

Hitcham and Taplow Society

Newsletter 99: Spring 2013
£2.50 to non-members



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: Keira Smales, Lyra Cherry and Sophie Greenham enjoying the snow last year (Nigel Smales)

Not the Editorial

I am a Newsletter without an Editor. I have been created by a committee. After so long in the wise and tender hands of Fred Russell it feels rather strange to have the opportunity to gaze at my navel and muse....

What am I for? Some might dispute that his words now ring true but Lord Reith set the compass for the BBC by defining its purpose as being 'to inform, educate and entertain'. This works for me. I aim to do just that by sharing reports and stories about the physical, historical and social fabric of Taplow and Hitcham.

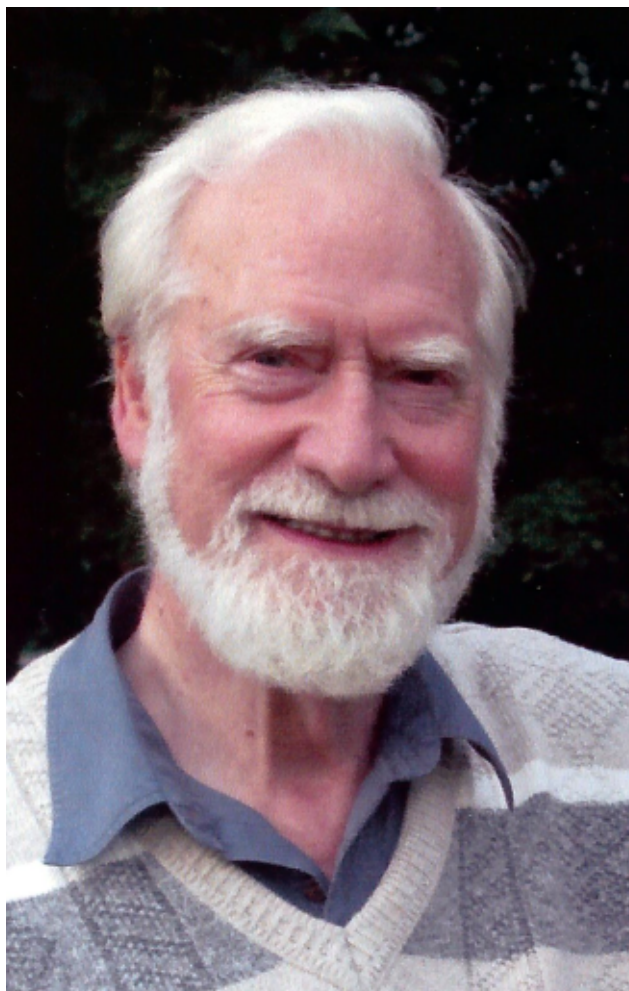
I don't appear often enough to be a newspaper and I am determinedly apolitical but I try to keep people in touch with 'hot topics' such as the hope of a Dropmore revival and the proposed developments at the Bishop Centre and Mill Lane. I don't advertise but I can tell tales about the history of or the people at local commercial enterprises such as Odds

Farm Park and Hedsor House. I am always delighted to support organisations such as Taplow Choirs and the Royal British Legion and to celebrate individual achievements and community activities from the fun stuff like the Village Green Party, the Royal Wedding Race to the Church, the Jubilee Raft Race and Carols on the Green to collective initiatives such as the renewal of Old Priory Garden and the rubbish clearances. I love to celebrate the heritage that makes our villages just that little bit different from anywhere else. And I like to think I'm adding a little to that heritage by maintaining a gradually unfolding record of what life is like today in our little corner of the world.

Ten people have penned my pieces. My successors will welcome contributions from others like them who share these aims and ideals.

Your Newsletter

Thank You Fred



Fred Russell became our Editor with Newsletter 70 in 1998.

With characteristic modesty in his first editorial he hoped that 'this issue is up to its usual standard'. It featured his first innovation – a full-colour cover.

Across his long serving years through 28 editions, he has transformed our Newsletter to be the exceptional, stand-out, informative, illustrated, full colour magazine it has become.

His editorials and articles are fluent and incisive. Always he has been the forerunner in the pursuit of the Society's prime objective 'to protect the surrounding countryside from bad development or neglect'. At the same time he has ensured the balance of the Newsletter content in reporting village activities, providing a permanent record of Taplow history and its heritage buildings, and bringing attention to the contribution of local residents to society at large.

Approaching the publication of edition 100, our Newsletter has become integral to the objectives and activities of our Society and indeed to the life of Hitcham and Taplow. Fred's achievements and the benefits they bring have been enormous.

Thank you Fred – Editor *par excellence*.

Karl Lawrence, HTS Chairman

Opening Times of Taplow Court in 2013

Taplow Court will be open on the following Sunday afternoons from 2:30pm – 5pm: 5th May, 2nd June, 7th July, 4th August, and the National Heritage Day on 15th September. As usual admission is free and cream teas will be available for purchase. There will be two exhibitions available for viewing.

The first exhibition marks the 300th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht which was in fact a series of individual peace treaties helping to bring the War of the Spanish Succession to an end. George Hamilton, the first Earl of Orkney and the first British Field Marshal, was the owner of Taplow Court at the beginning of the 18th Century and played a major role in the negotiation of the Treaty.

The second exhibition is entitled *Choose Life – celebrating the power of dialogue*.

This is about a dialogue which took place between the British historian Arnold Toynbee and the Japanese Buddhist, President of SGI, Daisaku Ikeda between 1972 and 1973. Their wide-ranging discussion resulted in the book *Choose Life*, which contains the optimistic message that humankind can find solutions to the many problems of the 21st Century.

SGI-UK would like to continue to extend our invitation to Taplow village residents to enjoy the gardens and grounds of Taplow Court on any weekend throughout the year. The gardens and grounds are open between 10am and 5pm. No dogs please, although guide and alert dogs are welcome.

Mike Yeadon

American Choirmaster for Taplow

Andrew Boddicker joins the Taplow Choirs from the USA where he was Director of the Boys' and Children's Choir and a teacher of music in a primary school in Oregon.



Andrew graduated with honours from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and he completed his Masters in Musical Education at the University of Illinois. There he focused not only on teaching music to youngsters but also on teaching future teachers. Unlike the USA where certification is compulsory, the UK has no requirement for a degree in musical education in order to teach at primary level. However Andrew says there is

more a traditional acceptance of singing in choirs here which makes teaching all the more enjoyable.

He spotted the post in Taplow on the internet and came to the UK for interviews last October. He now teaches in a Primary School in London and started teaching the Taplow Boys' Choir and the Children's Choir at weekends in mid-January.

The Children's Choir meets during term time on a Saturday from 10:00am until 11:00am. There are currently 34 in the Children's Choir and 21 in the Boys' Choir – 40 in each would be an ideal number to make a wonderful sound. There is no audition – enthusiasm is enough. The Boys' Choir rehearsal is immediately after the Children's Choir from 11:15am till 12:15pm. For more information about Taplow Choirs, including the Girls' Choir and Youth Choir, visit the website at www.taplowchoirs.org.uk

What will be the choirs' repertoire? 'As broad as it is long' is Andrew's answer since children like adults enjoy an eclectic choice of song from folk to classical and from reverential to ethnic as long as the music is of quality and is within their range. Andrew also introduces and arranges unaccompanied singing – for example, the Boys' Choir is at present learning a sacred song from the Caribbean.

In spite of all the modern-day distractions, Andrew finds the children very keen and committed to their singing. They aim to give a concert every term; their next performance will be at 7:30pm on 29th June at St Luke's Church, Norfolk Road in Maidenhead.

Taplow is truly fortunate to have such a focus of talent for music in the parish. Gillian Dibden was the innovator and her team is now strengthened by the fresh talent of Andrew Boddicker.

Maureen Dennis

Boulter's to Bray Swim

Saturday 6th July, from Boulter's Lock to the Waterside Inn at Bray: a distance of 2.8km. Anyone wishing to take part needs a wetsuit and should register 6:30pm–8pm on Friday 5th July or 5:15am–5:45am on Saturday 6th. Safety briefing: 6am. Race start: 6:15am. Categories: Open, Masters 49+, Junior 15–18. Entry fee: £32. For more information www.maidenheadswim.co.uk

Taplow Wombles

My working day starts and ends with a brisk walk from my front door at to Platform 4 at Taplow Station. I need 13 minutes to make the train. All too often, I don't leave enough time and end up with a sprint finish down Station Road.

There is something mildly debasing about running for a train. Some would rather miss it than be seen dashing, arms flailing, towards beeping doors. But for me running has an advantage – less time to pontificate on the endless trail of litter.

I despair when I see it, like graffiti on the magnificent walls of St Paul's Cathedral. And what's even more tragic than the filth being on the roadside is that someone threw it there. Hard as I try, I can't get my head around the carelessness of it all. I try to rationalise it as an act of defiance – two fingers to Society during hard times – but this seems too generous. Whatever the reason, it was there and wasn't going anywhere. So I decided to do something about it.

The sensible thing would have been to call the Council or galvanise support from willing villagers, but this was personal and I was impatient. It was making my walk to work a profoundly unhappy one.

I persuaded my children Ben and Lexie to join me. I wanted them to see the toxic and lasting effect litter has on the countryside and to feel a sense of responsibility for their surroundings. As it happens, they were halfway there already. St Nicolas' School has evidently instilled a civic conscience in the children. I was astounded to hear them talking about nature and the environment and the importance of taking care of it. For an hour at least they enjoyed clearing the place up.

We covered the two-mile round trip from Hitcham Grange to Taplow Station. Working solo, it took me eight hours to collect 15 sacks full to bursting with fag packets, endless beer cans, plastic bags, McDonald's lids, straws, cups, boxes, crisp packets, sweet wrappers, tissues, a toaster, a sodden furry hat, 3 shoes, socks, a bag of clothes, a condom, 3 hub caps and a partridge in a pear tree. I also picked up 50 or 60 bags of dog poo. You have to ask yourself – what kind of person bothers to clear up after their

dog only to throw the result in a hedge a few yards down the road?

The most disturbing thing was the age of some of the rubbish. Grass roots had a desperate grip on some very old crisp packets and sweet wrappers but, in the end, the earth couldn't stomach it. Bizarrely this gave me hope – now it has been cleared up it will take time to return to that dreadful state.

The spring-clean has worked its magic and the land looks as proud as punch. For a few days, the walk through Taplow was perfectly unspoilt and some weeks on it is still looking pleasantly rural. I have come to terms with the fact that the litter will reappear but I realise now that I'm happier picking it up than walking past it in despair.

I was quite content wombling along in relative anonymity, as many others have done before, but our little endeavour has sparked a flame. Two Cherry children and two Hills led a collection of 9 parents and neighbours who spent an hour and a half braving freezing conditions and snow sprinkles on 24th March to fill 19 bin bags with rubbish discarded on Mill Lane and the Jubilee River footpaths. Another venture is planned for May. Taplow is a beautiful village. Efforts like these will help to keep it that way.

Jamie Barnard



Jamie Barnard

Dropmore House

A group of Taplow residents were invited to meet with the team of architects and planners who are intending to correct the disaster that the previous developers made of the Dropmore site. The intention of the meeting was to ensure that the local people were fully aware and supportive of what they are trying to do with this much abused building and its once great gardens and to ask for help in their extensive research as to what was once there. They would be interested in old photographs or pictures of the house and gardens.

The firm of Giles Quarm & Associates in collaboration with Quinlan & Francis Terry (who are the main architects) are leading the attempt to finally restore the old house and its gardens to its proper state and purpose, which is to be an elegant private home. The previous developers only saw this site as a way to make money with a complete disregard for its history and architecture, and left a frightful shambles behind when they went bust.

At the meeting, which was followed by a site visit, we saw the full extent of the disaster. Before the serious restoration work can begin all the new additions tacked onto the house have to be taken down. That will probably take at least 18 months. An enormous effort is being made to research what was originally there, both in the house and gardens, so that they can be restored to their former glory and become a beautiful home once more. This is being done with money no object. A small new building to house guests will be built elsewhere in the grounds to a design by Samuel Wyatt, Dropmore's original architect.

It is difficult to describe the desolation of the site and many photographs would be needed to show the scale of it.

Photos by Eva Lipman



The north face of the house

For those not familiar with the recent history, the main house was burned down on two occasions by arsonists, but enough remained of the main structures to make restoration worthwhile. The estate used to boast huge beautiful gardens and a pinetum, now sadly neglected for many years. It is estimated that it could take about 20 years to restore. These gardens were once one of the greatest in England and Queen Victoria was an occasional visitor. We have seen the astonishing transformation of Taplow Court by its present owners SGI and it looks as though Dropmore has found a similar white knight to rescue it.



Abandoned works

The house is in the centre of a 220 acre estate, a plot so large that it spans two planning authorities, South Bucks and Wycombe District. The parish boundary between Burnham and Taplow actually runs through the house, which has been a grade 1 listed building since 1955. It was initially built in 1792–5 by Samuel Wyatt for Lord Grenville with alterations 1806–9 by Charles Tatham.

The gardens, pinetum and plantations were designed and planted by Lord and Lady Grenville. The English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* describes their development:

Lord Grenville, Prime Minister to George III, began work on the Dropmore estate in 1792, having bought 15 hectares of land complete with a small labourer's cottage, which he demolished, then employing Samuel Wyatt to build the south range of the present house.

Grenville wrote to his future wife, Anne Pitt, 'I think you will be pleased with the situation when you see it, though I know Lord Camelford will think it a great deal too exposed. I do not think that a great objection, being compensated, as it is, by the advantage of air and prospect' (Country Life 1956). Grenville began landscaping Dropmore immediately after he built the house, and his improvements are said to have included the removal of a hill that blocked the view of Windsor Castle 12 kilometres to the south-east (Country Life 1956). He was a keen botanist, and planted many trees, some supplied by his brother Lord Buckingham from Stowe, including, in the 1820s, a 25 hectare pinetum west of the house, around the lake. Grenville died in 1834, leaving his widow, also a keen botanist, who continued to develop the estate and gardens, constructing the alcove by the lake, and probably the Italianate features in the walled garden. Following Lady Grenville's death in 1864, aged ninety-one, the estate was inherited by the Fortescue family, and bought in 1943 by Lord Kemsley. Following its occupation by the Army during the Second World War, and consequent deterioration of the house and grounds, the Kemsleys restored the estate and planted many more trees to complement the existing planting. The majority of the house burnt down in 1990, and has not been rebuilt, although there are plans to do so (1997). Much of the garden has subsequently been vandalised and many structures have been stolen. The site remains (1997) in private ownership.

The main two-storey house lies towards the north end of the site. It is built in Classical style of rendered and colour-washed cement, with a central single-storey portico on the north entrance front. The south garden front has three bows with shallow domed roofs. The ground floor garden front supports a wooden trellis-work pergola at the west end, with arched openings in front of each window. (See photo as it is now!) It used also to support an enclosed verandah in similar style at the east end (now long gone).

The house was seriously damaged by the 1990 fire which left only its west wing standing. A modern house has been added



More decay

on the west elevation of this remnant. Beyond that are two walled courts side-by-side. The first is a service court; on its south wall is a small lean-to building with an overhanging slate roof supported on decorative iron trellis-work pillars. Two low towers flank the brick piers of a gate leading to the second court, a severe early-19th century red-brick stable court with its main access from the rear drive through a tall arch on the north side.

The proposed works will return the house to being a single residence, and include the removal of all the alterations made by the last owners and the demolition of a large new unfinished building immediately adjacent to the main building – the block of modern flats. The historic listed garden structures are to be restored to protect and enhance the setting of the house, with woodland on the periphery. The cost of restoring the aviary alone will be £1m. Oak Lodge will be one of the last buildings to be restored. The intention is to use it to house an estate worker.

We have put in a plea to move the ugly mesh fence back from its current position and to replace it with something more visually attractive, and have suggested that we be given a footpath alongside the boundary.

We wish the current owner well with his restoration work and look forward to seeing it rise like the phoenix from the sorry state which it is in today.

Eva Lipman and Fred Russell

Gazing on the Gages

Cliveden Gages (Cliveden Village) has had a long and tortuous gestation, perhaps appropriately in view of its previous incarnation as a maternity hospital which closed in the 1980s. The site became a ghost town, not only an eyesore but a haven for drug addicts. Its landlord the National Trust (NT) eventually applied for outline planning permission for a retirement complex for the over-55s and in 1997 South Bucks District Council (SBDC) gave outline approval for 99 houses plus 35 apartments for sheltered accommodation together with a surgery and communal buildings.

The NT was slow off the mark and ran into a housing price collapse. When the market eventually picked up the NT chose Countryside Properties (CP) to develop the site and in 2004 this partnership submitted a revised planning application for 197 dwellings without age restriction, including 20% affordable homes. A successful campaign by the Society led to a public enquiry in August 2005 which concluded that it 'would be an undesirable development of the green belt' and its recommendation for rejection of the application was accepted by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. (An article about this campaign and the subsequent victory is in Newsletter 85 – the spring 2006 edition).

The NT and CP were legally required to build to the original permission if their revised application failed. However they successfully applied for SBDC permission to amend the scheme to 134 units without the surgery or any sheltered accommodation. Construction commenced in 2006 with the first houses ready for occupation in 2007.

This was at the height of the housing boom. Queues of people visited the show houses and put their names down for the new houses and apartments. Smarting perhaps at the criticism levelled at it for attempting to over-develop the site, the NT insisted on homes built of sustainable materials with all the latest gadgets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. This included having solar heating panels and the majority of the houses had either no garages or only very small ones. The apartments had underground parking but all other cars had to be parked in the open or under 'pagodas' that

offered no shelter at all. However, all the units had bicycle sheds! At least the original planning permission was for two parking places for each unit instead of the 1.6 proposed for the rejected development.

There was a further problem. The NT is not allowed to sell properties or land; the units are therefore on a 125-year lease. This being the first NT development of its kind, it decided to use its normal lease with some modifications. Of course most NT lettings are of listed buildings, so there were and still are onerous restrictions on what could be done, both to the houses and in the houses. For instance, the leases have a specific clause banning hot tubs. The mind boggles at what must have taken place on NT property to require this – although with Cliveden in mind, perhaps not! The original lease also did not allow pets of any kind and elderly prospective residents had to be informed that they would have to kill their pets before they could move in. Unsurprisingly, this was not popular and as a result the lease was modified to allow well-behaved pets approved by the management company. Needless to say this was ignored by everyone and there is not (as far as I am aware) an approved pets list (and if there is, our cat is not on it).

However the lease was the least of the worries for the new owners now moving in. CP was anxious to build as quickly as possible and the quality of the fittings and workmanship were consequently affected. Some of this was due to poor craftsmanship and some to poor materials. A major problem (one of many) was the use of oak frames, doors and windows, perhaps at the insistence of the NT. Oak is a splendid wood but takes a long time (and is expensive) to dry out. The oak used was clearly not properly seasoned and as a result the windows and doors shrank and jammed, and in particular the window frames let water in. The residents formed a 'snagging committee' (only recently disbanded) to force CP to rectify the faults and the damage.

There were many other problems. To compound things even further, with the financial crisis of 2007–8, the bottom fell out of the housing market. Residents who had paid a premium for their homes to buy them in the rush had the



Nigel Smales

chagrin of seeing similar homes nearby sold at significant discounts and with stamp duty paid. It was still not enough however, and Lloyds Bank was forced to buy 50% of CP. Finally, all building work ceased in 2009 with only the first two phases built. It wasn't until almost three years later that construction of Phase 3 commenced, in early 2011.

CP had learnt some lessons. While the designs of the new houses and apartments are essentially the same, they differ in various respects including having brick facades instead of a rendered finish and black aluminium door and window frames rather than oak. The first residents of the new phase arrived in early 2012. There were some snagging issues but these were relatively minor compared with the first two phases. However sales were sluggish and after a year 5 of the 16 houses remain unsold. These are the smaller houses, without garages.

CP has to finish the whole development by 2014 or lose the right to build. Consequently the last phase of construction has begun while planning permission is sought for a significantly different scheme with fewer small houses and more large houses with large garages and a top price of £1.1m. This will reduce the total number of units from 134 to 128. It surprises some residents that it has taken so long for CP to realise that fewer larger houses and apartments will sell more easily and be more profitable. One estate agent director, asked to comment, said 'Well, they are from Essex you know'. This is a lesson other developers will do well to note (but don't hold your breath).

On the positive side, the problems have resulted in a relatively tight-knit and friendly community. Although the residents are prevented from taking control of the management company until the last unit is sold, a committee has been set up to co-ordinate action against CP and the NT on behalf of the residents. There are ongoing problems with CP in respect of security, access gates software, lighting, signage and other matters, and with the NT in respect of maintenance of the surrounding grounds and access to the Cliveden estate, which was promised but is restricted to opening hours.

As might be expected, the residents have much in common with each other and have made many friends. The houses themselves are very modern in style, with large windows and the latest and high quality furnishings and fittings in the bathrooms and kitchens. There is a flourishing social calendar with quiz nights, wine tasting, book readings and theatre and restaurant visits. This of course is apart from the idyllic setting with walks in the Cliveden estate within easy reach, and for those who wish, the Cliveden Club with the benefits of the swimming pools and social activities that go with that membership.

All-in-all, almost all the residents are very happy they moved to the Village (as it is known) and feel that once CP has gone and they can control their own affairs, it will be a fabulous place in which to be retired.

John Hanford

Hedsor House and Quartet



Fred Russell

Hedsor House first opened for events five years ago and since then we have hosted over 250 weddings, numerous corporate events and a number of major film productions including *The Golden Compass*, *The Ship that Rocked*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Little Dorritt*, *Brighton Rock* and of course *Quartet*.

What sets *Quartet* apart from all the rest is that apart from two scenes, one in a swimming pool and the other in a restaurant, the entire film is set at and shot at Hedsor.

It was a difficult contract to secure and to negotiate as our core business is weddings, which are booked a year or more in advance and Dustin Hoffman's scouts only approached us four months before filming was due to start.

After much negotiation it was agreed filming would take place all week and the crew would move out at weekends. Despite the obvious attraction of the film contract we could not contemplate cancelling existing bookings – can you imagine all those disappointed brides?

Thus in August 2011 one of the busiest four months in the House's history dawned.

Living and working on a film set is a very surreal experience. We needed to keep working to sell weddings and events and yet during the week our dining room was a geriatrics sitting room, the main hall a theatre, the Florence Suite a sanatorium, the bridal suite Maggie Smith's bedroom, and in the midst of this a gazebo mysteriously appeared on the lawn. Every

weekend the house had to be transformed to the theatre of dreams we had promised to dewy-eyed brides over a year before.

Only two required a little extra bribing to be content that the carpeted ballroom they had seen on first inspection now had a parquet floor and the wallpaper in the main stairwell was no longer red but a tasteful bronze. And we got to keep the Zoffany wallpaper.

The film crew moved in and out almost effortlessly as did the caterers, make-up artists, the army of chauffeurs and the support team which occupied every nook and cranny in the house including my sitting room!

Over the four months we had some laughs:

I remember showing a prospective bride around and when we went onto the terrace we were confronted by Michael Gambon in an outrageous kaftan and fez, smoking a cheroot and barking into a mobile phone.

I met Billy Connolly in the car park in full white tie and tails and when I asked if he needed anything he responded 'a pint wouldn't go amiss'.

When I saw Andrew Sachs weaving his way towards me carrying a tray it looked as though Manuel had risen from the catacombs of Barcelona.

We saw a lot of Dustin Hoffman who was charming and entertaining. On one occasion I found myself standing next to him in the gents when apropos of nothing he said, 'There is something about the water in Buckinghamshire

Any Answers?

that makes you want to pee all the time'. There's not really a response to that so without really thinking I said, 'It's because it's so good we don't like it to leave the county'. He wandered off muttering something about 'mad Brits'.

Pauline Collins was a delight, always busy and always mothering everyone. On one occasion I found myself in our own kitchen making a cup of tea when she rushed in and blurted out, 'I'd do anything for a cup of tea' – which she of course got.

Dame Maggie Smith was a more terrifying prospect. I had been told when on set she remains in character and on one occasion I was showing round a prospective client who was somewhat in awe of the proceedings, the house and the cast. We ventured into Dame Maggie's green room to consider its suitability for a focus group. Although I knocked clearly she was not in the mood so we exited quickly having met the full force of a put-down that would put the Dowager Duchess of Grantham to shame.

When the film came out we were delighted to attend the cast and crew premiere of the film in Leicester Square and it was wonderful. The film is funny, attractive, sensitive and above all a 90-minute advert for Hedsor House directed by one of Hollywood's greatest actors – and he paid us to be there. Life doesn't get better than that!

Eddie Hoare

Diary Dates

Sunday 19th May
Maidenhead Rowing Club Junior Regatta
Saturday 22th June
Village Green Party
Saturday 29th June
Taplow Choir at St Luke's Maidenhead
Saturday 6th July
6.15am The Boulter's to Bray Swim
Afternoon: Church Fete at The Rectory
Saturday 10th August
Maidenhead Rowing Club Regatta
Sunday 11th August
Thames Punting Championship
Saturday 14th December
Carols on the Green

The truth is out there. Some people look for it on the Society's website. Nowadays such enquiries tend to be passed to me in the hope that my research into Taplow's history might have dug up a relevant relic. All will be revealed in my book but here are a couple of queries to chew on.

If you have more or better information, please let me know on 01628 661636 or cazanig@aol.com

Nigel Smales

Taplow Twins

Christina Rawlings has been in New Zealand since 1966. She is trying to find her husband Trevor's twin cousins who were born to his uncle Ronald Prince in Taplow on 14th November 1948 within half an hour of Prince Charles.

I wondered if these 'Taplow Twins' made their debut at Cliveden Hospital but my researches failed to find anything about them. As it turns out, that's no surprise because the family name was wrong. Maidenhead Library discovered that Christopher and Lynne were born in Windsor to Joan & Thomas Calcott who lived at 'Fairlawn' in Marsh Lane. Does anyone recall them?

The Orkney Exile

James Hatch now lives on Vancouver Island in Canada's far west. He keeps in touch with his childhood roots in Cookham's Widbrook Cottage by running a blog called *Historical Cookham* at widbrook2.blogspot.com His query concerned an 1852 map which indicates that the Earl of Orkney lived at Cliveden View in the middle of Widbrook Common.

This would have been Thomas FitzMaurice, 5th Earl of Orkney, who inherited not only his grandmother's title in 1831 but also her parlous financial plight. Consequently in 1852 he became the man who sold Taplow. The auction of 40 lots (plus three more nearby) raised £102,415. The Orkneys had for many years also owned bits of Berkshire, one of which it seems was this Widbrook house from which perhaps he gazed forlornly at his erstwhile estates in Taplow.

Something to Remember

Members of the Hitcham & Taplow branch of the Royal British Legion contribute to send a small party of Scouts and Guides to the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall each year. One 13-year-old was kind enough to write to thank the branch 'for the fantastic day out'. Henry Brothers of the 1st Lent Rise & Dorney Scout Troop went on to say:

'The Royal Albert Hall was huge and we were just three rows from the front. We saw The Royal Marines, The Royal Navy, The British Army and The Royal Air Force. My favourite part was when Jonjo Kerr and The Military Wives Choir sang *In My Dreams*. It made me think how lucky I am to be free. I also enjoyed the Royal Fanfare performance and the sight of so many people performing at the same time. So thank you for a life-changing experience and changing the way I look at life. Please read my poem that I wrote for school about Remembrance Sunday.'

Here is Henry's poem:

*Remember, remember 11 of November,
Put it in your calendar, put it in your mind.
Never forget the horrors and the sorrows.
Never forget the past or present.
Poppies, poppies,
As far as the eye can see
at Flanders Fields,
War memorials and upon us too.
Today's a time to reflect,
a time to remember.
So let us never forget 11 of November.
Wear a poppy.
Poppies are red,
poppies are big, poppies are small,
But remember what they are for.
Remember, remember 11 of November,
Put it in your calendar, put it in your mind.
Remember the people who have fought for us,
And the people who are fighting for us.
Wear a poppy, wear a smile,
But remember 11 of November*

Current chairman Paul-Anthony Violet summarises the branch's objectives as being to organise Remembrance Sunday, the Poppy Appeal collection and the welfare of past and serving members of HM Armed Forces in the local community, and to be able to give 'life-changing experience' to the likes of Henry.



Nigel Smales

The local Poppy Appeal continues to be generously supported. A record £5,344 was collected in 2011 in the wake of the Military Wives Choir's television debut and despite increasingly tough times £4,584 was raised last year through the valiant efforts of 33 people including past-chairman Lee Grey, Sheila Peroni – a collector for 40 years, Freda Lane and Eva Lipman – collecting for almost as long. Sincere thanks are due to one and all. As promised, I have covered for the departure of Gillian Holloway who was our Poppy Appeal organiser. Please let me know if you would like to volunteer to take on this vital task.

As ever, the H&T RBL needs new members to be able to keep achieving its objectives and new volunteers to help with the Poppy Appeal. Anyone who is interested should please call branch secretary Laird Mackay on 07818 456205 or contact him at Losuce, Hill Farm Road, Taplow SL6 0HA or Lairdwm@googlemail.com

Nigel Smales

**Village Green
Party
Saturday 22nd June**

**See insert for details and
booking form**

An Odd Story

There are nearly 200 farm attractions in the UK. Taplow's is 'leading the way in terms of innovation, quality and customer experience'. Odds Farm Park is 'Farm Attraction of the Year 2013', an accolade awarded annually by the National Farm Attractions Network.



Jackie & Steve Vinden opened Odds Farm Park 20 years ago as a rare breeds centre. It has since evolved to employ about 50 people and to provide a unique mix of animal contact, education and leisure. The latest innovation is a giant indoor playbarn complete with cafe and espresso bar. Many local children have grown up not knowing what to do first – pet piglets, have a go at mini-golf, feed lambs, goats and rabbits, ride the tractor-train or dash past the duck pond to the adventure playground.



Nigel Smales

Jackie is the sixth generation of the House family at Odds Farm. Her great-times-four grandfather William House of Wooburn Common was a 'higgler' or 'general dealer' and tenant of five acres at Hodds Farm where his son Richard was born around 1852. Jackie's father Lionel House tells the tale that the land



Nigel Smales

Steve & Jackie Vinden,
Anne & Lionel House

was owned by Portland Estates whose local manager offered Richard the chance to acquire and expand the farm in the 1890s. His elder sons Dick and Joe moved to Oxfordshire where in 1913 they started a successful motor bus company running services between Henley, Reading and their home in Watlington. Their brother Freddie and sister Annie (known as Dolly) took over Hodds Farm soon after the Great War. It passed in the early 1970s to Dick's son Arthur House. He was busy with the buses so he employed Lance Pithers to run what was by then a dilapidated dairy farm of 140 acres.

Arthur was obliged to sell the bus company in the late 1980s and he persuaded Joe's grandson Lionel to take over Odds Farm in 1989. Lionel and his wife Anne sold their farm at Cublington in Aylesbury Vale and invested the proceeds in renovating the place. Dairy farming was no longer economic so they decided to breed beef cattle and offer bed-and-breakfast. However, further change was soon in the air. The seed was sown when the family visited friends who had a rare breeds farm in Pembrokeshire. Odds Farm Park now occupies half the land while Jackie's brother Derek farms the rest.

Nigel Smales



Odds Farm

Taplow's Secret Garden

Look carefully, and you'll see something Scarlett in Old Priory Garden. Push on a little deeper, and you'll discover one or two Hills, some Cherrys and even a couple of Foxes. But you'll need to look up to find them. Inscribed on the undersides of some 25 birdboxes placed around the Garden are the names of many of the children of Taplow village, and they represent the first step in a new community project to reopen this astonishing piece of woodland.



To find the birdboxes, you first have to find the garden. As you walk past the Oak & Saw pub along Rectory Road, you'll notice a pathway running between St Nicolas House and the old telephone box. Venture down that often muddy route, and you'll see horses grazing to your right, and woodland to your left. That woodland, which stretches all the way to Boundary Road, and runs along the south side of Wellbank, is Old Priory Garden, and it has quite a history.

Back in 1852, one John Noble, the heir to a paint and varnish manufacturer, acquired land in Taplow including Berry Hill House where he lived until around 1870. His youngest son Percy returned to his boyhood home more than 40 years later to replace Well Bank and The Walnuts with a new mansion called The Priory despite the site never having had any monastic past. In 1919 he bought further land south of The Priory from the ecclesiastical commissioners for the Church of England. Priory Garden was born.

Few records exist of the work Percy tackled across these five or so acres, but even a cursory glance shows it was extensive. Scrape away the dead leaves in the middle of the garden, and

you'll discover a concrete basin, once the foundations of the garden's small lake, fed by water from the Wellbank property and crossed by a bridge which still remains. Plinths pepper the eastern parts of the wood, presumably once adorned with statues or other embellishments, and just inside the Boundary Road wall twists a grotto, its narrow pathways winding past raised banks where ornamental flowers once grew. In the south of the wood stand various varieties of ivy-choked apple tree, testament to a former functioning orchard, while a host of other tree and plant species, native and exotic, with many still to be identified, lurk around every corner.



Percy and his family and friends must have enjoyed these many pleasures but, sadly, not for long. In 1937 Percy died and Wellbank Priory was sold. We know that Fairey Aviation occupied the site during the war, and that in the 1960s the property was knocked down in its turn and Wellbank as we now know it was built. The gardens themselves, meanwhile, fell under the control of South Bucks District Council and, for the next 50 years, all went quiet.





A fox visits the automatic camera

Until last year, Taplow residents Roger Andrews, Miv Wayland-Smith and Alistair Forsyth had for some time felt that Old Priory Garden, once a community delight, could become so again. Thanks to the chairmanship of Mary Trevallion, the Parish Council lent its stalwart support. Your Society contributed seed funding and, under the auspices of The Taplow and Hitcham Recreation Grounds Association, the Friends of Old Priory Garden was born. In December 2012, the first working party was gathered together, and to commemorate the moment, Parish Council Chairman George Sandy planted a cutting from Windsor Great Park's Jubilee Oak.

So is the idea to return the land to its former state? Not at all. The garden may have endured many decades of human neglect, but that does not mean that nothing had been happening during that time. As the trees grew and the plants spread, wildlife started to move in, and today the garden is a hive of natural activity. It will stay that way. A few areas are being cleared of bramble, a pathway or two are being cut through the woods to the lake, dangerous branches and dead trees are being cut down (and left for the insect life) – all so that the community can enjoy strolls and studies of woodland wildlife, while that wildlife is encouraged to grow even further. However, a word of caution – by all means take your children to explore the garden but, as it is still very much a work in progress, beware of obstacles such as water tanks, a ravine and masses of brambles.

Eventually the lake will be filled with water once more, while gaps in the canopy will be opened up to let in the light to encourage further insect life, the bedrock of a natural ecosystem. The orchard will be restored as much as possible as will, in time, parts of the intricately designed eastern grotto and walkways. Who knows – one day there might even be a statue or two.

But predominantly, the goal is to provide future generations with the chance to enjoy wildlife and the delights of the great outdoors.

Which brings us back to the birdboxes, built by Dave McNulty and Tony Harding. Many of the children who signed them, and even got to put the finishing touches to them, go to St Nicolas' school over the road. For many of them, this could be their introduction to the wonders of nature, and it is moments like these that last a lifetime.

As you read this, there is a camera trap being moved around the garden, waiting to capture the first photos of any breeding that might take place in the birdboxes this spring. The camera, which is triggered by movement, has already taken photos of foxes, rabbits, roe deer, muntjac and more, and it will remain a feature of the garden in the future. Just like the camera, the Friends have one key objective – to provide a wonderful introduction to the natural world, without disturbing it.

Would you like to join in?

For further information on the Friends of Old Priory Garden, please visit our web page at www.facebook.com/groups/oldpriorygardentaplow

Malcolm Tait



Photos: Miv Wayland-Smith



The 'official' carols were cancelled last year due to a clash with other events, but a hardy band assembled on the green anyway with torches, umbrellas and flasks of mulled wine. Recorded music was abandoned in favour of a rough consensus about the tune and key, and a great time was had by all! Mince pies and cup-cakes were consumed by the tray-load, and a collection was taken for charity. As a finale, Tim Browning and Toby Hornett risked hair and eyebrows in a spectacular show of fire-juggling.

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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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