



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

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2005

MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 15TH 2005

AGM followed by a talk by Martin Crick on
'The history of the bells of St Helen's, Abingdon'.

Please come along to our first meeting of an interesting and varied programme for 2005-2006. Most of the present committee will be standing again, and we are looking for several new and enthusiastic committee members to join us. As you can see several of us are doubling up jobs at the moment, and we have various hopes and plans for the Society that need your support! We are:

Simon Owen	Chairman
Manfred Brod	Treasurer and Local History Group Convenor
Jenny Devanney	Programme and Outings
David Rayner	Website and Publicity
Terry Stopps	Digging Secretary
Julia Brocklesby and me	Library
Janey Cumber	Secretary and Minutes Secretary

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Having now reached the close season in the Society's activities, I would like to thank everyone who has had an input into what we do, as members, committee members, diggers, historians or just interested parties, in whichever of these facets of our activity they partake.

As you will realise, this Committee is virtually a wholesale change from last season's, so we have been trying to forge our own direction whilst building on the achievements of our predecessors. Any bouquets or brickbats regarding our performance would be welcomed, since we (the committee) are not the Society – we are there for the membership. In a similar vein, we still need a few more committee members so if you would care to partake in this not onerous task, please put yourself forward to any committee member, who would be more than delighted to explain what it is all about (one evening per month, someone's house, tea and biscuits de rigueur).

We have made a contribution towards a lapel microphone for the loop induction system for the Northcourt Centre, which will be a bit more convenient than the hand-held one for the speakers. Having the system installed has been a great boon for our talks, and thanks are proffered to the Northcourt administrators who organised it.

The Society is now the proud owner of a high-quality metal detector; and I shall make multiple copies of the instruction book so that it is available to all. John Walford has done a great job for us

on our sites, but it is always useful to have our own for when he can't be there. I know that opinions are rather polarised about the use of these machines, but depending on the site, they can be most useful.

We are most indebted to Sue MacIntyre of Swinburne Road for providing some items which will make local historians feel that Christmas has come:

The Abingdon Roll of Service: This details all the Abingdon men who enlisted in the Great War, with their addresses and where those who did not return fell. David Rayner has put it on the website, but I have a laminated scan of the original for general perusal for those who do not have access. It will be available at each meeting, or give me a ring if you want to see it or want me to print it out for you.

Great Flood Postcards: Six postcards of the Great Flood, incongruously subtitled "Season's Greetings". Laminates of the scan are in the same file as the above.

Abingdon Scrapbook: A cornucopia of Abingdon and area bits and pieces, which I am still collating. They will be available online soon or as paper copies.

If anyone has any idea or offers of sites that the Society can dig, we would be most grateful to hear about them. The advent of professional archaeological units has limited the number of premium sites to which we can gain access. If you have any ideas of anywhere locally where we can instigate an investigation, please let the Digging Secretary know. We are particularly keen to encourage younger diggers (16+) - training and supervision would be provided, although membership of the Society is necessary for insurance reasons.

Our search for premises in which to store the Archives of the Society and other of our bits and pieces is coming to an imminent conclusion. Janey Cumber has most generously offered us a space in or around her farm buildings in Marcham on which to put a Portakabin. Terry Stopps is actively pursuing the purchase of one of these from various sources locally. This would give us a base for consultation of documents and storage of other items and I am trying to organise a computer/printer/scanner system (using recycled University machines) to enhance our fledgling electronic archive on the site.

At the time of writing, we have recently been on an outing to the Marcham/Frilford dig, which was well attended and shared with the Kennington Society. Our guides, Gary Lock and Pat Murphy, gave their usual exemplary talk on this complex site. Some Society members have been digging there recently, being initially fried and then frozen/drowned according to the vagaries of the weather. It was nice to be there without the subsequent backache. Thanks to Jenny Devanny for organising the event.

The Autumn Fayre at Northcourt is still imminent. (September); I am happy to mind a stall there to express our commitment to the place, but we still need some saleable items. I shall have some varieties of herb plants for sale (assuming they grow to order) and will have our display boards with flyers describing our activities and a cunningly worded exhortation for people to join. If anyone has any white elephant, pink rhino, mauve gibbon or any other hued wildlife items that they could donate to the stall for sale, these would be most welcome. I hope also to provide a sandbox in which are placed various archaeological artefacts (spoil heap specials) so that people can rummage around, pick one out, look at the label on it and see if it wins a prize (archaeological tombola?) Any prize donations would again be welcomed. Please contact me before the event.

WE (the Society) look forward to seeing you all again next time around, and please remember to renew your membership subscriptions. Tell all your friends!

Yours from the bottom of a trench.
Simon Owen, Chairman

THOMAS CLARGES (1617?-1695)

This continues my series on what the Dictionary of National Biography fails to tell about Abingdon people and events. My subject last time was Thomas Trapham, a capable surgeon, but not one who made any significant medical advances that we know of. But there were such advances in the Abingdon area. One man who has his entry in the DNB is Thomas Clarges, but the article has little to say about his brief period of local residence in the summer of 1643, during the Civil War, as a young man of about 26 years of age.

There was at the time a serious epidemic of what we would today call typhus fever. All down the Thames Valley, death rates among the civil population were running at six or seven times the normal level. Among the soldiers, who lived crowded together in inadequate billets, underfed, unwashed, and unpaid, conditions were even worse, and the Earl of Essex's campaign against Oxford petered out with his men in no state to fight. Clarges, on the strength of an uncompleted apprenticeship to an Oxford apothecary, had been put in charge of the royalist military hospitals at Sunningwell and Bayworth. A letter he sent on 13 July 1643 to Sir Edward Walker, the king's secretary at war, is a stylish piece of writing unexpected in its context, and shows him working desperately hard but undismayed. He needs a surgeon with a suitable number of assistants, he writes, and then we can begin to 'bury more toes and fingers than wee doe men'. For himself, 'I am nowe by a subtle Philosophy [i.e. an alchemical transformation] become a Dr of Physick, two Apothecaries, three overseers & twelve attendance [nurses], and I'le assure you this service is as dangerous (though not so honorable) as the leadinge on of Infantry perdues [shock troops]'.

But the interesting part of the letter is the attachment where he makes his requests. To understand this, we must first move forward and south-eastward to 1909 in Tunis, also subject to an epidemic of typhus. A certain Dr Nicolle, of the Pasteur Institute there, made a significant observation. When sufferers were first brought to his hospital, they were infectious; but once they had had their clothes removed and been washed and shaved, they were so no longer. Nicolle reasoned that the agent of infection could only be the lice that had been on their clothes and hair, and proved it by using these lice to infect monkeys. Delousing became routine in the great wars of the twentieth century, and must have saved millions of lives. Nicolle got the Nobel Prize for his discovery.

Now let us return to Tom Clarges in Sunningwell in 1643: 'And because vermine is a great cause of ye increase and continuance of deseases that if it can be read in ye churches of the neighbouringe counties that charitable people are desired to contribute their benevolence towards ye releife of the sick souldiers they may also be intreated to sende in all their ould linen of shirts or other because as soon as wee receive any souldier he may be stripped and have cleane linen put on him and his other clothes cleansed and made fitt for him to put on fresh, when he is recovered.' Clarges was ahead of his time; if only there had been some way for him to publicise his knowledge, many more lives might have been saved between then and 1909.

As it is, Clarges owes his presence in the DNB to his sister Anne, separated from her husband and working as a laundress (if not something worse) in the Tower of London. In 1644, she started an affair with a royalist prisoner of war. They were still together ten years later, when she became a widow and they married. By then, the prisoner had changed sides, and had become the General Monck who would later engineer the restoration of Charles II to his father's throne; Anne Clarges, daughter of a London blacksmith, would finish as a duchess. Her brother, who had plainly got his hospital job on personal merit rather than on high-level connections, became Monck's political agent, was knighted, and earned his DNB entry as a back-bench M.P. on the Tory side.

Manfred Brod

DIGGING REPORT, SUMMER 2005

St Helen's church Abingdon, May 2005

The society was invited by Professor Martin Biddle, consultant archaeologist for St Helen's church, to conduct an excavation of the Parson's House and the North Porch. Disabled access and facilities are to be fitted in here in the near future. The work commenced in late May after the location of Medieval deposits by the Oxford Archaeology within a small area co-ordinated by Jill Eubank of J.B.K.S. Architects of Thame.

After the stripping out of a Victorian tile floor and services by contractors a series of soil surfaces were exposed overlaid in part by an array of broken ledger stones and an indent slab all presumably buried during Victorian restoration work. Soils exposed in the Parson's House are intact medieval deposits, which are to remain undisturbed apart from removing 2 cms for pipe runs. The north wall of the Parson's House has an insubstantial footing in contrast with the North Porch. We believe that this was a later infill between the porch and the tower. This is backed up by historical documentation and hints of this exterior wall face are now the subject of a stone by stone survey to further prove this theory.

The North Porch was probably constructed around the mid 1400's and has at least three east-west burials inserted in them respecting the wall footing. These are thought to be Tudor or later in date. The most southerly was an adult occupying the full width of the porch. The other two are juvenile and infant burials. Due to the restriction of only being able to excavate the east half of the porch to a depth of 40 cms, we did not locate skeletal remains. The interest is now in what lies in the soil that the burials are cut into. We suggest that at least one medieval cess pit existed here due to green stained charcoal flecked dark soils with green and inglazed 12th century pottery.

Architectural fittings and stones are of interest. The skilled eye of Martin Biddle highlighted an alien piece of masonry inserted in the east side of the internal North Porch door. Of medieval work with roll moulding, it may have been a column base. Why this was placed here is a mystery. Also notable is a huge indent Purbeck marble slab. Julia Brocklesby has referenced Elias Ashmole's record of the church and thinks that it might be for either Audlett or Payne of 1539-1540. The slab with potential for identification could be subject to a grant application to cover cleaning and restoration and refitting on wall brackets inside the church.

Our thanks go to the churchwardens, particularly Malcolm for assistance in allowing us to have a spoil heap on site, also access to records and facilities on site.

Air photographic survey, July 2005. After two years of discussion and desk searches an aerial photography flight has taken place at a very late stage in what could be a classic year for crop marks due to the drought. John Walford flew in a two seater aircraft on a windy evening on the first of what we hope will be a series of flights. He flew over Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Bayworth and Sunningwell all over difficult geological terrain. He also flew over the Tesco/A34 long and round barrow complex and the open excavation at Frilford. Next he crossed Wittenham Clumps and the foothills down to Beedon and Peasmore in search of an elusive Roman temple and Iron Age complex under investigation by Victor Pocock of the Beedon Archaeological Group. We are planning another flight in the last week of July to record again at Wittenham and Beedon.

Wittenham Manor, March 2005. We took up an invitation from Tim Allen, Oxford Archaeology, Northmoor Trust Project, to cut a trench on the levelled site of an old tennis court to the rear and north of Little Wittenham church. The brief was to examine an elongated linear anomaly suspiciously like a track running north – south across the court indicated on a "geophis" plot by Abingdon Archaeological Surveys and to test a theory that a Saxon manor may be located hereabouts.

The 8 metre by 1 metre trench was taken down to natural upper greensand. A gravel and rubble "feature" on the west end of the trench was responsible for the geophysical blip. This was deposited

high in the stratigraphy and thought to be the remains of a contractor's hard road or path. Struck flints and Iron Age sherds were recovered mainly from levelling layers. The only true features cutting greensand appeared to be indeterminate hollows and scoops with small Iron Age sherds. The site of the trench on the edge of a scarp leading down to the floodplain gravels containing dense crop marks of Littleton and field walking prehistoric finds recovery attest to the occupation of the lower slopes of the hill as seen in trenching by Oxford Archaeology. No further work is contemplated near this trench.

Goring, May 2005. After completion of Wittenham we decided to follow the current policy to sample other society digs to see how they work. A group of five visited Gatehampton Farm Villa. SOAG have been investigating here for many years and are noted for their discovery and excavation of a late Glacial flint blade industry. The current trench near this site is within a now closed market garden centre. JCB trenches have exposed walls up to 50cms high. The finds processing unit in a very large greenhouse gave an impression of a high status house with many painted wall patterns and under floor heated tessellated floors. Unfortunately we only had one Sunday here due to an unexpected commitment in Abingdon.
Jeff Wallis

Digging Secretary's Report

Thank you Jeff for your excellent report.

I am now in my third year as digging secretary and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the "diggers" who have helped me so much in the last two years. Without their enthusiastic help and support I would not have been able to carry on as long as I have. They are a cheerful happy group, who I have been privileged to have "messed about in the mud" with. Come rain or shine, (and there has been a lot of rain!) they are always there, week after week, willing to work hard. They do a fantastic job of archaeology, in my opinion as good a job as the professionals would have done. We are slow, but we are thorough.

I would just like to add a few words about what we are hoping to achieve in the future as a very active digging team. I would like to carry on, as we have been doing for the last two years, digging with other local societies such as SOAG, the Beedon group, the OUAS and the Wallingford society. This not only gives us valuable experience in digging different types of geology, but it also allows us to meet and dig with other enthusiastic archaeologists and to hopefully get more interaction between the different societies.

We are looking for small excavations in the middle of Abingdon, hopefully between the High Street and the river, as we are very interested in the river frontage in the past. We would like to hear from anyone who would put us up for a few weeks on a Sunday between 10am and 4.00pm. Can anyone help?

Thanks to the generosity of Will and Janey Cumber the society are looking to buy a Portacabin which they have graciously allowed to be situated on their farm in Marcham. This will become a very much needed store for tools, drawing boards, etc. But also I am hoping to store some records there too so that they can be sorted and made available for future reference. Therefore I am looking to collect together any digging reports etc from any of the past Abingdon Area Archaeology digs. If anyone has any that they can give me, can you please contact me and I will collect them from you to go into our archives.

Terry Stopps

TREASURER'S REPORT

As I mentioned in the last Newsletter, the Society is currently in a healthy financial state, with a good bank balance and income and outgoings roughly in equilibrium. However, this is not likely to last. Both membership and annual surpluses are on a distinct downward trend.

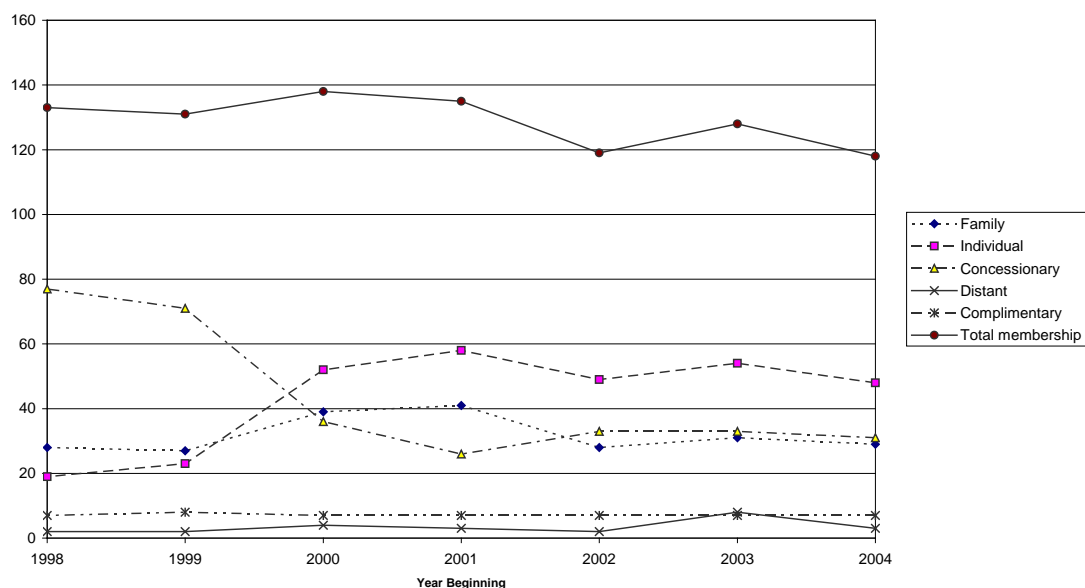
The financial results for the year to date show a decline in sales of Judy White's picture book, Abingdon in Camera, which in the past has covered a third or more of the Society's expenses. Costs, of course, are moving stealthily upwards.

Income/Expenditure Analysis for y.t.d. 22/07/05

	2004-5 (y.t.d.)	2003-4
Income		
Subs	912	1,019
Donations/Visitors/Tours	193	249
Picture book sales	281	510
Events and Outings	66	126
Guided tours	-	13
Bank Interest	54	21
Miscellaneous	-	-
Total Income	1,506	1,938
Expenditure		
Premises	374	313
Speakers	290	230
Insurance	282	291
Administration	151	169
Events and Outings	134	114
Digging	-	438
Library/Subs	72	54
Cost of book sales	-	-
Recording and archive	-	-
Publicity	35	26
Misc (see Note)	89	19
Total Expenditure	1,427	1,654
Profit/Loss (+/-)	80	284

Note: Misc category includes for 2004-5 a total of £75 donated to various charities in memory of three prominent members who died during the year.

AAAHS Membership over time



The surplus this year is quite small, and would be strongly negative if it were not for the fact that the diggers have so far spent nothing beyond the cost of their insurance. With various current activities, it is very likely that this situation will have changed by the end of the society's financial year on 31 August. Also, there is the prospect of setting up some kind of a Portacabin structure at Manor Farm in Marcham (through the kindness of Will and Janey Cumber) for storage and working on finds and records. This will involve a capital expenditure of perhaps as much as £1000, although there would then be no continuing rental costs such as we would face in Abingdon.

Abbreviated consolidated Balance Sheet

Cash Position at 1 Sept 04	9377
Income from general activities (+/-)	-202
Income from book sales (+/-)	<u>281</u>
	80
Cash position at 31 July 05	<u>9457</u>
Represented by	
Total Bank accounts	9322
Total Cash in hand	87
Debtors due	<u>48</u>
	9457

There is therefore some cause for concern for the long term financial health of the Society, and the Committee have agreed to propose to the membership at the September AGM a small increase in subscription rates:

membership type	current sub £	proposed sub £
family	12.00	15.00
standard	8.00	10.00
concession	5.50	7.00
distant	3.00	3.00
visitor	1.50	2.00

If agreed, these changes would come into force in the 2006-7 society year.

It has been recognised that it puts an excessive burden on our volunteer auditors to expect a full audit in the short time between the end of the financial year and the AGM. Accordingly, the accounts available at the AGM will be complete but provisional, and the audited version will be published to members later in the autumn.

Manfred Brod

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The May meeting of the LHG was excellent, with Hilary Clare describing the three years she has devoted to the history of Blatherwyke in Northants, a village that seems to have survived by keeping itself to itself and letting the wider world pass by on the distant high road. It was a valuable lesson in how to research an apparently unpromising locality, and the findings gave food for thought on the inner divisions of an outwardly united community. Hilary finished the evening an object of envy – we would all love to find some Maecenas willing to finance our research projects in local history!

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, 18 October at the usual time and place – 7.45 p.m. at 35 Ock Street – and the presenter will be Mienneke Cox, whose title is ‘Caldecott Upstairs, Downstairs: the strange history of the Linthall family and William Musson’. A rags to riches story in the best Victorian tradition.

Before that, however, the members of the Ock Street Research Group, which is now under the Local History Group umbrella, will be having their first review meeting (four months after the group was formed) to consider what progress has been made and how to continue. This will also be at 35 Ock Street, on Tuesday, 27 September.

Manfred Brod

TWO OUTINGS

The excavation site at Marcham/Frilford. On Thursday 28th July, Gary Lock gave us a guided tour. We started at the ‘Amphitheatre’ area. Trench 17 has a stone structure to the north which was being investigated. Trench 18 contains the entrance to the temenos, which is the sacred area around the temple, where the Romans would have left their votive offerings. The remains of two shops/workshops were found in Trench 18, where they would have bought their offerings and taken refreshment. This is a unique site, as every year more features are discovered which lead to more questions about what was happening there.

Walk from Kennington to Sandford. On Thursday 18th August we were met at the Tandem in Kennington by Roger Gelder. As he took us through the field to the riverside we looked for signs of where the river once flowed. Further along we came to stone and brickwork which once belonged to an old boathouse. There were interesting flowers, including mimulus. When we arrived at Sandford we went to see the causeway and an old bridge which was built when the railway was being constructed. Many thanks to Roger Gelder for taking us on a most interesting walk.

Jenny Devanney

MEETINGS PROGRAMME

September 15th AGM The Bells of St Helen’s. A History

Martin Crick

October 20th	The Archaeology of New Guinea	Dr Chris Gosden
November 17th	Early Christmas Social.	Mr Hemmings' Morris Dancers
December 8th	The English Landscape in the 20th Century	Dr Trevor Rowley

The rest of the programme is in the new membership card