

# THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

## *newsletter*

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### **The Future of High Wycombe Town Centre**

WYCOMBE DISTRICT Council has recently published its Delivery and Site Allocations Document for the whole of Wycombe District and there is a public consultation period from 2 September to 14 October.

Our Society was set up in 1968 to “protect and enhance the natural and built environment of High Wycombe”. A continuous theme running through our campaigning over the past 40 years, right from the time of our founder, Jack Scruton, has been the need to open up our historic River Wye as a civic asset. WDC have made a great start, for example at Wycombe Marsh and Loudwater. More improvements will come soon in the Desborough area. But in the town centre, the River is mostly still lost to sight underground, and major inner link roads – Abbey Way and Arch Way – sever the town centre from all the newer development (Eden, Sainsbury’s and Desborough Road, soon with the new LIDL) to the west.

For us, therefore, the most important part of the “DSA Document” is the High Wycombe Town Centre Master Plan. It contains detailed – although not yet precise – proposals for how the town centre should be opened up over the period between now and 2026, principally by routing the A40 to the south of the town centre and eventually removing the Abbey Way flyover, and by “singling” Arch Way. The Plan then fills in the picture by suggesting which parts of the River might be opened up, how the individual characters of different areas of the town centre might be emphasised and where new buildings might go.

We are delighted that Wycombe District Council’s Director of Planning & Sustainability has agreed to attend a special meeting of the Society (at which the public will also be welcome) to present the Master Plan and then take part in a discussion with us on the issues.

You are all urged to attend this meeting, which will take place in the Gateway Theatre of Bucks New University on 28 September at 7.30pm. Participation is not limited to members, so bring your friends!

**Chris Woodman**

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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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## Quality Counts! 2011

The Quality Counts! tours are a regular feature of WDC's annual calendar. Each May, a coach-full of Councillors, representatives of amenity groups, developers, architects and even a few "ordinary" people sets off to visit recent developments in the District, and sometimes further afield, to consider what has turned out well, what is less satisfactory, and to learn lessons for planning policy. This year, those resourceful officers of the Planning & Sustainability Department decided it would be about planning for "older people" – retirement communities, sheltered housing and care homes. As always, the tour was thought-provoking and informative, although on this occasion most of us, either with parents and friends who have recently gone through the care experience or (in some cases!) even contemplating it for ourselves, found issues about the kind and quality of care at least as interesting as the planning and architectural considerations.

Our first, and perhaps most interesting, stop was at **Denham Garden Village**, a huge site with (currently) 326 residences, originally built for the Licensed Victuallers' Association (who still have first refusal of new properties) but renovated in 2006 by Anchor Trust, a nationwide operator of retirement and care homes. The Manager, Jackie Eltis, explained the comprehensive facilities – restaurant, village shop, gym, exercise pool. Links were encouraged with the local community, who could use the on-site doctor's surgery, the bar and the gym. Local buses and a visiting mobile library served the site, and for residents, there was a handyman available when required, and – particularly impressive – "tailored support" such as visits by professional carers, and even live-in carers (the provision of which falls outside the normal service charge, of course). Although this can extend right to the end, in practice most residents tend to move to a care home eventually, if only for the company of others when they have lost mobility.



*Denham Garden Village – a quality development.*

So, was it a "quality development"? We thought yes, definitely! Although it had a slightly mass-produced feel about it, the site was varied and pleasant to wander around, and will become even better as the trees mature. Asked what they might have done differently with the benefit of hindsight, Ms Eltis said perceptively that an underground car park would have enabled more of the surface area to be soft-landscaped. Inevitably, however, Denham Garden Village established itself in our minds as a yardstick for what we saw later in the day.

Our next stop was at the more modest **Cedars Village** in Chorleywood. This is a 22-acre site,

with scattered bungalows, flats and cottages and an old listed building, Cedar House, with a restaurant, ballroom, library, bar and snooker room making it a focus. The grounds were attractive and wooded but the residential buildings seemed rather pedestrian and had no on-site manager or specialist care. Apart from Cedar House (which any infirm residents would have difficulty reaching) its scattered nature meant that it lacked a good sense of community and it also seemed to be cut off from the local neighbourhood.

And with that, our party moved closer to home, to the new "sheltered housing" facility built by McCarthy & Stone in Penn Road, Hazlemere, known as **Hughenden Court**. WDC had refused the original planning application on fairly specific design grounds – scale, form, the design of the car parking area and excessive height at the rear which would cause overlooking – and two proposals were dismissed by the Inspector. The final, approved design was certainly an improvement on the original, but in the final analysis, it seemed like just another rather large block of 32 flats, albeit with a rather modest communal area. There were no large tables for communal activities. And despite including an on-site flat for the manager, it could not be considered as a true "end-of-life" facility. The garden area to the rear was attractive, with a number of garden chairs, but we doubted it would be as effective in fostering friendships between



*Hughenden Court, Hazlemere – essentially a block of flats.*

residents as a courtyard might.

And so after a break for lunch (which we participants rightly had to pay for) at Hazlemere Golf Club, it was off to a 46-apartment sheltered housing complex, **Windsor Lodge** at Princes Risborough, developed by Churchill Retirement Homes. This was a rather intensive development compared to the residential area in which it was situated, although the limited height certainly helped it to fit in, and the materials (red brick and tiles) were rather harsher. Once again, there was no communal area with tables for joint activities. Residents were discouraged from owning cars and the small rear area with car parking was rather stark, though it would improve as vegetation matured, and provided good charging facilities for invalid scooters. However, the saving grace, particularly for those fortunate to live above ground level on that side of the building, was the existence of a park across the road.



*Windsor Lodge, Princes Risborough. Car-owning discouraged.*

Finally we paid a call on two sites in Marlow. **Brooke Furmstone Place** is a sheltered housing scheme, with 26 one-bedroom rented flats, constructed in the 1980s and managed by Wycombe District Council. We heard it was popular with the residents, and it deserved to be. The pleasant design was reminiscent of a new town development and the resident warden worked hard to keep his charges happy and occupied. Upstairs properties had generous balconies overlooking an attractive courtyard with flowerbeds and it seemed that all the residents had been encouraged to grow plants in beds and pots. The overall result was delightful. And inside, there was a generous-sized community room with tables and chairs and easy chairs for joint activities. The one feature which we were unsure of was that each dwelling opened into public space whereas in the denser properties they opened into corridors within the building; this seemed to have security implications which we were unable to assess.

**Sir Aubrey Ward House** is a 60-bedroom care home (with some units for people with dementia), developed by a partnership of Bucks County Council, Freemantle Trust and the

Housing Solutions Group. The design was attractive, with a pleasant combination of materials, but inevitably it looked more institutional and, not surprisingly, we were unable to go inside.

And so the tour came to an end. The last question on our questionnaires asked us which were the best examples of housing for older people that we had seen during the day. Your editorial team's answer was, undoubtedly, Denham Garden Village and Brooke Furmstone Place.

And what of the role of the planning system in all this? Well, the properties that seemed to us to be less satisfactory were the modern ones where large numbers of flats were packed



*Brooke Furmstone Place – pleasant design, popular with the residents.*

closely on to limited sites, without an imaginative outdoor space which could realistically encourage the residents to commune together. It is well within the role of the planning system to encourage appropriate shared external amenity space and, we would have thought, good communal spaces within the buildings. Perhaps WDC as the Local Planning Authority needs to develop a Supplementary Planning Document to make these aims clear and strengthen its negotiating arm with developers.

### Improve your baking

At our meeting on 13 January (*see p.12*), our member Stan Cauvain will be able to give advice on why your bread-making has gone wrong! Bring along a sample or a photograph to get his advice. And if you have any subjects you would like him to cover, please email him at [stan.cauvain@btinternet.com](mailto:stan.cauvain@btinternet.com).

### Planning This Quarter (concluded from p.4)

given a preliminary run-through of the document by the Head of Planning & Sustainability on 21 July. In addition to WDC's consultations throughout the District, there will be a presentation and debate for our members (to which we can also invite non-members) on 28 September, allowing us to take members' views before we prepare the Society's formal response to consultation by the deadline of 14 October (*see p.1*).

## Planning This Quarter

ONCE THE stadium issue was (mercifully) out of the way, the main work area of this quarter was to try to overcome our bafflement by the Government's new National Planning Policy Framework, and the analysis of Wycombe District Council's draft Delivery and Site Allocations Document, including the Town Centre Master Plan. The routine checking of planning applications continued – indeed we were curious to note that a hostile (and presumably pseudonymous) commenter on the *Bucks Free Press* website says we “invest vast amounts of time and energy into (*sic*) reviewing planning applications in the district”. Well, thanks, but it's not vast and for the most part it's quite a slick operation. But some applications are more important than others...

**Wycombe Community Stadium** We were pleased to be invited to send a delegation to an informal meeting on 6 July with Cllr Collingwood, now the Leader of WDC, and his deputies to make our pitch on the proposed stadium. We followed this up by making sure that copies of the Summer *Newsletter* reached all Councillors in time for the Cabinet meeting on 18 July. That meeting decided to stop work on the Booker Air Park proposal and, in the light of the loss of the ancillary facilities and sports village, to “engage with all stakeholders to investigate sporting provision in the District”. Our main aim, to prevent the stadium and the huge amount of “enabling development” being built on the Green Belt, was achieved, but the manner of the Cabinet's decision was disquieting, to say the least. Because of legal fears about pre-determination (particularly involving Councillors who had declared themselves *against* the project), and declarations of interest such as a relative having a WWFC season ticket, in the event only four members of Cabinet took part in the vote. And whereas the Green Belt was mentioned in the debate, most Councillors seemed more concerned about the inadequacy of the promoters' business plan (which time might have been able to resolve). We are sure the conclusion was what the great majority of members of our Society wanted, but some Councillors have pointed out that, at a time when unemployment in the town has rapidly risen, for reasons that are not understood, the loss of the project might be economically detrimental to the town.

**New Director of Planning at BCC** The new Director of Planning and Transportation at BCC, Mr Peter Hardy, has kindly made contact with us. The County has relatively little role in planning matters (the main exceptions being waste facilities and developments on school sites etc). However, we have heard that Mr Hardy is adopting a more questioning position on traffic lights than his predecessor, and we hope our Transport Group will find the contact useful.

**Bartletts Site, Grafton Street** In July we had a meeting with Catalyst Housing and their architects about a revised proposal for mixed use (housing and commercial) development of the old Bartletts factory in Grafton Street. We

were impressed with the proposal, which is a considerable improvement on a previous Michael Shanly design, fits in well with its surroundings and will help deliver the riverside walk through the Desborough area, and we have commented in favour. Council officers have some reservations over the detailed parking arrangements and overlooking between flats and houses, and one of our Group members has wondered if we should be comprehensively opposing major housing developments in the town. We await the WDC Planning Committee's consideration of the case with interest.

**National Planning Policy Framework** In July, the Government issued its long-awaited National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which will sweep away all the existing Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Statements, and allow Town and Parish Councils to adopt Neighbourhood Plans. However, it is far from easy to work out the document's precise impact. On the face of it, it endorses the protection of Green Belt and heritage sites. But it is strongly pro-development, requiring planning authorities to plan to meet all “demand” for both housing and commercial development, and declares that the “default response” to planning applications should be to approve. Even Neighbourhood Plans, touted as the instrument of the Government's “Localism”, cannot stand in the way of development. The Campaign to Protect Rural England and the National Trust are deeply worried. We await clarification as the dust settles.

**Chiltern Shopping Centre Students' Flats** We attended an exhibition in July about proposals to build students' flats above the shops in the Chiltern Centre fronting Frogmoor (rather than the hotel previously proposed). The Group considered this would be an improvement over the current heavy gables.

**Delivery and Site Allocations Document and the Town Centre Masterplan** This document, which complements the already approved Core Strategy by setting out the detailed spatial proposals for the whole of Wycombe District, was launched for consultation on 25 August after approval by the Cabinet. The Group were

## Through Thirties Childhood Eyes

Jackie Kay comments: A former resident of Wycombe, Mr Richard Whiting from Manchester, contacted the High Wycombe Society to obtain a copy of our book *'Wycombe Pioneers of Progress'* shortly after its publication. As he explained when asked, "My sister has the Bucks Free Press sent to her weekly in Hastings. She sends cuttings on to me. I read them with interest because I was christened, confirmed and wed in High Wycombe Parish Church where I sang in the choir." He also recalled time spent at Hughenden Manor before the war. "I sang for Mrs Disraeli in her Soirées on a Saturday afternoon as she entertained her lady friends in the Drawing Room. I stood behind a screen until Frederick Bailey (of the South Bucks School of Music - in Priory Avenue) beckoned us to step forward and let forth! There were two other boys with me, so we sang a range of songs as he played the piano. An inappropriate song for a young boy was 'I'll go no more a-roving with you fair maid' but it did not bother me! *Let the Bright Seraphim* was another piece considered suitable for a boy treble."

*Encouraged to reminisce further, Mr Whiting was happy to share his memories of Wycombe and Hughenden which are reproduced here and which he hopes will "stir a few others"....*

In the Thirties, kids played safely anywhere on the Rye, or say, in Hughenden Park – and when War began the same places were used for OTC (Officers Training Corps) exercises. I recall Mr Disraeli doing the Annual OTC Inspection and at the School there was a 'Disraeli' House. If I remember my history properly the Disraeli in residence when I knew Hughenden was a nephew (of Benjamin Disraeli) who was childless. His name was Coningsby. The family were no longer there after the war. Later I read that the Rowntree Report on Poverty in York was written there. (Seeborn Rowntree was indeed a resident at Hughenden manor, see below.-Ed.)

The churchyard there was always full of primroses and it was a sight to see. The young Conservatives of the day adopted this flower as their emblem and were known as The Primrose League. I still have a lapel badge in yellow enamel of a small primrose.



A chalk stream arose near the Church and



*Primrose League members on their annual pilgrimage to Disraeli's grave in 1934.* SWOP RHW38058

there was a saying about it. It would run dry every seven years and a cataclysmic event would take place – and of course the War started in 1939. When the stream returned years later it was not as pure as it was previously – or so it seemed. A horrid ditch ran alongside the narrow path by Broom and

Wade's which was toxic yellow and green and was the stream on its way to the Wye.

At the entrance to the Rye opposite Trinity Church there was a wide bridge over the River which was the forecourt to the Mill. I remember the workers, white with flour. The mill pool was about a foot or so deep - shallow enough for a small boy to fish for sticklebacks and keep them in a jam jar. Male sticklebacks were prized because they were so red. Better still were the fresh water shrimps on the gravel bottom - like little lobsters.

Just round the corner, the Water Works had an open day for their new pumping station. On the day, so many people queued to shuffle through the narrow underground passage which contained the huge painted pipe that we came to a standstill and there was an air of panic! Voices were raised to move on at the front.



*New and old pump houses are both visible on this view from 1933.* SWOP RHW43039

There was a water-cress bed just over the hawthorn hedge which separated the Rye proper from the Rye Mead - a big round pond which eventually was filled in because it harboured the typhoid bug! On top of one of the big banks which surrounded it was an odd plank seat and on it sat old gents in the sun to observe the goings-on. It was thought that the German gliders could possibly land along the length of the Rye so Army exercises took place which included those of us in the School OTC.

With other boys in uniform and armed with rifles we spread out on the banks of the pond facing the Town. One old man shouted out "Wait until you see the whites of their eyes and then fire!" There was at least one Bren Gun Carrier involved (from the real Army) and I managed to ride in it as the gunner in the back. Ambition was fulfilled while buzzing about the field!

Do people remember the Roman Villa? This was dug in 1932 and then filled in. It was protected by a chestnut fence and somehow I found myself within the compound in retreat from a thunderstorm. I was on my own aged about four or five - which was quite safe in those days - and I panicked trying to squeeze through the fence. The sun came out soon and all was well.



*A group of archaeologists inspect the Roman Villa on the Rye in 1932. The chestnut fence so vividly recalled by Richard Whiting is visible behind.* SWOP RHW08115

The Dyke was ominous because little boys drowned in the weeds in summer. The canoes were real birch bark. At the Coronation (of George VI) there were dragon punt races - teams of men kneeling side by side with

paddles. Long summer school holidays were spent there with a cricket bat and ball. On Saturdays there were dozens of cricket games going on and football in the winter. On Boxing Day, the Wycombiensians played rugby. I was a boy Air Raid Warden at a concrete pillbox at the mill race by Bassetsbury Manor and at the Cricket Pavilion - and a fire watcher in the chair factory on the other side of the road. Oddly I have the Certificate from the Borough of Chepping Wycombe to say so. That's a bit of history.

At a time when everyone went to church, there were other ever-present childhood threats to well-being. Measles was to be expected. TB was commonplace and required a period of convalescence at Peppard (wherever that was! - *beyond Henley-Ed.*) Scarlet Fever heralded a red ambulance which took you to Booker. Diphtheria was worse, and there was polio/infantile paralysis with the prospect of an Iron Lung.

**Richard Whiting**

*Note by Jackie Kay:* Seeborn Rowntree published three York studies related to poverty (in 1901, 1941 and 1951). He moved from Yorkshire to Buckinghamshire in 1936, residing for a while in North Dean before moving to Hughenden Manor. The 1941 study entitled *Poverty and Progress* was based on research carried out in 1936. The 1951 study entitled *Poverty and the Welfare State* was produced in collaboration with Commander G R Lavers. In the same year they also published *English Life and Leisure: A Social Study* which includes a detailed description of leisure facilities in High Wycombe.

## Saying it with Flowers



It was with a mixture of surprise, delight and excitement that we discovered at the beginning of July that a design we had submitted to Andy Sherwood at Wycombe District Council had been chosen for the summer planting in the Old Library Gardens. It featured the Winged Wheel of Progress taken from the Oak Room Window with the dates 1911 and 2011 to highlight the centenary of the windows.

The art of carpet-bedding has changed over the years. Nowadays designs tend to be drawn up on computers, and an experienced gardener tending "our flowerbed" told me that "the initial planting is carried out in trays in a nursery environment, so planting out is a relatively mundane activity akin to tiling, but it is still of interest to see each new design when it arrives".

A number of Society members have asked about the plants used. I am reliably informed by Andy Sherwood that the red background of our display is *Alternanthera*. The letters and numbers which spell out "PROGRESS" and the dates are in *Pyrethrum*, while the winged wheel itself is made up of *Helichrysum* Korma. For the less botanically-initiated among you I think that's Joyweed, Golden Moss and the Curry Plant!

**Jackie Kay**

## Penn and Tylers Green – the Transatlantic Connection

Many of you will remember that earlier excellent book by Society members – *High Wycombe's Contribution To Aviation* by David Scott and Ian Simmons. It is a glorious Aladdin's cave of facts linking our town with aviation, from the birth of Sir Geoffrey de Havilland in Terriers in 1882, to the landing of Samuel Cody in Downley in 1912, the manufacture of military aircraft in the furniture factories in two world wars, the carefree flyers of the 1930s, the history of Bomber Command headquarters at Naphill, the USAAF Eighth Bomber Command at Wycombe Abbey, the Hillside mapmakers at Hughenden Manor and the rise of Wycombe Air Park. All was lovingly collated and meticulously researched and it seemed to be utterly comprehensive.

But of course it couldn't be: nothing ever is! In May we were contacted by an 86-year-old Mrs Mary Rhodes from Acle, Norfolk, who was writing a book and had a most extraordinary story to relate.

In 1962 Mary Rhodes, her husband and children moved into Sweethope Cottage, Manor Road, Penn. To quote: "It appeared that the previous owner had led the life of a recluse with no close relatives." As they moved in during a harsh winter, they saw that the small maid's room was cluttered with "the kind of debris that collects in every house, piles of old newspapers and magazines." Amongst the clutter was a "box of memorabilia", much of which had evidently spilt out over the floor. With the pressures of child-rearing, it was some years before Mary Rhodes sifted through the contents. The elderly widow who had lived in Sweethope Cottage until her death in April 1962 was, it turned out, Mrs Mary Kennedy, the mother-in-law of Sir Arthur Whitten Brown. He and Sir John Alcock had been the first airmen to fly the Atlantic in June 1919, a 16-hour flight, winning a prize of £10,000 offered by Lord Northcliffe of the Daily Mail. The event was a sensation and, a few days after their historic landing in a bog in Ireland, both men were knighted by King George V at Windsor Castle.

Both men had served in the First World War



Sir Arthur Whitten Brown

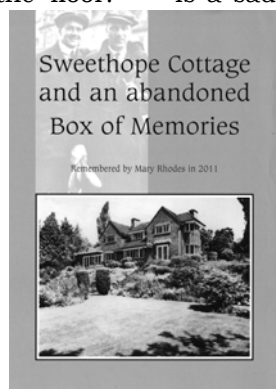
and had become POWs, one on the German front and the other in Turkey, and when the war ended Whitten Brown had joined the Ministry of Munitions where his boss was one Major David Kennedy, whose daughter Kathleen he would in due course marry. And it was on a visit to the Vickers works, looking for a job, that he was asked if he could navigate an aeroplane across the Atlantic, and the Alcock-and-Brown partnership was born. And

Arthur's marriage to his fiancée was deferred for a short while!

The story of how Sir Arthur Whitten Brown's mother-in-law's life ended in solitude in Penn is a sad one. Sir John Alcock died in a flying accident near Rouen in 1919 and Sir Arthur Whitten Brown never flew again following the terrors of his transatlantic flight. Major Kennedy died in London in a bombing raid in 1940. Sir Arthur and Lady Whitten Brown's only son, Flight-Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown, died over Arnhem in 1944. Sir Arthur himself died at Swansea in 1948, and Lady Whitten Brown in 1952. Mrs Kennedy's other child, her unmarried daughter, Eileen, also predeceased her, dying in 1956 at

the age of 59. Was it any wonder that an air of sadness hung over Stanhope Cottage until the Rhodes family moved in?

Happily, Mary Rhodes, a true respecter of



Alcock and Brown crash-landed their Vickers Vimy in a bog at Clifden in Ireland.



At Brooklands (p.8) we saw the replica Vimy which was flown on the same route in 2005 by the late Steve Fossett and Mark Rebholz.



history, ignored uncaring advice from lawyers and accountants that the memorabilia could be destroyed, and visited Sotheby's where the collection was received with alacrity. It was bought in an auction in 1988 for over £1,000 by Metro-Vickers, the successors of Vickers who had built the famous Vickers Vimy. Metro-Vickers were eventually assimilated into AEI and bought by GEC. We wonder where the collection is now – the best bet is probably BAE Systems! We hope they care about history.

Meanwhile, what signs of all this are there in Penn & Tylers Green today? Well, in Mary Rhodes' delightful little book, there is a photograph of a plaque commemorating three members of the family in the church of St Margaret's, Tylers Green. And, remarkably, our man in Tylers Green, Trevor Carter, tells us that it is well-known in the area that the

ashes of Sir Arthur and Lady Whitten Brown are buried there. Indeed, the fact even crops up in local quizzes!

Mary Rhodes' book also relates the thrilling story and background of Alcock and Brown's historic flight.

**Chris Woodman**

*Sweethope Cottage and an abandoned Box of Memories*, Mary Rhodes, 2011, A5, 51pp, The Whitley Press, Hunstanton, Norfolk, £6.50 plus £1.00 P&P, ISBN 978-0-9560476-3-2.

David Scott's and Ian Simmons' book, *High Wycombe's Contribution to Aviation*, ISBN 978-0-9558241-0-4, £10.00 plus £2.50 P&P, is still available from Mr I C Simmons at 154 New Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP12 4LA.

## A Visit To Brooklands – A Personal View

ONE BRIGHTISH day in August a coach-load of members and friends assembled at the Cressex Park & Ride for the quick 30-mile trip to the Brooklands Museum, close by Weybridge. Alas! All the roads to Brooklands were closed for a cycle race. After about an hour, our long-suffering driver, having given us a tour of the leafy suburbs of Weybridge and Woking, got us as close as he could and we disembarked and walked the remaining three-quarters of a mile to the wrong entrance to the museum where a puzzled attendant kindly let us in once she was presented with the appropriate paperwork. The race was a preliminary event as a trial for the Olympics to iron out the problems. Our driver might suggest a few! But I am sure we were all gratified to know we had contributed to the planning for the London Olympic Games.

I was the only person in the party who had actually attended a race at Brooklands, a claim which no one thought to challenge. My father took me in about 1938 and I had not been back since. I had expected the museum to be dominated by motor sport memorabilia, and large sections of the famous banked track remain. During WW2, however, the site was given over to aircraft manufacture and many of the exhibits reflect that period of its history. For instance, one of the hangars houses one of the only two remaining Wellington bombers, not just because it was dragged from the bottom of Loch Ness, but because it was actually built at Brooklands.

The same hangar also houses a Hawker Hurricane in the process of restoration. At the moment they are waiting for some substantial engine parts to be manufactured, after which they will run it out on to the tarmac and start the



*The famous banked track (with a Vickers Varsity navigational trainer on the left).*



*Santos-Dumont Demoiselle (1909) replica.*



*Hawker P.1127 in front of the historic clubhouse.*

engine. It is all done with volunteer labour as is most of the museum. Amongst other exhibits was a Santos-Dumont Demoiselle replica. Some of us will remember that the film *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* was made at Booker and if, like me, you lived close by, you will have seen a version of this plane in the air. It was flown by a small lady as she was the only pilot available who was light enough to get it in the air. The one in the museum is an exact replica of the original whereas the one in the film was modified to satisfy Health and Safety requirements, apparently.

There is a lot of empty open space, some of which is given over to a display of more modern aircraft including a Concorde which is marketed as the Concorde Experience for which one pays extra. Others include a VC10, a BAC 111 (the first jet I ever flew in), a Viscount and others of a similar vintage. They also



have one of the first jet VTOL aircraft, a Hawker P1127, precursor of the Harrier jump jet.

Another large hangar is given over to a collection of coaches and buses, starting with some horse-drawn ones and ending with more recognisable ones. Originally a separate collection at Cobham, it has ended up at Brooklands, and is included in the admission.

What I thought I was coming to see was labelled as the Motoring Village and is all about serious pre-war nostalgia. The original Brooklands Automobile Racing Club clubhouse is there, and houses the original toilets, of which they are very proud, and the café, which looks original but is presumably updated for modern requirements. It looks as if the BARC (now the British Automobile Racing Club) still has offices in the building. The remainder of the village is sheds and workshops where the drivers originally tuned their own cars (apparently few could afford to have mechanics). Most of them contain collections of cars and motorbikes and one a large collection of racing cars. Some of those exhibits were very impressive but were notable for not having been very successful despite being very pretty. A modern McLaren



*Vintage snow-clearer.*

simulator attracted much attention. The item which appealed to me was the Napier Railton car which once held the land speed record. I could not believe how enormous it was and how little power such a large engine produced by modern standards. Modern racing drivers would not have been very impressed with the tyres either!

The museum is run as an independent Charitable Trust and appears to be mainly volunteer-run. Frankly, it looks it, and I find that fine. A large injection of cash would smarten the place up with flowerbeds and nice paving but it would immediately lose its character. I like it the way it is with strange bits of aircraft and other items littered around. One of the stranger ones is shown here.

It is an early snow clearer apparently.

I thought that the day would largely appeal to the 'blokes' but there were plenty of the fair sex there and, who knows, perhaps some of them liked looking at shed-loads of aero engines. Not my scene though.

My thanks to Eileen for organising it and putting up with the hassle of getting us all there. We got home much faster than we went!

**Colin Kennedy**

### ***So what do you want your Newsletter to be like?***

In the past 13 years, I have tried to make the Newsletter interesting to our existing membership. When I took over from John Gore, it was strong on planning, and reported on meetings and visits. We still do that, but gradually I was able to build up a cadre of contributors on historical and heritage matters – people like David Snoxell, Mike Dewey, Jackie Kay, as well, of course, as John Gore himself. But we would like to know what articles you like to read, and what you would like to see more/less of. Please write or email in with your views, in the next few weeks, please!

My other aim has been to keep the cost down. The current 12-page newsletter costs 35p per copy to print, quite a small fraction of the annual Membership fee (whatever category of membership you pay). Some people save the Society money by taking the newsletter by email (which also enables us to reach out to the members of our affiliated groups). And by switching to a printer using modern copying/printing equipment, we have been able to include photographs comprehensively at no greater cost – a great advance. But does the result appeal to our non-members – and to the

young? Perhaps not? Colour and a new layout might help, but full colour would more than double our costs. The illustrations to Roger Wilding's write-up of John Tyler's talk in the current issue look really excellent in colour but none of you have seen them!

What do you think? Let me know!

**Chris Woodman**

### **Consultation with WDC Community Department**

Readers of the Spring *Newsletter* may have noted the Hon. Sec.'s observation at the AGM that WDC's Community (one-time Leisure) Department had not been as good as their Planning colleagues at consulting us about their forthcoming work and decisions.

This did not go unnoticed by the Director herself and we are pleased to report that we were subsequently invited by Elaine Jewell to be informed about the Council's proposals for the museum. This fell short of "consultation", but it was certainly a start and we now look forward to a further meeting to work out how the arrangements can be improved, whether they apply to museums or football pitches!

## Quarterly Meeting

# The Changing Wildlife of the Chilterns

IN HIS talk on 15 July, John Tyler took us through the major changes to the wildlife of the Chilterns, starting some hundred million years ago, when the area was situated on the bed of a tropical sea. Amazingly, traces of this period can still be found in the local undisturbed layers of chalk. Perfectly preserved skeletons of filter-feeding plankton, and other creatures such as sea urchins, are often found either in the chalk or inside nodules of flint, which is also formed from the dissolved skeletons of sea creatures. John brought along some specimens of chalk fossils, and a flint nodule, and these attracted a lot of interest at the end of the talk.

Moving on to the next significant milestone in the development of the Chilterns, John explained that by the middle of the Ice Ages some hundred thousand years ago, the sea had retreated and the hills had been formed. By that time, our local wildlife included mammals, such as bison and mammoth: the teeth of the latter are regularly seen in Thames-side quarries. Because of the continuous land cover around much of the world at that time, species could move out during periods when the land was covered by vast thicknesses of ice and return during the warmer periods between the ice ages. John said that it was interesting that whilst the juniper had survived throughout the ice ages, this small tree species is now in serious decline due to reproduction difficulties.



*The juniper survived the ice ages but is now in decline.*

The Chiltern valleys owe their existence to the ice ages, and the clays, which are found on the tops of our hills today, resulted from rocks that were ground down by the movement of ice. The presence of toads and the large bluebell populations in our area result from the presence of the water-retaining clays.

Following the end of the last ice age some ten thousand years ago, trees were able to start returning. The initial tree species to arrive were the willows, scots pine and birch. The latter species is a particularly good early coloniser, because its seeds are thin and light and widely dispersed by even slight breezes, and they germinate readily. Each tree species

tends to have its own associated community of fauna and flora, mention being made of the birch polypore, often called the razorstrop fungus on account of its former use for sharpening cut-throat razors. The early tree colonisers were followed by a far more varied range of tree species including cherry, ash, and hornbeam. The oak, which has become the climax species in much of Britain, only became established slowly, being slow-growing and reliant on animals collecting and burying its acorns and then forgetting where they had buried them.



*The birch polypore, once used for sharpening cut-throat razors!*

The activities of the nomadic hunter-gatherers had little impact on the woodlands, which covered most of Britain. By 6,000 years ago, however, people had become settlers, clearing woodland cover to build their homes and create flat open spaces to graze their livestock. This change of land usage resulted in the development of chalk grassland, one of the richest habitats in Britain today. The biodiversity of chalk grassland is due to the poor soil, which keeps plant growth in check and reduces competition. The Chilterns has an abundance of orchid species, some very rare: the military orchid only has two sites in the Chilterns and the monkey orchid has only one. The chiltern gentian is found in the Chilterns but nowhere else in Britain, and was adopted in a vote organised by Plantlife as the county flower for Buckinghamshire.



*The monkey orchid – only one site in the Chilterns*

Beech was the last tree to colonise Britain, having arrived before the land bridge to Europe disappeared. This species only gained a foothold because of forest clearance, and, with its shallow rooting system, could be a victim to future climate change. The early beechwoods would have been more open than those we are used to seeing today, with coppiced trees and a richer ground flora. The beech was found to be an ideal tree for the furniture industry, as it was fairly free of knots and splits easily: this resulted in the development of woods containing more mature trees, which supported only those plants which were able to flower early in the year before the leaf canopy formed. The cessation of coppicing also affected the duke of burgundy butterfly, which relied on primroses in open woodland. The white helleborine, on the other hand, thrives in our local woods because of its association with mycorrhizal fungi on the roots of the beech trees. The fly orchid survives by having a flower which resembles and smells like a species of female wasp. The male of the species tries to mate with the flowers and, in doing so, pollinates them. The survival of the wasp species is not affected by this deception, however, because the fly orchid flowers and the real female wasps appear at different times.



*The beautiful porcelain fungus, associated with beechwoods.*

John showed us photographs of some of the fungi associated with beechwoods, including the porcelain fungus, which is often found high up on the trunk or branches of beech, the saffron drop bonnet, which exudes a bright orange juice when its stem is damaged, and the beechmast candlesnuff, which is only found on old beech mast. We were also shown the roman snail, a very large species that has its main stronghold on the chalk grassland of the Chilterns: vast numbers can be seen in the

spring after rain.

John finished his talk by referring to some of the changes that the Chilterns have had, or are having, to cope with in recent times. Many beechwoods were replaced by conifer plantations in the past, and the 1990 storm damage cleared whole areas of mature beech woodland: in both cases, there was often a lack of semi-mature trees to ensure succession of the beech woodland. The loss of mature woodlands does create opportunities for widening the diversity of replacement woodlands, however, and the choice of species to be planted can take account of future climate changes. Our area has had to face considerable damage caused by alien species of mammal such as the grey squirrel, muntjac and edible dormouse, and biological attacks on our horse-chestnuts as well as other tree species. On the other hand, the red kite, the native population of which in Wales was declining rapidly, has now reached over a thousand breeding pairs in the Chilterns, following a highly successful reintroduction programme. Mention was made of the cutting in two of the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve when the M40 was built and how the proposed HS2 rail route through the Chilterns would yet again cause fragmentation

of areas rich in wildlife. John added that, in his opinion, fragmentation of habitats posed the greatest threat to wildlife as a result of HS2, adding that a species disappearing from one side of a split habitat would not be overcome by the migration of any survivors of the species from the other side.

Our thanks go to John Tyler for the interesting and informative talk.

**Roger Wilding**

## Team – Editor

*Yes, we still need an editor or there will be no newsletter in December – merely a diary of forthcoming events!*

So far there has been one cautious nibble! Some people have observed that there may be a case for a little team. The skills involved in soliciting and editing articles are not the same as those needed to lay out the material which, these days, means IT. And although we have had few complaints in the past about the Newsletter's content, its appearance could certainly do with a facelift.

So if you have any skills that you think could help, please get in touch with me at

chris@thewoodmans.plus.com as the outgoing editor. No, deciding the new editor(s) is not "my call" – that will be for the Executive Committee – but I have been asked to channel the information and to tell any volunteers what is involved.

And please don't hang around – work will need to begin on the Winter issue in November at the latest, earlier if there is to be a major change of approach!

Also, please note that we would like some feedback on everybody's desired *content* of the Newsletter (p.9).

**Chris Woodman**

## **Notices**

### **New Members**

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs S Granshaw of Flackwell Heath.

Mr J Aspinell of Nicholas Gardens, HW.

Barn Court Residents' Association, Sands.

### **FAGAM – our policy meetings for *all* our members!**

The next meeting of the Forum for Affiliated Groups and All Members (FAGAM) is in the Friends' Meeting House on 11 November. At these meetings we have very good exchanges about all sorts of matters of interest to the Society. This is *your* opportunity to raise issues of concern to you or an affiliated group you represent, particularly on matters concerning planning, transport and The Rye. It would be helpful, but not essential, if you could advise the Hon. Sec. in advance of any issues you intend to raise: this helps the Executive members to be better prepared.

### **Pioneers of Progress – The Aftermath!**

Amidst all the celebration in our Summer issue of the launch of our exhibition and book, a couple of points got left out. First, an important contribution to the success of the occasion was the provision of drinks, wine and canapés by Ann Simone and her helpers – a belated thank you to them! And within budget. It was a true “five loaves and two fishes” achievement! Second, in the run-up to the event, the Executive Committee

decided it would be sensible to co-opt Jackie Kay herself on to the Committee, and that was done. Jackie will not, of course, get the privilege of voting on the Committee until she gets confirmed at the 2012 AGM!

And Ann is also doing a wonderful job at getting sales of our second batch of 100 books underway. Congratulations, Ann! Readers can still buy their copy from her (£12.00 plus P&P if necessary) on 01494 448773.

### **Last Call!**

Many thanks to all those who have contributed copy for this issue, and indeed to the last 52 issues! The question of a new Editor for the Winter issue is not yet resolved (it will not be me!) but, meanwhile, if you send material to me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 November** I will make sure it is forwarded to the appropriate person!

**And the Proof!** If you have been impressed by the accuracy of the Newsletter over these past years, then thank our always-willing volunteer proofreaders, John Gore and Ann Simone. Little gets past them, and any residual errors are more likely down to my occasional lapse in incorporating their corrections!

*Once again, note that anyone – yes, anyone, including Group Leaders – may contribute copy for the Newsletter. All is grist to the editorial mill. Just make sure it is broadly related to the activities and aims of the Society!*

**Chris Woodman (Hon Editor retd.)**

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

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

### **2011**

Sunday, 11th September  
11am–5pm

Pann Mill open for National Heritage Weekend. Crafts by Society Members, bric-a-brac, plants and produce, teas & cakes, sale of flour (water level permitting).

Water Trail, 2.30pm, start and finish at Pann Mill.

Thursday 28th September  
Gateway Theatre, Bucks New  
University  
7.30pm

Special public meeting: “*The Future of High Wycombe Town Centre*” A presentation by staff of Wycombe District Council's Planning & Sustainability Department on the new Town Centre Masterplan, followed by an opportunity for a full debate, *see p.1*.

Friday, 21st October  
OAK ROOM IN THE TOWN HALL  
7.30pm

Quarterly Meeting: *Reflecting on the Wycombe Pioneers of Progress*. A presentation by Jackie Kay and the members of the Oak Room Windows Centenary Project Team.

### **2012**

Friday, 13th January  
Guildhall  
7.30pm

Quarterly Meeting: *Milling and Baking, Past And Present*. Speaker: Stanley Cauvain, Director and Vice-President, Research Activities at Baketran (*see p.3*).