

bridge

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Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Tribute to John Edmonds

Mike Hart, Chairman

Many of our readers will already know, sadly, that our President, John Edmonds, died in the Royal Berks on Monday 17 August at the age of 94, following a fall at his home at North Lodge, Sonning, the previous week.

John became the Society's first President at the 2007 AGM, in recognition of his contribution to the creation of the Society three years earlier. In those early days John persuaded Canon Chris Clarke, the then Vicar of St. Andrew's, to be the first Chairman. Together they launched the Society in the format that it still follows today.



John's professional life was spent as a diplomat and we used to chat about his days in the Embassy in Ankara when I was making frequent business visits to Turkey. John went on to lead the UK delegation, with the personal title of Ambassador, at the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty talks in Geneva.

Following retirement in 1981, John devoted much of his time to village life; he was a member of Sonning Parish Council for 9 years, including as Chairman 1984-90, and a prominent member of the Sonning Fire Brigade Trust. It was this background with the Parish Council that prompted John to facilitate the creation of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society at a time when the Parish Council was undergoing something of an internal crisis and there were conflicting views about planning matters,

particularly as to whether the proposed new 3rd Thames Bridge should be to the east or west of the village.

In setting the aims of the Society, John and Chris relied heavily on The Civic Trust which at that time was the

umbrella organisation for around 1,000 local civic societies. The Trust provided the draft constitution which was the model adopted by the Society. The Civic Trust no longer exists and nowadays the Society, encouraged by John, is a member of ASHTAV, the Association of Historic Towns and Villages. This

organisation, too, is set to change and plans are afoot for it to merge with the Historic Towns Forum.

It is becoming increasingly difficult in today's busy times to attract volunteers to commit their time to run local organisations and charities. John was of an era when this was "the done thing" and volunteering was considered to be a way of repaying society for a successful career. But in John's case it was never just a case of duty. Through his marriage to Armine Williams, a last scion of the Palmer family of Holme Park, John came to love Sonning and the pride he took in it is reflected in the aims of the Society today.

John's attention to detail and historical knowledge will be sorely missed and above all we will miss him as a true gentleman of a bygone era.

»Eye on Sonning from the Editor's desk

The Editor

2015 is the tenth year in which the Society will have run its popular walks. Led by our team of experienced guides these have proved a very positive contribution to the village calendar and have often brought in new members. Over the past 10 years, we have shown almost 500 people around the village, many from within Sonning or the greater Reading area, with some coming from further afield. The guides explain the evolution of St Andrew's from medieval to present-day church; view the site of the Bishop's Palace; and look at the rich variety of domestic vernacular architecture in Pearson Road and the High Street, whether timber-framed or built of brick.

This year the walks will take place as follows:

- Thursday 10 September at 2pm
- Friday 11 September at 2pm
- Sunday 13 September at 2pm

All walks start in the Churchyard near The Bull. Booking is essential via 969 2132 or diana.coulter@mac.com.



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» Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Pauline Simmonds, Patrick Hamblin & Mike Hart

AGM and supper

The AGM will be held on Saturday 21 November in the Pearson Hall. There will be a welcoming drink and the AGM will start promptly at 7.15 pm. Our guest speaker will be Peter van Went, who will talk about Holme Park. Tickets cost £16 and are available from Penny Feathers on 934 3193.

Planning applications

The Society submitted comments on the applications for The Great House. It also expressed concern about the removal of an oak tree in Pound Lane on land adjacent to Sonning Golf Club. (Wokingham BC has subsequently placed tree preservation orders on a large number of trees in the area).

A recent application by the Golf Club to build 17 dwellings (ten private and seven affordable) on the Pound Lane boundary of the golf course is being considered by the Panel.

The Society noted that its comments relating to the Mill House were mentioned in a national newspaper.

Following an informal hearing on 25

August, the Society awaits the Inspector's decision about the proposed development at Birchley, Old Bath Road.

Sonning Parish Council planning meetings

The Society continues to be represented at these meetings as an observer. A representative also attended the Annual General Meeting of the Parish Council.

Conservation Area Appraisal

The draft appraisal is now with Wokingham BC for final compilation in readiness for public comment.

Cycle racks

The Panel continues to investigate suitable locations and types for cycle racks in the village.

Traffic

The Panel's report on the practicality of improvements in a number of areas relevant to the village, will be submitted to the Parish Council soon.

Gates in Sonning Lane

The restoration of the 'gates' in Sonning Lane has now been completed and they are looking particularly good.

Many thanks to the Scarecrow Committee for funding this work.

Planning Permission for Lafarge gravel extraction

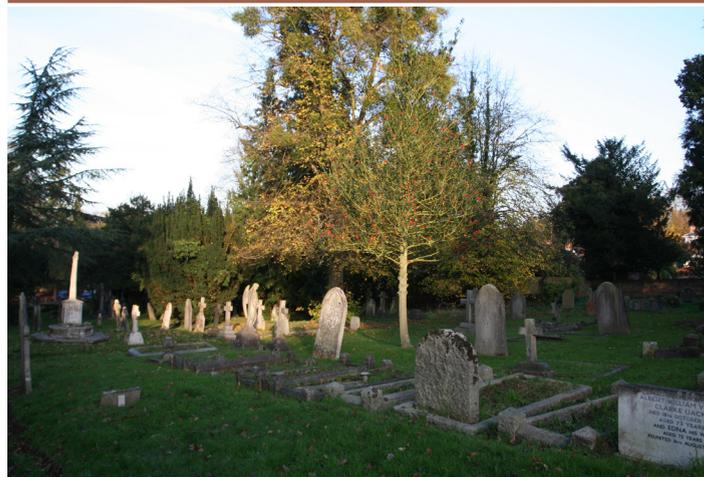
The Society continues to support the comments made by the Sonning Eye Action Group regarding the lack of consideration to the major issue of flooding after the proposed infilling with inert materials on completion of gravel extraction. Further letters have been sent to Oxfordshire County Council relating to potential groundwater issues.

New housing

Despite newspaper articles telling us we are falling short of the targets for new homes it seems that new houses are springing up everywhere. The development at Addington Place in Woodley is just one example. Here in Sonning we have some more modest examples with the two new houses at the site of the former Fire Station in Pound Lane, and the demolition and rebuild of the house at the top of Sonning Lane. Regeneration is necessary and the Society is generally supportive of proposals that are sympathetic and in keeping with their environment.

Ancestors & archives

Pauline Simmonds



Andrew's Churchyard, but there is so much more to uncover - if you know where to look! "How do we trace births and baptisms?" "What did our ancestors look like?" and "What did they do?" are all leading questions. Some of

you may know the answers already but the talk should fascinate local historians, give specific details from Sonning archives and provide an excellent introduction to anyone new to family history research.

On 2 October two senior speakers from the Berkshire Family History Society, Gillian Stevens and Chad Hanna, will help us to uncover the past by exploring old records and documents as well as newspaper articles and census returns. Our local memorial inscriptions, another useful information source, have also recently been recorded in Gordon Nutbrown's book on St

The evening starts at 7.30 for 7.45 pm and tickets cost £4 (or £5 for guests), which includes a welcoming drink. We look forward to seeing you there.

» New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

- Mr & Mrs Elliston
- Mr & Mrs Johnson
- Mr Pillai

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaney, the Membership Secretary, on 0118 969 7231.

If you know anyone whom you think would enjoy Society membership, please encourage them to visit the Society's stand at the Village Show on 19 September. Anyone joining then or before 31 December will get up to 16 months' membership for the price of twelve months.

Membership rates remain: Single £5.00 and Double £8.00. The Society is very proud not to have needed to raise the subscription since its foundation in 2004.

» Bridge Ends

Views of Hardwick House



From the top: east facade, original window in the drawing room, carved chalk fireplace, and stained glass collected by a member of the Rose family.

Delights of Toad Hall

Annabella Marks

Drift down the Thames from Pangbourne and you may catch a fleeting glimpse of the mellow, brick Elizabethan manor, Hardwick House. The southern aspect looks towards the river over water meadows flanked by avenues of limes while to the north are steep hills with magnificent beech woods.

On 5 June 24 Society members were lucky enough to enjoy a guided visit. Sir Julian Rose has run the estate since 1966 and was one of the first farmers in the country to embrace ecological land management and organic farming.

Over refreshments Sir Julian explained that a Saxon house with lands extending to Wallingford, was owned by Wigod. At the time of the Norman Conquest it was given to Robert D'Oyley by William the Conqueror. The house was named Hard Wick (wick or wyke is Celtic for spring) from which the family took its name and so were called de Herdwyke.

Early in the 16th century a fine Tudor house replaced the Saxon building. The Lybbe family purchased the estate in 1527 and owned it for the following 203 years. Queen Elizabeth visited Hardwick in the mid-1500s and a magnificent bedchamber was made ready for her.

During the Civil War Hardwick was a Royalist stronghold, bombarded by canon from Parliamentarian barges on the river causing significant damage to the south wing which was then rebuilt. In the early 19th century family fortunes declined and the estate was re-

duced as parcels of land were sold off. The Lybbes rented out the property to a British-Canadian banker, Charles Day Rose, who finally purchased it in 1909 shortly after being made a Baronet.

Sir Charles, as well as being the Liberal MP for Newmarket, had many interests. He was a leading horse breeder, a competitive yachtsman, a car and plane enthusiast and had a passion for real tennis (building three courts, one near Newmarket and two at Hardwick). His wife, Eliza, entertained many from the literary community including Henry James and Kenneth

Grahame. Mr Toad is based on Charles, a larger than life character, known for sounding 'poop poop' on his horn in the local area. Hardwick House is almost certainly Toad Hall.



The group explored the gardens, going down to the river through wild flower meadows with their abundant insect life, then visited the Real Tennis Court, which is still in use, and toured the house. This has evolved, each generation making adaptations which make it into a home. We were led up a handsome oak stair case, with finely carved balustrades, to Queen Elizabeth's room, now used as a drawing room. It is a fascinating space, with a fine east facing oriel window. The walls are oak panelled and the ornate plastered ceiling has medallion heads featuring Queen Elizabeth herself. Above the large fireplace is a remarkable overmantel carved from chalk in an excellent state of preservation.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Members are welcome to attend Executive meetings.

10, 11 and 13 September 2015

Bricks, Bishops and Other Riches: architectural and historical walks (See page 1)

19 September 2015

Sonning Village Show 2:00 pm onwards

2 October 2015

Ancestors & Archives Pearson Hall 7:30 pm (See page 2)

1 October 2015

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7:30 pm

8 October 2015

Berkshire Gardens Trust AGM and Lecture (Details will be circulated by email when confirmed)

21 November 2015

Annual General Meeting and Supper (See page 2)

9 December 2015

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7:30 pm



Future Events