



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2003

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS FOR 2003/4

2003

Sept 18	AGM, followed by: 'Revisiting the Golden Age of the English Peasantry'	<i>Dr Margaret Yates</i>
Oct 16	'Headington Quarry'	<i>Olga Samuels</i>
Nov 20	'A Bronze Age village buried by Mt Vesuvius'	<i>Dr Judith Toms</i>
Dec 11	'Cloth Making & Economy of Sixteenth Century Abingdon'	<i>Christine Jackson</i>
	Followed by the Christmas Social	

2004

Jan 15	'The Ancient Olympic Games & the True Olympic Spirit'	<i>Stephen Kershaw</i>
Feb 19	'Abingdon and Early English Monasteries'	<i>Dr John Blair</i>
Mar 18	'Indiana Jones and the Dipole of Doom' (Geophysical techniques)	<i>Dr Neil Linford</i>
Apr 22	'Archaeology in the 21st Century'	<i>David Miles</i>
May 20	'The Regal Cinema Site in Abingdon'	<i>Speaker from Oxford Archaeology</i>
Jun 17	Members' Evening	<i>Various</i>

Monthly meetings (except July and August) at 7.30pm, in Northcourt Centre, Northcourt Road, Abingdon. Normally on the third Thursday (but note non-standard dates in December and April). Visitors welcome – small donation.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

As an experimental alternative to the traditional format, the May meeting of the LHG took the form of a symposium. The general theme was 'What happened in and around Abingdon when the abbey was dissolved'. The evening was a near-disaster because Mienneke Cox, billed as the principal speaker, had to pull out because of a sudden illness. Bridget Rudge stepped in at virtually no notice to rescue the situation with a paper on the post-dissolution history of Sandford and its neighbourhood. Janey Cumber spoke on the effect of the dissolution on the landscape of Abingdon, and I spoke on some of the individuals who benefited from the sales of abbey properties.

We'll be back to the usual format for the next meeting. Hilary Clare will present her work on Humphrey Stafford of Grafton, whom she describes as a 15th century thug. Sounds interesting. This will be on Thursday, 9th October, 7.45 p.m. at 35 Ock Street.

Further meetings in 2003-2004 will be on Tuesdays 10 February and 11 May.

Manfred Brod

VISIT TO EGROVE AND THE MANOR HOUSE AT KENNINGTON

A large group of members and friends gathered at Templeton College in Kennington on 7 July. We were intrigued to visit the site of the shrunken village of Egrove. It was certainly shrunken - very little remains and the history seems hazy. It was located behind Templeton College and very close to the A34. Our guide, Roger Gelder, pointed out one of the old buildings which is now part of a substantial house used as student accommodation. An adjoining building was possibly the dairy and is now used as a shed. He said that the brook or stream mentioned in Roman and Anglo Saxon times still runs in the wooded valley near the house in spite of all the spoil from the construction of the A34 being dumped nearby.

After our brief visit to the remains of Egrove we drove through Kennington village to the Manor House where we were welcomed by Rear Admiral Myers. The house is situated in the middle of the village and is set well back from the road. The Rear Admiral took us on a tour of his extensive garden, which backs onto the main railway line. We viewed the outside of the house from the garden but were not able to go inside.

The Manor House was built in the 1620s. One end of it was destroyed and another wing was built in the 1930s when the Rear Admiral's family bought the house. He showed us maps of the area going back to 1803. The house was originally part of a large estate which was sold off in different lots. There are the remains of foundations of cottages at the end of the garden near Cow Lane. There is also an old gateway, now partly bricked up which probably gave access to the main entrance when this was at the back of the house. Many alterations have been made to the house and gardens over the years.

At the front of the house we admired a splendid thatched barn. Rear Admiral Myers showed us inside the barn and explained with great pride how it was "as strong as the Victory". He thought it was probably built in the 18th century. It was used as a grain store.

After admiring the beautiful mulberry tree on the front lawn, we thanked our host for an interesting insight into Kennington's history and departed for the Tandem pub.

Jill Lewis

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, SUMMER 2003

Welcome to the Summer 2003 newsletter. It seems a long time since I last wrote; the short, cold, digging days of winter having long since given way to long, balmy evenings of leisurely fieldwork. A lot has happened since then too and it's hard to sum up so many activities in few words.

In general our lectures continue to be well-attended, although there was a disappointing turnout for Members' Evening. This was a great shame as the three presentations, given by Paula Levick (Director of the Bayworth dig); Will Cumber (on the "Frilford" site) and Roger Ainslie (on his ideas about Akeman Street being the frontier of Early Roman Britain) were all fascinating.

Despite the lack of an "Outings" person on the committee, we still managed to rustle up two trips, to the Frilford excavations and to Kennington, which were both a success.

As well as continuing the excavations at Bayworth and post-excavation work on the Thrupp Cottages site, our diggers have been busy helping Tim Allen, our archaeological advisor, with his excavation of the hill-fort at Wittenham Clumps.

The History group continues to flourish and for their last meeting held a successful symposium on post-dissolution Abingdon. The Thrupp Research Group is also in good health, trying to draw together the many strands of evidence about the settlement.

It also seems we are hatching our own Abingdon branch of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record but as plans are in their earliest stages for this you will have to watch this space.....

Meanwhile the exhibition boards have been out to the Frilford dig for National Archaeology Day and at the end of June the Society held a small exhibition in Abingdon Library. Publicising the Society is essential for its future and I or any of the committee would be delighted to hear of any other ideas to let people know about us.

Behind the scenes Dick Barnes and Judy Thomas continue to represent us at consultations about the future of the Old Goal, where as you know, we are very keen to see the "proper" museum which Abingdon deserves and preferably, to have at least some Society involvement in whatever form it takes.

Finally I must make a plea, once again, for new committee members. We are now trying to fill five spaces as our Digging Secretary, John Dunleavy, will be unable to continue in his post into the autumn. It really isn't too painful, so please consider giving up a little time to your Society.

I shall end by giving thanks to our outgoing committee members, Miriam James, Trevor Ogden, Charles Wrench and John Dunleavy, who will be sorely missed. Thanks also to David Rayner, who has taken on the task of looking after our website. Thanks should be given, once again, to Judy Thomas, whose book sales and guided tours form the backbone of our income, to Diana Carne, for representing us on the Northcourt Centre committee and to Sally Ainslie as our Tea-Lady-In-Chief. Last but not least thanks to Dick Barnes for stepping in once again to edit this newsletter.

Rachel Everett, Chairman.

VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD EXCAVATIONS AT MARCHAM/FRILFORD

About two dozen members turned up for the visit on 17 July 2003, instead of the expected 40; many were probably put off by the rain earlier in the day. But they missed a treat, and not only because the evening was balmy and mild and an ideal time to be walking through fields. As Will Cumber told us in his talk on Members' Evening the dig is now in its third year. Earlier excavations in the immediate area revealed a Romano-British temple and Iron Age structures, and field walking and crop marks showed further evidence of Roman occupation, confirmed by geophysical investigations.

One of the main structures revealed was a circular building; an amphitheatre. But at the end of the season last year, doubts were thrown on this theory, and the building is now known as an 'unidentified circular structure'. Digging this year has revealed it to be much deeper than had been expected, while beside it an enclosed oblong building, perhaps an ante-chamber, of herring-bone construction, revealed plaster on the walls and even traces of red paint. It is now thought to be of 3rd or 4th century construction, though the lower part is better built, with a floor of flat stones.

Nearby another large building has been uncovered, but its purpose is even more of a puzzle. The floor is clean of scatter, so it was not robbed of stone, but only the base of the walls remain, standing on bedrock. Lots of late coins were discovered, and the building is on an East/West alignment, with doorways in three of its walls; it was thought to be a place of worship, but the hoped-for apse has not shown up.

As the excavations continue, the questions multiply; why was a large group of public buildings constructed so far from other Roman settlements? What was the purpose of the large building with a courtyard in the middle - or maybe two buildings - where high quality finds have appeared? This structure is 100 years older than the others; did it fall into disuse?

Nearer to the earlier excavations there is evidence of Iron Age occupation, including a large storage vessel with a rim and lugs; at the top of these pits, whose purpose is not known, there was a Roman midden, and mortar is now coming up, as well as fishbones.

The excitement of these excavations is, of course, the immediacy of the discoveries being made - 'yesterday.' 'maybe tomorrow.' and the enthusiasm of the excavators. Our group was particularly lucky to be shown round by Will Cumber, whose excitement is infectious. By the time that this Newsletter reaches you, the excavations will have been covered up until next year; but be sure to go and see the site in 2004.

Miriam James.

DIGGING REPORT

The diggers have continued to work at Manor Farm, Bayworth. However the developer has asked that we finish on the site before Christmas, so our work there will come to an end in a few months.

Paula Levick, our Director, feels that by December we will have answered the two important questions we set ourselves last year:

- We have confirmed that there was medieval activity on the site
- We have established the site of the house.

Courtyards, walls and significant finds including window glass etc. have been recovered, and we can be fairly certain that we have found the later phases of the house. Earlier phases of the building, which had over 400 years of occupation, has proven difficult to establish through the lack of dateable material, but with over 4 months left, and enough willing volunteers we may yet have the opportunity to explore this further. On completion Paula intends to produce a short report and submit it to the SMR.

One interesting find has been a high quality cobbled road which heads south. This has been tracked through a series of trenches to the southern limit of the field and almost certainly continues in the next field. It is interesting to speculate that this may very well have been the main entrance road to the house, at least from the Abingdon direction.

In the time remaining on the site we would still welcome volunteers. We dig each Sunday between 10 am and 3.30 pm. Please contact Paula Levick for more information on 01491 671895.

The next question for the digging team will be: Where do we turn our attention in January?

John Dunleavy

THRUPP RESEARCH GROUP

The Thrupp group had – as many readers will have noticed – a poster display at the members' evening in June, and met in July to review what new information had been gathered in the last six months.

Members of the group are working on several different approaches:

- people and families at Thrupp from the fourteenth century to the present;
- changes in the landscape, including field names and waterways;
- medieval and later artefacts from the archaeological activities;
- the sometimes violent sixteenth century disputes over water rights at Nyett ford.

We are getting close to the point at which our results ought to be reported, and one possibility we are considering is to present them to the Society at a general meeting in the year 2004-2005.

Manfred Brod

THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY

Our problem is the future of the library!

The Society has a small collection of books and periodicals collected over the years. Some of these are general history and archaeology, and some are specific to this area. Some have been purchased and some donated. Many of these books are now out of print and therefore no longer available except possibly in the public library. There is no proper catalogue of the collection.

We have very limited storage for the library in the Northcourt Centre. Access for members is on the monthly meeting night, when the committee bring the boxes of books into the hall. Members are encouraged to borrow books. However, although members seem to enjoy browsing, very few books are borrowed.

At present our policy is to buy new books about the local area which are privately printed and not generally available. We subscribe to Current Archaeology, British Archaeology, and local society magazines. We also have back numbers of Oxoniensia.

As regards the future of the library, perhaps members could tell the committee what they feel our policy should be in the 21st century!

Jill Lewis, Librarian

WEA LOCAL HISTORY COURSE – ADVANCE NOTICE

Title: Lollards, Levellers and others: the Thames Valley, 1500-1700

Tutor: Manfred Brod

Dates and Times: Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m., starting 20 January 2004 for ten weeks.

Place: 35 Ock Street.

The course will deal with events, people and ideas in a period that included the cataclysm of the Reformation and the catastrophe of the Civil War.

It will examine selected topics in the history of the period with special reference to the middle and upper Thames Valley, but with excursions elsewhere as needed. It will pay special attention to the social, political, and religious thinking of ordinary people, and will discuss individuals who exerted local leadership as well as local people who became active on the national stage.