



**NEWS-
LETTER
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Henley Archaeological & Historical Group

<http://www.henley-on-thamesarchaeologicalandhistoricalgroup.org.uk>

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The AGM is upon us on Tuesday, 4 December. In accordance with the Constitution agreed last year, you will find enclosed the necessary notification of the meeting. If you are interested in joining the Committee, please let me know. There is a vacancy resulting because Martin Cresswell would like to stand down and we will need a new Lecture Secretary to start arranging the programme for 2014. Cynthia Robinson was co-opted to the committee earlier this year as she is organizing the transcribing of wills and has kindly agreed to stand for election at the AGM.

Please note, only fully paid up members can stand or vote at the AGM; if you have not yet paid your annual subscription, which became due in October, Hilary will be glad to see you at the start of the AGM. Subscriptions not paid by the New Year will cause cancellation of future Newsletters.

Meanwhile we enjoyed an interesting outing to Mapledurham, organized by Ruth Gibson, who had arranged a guided tour of the refurbished working mill and of the Tudor house with its extensive outlook to the River Thames. – See P.3 for a description of the day by Angela Spencer Harper.

After the formalities of the AGM, we shall have a break for mince pies and drinks, followed by ten-minute talks by members who have offered to share with us some of the research they are involved in. So we shall hear from:

1. Adele O'Connor "Wills and Deeds in Gloucestershire"
2. Cynthia Robinson "Probate Wills in Henley"
3. Mary Hooper "Researching My Books"
4. Vyvienne Rubinstein "Jane Austen in the Locality"
5. Angela Spencer-Harper "Stoke Row and its artefacts"

Lectures Season 2013

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|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| 8 th January 2013 | Dave Oliver | 'Local Cold War bunkers' |
| 5 th February 2013 | Dr. Daniel Miles | 'The Mapledurham Estate through Dendrochronology' |
| 5 th March 2013 | Dr. Simon Townley | 'VCH Ewelme Hundred Project' |
| 9 th April 2013 | Shaun Morley | 'Emigration from Oxon in the C19 th .' |

7th May 2013 Barbara Allison

‘The Bell & The Catherine Wheel, Discovering Henley’s

17th Century Inns’

4th June 2013 Liz Woolley

‘Children & War, experiences of the 2nd World War in

Oxfordshire’

**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 two lecturers:

Dave Oliver - 8th January 2013

From an early age I always had an interest in archaeology. My dissertation for a BA in archaeology covered the strategic location and characteristics of Cold War bunkers, which are fast disappearing and in many cases have moved into the field of archaeology. Encouraged by English Heritage, as they have little data in this aspect of the Cold War, the dissertation concentrated on bunkers related to civilian administration. These were intended to coordinate recovery after a nuclear attack. A result of this input to English Heritage was that one Berkshire bunker became listed at Grade II and so has some degree of protection against threatened demolition. When these bunkers were active their existence was kept secret both from potential enemies and the local population. However, in the early 1960’s some aspects of these preparations became public knowledge when exposed by the “Spies for Peace” and a splinter group from the Easter march from Aldermaston to London invaded RSG6 (Regional Seat of Government 6) at Warren Row just off the A4 at Knowl Hill.

The talk will briefly cover the history of defence against air attack starting in WWI, but will concentrate on describing a number of bunkers mainly within Berkshire including the infamous RSG6 and a similar construction near Park Place across the river from Henley.

Contributed by Dave Oliver, Chairman of SOAG

Dr. Daniel Miles - 5th February 2013

Dan Miles’ work in tree-ring dating buildings in our Group’s area of interest goes back to 1989, after we had recorded the two barns at ‘Barn Grounds’ standing in a large field in Binfield Heath just across from the ‘Bottle & Glass’ PH. Dan was involved in the cruck survey of the Midlands at that time and identified the re-used timbers of the south barn as cruck blades, used upside down, and dating to 1452.

Since then Dan has dendro dated many buildings in and around Henley giving us immensely useful bench marks for comparisons with other similar buildings for which we have no construction dates. On the way he has gained his doctorate in dendrochronology in Oxford, where he also teaches this very specialist subject. He runs the Oxford Dendro Laboratory, which has produced the dates for the research undertaken recently by the Victoria County History for the two Henley publications. Pride of place is taken by the ‘Old Bell’, the 1325 built surviving cross wing of what must have been a hall house. The dating of the Tudor main range at Harpsden Court was another significant land mark, since it led to the realization that there are many similarities with the ‘new’ buildings at Greys Court by Elizabethan courtier Sir Francis Knollys; similarly dated by Dan to the later C16th.

Contributed by Ruth Gibson

Our visit to Mapledurham



On Wednesday 20th October, more than twenty members paid a visit to the hamlet of Mapledurham, led by Ruth Gibson and Peter Anderson. Fortunately, it was a beautiful day and we soon learned a great deal about milling flour from Jane, who, with her husband, John, manages the water mill on the Thames which has stood there since Saxon times. The present building dates from the 17th/18th centuries, but its existence is mentioned in *Doomsday*. Today it is much more modern and boasts an Archimedes screw-thread electricity-producing turbine which will eventually make money to keep the Estate going.

From there we proceeded to what survives of the medieval manor where cups of delicious tea and cake were served to us before we entered the Manor House itself under the guidance of John, the Estate Manager. This building was constructed between 1608-1612 by Sir Michael Blount, Lieutenant of the Tower of London and his son Sir Richard with an eye to impress but now seems to be set in a time warp because, like the many Catholic manor houses in this area, the family were highly taxed and penalised for their Recusancy in the days of religious intolerance. The state rooms were all on the second floor, so guests could take in the fantastic view, right down to the river at Reading which, in those days, did not have the high-rise buildings which one can see now!

One of the impressive things that were pointed out to us was the exquisite chandelier, recently cleaned at great expense, which made beautiful and fantastic patterns on the ceiling. Other attractive items included a model four-poster bed, made not really for little girls to play with, but as a woodcraftsman's example of the bed he could produce. There was also a rocking-horse in the Nursery. Again, it was not just a toy but to accustom children to ride.

As in many historic homes, in the early days there was no running water, sewage or gas, even though the estate, which today still comprises two thousand acres and employs over a hundred employees, was only a few miles from Reading. Nowadays it has to pay for all these 'luxuries'. One way is that they rent out land to the Reading Festival, as well as the traditional means of money-making, i.e. farming, forestry and letting some of the cottages as holiday homes including the Jacobean village almshouses. It has also been the site of many scenes in films and on television, most famously 'The Eagle has Landed'.



As we came to the end of our visit, everyone agreed that it had been a most enjoyable afternoon and a great 'taster' for the forthcoming February lecture on the buildings of the Mapledurham Estate by local resident and dendrochronologist Dr. Dan Miles, to whom we also owe the many tree ring building dates of our own medieval houses. – *Contributed by Angela Spencer Harper*

SOAG Open Day at Gatehampton Roman Villa 16.9.12

On a sunny September Sunday the South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group invited its members, interested groups and the public onto the site where they have been excavating a Roman villa for many years. Tea and cakes were offered to visitors in a marquee where many photographs, drawings and finds illustrated the years of work there, added greatly to the enjoyment of the afternoon.

The finds of tessellated flooring, large amounts of varied pottery, decorated wall plaster and sections of rectangular hollow heating pipes leave no doubt that this deserves the title of villa as it was a sophisticated dwelling with underfloor heating and colourful walls, much more than just a farmstead. It had an advantageous location in a fertile plain close to the river, providing both good agricultural land as well as transport; it must have been an important establishment in Roman Britain.



If you are interested in joining the dedicated diggers at Gatehampton next season, please Contact:
Hazel Williams – 01491 682016 ; villa@soagarch.org.uk.

Outings planned for 2013

July 2013, by bus: Althorp House, Geddington; time permitting also Rushton Triangular Lodge and Brixworth Church. Althorp is the ancestral home of the Spencer family, open to the public during July and August. Geddington is an important medieval village, where one of the 3 surviving Eleanor Crosses as well as a church with Anglo-Saxon roots are located. Please, have a look at the Geddington web site for its interesting connection with the former Royal Hunting Lodge, much used by the Plantagenets. More details on the outing in the spring newsletter.

19th May, by individual cars: Abingdon. Planned are: Visits to Christ's Hospital (15th C foundation charters to be displayed in a special exhibition), St. Helen's church; the newly re-ordered exhibition of the Town's history in the C17th County Hall museum (with wonderful roof top views from the cupola); lunch in one of the medieval courtyard inns and a guided visit to the medieval Abbey buildings which survived the dissolution (the Chequer, Theatre and Long Gallery). Please, put the date in your diary.

H.A&H.G.

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The Diamond Jubilee Garden Party at Greenlands on 25.6.2012

H.M the Queen was presented with copies of the VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY '**Big Red Book**' Vol XVI on Henley and surrounding parishes as well as the paperback edition '*Henley-on-Thames town, trade and river*' published in the ENGLAND'S PAST FOR EVERYONE' series; both edited by Simon Townley with contributions on the built environment by Geoffrey Tyack and Ruth Gibson. NB. The equerry is carrying both books.