

# Hitcham and Taplow Society

Newsletter 95: Spring 2011  
£2.50 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: Sheila Horton paints a new scene on the gates of the Old Rectory (Andrew Findlay)

## Editorial

It's been a quietish few months but I can't help the feeling that it is the lull before the proverbial! There are stirrings in the developmental undergrowth which if ignored can suddenly erupt full-blown into a local Green Belt concern. Your Society is about to join the London Green Belt Council (LGBC), a group of amenity societies dedicated to the on-going protection of the Green Belt against the threatened loosening of its boundaries, definitions and quality. This organisation has been in existence since 1955 and has built up an impressive level of expertise in governmental and local authority attitudes to restrictions on urban sprawl. With our links to ANTAS, The Chiltern Society, Civic Voice and now the LGBC, we have access to a considerable body of expertise available to us on what our local authority and national government has in store for us.

A quote for you: '...[The] green belt does not have to be scenic but just to be there and to remain open. Improving the scenery may, of course, often be a worthy aim in some settings, but that is not the be-all and end-all of green belt. And wild life enthusiasts too often seem to assume that the wildlife wants an "improved" environment too, when all it really wants is to be left alone.'

When you think of it, that sums it up really. I think we ought to consider ourselves as 'local wildlife' and demand the right to be left alone!

In any case, we need to be extra vigilant since the new word on the block is 'localism', which is supposed to have something to do with implementing the 'Big Society', concepts which are as yet undefined and have yet to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the unlamented Regional Planning System.

*Fred Russell*

## Website

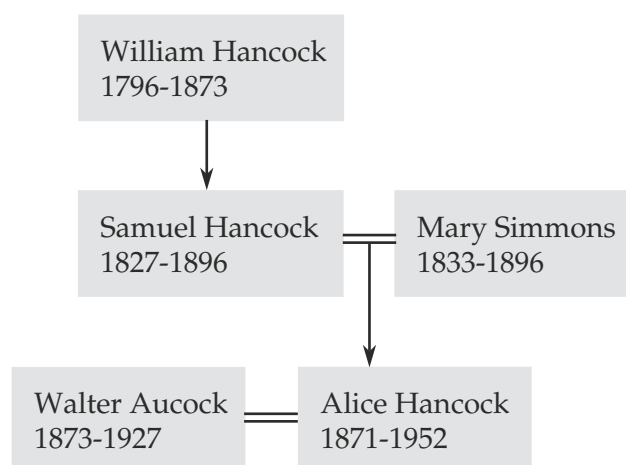
Register on the Society website and have your say in our Forum:

[www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://www.taplowsociety.org.uk)

# Ancestors

## The Hancock Family and the Paper Mill

I was very excited and pleased to find the Hitcham and Taplow Society newsletter plus the excellent website on Taplow itself because I have been researching my family history – in fact, it has absorbed virtually all my time and efforts for about two months now! Recent use of online censuses has enabled me to trace several lines back to the late 1700s, and in one case back to about 1600. Through this I have discovered that one branch of my father's family had strong connections not only with Maidenhead but also with Taplow. My grandmother's parents on my father's side were Walter Aucock, who hailed from Eastbourne and Alice Hancock from Maidenhead. Alice's lineage is shown below.



William Hancock, his son Samuel and another son, Daniel, were almost certainly working at Taplow Paper Mill. William Hancock is listed in the 1841 census as a papermaker, living in Cores End in the Wycombe area. His sons Samuel and Daniel are also both shown as paper mill workers in the 1851 and 1871 censuses. Samuel Hancock was living with his wife and three children in the Bray area of Maidenhead in 1871 and in Tyrrell's (or Turrell's) Buildings in Maidenhead in 1881. Samuel's wife Mary (née Simmons) was born in Taplow. I was briefly very pleased to find a picture of the paper mill on the Taplow website and subsequently rather

disappointed to find that it had been closed and the site sold to a developer – finding places linked to my antecedents makes me feel rather proprietorial towards them and consequently annoyed that no one asked me before making such decisions! Likewise, Tyrrell's Buildings is no more, consumed by Sainsbury's car park. If anyone in the Taplow area has any more information about the paper mill or the Hancock family I would be delighted to hear from them. For example, I know that Samuel and Mary had another nine children as well as Alice, produced between about 1857 and 1871 (which probably explains Mary Hancock's death at about 67 – in many ways, she must have been a very strong woman to have lived as long as this!) but I know very little about them or their descendants. Originally I thought that I would find out the names of my main ancestors and places where they lived and that would be enough, but now I want very much to know more about how they lived, what their work was like, who else was connected with the family. (Anyone who has not yet delved into family research, take heed – it can become quite consuming!) The sense of achievement when individuals are tracked down and the discovery of extra details about them is also enormous – I can thoroughly recommend it.

*Alison Bromley*

**Village  
Green  
Party**

**Saturday June 18th at 6pm  
See insert for details**

# My TV Times

*Anthony Read tells the story of his life 'behind the scenes'.*

In 1963 I took up a three-month contract with BBC TV as a script editor, giving up a secure job as a publisher's editor. I had also been working as a freelance journalist – I had been hired as theatre critic by a new magazine called *Scene* but my first review was so awful that they switched me to writing features and gave the job to another young hopeful called Tom Stoppard. And like so many others I had been frantically writing TV scripts 'on spec', until I scored at the BBC with a one-off play. I was thrilled to be given a cast led by Michael Hordern, supported by Donald Churchill and June Barry. I even got a good review from the *Daily Herald* TV critic, Dennis Potter.

Somehow, my three-month contract with the BBC stretched to ten years. I started with a series called *Detective* – dramatizations of classic detective stories. They were intended as pilots, and we got three or four series from them, including Sherlock Holmes, which I edited, starting a lifetime's connection with Conan Doyle's hero.

Following Holmes, I was given the task of dramatizing Rudyard Kipling's Indian short stories. I devised a format which interleaved two or more Kipling stories, linked by a newspaper editor in Lahore, played by Joss Ackland, and a young reporter.

*Kipling* was a happy series to work on, despite two main problems. In those days BBC drama never indulged in overseas filming, so we never got to India, but had to mock up scenes in Ealing or rural Surrey. The other



Photo © Wolfgang Schmidt

drawback was that there were virtually no Indian actors in Britain. I have vivid memories of, among others, Warren Mitchell as an Indian conman, Nyree Dawn Porter as a dusky courtesan and Alfred Burke as a villainous Pathan tribesman.

After 26 episodes of *Kipling* I found a new challenge in a series about a fictitious oil company called Mogul, with a new producer, Peter Graham Scott. Instead of a single pilot, we were given a trial run of 13 programmes for the summer of 1965. We cast Geoffrey Keen as the managing director, Philip Latham as company secretary, backed up by Ray Barrett and Barry Foster as thrusting younger executives. In later series, we replaced Barry Foster with the smoother Robert Hardy.

The big oil interest in 1965 centred on exploration in the North Sea. There was no guarantee that oil or gas would be found, but we took a chance and made our opening episode the story of Mogul making a successful strike. By happy chance, the week before transmission BP struck gas. It was a massive



Photo © BBC



Photo © BBC

news story, and the first episode of *Mogul* went out in a huge blaze of publicity. So was born a reputation for foretelling events that stayed with us throughout 136 episodes.

*Mogul* was a great success, and we were told to go ahead with a full run of 26 episodes, but under a different title. It was felt that 'Mogul' was too easily confused with 'Mongol'. Reluctantly, we came up with *The Troubleshooters*. To fill in the few weeks' gap between *Mogul* and *The Troubleshooters*, the BBC sent Peter and me to Glasgow, to set up BBC Scotland's first network series. The result, *This Man Craig*, was set in a Scottish comprehensive school (years before *Grange Hill* and decades before *Waterloo Road*). It was also the first drama series for the new BBC2 channel, under first Michael Peacock and then David Attenborough. I remember Michael looking at my format and saying: 'Yes. I like it. You're on air in six weeks.' And of course, we were.

Commuting between London and Glasgow meant life was pretty hectic. It was made even more so when Peter Graham Scott left to direct a movie, and I took his place as producer, while still remaining as script editor. Having lined up my writing team, I set about hiring directors – among them a former designer called Ridley Scott, who turned out to be very promising.

Making 26 hour-long episodes at a rate of one per week, with a front-office staff of myself and a secretary (who for a brief period was a temp called Ginny Miall), was the most stressful experience imaginable. But somehow we survived – and were rewarded with that year's BAFTA for best series.

*The Troubleshooters* played a central role in my life for seven frantic years. Since it was an international series, we needed to do at least some filming overseas, though we still had only a standard BBC budget. We devised ways of coping with this by using the most skeletal crews to shoot inserts featuring one or at most two actors in places like Hong Kong, Africa, Thailand and India.

Inevitably there were some hairy moments, but mostly things ran fairly smoothly. One exception was when we had been filming in Kenya. On our last evening, Ray Barrett inadvertently upset the Kenyan vice-president, who was staying in our hotel in Mombasa. The vice-president exploded in rage, shouting that he had been insulted. Enormous security men totting sub-machine guns suddenly appeared and started to drag poor Ray away. I was told that he would be taken outside, roughed up, and shot 'while trying to escape', and that there was nothing I, or the BBC, or the British government could do about it.

When I tried to intervene I had the muzzle of a loaded sub-machine gun rammed into my stomach – something that does terrible things to your digestive system. Talking faster than I have ever done in my life, I managed to persuade the vice-president not to have Ray shot immediately. Instead he was locked in his room under armed

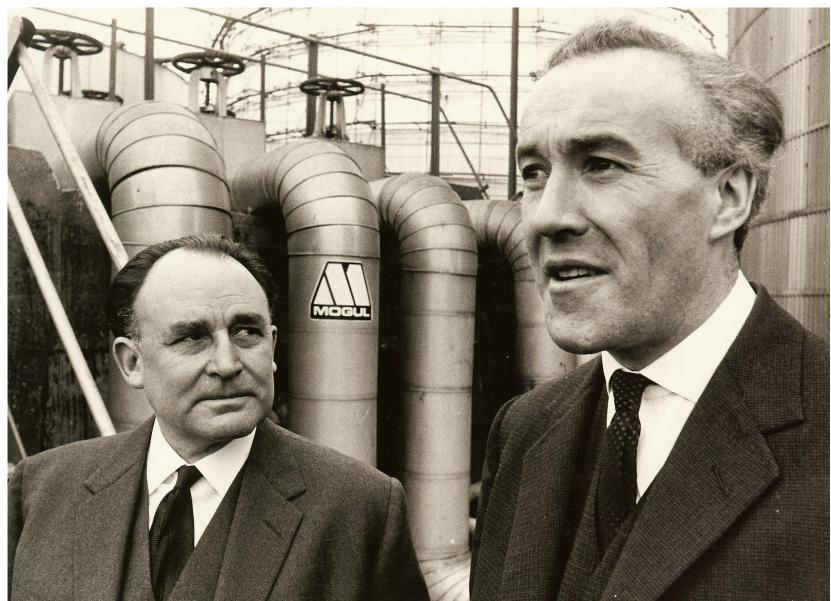


Photo © BBC

guard, while I spent five long hours sitting on a bar stool pleading for his life. At 5am, the vice-president was reminded that he was due at the airport that morning with President Kenyatta, to greet President Tito of Yugoslavia. By now, he had finally calmed down. We shook hands and he went to his room. We flew out next afternoon, after a jittery day by the hotel pool.

Back in London, I reported the incident to David Attenborough, who was then director of programmes, to alert any BBC personnel visiting Kenya. David's reaction was typically un-pompous: 'My God,' he exclaimed, 'I would have s\*\*t myself!'

Even before we had finished making *Troubleshooters*, I was already at work on my next project, a series about expatriates on a Mediterranean island. *The Lotus Eaters* was set in Majorca, where the author, Michael J. Bird, had lived some years before.

I liked the idea, and the script, but not the setting. After a great deal of agonising, I thought of Greece. Michael Bird was not happy. He had never been to Greece and knew little about it. So I took him to Crete, to do a recce. Within half an hour of landing at Heraklion, he was hooked. And by the time we drove into the then little known resort of Aghios Nikolaos next morning, he was busy pointing out where all our settings would be.

Back home, I chose as lead actors Ian Hendry, who had been my best buddy at drama school, and Wanda Ventham, who had played the MD's daughter in *The Troubleshooters* (when, incidentally, my daughters Emma and Amelia played her children). *The Lotus Eaters* turned out to be fraught with problems, some technical, some political. The Sixties were over – and it showed. Producers no longer had the freedom we had enjoyed for so long, and the fun was disappearing from the job. I felt that the time had come to move on.

To see out my contract, I made a four-part series, *The Dragon's Opponent*, the moving story of Lord 'Mad Jack' Suffolk, who was killed defusing German bombs in the Second World War. Peter Duncan, later of *Blue Peter* and Chief Scout fame, played Suffolk as a boy, with Ronald Pickup as the adult hero and Virginia McKenna as his mother. So, in the autumn of 1973, I left the BBC and plunged into the precarious life of a freelance writer. Five years later, after writing another single play and scripts for series including *Z-Cars*, *Shoestring*, *Quiller*, *The Omega Factor*, the opening

episodes of *The Professionals* and the final series of *Sapphire and Steel*, I was tempted back to the BBC to edit *Dr Who*, with Tom Baker.

My team of writers was a mix of old *Dr Who* hands and new talent. One of the old hands was a lively Bristolian called Bob Baker, who has since won plaudits as the writer of *Wallace and Gromit*. The new talent included a bright young man who had never written for television, but was then developing a sci-fi series for radio. I read the draft scripts of *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*, then called Douglas Adams in and commissioned a four-part *Dr Who*. What he delivered was technically hopeless, but fizzing with brilliant ideas. When I left at the end of the series, Douglas took over from me as script editor.

I had enjoyed my two years on *Dr Who* enormously, but it was time to get back to my typewriter. I returned briefly to script editing with an enjoyable stint creating *Hammer House of Horror*, but then started a new career as an author of serious non-fiction history books. Over the next 25 years I published ten books in London and New York and various other countries. Meanwhile, I also managed to write more than 200 TV scripts, in every area of drama apart from 'soaps', before moving on to another new career as a children's author with a series of books called *The Baker Street Boys*.

But that's another story ...

Anthony Read



Photo © BBC

# Chestnuts

In the previous autumn edition of your newsletter I called attention to the apparent apathy of the relevant authorities to the growing plight of the chestnut trees in our area because of the simultaneous attack on them by both the horse chestnut leaf miner (destroying the leaves) and bleeding canker (seriously damaging the bark). This lack of interest seems not to have changed very much and what interest there is appears to be focussed more on the associated conker problem than the health and survival of the trees themselves. A recent *Telegraph* article complains about conker shortage this winter owing to their falling from the tree before they are ripe. The blame is placed on the poor August weather and the article laments the risk to the World Conker Championships. Not a mention of what must be the underlying cause.

I am also dismayed that the last survey by the Forestry Commission of the problem that I can locate took place over two years ago.

When I spoke to the Tree people in SBDC about it in 2008 I was assured that trees were not at risk. The last survey by the Forestry Commission, however, made it clear that the bleeding canker is a tree killer. Younger trees are more at risk because the canker can spread round the girth of the tree quite quickly, but big trees can also die once they are girdled. Be it noted that the pathogen that causes this problem is not a quarantine pathogen so there is no statutory requirement in place requiring measures to prevent the spread of the disease. If this were not enough, the leaf miner moth is causing severe damage to the foliage of horse chestnuts on an annual basis, and results in defoliation before normal leaf-fall in the autumn. The larvae mine within the leaves and at high population densities they can destroy most of the leaf tissues. The trouble then spreads to the following year because the pupae over-winter in the uncollected fallen leaves. It has been established that these pupae are highly resistant to cold, surviving I gather temperatures as low as -20C in Hungary (yes, it's a European import). This problem therefore results in a year-on-year increase in population. Are we therefore to eventually lose all our chestnuts in the same way we lost elms? (And there is now also the threat to our oak trees in the form of sudden oak death.)

However, there is some hope because a Cambridge partnership may have an answer. They claim to have a cure for the bleeding canker (*Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *Aesculi*). The partnership



of JCA Arboricultural Consultants and Allicin Tree Care have developed a new product appropriately called 'Conquer' which is made from a garlic extract. Garlic, I'm told, is one of the oldest known effective anti-bacterial and anti-fungal agents but until now it has been impossible to harness its properties. Bleeding canker is a vascular disease that spreads through ground water and control was considered impossible because the bacteria spreads through a tree's cambium layer. The product has been tested and confirmed as lethal to the bacteria. Interestingly its use in treating the chestnut seems to have some effect on the leaf miner moth as well since the garlic taints the tree sap and the moth finds this offensive.

So, there is hope but in the current tight financial climate shall we see our chestnuts being given any priority? I think it's up to us to lobby the SBDC and our MP and any other decision-maker we can think of, to obtain this treatment for our local trees before they disappear. It might also be worth contacting JCA on [www.jcaac.com](http://www.jcaac.com) to ask when their product will be available and maybe treat our own trees.

*Fred Russell*

# St Nicolas' Centenary

The history of St Nicolas' Church in Taplow goes back well over the 100-year mark, but the centenary of the present church building will happen on 6th July this year. An 1828 church stood on the present site. Before that a medieval church stood in the old Churchyard next to Taplow Court, and next door also to the the pre-Christian burial mound. In 1996 archaeologists discovered that, before the medieval church, a Saxon church stood on the same site – giving strength to the local tradition that in the mid-7th century St Birinus was baptized in the Bapsey Pond (which can still be seen in the grounds of Taplow Court).

On 6th July 1911 the foundation stone of the present church of St Nicolas was laid (you can see it outside the church at the end of the chancel). On 6th December 1912 (St Nicolas' Day) the Bishop of Oxford consecrated the building. So we shall be celebrating 100 years of this church building during the period July 2011 and December 2012. We shall be offering a programme of special events, special visitors and preachers – and hope that other individuals, groups and organisations in the community will want to mark the

centenary of this significant (and noticeable) village building themselves.

To begin, we shall be joined on 3rd July 2011 at our 10.30am service by the Bishop of Buckingham (Alan Wilson) as we start the centenary year and the Bishop of Oxford will be coming in December 2012 to round off the celebrations. We have begun to put together the programme for the 18-month centenary 'year' and we hope to publish it soon after Easter.

*Alan Dibden*



## The Future for Our Library

In Taplow we share the excellent public library in Burnham... but for how much longer?

The public library system is in danger of extinction through the eagerness of county councils to take an easy route to reducing costs by closing many libraries, and the privatisation of its remaining library systems and services to the highest bidder who is likely to be a US firm.

The Burnham Library is receiving Big Lottery funding as part of a three-year plan, which was due for review at the end of March. A condition of the grant was that the County Council cannot change the use of the building without the written permission of the Lottery over a ten-year period. But things change.

The Buckinghamshire County Council criteria in judging the worth of a public library facility is that it must have 100,000 visitors per year. Burnham Library, with about 60,000 visitors, falls short of this requirement. So the clear message is that we have to use the Library or we shall lose it.

The more books lent and the more participation in the activities centred in the Library will support the determination of the Friends of Burnham Library in its efforts to ensure its continuing life into the far distant future.

*Karl Lawrence*



# More about the King of Siam in Taplow

*[The following is a summary of an article in the Maidenhead Advertiser of Wednesday August 11th 1897, which covers the arrival of the King of Siam at Taplow station the previous Friday. It provides a fitting elaboration of the article about this topic in our Autumn 2009 newsletter. Ed.]*

"The King of Siam (King Chulalongkorn) arrived at Taplow on Friday evening last, and was accorded a right royal reception. He journeyed, with his suite, in a special train from Camberly, to which a luxuriously furnished saloon was attached for the accommodation of his majesty. Taplow station had been lavishly and tastefully decorated with flags sent from the Siamese Legation, the national colours predominating. The station platform was carpeted, as was the paved way outside the station, and the scene hereabout was very bright. No one was allowed on the platform save those who had come to meet the king from Taplow Court, and the Siamese Legation and representatives of the press,

who were treated with every courtesy. The King was accompanied by the Crown Prince and amongst others were Lord Harris, Colonel Carrington, Colonel Hume. *[Names ring a bell?! Ed.]* Outside the station hundreds of people had gathered to witness the arrival while near the station an escort composed of the 4th Squadron of the Royal Bucks Hussars was drawn up under the command of Captain H. W. Lawson and Lieut. Grenfell. On exiting the station the King eyed the escort 'somewhat curiously', but was evidently pleased with their smartness and general turnout. The escort formed round the vehicle reserved for the King and was conducted to Taplow Court, amid hearty cheers from the assembled crowd. Many persons fringed the line of route, and at Taplow Court there was a very large concourse of persons who warmly welcomed the King."

*Fred Russell*



# Planning: Where Are We Now?

First intimation as to what is to come was revealed at a meeting of the Chiltern Society Planning Committee to which the Society is affiliated.

Regional plans will be discontinued. In July the South East Plan itself was abolished. The whole concept of central planning and the imposition of housing targets will be replaced by local assessments of local needs. The role of the Regional Authorities themselves is seriously diminished. This is the first step in returning power to local communities.

The need to make the most efficient use of land still remains an overriding concern due to the burgeoning population. Government funding for planning may be seriously cut back and the effect of this remains to be seen. One possibility being raised by the government is that in an attempt to speed up approval of planning proposals, where there is little local opposition, the developer may offer to pay or recompense affected people for their loss of amenity, so effectively buying off the objectors.

The key government guidance document, called PPS3, has been modified to remove the minimum build of 30 units per hectare; to designate gardens as green field not developed land; and to no longer require planning permission for change of use from single to multiple dwellings.

How the slimmed-down and localised planning system will work in practice no one knows. The old Local Plan is still extant in areas which the Core Strategy has not touched, e.g. design of new buildings, but where the Core Strategy does have policies they supersede those of the old Local Plan. Planning 'legal eagles' and developers may have a field day. There is bound to be a period when everyone will be feeling their way and testing the new system when it eventually comes in.

So, for the moment, 'Localism' is the way forward: let the locals decide what's needed.

*Karl Lawrence, Eva Lipman, Fred Russell*

## Easter Egg Hunt



They're off! Ginny Felton's picture captures the excitement at the start of this year's Easter Egg Hunt at Taplow House Hotel.

# Taplow Vineyard

When Iris Midlane and her late husband, John, bought Wickenden on the northern edge of Taplow in 1988, the purchase included two rather surprising extras: a vineyard and a cellar with 9,000 bottles of wine. The vineyard was set up by Raymond Locke, the previous owner of the house, to provide a small business venture for his daughter, Susan. The vines – of which there were several thousand – produced French and German white wines, both medium and dry, with grape varieties including Sauvignon, Merlot, Müller Thurgau and Seyval.

The Midlanes had little knowledge and no experience of wine-making, but fortunately they found help immediately at hand, in the form of George Clark, who had taken care of the vineyard since its earliest days. George admits that his knowledge was acquired 'on the job' and although the first vintage, in 1983, was not a great success, over the years the wines improved and in 1994 the Midlanes won a bronze medal at the English Vineyards Association national wine festival, with a white 'oaked' wine.

Viticulture is a year-round business, with the most arduous job – pruning the vines back to just a couple of feet in height – being done in January. This, and every other task, often had to be carried out in typically unpleasant English weather. Most of the work was done by George single-handed, but at harvest time, Iris and John's family and friends would come to give a hand and once all the grapes had been picked, a grand barbecue party would be held for everyone – weather permitting, of course. The harvest was best done in September, but the grapes' ripening process was frequently delayed until October and on one occasion Iris remembers it being done on Guy Fawkes night.

For the first few years, the Midlanes sent the grapes away to be processed, but then they set



about carrying out even this task themselves. The electric press that was used has now been removed from the property, but the huge fibreglass vats remain – three containing 580 gallons each, and one massive one that held 1,116 gallons. Yields varied considerably from one year to another, with the best year producing 12,000 bottles and the worst just 2,000. The wine was sold at local outlets, including the Orangery at Cliveden, some small off-licences and even Majestic Wines, at the Bishop Centre. However, the relatively high price and low yields mean that it was never going to be a great commercial venture, and the arrival of Sainsbury's in Taplow sounded the death knell for the little vineyard.

By 1997, the vines were in need of replacement and the Midlanes decided they would call it a day. All the plants were grubbed out and the site was covered by a small artificial lake, which today provides a peaceful haven for wildlife.

*Gill Holloway*

# Royal Jubilee

Although your Society did not put on an event for the Royal Wedding, undoubtedly many of you enjoyed the Go-cart and other events in the village on the day itself. We are planning to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee at our Village Green Party next year. Any suggestions

welcomed. Many of you might remember that for the Golden Jubilee we had a torchlight procession to the Old Churchyard and a massive beacon on top of Tæppa's Mound.

*Eva Lipman*

# Are Ratty and Mole's Days Numbered?

*Des O'Sullivan, a local amateur naturalist, wrote about the amazing bio-diversity of the Taplow Reaches in our Spring 2009 newsletter. In this issue he expands on the theme and asks for help to protect the site.*

In the belief that the local environment needs to be better protected a number of residents have formed the Taplow Reaches Environment Society (TRES). The primary objective is to raise awareness about this particular jewel of nature.

Taplow Reaches is home to a very wide variety of wild life but to take just birds and bats as an example there is a need to protect their breeding and nesting habitats, to look after the feeding grounds and try to ensure that development in the area leaves them reasonably secure. There is a huge insect population and massive fly hatches which provide a feast for the creatures of this area. Also it is an essential refuge from summer flooding and high winter water. To give you an idea of the diversity of the bird and bat population in the area there are several pairs of kingfishers, great crested grebe, moorhens, coots, scarce species of ducks, geese and swans. Several pairs of herons make their home there, as do tawny owls and cormorants. We have red kites visiting and no end of robins, tits, wagtails, thrushes, wrens, jays and woodpeckers. On the bat side there are Pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats.

Of course this part of the river and its Jubilee offshoot provide a slack water area, which provides a safe nursery and breeding ground for many different species of fish, for instance (for the fishermen among our readers) pinhead fry can survive their first crucial winter here. It is from this haven that the wider river fish populations can renew. Amongst the fish identified here are barbel, chub, roach, dace,

rudd, bream, gudgeon, bleak, carp, pike, perch, zander, catfish, salmanoids, trout and grayling.

On land the area is also home to deer, mice, badgers, foxes, grass snakes and adders. And in case you think this is not enough we also have significant mussel beds including swan mussels, zebra mussels, pea mussels and great freshwater snails can also be found. These mussel beds play an important role in the freshwater river ecosystem which benefits from the mussels' filtration, excretion, biodeposition and physical presence.

The Environment Agency maintains a 'red data' book of endangered species, which lists a number of areas in the reaches from Boulter's to Bray. The EA has stated that there is such a high level of biodiversity in these reaches that they must be protected. Your President, Eva Lipman, spent a great deal of time attempting to find some way of protecting these areas from developer depredations but unfortunately there seems to be little that can be done legally. The EA also maintains a Community Conservation Index (CCI), which summarises biodiversity and the comparative rarity of aquatic macroinvertebrates in the red data areas. The index offers a biodiversity rating scale in which 1-10 means no red data book species are present and 20+ means the site has a high ecological value. When the Thames at Boulter's Lock was last surveyed in 2008, it merited a CCI rating of 32.12!

TRES has appealed to your Society for help in this upcoming struggle. We can only do this by helping to publicise the extreme value of this local biodiversity hotspot so that generations to come can enjoy this haven.

For those of you interested in preserving this area and wish to know more about it then please contact Des O'Sullivan at: [desio68@googlemail.com](mailto:desio68@googlemail.com).



## Off to France

This month sees the departure of one of our longest-standing committee members, Andy McKenzie. Born in Kent, Andy describes himself as 'very ordinary'. However, at the age of 18 his life took a fairly extraordinary turn when, living in the United States with his mother, he was drafted into the US army and was sent to Vietnam. His account of his time as a tank driver in the war zone is typically understated – he describes it as 'useful experience for learning to drive a tractor'; what is more important to him is that when he left the army he was introduced to the practice and beliefs of Buddhism.

On his return to the UK, Andy worked in a series of jobs, trying his hand at everything from tree surgery and driving to selling koi carp (all of which he says have since proved useful!) His interest in Buddhism continued and he regularly visited Sokka Gakkai International (SGI-UK), a lay Buddhist organisation, where he met a young Frenchwoman, Annick, also a committed and active member of the Buddhist community. They married and had two sons and in 1985 the family moved to Musselburgh, just east of Edinburgh. They had only been there two years, however, when they were visited by Richard Causton, the leader of the UK branch of SGI, whom Andy had met some years before. Their friendship had strengthened through their shared interest in Buddhism and Causton now offered Andy the post of estate manager at Taplow Court, which SGI had recently acquired. Andy accepted without hesitation and in June 1988 the family came to Taplow.

With their sons attending St Nicolas' School, Andy and Annick settled quickly into village life.



Annick worked as a French *assistante* at Desborough School in Maidenhead for 3 years but in 1994 she decided to fulfil her life-long ambition to be an artist. She studied at the Berkshire College of Art and Design and at Amersham College and quickly developed her distinctive and successful style of vibrant colourist painting, inspired by masters such as Cezanne, Van Gogh and Matisse. Her work has been exhibited in the UK, France and New York as well as at art fairs closer to home in London, Windsor and Reading, and her commissions include Starbucks Coffee Company and Adrian Moorhouse's Lane 4.

Andy's first years as estate manager were, he says, 'pure hard graft'. But once the renovation of Taplow Court's house and grounds were complete, he too began to find time for hobbies of his own. In 1990, a great storm brought down over 65 mature trees on the estate. Andy didn't want the wood to be wasted, so he decided to make things of it. 'I couldn't saw in a straight line,' he recalls, 'so I started wood-turning. I made a lot of bowls.' At the same time, he was asked if Taplow Court could provide 'a few logs' for the ox roast at the annual Village Green Party. With such an abundant supply available, Andy had no trouble in finding some and the estate has been providing them every year since.

Andy and Annick are now making preparations to leave Taplow for the South of France, an area they know and love. We wish them well for their retirement in the sun.

Gill Holloway

# Mill Lane: What Next?

Core Policy 15 of the South Bucks District Council specifies Mill Lane as an 'opportunity site...in need of sensitive, comprehensive regeneration'. The site is defined as a 'major developed site in the Green Belt' and as such must be developed in conformity with National Green Belt Policy PPG2 Annex C.

Integral to the policy is the requirement that 'A development brief must be produced by the landowners/developers in conjunction with the Council and it must be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document, prior to a planning application being submitted'.

Policy 15 defines the constraints and parameters for a 'comprehensive, conservation-led approach which must be taken to the regeneration of the site' and it lists 14 factors which 'any redevelopment proposal' should include. The Society was consulted during the preparation of the Core Strategy and helped to develop this policy and is in agreement with it.

The owners of the Mill Lane site, Watchword, are in administration and the administrator has made an agreement with Barratt Homes for it to work with the South Bucks District Council to prepare a development brief and to submit a planning application in due course. Subject to planning approval, Barratt Homes would then exercise its option to buy and to develop specific areas of the site.

When the draft development brief is completed there will be a period of public consultation, including a public exhibition, planned to be held on 12th May, to explain it. Following this and including any changes made as a result of the consultation, the development brief will be adopted as the official Supplementary Planning Guidance for the site and become part of the South Bucks Local Development Framework documentation.

At the request of Frank Browne, consultant with Curtin and Co., acting on behalf of Barratt Homes, our Society's chairman and secretary attended an informal meeting to hear the Barratt Homes proposal for developing the Mill Lane site.

For the Society to speak with one voice on behalf of its members, it was agreed at this meeting that the Society Management Committee would distil a statement of key issues from the SBDC Core Strategy, the SBDC

comprehensive report refusing the Watchword planning application, the Statutory Consultees, Community Associations, and individual objections to that application, and the opinions of Society members.

Below is the statement of the key issues to be addressed in any proposal to develop the Mill Lane site that was approved for submission to Society members at the meeting of the Committee on 28th March.

## Green Belt

The site is an especially important and precious part of the Green Belt. It is a particularly effective 'buffer' preventing the merging of the Maidenhead and Slough conurbations. It affords and enhances views from and in all directions. It is a vital 'fresh air lung'.

There should be no new-build other than on previously developed areas. The new-build area should be no larger than the footprint of the existing buildings. The height of the new-builds should be no greater than the height of the existing buildings. No trees should be felled.

## Conservation Area

The site is set in a Conservation Area. The regulations and guidance rules for development within and adjacent to Conservation Areas should be observed.

Skindles, in its close proximity to Maidenhead Bridge and its long history, has special importance in this Conservation Area. Preserving its envelope, its size and its height should be integral to any proposal to replace it.

## River

The unique river environment bordering the site is too precious to lose. A comprehensive consultation with environment and wildlife organisations should be carried out to ensure the preservation of Taplow Reaches.

A riverside walk from Maidenhead Bridge via a bridge to Boulton's Lock Island should be integral to an overall development proposal. The footpath under Maidenhead Bridge and the slipway next to Skindles should be improved.

## Traffic

Access to the site from the Bath Road and Berry Hill is critical. A credible survey of the current volumes and times of traffic movements on these roads and on Mill Lane should be the determining factor in establishing the number of households, hotel rooms, restaurant tables, conference facilities and employment positions to be provided by an overall development proposal.

## Core Strategy

SBDC has now adopted its Core Strategy, as approved by the Inspectorate and incorporating

the key points made by the Hitcham and Taplow Society and the Ellington Road Residents Association.

'Policy 15: Mill Lane (Opportunity Site)' details the requirements which must be met by any planning application. In particular it states that new-build heights and footprints should be no larger than existing builds. Most especially it assesses the site to have 'potential for around 100' dwellings.

These conditions are critical to preventing detrimental impact on this important area of the Green Belt.

*Karl Lawrence*

# Woodland Walk

If you go down to the woods today you're sure of a big surprise...

Indeed, if you happen to visit the National Trust Woodland Walk at Cliveden you will encounter all manner of strange beasties – among them an elephant and numerous giant snails, not to mention the odd bear. In fact a quick glance at the photos should convince the

most sceptical amongst you that while this is true, you have nothing to fear, because they are of course made of wood. These carvings, made from tree stumps, are scattered along the paths to surprise you at each turn and help to make the walk even more of a delight.

*Fred Russell*



# The John Noble House

*Miv Wayland-Smith found two watercolour paintings of an unbuilt Taplow house for sale on Sarah Colgrave's fine-art website. The story behind them is fascinating:*

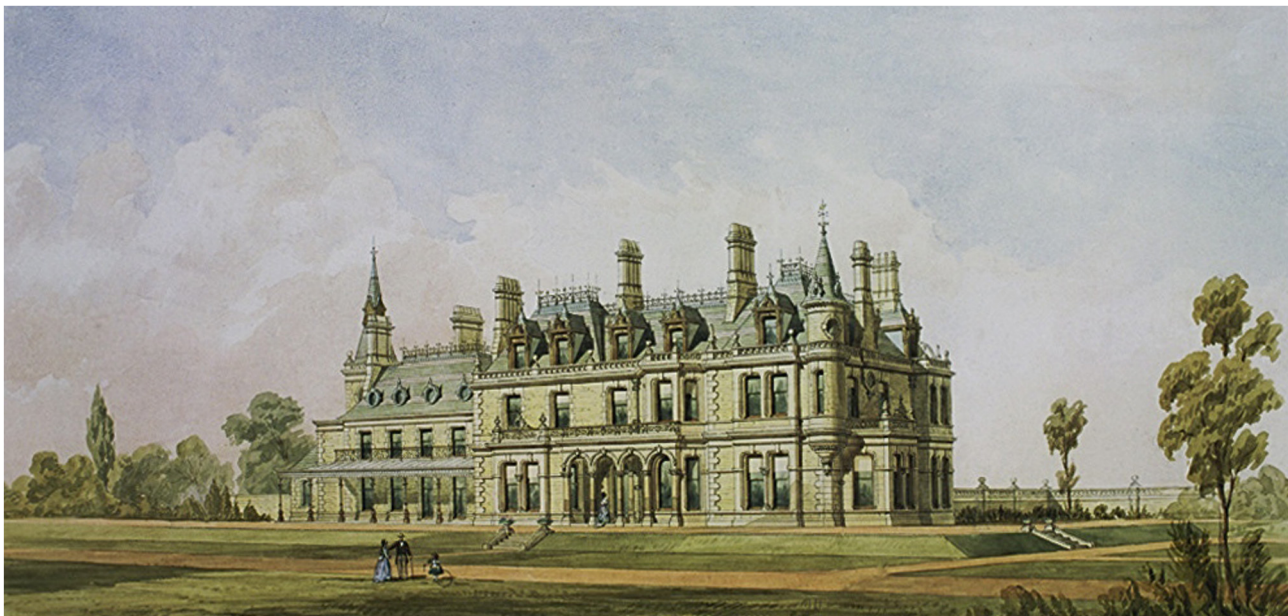
John Noble was the heir to a highly successful paint and varnish manufacturer. In addition to property in London he owned land and several houses to the north-east of Maidenhead and in and around the village of Taplow in Buckinghamshire, including an estate at Berry Hill. In the 1850s he moved his family into the Georgian house at Berry Hill, once the residence of the Earl of Kilmorey, and partly designed by Sir John Soane. Between 1856 and 1860 Noble employed Robert Marnock to design gardens and a small park with extensive artificial rockwork and a waterfall by James Pulham.

By the late 1860s Noble was obviously finding Berry Hill to be rather too confining for his large Victorian family of seven children and numerous domestic staff and considered building a new, larger and more impressive house. This pair of architect's perspective watercolours of a proposed Rothschild-style mansion for Berry Hill date from this period. It seems that this proposed house was never



realized as in 1870 Noble purchased Park Place, overlooking the Thames to the south of Henley on Thames. The house at Park Place was in a poor state and he employed Thomas Cundy to build a large and impressive house in the French Renaissance style, which still stands. (Park Place was sold for £42million in 2007, making it then the most expensive house sold in the Britain.)

Percy Noble, John Noble's youngest son, returned to live in Taplow. He set up home at Taplow Priory, another of the Noble properties in the area, where he also developed extensive grounds and gardens. The original Soane house at Berry Hill became a hotel and country club in the 1950s and was sadly destroyed by fire in the 1970s. A modern block of flats now stands on the original site.



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

The Newsletter is published by the Hitcham and Taplow Society.

Prepared for printing by Andrew Findlay using Scribus, Linux, and The Gimp  
Printed by Michael Burbridge Limited