



# The Buckingham Society

*Campaigning for a better Buckingham*

## Newsletter November 2023

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### View From the Chair – Ian Orton



Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Buckingham Society's Newsletter

Buckingham often looks at its best during the autumn and this year is no exception as Anthony Ralph's photographs show. We are all extremely lucky to live in such a great location blessed by a fantastic treescape.

#### **The Annual General Meeting**

The Society will be holding its annual general meeting on 23 November at 18.30 in the University of Buckingham's Vinson Auditorium. I look forward to meeting as many of you that can attend.

I realise that there is no shortage of alternatives, not least the switching on of the lights that will decorate Buckingham's town centre during the Christmas season. By way of a counter, we can at least offer wine and other refreshments immediately before the meeting as well as our annual winter talk which will follow the AGM (AGM -18.30; TALK – 19.30)

This year our speaker is Stuart Pringle, the managing director of Silverstone Circuits. Since Stuart last spoke to us a few years ago Silverstone has progressed by leaps and bounds. It has become a major economic growth pole as well as consolidating its hegemony within Formula 1 and other motorsports. Silverstone is a major source of employment growth and contributes millions of pounds to the local economy. It is also growing in importance as a destination centre not just for motorsport and Formula 1 fans but because of its status as the largest covered events space outside London. Stuart's talk will update us on the progress achieved to date at Silverstone as well outlining planned future developments at the venue.

### **Society Developments**

Returning to the more mundane, I would like to outline the progress achieved by the Society over the current year as well as offering a few thoughts about how we could proceed in the future. The good news is that we continue to attract new members. Unfortunately, however, we have not grown our membership base significantly.

The reality is that organisations like the Buckingham Society have to recruit new members each year to replace those that either leave the locality, die or decide not to renew their membership.

Over the years our annual membership turnover has fluctuated between 10 and 20 percent. Given our current membership base this means that we have to recruit between 20 to 40 new members each year to remain at the same size. This is quite an undertaking as I have found out over the past few months. To help boost our membership as well as making the Society more relevant to current members I have reviewed our current offering and compared it to that offered by other civic amenity groups.

In terms of our achievements, we compare very favourably, especially in terms of the influence we have had on planning and urban design initiatives. But there is considerable scope for improvement in other areas, not least in our membership offering and the way in which we communicate with our members as well as the outside world.

The executive committee is already exploring ways in which our membership offer can be expanded, not least by arranging more meetings and events as well as facilitating more informal initiatives. Similarly, we are in the process of establishing a working party to explore how we can improve communications by taking full advantage of all the tools available. If you have any suggestions or comments on either subject they would be much appreciated. We are also constantly looking for new members to help reinforce the executive committee. The Society will certainly need new members to help share the load, especially if it expands the range of events and activities we offer. We also need new executive members to replace those that, for one reason or another, stand down.

**Gill Jones** is one executive committee member that has decided to retire after spending many years as our membership secretary. Gill is efficiency personified and has done a fantastic job over many years. Prior to Gill's arrival as membership secretary the Society's administrative arrangements were not all that they possibly could have been, especially on the membership front. This changed following Gill's arrival with order replacing the chaos that had sometimes prevailed prior to her arrival. Thanks Gill!

## Some Notes on the Future of the A421 – Anthony Ralph and Carolyn Cumming

The A421 is an integral part of the major route across the country which links the east to the west. That it passes through Buckingham is obviously of particular interest to all Society Members.



The A421 is currently a topic of conversation across several organisations: there is a study being conducted by W.S. Atkins for Buckinghamshire Council with input from various stakeholders. The North Buckinghamshire Parish Planning Consortium (NBPPC) the organisation which includes Towns and Parishes such as Buckingham and Maids Moreton regularly discuss aspects of how the A421 might develop and are keeping a close watch on possible outcomes such as dualling or other 'improvements' in their areas, particularly in those parishes adjacent to the developing Shenley Park and Salden Chase projects for major housing on the edge of Milton Keynes. There is already serious talk of dualling the A421 from the Bottledump to Whaddon roundabouts for example. It is worth noting that the A421 east of Milton Keynes, down to J13 of the M1 and on to where it meets to A1, bypassing Bedford and other areas is already dualled and does illustrate how carriageway development might look.

Turning to Buckingham, which of course has the A421 passing through it, there has been talk for many years about an 'outer bypass' around the area. Indeed, going back to 2007, Thornborough Parish Council undertook a study on this very subject. The case to relieve the traffic flow levels and the possible pollution generated to areas bordering the road is not unreasonable, especially as recent developments such as Lace Hill, St. Rumbolds Fields and now Osier Way mean the A421 can hardly be classed as a bypass anymore. It would also be remiss not to mention the continuing desire for a Western Link from the A421 to the A422 to relieve pressure on town centre traffic too.

The Town Council is currently refreshing the Buckingham Neighbourhood (BNDP) Development Plan. Over the longer term the infrastructure in Buckingham will need careful study and investment to support the future shape of the Town. The A421

strategic route will have a key role to play. There will shortly be several opportunities for residents to look at the draft BNDP and make comment. Please be sure to do so.

## Congratulations to the Villiers Hotel



The Villiers Hotel have improved the town landscape by installing planters to deter drivers from parking in front of the building.

## What a waste – Ian Orton

We have fortunately been spared another big pollution incident on the River Great Ouse. The last major incident, which occurred on 30 June 2018, did untold damage to the river and its related ecosystems. The good news is that the river appears to have made a very good recovery and, according to the river wardens, is now in a healthy state.

The bad news is that we are still waiting for an “official” explanation for what happened. Bureaucratic and legal processes seem to have a timeline that stretches to near infinity (or even beyond). Furthermore, incidents still occur, though not on anything like the scale experienced back in 2018. This year, for example, the stream that runs from land behind Osier Way and joins the Great Ouse just upstream from Bourton Mill, was contaminated although the resultant damage was very small.

All this highlights the fact that the countryside and its waterways are still widely used to dump waste and other rubbish. According to data from Defra there were 1.09 million cases of fly-tipping recorded by authorities in England in 2020/21. This was a fall from the year before but is still the second highest on record. The highest rate was in London with 46 incidents per 1,000 people and the lowest in the southwest with 9 per 1,000. Highways, council land, footpaths and bridleways seem to be the preferred places to fly tip.

In terms of size the biggest culprits were “small van” loads which accounted for 32 percent of the incidents followed by “car-boot” loads (26 percent), single items (16 percent), “transit van” loads (15 percent), single black big bags (6 percent) “tipper” lorry loads (4 percent) and larger than “tipper van” loads (1.2 percent)

What a waste!

## Local Wildlife - Mary Melliush

There is an urgency and cohesion about birds in flight, sometimes on migration. A flock of gulls flew over early morning this week with steady wingbeat. Autumn brings skeins of geese to overwinter here, another lovely sight. I heard redwings calling overhead one night.

Recently the Council took our views on the plans for a new cemetery and allotments. There was no space for suggestions. Might they consider a wildflower area? There are several in Buckingham. On a sunny day the one outside The Larder is a magnet for bees, butterflies and other insects. Could this be included as well as the usual manicured area?

My provided water area and feeding station is still in use, and numbers will build up as the weather gets colder. But at any site of interest the question to ask is what is missing. Chaffinches used to come regularly but it is some time since I saw one and I wonder why? The Robin is still singing and the hedge is full of twittering sparrows. Otherwise there is very little birdsong.



This moth is a Blue Underwing, the Clifden Nonpareil, the Linnaeus name is *Catocala fraxini*.

It is very rare, there were a few in Kent. Now a few can be seen in Buckinghamshire, so to have one in Buckingham is special. Blue is an unusual colour in a moth. In 1976 the number recorded was 20 which was a good year for them. They are becoming seen more.

My granddaughter took the photo and did not know how special it was!

## Local history at the Old Gaol – Ian Orton

An event organised by the Old Gaol Trust on Saturday 9 September, which involved three of the Society's members, illustrated the potential offered by a local history group\*.

Ed Grimsdale, Ian Orton and Tony Seaton all gave illustrated talks covering facets of local history as part of the celebrations to commemorate the 275th anniversary of the establishment of the Old Gaol, the 40th anniversary of the launch of the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust and 2023's Heritage Weekend. The event, which was organised by Dr Brianna Wyatt, the current chair of the Old Gaol Trust, attracted a sell-out audience, illustrating the depth of interest in local history.

Tony Seaton, a global authority on the history of travel and tourism, gave a talk on the life and work of George Lipscombe, the author of a four volume History of the County of Buckingham. A native of Quainton, Dr Lipscombe, a physician as well as an antiquarian, published the first volume of his history in 1831. This was profusely illustrated by specially



commissioned woodcuts and copper plate engravings, many of which are in the possession of Professor Seaton.

Indeed, the expense incurred by Dr Lipscombe, in producing the first volume, delayed the publication of subsequent volumes, the last of which didn't appear until 1847. This was a year after Dr Lipscombe's death. Hence the title of Professor Seaton's talk: *Buckinghamshire's tragic historian: the life and work of George Lipscombe.*"

Ed Grimsdale's talk "*The History of Buckingham Gaol*" focused primarily on the reasons that led to the establishment of the Old Gaol in the late eighteenth century along with its early history, including the addition of the gaoler's house designed by George Gilbert Scott.

Ian Orton's talk, "*Justice at its finest: the trial of Simon Byrne*" examined the circumstances surrounding the trial of Simon Byrne, an Irish pugilist, for the manslaughter of Sandy McKay, at a fight at Salcey Green, near Hanslope in June 1830 along with its outcome.

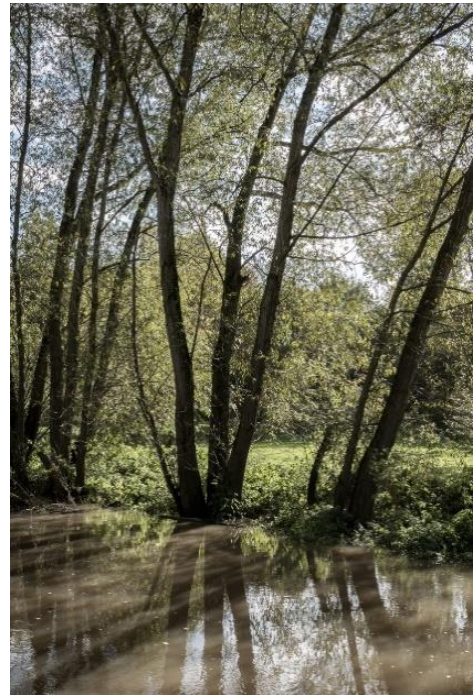
Although long forgotten, the trial which was held at the Town Hall on 28 July 1830, attracted considerable publicity at the time, not least because it involved many well-known sporting names. Indeed, it would have been very difficult to secure any accommodation in any of Buckingham's hotels and inns during the week of the trial.

What the talk illustrated was just how quickly justice was dispensed in the early nineteenth century. The court sat well into the night of 28 July, but it took just ten minutes to acquit Mr Byrne who had the distinction of being involved in two fights in which one of the participants died. The first resulted in the death of Sandy McKay: the second, which occurred three years later, in his own death.

*\*The Buckingham Society is currently exploring the establishment of a local history group.*

## Some Autumn Pictures by Anthony Ralph





## Green and Open Spaces – Ian Orton

There has been a recurrence of vandals' attacks on the new plantings and saplings at the Treefields end of the Green Heartlands. It remains to be seen whether this is terminal for the two trees attacked.

Trees have a habit of producing new shoots if branches have been snapped. This was certainly the case with the black poplars that were planted on the Heartlands in January 2022 and subsequently attacked.





The ongoing maintenance of newly planted trees remains a point of controversy, especially when Buckinghamshire Council (BC) is concerned. BC seems to be very keen on planting lots of saplings and nursery stock but not so keen on maintaining them. Consequently, the mortality rate can be high.

Photograph – Autumn Tree  
by Roger Newall

BC contends that it is cheaper to plant new replacements than to spend money on maintenance. This may or may not be the case. But it seems a waste of money nonetheless, especially as nursery stock can cost many hundreds of pounds, especially if it is a named species.

As it is there appears to have been a significant reduction in both the volume and quality of maintenance work provided by BC's contractors. The Old Churchyard looks especially scruffy and has done so for most of the summer. The ivy has been especially rampant.

Is this the time for community/Society action?

## **A Pointless Consultation? – Ian Orton**

It's great to see that Buckinghamshire Council (BC) appears keen to consult with residents when it comes to new policy initiatives.

Whether it takes any notice of any responses received is, of course, another question. There is more than a suspicion that, at best, its consultation efforts amount to little more than cosmetic. At worst, they could amount to little more than an expensive job creation scheme.

Take this example: on 26 June a public consultation was launched to gauge opinion about a proposal to move the sixth form at Winslow's Furze Down School to the Buckingham Opportunities Centre in Well Street. Furze Down School is a special school for children and young people with special educational needs.

At first sight the proposal looks very sensible as it will enable Furze Down School to add 26 places for pupils aged between 4 to 16 years without compromising the services currently supplied to adults at the Buckingham Opportunities Centre. Nonetheless, BC wants to solicit the views of the public.

But here's the thing. If the response to the consultation is favourable and both the governors of Furze Down School and BC decide to proceed with the proposal this will result



in the publication of a statutory notice. And yes, you've guessed it: yet another consultation!

Moreover, the consultation launched on 26 June seems more concerned about eliciting details about the consultees rather than the proposal itself. Of the 13 questions posed only four concern the merits or otherwise of moving Furze Down School's sixth form to Buckingham. The other nine questions are all about "you", the putative consultee! This hardly seems a good way to elicit a response.

Of course, BC can argue that respondents don't have to answer the additional nine questions. But this would seem to undermine the point of including them in the consultation at all. Furthermore, the consultation is not costless. My guess is that it would probably have taken one person around a month to have produced the consultation document. Perhaps there is a statutory duty to proceed in this way. But it all seems totally pointless and very expensive, especially in these cash strapped times.

## Committee Vacancies

**Webmaster:** We need a volunteer to manage the Society's website. Full support and training will be given. For more information contact David Child [davidchild@xecore.com](mailto:davidchild@xecore.com)

## Forthcoming Events

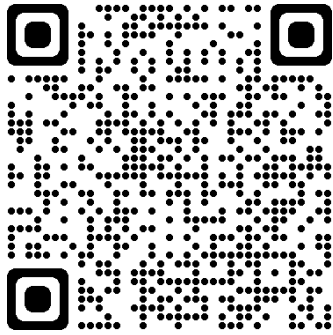
**Annual General Meeting:** 23<sup>rd</sup> November at 6.30 in the Vinson Auditorium

5.30pm        Drinks and nibbles  
6.30pm        Annual general meeting  
7.30pm        Stuart Pringle, the managing director of Silverstone Circuits Limited has agreed to give the Society's Winter Lecture. Stuart will provide an update of the exciting developments that have taken place at Silverstone in recent years along with his plans.

## 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
Belinda Morley-Fletcher	Minutes Secretary
Roger Newall	Planning
Russell Popee	Membership secretary
Anthony Ralph	Planning
Kathy Robins	Newsletter Editor, Planning
Mary Simons	Planning
Keith Wallace	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](mailto:kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk) Tel: 07834 484762. If you would like to become involved in any of our activities or attend a meeting of the executive committee, just contact us and come along. [www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk](http://www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk)