

Notes and queries

*** STOP PRESS - More owlish news ***

An excited Paula McNeill emailed Ali Driver on 2 November to report that unbelievably the family had seen a Barn Owl perching on the postbox in their garden! This was the first time they have ever seen one apart from the tame one at the launch of course!

A Thames Parish Magazine

The Society would like to congratulate the Parochial Church Council and in particular Gordon Nutbrown for his assiduous work in making back issues of the Sonning Parish Magazine more widely available. The three volumes are welcome additions to bookshelves if further inspiration is needed for Christmas.

Reading in 50 buildings

A new series of books published by Amberley, takes British cities and towns, presenting them through their 50 most interesting buildings. Stuart Hylton is the author of the volume on Reading, covering many buildings within the IDR but also further afield, e.g. in Caversham, Coley and Earley. Starting with St Mary Butts, the list ends with the new station and a historical pub crawl. This could make a good Christmas stocking filler.

Dunsden Hall Appeal - deadline soon

The Village Hall desperately needs a new kitchen and the One Family Foundation are offering £25,000 if the Hall can get enough votes. To do that the local community and hall users need to vote for it. Every vote counts! Here is the link <https://foundation.onefamily.com/projects/providing-a-new-accessible-kitchen-for-the-local-community-at-dunsden-village-hall/>

Owl box project take-off

Nature Notes by Alastair Driver

Thanks to the generosity of Sonning residents and a much-appreciated donation from the Scarecrow Committee we now have 15 new "state-of-the-art" Barn Owl boxes installed on large trees alongside



Above, Colin Shawyer installs a box, and right: Sadie Shepherd and me with Barn Owls and Caroline Gilmore (a sponsor/box host) with a Tawny Owl.

rough grassland on farmland and in large private properties around the village.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was Conservation Manager for the Thames Region of the National Rivers Authority, I

initiated a project with the Hawk and Owl Trust for the installation of Barn Owl boxes on Reading University farmland at Sonning and in the Loddon Valley. This project led to several pairs of Barn Owls breeding where there were none previously. In fact installation of Barn Owl boxes all over the country has been hugely successful with the population increasing from c. 3000 to over 8000 pairs in the last 30 years, with 75% of those pairs breeding in boxes. The Sonning boxes have all rotted away over the years and recently I decided it was time to resurrect the idea, doing it entirely with local funding. I hadn't predicted the incredible response I would get however - before I knew it I had more than enough sponsors and was having to turn people away!

With funding secured, my next point of call was the ex-Director of the Hawk and

Owl Trust, Colin Shawyer, who supplied all the boxes in kit form and constructed them on site at the Reading University Farm buildings - for which many thanks to Mike Judd and colleagues. Then in the space of a day and a half, Colin, assisted by me and an ecological consultant from Reading, Katy Thomas, installed the boxes around the village. The truth is, Colin did all the hard work and made it look easy, which is understandable I guess, given that he designed the boxes in the first place and during the course of our project installed his 3500th box!

The project publicity took place at Bishops' Close courtesy of Paula and Max McNeill and was a great success thanks to Sadie Shepherd of the Feathers and Fur Falconry Centre at Hare Hatch. Sadie brought along Barn Owls and a Tawny Owl, which drew in BBC South TV who covered the item pleasingly accurately on their evening news.

There is no guarantee that our target species will take up residence in these boxes and some of them will no doubt be adopted by squirrels, stock doves, jackdaws and maybe even Mandarin Ducks, but there is every chance we will attract



one or two pairs of Barn Owls. The monitoring, which will be done by Katy, Sadie and others under licence, will commence next June and I will let S&SES members know as soon as I have any news.

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

SCAA - nearly there!

Mike Hart, Chairman

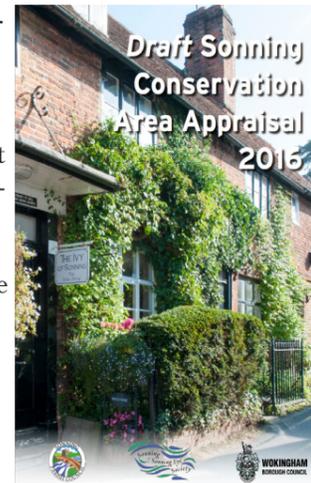
The 2016 Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (SCAA) is in its final stages before adoption by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). It has been a long time in the making but has been worth the wait.

The statutory definition of a conservation area is an "area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance." Once so designated, development proposals within the conservation area are subject to specific national and local policies that are designed to preserve or enhance the area.

The historic core of the village of Sonning was first designated a conservation area by Berkshire County Council in 1971. It was extended in 1980, and the first Appraisal was undertaken in 1996. The current SCAA, prepared in accordance with guidelines published by Historic England, builds on the 1996 edition but goes into much more detail in defining the "character areas" of the village.

At a joint meeting between SPC and the Society in 2011 to prepare the ground for the SCAA update, it was decided that updating the SCAA would be a collaborative effort between SPC and the Society. The conservation area was divided into 9 "character areas" and teams of volunteers were tasked with filling in forms that described the

characteristics of their allotted character area - these not only took account of the buildings but also the trees, open spaces, roads and footpaths as well as safety aspects and ambient noise. The forms were then collated by Diana Coulter and Louise Ryan, then a recent Reading University graduate and now



a senior conservation professional, to create the first version of the updated SCAA. This was showcased in a public consultation in Pearson Hall in February 2013 which attracted 55 visitors and over 110 contributions on the website.

The SCAA then went through a lengthy period of review and revision. Successive drafts were produced and commented upon by

SPC and the Society. A final draft was prepared by WBC and placed on their website for the second public consultation that took place last month with a well-attended presentation in Pearson Hall on 26 & 27 October. The ensuing comments are being compiled and any resulting changes made before the final SCAA is adopted by WBC early next year. The display boards describing the SCAA were displayed at the Society's AGM in Pearson Hall on 19 November.

The Society owes a huge debt of gratitude to Diana Coulter and Brian O'Callaghan who masterminded the SCAA update and guided it through the past 5 years. A job well done!

»Eye on Sonning From the Editor's Desk

The Editor

So how does Bridge reach you, the reader?

First is the ideas stage. This can be planned ahead, particularly for "Page 3". Sometimes, the editor knocks up a piece, but usually there is something in the top drawer or a willing author is on the case.

The front page can be challenging. It's good to ensure it's topical. Occasionally an historical story is used. The Executive and Panels generate news - reports on actions showing how we work on your behalf as well as advance notice of events. These are usually straightforward. It's difficult to quantify how long the ideas stage takes as it can depend on serendipity.

Secondly copy is put "to bed" using Adobe InDesign. There is a template and a few simple guidelines. Another editor may prefer different desk-top publishing software, triggering a fresh look at layout - for example, after 50 issues tastes in font styles have moved on. This technical stage probably takes about 3-4 days.

Finally, there is getting printed copies out to members, using Lesley Heaney's excellent Excel database to create distribution lists, bundling up copies for delivery to the team of distributors and perhaps taking on one round. All in all about 2-3 days work.

If you think you could take on all or any one of these elements, do please contact Mike Hart on 0118 969 8145 or the editor.

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

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Future Events

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Members are welcome to attend Executive meetings.

7 December 2016
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.00pm

February 2017 (Date tbc)
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.00pm

10 February 2016
Wargrave: another Thames-side village - a talk by Peter Delaney Pearson Hall @7.15 for 7.30 pm (See page 2)

April 2017 (Date tbc)
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.00pm

June 2017 (Date tbc)
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.00pm

August 2017 (Date tbc)
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.00pm

October 2017 (Date tbc)
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 7.00pm

»Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Andy Bell, Patrick Hamblin and Pauline Simmonds

New Executive 2016/17

At the AGM on 19 November, Mike Hart, Bob Hine, Andy Bell and Alan Furness were elected as Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon Secretary and Hon Treasurer respectively. Ali Driver was welcomed as a new member while the following were also elected: Patrick Hamblin, Lesley Heaney, Annabella Marks and Pauline Simmonds.

Planning applications

The Planning & Traffic Panel has met monthly and reviewed 15 applications during the past three months.

SPC Planning Committee meetings

In the same period the Panel has attended these meetings as an observer.

Cycle racks

The Society is now in discussion with SPC regarding the provision of cycle racks in the St George's playing field.

Traffic

Following a recommendation by the Society to SPC, a joint working group has been set up to discuss parking problems in Sonning. The first meeting was held at the end of October and discussions are to be held with some

Sonning businesses relating to their traffic/parking plans. Whilst we have made a good deal of progress in identifying the problematic areas, we realise that finding solutions will take much longer. **We would like to ask your help by telling us:**

1. Instances where you have experienced difficulties (inconsiderate parking, on pavements, for example); and
2. How you feel the problems of parking should be tackled.



Please feel free to contact either Patrick Hamblin (patrick.hamblin@btinternet.com) or Bob Hine (bob.hine@btinternet.com) with your comments. A similar note is being placed in the next edition of the SPC newsletter.

If you respond to our request you will not need to respond again to SPC as we are pooling the comments.

Local Plan Update

WBC has published a list of sites for updating the local plan that will guide development in the Borough for the next 20 years and also the gypsy and traveller local plan. There are seven sites listed in Sonning. The list of submitted sites is available on the WBC website. It is understood that an initial assessment of the sites would be undertaken by WBC, which would form part of the Preferred Options consultation that is planned to start in June 2017. It is also understood this is a lengthy process and that completion of the Local Plan is not expected before May 2019. A link to the pages on the WBC website is below:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-update/#>

Sonning Cutting

The Society continues to be grateful to Ali Driver for maintaining his involvement with the Sonning Cutting issues.

Wargrave unwrapped

Pauline Simmonds



Members had a very successful 'visit' to Salisbury in September but our next talk is much nearer home.

Wargrave, like Sonning, is on the river, was mentioned in the Domesday book, has several timber framed buildings and a central Conservation Area. Do we have many

things in common? Or does this neighbouring village, without a Bishop's Palace or bridge have a different 'history' to tell?

Peter Delaney has been Secretary of the Local History Society for over 25 years, and has written or edited several books on the subject. He has kindly offered to talk to us about

Wargrave: another Thames-side village on Friday 10 February 2017 in the Pearson Hall starting at 7.30pm. So make a note in next year's diary. Tickets as usual, costing £4 for members, £5 for guests, will be available in January from Penny Feathers (Tel 934 3193).

»New Members & 2017 subs due

In January we would like you to renew your subscription, which is being held at the same level as 2016. Renewal forms with all the details are enclosed for those who need them. **Please note** you can safely ignore this message, if you have already set up a standing order or joined at or after the Village Show.

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

- Dr & Mrs Farquhar
- Mr & Mrs Haldane
- Mr & Mrs Pascall
- Ms T Scott
- Mr & Mrs Thomas
- Mrs Westbrook

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaney, Membership Secretary (969 7231).

Amblings & ramblings: Eye - Sonning

Reflections on a stroll around Sonning & Sonning Eye by Joyce Reed

Shameless name dropping – and loitering with intent? In Sonning...? Cue three men in a boat who 'roamed about sweet Sonning for an hour or so'. Start at the Waterwheel bar; here two mills and five fisheries, owned by Reading Abbey, were recorded in Domesday. The eight, black-robed Benedictines from the Abbey of Cluny, founders of Reading, would have been intrigued, centuries later, by the recurrence of the name (albeit spelled differently) now associated with the island. Thespians sense the 'Blithe Spirit' of The Mill – Ayckbourn, Coward, Rattigan, music, jazz and rock. A glance left, towards Dunsden, nods to Owen's curacy there.

Who boated upstream?... The Danes, ready to sack Reading Abbey?... Turner, artist of the Thames?... Shelley, poet of the Thames, resident at Marlow, rowing with Thomas Love Peacock, in a wherry as far as Lechlade? A book of Shelley's poetry, gifted to Owen, entitled 'Strange Meeting', is the title of one of Owen's most famous poems. The Bishop of Sonning is reputed to have left from here, to conduct the obsequies of Henry 1, who died in France, from eating a surfeit of lampreys. The King, sewn inside a bull's hide, minus his entrails, travelled upstream, to be buried in a silver casket in Reading Abbey. Are his remains those found recently in the car park of Reading Gaol? Here, on the Thames, paths have crossed, centuries apart.

Downstream, mid bridge, glimpse Shiplake's islands. Spot a fish 'Coming Up For Air'? ... The title of a novel by George Orwell (Eric Blair) reflects his lifelong passion for fishing; ponds, carp and Lower Binfield evoke his childhood spent at Roselawn in Shiplake. Tennyson married in Shiplake. Arguably, the most famous Thame-side meal, Irish stew, was cooked, on a Shiplake island, by George & Co: potatoes, cabbage, a peck of peas, half a pork pie, cold boiled bacon, half a tin of potted salmon and cracked eggs would impress any River Cottage cook ... no waste here, Hugh, and as for local foraging, Mont-

morency's dead water rat seems an apt ingredient, if unlikely to make the menu at our fine eateries. Upstream, Jerome is buried at Ewelme, Orwell at Sutton Courtenay, both near the river.

Over the bridge, bear left into Blue Plaque territory – Rattigan lived in the Red House. On the right, Lutyens designed The Deanery, and Jekyll its gardens. Loud traffic noise may evoke



Led Zeppelin rather than the six-part canon 'Summer is i cumen in' by John Fornsete, a monk at Reading Abbey.

Pass The White House, associated with Uri Geller, and straight ahead lie the trees of The Acre, recalling Holman Hunt's most famous painting, 'The Light of the World', which this Pre-Raphaelite brother painted by moonlight in his garden here. Locals thought he was mad but St Sarik's chapel has a cure for that!

Into the High Street: French echoes reverberate. Isabella de Valois, child widow of Richard II, whose emblem was the White Hart, former name of The Great House, rides past you, with the Earls of Kent and Salisbury, on a

winter's night towards Cirencester. At the junction with Pearson Road, in The Grove, Admiral Villeneuve, of Trafalgar fame, was a prisoner, dining with Pitt. Look left towards Sonningdene ... Revd Sidney Smith defined heaven as 'eating foie gras to the sound of trumpets'. Political connections abound, historically as well as currently - Lord Sidmouth, speaker of the Commons, was also associated with Sonning.

Off to the right, the delicate tracery of Reading Bluecoat School and Holme Park has welcomed Ricky Gervais, aka David Brent, Keira Knightley and Inspector Morse. The medieval Bishop's Palace on the mound hosted King John and Princess Elizabeth I. At "Turpin's" house, go through the lych-gate. His exploits, and those of Claude Duval in Maidenhead Thicket, must have been the talk of the day at The Bull.

Grey ghosts of language, recorded by David Crystal, ex professor of linguistics at Reading University, surround you at every turn. Odo, mentioned in St. Andrew's, fought against the Danes, at the battle of Brunanburgh, although a Dane himself, commemorated in the Anglo-Saxon poem of the same name. Aelfric, monk of Abingdon, in his Colloquies, evokes everyday Saxon rural life, Sunna's people indeed; tombs, brasses and monuments weave a rich tapestry of language, in Latin, French, and English. Jane Austen's uncle, Edward Cooper, was rector here.

Choose your own end-point. Take refreshment at The Bull, where medieval pilgrims sheltered whilst visiting St Sarik's chapel for a cure for madness. Jerome describes it as a 'veritable picture of an old country inn', although its clientele may have changed from the old men who 'drink their ale and gossip over village politics'. The 'low, quaint rooms and latticed windows, and awkward stairs and winding passages' remain largely unchanged. Did Leland down an ale here?

Sonning?... Starting point, meeting point, end point. Walking made you feel peckish? Lampreys or Irish Stew?