

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

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Tuns of Change

KEEPING ABREAST of changes in our town can be difficult. News that the Hobgoblin was undergoing a makeover took us all by surprise, but consternation soon turned to delight when we realised that it was returning to its old name: the Three Tuns; this was just one of many news snippets mentioned in passing at our most recent Trustees' meeting. With a two-month interval between meetings, a new trial venue and invited guest contributors challenging us to think about our town centre in new ways, it was a particularly lively meeting.

So, if your image of committee meetings is of dull lengthy discussions tracking mundane issues, perhaps unduly influenced by fictional examples (Vicar of Dibley, anyone?), you might be pleasantly surprised to discover what we get up to! We may not always be able to avoid

bureaucracy (things like insurance and health and safety demand a certain level of it) but we do try to keep it to a minimum, and use of email helps us reserve precious meeting time for things which require collective endeavour. At our AGM in June we'd like more members to come forward to join in the fun (and share the workload). If you have views on what the Society should be doing, or would like to be part of the team that steers it, then I would urge you to consider becoming a trustee. If in doubt, speak to any of the trustees at one of our events about what's involved, or contact me or our Hon. Secretary for information. It's probably easier than you imagine.

Of course, not everyone wants to serve on a committee, and I am grateful to all that contribute in other ways. Many Society members both within and outside our established groups seem to be exceptionally busy at present and there's insufficient space to mention all the good work that is going on. At least six members have contributed to our local radio station recently, with more plans to do so on the horizon. As mentioned in the *Winter Newsletter*, there is an upcoming vacancy for the more traditional role of Membership Secretary. This is a vitally important role to fill if the Society is to continue to run smoothly. It can be combined with membership of the 'PAM' group and/or becoming a trustee. There are also opportunities to contribute to projects or to lend a hand at our flagship open day events at Pann Mill.

I hope to see a number of you in the near future – perhaps at the unveiling of the Red Lion in the High Street if not before.

Jackie Kay



...caring about our town: past, present and future

Registered Charity No. 257897

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Planning This Quarter

IT HAS BEEN a varied quarter for your hardworking Planning Group, with a mixture of interesting new proposals for our town, which we can expect to take shape quite quickly, and other projects where we eagerly await progress that never seems to come!

Leigh Street Readers will be familiar with the huge disused factory of William Birch in Leigh Street looming over the Desborough area of the town, visible from miles away and reminding us all of the town's furniture-making heritage. The factory is the focus of the Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area, created in 2006, which also includes the former Green Street primary school, now a community centre. Various small businesses have had premises in the factory buildings which, by all accounts, are now very run-down. On 11th January we were pleased to attend an exhibition about redeveloping the area and providing a total of 350 new homes. Among the principles offered by developers IDM Properties is 'to retain and restore the historic fabric of Birch House', and 'to create a vibrant, mixed-use quarter with a cohesive sense of place'. This is a challenging remit, and the possibilities look exciting, but we are concerned that the heritage aspects of the area should be promoted and the site made fully accessible to the public. A full planning application is expected at the beginning of May.

Aldi – “and two came along at once” In the Winter *Newsletter*, we looked forward to a meeting with developers for Aldi, who want to put a new store in Tannery Road (up behind B&Q and Halfords where The Old Mill building is). So we met them, and the plans looked good. They did not warm to our suggestions of a direct access to the residential area in Orchard Road above the site, or of more trees, but the proposals fit in well and will offer discount shopping at the east end of the town.



Site of the proposed Aldi Store in Tannery Road viewed from across the Halfords car park

Then it emerged that another Aldi store is suggested for the Baker Street area, not far from Lidl. We attended an exhibition organised by WDC Property Services, who own the site, and learned that the development is intended to enable the relocation of small businesses displaced from Leigh Street (see above) into 'low-cost small workspace/studios' in converted shipping containers. Again, the plans look promising, though some are concerned about

loss of car parking. Aldi is comfortable that High Wycombe is substantial enough to support two of its stores.

Alternative Route around the Town Centre The strategic plan of our County and District Councils to provide a viable alternative route continues apace, with consultation just ended on Phases 3 and 4 of the project, from Queen Alexandra Road, across the Gas Works site, past the end of Lily's Walk and into Desborough Road. The design is attractive and adopts the same design approach as the Oxford Road and Westbourne Street stretch, of central median strips and no traffic lights, with low design speeds (but good flow rates). As we said in our comments,

"We are encouraged by the options that the Alternative Route may make available for opening up the town centre and the River Wye. We appreciate that only the future will show how well the Alternative Route works, what its capacity will be and how well the public will accept it, and therefore understand the Councils' caution. But we commend the Councils for pressing ahead with the project and hope for its success."

We have, however, commented on the junction design with Lily's Walk which seeks to prevent drivers emerging from the Eden Car Park from heading west.

Collins House On the corner where Desborough Road passes the end of Bridge Street, adjoining the Eden Centre, there is a rather messy collection of buildings, including the Hertz car hire depot, ripe for redevelopment. This is now the subject of an application to build a seven-storey block of 51 1- and 2-bed flats, with a communal room on floor 5, and retail at street level.



A corner site opportunity – or just two slab-sides?

This should perhaps be an opportunity for the corner to be the visual focus of the building but,

instead, we shall see two slab-sides meeting without any celebration. We have commented to that effect but, reading between the lines, it may be all cut and dried with officers and perhaps councillors too – unfortunately.

And the trivia? We are always happy to offer background information to members who are worried by a planning application in their neighbourhood. One such case in this quarter concerned a proposal to divide a large plot into two halves and build an extra house. It looked innocuous to us, but two members were concerned about building traffic. They understood their ward councillor to say that, rather than merely being decided by officers under delegated powers, the application would be referred to WDC's Planning Committee, thus giving the objectors the chance to address the Committee for up to 3 minutes. Unfortunately for them, that is not how it works now. The system used to be that if a ward councillor asked for a case to be referred to the Committee, it would be, but some years ago, confronted by ever-increasing agendas and meetings often overrunning until 10.00 pm, it was decided that the Committee chairman would have to be convinced of the case for referring it to the Committee. In this case, he wasn't!

Privatising Planning? In the *Winter Newsletter*, we looked forward to a meeting with WDC officers who wanted to know how they could make the planning service more attractive to its 'customers', such as ourselves, now that the Government seems determined to introduce competition whereby developers may commission their own 'objective report' on their applications, instead of council officers doing the work! On 29th November I represented the Society at an interesting meeting with WDC, also attended by our counterparts in the Marlow Society and Penn & Tylers Green Residents' Association. We understand WDC found the feedback useful, although we felt it did not really focus on how WDC planners could make themselves more competitive under the new regime.



A short-lived fountain in Frogmoor

Frogmoor On 18th January, Heather Morley represented the Planning Group at a meeting organised by WDC Community Department about the possibility of a new fountain in Frogmoor. This was – unsurprisingly – inconclusive, with a number of sketches eventually being revealed. A pity – the saga of the future of Frogmoor has gone on for so many years. It was in 2007 when, led by our previous Hon. Secretary, the Society produced a comprehensive survey of local people's views about Frogmoor's future. [*And the BFP archives reveal it was also top of the agenda when the Society first formed in 1968! Ed*]

The next Local Plan, and the Green Belt Frogmoor is not the only topic that grinds on slowly! As reported in the *Winter Newsletter*, revised Census figures had enabled WDC to reduce the District's housing requirement by 2,200 dwellings (over 15 years!) and to rule out releasing 'any further large Green Belt areas'. We were expecting to see a new draft of the Local Plan in March but, on 7th February, the Government issued its White Paper *Fixing our Broken Housing Market*, which promises 'simplifying plan-making' and several policy changes, including clarifying that Green Belt boundaries should only be amended in the last resort. So now, it won't be March, but some time later!

Chris Woodman

High Wycombe's Not-so-Secret Garden

Following our A.G.M. on Friday 16th June, a local man, Keith Howkins will talk about his garden in Coates Lane. Known to many as 'The Secret Garden', it has been opened to the public on many occasions to raise funds for Diabetes U.K. It has appeared on television, and has raised a lot of money for the charity over the years. Keith has also published a book which tells his life story, called "The Garden House on the Corner". If you would like to find out more about the story behind this unique garden, please come along to the A.G.M. and stay for the entertainment!

Eileen Walters

In pursuit of Francis Colmer and our heritage

FRANCIS COLMER (1873-1967) came to High Wycombe with his wife and family during the first World War; he was an artist, a local historian and an antiquarian. Among his many achievements, he led a campaign to save the St John's Hospital ruins in the 1920s and he played a leading role in excavating the Roman villa on the Rye in 1932. For many years, he contributed articles of local historical interest to the Bucks Free Press.

Colmer painted many pictures of High Wycombe and the surrounding area as it looked before the destruction of the 1960s. Many of his works including a collection of his paintings recently given by his family, are held at Halton, near Wendover in the County Museum store rooms as there is not enough space in the Aylesbury or Wycombe museums to display them. The County Museum Trust welcomes visits by individuals and groups. Last August, Jackie Kay and I went to see the Colmer collection. The paintings capture a vivid and insightful impression of old Wycombe which supplements the photographic images we are accustomed to seeing in the SWOP collection. We found the visit well worthwhile and thought that others within the Society would enjoy the same opportunity.

I have arranged for a High Wycombe Society group visit to the Museum Resource Centre on Tring Road, Halton HP22 5PN on Monday 14th August at 10.30 am. The visit which will begin with a short talk by the curator, will last up to two hours and may include some other Wycombe-related exhibits. There is a charge of £10 per person. Places must be booked in advance. Please let Eileen Walters know if you would like to join the Group. Halton is 14 miles from High Wycombe and takes about half an hour by car. Car-sharing will be encouraged.

For some time now, we have been considering placing an information board in the centre of town. We were delighted when we discovered that Colmer had painted a view of Bridge Mill as it would have appeared from the street. We are hoping to place a board on the Round House in Paul's Row to inform the public about Bridge Mill which stood nearby. The board will include a reproduction of the Colmer Painting which is very typical of his work and gives you an idea of what to expect.

David Snoxell.

The Panel To the Right is a mock-up of the: Proposed board to be placed on the Round House (subject to necessary permissions being obtained)

The River Wye and its mills



The River Wye flowed to the right under the blue strip of tarmac across St Mary's Street. It rises in West Wycombe and joins the Thames at Bourne End, eleven miles away. It is now culverted under the flyover and the town and re-emerges fifty yards away. It then flows towards The Rye. Wycombe District Council hopes to re-open the Wye where feasible.

Nearby stood Bridge Mill, pictured above in a painting by artist and local historian Francis Colmer (1873-1967) and reproduced here by courtesy of Bucks County Museum. It was probably one of the six mills in "Wycumbe" mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, along with Pann Mill on The Rye, which was partly demolished in 1971 and rebuilt by the High Wycombe Society as a working flour mill in the 1990s. Bridge mill, probably the Angot's mill recorded in a 1185 survey, was also a corn mill until it burnt down in 1932. It was subsequently demolished and the Royal British Legion, now The Riverside, was built on the site. Twenty mills along the Wye were recorded in the Domesday Book. In 1815 there were thirty-four but today there are few remaining vestiges of our mill heritage along this river.



Endangering the Squirrel

THE PAST FEW YEARS have been uncertain for the Squirrel, the last public house in Booker. Taken over by Hawthorn developments in 2011 its attractiveness declined and, as winter arrived last year, the incumbent tenants closed the doors seemingly for good. With the approach of Christmas, there were however rumours of a new tenant and hope that the pub would be revitalised and reopen.

Christmas passed and as New Year approached a worrying notice appeared on the fence outside the pub. The owners wanted to sell about half of the site for development. Listed as an 'Asset of Community Value' this was the required notification.

New Year brought some good news. The pub had a new tenant and on January 13th reopened, but unfortunately, there was also now a planning application to build two new houses on the site. One house would result in the loss of at least half of the pub's parking area while the other would take away the beer garden and play area. The pub would reopen, but, if the owners had their way, its character as a country pub would be lost forever and the site would be decimated.

The owner's representatives, Cordage suggested that this development was needed to raise money

to save the Squirrel but were far from convincing. With the objections growing, Cordage arranged a meeting in the pub to reinforce their message. They made their presentation, offered no plans whatsoever for the pub and had completely failed



to recognise the impact their development would have on local residents. No one was convinced that this plan was good for the area or for the future of the pub.

Unfortunately, despite all the local objection the planning application remains in place and at the time of writing a decision by the Council is awaited. We hope that the plans are firmly rejected so that this endangered species of Squirrel, the last public house in Booker, is given the chance to thrive.

Brian Tranter

Revive The Wye and its Friends

IT'S TEN YEARS since the Revive the Wye (RTW) partnership first formed, its aims to protect and improve the natural environment of the River Wye and to make it a feature that people can enjoy and in which wildlife can flourish. It currently undertakes both strategic and 'hands-on' operational roles with the assistance of volunteer effort.

In 2016 Conservation Volunteers took part in twenty events covering areas of the Wye and Hughenden Stream. As well as removing rubbish and managing vegetation, there is an ongoing effort to eradicate Himalayan balsam along the river. It is now largely under control in public areas downstream as far as Holtspur Lane, Wooburn Green, and, where it is known to be present in private gardens, permission is sought to remove it, although there is still much to do.

Friends of the Wye is a supporters' group set up with the intention of taking over many of the operational aspects of RTW's work thereby allowing the RTW Steering Group to concentrate on strategic matters, such as seeking funds for major river improvement projects. A good start has been made by the Friends' growing team of River Wardens monitoring the river and, where remedial work is thought necessary, reporting it to the RTW volunteer coordinator who adds it to the work programme. As numbers continue to grow, the range of activities will expand to include walks, talks and fun social activities.

Since a May 2016 event which set up Friends of the Wye, a provisional committee has been working in the background to formally establish the group. A charity constitution has been agreed, ready to be put to the membership later this year. Research is ongoing to obtain appropriate insurance, set up a bank account and put operational policies in place.

Members and non-members alike will be most welcome at the Friends' open meeting being held at Trinity United Reformed Church from 10 o'clock on Saturday 13th May 2017. Visitors will be able to see the Friends' plans for the future, details of volunteer opportunities, chat with committee members, and renew their membership or subscribe for the first time.

RTW hopes to mark its ten-year anniversary with an event in High Wycombe. To learn more about RTW and Friends of the Wye visit www.revivethewye.org.uk and use the 'Contact Us' link to get in touch.

James Donald

The Restoration of the Red Lion

HIDDEN AWAY slightly off the beaten track at Wooburn Common, between High Wycombe and Beaconsfield, is a wood-carving studio of international repute which relatively few local people know about. Lillyfee Studio employs twelve people including two apprentices, and holds master classes on woodcarving throughout the year (by appointment only). Owner and Director, Colin Mantripp, is proud to relate that he has served clients in Japan, West Virginia, New York, Dubai, Athens and Los Angeles. Closer to home, current work in the studio includes carving a small oak portrait statue of a master for Eton college, with the prospect of three more statues for a panelled room for a great house in Surrey where the client's family wish to be portrayed in Roman costumes in classical poses. Meanwhile, furniture is being carved for Jeff Koons in the USA, and three staircases, and sculptured walls are destined for a Jordanian house in London. On the horizon at Easter is a new project in the Peloponnese.

If the name, Colin Mantripp, seems familiar, it is because Colin is one of the grandsons of Frank Hudson who carved the Red Lion statue which was placed in the High Street in High Wycombe in 1954. Its predecessor was retired to indoor sanctuary and is now prominently displayed at Wycombe Museum.

For the past few months, Lillyfee studios has been home to the Frank Hudson lion while it has been undergoing restoration.

When the statue first arrived at Lillyfee, it was in a far worse condition than had been predicted prior to its removal from the portico in the High Street; but thanks to generous donations to the Bucks Free Press campaign, restoration work could begin promptly.

The first task was to strip the paint off. Actually, a lot of it was just falling off as the statue was soaked right through with rain water; the paint had been acting like a large polythene bag, holding the water in, so as it was removed the water just ran out over the statue. Many joints were open so water had also run in and pooled inside the hollow statue encouraging wet rot to develop.

The wet rot was so prevalent that the statue was crumbling from the inside out.

The east side was significantly worse than the west: the front leg, rear leg, front of the mane and throat, and the back had rotted from the inside so badly that they needed largely

replacing in their entirety. A daunting task indeed.

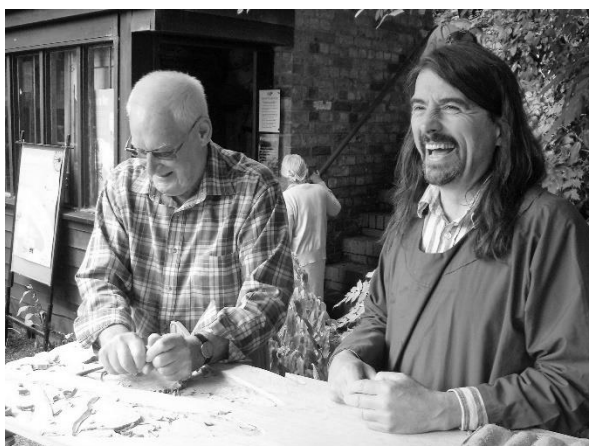
Fortunately, Lillyfee studio, once a 17th century barn on the Burnham estate, could provide the warm and dry environment needed, and the necessary expertise.

Having removed the paint and all the obviously rotten wood, the lion was left to dry out slowly with a plentiful airflow. Colin knew he had to wait until the wood joints began to open due to the wood shrinking as it dried out, then use the very nature of the wood to dismantle the statue.

As the wood shrank, gently tapering wedges of hard wood were carefully driven into the joints. After six weeks, it was possible to remove the lion's head without damaging it. Colin brought it along to the Pann Mill Open Day in September where its appearance helped boost the restoration funds.

The same procedure using tapered wedges enabled the lion's back to be removed soon thereafter, and the whole inside of the statue was thereby open to the air.

As Colin says, "It wasn't a glorious sight at all, the wood work had deteriorated to black earth in places, the outside skin of the statue was all that was holding it up, so we propped the statue up, and began the careful and slow removal of the rotten wood. We kept all the sound wood, Quebec yellow pine, but gradually we removed



At Pann Mill, Mike Dewey tries his hand at carving under Colin Mantripp's supervision.



The headless lion at Lillyfee

the front breast that had rotted. This allowed the wood around it to dry out normally. The front left leg was completely hollow, so we carefully cut a slot into it to remove all the rot, the same with the back leg and hip. The side of the head also needed similar work, with drying times between. With all the rotten wood removed, six more weeks passed with little work on the statue as we waited for it to dry out thoroughly."

Asked why the wood had deteriorated so badly, Colin explained that "the three air holes, which were situated in the body and head had been blocked up by a painter at some time, which prevented the statue being able to breathe as intended." This should be a cautionary tale to those who maintain it in future. "Denied an owner and left to rot, the Red Lion has also suffered from neglect on a grand scale."



Both the lion and the restorer - looking rather sad

As Colin put it quite poetically, "Dried out and dismantled in the studio, the statue looked rather sad, stripped of all its dignity, a derelict wreck like a patient on drip in an emergency ward at the hospital, with little hope of survival."

But at least it was in the right place to receive attention. "Medicine came next in the form of two, 25 litre drums of clear wood preservative, and wet rot killer. We soaked the statue in this by pouring it into the statue until it could absorb no more. The statue was still propped up, and open to the air, and needed time to dry out again. It was now December, when we had originally hoped to have the statue finished, but work of this nature dictates its own timescales; it cannot be hurried. You watch and move like a farmer, who, following the seasons, moves with the weather, knowing when to plant, and when to reap, instinctively. We understand wood and work in a similar way. Towards the end of December, the wood preservative had at last dried completely and the slow rebuilding could begin."

"Using prime pitch pine, two new legs were made and carved, the structure of the lion made strong and sound, then piece by piece the new

blocks of wood were cut and fitted to the lion's body and carved as required to make the new back, mane, fetlock, and feet."

"The statue isn't finished yet, but it already looks strong and wholesome. Three ventilation holes will be drilled to allow the statue to breathe again and they will be covered inside with fine gauze to prevent insects or birds from making a nest inside. After that the back will be fitted, then the head, the joints will be sealed, the statue will be given a last sanding. Then a new tail will be fitted; it has been made and carved ready. After which, the priming,



Working on a new tail

undercoating and painting with a high quality micro-porous paint system will begin.

The Red Lion team are now planning the return of the iconic statue to its place in the High Street. If all goes according to plan there will be an unveiling on the afternoon of St George's day, Sunday 23rd March.

In the meantime, the portico and plinth need to be prepared, and plans are also in place to ensure that in future the lion receives appropriate ongoing maintenance.

The Red Lion Team



Soon to be returned to the High Street.

The uses of railway land

THERE HAS BEEN a mini-saga taking place up behind the houses in London Road on land that was once part of the High Wycombe to Bourne End railway line, closed 46 years ago in May 1970. As with much ex-railway land, the ownership is not obvious to the observer. It would appear, from documents that were part of Fairview New Homes Ltd's application for the G-Plan Spring Gardens site in 1999, now known as Princes Gate, that it may have been incorporated into their landholding, but it was not built upon at that time. Some householders of London Road properties that back on to this land had, as householders do, informally extended their back gardens across the property, including the odd shed here or there. Meanwhile, the land concerned – which the High Wycombe Society and, we believe, a District Councillor or two, would like to get restored back into a railway line – is also the subject of Wycombe District Council's Local Plan Policy DM4 which would create a 5m-wide footpath and cycling corridor all the way from High Wycombe to Bourne End.

There have been two recent developments. First, the agents for some developer or other (they would not tell anyone who) have cleared the land back to the rear boundaries of the houses in London Road, sweeping away any sheds, lettuce patches etc which may have stood in their way, undoubtedly to the alarm and indignation (righteous or not!) of the residents, who include a High Wycombe Society member. Second, a Bridleway Creation Order promulgated by Bucks County Council to progress Phase 1 of the High Wycombe-Bourne End footpath and cycling corridor between Wooburn Green and Bourne End was struck down by the Planning Inspector appointed to hear objections to the order. The 16-page report is not easy to follow without all the inquiry plans but there appears to have been an argument over the precise alignment that the 5m-wide strip ought to take, and also there appear not, at present, to be rights of way that allow a cyclist or a horserider to access the two ends. Doubt also seems to have been cast over how much

demand there is for the facility, but the fact that you may not actually be able to get on to the two ends might have had something to do with that!

So, as for the land behind London Road, it all looks rather murky. We do not know who actually owns it. The area of land is quite small, but developers are used to working in small areas these days. And although WDC could be expected, with BCC's support, to object to any application that might frustrate WDC's policy DM4 and Phase 2 of County Council's footpath and cycling corridor, the Wooburn Green example shows that the mere existence of a policy cannot necessarily be relied upon. The fact that the end of this stretch of bridleway would reach the London Road where there was once, but is no longer, a railway bridge across to the top of the embankment on the other side, would be a factor in any argument.

We await the future with interest.

Chris Woodman

The View from Tom Burt's Hill

THE PROMISED PANORAMIC information board on Tom Burt's hill, which will help people identify features of our town from afar, has now been installed. Society Member, Val Hinkins, had her camera with her when she recently noticed its arrival. A keen walker, Val is also interested in the exercise described in the last edition of the Newsletter, to verify and make suggestions to improve where necessary the Definitive Map which details Rights of Way. It is not too late to get involved in this project, so please do make your interest known if you would like to attend a first meeting to discuss the way forward.



Swan Upping comes to Wycombe

WHILST I WOULD GUESS that very few people have never heard of Swan Upping, I am sure that many do not know why it takes place, and probably many more have never seen the event. As it only takes place during one week each year, and the action can occur anywhere where family groups of swans are seen during the swan uppers' journey up the Thames from Sunbury to Abingdon, it is extremely difficult for the public to see what happens, unless they are following the swan uppers by boat. The opportunity to learn more about it arose when a member of Wycombe Wildlife Group heard that Mr David Barber MVO, the Queen's Swan Marker, gives a limited number of talks in return for reasonable donations to a swan rescue charity. To ensure a large audience the possibility of a joint meeting with The High Wycombe Society was raised and welcomed by both organisations.

Around 90 people attended the resulting talk, enjoying both it and the interesting swan heritage and swan displays created for the occasion by The High Wycombe Society and Wycombe Wildlife Group respectively. Mr Barber told us he has been the Queen's Swan Marker for the last 20 years and loves his job. Apart from the annual swan upping task, he undertakes an educational role, mainly with primary school children, to promote the wellbeing of swans. We saw photos of children handling cygnets and helping to weigh them. We also saw some unpleasant images of swans seriously injured by fishing tackle, dog attacks and even air-rifle pellets. We heard that although a pen (female swan) will lay 6 to 8 eggs, an average of only 2.6 young per family survive the egg and cygnet stage, due to predation by birds of prey, mink, pike, foxes and dogs.

Apart from swans owned by Royal prerogative by the Worshipful Companies of Vintners and Dyers and by Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset, all of the wild Mute Swans in the UK are owned by the Queen: giving permission for others to own swans dates back to Edgar, the Saxon king who gave permission for monks in Lincolnshire to own swans in A.D.966. Several abbeys were later given similar permissions, and wild swans had their beaks marked to identify ownership. Beak marking was also used by the Vintners and Dyers to distinguish their swans, but the current Queen's Swan Marker managed to get this practice changed so that they are now marked with a numbered tag instead. The cygnets identified as belonging to the Queen are left unmarked, as all wild swans not identified as belonging to the Vintners or Dyers belong to her.

The Swan Upping ceremony is quite a colourful event, with those taking part being dressed in distinctive uniforms and using skiffs displaying flags to show who they represent. When a family group of swans is spotted, the cry "All up!" results in the boats moving in and boxing the family in, so that they can be caught and moved on to the bank for examination. It became clear from the talk that the purpose of Swan Upping extends far beyond merely keeping a tradition alive. The event provides an opportunity to check the health of the swans and cygnets within their family groups, identifying and marking the cygnets which are owned by either the Vintners or Dyers (which is done by looking at the marking, if there is one, on the cob (male swan)). The cygnets are then released, ensuring they are facing one of their parents.

The Swan Upping event also provides statistical information relating to the Mute Swan population, their health and longevity. Unfortunately, there is a downward trend in the number of cygnets at present. Let us hope that the educational work that is being done by the Queen's Swan Marker, and others, will pay off so that the Mute Swan continues to thrive and contribute to our enjoyment of riverside walks. Our thanks go to Mr Barber for his talk and to all those who attended the event and helped make it such a success. The joint meeting went so well that I wondered afterwards whether there might be other opportunities in the future to arrange such a meeting where the subject of the talk is likely to appeal to both organisations.

Roger Wilding

Margaret's Garden

WE HAVE MANAGED to keep gardening most Tuesdays throughout the cold weather. By the second Tuesday in February the aconites and snowdrops started peeping through and, by the third, were putting on a beautiful show and encouraging people to walk around the garden. In a hidden part by the water's edge is a beautiful display of crocus but you have to find them. Daffodils are in bud so they should be next. Besides the robin which follows us around, there have been little wrens in the woodpile and wagtails by the water. We always have ducks and moorhens and even a large swan. Please come by and visit us on a Tuesday morning and when you tidy up your gardens please remember that we would love your spare plants. There is plenty of room!

Irene, Julie, Dave and Wendy

Local Milestones

THE ROMANS CONSTRUCTED good metalled roads across Britain in order to move soldiers and supplies. When it came to measuring distance they marked every thousandth double-step with a large cylindrical stone. The Latin for thousand was 'mille' and the distance between the stones was 1,618 yards although Britain eventually adopted the standard mile of 1,760 yards. 117 Roman milestones still survive in the UK today. After the Romans left, roads gradually fell into disrepair and travel often became slow and difficult especially in wet weather.

Travel, through the centuries, continued along these old rutted roads until Turnpike Trusts were set-up by Acts of Parliament from 1706. During the first seven decades of the 18th century a comprehensive network of turnpike roads was created across Britain mainly based on previous routes. Local landowners and entrepreneurs could now either individually or collectively pay for local road improvements and then charge the users tolls for their maintenance. The name 'turnpike' comes from the spiked barrier at a Toll Gate.

One of these ancient Great Roads ran from London-Tyburn to Worcester. This road bypassed Oxford, though there was a branch that ran through Oxford and re-joined the Great Road north of the city.

A 13-mile stretch of this road through High Wycombe was taken over by the Beaconsfield-Stokenchurch Turnpike Trust in 1719 and the upgrade was completed by 1724. One of the backers was Henry Petty, the first Earl of Shelburne of Loakes Manor.

With the improved roads came increased traffic and soon coaches, carriers' carts and heavy freight waggons were rolling along this highway regularly. And with increased travel came increased trade and Wycombe coaching inns took on a new lease of life.

From the 1740s turnpike trusts started to measure their roads and put up milestones

giving distances. This was not only useful information for passengers but also for charging purposes as well as guidance for helping the coaches keep to schedule.



One look at local Ordnance Survey Landranger maps Nos 165, 175 and 176 will show along the A40 many instances of the letters 'MS' signifying a milestone. So, one morning last summer, I set-off on my bike to investigate those between Beaconsfield and Stokenchurch. A bicycle is incredibly useful for this purpose as the computer will indicate each mile travelled. At the same time, my average speed on a bike is similar to that of the stagecoaches in early Victorian times 10-12 mph!

Having found the first milestone on the London Road in Beaconsfield (London 23) on the (N) north side of the A40, I continued west along the road to try to find the next one (London 24) on the (S) south side near Butlers Court Rd. It was nowhere to be seen. After checking twice where it ought to be, I finally found it after dragging and pulling away much moss, ivy and branches. And with a little digging I even managed to 'unearth' Wycombe!

Continuing on, the next milestone (London 25) (S) appeared shortly after the road descends down White Hill after the B440 roundabout.

At Knaves Beech road the next one appears (London 26) (S) as does the following one

(London 27) (S) 150 yds short of Gomm Road on the way into town. All milestones, amazingly, present and correct so far.

However, the next one (London 28) was not marked on the maps and was indeed missing. According to one long-time local resident it had been absent for at least 60 years.

Continuing into town, by some quirk of fate the Little Market House, with its inscribed distances 'London 29' and 'Oxford 25', is (almost) in exactly the right place to be its own milestone.

Moving on along the West Wycombe road the next two milestones are not marked on the maps and are indeed missing.

However, the next one (London 32) (S) appears in winter (usually hidden by grass in summer) after West Wycombe just before Bullocks Farm Lane. Sadly any writing on this one is indecipherable.

Opposite the Dashwood Arms in Piddington the next one (London 33) (S) is easy to spot. But not so the next one (London 34) at the top of the slope where the A40 meets Old Dashwood Hill road. It sits in between the 2 roads about 20m short of the junction. And I had again to move a few branches before it was discovered.

The last two milestones are out in the open with the first (London 35) (S) sitting on the road

between Studley Green and Stokenchurch and the second (London 36) (N) at the junction of the A40 and B482 in Stokenchurch.

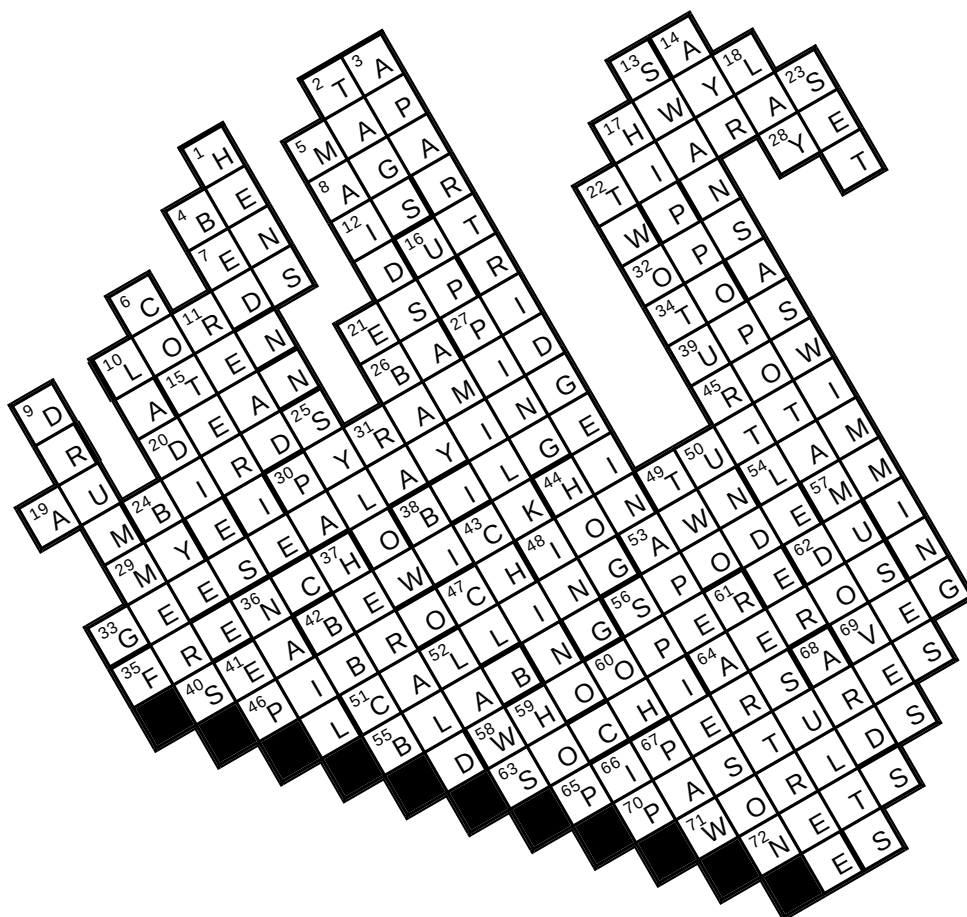
So, of the 14 places where milestones in the past would have adorned the Turnpike Road between Beaconsfield and Stokenchurch 11 can still be found which has to be impressive.

One reason why all the above milestones are still in place is because Bucks County Council seemed to ignore a government decree in 1940 for councils to remove milestones from their area as it would help the Nazis find directions if they ever landed in England. Neighbouring councils were not so lethargic and that is why today Buckinghamshire has more milestones still in place than surrounding counties.

For most county councils maintaining milestones is not a priority, especially when so many of our roads are in desperate need of repair. And this situation is likely to continue for some time. In the meantime, the milestones and the inscriptions will continue to decay, some will break up, others get smothered and in the end many could well be forgotten. Unless local parish councils can be persuaded to adopt them.

Willie Reid

Solution to Clarsach's Christmas Swan



Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mr N Catlow

Ms S Longman

Obituaries

We regret to inform members of the deaths of:

Mr Broadbridge

Shared Car Outings

Several years ago, the society organised a series of local outings by car with a number of volunteer drivers, filling their cars with passengers who helped with petrol costs.

Eileen would like to reintroduce such outings for our members to places of up to a maximum one hour drive away, a few times a year, but needs to know if there are enough drivers willing to volunteer their services (and vehicles).

Would you be willing to be a volunteer driver and pick up other passengers in your area? If so, please let her know along with an indication of your availability. (e.g. only weekends, certain days or anytime).

Email: programme@highwycombesociety.org.uk or phone Eileen on 01494 449902.

Dusty Memories

The Society has invited John Dunsterville to give a talk as part of our contribution to the Wycombe Arts Festival. John, also known as Dusty Dunsterville, will tell the story, through songs and anecdotes, of his fifty years as a guitarist and entertainer, playing everything from classical to rock and from folk to country to audiences the world over. John runs the highly successful 'Dustys Music Club in Holmer Green' alongside his busy guitar and singing commitments. He was Rick Wakeman's guitarist in the seventies and has backed many household names such as Val Doonican and Don Everley. High Wycombe has always been his home turf and he has played and set up clubs in the area ever since the 60s.

Contributions Please.

Thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue of the Newsletter. Please send material for the next edition addressed to me, Jackie Kay, as The Editor at 19 Hepplewhite Close, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 6BZ (Tel: 01494 534876), or preferably by email to:

newslettereditor@highwycombesociety.org.uk

All contributions to the next edition must be received by **20th May 2017**

You can also get in touch with the Editorial Team via the Society's facebook page.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Put these dates in
your diary **now!!!**

2017	
Sunday 23 rd April 12.30 pm	Unveiling of the Red Lion Statue in the High Street
Saturday 29 th April	Coach Trip to Bowood House in Wiltshire, home of the Lansdowne family, descendants of Lord Shelburne.
Sunday 14 th May 11 am-5 pm	Pann Mill Open Day Willie Reid will be leading a Town Trail at 2.30 pm.
Friday 26 th May	Wycombe Arts Festival talk John Dunsterville will talk about his career (see above)
Friday 16 th June Please note 7 pm start	AGM to be followed by a talk by Keith Howkins, creator of High Wycombe's secret garden (see p 3) and author of "The Garden House on the Corner".
Sunday 9 th July 11 am to 5 pm	Pann Mill Open Day
Monday 14 th August 10.30 am at Halton	Visit to Bucks County Museum Trust at Halton – see p4 To register your interest for this event, please contact Eileen on HW449902 or via programme@highwycombesociety.org.uk
Sunday 10 th September 11 am to 5 pm	Pann Mill Open Day