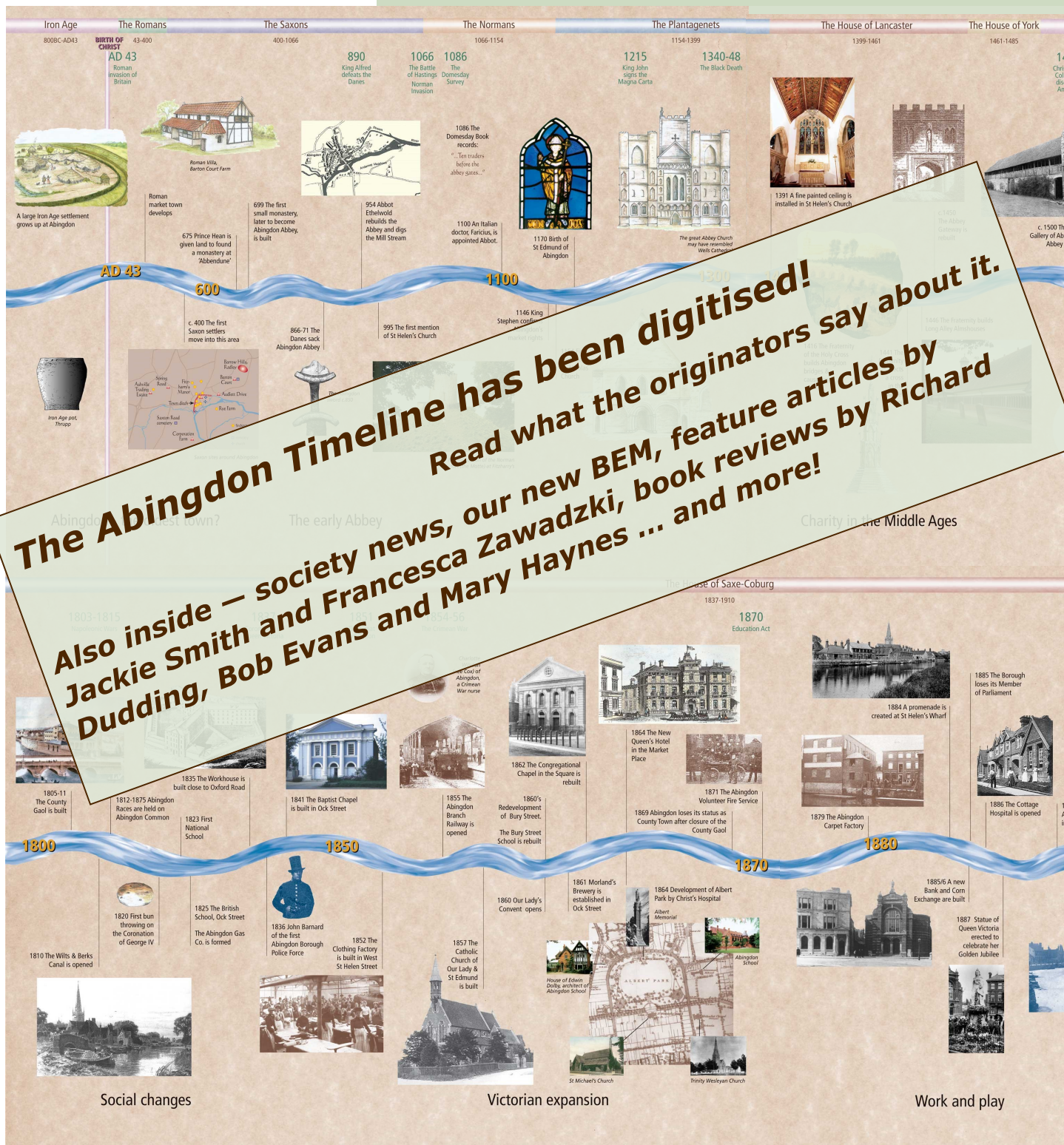




# Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

[www.AAAHS.org.uk](http://www.AAAHS.org.uk)

## NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2017





## **AAAHS Newsletter—Spring 2017**

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*If you are reading this and are not a member of the AAAHS, we would love you to join. You can find a form on <http://www.aaahs.org.uk/contact/downloadable-forms>*





## Report from the Chair



Last time in this column I wrote about causeways and their historic importance in the local landscape. I could have brought in the one at Sutton Courtenay, medieval in its origins, which leads between the mill stream and the main course of the Thames, and served the fisheries and wharves of that flourishing riverine village. When I led a Ramblers' history walk there recently, we reflected on the significance of such waterways as borders. Sutton and its neighbour settlement Culham on the opposite bank had no connecting bridge till the 19th century. They were not only separate

parishes: they lay in two separate counties; indeed during Saxon times they belonged to two separate kingdoms.

That story readily connects, of course, to Abingdon's. Culham belonged to the abbey; its own bridge over the Swift Ditch formed part of Abingdon's municipal causeway scheme. Sutton, long before its association with the prominent Anglo-Norman family of Courtenay, was Abingdon's own southern 'ton', or settlement, extending right up to the Ock, via Peep O'Day lane. The town itself occupied a liminal position in wider historical terms. Its situation on the edge of Berkshire made its role as a focus for that county increasingly difficult to sustain. The proximity to Oxford made for frequent tensions – at their height during the Civil War – and the vicinity felt the pull of the larger city (even the navigation along the Swift Ditch during the 17th and 18th centuries represented a bit of an Oxfordshire takeover).

Yet Abingdon could continue to assert centrality within its own little region (or 'Area' as our Society decided to call it, in order to secure a place for its acronym at the head of the alphabet, at least immediately behind those several European rivers called Aa). That was perhaps already so in pre-history, as marked by earthworks like the 'Drayton' (really more of a Sutton Courtenay) cursus; certainly so by the start of the Christian era. In his best-selling new book, *The Making of the British Landscape*, Nicholas Crane dwells on the 'proto-urban agglomerations marked on modern maps as "Dorchester" and "Abingdon"', the latter in its 'semi-moated, 33-hectare enclosure at the confluence of the rivers Ock and Thames'. He notes the significance of its 'insular centrality', a nice phrase. This is Abingdon as oppidum, in the first phase of its claim to a unique degree, among English towns, of continuous settlement.

That claim, and the search for evidence which could throw light on it, has been a central preoccupation of this Society since its foundation in 1968. Members have been closely involved with a long series of noteworthy digs, yielding finds from the iron age onwards. We have much material to prove this, the bulk of it housed in a scruffy and leaky portacabin in a farmyard at Marcham. Very little of the material has been fully analysed, still less rendered accessible in published form. Even our wonderful Abingdon Buildings and People resource on the town council's website, where so much excellent detailed local history research has been made available, contains only a brief summary (by Roger Thomas) of the archaeological testimony. As we approach the fiftieth birthday of AAAHS, that should give us pause for thought – and resolve for the future.



We have lots of preliminary ideas for the commemoration next year, from open lectures and guided walks, through hands-on events and an exhibition, to some kind of collaborative volume about Abingdon's past. However, evaluation and publication of the archaeological fieldwork record must count as our top priority. We need a full inventory of finds, matched with the extant documentation about every dig. Then we need to tell people what it all means: the crucial step from finds to findings. At very least we must tell the story on our own website, where we don't require full scholarly rigour. But we should seek to make the most important discoveries known through the proper academic outlets too. All hands on deck! There will be many jobs to do, most of them requiring only limited expertise, or none at all. Please let us know if you can help in any way.

All this could furnish a kind of proof of continuity within the Society itself. It might also help clarify what we really seek to prove about continuity, of settlement and culture, in Abingdon. Roughly perhaps that Abingdon was ordinary in each historical age, but extraordinary by virtue of being a participant in all of them? Maybe too that the town's remarkable continuity was somehow related to that border status which I considered at the outset.

*Bob Evans*

### ***Membership Secretary's report***

I'm pleased to be able to tell you that the number of paying members on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January was 69. This is good news as on the same date last year the number was 52; this rose to 69 at the end of August 2016. Nevertheless, we very much hope that more former members will re-join, and that we may attract some new ones before the end of the summer.

*Hubert Zawadzki*

### ***Treasurer's report***

Hubert's news that there has been a growth in membership compared to last year is very welcome, since membership subscriptions account for a large part of our regular income; we have received £569 so far in subs this year. Other major sources of income include donations from visitors to our talks, which to date have totalled £157.10. Particularly popular were Peter Dye's talk on WW1 aviation in Oxfordshire and Professor Nick Barton's session on archaeological finds at Gatehampton Farm. Book sales of *Abingdon in Camera* and Bob Evans' *Tales from God's Acre* have brought in £100.02, a significant contribution to our income.

We've been lucky so far this year in that we have had no unexpected expenses, and we have been able to cover our regular costs, the major items being room hire and speakers' fees, as well as insurance for our archaeological activities. Voluntary contributions to refreshments don't quite cover the costs but the amounts are small. Sending the newsletter electronically and generally using email for communications are keeping costs down significantly.

*Francesca Zawadzki*



## ***The 2017 Lambrick Lecture***

The Lambrick Lecture this year will be jointly hosted by AAAHS and the Friends of Abingdon. It will be given by David Clark, and his subject will be

*"The Long Gallery at Abingdon Abbey in the context of communal living in the middle ages"*



*David Clark, who is a member of the Society, specialises in vernacular buildings. He has published on medieval shops, on timber framing in Berkshire for the revised volume in the Buildings of England series, and is a co-author of Burford: buildings and people in a Cotswold town, for the England's Past for Everyone project. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.*

The event will be held on Thursday 20 April at the Unicorn Theatre, Checker Walk, Abingdon OX14 3JB. It will start at 7.30 pm and finish at approximately 9.30. Afterwards there will be light refreshments and a chance to visit the Long Gallery and other parts of the Buildings, and also to view the Abingdon and Abbey Timelines.

Please be aware that there is no parking at the Abbey Buildings, although drop-off and pick-up is possible. Parking is available in both the nearby Abbey Close and the Cattle Market car parks. There is limited space for wheelchairs in the theatre: please contact the Curator on 01235 525339 if you would like a space to be reserved for you, or have other questions about accessibility. Sadly, access to the refreshment area and the Long Gallery is only possible by stairs.

And it was David who was the only reader to identify any of the mystery photographs in our last issue.

This one is of the former Dower House in West Hanney, scene of an AAAHS outing probably in the 1980s. It was built in 1517 to house dowagers of the Yate family of nearby Lyford, and is now a private residence



P3\_31-18 . The signboard says 'John (?) Parker, Plant and machinery dealers'. Anyone recognise it?



## ***And for the rest of the 2016-7 year:***

**Lectures** at the Northcourt Centre, Northcourt Road, starting at 7.45 pm.



**8 May 2017 : Phil Neale: Lawrence of Arabia as a young archaeologist and what recent archaeology has shown us about his war exploits.**

Not only was Lawrence an accomplished archaeologist from an early age but his experiences in the Middle East as an archaeologist enabled him to perform a key role in the region at the outbreak of the First World War. Recent archaeology has uncovered remarkable evidence of his exploits in the Arab Revolt.

**5 June 2017: Members' Evening.**

**21 September 2017: AGM. Lecture to be announced.**

## ***Outings***

As every year, there will be three outings during the summer.

**Monday 22 May - Discover the village of Sunningwell. A guided walk followed if wished by a meal in the village pub, the Flowing Well.**



Photo Derek Harper; Creative Commons Licence



Photo Brigade Piron; Creative Commons Licence

**Wednesday 21 June - An outing to Somerville College, Oxford.**

**Tuesday 4 July - A tour of Abingdon School.**

**Further details to follow—keep watching the website!**



Photo Reading Tom; Creative Commons Licence





**In 2000, the AAAHS produced a timeline of Abingdon's History, which you can now see on-line. Judy White, one of the original group, recalls the project.**

## ***The Abingdon Timeline***

In 1998 the Abingdon Town Council formed a Millennium Committee with Councillors and members of local groups to discuss how Abingdon might celebrate the Millennium. One of the suggested ideas was a time-line of the town's history. This seemed an ideal project for the Archaeological Society; it was put to the Committee who endorsed it enthusiastically.

By October 1998 a brief had been prepared and the Society was applying to the Vale of White Horse for a grant towards the cost. A research group comprising John Carter, Anne Smithson, Elizabeth Drury, Jackie Smith and Judy Thomas (White) started work in earnest, planning the panels, researching dates, and finding suitable illustrations. We hoped that members of the Art Department in Abingdon College of Education might do the artwork, but this proved impracticable. However, we were put in touch with Linda Francis, a graphic designer living in Little Wittenham, who agreed to take on the project. Her practical help and advice were invaluable.



A cheerful group at the unveiling of the Timeline in 2000. From left to right: Gill Jacobi, AAAHS chairman; Linda Francis, designer; Judy White; Lesley Legge, Mayor

The Society applied to the Millennium Festival Awards for All for a grant, and were delighted to receive £4,077 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the design and production costs. The Joint Environmental Trust for Abingdon (JET) and Abingdon Town Council also supported the project.

The final design comprised seven panels, each depicting a different era and with its own theme. The panels are united by a wavy blue line representing the River Thames which runs across the centre of each panel carrying key dates. Pictures and text illustrating people, buildings and events in Abingdon's history are arranged on either side of the river. Delightful drawings by local artist Muriel Halliday enliven the first two panels and elsewhere in the text.

The finished Time-line was first displayed in the Old Gaol Leisure Centre. It was officially unveiled on Thursday, 6 July 2000 with the Mayor, Cllr. Lesley Legge, the AAAHS Chairman, Mrs Gill Jacobi, Linda Francis, Muriel Halliday, the working group and many others. When the Museum was shut for renovation it moved to its present location in the Upper Hall of the Checker in the Abbey buildings.

It is hoped that the current project to digitize the Time-line will make it accessible to a much wider audience.

*Judy White*

**You can now see the Timeline on <http://www.aaahs.org.uk/archive/reports-and-reviews-7>**



## *Local History*

### ***The Local History Group***

There have been a couple of Local History Group meetings since the last newsletter, and — since we don't have a formal programme or a team of secretaries taking minutes — I'm struggling a little to remember exactly what happened.

In October, the main event was Bob Frampton talking about his research on Abingdon Airfield. It was a slightly horrific tale, with obsolete bombers used for training not having enough power to clear Boars Hill and all too frequently crashing into it, and a couple of Luftwaffe bombs falling precisely on the base's bomb dump and providentially failing to explode. I came up with a couple of bits from work on the ABP website—the difficulty of writing about Airey Neave's assassination because just about everybody who reported it was telling porkies, and — shock, horror — did you know that William Blacknall, the sixteenth century entrepreneur, didn't come from Swallowfield as lots of people have said but from Wing in Buckinghamshire?

And John Foreman explained that the alleged WW1 trench on Andersey Island wasn't one, and Jackie Smith about the significance of the ex-Bellinger site in Ock Street, and I'm sure there was more but my memory fades ...

The February meeting once more had Bob Frampton as the star attraction, and he did indeed attract a lot of people. The number was somewhere in the mid-twenties, which must be the best ever by a margin. What brought them in was Bob's account of the MG factory from the workers' point of view. The piece I remember was the good lady accosting a tramp-like character wandering round her workshop who introduced himself charmingly as Mr Morris. Then I came in again (this begins to sound like a double act, but it really isn't) explaining the why and wherefore of a kerfuffle about the communion table at St Nics in 1628. John had a theory about where Turner stood when he made his watercolour painting of Abingdon in 1804, and Elizabeth Drury showed a film of the Morland Brewery before it closed, but the point was a bit lost because we couldn't get the sound system to work and the talking heads remained silent.

The LHG meets three times a year—the next one is 30 May, 7.45 at 35 Ock Street. John Foreman runs it. You don't have to have something to say, but if you have you'll be welcome to say it. It's as formal or informal as you please, and there is coffee. If you are interested in local history (and if you aren't you won't be reading this) do come.

*Manfred Brod*





## Digging

### ***The Shrieve Cottage Dig***



Shrieve Cottage as it was in 1912

whole floor area of the main room in the more easterly of the two cottages. When we removed both the small trees (an elder and an elm) which had barred our way, we discovered that their roots had not penetrated the solid flooring beneath them. It's made of some kind of Victorian concrete mix. In places it bears the traces of paint. Now we're wondering what's underneath that.

As we approach the remains of the chimney-piece – the one part of Shrieve that was partly visible at the start of our operations – we're finding more and more bricks and tiles. Last time we unearthed the first brick so far to have lettering on it. It's a firebrick,



Firebricks from the hearth

It's over a year since I last reported on our excavation. During that time we have continued with regular digging sessions, every month or two, supported by staff, AAAHS members, and other local enthusiasts. Latterly we've been able to welcome some children on site, with their parents. Not sure what the youngest ones make of it all; but they've been super-active with buckets and spades. Despite – or because of! – that, progress has been fairly slow; though that's also in good part because we're a sociable group: all finds are shared – and a good pretext for a coffee break, and a sausage roll.

We have at last more or less uncovered the



A dig for all ages!

manufactured at Stourbridge by Harper & Moore, a well-known name through the Victorian period and beyond. Evidently local kilns couldn't supply such a specialized item for the hearth at Shrieve.

We have made lots more finds of bits of crockery, glass, metal objects of all kinds, primitive sorts of plastic, etc. I was specially pleased to find evidence that the cottagers enjoyed the products of the old Corona works, Thomas & Evans, in the Rhondda valley. In my youth they constituted the Welsh temperance movement's greatest gift to the English fish



and chip shop: the firm's soft drinks had originally been marketed as an alternative to alcohol. Bottles were prominent in the little exhibition we mounted in the autumn at Abingdon Library. We hope to return there with an expanded display very shortly.

Do come along, either to join in the digging or just to look around. Contact addresses as above.

*Bob Evans*

## Websites

### ***The Abingdon Buildings and People Website***

In February 2013 the then members of the ABP group committed to producing at least 30 articles within about six weeks for the planned start-up of the new Town Council website. In the event, we managed short articles on forty-two different topics. The first articles were uploaded in mid-April.

The pace today appears from the outside to be very much slower – for a while it's been averaging not much more than one new topic a month. But the raw numbers are deceptive. The original fill for the web pages was of short articles largely written using information that group members already had in their files. Today the stand-alone short articles are much longer than the early ones and the long articles are substantial essays. New topics now entail special research by group members.

If you have a few minutes to click your way through the ABP web pages, you should be able to identify the very early articles by their brevity.

#### New on the website since the last issue:

- a feature article on the Bear Club
- a short article on Henry Forty
- short and long articles on the Blacknall family
- a long article on St Edmund of Abingdon
- a short on Maud Hale Terrace
- a short and a long on Our Lady and St Edmund's.

If you would like to find out more about the ABP group, or maybe you are thinking of joining us, please contact me or any other member of the group.

*Jessica Brod*



## ***The AAAHS Website***

It was with slight trepidation that I volunteered to update the AAAHS website and was somewhat surprised when Manfred Brod indicated (after my ‘interview’) that a series of tutorials would be necessary. After the first lesson I could see why. Having watched several videos on YouTube and experienced Manfred’s tutorials I gained some hands on experience with the system.

JOOMLA is the free open-source software used to run the AAAHS website. It is very flexible and powerful and consequently rather complicated. The editor has a life of its own: getting the font, the font size and the images more or less where and how you want them is an unexpectedly tricky procedure, particularly in the light of online text editors available today. These are very much What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG), which is not the case with JOOMLA. However, I can safely say that updating the website becomes less complicated with new software updates. At least I think it does: it’s certainly different. Mark Holland of Abingdon Technologies hosts the site, installs the new software releases and deals with any serious problems, such as a lost website!

These days all local societies are expected to have a website and it is important to consider the probable visitors that the website may have. You have to ask yourself who the website is actually for and what its functions should be. Of course it is there for the members (and non members) to see when and where the meetings are, who the speakers are and what they are speaking about. It also hosts the research archive, which allows members to publish their research, and provides contact points for enquiries. I try and make the AAAHS website one I would like to visit.

A website should enable information to be found quickly and easily and above all it must be up to date and accurate. A website with information that is obviously out of date with the next meeting already passed and unclear even which year it’s referring to discourages visitors, who may be interested in becoming members. This is one of the reasons why it is important to keep the AAAHS website up to date. I can only do that if I have the necessary information, which from some sources is a bit slow in coming. But then my usual sources do say that extracting the necessary information from their own sources is ‘like getting blood out of a stone’. It’s useful if the Committee (and the Members) bear the website in mind when they obtain information which may be useful to share on the website and let me know. I rely on the AAAHS members to allow me to create a website that is relevant to their activities. Of course I hope that members will tell me if they find something wrong: I am sometimes tempted to put something really bizarre on the website, just to check that someone out there reads it: ‘Stonehenge to be demolished to remove distraction hazard for WWI aircraft’, perhaps? I’m always thankful for any information and particularly grateful if I get a nice JPEG Image that is in kilobytes rather than megabytes. I didn’t realise until I started this work that images came in so many different sizes and types. Fortunately JOOMLA seems to know what to do with them even if I don’t. Text is always best as a pdf as it’s more secure, displays neatly and prints easily.

From time to time I take a back up of the website on the server. It would be a great shame if I managed to lose all the carefully updated information and the website reverted to how it was





three months ago. Back-ups are made through the cPanel website which is, you'll be interested to know, a Linux-based web hosting control panel.

At sometime I must write a guide. This is not easy as constant developments in the JOOMLA software make some processes either different or redundant, but there are situations in which a manual would certainly help, especially if there is a particular edit which I haven't done for a while. The AAAHS website could be better looking and it would be nice to improve the Gallery with captions for those photographs which have been so painstakingly scanned in.

*Mary Haynes*

## **The AAAHS@50!!!**

The AAAHS began when Lucy Hale called a meeting at the College of Further Education on 3 May 1968. Sixty-five people came, and formed the Abingdon & District Archaeological Society. In 1975, it changed its name to what it is now.

A select few of the founder members are still with us. One of them was very nervous at the first meeting when the question of a lower age limit came up. He was eleven. He is now a distinguished past chairman (no prizes for the answer!).

The fiftieth anniversary will be in 2018 and there will be celebrations. There's no decision yet on exactly what they will be, but they will certainly include an exhibition at the Museum and a series of lectures.

If you have any further ideas or suggestions, please tell any member of the Committee.

Better still, if you are willing to help with any of the activities, please make yourself known. One volunteer is worth any number of pressed men (or women) and there will certainly be jobs for all.

The Committee



## Feature Articles

### ***A legend in his own time***

#### ***Dick Barnes has been awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Years Honours List***



Dick Barnes is a veteran member of the AAAHS. He has filled many roles as a member of its committee, including those of secretary and newsletter-editor.

Dick was one of the original members of the AAAHS's Local History Group, which started in 2000. This group meets three times a year and either one or two members present their current research which is then open to discussion and comment. Dick (in spite of his advanced age) remains a regular attender and participant in the discussions.

There are no full records, but Dick has made numerous presentations to the Local History Group. A particularly memorable one was in 2004, on the mixture of complex politics and confused administration that led in the 1950s to the demolition of Fitzharris Manor in Abingdon. This is the work for which he was awarded the Judith Hunter Prize of the Berkshire Local History Association in 2006. Other talks were on the history of St Nicholas Church, on which he is the recognised authority. One presentation in 2007 dealt with Dolby's 1880 restoration of the church, and another in 2011 with the peregrinations around the church of the fine memorial to the Blacknall family, first placed there in the seventeenth century and now uncomfortably squeezed into a niche in a side chapel that is just too small for it. In 2010 he gave two talks in the same evening, a feat that would have stressed a younger man; one of these dealt with the early development at Harwell of what later became known as the Witch computer, of which he was one of the originators. The other was a study of the work, life and times of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Abingdon administrator and historian A E Preston.

Dick's historical work forms an important part of what is known of Abingdon's past. It is his research that informs some very significant articles in the Abingdon Buildings and People website, notably those on the Fitzharris Estate and on A E Preston.

That website suggests that Preston sought to emulate a 17<sup>th</sup> century worthy whose career he studied, Francis Little. Like Little, Preston fitted his historical researches into a life of active and varied endeavour to the benefit of the town of Abingdon. Exactly the same can be said Dick Barnes. Like these illustrious predecessors, Dick has become a local legend in his own time.

*Jackie Smith*



## Obituary

### Will Cumber (1948-2016)

**Will Cumber died on 29 October 2016 at the age of 67. He had been an honorary member of the AAAHS for many years. As well as being an active participant and occasional speaker at our meetings, he was a great benefactor of the AAAHS as of other societies and activities with related aims. It is thanks to Will that we have a portacabin at Manor Farm in Marcham, where we store our equipment, archives and archaeological finds at no cost either in rent or for utilities.**

**But Will was a man of many interests and talents, as Simon Blackmore recounts:**



Will Cumber at the wheel of a tractor

Will was a leading light in the farming world, both locally in Oxfordshire and also nationwide, regularly officiating at 'The Royal Show' and 'Smithfield'. He was also a Trustee of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, based in Oxford and donations in his memory were made to the RABI following his funeral on 11<sup>th</sup> November last year.

In his early years Will lived at Haywards Farm near Theale and then afterwards at Beansheaf Farm at Calcot, near Reading. After prep school at Prior's Court, Will went on to his senior school at Kingswood, near Bath. He then studied Agriculture at Reading. He moved to Manor Farm, Marcham, in February 1973. His sister Mary and her school friend Janey Lampitt joined him there. Janey and Will were married in Marcham Church in 1976. Will was a loving husband, a proud father of his three children, William, Ellen and Sophie.

As a man of the land, he was greatly interested in both Archaeology and History, a passion that he shared with his wife Janey, who gained a DPhil in Local History at Kellogg College. They were both heavily involved in the Marcham Society and were active life members of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historic Society and the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Will was also a great supporter of Public Speaking. He had been on a team that won at National level in the 1970s and he subsequently judged competitions for the Young Farmers. He was an accomplished speaker himself and his talks to local historical societies were always given to highest standard, humorous and well illustrated with slides.

His favourite topic, not surprisingly, was "Trendles", the field on his land near Frilford that contained the archaeological remains of an Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon religious site. During the eleven years dig by Oxford University, Will gave regular talks and progress reports, especially





recounting the changing views on the purpose of the “big round object” at Trendles – that is the ‘amphitheatre’. It was crop marks and aerial photographs that led to the discovery of this structure. Although the Noah’s Arc temple site was already known and had been excavated several times in the past, it was Will and Janey’s enthusiasm and the personal interest of Professor Gary Lock from Oxford University that extended the excavation and deepened research.

Will and Janey were also trustees of the Vale of the White Horse and Ridgeway Archaeological and Historical Trust and through this charity successful applications were made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for grants for the post-excavation cataloguing and recording of the finds over the last three years. The family has also been generous in their financial support for the project – space and facilities at Manor Farm has been provided for volunteers and twice a week there has been a buzz of activity as the local community has been actively involved in further research.

We all have fond memories of Will and we remember his great generosity, his deep love of the land and his strong community spirit. His death is a great loss to the village of Marcham.

*Simon Blackmore*

## Keeping up with AAAHS on-line

**There’s the AAAHS website** — simply go to [www.aaahs.org.uk](http://www.aaahs.org.uk). You can check forthcoming meetings, retrieve old newsletters, and access a large and growing archive of local historical material that you won’t find anywhere else.

**And there’s the AAAHS on-line bulletin board** — This keeps you up to date with news about the AAAHS and local history and archaeological activities throughout the region. It lets you post your own news and views. And every now and again there are flurries of correspondence about some piece of lore about the local past that everybody is excited about. Everything comes as emails to your own in-box.

But there’s a paradox about the bulletin board. It has over 100 subscribers, and most of them are not AAAHS members. At the same time, most AAAHS members are not subscribers.

So, why not do the obvious? An email to [aaahs-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:aaahs-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) starts the process. Or to [secretary@aaahs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@aaahs.org.uk). It doesn’t cost anything.

**And then there’s always Twitter ....** [https://twitter.com/AAAHS\\_org](https://twitter.com/AAAHS_org) will find it, but you need to be a follower to get full detail.

## ***So who were the poor of Cumnor in the 1840s?***



Rural idyll: William Turner of Oxford's famous view of the city from nearby Hinksey Hill (c.1840). But was it really like this?

“The country between Abingdon and Cumnor is bleak, flat and uninteresting, occasionally interspersed with mud hovels of the most wretched description, which gives an air of poverty and desolation to the scene.”

This visitor to Cumnor in 1850 was clearly not impressed on his journey through the outlying hamlet of Henwood. But who were the poor of Cumnor, why were they poor, and how typical was their plight? Three documents available on the village website (<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/external/cumnor>) may help us to answer these questions.

Cumnor stands on the line of hills which flank Oxford to the west. Although Oxford is nearer, historical links with Abingdon were strong, mainly because of the difficulty of crossing the Thames. Cumnor lay within the domain of Abingdon Abbey, and the major landowner was the Earl of Abingdon. Cumnor and Abingdon were in the same county, the same diocese and the same Poor Law Union. But Cumnor remained a rural community mainly dependent on agriculture except for a small brickmaking enterprise at Chawley.

It's well-known that times were hard in the countryside, and Cumnor was no exception. Enclosure, which took place in Cumnor in 1814, meant that agricultural workers were often only employed at certain times of year. There was a labour surplus in the 1820s with the return of soldiers from the wars with France. Enclosure also meant people no longer had access to common land. In 1843 poaching accounted for a quarter of total male summary convictions in Berkshire. Technological advances such as the introduction of the threshing machine, the engrossment of farms and in some areas a move away from arable farming all reduced employment opportunities. Other factors were a steadily rising population, poor harvests and high grain prices. Locally, women's work on which many families partially depended was affected by mechanisation which reduced the opportunities for “slop work”, the hand-finishing of garments at home for Abingdon's clothing industry. It all contributed to an increasingly desperate situation, one symptom of which was the Swing riots. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reports the sentences meted out in Abingdon to rioters in 1831, including one sentence of death. The unrest even reached Cumnor, where Joseph Clan-



field's barn and stable were burnt down in an arson attack in December 1830.

So who were the individuals affected? The first of our three documents is the vicar's census of the parish in 1841, the second is taken from the Overseers' book and lists individuals receiving out-door relief in March 1842, and the third is a list of Cumnor inhabitants who found themselves in the Abingdon workhouse at some point between 1840 and 1845. The out-door relief is interesting; people were given cash and often a ration of food each week to maintain them at home. There are two one-off payments for a child's funeral and one for wine and brandy, presumably medicinal.

The people on lists two and three are all paupers, but we aren't given much more information. The vicar's census has more details about each person and by cross-checking we can build up a picture of who was falling below the poverty line. Family breakdown, then as now, is frequently a factor. There were four Cumnor orphans in the Abingdon workhouse, and three young single women with infants. Families with children were usually in the workhouse because they had lost the breadwinner or the main carer. The Adams family had lost their mother, whose death was recorded in 1844; the Tarry family had lost their father who died in 1843. The Walklins were also fatherless, but the reason was that he had been sentenced to ten years' transportation for sheep stealing in 1841.

Old age almost always went hand-in-hand with poverty. Almost everyone receiving out-door relief was over working age. But the last resort for those who could no longer manage at home was the workhouse. It was also almost the only place where those with disabilities or long-term illnesses could be accommodated, although a few specialised institutions were gradually becoming available. Thus the 80-year-old Jane Grant, a "lunatic", was an inmate at Fairford Asylum in Gloucestershire, funded by the Abingdon Union.

The Cumnor records show the typical life-cycle of poverty; you were most likely to be a pauper in the first two decades of life and again later on when you could no longer work. How did people manage, individually and collectively? Cumnor benefited from a few charitable bequests for the "deserving", as well as a small amount of subsidised accommodation; there was also the "poor" land, a plot of about twelve acres where furze could be cut for kindling. But it was not a wealthy parish and had no resident lord of the manor after 1810. A non-conformist chapel was registered in 1850, which may have been a source of charitable support. A number of people probably migrated to towns, and there are records of three Cumnor families emigrating overseas, one at the expense of the parish. Chaotic circumstances or desperation undoubtedly caused some to resort to crime, like the Wilkins sisters who were regularly sentenced to several weeks' imprisonment during the 1830s. On a more positive note, the documents show a dense and close-knit network of relatedness and intermarriage within the community, with a number of households where adults other than the parents appear to be caring for children.

So who were the poor of Cumnor in the 1840s? Probably almost everyone in the labouring class. Hardly a rural idyll. Sadly, the traveller's description of "poverty and desolation" may not be far off the mark.

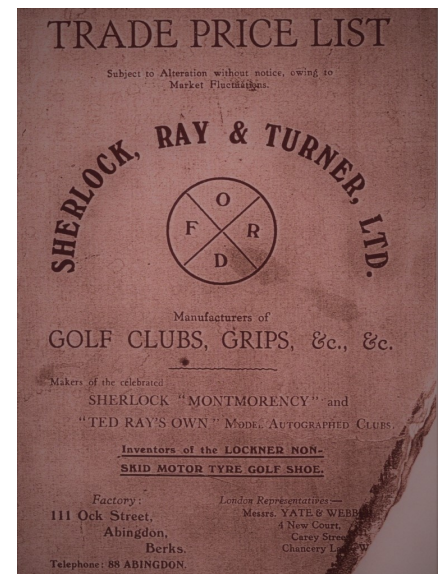
*Francesca Zawazki*





## Sherlock, Ray and Turner, Golf Club Makers

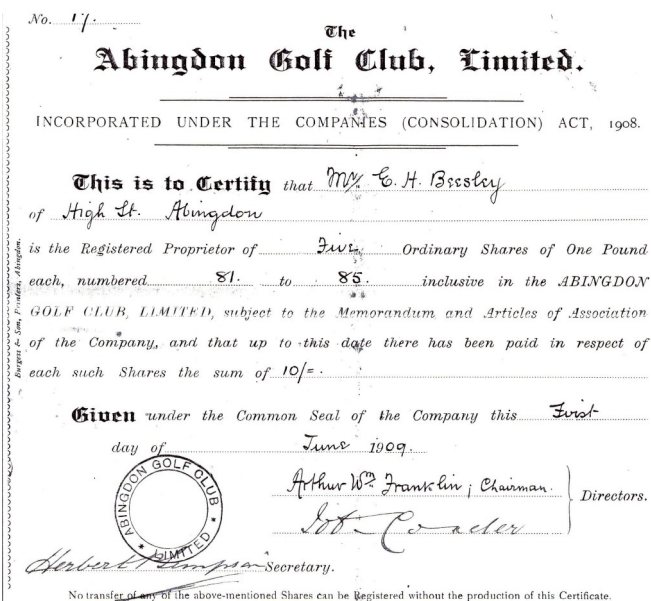
The small firm of Sherlock, Ray and Turner is listed in Peter Georgiady's 'Compendium of British Club Makers', published in 2000. It was formed by John Henry Turner who hired two professional golfers, James George Sherlock and Edward Rivers J "Ted" Ray, as golf club designers. Sherlock and Ray were members of the 1903 English Golf team. Sherlock already had a close association with the area, having been professional to the Oxford University team from 1894 to 1909. The firm's trade list advertised Sherlock's 'Montmorency' and Ted Ray's 'Own Model Autographed' clubs in addition to the firm's own patented golf bags and the 'Lockner non-skid motor tyre golf shoe'. The business was of short duration, operating from No.111 Ock Street between the years 1922 to 1926 when the firm went into voluntary liquidation. The premises were afterwards occupied by Gowrings.



Trade list, Sherlock Ray and Turner

Source: Abingdon Town Archives

It may seem strange to have chosen Abingdon as its manufacturing base. The town, however, has had more than a passing association with the game since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In May 1876 Captain Molesworth, a distinguished golfer, visited Abingdon Common to view its suitability for conversion to golf links to enable all the year round play. Molesworth was thinking particularly of the Oxford University golfers. He saw the game as an antidote to 'these heavy days of brain pressure'. Molesworth concluded that the common offered good possibilities but despite a favourable report in *The Field* there was no action was taken.



Share certificate of a founder member of the Abingdon Golf Club, 1909

Photo courtesy of David Barrett

According to the Victoria County History golf first appears to have been played at Abingdon in 1901 on a small course laid out in the grounds of The Abbey (ie Cosener's House) by the tenant Mr W.J. Clayton. It had been common for the occupier to take up the option of leasing the 17 acres or so where the open air pool and children's play area are now situated. A club was established which later moved to land on the Wootton Road. In November 1902 it moved to Shippon where a 9-hole course was laid out by Mr A.C.M. Croome, a keen sportsman and schoolmaster at Radley College, and James Sherlock of Oxford.

In 1909 the Abingdon Herald reported a meeting at the Lion Hotel to establish a new golf club for Abingdon. Rules were adopted and articles for



the formation of a limited company were sent off for registration. The article concludes by saying that the club has taken possession of the golf course at Shippon. Abingdon Golf Club Ltd's office holders are listed in Hooke's Almanac and Directory until the late 1930s.

This new venture was probably prompted by the establishment of a golf club at Frilford Heath where the sandy soil of the heathland produced ideal turf for a golf course. The founding members of the Frilford Heath Club were three professional men from Abingdon, Arthur Preston, Harry Challenor and Thomas Skurray, who had negotiated a lease with the major landowner Magdalen College. The old thatched clubhouse from Shippon was enlarged and re-erected at the new course. The first chairman was Claude Rippon, proprietor of the Oxford Times, and the secretary was local solicitor W.T. Morland. John Henry



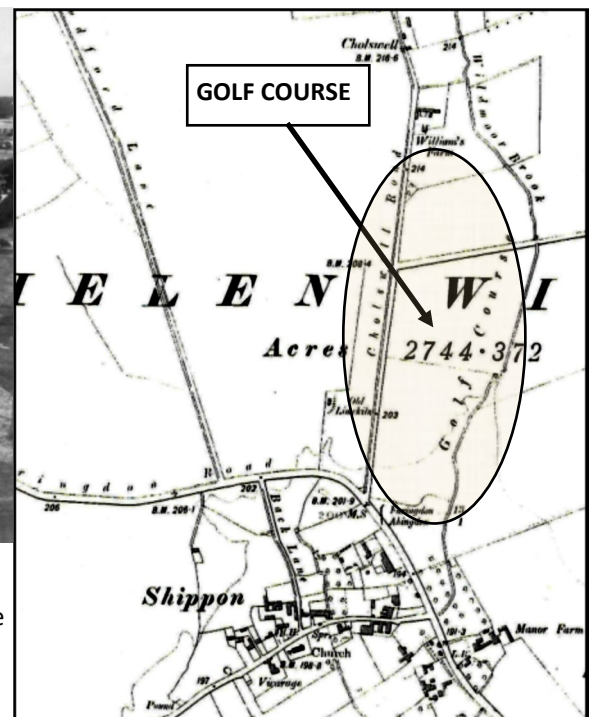
The English golf team at the 1903 Olympics. James Sherlock is on the back row standing first left and Ted Ray front row seated second from right

Wikimedia Commons



The location of the old 9-hole golf course at Shippon is shown towards the right-hand edge of the picture and on the 6" OS map of 1914. The site is today partly covered by a sports ground and partly by housing.

Photo courtesy of Pat Minns



Turner became Frilford Heath's first professional. In 1939 he received a testimonial marking his twenty-five year association with the club.

*Jackie Smith*



## Book Reviews

**Joyce Huddleston (ed), *St James the Great, Radley. The Story of a Village Church* (Radley: Radley History Club, 2016), pp.vi+178; £12 + £2.50 p&p from the Club at [http://www.radleyhistoryclub.org.uk/book\\_church.html](http://www.radleyhistoryclub.org.uk/book_church.html)**

In the twenty years since its foundation, Radley History Club has become a model for active local research. After recent publications on transport, farming, education, etc., a group of its members here turn their attention to the church, as building, institution, and central feature of village life. As before, the volume is attractively presented, richly illustrated and the product of a thorough trawl through familiar and unfamiliar source materials.

After a short introduction to key themes, notably the development of the village community and the lordship of the manor, and Radley's long dependence in ecclesiastical matters on St Helen's in Abingdon, a first main chapter (by Richard Dudding) presents the architectural evidence. In some ways St James the Great is a typical later medieval church structure; but it contains some remarkable elements. Both its nave aisles are notable: the southern one because it's supported by tree trunks fashioned as pillars, an extremely rare survival about which there seems to be no written testimony; the northern one because it doesn't exist, though many have thought it should, or once did. Dudding conclusively demolishes the tales of its collapse or supposed destruction, by civil war soldiery or otherwise. He also supplies a careful survey of the amazing ancient vicarage adjoining the church, though we're left wondering quite how it could have survived as a parish amenity when almost all others of its kind were in recent years sold off by the Church Commissioners.

Some of Radley church's rich interior decoration (described by Felicity Henderson) is puzzling too, especially the pulpit canopy which is often claimed – with no proof – to have been removed from the Speaker's chair at Westminster in the time of the Lenthalls. Of particular note too are the western gallery, perhaps devised earlier for musicians; monuments to the patronal clans of Stonhouse and Bowyer; the gifts from the latter family of stained glass and the superb chancel stalls, German in origin it seems, complete with misericords; the bells and their sometimes quaint inscriptions. A very useful survey (by Rita and Brian Ford) of the churchyard and its graves – at least the still legible ones – completes the material inventory.

The core of the book lies in the chapter (by Christine Wootton) on incumbents. It's lengthy: there have been an awful lot of them over the years. In shadowy earlier days that no doubt had partly to do with Radley's being a chapelry to Abingdon: in practice autonomy could be asserted (with the help of the patrons) from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, although final formal confirmation of this only occurred around 1850. Another snag about ministering to Radley's flock was the physical separation of church and vicarage from the main village settlement, maybe – albeit this remains speculative – because the latter had been relocated during the later Middle Ages when a deer park was created around the manor house. In any event, the parson thereafter also found himself in close, perhaps all too close, proximity to his patron and social superior at the Hall. That later gave way to a complicated and sometimes tense relationship with Radley College.





Some clergy actually doubled up as schoolmasters, among them William Wood, who was simultaneously vicar of the church and warden of the College for a few years, and whose diary has just been published by the Oxfordshire Record Society. There were, however, two outstanding exceptions to the rule of short incumbencies: John Herbert served for some 45 years on either side of the Civil War, and John Radcliffe enjoyed a similar tenure through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Only when we reach Richard Dudding's second contribution, on financial and economic aspects of the subject, does the main cause of the comparative unattractiveness of the cure at Radley become apparent: it was long an exceedingly poor living, far poorer than was the case in surrounding parishes, even those with smaller populations. Not only were the main tithes siphoned off to Abingdon, or later to the lords of the manor; the vicar lacked even the normal portion of glebe land. Hence the short career (1796-1800) at Radley of John Lemprière, the finest scholar among the vicars (astonishingly his *Classical Dictionary* is still in print), but a negligent and feckless priest, who combined the role with his headship of Roysse's, i.e. Abingdon School, and almost ruined that too. We learn about the minutiae of churchwardens' accounts, benefactions, and charitable gifts, covering matters as diverse as the relief of indigence in foreign parts (by the instruments known as 'church briefs') and payments for the tails of dead sparrows. A pity, then, that in a concluding section of the book, on the role of the laity, we only hear about Radley's present arrangements.

Issues of status and funding, as they are detailed here, invite comparison with other parishes around Abingdon. Drayton provides a parallel case of formal dependency; so too, though more squarely as daughter congregations, do Shippon and Dry Sandford. Sunningwell shared the same patronal families with Radley. Both these parishes were involved – not without friction? – in the ecclesiastical development of Kennington. The Hinkseys and Wootton stood for centuries in the same relation to Cumnor as Radley did to Abingdon; all were presumably underfunded as a result: even Cumnor itself was not a wealthy living. For the role of great landowners in the life of the local church, we could also look across the river to the more dramatic example of Nuneham Courtenay. Once again Radley History Club's authors, by cultivating their own ground so assiduously and so fruitfully, can prompt their readers to think about wider issues too.

*Bob Evans*

**Murray Maclean, *From Arrowheads to Irrigators, A History of Frilford and Collins Farm*, (self-published, 2016) £7.95 from the author**

The arrowhead in the book title is a Neolithic one, dating to about 2,500 BC, found on Collins Farm. The irrigators are part of the investment that has helped Murray Maclean, the author, improve the farm over the last 50 years. His book takes us through the centuries from one to the other, never departing far from the local soil and topography and the development of agricultural techniques and markets.

The hamlet of Frilford is on light limestone draining into the River Ock to the south and Piling Brook to the north. It lies astride the modern A415 between Marcham and Kingston Bagpuize.



Collins Farm is on the west side of the hamlet, roughly between Frilford Golf Club and Millets Farm Centre.

The light soil and easy access to fresh water made the area ideal for early settlement, and consequently it has been much surveyed and dug by archaeologists. As well as the Neolithic arrow in the book title, there is evidence of iron age huts, of a Roman villa and temple complex and of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery.

From the middle ages to the early C19th the account, as the author concedes, is patchy. There is a very good Enclosure Map of 1846 showing there to have been at that time three open fields, with the individual furlongs and strips clearly marked, and there is modern corroboration of the layout of these fields from geophysical evidence and visible headlands between furlongs. But much of what is said about the pre-enclosure period is surmise.

After that the story picks up in much greater detail. Enclosure came late - in 1861 - following an earlier abortive attempt in 1846. The author tells us that by 1861 there were only two farmers holding the strips in the open fields and that one of these, Thomas Floyd, had already invested heavily in new farm buildings. Enclosure appears therefore to have been a late tidying up exercise following a long and gradual period of de facto consolidation.

As we move into the 20th century there is an interesting interlude about World War 2, when an anti-tank line consisting of a ditch and pillboxes (the Red Line) was constructed between the Thames at Newbridge and at Abingdon. Like much else over the centuries it has left its visible trace and some nice archaeology at Collins Farm.

From 1959 the author started farming in the area and in 1969 he purchased Collins Farm. The story of the last 50 years has been one of capital investment, including those irrigators, helped by Government grants; and of entrepreneurial responsiveness to new markets, such as sweetcorn for American airmen at Brize Norton and trees and shrubs for new town landscaping at Milton Keynes.

At the end of the book the bibliography is a little sparse. There is no mention of some relatively obvious sources such as Ross Wordie's 2000 book on Enclosure in Berkshire, which includes a section on Frilford. And the author does not appear to have accessed the (probably rather challenging) manorial records for Frilford with Garford that are held by St John's College Oxford. Wider reading might have enabled a more rounded picture to have been painted which would more easily justify the subtitle 'A History of Frilford'. In particular we might have learnt more about the lives of ordinary villagers in the pre-enclosure period.

Against that the undoubted strength of the book is the author's intimate understanding of soil and topography and of agricultural technology and markets – which did so much to shape the history of the area.

The book is 87 pages of A5. It is lucidly written and very well illustrated with maps and photographs. These benefit greatly from being in colour and despite the hike to production costs that must have caused, the sale price is a reasonable £7.95.

*Richard Dudding*



**Bob Evans: *Tales from God's Acre: Fifty Sunningwell lives* (self-published, 2016)  
Available from the author.**

This book consists of 50 short articles mostly on individuals and their families associated with Sunningwell Church, being either buried or commemorated there.

You may think that by the time you've reached the 50<sup>th</sup> tale, things might become rather tedious, but you would be very wrong because there are so many nuggets of information contained within them. I never knew that at one time Henry John Roby's Latin Grammar vied with Kennedy's Latin Primer and that the rhyme 'I do not love thee Doctor Fell ...' which my Grandmother used to quote had anything to do with the Fells in Sunningwell church yard. So disappointing though, to find that the Baskervilles had nothing to do with the hound, or even John Baskerville's typefaces come to that. But the famous names that are associated with them do include artists Joseph Turner and Augustus John, writers Agatha Christie and Iris Murdoch and even the philosopher Wittgenstein. Bob Evans has effortlessly put flesh on the buried bones and re-created living people from an assemblage of facts about their lives. His own personality is revealing and revealed.

These articles were originally published in a Parish Magazine between 2010 and 2014. They are also available on the web at [www.stleonardsunningwell.org.uk/tales-of-gods-acre](http://www.stleonardsunningwell.org.uk/tales-of-gods-acre). The book format would have benefitted from some editing of the articles and restructuring of the texts to make it more suitable for the wider audience for which it is presumably intended and certainly deserved.

Having read this book, I made a mental note to bear in mind that with researchers such as Bob Evans, one's past may not always be buried with one.

*Mary Haynes*

## **ABINGDON-ON-THAMES HERITAGE WEEKEND**

**9 - 10 September 2017**



Heritage Weekend this year will be on 9-10 September. No details yet at the time of writing, but there will be talks, walks, and exhibitions. And we will certainly be helping to put them on. Any suggestions and offers to help – please talk to any member of the Committee.



## Who does what in 2016-7?

### The Committee:

**Chairman/town planning:** Bob Evans

**Secretary/Newsletter:** Manfred Brod

**Treasurer:** Francesca Zawadzki

**Membership:** Hubert Zawadzki

**Local History:** John Foreman

**Digging:** Jeff Wallis

**Lectures:** Jeff Wallis and John Foreman

**Publicity:** John Foreman

**Posters:** Wendy Robbins

**Archives:** Jackie Smith

**Member without portfolio:** Bob Frampton

### Functions without Committee membership

Refreshments at meetings: Angela McCreavy; Outings: Elizabeth Drury; Webmaster: Mary Haynes

Note that Committee members normally serve either three or six years. New Committee members will be elected at the AGM on 21 September. Nominations will be welcome.

**Contact committee members through the website, or email to [info@aaahs.org.uk](mailto:info@aaahs.org.uk)**

### Editor's Notes

I have had various comments made to me about readability, and now that we don't have to worry about printing costs I have gone to single columns, a larger type size and more inter-line spacing. I hope this helps and am always happy to hear what readers think!

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 2017.

*Manfred Brod*

## Dates for Your Diary

### Town, County and National:

17 June: Oxpast 2017 will be at Thame—details to be announced

15-30 July: 27th Festival of Archaeology

9-10 September: Heritage Open Days

### Abingdon Museum Friends

**St Helen's Church Centre, 7 for 7.30 pm**

6 April: AGM and Richard Smith, *Oxford Eccentricity*

### Marcham Society

**All Saints' Church, 7.45 pm**

11 April: Alan Markman, *Old-fashioned farming for wildlife at City Farm, Eynsham*

9 May: Ben Ford, *Archaeological discoveries at the Westgate*

### Radley History Club

**Radley CE Primary School, 7 for 7.30 pm**

10 April: Rachel Everett – *What's beneath your feet: the archaeology of Radley*

8 May: Mark Davies – Daniel Harris: *Oxford Castle gaoler extraordinaire*

12 June: Liz Woolley – *The Victorian and Edwardian development of east Oxford*

10 July: Stephen Barker – *The Oxfordshire Home Front 1914-1918*

11 Sept: Peter Neal – *MG Cars in Abingdon*

### Sutton Courtenay Local History Society

**All Saints Church, 7.30 pm**

17 May: AGM and talk TBA.

### Wallingford Hist and Arch Soc

**St Mary's Church, 7.45 for 8.00 pm**

12 April: Tim Allen: *"Excavations at St Brieuc, Brittany - an Iron Age town?"*

10 May: Jim Leary: *"The Round Mounds project: from Medieval Mottes to Prehistoric Round Mounds"*

14 June: Edward Carpenter: *"The view from above: Lidar and Aerial Photographs of Wallingford and beyond"*

12 July: Julie Thorne: *"The Water Gypsy: how a Thames fishergirl became a viscountess"*

13 Sept: Rachel Pettit-Smith: *"A history of Pettits of Wallingford"*