



Maidenhead Civic Society NEWS

Issue 3/05

July 2005



The new Footpath 9 is open at last!

In this issue

Opening of Footpath 9, and Inaugural Walk

Meeting with Crossrail Representatives

Regular features on talks, outings, the Heritage Centre,
Projects and Planning

Visit our website! : www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Newsletter time has come round again and with it the need to concentrate and organise the multifarious strands of the Society's doings over the past three months. Let it be said straight away that nothing spectacular has been done or has happened. It has been more a matter of building on all the issues that were reported in the April Newsletter.

The most important item is the ongoing battle to make sure that the current strategies for development and redevelopment in Maidenhead leave us with a town that is a pleasure to live and work in. For this we need a vibrant centre with a comprehensive range of shops that stock the goods that people need and want to buy. Also required is housing of good design within a pleasant environment and providing a good proportion that is affordable. A reasonable supply of offices and other work places is essential to maintain the ongoing economic health of the town. Housing and offices need to be in balance and moreover both must meet high design standards. On top of that good roads and communications are needed in, out and through the town.

This is what we set out to display and promote in the Strategic Review of Amenity published just a year ago. How far have we succeeded in our objectives? The answer has to be 'Not much!!!' This is not a surprise. Given the momentum from the past it is a bit like trying to turn a super-tanker around and we can hardly expect instant success. On top of that the top-down central government control of local government and its processes makes beneficial change matching the needs of a community to the opportunities unnecessarily difficult. The process of starting the necessary changes has begun but it needs a great deal more heave-ho to have real effect. This we will continue through the regular meetings with the Council and its officers. The immediate effort is going in to scrutinising the Local Development Framework in which the Council sets out its planning strategy for the next fifteen to twenty years. This follows on our examination of the South East England Regional Assembly Strategic Plan which I mentioned in the last Newsletter. These documents are very formulaic and far from light reading. We have a six week window in which to make our comments.

So far I have emphasised the planning issue but there is much more needing consideration to make Maidenhead the place its citizens want it to be. One example is the York Stream where, as was feared, the works so far undertaken by the Environment Agency in the pursuit of a regular and sufficient flow of water have again failed. More are planned, particularly the clearing of rubble dumped in the stream at the back of Sainsbury's during the original construction. However, until the whole issue is dealt with in a way which provides adequate water from a reliable source the town will continue to be plagued by the stream's periodic drying out to a muddy ditch where we ought to have an attractive water feature.

Another item which we will be emphasising are the 'eyesores' highlighted in the July 2004 issue of the Newsletter. Of these the 'Boy with Boat' statue has been restored. On the other hand Cresset Towers and the 'Cinema' site both continue to moulder. The Council has said that it is taking action in respect of these two but so far there is no obvious sign that anything has happened. We have been told that the legal process to compel action is long-winded and expensive. This may well be true but the Society will press for more visible signs of practical developments.

Then there is Crossrail. The Society has had two meetings with their representatives, the second one attended by our M.P. Theresa May. From these we have learned little that indicates clear benefit to Maidenhead and the reasons why this town has been chosen for the western terminal rather than Reading or Slough remain obscure. The train services into London seem unlikely to provide a faster service since they are apparently to stop at each station down the line and into central London. An increased flow of passenger traffic in and out of Maidenhead is not expected in the short run. Any question of a transport hub forming an organic link between rail and road is not

in their thinking. The whole project and its reach out into this area seems to have more to do with a desire to create a series of linked towns from London out to here rather than anything to further a modern transport link. But then I may have a rather jaundiced viewpoint.

A major goal is to get some real drive and momentum into the desirable changes that we have set out. These need people making clear in however fragmented a way just what they as individuals want this town to be and to provide. The Society and others are planning The Great Debate in the next few weeks which we hope will give everyone a chance to 'say their piece'. We hope the Advertiser will spell it out. I urge you then to make your views known for the only thing that will bring about real change is when local and national government know that people will have action or else!

Let me close by asking you all who read this Newsletter to play whatever part you can in shaping these issues to the benefit of the town. Don't leave it to the others, please. It is all too important.

John McIntosh – Acting Chairman

TALKS

WEDNESDAY 21st September 2005 – 8 p.m.

**“THE MAGUS, THE RANTER, THE PROPHETESS
AND THE VICAR’S WIFE
Mystical Religion in the Thames Valley ca 1650”**

An illustrated talk by Manfred Brod

How to make sense of catastrophe and resolve a terrifying crisis: religion, magic, sex and high politics in post-Civil War Berkshire. Manfred Brod is a post-doctoral fellow at Harris-Manchester College, Oxford, and convenor for local history in the Abingdon Area Arch. & Hist. Society.

WEDNESDAY 19th October 2005 – 8 p.m.

“WEATHER LORE – FACT OR FICTION”

A talk by Mr I Currie

WEDNESDAY 16th November 2005 – 8 p.m.

**“GREY’S COURT – NATIONAL TRUST PROPERTY
Recent Archaeological Investigations ”**

An illustrated talk by Mr Gary Marshall
Regional Archaeologist for National Trust

OUTINGS

On Saturday 2nd July we took a good size group to Portsmouth for the International Festival of the Sea. Our coach was able to drop us at the entrance and we joined many thousands of visitors for this spectacular display of ships from across the world and the many dockside displays. There was also a fly-past from the Navy. The star of the show was *HMS Victory*, but there was so much to see that our day there could not possibly cover it all. We returned weary, but with wonderful memories of a spectacle that is unlikely to be repeated in our life times.

Our next trip is called 'Two Castles in a Day'. We will be visiting Hever Castle and Chiddingstone Castle, both near Edenbridge in Kent on the 9th October. Hever was built in 1270, was the home of Anne Boleyn, and later became the property of Lord Astor. It contains many Tudor items and is set in beautiful gardens with mazes.

Our second Castle is Chiddingstone. We will have a private tour as the castle is closed to the public at this time. It was built in 1805 and English Heritage part-funded its restoration. It is set in a 35-acre park and contains many treasures from around the world.

Hever Castle



Chiddingstone Castle

We do hope that you will come and join us and you are welcome to bring a friend.

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

YORK STREAM

Town centre

There is now no water in the town centre. It began retreating around the middle of June and by the 20th June, when we attended a meeting with Sainsbury's to discuss what they propose to do to improve the area of the stream next to the Hines Meadow car park, it had stopped at the Evenlode bridge on Maidenhead Moor. Today (15 July) it ceases to flow between the hippo at North Town Moor Cricket Club and the bridge east of North Town Moor leading to Blackamoor Lane. It will almost certainly continue to retreat.



*York Stream, dry at
bridge east of North
Town Moor*

The Environment Agency (EA) was supposed to spray to reduce the amount of reeds in Maidenhead Ditch. Unfortunately, only part of the promised spraying had been done by 13 July (from Ray Mill Rd to the hippo). David van Beesten of the EA tells me that above that point (i.e. Maidenhead Ditch) a flail mower is to be used to reduce the vegetation prior to the spraying continuing as it was ***too high to spray last week*** (my emphasis). Not only have they left themselves more work to do by leaving it so late they have also missed the period of active growth of the reeds when herbicides might be expected to be more effective.

So when you read that the EA spokesman is blaming the lack of water on dry winters, low levels in the Thames, or low ground water levels, just bear in mind that Maidenhead Ditch, like the White Brook before it, is **COMPLETELY CLOGGED WITH REEDS!**



Reeds in Maidenhead Ditch, north of the flood control gate

Sainsbury's Proposals

The proposal of their Landscape Architect to improve the area of the stream next to Hinds Meadow car park basically was to shift the dumped stone (dumped to make it easier for contractors to build the car park) to the sides to create a meandering route for the stream and do some planting in the dry bits. In collaboration with East Berks Ramblers we submitted our own proposal that involved removing as much of the dumped material as possible. Normally it might be expected that the EA would require the removal of the dumped material as it provides an obstruction to water flow, important when it floods. However, Sainsbury's have got permission from them for their scheme.

We await with interest the outcome of the EA study of North Maidenhead Study, due in October, which will determine whether they re-apply to have the Maidenhead Ditch works deleted from the planning approval for flood alleviation scheme. Needless to say, we will be opposing any such deletion.

Maidenhead Town Forum

Lack of water in York Stream has been a topic raised at the Forum over a number of years. At the most recent meeting (10 May) the EA, via email, detailed what they proposed to do this year (spraying Maidenhead Ditch and repeating the dredging the White Brook near to the Thames done in 2004).

At the meeting we were asked to give a presentation about the problem. The dredging programme of 2003 and 2004 was described (2003 White Brook on Widbrook Common to Strandwater: 2004 repeat dredge of White Brook on the Common plus dredging of the Brook nearer to the Thames – see map in Newsletter 1/04, page 5). We also reminded the Forum of the promise the then National Rivers Authority (now the EA) made when the Jubilee River was planned which said:

“Existing channels which pass through the centre of Maidenhead town will be upgraded to offer greater capacity during flood time, whilst their appearance under normal conditions will also be considerably improved”.

MILLENNIUM WALK

Inaugural Walk of Thames Path-Millennium Walk Link

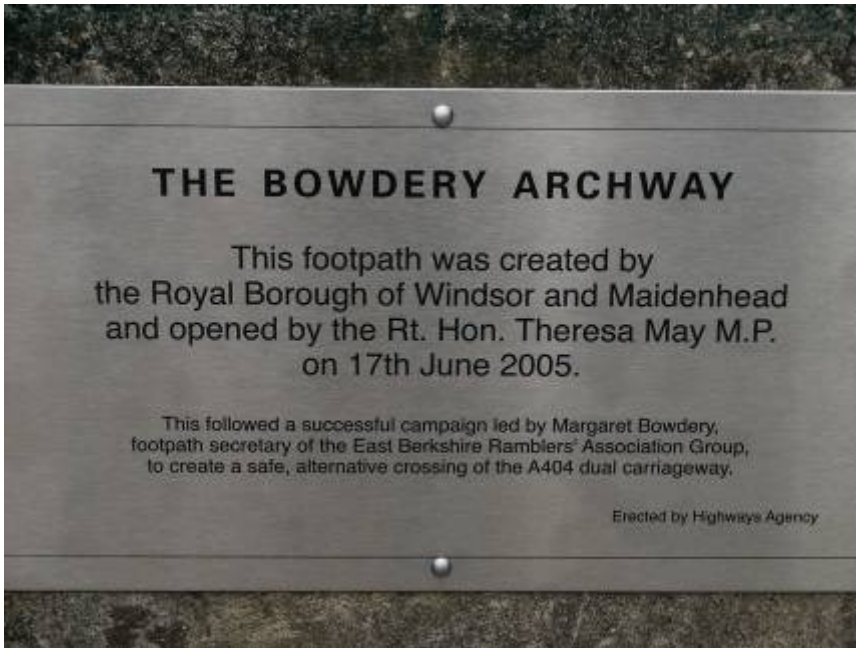
At long last, the saga of Footpath 9 in Bisham has come to an end with the creation of a route that now connects the Thames Path with the Millennium Walk, immensely benefiting our Millennium Walk project by creating two circular walks (see map on our web site).

The new route was formally opened by our M.P. Theresa May on 17th June, with the inaugural walk being held the following day in the blazing heat. The path under the A404 passes through a flood arch named “The Bowdery Archway”, as a tribute to Margaret Bowdery, Footpaths Secretary of East Berks Ramblers, without whom this safe, traffic-free route would not have happened.

Theresa May about to cut the ribbon at the inauguration Footpath 9



John McIntosh, Ann Darracott, Margaret Bowdery & Theresa May enjoy a congratulatory glass of champagne; note the memorial plaque



The plaque commemorating the "Bowdery Archway"



Participants on the Inaugural Walk, approaching the A404 (Photo by Tim Goldingham who risked life & limb to get it!)

Many thanks to Lydia Parker for allowing us to use her house for the very welcome refreshments at the end of the walk and to Sarah Copeland who, with her band of helpers, masterminded the refreshments.

Shashi Dare, Lydia Parker and Sarah Copeland – who helped to refresh the weary walkers!



The collection taken has been divided between the National Trust and the Woodland Trust. See website for details of the Millennium Walk plus a chronology of how the new route for Footpath 9 Bisham was achieved.

Lower Cookham Road to Towpath

Progress on this missing link appears to have ground to a halt. No one seems to know when the flood bund land on White Place farm is to be handed back to RMC/Cemex and then from them (presumably) to John Edwards, the new owner. We have written to Cemex asking for clarification and have even offered to write to their head office in Mexico if this would help. Rumour has it that proposed development of the farm buildings may be holding things up.

In addition, Quintain who own the patch of land next to the towpath and the existing bridge onto it, have now decided to put their land up for auction in a month or two. This land was in 2003 on offer at no cost to a suitable organisation. The National Trust said they wanted it and then in 2004 changed their mind, after which we contacted the Royal Borough who have been thinking about it since then.

The Rotary Club want to use this route for their Boundary Walk on 2nd October as they regard it as a safer, more attractive route than walking along the Lower Cookham Road to Boulter's Lock. The Civic Society and other amenity groups will be supporting the Boundary Walk. However, we would like to know sooner rather than later whether we can use the route as some clearance will be necessary, not to mention repair to the surface of the bund where the cows got on it. Check the web site for up to date information.

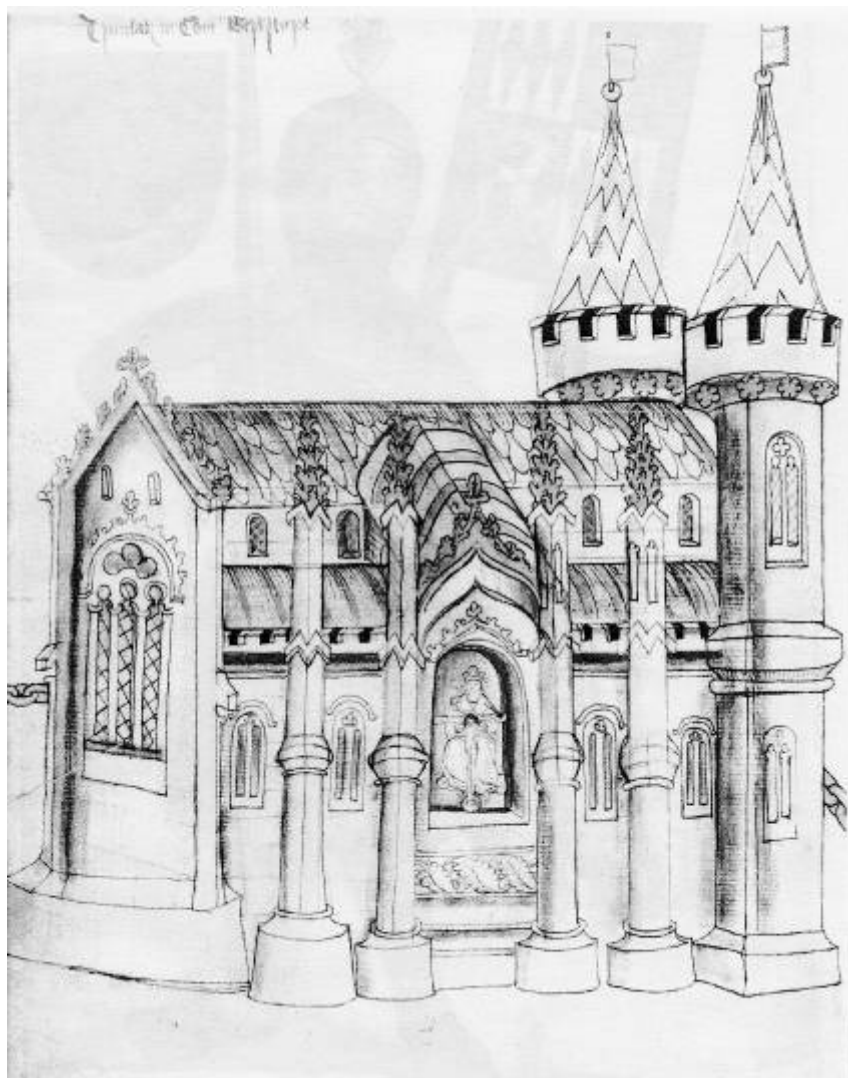
OCKWELLS PROJECT

Great Malvern Priory

You may remember an article in the newsletter of April 2004 (pages 5-8) describing the Mortimer of Chirk coat that occurs in armorial glass at Ockwells and on tiles in this priory. A study of the reconstruction of the priory in the 15th century has now been published in the form of a book with the aid of a grant from Shell. A CD version will also be produced. I am very grateful to both my husband Brian who undertook the editing and to Brian Sanderson who produced a striking design for the front cover. The Friends of Great Malvern Priory are selling copies at present but if you are interested please contact me.

Bisham “Abbey”

The ground probing radar geophysical survey designed to detect underground features in the grounds of Bisham Abbey unfortunately coincided with a torrential down pour of rain, so is incomplete. Another attempt will be made. In the meantime some interesting background to the early history of Bisham and its priory is being assembled.



Drawing of Bisham Priory Church ca 1485. Evidence of this is what the geophysical survey is hoping to find (Drawing courtesy British Library)

The founder of Bisham Priory in 1337 was William Montacute, made Earl of Salisbury by Edward III in the same year. Corbels with what are said to be portrait heads for Montacute and his wife, Katherine Grandison, sister of John Grandison, Bishop of Exeter, can still be seen in the Lady Chapel of the church at Ottery St Mary, built by the Bishop as a replica of Exeter cathedral. As noted in the last newsletter, I think he may also have done something similar at Bisham.

William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury



His wife, Katherine Grandison

Corbels in the Lady Chapel of the church at Ottery St Mary

HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

We have now settled into our new premises in King Street and our current exhibition is 'Maidenhead Past and Present'. We will be here for at least 2 years and although it is a lot smaller than the Green Dragon we have had many positive comments regarding location and visitors numbers have increased. We aim to put on a different exhibition every 8 weeks or so.

Local schools have been borrowing our 'Maidenhead at War' exhibition panels for their projects on VE day, and we also have loaned to Taplow Court some equipment for their exhibition about the Grenfell family which will run until September.

We are extremely grateful to the following people for giving us free storage: Reading Museum; The Royal Borough Collection Windsor; RK Video Queen St (for the use of a garage); and SPACE STATION Storage company in Slough; they kindly came to our rescue after Richard Poad put an appeal in the local Paper.

If you are looking for a special present for someone we have a wide range of local books in our gift shop and some lovely watercolour prints by local artist Lesley Olver.

We can offer research facilities with our browsing library. We can offer talks for local groups.

Bookings for our September cruise are a complete sell-out as was the one in May.

To avoid disappointment of missing out on our various events why not join the friends of the Heritage Centre. You will be kept informed of all our programmes, news and progress throughout the year by newsletter, and you will also be entitled to 10% discount on anything in our shop and a discount on events. All this for only £15 per year, or £25 for a couple.

If anyone would like to help the Heritage Centre by way of volunteering for 3 hours once a week or fortnight we would love to hear from you. Volunteers work a 3-hour shift from 10am to 1pm, or from 1pm to 4pm. They greet visitors and help with enquiries and sales. If you would be able to help on a regular or occasional basis, please phone Fran Edwards on (01628) 780555 for more details.

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is open Tuesday – Saturdays
90 Moorbridge Road, Maidenhead SL6 8BW, ☎ 01628 780555
www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk

PLANNING DIGEST

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Group met in May, June and July to review the plans for a number of applications that had been selected from the weekly listings for April, May and June. All the sites were visited and reviewed in detail. Comments were submitted to the Planning Department on 21 of the applications and the full text of these can be seen on the Society's website.

The applications included several blocks of flats, four telephone masts, developments at Stafferton Way, and re-development of the former Grasslands Research Institute at Hurley, to provide 67 new houses.

CROSSRAIL - MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES

On 24 May, a meeting was held with representatives of Crossrail. The Society was represented by Tina Sell, Bob Dulson and John McIntosh, who met Jacqueline Saultry, Phil Spencer (Senior Design Manager) and Martin Dover (Design Manager).

This meeting was held to clarify the scope and intent of the Crossrail Project as it is likely to affect Maidenhead and its immediate environs. Our concerns centred on four aspects, the first two of which we highlighted at length in the April edition of the Newsletter:

1. Visual Impact on the Brunel Bridge of electrification
2. The use of Guards Club Park and Island for storage and site office.
3. Redevelopment of Maidenhead Station.
4. Issues involving Traffic and car-parking resulting from the Crossrail development.

The Brunel Bridge

This is a local landmark and with Maidenhead Bridge forms a panorama that is internationally known. It is a matter of concern that electrification will add potentially unattractive gantries and other works to the Brunel Bridge. The original was for two tracks built in 1838 and widened to four in 1890-92. It is thus, as seen now, not the original. The ongoing aesthetic appearance of the bridge is irrefutable. Crossrail have contacted English Heritage to review the proposals for the bridge.

It was explained that the bridge as it stands is actually of quite a flimsy construction. It is hollow across the span and built up internally of a rectangular honeycomb of brick walls. These are covered over by Yorkshire flagstone about 2in. thick to provide the top surface on which the tracks are laid. Normally the overhead cables would be carried on a standard box girder gantry over the tracks. For the Bridge, it is proposed to use a cantilevered support with three supports across the width of the bridge. This number is dictated by track width considerations. There would be five of these trios along the length of the bridge with a spacing of 53metres(approx.). While there is the possibility of setting the outer supports just inside the bridge parapets the preferred system is to fix those outside on reinforced and new purpose-designed parapet sections. The stability of the existing parapets is suspect and when work begins on the base surface of the bridge these will have to be dismantled and a temporary barrier will be needed. It was explained that because of the light-weight structure of the bridge floor it would be necessary to replace the sections around the gantry supports with something more substantial. This would necessitate works under the tracks and

replacement of the appropriate surface. This work needs strong scaffolding on the piers of the bridge.

Guards Club Park and Island

This brought up the question of the use of the park and island for works, site office and storage. We stressed the role that the Society had played in creating the park and represented strongly our wish to see all practical measures taken to preserve the amenity and to minimise any disruption particularly to the wild life that uses the island.

Crossrail explained that the volume of materials involved was not huge on any one day - rather more in the rebuilding than for dismantling. Bringing in the scaffolding poles would require ten flat-bed lorries in and out in total. The rest of the materials would be brought in in vans. There would also be two Portakabins as offices and worker facilities. Use would be made of the side arches of the bridge for storage in particular the arches on the east side of the bridge in River Road.

We commented that the proposal to use the island in general and in particular to bring materials across the existing bridge was highly undesirable. The foot-bridge is a very light structure and not at all suitable for people tramping across it day in and day out carrying materials etc. The Crossrail representatives agreed that this could be modified with the works and upset to the flora confined to the tip of the island under the bridge while there could be a gangway across from the bankside scaffolding to the scaffolding on the island pier. The proposed secure Portakabins will be placed on the car-park and surrounded by security fencing with security lighting. We stressed that clear written instructions must be given to the supervision of any site and works in Guards Club Park and on the bridge and its surroundings drawn up to ensure the objectives of minimum disturbance in the park and on the island.

We queried the compulsory purchase power in the putative Act of Parliament which is part of the current legislative programme and has just had its first reading. Crossrail commented that it was there as a power of last resort and would only be invoked in the face of 'unreasonable' refusal to allow use of the park for the purposes listed above. This has to be taken at face value but just what constitutes 'unreasonable' is a matter of opinion.

Redevelopment of Maidenhead Station

The work on the station will involve major reconstruction of the buildings and platforms. Platforms 2 and 3 will be extended. The Marlow branch line platform will be replaced with a new one on the north side of the present one. There will be modifications to the canopies of all existing platforms. Extra and modified tracks will allow Crossrail trains to stop and move to the sidings where trains will be stabled overnight. The present ticket hall will be replaced by new facilities. These will extend out into the existing forecourt which will be remodelled and repaved. A new entrance with an additional ticket hall will be built on the Shoppenhangers Road side. The two subway passages under the station will be modified to provide a 'paid' and an 'unpaid' route to and from the two ticket offices and with stairs to the platforms. Other works involve re-routing a sewage tunnel which runs at right angles to the tracks to the west of the station under the sidings.

We enquired what the forecast of passenger numbers were for the Crossrail system at Maidenhead and were somewhat surprised to be told that no big increase in numbers was expected although long term there would be a modest growth. The choice of Maidenhead rather than Reading as the western terminal was said to be determined by the limit of the region with the greatest number of commuters. Slough had been examined as an alternative but rejected as there was a further large tranche of commuters in the Maidenhead area to be served. It then appeared that Crossrail, as far as the town is concerned, would provide a stopping service of nominally four trains per hour into London and which happens to have a tunnel system under that city.

Construction may be spread over three years including 18 months work on the station itself. This will involve a great deal of upheaval on Shoppenhangers Road as well as on the station forecourt.

Issues of Traffic and Car-parking

Crossrail said that car-parking was not their problem either during the reconstruction or subsequently. They were, however, happy to talk about the creation of a transport hub at the station. Their actions will result in loss and displacement of car-park spaces in front of the station. There would be improved taxi and set-down layout. There will be some loss of car-park spaces at the Silco Road car-park and the temporary loss of some space in the Shoppenhangers Road one.

Comments on the Meeting

It is difficult to see what Maidenhead will get out of all the upheaval which will be involved in this project. There is no evidence that one will be able to get into London more quickly although the new stations in London may help some and probably anyone wanting to go to the east side of London and Essex. If their figures for passenger numbers are to be believed then the incremental opportunity for Maidenhead in commercial terms seems very limited. It is hard to see just what all this is for. It seems unlikely that it can be just to move commuters in to London, and what happens to the four trains/hour out of peak time? No really satisfactory answer as to why Maidenhead was chosen as the terminal rather than Reading was forthcoming. There was some mention of the electrification being conveniently split into ca. 13-mile sections, one of these terminating at Maidenhead. Interestingly, the plans we were shown were drawn up as far back as 1992. Although one must not believe in conspiracy theory there is a feeling that we do not have the whole story.

Further Developments

The parliamentary hybrid bill was recently reintroduced into parliament and has had its first reading. The petitioning period of 2-3 weeks would have been early to mid-June with Select Committee examination taking place in October. The whole process of passing the Bill into law would take 12-18 months and 2 years to get through both Houses. Royal Assent would be early 2007. If the town/Society/individuals want to try and have changes made then these have to be made by sending in a petition and then potentially backing these up at a Select Committee hearing.

John McIntosh

CIVIC TRUST'S HERITAGE OPEN DAYS (HODS)

Advance Notice

St Luke's Church, Norfolk Road, will be open from 10am to 4pm on **Saturday 10th September** for HODS. Visitors will be able to see the newly restored west window by Clayton & Bell, glazed in memory of Dr Francis Goolden F.R.C.S. of the Wilderness, Maidenhead, Churchwarden from the consecration of the church Aug: 23rd 1866, until his death Feb: 15th 1892.

The church also boasts a fresco tile painting "Jacobs Ladder" on the chancel arch which was included in a recent study by the British Museum of the work of the Victorian tile firm, W.B. Simpson & Son (see article by Laura Gardner "Domestic and Ecclesiastical Art Workmen: W.B. Simpson and Sons" published in the *Journal of the Tiles & Ceramic Society* vol 11, 2005, pages 11-19).

Do use this opportunity to see these examples of Victorian art. Refreshments will also be available. Watch the press for other properties open for HODS in the Maidenhead area.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 21 September 2005

Talk by Dr Manfred Brod

“The Magus, The Ranter, the Prophetess and the Vicar’s Wife”

Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Sunday 9 October 2005

Outing

Hever & Chiddingstone Castles, Kent

Wednesday 19 October 2005

Talk by Mr I Currie

“Weather Lore – Fact or Fiction? ”

Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Wednesday 16th November 2005

Talk by Mr Gary Marshall

45th Annual General Meeting

Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m. and

“Grey’s Court – Recent Archaeological Investigations”

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2005

Parish Centre in St. Luke’s Church, at 7.45 p.m.

12th January, 9th February, 9th March, 13th April, 11th May, 8th June, 13th July, 14th September, 12th October, 9th November, 14th December.

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 16th November 2005 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 8.00pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 7th October 2005.**

(Unless otherwise acknowledged, photographs taken by Ann & Brian Darracott using the Society’s digital camera purchased with a grant from the Kidwell’s Trust)

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