

# Hitcham and Taplow Society

Newsletter 93: Spring 2010  
£2.50 to non-members

50th  
Anniversary

[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.*

President: Eva Lipman  
Vice Presidents: Tony Hickman, Fred Russell, Professor Bernard Trevallion OBE  
Chairman: Euan Felton  
Vice Chairman: Karl Lawrence  
Treasurer: Peter Mole  
Secretary: Neil Blundell  
Membership Secretary: Gill Holloway  
Committee: Sarah Brodie, Heather Fenn, Nicky Fratagnoli, Jill Harden, Andy McKenzie, Warren Palmer, Barrie Peroni, Louise Symons, Matthew Travers, Jeremy Vanstone, Esther Willmore  
Website Adviser & Newsletter Production: Andrew Findlay

Contact Address: HTS, 21 Byways, Burnham, SL1 7EB

Cover picture: A successful egg-hunter (photo by Andrew Clarke)

## Editorial

When our first Chairman, Dr Maurice Rogers, retired in 1974 he wrote an open letter stating that he believed that your society had had "a significant influence in maintaining the surroundings to our homes at least as attractive as we found them". It's often enough said that the only constant thing in life is change, but it is my view that without the presence of the Society to moderate that change then the parishes of Hitcham and Taplow would have been a lot less attractive than when Dr. Rogers left us.

In more recent years we began to learn to play the game of anticipating what the planners and the government intended for our lovely parish, lying as it does so enticingly athwart the green space between Slough and Maidenhead, by attempting to tell them what we would like to see happen, given the unrelenting pressure to build and build simply because the land was there to be built on.

We had a go at producing a Village Design Statement, using the one produced by Wheatley as an exemplar. This idea of a VDS matured into our Parish Plan under the guidance of Professor Trevallion and the Parish Council. I think it perfidious that after the work we all put into its creation that we were eventually told that it would not, after all, be used by the increasingly remote planners as a Supplementary Planning Document (which they had promised it would be). Had it been accepted as a planning supplement then, as the growing regionalisation of our beloved country and the concomitant bureaucratisation and remoteness of the planners proceeded apace, they would at least

have had some idea of where and what Taplow was. As it happened the new and somewhat unwieldy system devised by the government is still in some disarray. The latest version of the South Bucks Core Strategy clearly shows that local planners are desperately trying to avoid the worst excesses of centralised planning and showing true care for our green land. In particular the requirement for a proper planning brief for the future development of the Mill Lane site is a welcome step in the right direction. Our constant pressure on the District Council has, I believe paid off. Together we have made a difference, we are highly visible, our parish is not just a strip of available development land between two expanding conurbations.

During these latter years we also created links with other societies, such as the Chiltern Society but perhaps most importantly with ANTAS (the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies) which gives us access to about 20 other societies which have added critical mass to our voice on larger issues.

In this later period we have also been moving with the times in engaging ourselves in wider community activities and in joining up with the younger folk responsible for the marvellous Taplow Heritage Day. In this connection it's worth noting that your committee is not getting any younger and is in serious need of fresh faces to carry the torch forward to face the challenges of the Society's next 50 years.

*Fred Russell*

# Letter from the President

I feel greatly honoured by being elected your President and feel even more so on looking back on our distinguished list of Presidents, starting with Lord Astor. I must admit that when I took it on I had no idea quite how illustrious my antecedents were. I knew that Louis Freedman had bred a Derby winner and that Leonard Miall had been honoured, dear Lincoln Lee had been very high up in the aviation industry, John Kennedy had been Chairman of South Bucks District Council, and Tony Hickman is an expert in planning and buildings, so I was quite nervous about carrying on in their footsteps.

I have however found it very rewarding and not the least bit daunting and want to thank everyone for being so welcoming – it is always lovely to see so many friendly faces at our AGMs. During my time in office I have tried not to interfere with the day-to-day running of the Society but have helped out by taking meetings when our Chairmen have been unavoidably absent, or when my advice has been sought. It comes as a bit of a shock to realise that I am now one of our longer-serving members.

I remember I was first recruited to the committee by Dick Nutt and Budge Francis at a party given by Eileen Law on behalf of the Taplow Horse Show. They assured me that it only entailed a few meetings per year and that I would enjoy it. Well, I have enjoyed it and feel that the Society has played its part in helping to keep Taplow the pleasant place to live that it is today. I believe an important function is to be there and ready in case of dramatic planning



applications that might have a really negative impact on our Parishes, such as Cliveden or the Paper Mill, as well as the relatively minor but significant developments that could affect us all adversely, but we are by no means against all change.

I am very proud of the Village Green Party and the way it brings the whole village together and at the same time raises money for local charities and amenities. I hope our Society will continue to be an apolitical and independent voice in the community.

*Eva Lipman*

# Fifty Years of Service to the Community

The Society came into being as the Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society in December 1959 in the dining room of Lea Rig, the farmhouse of Poplar Farm on Hitcham Road, at a meeting called by Dr Maurice Rogers, the owner of the house and the first Chairman of the Society. With many village residents, Dr Rogers was concerned at the sudden and unheralded appearance of men and machinery to excavate gravel from the fields between Boundary Road and Lea Rig to build a sub-base for the new M4 motorway.

The first task of the Society was to ensure that the excavations conformed with the conditions of the planning permission regarding noise, dust, working hours and traffic movements. The second and paramount task was to ensure that the land was restored to its Green Belt status. We see the result of their success every day in the shape of the spacious green field bordering the east side of Boundary Road.

Through the years the Society has been engaged in many battles over planning applications. Its strenuous expert objections brought amendments to the Flood

Relief Scheme. It failed to prevent the permission for a small branch of Homebase becoming manifest as a Sainsbury's superstore, but its vigorous 'Cliveden No' campaign brought a one-third reduction in the number of dwellings the National Trust was allowed to build in the heart of the Green Belt and it made a significant contribution to defining the reasons for the rejection of the recent application to develop the Mill Lane site.

In 2007, to reflect the many and various activities and achievements of the Society, its Annual General Meeting elected to drop the word 'preservation' from its name.

The Annual Village Green party, now in its 26th year and a major event in the Hitcham and Taplow social calendar, is the most visible of the Society's contributions to the community. Now to celebrate this anniversary year the Society brought a new annual event to the calendar – the Great Easter Egg Hunt.

*Karl Lawrence*

**Among the many projects your Society has undertaken are:**

- Maintenance of the old churchyard
- Clearing Bapsey Pond
- Restoration of the Celtic Cross in the Old Churchyard at Taplow Court
- Clearing the St Nicolas churchyard
- Planting the row of trees on the east side of Boundary Road
- Rebuilding the flower beds at the railway station
- Clearing footpaths and bridleways

**The Society has contributed to funds for:**

- Restoration of the Hanging Woods at Cliveden
- Plaque commemorating the building of the Brunel Bridge
- Benches on the Thames Towpath and the Village Green
- Repair of St Nicolas Church spire
- Village Centre mural



**Across 50 Years the Society has:**

- Fought against any infringement of the Green Belt
- Lobbied hard for tree preservation orders
- Assisted in the establishment of the two Taplow Conservation Areas
- Scrutinised and commented on hundreds of planning applications
- Monitored the conditions placed by Planners on gravel extraction and other building projects
- Attended many a Public Inquiry

**The Village Green Party raffle has benefited:**

- St Mary's Church, Hitcham
- Thames Valley Hospice
- Taplow Play Group
- Thames Valley Adventure Playground
- Women's Institute
- The Scouts
- and many more

## Officers Through the Years

### President

- 1959-66 Lord Astor
- 1966-?? Louis Freedman
- 19??-74 Dr Maurice Rogers
- 1974-91 Leonard Miall
- 1991-96 John Kennedy
- 1996-00 Tony Hickman
- 2000-04 Lincoln Lee
- 2004- Eva Lipman

### Chairman

- 1959-?? Dr Maurice Rogers
- 19??-79 Ivan Snow
- 1979-83 Tony Hickman
- 1983-91 Bob Hanbury
- 1991-92 David Aldridge
- 1992-96 Barrie Peroni
- 1996-98 Eva Lipman
- 1998-01 Heather Fenn
- 2001-02 Eva Lipman
- 2002-06 Ann Hanford
- 2006- Euan Felton

### Secretary

- 19??-76 Eileen Huddart
- 1976-91 Dick Nutt
- 1991-95 Bob Hanbury
- 1995-98 Sally Sandy
- 1998-01 Maureen Dennis
- 2001-06 Jeremy Vanstone
- 2006- Neil Blundell

The Chairman wishes to hear from any member who recalls the several names and dates missing from the early years.

# Easter Egg Hunt and Lunch



To mark the Society's 50th Anniversary, a new village event was held at Taplow House Hotel on Easter Monday. An uncertain time of year weather-wise and a popular time for families to go on holiday, this was a leap in the dark. We need not have worried – the event was sold out. Over 100 people attended, in the age range 9 months to 90 years, those new to the village and those who have been residents for many years.

Hunts were organised for different age groups and over 30 children searched for brightly coloured eggs which proved difficult to hide nearly well enough! The eggs were traded in for prizes so that everyone ended up with the same amount of chocolate.

The excitement was so intense that we had to start five minutes earlier than scheduled to avoid a stampede. Present in full white costume

throughout, the Easter Bunny was a great hit.

The Taplow House Hotel grounds were the perfect place for the event with lots of wooded paths and hollowed-out trees in which hunters could scramble around. The organisers only found one egg that had been missed (out of over 400)! With the children safely occupied running around, parents and others who had come to watch had plenty of time to enjoy the drinks and Easter cakes.

Just before lunch there was a champagne hunt for the adults. This had the potential to be the most competitive part of the day. In the end there was no (obvious) foul play and the adults, who were helped by their now-expert hunter children, found all the bottles of champagne donated by the Taplow House Hotel.

After the champagne hunt was over, lunch was held at the Hotel in the room overlooking the terrace. It was a very happy event, with many generations of Taplow residents present and all having a good time. Gill Blundell had baked a cake (bunnies and balloons of course) to mark the Society's 50th anniversary. Eva Lipman gave a few words of thanks and with help from many of the children drew the raffle. The raffle was generously supported by local businesses and the prizes included a voucher for one hour of water sports at Taplow Board & Ski, a month's free membership at La Roche Health Club in Maidenhead, a plant from Roots Nurseries, Waitrose vouchers and wine and chocolate from the Society.

Our initial aim was to break even rather than raise money from the event. Now with the money raised by the raffle on the day and the money raised by holding a spinning class (indoor cycling) at La Roche, Maidenhead (16 local residents took part one Saturday afternoon in March, and the "Taplow Spinners" was born!), we are hoping to have some funds left over to give to Thames Valley Adventure Playground.

A special thank you to Sam Goss and his team at Taplow House Hotel whose enthusiastic support for the event is greatly appreciated. Here's to 2011!

*Neil Blundell*



The event was covered by photographer Andrew Clarke, and many more pictures can be seen on his website:

[www.people-photography.net/apps/links/](http://www.people-photography.net/apps/links/)

Look for 'The Easter Egg Hunt'. The password is 'Taplow'.

# Taplow People: Peter Lane

*A while ago we changed the name of your Society to more properly reflect the focus of our community activity. The previous concentration on 'preservation' tended to bias the Newsletter towards the buildings and countryside in our parish but we, who actually live here, tended to get a bit sidelined. Our small community seems to have more than a normal share of interesting people living in it and your committee felt it would be a good start to our next half-century to introduce some of these people to you.*

*The first (reluctant) volunteer is Dr Peter Lane who had a major role in a great British achievement. Ed.*

## Developing the Magnus Oilfield

In 1955 as a young petroleum engineer in Kirkuk, North Iraq, I little thought that 20 years later I would be back in the UK, leading a team to develop the Magnus Oilfield 135 miles North-East of Shetland. In the intervening years my career took me to the US and several of the Gulf States when it came full circle back to Kirkuk and finally Basrah in Southern Iraq. It was from there that we, as a family, were thrown out by Saddam Hussein to return to the UK late in 1975.

When I originally went to Iraq the prospect of oil or gas being discovered in the North Sea was not contemplated. Now, on my return, the UK was enjoying gas from the Southern North Sea, and the mighty Forties Field, 110 miles east of Aberdeen in 300 feet of water, was supplying 20% of the UK oil requirements.

Exploration activity had moved north and 135 miles North-East of Shetland the Magnus Oilfield was discovered in 1974. St Magnus is the patron saint of Kirkwell in the Orkneys. This oil find was the most northerly yet discovered and in a very hostile environment: 620 feet of water with the possibilities of storms



with 100-foot waves and winds of 120 mph. The discovery took two years to evaluate and proved to be a long thin reservoir, located 10,000 feet below the seabed. A budget of £1.3 billion was approved for the development with a target on-stream of mid-1983. The plan required some 15 wells, drilled at various angles from the central platform, together with several sub-sea wells also controlled from the platform. The produced oil, after its separation from its associated gas and water, was to be pumped via a 24-inch buried line to Sullom Voe Terminal in the Shetlands.

The platform to be used was designed with four legs, each some 34 feet in diameter, to be pinned to the seabed by 34 massive steel piles, each 7 feet in diameter, 320 feet long and weighing 330 tons. The platform was constructed on its side at Nigg Bay, Moray Firth, in a huge dry dock. The weight at tow-out was some 30,000 tons, with a capability of supporting a topsides weight of some 35,000 tons. The topsides, i.e. the drilling rig's oilfield plant equipment accommodation for 200 staff and a large helideck, consisted of 17

modules or steel boxes, each weighing up to 2,000 tons. This weight was the maximum lift of the world's largest floating crane at that time. The helideck had to be capable of accommodating two Chinook helicopters (specially imported for civilian use). Why space for two? – because, if one helicopter was parked and a second one flying in encountered trouble, it had to land immediately, thus if the helideck was not large enough, the parked machine had to be pushed over the side – an expensive option!

The modules were constructed at yards on the Tay, Tyne, Tees and Moray Firth and in Holland. On 1st April 1982, the onshore construction was substantially complete and float-out of the platform on its side from Nigg, with a 350-mile tow to Magnus, got under way in predicted calm seas. However, the weather was not kind. Once on location, the up-ending to the vertical commenced, but unfortunately disaster struck. Several anchoring piles slipped free and pinned the platform to the sea bed at an alarming angle – a heart-stopping moment. Here was the world's largest and most costly steel structure, costing £200 million, in serious danger of sinking! The world's press was represented and watching but the Falklands war was raging, and press coverage was limited. We waited on tenterhooks for the results of computer simulation studies to confirm whether it was safe to pull the platform free from the slipped piles pinning it to the seabed. This simulation confirmed it should be safe so the decision was made and the pull-off was successfully achieved. On 4th April 1982 the platform settled vertically on the seabed in the assigned position to great relief all round.

Once the platform was pinned to the seabed the barges carrying the topside modules began to arrive, and lift-on with the

floating crane commenced, rather like stacking bricks. The next task was hook-up, a monumental task of joining up all the plant and equipment to make a working oilfield. This required a workforce of 1,200, working 12 hours on, 12 hours off, for two weeks followed by one week ashore. A logistical nightmare – hence the need for the two Chinook helicopters each carrying 50 workers from our base in Aberdeen. In addition, a specially designed 'flotel' was constructed in Japan to house some 1,000 workers. A further vessel, a 2,000-ton safety boat, was built at Lowestoft, and was on station at all times, equipped with a fire-fighting system, workshops and emergency accommodation.

The hook-up stage was substantially complete by Easter 1983, and commissioning commenced with the initial oil flowing from the sub-sea wells and thence to the Sullom Voe Terminal on 14th August 1983.

By this time I had been promoted to be CEO of BP Exploration and Production and we were enjoying a family holiday in Rhodes when I received a call from Magnus saying, 'We are on stream.' This was an exciting but demanding project, particularly due to the water depth and harsh environmental conditions. Magnus is still on stream.

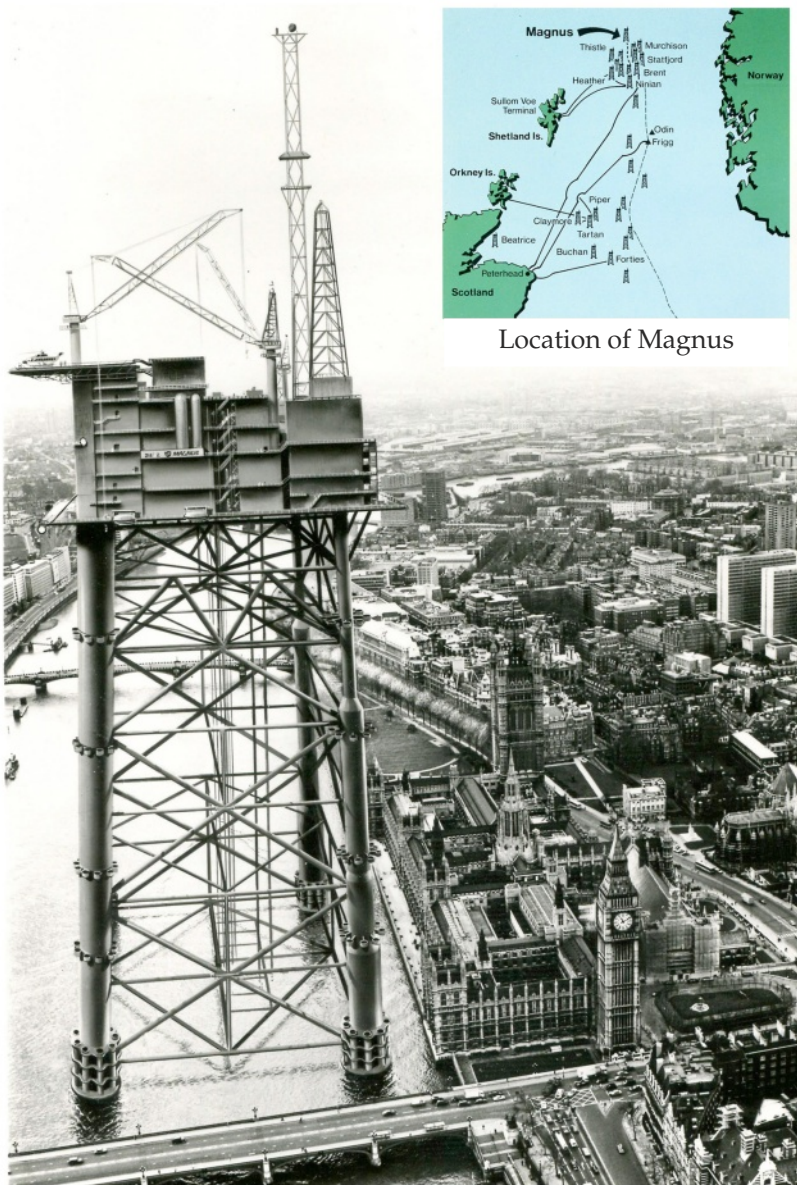
All this happened 25 years ago. The industry has moved on and, for example, in the Gulf of Mexico, oil exploration and

developments are taking place in waters one and three-quarter miles deep, and with horizontal drilling extending to some 7 miles. The availability of huge floating cranes capable of lifting 30,000 tons has reduced offshore working to allow the hook-up phase to be undertaken onshore, thus saving time and costs.

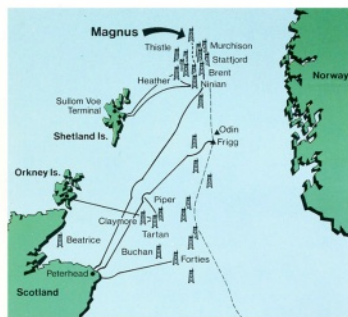
I was fortunate to be part of the Magnus Team, and in 1984 the Company was awarded The Queen's Award for Technological Achievement. The citation hangs in my study.

On retiring in 1985, I was awarded an OBE for services to the oil industry both in the Middle East and the North Sea.

*Peter Lane*



A comparison of the scale of the rig to Big Ben



Location of Magnus



At tow-out



The topsides loading



Magnus at work

# 50 Years of the Newsletter

In the beginning was the ancient-style single sheet with details of recent Committee meetings. Then came multiple one-side pages with brief historical notes and current reports. Next came a 'proper' front cover, a contents page and articles with photographs and illustrations. Newsletter 50 saw the first editorial and more adventurous design under the editorial reigns of Aleya Grellier (see 'An ex-editor recalls' on page 15), Danita Pierce with a transatlantic touch and long-serving stalwart Dick Nutt (self-styled 'Not-the-Editor').

There was a short 'dark' break after Newsletter 65 and then past president Leonard Miall was persuaded to bring his BBC experience to edit the next few issues, introducing two-column layouts for the first time. Enter Fred Russell at Newsletter 70 to begin his ten year reign, expanding the scope of the content, using colour photographs to illustrate articles, and joined by the expertise of Andrew Findlay in design and computer printing technology, transforming the Newsletter to the full colour illustrated magazine it is today.

*The following pages are facsimiles of a few of the highlights from the past 92 issues.*

## Issue 31 – 1975 Bapsey Pond and Cruciform Dairy, Taplow Court

The Bapsey pond has featured quite often in the past and for those readers who may be new to the area, or as just a reminder, here are a few snippets of its history and activities. It's a great pity that after all, access to the pond was cut off by the closure of the footpath from Mill Lane.

In the seventh century, A.D., St. Birinus, afterwards Bishop of Dorchester is said to have used the pond for the baptism of converts to Christianity and from this it acquired its name. The old house of the manor has stood

The pond lies about half way down the path from Taplow Court to Mill Lane. (This path can be used by Members of the Society by kind permission of Plessey, the owners of Taplow Court). It is about seventy feet across with a hard floor; water flows in through a brick conduit from a spring somewhere above and out across the field to the west. The original drain appears to have run down the path, but is now blocked.

As mentioned in our last Newsletter, at the request of your Committee, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers undertook to clear out the Pond in October. They began work at the Northern end, assisted by a number of Society Members and Plessey Staff. A hard bottom was found about a foot below the level of the water which had been reduced to facilitate the work and good progress was made. However, the pond became deeper as work moved southwards and although much of the growth was scythed, the roots were very tough and lay above a layer of mud at least a yard deep. Most of the growth was cleared by the end of the fourth visit of the Volunteers, but the mud remained. However, Messrs. Plessey hired a powerful hose to bring the mud into suspension and a large sludge pump to remove it, and with the aid of some of our members and work during the week by Plessey, most of the mud was cleared. The water level is now up to the original level and the banks have been planted.



## Issue 35 – 1978 Flower beds at Taplow Station

### FLOWER BEDS AT TAPLOW STATION

British Rail, having seen an account in the Press of work on the clearing of footpaths and bridleways, asked if we could help to restore the flower beds on the central platform at Taplow Station which had become overgrown. In the past the Station had won prizes for the high standard of its flower beds, but now there is only one man on duty at a time who has too many duties to allow him to undertake the considerable weeding involved. We agreed to restore the beds as a contribution to local amenity, but made it clear that responsibility for future maintenance after restoration would rest with British Rail. A working party was formed which by Christmas had cleared the beds and applied some manure, since then several further loads have been provided.

## Issue 36 – 1978

### FLOWER BEDS AT TAPLOW STATION

Since the last Newsletter a lot of work has been done and the beds are now resplendent with roses and dahlias (encouraged by manure from members' horses!). British Rail have had 2 plaques made and put in the beds, and there is also a credit to the Society in a notice above the booking office window.



The beds today – colourful, but no roses or dahlias.

## Issue 39 – 1980: Excerpt from Country Life – The Philosophy of Conservation

### The Philosophy of Conservation

At the heart of many of the problems connected with the conservation of the landscape lies a fallacy; the belief that the beauty of the English countryside is "natural". Natural in this context, is presumably taken to mean something other than manmade. The confusion is exemplified in that curiously misleading term, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The average AONB contains much beauty, and some of it is outstanding; practically none of it is natural. If the fertile English countryside were left to return to this "natural" state, that is to say left without the influence of man and his domesticated livestock, it would revert in a century or so to impenetrable thicket. After another century or two it might again become primeval forest – either hardwood or softwood, depending on the altitude and the soil. Neither thicket nor primeval forest would provide the kind of accessible countryside that the average man or woman wants, for recreation and relief from the pressures of an industrial society. The beauty of the English countryside has been created largely by the land of agricultural man; only by agriculture can it be maintained.

### A selection of Newsletters from the archive



## Issue 45 – 1983 The Old Graveyard Taplow

A reminder of the many wry contributions Lincoln Lee made to this publication over the years.

### THE OLD GRAVEYARD, TAPLOW

The old graveyard in Taplow, around the Celtic cross marking the site of Taplow's first church and by the Saxon burial mound, is the repository of much local history. Not only did it achieve moments of fame about 1970, when the famous vault was discovered, and a hundred years ago when the Saxon mound was excavated, but its many gravestones convey some interesting information, especially for the period 1650 to 1850.

Grass grows rampant over these gravestones, but on two recent occasions somebody has taken meticulous care to cut back this grass and clean the earth off the stones. A few of interesting epitaphs are shown (opposite).

Does any member know who it is who has put in so much work? Is it somebody from Plesseys? And, if so, do they have a better record of the inscriptions?

L.L.

JOHN NEIGHBOUR - - 1809

A sudden change! He in a moment fell  
And had not time to bid his friend farewell  
Think nothing strange, chance happens unto all  
His lots today to Morrow thine may fall



## Issues 51 – 1986 Midsummer Revelry – Society's Picnic

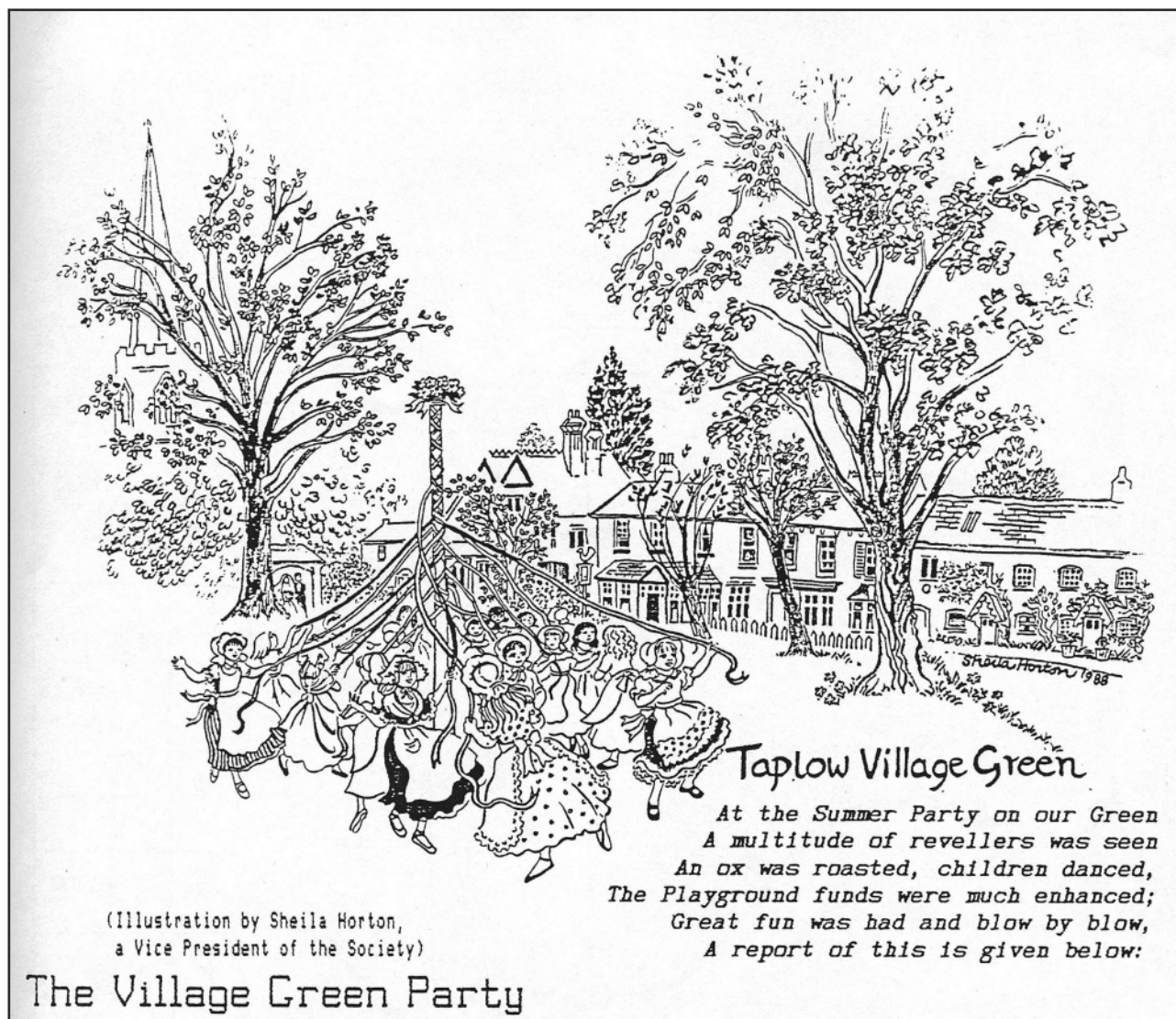
This was the first true Village Green Party. Sheila Horton's illustration appeared in issue 55.

### MIDSUMMER REVELRY – Society's Pic-Nic

On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June the Society is organising a Pic-Nic on the Taplow Village Green in aid of the Hitcham Church Appeal. We gather together from 6.30pm and the revels end at 10pm. We expect you to buy a ticket for £1 a head. You will be regaled by the Hitcham Players and there's also Barn Dancing to a caller. There will be a bar and we hope to roast part of an ox and you can buy a slice or two.

You are asked, as a Member of the Society, to deliver to Eckart Schmitz-Peiffer a bottle(s) of something to go on our Tombola stand; please do this well in advance and ring Eckart on Maidenhead 30361 to arrange a convenient time to hand it (them?) over.

Tickets will be on sale at the Green and we hope that the event will benefit the Appeal substantially and that you will all have a good time.



## Issue 61 – 1992 Evolving Taplow

***After the Annual General Meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1991 Leonard Miall, OBE, the retiring President, gave a talk on the changes that had taken place in Taplow since he moved here from Washington in 1953.***

Like many others he had been attracted by the train service at that time. Taplow, which in those days had its own stationmaster, regularly won the competition for the best-kept railway station, and enjoyed one non-stop train to Paddington in the morning and another back in the evening. This amenity had survived from the time that Lord Desborough, the owner of Taplow Court, was chairman of the Great Western Railway. When he was ennobled he took the name Desborough from the county division just to the west of Taplow, one of the three that constituted the Chiltern Hundreds. Taplow itself was in the Burnham Hundred.

Near the station the land on the west side of Institute Road, which had been used for the storage of barbed wire during the war, was in a very derelict condition. In 1954 some local residents learned that this land was to be sold for use as a caravan site. The owner said he would sell the land to them instead if they could raise the purchase price within a week. Ernest Perkins, who then lived at Hitcham Close and was a member of the parish council, played a major role in raising the money and establishing the Taplow and Hitcham Recreation Grounds Association, registering it as a charity, and leasing part of the site to Flexello as a sports ground.

The village green and the land on which St Nicolas School now stands were then cow pastures belonging to Hill Farm. So was the site of the Buffins housing estate. The parish council, under the leadership of Ernest Perkins, was able to preserve part of this land for a village green, although planning permission for some housing to be built opposite the church had already been given. There were long and difficult negotiations. At the same time the Church Reading Room was bought and extended to provide a village hall.

Other major changes in the village during this time had been the creation of Wellbank, Cedar Chase, Stockwells, Saxon Gardens and the Springfield Estate. These were built on what had previously been large properties, or were infilling. Many Taplow residents were deeply concerned when Eton Rural District Council authorised the building of the Buffins Housing estate in Green Belt land, and attempts were made to get this decision reversed. Legal advice was that there was virtually no chance of achieving this, because the change in the value of farmland once planning permission had been granted was too heavy a financial burden for the planning authorities to bear. The best course would be to make such a loud public fuss that the authorities would think twice before allowing a further violation of the Green Belt land at Taplow.

Eton R.D.C. had just circulated to all ratepayers a special report on its recent activities, which included reference to its protection of the Green Belt. Leonard Miall had thereupon written an open letter to the chairman of Eton R.D.C., couched in offensive terms and sent to all the local newspapers, challenging him to declare how much ratepayers' money had been spent on this glossy brochure with its mendacious propaganda. The row got taken up by the national press, and the luckless chairman lost his seat at

the next election. The resulting fuss led directly to the creation of a village plan for the development of Taplow, and in due course to the village being made a Conservation Area.

- Taplow residents were also greatly concerned at this time by the dirt and disruption caused by the extraction of gravel for the Maidenhead extension of the M4 from the field between Poplar Farm and Boundary Road, and none more than Dr Maurice Rogers who lived at Lea Rig. He formed the Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society in January 1960, and it held its first Annual General Meeting in November of that year, with Viscount Astor as President in the chair. The Society brought great pressure to bear on the gravel extracting company to honour its obligations to replace the topsoil and to restore the field to a proper condition for pasture.

The Society successfully opposed other applications for gravel extraction in Buffins field and Huntswood in the early 1960s, as well as at Barge and Amerden Farms in 1967. It was also greatly concerned about the increase in aircraft noise following the installation on 21st July 1972 of the new aircraft beacon behind Neville & Griffiths dairy. This concentrated what had previously been dispersed aircraft taking off from Heathrow for Scandinavia, the USA and the North of Britain to fly in a narrow channel right over the village. It was what was known as a 'minimal noise route' which meant maximum noise for people living in relatively small and peaceful areas such as Taplow. The Society was told that the Civil Aviation Authority could only be encouraged to move some of this traffic away if there was an immediate and powerful local protest.

Mr T.A. Field of Cedar Chase was one of the founders of what was called the 21st July Action Group, and he gave the Society useful advice on how to create a protest which would be effective: send a letter to the Civil Aviation Authority with an open copy to your MP; make no complaint but just ask a rather difficult question, for instance: "Could you please tell me how many perceived noise decibels a 747 should be emitting when it passes over Taplow Village?" The Authority could not then respond with the standard postcard saying the Minister would take note of your views, because you had not expressed any views. And there was the awkward spectre of the MP asking in the House why his constituent had not received an answer to his perfectly reasonable question, and so the civil service had to draft individual replies to these letters.

Together with the 21st July Action Group the Society managed to organise the sending of some 5000 letters to the CAA. They did include some form letters, but there were enough variants on difficult questions to cause havoc in the CAA. They had to stop this flow of letters. They sent spokesmen to a meeting in the village and they separated off the Scandinavian traffic and sent it elsewhere. The Society's then chairman, the late Ivan Snow, together with Leonard Miall then had an opportunity of presenting Taplow's case at a meeting of the Noise Advisory Council. They made the point that people living in areas of low ambient noise level were often more disturbed by aircraft noise than those in urban areas. For this reason the so-called minimum noise routes were unacceptable in principle.

Leonard Miall concluded by saying that the achievements of the Society were not permanent victories. Matters such as the havoc caused by gravel extraction, aircraft noise and threats to the Green Belt were still present.

The Society must remain constantly vigilant.

# An Ex-Editor Recalls

*Aleyn Grellier recalls how he changed the presentation and layout of the Newsletter.*

Our family moved into Victoria Cottage in the High Street in 1957 and have stayed ever since, so when in 1987 I was asked to edit this publication I was happy to try.

I had worked as a journalist and editor on various newspapers and magazines and in the 1950s had edited a prestige promotional magazine for the British Motor Corporation. Working alongside experts in graphics, I learned that however good the editorial copy, it could be and should be made more legible, attractive and digestible by the art of layout, illustration and general presentation.

Looking through previous editions of the Newsletter, it was clear that it should be produced in a magazine format with a re-shaped front cover with large, bold lettering and full page contemporary photographs illustrating the main features.

One did not have to look far for subjects as Taplow was bounded by the magnificent estates of Lords Astor and Kemsley and the Grenfell family, with the grounds for their leisure pursuits, horse breeding and cricket.

For my first issue, I obtained an article on the 10-acre field, site of the Taplow Cricket Club, founded in 1850 and given to the club by the will of the Viscountess Gage, daughter of Lord Desborough. The secretary, Keith Paskins, wrote of how 'Messrs. Skindle and Rance and a dozen other founding members' paid a shilling a month. The article was illustrated with a cartoon by a Bray artist of a 19th century cricketer. For the front cover of the following issue I commissioned an attractive photo of the great marble 'Fountain of Love' on the drive at Cliveden House, by then already an hotel. Current topics of debate were argued in an editorial.



I do not believe that any reader likes to be presented with pages of unbroken columns of print. I ensured that every article commenced with a snappy introduction to whet the appetite set in larger type and wherever possible small illustrations and sub-heads were included. Before the introduction of computers, all lettering and words had to be meticulously measured and calculated so I secured the assistance of my daughter Frances, who worked as a print specialist with a design consultancy.

The issues of 1987/8/9 included a main feature on the refurbishment of Taplow Court by NSUK and an interview with the owners of the Cliveden Stud, Louis and Valerie Freedman, who had a Derby winner in their fold. Further contributions were gained from the President of the Society, Leonard Miall, who,

having spent eight years in Washington as the BBC's chief correspondent, wrote about the architecture and occupants of the White House. An indefatigable contributor, Lincoln Lee, produced a fascinating article on Taplow parish boundaries and the Thames 'strip' parishes which date from Saxon times. Correspondence was also sought and letters were printed from George Milne and Tony Hickman, the planning watchman.

Finally I recall with gratitude the co-operation of that most organized of men, Major Dick Nutt, who put everything to bed most efficiently. Dick served the Society first on the Committee, next for 15 years its Secretary and then Editor of the Newsletter – a total of 22 years! Now he is the senior member and the first call for facts and information about the Society and its activity across the years.

# Hitcham and Taplow Recreation Grounds

To many, the piece of land off Boundary Road where the Scout and Guide Huts are situated – and which looks like an old gravel pit – is a bit of a mystery. Who owns it and how has it survived the greedy hands of the developers? You may be interested to know that, long before the Green Belt policy came into force, a number of local residents bought the land out of their own pockets and deliberately set it aside to provide a buffer against excessive urban development into Taplow and Hitcham.

At that time, the derelict piece of land lay between Burnham and Taplow in a very strategic location, which was going to be developed as a caravan site.

There were seven original subscribers, including Mr JE Martineau, who was elected Chairman of the new Taplow and Hitcham Recreation Grounds Association. Other subscribers included Mr Ernest Perkins, after whom the committee room in the Village Centre was named, and Miss EV Matthews, later to become Mrs Eileen Law, who was also the President and driving force behind the Taplow Horse Show until her death a few years ago. At the second meeting Mr John Page, later Sir John, was also appointed.

Members of the public were invited to join the Association either as life members, for a fee of not less than £50, followed by £5 annually and £100 to be left in their will as a deed of covenant, or as ordinary members for an initial subscription of one guinea.

The first meeting of the Taplow & Hitcham Recreation Grounds Association was held on 14th March 1956. Even in those days, there was much concern about the urban sprawl of London heading into the countryside and about Slough and Burnham overwhelming the parishes of Taplow and Hitcham. This was a time before the Green Belt had been established and when the prevention of urban development was in the hands of the public rather than the politicians. The Association felt that by preventing this strategically placed piece of land from being developed they might stop the urban sprawl extending to the villages of Taplow and Hitcham and thereby destroying their identity. In this they undoubtedly succeeded.

Over the next few years, the Association proposed the construction of Scout and Guide Huts on the Grounds and talked about improving the quality of the land by planting grass seed in order to make it more accessible to the general public. Part of the site (now leased to Phoenix & Claires Court Sports Association) was originally leased to Flexello Castings & Wheels Ltd and, to many people today, Flexello is still the name applied to the land.

However, all these ideas about improving the site were put on hold in 1959 when the County Council approached the Association with a proposal to extract gravel from the Grounds, which would benefit the Association to the tune of over £10,000, no

doubt a very large sum of money at the time. After much soul-searching, this work was approved and was carried out in 1960, with the gravel being used to help build the new M4 motorway.

By 1961, the gravel extraction was complete and the Association considerably richer for it. Thus they were able to repay some of the interest-free loans and return to their plans to landscape the area and construct the Scout and Guide huts. At this point the founder members chose to forego the money due to them from the proceeds of the gravel extraction. Instead they left the money in the Association to be used 'for the maintenance of a recreation ground for the use of the inhabitants of the ecclesiastical parishes of Taplow and Hitcham and, if appropriate, for charitable purposes within the said ecclesiastical parishes'. As a result of their generosity, the Association has been able to maintain the Grounds ever since without recourse to further subscriptions or loans and, with good financial management, this situation should continue for the foreseeable future.

Today the Association continues to be run by a Council of Management, which meets twice a year and is made up of local people. In addition we have a smaller Executive Committee, which meets whenever necessary to deal with any urgent matters which arise between the main meetings.

Our main activities relate to the management of the Association's finances and the maintenance of the Recreation Ground, which is used quite extensively by local people and was particularly popular for sledging after the heavy snowfalls we experienced earlier this year. Our biggest concern in recent years has been the illegal invasion of the Grounds by travellers, who cause damage by forceful entry and leave a lot of rubbish behind. In recent years the local police have been very prompt in evicting these unwelcome visitors and, since we built the bund along the Boundary Road perimeter, this problem has diminished.

On the charitable front, we have been able to award grants or loans to a number of local charitable organisations plus St Nicolas' School and the St Nicolas' and St Mary's churches. In 1987, for example, the Association paid for the electrification of the clock in St Nicolas' church.

The Recreation Grounds are as relevant today as they were when they were first established over 50 years ago. As the demand for housing in this area continues to grow, the pressure on using land for urban development is greater than ever but, at the same time, the need for open spaces for recreation is equally important. It is nice to know that one open space in our parish will remain for the benefit of the community indefinitely.

*Alistair Forsyth, Chairman THRGA*



# What ANTAS Can Do for Us

For a number of years now Fred Russell and I have represented your Society at the biannual meetings of the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS). This is when many Societies such as our own, from Oxfordshire, Berks, Bucks and Herts, come together to listen to a speaker on a subject of interest and to talk about the problems in our local areas and what measures have been effective in combating them.

It is quite clear that most areas are suffering under the pressures of having more new development thrust upon them than their communities feel happy about. Poor Stevenage is having to cope with 5,000 new 'units' on their doorstep. (You may have noticed that nowadays dwellings are referred to as 'units'.)

ANTAS is also concerned with reading and commenting on the various documents produced by the local, regional and national authorities that affect planning and the environment. These are many and varied and coming at an increasing rate. We sometimes feel that we are being overwhelmed by them on purpose in order to confuse and confound us, with the important bits buried in amongst the verbosity. Very few people realise the extent to which the planning process has been taken away from local people in the last few years and is now largely dictated from on high. Changes have been

coming thick and fast. These affect us all, especially in the South-East Region with the ever-increasing demand for new housing.

We are fortunate that within the various Societies in ANTAS as well as amongst its own officers there is a wealth of expertise, which can be called on if necessary. Many of the other societies are experiencing the same sorts of problems and it is always interesting to hear how they deal with them.

Many people regard planning as a boring topic and indeed it can be, but unfortunately the consequences of planning decisions made increasingly in a more centralised way are having the most profound effects on our way of life. We therefore ignore the political interference in our planning system at our peril. For a number of years now we have seen the gradual transfer of planning power move from the local level to regional and governmental levels, thus making the planning system a political tool for implementing government decisions and policies. For real harm to come to our community it only requires good men to do nothing! ANTAS is a useful tool in countering this rather serious trend towards centralised planning by adding scale to local opinion.

*Eva Lipman*



**The Recreation Grounds today**

# Spreading Out...

On moving into the 51st year of your Society's existence, it was felt at the last AGM that we should be engaging with aspects of parish life other than the traditional areas it has so far concerned itself with, namely to help protect the parish from inappropriate development. Tony Hickman (a past President) suggested that following on from the undoubted success of the Taplow Heritage Day, we should take advantage of the impetus to widen our appeal to the people of our parish by tapping the talents, skills and interests of our residents so well demonstrated by the Heritage Day displays.

To this end he put forward the idea of developing a range of informal, special-interest groups under the umbrella of the Society to broaden interaction generally and provide a means by which people can come together without the formal commitment of joining the Committee. The Committee would remain directly responsible for the Village Green Party, planning matters and the twice-yearly newsletter, but in addition there would be a number of interest groups, formed and run by volunteers, free to develop their activities as the participants wish and publishing their work (and fun) in the Newsletter. The following groups were suggested by Tony:

- **Art Group**  
Main activities would be an annual exhibition, possibly coinciding with the Village Green Party (providing a potential audience of 500-plus), painting and drawing activities, exhibition visits and the like.
- **Literary Group**  
For those who enjoy writing, readings in any genre, poetry or just plain gassing about the latest books.
- **Taplow History Group**  
To carry out research, discussion and publication of the history of Taplow and Hitcham; its places and people, maybe in the context of the wider history of England. Link to the Heritage Day organisers, plus feedback from members of the local branch of NADFAS (National Association of Decorative & Fine Art Societies).
- **Gardening Group**  
Informal visits to members' gardens, summer fruit and flower show, plant swaps, specialist talks, etc.
- **Natural History Group**  
Details of local flora and fauna, articles for the newsletter, site visits, discussions, specialist talks.

- **Music Group**

Informal recitals in members' homes, circulating details of local music events, discussions, concert visits and choral evenings.

There are probably many other specialist interests within our community which the Society can help organise and provide communication channels for. For example, Taplow is probably better served for broadband access than most rural areas (or is it?) and there may be a case for starting a DIY broadband facility somewhat above the modest 2 megabits per second promised by the government – which sounds fine until you find that South Korea is planning a universal coverage at 500 times this speed! A lady in South Witham in Grantham called Helen Anderson, who knew nothing about broadband, started an initiative to provide a self-help cable connection. It's quite a story and in these days broadband is becoming as essential a facility for a community as its gas and electricity connection. Maybe we in Taplow should consider a Broadband Connection Group?

These are all just ideas right now, but the talent is there (take the wonderful material on show at the Art Exhibition during Heritage Day). If you are interested, even just to talk through the above ideas, then contact either Tony Hickman at [hickman124@aol.com](mailto:hickman124@aol.com), or me, Fred Russell, at [fred.russell@sky.com](mailto:fred.russell@sky.com)

Our parish and its community are precious assets, especially in its critical and strategic position as a green lung preventing the conurbations of Slough and Maidenhead from merging. They are worth protecting and nurturing and that can only be done by you, kind reader.

*Fred Russell*



# Wickenden

Approaching Taplow village from the north, the tall Lutyens-style chimneys of Wickenden are clearly visible as one passes the village boundary. But not everyone could be aware of the interesting details that are hidden from view by the plain exterior of the back wall of the house.

The land adjoining the front of the property has been home to Taplow Cricket Club since 1859, and in the 1960s, Raymond Locke, then president of the club, bought the Victorian cottage that occupied Wickenden's site at that time, and demolished it in order to build a modern bungalow. When he sold the bungalow in 1988, it was bought by John Midlane, another ardent cricket fan and member of the village club, and his wife Iris.

The Midlanes were unsuccessful in their attempts to enlarge the bungalow, but gained permission to demolish it entirely and build a new home on the site. Plans were drawn up by architect Gavin Charlton-Brown, who lived in Cookham and, with his wife Sarah, had become friendly with the Midlanes when their sons attended St Pirans' prep school in Maidenhead. Carlton-Brown devised a fascinating design that incorporated not only superb, grand features in



the style of Lutyens, but also some more intimate details that reflected John's great love – cricket.

The front door is flanked by two stone pillars in the shape of cricket stumps. There is a third stump, of course, but this is inside the house, clearly outlined in the stone floor of the entrance hall, as though felled by a giant bowler. Originally the stumps supported a pair of bails, over the threshold, but these were removed in order to make way for a more pleasing arch above the door, and are now set into an internal wall. Inside the house, the discreetly placed details continue – stumps instead of banisters along the galleried landing and on the staircase,

which also has cricket balls on the newel posts at the top and bottom, and more stumps in the stone surround of the drawing room fireplace.

Like the bungalow that preceded it, the house is positioned to give a perfect view straight down the wicket. Indeed, local lore has it that Raymond Locke liked to lie in bed, watching the matches over the bowler's – or umpire's – shoulder! The view from Wickenden's drawing room, with its gracious Lutyens-style window rising up to the full height of the first floor, is spectacular, with not so much as a low fence to interrupt the eye of the observer. This does have its disadvantages, however, since visitors to cricket matches may occasionally be found wandering in the garden, not realising that they have strayed on to private land.

The design of the house is not entirely given over to cricket, however: there is one small, but telling, architectural detail that has nothing to do with the game. When the plans were being drawn up, Iris Midlane insisted that there should be something of her choosing in the house and so, set into the brickwork above the front door, there is a stone carving of the flower that bears her name.

*Gill Holloway*



# Do You Know?

The Society receives many queries from visitors to its website – [www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://www.taplowsociety.org.uk) If you have the answer to any of the requests below please contact the Chairman, Euan Felton.

- **Old Taplow Ware**

Barry Carter writes: My mother has an embossed vase approximately 200mm high decorated with flowers and has "Old Taplow Ware" on the bottom. Is there anything you can tell me about "Old Taplow Ware" or direct me to a website for reference?

- **Wittage**

Shane Brownie writes: I am researching my family history and wondered if you could put me on to an expert of the history of Taplow? My relative Robert Swanell Brownie lived in a Manor House in Taplow, originally owned by WH Grenfell (of Taplow Court), in a close called "Wittage" but I am unable to track it down. So I was wondering if you were able to point me in the direction of someone who might know the history (around the late 1880s in particular).

- **Barge Farm House**

Sue Jones writes: We are just about to acquire a 1932 Rolls Royce that was owned in 1946 by JC Sims of Barge Farm House, Taplow and I was wondering if you had any information about either JC Sims or Barge Farm House. It may interest you to know that the previous owner of the car was Sir JW Gibson of Stanwell who invented the Mulberry Harbour which was used to great effect during the D-Day landings.

- **The Kennels**

Dave Pitcher writes: I am trying to trace the location of two places in Taplow. The first is/was a single storey building called The Kennels which I remember being taken to in the 60s or 70s (where my mother lived as a child). The second is Taplow Hill Cottages (home of my great grandfather in the 1911 census). These may be the same as The Kennels.

- **Hitcham Horses**

Carole S writes from California: About 25 years ago, my husband and I purchased a rocking horse in your area from a very small company called "Hitcham Horses". We drove back to Germany with the horse and later we (and our horse) migrated to America. I wondered if the couple who owned the business are still living in your area and if their firm, "Hitcham Horses" still exists. I've been unable to find any info, or any website or links that can help with my search for the folks who created our rocking horse.

- **Duke at Taplow Horse Show**

Sue Maskell writes: Would it be possible that there are any photos of the Taplow Horse Show in 1988 as I have an old stallion who was there. He was at the 1988 Taplow Horse Show with a man called Eddie Price, this man has now passed away, and we did wonder if this was the last Horse Show and if any photos of the show are still kept. Duke may have been about 18 months old at the time and he is now in his 20s.



Duke in 2009

- **Taplow Photographs**

Bob Donovan writes: I am looking for pictures of around the First World War and Second World War featuring Lord and Lady Desborough.

Edited by the HTS committee  
21 Byways, Burnham SL1 7EB

E-mail: [editor@taplowsociety.org.uk](mailto:editor@taplowsociety.org.uk)

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