

Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

www.AAAHS.org.uk



NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2011

Meetings Programme:

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

17 March 2011 **Adrian Ailes:** Elias Ashmole's Heraldic Visitation (Lambrick Lecture)

21 April 2011 **Jane Harrison:** Sand Mounds and Middens: Cultural Landscapes of the Viking North Atlantic 800-1200 AD

19 May 2011 **Professor Gregory Stores:** The History & Folklore of Witchcraft (*Please note change from the original programme*)

16 June 2011 **Open Evening:** Talks and displays by AAAHS members

15 Sept 2011 **AGM**

AAAHS Outings 2011

For all outings please use the form at the end of this newsletter to book by **May 16th**. Numbers are limited on some outings. Bookings contact: Elizabeth Drury, 33 East Saint Helen St, Abingdon OX14 5EE. Tel 01235 553636

Victorian Abingdon **Wednesday 25 May 6.30pm**

This walk looks at the evolution of the planned suburb of Albert Park often compared to Victorian North Oxford. The route will include Park Road and Park Crescent, returning to the town centre via Ock Street. Estimated time 1hr 15 minutes.

We will meet with our guide Jackie Smith in the small square outside 33 Bath Street (at the junction of Bath Street with Stratton Way).

Hidden Oxford **Tuesday 7 June 6.30pm**

Led by John Gibbs this is an opportunity to look at some of the buildings and landmarks of Oxford city that are not on the usual tourist trail. Estimated time 2 hours.

Meet by the Ox sculpture outside the entrance to Oxford Station at 6.30pm. The X3 bus from Abingdon goes directly to the station.

The Archaeology of North Abingdon Wednesday 6 July 6.30pm

Our Digging Secretary, Jeff Wallis, will show us some of the archaeological sites of North Abingdon. The route will include the sites of a Roman cemetery, Saxon buildings, a Neolithic Long Barrow, the Abbey Fishponds and Barrow Hills. Estimated time 2 hrs

Meet at the car park on Audlett Drive near the roundabout at the junction of Audlett Drive and Radley Road. (OS 515983)

Chairman's Report

I'd like to open this report by paying tribute to two former chairmen of the Society – Norman Gray and Ron Henderson – who both died at the end of last year. Both played a large part in the Society's early and formative years in the late 1960s and early 1970s (as did Ron's wife Edna, who died some years ago). We extend our sympathy to their families.

I am writing this at the start of what seems likely to be a difficult year. The public spending cuts are beginning to bite. Some of them will impact directly on things which local archaeological and historical societies, such as our own, value very greatly. Many local authority functions are going to be scaled back. Archaeological services, planning and conservation, archives, museums and libraries are all likely to see shrinking budgets. In Oxfordshire the post of County Archaeologist already seems to have gone, and the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies is shortly to close and be merged with the County Record Office. Many libraries in the county are also under threat of closure.

What does this mean for the relationship between the voluntary efforts of societies like ours (and of individual private researchers) and the professional public services which we are all used to. We all (obviously) appreciate how big a contribution voluntary effort and private initiative makes in our subjects, but I think we also recognise the importance of public services in making this possible. The County's Historic Environment Record, the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, the County Record Office and the County Museums Service all play a vital role. They provide secure long-term care for records, archives and collections; they ensure that these are indexed and made accessible; their knowledgeable staff give help and guidance. Reductions in these services will make life more difficult for the voluntary researcher – reduced staffing, reduced opening hours and less space are likely to affect anyone who is trying to undertake research, or to obtain information or advice from staff. The proposed closure of public libraries will also have a serious impact. The local library is a first port of call for most people – newcomers to an area, for example – who want to find out about their local history. If there is no library, where will they turn?

What, if anything, can be done? Perhaps three things. First, we can press our case with politicians. Many benefits flow from kinds of things we do, and some of them (such as helping to promote a sense of community) go well beyond the simple interest and enjoyment of researching the past. Politicians always have at least half an eye on the ballot box. Anyone is free to telephone or write to their local councillor or MP at any time – if you feel strongly about something, then say so! Second, voluntary support for threatened public services. In some ways, this is a controversial

direction and, in any case, spare time is not abundant for many people. Nonetheless, opportunities for becoming involved in these services are likely to increase, and this could prove rewarding and interesting for those who take part. Finally, is there a need for societies like ours to be more active in reaching out to the public at large if public bodies are going to be less able to do this? The great success of the Ock Street exhibition, and the more recent Society exhibition in the 'Community Shop', shows both what can be done (and at very modest cost), and how much it is appreciated by the public as a whole.

I'd like to end this report on a more positive note, and there in fact is plenty that is good to report. We had a number of excellent lectures in the autumn, and ended the year well by dancing with the Vale Islanders at the Christmas Social. The puddings, made to 17th century recipes by Sally Ainslie (carrot pudding) and Alan Drury (almond cake with currants) were also greatly enjoyed! We have an equally good programme of meetings to look forward to over the next few months. Our final meeting of the season will, as usual, be our Open Evening in June, at which Society members can talk about or display their own work. If you are doing a project which you would like to tell us about, please let a member of the Committee know.

Finally, many of you came on one or more of the excellent evening outings which Liz Drury organised for us last summer. Liz has now arranged three more outings, to take place in May, June and July. Further details and a booking form appear elsewhere in this newsletter. Places are limited, so do sign up if you would like to come. I'm writing this on 29 January, and I can promise (well, almost!) that the weather will be warmer for our outings than it is now!

Roger Thomas, Chairman

Digging Report - The Society's Excavation at Marcham

Members may know that the Society has been excavating at Marcham for the past two years. We are working in a wood known as 'Kiln Copse' and are trying to locate the brick kiln after which it was named.

At the Members' meeting last June I said that we were waiting for a magnetic susceptibility survey. This took place shortly after last June's meeting and identified two areas with high readings. One, we learned later, was the site of a building which had burned down some years ago. We have put in a ten metre by ten metre trench over the other and last September opened up the first five metre square in the North-East corner of the trench. Though it has been slow we have made progress and just before Christmas came across some limestone blocks and a spread of limestone rubble. We hope that this may be a surface of some sort and are presently working to see if this is the case. As in our other trenches we have found a substantial amount of broken brick and tile, but nothing, yet, to indicate where the kiln might be.

We have always believed that the kiln was operating from the late 18th Century to the mid-19th but recently found three pottery fragments which are 17th or early 18th Century, including the base of what may be a Bellarmine Jar. These may be contemporary with a spoon which we found in the topsoil of the trench, though this can't be used as dating evidence. This is leading to a rethink of its age. Unfortunately the weather has been unkind to us recently so we have not made

much progress since we found the pottery but we are looking forward to finding further dating evidence as we move into spring.

We have been excavating a trench through a bank on the southern edge of kiln copse which we believe might be late Bronze or early iron Age. We haven't yet reached the bottom of this trench but haven't at this stage found anything to date the bank. The trench is flooded at the moment but will carry on when the weather improves.

We always welcome more diggers, novice or experienced, and meet at 10:00 in the car park to the Cemetery (on the right hand side as you leave Marcham on the Frilford road). We are always happy to welcome visitors to our excavation. Call me on 07880 897047 to check that we are going to be there.

John Gibbs

Membership Secretary's Report

Last year, as many of you know, I set up a Members' email account. This is not intended to replace the Yahoo Groups discussion forum but gives the Committee a means to communicate quickly with many members and cuts down on the cost of postage. Information by post is of course still sent to those without access to email. If you have not yet been contacted via email and would like to be included please email me at aaahsmembersec@hotmail.co.uk

As of the end of January we have 97 paid up members, which is an increase on this time last year when we only had 89. The breakdown is:-

	2009/10	2010/11
Individual	43	47
Concessionary	22	30
Family	23	19
Distant	1	1

The increase in Concessionary members seems to indicate (unsurprisingly) that we are all getting older, but maybe more worryingly, we have fewer Family members this year. However, since the overall numbers are up, it seems that our rise in subscriptions has not deterred too many members from renewing this year. There have been 5 new members so far (all Individual) and 9 members have not yet renewed their subscriptions. Many thanks to those members who included donations with their subscriptions, and also to those who paid for Individual subscriptions when they are entitled to the Concessionary rate!

Sally Ainslie, AAAHS Membership Secretary

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. Income is healthy and visitor donations remain consistently high with an average of 3 visitors per session so far. Donations to the tea/coffee fund has netted the considerable

income of £14, more than doubled from last year. Book sales also remain healthy. The Events/Outings figures of £400-450 was due to the income/outlay for the Mienneke Cox Day, for which we eventually broke even. 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	
2010/11 ytd	
Subs	1038
Donations/visitors	121
Tea/coffee	14
Income from book sales	300
Events/Outings	400
Bank interest	10
Miscellaneous	0
Total income	1883
Expenditure recurrent	
2010/11 ytd	
Premises	0
Speakers	120
Insurance	0
Administration	72
Events and Outings	451
Ock St book grant	0
Library/subs	0
Publicity	141
Miscellaneous	58
Total expenditure	842

Andrew Steele, Treasurer

Local History Group

The Local History Group meeting on 19 October was unusual and fascinating. John Dunleavy spoke on the early history of St Edmund's in Abingdon, and his presentation was complemented by the photographs (and occasional interpolations) of Mike Corbett. The talk was multi-faceted, and different people will have concentrated on different aspects. There was, especially, much of interest on the architecture and furnishings of the church and associated buildings. For myself, I was left pondering on the religious turmoil of the mid-nineteenth century which sent so many earnest upper-class individuals into Catholicism: Oxford intellectuals to become clergy, architects like Wardell to design their churches, and above all rich gentlemen like Sir George Bowyer to finance those churches however scanty their congregations. And the earlier political developments that meant that all of this was now perfectly legal.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 3 May and the main presenter will be Janey Cumber, who will take us back to the years following the dissolution of the Abbey.

Manfred Brod

'Celebrating Abingdon's History' - an event in commemoration of Mieneke Cox

On 9 October, the Society put on a major event to celebrate the life and work of its late founder-member and honorary vice-president, Mieneke Cox, who died in December 2009.

It was an all-day event, which took place in the south aisle of St Helen's Church, with which Mieneke was also closely associated. Far more people came than had been expected. There was a capacity audience of seventy-five, and several more would-be attendees had, regrettably, to be turned away. This is a tribute both to the extent of Mieneke's reputation and influence in Abingdon, and to the great local interest that exists in the town's history.

Participants heard a total of nine presentations from a miscellaneous group of professional and amateur local historians on themes and subjects that had benefitted from Mieneke's contributions. These are now in process of being put together in a book, which should be available shortly.

The organising committee consisted of Anne Smithson, Jackie Smith, and myself, and we had the help on the day of numerous members of the society as well as of several St Helen's churchwardens, to all of whom our most sincere thanks.

Manfred Brod

Dates for Your Diary:

Monday 9th May at 7.30pm: **Richard Dudding: Lower Radley**, Radley Primary School

Monday 13th June at 7.30pm: **David Clark: The existing buildings of Abingdon Abbey** - Radley History Society, Radley Primary School

Tuesday 3rd May at 7.45pm: **Janey Cumber: the years following the dissolution of the Abbey** - AAHS Local History **Group** 35 Ock Street

20 June 2011 at 7.15pm for 7.30pm: **Simon Townley: 'The Work of the Victoria County History'** -Berkshire Family History Society Vale of the White Horse Branch, Long Furlong Community Centre, Boulter Drive, Abingdon

Tuesday May 10th, 2pm **Abingdon's Hidden History** Oxford Preservation Trust OPT Members' Programme: Explore three historic houses in Abingdon with architectural historian, David Clark. Visit the Trust's medieval merchant house in East St Helen Street dated to 1431 with some excellent examples of early decorative schemes before moving on to David's house (16th to the 19th centuries). Followed by afternoon tea and cakes at St Ethelwold's House; another multi-phase house built over a 13th century cellar.(£14.50)

<http://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/news/eventsBook.php>

The Banbury WEA will be running a History Day Course on Broughton Castle on 11th June 2011 and will also be running an Archaeology Course in September 2011. The cost of the Day school is £20 and includes tuition, admission to the castle and guided tour. Regrettably lunch is not included or transport from the classroom to the Castle. However, Cream Tea can be arranged at the Castle if booked at time of enrolment.

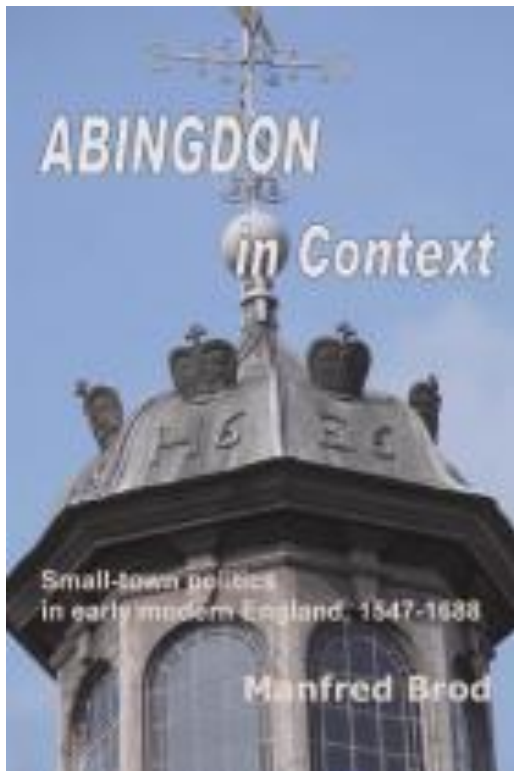
At the moment they are just taking names of people who are interested in the Archaeology course.

They say our members are welcome to come to any of their courses.

Contact: Jenny Gough (Branch Sec) Tel: 01295 690326 or email Banbury Branch on wwma63@hotmail.com

Book Review

Manfred Brod, *Abingdon in Context. Small-town politics in early modern England 1547-1688* (Fastprint Publishing, 2010)



For a town of its size, Abingdon has been very well served by local historians of repute: the works of Arthur Preston, Agnes Baker and Mieneke Cox spring readily to mind, to name just a few. Now, we have Manfred Brod's new book, *Abingdon in Context*. This is, in many ways, local history at its best: a detailed and scholarly study of a particular town, but set firmly in the wider context of national events and trends. The book covers the eventful period between the mid 16th and late 17th centuries.

The book has two parts. The first is a series of chapters, in chronological order, covering such topics as: the granting of the first charters for the Borough and Christ's Hospital; the small and sometimes quarrelsome group of men ('oligarchs') who governed both institutions; the relationship of the town's government to members of the nobility and to central government; the impact of the Reformation (which led to a divided town) and the Civil War; and the loss of independence in the late 17th century, when political and legislative changes gave central government (through the agency of rural-based gentry and the nobility standing behind them) a much greater role than before in the governance of Abingdon. This last theme – the tension between local desire for self-government and a centralising state – still has many resonances today.

The second part of the book consists of a series of short essays about particular individuals and families who are prominent in the events discussed in Part 1. These

portraits are of much interest in themselves, as well as being invaluable to anyone who is interested in Abingdon's history in this period. The book also includes a detailed timeline which very helpfully relates the chronology of national events to that of local ones

This meticulously-researched book is authoritative (and very fully referenced) but at the same time highly readable and enjoyable. It should find a prominent place on the bookshelves of anyone who is interested in Abingdon's history. At £10, it is also extremely good value; it can be bought at the Bookstore in the Precinct.

Roger Thomas

Try These!

Friends of Abingdon Museum <http://abingdonmuseumfriends.org.uk/index.html>

The East Oxford Archaeology and History Project will have Anne Dodd talking about the Saxons in Oxfordshire and Trevor Rowley about the Medieval period - dates and venues to be confirmed. <http://www.archeox.net/>

Oliver Sansom (1636-1710)

The religious passions of the sixteenth and seventeenth century were largely destructive, but had their positive side. It was religion that brought ordinary people into public life, giving them the impetus and opportunity to take initiatives, to contest social structures and hierarchies, and to follow leaders whose legitimacy depended on their principles rather than their birth. Religion thus represented a step in the development of modern politics.

A case in point is Oliver Sansom. For much of his life, Sansom was undoubted leader of the Quakers of the Vale, and influential also among those of the Newbury region. He was already a familiar figure in Abingdon before moving there from Faringdon in 1691, living in Boar Street until his death in 1710.

Sansom was born in 1636 in Beedon but of a family based in Charney Bassett. His grandfather, after whom he was named, had belonged to a godly group that described each other as their brothers in Christ, and was probably descended from the local Lollards of several generations earlier. At seven, and in spite of the Civil War, he was sent to an aunt in Charney to go to the Marten school at nearby Longworth; he learned to write in a neat clerkly hand, and even some elementary Latin. About 1660, he married a Charney girl of the extensive Bunce family, but the couple could not live together until they had acquired a landholding and before this happened he had become a Quaker.

Of the many sects that pullulated in those disturbed times, it was the Quakers who were the most detested by the orthodox and by other non-conformists alike. They had pulled back from their earlier confrontational behaviour, heckling orthodox clergy in their own churches and indulging in provocative street theatre. But they still

proclaimed their separation from normal society by refusing conventional courtesies, declining to serve in social functions that required oath-taking as most then did, and withholding the tithes that maintained the orthodox clergy and that everyone, by law, was supposed to pay. They professed in and out of season that it was the Holy Spirit, acting within them, that controlled their actions, and that their individual consciences took precedence even over the dictates of the Bible. Respectable parents feared, with reason, that their children might be drawn into this strangely attractive counter-culture.

Sansom, moving with his wife to Boxford, could not keep his allegiance secret. He was soon in trouble with the law, and even more with the clergy whose tithes he refused to pay. His and his wife's families at first tried to smooth matters over and pay his fines and taxes for him, but he always refused, and over the years he was able to convert them all to his own beliefs. He spent much time in prison, but often contrived to be allowed out on his own and Quaker business. Quakers did not lie, and the jailers could be confident he would return when he said. He even set up a business in jail, manufacturing pattens from raw materials his wife got for him, and grew vegetables to send home. By 1678, he had given up farming and was living in Faringdon as a mercer. Faringdon became the centre for the three hundred or so Quakers in the Vale. It was his family that was his main support in the leadership; his wife Jane handled administrative and social affairs, and her sister, the prophetess Joan Vokins, the spiritual teaching and exhortation.

Sansom was a participant in the debates and conflicts that shook quakerdom, but his greatest days were in the 1680s when persecution reached new heights. He became an accomplished court-room performer, and magistrates learned to fear having him before them. He would take the Bible in his hand, look slowly round the courtroom with a smile on his face, then let the book fall open – always exactly at the page in Matthew where Christians are forbidden to swear. To prove that Quakers were law-abiding, he once, when sentenced in Newbury to be imprisoned in Reading, took himself there unescorted, though accompanied, no doubt, by a rout of vociferous supporters. Politically aware, he mocked the magistrates with the absurdities in the law they were applying, and publicised the corruption in the legal hierarchy where clerks and informers conspired to extort blackmail and hush money from non-conformists. He exploited conflicts among the magistrates, and it was from him in 1686 that they first learned of the change in government policy towards dissenters. 'The king' he told them, 'is inclined to show us some favour,' and he and his fellows were acquitted.

In 1682, Sansom had led a recruiting drive in Abingdon, when he and Joan Vokins had preached, sometimes in the open street, and made converts. He had negotiated an agreement with the moderate mayor William Foster; he would accept being heavily fined, so long as his congregation were not. By the time he moved to Abingdon, William III was on the throne and serious persecution had ceased, but there was still the matter of the tithes that he refused to pay to the controversial Scottish vicar, James Canaries, and this and similar conflicts would end only with his death. He left numerous polemical writings, administrative documents, letters, and a very informative autobiography.

Manfred Brod

AAHHS OUTINGS 2011

BOOKING FORM

please complete in CAPITALS

Name

Address

.....

.....

Telephone

Email

EVENT	Number of people	Total
Victorian Abingdon Wednesday 25th May 6.30pm at £3 each	
Hidden Oxford Tuesday 7th June 6.30pm at £3 each	
The Archaeology of North Abingdon Wednesday 6th July 6.30pm at £3 each	

Please make cheques made payable to A.A.A.H.S.
 Please return form by **16th May**. Numbers are limited on some outings

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

Thank you.

Total Enclosed