



# Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

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

## NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2013

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### Meetings Programme

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

**21 Feb:** “The East Oxford Project” – **Jane Harrison**, Kellogg College

**21 Mar:** “The production, distribution and use of salt in the British Iron Age” –  
**Janice Kinory**, University of Oxford

**18 April:** “The work of the Portable Antiquities Scheme” – **Anni Byard**.

**16 May:** “The Origins of Wessex Project: The Upper Thames Valley in the early  
Anglo-Saxon period” – **Helena Hamerow**, University of Oxford

**20 June: Open Evening:** Talks & displays by Members.

The **2013/14** season commences with the AGM on **19 September 2013**

### AAAHS Outings 2013

If you would like to join us please fill in the form on the last page to arrive by **15 April**.  
Numbers are limited on some outings.

Bookings/queries: Elizabeth Drury, 33 East Saint Helen Street, Abingdon OX14 5EE  
Tel: 01235 553636

**The Bate Collection, Oxford** Tuesday 23 April 6.30pm

The Bate Collection is one of the most magnificent collections of musical instruments in the world. Following an enjoyable meeting in December when we were entertained by the curator, Andrew Lamb, we will now be introduced to the highlights of the collection and given some demonstrations.

Bate Collection, Faculty of Music, St. Aldates, Oxford

The X3 and X13 Buses from Abingdon stop outside the County Court, St Aldates, and the Faculty is across the road.

**Guided walk round Bampton** Wednesday 8 May 6.30pm

Now well known as the fictional village in the TV series Downton Abbey, Bampton is one of the oldest and most attractive villages in Oxfordshire. Sarah Wearne, archivist at Abingdon School and Bampton resident, will show us round her village.

Meet outside the Church (junction of Church View and Church Street)

Please say on the form if you would like a lift.

**World War II defences near Abingdon** Thursday 13 June 6.30pm

David Rayner will lead an informal exploratory walk looking at the pillboxes and anti-tank blocks between Marcham and Abingdon. We will be following the local anti-invasion defences of 1940.

Meet outside Marcham Church

Stagecoach 31 buses run between Abingdon and Marcham, or say if you would like a lift.

**Archaeology at Dorchester-on-Thames** Wednesday 17 July 7.00pm

Dorchester is a key site in British history. This is a return visit for a guided tour of the current archaeological excavations.

Meet at the car park near the bridge in Dorchester at 7.00. Please say if you would like a lift.

**Janey Cumber**

*We are sad to report the death on 26 January of Janey.Cumber. She was an AAAHS member of long standing and a sometime committee member and secretary. With her husband Will, she facilitated a wide variety of archaeological activities on their farm at Marcham/Frilford, and in her own right was a leading historian of Abingdon, specialising in the development of its economy and society in the sixteenth century.*

*The Society offers its sincere condolences to Will and the family. A full obituary will appear in our next Newsletter.*

## Chairman's Report

Looking back, the year 2012 was memorable in many ways: for the royal jubilee celebrations, for the Olympics and of course for the atrocious weather. Locally, we had what was probably the soggiest bun throwing (for the jubilee) ever - although the heavy rain did not deter people from turning out in huge numbers. The year also saw the reopening of the completely refurbished County Hall Museum, with its brand new exhibitions – and very fine it all looks too. It is now possible to visit almost every part of the building, from the basement to the roof, and I am sure that pretty well all of you will have visited at some point. If you haven't, I'd encourage you to do so at the earliest opportunity!

The Society had a full and varied programme of lectures in the autumn, with talks on Neanderthals in Norfolk, 'the Apple' ('England's favourite fruit'), and the 'Craven case' (political skullduggery in 17<sup>th</sup> century England). For the last, we were especially grateful to Manfred Brod for stepping in at very short notice when the planned speaker was unable to come through illness. The Christmas Social was a memorable talk and performance by Andy Lamb, from the Bate Collection of musical instruments in Oxford: he talked about 'the serpent that tempted Eve' (the serpent being a baroque musical instrument) and played for us on a modern example which he had brought along. It was a very good note (pun intended!) on which to end the year. The Local History Group also held a successful meeting in October, with talks on a variety of topics.

The Society and its members also continue to carry out projects of various kinds. One important new initiative which has taken shape during the year is a project to write histories of selected Abingdon buildings and people, and to make these publicly accessible on the internet. We are fortunate, in that the Choose Abingdon Partnership (an umbrella organisation which aims to promote the vitality of the town) is creating a web-site, to which it hopes a variety of community groups will be able to contribute. It has been agreed that the 'Buildings and People' project can put its results on this web-site, which should ensure that they reach a wide audience. The web-site's developers see this as something of a trial run for community groups' contributions to this web-site: it is good to see the Society leading the way here.

Our lecture programme for the rest of our year contains a wide variety of interest: 17<sup>th</sup> century interior decoration at the Bodleian Library, community archaeology in East Oxford, salt in the British Iron Age, and the origins of Wessex. Our June meeting will, as usual, be devoted to talks and displays by Society members. June may seem a long way off, but it will come round surprisingly quickly – do think about whether you have a piece of research or particular local topic about which you would like to talk, or to mount a display on. If you think you might like to do something, please let any member of the committee know. We will also be running a further series of evening outings during the summer – details and a booking form (spaces are necessarily limited) are elsewhere in this newsletter. Many thanks are due to Liz Drury for organising what has become a very pleasant and worthwhile part of our programme.

Although I am writing this in early January, it will probably be a little late to wish you 'Happy New Year' by the time the Newsletter reaches you in February. I hope, though, that 2013 is a

successful and happy year for everyone, and I look forward to seeing many of you at Society events during the course of it.

*Roger Thomas, Chairman, January 2013*

## Membership Secretary's Report

At the time of writing (mid Jan) I have received 72 subscriptions – 11 family, 32 individual, 27 concessionary and 3 distant. I am pleased to say that we have 5 new members but so far 6 people have said they do not intend to renew this year, mainly because of poor health. I have recently sent reminders to all those who have not yet paid so hopefully a few more subscriptions will arrive soon. However, it appears at present that our total number of subscriptions for 2012/13 will be considerably lower than the 98 we had last year.

*Sally Ainslie  
Membership secretary*

## Treasurer's Report

There have been no major single expenditures so far this year. The largest has been the hire of the Northcourt Hall at £137 to date. Speakers come a close second at £100 and total expenditure has been £342. The expected purchase of a new/second projector for lectures has been put on hold as the Northcourt Centre is debating whether to buy their own fixed installation projector which we would use in preference.

Income is fairly healthy with £758 from subs, £102 from book sales and usefully, £166 from the sale of Mienke's book. This leaves us about £95 short of break even in total on this project. Total income to date is £1175.

Visitors averaging out at 2.7 visitors per meeting and tea donations has netted £9.

<b>Principal Income/Expenditure Analysis as of 10/01/13</b>	<b>2012/13 ytd (£)</b>
<b>Income recurrent</b>	
Subs	758
Donations/ visitors	87
Tea / coffee	9
Income from book sales	268
Bank interest	24
<b>Expenditure recurrent</b>	
Hire of halls	137
Speakers	100
Admin	66

*Andrew Steele, Treasurer*

## Digging Reports

### Site evaluation at Bowyer Road

Bowyer Road is located within the 1930s housing development at Boxhill. This is a flat area of first terrace gravel approximately 1 km north of central Abingdon, which was shown as enclosed fields on the 1875 edition OS map. The Union Workhouse was shown 200 m south-east of the site, while 250 m to the west are extensive Iron age and Roman features that were discovered during construction of new classrooms at St. Nicholas Primary School.

The Society was invited to investigate the garden of a bungalow in Bowyer Road by its new owners. They had recently (June 2011) called a contractor to cut and remove a concrete slab as part of landscape and small building works in the rear garden. Much to their surprise and horror, the contractors uncovered remains of at least four burials in shallow graves. Assuming a Cromwell Street, Gloucester, scenario the police became involved. One skull was removed and taken for forensic examination. After some deliberation it became clear that this was not a crime scene, and what was required was archaeologists.

With much reluctance because of its backlog of publishing, the Society became involved. There was bureaucracy to battle through as the site required a Courts of Justice burials licence. A small investigation was agreed. Acting on advice from Tim Allen, the Society opted for creating a basic record of the site and not to incur huge expense lifting remains. Following on from this it was decided to treat the site as an evaluation rather than a full excavation.

I had a recollection of burials in this area. Consulting back-volumes of *Oxoniensia* revealed a note by Duncan Wilson (*Oxoniensia* 44 (1979), pp 97-99). Enquiries to a very helpful Sue Lisk at the Historic Environment Record turned up Duncan's original site notes – albeit with some misleading dimensions and orientation, and labelling simply as Boxhill. We were able to confirm that the seven burials did indeed refer to the same garden and these remain where they were located under a 1979 extension on the north-west end of the bungalow. The burials were thought to be Saxon or Roman. A male burial had a “pillow” using a huge sherd of Roman grey ware and the chest and lower limbs weighed down by limestone flags. Posthole and gully indicated pre-burial settlement. The burials were between 0.6 m and 1.1 m beneath the modern surface and resting on the gravel terrace.

From the desktop evaluation it became clear that the 2011 discoveries were additional and not re-exposures. The owners' original idea to place a small construction in the area of the slab was re-assessed because of the exposed remains which in the intervening period had been re-buried. In view of the new proposals for the garden, we decided to cut two new trenches. Trench 2, 2.4 metres square, was dug on the edge of the recent discoveries and Trench 3, 4 m by 2.4 m, was 1.3 m NE of Trench 2. The area of Trench 3 was cleared of dense bushes and

revealed a boundary stone which must be Parliamentary Boundary between St. Nicholas and St. Helen Without as shown on the 1875 OS map.

Excavating by hand in the garden soils, we retrieved a large group of flints probably of Mesolithic date among the more usual modern, medieval and Roman material This would be in keeping with finds in other riverside locations The trenches and bungalow are on the terrace edge as are the burials, at around 58 m above ordnance datum. The garden slopes away to River Stert alluvium and the river at around 56 m AOD. We came quickly down to more human remains at a comparatively shallow depth just beneath garden soils, around 25 cm below the modern surface. As our licence did not allow for lifting we opted for partial exposure, enough to gauge orientation, sex, age and possibly to define the extent of the burial area. Trench 2 produced partial remains of three sub-adults, one late sub-adult and one unidentifiable fragment. Trench 3 contained partial remains of two sub-adults and one adult, the cranial vault of an infant and one set of unidentifiable remains.

The site as defined is a linear cemetery consisting of two lines of opposed burials within possible grave cuts, orientated NE-SW. The linear arrangement respects the sloping terrace edge and no burials were found 6 m to the south east during construction of a north-west bungalow extension. Do the burials respect the boundary stone 1 m outside Trench 3? How far to the south-west further burials may be located we do not know; so far we have a 14 m run. The burial count so far include the seven recorded by Wilson, at least four discovered by the contractor (seen as a photograph) and ten partially articulated, disrupted by boundary post and fragmentary, suggest that twenty-one if not more exist here.

The date and nature of the cemetery is a mystery. Do the burials respect the boundary and link to parishes? The burials that have been sexed appear to be sub-adult males apart from the infant cranial fragment. Are these burials the result of Civil War skirmishes? Plague pit burial does not seem to fit given that we have possible grave cuts. Wilson suggests a Saxon date as stratigraphically the remains are post-Roman and stone placements fit Saxon contexts. Documents refer to "heathen" graves around the town. The Workhouse and St. Nicholas School sites could have attracted cemeteries. A point of conflict is the burial depth. The 1970s burial is much deeper in contrast to the recent finds. One of the latter has a burial below as far as can be seen in the photograph. Is it possible that the burials are multi-period?

It is planned to lift the left Humerus from burial 310 as the bone is slightly higher in deposits and therefore under threat from groundworks. This is to be used as a carbon dating sample via Oxford Archaeology.

The Society is indebted to Tim Allen, our advisor, for his skilled negotiations and much sound, practical advice. We wish to thank Dr Peter Hacking who kindly volunteered to identify and comment on the human remains on site in bitter weather.

*Jeff Wallis*

## **Society Excavation at Kiln Copse, Marcham**

The Society has been excavating for the past four years at Kiln Copse, Marcham. This is the site of a brick and tile works that was in operation from at least the mid-eighteenth century until around 1855. We have been trying to locate the site of the kiln and ancillary buildings, so far without much luck, though we have found a considerable spread of brick, tile and land drain rubble. We will be continuing our excavations this year, commencing as soon as the weather improves. At the end of our excavations last year we came across what is potentially a feature and we are anxious to follow this up. In the meantime we have been sorting and quantifying something like half a ton of rubble and this will continue while we are unable to dig. This will then need to be analysed so that we can start to try and understand what has been going on. We dig on most Sunday mornings from April on, and welcome new diggers and visitors.

*John Gibbs*

## **Local History Group**

The October meeting was rather sparsely attended, no doubt because of competing events elsewhere. But the agenda proved an unexpectedly full one.

John Dunleavy described some episodes in his career as a local historian, which might perhaps have been sub-titled 'editors I have known'. It was an implicit reminder that nothing is finished until it's been published.

I spoke briefly about sixteenth-century surveying, having studied contemporary professional training manuals. These show that the reason the great land transfers after the dissolution of the monasteries had been carried through almost entirely without measurements was that the simple geometry needed by surveyors was not yet being taught.

And then John Foreman, casually admitting that he happened to have brought his memory stick with him, treated us to an unscheduled talk on his work on St Helen's Wharf and its surroundings. Some of the nineteenth-century pictures he showed were unfamiliar to most or all of us. There was much discussion and a late ending.

*Manfred Brod*

## Abingdon Buildings and People

This sub-group of the Local History Group is working with the Choose Abingdon Partnership to set up an on-line database of all available information on Abingdon buildings, the people who lived in them, and the businesses they carried on. It is intended to appeal to serious historians but also to schools, tourists, and the ordinary man in the street who just wants to know what he is looking at.

It will be a long-term project, but the site should be up and running by April this year. We have a target of at least thirty buildings to put in as initial fill.

The website will be a modern and attractive one by top designers. Look at <http://tapeinteractive.com/> for the design company, and <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/> for a historical site that our particular designer has produced.

The project promises to be exciting, and we believe it will be unique to Abingdon. If you haven't already joined, this would be a very good time to start. Please contact me on [local@aaahs.org.uk](mailto:local@aaahs.org.uk).

*Manfred Brod*

### 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 September issue is end-July 2013.

We have changed the typeface in this issue to (mostly) Times New Roman. This should improve readability, especially for longer blocks of text. I would welcome any comments.

*Manfred Brod, Newsletter Editor*



## A Lost Lane in North Abingdon

The Rev C D Cobham is probably best known in Abingdon local history circles as the editor of “A Monument of Christian Munificence”<sup>1</sup>. A paper by Cobham on “The Registers and Churchwardens Accounts of Abingdon”, published in the Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society (New Series V.2 1864-71) includes an interesting insight into burial customs in Abingdon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Cobham quotes an entry from the St Helen’s Parish Registers of 1566 detailing the burial of Lawrence Grige “*who cut his owne throat wt a porig knyf and is buried between Northcot and Abington at the towne stone.*” He continues: “the town stone exists in situ; and about 5 years since, in a nursery garden close to a lane between Northcourt and Abingdon, still called Cut-throat-lane, some human bones were found and examined by Prof Rolleston and Mr James Parker.” The initial suggestion was that the two skeletons were possibly victims of the plague but Cobham thinks it likely that this area was a burial spot for suicides and that the bones could perhaps be the remains of Lawrence Grige and of John Hyne who, in 1586, had hanged himself in ‘master fisher’s barne’. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was common practice for suicides considered to be self-murderers to be denied funeral rites or burial in the consecrated ground of the churchyard; the corpses were often buried under roads or by crossroads to be trampled on.

Documents in the Manning Archive held by the Ashmolean Museum give an approximate date for the discovery of the skeletons. They record that Professor George Rolleston paid several visits to Abingdon to examine skeletons. He is known to have visited Northcourt in about 1865 to excavate two skeletons which he considered to be victims of plague or the Civil War. At this period the small hamlet of Northcourt, a detached part of St Nicolas parish, lay well outside the 16<sup>th</sup> century borough boundary marked, according to the charter, by a “meer” stone in the vicinity of the present junction of the Oxford Road with Radley Road. Would Rolleston have been aware of an entry in the borough records in 1665 when the Chamberlain was ordered to erect houses to accommodate plague victims: “the same howses to be erected at or near the place called the royll Fort in Box Well neere the said Borough”?<sup>2</sup>

So where was Cut-throat-lane? There are no clues on the Abingdon and Northcourt enclosure maps. Nineteenth century OS maps record a stone near the junction of the Boxhill Walk footpath (now Boxhill Road) and the Oxford Road though this is more likely to be a parliamentary boundary stone. These maps also show a footpath on the line of the present Northcourt Walk continuing to the west of Joy Mount House and heading towards Northcourt Lane. Close to the



<sup>1</sup> Cobham, CD, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*, James Parker and Co., Oxford and London, 1872

<sup>2</sup> Borough Minutes Volume I, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1665. Boxwell/Boxhill. Abingdon Street Names in Gelling, M, *The Place-Names of Berkshire, Part II*, The English Place-name Society, 1974

footpath is a large plot occupied by what appear to be two glazed structures, possibly greenhouses. Could this be the nursery garden referred to by Cobham? The later OS 6" sheet, Berks X NW, shows an extensive nursery lying behind Bowyer Road on the same shaped plot in addition to the public footpath leading from Northcourt Walk towards Joy Mount House before joining the present Northcourt Lane.<sup>3,4</sup> Could part of this old footpath, which still exists with a minimal realignment as it crosses Clevelands, be Cut-throat-lane?

Jackie Smith

## Dates for Your Diary

### Christ's Hospital

An exhibition of archives, in the Hospital hall  
Saturday and Sunday 18 and 19 May, 10-4.



### Radley History Club

All meetings start at 7.30 pm in the hall at Radley Primary School, Church Road, Radley

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 11 March | Tony Hadland - 'Recusants in North Berkshire'   |
| 8 April  | Members' interests  |
| 13 May   | Michael Cornwell - 'Maiwand: The Last Stand of the 66th Berkshire Regiment in Afghanistan 1880' |
| 10 June  | Richard Dudding - 'Radley in the 17th Century: Yeomen, Gentry and Land'                         |

### Marcham Society

Meet on Tuesdays at All Saints' Church, Marcham, at 7.45 pm.

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 12 March | Richard Harrison: Wildlife of the River Ock |
| 9 April  | Bob Harris: The early life of Lord Nuffield |
| 14 May   | Martin Woodgett: The Cutty Sark             |

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<sup>3</sup> OS Provisional Edition, Revision of 1932 with 1938 Additions

<sup>4</sup> This footpath past Joy Mount House is recorded on earlier OS sheets: Berks X 2, 1:2500 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1875 and Berks X 2, 1:2500 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1912, but the nursery does not appear until the 1936 sheet at this scale.

### **Sutton Courtenay Local History Society**

Tuesday, 12 March. "The History of Didcot Power Station." Speaker from RWE npower, Village Hall 7.30 pm

Tuesday, 9 April. "Wallingford: Royal Stronghold of the Thames Valley". Judy Dewey. Village Hall 7.30 pm

Thursday, 16 May. AGM followed by talk on Wilts & Berks Canal by Chris Coyle. All Saints' Church, 7.30 pm

### **Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society**

All meetings are on Fridays at 7.45pm for 8.00pm in Wallingford Town Hall (in the Market Place).

12 April	David Radford – <i>Life, death and alchemy in medieval Oxford</i>
10 May	Martin Andrews – <i>Fox Talbot and the Oxford Connection</i>
21 June	Roland Hogg – <i>Coins of the Tudor and Stuart Periods</i>

## AAAHS OUTINGS 2013

### BOOKING FORM

Name	_____		
Address	_____ _____		
Telephone	_____	Email	_____

EVENT	Number of people	Total
<b>The Bate Collection Oxford</b> Tuesday 23 April 6.30pm  I require a lift _____ I can give a lift _____	_____ at £3 each	
<b>Guided Walk round Bampton</b> Wednesday 8 May 6.30pm  I require a lift _____ I can give a lift _____	_____ at £3 each	
<b>World War II Defences near Abingdon</b> Thursday 13 June 6.30pm  I require a lift _____ I can give a lift _____	_____ at £3 each	
<b>Archaeology at Dorchester</b> Wednesday 17 July 7.00pm  I require a lift _____ I can give a lift _____	_____ at £3 each	

<b>Total Enclosed</b>

Please make cheques made payable to A.A.A.H.S.

Please return form by 15 April. Numbers are limited on some outings.

Return forms to Elizabeth Drury  
 33 East Saint Helen Street  
 Abingdon, Oxon  
 OX14 5EE

Tel. (01235) 553636

Thank you.