**Chairman's Miscellany - TrustNews Dec 2005**

The Inspectors' report on the Local Plan Review has some welcome recommendations in respect of the need for recognition of local character in determining planning applications. However, the proposals for reserve sites to be included give us cause for concern as the Winchester sites are to be used to accommodate any shortfall in housing provision anywhere in the district - i.e.West of Waterlooville. The largest site proposed is at Pitt Manor Farm which forms a very sensitive part of Winchester's setting. This site could be used to accommodate housing for another 1,000 people in addition to the plan requirement for Winchester. The Trust believes that there are good reasons for the City Council to amend this modification before the matter goes forward for public comment in January.

The need for improving design in the streets of our city has a high profile in this edition of TrustNews for good reason. Members who attended the AGM in September were introduced to radical ideas which have proved successful elsewhere and are reproduced here to reach a wider audience. English Historic Towns Forum also adopted this theme for their recent conference and it is important to persuade our local authorities to give serious consideration to solutions that could transform Winchester's street scene for the benefit of all.

Ever since the successful restoration of the balustrades on the terrace of houses in Eastgate Street, the Trust has been anxious to see the restoration of the railings which were donated to the 'war effort' about 60 years ago. Thanks to Huw Thomas, who has produced the design work, Nick Bourne and Michael Carden who have organized the work programme and the County and City Councils who have assembled grants contributions, work is due to start on site this month and the Trust is managing the project as well as making a financial contribution.

Dialogue with Thornfields and he architects for the Silver Hill development continue and the timetable of events to progress the plans is listed elsewhere. Council members have also met representatives of London & Henley to see their proposals for the part of the site in their ownership.

Most recently the Trust has submitted to a Select Committee considering Heritage matters, a paper written by Michael Carden MBE putting the case for a Heritage town status to be adopted to protect such towns from the excesses of high density development. If any member would like to support this or has views for the Select Committee to consider,the contact address is: Mr. Kenneth Fox, Clerk to the Select Committee for Culture Media and Sport - cmscom@parliament.uk

In accordance with the request made at the AGM, a meeting has been arranged for Friday 1st February at 7.0 pm in the United Church Hall, Jewry Street to discuss matters of interest to members. It would be helpful if topics for discussion could be notified to the Trust Office beforehand so that we can use the time efficiently. We should also like to have your ideas for celebrating our 50th anniversary for which we have only a year to prepare.

Meanwhile - all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all members of the Trust.

**Website up and running again - TrustNews Dec 05**

www.cityofwinchestertrust.co.uk

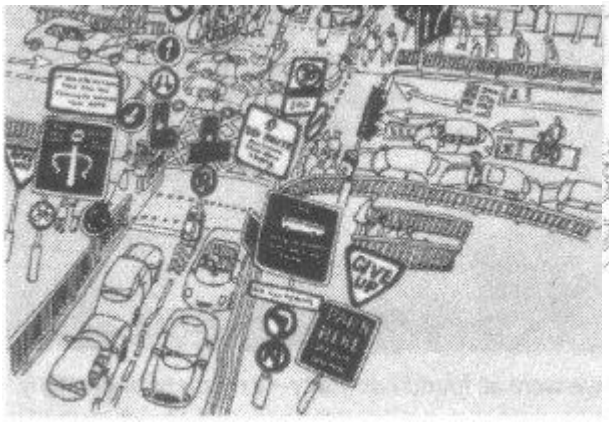
We are delighted to say that Barrie Brinkman has agreed to take on the task of designing and organizing our website. It will take a few weeks to build the site up again, but will eventually include information about the Trust, its activities.and ambitions. There will be news of hot issues such as the Friarsgate/Silver Hill proposals and the future of Bushfield Down.

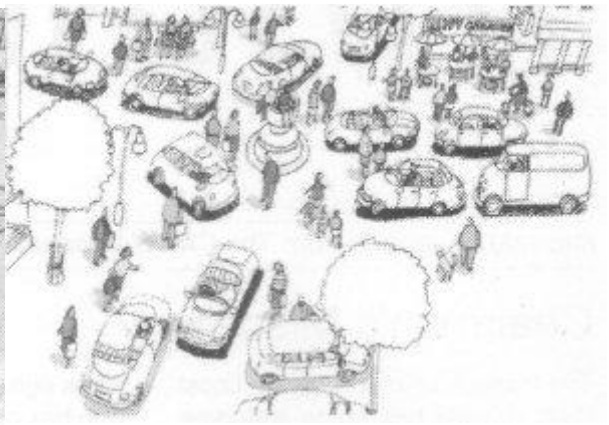
Finally, and most importantly, there will be information on Planning applications within the City area and the relevant comments made by the Trust's appraisal panels that scrutinize plans weekly.

Antony Skinner

**Streets ahead - TrustNews Dec 05**

*This article is reproduced by kind permission of the CPRE from the autumn edition of their publication "Countryside Voice"*





These two cartoons contrast the conventional and shared space approaches to handling traffic in the public realm (by the author).

*The response of the majority of highway authorities to problems of traffic and speeds is to add more signs, signals, barriers and road paint. But there is another way says architect, urban planner and transportation specialist Ben Hamilton-Baillie.*

It is a rare and exciting moment when a new set of insight and ideas changes the way we think about our surroundings. It is especially rare for a fundamental paradigm shift to be inspired by a traffic engineer. Highway engineering is not a

profession renowned for radical insights or counter-intuitive challenges. But the work of Dutch traffic engineer Hans Monderman represents a very radical change in our thinking about the relationship between people, places and traffic. It is a change that offers new hope for the quality of towns, villages and rural roads.

The last time traffic engineering set a new agenda for our towns and cities was in 1963. The late Colin Buchanan's Traffic in Towns report for the UK Government concluded that civic life was fundamentally incompatible with the movement of motorised traffic, and it should be the task of planners, architects and engineers to segregate vehicles from pedestrian movement and social activities wherever possible. Segregation of the built environment into 'highway' and 'public realm' became the central dogma of traffic design across the UK and in other countries.

Hans Monderman was appointed Head of Road Safety for the northern provinces of The Netherlands in the 1980s, and given a wide brief to tackle rising pedestrian casualties in towns and villages. Having studied accident reports and conventional traffic engineering for many years, he realised that something was fundamentally wrong. As he describes it: 'when faced with a safety problem, most engineers tend to install something additional. My instinct is always to take something away.'

His early experiments in removing signs, signals, barriers, kerbs and road markings proved remarkably successful. Starting with small towns and villages across his native province of Friesland, Monderman inspired scores of public realm designs that allow vehicles and people to mix together safely, turning Buchanan's admonition on its head. By emphasising context and deliberately integrating drivers into the social and cultural world of the town or village, Monderman found that he could radically reduce speeds, improve safety and transform the quality of the built environment without limiting or restricting the flow of traffic.

Such a revolution rarely comes out of the blue. Monderman's 'shared space' principles have their roots in the pioneering work of Joost Valid and his contemporaries who introduced the woo nerf concept to European street design in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In more recent years, we have seen limited experiments in Norfolk villages (the work of Neil Mayhew) and across Wiltshire's settlements involving the removal of signs, road markings and conventional traffic calming to achieve slower speeds and safer roads. Monderman and his colleagues are building on the increasing realisation among behavioural psychologists that driver behaviour can be transformed through a strong emphasis on distinctive context. Signs and highway clutter appear to act as a barrier to reading contextual clues. Without them, drivers have to rely on normal cognitive skills to read their surroundings for clues, and the resulting lower speeds appear to reduce congestion by allowing road junctions to work more efficiently. Sharing Space Monderman's work is merely the leading edge of a seachange taking place throughout Europe in the use of urban design to inform traffic movement. Similar successful schemes can be found in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden. Sceptics assumed that shared space would only work in the bucolic, sleepy village and rural roads of pastoral Friesland or Norfolk. But more recent urban schemes in Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Groningen indicate that a reduction in highway clutter, barriers, traffic signals and road markings might hold the key to tackling serious congestion as well as road safety. In the industrial town of Drachten, a busy

intersection handling over 22,000 cars, buses and trucks a day has been transformed by making a simple roundabout an integral part of the town's public realm.By encouraging human activity close to the junction and relying on eye contact rather than conventional pedestrian signals and signs, traffic queues appeared to have diminished, safety appears to have improved, and a busy piece of highway has become a lively and distinctive part of the urban fabric.

Hans Monderman's insight stems from a recognition from behavioural psychologists that single-purpose motorways and high-speed highways demand different cognitive skills to the complex human context of public space. The former requires standardised, simple, repetitive signs and signals. But if you treat the driver in the public realm as an idiot, you will foster idiotic driving. So a sign that reads 'Caution Beware of Pedestrians' in a town centre is not only patronising to the driver's intelligence; it also makes him less responsive to the normal human responses to places and circumstances.

The UK has begun to respond, albeit slowly, to the potential benefits offered by shared space principles. Shrewsbury High Street is one example where the usual manifestations of highway design have been removed to allow traffic to flow freely through a busy shopping area. There are ambitious schemes in preparation for Exhibition Road in Kensington, London - fronting the great Victoria and Albert and Natural History museums - and the New Islington regeneration area in inner Manchester based on shared space principles. But the majority of highway authorities still prefer to add rather than to take away.

CPRE has been campaigning relentlessly to reduce clutter and preserve the distinctiveness of towns, villages and rural roads. English Heritage's Save our Streets campaign tapped into growing public disgust at the damage done to historic environments through clumsy standardised highway engineering. Hans Monderman's inspiring examples suggest that this is not merely an argument about aesthetics. Ensuring that traffic signs, signals, road markings, kerbs, bollards and barriers are removed from towns, villages and rural lanes and confined to the high-speed highway network has more pragmatic benefits. It may provide the solution to the Government's key transport objectives of tackling congestion, maintaining access and improving safety.

Hans Monderman's traffic engineering emphasises the spatial qualities of place over the linear characteristics of the highway. This change challenges most of the regulatory framework and conventions within which UK highway authorities work. The Department for Transport promises a new Manual for Streets to respond to new findings on shared space. But new regulations are not likely to spearhead a change which is in essence about the removal of regulation. By treating the driver as an intelligent being, and as an integral part of the social and cultural fabric, shared space transfers the responsibilities and control of movement and traffic from the state to the community and the individual.

Such changes are rarely led by the state, but emerge from the growing confidence of communities to reject the standardised traffic engineer's handbook in favour of designs built on the distinctive history and circumstances of each town, village and landscape. The success of Monderman's schemes that apply such principles

suggests that a revolutionary opportunity is available for those passionate about the quality of the urban and rural landscape.



Left: A sketch of Hans Monderman, courtesy of David Engwicht (from his forthcoming book Memo/Speed Bumps).

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**Planning Appraisal Group - TrustNews Dec 2005**

Would that space in TrustNews (and possibly also its readers' patience) allowed a full account to be given of all the interesting - and sometimes alarming - applications seen recently by the Trust's panels. Sadly, this is impossible and only a selection can be reported.

Interesting new applications include the residential development at **16 & 16A City Road**, which was discussed in the last TrustNews, a retirement residential development at **Milesdown, North brook Avenue**, and a day centre for Trinity Winchester on the site of **Durngate House, Durngate**. The Trust had reservations about the long and massive block of flats it is proposed should face onto Baring Road at **Milesdown**, and about the block facing the road at **Durngate**, but found the **City Road** development generally acceptable.

Refusals of previously mentioned schemes include the second proposal to replace **St Cross Lodge, St Cross Road**, with a block of 13 flats, primarily because of the effect the bulk, size, scale and design of the proposed building would have on its surroundings.

Permissions have been given for the new university centre for **University College Winchester, Sparkford Road**, the residential development at **23 City Road**, and the proposal to alter and extend **98-102 Sussex Street** to form 14 flats. A second scheme for this **Sussex Street** site, to replace the structurally sound Edwardian terrace with a structure of dubious contemporary architecture, has been refused and it has just been learnt that the applicant has gone to appeal, by Written Representation, against this decision. The Trust will be writing in support of the refusal.

At present appeals seem to be the flavour of the month. These include an Informal Hearing against the refusal of two applications to alter the existing house and build new dwellings at **15 Chilbolton Avenue**, and the Public Inquiries requested for two major schemes: the proposed Aldi store on the site of **Chimneys & 1 Burnett**

**Close**, and the proposal to demolish **Nos 2-4 Chilbolton Avenue & West Hayes Lodge, Sarum Road**. The Trust supports the City's refusals of both these applications, being strongly opposed to siting a store of this type in this position, and finding it difficult to comprehend how Orchard Homes can claim (as is done in their grounds of appeal) that their scheme, with its 6-storey "elliptical landmark building" on the corner of Romsey Road and Chilbolton Avenue "would not introduce building which would be out of character and scale with the area" - or, indeed, anywhere else in suburban Winchester.

As no doubt members will have read in the local press, the proposal to re-clad the tower at the **Police HQ, Romsey Road**, has been dismissed on appeal. This has given rise to an amended scheme for the outline application made last March for residential development on the site. As was reported in detail in the June TrustNews we didn't like the residential development, finding the proposed density, height and formal layout very out of character with the neighbourhood, and wondering how the extra load of 500 residents or so could be borne by the existing local infrastructure. The amended scheme is little different, and the token reduction of six units from the original 300 results in a layout as rigid as that previously proposed. The scale and mass of the structures needed to accommodate the residents of the 294 units now put forward would still have more in common with the nearby institutional buildings, the prison and the hospital, than with the houses in West End Terrace and West End Close, and the Trust had no reason to alter its previous strong objection to the residential scheme proposed for this site.

The decision reached by the Inspector of a recent Informal Hearing is worrying because of the precedent it could set for future appeals. This was on the appeal by Banner Homes against the refusal to build a block of flats in place of **46-48 Chilbolton Avenue**, which has been allowed. We felt that the ponderous block, with its somewhat inelegant mix of architectural styles, sea of parked cars and high density, would be detrimental to the character of the road, and could also overlook neighbouring properties. While saying he would bear in mind the findings and recommendations of the draft Chilbolton Avenue Local Area Design Statement (LADS) of March 2005, the Inspector's conclusions in fact seemed to pay them little heed. He found a density of some 42 dwellings per hectare (dph) acceptable, in a part of the road where a density of about 30dph was felt desirable according to the Chilbolton Avenue LADS. He also felt that the 28 cars parked in front of the building could be screened by means of a wall along the frontage, designed in "the Arts & Craft Movement style of the building, including brick panels with piers backed by a hedge that would be located between the new wall and the most adjacent car parking spaces. Such a feature would provide interest in the street scene." - and it would be very unlike the present boundaries along Chilbolton Avenue and therefore uncharacteristic of the neighbourhood. Another worrying aspect is that the Inspector appeared to rely very greatly on the screening abilities of trees (some deciduous) and hedges to prevent the block being seen or overlooking neighbouring properties. As has been said before, trees are subject to disease, natural disaster and human activities, and we feel they should not be considered as a permanent or reliable method of screening intrusive structures. This seems a bad decision, made by an inspector with no design qualifications, which could bode ill for future suburban developments in Winchester.

Shione Carden

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**After Ludlow - TrustNews Dec 05**

After a false start earlier in the summer, on 13th October at the councillors' Town Forum (as opposed to the public sessions) the Trust's best advocate for the Cittaslow concept, the mayor of Ludlow, was, at last, able to make his case to Winchester's elected members.

It would have been hard to put a more unanswerable case. Graeme Kidd spoke for only 15 minutes, but was able to convey a huge amount about the value of what he called 'the mindset' that Cittaslow membership gives.

Emerging initially from the Local Agenda 21 group, the idea of Cittaslow was embraced by the WI and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust among other groups. Application for Cittaslow status has to come from the local authority, to which Ludlow Town Council happily agreed. As in Winchester, many of the elements of Cittaslow - environmental awareness, community involvement - were already in place in Ludlow, but the addition of 'the mindset' gave added impetus. As a result there is now a flourishing composting scheme and a programme whereby children are taught about real food, both in and out of school. The local perry (pear cider) has joined the Slow Food Ark, giving it protected status as a regional product, like Parma ham or champagne.

It's not immediately obvious what Winchester's contribution to the Ark might be - suggestions welcome - but there are still many areas where Winchester might follow Ludlow's leading 'mindset'. The protection of the town centre against the corporate designs of so many shop fronts, the links forged between disparate community groups, as well as the selling point of the designation itself, are all huge benefits.

After Graeme Kidd's presentation, councillors asked many questions and debated the suggestion before deciding that what they really needed was a fact-finding visit - a sensible decision for a place so full of Michelin stars. (It was made very clear that members would pay for the trip themselves). They head for the Marches on January 5th - we hope they will be as impressed as we were.

Judith Martin

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**Transportation & the Historic Public Realm - TrustNews Dec 05**

This was the theme of the English Historic Towns Forum Conference held in Oxford in October. It was of particular interest having heard Ben Hamilton Baillie's presentation following our AGM a few weeks earlier and it is worth noting the following points which were pertinent to Winchester's problems:
1. The view of Phil Godwin, Professor of Transport Policy at the University of the West of England, that it is impossible in historic towns to match supply to demand

and therefore demand must be controlled by access charges. He gave Durham City as an example. Members who have visited Durham, before and after, will have noticed the new freedom for pedestrians in the Market Place and on the route up to the Cathedral. It is now all 'shared space'.
2. Several speakers talked of how such shared space causes drivers to respond to circumstances instead of relying on their 'rights' indicated by road signs. When driving through the restricted part of Winchester's High Street, one feels a little guilty about intruding and therefore drives slowly.
3. There is a general movement to improve streets by the removal and simplification of signs. The Department of Transport has been resistant to English Heritage pressure but is yielding. The professionals present were keen on improving the visual aspects of streets but they have to push gently. One speaker saw the need for political will and courage - as demonstrated by the Leader of Kensington & Chelsea Council - to challenge the traffic engineers who tend to regard the D.o.T. guidance as mandatory. He also expressed the view that the quality of design demanded by Local Authorities was set too low - a weakness which is all too evident in Winchester.

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**Bushfield Down - TrustNews Dec 2005**

As you will know the area of the former Army camp on the downland on the west side of the Itchen Valley opposite St. Cross has for some time been a target for development. The east side of the Itchen valley, which falls within the boundary of the proposed South Downs National Park, will be afforded protection from development. However, as matters now stand, the western side has no such protection, in spite of the area forming a vital part of the peerless setting of our City.

Prompted by the known desire of Winchester City Council to develop some form of sports facility in the area, the Trust has decided to investigate what need the City has and whether it can be accommodated elsewhere.

The results of this consultation will be known at the end of November and will influence subsequent action. The Trust's Council is planning a spring tour of Bushfield Down, possibly led by a national figure, to show the membership and the citizens of Winchester, what a wonderful treasure we have in this area of downland, and what development on it would mean in terms of the City's setting. The Trust is also considering a comprehensive leafleting campaign in which we will need the help of our membership. When the need arises we will be seeking volunteers to put the leaflets through letter boxes. Sadly the facilities provided by The Post Office are unaffordable.

We will let you know how this project develops.

Robin Merton

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**Summer Walks 05 - TrustNews Dec 05**

We had 13 Walks this Summer - unlucky for some maybe, but not so for the Trust as we enjoyed another successful year. Whether this was due to the variety of Walks' subject matter or whether to a particularly kind meteorological regime, I cannot say. Perhaps it was due to the brilliant advertising and pre-season publicity afforded us by those Hampshire Chronicle articles on Winchester's hostelries by Phil Yates. We certainly enjoyed plenty of press coverage and not one but TWO walks by our own theatrical impresario.

Our **first walk** on 2nd June, conducted by Hampshire County's Assistant Director of Environment, Merrick Denton-Thompson was a repeat of a walk entitled "Winchester in its landscape setting" which we had enjoyed two years ago. But here the "repeat" characteristic changes, because anyone who has attended a presentation by Merrick will know that so much intricate and contemporary detail is woven into the plot that the whole event takes on a new and refreshing life of its own.

We assembled in the delightful Abbey Gardens for the **2nd Walk** on 9th June, where Phil Yates shared with us his knowledge of the nature and quality of the brewing industry in Winchester. We learnt about the many brewing establishments, how public houses had grown up and formed part of the social framework of the city and of how these differed from brewery "taps". Many of the colourfully named pubs have of course disappeared and breweries too. Following Phil, who once worked as a solicitor's clerk for Marstons, whenever a Marston's pub was pointed out, the assembled walkers had to exclaim "but now its a Greene King pub". All good Music Hall stuff!

The Trust's evening walkers were brought back to sobriety for the **3rd Walk** when we made the by now regular visitations to the Hospital and Chapel of St Cross, guided by the Trust's Vice-Chairman Michael Carden MBE. Once again we enjoyed good weather on 16th June and an excellent discourse by Michael as he guided us first around the perimeter of the ancient establishment and then into the glorious and unique Transitional Romanesque chapel. Having been architect to the fabric for so many years, Michael was able to point out many of the detailed idiosyncrasies of the magnificent building. We concluded the evening with a tour of the Brothers' Hall and the amazing Mediaeval Kitchen.

The **4th Walk** on 23rd June **Architecture Week** was celebrated and brought to a fitting conclusion by Keith Leaman, Architect and longstanding Trust Council member. In a most interesting presentation Keith gave us a short history and synopsis of Modern Architecture and illustrated various aspects of this by selecting "typical " examples from buildings which had received Civic or Preservation Trust Awards.

*"Winchester's Churches, Past and Present"* was the subject of **Walk 5**, led by Architect and Planner, Richard Baker. Richard stressed how many churches have been lost and drew our attention to many of their sites. Reference was also made to the social cohesion of the church and parish and to the sad demise of this from contemporary life. Once again the subject was well-researched and presented. I was again made aware of the complete change of scale and perception of communities in the present century.

**Walk 6** took us to the "Green Man" - not on one of Phil's pub crawls, but to rendezvous with Andrew Rutter. After first being given a history and mythology of the Green Man image we proceeded along St Thomas Street and heard anecdotes of past planning problems from his days as conservation architect. We looked in on several houses and proceeding northwards were about to start debating the controversial building on the site of Minstrels Restaurant when a summer shower intervened and brought the evening to a somewhat anti-climactic conclusion.

For **Walk 7**, Barbara Hall, City Guide and Chairman of the Friends of Hyde Abbey Garden took us on a well-prepared itinerary around the area of the mediaeval city's North Gate, past the Hermit's Tower,over City Road, a 19th century thoroughfare, and into Swan Lane,the original mediaeval route. Here we talked about "twitchens" , early road classification and the whole hierarchy of these communication networks. It is difficult for inhabitants of the 21st century to come to terms with the intricate and minute scale of the mediaeval city. Swan Lane was once a major access point leading towards the North Gate and busy with carts, horses and pedestrian traffic.

Robin Freeman, Architectural Historian and Local Studies Librarian,introduced us on **Walk 8** to his particular interest in the architectural history of buildings of the High Street. This turned out to be complementary to the detailed research on hostelries already undertaken by Phil Yates. Robin was able to examine the architectural significance of certain well-known landmark buildings particularly those by Owen Browne-Carter and Thomas Stopher. Of course, some of these buildings were also public houses and so we had come full circle.

One of our regular walkers, Chris Pile, led us on **Walk 9** on a most carefully planned new area of subject matter, that of the humble post box. He took us on a major hike around the city, visiting these familiar items of street furniture. As we started outside the General Post Office in Middle Brook Street, Chris gave us a detailed introductory history of the postal service and of the post box in particular. We were enlightened about many of the idiosyncracies of the Royal Mail and then we walked.....covering most of the area of central Winchester and even including a unique wooden Victorian post box inside the Hampshire County Council HQ in the Castle. Chris was a mine of information and gave out his expertise in a wonderfully modest manner, even compiling a quiz,which I still haven't cracked!

**Walk 10**, on 4th August we were treated to another fascinating tour of The Grange, Northington, again as guests of David Brock, Team Leader of the South East region of English Heritage. Once again we were fortunate with the weather and were able to see much more of the interior than last year because the light held out longer. Even so we had to take parts of the hazardous interior journey in shortened stages, but that made the whole experience rather more exciting. David Brock had produced some interesting handouts describing the complicated building process which has resulted in the present building group. We are hoping that next year we will be able to extend the visit to include the attractive new opera building.

For our **11th Walk** was led by John Wells, Works Bursar of Winchester College. Last year John had introduced us to the new Music School which has since been given a Trust Award. This year John was asked to take us around the college and consider the major and ongoing problem of restoring ancient stonework. We started by

viewing the renovated statuary in College Arch and proceeded to consider the newly restored exterior of Chapel. John described the difficult and skilled cleaning processes with the various washes of limewash protection integral to the programme. It was apparent to all that the limestone buildings of College, whilst forming a major asset and defining characteristic of its atmosphere, were also a major financial liability.

**Walk 12**, the penultimate Walk was my own, entitled "The Village in the City", an architectural walk around Hyde. As Walk Leader responsible for this one, I can only say that it works well. The core of the Walk is based on architectural illustration work undertaken during my two year part-time MA at Kingston University in 1993.

The Walk season was brought to a fitting close by Phil Yates, who led a group of "regulars" on the second of his guided tours of Hostelries. Starting at the Westgate Hotel we proceeded along Upper High Street, passing the end of Newburgh Street and collected at the corner, overlooking the new County Records Office. Phil explained how much this particular part of town had changed and how many pubs had been part and parcel of the Victorian grid of terraces. One such building, although hardly a common hostelry, was the Carfax Hotel. Phil produced a photograph of Station Approach in the 1930's showing the remarkable variety of buildings and change of scale. Our final stop was at the famous Hyde Tavern, a traditional venue for Trust conclusions and farewells. Here we drank at what had been a Marston's pub "but now its a Greene King pub".And all agreed that it had been a very good year.

Nick McPherson

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**To the Pullers-Down - TrustNews Dec 2005**

*This poem, author unknown, was found recently at the Chesil Rectory, Winchester's well-known restaurant, by its owner Carl Reeve. Written exactly 100 years ago it has an obvious resonance today.*

THE OLD CHEESEHILL RECTORY

[To the Pullers-down - To the Mayor and Corporation, and to everyone concerned]

Such house is sanctified by time,
This renders it unique,
About it antiquarians
With reference all speak.
If such a quaint old house as this
Were levelled to the ground
It would in my opinion, be
Stupidity profound.

For what attracts to Winchester
The folks who come your way?
What makes them lavish money there,
And in your hotels stay?
What makes the Yankees trot around
And spend with you their gold?
Because they're sick of what's brand new,
And want to see what's old.
What makes a hardened globe trotter
Your ancient High-street climb?
To see old houses such as these,
That sanctified by time,
As firmly stood on mother earth
As when their bricks were laid
As when their footings were dug out
By men with pick and spade
Five hundred years or more ago,
And yet in your old town
An ancient edifice like this
You talk of pulling down.
22nd April 1905

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**The Chesil Rectory - TrustNews Dec 05**



History

The Chesil Rectory is the oldest house in Winchester. It was previously thought to have dated from 1450 but experts have recently revised this date to the 1420s. It stands in the district of the city known as the Soke, which was formerly under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester. The area that the house is built in is marked on early maps as the village of Chesil. This is corruption of the old English "chisol", meaning a shingly beach or bank. The river was previously much wider than it is now

and this area would have been right on its eastern bank. The house itself is very unusual and its design is possibly, unique. Strangely the entire weight of the central valley of the double roof does not fall onto any supporting walls but, via four vertical beams, rests on the central beam of the downstairs passageway. Originally vents in the roof would have let out the smoke, but the walls and roof space would have been smoke blackened and the air quality very poor. The windows were once made up only of a number of vertical wooden security bars and shutters. In bad weather the occupants would have had to choose between being very cold and being in the dark! Although it was probably originally owned by a merchant the house was adopted as the rectory to St Peter's Chesil at the time of the Reformation. In the late 1700s the house was divided into a number of separate tenements, with a family living in each room. Amongst these inhabitants was a shoemaker who started one of Britain's first Sunday Schools in the large upstairs room. The state of the house gradually deteriorated during this period until it was deemed unfit for human habitation in the late 1800s and was very nearly demolished. Fortunately it was bought by Thomas & Co Stores in 1892, at which point it was thoroughly restored. It is most unusual to see such an old building still occupied and "working" -most from this period have either been changed beyond all recognition or are preserved in open air museums. The building does have a ghost, a man who apparently can be heard climbing the stairs at night.Nobody working here has encountered him - yet .....