



THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 94

WINTER 1994/95

'Save The Rye' Mark 2

Holywell Mead Swimming Pool proposal sparks campaign

There had been rumours all through the Summer. Wycombe District Council's Rye Management Plan which we exhibited at Wycombe Show, showed some ominous hatching in the area of the open-air swimming pool and the tennis courts. Then it all became clear at the Leisure & Community Committee meeting on 5 October. The Council was negotiating with a private firm to redevelop the pool and its environs, briefly to achieve the following:

- put a transparent roof over the pool area and provide leisure pool facilities;
- demolish the existing changing rooms and provide changing facilities in the pool building;
- build a private 25,000 square feet health and fitness club with outside tennis courts; and
- extend and landscape the car park increasing its size from about 90 spaces to over 200, which would take up all the land between the pool and the existing tennis courts plus extra land north of the approach road.

The pool facilities would remain open to the public all year, but with restricted opening hours, but the private club with a membership of up to 2500 would be open from 7am until 11pm, attracting several hundred people per day. The attraction for the Council is that the firm would carry out the development and manage the whole

unit, public and private, at no cost to the Council, thereby saving about £50,000 per year in running costs.

A letter from Olive Scruton to the local press raised the alarm about this threat to the tranquillity of The Rye and Holywell Mead, and the response in support from people in all parts of

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Come to our January Quarterly Meeting

AN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

**Tape/slide presentation by
Dennis Lamb**

**of the Chiltern Society
at the Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row
on Wednesday 18 January 1995 at 8pm**

***Hear about the work of the Chiltern
Society in protecting and conserving our
own Chiltern Hills.***

All welcome



..caring about our town and heritage

Registered Charity No. 257897

Honorary Secretary, John Gore, 30 Wordsworth Road, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 2UR. Tel: (0494) 526671

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the town has been tremendous. The Council's Leisure Department and the Leisure Committee sincerely, but erroneously, believe that these proposals would not damage the green environment, but we do. Our reasons for opposing the proposals are:

O This is a good site for an outdoor swimming pool, but it is completely unsuitable for an indoor pool and club. If the outdoor pool had not been there, no one would have considered putting a private health and fitness club on this historic open space, the 'jewel in High Wycombe's crown', which should be reserved for outdoor games and quiet recreational pursuits.

O The roofed-in pool and the new club building are of much greater bulk than the present buildings and would dominate The Rye and Holywell Mead when viewed from every direction. There are several policies in the District Local Plan against such a development. If an ordinary developer came along with this proposal, it would almost certainly be rejected by the Council's Planning Committee, because Holywell Mead is in a Local Landscape Area, it is Green Space and it is in a Conservation Area. Unless the plans are carefully inspected, it is not obvious that the club building would extend by over 30 feet into the existing car park. It has been acknowledged that it would be three or four feet higher than the present building. However, even if a foot were taken off here or there, this is not the right place for such a development.

O This year, the Government published planning guidance aimed at reducing car journeys in order to reduce pollution. This has been powerfully supported by the recent report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Encouraging extra car journeys and increasing local traffic by putting a club with over 200 car parking spaces on Holywell Mead goes right against this Government advice, and, in fact, against the Council's own transport strategy, which aims to reduce the number of car journeys within the town.

O At present, The Rye is peaceful by day and by night. With the club in full swing, there would be noise and lights and cars would come and go until late into the evening. This would completely spoil the character of a place which the Council's Open Spaces Strategy says '*acts as a green lung, by providing a contrast to the harsh urban environment...*'.

O Bassetsbury residents are rightly concerned about the increased risk of flooding with the much bigger 'hard' area close to the 'flood plain' which is intended to retain excess water.

The Council put the plans on public display for two weeks in November, and we urged people to look at them and send in their comments. Many letters critical of the plans have appeared in the local press. Olive Scruton distributed a petition leaflet widely around the town with the aid of many people, both members and non-members. Hundreds have signed as we go to press. See our next issue for the result.

Meanwhile, Carol and Martin Hadrill alerted residents in Bassetsbury and the surrounding area, calling a public meeting in the Manor at which the Council explained their proposals and attempted to allay fears.

The High Wycombe Society does not want to be negative on this. There might well be a demand for a leisure pool and a health & fitness club (and it ought to be open to the public on a pay-as-you-go basis) We certainly need to provide community sports and other leisure activities, for the benefit particularly of young people, at this time of increasing, and sometimes enforced, leisure. We think the best place for such a facility would be in a more central location close to public transport facilities. What about the Stewart & Arnold site?

If it proves impossible to keep the open-air pool open, one possibility might be to make a heritage feature of the Roman villa which is at present buried under the site.

Jack Scruton won his spurs defending The Rye against a dual-carriageway road across the north-west corner (Save The Rye Mk 1). He believed in jealously guarding all our open spaces, so he would undoubtedly have supported the Society's present action on the south-east corner (Save The Rye Mk2).

John Gore

High Wycombe Cycle Routes

A public consultation has taken place on the County and District Councils' proposals for a cycle route between Loudwater and West Wycombe. The Society is very much in favour of cycling both as a form of exercise and as a means of transport to reduce the number of cars on our roads. However, the Councils' proposals were disappointing as the routes used footpaths on the open spaces of Kingsmead, The Rye and Holywell Mead including Wendover Way, and Desborough Park Rec. People use these places for recreation: they do not want to be continually on the look-out for cyclists, so we opposed these parts of the route. We think that to really encourage cycling, more money needs to be spent on proper cycling facilities, including safe segregated routes and storage facilities.

WYCOMBE SHOW 1994

SETTING THE SCENE

The 46th Wycombe Show got off to a rather dank and dismal start on the morning of 3 September. The rain, although not heavy, was certainly persistent and caused the attendance to be down by 25% on the previous year. However, people who braved the elements found plenty to see and enjoy. Animals are always a crowd puller at the Show, and this year saw a welcome return of the cattle section on the Sunday. Sheep were on parade on Sunday, with goats on Saturday. Rabbits and guinea pigs were also there to be seen and admired. Rare breeds were exhibited this year, including the Jacob's ram with his baleful stare and formidable set of horns! There was camel racing in the arena, although The Rye's water-laden turf hardly resembled the Arabian Desert. Another arena was

the falconry display, with the birds excitingly flying and swooping to the lure.

Human attractions included the Whitchurch Morris Men, marching bands and a man who created sculptures out of tree trunks using a chain saw. All in all, plenty to see even if the weather was not as kind as it might have been. Let us hope for better luck next year.

The High Wycombe Society would like to express condolences to the Wycombe Show Association on the death of their President, John Roberts, just a few days after this year's Show. John was a great stalwart of High Wycombe, and involved in many activities in the district. He will be sorely missed.

Janet Tully

BIRDS, BATS AND BADGERS

You might say that we were lucky that it started to rain just as we arrived for our session on the High Wycombe Society stand at the Wycombe Show on the first weekend in September. The weather did encourage most of the brave, or foolhardy, souls, who had come to the Show, to take shelter – and the Conservation Marquee was one of the most popular places to be. Wol, the owl, was a great attraction and the Badger Group really drew the crowds. Business was brisk on our stall too. (The bats were having a nap, so all was quiet at their end of the tent!)

As part of our stall we had an exhibition on the theme 'The Rye, Past Present and Future'. The past and the excellent photographs of the

present were as popular as ever. At this exhibition, however, we were particularly lucky to be able to show the issued plan for the development of the Rye. The plan was news to me and to all the visitors that I spoke to, so this was an excellent chance to make more people aware of the proposals.

Our thanks go to the organisers of the Wycombe Show for providing us with this opportunity to publicise the activities of our Society. For their sake, and the sake of all those involved, let's hope they have a scorching weekend next year!

Roberta Wilson

Pann Mill

I am writing to tell you a little bit about Pann Mill. I don't know if anyone went to the mill at the Wycombe Show. Well, if you didn't, this is a bit about it. I found it was really interesting because the mill had been there hundreds of years and because there are so many wheels. The water from the wheel outside looked as if it was raining because of all the water rushing down the wheel. I hope it stands there for many years to come. I think it is a dreadful thing that all the other mills have been knocked down. I hope this one never will be.

Georgina Mason
Age 9

OUTING

SIR HAROLD HILLIER GARDENS & ARBORETUM

Here we give two impressions of the Society outing to the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum, one by Ron Sims and the other by Barbara Rippington.

At approximately 9.30am on the morning of Saturday 22 October, 26 members and friends of the Society gathered at the bus stop in Temple Street, frequently referred to as the "Stewart & Arnold" bus stop. The coach was already waiting and we were soon on our way to the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum at Ampfield, near Romsey, Hants.

It had been raining hard, causing the ground to be very wet and soggy, and the sky indicated that more rain would soon be descending. On arrival, we were told that the guide allocated to our party had failed to report for duty and we were asked to join another smaller party for our guided tour.



We were fortunate. The young guide was very good. He gave us a brief history of the gardens and led us round the many trees and plants, pointing out the more spectacular ones. Two deserve special mention here: the *Cornus* 'Porlock', with its 'strawberries', and the giant rhubarb, whose proper name escapes me as I write this (*Gunnera manicata* Ed.).

We got back to the Jermyn House restaurant just before 2pm and stopped for coffee before making our own unguided tour of the rest of the gardens. At this point the heavens opened up. It

was only a brief shower, but very heavy while it lasted.

Then the sun came out again! I went back to the pond, up the hill and three sides round the pond discovering, in the process, a public foot-path running alongside the gardens. I then set out to find the Pylon Field (where the electricity pylons are 'grown') and thence back to the coach for the return journey to High Wycombe. Just for the record, the outing made a small profit for the Society - 50p!

This is the third of three outings arranged this year. So far, only one has been fixed for 1995. On Saturday 24 June we are planning to go to Devizes for a conducted tour of the town, and this will include the Caen Hill Locks, a spectacular flight of sixteen locks on the Kennet & Avon Canal. This promises to be a very interesting outing and the highlight of the year.

The undersigned would like to learn from other members of the Society whether the 1995 programme should include any additional trips or other types of event. We are currently planning the 1995/96 programme and would especially welcome your comments.

Ron Sims

Membership & Publicity Group
(01494 526671)

It seemed, under leaden grey skies with the rain bucketing down impressively for most of the journey (how this enhanced the Autumn colours, at their very best this year), that we were in for a bad day. Not at all! The rain stopped just before our arrival, and returned only briefly when we were lunching - some on packed lunches brought along, others partaking of the good value provided by the cafeteria.

Hilliers seems to be almost unknown in this part of the country, but at only two hours' drive from High Wycombe, it is well worth the journey. One of the three largest botanical institutions in the country, the others being Kew and Cambridge, it accommodates many national collections, oak, dogwood and cotoneaster, among others.

Begun by Sir Harold Hillier in 1953, it has been in the care of Hampshire County Council since 1977. We had a very knowledgeable guide,
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OCTOBER QUARTERLY MEETING

THE LANDMARK TRUST

How would you like to spend a holiday in a pig sty? Not very inviting, you might think, but this is no ordinary pig sty. In fact, it bears no resemblance to a pig sty, although it was built by an aristocrat for his pigs in the 18th century. It has now been carefully and completely restored for civilised human habitation by the Landmark trust, and is available for holiday letting along with 150 other interesting buildings. Most of these are in the UK, but the inventory includes a mansion in Vermont, USA and an apartment in Rome, near the Spanish Steps.

Max Watters, who has the challenging but fascinating job of Buildings Manager for the Landmark Trust, which involves organising the restoration and running of all their properties, told us about the history and functions of the Trust, and described with illustrations a range of their properties available for holidays. Apart from the pig sty, Landmark has on offer for self-catering letting a former convent and a Norman gate-house – just part of probably a bigger range than any other organisation. Some of the prices are apparently quite expensive, but in

SIR HAROLD HILLIER GARDENS

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who told us about the plants and history of the grounds with infectious enthusiasm. We were amused by the names of various areas. Centenary Border, commemorating 100 years of Hilliers' Nurseries, and planted originally in 22-yard beds because Sir Harold was a cricket enthusiast, Spring Walk (camellias, mahonias, rhododendrons), Three Acre Paddock (fine eucalyptus, pines and birch, Ten Acres (growing 42 different witch hazels) and Pylon Field.

The pond area was particularly beautiful in Autumn hues, and I marvelled at the *Stewartia*, with its appearance of a painted trunk, the *Cornus* 'Porlock' – a strawberry tree, surely? No, it wasn't – and the lovely red-leaved *Nissa sinensis*, *Fothergilla* and smoke bush. Don't let me blind you with science: I wrote these names down from the labels on the trees!

I particularly like this place, because it contains borders as well as the arboretum, so there is much to interest the gardener whose interest is flowers and herbaceous borders, as well as the tree enthusiast.

Many thanks from all of us to Ron Sims for organising the event so efficiently. Where are we going next, Ron?

Barbara Rippington

many properties large groups can be accommodated, so the cost per head is reasonable.

The Landmark Handbook containing descriptions and histories of all the buildings is available from The Landmark Trust, Shottesbrooke, Maidenhead SL6 3SW Telephone (01628) 825415 at a cost of £8=50 (incl p&p) refundable on booking a holiday.

This was an interesting evening, and Stanley Cauvain aptly summed up our gratitude to the speaker in his vote of thanks.

John Gore

PLANNING

BUCKS COUNTY STRUCTURE PLAN 1991/2011

The Bucks County Structure Plan 1991/2011 is currently being drawn up. The Examination in Public (EIP), which took the form of a discussion about planning issues between a Panel chaired by Prof Gordon Cherry and interested parties was held in November. The Society was invited to participate in four of the topics along with the County and District Councils, builders, superstores, transport interests and other groups.

Housing A total of 6700 dwellings has been allocated to Wycombe District for 1991/2011. It seems that High Wycombe's Areas of Special Restriction, especially those in the AONB, will be 'safe' until at least 2001, unless the building industry is successful in persuading the Panel that we need an extra 4000 or so dwellings up to 2011. The Councils have based their figures on Government regional guidance which aims to switch development pressure to the east of London. On the basis of a pessimistic traffic forecast by the County Engineer, we commented that there should be no more development in High Wycombe until the Wycombe Positive Public Transport Strategy has been implemented.

Transport It was gratifying that it was agreed to rename the Strategic Highway Network as the Strategic Transport Network, to include rail as well as road. The Society emphasised the need for a properly integrated transport system, with good bus services connecting with our excellent Chiltern Line rail service.

Out-of-centre superstores The Plan seeks to discourage these. We promoted our view that superstores should provide delivery services to minimise the use of cars for shopping.

The next stage is for the Panel to publish its recommendations for further comment.

TRANSPORT GROUP

A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

The Transport Group is led, definitely from the front, by Elsa Woodward, who was Jack Scruton's inspired choice to form a nucleus of people, originally called the Roads Group, to formulate a Society policy on new road proposals. Transport policy and operations are a wider remit, which the Group now follow and research with enthusiasm. Cyclists are well represented in the Group.

Recent concerns have also included the Sainsbury and Safeway planning applications for superstores on the Wycombe Marsh Paper Mill and Parker Knoll/Glenister site in Temple End respectively, both of which have traffic implications. Objections to these applications have been submitted in conjunction with John Gore, who has pivotal influence on planning matters in our Society. Elsa has been publicising the idea of superstores providing delivery services, so that shoppers can leave their cars at home. She recently wrote about this to 'The Independent', and an interesting exchange of letters ensued.

The possible re-establishment of a light rail or tramway link between High Wycombe and

Bourne End has been a project upon which 'Elsa & Co' have spent a considerable amount of time and considered thought, with voluntary civil engineering advice from Chris Wallis. Moreover, Elsa has discovered a transport equipment manufacturer, Parry & Co, who have designed a two-car 'People Mover' tram, operating on energy stored in a flywheel, with recharging of the flywheel taking place at setting down/boarding points. The Group considers that this has practical application to the old High Wycombe/Bourne End branch line route. The problems associated with the buildings constructed on parts of the old line do not make the project invalid, in our joint opinions.

The oil companies' predatory interest in constructing Motorway Service Areas (MSAs) on the M40 in South Buckinghamshire and South Oxfordshire has attracted the Group's interest to support and work with affiliated groups, who are opposed, as we are, to the MSA proposed for Booker, close to the airfield. The Public Inquiry started on 15 November.

The findings of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution have confirmed the long-held conclusions of the Transport Group relating to road pricing. Charging for road use based on entering junctions, and using the proceeds to build a first-class integrated transport system, is just one measure advocated by the Group to encourage people to reduce their car mileage.

The Group continues to support the 'Ringrail' proposal formulated by consultants S B Teitz & Co, who envisage a ring of railway track around London, paralleling the M25 ('The biggest car park in Europe'). This would provide an invaluable link between airports and between towns on the outskirts of London, as well as speeding freight around the capital.

Remember, if you ever meet a well-informed road engineer, that person must have picked up any bright ideas from a constructive encounter with 'Our Elsa'!

Roger Lawson
Transport Group member

TAKE A BUS

Public transport it must be,
Lots of it for you and me.
Lock your garage, leave the car,
You'll be better off by far
With a Bus.

It does you good to walk a bit,
Slims you down and makes you fit.
When it rains it's sure to splash,
So hurry up and make a dash
For a Bus.

Clear the traffic off the roads,
Vans and lorries, heavy loads.
Elsa has the right idea,
She's the Society's pioneer
For the Bus.

Elsie B Fowler

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN HERE?

As Elsa Woodward wrote in a letter to the 'Wycombe Star' recently: *In Switzerland the public transport is so good that even the President uses it. Zurich gives top priority to trams and buses and makes it very difficult to park a car, but its economy flourishes ...*

NEWS IN BRIEF

FORMATION OF ANTAS

The Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS) was officially inaugurated on 5 November at a meeting in St Albans. Joining the High Wycombe Society were similar societies from Aylesbury, Beaconsfield, Chesham, Great Missenden, Hitchin, Marlow, Potters Bar, St Albans, Stony Stratford and Milton Keynes, all of whom are registered with the Civic Trust. The object of the new association is to work together to promote high standards of architecture and to preserve what is best in our areas by sharing information and expertise.

The President of ANTAS will be Jennifer Moss JP of Chesham, the Chairman, Ian Morgan of Marlow, and the Secretary/Treasurer, Anthony Wethered, also of Marlow.

The opening meeting was addressed by Martin Bradshaw, Director of the Civic Trust, who was optimistic about the change of mood at the Department of the Environment under John Gummer, considering that 'Mediocrity is at last giving way to quality'. He welcomed the publication of 'Quality in Town and Country' (see this page), and was hopeful that the Government would set up a Town & City Commission on a par with the Countryside Commission. Matthew Saunders, Secretary of the Ancient Monuments Society and of the Joint Committee for National Amenity Societies also spoke.

DISTRICT COUNCIL REORGANISATION

Wycombe District Council management structure has been reorganised into new departments with directors, as follows:

- Director of Planning, Transport & Development
- Chris Swanwick
- Director of Corporate Services
- Paul Ricketts
- Director of Property & Housing
- Harry Potts
- Director of Leisure, Health & Community
- Neil Roberts

Richard Cummins remains Chief Executive and is also designated Director of Finance.

RAILWAY PLACE DEVELOPMENT

The Council has granted planning permission to the Guinness Trust to build 20 sheltered flats on the front section of the Railway Place car park.

The Society welcomes this development. It will fill the ugly gap in the Easton Street/London Road frontage, part of the conservation area between the ancient monument of St John's Hospital and the listed Trinity URC Church, and improve the view from The Rye and Pann Mill. This gap was long lamented by the late Jack Scruton, and the Society has urged the redevelopment for many years.

DESIGNING RESIDENTIAL AREAS AGAINST CRIME

Wycombe District Council has recently published a new advice leaflet with the above title, in consultation with Thames Valley Police Architectural Liaison Officer. It is mainly intended for designers of new residential schemes to reduce opportunities for crime, but it gives useful advice to everyone, particularly to those who might be considering moving to a new area. Copies are available from Planning Reception at the Council Offices.

QUALITY IN TOWN & COUNTRY

The Department of the Environment has published a glossy discussion document 'Quality in Town and Country', which aims to increase awareness that good design of buildings matters, and encouraging debate about how, through better design, we can improve the quality of the built environment in our cities, towns and villages. John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment, in the Preface, emphasises the importance of Sustainable Development 'developing in this generation without stealing from the next' as he puts it. This involves war on waste: wasted land, wasted energy, wasted travel time. He recognises that our urban areas cannot accommodate unlimited growth in road transport, nor can the environment tolerate it.

Each chapter looks at aspects of quality in the environment and poses questions to stimulate debate. The High Wycombe Society has responded in the affirmative to an invitation to participate in a questionnaire on the subject.

MOTORWAY SERVICE AREA PUBLIC INQUIRY

The bumper Public Inquiry into the provision of seven Motorway Service Areas along the M40 on seven sites from Wheatley through to Booker opened on 16 November at the Crowmarsh offices of S Oxfordshire District Council. The Inquiry will move to High Wycombe in January for the Stokenchurch and Booker hearings.

LEGACY

The Society is grateful to the memory of the late Miss Marjorie Nash, a former Vice-President, who died in August, for her generous legacy of £1000.

Your environment

Wycombe District Council have just issued a booklet with this title to introduce their revised environmental strategy. Much of it cannot be faulted, but, bearing in mind the Holywell Mead Swimming Pool proposal (see front page), how can they say:

- We already provide additional protection for green spaces in the Local Plan, and
- We aim to continue to implement planning policies strictly to afford green spaces the protection they deserve?

Why can't they be consistent? More details can be obtained from Ian Westgate, Head of Environmental Services Tel: (01494) 421701

NEW MEMBERS

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs R Barrett, Rutland Avenue
Mrs & Mrs C S Blackton, Framers Court,
Lane End
Mr A A Ivermee, Herbert Road
Mr C J W Jones, Holly Bush Lane,
Amersham
Mr P R Nye, Amersham Hill Drive
Mr M J Relf, Brands Hill Avenue
Miss O M Shepherd, Rutland Avenue

We look forward to meeting our new members at the next Quarterly Meeting. Please introduce yourself!

ET CETERA

Peter Hazzard, a member of the Pann Mill Group as well as of the Executive Committee, offers the following 'mill' quotations, mostly rather 'negative', he says.

O From Chaucer's 'Prologue to the Canterbury Tales' about the Miller:

'His was a master hand at stealing grain.
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew
Its quality and took three times his due—
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an out!'

O As the miller continually pinched grain against his thumb to feel its hardness, he developed a large, flattened thumb. Hence the name 'Miller's Thumb' for the small broad-headed freshwater fish.

O Before standard weights were used for checking suspect scales, the miller's customers sometimes used themselves. By stepping onto the mill scales they gained an idea of their accuracy.

O Although there are many more 'mill' references in the English language, it is time to stop milling around; we must now grind to a halt!

We trust that the Pann Mill millers were and are a little more honest than those Peter has referred to!

ET CETERA - a column for members to contribute memories and snippets of interest about High Wycombe. Your contribution is invited!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 18 January 1995
8pm Reggie Goves Centre

Quarterly Meeting: *An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*: an illustrated lecture by Dennis Lamb of the Chiltern Society

Thursday 6 April 1995 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

Annual General Meeting followed by a talk on *The Extraction of Minerals* by Lily Matson

Saturday 29 April
- Sunday 28 May 1995

Wycombe Arts Festival
High Wycombe Society event to be advised

Saturday 3 June 1995 8am - 12.30pm
Little Market House

Charity Market Stall