

# bridge

Issue 43 • Summer 2015

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

## Cutting edge stuff

Alastair Driver

In the winter edition I wrote about the devastating clearance of trees and scrub from the entire length of Sonning Cutting. I had persuaded Network Rail (NR) in September not to remove every single tree and shrub, but instead to pollard oaks, coppice other species and retain a proportion of scrub and cut timber on site. Time will tell whether this better option for wildlife and landscape will be successful.

Despite my efforts, very significant concerns remain so here is an update using some very pertinent questions posed by one resident and responses to them from NR and



Wokingham Borough Council (WBC):

**Q:** Why has there been no clear consultation ... relating to the works?

**NR:** Apologies if you have not received adequate communication ... we clearly have not achieved this to the extent we would want to [and] will redouble our efforts.

**Q:** How has NR been allowed to carry out the works to the extent they have? If I wanted to cut a tree in my garden, I would have to submit countless applications to WBC. Was this done? If so, why hasn't WBC informed residents of what was approved and the impact this would have?

**NR:** NR is permitted to carry out vegetation management works which are necessary for the safe running of the trains.

**WBC:** The trees in Sonning Cutting were not subject to any legal protection and there was no legal requirement for NR to apply to us for permission to fell these trees.

**Q:** What has WBC's involvement been in this entire process to date?

**WBC:** WBC became involved last September [when we contacted NR by various means]. We drew NR's attention to their new duties (as a newly

nationalised body) under S.40 of the NERC Act: *'Every public authority must, in exercising its functions have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'*.

Overall, we consider that a reasonable compromise has been reached, greatly assisted by ... Mr Driver.

**Q:** What's going to be done regarding the increase in noise? I have young children who are now frightened to go into the garden ...

**NR:** Noise levels will be reduced significantly when the lines are electrified as the rolling stock is far quieter than the existing diesel stock. In addition, as scrub vegetation regrows on the embankment it will improve the noise absorption.

Other questions related to the loss of privacy and impact on property valuations. The full story can be read in the next issue of the *Sonning Parish Magazine*.

## »Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Mike Hart, Chairman

In the last edition I commented on the characteristics that make Sonning so special. Judging by the record attendance at the recent Society talk on the Thames (described on p. 4) the setting of the village on the river must be one of the most treasured characteristics. The built environment must be another and Society members have an opportunity to experience a local treasure in the visit to Hardwick House in Oxfordshire on 5 June.

To foster the aims of the Society and build future appreciation for our heritage we are still looking for a motivated young person from one of our villages with an interest in conserving and enhancing the historic environment. A modest sponsorship is available to pay for the costs of attending courses or events that highlight the importance of sustainable development.

Still on the theme of the environment, the Society has commented on the latest draft of the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal and the document is now back with Sonning Parish Council for submission to Wokingham Borough Council. Following their review it will be opened up for public consultation which will give residents a final opportunity to have their say. The Society will notify members once a date for this consultation has been set.

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## Nick Marks

Spring is here and most of the trees in the Eye and Dunsden Community orchard have survived the winter. There is plenty of blossom to see, but the grass needs cutting!

Despite a mild and not too wet winter, three of the trees have perished. One was ring barked but the other two probably succumbed to drowning in the heavy wet clay, where you could see them sitting in pools of water. They have all now been replaced taking care to try and give them much better drainage.

The main project this winter was to finish the planting and original design with the completion of the entrance to the Village Green. This is a hooped pergola, with apple trees planted along each side. A gap had been left in the hedge to accommodate this, and the hedge itself is beginning to thicken out well.

There is plenty of scope for further volunteers who would like to be involved in this project. Anyone interested should contact David Woodward on [david@designforprint.org](mailto:david@designforprint.org) and he will then keep them up-to-date with any developments.

# Hello Historic England

## Planning & Traffic Panel

On 31 March 2015 English Heritage as we knew it ceased to exist, and two new bodies emerged. From 1 April, the section of old English Heritage which managed its 400+ sites has been separated out with a view that within five years it will be self-financing and free of direct government financial support. This section retains the name English Heritage and its first Chiref Executive is Kate Mavor, formerly of the National Trust for Scotland. For more information see: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>.

The organisation with which the Society will be most concerned, however, is the new Historic England, which encompasses the research and development unit of the old English Heritage, as well as the National Monuments Record (Swindon) and the professional advisory service on all aspects of the historic environment: see <http://www.historicengland.org.uk>. Its strapline is "We are the public

## Pauline Simmonds and Patrick Hamblin

### Hardwick House, Oxfordshire, 5 June

Hardwick House is a 16th-century manor overlooking the Thames between Mapledurham and Whitchurch. Its beech wood is excellent for walkers and it is organically managed by Sir Julian Rose whose family has owned it since



the 19th century. In addition to a real tennis court, the house has retained many original features and boasts links with Jane Austen's family as well as Mr Toad from *Wind in the Willows*.

There will be a private tour of the house and estate on Friday 5 June at 10:30am, lasting about two hours. Tickets at £8.00 per head include light refreshments. Please contact Pauline

Simmonds for more information on: 0118 969 7033 or [psim@waitrose.com](mailto:psim@waitrose.com).

### Heritage Open Days Weekend walks

Our free architectural and historical walks as part of this nationwide event are scheduled for 10, 11 and 13 September this year: see the next issue.

### Planning applications

There have been a number of applications on which the Planning & Traffic Panel have submitted comments: Augustfield/Acrefield, Charvil Lane; land adjacent to Keeper's Cottage at Sonning Golf Club, Duffield Road; The Great House, Sonning; Holme Park, Sonning Lane; and The Mill House, Sonning Eye.

### Planning Permission for gravel extraction

The Society continues to support the Sonning Eye Action Group's views on the lack of consideration to the major issue of flooding in Sonning Eye, which would be a consequence of any proposed infilling with inert materials after completion of gravel extraction at the Lafarge works. A response is still awaited to our letter was sent to Oxfordshire County Council questioning the responses from the Council's representative to various points raised previously.

### Gates in Sonning Lane

We are waiting for the contractor to carry out the restoration of the gates.

### Cycle racks

The Society continues to investigate suitable locations and types of racks for secure cycle parking in the village.

### Traffic

The Society is finalising its assessment of the practicality of potential improvements in a number of areas relevant to the village. A report will be available for submission to SPC in due course.

### SPC Planning Committee meetings

Monthly observation is ongoing.

body that looks after England's historic environment. We champion historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them." Dr Simon Thurley, formerly in charge of old English Heritage, remains as



Chief Executive of this new body.

The Society will be interested in Historic England's pronouncements on heritage protection, its responses to government policies on national planning and conservation, as well as in designation processes (e.g. the role of historic building inspectors in spot-listing buildings at risk as happened at Keeper's Cottage in Duffield Road). Fingers crossed!

## » New Members

A warm welcome is extended to Mr & Mrs Flower. Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaneynon 0118 969 7231.



# »Bridge Ends

## Notes and queries

**West Green House, 8 June 2015 2-5pm**

A guided tour of the gardens exclusively for the Berkshire Gardens Trust. Features include walled gardens, various follies, a grand water staircase, created as the focal point to the Nymphaeum fountain designed by Quinlan Terry, a dramatic new Persian water garden, a restored lake, a small topiary garden and an aviary.

For members of the National Trust the cost is £17 (bring your card with you), otherwise it is £25 to include the guided tour, entry, and refreshments.

### Brian Eighteen remembered

Brian Eighteen, who passed away in April, worked at Sindlesham Mill for most of his life. Deeply knowledgeable about Thames mills, he gave a talk in March 2007 and advised us for that year's Heritage Open Days event, "A dramatic conversion", celebrating Sonning's mill. Mary Chapman recalls he was a mine of information about mills for *Village Voices*.

### Old postbox watch

Kent Police recently tweeted a new twist on heritage crime - the theft of a Victorian postbox in Hartley, near Sevenoaks. Walkers, cyclists and drivers may just want to keep an eye on our old postbox in Thames Street.

### Aldworth St Mary celebrates 700 years

Society members are invited to attend a talk by John Harper, Professor of Music and Liturgy at Bangor University, on "The experience of worship in the late medieval parish church" in the church on 24 September at 7.30 pm. Tickets may be ordered in advance for £10 or will cost £15 on the door. The editor can supply an advance order form.

# The Thames explored

## Pauline Simmonds

Our year started with a great 'walk' along the river described by Richard Mayon-White to a full house in the Pearson Hall.



We were taken - via slides - to a surprising number of nature reserves and hidden pathways between Oxford and Marlow – including Charvil Lakes and Ali's Pond!

When the talk broadened out, we saw little-known sites near London: quiet

islands near Richmond, hidden tributaries or deserted corners near Docklands. We headed east to the estuary, with its stunning scenery and wide open marches, full of native plants and visiting birds.

Richard has been involved with the River Thames Society for over 50 years. He has seen many changes, like the growth of cycle paths, riverside cafes and car parks. He thoroughly understood the need to respond to local community needs but stressed that the river must also provide something for everyone. It was vital to conserve its wildlife and unspoilt pathways. The Thames is a wonderful resource and he encouraged everyone to get out and enjoy the great variety of walks on offer.

# Owen in Dunsden app arrives

## Alice McGuigan

On 17 May the Dunsden Owen Association officially launched its Wilfred Owen In Dunsden Smartphone app, inspired by the work of the great WWI poet who lived in the village from 1911-1913. The interactive app will engage visitors on a fascinating walk through some of the places and countryside Wilfred Owen pictured so vividly in his letters.

Celebrations at Eye & Dunsden Village Hall and Green included maypole dancing, live music, a picnic, fancy dress, games, tea and cake, and further activities on the trail itself. Award-winning poet, Martin Malone, opened the trail with edgy readings, followed by the unveiling of a plaque at the hall dedicated to Owen's work. This inspiring and well-attended community event was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as Lord and Lady

Phillimore. You can download the Smartphone app via the DOA website [www.owenindunsden.org](http://www.owenindunsden.org), where a leaflet on the trail is also available.

You can follow us on Facebook and on Twitter @OweninDunsden.



## Future Events

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

**5 June 2015**

Society visit to Hardwick House near Mapledurham (p. 2)

**10 June 2015**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7:30 pm

**19 August 2015**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7:30 pm

**10-13 September**

Bishops, bricks and other riches (See next issue)

**19 September 2015**

Sonning Village Show 2:00 pm onwards

**2 October 2015**

Family history research talk 7:30 pm (See next issue)

**7 October 2015**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7:30 pm

**21 November 2015**

AGM & supper (See next issue)

Members are welcome to attend Executive meetings.