



The Buckingham Society

Campaigning for a better Buckingham

Newsletter September 2023

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View From the Chair – Ian Orton



Hello everyone. It has been a busy three months for the Society's executive committee since the publication of the last newsletter. In addition to continuing our ongoing work we participated in the Celebrate Buckingham Day held on 17 June as well as the launch of this year's Swan Trail on 24 June and on 20 July we hosted our summer lecture and garden party.

Buckingham Town Council (BTC) once again organised a very successful Celebrate Buckingham Day at The Paddock in Bourton Park on 17 June. It attracted a variety of local clubs and organisations.

We ran a Society stand and, in addition to providing an opportunity to inform the wider public about what we do as well as meeting prospective members, the event provided a

good opportunity to showcase and present our Design and Heritage Awards. The Society launched its Design and Heritage Awards (or Conservation and Heritage Awards as they may have been called then) in 2019 to highlight the efforts made by individuals and organisations in conserving and enhancing Buckingham. The awards are made on an occasional basis with criteria set by the Executive Committee.

This year's winners were:

- The Grand Junction, 13 High Street
- Clarendon House, Cornwalls Meadow,
- 19 High Street.
- Smith & Clay, 6 Market Hill.
- Alder House, Verney Close.
- The Mitre, Mitre Street.
- The BTC Grounds and Maintenance team

It was good to see all the award winners turn up for the presentations.

The Society also displayed the swan we had sponsored for this year's Swan Trail. Our swan, painted by Ash King, a local artist and illustrator, is called Lord of the Wings and features local birds, along with their eggs.

I would like to thank fellow executive committee members Carolyn Cumming, Ed Grimsdale, Russell Popee and Mary Simons for helping to set-up and man our table during the day. Special thanks also to Ed Grimsdale, who set and sponsored a "Buckingham Conundrum" which was won by Gill Osborn, one of only three entrants to come up with the right solution.

The Summer Lecture and Garden Party

As a result of the poor weather the garden party was held in the Vinson Centre at the university. The talk was given by Dan Winter, the Head Gardener of Evenley Wood Garden. Dan gave us an erudite talk about the garden, including a brief history of its establishment and subsequent development as well as an illustrated virtual tour through the seasons. Michael Hunt, the Society's own dendrologist, is keen to curate a guided tour of the garden in the early autumn if there is sufficient demand. Thanks are due to Kathy Robins, who organised the event with her customary zeal and efficiency – and as usual the canapes were fantastic.

Meetings

The Celebrate Buckingham event generated a lot of interest from new Buckingham residents. It is quite clear that many new residents are interested in the town and would like to help make it even better, wherein rests a quandary. One of the most difficult questions I had to field from aspirant new members concerned meetings or, perhaps, more pertinently, the lack of them. "When and where do you meet" was a frequently asked question. And it proved almost impossible to answer. The reality is that we don't really host any meetings for members where they can raise or discuss points of interest, especially relating to the future

development (or lack thereof in Buckingham) except for the annual general meeting and the summer garden party. But these tend to be social, rather than business, events. We also have special interest groups (SIG), such as the planning SIG. But these tend to appeal to a very small number of people with the meetings rarely advertised. This is rather unfortunate, not least because our membership leaflet claims that, inter alia, the Society offers members the opportunity to “join in meetings and events with like-minded people”.

One way of resolving the current problem may be to offer members opportunities for meeting informally during lunchtimes or the early evening. What do members think? Or, is there any need at all for meetings? If you have any strong views please let me or other members of the executive committee know. Possible topics for consideration:

- i. Pedestrianisation of the town centre.
- ii. Graffiti and litter control.
- iii. Care and maintenance of sensitive green spaces NOT owned by BTC.
- iv. An arts centre for Buckingham.
- v. The future of Ford Meadow as a recreational area,
- vi. Is Buckinghamshire Council’s “award winning” planning department fit for purpose?
- vii. Does Buckingham really have a climate emergency?
- viii. Does Buckingham need more tourist accommodation?
- ix. Suggestions for possible talks or visits.

We are still exploring ways in which we can improve the way in which the Society communicates with members as well with the wider world. In the meantime, however, please don’t forget the Society’s website and Facebook page. Any contributions will be much appreciated.

Executive committee membership

We always need active members who are willing to join the Executive Committee. This meets every two months at 17.30 to 19.00, to discuss strategy, current and possible future activities as well as hearing reports from the Society’s special interest groups.

Membership is open to ANY member although certain positions (chairman, treasurer, membership secretary etc) are voted on at the AGM.

Planning – Carolyn Cumming

Most recent planning applications have been for extensions of an uncontroversial nature. However, one or two “old chestnuts” keep rearing their (unwelcome) heads, notably the former **Oddfellows Hall**, which has been subject to numerous amendments, leading to a serious loss of amenity for residents in Well Street. Originally approved for 9 self-catering student flats, it now advertises the flats as an Airbnb destination.

Equally concerning are the rise of HMOs (houses in multiple occupation). Currently, No. 36 Chandos Road seeks to accommodate 8 separate units. Not surprisingly, there are multiple objections from residents on the planning portal. Laughably, highways department appear to have no objections, citing that they “note there is no restricted parking on Chandos

Road". Perhaps one of their officers should attempt to negotiate Chandos Road at 3.30 p.m.

23/02267/APP Best Western Hotel, Bypass Road A421 Buckingham

The University finds itself very short of suitable student accommodation and has applied for a change of use to allow the hotel to be used as temporary accommodation for the new intake of students in 2024. This follows the recent transfer of the asylum seekers to sites elsewhere. We support this plan as a temporary measure, making good use of the whole premises until Best Western can re-open.

Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan

The long-awaited review of the above has reached its first consultation stage. There will be a chance to comment on the work so far. Look out for dates. The first is planned for the 30th September. Be sure to find out what is in the pipeline for our town in the next 15 years.

Two new cafes/restaurants for Buckingham:

Greek Restaurant, 4 West Street. This has had some favourable reviews. Although the very large blue sign over the window which was given approval, does dominate the street elevation of this Grade 2 listed building.

Cosy Club. Work progresses a pace on the former M&Co/Woolworths building. We are told that it will be called the Verdetto Lounge. Verdetto translates from Italian as verdict - a nod to the Old Gaol - and opening is planned for 13th September.

Bernie Marsden: A Buckingham Great

There has been no shortage of appreciation bestowed on the life and work of Bernie Marsden following his untimely death on 24 August.

And quite right too for Bernie was one of the best in his field, a point acknowledged not by his legion of fans worldwide but by his peers as well.

Take the legendary bluesman B.B. King, for example. Back in 1996 he was asked on German radio if white men could play the blues. "Some can", the great man replied. "Peter Green, Eric Clapton, Jonny Lang, they feel the blues. Oh, and that Whitesnake guy Bernie, he got it". High praise indeed!

Bernie Marsden was much more than just a very good blues guitarist, however. Not too many people may know that he was involved in two National Theatre productions of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry V*. Or that he also produced a documentary on the blues as well an excellent memoir called "Where's My Guitar? An Inside Story of British



Rock and Roll.” Or that he had an honorary M.A. from the University of Buckingham and also curated a series of guitar masterclasses at Stowe.

More importantly, Bernie was a really good bloke, who always had time for a word with just about everyone, as some of our members can confirm. He was proud of being born and bred in Buckingham and continued to live in the area with his wife Fran and two daughters, notwithstanding his fame as one of the leading blues and rock guitarists on the planet.

For a short time Bernie was also the proprietor of Vinyl Riches, which operated from premises on Bristle Hill. I thought that this provided a good example of the way in which Buckingham’s retail trade could have evolved: as a centre of specialist shops that would attract visitors from outside the town. This theme has been taken up by other towns, most notably the book towns of Hay on Wye, Wigtown and so on. There is nothing to beat a good browse in a second hand book or record shop, especially if the proprietor and/or staff are experts in their field (as Bernie Marsden most certainly was).

But back to Bernie Marsden....We sometimes struggle to articulate why we are proud to live in Buckingham. Bernie provides one good reason.

Canteen Food – Ed Grimsdale

The year was 1935, and the new School Canteen was in the ‘Senior School’ on the London Rd. **RABBIT STEW AND MINCED LENTILS** - A little teaser for you. Your task is to marvel at the school lunches and to speculate which Buckingham School Canteen had just been opened? (From an old Buckingham Advertiser, transcribed by Ed)

THE BIG MOMENT!

If our representative were to be asked what impressed him most during a visit to the new school this week, he would be inclined to reply the school canteen during the luncheon hour. Suddenly, the atmosphere of educational routine became dispelled, and he found himself standing in a spacious room, equipped with serving hatches and numerous tables, suggestive of an up-to-date London restaurant when the City sets free its captives of commerce.

Girls of the school were to be seen covering the tables with dainty cloths and these, he had been informed, were being made in the school and in the school colours. The children help in the serving of the meal. 118, ten more than the number anticipated, partook, on Monday,

of the hot meal and enjoyed the two courses of lentil mince [i.e. beef mince eked out with plenty of dark lentils] followed by rice and raisins.

The following was the menu for three other days of the week :

Tuesday : Savoury suet pudding and rhubarb and custard;

Wednesday, Rabbit stew and milk pudding;

Thursday, Shepherd's pie and prunes and custard.

The menu is arranged so that a balanced diet is achieved. Mrs. C. Garrett is the school cook, assisted by Miss Gibbs and their work was highly praised by the Headmaster.

Afterpiece from a 1953 Advertiser

LOCAL LOQUACITY AT THE LOCAL - A LITTLE OF WHAT YOU FANCY by Chimney Corner Charlie

Most the fellows at our local are regular newspaper readers. In came Harry, who said he'd been reading that some of these scientists have been writing a lot about food, vitamins, calories and lord knows what —lot of tommy rot, I thought ; but I did notice that they say there are twice many calories in beer than there are in tea. Perhaps calories are what they make beer of nowadays. Anyway, costs too much and not half the stuff that the home-brewed was years ago.

Said Jimmy, "I wonder how many vitamins and calories there were old Cay's rabbit stew?" ("Cay" short for Caleb.) The story : An old one, but I believe true. Caleb, who hadn't much to learn in the poaching line, prepared stew in his wife's absence. When she returned, he said, "Well, gal, have a bit of rabbit stew." She joined him. When they had finished he said , "Did you like it?" She replied, "It were Jolly good". He then explained it was hedgehog. She declared, "Cay, you have poisoned me. I feel ill and I know I shall die!" But anyway, she was not ill and did not die until a good many years, afterwards.

The Common Swift - Sue Hethrington

One of the most urban of urban birds is the common swift, *Apus apus*. I consider them the ultimate urban bird because in our country they only make their nests within our buildings – not in trees or bushes or on the ground as other birds may choose but actually within gaps and crevices in the fabric of our buildings. I've been interested in swifts for at least 10 years and whilst I don't really consider myself an expert, I am listed as such on the Swift Conservation website which can be found at www.swift-conservation.org .

The UK Government was recently petitioned to "Make swift bricks compulsory in new housing to help red-listed birds". This was e-petition 626737 raised by West Oxfordshire nature writer Hannah Bourne-Taylor. The petition was enthusiastically supported by the RSPB who have been active supporters of much work of this nature – such as at the Barratts David Wilson Kingsbrook development in nearby Aylesbury and work in Oxford as part of the "Oxford Swift City" project. There have been lots of groups popping up nationwide championing swifts and some local authorities have also come on board - Brighton and Hove City Council has made swift bricks a requirement in new buildings above 5 metres in height.

The petition was duly debated in Westminster on Monday 10/7/23 but it didn't succeed. The government said it would not legislate to require developers or local authorities to use particular forms of building material, such as swift bricks, in every development. They said particular forms of green infrastructure, such as swift bricks, were not suited to all developments. In summary, they said "We welcome actions by developers to provide "swift bricks", however Government considers this a **matter for local authorities** depending upon the specific circumstances of each site."

But there is more at stake than just newbuild. There is also a problem with destruction of nest sites within old build. As I mentioned earlier, swifts **natural nest sites are only in man-made buildings**. The problem with such sites is that when any remedial work is done to fill in cracks and holes or replace old decayed material, the swifts are excluded. They are quite long-lived birds and are nest site loyal so if a site is lost, that's the end of their breeding



unless some form of mitigation is considered, such as a brick or box.

As mentioned, Barratts David Wilson made an effort at Aylesbury Kingsbrook with the support of the RSPB to accommodate swifts by use of swift bricks. They have paid lip service to doing the same at St Rumbolds Fields (without the RSPB) saying they will instal seven bird and bat boxes. I consider this a rather pathetic gesture given it would be 1.76% of the completed

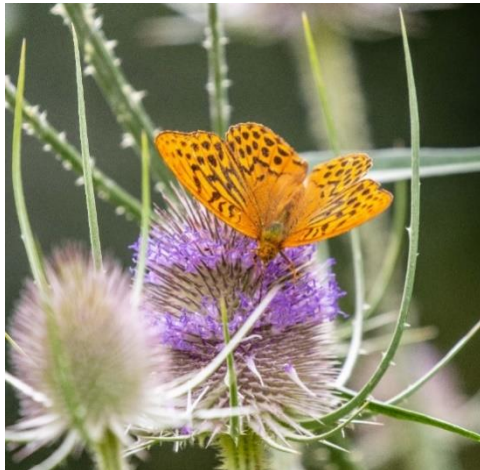
size of the development of 397 homes. It's actually even worse than that figure because I recently surveyed the development and accepting it's not yet complete, I only found 2 "bricks" which look as if they're bat bricks and 3 "bird bricks". These "bird bricks" have 3 small round holes which I assume are suitable for sparrows but are unsuitable for swifts. So the percentage swift bricks at the current, admittedly unfinished, stage of the development is actually **ZERO** percent. I am a resident of the development, and I was very disappointed not to have been offered the chance of having swift or bat bricks.

The situation with swifts is really very serious, they are on the red list of conservation concern. We are fortunate to still have reasonable numbers in Buckingham, but we need to wake up and take action now, before it's too late. It would be tragedy if we simply didn't notice the numbers dwindling away until one day we wait in vain for their return as summer visitors. We must do everything we can to "keep the Buckingham summer skies alive".

Local Wildlife Observations - Mary Melliush

Sparrows are so energetic, they fledge, feed, wash in the bird water and cluster in noisy groups on the provided feeders giving good entertainment. The young brown feathered starlings ate so many fat balls I was topping up most days. Eventually they will grow their adult sparkly plumage.

There are jewels in the air of Buckingham. It has been a reasonable summer for butterflies. Despite snow earlier in the week I saw my first brimstone on 30th March. This was followed



by orange tip, speckled wood, peacock, red admiral and the pretty silvery holly blue which had a good first brood and emerged again in August for their second brood.

Various white butterflies including marbled white were noted. There were lots of gatekeepers and meadow browns but small tortoiseshells have had a poor year.

Left: Silver washed Fritillary. Photo by Mary Melluish



On 19 July swifts were flying in a restless fashion and I did not see them again. The numbers were low and it is sad that house builders off the Tingewick Road failed to put in the promised swift brick, an unobtrusive single brick with a slot in the buildings to provide nest space.

Picture on left by Mary Melluish.

On warm summer evenings bats have been seen flying under the bridges of Buckingham.

The appalling cost of UK infrastructure – Ian Orton

Railways, metro systems, trams and roads all cost far more to build in the UK, according to data collected by Britain Remade, a pro-growth campaign group.

Take HS2, for example. Back in 2013, the putative high speed railway line which is supposed to connect London with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds was estimated to cost about £56.7 billion at 2023 prices.

But this turned out to be a massive underestimate. The 134 miles of track between London and Birmingham alone is now forecast to cost £53 billion or around £396 million a mile. This would make it the world's most expensive new build railway.

Even if the 2013 estimate had been correct, however, HS2 would still stand out relative to similar projects elsewhere. At £165 million per mile it would still be double the price Italy is paying to build a high speed rail connection between Naples and Bari, according to Britain Remade. It would also be 3.7 times more expensive than France's high speed line between Tours and Bordeaux.

It could be argued that one reason HS2 is much more expensive is because of the amount of tunnelling involved. Yet in Japan Hokkaido's new Shinkansen high speed line cost around £50 million per mile despite almost half the line being tunnelled.

The reality is that the UK doesn't seem to be any good at building transport infrastructure in a cost-efficient manner relative to its international peers. Britain Remade looked at 138 train, metro and rail projects in 14 countries along with 104 road projects in 11 countries. The results from a UK perspective are depressing to say the least.

Trams

Britain Remade looked at 21 train projects in Britain and France. After adjusting for inflation it found that tram projects cost two and a half times more than their French peers on a cost per mile basis.

Metros and Tubes

New York is by far the most expensive place to build tubes or metro systems. But Britain doesn't do well here either. At a cost of £676 million per mile British projects are two times more expensive than those in Italy or France, three times more expensive than in Germany and six times more expensive than in Spain.

Spain stands out for its ability to build metro systems cheaply, says Britain Remade. But the Nordic countries are no slouches in this respect either. Finland, Norway and Sweden all seem far more capable at building metro systems at a fraction of the cost than would be par for the course in the UK. This often makes projects that could offer significant economic and social benefits unaffordable.

Rail Electrification

A similar tale of woe exists with any number of rail electrification projects curtailed or shortened because of high costs and subsequent overruns. These include electrification of the reinstated Bletchley to Oxford line.

Research for the Rail Industry Association highlights that rail electrification costs are delivered at much lower cost in Germany, Switzerland and Denmark. It estimates that rail electrification projects can be delivered at between 22 percent to 50 percent cheaper than many projects end up costing.

Roads

Britain is closer to its international peers as far as building new roads are concerned. It would rank midway in an international cost per mile table constructed by Britain Remade. The country is 23 percent more expensive than France, 17 percent more expensive than Canada and 13 percent more expensive than Italy. It is cheaper than Australia and Sweden, however. Nonetheless, there are individual projects that are extremely expensive by international standards such as the Lower Thames Crossing, where the cost has more than doubled from a budgeted £4.3 billion to around £9 billion (thanks, in part, to £250 billion

spent on its 63,000 page planning application, says Britain Remade. Or the £500 million being spent on adding a new lane to the existing four mile A46 Newark bypass.

Britain Remade says that for the same cost Germany built 14 miles of a new six lane motorway and refurbished another 14 miles as part of the A4 autobahn.

Other physical infrastructure

Britain Remade hasn't extended its analysis to considering the cost of new power stations or water treatment works. The likelihood is, however, that the same differentials would occur if it did conduct an international comparison. All this may partly explain why Buckingham, along with other parts of the country has a growing infrastructure deficit.

So why does it cost so much more to build infrastructure here? Answers on a £1 billion banknote please!

Evenley Wood Garden



Following the summer lecture, members expressed interest in a guided trip to Evenley Wood Garden. Michael Hunt has suggested that the middle to end of October would be a suitable time. If you would like us to arrange a visit could you please let us know your favoured days and times by contacting Ian at drone@ianorton.co.uk?

Committee Vacancies

Membership Secretary: Gill Jones, who has performed this role for many years, is retiring. Anyone who is interested in taking on this role should contact Ian Orton drone@ianorton.co.uk. Volunteers will be given training and support.

Webmaster: Someone is required to manage the Society's website. Once again full support and training will be given. For more information contact David Child davidchild@xecore.com

Forthcoming events

Guided walk in Evenley Wood lead by Michael Hunt: Contact Ian Orton at drone@ianorton.co.uk to book a place and to agree the date and time.

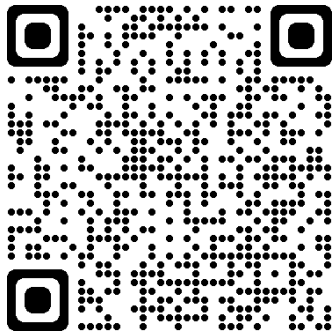
Annual General Meeting: 23rd November at 6.30 in the Vinson Auditorium. Stuart Pringle, the managing director of Silverstone Circuits Limited has agreed to give the Society's Winter Lecture which will immediately follow the AGM at 7.30pm. Stuart will

provide an update of the exciting developments that have taken place at Silverstone in recent years along with his plans for the future."

Executive Committee:

Ian Orton	Chair, Green and Open Spaces, planning
David Child	Treasurer, transport, website, and planning
Carolyn Cumming	Planning
Ed Grimsdale	Planning and Society Historian
Gill Jones	Membership secretary
Belinda Morley-Fletcher	Secretary
Roger Newall	Planning
Russell Popee	
Anthony Ralph	Planning
Kathy Robins	Newsletter Editor, Planning
Mary Simons	Planning

We should like to hear from you!



Please give us some feedback - tell us what activities you would like The Buckingham Society to prioritise, any ideas for social events (once they are again allowed) or simply write to us on any Buckingham related matter. If you have any ideas, questions or comments please address them to: kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk Tel: 07834 484762. If you would like to become in involved in any of our activities or attend a meeting of the executive committee, just contact us and come along. www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk