



**Abingdon Area
Archaeological and Historical
Society**

www.AAAHS.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2016



They didn't smile much, did they?

Digitising the AAAHS image library—will you help?

IN THIS ISSUE: Summer activities—2016 Outings—and more!





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Lecture Programme and Outings, Spring 2016

21 Apr: Joan Dils: The Lambrick Lecture, 'Reflections on aspects of Abingdon society c.1550-c 1700'.

11 May: Outing to Ashmolean Museum, led by Jeff Wallis.

19 May: Richard Dudding, 'Radley Church and the Civil War'. To be followed by an outing to Radley on 7 June led by Richard Dudding.

16 June: Members' Evening.

July tba: Outing to Brasenose College, led by Bob Evans.

See pp 5-6 inside for further details



Report from the Chair



Nowadays the internet is the source of a bewildering volume of historical information; and its eagle eye can be disconcerting. Recently my alma mater placed online a complete run of our old school magazines, including those in which the undersigned features as cub journalist. The half-forgotten evidence made me cringe. Much too pretentious, is my verdict today; and not as funny as he thought he was. Yet it's fantastic to have such materials so readily available, and I don't think there can be any such embarrassment for readers of the back-numbers of this *Newsletter* which are on our website and to which Manfred Brod has just added an index.

For the moment these stretch back to 2002, and the earlier ones yield a snapshot of our activities as a society rather more than ten years ago. Recognizably they provide the same biannual stock-takings as now, reviewing the same sorts of doings, in much the same format, with a reassuring overlap of people. The Local History group was already vigorous, with twenty or so supporters. There were regular outings, some more ambitious than today's; digging is described from Thrupp and Bayworth and farther afield. The local business of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record, from which our current Abingdon Buildings and People [ABP] project would later profit, finds its place; as do planning concerns, at that time especially the fate of the Old Gaol (we still await an archaeological report on this development as I write). We find articles in the *Newsletters* on topics in local history – still much to be welcomed now. In 2002 the AAAHS already has a website: it's described as 'just about adequate'.

That certainly hadn't been the case when the Society was founded in 1968. In those days none of its chief officers even used the telephone, as we learn from the pages of an earlier in-house record not (yet) on our website. This is a booklet produced for the twenty-first anniversary of the foundation of what initially called itself the Abingdon and District Archaeological Society. It contains a vivid description of the inaugural meeting summoned by Lucy Hale to a room in Abingdon College, where she expected a handful of people but attracted sixty five; and it reminds us of the zest of those early members. Again, however, much about the Society's then profile remains recognizably the same today. The documents reveal a strong digging programme, headed for a time by a professional Abingdon Excavation Committee, but always reliant on volunteers; close links with the town museum; ambitious events, including open days and a week-long exhibition with prehistoric and medieval displays and even a simulated excavation; and publications, notably the very successful *Abingdon in Camera*.

It might seem quaintly old-fashioned these days to celebrate twenty-one years of existence. But half a century is still a major landmark. We shall reach that milestone in 2018, on 3 May to be exact: a date to conjure with therefore in Abingdon (as also, incidentally, in Poland). We ought to start planning for that event now, and perhaps incorporate a publication to mark all the achievements of AAAHS as casually recorded in newsletters over the years. Your committee has begun to address this issue, especially in connection with the problem of our stored artefacts – some already amassed during those early digs of the ADAC. A working party led by Rachel Everett will try to catalogue all surviving paper records, as a preliminary to some kind of written survey.

Much still needs to be done to put Abingdon's distinctive past on the map. Now we are assembling such lucid and accessible materials for the town's more recent history through the ABP enterprise, the Society's original archaeological mission requires reassertion. Many important findings are still not in the public domain. Yet over our initial forty-eight years we've certainly begun to spread the word. A German colleague, expert in the history of landscape and ecology, visited here the other week for the first time. He already knew a lot about Abingdon, thanks to the AAAHS. He could even cite references to plant remains found in the Society's earliest digs.

Bob Evans
February 2016



Treasurer's Report January 2016

There was a smooth change over of signatories at NatWest in September and the new committee were able to get to work swiftly. Andrew Steele has stepped down as Treasurer for a very well-deserved break and I have taken on the job, working closely with our new Membership Secretary, Hubert Zawadzki.

Expenditure and income since the start of the AAAHS year in September has been fairly stable with no unexpected expenses and some pleasant surprises. Our regular source of income from memberships is down on last year with £496 received to date, compared to £560 this time last year. There have been some glitches over setting up standing orders for memberships and we ask for your patience if you have been affected but hope that in the long term this will make life easier for both the committee and members.

Our second main source of income, donations from sales of “Abingdon in Camera” continue to bring in a steady income of £95.76 (compared to £95 this time last year). Whilst refreshments after our meetings have brought in a very modest £5.20, visitor donations overall have brought in an impressive £174.51, of which £93.91 was received from Hubert’s lecture in October.

Expenditure to date has been modest, with two of our speakers this year not requiring a fee (£150 spent) Expenditure on food for the Christmas Social (£66.18) was exceptionally low owing to existing stocks of drinks left over from the summer. Admin costs for stamps, ink cartridges for printing posters and other sundries come to £122.66, including expenses related to the Archaeology symposium in the summer. Printing the newsletter remains a major expenditure (the last cost £61), even without the added cost of postage. The only digging expenditure since September has been fencing for the Kiln Copse site in Marcham (£38). Payment for hire of the Northcourt Centre remains at £68.75 quarterly, so £137.50 since September.

A major expenditure to come will be the ongoing rehabilitation of the portacabin. We paid £75 for an electrical inspection and are hoping that the supply will be restored in the near future; however, this will involve further expense in upgrading the wiring to meet current standards.

Further expenses to come which will be itemised in the full report submitted at our AGM in September will include hire of our Local History Group venue at 35 Ock Street, insurance for excavations and affiliation to organisations such as the Oxfordshire Local History Association and Council for British Archaeology.

Rachel Everett
Treasurer

Principal Income/Expenditure, year to date as of 24/01/2016

Income:

Memberships £496
 Visitor donations, including tea/coffee £174.51
 Book sales £95.76
Total income to date: £766.27

Expenditure:

Hire of premises £137.50
 Speakers £150
 Admin £122.66
 Printing costs, newsletter and posters £78.75
 Refreshments at Christmas £66.18
 Digging £38.49
 Miscellaneous, including portacabin £92.49



The Spring 2016 Lecture Programme and Speakers

All at the Northcourt Centre, Northcourt Road, starting at 7.45 pm

21 April

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



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

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

19 May

Radley Church and the Civil War, presented by Richard Dudding



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

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

16 June Members evening

There are no meetings in July and August. The 2016-17 season begins with the AGM on 15 September 2016.



Outings 2016

Join us for our summer outings.



Wednesday 11 May, 11 am, Visit to the Ashmolean Museum, led by Jeff Wallis

This will concentrate on the Museum's many displays relevant to the archaeology and history of Abingdon and its region. And of course we will also pay our respects to the Tang camel that was the subject of our November 2015 meeting.

Tuesday 7 June, 6 pm, Exploring Lower Radley, led by Richard Dudding

This walk will follow the talk on Radley Church and the Civil War, which will be given by Richard to the Society on 19 May. Richard is a Radley resident, and the outing will finish with a glass of wine in his garden. Participants may then if they wish continue the evening with a meal at the Bowyer Arms.



Date in July to be arranged, 7 pm, Visit to Brasenose College, Oxford, led by Bob Evans

Brasenose College, or BNC to the cognoscenti, is a sixteenth-century foundation with interesting architecture from many periods, much of it pastiche. Our chairman, who knows it well, will guide and explain.

Each outing £5 per person. This will include a suitable donation to the Ashmolean Museum, but not (obviously!) the optional meal at the Bowyer Arms in Radley.

For application form, [click here](#).

Pictures on this page from Wikimedia Commons

**BOOKING FORM**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Event	Number of people:	Total
Wednesday 11 May, 11 am Visit to the Ashmolean Museum	_____	@ £5 each
Tuesday 7 June, 6 pm Explore Lower Radley Do you wish for a booking at the Bowyer Arms after the outing? Yes/No Can you offer, or do you need, a lift to Radley? Offer/need ? How many people?	_____	@ £5 each
Date in July to be announced, 7 pm Visit to Brasenose College, Oxford	_____	@ £5 each

Please make cheques payable to AAHS Total enclosed: £ _____

Please return by 1 May to:

Rachel Everett (email: outings@aaahs.org.uk)

Treasurer AAHS
 26a East St Helen Street
 Abingdon OX14 5EB



Local History

The Local History Group

We are fortunate that there are members of our society who are producing fresh and interesting research. One of them is Bob Frampton. As you will recall, Bob has produced a number of books covering a range of local topics, and the latest one he is working on is about Abingdon in WW2. At our meeting on 27 October, he spoke to us about the soldiers, airmen and sailors that were stationed in or visiting Abingdon, the military police and the black-out. A frightening but also exciting time for the locals here as their men were away but strangers from different parts of the world were here. We were interested how Bob worked on his research and books, so an open discussion followed. If you want to get rich, do not do what he does. He said that he makes a loss on all the books he does as they do not sell in sufficient quantity to bring down the printing costs. He realised at an early stage that this was to be his hobby, and hobbies cost money, so was prepared to underwrite the loss. He also loves history and writing about Abingdon is a legacy for others who feel the same way.

We followed up with an open discussion about what is known about Abingdon's two castles; Fitzharris and on Andersey Island. In consideration that both these sites have always been known about, it is surprising that there has been almost nothing researched or written about them. We also spoke about Sutton Courtney paper mill, as some interesting information had come up while research was done for our Buildings and People website.

The meeting on 16 February had another spin-off from our Buildings and People site. Manfred Brod had been writing up a report, and as usual in our review system, circulated it around for the other writers to cross the t's and dot the i's and make helpful comments. Manfred's report was based on what was thought to be definitively known about one of Abingdon's MPs, a certain John Maberly.

Jackie Smith was able to add a whole new section to Maberly's life. After he had gone abroad to avoid his creditors, rather than disappear and die in obscurity, he had eventually moved to Amiens in France where he opened a huge silk spinning mill. He was very successful there and his methods were written about and duplicated in French industry. Manfred's presentation for us was about what was not gone into on our Buildings and People site, and on hearing it I think he should include it! It dealt with Maberly's father, a high-end carriage maker, and Maberly's houses in London. Blingtastic! We also saw many pictures that are not shown on our web site.

The other showing was by myself. I had recently bought a print of 1857 showing an unusual view of St Nicholas Church and the buildings that surrounded it at the time. Most have gone or changed so could one judge by what remains and other contemporary pictures as to the accuracy of what has been lost. Is the print all we have of what is gone? Those round the table shared their knowledge and we all came away knowing a little more.

The encouragement bit! I have no special qualifications beyond an O level in history, and I feel you do not even need that. If you are curious about the past, then it is easy to do research for yourself, especially if you are online, though that is not essential as Bob Frampton is not. Everyone in AAHS will encourage you and, if they know, will try and point you in the right direction. With some work you can become the world expert on something. It may not be big, but it will be yours. If you have an idea, a question, a story that gets you going, then please contact me or any committee member in person, at a meeting or by email through our website. I look forward to hearing from you.

Our next Local History Group meeting is on the 31 May, 7.45 pm at 35 Ock Street. Details will be posted on our website as I receive them.

John Foreman
Local History Group convenor



Websites

The Abingdon Buildings and People Website

We had a bit of a hiatus after our celebration last September of reaching the first hundred topics on the website, but soon got over that. We are now at 108, and the editorial pipeline is healthily full. Recent uploads have mainly been about Abingdon people, and perhaps the most spectacular addition has been a pair of articles by Peter Gale on the Abingdon artist William Watkin Waite, complete with a selection of his works by courtesy of the Abingdon Museum and private owners. Do look—it's on <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/william-watkin-waite>.

Also, for the first time, we have been able to get numerical evidence of the website's success. In the past year, and in very round numbers, there have been 26,000 hits, almost 5% of the total for the Abingdon town portal. Buildings have proved more popular than people, with about 15,000 hits against 7000. Five individual articles made it into the top 100 for the portal as a whole: the Old Gaol (1099 hits), the Abbey (1094), the Stert Culvert (1005), Ock Street (856), and the Clock House (803). It's all nice to know!

*Manfred Brod
ABP Convenor*

The AAHS Website

There's been good and bad news for the Society's website. The bad news came one day during the Christmas holidays when people trying to access it were faced with a statement that it had been encrypted and demanding a sum of money in bitcoins to get it back again—complete with detailed directions on how to get bitcoins and how to send them around the world to untraceable criminal accounts. But the good news is that it took the guys in the white hats just a few hours to get the site working again, unencrypted, and with nobody paying anything to anybody. As it happens, I was the last to know because somehow in the recovery process they cut off the webmaster's access.....

By way of precaution, the old and now redundant parts of the site which held the members' section, and which may have offered a way in to the unscrupulous, have been removed.

There have been changes. The archive sections were unwieldy and hard to navigate. There's now an archive index. You open this, search for what you want, and click the hyperlink to go there. <http://www.aaahs.org.uk/archive/index-to-archives>. Try it! The hyperlinks don't seem to work for some people and some equipment—if you find this, please let me know, with the circumstances and the systems involved. If you are unfortunate in this way, the index will still tell you in which archive section to look for your material, and you can still get there manually.

*Manfred Brod
Webmaster*



And ... the Newsletter

Sorry for any disappointment, but the Newsletter is now online only. Printing is just too expensive for a society like ours, and many other societies have taken similar decisions. At least, I will no longer be foaming at the mouth when I see the mess the printing process makes of my careful choice of colours.

For the moment, I am keeping the traditional page-based layout that we are all accustomed to, but there is now the possibility of going to a blog format. This would simplify the work of laying out, at the cost of a certain loss of flexibility. Desk-top publishing lets you put what you want where you want, and HTML doesn't. But on the other hand, the blog format is easier to read on screen, with much less scrolling up and down. I'd welcome any comments.

Manfred Brod
Editor

Feature Articles

The Cinemas of Abingdon

The plural is used here because there have been several film-theatres in town. Most people if asked think of the Regal in the Square and are astonished that the first was in Stert Street. The Picture Palace was opened in 1912 at 57 Stert Street at what is now New Abbey Court. It seated 200 and was opened on 25th May of that year. Evening performances began at 7.30pm with a matinée at 2.30pm.

Excited locals could watch 'The Battle of Trafalgar' and 'Oliver Twist' and clearly wanted more. As a result the cinema was enlarged and re-opened as the Abingdon Kinema in 1920, with a 400 seating capacity. Success brought competition, and while the Kinema was being enlarged, films were shown at what was advertised as the Grand Cinema, occasionally called the New Cinema, in the Corn Exchange.

After 1920, musicians accompanied the Kinema screenings, while stage shows 'straight from the London Halls' came to the Corn Exchange. For some years films mixed with stage shows there.

In 1923 Abingdon was host at the Queen's Hotel to national film stars, filming 'The Naked Man' around the Abbey archway.

In 1937 the Regal opened and the Stert Street cinema finally closed. The new art-deco theatre seated one thousand and was a success from the start. Local children could join the Regal Chums for 'Saturday morning pictures' at 3d or 6d.

After the 1950s TV and cars came and cinemas were gradually forced over to Bingo. The Regal finally closed in 2003, its final film being 'Batman'.

Other local cinemas were the RAF Abingdon 'Astra' for service-people, the Old Gaol Little Theatre and the Abingdon and District Film Society.

The future is not bright for cinema in Abingdon. Council plans do not provide for one.

Bob Frampton

Bob's book, 'The Cinemas of Abingdon', is due for publication later this year. Since he wrote this article, the Council has confirmed that the current revamp of the Guildhall will provide 'a proper full-size cinema screen with high-class projection' (*Abingdon Herald* 24 Feb, p.1).

The Editor



The AAAHS image collection

You probably didn't know this, but the AAAHS has an absolutely enormous image collection!

It has been remarkably little used, because a set of photographs and slides can only be looked through by one person at a time, and anyway these days if you want to use an image it must be in digital form.

So a few years ago the Committee started a digitisation programme.



Most of it so far has been done by Andrew Steele, and there is now a digital file of about 600 images, all in very high definition, with an index in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. No one knows exactly how many are left, but it may be about the same number again.

It's all very time-consuming, and Andrew is running short of time. So we are looking for volunteers to continue the work.

On this page and the next is a selection of pictures from the collection. The ones I have arbitrarily chosen are of people rather than buildings—Abingdon people at work whether paid or voluntary—or waiting outside a pub for the charabanc that will take them for a day away. They go back to a time when Abingdon people mostly worked in the town, and there was a civic pride that I fear we no longer have. The mayor was a dignified personage who marched



in a uniformed or gowned procession, which the common people turned out to watch. The fire engine had Abingdon painted on it, and the firemen's helmets were as highly polished as their machine. And no, you never see any of them smiling!

You may want to enlarge the pictures on your screen to see them better.

If you have access to a high-quality scanner, enthusiasm, and time to spare, please join the digitisation effort. Just talk to any member of the Committee.

Manfred Brod
Editor





Polish Resettlement Camps in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds 1946-1970

Why were they created?

When the British government signed a treaty of alliance with Poland in August 1939 and guaranteed that country's independence in the face of the Nazi threat, few Britons could have imagined that after the war that followed Britain would be a sanctuary to over 100,000 Polish ex-servicemen plus their dependants and thousands of other Polish civilians.

Throughout the entire war Poland was Britain's close ally and Polish armed forces in the West and in the Middle East fought under British operational command. However, by early 1945 the political situation had changed dramatically. The Red Army was in control of most of Poland, while the Yalta Agreement imposed a new territorial and political order on the country.

In July 1945 the USA and Britain withdrew their recognition of the exiled Polish government in London, and recognized the Communist-led government in Warsaw, leaving the exiled Polish government and its armed forces in limbo. A large proportion of the Polish servicemen were former prisoners and deportees in the USSR and had no wish to return to a Soviet-dominated Poland; furthermore they had lost their homes as a result of the border changes imposed on their country. Churchill offered not only sanctuary but also the prospect of British citizenship to those Polish servicemen who had fought under British command.

In 1946 about 130,000 Polish servicemen were brought to Britain from N.W. Europe, Italy and the Middle East, and arrangements were made for their settlement here. Most enrolled in the Polish Resettlement Corps, a non-combatant unit of the British Army created to prepare its members for civilian life in the UK. In 1947-50 they were joined by over 30,000 dependants from the Middle East, India and East Africa. The rigged election held in Poland in January 1947 confirmed the Communist control of the country and marked the end of hope for those exiled Poles who still harboured the idea of returning home.

The Poles who came to the UK in the 1940s did so for the most part in organized and disciplined groups with their own political and military leadership and a sizeable cultural elite - a kind of miniature 'state in exile'. Few had traditional ties with Britain and little familiarity with the English language. Most were unwilling settlers, in the sense that they had expected go home after war; they felt bitter that they had been 'betrayed' by their British allies at Yalta.

In view of the acute housing shortages in post-war Britain many of these exiles were housed in vacant service camps, former military hospitals or even ex-POW camps. Of the over sixty known Polish resettlement camps in the UK six were situated in Oxfordshire and eight in Gloucestershire. Most were gradually closed in the 1950s and early 1960s but Northwick Park in the Cotswolds lasted till 1970.

What was life in a civilian camp like?



The Zawadzki family in front of their Nissen hut in Springhill Lodges (an ex-POW camp) near Moreton-in-Marsh, c.1953.



Most were situated in isolated rural areas. Accommodation was poor and primitive. People lived in barrel-like Nissen huts with corrugated iron roofs and concrete bases with black bitumen floors. There were some brick barracks with 3-4 rooms for larger families. Most dwellings had no running water and residents had to use communal washing facilities in separate blocks.

Those residents in work had to contribute to their board and lodging.

There was some welfare provision: larger camps had sick bays staffed by Polish doctors and nurses. As for food, most camps initially relied on communal kitchens for all meals. Gradually facilities improved and self-catering became the norm. Many residents cultivated their own allotments; they grew vegetables, fruit, flowers – even tobacco – and kept rabbits and chickens.

Educational provision consisted of nursery and primary schools in the camps where children were supposed to learn sufficient English to enable them to attend British schools at the age of seven.

Most of the camps' residents were Roman Catholic, and religious observance and the religious calendar of feast days provided a structure and a sense of continuity to their lives, as did the celebration of national traditions and festivals. Camps had entertainment halls which served as cinemas and as a venue for dances, live bands, choirs and amateur dramatics. Younger residents could join Polish scout and guide troops, and enjoy sport.

Many of the residents tried to keep faith with the cause of national independence. But as time went on it became gradually clear, even to the most committed patriots among them, that their stay in Britain would be for good. Integration with local people was not easy at first, but gradually friendly contacts were made with nearby English communities. As employment prospects improved people moved out of the camps and bought modest homes in nearby towns and further afield. Some were offered council accommodation.

It is probably fair to say that life in the camps, with their tightly knit communities, delayed the Poles' integration into English society. On the other hand, the camps did give the residents a sense of security and restored some stability to their lives after the difficult war years and nearly a decade of displacement across several continents. It allowed them time to adjust and adapt mentally to a new life in Britain.

Credit must be given to both sides: the ad hoc administrative machinery established by the British authorities to deal with the Poles in the immediate post-war years functioned well, and most Poles responded in a co-operative and orderly manner.

The story of the camps is largely unknown today: the camps' older inhabitants are no longer with us while their descendants, now integrated into British society, are scattered across the country. The buildings have either been totally dismantled or are overgrown. Only one in this area, Northwick Park, has survived more or less intact as a business park. The most poignant reminders of the post-war Polish presence are the Polish graves in cemeteries in villages and towns near the former camps.

Hubert Zawadzki



Book Reviews

Sandy King (ed), *Celebrating 150 Years of Albert Park, Abingdon-on-Thames. The Albert Park Residents' Association, (Abingdon, 2015) £12.50.*

This attractive and well-illustrated large format book was published last year by the Albert Park Residents' Association to mark the 150th anniversary of Albert Park and of the statue of Albert that gives it its name. The unveiling of the statue in 1865 in the spacious new recreation ground was of enough national interest to make the cover of the *London Illustrated News*.

The book discusses all aspects of the park: its history and design, the development of the new roads and buildings around it, its plants and wildlife and the considerable effort and expense needed to maintain it and the statue. The park's place in the town community is illustrated by affectionate memories of family outings and by the sports and many other activities the park is used for today.

Albert Park is situated on land that had been given to Christ's Hospital as part of its original endowment. In 1859, after 300 years of independence, Christ's Hospital was obliged to operate under a Charity Commission scheme that included the creation of a recreation ground and allotments for the town and a new site for the grammar school on what had been farm land. The design competition was won by a Mr Chapman of Dulwich who proposed a D-shaped 14-acre park with a planting layout echoing that of the grounds of a country house, a style then much in vogue for urban parks.

Over its 150 years the park has seen periods of relative neglect punctuated by periods of renovation - its owner, Christ's Hospital, as a charity, has other responsibilities and calls on its funds. Happily, it is now well into its latest renovation thanks largely to the initiative and generosity of two local residents, Richard and Jacqueline Worswick. The park contains some 150 species of trees and over 280 other species of plants, of which 165 are wild or self-seeded. It takes a full-time park keeper and the contracted services of outside specialists to maintain the park as a recreational area and a rich habitat. The book includes illustrated chapters on trees and on flowers and fungi, supplemented by shorter sections on birds, butterflies and small mammals.

Park Road and Park Crescent were laid out in the area surrounding the park when the park was created. Edwin Dolby, the Abingdon architect, was responsible for the informal suburban layout, for many of the houses and for the initial buildings of the school. The houses are all different but almost all have gothic detailing and many use red brick with polychrome bands. Dolby created what John Betjeman described as 'the perfect Victorian suburb, well-built and spaciouly planned'. With its designation in 1975 as a conservation area and its inclusion by English Heritage in 1998 in the list of Parks of Historic Interest, this rare survival should be protected in the future.

Fourteen authors contributed to the book (they are listed in a discreet paragraph right at the end) and over thirty people to the overall production. The different sections vary in style, ranging from the succinct and informative history chapters to personal reminiscences and to comments and drawings by the children of Carswell School. I have two criticisms: it is a pity that the book is lacking an index which would have made it more useful as an information source; and I would have expected it to include sources and acknowledgements separately for each illustration. I also noticed a small factual error: Edwin Dolby's son, also Edwin, cannot have been articulated to Sir George Gilbert Scott. Scott died in 1878 when young Edwin was only eleven. But, all in all, this is an attractive book that does exactly what its authors, the production team and the Residents' Association set out to do. It celebrates the Albert Park area through its history and its place in the life of the town today.

Jessica Brod

Obituary

Bill Skellington (1929 – 2016)



Bill Skellington demonstrating Iron Age finds at an AAHS open evening in 1972

Bill (William Arthur) Skellington, a prominent member of the Society in its early days, died at a care home in St Ives, Cornwall, on 23 January. He was 86. Bill was born in Leeds in 1929. He did his National Service in Jamaica as a member of the Royal Medical Corps. On his return he worked as a gardener and woodsman at Temple Newsome Park in Leeds. Bill was an active trade unionist, and this led to him coming to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Ruskin College, Oxford. He moved to Abingdon in 1968, where he worked for the Borough Council as the Cemetery Superintendent.

Bill made a number of important archaeological finds while digging graves in the cemetery. He was also active in the Society's early excavations. With Lucy Hale, he excavated an Iron Age hut circle uncovered in gravel working at Thrupp. He also spent much time fieldwalking, notably along the line of the present A34 – this was an AAHS priority in the early 1970s. He is credited with the re-discovery of the medieval deserted village of Sugworth. His regular activities included visiting local gravel pits and scouring heaps of material dredged from the river. He amassed a large collection of flints, clay tobacco pipes and other artefacts.

On his retirement from the Council, Bill moved to Hayle in Cornwall where he continued to take an interest in archaeology. Whilst walking in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, he started to find primitive tools fashioned from quartz as well as the more common flint. He had a paper on this topic ('White vein quartz tools in west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly') published in *Cornish Archaeology* in 2002. In 2014, Bill arranged for his collection of local finds to be brought back to Oxfordshire, so that it could be deposited in the County Museum Store as a resource for future study.

Bill was a man of wide interests, including physics and geology as well as archaeology. He was also a Morris Dancer, and played the mouth organ, as well as being a fine singer of traditional folk songs. He was curious about the world around him, and he had keen powers of observation. Visiting sites to search for artefacts with Bill was always rewarding and engaging. I have some very happy memories of making such visits with him, and I have always been especially grateful for the encouragement which Bill showed me when I was a schoolboy, starting to develop my interest in archaeology.

(I am very grateful to Jonathan Leach, Bill's brother-in-law, for providing some of the information included in this note.)



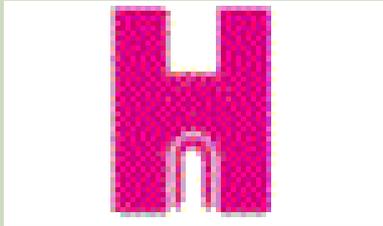
Bill and his collection of clay pipes

Roger Thomas



ABINGDON-ON-THAMES HERITAGE WEEKEND

10-11 September 2016



Heritage Weekend 2016 is on 10-11 September. This year is the 600th anniversary of the building of the Abingdon Bridge (or, more correctly, bridges) so the Heritage Open Days will have a medieval theme. As in recent years, there will be a mix of talks, displays and re-enactments so as to provide something for everyone. In addition there will be a range of properties (not all medieval) open to visit and a programme of guided walks.

We will also have an exhibition in the Community FreeSpace during the week leading up to Heritage Weekend. Since photos - or pictures of any kind - from 1416 are in short supply, this exhibition will be based instead on Abingdon 60 years ago - 1956, the year in which the Queen opened the refurbished County Hall Museum. Once again, we will be inviting Abingdon people to bring their own photographs or memorabilia from this time. Please contact [Elizabeth Drury](#) if you have anything to offer.

Editor's Notes

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

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

The Newsletter is sent electronically to members at the time of publication when it is also posted on the website. It is no longer available in print. Copy deadline for the next issue is end-July 2016.

Manfred Brod

Dates for Your Diary

Town, County and National:

23 April: Abingdon Clubs and Societies Day

4 June: Oxpast (at the Northcourt Centre, Abingdon)

16-31 July: 26th Festival of Archaeology

8-11 September: Heritage Open Days

Abingdon Museum Friends

St Helen's Church Centre, 7 for 7.30 pm

7 April: AGM and talk TBA.

1 Sept: Mark Davies – 'James Sadler: Oxford pastry cook & first British aeronaut'.

Marcham Society

All Saints' Church, 7.45 pm

12 April: Bob Heath-White, *Medieval Wall Paintings in St Mary's Church, Chalgrove*

10 May: Valerie Burton, *History of Witney Blankets*.

Radley History Club

Radley CE Primary School, 7 for 7.30 pm

11 April: Jenny Lee, *Men of Radley who served King and Country and died in World War I*.

9 May: Ian Brown, *Abingdon's Lost Abbey*.

13 June: Bob Evans, *The Bayworth Coal Mine Debacle*.

11 July: Paul Sandford, *A History of Letchworth Garden City*.

? August: Club visit to the church and churchyard at Radley.

Sutton Courtenay Local History Society

All Saints Church, 7.30 pm

18 May: AGM and talk TBA.

Wallingford Hist and Arch Soc

St Mary's Church, 7.45 for 8.00 pm

13 April: Katharine Keats-Rohan, *Coronation Street: William the Conqueror and Wallingford*

11 May: Ben Ford, *The Excavations at Westgate, Oxford: the story so far*.

9 June: Simon Townley, *Benson: Anglo-Saxon Estate to Airfield*.



The Committee for 2015-6 — who does what?

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

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

Treasurer: [Rachel Everett](#)

Membership: [Hubert Zawadzki](#)

Local History: [John Foreman](#)

Digging: [Jeff Wallis](#)

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

Outings: [Rachel Everett](#)

Publicity: [John Foreman](#)

Posters: Wendy Robbins

Archives: [Jackie Smith](#)

Members without portfolio: Penny Cookson, Bob Frampton

Note that Committee members normally serve either three or six years. New Committee members will be elected at the AGM on 15 September. Nominations will be welcome.

Joining the AAAHS

New members always welcome

Membership forms on

<http://www.aaahs.org.uk/contact/downloadable-forms>