

**Lancelot Brown in Berkshire**

This year Berkshire Gardens Trust (BGT) is celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the man who has rightly been called the father of English landscape gardening. The 2016 Spring Lecture by Ben Viljoen will be held on Thursday 17 March, 7.30 for 8pm at The Barn, Purley on Thames, RG8 8DR. Tickets cost: £10.00 for BGT and S&SES members, £12.00 for non-members, and £20.00 for a member and guest.

**Lancelot Brown & Caversham Park**

As part of the nation-wide Capability Brown Festival, the BGT has arranged with the BBC for Caversham Park to be open on the afternoons of Sunday 17th April, Sunday 12th June and Sunday 18th September from 2 pm to 6 pm. Admission will be by ticket, which must be obtained in advance. There will be a talk on the work that Brown did at Caversham Park, conducted walks in the grounds, a tour of the house and light refreshments. Tickets are £7.50 per person and can be obtained for the 17 April, or reserved for the 12 June and the 18 September. Please contact Pauline Simmonds for a booking form.

**Memories of the Vale: a significant reprint**

First published in 1866 as "A Berkshire Village: its history and antiquities" at a time of rapid change in the English countryside, Stanford-in-the-Vale curate Reverend Lewin G. Maine, sought to capture local people's recollections of a lost way of life. The reprint is edited by local historian Julie Ann Godson. It is available on Amazon for £10.99 including postage and packing.



**Future Events**

**Owen: The Life Cycle**

Joyce Reed

Held at Coppid Hall, with the generous support of Lord and Lady Phillimore, and presented by the Dunsden Owen Association, this inventive evening was admirably introduced by Jennifer Leach, to whose notes this article is deeply indebted.

A welcome by John Bodman, co-chair of the Association, was followed by Benoit Mission's humorous rendition of one of Owen's letters to his mother, bewailing his subjection to the interminable perusal of sepia-tinted photograph albums in Dunsden vicarage drawing room.

The audience was promised an evening that broke the 'mould'. An Out-rider Anthems film by Jennifer Leach took inspiration from 'Deep Under Turfy Grass', Owen's response to the tragic loss of a mother and child on Dunsden Hill. Ghostlike, childish faces, footage of 'idyllic' rural life, landscape, people and pursuits were revamped ironically from film shot in 2014, making a haunting prelude to Professor Pearson's reading of the poem.

Anne Latto, a mesmeric story teller, recounted an Arab folk story, 'The Girl who spoke Jasmine and Lilies'. Here, despite being targeted by destructive jealousy, creativity blossomed triumphantly.

An excerpt from Daniel Adams' film 'Disappearing' challenged the audience to create a personal, emotional and imaginative response to apparently disparate images of candle flame, script and fragments of charred paper. No single response among the audience could have been predicted nor the same.

'The Thameside Cycle' libretto created by Patricia Beall Gavigan and composed by Chris Mitchell struck a light hearted and witty note, reflecting our local riverine setting.

Post interval, regaled with canapés and champagne, an animated film based on Wilde's 'The Nightingale and the Rose', shown at the 2015 Berlin and London Film festivals, focused on love, fickle feeling and suffering. Created by Del Kathryn Barton and Brendan Fletcher, this extraordinary dramatisation prompted reflection on Wilde's suffering in Reading jail. The counterpoint of black and white graphics and Tifanyesque colour, accompanied by music and speech, imbued the willing self-sacrifice of the nightingale with huge poignancy – Owen's 'pity'.

'Checkmate', written by Frances Hall, was read with sensitivity, humour and immaculate comic timing by Anne Latto, then Wagner's 'Isolde's Liebestod' was arranged and performed by Edward Chilvers, a renowned pianist and composer. It was forceful, moving and a dramatic finale to the 'creative' events.

Lord Phillimore concluded the evening with a penetrative appraisal and a justly deserved accolade to the 'creativity' of those involved. The evening enabled us to view with Owen 'The untravelled world over the hedges of Dunsden Garden'. It was as if the perusal of the sepia tinted photographs had been hi-jacked by Brian Cox; instead our agenda was the catalytic creativity of an exploding supernova.

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Dunsden Village School (Courtesy: OweninDunsden Association)

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES**

Members are welcome to attend Executive meetings.

**11 March 2016**

The secret life of bees - a talk by Jeremy Gilmore and Tracey Hicks Pearson Hall, 7.15 for 7.30 pm

**27 April 2016**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.30 pm

**15 June 2016**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.30 pm

**26 June 2016**

Afternoon Tea in a Sonning Garden – Acorns, 2 West Drive (venue kindly provided by Mary and Gordon Jones) to celebrate the Queen's 90th Birthday. Details will be published in the next edition.

**10 August 2016**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.30 pm

**8-11 September 2016**

Heritage Open Days Weekend - S&SES contribution, if any, to be confirmed

**bridge**

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

**Taming the flood**

Nature Notes presented by Alastair Driver

The Society is delighted that Ali Driver has volunteered to write a regular feature for "Bridge", entitled Nature Notes. The first thought-provoking piece follows.

Welcome to the first in a new series of what I will endeavour to make a regular feature – subject to feedback of course!

Here I am going to focus not on wildlife specifically, but on something which has dominated my working life over the last 35 years and which is absolutely fundamental, not only to wildlife, but also to people and indeed to the very economy we depend on. This is the subject of sustainable catchment management, and flood risk management in particular.

Whether you believe in man's impact on the climate or not, it doesn't really matter – the fact is that the climate is changing just as scientists have been predicting for three decades: polar ice-caps are melting and we in the UK are getting warmer, wetter winters, hotter, drier summers, more extreme weather events and the sea levels are rising fast. So the type of extreme rainfall events that we saw in Somerset in 2014 and Cumbria last winter, can be expected on a more frequent basis. This means that we need to take a very different approach to the way we manage our catchments because rain is racing off high ground into flood plains significantly faster than it would do naturally. This is primarily due to highly compacted and bare winter soils in agricultural areas and of course the impervious nature of our settlements. As Einstein so rightly said "Today's problems cannot be solved if we con-

tinue to think the way we thought when we created them."

And so at last there is genuine interest and awareness of the benefits of working with nature when trying to reduce flood risk. This doesn't mean abandoning the construction of walls, embankments and flood storage reservoirs etc. – they are still an important part of the toolkit – but it does mean doing more to slow the flow of water off the land. And we do at last have good evidence to show that "natural flood management", or NFM, can make a significant difference – e.g.:

- Re-wetting the Exmoor Mires by blocking drainage ditches reduced storm flows to 32% of the pre-restoration level.
- Installation of 6 large woody debris dams in a headstream near Bedford, Northumbria, more than doubled the travel time for the peak of the flood 1km downstream.
- Rainwater infiltration into the ground at Pont Bren in mid-Wales is up to 60 times higher under woodland shelterbelts compared to adjacent heavily grazed pasture.
- £160K of NFM work in the Holnicote Estate catchment in Somerset reduced the flood peak by 10% and helped to prevent £30M of assets (98 properties) from flooding during a greater than 1 in 50 year rainfall event on Christmas Eve 2013.

If we get this balance between land and water management right then we will all reap the societal benefits and what is more, wildlife will flourish.

**»Eye on Sonning  
a view from the Bridge**

Mike Hart, Chairman

Now that the festive season is over we are looking forward to Spring. Thankfully, so far at least, Sonning has escaped the flooding that has hit the north-west of the country. Readers will recall that we have had our share of it in past years.

I have to report, sadly, that Diana Coulter intends to step down as editor of "Bridge" next year. We have been very fortunate to have had Diana as our founding editor and she will be a hard act to follow. She has produced all 45 issues since the Society was founded (2004) and she plans to hand over after the 50th issue in Spring 2017.

Diana has kindly offered to carry on in a supporting role to assist the new editor in "bedding down" and she will continue to provide articles of interest but we are looking for a new editor to take over. Our members tell us how much they enjoy reading "Bridge". We feel that it is one of the most valuable features of the Society, therefore we would be much diminished if we were not able to continue producing newsletters of the high standard set by Diana. We will take this opportunity to review the format of Bridge and may introduce some changes but it is our intention to continue with its production so please let Diana or any Executive Committee members know if you are willing and interested in accepting the challenge!

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# »Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Andy Bell, Patrick Hamblin and Pauline Simmonds

## Co-options onto the Executive 2015/16

At its meeting held on 9 December 2015, the following members were co-opted onto the Executive Committee: Jeremy Gilmore, Patrick Hamblin and Annabella Marks.



## Remembering wartime Sonning

Ron Darvell regales Annabella Marks with his memories of Sonning as a boy - see opposite for the full story.

## Planning applications

The Planning and Traffic Panel continues to meet monthly. It has reviewed 13 applications since the last edition. The Panel has sent written comments to Wokingham BC on the applications for the land adjacent to Model Farm Cottages, Bath Road and the Pavilion,

Holme Park Sports Ground, Sonning Lane.

Since its last report planning permission has been given for the development of the Birchley, Old Bath Road site. The proposed back-land development of this site is disappointing.

## SPC Planning Committee meetings

The Panel continues to observe the Parish Council's planning meetings.

## Conservation Area Appraisal

The draft appraisal continues to be 'work in progress' for Wokingham BC. It is now anticipated it will be available for public comment later in the Spring.

## Cycle racks

The Panel has chosen the type of cycle rack for installation outside the Pearson Hall and final agreement as to the type is being sought from the Pearson Hall Committee. A second location has been accepted by Sonning Parish Council in King George's Playing Field. This will not be installed until some work on drainage has been carried out. Consideration was being given to the installation of a further rack in the Churchyard

but it is understood that cycle racks will be provided as part of the Church Hall development.

## Traffic

No further developments have taken place regarding discussions on the traffic issues in Sonning Lane but it is hoped the Society will be involved in these discussions when they take place.

The Panel is revising its assessment of the practicality of improvements to traffic and footpaths in a number of areas relevant to the village. A report will be available for submission to the Parish Council in due course.

## Scarecrow volunteers welcome!

Remember 2014? If so, the Education & Social Panel would welcome any crea-



tive members who would be happy to help with a Society Scarecrow this year. Please contact Pauline Simmonds on 0118 969 7033 if you would like to add your flair and expertise to our efforts.

## Date for your diary: celebrate the HM Queen's 90th birthday!

We are very grateful to Mary & Gordon Jones for agreeing to host a tea party in their garden on Sunday 26 June as part of the nationwide celebration of Queen Elizabeth's 90th birthday.

## » Membership news

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

Finally a reminder that this will be the last edition of *Bridge* you will receive if you have not yet renewed your subscription. If you would like to re-join, it would be appreciated if you could do so promptly. Please contact Lesley as above.

# Secret life of bees

Pauline Simmonds



Tracey Hicks is seen here rescuing an errant swarm in the editor's garden

Bees are an important part of our environment. How can we support them? Where do they live and what about their honey? If you would like to learn more about these

fascinating insects come and join us in Pearson Hall on Friday 11 March at 7.30 pm. Two local apiarists, Jeremy Gilmore and Tracey Hicks, will talk about "The secret lives of bees". They will chat about their own experiences of looking after honey bees, shed some light on their intricate society and show us what really goes on inside a bee hive!

Tickets - including a glass of wine - cost £4 for Members (£5 for guests) and are available from Penny Feathers on 0118 934 3193.

# Becontree evacuee revisits Sonning

Ron Darvell with Diana Coulter and Annabella Marks

Ron Darvell's return to Sonning last November was a trip down memory lane as he strode on, with great energy and enthusiasm, to remind himself of his time here in our village which he last saw over 70 years ago. His co-authors did their best to keep up as he led the way and are sorry not to have had a camera when Ron peered through The Deanery letterbox trying to recall his stay there, aged four.



Ron Darvell as a schoolboy (Courtesy: Ron Darvell)

Ron grew up in Becontree, Essex, where his parents, Robert and Elsie, had moved into a brand new house soon after their marriage in 1929.

Becontree was a significant new east London estate, built as homes for heroes, designed with nods to Essex vernacular and laid out, initially at least, like a garden city. Ron was born in 1936, his sister, Edna, in 1940. Elsie Darvell brought her children to Sonning twice during the Second World War - in 1940 to escape The Blitz and again in 1944 to find safety away from the VI and V2 bombs or doodlebugs.

## Staying at The Deanery 1940

Ron arrived on a coach that brought the family and other evacuees here from Maidenhead railway station. He recalls being one of the first to be picked out and was selected to stay in the servant's quarters of The Deanery with his mother and Edna, then a babe in arms. Ron remembers how Elsie battled with the kitchen stove. Was this the "French Briffault double oven range" that certainly existed in the house when it was sold in 1929? If so, it would have been a very different experience from the kitchen equipment Elise was familiar with back in her still

new home in Becontree.

Ron started school in Sonning. The first day at school can be a pretty terrifying experience at the best of times, but in the country where an evacuee was probably always a stranger, the first day was probably more difficult than it would have been back home. Ron particularly recalls that a "friendly teacher held him in her arms". Was this perhaps Mrs. Rose, a Supply Teacher employed from February 1940, to help in the infant department for boys and girls, which then occupied the Girl's School in Pearson Road? Like all small boys, the river was tempting and Ron waded out too far and nearly drowned. 75 years later we sat together and chatted over coffee, overlooking, from the safety of the Coppa Club, the very spot where this escapade happened.

## Brief return in 1944

Ron cannot remember how long his first stay lasted. The family returned to Becontree when it was safe to do so but the launch of doodlebugs from the French and Dutch coasts from summer 1944 onwards, made London unsafe yet again. Elsie therefore brought Ron and Edna back to Sonning, staying this time with a Mrs. Brooks, who lived in Pound Lane opposite the pavilion. There is a plaque to William and Mabel Brooks in the churchyard - could these have been his hosts? Ron remembers it being a shorter stay because Elsie was much less happy on this occasion. He also



Elsie Darvell in happier times (Courtesy: Ron Darvell)

remembered Mrs. Brooks combing her daughter Susan's hair before Susan went to school. He retains a memory

that Mr. Brooks was older and powered his radio with a very large battery. Ron told us about the American and Canadian soldiers in the village and how, along with other children, he hung around their mess near King George's Field, in the hope of being given gum and other treats. Ron also recalled that there was a buzz in the village as preparations were in hand for an important wedding, but whose?

## Why Sonning?

In 1995, the year before he died, Ron's father was interviewed for the Debden [Oral History] Project, based around Loughton in Essex where the family moved in 1948 and where Ron still lives in the family home. Robert's story reveals that he worked for the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) for most of his life. He was a driver delivering supplies to the Trinity House stores in various east London centres including the Docks, but mostly in Canning Town. He was exempted war service as he was also a part-time fireman with the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS). Did he know someone in the Sonning Volunteer Fire Brigade perhaps? Would this help to explain why his wife and two children were made welcome here? Clearly Ron's stays here were not part of any formal billeting, and private arrangements abounded based on whom people knew.

The Parish Magazine records that in 1939, Sonning hosted children from schools in Battersea and Lewisham during the "Phoney War". There does not seem to be any connection with Becontree or the LMS, which was one of the first companies to move its headquarters operation and its employees out of London. AFS duties would have been particularly risky during The Blitz and again when the doodlebug offensive was at its height, so Robert Darvell, Ron's father, perhaps explored personal contacts to find a safe haven for his family. Fortunately for us, his son Ron took away some indelible memories of his two stays, which it was a delight for us to explore with him.