



**Abingdon Area
Archaeological and Historical
Society**

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - AUTUMN 2015

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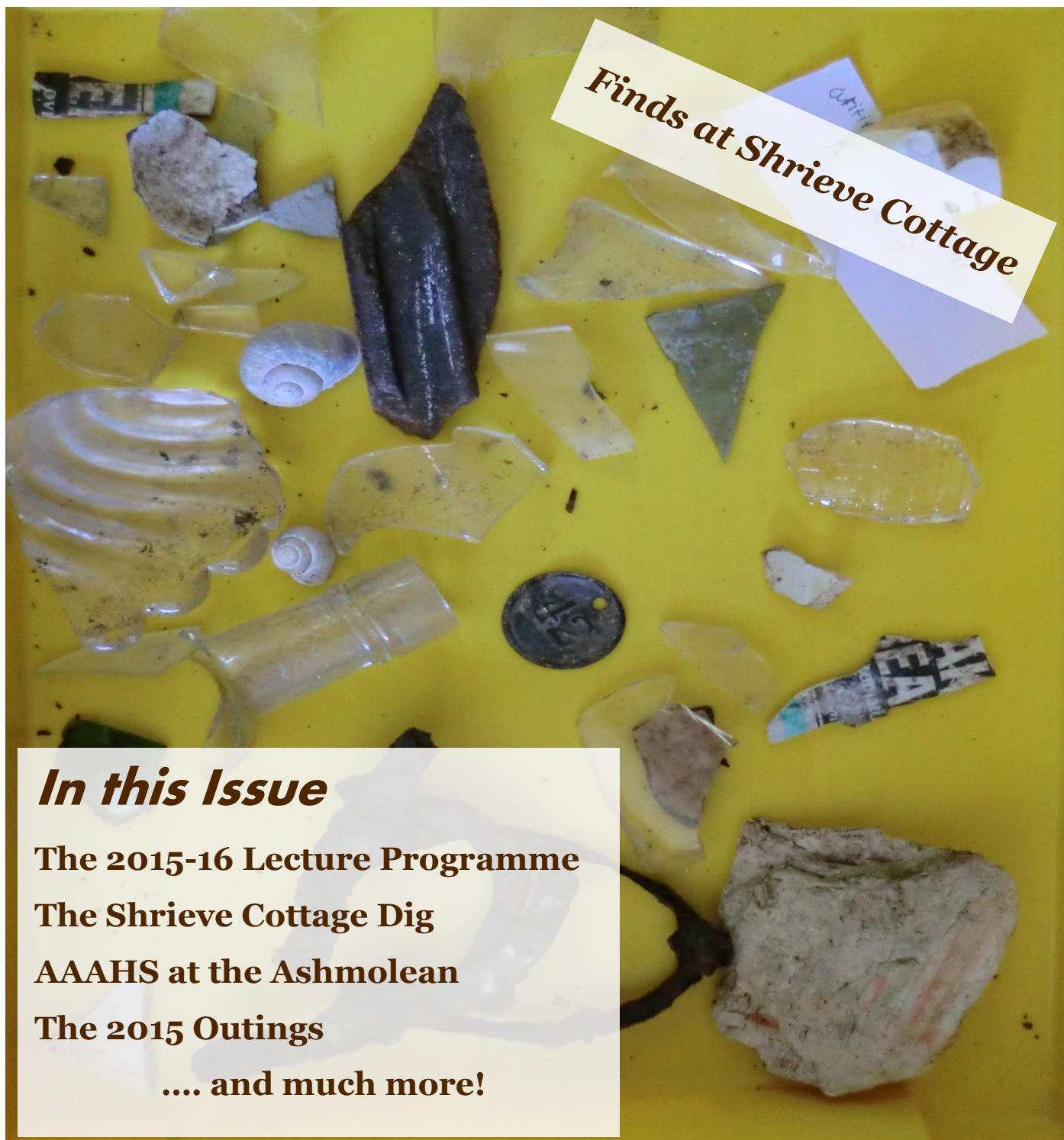
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Lecture Programme 2015-6

- 17 Sept: AGM . Lecture TBA.
- 15 Oct: Dr. Hubert Zawadzki, 'Polish Resettlement Camps in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds, 1947-69'.
- 19 Nov: Dr. Sally Crawford and Dr. Katharina Ulmschneider, 'The Story of the Camel'.
- 17 Dec: Christmas Social: Kevin Varty, 'What did amuse Victoria?'
- 21 Jan: Graham Carter, 'The Life of Alfred Williams, 1877-1930'.
- 18 Feb: Peter Halman, 'The Thames from Oxford to Windsor. Shaping history through the centuries'.
- 17 Mar: Dr Zena Kamash, 'Excavations at the Municipal Cemetery, Spring Road, Abingdon'.
- 21 Apr: Joan Dils: The Lambrick Lecture. 'Reflections on aspects of Abingdon society c.1550-c 1700'.
- 19 May: Richard Dudding, 'Radley Church and the Civil War'.
- 16 June: Members' Evening.

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Report from the Chair



Abingdon's history has been on public view over recent months, in three ways particularly, which I'll mention in turn. On Saturday 18 July this Society organized a six-hour symposium at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford entitled 'A Monument Celebration: Ab-

ingdon and its Prehistoric Earthworks'. The brainchild of our digger-in-chief, Jeff Wallis, and organized by himself and by our events secretary, John Foreman, the occasion proved a huge success. Well over a hundred people attended at various times during the day. They enjoyed lectures on important archaeological sites in and around the town: the Drayton cursus to the south, the causewayed enclosure and Barrow Hills to the north-east.

It was especially appealing that the principal speakers, Gill Hey, George Lambrick, Frances Healy, and Alistair Barclay, all had a long personal association with the excavations they described, and members of the AAAHS had also been involved; so the proceedings constituted a kind of history of our own digging past. Extraordinarily enough, the enclosure, just off the Radley Road, seems to have been occupied for less time in the 36th century BC than it took to unearth it in the 20th century AD. So rich was the menu that when our last lecturer – due to talk about excavations on the Spring Road Cemetery site – failed to show up, it seemed almost providential, since we had more opportunity to discuss the lessons of the day.

Dilettantes like me must have been amazed to learn how much archaeologists know about the what? and where? but how little about the why? That's true of the whole of history of course; but at least there are more clues once written records become available. One intriguing theory has been prompted by the discovery of pits in the area of the Drayton earthworks which were evidently made by trees being upturned rather than chopped down. Had early man acquired a handy technique for removing roots as well as trunks? Or could this have been caused by natural storms? Might such awe-inspiring weather events even have generated the very cult that the cursus was constructed to serve? A weird notion perhaps, but only the other week scientists reported that British tornadoes are most likely to occur in the middle Thames valley (cf. [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/16/scientists-find-uk-tornadoes-are-most-likely-to-occur-west--london)

[jun/16/scientists-find-uk-tornadoes-are-most-likely-to-occur-west--london](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/16/scientists-find-uk-tornadoes-are-most-likely-to-occur-west--london)).

It seems unclear how far all of this contributes to Abingdon's claim to be the oldest town in England. That has to do with continuity of settlement, and probably will never yield a clear-cut case. But increasingly Abingdon can compete for the town with the best online municipal history project. Recently the Buildings and People team have qualified for their own celebration by completing a hundred entries on the council website. As many of you will be aware, <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/partners/history> is already a wonderful resource, alluringly presented and illustrated. It embraces over forty buildings, from the remains of the abbey and ancient houses along central streets and squares, through churches and taverns, to the blowing apparatus for St Helen's organ and the demolished Regal cinema. Half a dozen significant locations within the town are included, along with a similar number of remarkable 'feature articles', which give extended coverage to such matters as urban boundaries and Abingdon during the Civil War.

Almost fifty persons and families also feature on the website, from St Aethelwold and Archbishop Aelfric, through medieval craftsmen, Tudor and Stuart burghers, and Georgian aristocrats, to prominent shopkeepers, brewers, or sportspeople of modern times. One of the more recent subjects, Arthur Edwin Preston, has lately also gained a rarer accolade: an Oxfordshire Blue Plaque. This was proposed some years ago by several local councillors (to their great credit); but it hung fire because of difficulties in securing permission to mount a plaque on the house where Preston lived during the first half of his life, 13 High Street, and the practical problems associated with such an old structure. Eventually a reconsideration took place, and it was decided to honour him on his own long-time family home, Whitefield in Park Crescent. The location is doubly appropriate, since the house faces onto Albert park, which Preston did so much to maintain and beautify, and now belongs to Abingdon School, where he both studied and subsequently served for decades as a governor. At a ceremony on 12 June Jackie Smith, honorary archivist both to the town and to this Society, compendiously laid out Preston's merits (her text can be found at http://www.oxfordshireblueplaques.org.uk/plaques/preston_speech.pdf).



Arthur Preston (1852-1942) was the founder of a notably successful accountancy firm (still in business today as Wenn Townsend), who played a major role in Abingdon's administration and politics and became devoted to the history and antiquities of the town. He presided over the restoration of many of its old buildings, often at his own expense. He avidly collected source materials, and published extensively on aspects of local history, particularly the churches of St Helen and St Nicolas, and

the Christ's Hospital charity, of which he was Master. Thus Preston anticipated much of what AAAHS would come to stand for – except the archaeology, with which I began (and with which our Society began in 1968), since that has only come to light, ironically, once newer techniques, especially aerial photography, could be deployed.

Bob Evans

Treasurer's Report

Principal Income/ Expenditure Analysis as of 26/07/14	2014/15 ytd (£)
Income recurrent	1799
Subs	847
Visitors	478
Tea / coffee	17
Income from book sales	48
Bank interest	24
Expenditure recurrent	2425
Insurance cover	496
Hire of halls	390
Speakers	300
Admin	106
Admin (printing)	291

The single greatest one off expense this year was the repair to the portacabin roof at £1360. This does however have a 10 year guarantee. The second largest non-recurring expense was the £500 for the new website set up.

The three largest single ongoing expenditures this year have been the insurance at £496, digging expenses at £438, of which £68 was for a radio carbon dating for the Daisy Bank excavation, and the hire of the Northcourt Hall at £310. These were closely followed by the speakers at £300 and printing costs at £291 which is largely the newsletter. For this reason the Committee would request all members to take an electronic copy of the newsletters only in future.

Total expenditure has been £4285.

Income from subs is down on last year by around £200 to £850. Donations and Visitors has netted £478 (with an amazing £102.2 for the May Lambrick lecture), and only £48 from all book sales. We did make a small profit on the Mienieke Cox book sales (Celebrating Abingdon) i.e. £10. Total income to date is £1799 so we have an operating loss of around £626 and an overall loss of £2486.

The number of visitors to the talks has averaged out at 9.5 visitors per meeting, thoroughly skewed by the 34 visitors for the Lambrick Lecture.

A full set of audited accounts will be available at the September AGM.

Andrew Steele
Treasurer



2015-16 Lecture Programme and Speakers

17 September. AGM. Lecture TBA.

15 October

'Polish Resettlement Camps in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds, 1947-69'. Presented by Dr. Hubert Zawadzki



The Second World War and its immediate aftermath brought thousands of Polish servicemen and civilians to Britain. Of the sixty-three known Polish resettlement camps across Britain in 1947-69 eight were situated in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. The talk will explain why such camps were established and will set their story in the wider context of international politics. Born in Scotland of Polish parents who came to Britain with the Polish Armed Forces during the war, Hubert Zawadzki lived in various Polish resettlement camps in Britain until the age of eleven, the last one near Moreton-in-Marsh. His talk, illustrated with many photographs, will give an insight into what life was like in the camps.

Dr. Hubert Zawadzki read Modern History at Keble College, Oxford, before obtaining a doctorate at Wolfson College, Oxford where he was also subsequently a Junior Research Fellow. He taught history at Abingdon School for thirty years while continuing with his academic interests in Poland and Eastern Europe. He is the author of *A Man of Honour: Adam Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland, 1795-1831* (Oxford, 1993), and co-author (with Jerzy Lukowski) of *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge, 1st edn. 2001; 2nd edn. 2006). He is currently preparing his mother's memoirs for publication.

19 November

'The Story of the Camel'. Presented by Dr. Sally Crawford and Dr. Katharina Ulmschneider.

Dr Sally Crawford is Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Archaeology, Oxford and Dr Katharina Ulmschneider is Senior Research Fellow, Worcester College, Oxford. They will speak about a large Tang camel currently in the Ashmolean, with a particularly interesting twentieth century history.

17 December

What did amuse Victoria? Presented by Kevin Varty.



"Pictures in the Parlour", an evening of Victorian enlightenment, education and entertainment using the amazing and occasionally dangerous Magic Lantern. The facts are amazing, the images stunning and the jokes truly awful - but they did make the Victorians laugh - so come, join in and enjoy a unique show. "Pictures in the Parlour" is a show using only original Victorian equipment and glass slides. No computers are used in the presentation.

Kevin Varty was born in Derby, went to school in Ashby de la Zouch, to college in Loughborough and ending up working in the Motor Industry in Yorkshire. He now



enjoys early retirement and lives in Milton Keynes with Amanda and dog Daks. His hobbies now include presenting Magic Lantern shows, giving talks about the Victorian way of death and researching the Great War.

21 January.

The Life of Alfred Williams, 1877-1930. Presented by Graham Carter.

Graham Carter presents an illustrated talk about the remarkable life of Swindon writer Alfred Williams (1877-1930). Known nationally as 'The Hammerman Poet', Williams published six books of poetry and a series of books of prose about the Upper Thames and the Vale of White Horse - mostly while working full-time as a steamhammer operator in Swindon's Great Western Railway Works. This year (2015) sees the centenary of the publishing of his book, *Life in a Railway Factory*, a rare account of industrial and social conditions in the early part of the 20th century. Williams is also nationally revered as a collector of folk song lyrics, and served his country in India during the First World War. Self-educated and self-made, his is an inspiring tale of what one man can achieve against the odds.

Graham Carter is freelance journalist and editor, based in Swindon. He is a founder and editor of Swindon Heritage, a quality quarterly magazine about the town's rich and proud history, and has written a weekly column for the Swindon Advertiser for the last 11 years. He is also a co-founder of the Alfred Williams Heritage Society, dedicated to the memory of Swindon's remarkable 'Hammerman Poet'. Graham is currently co-organising a week of events in Swindon to mark the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, including a spectacular flypast by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight on Battle of Britain Day.

18 February

'The Thames from Oxford to Windsor. Shaping history through the centuries.' Presented by Peter Halman.



The talk will focus on six principal aspects of the river's influence on historical events and especially on the lives of the local population. Since the earliest of times, the Thames has provided an effective political and social boundary and has determined the siting of settlements which grew into today's towns and villages. A wide range of employment opportunities developed and the river was an important source of food during medieval times. Until the coming of the railway, the Thames was a main high-way for goods, people and ideas. Today, the river is a highly valued social and environmental resource and continues to influence the lives of those who live along its banks.

Peter has lived in the Thames Valley for many years and is actively engaged in local history and heritage matters in his home village of Wargrave. His interest in the river arose from research for his dissertation at Reading on the importance of water transport in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He is involved in editing and publishing of books relating to Wargrave's history.

17 March

'Excavations at the Municipal Cemetery, Spring Road, Abingdon'. Presented by Zena Kamash.

Details to follow.

**21 April****The Lambrick Lecture. 'Reflections on aspects of Abingdon society c 1550-c 1700.' Presented by Joan Dils**

‘Abingdon, like some other Berkshire towns, experienced social change and economic challenges in the years following the granting of a borough charter. I hope to explore some of these developments including changing ways of earning a living, business and neighbourly relations and family and domestic life, enlivened by few tales which would not be out of place in a modern tabloid newspaper.’

Joan Dils is an Honorary Research Fellow in History at the University of Reading where she was for a time a part-time lecturer in the former School of Continuing Education. For many years she has taught local history in Berkshire and South Oxfordshire for the continuing education departments of Reading and Oxford and for the WEA. A number of her courses were workshop classes which resulted in a number of booklets and journal articles. She has published in *The Local Historian* and *Oxoniensia*, edited the first edition of *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire* (1998) and co-edited an enlarged second edition with Margaret Yates in 2012. Her edition of *Reading St Laurence Churchwardens' Accounts 1498-1570* was published by the Berkshire Record Society as vols.19 and 20 in 2013. Her *History of Reading* is to be published soon. She is currently a Vice-President of the Berkshire Local History Association and President of the History of Reading Society

19 May**Radley Church and the Civil War, presented by Richard Dudding**

The Church of St James the Great, Radley lacks a north aisle and transept. Local legend is that they were destroyed by Parliamentary troops in the English Civil War and that Royalist soldiers killed in the skirmish were buried in the churchyard. This legend has developed traction and is supported by authorities such as The Victoria County History and the latest edition of Pevsner. But can any evidence be found to substantiate this account? Richard Dudding's talk takes a rigorous look at the structure of the surviving building, archaeology in the churchyard and documentary accounts. A rethink may well be required.

Richard Dudding studied history at Jesus College Cambridge, and has recently returned to the subject after a career in central and local government. In 2014 he published 'Early Modern Radley, People, Land and Buildings 1547-1768', and currently is researching for a Radley History Club book about Radley Church due to be published in Autumn 2016.

16 June Members evening**There are no meetings in July and August. The 2016-17 season begins with the AGM on 15 September 2016.****Please note especially ...**

... the AGM on 17 September. Please consider standing for the Committee — there is work to be done, but it is (mostly) fun. Prior nominations to any member of the committee, or get yourself nominated at the meeting itself.

Our Symposium: 'A Monument Celebration: Abingdon and its Prehistoric Earthworks'.



Wikimedia Commons

This year, the society made a splendid contribution to the annual national Festival of Archaeology (11-26 July 2015) by organising a one-day symposium entitled 'A Monument Celebration: Abingdon and its Prehistoric Earthworks'. The event was held in the Ashmolean Museum's subterranean Headley Lecture Theatre. The fact that so many people choose to be there when the weather was so warm and sunny outside shows how much interest there is in the topic. The day focussed on the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments of Abingdon.

The lecturers were all leading prehistorians, and already well-known to many society members. Dr Gill Hey (Chief Executive of Oxford Archaeology) introduced the day, and drew attention to the wide range of prehistoric monuments at Abingdon. George Lambrick (an Honorary Vice-President of the Society) reviewed the work on the Drayton Neolithic cursus, where the AAAHS did some important work in the early 1980s. George had some interesting observations on possible alignments between different monuments in the area. Dr Frances Healey (National Museum of Wales) talked about recent work on dating the Abingdon Neolithic causewayed camp on Radley Road. This work has used new radiocarbon dates and advanced statistical techniques (Bayesian statistics – based on the work of an 18th century clergyman who took a methodical approach to his gambling!). The new work showed that the camp was built in around 3600 BC, and only remained in use for between 50 and 150 years. Dr Alistair Barclay (Wessex Archaeology) looked back at the excavations at the Barrow Hills prehistoric site. He described the site's long and complex history, and pointed out that there is ample scope for further analysis. The chronology is weak, and needs more work; isotope analysis could be used to determine

how many of the people buried were incomers; and more could be learned from further study of the rich body of artefacts found there. The final programmed speaker (Dr Zena Kamash, Royal Holloway College) had been due to talk about the Spring Road Cemetery excavations, but was unable to attend. (She will be speaking to the Society during the coming year). Instead, the previous speakers formed a panel, taking questions from the audience and debating the answers. Finally, I filled the remaining minutes with a whirlwind account of the later Bronze Age and Iron Age archaeology of Abingdon, including our 'oppidum', to complete the story up to the Roman conquest of Britain and the 'end of prehistory'.

The day also had a 'hands on' element. At lunchtime, prehistoric material from Abingdon and some other local sites was brought out of the Ashmolean stores and laid out for people to examine at close quarters. Alison Roberts and other staff from the museum were on hand to talk about the material and to answer questions. This opportunity to engage so closely with such fine material was very much appreciated (and great thanks are due to the museum staff who gave up their Saturday for this).

The day was a great success, and warm congratulations are due to Jeff Wallis, whose brainchild it was. The professional speakers were very complimentary about the society's contribution to local prehistory over the decades. Everyone present was impressed by just how rich the prehistoric archaeology of Abingdon, and how well-served it has been by archaeological research over the years. Long may this continue!

Roger Thomas



Digging

Shrieve Cottages Update, August 2015

In the last *Newsletter* I announced that we were about to begin excavating the ruins of a pair of old cottages on the edge of Sunningwell village. Since then we have had half-a-dozen digging sessions and made some real progress. Above all, it's been fun: we are a rough and ready team of school staff, governors, and supporters, with help from several members of the AAAHS, above all Roger Thomas as our chief professional adviser, and some visiting experts (see below). There's no hurry – this isn't rescue archaeology – and no external taskmaster; so we can make our discoveries at leisure.

And exciting discoveries there have been already. We started by clearing the surrounds of the site, to establish an exact footprint for the building. That quickly yielded a fine section of access path, sturdily but attractively constructed, and a cobbled area at the back, along with other evidence of the line of external walls. Inside the task proved harder, even though the surviving base of one of the chimneys has been a conspicuous feature from the start. It soon became evident that much of the fabric had been simply collapsed inwards when the place was demolished circa 1940, so we've found



Drone's eye view of the site

mounds of stone, mainly undressed, and bricks and tiles, of various shapes and sizes, most of it presumably from local quarries on Boars Hill and some no doubt roughly dateable if we can call on the right expertise.

The real breakthrough so far came when we finally located part of a stone floor, coarse and uneven, but definitely homely. So we now know the dimensions of one of the rooms. With more specialized techniques we've had mixed fortunes as yet. The film-maker John Tolson, besides recording some of our proceedings, sent up a drone, which supplied excellent aerial shots of the whole site. But we're still searching for a well, despite the best efforts of a water-diviner (who did, however, tell us where he believes the cottage doors and windows must have been). With the help of botanist friends we tried to find evidence of former gardening and husbandry, but only a few fruit trees appear to have survived the long period of neglect.

Particularly satisfying, because so fortuitous, have been the many casual finds, including much window and bottle glass; sherds of pot and crockery; and lots of metal: nails, hinges, tools, guttering, etc. On the uncovered piece of floor lay a well-preserved lady's shoe, reminding us that another village name for the cottages was 'Cobblers', as well as some bicycle parts (could they have repaired those too?). At the moment we are still at the 20th-century level, but must hope there will be similar, more ancient abandoned bric-a-brac when we penetrate deeper.

Alongside the excavation we have made a start with the documentary record. We know that a family called Shrieve was prominent in Sunningwell in the early modern period, at a time when our cottage – to judge by the photographs we have of it – would already have



One of the finds



been in existence, and probably still in single occupancy. The AAAHS's expert in local landholding, Richard Dudding of Radley, has found a John Shrieve in an estate survey of 1768 as renting 27 acres (plus a few roods and perches), and thus as one of a by then vanishing breed of yeoman-farmers. Now we need to confirm that our cottage was indeed the Shrieve residence. In the end we trust both written and material evidence will come together to provide a picture, for adults and for the children, of how life was lived in the village past.

Bob Evans

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 a maximum of about a thousand words but may of course be shorter. 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 when it is also posted on the members' section of the website. It is moved to the public section of the website after six months. Copy deadline for the next issue is end-January 2016.

Manfred Brod

Local History

The Local History Group

At our last meeting of the Local History Group on the 26th of May, we had a large turn-out. Manfred Brod reported his recent work on the building, operation, and eventual closure of the Old Gaol, which was so important for Abingdon's civic pride in the nineteenth century. He introduced us to men like the Marcham lawyer Benjamin Morland, who organised the construction and made a lot of money out of it, and the Reading magistrate William Merry whose campaign to close the gaol took twenty-five years but was finally successful. And he assured us that there were never any French prisoners-of-war within fifty miles of Abingdon.

We had three short films of Abingdon in the 1960s .

Finally I gave a presentation about what is possibly England's smallest castle, which is here at Abingdon. The Norman Motte dates from about 1075, very little research has been done on it, and the site is now regarded at risk due to erosion.

It was an entertaining and informative evening. Do try and come along to the next.

The next meeting is on the 27th of October at 35 Ock street. Details will be posted on the web site.

John Foreman



The Abingdon Buildings and People Website Group



If you don't know what this is you will need to ask your grandchildren.

If you do, try it and see where it takes you!

It's now just over two and a half years since the Town Council invited the AAAHS to provide the history pages for the new town website that was under development. This gave us space on a more sophisticated website than the Society would ever have been able to afford by itself. We undertook to have thirty articles when our site went live in April 2013, but in fact at that point we already had forty-two. Since then the Abingdon Buildings and People website group has worked steadily to add to the original fill, and we are happy to report there is now a total of 123 history articles on the website representing exactly one hundred separate topics.

We will be using this milestone to publicise the web pages in the town and elsewhere, under the slogan 'Unlock Abingdon's History'. We have been given funding to hold an 'event' in the Long Gallery to introduce our pages to a new generation of town councillors and local leaders who may not previously have met them. This will also give us the opportunity to thank the many people who have contributed material or helped us in other ways.

From the outset we decided to apply strict standards to the articles. Long articles are fully referenced. Short articles are not but the group keeps a record of the information sources used. The web pages have been recognised as an educational resource by the Bodleian Library and the National Library of Scotland who have given us free licences to use illustrations that are their copyright.

The web pages are at <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/partners/history>. I'm sure you have already looked at them, but do look again if it was some time ago. There may be more new material than you expect. And if you think you might like to contribute an article or get involved on a more regular basis – there is now quite a lot of administration and record keeping involved as well as some original research – please contact any member of the committee who will put you in touch with the group.

*Jessica Brod
Editor, ABP group*

Dates for Your Diary

Abingdon Museum Friends

St Helen's Church Centre, 7 for 7.30 pm

3 Sept:: Mark Davies, *Oxford's Historic Waterways—from legend to leisure*

1 Oct:: Chris Gale, *Medals and Uniforms at the National Museum of the Royal Navy*.

5 Nov: Richard Dudding, *The Deserted Settlements of Radley*.

3 Dec: Christine Bloxham, *Christmas Customs*.

Marcham Soc

All Saints' Church, 7.45 pm

8 Sept: Jim Asher, *Saving Butterflies*.

13 Oct: Martin Buckland, *The Invisible Brick*.

10 Nov: Rosemary Kitto, *The Hush-Hush Factory in Tubney Wood*.

Radley History Club

Radley CE Primary School, 7 for 7.30 pm

14 Sept: AGM; Tony Rogerson, *The Oxford Dambusters*.

12 Oct: Simon Wenham, *The History of Salters Steamers in Oxford*.

9 Nov: Stephen Barker, *The City of Oxford during the Civil War 1642-46*

14 Dec: *Christmas Party*

Sutton Courtenay Local History Society

Village Hall, 7.30 pm

29 Sept: (at All Saints Church) Stephen Barker, *The Civil War in Oxford*.

10 Nov: Ann Gould, *The History of Abingdon*.

26 Jan: Clare Simpson and Mary Thompson, *Contrasting Schooldays*.

Wallingford Hist and Arch Soc

Wallingford Town Hall, 7.45 for 8.00 pm

11 Sept: Jane Stubbs, *Women in Victorian Times*

9 October: Tony Hadland, *What my DNA Test told me!*

Sat 24 October at the Methodist Church Centre: All-day Conference on Castles in the Thames Valley.

13 Nov: Ian Wheeler, *Fair Mile Hospital, Cholsey*.

11 Dec: Steve Head, *The History of Glass and Glasses*



Obituary

Professor Sheppard Frere (23 August 1916 – 26 February 2015)

We were very sad to learn in February of the death, at the age of 98, of Professor Sheppard Frere. As well as being one of the most eminent archaeologists of his generation, Professor Frere was an Honorary Vice-President of the Society, and a long-time resident of Marcham.

Sheppard Frere was born in Sussex. He studied Classics and Ancient History at Cambridge, and then became a school teacher, undertaking excavations in his summer holidays. In 1954, he moved to a university lectureship in Manchester. A year later, he went to a post in London University, becoming a professor there in 1963. In 1966, he was appointed Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire at Oxford, a position which he held until retirement in 1983. In 1967, his book *Britannia – a History of Roman Britain* was published; it remained the standard text on the subject for many years.

Professor Frere combined his academic work with a strong commitment to 'rescue' archaeology. He carried out excavations of Roman remains on bomb-damaged sites in Canterbury and on development sites in Verulamium (St Albans) between 1946 and 1961. In 1962, he

excavated at the Roman small town of Dorchester-on-Thames. Some of his trenches there have recently been re-excavated as part of an Oxford University and Oxford Archaeology research project; Professor Frere was delighted to visit the site several times, most recently in 2014, more than fifty years after his own work there. (Some members may recall the Society's own evening outings to this excavation in 2010 and 2013.)

He was also instrumental in establishing a number of local organisations which arranged rescue excavations on threatened sites. One of these was the Abingdon Excavation Committee (AEC). This was formed in 1971, and included Society members, councillors and academics: among them, Professor Frere. The Committee raised funds which allowed Abingdon's first full-time professional archaeological team to be established in 1972. The Society was very grateful for Professor Frere's support for Abingdon's archaeology, and we were delighted that he accepted the position of Honorary Vice-President of the Society, a position which he held until his death.

Roger Thomas

Note: more detailed obituaries were published in a number of national and local newspapers, and can be found on-line. They include:

The Guardian (10 March 2015): <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/10/sheppard-frere>

The Telegraph (13 March 2015): <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11470309/Sheppard-Frere-archaeologist-obituary.html>

The Oxford Times (19 March 2015) http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/obits/obituaries/11864794.Obituary_Pioneering_archaeologist_has_died_at_98/



Outings 2015

A tour of Northcourt

On the fine evening of the 12th of May, we met in the car park of Christ Church, off Northcourt Road, which had been the yard of the successful Candy family dairy business. In 1960, the Parish of Abingdon purchased the tithe barn from James Candy, and the church was opened in it in 1961. Then the buildings around the yard were bought by Christ Church in 2001 and are now part of the thriving church with the café in one of the Berkshire barns a popular and important community hub during the week.

Judy White welcomed us with the words, "We're standing in the yard of Northcourt Farm, the abbey's home farm, and the tithe barn was built around 1270" and with that we were whisked back to the 13th century, feeling the dominance of the abbey a mile to the south. Workers would have come up from there, with some continuing along the track, now footpath, beside Shelley Close, to Sunningwell where there was more abbey property.

Then we were off on a neat circuit - Northcourt Lane, Clevelands, Tatham Road, Brookside, Northcourt Road - to look at the outsides of four old houses and get glimpses of earlier landscapes before the 20th century development of North Abingdon.

First was the Old Farmhouse at the junction of Northcourt Road and Northcourt Lane, formerly Northcourt Farmhouse and now a private residence. It had the inconvenient honour of straddling the old parish boundary between St Nicolas and St Helen and when the bounds were being beaten the multitude would pile in the front door and out the back door where a chalk cross was marked on the lintel establishing exactly where each parish lay, important for the protection of tithes. The reason for the route may be that the southern section had been a detached kitchen with the corridor an outside path.

We went down Northcourt Lane and into the garden of Northcourt House, built in 1805, and now back as a private house after being used for institutional purposes. The brick cube of the house, framed by the dark trees, was an elegant contrast to the rural dwellings around.

Joymount was next, completely tucked away off the Lane, having lost its entrance on Oxford Road and eight

acres to new houses. This is possibly a 16th century house with a 17th century addition and had been called The Mount. In 1859 it became the first home of the Sisters of Mercy who had been invited to Abingdon to teach at the new convent school and they gave the house its happy name.



A welcome from Judy

Then we went along Clevelands and into Tatham Road, named after the family who had run a school in Northcourt House. We saw recent houses on the south side and a field on the north, which had run up to the House, and from which a spring fed an ornamental lake in the garden. Beyond the field we could see the back of the Northcourt Centre, which is the successor of the village hall which had been built on land given by Miss Tatham.

Up Brookside, which is just that, alongside the hidden Stert, and we turned into Northcourt Road, to see The Old House, opposite what had been the abbey home farm. There is in one small room a huge fireplace, far bigger than necessary for the house, which might have been used for making meals for the farm workers. The house is the oldest in the village and built of stone (only the abbey could afford that) with the new front on the garden side dateable to around 1650, due to its stylish window catches.

The circuit was completed (as all good walks should) outside the public house, which had been the Eagle until



How all good outings should finish

WWI when it took on the less Germanic title of the Spread Eagle and we looked for the four cottages that had been divided into seven at one time with the pub on the end.

It had been a fascinating walk, showing hidden aspects of Northcourt, highlighting its village character and giving this area a heart. Judy was warmly thanked for taking us round and organising access to see the houses. Then the evening continued in fine style with a meal in the Spread Eagle.

As always, it is worth looking at *More of Abingdon Past & Present*, by Judy and Elizabeth Drury, for the section on Northcourt has more information, old and new photographs and the Ordnance Survey map of 1936 showing great white wastes, now built over.

Genefer Clark

Appleton Outing

A large group of members turned up at the Plough pub in Appleton on a cool but dry evening and were met by John Page, Chairman of the Appleton with Eaton Historical Society. We were in for a most interesting and informative walk ably led by John and no fewer than four other members of his society who joined us for all or part of the walk and contributed from their particular areas of knowledge and interest.

John started by handing out copies of the 1843 Tithe Computational Map showing field boundaries and used to calculate how much each farmer owed in tithes to the Lord of the Manor. He explained that Appleton was a Saxon village at the northern edge of North Wessex – the Thames a mile or two to the north formed the border with Mercia. Bablock Hythe in the parish was an ancient crossing point between the two kingdoms. In a document of 680-690 the village was known as Airmundesley after a Saxon landowner named Airmund, but became Appleton (via Appletune) later as a result of the apple (and gooseberry) orchards that abounded here. Unfortunately no Saxon remains were found in the village despite numerous excavations.

We started by viewing the church exterior. Dedicated to St. Laurence it was built in the late 12th century. An interesting addition was a small wooden hut perched on top of the tower. The story we were told was that one of the Lords of the Manor (named Fettiplace) appropriated large amounts of common land under the Enclosure Act and, on this death bed, felt he should make some recom-

pense to the village so he left money for several new bells. There was insufficient space to hang them all in the tower so this hut was built on top. The villagers were unimpressed, feeling that listening to bells pealing was hardly adequate compensation for the loss of their land. There are now 10 bells in all, an unusually large number for a country church.

There were two (possibly three) manor houses in Appleton and we first viewed the very imposing one next to the church, unfortunately largely obscured by trees. This was built by the Tintyne family in the 13th century, and,



Appleton



St Laurence, Appleton

though heavily restored, still retained many of its original features which we were sadly unable to view. We then walked over fields to the second one, Dean's Farm, unfortunately demolished in the 1920s with its site now occupied by a modern house. However we were then taken along Park Lane (also known as Berry Lane), which had a number of cottages dating from the 17th century onwards and still largely unchanged. The area had many wells and was formerly used for orchards and fish ponds. The Lords of the Manor had done little to improve the quality of life for the villagers over the years and by the 19th century Appleton had become seriously impoverished and many of the inhabitants lived in hovels. This had a beneficial effect for modern historians as, in a similar way to the wool villages of Suffolk and the Cotswolds, lack of money meant that properties were patched and repaired rather than demolished and rebuilt, ensuring their survival for us today. However in recent times the village had become prosperous due to wealthy incomers attracted, no doubt, by its location and proximity to Oxford and other centres. We were told that many of the houses were farmers' houses – not farmhouses, since the ancient field system meant that farmers had widely scattered strips of land, so it made sense for them to live in the centre of the village away from any of their land but in the heart of their community.

There followed a long walk around the village centre visiting, among many other buildings, Pound Farm, White's Forge (which retained its outdoor wheelwright's circle) and two former pubs: the Three Horseshoes and the Thatched House, the latter of which, we were told, never lived up to its name. One attractive cottage that was thatched was Eyebrow Cottage and this certainly did. We viewed The Close which may have included a third Manor House and which retained a 17th century

dovecote. Other properties included Old Cottage which retained some wattle-and-daub construction, South Lawn with its very large barn, Appleton House and the Old Rectory with a surviving granary. Badswell Lane (deriving from Badgers Well, rather than a reference to water quality) had a considerable number of smaller but attractive cottages, again mainly 17th century. We also saw a pond used in recent times by an agricultural machinery company for washing JCBs and other equipment.

We were then given a history of education in Appleton. The first school was founded in 1603 but only had three pupils. In the early 19th century the landlord was petitioned to build a new school but refused, preferring to spend his money on living the high life in London. In the end in 1838 a small school building was built by members of the Baptist Church. The Nonconformists were keen to show that they could provide what the establishment failed to deliver. This lasted until 1961 when a new school was built near the church, which is still in use and has good modern facilities. Lastly on the walk, were told to imagine the once-extensive village green, now built over and intersected by roads. The former village pond is now part of a private estate which includes a huge barn, formerly even bigger until a section of it collapsed in the 1930s. Near there we were told the story of the Great Fire of Appleton on June 8th 1899 when a straw thatch fire, probably started by children, quickly spread and



"Unfortunately largely obscured by trees" - and a wall!

destroyed a number of properties. The fire engine was summoned from Oxford but took several hours to arrive by which time the fire had been put out. Fortunately there were no human casualties but a number of pigs died – no doubt the villagers lived on roast pork for some time to come.



Eyebrow Cottage

At the end of the walk we retired to the Plough where, over drinks, we were regaled with another Appleton story, this time featuring a visit to that establishment by C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and others in January 1941 to celebrate the latter's 49th birthday. To make the experience more authentic we were all offered a pinch of snuff,

which apparently they took on that occasion. We were also offered copies for sale of the Society's journal which had the intriguing title "Appleton With Histories Eaton Some". Obviously there was a local reason for this seeming jumbling of the words. Some of us were hoping for a pub meal but were told that was not possible as they were cooking for Aunt Sally. She turned out not to be a relative of the landlady but rather an ancient game, unique to Oxfordshire, being played by teams in the pub garden. So we left hungry, but replete with vast quantities of information and a sense of a village impoverished over the centuries by a succession of rapacious Lords of the Manor, but now affluent, with a strong community spirit and a respect for its history and maintaining its traditions. Thanks go to John Page and his team, and to Elizabeth Drury for organising yet another excellent field event for us.

Michael Bloom

Oriel College tour

A group of around 24 people assembled in Oriel Square on the evening of 15 July 2015 prior to being led into the College main entrance by Bob Evans. (Bob was Regius Professor of History from 1997 to 2011, is a Fellow of Oriel and is currently Chairman of AAAHS).

Oriel is a typical sized Oxford college and one of the oldest (fifth in fact), and will celebrate its 700th anniversary in 2026. It was founded during the reign of Edward II, but its oldest buildings today date from the time of Charles I. It only took on undergraduates however from the sixteenth century, prior to which it had held only a Provost and ten Fellows (graduates).



A lecture from the Prof

We started in the Chapel which dates from the 1620s or 30s and has undergone various restorations; the ceiling has been renewed in the last 12 months. Above the entrance is a room used by John Henry Newman (a leader of the High Anglican movement in the mid 19th century). There are several fine stained glass windows in the Chapel, the earliest dating from the 18th century, but also with Victorian additions.

Moving on to the Hall, the entrance is fronted by a portico dedicated to Charles I within whose reign the hall was originally built and with the inscription REGNANTE CAROLO (during the reign of Charles). A statue of the Virgin Mary, after whom the hall is named, sits above those of Edward II and Charles. The hall can seat around 120 people with the Provost and Fellows at the top table which runs east-west. Behind the high table is a portrait of Edward II with several other portraits around the room of previous alumni. The wood panelling, heavy wooden tables and low light through the stained glass windows gave the hall an air of what an Oxford college hall should be.

We emerged into the quad, the first of four in the college, and passed a group of summer school attendees who



seemed to be enjoying an end of 'term' evening picnic by the steps of the portico. We made our way through various passages and a corridor to the second quad, the north range of which houses the senior library on the first floor and below, the first purpose built senior common room in Oxford. This was a late 18th century addition in the neoclassical style. Before reaching the library however we passed what must be one of the most ornate cat flaps in existence dedicated in 2004 by the then Provost, Derek Morris.

We ascended to the senior library via the grand staircase past the portraits of various donors to the college. On display for us here were numerous examples of the ancient documents held by the college. These included 18th century sheet music by Purcell and Handel and 16th-18th century herbals and books on topography.. The library also houses an extensive collection of legal and political works of the time, not usually found in other college libraries. The college charter, issued by Edward II to Adam de Brome, the first Provost, is also held here.

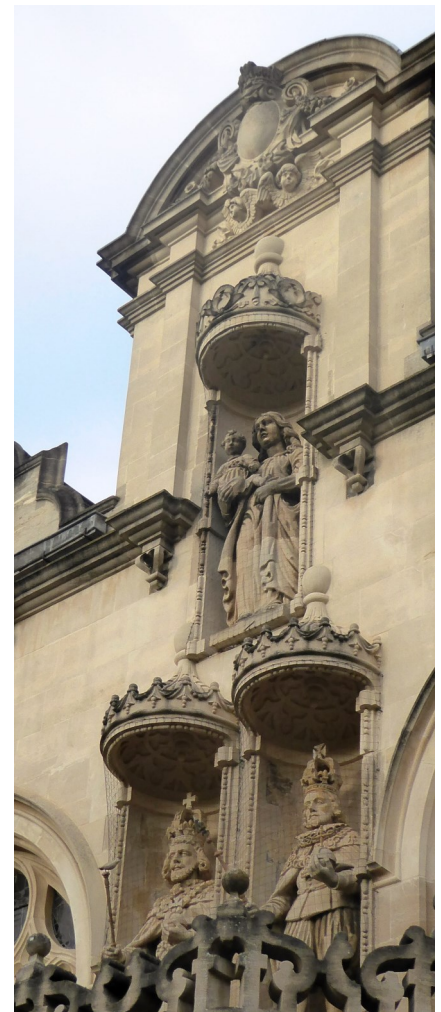
On the upper floor some of the oldest documents held by the college were on display and were described by Rob Petre, the college archivist. These included a 1733 copy of a 1678 map of Wadley Manor, an extensive estate near Faringdon granted to Oriel in 1440, a 1300 institutional copy of Magna Carta and of the Forest Charter which accompanied Magna Carta but gave rights to the common man rather than to the barons. The oldest document here was the Royal Charter of St Bartholomew's (i.e. Bartlemas in east Oxford, still in the College's possession), signed (sealed) by King Stephen, sometime between 1140 and 1150, during the time of the civil war concerning the line of succession from Henry I.

We descended to the senior common room which as mentioned above was the first purpose built Common Rom in Oxford, now used for various functions, and the walls of which are covered in the pictures and portraits of previous Provosts. Here we met two of the latest Fellows using decidedly 21st century technology to look at the latest images of Pluto from the New Horizons spacecraft.

Our next move took us to the third quad, the buildings on three sides of which housed elements of St Mary's Hall incorporated in 1902 into the College. Here also, on the north side is the Cecil Rhodes building built in the first decade of the 20th century with money bequeathed by Rhodes, a former student.



The College Cat-flap



Regnante Carolo?

Finally, for some, we passed through a tunnel under Oriel Street into the area known as O'Brien Quad. Originally, the High Street frontage to this area housed Tackley's Inn which was the first piece of property bought by Adam de Brome on founding the college. In the centre of the quad is the Harris building which housed a real tennis court on which Charles I played tennis with his nephew, Prince Rupert in 1642. The tennis court is now a lecture theatre and seminar room. The area also houses the staircases for the quad. Unlike the staircases of the first three quads, these are numbered in Roman numerals and we arrived amidst a



group of talkative thronging students some of whom it seemed, didn't know their IV's from their VI's.

At this point those of us who did not wish to go up to the college roof (!) left the quad by a short tunnel and metal gate, emerging into Oriel Square at a location very close to our assembly point. This therefore brought us full circle on this extremely interesting and informative tour of an historic and yet still thriving Oxford College of which this piece can only scratch the surface.

Andrew Steele.

A note from the Outings Secretary

My tenure as Outings Secretary on the AAAHS Committee is coming to an end and I should like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of the outings programme over the past six years and also to thank those who have guided us on some very interesting and informative expeditions. I do appreciate the write-ups on each outing that members have kindly contributed.

Our thanks for this years outings go to Judy White for guiding us round the old hamlet of Northcourt (followed by an excellent meal in the local pub), John Page together with members of the Appleton Local History Society for a tour of Appleton and for the experience of taking snuff, and to Bob Evans, our Chairman, for introducing us to Oriel, one of Oxford's oldest colleges.

The Society would be delighted to receive your suggestions for future outings.

Thank you

Elizabeth Drury

Book Reviews

Bob Frampton, *The Abingdon Races – A Forgotten Tradition*. Available from bookshops or from the author, Price £7.00.

'Little known' and 'long forgotten' are phrases which aptly describe the Abingdon Races, so we are indebted to Bob Frampton for resurrecting this important aspect of Abingdon's history in his attractive and well-researched book.

The races started at Clifton Heath in 1703, moved to Culham Heath from 1733 to 1810, and when this was enclosed in 1810, the races moved to Abingdon Common along the Marcham Road. They rapidly acquired a national reputation and were the highlight of the town's social scene in September, with balls and 'ordinaries' in the County Hall and local inns for post-race entertainment.

The author has placed them in the economic and historic context of the time, showing how improvements in the roads and the coming of the railways enabled many more people to attend such events. Every aspect of British horse-racing has been covered, and Jackson's Oxford Journal has been mined for programmes and race reports, plus the inevitable frauds and brawls which attended such occasions.

The flat-races finally ended in 1875, but the Old Berks Hunt and the Oxfordshire Hunt then organised steeple-chases between Sutton Wick and the Otneys from 1884 to 1899. What a pity that this colourful activity no longer exists in Abingdon!

Muriel Halliday's attractive illustrations enliven the text, but the random placing and small size of many of the illustrations, and the absence of captions, detract from the overall appearance of this otherwise excellent little book.

Judy White



Feature Articles

Abingdon in the news – in 1871

There's hours of innocent fun available just by entering Abingdon into the many historical websites that now exist and seeing what comes out. Here's an anonymous article from the *Daily Telegraph* (yes, it had to be the *Telegraph*!) of 25 October 1871, page 5:

We should tremble for the peace of homes, and we should despair of the maintenance of conjugal tranquillity, if it became generally known that, according to a decision at Abingdon, a married woman separated from her husband is entitled to a municipal vote. Here is presented to wives now contented with family happiness a short cut to a public career. A tiff, a quarrel, a separation, and it is done! The serf—see Mill *passim*—rises into freedom as the deed of separation is signed; the chains fall from her lovely limbs, and she is elevated at a bound to citizenship, dignity, and public duties. No longer concerned with nursery prattle, kitchen duties, or parlour gossip, she takes a part in the affairs of town councils, vestries, and boards of guardians; she may study sewage, examine gas, consider paving, and visit the parish workhouse as a responsible ratepayer, an electress, and a public personage of dignity and worth. This, no doubt, is a brilliant career, and the public may gain in the long run by the presence of petticoats everywhere; but we must carefully consider its disintegrating effect on households now happy and undisturbed. It is said that, even as it is, there are wives

who are restless and discontented, but what will it be, when outside the home will stand the Genius of Municipal Freedom, beckoning the woman from the nursery and the hearth and asking her to tread the upward path to civic fame? If there are wives now whose great souls chafe at the petty work of overlooking tradesmen's bills, how can we expect them to continue in that limited career when public duties are at their command on the simple and easy condition of quitting their husband's roof? Even the very threat of doing so may exercise a serious effect. We may hear—"Algernon! a new dress to-morrow, or you behold me an emancipated being, addressing the electors of the ward;" or, after a glowing picture of what she might be—a Colonel Hogg in crinoline or a Haussmann in a Dolly Varden—the devoted creature will sink into her lord's arms with a sigh and "see what I sacrifice for you." Our only hope is that, as women do not read the papers carefully, they may not have observed the Abingdon decision; and if husbands generally would only conspire, they might keep the secret carefully from their wives.

An amusing rant, but what's it about?

In 1869 the Municipal Franchise Act extended the vote in local elections to tenants who had occupied their homes for twelve months and paid their rates, irrespective of gender. Few had foreseen the implication that married women living apart from their husbands might now be able to vote. It was acceptable for spinsters and widows to exercise such rights, but the idea that a married woman might vote without reference to her husband seemed outrageous to many. At the centre of the Abingdon case was Mary Passey, a poor labouring woman who headed her household because her husband had walked out long before. We don't know why Mrs Passey was eager to vote, but the Liberal agent, Mr Williams, was keen that she should be able to do so and the Conservative Mr Challenor that she should not. They argued it, no doubt as a test case, before the local Court of Revision, which ruled in favour of Mrs Passey.

Unfortunately, Mary Passey kept her status as an elector for only a few weeks. A case arose in Sunderland where an election had been determined by the votes of two married women. The aggrieved loser appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench, where the Lord Chief Justice asserted that Parliament could never have intended anything so monstrous as to give married women voting rights, and quashed them.

Manfred Brod



The Committee for 2014-15 — who does what?

Chairman/town planning: [Bob Evans](#)

Secretary/Newsletter/Website: [Manfred Brod](#)

Treasurer: [Andrew Steele](#)

Membership: [Penny Cookson](#)

Local History: [John Foreman](#)

Digging: [Jeff Wallis](#)

Lectures: [Jeff Wallis](#) and [John Foreman](#)

Outings/publicity: [Elizabeth Drury](#)

Archives: [Jackie Smith](#)

Note that Committee members normally serve either three or six years, and several will end their stints in September 2015. New Committee members will be elected at the AGM on 17 September. Nominations will be welcomed.

Watch the members' section of the website for the distribution of functional responsibilities in the new Committee.

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES HERITAGE OPEN DAYS



12-13 September 2015

With a Victorian flavour!

The AAAHS will be heavily involved.

Don't miss the activities, walks, lectures ...

Join in if you can—the AAAHS will be helping to man the community shop in the Precinct, 5-11 September, and extra hands will be appreciated! Contact [Elizabeth Drury](#).