

David Rayner



Abingdon Area  
Archaeological and Historical Society  
NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2002

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**LECTURE PROGRAMME 2002-2003**

**2002**

- 19 Sept AGM: Landscapes and placenames in and around the Chilterns. *Ann Cole*  
17 Oct How Oxford got its railway. *Robert Sephton*  
21 Nov Lambrick Memorial Lecture: The parsonage in the local community. *Kate Tiller*  
12 Dec Megalithic temples of Malta: Christmas social. *Jenny de Bono*

**2003**

- 16 Jan Kelmscott. *Simon Townley*  
20 Feb 100 years of change at UKAEA Harwell. *Nick Hance*  
20 March Alcester. *Eberhard Sauer*  
17 April The life and times of Sennacherib. *Stephanie Dalley*  
15 May The Archaeology of the Channel Tunnel. *Stuart Fordham*  
19 June Members' Evening: Presentations and displays of members' work  
18 Sept AGM

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**The National Monuments Record Centre** at Swindon are having a Research Day for Local History on 18 September. This consists of a tour of the search rooms, case studies and a practical session. It lasts all day and costs £20 without lunch and £24 with. Their telephone number is 01793 414735. The Centre has excellent coverage of Abingdon, e.g. several box-files of photographs of churches, streets, the Abbey, Christ's Hospital, archaeology, Fitzharris Manor (some 50 photos!).

**The Society's web site** is at [www.aaahs.org.uk](http://www.aaahs.org.uk) Whilst this is currently just about adequate it is not very up-to-date, and could do with some improvement. We should be grateful if there is anyone who could volunteer to take charge of it

**Northcourt Centre Bazaar.** There will be the annual fund raising event at Northcourt Centre on Saturday October 19th. We have not yet decided whether the Society will have its own stall there but even if we don't we should be grateful if members could support this event by gifts and purchases as we need to do our bit to ensure the financial stability of the centre.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It has been a very mixed year. The death of John Carter had an effect on us all and we wanted to find some way of remembering his contribution to both the digging and historical work of the Society. There are various proposals being considered, but nothing definite has yet been decided. Some of these - for example, seeing whether we can have an Abingdon based edition of Oxoniensia - are not within our control.

The talks continue to be well attended and we all have our favourites. I particularly liked the talk on Droving by Nigel Hammond. The historians have now got together with the diggers and are carrying out a research project on Thrupp. The task here will be finding a way of bringing the work to a publication standard; and we also need to develop expertise in identifying medieval pottery. The Members' Evening showed the type of work being undertaken and I would be the first to admit that I should have been more robust in limiting the length of some of the talks. The problem was that the level of enthusiasm was such that it would have been a bit mean to have done so.

The outings appear to be well supported for the shorter evening ones but less well for the longer day trips. This is difficult to judge, as we should be enabling people to see places of interest but at the same time it would be silly if we went to places that people were so uninterested in that they did not join us. I suspect that we will need to have just one whole-day outing per year and to recognise that this may make a loss. It is however up to the membership and the committee to decide what they want. We are looking for people to join the Committee. Please phone me on Ab 529720 if you wish to know more - no-one can be on for more than 3 years without a break so it is not a lifelong commitment.

Whilst I am the person who stands up and introduces the speakers, this is only a very small part of the work which is carried out. Not only do we have the committee which organises the speakers, outings, digging and the Society generally, but we also have other people who help, such as Diana Carne who attends the Northcourt Centre Committee, enabling us to use the premises at a reduced rate. This Newsletter was produced by Dick Barnes, again, someone who is not on the committee but without whom we would all have to do a lot more running around. The best example I can give of the assistance given by members generally was the speed with which over 100 cups of tea were produced for the 'Oxfordshire Past' conference. Society members who were around stepped in and helped, and this enabled the queue to be got through in 10 minutes. So I would like end by thanking everyone who has helped with the Society this year.

*Roger Ainslie*

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The Local History Group now has about twenty members. The meeting in May featured, exceptionally, an outside speaker: Grant Audley-Miller, who leads the Oxfordshire Building Record project on the old police station on Bridge Street. He described the 19<sup>th</sup> century building and the way it functioned: the business section and the cells on the ground floor, with the policemen and their families living 'above the shop'; the policemen scattering each day to their beats in the Vale villages and checked on by the inspector making the rounds on his horse. A Victorian policeman might keep the same beat throughout his career and would develop an intimate knowledge of his area and its inhabitants.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, 22 October, when Margaret Gosling will present her work on the Hyde family of Northcourt and its branches. Meetings after that will be on the first Tuesdays in February and May 2003.

*Manfred Brod*

## **JOHN CARTER (1931-2001)**

### **An Appreciation**

To more recent members of this Society John Carter is probably best remembered for his close questioning of reports at the Annual General Meeting, when the majority of those present would undoubtedly have preferred to move swiftly on to the evening's speaker. Many will be unaware of his major contribution to the development of the Society. John was a founder member, one of an elite but rapidly dwindling band of people who responded to Lucy Hale's advertisement in the North Berks Herald suggesting the formation of an archaeological Society in Abingdon. He attended the inaugural meeting in May 1968 and at the first Annual General Meeting in the following September he was elected on to the committee of the Abingdon and District Archaeological Society as it was then known.

In the first ten years of the Society's history John occupied most of the major offices on the committee: Chairman, Secretary, and Digging Secretary. It was during this period that his influence was probably at its height. He was committed to bringing the Society's activities to the attention of the general public and used his great skills of organisation and persuasion to mount exhibitions in shop windows, at school fetes and excavations, and in the Abbey buildings. In 1974 he co-ordinated the first major open day at an excavation in Abingdon on the Ashville Trading Estate when over 3,000 people visited the displays of the Iron Age site presented in the Society's small caravan. A second one-day exhibition, "A day of archaeology at Abingdon Abbey" followed in 1975. Background planning and preparation often took place in his office while John pursued his day-to-day life as a shopkeeper. Indeed in the early days it could be said that John's toyshop in Stert Street was the informal headquarters of the Society.

It was, however, the week long Silver Jubilee Exhibition in 1977, which demonstrated fully his vision of the twin disciplines of history and archaeology and his skill as a director and co-ordinator. Seventy feet of displays, involving thirty screens and ten cases, had to be thought out, labels created and typed, photographs mounted, and records kept of artefacts borrowed from other museums and private individuals.

There were lectures in the afternoon, music and plays in the evening and guided tours of the town. The event was a major tour de force resulting in increased membership and the financial stability to venture into the publication of "Abingdon in Camera".

Although he had scaled down his involvement in the Society's management, John continued to be a committed member of the digging team but drew the line at potwashing! He had been an enthusiastic advocate of changing the name of the Society and now devoted more time to historical research, publishing jointly two books and a research paper in addition to writing articles for the Market Place magazine and sketches for the town's Millennium Drama. He was a member of the team researching the Society's Millennium Time Line and supported the establishment of the local history group within the Society. After retirement he was appointed Honorary Archivist to Christ's Hospital where he used his newly-acquired computer skills to transfer their card index system to disk.

John set and demanded high standards from all those who worked with him. His main concern was to promote the archaeology and history of Abingdon. His achievements speak for themselves.

## OUTING TO SEE THE COPY OF THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

At Reading Museum, April 28th 2002

If you haven't seen the copy of the Bayeux Tapestry in Reading Museum you must! Twelve of us met there on Sunday afternoon April 28th to see it, with our own speaker (a young archaeologist appropriately named Delphi) and were amazed at how the thirty-five members of the Leek Embroidery Society back in 1885-6 were able to reproduce such a large piece of work in so short a time and to do it as such a faithful copy of the original, housed in Bayeux.

The Embroidery Society's leader, Elizabeth Wardle, had seen the original tapestry and decided it would be a wonderful project to copy it. Photographs of it from the South Kensington Museum (now the V & A) were traced and transferred onto linen, and the workers started, taking great care over every possible detail, even having the woollen yarns specially dyed to match the original colours.

Briefly, the story depicted on both "tapestries" (they are really embroideries) starts with King Edward the Confessor (who had no children of his own) sending Harold Godwin to France to tell William of Normandy that he can have the throne of England when Edward dies. When he does die Harold takes the crown, prompting William to invade England in order to take that which was promised to him, and we all know how he succeeded and that Harold died in the battle!

The story is enhanced all along by lots of detail which tells us about everyday life in 1066. For instance, we don't just see Harold stepping into a boat to cross the channel; we see him in conference with Edward, getting his instructions, then setting out on horseback, being led down the road by his hounds and carrying a falcon. He then decides, as it's a long journey, that he should pop into Bosham Church to pray before having a last meal on land, and then wading stockingless out to the boat already being pulled out by the tide.

Similarly we are given a lot of details about how William set out to conquer England. It took a while to build enough boats, so we see all the trees being cut down for timber, then carpenters and workmen building the boats. They are launched and then stocked with weapons, armour, food and wine, and finally set sail across the Channel; we can see not only men on board but they have brought their horses as well.

All this makes the Bayeux Tapestry and its copy a very human document, not just of wars and battles but how human beings lived and worked, the way they dressed and ate and much else. The copy in Reading Museum is displayed beautifully, well lit and in its own airy gallery; and if you missed the AAHS visit I can recommend that you pay a visit to the museum to see it.

*Suzette Woodhead*

*Enjoy a free guided tour of the famous full-size replica of the Bayeux Tapestry every Saturday, 2.30 - 3.00 p.m - no need to book Open for self-guided visits at other times.*

*And now you can enjoy this excellent display of the Tapestry online at [www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk](http://www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk).*

*Also, there is a fascinating book in the Society's library which, for example, looks at the back of the original tapestry to reveal evidence of design changes.*