



High Wycombe Society

SECRETARY: J SCRUTON 17 LONDON ROAD HIGH WYCOMBE BUCKS
Telephone 25933

NEWSLETTER No. 17 July 1973



JAM TODAY - But soon perhaps to be only something of yesterday.

Heartening news for the Society in general and the small but valiant Traffic Group members was the announcement by the Borough Council of the proposal to close the High Street to cars and lorries for an experimental period beginning as soon as the necessary signs and signals are installed.

The Scheme which was not possible until the DoE gave permission to 'de-trunk' this part of the A40 has been one of the main points pressed for by the Traffic Group since its foundation 2 years ago. Though it is still not the complete answer to the problem of roads in the town centre, the

Group does believe it represents a step in the right direction towards an entirely traffic-free precinct - and a considerable improvement on the previous plan put forward by the Council and opposed by the Society.

Other important events since the last Newsletter include the Annual General Meeting of the Society, talks to members by the Secretary of the Bucks Society of Architects (at the AGM) and by the Chief Engineers, Bucks Water Board (at a Water Group Meeting), an important ruling by the County Council upholding a joint Society/Residents' Association objection to factory development at Loudwater, a marvellous response by other amenity societies to our own Old Chequers Fund - as well as the usual regular meetings of the individual groups. Oh yes, and the launching of EAHY (for explanation read on).

THE AGM

Many members will now have seen copies of the Secretary's report in which this year's progress was outlined. Membership, both individual (308) and of Affiliated Societies (35) continues to grow, bringing us to about the average for other such societies throughout the country.

Strength certainly lies in numbers but also in a fully-participating membership so the plea is not only for continued recruitment of new members for the Society, but also for a greater support for the existing groups and ideas and suggestions for further activities. (A membership application form is enclosed for you to pass on, and see also below).

President Mr. Patrick Reyntiens kindly agreed to continue in office for a further year as did also Vice Presidents Colin Walson and Ewart Steevens, Chairman Ted Kearney,

Secretary Jack Scruton and Treasurer C. Stone. They were sincerely thanked from the floor for their past work and for their future undertakings.

A point of business quickly settled was the inevitable increase in subscriptions. New rates which it was agreed would be written into the Constitution were:-

Life	£10
Individual	75p (from 60p)
Family	£1 (from 90p)
Junior/Retirement Pensioners	20p
Affiliated Societies	75p (from 60p) to a max of £6
Affiliated Junior Societies	20p

(If you have not yet had a receipt for this year's dues, either you will find one enclosed with this newsletter, or we hope you will be activated by reading this to pay up while it's still in your mind - Ed. Address of Membership Secretary Mrs. E. Rowe is 3, London Road, High Wycombe.

WATER: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The present water shortage and the problems of future supply and ways to solve them were discussed by a meeting of the Water Group in May when the guest speaker was one of the men most involved in the crisis - Mr. R. Pownall Chief Engineer of the Bucks Water Board.

Mr. Pownall explained that the immediate lack of water was due to a series of remarkable dry winters . Both our streams and water supplies are derived from springs or boreholes in the chalk layer, part of a great saucer-shaped stratum that underlies London and forms the Chilterns to the north of the Thames and the North Downs to the south.

Almost all the rain falling in the summer months never reaches this chalk layer, being lost by evaporation direct from the top soil or by absorption by vegetation. Thus it is really only winter rainfall that is effective for topping up our underground sources of water (When annual rainfall is 20 inches compared with the normal 30, only 2 inches reaches the chalk instead of the usual 12 inches or so). It was said that if the last two winters should prove to be the start of a new climatic trend, the situation will become very serious.

High Wycombe's problems are made worse by our position on the very upper edge of the water table, so that when the level drops it is our local springs which are the first to suffer. Since the growing needs of industry and householders have to be met, it seems likely that we shall have to augment our water supplies in the future. Extra water from the new borehole at Medmenham should be adequate until the early 1980's. After that supplies in the High Wycombe area will probably be supplemented by water from some large regional scheme - probably drawing water from the River Thames.

Regarding the reorganisation of the local authorities into ten large Regional Water Authorities in England and Wales, Mr. Pownall said that people will have to face the fact that water, owing to higher demand, is becoming a scarcer commodity, and will therefore become more expensive. He said that the new RWA's would be responsible for supplying water, treating and disposing of sewage, management of river basins etc., and would make a 'water charge' to cover this - which could well amount to more than three times the level of the present water rate.

Following Mr. Pownall's address discussion centred principally on possible ways of alleviating the present water shortage, and of economising in view of the inexorably rising demand. The Laebourn scheme, in which water is pumped artificially out of the aquifer in summer to maintain river flow, was put forward as one way of keeping the Wye and Hughenden stream flowing, but Mr. Pownall felt that this would be impracticable in the Wye Valley because of our position on the edge of the water table, and any such withdrawals from the aquifer in excess of the normal load would merely accelerate the drying up of the natural springs.

The possibility of metering private water supplies was discussed at length with

many opinions being expressed by members, Mr. Pownall's view was that metering was an unlikely development - not impossible, but it would take many years to implement in view of the enormous amount of work involved and the associated staff requirements.

Members were agreed on the urgent need to educate people into the greater economy of water use and that this approach was of much greater value than metering. Conservation of rainwater in urban areas instead of channelling it through drains straight into rivers or sewers could effect major savings. Street water probably would not be useable, but water off roofs could be stored in underground tanks or water butts. Though not fit for drinking purposes it could still be used for washing or watering the garden. Householders could be encouraged to have showers rather than baths, and industrial firms should be encouraged by every means to install recalculating systems for their water.

All the techniques suggested for saving water will take time and money to achieve. Above all it is quite impossible to change the inborn attitudes of many generations in the space of a few weeks or months. But it was strongly felt that this change in attitude was essential and the sooner it becomes part of our national thinking the better, if we are to escape drastic water shortages in the future. The Group was also of the opinion that it should be one of the responsibilities of the new RWA's to foster and encourage this change by every means at their disposal.

They were most grateful to Mr. Pownall for giving so generously of his time, and for contributing so much to a very stimulating and successful evening.

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

TREES

Barbara Rippington writes : A series of walks and outing has been planned by the Group to acquaint members with the local woodlands, and as many adults and children (and dogs'.) as can join us are welcome.

The first one, undertaken on Sunday June 10, was the longest distance we expect to cover - 16 miles from Booker Common to Bradenham Woods and return - and those who took part found it both enjoyable and instructive.

We have cooperated with Hughenden Park Residents' Association in clearing Tinkers Wood of rubbish and, together with the Chiltern Society, we helped to clear rubbish and wrecks from part of Kingswood.

The Chiltern Society, Downley Residents' Association and West Wycombe Rural Parish Council hope to plant some trees on open spaces at Downley and Wheeler End this autumn, and we shall be helping in this too.

Sympathy was expressed to residents of Tancred Road who lost six roadside trees in one night due to vandals. The Trees Group themselves are investigating means to prevent similar future acts of destruction, and any constructive ideas to protect newly planed young trees are welcome.

We are also sorry to learn from Mr. Andrews, High Wycombe Borough Parks Manager, that the fine belt of 150 year-old beech trees at the top of Tom Burt's Hill will have to be felled. A strong gale in April blew one down and an inspection showed it to be diseased at the centre. Further inspection then revealed that they are all diseased to varying degrees, and whilst it cannot be said that they will fall, they are a constant threat to those residents whose gardens end where the trees are situated. With foresight, the Parks Department has in the past six years planted a young replacement belt of trees and although they will not create the same screening effect for some 15 years yet, the department is to be congratulated on its forward-looking policy.

From the beginning of September, the Group will be digging a nursery bed at Magpie Wood, and volunteers to help will be welcome. If you wish to take part (and actually plant a tree yourself before '73 is out) please contact the secretary, (see below).

Future walks and outings are given in the DIARY feature below.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS & WORKS

Attention is centred mainly at the moment on the two buildings which have been the subject of appeals lately - the Toll House and Old Chequers.

The Toll House Fund stands at £542 less £20 expenses and the Society is now awaiting formal estimates from two contractors for the work of restoration. These estimates have been requested by the local authority in order that consideration may be given to our application for a grant. We hope to be able to report further progress in our next Newsletter. Meanwhile we are pleased to say that the old Toll House clock is now in working order and on view in the Public Library. As you may have read in the local press, when the clock was removed from the Toll House recently it was in poor condition, badly oxidised and with several parts missing. Now, giving his services without charge, a keen amateur horologist, Mr. Harold Vickerstaff of Liverpool has carefully restored it, and members will be interested to see the sturdy brass movement and pendulum looking as good as they must have done when the clock was new nearly 150 years ago.

The hearings of the Old Chequers Inquiry continue, and two more days in July have set aside, when our own witnesses will resume giving evidence in favour of the building's preservation. They are 25th and 31st July in the Guildhall, starting at 10.30 am. Counsel, Mr. Lionel Reid has had to leave because of other commitments and Mr. Walter Kraft has nobly volunteered to carry on. Mr. Reid will present a written summary at the end of the Inquiry.

At the time of writing, the Chequers Fund Treasurer has made out nearly 300 receipts and with money still coming in slowly, it appears that our financial needs will be met without calling upon our guarantors for sums of money beyond what they have already donated. This response has been very gratifying and thanks to our members and friends, The Chiltern Society, and to the 184 societies throughout the British Isles who have sent donations in response to a letter we and the Children Society circulated to all societies registered with the Civic Trust, a total of £1247.58 has been received in hard cash, and in addition a promise of £250 from an anonymous donor. No less than £750 has been received from these societies, ranging from £1 to £50. Sometimes the rules of the society forbade them contributing officially, but such was the sympathy in this case that several societies had a 'whip round' among their members to make useful donations. A letter to the Daily Telegraph won response from 19 readers who sent money totalling £36.85 in donations, ranging from 25p to £10, including several anonymous contributions.

Many of our own members have given either directly or by placing sums of money in collection plates.

In support of the Chequers and Toll House Funds we arranged an excellent concert at Bassetsbury Manor and a fascinating walkabout around historic Wycombe led by Mr. Steevens. This latter was a follow-up to the 'talkabout' earlier in the year, and included a conducted tour of the Parish Church under the expert guidance of Mr. W. Newall, Society member and Secretary of the PCC, a visit to Mr. Sweetland's house in the High Street (which we hope to feature in a future Newsletter), and finally an English Tea laid on by the Cottrell's which would have done The Times Diarist Mirabel Cecil proud. Our special thanks go to Mr. Steevens for his most careful preparation of the afternoon's programme which contributed so much to its undoubted success.

PLANNING The weekly check continues to be kept on all Borough and RDC planning applications, and in addition the corporate eyes and ears of the Group are open for any other early signs of property development which could be detrimental to the interests of the Society (and of society in general) in the town and its environs. Every member has a part to play here, and the Group are anxious to be informed of any news or even rumours of proposed site demolition or purchase of parcels of land which could lead to undesirable redevelopment 'by the back door' . The Group convened an important meeting in late June, the Quarterly meeting of Affiliated Societies, which was well attended by representatives of nearly all Local Residents' Groups which are associated with us and who put questions on a variety of planning and housing topics to the distinguished panel of Council Committee Chairmen. These included Alderman Goulbourn, (Borough Housing) and Councillors Crossley (RDC Housing), Slowe (Borough Planning) and Yates (RDC Planning). The meeting was notable for the number of honest answers elicited from the panel, and while time and space prevents a fuller account here, a report on the meeting was sent to the local press for publication in early July.

WATER Anthony Smith writes: On 5 May despite the usual downpour that attended our efforts we managed to clear a large amount of rubbish from the 'dry' river bed of the Wye north channel from Chapel Lane to Park Farm Road. We would like to express our thanks to the number of young non-members who turned up and helped nobly throughout.

On 9 June we had hoped to attack the stretch of the Wye by Kingsmead, but unfortunately the date coincided with the Dog Show so we cleared the river in the vicinity of Rye Mill instead, and hope to 'do' the Kingsmead reach later in the summer.

On 7 and 14 July we were due to help the Loudwater Residents' Association clear their part of the Wye.

John Peek writes about the Ecological Survey: Since our last report, many of the schools previously mentioned have carried out parts of the survey. The first two days were in April when eight schools (consisting of about 110 children) braved the elements to take samples and make large scale maps of various stretches of the river. Further work has since been carried out by the Army School, Beaconsfield, and the Abbey School is now about to start sampling too.

Most of the results - physical, chemical and biological - have been returned to the co-ordinators of the project and an overall report is to be prepared in the near future. In addition, the material was to be used as an important contribution to the Environmental Studies Exhibition at Wing in early July.

VACANCIES always exist in the above Groups. If you would like to take part in any of these interesting and worthwhile activities, please get in touch with the respective secretaries. They are as follows:

Planning: Mrs. R. Shorter, Vale Cottage, Downley Common: Tel. HIV 26964

Historic Works: Mr. J. Scruton, 17, London Road, High Wycombe: Tel. HW 25933

Water: Mr. A. Smith, Old Mill Cottage, Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe: Tel. HW 29301

Traffic: Mr. W. Kraft, 12, Wellfield, Hazelmere: Tel. Penn 2724

Trees: Mrs. B. Rippington, 55A, Booker Lane, High Wycombe: Tel. HW 26616

WEST WYCOMBE FARM TRAIL

We are pleased to draw your attention to the trail on public footpaths organised by the Chiltern Society, with the help of Sir Francis Dashwood, Mr. H. Dugdale, Farm Manager, Mr. A. Bell of Chorley Farm and the NFU.

It was initiated last year as an experiment and follows a line across farmland in commercial woodland and beautiful countryside from West Wycombe Car Park (on the Radnage Road) to Cockshoots Wood, Chorley Farm and Hearnton Wood and return. Although only 3½ miles long, we understand about 2 hours should be allowed to cover the circuit which is steep in places and sometimes quite muddy. Dogs should obviously be kept on a lead throughout.

The aim is to allow a greater knowledge and understanding on the part of the public of what goes on in the farmer's workshop, and to assist in this an excellent printed guide has been written by Mr, Ken Holbrook, headmaster of West Wycombe School, and which contains a map and some illustrations. It is available (price 6p) from the Kiosk in West Wycombe Car Park or from shops in the village. It can also be obtained by post (9p, i.e. three 3p stamps) from Jeff Hawkins, Pitstone Green Farm, Pitstone, LEIGHTON BUZZARD, Beds.

EAHY Another of those almost unpronounceable acronyms (say it 'eehee* to rhyme with easy') but one that could have a real significance for the town in the next year or so.

It stands for European Architectural Heritage Year 1975, which was launched by the Council for Europe with the three-fold objectives of awakening the interest and pride of European peoples to their common heritage, to draw attention to that heritage and to secure the action needed for its conservation. The Society has received a letter from the Chairman of the UK Council, Lady Dartmouth, inviting us to inform her of any work that is already being done in the district (particularly the Conservation Area) to enhance our architectural environment, and to suggest any new schemes with this aim which could be completed by the end of 1974, and for which Government money and special Heritage Grants may be available.

The Society sees this as a unique opportunity to achieve a substantial improvement in the condition of our priceless and in many ways neglected historic town centre. A small sub-committee has been set up under the chairmanship of Mr. Ewart Steevens to look into ways in which money available could best be spent. If you have any suggestions yourself, please get in touch with the Secretary Jack Scruton (address above). We hope to say more about Wycombe's Conservation Area in our next issue.

SNAKELEY MILL - LOUDWATER

To finish as we began - on an encouraging note. After more than a year from when the first metaphorical shots were fired, we have at last heard that our joint objection with the Loudwater Residents' Association to the proposal to develop Snakeley Mill as a warehouse site has been upheld by the County Council.

In his letter, County Planning Officer, Mr. F.B. Pooley agrees that the land instead should be redeveloped for housing, thus preserving something of the character of the site. Indeed County inform us further that they have decided to place a Building Preservation Order on the Mill House itself. This surely represents a worthy victory for the Residents' Association and the Society, and all who worked so hard for this and encouragement that forceful and concerted action sometimes does produce results required.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday July 15	Bedford Park. By car. Take picnic tea. Meet opposite Woolworths. High Wycombe High Street. 2.30 pm.
Saturday September 1	Wycombe Show (Tickets may be obtained at reduced rates from the Show Office in High Street before the day)
Sunday Sept. 2	Walk. Branchwood, Bradenham, Naphill. Take picnic tea. Meet Branchwood School. 2.30 pm.
Friday Sept. 7	Trees Group Meeting.
Saturday Sept. 15	Ascott, Wing. By car. Take picnic tea. Meet West Wycombe Road/Fryers Lane. 1.30 pm.
Sunday Sept. 30	Walk. Hampden Woods. Time and venue to be arranged.