



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2003

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to the Spring 2003 newsletter and I hope you are all enjoying the society's activities this year as much as I am enjoying my time as Chairman. It's proving to be a dynamic year. Charles, our Speakers secretary, is already working on next year's lecture programme after having organised such a varied and exciting one for this year. The digging group are busy with post-excavation work on the Thrupp Cottages site and with a new project at Bayworth. The Local History Group continues to flourish, and its offshoot, the Thrupp Research Group, is now looking for ways of presenting the astonishing range of evidence they have collected on the settlement. Meanwhile Julia Brocklesby has been busy updating our website.

Or, the committee, as well as organising the day-to-day running of the society, we have been spending a lot of time thinking of ways to raise the profile of archaeology and the historic environment in Abingdon. These should be taken into account during the planning process but several members have shown concern about the way redevelopment, such as that on the Regal Cinema/West St Helen's Street site is currently going ahead. We have already commented on the first draft of the new Local Plan (see John Dunleavy's article below) in an attempt to tighten up protection for Abingdon's archaeology and historic buildings and are making our voice heard in proposals for the new uses of the Old Gaol/Police Station site. (Surely Abingdon, 'England's Oldest Town', deserves a real museum to tell its story).

Where excavation is carried out such as on the site of the old SEB showroom in West St Helens Street we are looking at ways of improving public involvement with the process. How many of you would dearly have loved a site tour of the SEB dig? If this had not been appropriate, perhaps because of safety reasons or time constraints, surely it would have been possible to have a viewing window in the Lovell hoarding and an information board?

On a lighter note, despite our inability to recruit an outings organiser we are also hatching one or two evening excursions for the summer, perhaps to Kelmscott, subject of Simon Townley's recent talk, or to Kennington at the invitation of the Kennington History Society. (Other destinations will not necessarily begin with a K).

Which brings me onto a plea. Three of us will come off the committee in September and with "Outings" vacant that will leave four places to be filled. There is a list of the present committee members in "Your Society Needs You" below. This shows those who have served for three years on the committee and must retire in September. So if you fancy joining us don't be put off by feeling that the work would be daunting. We meet once a month in each other's houses, and it is both satisfying and lots of fun to be involved in everything which goes on.

Finally I should give thanks once again to Diana Carne who continues to represent us on the Northcourt Centre committee, to Sally Ainslie who has more or less single-handedly resurrected the tradition of post-lecture coffee and biscuits and of course to Dick Barnes, our indefatigable newsletter editor.

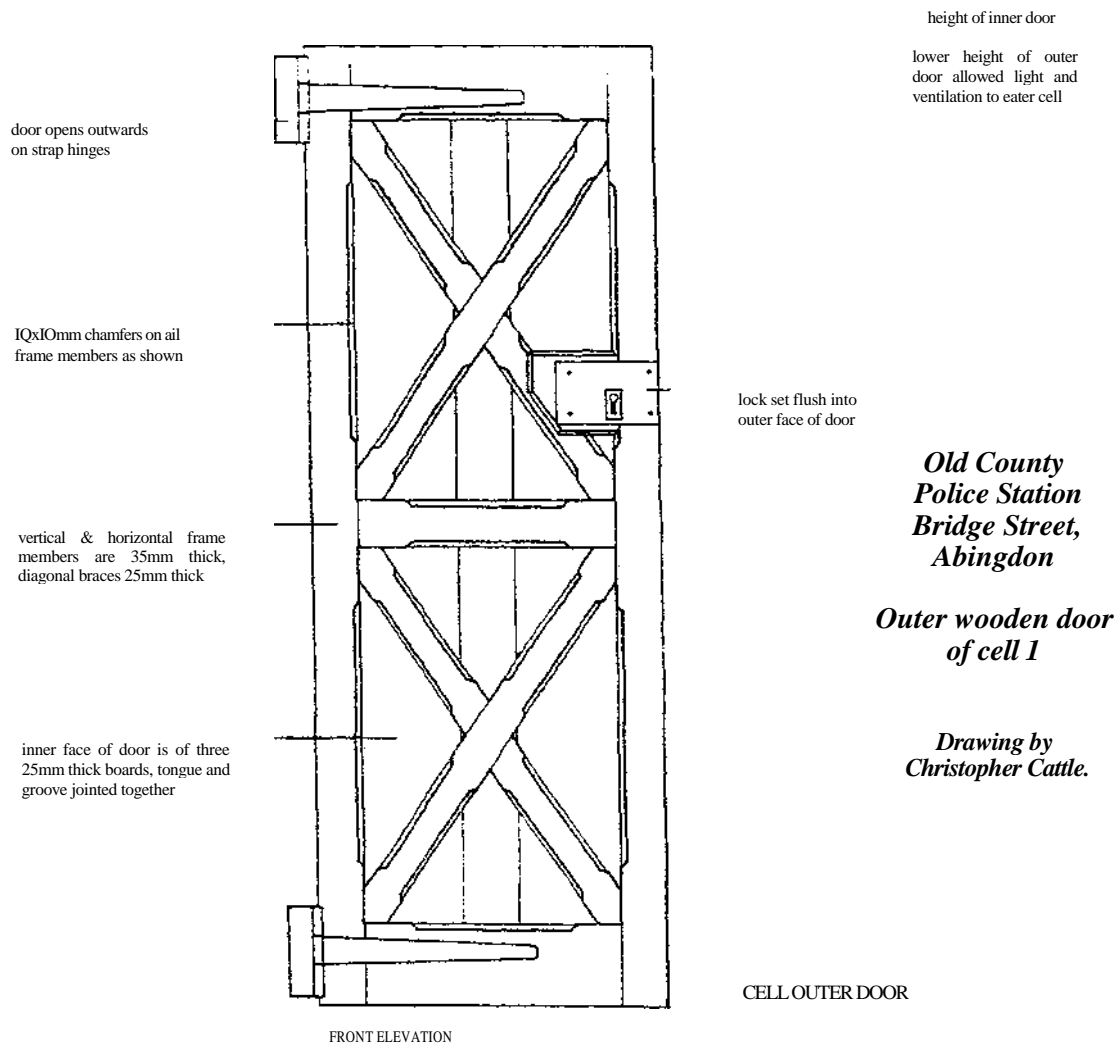
THE OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD

Buildings of all kinds are increasingly being seen as an important aspect of local history, and a number of counties have a building recording organisation. The Oxfordshire Buildings Record (OBR) was founded three years ago with two broad aims: to encourage interest in buildings of all types within the county and promote the recording of buildings; and to create a publicly accessible archive of building records.

To meet its first aim the OBR organises visits and recording training days for its members, and it actively supports local groups (often local history societies) in their own building recording projects. The publicly accessible archive is being created with the co-operation of the County Record Office, which accepts records of buildings that the OBR has prepared and indexed for deposit. So far we have deposited architectural drawings of Morland pubs, and drawings and other material from some private archives that have been given to us. OBR reports are also deposited. Preparing archive material for deposit is a regular activity in which a number of members participate.

A Recording Project: Abingdon Police Station

A good example of an OBR recording project is the work done on the old Bridge Street Police Station in Abingdon. One Saturday morning a number of members gathered in the Police Station



reception area. We were lucky to have existing plans of the building and, by the end of the day, we had described, surveyed and photographed the building inside and out and made records and drawings of the most important features, particularly the cells. The two drawings reproduced here illustrate the security arrangements in the cell area. The highlight of the day for some was a hopefully unique experience, lunch in a police cell. Each narrow, windowless cell is furnished with a built-in unit consisting of a wooden bedstead and flush toilet. When the toilets were first installed they were flushed by chain-operated cisterns mounted on the corridor wall outside. Push-button flushes inside the cells were added later.

The recording day was only the beginning of the project. It has been followed by documentary research carried out by a small group working with the team leader, Grant Audley-Miller, on the history of the building and how it was used. It was purpose-built in 1856 - there is a surviving tender for £1312 12s.5d. - and extended in the 1890s. Originally there were living quarters upstairs for the officers. The 1871 census records 14 people living in the station, including the superintendent and his family, and two constables. Downstairs were the sergeant's private suite, with drawing room, sitting room, kitchen and pantry; the mess room and scullery; the Superintendent's study; the guard room; the enquiry office; and the same three cells that remained in use until 1999.

(Various Diagrams of locks & doors not picked by scanner)

The cell corridor is accessed through a heavy wrought iron security gate. The sliding metal bolt that holds the gate shut is secured in a locked wall safe. The gate is also fitted with hinge bolts to prevent its being lifted off its hinges. The cell doors have similar security bolts in locked wall safes. The specification for the security locks has survived in the Berkshire Record Office.

Documentary research on the Police Station is continuing, with the aims of understanding more of the history of the building and the changes in the operation of the police force which occupied it for almost 150 years, and putting this in the context of the evolution of policing in the old county of Berkshire. Unfortunately, few archives have survived, even for the relatively recent past.

OBR activities

Recording projects and archiving sessions have turned into social occasions that bring together members from across the county. We also organise visits to places of interest - the next one is to the Chiltern Open Air Museum. Members have widely different degrees of expertise. Some are professional building historians. Others, including me, are interested amateurs who enjoy active participation in building research projects. Others again may not take part in recording buildings but enjoy the documentary research that is a necessary part of any building recording project. A wide cross-section is involved in preparing archives for deposit.

Local Groups

Local groups are undertaking their own projects. One or two were active before the OBR was founded. Others have started up with help and guidance from experienced building recorders who are OBR members. We have recently started a new long-term project - a survey of farm buildings - in which we hope a number of local groups will participate. Farm buildings are disappearing, and the OBR hopes to encourage all local history societies in the county to make short records, including some photographs, of existing farm buildings in their area.

How to Join

The OBR leaflet enclosed with this newsletter includes an application form. The annual subscription is modest. If you would like to take an active interest in buildings and their development, or if you are just interested in local history and support our aims, we hope you will consider joining. Quite apart from activities organised by the OBR there is certainly room for local projects in and around Abingdon.

Jessica Brod, OBR Treasurer

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF AAAHS MEETINGS

Remaining meetings in 2002/3

20 March	Alcester. <i>Eberhard Sauer</i>
17 April	The life and times of Sennacherib. <i>Stephanie Dalley</i>
15 May	The Archaeology of the Channel Tunnel. <i>Stuart Fordham</i>
19 June	Members' Evening: Presentations and displays of members' work

Dates for meetings in 2003/4 - further details in summer newsletter

2003 September 18 (AGM), October 16, November 20, December 11

2004 January 15, February 19, March 18, April 15, May 20, June 17

YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

The nine members of the Committee of the Abingdon Area Archaeological Society form the group of people who keep the Society running from month to month and from year to year. The names and offices of the present members of the Committee are given below; you can see that there is one post unfilled. The rules of the Society state that nobody may serve on the Committee for more than three years. At the end of this year three members (marked with an asterisk * in the list below) must retire, so that by September there will be **four** vacancies to fill.

At their first meeting the Committee appoints its members to the various posts; these may alter from one year to the next.

Committee Members Sept 2002 - Sept 2003:

Roger Ainslie (Treasurer)	529720	rogerainslie@hotmail.com
Elizabeth Drury (Publicity)	553636	eliz.drury@ntlworld.com
John Dunleavy (Digging Secretary)	524383	john@dunleavy-abingdon.freeserve.co.uk
Rachel Everett (Chairman)	537128	
Miriam James* (Secretary and History group)	01865390535	miriam.james@upwood.fsnet.co.uk
Jill Lewis (Librarian)	200327	
Trevor Ogden* (Minutes)	534380	ogden@ogs.org.uk
Charles Wrench* (Speakers)	01869 246034	

There is a vacant position on the committee

Archaeological Advisor

Tim Alien 559729 Tim.allervSoxfordarch.co.uk

If you feel that you could play a fuller part in the running of the Society we hope that you will put your name forward to join the Committee for next year. You don't have to be an expert, you don't need to undertake a lot of extra work, you'll find the existing members are helpful and encouraging; and you only need to be keen for the Society to continue to exist in its present form. It's not a life sentence: the rules state that you can only serve for three years. And if enough people come forward, who knows, we might even need to have an election!

Miriam James

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

There have been two meetings so far this year. In October, Margaret Gosling spoke on the Hyde family of Northcourt and their relations; and in February, I described the life and career of John Wellesbourne, the Henrician courtier put in by Thomas Cromwell to oversee the dissolution of Abingdon Abbey.

The Thrupp project continues to make progress, and is fast approaching the point where a decision will have to be made on the form that a publication will take. The project is threatening to burst its geographical bounds and take in other parts of Radley. It is also leading to spin-offs: work is in hand on two 16th century maps of Abingdon, and on changes in the use of the river between Thrupp and Abingdon from the 16th century on.

The next meeting of the group is planned in the form of a symposium. Three members - Mienke Cox, Janey Cumber, and I - will each present a short paper on some aspect of the effects of the abbey's dissolution. These will not necessarily describe recent research, but will be intended to bring to mind and to re-open discussion on one of the formative events in Abingdon's development. This will be on Tuesday, 1 May, 7.30 p.m., at 35 Ock Street. Members of the society who don't normally come to local history group meetings are invited to attend.

Manfred *Brod*

FUTURE USE OF THE OLD GAOL SITE

Most of our members living in the Vale will have seen the article and questionnaire in the Winter 2002 issue of Vale News. The Society is watching the proposals for re-use of the Old Gaol complex closely, mainly through its two representatives on the Abingdon Area Forum, which gets frequent updates from District Councillors and Officers. We have felt for some time that the Abingdon area needs a much better display of local history and archaeology than can be accommodated in County Hall. The Old Gaol seemed an obvious venue for such a display, possibly with the Society taking an active role. However, the situation changed drastically when the County Museum Service expressed an interest in moving Abingdon Museum into the Old Gaol and enlarging it so that it could display more local material. The Society also has an interest in the creation of a public exhibition space to replace the Electricity Showroom and Old Gaol Foyer that we have used in recent years.

We hope you have expressed your personal preferences for the three options in the questionnaire (closing date 21st March 2003). Your representatives have suggested that the needs of the Society might be met by Option 2, provided this could be modified to include public exhibition space. But the wider needs of the community would be best met by Option 1, particularly as it is now understood that the cinema would be a revenue-earning commercial activity. Option 3 would provide no community facilities, and hence presumably no improved display of local material or public exhibition space.

Judy Thomas & Dick Barnes

DIGGING NEWS - BAYWORTH, MANOR FARM.

The diggers' current project is an investigation of the earthworks situated to the east of Manor Farm, Bayworth. The collection of lumps, bumps and ridges is so intriguing the new landowner, Andrew Herring, that he has invited us in to find out more.

From documentary evidence it seems that the site is the location of the lost medieval manor of Bayworth which together with the private chapel of All Saints, belonged to Abingdon Abbey until the Dissolution. What happened between 1538 and the late sixteenth century is not clear but in 1597 the house was bought by Thomas Baskerville, an Elizabethan general.

The manor stayed in the possession of the Baskervilles until the 1720s when the last of the family died and the house was left to decay. Thomas' son Hannibal and grandson Thomas were both eccentric and rather fascinating men. Hannibal was frequently in trouble with the authorities for "harbouring beggars", for whom he had a purpose built barn constructed whilst Thomas was an antiquary and poet.

The group have set to work to determine the age, function and state of preservation of the earthworks both by survey and selected trenching. A detailed contour survey and resistivity survey are showing us the layout of the site with the manor and its outbuildings proving to be on an impressive scale, perhaps similar to that at Minster Lovell. A metal-detecting survey is turning up finds ranging from a 1950s toy aircraft to a twelfth of thirteenth century "short cross" penny. Horse shoes and a broken plough share suggest that the site, which we had thought to have always been pasture, has at least been partially ploughed (perhaps during World War Two).

Following the surveys we have been trenching to investigate key questions such as the layout of the site (house or gardens?) and the date of the buildings (Medieval or Thomas Baskerville's seventeenth century "improvements"?)

Getting Involved.

If you would like to get involved with the Bayworth Project there is still plenty to do. We dig every Sunday between 10am and about 3.30pm and as the dig progresses there will also be finds processing tasks such as pot-washing or marking to do.

We would also welcome involvement from historians able to work on the medieval aspects of Bayworth or on its more recent history (Thomas Baskerville's papers are in the Bodleian Library).

Finally a plea for any information that members may have on a previous dig at the site carried out in the 1960s by the late Mr Peter Spokes. Despite our best efforts we have been unable to trace anything but the most minimal records of this.

Please contact Paula Levick, our Director, on 01491 671895, or our Digging Secretary, John Dunleavy, for more information.

VALE OF WHITE HORSE LOCAL PLAN

In November last year the Vale published the first draft of its Local Plan which covers the period up until 2011. One section of the document covers the Historic Environment and deals with conservation areas, historic parks & gardens, historic buildings and archaeology.

The Committee had a short while in which to consider the Local Plan and its possible impact on archaeology and historic buildings. We are aware of the requirement for housing and commercial development and especially the need for affordable homes. However a significant number of future developments are described in the Local Plan where important archaeological remains are almost certain to be present such as the former British Gas site/Red Lion/Maltings area and the Caldecott School site. It is vital that adequate attention is paid to the preservation of these remains where possible or where this is not achievable to properly funded investigation and publication of archaeological reports. In a similar manner if historic buildings are affected by developments then these also need to be protected adequately.

While the Committee broadly supported the policies and proposals outlined in the draft Local Plan about the historic environment, a number of amendments were proposed to try and strengthen the wording of the document with regard to historic buildings and archaeology. It was felt that this was especially necessary given that members of the Society are concerned about recent housing and commercial developments in Abingdon. In particular there are worries as to whether adequate protection has been given both to below-ground archaeology and to historic buildings during the course of these developments.

The Vale will now consider amendments to the Local plan suggested by the Committee together with those from other organisations and individuals. In the autumn of this year the Council will let the Society know about its views on these amendments and a second version of the Local Plan will be published early in 2004.

John Dunleavy Digging Secretary

ABINGDON IN THE 1920'S

There is a fascinating description of Abingdon as it was "a year or so after the first world war", which is said by the unnamed author to be "A catalogue of the businesses and buildings in an Abingdon which existed quietly, usefully and happily". But it is much more than a mere list of properties or a re-working of an Abingdon Directory - indeed it may well have been written from memory rather than from a Directory or other such source. It is presented as a perambulation of the streets, commenting on the buildings and mentioning local characters such as "Peggy" Sykes the peg-legged barber in Stert Street, and "Paddy" a belligerent resident at the common lodging house in the Vineyard.

This quiet town of dilapidated charm, small shops, and squalid slum courts without indoor water or sanitation was much smaller than it is today. Going up the Oxford Rd there were few houses beyond St John's Road and, similarly, on Wootton Rd few beyond Faringdon Rd. On Radley Rd the town ended at Swinburne Rd. Some features of this bygone Abingdon disappeared long ago, but others survived until after WWII, and will be remembered by those who came to Abingdon in the post-war influx.

The date of writing is not given but there are clues, for example the use of "first world war" rather than "Great War" shows that it was not written before the second world war. A derogatory reference to "the developers and other vandals" probably puts it in the 1960's or later. The author was often vague about dates and architectural styles, but had strong views on Victorian design and modern building standards, describing the Corn Exchange as "a building of uncommon hideousness", and the council houses as "built of ticky-tacky".

A photocopy of a rather poor typescript is held by Judy Thomas, and some work has been done on a transcription. Further editorial work would be worthwhile to make it more accessible and perhaps compare it with Abingdon Directories, Abingdon in Camera, and maps. It would be nice to be able to identify and acknowledge the author. He obviously had a detailed personal knowledge of properties and businesses, perhaps through working for a public utility such as the Gas Company. An indistinct manuscript note on the first page includes a name, possibly "George Wheeler", which may be that of the author. The 1901 Census lists a George Wheeler, who would have been in his 30's at the time the paper portrays and in his 70's when it was written. The author is probably no longer alive, but is there someone who knows the origins of this paper? Judy Thomas (520238) or Dick Barnes (531566) would welcome any information that you may have.

KENNINGTON HISTORY SOCIETY

Developing from the earlier '*Kennington History Project*' which was both encouraged and led by Shirley Jones, the newly formed Kennington History Society has ambitious plans for a range of talks covering local history, visits to interesting historical places and the research for further publications in our local village series.

Under George Ross's able Chairmanship (until recently Kennington's Parish Clerk) the *Society* has some 60+ members after only its first meeting in January this year. Meetings are planned on a monthly basis in the Methodist Church, Upper Road Kennington. Hopefully a schedule of these events will soon be published on the History Society's page on www.kennington.org

Of interest to Abingdon members of the Archaeology & History Society may be a talk set for the 17th March 2003 by Rear Admiral John Myres, occupier of the Manor House Kennington, which was built in 1629 and lived in ever since.

By reflecting our earliest historical links, it is hoped that the Societies whose villages and farms in the 'Hornier *Hundred*' were originally owned by Abingdon Abbey may help further our mutual interest in local history.

All visitors are very welcome at our meetings, subject to a £2.00 fee for non-members.

MODELLING ABINGDON STATION

It was in November of 1998 that my wife and I migrated to Abingdon from our birth county of Suffolk . At that time the branch railway that had run from the nearby station of Radley on the Didcot to Oxford line had ceased for about four years. It lost its passenger service in the sixties followed by complete closure when the MG car factory in Abingdon closed. The cars had been the main reason for the line's survival, along with a fortnightly coal train.

In 1988, if my memory serves me right, most of the platform and the entire stable block remained. But it was not until the end of 2002 that a friend, Phil, and I decided that we would work on a joint project to recreate the railway in 4-mm form as an exhibition layout. So I decided to do some research and see if I could obtain a few more photographs. I joined a web ring dedicated to railways with an emphasis on modelling. Having put out an appeal for information on The Abingdon Branch, I had so much material back it became difficult to keep pace with it. I then wrote an email to every Model Railway Group and Club secretary I could find on the web. Once again the response was brilliant. One of the emails received came from a gentleman who lives in Australia. He is also working on a 4-mm scale layout of Abingdon and was very pleased to share his research with us. I have just put out an appeal on local radio for any one who was connected with the railway to get in touch. I intend now to record their memories of the railway on tape. As a spin off from this the local BBC Radio Station has expressed interest in using some of the material for a possible half hour programme.

However, this brings me to my appeal. If any reader feels that they could help in my continued research I would be very pleased to hear from them. For example, local people may have photographs of relatives at the station. These can be very useful as they can also show details of the structure of the surroundings. I can be contacted through email ivan@icadge.freeserve.co.uk or by phoning me on my mobile number 07979742851

Ivan Cadge

Source of this document: Scanned from a paper newsletter by D.J.Rayner david@rayninfo.co.uk 29th April 2003. Please excuse unspotted scanning errors. Scanning is never 100% accurate, the article on the Old Gaol suffered particularly.