

# Hitcham and Taplow Society

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[www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://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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Cover picture: Taplow Village Panorama by Andrew Findlay

## Editorial

It's been a very quiet six months with no major developments either to support or to fight, as the case may be. Loads of applications for conservatories, extensions and tree surgery and some were worth looking at in detail – like the Feathers external refurbishment and that awful new sign. There is cause for concern in the Riviera Hotel's application for a change to their Entertainment Licence since this could add significantly to the general noise and nuisance levels for the residents of the north end of River Road. One obvious reason for the quiet must be the recession having seriously affected the building industry so causing them to draw in their horns, or even go under. So it's been a period of comparative relaxation and this is reflected in the range of topics in the current newsletter. Members of your committee attended a planning session of the Chiltern Society at which a local government planning expert outlined what has been happening in the planning field since the election: the first steps have been taken to dismantle the top-heavy and over-complicated planning system. The massive South-East Plan has been revoked and some authorities are abandoning their still

uncompleted Core Strategy. South Bucks are continuing with the final stages of our Core Strategy and your Society has been invited to make representations to a formal meeting of the District Council to examine it. Your Chairman, Euan Felton, will be representing us with as many as possible of your committee supporting him on the 17th November. One of the key issues within the Core Strategy affecting us is SBDC's encouraging stance on the Mill Lane site. There are rumours that the site has been purchased by a big national builder, so we can expect the next six months to see new activity there. Interesting times will lie ahead so we need always to be poised to respond.

Euan has been unstinting in giving his time and invaluable experience as your chairman for the past four years and cannot be reasonably expected to continue in that role, particularly since the rules technically only allow a chairman to serve three years, so he will be stepping down at the AGM with our heartfelt thanks.

*Fred Russell  
Not-the-Editor (Mark II)*

# Repairs to Maidenhead Bridge

For no little time many of us had been concerned at the state of disrepair of our bridge and often enough wondered whether the obvious damage was the result of allowing 44-ton lorries to use a bridge initially designed for carrying nothing much heavier than a stagecoach. The decision was eventually taken to repair the bridge. The reasons given were that the stonework was in poor condition due to weathering. A load assessment was also carried out to determine whether the bridge could take heavy vehicles and it showed that it fell below the 40-ton strength in certain areas. This assessment makes one wonder whether the bridge should have a weight limit imposed. The engineers of a long-gone era built well it seems. In addition it was decided that the deck of the bridge required waterproofing to stop water seeping through the surface of the deck into the stonework of the arches causing future weathering problems. The intent was to resurface the deck and repave the two footways, using York stone paving.

The cost was estimated to be just over £1 million. The bridge is on the boundary

between the districts of the Royal Borough and Bucks County Council. Negotiations took place between the two parties and an agreement made that Bucks would fund 50% of the total costs and that Bucks' contractors Ringway/Jacobs would carry out the resurfacing works, and RBWM's contractors BBIS would carry out the stonework. The Environment Agency gave permission for RBWM to work on the river (see photo) but, apparently, work on navigation channels could only be carried out between September and April and also for health and safety reasons the river flow had to be less than 100 cubic metres a second. Work was started in September 2009 but due to severe weather conditions it was stopped in December as it became too dangerous and then resumed in March 2010. The entire scheme was completed at the end of June this year and came in under budget. So our lovely old bridge is safe and looking good again.

*Fred Russell and Eva Lipman*



# Poppies and Remembrance

As once again we near Remembrance Sunday and the annual Poppy Appeal, I have been asked to write a few words about these two very closely related events and the work of the Royal British Legion, a branch of which was formed in Taplow and Hitcham as long ago as 1923 with Lord Astor as its first President. Since then, the branch has played a leading role in the observation of an annual Service of Remembrance at the two war memorials, and organising the collection for the Poppy Appeal in both parishes to help any ex-service men and women who are in need.

Originally the national act of remembrance was observed on the eleventh day of November, which was the anniversary of the armistice that brought about the end of the First World War. It was then known as Armistice Day when all activity paused at the eleventh hour and we all observed a two minutes' silence in honour of the dead of that war. After the Second World War, the current practice was introduced of honouring the dead of both wars at the eleventh hour of the Sunday nearest to the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

On retirement from the Royal Navy in 1964 I came to live in Taplow and before long became a member of the Legion. In those days our membership was in the order of 45, about half being veterans of the First World War and half from the Second with one or two from both. Our service was held at three o'clock in the afternoon and alternated annually between St Nicolas' Church in Taplow and St Mary's in Hitcham. Later it became expedient to combine the service with the morning service in church and at the same time invite the attendance of the local scouts and guides, which is the current practice and has served the parish well. Sadly however it meant that the total attendance far exceeded the capacity of St Mary's and hence the sole use of St Nicolas'.

Past presidents of the branch include Victor Williams, Major Rex Law, Mrs Eileen Law, Louis

Freedman and Sir John Page. Past chairmen include Colonel Bernard Morton (1958–1967), myself (1968–1984 and 2000–2009), Major 'Budge' Francis (1985–1990) and Commander Lee Grey (1992–1999) and the current chairman is Major Paul-Anthony Viollet.

As honouring the dead of war is a keenly felt need throughout the nation so there is equally a keen need to provide for the the welfare of the living casualties of war, and in 1920 an initiative was taken by Field Marshall Earl Haig to inaugurate an annual and national appeal for funds to relieve the suffering of thousands of severely disabled ex-servicemen for whom life had little to offer. The emblem of this appeal was the red Flanders' poppy that we all know so well. In Hitcham and Taplow, since the foundation of the branch in 1923, there has been a dedicated team of supporters who make a house-to-house collection in aid of the Poppy Appeal which produces a well worth-while contribution to the national fund. Past organisers have been Mrs Anne Paines (1964–1972), Major Budge Francis (1973–1990), Commander Lee Grey (1992–1996) and most recently Mrs Pamela Bentley (1997–2009), whose final year produced a total of £4,462, which was a record for the branch. The current organiser is Mrs Gillian Holloway.

In these days, our television screens bring us into almost daily contact with the young servicemen and women who are engaged on our behalf on active service in Afghanistan, many of whom have, or will, become horrific casualties of war. We can weep for them, or we can make an extra effort to provide the resources they need to overcome suffering and distress in order to lead useful and rewarding lives. The Royal British Legion is the principal national charity dedicated to this never-ending task. When the Poppy Collector calls this year, please give as generously as you can and wear your poppy with pride.

*Lt Cdr George Milne RN (ret'd)*

# Greta Saunders at 100

Greta Saunders of Huntercombe Lane South, Taplow, celebrated her 100th birthday on 1st September 2010 at a tea party in the garden with many friends and family. She was proud to receive a card signed by Queen Elizabeth and overwhelmed by all the flowers, cards and gifts that she was given. She cut the birthday cake made by a friend, Mrs Judy Norbron, and everyone toasted her good health with champagne.

Greta was born in a small village in Essex, the youngest of four children, and had a free and happy childhood where life centred around the parish church and school.

Her family were regular churchgoers and she eventually married Bernard, a choir member, whose father was choirmaster and mother the organist. Greta worked as a milliner in London until her marriage in 1938.

Their only child, Christine, was born during the war and the family spent some years in South Wales where Bernard was stationed. Back in Essex after the war the family attended their local church every Sunday where Bernard was choirmaster. Greta joined the Townswomen's Guild and was always baking, dressmaking, jam-making, etc. A thrifty, practical person! In the 1950s the family went to the West End to see all the musicals – a love of which she has to this day.

They moved to Buckinghamshire in 1971 to be nearer family and became members of High Wycombe Parish Church where they enjoyed the exceptional choirs. When they moved to a flat in their daughter's house in 1983 they soon joined St Nicolas' church which their daughter attended, for the same reason. Unfortunately, Bernard died the following year but Greta was comforted by having her family so close and



soon made many friends in the Mother's Union and Women's Institute. Always clever with her hands she was constantly knitting little vests and shawls for Mother Theresa's Homes and continued this work until arthritis made it impossible.

Her great love of choral music was enriched by a friend from Burnham, the late Len Burgess, who asked her to the concerts given by the London Welsh Male Voice Choir, of which he was a member. She enjoyed these immensely and made some more Welsh friends in the process.

When asked the secret of her longevity she said that she has always enjoyed the simple things in life – never expecting too much and being grateful for life's blessings. In the last few years she attributes her sharp mind to her two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren who would notice if she appeared 'ancient'.

A remarkable 100-year-old lady!

*Christine Griffin*

# Adventure Playground New Annexe

Ever since the Thames Valley Adventure Playground opened its doors in the summer of 1982, we have been located on the Bath Road in Taplow, alongside Taplow Lake, in a totally secure 2-acre site. We offer an exceptional range of adventurous, therapeutic and educational play activities, providing fun and freedom in a safe, caring and stimulating environment for children and adults with all types of disability, however mild or profound, together with as much respite care as possible.



Indoor facilities boast a large interactive Soft Play area with ball pool and intelligent lighting. Multi-sensory and music rooms offer the latest technology for both stimulation and relaxation. Inside the main playroom you can enjoy arts and crafts, touch-screen computers, a games room, quiet area and lots of toys and games. All areas, including the toilets and changing room, are accessible by wheelchair and hoist. Outside, there are specially-adapted bikes, trikes and battery cars as well as a wheelchair-accessible roundabout and swing. The elevated walkways allow our users to find out what it is like to get high among the trees, even if they can't actually climb one, and a specially-designed bucket seat with harness allows them to experience the thrill of whizzing down a zipwire.

The Playground experience is totally unique and offers something for everyone. Users travel from a wide area around the Thames Valley and beyond, stretching from Essex and Hampshire, up into Hertfordshire and down to the South Coast. They visit with their families, and as individuals for respite care, as well as as

with schools, playschemes, day centres and residential units.

An OFSTED-registered day-care facility, the Playground is run by a voluntary Board of Trustees, with on-site care provided by four full-time, three part-time and 10 sessional staff, supported by a loyal band of volunteers. Open Tuesday to Saturday all the year round, Fridays are reserved for adults with special needs.

In May 2009 Rolf Harris opened our new annexe, which we had been able to build having received the most generous legacy from the Gold family, who lived in Hambleden.

On entering the annexe for the first time one appreciates the 'wow' factor it offers. Built out over the lake, it benefits from the amazing view to the south, across the water to farmland, and one can see the birds, the fishing and the water-skiing which also take place on the lake. In one corner of the annexe, right out over the water, any action in the lake itself is visible through the glass floor.

The annexe has given much-needed additional indoor space, as the demand for our services continue to rise. Whereas in 1982 we had six users each day, today that figure averages some 55 per day, with over 13,500 visits now made each year by our users with a special need, and a further 10,500 visits by parents and carers.

Although the Playground fulfils the founders' original dream, fund-raising is a never-ending battle, and the current financial problems do not help. All our money comes from voluntary donations, apart from possible grants for which we have to apply every year but with no guarantee that we will be successful. None of what we do qualifies us for any government funding.

If you can help in any way, please contact our Donations' Manager, Nicky Hutchinson, on 01628 628051. If you are interested in finding out more about on what goes on here, our website, [www.tvap.co.uk](http://www.tvap.co.uk), is a good source of information, but we would much rather welcome you to the Playground and have the opportunity to show you what we are doing in person.

*Barrie Peroni*  
*Chairman, Thames Valley Adventure Playground*

# A Busy Year for Taplow Court

The members of Soka Gakkai International continue to use the beautiful Taplow Court to undertake a wide range of activities in support of peace, culture and education. This year, these included the mounting of an exhibition entitled, 'From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit'. The exhibition has been on view during the Taplow Court Open Days which fell on the first Sundays of June, July and August from 2 to 5.30pm, and on the National Heritage Day, 13 September.

Over the past few years SGI-UK has mounted two live arts events each summer – these are held in May and August – open to the general public. This year the programme was called 'Guitars Galore' and revolved around music for the guitar, written by such greats as Joaquin Rodrigo, Villa Lobos, Django Reinhardt, Lennon and McCartney, and James Taylor, but also included voice, violin, and saxophone. All proceeds after costs were donated to UNICEF.

A gathering of practitioners from different Buddhist traditions took place at Taplow Court on July 10, for a seminar organised by the Institute of Oriental Philosophy entitled 'Ordinary or Extraordinary Living?' The next seminar in this Creative Awakening series will be held on 13 November 2010, when Dr Susan Blackmore, a psychologist who practises Zen Buddhism, will be talking about concepts of identity and neuroscience.

The first in a series of three annual academic symposia, discussing issues relating to peace was held in January, based on the theme 'Toward Humanitarian Competition – a New Current in History', with a second event being held later this year has the theme 'Toward a New Era of Value Creation'.

200 young people came to Taplow Court on March 18 to participate in an Inter-Change Conference. Organised by Creative Junction together with a group of Slough schools, who have previously held their Model UN General Assembly events at Taplow Court, this event brought together delegates from very diverse social and geographical backgrounds. Tackling complex global issues, they inspired and empowered each other to be young agents of change within their own communities.

On May 24, Taplow Court hosted a visit by five tsunami orphans and three helpers from Thailand. They came from their home in Thailand which they share with 67 other children orphaned by the tsunami to thank various organisations in the UK who support them. SGI-UK was asked to help by one of our friends from the Anglo Thai Friendship Society to provide a day out for the children. They looked around the house and heard about the King of Thailand staying there in 1891. They spent time in the gardens taking lots of photos and the children performed a beautiful Thai dance for everyone.

SGI-UK offers Taplow Court in support of a wide variety of local charities' events. This year they have included Thames Valley Hospice Care, who held their annual fund raising open day and 'bring and buy sale' on 5th June and were able to raise £700 for the Hospice; the Maidenhead fundraising group for the Thames Valley Hospice held a live arts concert on 30 April and were able to raise over £4,000 which will go towards palliative care for patients with cancer and other life limiting illnesses, their family and carers; and Thames Valley Adventure Playground held a concert with Alex Prior and the Young Virtuosos, raising in the region of £6,000.

And finally, there have also been a number of educational visits, looking at either the history of the site, or to support comparative religious education.

*Andy McKenzie*

## HTS Diary 2011

**25th April Easter Egg Hunt**  
**18th June Village Green Party**

# Mill Lane – Time Now

*This is a summary of where we are with the Mill Lane Project – the 'project' being the Society's attempt to ensure that the eventual development of the Mill Lane site is the most favourable deal we can bring about, within the constraints of the (as yet unapproved) Core Strategy, the effective SBDC design brief for the site implicit in their planning refusal criteria and the general policy of your Society regarding that site. The following material is the outcome of a detailed discussion with Heather Lindsey who, by virtue of the pole position she occupies in that site, is keeping herself fully briefed on the situation. Ed.*

As you will know, we had a pretty full campaign on our hands between 2007 and 2009. In May 2007, the site owners, Watchword, tried to sell off the site and the period culminated with the withdrawal at the 11th hour of the planning proposal submitted by Watchword in 2009, following the huge number of objections which were received by SBDC's planners. Not many months later, in June, the company was put into administration by the Irish Nationwide Building Society (INBS), who had lent them the £30 M to purchase the property. The debt against the company will by now have risen by now to something like £50 M, due to other unpaid debts to contractors, surveyors and planning consultants.

INBS transferred the loan to the NAMA, the Irish National Assets Management Agency. NAMA was set up by the Irish government in late 2009 as a direct response to the general financial crisis and the deflation of the Irish property bubble. NAMA functions as a 'bad bank' whose role is to bail out banks in financial trouble by taking over 'toxic' loans that are almost certain to be written off as losses. For taking on this risk NAMA discounted the transfer of the Towntalk money by a socking great 73% (whereas the average discount is 30%).

Had Watchword gone into liquidation the implication for us would have been that the site would have been sold off to any interested party, almost certainly as small lots. This would not have been good news for us since we would then have been dealing with multiple planning applications where each developer might have been competing for the best possible return, regardless of the overall amenity value of the whole site.

As things stand, it appears that these assets will be converted to government bonds, which effectively means that not only did the HMRC lose the tax owed by Watchword, but the Irish taxpayers now own the Mill site!

The administration of the site has been put into the hands of a London based accountancy company called BDO. This is the London office of the world's fifth largest accountancy body so are we in good hands? – or are we just small beer? There may be truth in the latter view since the original mandate given to BDO was to complete the process of administration within 12 months. That time expired and they applied for and were granted a 6-month extension, which ends on December 23rd this year. We have no information about what is to happen if they fail to finalise the whole thing by that time. It is possible that the Administrative status can roll on for a further 6 months after that. Or will they go to a forced sale to rid themselves of the embarrassment of this site?

Since BDO is an accountancy company, they will have realised that the value of the site (and their fees) is worth much more with, rather than without, planning permission. So it would appear to be in their interest as well as that of the Irish taxpayer to get a plan accepted by SBDC before trying to sell it. At the time of writing they have just about two months to put something together and currently there is no evidence of developers or planning people roaming round the site, nor of any consultation with the locals. It is understood that there are at least two large developers circling the campfire. I wonder if the SBDC Core Strategy is being monitored by BDO? The Core Strategy as presently drafted serves us well since it incorporates the basics of the design brief that came out of the refusal to approve the Towntalk plan. The Watchword owners (and, it rumoured, the Gas Board) have tried hard to get the Core Strategy altered in their favour and until the Strategy Document is finally approved there is still room for this pressure to continue, this time from London.

There are interesting possibilities too in the Gas Board site. About 10 years ago there was an attempt to develop the Mill Lane site as a



whole and the Gas Board signified their interest in making their land available for the proposed major office block. This option is again open and indications are that the Gas Board would dearly love to remove their gas holder and release the land for development, probably for housing rather than offices. The northernmost part of the site is not suitable for housing because of flood risk (in spite of the Jubilee River) so this raises the interesting possibility of setting aside that area for a wildlife reserve and maybe producing a more suitable footpath strategy including the proposed Boulters Lock footbridge.

It is noticeable that the Paper Mill site is still in some form of use, probably illegally, since there are large boats now moored on the riverside, which are accessed directly from Mill Lane, and highly visible from the Maidenhead bank. These are residential boats and could give a long-term tenancy right to the squatters unless South Bucks wakes up and does something about it.

In retrospect it would appear that we (your Society) did pretty much the right thing in the way we campaigned for a better deal than Towntalk were prepared to offer, and we did make a difference. The question now on the table is this: Will we be as ready for the inevitable next round? The situation has changed dramatically since we now have not only the nascent Core Strategy as a framework but also a pretty comprehensive design brief which more or less spells out the conditions a new developer would have to satisfy in order for the planning proposal to be treated seriously. This actually benefits any new developer, since all they have to do is to stay within that brief. However, it is possible that the brief actually makes the site a more uneconomic proposition to develop and so it is uncertain whether this is a good thing or not from our standpoint.

Your Society is developing a number of ideas for a more Taplow-friendly use of the site which may or may not be the kind a thing a developer and SBDC want to see happen. We therefore need to develop these various ideas in more detail before the day arrives when the next development proposal drops into the SBDC letterbox.

*Fred Russell*

## Village Green Party

*It's that time of year at last  
When all turn up and have a blast.  
The pit is dug, the ox is turned,  
Just well cooked and never burned!  
The green is filled with cheery folk,  
Beautiful music and BBQ smoke.  
Euan's team have planned it right  
And made 2010 a successful night.  
So many people have helped all day;  
Others for good weather pray.  
Over 500 ox roast tickets sold.  
No one got wet, just a little cold.  
The band was playing till half past ten,  
Dancing children, women and men.  
The raffle offered lovely prizes –  
The winners got some nice surprises.  
Thames Valley Playground will benefit  
And all the folk who play in it.  
So Matt would like to hear a cheer  
For every single volunteer.  
And don't forget when next year's here  
You could be that volunteer.  
Turn the ox, or dig the pit,  
Sell the tickets, do your bit.  
Cook the burgers, fill the bun,  
Or just turn up and have some fun;  
Come and help erect a tent,  
But most of all – support the event.*

Matt Travers

A very big thank you to all the volunteers who helped with the Village Green Party in 2010. The raffle proceeds were donated to the Thames Valley Adventure Playground. Next year's Village Green Party is on Saturday 18 June 2011. If you'd like to help, please email Matt Travers at [vgp@taplowsociety.org.uk](mailto:vgp@taplowsociety.org.uk)

# Life at Cliveden Gages



*Professor Bernard and Mary Trevallion decided to downsize and leave their lovely home near Dropmore. Their choice of a new home was an apartment at Cliveden Gages, where the first phase of this significant development had just been completed. This brief article summarises their experience to date. Ed.*

The first half of Cliveden Gages has now been constructed and is fully occupied. We moved into an apartment a year ago after 40 years in a large extended Victorian lodge in two acres of land in the middle of the woods.

A common question is, 'How can you live in a place you so strongly opposed?' The answer is easy. We did not think Cliveden Gages should be built but that does not mean we did not think it would be a great place to live. However, without the opposition and the successful appeal, the development would have been far less attractive. There would have been many more dwellings and with no over-55-years age restraint the estate would have been a much busier and noisier place.

The architecture of Cliveden Gages appealed to us from our first sighting. It is contemporary, with balance rather than symmetry, interesting materials and a strong geometry in both the built and planted environment. For us as a family it had a particular attraction. Our severely learning-disabled daughter relies on visual perception of the world for security and meaning and she loves the simple shapes and layout. The

apartments and houses are graced by unusually high ceilings and high windows. They are light and airy with plenty of wall space for our floor-to-ceiling bookcases and large paintings. The simple lines are the perfect backdrop for either modern or classic furnishings.

Our apartment is on an east-west axis so the morning sun streams in from dawn at the front and the afternoon sun streams in until the sun sets directly in line with

the back windows. The low density of the buildings and the number of open spaces provides a hilltop setting bathed in light when the English weather obliges. The domestic and external environments are enhanced by their tree-top surroundings and the access residents enjoy to the Cliveden Estate. Within a five-minute walk from our apartment we can stand on the edge of the Chiltern scarp and look across views of several counties. The River Thames can be reached in 8 minutes and all through the year the changing landscape and wildlife are constant source of pleasure and interest.

Cliveden Gages is also a kindly community with plenty of activities – a book club, wine tasting, bridge club, pilates, yoga, summer barbecues and Christmas cocktails. If you wanted to encapsulate living in Cliveden Gages in a couple of scenes it would be seeing our neighbours walking their cat and others stopping to chat, safe in the knowledge no through traffic will interrupt them. If they are laughing hysterically you can be sure someone has just told them when their 'snagging list' will be dealt with. Think of us sitting on our verandah with a glass of wine watching the sun set behind Green Drive to the sound of birdsong and you will know why we enjoy living at Cliveden Gages. Good neighbours, good place, good times.

*Mary Trevallion*

# Sally Miall 1918 – 2010

Sally Miall died calmly at the age of 91 after an extremely eventful life. Her father, Gordon Leith, a young South African architect, was invalided out from the Western Front after a gas attack. Sally was born in Essex on 18 December 1918. After the war, her father worked in France with Sir Herbert Baker on the War Graves Commission and then returned to a long and successful career in South Africa.

Sally grew up in Johannesburg and returned with her mother and twin sisters to England in 1934 to complete her schooling at Roedean. From there she went up to Newnham College Cambridge where she read English and made many lifelong friends. She met and married Nigel Bicknell, a glamorous amateur flyer who, on the outbreak of the Second World War, joined the RAF, flying extremely risky reconnaissance missions over occupied Europe in the fast but lightly-armed Mosquitoes. He was shot down once, and survived a further near-fatal crash. During the War Sally survived a night of the blitz when a fire bomb landed on her bed but did not go off; she worked at Bletchley Park with the now famous code-breakers; she crossed the Atlantic in embattled convoys twice. Home for Sally and Nigel at this time was Finella, a large house in Cambridge with notorious 'moderne' interiors, which they shared with Nigel's brother Peter and his wife, the ballet dancer Mari Bicknell, and two other families – and their first son Julian.

At the War's end Nigel was appointed Air Attaché in Washington. There Sally and Nigel met and shared a house with the photographer Paul Child and his wife Julian Child, later to be the first, much-loved television chef. A second son, Marcus, was born in Washington. Nigel continued his career in the Foreign Service, and was posted to Istanbul and Athens where, in 1956, Sally won the Ladies Cup in the

Acropolis Rally in a Fiat 500 – and had a third son, Alexander. Her fourth, Stephen, was born in London. A rumbustious family life filled a rather ramshackle terrace house in Chelsea and a draughty cottage in Sussex for some 20 years.



Sally had many talents. She played the piano, she drew, she knew and loved the literary canon, she was a writer – first of trenchant illustrated diaries and later of novels for children and adults. She was a skilful dressmaker, an accomplished cook, and a dedicated gardener. She shared her enthusiasm for all of these with her friends and extended families.

In 1975 Nigel and Sally were divorced and both remarried, Sally to Leonard Miall OBE. Leonard had started as a wartime reporter, was the BBC's man-in-America through the fifties, and returned

to the UK to set up BBC2.

During this time Sally worked as Secretary to the British School at Athens, serving distinguished academic archaeologists from an office in Gordon Square, with yearly trips to Athens and the various digs run by the School. Sally's earlier experience of living in Greece and her enthusiasm for ancient Greek culture and literature suited her perfectly for this role.

Leonard and Sally's home in Taplow saw many happy gatherings of their joint families over a period of 30 years. Leonard died in 2005. Sally continued to complete the *Times* crossword every day until only a few weeks ago. She is survived by three of her four sons, four step-children, their wives and husbands and a fleet of grand- and step-grand children.

## *Julian Bicknell*

There is a Book of Condolence in Taplow Parish Church. People are invited to contribute reminiscences both in writing and in drawings. A memorial service will be held in the Church at 11.30 on Friday 10th December

# Thames Punting Club Championships

*I suspect than many of our readers are not familiar with such things as racing punts – I wasn't until Dr Brian Smith introduced me to Peter Williams, author of this article. The punting races take place following the Maidenhead Regatta and always within the area called Bray Reaches which includes Taplow and the Brunel Bridge. After reading this article I have resolved not to miss the 2011 championships! Ed.*

*(Technical note: the 'pecks' referred to in the article are a pair of poles called 'ryepecks' which mark the course limits.)*

2010 was the 125th anniversary of the first punting championships under TPC rules and we had a great day. This was Bray Reach at its best with a fine sunny day, neither too hot nor too windy and with limited river traffic – ideal for good punt racing! So with a good crowd building, reflecting some helpful publicity via the BBC, the *Financial Times* and the *Maidenhead Advertiser*, the stage was set for an excellent day of racing.

With entries from four of the five punt racing clubs operating we had 15 races in the Championship programme over the half-mile and three-quarter-mile courses. Bruce Maidment from Thames Valley Skiff Club (TVSC) won the Amateur Punting Championship race (three-quarter mile) beating Mike Hart, a former Olympic rowing silver medallist from Dittons Skiff and Punting Club (DSPC), by some distance after Mike ended up in the water at the turn (the peck) when his best boat was hit by wash. Bruce won in a time of 8 minutes though it was subsequently discovered the peck had been placed 35 yards beyond the half-mile post. This gave an adjusted time of 7 minutes and 30 seconds.

Natalie Maclean (DSPC) beat Karen Ball (TVSC) to win the Ladies Amateur Punting Championship race (half mile) in a close-fought race and she then combined with Mike Hart to win the Mixed Doubles Championship race. Mike also won the Gentlemen's Double Punting Championship with Simon Liefer. The closest race of the day was in the Junior Championship where Lucie Damon overtook Laura-Jane Robinson in the last few metres to win the race by 3 inches (having fallen in at the peck).

After the Championships were concluded we then held the nine inter-club races. Here the

competition was between 5-person teams from three of the clubs. The pecks were moved to be at either end of the concrete embankment giving the crowd the chance to really see the action on the turns and it proved to be excellent racing with close-fought singles, doubles and mixed doubles races. Wraysbury Skiff and Punting Club was the eventual overall winner.

After a brief introduction by Ivan Jones, Chairman of the TPC, Sarah Winkless, Great Britain Olympic Rowing Medallist and World Champion, presented the cups and medals. The TPC silverware is something to behold with elegant silver cups going back over the 125 years of racing – sadly the winners only get to receive and hold them for the moment before they return to the strongroom!

Aside from friends and family the crowd for the day included local residents and passers-by and we hope to see this grow next year. We were delighted to be joined by the Deputy Mayor of Royal Windsor and Maidenhead, Councillor Asghar Majeed, and the Chairman of South Bucks District Council, Councillor Alan Walters. I think both had the chance to see first-hand a classic English sporting event in a fabulous location on the Thames.

TPC has been using the Bray Reach for the Championships since 1986 so this was also our 25th anniversary in this location though TPC first used the reach in 1894 (and from 1946 to 1960). Given that no clubs race there normally, it is a neutral venue for all competitors and a great setting described by some as the 'spiritual home of punt racing'. Moreover, because there is a good gravel bottom over a long distance (setting aside the bomb crater), the Bray Reach allows us to run races over two legs rather than the typical four. Though this reduces the number of turns (where the punter, not the boat, turns round!) and some of the excitement (because the turns require great skill and can often result in the lead changing hands), the Bray Reach puts a premium on being able to hold a straight course over a longer distance requiring considerable stamina and concentration. The downside of that is the course takes the punters well away from the crowd (and in the case of the Amateur Championship race actually around the corner!) We continue to debate how best to deal with this but running the inter-club races along the

embankment section really did work in terms of getting the crowd to engage with this dynamic and graceful sport.

We will certainly welcome all members of the Hitcham and Taplow Society at the 2011 regatta and would hope to give you all early notice. We will also aim to send a notice to all River Road residents who have in the past been generous supporters of the Regatta. There is no doubt that it is increasingly difficult for minority sports such as punt racing to function. Attracting and retaining punters is hard, given the huge array of options people now have and there is no doubt punt racing does require an investment of time and energy to become good enough to compete. Setting aside coping with more wash from the ever-increasing number and power of boats going by, we now have some difficulty sourcing aircraft-grade aluminium for the poles!

However despite these real difficulties we do have a hard core of members who are keen to keep this sport alive. Punting does have a warm place in many people's hearts and the Maidenhead Regatta remains the highpoint of the punt racing year. Long may it be so! We had a great day out and our thanks to Taplow and the Bray Reach.

If anyone reading this would like to join the Thames Punting Club (£15 pa) or would like to offer any support to the Club or the Championship Regatta please do not hesitate to contact me:

07718120858

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*Peter Williams, Treasurer, TPC*



# A Chelsea Adventure

I'm sitting here in the middle of a heap of gardening books, Henri Matisse's biographies, and a blank sheet of paper. The good news is that I have sponsorship for the next extreme journey in my life: creating a garden at Chelsea Flower Show. This will be my second attempt.

In 2008, we had just opened Maryfield garden to the National Gardens Scheme (NGS) for the first time. It was May and we had been accepted into the infamous Yellow Book; some of you may have seen the BBC2 series on qualifying. With that challenge behind us, Jacqueline and I were sitting with our wonderful group of volunteers in the kitchen feeling exhausted and glowing after a long day. We had had over 200 visitors and felt very satisfied. The team was Daphne and Derek Walker on the teas, Brenda and Tony Hickman on the gate and plants, and of course Jacqueline making hot cakes!

The next day I cheekily made a phone call to the chief executive of the NGS and asked her if she fancied 'doing' Chelsea the following year. I think it's fair to say that Julia was very excited and enthusiastic about the idea.

Off I went on my journey to design the Elliptical Walled Garden for Chelsea Flower Show 2009. For various reasons, mainly associated with funding, this first attempt was not successful. A show garden costs on average £250,000 and I wasn't a known designer so I hadn't got the 'weight' of designers like Tom Stuart-Smith or Andy Sturgeon. However, the experience has proven extremely useful in my career as a garden designer. The learning curve at that time was almost vertical and it was the NGS who helped me. They introduced me to a number of interesting characters in the gardening world. Among them were TV presenter Joe Swift, who is now president of the NGS, and Alan Gray who owns a wonderful garden at East Ruston in Norfolk. He has been involved with the RHS for years and is a garden critic. I met nurseryman David Howard of dahlia fame (beautiful bronze foliage topped with red/orange flowers); and Rosie Atkins who had created a Chelsea garden a few years earlier and was then Curator of the Chelsea Physic garden.

So fast-forward two years and I am now applying to create the Matisse Garden at Chelsea 2011. This will be an urban garden, occupying a 7 by 5 metre space. It is in conjunction with the NGS again and we have sponsorship from a multinational software company.

I started 2010 with the objective of becoming a full-time gardener. In fact, it's a little more than that. Most of my life I've designed and made things – mainly furniture, clothes, buildings and gardens, including of course Maryfield. I had decided in the previous September that I wanted to move from the software business in favour of focusing on my more creative side. By December I had cleared the decks and was able to focus on becoming a 'gardener'.

Gardening has been a passion for over 25 years. I think it was the visits to the magnificent Cornish gardens in my childhood that started it. Gardens are about beauty, reminding us of nature, reconnecting us with the earth. Unfortunately, a drop in gardening knowledge and skills, coupled with less and less free time has meant beautiful gardens have become less accessible to many of us. However, we still desire this beauty more than ever!

My first activity in January 2010 was to attend a life drawing course in a studio in the East End of London. I also had to get the garden at Maryfield ready for opening in the spring and prepare for the Marathon des Sables in April. It was from this drawing class that the idea of the Matisse garden was born.

When Henri Matisse appeared on the Paris art scene in the early 1900s, he shocked critics with his controversial use of colour and form. He was involved in the Fauvist (wild beasts) movement and is said to have been a major influence on Cubism. Cubism incidentally led to Art Deco, and was part of the simplification or reduction of the world we live in which led to the Arts and Crafts movement. Throughout his life Matisse used colour in exciting new ways, and his use of shape and form is still dramatic. Matisse's legacy is all around us. Many designers, such as Paul Smith, writers of children's books, etc., have been



influenced by the simplicity and the bold colour combinations of Matisse.

My Matisse garden is influenced by his use of form and colour. I have used striking blue delphiniums, with *anchusa azurea* 'Loddon Royalist', red and yellow peonies with orange iris, purples and pinks, all under-planted with bronze heucheras and euphorbias. Height is provided by large fig trees and a very old, gnarled olive! The centrepiece is a bronze pool with an infinity edge. This provides a reflective surface in the

middle of the garden space. The final touch is an eight-foot-high ultramarine blue wall with an arch spanning the garden.

The application to the RHS is in process. While I await their decision I am working on my other garden design projects. Amongst them are a walled garden, a shady garden, and a bog garden – not to mention an old friend wanting me to design a garden at his ranch in Sydney!

*Roger Andrews*

# William Clemence Codrington (Bill) Ball 1923 – 2010

His full title was known to few but many knew of the deeds of 'Bill' Ball through his long years of quiet service to our community.

Bill and Marjorie came to Taplow to live in Cedar Chase in 1982. They especially enjoyed being part of the Cedar Chase 'family'. Bill served on the Residents' Society Management Committee including a year as Chairman. He and Marjorie were ever-ready when the call went out for help.

Within a very short time Bill was involved in local activities. He served on the Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society Committee for 20 years, including a three-year term as Chairman. He was a Parish Councillor for many years, being Chairman of the General Purposes Committee until he decided it was time to pass the baton to the next generation.

Bill was Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind (now renamed Bucks Vision) for 15 years and then was persuaded to continue to serve as the Chairman of the South East Division for a further 10 years. He was responsible for arranging a full calendar of days out and entertainments, for managing the maintenance and distribution of radios and Talking Book players, and for organising a

programme of Shop Mobility excursions and newspaper reading events.

He was much admired by his close colleagues for his devotion to service to the Association for the Blind, and in recent years he was the principal and honoured guest at its Christmas Party.



After a career with the Engineering Division of Rank Film Processing, ending as the Chief Executive, Bill carried out a number of post-retirement consulting assignments in Germany and South Africa. In Taplow, his engineering know-how was called upon to design and to maintain the spit used to roast the ox at the annual Village Green Party.

Neighbours and friends joined the family for a celebration of Bill's life, opening with Albinoni's *Adagio in G Minor*, then a quiet reflection

with *What is Life* sung by Kathleen Ferrier, a warm and touching memoir from grandson Simon, and closing with a rousing goodbye from Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*.

A splendid tribute to the long life of a quiet stalwart always at work for the common good.

*Karl Lawrence*

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