

Henley Archaeological & Historical Group

NEWS-
LETTER
NO. 124

June 2012

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

There have been four interesting speakers this year attended by an increasing number of members, and that is re-assuring. Do let us have your comments on what is happening to HAHG; after all, it is your Group.

I have been keeping you up to date at the meetings on what your Committee is discussing. This includes Highlands Farm dig in liaison with SOAG (see ensuing article), our comments on the Northfield End triangular green contretemps, where there will now be a public inquiry; buildings recording and digging at Ewelme (see ensuing articles); and the wonderful new website designed by Graham Jones. Do go to www.Henley-on-thamesarchaeologicalandhistoricalgroup.org.uk and have a look. There you will see amongst other items a précis of those talks you may have missed. These are also being put into the Henley Standard, as you may have noticed.

The talk in May on the history of witchcraft was intriguing, especially as regards the mystical ways to fend off the devil. It was spooky for me to come across, within a week, a small, black shoe in the middle of a country lane near Ashampstead (where my forebears lived)! Should I stop and pick it up, but then I could not place it up my chimney because of the gas fire in use?! - On this subject, perhaps it is of interest to see the Daily Telegraph article on the anniversary of 400 years of witch trials in this country.

Finally, the **OXPAST Conference** organized by Oxfordshire Architectural & Historical Society and co-hosted by our Group will take place on 9th June at the d:two centre in Market Place between 10am – 4 pm. Entrance tickets (£ 7) can still be purchased at the door, unless the venue is fully booked.

Valerie Alasia

Lectures Season 2012

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| 12 th June 2012 | Dr. Mary Lewis | ‘Death of a Traitor? The case of a hanged, drawn & quartered skeleton from Hulton Abbey’ |
| <i>NB note above, change of lecturer and date; i.e. now second Tuesday of June</i> | | |
| 2 nd October 2012 | Dr. Malcolm Airs | ‘Survival of the Country House in the C20 th ’ |
| 6 th November 2012 | Jill Greenaway | ‘Thames Water Collection, based on Reading Museum’s exhibits’ |
| 4 th December 2012 | A.G.M. | Refreshments and short talks by members |

All lectures are held at 7.45 p.m. in the old ‘Kings Arms’ Barn; entry from Kings Road Car Park. All welcome, members free, non-members £ 3

About our next lecturer

Dr. Mary Lewis - 12th June, 2012 - *NB change in lecture date, not the 1st Tuesday of the month !*

Analysis of a set of bones redeposited in a medieval abbey graveyard showed that the individual had been beheaded and chopped up, and this in turn suggested one of England's more gruesome execution practices. Since quartering was generally reserved for the infamous, the author attempts to identify the victim and proposes a Royal connection.

Dr Mary Lewis teaches the method and theory behind the study of human skeletal remains, osteological techniques and palaeopathology at undergraduate and Masters level. Mary specialises in non-adult skeletal pathology and in the personal identification of children in forensic anthropology. She examines the changing pattern of disease in children in relation to socio-economic transitions in the past (Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon; urban to industrial) with particular focus on metabolic and infectious diseases.

REVIEW OF HENLEY BAPTIST CHURCH DOCUMENTS & Setting up a DOCUMENTS GROUP

Cynthia Robinson

Over the past few months since joining the Group, I have had the opportunity to peruse the Group's library and materials in their room at the rear of the Town Hall. My first task was to review the deeds relating to Henley Baptist Church, also known as d:two, in Market Place.

The documents relate to numbers 55 and 57 Market Place, some of which go back to 1690, and mention two tenements with a malthouse located on the rear burgage plot of 57 Market Place. These documents provide an insight into the property dealings at the time with property being leased for short periods and used as security for loans. Properties were referred to by location and a detailed description of the adjoining land; this provides further information as to the ownership of land adjoining 55 and 57.

Some of the property's owners also owned land in other parts of the town and their names crop up throughout these and other records, such as Jonathan Sayer who in 1736 left this property and also the White Hart, now 21/23 Hart Street, to his widow Mary who sold these properties. Amongst the deeds are extracts from the wills of John Tyrrell as well as William and Joseph Dobson, with the latter found drowned at Battersea in the winter of 1876.

In 1877 when it was decided to establish a Baptist chapel on the site, the property was sold and the contract for the building works was awarded in June 1878 to Charles Clements. (Also see articles by R.Gibson & A.Cottingham in Journal No. 24 on this)

Are you interested in joining a group to transcribe C18th wills of Henley residents?

The next task I am looking forward to participating in concerns the transcribing of some of the wills of Henley residents, which have been sourced from the National Archives. It is planned to form a small working group to work on these documents. If you are interested in assisting with this please contact me on 572445 or Ruth Gibson on 572271.

Devizes Spring Outing

On Sunday 13th May our group outing to historic Devizes enjoyed a town walk in miraculous sunshine. Our very local guide, John Girvan, told us about the Norman motte & bailey castle, located on the boundary of three manors – from which the town seems to take its name. The town grew up in the large outer bailey of the castle and its semi-circular street pattern still reflects this medieval boundary. The early Norman church survives, unlike the castle, and its large central tower preserves fine original windows, still with some Anglo-Saxon detailing. All around the town early timber framed buildings survive, but many are hidden behind brick and stucco facades.



Market Place start of tour

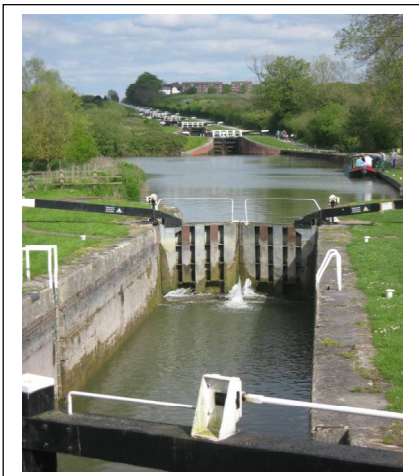


Norman St. John's Church



C15th inn yard

After a buffet lunch of excellent home cooking, coffee and cakes to die for at the Crown Centre, a former inn, we went to the Devizes Museum and were introduced to its collection by the Director, thanks to John Howard arranging this for us. (John is a founder member of our Group, who recently moved to Devizes and is now an active volunteer at the museum, doing work in the extensive document collection of an archive of national importance). The museum's treasures include stone tools from the Palaeolithic to the Bronze Age; precious metal object from the Bronze, Iron, Roman and Saxon periods, including a golden breast plate from the Bush Barrow excavations and a 6.000 years old, highly polished jade axe, a precious, high status object which originated in the north Italian alps.



We ended the day with a visit to the flight of 16 locks, which bring the Kennet & Avon Canal up 72 m to the top of Caen Hill and the Devizes town wharf. This feat of engineering by John Rennie was not finished until 1810, finally connecting the Avon with that of the Kennet/Thames navigation. Although the canal of 87 miles had been built by 1801, goods had to be unloaded from their barges and taken up and down the hill by horse drawn trams until the large number of pound locks to control the water levels needed for the barges were fully operational. Thanks to much restoration work in the late C20th they still are.

News from Ewelme

Buildings survey on 28th April 2012

This is part of the research by the Victoria County History into the history of the village. A group of c. 30 volunteers, some from Henley and many members of the Oxford Buildings Record braved the rather damp conditions to have a good look at the village houses. Most were examined from the outside with building materials, window and door types, roofs, chimneys and any alterations noted; quite a few owners joined in and also allowed us to have a look inside as well as telling us about their buildings' personal histories. As so often brick, stone and rendered facades hide earlier structures. The most unusual building discovered was an 'ice house', built into the north/east facing hill side in the long back garden of the former Greyhound PH. It is a brick vaulted space underneath a small brick building, both reached by separate doors at different levels of the steeply sloping ground.

Interestingly many of the village houses still belong to the Trust, which was set up for the building and maintenance of the Almshouses and School in 1437 under a licence for a chantry granted by King Henry VI to the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk.

As quite a number of buildings remain to be visited, further survey days will probably be organized by the ever resourceful and hard working editor of the VCH, Simon Townley. Thanks to him the day was very enjoyable despite the weather! - If you are interested to join in, please give me a ring.



Above: The modest Warden's Cottage.

Left: Greyhound House; NB how the fine grey glazed header brick front wall, rubbed red brick window surrounds and quoins contrast with the less visible plain side wall, built of coursed rubble chalk, also known as clunch, (found in many of the village houses).

Right: Outbuilding set into the hill-side. The entrance to a vaulted chamber is being viewed by members of the recording team. The building is shown on the 1834 estate map. Was this an ice house with game larder above?

Ruth Gibson
May 2012

Ewelme Hundred VCH archaeology project

*Project Director: **Stephen Miles** (VCH and SOAG) email: stephen.miles@history.ox.ac.uk tel: 07796 146237)*

*SOAG Dig Leader: **Roelie Reed** (SOAG) email: roeliebom@hotmail.com, tel: 01844 353914)*

HAHG Archaeology Liaison Viv Greenwood (HAHG and SOAG) email: vivgreenwood@gmail.com, [tel:01491 413544](tel:01491413544)

The first set of test pits of the 2012 season was excavated during the weekend of 14/15 April. The three pits were all in the vicinity of the medieval Wace manor, later part of the Cope estate, in the north-west of the village – an area of considerable interest.

Unfortunately, the ground at all three properties seems to have been very disturbed in the post-medieval and modern periods, but further investigation (including geophysics) may help develop the picture – especially as we come closer to the target of 50 test pits.

We completed two further test pits over the weekend of the 12/13 May, one of which could yield some interesting finds. The next 3 test pits to be dug are over the weekend of 16/17 June - so if you are interested please contact Roelie Reed or myself, Viv Greenwood, should you have any questions.-we DO need more volunteers! ...no experience necessary!

(For further information about the VCH project see:

<http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/oxfordshire/work-in-progress/south-oxon-project>)

INTERIMS REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS BY SOAG AT HIGHLANDS LANE, HARPSDEN, March 2012

In conjunction with HA&HG, a 2 x 2 metre test pit was dug at Highlands Lane, near Henley on Thames. The Highlands Farm site is a SAM and SSSI. It is probably the most prolific producer of Palaeolithic tools of the four major sites within the UK, although that was when the gravel pit was in active production and its working faces were examined by John Wymer in the 1950s and 60s. Wymer reported finds at the rate of around 70 per cubic metre of gravel, but this was perhaps the "six inch to two foot" layer that is immediately above the chalk. He also described that there was a distribution of worked flints in the higher levels of the gravel. These flints covered a range from Clactonian through to middle Achulean with many hand axes amongst the finds; these were often

found at the sorting plant having been rejected as being too large for the graded gravel that was being commercially produced. The current thinking is that these tools were the work of Homo Heidelbergensis and can be dated to 400,000 to 450,000 years ago.

There is a possibility of development taking place within the area covered by the old gravel pit as well as around the buildings that form the Highlands Farm complex and also potentially within the field that bounds the northern edge of the SAM. This has caused concern within HA&HG and the test pit was dug at a point some 90m from the SAM where access was granted at the rear garden in Highlands Lane which is the domicile of a HA&HG member. The object of the test pit was to see if there was evidence that the finds found within the old gravel workings continued this far from the Sam and also to determine if the geology was similar. In this we were supported by Richard Oram who is the county archaeologist with responsibility for south Oxfordshire. Richard also spent two days digging on site and has arranged that environmental samples we took will be analysed as well as any finds we made will be expertly identified.

Unfortunately this location proved to be partly over a clay filled solution hole in the chalk which limited the exposure of gravel and reduced the maximum depth of excavation that could be achieved due to safety considerations and consequential restricted access for the diggers. Nevertheless a 1.75 sequence of gravel was exposed and some worked flints found during the sieving of all the removed material. The most significant find was probably a large core as shown below. Identifying tools as opposed to knocked about flints, particularly with the earlier tools, proved to be difficult and we were lucky to have two visits from Terry Hardaker who is an expert on stone tools. Terry brought examples of tools found on the Highlands site and gave a brief course on tool identification.

An afternoon was also spent on site by Dr Rob Hosfield of Reading University. Rob is also a specialist in stone tools and additionally in palaeo river channels; his advice on the excavation technique to be used was invaluable. Initial conclusions, before we have any of the expected expert input, are that the gravel sequence is similar to what Wymer described and his highly productive layer is probably around 1.5m deeper than what we were able to reach. Tom Walker had proved the depth to the chalk by using a hand auger. This was 3.8 metres in the centre of the test pit and yet 1.2 metres deeper only depth being only 2.2 m we were still above the "Wymer Layer". These solution holes are still active 60 cm away into the clay filled solution hole in the chalk. Hence it is obvious that with our maximum obtained around the site with a new one a few metres across at the surface, having recently appeared only 50 m away in the garden of another house in Highlands Lane. There is the suggestion of many more in the area, visible as small dark circles on Google Earth.



Left: Worked flint Core

SOAG and HA&HG members at work on the 2 m by 2 m excavated pit at Highlands Lane

Dave Oliver, SOAG Chairman, April 2012



Sharp eyed Henley gardener makes Stone Age find:

A small flint flake, probably a cutting tool, has been found in a different location in Henley by Peter Anderson. It has been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and was on display at our May meeting.

**News from the River & Rowing Museum - Roger Kendal**

The museum has been greatly encouraged by its record visitor numbers and its success in the educational field in the past year. Its growing international reputation has been underlined by a request for the loan of the picture 'Henley from the Wargrave Road' by Jan Siberechts for an important exhibition of British art at the Fundacion Juan March in Madrid. With a large influx of rowing enthusiasts for the Olympic Games at Dorney Lake and the continuing re-development of the Thames Gallery the museum faces a busy summer. A full programme of exhibitions, lectures and other activities has been arranged, a few of which are outlined below:-

People in a Chiltern Landscape

Saturday June 30th 11.30am – c12.30pm

Simon Townley will describe the Victoria County History's work on the Ewelme Hundred, summarising the discoveries made so far and outlining some of the new approaches being adopted.

John Piper (1903 –1992) The Gyselynck Collection

Treasures Gallery 3 March – 8 October

Michael Gyselynck developed a collection that explores Piper's creative genius throughout his artistic life from his early abstracts to his later figurative work

Website - Graham Jones

The website is functional and the content is gradually being extended. and news items are added as they arise. A number of articles about building research carried out in Henley have been added. The website provides an easy way of publishing the work of individual members. Anyone wishing to take advantage of this opportunity should contact the Secretary.

Members of the Group are invited to register, which is essential in order to access the newsletter and minutes of Committee and Annual General Meetings. Registration will also provide an indication of the use made of the website by members.

Creating and maintaining the website is done by a very small number of members who would appreciate help. If any members have relevant experience or would like to extend their existing knowledge, please contact Graham (01491 576102).

H.A&H.G.

President and Journal editor Ann Cottingham 01189 403276

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Website: www.henley-on-thamesarchaeologicalandhistoricalgroup.org.uk

MAIDENHEAD ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Sat. 14 July Coach Outing to Saffron Walden and Audley End, 0800 departure
£30 for non-English Heritage members + guided walk extra

Sat.1st Sept Outing to Sulgrave Manor & Canons Ashby (C19 Drydens House & garden)
£31 non-National Trust

Departure from Boyne Hill Avenue, Maidenhead. Contact T Jones 01628 672196
HAHG members welcome if space available. – NB: ON-STREET PARKING AVAILABLE