



Maidenhead Civic Society

NEWS

Issue 3/03

July 2003



A successful Civic Society trip to Highclere Castle and Broadlands

In this issue

A Strategic Plan for Maidenhead? – John McIntosh, V. President

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

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

COMMENTS FROM THE VICE-CHAIRMAN

Maidenhead now has a new Council of a different complexion and a promise that the Town Hall will be retained. But we hope that the newly elected councillors will see the improvement of the “grot spot” – the York Stream – as an urgent problem to be tackled at the earliest opportunity and we look forward to a dialogue with them.

You are probably aware that the Licensing Bill may greatly extend the opportunities for consuming alcohol in public in large quantities. In common with many other towns, Maidenhead already has a considerable number of drinking establishments in the town centre and suffers badly from the effects of over consumption especially at the weekends. I regard the town centre as no-go area on Friday and Saturday evenings and I know that many others feel the same. I am relieved that this Bill has met with much opposition both within and outside Parliament and many amendments have been tabled. The Civic Trust is one of the organisations which has put forward evidence of the damage already occurring to the built environment, as well as crime and violence, under the existing law. There can be no doubt that any increase in alcohol consumption would have entirely detrimental consequences to the community.

The Executive Committee is hoping to follow in some degree the example of the Windsor and Eton Society which has compiled a comprehensive list of the amenities in its area and many suggestions for improvements. It would be greatly appreciated if members would look with a critical eye at their local environment and pass on to the Committee comments and suggestions. We cannot guarantee that improvements will be made but at least we will have taken a step in the right direction.

Angela Howorth

YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

We are still hoping that a volunteer will come forward to take on the job of organising the talks. Between us, Mike Copeland and I are putting together a full programme for the autumn and winter. However, there is still a need for someone to take on the role of talks Organiser. It would help greatly if someone came forward and joined Mike and me in the planning of the next series. Apart from creating some continuity, it would be an easy way into what is involved. Any offers?!

John McIntosh

TALKS

WEDNESDAY 17th September 2003 – 8 p.m.

“CLIVEDEN HOUSE”

An illustrated talk by Ann Savage
(under the auspices of the National Trust)

Cliveden, in Taplow, Buckinghamshire, is one of the great country houses of England, and was lived in by the Duke of Buckingham, the Dukes of Sutherland, and more recently the Astor family.

John McIntosh

FROM THE EDITOR

Members recently received a mailshot from Norden Farm Arts Centre which offered a discount on the prices of two productions at the Centre. Please rest assured that your names and addresses have not been passed to Norden Farm. The blank envelopes, with their contents, were brought to the Membership Secretary who then attached address labels.

Carol Innes and her team of helpers do a splendid job each issue delivering the Society's Newsletter. If any members have any problems with the receipt of the Newsletter, please contact Carol, whose telephone number is printed on the back page of the Newsletter.

Readers may be interested to know that most of the pictures that have appeared in the Newsletter over the past year were taken with a digital camera purchased by the Society with a grant provided by the Kidwell's Trust. This fund is administered by the Royal Borough, and we are extremely grateful to them for their support and recognition of the value of the Civic Society's work.

OUTINGS

On Sunday 18th May we visited Broughton Castle and Stonor, stopping off at Banbury for lunch.

The weather was very kind to us. Our first stop was Broughton Castle set in beautiful Oxfordshire countryside. The castle dates back to the 1300's and is set inside a 3-acre moat. We had a very informative private conducted tour, as the castle did not open to the public until the afternoon. In the past it had been the venue for political plotting and up to the present it has seen many period films shot on location. After lunch we arrived at Stonor the home of the famous Stonor family. Again, we had a private guided tour of this magnificent house. The house dates back to the 1300's and now contains one of the largest collections of Catholic books.

By the time this is published we will have visited Highclere Castle and Broadlands.

On Saturday 20th September we will be visiting Buckingham Palace, where we have managed to secure a limited number of tickets to visit the State Rooms and special Coronation Exhibition, the Royal Mews with the Coronation Gold State Coach on display and the Queens Gallery, which has a special exhibition of the Royal Treasures. There is also an exhibition by Leonardo da Vinci called "The Divine and the Grotesque". All of these visits are by timed tickets and there will be time for lunch between the State Rooms and the Royal Mews.



The State Rooms

We have to confirm final numbers to the Palace so we must receive your bookings by 21st August at the latest. This tour is only available to pre-booked groups and has been specially arranged to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Coronation.

Mike Copeland

HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

LOCAL HISTORY COURSES

In a major new initiative the Heritage Centre is going to run its own local history courses, starting this autumn with a 5-week local history course beginning on Monday 3rd November. Supported by West London Aero Club, this course will trace **Maidenhead's Aviation Story** from the pioneering days of O L Davidson and Johnny Benton in the early 20th century to the opening of the first local aerodrome at Bray in 1928 and the development of White Waltham from pre-war days right up to the present. Fairey Aviation (Rotodyne/Gannet), Fairey Air Surveys, ML Aviation and other companies will be discussed in detail, as will ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary), the wartime ferrying organisation which used White Waltham as its headquarters between 1940 and 1945. Archive films will be shown and the course will include a visit to White Waltham Airfield and the Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance (subject to operational requirements). The course fee is £26 and you can enrol in person or by post to the address below. If successful, future courses will include **The River Thames** and **Buildings of Maidenhead**.

OTHER HERITAGE CENTRE EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

30th July – 27th September

Aviation in Maidenhead

Exhibition to celebrate our local aviation heritage, including new material never previously exhibited in Maidenhead. PLUS many rare archive films.

Supported by West London Aero Club

Thursday 4th September

River Thames Historical Cruise

5-hour round trip cruise from Maidenhead to Marlow & Bisham, with full commentary en-route. Departs 10am, returns 3pm. Cash bar, tea/coffee available, bring a picnic lunch. Tickets on sale now, £15 (£14 for Friends)

8th October - 15th November

Exhibition: ***Maidenhead at War***

Friday 14th November

Fund-raising Quiz Night

Plenty of notice to let you assemble your team! Full details available in September.

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

PROJECTS

YORK STREAM/GREEN WAY

Depressingly, my prediction that the stream in the town centre would dry up has proved true. It was dry by mid-April, and now only has occasional water via its function as a storm drain. No clearing of the reeds has yet been done by the Environment Agency but at least the survey to locate species to be protected (flowering rush and tubular water dropwort) during the clearing has been completed. According to David van Beesten of the Environment Agency, once a work plan has been finalised work on removing the reeds will begin on both the White Brook on Widbrook Common and the Marsh Meadow ditch at Cookham, probably some time in July.

With regard to the White Brook, hopefully clearing the reeds will improve flow but it has to be said that the scouring effect of the floods last winter may have changed the stream's flow characteristics. It's also possible that the clay barrier underneath the new flood bund could affect groundwater flow, a potential influence on the stream. It will be interesting to see which way the water flows once the stream has been cleared. At present (24 June) there is little or no flow but the flow that exists is **into** the Thames at Islet Park. If the White Brook does not flow **from** the Thames then Maidenhead town centre will stay dry.



*Luke Darracott surveying the pond life in the reed beds on Widbrook Common on 23 June 2003.
Dominant species recorded included mosquito larvae and pupae plus the odd blood worm
- indicative of stagnant water.*

Ideas for enhancing York Stream, the Library Gardens and the Green Way

The results of the questionnaire on the town centre organised by the previous administration (see April newsletter) seem to have disappeared without trace. The following snippets on what the public thought were gleaned from a meeting of the Green Way Working Group:

- *York Stream was considered the most important environmental feature in the area rather than the Green Way or Library Gardens*
- *Improvements to York Stream - bank improvements and vegetation control (for that read nettles and ground elder)*
- *Better views of York Stream and better seating, new steps/ramp*
- *Green Way – security most important followed by lighting*

MILLENNIUM WALK

A404 Marlow to Malders Lane Link The new Rights of Way Committee met on 16th June and decided to approve the Secretary of State's orders to extinguish Footpath 9 and create a new route to go under one of the flood arches. The Secretary of State's route is a modified form of the one approved in June 2000 by an earlier Rights of Way Committee.

This matter will still go to public enquiry, as it should. One hopes the enquiry will address how it was that Footpath 9 Bisham and the other two footpaths were not diverted at the planning stage before the existing A404, built in the 1970's, became a link between the M4 and the M40.

As you may have seen in the press (Maidenhead Advertiser, 30th May) the area manager for the Environment Agency has said "*We would prefer the plan to create a footpath further up the A404 across Town Farm (i.e. the route the Society has been supporting). In light of the floods in January and recent modelling we need to ensure water can flow freely and unhindered with the maximum capacity available*". I would be interesting to know how it was that it took last winter's floods for the Environment Agency to suddenly realise that building an elevated walkway in the Bisham Brook culvert might just increase flooding in the area. They have now refused to renew the permission to build the walkway "*as structures within the culvert could cause flooding upstream*" (RBWM Press Release 27 May 2003) making the route under the flood arch the only one on the drawing board.

Unfortunately I believe the Royal Borough is not planning to act until after the enquiry so it will still be some time before there is a safe route for this link. However, eventually we will get there.

Lower Cookham Road to Towpath (see map Oct 2002 newsletter)

Progress was recently made in the creation of this link in the Millennium Walk. A meeting was held at Stiefel Laboratories on 30th May, at which an agreement was obtained for a permissive path across their land for 10 years. Attendees at the meeting included Theresa May, M.P. for Maidenhead, who helped chair the meeting; Margaret Bowdery, Footpath Secretary, East Berks Ramblers; Rosemary Box, Estate Manager, R.M.C. Aggregates (Southern) Ltd; Jane Carter, Planning Adviser, Environment Agency; Ann Darracott, Projects, Maidenhead Civic Society; Andrew Fletcher, Public Rights of Way Officer, R.B.W.M.; Jane Gifford, Windsor & Maidenhead Urban Wildlife Group; Wendy Harris, Public Affairs, Stiefel Laboratories; Ian Monro, Head of R & D, Stiefel Laboratories, and John McIntosh, Vice President, Maidenhead Civic Society.

The meeting was followed by a site visit to see the land next to the towpath that Quintain Development PLC have offered to convey at no cost to any interested party. Last year the National Trust had said they would like the land but have recently decided that the access to it is inadequate for their needs. We have now brought it to the attention of the Royal Borough.

As reported previously a new bridge is needed to take our path over the White Brook as the old one (rumoured to have been built by Cookham Scouts) lifted during last year's floods and is not suitable for public use. On 4th July a representative from Sarum Hardwood came to have a look at the site in order to quote for the new bridge. As it happened, a willow had fallen over the bridge so a large branch was used to measure the depth of water under it, which proved to be quite deep.



Site visit after the meeting



Ian Monro of Stiefel Laboratories and Julian Smith of Sarum Hardwood with the branch used to measure the depth of water (1.3m of which 0.7m was silt).

Ann Darracott

PLANNING DIGEST

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Since the last Newsletter, the Planning Group have met three times and considered and responded to 19 planning applications. Whilst most of these deal with very localised developments, of broader interest will be the following Planning Application:

Bridge Road/Oldfield Road corner site (Demolition and construction of 209 flats.)



The near derelict Meridian House at the corner of Bridge Road and Oldfield Road

“The supportive element of our previous comments on this important site have been in proportion to the amount of housing included in the Applications, so we remain supportive of the fact that the **whole site** is now being considered for this purpose. We particularly welcome the sheltered housing, and the extensive open area for children is a worthwhile inclusion. The limited availability of parking is a concern.

We recognise that at this stage the Application does not contain any details of the design of the properties, although at four storeys they are likely to be dominating buildings unless treated with considerable care and imagination. This is important particularly for that part of the site which fronts onto Bridge Road, partly because the corner site provides the major visual impact of the town to those approaching from the bridge and, perhaps even more, to safeguard the architectural attractions of the almshouses, which are about the only building of historic architectural distinction in Maidenhead.

The traffic implications of this proposal are important, too. This particularly concerns the junction

of Oldfield Road and Bridge Road, and the impact of a future southern relief road from Stafferton Way should be high on the list of considerations.”

This seems to be the third application from Salmon Harvester for the development of this site – each one with progressively more houses and less offices! The appeal in respect of their second application (for 120 housing units and office and industrial space) is still due to be heard on the 3rd, 4th and 5th September 2003, at the Town Hall.

MEETING WITH PLANNING OFFICERS

On Tuesday 1st July, Michael Johnson, John McIntosh and I met Vicky Howes - Councillor for planning - and David Oram and Peter Hitchin from the Council to discuss the Civic Society's concerns about improvements to the York Stream. Michael outlined a number of possible solutions and opportunities that the Civic Society would like to see receive the new Council's early attention. These included the old cinema site, which the Council is apparently currently discussing with the owner. The Council's only objection was the cost of any improvements including the continuing maintenance that would be needed of any capital improvement. We pointed out that all the money did not all have to come from the Council, as there were other sources of funds available and we encouraged them to give this project priority and communicate their plans to the public.

We also raised the issue of the Government's Planning Policy Guidance Notes regarding housing (PPG 3) and the need for the Council to have a policy agreed with the local community on the types of residential environments they wish to see in their area in connection with blocks of flats. Vicky Howes agreed wholeheartedly with this approach and had already been discussing this with Peter Hitchin. Peter said the policy was part of their issues paper and would have to await the revision of the local plan. He did not yet have a timetable for these.

On open spaces, John has had a reply from the Council which supported Civic Society involvement in the selection of projects for funding. Peter Hitchin confirmed that the initial set of projects had already been agreed.

Nigel Cockburn

STRATEGIC PLANS AND OPEN SPACES

Our sister society the Eton and Windsor Society have just introduced us to the overall review they have made of their needs and wishes for the future of a wide range of amenities in their area. It requires no leap of imagination to realise that there is a strong need for a similar plan for Maidenhead. For many years the Civic Society has lobbied for improvements to the town's infrastructure on an ad hoc basis, and there have been a number of successes. What has been lacking, at least in recent years, is a comprehensive, coherent, and systematic view of what the goals should be. Such a document would serve a number of purposes. Not least it would become much easier to approach the authority responsible in any area if they knew in advance what our ideas were. There could be no excuses that they did not know what was in our sights. Further it means that our members would have a reference to what the Society wants to achieve and in general the existence of such a review, if updated regularly, would be a way of funnelling members' views into the Society's thinking.

A good example would be my personal *bête noire*, the York Stream where it runs through the town. We know that a considerable section of our membership thinks it something of a disgrace that the town should have to put up with this muddy apology for a waterway. Something will only be done about it when there is a real will at Council level to achieve real improvement. Our Strategic Review could tackle this in some detail and make plain what we want.

A similar but more immediate review concerns the Government's Open Spaces plan. This involves the use of funds levied on developers to extend and upgrade open spaces in the Borough. The outer

areas are covered by their parish councils but the centre of Maidenhead has no consolidated forum for bringing views together so that needs can be agreed and the application of the money available prioritised. Again, the Society has said that it wishes to be involved.

This now brings us to the crunch for if the Society is to make an impact in both these aspects we need to hear members views and we need people willing to put in the effort. It is not one or the other. Both are needed and now if these goals are to be met in a reasonable time. Basically if something concrete is not forthcoming within the next three months then the window of opportunity is gone.

So what is to be done? First, get hold of a copy of the Eton and Windsor Society document. This will be displayed on the Society's website at www.maidenheadcivicsociety.org.uk. The other document on Open Spaces is available on the Borough's website at www.rbwm.gov.uk. Now we are aware that many will not have access to these websites, so I am asking that members who do, to be good enough to help others who don't, to see the information in these documents. The Society has no other quick route to making such material available to its members. It simply is not on in terms of cost to print them out and mail them to every member. So please take action; it is this town's future and environment which is at stake.

In closing I am asking any member who is willing to get involved to contact me. My address and e-mail address are given below. If you do not make a contribution the efforts will go off at half cock!

John McIntosh

26 Harvest Hill Road, Maidenhead, SL6 2QQ. ☎ 01628 633259. E-mail: boros@ukgateway.net

THE LIFE OF BRIAN

Your editor couldn't resist this as a "tail-ender":



Brian Sanderson and Brian Darracott designing the Society's new stationery

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 17th September 2003

Talk

“Cliveden House”.

Ann Savage

Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Saturday 20th September 2003

Outing

Buckingham Palace – State Rooms, Royal Mews
and Queen’s Gallery.

CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2003

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

8th January, 12th February, 12th March, 9th April, 14th May, 11th June, 9th July, 10th September, 8th October,
12th November, 10th December.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 3rd October 2003.**

(The AGM Issue)

News Editor **Brian Darracott**
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