



Maidenhead Civic Society **NEWS**

Issue 2/05

April 2005



The "Boy" is back!

In this issue

Crossrail – What would Brunel think?!

The Story of Guards Club Park

Regular features on talks, outings, the Heritage Centre,
Projects and Planning

Visit our website! : www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

In writing this report for the Newsletter every three months it has been my objective to give an overall view of what the Society has been doing over the previous three months and to highlight some success. There is always a mixed feeling about the latter because, while we do succeed on some issues as a result of intensive efforts by individuals, there are so many areas where we want to move things forward and are limited by the effort available.

An area of major concern is the on-going and uncoordinated developments and redevelopments across the town which bid fair to change the character of parts of Maidenhead. Contrary to common belief the Council's powers to stop undesirable development is less than people think. Each application is determined on its own against a limited set of legally defined criteria. When an application is turned down it is open to the developer to appeal the decision, which not infrequently leads to the Council's refusal of an application being overturned. Defending against these appeals costs the Council money. The future shape and appearance of the town is thus in considerable degree taken out of the hands of the elected representatives. The Civic Society is not against development as such. Indeed, redevelopment is needed to revive areas whose buildings are wearing out. What concerns us as a Society is the cumulative effect of developments which have no overall vision for the creation of a harmonious and pleasing whole.

Thanks to the efforts of Nigel Cockburn and Bob Dulson a thorough critique has been made of the SEERA (Southeast England Regional Assembly!!!) strategic plan for future development in South East England. A letter commenting on the proposals has been sent to the Secretariat of that organisation. It was felt that the plans took a 'one size fits all' approach to planning in a region as diverse as Kent, through Berkshire and Buckinghamshire to Oxfordshire. There was also overemphasis on development and house building in areas such as ours where there has already been massive development.

A further area of concern to which we are giving attention is the Crossrail proposal. There has been alarm at a plan mooted to use Guards Club Park as a depot for storage of materials and equipment likely to be involved in the electrification of the rail-lines through to Maidenhead. You can read more of the Society's concerns about this on page 11.

We have continued to progress the Strategic Review of Amenity through meetings with Councillor Kathy Newbound, Councillor Werner and Mr. David Lunn the Council's Chief Executive. We are due shortly to have another of our regular quarterly meetings with Councillor Vicky Howes and Council Officers to encourage progress in meeting our Strategic Review targets and to learn of developments on issues such as removing the 'eyesores' identified in our earlier Newsletter. A matter of particular interest will be to be briefed on the Council's examination of the Crossrail project.

Some of you will remember Bob Sandys whose death we recorded earlier along with a resume of his work for the Society. To mark this the Society has funded a memorial seat with a plaque commemorating Bob and with the assistance of the Council officers this has now been installed at Belrope Meadows on the riverbank near Cookham. It is hoped in the near future to have a small dedication ceremony with official photograph. For those who may wish to attend notice of timing will be posted on the website. Thanks go to June Churchman for her work in organising the seat and its installation.

Finally do support the Society and its work. It has never been more needed than now.

John McIntosh
Acting Chairman

TALKS

WEDNESDAY 18th May 2005 – 8 p.m.

**“LOVELOCKS & SPANGLED GARTERS
- Dressed In The Age Of Charles I”**

An illustrated talk by Miss Alexandra MacCulloch

The talk will examine fashionable dress worn in the reign of Charles I, and clothing worn in the court of his father, and will cover the production and buying of clothes, and also armour worn during the Civil War. Just how realistic are the clothes seen in pictures of the period? Miss MacCulloch is Keeper of Art, Clothing and Textiles at Buckinghamshire County Museum.

WEDNESDAY 21st September 2005 – 8 p.m.

**“THE MAGUS, THE RANTER, THE PROPHETESS
AND THE VICAR’S WIFE
Mystical Religion in the Thames Valley ca 1650”**

An illustrated talk by Manfred Brod

How to make sense of catastrophe and resolve a terrifying crisis: religion, magic, sex and high politics in post-Civil War Berkshire. Manfred Brod is a post-doctoral fellow at Harris-Manchester College, Oxford, and convenor for local history in the Abingdon Area Arch. & Hist. Society.

WEDNESDAY 19th October 2005 – 8 p.m.

“WEATHER LORE – FACT OR FICTION”

A talk by Mr I Currie

WEDNESDAY 16th November 2005 – 8 p.m.

**“GREY’S COURT – NATIONAL TRUST PROPERTY
Recent Archaeological Investigations ”**

An illustrated talk by Mr Gary Marshall
Regional Archaeologist for National Trust

OUTINGS

On Sunday 3rd April we chose a glorious day to visit Sussex. We firstly took a trip on the Bluebell Railway in vintage carriages dating back to the 1920s and pulled by fully restored steam engines. The dedication and work that the volunteers put into the running of this railway is quite remarkable and their efforts were appreciated by us all.

After having lunch at the station we took a 25-minute trip to Saint Hill Manor where our guide greeted us. Whilst half of us were being shown around the house the other half took tea on the terrace and looked around the beautifully maintained garden.

This visit was very well supported and we had quite a few new faces.

Our next trip is on Saturday 2nd July to Portsmouth Naval Dockyard. On this weekend they are celebrating Admiral Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar 200 years ago. Portsmouth will play host to the International Festival of the Sea, with over 400 ships taking part along with military displays, a 19th Century street market and street entertainment and much more.

You will also have access to the whole Dockyard where you can see the Mary Rose, HMS Warrior, HMS Victory, the Royal Naval Museum and you may take a harbour tour by boat

This festival is on for just 4 days so don't miss this opportunity to see one of the greatest maritime festivals ever assembled. We do hope that you will support this visit and if you would like to bring along children or grandchildren they will be most welcome.



HMS Victory, at Portsmouth

We look forward to your support for our outings and will always welcome non-Members.

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

YORK STREAM

Town centre

As of 16 April, water is still in the town centre and has been flooding the path alongside the stream as it passes under the A4. We will have to wait and see whether it retreats once the reeds start sprouting. Let's hope the Environment Agency (EA) carry out the promised spraying soon. It is expected that removing the gravel dumped in the stream when the Hines Meadow car park was built plus its associated now abundant vegetation, will reduce flooding of the path under the A4. This will be done as part of the Sainsbury's redevelopment via an S106 agreement which requires improvements to York Stream (including dredging work) and to the Green Way (including planting) to be done prior to the opening of the new store or occupation of the first dwelling, whichever is the sooner (minutes of the Green Way Working Group (GWWG), 14 Dec 2004).

Marsh Meadow, Cookham

At the March meeting of GWWG it was noted that the EA will dredge Marsh Meadow ditch, now absent of water voles, in September 2005 and may spray in Spring 2005. Hopefully this will increase water flow into the system. According to Jane Gifford of the Windsor & Maidenhead Urban Wildlife Group, the pipe connecting the ditch to the Thames is completely clogged.

Maidenhead Town Forum

At a meeting of the Maidenhead Town Forum on 15 Feb it was stated that the Royal Borough would be doing some pollarding of trees in the town centre and also nettle and ground elder control (no sign so far!). A representative of the EA will apparently attend the next meeting of the Forum.

By the way, remember that promise the then National Rivers Authority (now the EA) made when the Jubilee River was planned which said: *“Existing channels which pass through the centre of Maidenhead town will be upgraded to offer greater capacity during flood time, whilst their appearance under normal conditions will also be considerably improved”*? Well, our MP Theresa May raised this with them and they replied that the works originally proposed to the watercourses in Maidenhead for the flood alleviation scheme did not extend further south than Ray Mill Road West on the Maidenhead Ditch. Further options were considered during the feasibility study which included increasing the capacity of the watercourses through Maidenhead **“however they were found to be impractical”**. Found by whom, one wonders!

They went on to say that a review of the North Maidenhead proposals in July 2000 resulted in a decision not to undertake works in Maidenhead Ditch because of improvements elsewhere. This provided a reduction in scheme costs and - this bit I particularly liked - **“removed the potential disturbance to the wildlife habitat along Maidenhead Ditch”**. They were obviously not thinking of aquatic wildlife as the ditch has been dry each summer since the Jubilee River opened and features wall to wall reeds.

However, the Maidenhead Ditch work has still not been deleted from the planning approval issued by the Royal Borough. Following the flooding of 2003, an application in 2002 by the EA to delete was withdrawn and they are now trying to decide what to do. I guess this will depend on how much they think the Strande Lane area is likely to flood in future. All members in the Strande Lane area please take note!

MILLENNIUM WALK

A404 Footpath 9 Bisham

Hopefully by the time you read this newsletter the new route for Footpath 9 under the A404 will have been created. This is an important addition to our Millennium Walk project as it provides a safe path linking the Thames Path to the Millennium Walk and thereby creates two large circular walks. The bridge the Royal Borough has commissioned to take the path into Bisham Woods is not the most beautiful of objects (see photo). We did make suggestions which would have altered the odd angle the bridge is being constructed at but were told the EA were not willing to relax their requirement relating to clearances over the bridge and the bank (evidently the EA believes that water flows uphill). However at least it will complete a route which allows us to cross the A404 safely.



The footbridge under construction

Inaugural Walk of the New Link

Using the rail network, we plan to have an inaugural walk on Saturday 18th June, starting from Marlow railway station at 2.15pm. The 18th is the start of *Use Your Paths Week* (18-24 June), an initiative of the Ramblers Association, and the East Berks Ramblers will be participating in the walk. For details see the enclosed notice. Do join us for the walk and for light refreshments in the garden of one of our members at Pinkneys Green. There will be no charge for this event, though there will be a collection plate available for contributions to be split between the Woodland Trust and the National Trust (towards repairs at the recently vandalised Brick & Tile Works Nature Reserve).

Lower Cookham Road to Towpath

Creating one of the other missing links has been held up by the take over of Ready Mixed Concrete (RMC) by Cemex. However, there is some good news. White Place farm has been sold by RMC to their tenant Mr John Edwards who is happy for the walk to go ahead. But, because the flood bund land, where we hope the path will run, is still in the hands of the Environment Agency, and RMC are still negotiating with them (they won't say what about!), things are still on hold. We hope there will be some progress to report in the next Newsletter.

We would like to thank Cllr Richard Fagence, Lead Member for Leisure & Culture for his support in creating this link and our MP Theresa May who has been a tower of strength in connection with this link and the link crossing the A404 that required the tabling of several parliamentary questions.

THE “MAIDENHEAD BOY” STATUE

We are glad to say that the vandalised statue is back in place at the top of the High Street and was unveiled at a ceremony on Monday 28th February by our patron, the Mayor, Cllr Emrys Richards. After the ceremony we repaired to Messrs Boville Wright (the art supplies shop) who kindly provided very welcome hot cross buns and coffee.

The repair of the statue was a combined operation involving the Royal Borough, the Maidenhead Advertiser and our Society. We would like to thank everyone involved especially Lydia Parker (née Karpinska) for organising the work. To give you an idea of what was involved see the photos below.



The vandalised statue

The Boy minus his left arm and boat, awaiting repairs





Lydia working on the wax of the missing arm

Welding the Boy back onto his feet – done by Ben Richards Sculpture Services who also turned the wax into a new bronze arm



Smile please! The unveiling ceremony, with Civic Society Chairman John McIntosh, Jeremy Spooner representing the Louis Baylis Charitable Trust, the Mayor - Cllr Emrys Richards, and Lydia Parker

The plaque; from 1986 to 1995 the statue languished at the foundry when, with our help, it was put up in the town centre



Members may well be wondering how the statue came to be where it is. **Sarah Waller** has kindly written this by way of background:

On the 4th of December 1984 I received a letter from Anthony Apponyi, AMSA Developments Limited, following a telephone call from his secretary confirming the initiation of a competition to find a suitable sculpture for part of the landscaped area in front of their building at 13/35 Grenfell Road. In order to get planning permission for another building they had decided to donate a sculpture and wanted Maidenhead and District Arts Council to organize the competition and be represented on the judging panel. A prize of £1,000 as well as expenses was to be granted for the sculpture's commissioning.

The competition was advertised in the *Maidenhead Advertiser* and copies of the drawing of the site where the sculpture would be erected were sent to the competitors. A judging panel committee was established consisting of Cllr E.A.S. Brooks – Chairman; Mr Stephen W. Greenbury Dipl. Arc., Newman Lavinson & Partners; Mr Michael Bowley – Architect - Representative of the Maidenhead and District Arts Council; Mr Richard Poad – Civic Society; Mr Anthony Apponyi – Managing Director AMSA Developments Limited and Mr George Muller – Sculptor.

It was decided by Michael Bowley and Mr George Muller that maquettes should be provided by the best entries and Mr Muller suggested that Bronze was less likely to be vandalized (!!! Ed.). After viewing the maquettes, “Boy with the Boat” (Lydia Parker) got 40 points and “Maiden with Swan” (Eunice Goodman) got 36 points. It was decided that the chairman should invite the winner Mrs Lydia Parker and her husband to meet the panel of judges at a small reception in the Mayor's parlour on the 25th of November 1985.

The “Maiden with Swan” was erected in the park soon afterwards, but as Mr Apponyi did not get his planning application, in spite of Michael Bowley's efforts, the “Boy with the Boat” was left to gather dust on a factory floor and it was 10 years almost to the day that a home was finally found at the top of the High Street by The Methodist Church. Lydia was at the unveiling and we had a chat. The “Boy” was modelled on her young son, who was a grown man by then and living abroad and unable to attend.

OCKWELLS PROJECT

Bisham Abbey

As you may have read in the *Advertiser*, the Civic Society is helping the Marlow Archaeological Society and Chiltern Archaeology, under the direction of Dr Jill Eyers, to carry out a geophysical survey of the area of the old tennis courts at Bisham Abbey. These were until recently covered by tarmac. The aim of the exercise was to try and locate the foundations of the long gone Bisham Priory Church built in the 14th century by the Montacute Earls of Salisbury.

The survey was undertaken over the weekend of April 9th and 10th, using a resistivity meter which can detect underground solid objects by mapping changes in the electrical properties of the near-surface subsoil. Unfortunately, this has proved unsuccessful. It appears that the contractor that cleared the tarmaced tennis courts didn't properly remove the rubble, simply grassing over it. Apart from interfering with the electrical signals, it is unlikely to let the grass grow! Dr Eyers now plans to use another method - ground probing radar - in a further attempt to detect any underground features.



Archaeologists Betty Bell-Smith and Alex Agar conduct the resistivity survey at Bisham

We hope in a future newsletter to show what Bisham Priory Church looked like (there's a drawing of it in a 15th century roll commemorating the Montacute and Neville families). However, in the meantime, if you are visiting Devon in the summer try and visit Exeter Cathedral and the church of Ottery St Mary. John Grandison, Bishop of Exeter from 1327- 1369 (and the brother-in-law of William Montacute, 1st Earl of Salisbury, who founded Bisham Priory), evidently had a thing about the cathedral and built a replica of it at Ottery St Mary. My theory is that he helped do something similar at Bisham.



The Parish Church at Ottery St. Mary, from the northeast- note the “Norman” towers

CROSSRAIL

An item of concern to which the Civic Society will now be giving attention is the Crossrail proposal. On 22 February 2005, the Secretary of State for Transport deposited a Bill in Parliament seeking powers to construct a railway transport system running from Maidenhead and Heathrow Airport in the west through central London to Shenfield and Abbeywood in the east. As part of the Crossrail proposals, the Great Western Main Line between Stockley Road bridge in Hillingdon and Maidenhead will be electrified. This will require the provision of new 25kV overhead line equipment. This will generally employ portal frames, although masts with cantilevers will be used over Maidenhead railway bridge.

There has been alarm over the plan to use Guards Club Park as a depot for storage of materials and equipment likely to be involved in the electrification of the rail-lines through to Maidenhead. Such a scheme would be totally unacceptable. Access to it is through quiet housing areas on narrow roads designed for domestic use. The park is a public open space in a town which, on the government's own criteria, is forty percent below the norms in this respect. Moreover, the park was created by the initiative and effort of the Civic Society. It seems on the face of it that the proposal has much to do with the convenience of the contractors.

So far, most of the planning for Crossrail seems to have focussed on the most immediate needs of the project mainly in relation to the lines, the station and sidings for parking of rolling stock. No consideration has as yet been given to such issues as the additional car parking which will be required to cope with the additional inflow and outflow of passengers using the service. Most of these will be from a wide catchment area outside Maidenhead. Even more, it is unclear how the existing road network in and around the station will cope with additional traffic. The whole project is the subject of an Act of Parliament which has yet to be passed and whose progress, as far as we know, will have been disrupted by the General Election.

Here are a couple of contributions to set the scene, as it were. Firstly, member **Tina Sell** describes her concerns about the impact of the scheme on Brunel's bridge, and then Civic Society President **Richard Poad** tells the story of the creation of Guards Club Park and its origins, which will help to explain why the Civic Society has such a proprietorial interest in it.

WHAT WOULD BRUNEL THINK?

On first reading about the proposed plans for a railway link from Maidenhead to Shenfield, my immediate reaction was that it would be an excellent idea. Anything which encourages rail travel as opposed to road travel must be good and to enable travellers, who at present endure the daily grind of getting across London, to arrive at their destination by a direct route seems a long overdue development. It took some little time for me to realise the implications. On hearing some of the concerns about the changes to Maidenhead Station and the former goods yard, I decided to visit the library and look at the plans for myself. The amount of information is daunting. Where does one start?

I am very fortunate in that I live within sight of Brunel's wonderful bridge over the River Thames, known locally as the Sounding Arch. As a primary school teacher, I have always promoted Brunel as a hero to my pupils, using this Heritage Site as a place to visit, learn about and admire. They learned that the Thames Commissioners specified that the bridge must not obstruct the navigation channel or the towpath, must be built of brick and should have one pier which would stand mid-river. Many people thought the structure would be unsafe and although there were problems with the eastern arch due to the cement not being set properly, when a violent storm blew down the buttresses the bridge stood firm, as it does to this day.

I decided to begin my search with the bridge. How would it be affected? Would there be obvious changes? How would the work be carried out? How much disruption to those living in close proximity?

I was immediately alarmed by what I discovered: the line will have an overhead electrification system; Guards Club Park was proposed as a compulsory purchase; the work would be accessed along Oldacres and River Road. The Crossrail project was most definitely going to impact on our lives.



The clean lines of Brunel's famous "Sounding Arch" railway ridge over the Thames

My first concern is the appearance of Maidenhead Bridge, a Grade II listed structure. The document describes its plan: *"Overhead electrification on top of the structure will be installed. The design is being undertaken with advice from heritage specialists to help ensure that the impact on the structure is acceptable. Once installed the gantries would be visible on the bridge from viewpoints along the river and nearby."* It then shows a photo of Wharncliffe Viaduct as an example of electrification for the Heathrow Express. It is not a pretty sight!

The Crossrail helpdesk are most helpful and responded to my queries promptly. However it did not remove my concerns. It appears that the masts and wiring will be installed from the railway using special engineers' trains but the foundations to the masts could involve some construction activity from the road. No details are available at this stage. It is likely that temporary scaffolding will be constructed on both outer faces of the bridge, with the scaffolding being delivered by lorry as close to the four "corners" of the bridge as possible.

Crossrail assume that at least part of the Guards Club Park car park at the eastern end of the road called Oldacres would be used by the contractor as a storage compound, providing a small temporary site office/store facility. It is also proposed to carry scaffolding through the Park and across the footbridge to the island in the middle of the river to be erected adjacent to the middle pier of the bridge. The foundations have not yet been designed but may be largely formed with pre-cast concrete units, which could be delivered by rail or might be craned into position using road delivery. In either case the workforce would probably access the site from the adjacent roads, including the worksite at Guard Club Park. The duration of the works could be 6 to 9 months but there may be extended periods when work would be limited.

This area of the river is accessible to the public and a rather attractive site. It is also purely residential. The two access roads, River Road and Oldacres are very narrow and not robust. How will they stand up to heavy traffic? Furthermore, the Guards Club Bridge is an ornate structure refurbished by the Civic Society as part of the Silver Jubilee Park project, not intended to support heavy loads.

All in all, this is an area of natural beauty which cannot fail to suffer some damage during this development. In my view we need assurances that the character of the area will be restored after the work is complete and where possible to maintain the beauty of the Bridge.

As author Denis Griffiths says in his book *Locomotive Engineers of the GWR* "In all his schemes Brunel sought to instil a sense of beauty; his designs not only had to function but also be pleasing to the eye." What would Brunel think!!

THE CREATION OF GUARDS CLUB PARK

Guards Club Park was created by the Civic Society as a Silver Jubilee project, which began in 1976 and finally ended in 1980. The centrepiece was the restoration of the delicate timber and iron footbridge, which was built prior to 1880 and which a team of Civic Society volunteers restored between 1976 and 1978, working on Sunday mornings come rain or shine. Members of the team included the late Jack Widgery, Harold James, Michael Bowley, Pat Symons, George Mair, Aubrey Norris, and Richard Poad. In a second phase Vincent Becket and Mac Mackrory joined the team building the shelter in the park.

The Brigade of Guards had their boat club in Maidenhead for 100 years, coming to rooms at Skindles in 1865 and moving in 1905 to two houses on the Maidenhead bank donated by Lord Cheylesmore. A ballroom, swimming pool and tennis court were built, and the club's regatta was a feature of the social scene between the wars. Ladies were not allowed to stay overnight, and the name of Gaiety Row for the houses opposite the Guards Club on the Taplow Bank needs no explanation! Royalty came visiting by boat and attended the annual ball at the end of Ascot Week.



Guards Club Bridge

But in 1965 high running costs forced the club's closure and the site was sold to a developer who also owned the land where Oldacres and Horseguards Drive were later built. Planning permission was given for those developments, and for two blocks of riverside flats on the open space at the back of the park; incidentally the mound covers the club's swimming pool. The council required the island and the immediate riverside area to be dedicated to the public as a 'planning gain'. The club buildings were demolished and the footbridge and a boathouse at its island end (complete with spire) gradually decayed.

In 1973, which was European Architectural Year, the Civic Society put on an exhibition about the architecture of Maidenhead. The photographs of the rotting footbridge galvanized the Society into

doing something - anything - to prevent it being lost. With fewer than 150 members, very little money in the bank and an estimate from Harold James that the restoration would cost up to £10,000, we set about persuading the developer (J A Pye from Oxford) to let us work on the bridge *before* he actually handed it over to the council. We also persuaded J A Pye to modify the layout of their estate to delete the blocks of flats and increase the area of the riverside land to be dedicated.

Work started in 1976, with the salvaging of the cast iron arches and stanchion posts. The wooden structure was completely replaced. The pile driving and the casting of replica arches (at Cinderford in the Forest of Dean) were the only parts of the entire project which were not carried out by Civic Society volunteers. The boathouse having collapsed, local scouts rescued the spire from its roof, and this was later incorporated into the shelter in phase 2 of the project.

Although promoted as a Silver Jubilee project, which helped us when it came to fund raising, it was clear that the restoration would take much longer. But as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations hundreds of people came to the 'park' to enjoy Maidenhead's first rag regatta in years and its first ever Combined Charities Fair. The swimming pool was filled for us by the Fire Brigade and radio controlled boats sailed up and down it all afternoon.

As a result of all the publicity, the Society's membership doubled in a single year, and then doubled again the next year. Funds for the project kept flowing in, and in the summer of 1978 we began to clear deep mud from the paths on the island and get the unkempt lawns into shape. I well remember George Mair on an ancient ride-on mower.



The Shelter in Guards Club Park

The project was opened on 30th September 1978 to great acclaim - and a Civic Trust commendation for the Society. The volunteers took a year off, and then built the little shelter, using a wooden summerhouse on top of which we put the spire rescued from the boathouse. We also salvaged a pair from pillars from a nearby site and hung on these pillar the gates from Maidenhead's original public library, which had been languishing in the council depot.

At Guards Club Park the Civic Society created a public asset of lasting worth, and not surprisingly has a proprietorial interest in the area. After an initial period of neglect, the park is now well looked after by the council and provides a quiet oasis at the riverside, where the only modern things in sight are the trains on Brunel's bridge and the planes above your heads. Add a little imagination, and you could be back in the Maidenhead's heyday, with punts on the river and pretty girls installed across the river in Gaiety Row! One wonders what they would all make of Crossrail's proposal to use the park as a building depot.

From the Editor: The building of Guards Club Shelter has particular memories for me, as it was through being roped in to help - almost literally! - that I and Ann became members of the Civic Society. At that time (1979/80) we lived in Guards Club Road, near Maidenhead Bridge, and often wondered why there was so much traffic to-ing and fro-ing with cars pulling trailers laden with all

sorts of DIY equipment. Eventually curiosity got the better of me and I wandered down to take a closer look. As I recall it, the frame of the shelter was up and the workers were pondering how best to lift up the quite heavy spire on to the top. I offered the use of my heavy-duty block and tackle gear (previously used to assist in getting my Jeep out of tight spots in the African bush!) and was immediately dragooned by Richard Poad into the work party (he would have made an excellent 18th century press-gang officer!). It was only a matter of time before Ann and I were signed up for membership.



Photo: Maidenhead Advertiser

*The official “opening” of the shelter in Guards Club Park, ca Easter 1982.
How many faces can you recognise now?*

HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

Richard Poad, Chairman of Maidenhead Heritage Trust, writes that everyone at the Heritage Centre is excited about their relocation to the town centre in June - watch the local press or the Heritage Centre's website (www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk) for details.

The last exhibition at the former Green Dragon in Moorbridge Road runs until 21st May and celebrates the 60th Anniversary of VE-Day. **MAIDENHEAD AT WAR** looks at life in our town during the war, with sections on Evacuees, Weddings, Entertainment, the Home Guard, Rationing and so on. Among the objects on display will be many items from the Heritage Centre's large collection of memorabilia of Air Transport Auxiliary, whose headquarters were at White Waltham from 1940 to 1945, and the Dutch flag which flew over Stubbings House when Queen Wilhelmina lived there as her home from home.

On Saturday 21st May at St Joseph's Parish Centre (Cookham Road) a special concert '**Music in May**', will celebrate the Heritage Centre's time at the Green Dragon. Given by a talented local group of eight singers called 'Voices in Harmony', who have been delighting local audiences for 15 years, the concert promises to be a sparkling evening's entertainment. The varied programme includes serious and humorous arrangements sung in close harmony. Whether you prefer classical, jazz, folk, songs from the musicals or even Beatles, Stevie Wonder and Freddie Mercury there will be something for you. So please do come along on 21st May and bring your family and friends. Tickets are available from the Heritage Centre or from Tricia Brooking on (01628) 637759, price £6.

There are still some seats available for the ever-popular **River Thames Historical Cruise** on 6th September, departing from Riverside Gardens at 10am, returning at 3pm. Sit back and relax as you cruise gently upriver to Bisham Abbey and then back down to Bray, with a live commentary en-route. Tickets for this wonderful day out on the river cost £18 and are available from the Heritage Centre.

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is seeking a few more volunteer stewards from early June. Volunteers work a 3-hour shift from 10am to 1pm, or from 1pm to 4pm. They greet visitors and help with enquiries and sales. If you would be able to help on a regular or occasional basis, please phone Fran Edwards on (01628) 780555 for more details.

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is open Tuesday – Saturdays
90 Moorbridge Road, Maidenhead SL6 8BW, ☎ 01628 780555
www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk

PLANNING DIGEST

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Group met in February, March and April to review the plans for some 30 applications that had been selected from the weekly listings for January, February and March. All the sites were visited and reviewed in detail. Comments were submitted to the Planning Department on 26 of the applications and the full text of these can be seen on the Society's website.

The applications included three blocks of flats in Shoppenhangers Road, a block of flats and houses and care home in Courthouse Road and the redevelopment of 1 High Street, 6 telephone masts, a block of flats in Marlow Road and the redevelopment of the Esso Service station on the road to Windsor.

It will be apparent from the lists of applications that the issue of the development of blocks of flats in Shoppenhangers Road is one that is of increasing concern to the Society, and we thought it would be of interest to reproduce here an example of our responses to the Planning Department.



*One of the blocks of flats currently under construction on Shoppenhangers Road.
It seems far too close to the adjacent house*

Shoppenhangers Road:

“This is another example of the folly of treating each planning application in isolation. There is already a surfeit of planning permissions applied for or given for similar such developments along Shoppenhangers Road. This is fundamentally changing the character of the area. In accordance with PPG 3, the Council needs to produce an overall plan and planning guidance for where this type of dense development is appropriate in Maidenhead. Such developments should be well designed and also enhance and respect local character.

We object to the removal of another house on this important road to be replaced by a block of flats, which does nothing to enhance local character. The other blocks of flats being developed along this road are designed to look like large houses but this block looks like an office building with chimneys. The building with three storeys is disproportionately bulky on a corner plot where it replaces a building which is not bulky. Consequently it is out of character with the area. The development will increase the footprint of the building, tarmac the rest of the site and result in a loss of green space.

The number of additional households will put additional pressure on local facilities, infrastructure and the environment. For example there are reports of reduced water pressure in the area as a result of previous developments.

The density of the development is too high for the area and there is very little amenity space around the building which fills most of the site. The increase in households will lead to more traffic on already busy roads. There will be additional parking problems from vehicles parking or stopping outside on Larchfield Road.

We should like any developer's contribution (Section 106 etc) to be use to improve local bus services and on a local LCN design compliant cycleway."

Telephone Masts:

Michael Johnson recently wrote to our MP Theresa May outlining a proposal that could alleviate some of the concern over the proliferation of applications for new mobile telephone masts:

"Through my involvement with the Maidenhead Civic Society, I tend to see many of the planning applications for phone masts, and I have been encouraged by your increasing involvement and concern about the visual harm they do, quite apart from ant radiation that may emerge from them.

One suggestion, that has consistently been made, is that no approval should ever be given unless it is temporary, so that the planning authorities can keep a watchful eye on all aspects of the technology. Unfortunately, I have seen little evidence that that has been followed.

For those who regret the damage such masts can do, a particularly depressing facet is the way in which these applications come from the separate phone companies week after week. It must make the job of the Planning Department particularly difficult when each of these has to be given separate attention.

I would therefore like to suggest that there should be a "season" during which all phone companies may submit their bids for the year. To say that applications will only be accepted in an identified two month period, for example, would enable local authorities, taking what extra technical advice they need, to lean heavily on all applicants so that the maximum number of masts are shared. I recognise that such a scheme would also emphasis the sheer scale of the number of masts being requested, but I cannot always believe that such development is always in the best interests of those who live amongst them."

Nigel Cockburn

THE PLANNING GROUP AT WORK

The Planning Group of the Society meets monthly. There are 10 members who are led by the Chairman, Nigel Cockburn. Our function is to study selected planning applications and submit a written statement to the Planning Department on any proposal that we feel warrants comment from the Civic Society.

This activity on behalf of members has been going on for many years - more or less since the founding of the society some 45 years ago. The Planning Group is proud of this consistent work, and our objective approach, which has earned us credibility over the decades.

We thought that you would like to know more about how we work and where we fit in to the Planning system.

Planning applications are submitted to the Planning Department of the Royal Borough all through

the year. The Department issues a weekly list of those which it has received. There are usually between 60 and 100 applications each week. Two members of our Group, John Ashford and Janice Crewe, scrutinize these lists to select those plans that might be appropriate for us all to consider.

In the Maidenhead area Parish Councils have an important role in looking at plans that fall within their geographical patch - for example, Cookham or Bray. However, the centre of Maidenhead has no equivalent Parish Council to fulfil this role. That is why it is important for us, the Maidenhead Civic Society, to act.

Janice & John first look at whether the address of the application is in 'our' patch - the central, mostly urban part of Maidenhead. Next they look at the size of the development, whether a listed building or a conservation area is involved, and whether the proposals might be controversial. Applications vary a good deal, and can raise many issues. To get further information they study the plans & written material that have been submitted to the Planning Department. They consider matters of design, scale, density and layout. Each month they visit several sites before reaching a decision about which of the many applications should form the agenda for the Planning Group.

The aim is to get the agenda to members of the Planning Group in time for them to go & see the location of all the items. This is important so that there can be an informed discussion about each application. In fact the skill & detailed knowledge around the table is often impressive. Whether we are discussing water-tables, flood areas, Green Belt policy, the history of the site, parking guidelines, architecture or the range of telecommunication masts, someone seems to know the answer!

But we are also careful to avoid conflict of interest. If an application should impinge directly upon a member of the Group, they will sit out & not contribute to the discussion when that plan is considered.

Typically each month we discuss about 12 planning applications and send in written comments on five or six. In our comments we aim to be as objective and consistent as possible. Sometimes we commend a scheme. Sometimes we support a plan in principle, but would recommend some modification. We express opposition to applications for a number of reasons but particularly when they seem to be contravening approved planning policy or might lead to over development on a site.

Any statement that we make is made on behalf of the Civic Society & becomes a public document. If you wish to read what we say each month please visit the website www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk. A summary of the work of the Planning Group appears in the Newsletter in the form of a Planning Digest.

And then, no sooner have we completed one agenda than John & Janice are off again, checking the next lists of planning applications. It never stops! So our group never stops - not for summer holidays or for Christmas: especially not for Christmas, because we have found over the years that some of the most controversial developments seem to be submitted at that time.

These days, professional planning officers determine many planning applications, but certain applications have to be decided by a Committee of local councillors. In Maidenhead this is known as the Development Control Panel. It meets monthly, usually on a Wednesday at 6.30 pm in the Town Hall and members of the public can attend. If you are interested in seeing planning officers, councillors, developers & the public interacting in open debate in order to make decisions on planning applications, then please go along! It has been described as democracy at work - others say it is pure theatre!

If you would like to see the list of local planning applications you can find them at www.rbwm.gov.uk. You can look at the agenda for the meetings of the Development Control Panel here too. The Planning Department is in York Stream House, just beyond the library in St. Ives Road. This is a public office and if you ever need to study a planning application you can do so here during normal office hours.

Janice Crewe

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 18 May 2005 Talk by Miss Alexandra MacCulloch	“Lovelocks & Spangled Garters ” Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.
Saturday 18 June 2005 Walk	Inaugural Walk of the Thames Path-Millennium Walk Link Start from Marlow Railway Station at 2.15 pm.
Saturday 2 July 2005 Outing	International Festival of the Sea - Portsmouth
Wednesday 21 September 2005 Talk by Dr Manfred Brod	“The Magus, The Ranter, the Prophetess and the Vicar’s Wife” Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.
Wednesday 19 October 2005 Talk by Mr I Currie	“Weather Lore – Fact or Fiction? ” Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.
Wednesday 16th November 2005 Talk by Mr Gary Marshall	45th Annual General Meeting Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m. and “Grey’s Court – Recent Archaeological Investigations”

CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2005

Parish Centre in St. Luke’s Church, at 7.45 p.m.

12th January, 9th February, 9th March, 13th April, 11th May, 8th June, 13th July, 14th September, 12th October, 9th November, 14th December.

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 16th November 2005 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 8.00pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 8 July 2005.**

(Unless otherwise acknowledged, photographs taken by Ann & Brian Darracott using the Society’s digital camera purchased with a grant from the Kidwell’s Trust)

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