



**Abingdon Area  
Archaeological and Historical Society**  
*www.AAAHS.org.uk*

**NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2004**

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**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Welcome to the Summer edition of the newsletter (OK, I know it seems about five minutes since you received the last one) and I hope you are all busy enjoying a historical/archaeological summer. I've just returned from my mother's home town near Barcelona where my archaeologist friends are busy digging the cloister of a Franciscan friary and keeping an eye open for the next Bronze Age site to be in the way of a road development scheme... but perhaps this is an article for a future newsletter!

Closer to home I should say that this is my last report as Chair of the Society. Although I haven't quite served my three years, pressure of work means that I shall have to step down after the AGM in September. I've thoroughly enjoyed my time as Chairman. It's been a great satisfaction to give something back to a Society that has given me so much pleasure since I first joined, age 15, in 1979.

As for the future – Manfred has done a fantastic job in organising a programme of lectures for 2004 – 2005 in which there really is something for everyone. Jenny has more outings in the pipeline and for those of you who are really keen don't forget that the Digging group exists for those who want to get their hands dirty and the History group to support those who want to do their own local research. Don't forget to check our website ([www.AAAHS.org.uk](http://www.AAAHS.org.uk)) for the latest details of lectures and activities.

Now for my annual nag. In addition to my leaving the committee, Roger Ainslie (Treasurer), Elizabeth Drury (Publicity) and Jill Lewis (Secretary) all have to come off as they have served three years. Please consider coming on. You need no special knowledge of archaeology or history, just a willingness to get stuck in and help to organise your society. The committee meets once a month in members' houses and once again, you don't need to feel that "I don't know anyone" as you quickly get to know people and make new friends. The amount of enjoyment you will gain from being a committee member far outweighs the small amount of extra work that any committee position involves.

Finally, I must as always thank our outgoing committee members for their hard work over the last three years, and also those in the background who keep things running so smoothly for us. Thank you again to Diana Carne for your work on the Northcourt Centre committee, to Dick Barnes for editing the newsletter (at the last minute, again...) and thank you Sally Ainslie for all those urns of tea and packets of biscuits you so expertly rustle up, perfectly timed for the end of lectures.

See you all at the AGM in September.

*Rachel Everett, Chairman.*

## TREASURER'S REPORT 2004

I hope to have full accounts available for the AGM but these are yet to be checked by other people. This is however my understanding of the past year's finances:-

**Income** This year we appear to have an excess of income over expenditure of approximately £250. This compares with approximately £540 last year.

The main sources of income were:-

- Subscription income of approximately £1020
- Book sales £600
- Christmas party £126
- Donations approx £200.

**Expenditure** The money went in the following ways:-

- Hall hire for main society £270
- Hall hire for history group £43
- Speakers fees £230
- Stationery/postage/publicity £220
- Christmas party £114
- Digging £443
- Insurance and affiliation fees £290
- Library £54

We have approximately 128 members -the figure is not that certain as some people paid twice, some joined during the year and some have paid this year for next year. The exceptional items to the accounts this year are the figures for digging where £300 was paid to an illustrator to have drawings done to enable Dr Eeles to publish his finds from the gravel pits in Sutton Courtenay and £137 was spent on digging equipment. The income was increased by a donation of £100 from George Lambrick for the Lambrick lectures last year and this year. We've also received some small donations for geophysical work carried out by members of the Society for other societies.

As we did not have an outings Secretary for much of the year no coach outings were organised and these have in the past made a loss. I consider that it is acceptable to make a loss at activities which will benefit a good number of the members. It is however always very difficult to ascertain whether there would be enough demand for a coach outing to enable it to run at anything other than a major loss.

**Air photos** I have made myself fairly unpopular with some members by opposing a proposal to spend approximately £400 of Society money on taking air photographs. I took this view as in the past flight costs have been shared by those flying. I also considered that the coverage already available at the national Monuments Record in Swindon should first be seen and advice obtained from the NMR air photographer concerning when to go and other technicalities.

**Next year** the Treasurer will need to sort out a Bank account, as the Yorkshire Bank in Abingdon has closed, which is a pity as they had accounts for Societies which also had chequebook facilities - the others are largely business accounts which charge you or passbook ones with no cheques.

Another thing to do will be to consider the funding of a reprint of Abingdon in Camera which could become necessary in 2006. Judy White's income from this has kept our balances high and subs low, as well as providing useful publicity for the Society.

*Roger Ainslie*

## DIGGING REPORT

**Thrupp** – The quarry area in Barton Lane (i.e. Thrupp) is still producing interesting archaeological features and artefacts. These include Bronze Age pits and ditches containing flint tools such as barbed-and-tanged arrowheads, scrapers, a polished axe/chisel as well as wild (wild boar, badger, roe deer, red deer and crane are confirmed) and domesticated (cattle, horse) animal bones. We have also located a spread of Post-Medieval building rubble, pottery and re-used quartzite stone hammers/rubbing stones and limestone slabs (perhaps 'mined' from another Iron Age stone-paved trackway in the vicinity) which indicate that the remains of an 18<sup>th</sup> century building is located nearby. This building may have been one of the watermills referred to in contemporary documents. We have also located a substantial piece of bog oak, (more than 2,000 years old) beneath the 'peat'. We have established to our satisfaction that the width of the quarry at Thrupp approximates the width of an ancient, now 'peat'- and alluvium-filled, river channel roughly the breadth of the existing river to the south but only half as deep. This was the "Thrupp Water" shown on the Monks' and Blacknall maps that has never been satisfactorily located before. (There has always been some doubt surrounding the reliability/precision of these 16<sup>th</sup> century maps but they are in fact surprisingly accurate). Over the course of approximately 2,500 years "Thrupp Water" seems to have slowly filled with alluvium and 'peat' until fully 'drying out' and being suitable for farming during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

It seems that the "Thrupp Water" channel plus the existing watercourse once surrounded a substantial gravel island (the field referred to on certain older maps as "The Eyet" or "Nyatt"). A series of smaller 'islands' occurred in the immediate vicinity 'bridging' the recently confirmed example with another large one to the east. The latter, dug by the society during the 1970's-80's, had rich Mesolithic to Medieval remains. The newly recognised example may also have evidence for human occupation within the same date-range. Such hypothesised, perhaps intensive, occupation would explain, in part, activities such as the construction of at least two substantial stone-paved trackways that crossed "Thrupp Water" and linked the gravel island with the northern riverbank during the early Iron Age (see previous newsletter reports). This became necessary when, as a result of increasing rainfall/run off and/or deforestation of the higher ground upstream, "Thrupp Water" became an increasingly difficult obstacle to cross. There is no evidence for significant early Iron Age occupation on the northern bank of "Thrupp Water", i.e. in the area now occupied by the science park but quarried out during the 1960's, so this may be located on the gravel island itself. A consent for gravel extraction means that this potentially archaeologically rich gravel island site is under threat.

Two small exploratory trenches dug during the winter of 2003 plus earlier excavations by the society in 1990/1 indicate that "Thrupp Water" diverted from the present river near the railway bridge, flowed north until encountering the higher gravel terrace where the old Abingdon railway line was located (and the site of the 'lost' medieval village of Thrupp) and then turned through 90° in a westerly direction before rejoining the current channel where the weirs are now situated. We can also trace old 'peat' and alluvium filled river channels to the north of Thrupp, as far as Sandford-on-Thames and south as far as Sutton Courtenay (surrounding a number of other gravel islands). All of these sites have produced evidence of human occupation in the form of pits, ditches, flints, pottery and bones dating between the Late Mesolithic period and the Iron Age. Sadly they are also the main focus for gravel extraction and many have been lost without any meaningful archaeological investigations.

The Pleistocene river channel ('Optically Stimulated Luminescence' dated to between 90-70,000 years old) lying beneath the 'peat' and gravel deposits at Thrupp is still producing the bones of bison, reindeer, wolf and bear. There is a higher than normal concentration of bones at the western extension of the quarry where four incomplete bison skulls were most recently recovered. This quarry has produced fragments of at least 30 skulls plus many hundreds of other well-preserved skeletal parts. Only three human artefacts have been found which is perhaps on the low side when compared with other quarries in the vicinity. These consist of two much older handaxes plus a struck flake found within the channel deposits. The most

recent date might just coincide with the earliest occurrence of Neanderthals along this part of the Thames Valley. Landscaping of the quarry margins by the gravel company is now taking place and by the end of the year the pit will be permanently flooded so the current season will be our last opportunity to investigate the area (post-excavation work, however, will take many more years). Final excavations are planned for the late summer/autumn in collaboration with Drs Kate Scott and Christine Buckingham, flooding and funds allowing.

**Pumney Farm** – This gravel island, a little upstream of Thrupp, and which was mostly quarried away a few years back to create a lake, is still producing many Late-Mesolithic/Early Neolithic flints including, most recently, many tens of microliths (found on the day when I remembered to take my reading glasses with me), a possible Mesolithic ‘core’ axe plus knapping debris (mostly burned) numbering in the tens of thousands. There are bones too including what I believe, because of its enormous size, is the tooth of an aurochs (the wild ancestor of domesticated cattle) – a species that became extinct in Britain during the Bronze Age.

**Beedon** – Members have been assisting the Beedon group with their excavations of some remarkable Neolithic and Bronze Age features including a substantial storage pit containing the articulated remains of many immature sheep plus some horse and/or cattle bones. The location of a polished axe ‘rough-out’ nearby might indicate the presence of a limited-intensity ‘axe factory’ at this flint-rich chalk downland site.

**Wittenham Clumps** - We have also been busy helping Oxford Archaeology with the latest phase of excavations at this site.

*Bob Eeles*

**Missing.** Does anybody know the whereabouts of the finds from Culham Hill? If so, please contact Bob Eeles.

## **LOCAL HISTORY GROUP**

The next meeting of the group will be on Tuesday 19 October at the usual place and time – 7.45 p.m., 35 Ock Street.

Dick Barnes will be presenting the true story of how Fitzharris Manor came to be demolished – a bit of modern local history in the raw. All members who are interested will be welcome.

*Manfred Brod*

## **AAAHS E-MAILING LIST.**

Keep up to date with late changes to events, news and discoveries by joining our mailing list. It's free, easy to join (and easy to leave). At present there are just one or two emails a week, dealing with topics such as a mysterious gatepost in Broad St, the origins of Wharf House, and reminders of forthcoming events.

Subscribe/join by sending a blank email to [aaahs-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:aaahs-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

Any subscribed member can send a message to the list by sending it to

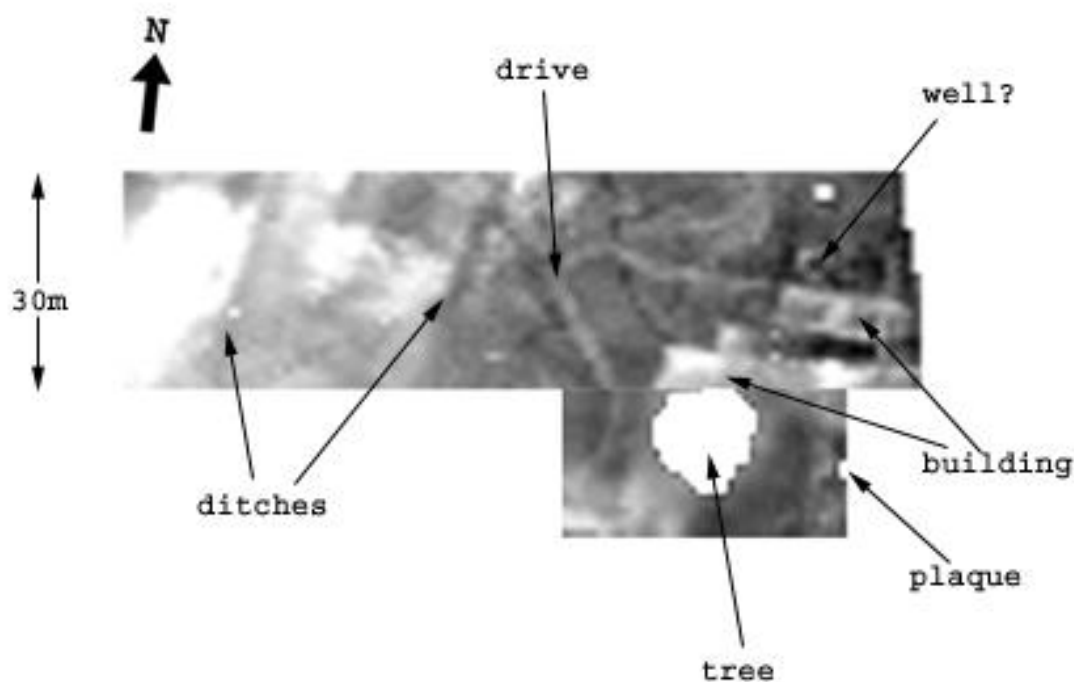
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## FITZHARRIS HOUSE, ABINGDON

I have some resistivity and magnetometry equipment which is useful for locating archaeological sites and for ascertaining exactly where to dig. Some sites give good results with magnetometry which is the quickest method, and more give good results with resistivity, which is far slower and affected by rainfall and soil water content.

Sally and I tested the equipment on Fitzharris green and had disappointing magnetometry results. The resistivity was better as shown in this picture, which will lose much of its detail in photocopying.



The main results are some previously unknown buildings to the north of the house, (which was where the tree now is), and the two NE-SW ditches on the western side of the green. Although it doesn't show here, the light high resistance patch to the west of the ditches has some small ditches on it which could be prehistoric features. The drive and paths from the buildings appear to have a right angle junction which could indicate some earlier garden or building alignment.

The area near the tree has less detail as it was surveyed later when there had been more rain and the soil had lost its ability to define buildings well.

This just goes to show that if you use the right geophysical methods at the right time you can see where to put a small trench to sort a site out; not that we have any intention of doing so here as the site is unthreatened and geophysical techniques are constantly improving. It makes one wonder whether they would have had to dig such a large excavation on the Roman temple site at Marcham/Frilford if they had carried out a resistivity survey first.

*Roger Ainslie*

**Deaths.** We are sorry to hear of the recent deaths of two past members of the Society, John Darke and Frank Harker. We send our condolences to their families.

## **CHURCHWARDEN'S ACCOUNT 1820-22 JOHN FRANCIS SPENLOVE, ABINGDON ST NICHOLAS'**

Paid Woodley for a wesel (sic) ... 2d  
How to deal with the church mice

*Until 1868 parish income was provided by church rates. Rate income was used specifically to defray parish expenses and maintain church fabric and ceremonies. The rate was based on real property, leased and freehold, and levied at a rate in the pound of the assessed rateable value. The rateable value was normally based on the size of landholding that a particular parishioner held.*

The account, drawn up by John Francis Spenlove, churchwarden, for St Nicolas' parish, provides fascinating reading and offers insights into affairs of church and town and Abingdon residents of the period. The parish rateable value was £866 10s (1820-22) and a rate levied at 1s in the pound, which raised £43 6s 5d. Clearly collection was complete and John Spenlove's accounts balance precisely. Spenlove, the brewer, operated Abbey Brewery in the Vineyard, that was in due course taken over by Edward Morland (1866) and together with Eagle Brewery, purchased 1861, came to form part of Morland's United Breweries, Abingdon.

### **Income**

Major ratepayers. William Bowles, for his house (Fitzharris manor), pleasure ground and orchard (£1 17s), together with another five shillings for Hill Piece, a field measuring in extent two acres two rods and two poles. Mrs Frances Sellwood at Abbey House paid £2 14d.

Avery Tyrrell, for part of Fitzharris, namely Pound Close and Chestnut Tree Close or Long Piece, also for Homestall Close and a garden that formed part of Lacy's Court on the opposite side of Boar (Bath) Street, together with a malthouse at Lacy's Court (£2 7s 5d).

Abingdon attorney, Benjamin Morland, paid for a garden, laundry and stable (9s 6d) and the Revd Edward Nicholson, headmaster at Roysse's School, for the school premises (12s).

Parish innkeepers. Payments were made by Henry Harden (5s) for The Jolly Waterman in Bridge Street. In Stert Street William Withers (15s) for the George, who was also licensed to let flys and gigs from the premises; Martha Kimber (12s 9d) for the Bear; William Mart [or Mant] (6s 5d) for the White Lion and Thomas Copus (6s) for the Plough. Copus also had business as nursery and seedsman.

Other nursery and seedsmen: John Summersby (2s) in Stert Street and James Huggins, who operated business with George Huggins, in the Vineyard (£1 17s 7d). Also in the Vineyard was Joseph Ivey (senior) in business as corn dealer: Joseph Ivey, for the Parsonage (7s 6d).

Other parish traders. John Lawrance at the Market Place (2s), saddler and harness maker; Thomas Baker of Stert Street for the so called Brush Shop and various other properties (£1 16s 9d). He was a grocer, tea dealer, tallow chandler and spirits merchant. Joseph Rogers, agent for the Norwich Union (6s), and Edward Cowcher, surgeon (3s 2d). Richard Bradfield paid the highest rate (£7 12s) for Abbey locks, Abbey mill, stream and eyott. John Francis Spenlove, for his house, brewhouse and Brewing Hayes (£4). William Wright for a house, mill, garden and Meadow Ground (£3).

### **Expenditure.**

Payments were made to the Revd Dr Pearson, vicar of St Helen's (£1 15s). The Revd Dr Hugh Nicholas Pearson was vicar only from May 1822 to early 1823, when he became Dean of Salisbury. The Revd William Smith, Tesdale Usher at Roysse's School (1793-1845), one year's payment as Reader at St Nicholas (£3). It interesting that Smith was paid annually, for saying twice daily prayers, less than a third of the rate of the organist. John Brooker, one year's salary for playing the Organ (£10).

James Fisher for the (bell) ringers, one year's allowance (17s 6d) together with paid to him one year's allowance for the sexton (£1 10s) and one year's allowance as Clerk, due at the bishop or archdeacon's visitation (£2). Ann Fisher, presumably James' wife, for making a new surplice (6s 6d). John Harding, apparitor at the bishop's visitation (£3 13s 11d) and the ringers at the bishop's visitation (15s). To keep the church comfortable and running, payments were made to Richard Bradfield for coals (£1 15s), Lawrence for weeding (6d), James Fisher for cleaning stoves and lighting fires (£1). And lastly, but by no means least, paid for the Churchwardens' Dinner (£1 1s).

In many ways the most intriguing entry is: "paid Woodley for a Wesel 2d". Might it be fair to assume that the church had an infestation of mice and rats? If so, what could a weasel manage to do that a church cat could not?

*Nigel Hammond*

## **W E A CLASSES IN ABINGDON 2004 – 2005**

The new programme of Adult Education Courses for Oxfordshire has been announced. A selection from those courses which start in the Autumn term is given below. For further details see the WEA booklet, or contact Chris Minay Tel 0845 4584072. For enrolments contact John Williams, Tel 0845 520608.

Classical to Neo-Classical Architecture, Design & Furniture. Andy Gunn. Thursday mornings, 10 weeks from 23 September, St Helen's Church Hall.

The Abingdon Waterturnpike Murder – 18<sup>th</sup> Century Justice Examined through a Factual Murder. Mark Davies. Day School (Walk) on Saturday 9 October. 35 Ock Street.

Make a Start in Discovering your Family History. Philip Morris. Tuesday mornings, 7 weeks from 2 November. 35 Ock Street

## **OUTINGS**

Unfortunately, due to bad weather we had to postpone the outing to Steventon from 23<sup>rd</sup> June, to 26<sup>th</sup> August.

The outing to the Frilford/Marcham excavation on 28<sup>th</sup> July was a success, there being about thirty people - a lot more than expected. The evening was warm and sunny and we all enjoyed it. Our guide, Gilbert, gave us a very interesting and knowledgeable talk about the site and what was happening there.

At the moment there are only eleven people who want to go to Bletchley Park on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September. If anybody else is interested, please let me know as soon as possible.

**If anybody has any ideas for outings in 2004/5 please let me know.**

*Jenny Devanney, 77 Sherwood Avenue. 01235 203212*

**Sound Reinforcement.** We are looking at ways of improving the sound system, which helps those with impaired hearing but is unpopular with speakers as the microphone has trailing wires. A radio microphone system is being considered, but this would probably take longer to set up before meetings and might necessitate starting meetings at 7.45. Members will be asked for their views at the AGM.

## NEW EDITION OF THE DNB

Members involved in local history – and others – will be interested to know that the new edition of the Dictionary of National Biography will be out in late September. The last edition was a century ago, and some of the articles about Abingdon and North Berks people were – frankly – a bit amateurish. This should now have been put right. I can personally vouch for the 0.01% of the articles that I wrote myself.

I don't imagine that many libraries will have shelf space for sixty large volumes, but the main edition will be on CDR so it should be easily accessible. Should be a good browse, and an even better reference book.

*Manfred Brod*

### AAAHS Provisional Speaker Programme 2004/2005

For information on any changes to this programme please see the web-site

16th Sept 2004	<b>Steve Kershaw</b>	The Ancient Olympic Games
21st Oct 2004	<b>Brian Stovold</b>	The Wilts & Berks Canal
18th Nov 2004	<b>John Steane</b>	Abingdon: The Built Environment, 1300-1540 <b>Lambrick Lecture</b>
09th Dec 2004	<b>The Vale Islanders (Xmas meeting)</b>	Seventeenth Century Dancers
20th Jan 2005	<b>Dr Caroline Cannon-Brookes</b>	Prague: City of Art
17th Feb 2005	<b>Professor Donald Matthew</b>	The War in the Thames Valley, 1135-1154
17th Mar 2005	<b>Judy Dewey</b>	Wallingford
21st Apr 2005	<b>Dr Helena Hamerow</b>	The Anglo-Saxon Settlement Complex at Sutton Courtenay/Drayton
19th May 2005	<b>Dan Poore</b>	The Archaeology of the Oxford Castle Heritage Project
16th Jun 2005	<b>Members Evening</b>	Various Members' Projects

*Assembled by Dick Barnes for Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.  
With thanks to all the contributors, but particularly to Roger Ainslie, Bob Eeles and Nigel Hammond for providing Archaeology and History to counterbalance the administrative details  
The next newsletter should appear in March – all contributions welcome, don't wait to be asked.*