

HIPS



NEWSLETTER

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HITCHAM & TAPLOW PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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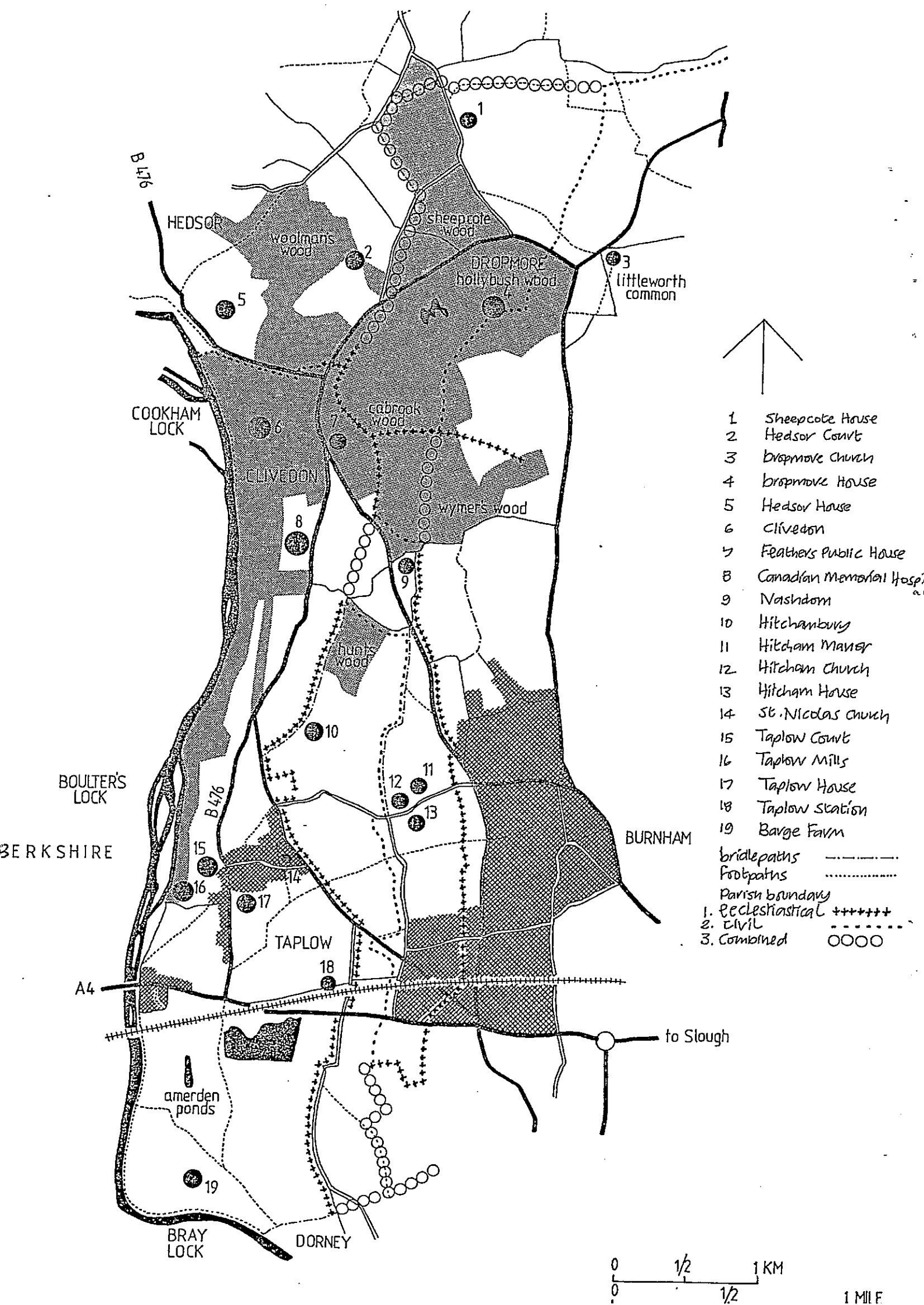
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This issue of the Newsletter has a historical theme, intended to acquaint people better (particularly those who are new to the area) with the heritage of Hitcham and Taplow. The following have contributed to these historical notes.

Mervyn Eden
Helen Grellier -
Lincoln Lee -
~~Susan Mason~~
~~Richard Sneyd~~
Philip Cooley

The Society has also received a letter from Dr. Rogers, the Society's Founder, congratulating us on reaching the ripe old age of 21, and this is published in this issue.

Opposite is a map of Footpaths and bridlepaths in the Parish which can also be used to locate the places named in the Historical Notes.

1. HISTORICAL NOTES ON HITCHAM AND TAPLOW

Cliveden

Cliveden - pronounced Cliffden - is today an estate of 327 acres belonging to the National Trust. Former owners included the Dukes of Buckingham, Sutherland and Westminster and the Lords Orkney, Inchquin and Astor. Frederick, Prince of Wales, rented the estate between 1739 and 1751 setting up a rival court to that of his father George II at Windsor. Each of these owners has contributed something to the Cliveden we see today, particularly in the grounds, the great terrace (Buckingham), the Blenheim Pavilion, Octagon Temple, yew walks and grass amphitheatre (Orkney), the Ilex Grove (Prince Frederick), the parterre (Sutherland), the forecourt (Westminster), the statuary, water garden and rose garden (first, second and third Lord Astor), Borghese balustrade, sarcophagi, the Russian Valley and Spring Drive (Westminster).

Cliveden House is the third house to be constructed on the great red brick terrace, which dates from 1666. The present house, built in 1851 by Sir Charles Barry, incorporates the two wings of the previous house designed by Thomas Archer in 1706. Henry Clutton designed the stable courtyard and clock tower (1861); and the porte cochère (1869); J.L. Pearson remodelled the hall and the library (1893-7) and the panelling and decorations in the dining room were brought from the Chateau d' Asnieres.

The four state rooms are open to the public on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and the house is let to Stanford University, California, for overseas courses. The sword garden, the war memorial garden, the fountain of love, the terrapin fountain, the long garden and the giant redwood slice are all worth finding and contribute to the Cliveden of today.

Dropmore

Lord Grenville was Pitt's Foreign Secretary from 1791 to 1801. In 1792 he purchased a small house with 30 acres on One Tree Hill, as it was, with a prospect of Windsor Castle, Hindhead and Blackdown. Here he began to build and plant trees, and this became Lord Grenville's home for many years until his death in 1834. The house is "long,

White and delightfully unassuming.....including Greek Doric temple fronts.....In the centre of long pergolas, an aviary of iron and green pottery panels" (Pevsner). The estate was extended by many purchases, among them the Manor of East Burnham which included Burnham Beeches, sold in 1879 to the City of London. The seclusion Lord Grenville sought was achieved by diversion of local roads and paths and by eviction of cottagers from the estate. In 1830 the pinetum was established, and a cedar avenue threequarters of a mile in length; Philip Frost the gardener lived until 1887 and, as a result of his labours, the grounds are believed to contain some of the finest coniferous trees in England.

Hitchambury

There is very little written reference to Hitcham before about 1550, and it seems likely that the original village was near the church. By the sixteenth century; the development of Hitcham Manor as a large estate had caused the first dispersal of population, and at some stage Hitcham's priest had become both resident and farmer of a considerable acreage of glebe land. The farm near the church was a manorial farm, though adjacent to it was the tithe barn. The rector was often an absentee, with the rectory land used variously as his residence and as a curate's residence. The curate in 1591, Henry Reynolds, was described as 'Clerke and Farmer of this parsonage', the term farmer probably relating to his being a tenant of the land, i.e. it was 'farmed out' to him.

Hitchambury (the Parsonage House as it was described) was in 1627 a house of '7 bayes built all of timber and covered with tiles and all being chambered over and boarded and the whole building contrived in two storeys and siped into 15 rooms'.

The parsonage was enlarged in 1685 and 1702, and new barns were erected in 1671 and 1679 - a period when Edward Nicholas was putting a great deal of his wealth into the church, churchyard and parsonage. Later the Rector, Edward Carter (1873-1905) foolishly decided to enlarge and improve the Rectory and he saddled the benefice with a large mortgage. So the house reached its present general appearance. Soon after the mortgage was paid off it was decided to move the Rectory closer to the church; after selling some glebe land and the old parsonage for £7629, the present rectory was built, commencing in 1908, in the field opposite the school.

Hitcham Manor and Hitcham House (Blythewood)

The Lord of the Manor lived at Hitcham Manor from about Elizabethan times until the beginning of the nineteenth century when William Wyndham (Lord Grenville) moved the official residence to his new house at Dropmore after purchasing the title and rights of Lord of the Manor.

Hitcham Manor was laid out by a succession of Lords of the Manor who probably were important 'civil servants' (Secretaries of State, Royal Physicians etc.) and wished to be near Windsor and London. The Manor House, like the church, had thus to be a mirror to their assumed high status, and HitchamHouse was thus described as having a collection of portraits from the time of Charles I, the Commonwealth and Charles II. Unfortunately Hitcham declined in the eighteenth century and the Manor House eventually became Dr. Gretton's school. It finally fell victim to fire, being demolished in 1804.

St. Nicholas Church

The present church, designed by W.H. Fellowes Prynne, and completed in 1912, replaced a structure of the poorest style in yellow stock brick which had served as parish church for nearly 70 years. Taplow is one of the most ancient sites of Christian Worship in this part of England and the original church, a tiny building of Saxon origin, stood in the grounds of Taplow Court.

The main features of the present church are its copper spire, the stone screen and rood and the Lady Chapel. The spacious proportions of the church reflect the optimism and prosperity of the pre-1914-18 era. The collection of brasses are from the old church and include the earliest surviving brass of a civilian in England - Nicholas de Aumberede, 1350, a fishmonger.

St. Nicholas School

St. Nicholas School is an old foundation; the original Taplow School was built in 1848 on glebe land known as Paternoster Meadow to the south-east of the present building, on the site of the car park. It was a typical Victorian school of diapered brickwork with a steeply pitched tiled roof and high windows. The New school was opened in October 1965, and was designed by Peter Reynolds Associates of Oxford, to blend into the village landscape. The school is a Church of England Aided School, partly built and maintained by the parish.

Taplow Court and Taplow House

It is Taplow Court which dominates the village and the skyline, and its famous avenue of cedars which were planted by notable persons can be seen even from the hills beyond Marlow. Although the Plessey Company, who occupy it now, work towards the future of electronics, the site where their planning takes place represented an important position even for centuries before the Saxon mound was raised. The Court's most famous owner, Lord Desborough, was a person of outstanding achievements, but before his family arrived there were the Earls of Orkney, and the Guildfords and legend has it that 425 years ago Elizabeth was held prisoner here before she became Queen.

By contrast, Taplow House is less obtrusive, and yet there seems to be no proof that the house is any less ancient. The Queen Elizabeth legend here is that she planted one of the tulip trees, and the cellars, with their brick oven, certainly seem old enough to be Elizabethan. As a place to live (as distinct from a place to defend) it could have been far more attractive than Taplow Court. It is sheltered from the colder winds and its gardens and stables could have had running water channelled from the springs on the hillside above. Certainly the Grenfells, having enlarged the house in 1794 (did they build the carriage porch and install the wonderful mirrors, including the remarkable one which slides across so as to allow the scent of flowers to drift in from the conservatory?) lived there in great comfort for nearly 50 years before moving to Taplow Court.

For some years the Guinness Book of Records wrongly attributed the tallest tulip tree to Taplow Court, and similar confusion between the two mansions seems to have troubled others who wrote the history of the village.

Many features of the estate layout survive: the walls, the gardens, the 'pond' where carriages were washed; one can trace the route of the old road from the Gore straight to the north end of the churchyard, and imagine how it was diverted to run south of and then west of the churchyard to give more privacy to the Manor House, probably about 1685-1700.

Hitcham House (now a Nurses's Home) was built by the Hanbury family as their country home in the 1860's. Like many other large houses in the Taplow and Hitcham area, it was a summer 'entertaining house' where lavish house parties would have taken place, the house being virtually closed down in the winter. The land where this house was built was previously ordinary farmland but, like Dropmore, it involved alterations to local paths, a site with a view of Windsor Castle, and a major change in the social and economic life of the parish.

Maidenhead Railway Bridge

Brunel's bridge crosses the Thames in two of the flattest and largest arches ever built in brickwork, 128ft, span and 24ft.3in. rise. At each side are four semicircular flood arches. The eastern elliptical arch showed some distortion when the centering was first lowered, due to the 'Roman cement' not being fully set, but was repaired by some rebuilding. Much later the bridge was altered by widening the arches on both sides, this time on piled abutments.

Before completion of the bridge, Maidenhead Station was built in Taplow, a wooden structure west of the Bath road bridge and about $\frac{1}{4}$ ml. short of the river bridge. Thus far the railway was completed in May 1838, and it was opened publicly the following month. This first station remained the only main line station for both Maidenhead and Taplow until 1871. The extension of the railway westward across the new bridge was opened in July 1839, so providing the scene for Turner's painting, 'Rain, Steam and Speed'.

Nashdom

The house was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1908 for the Russian Prince Dolgorouki and his English wife; a large but simple house of white-painted brick. The Prince died in 1915, and the Princess four years later. In 1924 Nashdom was brought to the attention of a Benedictine community occupying the Abbey House at Pershore.

This community was the third serious attempt to revive the Benedictine life in the English Church, its predecessors being that founded by Ignatius at Llanthony and the Caldey Community. The third was initiated at Pershore in 1913, but by strict standards was not established until 1922, when the minimum of three professed brethren was attained. Growth of the community brought a need for a larger home, and the move was made in 1926 to Nashdom, the Russian name being retained. A new wing was completed in 1968, and the lodge has been adapted as a guest house.

The monks of Nashdom Abbey have a timetable consisting of worship, work and study. Following the rule of Saint Benedict, their approach to God is made in an enclosed and mainly silent community. Corporate worship provides a framework within which develops the personal prayer and reading, spiritual and intellectual. The walled grounds of the house include a large cultivated area, for the Abbey grows food to be as self-supporting as possible.

However it does seem that when the Grenfells sold Taplow House it was to the Marquis of Thomond, of the family which in turn had lived at Taplow Court during the Napoleonic Wars. Theirs was a rather inbred Scottish family, the Orkneys and Inchquins, and it seems remarkable that they should have achieved something very rare in English village life. On the basis that the fabric of the church was in poor condition, they had it demolished rather than restored; the new church built half a mile from the ancient site, no longer blocked their view across the valley.

The Tumulus

Some authorities derive the name Taplow from Tappa's Hlau (A.S. Hlau - burial mound) which appears in Domesday as Thapeslau. If this is so, the contents of the tumulus may be the remains of this Mercian chieftain whose name occurs in no records; they are dated by the British Museum as pre-Christian, early 7th century.

The tumulus measures 240ft. in circumference, 80ft. in diameter and is 14 to 15ft. high. It was opened in October 1883 by Mr. Rutland, Major Cooper King and Dr. Stevens of Reading Museum who kept an illustrated diary of the excavation. The remains include human bones, a standing Coptic bowl, a fine gold buckle, shield bosses and drinking horns. Until the discovery of the great Sutton Hoo ship burial, this was the most important single Anglo-Saxon archaeological find; the contents of the mound can be seen in the British Museum alongside the Sutton Hoo display.

Waterworks

At intervals along the river bank below Taplow Court are seven boreholes into the chalk stratum, the greatest depth being 400ft. From these a water supply is pumped to Taplow, Burnham and adjoining districts. The first was drilled in 1948 by the Burnham, Dorney and Hitcham Water Company (founded 1891) who acquired the site from Lord Desborough, together with rights of supply to Taplow village and the new Taplow Paper Mills. Later boreholes were drilled by the Middle Thames Water Board, and other associated work built by Thames Water. The water is sterilised and pumped to distribution systems regulated by covered reservoirs at Littleworth Common and Stoke Wood. Current output is about 18,000 cu.metres per day, sufficient to supply about 60,000 people.

2. THE SOCIETY COMES OF AGE

Congratulations to the Society on achieving its majority (the old fashioned 21 year variety). The list of Committee members does not include the name of any of those who helped to found the Society in 1959 (though we are glad to see several vice-Presidents who have stayed the course).

Perhaps I might therefore remind members of the Society of its origin. It was all to do with gravel-as so often in Taplow. The news that Poplar Farm was to be the scene of a huge extraction job for the M4 was received with horror by most of us in Taplow and Hitcham, but we were not organised to fight, and, by the time we tried to, the battle was practically over. One day, discussing the position with friends in what was then my house (now that of the Secretary), I suggested the formation of a Preservation Society, so that never again need we be caught unprepared. An immediate task would be to monitor the activities of the contractors on the Poplar Farm site. We called a special meeting in the WI Hall,

and the support we got was most encouraging. We were now organised and ready.

We found that the contractors were treating the 'conditions' in the cavalier way that is characteristic of their kind, and there ensued a long fight to see that they were enforced. The result is there for all to see—the restoration of Poplar Farm has been pretty successful.

For 20 years, no new gravel pits have come to Taplow, and not for lack of attempts by the gravel companies, who still own large amounts of land round about, and bide their time. But things are rather easier for us now than they were; perhaps the most important outcome of the rumpus over Poplar Farm was the decision of the Local Authority to change the procedure for contractors seeking gravel extraction rights. In the past it had been a sort of authorised piratical foray by the gravel companies, and when they had made deals with the owners of land overlying gravel, planning permission was almost guaranteed. This was changed, and the opposition now stands a chance; we have successfully fought off several applications which previously would have been lost.

3. RECENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS

a. Berry Hill Farm. Gravel extraction

The last issue of this Newsletter dealt very fully with this. The applications, one concerning access to the workings and the other with the removal of a tree bank have not yet been considered by Buckinghamshire County Council, and Beaconsfield District Council.

b. Elibank House. Rectory Road. Taplow

A planning application was made on behalf of the owners of Elibank House for (i) the subdivision of the house into 2 residential units
(ii) the construction of a new porch
(iii) the erection of a new dwellinghouse in the grounds of Elibank House.

The Items (i) and (ii) have been approved by Beaconsfield District Council. Item (iii) has not yet been taken pending the Council receiving details of the proposed development. The Society will have the opportunity of considering this in due course.

c. Skindles Hotel.

The original application to erect an 81 bedroom hotel with a bridge link to the existing hotel has now been withdrawn.

The Council have now received an outline application to develop an 81 bedroom hotel, with car parking and servicing on the site of the Orkney Arms/Sir Percy Flanagan Public House on the Bath Road. A large portion of this site comes within Windsor and Maidenhead.

d. Berry Hill Country Club.

The application to erect 12 Flats on the site of the Berry Hill Country Club has still to be determined.

4. 20TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's AGM will be held on Friday 26th October 1979 at 8.15 pm in the Reading Room, Taplow Village. A Notice giving details of this is being distributed separately.