



**Abingdon Area
Archaeological and Historical Society**
www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2006

*****Please note venue change***
for the September AGM and talk**

Julian Richards

'Meet the Ancestors'

**Abbey Hall, Abingdon,
8pm Thursday 21st September 2006
Tickets £5**

Tickets free to rejoining AAAHS members

**The AAAHS AGM will precede the talk
at 7.15 pm prompt, also in the Abbey Hall**

AN ABINGDON BUILDINGS RECORD OPEN MEETING

The West Legacy

*Abingdon Architects
1885-1985*

A talk by the local architect

Philip Waddy

**Friday 21st April at 7.45 pm
St Helen's Church Hall**

Follow path near church entrance in West St Helen Street

All welcome – admission free

HUGH THOMAS RANDOLPH

1936-2006

Hugh Randolph, who died on 20th February, came to Abingdon in 1963 from King Edward VI's School, Southampton, when he was appointed to teach classics by James Cobban.

At Abingdon Hugh ran the Rugby fives club, the police cadets, and coached cricket. He was boarding house-tutor in turn at Crescent House and School House and later appointed housemaster of Randolph's, one of the new clutch of dayboy houses. Hugh was a fine example of the old-style all-round schoolmaster.

Retiring in 1993 he became membership secretary of the Old Abingdonian Club and edited Griffen, the old boys' annual newsletter. Throughout his Abingdon career and retirement, with four headmasters, Hugh skilfully managed to keep his mainsail billowing, regardless of wind direction. His knowledge of people and personal detail, always guarded with the utmost discretion and integrity, was immeasurable and will be greatly missed. Hugh was churchwarden at St Michael's, Abingdon, and secretary to the deanery synod. In politics he was Prussian blue.

Hugh Thomas Randolph was born in September 1936 in India and grew up there and at Eastleigh vicarage. From The Pilgrim's School, Winchester, he joined Marlborough College and entered Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, reading theology and classics.

Primarily during his retirement (and mine) we were fond particularly of long-distance walks over the footpaths and bridleways of old North Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Despite Hugh's austere life-style we would take a pub lunch here and there, which normally I purchased for him. I recall one occasion, after walking over the Lambourn Downs, which ended by my taking him to Letcombe Bassett church to show him the Randolph window. It became quickly apparent that a gleeful Hugh had never before seen the panels. He in turn delightedly showed me his signet ring that repeated the family crest portrayed in the glass. Hugh was always highly reticent about his distinguished ecclesiastical and academic ancestors, although I did manage to inveigle from him, over the years, often by devious means, many of his local connections.

The eponymous Oxford hotel was built on the site of the Bishop's Palace. John Randolph (1749-1813) was Bishop of Oxford (1799-1807), then holding the sees of Bangor (1807-1809) and London (1809-1813). He was Professor of Poetry (1776) and Regius Professor of Divinity (1783) in the University of Oxford. He was son of the Revd Dr Thomas Randolph (1701-1783), President of Corpus Christi College (1748-1783) and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford (1749-1783). The Revd Francis Randolph (1714-1797) was Principal of St Alban Hall, Oxford, and vicar of Warborough (1756-1797), a living in the gift of Corpus Christi College. He, like Hugh, was described as being 'particularly interested in natural history and the country life'. Francis Randolph kept Warborough church records in a 'meticulously written scholarly handwriting', so typical of Hugh's own style: Francis endowed the Randolph Gallery at the Ashmolean. The Revd Herbert Randolph (1789-1875) became vicar of Marcham (1819-1875), initially largely as an absentee and in plurality with the more valuable incumbency of Haytesbury (1812-1849), latterly holding Marcham in plurality with Culham.

Hugh's father in due course was preferred as Archdeacon of Hereford. I recall with pleasure being invited in the 1960s to lunch with the Randolph's at their home in Hereford Cathedral Close and to weekend with them during their retirement at Midhurst, when Archdeacon Randolph would join us on substantial walks along the Sussex Downs.

Hugh will be greatly and sadly missed by his many friends.

Nigel Hammond

ANCIENT RIGHTS IN ABINGDON - A LAWSUIT OF THE 1650s

It is fashionable among historians to consider that the rhetoric of social upheaval during the period of the English Commonwealth (1649-1653) was no more than propaganda, and that little really changed. This was not the contemporary perception. There was a general shift in relationships among groups and individuals, with those that had supported the Royalist cause in the Civil War losing influence and power and those that hadn't, gaining it. Old grievances could now be raised and old settlements questioned. The point is well illustrated in an Abingdon law-suit that began in 1653.

The Bostocks of Fitzharris were a well-established and prominent local family, Royalist, and not popular with their neighbours. William Bostock, now dead, was known as 'a person very powerful and contentious', and a frequent and aggressive litigant. Nicholas Badcock had taken over Fitzharris from the Bostocks in 1648 and was determined to hold on to the advantages that accompanied the property. Allied with him were William Weston, a Catholic maltster, and Peter Heylin, probably the most important of Royalist intellectuals, who had settled at Lacy's Court after ejection from Oxford and a period spent in hiding at Burford.

On 10 August 1653, Thomas Twyford of Abingdon, no doubt accompanied by many cheering supporters, took a horse to a section of Abingdon Mead near the Ock, where it was formally impounded by William Weston's son, acting as his bailiff. This signalled the start of a legal conflict intended to settle a grievance of long standing.

Abingdon Mead was a hundred-acre meadow lying to the west of the Ock Bridge, south of Abingdon Common, and between the Common and the river. According to popular belief, any Abingdon townsman resident in an 'ancient messuage' – presumably one of those that had been granted to Christ's Hospital and to the Corporation from the spoils of the old Abbey – had the right to pasture one horse and one cow in Abingdon Mead from Lammas-tide – 1 August – until 25 March the following year. Many years earlier, William Bostock had acquired the mead as his property and divided it into two parts. He restricted the general pasture rights to the Upper Mead, and let them start only on 10 September, by which time he would have taken a mow of hay. Furthermore, he refused to allow access to the Upper Mead by way of the Lower. Presumably, he would have had the law on his side; but times had changed, and Twyford and his friends now felt confident enough to issue their challenge.

The case was presented as the theft of Twyford's horse by Weston, who had to convince the courts that he was entitled to impound it for trespass. The jury at the assizes found in favour of the plaintiffs, but Weston and his friends appealed to the court of Upper Bench – the former, and future, King's Bench. The appeal judges upheld the verdict. But in August 1654 the Abingdon residents complained to Chancery that the verdict was not being applied and asked for a commission of local gentlemen to be set up to investigate.

Chancery proceedings are useful to the historian, since the evidence was taken in a standard form and recorded in longhand and in English. Half a dozen witnesses on each side, with stated ages ranging from 67 to 103, were interrogated on their memory of ancient customs. Unsurprisingly, they differed radically. Prosecution witnesses were steadfast in their insistence that the Mead had never until recent times been divided, and that there was no practical way into the Upper Mead except by going along Ock Street, cutting across to the river, leaving one's horse by the Witch Bush, and then crossing the Lower Mead. The other side were equally emphatic that the division

had been made and marked before living memory, that Bostock had always had his mows of hay from the Lower Mead, and that there was a perfectly good way into Upper Mead through the Lower Ham.

Unfortunately, the helpfulness of Chancery proceedings does not usually go so far as to provide us with a record of the outcome, but it is very unlikely that Chancery would have risked a disagreement with the common-law courts. For a time, at least, it seems certain that many inhabitants of Abingdon will have benefited from free pasture for their horses much of the year – equivalent, in modern terms, to a significant subsidy on petrol and parking for one's transport.

Manfred Brod

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The Local History Group meeting on 7 February was unusually well attended. Eighteen members came to hear Bridget Rudge describe the history and past inhabitants of 12 Ock Street - one of the more interesting buildings of this most interesting street, and the object of much work on the part of the Abingdon Buildings Record over several years. Bridget showed that it is possible to get a fairly complete series of the occupants of an Abingdon building from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, although there may be room for debate on the sequence of building modifications and when they took place

By way of a bonus, attendees were treated by a guest, Mr Alan Crook, to a graphic account of the working of Abingdon Station in the pre-Beeching era. His descriptions of pre-computer book-keeping and pre-xerox document copying, and how railway employees kept their houses warm in the dreadful winter of '46-47, kept the audience enthralled.

The next meeting will be on 2 May, 7.45 p.m. at 35 Ock Street. I will present my own work on 'Lord Craven's Case', one of the most spectacular 'affairs' of the 1650s, involving wealth, greed, corruption in high political places ... even rogue intelligence agents. At stake was the ownership of a number of local properties, including Sutton Courtenay and Garford near Abingdon, and Ashdown and Uffington at the other end of the Vale. And, yes, virtue triumphed in the end. Or did it...?

Manfred Brod

THE OCK STREET HERITAGE PROJECT

The Ock Street project has the wind in its sails, and the planned exhibition is beginning to take shape. There is a core of eleven members with a variety of specialised historical skills, but the project has also caught the interest of several members of the Abingdon Artists' Society who are working to add some more imaginative interpretations of Ock Street's unique history and traditions. The Abingdon Town Council has given an, alas, rather limited grant, but more is hoped from the Vale and, perhaps, the Lottery.

Any AAAHS member wanting to keep up with the progress of the project can get themselves on to the email circuit (just ask me, local@aaahs.org.uk) and is welcome to join the web group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ockstreet/> - you have to register).

The exhibition itself will be 29 September to 1 October at Trinity Church Hall in Conduit Road. Make a note in your diaries now!

Manfred Brod

AWARDS TO AAAHS MEMBERS

At the Department for Continuing Education's 2006 Award Ceremony on Wednesday, 8th March, 2006 at the Sheldonian Theatre, three AAAHS members received certificates and a diploma. They were:-

Mary-Nell Pilgrim	Diploma in British Archaeology;
Jennifer Devanney	Certificate in Archaeology; and
Roger Gelder	Certificate of Higher Education.

The certificates were presented by the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University in a ceremony in the superb setting of the first building undertaken by the then Professor of Astronomy, Sir Christopher Wren.

Roger Gelder

DIGGING REPORT SPRING 2006

The excavation in the Parson's House and North Porch of St Helen's church was completed in autumn 2005. This was a very restricted dig, both in area, and the depth that we were allowed to excavate under the porch floor. But even so the dig was quite different to any of our excavations of recent years, and was both interesting and enjoyable to be involved in. (See Jeff Wallis's report in the Summer 2005 newsletter).

The post excavation work is well under way, and both Jeff Wallis and Julia Brocklesby, are working very hard on the report. They are both to be commended and thanked for their sterling efforts.

Thanks are also due to Mary-Nell Pilgrim, Simon Owen, Shirley Kay, Christine Buckingham and Jenny Devanney for their help with the dig.

The open day that we arranged outside the dig, was well received by very interested members of the public. (See the photos on our website).

Again I would like to thank the St Helen's churchwardens for their help and support during the excavation.

At the invitation of the local historical society, and with the permission of the landowner, part of the digging team have started an excavation, on a small scale, in Drayton St Leonard. This is in the garden of a house which runs down to the River Thames. Before work commenced, a Geophysical Survey was carried out by Roger Ainslie (Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics).

Following this we have opened two small holes to investigate anomalies shown on the report. This is still ongoing, but we seem to have uncovered a medieval ditch running at 90 degrees away from the river. In the second trench we have uncovered two more ditches, which at the time of printing are of unknown date.

We will again be helping the Beedon Archaeology Group at Beedon during the summer. We have been helping Victor Pocock with this very interesting Iron Age and Roman site for the last two summers. Anyone interested in helping please get in touch with me in the next few weeks.

The second part of the digging team has been working under Roger Gelder who has been appointed as the Field Walking Secretary. His report follows.

Terry Stopps

FIELD WALKING IN 2005 OF A MEADOW IN MARCHAM

Will and Janey Cumber, AAAHS members who farm in Marcham, had noted Roman potsherds showing in the top-soil during ploughing, and had requested help from AAAHS for a field-walking exercise, in order to determine the extent and quantity of these artefacts, and whether they indicated the presence of a small Roman farmhouse or villa?

An additional personal incentive for the Roman farmer was the presence of wild sea celery. Considerably smaller but far tougher than normal celery, this grows in saline areas – sea cliffs – but also where saline springs break through at ground level. Whilst considerable efforts have gone into draining these flood plain meadows, it is thought that the breakdown of land drains have given rise

to the up-welling of the original saline spring, around which sea celery may have been originally deliberately cultivated, perhaps by Roman and Saxon farmers. If you have ever eaten simple pottage (read – plain porridge) then ANY improvement in flavour is welcome!! Will would very much like to see the restoration of this plant but what it says for his morning porridge I could not say!!

One thought relates to the location of this site relative to another local archaeological site, being investigated for the past few years by the University. Just 1 km distant is the great Iron Age /Romano-British site at Frilford, with temples and an ‘amphitheatre’. The latter may have been associated with an annual flooding and subsequent draining of this “great round thing” as it is affectionately known, providing a source of wonder and amazement to local people. Could the same ‘veneration’ have been directed to the saline spring, treating it as another ‘shrine’? Many such features in the landscape received similar attention in those far-off times.

The meadow in question is 47 acres in size – it has to be seen to realise the full extent of the area to be searched – over 500 metres by 300 metres!! It was decided to use 10 m long transects, searched 1 m on either side, for every 10 square metres, giving a 20% sampling of the area. This methodology is recognised as a recommended system, but required considerable effort to set out the necessary precise grid. The area was marked out in 50 m x 50 m squares and pea-sticks used to mark every 10 m interval.

Results from potsherds collected to date have been interesting but await full evaluation after washing and sorting. So far, it seems the upper half of the field contains largely Roman potsherds with the odd fragment of Roman glass, although the most interesting part –the saline spring area - is inaccessible due to swampy conditions – walk more than 5 paces forward into it and there is a risk you will be stuck there! It is adjacent to this region that several items of early 2nd century samian ware have been found.

The lower half of the field, south of an old cart track crossing east-west, seems to contain much less roman ware but considerably more medieval up to Victorian potsherds. One interesting development, yet to be investigated, is the presence of slag from metalworking. It remains to determine whether this is slag used by an earlier farmer as fertilizer for the field (derived from modern blast furnaces) or – maybe – just maybe – it might arise from a bloomery or similar smithing activity from an earlier period. A more prosaic comment considered whether this could have arisen from raking out the fireboxes of the great coal-burning steam engines used for ploughing before the advent of tractors? Only time and hard work will give us answers.

Of the metalwork so far found, one is a lead token from the 17th or 18th century, probably used by farm labourers for purchases from farm shops. An alternative suggestion that these were used for gambling seems less likely, given the isolated nature of the field. A very precisely dated Roman coin from 307-310 CE, the time of Emperor Constantine, was found halfway down the field, well apart from the main Roman potsherd area in the north of the field, but shows that farming on this site had a continuity of at least 200 years. Another nice item is the pair of horseshoes from great horses – the big Shires used for ploughing.

Finally, from top to bottom of the field there are considerable numbers of flint fragments. Whilst these have mostly arisen from plough damage of small flint nodules, some are clearly worked items, showing the presence of early man, hunting across this area of flood plain when conditions would have been much different from today’s fields.

Progress across this winter landscape is steady, thanks to willing helpers who march steadfastly across the field, plastic collecting bag in hand, nose dripping and freezing in the frosty conditions, with wind-chill factors lowering temperatures even further. We hope to complete much of the walking within the next two months, followed by the cleaning and cataloguing of our finds. Once

sorted, these will be plotted onto a map of the field to determine whether there are any special concentrations where extra effort might give further results for our search for the long-lost history of the field in Marcham.

Roger Gelder with many great helpers!

WW1 MILITARY HOSPITAL at ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

This February I came across an old Postcard being sold on EBay described as 'WW1 Photo Postcard Military Hospital Abingdon-On-Thames'. Initial inspection showed that the seller from Australia had only assumed that the hospital was in Abingdon because that was the address of the photographer, however I circulated an enquiry about this on the AAAHS mailing list. Hilary Clare decided she would attempt to win the postcard even though she was an eBay neophyte (in the end it was "sniped" in a bidding war between two collectors).



Meanwhile on the mailing list the emails were buzzing but even the most learned of members could not recall any such hospital in the vicinity. Bob Eeles suggested that it might be at Milton. Finally Jessica Brod circulated a modern photo of Milton Hill House that she had presumably Googled. This was taken from the wrong angle but seemed to hit the bulls eye. The next day I travelled to Milton Hill House, now a conference centre, and boldly approached the desk staff. They were very helpful and knowledgeable and one agreed to pose for my attempt to take exactly the same picture as that taken for the postcard some 85 years ago (not easy!).

Hill House has a long history, and once received the visit of Peter the Great, later it became the home of John Bowles, Town Clerk of Abingdon from 1765 to 1780.

During World War 1, the then owner Sir Mortimer Singer (Sewing Machines) turned the house into a military hospital. The soldiers received treatment for their wounds and were able to take full advantage of the peaceful rural setting whilst treated.



Local people must surely have worked as nurses or other staff? Please let us know if your relatives have any memories.

All in all, the above is a splendid example of the power of a historical mailing list, We request all members to join as it is also a great way of getting last minute changes of program or visits to everyone Full instructions may be found here: <http://www.aaahs.org.uk/maillinglist.html>

As a foretaste, our next newsletter should contain an article linking Caldecott House to the Black Hole of Calcutta, and to the social circle of Jane Austen.

David Rayner and the AAAHS Mailing List

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I hope that the advent of Spring finds you all in good health and uplifted spirits, and that our continuing series of talks and other activities will provide you with a varied and stimulating selection of topics, both local and from further afield.

Our meetings continue to be well attended, although we all need to consider ways in which to make membership of our Society appeal to a wider range of people, given the continued expansion of the Abingdon populace and our slightly diminishing number of paid-up members. Any suggestions for ways to entice new members, particularly young people (who do seem to be rather unrepresented at present) would be welcomed. Please call any Committee member if you have any ideas as to how to go about this, and they will be gratefully received.

We had a stand at the Clubs and Societies Day in the Guildhall at the end of March, but it is hard to gauge how much of the interest expressed by visitors to our display will be translated into attendance at talks/digs/ historians' meetings thus far.

If as many members as possible could try to convince at least one friend to come along with them to a talk/dig/meeting and then join the Society if they like what they encounter, then our position will change from static or at worst declining membership into a dynamic one.

Due to Jenny's recent indisposition, I have assumed the mantle of organising speakers for future meetings. Many thanks to Jenny for a fine job done. Speakers have to be sought out and have to provide a topic of interest to as many members as possible, so if anyone has any ideas on a subject they would like to hear a talk about or indeed a particular person that they would like to hear speak, again please contact any Committee member and make your vies known. The converse also applies of course – if you don't like the way something is being done, please let us know!

Our sumptuous headquarters Portacabin at Janey and Will's farm is now up and running and I hope that some of the 'acquisitions' that I have for it will be brought over to it during the Easter break (computer, desk, microscopes etc). We hope that this will be a resource for the whole Society, since a Society such as ours IS its members and the more people that get involved the better. A full list of the resources available at HQ will be available soon.

Other aspects of our activities are covered in the other reports, so may I end by thanking all of the Committee for their efforts, all the membership for their support and anyone connected with the Society in any way.

Regards,
Simon Owen
Chairman and Field-limping person

OUTING

Guided Tour of the Marcham Frilford Excavation 2006: Thursday 20th July.
Meet at AAAHS HQ in Manor Farm Yard at 6.30pm (20 minute walk) or at dig at 7pm
Parking on site or in old Noah's Ark car park.
Further details from Roger Gelder (roger.gelder@ntlworld.com) or Janey Cumber (janey.cumber@tiscali.co.uk).