



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2014

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The Committee – who does what?

Chairman: Roger Thomas

Secretary/town planning/publicity:
Stuart Hughes

Treasurer: Andrew Steele

Membership: Penny Cookson

Digging: Jeff Wallis

Lectures: Bob Evans

Outings: Elizabeth Drury

Local History/Newsletter:

Manfred Brod

Website: David Rayner

Archives: Jackie Smith

Contact

info@aaahs.org.uk

AAAHS OUTINGS 2014

Please join us for our summer evening outings

The Canal at Abingdon Tuesday 3rd June 7.00pm

The Wilts & Berks Canal was opened in 1810 and abandoned in 1914; it served as a major transport link throughout this time. Led by Martin Buckland we will explore the route of the canal in Abingdon and get the latest news on its restoration.

Please meet under the County Hall Abingdon.

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Oxford's Jewish Quarter Tuesday 24th June 7.00pm

Following the very popular talk in January by Pam Manix we will be exploring the Medieval Jewish quarter of Oxford with her. The tour may include entry to various Oxford colleges including Christ Church, Pembroke and Magdalen.

Please meet outside Oxford Town Hall in St Aldates.

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JET at Culham Wednesday 16th July 6.30pm

We all wonder what goes on in those large white buildings so this is a chance to see JET and MAST experimental facilities and meet some of the scientists and engineers who work in fusion research. People with pacemakers or other medical implants will not be able to access certain areas.

Meeting place to be confirmed nearer the time.

=====

If you would like to join us please fill in the **form at the end of this Newsletter** to arrive by 6th May.

Numbers are limited on some outings.

Bookings/queries: Elizabeth Drury 33 East Saint Helen Street, Abingdon OX145EE . Tel 01235 553636

Meetings Programme

2013-4

All at the Northcourt Centre at 7.45pm.

Members free.

Visitors welcome (£3.00)

20 March: Richard Smith, *Oxford Eccentricity: a history of mischief and mayhem.*

17 April: Andrew Webster, *The Cherwell Crossings Battlefield Archaeology Project – Gosford Bridge, Enslow Bridge and Tackley Ford.*

15 May: Jane Bowen, *Creating a new museum in the historic County Hall.*

19 June: Open Evening; members presenting their work

The **2014/15** season commences with the AGM on **18 September 2014**

YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

If you look at the 'who does what?' list on the front page, you will see how many members of the committee are doing multiple jobs.

That's because we don't have enough people on the committee, and that's because not enough society members are coming forward to serve on it.

So, if you have a bit of time and energy left over from the daily round, do please volunteer. Yes, it does mean work, but it's also fun. And it is satisfying—believe me—to be really making things happen!

Manfred Brod

Treasurer's Report

Principal Income/ Expenditure Analysis as of 25/01/14	2013/14 ytd (£)
Income recurrent	
Subs	840
Visitors	86
Tea / coffee	18
Income from book sales	118
Bank interest	23
Expenditure recurrent	
Hire of halls	218
Speakers	200
Admin	77
Admin (printing)	62

There have been no major single expenditures so far this year. The largest has been the speakers at £200 with the hire of the Northcourt Hall at £137 and the Ock Street Hall at £81 to date. Total expenditure has been £670. The Committee has also agreed to the cost of purchasing a radio-carbon date for one of the digs undertaken by the Society's digging team. This will be around £250.

Income is fairly healthy with £840 from subs, £32 from book sales and, usefully, £86 from the sale of Mienke's book. This leaves us about £29 short of break even in total on this project. Total income to date is £1340.

Visitors averaging out at 7.1 visitors per meeting (a large increase on this time last year) and tea donations has netted £18.

Andrew Steele
Treasurer



Abingdon Clubs and Societies Day

At the Guildhall, Saturday, 29th March, 10:30am-3:00pm.

Can you spare an hour or two to help staff the Society's stall? Contact any member of the Committee.

Chairman's report

I am writing this in January. By the time you read it in March, the Christmas festivities will be a distant memory; so too, we hope, the floods which are currently afflicting the Thames valley.



The Bifrost Guard—less rape and pillage, more fashion show

Looking back, 2013 was a good year for the Society, with our usual varied and interesting mixture of lectures and outings. The year ended on a very interesting and enjoyable note, with the Bifrost Guard (a Viking re-enactment group) providing entertainment (and education) at our Christmas Social evening.

A highlight of the year was the launch of the 'Abingdon Buildings and People' section of Abingdon Town Council's new website. This incorporates the results of much high-quality research by AAAHS members. Information is presented as articles, with illustrations, on individual Abingdon buildings or people. New articles are constantly being added, and suggestions for further topics which could be covered are always welcome (the more so if the person making the suggestion is also offering to produce the article!).

The coming year will see our activities continue, with lectures ranging from Oxford's medieval Jewish heritage to the classical archaeology of Cyrenaica in Libya. In May, we will be especially pleased to welcome Jane Bowen, curator of Abingdon Museum, who will tell us the 'behind the scenes' story of the major project to refurbish and redisplay Abingdon's County Hall museum. We also have a number of summer outings to look forward to (details and are booking form are included elsewhere in this newsletter) and the Local History Group has three meetings planned for the year.

Of course, 2014 will see the centenary of the start of the First World War (or the Great War, as it was known until 1939). This centenary is stimulating renewed interest, and lots of new research, into this poignant subject. The impact of the war on individuals, families and communities is likely to be one major area of attention. There is good scope for research on this in Abingdon. We have a Roll Of Honour, listing the names and addresses of all the Abingdon men who fought in the Great War; this opens the way for much detailed research on those who fought, what happened to them, and their family histories. I am sure that AAAHS members will take part in First World War research projects, and I am equally sure that we will all follow such work with great interest.

It will be rather too late, by the time you read this, to be saying 'Happy New Year, but I do wish you all a very happy and fulfilling year in 2014, and hope to see as many as possible of you at Society events in the coming months.

From the Editor

Yes, I admit it. I'm playing with typeface and layout and even putting in a bit of colour. And adding additional sorts of content likely to interest AAAHS members. The idea is to make receiving the Newsletter a greater part of the attraction of Society membership.

It's all experimental, so do let me know what you think of it.

Manfred Brod (local@aaahs.org.uk)

Roger Thomas
Chairman

Local History

Local History Group

The October 2013 meeting saw local history become very local, with Hilary Clare talking about her research on the houses close to her own on Faringdon Road. The attendance included, very appropriately, several of her neighbours. We learned, among much else, of the uncomfortable quarters of the girls of St Katherine's, that Springfield fully justifies its name, that the district was optimistically advertised as twelve minutes from the Thames but without any specification of the mode of conveyance, and about Mr Rippon of the Oxford Times who in 1901 was both an enthusiastic photographer and a pioneering motorist. Thank you, Hilary, and we look forward to further instalments as the work continues.

The February meeting gave me an opportunity to vent my scepticism at the usual hagiographic accounts of our only local saint, Edmund of Abingdon. I maintained that, far from being too saintly to do an adequate job as archbishop and fleeing into exile at the first hint of controversy, he was from the start an able and aggressive politician, whose way of screwing the knife into a defeated opponent was to accept from him a 'gift' of animals to stock his — Edmund's — hunting park. The sanctity was a later invention by people who stood to gain from his canonisation. There was a lot of discussion, and nobody threw anything at me.

The next two Local History Group meetings will be on Tuesdays 6 May and 21 October. At the May meeting, Bob Frampton will introduce his new book on Abingdon in WW1, which should have been published by then. Anyone who has anything else they want to present or discuss, either at that meeting or in October, please contact me on local@aaahs.org.uk.



St Edmund forces a baron to make friends with King Henry III, who doesn't seem enthusiastic.

Manuscript illustration by Matthew Paris (13th century), from Wikimedia Commons

*Manfred Brod
Convenor*

The Abingdon Buildings and People Website

<http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/partners/history>

Almost a year after its launch, the Buildings and People website is continuing to grow, if not at the vertiginous rate of its early days when the need was to have enough articles for a credible site as quickly as possible. Further articles, especially on Abingdon people, continue to be added, and existing articles are being expanded with a choice of relatively brief 'highlights' and more academically substantial 'long' versions. We are also beginning to consider a series of feature articles on such subjects as Abingdon's pre-history and Abingdon's role in the Civil War. The growing reputation of the site means that outside specialists are increasingly willing to write for us, and readers (is that the right word? Should it be clickers?) are writing in with additional information or corrections. Our increasing technical expertise means that the glitches that continue occasionally to tease (uploads that don't show? references numbered with Roman numerals ??) can be quickly dealt with.

But we are a small group of mostly old people, and there is a lot of work to be done. If you are interested, and feel you can put some time and effort into a very satisfying cause, please consider joining us. Contact any member of the group, or me on local@aaahs.org.uk.

*Manfred Brod
Convenor*

Archaeology

Sorry, a recalcitrant computer means that the regular diggers' report will have to be held over to the next issue.

But to ease our frustration, here's an entry that is intended for the next *South Midlands Archaeology* about some grisly finds in Bowyer Road. Thanks, Julia, and also for the Exhibit A!

Skeletons at Bowyer Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire



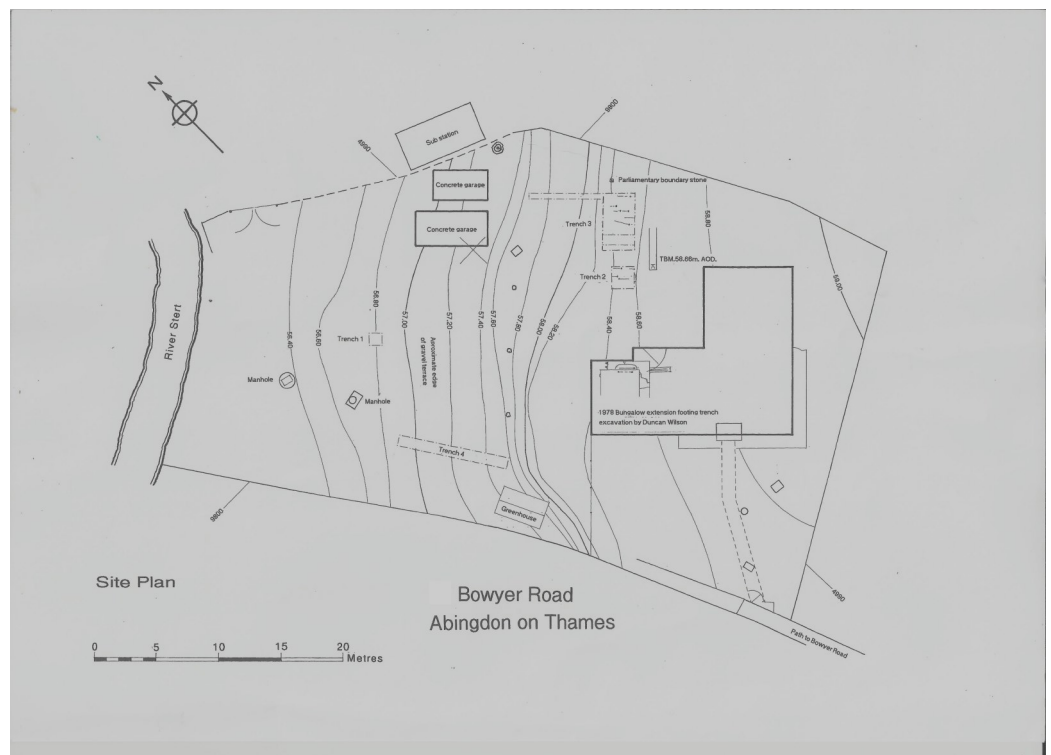
In June 2011, the society was invited by the owners to investigate skeletons found in their garden in Bowyer Road. When contractors had removed a concrete slab, the remains of at least four burials were uncovered. The police forensically examined one skull and decided it was old enough to be archaeology rather than a crime scene. Seven burials, possibly Roman or Saxon, had previously been reported by Duncan Wilson (*Oxoniensia* 44, 1979, pp. 97-99) at this site, then known as Boxhill.

Four trenches were excavated by hand in the garden. This slopes down to the River Stert which lies at about 56m AOD. Due to previous building and landscape work the ground was very disturbed. However, human remains were uncovered only 40 cm below the ground

surface in trenches 2 and 3, sited on the terrace edge at about 58m AOD. These were 32m south-east from the river (see Fig.1). A bone from burial 310 is being radio-carbon dated.

A total of 1,372gm of Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval pottery sherds were recovered from these very disturbed soils, also 55 pieces of worked flint which were predominantly Neolithic, 3 being Mesolithic. Post excavation analysis of the finds is currently being carried out by the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Our thanks go to Tim Allen and Dr Peter Hacking for their advice, support and expertise.



Work by J. Brocklesby, M-N Pilgrim, T. Stopps and J. Wallis.

Report by *Julia Brocklesby*
March 2014

Book Reviews

**Nat Alcock and Dan Miles. *The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England*
John Steane and James Ayres. *Traditional Buildings in the Oxford Region c.1300-1840*
both published by Oxbow Books, 2013.**

As if celebrating the 50th anniversary of the publication in 1963 of Raymond Wood-Jones' groundbreaking book on the traditional buildings of the Banbury Region, 2013 saw the publication of two major books containing much new and valuable material on Oxfordshire buildings, including many in the Abingdon area. None of the buildings discussed has been published before in any depth, and both volumes are the result of very detailed recording and analysis. There is no overlap. In both cases, general conclusions are drawn from the evidence, and the results presented in lavishly illustrated hardback volumes that are a pleasure to read. Yet in concept, approach and style, they are quite different.

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England reports the results of a project on the tree-ring dating of cruck-framed buildings funded by the Leverhulme Trust and started in the late 1980s. Of the 111 houses surveyed, 28 are in the present county of Oxfordshire, and most of these are in the Vale of White Horse (Harwell, Steventon being well represented). Some of the houses are described (with their documentary histories) in the text, while all are supplied in pdf format on an accompanying CD. Steane and Ayres, on the other hand, present the results of some 20 years' 'developer-funded' research on over 90 buildings of different types, half of which are in the Vale or West Berkshire. Most of the buildings have detailed descriptions and one can almost hear the debate between the authors as they draw out their conclusions.

Alcock and Miles use the data collected to address some current academic issues. They show, for example, that many of the surviving medieval houses were in fact built by peasants. Tree-ring dating was crucial to drawing conclusions about the carpentry and use of space in the pre-1530 house; for the effect on households of the Black Death in the 1350s, and for the appearance of service rooms after 1440. The result is a 'new and detailed' view of the midland peasant house that should stimulate further research in other areas of the country and

lead to a new understanding of this iconic English building type.

Steane and Ayres have a more directly local focus, in which the buildings are used to illustrate various strands of architectural history – materials, carpentry, fixtures and fittings, decoration – and types such as town (including public) buildings, rural and farm buildings, inns and public houses. The illustrations are a particular strength, capturing the essence of the feature or building as both authors use them to delve into the minds of the craftsmen that created them. In Abingdon – to which a whole chapter is devoted – there are descriptions of six buildings in High Street alone: 1, 2, 3, 12, 13 and The Grapes. Behind these sometimes much later facades is a wealth of remarkable roofs and decorative features. Their work at Christ's Hospital's Long Alley and Brick Alley almshouses produced new insights, supported by documentation from the charity's archives. From nearby, buildings in Drayton, Goosey, Marcham and Sutton Courtenay are also discussed and analysed.

If this review results in drawing you towards one of these – be warned. If you get sight of the other you will want that as well.

David Clark

(David Clark is Secretary of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record, and a member of the Abingdon Buildings and People Group).

OXPAST 2014

Oxfordshire Past 2014 is to be held on Saturday 31 May at Woodstock Community Centre from 10.00 a.m. to 4.20 p.m. This is the twentieth OxPast event and is now well established in the Oxfordshire calendar for all those interested in history and archaeology.

The cost of attendance is £7 and tickets must be booked in advance. This includes tea/coffee but not lunch.

Abingdon speakers will include David Clark on Oxfordshire buildings and Manfred Brod on the Abingdon Buildings and People website.

For the full programme and to book see the OxPast website at www.oxfordshirepast.org

Christine Wootton (ed): *Radley People and the Railway 1843-2013* (Radley History Club, 2013)

I always seem to read non-fiction books, ("look at" is perhaps a more appropriate description,) from the back cover and taking in firstly the pictures and captions only.

This book outwardly appears to have a railway bias, the illustrations I expected to have a particular significance as they do in the Middleton Press publications. The Middleton Press publishes books of this nature and stature on a large range of railway topics and locations. As with this book there are always several maps and pictures taken through the ages to be both enjoyed and informative. Being visual rather than bookish, I always create an imaginary romantic picture of the line or the location. That is where it stops usually because the script, in most railway books, is about what happens between and on the rails and rarely touches the human involvement apart from stock or archive photographs taken of a Sunday school outing or a butchers shop in a village at Christmas and of course railway paraphernalia.

This book is different in that it takes you away from the railway hardware and introduces you to the humans that both operated it and relied on as a life support system.

The impression of the book is of a catalogue of family lives in a form of a compendium, ready for easy local reference. This is a delightful coffee table book, written by the villagers of Radley for the villagers of Radley.

So as not to be biased by my interest in railways I asked a colleague, Dennis Brown, who has a broader experience than me, to add his impressions, and for a bit of local input, a friend who used the line from Appleford to Abingdon as a school girl .

My railway colleague considered (verbatim)

"The book is unlike most railway histories, in that it concentrates on people rather than events. However,

despite this, a few errors of fact or typography have crept in to the railway history. A little more research into the railway history would prove productive, for example into the change over from the broad gauge track on the Didcot-Oxford line. On the main focus of the book, the book has the feeling of work in progress, with more information still available about some of the families involved, for example the Smewins. The compilers would do well consider an equivalent for the Abingdon line and to produce a second book, in this case dealing with the staff of the Abingdon line and the station over the same period".

My friend thought

"It was a dip in and out book and of great interest to the locals and was an ideal as a gift for old Radleians from the days when the railway was of importance to the community."

(Her father was, at sometime, a keeper of the Appleford signal box.)

Regarding the book's layout, perhaps its Achilles heel, the illustrations give a scattergun impression. I would have preferred to see the illustrations in blocks of say two or three double sided pages positioned at intervals between whole sheets of text. Furthermore, the font used was neither sturdy nor varied in size enough to give a relaxed read (this last point is a personal view). The closing comment is that it is obvious that a great amount of time and effort was expended in coordinating its publication and this should be recognized and applauded. Over all, a good effort.

David Birkett

(David Birkett is Chairman of the Thames Valley branch of the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society, and Dennis Brown is Publicity Officer).

Are you doing any oral history?

We hear that the Abingdon County Hall Museum has an audio recorder that it might lend out for such purposes.

Contact <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/partners/abingdon-county-hall-museum> for further information.

Dates for Your Diary

Sutton Courtenay Local Historical Society

Meets Tuesdays, 7.30, Village Hall or as stated.

25 Mar: Andrew Sargent, *The History of the River Thames*.

13 May: Annual General Meeting followed by Malcolm Lock, *A Victorian of Sutton Courtenay Remembers: The life of Henry Lock 1875-1963*. All Saints Church.

Radley History Club

Meets Mondays, 7 for 7.30, Radley Primary School Hall.

10 Mar: Tony Hadland, *William Gill, spy and explorer*.

7 Apr: Mary Russell, *Women Travellers: "The blessings of a good thick skirt"*.

12 May: Richard Smith, *Oxford Eccentricity*.

9 Jun: Shaun Morley, *Friendly Societies*.

The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society

Meets Fridays, 8pm, Wallingford Town Hall

26 March (Wednesday)

A SPECIAL PUBLIC LECTURE (St Mary's Church, 8pm)

Richard Buckley: *The Search for Richard III - the King under the Car Park*

11 April: Dr John Smith, *The Roman Army Fact and Fiction*

9 May: Steve Head, *A potted history of gardening*

13 June: Tony Hadland: *Catholic Recusancy in Oxfordshire*

12 September: Ben Ford: *Winchester - A City in the Making*

The Marcham Society

Meets Tuesdays, 7.45 pm at Marcham Church

11 March: David Buckle, *Turbulent Times in the Car Industry: the Cowley works*.

8 April: Rosi Rollings. *How to support Bees in your Garden*

13 May: Liz Woolley, *Leisure and Entertainment in Victorian & Edwardian Oxford*.

10 June: *Evening walk in Oxford led by Liz Woolley*

9 Sept: Members' Evening

Abingdon Museum Friends

Meet Thursdays 7.30 pm, St Helen's Church Centre, West St Helen Street.

6 Mar: Wendy Morrison, *Before the Romans: Abingdon & The Upper Thames Valley in the Iron Age*.

3 Apr: AGM and Jane Bowen, *Abingdon Museum*

AAHS Membership Secretary Report

Membership stands at 77 after the January Lecture. This mainly consists of previous members who have renewed their subscriptions but also includes some new members. Comparable figures for 2012 were 83. Overall there has been a very small decline in numbers but we are maintaining a consistently good level of membership. Attendance at Lectures is high and always includes several non-members.

Penny Cookson

Membership Secretary

"Washday? Just forget it!"*

Members with long memories will recall the laundry equipment of their childhood, coppers, free-standing mangles, Acme wringers, and those mysterious little bags of Reckitts Blue which now form part of our social history.

But how did the women of the 17th century launder their petticoats and partlets without the products of Unilever to lighten their day? For twin tub substitute bucking tub. An insight can be found from an entry in the Christ's Hospital Accounts of 1637 when Goody Tarrant was given 2/6d to buy a bucking tub.

Bucking was known from late medieval times. Dirty linen and underclothes were layered in the wooden tub with wood ash and hot water, a combination which produces lye, an early form of bleach. Sometimes urine would be added as the bleaching agent! The clothes were then beaten by a long square-ended paddle called a battledore. After numerous rinses the clothes would be laid out on the grass or hung over convenient bushes to dry. Quite a physical process without piped water. The yeomen's wives of Burford probably paid a poor woman like Goody Tarrant to carry out this backbreaking work.

* The advertising slogan that launched the automated Hoover Keymatic washing machine in 1961.

Jackie Smith

(And there's a lot more on bucking on <http://www.oldandinteresting.com/lye-bucking.aspx> - Ed.)

Heritage

The THROAT project

On 14 December, the Mayor officially opened the Heart of Abingdon heritage trail around the St Helen's quarter of the town. This was not an AAAHS project: it was funded jointly by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council and the Choose Abingdon Partnership. Ann Berkeley was project manager. But the project team was made up, with very few exceptions, of AAAHS members.

The trail follows a short circular route starting in East St Helen Street, to St Helen's church, the Almshouses, past the Thames and Ock river frontage via Margaret Brown Gardens to finish in West St Helen Street. The walk includes five information boards, printed leaflets and an audio tour which can be downloaded on to a tablet or telephone.

If you haven't yet taken the walk, why not do so? You may be surprised at how much there is to know!



Ann Berkeley and the Mayor, Cllr Bowring, at the opening of the new Heritage Trail

Obituaries

Leslie Argyle

Members will have been saddened by the death on 6 January of Lesley Argyle. He had long worked as a baker and was a steward at the Ock Street Chapel and then at Trinity Church, but his major contribution to the public life of Abingdon was in his involvement with the great Ock Street tradition of morris dancing.

The following obituary was written by a fellow member of the Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers, whom we thank for permission to reprint it.

Leslie Argyle (Les to all his friends in the Morris) started dancing with Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers in 1951. During the following 60 years he was a stalwart of Abingdon morris dancing and was Mayor of Ock Street from 1980 to 1995. Les was also a member of Oxford City Morris Men from the 1950s up to the 1970s.

He choreographed two new dances for the Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers: Buttercup Joe (in honour of the memory of Johnny Grimsdale) and, in 2006 to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Abingdon's Town Char-

ter, Queen Mary's Favour. In 2007, he celebrated his 80th birthday, and the Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers commemorated this with a new dance in his honour – How d'you Do Sir.

He re-founded The Abingdon Mummers, who have performed their traditional Mummers Play every Christmas since the 1970s. Les appeared in every play up to 2009

Dave Spiers

Bill Burton

We were sorry to learn that long term AAAHS member Bill Burton passed away last September after a short illness. Bill was a former enthusiastic member of the AAAHS digging team and was also an active member of several other archaeological and historical societies, notably the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society and the Oxford University Archaeological Society.

Sally Ainslie

Editor's Notes

Thanks to all members for their contributions and feedback – all gratefully received. The Newsletter is published in March and September each year. Any suggestions for outings, speakers or newsletter items are most welcome.

Articles should be limited to about a thousand words. They may be edited for content, but views and opinions in published articles are those of the contributors rather than the society itself.

The Newsletter is sent to members at the time of publication and posted on the website after six months. Copy deadline for the September issue is end-July 2014.

Manfred Brod

An Adventure Underground

During August last year the message reached me via email. Would I like to walk (perhaps crawl?) along a wet, dark and damp tunnel beneath some of Abingdon's most important buildings and the pavement of Stert Street? Why do it? Would not staying at home reading the Archaeological Times be a more sensible thing to do for an



Did I hear — rats?

81 year-old whose limbs are starting to creak? But I thought it through and remembered you're only old once, so give it a go.

My instructions were to report to the Crown & Thistle pub wearing my high viz-jacket over my painting clothes and a decent pair of wellies. Then followed a terrifying health & safety briefing. I reckoned it best not to listen, but I could not prevent hearing the words rats, injury, drowning (surely not) and foul air. But I decided to be brave and felt more confident once I could persuade my hard hat to stay on my head. I was then directed to the smallest manhole I have ever seen where a ladder was waiting for me and my archaeologist companions to descend.

My first job was to hand down my bag with flash-gun and

cameras to those who had gone ahead and with heart in mouth and suppressing the thought A Giant Leap for Mankind I placed my wellies in the stream flowing below; I had survived the first 60 seconds.

I knew my expert companions were there to find further clues to the history of the culverted stream by examining the walls, base and the many drains entering from each side. So what was this layman going to do apart from getting in the way? Equipped with two semi-professional cameras and a powerful flash gun, I wanted to return with some useful photographs and I also very much wanted to know if there was still evidence of the bridges that enabled medieval residents to cross the open stream. We split two ways - two went south towards the Thames and I and archaeologist Roger Ainslie proceeded north. Oh, I thought, it's all lit up, that's great, but following a few stumbling steps we found ourselves in the blackest of darkness pierced only by my feeble torch.

As soon as I started walking I got into trouble. The roof was so low that bending down all I could see was the visor of my hard-hat and the water – too soon to turn back. Additionally I started stumbling quite badly as the water,



My expert companion



Light at the end?

though shallow, was flowing over a jumble of ankle-breaking rock slabs of all shapes and sizes randomly placed. Fiercely suppressing thoughts of returning to the real world I supported myself by holding onto the mossy wall to keep my balance. Soon the roof was higher and I could stand upright but maintaining balance was still difficult - I feared dropping the camera and flash into the water. I saw that Roger was calmly making written observations and I was left to myself to decide what to photograph, so I chose to record the base ("shelf") of the three-metre wide tunnel, the varied construction of the roof and the various entry points for water. I drunkenly walked a distance of 73 metres until I encountered a severe drop in roof height and could proceed no further although Roger went on – he managed to get through the low tunnel under St Nicolas' church and a little way up Stert Street while I less than bravely started on a lonely staggering walk back to my favourite manhole. I had photographed Roger at work, the culvert's shelf and several of the strange inlets on the west side. That was enough for posterity, surely.

The return journey found this elderly man getting rather tired. I pulled myself up the ladder and pushed hard to

get through the manhole but finding I could not reach escape velocity two muscular workman who happened to be near extended welcoming arms to extract me; I was glad to be in the sunshine once again and staggered home (nearby) for a coffee or two and a bath.

The experts have now provided their illuminating technical report, which I shall value, for the Stert Stream has always been of great interest to me. By the way, I never used my second camera - I did think of it at the time but could not find it in the bag and my torch was fading.

I had been accompanied into this journey into the unknown by Sally and Roger Ainslie and buildings historian David Clark – their reports and sketch plans will, I know, provide a lasting and most useful contribution to our knowledge of one of Abingdon's most precious arte-



My favourite manhole

facts. It was an unforgettable experience and a great chance to take an unusual set of photographs (my companions took many more.) As for the medieval abutments – a shame I saw none.

Michael Harrison

AAAHS Membership form

Membership type (please tick)	Individual	£12
	Family	£18
	Senior/unwaged/student	£8.50
	Distant	£4
Full name & address		
Telephone no(s)		
E mail address		
Newsletter. Please tick preferred option(s) <input type="checkbox"/> e mail <input type="checkbox"/> paper copy		

Please send completed form with cheque payable to AAAHS to
Membership Sec, AAAHS, 136 Marlborough Road, Oxford, OX1 4LS
or bring form with cheque/cash to any lecture meeting. Thank you

AAAHS OUTINGS 2014

BOOKING FORM

Name	_____
Address	_____

Telephone	_____
Email	_____

EVENT	Number of people	Total
The Canal at Abingdon Tuesday 3rd June 7.00pm	_____ at £4 each	
Oxford's Jewish Quarter Tuesday 24th June 7.00pm	_____ at £4 each	
JET at Culham Wednesday 16th July 6.30pm	_____ at £4 each	

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

Please return form by **6th May**. Numbers are limited on some outings

Total Enclosed

To:
Elizabeth Drury
33 East Saint Helen Street
Abingdon
Oxon
OX14 5EE

Tel. (01235) 553636

eliz.drury@ntlworld.com

Thank you.