

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 205

WINTER 2022

Wycombe's Nutcracker Soldiers

A LONG TIME AGO, in a densely wooded mountainous region that straddled the border between Germany and Czechoslovakia, a tradition began which has since spread far and wide. A distinctive style of carving of nutcrackers started to evolve into the creation of brightly coloured articulated toys and figurines which became attractive seasonal gifts.

The toys might have remained in relative obscurity had it not been for a story by E T A Hoffman called "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" published in the early nineteenth century, and for the remarkable

foresight of an enterprising German manufacturer, who started mass production of the dolls later that century as demand started to grow.

Tchaikovsky's ballet adaptation of Hoffman's story was not an immediate hit but it, too, has evolved into a Christmas classic — and "Nutcracker soldiers" are widely recognised and manufactured all over the world.

This year the Royal Opera House production of "The Nutcracker" ballet is being broadcast live to cinemas including the Wycombe Empire, while at a barber's shop in the centre of Wycombe, for several years now, preparations for Christmas have regularly included setting up a dedicated post-box for letters to Santa and stationing two nutcracker soldiers to guard it.

Look out for them next time you are in town!

Jackie Kay



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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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Chairman's Chatter

ANOTHER NEWSLETTER ALREADY? I'm reminded that many decades ago I took to writing a regular column for a quarterly professional magazine, only to find that after my second such offering a decision was taken to go monthly. The Editor assures me that won't happen in this case – it is three months since the last one – and she has given me a sneak preview of some of the draft contents to help fuel my ideas.

It has been good to return to "in-person" Society meetings at our regular venue of The Riverside. Our Autumn programme of events began back in October with a long-awaited talk by Sarah Charlton (see p6). We had a good session in November with David Lane presenting his Early History of the Wycombe Railway (see p7).

And by the time you receive this Newsletter our Christmas event with a touch of Pantomime flavour will be behind you (😊) – I'm sure that will have been great too! Our future programme for 2023 includes several heritage-related talks as well as Open Days at Pann Mill, so there is much to look forward to.

For this year's Christmas event we have hired the Guildhall, a building which has played an important role in our town's history, but which is showing signs of needing better maintenance. Sadly, it is not alone in that respect; our magnificent, mainly Georgian, High Street is not receiving the attention it deserves, with many of our listed buildings showing outward appearances of neglect, a cause which I am pleased to note members of our Planning Group are addressing with the Conservation Officer of Buckinghamshire Council (see p4).

I am pleased also to read of the progress being made by the Riverside Project (as reported by Heather Morley on p5). And I note with interest the mixed responses to one of the newest additions to the local street scene: the "PickMeUp" experiment in demand-responsive

transport, an initiative we would like to see succeed. (See pp12-13)

Attendees of our November meeting may remember that I conducted a straw poll and appealed for people to give feedback on their experiences when visiting Wycombe Museum. Comments made after the presentation were collated and included in a short narrative, which we provided to museum staff to use in support of some of their future work. We look forward to future opportunities for collaboration.

After some comments made in recent months both by Society members and others about not knowing who to contact about what, the trustees have been giving some consideration to revising our promotional literature and making it available in more places – this work is ongoing.

For regular routine tasks the various generic email addresses we have previously set up should now be appropriately manned, but if all else fails I am always happy to receive emails at chairman@highwycombesociety.org.uk (which I will sometimes pass on to others more able to answer than me).

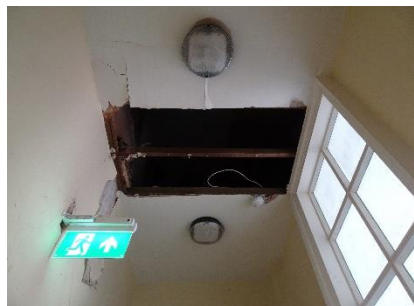
And finally, to all who are reading this:

Have a Happy and Blessed Christmas!

Colin Hingston
Chairman

Alarming signs of neglect

DURING OUR ART exhibition at the Guildhall in April 2022, several visitors expressed concern about the need for better maintenance of the building. These pictures were taken at that time and show an untidy hole in the roof of the corridor, peeling paint and rotting wooden window surrounds.



Planning Matters

A MIXED BAG of work for the Planning Group in the last quarter. The best planning news, in fact, is on p5 where Heather Morley reports on the work of the “Project Riverside” Group. Several of us are working hard with other local environmental groups who share our wish to bring the River Wye to the surface, and we are proposing some repurposing of town centre sites, which could have huge and multifarious benefits. And of course, it remains to be seen what impact the nationwide financial difficulties will have on our town’s future.

Telephone Boxes for updating! Now that practically everyone has a mobile phone, British Telecom (BT) say that traditional phone boxes are no longer economic to operate, but do not want to lose an opportunity to provide modern services and advertising. A flurry of recent planning applications is for new slab-like “street hubs”, 9 ft high and just 14 inches thick, with 6ft-high displays changing every 10 seconds on the broad sides and network services for consumers and pollution monitoring on the edges.

It is intended that such street hubs will supersede phone boxes in Frogmoor, Oxford Street, the High Street and Desborough Road. If you think this is an issue, it’s a national one. We need to look into how they are received in other towns and cities.



Looking not unlike the fictional obelisk in “2001 - A Space Odyssey”, BT’s slab-like “street hubs” are a prominent feature wherever they are sited. This artist’s impression is of a proposed street hub in Frogmoor.

Wycombe Air Park We were pleased to hear that, unexpectedly, the Air Park’s management relented on its decision to exclude gliding from the newly developed airfield on spurious safety grounds, and gliders are back, although on a reduced area (contravening the Local Plan). But the massive film studios located on a large southern area of the airfield, which was removed from the Green Belt in 2021 (despite our objections), are a terrible blot on the landscape and raise many of the same issues as the Marlow Film Studios project, with the added problem that Booker and Cressex’s already-congested roads will be unable to cope with the extra traffic. [see

also p15 for a letter from CPRE the Countryside Charity in response to the Autumn Newsletter.]

The Brunel Shed The restored building continues to look splendid, but we still have no information about who will occupy it, and whether appropriate provision will be made to display historical information inside. David Lane’s recent talk to the Society (see p7) patiently covered the different stages in the history and development of High Wycombe station, which are reflected in the architectural features of the buildings that remain.

One morning Heather Morley counted no fewer than 29 Range Rovers in the multi-storey station car park, an indication that a much more affluent demographic uses the station than the town in general, presenting a significant opportunity to encourage that potential spending to venture into the rest of the town in due course.

At any rate, we anxiously await the news and hope that the Brunel Shed will be able to offer some top-notch retail and hospitality to tempt visitors from simply scuttling off home without first opening their wallets in our town. Not just another Tesco convenience store, please!

Meanwhile, we see that the new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan currently being consulted upon by Buckinghamshire Council (BC) includes improvements for walkers and cyclists all the way from Hughenden Park to Bourne End via the station and of course the old railway alignment.

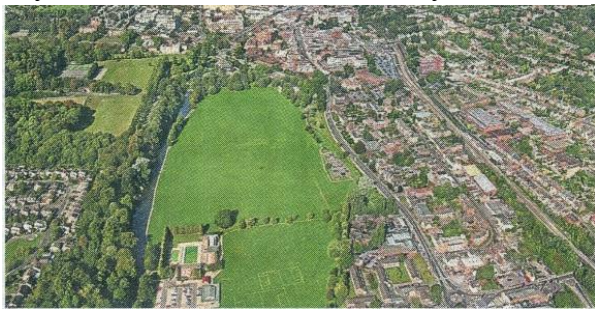
Bassetsbury Allotments site We have previously reported the controversy over the planned development of the once-loved and environmentally sensitive allotments site in Bassetsbury Lane (just beyond a distant arm of the Town Centre Conservation Area). A long time ago, it was declared by Wycombe District Council, the owners, to be polluted and unfit for cultivation, though that was contested by a group which commissioned an alternative survey.

At the Local Plan Public Examination, the Society objected unsuccessfully to the area being designated for housing, mainly on environmental grounds (in a wildlife corridor and too close to Funges Meadow Nature Reserve), but eventually the Council announced they would develop the “Bassetsbury Triangle” (as they now call it) with “park homes”. These require lighter foundations than brick-built houses.

In recent weeks these homes have gone on sale as “St Regis Homes” (linked to a brand, owned by Marriott International, of hotels and a disparate range of homes, from hotel suites to park homes, around the world). Marketing is aimed at older folks wishing to downsize. To some of us they seemed quite good-looking, but very different from the mature homes across Bassetsbury Lane.



Above: one of the park homes on sale in the Bassetsbury Triangle. Below: aerial view of The Rye included in St Regis marketing material, which has caused some confusion as it doesn't show the location of the homes.



High Street issues On 6th December the Group have a meeting scheduled with the Conservation Officer Sarah Oborn and her new BC Team Leader on heritage issues, Joanna Horton. We plan to underline the importance of the Council following through its commitment (“subject to resources”)

to issue Supplementary Planning Guidance on shopfronts, with particular reference to the marked deterioration in the condition of the Grade II-listed No. 21A High Street, the “White House” (with newly let flats above and the still-smart Kappad restaurant below), on which we sadly submitted a formal enforcement complaint.



The condition of the White House in the High Street is giving cause for concern. (See also pages 14-15)

Photo: Chris Woodman

We also had a good meeting with Abbey Ward Councillor Mahboob Hussain, who is as committed as we are to improving our historic High Street, and we were gratified to hear in the High Wycombe Community Board Recovery & Regeneration Action Group (now chaired by Mahboob) that at last, after much campaigning by Cllr Lesley Clarke, BC Transport are to take action on the town centre road surfaces in Church Street and White Hart Street, and to gate off Bull Yard which has become a rundown venue for illegal activity.

Planning Group

Seen from the Air

When the Google Earth cameras last passed over The Rye, they caught a funfair in action as well as the newly laid out Bassetsbury Triangle development in progress.



Project Riverside

SOME SOCIETY MEMBERS will be aware that a group was formed nearly two years ago to promote the importance of raising the River Wye through the town centre. This has long been a key ambition of the High Wycombe Society, but a combination of Covid spending priorities and the change to unitary council governance, meant that the river was put on the back burner - yet again.

So, we formed a group comprising a few High Wycombe Society members, representatives of Revive the Wye, Friends of the Wye, the Chiltern Society, and longstanding river champion, Hugh McCarthy. This group, under the name of "Project Riverside", met behind closed doors to research demographic and psychographic shifts, attitudes to the environment, how the river could be raised, how "riversiding" has benefited other towns and cities, and also brainstormed what the ideal riverside scenario could look like throughout the town centre.

The resulting presentation and information pack were well received in Autumn 2021 by the then deputy Buckinghamshire Council Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration, who immediately saw the benefits including educating children about the importance of nature. Her boss was more concerned about the cost, although could also see the benefits. Time has moved on and we have new cabinet members in situ. We have more recently presented to the Cabinet Member for Transport, as our plans

include a re-thinking of some roads in the town centre, as well as to Cllrs Arif Hussain and Lesley Clarke. Our proposals come at an opportune moment as they address a number of issues such as: polluting bus emissions in the historic core; likely decaying concrete in the flyover ramps and river culverts below; reduced need for retail space as online shopping increases; too much distance between the bus and train stations for realistic widespread use of public transport; and the fire station that is no longer fit for purpose, according to some.

The next step is a presentation to Cllr Rachael Matthews, Deputy Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration in early December. We hope that she will also see the benefits of our proposals and choose to take them further - both up the levels of seniority at Buckinghamshire Council and also into a proper feasibility study. More news anon!

Heather Morley

Let's Say NO to Neglect in our Town Centre!



A selection of photos showing signs of neglect in our built heritage, prepared for discussion purposes, and contributed by Gemma Shinh, an active member of the Society's Planning Group.



Top Left: the lettering on Buckinghamshire House in White Hart Street has eroded badly.

Top Right: the decorative painting on this central building in Queen's square is flaking.

Bottom left: attractive stone features are deteriorating.

Bottom right: the upper floors of No. 1 High Street show signs of neglect.

(See also page 12.)



The Giant Scrapbook of the 3rd Lord Carrington

MANY OF US of a certain age compiled scrapbooks in our school days. Few continued them into adulthood, let alone old age. But Charles Robert Wynn-Carrington (1843-1928), the third Lord Carrington and later Earl Carrington (1895) and Marquess of Lincolnshire (1912) did. I will refer to him by his Christian name Charles to avoid confusion over titles and spellings.

Sarah Charlton, Archivist to the Carrington Estates, gave an illustrated talk on 14th October to the Society about one of Charles' scrapbooks which had been discovered in the attic of Bledlow Manor in 2018. Charles had compiled several normal size scrapbooks, which were known about, on specific subjects such as the coronation of George V and Queen Mary, but this sleeping giant had gone unnoticed hidden in the attic. It seems to have been started after Charles returned from New South Wales, where he was Governor (1885-1890), and continued into the 1920s.

The scrapbook contains a wealth of historical material mostly devoted to local and family affairs – press cuttings, political pamphlets, election posters, maps, prints and photos of Buckinghamshire

mansions and views. Sarah shared a wide selection of these, and her vivacious commentary overcame the technical problems which arose as the Society's trusted projector, which has given faithful service for over a decade, sadly started to show signs of its age. It has since been replaced.

Sarah's selection of material included some amusing aspects of nineteenth century life such as the ephemera Charles had kept that related to an episode in which he was summoned to appear in court for riding a bicycle in the London Road "without having attached a lamp to exhibit a light in the direction in which he was proceeding" i.e. without a head lamp. The scrapbook includes both the summons and the related bill from Clarke & Son, the solicitors instructed to attend the Petty Sessions to represent both Charles and Lady Carrington and to pay the fines for this offence and for that of breaching an order for muzzling a dog. Contemporary press reports explain the circumstances in which the Carringtons had found themselves unexpectedly stranded in Maidenhead and decided to cycle home.

Another item of local interest was an invitation from Charles E Skull to view two chairs intended for presentation by the town of High Wycombe to H.R.H the Duke and Duchess of York. Local contemporary press coverage oozes with pride in

the craftsmanship displayed in these chairs which were clearly intended to demonstrate the skills of the chairmakers.

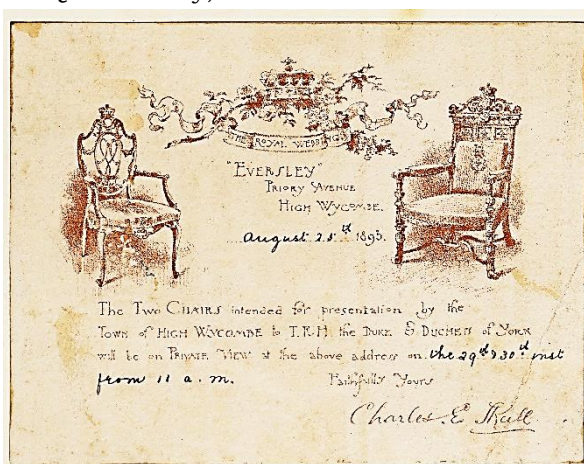
The scrapbook gives insights into many of Charles' activities and interests. Alongside all the responsibilities of large land holdings, estates and family, he had been a friend since childhood of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), a colonial governor, Lord Chamberlain of Queen Victoria's Household, President of the Board of Agriculture and Lord Privy Seal. It is surprising that a public person of Charles' stature found time to compile scrapbooks but there were of course no distractions from television, radio or social media. I asked whether compiling scrapbooks was a common pastime of the rich and famous

at the time. Sarah commented that there were other compilers amongst the aristocracy and that research was being done on the prevalence of this activity.

Finally, Sarah explained how the current Lord Carrington had come to inherit the position of Lord Great Chamberlain, an office which goes back to the 12th century and was an inheritance shared between several families. It had descended through Charles' mother. It only became apparent at the Proclamation of King Charles from the balcony of St James Palace and at Westminster Hall when we saw Lord Carrington, resplendent in scarlet court uniform preceding the Queen's coffin. A detailed explanation can be found in Wikipedia.

Clearly the scrapbook is an important source of local history which is why Lord Carrington has made it available to the public, and The High Wycombe Society was happy to contribute towards the cost of its digitisation. The original scrapbook remains in the Bledlow Manor archives, but Buckinghamshire Archives now have a digital copy, which independent researchers can access (ref. AR 21/2022.) The Society has also retained a copy for its own use, which Jackie Kay currently holds.

David Snoxell



Invitation from C E Skull – just one item in the scrapbook, reproduced, thanks to Lord Carrington.

The Early History of Wycombe Railway

1846-1906

AROUND 80 people assembled at The Riverside on the evening of Friday 11th November to hear David Lane give an interesting talk about the history of Wycombe Railway. A good mix of members and, who knows, maybe some potential members. David has written an extensive article in the Autumn 2022 edition of "Broadsheet", the journal of the Broad Gauge Society, and his talk was based on this.

He started with a brief history of the development of the first railway into High Wycombe, which was, of course, the broad-gauge Wye Valley route from the Great Western line at Maidenhead, via Furze Platt, Cookham and Bourne End; terminating in what is the now restored Brunel train shed in front of the present High Wycombe station (1854). Stations were provided at Wooburn Green and Loudwater. The line branched off the Great Western Main Line just to the west of Maidenhead's current station. It turned north, and soon reached the first intermediate stop, which was Maidenhead (Wycombe Junction). This station was situated on the Bath Road halfway up Castle Hill. The station closed in 1871 when the present Maidenhead railway station was opened. The entrance to this station can still be seen, although it is totally bricked up.

The line was subsequently extended to Thame via Princes Risborough (1862), then from Princes Risborough to Aylesbury via Little Kimble (1863), and finally extended to Oxford from Thame (1864). Incidentally, this closed route would have been the most direct when in modern times Chiltern Railways wanted to restore a service to Oxford. They had to settle for the route via Bicester Village and Oxford Parkway, which nevertheless, provides a fast regular service.

The GWR were running the trains, but the initial investment came from the High Wycombe Railway Company, although it was subsequently taken over by the GWR in 1867. The line originally laid to the 7' ¼" gauge on longitudinal

timber sleepers and tie bars, was re-laid to standard 4' 8 ½" in 1870.

The talk then went on to reveal the interesting and surprisingly uniform design of the station buildings along the line. The earlier ones were a brick and flint design with a front entrance porch to the ticket office, and a generous covered bay to act as a shelter for waiting passengers. The window lines were very similar with, usually, a bay window for the stationmaster's house, and if the station was blessed with a level crossing, a crossing keeper's house was grafted on at the end, once again of fairly uniform design. Some of the later stations were an all-brick design.

He then described the arrangement at High Wycombe when the new Great Western and Great Central line arrived via Beaconsfield. Pictures also showed the construction of the viaducts along the valley, and over Frogmoor when the northbound line was double tracked. This caused High Wycombe station to be relocated further up Amersham Hill and necessitated the construction of the massive Staffordshire Blue brick wall we have today. It also created the separate up and down lines at Saunderton, with the new line easing the gradient on the up (to London) line with a short tunnel and deep cutting.

There were some wonderful photos of the early stations, and some excellent computer renderings of early locomotives and railway views. An enjoyable and informative evening.

Nigel Phillips

Did you see Nigel on TV?

TELEVISION PRODUCERS SOMETIMES contact the High Wycombe Society, usually at short notice, wanting people to talk about points of interest in our town. Earlier this year Nigel Phillips bravely responded to such a call and found himself front-of-camera in a piece that featured the Brunel Shed.

If you missed it, you can find him on BBC iPlayer. The programme to look for is "Escape to the Country" series 23, episode 3. Nigel's bit is 14 minutes in.

Nigel doesn't recommend watching it, but we do!

JK

No shortage of chaff!



The millers have been travelling back in time. Details of their use of heavily chaff-laden wheat can be found on p10.

Puzzling Peripatetic Lodges and Pillars

THE 'RUPERT GATES', nowadays generally understood to mean not just a pair of gates but also a surrounding crenellated stone gateway, doors on either side for pedestrians and an elaborate mock-Norman lodge, are a familiar sight on Marlow Hill. They were erected in their current location in 1900 to provide a suitably grand entrance to the grounds of what was then the new Carrington family home at Daws Hill house. The Carringtons' former residence, Wycombe Abbey, had been sold in 1896 to the Girls Education Company to form Wycombe Abbey school. Prior to their move to Marlow Hill, the gates had stood in the High Street at the end of a carriageway from Wycombe Abbey which would soon become part of a more major thoroughfare. We know it today as Queen Victoria Road.

In the absence of any information to the contrary it would be reasonable to assume that the Rupert Gates had been in their former location for a long time. It was after all in the mid-eighteenth century that the Earl of Shelburne, then owner of Loakes Manor (before it became Wycombe Abbey) had extended his estate, leasing the land required to create the above carriageway. Ashford in his "The History of the Borough of High Wycombe", states that the "front-gates" to the carriage-drive were "pushed forward to the High Street" in 1762; but he makes no mention of any stonework or a lodge, and "Rupert" is a Carrington name, not a Shelburne one.

Lady Victoria, a daughter of the 3rd Lord Carrington, is said to have credited her great grandfather, the 1st Lord Carrington, with the building of two castellated lodges with very solid and impregnable doors allegedly intended to prevent his many daughters conversing inappropriately with officers of the Bucks Militia stationed at Loakes Hill. The heavily studded wooden doors, which were a feature of the Rupert Gates both in the High Street and when they moved to Marlow Hill, were consistent with this oft-repeated story. But Lady Victoria did not spell out the location (or dates) of the lodges to which she referred.

When recently preparing material for a guided tour for members of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, I was surprised to find



The Rupert Gates in their current location on Marlow Hill – a familiar sight here since 1900. Photo Courtesy of High Wycombe library SWOP ref: RHW:71386



The Rupert Gates in the High Street – with the lodge adjacent to Wheeler's brewery Photo Courtesy of High Wycombe library SWOP ref: RHW:10014



The Rupert Gates just after their reconstruction on Marlow Hill in 1900. Photo Courtesy of High Wycombe library SWOP ref: RHW:39007

references as late as 1891 to the "newly built" lodge in the High Street, with a suggestion that the stone had come from the dismantling of another lodge on the London Road. This called for further investigation.

Previous Newsletter articles by David Snoxell (in Summer 2008 and Autumn 2009) have highlighted that during the nineteenth century there were at least four gated entrances to the Wycombe Abbey estate: the easternmost on the London Road where Chestnut Avenue is today; a second providing more direct access to and from the High Street where the Library Gardens are today; a third on St Mary Street; and a fourth, at the bottom of Marlow Hill where a castellated lodge is still extant. Not all these entrances needed lodges and their usage changed over time.

The easternmost entrance on the London Road would originally have been used for travel to and from London. It would not be surprising to find a lodge there at an early date, but use of the entrance diminished over time, most notably with the arrival of the railway in Wycombe.

A useful snapshot is provided in 1849 by the tithe maps. There are two of these: one for the Borough and one for the surrounding Parish. Wycombe Abbey lay

in the Parish outside the Borough, but the boundary passed very close to the front of the house. Hence the grounds acquired by the Earl of Shelburne for his carriageway to the High

Street were well within the Borough boundary.

The Parish Tithe map confirms that in 1849 there was a lodge where Chestnut Avenue is today and that there were by then also other "park lodges" in use further up Keep Hill.

The Borough Tithe map, also 1849, includes only one entry for a "lodge, yard and outbuildings." This is the one at the foot of Marlow Hill and the name of the occupant is given as Reuben Batten. He can be found in both the 1841 and 1851 censuses and in the latter his residence is explicitly recorded as "Abbey Lodge". An account in the Oxford Journal on Saturday 8th October 1842 further explains that Reuben Batten "occupies a lodge at the entrance [to Lord Carrington's property] by the Marlow Road". As a worker employed by Lord Carrington his right to vote in the Borough election was challenged and he successfully proved his eligibility by producing receipts for £2 10s rent paid on two successive quarters to Lord Carrington.

There is no sign on the above 1849 tithe maps or in the early censuses of any additional lodge in St Mary Street but there is a substantial house belonging to Charles Ashton who was employed by Lord Carrington and is sometimes described as the head gardener on the Wycombe Abbey estate. This is surrounded by some of the kitchen gardens.

There is also no sign in 1849 of a lodge where we might expect to find the Rupert Gates in the High Street.

A short announcement in the Bucks Herald on 29th March 1879 confirms the appearance of the High Street. Lord Carrington[sic] is said to be proposing a new entrance to "do away with the long blank wall that now forms such an unattractive feature in the principal street". Plans submitted to the Town Council were "for the removal of the gates from the Marlow Road



An early photograph of the High Street shows a solid wall with a pedestrian entrance into Wycombe Abbey grounds. Photo courtesy of High Wycombe library SWOP ref: RHW:22009



St Mary Street Plain walls surround the Kitchen Gardens on both sides of the road. c1896-1899 Photo courtesy of the Bucks Free Press SWOP ref: BFP:06536



St Mary Street Entrance c1900 Photo courtesy of the Bucks Free Press SWOP ref: BFP:05177

entrance to the new entrance in the High Street". The first mention I have been able to find of "Rupert's gate" is the following year. Rupert Carrington, the youngest brother of the 3rd Lord Carrington (who would later become the 4th Lord Carrington), had been serving in the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 and the gates were named after him in 1880 as he rode through them on his return from the war. The Rupert Lodge would appear to have been a later addition to the street scene in 1891. At that time extensive building work was being carried out at Wycombe Abbey to create what we now know as "Big School", the hall which incorporated both the Shelburne Pew at one end and an assortment of hatchments of prominent High Wycombe people in the ceiling.

The Rupert Gates were not the only architectural features to ascend Marlow Hill. Much has already been written about the peripatetic past of a pair of ornamental wrought-iron gates from the Shelburne - era, which adorn the north side of the courtyard at Daws Hill House (see also David Snoxell's letter on p14). Their complete history still involves some conjecture, but it is known that by around 1885 they had become a feature at the western end of Wycombe Abbey's kitchen garden.

Also up at Daws Hill House (which is now part of Wycombe Abbey school), there are some pillars which it is thought once helped form another entrance. At the end of the nineteenth century, on either side of St Mary Street there were long blank walls enclosing the Wycombe Abbey kitchen gardens. In around 1900 the entrance on the eastern side of St Mary Street was enhanced with gates and pillars supporting globe lights. It appears to have been a relatively short-lived enhancement to the streetscape.

Jackie Kay



Always smiling, John

John Mumford Remembered

IT WAS A sad shock to all the members of the Pann Mill team to learn in an email one morning that John Mumford was no longer with us. Some of us have known John for a long time while for others it was a much shorter period. But you did not need to know John for very long to know that he was a special man and well worth knowing. Frequently it was John who showed round any prospective team member, explaining the history of the Mill, what the team were trying to do and generally making them feel at home. At least one newer member joined us as a direct result of John's attention.

John, though, had been a volunteer with the restoration team for a long time, back

to the days when all we had was a waterwheel and the shell of a building and a dream that one day we could get the heap of bits to mill flour again. Eventually, of course, we did mill once more and John's considerable background knowledge was invaluable in keeping the recalcitrant machinery running. On many occasions his deft application of a big hammer kept things moving. The skill, of course, is in knowing just where to apply the hammer.

Once we had the Mill running again we started to welcome visitors on open days and work mornings. John was always keen to talk to anybody about the Mill, its history and future. He had an amazing ability to engage with our visitors, particularly the more timid ones and children; he had the gift of spotting those who had a question but were too shy to ask, and he was able to explain things in a no-nonsense, almost jokey way that was clearly tailored to whom he was speaking.

Nothing was too much trouble for John and there was always a sense of contentment and happiness about him and a readiness to see the funny side of any situation. He was a very practical man often surprising us with useful skills that he had not bothered to mention before. A lot of our brickwork has been deftly repointed by John who we later learned had also built a significant part of a local Scout hut. When we were discussing a possible new workshop, John rapidly drew up some plans and then surprised us with a beautiful scale model of our desired building. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to bring it to reality.

An enthusiastic worker, John was not one to sit around chatting when we should have been doing something. When tea break was over, he was often the first to return to the task of the day, usually with a cajoling joke. We all remember when we were replacing the timber cladding being told that we had a board meeting to go to and the boards would not meet on their own.

You're greatly missed, John.

The Millers

Wheat in Times Past

A WHILE AGO we were asked by Waltham Place Farm, a small farm near White Waltham Airfield, if we could mill some of their ancient style crop. Modern wheat is very different from that grown in the past and the farm is experimenting with growing the sort of crops that existed in the 1940s and back in the eighteenth century. The farm delivered the grain for us to mill so we set to work without delay (well, there was money involved!)

The 1940s variety looked like a small version of our normal wheat but with more chaff and other seeds. It was rather dry but surprisingly clean. It took over an hour to raise enough water in the leat which was promptly blocked by leaves building up on the grating, and it took a while to fill the stones as we had run them out last September. Eventually, though, good flour was forthcoming. Unfortunately, the Mill objected to being woken up in November and was labouring badly. With frequent clearing of the leaves building up in the leat, it took us about 4 hours to mill getting on for 100kgs of wheat.

We adjourned our efforts for a couple of days before tackling the second lot of grain which was similar to that grown around 200 years ago and included spelt, emmer and Einkorn and a LOT of chaff, the result of hand threshing and winnowing. It was very like the wheat we used to demonstrate

our winnower some years ago and apparently replicates products that would have been commonplace pre-mechanisation. With fewer leaves in the leat, the Mill ran relatively well but it did choke on the excessive chaff at times, spitting out a ball of it before running smoothly again.

In both cases the flour produced looked similar to our normal produce, but on closer examination there was a lot more fibre in it. This can be sieved out and the result for the 1940's style would be very similar to modern flour. But the older style flour would cook very differently as the ancient seeds are very low in gluten and would not rise much. This is one reason why old-style breads are much flatter than modern loaves. We have some samples of the flour and will see what they produce.

Malcolm Connell

Trinity Church Burial Ground

IT WAS BROUGHT to my attention during the pandemic, by another High Wycombe Society member, that the Eureka Partnership had recently produced a booklet on Baptisms, Marriages & Burials at the Trinity Congregational Church (now called Trinity United Reformed Church) opposite Pann Mill. This came as a bit of a surprise, as no records for the church appeared in the Buckinghamshire Archives Catalogue at that time, although they had clearly existed.

For the period 1851-1868, the register in the booklet listed the names of over 100 individuals who were said to have been interred in the Trinity burial ground. The last of these was Purton Weston, a draper of Queen's Square who had served as Mayor of High Wycombe in the year 1864-65. The "Bucks Advertiser" reported on 27th June 1868 that the town had been "thrown into some degree of excitement" by his sudden death, and that the inquest jury had returned a verdict of "Died by the visitation of God from natural causes".

However, on further investigation it transpires that he, along with most of the others recorded in the Trinity Register, were actually buried at Wycombe Cemetery. Subject to further checking by a very helpful and willing administrator at the cemetery, it now appears that the last person to have been buried at Trinity was Mrs Catherine Eele, on 13th February 1855.

Amongst the earlier entries was John Lane, who had been the owner of Ash Mill. One of his descendants had spent years trying to find his final resting place, so it was a real Eureka moment when she discovered the booklet and told me that her search was over.

But where, exactly, had this burial ground been?

My immediate thought was that it must have disappeared under the Railway Place Car Park, but I went to take a look at the site, armed with an old map of the area, courtesy of the National Library of Scotland. The burial ground was clearly marked on the map, immediately behind the church building, but stopped short of the southern end of Saffron Road.

Taking a closer look at the church, it soon became apparent that the original building had been extended by the addition of Crendon Hall at the rear, exactly where the burial ground had been marked. A stone plaque can be found on its eastern side, dated 26th September 1923,

containing the words "Lest We Forget, 1914-1918".

According to an article in the "Bucks Advertiser" on 8th May 1922, the new building was intended for the Sunday School, whose scholars had set out to contribute "a quarter of a mile of pennies, worth £55. They bring their pennies once a month, and lay them side by side on the floor of the aisles. So far the sum raised by this method has reached a total of £9."

Whilst poring over the map, I was approached by a local resident, asking if she could be of any help. When I explained the reason for my visit, she suddenly remembered having once seen what looked like the remains of a grave alongside the western wall of the Crendon Hall. Without any hesitation she led me towards the spot, but said I'd have to squeeze through a gap in a hedge in order to see it properly.

And there it was, a very dilapidated raised ledger style monument. There did not appear to be any sign of an inscription - until I peered at the side facing the wall. Imagine my surprise when I then saw the words: "SACRED

TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN LANE". I could hardly believe it, and neither could his descendant when I told her the news! It is hoped that at some time in the future, it might be possible to have the grave cleaned and restored.

But what about the other gravestones which must surely have existed?

The site would have needed clearing before the hall was erected, even if the bodies were left underneath, but surprisingly there is no mention of this activity in the Trinity Minutes Books, nor of the building of Crendon Hall. Newspaper searches have also been unsuccessful thus far, but may yield more information if and when the "South Bucks Free Press" ever becomes fully digitised ...

Ann Davies



Above: the plaque at Crendon Hall; below: the raised ledger monument "Sacred to the memory of John Lane"

Photo: Ann Davies



PickMeUp... tried and tested?

A NEW DEMAND-RESPONSIVE bus system has been introduced to High Wycombe as a trial. When I first heard about it I felt its name could be misconstrued but I was willing to give it a try. It operates within the area drawn on the map, offers a large number of stops, and at the start will serve: Booker, Sands, Cressex, Daws Hill, Wooburn Green, Wycombe Marsh, Loudwater and Downley. It's funded by the Government's Rural Mobility Fund and uses Carousel minibuses.



My mission was to get back to Sands from High Wycombe Railway Station.

You are encouraged to book your ride online, but due to being unable to get a decent internet connection at Marylebone, I rang the telephone number when I arrived in High Wycombe.

The time was 2.10pm. The phone was answered promptly and a suitable destination stop (Sands Village Hall) was identified. I was offered 2.15 or 2.30, so I naturally plumped for 2.15. Moments

later a PickMeUp bus arrived – however it was not for us, that one was scheduled for a 15 min layover at the station. Seconds later our bus arrived, and we left promptly at 2.15. It took us swiftly to our destination, and by using our bus passes it was free. Something to bear in mind is to state how many people are travelling, a point I omitted, but it didn't really cause a problem this time.

Well, on a small sample of one it was brilliant, but it is early days and at 2pm the service probably isn't too busy.

How to book: 01494 296021 or visit <https://www.pickmeupwycombe.co.uk/book-now/>. There is of course, an app. as well.

Demand Responsive Transport was one of the initiatives that Dr. Elsa Woodward had championed during her time on the Transport Group many years ago. It is popular in some continental cities and she saw the potential of it then. A small-scale pilot happened using a local taxi company but was not widely available.

Nigel Phillips

Saying No to Neglect in our Town Centre



Gemma Shinh's second selection of photos draws attention to the crumbling condition of the fabric of an important building on Easton Street formerly Clarke's solicitors. (See also p5)



PickMeUp ... but at what cost?

ON 26th SEPTEMBER I attended an online meeting of the Transport Action Group of the High Wycombe Community Board and posed a number of questions concerning the new “PickMeUp” service. The questions could not be answered immediately by those present but I was promised a response as they were relevant to the subject under discussion. On 15th October, having received no response and recognising that the deadline for submitting questions to the next meeting of the High Wycombe Community Board was fast approaching, I submitted a request in writing which was acknowledged by the Council on 17th October, but I have still received no answers to the questions raised within it.

The PickMeUp service, funded by the Government's Rural Mobility Fund, commenced operation in High Wycombe urban area in late September 2022. The amount awarded for a 3-year period totalled £736,000, say £245,333 per annum. As the service only operates from 06.00 until 19.00 on Mondays to Fridays, to calculate a daily cost you need to exclude 52 x 2 days for weekends and a further 7 for bank holidays. At 254 days per annum, the daily cost is £965.

I wanted to know:

Why were the North East quadrant of the town and rural areas surrounding the town excluded?

What are the targets (both passenger numbers and revenue) for this service?

What has been the patronage and revenue during its first month of operation?

The Government's plan to improve bus services requires individual councils to produce Bus Service Improvement Plans. When I first tried to access the Buckinghamshire Plan I was directed to the Council's website where a message appeared saying “page does not exist”.

So I began to question: Does Buckinghamshire Council have a Plan? And, if so, why can it not be seen? How can it be claimed that bus services have been improved when frequencies on most services have been reduced and late evening services are now non-existent?

I was advised in writing by Buckinghamshire Council that any questions would be answered before the meeting of the Community Board on 3rd November. This did not happen. I spoke at

that meeting and, as of 30th November a response is still awaited.

The Buckinghamshire Bus Service Improvement Plan is now accessible on the Buckinghamshire Council website, where I have been able to study it and compare its contents with those of other local authorities similarly published. It is easy to see why Reading Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council were successful in their bids and have been awarded substantial sums. The Buckinghamshire Plan is relatively lacking in detail. It highlights the need for demand responsive bus services for the rural areas not the urban areas.

There is no detail relating to Buckinghamshire Council's application to the Rural Mobility Fund and no explanation as to who decided on the area in which the PickMeUp service would operate. At the meetings I have attended it has been stated that the intention was to concentrate on the hilly areas, but when I queried why the flat West Wycombe Road between Chapel Lane and the Pedestal was included while the area east of Hughenden Road and above the railway line was excluded even though it has some of the steepest hills in town and places like Green Hill have no bus service, there was total silence.

Councils are supposed to act transparently but, in this case, I find the silence from Buckinghamshire Council bewildering. I intend to persist until I get answers and if I, as an Honorary Alderman, cannot get answers, what hope is there for Joe Public?

Peter Cartwright



Wycombe Monopoly

BACK IN THE SPRING we drew attention to the likely creation of a Monopoly game featuring High Wycombe places and landmarks. When suggestions were called for, we put “Pann Mill” forward as an important heritage site worthy of a place on the board.

We heard very little until just before the official launch on 28th October. Not the most exciting of events – a giant board set up on its side beneath the Guildhall and a tombola with a chance to win one of three copies of the game – if there was a party anywhere then we missed it!

But we were successful. Pann Mill is in the place occupied on a traditional board by Euston Road and we are neatly between Wycombe Museum and the Wycombe Sound Chance box.

The game is available from several retailers in the Town.

MC

Letters to the Editor



I was pleased to read Heather Morley's article in the autumn edition about the imaginative proposals for improving the overall look of All Saints churchyard and its potential for a variety of communal usage. Heather mentioned that the refurbishment of the churchyard gates would soon be completed. It is great to see how this restoration has highlighted the striking elegance of the gates and enhanced the approach to the South Porch of the church. As those who may have read my article ("All Saints Churchyard Gates – Where did they come from?" Autumn 2009 Newsletter) may know, I do not believe the gates came from either the Earl of Shelburne as a gift or from Loakes Manor/Wycombe Abbey. From a vestry minute of 24th July 1772, it is clear that the Corporation itself commissioned and paid for the gates, probably inspired by those at the entrance to Loakes Manor, erected a decade earlier which were "much esteemed by our neighbours as being a great ornament to the Town" (letter of 8th Oct 1762 to the Earl of Shelburne from his agent Samuel Auld).

My photo shows the churchyard gates as they were on 10th October with three cars parked behind, obscuring the view of the South Porch. The parking problem is covered in the proposals by The Rev'd Gareth Morley for making better use of the churchyard, but when will the closure of the South Porch also be addressed? The porch was closed in December 2018, the architect having advised closure "until the roof of the porch was made safe". Nearly four years on, there is no sign of progress. Surely by now the safety issues could have been addressed? Indeed, it should be part of the proposed improvements to the churchyard. There seems little point in stopping



Cars obscuring the view of the South Porch

Photo: David Snoxell

parking in front of the South Porch unless and until it is reopened for public use.

The South Porch is regarded as a fine example of Early English gothic architecture in Buckinghamshire. It was built in the late thirteenth century along with the nave and side aisles and remains an integral part of the church. It was comprehensively reconstructed in 1893-4 by the well-known architect J Oldrid Scott at a cost of £630. The figures of the four evangelists were placed in the exterior niches in 1894 in memory of Edward Wheeler (and the statues of St Timothy and St Stephen were later added in memory of his son R D Wheeler). Pevsner's "Buildings of England, Buckinghamshire" (1960) describes the South Porch as late 13th century, rib vaulted, pointed trefoil arcading on the shafts which carry stiff leaf capitals, an inner doorway which is double shafted with a complexly moulded arch. Similar and more detailed descriptions are to be found in Downs' "The Parish Church of High Wycombe" (1894), "Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Buckinghamshire" (1912) and Green's "Parish Church of High Wycombe" (1966).

David Snoxell

Listed Buildings shouldn't look like this



With reference to Denise Lindsay's letter opposite No.21 High Street, the White House, is steeped in history and in need of urgent care and attention.

Thanks to Gemma Shinh of the Planning Group for these photos of No.21 High Street.





I lead monthly town trails for Wycombe Museum, and of course, we spend quite a lot of time in the High Street.

Unfortunately, every time we come to the White House (at 21 High Street), this once lovely building looks worse. It has an uncared-for appearance, with peeling paint and an air of neglect.

This gives me concern for the interior, which, though turned into flats, contains some late Elizabethan wall paintings, as the core of the building is much older than the façade implies.



*Paintings cover a whole wall in one of the upper rooms
Photo: Jackie Kay*

High Streets everywhere are under-used, and therefore under threat, lacking too few "real" shops. It would be good if this trend could be reversed, but in the meantime, we must make the best of what is left, and make sure the buildings are looked after.

People are not visiting the High Street to shop, so this is all the more reason to make this area more attractive to visitors who may enjoy the architecture. The old Library Garden is a good focal point, and I hope that continues.

Maybe somebody could reply to this with some good news!

Denise Lindsay



*Detail from Tudor painting inside the White House
Photo Jackie Kay*



I was shown an article published in your latest newsletter (No 204) concerning the proposed Film Studios at Little Marlow and I felt compelled to respond.

I represent the Buckinghamshire branch of CPRE, The Countryside Charity and we are objecting most strongly to the associated planning application. I thought the article was not fairly balanced and presented a rather one-sided view of the proposal, presumably because the presentation was given by Studio representatives. I would appreciate it if you could redress the balance by printing this letter.

As I'm sure your readers will know (but it's not mentioned in the article), the site of the proposed film studios is actually the location intended by Buckinghamshire Council for a Country Park. This is identified in the Wycombe Local Plan, which was only formally adopted fairly recently. The Local Plan went through a lengthy, democratic, formal process whereby the Council (actually Wycombe District Council at the time) consulted the public, had the plans inspected by a Government Inspector (which included a further opportunity for public opinion) and then formally adopted by the Council as the "blueprint" for development in the Wycombe area for the next 15 years. The Local Plan is therefore the over-riding document setting out how the area in question should be treated.

The article acknowledges that the site is in the London Metropolitan Green Belt but it implies the only concern is the "scale of the development". That is not how planning law works. The government is very clear that Green Belt can ONLY be developed in "very exceptional circumstances" and, frankly, a film studio does not meet those criteria. The Council's plans for a Country Park, on the other hand, will keep the area free from development and be retained as open countryside, accessible to the public for leisure and recreation. Indeed, the Council aims to improve the land for that purpose from its current run-down state, while also improving biodiversity, flora and fauna. None of this is mentioned in the article.

Many of the claims for the Film Studio are presented as fact in the article but are highly questionable. These include the claimed local employment (no evidence) and bus service (which could well disappear as soon as finances get squeezed). Finally, this proposal needs to be considered alongside a number of other film studio proposals in the area north-west of London, something that also impacts the argument for building all over the Green Belt. I would be happy to come to one of your meetings and give you a presentation about ourselves!

**Neil Salisbury, Trustee and Head of Planning
CPRE – The Countryside Charity**

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:
Stewart Thompson
Ian McEwen
Edmund Gemmell

Obituaries

We regret to inform members of the death of:
John Mumford (see p10)



“A Caribbean Garden” covers stories of medicinal plants, global plant trading, enslaved garden workers, western botany, plants as foods, plus connections to local Caribbean food stories. This exhibition explores the history of St Vincent Botanical Garden and its relevance to Wycombe's Vincentian community today. The exhibition is part of a larger project, “Unearthing Indigenous Caribbean contributions to western botanical knowledge”, researched by Dr Christina Welch at the University of Winchester.



THE ENGLISH COACHING INN – A TALK BY JULIAN HUNT AT THE RIVERSIDE 10TH MARCH 2023

“High Wycombe unmasked” offers a flat guided walk around the town centre on Monday 2nd January starting at the red letterbox at the Railway Station. No need to book. Just turn up. Distance 1 mile in 2 hours. Willie Reid invites you to: learn about the mediaeval welfare state and see the Wycombe ruins, discover the world-renowned institution that started life here in 1799 and hear about one of only two British Prime Ministers who also rose to the rank of army general. Also, view what is still Wycombe's claim to European fame even after leaving the European Union.

www.WalkingWycombeWithWillie.co.uk

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 February 2023**

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!!!**

2023	
Monday 2 nd January 10 am. start	“High Wycombe Unmasked” – a walk led by Society Trustee, Willie Reid – starting at the Red Letterbox at High Wycombe Station. (See above)
Throughout January, and until 19 th February at Wycombe Museum	“A Caribbean Garden” – an exhibition featuring the Botanical Garden on the island of St Vincent in the Caribbean with a fascinating history. (See above)
Friday 10 th March 7.30 pm The Riverside	“The English Coaching Inn” – of which there were and are many examples in Wycombe. Julian Hunt is President of the Bucks Archaeological Society, a frequent speaker on various subjects and local history researcher.
Friday 28 th April 7.30 pm The Riverside	“Life and Death in Anglo Saxon Buckinghamshire”. Presented by Mike Farley. Mike's particular speciality is Pots and Potteries, but on this occasion, he will talk more generally on the Anglo-Saxon period.
Friday 12 th May 7.30 pm The Riverside	Dr. Wendy Morrison with an update on the “Beacons of the Past” project. Rescheduled from 2021. In her work with Chilterns AONB Wendy has made use of the LiDAR survey investigating the various lumps and bumps and discovering hillforts that no-one knew existed before.
Sunday 14 th May	Pann Mill Open Day – to coincide with National Mills Weekend