

The Beaconsfield Society

NEWSLETTER October 2015

Date for your Diary

**Annual General Meeting
and a Society Talk in our series on local heritage**

Thursday 5th November 2015 7.00 pm

“Bugging the Nazis”

The Secret History of Wilton Park and Latimer House

AGM and talk by Dr Helen Fry, Biographer and Historian

The Fitzwilliams Centre Windsor End Beaconsfield HP9 2NW

The short AGM will be followed immediately by the talk. Tickets are free for members of the Beaconsfield Society and priced at £10 for non-members and guests (and includes a year's free membership of the Society). Refreshments will be served at the end.

The capacity for the talk does have a limit so will those members wishing to attend the talk as well as the AGM please advise Kari Dorme on 01494 675923 leaving their name, contact number and numbers coming by 1st November. Tickets will then be reserved for you to be collected when you come on the evening.

Chairman's letter

Mike Elliott

We have another bumper newsletter for you, highlighting how the key aims of the Beaconsfield Society are put into practice, **celebrating the past, promoting the present and influencing the future**. I commend it to all our members and invite you to pass it on to neighbours and friends who care about our Town and encourage them to join us. Our voice is made all the more authentic and loud with increasing membership.

The visit to Dorneywood House and the WW2 Wilton Park talk were much enjoyed, Beaconsfield Now! 2015 gave a rich array of local organisations a chance to showcase their activity in the Town and your committee have been active in the Vision for Beaconsfield initiative. I will include a V4B update here and leave others to report the other events elsewhere.

Vision for Beaconsfield update

An independent group of representatives from many voluntary organisations was assembled in October last year. Following an initial questionnaire, exhibitions and fact finding, the steering group formed five subcommittees to focus on Transport, Environment, Community, Local Economy and Blue Skies. I was the Vice Chair for the project, many Beaconsfield Society members were involved in the subcommittees. The insight, analysis and energy generated in these subcommittees was tremendous and a great credit to those involved and to our Town. The levels of engagement surpassed anything that I have seen in 25 years as a resident of Beaconsfield.

V4B presented the results of its work to the Town Council in record time on 23 July with 65 recommendations. Some invite direct action by the Town Council, others their support and lobbying for action by District and County Councils and some, endorsement and leadership in the Community. It is not clear how the Town Council intends to progress these recommendations and we await a formal response. With a newly elected and enthusiastic Council, I am optimistic that quick wins can be made and momentum harnessed on the larger, medium term, aspirational recommendations.

The report, "Creating a Better Beaconsfield", can be found on the Vision for Beaconsfield website. It is pretty comprehensive, 150 pages long including appendices, but the first 19 pages give the overview. Here is the link to the main report, the appendices, comments and discussion can be found on the same site.

<https://visionforbeaconsfield.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/v4b-town-plan-report-17-07-2015.pdf>

Talking of access to information via the internet, the Society continues to maintain its website and we are also represented on Twitter and Facebook as a way to reach a wider demographic in our Town. For those of you well versed in these new media formats, please support us with likes, retweets, follows, blog contributions etc. Please see the links to the Society's media presence on the penultimate page.

Wilton Park and A355 update

Things have been quiet on this front since SBDC approved the Supplementary Planning Document in March. Inland Homes have been working on the detailed planning application stage that will follow and we expect to see something in the Autumn. Expect an overall design brief for the scheme as a whole with a first phase or phases in detail. Meanwhile Inland are out to tender for the fully approved part of the relief road north from Pyebush roundabout that crosses their land.

Central government funds have been approved and earmarked for a connecting section to link the A355 to this new section of road on Wilton Park. The exact routing and details have yet to be defined but things are moving forward. The Society has been invited to attend a "Stakeholders Workshop" in early October to discuss the latest BCC thinking. To set expectations, the relief road will not span the railway (the funds will not allow it) but the overall scheme does hold the prospect of making the London End roundabout, and the Old Town in general, less congested.

Local plan - SBDC call for sites and other planning issues

In February, SBDC began the process to prepare a new District plan. The first step of this was to call for possible sites to be considered for redevelopment and redesignation. It was to be hoped that the submissions would have been made public by now but that is not the case. We await with interest to see them and assume that some currently designated Green Belt land around the Town will be proposed. One can imagine that a case could be made for some form of modest development for, say the waste area opposite the Harvester, adjacent to the Motorway. The same cannot be said for the vast majority of open land that surrounds our Town! The Society will be monitoring this closely.

<http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/article/4814/Emerging-Local-Plan>

Your Society monitors the weekly planning applications affecting the Town for the worst excesses and formally objects where appropriate. One recent success was the refusal of an overly large development in Seeleys Road that may have had the potential for multiple occupancy. Members are encouraged to share their concerns with us on planning matters, on specifics or in general. The Food for Thought piece below may prompt you to do so.

Piecemeal development with an increasing number of multiple occupancy applications is putting strain on our infrastructure - water systems in particular. The Society remains concerned at the incidents of recent years in Gregories Road, Windsor End and Hedgerley Lane and frustrated by the platitudes from Thames Water. Health hazards, more frequently seen in third world countries, cannot be tolerated in Beaconsfield.

Pride in our Town

We joined the Scouts and others in what I dubbed the "Heineken Litter pick", reaching parts of the Town that others don't reach! Footpaths, woods, open spaces were visited with nearly 200 kg of rubbish collected in total. Look out for us with new tabards in October as our working party tackles illegible, illegal and irrelevant signage again. We questioned Transport for Buckinghamshire at a recent Town Council meeting as to why they seemed one of the worst culprits, e.g. "no road markings", "loose chippings" and "road closed" signs up or abandoned for weeks and months beyond any relevance.

AGM and talk

Finally, the format of our AGM is a little different this year and will endeavour to condense the business part of the meeting to give maximum time to our distinguished and expert speaker. Details are given below, and I do encourage you to come along. It will also be a chance to meet informally over some refreshment and discuss any of the many issues affecting Beaconsfield. See you there!

Photo Gallery Summer 2015



Beaconsfield Now! on the Council Green (top and left)
l-r: Mayor John Reed, Richard Jones, Mike Elliott,
Colin Maitland, Town Crier Dick Smith

One of the new community noticeboards erected by the
Society with Laurence Smaje and Colin Mitchell (right)

Sarah Paterson (r) with Kari Dome (lower right)



Report of the talk on 21st April “The Secret History of Wilton Park in WW2”. A talk by Sarah Paterson Senior Librarian at the Imperial War Museum. Presented by The Beaconsfield Society.

Sarah gave a fascinating talk to a sell-out audience in Beaconsfield. Much detailed information was revealed about what had been a top-secret intelligence centre in WW2. Kari Dorme who organized the event and introduced the speaker said, “It was a wonderful and informative evening learning about the clandestine work of the secret listeners at Wilton Park. Sarah told us that the lovely grounds relaxed the Nazi PoWs, but that not only their cells but even the trees were bugged! What impressed me most was the eagerness with which so many of the audience shared their own knowledge and asked questions over a wide range of issues. At the end the place was really buzzing with the interest of it.”

Mike Elliott the Chairman of the Beaconsfield Society said, “Clearly Wilton Park is of great interest to local residents. Those lucky enough to get the hottest tickets in Beaconsfield were rewarded with an excellent talk plus enthusiastic and informative contributions from the floor. I hope we can devise a fitting way to recognize the importance of the site to the town.”

WW2 changed Wilton Park’s history forever. Leased to the War Office in 1939, it became a top-secret interrogation centre for Nazi prisoners of war and the most important POW site in the country. The activities that took place there were hidden at the time and are still little known today.

Secret interrogation and re-education. Wilton Park was the biggest POW site in the country.

During the war, enemy prisoners of war were interrogated at Wilton Park before being sent on to their permanent camps. By bugging their cells, the British obtained valuable information from their monitored conversations. They also gathered intelligence from British POWs in Axis hands and sent help to enable them to escape. Sarah described how specially made boots with hidden compartments for survival kits were issued to resistance workers at Wilton Park. Also to help them escape in Europe they were given secret maps printed onto silk or rayon, this was really pre-James Bond stuff!

After the war, the site was used as a re-education centre for German POWs. The Foreign Office ran ‘de-nazification’ programmes to encourage independent thought and promote a democratic way of life, with the aim of re-establishing democracy in Germany.

In 1951, the Beaconsfield site was occupied by the Royal Army Educational Corps which later became the Defence School of Languages and the courses for democracy were moved to Wiston House, near Steyning in Sussex, where they retain the Wilton Park name.

Preserving the Wilton Park story

The house itself was demolished in 1968 and the Army left in 2014. The 100-acre site was sold by the Ministry of Defence to developers Inland Homes, who have submitted plans to build 350 new houses there.

The Beaconsfield Society believes it is important to raise awareness of Wilton Park’s secret history and find ways of commemorating it, before this part of our town’s heritage is lost to view. The Society received a boost days after the talk when Inland Homes announced that they had saved the beautiful mosaic which had been in the officer’s mess at Wilton Park. The Society hopes that one day this will be available to be displayed to the public.

A further talk to continue the story

Sarah Paterson’s talk had been a sell-out. The Society has arranged to include a further talk with a contrasting angle by a different speaker and including the role of nearby Latimer House. It will follow our short AGM on 5th November. Do come to this combined event, but please be sure to indicate your intention to attend (see page 1) as demand is again expected to be high. We will endeavour to contact those who were on the waiting list for Sarah Paterson’s talk and so who may be keen to attend the talk at the AGM.

Food for Thought: Residential Areas of Exceptional Character and Planning Policy

Alison Wheelhouse (member)

including Areas of Special Character and Woodland Roads

The local planning policy which guides SBDC in determining planning applications is broadly established by the Development Plan for South Bucks District. The overall Development Plan includes the Local Plan and the Core Strategy. The Proposals Map (also called the Policies Map) shows where the policies apply. These and other supplemental documents (for example, the Townscape Study) which also inform planning decisions can be viewed in the planning policy section of the SBDC web-site (www.southbucks.gov.uk).

The Local Plan sets out in detail the Planning Authority's policies for controlling development in the area and this plays an important part in the planning system and guides planning outcomes. The natural beauty and special character of Beaconsfield is recognised and protected by various aspects of planning policy, one such aspect being the designation of Residential Areas of Special Character within the Local Plan. These areas are shown on the Proposals Map and also within the Townscape Study on the SBDC web-site which describes areas of special character in more detail (see below).

Local Plan policy requires that any new development must relate well to surrounding property and also the overall character of the area. Within the Residential Areas of Exceptional Character (the RAEC), development proposals will not be allowed if they would adversely affect the exceptional character of the surroundings. In assessing impact on the surrounds, many factors are taken into account, including density, plot size, width of frontage, spacing, layout, siting, trees and greenery, walls and fences, verges, design, safety issues and traffic - all with the intent of protecting character and not allowing it to be eroded,

Two RAEC have been designated in Beaconsfield and these are the Penn Road area and the Burkes Road/Gregories Road area. The Townscape Study adds the Seeley's estate and Ledborough Lane areas to these Areas of Special Character. These areas are characterised by low density of development, generous plot sizes, wide frontages, individually detached buildings, mature trees and hedges and a semi-rural street scene. The purpose of the RAEC designation is to exclude intensive development. In particular, policy H10 of the Local Plan provides that, within the RAEC, proposals which would have an adverse effect on their exceptional character will not be permitted. Further, the design should be of a high standard and compatible with the character and size of the existing development in the vicinity. The stated aims are to prevent the gradual and progressive change in character and to avoid the cumulative effects of redevelopment, infilling and conversion. Policy H10 seeks to protect these residential areas by providing a robust framework for the consideration of applications and specifically mentions, for example, that the conversion of single dwellings into flats would not be acceptable.

The Townscape Study also identifies other character typologies, such as Woodland Roads, many of which exist in Beaconsfield and including those within the Penn Road/Ledborough Lane and Burkes Road/Gregories Road Areas of Special Character. The Study identifies threats to these roads such as new development which does not relate well to the existing topography and makes recommendations for protection of the character of these Woodlands Roads. Amongst other recommendations, The Townscape Study recommends that building heights are limited to two storeys (including accommodation in the roof); that retaining walls and hard landscaping be avoided; and that the woodland character of these roads be preserved.

Previous Food for Thought articles by The Beaconsfield Society:

October 2014 Public Consultations

April 2015 Threats to our Green Belt

April 2015 Public Planning Comments

This annual event, generously sponsored this year by Winkworth Estate Agents, aims to inspire and inform local residents about the not for profit organisations and societies in Beaconsfield. On the 13th June, the Town Council Green was busy with over 35 stalls.

Our guest of honour, Richard Jones, helped by Dick Smith, the Town Crier, opened our event and chatted with exhibitors. Our new Mayor John Reed and The Right Honourable Dominic Grieve QC MP also attended. Colin Maitland was our competent compere this year and interviewed stall holders thus gaining information to share with visitors about all that is on offer in and around Beaconsfield.

A varied selection of music performed by The Beaconsfield School, Davenies and the Beaconsfield High School choirs was very entertaining and enjoyable. The sound system set up and managed by GoDJ was a big success. Generally there was a real buzz and many more visitors attended despite the wet weather. The community atmosphere was great and feedback from visitors and stallholders was good.

Preparation has already begun for next year. Questionnaire responses about this year's event have been gratefully received and have been really helpful in planning for next year's Beaconsfield Now. Resulting changes hope to make our event even better. Therefore please make a note to join us for Beaconsfield Now on June 18th 2016 on the Town Council Green.

Heritage Visit to Dorneywood House (22nd July 2015) *John Burton*

Standing to the south of Burnham Beeches, Dorneywood House was the subject of our Heritage Visit this year when 30 of our members and their guests were able to visit to the house and gardens. This was a rare opportunity because of its official use by senior government ministers and so not often open to the public

The Dorneywood estate was purchased by Sir Courtauld Thomson as he then was, in 1919 from Charles Palmer whose family had owned the Dorney estate for more than three centuries. Over the years, Courtauld Thomson and his sister Winifred, who lived there too, began to build on and decorate the house, and to fill it with the imposing works of art that remain in the house to this day.

In 1942 he decided to donate the estate to the nation in the care of the National Trust, and in particular to the incumbent Prime Minister, to provide a residence for a Secretary of State or senior Minister appointed by him. The deeds were handed to the then Prime Minister Winston Churchill, in the Cabinet room of 10, Downing Street. Over the years the many distinguished residents have included Sir Anthony Eden, The Earl of Home, George Brown, James Callaghan, Viscount Whitelaw, Sir Geoffrey Howe and numerous others.

Dorneywood House is said to have the general character less of a stately home than the Georgian farmhouse which it originally was and is approached by a brief drive. This leads into a forecourt and the North Front of the building which was extended in 1920 by the addition of an east wing; an inner porch was also added at this time. In fact the house does have the feel of a welcoming family home. Walking along the front of the house one finds a small white door labelled "*Toad Hall*" named in honour of a family connection to Kenneth Grahame, author of "*The Wind in the Willows*".

Once inside the house, the visitor is confronted by a wealth of period furniture and works of art including paintings by Rex Whistler and Winston Churchill plus Oswald Birley's portrait of Sir Courtauld which hangs in the hall. Among the fine furniture in the drawing-room is a rare Queen Anne walnut bureau. Beyond the drawing-room, previously known as the music room, is Dorneywood's largest and grandest room which occupies most of the east wing. At one end there is a bow window overlooking the garden. As we walked around it was so nice to find welcoming knowledgeable guides in every room.

There was time to explore the extensive gardens where a large orchard was created to the west of the house. Other features included herbaceous borders and an attractive sunken garden known as *The Dell* planted with ornamental trees including weeping cherry, Mount Etna broom and a tall Italian cypress. Above the Dell is the rose garden with pink, white and apricot-themed beds formed in a circular geometric pattern. Afterwards tea and homemade cakes were enjoyed in the marquee. Dorneywood is a delightful place not so very far from Beaconsfield and the visit much appreciated by all.

Banner positions and Notice Boards for the Community

Laurence Smaje

Last year, The Society invested in new banner fixings on four key lamppost locations, both to promote our own events, such as Beaconsfield Now!, and to enable other not-for-profit organisations to display their own banners without having to bear the fixing and erection costs. We see it as a valuable contribution that we have been able to make in support of community activities where promotional costs can be so high.

Another favourite location for smaller posters and flyers has in the past been the railway fences each side of the Station Road bridge, but this had so often become unsightly and Chiltern Railways began understandably to remove items from time to time, including our own posters advertising our performance 'Behind the Lines', a poetry and prose anthology to mark the 100th Anniversary of WWI in 2014.

The manager of Beaconsfield Station, Rob Munday, explained that, while they wished to be community-friendly, the fences had become an eyesore with many posters out of date or fittings often left behind. We could well appreciate this and enquired whether he would accept properly managed, locked noticeboards located on either side of the railway bridge, if we could find the funds. He readily agreed.

The Society approached The Shanly Foundation, generous past supporters of our community work, and was able to show them that there was a real need for this facility. They agreed to fund the purchase of two community noticeboards. Rob Munday agreed that Chiltern Railways would erect the boards free of charge.

The boards were installed in early April 2015. Since then, we have been able to display some 95 posters and notices from community organisations in Beaconsfield and the local area. Local charities and other not-for-profit organisations have first call on our space, but if individuals or local government wish to post an item aimed at helping the community, we can often accommodate them.

The boards are managed by committee members Colin Mitchell and Graeme Richards, who place the notices and keep the boards up to date. Colin finds that when he is placing new posters or removing old ones, he is frequently approached by passers-by who say how pleased they are to have this community information available.

This facility follows two key Society objectives – to contribute to community cohesion and, as part of our *Pride in Beaconsfield* campaign, to help keep our town attractive and litter-free. **We wish to express our gratitude to The Shanly Foundation and Chiltern Railways for their generous support. Without them, this initiative would not have been possible.**

Booking a space on the boards to advertise events and organisations is straightforward. Log on to our website www.beaconsfieldsociety.org.uk. Under the heading *Community Noticeboards*, you will find a simple form and our Terms and Conditions.

The Society

<http://www.beaconsfieldsociety.org.uk>

The current Committee is as follows:

President: Les Davies

Vice-President: John Page

Chairman: Mike Elliott

Secretary: Laurence Smaje

Treasurer: Graeme Richards

Members: Tony Bristow, John Burton, Kari Dorme, Nanu Hodson, Debbie Marsden, Colin Mitchell

Newsletter Editor: Tony Bristow

The Society's Website www.beaconsfieldsociety.org.uk

facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BeaconsfieldSociety>

Twitter <https://twitter.com/TheBecSoc> or @TheBecSoc

We hope you found the Newsletter interesting and informative. Feel free to pass this on to interested neighbours and friends and do encourage them to come along to our events and become members.

Annual General Meeting and Society Talk

Thursday 5th November 2015 7.00 pm

**The Annual General Meeting for the year 2014/2015
will be held in The Fitzwilliams Centre, Windsor End**

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE AGM

1. Welcome by the President
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the last AGM and matters arising not covered below
4. Chairman's report
5. Treasurer's report
6. Election of Officers and Committee
7. Presentation of the Society's awards
8. Any other business

THE SOCIETY TALK – “BUGGING THE NAZIS”

The Secret History of Wilton Park and Latimer House

The AGM will be followed immediately by a talk by the biographer and historian

Dr Helen Fry

Refreshments will be available after the talk with time to meet the Speaker and the Committee.
All are welcome and members are encouraged to bring guests!

NOTES

The current Committee is shown on the previous page. If you would like to make any other nomination either as Officer or Committee member, or for either of the Society's awards below, please make your recommendation to the Secretary, Laurence Smaje, on 01494 681165, or email him at laurence@smaje.co.uk or (for the awards) by sending him the tear-off strip below, not later than Monday 19th October 2015.

Outstanding Citizen of the Year Award - in recognition of the work of an individual person who over a number of years has made a significant contribution to the life of the Beaconsfield community as a whole.

Outstanding Building of the Year Award - in recognition of what the Society considers to be the outstanding design for a building (of any type) erected or modified in Beaconsfield in the past year.

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- Do you have a nomination for Citizen of the Year? Please give his/her name and contact details

- Do you have a nomination for Outstanding Building? Please give its name and location details

Your name.....Address.....Tel.No.....

Please send to the Secretary, Laurence Smaje, 22 Hampden Hill, Beaconsfield HP9 1BP by 19th October