

# The Cookham Society



January 2019 Newsletter

Photograph by Mick Vogel Photography

Registered Charity No. 257224 | [messages@cookhamsociety.org.uk](mailto:messages@cookhamsociety.org.uk)

## NEWSLETTER UPDATE

**W**elcome to our second special edition of the Cookham Society newsletter, which is being sent out to all the residents of the three Cookhams.

We normally send out four emailed or posted newsletters a year to our paid-up members only, but have decided to publish and distribute two, unique editions for everyone in Cookham to enjoy.

Our New Year publication features a special article on the Fleet, the Strand, and the White Brook waterways, by the Chair of our Planning Committee, Dick Scarff, and there are lots of other, informative pieces about our lovely villages.

We hope it inspires you to join the Society. Our new subscription rate is just £5.00 per household, payable by Standing Order.

## THIS ISSUE:

- Management of Cookham's Waterways
- Managing the Biodiversity of the Waterways

For further details contact the membership secretary, Ossie Wardell-Yerburgh on **01628 528041** or by email to **ossie.daphne@btinternet.com**

## From the Society's Chairman:

**T**here is a widely-held view of the Society that our main purpose is to object to people's planning applications and it is true, that our Planning Sub-committee does scrutinise the monthly list of planning applications submitted to the local authority, about which more elsewhere in this newsletter. But the Society casts its net much wider than this.



We are concerned about the whole environment of our villages and some of the threats to its protection may not be readily discernible. For example, the proposals by Maidenhead Waterways to turn the town's York Stream into a navigable waterway will, on the face of it, give a much needed boost to its overall aesthetic appearance. However, the water for the scheme has to come from somewhere and most of its sources lie close to Cookham.



As Dick Scarff's article on the following pages illustrates, the hydrology of the Fleet Ditch, Strand Water and White Brook is complex and the management of these streams involves several different organisations. The streams are a vital part of what makes Cookham special and give

the village its sense of place. We need to ensure that they and the wildlife they support continue to thrive and future demands on them do not prejudice their vital role in Cookham's unique and beautiful environment. The Society is working on behalf of all the residents in the Cookhams. We are a small team that perhaps you may wish to join. You would be welcome. Alternatively, continue to support us through your membership.

May I wish you all a very Happy New Year.  
Tom Denniford

*Images from top: Town Centre, Maidenhead Waterway by Barry Wearé  
Grazing on Widbrook Common by Barry Wearé*

## The Cookham Society AGM 2019

- **AGM Speaker Announced**



The Cookham Society are delighted to announce that the speaker at our AGM on Thursday 7th March 2019, will be Lord Young of Cookham. Lord Young famously served in cabinet on three occasions and now sits in the House of Lords.

## Borough Local Plan Dilemma

There were many complaints about the 'soundness' of the forthcoming local plan during the first stage of its Examination in Public and the Planning Department has now admitted that a lot more work will have to be done on the allocations of housing land the plan is proposing. "We expect to be in a position to consult on the additional work in late May 2019," the Royal Borough's Head of Planning has written. Where, then, will the plan go next? Should the Borough press ahead with a plan which may be deficient in its entirety or withdraw it, carry out a thorough review, and replace it? In the meantime, the lack of an up-to-date strategy is an open invitation to development proposals which the Borough will find it difficult to resist.



We are featuring this piece by WildCookham which an independent organisation of local people passionate about sharing their knowledge through looking after wildlife and nature in the parish of Cookham

## Local waterways get WildCookham support

As a riverside community, water is important to Cookham in many ways and WildCookham is keen to see our local water courses and ponds providing safe and sustainable homes for a wide range of flora and fauna.

These include the nationally rare Brown Galingale plant, and several other notable species, on Cockmarsh, the beautiful dragonflies and damselflies that grace our waterways in the summer, a myriad of birds, insects and small mammals, and a great variety of wildflowers and other plants. These waterways are always under pressure and getting the balance between our human interests and the needs of the many thousands of animals and plants who live with us is an inevitable challenge. Knowing what's there is an essential



first step, so we are undertaking surveys of these habitats. A Wild-Cookham team is looking at the ponds across Cookham to determine their quality and to find out what life is in them (starting with toads and frogs). We have also been surveying Cookham's waterways, especially those like the Fleet, Strande Water and Widbrook which will be affected by the Maidenhead Waterways project. These surveys have revealed that they are important for summer visiting Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers, and winter-roosting Reed Buntings. More importantly, they are

home to the rare Variable Damselfly, a delightful damsel found only in a handful of locations in the county.

We're keen to work with the Cookham Society, bringing our own expertise to help protect our waterways and especially to find ways to address conflicts between the needs of local natural habitats and the demands of water/river management plans up and down the Thames.

Above: Brown Galingale  
Left: The rare Variable Damselfly

## Cookham Dean Nature Reserve gets the go ahead

Wild Cookham are delighted that work has started managing the Harris Woodbridge Reserve in Cookham Dean (a small unmanaged area, once part of a garden).

The plan is to manage this initially as a type of wild garden supporting its objective to ensure that all gardens in the Cookhams encourage wildlife.

The Wild About Gardens Awards in 2018 were a great success with 50 gardens participating in the Awards' first year. We aim for a considerable increase in 2019 and hope that Cookham Society members with gardens will get involved.

Details will be announced in the Spring.



Work begins on the Harris Woodbridge Nature Reserve, Cookham Dean

## Management of the Fleet, The Strand and the White Brook

Driving back into Cookham from Boulter's Lock many of us appreciate the views over Widbrook Common.

Often the cattle are grazing amongst the wild flowers or standing in the stream among the reeds. The scene typifies the rural character of Cookham that we cherish so much. The White Brook on Widbrook Common is a gentle stream which under normal conditions flows west from the Thames and joins with the Fleet Ditch / Strand Water coming from the north and together they feed water into the Maidenhead Ditch and onward to the centre of Maidenhead. These streams are vital for preserving the vitality of the wildlife and the character of the low lying flood plain that stretches from the Thames upstream of Cookham across Marsh Meadow and Cookham Moor and southward through Widbrook Common towards Maidenhead.

It is tempting to think of these streams as natural watercourses that should be allowed to do their own thing. "Rewilding" is a word that is sometimes used. Regrettably because of silting up and reed growth this is not a viable alternative. If we want to keep the water flowing and keep the wildlife that flowing water supports, then these streams must be managed.

Due to the very flat topography these watercourses are particularly susceptible to the effects of man-made changes to the hydrology of the area. In addition to the effects of agricultural drainage, there have been three major changes. Firstly, there was the construction of the weirs at Boulter's Lock; later the construction of weirs at Cookham and, most recently, the extensive extraction of water from the underlying chalk in the vicinity for domestic water supply. The construction of the weirs altered the normal river levels above each of the weirs while the ground water extraction from wells at the pumping station in Whyteladyes

Lane and other nearby sites has caused a major reduction to the flow from natural springs along the base of the hills to the west of the area together with increased loss from the streams themselves due to percolation into the ground. An intervention last century was the installation of a piped feed from the main River Thames at the north end of Marsh Meadow into the Fleet Ditch to attempt to compensate for the loss of spring water. The extent of change from the original natural watercourses can be illustrated by reference to early maps. (Copies of both Rocque's map of 1761 and Pride's map of 1790 are available in Maidenhead library). Both maps clearly show a stream rising in the area of Lightlands Lane running northward across the Moor and entering the Thames around the north end of Marsh Meadow. This is the opposite direction of flow to the present stream. They also show a significant channel called Wide Brook on a similar route to the modern White Brook and Thames Ditch.

In developing a suitable management regime for the streams, the interests of a range of parties need to be considered. These include the Environment Agency (who define these streams as "Main Rivers" and have responsibilities regarding flood

protection and wildlife); the National Trust, together with the commoners who have rights on the common land; other landowners; the parish and borough councils; wildlife protection groups; and of course, the Cookham Society. In addition, Maidenhead Waterways have concerns regarding the supply of water to their waterway scheme in the town centre during periods of low flow in the streams.

In order to help some of the parties explain their issues and understand other groups concerns, early in 2016 the Cookham Society initiated a series of periodic informal discussions involving the parish council, wildlife groups, the National Trust, Maidenhead Waterways and ourselves. These have progressed constructively and we are now hopeful that with the support of the Environment Agency further progress can be made towards developing a mutually beneficial management scheme. We are now expecting that an initial workshop of all interested parties will be held under the chairmanship of Thames 21 (an independent river focused charity) early in 2019. We shall be wanting to ensure that our countryside and wildlife are properly protected and our existing flood resilience is fully maintained and, hopefully, improved.



View of White Brook by Barry Weare

Local information on flooding is available on: [www.cookhamfloodwarnings.blogspot.com](http://www.cookhamfloodwarnings.blogspot.com)



Tamise ploughs by Barry Weare

## New crops, old solutions

In the age of the internet, it's easy to assume that the latest technology is the go-to place to solve new problems.

Not always. One of our members has a sharply-sloping garden in Cookham and wanted to plant a new vineyard to take advantage

of the incline and warmer summers. GPS-guided plough to prepare the way? No, too big, too awkward, but a horse-drawn plough was just the ticket. With Emma directing, Chris steering and Tamise the horse doing the heavy work, the soil was turned over and the new white grapes can go in next spring.

## COOKHAM SOCIETY DESIGN AWARD

The Society is now inviting nominations for its 2019 Design Award.

Nominations may be submitted for building projects, extensions and landscaping schemes in the Parish of Cookham, which have been completed by 31st December 2018. The Award is given to projects which enhance the visual environment and are in keeping with the Cookham Village Design Statement.

If you would like to make a nomination for the Award please ask Pablo Dubois (pablo@dubois.me.uk) for a Nomination Form, which should be completed and returned to him by 15th January 2019, either by email or to Regency Cottage, The Pound, Cookham SL6 9QD.



### MEMBERSHIP AND PAYMENTS UPDATE

If you are already a member you will be aware we are trying to simplify our administrative procedures and plan to move towards a system of membership payments by Standing Order only. This means members don't have to fill in a form every year and we don't have to waste time chasing members for the money. If you get a reminder from us, please consider switching to SO. Our bank details are as follows:

**Bank:** NatWest

**Bank Account:** The Cookham Society

**Account Number:** 64226026

**Sort code:** 60 13 35

For membership enquiries contact the membership secretary, Ossie Wardell-Yerburgh on 01628 528041 or by email on: [ossie.daphne@btinternet.com](mailto:ossie.daphne@btinternet.com)

### COOKHAM SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Are you someone with energy and an interest in the Cookhams? We are always on the lookout for good committee members. If you feel you could offer something to our current committee why not join us?

The main committee meets once every two months and there are other sub-committees that get together more frequently to look at planning or environment issues. For further information, contact Lysette Penston, on 01628 473862.

#### THE COMMITTEE - Cookham Society: Committee Members

- President..... John Bowley
- Vice-president..... Vacant
- Chairman..... Tom Denniford
- Vice-chair..... Lysette Penston
- Treasurer..... Mark Chapman
- Secretary..... Lysette Penston
- Membership Secretary... Ossie Wardell-Yerburgh



**Committee members:**...Fiona Butler, John Kitching, Bill Perry, Liz Peters, Dick Scarff, Mike Springate, Barry Weare

**Join the Debate** - Have your say on our facebook page or listen to other peoples points of view. Join us on facebook -

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For facebook enquires email [Barry.weare@btinternet.com](mailto:Barry.weare@btinternet.com)