



# Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

[www.AAAHS.org.uk](http://www.AAAHS.org.uk)

## NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2012

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### Meetings Programme:

All at the Northcourt Centre at 7.45pm. Members free. Visitors welcome (£3.00)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Thurs 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012</b> | Dr Gill Hey, Oxford Archaeology North: <i>"Being Neolithic in the Thames Valley"</i>   |
| <b>Thurs 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012</b> | Dr Jane Kershaw, Institute of Archaeology, Oxford University: <i>"Metal Detecting and its Impact on our Understanding of Viking Archaeology"</i> |
| <b>Thurs 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012</b>   | Liz Woolley: <i>"Child Labour in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Oxfordshire"</i>  |
| <b>Thurs 21<sup>st</sup> June 2012</b>  | Open Evening presented by members  |
| <b>Thurs 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2012</b>  | AGM and talk   |

### AAAHS Outings 2012

For all outings please use the form at the end of this newsletter to book by **May 1<sup>st</sup>**. Numbers are limited on some outings. Bookings contact: Elizabeth Drury, 33 East Saint Helen St, Abingdon OX14 5EE. Tel: 01235 553636

#### **Walk Around Steventon Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 6.30pm**

Steventon is fortunate in having a large number of timber framed medieval buildings. This is an opportunity to have a guided walk round the village led by buildings expert Dr David Clark of the Oxfordshire Building Record (OBR).

The X2 bus travels between Abingdon and Steventon. Meet in the car park by the village hall on the village green.

#### **Visit to Radley College Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 6.30pm**

Radley Hall is a fine early 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion, once the home of Sir George Bowyer. In 1847 it was rented to the newly founded Radley College. This is an opportunity to look around the college, including going into some of the main buildings.

No 35 bus stops near the entrance. Follow the drive into the school grounds and meet in the car park.

#### **Longworth Village Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> July 6.30pm**

Members of the Longworth History Society will be showing us round this Oxfordshire village. The cost includes a copy of the society's book 'Longworth a sense of Place'.

Please meet at the car park by the Church.

## Chairman's Report

The 'new year' is not so new now, but this still seems a good moment to look both backwards and forwards at what the Society has been doing, and what will be happening in the coming months.

Our autumn programme was diverse and interesting, with talks by Judy White on 'The History of Northcourt' (September AGM), Graham Moores on 'The Peninsular Wars – the Early Years' (October) and Martin-Sirot Smith on 'Sulgrave and the Washingtons' (November), memorably delivered in period costume. For the Christmas Social, a fascinating talk by Ian Lewis of Regia Anglorum re-enactment group on 'The Wychurst Project' – a project to build a replica of an Anglo-Saxon hall in a wood in Kent – was followed by excellent refreshments, the chance to socialise, and the opportunity to talk informally to the lecturer. It was a very enjoyable way to end our year. A meeting of the Local History Group (October) offered a range of interesting presentations and discussions.

The autumn saw the publication by the Society of *Celebrating Abingdon's History*, the collected essays from the event we organised in October 2010 to commemorate Mienneke Cox's contribution to Abingdon history. We held a small book launch in Abingdon Library in November, and the book has sold well. It contains nine contributions by well-known names on various aspects of Abingdon's history, and is well worth reading. Copies can be bought in The Bookstore and in Mostly Books.

In January we heard from Amanda Clarke about recent excavations at the Roman city of Silchester and Tony Hadland told us about the 'Thames Valley Recusants' (February). Future lectures will deal with 'The Neolithic of the Thames Valley' (Gill Hey, March – this will be the Lambrick lecture); 'Metal detecting and Viking archaeology' (Jane Kershaw, April), and 'Child Labour in 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxfordshire' (Liz Woolley, May). As usual, June is our Members Evening, and we will be inviting contributions nearer the time. The Society will also have a stand at the Abingdon Clubs and Societies day on Saturday 21 April, in the Guildhall. Do come along (and, better still, volunteer to spend some time staffing the stand!). During the summer, we will also be running a further series of evening outings, details above.

We have been busy in other ways too. We have started commenting more regularly on planning applications which affect our heritage: committee member Stuart Hughes is leading on this. In these difficult times, we think it is good to let council planning officers and councillors know that local people care about their heritage, wish to see it properly protected, and are keeping a watchful eye on proposals for development.

Another initiative has been to publish and properly archive some of the Society's past archaeological excavations. Members of the digging team have had two meetings to identify priorities for this, and what work is needed to bring key sites to publication. Non-publication of excavations is a persistent problem in archaeology, and it will be a great credit to the society if we make some progress with our own past excavations.

2012 promises to be an exciting year in Abingdon. The Museum is due to reopen after a major refurbishment of the County Hall (which now looks very splendid) and the installation of completely new displays; members of the Society have helped by providing objects and information, and we very much look forward to seeing the end result. June will of course see the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, which will be marked in Abingdon by a bun-throwing from the County Hall.

Finally, we have just heard that Jane Bowen – who has been working extremely hard on the new displays for the Museum, and who many of you may have met – has been appointed Curator of Abingdon Museum. Jane succeeds Lauren Gilmour, who is retiring this year. I would like to take this opportunity both to thank Lauren for all that she has done during her time in Abingdon (and to wish her a long and happy retirement), and to congratulate Jane very warmly on her appointment. We will look forward very much to working together in the years ahead.

*Roger Thomas, Chairman*

## **Digging Report - The Society's Excavation at Marcham**

The Society has been conducting a small excavation at Marcham in a wood known as 'Kiln Copse' where we are trying to locate the brick kiln after which the wood is named. We have always believed that the kiln was operating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> but recently found three pottery fragments which are 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, including the base of what may be a Bellarmine Jar. These may be contemporary with a spoon which we found in the topsoil of the trench, though this can't be used as dating evidence. This is leading to a rethink of its age.



We have made very slow progress over the past year and apart from large scatters of fragmented brick and tile have found no evidence, yet of the kiln itself. We backfilled one of our trenches at the end of the year and were finishing off another when we found what may be a cut filled with rubble. Inevitably something interesting appears just as we are winding down for the winter... The weather has been too bad to be able to dig recently but we look forward starting again in the spring.

We always welcome more diggers, novice or experienced, and meet at

10:00 in the car park to the Cemetery (on the right hand side as you leave Marcham on the Frilford road) and are always pleased to welcome visitors to our excavation. Call me on 07880 897047 to check that we are going to be there.

The photograph shows Ruth Barber, Julia Brocklesby and Mary-Nell Pilgrim hard at work in Trench 5.

*John Gibbs*

## **Treasurer's Report**

So far this year the biggest expenditures have been on the Mienneke Cox book publication, speakers' remuneration and the hire of the two halls. These outgoings have been offset by the incomes of sales of the Mienneke Cox book and members' subs and donations.

Income is healthy (currently £796 in the current account) and visitor donations remain consistently high with an average of 2 visitors per session so far but also other 'one off' donations that have come with the membership renewals.

Donations to the tea/coffee fund have netted the sum of £12. Book sales, other than Mieneke's, also remain healthy with £120 from the sale of Abingdon In Camera. The figures below give an indication of the current state of finances with approximate values for the largest cost items.

A full set of financial figures will be presented at the AGM.

| <b>Income/Expenditure Analysis as of 10/02/10</b> |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| <b>Income recurrent</b>                           | <b>2011/12 ytd (£)</b> |
| Subs  | 980                    |
| Donations/ visitors                               | 90                     |
| Tea / coffee                                      | 12                     |
| Income from book sales                            | 626                    |
| Bank interest                                     | 12                     |
|   |                        |
| <b>Expenditure recurrent</b>                      |                        |
| Hire of halls                                     | 243                    |
| Mieneke book publication                          | 1210                   |
| Speakers  | 150                    |
| Publicity and events                              | 225                    |

*Andrew Steele, Treasurer*

## **Local History Group**

The Local History Group meeting on 21 February was well attended and had an unusually full agenda.

The main presentation was given by John Dunleavy and was on Abingdon's tradition of bun-throwing and the attendant festivities, a subject on which he has published several recent articles. The tradition is believed to have started at the accession of George III in 1760, but it was at various royal occasions in the reign of Victoria that it became a regular occurrence. At the time of the marriage of the future Edward VII in 1863, Abingdon men were regaled with a roast beef luncheon, while their female equivalents were supposed to wait till 4 p.m. for a tea. In the event, the irate ladies invaded the marquee and bagged up the goodies to take home to their families. When it came to the Jubilee in 1887, both sexes could partake, but the undeserving poor from the workhouse were excluded. The latter, however, were suitably entertained by the charitable Misses Morland in their garden in Bath Street. More recently, bun throwing has become a much more frequent event. There was much discussion on the theme of a food dole turning into a high-spirited civic celebration.

After coffee, the meeting turned to current projects. Judy White described the new Abbey timeline which is to hang in the Checker, and will be inaugurated on 16 March. The 'Lost Abbey' project has resulted in a booklet written by Tim Allen, which was subjected to critical review by Janey Cumber. Her main point was that although the

archaeology is well handled, the role of the abbey and its abbots in English medieval history is passed over in silence. There were suggestions that there should perhaps be a complementary publication, possibly on-line, emphasizing the abbey's history rather than its archaeology. This was left for further consideration.

Jane Bowen gave an update on the Museum refurbishment, including an amusing set of pictures of an MG car being posted sideways through a window by a number of sweating operatives and two cranes. Opening is expected in the late summer. There will be the main sessions hall and several rooms on the top storey to be named the Abingdon Attic. A full programme already exists to the end of 2013, but we have the possibility of putting on a local history exhibition in 2014 or later. Ruth Weinberg described her work for the museum, in which she is listing Abingdon's historic buildings and what is known about them.

The next meeting is planned for Tuesday 15 May.

Manfred Brod

## Try These!

If you heard Amanda Clarke speak at our January meeting then you can find out more about the Silchester excavation at

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/silchester/> or  
<http://www.silchester.rdg.ac.uk/>

All you could wish to know about Thames Valley Recusants about whom Tony Hadland spoke to us in February.

<http://www.hadland.me.uk/rec.html>

In a podcast from November 2006 Dr Nick Snashall, National Trust archaeologist for Avebury, describes how a fresh look at the Neolithic Cotswolds brings to light how its people lived their lives.

[Life and death in the Neolithic Cotswolds](#)

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/lmf/download/019-podbath-NickSnashal/17451.mp3>

Excellent site detailing archaeological sites around the world and closer to home with visiting information, photos, etc.

<http://www.megalithic.co.uk/index.php>

Some recent reports in the ADS grey literature library of local interest-

Old Gaol – [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-988-1/dissemination/pdf/johnmoor1-48882\\_2.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-988-1/dissemination/pdf/johnmoor1-48882_2.pdf) and

[http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-988-1/dissemination/pdf/johnmoor1-48882\\_1.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-988-1/dissemination/pdf/johnmoor1-48882_1.pdf)

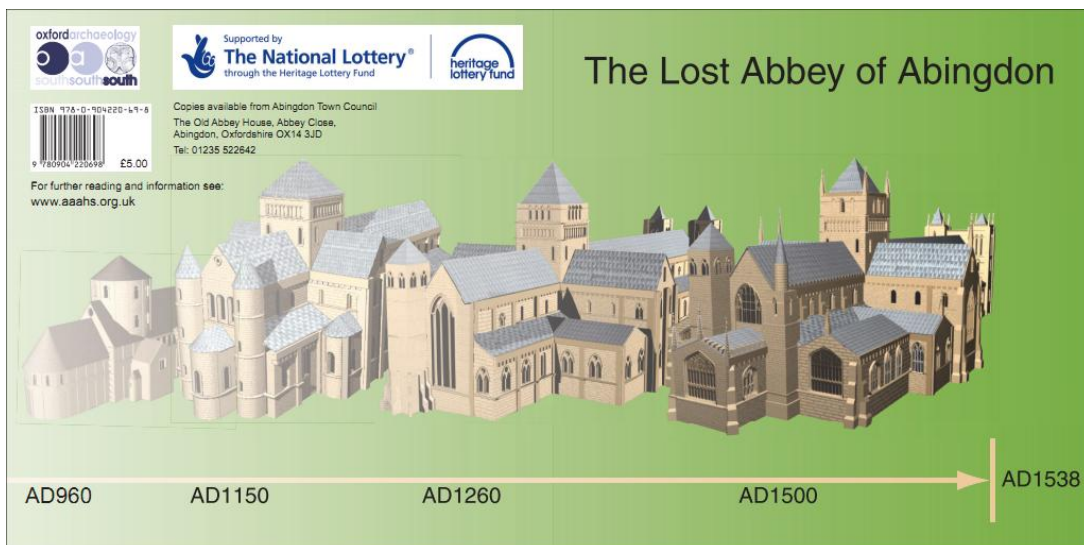
Northcourt – [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-483-1/dissemination/pdf/thamesva1-109647\\_1.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-483-1/dissemination/pdf/thamesva1-109647_1.pdf)

Fitzharris - [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-426-1/dissemination/pdf/foundati1-108335\\_1.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-426-1/dissemination/pdf/foundati1-108335_1.pdf)

A site offering on-line access to the construction and design of many hundreds of English-made and continental *concertinas* and related *free reeded instruments*

<http://www.concertinamuseum.com/>

# The Lost Abbey Project



When Abingdon Abbey was dissolved in 1538 the main ecclesiastical buildings were systematically dismantled and the stone taken away by river to further Henry VIII's building projects. Any surviving foundations also provided a convenient local quarry for building and road repairs. In 1922-3 excavations in the gardens of the Abbey House were directed and financed by Arthur Preston with the aim of determining the site of the Norman church and any earlier features. Today this area is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Using the detailed 1:500 scale edition OS map of Abingdon as a model, Mr Trendell's Victorian gardens were refurbished by the Vale of White Horse District Council in 2006-7. The outline of the abbey church was marked out using stone slabs and two interpretation boards installed. In 2008 the Vale of White Horse District Council received £49,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to finance the Lost Abbey Project to raise awareness of the abbey and its historical significance in the history of Abingdon. This would be achieved by the publication of a booklet, seven new interpretation boards, an abbey timeline and an educational pack for schools. A large focus group was formed known as the Friends of the Abbey Gardens, from which a much smaller group emerged, composed mainly of members of the AAHS and the Friends of Abingdon, who provided the necessary background research and appropriate illustrations.

Last September saw the launch - on Heritage Open Day - of the Abbey Heritage Trail, a self-guided walk round the nine interpretation boards. The new booklet, "The Lost Abbey of Abingdon" written by Tim Allen, was published before Christmas and is available from the town's independent bookshops and the Abingdon Town Council offices at Old Abbey House, price £5.00. An official launch of the booklet, abbey timeline and education pack will take place in March.

*Jackie Smith*

**NB** Michael Harrison has helpfully provided a link to his site which includes translations from the medieval Latin of three of the Obedientiars' Accounts at Abingdon Abbey during 1388-1451. The Accounts are those of three of the four gardeners and the link can be followed at [www.mjfh1.demon.co.uk](http://www.mjfh1.demon.co.uk)

## Dates for Your Diary:

As you may know we get a reduced room hire rate from Northcourt Centre as we participate in its management. Every year there is at least one fund raising event to offset maintenance costs and this year there will be a **Supper Dance and Raffle** on Saturday May 5<sup>th</sup> at Northcourt Centre. Tickets cost £10 each to include food and a Swing Band. Licensed bar available.

Also the Abingdon Quilters, who also meet at Northcourt, are having an **Exhibition of Quilts** at the Manor School on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> and Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Entry £2, refreshments available, some of proceeds will be donated to the Northcourt Centre.

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July and Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> August: open days at **Silchester excavation**

Sundays 8 July, 5 August and 9 September: **Abbey Tours** - Guided walks organised by the Friends of Abingdon around the mediaeval abbey site, followed by refreshments in the Lower Hall.

**Iffley History Society** - Church Hall, Church Way, Iffley. Tuesdays at 7.30pm.

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March: Anna Eavis – *“Medieval Stained Glass: the craftsmen and their techniques”*

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> April: Geoffrey Tyack – *“Oxford Churches since the Oxford Movement”*

## The Afterlife of Edmund of Abingdon

We all know about Edmund of Abingdon – how he became Archbishop of Canterbury, how he got as far as Pontigny in Burgundy on his way to a council in Rome but died near there, and then was canonised. But what the books don't tell us is how this canonisation came about. He died a natural death and wasn't an obvious candidate for sainthood. A Pontigny local historian, Jean-Luc Benoit, dealt with the question in a very informative paper published in 2001.<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Benoit's publication.

Edmund died at Soisy, a few days' journey from Pontigny. His death caused anguished debate among the Pontigny monks, which would continue for years. It was basically about ethics – to what extent might the abbey make profitable use of the incident?

Edmund's body was immediately taken to the nearby town of Provins, where it was disembowelled and embalmed on the assumption that it would be returned to Canterbury for burial. Then it was transported in a solemn procession to Pontigny, with large crowds of curious lookers-on.

And on the way, there occurred what must have been expected: a miracle. A sick child was placed on the coffin and was instantly cured. Everything was suspiciously

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Benoit, 'Autour des tombeaux de Saint Edme à Pontigny, au milieu du XIIIe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société des Sciences Historiques et Naturelles de l'Yonne* v. 133 (2001) 33-70.

in place for an immediate formal enquiry. The boy's father said it was a monk who had put the child on the coffin, but the inquisitors were not happy with this; the mother was questioned and agreed the initiative had come from the family, not from the monks. The abbot of Pontigny came out to meet the procession, and formally



St Edmund being put on display  
(Glass at the church of St. Bris,

forbade the deceased to carry out any further miracles till he had reached the abbey. It was explained that Edmund, while staying at the abbey, had requested to be accepted as a *confrater*, a sort of country member, and so was subject to the abbot's discipline. What was probably more important was that the abbey would derive no direct benefit from miracles occurring elsewhere.

Once the body reached Pontigny, the miracles started again. One of them involved a crippled boy named Thomas who began to walk normally. The name was significant for the internal argument at the abbey. Many years earlier, Thomas à Becket had stayed there and promised that one day he would reward the abbey for its hospitality to him. The decease of this other Archbishop of Canterbury effectively on Pontigny's doorstep must surely be seen as a posthumous settling of accounts, and it would be discourteous to refuse it. Any intention of returning the body to England was now abandoned, and Edmund's chancellor, Richard de Wych, was called on to affirm that the prelate had expressly asked to be buried at Pontigny.

The body was buried, but it appeared that the miracles required it to be touched, or at least seen, so it was exhumed and placed in an appropriate partly open structure. Over time, new such structures were built, each one more ornate and bejewelled than the last. This was strictly against Cistercian tradition and practice, but to fail in honouring this source of new wealth for the abbey would be churlish. It was Eustace of Faversham, Edmund's chaplain and his first biographer, who wanted a truly magnificent sepulchre for his master and obtained papal authorisation for it. Benoit seems to have discovered that Eustace became a Cistercian, remained at Pontigny, and ended as its prior.

One problem that arose was that no female was allowed in a Cistercian monastery; women pilgrims or miracle seekers had to be content with a sight of some relic, probably the episcopal ring, taken outside the fence on a couple of days each week. Later, Edmund's right arm somehow became detached and would be used for this purpose. Eventually, the Pope gave exceptional permission for Englishwomen to enter the abbey. This marked another breach in Cistercian tradition.

The canonisation was fast-tracked, supported by the English royal family and magnates throughout Europe with links to the Cistercians. It took little more than six years from Edmund's death. Bishops gave indulgences for those who contributed to



his cult, at first of forty days, but later with inflation amounting to a year or more of relief from the pains of purgatory.

Edmund – or Edme as he is known in France – never attained quite the prominence of Thomas of Canterbury and the pilgrims who came to Pontigny were mostly from within a hundred-mile radius. But in his afterlife he did very well for his posthumous home.

*Manfred Brod*

| <b>AAAHS OUTINGS 2012</b>  |   |                             |                   |
|--|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BOOKING FORM</b>  |   | please complete in CAPITALS |                   |
| Name   | _____   |                             |                   |
| Address  | _____   |                             |                   |
|  | _____   |                             |                   |
| Telephone  | _____   |                             |                   |
| Email  | _____   |                             |                   |
| EVENT  | Number of people  | Total                       |                   |
| <b>Walk Round Steventon</b><br>Tuesday 8th May 6.30pm  | _____   | at £3 each                  |                   |
| <b>Radley College</b><br>Wednesday 6th June 6.30pm   | _____   | at £3 each                  |                   |
| <b>Longworth Village</b><br>Wednesday 4th July 6.30pm  | _____   | at £3 each                  |                   |
| Please make cheques made payable to A.A.A.H.S.<br>Please return form by <b>1st May</b> . Numbers are limited on some outings |   | <b>Total Enclosed</b>       |                   |
| To:  | Elizabeth Drury<br>33 East Saint Helen Street<br>Abingdon |                             |                   |
|  | OX14 5EE  | Tel. (01235) 553636         | <b>Thank you.</b> |