



Maidenhead Civic Society **NEWS**

Issue 2/08

May 2008



St Michael's Church, Bray – see Page 13

In this issue

A Chance to Visit Ockwells Manor!

Regular features on Talks, Outings, Projects and Planning

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Are you one of those people who beguile their friends at Christmas with a documentary reference of the past year? Preparing for the Society's first meeting of its new Board of Trustees brought them to mind.

You know the sort of thing: they're either a calendar of seemingly chronic ailments, or else a list of the serial successes of precocious grandchildren who, if all goes to plan, will apparently be running the country by December.

Being called to account by the first meeting of the Society's new Board of Trustees was altogether a more awesome experience. But once we cut through the trees of regular challenges, the wood of achievement looked strong and healthy, even after only six months. There's a comprehensive report on the proceedings from our president, John McIntosh, in this edition.

Although the Society may have lost the flush of youth, it is still pretty feisty. Our firm views on the future of the old cinema site seemed to act as a catalyst for others and democracy prevailed. Success may be short-lived, however, and, as Martin McNamee reports, underlines the need, which we've long called for, to produce development briefs for key areas of the town. We achieved considerable success with our Crossrail campaign in the Commons and are hoping there may be some more concessions following our representations to the Lords.

Particularly pleasing to report was the progress of the Events Group which, under Tina Sell, is re-shaping its offering to members with considerable success. If you've not attended one of the talks this season, you've missed out but there are plans for new attractions later in the year. In the short-term there are also seats left on our trip to Winchester and Salisbury cathedrals in May. We will be joined on the outing by eight colleagues from our sister society in Bad Godesberg, one of Maidenhead's twinned towns, who will be spending the weekend with on a biennial exchange visit.

Membership and serving members' interests was a key finding from the review undertaken by the new Strategy & Policy Group, headed by Nigel Cockburn, and we've plans for a new initiative in this area – look out for more details in the next edition of the newsletter.

Another way we're trying to engage with our members is by redeveloping the website and work is well under way. Plans are also in hand for a re-vamp of the Newsletter to follow that. So if anyone has any particular preference, apart from the need for a bigger typeface, which I think we all recognise, please let us know.

We'd also like to hear from those of you with e-mail addresses. There are occasions, often at short notice, when it would be helpful to seek people's views, for example on a planning application or a planned event. We're keen to circulate information which may be useful to members too. So if you have an email address and have not yet let us know, please drop a note to Shashi Dare, our membership secretary, at: geoffshashi@btinternet.com.

Bob Dulson - Chairman

Pat Symons

Civic Society members will be deeply saddened to learn of the death of Pat Symons on 18th March.

Pat first showed her commitment to the local environment as a member of Maidenhead Civic Society, getting stuck in to tree planting, litter clearances and the Guards Club Park Project. She wrote a report which led to the establishment of the riverside Conservation Area and the listing of Maidenhead Court Boathouse, and organised two town centre Facelift Projects. When the first Green Way leaflet was published by the Society in 1985, Pat prepared the historical detail for it and found the funding. This leaflet is now in its 4th edition, published by the Royal Borough. She served as a member of the Executive Committee, including time as Vice-Chairman of the Society, and was always amongst the first volunteers to help on Environment Days and talking to schools.



Pat in 1978, holding one of the original cast iron badges from Guards Club Bridge

It was Pat who persuaded the Civic Society to commission a feasibility study for a Heritage Centre, in the firm belief that one cannot plan for the future unless one understands the present, and cannot understand the present if one doesn't understand the past. Explaining the whys and wherefores of Maidenhead remains one of the Heritage Centre's guiding principles. The exhibition that she played a leading role in producing, about the coming of the railways to Maidenhead, is still in use at the Heritage Centre. In 1982 she was involved in Maidenhead 400, a series of events to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the granting of a charter to the town by Elizabeth I.

Pat was a member of the steering committee which set up the Heritage Centre in 1993, and was a regular volunteer at the Centre, also working with schools groups and on Heritage Open Days events. In 1995 she became the very first Friend of the independent Maidenhead Heritage Trust and served as a Trustee for several years.

Among Pat's many interests were all things historical and architectural. She took part in many WEA classes lively participating in courses focusing on local events and buildings.

After the untimely death of her husband, Pat returned to full time employment working first on a rugby magazine which combined her love of the game and organisational skills. She later became the Practice Manager of the Stoneleigh Dental Practice, where she will be remembered by staff and patients for her calm efficiency.

Pat fought a long battle against illness with dignity and courage, and she will be greatly missed by many Maidenhead people and organisations.

FIRST MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Under the new constitution of the Society adopted at the last AGM the Society is required to have a top tier in its structure which is charged amongst other things with ‘oversight and guidance, fulfilling the Society’s legal obligations, and focussing clearly on long-term strategy and objectives’. This is the Board of Trustees.

As a central part of this process the Chair of the Executive is to give periodically ‘an account of the activities of the Groups (who carry out the Society’s work in pursuit of its aims) to the Board of Trustees.’

Accordingly the Board had its first meeting on the 9th of April. We were pleased to welcome on this occasion our two external Trustees in the persons of Mrs Theresa May MP, and Mr Harold James, who has long been associated with the Society and is a former Chairman.

After the President’s introductory remarks Bob Dulson as Executive Chairman gave an overview of the Society’s work over the past six months highlighting a successful Events season though not without difficulties in the take-up of places on the Outings. Future plans are for more local visits to improve member’s knowledge of the locality. Financially the Society is reasonably secure but the decline in revenue from Outings is worrying. A visit from our sister society in our twin town, Bad Godesberg is scheduled for May.

Nigel Cockburn had handed over the chairmanship of the Planning Group to Martin McNamee after a successful six years, which for the past two years has involved reading and digesting the voluminous material, generated for the Local Development Framework. The Group has a number of new members who bring with them new ideas and perspectives. There had also been some impact on the proposals for the redevelopment of the Taplow Mill site although that lies in South Bucks.

Projects Group had had some success in improving the water level in the York Stream but questions relating to the definitive route of the Millennium Walk remain to be resolved.

The Society’s work on Crossrail, driven by Tina Sell, had resulted in significant changes in the project, particularly as they relate to the use of Guards Club Park and its surroundings.

In the field of Communications Group the website is being redesigned with the intention that it will be used more dynamically and in harmony with the Newsletter.

Thus although the Society has had a satisfying number of achievements there is a need to capitalise more effectively on these which in turn leads to more and effective publicity.

Each Group chair then gave an overview of the work of their Group over the past six months. These will appear in the Minutes of the Board Meeting. Of particular immediate importance is the review of the Strategy and Policy Group presented by Nigel Cockburn. The ensuing discussion focussed on how the Society could make itself more effective. This came down to finding enough members willing and able to tackle the many possibilities in the amenity field. Recruiting such members is difficult as the young are too busy and existing members are often becoming less active. Theresa May commented that this is a problem for all organisations. Single issues are most likely to attract them. Cooperation with other Societies was a proven route. A thorough membership review was needed and a potential target for a recruitment drive could be those around age 50 who

were thinking of retirement. Martin McNamee undertook to look into the setting up of a Membership Group.

Other issues that were reviewed included the need to press the Council to have development briefs prepared for all the centre of the town before developers pre-empted desirable redevelopment.

There was also the question as to what other areas constituted valid Society objectives e.g. supporting the upgrading of facilities at St. Marks Hospital.

Finally the meeting agreed unanimously to accept the conclusions of the report of the Strategy and Policy Group.

John McIntosh

REVIEW OF STRATEGY AND POLICY

Following the adoption of the new constitution for the Society, a Strategy and Policy Group was set up after last year's AGM. Its members are Nigel Cockburn, Chairman, Bob Dulson, June Jorge, Martin McNamee and Brian Darracott. A Preliminary Report following an initial review of Strategy and Policies was submitted to the Trustees and adopted at their meeting on 9 April. If you would like to see a copy of the report please contact Nigel Cockburn.

The summary and conclusions were

1. The Society may in due course want to develop a detailed Statement of Mission and Values. However, the existing objects set out in the Constitution are still considered appropriate and should be left unaltered.
2. A list of Strategic Objectives has been prepared together with some suggested means of achievement.
3. The agreed action points should be implemented by the Executive Committee, who should report back on progress to the Trustees on a regular basis.
4. The main priority for the next year should be to increase the number of members. A membership committee should be established to ensure existing members are retained and new members recruited.
5. All existing activities should be continued and maintained to a high standard.
6. New activities should be pursued as and when resources are available.

As the first attempt to set the framework for some sort of business plan for the Society it is important to recognise that the exercise has been based on the present position of the Society and the report is a working document. The situation, objectives and priorities set will be reviewed, revised and refined on a regular basis as time passes, progress is made and events change.

Nigel Cockburn

PLANNING MATTERS

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

During the last three months we have participated in the consultation on the proposal for a third runway at Heathrow. Our press release in February stimulated considerable cover of the issue in the Maidenhead Advertiser. The Society believes that a third runway, or even the alternative proposal of “mixed-mode” operation of the two existing runways, will result in a significant increase of overhead aircraft noise due to a northwards shift in flight patterns – especially on westerly take-offs.

The Planning Group have site-visited and reviewed in detail more than 30 planning applications since December. We have passed comment on 12 applications – of which one was favourable support.

There were four ongoing proposals for office development in the Town Centre. The rather distinctive Symantec building next to the Police Station is to be part demolished, refurbished and extended. The new architectural style is unappealing, so we are sorry to have lost the existing building. Another unimpressive office block is to be built at 68-72 Moorbridge Road – and will be very visually dominant on the eastern approach to town. The third development is by the Cookham Road roundabout – next to Sainsbury’s. This has been passed but the Society feels that the architecture is utilitarian, with angular elevations close to the roundabout. It will certainly be a highly visible structure and will obscure the west-facing elevations of the Sainsbury’s development.....Good news or bad?

However, our main concern has been with the proposed office development of the Old Cinema site – at the junction of Bridge Avenue and High Street. The latest press release issued by the Society is re-printed below. The site needs a solution, but a four-storey office block – alongside Chapel Arches and York Stream – is not the answer, and we are obviously delighted that the proposal has been rejected. The site is designated for leisure use and changing it to offices is of significant financial gain to the developers. However, we support the Waterways Group’s proposals, and wish to retain the architectural and historic features of Chapel Arches – which are in any case a conservation area. There must be a better use for the site – preferably a mixture of retail, restaurants and residential above. A development brief is urgently required as there is always a risk of the developer going to appeal.

The positive comments made by the Planning Group were with regard to the proposals to refurbish Boulter’s Inn. This is obviously a sensitive historical site in a conservation area. It is also a prime riverside leisure amenity for Maidenhead, which is currently dormant. We believe that the proposals are not excessive, and are delighted that approval has been granted – albeit with considerable conditions attached.

In the meantime, further developments are expected shortly regarding the development of Badnell’s Pit.

Martin McNamee

OLD CINEMA SITE SUCCESS

The Civic Society welcomes the decision of last Wednesday's Development Control Panel (DCP) to reject the proposals for a 4-storey office development on the old cinema site at the junction of Bridge Avenue and High Street.

The application represented over-development of the site – requiring a key change of use from leisure to offices. It was unsuitable for an area of historical interest – alongside Chapel Arches, and it would restrict the potential enhancement of the York Stream waterway project.

“This is a key site in the future development of Maidenhead,” said Martin McNamee, chairman of the Society's planning group. “The Society is encouraged that the elected representatives on the Development Control Panel unanimously refused permission. At the same time we are concerned that the planning officers, following pre-application discussions with the developer, recommended approval of the scheme.

“The short-term resolution of the problem site should not get in the way of our long-term vision for Maidenhead.”

If the site is to be developed, the Society's preference remains for a mixed-use development – retail and restaurants with residential above.

The Society would urge the Borough to consider compulsory purchase of the site to create a true leisure facility – including a park area alongside Chapel Arches and York Stream. Such compulsory purchase would reduce the risk of a similar office proposal being passed on appeal at a future date.

The Society is encouraged by the Borough's decision to commence Section 215 proceedings to require the owner to clear up the site.

The need for Development Briefs in the town centre was demonstrated by the refusal of this proposal. “We need to be in a position where the townsfolk determine what we want to see in certain areas, not leave it to the whim of the market and developers,” said Martin McNamee.

Martin McNamee

PUTTING BOULTER'S BACK ON THE MAP

Boulter's Inn, arguably Maidenhead's most famous building, looks set to return to its former glory as a riverside dining and watering hole following council approval for a £1.5 million refurbishment.

The Civic Society lent its support to the application – to remove an eyesore and restore an icon. Experience had shown that, despite its unique location, maintaining a viable business on the site was not possible without significant improvements to the facilities. Thankfully, local councillors thought so too.

Overruling objections from the Borough's conservation officer, they decided that the need “to secure the future of this important building in the Conservation Area” constituted “very special circumstances”. The planned extensions and improvements would benefit its viability and appearance, outweighing any concern over their impact on the openness and character of the area, which was relatively minor. Boulter's was already a prominent building on a prominent site.

The new owners plan to revive Boulter's appeal to visitors, whether they arrive by road or by river. The renovation programme, already under way, will include the addition of two fully glazed extensions on the first floor, a complete remodelling of the restaurants, bars, food preparation areas and facilities, and the removal of all the unsightly ductwork, pipework and poor quality extensions

at the rear. Outside, the first floor balconies will be timber decked and the riverside terrace brought back into use.



Boulter's as it is now



The proposed new look

Permission was granted subject to several conditions, including the need to refurbish the Grade 2 listed phone box which stands near the main entrance.

Local residents and Society members will be cheered that the council, as the freeholder, has ensured that such a landmark building in one of the best of Maidenhead's riverside locations is maintained as a public amenity – putting Boulter's back on the menu and, hopefully, in the black.

Martin McNamee

TAPLOW MILL: SHORT-TERM PAIN – LONG-TERM GAIN?

Will September be the turning point for the future of the former Taplow Paper Mill site? That's when agents for the owners of the 48-acre riverside site hope to be submitting plans for its redevelopment to the local authority.



*The 48-acre site occupies most of the land between the two waterways.
Looking south, with Maidenhead Bridge in the top right corner.*

Also by then the residents of Taplow's Mill Lane should be regularly enjoying a good night's rest. With an end in sight to the noise and vibration of heavy lorries past their doorsteps, the residents have been raising their glasses. But the glasses are only half full, for the moment.

Although the recycling firm Severnside was ordered to cease its operations in Mill Lane, the period for compliance was extended on appeal. The company was also allowed to extend a limited number of vehicle movements to weekends in the meantime. Glasses will be recharged perhaps as early as July but certainly by the end of September by when the company should have relocated.

Also relocating are Severnside's owners St Regis who used the listed Glen Island House near the now defunct mill as their HQ. St Regis has been renting the property since selling the entire site

and all its buildings, including Skindles, to developers nearly two years ago. The 45 staff will be crossing the river to Whitebrook Park in Maidenhead Riverside in May.

Meanwhile, the site's new owners, Watchword, have appointed a firm of planning experts to produce a development scheme for the site. Last month Hunter Page Planning invited residents' representatives and amenity groups to join a community liaison group to discuss the options for development in the run up to a planning application in six months time.

The Civic Society is a member of this group which also includes the Hitcham and Taplow Society, the Parish Council, the River Thames Society and Mill Lane residents. Monthly meetings are planned. Following the sale of the site the Civic Society coordinated a mutual interest group of similar voices. This came up with a list of priorities and appropriate uses for the area which we hope will influence the plans.

There are many restrictions to development. The site is in the flood plain, the green belt and the Setting of the Thames, much of it is also Conservation Area. Nevertheless it has tremendous potential as a river-based destination with an opportunity to create something truly magical to the benefit of the whole community – as well as the developer.

Bob Dulson

CROSSRAIL – FIVE-POINTS FOR THEIR LORDSHIPS

The Society was back in Westminster again last month with its second Petition against the Crossrail Bill. Last time we won three significant concessions from Crossrail at the Committee Stage in the Commons. This time it was the House of Lords Select Committee.

The Society supports Crossrail in principle but is concerned at the impact it could have, if aspects are left unchallenged. The issues centre on the effects of such a huge development on the town of Maidenhead – its infrastructure, environment and inhabitants – and the need for safeguards for their protection. We chose to present five points to their Lordships. In a statement supporting our formal Petition, we argued that:

- Reading, not Maidenhead, should be the western terminus
- Crossrail's arrival in Maidenhead will necessitate improvements in infrastructure, so far unaccounted for
- The benefits of Crossrail should extend choice for commuters
- Guards Club Park & Island needed further protection from the effects of construction work
- Overhead gantries should not be allowed to disfigure Brunel's Maidenhead Viaduct

The Western Terminus

In February the Government said it had no plans to extend Crossrail to Reading; however, they are "safeguarding additional land" which suggests that Reading, not Maidenhead, will become the Western Terminus eventually. If this was the intention, we submitted, then that decision should be taken sooner rather than later. The effects such a Terminus could have on a small town like Maidenhead, without further serious help on infrastructure could be seriously damaging.

Infrastructure

Since the first settlement, Maidenhead's history has been determined by its accessibility. Each transport era, from the pack mule to the motorway, with certain inevitability, had brought new blood, new building – and growth.

Crossrail may not bring the sea-change of some earlier transport transformations but experience had shown that its impact must be taken into account. For the promoter to claim that “no major changes to passenger flows are expected as a result of Crossrail”, we argued, was naïve or disingenuous.

In their response, Crossrail said they were committed to mitigating the “genuine predicted impacts” associated with Crossrail but that sufficient transport arrangements existed and they did not see it was their responsibility to remedy inadequacies or deficiencies in the current system. “Passenger growth on Crossrail post 2016 will be as a result of population and employment growth,” they said.

The Society, however, believes that Crossrail will in part be a driver of this growth and a sizeable increase in passenger levels over time. This underlines the need for a proper transport hub at the station with improved access and increased parking and it would seem reasonable that Crossrail should accept a greater share of the financial responsibility for this, rather than the local taxpayer.

Extending Choice

With regard to the frequency of service, the Society expressed concern that more stopping trains on lines with limited capacity could hardly be described as extending choice for commuters.

Crossrail insisted that Maidenhead will benefit. There would be 4 stopping Crossrail services an hour all day, 2 semi-fast services an hour throughout the day on the slow line between Reading & Paddington, and also peak hour express services, as at present. They say the stopping and semi-fast services will have shorter journey times than now and the net result would be more trains (especially off-peak), more choice of destinations and more capacity.

Guards Club Park & Island

The Society acknowledged the concessions made by Crossrail in limiting the proposed areas and periods of activity in Guards Club Park and the use of barges for some storage of equipment. Nevertheless, in our view the transport and storage arrangements could be undertaken in a manner that would have little or no adverse effect on this environmentally important area. We suggested they should either seek an alternative site or use barges for both storage and transport, which other agencies do successfully.

In their response, Crossrail said they intended to use the arches as a worksite, not the park. Only if this proved impractical would they use the car park and an adjacent hard standing. They disputed our claim that the approach roads were unsuitable for deliveries but in any case, they said, the majority of materials would be transported to and from the site by rail.

Crossrail also reiterated their assurance that any damage to the footbridge or the park would be repaired.

Overhead Electrification (OHLE)

The Society was pleased to note that there would now be no fixings to the external elevation of the Grade II Listed Brunel Bridge, a concession given following our appearance in the Commons hearing, and that the Council and English Heritage would continue to be involved in discussions over the design of the OHLE equipment.

Brunel himself, we suggested, would no doubt be excited at the prospect that the railway across his architectural masterpiece was to be electrified, but instead of unsightly galvanised gantries we felt sure he would have found a more suitable means of achieving it! Perhaps, in tribute to him, there should be a competition to find the most innovative solution?

Crossrail replied that a bespoke arrangement was proposed, similar to that used on other listed bridges – including the Grade I Listed Wharnclyffe Bridge that was electrified as part of the Heathrow Express project.

EVENTS

A NEW VENTURE

In response to some members' requests, we are hoping to try a new style of talk. In September 2008, we are planning to organise a Presentation Lunch with an invited speaker. We will announce the guest in the next Newsletter but please keep the event in mind. It will, as usual, be open to non-members and we would like to attract as many as possible so please warn your friends.

Tina Sell

REVIEWS OF RECENT TALKS

SWAN UPPING BY DAVID BARBER

Our second speaker of 2008, David Barber, HM Swan Marker, gave a very stimulating talk on his experiences as the Queen's Swan Marker and the history of this tradition, which dates back to the twelfth Century. On applying for the job he had good credentials - a long association with river life through his work and a clear idea of how he saw the future of the position. He had new ideas and very clear objectives.

David obviously impressed the interviewers at the Palace as he was appointed in 1993.

He set out to move this traditional task into the twenty first century and has achieved this in a number of ways. Firstly by stopping the cruel tradition of nicking of the bird's beaks and instead placing a stainless steel ring on the swan's leg, in order to identify its ownership; he also uses the media to publicise this annual event, often getting television and newspaper coverage through inviting celebrities along and also groups of schoolchildren to observe the ceremony; but his main priorities are in education and conservation.

As a consequence we had a most successful evening, learning about Swan Upping and looking forward to catching sight of the event on the Thames at Maidenhead in July.

Tina Sell

THE MAKING OF MAIDENHEAD BY BRIAN BOULTER

On Wednesday the 19th of March, Brian Boulter, local historian, archaeologist and Curator of the Heritage Centre's collection of local historical artefacts, gave an illustrated and illuminating talk to a varied and intrigued audience on the way in which Maidenhead has grown from the convenient crossing of the river Thames and its floodplain to develop into a mid-sized and highly successful commercial centre. He pointed to how the essential feature in this progress arose because not only was it a good place to cross the river it was also on the most direct east-west route out of London - a feature followed by the stage coaches and the railway. He illustrated the talk, taken at a gentle pace to allow his audience to savour the slides presented, starting with an artist's vision of the earliest wooden bridge over the river. From there he followed on to the latter part of the talk with slides showing houses in estates of quality from the late 19th Century. It whetted the appetite to develop the picture of Maidenhead through the centuries. More power to the local archaeologists and historians to continue their good work!

John McIntosh

BAD GODESBERG TWINNING VISIT and OUTING

A reciprocal visit from our twin town by our sister society **Verein für Heimatpflege und Heimatgeschichte Bad Godesberg** is scheduled for the 17th through the 19th of May. This is the return visit following the visit there by a group from the Civic Society in 2006.

The plans for the visitors, who will be staying at Moor Hall in Cookham, include, on the first day, a reception by the Mayor, visits to Ray Mill Island, lunch at the Riviera Hotel, tea at the new Heritage Centre followed by dinner with families. Next day there will be a visit to the cathedrals at Winchester and Salisbury followed by a dinner at the Odney Club. The final day of the visit will start with a viewing of the Stanley Spencer Gallery's newly remodelled display of that artist's works followed by an expedition to Windsor. Because of the visitors relatively early departure for their return flight there won't be time to visit the Castle. However, there will be an opportunity for them to either walk from the Guildhall down to and across the river to Eton or to shop in Peascod Street and its extensions. We can only hope that the weather will be kind!

John McIntosh

OUTINGS

There have been no visits over the winter period as most sites and houses are closed during this period. However, as detailed above, we have our first trip of the year on Sunday 18th May to Winchester and Salisbury Cathedrals with our visitors from our twin town Bad Godesberg. **We do still have places available for this visit, so please contact me soon if you wish to make a last minute booking.**

Our next trip will be to Kew Gardens in London on Sunday 6th July. We will not only be visiting these world famous Gardens, but also Kew Palace which is situated in the grounds. There is a special Botanic Art exhibition on in the Shirley Sherwood Gallery. Also, the new Rhizotron and Xstrata Treetop Walkway will just have opened in the arboretum and will give you a view across the gardens. This new walkway is the centrepiece for the Year of the Tree Festival.

The recently renovated Kew Palace



In the autumn we will be starting a series of visits to local places of interest for small groups. We will be providing more details of this exciting development in the next Newsletter.

Recently the cost of coach hire has increased due to new vehicles and the ever-increasing cost of fuel. To make our visits attractively priced and viable we do need your support.

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

GREEN WAY/YORK STREAM

There have been several developments all of which should ensure water continues to flow into the town centre throughout the summer.

The “Windows” Project

As described in the October 2007 Newsletter the Society, in conjunction with East Berks Ramblers, put together a proposal to create “windows” onto the stream free of weeds and reeds so that walkers on the Green Way north of Maidenhead that parallels the stream (termed poetically Maidenhead Ditch in this section) can actually see in the summer months, water, rather than wall-to-wall reeds and watercress. The Environment Agency agreed to fund the project and the amenity societies have made site visits with Forest & Garden Timbers Services who will undertake the work this spring.

The main aim is to treat the reeds in the stream from the flood control gate south to North Town Moor, so that their growth is impeded. This hopefully will open views of the stream during the warmer months and will also, by removing the obstructing reeds, facilitate water flow.



*Ann Darracott, and Ian Gunner & Jeremy Gates of Forest & Garden Timber Service
at the Flood Control Gate in November 2007*

Encroaching reeds in North Town Moor pond will also be treated. We have suggested that similar work be done on the reeds in York Stream on Maidenhead Moor. Improvement to the stream was given a high priority by the public in the consultation exercise undertaken last year by the Royal Borough. Unfortunately, this work has been delayed because the Council say they don't yet know the route of the new water pipeline that will cross the Moor. The following quotation is relevant:

“The Common Reed, Phragmites australis forms dense reeds beds and if undisturbed by man have a tendency to encroach on the water area and in time may even convert quite large sheets of water into marshes. Their lower parts limit water movement and encourage the accumulation of silt,

while their death and decay in the autumn continues the process. Their remains pile up year after year and so raise the level of the ground" (*Observer Book of Pond Life*). This is exactly what happened to the White Brook, and is now happening in Maidenhead Ditch.

Tree Removal

The Environment Agency in February 2008 removed fallen trees from the stream starting at the old sluice west of where Strand Water joins the White Brook, and then southwards to North Town Moor.

Cookham Flood Remediation Works (formerly the Strande Lane Flood Alleviation Scheme)

Comments on the planning application for this scheme were submitted by the Society in February (see the Feb 2008 Newsletter for details). Interestingly, the Environmental Statement accompanying the application said that doing nothing "*would involve the Environment Agency abandoning all works and maintenance responsibility for Cookham and the surrounding area. Were this to occur drainage channels would be more likely to become overgrown and subsequently the flood risk to properties within the catchment would be likely to increase*". However, the reality is that funds for just such maintenance have been in short supply following the EU fine on DEFRA for late payment to farmers, a fine which seems to have fallen heavily on EA resources.

We said we had no objection to the scheme but suggested that if the Council was minded to grant the application, it should place a condition that a programme of regular clearance took place so that the existing streams can carry more water before it overtops the bank. The Cookham Society said something similar.

The scheme itself does not include any maintenance and so unless such a condition is made it is quite probable that the forty or so trees now obstructing Strandwater together with the trees down in Fleet Ditch, and not forgetting the reeds, will still be there the next time Cookham floods.

MAIDENHEAD AND COOKHAM COMMONS - NEW LEAFLET

The National Trust has recently published this attractive leaflet, now available in Maidenhead library. It contains a wealth of historic detail plus a map showing the location of the various commons. Both the walks that the Society helped create - the Green Way and now the Millennium Walk (of which more next time) - in practice serve to link up several of these areas of common land. Protection of these areas has been a hard fought battle in the past as detailed in the new leaflet. Very likely there will be further battles to come - battles that must be won!

A CHANCE TO VISIT OCKWELLS MANOR

Ockwells Manor house, referred to by Nicolas Pevsner as being "the most refined and the most sophisticated timber-framed manor house in England", was built by John Norreys (Norrys) Esq in the mid fifteenth century. The survival of Ockwells has been due to the presence of the armorial glass, still in its original setting in the Great Hall, glass that Norreys put up to honour his King, Henry VI and Queen, Margaret of Anjou, and the people he was close to, including his wives (the coats of the first two are there), earls, abbots, bishops and more lowly esquires. The glass is of great aesthetic value, the draughtsmanship is superb, the colours are clear and there is some "jewelling" (insertion of small pieces of glass to resemble jewels) in the two crowns and the surviving mitres. In 1888 the *Illustrated London News* said that they wished to see "*sunshine streaming into the vast room through the casements stained with every variety of exquisite colour*". Certainly this light bathes the great hall, setting off its medieval features, the open timber roof, large stone fireplace, refectory table and minstrels' gallery.

With the kind agreement of the owners of Ockwells, there is now the opportunity to see this for yourself and help raise funds to restore St Michael's Church in Bray.



The Great Hall of Ockwells Manor House



Left: Armorial glass in the Great Hall at Ockwells for John Norreys Esq and second wife Eleanor Clitherow, also with sea otter supporters.

Right: Corbel of Ravenscroft (for Norreys) impaling Clitherow (quartered with Oldcastle) for the second marriage of John Norreys Esq to Eleanor Clitherow whose grandfather was the famous Sir John Oldcastle.

John Norreys Esq was connected with St Michael's Church, Bray, by 1446 until his death in 1466. In 1446 he helped found St Mary's Chantry in the church with the then vicar, Thomas Ludde, whose brass is still in the church. In his will of 1465 Norreys left money for masses for his soul and to pay for his tomb to be located in St Nicholas's Chapel. He also left money to pay for the renovation of the chapel. Although his tomb is long gone the "re-edifying" work is still apparent with wall plaques and stone corbels supporting the roof of the chapel decorated with angels bearing his armorial coat including those of his second and third wives.

Four hundred years later, in 1862, the then owner of Ockwells Manor, Charles Pascoe Grenfell (grandfather of William Henry Grenfell, Lord Desborough) repaired the chapel as a memorial to his family, placing on the stone corbels, supporting the roof, similar angels bearing the coats of his parents and himself and his wife. By then Ockwells itself was "ruinous" and the armorial glass had been removed for safe-keeping. It was Charles Pascoe's grandson, William Henry Grenfell who initiated the restoration of Ockwells and by the end of the century it was rescued and the glass restored to the Great Hall.

So the connection between Ockwells Manor house and St Michael's Bray continues to this day with the owners of the manor house, Mr & Mrs Brian Stein, very kindly agreeing to open the grounds and the Great Hall with all proceeds going towards the restoration of St Michael's.

The cost of the visit is £10 per person. Applications, giving your name and address, for a place should be sent to Jim Tucker, 24, Chantry Road, Maidenhead, SL6 1TS (tel 07779 722394) together with a cheque payable to "Friends of St Michael's Emergency Appeal". You will get an acknowledgement, but not a ticket. **Ockwells will be open from 10am to 1pm on Saturday 21st June.** It is hoped to have a short opening ceremony at 10.15. Those coming by car should leave their vehicles in Ockwells Park and walk up Ockwells Road. There are public conveniences at the park. A Civic Society history trail leaflet will be available to help you explore the grounds. Groups will be allowed into the Great Hall to see the glass on a first come, first served basis, for a timed period of about half an hour. Ann Darracott will act as guide.

This is a very rare opportunity to see the famous glass for yourself and to explore the grounds. Remember to book early, as tickets are limited to 150 – and bring your binoculars!

Ann Darracott

HERITAGE CENTRE CLOSE TO OPENING

As this newsletter goes to press, the new Heritage Centre at 18 Park Street is being transformed by a team of volunteers wielding paintbrushes and rollers. Free paint has been donated by Dulux Decorator Centres.

By early May the wheelchair lift will be installed, and then the fitting out of the galleries will begin. The first exhibition will be "**Made in Maidenhead**", including everything from beer and boats to Brylcreem and racing cars. However it is not yet possible to set an exact opening date.

The Heritage Centre is hoping to recruit additional volunteers to supervise the enlarged galleries, and would be pleased to hear from any Civic Society members who would like to help. Volunteers with public relations, financial planning and fundraising skills are also being sought as the Heritage Centre moves into its permanent home. Please contact Fran Edwards on 01628 780555 if you are interested.

Full details of all Heritage Centre events can be found on its website www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Whilst sorting out some old files containing minutes of past meetings of the Society, our Hon Secretary came across this poster from early 1961. The original measures about 30 ins by 20 ins and is in partial colour. As far as we can tell, it may be the publicity for the first ever talk and public meeting held by the Society. Does anyone remember seeing it on display anywhere? Did anyone attend the meeting, even? And what sort of response was there?

 **MAIDENHEAD AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY**
invites you to a
PUBLIC MEETING
8.0 p.m. WED. 25 JAN '61
in
**ST. MARY'S
CHURCH HALL**
MAIDENHEAD
ADMISSION FREE

★ **ANGEL IN NEED**
A colour film of Burslem town improvement shown by Mr. Michael Dower of the Civic Trust

★ **HENLEY DEVELOPMENTS**
An illustrated talk by Mr. John Morton of 'Townmaker'

You too can have a better Maidenhead
COME AND SEE HOW!

Some simple arithmetic will show that the Society's "Golden Anniversary meeting" will be in January 2011 – just under three years away. That may seem quite a time, but maybe now might be a good time to start thinking how we might celebrate this event – or perhaps the Society's formation in 1960, which would take us to 2010. These things always take longer to plan than everyone thinks and we need some ideas to start with!

It has been observed earlier in this Newsletter that the Society's membership is now heavily skewed towards the upper age levels, and probably we are not as adventurous as we once were. To celebrate the Society's 25th anniversary in the summer of 1985, an intrepid group of members took to the skies in a light aircraft, taking off from White Waltham airfield for a low-level spin along the course of the River Thames to the Thames Barrage and back. The plane made several sorties so everyone got a chance – though your Editor, being of a nervous disposition, declined!



Society members (including Ann Darracott in the white jacket) prepare to board

And to show that Society's members are "doers" with a practical commitment to a better environment, and not just a talking shop, here's a reminder of the work we did back in 1987, restoring North Town Pond. The project was judged "Highly Commended" by the *Keep Berkshire Tidy* competition.



Your Editor is 3rd left (at back) and Trustee Harold James at far right

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 18 th May 2008 Outing	Winchester & Salisbury Cathedrals
Saturday 21 st June 2008 Event	Visit Ockwells Manor Great Hall and Gardens
Sunday 6 th July 2008 Outing	Kew Gardens and Kew Palace
Wednesday 17 th September 2008 Talk	“Stanley Spencer – Cookham Artist” Stanley Spencer Gallery, Cookham, 7 p.m.
Wednesday 15 th October 2008 Talk by Martin Little	“Gardens I have Grown” Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.
Wednesday 19 th November 2008 Talk by Linda Aitken, followed by AGM	“St George’s Chapel, Windsor” Methodist Church Hall, 7.45 p.m.

CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

President of the Trustees	John McIntosh, 26 Harvest Hill Road, SL6 2QQ	633259
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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2008

Parish Centre in St. Luke’s Church, at 7.45 p.m.
8th January, 12th March, 14th May, 9th July, 10th September, 12th November

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETINGS FOR 2008

Parish Centre in St. Luke’s Church, at 7.45 p.m.
9th April, 8th October

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 19th November 2007 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 8.00pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 11th July 2008.**

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