



Maidenhead Civic Society NEWS

Issue 2/06

April 2006



The main entrance to Bisham Abbey

In this issue

The History of Bisham Abbey – Special July Event

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

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

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

In the past few days spring seems at last to be springing and with it comes some degree of optimism and cheerfulness. Since the last issue of the Newsletter the Society has been much involved with a wide range of issues including the conclusion of the Great Debate, the Council's consultations with the public on the Core Strategy document setting out the future development of the town, Peter Prior's proposals for turning the York Stream into a navigable waterway and the St. Regis' Paper Company's review of the future of the area on the Bucks bank of the Thames owned by them. In addition there have been all the ongoing activities involved in selecting and scanning development applications although here the pressure has been relieved for the time being by the Council's moratorium on large-scale developments. Then there is Crossrail where we wait to see if the Society will be called in front of the Select Committee examining the petitions submitted. Also a new initiative has been undertaken by a group of the Executive Committee to develop a more cohesive and attractive programme of events through the year. One idea is that we could then, at six-monthly intervals, launch each half-year programme with a social event for members. So as you can see there has been a lot of activity. Let us hope that we can make the outcomes commensurate!

As far as the Great Debate is concerned we feel that it has been a substantial success. The public meeting held in late February in the Management Centre in Cookham was attended by something over one hundred people. Happily Councillor Vicky Howes and senior Council officers David Oram and David Trigwell joined in. Their presence was most helpful as they were able to give valuable background to issues raised and at the same time to hear first hand of people's concerns. Thanks must also go to our MP Theresa May and to Martin Trepte, the editor of the Maidenhead Advertiser, who were involved with the Civic Society in setting up the Great Debate and particularly to the latter for chairing the public meeting. One of the tasks awaiting the Society is to review and re-edit the Strategic Review in the light of the information from the Great Debate and from the Council's public consultations.

The Council's town centre public consultation on 8th March was well organised if thinly attended. The afternoon timing clearly did not help. However, a strong representation of the Civic Society (five in all) was able to make many significant points which have been faithfully recorded for inclusion in the final document that will be submitted to the higher echelons of the cumbersome planning process in September. Whatever our immediate feelings about the Council and its officers' handling of the LDF process there has to be sympathy for the enormous extra workload that it has entailed which is made worse by the impenetrable jargon used and the mechanistic, top-down approach of central government.

The moves on the York Stream and the St. Regis review are in their infancy but thanks to swift involvement by Bob Dulson, Nigel Cockburn and Michael Bayley *inter alia* the Society has succeeded in establishing a position in the inner councils of both. Peter Prior has set up a steering group for the former and St. Regis have called in a firm of international planning consultants to advise them on how to exploit their 48 acre land-holding on the east bank of the Thames. The latter have agreed to consult local interests and although Maidenhead is in Berkshire what happens on the Bucks bank is clearly of major interest to the people of Maidenhead.

The swarm of planning applications to knock down perfectly good houses and to replace them with blocks of flats has thinned to a trickle. However, it is only a matter of time before one or more developers will test the moratorium by filing a significant application and pushing it through to appeal at least. This, we understand, has now happened with two particular applications. Developers don't often give up and they have, inevitably, a masterly understanding of how to use the system quite legally in pursuit of their purposes. I just wish they would develop some real

sensitivity to the community's wishes and feelings. The Society is not against development but only when it is insensitive and inappropriate.

As for the new approach to what we have entitled 'Events' there is much to be done. Talks and Outings were started to give our members and their friends the opportunity for stimulating visits and viewpoints. As they are open to non-members also we hope that they encourage people to join the Society and to become active in pursuing its goals. We feel that we can do better in these endeavours and, as mentioned above, have set about developing new ideas under the general heading of 'Events' to bring in new opportunities. We need to know more of what seizes people's imagination. The two social occasions we are proposing each year should give the opportunities to learn more about members responses to our programme and to encourage more to take part in it. At the moment these ideas are being worked on intensively. Watch this space and our website at www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk for the up-to-date news.

This message would be incomplete without remarking on Ann Darracott's sterling efforts to complete the Millennium Walk route and to persuade the Environment Agency to provide a reliable and substantial flow of water in the York Stream. Her latest effort has been to research the Council's archives back through the years to 1838. Her results are now in the public domain in the form of The York Stream Review. This shows that the York Stream has always been temperamental in its flow. What we now need is the resolution by responsible authorities that that will be made past history and in the future the watercourse will be an attractive feature of the town centre.

John McIntosh – Acting Chairman

TALKS

WEDNESDAY 17th May 2006 – 8 p.m.

**“CREATING A NAVIGABLE WATERWAY THROUGH
MAIDENHEAD”**

An illustrated talk by Mr Peter Prior

WEDNESDAY 18th October 2006 – 8 p.m.

“FLORENCE – HER HISTORY AND TREASURES”

An illustrated talk by David R. Gilbert

David is a retired corporate lawyer; many years ago he lived in Florence for two months and has returned many times over the past half-century. The talk will cover the early days of Florence, its renaissance heyday under the Medici and, later, its particular affinities with the English from the nineteenth century – illustrated by slides of the city's leading characters over the last thousand years and the buildings and art treasures which they created.

From feedback relating to the March talk about National Parks, it seems that this was well received, and so we have asked the speaker to capture some of the key points in the following little article:

THE FAMILY OF NATIONAL PARKS - by Adrian Thornton

England and Wales have a family of 12 National Parks: the Broads, the Brecon Beacons, Dartmoor, Exmoor, the Lake District, Northumberland, the North York Moors, the Peak District, Pembrokeshire Coast, Snowdonia, and the Yorkshire Dales. It began in 1951 with the Peak District and Lake District. The new century saw the birth too of a Scottish family, with two National Parks so far: Loch Lomond & the Trossachs, and the Cairngorms.

There are likenesses between the family members. But their diversity is just as striking.

In East Anglia, Broadland is so flat that the only way to see a wide panorama is from the air. It teems with wildlife, and needs to be experienced and explored peacefully, ideally by electric boat. The Broads themselves are artificial, despite appearances; they originated as huge holes created by peat-digging, mainly in Norman times. This got forgotten later, and was sensational news when rediscovered by careful research in the 1950s.

Pembrokeshire is far from flat, and its coves and cliffs alternate so irregularly that each view you meet on the easy coast path is a new and rich experience. The City of St David's, with splendid cathedral and major music festival, is like a village. The inland creeks of the Cleddau Estuary (also best seen by boat) are different again, as are the Preseli Hills, where the bluestones of Stonehenge came from and which have their own prehistoric remains.

The beauty of the Lake District is so famous that some parts of it are too popular for their own good, but it's so large that it has many uncrowded valleys and hills that are just as enjoyable. We can also help (and get better views) by travelling by bus and by lake steamer where we can, leaving the car at base. Even better, strike out on foot!

The Lake District's grandeur may suggest an untouched natural landscape, never visited by industry. Yet on the slopes of Pike O'Stickle is a 'factory' where prehistoric man quarried the volcanic tuff and roughed out stone axes that got exported all over the north. The summit of the eastern mountain group is surprisingly called High Street, after the Roman road along its ridge. Majestic Thirlmere and Hawes Water were once small lakes; their larger modern size is due to dams built in 1890 and 1930 to create reservoirs for quenching Manchester's thirst. The Lake District's history is rich, varied and fascinating.

There have always been divergent opinions as to how National Parks should be 'developed', and whether development is consistent with conservation. There's no doubt that conservation is essential, as if we let them get spoilt or eaten away, our children and grandchildren won't be able to get them back. The National Trust does a fine job of conserving the areas it owns (and of making them accessible too), but most land in National Parks is privately owned and much is extremely vulnerable to commercial exploitation.

National Park Authorities, the bodies responsible for planning in the Parks, walk a tightrope but mostly hold the balance well. Yet mistakes are easily made and can cause great harm. There's a charity - the Council for National Parks - that strives to ensure that the best balance is in fact kept. Supported by many environmental and recreational groups (like the Wildlife Trusts, the Youth Hostels Association, and the individual Parks' support societies), it benefits too from the support of the Friends of National Parks, individuals in all our cities and counties who've enjoyed and who value the Park family, and want to 'put something back' in return.

If you'd like to know more about the Friends, or about the National Park family, please contact me at Phoenix Cottage, Cassington, Witney, Oxon, OX29 4DL; or on 01865-880359.

OUTINGS

On Saturday 8th April we travelled to Bristol on the Bicentenary of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's birthday. We were the first group to visit the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum behind the scenes and were treated to views of the original Great Western Railway broad gauge platform, the underground vaults and the original offices and boardroom. We were shown round by the curator who joined the project at the start and who had a wealth of knowledge about Brunel and his engineering prowess.

In the afternoon we visited the S.S. Great Britain, which has been amazingly restored from a rusting hulk in the Falklands to a fascinating example of the first steel ship. They have restored the living and dining accommodation and have built a museum to chart the history of this feat of engineering.

Our next trip is very different, as we are off to Sussex to visit Herstmonceux Castle on Saturday July 8. The castle is now part of the Greenwich Royal Observatory, and we will have a guided tour of the castle and will visit the science centre and the grounds.



Herstmonceux Castle, Sussex

In the afternoon we will move on to Hammerwood Park for a private guided tour of this most interesting house, which was built in 1792 by Benjamin Latrobe as a temple to Apollo. Latrobe was responsible for the Capitol Building in Washington. In the 1970s it was owned by the rock music group Led Zeppelin. The current owners have been restoring it since acquiring it in 1982 and they will show us around. It is set in spectacular parkland.

We do hope that you will come and join us and you are welcome to bring a friend.

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

GREEN WAY/YORK STREAM

Town centre

As predicted York Stream in the town centre now has water in it. How long it will remain depends on what effect the dredging of the White Brook (for the third year in a row) by the Environment Agency has had on water flow. Certainly last summer the stream kept flowing until it reached North Town Moor, whereas in previous years it had dried out north of the flood control gate (at west end of flood bund). However, given the amount of weed and silt clogging Maidenhead Ditch together with the prediction of a summer drought it's likely that water will again retreat from the town centre by June.

Review of York Stream

As you may have seen in the Maidenhead Advertiser, we have produced a review of what was done in the past to keep the stream clear. Records dating back to 1838 are summarised together with maps of the area between Cookham and Maidenhead dating back to 1761. This document is available in Maidenhead Library and can be downloaded from our website www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk.

Maidenhead Ditch

The Environment Agency has now applied to have work on Maidenhead Ditch (widening and deepening) deleted from the planning application for the Maidenhead, Windsor & Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme (a.k.a. the Jubilee River). Apparently, they have already handed the land concerned back to Summerleaze Gravel. This application came with no statement as to the reason for the deletion. The planning group met on 3rd April and has objected very strongly to the application (see later) but has said that they would have no objection to the Council negotiating some alternative works from the Environment Agency which would help drain Cookham and provide an adequate flow of water through the town in York Stream.

MILLENNIUM WALK – missing links

From Prospect Hill above Hurley to Temple Golf Club

We were hoping to walk, at the end of May, the new agreed link across Berkshire College of Agriculture. This link is now on hold because no final decision has been made as to where the Maidenhead to Henley road should be crossed in the vicinity of Temple Golf Club. We hope to persuade the traffic department to allow us to cross directly opposite the golf club entrance rather than further south where the speed of traffic is greater.

Lower Cookham Road to Towpath

There has been some progress on this link. Maidenhead Rotary Club has written to the owner of White Place Farm, Mr John Edwards, to obtain confirmation that they are able to use our proposed route for this year's Boundary Walk on Sunday 8th October. The link will provide a far more attractive path from Widbrook Common to Boulters Lock than that formerly walked (along the Lower Cookham Road).

As this link has been mentioned *ad nauseam* over the years we thought you, as members, might like to see it for yourselves. Our plan is to provide a coach from Boulters Lock to Pinkneys Green to allow members to walk half the Boundary Walk that will include the new link. Further details will be in the next Newsletter.

OCKWELLS PROJECT

Wenlock Jug

This medieval Jug bearing the words “My Lord Wenlok” has been in the news (The Times 21 Feb p30) as there were fears that it would be sold to the Museum of Art in New York. A spirited campaign by Luton Museum has prevented this and it will now be housed at the Luton Museum and Gallery, Wardown Park. The reason the Civic Society has taken an interest in this and donated £100 towards the cost of keeping it in the country is that one of the possible owners of the jug is thought to be Lord John Wenlock, the same man who is represented by an armorial achievement at Ockwells Manor and who was an executor of the 1465 will of John Norreys Esq who built Ockwells.



The Wenlok Jug – possibly owned by Sir John Wenlock of Sommeries, Bedfordshire



Armorial achievement of Sir John Wenlock in Ockwells Manor House, Maidenhead

Our name will appear on the donors' board and we expect to be invited to the unveiling of their new exhibit. If worthwhile, a visit to see the jug may form part of a future outing.

Bisham Abbey

A **talk** on the history of Bisham Abbey combined with **afternoon tea** will take place at Bisham on Sunday 2nd July (see booking form). Please book early if you want to come. The afternoon tea is optional but be warned: **Bisham do not allow people to bring their own food and drink!**

We hope that by then there will be more information on the foundations of Bisham Priory Church, demolished during the suppression of the monasteries in the time of Henry VIII. The geophysical survey by Drs Tim Astin and Jill Evers is due to take place after Easter. If they are ready to present their findings by July it will be incorporated into the event at Bisham.



The east front of Bisham Abbey, showing the windows of the Elizabethan Room where the talk will be held

In the meantime information on the early history of Bisham is coming in thick and fast, and we hope to present this in a future edition of the Newsletter.

VALLEY GARDENS ACTION GROUP

Some of you may be aware of the proposal by the Crown Estate to fence in Valley Gardens (next to Savill Gardens near Old Windsor) and charge an entrance fee. George V granted free public access to the Gardens in the 1930s. One of the reasons given is to create a revenue stream, a desire probably not unconnected with the fact that £7 million has been spent on a new visitor centre at Savill Gardens!

The action group campaigning to keep the gardens free from fence and fees has a website www.valleygardens.org.uk which you can log on to for further information and to record your objection should you wish to do so. The planning group of the Society has written formally to object to the proposal as it would mean a major loss of amenity for the whole area, as have the Windsor & Eton Society and our MP Theresa May among many others.

Ann Darracott

HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

Exhibitions and Events

When Brunel's Railway Came to Maidenhead: 11th April – 19th May

A revival of our railway exhibition to celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of the famous Victorian engineer, whose Sounding Arch railway bridge at Maidenhead is featured on one of the special commemorative stamps. A wonderful scale model of the bridge will be the star of the exhibition, together with a newly acquired pub sign showing the locomotive North Star, which hauled the first train from Paddington to Maidenhead Riverside. Two new books on Brunel are in stock at the Heritage Centre shop.

Maidenhead And The Movies: Wednesday 24th May at 8pm, King George VI Club, York Road

Illustrated lecture tracing the area's extensive connections with the film industry, including Hammer, Carry On, Gerry Anderson, 3 Oscar winners and several companies involved in special effects; with many film clips, including a compilation of scenes shot on location in this area. Tickets £4 from the Heritage Centre or on the door (free for Friends of Maidenhead Heritage Centre)

St Piran's School Bicentenary 1805-2005: 23rd May to 10th June

This prominent local school, whose most famous pupil was Benjamin Disraeli, has produced a fascinating exhibition tracing its history. Founded in Blackheath, it came to Maidenhead in 1873, first as Cordwalles College, then under its present name. An evocative look at school life through two centuries.

The House Of Horror – Hammer at Cookham Dean and Bray: 13th June – 29th July

It is 60 years since Hammer films left Bray Studios, having made over 80 films in the previous 16 years. Every actor who was anyone starred in a Hammer Film, even Joyce Grenfell! Come and remember the glory (or gory?) years of Hammer and say "*Fangs for the Memory*"

The Story Of Maidenhead: 31st July – 30th September

An overview of local history, illustrated with as many objects from the Heritage Centre's collection as can be squeezed into the display cases – everything from the stone age. Includes a section on 'Maidenhead and the Olympics'.

Interested in art history?

We are looking for someone, possibly a member of NADFAS, to help research the background to our autumn exhibition 'Maidenhead in Art'. We have identified Turner, Tissot, Lavery, Caffieri, Spencer, Gregory and other artists who painted local scenes, and have found prints of most of the works. For the captions we need information about the artist, the painting and the background to the painting. If you would be interested in helping, please phone us on 780555.

Friends in Germany, Italy or France?

We now have translations of our 'Outline History of Maidenhead' available in German and Italian, with the French version due for publication in May. Also a new range of Maidenhead souvenirs (mugs, fridge magnets and thimbles) which would be ideal to take on twinning visits.

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is open from 10am to 4pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays

3 Kingsway, King Street, Maidenhead SL6 1EE, ☎01628 780555.

Website: www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk

VISIT TO BAD GODESBERG AND THE RHINE VALLEY

14 members will be travelling to Germany for a long weekend at the end of April, in the latest in our exchanges with the Bad Godesberg Heritage Society. There will be a full report of the visit in the next issue.

PLANNING DIGEST

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Group looked at 31 planning applications in detail for the three months to April, visited all the sites and commented to the Council on 16 of them and the full text of these can be seen on the Society's website.

Here are the comments on the EA's application in respect of the **Summerleaze Site** (Planning consent variation, requested by Environment Agency):

"The Environment Agency has major local obligations, which include the continuation of satisfactory drainage in the Cookham area, and an adequate flow of water through the town in the York Stream. We would object very strongly to any reduction of these as a result of this application. We would have no objection to the relevant experts from the Council negotiating some alternative works with the Environment Agency, provided they still met these considerations and also covered the future management of the system."

MILL REVIEW SENDS RIPPLES ACROSS THE STREAM

The Advertiser called it "the end of an eyesore" and Royal Borough reps offered a cautious welcome. Then a Burnham councillor got out of the wrong side of the bed, calling for the demolition of Maidenhead Bridge and the spotlight moved on.

But the view out of Maidenhead's east window, across the river to the south Bucks bank, could be set to change dramatically. St Regis Paper Company is pushing on with the review of its operations. Announced in January and expected to take nine months it will consider the future of their entire 48-acres site. This includes the sad faced Skindles and the rundown riverside Dunloe Lodge, as well as the Windrush garage on the A4, the paper mill itself, the Severnside recycling plant and St Regis's turreted HQ building. The plot is roughly triangular with its base on the A4 and stretching north, along most of the riverside, to a point opposite the public park on Ray Mill Island at Boulters Lock.

At a meeting with the Civic Society, St Regis and their London based property consultants GVA Grimley stressed that they were keen to explore all the options open to them which might include closing some or all of their operations and redeveloping parts of the site. Three things became clear, however: 1) that the status quo was not an option, 2) that they would like to retain the recycling plant on site, and 3) that they see Skindles as an opportunity for residential or mixed development.

Nothing is likely to happen in the immediate future. Mill Lane residents have been told no change is contemplated for the next three years. There's a lot of goodwill towards St Regis, following their sponsorship of Maidenhead Carnival and the staging of the riverside concerts over the years. But that may quickly disappear if their plans fail to take account of public opinion.

The consultants said they were liaising with interested parties which, as well as the local councils and amenity groups like ourselves, will no doubt include property developers. However, the site

lies in the Green Belt and is adjacent to an Area of Attractive Landscape. And while the Conservation Area currently protects only the Skindles building, interestingly, South Bucks District Council – not always our closest allies in planning matters – published a proposal earlier this month to extend it to include the whole of the riverbank, including the paper mill site. This proposal is out for public consultation until May 1st.

The Society's priority would be to protect and revitalise this prime riverside green belt, maintaining and improving public access to the river. The limited footprint of existing buildings on the site and the nature of adjacent properties and businesses – boatyards, moorings and a former hotel – we suggest makes a leisure and recreational solution more appropriate than a residential one.

Looking at the whole of the reach between Maidenhead Bridge and Boulton's Lock, there is an opportunity dramatically to enhance facilities and amenities for river users, walkers and visitors, perhaps to make Maidenhead/Taplow a welcoming "destination" once more.

Bob Dulson

AN IDEA WORTH FLOATING?

The Civic Society is lending its support to Peter Prior's initiative for improving the York Stream. Peter, the boss of Summerleaze, has gathered a number of enthusiastic helpers and formed the Maidenhead Waterways Group which initially will test the feasibility of creating a navigable stream between Bray and Chapel Arches.

The idea of an attractive town centre waterway captured the public imagination when the Society proposed it in 2004. Our Chairman, John McIntosh, said: "The importance the Civic Society attaches to a well maintained and attractive York Stream is well known. It is a key objective in our own Strategic Review of Amenity. If it is done sensibly and sensitively and revives a charming facet in the town centre, then it could be that the Waterways Group succeeds where the authorities responsible have so far failed."

Bob Dulson

CROSSRAIL UPDATE

At 1130 on Thursday 6th April a "Sounding Arch Sleuth" spotted a large group of official looking people marching towards Maidenhead Railway Bridge lead by Phil Spencer – Senior Design Manager for Crossrail. They spent about 20 minutes in the environs observing this Wonder of Maidenhead, then returned whence they came. The sleuth feels sure it was an outing arranged for the Parliamentary Select Committee to admire this worthy monument and to imagine it with the addition of overhead wires, girders and gantries on completion of the Crossrail Project – many were carrying clipboards! This visit may be an indication that those who have petitioned with issues concerning the Bridge, may soon be called to argue their case before the Committee. It is a blessing that the day was bright and sunny and the whole Conservation Area looked stunning. It may not have slipped their notice that the swans are already nesting on Guards Club Island.

Tina Sell

YOUR E-Mail ADDRESS

We would like to recruit active new members and also speed up communications to members, so if you have an e-mail address please send it to the Membership Secretary (Shashi Dare) at shashi.dare@yellgroup.com.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 17 th May 2006 Talk by Mr Peter Prior	“Creating a Navigable Waterway Through Maidenhead” Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.
Sunday 2 nd July 2006 Talk by Ann Darracott	“The History of Bisham Abbey” Bisham Abbey, 2 p.m.
Saturday 8 th July 2006 Outing	Herstmonceux Castle and Hammerwood Park
Wednesday 18 th October 2006 Talk by Mr David R. Gilbert	“Florence – Her History and Treasures ” Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.
Wednesday 15th November 2006	46th Annual General Meeting Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m. and

CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

President	Richard Poad, Hollyhocks, The Common, Cookham Dean, SL6 9NZ	484298
Acting Chairman	John McIntosh, 26 Harvest Hill Road, SL6 2QQ	633259
Vice-Chairman	Vacancy	
Secretary	June Churchman, 20 Chiltern Road, SL6 1XA	638546
Asst. Secretary	Gillian Moore, 10 Langdale Close, SL6 1SY	630130
Treasurer	Trevor Farnfield, Ditton Meads, Winter Hill Road, SL6 6NS	638142
Membership Sec.	Shashi Dare, Silvretta, Islet Road, SL6 8LD	629976
Planning Group	Nigel Cockburn, Willow House, Fishery Road, SL6 1UN	621084
Outings Sec.	Mike Copeland, 14 Laburnham Road, SL6 4DB	681955
Publicity	Bob Dulson, Bryher, Islet Road, SL6 8HT	627130
Co-ordinator		
Newsletter		
Distributor	Carol Innes, Contour, Briar Glen, Cookham Rise, SL6 9JP	532418

COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2006

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

11th January, 8th February, 8th March, 12th April, 10th May, 14th June, 12th July, 13th September, 11th October, 8th November, 13th December.

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 15th November 2006 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 8.00pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 7th July 2006.**

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

News Editor **Brian Darracott**
6 Medallion Place, Maidenhead, SL6 1TF (01628 620280)