

Hitcham and Taplow Society

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www.taplowsociety.org.uk

Hitcham and Taplow Society

Formed in 1959 to protect Hitcham, Taplow and the surrounding countryside from being spoilt by bad development and neglect.

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Vice Presidents: Tony Hickman, Fred Russell, Professor Bernard Trevallion OBE
Chairman: Karl Lawrence
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Cover picture: An essential element of the restoration of the Village telephone box, preparation for application of gold leaf crown by furniture conservation expert Ernest Riall PhD of Bucks New University and Lyon's Restoration Ltd, Wooburn Green. (Nigel Smales)

Editorial

Never mind the width, feel the quality of this bumper 20-page edition of the Society's newsletter.

We are delighted to mark an important milestone. This is the one hundredth edition of the newsletter which has been produced bi-annually for most of the 54 years since the Society was founded.

It is the perfect opportunity to look back at what the Society and its members have achieved, to demonstrate how it remains relevant today and in the foreseeable future, and to come up with a cunning plan to spread the word as far as possible by delivering this newsletter not only as usual to members but also into every letterbox we can find in Taplow and Hitcham. If you are an old hand, we hope you will celebrate with us. If you are new to the game, welcome to our world. Come in and look around. New members are always welcome. It costs just £7 a year for each household.

The Society's original and still primary goal is to protect our locale from being spoilt by bad development or neglect. Of course, 'bad' is subjective but as is demonstrated on the following pages the clear evidence is that

efforts by members and allied organisations have succeeded in moderating for the better many proposals for changes great and small.

Over the years, the Society has also embraced two supplementary goals. We encourage local community spirit through social events such as the Village Green Party and the Easter Egg Hunt. And we share and celebrate our heritage in various ways. Some of our practical projects are recalled in these pages; others include the renovation of Bapsey Pond and of the Hanging Woods at Cliveden, the replenishment of Taplow Station flowerbeds, the rescue of the telephone box and the rediscovery of Old Priory Garden. Of course, the Newsletter is our primary means of sharing the fascinating facts and folklore that surround us. This is now my responsibility as editor. Please treat the new boy gently. I hope to be worthy of stepping into the shoes of the illustrious Aleyn Grellier, Leonard Miall, Fred Russell and the elusive 'Not the Editor', whoever he was.

Nigel Smales

Digging In, Branching Out



It all began in what became a very big hole. The seed sown there in the autumn of 1959 has grown into the Hitcham & Taplow Society.

Eventually the hole stretched from top to bottom of the wheat field between Boundary Road and Poplar Farm. There was no stopping it – the M4 was hungry for the gravel hidden beneath the topsoil – but Dr Maurice Rogers galvanised Taplovians who together fought long and hard to ensure that the gravel extraction contractors adhered to the conditions of their planning permission and that, as agreed, the land was restored to a proper condition for pasture. As Rogers remarked in 1979, "The result is there for all to see – the restoration has been pretty successful".

And there was more. Rogers added that, "Things are easier now. Perhaps the most important outcome of the rumpus was the decision of the Local Authority to change the procedure for those seeking gravel extraction

rights. In the past, it had been a sort of authorised piratical foray. This was changed, and the opposition now stands a chance". The evidence was that your Society had been successful in influencing access and screening provisions for a small gravel pit immediately west of Hillmead Court. And in 1980, it could pat itself on the back for having done its bit to save Barge Farm from becoming yet another big hole.

The Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society began with this single purpose but, as Rogers observed in 1974 when its objections prevented 146 houses being built on the Poplar Farm pasture, it had spread its branches to have "a significant influence in maintaining the surroundings to our homes at least as attractive as we found them". We still enjoy the fruit of this labour. We still strive to walk in the footsteps of Rogers and his fellow pioneers.

Here in a nutshell is what the Society is about – it aspires to make the best of things. It has always lived in the real world of change – hence its change of name in recognition that its purpose as a civic society is protection not preservation – while never accepting that poor planning or design, lack of joined-up thinking or no thought at all can ever be acceptable. It is prepared to ask decision-makers and developers difficult questions, to be their conscience and if it can to hold them to account for the sake of the social and physical fabric of our little corner of the world and its character and quality of life. If it didn't exist, you'd be daft not to invent it.

Nigel Smales

Not the Editor

My wife Jane and I must be two of the few Taplovians nowadays who knew Matt Rogers (known for his initials MAT). In fact, 40 years ago we bought Lea Rig from him; the 'house in the fields', locals called it. When he told me the Society was conceived in its dining room, it seemed only right that I should offer to help and I was soon on the committee. The chairman, Dr Ivan Snow, asked me to take over as Treasurer and then in 1979 as Secretary, a job I held for 17 years. During that time there were many innovations. One was to have a bit of entertainment after the business part of the

AGM. On more than one occasion, I used a pair of projectors to give slide presentations on various themes of local architectural or historic interest.

Some time later, we had difficulty in getting an editor for the newsletter. I stepped reluctantly into the breach but – lest it should be thought the vacancy had been filled – cast myself as 'Not the Editor'. Unfortunately the ruse didn't work. I remained 'Not the Editor' for many years until resigning as Secretary in 1996.

Dick Nutt

Past Presidents

Your Society has been privileged to have had many distinguished, able and committed presidents.

We owe a great debt to Dr Maurice Rogers, chairman of the Society from its inception in 1959 until 1975. He persuaded the third Viscount Astor, known as Bill, to be our first President and to chair our first AGM in November 1960. Unfortunately I never knew them. It was due to their efforts that the field between Poplar Farm and Boundary Road was restored to a proper condition for pasture after having the gravel beneath extracted.

Leonard Miall was the BBC's man in Washington with great influence. He was in touch with many of the Great and the Good of his era. It is said that we are indebted to him for the Marshall Plan. Sir David Attenborough spoke at his Memorial Service and said that, "Leonard succeeded because of his sheer niceness, his kindness, his good humour and his straightforward honesty. Whatever you thought of his decisions, no one could believe that he would do anything that was mean-spirited; or that he was driven by a thirst for power". He brought these wonderful qualities as well as his wisdom to the post. He lived in the heart of the village and contributed greatly to Taplow over many years, as did his wife Lorna and, after her death, his second wife Sally. Max and I are not alone in having enjoyed their hospitality on numerous occasions along with large numbers of Taplovians. I particularly remember his kindness and humour.

John Kennedy is a well known and respected figure in Taplow who served on the District Council for a long time and held office as its Chairman. He is also a prominent member of our Parish Council. He has been involved with Padstones, a very worthwhile local charity which helps homeless youngsters. I have known John and Brenda personally for over 40 years and I have valued his advice. John is someone with strong opinions who gets things done.

He was very ably succeeded by Tony Hickman, an architect by profession, who is our planning advisor and has commented knowledgeably on planning applications and local authority documents which might affect our area and still continues to do so. He and his

wife Brenda have contributed greatly to Taplow over many years. They were particularly kind to me when I became your very nervous President in 2004.

My immediate predecessor was the inimitable Lincoln Lee, a former RAF bomber pilot who had later flown civilian aircraft and held a very senior position in IATA carrying responsibility for North America and the North Atlantic. He and his wife Helen were pillars of our community and especially of the Society for many years. They are sorely missed.

These men who have been your past Presidents have all been distinguished in their fields and we are extremely fortunate and grateful that they have been prepared to give up their time to serve our community so well.

Eva Lipman



Lincoln and his Lapsang

Lincoln's Legacy

Lincoln Lee served as president of the Society for four years, writes Fred Russell. However, time in the public eye, so to speak, does not necessarily equate to contribution. Lincoln's contribution to your Society, from the viewpoint of a relatively long standing newsletter editor, ran like a silver thread through the intricate tapestry of its activities over the past 54 years of its existence; particularly in his many contributions to the newsletter, beginning in 1983 and ending in the Spring edition of 2006 where I wrote an open thank you letter to Lincoln for the 52 articles he submitted during that time.

I can of course only speak from my own direct experience but it was always his copy – usually arriving ahead of everyone else's – that made me wake up to the fact that yet another newsletter had to be put together. As an inveterate last-minuter this copy tended to generate total panic about the paucity of material available and generally got me going. Without this kindly nudge I am fairly convinced that many a deadline would have been missed. In those days before Andrew Findlay took over the onerous job of assembling the newsletter for printing, I used a professional desktop publisher system to provide the matrix into which I slotted the edited copy as it arrived, and Lincoln's pieces gave me the necessary anchor and, sometimes, a theme around which further articles or the editorial could be developed. But this is a rather a mechanistic and insular viewpoint since the reality was that Lincoln opened my eyes to the fascinating complexity of life in our parish, which I felt need to be explored through the medium of your Society's newsletter and led to my widening its scope from being a rather dry piece of reportage about planning or development problems to a (hopefully) far more interesting and wider social context. From my standpoint this was a profound contribution he made to your Society and a legacy to be greatly valued.

I did of course know Lincoln personally as many of my readers did but perhaps I can at this point hand you over to Eva Lipman who, as his immediate neighbour, is supremely well qualified to remember Lincoln on a more personal level.

Linc and Helen were the most wonderful neighbours anyone could hope for, writes Eva Lipman. When Max and I moved next door to

them in 1968, his first act of kindness was to spontaneously trundle down our drive with his lawnmower because he thought we might be in need of it – which indeed we were. They held a party to introduce us as a young couple into the Taplow community. It was the start of a long and beautiful friendship between our families. They were always there for me and I knew that I could rely on their help in all situations.

From a very early age our children would happily trot up the drive to visit what to them were another set of grandparents. They were equally fascinated and horrified by the large number of African masks – some of which were quite gruesome – and excited by the cupboard nearby where toys waited to play with visiting youngsters. Linc was ever ready with a quip or a joke, or to talk about his collection of old maps – he was very knowledgeable about them – and he had an almost childish delight in fireworks. On Bonfire Night, he would always present us with a large box, including huge rockets, and would spend the afternoon pottering about happily setting up his Catherine Wheels. I have happy memories of him and Max supervising excited children and setting the fireworks off. In those days before Health & Safety, private fireworks parties were the norm and great fun. His love for them made the events even more special.

I acquired my taste for Lapsang Suchong tea because on my frequent visits to their house I was always warmly greeted and offered a cup together with Helen's excellent homemade shortbread. When we went to concerts and other events in the latter years, they were always in the back seat of the car. He nursed Helen devotedly during her last illness and protected her in a most touching way from understanding just how bad her dementia was becoming. After she passed away, he popped over to visit almost every day or I went up the drive to him. Standing at my kitchen window, I still see him in my mind's eye coming across the forecourt bringing raspberries or other offerings according to the season. And every one of the many plants he gave us for our garden is a fond reminder of the very kindly modest gentleman, in every sense of the word, whom I am privileged to have called my friend, and a great asset to our community.

Fred Russell & Eva Lipman

Lincoln's Corner

I met Lincoln Lee a few times but not often enough to think of him as a friend. However I feel I know a little of the gentleman through reading past Newsletters which shared in Lincoln's Corner his contributions treasured for his informative and gently whimsical brand of humour, for his love of the quirkiness of life and for his ability to write as though in intimate conversation. Newsletter 54 (Spring 1988) had one of my favourites...

A turn-of-the-century horse-drawn wagonette stops outside the Bear hostelry in Maidenhead. From the doorway, the publican calls out to the driver, "Where are you going?" "Ah!" says the driver (in a rich Berkshire accent, of course), "I be taking these 'ere women-folk to Taplow and Burnham". "Good," says the publican, "I'll get the wife and you can take and burn 'er too".

The Environment Agency's announcement of a competition to name the Flood Relief Channel prompted Linc to ponder in Newsletter 75 (Spring 2001), "How about METS (Maidenhead Expects Taplow to Suffer)

or LODHIC (Look Out Downstream, Here It Comes). Wonder what we will be landed with?" We know now what the answer was, but there will always be something that somebody doesn't know. Consequently Lincoln's Corner is to be revived with two objectives – to look back at excerpts of his wisdom and to provide a forum for questions and (hopefully) answers.

If you have a question about Taplow or Hitcham, please submit it to me at cazanig@aol.com or on 01628 661636. If I have the answer, I'll reveal it here. If I don't (as is most likely) I'll air the question in a future Newsletter.

But before I go, in true Lincoln style, let's end with a question. His sons Neil, Nick and Dougal have given your Society £1,250 to be spent as we think fit as a memorial to Helen & Lincoln. How should we best invest this bequest? If anyone has any ideas, please contact the Committee.

Nigel Smales

Fond Memories

Barbara Prior

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Barbara Prior. As Chairman of the Thames Valley Adventure Playground (TVAP) for over 17 years, Barbara's commitment to the Playground and its users was extraordinary. That TVAP is what it is today is due in no small measure to her enthusiasm and dedication, overseeing, as she did, its growth from its small but perfectly-formed beginnings into the professional organisation it is today. No-one could have devoted more of their time and energy and, on behalf of all those for whom the Playground has been and continues to be such a lifeline, we thank her for her inspiration and support.

Nicky Hutchinson, TVAP

Michael Bayley

Michael Bayley's local farming stock roots stretch back for hundreds of years with as many tales told down the generations of his family and their friends. He was an architect, co-founder of the Maidenhead Civic Society and a charming gentleman with a deep love of local history and of traditional building techniques and a desire to make Maidenhead a better place. He shared his knowledge generously in various publications including our Newsletter. With his passing just eight days short of his 91st birthday, his friendship will perhaps be missed most by Tony Hickman, whose career and interests run parallel, while latecomers such as I will miss his perceptive and gently provocative perspectives on our heritage.

Nigel Smales

The Liz We Knew and Loved (1929-2013)



Elsie Cook

The Doctors Anderson: Liz & Tim

Liz Anderson was born in Mandalay, Burma, into a deeply religious family. Her father, a medical missionary, translated the Bible into Burmese using the original sources. Liz kept her Christian faith all her life.

She was adventurous, creative, funny and generous to her many friends and family. Besides her work as a GP, she played the violin in the Slough Philharmonic Orchestra, went bird-watching and skiing from their chalet in Courcheval in the French Alps.

When she and her gynaecologist husband Tim retired, they took on two years (1991-1993) as Voluntary Service Overseas in Phnom Penh in Cambodia. This was a dangerous place just emerging from the horrors of Pol Pot, but they worked in the heat and the squalor treating young prostitutes. They found the work hard but very worthwhile and made many friends there. Liz has written very movingly about their experiences in Cambodia in her excellent book *Red Lights and Green Lizards*.

We enjoyed several unusual and entertaining holidays with Liz and Tim. One summer we visited them at Courcheval when Liz was studying the wild flowers.

We also went bird-watching, notably on the island of Skomer off Pembrokeshire. Few people are allowed to stay overnight but we shared the only room available – Brian hoping he would not snore. It was wonderful on Skomer, holding binoculars and sketchbooks we saw hundreds of seabirds crowding the cliffs and onshore, notably the comical puffins and the Manx shearwater who come in off the sea at dusk to feed their chicks, kept safe from predatory greater black-backed gulls down old rabbit holes. We got drenched on the short boat trip back to our cottage on the mainland, wrung our clothes out to dry and went for a walk – then the clothes line broke.

Another treat was to Tresco on the Isles of Scilly, a helicopter ride from Penzance; more marvellous birds and flowers again.

But we shall never forget the puffins pottering round our feet on Skomer and the fun we all had.

Liz, we shall miss you always, and are proud to have been your friends.

Sheila & Brian Horton

Planning

How it has evolved and why it matters

The Town Planning Act 1909 gave local councils, both urban and rural, the ability to begin producing local planning schemes for their areas and several hundred councils had done so by the 1920s. In 1919 a further Town Planning Act extended the scope of planning to include Regional Joint Planning Advisory Committees enabling Councils to join together to plan for whole regions of the Country and in 1925 a further Act contained a clause permitting landowners to designate areas of their land as 'Private Open Spaces' which would both preserve those areas from development and enable the landowners to reduce their death duties. This was seemingly a win-win for the owners of the great estates who had been squeezed by 'Lloyd George taxes' and when the economic viability of their estates was also in jeopardy for other reasons. Downton Abbey times.

Step onto the stage Waldorf Astor, owner of Cliveden, who had recognised the threat of creeping development along the Thames and grasped at the opportunity provided by the 1925 Act to prevent its most damaging effects. He was invited to chair a conference called by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) to discuss the formation of a society for the preservation of the beauty and amenities of the Thames between Windsor and Oxford to be held in June 1927 in Oxford.

Lord Astor wrote to his neighbours at Taplow Court, Hedsor and elsewhere to encourage their support, "We could confer no greater benefit on posterity than by guaranteeing that the banks in Bucks and in Berks of the reach which we overlook should be preserved from the gerry builder".

Later in his address to the conference he said, "For the sake of posterity and of our own generation a definite policy and plan of preservation should be prepared without delay".

Also addressing the conference was George Pepler the Chief Town Planning Inspector for England, then under the control of the Ministry of Health, who promoted the cause of planning and spoke in support of the conference ambitions but also counselled against 'nimby-ism' by saying, "I do not for a

moment suggest that you should strive for selfish seclusion. On the contrary, every facility must be provided for suitable industry and accommodation should be gladly afforded for those who are now able to move farther from our big cities. What is essential is that these things should happen, not casually and without care for others, but according to a plan based on policy which envisages what you consider to be a reasonable future for the places in your charge, and provide for the preservation of all that you value".

Following the Oxford Conference the Thames Valley Branch of the CPRE was set up under the chairmanship of Lord Astor. The Association represented all County Councils and Boroughs along the Thames from Oxford to Surrey and included Lord Desborough of Taplow Court and the Provost of Eton among many others as Vice-Chairmen.

One of the first activities was to commission a survey and report on the Thames Valley. Professor Patrick Abercrombie, then Professor of Civic Design at Liverpool University, honorary secretary and one of the founders of the CPRE, who was later to be one of the driving forces in planning for London and the post-war New Town movement, undertook with others to produce a Thames Valley Report which was published in 1929 under the title *The Thames Valley from Cricklade to Staines – A Survey of its existing state and some suggestions for its future preservation*. This report informed many subsequent town planning schemes.

Shortly afterwards, in 1935, green belt policy was pioneered in the United Kingdom initially by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee after pressure from the CPRE with Abercrombie and various other organisations.

After the Second World War, planning was seen to be critical to the re-building and re-shaping of the nation. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act determined that, for the first time, all development would require planning permission and that Local Authorities must produce development plans for their areas which could include Green Belt proposals. However, it wasn't until 1955 that Green Belts were commonly established and

until the early 1970s that most of the modern boundaries came into existence.

So it can be seen that Taplow was very much a part of the seed bed which gave rise to the planning regime today with the CPRE, George Pepler, Lord Astor and Patrick Abercrombie all in some way associated with Taplow and contributing to the process. Taplow also became part of the Green Belt whose main features are to protect the openness of the countryside and prevent towns merging into each other.

Why is this still important? Imagine for a moment that it had not happened as it did. Taplow would have been a very different place. Without planning there is absolutely no doubt that Taplow would have been subsumed by development stretching northwards to Beaconsfield and southwards to Windsor. Field by field and wood by wood the developers would have advanced into the countryside. Slough and Maidenhead would have merged into a single sprawling city.

So we come to today and the balance between preservation and the need for new development and what influence the Hitcham & Taplow Society has had over the years and can have today on the planning process. The local planning authority, South Bucks District Council, takes note of what we have to say and gives weight to our opinions, which is why the Society studies all planning applications and where it feels necessary comments on them in the light of the local knowledge and opinion.

In general over the years we have been able to influence planning decisions in many cases, although it is important to emphasise that planning is not all about winning. Often our intervention helps to provide outcomes which are a compromise that improves on the original. Two examples demonstrate how the Society has been able to contribute significantly to the modification of initial proposals for the better. As Alistair Forsyth explains elsewhere in this Newsletter, opposition from the Society and others result in the purely functional and unattractive flood relief scheme being softened by thoughtful design and extensive landscaping to create the Jubilee River, now a splendid recreational asset. The Society fought off a proposal for an isolated and car-dependent housing estate of 192 homes on the Cliveden hospital site to achieve a much more sustainable scheme of 135 dwellings for older people, a less damaging outcome in part due to

the Society identifying mistakes in traffic forecasts. A similar analysis revealed that plans for the Bishop Centre redevelopment would have a higher traffic impact than forecast. Sadly, despite the Bath Road already being "close to capacity", this impact was still apparently acceptable to Buckinghamshire County Council.

Outright successes are also important and the recent rejection of a totally unsuitable industrial-style chicken farm on the Bath Road is another example where the Society in conjunction with others has succeeded, as is the refusal of several applications for infill development in Ellington Gardens.

The Society's current planning concern is to try to achieve a reasonable plan for the redevelopment of Mill Lane including Skindles hotel in a way which will improve the locality while not over-developing it. We had thought that we had achieved that but are now concerned that the District Council has recently gone back on their long-standing indication that there would be around 100 dwellings on the site and is now saying that the number of dwellings is open-ended and we know that the interested developer wishes to build 300 or more. We will be looking very closely at any planning applications which are expected soon.

On a final note, it is important to recognise that whilst the Hitcham & Taplow Society forms only one part of the fabric of our community it is a strong strand without which local influence on planning would be weaker. The Society relies on its membership for its existence and with your help and support we have a genuine ability to continue to improve the quality of development in Taplow.

Euan Felton



Men at Work: Euan Felton & Karl Lawrence

Taplow & Hitcham Recreation Grounds Association

In 1956 a number of local residents jointly bought the area of land between Boundary Road, Institute Road, Station Road and Hitcham Road, and deliberately set it aside to provide a buffer against excessive urban development into Taplow and Hitcham and in particular to prevent it from being developed as a caravan site. They managed to find the funds to purchase the land over the course of a weekend by approaching friends and associates for small contributions.

The seven original subscribers included Ernest Perkins, after whom the Village Centre committee room was named, Eileen Matthews, later to become Mrs Eileen Law, the driving force behind the Taplow Horse Show, and Jack Martineau (of Old Lodge) who was elected Chairman of the new Taplow & Hitcham Recreation Grounds Association (THRGA). At the second meeting Jack Page (MP for Harrow West from 1960) was also appointed. Members of the public were invited to join THRGA either as life members, for a fee of not less than £50, followed by £5 annually and £100 to be left in their will as a deed of covenant, or as ordinary members for an initial subscription of one guinea. Both my parents, Leonard and Lorna Miall, were involved; Leonard as a subscriber and Lorna as the Association's secretary.

Over the next few years, part of the site was leased to Flexello Castings & Wheels Ltd – some still refer to it by that name despite it having long been leased to Phoenix & Claires Court Sports Association – and plans were developed to build Scout and Guide huts and to grass the remaining area. However all these ideas were put on hold in 1959 when, just as at Poplar Farm across Boundary Road, the gravel under the grounds was coveted for the construction of the M4 motorway. The County Council approached THRGA with an offer for its gravel to the tune of over £10,000 (about £200,000 at today's value). After much soul-searching, this work went ahead in 1960. I have strong memories of the trucks trundling through clay-coloured muddy puddles.

By 1961, the gravel extraction was complete and the Association considerably richer for it. Some of the interest-free loans were repaid, the Scout and Guide huts were built and the landscaping works completed. The founder members chose to forego the money due to them and instead left it in the



Nigel Smales

Association to be used "for the maintenance of a recreation ground for the use of the inhabitants of the ecclesiastical parishes of Taplow and Hitcham and, if appropriate, for charitable purposes within the said ecclesiastical parishes". As a result of their generosity, THRGA has been able to maintain the grounds ever since without recourse to further subscriptions or fundraising and, with good financial management, this situation should continue for the foreseeable future.

Today THRGA continues to be run by a Council of Management made up of local people. This meets twice a year under Alistair Forsyth's chairmanship, with Keith Paskins as treasurer. A smaller executive committee meets whenever necessary to deal with any urgent matters which arise between the main meetings.

The main activities relate to the management of THRGA's finances and the maintenance of the recreation ground, colloquially known to many as the Pit and to others as the Dip. It is used

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extensively by local people as a short cut from Lent Rise to Taplow railway station and by many dog-walkers. It banks are particularly popular for sledging after snowfalls. The biggest concern in recent years has been the illegal invasion of the grounds by travellers who cause damage by forceful entry and leave a lot of rubbish behind. Extreme measures were needed to keep the travellers out and, on one occasion, Helen Grellier, the former THRGA chairman, bravely parked her car across the entrance gate to prevent more 4x4s and caravans from entering the site, and to prevent those already there from leaving. The police eventually arrived and told her she could be spending a day in court if she didn't move as she could be accused of causing a riot. The situation was resolved the next day and the Police were able to evacuate the grounds much faster than on previous occasions. Since THRGA built the bund along the Boundary Road perimeter, the travellers have not returned.

On the charitable front, THRGA has been able to award grants or loans to a number of local charitable organisations plus St Nicolas' Primary School, St Nicolas' and St Mary's Churches, the Taplow playgroup, the WI and the Cricket Club. In 1987, for example, the Association paid for the electrification of the clock in St Nicolas' Church. It also regularly pays for the holly hedge around the churchyard to be cut.

Roger Andrews and Miv Wayland-Smith have joined THRGA's council to lead a new initiative to

restore the area of land known as Old Priory Garden. The land south of Wellbank had been ignored by South Bucks District Council for many years and was seriously overgrown. With support and seed investment from the Hitcham & Taplow Society and in conjunction with the Parish Council, community work has begun to turn it back into a public area for nature walks and a place to enjoy the environment.

The recreation grounds are as relevant today as they were when they were first established nearly 60 years ago. As the demand for housing in this area continues to grow, the pressure on using land for urban development is greater than ever but, at the same time, the need for open spaces for recreation is equally important. It is nice to know that one open space in our parish will remain indefinitely as an open space for the benefit of the community.

I am very grateful to Alistair Forsyth whose article in Newsletter 93 (Spring 2010) is the basis for this piece.

Ginny Felton

At the heart of Old Priory Garden, a small lake was once fed by a serpentine stream, both now dry and overgrown. The aim is to repair the water course and span it with a small timber footbridge designed by Martin Knight to pay homage to the timber 'Mathematical Bridge' over the River Cam in Cambridge, reputedly inspired by Isaac Newton.



Martin Knight

Tree Planting on Boundary Road

Hundreds of elm trees once graced Taplow and Hitcham. Sadly the appearance of the countryside was markedly altered in the 1970s when they were lost to Dutch Elm disease. The wide verge along Boundary Road looked particularly bereft. Consequently, in the autumn of 1983, it was here that the Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society began a four-year project to restore something of what was.

The first step was to get the written approval or at least confirmation of no objection from all the statutory bodies: the Highways Department, the gas, water and electricity boards, the Post Office (for its telephone lines) and perhaps some others that have been forgotten.

In due course, working parties were organised to prepare the planting sites by applying weed-killer and then, a few months later, to dig the holes in the bare earth. Instead of taking the easy option of making the holes just big enough for the roots, quite large ones were dug so the sub-soil could be broken up to give each tree the best chance of survival. The trees were planted with substantial stakes and protected with weld-mesh guards to a height of six feet.

Complete records of these activities are not easily to hand and may have been lost but, if memory serves, 42 trees were planted altogether – 11 in the first year, 13 in the next, eight in 1985 and 10 in the final year. They were of 18 species – 11 larches, four ashes, four birches, four walnuts, three oaks (an English one and two American), two each of aspen, chestnut, copper beech and maple plus one each of Atlantic cedar, black walnut, lime, liquidambar, plane, tulip tree, willow and keyaki (*Zelcova serrata*). Hands up who can say which is which.

Of course, the real labour starts after the tree is planted. For the first year, during the summer, most of the trees had a gallon or two of water applied each week while working parties cut back the grass and weeds which



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threatened to engulf the trees. And after a few years, the tree guards and most of the stakes were removed.

The planting of these trees received much enthusiastic and some adverse comment. Despite the fact that they were planted in small numbers year by year advancing down the road, one resident protested vociferously and a year or two later another dug up recently planted trees. These regrettable objections were a surprise since the new trees replaced those lost and were on the opposite side of the road.

The stretch of road south of the turning to the station presented greater difficulties because it is a very exposed site with nothing to break the prevailing wind coming across the sports ground. Bushes rather than trees were planted with some little success. Damage was also suffered from a grass fire, which started on the allotments.

A survey of the surviving trees and their condition would be in order, as would the removal of now redundant stakes. And it might be appropriate to remove some trees to allow the remainder to fully develop.

Robert Hanbury

(Bob modestly omits to mention how hard he worked on this project – not least by giving the young trees their much needed drink each week. – Ed)

Panorama by Andrew Findlay



Origins of the Jubilee River

In 1986 the National Rivers Authority (NRA) published a document proposing various alternative plans for a Maidenhead Flood Relief Scheme. Their argument was that Maidenhead was vulnerable to a 60-year flood event, which would have devastating consequences for the town and it was the NRA's duty to provide flood protection in such circumstances. The last major flood was in 1947, so another one was likely sooner rather than later. The NRA came up with no less than ten possible schemes, and eventually chose one that involved creating an entirely new channel through Taplow countryside, mainly because it would have the least impact on existing housing. Naturally Taplow residents felt aggrieved that we should bear the brunt of a project to save Maidenhead from flooding, where regulations against building in a known flood plain had been ignored, whilst they had been fully observed by South Bucks on our side of the river.

Taplow Parish Council (TPC) therefore invited the NRA to a public meeting in a packed village hall, where much concern was expressed about the environmental impact such a scheme might have on Taplow, both during and after construction. As TPC Chairman, I put together a Taplow Action Group of local residents which included Philip Cooley, a retired senior project manager for Thames Water, Derek Walker who had been involved in his career in several large infrastructure projects and Sir John Page who, whilst an MP, had been chairman of one of the river authorities.

Our opposition focused on three main objections: the scheme would be an environmental disaster both during and after its five-year construction, leaving Taplow with an ugly scar; it was not economically justified (the estimate then was £45 million) and a far smaller scheme would be less damaging but equally effective.

Maidenhead suffered a flood in 1990 which conveniently gave us some extra ammunition. The NRA claimed that 123 properties were "damaged", but we found that only 35 suffered damage over £1,000 and that the two worst cases involved indoor swimming pools. We argued that these people would be well insured and that surely public money should not be spent to protect rich people's extravagances.

Although we were supported by South Bucks District Council, Bucks County Council

was in favour of the scheme. I therefore enlisted the help of our Member of Parliament, Tim Smith, who was extremely helpful and, after much effort, secured an emergency debate in the House of Commons that made the national news. It took place at 11pm in the House of Commons attended by about six MPs and about the same number of members of the public, all from Taplow. However, it did have a successful outcome because the Secretary of State called the project in for a public enquiry.

The enquiry was held in Reading about a year later and lasted for a month. We had to raise money to get the representation of a barrister. In the end we raised £5,000, which entitled us to one day of the hearing to present our case!

At this point, it was clear to us that the scheme was going to go ahead, so we decided to focus our resources on damage limitation and in particular to minimise the environmental impact of the scheme on our fragile landscape. The planning authorities were receptive to our arguments and it was agreed to introduce a number of measures to make the channel less like a concrete culvert and more like a natural river with a flourishing wild life habitat. Thus islands were placed in the channel and a massive planting operation was undertaken.

Although the construction work was highly disruptive, the end result looks very natural and has attracted an interesting variety of plants and wild life. I still doubt whether a scheme of this proportion was justified (the final costs were well over £100 million) but at least the Jubilee River is not the eyesore we once feared.

Alistair Forsyth
Chairman Taplow Parish Council 1986-1994



Nigel Smales

The Five Great Houses

Well, the term 'great' might be a little over the top considering the number of truly great houses in the parish, such as Cliveden, Nashdom, Taplow Court and the like, but between 1890 and 1910 a number of smaller country mansions sprang up in the south of Taplow as the wealthy middle classes migrated from all over England to the countryside to enjoy their wealth; and Taplow, with its proximity to the river, Skindles, Cliveden and the railway link, appeared to be an ideal place to be.

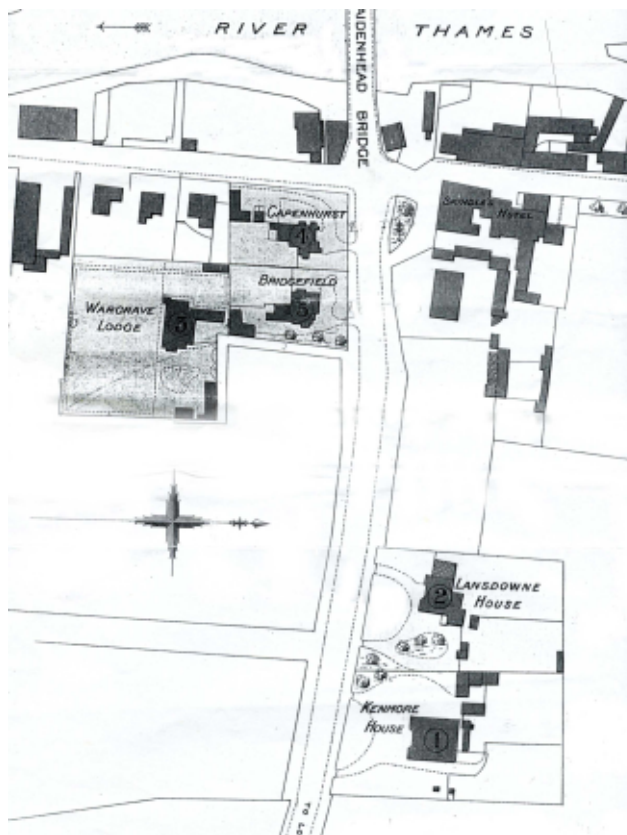
However, so far as the Taplow Riverside Settlement is concerned there were five significant mansions built, all within a few hundred yards of each other and built within a narrow time window at the turn of the century. These houses known as Wargrave Lodge (now The Hermitage), Bridgefield, Capenhurst, Lansdowne House and Kenmore House (later Old Court Hotel) were strung along the Bath Road in close proximity to Maidenhead Bridge to enjoy the benefit of the river environs. All five were auctioned in 1904 by a London firm. The Grenfell family owned

all five houses at that time and it appears had them built. The text of the sale notice read, "The houses were all specially designed by an Eminent Architect and were built for the vendor some years ago in an unusually substantial manner without regard to cost".



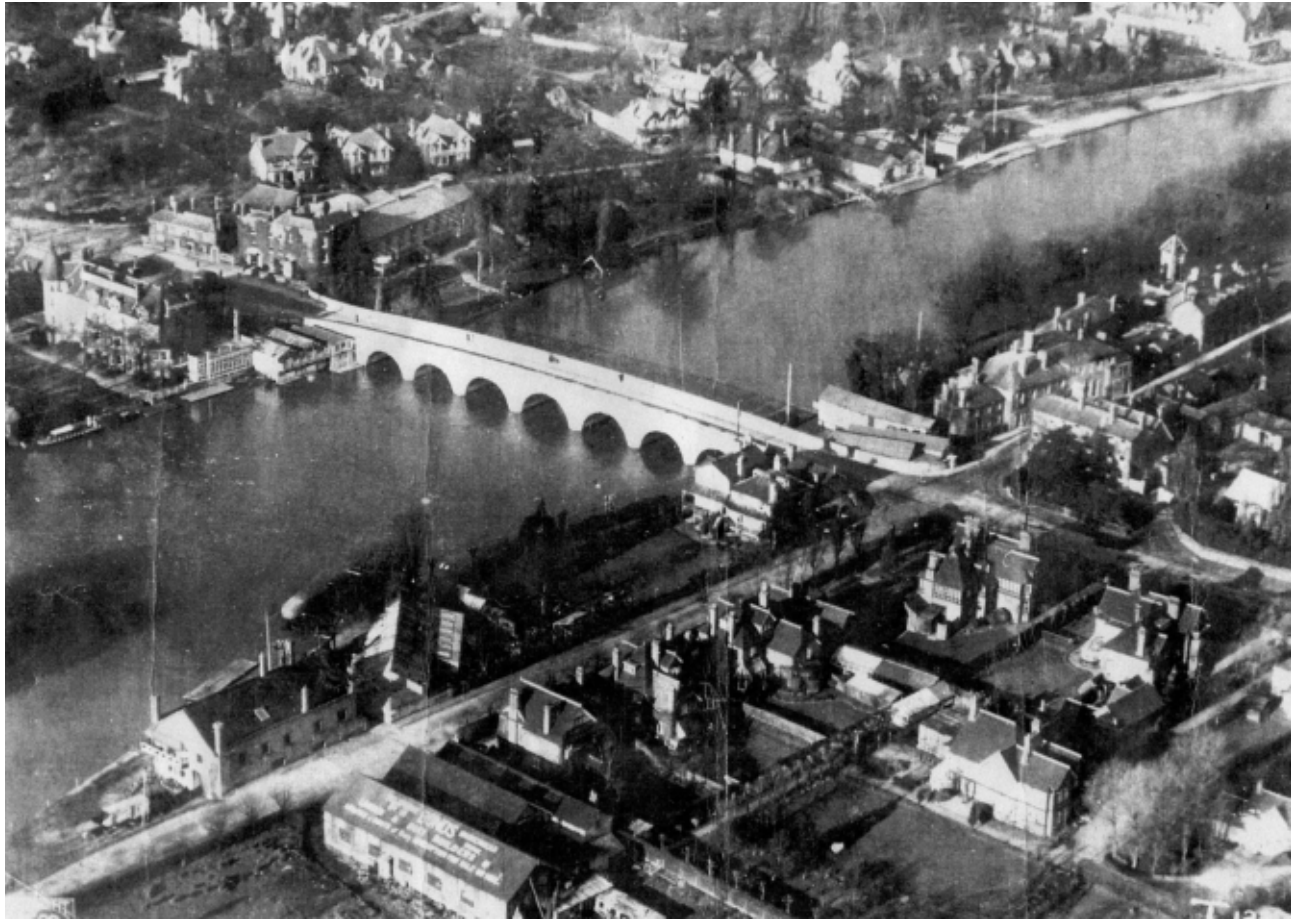
Fred Russell

Old Court Hotel in 2006
originally Kenmore House
now demolished



1925 Map

On a 1925 map all five houses were still in place and an undated aerial photo – probably taken in the 1920s – clearly shows that Capenhurst and Bridgefield were still in existence, as were both sections of Bond's boatyard on either side of River Road. The provenance of the photo would be interesting to research since the quality of the original was quite exceptional for the time since the aircraft of those far off days tended to vibrate a lot and made aerial photography a bit dodgy. I suspect this photo was taken from a balloon. However Capenhurst and Bridgefield together with the easternmost of Bond's boathouses were demolished to make way for the two blocks of flats – River Court and Bridge Court – that we have today. Only two of the five houses now survive since Kenmore House was demolished in 2006 when the developer who then owned the building, in an act of sheer vandalism, decided to demolish the house rather than risk the District Council commandeering it to house needy people. The pile of rubble is still there seven years later, as anyone driving along the Bath Road can testify.



Lansdowne House was beautifully converted into apartments and is a testimony to what can be achieved with these old mansions given the will.



Andrew Findlay

Lansdowne Court

This leaves The Hermitage, nestled in among the houses along the Bath, Ellington and River Roads, which has been under terminal threat of demolition for at least thirty years and survived about 25 or so applications to replace it with a variety of flats or houses. However, the new government planning guidelines published recently suggest there are more battles to come to preserve this beautiful example of Victorian architecture.



Andrew Findlay

The Hermitage

There is clear evidence that The Hermitage, and probably Capenhurst and Bridgeview, were planned together with the Victorian houses in River Road and Ellington Road to form a coherent late Victorian middle-class riverside settlement. The central positioning of The Hermitage makes it a key element in the Riverside environment, a point explicitly made in the original Conservation Area Document, which was the enabling document, which led to the creation of the Taplow Riverside Conservation Area.

*Fred Russell
(With much valued input from Joy Marshall)*

Village Green Party

Some 25 years after the foundation of The Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society in 1959, the question was posed as to what if anything the Society did that was obvious to the individuals in the area apart from monitoring preservation and related planning and building works.

Initial thoughts led to the idea of holding a barn dance on the Village Green. An enormous amount of research and planning was needed to get the whole idea off the ground. Without the help, advice and support of Cedar Chase which already ran its own bonfire night and summer barbecue parties, the Society could never have got under way as quickly and as successfully as it did. The first barn dance was held in 1986 and has subsequently evolved into The Village Green Party (VGP), an essential element in the village diary for 28 years thanks to a whole army of willing volunteers prepared to contribute the necessary support and commitment. Naturally, these committed folk change over the years, so it is impossible to thank everyone individually for their vital contribution. However the names of Bob Hanbury and Dick Nutt from the early years through Eva Lipman to Euan Felton today cannot be overlooked.

In the early days, annual membership subscriptions covered the Society's day-to-day expenses. It was only when an expensive restoration project came to light that we had to address the question of funding such projects for which the Society felt a sense of responsibility.

After much consideration, two principles were agreed. Firstly, the VGP itself should be about having fun not raising funds. Ticket prices are set with the aim of breaking even, a goal achieved this year when the dry weather attracted nearly 400 people enabling us to cover by a small margin total costs of £1,123, just over half of which was spent on food and the rest on the band and other expenses.

Secondly, raffles would be held to aid specific projects. In this we were successful, leading us to consider whether in the future local charities could be offered the opportunity to organise and run a



Photos by Nigel Smales

Tom Brown, the caller

raffle at the VGP. Such an arrangement would enable the charity to raise money for their particular cause with minimum workload while protecting the Society from having to find further volunteers for the raffle on the same day. This idea has been a great success and, apart from when the Society held raffles in aid of the restoration of the Celtic Cross and an ancient wall at Burnham Abbey, every VGP raffle has been run by a nominated charity; this year, the restoration of Old Priory Garden benefited to the tune of £595.

Another vital contribution to our success has been Mike Sanderson's folk band which participated in the very first VGP. The band and its caller Tom Brown have continued to be with us every year since then with one exception when Tom was not available. Oh boy was his magic missed, particularly by the children.

On the evidence built up over the years, the Hitcham & Taplow Society has found a winning formula and may it continue to produce success in the years ahead.

Barrie Peroni



Easter Egg Hunt

Back in 2010, many ideas were discussed about how to mark the Society's 50th Anniversary and how to expand its social calendar. Easter was the obvious free date, although many families go away then and there are various competing events offering chocolate and mayhem. Still, nothing ventured, nothing gained...



Nigel Smales

We were lucky enough at the time to have a new manager at the Taplow House Hotel, Sam Goss, who was keen to support us. A plan was hatched to host a family Easter Egg Hunt and Lunch at the hotel on Easter Monday. We took the plunge and hand delivered flyers around the village in the hope that more than just the organisers' children would turn up.

We decided that offering chocolate eggs to hunt for would be too stressful and involve too much carnage so we decided to buy plastic eggs with prizes given (to all) once sufficient eggs had been collected. We also wanted to have an Easter bunny so a costume was hired which was sufficiently large to wrap up Nigel Smales for the occasion. Since it was an anniversary event, helium balloons were bought and Miv Wayland-Smith's car nearly floated away bringing them back from the Bishop Centre.

Ticket prices at £3.50 per adult (children free) were intended to cover the annual running costs so we had to raise money to meet the set up costs and anniversary specials such as the plastic eggs, bunny costume and balloons. Gilly Blundell organised a sponsored spinning class at LaRoche, well attended by Taplow's elite (and not-so-elite) athletes. We also held a raffle at the lunch sponsored by local businesses including Taplow Board & Ski, Roots Garden Centre and Waitrose. To ensure



plenty of adult attention, the hotel donated a number of champagne bottles for an adult hunt. And so the stage was set.

Ticket sales dribbled in (as did the wet weather) but a last minute rush meant that we had nearly 40 children hunting and 100 guests

lunching. The children, some of whom were surprisingly frightened of the bunny, found all the eggs in no time at all (note for next year – hide them better) and the adults predictably showed no mercy to one another in the champagne hunt. The lunch was a great family occasion with a full range of ages (under-10 to over-90), a fabulous cake by Gilly Blundell, a speech from President Lipman and calls for a repeat performance in 2011.

The Easter Egg Hunt has now taken place on four consecutive years, limited to about 40 children each time. This year we changed the venue and dropped the hotel lunch to make it a more casual, less expensive affair. Perhaps in future years there will be new ideas and new venues, including at Old Priory Garden when it is cleared.

The event has quickly become established in the calendar, not to the same scale as the Village Green Party, but a lovely family event nonetheless. We hope it will continue. Many thanks to all who have supported it over its first four years – those who deserve a special mention outside the Committee are Gilly, Laura and William Blundell, Euan Felton's marquee plus Charlie & Toby Grieves and Sheila & Barrie Peroni for hosting the 2013 event.

Neil Blundell



Andrew Clarke

Mill Lane – The Die is Cast

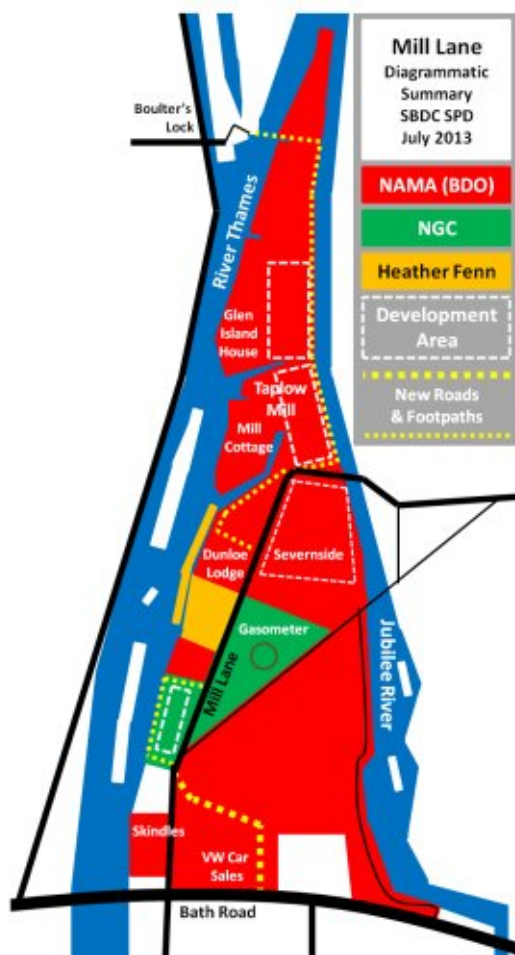
The 2011 census counted 1669 people living in 791 households in Taplow. As a result of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) adopted by the Cabinet of South Bucks District Council (SBDC) in July, these figures are set to increase dramatically, perhaps by 40% to around 2,400 people in 1,150 households, possibly within five years.

The Mill Lane saga is a long one fraught with a spectacular array of difficulties. The Green Belt triangle bounded by the Thames, the Jubilee River and the Bath Road (A4) is industrially contaminated here, environmentally sensitive there and subject to degrees of flood risk almost everywhere. It has different owners with very different objectives, iconic but increasingly dilapidated buildings and access from the A4 which Transport for Bucks (TfB) reckons is already "close to capacity".



Nigel Smates

Threatened Trees



The blight began back in the 1980s when mill owner St Regis Paper Co Ltd acquired land for Severnside, its waste paper subsidiary, and to protect its access along Mill Lane. Now the

mill is no more, the iconic Skindles is crumbling and it will cost £1m to clean up after the redundant gasometer. The triangle has been coveted for retail, hotel and residential schemes galore. All came to nought for having no financial viability. When the most recent owner went into liquidation, the land passed as a 'toxic debt' to the Irish government's National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). Its administrator BDO was tasked to find a buyer. Barratt Homes waits in the wings with dreams of building a "new community of over 300 homes" despite SBDC having an economic report indicating that 100 households will offer reasonable profit. Meanwhile Heather Fenn, owner of Taplow Investments Ltd, tries to protect her home and her business interests as National Grid Company (NGC) sits on the fence despite its two former gasworks being critical to the whole.

Whilst always recognising the site's critical need for rescue, members of the Society objected to each proposal and contributed in large measure to their rejection for being of poor design, often naive, piecemeal, insensitive and over-ambitious. The Society was pleased that SBDC decided in its Core Policy that a cohesive development brief for Mill Lane should be developed in public consultation. The resulting SPD sets in concrete what must be done and what may be done by a developer.

It isn't all to everyone's taste but there are some tasty bits. The headlines are:

- A permitted 'footprint' of up to 10,000 sq m – potentially 350 dwellings depending on size – in four development areas on the mill's sites and the old riverside gasworks. This is despite SBDC being well ahead of schedule in achieving its housing targets and therefore unlikely to have to rely on Mill Lane to meet them.
- Mill Lane will be closed to traffic at the Jubilee River and its A4 junction will be moved eastwards despite the consequent loss of a dozen 'protected' trees, the disconnection of the development from Taplow Village and the increase in 'rat run' traffic on Berry Hill.
- Glen Island House, Mill Cottage, Dunloe Lodge and Skindles will be refurbished.
- Protection of the special biodiversity of the river and its banks, and provision of new footpaths and a new footbridge over the Thames to Boulter's Island.

After an initial refusal, SBDC Principal Policy Planner Jane Griffin has accepted the Parish Council's invitation to present the SPD at Taplow Village Centre on 21st November.

Taplovians should be ready to peruse and comment on the planning application which SBDC anticipates will be submitted around the end of this year. Examine it carefully. Consider its potential impact to the Taplow community, on the congested A4, on schools, health services and environmental infrastructure too as Thames Water worries about supplying enough fresh water and disposing of the extra waste. Let's hold SBDC to make sure a developer doesn't quietly drop 'tasty bits' like the footbridge. And why not also press for some recognition of 1,000 years of history in the form of a small 'mock mill' with a waterwheel (to generate 'green' electricity) with a room for a Taplow Heritage Centre?

Karl Lawrence and Nigel Smales



The Celtic Cross



Fred Russell

Before restoration, 1997



Andrew Findlay

... and after, 2009

The beautiful old weather-worn Celtic cross in the Old Churchyard near Chief Taepa's burial mound was in grave danger of crashing to the ground and breaking. Its carved stone plinth was in a dreadful state. Your Society decided that it would restore it. I was chairman at the time and took the task on. Little did I know how much work it would be or how much paperwork it would entail.

The Old Churchyard is an English Heritage site of national importance because it has been in continuous use from Saxon times to the 19th century. It belongs to the Oxford Diocese and had been designated by them as a wildlife site. They had no money to undertake the restoration work. Before anything could be done I had to get permission from English Heritage and a firman from the church authorities in Oxford. English Heritage laid down certain conditions: nothing could be done without an archaeologist on site and the work had to be undertaken by approved craftsmen. We are very fortunate to have Cliveden Conservation Workshops on our doorstep and as you can all see they have done a wonderful job.

Having secured the permissions we set about raising the £5,000 needed. This we did from various sources including the raffle at the Village Green Party that year, the Taplow & Hitcham

Recreation Grounds Association and South Bucks District Council. We got round having to find the money for VAT which would have been payable on the restoration by asking the Parish Council to commission the work, which they very kindly did.

The carving round the plinth had eroded so much it was no longer legible and so Fred Russell and I went to the county records office in Aylesbury where we found a copy of Georgiana Grenfell's diary in which she had noted that the inscription read "In memory of all those who rest in this churchyard". We thought this highly appropriate and that is what we commissioned to be carved on the new plinth. We believe the reason that the cross, which is a copy of one in Boyne Hill, is in the Celtic form is because of the Scottish connection of the Earl of Orkney. He built the present Taplow Court and designed the entrance hall with the same dimensions as Kirkwall Cathedral in Orkney which he found pleasing.

It gives me great pleasure whenever I visit our beautiful old churchyard to see the lovely old romantic worn cross in its proper place and know that it will still be standing proudly and safely for many years to come.

Eva Lipman

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Unless otherwise stated, the views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Society or its Committee.

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