



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

www.aaahs.org.uk

NEWSLETTER – Spring 2021

Welcome to the Spring newsletter.

Millions are being vaccinated and the lockdown restrictions are being eased. However, we are still unable to resume our normal meetings at the Northcourt Centre. Thus, we have taken the sad decision to postpone once again the Lambrick Lecture to 21st October 2021.

The enforced periods of lockdown have nevertheless encouraged people to rediscover their immediate surroundings during their daily walks and to explore and enjoy new places in the neighbourhood. Details of a lockdown walk at Lodge Hill follow in the newsletter.



MEETINGS

For the time being all Society's meetings will continue to be streamed via Zoom. All members will be sent an invitation in advance and will be admitted virtually to the meeting from 19:30 for a 19:45 start.

Thursday 15th April 2021

'Tales from the HEIR Project'

by Dr Janice Kinory

Thursday 20th May 2021

'The Coming of the Railway to Oxford'

by Liz Woolley

Thursday 17th June 2021

To be confirmed

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The next LHG meeting will be on **Tuesday 20th April 2021**
Theme: Interesting Images

Do you have a favourite view of Abingdon? Has this changed over the years and what can you find out about that?

If you are working on any aspect of Abingdon history, you may find this meeting inspirational.

This is an informal meeting. All are welcome to join in and share images and thoughts about the chosen topic with the group.

The topic is decided upon at the previous LHG meeting by those there.

For more information about AAAHS meetings, please visit
<https://aaahs.org.uk>

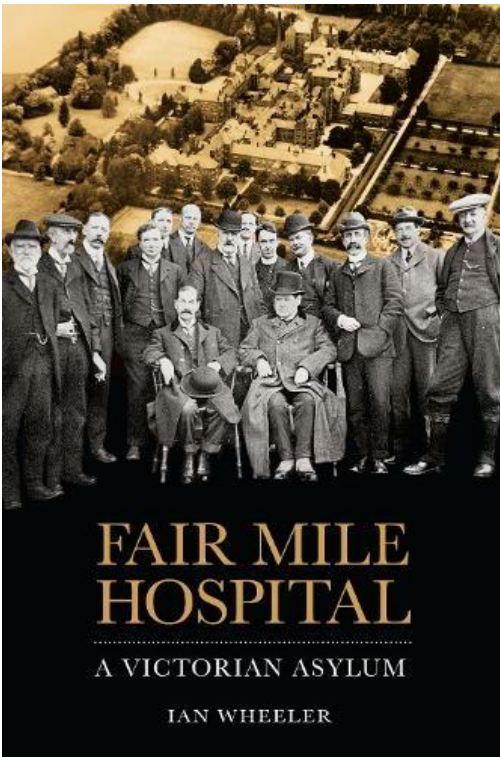
**We hope to keep seeing you
all at the forthcoming talks.**

A look back at the talks over the winter months

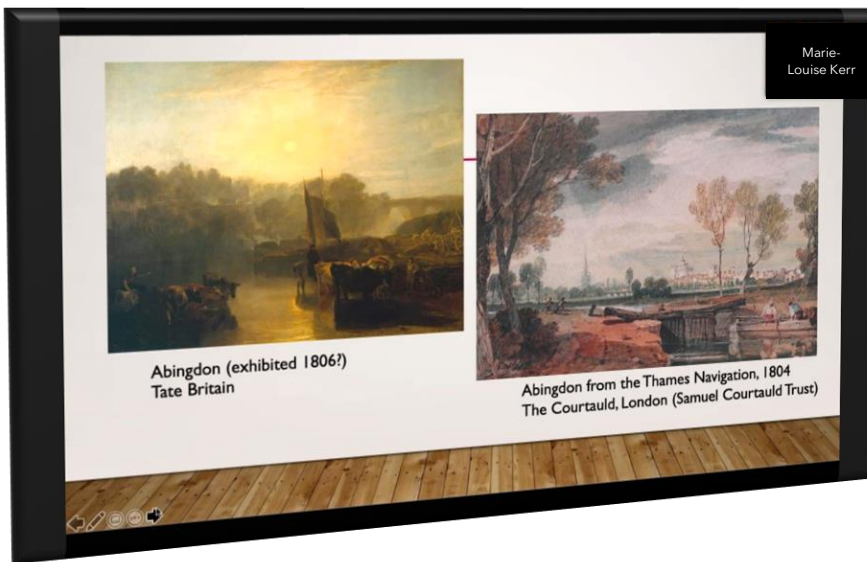
Thank you for joining the AAAHS Zoom meetings over these past few months; we hope you have enjoyed the evening talks.

In January Ian Wheeler gave an extremely interesting talk on the Fair Mile Hospital, which included a comprehensive description of the architectural complex and photographs of the residents and staff, including Wheeler's ancestors. If you would like to know more, his book *The Fair Mile Hospital - A Victorian Asylum* is available to purchase online or in store. The book's cover shows J. T. Morland Clark as one of the Committee of Visitors from 1912-1917.

David Taylor, Chairman of the Didcot and District Archaeological and Historical Society, joined our online meetings in February and talked about the Army Barracks in Didcot, highlighting their use during the World Wars and after. To know more about the history of Didcot please visit DDAHS's website <http://www.ddahs.org.uk/>



In March we invited Marie-Louise Kerr, Museum Advisor at Wallingford Museum, for her popular lecture 'Oxfordshire on Canvas'. Members who joined the meeting had the pleasure of viewing some of the most famous paintings of Abingdon and listened to a fascinating talk on the artists' inspiration and technique.



Some of the paintings featuring Abingdon and the surrounding area are exhibited in many museums. Despite the fact museums are still temporarily closed, one can see many of them online thanks to Art UK, a platform making art available for everyone and everywhere.

Here is the link: <https://artuk.org/>
The section dedicated to war artist Paul Nash is worth a click:
<https://artuk.org/discover/artists/nash-paul-18891946>.

Join us on Zoom AAAHS Vision

We would like to know your thoughts about the talks offered via Zoom so far so please do let us know if there is anything you think can be improved or if there is a specific topic or speaker that you would like to hear in the future. Committee Member Michael Bloom is doing an amazing job in planning the AAAHS 2021/2022 Lectures and he would be happy to hear any of your suggestions via email at speakers@aaahs.org.uk

LODGE HILL - A great vista. A lockdown walk.

By Jeff Wallis

The fences have gone up at Whites Lane, Radley, as Pye Homes prepare to machine away the early Iron Age onto the spoil mountain, so this means the loss of another peaceful Sunday stroll. I now renew interest in a well-trodden path, a public footpath to Lodge Hill across Peachcroft Farm land. The path starts on Twelve Acre Drive, a few metres from the Oxford Road Roundabout, and immediately enters a copse, at this time of year very slippery underfoot echoing the silty clay subsoil exposed by a gully at the copse edge. The boring bit is a straight cut across a grass crop field and crossing a footbridge across a stream that bubbles out at Lodge Hill and eventually becomes one side of the Abingdon Causeway Enclosure on its way to the Thames.

After the slippery bridge is another superficially tedious field, but after ploughing and a bit of rain this area starts to speak to us. The subsoil geology fetched up by the plough is abundant with quartzite cobbles that would look good in Radcliffe Square or Merton Street. This is down-slope drift from the Northern Drift (Plateau Gravel) parked at the top of the hill. Some of these cobbles (Bunter Quartzites) are six inches across amongst a pudding basin of material from the Midlands and even exotics from way up north. Also seen are some scratchy frosted flints of a size and quality that no self-respecting knapper would consider as hardcore.

The next field is a tiny bit more interesting and elevates one to the giddy heights of the 80-metre contour. Pebbles are still abundant, but one becomes aware of some displaying features of shattering, angular breaks and pinkish/plum discoloration as one proceeds towards the top part of the field and the 18th century Chestnut Avenue, running east to Radley College. The path cuts across this field



*Whites Lane. Early Iron Age.
The rim sherd on the right has a pierced hole.*

diagonally, but most use the track around the edge, both terminating at a stile onto the Drive. A significant feature here, to me at least, is the presence of a pond disguised by much overgrowth and chestnut trees. A stroll to this pond along the field edge highlights the hollow and downslope trace of a spring line and a slight sound of subterranean water. This is key geology as the spring line must bubble out at the Kimmeridge Clay interface with one of the Lodge Hill Members of the Sugworth Channel System, a series of 800,000-year-old buried channels underlying the Northern Drift capping hereabouts. A quartzite Palaeolithic handaxe was found nearby back in the 1980s.

Turning to face south here on a fine clear summer evening on this sheltered slope with fresh water on hand, one sees a vista of the Berkshire Downs from Uffington, Segsbury and Cherbury in the Valley, to Chinnor and beyond eastwards. The field immediately north has spreads of Hanborough and Wolvercote Terrace gravel over Northern Drift with findspots of small lithics before slipping down into a shallow valley.

What have we here? Fresh-water springs, a flat plateau, easy access to lower gravel terraces, a southerly aspect, good extensive view to points on the Berkshire Chalk Downs and an apparent clustering of various naturally split and mineralised pebbles towards the top and close to spring water.

LiDAR cover is not particularly informative apart from showing slight earthworks and ridge and furrow probably from the medieval Manor Sugworth. Two spring line hollows are seen and a rather sharper enclosure at SU512998 nicely placed on the brow of the escarpment. The spread of split and discoloured quartzite and the mineralising needs defining and explaining as part of The Peachcroft Research Project.

What's on the Web

Now that we are allowed out, you might enjoy following the Agatha Christie trail round the places associated with her: https://www.wallingford.co.uk/files/agatha_walks.pdf

The great crime writer (and archaeologist) Agatha Christie lived at Winterbrook House, Cholsey near Wallingford from 1934 to her death in 1976. Her grave is in the churchyard of St Mary's, Cholsey. Her life was eventful and at times very sad, though her years in Wallingford seem to have been very happy.

Read more here:

<https://womenshouldknow.net/agatha-christie-three-decades-archaeology/>

Members may have read about the recent discovery of another thermopolium, or street food stall, at Pompeii. It was one of 80 in the town, but a big step up from a burger van! Choices for dinner included duck, goat, pig, fish, land snails, all of which were found in the deep terracotta jars embedded in the stone counter. The stall was beautifully decorated with pictures of a nymph riding a horse, a dog, two ducks and rooster. A 3D reconstruction has been posted on YouTube by Pablo Aparicio and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaCJHVP2bP8>

After our recent interesting talk about paintings of Oxfordshire, you might be interested in this free online public lecture being offered by the Society of Antiquaries of London at lunchtime on 4 May. Find out more and register to attend by following this link:

<https://www.sal.org.uk/event/wartime-paintings-of-london-the-story-of-the-war-artists-who-documented-the-capital-1939-1945>

We aim to send round the Society's Newsletter each term. We welcome members' contributions so if you have photos, curious stories or book/place reviews that you think other members might be interested in, please send all content by email at publicity@aaahs.org.uk or to any committee member.

Please stay safe and we look forward to seeing you soon!

AAAHS Committee Positions

John Foreman (AAAHS Chairman), and Hubert Zawadzki (Society Membership), will be stepping down in September 2021. If there is anyone, among the older AAAHS members, who feels able to take one of these roles and to help the running of this Society, or would like to know more - no commitment - then please contact any member of the Committee. You will be greatly welcomed!

AAAHS News



Members will remember that AAAHS held an exhibition in Abingdon Museum in 2018, to mark the Society's 50th anniversary. As part of that, we produced four panels on different aspects of the archaeology of Abingdon (Early Hunters and Gatherers, Prehistoric Monuments, Thrupp and Medieval Abingdon).

These panels, which highlight some of the Society's most important excavations and finds, have recently been mounted on the AAAHS's website. You can see them at this link:

<https://www.aaahs.org.uk/archive/aaahs-50>

The production of the panels was part of a project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to catalogue the results of past AAAHS excavations, and to publicise these through a book, online map and events. This work has been slowed down by Covid, but we hope to make better progress now restrictions are easing.