



# Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

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

## NEWSLETTER - AUTUMN 2013

### Meetings Programme 2013-4

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

**19 September:** AGM, followed by Dr Simon Wenham, *The History of Salter's Steamers*.

**17 October:** Tim Allen, *Being British, Becoming Roman: Iron Age and Roman excavations along Watling Street in Kent*.

**21 November:** Barbara Allison, *Petticoats and Partlets: the clothes of an ordinary woman in the seventeenth century*.

**19 December:** Christmas social with The Bifrost Guard.

**16 January:** Pam Manix, *Invisible in Oxford: a remarkable Medieval Jewish quarter*.

**20 February:** Dr Philip Kenrick, *Cyrenaica in Libya: a rich classical heritage*.

**20 March:** Richard Smith, *Oxford Eccentricity: a history of mischief and mayhem*.

**17 April:** Andrew Webster, *The Cherwell Crossings Battlefield Archaeology Project – Gosford Bridge, Enslow Bridge and Tackley Ford*.

**15 May:** Jane Bowen, *Creating a new museum in the historic County Hall*.

**19 June:** Open Evening; members presenting their work

The **2014/15** season commences with the AGM on **18 September 2014**

### Chairman's report

July 2013 – a royal birth, a heat-wave, British sporting success and (more predictably) the approaching end of the Society's 2012-13 year. It has been a good year for us. Our lecture programme has, as ever, been interesting and varied: talks ranged from Neanderthals in Norfolk to the painted decoration of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Duke Humphrey library in Oxford's Bodleian Library. The Christmas Social was a particular highlight, with a highly entertaining talk and musical demonstration by Dr Andy Lamb of the Bate Collection of Musical Instruments in Oxford. At the Open Evening in June, we were treated to a range of talks by Society members on a diversity of topics; excellent refreshments and a number of displays added to the success of the evening. The Local History Group has also continued

to meet regularly for talks and discussions on a wide range of historical topics.

Our summer outings have also become a popular institution, with visits this year to the Bate Collection, Bampton (where we were treated to champagne!), World War 2 defences around Marcham and the Oxford University-Oxford Archaeology excavations in Dorchester. More detailed accounts of these excursions appear elsewhere in this newsletter.

Many members of the Society are active in research. Excavation work has taken place (weather permitting – which hasn't been always!) at Bowyer Road, where skeletons had been unearthed during building work, and at Kiln Copse, Marcham (the site of a former brick- and tile-works).

A highlight of the year, and a tremendous achievement for the Society as a whole, has been our 'Abingdon Buildings and People' contribution to the new Abingdon Town Council website. The Council, with the Choose Abingdon Partnership, has been keen to use its new website as a 'portal' to the work of community groups, and AAAHS was chosen as a 'pilot' for what voluntary groups could bring to the website. Thanks to huge effort on the part of many members, the results of much high-quality research are now available on the website. A fuller account of the project appears elsewhere in this Newsletter – suffice to say here that the professionals involved in creating the website have been very impressed by the productivity of AAAHS and the quality of our work. We can be justly proud of this.

There has, though, also been sadness in the year. On 26 January, Janey Cumber of Marcham died. Janey, who was a great supporter of the Society, was well-known and much loved by very many people. An obituary appears elsewhere in this newsletter. She is very greatly missed.

As I write this, September does not seem so far away, and we look forward to our 2013/14 year, starting with the AGM on 19 September. As well as the AGM itself, we will hear Dr Simon Wenham talk about 'The History of Salter's Steamers'; I look forward to seeing as many as possible of you at the AGM, and at other Society events throughout the coming year. Finally, I would like to thank you for your continuing support of the Society, which is greatly appreciated.

*Roger Thomas,*  
Chairman

#### **Editor's Notes**

Thanks to all members for their contributions and feedback – all gratefully received. The Newsletter is published in March and September each year. Any suggestions for outings, speakers or newsletter items are most welcome.

Articles should be limited to about a thousand words. They may be edited for content, but views and opinions in published articles are those of the contributors rather than the society itself.

The Newsletter is sent to members at the time of publication and posted on the website after six months. Copy deadline for the March issue is end-January 2014.

*Manfred Brod*

## Membership secretary's report for year 2012/13

This will be my last report as Membership Secretary as my allotted time on the Committee has come to an end but no doubt I'll be back on the Committee at some future time (if they'll have me).

Once again our membership numbers are down this year. Counting Families as 2 members and including our 6 "non paying" members (Vice Presidents etc) total membership this year is 112 compared with 120 last year. The subscriptions for this year compared with last year are shown in the table below.

We thank those members who choose to pay Individual rate when they are entitled to Concessionary rate and also to those who included a donation with their subscription as this helps to offset the reduction in subscription income.

Membership type	2011/12	2012/13
Free	6	6
Family	16 subs = 32 members	15 subs = 30 members
Concessionary	34	37
Individual	46	35
Distant	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>112</b>
Members not renewing	16	19
New members	11	9

Subscriptions are due at the AGM in September. Rates are the same as last year – Individual £12, Family £18, Senior/unwaged/student £8.50, Distant £4. A membership renewal form is included at the end of this newsletter. Please bring your completed form along to the AGM or any lecture meeting or post it to me at the address on the form and I will pass it on to whoever takes over as Membership Secretary.

I have enjoyed being on the Committee but I am looking forward to returning to becoming an ordinary member again!

Best wishes  
*Sally Ainslie,*  
Membership Secretary

## **Treasurer's report - August 2013**

The largest expenditure this year has again been the digging insurance at £474.39 but this has not increased against last year's cost. Hire of the Northcourt Hall and the speakers' remuneration have been around £250 each to date. Total expenditure has been £1419.

Income is fairly healthy with just over £1000 from subs, £192 from book sales and £166 from the sale of Mienieke's book. This leaves us about £95 short of break even in total on this project. Total income to date is £1905.

Visitors' donations average out at £12 per meeting and tea donations has netted £27.

A full set of audited accounts will be available at the September AGM.

*Andrew Steele*  
Treasurer

### **YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!**

The AGM will be held immediately before our regular monthly meeting on 19 September.

As every year, some Committee members will be standing down and will have to be replaced.

Do please think about standing for election to the Committee. You don't need special skills (though any that you happen to have may well come in useful), just a willingness to help run the Society and develop its activities.

If you are interested, contact any member of the Committee, or have yourself nominated on the day.

## **Obituary**

### **Janey Cumber**

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Janey Cumber on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013, at the early age of sixty-one. Janey had been a member of the Society for many years, including spells as a committee member and as secretary. She was born in Assam, daughter of a tea planter. She came to England at the age of eight to continue her education, attending the Abbey School in Reading, and graduating from St Andrew's University in 1973 with a degree in Mediaeval History. Janey then moved to Oxford where she met Will, a farmer at Marcham. Janey and Will married in 1976 and had three children, William, Sophie and Ellen. Janey took her full part in the management of the farm and also became deeply involved in the life of the village, both as a churchwarden and in secular affairs.

Janey was a woman of many activities, but those that most concern this Society were her achievements as a local historian and her involvement in local archaeology. In 1999 she enrolled at Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, progressing to a doctorate in 2010. Her thesis was a re-evaluation of Abingdon's social and economic history in the sixteenth century. She demolished the traditional idea that the town had been impoverished by the dissolution of the Abbey, and replaced it with a much more nuanced picture of transformation, recovery, and modest growth. Her death robs us of the further work she was planning, notably a much-needed scholarly edition of Roger Amyce's 1554 survey of Abingdon.



Janey Cumber

It was while Janey was studying at Rewley House that she met the archaeologist Dr Gary Lock. Her husband Will had earlier noticed interesting archaeological features on Trendles Field at his farm. The contact led to a close collaboration with Dr Lock and the Oxford archaeology department, and a training excavation which ran each summer for eleven years, with Janey and Will providing the facilities and much practical help. When in 2012 the project moved into an evaluation and writing-up phase, it was Janey who was instrumental in getting funding, and in organising a group of Marcham villagers to expedite the less skilled and more labour-intensive parts of the work. The outcome, still some years in the future, will almost certainly be a major step forward in our understanding of the Abingdon region in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods.

Janey was a founder member of the Marcham Society, which is devoted to studying the local history, natural history, and archaeology of the village of Marcham. She was deeply involved in creating the Coral Rag, that society's highly respected journal, and was its editor at the time of her death. She was a prominent member of our sister society, the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society, of which she was Programme Secretary. Janey and Will were highly supportive of the AAAHS in a number of ways, providing space and utilities for the Portacabin which the Society uses for storing its archives and archaeological tools, and, at need, granting free use of the meeting room at the farm.

Janey had a warm personality, with a friendly smile and a kind word for everyone she had dealings with. She was at the centre of a myriad of local activities, and the driving force behind many of them. She was greatly respected and will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

*John Gibbs*  
Secretary

## **Meriel Rush**

We are sad to record the death in July of Meriel Rush, a former teacher at Rush Common School and an AAAHS member of long standing. The Society offers its condolences to her family.

## Outings 2013

### The Bate Collection, 23 April

Philip Bate was educated in Aberdeen, where his mother, a gifted singer, pianist and violinist, encouraged him to learn the clarinet and to begin to collect musical instruments. As an adult, he joined the BBC, moving to London in 1934 as a producer in radio and, later, television. At the same time he continued with his interest in collecting and studying musical instruments gathered up from junk shops, market stalls and sale rooms. In 1968, he gave what had become a unique collection of instruments dating from the medieval period to the present day to Oxford University. The condition was that they were kept available for study by students, makers and players alike and used for teaching, so increasing knowledge of the history of music and enabling everyone to enjoy historically accurate performances.



We were welcomed to the collection by its curator, Andy Lamb. We found ourselves in an L-shaped display area that was overflowing with well over a hundred historic instruments. Andy demonstrated the Bressan recorder made in 1720 by Pierre Jaillard as the perfect example of its design. A trumpet made in 1666 and used by Simon Beale, state trumpeter to both Oliver Cromwell and Charles II, was painted with a motif of winged putti on the silvered bell. For many years this instrument had been kept at a gentleman's residence and used by the butler to summon the household and guests to dinner. It is difficult to play as it is soldered together and has a large mouthpiece and no backbore. However, it was used in 2003 at Canterbury Cathedral to play a fanfare for the centenary celebration of the Art Fund.

Elizabeth Drury plays Handel's harpsichord, with a cast of Haydn's skull above her head!

Andy encouraged us to play the keyboard instruments. It was a privilege for many to even touch the harpsichord used by G F Handel during a visit to Oxford.

Of Abingdon local interest, proudly displayed in a small cabinet on the upper level, was a small bone whistle discovered during excavation in Stert Street. It is now so fragile that it cannot be lifted from its scarlet display fabric.

Our warm thanks to Andy for giving us his time and expertise and making us most welcome in his musical environment at Oxford.

*Anne Smithson*

## Bampton, 8 May

After enjoying many lovely sunny days recently, we drove to Bampton in gathering gloom and after parking outside the church, quite heavy rain fell on the car. It was grey and rather cold as we made our way into the church. Our spirits rose with the warmth in the Church and meeting our guide Sarah Wearne who immediately hit a delightful balance between informing us and entertaining us with fact, anecdote and local stories of both the church and the so varied local history from Bampton's founding to the present day.

As we came out, switching off the lights and closing the door behind us, the weather had cleared a little and, with the maps and photos that Sarah had given us, in spite of her mentioning a manor and a castle, we thought we were going to walk the streets and pathways of Bampton and learn more about its history. We took a lane, then a path, crossed



Bampton Castle, romantic in the evening light

a meadow, walked by a stream, crossed a road, walked a pavement - in no way going towards the centre of Bampton - and then were welcomed through a door in a wall. To go through any small door in a wall is a bit magical and this was very much so. We were able to walk around the most delightful gardens of the large and ancient Weald Manor. It was very extensive and there was much satisfaction, and then it was time to go. But no! We were

ushered into lovely intimate cosy rooms, formal but homely and offered a glass of bubbly to lift our spirits further. It was delightful and so interesting (stone niches, a covered courtyard, a Downton Abbey connection). And upstairs, too, to see the double-cube drawing room reworked into a seventeenth century building - what ingenuity and ambition! It was all so interesting and a privilege to see. Our gentle hosts were most extraordinarily kind and welcoming.

As we left, the West Oxfordshire skies were now aglow with late evening sun and perfectly replete, we were nevertheless urged to walk briskly to Ham Court, Bampton Castle as was.

Noting wide open spaces, large earthmoving equipment, a new avenue of trees planted, a



glimpse of an impossibly romantic part castle/part house, we were robustly welcomed into a converted barn by our energetic host.

We were immediately thrown into trying to understand the origins in the mid-1300's of this grand surviving fragment of castle. And what a story it is! After sharing the results of the owner's research in the last few years, we were shown round the moat, surviving wall and gateway and rooms inside the house. It was astonishing and magical - such a tremendous story. Pevsner quotes Anthony Wood in the seventeenth century describing "a quadrangular building, moated, with towers at each corner and a gatehouse of town-like character on the West and East sides" and Mr Rice is hoping to find the footings of the walls to support that description. It was fascinating to see the clearance and improvements, reinstatement of the moat, and planting that is going to make such an unusual and interesting house, design studios and gardens for him and his family.

We were all, I feel, elated as we walked back to the church after a most memorable evening that had surpassed all expectation for craftsmanship, beauty, age, splendour and intimacy.

*Mary Storrs*

## **Our very own Maginot Line, 13 June**



David's Army assembles for a briefing

For those of us who fondly imagined that Dad's Army was confined to the vicinity of Walmington-on-Sea, the Society's tour of inspection, on the evening of Thursday 13 June 2013, of part of General Ironside's *Red Stop Line* came as a fascinating revelation. Here, right on our own doorsteps, was a vital link in the defensive chain of fortifications, designed to repulse the Nazi panzer assault, in the event of an invasion in the autumn of 1940. Expertly led by David Rayner, some 20 Society

members followed the line of defences from Marcham church, along Cow Lane as far as the Sandford Brook. Whilst the anti-tank ditch has long since been back-filled, the virtually indestructible concrete pill-boxes, although now well camouflaged by natural vegetation, are likely to baffle and fascinate future generations of archaeologist for the indefinite future. According to Nigel Dawe's informative article (*Local Anti-invasion Defences of 1940*) there were two varieties of pill-box deployed locally. The larger Type 28A,



comprising 250 tons of reinforced concrete, was designed to house a two-pounder anti-tank gun and crew. The smaller Type 24 was for typically eight infantry armed with rifles and light machine guns. We visited two of each type. The main line of defence was to be the River Thames, but the salient between Newbridge (north of Kingston Bagpuize) and Abingdon was protected by an anti-tank ditch, typically 20 ft wide and 8 ft deep, reinforced by pill



How many AAAHS members will fit into a 2-pounder pillbox?

boxes and concrete blocks (*dragon's teeth*). The defences were manned by the 12<sup>th</sup> Berkshire Battalion (Upper Thames Patrol) Home Guard (known locally as the *Up the Pubs* because of their allegedly scrupulous care to defend the local public houses). Was this local variation of the Maginot Line likely to be any more successful than its more illustrious French equivalent? Thank goodness it was never put to the test. But at least it was a physical manifestation of Churchill's promise to "*fight them on the beaches etc*", and it would probably have been popular with the local construction contractors. And as to the weather, on the occasion of our visit, it was somewhat metaphorically reminiscent of World War II itself, commencing with dark threatening storm clouds, but gradually improving, to misquote Churchill, "Westward, look, the sky is bright".

*John Rawling*

## **Dorchester dig site, 17 July**

On the hot evening of 17 July, fourteen people congregated at the north end of the allotments in Dorchester for a guided tour of this season's dig at the Roman/Anglo Saxon site. There had been a previous visit in July 2010 – see Autumn 2010 Newsletter. Work started on the site in 2008 and between then and 2010 there were 2-3 weeks' work in each season followed by 3-4 weeks in each of 2012-2013. There are two or three seasons of work yet to be done and the site is also being used to teach archaeology to both students and local people.

The whole site is thought to be 5-6 ha (12-15 acres) in area and was a defended settlement with first to fourth century Roman activity across the whole of it. The current dig site is about 550m<sup>2</sup>.



Inspecting the site ...

Paul Booth, Director of Oxford Archaeology, greeted us with the immortal words 'it's just too darn hot' before going on to explain the latest findings.

This season has concentrated on the west side of the allotted area with, essentially, a series of pits being dug in case next year access to the west side of the site is restricted. Several of the pits in the area had originally been dug by Professor Sheppard Frere in the early 1960s but their use and context was poorly understood.

In this area two large structures have been identified. A free standing room with a hearth was thought possibly to be a kitchen, as an area of discarded oyster shells was found just outside. The identification of the adjacent foundation is as yet undecided. Unfortunately this also extends under the area which is outside the allowable dig area. A possible well has also been unearthed close by. However there are intercutting pits across the area making the chronology unclear although the main activity here is possibly mid-fourth century.

To the east of the site is the main axial feature, a Roman road running north-south, the west side of which is visible. In this area the archaeology extends beyond the Roman into the early Anglo-Saxon period with the settlement somewhat set back from the road. The site was most likely abandoned in favour of the present village site in the medieval period with the construction of the Abbey which is outside the area of the Roman defences.

Finds have included numerous animal bones thought to be the usual domestic type of animal waste rather than any intensive farming type of usage, much pre-Flavian (late first century) pottery and a mix of other Roman material. There is also late Roman to early Anglo-Saxon pottery which is considered to be the most important aspect of the site.



... and the finds.

Paul was thanked for giving up his time, again, and (later) the Committee gave him and his team a bottle of wine for their efforts on our behalf. With another couple of seasons' work to be done, a final visit in a couple of years should see the definitive statement on the site being available. Let's just hope it won't be 'too darn hot'.

*Andrew Steele*

## **Local History**

### **Local History Group**

The Spring meeting of the Local History Group was on 7 May. We had asked Rachel Everett to speak to us from her professional experience on how history is currently taught in schools. Instead, she provided a selection of textbooks, teaching notes, and exam papers and left us, under guidance, to draw our own conclusions. I think it is fair to say that most of us were pleasantly surprised. The present syllabus seems, admittedly, not to be strong on the regnal dates and heroic battles of our own school experience, but it does show history as based on evidence which is subject to analysis and interpretation. Certainly, it provides as good a training as can be desired for future local historians, and it is up to us to make our subject attractive to them. Thanks Rachel

I spoke briefly on the long drawn-out conflict between Reading and Abingdon for prime status in Berkshire, and how this was embodied in the competitive building and rebuilding of courthouses and prisons in the two towns. This led to much discussion on exactly how the County Hall was used for the assizes. Did civil and criminal courts sit in the same chamber simultaneously, as they did in the much bigger courthouse in Reading? Can we imagine groups of felons, in leg-irons and manacled together, being marched up the stairs to the sessions hall? There's a lot more work to be done on this.

Next meeting will be on 15 October. Hilary Clare will present her current work on the houses of Faringdon Road, and Bob Frampton will update us on his progress in tracing the history of Abingdon during the First World War.

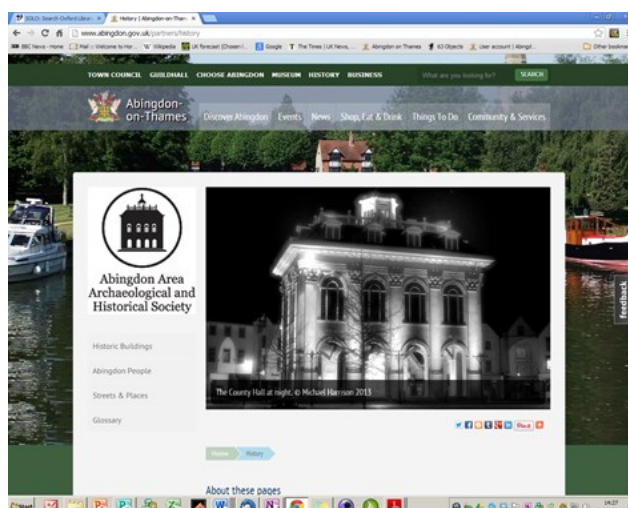
### **Abingdon Buildings and People Group**

I'm sure all members will by now have seen the new and impressive Abingdon town website, <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/> , and have gone further to admire the AAAHS's contribution to it, courtesy of the Buildings and People Group, <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/partners/history>.

The group first came together about two years ago, largely at the initiative of Ruth Weinberg, with the long-term aim of finding a way of putting the accumulated knowledge of Abingdon's history, scattered in a myriad of often obscure publications and a dozen or more public and private archives, on-line in an easily accessible form. The relationship that was established between the group and the Choose Abingdon Partnership has proved beneficial to both. The Town Council is pleased to have a website that is much more than a simple listing of shops, offices, and events, and for our part we have a site of far greater sophistication than we could ever have produced by our own efforts. Our thanks are due to Heather Brown and Will Hewstone of Choose Abingdon for their unfailing cooperation.



Setting up a big new website is not easy, and the eight-person group was hard put to it to provide the material for a first fill to the quality standard it set itself and in the short time available. We were fortunate in having overlapping membership with the Oxfordshire Buildings Record and access to their extensive archive on Abingdon buildings. In the event, we opened with forty-two articles instead of the thirty we had promised, and, unlike some of the professional contributors, met all the deadlines.



Find [www.Abingdon.gov.uk](http://www.Abingdon.gov.uk) and click on 'history' and this is what you will get.

Since then, there has been a hiatus while technical work continues on the site, but further material is being prepared and by the time this newsletter is published many more articles, mostly on people rather than buildings, and some of them of substantial length, should have been uploaded.

*Abingdon Buildings and People will be the theme of the Community Shop display leading up to the Heritage Weekend. We will be there from 1030 to 1600 on 7 and 9-14 September. Come and see us there - it's the former toyshop in the Precinct next to Lloyds the Chemist.*

We are still a small group, and would very much like some additional members. There is lots of work to be done, not only preparing and editing articles but also administrative tasks which are becoming more complex and demanding as the

website grows. Volunteers, please contact me on [local@aaahs.org.uk](mailto:local@aaahs.org.uk)

## ... and let's not forget the THROAT Project

The Heart of Abingdon. It's a continuation of the 'Lost Abbey' project of a few years ago, and will extend the coverage of tourist information boards to the area around St Helen's Church and the almshouses. This is not an AAAHS project; it is led by Ann Berkeley and has lottery funding. But almost all those involved are AAAHS members, and this gives our Society the right to have its logo prominently displayed at the bottom of the boards.

*Manfred Brod*  
Local History Convenor

## Feature Article

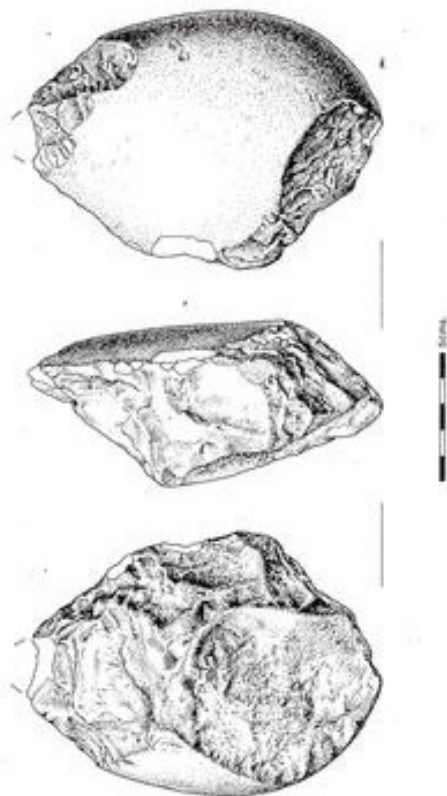
### Old Cobbles

The ploughed and weathered soils of a rather drab field on the southern slopes of Lodge Hill did not look too inviting, especially in the cold biting winds of December 1984. However I had not ventured into this field before. The drift geology maps describe a capping of what is known in the trade as Northern Drift gravels. Well gravel is slightly misleading, We think of gravel as that slip slide crunchy stuff on driveways around Abingdon. No. Think of Merton Street or Radcliffe Square with painfully large ankle breakers. The Drift contains an abundance of those liver brown ovoid cobbles and an array of other non-local exotics such as vein quartz, basalts and rotten old flint. The Drift is the great pudding basin of all that was swept into the Thames Valley from the north via the valleys of the Evenlode and deposited on what is now high ground incised with ancient river systems around oxygen isotope stages 17-19 at least 700,000 years ago (early Cromerian).

At least five ancient channels had been exposed in the sides of a cutting during construction of the A34 Abingdon Bypass. They related to the Drift deposits and were investigated by Birmingham University geologists. The main type section was recorded as part of the Sugworth over bridge footing and bones from an ancient Rhino recovered amongst other environmental remains.<sup>1</sup> The channels occur from Bagley Wood to Lodge Hill interchange, are discussed in detail in many specialist texts and have SSSI status. The area had been walked by Robin Holgate as part of a lithic survey recording mainly Neolithic / Bronze Age activity.

I knew immediately that the cobble I held in my fist was not just any old battered fragment that had taken a beating from the plough or naturally crushed by permafrost. It stood out like an ancient beacon of light from thousands of generations back in time. I was at the top of the slope of the field. You know the one. Driven past it lots of times. Just north is a tree line and peeping through is the garage with the fake Spitfire on its pole.

Look at the drawing. The object is not a stunning beauty. A pale liverish to whitish complexion. Scarred skin, (cortex) of gnarled appearance indicative of a hard life. However it has a purposeful solidity of form, certain regularity about the flake pattern. A whacking



great blow from a hard hammer had driven a great biting negative scar from the dorsal surface from a primary platform at the proximal end with accompanying typical fine to hackled texture characteristic of struck quartzite.<sup>2</sup> Two thirds of the original ovoid pebble had also been regularly flaked to create a straight slightly jagged edge. An attempt at a more pointed distal end had seen three removals from the distal end of the ventral surface. To me this all added up and it was on the right side of the fence. This was indeed a controlled, modified pebble. A flaked something! Possibly by an early visitor, not necessarily a modern. Its archaic form did not shout Acheulian as compared with the lovely quartzite pointed perfection on display in Abingdon Museum from Thrupp Pit. Was it a drunken attempt at a creation by a down at heel Mesolithic occupant of that field? I stuck it on a spare bit of shelf-space as a memento of how cold and tedious that field can be.

Happisburgh, Pakefield. The big mad season news on the BBC. National news carried the story of a local dog walker finding a flint axe from eroded soft cliffs on the Norfolk coast. The BM. alerted, put a team together and not forgetting wellies tore down to the beach for fun and frolics with the tide. Hurrah for coastal erosion. After much pub discussion and serious sediment analysis Britain's first occupants are allowed to be given a slot somewhere around 700-900,000 years ago, OIS17-19.<sup>3</sup>

Click click the cogwheels turn. The Northern Drift is Anglian, around the time of warm conditions with the drawbridge down for a visit to Britain not hitherto on a tour route. The proto Thames may have looked enticing for an evening meal beyond Happisburgh.

Is it possible that this unassuming plough scratched old stone souvenir was dropped by one of Britain's first tourist some 900,000 years ago. Well I would like to think so but frustration aside I cannot prove it. The plot thickens. On an early spring visit to Nuneham, on the way to the bluebell wood, I slipped off the track and found myself pulled into the midst of boring old Northern Drift. Oh no, yet another bashed up old split cobble crudely fashioned into a now very blunt point. An Eolith..<sup>4</sup> Arrgh or does this mean that tourists really wanted to visit Abingdon-on-Thames. Abingdon, the oldest inhabited town in England. No let's not venture down that road. Where do we go from here?

*Jeff Wallis*

And for any readers who didn't quite understand ...

1. Sugworth bridge footing was a very deep hole which happened to be dug into one of several ancient Thames channels by accident. The vertical section was cleaned and described by a Birmingham University team and has become the yardstick or type section representing or characterising Sugworth deposits, should they be encountered elsewhere.

2. A negative flake scar is a hollow on the surface of the implement caused by hammering, in this case a hard stone hammer, which would cause a deep hollow to be created after removing a flake for the purpose of thinning and giving specific shape to the artefact.

3. Oxygen isotope stages 17-19. A means of dating by reference to deep sea cores of sediments recording natural sequences of events ie warm to cold periods generally related to Greenland ice cores for cross reference. This stage is probably around 900,000 years ago.

4. An Eolith is a naturally flaked stone which may resemble an artefact that has been created by early humans as toolmakers.



## Dates for Your Diary

**DON'T FORGET THE HERITAGE WEEKEND, 14 AND 15 SEPTEMBER!**

GO TO [HTTP://WWW.HERITAGEOPENDAYS.ORG.UK/DIRECTORY/TOWN/ABINGDON](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/directory/town/abingdon) FOR DETAILS

### Sutton Courtenay Local Historical Society

Meets Tuesdays, 7.30, Village Hall

24 Sept: Shaun Morley, *Time Out of Mind: Customs & Rituals of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Oxfordshire*.

12 Nov: Martin Way, *Tin Helmets & Gas Masks*.

28 Jan: Informal Evening: Local Family Histories.

25 Mar: Andrew Sargent, *The History of the River Thames*.

### **At the Amey Hall on Wednesday 9 October, 7.30 pm:**

A talk by Professor Frank Close on *The Atomic Spies of Abingdon - Klaus Fuchs and Bruno Pontecorvo*

*Admission free.*

### Radley History Club

Meets Mondays, 7 for 7.30, Radley Primary School Hall.

9 Sept: AGM and Clare Sargent, *Radley in 100 objects*.

14 Oct: Mark Davies, *The Abingdon Waterturmpike Murder*.

11 Nov: Liz Woolley, *Children and War: Children's experiences of the Second World War in Oxfordshire*.

13 Jan: Victoria Bentata, *Medicine in Oxford: C13th to C19th*.

10 Feb: Jenny Lee, *"A Lawless and Piratical Lot"*.

10 Mar: Tony Hadland, *William Gill, spy and explorer*.

7 Apr: Mary Russell, *Women Travellers: "The blessings of a good thick skirt"*.

12 May: Richard Smith, *Oxford Eccentricity*.

9 Jun: Shaun Morley, *Friendly Societies*.

### The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society

Meets Fridays, 8pm, Wallingford Town Hall

13 Sept: Dr Christopher Ferguson, *West Hanney, Lowbury, and Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire: The fifth to eighth centuries in the Upper Thames Valley*.

11 Oct: Brian Durham, *Publishing the 1980 Regal dig, and the case for 10th-century Anderson shelters*.

8 Nov: Prof. Gary Lock, *Hillforts of the Ridgeway: Living with the White Horse*.

13 Dec: Jane Harrison, *The East Oxford Archaeology Project: Bartlemas Leper Hospital, Littlemore Priory and archaeological landscapes in East Oxford*.

### The Marcham Society

Meets Tuesdays, 7.45 pm at Marcham Church

17 Sept: Graham Scholey, *Otters, Ecology & Conservation*.

8 Oct: AGM and Judy White, *The Story of Northcourt*.

12 Nov: Members' Evening.

10 Dec: Christmas Social.

### Abingdon Museum Friends

Meet Thursdays 7.30 pm, St Helen's Church Centre, West St Helen Street.

5 Sept: John Dunleavy, *Leisure & Learning in Victorian Abingdon*.

**On Saturday 5 October, the Museum Friends are holding a Fish & Chip Supper Quiz. Tickets will go on sale at the beginning of September - please call Ruth on 01235 524119 for information**

3 Oct: Manfred Brod, *New Light on the Monks' Map*.

7 Nov: Colin Fox, *The Mary Rose*.

5 Dec: Tim Healey, *The Green Man in Oxfordshire*.

6 Feb: Jacqueline Smith, *Christ's Hospital: 460 years of charitable work*.

6 Mar: Wendy Morrison, *Before the Romans: Abingdon & The Upper Thames Valley in the Iron Age*.

3 Apr: AGM and Jane Bowen, *Abingdon Museum*.

## AAAHS Membership form 2013/14

Membership type (please tick)	Individual	£12
	Family	£18
	Senior/unwaged/student	£8.50
	Distant	£4
Full name & address		
Telephone no(s)		
E mail address		
Newsletter. Please tick preferred option(s) <span style="float: right;"> <input type="checkbox"/> by e mail           <input type="checkbox"/> paper copy         </span>		

Please send completed form with cheque payable to AAAHS to  
 Membership Sec, AAAHS, 4 Sutton Close, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 1ER  
 or bring form with cheque/cash to any lecture meeting. Thank you