



# Maidenhead Civic Society NEWS



*Special Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*

Issue 2/10

May 2010



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# CHAIRMAN'S ANNIVERSARY MESSAGE

Welcome to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of Maidenhead Civic Society News. Our archives contain a hoard of remarkable stories and for this special edition we've put together a selection of just a few of them. It's a mere snapshot but a faithful one, we trust, recording both successes as well as some of the frustrations felt by the Society over the last 50 years.

Our founding members were invested by the council with a responsibility to reflect informed public opinion. They took that very seriously and, coupled with its primary objective of stimulating public interest in Maidenhead, the Society has remained true those principles ever since – often incurring the wrath of their instigators along the way by saying things they didn't want to hear!

Hundreds have played their part over the years and it really would be invidious to single out any for special mention here. There is no doubt, however, that the Society's most notable achievements have been due to a few dedicated and determined individuals.

Of our founder members only one, so far as I know, has been there continuously since day one. Wrapped up as he was, and still is, in the vagaries of the planning system, he was involved in the inaugural discussions and he was elected to the executive committee at the founding general meeting on Wednesday 18 May 1960. I am referring, of course, to Michael Bayley who, as a trained and still practising architect, brings his expertise and unique experience regularly to the meetings of the society's Planning Group. We salute him.

I very much enjoyed the birthday luncheon we held at Boulters with Advertiser editor Martin Trepte last month. Please come and see us at the Society stall we're having to celebrate our anniversary at the Maidenhead Carnival and make a note of the celebratory luncheon we're having with Richard Poad as our guest on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

For 50 years the Society has tried to ensure that nothing which affects Maidenhead and its inhabitants escapes its notice. With your support and, hopefully, that of a new influx of members we can continue to use our considerable influence towards preserving the best and improving the rest of the local environment.

On a lighter note, since the Society began we've arranged more than 250 social events, trips and outings, listened to well over 300 speakers in our talks programmes, consumed 21,000 cups of tea and coffee (and the odd glass of wine) and we've written and published 160 editions of the newsletter.

I hope you enjoy this special edition. Flick through the pages and watch your life flash before your eyes.

## HOW DID IT ALL START?

MAIDENHEAD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY was inaugurated at a public meeting held on 18th May 1960, but one must go further back to trace its beginnings. First plans were being laid for the redevelopment of Maidenhead town centre and the Borough Council, notably Alderman Robert Abell, saw the need for the people of Maidenhead to participate in this process. At a meeting of the Borough's Planning & Development Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1959 the Mayor (Councillor Mrs Longworth) drew attention to the successful operation of a Civic Trust scheme in Norwich, and suggested that such a scheme might be adopted in Maidenhead and the Town Clerk (Mr Stanley Platt) was requested to obtain further information for consideration at the next meeting. The Civic Trust was a national charitable organisation set up in 1957 with its prime purpose being to improve the quality of new and historic buildings and public spaces, and to help improve the general quality of urban life.



*Robert Abell, who started it all*

At its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November, the Committee again considered the possible formation of an amenity society to look into and advise upon preservation and improvement of amenity in the Town, and the Town Clerk submitted a letter from the Secretary of the Maidenhead Chamber of Commerce expressing interest in such a proposal. The Committee welcomed this interest and wrote to the Chamber requesting them to convene a public meeting with a view to the formation of an amenity society, and from here on the running was made by the Chamber.

At a special meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1960, which was addressed by Councillor Norman Tillett of the Civic Trust, it was unanimously agreed that such a Society should be formed and to this end a small "caretaker" committee was formed to make the necessary arrangement for a public meeting. It was hoped that the Civic trust would send more or more of its leading speakers to inform on what could be done by societies of this nature. The Chamber continued to plan the inaugural meeting at its meeting in March and it was then that the name Maidenhead & District Civic Society was proposed. It was also hoped that all shops in the town centre would co-operate in displaying window posters promoting the meeting (if only we could do that today!)

And so, the big day arrived! Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 1960 saw the inaugural meeting of the Society, with nearly 150 interested people in attendance, with the meeting chaired by Capt. F Clifford Armitage JP. The scene was set by two guest speakers – Mr R

Furneaux Jordan (a former Principal of the Architectural Association School) who spoke about architectural development in general, and Mr Basil Marsden-Smedley OBE (a former Mayor of Chelsea) who discussed the work of the Civic Trust and civic societies in general. There appears to have been some lively questions and discussions after the talks, and the meeting then resolved itself into the first general meeting of the Society.



*Our first front-page headline!*

76 members were immediately enrolled. Some objections to the draft constitution prepared by the caretaker committee were raised, particularly on the grounds of membership qualifications and the main objects of the Society. Amendments were proposed for consideration at the next general meeting. Some of the new members felt that the constitution should be framed so that not more than one-fifth of the members of any executive committee should be aldermen or councillors of the Borough Council. And it was decided that the executive committee should not exceed 50 members or be less than 20 (it is difficult to see this working today!) and from the outset it was stressed that the Society was not intended to throw brickbats at the Council, but for liaison between the Council and the public.

The Presidency of the new society was accepted by Lord Palmer (of the Huntley & Palmers biscuits family) with Lord Astor and Jack Arnold as Vice-presidents. Clifford Armitage became the Society's first Chairman, with R E Pritchard as Secretary, J E Furley as Treasurer. Members of the caretaker committee, who for some months had been doing the preliminary work of forming the Society, were elected to the executive committee. They were: The Mayor-elect Cclr Robert Abell, Cclrs B Davey and D Lewis, Mrs Marjorie Metz, Michael Bayley, Wally Halliday, J B Aust, H M Williams, Eric Brooks and S Heath. Twenty more members from the audience were also elected to the executive committee.



*Michael Bayley*



*Capt. F Clifford Armitage*

*(The character sketches are by Michael Bayley who seems always to have attended committee meetings with his sketchbook!)*

The Society's first constitution was formally adopted on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1960, with the principal objects being:

- To stimulate public consciousness and appreciation of the beauty, history and character of the neighbourhood and its surroundings.
- To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of the features which go to make pleasant and convenient conditions in which to live and work.
- To promote the study of civic design.
- To pursue these ends by such means as co-operation with any other corporate body, meetings, lectures, study groups, exhibitions and publications.

With some amendments these sentiments still form the core of the Society's purpose and have been the guide for our activities during the past 50 years.

The initial subscription for individual members was set at ten shillings (10/- for those with a sense of nostalgia) – which would be worth about £8 to £10 in today's money; so, in terms of subscription income we are pretty much where we were then. But when one considers the enormous strides we have taken over the years and the sum of our achievements to date, we can surely congratulate ourselves.

Sadly, the Civic Trust went into administration in April 2009 and has been superseded by a slimmer organisation called Civic Voice, which had its inaugural meeting recently on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2010. The Society will become affiliated to Civic Voice, and, we all hope, will continue to work for improvements in Maidenhead for a further 50 years.

# APPROVALS, REFUSALS AND DEFERRALS A-PLENTY

Then, as now, it was a plan for Maidenhead town centre that 50 years ago focused the minds and led to the conception of the Civic Society. Town Planning lies at the base of the Society's foundation and it has remained our core activity ever since.

In June 1961, just a year after its creation, the Society published its own proposals for the traffic-choked town centre. They included some quite radical suggestions. Pedestrianisation of High Street, Queen Street, King Street and Broadway was proposed, with underground service roads, a central Forum on the site of Nicholsons Brewery, first floor travelators for pedestrian movement and even a heliport on the roof.

## Heliport and shoppers' 'travelators'

# NOW—IDEAS FOR TOWN CENTRE

**M**AIDENHEAD Civic Society this week produced its plan for the re-development of the town centre, a week after publishing its ideas on how the Norden Farm site should be laid out. It was described as an overall framework, giving individuals freedom to develop within it.

Briefly, the plan turns the area between High St, Queen St, and King St into a pedestrians only shopping precinct with underground and multi-storey car parks topped by a heliport, and surrounded by a conveyor-belt to carry shoppers around.

While some may regard the scheme as a futuristic dream, the two designers, Mr. Peter Murray and Mr. W. Hickman, say that it is not "fanciful, fantasy or science fiction." The intention

and related to the re-building that will be necessary around Market St and Tyrells car park.

Market St, it says, should not be widened south of West St, and shops on the east side should be re-built to their present line and not taken back level with Hildreth's. This would fit in with the pedestrians only scheme.

Phase 2 depends on the east-west Inner Relief Road, which should join Bridge Rd at a roundabout. Tyrells car park should be enlarged, and the whole of the Moffatt St park excavated to form an underground park with a landscaped pedestrian forum on top. Additional park-

1981, took shape in plan form before the admiring gaze of members of the Society's executive committee.

*From the Maidenhead Advertiser 16 Jun 1961*

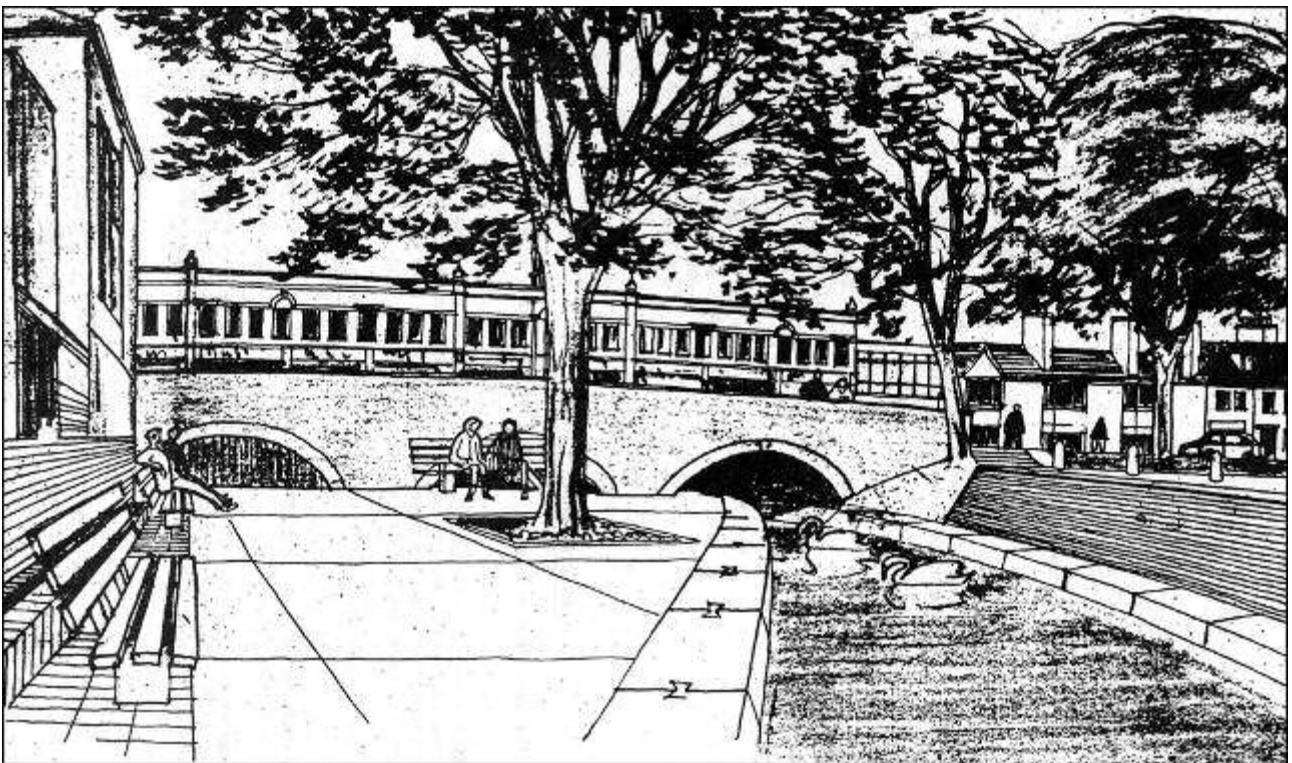
A public meeting supported these plans for a "beautiful and virile town centre" and in due course a Borough plan by the architect Lionel Brett (later Lord Esher) was seen to endorse several of the Society's ideas, though not the heliport. Controversy raged for 10 years on the nature of the new town centre, with the Civic Society criticising the huge office blocks, the covered shopping centre that became Nicholsons ("it would kill off King St and Queen St") and the alignment of the relief roads ("they should be further out").



With its objective for stimulating public interest in Maidenhead and thus for encouraging public participation in what the 1970's came to call "the environment", an early aim of the Society in 1967 was to make planning applications available for public scrutiny. Although it won the right quite quickly for itself, incredibly it wasn't until 1985 that regular lists were published.

In 1974, following local government reorganisation, the Society's area of interest became merely a part of the new Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Although the inspiration for creating the Civic Society had come from them, the old Council had at first been suspicious of our role as a planning watchdog. Under the new order, however, public participation was now recognized as a vital principle in a more open style of planning.

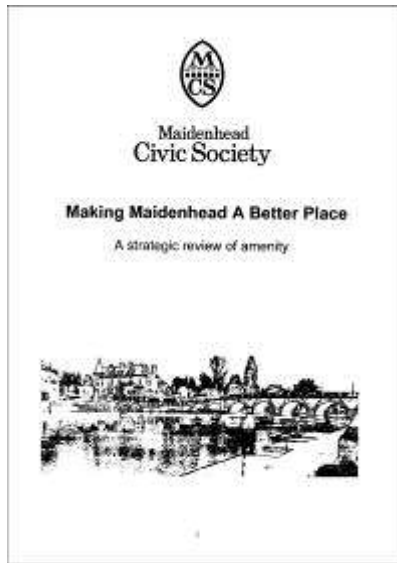
So, whereas in 1970 a Borough councillor (who later became a Member) accused the Civic Society of being "anti-everything", from the mid-70's members have regularly been meeting planning officers in mostly constructive discussions. For example, in one such meeting direct proposals were made for improvement of streamside land at Chapel Arches, High Street, and these were incorporated in the Town Centre Local Plan in 1977.



*Michael Bowley's 1976 proposal for the streamside improvement at Chapel Arches*

Although nothing came of the plan, we resurrected it in 1984 to be considered as part of what would become the Green Way. Consultations also took place before the publication of the 1984 Maidenhead and District Draft Local Plan and again in the 1990s. But due to the vagaries of the political system, no firm-footed, enduring Masterplan had ensued. In general the Society has supported policies of restraint,

with an emphasis on protecting the Green Belt, maintaining a small town feel and making residents the priority. These aims were at the heart of the Society's Strategic Review, compiled following a survey of members, in 2004. With the support of our local MP, the Chamber of Commerce and the Advertiser this led to the Great Debate and, ultimately, to the formation of PRoM (Partnership for the Rejuvenation of Maidenhead), the cross party partnership looking at town centre regeneration.



*The updated (2010)  
Strategic Review*

Over the years, the Society has developed a staunchly apolitical stance, though this didn't stop the *Maidenhead Advertiser* from once making a surprising suggestion that it should seek election to the council. In terms of power and influence the Society can claim, quite rightly, only the latter. Even then it would be arrogant to expect the Society's view always to prevail, despite a wide groundmass of support.

Thus while we've contributed to, for example, the successful opposition to a leisure centre at White Place Farm and a Hypermarket at Braywick, we've failed to influence decisions to allow an industrial estate on Forlease Road allotments, ugly office blocks in various parts of the town and the total transformation of Shoppenhangers Road. However the Society was active in opposing high-rise developments opposite Boulters Lock and for many years pressed the Council to restrict the scale of building in the flood plain. The Council finally adopted a Flood Policy in 1978, which the Society said was "better late than never". This undoubtedly helped to prevent the abuse of brownfield sites and "another Shoppenhangers" in Riverside.

In 1961 the local newspaper proclaimed: "Society Queries Town Centre Planning". The same headline would have been appropriate in any month over the last half-century. Only a few weeks ago after poring over the small print of a planning application our eagled eyed planning team alerted the public – and our councillors – to plans to



*The All Saints development, Boy'n Hill*

install five sets of traffic lights on the A4. Statistically, our planning group revues around 150 planning applications a year. While always commenting as constructively as possible on all significant planning applications, the Society is



particularly concerned with the scale, materials and design of new buildings.

At the time, members did not think much of the new library in 1972 or more recently the new Sainsbury's. Other designs, however, for Boots, the old Sainsburys and Isaacs were all influenced for the better by Civic Society comments, while in the conservation area at All Saints, Boyn Hill (see photo, above), the sensitive housing scheme eventually constructed emerged from meetings between the Civic Society, the Victorian Society and the developers.

It was to encourage good design that the Society launched an award scheme in 1979. Award-winners included the Tithe Barn estate at Bray, Waterglade House in High Street (right), the interior restoration of Oakley Court manor, shops flats and offices at Regent House in King Street and the Oaklands office block at 1 Bath Road near the top of Castle Hill.



Subsequently the award scheme was subsumed into one organised by the Borough. Sadly this fell into abeyance five years ago but a reincarnation is on the cards.

In a fast-changing town such as Maidenhead the conservation of the best of the past must go hand in hand with the encouragement of good new design. The retention of the facade at 16-20 High Street, while allowing a modern complex to be built behind, was a very satisfactory outcome to a long period of opposition to Borough Council plans to demolish those well-loved Georgian buildings.



*Left: 16-20 High Street before the restorations in 1976/7,  
and right: as it is today – the Halifax Bank.*

The Society campaigned for and won some important concessions over the electrification of the railway for Crossrail which threatened to deface the historic Brunel Bridge and also use Guards Club Park as a depot during the engineering works. Our delegation of Nigel Cockburn and Tina Sell (right), and John McIntosh presented the Society's case to the House of Commons Select Committee on Crossrail.



The Jubilee Clock Tower in Station Approach was another landmark at risk, in this case from a road scheme; eventually the County Council designed a road layout which retained the clock tower – and incorporated a Society suggestion for planters. And as part of an “eyesores” campaign a few years ago the Society's persistence once again paid off when the owners of Cressett Towers were eventually persuaded to improve the appearance of this High Street icon.



*Jack Widgery's sketch (left) of the Clock Tower in the early 1980s  
Before the new road scheme, and the same view today.*

Over the years the Society has urged the Council to designate additional Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. We have been gratified recently by proposals to expand and merge the Boulton Lock and Thames Reach Conservation Areas and, following our representations, to extend them further still. This is a far cry from 1970 when the Society's original proposals were received by the Borough “with studied contempt”, according to one angry committee member. But as attitudes changed, new Conservation Areas were designated at All Saints in 1975, in Maidenhead Town Centre in 1978 and at Castle Hill in 1981. The Civic Society also submitted a detailed list of suggestions for new Listed Buildings when the official schedules were revised in 1981.

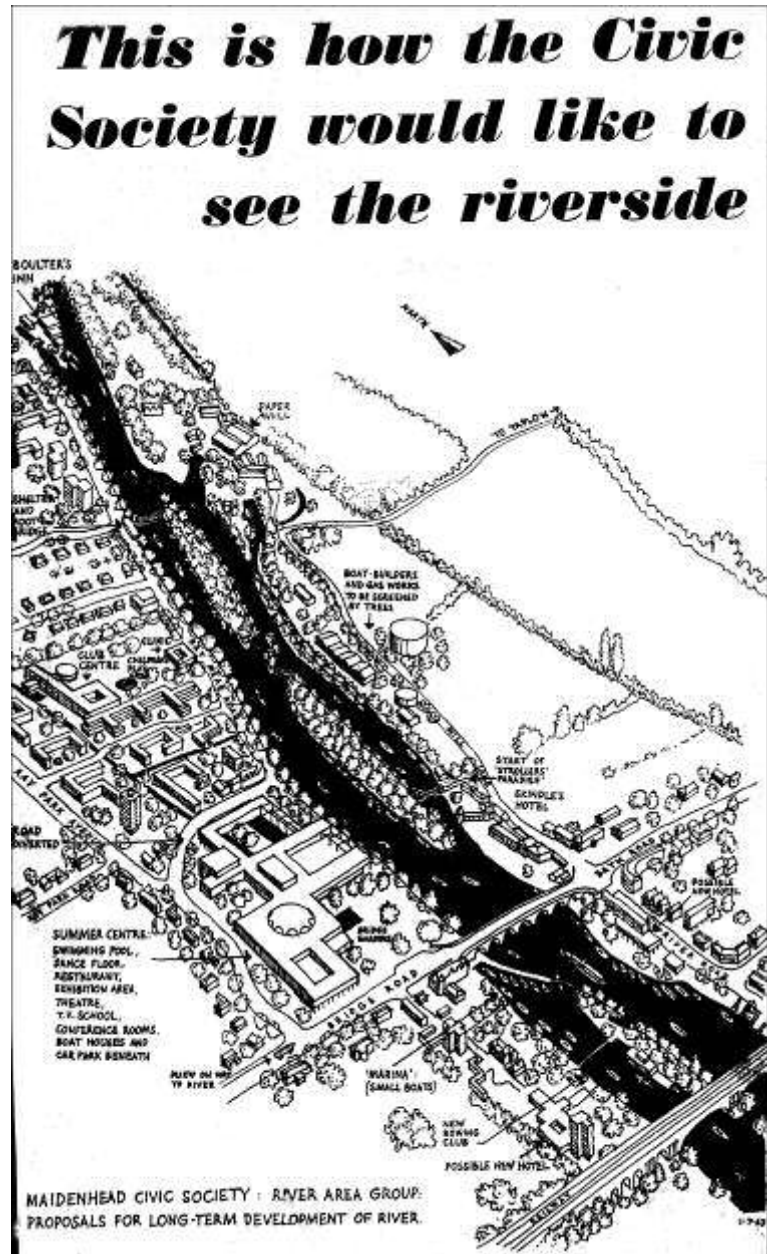
Conservation was also the key five years ago when Taplow Paper Mill first intimated it may be shutting shop. The Society moved swiftly to coordinate residents and amenity groups to set out a case for preserving and enhancing the natural assets of this 48-acre riverside site. Gratifyingly, the District Council was sympathetic and produced a Conservation Appraisal and a draft policy both of which echo most of the features we outlined.

Forty-three years earlier the Society had devised a plan for the riverside from a Maidenhead perspective. It was variously described as an inland Blackpool, a civic paradise and an H.G. Wells project. The Advertiser, diplomatically hedging its bets, said the proposals “may be thought revolutionary in outlook”.

The essential elements included diverting the main road to Cookham to create a traffic-free promenade, an arts and leisure centre containing a swimming pool and theatre near the bridge, hotels, marinas and a youth centre, plus a “stroller’s paradise” using a series of footbridges to link the chain of islands between Maidenhead Bridge and Boulters Lock. In the sketch plan published at the time, the artist had added a delightful little extra touch – a wartime DUKW carrying passengers from the town centre for a trip on the river!

The scheme won a £50 prize from the Civic Trust but unfortunately failed in its declared aim of prompting the Council to produce a coordinated plan for the development of the riverside area. It nevertheless silenced some of the Society’s sterner critics who only weeks before had accused it of being “stagnant in its approach” and presenting “rather an elderly image”.

Maybe it’s time to dust it off and try again....



# IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT

Practical projects have always helped to give the Civic Society a positive image. It is obvious that the Society's concern for environmental issues has broadened since our inception to go far beyond mere planning matters. Aircraft noise (in 1973 we secured alterations to the Heathrow departure flight paths – routes which exist today), hospitals and waste disposal have all concerned us: our vigorous and well-informed campaign helped to persuade the Council to introduce the first Bottle Bank scheme in 1979. Over the years since 1973 we have also engaged in litter-picking (on North Town Moor, Maidenhead Moor, Braywick Park and York Stream), tree-planting and bulb-planting programmes.

Trees have been planted by the Society on Maidenhead Moor, Laggan Field, and outside the Library. In December 1980 Elaine Mordaunt and a party of Society members planted 2,500 bulbs on the banks of Castle Hill, with another 2,500 in the autumn of 1981. More bulbs were planted on North Town Moor, at the junction of Forlease Road and Oldfield Road, and in 1991 on the A4 along Bridge Avenue near the Thames (see the photo on the front cover and right).



*At various times, gangs of Society members have formed working parties to clean and tidy up various areas such as All Saints Cemetery, ca. 1975 (left).*



In the past the Society has organised events for the Civic Trust's Environment Week (now defunct). These included walks, talks and nature activities for children.

**Guards Club Park** was created by the Civic Society as a Silver Jubilee project, which began in 1976 and finally ended in 1980. This is beyond doubt the Society's most ambitious – and most visible – achievement. 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 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. Harold James was the engineer (or the "Gaffer") and drew up the all the required plans.

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



*Divers inspect the foundations of the decaying bridge*

restoration would cost up to £10,000, we set about persuading the developers of what is now Oldacres and Horseguards to let us work on the bridge *before* it was actually

handed it over to the council. We also persuaded them 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.

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, and it was also

necessary to mount a vigorous fund-raising campaign, determinedly led by Richard Poad, to secure the necessary funds of more than £10,000.

The bridge was formally opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire in September 1978. In the photo to the left you can see a youthful Richard Poad, second from the left.



*The success of the project was crowned by the award of a Civic Trust Commendation in 1980 (clipping from the Maidenhead Advertiser).*

## Awards for restoring Victorian footbridge



Chairman of Berks County Council, Mr. Lewis Moss (centre) presents Civic Trust certificates to chairman of Maidenhead & District Civic Society, Mr. Jack Widgery (right) and vice-chairman, Mr. Harold James.



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 pillars 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. The full story of this major achievement was told in the April 2005 edition of the Newsletter.

As this project progressed in 1981, plans were already being laid for an ambitious streamside 'linear park' running from Cookham to Bray and carrying the countryside right into the heart of Maidenhead. This was developed from an idea by Peter Nevell of East Berks Ramblers. Now known as the **Green Way**, this project has been incorporated in the



*The inaugural walk after the formal opening of the Green Way in 1985. Peter Nevell at far left, talking to the Mayor of Maidenhead.*

Maidenhead Local Plan and was the winner in the category "Best Environmental Initiative" in the "Central Southern England in Bloom" competition in 1993. An introductory leaflet was published by the Society in May 1985, and further editions have been produced with Society support – the most recent, the 4<sup>th</sup> version, being in 2009.

A related project to restore the **North Town Moor pond**, near to the Green Way, began in 1987. The pond had become severely overgrown and the water all but vanished. The damaged outlet sill was repaired then the sludge was dug out and any litter was removed. The silt was laid on nearby banks and wildflowers were planted then clay was added to help reseal the pond.



*The overgrown pond as we found it in 1987*



The project was deemed “Highly Commended” by the “Keep Berkshire Tidy” Environmental Awards in 1987, and Ann Darracott received the certificate on behalf of the Society from rock singer Joe Brown!

Following requests for help, Society volunteers again participated in the recent restoration of the pond in March 2010 organised by *Make Space for Life*.



*North Town Moor pond as it is today*

The Society has also had a long-standing interest in the state of **York Stream**. In 1964 we persuaded the Council to clean up the town centre section and this subsequently provided the route through Maidenhead for the Green Way. When the stream stopped flowing in 1988 we campaigned to get it flowing again and became an active member of the group formed to solve the problem that still meets as the Green Way Working Group (GWWG). In 2002, after the stream dried for a second time, we produced a report on the ***Status of York Stream*** that reviewed past problems with the stream. Currently our “Windows” project aims to limit reed growth in the stream by organising periodic targeted spraying.



*Seventy-five Society members and Ramblers enjoy the crossing of Temple Golf Course*

**The Millennium Walk**, a long distance path from Hurley across to Maidenhead Riverside, is another project currently being finalised together with East Berks Ramblers. Several years of planning culminated with the inaugural walk in May 2000. Throughout we have been fortunate to have had the support of our MP Theresa May in dealing with bureaucratic obstacles.

A notable success in filling in the missing links was the creation of a path linking the Thames Path at Marlow to the Millennium Walk. This required the diversion of Bisham **Footpath 9** underneath the A404 (right) necessary for public safety. East Berks Ramblers together with our help, three questions in Parliament (!) and a public enquiry, achieved the diversion.



The Society has long campaigned for smaller projects to improve the amenity and environment in the town centre and a good example of this is the erection of the **Boy and Boat** statue at the western end of the High Street. This sculpture, originally made by Lydia Parker in 1986, had been languishing in the foundry for years, an unwanted planning gain. At our instigation it was put up in the town centre in 1995. After it was severely damaged by vandals in 2003 the Society arranged for its repair and it was formally re-installed in 2005, at a ceremony led by the Mayor, Cllr Emrys Richards. The statue now frequently appears on promotional material for the town.



*The vandalised statue (above) and the “Boy” back in his rightful place. The sculptor is Society member Lydia Parker, far right.*



We just haven't had the resources to do everything we would have liked, but that hasn't stopped us fighting for environmental improvements. For example, we campaigned for the Braywick old rubbish tip and landfill site to be turned into a **nature centre**, which now provides a centre for nature activities similar to those offered during the former Environment Week. Sometimes we take a wider interest, and in 2006 we lent our support to the campaign to keep **Valley Gardens** (next to Savill Gardens in Old Windsor) unfenced and free from entrance fees by helping to collect signatures for the petition. We can now continue to enjoy for free these wonderful expanses of flowers and trees



# HERITAGE AND HISTORY

The Civic Society has always tried to promote an interest in the area's heritage history and through such interest to encourage an understanding of the present and a concern for the future. Commemorative plaques, a booklet of town trails, a series of exhibitions – notably “Brunel's Railway Came to Maidenhead” (in 1986), “Maidenhead Jewel of the Thames”, and “The Origins of Maidenhead” (in 1996) are all examples of the Society's past activity in this field. The Society was also one of the moving forces behind “Maidenhead 400”, the 1982 celebration of the 400th anniversary of Maidenhead's first royal charter.

**Plaques** have been put up by the Society to mark places of heritage interest; these include the one on the wall at the entrance to the NatWest Bank in the High Street commemorating the site of the old Greyhound Inn where King Charles I last met his children before being taken off to his execution; Brunel's famous railway bridge (in 1975); Guards Club Park; Chapel Arches in Bridge Street in 1996 (here the



Society were asked to recommend an appropriate site to the Council); and more recently, in 1997, a plaque to mark the site of the chapel of SS Andrew & Mary Magdalene, whose guild, founded in 1451, maintained the road and bridge across the Thames and was the precursor of civic life in Maidenhead. This plaque can be seen inset into the pavement in front of the entrance to the Bear Hotel in the High Street.

During 1982 the Society took a major initiative in the educational field by promoting a Schools Project in which almost every school in the town participated. The Schools Project was a huge success, culminating in a superb exhibition of project work at the Town Hall which featured on Thames Television News. The Schools Project led directly to the establishment of an Environmental Education Group in cooperation with Maidenhead Teacher Centre; this Group aims to encourage an interest in and concern for the environment from the earliest stages of a child's education.

The important educational role of the Society has led it to give enthusiastic support to the formation of a **Heritage Centre** for Maidenhead. In about 1983 a first initial review of possibilities of setting up a Heritage Centre was made by Pat Symons. In

1985 a further report was written based on using the building on the corner opposite Waitrose in Moorbridge Road (the oldest building in Maidenhead!), which was then vacant. This turned out to be too small for a Centre but a committee was set up to pursue the ideas in the report. Eventually, in about 1990, the building now occupied by Team Focus at 18 Bridge Street, on the northwest corner with Forlease Road (opposite corner to Waitrose) was identified as suitable, being temporarily available and essentially rent and rates free.

In 1992, we joined forces with the Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society and thus the first Heritage Centre was jointly set up and proved a good draw. In 1993 the Heritage Centre was hived off into a separate charity since its purposes had become rather distinct from those of the Civic Society, and Richard Poad was elected first Chairman of the new Maidenhead Heritage Trust. After a period of having to occupy a succession of temporary



*The Heritage Centre in its permanent home in Park Street*

venues, a generous bequest from the late Ted Sammes enabled the Heritage Trust to consider a permanent location and is now firmly set up in Park Street.

The Society undertakes study on two Grade I listed buildings on our patch. Most recently Bisham Abbey has been studied and talks and tours given: the next talk for the Marlow Society is on 19<sup>th</sup> July. Of longer standing is the study of Maidenhead's most significant historical buildings, **Ockwells Manor**, a 15<sup>th</sup> century house situated on the south side of Ockwells Road, Cox Green. The house, has been described by Nikolaus Pevsner in the Berkshire volume of "The Buildings of England" as "...the most refined and the most sophisticated timber-framed mansion in England". It is also famous for the armorial stained glass still in its original position in the windows of the Great Hall, which feature the armorial achievements of John Norreys Esq, the builder of Ockwells Manor, together with those of Henry VI of England and his Queen, Margaret of Anjou, plus other important figures of the time, making a total of eighteen lights.

Our interest in the house began when Ockwells Manor came on the market in the 1980s. The Society was in talks with the Council discussing the possibility of the Royal Borough buying it to run as a community centre. However, in 1984 it was sold to Mr and Mrs Brian Stein, to be restored (having been left vacant for 15 years) as a private house. In spring 1985 with kind permission of the owners, Society members



were able to tour the house, guided by their architect David Mansfield Thomas. At this time it was looking very sorry for itself!



*The magnificent armorial glass in the Great Hall at Ockwells Manor*

In June 1988, the new owners kindly gave permission for the Society to hold a fund-raising concert in the tithe barn – a concert of early English music given by the Belmont Consort (the Society's planning group chairman Elaine Mordaunt was the cellist!) and Windsor & Maidenhead Brass. Following the concert we gave Mr Stein a copy of the 1892 Sale Catalogue, which recorded the details of the sale of the house after the Victorian restoration. Mr Stein, who had commissioned historian Harvey van Sickle to write a history of the house, was very interested in the document and asked if we could find anything else. We felt this was a worthwhile project for the Society and the invitation was enthusiastically taken up by Ann Darracott.

In June 1990 the Society organised another visit around Ockwells Manor house, including a tour of the ground floor of the house. An exhibition on the History of Ockwells Manor, designed by Brian Sanderson with photos and text supplied by Ann Darracott, was put up in a marquee borrowed from the local Boy Scouts and the first leaflet on the history of the house was produced. Ann and Harvey van Sickle acted as guides. This exhibition was subsequently put on display in Maidenhead library during June and July 1991, and again in the Ockwells tithe barn when the manor grounds were opened to the public under the Open Gardens scheme.



*Detail from the glass  
in the Great Hall*

The exhibition marked the point when the Society began in earnest to assemble the known information about Ockwells Manor into a digestible form. Much more has been discovered about its history and in particular about the details of those individuals represented in the armorial glass, some of whom were unidentified at this time. Whilst on a Civic Society outing to Great Malvern Priory in 1997, Ann noticed, on a tile in the Priory, a coat that occurs in the armorial glass at Ockwells, then unidentified; a detailed study of the coats at Malvern clarified who was represented by this same coat in the Ockwells glass. The investigations at Malvern resulted in the Society publishing a booklet on the subject in 2005.



*Brian Sanderson puts finishing touches to the display at Taplow*

Many tours of the house and grounds for various groups have been conducted since then, thereby raising the Society's profile. Also, the Ockwells exhibition was displayed at Taplow Court, now home to SGI-UK, but once the home of William Henry Grenfell, Lord Desborough who had owned Ockwells Manor. A large collection of historical information and material has been amassed about the history of the house with the ultimate aim of producing a fully illustrated guide to Ockwells Manor and its armorial stained glass in booklet form and on CDs.

Our fund of knowledge is currently contributing to the National Trust's attempt to protect the setting of Ockwells from proposed urban development in the field to the north of Ockwells Road. The Society has also assisted the editor of the revised and updated edition of

Pevsner's book on Berkshire, Geoffrey Tyack, with the entries for both Ockwells and Bisham Abbey. Professor Tyack will be talking about the new book to the Society in October.

We have also lent our support to local campaigns and causes with a heritage flavour: for example, a leaflet on the link between Ockwells and St Michael's Church Bray was produced and sold during a tour of Ockwells in 2008 in aid of the Friends of St Michael's Bray Emergency Appeal (to save the church tower). We also joined the Save Jesus Hospital campaign when it seemed that the elderly residents of this 17<sup>th</sup> century almshouse in Bray were to be moved out and the property sold for development.

As with all other Society projects, we have had to raise funds to support our work. Fees from talks and tours help with running costs. The Ockwells Exhibition benefitted from a grant from the Royal Borough's Kidwells Trust and a grant from the Shell Employee Action Scheme largely financed the Malvern Priory study. A current grant will allow a publication relating to Bisham Abbey to be produced.

# ..... AND WE ALSO HAD SOME FUN!

An important part of the Civic Society's activity is our programme of talks, outings and other social events. These help us engage our members and stimulate interest in the Society's work and achievements. The events are open to all – members and non-members – and hopefully have inspired some to join the Society.

*As far as we can tell, this poster advertises the first ever talk and public meeting of the Society after its formation*



Generally, we have about four to six talks a year on topics of local and national interest; three or four outings to places of historic or other interest within an easy coach ride from Maidenhead, and occasional social events.



*The Cliveden Set*

400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maidenhead's first royal charter, members played Nancy Astor, Lord Desborough and a bevy of flappers in a colourful tableau of the "Cliveden Set". Things are definitely not all serious!

In the 1977 Silver Jubilee celebrations the Society had a float in the Carnival procession and helped run a Rag Regatta. The Society organised the first Charities Fair, which has now become one of Maidenhead's most successful annual events. In the 1982 "Maidenhead 400" Wagon Pageant, which celebrated the

This Newsletter is all about our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but in 1985 the Society celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a birthday thrash in the form of barbeque party with jazz band held in giant marquees in the grounds of Glen Island, Taplow, hosted by Sandy Stratton, then managing director of Taplow Paper Mills who owned the riverside land.

## 250 celebrate Civic Society's 25 years



Gathering to celebrate Maidenhead Civic Society's 25th anniversary are, from left: Mrs. Margaret Widgery, the Mayor and Mayoress (Cdr. and Mrs. Dick Shaw), Sandy Stratton (managing director of Taplow Paper Mills) and Jack Widgery (chairman of the Civic Society).



The more intrepid of our members signed up for a series of short flights (£26 a seat!) following the River Thames into London as far and the new Thames Barrage scheme, amongst them David Coulson (far left in picture (and Ann Darracott (foreground in white jacket).

As well as the Society's jubilee, 2010 also marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the twinning relationship between Maidenhead and Bad Godesberg in Germany. An important event in the Society's calendar is the organisation of exchange visits with representatives of our sister organisation. Our first visit to Bad Godesberg was in 1989 when a party of twenty or so enjoyed a very pleasant long weekend there.



1995 saw the Society enter a float in the Maidenhead Carnival. The theme celebrated the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coronation of Margaret of Anjou whose armorial achievement occurs in the stained glass at Ockwells Manor. Whilst those on the float got a "free ride" another team manned a stall in the

High Street with a display of the Society's work. We followed this in 1996 with the stall again in the same place.

In the past fifty years Society members must have visited nearly everywhere worth visiting – National Trust houses, beautiful gardens, lesser know museums and galleries, cathedrals and castles. For many years our coach trips were organised by the late Bob Sandys, and for the last ten years or so by Mike Copeland. A recent theme has been “Looking behind the Scenes”. This has taken us to Wimbledon, Lords cricket ground, White Waltham Aerodrome, Ascot Racecourse and the War Graves Commission Building.



*A successful trip to Highclere Castle and Broadlands, 2003*

Talks have ranged from such diverse subjects as “The Knights Templar” to St George’s Chapel; the Jubilee River to Magistrates in the Community; Civic Matters to Fighting Crime in the Borough; Plant Gathering in South America to Swan Upping; the Lighter Side of Africa to “How RBWM Manage Waste” and many other topics, usually presented by those who manage local affairs, the aim being to shed light on the difficulties and challenges of important issues.



A new event has been our Speakers Luncheons. The first being held in September 2008 at Norden Farm when Ian Trenholm, Chief Executive for RBWM, was our guest, followed in March 2009 by Supt Tim De Meyer police commander for Maidenhead. The most recent was held at Boulders

Restaurant where we enjoyed the company of Martin Trepte, Editor of The Maidenhead Advertiser (above).

Social events have been more difficult to organise, with a number having to be cancelled through lack of support. However we intend to persevere in the hope of finding activities which will attract our members to leave the comfort of their own homes and come and meet other like-minded people.

# MAIDENHEAD CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

## and other key positions

Whilst putting together this Newsletter we realised we had no single record of all those who've played a key role the Society over the years. A few hours perusing through old editions of Newsletters and AGM reports has led to this list below. But due to the absence of information for some of the early years, there are still some uncertainties. And we apologise if we've missed anyone out!

### PRESIDENT

Rt. Hon. Lord Palmer	1960-1966
John Smith	1967-1979
Gordon Slater	1980-1989
Eric Brooks	1990-1992
Richard Poad	1993-2007
John McIntosh	2008-Present

### CHAIRMAN

F. Clifford Armitage	1960-1962
Gordon Slater	1963-1970
Basil Sheasby	1971-1978
Marjorie Metz	1979-1980
Jack Widgery	1981-1985
Richard Poad	1986-1992
Harold James	1993-1995
Harry Fenech	1996-1998
John McIntosh	1999-2002
Angela Howorth (acting)	2003
John McIntosh	2004-2007
Bob Dulson	2008-present

### HON. SECRETARY

R E Pritchard	1960-1964?
John Haydon	1965?-1970
Willy Blackmore	1970-197?
Pat Doherty	197?-1975
Richard Poad	1975- 1986
Ann Darracott	1987-1990
John Howorth	1991-1993
Penny Baker	1994-2001
June Churchman	2002-2006
June Jorge	2007-present

### HON. TREASURER

J E Furley	1960-1964?
M J Raynes	1965?-197?
J R Meek	197?-1976
Brian Little	1977-1984
Arthur Marshall	1985-1987
Ann Child	1988-1997
Trevor Farnfield	1998-present

### CHAIR. PLANNING GROUP

Wally Halliday	1960-1984
Elaine Mordaunt	1985-1990
Tricia Brooking	1991-1994
Michael Bayley	1995-1998
Michael Johnson	1999-2002
Nigel Cockburn	2003-2007
Martin McNamee	2008-present

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Chairman of the day	1970
Richard Poad	bef 1976-1985
Martin Webster	1986-1991
Richard Poad	1992
Trevor Farnfield	1993-1996
Gillian Moore	1997
Clifford & Penny Baker	1998-2001
Brian Darracott	2002-present

### OUTINGS

Richard Poad	1975?-1982
Bob Sandys	1983-1999
John McIntosh	2000
Mike Copeland	2001-present

History & Environment  
Heritage & Projects  
Webmaster  
Webmaster  
Talks

### OTHERS

Ann Darracott	1983-present
Pat Symons	1980's
Tim Goldingham	2000-2008
Brian Darracott	2009-present
Angela Howorth & Tina Sell	



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## **SUMMER “CELEBRATORY” CREAM TEA**

Shashi Dare will very kindly once again opened up her garden for an afternoon Social Event on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2010 to continue our celebration of 50 years of the Maidenhead Civic Society. Full details on the enclosed booking form.

## **VISIT TO KNEBWORTH HOUSE, HERTFORDSHIRE**

A visit to the historic family home of the Lytton family is planned for Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010. Full details on the enclosed booking form.

## **FORTHCOMING TALKS**

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2010:** Two volunteers from Bucks Search and Rescue will talk about their work searching for missing people in and around the county of Buckinghamshire and the surrounding counties.

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010:** Dr Geoffrey Tyack, Director, Stanford University Programme in Oxford, Kellogg College, University of Oxford, will be talking about the new updated edition of the “Berkshire” volume of the legendary series “The Buildings of England” by the Nikolaus Pevsner.

n.b. There will be a small charge of £3.00 to members and £4.00 to non-members inclusive of refreshments for the above two talks.

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2010:** This is our AGM evening and the guest speaker will be Peter Quarmby, Regional Flood Risk Manager, Environment Agency, who will talk about climate change and flooding on the Thames.

## **CIVIC SOCIETY LUNCHEON**

We have organised another special luncheon for Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010 at the Monkey Island Hotel, Bray, to continue our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Former Society Chairman and President Richard Poad will be our guest and he will give us his personal perspective of these fifty years. Full details in the August Newsletter.

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS**

As you will be aware, the membership year extends from 1st June to 31st May and it is now time to renew. After many years of level membership subscriptions, we now have to make a small increase. Would all Members please complete the enclosed renewal form and send together with the appropriate subscription to Shashi Dare.

## **NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTOR NEEDED!**

We are looking for a volunteer to distribute a few Newsletters to four locations in the Town Hall area, four times a year. The Newsletters will first be delivered to your address. If you can help please contact Carol Innes on (01628) 532418.

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2010

## Event

Celebratory Cream Tea

‘Silvretta’, Islet Road, Maidenhead, 3-5pm

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010

## Visit

Knebworth House, Hertfordshire

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2010

## Talk Bucks Search & Rescue Team

“Bucks Search & Rescue”

Methodist Church Hall, King Street, 8.00 pm

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010

## Event & Talk by Richard Poad

The Civic Society Luncheon.

12.00 noon, Monkey Island Hotel.

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010

## Talk Geoffrey Tyack

“The New Berkshire Pevsner”

Methodist Church Hall, King Street, 8.00 pm

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2010

## Talk by Peter Quarmby, followed by AGM

“Climate Change and Flooding on the Thames”

Methodist Church Hall, King Street, 8.00 pm

## CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

President of the Trustees	John McIntosh, 26 Harvest Hill Road, SL6 2QQ	633259
Hon. Secretary	Vacancy	
Hon. Treasurer	Trevor Farnfield, Ditton Meads, Winter Hill Road, SL6 6NS	638142
Executive Chairman	Bob Dulson, Bryher, Islet Road, SL6 8HT	627130
Planning Group	Martin McNamee, 14 Lower Cookham Road, SL6 8JT	623203
Projects Group	Ann Darracott, 6 Medallion Place, SL6 1TF	620280
Communications Group	Brian Darracott, 6 Medallion Place, SL6 1TF	620280
Events Group	Tina Sell, Marlborough, River Road, Taplow, SL6 0BB	628675
Outings Sec.	Mike Copeland, 14 Laburnham Road, SL6 4DB	634181
Membership Sec.	Shashi Dare, Silvretta, Islet Road, SL6 8LD	629976
Newsletter Distribution	Carol Innes, Contour, Briar Glen, Cookham Rise, SL6 9JP	532418

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2010

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

12<sup>th</sup> January, 9<sup>th</sup> February, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 14<sup>th</sup> December

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETINGS FOR 2010

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

13<sup>th</sup> April, 12<sup>th</sup> October

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2010 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 7.45 pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue  
of the Newsletter is 9<sup>th</sup> July 2010.**

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