



Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2015

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Coming attractions—not to be missed !

AAHS OUTINGS 2015

Please join us for our summer evening outings

Northcourt Walk Tuesday 12th May 6.00pm



Led by Judy White this is an opportunity to discover the buildings and history of the old hamlet of Northcourt. Followed if wished by a meal in Northcourt's local pub, The Spread Eagle.

Please meet outside Christ Church, Northcourt (OX14 1PL.)

Discover Appleton Wednesday 10th June 7.00pm

A walk and drive round Appleton with Eaton - describing the parish history up to the 20th century with John Evans of the AwE History Group.

Meeting place to be confirmed nearer the time.



Photo Motacilla (Wikimedia Commons)

Tour of Oriel College Oxford Wednesday 15th July 7.00pm



Photo Godot-13 (Wikimedia Commons)

Oriel is one of Oxford's oldest colleges, approaching its septcentenary in 2026. The tour will focus as much on history as on architecture and the current life of the college. Our guide is our Chairman, Bob Evans.

Meet at the Lodge OX1 4EW.

If you would like to join us please fill in the form on [Page 22](#) to arrive by 1st May. Numbers are limited on some outings.

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

Tel 01235 553636
eliz.drury@ntlworld.com

Thank you



LECTURE MEETINGS SPRING 2015

Meetings at the Northcourt Centre, Northcourt Road, 7.45 pm

19 March: Maureen Mellor, 'Pots and Food: do medieval pottery studies add to the enjoyment of eating and drinking?'



Medieval pottery vessels are intimately linked with foodstuffs and drink. In a period of agrarian change and the introduction of horticulture, pottery styles also change, but was the potter adapting his styles directly, or was he responding to the tastes of household and urban markets? Local archaeological evidence can give an insight into changes in food processing, while English and European documentary and art-historical sources help to set eating and drinking in wider context.

This lecture will lift the lid ajar!

Maureen Mellor has over 30 years experience working with the products of English and European medieval clay industries in field archaeology and in museums. She is a member of the Medieval Diet Group and regularly contributes papers to their meetings. Maureen is currently writing an overview on 'commerce and industry' for *The Oxford Handbook of Late Medieval Archaeology in Britain* and is an active member of the court of The Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars.

16 April: David Beasley. 'The history of Howbery Park and its connection with Jethro Tull'



The presentation will consist of about 100 old photographs, maps and copies of paintings.

David Beasley describes himself as a 73 year old boy, who has retired from HR Wallingford at Howbery Park after 40 years service. He started collecting old photographs and postcards of Wallingford and the surrounding villages over 50 years ago; he has a collection of over 20,000 photographs and has published seven local history books. He started doing slide show presentation in about 1970 and progressed to digital displays. So far he has presented over 300 shows, 7 photographic exhibitions as well as being on Radio Oxford a number of times.

21 May: The Lambrick Lecture

Professor John Blair: 'Early Abingdon in Context: Monasticism, Wealth and Urban Growth in Late Anglo-Saxon England'



The monastic origins of Abingdon are well-known but can be better understood in wider contexts, both of the monastic boom of the decades around 700 and of the reform from the 940s. This lecture will present some completely new evidence for understanding the layout of the monastery, town and surrounding landscape.

John Blair is at Queen's College, Oxford. His main interests are in the settlement, landscape and society of Anglo-Saxon England, especially the built landscape, with an emphasis on archaeological evidence. He is the author of *Anglo-Saxon*



Oxfordshire (1994) and *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005). He gave the Ford Lectures in British History for 2013 under the title 'Building the Anglo-Saxon Landscape'. He is involved in numerous archaeological projects in the Upper Thames region, including a long-running research project at Bampton.

18 June

Members' Evening. An evening highlighting members' interests and recent research. Details to be confirmed.

The 2015 AGM will be on 17 September, speaker to be confirmed, but you will have received the next issue of the Newsletter by then!

What are the Lambrick Lectures?

Gabrielle Lambrick was a highly respected medieval historian who died in 1968. Much of her work was on Abingdon Abbey. Most notably, she and CF Slade edited *Two Cartularies of Abingdon Abbey*, published in two volumes by the Oxford Historical Society in 1990-2. These are collections of legal and internal documents of the abbey. She contributed to a set of papers on 'The Early History of Abingdon, Berkshire, and its Abbey' in the journal *Medieval History*, Vol XII, 1968. She wrote a booklet for the Friends of Abingdon in 1966 on 'Business affairs at Abingdon Abbey in medieval times' describing the obedientiary system of administration, and was the author of numerous other papers in the academic journals.

She was the mother of the archaeologist George Lambrick who is an honorary vice-president of our Society, and it is George who sponsors the annual Lambrick lectures in her memory.

The AAAHS's participation in the CBA 2015 Archaeology Festival

As part of the Festival (on which see <http://www.archaeologyfestival.org.uk/>) the AAAHS is planning a special event at the Ashmolean on Saturday 18 July from 10 am to 4 pm. The current working title is 'A Monument Celebration: a case study of Abingdon and its prehistoric earthworks'. There will be eminent speakers and associated displays. Details will be announced later, but **put the date in your diary now!**



Report from the Chair



In the last *Newsletter* this column was still written by Roger Thomas, who demitted in the autumn after serving a six-year term as chairman. We owe Roger a big debt of gratitude. As a prominent member of the archaeological profession, with special responsibility for urban sites, he has sustained the Society's close involvement in all aspects of the past of the Abingdon area. Besides that, he has presided over the affairs of the AAAHS with wisdom, diligence and much good humour. Happily, Roger will still be around to provide advice and guidance, especially on planning issues (cf below).

After the AGM the committee asked me to take over from Roger. An undeserved honour, I thought, especially since I only joined the Society quite recently, on retirement. Colleagues said that, after my long career as a university historian, latterly with many administrative duties in the faculty, I ought to be able to handle a meeting. Others must be the best judges of that! I'm still finding my feet and learning about the Society's manifold pursuits. They are far more extensive than many people realize. So please excuse me for laying out briefly below what is very familiar to some among you.

Firstly there are the monthly speaker meetings, the staple of any organization like our own: well supported on the whole, although some lecturers deserve larger audiences. The December social, alias Edible Evening, seems to have gone exceptionally well, thanks both to our visiting performers, culinary and musical, and to all those members who contributed nobly in preparing the fare and decorating our normally rather Spartan venue. We're just beginning to prepare next year's programme and suggestions are, as always, most welcome. We aim for a balance between broadly archaeological and historical talks, though of course there is frequently an overlap between the two, as will be the case at this year's keynote event, John Blair's Lambrick lecture in May.

As stalwarts are well aware, the AAAHS started as an archaeological enterprise, and that remains fundamental to its purpose. Presently we have a brief lull as findings from the latest digs at Bowyer Road and Daisy Bank are worked up and storage is found for artefacts collected during earlier investigations. A modest post-medieval excavation on my own doorstep in Sunningwell is just starting: see elsewhere in this *Newsletter*. And plans are afoot for a study day and workshop in Oxford to highlight the significance of recent discoveries by the AAAHS digging team, especially as archaeological underpinning to Abingdon's claims for unique continuity of urban settlement.

On the historical side, the Society has enhanced its role as a forum and resource for local studies. A group under the leadership of Manfred Brod has continued to hold regular meetings for informal discussion of the past of Abingdon and area. It should be stressed that all members are welcome at these meetings, whose arrangements were recently taken over by John Foreman. Those activities now feed into a notable internet presence for the AAAHS. We have a new website of our own – please consult it and register so that you can use it interactively. We are building up a gallery of pictures, reports, trails, etc, on it, as well as communicating current practical information. At the same time the Society has provided for Abingdon's municipal website a superb history section, with fascinating stories of individuals and buildings associated with the town.

Finally, the AAAHS has an obvious concern about planning proposals in and around Abingdon. Along with others of like mind, we seek to safeguard the character and antiquities of the town, and we have among our membership special expertise in relation to possible archaeological sites and old buildings. Evidently we must concentrate on a small number of really important planning issues, and try to follow these through beyond the initial development stage. At the moment, following earlier representations by Roger Thomas, we are still pressing the Vale of the White Horse council over excavations in the prime locations of Abbey House and the Old Gaol that were carried out years ago, but where the requirement to publish findings has yet to be honoured.



Altogether we are, I feel, a thriving organization with a distinctive set of interconnected aims, and with much skill and enterprise in our ranks. However, we depend entirely on a supportive and committed membership. So please participate in our activities as much as you possibly can, and encourage others to join us. There is, as can be seen, a great deal to be done.

Bob Evans

We have sadly to report the death on 25 February of Professor Sheppard Frere, an Honorary Vice-President of our Society. Until his retirement in 1983, he was Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire at Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls, and was eminent for his excavations and his publications on the history of Roman Britain. We hope to publish an obituary in our next issue.

Treasurer's Report

There have been a couple of relatively large payments so far this year. The largest has been a one-off payment for the design and setting up of the new website (£500) and a radio carbon dating for the Bowyer Road dig (£350). The printing costs, mainly the Autumn newsletter, are currently at £224, a figure which the Committee hopes to reduce by persuading members to accept email copies of the newsletter in preference to hard copy. The speakers' expenditure is £200 with the hire of the Northcourt Hall at £172 to date. Total expenditure has been £1732. Petty cash is currently showing a profit of around £15 on the start of the year.

An expected expenditure of several hundred pounds, possibly exceeding £1000, is expected for the cost of repairs to the Society's portacabin roof. This work is expected to start in early March.

Income is fairly healthy with £560 from subs and £77 from book sales. With £18 income from the sale of Mienneke Cox's book, this leaves us about £10 short of break even in total on this project. Total income to date is £1326.

Visitors are averaging out at 5 per meeting (a slight decrease on this time last year) but visitor income is £60 and tea donations has netted £10.

Andrew Steele - Treasurer

Principal Income/ Expenditure Analysis as of 25/01/15	2014/15 ytd (£)
Income re-current	
Subs	560
Visitors	60
Tea / coffee	10
Income from book sales	95
Bank inter-	23
Expenditure recurrent	
Hire of halls	172
Speakers	200
Admin	83
Admin	224

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 next issue is end-July 2015.

Manfred Brod



Digging

The New Year has got off to a shaky start. Our finds and paper archives are stored in a Portacabin at Manor Farm in Marcham, thanks to the kindness of Will Cumber and his family. The Portacabin was bought second-hand some twelve or fifteen years ago, and its roof has been a cause for concern since last summer with serious leaks develop-



The Portacabin, with a tarpaulin protecting its roof

ing. There was a series of delays in getting remedial work done, and this is still not complete at the time of writing. So we are now confronted with plastic finds boxes full of water and cardboard boxes sagging on the shelves. Fortunately finds labels are intact so some contexts can be re-boxed and also paper material storage has survived in a less wet area. Mould needs to be controlled, internal panels and door may need replacing. We can't afford a new Portacabin, and it has been decided to re-roof, dehumidify, tidy and reoccupy the current unit.

In addition, an urgent need arose to move the Henderson Collection away from "temporary" storage which had begun to look sadly permanent - thanks, Roger and Sally Ainslie, we do realise you needed your garage back, and we really shouldn't have left this collection unexamined for so long.

Ron Henderson was an early and enthusiastic member of the AAHHS who directed a number of excavations. He died in 2010 and his family passed his papers and finds into the Society's keeping. The Henderson collection contains finds from local sites among which is Corporation Farm, a key site near the end of the Lower Drayton Cursus. As far as I understand no evidence of a cursus terminal near the sewage works was identified among multi-period features examined in advance of gravel extraction. Certainly Neolithic and Bronze Age finds attest to much activity around what may have been an open end to the cursus. I recovered an unaccompanied crouch burial from here as part of rescue work in advance of further digging in the 1980s. We are keen to look at the contents of this collection which should have some very interesting lithics and maybe prehistoric pottery some of which may be contemporary with the cursus use.

Currently only limited fieldwork is being undertaken within the Society, with the major issues of publication needing attention. The focus is on identifying medieval sherds from the Bowyer Road excavation. No funds are available for specialist examination, and much needs to be researched and written up in-house which can be rather time consuming. All but two of the medieval groups are undecorated body sherds and require only a rapid look at

the fabric types to confirm a likely medieval product. I have used Maureen Mellor's bible* as a guide and attempted to place sherds into her suggested type series. It looks as if we have South Oxfordshire, Brill and Abingdon fabrics in equal proportion. Attention is now drawn to looking at a far larger group of Roman sherds. I think we have a Roman structure in this garden judging by the amount and size of some sherds along with data from previous excavation work.

Jeff Wallis
Excavations Secretary



Finds storage, showing water damage

*Maureen Mellor and M R Cowell, 'A synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and post-Medieval pottery in the Oxford region', *Oxoniensia* LIX (1994) pp.18-217



Shrieve's Cottage Dig in Sunningwell



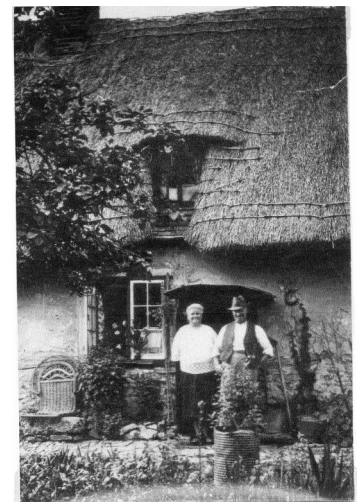
Shrieve's Cottage, Sunningwell, in 1912

A few years ago the trustees of Sunningwell Primary School acquired a piece of land next to the school to manage as a nature reserve. We call it the Spinney. It was neglected and overgrown, but in the middle of it were the remains of an old building, remembered in the village by the name of Shrieve's (or Cobbler's) Cottage. This house is still documented in the 1930s: we have pictures of it at that time, and of the last occupants. It's thatched and looks venerable. By then it was divided into two, and let to people of modest means; but local tradition holds that it dated back to Tudor times, and associates it with a family called Shrieve once well-to-do and prominent in Sunningwell.

We've decided to try to excavate the site of Shrieve's Cottage, with the support of the local community and some expert guidance from members of the AAHS. The opportunity is an unusual one: it's rare to be able to dig up old cottages, since most are still lived in, and are anyway privately owned. Shrieve's lies slightly outside the area of historic village settlement, and must have become increasingly difficult of access in the age of modern transport. Even so, it's curious that it was demolished so recently. There should be written sources which cast light on that, and on other aspects of the cottage's story: we plan to find out as much as we can from the documentary record too, in parallel with the excavation.

We've no idea as I write this how long the job will take; still less whether we shall discover anything exciting or spectacular. The main thing is to proceed methodically, keep a full record, and work as a team. The objective, besides revealing some typical evidence of village life in the past, is to create a space for the schoolchildren to use in the future, perhaps covered over as a kind of outdoor classroom. That will need funding, and lies quite a way off at present. If you would like more information about the project, please look out for updates on the AAHS website or contact either Bob Evans (robert.evans@history.ox.ac.uk) or Anita Leech (head.3242@sunningwell.oxon.sch.uk).

Bob Evans



The last occupants of Shrieve's cottage, c 1939 (photo by kind permission of Roger Wiggins, Geoff Cross and Shirley Minns)

Excavation at Kiln Copse

For a number of years now the society has been excavating at Kiln Copse at Manor Farm, Marcham. The kiln of its name is a brick kiln which we know had been making brick, tile and land drains from at least the mid eighteenth century until around 1855. Towards the end of 2013 I made the decision that we were not going to find any remains of the kiln itself, even though we had found plenty of evidence of its existence. We would quickly finish the trench we were excavating (trench 4) to confirm that it was similar to the others that we had already finished, and start to think about writing the report.

However, it soon became evident that whatever we were looking at, it was not like all the other trenches. It was too late in the year to do much more so we shut it down for the winter, intending to finish it off quickly in the spring of



2014. Of course, that proved not to be the case. It was clear as soon as we started working on it that we were excavating a pit which had been filled with rubble consisting of broken brick, tiles and to a lesser extent land drains, together with a scattering of limestone (the local bedrock). We speculated that it could have been a pit related to the kiln, possibly for



“It was not like all the other trenches”

Photo: John Gibbs

tempering the clay before moulding. As the summer went on the pit continued to go down, finally bottoming out at 1.2 metres. It was probably too deep, therefore, to be part of the workings of the kiln. The next thing to be done was to try and establish the extent and profile of the pit so we put in a number of small test pits to see where the rubble infill ended. We established one edge to the pit, which now appears to be quite extensive.

This brought us up to November (2014) and the weather was getting too wet to carry on so we closed the trench down for the winter. As soon as the weather improves we will start to put in slots to try and establish the extent and general shape and profile of the pit. It is not possible at this stage to say what the pit might have been but I have speculated that it may have been created by clay extraction. Once again, I am hoping that this year we will be able to finish excavating so that we can finally finish our work at Kiln Copse and write its report. But this is archaeology and there is always the unex-

pected so who knows what surprises are in store for us this year.

We are always looking for enthusiastic diggers to join our team. We work on Sundays from about 10:00 till 4:00 and if you would like to join us please email me at: john.gibbs@vodafoneemail.co.uk.

John Gibbs

Local History

Local History Group

It's the end of February, and our meeting last October is a bit of a distant memory. Judy White was the main speaker, describing the development of Benedictine monasticism and the place of Abingdon Abbey in this. And Manfred Brod had stumbled on a dramatic event involving Abingdon's great patron, Sir John Mason, and his poetical friend Sir Thomas Wyatt.

But to come to the Local History Group meeting on 24th February, 2015

Twelve people attended and I think we all had a good evening. Bob Frampton spoke about his latest book on an un-researched part of Abingdon's past. This was horse racing and the society that went with it. The earliest local record he has found was for racing on Clifton Heath with horse racing starting on Abingdon Common in 1810. The course was to the south of the Marcham Road opposite the Shippon Road junction. These were big social occasions with dinners and dances in Abingdon with the races sponsored and supported by the local land owners and gentry. They went on till around 1875 when cheap accessible rail travel meant access to courses with better facilities made a more attractive option. The book is soon to go to the printers, so keep your eyes open.

We then had a refreshment break followed by a short open question and answer session. There is usually at least one person round the table who can help.

We finished with the showing of two films.

The first was from 1953 and showed the inauguration of Mayor Percy Holmes and various other members of the corpora-

**YOUR SOCIETY ...**

... does a lot of things.

If you are content just to come to a lecture each month, that's fine.

But why not join in other projects and activities?

You could dig a trench, or, if that seems too energetic, help with the post-excavation analysis and writing up.

You could do some local history—find your way round the archives, or interrogate your grandparents. How about throwing new light on eminent people of Abingdon's past or on the town's historic buildings for the ABP website?

Or you could stand for the committee, which is always short of people to do the necessary administration.

Or if all that seems too ambitious, you could still help with the chores—somebody has to produce the tea and coffee after the meetings.

Contact any committee member, or email info@aaahs.org.uk

tion. Then there was a fete at Caldecott House with displays of dancing and calisthenics. This was followed by bun throwing and an ox-roast in the Square. A parade followed and then a fete at Rye Farm meadows with a children's fancy dress competition. One of our members was able to identify some of the competitors, now of course elderly.

The second was mostly from 1956 when the Queen visited and opened the restored County Hall. Lots of the great and the good of Abingdon of the time. Cut to the opening of the new-built precinct. Then a film of bun throwing from County Hall. A number of obviously foreign mayors were present, probably visiting from the 'twin towns', seemingly mystified by this strange piece of municipal ceremonial.

There is so much to see in these old films; the faces and businesses and simple entertainment. Abingdon looked like a happy place.

Our next meeting for the LHG is on the 26th of May. Please check the web page for further news.

John Foreman
Local History Group Coordinator

The Abingdon Buildings and People Website Group

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

When articles currently in the editing pipeline are uploaded, we will have reached our initial target of 100 subjects. About a quarter of these are there in both the standard short format and in a long, more academic and fully referenced, version. We will then move into a period where the emphasis will be on review and general updating.

But we are still looking for volunteers to join the group. You can write for us, or join in editing and administrative tasks, or (ideally) both. Contact me on secretary@aaahs.org.uk or any member of the group.

Manfred Brod



Recently arrived on the website:
Willoughby Bertie, fourth Earl of Abingdon (seated), after J F Rigaud
(From New York Public Libraries, digitally enhanced)



The new website

Joomla!

One thing you can say about being on the AAAHS Committee is that it is likely to provide a learning experience. Or two or three.

There were three of us who made up the sub-committee to revamp the clunky old website that dated from the 1990s, the early days of the World-Wide Web, and possibly even before Google. Andrew Steele, John Foreman, and I had the daunting task of sitting down with the experts who were using words we scarcely understood, and trying to ensure that what we would eventually get would come reasonably close to what we wanted. I think we succeeded in that, with the willing cooperation of the expert we finally selected, Mark Holland of Abingdon Technologies. But it's when you find yourself for the first time alone with the website, and having to put in the content you want in the right format and in the right place and with the potential to be updated as needed, that's the moment of truth. The three of us are all at about the same level of knowledge, have the same level of permission to meddle, and are duly meddling. There's been a lot of adrenaline flowing, but – frankly touching wood – nothing too desperate has yet happened.

Modern websites are kept working by what are called content management systems, or CMS for short. The old one didn't have this, which was why it was so difficult to keep updated. There are several CMS's, with variously barbarous names. Mark's preference was for Joomla! (note the exclamation mark, I think it must be very important and if you leave it out the website will probably fall over and vanish). Joomla! is said to be simple and quick to set up, and it was that, no doubt, that allowed Mark to do the necessary within our very restricted budget. But for the user, that is us, the learning curve is acknowledged as steep. Well, we seem to be managing

Of course, there were and still are glitches. Some material from the old website failed to come across; a lot of pages still appear under the wrong menu bars. These are gradually being identified and corrected. The members' registration has been a nagging pain. In principle, I get an email each time, and, once I am satisfied the person

registering has paid his or her subscription, I can simply press a button and admit them. In a few cases, the email never came, and registration has had to wait until the member complained or until I thought to get into the works and check for tell-tale red blobs. And somehow a couple of apparently Polish punters have managed to get

The Causeway, 1909

You are here: Home

The Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

The AAHIS was founded in 1968, and since then it has been the principal meeting point for all who have an interest in the past of Abingdon and its region.

The society organises monthly lectures by acknowledged authorities on topics related to history and archaeology and to those of Abingdon in particular. There is also, during each summer, a programme of visits to sites of particular significance. Members receive a bi-annual newsletter for which they are encouraged to write.

The society encourages its members to pursue their own research interests, either independently or within its special interest groups, and supports these financially so far as its means allow. Its archaeological group, the longest established, has carried out numerous excavations in and about Abingdon; many of these have been published while others are currently being prepared for publication. The local history group was established in 2000 and since then has taken a number of initiatives, notably including the Ock Street Heritage project of 2006-8 and the 'Abingdon Buildings and People' history website. The society provides guides and lecturers, and cooperates with other local organisations on projects of civic importance.

If you want to join the AAHIS, there's a membership form on this website, or you can contact any of the committee members.

Next Talk:
Thursday, 19 February, 7.45 pm, at the Northcourt Centre, Northcourt Road, Abingdon: [MAP](#)

Mark Cornwall: 'Traitors and Treason in the Great War'

See the complete lecture programme and additional information for this talk [HERE](#)

This should be familiar to everyone by now

themselves on the registered list without any formality and had to be blocked. Fortunately, I can put in red blobs as well as clear them.

How successful is the website? Good question, but what's the criterion? We have a modern professional-looking



site. You may or may not like its visual appearance (we're pretty amateurish at graphic design, as well as at website development) but it is visually distinct from the many other local websites that often have a depressing sameness about them. It shows the AAHS as a serious organisation, provides the information on the Society and its activities that members and interested non-members need, and has a large archive to hold Society publications and reports. Andrew is working on the Society's photograph collection, which is beginning to go into the Gallery section. To that extent, the objective has been attained.

It's not an advertising website, so the number of hits is not overwhelmingly important.

Why aren't more people using the forum?

Not useful? Too complicated??

up quite high on the list when you google the subject. This is a good example of the way the site is putting our information into the public domain.

There are still, of course, problems. A major concern is the Members' Area. This is the area for which you have to register and be approved as a member in good standing, and it gives access to the most recent newsletter, to information that must be restricted to members, and to the forum where it was hoped members would discuss matters of mutual interest. This section is not proving a success. To date, only seventeen members have registered (a few, for various reasons, have registered more than once under different names), and some who have registered have never logged in. Use of the forum has been even more limited, and so far no real discussion has ever developed. It's still early days, but this is something we obviously have to keep under observation. So if you think this section of the website has value, do please register (contact me if you have any difficulty) and do write something in the forum.

Manfred Brod

Dates for Your Diary

Abingdon Museum Friends

St Helen's Church Centre, 7 for 7.30 pm

2 April: AGM, plus Sally Stradling, *Conservation in the Vale of White Horse*

Marcham Soc

All Saints' Church, 7.45 pm

14 April: Peter Barker, *The Otmoor Year*

12 May: Pam Manix, *Oxford's remarkable medieval Jewish Quarter*

8 Sept: AGM

Radley History Club

Radley CE Primary School, 7 for 7.30 pm

13 April: Jessica Feinstein, *Building your family tree: pleasures and pitfalls*

11 May: Jenny Lee, *Gone for a soldier: men of Radley who died serving king and country 1914-1918*

8 June: Richard O Smith, *Oxford eccentricity: how madly and badly the Oxford University have behaved over the last 900 years*

Sutton Courtenay Local History Society

Village Hall, 7.30 pm

19 May: AGM and Richard Smith, *Eccentric Oxford: A History of Mischief and Mayhem*

Wallingford Hist and Arch Soc

Wallingford Town Hall, 7.45 for 8.00 pm

10 April: John Smith, *Roman Oxfordshire*

18 May: Richard O. Smith, *Eccentric Oxford: a History of Mischief & Mayhem*.

12 June: Helena Hamerow, *The Origins of Wessex: re-shaping identities in the Upper Thames Valley, 5th-7th centuries*



Meeting Report

The Christmas Social, 2014

The Society's 2014 Christmas Social exceeded all one's expectations and must surely rank as the best ever! What more could one ask than fine music and interesting food, interspersed with historical information?

Entitled 'An Evening fit for an Earl', the occasion was dedicated to Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon, the eccentric but talented 18th century politician and musician. The Northcourt Hall was transformed for the occasion; long trestle tables in a U shape, laden with food, filled the centre of the room. Another table under the stage held soft drinks and fragrantly steaming mulled wine. Swags of ivy and subdued lighting created a festive atmosphere.

In one corner there was a trio of musicians, the



The Earl of Abingdon's Consort provided the music, including some of the earl's own compositions



Tables laden with eighteenth-century dainties!

Earl of Abingdon Consort, consisting of two flutes and a harpsichord. The earl was an accomplished flute player and he also helped to put on concerts with his friends and fellow musicians J C Bach and C F Abel. Our evening's entertainment started with a delightful recital including two Trio Sonatas by Bach and Abel sandwiched between a selection of Lord Abingdon's charming country dance tunes, all interspersed with information about the Earl's colourful life.

After the music, the food! This was organised by Marjory Szurko, the librarian of Oriel College, who has become something of an expert on historic cuisine. She attended our November meeting and invited members to make up recipes for the Christmas Social from a selection which she had brought along. Thus the tables were covered with bis-

cuits, pies, tarts and sweetmeats, plus delicious rustic bread with cheese and quince jelly, two splendid cakes, whipped cream and other delicacies which Marjory herself had produced.

As an introduction to the food, Marjory explained how her interest in historic recipes had started with the chance discovery of old recipe books, and how the present feast had drawn on recipes from the Earl of Abingdon's chef, Bernard Clermont. Then, time to tuck in and try as many treats as possible,

washed down with

mulled wine and enlivened by good conversations with friends old and new.

Commiserations to those members who missed such a special treat, and congratulations to the Committee for organising such a splendid evening.

Judy White



Marjory Szurko with her *pièce de résistance*



Book Reviews

Aspects of Abingdon's Past, Volume 7: Four talks given in St Nicholas' Church in September 2014. Edited by Julia Bishop, Published by St Nicholas' Church, Price £5.00

This little volume brings together four pieces of scholarship by leading members of Abingdon's historical community.

Manfred Brod writes about *St Edmund of Abingdon – a New Look*. St Edmund is one of Abingdon's most famous sons, born in about 1175, possibly in West St Helen's Street. He studied and then taught at Oxford and Paris, before becoming Treasurer of Salisbury Cathedral and then (in 1231) Archbishop of Canterbury. He died in 1240 in France en route to a meeting with the Pope. His body was brought to Pontigny Abbey, and a series of miracles reputedly occurred, as a consequence of which he was canonised – unusually fast – in 1246.

These are the bare facts about his life. Beyond that you will normally read that he was a retiring and ascetic scholar, devoted to the poor, and uneasy with the worldly duties of an archbishop; and that his final journey to France was a form of self-imposed exile.

Brod brings us breezily back to reality, demonstrating that this is myth created by the contemporary chronicler Eustace of Faversham, and by the Cistercian community at Pontigny who stood to gain from their Abbey becoming a place of pilgrimage. The reality, he argues, is that he was a perfectly plausible and worldly archbishop who progressed through the patronage of Stephen Langton (possibly) and his younger brother Simon Langton (certainly). As for asceticism, this was someone who took the deer of his adversary, des Roches, to stock his own park. Not really a saint, but certainly a local boy who made good.

Jackie Smith, gives us *An introduction to Social Housing in Abingdon*; an account grounded in hard fact as would be expected of the town's archivist. She concentrates on the period between 1870 and 1939, but her story really starts earlier, with the strong prior tradition of charitable housing provision in Abingdon; Long Alley and St John's almshouses date back to monastic times and when the Abbey was dissolved, the mantle was taken up by Christ's Hospital.

In the 1870s, Christ's Hospital was continuing to provide homes for poorer people, most notably model houses as part of the Albert Park development. But the number of charitable homes was small, and most of Abingdon's hous-

ing was insanitary and overcrowded, especially in West St Helen's Street (of St Edmund fame), the Vineyard and Ock Street. Smith's story up to 1914 is of Acts of Parliament giving local councils ever stronger powers to clear slums and build new homes, but of Abingdon Council ever holding back and looking to Christ's Hospital to take the lead.

The peace of 1918 brought a changing political climate and more financial support from Central Government. Abingdon Council finally accepted the need to act and built over 500 new homes in the interwar period, with new estates at Boxhill and Caldecott. In the 1930s they began also to tackle the slums in the old central area.

David Clark's piece is *Collars, Ties and Braces – the Wardrobe of Abingdon's Timber-framed Buildings*. There is a link here with Smith's story as these buildings are largely in the areas which were the subject of slum clearance. What we see is what survived, and we need to look hard because the timber framing is often disguised by render and later embellishments.

Nevertheless, Clark uses his perceptive eye and expertise to reveal what a wealth of timber vernacular buildings Abingdon still has. His talk was able to make greater use of illustration than is possible on the printed page, and his audience could also take inspiration from the church's crown-post roof above them.

His earliest house, 15 High Street has a roof dating to 1291 – but there is nothing from the next century – one of unrest in Abingdon and the Black Death. It is the fifteenth century, when Abingdon's wool trade was flourishing, that things start moving and we get fine examples such as 26 East St Helen's Street and Long Alley Alms Houses (again a link with Smith).

Clark's account shows the extent of technical innovation in some of Abingdon's carpentry, and it can be frustrating to know so little about who the carpenters were and who first occupied the houses they built. But Clark does identify the likely master carpenter of the Abbey's fifteenth century Long Gallery: John Braunche, who owned a house in West St Helen's Street.

Last we have Judy White's *The Monastic Life – Saints and Sinners*. She starts her account in third century Egypt



where St Anthony withdrew from worldly life dedicating himself to prayer and manual work. His life, recorded by Athanasius of Alexandria, became an inspiration for many others in the early Church. Monasticism took root and eventually spread to Britain in the sixth century via Ireland.

We know from Brod that accounts of early sainthood should not be read uncritically, but it seems very likely that these early examples of monasticism were imbued with genuine spirituality and self-denial. White also tells us how recent monastic revivals, for example at Douai and Taizé have a similar simplicity and spirituality.

In between was the medieval period during which monasteries became wealthy establishments, endowed with accumulations of manors. This required them to become large scale managers of secular property as well as places

of spiritual contemplation. Their wealth did not seem to prevent them getting into debt, but it did often give rise to frictions with the local population and internal infighting. This is well exemplified by Abingdon in the fifteenth century. Numbers of monks dropped from 80 to 34, debts rose to £2,000 and the bishop's visitations spoke of scandal, greed, neglect and even evil. Dissolution in 1538 was for wider political reasons, but arguably the time was anyway ripe.

This publication is an easy but scholarly read, wide ranging in its content and context. Arguably it could have been adapted a little more for the written page, for instance by a map showing the main locations spoken of. But that is a very small quibble and at only £5.00 you should buy.

Richard Dudding

Bob Frampton, *Abingdon in the Great War*. Available from the Abingdon Museum or from the author, Price £10

There is a saying something like that everyone has at least one book in them. The trick is to get it written and published. Bob has done this with the commendable 'Abingdon in the Great War'. This readable account of, well what the title says, is in the tradition of the accounts of Abingdon by Mienneke Cox. I found a readable story covering the period from about 1911 to 1921. Little is told here of what Abingdonians did in the services but the book concentrates on the town, businesses and the people. There is an index of people and businesses and short bibliography, all familiar to those of us who are interested in the town's past. There are no references or footnotes in the text, and I find this a bit disappointing as they have the benefit one can follow up anything particularly interesting and it does also demonstrate that the author has not made it all up! However, I do know Bob has done his research, I have often had to wait for him to finish with the microfiche reader in the library and he has even included a couple of titbits that I found and passed on to him. I know many others have contributed in the same way. There are 126 pages of text, and 19 photographs.

The contents comprehensively cover how the war impacted the town and businesses. With time came the new challenges of absent male workers and small family businesses, as many Abingdon ones were, losing skilled members to the armed forces. As the war went on conscription took more away but strangers were brought to the town for recuperation and billeting. Children and women were employed to fill some jobs while more land was brought into production and mechanisation adopted. Some businesses like the Pavlova Leather Company, started in 1912, had war contracts and expanded, causing problems with pollution. When war finished some of the men returned to a changed town and society. Woman occupied jobs that were a man's preserve before and many did not want to give up their new independence. An influenza pandemic followed the war killing nearly 80 locally. There is one chapter dealing with a few of the service personnel, but this book is really about a town and how it went through the Great War. I wrote earlier that I found in this book a readable story, but in fact there are many stories here and I am sure I will re-read this book many times.

This book is printed by LeachPrint and published by Abingdon County Hall Museum. It is available from them for £10.00. The 200 of the first print-run, bar a few copies, have been sold and a second print-run will be coming soon.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Bob has two new books in the pipeline; one about Abingdon in WW2 and the other about Abingdon Races.

John Foreman



Rob Belk, *Robert Acton Blandy – Miner, Leader, Legend. A Boer Epic. Published by Thematic Trails, Longworth, at £2.*

As an Abingdon resident with an interest in the town and its history, I am always pleased to read of events and personalities hitherto hidden from my general knowledge of this area. I am especially pleased too, when what I find is positioned firmly in the modern era, as I feel too little has been written about north Berkshire in the 19th and 20th centuries and that there are many gaps in our recent local history.

Gratifying it is then to read of a man whose family has strong local connections, having owned Kingston Bagpuize house for nearly two-hundred years and with marriage links to Longworth and to Hinton Waldrist. ‘The Warren’ on Radley Road in Abingdon was built by Blandy’s father Adam Fettiplace Blandy in the late 1890s and for some time was the family residence. It was demolished in 1982. He and his wife are buried in the graveyard of the church of St James The Great, Radley.

Robert Blandy was born in London in 1870 but was not himself a local resident. Having attended Clifton Boys’ School in Bristol he chose a career in mining and eventually moved to South Africa. In 1899 the Second Boer War began, and Blandy joined the Frontier Mounted Rifles.

His time from then on seems to have been spent in leading his men on scouting patrols, seeking out Boer units, guarding railways and roads. Undoubtedly he was a courageous leader but we are told little about the many ‘tight corners’ in which his unit found itself.

Finally we find his patrol in a range of mountains near the township of Molteno, engaged in a firefight with around thirty Boers. Blandy is killed when he leads his men into an ambush. The eye-witness account tells of a quite normal ruse, of the enemy firing at an approaching force, then running into cover where an ambush has been planned. The Press tried to turn this into an act of deceit and cowardice, talking about ‘raising of surrender flags to lure Blandy’s men’. The patrol-members do not mention this. There is a feeling that Blandy suffered from his own inexperience in this incident.

What may confuse and perhaps irritate the reader somewhat is the constant desire of the writer to glorify the man and his deeds beyond what can reasonably be justified. This begins with an effort to connect Blandy’s family with ‘the Merovingian days of Clovis the Frank’ but without any evidence for this. The Battles of Crecy and of Agincourt are dropped in.

The writer goes on to link him with the cricketer WG Grace and Newbolt’s ‘*Vitai Lampada*’ which ‘drove generations....to endure and perform miracles the world over’.

What one might find difficult to accept is the ‘*story that has taken root*’, of Blandy’s body being used as a modern ‘El Cid’, the corpse, stiff with rigor mortis and with the icy-cold of the mountains, keeping Blandy astride his horse with a view to convincing local Boer sympathisers that he was still in command.

Even his sister’s words at his funeral give an echo of something much grander than it was. ‘*We buried him in Molteno covered by the Union Jack and the Last Post sounding in our ears*’. Is there not a faint echo here of lines from Charles Wolfe’s description of the burial of Sir John Moore?

It is this continual name-dropping, of attempting to give a great nobility to a man who, from what we can read here, was a good, effective, but not, from the evidence, far above average, officer.

The booklet is welcome in that it gives life to a character whose family were local although he himself was not. It gives meaning to the Radley church grave and is informative about the origins of the Warren hospital. Belk has clearly carried out competent and professional research. He has travelled to the relevant places, and his War Memorial Crescent is of course to be admired.

His main fault here is that he is trying too hard to make Blandy something he was not.

Bob Frampton



Feature Articles

Of course, Abingdon used to be the County Town of Berkshire ... or did it?

If there's one thing that every Abingdon historian is sure of, it is that Abingdon has long been the accepted and rightful County Town of Berkshire. Only in 1868 was it robbed of the title by the devious dealings of its unscrupulous rivals in Reading.

But of course, nothing is quite so simple. If you look through the reference books of the seventeenth century

for county or shire towns, you will mostly find short lists of the towns for which counties are named, such as 'Bedford, Bedfordshire' or 'Stafford, Staffordshire'.

Berkshire, for obvious reasons, does not figure. If Abingdon features at all in their accounts of Berkshire, it is as a place of only minor significance. The greatest of the geographers of that century, John Speed, describes the main towns of the shire: they are Reading, Windsor, and Wallingford. Reading, uniquely, runs to a street plan where it is described as 'one of the chiefest townes', but not as the county town. Abingdon gets a single mention as one of several former sites of religious institutions.

It is true that about the same time as Speed was writing, Abingdon got a new charter from the government of James I in which it was described as 'the chief town of our county of Berkshire'. But this formulation will have been due to the town's lawyers, including no doubt Wal-

ter Dayrell whom the charter would elevate to the rank of recorder, and we don't know what smiles the presumption may have aroused in the offices of Chancery.

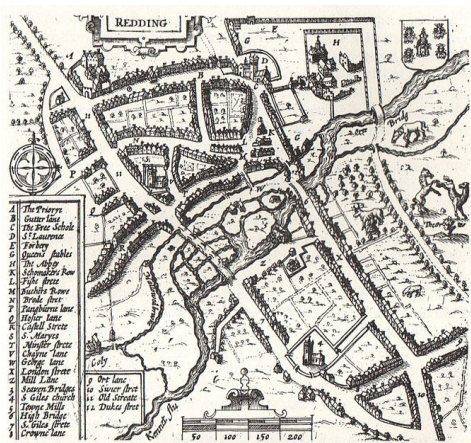
The search for something more definitive takes us further back. Parliament in 1500 decided that all shire towns should hold a set of standard weights and measures, and helpfully appended a list, the only official list I have been able to find. The shire town for Berkshire was, quite plainly and simply, Reading.

From Anglo-Saxon times, the idea of a county town had been linked to that of a centre of administration and jurisdiction. From the seventeenth century and probably earlier the itinerating judges of assize included Abingdon in their Spring, Reading in their Summer circuits, with infrequent excursions to Windsor or Wallingford. Quarter sessions, which were partly administrative, also alternated between Reading and Abingdon with occasional deviations to Newbury.

Modern technology lets us search through the nineteenth century newspapers for references to the county town of Berkshire. There are many, and they are split roughly evenly between Abingdon and Reading. There is even a nod to 'both our county towns'. In 1828, a correspondent invited the editor of the *Berkshire Chronicle* to give his opinion. The editor had to tread lightly: 'Almost all the old writers', he said without naming any, had described Abingdon as the county town, 'but *why*, there may be some trouble to ascertain'. Wallingford had been important in the past, and Windsor was also an assize town; Abingdon might hold the *nominal* title, but Reading was currently 'the metropolis of Berkshire' and 'the chief place of the County of Berks *de facto*'.

I would love to know to which 'old writers' the editor was referring. Can anybody tell me?

Manfred Brod



John Speed's street plan of Reading, 1610
(Wikimedia Commons)

There is nothing equivalent for Abingdon!

Brother and Sister Re-united

John Steptoe had stopped for an afternoon break on a hot oppressive afternoon in mid-summer of 1982. He lazily slid from the dishevelled rusting cab of the old Tuckwell “navvy” in an apparent hypnosis from the thumping Gardner diesel. Little did he know that he was, in a few moments, to cause an amazing goal score that would generate a great pulsating wave of exhilaration around a great stadium of observing archaeologists?

The venue was Tuckwells gravel quarry at Thrupp Lane, Radley. four feet down below, on the hallowed ground turf (in this case rather hummocky watery Kimmeridge clay surrounded by an arena of undug ballast). John positioned the ball, in this case a harmless unassuming pebble. A good firm well aimed kick saw the projectile central between the posts. The goal keeper, a little perplexed at the velocity of the incoming missile let it do its worst and then took a closer look. No ordinary ball. Rather the missile was a rather distinguished flaked stone. John was also a little perplexed by this curiosity and wrapped it in a greasy rag and chucked it unceremoniously into the navvy.

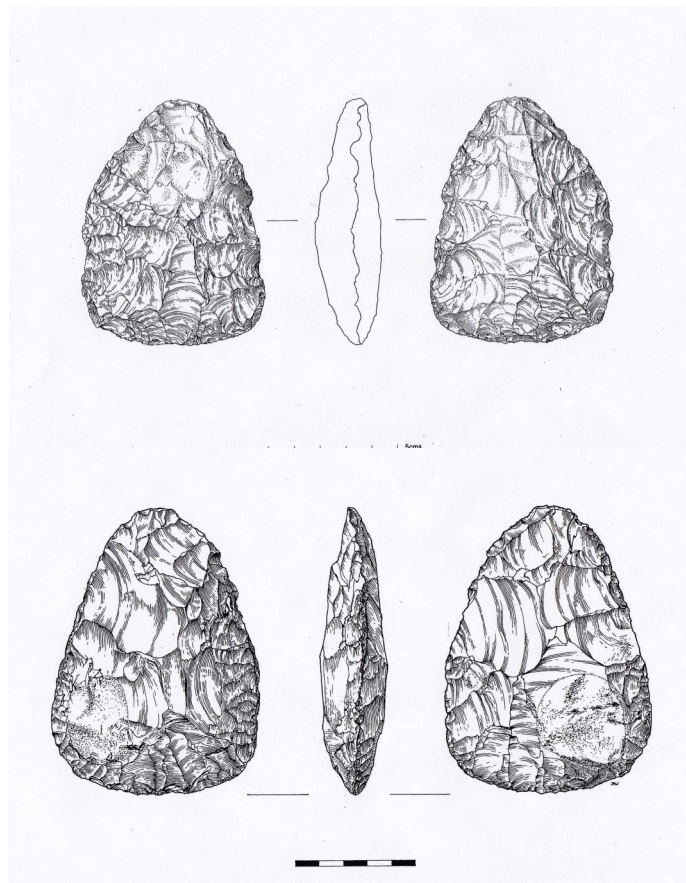
On my next regular pit visit the following Saturday John approached me clutching the greasy rag offering and described the great goal score. ‘Well you certainly won the cup’. John had presented me with a bifacial flaked Palaeolith of carefully considered geometry. A most rare and delightful piece.

With John’s permission the implement was taken to Joyce Tyldesley at the hub of anything Palaeolithic at the Quaternary Research Centre at No 60 Banbury Road. A most holy institution directed by Dr Derek Roe. Joyce was at that time studying Bout Coupé handaxes for her Ph.D. Recently she was on Radio Four discussing ancient Egypt!

Bout Coupé handaxes are visually distinctive. They have carefully considered regular flaking using a soft hammer. The planform varies within a tight framework from almost rectangular with radiused base corners and broad tip, to a slightly more ovoid shape but essentially still towards rectangular.. They have a narrow date range from around 60,000 to 40,000 years old. The hands that fashioned these carefully planned implements were specifically of the Neanderthal lineage. Only five Bout Coupés have been found in the the Upper Thames and at least two others are from near Abingdon. So there is some scant evidence of incursions into this watery territory pursuing herds of megafauna.

Joyce confirmed identification as a classic Bout Coupé and published a note in *Oxoniensia* 1983, pp 149- 152.

The years clicked on and Tuckwells gathered dust. Mainly dust from flyash covering the diluvial landscape in Pompeii grey. However, business as usual trading gravel and premix. Just before Christmas 2012 intrepid eagle eyed local curio collector Geoff Cross paid Tuckwells a visit to purchase some very exciting ballast. Searching reject heaps as one does



The 2012 Find
(© Jeff Wallis)



religiously on such occasions looking primarily for Jurassic marine reptile fossils he picked up a handaxe.

I became involved in this discovery through a call from Leigh Allen, head of finds department at Oxford Archaeology. She needed an illustration of a new Bout Coupé find from Tuckwells.

As it happened I had recently tracked down and obtained a loan of the Steptoe axe. Sadly I learned that John had, in that interval, died and his daughter had possession of the implement. The plan was to place the axe on a five year loan to Abingdon Museum. However the Curator had then secured loan of the other Drayton example in No. 60's teaching collection which lacked the aesthetic appeal and the Steptoe axe could be returned.

I distinctly remember the hour when Leigh brought the Cross axe to me. The implements were reverently unwrapped from their holy shrouds. In this case best Levi denim offcut and bubble wrap. Wow. It was immediately apparent that we had re-united a brother and sister (if axes have gender) after 60,000 years.

Looking at these implements together objectively raises intriguing questions. Are we looking at two implements fashioned from the same parent nodule of flint? Did the same Neanderthal hand flake both of them in a few moments fossilised for 60,000 years?

A major visual feature occurring on both tools is a well-defined circular pipe of chert infill with unusually sharp boundary with the flint. Normally on Chiltern flint these occur as fuzzy edged patches. Patination and stain is also in harmony on both examples. Even more striking is the plan form. The maker's imprint, his hallmark, thought pattern, call it what you will, is there on both. One may suggest that the Cross example was not completed. A distinct bulge of material disrupts the symmetry as if an ultimate round of soft hammer (antler) work was somehow interrupted and never completed.

Of course this is all supposition and, as it stands, a wild unsubstantiated claim. But one feels that we have a case to investigate. If this scenario could be researched one has a snippet of hours 60,000 years ago. Did a Neanderthal manuport a chalk flint nodule with its chert inclusion signature 15 miles from the Berkshire Downs and establish a temporary "activity" site at Tuckwells?. Can we expect to locate a flaking floor with debitage and preserved fragments of land surface? At least Radley has become a double dot on the Neanderthal map.

These finds are the basis for a research project. It may be possible to establish through looking at microfossil and mineral signatures in the flint a source for the raw material. It may be possible to say yes, the two implements are from the common parent and from this we can start to look at how the landscape was utilised and so forth. This would be a very exciting breakthrough for the study of such a remote period. A winning goal scores for the gold. We can look back and remember John Steptoe and that famous well aimed kick into the past 60,000 years.

Jeff Wallis



The Committee — 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

And with grateful acknowledgement of the help given by various individual members—notably David Rayner—audiovisual, Wendy Robbins—posters, Ruth Weinberg—planning applications.

Contact committee members through the website, or email to

info@aaahs.org.uk



AAHS Membership form

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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

AAHHS OUTINGS 2015

BOOKING FORM

Name _____

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EVENT	Number of people	Total
Northcourt Walk Tuesday 12th May 6.00pm Please state if you wish to participate in the post-walk meal at the Spread Eagle	_____ at £4 each	
Discover Appleton Wednesday 10th June 7.00pm I need a lift YES/NO I can offer a lift YES/NO (Please circle as appropriate)	_____ at £4 each	
Tour of Oriel College Oxford Wednesday 15th July 7.00pm	_____ at £4 each	

Please make cheques made payable to AAHHS

Please print off and return form by 1 May. Numbers are limited on some outings

To: Elizabeth Drury
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 Tel. (01235) 553636
 eliz.drury@ntlworld.com

Thank you.

Total En- closed