



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2010



Mienneke Cox, who passed away in December: tributes appear on the following pages.

Chairman's Report

By the time you read this, the snow will probably all have melted and it may even seem quite spring-like. At the moment, writing in mid-January, it's hard to envisage that. The unusually heavy snow-falls in January made Abingdon look especially picturesque, and provided great opportunities for photographers. David Rayner added the first pictures to the web-site within a few hours of the snow falling.

We had a successful series of lectures through the autumn. The AGM in September was well-attended, and a new Committee was elected – many thanks to outgoing

members for their service and to incoming ones for being willing to help with running the Society. At the AGM, a motion was discussed, and passed *nem con*, to raise our subscriptions. We did not put this forward lightly, but our costs do continue to rise, and we need to be able to cover them from our income. Thank you to you all for continuing to support the Society.

Our lectures over the autumn covered a broad range of topics. Anthony Poulton-Smith spoke, after the business part of the AGM, about English Placenames, and I think we all learnt something new from that. In October, Maureen Mellor gave us a fascinating 'behind the scenes' talk about creating the new Medieval Gallery at the British Museum, a project in which Maureen was closely involved. We were all very struck by how much work and thought goes into such a project – something to bear in mind when you visit the newly re-opened Ashmolean, where pretty well the entire museum has been redisplayed (to extremely good effect). In November, Pat Minns spoke to us about RAF Abingdon. His talk stimulated a lively discussion: there are many people around (some of them at the lecture) who can still remember RAF Abingdon and some of the events which Mr Minns described. It is salutary to remember that so many aircrew died in flying accidents, as well as those killed in action.

We rounded the year off with the Christmas Social, at which we were both stimulated and entertained by the Abingdon Mummers. Les Argyle of the Mummers gave us an excellent talk about the origins and symbolism of the Mummers' play, following which we were treated to a spirited performance of the play itself. The version of the play performed by the Abingdon Mummers actually comes from Sunningwell, and a group who are making a film about Sunningwell came to our event and filmed the play being performed. Some of you who were in the audience may yet appear in cameo roles in the film! We also held a raffle and by the end of the evening the society was £27.00 better off – for which, many thanks!

The year ended on a sad note with news of the death, on 22 December, of Mieneke Cox, eminent local historian and a staunch supporter of the Society since its foundation over forty years ago. Her funeral was held in St Helen's Church on 15 January. It was very well attended, with many Society members present. A fuller appreciation of Mieneke, written by Jackie Smith, appears below. It is enough to say here that she will be sadly missed by everyone who knew her. Thought is now being given to an event to commemorate Mieneke's work, as Manfred mentions below.

Roger Thomas, Chairman

Mieneke Cox , Abingdon Historian, (1928-2009)

Mieneke Cox, who died in December, was one of Abingdon's best known local historians. For many people their first introduction to the town's history will have been through attendance at her WEA classes, lectures, tours, or through her books and published articles.

Mieneke was born in Holland where she studied history at the University of Utrecht. She met her future husband, George, on a walking holiday in the Lake District. After

their marriage she settled down in Abingdon as a 'Harwell wife' attending St Helen's Church where her interest in history was rekindled by the Vicar, Rev John Dixon, who granted her access to the church's archives. This led to the publication of her guide to St Helen's Church in 1965. The Vicar also introduced her to the historian, Mrs Gabrielle Lambrick. Both were present in 1968 at the inaugural meeting of then Abingdon and District Archaeological Society as was another figure Mrs Eve Harris, a professional archaeologist and curator at Abingdon Museum, who would further influence her career. Following Mrs Lambrick's untimely death in 1968 Mieneke was invited by the WEA to arrange the first of many courses in local history.

Shortly afterwards Mrs Harris left Abingdon creating a vacancy at the museum. In 1970 Mieneke took up the reins as curator of Abingdon Museum, then run by the Abingdon Borough Council. In addition to her work at the museum and her position as St Helen's Archivist she found time to continue with her research, publishing "Abbey to Borough" in 1974. This was the first of many successful titles produced over the years - there are thirteen entries for Mieneke's books in the online Bodleian catalogue covering the following subjects: Abingdon Abbey, St Helen's Church, pageants and the four volumes of the Story of Abingdon. In the early 1990's Mieneke led a group transcribing St Helen's parish registers – a boon to family historians.

She was already an Honorary Vice-President of the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society when her outstanding contribution to our knowledge of Abingdon was recognised in 1997 by the presentation of a Mayor's Award, an honour introduced by Abingdon Town Council to recognise service to the community. Despite retirement and ill health she remained an active member of the society, contributing her knowledge and experience via the local history group email to any member who sought it.

Jackie Smith

The Reading at Mieneke's Funeral

Any members who were unable to attend Mieneke's funeral may be interested in the reading that was given. From "History of the English Church and People", Book 2, chapter 13, about King Edwin of Northumbria and his advisors debating whether to accept Christianity, AD 627.

"Another of the king's chief men signified his agreement with this prudent argument, and went on to say: 'Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man with that of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like swift flight of a lone sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you sit in the winter months to dine with your thanes and counsellors. Inside there is a comforting fire to warm the room; outside, the wintry storms of snow and rain are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the darkness whence he came. Similarly, man appears on earth for a little while, but we know nothing of what went before this life, and what follows. Therefore if this new

teaching can reveal any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it. The other elders and counsellors of the king, under God's guidance, gave the same advice."

(Penguin Edition, translation Leo Sherley-Price)

Trevor Ogden

Mieneke Cox - a personal memoir

It was in about 1990 that I first went to one of Mieneke's lectures at, I think, the Guildhall, and was captivated by her story of what Abingdon had been like in past centuries. When I retired from gainful activities, I began going regularly to her WEA courses at St Helen's, and was fascinated by the degree of detail she had managed to tease out of surviving records. Put Mieneke with her little shopping basket in the centre of Abingdon at any time between about 1400 and 1800, I concluded, and she would have no difficulty in finding suppliers for whatever was on her list, and, furthermore, would be able to chat to the shopkeepers about the state of their businesses and the affairs of their families. They might, indeed, be surprised at how much she knew about them. It was with Mieneke's example before me that I embarked on my own historical explorations.

At this point I regarded Mieneke as a distant and superior being. The history I was doing was rather different from hers, and I hesitated to approach her. But when I had gathered some information on Elizabeth Poole, the seventeenth-century Abingdon prophetess, I plucked up my courage and rang her doorbell, clutching a photocopy rather irregularly obtained at the British Library. I feared that a specialist in Abingdon history might fail to appreciate a local person whose significance was in national rather than local affairs. I need not have worried. Mieneke might be a specialist, but narrow was not a word that could be attached to her. Her understanding of Elizabeth Poole's role in the politics of the late 1640s was complete and immediate, and she knew more of Poole's sometimes rather eccentric associates than I had any right to expect. A very long tea-time culminated in much laughter.

Thereafter I made a habit of passing her my work for comment, and she was always encouraging and often complimentary. Only once did she question my historical judgement, leading to a disagreement that was never resolved. As a patriotic Dutchwoman and a great supporter of the House of Orange, she could never accept that Willem III, Stadholder of the Netherlands, was a usurper when he made himself William III of England. But we shared an interest in the Anglo-Dutch connections of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and she regaled me with stories of her illustrious ancestors going back to Burgundian times.

Mieneke's intellectual legacy is assured through her books and writings, and by the generation of local historians she has trained and influenced. As one of the latter, I feel I owe her a great debt of gratitude.

Manfred Brod

Mieneke Cox – Commemoration Event

As many of you know, the AAAHS committee has decided to hold an event in commemoration of Mieneke Cox and her work for the town. It is hoped that this will take the form of a symposium, to be held in the South aisle at St Helen's. The proposed date is Saturday 9 October, but this is still open to change if it is found to clash with other events.

We are now looking for people who would like to make presentations. These should fit in some way with the scope of Mieneke's work, and be suitable for a largely non-academic audience. Current plans assume that presentations will be twenty minutes with another ten for discussion, but this is still flexible.

Any further suggestions or ideas would be welcome. Please contact any or all of Anne Smithson, Jackie Smith, or myself.

Manfred Brod

Meetings Programme

All at the Northcourt Centre starting at 7.45pm. Members free. Visitors welcome (£2.00 entry)

Thurs 18th March – Julian Munby: “Edward The 3rd's Round table at Windsor”

Thurs 15th April – Brian Dix: Garden Archaeology”

Thurs 20th May – Tim Allen: Subject to be confirmed (Lambrick Lecture)

Thurs 17th June - Open Evening presented by members.

Thurs 16th September – Annual General Meeting.

Editor's Notes

Thanks to all members for their contributions and feedback – all gratefully received. Any suggestions for outings, speakers or newsletter items are most welcome. Please note that the views contained in the articles are those of the contributors rather than the society itself, and contributions may be edited for content.

Tim Barnett, Newsletter Editor

Treasurer's Report

So far this year there has been little expenditure, mainly due to the events/outings season not yet having started and no insurances having been paid. The largest

outlay has been for the Northcourt Centre hire. Income is healthy and visitor donations remain consistently high with an average of 3 visitors per session so far. A new initiative of inviting donations to the tea/ coffee fund has netted the considerable income of £6. The figures below give an indication of the current state of finances with approximate values only.

Income/Expenditure Analysis as of 17/02/10	(£)
Income recurrent 2009/10 ytd	
Subs	732
Donations/visitors	212
Tea/coffee	6
Income from book sales	150
Bank interest	20
Miscellaneous	0
Total income	1120
Expenditure recurrent	
Premises	154
Speakers	165
Insurance	0
Administration	26
Events and Outings	24
Ock St book grant	0
Library/subs	0
Publicity	55
Miscellaneous	70
Total expenditure	494

Andrew Steele, Treasurer

Membership Secretary's Report

Membership numbers are very encouraging so far this year. As of Feb 10th there are 90 paid up members, the same number as the total at the end of last year. The breakdown of membership types (individual, family, concessionary and distant) is almost identical to last year. I am pleased to say that we have 9 new members so far, although 2 members have resigned and a few have not yet paid for this year – I am still hopeful that one or two may still pay up! Thank you to all those who have paid and particularly to those who have given donations or who have paid extra for single membership when they could have had a concessionary one. You should all have your membership cards. If you have not yet received your card please let me know.

Sally Ainslie

AAAHS Outings 2010

Oxford Tour - Tuesday 8th June 6.30pm

Dr Malcolm Graham has kindly agreed to give members of AAAHS a guided tour of part of Oxford to include the castle, canal, markets, fairs and a palace.

We will be meeting at the Oxford Castle site, outside the Key Learning Centre at 6.30pm and finishing at the Far from the Madding Crowd pub in Friars Entry.

The tour should take about 2 hours.

The bus service between Abingdon and Oxford is excellent (X3 is best for the Castle) but car parking is expensive unless the park and ride is used. There are plenty of places to eat in Oxford before or after the tour.

Visit to the Museums Resource Centre (Store), Standlake (OX29 7QG) - Tuesday 29th June 6.30pm

Many members of AAAHS are probably aware that the Oxfordshire archaeological archives are deposited at the Museums Resource Centre, Standlake. Abingdon is well represented here and finds from some Abingdon sites will be on view. The visit will include a tour of the building.

The Centre is on the Standlake Business Park, one mile from Standlake on the A415 Witney Road. Meet in the car park outside the store at 6.30.

The Rose Revived Inn is on the A415 between Abingdon and the Resource Centre. Some members might wish to stop there for a drink or meal after the visit.

Visit to Dorchester-on-Thames Archaeological Excavations - Thursday 15th July 6.30pm

Dorchester is a key site in British history. It was a prestigious ceremonial centre in the Neolithic and Bronze Age and is highly unusual in having important Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon towns in a single place which has suffered remarkably little damage from development.

A member of Oxford Archaeology is showing us round the current archaeological site.

Meet at the car park near the bridge in Dorchester at 6.30.

All outings are £3 per person. Booking is essential as places are limited; please use the form attached at the end of the newsletter and say if you need a lift or can offer one.

Enquiries: Elizabeth Drury, 33 East Saint Helen St, Abingdon OX14 5EE
Tel 01235 553636.

Society Archivist's Report

Norman Dix Map Collection

Recently the Society was approached by Graham Dix, the son of Norman Dix, with a view to donating his father's collection of maps to the Society. Members of long-standing will recall Norman's work on former Saxon charter boundaries in the parish of St Helen and the group that met regularly at 60 East St Helen Street to trace maps. The collection comprises modern OS maps at 1:10,560 and 1:10,000 and several 19th century maps relating to St Helen's parish, some of which are in a fragile condition. The maps will be of particular interest to local historians in the Society but should also prove useful to archaeologists.

The full list of maps relating to the Abingdon area is as follows:

1. OS County Series 1:2500 Index Sheet, 1968
2. OS 1:10,560 or 6" to 1 mile, Provisional Edition. 1960's.
Sheets: SP 41 NW, SP 41 NE, SP 41 SW, SP 51 SW, SU 49 NE, SU 49 SE
3. OS 1:10,560 or 6" to 1 mile, Provisional Edition. 1960's. Sheets: SU 59 NW, SU 49 NW, all photocopies.
4. OS 1:10,000. Sheets: SU 59 NW, 1975; SP 50 SW
5. St Helen's Enclosure Map
6. Tithe Map, St Helen's Parish
7. Tithe Map, Parish of St Helen's Without.
8. Plan of St Helen's Parish, 1835. 7ft wide x 9ft long approx. A few tears in places.
9. St Helen's Within the Borough, 1838. NB Needs Attention
10. John Rocque, 1760. Poor quality photocopy of Abingdon and its environs.

Jackie Smith

Local History Group

The meeting on 2 February featured a double bill from Dick Barnes, who regaled us with two separate presentations on widely different topics.

One was on the great Abingdon historian A.E. Preston, which left us breathless at the sheer scope of the man - local politician and administrator, accountant, barrister, sportsman, conversationalist, and, most important for our interest, antiquarian and organiser of the great mass of archival research that is currently preserved in the Berkshire Record Office. We learned of the sometimes stormy relationship with his

historical secretary Agnes Baker, and of the feud with Bromley Challenor that ended in the displacement of his memorial tablet from his own church of St Helen's to St Nicholas.

The other presentation was on the history of the Harwell Dekatron computer, later to be known more elegantly as the Witch, built in the late 1940s by three engineers, of whom Dick himself was one. It was an unambitious effort by comparison with some of the big computer projects of the time, and was little faster than the machines that were being used for manual calculations. But it was totally reliable, and could be left to work by itself through nights and weekends and even Christmas-New Year breaks; and unlike its competitors it still exists and is currently being put back into working order, with Dick and his associates - all still active - giving advice.

Thanks, Dick! The next meeting will be on Tuesday 4 May.

Manfred Brod

Dates for Your Diary

Oxford Open Doors – 11th and 12th September: Many interesting buildings and spaces open to the public. Details: <http://www.oxfordopendoors.org.uk/>

Abingdon Anglo-German Club

Abbey Chapel, Checker Walk, 7.30pm

1st April - Roger Thomas: *"England's Oldest Town? The Archaeology of Abingdon"* - talk by Roger Thomas of English Heritage (and AAAHS!)

Vale of the White Horse Branch, Berkshire Family History Society

Long Furlong Community Centre, Boulter Drive, Abingdon. 7.30pm.

15th March - Chris and Judy Rouse: *Murder and Mayhem on the Midland Railway*

Wallingford Historical & Archaeological Society

Fridays in Wallingford Town Hall (in the Market Place)

12th March - Jane Macdonald: *The Cook, the Scullion and the Turnspit boy: the History of the 18thC Kitchen*. Jane is a local historian and lecturer who has spent many years researching the history of food

9th April - Dr Simon Townley: *Henley as an Inland Port*. Simon is Editor of the Oxfordshire Victoria County History and a well-known lecturer. His talk will cover the history of Henley from the Middle Ages to the 19th century

14th May - Dr Neil Christie (Leicester University): *The Burh to Borough Project – Results and Questions*

11th June - Liz Wooley: *Child Labour in Oxfordshire 1870-1900: The differences*

between boys' and girls' experiences of work and the particular fates of the pauper apprentices

10th Sept - Martin Way: *Glimmer in the Dark*. A celebration of art and craftsmanship in Anglo-Saxon England with later Viking influences (set against a backdrop of everyday life)

Longworth History Society

14th April - Deborah Hayter: *Ridge and Furrow*. An illustrated presentation - in Longworth Village Hall. 7.15 for a 7.30 start.

16th Sept - Ken Wells: *A History of Policing*: the curator of Thames Valley Police Museum talks on Policing from parish constable to Bow Street Runners & Victorians - Southmoor Village Hall 7.30.

25th Sept 10am to 5pm – *History on our Doorstep Heritage Day* for all the family - full of interest & fun –stalls, hundreds of photos, local finds & displays. Cream teas & other refreshments. Entry with programme 50p. Children free & especially welcome - Southmoor Village Hall.

Marcham Society

Marcham Church, beginning at 7.45pm

11th May - Ron Dell: *The History of Sutton Courtenay*

Cowley Local History Society

United Reform Church, Temple Road, Cowley (Opposite the Police Station) at 8.00pm

16th March – Malcolm Graham: *Henry Taunt, Oxford Photographer*

20th April – Alan Copeland: *Tales of the Unexpected*

18th May – Liz Woolley: *Oxford's Victorian and Edwardian Industrial Building*

15th June – Carl Boardman: *Oxfordshire's Sinners and Villains*

Standlake and District Historical Society

Standlake Village Hall at 8.00pm.

6th April - Sir James Craig: *Standlake Surnames*

Oxford Civic Society

New Road Baptist Church, Bonn Square, Oxford

Thurs 15th April – Professor Allan Chapman: *The Royal Society, Wadham College and the Experimental Scientific Tradition 1660 Onwards*

Try these!

A couple more websites of interest:-

Bede's World (recommended by Trevor Ogden). A fascinating site dedicated to all things Bede. <http://www.bedesworld.co.uk/>

Fascinating website about the Jewish history of Oxford, from 1080 when William 1 encouraged Jewish traders to come to this country. Lots of historical facts about Medieval Oxford, a walking tour and useful links.

http://www.oxfordchabad.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/450797/jewish/Oxford-Jewish-Heritage.htm

350th Anniversaries

Two events which happened in the year 1660 are worthy of mention.

May 29th saw the Restoration of Charles II to the throne on his 30th birthday. This became known as Royal Oak Apple Day in celebration of the tree in which the king had hidden in order to escape Cromwell following the Battle of Worcester.

And on November 30th a dozen men gathered to hear Christopher Wren give a lecture on astronomy. In the discussion that followed they decided to form a society for the study of the new and still controversial Experimental Philosophy and so the Royal Society. A terrific book has been published to commemorate the occasion. Called "Seeing Further" (edited by Bill Bryson and costing £12.50 from Amazon).

Christopher Assheton and the opposition to Queen Mary

It is remarkable how many of the men who were prominent in and around Abingdon in the early to mid sixteenth century had been members of the privy chamber of Henry VIII. Among them were the steward of the abbey properties after its dissolution in 1538, John Wellesborne, and the understeward, Thomas Denton. Yet another, Christopher Assheton, is mentioned by the surveyor Roger Amyce as holding the position of collector of the abbey rents by letters patent, with a salary of ten marks per year. It is entirely consistent with what we know of Assheton's character that there is no mention of any such letters patent in the Chancery files.

Assheton's earlier career is obscure, but by 1537 he had married, as her fourth husband, the elderly Katherine Gordon who had long before been celebrated as 'the white rose of Scotland'. She had escaped sharing the downfall of her first husband, the pretender Perkin Warbeck, and had been endowed by Henry VIII with a clutch of manors close to Abingdon, including Fyfield and Eaton.

Assheton was acquisitive and unscrupulous. Before the dissolution of Abingdon abbey, he had tried to profit from the dispute between the abbey and its steward, John Audlett, grabbing some of the properties at issue. Concessions were made to

him, but he always came back for more, leading the abbot to appeal to Thomas Cromwell for help and doubtless serving the latter's purpose of softening up the abbey for a trouble-free surrender. Afterwards, he continued to harass Audlett's widow and family, and she was able to get a letter from Lord Sandys confirming that Assheton was 'a man of marvellous perverse and evil condition. Many honest persons, in town and country, stand in great dread of him.' Sandys was lord chamberlain and doubtless knew Assheton from the king's court. In 1543, Assheton was involved in some sort of altercation at the county musters, serious enough to lead to an investigation by the Privy Council.

But his place in history was secured only later. The older history books emphasize how it was popular pressure that put Mary on the throne over the pretensions of the Dudley clan and Jane Grey, and that what opposition there was was religious rather than political. This is not the case. The Dudleys were not extinct, and the French king Henri II was not keen to see England become a Spanish satellite. Many Englishmen were of the same opinion. A small colony of defectors built up on the French coast, tacitly tolerated by Henri, and maintaining themselves by his occasional handouts and by Channel piracy. Their leader was Henry Sutton or Dudley, a Dudley cousin, who was (or would later be) Assheton's son-in-law. At least in the opinion of David Starkey, it was Assheton who was the driving force behind his plans for an insurrection.

At Christmas time 1555, there was a conference of conspirators at Fyfield. The rest of the winter Assheton and his associates spent travelling about, setting up their organisation and raising money. When spring came, he and his son, also Christopher, left for France.

The plan was by no means a forlorn hope. All over England, there were people who loathed the idea of Mary's Spanish marriage and wanted to remove her in favour of her sister Elizabeth. Overtures were made to Edward Courtenay, who had his own dynastic claim as a descendant of the Yorkist kings and was in exile in Venice; he was seen as a suitable – and English – husband for the young princess. Sutton judged, perhaps correctly, that if he landed with a force of at least 3000 well-equipped mercenaries, enough English malcontents would join him to have a realistic chance of success. Arrangements were made to secure Portsmouth for the invasion, and a daring plan to raid the queen's treasury for the means to pay the soldiers failed only because the treasure chests proved too heavy to be removed without attracting attention. That was the high point of the enterprise. Thereafter, it quickly unravelled as government investigators closed in. Elizabeth lost some of her closest servants, but to execute her was out of the question. There was a general pretence that she herself had been unaware of the plot. The Asshetons joined their friends in piracy. They escaped a sweep by the English navy in July, and in the next year were planning a raid on Portland which aborted. The older Assheton never returned to England, although his son may have done so when Elizabeth was on the throne.

Starkey describes Assheton as 'a swashbuckling adventurer of the authentic, larger-than-life Elizabethan type'. His contemporaries around Abingdon might have been much less complimentary.

Manfred Brod

AAHS OUTINGS 2010

BOOKING FORM

please complete in CAPITALS

Name	_____
Address	_____ _____
Telephone	_____
Email	_____

EVENT	Number of people	Total
<p>Oxford Tour Tuesday 8th June 6.30pm Do you require a lift? _____ Can you offer a lift? _____</p>	_____ at £3 each	
<p>Museums Resource Centre, Standlake Tuesday 29th June 6.30pm Do you require a lift? _____ Can you offer a lift? _____</p>	_____ at £3 each	
<p>Dorchester Thursday 15th July 6.30pm Do you require a lift? _____ Can you offer a lift? _____</p>	_____ at £3 each	

Please make cheques payable to A.A.A.H.S.
 Please return form by **15th May**.
 Numbers are limited on some outings

To:
 Elizabeth Drury
 33 East Saint Helen Street
 Abingdon
 OX14 5EE
 Tel. (01235) 553636

Thank you.

Total Enclosed