



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - AUTUMN 2008

Meetings Programme

All at the Northcourt Centre starting at 7.45pm. Members free. Visitors welcome (£2.00 entry)

Thurs 18th Sept - AAAHS AGM and John Foreman: "Abingdon Oddfellows"

Thurs 16th October – Mark Davies: "The Abingdon Waterturnpike Murder"

Thurs 20th November – Jill Eyers: "What's Under Your House?"

Society Events

Thurs 11th September– Tour of 16th Century Abingdon - a walk around the town with Janey Cumber. Meet 7pm at the Abbey Gateway.

Sat 13th September - Heritage weekend – Abingdon Guildhall. The Society and the Ock Street Group will both be represented.

Website: <http://www.abingdonheritage.co.uk/>

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the Summer 2008 newsletter. I hope you are all enjoying the warmer weather (neither too hot nor too wet this year) and have had a chance to get out and about to visit archaeological or historical sites - and that you are all looking forward to our 2008-2009 season.

The last six months has certainly had plenty to enjoy. The highlight was our 40th anniversary celebrations. Roger Thomas gave a fantastic summary of 40 years of archaeology in the town during which I think everyone learnt something new. We hope that a version of his talk will make its way into print but in the meantime Roger has kindly donated a cd of his lecture to the

society which is available for members to consult. (The cake was pretty amazing too.....)

Other lecture meetings covered topics ranging from Victorian entertainments in Abingdon to the Iron Age and continue to be well-attended. The discussion board also continues to be popular. You can join this through our website and I can recommend it if you have any queries about our town; between us we have a wealth of knowledge to share. However, less of you are participating in our outings than used to be the case and this is a shame, as the destinations chosen are those which would not normally be open to the public and thus are rather special.

The Ock Street group has been going from strength to strength, with another exhibition on the cards and the publication of the very successful "Ock Street Remembered". The digging group have spent the winter months writing-up and the summer helping Victor Pocock at Beedon once again. A handful of us were involved in the production of Channel 4's "Time Team" at Radcot in May, a site being investigated thanks to our Roger Ainslie. I would like to say how exciting it all was but actually the most thrilling aspect of my day (of standing around) was being told to get off a spoil heap by Phil Harding....

As for the future... well, plans are already under way for our stall for Heritage Open Day (September 13th), so if you'd like to be involved with that please get in touch. Our AGM will be held on September 18th, followed by an intriguing talk on the Abingdon Oddfellows, so do try and make it.

Finally, my annual plea for committee members. Please consider joining us. No experience is needed, just a willingness to help and plenty of curiosity about the history of our town.

See you all at the AGM!

Rachel Everett

AAHS Membership and Treasurer's Report

Membership and Treasurer's report 2007/08

This year has been a relatively quiet one as far as AAHS expenditure is concerned as, unlike recent years, we have had no major expenditure on reprinting or equipment. We did give a £500 grant towards the printing of the Ock Street book but this has already been repaid – well done to all concerned!

Last years accounts have now (at last!) been audited – thanks to Spencer White and Bob Eeles, and this year's should be audited before the AGM in September.

Below are some provisional figures for this year.

Income/Expenditure Analysis as of 29/7/08

	2007/08 ytd
Income recurrent	
Subs	1004.00
Donations/visitors	132.50
Income from book sales	250
Bank interest	116.21
Miscellaneous	132.43
Grants (500 for Ock St exhibition)	
500 repayment of grant for Ock St book	1000.00
Total income	£2635.14
Expenditure recurrent	
Premises	162.85
Speakers	330.00
Insurance	382.78
Administration	22.75
Events and Outings	263.97
Ock St book grant	500.00
Library/subs	68.00
Publicity	45.98
Miscellaneous	137.47
Total expenditure	£1913.80

However membership numbers have gone down this year as approx 30 were not renewed compared with approx 10 new members. We are hoping that all the purchasers of the "Ock Street Remembered" will be encouraged to join! Also as we are all getting older some members are changing from family or individual membership to concessionary membership with the consequent drop in income.

A membership form is attached to the newsletter– please either send your subs to me or bring them with the completed form to the AGM. Please note that new members who have joined in the last three months have 08/09 membership free.

Sally Ainslie tel: 01235 529720 membership@www.aaahs.org.uk

Digging Secretary's Report

This year we – or should I say I – took the unusual decision not to start any new digs!! As strange as this may seem it was for very good reasons. There have been many digs over the years that your Society has undertaken but very few that have been completed. We decided that this year we would attempt to complete the post excavation work for at least one of them. To this end February and March saw our Headquarters Building, otherwise known as The Hut, filled with lots of bits of pot, diggers training to be pottery identifiers

and a couple of experts (Rachel actually) all slogging away. We have done quite well but there is still a very long way to go even to finish one excavation's worth of pot. Meanwhile Jeff has been very busy with the illustrations.

The diggers have been busy with our fellow societies where we have the luxury of just excavating. Beedon, on the Downs, has continued with the "hard core diggers" such as Mary-Nell, Terry and Julia among many others attending for most Sundays. Unfortunately, I have only been able to get there twice this year so far due to family commitments, but I hope to resume at the end of July.

The Society is very fortunate in that it was asked to provide a team of diggers for a Time Team excavation that took place in May at Radcot. How fascinating it all was – and yes, they really do do it in three days! We all learnt so much from the experts and we were treated very well indeed by the whole production team. The weather on the first two days was beautiful but the third day was very wet and soggy. Perhaps we should have sacrificed Tony Robinson to the Gods after all. We have been asked not to tell anyone what was found so that if the excavation is televised it will all be a big surprise. We spent the third day in the finds tent washing pot, bone and glass getting very dirty and wet so we don't even know what was found. Hey ho, the life of a television star!!

We are always happy to welcome diggers, illustrators, pot identifiers, people who can bring chocolate cake; in fact anyone who would like to come along. Please contact any member of the committee for details.

Jane Poulter

Speakers Organiser

Hello, me again. I hope you have all enjoyed the speakers that we have had this year; we have some more crackers for next year. May I ask a favour of you all? If there is any specific topic or speaker that you would like then please let me know and I will try to arrange it. I have had a few problems recently, over 20 requests to potential speakers have not been replied to and I am very quickly running out of names!! All the speakers that we have had recently make note of the fact that the audience is well informed, very friendly and a delight to address. Well done!

Thank you.

Jane Poulter

Society Archivist's Report

Last year the committee decided to reassess the contents of the society's library. There were two major factors behind this decision. Firstly the society

was approaching its fortieth anniversary and the general consensus was that the library was no longer meeting the demands of the membership and secondly the perception that the space available at the Portakabin, which houses the society's archives, would require careful management.

A small subcommittee spent some time going through the stock before deciding which general books it would be reasonable to weed out to make way for others of a more specialist nature, e.g. pottery identification or house history. This rationalisation produced four small skips of books, exhibition catalogues and magazines, which will be offered to society members at a nominal sum at a future meeting. The proceeds from the sale will go towards restocking the library as outlined above. Suggestions for new books are always welcome.

Obviously the committee does not wish to offend anyone who generously donated books in the early days of the society and would be happy to return items to original owners if required. If any member has strong feelings on this matter, please raise it with a committee member or at the AGM under AOB.

Jackie Smith

Local History Group

The May meeting was all seventeenth century. I reported on my recent work on Abingdon politics after the Restoration, including a new town charter that was issued in 1663 and appears to have escaped the notice of local historians until now. But the main part of the meeting was a group exercise in which we considered contemporary army reports and recent archaeological evidence on the royalist attack of 4 March 1646, and reached some conclusions both on the details of the attack and on the design of the fortifications to the east of the town. This proved a successful innovation, and we hope to include more such exercises in our programme in the future.

Next meeting will be on **Tuesday 28 October**, 7.45 pm, 35 Ock Street. Suggestions for subjects to be discussed, presentations, or other programme items will be welcome.

Manfred Brod

Ock Street Heritage Group

The Group is continuing its work and will have a display in the South Aisle of St Helen's Church from 4 August to 15 September. This will hopefully attract tourists, show them something of Abingdon's heritage, and set them walking the Ock Street Heritage Trail. Most of the exhibits will be re-used from our

Trinity Hall exhibition of 2006, but there will be a significant amount of new material.

We - and St Helen's - would welcome volunteers to help with the stewarding in this period. There are lots of two-hour slots available - contact Anne Smithson or myself in the first instance.

The Ock Street book, which was launched during our exhibition in the Museum in January-February, is proving a great success. It's already on its second printing, and is making a significant amount of money for the Society.

Manfred Brod

Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust (JET)

Elizabeth Drury is the Society's co-opted member on the Abingdon JET. Recent discussions by the JET which might be of interest to our members include:-

Concern for the state of the War Memorial has resulted in the advice that a survey should be commissioned to find out if there is a problem with the foundations.

A leaflet promoting shop front grants scheme had been produced and distributed to local businesses

The Town Council wished to make an application for surveys to be done on the two 19th century chapels in the Old Cemetery.

An information board has been proposed for the Margaret Brown Garden in Wilsham Road.

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

Try these!

Some more websites of interest:-

http://www.le.ac.uk/ar/njc10/wallingford_project/

The excavations at Wallingford which are part of the Burh to Borough Research Project

http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research_projects/marcham

The latest on the Marcham/Frilford digs.

Dates for Your Diary

Oxford Open Doors – 13th and 14th September: Many interesting buildings and spaces open to the public. Details:

http://www.openingdoorsopeningminds.org.uk/ODOM_leaflet.pdf

Vale of the White Horse Branch, Berkshire Family History Society

Long Furlong Community Centre, Boulter Drive, Abingdon. 7.15pm for 7.30pm.

15th Sept - Ian Waller: Sold, Separated or Divorced

17th Nov – Barbara Dixon: Lies, Damn Lies and Registration

Wallingford Historical & Archaeological Society

Fridays in Wallingford Town Hall (in the Market Place)

12th Sept - Dr Kate Tiller: The Desert Begins to Blossom - Primitive Methodism in Oxfordshire based on the 1851 Religious Census

10th Oct - Professor Malcolm Airs: The Decline & Rise of the English Country House

14th Nov - Dr David Roffe (Sheffield University): Wallingford - Borough & Shire

12th Dec – “Penny Readings - A Victorian Entertainment” produced by Judy Dewey

Longworth History Society

Weds 17th Sept - Ken Houlton Local Photos and Archives of Yesteryear. A picture of local village life in the not too distant past. Longworth Village Hall 7.30pm

Oxfordshire Family History Society

Open Day sat 20th Sept 2008 10am to 4pm. – Exeter Hall, Kidlington

Marcham Society

Marcham Church, beginning at 7.45pm

11th Nov - Liz Woolley: The Parish of St. Thomas the Martyr, West Oxford

Oops!! - Apologies to Andrew Bax who provided the item on “Elma’s Story” for the last newsletter but I neglected to credit: sorry Andrew.

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

Some Amateur Theology in Seventeenth-Century Abingdon

The period of the Civil War and the military dictatorship that followed it was in many ways catastrophic, but it was a time when ordinary people felt able to subject the ways of their world to critical examination. Their criteria were not utilitarian or rational. They regarded the Bible as the only ultimate truth, and practices and institutions were acceptable only to the extent that they conformed to the precepts of Holy Scripture. A controversy that arose in Abingdon made it a nursery of a new sect, the Seventh-Day Baptists, that spread widely and would persist well into the nineteenth century.

There was unanimity among all religious people that the due observance of the Sabbath was essential to religious and social propriety. It was enshrined in current law, and offenders who travelled, worked, played, or drank on Sunday were heavily fined. But in 1657 or 8, some Abingdon Baptists began to preach in the market place that it was the seventh day not the first, Saturday and not Sunday, that was the true Sabbath; and some took to opening their shops on the first day of the week and challenging the magistrates to show them where in the Bible this was forbidden. The magistrates, to their credit, did not come down hard on the new idea; on the contrary, they seem to have shared the Baptists' doubts and genuinely wanted to see them resolved.

There was a meeting, perhaps more than one, at which these matters were discussed, and the Baptists claimed to have won the debate. The Corporation, however, remained unconvinced. The champions on both sides put their arguments into print to appeal to a wider audience. The Baptist case was made by Edward Stennett, a brazier, while in the Corporation's corner was John Hanson, several times mayor of Abingdon during the preceding decade, and a brewer and tobacconist by trade. No one seems to have felt the need to appeal to professional theologians in the university.

The basic question was to what extent the coming of Jesus had abrogated the old Jewish law. It was common ground that if the Ten Commandments were still in force, then the seventh-day Sabbath prescribed in them must also be. Stennett could not see how these could no longer be valid; Hanson insisted they had in some way been transcended or spiritualised, though he had difficulty in giving a credible reason for the adoption of Sunday for the Sabbath as against any other day. Both authors provide a massive superstructure of biblical citations, combined with impressive feats of logic-chopping to demonstrate their relevance to the argument and to deal with lists of objections that must have arisen in the original debates. Hanson occasionally takes a position that seems much closer to that of his opponents than his colleagues will have been totally happy with: a church to him is a community of the faithful, and the building with a steeple on it no more than a common meeting house. He, like the more extreme among the sectaries, is expecting the mystical birth of Christ within him.

What is truly remarkable about this exchange of controversial tracts is the tone of perfect courtesy adopted on both sides. The opponents are 'eminent

Christians', albeit perhaps deluded, and there is a noteworthy absence of the vituperation that was customary when professional clergy clashed in print. Some of Hanson's comments suggest to a modern historian an engagingly dry sense of humour. He ascribes Paul's repeated injunctions that women should stay silent in church to a laudable desire to protect husbands and fathers from public demonstration of their inferiority, and justifies the controversial system of tithes by comparing clergy to oxen threshing the corn, which, according to the Bible, must not be muzzled. The historian might be mistaken; puritans were often disturbingly literal-minded, and he may have been quite serious.

In the end, the established theory triumphed. Stennett and some of his friends were ejected from the Abingdon Baptist church, although this is more probably on account of their dabbling in the seditious Fifth Monarchy ideology, inviting the attention of the security services, than for their sabbaterian beliefs. They moved as a group from Abingdon to Wallingford, and colonised a number of villages in the Berks-Oxon-Bucks borderlands. Edward Stennett became progenitor of a dynasty of Seventh-Day Baptist clergymen who kept that particular faith active through four succeeding generations.

Manfred Brod

Ronald Harry Williams (1909 – 1993)

Ronald Williams was an Abingdonian who ran a greengrocery business at 14 Stert Street until he retired in 1966. His father had a saddlery business in Abingdon and elsewhere. His mother had a confectionery and newspaper business in Stert Street. His grandfather had Abingdon's largest butchery shop in Bury Street, and his grandmother kept the Bull Inn next door.

His autobiography, written in retirement from notes kept over many years, states that it was for his family and not for "the public gaze". However, Judy White and I have been given a copy of the autobiography and also of the complementary "History of the Williams Family in Abingdon", on the understanding that they are for personal research rather than commercial reproduction.

Ronald was a pupil at Culham College School, where he developed a keen interest in sport. When he left school, horses were still the main motive power for transport and farming, and he was apprenticed to his father in the flourishing saddlery business. But the use of horses began to decline, and Ronald took over his mother's confectionery and newspaper shop in Stert Street and developed it into a greengrocery business. With the help of his father, he also worked land and orchards at Abbey House to produce fruit and vegetables for the shop, and bought-in fruit from orchards in the neighbourhood. He steered the business through the austere times of WWII, with shortages, controls and rationing – serving on the Oxford Food Allocation Committee which oversaw the allocation of fruit and vegetables in the area.

His account of these business activities is interlaced with family details: marrying Phyllis Silvester (Connie Silvester's sister) and bringing up three children – Alan (who later qualified as a barrister), Paul and Kathryn – in the cramped accommodation above the shop in Stert St. There was no garden, but before the growth of motor traffic it was safe for quite small children to play in Stert Street and the Market Place. Ronald and Phyllis were staunch Methodists, being connected with both Trinity Church in Conduit Road and the Primitive Methodists in Ock Street. After retiring to Picklers Hill they were founder members of the new All Saints Methodist church in Appelford Drive.

The third strand of the autobiography is a series of pertinent observations on social conditions and on events outside Abingdon. He made many visits to London, for business, for pleasure, and to visit relatives. He gives first hand accounts of a Zeppelin bombing raid in London during WWI; the hardships in Abingdon in the post-war depression; the General Strike; and going to the first Cup Final in the new Wembley Stadium. Shortly before WWII he joined the Abingdon Fire Brigade, and enjoyed its spirit of comradeship. During the war the Abingdon brigade became part of the National Fire Service, and Ronald was involved in fighting fires in London, Birmingham, Coventry, Bristol, etc, often while German bombs were still falling. He was among the first in Abingdon to own a telephone, a car, a wireless set and a television set.

We are grateful to Ronald's son Alan R Williams for allowing us to use this unpublished material, and to his niece June Salt for help in setting up the contact.

Dick Barnes



Ronald and Phyllis Williams with their children Alan, Paul and Kathryn, c.1958

Membership Form 2008/09 1st September 2008-31st August 2009

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 send completed forms and cheque payable to AAAHS to

Membership Secretary and Treasurer
AAAHS
4 Sutton Close
Abingdon
OX14 1ER

Or bring form with cheque/cash to lecture meetings.