



Maidenhead Civic Society

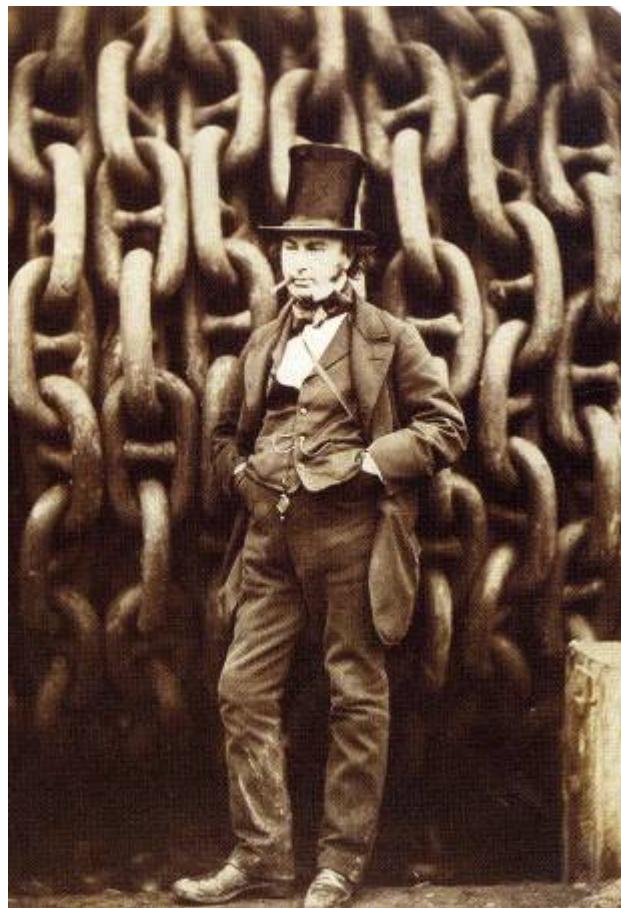
NEWS

Issue 1/06

January 2006

*Isambard Kingdom Brunel
in front of the chains of the
“Great Eastern”, 1857.*

*See inside for details of
“Brunel –related” events.*



In this issue

The “Great Debate”

Update on Crossrail Developments

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

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

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

First of all, may I wish everyone a Happy New Year. With the season's festivities over, there is always a bit of a sag while we recover from whatever our various Christmas and New Year activities have entailed. The Civic Society, however, tries to keep up the momentum.

The past year's doings have kept willing hands at full stretch with the stimulus from the Strategic Review, the Great Debate and Crossrail. In addition, the rush of planning applications to beat the deadline set by the Council's new restraint policy on housing development and redevelopment meant the Planning Group had to go into overdrive. All this taxes those directly involved; attending the meetings involved, preparing notes and reports and chasing up the actions that result. There are never enough people with the time and willingness to do all the things we know are needed and all thanks to those who do.

The Society's aim to see the centre of Maidenhead given a new vibrancy and makeover of its buildings with the creation of a proper town square has been pursued consistently. In the nature of these things, it takes unrelenting pressure to see concrete results. The Chamber of Commerce has pursued a similar line, so one can see that the urge to move Maidenhead on and keep up with the developments in neighbouring towns is not only the Society's ambition. In the end, the Council has to be convinced and has to take action. Encouragingly, their new Local development Forum (LDF) document, '**A Vision for the Royal Borough**', which is just going out for public consultation, does give some grounds for hope. For one thing it is couched in much more accessible language than the several documents that have led up to it, most of which were in impenetrable jargon. Through our regular meetings with the Council and its officers you can be assured that we will make the Society's voice heard.

Lastly, a brief word about 'The Great Debate' – We are grateful to the Maidenhead Advertiser and its editor for setting up this opportunity, aside from the formal consultations the Council is undertaking, for people to have a say in what they would like to see happen in Maidenhead. The results of the questionnaire which concluded the Advertiser's Debate should help crystallise the views on what is wanted for the town. We understand that they plan to follow it up with a public meeting. I urge our members to get involved, bring along friends and have your say at this and at other forums which the Council will be arranging. No good will come from keeping silent when the future of the town is up for discussion. Go to it!

John McIntosh – Acting Chairman

ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL

This year, 2006, in the bicentenary of the birth of the great engineer, and this issue of the Newsletter has a "Brunel Theme" to it. On 8th April – his actual birth date – the society will making a trip to Bristol to see some of his achievements. Furthermore, the Heritage Centre will have an exhibition (in April and May) dealing with the arrival of his railway to Maidenhead; and the progress of the Society's efforts to influence the (infamous?) Crossrail project, which will impact on Brunel's famous "Sounding Arch" across the River Thames, are reported on by Tina Sell. Later in the year, we are hoping to arrange a talk from a representative of the Brunel Society.

TALKS

WEDNESDAY 15th February 2006 – 8 p.m.

**“IS MY ESTATE PROPERLY PLANNED
or – Don’t Waste Your Worth!”**

A talk by Dr Andre Davidson APFS

Andre is a Chartered Financial Planner and a professionally qualified Independent Financial Advisor of 15 years experience. The talk will give tips on information and ideas on ways to save money, worry and time with simple solutions to estate planning.

WEDNESDAY 15th March 2006 – 7:45 p.m.

(Please note change of time for this talk only)

“DALES AND DOWNS”

A talk by Mr Adrian Thornton

Following retirement from the legal profession, Adrian became an active Volunteer with the Council for National Parks, initially as a Speaker in Oxfordshire, but more recently over a wider area and in other ways. The Council is a campaigning charity entirely independent of government, and is an umbrella organisation that co-ordinates and promotes the National Parks interests of a wide range of other conservation and recreational charities, national and local. The talk will deal in some depth with the Yorkshire Dales National Park (one of the ‘original’ National Parks set up in the 1950s) and the proposed South Downs National Park, for which a government decision is expected this spring or summer.

Shashi Dare

CORRECTION

In the last edition of the Newsletter we inadvertently reported the death of member Mr Pillinger, whereas it was Mrs Pillinger who had passed away. We apologise to Mr Pillinger for any distress this may have caused.

OUTINGS

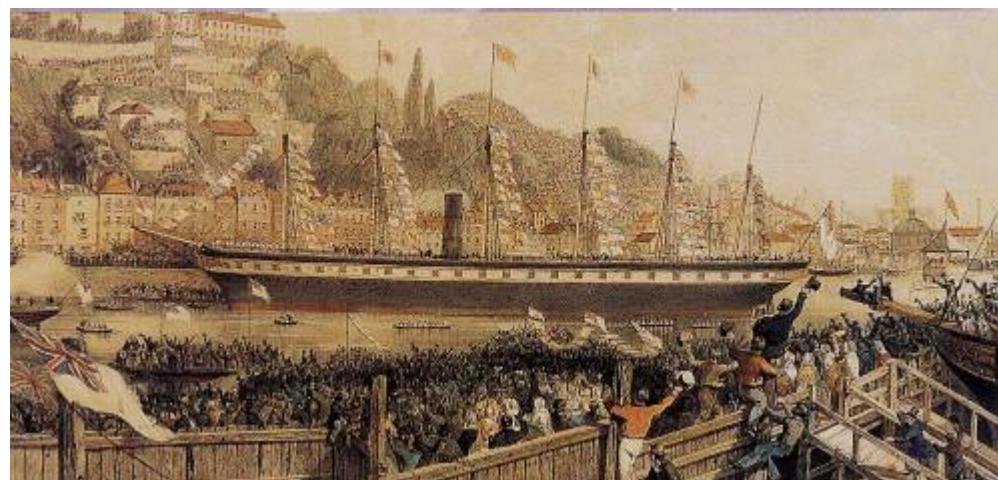
No visits have been undertaken since the last Newsletter as most National Trust and English Heritage sites close over the winter period and the short days and cold weather are not too conducive to venturing outside.

So we restart our season with a very appropriate visit for Maidonians to Bristol. Here we will be visiting the Empire and Commonwealth Museum which is housed in the Grade 1 listed Old Station built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1841. The museum traces the Empire and Commonwealth through the ages and is very informative. It was only opened in 2002 and has been nominated as European Museum of the Year.

April 8th is the bicentenary of Brunel's birth and to celebrate this the museum is putting on a special tour of parts of the building not normally open to the public. These include the boardroom and vaults along with many other areas. We will be among the first visitors to be shown round.

After visiting the Museum we transfer a small distance to the docks to visit the SS Great Britain and the Dockyard Museum. An audio tour will let you chose from 4 different aspects of sailing: you can sample what it was like to travel to Australia 1st Class; you can go there 3rd Class as the emigrants did; you can experience it as a child, or you can tour the ship with a marine expert.

With Maidenhead's strong connection with Brunel, what better way to celebrate his birthday than visiting Bristol and two of his engineering triumphs?



*The launch of the
SS Great Britain,
1845*

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

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

GREEN WAY/YORK STREAM

Town centre

There is now water in the town centre stream but how long it will stay there is anyone's guess; probably by June it will retreat. The Environment Agency (EA) did more dredging of the White Brook last year, which will help, but haven't touched Maidenhead Ditch which is completely clogged with reeds.



Reeds clogging Maidenhead Ditch, north of the flood control gate, November 2005

Maidenhead Ditch has been inspected by Cllr Alison Napier, chairman of Maidenhead Town Forum, and Cllr Clive Baskerville. The Forum has been in discussions with the Environment Agency about the problem of lack of flow. Currently the Borough planners are formulating their reply to a letter from the EA sent before Christmas that basically said that they proposed to re-apply to the Royal Borough to have Maidenhead Ditch works deleted from the planning application for the Jubilee River scheme. The Civic Society executive has already decided to oppose any such deletion.

This stream has been a problem twice in my memory and the current situation has often been compared unfavourably with the stream in the past. To try and sift fable from fact I decided to look through old records (mainly minutes of the Borough of Maidenhead) for references to the stream. These records, together with maps showing the stream system at different times in the past, were collated with more recent information about problems with the stream, and what has been done about it, into a report on York Stream. This will be submitted to Maidenhead Town Forum and the Green Way Working Group with the suggestion that it be brought to the attention of the Environment Agency.

It is clear that the stream has always been a problem, as least as far as the records go back (ca 1838). It has required regular clearance of obstructions e.g. fallen trees, plus removal of other vegetation e.g. reeds, and silt. If this does not happen the stream silts up.

Two photos from the report demonstrate the problem. One shows a part of Maidenhead Ditch that had been recently diverted in 1998 to give room for an extra pitch in the cricket club. The other shows the same section of stream seven years later. This clearly shows the amount of reeds and watercress that had accumulated in the stream over that period. Since the entire ditch has this level of congestion it is hardly surprising that water has difficulty flowing through it.



Newly diverted Maidenhead Ditch near to the cricket club, September 1998



Same section of Maidenhead Ditch, November 2005

The Environment Agency has blamed dry winters, low groundwater tables, and low flow in the Thames for the problem of lack of flow in York Stream. The past history of this stream shows that obstruction by vegetative growth and silt is a major problem and only regular clearance can keep the stream flowing.

MILLENNIUM WALK – missing links

College of Agriculture Link



Peter Thorn and Margaret Bowdery (East Berks Ramblers) at the site of the new gate leading to the crossing of the road near Temple Golf Club

We are hopeful that this missing link (from the top of Prospect Hill above Hurley to the entrance to Temple Golf Club) will be created over the winter period. We are grateful to Peter Thorn, Principal of the College for agreeing to the path and to the East Berks Ramblers for providing funds for new fencing and a gate. If all goes according to plan we hope to have an afternoon walk of the new link at the end of May (probably Sunday 28th), ending with tea in a member's garden. See details in the next Newsletter.

Lower Cookham Road to Towpath

The flood bund has still not been handed back to the new owner of White Place Farm, Mr John Edwards. However on the plus side, Mr Edwards is now the owner of Quintain's land (wetland to the south of White Place farm proper) and he is broadly amenable to allowing our path. We will continue to pursue this link.

Ann Darracott

VISIT TO ROUEN, FRANCE

St Luke's Church is organising a weekend away over the May Day bank holiday break to visit Monet's Garden and Rouen in France. Two years ago a similar trip to Bruges and Ghent was a great success and much enjoyed by all those who went, and we are confident that this year's trip will be just as enjoyable. There are still some places available on the coach, and the invitation is extended to the Civic Society – indeed a number of Society members are already in the party!

The details are as follows:

Depart by coach from St Luke's Church, Norfolk Road at around 7.30 am (to be confirmed) on Saturday 29th April. Travel to Dover and take a mid-morning ferry to Calais. Arrive in Rouen mid to late afternoon. Dinner in the hotel, which is the "Relais des Deux Rivieres", in the centre of the town, overlooking the Seine and close to the historic old town. Sunday morning is free to explore the town, and in the afternoon we will board the coach for the trip to Monet's garden, returning late afternoon. Evening at leisure. After breakfast on Monday we check out of the hotel and travel to Le Touquet Paris-Plage, a delightful resort close to Boulogne. We depart mid-afternoon for an early-evening ferry from Calais back to Dover, arriving back at St Luke's late evening. The cost is £185.00 per person based on two people sharing a double or twin-bedded room and including £15.00 travel insurance. If you have your own travel policy then this can be used instead, making the cost £170. Single supplement is £35.00 per person. The price includes all travel, accommodation, entrance to Monet's Garden, continental breakfast on both Sunday and Monday, and evening meal on the Saturday evening. If you wish to dine at the hotel on the Sunday evening then this is an extra £15.00 per person, but of course you may choose to go out to other restaurants in the town instead and pay them directly. Children aged 3 - 11 sharing with two adults can travel for £94.00 (including insurance, £79.00 if using another travel policy). A deposit of £35.00 plus £15.00 insurance if using that offered by the tour company will secure your place, with the balance being due 8 weeks before travel (i.e. by 4th March). To reserve a place or for more details please telephone Ann or Richard Burdett on 01628 631486.

HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

Exhibitions and Events

The Romans in Maidenhead: 31st January – 11th March

How did they live at Cox Green Roman villa? Who did they worship at the temple on Weycock Hill? Find out more about local life 1800 years ago.

Ivor Novello at Redroofs: 14th March – 8th April

An exhibition celebrating Littlewick Green's most famous son.

When Brunel's Railway Came to Maidenhead: 11th April – 19th May

A revival of our railway exhibition to celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of the famous Victorian engineer, whose Sounding Arch railway bridge at Maidenhead is featured on one of the special commemorative stamps. A wonderful scale model of the bridge will be the star of the exhibition.

River Thames Historical Cruises: 20th July & 6th September

Our ever popular 5-hour cruise, with live commentary about the buildings, people, gossip, history, wildlife and environment of the river, will be repeated twice this year. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is open from 10am to 4pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays

3 Kingsway, King Street, Maidenhead SL6 1EE, ☎ 01628 780555.

Website: www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk

PLANNING DIGEST

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Group looked at 41 planning applications in detail for the three months to December, visited all the sites and commented to the Council on 29 of them and the full text of these can be seen on the Society's website.

Developers were desperate to meet the 1st November Council deadline to restrict the number of developments as a result of the Borough exceeding its housing targets. The weekly lists for November were 60+ pages! There were lots of blocks of flats and a number of applications in the floodplain. The biggest proposed development is the land at Water Oakley in Bray and that is in the Green Belt as well. The comments on this and the Delta Motors site are shown below:

Land at Water Oakley, Windsor Road

(Demolition and redevelopment of site to provide 65 residential units-including 20 affordable, associated play area, 2 sports pitches, nature reserve, informal open space together with access)

“This development is in the floodplain and would put additional people at risk from flooding. Furthermore the site is in the Green Belt and should be cleared and restored to Green Belt land. We do not agree with any of the arguments put forward to justify the development of the site in the Green Belt as being ‘special circumstances’. There is also no justification for a change of use.”

Delta Motors, 51-55 Grenfell Road

(Demolish existing garage showroom and erection of 89 apartment dwellings with access, parking and amenity space)

“There appears to be little change from the previous application where we found the building unattractive and architecturally uninspiring. The park opposite which it will overlook will be spoilt by the ugly façade. The flat roof presents a stark line at the top of the building facing Grenfell Road and this would benefit from being softened architecturally by having a Mansard or sloping roof. The provision of only 65 car parking spaces for 89 apartments will be totally inadequate for this development. The number of spaces should be increased significantly in order to avoid parked vehicles overflowing onto the surrounding streets and car parks, which are already being used to capacity. Although the development is near the town centre we consider the proposed density of over 250 dwellings per hectare to be far too high for this location and this is over five times even the government’s guidance.....We welcome a residential development on this site and particularly the element of affordable housing. **However, the site provides an alternative space for a bus station linked to the railway station and if this development proceeds that opportunity will disappear.**”

We have also commented on the Council’s Transport Plan, its Enforcement Policy Statement and the LDF River Thames Policy and the latest Statement of Community Involvement.

Finally, we were pleased to learn that the old cinema site in Bridge Avenue has been sold and that the new owners plan to develop it; and readers of the Maidenhead Advertiser of Friday 13 January will have read that there may now be moves afoot to resolve the long-standing issue of that other major eyesore – Skindles.

Nigel Cockburn

CROSSRAIL – UPDATE

The members of the House of Commons Select Committee which will consider the Crossrail petitions were selected on 5 December 2005. They are:

Alan Meale (Lab, Mansfield); Brian Binley (Con, Northampton South); Katy Clark (Lab, Ayrshire and Arran); Phillip Hollobone (Con, Kettering); Kelvin Hopkins (Lab, Luton North); Sian James (Lab, Swansea East); Ian Liddell-Grainger (Con, Bridgewater); Dr John Pugh (LibDem, Southport); Linda Riordan (Lab, Halifax) and Sir Peter Soulsby (Lab, Leicester South).

The programme has been published for the first phase of the proceedings, which commence on Tuesday 17 January 2006. The list of petitioners in this phase does not include Maidenhead Civic Society, so if we are to be called, it will be after 22 March 2006. Transcripts of the proceedings will be available on the Private Bill Office website and will be published daily. They should make fascinating reading. In the meantime, we will wait patiently in the hope of being allowed to put forward our views regarding the issues which cause us concern.

In the Second Reading of the Bill, on 19th July 2005, much time was taken discussing the choice of Maidenhead as a terminus. Many speakers argued the case for Reading to be a more suitable alternative. After much debate, at the close of the session, it was still unclear as to whether Petitions could be heard which set out an argument for an alternative to Maidenhead. Derek Twigg promised that they would introduce an amendment if necessary, after further discussion with the clerks. As a consequence, it was announced in December that “Motions relating to the Crossrail Bill” would be considered on 12th January 2006.

The second motion of this amendment was of crucial importance to the people of Maidenhead. If approved, it would allow the Select Committee to consider the arguments put forward by Petitioners who feel that Reading would be a more suitable terminus for Crossrail, therefore allowing the Committee to make recommendations to the House. Martin Salter (Reading West) (Lab) put forward a strong case for Reading to become the terminus, making reference to the petitions from Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con) and the Maidenhead Civic Society, whom he cited as rejecting the argument that Maidenhead is a “logical western terminus”. Theresa May expressed her welcome to this amendment should it be approved, as it would give the Select Committee an instruction to examine the extension from Maidenhead to Reading. After two hours of debate, the motion was carried unanimously - 390 For, 0 Against.

There have been 357 petitions submitted against the Crossrail Bill as it now stands, (these can be accessed on www.parliament.uk): many voices to be heard! Let us hope we will have an opportunity to put our point of view to the Committee, so enabling us to have a say in the future development of Maidenhead and its transport links.

Tina Sell

RBWM Vision and the Great Debate

Have you had your say yet? The Council is seeking residents' views on the future of Maidenhead outlined in its “Vision for the Royal Borough”.

This Core Strategy document is at the heart of the Local Development Framework (LDF) which will replace the Local Plan. “It is,” says RBWM, “the overarching document which sets out the vision for the Borough over the next 15 to 20 years and how spatial planning will contribute towards achieving the vision.”

The council’s consultation began on January 27th and runs for six weeks. The Council is obliged to consult but previous documents have been couched in language and style that all but the most

dedicated planning devotee would find virtually impenetrable. The Civic Society, concerned that this would put people off, has lobbied hard for the LDF documentation to be more accessible and for the council to encourage people to get involved. The latest document is a great improvement.

The importance of public involvement was also behind “The Great Debate”, our initiative with the Maidenhead Advertiser to get people talking about the future of our town – and to get the council to take notice.

The rival freesheet Express ran a spoiler campaign to counter the perceived criticism of the Great Debate. A pity in some ways, but in terms of our aim of raising awareness of the issues, it was a plus!

It’s true that the Great Debate contained a fair amount of criticism but it’s also true that it had a lot which was positively constructive too, much of it from individuals, as well as the ideas and suggestions from ourselves in the Civic Society and the Chamber of Commerce. Council leader Mary-Rose Gliksten, lead member for planning Vicky Howes and Tory leader David Burbage were among the council members to give us their views. We commissioned a piece from town planning expert Joe Doak from Reading University who cut through the complexity of the LDF process to tell Maidonians, effectively, ‘you’ve got to be in it to win it’ and there were similar messages from Theresa May MP and RBWM Chief Executive David Lunn who exhorted people to make their views known. Said Lunn: “This (LDF) is about what people want their community to feel like and be like.” Our thanks go to everyone who took part and the Advertiser for their generous cooperation.

As well as raising public awareness, we were also keen that the Debate should inspire some imaginative and inventive thinking. The Chamber of Commerce opened in spades with their detailed and sometimes controversial plans for revitalising retail; and Peter Prior got everyone talking with his scheme for a York Stream marina by Chapel Arches.

The Society restated its ambitions, first set out in the Strategic Review, and we’re delighted to see that three of them – an integrated transport hub, a specific policy for the Thames “corridor” and the regeneration of the town centre – are well reflected in the Council’s new Core Strategy proposals. But these are broad-brush strokes at the moment, it’s still early days and we need to keep plugging away.

The Great Debate drew to a close with a reader survey. We based the questions entirely on the comments and suggestions made during the debate. You will have seen the results in the Advertiser. Many Society favourites for concern were among people’s top priorities for action: eyesores, York Stream, safe streets and pathways, better shops and a need to preserve the character of our small riverside town – despite one despondent respondent who wrote: “It has no character anymore!”

There was a general thumbs up for a department store rather than the Chamber’s giant Tesco idea and scant enthusiasm for more flats. But if Maidenhead has to have more flats, we asked, where should they be located? One wag ticked the box for ‘other’ and wrote: “In Slough”!

The Advertiser is planning a public meeting to discuss the issues raised in the Great Debate on Monday February 27th – watch the Advertiser for details. We hope the council will be represented but the outcome and the results of the survey will be shared with the town hall. We also urge members to take advantage of the forums that the council itself will be organising as part of its consultation which runs until 10th March.

Bob Dulson

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 15th February 2006
Talk by Dr Andre Davidson APFS

“Is my Estate Properly Planned?”
Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Wednesday 15th March 2006
Talk by Mr Adrian Thornton

“Dales and Downs ”
Methodist Church Hall, 7:45 p.m.

Saturday 8th April 2006
Outing

Celebration of Brunel’s Birthday, Bristol

Wednesday 15th November 2005

46th Annual General Meeting
Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m. and

CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2006

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

11th January, 8th February, 8th March, 12th April, 10th May, 14th June, 12th July, 13th September, 11th October, 8th November, 13th December.

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 15th November 2006 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 April 2006.**

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

News Editor Brian Darracott
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