

# Hitcham and Taplow Society

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£3.50 to non-members



[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: The 10:18 to Reading pulls out of Taplow on 14th April 2015 (Andrew Findlay)

## Editorial

Two contrary themes run through this Newsletter. The first: nothing ever stays the same. People come and go, leaving footprints, making memories and taking them. Now perhaps never more so than when the railway first arrived 177 years ago, Taplow and Hitcham stand on the brink of an uncertain future. Just as a silver lining shimmers over Mill Lane, the horizon clouds with impending doom as distant dark lords plot to descend urbanity upon our green and pleasant land. Where is Gandalf when we need him?

But wait. Maybe we don't need his kind of magic. We have some wizardry of our own. The second theme is that continuity counts in making and maintaining community. Consider the correspondents in this Newsletter. Ginny, Jon, Adam, Liz, Alistair, Karl, Euan and Louise have footprints going back years, some for over half-a-century. Lynette's time here was briefer yet her affection for Taplow endures. Caroline,

Malcolm and Roger are making their mark. And the get-up-and-go of Sasha and Scarlett bodes well for the future.

Our physical fabric is under threat. Change is inevitable. How will you respond? Will you keep your head down and hope it won't be too painful? Or will you stand tall and get involved in making these changes for the better? Do your bit in shaping the future. Join the Parish Council or the executive committee of the Society. Contribute to the creation of the new Local Plan (see 'A Brave New World?'). Volunteer to help organise the events that embroider our calendar. Contact Nicki Jeffries at [paxcottage@aol.com](mailto:paxcottage@aol.com) to help raise funds to renovate the roof of St Nicolas' Church. Or do something else completely original. Leave a few footprints. Make some memories.

*Nigel Smales*

## A Nice Bit of Pleaching



Nigel Smales

When was the last time you saw a nice bit of pleaching? Wander down the pathway that leads from the telephone box in Rectory Road, or through the field on the south side of Old Priory Garden (OPG), and this ancient craft will be revealed. A hedge has been laid along those two sides of OPG, and as it's in its early stages, the signs of workmanship are still in evidence.

At the moment, the hedge looks more like a fence. Dozens upon dozens of hazel stakes have been thrust into the ground, stretching along the 300-plus metres of the two boundaries, and bound together along the top by thin hazel whips. Yes, it looks like a fence, but it's actually a sort of scaffolding around which the hedge will build itself.

All along the line of hazel stakes, you'll notice trunks and plant stems lying at a steep angle, almost parallel to the ground. This is where the pleaching comes in: it's a process in which stems of existing foliage are slashed through near their base, leaving just enough bark and sapwood to keep them alive, then the stems are bent back to run along the hazel scaffolding. In the ensuing years, those near-horizontal plants and shrubs will create new shoots that will intertwine and mesh together, and the natural hedge will steadily be formed. After a number of years, the hazel stakes and binding will slowly rot away, by which time the hedge will have become the new self-supporting structure itself. Nature at work!

There are, of course, some areas of the neophyte OPG hedge where there was very little foliage to lay in the first place, so to help

plug the gaps, a number of saplings have been planted: 15 blackthorn, 10 common dogwood, 25 field maple, 25 hazel and 175 hawthorn: all provided by H.E.D.G.E Estate Services, the company hired by OPG to lay the hedge. H.E.D.G.E also provided the hazel stakes and binding whips, all sustainably coppiced from a woodland near Newbury.

There was plenty of preparation work needed before the professional hedge-laying could begin, including the removal of the concrete posts and barbed wire that ran along the south side of OPG. Working parties of volunteers from the village helped to clear the area. On the first weekend of hedge-laying, back in January, some of the volunteers took the opportunity to find out how to lay a hedge themselves, tucking into the hazel binding work with gusto.

It has only been three months since the hedge was laid, but those saplings are already growing and budding, while the pleached foliage is starting to show new growth of its own. If you'd like to help the hedge along, it couldn't be easier – all you have to do, whenever you're wandering along the boundary of OPG, is tuck in the odd twig or two that you see poking out. By helping keep the foliage intertwined, you'll be playing your part in the creation of a natural hedge that will, in the years and decades ahead, add further charm, plus wonderful opportunities for nature to make its home, to the growing saga of Old Priory Garden: Taplow's very own community woodland.

For further information on Friends of Old Priory Garden, please visit Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/groups/oldpriorygardentaplow](http://www.facebook.com/groups/oldpriorygardentaplow)

*Malcolm Tait*



Andrew Findlay

## The 1965 St Nic's

*In 1998, Headmistress Helen Grellier commemorated 150 years of what in 1973 had become St Nicolas' Combined Church of England School by writing the first volume of its history covering the period from 1848 until 1900. Now Adam Smith – former pupil (1966-1972) and current parent (of Sam and Poppy) and Governor (since 2010) – is commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the current school by taking up the tale from 1944. He has kindly provided this story of how the new school came into being...*

Among many other things the 1944 Education Act sought to improve the fabric of schools. It made 'voluntary' church schools like Taplow the offer to become 'aided', which included paying up to half the cost of a new build. Taplow accepted.

September 1945 found Taplow school effective but primitive: a typical Victorian arrangement lacking electricity, efficient heating or mains drainage. The loos were outside (and often froze in winter) and the only hot water was in the kitchen. The sole access was steps from the High Street, treacherous when icy. There were 84 pupils on roll occupying three classes of mixed age groups. The school building was at least big enough, as it had the use of the old 'Parish Hall' and occasional use of the Reading Room, both church-owned. The playground was far too small, but the school had permission to use the present playing field (or thought it did). What we know as the 'village green' was a farmyard.

1956 brings the first record of the Taplow school managers (from 1981, 'governors') thinking about the building. Fabric was the priority: specifically, the dilapidation of the Parish Hall, which served as kitchen, dining room and sometimes infant classroom. Capacity was a problem only to the extent of needing a bigger playground and the desirability of creating a school hall to be independent of the Reading Room. From later records it seems likely the managers envisaged a mix of new building, refurbishment and rearrangement.

The managers made this a five-year target, but things became more urgent when in 1957 Eton Rural District Council earmarked 'the field adjoining the school for housing purposes' (ie. the present school site and village green). The RDC agreed to reserve three-quarters of an



Adam Smith

Nigel Smales

acre, though a year later it decided on Buffins Field for its housing instead. With pupil numbers already nudging 100, the managers now worried their present plans may not be enough to accommodate 'possible housing developments at Taplow'.

Securing the playing field was now necessary if the school was to remain on or near its existing site. There was a wobble when Lady Gage's Hill Farm tenant Arthur Mewton objected, but in 1959 she conveyed the field to a charitable trust for the school 'subject to the tenancy (if any) in favour of AW Mewton'. With this settled, the school plans immediately moved into a more serious phase which would lead eventually to the new building.

The managers and church had by now decided to abandon the old school and build a new one. The 1959 Education Act conveniently raised the government's share of the cost from 50% to 75%. This was the high-water-mark of Harold Macmillan's stop-go government. The 'stop' element then delayed Ministry approval of Taplow's plans until late 1961, when it agreed to contribute £30,800, leaving the managers (in practice, the diocese) to find the other £7,700. The Ministry would not pay for a new headmaster's house.

This £30,800 was fixed, but it would be another three years before the builders actually started. Pupil numbers at the newly-renamed St Nicolas' Church of England Primary School meanwhile rose from 110 to 170, occupying five classrooms. The money and plans for the new school allowed for only four classrooms, so it was already too small before the first brick was laid. The inevitable decision to add a fifth classroom was made during the build.

The diocese paid for this, with help from Taplovian donor Percy Goulden, hence the name over the classroom door today. The small library also got built somehow, despite having been sacrificed at one point to meet the budget. This library would serve as a classroom, bringing the total to six.

The builders had been supposed to finish by 31st December 1964, but a national brick shortage delayed completion until April. The big move happened in the last two days before the Easter holiday, and the first proper day was the start of the summer term on 4th May 1965. The new kitchen was not quite ready, so the old school dining room continued for a few weeks. Classroom 5 would not be finished until the new school year in September, so Mrs Weller's class remained in the Reading Room for the term.

Once everything was working, the official Opening and Dedication went ahead on Saturday 9th October 1965. On Tuesday 19th October caretaker Mr Fowler took a last look



Music teacher Joan Carr with a class in 1972



The Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977: Class 2

around and locked up as usual at 6pm for his short walk home to Pax Cottage. Headmaster Colin Blackwell related what happened next in the school log book:

*This evening Mr Grellier reported to me that smoke was coming from the rear of the school near the chair store. On investigation I found that the caretaker's supplies were on fire and immediately summoned the fire brigade.*

*Flames were soon leaping through the roof but the firemen soon had the fire under control and prevented damage to other than the Assembly Hall, Chair Store, Library and Classroom No. 2. Smoke however spread to other parts of the school causing considerable damage to the paintwork.*

The next day a small army of mums with rags and buckets cleaned the walls. The cause of the fire was never established. Electrical fault and vandalism were ruled out. The most likely explanation was a year's supply of paper towels stacked in front of a heating grille.

Mrs Alexander's Classroom 2 (nearest the hall) became a temporary dining room and her class occupied the Reading Room. The builders returned on 20th January 1966 to repair everything. The school was still not quite back to normal at the start of the summer term on Friday 29th April, the day I started with 14 others, bringing the roll up to a new record of 179. I remember a short spell with Mrs Alexander in the Reading Room, sunshine streaming through the high window, hot enough to soften crayons. Mrs Alexander kept a souvenir of the fire: one of the lampshades from high up in the hall roof, molten and misshapen.

*Adam Smith*

# The 1960s Silchester House

Lynette Szczepanik



*Last year, the prospect of Silchester Manor being demolished attracted the interest of a pupil who attended Silchester House School at the time the new St Nicolas' School was coming into being....*

As an assistant film director, my mother Daphne Murray (née Anderson) knew 'Smithy' Smith-Morris of Polytechnic Films who lived in the 1950s on Berry Hill at The Elms, now replaced by Stockwells. Perhaps that's why my parents came to live in Maidenhead. I was born in the Canadian Red Cross Hospital at Cliveden in 1956 and later I succeeded my cousins Giane and Antoinette Charpentier at Silchester House Girls' School.

The school had been founded by Beatrice Roberts who gave Jonathan Bond's *Brookside* new life and a new name in the late-1910s. During the 1920s she engaged various tutors including Eileen O'Shaughnessy, future wife of George Orwell, and Yvonne Blonay, who succeeded as headmistress in the 1940s. She may have been related to Baron Godefroy de Blonay, a Swiss friend of Lord Desborough from the time both were on the International Olympic Committee for the first London Olympic Games in 1908.

Mme Blonay was petite, elegant, charming, warm and friendly to my parents and me at my interview. It was surprising how much firmer and stricter she was with the girls once the school day was in progress. And yet, although we had to talk French, it was an honour for any girl to be invited very occasionally to sit at her table for lunch – the best part of the school day. The food was delicious, the puddings exceptional: oblong

jam or treacle tarts which the elder girl on each table must divide up equally. After lunch, we enjoyed walking along the lovely veranda at the rear of the school to the gravel playground, although I wasn't so keen on skipping there after I fell into the nearby greenhouse, cut my hand and had to be rushed to hospital. I still have the scar 48 years later.

My friends included Ingrid Thomas, Pat Becker, Kim Wallis, the French sisters Chantal and Huguette Boyagis and (although nobody believed it at first) a Russian princess. As a Rurikid, Princess Alexandra Obolensky must be distantly related to Prince Alexis Dolgorourki of Nashdom. Her family fled the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and her uncle, Prince Alexander Obolensky, is famous for scoring two tries in England's 13-0 rugby union victory over the All Blacks in 1936 and for being killed in action serving in the Royal Air Force in 1940.

Captain Parker taught history with the aid of a well-aimed board rubber but he was still a favourite. The girls were devastated when he died. The tall and capable Miss Forster was the deputy head. She taught physical education with great enthusiasm, building confidence in the girls by having them vault over double bars and climb up wall-bars and ropes. Every week, part of our homework was to answer 20 general knowledge questions and perhaps it was learning to recite Bible passages for the gentle deaconess who taught Religious Studies that led to my studying theology at Oxford.

Silchester House was spacious and welcoming. I had such a happy time there. It would be wonderful if the beautiful Victorian building can remain preserved for posterity.



Tessa Szczepanik

Lynette Szczepanik

*Lynette Szczepanik (née Murray) of Tonbridge, Kent*

# Making Memories

Victoria Wayland-Smith



Scarlett and Sasha

With no Carols on the Green being arranged in 2013, we were keen to resurrect this event as it was such an important part of our childhood and who could deny

newcomers to the village and young children such a great Taplow tradition? So, early in December, we made the brave decision to organise a carol-singing event ourselves – but on our terms with yummy cakes, hot chocolate and hot dogs! We were amazed by how many of our friends felt the same way about the Carols on the Green and recruiting helpers was easy.

Firstly, we had to get permission from the Parish Council to hold the event on the Village Green and then come up with a date that didn't clash with any other event taking place in the village. After many planning meetings the day finally arrived and thankfully it was rain-free! We were thrilled by how many people helped on the day and the delicious food which was so kindly donated – Joel Viollet's crostinis and Ginny Felton's mini-sausages being particular highlights. The carols were sung with great enthusiasm thanks to the brilliant live music performed by Sally and Lauren Sharp on the guitar and trumpet which made the night truly unique along with the back drop of our beautiful sparkly Christmas tree just

added to the festive feeling. We were also very excited to see our local celebrity Terry Wogan come and show his support!

We made the decision not to charge anything for the food and drinks instead just asking for a donation to our nominated charities. This not only helped speed up the distribution of food but also proved what generous people we have living in Taplow. The total we received in donations amounted to £250 which was equally split between The Salvation Army and the St Nicolas' Church Roof Appeal.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who made a donation, those friends of ours who helped, everyone who brought along food and everyone who made the night possible. From start to finish, organising this event showed us why we are so lucky to live in this village. We are already planning Carols on the Green 2015 and hope it will be as fabulous as last time.

*Sasha Boden (14) & Scarlett Wayland-Smith (10)*



Andrew Findlay

# What a Load of Rubbish

The last Newsletter carried an article by Caroline Gillies on our new rubbish collection regime, a longer version of which appeared on the Society's website. While being all for recycling, it pushes upstream a whole agenda of questions. What packaging, paper and card are recyclable and what not? Which bin does what go into and when must which be put out for emptying? After having garden waste collected as part of the service for all but a few of the 30 years we've lived in South Bucks, why are we now faced with the choice of paying the same for less service or more for the same? Isn't it sad that so many streets are cluttered by vast families of bins that householders can't find out-of-sight room for? Why was it so hard to

accept that food waste must be collected every week? And when we take food waste to the dump, why are we told to throw it in the skip for non-recyclables when surely it is recyclable?

At least there is a reason to be cheerful. It was lovely to hear that Molly Edmondson, Ametz Parcell-Arreqi and Mia Webb had organised their Year 6 pals at St Nicolas' School to pick up litter from local footpaths to raise funds for more litterbins. Well done to the girls and their friends, and also to Head Teacher Paul Adams, PCSO Angela O'Donnell and Tesco staff for helping the children with their mission.

*Caroline Smales*

# The Moment is Now

Inspired by the experience of writing *When You're Smiler*, his meticulously researched story of the pioneering career of his father, film cameraman Eddy Smales, Nigel Smales decided to make his next project a History of Taplow. For the last three-and-a-half years, between editing and writing articles for this Newsletter, he has been engaged in exhaustive research and extensive interviews to complete that project. The title is *Taplow Moments*.

Nigel's history is written in a unique narrative format setting the evolving story of Taplow through the centuries within a context of the present day and its residents. He invited the authors of *Taplow at the Millennium* to read his final draft for accuracy of content and consistency of style. Both agreed on the extraordinary depth of the research supporting the content and the

appeal of the free movement of the narrative from present-to-past and back again.

*Taplow Moments* is an A4 hardback book of over 450 pages with a foreword by Sir Terry Wogan and 517 photographs, 46 maps and 21 family trees made all the more colourful by a grant from the Parish Council's legacy fund. It will be published on 20th June. The price will be £25.

Nigel has hand-delivered a leaflet to every Taplow letterbox he could find with a special offer of £20 per copy if ordered before 15th May. Any readers who have not received one should telephone 01628 661636.

Ten percent of each sale and all of the profits will be going to the roof repair fund of St Nicolas' Church.

*Karl Lawrence*

# Jon Willmore 1948-2015

Taplow Station might not still exist if it hadn't been for Jon Willmore. As founder and the heartbeat of TRUG – Taplow Rail Users Group – there could be nobody better to pen a piece for this Newsletter about the coming of Crossrail. He and I have been exchanging ideas and drafts since last November. Sadly he passed away on 27th March before we had finalised exactly what to say and how.

In 1950, Jon's parents bought The Lodge on Boundary Road, now the last remnant of Taplow Grammar School since it was replaced by Hillmead Court. He went to Silchester House School until he was seven, then to public school and Cambridge before heading for the potting shed at William Wood & Sons in 1969. His first job each day was to water shrubs from soon after half-seven until ten when Dick, an accomplished old-fashioned head gardener complete with pipe and pork pie hat, would call everyone inside to enjoy Cornish pasties heated over a paraffin stove. This genteel horticultural company was taken over in the early-1970s by Jack Bishop who transferred Jon to the drawing office where he designed a swimming pool for actor Sid James and a lake for ex-Beatle John Lennon. Imagine.

Eventually, Wood's nursery became The Bishop Centre, but that's another story. Meanwhile, Jon built a career in market research



Esther Willmore

and married Esther. They succeeded his mother at The Lodge in 1987 and gradually he gave more and more of his time to Taplow. His achievements include making significant contributions to the Community and Parish Plans, and running the Neighbourhood Watch and TRUG. With this last hat on (that distinctive baseball cap, of course), he persuaded Network Rail not only to keep Taplow Station open but also to invest £250,000 in renovating its footbridge in 2006.

*Nigel Smales*



# The Coming of Crossrail



Nigel Smales

The Great Western Railway arrived in 1838 to change Taplow forever. After 67 years of cogitation and construction, now Crossrail is coming: a 73-mile east-west railway connection from Reading and Heathrow through 26 miles of tunnels under London to distant Essex. It will increase London's rail capacity by 10%. It has already begun to change Taplow...

The new, longer trains will be electric, powered by overhead lines suspended from a string of towers. Neither overhanging branches nor the fearful prospect of 'leaves on the line' can be tolerated. Anything growing within 6.6m of the tracks (almost 22 feet) has been stripped away so passing trains are more intrusive sights and sounds. However, if this a bit of a shock, wait until Brunel's graceful brick masterpiece wears its spiky metal crown.

The first phase of upgrading work at Taplow Station is under way. Platforms 1 and 2 are already isolated by hefty fences and Platform 3 has a reduced canopy with its timber valance restored. New help-points and CCTV will be installed before the summer is out, the footbridge will be reinforced and enclosed by glass barriers and the flowerbeds will be restored by botanist and artist Pam Taylor of Stomp Road, former TRUG committee member.

Crossrail will begin operation in London in December 2018 but it will be another year before it reaches us. By then, a new step-free footbridge with two lifts will link the London-end of Platforms 3 and 4, and a number of the spaces in the north car park (perhaps all of them) will be reserved for Blue Badge holders. We are promised four peak-time trains-per-hour and two-per-hour off-peak with quicker journeys to Paddington (34 minutes instead of 40) and Reading (15 minutes instead of 20) plus

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direct connections to central London and the City – for example: 38 minutes instead of 55 to Bond Street and 52 minutes instead of 72 to Canary Wharf. This convenience and the various commercial and residential developments hereabouts all combine to inform projections that the numbers of passengers leaving or arriving at Taplow each year will double by 2026 to 480,000 – but never on a Sunday. Despite commuter surveys giving plenty of evidence of local demand, Network Rail and First Great Western (FGW) have persistently resisted providing Sunday services and Crossrail is silent on the matter. Perhaps Land Securities and Berkeley Homes might ally to rattle cages?

*Jon Willmore*

This last thought is typical of Jon: always on the lookout for ruses to make things better. He hoped that the Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers Association ([www.mmpa.org.uk](http://www.mmpa.org.uk)) might have a greater gravitas than TRUG not only to press Crossrail to provide Sunday services but also keep Taplow Station in good repair. Its buildings are between 131 and 143 years old, they need more tender loving care than a coat of paint. The footbridge is pocked with underlying rust and three of the posts have faulty joints. It isn't clear if current or future renovations will resolve any of these issues. While Jon feared that the swish new electric trains might arrive just in time to see the old place crumble, he thought this might be prevented if Taplow rail users joined MMPA to establish a supplementary 'Friends of Taplow Station' group. Are any commuters willing to step into his shoes?

Andrew Findlay

*Nigel Smales*



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# A Brave New World?

Readers may recall that Newsletter 102 (Autumn 2014) introduced Paul Cheshire, Professor of Economic Geography at the London School of Economics. This gentleman argues that "this country is turning homes into luxury assets similar to artworks and gold" and that the solution is to drastically prune the Green Belt, which he says subsidises "horseculture and golf", and flood the place with new dwellings. Perhaps the professor was upset by our demonstrating last November that his numbers were 13 years out of date: during a Radio 4 interview broadcast on 11th March, he advocated that 25,000 new houses should be built in Taplow and Dorney. For comparison, the 2011 census counted 50,800 homes in Slough and 58,349 in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, which some say should see perhaps 12,000 new dwellings peppered from Braywick to Holyport and Fifield to Clewer.

Clearly, if it were left to Prof Cheshire, the future of the middle Thames Valley is one of urban sprawl with green confined to garden lawns and the occasional tree. Fortunately, he is not in charge. However, the current Government has recognised the (much) greater development pressure by requiring every local authority to discard its local plan and start again. South Bucks District Council (SBDC) has commenced the process of public consultation for what will become the new Local Plan, a strategic document that will shape the growth of the district for the foreseeable future. This will include the provision by 2036 of an additional 7,000 homes in the district – a lot fewer than 25,000 crammed into one corner of it, but we won't escape entirely.

For its part, Taplow Parish Council (TPC) recently circulated a briefing paper and encouraged residents to respond to SBDC's initial survey. The paper began by recalling the purposes of the Green Belt: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another, to safeguard the countryside, to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, and to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. It asserted that Taplow's Green Belt is of regional and national significance because of the attractive natural setting it provides for locations of historical, sporting and leisure importance, because it provides a rural separation

of the urban areas of Maidenhead, Burnham and Slough, and because it forms part of a larger swathe of Green Belt stretching from Beaconsfield to Windsor. This rural character is an essential component in support of the role of the Parish as a regional amenity area.

With two motorways nearby and crossed by a major railway line that is being upgraded, Taplow is particularly attractive to developers and consequently will see a conflict between providing new areas for development, principally housing, and conserving the Green Belt. Increased traffic generation could not only impair ease of movement but inevitably downgrade the rural character of the area due to white lining, road widening, extra signage and kerbing. However, TPC recognises that a purely negative or blanket 'NIMBY' response will not carry much weight in the consultation process. Instead, it suggests a better strategy would be to identify positive opportunities for development. But most importantly, it is encouraging the widest possible engagement of residents to define how Taplow Parish should be treated in the new SBDC Local Plan as it evolves over the next two years.

The Society is at one with TPC on this matter. Although this Newsletter is published just after the end of this first phase of consultation, it echoes TPC's message that Taplovians should look out for and grasp any opportunity they can to protect the best of the Parish and to guide and inform its future growth in the most socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

*Nigel Smales*

## Village Green Party

Saturday 20th June

See insert for details and  
booking form

# Mill Lane: Ready, Steady, Wait

In September last year, Berkeley Homes (Three Valleys) Ltd submitted four planning applications, the sum of which was to seek permission to build 257 homes at Mill Lane. On 16th December, South Bucks District Council's Planning Committee assembled to consider three of these applications, one having been withdrawn just hours before because National Grid, owner of the two former gasworks sites, would not countenance the refusal recommended by the Planning Officer. Most Taplovians were encouraged by this recommendation but nobody had forgotten that this Committee had approved the Bishop Centre application despite its Officer's contrary advice. Locals crowded into the 'public gallery' to hear Roger Worthington and Nigel Smales use their allotted five minutes to speak on behalf of the Hitcham & Taplow Society, the Ellington Road & District Association and the Maidenhead Civic Society to advocate refusal of the main application.

Deliberations began. Councillor Lord Stockton was particularly scathing about the design, Councillor George Sandy remarked on

"the elephant in the room" (the number of dwellings) and gradually it became clear that the Committee would accept the Officer's recommendation to refuse the main application on the grounds of the bulk of the proposed development in the Green Belt. Applications to convert Glen Island House to residential use and to build Martin Knight's footbridge across the Thames were both approved but then withdrawn for being untenable without the main application being approved.

Councillor Jacquetta Lowen-Cooper encouraged Berkeley to take on board the reasons for the refusal and return with new proposals, a sentiment echoed by some Taplovians in subsequent communications with Berkeley. Recent conversations with the Parish Council, with Dominic Grieve MP and with various stakeholders suggest that Berkeley will do just that – but not before this Newsletter's copy deadline and perhaps not until after the forthcoming election. We can only wait with bated breath.

*Karl Lawrence*

# The Race is Run

On 3rd March, for the first time in 107 years, there was no need to bolt the stable doors at Cliveden Stud. Having been its tenant since 2006, an increase in rent left former international eventer Tessa Spencer with no choice but to move her livery stables and riding school to Henley.



Waldorf Astor, later 2nd Viscount Astor, founded Cliveden Stud in 1908 to stable and train his thoroughbred racehorses. By 1950, horses bred at the Stud had won 460 races and been placed 547 times to win £487,750. Louis Freedman succeeded the Astors in 1966. He and his son Philip continued to breed winners there for 40 years, the pinnacle of which was seeing *Reference Point* win The Derby in 1987. Tessa has kept up appearances, but a shadow of possible redevelopment has hung over the place since Philip sold up in 2006. Planning applications to develop the site or parts of it for residential purposes have been refused and now provisions which prevent the land from being used for anything but equestrian or agricultural purposes may have been breached. Only time will tell how the new Local Plan will decipher this conundrum.

*Nigel Smales*

## Can't Be Seen For Dust?

What's in the dust created by gravel extraction? It is not the same as that created by farming or other periodic natural events. The killer is the fine particles of dust you cannot see. Quarrying releases fine particulate matter into the air to drift downwind and permeate nearby homes, parks, schools and playgrounds. The impact is gradual over the many years a pit is in operation. The closer you are to the source, the higher the concentration and danger. The noise is irritating and it is so disheartening to watch the incessant accumulation of dust on and inside cars and houses – but that's not the half of it. The really scary part is to realise that the particles are also lining our lungs and our bodies have no means to expel them.

My home is immediately downwind of the gravel extraction operations which have continued on-and-off over many years at Berry Hill Farm. When I first experienced breathing difficulties, I thought I had bronchitis. The problem gradually worsened until mysteriously disappearing several months after the quarrying had stopped only to recur within months of works recommencing. In 2009, the King Edward VII Hospital in Windsor diagnosed my asthma and, when I was critically ill, I had to be rushed to A&E at Wexham Park for an overnight stay on a respirator. My condition becomes more acute when the quarry is active. Last year, I only got through many distressing sleepless nights with the aid of an array of brown, blue, green and purple inhalers. Life is a little easier now the works are on hold, but the future is daunting, not least because Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) doesn't seem to be doing a very good job...

BCC always used to invite local residents to pre-planning application

meetings and a site visit to the next planned area of operation. And yet out of the blue and just days before Easter 2014, we had a planning application notification without the customary prior meeting. The BCC website was often down and even a trip to the County Council Offices in Aylesbury couldn't reveal what extraction operations were being proposed. It was only some weeks later that I learned the works will be 70 metres from houses in Boundary Road and just 50m from those in Approach Road. This goes completely against all previous recommendations and guidelines which require such works to be no closer than 200m from any residential property.

BCC said that this information was given at a previous meeting, a claim supported by neither the recollections of those residents present nor BCC's own minutes, and that it had contacted local residents – yet many people living in Boundary Road, Berry Hill and Approach Road were unaware of these plans until after planning permission had been granted. Astonishingly, despite a succession of complaints being made at meetings and in writing over the years about the noise, the dust and the detrimental effect on wildlife, BCC further claimed to have received no complaints about previous extraction works. In my opinion, it is incomprehensible and inexcusable for BCC to have granted permission for gravel to be extracted so close to our houses let alone our gardens when the distress and harm this causes at 200m – let alone at 50m – has been well-documented. One does begin to wonder if County Councillors actually read the reports they are given before making their decisions. Perhaps they can't see them for dust.

*Louise Symons*

Nigel Smales



# The Outgrowing of Rowing

Maidenhead's first rowing club seems to have been the Star Club which competed in the 1840 Henley Regatta. Its star faded and was succeeded in 1876 by Maidenhead Rowing Club (MRC) with Taplow's William Grenfell a founder member and its first president. Since then, the Club's fortunes have risen and fallen along with the endless rise and fall of the River Thames.

In 1988, it was decided to demolish the old timber-and-corrugated-iron MRC clubhouse, which was sandwiched between the Riviera Hotel and Maidenhead Bridge, and build a brand new one on the former Bond's Boatyard, then still in Berkshire. After years of wrangling, the County boundary was realigned to the centre of the Thames. However, by the time the sliver was subsequently transferred to Bucks at the beginning of 1994, it came complete with Maidenhead's planning permission to build a new clubhouse there, partly funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

At the time, MRC had about 75 members. The clubhouse and its car park were designed accordingly and opened by Sir Steve Redgrave in 1998. Since then the Olympic Games successes of Redgrave, Rob Williams and others have spurred the popularity of rowing in general and of MRC in particular. Today, it is a strongly competitive club with extensive junior interest stimulated through hosting Claires Court School Rowing Club. This wave of success has led inevitably to the Club bursting out of its skin. Training and parking facilities are grossly inadequate for the current 300-plus members. This is frustrating for the membership and causes difficulties for residents and Thames Path walkers as MRC parking seriously overflows along River Road and Ellington Road. Some residents are less than charmed by early-bird rowers in the summer dawn.



Martin Maund

The view across River Road?

MRC wishes to support its growth in membership by enlarging the building, specifically to provide better training facilities in an extension at first and second floor levels over the upstream end of the car park. A planning application to this end was submitted to South Bucks District Council in January 2015. The objections are clear: furtherance of the intolerable traffic and parking volumes and the bulk of the extension looming oppressively in the Taplow Riverside Conservation Area.

At the time of writing (early April), the application has been withdrawn due to objections from the Highways Authority. MRC is considering its options. If permission is eventually granted for this design or anything like it, residents are going to be greatly inconvenienced by traffic congestion and dangers, loss of daylight and curtailment of the Thames Path views of the river. If permission is refused, the Club will have its own existential crisis. There aren't exactly many unused riverside sites waiting for a new clubhouse! It may look to reconfigure its internal spaces to make more training space available or have to limit the number of activities and members it supports. So once more its fortunes may fluctuate like the river levels.

*Roger Worthington*

An artist's impression from the planning application



## Farewell from the Feltons and Forsyths



*Having collectively and individually made significant contributions to the life and times of Taplow over many decades, two couples have departed to seek new adventures – Ginny & Euan Felton to Dorset, Liz & Alistair Forsyth to Lothian. Ginny begins this retrospective reflection....*

I have lived in three different houses in Taplow and a fourth in what was Hitcham. In 1953, we returned from the USA where my father, Leonard Miall, had been the BBC's Washington correspondent. We briefly rented The Red Cottage, now St Nicolas House, where I have a particular memory of proudly handing a display of voluptuous chrysanthemum blooms to my mother Lorna which I had just 'found' on a gravestone in the churchyard.

My parents bought Maryfield for £3,999 from Lady Beatrice Pole-Carew in 1954. It had four bathrooms – an outrageous luxury by post-war British standards, but unremarkable by American – and we installed central heating as a high priority. The village had a Horse Show, a Bible College, a Post Office, a butcher and a Budgen's shop that never stocked anything our mother wanted. Mr Roadnight would patiently explain that there was 'no demand for that sort of thing' while she turned apoplectic. Our first Taplow Primary School classroom was the 'Parish Hall': a stand-alone tin hut where the Perkins Room of the Village Centre now stands. It housed in turn the Infants' Class, the Brownies, ballet classes, jumble sales and the Sunday School Christmas Party. It overlooked a farmyard – now the Village Green – where my three brothers and I would sneak into the open-sided hay barn to climb the bales and risk the terrible wrath of Mr Mewton, Taplow's fat and fearsome farmer.

In my late teens, we returned to the States for a few years – this time to New York – before

spending the next 20 years or so living in London and working in theatre, film and TV. Euan and I married in 1984 and had our marriage blessed in St Nicolas' Church by Johnny Meyrick with a little help from Christopher Hare, the rector from my childhood. Eight years later we settled in Byways with Leo, our six-year-old son. After Lorna's death in 1975, Leonard, at 61, had married Sally Bicknell and they moved down the drive to spend 30 happy years together at Maryfield Cottage.

Euan probably felt he was an outsider, but he plunged in with both feet taking the helm of tricky negotiations with the National Trust over Cliveden Hospital's housing development plans. The Society kept him busy organising the annual Village Green Party for about ten years – reins he was grateful to release last year – and as a Parish Councillor has seen off two or three Chairmen.

*Euan takes up the tale...*

I'm not sure about seeing off Chairmen (and a Chairwoman) of Taplow Parish Council (TPC)! I was more supporting, I hope, while standing up for the principles of local democracy. As lead Councillor on planning matters for many years, I have attempted to put the interests of Taplow first and have always believed in the power of facts and the rule of law over political expediency and bluster: broad shoulders required.

Through Ginny's long association with Taplow, I was welcomed into a very special realm of friendship and kindness which has lasted and evolved through the years. It is strange to remember that not much more than ten years ago all the talk was of an ageing village and now to be leaving when a new generation has flowed in to re-invent the community. I can't help a wry smile when I witness the old guard,

Richard Forsyth



themselves and their children – young, thrusting and rowdy in the 1970s – now muttering and complaining that the Green is populated with young people playing. Whatever next?

Now Taplow looks to its next evolution with the Mill Lane regeneration project about to happen, not hastily but through a process of thoughtful, if extended, negotiation. Unless the red mist of economic imperatives clouds the judgement of the decision-makers, I am sure that the future Mill Lane will soon not only fit well and be welcomed by the existing residents but also add to the variety and interest of a treasured landscape.

We will both miss Taplow hugely and will, of course, look for any opportunity to meet up with old friends.

*And finally, Alistair tells the Forsyth Saga...*

Liz and I arrived in Taplow with Jillian (aged 6) and Richard (4) in May 1978, moving into 22 Cedar Chase. Coming from Edinburgh, my dream vision for living in England was to find a small village with a village green, a cricket pitch, a church and a pub. My dream came true!

At that time, there was a Ladies' Dress shop in the High Street and a Post Office in Rectory Road where you could pick up all the village gossip. Apparently you still can. I soon discovered that residents of Cedar Chase were considered *nouveau*, having dared to build new houses in the heart of a great, historic village. When we moved 200 yards down Rectory Road to The Old Manor House seven years later one formidable resident said to me: "Welcome to Taplow."

However, we were made very welcome in Cedar Chase where we found a community spirit quite unlike anything we'd known before. There must have been about 20 young children living there, and enjoying the wonderful communal grounds. At the weekend, we'd open the back gate to let Jillian and Richard out



Nigel Smates

to play, and only saw them again when they were hungry. Through the children, we made lots of good friends with their parents, many of whom are still good friends today.

Our move in 1985 had two objectives: to find a bigger house in the village and, arguably, to be nearer the pub. Before long, I was invited to join TPC, which I served for 15 years, eight as Chairman, during which time the Flood Relief Scheme was the big burning issue. The Council opposed it vigorously and it kept me very busy for about five years. However, I got to know our MP, Tim Smith, very well and spent many hours in the House of Commons discussing our case with Tim and getting support from other MPs, which almost tempted me into a career in politics! Keeping up the family tradition, Liz has now served TPC for eight years.

Whilst the generation before us complained of the new housing in the village, the big difference of living in Taplow since 1978 has been the amount of development taking place outside the village. The village is still an oasis of calm, although the amount of through traffic is increasing all the time. And we are only a mile away from the Bath Road, the hideous Tesco development, the ever-growing Sainsbury's site and the multitude of housing schemes being built all around us.

Once more, there are lots of families with young children – not just in Cedar Chase but throughout Taplow – and it has developed into a great community, but it is up to you to continue the fight for this very special place. We have learned that, if you live in Taplow, you have a duty to serve it if you can. Liz and I have both contributed to the school, the church, TPC, to the Recreation Grounds (THRGA) and also now to Old Priory Garden, which is a wonderful community project. I have to say it's all been a great pleasure and very satisfying. We shall miss it and all of you.

# Lincoln's End

Remembering Lincoln Lee

## Unforeseen Consequences

It seems that Lincoln Lee needn't have worried – as he did in Newsletter 84 (Autumn 2005) – whether Taplow Station's platforms would be long enough for Crossrail trains. However, unusually for such a perceptive fellow, he didn't anticipate the greater concern that such long trains might be full of commuters attracted by the rural feel of hereabouts only to make it all the more urban by their arrival. Articles within consider this prospect.

## Invisible Taplow

You might not have noticed, but Taplow is invisible. Editions of the *Maidenhead Advertiser* sold at Bucks newsagents used to appear as the *Burnham & Taplow Advertiser*. Now it's just the *Burnham Advertiser*. And recently, when it ran a Taplow news story about the railway embankment being "denuded" for Crossrail, the newspaper contacted Maidenhead Civic Society for its opinion. Why not seek comment from Taplow Parish Council, the Hitcham & Taplow Society or the Ellington Road & District Association? This isn't an isolated incident: nowadays, the Skindles saga is always reported exclusively from the Maidenhead viewpoint. If the *Advertiser* doesn't sell well in Taplow, why would that be?



Nigel Smales

## Who's Who?

Donald Rose (then Rosenthaler) is second from left in the third row of this 1934 Taplow School photo which he sent from his home in Spain. He wonders if anyone recognises anyone. If you do, please let the Editor know.



## Station Parking

The six-month trial of double-yellow lines in Institute Road is up. The Society decided not to object to this parking prohibition remaining in place because of the number of crossovers there will be once the former SGT site is fully developed. But a weather eye must be kept on the evolving situation...

Parking around here isn't a new problem. In Newsletter 75 (Spring 2001), Lincoln bemoaned how many people parked on local roads to avoid paying to use Taplow Station car parks. On 24th September 2014, only 17 of 103 cars were in the station car parks. The rest were in Institute Road (30), Approach Road (13) and Station Road (43). On 26th March, there were 113 cars in all: none in Institute Road, 13 in Approach Road, 59 in Station Road and 41 in the car parks which had only three spaces vacant. The discrepancy in car park capacity results from contractors' vehicles taking up less space in the south car park. The increase in Station Road might be partly due to overspill from the Bishop Centre, where some say there aren't enough spaces for staff to park. There is no indication that the proposed expansion of the car park there is intended to address this problem, and Crossrail is likely to make matters worse.

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