

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 213

WINTER 2024-25

No Moaning Here Please!

2024 ENDED with a burst of nostalgia: a sizeable audience in the United Reformed Church on 12th December heard Mike Dewey deliver a talk to the Society with illustrations from the “SWOP” photograph collection. At the end of the evening, a quiz challenged attendees to identify locations in some of the old photographs. John Bignal claimed first place, closely followed by Mike Gardner.

Newcomers to the town who felt at a disadvantage in the above quiz could have improved their performance by watching some of the films recently released by the Wessex Film and Sound Archive (WFSA) on their YouTube channel. There's a [Playlist](#) which can be used to browse and access any of the 73 High Wycombe Film Society films available free of charge. The High Wycombe Society is acknowledged for its part in rescuing these films. With our agreement, WFSA has also started using extracts from the films in some of its themed online screening events. Tickets for these live events can be booked online in the [Hampshire County Council Shop](#). The first two compilations are of “Women Amateur Filmmakers” and “Fashion on Film” to be screened in February and March respectively.



Do you know what this is? Answer on p7
Photo: Mark Page.

Sharing photos and films, can be a good way to foster interest and awareness of a changing townscape, although “Then and Now” comparisons sometimes lead to moaning laments over what has been lost. Blue plaques and information boards can similarly inform and inspire. I was recently challenged to say what additional plaques I would like to see in the town to help instil pride in our heritage. Society Trustee Willie Reid already has a long list of potential candidates, but what would you like to see commemorated in our town?



In the Autumn edition of this Newsletter, we briefly mentioned a new weekly bite sized publication helping to promote activities in the town: [The Wycombe Pulse](#). It's open to all to sign up and receive a weekly cheery email every Thursday morning advertising events taking place in and around our town – and it boasts there will be “No Moaning!” We can now reveal that the editor of that publication is Steph Osborn, a High Wycombe Society member (seen here) who for several years has taken the minutes at the Trustees' meetings. We are delighted to announce that she has recently agreed to become a Trustee herself and has been co-opted to undertake the officer role of Secretary.

Jackie Kay

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

Patron: Lord Carrington

Registered Charity No. 257897

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

Beat that!

PANN MILL OPEN DAY in September coincided with the “Wycombe Celebrates” festival, with various other events and displays taking place in the town centre. I was initially uncertain whether the other attractions would lead people away from the Mill or if the overall increase in footfall in the town would have a positive knock-on effect at our event. We had invited the Mayor to Pann Mill to make a presentation to Chris and Mary Woodman in recognition of their sterling efforts over many years. As reported in the last Newsletter, Chris has recently stepped down from the Planning Group, but both he and Mary remain active members of the Society. What better place and time could there be to present them with a framed painting by Tony Mealing?

I had to warn Chris and Mary about the presentation so that they would be in the right place at the right time. “We don’t want a lot of fuss”, they said. But sometimes you just have to go with the flow...

I contacted the Council organisers of the town-wide event, and they confirmed that the Mayor would be available at 11am, but I would need to go to the High Street to collect him. “By the way”, they said, “there’s a Pathfinders marching drum band just finishing in the High Street at that time. Why don’t you and the Mayor proceed to the Mill with them?” It seemed too good an opportunity to pass up. So, on the day, I duly presented myself at the Guildhall. Not only was the Mayor there, but also Cllr. Mimi Harker OBE, Chairman of Bucks Council, plus Lesley Clarke OBE, Chairman of High Wycombe Community Board, and a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire. Getting the band across Frances Dove Way was a logistical challenge. With the Mayor holding the traffic up on one carriageway and the Chair of Bucks Council on the other, both with their chains of office, it was quite a spectacle for the drivers who happened to be there at the time.

Chris and Mary have since sent a thank you letter to the trustees. They are delighted with Tony’s painting of West Wycombe Church and Mausoleum which now hangs on the wall of their sitting room.

Willie Reid helped to address the footfall issue by conducting several walking tours and

delivering participants to the Mill. The weather held out until 3.30pm when a sudden and sustained deluge effectively brought about an early end to it all. We all struggled to rescue display items and stock from under gazebos, where the wind was driving the rain sideways. From a financial perspective, we were pleasantly surprised to observe that the takings were no different from those for an average September Open Day, despite losing the last 1½ hours of trade.

The delights and trials of that day, however, now seem a very distant memory, as the milling team have since had to come to terms with losing two of their long-standing and highly regarded members. An obituary for William Sprigge can be found on page 10 of this Newsletter, while tributes to Alan Furness can be expected to appear in the Spring edition. Inevitably, as we are all getting older, we need to inspire a new generation to get involved in the Society’s activities and sustain our heritage.

One very positive step in that direction was taken by the Trustees in December when they appointed Steph Osborn to take on the officer role of Secretary (and Trustee) of the Society. You can expect to hear more from her soon! Steph is well-versed across the breadth of the Society’s work, having previously taken minutes at meetings of the trustees. We wish her well in her new role. Now all I need to do is find a Chairman and I can retire!

Colin Hingston



Colin leads the way to Pann Mill



Where Colin led others followed! The Pathfinders marching drum band



The Mayor, Cllr Nathan Thomas, presenting Chris and Mary Woodman with a painting of West Wycombe by Tony Mealing. Photo: Denise Lindsay



Wycombe's Newest Almshouses



ON 24TH OCTOBER I was delighted to attend the formal opening of two new almshouses in High Wycombe - a cheerful occasion with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, a few speeches from local and visiting dignitaries, and light refreshments in the nearby Red Kite lounge. I was interested to hear what the visiting representative of The Almshouse Association, Simon Ling, had to say about the contribution that almshouses make to social housing, and how it is an anomaly that they provide homes for 36,000 residents nationwide, but are not included in any government counts of "affordable" housing. To be included in official statistics might require a level of regulation from which almshouses are currently exempt.

The earliest known reference to almshouses in High Wycombe is in the will of Sir John Stokton, a wealthy gentleman who was Lord Mayor of London in 1470. Translated from the Latin, an extract reads: *"I will that my executors ... should divide three of my tenements with gardens adjacent and appurtenances situate in the said High Street of Great Wycombe ... called 'les Almshouses' into five convenient dwellings for five poor people to live there ... so that impotent poor persons who have been good and faithful workers, but can no longer labour, might live in secure retirement ..."*

Episodes in the long and chequered history of our various local almshouses can be found in Royal Charters, Borough ledger books, minutes of the Royal Grammar School and Almshouse Foundation, correspondence with Charity Commissioners and in government reports. One such report in 1832 provides a useful snapshot of the status in Wycombe in which one charity was said to be responsible for:

- 4 alms-houses adjoining the schoolhouse – accommodating 8 almspeople
- 7 in "Newland" built by Mr Waller MP on Pagan's Mead – each with one room above and one below and shared wash house – catering for 14 inhabitants
- 2 in St Mary St (under one roof – one above and one below) – 4 persons
- And 5 in Easton Street. Of these, two are under one roof (each with one above and one below with shared wash house) for 2 persons with families, and the other 3 adjoin the workhouse – occupied by 1 person each.

Allowances were then being paid to 23 persons in 14 houses (in addition to the 8 almspeople in the 4 houses adjoining the schoolhouse).

Another notable past benefactor was John Lane of Hammersmith who in 1674 requested that his *"two little tenements in Kornell Lane"* (Crendon

Street today) should be used by *"two poor widows or two other poor old people"*.

In addition to documentary evidence, important historical details were sometimes recorded in stone and displayed in the street. For example, there is an entry in the second ledger book on 12th June 1686: *"Att a common Councill held in the Guildhall ... It was ordered that Mr John Bigg Sen Hospitall Chamberlaine for the ... Burrough Doe forthwith Build, Erect and Finish the Almshouses now in decay viz those having the Highway and Freeschole North and the River South of them ..."*

A stone tablet recording Mr Bigg's role in 1686 was preserved in Easton Street and transferred to the site of the current almshouses in Chichester Close in 1968. It was one of two tablets which needed to be moved to carry out the latest changes. The other, a more modern tablet, created in 1982, mentions almshouses that once stood on the opposite side of Bowerdean Road. A third tablet in the garden commemorates almshouses that once stood in Newlands.

The designer of the most recent changes is Richard Clarke, an architect and trustee of the Wycombe Almshouses. My thanks to Cllr Paul Turner for his invitation to attend the opening and to Neil Marshmant who took photographs including the above images of the building and the one below of me beside the newly set tablets.

Jackie Kay

*Historic
stones
in
their new
location*

*Photo: Neil
Marshmant*



Planning Matters

WORK IN PROGRESS is seldom pretty. We welcomed the announcement that resurfacing and re-landscaping work was due to start in White Hart Street, its aim to support a café culture and vibrant nightlife; but we may have under-estimated the extent of disruption that would occur in the shorter-term. As many have commented, the town centre was not looking its best over the festive season, with ugly hoardings and corrugated iron obscuring much-loved landmarks such as the Guildhall and the South Porch of All Saints; and even at the eastern end of town we note that St John's Hospital has been cordoned off in a ramshackle manner for an indefinite length of time. Against a background of ambitious county housing targets, when we focus on the town centre, we wonder when there will be any movement on the long-awaited Dandara redevelopment of the Chilterns Centre with its potential to transform Frogmoor in its wake. Meanwhile we are bemused and frustrated to find phone kiosks being re-installed in the town, contrary to the wishes of all involved in their recent removal, and we continue to discuss the detailed merits of shopfronts: the good, the bad and the ugly!

White Hart Street is slowly being transformed. Businesses have bravely soldiered on through the disruption, with occasional moans about dips in footfall and plaintive signs of "Business as Usual", aware that they stand to be long-term beneficiaries when the work is finished; but if anyone thought it would all be over by Christmas, they were bound to be disappointed. There's a statutory consultation currently open regarding the removal of three trees and their replacement with additional planting.

St John's Hospital Signs now prohibit "unauthorised entry" to St John's ruins. The fencing looks untidy but there's some good news: we have been told that the monument has been "fenced off" following a condition survey. Buckinghamshire Council and Historic England are both now involved in determining the best way forward for conserving the ruins. This includes both professional building recording and some archaeological work – all aimed at recording the structure and understanding past repairs (some of which may need to be removed and replaced). We are glad to see the ruins receiving the expert attention they need and which the Society has previously requested.

BT Phone Kiosks Now that nearly everyone has a mobile phone, traditional phone boxes or kiosks have become redundant and tend to be used only as repositories of street beggars' paraphernalia. We were therefore delighted to see them removed from town centre streets months ago; but we were incredulous to hear that a planning application by British Telecom to reinstall them in Paul's Row and White Hart Street was recently approved. Local businesses, councillors and our Society were against it, but Council wheels move slowly

and although a process is underway to move away from phone kiosks, this did not provide sufficient grounds on which to refuse permission.



Above Hopefully not the final appearance of White Hart Street

Photo: Ed Silvester

Below: ramshackle fencing surrounds St John's Hospital but the news is good.

Photo: J Kay



Frogmoor and Dandara Dandara Living, a development company who build to rent (not sell) residential property, saw an opening in High Wycombe a few years back. With a lot of public consultation and negotiation they proposed re-developing the Chilterns centre and the adjacent old brewery site into an interesting residential complex over ground floor retail outlets and parking. The plans featured a wide range of apartments from small studio units up to large three-bedroom properties, but progress stalled when the Environmental Agency objected on the grounds of the flood risk. We understand that a similar situation arose when the Eden Centre was planned but the then Wycombe District Council were able to override that objection.

Buckinghamshire Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, has a need to understand fully the drainage issues that may arise and are understandably cautious. The obvious questions are: "Will it flood? Is there a risk to life and

limb?" Many existing buildings in our valley would not get permission if they were proposed today. In the Dandara plans, all residents are on the first floor or above and there is an exit route via Priory Road, which is on higher ground.

A recent communication from Dandara suggests that their application is nearly ready to face the planning committee stage. We very much hope this means that they will be able to satisfy the Council with regard to the drainage arrangements and that the development will be permitted.

Shop Fronts. are an integral part of Wycombe's historic street scene; they set the tone for the area and influence all who walk around the town centre. Changes to their appearance regularly provoke passionate discussions within the Planning Group.

A recent example of a sympathetically restored shop front can be found near to the Little Market House, in a Grade II Listed Building in the core of the historic town centre. The space available for signage is proportional to the scale of the area, without overwhelming it. Attractive fretwork and corbels add interest. The windows appear to be openable, which would enable it to be used as a food and beverage offering, bringing life and footfall to the immediate surroundings. This is just the kind of stylish shop front design that the Planning Group supports...



A sympathetic restoration with a shopfront that Planning Group support

... but sadly, a satellite dish and white vinyl signage blot the upper floor. Their installation would have required Listed Building Consent which doesn't appear to have been sought (and, we think, would probably not be granted). We intend to bring this to Buckinghamshire Council's attention to take appropriate action for their removal.

Unfortunately, not all retailers are as concerned about the aesthetics of the High Street. Compare and contrast the above with the image below. The



Solid roller shutters are an unwelcome addition to the street scene.

former Argos and Job Centre in our High Street is a relatively modern unattractive building, but it still falls within the constraints of the Conservation Area. It has recently been fitted with solid roller shutters and we understand that there is a proposal for it to become a supermarket. The shutters are clearly contrary to Conservation Area guidelines and it would appear that these are unapproved works constituting a material change.

The Planning Group want to see an inviting town centre. Solid roller shutters are hostile in nature, set a poor precedent, and materially detriment the area. There is no precedent for this type of ugly addition. Once again, we will be bringing this to Buckinghamshire Council's attention so that they can take appropriate action for their removal.

In our discussions about shop fronts, we frequently draw comparisons with other locations that we have either visited or found online. Tony Mealing recently brought to our attention the work that Coventry City Council has undertaken to protect, enhance, and set expectations of the street scene in their city. They have an excellent document giving [Design guidance on shopfronts for conservation areas and historic buildings](#) which can be accessed online.

Another example which caught our eye was a shop front, located on Golborne Road, a few steps from the world-famous Portobello Road in London. It has a protective shutter installed, but it is not solid in nature. The shutter can, of course, be installed behind the glazing. The Planning Group recognises that some businesses want to take extra precautions to protect their premises. This solution shows that it is possible to add security and still create a welcoming environment.



If you would like to be part of the conversation on shop fronts or have other interests concerning current changes on the planning horizon, please contact us. We would also welcome new members to join the Planning Group.

Planning Group

Mosquito Crash 8th June 1944

THE 'STOP PRESS' on the back page of the Autumn 2024 Newsletter asked the question: 'Does anybody know who posted this notice at the Mosquito crash site on the embankment of the old branch railway line near the Lidl car park at Pinions?' It has since been confirmed that the poster was created and placed there by Gillian Denning and her partner Ron, who is a member of the Mosquito Museum. We thank them both for their thoughtful action in drawing attention to the 80th anniversary of the crash.

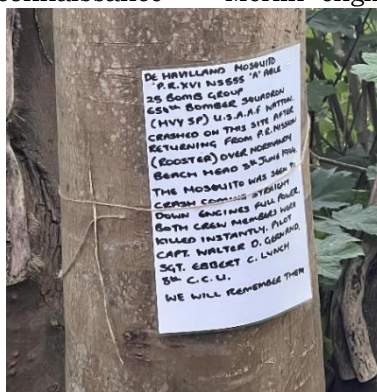
The de Havilland Mosquito PR XVI NS555 was part of the USAAF 8th Reconnaissance Photographic Squadron from the 802 Reconnaissance Group based at RAF Watton and was tasked to fly a 'Rooster' mission over the D-Day invasion beaches on the 8th June 1944, piloted by Captain Walter C Gernand, pictured here, and photographer Sergeant Ebbet C Lynch.

The photo reconnaissance mission completed, NS555 headed back over the English coast to make a refuelling stop at RAF Middle Wallop. On the return leg to RAF Watton the Mosquito engines were heard to be failing above High Wycombe during overcast weather conditions at about 7.00pm. Moments later the plane broke out of the clouds in a near vertical dive above the Rye, which seemed to have been chosen as the crash landing site, but eyewitnesses at the time stated that the pilot must have spotted children playing in the area, as he went on to crash into the Western side of the Bourne End to Wycombe branch railway embankment close to the Bowden Lane bridge at Pinions, behind a house named Edgewood.

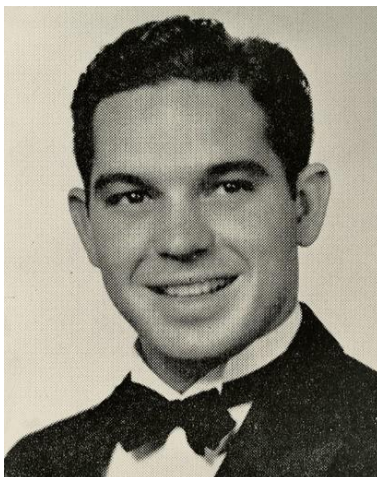
Both crew members were killed instantly in a large explosion and a later investigation into the cause of the crash recorded a verdict of loss of control by the pilot.

Local aviation enthusiasts, the Chiltern Historical Aircraft Preservation Group, carried out an excavation of the crash site in March 1972. Several aircraft parts and items were

recovered including one of the Rolls-Royce Merlin engines pictured below which is now displayed in the de Havilland Aircraft Museum at London Colney having been presented to them in April 1995.



The poster at the crash site



Captain Walter C Gernand

Also recovered and pictured is the pilot's gold graduation ring from Texas-based Baylor University, where Walter Gernand received a Business Degree in 1940. The ring was later sent to the USA to be presented to Walter's mother, and she then later returned it to Baylor University.

At the time of the excavation the events and outcome of the dig were covered by Bucks Free Press reporter Alan Hunt, who wrote an article for the Bucks Free Press and also for a daily newspaper in Waco, Texas, home of Baylor University. As a result, three years later, in 1975, Alan was offered a job at the Texas newspaper which, after some deliberation, he accepted. Later in 1980 Alan left the Waco newspaper and joined the Public Relations Department at Baylor University. In 2016, the Bucks Free Press published a further

article by Alan, mainly about his time with his family in Texas.

The remains of the crew recovered during the dig were kept in England and later interred at the American Cemetery in Cambridge.

John Gurney on behalf of the Flackwell Local Area History Group.



Items recovered from the crash site

Left: The Rolls Royce Merlin engine is now displayed at the de Havilland aircraft museum.

Right: the pilot's ring was returned to the family and is now at Baylor University.



Wycombe's Wealthometer



CHECK OUT this charming piece from my collection of High Wycombe memorabilia — a vintage "Home Safe" money box. This little gem was given to account holders by their bank, but here's the twist: the key stayed with the bank! So, when the safe was full, you had to take it back to the bank, where they unlocked it for you and deposited your savings.

This particular beauty is marked with Patent Number 168828, dated June 11, 1921. It was patented by The Automatic Recording Safe Co Ltd of London, although they were based in Chicago. The top is adorned with a riveted plate named "Wycombe & South Bucks Savings Bank - No330." This number was linked to the "safe" key account.

Measuring approximately 9.5 cm long, 4.5 cm at its widest, and 6 cm tall, it's a compact but fascinating item. The oval safe has separate compartments for coins, including slots for PENNY OR HALF CROWN, SHILLING, SIX PENCE (two slots!), and THREE PENCE. Plus, there's a clever feature on the side for inserting notes—just slip them through a round hole at the base!

The Wycombe and South Bucks Savings Bank was in Church Street, where the new "Collectables R Us" model shop now stands.

Mark Page



The Wycombe and South Bucks Savings Bank, in Church Street – Photo Courtesy of SWOP and High Wycombe library, SWOP ref: RHW01358



Customers could see the level of their savings through the slots in the side, but only the bank staff could open it up to deposit the money.

Photos: Mark Page



THRIFTY HOME SAVERS today may want to check out a relatively new initiative in the centre of town. Shop premises adjacent to the Travel lodge in Octagon Parade have been taken over by The Global Education Trust (GET) which has a wide range of second-hand books to give away FREE to anyone who wants them. Up to 3 books can be claimed on each visit. Needless to say, donations of books are also welcome; and the hunt is on for more volunteers to help sustain the operation.

From Rags to Riches

ON THURSDAY 12th September, as part of the Society's Autumn programme of talks, I presented a history of B. North and Sons furniture manufacturers, a company founded by Benjamin North in 1853 in West Wycombe, and which later moved to create the new village of Piddington in 1903. My book on this topic was first reviewed in the Summer 2022 newsletter.



Benjamin North's factory in West Wycombe was on the site of the present village hall. Photo courtesy of SWOP and High Wycombe Library: SWOP ref. RHW40227.

The company founder, Benjamin North, wrote an autobiography which gives a detailed first-hand account of his life as an agricultural labourer, the long working hours and very basic food etc. He also detailed the blood sports in his hometown of Thame around 1820, probably typical for their time.

He served an apprenticeship in manual papermaking, during which time he was converted to Methodism, but he became redundant when mechanised paper machinery was introduced. The 1830 Wycombe paper mill riots tried to destroy all the new machinery which threatened workers' livelihoods.

Benjamin North and a friend trudged around the country for 5 months, covering around 3,000 miles, but could not find any work in the paper trade. The experience, however, helped Benjamin to secure work as a travelling chair salesman, walking beside his wagon-load of chairs. After two years he was given a better offer from Thomas Harris, chair manufacturer in West Wycombe.

In 1853, aged 42, he decided to start his own chair factory in West Wycombe (at the site of the present village hall). From 1856 to 1860 the company registered patents for 15 new designs: all varieties of Windsor chair. No other Wycombe firms appear to have protected their designs in this way. Mr North himself still concentrated on sales, travelling around the country by train.

By 1881 the company was producing furniture in a wide range of woods including tropical hardwoods, and making many types of seating and cabinets. The company leased land at West Wycombe station to store timber, and opened a London showroom in 1887.

In 1902 the Great Western Railway planned to expand West Wycombe station and had to terminate his lease there. Benjamin North approached Sir Robert Dashwood and agreed a price to rent farmland nearby for a timber store and machinery, but it is said that Sir Robert set "unacceptable conditions" (although the details are not known). Rather than go ahead with the arrangement, Benjamin North bought three fields beside Piddington Lane from Lord Carrington. These were over a mile to the west of West Wycombe, so North decided to build a whole new factory there. Buying all three fields gave room for the construction of workers' houses.

The West Wycombe factory lay empty and advertised as To Let for several years; it was eventually taken over by Abbots.

Meanwhile Piddington became, to some extent, a "model village", designed and influenced by the local employer. The factory supplied water and some electricity; the factory caning room was used for Methodist services, and some land was donated to be used as a Methodist mission hall. No premises in the village were allowed to sell alcohol and Mr North had to approve all the early house designs.

The Piddington factory produced high quality furniture for London theatres, and chairs and stools for three royal coronations. After 1953 ownership passed to the Tilbury family, but after several fires they ceased manufacturing and in 1979 leased the industrial estate out to various companies. One of these is the high-quality bespoke furniture firm of Davison Highley, who still use some of the original North buildings.

Simon Cains

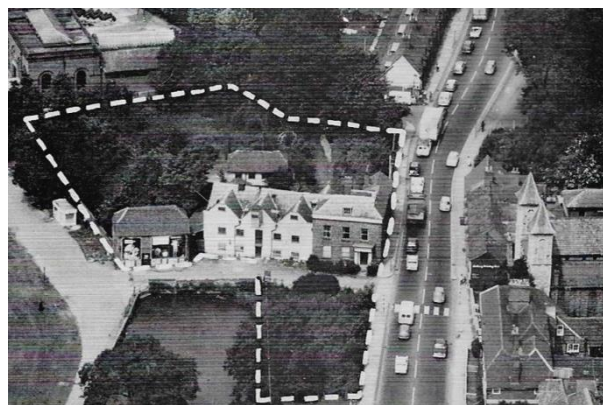
Pann Mill revisited

THE HIGH WYCOMBE U3A History Group to which I belong has recently enjoyed a number of talks and events thanks to the efforts of various High Wycombe Society members. Jackie Kay gave a talk about the family of Miss Frances Dove and Willie Reid led a walking tour of Wycombe, which included a stop at Pann Mill. Seeing an opportunity to promote Pann Mill to a broader audience, Malcolm Connell was the latest to accept an invitation to talk to the group, his chosen subject: the restoration of Pann Mill.

Thanks to Malcolm, I learnt several facts about the Mill history that I had not previously been aware of from talks, conversations or the Pann Mill website. Even recent events quickly become history and must be rediscovered by new generations. Malcolm is promising a rewrite of the Pann Mill booklet, which I hope will record more of this history.

Firstly, there was an archaeological dig on the site of the Mill. This led me to the report on [Investigations at Pann Mill, High Wycombe](#) by Stanley Cauvain and Pauline Cauvain, with contributions from Peter Hazzard and John Steane, published in the 39th edition of the *Records of Buckinghamshire* in 1999 by the Bucks Archaeological Society. This was mentioned in an article by Malcolm in the Summer 2021 edition of the HWS Newsletter, but the *Records of Bucks* volumes have only relatively recently been digitised and made available online. The dig showed that there were at least three phases of mill building on the site. The earliest evidence dates to the 14th century, with the location of the mill wheel and water course changing several times over the centuries.

The report is a fascinating insight into the history of the mill and its occupiers, with finds of pottery, glass, metalware, clay pipes and animal bones. My litter picking on the site still turns up pieces of broken pottery.



Pann Mill site in 1969 as it appears in an auction brochure.

My second discovery through listening to Malcolm was that the 1971 demolition was not the first time the town council owned and partly demolished the mill for road widening. The first



Malcolm with the Pann Mill display at the U3a meeting

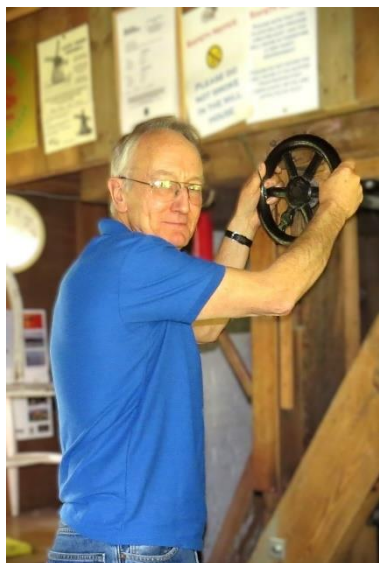
time was in 1898, when it was purchased to widen the London Road. Traffic was clearly already an issue in the 19th Century! The Mill House was originally double-fronted and extended nearly as far as the middle of the road (that would become the A40) in front of Trinity URC. The truncated Mill House can clearly be seen in a brochure dating from 1969 in the Society's collection of [Hamnett and Raffety auction brochures](#). On the other side of the road can be seen the Coach and Horses pub before demolition and creation of Railway Place car park. The SWOP photo from around the same time shows that the road was still not very wide.

Steve Strutt



Mill House and Coach and Horses in 1965. Photo: courtesy of SWOP and High Wycombe Library ref. RHW:03006

William L Sprigge (1951 – 2024) – A Late Age Apprentice



AT ONE OF the Pann Mill Open Days in 2015 a tall, distinguished gentleman asked of the mill team if he could volunteer and help at the mill. We did our usual assessment, “Is he breathing?” “Yes.” Well, of course he would be very welcome to come to our next work morning and see what it was all about. And so, William joined the team.

It quickly became apparent that William was going to be a great asset to the mill; he got on well with everybody, and with his well-honed DIY skills already knew which end of a chisel was sharp. He was keen to learn everything and declared himself to be the mill’s “Oldest Apprentice” a role he played to the full in the months that followed. And such was his enthusiasm that at the September 2016 Open Day we were able to present him with a certificate acknowledging completion of his apprenticeship, something of which he was very proud.

Over the coming years we very much enjoyed having William with us. He would turn his hand to many tasks while we were replacing the buckets on the water wheel, and he demonstrated great skill at obtaining donations of material for recladding the mill building. He also managed to get the then Mayor to come and drive in the last Golden Nail. William in a wet suit, clearing weed and other detritus from the river, was a sight to behold.

During tea breaks we were often regaled with stories from William’s past, suitably edited to protect the innocent, and, being from the legal profession, no doubt the guilty as well. Stories also included his walking adventures on the Camino de Santiago and other paths.

It was with great shock and sadness then that we learned of William’s untimely passing while on holiday last October. We of the mill team miss his company, expertise, enthusiasm and drive; he is a great loss to us and our regular volunteer activities in maintaining and operating Pann Mill. Most of all though we wish to express once again our heartfelt sympathy and best wishes to his wife Jane and his family.

Malcolm Connell (on behalf of the millers)

Food for Thought

IN OCTOBER, the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (BAS) hosted its 25th BLHN (Bucks Local History Network) conference in Aylesbury. With a title of “Food for Thought”, the focus was on local agriculture and food supply, and there was a star speaker: TV personality and author, Ruth Goodman, who delivered a thought-provoking talk about the role of women in agriculture. As in previous years, the High Wycombe Society provided a stand for the local history fair, tailored to the theme of the day.

This time our stand featured the Pann Mill restoration and its continuing operation. The stand attracted much attention, partly because, with limited floor space available it had to be placed on top of a table, where it towered above all its surroundings – and partly because we were also able to offer six bags of flour for sale, a bit of a novelty in that environment. (We sold out!)



At the end of the event, Ruth Goodman was invited to choose a lucky ticket number, and there was a pleasant surprise for our Treasurer, Steve Strutt, who discovered he had won a signed copy of Ruth’s book “The Domestic Revolution”. This book looks at the manner in which coal became the most prevalent fuel in homes and explores the impact it had on domestic life.

Plans are already in progress for next year’s conference, with a likely theme emerging of “Buckinghamshire Burning”.

Colin Hingston

Wrong sitter, wrong artist:

why is there a slave trader on the wall of the Art Gallery in Wycombe Museum?

Sunday 9th February 2025 at 2 pm

ARTIST AND ART HISTORIAN Cally Trench has beguiled audiences at Wycombe Museum before with her well-researched and thought-provoking Sunday afternoon explorations of artworks in the museum collection.

The latest object to receive her attention is a 17th-century painting which was understood in 1934 to be a portrait of Sir Richard Browne - a Roundhead commander in the Civil War and MP for Wycombe. The sitter is, however, now known to be Sir Robert Vyner, the goldsmith who re-created the Crown of St Edward for the coronation of Charles II. He was also a shareholder in the Royal African Company, which was responsible for the transportation of thousands of enslaved people from Africa to the Caribbean, about 20% of whom died en-route.

What should the Museum do with the portrait?

The painting had previously been attributed to a follower of Sir Godfrey Kneller, but is now attributed to John Michael Wright, a well-regarded British portrait painter.

New Home for Hannan picture

BACK IN 2022 the High Wycombe Society hosted an art exhibition at the Guildhall. A star attraction was a view of the Cornmarket end of the High Street in 1772 by William Hannan. This was a reproduction, funded by the Society, based on a professional photograph of the original taken by Andrew Smart of A C Cooper Ltd, Photographers of Art. The reproduction has recently been loaned for display at All Saints church in High Wycombe, and is accompanied by interpretative notes by Society Trustee, Willie Reid.



The Hannan picture in its new location near the West End entrance of the Church

Upcoming Speakers in 2025

THE SOCIETY's programme of talks for 2025 will see the return of some familiar speakers as well as some newcomers.

It was 2008 when Society members David Scott and Ian Simmons released their book entitled "High Wycombe's Contribution to Aviation". On 11th March 2025 we will welcome Dave Scott back to talk about their research and the many related discoveries made since then.

On Tuesday 8th April, a talk entitled "The Enumerator Strikes Back" promises to provide a revelation of the practices and processes of the UK census since its inception in 1801. The speaker will be Dave Annal, a senior researcher from "Lifelines Research", an organisation which supports people around the world researching their family histories. In 2019 Dave was awarded a Fellowship of the Society of Genealogists and in 2022 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. In addition to giving talks Dave has written several family history books and is a regular contributor to Family Tree magazine.

On Wednesday 14th May, it will be the turn of Dr. Beth Rogers, Chair of the John Hampden Society. According to her Trustee profile on their website, Dr Rogers was brought up in High Wycombe and discovered John Hampden as a "local historical celebrity" while at primary school.

Finally, on Thursday 12th June, it will be almost exactly ten years since Kate Ashbrook last visited the High Wycombe Society to help us celebrate the golden anniversary of the Rye Protection Society's achievement in preventing a road being built across the corner of the Rye. She joined us for the Big Picnic held that year and also gave a talk to the Society on the work of the Open Spaces Society. We look forward to welcoming her back.

JK

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new member:

Rosie Kin

Obituaries

We regret to inform members of the deaths of:

Adam Gielgud

William Sprigge (see p10)

Alan Furness

The Enumerator Strikes Back

A talk by Dave Annal

Tuesday 8th April

Trinity United Reformed Church

Nineteenth century enumerators played a vital role in recording the censuses. It wasn't always an easy ride: confronted by hostile householders and at the mercy of the decisions made by the census authorities, their stories shed light on one of the most important sets of records used by family and local historians today. Using original documents, contemporary newspaper reports and the census returns themselves, this talk will turn the spotlight onto the men and women who created the UK's census returns.

Volunteers Wanted!

Many Society members receive this newsletter as a paper edition, freely delivered to their home. This is only possible thanks to a small army of volunteer distributors whose efforts save the Society the expenditure on postage. Andrew Cole receives the newsletters from the printer and co-ordinates their distribution. If you think you might be able to help him, he would like to hear from you. Email: cole.andrew@btopenworld.com

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



Newsletter Timing

The Winter edition of the HWS Newsletter is usually produced in time for distribution before Christmas. This year, for unavoidable reasons, it had to be delayed until the New Year. The intention is to bring out our Spring edition on the usual timescale. Some material has been held back for that edition.

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 2025**

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!!!**

2025	
Sunday 9 th February 2pm Wycombe Museum	A Wycombe Museum event: "Wrong sitter, wrong artist: why is there a slave-trader on the wall of the Art Gallery in Wycombe Museum?" (see p11)
Tuesday 11 th March 7.30pm Trinity URC	"High Wycombe's Contribution to Aviation" A talk by Dave Scott (see p11)
Tuesday 8 th April 7.30 pm Trinity URC	"The Enumerator Strikes Back" A revelation of the practices and processes of the UK census since its inception in 1801 - Dave Annal (see above and p11)
Sunday 11 th May 11-5 Pann Mill	First planned Pann Mill Open Day of the Year to coincide with The National Mills weekend.
Wednesday 14 th May 7.30 pm Trinity URC	A talk by Dr. Beth Rogers of the John Hampden Society – content details to be advised nearer the time.
Thursday 12 th June 7.30 pm Trinity URC	AGM followed by a talk by Kate Ashbrook of the Open Spaces Society on the work of the Open Spaces Society (see p11).
Sunday 13 th July 11-5 Pann Mill	Second planned Pann Mill Open Day of the Year.
Sunday 14 th September 11-5 Pann Mill	Final planned Pann Mill Open Day of the Year, our contribution to "Heritage Open Days 2025".