

Notes and queries

Remember these fellows?

This was Carole Barnett's excellent contribution to the 2006 Scarecrow Trail of the architect, Henry Woodyer, whose legacy in the village is substantial. Then in 2008 we had the Highwayman & Bess, thanks to Jim & Joyce Reed. If you have a suggestion for a Society scarecrow in 2012, do please get in touch with the Editor.



A year in the life of Sonning & Sonning Eye

We are now three months into the our Photography Competition, and we hope many of you have started to capture community life. The Education Panel is excluded from submitting entries, but hope others might have thought to capture tea at the lock or boating on the river for instance. As we move into the autumn, there will be no shortage of events that might fit the categories, for example, the Village Show and the Remembrance Sunday parade. So get snapping - all you need are images that say everything about a particular month in Sonning or Sonning Eye. Full details are available on our website: [www.sonning.org.uk](http://www.sonning.org.uk).

Robert Palmer Cottages' history

Member, Daphne Payne and a colleague, are researching a history of the Robert Palmer Cottages in Pearson Road. They would welcome any help you may be able to offer so please contact Daphne on [daphne103@btinternet](mailto:daphne103@btinternet).



Future Events

Free guided tours

Education Panel

Once again we have organised our popular walks around the village as our contribution to the nation-wide Heritage Open Days Weekend 8 - 11 September 2011.

The Society's team of experienced Guides are offering three walks. They all start in the Churchyard near the entrance from The Bull and are free, but booking is essential as group sizes are limited. Please contact Diana Coulter or Brian O'Callaghan on 0118 969 2132.

There will be one tour each day:

- Friday 9 September - 2:00 pm
  - Saturday 10 September - 11:00 am
  - Sunday 11 September - 2:00 pm
- Newer Society members may find this a



useful way of discovering more about our very interesting buildings and history. We look forward to welcoming you.

Berkshire Gardens Trust News

Penny Feathers

Several members attended the Berkshire Gardens Trust AGM held at Watlington House in Reading in July. After the business meeting Clive Williams talked about the history of the house (shown below), some parts of which date back to medieval times, while Gaila Adair explained the Trust's plans to restore the gardens. Plans for the project were on display and it is hoped that the finished work will provide an accessible area of peace and calm in the middle of Reading's busy hub.



to Parsons Down Infants School in Thatcham where they saw 6-year olds potting on saplings and able to answer basic questions about garden plants. Also receiving awards were Council hanging basket and planter schemes and a Town Allotments – both of which had a community element and made a positive impact on the local community. Maybe Sonning could suggest a scheme to be considered next year? If so could you be a champion for

the submission?

The Society is a corporate member of the Berkshire Gardens Trust which enables our members to receive discounts when attending their talks. For more information about the Trust, please go to [www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk](http://www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk).

9 October 2011

Woodley's Hidden History: a walk, tea and talk Meet at the St. John's Centre, Church Road, Woodley at 1.45 for a 2.00 pm start or join in at tea-time.

26 November 2011

Annual General Meeting Pearson Hall, Pearson Road 7.00 for 7.15 pm start

7 December 2011

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Old Woodley revealed

Pauline Needham & Diana Coulter

Do you know where in Woodley to find a Grade II listed 17th-century barn converted into two homes? Could you identify the building that once served as a convalescent home for sick children? Do you know how many farms were gradually replaced by various housing estates in the second half of the 20th-century? Where is Woodley's conservation area and what buildings are within it? You will find answers to these and many other questions at our Woodley walk on Sunday 9 October.

Why focus on Woodley? The ecclesiastical parish of Sonning extended to include



Do you know where to find these four cottages?

Dunsden, Earley and Woodley until well into the 19th-century, and much of the land belonged to the Palmers. As you will discover Woodley residents would walk to Holme Park to pay their rent, while today many Sonning residents may visit a Woodley surgery or the shopping precinct or the library. With these connections and some 10% of our members living there, the Education Panel felt it would be interesting to spend time looking at these links, and we hope several of you will be able to join us.

The afternoon will be in two distinct parts separated by tea. In Part 1, Pauline Needham, a long-standing member of the Society and Woodley resident, will take walkers on a short

tour of the conservation area and show you the barn, the convalescent home and some gems of cottages that are easy to miss. Pauline will then lead us back to the St. John's Centre for tea, during which there will be a small display on Woodley past and present, as well as information on places we cannot reach in the walk that you might want to explore separately. Some of you

may want to use the time to pop into St. John's, 1871, by Henry Woodyer, who refurbished St. Andrew's. In Part 2 after tea, Mark Green will give a short talk on the Airfield. Some of you

may remember it, while others see only a reminder in the names of the roads.

While the afternoon will suit fitter Members and guests, others are welcome to join us for tea and the talk. Because we have adopted this structure there will be two ticket prices: the price for Parts 1 and 2 with tea will be £4.00 (Members) and £5.00 (non-Members), and the price for Part 2 only with tea will be £3.00 and £4.00 respectively.

If you would like to join us for Parts 1 and 2 please meet in the car park at the St. John's Centre at 1.45 for 2.00 pm. If you plan to join us for Part 2, please meet us in the Centre at 3.30 pm for tea, display and talk. A booking form is enclosed, and queries can be directed to Diana Coulter on 969 2132.

»Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Bob Hine, Chairman

In the last edition, I mentioned that following the Election of Parish Councillors, the Executive needed to co-opt a new Chairman for the Planning and Traffic Panel. I am delighted to report that Colin McCulloch was duly co-opted. With experience as a parish councillor, Colin is well versed on the issues that we face, and we have already benefited from his commitment.

It was good to see many of you at the "Champagne Tea" in Sonning Eye in June, by kind permission of Annabella and Nick Marks. This was most memorable in many different ways. We congratulated our President, John Edmonds, on his 90th birthday and acknowledged his continuing involvement with our activities. We also bid farewell to Carole and Gordon Barnett, who have moved to Milford-on-Sea. It was an opportunity to thank Carole for her substantial contribution as both Membership Secretary and mastermind behind the catering at our successful social events.

Lesley Heaney has kindly agreed to succeed Carole and I am pleased to announce that at our recent Executive meeting she was co-opted. We warmly welcome her.

The Village Show will soon be upon us. On Saturday 10th September we do hope that you will come along and support our stand. You will also be able to purchase tickets for the AGM Supper.

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

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# How do we care?

Colin McCulloch

## Statutory responsibilities

The Government's aim for conservation areas is "that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations". Wokingham Borough Council is under an obligation to "take into account the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment".

## Principles?

Sadly, as far as Sonning is concerned, the impression is gaining ground that conservation principles are being disregarded. The more this occurs, the less the importance that is attached to the "historic environment". Some of the damage is already irreversible. For example, Pearson Road has suffered successive intrusions to its character over the past decade, despite opposition from local people and organisations.



## What do we want?

It is down to us to assert a vision for our village. We are privileged to live here. Estate agents tell us that conservation areas "tick the high quality box". As a result the value of a property within a conservation area is more likely to hold up better

than the general market. However, individual opportunism can operate at the expense of the greater good. This begs questions about what we mean when we refer to the "community" of Sonning.

## Development should be OK

Development in a conservation area is neither good nor bad. The point is that the area should be enhanced by it. Modern imaginative building should be welcomed as, paraphrasing Edmund Burke, a community without the means of change is without the means of its conservation.

## Opportunities

Protecting our historic environment is difficult but opportunities exist. One of these is The Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal. This will provide a new baseline from which we could influence the development of our village. The appraisal could be all the more potent in the new climate of "localism". A second opportunity,

admittedly a distant prospect at present, might exist for the High Street to be restored to the community. Pedestrianisation of an important part of the historic environment would benefit all residents and visitors. Such a prize would be a triumph, but it could also be prove to be elusive.

# More new hedges

Alastair Driver

After many months, I have secured agreement in principle from the University Farm to plant trees in memory of David Penny on their land alongside Charvil side of the farmyard entrance gateway. The latter species was a particular favourite of David's and is stunningly beautiful, growing narrowly and conically and being bright green in early



The farm and Charvil Lane viewed from the A4 with earlier new hedges in the foreground.

Lane. It is proposed that a row of Small-leaved Limes (*Tilia cordata*) should be planted on the north side of the lane to the east of the old farm cottages and two Dawn Redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) should be planted either summer, becoming bronze and then golden in autumn. The David Penny Memorial Group have raised sufficient funds for this planting to take place in the autumn of 2011 and David's widow Catherine is delighted that agreement has now been reached.

## AGM Supper 26 November 2011

Penny Feathers

This year's AGM and Supper will be held in the Pearson Hall on Saturday 26 November at 7 for 7:15 pm. The cost has been held at £12 which will include a welcoming drink. There will also be a pay bar. As in the past, the business meeting will be followed by supper after which we look forward to welcoming the Sonning Handbell Ringers to entertain us.

Tickets will be on sale at the Society's stand during the Village Show on Saturday 10 September. Please put 26 November in your diary and come and join us.

## » New Members

A warm welcome to two new members:

### Mr. & Mrs. Herdman.

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaney on [lesley@sonninggate.com](mailto:lesley@sonninggate.com) or 0118 969 7231.

Very occasionally we need to email Members. If you would prefer not to be contacted by email please let the Membership Secretary or Editor know. If you have not heard from us and would like to be included in our list, please confirm your correct email address.

# The many guises of Dunsden Lodge

Nick & Annabella Marks with John Edmonds & Diana Coulter

Neat handwriting sets out meticulously the inventory of a bachelor's household in the early 20th century. The contents, large or small, of each room, with 'my room' featuring early on in the small, leather-bound ruled book, are carefully listed and their value noted. If the house were burgled, this inventory would have made the constabulary's life much easier. It was written out by Clement Williams, managing director of Huntley & Palmers, who rented Dunsden Lodge in Sonning Eye from 1911-1921 until his marriage to Margaret Deare, a young widow and formerly L'Estrange Ewen, niece of one of the last owners of Holme Park.

## Architecture and early history

Dunsden Lodge has had a chequered history and this shows in its architecture and layout. Early photographs from sale catalogues show the front door to the right of the current one, while the bay for the room overlooking the garden was only glazed on the canted sides – the central part where one might have expected an opening such as we see today has a brick extrusion rising through almost two storeys as if a fireplace had been intended. It's no surprise to see the house creeper-covered in early photographs to hide this rather unsightly feature.

The house dates to the early 1850s and one can confirm this from the thin leading of the sash windows and the fine plate glass used. It was built by the new mill-owner, Charles Witherington, who bought Sonning Mill from the May family in 1852. It is not entirely clear whether the house was built for owner-occupation as the Witheringtons are described in one source as living in Mill House (known at one time as Aberlash House). Perhaps since Charles's son, Ilted, took over the running of the

mill in 1892, the house was built for him and his family. The house was sold to the Phillimore family in 1897, and the Mill itself was to be sold to them in 1912, although the Phillimores continued to trade under the name of C. H. Witherington & Sons Ltd.

## The 'estate'

The 1897 sale catalogue (below) describes 6 lots that included the house and its grounds, the neighbouring cottages, now one



would prevent the adventurous from keeping livestock like chickens and pigs, although a concrete platform once used for an armament emplacement, is the remains of a hen house.

In this post-war period the house was divided into two substantial flats, but was restored to a family home when Dr. Stephen and Jeanette Hetherington brought it in 1973. The Hetheringtons opened up the bay into the garden and moved the entrance so that the old entrance hall is now the dining room – this is more obvious internally than externally – and the former morning room became the entrance. The Marks moved into Dunsden Lodge in 1985 and have made further improvements, including the clever portico over the entrance that can fool the unwary.

## Below stairs

The house once had a back stairs,

which has been removed, between the ground and first floors but still evident in the ceiling levels in the area that would once have been behind the 'green baize door'. This brings us back to Clement Williams, whose household in the 1911 census consisted of a butler, housekeeper and a maid, each of whom had a room. He also employed a gardener and a groom (later chauffeur), who presumably lived elsewhere.

## End note

The Society was grateful to the Marks for allowing us to enjoy a champagne tea in the grounds of their home on a perfect summer's afternoon in late June. In a sense history (and this article) came full circle. John Edmonds, our President, who celebrated his 90th birthday with us that day, was, after all, Clement Williams' son-in-law.