



**Abingdon Area
Archaeological and Historical
Society**

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - Autumn 2007

2007 AGM: Thursday 20th September, Northcourt Centre – details on page 2.



The Batavi Re-enactment Society (Guests at last December's meeting) in action at the Marcham:Frilford dig in July.

AAAHS again manned a stall as crowds battled through the floods at the 6th year of the Marcham:Frilford dig. Excavations take place for 4 weeks each July and this year an impressive glossy pamphlet guided visitors around the site.

(More details from the Oxford University School of Archaeology website:
www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research_projects/marcham)

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Meetings

Details of the next 4 meetings are given at the end of the newsletter with your handy cut-out-and-send-in Membership Form. All are at the Northcourt Centre starting at 7.45pm. Members free. Visitors are welcome (£2.00 entry).

This year's AGM is on Thursday 20 September. We have several committee members who've finished their term and so this is your chance to have a go. Great fun, worthwhile and occasional biscuits – you can do it. Just let Rachel (or any committee member) know on the night or by email beforehand. Give it a go – make a difference in your society.

The AGM on 20th September will be followed by Dr Manfred Brod speaking about Reading in the Civil War (Reading being the town rather than literacy).

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the Summer 2007 newsletter. What a contrast this year is to last summer, when the talk was about parchmarks in drought-stricken fields. I hope none of you have been affected by the recent floods and that if you have had this misfortune, it will soon be possible to put things right.

Being an Archaeological and Historical Society we naturally have a slightly different "take" on events than most people. Those of you following the AAAHS discussion board will be aware of the difference between our membership and the general public, who seem barely aware that July, let alone 1947 (for example) existed. It really has flooded this badly in Abingdon before and not just in the winter. The quickest of glances at [Abingdon in Camera](#) shows pictures of children standing in a flooded Ock Street in *June* 1903 and a mention that in *June* 1249 "fell great Raines especially about Abingdon wch carried away many trees, houses, beasts, mills, bridges and one chappell".

On a happier note I can report another action-packed six months since the last newsletter. The lecture programme continues to be well-attended and finished on a splendid note with our "Open Evening" where we broke with tradition for a more informal atmosphere and mid-lecture refreshments, complemented by a fascinating selection of speakers from amongst our own membership.

I was unable to attend the Christmas Social this year, having had to do some parenting instead... however, I understand that everyone had a wonderful time being Roman. There have also been outings to enjoy, including the very successful Christchurch tour and our traditional guided visit to the Marcham Dig. More goodies are in store!

Just to finish, I must make my annual plea for new committee members. Once again a number of people will be standing down in September and new (keen) faces are needed. So – if you've served before and enjoyed the experience,

or want to try something new, please get in touch. We would particularly welcome someone who feels able to take on the role of treasurer.

See you at the AGM in September!

Rachel Everett, Chairman

NB: Postcards of Abingdon's great flood of 1894 can be seen on the AAHS website.

Membership Secretary and Treasurer's Report Summer 2007

We have had a very active year, and membership has continued to increase. The healthy state of our finances has allowed us to look to the future provision of high quality facilities for members. Two items of capital expenditure are reported, one being the purchase of a digital projector for use at members speakers meetings, and the other being a reprint of Abingdon in Camera, which is continuing to generate annual income for the Society. The timing of receipts (credited in last years accounts) and payments (most of which fell in this year's) for the Sept 2006 Ock St Exhibition also contributed to the surplus of expenditure over income for the 12 month accounting period. We hold a prudent reserve, and can expect further income to be generated by these planned expenditures.

Income/Expenditure Analysis y.t.d.	July 2007	
		2006/7 y.t.d
Income – Recurrent	£	
Subs		1202.00
Donations/Visitors/Grants		685.10
Picture book sales		350.00
Events and Outings		185.00
Guided tours		30.00
Bank Interest		129.28
Miscellaneous		14.00
Total Income	£	2,595.38
Expenditure - Recurrent		
Premises		369.60
Speakers		430.00
Insurance		328.80
Administration (includes expenses of Ock St Exhibition Sept 1st 2006)		1004.44
Events and Outings		90.67
Digging		0.00
Library/Subs		163.36
Reprint of Abingdon in Camera		1506.00
Recording and archive		98.63
Publicity		97.17
Misc		188.88
Total recurrent expenditure	£	4277.55

Expenditure - Non-recurrent		
Capital expenditure (digital projector)	£	921.44
Total Expenditure	£	5,198.99

Excess of expenditure over income £2606.61

For the first time we have distributed the Spring newsletter by e-mail to members who have indicated a preference, and will be pleased to extend this service, which cuts costs of printing and postage, on request. My term of office ends in September so I am retiring from the Committee, and would like to thank all members for their help and hard work in ensuring another financially successful year of achievements.

*Julia Brocklesby, Treasurer
July 2007*

Digging Autumn 2007

This spring and summer the diggers and I have once again been working at the very picturesque site at Beedon. To reach the site we walk through the fields from the small lane where we park our cars. The site is at the top of a hill and the view from the top is beautiful. We look out over the crops of wheat and barley wavering in the wind, over fields and hedges down to the stream, and up the far hills at small clumps of trees. Truly a typical view of the English countryside. You cannot hear any traffic or noises of our modern age, just birdsong and the wind. You look up into the blue sky and watch the white clouds drifting over your head.

Then you realise that in this very spot over 2000 years ago, other people just like us, looked at the same scene, the same hills, the same sky, listened to the same birdsong, wondered about the same billowing white clouds, just where you are standing now. But what a different lifestyle they led. Ever fearful of hunger and disease, small injuries that untreated by our modern medicines could kill. Fearful of other bands of iron age people ready to kill them and their children, to steal what they had toiled long and hard for in the fields with the sweat of their brows and the muscles in their backs. They were in awe of things that we take for granted because we understand how they work and what they are, the sun, the moon, the seasons, the rain. They did not take these things for granted, and we know of the elaborate rituals and sacrifices they must have believed in, even as we believe in our religions, to ensure that the sun once again would return to warm the land for the growth of their crops. Rituals and offerings given to ensure the fertility of their women, a subject that seems to be a worry of all primitive peoples. They did not take these things for granted. What did they believe in? Did they worship Mother Earth, the Sun, the Moon? Some God-like being that inhabited the waters of lakes and rivers?

I am sure however that they were just as intelligent as we are, finding solutions to problems like storing seed corn in pits over the winter without it rotting. No-one on the Discovery channel showed them how, or gave them the perfect conditions that are needed; they worked it out for themselves. As they also learnt how to build shelters, animal husbandry, weaving and metal-working. Again no-one showed them how, they invented these things. We also know that they were superb craftsmen, producing metalwork objects not only very functional, but also of great beauty.

Many other things about the way they lived are lost to us. We do not know about the multitude of wooden objects (no doubt objects of beauty too) that they used. We know they used leather, fur and organic materials, but these do not survive underground and are lost forever.

This is why I dig. I am fascinated by how they, ordinary people, just like you and I, lived their day-to-day lives. I know there are many questions that will never be answered, can never be answered, but I love to keep on looking anyway!

This will be my last report as I am standing down as Digging Secretary in September. Again I wish to thank all the people, far too many to name, for their help and support (and the laughs!) over the last four years.

Terry Stopps, Digging Secretary

Local History Group

It was a rather select group on 16 May that heard (and brilliantly saw, thanks to the new AAHS digital projector) Dick Barnes on the remodelling of St Nicholas in 1880. Dick's meticulously detailed work means that we will never look at St Nic's in quite the same way again, and raised many new questions. How had the walls stayed vertical for so long after the tiebeams in the roof had been sawn out? What was the mass of masonry that was removed from the Blackwell aisle, and why was it there? And, inevitably, we finished in a frenzy of speculation about the magnificently unsymmetrical west facade, and the offset of the nave and tower from its centre line. Thanks, Dick.

Trevor Davies, as secretary of OLHA, came to update us on the state of play regarding the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies (to give it its old name). Six societies, including OLHA, have come together to form a lobby group. Trevor reported that they have met a response from the County Council that was dismissive, evasive, and even on occasion offensive. The official position is that there are not yet any plans to discuss, while it is understood that the Centre in its present form is to disappear and its staff will be merged with that of the general library. There seems at the moment to be no plan for what will happen to the collections in the immediate and in the long term. Members who have strong views on the subject were encouraged to write to their county councillors.

The next meeting is planned for 16 October, with Janey Cumber presenting some more of her current research into 16th century Abingdon.

Manfred Brod

Ock Street Heritage Group

Our Communigate website is proving successful, thanks mostly to Jackie Hudson, with about 100 hits per month. Articles on various Ock Street-related topics are following each other at frequent intervals and a valuable electronic archive is developing. If you haven't seen it yet, go to <http://www.communigate.co.uk/oxford/ockst/index.phtml>.

Some parts of our exhibition of last year, plus a few new items, have been shown again at Oxfordshire Studies at the Westgate. They were there throughout June and July. Inevitably, there were rather few recorded comments, but those received were favourable and a good number of our leaflets were taken away.

We are now deep into planning for our next spectacular, which will see us taking over the Abingdon Museum in January and February 2008. This will be angled at the activities - industrial and other - of Ock Street, and will feature artefacts illustrating these as well as their connections with individual people and families.

If any AAHS member has any objects or memorabilia that could be useful to us, please get in touch!

Manfred Brod

Publications Sub-committee

We had hoped to have some mock-ups available for comment by the June meeting, but decided we weren't as far advanced in development as we had hoped. Getting it right is not as easy as it may seem, and fortunately there is not currently a great pressure of work waiting to be published, so we are now working to target for completion of early 2008. If any member has work they may want to publish under an AAHS imprint, please contact the sub-committee.

Manfred Brod

Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust (JET)

Elizabeth Drury is the Society's co-opted member on the Abingdon JET, a grant awarding body administered by the Vale of White Horse District Council assisting repairs to historic buildings and projects such as landscaping public

open spaces. Other bodies represented are Christ's Hospital, Friends of Abingdon, Abingdon Naturalists Society and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

The meeting in June discussed a number of items of interest to our members. The Trust considered a request for a grant to the society to help with the costs of staging the Ock Street Exhibition at the museum from 12 January to 22 February 2008. If awarded it will be subject to the exhibition being displayed either longer or also at other venues. A proposal was also considered to place a blue plaque on Ock House to commemorate Arthur Preston, whose work will be known to many of our members.

The Trust also considered an application from the Friends of the Abbey Grounds Project for assistance with a project aimed at discovering more information about the Abbey layout using new surveying techniques and to make the history of the Abbey and its environs accessible to the general public. This would include a Perspex panel to view through, re-surveying the church, a display case for recent finds, and the publication of booklets, leaflets, interpretation panels and educational resource packs.

If you have any suggestions that you wish to be put forward to the JET, please let Elizabeth know on 01235 553636.

Dates for Your Diary - Some talks with a historical bias:-

Oxfordshire Architectural & Historical Society Rewley House, Oxford at 5.30pm, 16 October: Building Oxford's Heritage: Symm & Company from 1815 by Malcolm Axtell.

Berkshire Family History Society Long Furlong Community Centre, Boulter Drive, Abingdon at 7.30pm, 15 October: Grave tales and Memorials by Graham Sutherland.

Blackwell's 1000 Years Free Walking Tour 26 October at 9.10am – booking essential. **Further information** Blackwell Oxford Shop, 53 Broad Street, Oxford or oxford@blackwell.co.uk

Oxon Family History Society Exeter Hall, Kidlington
Saturday 22nd September 10.00am to 4.00pm Open day. More details:
<http://www.ofhs.org.uk/OpenDay.html>

Editor's Notes

Thanks to all members for their contributions and feedback – all gratefully received.

Please note that the views contained in the articles are those of the contributors rather than the society itself, and contributions may be edited for content.

Tim Barnett, Newsletter Editor

Visit to Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford

With sixteen members turning out on what threatened to be a wet evening on 26th April, no-one could have anticipated what Jim Godfrey, Canon Verger, was about to tell and show us.

From Tom Tower gate entry, a swift traverse across Tom quadrangle led us to pause before entering the cathedral proper. Jim explained the complicated history of the site. Originally an Augustinian monastery, including a 12th century Norman church (St Frideswide's Priory), Cardinal Wolsey obtained permission from the Pope (before the separation by Henry VIII from the Catholic church) around 1525 for the building of what was intended to be the greatest teaching college within Europe (Cardinal College), at that time. Having cleared a synagogue, St Martins of Southgate church, a number of business premises and a principal east-west Oxford road, Wolsey began construction of the cloister around the quad, intended to house 100 students.

Being short of a chapel during this phase, he left standing the 12th century chapel, all-but-it shortened, for daily worship by the students and clergy providing their training. However, by 1529, Wolsey 'fell out' with Henry VIII, in the worst possible way, being accused of treason (at the instigation of Anne Boleyn), and his unfinished college was taken by Henry and renamed Henry VIII College, with building suspended. Wolsey was 'sent down' from court and spent his final months at York, where he was Archbishop, dying on the return to London in 1530.

Having had this vivid explanation of how Christchurch (re-named in 1546) came about, we now moved into the church building proper. Just inside the entry are the stalls for the choristers, with (apparently) an over-size organ (1720s) whose installation nearly bankrupted the college.

Amazingly, the cathedral still retains the seating structure of an ecclesiastical church, with rows of seats facing the central aisle from both sides, intended for the teaching fellows ["Students"!].

The Bishop's throne, usually located beside the pulpit, has (because of lack of space) had to be set in the northern aisle, next to St. Frideswide's Memorial.

This latter proved to be the high-light of the evening. Having been built of stone sometime in the 1200s for the Saint's bones and for pilgrimage, this had been smashed and dispersed amongst the grounds and part had been re-used for other structures. With the discovery of major portions of the canopy in 1985, work was set in motion for the reconstruction, with some 20 later fragments added subsequently.

Today, the St Frideswide's Memorial stands as it would have been seen some 800 years earlier and made a fitting final moment for our Christchurch visit.

Roger Gelder

Abingdon's First Woman Councillor:

Edith Claudia Reynolds nee Sandys

The material for this talk, given at the Members' Evening, has been largely collected from family history websites, in particular Families in British India Society (<http://www.fibis.org>), and local newspapers.

Edith Claudia Reynolds was elected to the Borough Council in November 1919. She was then approaching the age of 75

Edith was second youngest of the four daughters of the Rev Claudius Sandys of Lanarth, Cornwall and his wife Helen (sometimes recorded as Ellen). Her father was a military chaplain in India and her grandfather was Lieut Col William Sandys, late of the Honourable East India Company's Service (often abbreviated to HEICS). She was born at Belgaum in India in December 1844. After her father's early death in 1848 the family spent some time in France before settling in Cheltenham where the 1861 Census records Helen Sandys and her four daughters, Laura, Florence, Edith and Julia, living in Pittville. The mother's occupation is given as Fund holder; the two older daughters, Laura (23) and Florence (20) have no occupation; Edith (16) and her younger sister Julia (13) are listed as scholars. Julia is known to have been educated at Cheltenham Ladies College – so it seems fairly reasonable to deduce that Edith would also have been a pupil there. The Ladies College, founded as recently as 1854, was a pioneering girls' public school. Its most famous Principal, Dorothea Beale, was appointed in 1858 and therefore Headmistress at the time the Edith and Julia Sandys were pupils. In the 1871 Census Laura, Edith and Julia are boarders at 18 Gloucester Street in the parish of St George's Hanover Square in the borough of Westminster.

In April 1871 Edith married Samuel Harvey Reynolds who had been one of the first two pupils at the newly opened Radley College in 1847. Following an academic career as a classicist in Oxford, Reynolds was ordained as a priest and in March 1871 was presented to the college living of East Ham by Brasenose College. Edith became involved in the pastoral work of the parish, in particular St Hilda's East Settlement.

In 1893 her husband resigned the living and they moved to Abingdon, to The Gables in Bath Street *"to be near enough to the Bodleian for study, and not near enough to Oxford for society"*. Their two domestic servants at the East Ham vicarage moved to Abingdon with them. Samuel Harvey Reynolds died in February 1897 in Biarritz having suffered from failing health for years. His reminiscences of life at Radley College were published in June of that year in "Fifty Years of Radley College."

After her husband's death Edith Reynolds devoted much of her time, energy, and personal finance towards good works in the town at the same time keeping in touch with her husband's former parish. In particular the Girls Friendly Society and the Abingdon Infant Welfare Centre benefited from her commitment and generosity.

Prior to her election to the Borough Council she had been Lady Almoner at the Cottage Hospital – almost on her doorstep – and had also been elected to the Board of Guardians in 1915. During the Great War her solution to the question of increasing food production in the local area was to personally finance the ploughing of land near the Corporation rubbish tip opposite the Isolation Hospital now known as Marcham Road Hospital. She was also involved in the campaign for a War Memorial.

Edith's election address, printed in the North Berks Herald, demonstrates a certain political shrewdness in appealing to the working women of the town whilst underlining her contribution to social welfare and education in the town. This was the first election since the extended franchise under the Representation of the People Act of 1918. The number of voters on the register had risen from 2682 in 1918 to 2724, though I can't say whether the additional 42 all qualified as women of property over 30 years old. Arthur Preston, in his address to the electors, alluded to "the notable influx in women voters". Arthur Preston topped the poll with 1201 votes and Edith came second with 843 votes, well in front of the next candidates with over 600 votes.

Mrs Reynolds' first appointments on the council were as a member of the Free Library joint committee and as a representative manager of the National Schools, reflecting her interest in education. At the end of her three-year term, however, she was not re-elected.

She had played a major role in Abingdon's political life as Secretary of the Women's Constitutional Association for 11 years from its formation in 1918. On her resignation at the age of 85, she was presented with an armchair. Her cousin, Lady Norman, who also lived in Bath Street in Stratton House, was its President.

Edith Reynolds was a woman of strong convictions and beliefs, typical of her generation and social class – Miss Beale would have been proud of her.

Addenda

Her sister Julia had moved to Abingdon in 1909 after a career as an assistant mistress at Cheltenham Ladies College and later at a school in St Andrews. She was one of the founders of the "Baby Welcome Club" and during the war looked after Belgian refugees in Abingdon. She lived at 30 East St Helen Street and died in 1930.

Two other notable firsts:

Mrs Agnes Leonora Challenor, first woman mayor, 1951, and first female alderman.

Mrs Constance Cox, Mayor, 1960, and first female governor of Christ's Hospital of Abingdon.

Jackie Smith



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Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

Speaker meetings 3rd Thursday of month, 7.45pm Northcourt Hall, Northcourt Road, Abingdon. Visitors are welcome. The first 4 talks are:

- 20 Sept AGM followed by Dr Manfred Brod Civil War Reading
- 18 Oct Dick Greenaway Woodland Archaeology
- 15 Nov Chris Lillington-Martin Battle of Dara AD 530, Topography, Texts and Tactics
- 20 Dec Dr Elizabeth Gemmill Medieval Food and Drink (with tasters)

Membership Form 2007/8 1st September 2007-31st August 2008
I/We apply to join/rejoin the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

Membership Type	Individual	£10.00
	Family	£15.00
	Unwaged/Student	£7.00
	Distant	£3.00
	Visitors	£2.00
Full Name		
Address		
Postcode		
Telephone		
E-mail		
I would like to receive the Newsletter by e-mail		

Please post this form **enclosing cheque payable to AAAHS to**

The Treasurer and Membership Secretary

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