

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 209

WINTER 2023

100 YEARS AGO, in February 1924, Lady Terrington, newly elected Member of Parliament for Wycombe, used her maiden speech to support the abolition of means-testing for old age pensions and had a longer-term ambition to reduce the qualifying pension age to 65 for men and 60 for women.

Within a year, she had lost her seat, but a short snippet of 16mm film survives showing her conceding that defeat from the portico of the Red Lion Hotel in High Wycombe High Street. With modern image-processing techniques we can gain a good impression of what it was like on the portico.



Lady Terrington conceding election defeat in 1924 from the portico of the Red Lion Hotel. A single frame from 16mm film colourised with the help of Palette.fm in 2023.

TODAY the use and abuse of technology to inform or mislead is a hot news topic, with Artificial Intelligence alternately viewed as an exciting opportunity and a harbinger of impending doom. But creative use of imagery is not new. Artists have been at work for centuries.



This recent depiction of the Guildhall by local artist Tony Mealing, comes to you with seasonal good wishes. The very tall Christmas tree and the Lowry-esque crowd of Christmas revellers assembled in our High Street were the products of his imagination.

Jackie Kay

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

Registered Charity No. 257897

Chairman: Colin Hingston, 65 Dean Garden Rise, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 1RF. Tel: 07718 103603

Making a Splash

THE PANN MILL Open Day in September was a great success again, though meteorologically interesting thanks to the occasional heavy shower. With my customary Chairman's wisdom, I decided to check if a depression in the roof of the refreshments gazebo was caused by accumulated water. Pushing my finger up from underneath resulted in a quantity of H₂O descending on my upper body. Still, the visitors around seemed to be appreciative of the unscheduled entertainment and it was warm enough for me to dry out quite quickly.

Following all the disruptions of the past couple of years, we have at last returned to a full public programme of events for the first half of 2024 with a varied mix of meetings and outings. (See back page for details). We have been a bit disappointed with the turnout for our meetings at the Trinity United Reformed Church, though we recognise that the weather has been less than favourable, and the evenings are now dark. We hope that the new programme will appeal to more members and guests in the Spring.

Many of you will remember the Art Exhibition we put on at the Guildhall in April 2022, and you may also be familiar with the prints of the friezes of original paintings by Tony Mealing of Wycombe High Street (North and South sides), which have been on sale since then. The last half-size version of these in stock has made its way on the latest High Wycombe Town Twinning Association visit to Kelkheim, our twin town in Germany, accompanied by the Mayor, Cllr Paul Turner, and Cllr Lesley Clarke OBE. We just wonder now whether Tony is ready to visit Kelkheim and paint similar friezes of their main street so they can return the favour.

I know some of our members like the idea of the Marlow Film Studios proposed development, while others are dead set against it. Robert Laycock, the CEO, has kindly agreed to come and

talk to us on March 14th next year, when there will be a chance to ask him questions (polite ones please!) Hopefully views for or against will then be better informed. Personally, I've come down firmly on the fence on this subject – I can understand and sympathise with the arguments on both sides.

There was some concern at our last Trustees' meeting about the subdued profile of the Society and the lack of appeal to younger people. Indeed, I didn't know anything about the Society until after I retired from paid work, and my experience is evidently quite common. We are working on a couple of ideas to try and put ourselves about a bit more, but word of mouth is still probably the best way we can spread knowledge of our existence. So don't be shy about including the Society in conversations with friends and family. Supporting information, including details of the Society's aims, can be found on our website and in the "Join Us" leaflets (see below). Perhaps together we can all make a bit more of a "splash".

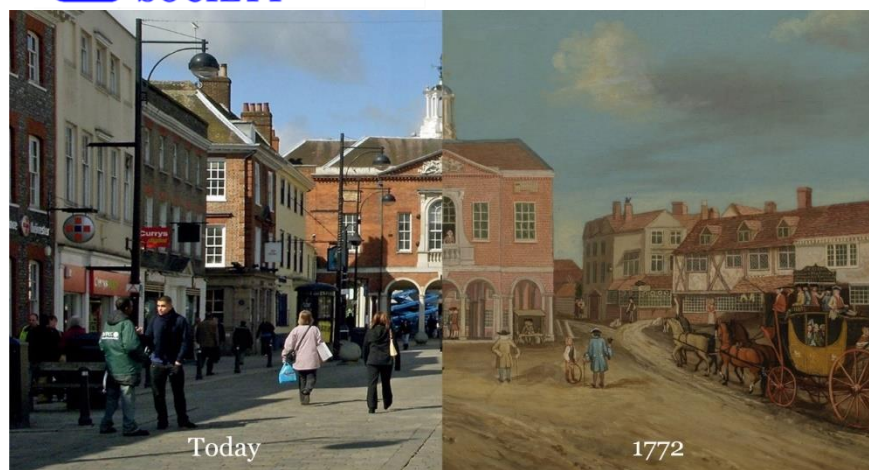
It remains for me to hope you enjoy reading the rest of this Newsletter and to wish you all a Happy Christmas!

Colin Hingston
Chairman

OUR TRI-FOLD promotional leaflets inviting readers to "Join us!" have undergone many revisions over the years, reflecting changes both to the Society's scope of activities and publicity practices.



Join us!



Copies of the latest leaflets can be picked up at any of our events and are also now available between events on the ground floor of the library.

Included on the inside is a composite "then and now" picture of our High Street, inspired by William Hannan's portrayal in 1772 and a more recent photographic image.

Thanks to Brian Tranter for this update.

Our Patron, the Lord Great Chamberlain

ON 14TH SEPTEMBER, Lord Carrington, Patron of the High Wycombe Society, gave a lively talk to members and guests about his new role as Lord Great Chamberlain (LGC) which he became on the accession of King Charles to the throne. One might have expected it to be a serious account of the history of the office and its responsibilities. It was indeed but also gently peppered with dry humour and amusing moments, all of which ensured that the audience remained attentive and engaged. Among those enjoying the occasion was Cllr Paul Turner, the Mayor of High Wycombe, who had accepted our invitation to attend.

In his welcome, the Chairman set a light-hearted tone by introducing Lord Carrington as the Lord High Chamberlain, later correcting himself with reference to the Lord High Executioner in *The Mikado*. Undoubtedly the uniform of the LGC and the ermine and velvet Coronation robes bore echoes of that other exalted but fictional office. Retrieved from the attic at Bledlow, they had last been worn in 1911 by Lord Carrington's great great uncle, Earl Carrington, at the coronation of George V. With a minor adjustment he was able to wear them for the King's coronation.

Lord Carrington gave a potted history of the LGC's evolving role since it was first created by Henry I in 1132. It is a hereditary title with a complex descent, today shared by three families who hold different percentages of their entitlement to it.

The Carrington share descends from the marriage of the 2nd Lord Carrington in 1840 to a Willoughby de Eresby. The third Lord Carrington, later Marquess of Lincolnshire, became joint hereditary LGC on his mother's death in 1879. But it was not until the start of George V's reign that he had the opportunity to "exercise the office" when it was the Carrington family's turn to do so. He served from 1911 until his death in 1928. The office is held by each family until the monarch's death.

Lord Carrington related how he knew from an early age that it was likely that he would be called upon to fulfil the role when the Queen died. At the end of King Charles' reign, it will revert to the Marquess of Cholmondeley whose 50% share of the entitlement determines that he holds the position every other reign.

Today's responsibilities are confined to ceremonial aspects of the monarch's funeral, the lying in state in Westminster Hall, the accession and coronation of the new monarch, where the LGC presents spurs to the King (or Queen), and the management of the royal parts of the Palace of Westminster, for which he is the

King's representative in Parliament. Asked what was his most memorable and moving moment of the recent events Lord Carrington said that it was the solemnity of being alone with four guards in Westminster Hall keeping watch over The Queen's coffin.



Society Chairman Colin Hingston, Lord Carrington and the Mayor, Cllr Paul Turner.

Photo: J Kay

A little-known aspect of the run-up to a coronation is the role undertaken by the Court of Claims. The Court decides on the validity of claims to be present or play a part in the coronation.

In 2023 this body was replaced by a Coronation Claims Office within the Cabinet Office, its members appointed by

Downing Street. Over 400 claims were submitted of which only 16 were upheld. Lord Carrington cited one such claim from the King's Champion, whose origins go back to the Norman Conquest. His role was to challenge anyone who contested the new monarch's entitlement to the throne to trial by combat. The Champion no longer rides in full armour into Westminster Hall during the Coronation banquet but carries the royal standard in the procession.

Lord Carrington is, as an elected hereditary peer, in the House of Lords and has chosen to sit on the crossbenches. The legislative duties of a peer today are wide ranging, including domestic and foreign affairs issues and membership of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, one of which I myself am the coordinator.

We are fortunate that Lord Carrington accepted our invitation to become the Patron of the High Wycombe Society last year and for his memorable talk, which provided insights into some of the more arcane aspects of how monarchy, state and Parliament interact, as well as being an enjoyable and convivial evening. We understand from Lord Carrington that the "Discover Bucks" museum in Aylesbury is planning to include items relating to the LGC role in a future exhibition. Something to look out for in 2024.

David Snoxell

Pushing the Wheels of Industry Around

IN THE YEAR 1932, Wycombe found itself grappling with a daunting challenge: widespread unemployment. The root of this issue lay in the advent of new industrial processes, which were systematically replacing the manual craftsmanship that had once thrived in the local furniture industry. As the winds of change swept through, approximately 750 skilled furniture makers found themselves without jobs. This was a significant blow to the community, given that the entire population of High Wycombe hovered around 26,000 souls. The distressing situation, however, ignited a spark of resilience in the hearts of several prominent individuals within the town. Determined to mitigate the growing unemployment crisis, they banded together. A town hall meeting was convened, and nearly a thousand concerned citizens gathered to deliberate and craft a solution to this pressing issue.

Among the attendees at the town hall were notable figures, including Reverend W.L.P. Float, President of the High Wycombe Rotary Club, Councillor W.S. Toms, who held the office of Mayor, Mr. J.L. Humphrey, Sir John Foster Fraser (a travel writer and journalist who by then was well-known), Councillor W.H. Healey, Councillor G.H. Brocklehurst, and Alderman W.H. Tyzack. The discussion at this pivotal meeting revolved around ideas for those who were gainfully employed to extend a helping hand to their unemployed brethren.

Suggestions ranged from refurbishing their homes and tending to gardens, to embarking on shop renovations.

"Work-finding" committees were elected to serve each of the four wards in the town. Each committee had its own secretary: Mr. Barry, Cllr. J.R. Avery, Reverend W.L.P. Float and Mr Chisolm. They were to arrange for canvassers to make house-to-house visits within a week to urge all residents to do everything in their power to support the schemes.

In the midst of deliberations, Lucian Ercolani introduced some innovative proposals that captured the collective imagination. Ercolani unveiled three exquisitely carved wooden oak house nameplates, each priced at a modest 7s 6d (equivalent to 37.5p today). He envisioned the Furniture Manufacturers Federation supporting this initiative by encouraging their sales representatives to showcase these nameplates to their clientele. It was estimated that orders for 4,000 of these nameplates would generate 50 hours of work per week for 20 individuals over a three-month period. Ercolani appealed to those in attendance to serve as guarantors, pledging £75 to cover the costs of the first 400 nameplates. Mr Winter Taylor later advised that

a well-wisher had granted £50 towards the costs. It was hoped to make the Wycombe-made nameplates fashionable across the country.

In addition to the wooden nameplates, Ercolani had silver tokens crafted, intended to serve as keepsakes commemorating the collective effort to combat unemployment. One side of these tokens bore the High Wycombe crest, with the

words **"Push the Wheels of Industry around."** On the reverse side, the slogan read, **"Change Idle Money for a Busy Industry."** Though there were initial concerns about the practicality of canvassing the sale of nameplates door-to-door, Ercolani managed to sell 20 of these silver tokens himself at £19 each, a noteworthy accomplishment.

Further, a subsequent run of aluminium tokens was produced, to be offered at a mere 2d each, with the hope of raising an additional £40. These tokens were designed to symbolize the town's collective determination to conquer the scourge of unemployment. These tokens, particularly the silver ones, are enduring reminders of this episode in our town's history.

As we reflect on this fascinating piece of Wycombe's past, we wonder: where are these tokens today, and who purchased them? And do any of the Ercolani house nameplates survive? We invite you to share your stories and connections to this historic endeavour, as we strive to add more layers to this compelling narrative. The legacy of Wycombe's collective action in the face of adversity lives on, and your contributions to this tale are most welcome.

Mark Page

[Street Life - Wycombe and its people through my eyes | Facebook](#)



Commemorative silver and aluminium tokens were produced and sold to raise funds to help counter unemployment.





Roger Lawson 1940 – 2023

ROGER LAWSON, who died on 21st August, was a much-loved, conscientious and hard-working member of the High Wycombe Society for 48 years. He joined the Society in 1975. By 1978 he was elected Vice-Chairman, and in 1986 became Chairman, a post in which he served for 28 years. A first-rate chairman, he prepared diligently for Society meetings, welcoming visiting speakers and presiding over proceedings with dignity and well-spoken words. He was just as authoritative when chairing the monthly meetings of the Executive Committee. He eventually stepped down in 2014, when it was decided, for better or for worse, that the senior posts should change hands every three years (later revised to every five years).

Besides chairing meetings of the Society and its

Trustees, he was a keen and active member of the Society's Planning Group from the 1990s until 2018. His special area of responsibility was Downley, where his good knowledge of local opinion and politics enabled the Group to object effectively to many bad proposals that would have been detrimental to the street scene and to residents. After he stood down from leading the Group, he was always happy to take the chair, very effectively and with his usual conscientious preparation, when his successor was not available.

Apart from those formal responsibilities, so long as his health lasted, he attended Pann Mill Open Days, setting an example to the rest of us by using those events to tell visitors about the Society's work and entice them into joining! He was also a member of the Society's erstwhile Trees Group, which became the "Trees & Water Interest Group", abbreviated to "TWIG"! And last but not least, he served for many years as an "über-postman", supervising deliveries of newsletters by our small army of volunteer postmen serving the west of High Wycombe.

Roger believed fervently in the work of the High Wycombe Society and devoted a great deal of his time and effort to it over almost half a century. He was a greatly appreciated and much-loved chairman.

Roger's life was celebrated at a beautiful and interesting service at the Chilterns Crematorium on 18th September where his elder daughter, Rebecca, and grandson gave us a fascinating

background on his life. He was born in 1940, when his father was away fighting in the war and who sadly died without meeting him. His mother Ruby joined forces with her sister who also had a young son and they were brought up like brothers. Roger was a bright boy and won a scholarship to University College School. There it must have been that our former chairman learnt to speak with his characteristic eloquence and assurance.

And perhaps that was where he honed his mischievous sense of humour, a school report describing him as "the buffoon of the class". After school he worked for Mobil Oil and a series of manufacturing companies, eventually becoming executive Shipping Manager. Roger had married Diana, who happily is still very much with us, in 1965 after an "unofficial engagement" of six years, moving into the first of their two homes in Downley, where they brought up their daughters Rebecca and Naomi.

One of Roger's many friendships was with the late Tony Fooks, whom he persuaded (by stealth, it is said!) to become involved in our Society. Tony was a great asset, a dynamic leader of the Planning Group who carried considerable weight with local councillors, while his wife Sheila worked hard at society events.

Eventually, in retirement, Roger would increasingly be away for weeks on end, having fallen in love with cruising and seeing the world with Diana. He deserved to enjoy it!

The Society is tremendously grateful for his enthusiasm and selfless contribution sustained over so many years.

Chris Woodman



*Perched on a granite ball in the High Street,
Photo courtesy of Roger's family.*

Planning Laments

EVERY QUARTER, the Planning Group endeavours to compile a snapshot of the most interesting planning applications and construction activity in and around the town centre, and sometimes also a little further afield. But progress on planning matters can be frustratingly slow. On this occasion, we thought we would take a different approach and share some of our frustrations. The result: some laments and a bit of a rant (*although it may not all get past the Editor!*)

The Brunel Shed has been a cause of both celebration and consternation to our Group. After many years of lobbying anyone we could think of to refurbish and protect this historic building for future generations, careful work has been undertaken (at very significant cost) to bring it back to life. But we are alarmed that over a year since completion of the work, there is still no sign of life. We understand that Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) will occupy the building with a café and trading space for creative start-ups (a great idea, which we welcome) but our question is: when? We have observed weeds proliferating at times in front of the building, and paintwork starting to peel as well, so please can someone tell us when it will be occupied?



Already paint is peeling from the top of the façade. Will it ever come to life as planned?

Photo: Tony Hatton

White Hart Street The council's regeneration team have outlined their broad brushstroke plans for this area, which include pedestrianizing the street so that hospitality outlets can place tables and chairs outside their premises. There will be improved surfaces and perhaps some tree planting, and street lighting that's more attractive and conducive to a vibrant café culture. Street begging, we understand, will not be tolerated – it is unlawful, after all – and we already have the 'diverted giving points'. (See p14).

But, please, when will all this work actually start? For what feels like years, work has been imminent but subject to one delay after another. Why? Can we help?

Parking and driving infringements We know there are now CCTV cameras and automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) devices, and that the council has powers to sanction those driving through parts of town that are barred to cars, and that's great! But why do cars still park illegally at the east end of the High Street, particularly in the middle of the road where taxis used to wait? This is another issue that has been outstanding for more years than we can recall. If

it was dangerous for taxi drivers and passengers to open their car doors and step into the path of passing traffic, why is it tolerated for domestic cars?

Some years ago, we were assured that the middle section would be appropriately laid out, perhaps enhanced by some planting, and that proper formal on-street short-stay parking would be added to benefit the businesses that are in that area, but so far there is none of that. The only current beneficiaries are the chancers who have the nerve to risk being ticketed by the traffic wardens, trusting in their defence that there is no signage to stop them parking. Please can this be sorted?



If it was unsafe for taxis, why are cars allowed to park illegally in the middle of the High Street and risk opening their doors into the paths of passing buses?

Photo: Tony Hatton

Shop fronts Our very own Chris Woodman has championed the cause of regulating shop fronts in his role on the High Wycombe Community Board. There is, in fact, a shop fronts guidance document which fell into disuse and is no longer part of the approved planning policy, although our planning officers reckon it is still basically sound. Compared with neighbouring towns such as Amersham and Marlow, where the street scenes, no more historically significant than ours, are protected by vigilant town councils liaising with Buckinghamshire Council officers, it often feels as if High Wycombe infringements are overlooked. Lack of resources (certainly a factor) and whether enforcement would be in the public interest (which seems far more debatable) are quoted as reasons for allowing shocking liberties such as the painting of the corner barber shop, facing the Little Market House. If you remember it as a tasteful dark maroon colour, with well-maintained signage and paintwork, you will be

dismayed to see it now painted very shoddily in white paint with very amateurish red painted lettering. This happened over two years ago, yet the rules are perfectly clear that paint colours may only be changed by small degrees in a listed building within a Conservation Area. We complained promptly but were reminded that enforcement action by the planning authority is always discretionary. Our view, as members of the public, is that it is very much in our public interest that the rules be obeyed. Would this have happened in Marlow? We think not. It is situations like this that cause High Wycombe people to petition for a town council, even though that is not a straightforward issue.



No. 1 High Street, a prestigious address in a Conservation Area, let down by shoddy paintwork.

Photo: Tony Hatton

We are now working internally towards producing our own Shop Fronts Guidance document, pointing out the rules and even suggesting an appropriate paint colour palette (two of our members have expertise in this area). This would take on board the excellent briefings that we have received from the council over the past two years, and we hope that it will get early results on the ground.



The red colour at No.8 High Street does not fit in with the colours of the Conservation Area, while next-door, the "Making Smiles" fascia nameboard does not fit with the traditional timber front.

Photo: Tony Mealing

If in due course the council's conservation staff are able to get the funding that they want and can conduct their own county-wide exercise to tighten up the rules and management of all Conservation Areas, we shall welcome that because it will carry much more authority. We're all in this together.

Our Culverted River Nobody reading this far is likely to be a stranger to our major ambition: to uncover the River Wye as it flows through the centre of town. [On pages 8 to 9 you will find an update from Project Riverside with a diagram summarising changes we would like to see in due course.] This isn't a quick project and can only happen over an extended period, but we would like to raise a related issue: leaking culverts.

We understand that concrete typically retains its structural integrity for approximately 50 years. It was back in the 1960s that the river was culverted, prior to the construction of the (also largely concrete) flyover. Many people nowadays bitterly regret that the river was culverted in the first place, but it was a poor-quality waterway with chemicals from the furniture workshops rendering the water a murky green at times, and of course the High Street was a traffic bottleneck in those days, before either the flyover or M40 provided a bypass. So, decisions were made at the time for contemporary reasons.

But that was all 60 years ago, and we are increasingly concerned about the ramifications of relying on ageing concrete. We know that Buckinghamshire Council have undertaken a significant survey to determine the safety of the flyover, but how about the older concrete culverts which, we understand, are leaking water into the foundation of buildings alongside?

In conclusion, we are glad to know that Martin Tett (Leader of Buckinghamshire Council) reads this Newsletter (see p14) as we want everyone at Buckinghamshire Council to hear our voice.

We know that we all share concerns for preserving and restoring the natural environment in our beautiful county, as well as maintaining services and a functional infrastructure. We also all understand that restructuring the council in 2020, coupled with the demands of the Covid pandemic, presented massive challenges.

But is High Wycombe now receiving the attention and investment it deserves?

As a historic market town and a major contributor to the economy of the county (both in the past and present), it needs to look the part and function well. How much longer do we have to wait for changes we can all agree are needed?

Where's the action timetable? Or is it only we who are now "Caring for our town, Past, Present and Future..."?

We hope not!

Planning Group

Project Riverside – an update

REGULAR READERS may remember that in the Winter 2022 Newsletter we reported the formation of a team comprising members drawn from the High Wycombe Society, Revive (and Friends of) The Wye and The Chiltern Society, our combined aim being to envisage the best future for our town centre, given our united ambition to raise the river from its ageing concrete culverts. At the time we were looking forward to a meeting with Cllr Rachael Matthews, Deputy Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration.

In October 2023 we were pleased to note that Buckinghamshire Council Cabinet approved a Regeneration Framework document which made specific mention of the River Wye as follows: *“The River Wye runs through the town centre and there are opportunities both to improve access to the river where it is not built over and consider incorporating further ‘opening-up’ of the river as part of potential redevelopment proposals. Over the longer-term there may be further opportunities around the river, but these will be subject to wider development plans and investment.”* It is good to see such a statement in a broad framework document. The wording may fall short of our ideal as we think it is also important not to do anything to prejudice the river’s re-opening, but on balance it is good news that the connection is being made between

opportunities to uncover the river and potential benefits to regeneration. We like to think that our one-page summary of our vision (reproduced on the opposite page) may have helped influence opinion.

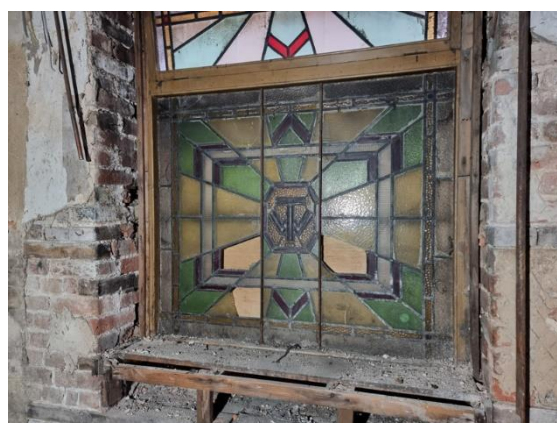
We recognise that uncovering the river will only be achieved in the long-term and that significant change is likely to be driven when tipping points such as concrete failure occur. But major changes are gradually occurring. In future there will be lower car ownership and daily commuting for all is already a thing of the past. We ask Buckinghamshire Council to support this direction of travel, rather than simply continue to patch up and replace the ugly and polluting roads that divide our historic town.

Newly discovered



IF YOU ARE a Wycombe resident, the chances are that you have passed by the above window in Bull Lane many times. Almost (but not quite) fully boarded up in such a way that only a small shaft of light could enter the room behind, it has probably not attracted your attention. Only those with very keen eyesight might have observed a pattern in the glass and wondered what once lay behind and below.

As we go to press, all has been revealed in a social media post by Mark Page, which has aroused some excitement. Timpsons owned the property for much of the twentieth century and thanks to Mark’s efforts, their company archivist, Russ Sander, has confirmed that this is an early example of a William Timpson window design. Russ travelled from Manchester to Wycombe to see it. For decades it has lain hidden behind a false wall and plywood panel so nobody knew it was there. Talks are now in progress regarding how it might best be preserved and/or restored. Mark has promised to keep us all informed. In the meantime, our thanks to the current owners and congratulations to Mark and to those working at the property who alerted him.



Reviving the Wye is the key to regenerating High Wycombe

Our town centre has the River Wye buried underneath a sub-standard shopping centre and flyover with a dual carriageway that divides the town. We can do better!

We've already invested in the 'alternative route'. If we capitalise on this, we can make our town centre into a good place that benefits people, business, and wildlife.

1

A: The Oxford Road Roundabout and flyover ramps are removed to become a green space. The Wye is remade outside Sainsbury's. No change is needed to vehicular access to Eden. The shops along Octagon Parade are extended to front into the mall.

B: The old road structure is left as the roof to the mall, and new pedestrian entrances are opened into the mall from the green spaces.

C: With the flyover ramps removed, Lily's Walk can be a ground level road. The Wye is opened up and the mall connects with BNU.

2

Because the investment has already been made in the 'alternative route', we can now 'cash in the dividend' and bring benefits to the town centre for people, business and wildlife.

3

Taking out the ramps means we can move the bus station to the heart of the town centre, in place of secondary retail. This means buses won't need to come along the High Street and Oxford Street.

4

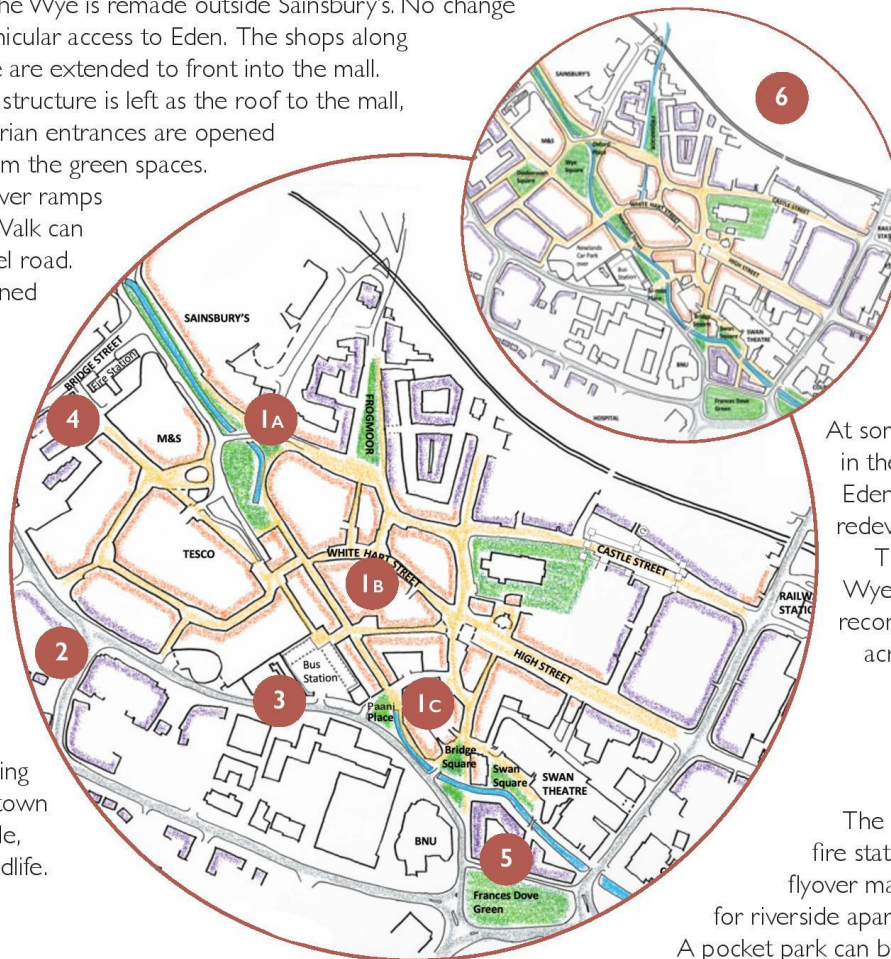
Moving the bus station allows the fire station to be moved. Key worker housing can be put on the upper floors.

6

At some time in the future Eden will be redeveloped. Then the Wye can be reconnected across the town.

5

The existing fire station and flyover make way for riverside apartments. A pocket park can be made from the 'magic roundabout'. And the road outside the theatre becomes a riverside pedestrian square.



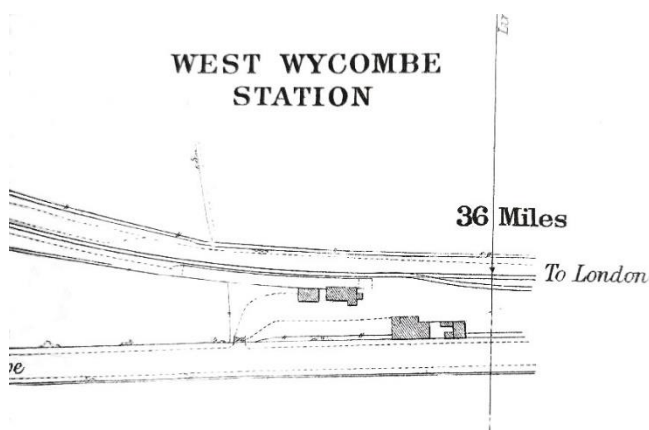
The River Wye is a chalk stream, an internationally rare habitat. Research shows opening up the Wye does not increase the risk of flooding. The economy will benefit because people are attracted to water and greenspace. To regenerate the town let's revive the Wye.

Some ideas from a partnership of the High Wycombe Society, the Chiltern Society, Friends of the Wye and Revive the Wye 08122022

Back to Brunel

IN THE SPRING Newsletter I was able to describe the research project of the High Wycombe and District Model Railway Society and the various initiatives that sought to capture not only the history of the very first railway that arrived in the town in 1854, but equally importantly, the impact that our railway had on the economic and social growth of the town through the 19th century. A particular focus has been applied to West Wycombe station, whose history is relatively under-recorded.

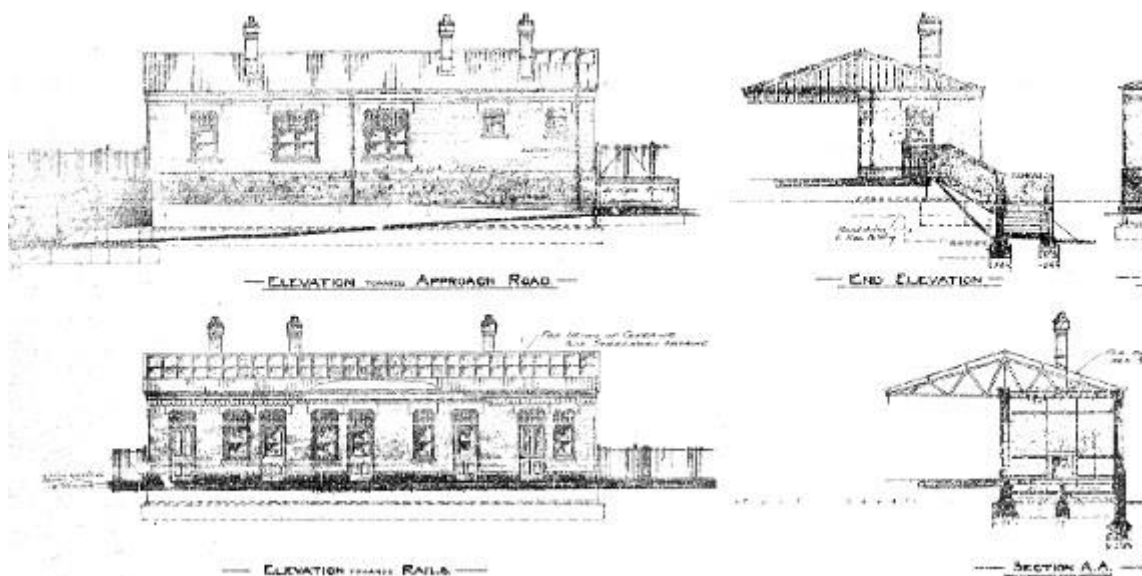
Throughout 2023, our historians have been trawling through numerous local and national archives, seeking anything that could add to this story. One special moment was the discovery of a set of Great Western Railway company maps of the original broad-gauge route dating from 1879 and another set recorded after the line was doubled in 1912. They are in the traditional railway format of that period, 2 chains to the inch or a scale of 1:792, and provide a level of detail not found in contemporary large scale OS maps. As an example, a milk dock is shown at West Wycombe station, a reminder that up until the mid-1960s, much of the land around that location was still farmed, with local milk being transferred away by rail.



Extract from a GWR "2 chain" company map showing West Wycombe Station in 1879

Another special moment was when we finally tracked down a set of the original plans for the new station and goods yard buildings that were erected at West Wycombe around 1904 as part of the new Great Western and Great Central joint main line from Paddington and Marylebone that would eventually sweep away much of the early broad-gauge route. These plans were drafted for the contractors so, again, the level of detail is astonishing, both internally and externally. In the predictable absence of photos that captured the rear elevations of the station building and goods shed, rarely a subject that trainspotters were attracted to, we now have all the information and more for our future scale model! What is also interesting is that the memories provided to us by those who worked at West Wycombe up to its closure in 1958, have proved to be accurate in every aspect, almost certainly a reflection of their dedication to the important work that they delivered for the town and local businesses.

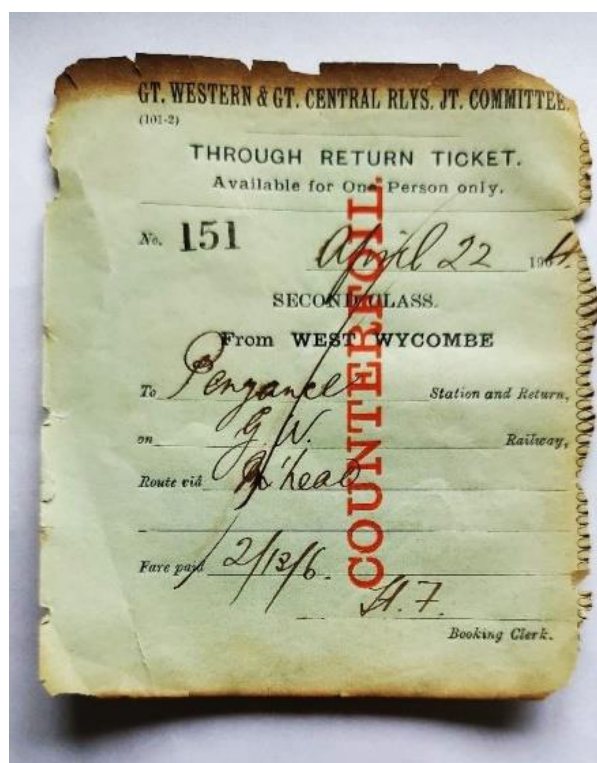
Plans c1904 for the new station and goods yards buildings at West Wycombe station (Joint GW&GC drawing)



More has been learnt about the businesses, large and small, that depended on the rail connection at West Wycombe, from local farms to manufacturers. We now know a lot more about major furniture makers Norths, operating in the old Wycombe railway station yard up to c1902 before moving to West Wycombe and then Piddington. Information about a smaller furniture maker, C W Amos, who had a workshop immediately west of the station in more recent times, is proving more elusive. In the meantime, more information has been provided by local residents about the Friend in Hand Public House and its stable block, which was adjacent to the station and probably erected when this line first opened.



West Wycombe Station Yard with a Smedley's delivery lorry. Smedley's was a food bottling and canning business based in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire and in 1937, the first UK company to freeze food products. They distributed their products to grocers across the country up until 1981.



During the year we have also secured some fascinating artefacts including a ticket issued by the original broad-gauge booking office at West Wycombe in 1904 for a journey to Penzance via Maidenhead at a cost of £2/13/6d. (see left)

And in contrast (below), a 1954 ticket stub from the British Railways era for a trip from Marylebone to West Wycombe, price 7/6.



Local interest in our research has been both encouraging and rewarding, with an exceptional response to our exhibitions and other events. Recently, we took nearly 40 people on a guided ramble around West Wycombe and had to disappoint many more! Introducing local residents to the surviving features of Brunel's original broad-gauge railway is always a satisfying experience. Look out for more events during 2024 and the launch of a dedicated Back to Brunel website for all the information, records, photographs, ephemera, plans and maps that we have brought together. And if you can add to this project in any way, please do get in touch.

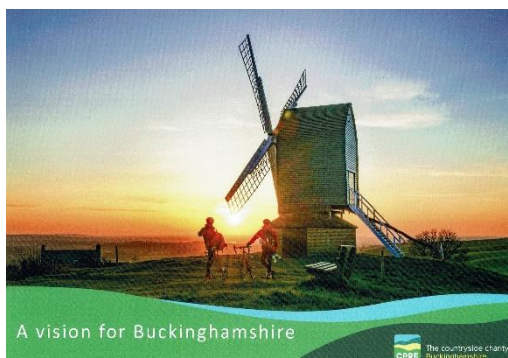
Francis Gomme
High Wycombe and District
Model Railway Society

Saving the Countryside, past, present and future

THE CPRE began life in 1926 as the “Council for the Preservation of Rural England”, morphed into “the Campaign to Protect Rural England”, and nowadays likes to be known simply as “The Countryside Charity”. As it approaches its centenary, it claims an impressive list of achievements, particularly at a national level, where it has lobbied successive governments to introduce legislation to protect the countryside. Successful campaigns are reflected in Town and Country Planning Acts, the creation of National Parks and the Green Belt, as well as in measures to counter more recent threats such as plastic pollution. And when it comes to involving the public, who hasn’t heard of the “Keep Britain Tidy” campaign? Neil Salisbury, who came to speak to the High Wycombe Society on 9th November, was an articulate ambassador both for the ongoing work of the organisation at the national level and that of the regional Buckinghamshire branch to which he belongs and in which he holds the position of a Trustee and Head of Planning.

Neil may not have been aware of our own Society’s experience of planning. Some of us may remember that Chris Woodman drew attention to some excellent CPRE material produced back in 2020 in response to a Government White Paper at that time, proposing changes to the planning system. It would have been interesting to hear whether CPRE’s worst fears, as expressed then, had materialised or not.

Listening to Neil’s talk, it occurred to me that I had also come across a much earlier, more direct involvement of CPRE when I was researching the Rye Protection Society’s campaign to preserve the Rye. The commemorative document we published in 2015 stated that: *Country Life magazine [had carried] an article entitled ‘Coming through the Rye?’ [which had in turn] mentioned the support of the Penn Country Branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) and wished the Wycombe Rye Protection Society success in ‘withstanding the petty tyranny of misguided officialdom!’* A booklet produced by the campaigners back in 1965 also acknowledged the support of the CPRE.



The Windmill at Brill on the cover of CPRE’s publicity
Photo: Mark Caldicott at Pixabay

When the Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority was created, the former Wycombe District Council already had a recently adopted Local Plan in place, but other local councils were at different

stages in the development, review, inspection and approval cycle. South Buckinghamshire did not have an approved Local Plan. Understandably, therefore, much of Neil’s work of late has been focused on ensuring adequate protection for the countryside in South Buckinghamshire.

Reflecting on Neil’s words, it seems to me that the CPRE is at its most effective at the national level where it complements the work of organisations such as Civic Voice and ensures that the interests of the countryside are not forgotten. At a local level, however, we are already well-served by many organisations including the Chiltern Society and the Open Spaces Society whose objectives overlap with those of the CPRE. I fear that Neil’s appeal for local volunteers to join him may have fallen on stony ground.

Jackie Kay

A YEAR AGO, we published a letter from Neil Salisbury in which he took exception to our previous coverage of the proposals for the Marlow Film Studios. The proposed development is outside the area covered by our Planning Group, but we continue to pay close attention to it as whether or not it goes ahead will be of consequence to the people of High Wycombe.

Having listened to an early presentation by the proponents of the film studios scheme and having kept abreast of the objections raised by our friends in the Marlow Society, we thought we had acquired a balanced view. But for Neil, it is a straightforward case, as the adopted Local Plan, which the former Wycombe District Council worked hard to produce and satisfy the inspector, reserves the land for a “Country Park”.

Our elected representatives do not all agree with Neil’s assessment. When Buckinghamshire Council officers recently recommended the

refusal of the planning application for the studios, the Strategic Sites Committee heard arguments on both sides and were divided over what should be done. The committee chairman’s casting vote was used firstly to reject the officers’ recommendation for immediate refusal, and then to defer further decision-making for a few months allowing time for some of the reasons for the officers’ recommendation for refusal to be addressed. We await further developments.

JK

Achieving Sustainable Urban Development

PENELOPE TOLLITT was once a fine Head of Planning at Wycombe District Council, believing in the power of consultation with the public to arrive at better council decisions, which she put into practice very effectively and was well-respected by elected councillors for it. (Is that a familiar thought to our new unitary authority, I wonder?) She was also committed to taking forward her council's own agreed Local Plan, which includes the deculverting of our beautiful historic chalk stream, the River Wye, although for that she was criticised, remarkably, by her own senior management. And in talks to societies like our own, she and her late husband Michael spoke convincingly of the need to tackle climate change, when that was not yet universally accepted, and the oil companies still worked deviously to peddle their alternative view.

So it was with anticipation that we attended her talk on 10th October, which she subtitled *"With the latest changes in planning rules, how far beyond business as usual are we going?"* Her answer? "Not very far, if at all!" In the ensuing three-quarters of an hour she took us through 64 slides of great diversity, covering:

- The failure of the construction industry to recycle and reuse their own waste.
- The great, largely unused scope to build much more sustainable homes.
- The flagship projects that nevertheless exist in the UK to take forward sustainability in the design of apartment blocks and commercial buildings.
- The "wider determinants of health" (education, fair work, money and resources, housing, transport and an amenable built and natural environment) and the need for authorities to facilitate the pursuit of healthy lifestyles like cycling, jogging and walking.
- The encouraging trend in 2-car ownership (downwards) and no-car ownership (upwards).
- The seven principles of a "circular economy" – a model of production and consumption involving sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible, thus mimicking the natural processes of the water cycle and the carbon cycle. Following these principles, the life cycle of products is maximised, and waste is minimised, in contrast to what happens in pursuit of the "linear economy" of take (materials), make (product), and waste (to landfill).

In her final section, Penelope focused on the famous, hopefully not notorious, "1.5 degrees



Central to Penelope's talk: we all have a role to play in support of circular economy principles.

global warming" target. She referred to the hesitant progress now being made, described the developing technologies that can help to achieve it, and gave a nod to what really makes humans (and other animals!) happy: "stuff, home, food and travel". She then set out the consequences of failure for our descendants at the end of the 21st century, but she ended with the remarkably encouraging conclusion of a distinguished climate scientist:

"Once the world reaches net zero CO₂ emissions, global temperatures will stop increasing as soon as three to five years." (Michael Mann)

The solution is there, and it is for the world to grasp it.

It was an excellent, eye-opening talk.

Chris Woodman

P.S. First to express her appreciation for Penelope's talk on behalf of everyone present was new Society member, Cristiana Ionescu, whom the Chairman invited to give a formal Vote of Thanks. Cristiana came to High Wycombe to do a course in furniture design at BCUC (Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College), followed by a master's degree with BNU and now has her own firm, CI-Design, which designs stylish furniture for offices and other open spaces which is then manufactured by local craftsmen. Cristiana has also worked as a colour consultant for Farrow & Ball paints, and says she is passionate about history and historical buildings. She has already joined the Society's Planning Group and intends to produce a colour palette for the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Letters to the Editor



Just to say how much I enjoy these magazines. I was particularly fascinated by the article on Benjamin Franklin in the Autumn 2023 edition. I had never heard of his connection to High Wycombe.
Best Regards

Cllr Martin Tett
Leader of Buckinghamshire Council



May I offer a clarification to the script on the All Saints window, a photograph of which was in the excellent article (Benjamin' Franklin's Paradise) in the autumn issue. This 1990 garishly coloured window, adjacent to the Shelburne monument and where William Petty (Earl of Shelburne) is buried in the North Chapel of All Saints parish church commemorates the role of the Earl and Benjamin Franklin in the negotiations of the Treaty of Paris. The window proclaims, "the Treaty of Paris establishing the United States of America, 20th January 1783". This is not quite accurate.

Spanish, French, British, and American representatives signed a provisional peace treaty on 20th January 1783, proclaiming an end to hostilities. The formal agreement was signed at Paris on 3rd September 1783. The US Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris on 14th January 1784, officially establishing the United States as an independent and sovereign nation.

To answer Mick Lewis' hypothetical questions in his last paragraph I doubt that in the unlikely event of the United States remaining in the British Empire as an independent nation such an arrangement would have lasted more than a few years or that it could have had any lasting influence on the transition of Empire to Commonwealth and Britain's relationship with Commonwealth member states.

David Snoxell
Director of British Information Services, New York, 1986-91



Do you ever find yourself wanting to help someone who claims to be homeless, or in need of a meal or similar, but unsure what to do for the best? If you are approached in the street, however plausible their tales of woe, you need to be aware that most donations made to street beggars go straight towards buying drugs. Wycombe Homeless Connection and HWBidCo advise that during office hours you can point people seeking help towards the Wycombe Homeless Connection office in Castle Street (at the Oakley Hall by the gym). You can also contact StreetLink to report anyone in apparent distress: www.thestreetlink.org.uk or 0300 500 0914. Helping to tackle the wider issue of drug use in our town, as highlighted in the Summer edition of this Newsletter, there are also "diverted giving" points which invite members of the public to make card payment donations to benefit The Oasis Partnership, a local charity.

Thank you, Martin and David for your appreciation and interest. Readers who enjoyed Mick Lewis's article on Benjamin Franklin's Paradise, might also be interested to know that it is possible to visit Benjamin Franklin's house in London. Tickets for tours can be obtained in advance online at:

www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org

The Architectural Tour which is available on Fridays is recommended by the Editor!



It was an absolute pleasure for Karen and me to make the journey to Aylesbury on Saturday 18th November to hear you give the BAS Winter Lecture on "The Vernons of Wycombe". What a fascinating family, and I am certain that the audience, both at the Discover Bucks Museum and online, will have relished this immaculately researched and beautifully presented family history.

Thank you so much for publicising this talk on the back page of the Autumn Newsletter. If we hadn't seen that, we would never have known about it. More, please!

Peter Lerner

Thank you, Peter – I am glad you both enjoyed it. My personal plans for 2024 include a couple of High Wycombe-related talks to groups in Beaconsfield (details on request) as well as the one advertised in the Society programme overleaf for 13th June 2024 about a very different family with local connections. The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (BAS) programme covers the whole of the county, so it is relatively rare for them to host a High Wycombe centric event but when it does, I do try to mention it somewhere in the Newsletter. Also, each October it hosts the annual "BLHN (Bucks Local History Network) at which the High Wycombe Society usually contributes by at least holding a stall. 2024 will be the Silver Anniversary of BLHN so stand by for further details! JK

A Tudor Party Shop in Wycombe?

AMONGST THE publications of the Buckinghamshire Record Society is the Household Book (1510-1551) of Sir Edward Don. Sir Edward's father, John Don, had risen to prominence during the reign of Edward IV, amassing several manors which were inherited by his son. These manors included Horsenden (near Princes Risborough). The Household Book was written whilst Sir Edward was living there with his wife Anne, the daughter of Sir John Verney of Middle Claydon. The book gives a fascinating insight into the life of the Buckinghamshire gentry in Tudor times. It is mainly an account book, but he does include some other observations e.g., concerning the weather. Two entries in the accounts particularly caught my eye.

In January 1523:

*"to Wyllam Baker lorde of
mysrewle for hys expences
viiiid"* [8 old pence]

and on the next line:

*"for the hyer of hys coffys
and bellys from Wycum
xiid"* [12 old pence]



The Lord of Misrule, typically a servant or minor official, presided over festivities during the Twelve Days of Christmas. He would dress colourfully and tie bells to his legs and lead the company in dances, games, and general high jinks.

William Baker is mentioned many times in the Household Book, being paid for making or mending Sir Edward's clothes. Sir Edward was evidently quite a dandy. So William was, presumably, a tailor. His name also appears in a list of servants provided with livery so he may well have been a liveried servant in the household at Horsenden.

As for his "coffys and bellys", these would have been the coifs or caps and bells worn by William as part of his Lordly costume.

There was another commodity frequently purchased at Wycombe by Sir Edward. But that's a story for another time! Meanwhile, if you are not a member of or familiar with the Bucks Record Society, I commend its volumes to you. Here is a link to the Society's website:

[Buckinghamshire Record Society \(bucksrecsorg.org.uk\)](http://BuckinghamshireRecordSociety(bucksrecsorg.org.uk))

Marian Miller

Tales of a House Detective



WINSTON CHURCHILL once said, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us". Come and hear Marian's tales in a profusely illustrated talk about the people who lived in some of the buildings she has researched, from stately piles to country cottages.

Tales of a House Detective

A talk by Marian Miller

Thursday 18th April 2024

Trinity URC at 7.30pm

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Jack Nicholson
Cristiana Ionescu

Good Mourning! Sunday 28th April 3pm

In the older parts of High Wycombe Cemetery, every headstone has a tale to tell. Come for a guided tour led by Sally Scagell who has been researching the lives (and deaths) of the graves' occupants (and the mourning practices of those left behind) for the past 15 years. The tour will take between 60 and 75 minutes depending on the walking speed of participants, who are recommended to wear "sensible" shoes for walking on wet grass!

A Reminder All talks and events in our Programme are open to members of the public who wish to attend and/or participate and are FREE unless otherwise noted.

Updates to the Programme will be added to the website. Where booking is required, details will usually be sent out by email. Any readers wishing to participate who do not regularly receive Society emails are advised to contact the Society Chairman via email: chairman@highwycombesociety.org.uk or by telephone: 07718 103603



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 2024**

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

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All events are **FREE**
unless otherwise noted.

2024	
Tuesday 6 th February 2.30 pm	Visit to the Mayor's parlour (Booking essential). Let Colin Hingston know if you would like to be part of a group visit to the Mayor's Parlour in the New Year. Email chairman@highwycombesociety.org.uk or tel. 07718 103603
Thursday 14 th March Trinity United Reformed Church 7.30 pm	A talk by Robert Laycock Chief Executive of Marlow Film Studios (see Colin's introductory remarks on p2 and a relevant update on p12)
Thursday 18 th April Trinity United Reformed Church 7.30 pm	"Tales of a House Detective" – A talk by Marian Miller (see p15 for further details)
Friday 26 th April	Colin Hingston is organising a coach trip to St Albans and Mill Green Watermill and museum near Hatfield £25 per person – for further details you can contact Colin on colinehingston@aol.com or 07718 103603
Sunday 28 th April High Wycombe Cemetery 3 pm start	"Good Mourning" – a tour of the older parts of High Wycombe Cemetery with guide, Sally Scagell (see above). Further details in the Spring Newsletter.
Sunday 12 th May 11 am-5 pm	Pann Mill Open Day to coincide with National Mills Day.
Thursday 16 th May Trinity United Reformed Church 7.30 pm	"Wycombe's Military Past" – A talk by Prof. Ian Beckett, formerly Professor of Military History at the University of Kent. Further details in the Spring Newsletter.
Friday 24 th May 2 pm Ewelme	Group Visit to Ewelme Watercress beds. Further details in the Spring Newsletter (Booking essential)
Wednesday 5 th June 6 pm Bekonscot	Group Visit to Bekonscot for a talk and tour. Further details in the Spring Newsletter (Booking essential)
Thursday 13 th June Trinity United Reformed Church 7.30 pm	AGM followed by "The Other Misses Dove" – A talk by Jackie Kay. Further details in the Spring Newsletter
Sunday 14 th July 11 am-5 pm	Pann Mill Open Day