposium (in common parlance, a get-together and chat-in) organised in Environment Week by Wycombe District Council, and held at Court Garden, Marlow. The High Wycombe Society was represented by your Honorary Secretary and Chairman, although other members and friends of the Society were also present representing other groups involved in environmentally-related causes.

The introduction by the newly-appointed Chairman of WDC, Pam Priestley, had drawn the attention of delegates to their copies of the WDC Environmental Strategy, published in April of this year, which is available from the Council Offices. This document gives a pretty detailed statement of intent, featuring such topics as pollution control, heritage and conservation areas, design in buildings, urban neglect, transport, the countryside and, not least, health and safety; all vital aspects of our daily lives. The Strategy also summarises environmental initiatives already taken by WDC.

WDC had invited four keynote speakers from diverse organisations:

- Andrew Blaza, Head of the CBI's recently-established Environment Unit, gave a forthright presentation of the CBI's work in influencing its industrial and commercial members to responsible stewardship of the processes and resources they operate and consume.

- Nearer to the Society's home ground, Daphne Kelly, Development Officer of the Civic Trust, gave a wide-ranging talk on the aims and policies of the Trust, with which our Society is registered. The Trust is much concerned at present with the greater participation of its member societies in productive conservation projects.

- There followed a summary by Brian Etheridge, Assistant Secretary for the Environment, Association of District Councils, of the impact of the Environmental Protection Act. This came into effect in April, and places specific

duties on local authorities to dispose of litter and otherwise clean up the local environment, notably with regard to dogs' droppings. The Act provides the ordinary citizen with the means to ensure that a local authority does its job properly.

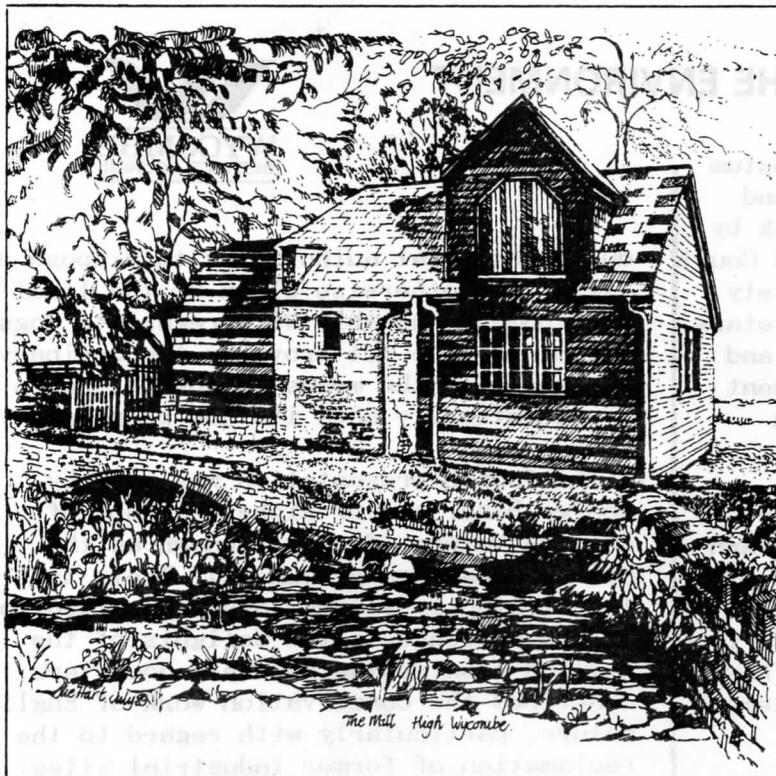
- The fourth presentation was made by George Baker and Dr Richard Hornby of English Nature (formerly known as the Nature Conservancy Council). Their talk, illustrated by slides, drew the attention of the audience to the delights of the English countryside on their doorsteps, and described the conservation work of English Nature, particularly with regard to the reclamation of former industrial sites.

The afternoon programme had been organised into small group "workshops" or discussion groups, in which delegates had chosen to participate according to their particular interests. My group, discussing "Neglect in the Environment" had centred on WDC's concern to make improvements in residential and industrial areas, and especially through the General Improvement Area Schemes, which have so far, in my opinion, achieved varied success.

In the workshop attended by John Gore, "Urban and rural nature conservation", the need for continuing education was the main theme, with delegates asking why the environmental message so often gets lost in the teenage years.

Due credit must be given to WDC for organising this Symposium. Apart from the guest speakers who so capably stimulated and informed the audience, the social contact between the councillors and officers who were present, and representatives of local industries, utilities and conservation groups was both positive and helpful. This contact should be encouraged to continue, possibly by meetings of shorter length but of equal impact and concern.

Roger Lawson, Chairman



PANN MILL, THE RYE, HIGH WYCOMBE

There has been a water mill at this spot on the River Wye for over 900 years. The Domesday Book of 1086 records it as one of six mills in Wicumbe which ground corn. The old Pann Mill was demolished in 1967 leaving only the water wheel.

The present building was erected in 1984, and the mill machinery is being restored by the High Wycombe Society.

Drawing of Pann Mill by Susan Hart
Reproduced by courtesy of British
Telecommunications PLC
Published by the High Wycombe Society
Publication sponsored by British Telecom



You may recall that in Environment Week 1990 British Telecom kindly presented the Society with a framed drawing of Pann Mill. We have now produced some postcards in black-and-white for sale at 15p each making use of this drawing (reproduced here). We are further indebted to BT for sponsoring the printing of the cards. Why not get some yourself? Proceeds will aid Pann Mill restoration.

RIVER POLLUTION

It is very regrettable that the River Wye has suffered from pollution a couple of times at least in recent months. Swift action is needed whenever pollution occurs in order to limit its harmful effects. Should you ever see any signs of spillage in the river, please advise the National Rivers Authority (NRA) as soon as possible.

Their numbers are:-

Normal office hours: Reading (0734) 311422
All other times: (0734) 575268, or dial 100 and ask for FREEPHONE RIVER POLLUTION to get in touch with the continuously staffed NRA Control Room.

The NRA takes swift and vigorous action in all cases of pollution, and your help would be warmly welcomed.

(Chiltern News March 1991)

WOODLAND STRATEGY

Denise Lindsay reports on the April 1991 Quarterly Meeting talk, which took place after the AGM.

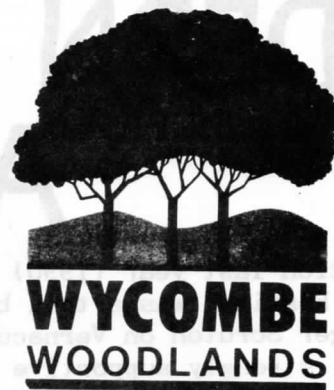
The Wycombe District Council Woodland Strategy was launched at Court Garden, Marlow on 24 April 1990, to plan for and take care of the fourteen woodland sites owned by the Council. As you may imagine, there was an enormous amount of work to be done as a result of the storm damage.

Ollie Kelly and Steve Crosby are Landscape and Development Officer and Woodlands Officer respectively, and these two dedicated and enthusiastic gentlemen entertained us and our guests with an enlightening talk on the Woodland Strategy after the business of the AGM.

Our home in Sands overlooks the Castlefield Wood, and I well remember watching with amazement as the relentless wind felled



Illustration from Chiltern Woodland Project Guide to Tree Planting in the Chilterns



tree after tree in January 1990. It was a literally awesome sight, and one we all hope will never be repeated. We have watched the subsequent work with interest, and as Steve and Ollie showed their slides, I was able to put up my hand several times when asked "Does anyone know this area?"!

Much clearing and replanting has taken place in Castlefield and Rowcliffe Woods and Roundwood, with help from organisations such as the Rotary Club, Soroptimists and almost fifty schools, not forgetting the High Wycombe Society.

It was interesting to learn which types of tree have been planted, and in Castlefield Wood there are now 45% beech, 14% oak, 10% cherry, 5% hornbeam, ash, rowan, maple and also 100 yews have been dotted throughout the wood. Incidentally, over 10,000 saplings came from a nursery in Lincolnshire. Future plans include new footpaths, commemorative seating and steps to be constructed by volunteers to keep out bikes and cars.

Some of the trees have been fitted with bird boxes and bat boxes (made by residents of Hillcrest Handicapped Centre) and these will be monitored by a wildlife group. While litter dumping remains a perennial problem, it seems that every cloud has a silver lining, for we were shown a slide of a family of mice who had made themselves at home in the body of a dumped vacuum cleaner! However, byelaw signs will be erected in the future, and hopefully there will be less litter.

Finally, Steve and Ollie's talk brought home to us just how necessary woodlands are, how they enhance the quality of life. Where better to go horse-riding, dog-walking, bird watching or jogging?

Denise Lindsay

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Our contribution last year (1990) to the Wycombe Arts Festival was a talk by Professor Roger Scruton on Vernacular Architecture, strongly supportive of Prince Charles' views on tradition and heritage and classical design. This proved a difficult act to follow, and we are enormously grateful to Michael Tebbot, who agreed at very short notice (so many others had declined) to come and talk to us in support of modern architecture. There must, we felt, be something good to be said for it!

Now a practising architect in Easton Street, Michael Tebbot's architectural education took place in two different schools of architecture, and finally at the Architectural Association.

As an enthusiast for modern architecture we could not have found better: Michael's zeal for his subject was infectious. Welcoming Prince Charles' public opinion, which has opened up public debate on the subject, he also praised the Prince's Ten Principles of Architecture, explained in his book "Vision of Britain" published in 1989. Michael illustrated in his many slides how all of the Prince's principles had, in fact, been adhered to in modern work.

Supporters of Modernism espouse Industrial Method as their rationale, and Modernism is the expression of their democratic ideals--they would say the debate is between democratic populist taste (Rod Hackney, Max Hutchinson, Richard Rogers, et al) and the aristocratic and traditional (Prince Charles, the Public).



Those of us who were left struggling by such pronouncements could attend to the slides. Excusing the malfunctioning carousel, these were superb, a wealth of modern architecture in buildings designed by the current "greats" -- Frank Lloyd Wright, James Stirling, Richard Meier, Peter Smithson et al. We saw museums, factories schools, colleges and, in my view, one of the most successful, a development of housing, offices and shops in Oslo, a mixture of glass and concrete with varied roof levels, building lines and angles. I have never agreed with the term "exciting" being applied to buildings, they are too passive for this active world, but this Norwegian development excited my interest considerably.

After an hour of being saturated by some of the best examples of modern architecture from all over the world, the last slide was of Edwin Lutyens' cottage, small windows, brick, familiar. With a shock I found myself thinking "how dark, how dull!". Michael Tebbott had begun my conversion--but there is a long way to go! We saw the best of modern architecture: perhaps we are nostalgic, and wish to keep the architecture of the past because all that we have left are examples of the best.

Barbara Rippington



ROADS

The Society published its report "New Thinking on Transport" in April 1990. Judging by the recent Policy Outline Statement by Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Transport, a great deal of the contents of his proposals could well have been written by the same author. Elsa Woodward! (Still, as many would say, its the old story: where High Wycombe Society leads today, others will follow tomorrow!)

Following on from exploratory discussions on Roads Policy with officers of the Wycombe District Council and Bucks County Council last December, the Roads Group is now about to make presentations to all

three major political groups on these local authorities, in conjunction with High Wycombe Friends of the Earth, who generally share our views and policy proposals on this subject.

These presentations will develop the ideas suggested in our publication, and seek to persuade the councillors that grandiose road schemes, such as the proposed Northern Relief Road, will solve nothing, but, on the contrary, will encourage greater road congestion.

(In the meantime, we really must try to find out how a copy of our "New Thinking on Transport" got into the hands of the Transport Secretary and so influenced his thinking!)

Roger Lawson

PLANNING

This has not been a good week for those who care about our local environment. On Monday (3 June) the go-ahead was given for a ski slope in Deangarden Wood, and on Wednesday (5 June) councillors postponed a decision on Adams Park training pitch. One wonders why we have a local plan when it can so easily be breached.

SKI SLOPE

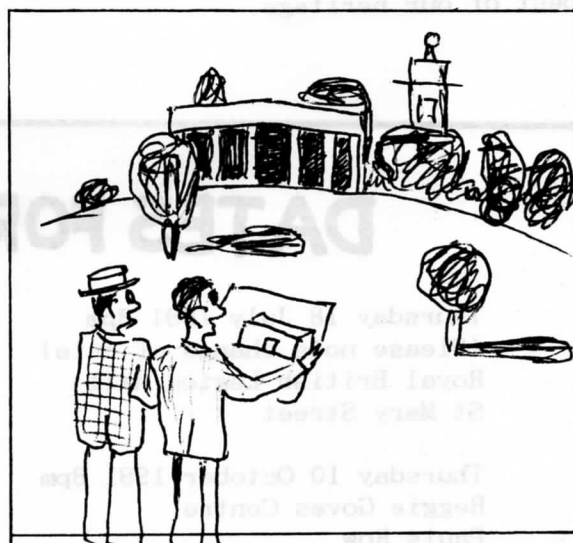
One of the few remaining rustic corners of High Wycombe will soon disappear when a dry ski slope with all its attendant buildings and activities is built in Deangarden Wood. Ancient woodland and rare plants will be destroyed and increased traffic will flood the area when Abbey Barn Lane is widened. Jack Scruton thinks this is one of the worst planning decisions ever, and he has seen some bad ones!

ADAMS PARK

Congratulations to Wycombe Wanderers on winning the FA Trophy! Somehow they managed to do it without a training pitch alongside the main pitch at Adams Park! The latest position is that before a decision is made the club are being asked to lower the proposed training pitch which is some 25 feet above road level with floodlighting at over 50 feet above that. Our main objection to this application is that it is an infringement of the Green Belt and Chilterns AONB. We still think that there should be a public inquiry to settle the matter. We fear that giving way on this will lead to further pressure on the Green Belt in this part of the district.

POULTRY AFFAIR

For several years, Lord Palumbo has wanted to replace the listed Mappin & Webb building and adjoining buildings in Poultry in the City of London by a new building designed by James Stirling, a well-known modern architect. Lord Palumbo says the new building will be a "masterpiece"; Prince Charles on the other hand says it looks like a "1930s wireless set"! SAVE Britain's Heritage has been fighting for the retention of the listed buildings through all stages of appeal, but recently the House of Lords decided in favour of Lord Palumbo's proposal. Conservationists see this as a serious setback in the defence of our heritage. It is firmly hoped that this ruling will not be used as a precedent.



That's a good place for our DIY warehouse! We'll get those old listed buildings pulled down and put our's up instead. It's going to be a "masterpiece"!

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

Ms N Wyatt-Spratt, Oakridge Road
Miss M A Isherwood, Priory Road
Mr S S Seehra, West Wycombe Road
Mrs M Cummins, Penn
Mr & Mrs B Goodwin, Warren Wood.
Miss R A Butler, London Road.
Mrs S F Smith, Eaton Avenue
Mr P F Wright, The Pastures
Mr & Mrs D Willmot, Desborough Avenue

OBITUARY

We record with regret the deaths of the following members of the Society, and extend our sympathy to their families and friends:

Miss E Perkins, Aveling Road

Mr E J Rogers, Rosebery Avenue

GIFT TO THE SOCIETY

The Executive Committee would like to acknowledge a most generous gift from a founder member of the Society to aid the Society's finances. This gift will be a great encouragement to us all to redouble our efforts to increase our membership and pursue our aims of conserving and enhancing the best of our heritage.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Membership Secretary, Mrs Annie Woodward, would like to thank all those members who paid their 1991/2 subscriptions so promptly (they became due on 1 March 1991), and especially to those who increased their subs. above the minimum asked for. She would be pleased to receive any subs. still outstanding. Her address is: 20 Coningsby Road, High Wycombe, HP13 5NX.

DEATH OF JACK SCRUTON

We very much regret to announce the death of Jack Scruton on 11 June. He had been unwell and virtually confined to his home for several months, but in spite of his breathing problems he continued to play an active role in responding to local planning problems. We extend our sympathy to Olive, Jack's wife, and to the rest of his family.

Jack Scruton was a founder member in 1968 of the High Wycombe Society, and before that he had been active in the Rye Protection Society, which successfully fought a proposal to build a road on the Rye. He was Honorary Secretary of our Society from its formation until 1988, and continued as Planning Secretary until his death.

A fuller appreciation of Jack's life and contribution to the betterment of High Wycombe will be given in our next issue.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 18 July 1991 8pm
(Please note change of date)
Royal British Legion Hall
St Mary Street

Thursday 10 October 1991 8pm
Reggie Goves Centre
Pauls Row

Thursday 28 November -
Sunday 8 December 1991

Water Quality Janet Kent of
Thames Water Customer Services

Birds of Buckinghamshire with
special reference to the birds of
Hughenden Valley Daryll Hamley

National Tree Week 1991