

HITCHAM and TAPLOW PRESERVATION SOCIETY



TAPLOW COURT
(Plessey Major Systems Ltd.)

No 49

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1985

HITCHAM and TAPLOW PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Objects of the Society

The Society was formed in 1959 and one of its most important objects is:-

"....securing the protection from disfigurement or injury of the countryside and rural surroundings and amenities of the Parishes of Hitcham and Taplow....".

The Society therefore scrutinises many Planning Applications and Appeals and makes constructive comments when appropriate; it also gives evidence at Local Planning Enquiries.

Officers and Executive Committee Members

President	Mr Leonard Miall OBE
Vice Presidents	Mrs E Law, Mrs GL Milne, Mr AJC Paines, Mrs AB Horton.
Chairman	Mr RJ Hanbury
Vice Chairman	Mr NBRC Peroni
Treasurer	Miss E Ricketts
Secretary	Mr RGR Nutt
Planning	Mr A Hickman
Committee Members	Mr W Ball, Mrs CJL Cumberlege, Lt Col SJ Dagg , Mrs BM Eley, Mrs H Lee, Mr HC Nixon, Miss GG Pollock, Mr E Schmitz-Peiffer.

EDITORIAL MISCELLANY

Treasurer's Memorandum

The finances of the Society remain satisfactory and there has been a good response to the request for payment of the 1984-85 subscription - £1 to Miss Ricketts. Although there are a few defaulters, (and we hope these have overlooked rather than rejected the annual call) the Committee has decided that for them, pending payment, this Newsletter will have to be their last.

(ER)

The Canadian Memorial Hospital

The Hospital, which has been under threat of closure for some time, was due to close on 31st March. The site is part of Cliveden and, to maintain its revenue, the National Trust will be seeking a fresh occupier. The common interest of the Trust and of the Society is to ensure that local amenities are not impaired. The Society, as an onlooker, will do what it can to that end. Meanwhile the lease of the Regional Health Authority has, we believe, some three more years to run.

(SJD)

Cliveden and Blakeney Hotels Limited

The National Trust has announced that it has granted a 45 year lease to Blakeney Hotels under which Cliveden will be converted into a country house hotel.

As previously, certain rooms will be open to visitors on two afternoons a week. Unrestricted access to all parts of the grounds and formal gardens will continue. The house will re-open to visitors in April 1986.

(SJD)

Bapsey Pond Footpath

When the Society, with the help of Plessey, arranged the clearance of the Bapsey Pond, the Members were allowed to use the private footpath which runs alongside the Pond from the gate in Mill Lane to the Old Churchyard.

We have heard from Plessey that they may have to lock the Mill Lane Gate on occasions but we have been assured that this Gate will be open "at nearly all times during hours of daylight".

Members who wish to exercise their dogs in this area are free to do so but they must ensure that they are "closely controlled" to ensure that they do not foul the paths.

Incidentally, the only public right of access to any part of the Taplow Court Estate is over the Back Drive (which belongs to Plessey) for the sole purpose of visiting the Old Churchyard (which does not belong to them).

(RGRN)

Parish Boundaries

Mr Martin White, Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire County Council, in reply to a letter from the Secretary of the Society to the Chairman of the Council, explained that Berkshire have submitted a proposal to the Local Government Boundary Commission. As far as we are concerned, this is a take-over of the southern part of the Parish. The exact area is all the land South and East of Mill Lane and West of Berry Hill; add to this all the land South of the Bath Rd (or the railway line whichever gives a bigger area to Berks). Later this year, the Boundary Commission will decide whether it is going to consider this proposal and, if so, how the public consultation is to be arranged.

The Executive Committee will be watching these developments very carefully and if necessary will circulate all or part of the membership.
(RGRN)

Taplow Arts and Crafts Exhibition.

This is being arranged jointly by the Taplow Parish Council and the Parents/Teachers Association of the School and is to be held in the School and in the Village Centre on the Mayday Bank Holiday week-end - Sat 4th, Sun 5th and Mon 6th

The Society hopes to have a small stand and is preparing a Leaflet about Taplow.

Proceeds from the sale of the work will go towards a new Hydrotherapy Pool at Wexham Park Hospital. I hope you will be able to support this very worthy cause. Those being asked to exhibit will have already been contacted.

(RGRN)

Springfield Boat Yard

In January this year, the familiar river landmark of Springfield Boat Yard on River Road was auctioned. The residents of this part of Taplow now await the results of this sale with trepidation. The land between the boat house and the bridge is currently being cleared and the trees lopped for what could possibly be the forerunner of residential development.

The future of the boat yard itself seems more hopeful and it is thought that the yard has been leased out for hiring summer cruisers, some of which have already appeared at moorings.

The lessee of the boat yard is most anxious to improve the area and the river frontage and would welcome any suggestions from local residents; if you have any ideas, please contact Mrs Barbara Eley (tel Maidenhead 26748).

(BME)

TAPLOW COURT

The House

Standing on a southerly spur of the Chiltern Hills and commanding extensive views of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and the Home Counties, Taplow was recognised in 1946 as an ideal environment in which scientists and technicians could pursue the problems of extending all branches of telecommunications into the post war era and, subsequently, into the space age.

The visitor will be conscious of the contrasts presented by the house and its environs, although care has been taken in siting the modern laboratory blocks to preserve the natural amenities of the estate. The vault of the Desboroughs, the last family to occupy the house - the crypt and churchyard of a medieval church in which lie the remains of a long line of the Lords of Taplow Manor - a Saxon burial mound from which the Manor takes its name - a spring which has supported community life from the very remotest times - all these lie in close proximity to each other, some separated by no more than a few paces.

The Earliest Days

The house is the last of the dwellings which have occupied this promontory overlooking the River Thames for at least two thousand years. Celtic and Roman remains dredged up from the Thames and excavated from hilltops adjacent to the river indicate that a succession of different peoples occupied the higher defensive positions and used the river both as a frontier and a source of food. The Anglo Saxon Chronicle infers that the British inhabitants of the Taplow ridge were warlike and quarrelsome, and took part in a delaying action against Caesar's legions at the battle of Chertsey Stakes, when the bed of the downstream ford at Chertsey was sown with sharpened stakes to impede the progress of the legions. After the fall of the Roman Empire and the legions were withdrawn from Britain, the westward advance of Saxons was also impeded by the resistance of a Romano-British leader, Ambrosius Valerian, from his strongpoint on this ridge.

The Saxon Heritage

That the Saxons occupied Taplow is implicit in its name, given in older records as Thapelau, or the burial-mound (lau) of Thapes, a Saxon chieftain. In more modern records he is called Tapp and his mound is spelt 'low'. The mound under which he, and possibly another chieftain called Aella, or Aedda, were buried still remains in the churchyard on the south side of the house. This mound, about eighty yards in circumference, was opened in 1883. Some human remains were discovered, and more than a hundred Anglo-Saxon relics, including a sword, spearheads, a fine bronze bowl and intricately-worked jewellery, were removed and deposited in the British Museum. Expert opinion dates the burial at between 590 and 610 A.D., although the layers of which the mound is composed contains debris from earlier times.

About 150 yards downhill from the mound is a pond which is fed by a spring such as would have been essential to a garrison occupying this height. This has always been known as the Bapsey Pond and is reputed to

have been the place where St. Birinus, the Roman Bishop of Dorchester in the 7th Century, baptised Saxon converts to Christianity.

Prior to the Norman Conquest the manor was bestowed on Astig, a Saxon noble, by Earl Harold who was later to become Harold II of England and to die on Senlac Hill in 1066. After the Norman Conquest, King William I gave the manor to his brother Bishop Odo of Bayeux who let it to the monks of Merton Abbey for six shillings a year. During the Middle Ages, the monks sub-let the manor, and the names of the tenants, such as the Turvilles and the de Botillers, are still known in the locality. Records of transactions begin to appear in the archives, and with them, evidence of the personalities who lived in and around the manor house. Until more recent times the parish church of Taplow occupied a site adjacent to the house. Its origins go back at least to Medieval times and possibly to the time when the local Saxons were converted to Christianity. The old church fell into disuse about the year 1820 and was completely demolished by about 1850. It is described as being about 84 feet long by 20 broad, having handsomely mullioned windows in painted glass, and a very ancient square font supported by a circular column and profusely decorated with carvings and Coats of Arms. In the crypt under the north aisle have only recently been discovered the remains of several members of the great families whose names featured prominently in local history after the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII, when the manor became at the disposal of the Crown.

The Tudors

Henry VIII is said to have held court at Taplow while visiting Windsor. During the reign of Mary I the house was used as a State prison for persons of importance who could hardly be sent to common gaols but whose offences were not serious enough to warrant their committal to the Tower of London. Such a person was Mary's sister, the Princess Elizabeth, who later became Queen Elizabeth I. A large oak tree in the grounds, the Queen's Oak, now removed but appearing on Ordnance Survey maps as late as 1933, was reputed to be the same tree under which Elizabeth used to sit during her imprisonment. The house which Elizabeth knew was burnt to the ground in 1616.

From Stuart to Hanover

The manor was subsequently sold to Sir Henry Guilford who sold it to a Charles Harbert. In 1635 the manor was bought by Thomas Hampson, who became a Baronet in 1642 and was succeeded by his son Thomas in 1655. His grandson, Sir Dennis Hampson, held the office of Sheriff of the County (Bucks) and was later Member of Parliament for High Wycombe; he it was who eventually sold the manor to George Hamilton, 1st Earl of Orkney, in the year 1700. At this time the neighbouring estate, Cliveden, which had once been part of the Manor of Taplow, was owned by the illustrious Villiers family. An aptitude for achieving intimacy with the current monarch was a mark of the Villiers line, although they quarrelled with, and flouted their respective sovereigns with a wild independence and a frequency that would have lost most courtiers not only their positions but also their heads. It was the daughter of Sir Edward Villiers, Elizabeth, who was married to George Hamilton and whose political acumen contributed much to his brilliant career. To her cousin Barbara, Lady Castlemaine, goes the doubtful distinction of being the 'Amber' in 'Forever Amber', but the glamour of Elizabeth was a different sort

altogether. Plain in the extreme and with a slight squint that would deter all but the most ardent, she nevertheless commanded the respect and affection of all who were involved in the politics of those times. Before their marriage her influence is attributed to the fact that she had been for a time mistress of William of Orange. George Hamilton had learned his trade as a soldier under William in Ireland, and within a few weeks of marrying Elizabeth was created 1st Earl of Orkney. Thereafter her firm grasp of affairs added much to her husband's advancement although he won distinction as a general under the Duke of Marlborough in the Low Countries. He was awarded many sinecures and offices during the reigns of Queen Anne and the first two Georges, and was absentee Governor of Virginia from 1714 until his death. A small tribute to his success as a general may still be seen in the gardens - three decorative stone urns presented to him by Queen Anne and, as the inscriptions show, were given in commemoration of his part in the battle of Blenheim. The Earl carried out extensive improvements to the building; notably he added the Norman Saloon, in imitation of the nave of Kirkwall Cathedral in the Orkneys, and the porch and vestibule, all of which are still features of the present house.

When the first Earl died in 1737, he joined the Hampsons in the crypt of the old church, and was succeeded by his daughter Anne, Countess of Orkney, who inherited both Taplow Court and Cliveden, which had also been acquired by her father. She married William O'Brien, the 4th Earl of Inchiquin.

On their deaths, they were in turn committed to the vault of the old church and in 1756 the manor passed jointly into the hands of their daughter Mary and her husband Murrough O'Brien, 5th Earl of Inchiquin. Murrough O'Brien became the sole inheritor on Mary's death in 1791, and for a time the manor passed out of the hands of the Orkneys. However, on his death in 1805 it was inherited by his daughter Mary, Countess of Orkney, who outlived her husband and son. In her time the Cliveden estate was sold off and the old church fell into disuse and ceased to be the last resting place of the Lords of Taplow. When Mary died in 1831 the Taplow estate passed to her grandson Thomas John Hamilton, the fifth and last of the Earls of Orkney.

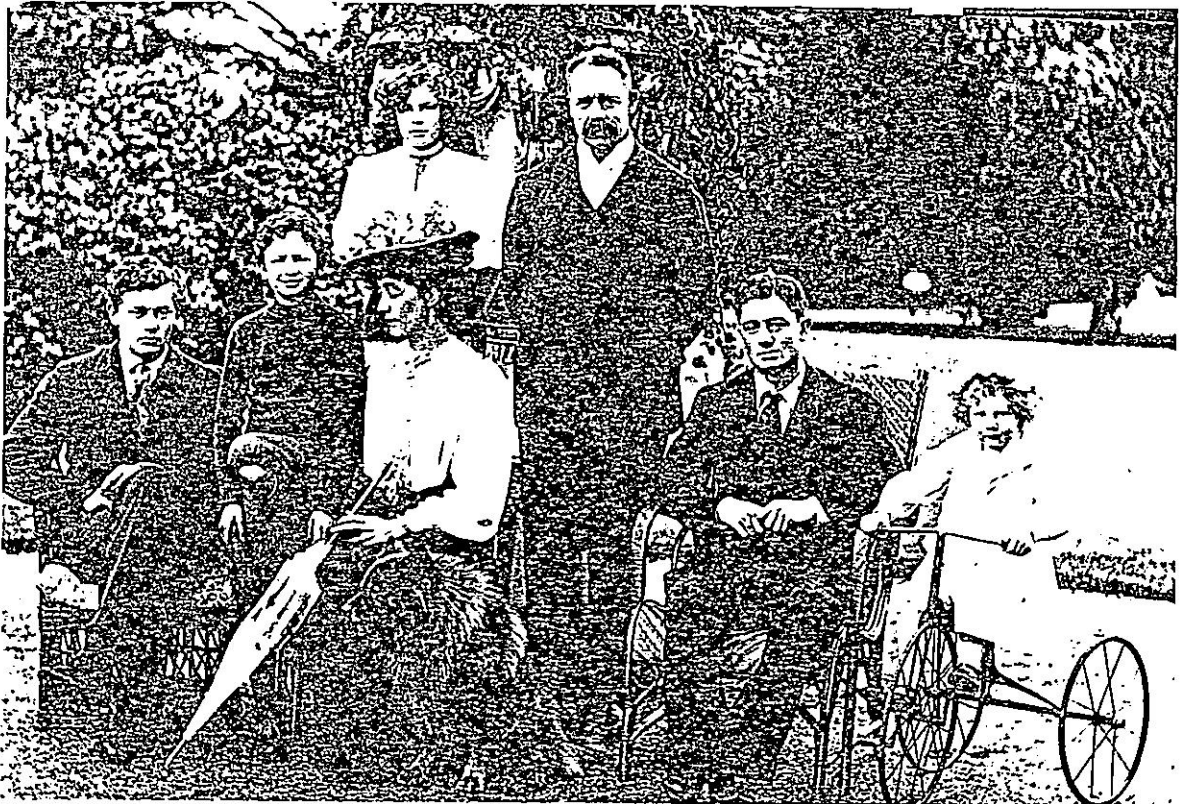
The Grenfells

About the year 1820 a new family vault appeared in the churchyard, that of the Grenfell family, who occupied nearby Taplow House and were later to buy Taplow Court. In 1852 the 5th Earl of Orkney was driven by bankruptcy to sell the estate to Charles Pascoe Grenfell, Member of Parliament for Marlow and related to a Cornish family who bore the ancient title of Barons of St. Just.

Some records say that the prosperous Grenfells completely rebuilt Taplow Court, but the evidence still extant of the old Norman Saloon, the porch and the vestibule built by the 1st Earl of Orkney suggests that the old building was added to. The outside appearance was changed to the Gothic style perfected by the Victorians and the principal apartments to the south west of the building and the offices now in existence were added. Its present appearance lends credence to the claim that Sir Charles Barry, architect of the Houses of Parliament, inspired the design. The architect was in fact William Boon. He is also reputed to have been responsible for the complete laying out of 30 acres of formal garden down to the edge of the cliffs overlooking the Thames.

William, First Lord Desborough

Of all the characters to appear on the Taplow scene, Pascoe's grandson William, later to become Lord Desborough was one of the most remarkable. He swam Niagara Rapids twice, the second time to prove to sceptics that he had done it the first time. At Baliol College, Oxford, he was president of the O.U.B.S., rowed twice in the University Boat Race, including the only dead heat on record, sculled a racing skiff from Dover to Calais and took the Oxford crew in their racing shell over the same route in 4 hours 22 minutes. He represented Britain with epee and foils in the first revival of the Olympic Games. In his time Taplow Court was a resort for the illustrious personages of state, law and the arts but there is no evidence that His Lordship was equally 'at home' to the great in the field of science. A great avenue of Cedars of Lebanon running from north to south along the top of the ridge overlooking the Thames commemorates the names of members of the family, and those of British and European Royalty, statesmen, diplomats and artists who had come to Taplow to plant their trees with their own hands. Their names are in a list prepared by the late head gardener who served the Desborough family for almost fifty years - Mr. George Emmett.



DESBOROUGH FAMILY GROUP - CIRCA 1906

Of Desborough's three sons, not one survived to inherit the title. In the Spring of 1915, Julian and William, both infantry officers, were killed in action in Flanders. Sir Aurthur Bryant, in 'English Saga' writes of Julian:

"A greater poet than Rupert Brooke and a great Englishman, was Julian Grenfell. A fine sculptor and brilliant athlete, born to all the worldly gifts that any man could inherit, his sympathies - at a time when such sympathies were unusual and regarded with disfavour - were the revolutionary, the crank and the underdog. It was not that he rebelled against order, but that he instinctively comprehended the causes of his age's discontent. A professional soldier before the War, he embraced the call to arms as a crusade, not so much against the German people, or even their tiresome rulers, as against the inertia and death that seemed to have fallen on the world. After enduring the first harsh winter in the trenches, he fell in the spring of 1915. A few weeks before he died, looking over the April Flemish plain, he wrote one of the greatest lyrical poems in the language and which, so long as English is read, will remain the epitaph of himself and his generation'

and he quotes that poem which is engraved on their memorial - a statue of Phaeton on a grey stone plinth set among the flower beds on the south side of the old churchyard.

When the third son, Ivo, was killed in a road accident in the early 1920's, Lord Desborough gradually withdrew from public life to concentrate on farming, breeding a very successful dairy herd. Some days before the outbreak of the Second World War he moved permanently to his estate in Hertfordshire. He died on 9 January 1945 at the age of 89 and is buried in the family vault.

The End of an Era

At the outbreak of the War in 1939, the buildings housed children of nursery school age, evacuated from London at a time when concentrated air attacks were an imminent possibility. The house was later occupied by a girls' school until shortly before 1946 when it was leased by British Telecommunications Research Limited to be used as an advanced research centre financed jointly by the Automatic Telephone and Electric Company and British Insulated and Callender's Cable Company. When the Plessey Company extended its interests in the field of telegraph and telephone communications, B.T.R. became part of The Plessey Company which remains to the present day.

The history of this house since World War I typifies the breakdown of the old order and the yielding of privilege and aristocracy to a form of 'meritocracy', yet the day-to-day pursuit of our present activities at Taplow Court is a great deal more pleasant for the mellow atmosphere created by those who lived here in a less democratic age. Although it is doubtful that our presence would find favour with the former tenants, we at least, should be grateful for their foresight, and the heritage which we now enjoy.

The Editor wishes to thank Plessey Major Systems Limited for permission to reproduce the above article which the Company publishes as a booklet.

PLANNING

Housing Services Committee

At its meeting on 13 Sep 84, the Committee decided that, under the 1984 Homes Protection Scheme, houses with up to 30mm of existing insulation would now be eligible for grant.

Recreation and Amenities Committee

At its meeting on 15 Jan 85, the Committee recommended that four annual payments of £1000, should be made to the National Trust Cliveden Hanging Woods Appeal; this was subject to confirmation.

Planning & Development Committee

At its meetings on 5 Sep & 14 Nov 84, the Committee discussed publicising Planning Applications to nearby residents. Although the Taplow Parish Council and the Society were in favour of informing neighbours of Applications, the District Council resolved against in view of the possibility of a statutory system. The Government considered that the basic principle should be that, before approval was given to significant proposals of wide concern or substantial impact on the environment, local opinion should declare itself. The consensus of advice from District Council was against neighbour consultation on every application received. Only proposals significantly affecting the public interest should so rate. Locally a majority of councils put applications on public notice boards.

At its meeting on 5 Sep 84, the Committee considered the application to Wycombe Council for the demolition and replacement of Mistine, Sheepcote Lane, Wooburn Common. Wycombe Council was informed that the South Bucks District Council had no objection as long as the new dwelling was not substantially larger.

At its meetings on 10 Oct 84 and 16 Jan 85, the Committee considered a government consultative document on Aircraft Noise and made a number of points. They wanted the rigorous enforcement of the limit of 275,000 movements per annum at Heathrow and it was resolved to support Surrey County Council's proposed campaign against further expansion at Heathrow and, in particular, the re-location of the sewage works, which would probably be much closer to Taplow.

At its meeting on 16 Jan 85, the Committee deferred its decision on the erection of a Cottage at Barge Farm, Amerden Lane and decided that the development at Abotts Wood Mill, Heathfield Road was not to be used for the production and recording of sound; an Enforcement Order was to be served if this usage occurred.

The following Planning Applications were considered by the Committee:-

SBDC 583/80 - Taplow Court. Appeal by Thames Water for siting of diesel storage tanks; dismissed.

SBDC 751/83 - Mill Lane. Appeal by New Taplow Paper Mills for long traffic lay-by; allowed. (the Society supported this appeal).

SBDC 16/84 - Hitcham Close, Hitcham Lane. Erection of 2-metre high boundary wall; recommended.
SBDC 647, 649, 650 & 651/84 - Cliveden-Blakeney Hotels. Change of use of main house to hotel and change from single to multiple occupancy of 5 outlying houses; deferred for legal agreement.
SBDC 678/84 - The Bishop Centre, Bath Road. Single storey extension at rear of showroom for storage; recommended.
SBDC 754/84 - Meca Liveries, Wooburn Common Road. Siting of mobile home; conditionally permitted.
SBDC 755/84 - Meca Liveries, Wooburn Common Road. Erection of detached house and garage; recommended.
SBDC 778/84 - Norfolk Guest House, Bath Road. Wing to be added at rear to form bedroom and bathrooms; recommended.
SBDC 891/84 - Burwood House, Taplow Common Road. Staff accomodation and new garaging; deferred for legal agreement.
SBDC 952/84 - The Lindens, Rectory Road. Additional garage and workshops; conditionally permitted.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Railway at Taplow.

Mr Matthew Wells, the author of the last Newsletter's feature article writes:-

"I am now able to correct a few errors. The original station was renamed 'Taplow' on 1st May 1869 and not when the present Maidenhead station opened on 1st November 1871.

When the line from Paddington to Maidenhead was opened on 4th June 1838 there were eight (not four) trains each way on Mondays to Saturdays, reducing to six (not three) on Saturday. In 1839 when the line was extended to Twyford there were eight (not three) trains each way on Mondays to Saturdays."