



**NEWS-  
LETTER  
NO. 128  
July 2013**

## **Henley Archaeological & Historical Group**

### **Chairman's Introduction**

Unfortunately, there was not enough take-up for Althorp etc on July 14, so that coach trip has been cancelled. We are keen for people to put in ideas for outings, if in fact these are still of interest. Please complete the attached tear-off slip with your suggestions/views.

Meanwhile, members may wish to take advantage of the Goring & Streatley Society's trip to Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, on 7 August. (Details from me.) Also there is an outing arranged by Maidenhead Society on September 7 to the London Olympic legacy. Details again from me.

The Henley Society is organising a coach outing to Bletchley Park on 25<sup>th</sup> September (cost including lunch will be £40). I shall have details for members of how to book this outing.

**NB Our own lecture programme will resume on 1<sup>st</sup> October with the talk by Dr. Creighton about Silchester, following our planned visit to the Roman town on 31<sup>st</sup> July. There are still a few places available for the visit; please contact Pam Syrett on 574983 without delay if you are interested.**

Valerie Alasia

**The Outing to Harpsden Court has been kindly agreed with Mr. and Mrs. Gerrard for 8<sup>th</sup> August, 11 am. Please share car transport, or walk/cycle if you can – it lies on the southern outskirts of the town, behind the magnificent stone gateway, to the left of Harpsden Church. The booking lists are now very full, so unless you booked originally after the talk or during our recent June lecture, there are no more places available this time. If in doubt about the arrangements, please ring Ruth Gibson.**

### **Lectures Season 2013**

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1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 John Creighton 'Silchester. Three Centuries of Mapping the Ancient City.'

5<sup>th</sup> November 2013 Hella Eckardt 'Foreigners in Roman Cities'

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013 **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 two lecturers

**Dr John Creighton**, senior lecturer at the Dept. for Archaeology, University of Reading

While the modern excavations of Professor Fulford ( since 1975 ) and the earlier campaigns of the Society of Antiquaries are well known (1890-1909), they are still but a fraction of the many surveys and excavations that have been undertaken. Apparently the Emperor Constantius was buried here and his body discovered in 1283, though the sources for that excavation are decidedly dodgy. But some of the earliest excavation plans come from as early as the 1740s. This lecture will be an amble from antiquarianism to geophysics and airborne remote sensing, seeing how the city has been mapped across generations and how our understanding of it and its setting has changed. The talk derives from a project which has sought to dig out the archives of past work, digitise them and bring them together with modern geophysics to map the townscape and to remember the huge value that earlier work still has to offer us.

**Hella Eckardt**, senior lecturer in Roman Archaeology at the University of Reading. Her talk focuses on the '*A long way from home - Diaspora communities in Roman Britain*' research project. More than 150 skeletons from Roman Britain have been examined to find out about migration in the Roman World. Techniques including ancestry assessments and isotope analysis suggested that people from both warmer and colder areas came to Britain, including individuals of possible African descent, migrant women and children.



## Our Website

The website has recently celebrated its first birthday of public availability. Most importantly, we have been successful in ensuring that the website features highly in the results returned by search engines. In Google, the search engine used by the great majority of UK internet users, searches for "Henley" + "Archaeology" returns the Group's website as first suggestion and "Henley" + "History" returns the Group's website as second suggestion after the Wikipedia article on the History of Henley. Also, we have reciprocal links from Groups with similar objectives such as the Henley Society.

Most importantly the content continues to grow:

- The lecture programme is available to end 2014. Details are added when available and usually each lecture is reviewed.
- Visits and events are advertised and usually reviewed.
- Newsletters are available from No. 123 (March 2012).
- All Journal contents are included and No 127 (June 2013) is available complete and in colour to members.
- Ten articles, including eight Building Research articles by Ruth Gibson are available.
- Minutes of Committee meetings are available to registered members only.

After one year it is appropriate that we should review both the style and the content of the website. Members' views and suggestions on style and for additional content will be much appreciated.

The website was designed to be viewed by modern browsers with relatively high definition screens so that users of older computers and browsers might experience difficulties in viewing the website. If any member has such difficulties, please contact the [webmaster](#) for advice.

At present all Journals are available in print, but in some cases only a single copy is held in the Group Archive. It has been suggested that all past Journal be digitised and made available on the website. If anyone would like to participate in this project please contact the [webmaster](#).

Work continues on other websites. The Probate Group have completed three quarters of their objective, having transcribed over 300 wills and 35 bonds. The census website [www.henleycensus.info](http://www.henleycensus.info) is already available to search by names and street. Work is well advanced on including search by occupation and expected to be available by September.

For the convenience of members, the website can be accessed by clicking this link: <http://www.henley-on-thamesarchaeologicalandhistoricalgroup.org.uk/index.php>.  
Graham Jones

### **About Our Visit to Abingdon – 19 May 2013**

On Sunday 19 May, a small group visited Abingdon, led by Cynthia Robinson and local guide Judy White. After walking across Abingdon bridge, nearly six hundred years old, - really three bridges linked together - the first two built by the Fraternity of Holy Cross, a medieval guild, we passed the gaol, built in 1811 which housed prisoners for the County of Berkshire for over 50 years.

Reaching the Mill stream and the few surviving buildings of the Abbey, which in the late Middle Ages ranked among the greatest English abbeys. It was at its most influential in English church life during the abbacy of Ethelwold from the 940s to 963 and was a rich and very powerful establishment.

The outline of the Abbey has been marked in the ground nearby, now a pleasant park, and although only a few descriptions can be found in old chronicles, it has been estimated as being as large as Westminster Abbey, possibly similar to the imposing Wells Cathedral. The group visited the few surviving domestic buildings with the first being the Abbey Granary; beyond this were the Checker, a fine 13th century room, and the Long Gallery, formerly sub divided into several chambers accommodating travellers.



Left: The Long Gallery with its first floor, timber framed open gallery (now covered with cloth blinds)  
Right: The splendid roof trusses of the gallery, formerly subdivided into several grand chambers, accessed from the long corridor on the left.

The Abbey Granary now houses the Unicorn Theatre and although rehearsals were in full swing we were able to glimpse this unique venue with its splendid roof.

We were then guided through the Gothic gateway into the yard of the old Grammar School founded by John Roysse in 1563. It occupied parts of the former St. John's Hospital founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a lay infirmary. All burials of the townspeople were in the Abbey cemetery rather than the church's. Several burial grounds have been discovered during excavations and one recent discovery near the gateway is believed to relate to the Civil War. The expense of burial in the Abbey itself often resulted in burials outside the precinct of the Abbey premises with many bodies in the same grave.

After a sustaining lunch in the King Charles Room, at the C17th Kings Head and Bell where it is claimed that Charles I held more than one council of war, we visited the County Museum in the Market Place where we inspected the exhibits in a recently refurbished building. Some interesting artefacts from the history of Abingdon from its earliest times were on display.

The Long Alley almshouses or The Hospital of Christ in Abingdon, which dates from 1553 was commemorating the 460<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding at the time of our visit and many original documents were on display including accounts, indentures of apprentices, together with a copy of the original Charter and other documents and photographs. The Hospital was endowed with properties that had formerly belonged to the Abbey and in return it was required to assume responsibility for the alms people who lived in the almshouses which had been built earlier, which it has been doing ever since.

Our next stop was at St. Helen's church, which has an early history dating from the C13th with major remodelling in the C15th, C16th and Victorian times. Of particular note in the Lady Chapel were the wonderful 38 (remaining) painted ceiling panels depicting the 'Tree of Jesse' dating from c.1390 showing alternate prophets and kings on a vine trail proceeding from Jesse to a Virgin Annunciate within carved gothic arches. There is also the tomb of John Roysse who re-founded the Grammar School in 1563.



**Left:** The beautifully painted ceiling panels in the church. **Centre:** Original, moulded 15<sup>th</sup> C first floor windows in No. 26 East St. Helen Street and **Right:** Painted plasterwork at the first floor landing of the same house.

After walking along the river wharf and up East St. Helen Street, we had the opportunity to visit No 26, a 15<sup>th</sup> C merchant's house and St. Ethelwolds, documented as a brewery in the C16<sup>th</sup> but with a C13<sup>th</sup> cellar, At the end of a very interesting day we were able to have tea in the sunny garden of St. Ethelwolds, rounding off a very informative, pleasant and successful day.

Cynthia Robinson

**Pre view of our 2014 lectures:**

- 7<sup>th</sup> January ' Lest we forget' Michael Willoughby
- 4<sup>th</sup> February 'The people of St. Mary's' Elizabeth Hazeldine
- March 4 ' Archaeology & History of the Chiltern Woods' John Morris
- April 1 ' West Wycombe ' Gary Marshall
- May 6 ' The passage of tea through time ' Mark Nicholls ( Twinings Tea )
- June 3 'A virtual tour of Bisham Abbey ' Ann Darracott
- October 6 ' Jan Siberecht's Paintings of Henley ' Laura Wortley (Council Chamber)
- November 4 ' The History of Wallingford ' Judy Dewey

## A Visit to the Chiltern Open Air Museum

On 6<sup>th</sup> of April a number of our members visited the Museum for a special study day, organized for the Vernacular Architecture Group, of some of the rescued and re-erected buildings on this delightful, but very cold Chiltern hills site in Buckinghamshire.



The former furniture factory which houses an interesting museum and, most importantly, hot food and drinks. By the time we had finished the sun had come out and the afternoon was glorious with people picnicking on the greens.



The site is that of a dispersed village with houses arranged in small groups around greens. They date from an iron age round house (an earth fast structure based on archaeological evidence), a medieval cruck barn, a C 19<sup>th</sup> former furniture factory, (now the cafe where we were revived with a very welcome hot meal), the magnificent, cast iron public convenience, formerly found on Caversham Bridge – and still in working order! - and a mid C20<sup>th</sup> pre-fab, furnished with all mod-cons of the period. It turned out to be a journey through social history as well as that of how buildings were put together. - We were led by the museum's director, John Hyde-Trutch, who has been involved with re-erecting, repairing and, if necessary, re-inventing lost building traditions, for the rebuilding of lost features over the past couple of decades.



Left: Medieval cruck barn. This has been re-thatched using several different techniques and many thatching materials as an ongoing experiment to assess their durability and suitability.

Right: Witchert cottage. This is a house from Haddenham, where this 'white earth' i.e. decayed lime stone and clay, was extensively used for wall construction. It provides excellent insulation and durability, as long as the wall base and top are kept dry with a substantial stone plinth, called 'grumpling' and an overhanging thatch roof.



The day ended with a visit to the 'Glory Mill Store', a large shed with the dismantled material of some 10 timber framed buildings, awaiting their re-construction, funds and great skills permitting. R.Gibson

## H.A&H.G.

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## Outings & Activities

The various outings prepared for this spring and summer have been poorly attended. To get it right your committee would like you to tell us what you would like to see and do next year, or alternatively let your committee know that you prefer not to go on outings, but are happy with attending the lectures and perhaps joining the local research, digging or recording groups. – Please take a look at the questions below and let us have your views.

1. Are you interested in outings to places of historic interests? YES/NO
  
2. Would you prefer weekends for visits? YES/NO
  
3. Would you prefer a weekday visit? YES/NO
  
4. Do you have any suggestions for visits?  
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5. How would you prefer to travel?            CAR            TRAIN            COACH

Please cut out or copy and give to Ruth Gibson at our next meeting - in strictest confidence - or fill in electronically and send by E-mail to [ruthgibson@hotmail.com](mailto:ruthgibson@hotmail.com)