



# Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2002

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### LECTURE PROGRAMME 2002-2003

#### 2002

- 19 Sept AGM: Landscapes and placenames in and around the Chilterns. *Ann Cole*  
17 Oct How Oxford got its railway. *Robert Sephton*  
21 Nov Lambrick Memorial Lecture: The parsonage in the local community. *Kate Tiller*  
12 Dec Megalithic temples of Malta: Christmas social. *Jenny de Bono*

#### 2003

- 16 Jan Kelmscott. *Simon Townley*  
20 Feb 100 years of change at UKAEA Harwell. *Nick Hance*  
20 March Alcester. *Eberhard Sauer*  
17 April The life and times of Sennacherib. *Stephanie Dalley*  
15 May The Archaeology of the Channel Tunnel. *Stuart Fordham*  
19 June Members' Evening: Presentations and displays of members' work  
18 Sept AGM

### NEWS IN BRIEF

**The National Monuments Record Centre** at Swindon are having a Research Day for Local History on 18 September. This consists of a tour of the search rooms, case studies and a practical session. It lasts all day and costs £20 without lunch and £24 with. Their telephone number is 01793 414735. The Centre has excellent coverage of Abingdon, e.g. several box-files of photographs of churches, streets, the Abbey, Christ's Hospital, archaeology, Fitzharris Manor (some 50 photos!).

**The Society's web site** is at [www.aaahs.org.uk](http://www.aaahs.org.uk) Whilst this is currently just about adequate it is not very up-to-date, and could do with some improvement. We should be grateful if there is anyone who could volunteer to take charge of it

**Northcourt Centre Bazaar.** There will be the annual fund raising event at Northcourt Centre on Saturday October 19th. We have not yet decided whether the Society will have its own stall there but even if we don't we should be grateful if members could support this event by gifts and purchases as we need to do our bit to ensure the financial stability of the centre.

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

It has been a very mixed year. The death of John Carter had an effect on us all and we wanted to find some way of remembering his contribution to both the digging and historical work of the Society. There are various proposals being considered, but nothing definite has yet been decided. Some of these - for example, seeing whether we can have an Abingdon based edition of Oxoniensia - are not within our control.

The talks continue to be well attended and we all have our favourites. I particularly liked the talk on Drovng by Nigel Hammond. The historians have now got together with the diggers and are the carrying out a research project on Thrupp. The task here will be finding a way of bringing the work to a publication standard; and we also need to develop expertise in identifying medieval pottery. The Members' Evening showed the type of work being undertaken and I would be the first to admit that I should have been more robust in limiting the length of some of the talks. The problem was that the level of enthusiasm was such that it would have been a bit mean to have done so.

The outings appear to be well supported for the shorter evening ones but less well for the longer day trips. This is difficult to judge, as we should be enabling people to see places of interest but at the same time it would be silly if we went to places that people were so uninterested in that they did not join us. I suspect that we will need to have just one whole-day outing per year and to recognise that this may make a loss. It is however up to the membership and the committee to decide what they want. We are looking for people to join the Committee. Please phone me on Ab 529720 if you wish to know more - no-one can be on for more than 3 years without a break so it is not a lifelong commitment.

Whilst I am the person who stands up and introduces the speakers, this is only a very small part of the work which is carried out. Not only do we have the committee which organises the speakers, outings, digging and the Society generally, but we also have other people who help, such as Diana Carne who attends the Northcourt Centre Committee, enabling us to use the premises at a reduced rate. This Newsletter was produced by Dick Barnes, again, someone who is not on the committee but without whom we would all have to do a lot more running around. The best example I can give of the assistance given by members generally was the speed with which over 100 cups of tea were produced for the 'Oxfordshire Past' conference. Society members who were around stepped in and helped, and this enabled the queue to be got through in 10 minutes. So I would like end by thanking everyone who has helped with the Society this year.

*Roger Ainslie*

## **LOCAL HISTORY GROUP**

The Local History Group now has about twenty members. The meeting in May featured, exceptionally, an outside speaker: Grant Audley-Miller, who leads the Oxfordshire Building Record project on the old police station on Bridge Street. He described the 19<sup>th</sup> century building and the way it functioned: the business section and the cells on the ground floor, with the policemen and their families living 'above the shop'; the policemen scattering each day to their beats in the Vale villages and checked on by the inspector making the rounds on his horse. A Victorian policeman might keep the same beat throughout his career and would develop an intimate knowledge of his area and its inhabitants.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, 22 October, when Margaret Gosling will present her work on the Hyde family of Northcourt and its branches. Meetings after that will be on the first Tuesdays in February and May 2003.

*Manfred Brod*

## **JOHN CARTER (1931-2001)**

### **An Appreciation**

To more recent members of this Society John Carter is probably best remembered for his close questioning of reports at the Annual General Meeting, when the majority of those present would undoubtedly have preferred to move swiftly on to the evening's speaker. Many will be unaware of his major contribution to the development of the Society. John was a founder member, one of an elite but rapidly dwindling band of people who responded to Lucy Hale's advertisement in the North Berks Herald suggesting the formation of an archaeological Society in Abingdon. He attended the inaugural meeting in May 1968 and at the first Annual General Meeting in the following September he was elected on to the committee of the Abingdon and District Archaeological Society as it was then known.

In the first ten years of the Society's history John occupied most of the major offices on the committee: Chairman, Secretary, and Digging Secretary. It was during this period that his influence was probably at its height. He was committed to bringing the Society's activities to the attention of the general public and used his great skills of organisation and persuasion to mount exhibitions in shop windows, at school fetes and excavations, and in the Abbey buildings. In 1974 he co-ordinated the first major open day at an excavation in Abingdon on the Ashville Trading Estate when over 3,000 people visited the displays of the Iron Age site presented in the Society's small caravan. A second one-day exhibition, "A day of archaeology at Abingdon Abbey" followed in 1975. Background planning and preparation often took place in his office while John pursued his day-to-day life as a shopkeeper. Indeed in the early days it could be said that John's toyshop in Stert Street was the informal headquarters of the Society.

It was, however, the week long Silver Jubilee Exhibition in 1977, which demonstrated fully his vision of the twin disciplines of history and archaeology and his skill as a director and co-ordinator. Seventy feet of displays, involving thirty screens and ten cases, had to be thought out, labels created and typed, photographs mounted, and records kept of artefacts borrowed from other museums and private individuals.

There were lectures in the afternoon, music and plays in the evening and guided tours of the town. The event was a major tour de force resulting in increased membership and the financial stability to venture into the publication of "Abingdon in Camera".

Although he had scaled down his involvement in the Society's management, John continued to be a committed member of the digging team but drew the line at potwashing! He had been an enthusiastic advocate of changing the name of the Society and now devoted more time to historical research, publishing jointly two books and a research paper in addition to writing articles for the Market Place magazine and sketches for the town's Millennium Drama. He was a member of the team researching the Society's Millennium Time Line and supported the establishment of the local history group within the Society. After retirement he was appointed Honorary Archivist to Christ's Hospital where he used his newly-acquired computer skills to transfer their card index system to disk.

John set and demanded high standards from all those who worked with him. His main concern was to promote the archaeology and history of Abingdon. His achievements speak for themselves.

## OUTING TO SEE THE COPY OF THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

At Reading Museum, April 28th 2002

If you haven't seen the copy of the Bayeux Tapestry in Reading Museum you must! Twelve of us met there on Sunday afternoon April 28th to see it, with our own speaker (a young archaeologist appropriately named Delphi) and were amazed at how the thirty-five members of the Leek Embroidery Society back in 1885-6 were able to reproduce such a large piece of work in so short a time and to do it as such a faithful copy of the original, housed in Bayeux.

The Embroidery Society's leader, Elizabeth Wardle, had seen the original tapestry and decided it would be a wonderful project to copy it. Photographs of it from the South Kensington Museum (now the V & A) were traced and transferred onto linen, and the workers started, taking great care over every possible detail, even having the woollen yarns specially dyed to match the original colours.

Briefly, the story depicted on both "tapestries" (they are really embroideries) starts with King Edward the Confessor (who had no children of his own) sending Harold Godwin to France to tell William of Normandy that he can have the throne of England when Edward dies. When he does die Harold takes the crown, prompting William to invade England in order to take that which was promised to him, and we all know how he succeeded and that Harold died in the battle!

The story is enhanced all along by lots of detail which tells us about everyday life in 1066. For instance, we don't just see Harold stepping into a boat to cross the channel; we see him in conference with Edward, getting his instructions, then setting out on horseback, being led down the road by his hounds and carrying a falcon. He then decides, as it's a long journey, that he should pop into Bosham Church to pray before having a last meal on land, and then wading stockingless out to the boat already being pulled out by the tide.

Similarly we are given a lot of details about how William set out to conquer England. It took a while to build enough boats, so we see all the trees being cut down for timber, then carpenters and workmen building the boats. They are launched and then stocked with weapons, armour, food and wine, and finally set sail across the Channel; we can see not only men on board but they have brought their horses as well.

All this makes the Bayeux Tapestry and its copy a very human document, not just of wars and battles but how human beings lived and worked, the way they dressed and ate and much else. The copy in Reading Museum is displayed beautifully, well lit and in its own airy gallery; and if you missed the AAHS visit I can recommend that you pay a visit to the museum to see it.

*Suzette Woodhead*

*Enjoy a free guided tour of the famous full-size replica of the Bayeux Tapestry every Saturday, 2.30 - 3.00 p.m - no need to book Open for self-guided visits at other times.*

*And now you can enjoy this excellent display of the Tapestry online at [www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk](http://www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk).*

*Also, there is a fascinating book in the Society's library which, for example, looks at the back of the original tapestry to reveal evidence of design changes.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF A VISIT TO COVENTRY

On 26<sup>th</sup> May, fourteen members travelled by coach to Coventry. Once there we were free to explore on our own. We were dropped off at the Information Centre where most of us picked up either a walking tour leaflet or an audio guide of the city, which could be stopped at any point in order to visit some of the interesting places en route.

Our first visit was to a 14<sup>th</sup> century cellar beneath the Information Centre. It had been the basement of a fine house whose early owners had been connected with the wool and cloth trade in England and would have been used for storage. It was very extensive and very high, had groined ribs and was made of local red sandstone.

We were very fortunate to be able to get into St. Mary's Guildhall which was open to the public on the day of our visit. Coventry was an important mediaeval city and one of the largest in England in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its prosperity was founded on cloth production. The Hall was first built in the 1340's for the merchant Guild of St. Mary, which later merged with others to form the Trinity Guild. We saw the Great Hall with its Tournai tapestry commissioned for the visit of Henry V11 and Queen Elizabeth in 1500 for their ceremonial admission to the Trinity Guild. We also saw the Old Council Chamber and the Prince's Chamber [Coventry has an association with the Black Prince]. Other rooms in this impressive building include a treasury, an armoury and a small room where Mary Queen of Scots is believed to have been imprisoned.

Another important visit was to the Priory Visitor Centre. This was built alongside an area that was excavated for the millennium and has now been made into a garden. Earl Leofric and his wife Lady Godiva founded a monastery here about 1000 A.D for an abbot and twenty-four Benedictine monks. About 1100A.D.the Bishop of Chester moved his seat to Coventry and the Priory church became a cathedral. A great cathedral was built over this site and remained there until 1539, when Henry V111 ordered the cathedral to be demolished. [Coventry did not have another cathedral until St. Michael's was made into a parish church cathedral in 1924.] Inside the Visitor Centre, built of Hollington sandstone as a deliberate link with the new cathedral, are some finds from the excavation. There is a glass portrait of a woman with long golden hair, once part of the west window of the mediaeval cathedral. Some people think it might be the face of the Priory's benefactress, Lady Godiva. There is also an exquisitely painted fragment from the wall of the Chapter House. It is of St. John's Apocalypse and is thought to be French in style.

No visit to Coventry would be complete without a visit to the new cathedral, which is a little to the south of the mediaeval one. It is thirty years since I last visited but it still had the same impact. Entrance to the splendour of the new cathedral is from the peaceful ruins of the bombed St. Michael's Cathedral. Inside the new cathedral the organ was thundering and the building was filled with light and colour from the windows of the baptistry and nave. There are many works of art from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is good to know that we are leaving something very much of our time for future generations to enjoy.

Finally to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, where we only had time to visit the exhibition on the ground floor. This depicts the history of Coventry from the foundation of the Benedictine monastery and the development of the wool trade, the prosperity of the town, the foundation of three later monasteries, the fine ribbon industry, the Lady Godiva parades, the manufacture of bikes, motor bikes, cars, watches and aero engines, to the blitz and the present day. We learned that the Lady Godiva parades were formed to bring in trade. Early Lady Godiva's were played by boys. Later parades became a bit boisterous. One female Lady Godiva fell off her horse, drunk. We also discovered the origin of the expression "sent to Coventry." Coventry was a Puritan stronghold during the Civil War and Puritan jailors refused to speak to their Royalist prisoners.

Coventry provided us with plenty to see. It is good that there is so much to display after the war time devastation. The weather improved as the day went on. Occasionally the audio machine had a mind of its own. It also had tough competition at times from the church bells but we had a good day out.

*Elna Mayor.*

## MARLOW TOWN WALK: 27 JUNE 2002

On a fine summer evening 22 members met three guides from the Marlow Society at the Leisure Centre. Our group set off to the rear of the Centre, and here we encountered Sir Steve Redgrave in bronze, looking out across the Thames and the Rowing Club, and recently unveiled by the Queen. A short walk along the river brought us to the jewel of the town, the wrought-iron suspension bridge built in 1832 to the design of Tierney Clark, who also designed the chain bridge in Budapest. From the bridge we had fine views of the Compleat Angler Hotel, the cascading weir, the lock, and the river with the beautiful beech trees of Quarry Wood in the background.

Returning from the bridge we entered All Saints Church rebuilt in 1835. It contains many interesting memorials and hatchments, including a monument to William Horsepole (1624) who was related to George Washington.

A path at the side of the churchyard leads to St Peter's Street, which runs down to the point where all previous bridges crossed the river. Walking along this street we passed the Roman Catholic Church designed by Pugin in 1846, and the Old Parsonage with parts dating back to the 14th century. Marlow Place faced the end of this street, a fine listed Georgian mansion (c 1720).

Returning to the broad High Street we discovered that it was full of unspoilt buildings from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and noted that some facades were refacing older properties. At the top of the High Street stood the Crown Hotel built in 1807 as the town's Market House, replacing a former wooden building. We were informed it has a fine Assembly Room on the first floor.

The walk continued along West Street, where our guide pointed out commemorative plaques to T S Elliot the poet, Thomas Peacock the author, and to the poet Shelley and his wife Mary, who completed her novel 'Frankenstein' while they were here. Next we came to Sir William Borlase's Grammar School, founded in 1624 to teach 24 poor boys to 'read and write and cast accounts' and 24 poor girls to 'knit, spin and make bone lace'. It is now a mixed grammar school with a sympathetic modern extension. Opposite was Remnantz, an 18th century house, where the junior section of the Royal Military College was housed for about ten years before moving to Sandhurst in 1812.

The return walk brought us to Court Garden built in the mid-18th century by a Dr Battie, who specialised in nervous diseases. He designed it himself and is said to have forgotten at first to put in a staircase.

Marlow still permits cars to park in its High Street and with various eating places and hostelrys open it had a busy and lively atmosphere

*Bryan Cozens*

## TREASURER'S REPORT

The Society's finances are in a healthy state. At the end of our financial year, which is 31 August, we can expect a surplus of £350 or £400, in line with previous years. Routine incomes and expenditures have been (for once) reasonably stable. Outings and excursions had to be subsidised to a small extent, and there were two non-routine items: the extensive Baker archive of Abingdon historical photographs, which has been given to the Society, has been organised and scanned at a cost of £310; and hosting the successful Oxpast conference gave us a surplus of £220. Membership is marginally down from its peak of last year, but the trend towards full rather than concessionary subscriptions has been maintained, indicating, as has been noticeable in meetings, that the Society is getting steadily younger.

The satisfactory state of financial affairs would not be possible without the personal contribution of our vice-president, Mrs Judy Thomas. It was Judy who presented to the Society the rights in her book *Abingdon in Camera*; she assumes the considerable work load involved in marketing the book; and she also runs guided tours in Abingdon and donates the proceeds to the Society. Judy single-handedly provides between a quarter and a third of the Society's income, and I believe that members ought to be suitably appreciative of this.

The final audited accounts will be presented at the AGM on 19 September, and this will be my last act as treasurer before I hand the job over to my successor. The message with which I would like to finish my term of office is the same as the one I gave last year: the Society is perhaps too comfortable financially. A few thousand pounds of reserves are certainly needed, especially as *Abingdon in Camera* has to be reprinted from time to time; but the £8000-plus which we have is arguably too high. I would encourage any members or groups of members who have pet projects within the Society's range of interests to apply to the committee for support.

*Manfred Brod*

## THRUPP RESEARCH GROUP

A number of members of the Local History Group have joined the archaeologists to help work out the history of Thrupp (down Barton Lane for those who don't know!) from documentary sources.

It turns out that there is a mass of sources going back to the medieval period, with only the eighteenth century being relatively thinly covered. We are still at a very early stage of skimming what is available, but already it looks likely that we will be able to trace the fortunes of Thrupp families - both landowners and tenants - and their holdings through several centuries.

It seems that Thrupp was a larger village before the Black Death than it has ever been afterwards. After the dissolution of Abingdon Abbey, it was always held as part of the manor of Radley, so was not an economic unit in its own right. Thrupp Water, now no more than a drainage channel, was a broad side-channel of the Thames and an important fishery with fixed equipment that represented considerable capital. It was an object of discord between Abingdon entrepreneurs and Radley tenants that led to occasional violence and numerous lawsuits in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

This is a project that promises to continue for a very long time. Anyone who wishes to become actively involved should contact Rachel Everett or Manfred Brod.

## MARTHA WASHINGTON'S "HOME IN ABINGDON PARRISH"

A coach tour in Virginia (VA) last year took us to the attractive little town of Abingdon in Washington County, in the far south-west of the state. Its name was specified by the document which authorised the settlement in 1778. We were intrigued by the statement on the official web-site that "the town's name was derived from Martha Washington's English Home in Abingdon Parrish". Could it be that George Washington's wife had connections with our Abingdon in England?

The Historical Society of Washington County VA provided a helpful newspaper article, and there are web-sites with genealogical data and biographies. Although there are several glaring inconsistencies in this data, we can immediately rule out the interpretation that Martha had actually lived in a home in England. Her father, Col John Dandridge, emigrated from England to Virginia c.1714, when he was 13 or 14, and Martha was born at Chestnut Grove in eastern Virginia in 1731. Another interpretation is that Martha's English ancestors may have had a home in our Abingdon (or perhaps a nearby village) – this cannot be ruled out, because Dandridge was (and still is) a local name. Perhaps "English Home" means no more than a home in English style, and we should look for some other link between Martha and the name "Abingdon"

The newspaper article points out the existence of a cluster of Abingdon place names in the east of Virginia, not far from the colonial capital of Williamsburg. It claims that Martha was born, grew up, and lived in Abingdon Parish, worshipped in Abingdon church, and owned Abingdon Plantation. The Abingdon Census District on the road map of Gloucester County VA may well be related to "Abingdon Parish", and "Abingdon Church" features in the Gloucester County web-site as the largest Colonial church in Virginia. "Abingdon Plantation" was one of the properties of Martha's first husband, Daniel Custis, who died after only seven years of marriage, leaving Martha as a wealthy young widow who would soon marry George Washington. That still leaves the question how these Abingdons got their name!

In passing; we noticed that the US Census web-site lists only four Abingdons which are currently census districts. These are: the town we visited in Washington County VA; the district in Gloucester County VA mentioned above; a town between Washington DC and Baltimore; and a small town in Illinois which was mentioned in the Society's Christmas lecture on mouse traps.

*Dick Barnes*

**Oxoniensia.** This year's edition is now out. It contains several items of local interest. The principal one is the note on the Lower Palaeolithic artefacts from Culham by Bob Eeles, Rachel Everett and Jeff Wallis. There are also book reviews of 'The Charters of Abingdon Abbey' by S. E. Kelly and 'Enclosure in Berkshire 1485-1885' by Ross Wordie.

**WWII** We have been contacted by Mr Ron Darby who asked if anyone has any information about a German bomber which crashed on Blewburton Hill in the late autumn of 1940. He observed the plane coming down whilst staying with relatives at the Barley Mow in Clifton Hampden. His telephone number is 01959 522869.



## OXFORDSHIRE PAST CONFERENCE

We were the host to the Conference this year. It is held under the auspices of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society, and enables people interested in current work to get together once a year.

The main items of the day were the talks by Paul Smith, the County archaeologist and by Brian Durham, the City Council's archaeologist. These gave details of the current work in their respective areas, with Paul Smith's talk concentrating on monastic excavations. Brian Durham talked on Oxford Castle and on more general sites from the City, ranging from Bronze Age material from the Science Area to the future of the railway turntable north of the station.

Another talk, by Dan Miles an expert on dendrochronology, showed that the Preservation Trust building in East St Helen street once had timbers which came from the Baltic. Eberhard Sauer gave a talk on Alchester where he is excavating a Roman fortress. The main point of interest here is that his dendrochronology dates of 44 AD for an extension to the fort indicates that the Romans got to Bicester very quickly, and then stopped before going further north. This theme was taken up during the lecture by Martin Henig, who has revived the theory that the Romans did not invade Britain via Kent, but were initially invited in.

Local work was covered by Manfred's talk on Religious Strife in 17th century Abingdon, and Rachel and Sue gave a talk on the excavation work at Thrupp. The South Oxfordshire Archaeological group gave a talk on a villa which they are excavating. Overall we had about a hundred people there who appear to have had a worthwhile time.

### MEMBERSHIP 2002-2003

Please note: membership runs from 1 September to 31 August.

#### Rates

Family members     £12  
Individual members   £8  
Students and unwaged £5.50  
Distant members     £3

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I /we wish to join/renew my/our membership for 2001-2002.

**Please note:** (1) Several members are already paid up for 2002-3. Please ensure that you do not pay twice! If you are not sure, contact the treasurer.

(2) Treasurer changes at the AGM! If you have not paid your subscription by 19 September, then please send it to the new Treasurer, not to Manfred Brod