

HITCHAM and TAPLOW PRESERVATION SOCIETY



(Courtesy of British Rail)

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NEWSLETTER

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Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society.

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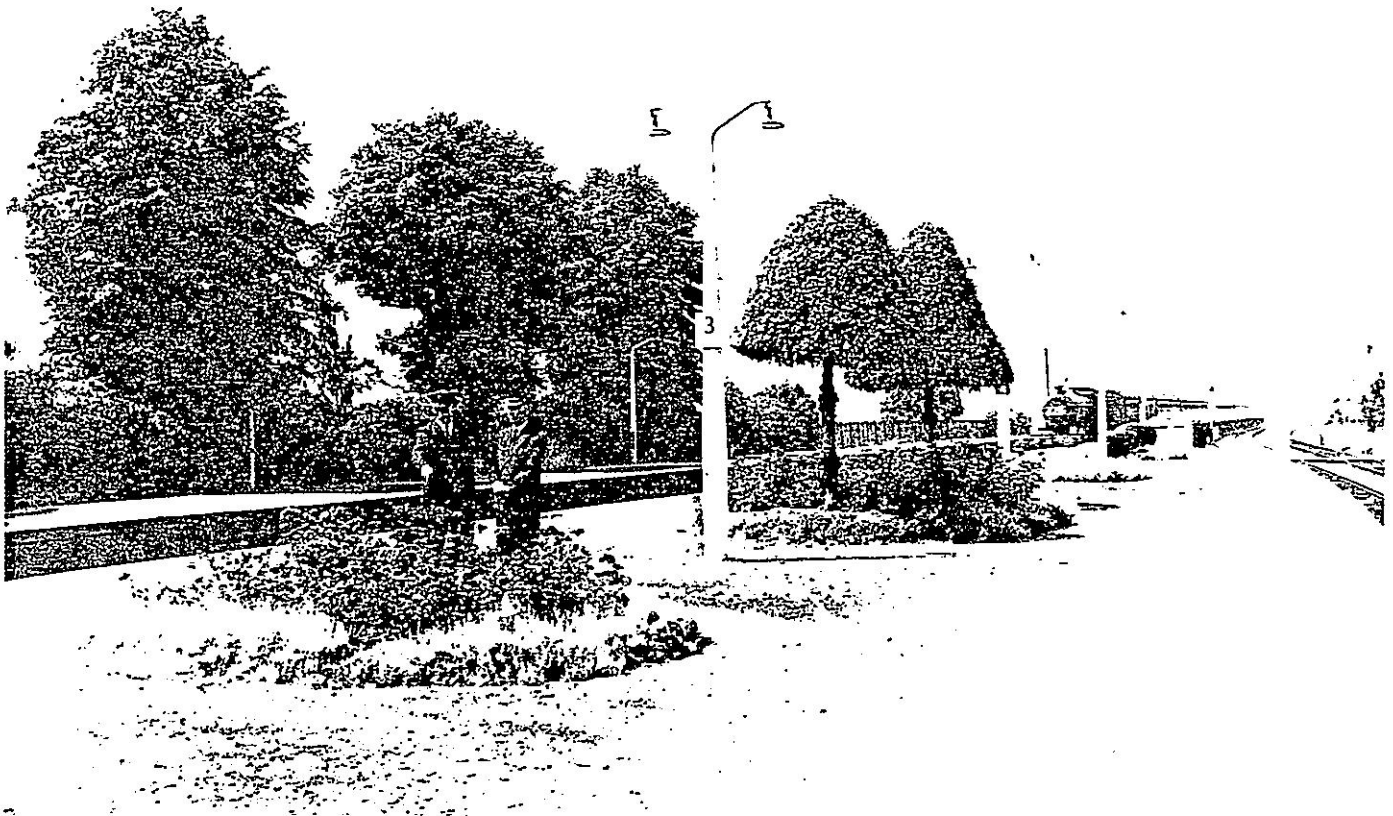
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TAPLOW STATION (Courtesy of British Rail)

THE RAILWAY AT TAPLOW

Plans for the Great Western Railway's main line between London and Bristol began as far back as 1833. However the Act of Parliament incorporating the GWR did not receive the Royal Assent until August 1835. Originally it was not intended to provide the village of Taplow with a station, but the difficulties encountered by the need to bridge the River Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead forced the GWR to build their first westward terminus within Taplow's boundaries. The station was known at first as 'Maidenhead', that town already being an important entrepôt for traffic between the West Country and London.

The station was opened to public traffic on the 4th June 1838 when a limited service of four trains each way was provided, reduced to three trains each way on Sundays. The station was situated on the embankment just west of the railway bridge over the main A4 Bath Road. This bridge was originally designed by Brunel and later extended on the north side during 'widening', i.e. quadrupling the tracks, in the 1890's. The south west abutment of the bridge contained one of the entrances up to the station at track level. The former archway to this entrance can still be seen today and is a surviving remainder of the old station. The steps from the entrance were removed not long after closure and now form part of the stairway which itself has since been closed, between Paddington's suburban line platforms and Bishop's Bridge Road. There were two other entrances to the station at track level; the first led up from the main concourse of buildings at ground level to the north of the railway and the second on the south or 'Down' side led up from a lane at the west end of the station, being on the same side but at the end opposite to the entrance in the bridge abutment.

The main group of buildings for the station were provided at ground level but each platform at track level had a substantial range of buildings complete with clock tower, provided so that passengers were reminded that trains ran to Greenwich Mean Time and not to local time, which was about three minutes behind GMT. The site of the former Down side platform can be seen to the side of the current Down main line, a few yards to the west of the bridge over the A4 Bath Road.

A small servicing depot was provided for the station and this is believed to have been situated near the site of the current Taplow station, where access to the railway from the road would have been much easier than at the station. Coaches, horses and other road traffic to or from the West Country was often carried by the GWR between Paddington and Maidenhead, thus easy transfer between road and rail was essential. The depot also included a large engine shed, turntable and other ancillary facilities which were staffed by just six men.

The usefulness of the road/rail access was shown in January 1838 when one of the GWR's first locomotives, the 'North Star' was delivered to Maidenhead by barge and transferred to the railway at Taplow. The 'North Star' later hauled the GWR's first passenger carrying train between Paddington and Maidenhead.

The original station had many different names ascribed to it during its short life. At first it was called Maidenhead whilst also being known as Maidenhead Riverside or Maidenhead Dumb Bell Bridge, the latter after a nearby public house, the Dumb Bell, which remains to this day. It is interesting to note that this pub is opposite another built later on the site of the original station's buildings and called, appropriately, Old Station Inn. The different names by which the station was known can probably be attributed to the fact that, although the station was meant to serve Maidenhead, it was nowhere near the centre of the town. The station was later shown in timetables as 'Maidenhead and Taplow' and to distinguish it from the Wycombe Railway's station in Maidenhead (on the A4 too - at Castle Hill), eventually as 'Taplow'. Taplow station was only expected to be temporary and was designed as such by Brunel. Unlike the more permanent stations at Slough and West Drayton, Brunel designed a wooden station for Maidenhead and even though it had its clock towers and consideration was given to providing it with an overall roof, it was always doomed. Indeed in August 1839 the GWR board resolved to move the station further west but did not for a number of reasons even though they were constantly being urged to do so by the local users of the station. It was finally closed on the 1st September 1872 when the present Taplow Station was opened.

The reason why Taplow was home to the first Maidenhead station was of course the problem of crossing the River Thames which proved to be one of the GWR's most severe engineering problems. The difficulties came about mainly as a result of the stipulations laid down by the River Thames Commissioners. They said that the bridge must not obstruct the river or its towpaths and that it must be brick built. No brick bridge of a comparable size had ever been attempted before. Fortunately the GWR had as its architect I K Brunel and his revolutionary design won approval from the Commissioners. Inevitably his design had its critics who claimed that the proposals to construct a bridge 778 feet long with two arches spanning 128 feet with a rise of just 24 feet 3 inches each was far too optimistic. The GWR however kept their faith in Brunel and construction began in 1837. The critics appeared justified when the centerings to the eastern arch were first removed. The arch showed signs of distortion but the foreman in charge of construction admitted that he had ordered the centerings to be removed too soon. The arch was soon repaired. In the meantime the western arch was found to be perfectly satisfactory. Brunel's design had proved to be more than up to the task demanded of it.

After some initial tests the bridge was opened to public traffic on July 1st 1839 when the line was extended through to Twyford. At this time the timetable was considerably altered. Now there were to be seven trains each way between Maidenhead and Paddington, with an additional Down train early on Monday mornings only. On Sundays there were six trains each way. In about 1844 Turner completed his famous painting 'Rain Steam and Speed', which featured the bridge at Maidenhead. This painting now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

The Wycombe Railway Company opened the first ten miles of its line to Oxford on 1st August 1854. This section was between Maidenhead Junction (on the site of the present Maidenhead Station) and High Wycombe. It was extended through to Aylesbury in 1862 and to Oxford via Princes Risborough in 1864. Trains started from the GWR station in Taplow until the new Maidenhead Station was opened on 1st November 1871.

In 1882 the GWR announced that the number of running tracks between Slough and Taplow was to be doubled from two to four. The plan was carried out at Taplow during 1883/84 when the opportunity was also taken to rebuild and enlarge the station on the Northern side. It is known that the plans for an enlarged Taplow station were prepared as early as 1871. This suggests that when the new Taplow station was built in 1872 a quarter mile east of the old Maidenhead Riverside, thought was already being given to 'widening'. The even newer and enlarged Taplow Station came into public service early in 1884.

Shortly after, with both freight and passenger traffic increasing all the time, the GWR decided to continue 'widening' between Taplow and Reading. Brunel's masterpiece however caught the GWR in a dilemma. Should they demolish Brunel's bridge and replace it with an iron girder structure or could they widen the old bridge? Fortunately consideration was given to the aesthetic value of Brunel's work and it was decided to widen the bridge on each side by fifteen feet and to keep the original design. Widening proved far more difficult than building the original bridge. Part of the reason why consideration was given to demolishing the bridge was that it had shown signs of distortion and had to undergo a considerable amount of repair before it could be widened. Delays were also encountered on land west of the bridge. Thus although work began in the early 1880's the new part of the bridge was not opened to public service until January 1893.

By the end of the nineteenth century the pattern of the railway through Taplow had been established and remained virtually unchanged until the beginning of the modern era which began with the famous Beeching report of 1963, entitled 'The Reshaping of British Railways'. So far as Beeching was concerned Taplow came through unscathed. No recommendations for closure were made not even for the goods depot which, according to the report, handled less than 5,000 tons of freight per week (this was the lowest category for freight in the report - putting Taplow on a par with Furze Platt Halt!). Maybe no recommendation was made because a decision to withdraw these facilities had already been made for the Goods shed was closed shortly after the report was published. Almost immediately however it gained a new lease of life when the then recently formed Great Western Society leased it from British Rail in 1965 to store some of their early acquisitions. Amongst the stock kept at Taplow was the 2-6-2T tank engine No. 6106 which came back to the area in 1973 when it helped to operate trains between Maidenhead and Bourne End during the Bourne End to Marlow branch centenary celebrations on the 15th of July of that year. Other stock kept at Taplow at this time included an Ocean Liner Saloon, other special saloons and a Dynamometer Car which is now on the Dart Valley Railway in the West Country. The GWS did not remain at Taplow for very long. By the mid 1960's the substantial engine sheds and sidings at Didcot had become available and in November 1967 the GWS stock at Taplow was transferred to its new home.

Although it lost its Goods facilities Taplow retained a number of other features which stations of a similar size were rapidly losing. Until the 1960's Taplow was used by BR as a local centre for training its road vehicle drivers. The centre was closed shortly before BR's road delivery service became a part of the National Freight Corporation. The station also boasted a coal distribution depot, for which a locomotive was regularly provided each morning to shunt wagons in the sidings. This facility was withdrawn in the late 1970's. In the latter years the locomotive was usually a class 35 all of which have since been withdrawn from BR, or a class 31 examples of which can still be seen hauling passenger or goods trains around the Western Region. But even though Taplow was able to retain some distinctive features during the 1960's and 1970's, rationalization and the modern era finally took their toll and the station now exists only for passengers.

With the introduction in 1976 of the IC125 services between Paddington and Wales and the South West, it was clear that locomotives and rolling stock would become available to take over some of the semi-fast suburban and commuter services between Oxford and Paddington. If these trains were transferred to the suburban services they would of course not always be able to use the main line because of the impracticability of mixing 90 mph suburban trains with 125 mph main line expresses.

To make the best use of this newly available stock BR decided to raise the speed limit along the relief lines where possible. At Taplow the speed limit then existing was raised substantially by realigning the platforms and the running tracks. The Up relief line platform was widened considerably and the Down relief similarly narrowed, the net result being that the speed limit through the station has been considerably increased.

In more recent years Taplow has lost its buildings on the Down main platform and those on its island platform (the Up main and Down relief) have been truncated. As elsewhere the emphasis is on car parking. On the Down side commuters park where once the gentry detrained their coaches, and on the Up side the single track bay has become a roadside car park.

However, despite all the changes that have taken place over the years Taplow with its neat gardens and tidy platforms, manages to retain its country air and a feeling of timelessness; let us hope it continues so for many years to come.

A CALL FROM THE TREASURER

The Society's financial year ends on 30th September, and those who have not yet paid their 1983-84 subscriptions - a minimum of £1 per person is what is needed - are asked to do so promptly. Subscriptions only just meet expenses incurred, and these are kept low by the efforts of the committee and because some charitably minded members forego claims on the funds. The 1984-85 year begins of course as the old one ends and early payment of subscriptions would be appreciated. If you miss the post there will be an opportunity to pay at the Annual General Meeting on 26th October.

The Treasurer is:

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CLIVEDEN HANGING WOODS APPEAL - SOCIETY'S BARBECUE RAISES £1,000

"The Hanging Woods? Who was hung there?" This was the initial reaction of many locals. "Oh - you mean the woods which make the Cliveden Reach so spectacular - yes, they do look as though they are dying back."

What more appropriate cause could there be for our Preservation Society? Most of us have boasted about the Cliveden Reach, and all of us have enjoyed the views from the Cookham Road, or even better, from the river. Clearing away the dying trees and replacing them with young ones is too expensive a task to be found from the National Trust's slender resources, & because most of the work will call for manual effort. So when the New Taplow Paper Mills offered to host a fund-raising event on a Thursday in July, the die was cast.

"Dine by the riverside," we put on the advertisement, but few of us anticipated such a warm summer evening and such an excellent meal. We hesitated to charge too much for a weekday evening, so the profits from the tickets themselves were small. No matter - various fund-raising projects boosted the total profit to £1000 which will help the National Trust in its financing.

Those who helped, those who provided prizes, and those who came and contributed, all deserve our thanks. And thanks too to the Paper Mills, to Mr. Stratton who so generously donated the wine, to Mr. Briggs and his staff, and last but not least to Mike Smith for providing such a succulent barbecue.

CLIVEDEN AND BLAKENEY HOTELS LTD

Members will have seen mention in the national and local press of negotiations between the National Trust and Blakeney Hotels Ltd for the conversion of Cliveden into a luxury hotel. It is understood that the negotiations are going well. Planning permission for a hotel has been granted subject to Listed Building Consent. However, at the time of writing the National Trust has not yet given top level final approval. Assuming agreement is reached the House will be closed in 1985 and when re-opened in 1986 will be open in part to the public on two afternoons a week. The grounds will remain open throughout.

AIRCRAFT NOISE

The fine summer has meant the windows being open wider for longer and more time spent in the garden. Consequently we have been more troubled by aircraft noise. Our only defence is vigilance and protest. Probably the best we can hope for until quieter aircraft come into service is that the situation doesn't worsen. Meanwhile we are grateful to our President, Mr Miall, for his continued efforts to abate the nuisance.

CLIVEDEN HANGING WOODS APPEAL - CHAIRMAN'S STATE OF PLAY

Following the very successful Supper Party at the New Taplow Paper Mills, Tony Hickman, Chairman of the Cliveden Hanging Woods Appeal, wrote to thank the Society for making the arrangements and the Mill for their generosity for making the marquee available and for providing the wine. He said that the evening raised £1,064, including two covenants or just over £3 per person excluding the covenants. Up until the Supper Party, twenty six Taplow residents had generously contributed £801 or just over £30 per person. He is very grateful for the support and hopes that Taplow will be able to raise its total to at least £2,500, enough for an acre.

Just over £65,000 of the £150,000 target has been raised so far, a tremendous boost to the Appeal being £20,000 spread over four years from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The majority of donations, however, have come from individuals, mainly members of the National Trust.

Covenants can dramatically increase the total. £15 a year for five years produces £47 from the Inland Revenue from a standard rate tax payer. A lump sum covenant of £140 from a tax payer in the 50% bracket will cost the tax payer £100 and produce £200 for the Appeal.

MICHAEL GOOD MEMORIAL TREE

Thanks to the efforts of the Stannings the memorial tree planted at the top of Berry Hill is flourishing. Recently a suitably inscribed plaque, provided by Mr W Bell, has been attached to the tree as a permanent record.

THE TAPLOW BURIAL MOUND AND THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The eagerly, and long, awaited visit to the British Museum to see the artefacts recovered from the Taplow burial mound is postponed until 1985. We hope to tell you all about our visit in the next newsletter.

Appeal lodged 751/83 Land on West side of Mill Lane - construction of lay-by to accommodate lorry traffic to paper mill.

Enforcement Notice under Section 87 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1971 - Lyndis Farm, Hitcham Lane - unauthorised stationing of caravan and erection of shed.

208/84	The Orchard High Street Taplow Extensions/ Alterations	Approved
282/84	Maidenhead Autos Bath Road southside - Sign	Approved
306/84	Ditto - Sales kiosk extension to canopy/ modernisation of forecourt	Approved
160/84	Sports ground, Institute Road-demolition and erection of replacement sports pavilion	Approved
321/84	Stable Cottage Berry Hill-Two storey rear extension	Approved
330/84	Windsor & Purbeck Cottages Cliveden Estate - demolition of brick and timber sheds, erection of block 3 garages	Approved
350/84	Cliveden Estate - new roof over sequoia section	Approved
397/84	Taplow Cricket Club - demolition of existing kitchen and erection of single storey extension, kitchen bar and toilet facilities	Approved
482/84	Jameson Cottage Marsh Lane - first floor rear extension	Approved
400/84	Taplow Court, Cliveden Road - replacement of gardener's sheds provision of 16 parking places and reinstatement of remaining area to grass/ flower beds	Approved
497/84	The Bishop Centre Bath Road - erection of Garage for storage loading bay area - rear of Payless DIY Ltd	Deferred for site visit
385/84	The Barn - Skindles Car Park - change of use to production and repair of sailing dinghies	Refused
371/84	Barge Farm Amerden Lane - erection of one pair of semi-detached farm workers' cottages	Refused
187/84	Unit 1 Stable Block Hitcham House - sub division into separate ground and first floor units/construction of additional garage and dormer.	Refused
115/84	Unit 7 Parkland View Hitcham House - two new dormers to front at first floor and one to rear	Approved
113/84	Unit 5 Magnolia House one new dormer to the rear at 2nd floor level	Approved