

# bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Issue 68 • Spring 2022

## Platinum Jubilee: Planned Events

Mike Hart, Chairman

Much forward planning of the Jubilee celebrations has taken place since our report in Issue 66 of *Bridge* last Autumn. As there won't be another edition circulated before the events take place at the end of May/early June we are providing a summary of the current arrangements in chronological order so that readers can make notes of the key dates to avoid missing out. Many thanks to the organisers for all their efforts and to Reading Blue Coat School for providing their facilities for the Regatta and for making their grounds available for the Elegant Picnic.

### Sonning Jubilee Regatta

Saturday - 28<sup>th</sup> May

11am - 6pm

The Regatta will be held on the Oxfordshire bank of the Thames opposite Reading Blue Coat School boathouse. A passenger ferry will operate from the landing stage of the boathouse on the Berkshire side tow-path. Access by car to the regatta site is also possible via Sonning Eye subject to pre-booking and payment of the £10 fee. The races promise to be as exciting as ever and there will be a bar and burger stall for competitors and spectators.

### Nature Reserve Walk

Sunday - 29<sup>th</sup> May

2pm - 4pm approx

Ali Driver will lead a group of up to 20 adults for a two hour guided tour around the Thames Valley Park wetlands. Meet in St. Andrew's churchyard at 2pm.



### Children's Tennis Taster

Monday - 30<sup>th</sup> May

Two separate sessions at Sonning Tennis Club, each with a maximum of 24 juniors. The first for ages up to 13 from 10.30am-12.30pm and the second for 13 years and above from 2-4pm. Coaching will be by three LTA registered coaches supported by Club members. The Club can provide tennis rackets if required.

### Dipping at Ali's Pond

Wednesday - 1<sup>st</sup> June

2pm - 3.30pm

Ali Driver will run a one and a half hour pond-dipping session for a group of up to 20 primary school age children (plus parents). Meet at Ali's pond at 2pm.

### Sonning Scarecrow Trail and Open Gardens

Thursday & Friday - 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> June

10am - 5pm approx

Sonning Scarecrow Trail and garden opening will be held on the Thursday and Friday, with refreshments available in Pearson Hall. Sonning Art Group will hold an exhibition in the Pearson Hall committee room on the same days.

### King George V Field BBQ

Thursday - 2<sup>nd</sup> June

From 6.30pm with Beacon Lighting at 9.45pm

Sonning Parish Council is organising an evening event in King George V Field culminating in the lighting of our beacon with others across the country. Sonning Scouts will run a BBQ and Sonning Cricket Club will open the bar.

### Junior Football

Wednesday - 1<sup>st</sup> June

Two separate introductory sessions at Berkshire County Sports ground in Sonning Lane, each for up to 20 juniors.

7-11 year olds are invited 10am-12 noon; 12-16 year olds from 1-3pm.



Bridge is the newsletter of the  
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

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**St Andrew's Full Peal**

Friday - 3<sup>rd</sup> June

10am

The Church will ring a full peal of bells at 10am. The Church will be decked out with a beautiful flower display and will be open to visitors.

**Elegant Picnic**

Saturday - 4<sup>th</sup> June

7pm - 11pm approx

The Picnic will be held in the grounds of Reading Blue Coat School behind the Buttery. Attendees should register their intention to erect a gazebo (£30) or just attend (£15 per person) at the ticketing event on 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

**Jubilee Church Service**

Sunday - 5<sup>th</sup> June

11am

St. Andrew's Church will hold a special Jubilee service at 11am at which Lord Carey (the 103<sup>rd</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury) will be preaching. This will be followed by a reception in the Ark.

**Ticketing Event in Pearson Hall - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April from 10am - 12 noon**

The organisers of the Sonning Festival (for events such as the Regatta and Elegant Picnic) and the Jubilee Weekend Street Party will be holding a ticketing event to allow you to register. (Although tickets may be obtained later if you cannot make it.)

**Street Party - Pearson Rd**

Sunday - 5<sup>th</sup> June

From 2.30pm

Arrangements are in hand for a road closure of Pearson Road from High Street to Pound Lane to enable the street party to take place outside Pearson Hall, as it did at the Diamond Jubilee in 2012. Attendees are asked to register at the ticketing event on 23<sup>rd</sup> April when they will be asked what food (sandwiches and/or cakes) they will bring to Pearson Hall before the event starts at 2.30pm. The food will be laid out in advance on tables set up by the organisers. Attendees should bring their own chairs.



Coronation Day in Sonning  
2<sup>nd</sup> June 1953

# Executive Committee & Panels

## Patrick Hamblin, Planning & Traffic Panel

### Meetings & Planning Applications

Monthly meetings of the Panel have continued to be held since the last edition of *Bridge*, with additional meetings held in January to discuss the Local Plan Update (see below) and in February to discuss the two care home planning applications. At those meetings a total of nine applications were discussed.

Comments were sent to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) on the following applications:

- Sonning Golf Club care home and the care home to replace 101/101A Pound Lane. There were over 30 objections to each of these applications.
- The need for an archaeological survey to be conducted before commencement of work on a premises in the High Street.
- Holme Park Sports Ground pavilion.

Comments were sent to Reading Borough Council relating to the proposed building

of 223 houses on the former Reading Golf Club site in Emmer Green. Our comments were one of over 4,500 comments but Reading Borough Council has subsequently given approval to the plans.

### Local Plan Update

Information on the WBC Local Plan Update was distributed to all Sonning properties in January, giving all residents the opportunity to comment. It is not known how many persons responded, but an extensive response was prepared by the Society and submitted to WBC by the closing date for comments.

### Traffic

As noted previously, Panel members are participating in a working group consisting of representatives of Sonning Parish Council, WBC, and others to endeavour to find solutions to the

road safety problems in Sonning. The improvements in Pound Lane, being the extension of the 20mph area, previously understood to have been agreed by WBC, have been turned down by Thames Valley Police.

### Sonning Neighbourhood Plan

The first full draft of the plan is currently being developed by the Working Group.

### Third Thames Crossing

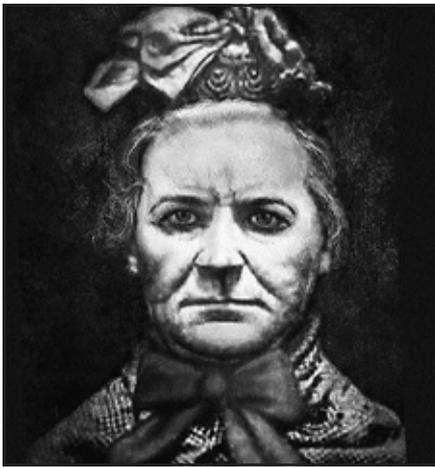
No further developments to report.

### Sonning Parish Council Planning Committee Meetings

The Society continues to monitor all the applications and 'attends' the virtual meetings, where appropriate.







Far left: Photograph of Amelia Dyer upon entry to Wells Asylum in 1893

Left: Police photo of Dyer after her arrest in 1896

Below: Amelia Dyer's confession with permission of Thames Valley Police Museum in Sulhamstead, Berks

Top right: Example of newspaper adverts placed by Dyer

# The Baby Farmer....

## Amelia Dyer – Britain's most prolific serial killer

Terry Dixon, founder of Terry's Reading Walkabouts

Not far upstream from Sonning, is Caversham Lock. 125 years ago, the intriguing, but very disturbing and eventual evil tale of Amelia Dyer started to unravel nearby!

One morning in March 1896 a bargeman recovered a package from the Thames near the lock and was horrified to find in it the body of a baby girl. A subsequent search of the river found six more tiny bodies. A baby girl and boy, together in an old carpet bag, were identified enabling the police to build a case against Mrs Thomas aka Amelia Dyer

In the subsequent police investigation Detective Constable James Anderson and Sgt. James found traces of a Mrs Thomas address in Caversham in the paper in which the body had been wrapped. They found her now living in Kensington Road, Reading but needing more evidence, the officers decided to use a young woman as a decoy, who arranged a meeting with Dyer to discuss her services. Dyer was expecting her new client (the decoy), but instead detectives were waiting on her doorstep! She was arrested and letters and baby clothes found in a search of her home suggested she was caring for several children, none were found.

Amelia trained as a nurse, then a midwife and by the 1860s, became a Baby Farmer, a lucrative shady

trade in Victorian-Era England. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had made it so that fathers of illegitimate children were not obligated by law to support their children financially, leaving many women who became pregnant out of wedlock, with few options.

It being ruinous to be an unmarried mother, it wasn't uncommon for single mothers to pay a one-off sum to have their baby brought up by somebody else, often in response to a newspaper advert. With ineffective regulation this practice was wide open to abuse.

Many of these women were young, were either coerced or raped (especially if they were in service as say a maid). Even if they lived at home, they more often than not,

faced being disowned and putting out on the streets. There was no welfare state, no charities or other organisations to help them!

Therefore, for a fee, baby farmers would adopt unwanted children. They operated under the ruse that the child would be taken care of, but often the children were mistreated and killed (directly or indirectly).

Amelia Dyer would place adverts in newspapers offering to adopt a child into a "good country home" with prices starting at £10.

She started in Bristol where babies in her "care" tended to die of neglect. Eventually she refined the process, eliminating the need for a death certificate by disposing of the bodies. This had the benefit

To The Chief Superintendant of Police

Sir will you kindly grant me the favour of presenting this to the Magistrates on Saturday the 10th instant I have made this statement out for I may not have the opportunity then I must releiv my mind I do know and I feel my days are numbered on this Earth but I do feel it is an awful thing drawing Innocent people into trouble I do know I shal have to answer befor my Maker on Heaven for the awful Crimes I have committed but as God Almighty is Judge in Heaven as on Hearth neither my Daughter Mary Ann Palmer or her Husband Arthur Ernest Palmer I do most solemnly declare neither of them had any-thing at all to do with it, they never knew I contemplated doing such a thing until it was to late I am speaking the truth and nothing but the truth as I hope to be forgiven, I myself and I alone must stand before my Maker in Heaven to give a answer for it all wites my hand Amelia Dyer.





**The policemen responsible for bringing Amelia Dyer to justice and the evidence presented in court pictured in front of them. DC Anderson is on the right**

his wife and child, James George (born 1936 in Birmingham). They bought a house in Glebe Lane, Sonning where Henry James remained until his death in 1980.

James George and his wife Maureen lived with his parents in Glebe Lane until 1960. They were awaiting the completion of their allocated council house in Woodley when a house, just around the corner in Little Glebe, became vacant. They moved in and spent

many happy years (more than 55) there raising their family.

It was in the loft of that house in Little Glebe that Richard Anderson found the evidence from the Amelia Dyer case.

So – some of the evidence which helped to convict possibly one of the world’s most prolific serial killers found its way back to the Thames Valley via Birmingham, at least two house moves and after over 120 years. Not forgetting that this crime was solved without the aid of modern-day forensics, just thorough and intelligent detective work. An achievement to be proud of.

# Blue Coat School

**Pete Thomas, Headmaster of Reading Blue Coat School**



When we moved to Holme Park from Reading following WW2, Blue Coat was a school of 150 boys, 90 of whom were boarders, with 12 staff. There have been some significant changes since then, with girls joining the Sixth Form in 1987 and boarding ceasing in 2001. Today, with over 800 students and 200 Operations and Teaching staff, we have grown too!

Last summer it was reported that the School has plans to change again, extending the co-educational provision as we welcome girls into Year 7. This is absolutely true! An item for Governor consideration for some time, I am delighted that we will begin working towards complete co-education from September 2023. Having about a hundred girls in the Sixth Form is fantastic, but to learn to support and encourage, challenge, and compete together throughout adolescence will be even better. For almost all of our joiners into Year 7 it will also be a very natural progression, with over 95% of our feeder schools at Year 7 being co-educational themselves.

We have a wonderful site of 46 acres, a bucolic gem on the banks of the Thames. At least, that is how it feels within the grounds; I know that the story for regular users of Sonning Lane may be a little different at the beginning and end of the day during term time, when traffic is often rather heavy. As an integral part of the village, we want to ensure both the future health of the School and continued strong relations with our neighbours and changes we seek to make will always consider the impacts. Of course, the traffic on Sonning Lane is not all down to Blue Coat, but we have looked closely at our travel planning and are actively seeking to increase the number of students arriving and leaving by improved coach travel each



day, thereby reducing the number of vehicles on the road. This isn't an instant fix, and it needs to be in conjunction with other measures, but it will help us all as the School moves forwards.

Covid's impact on so many schools and businesses has been significant and varied. At Blue Coat, whilst we have weathered it well, we know that the sustained crisis of the last two years will undoubtedly uncover or create further difficulties to which we need to respond; Covid won't be the only bump in the road! We want to - and must - keep focused on our core business, the task of educating and nurturing young lives. Providing exceptional pastoral, academic and co-curricular care and opportunities for students who are expected to be engaged and kind is, in a nutshell, our mission. It was Richard Aldworth's too when he founded Blue Coat in 1646. Our school's journey started 362 years ago, in Reading and without the traffic problem! It's done a lot of miles but, wonderfully, there are so many exciting new roads to explore.





## Dates For Your Diaries

The events that are organised by the Society are shaded in brown, other events within the environs of Sonning and Sonning Eye have a green background.

Check our website for information and to book tickets.

## Future Events



25 <sup>th</sup> March 7.30pm	S&SES Talk: Simon Wenham introduces The Pursuit of Pleasure - Leisure on the river in Victorian and Edwardian times	Tickets available online, members of the Society and guests are welcome
6 <sup>th</sup> April at 7.45pm	S&SES Executive Committee meeting in Pearson Hall	Members of the Society are very welcome
22 <sup>nd</sup> April 7.30pm	S&SES Talk: From a Ford to a Flight - Tony Weston details the many different ways that the Thames has been crossed	Tickets available online, members of the Society and guests are welcome
23 <sup>rd</sup> April 10am - 12 noon	Ticketing for Sonning Festival Jubilee Weekend - in Pearson Hall	Visit <a href="http://www.sonningfestival.co.uk">www.sonningfestival.co.uk</a> for more
28 <sup>th</sup> April - 25 <sup>th</sup> June 2.15pm & 8.15pm	The Mill at Sonning: Busman's Honeymoon, Brian Blessed directs this adaptation of a Dorothy L. Sayers whodunnit	Tickets available from <a href="http://millatsonning.com">millatsonning.com</a>
28 <sup>th</sup> May 11am - 6pm	Sonning Jubilee Regatta on Oxfordshire bank of River Thames	See <a href="http://www.sonningfestival.co.uk">www.sonningfestival.co.uk</a> for more
29 <sup>th</sup> May 2pm - 4pm	Nature Reserve Walk with Ali around Thames Valley Park	
30 <sup>th</sup> May	Children's Tennis Taster at Sonning Tennis Club	<a href="http://www.sonningtennis.com">www.sonningtennis.com</a>
1 <sup>st</sup> June 2pm - 3.30pm	Dipping at Ali's Pond	
1 <sup>st</sup> June 10am and 1pm	Junior Football introductory sessions at BCS	<a href="http://www.berkshirecountysports.club">www.berkshirecountysports.club</a>
2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> June 10am - 5pm	Sonning Scarecrow Trail	Visit <a href="http://www.sonningscarecrows.com">www.sonningscarecrows.com</a>
2 <sup>nd</sup> June 6.30pm	Jubilee Beacon Lighting, BBQ and bar on King George V Field	See <a href="http://www.sonning-pc.org.uk">www.sonning-pc.org.uk</a>
3 <sup>rd</sup> June 11am	St Andrew's Church Full Peal	
4 <sup>th</sup> June 7pm - 11pm	Elegant Picnic in the grounds of Reading Blue Coat School	See <a href="http://www.sonningfestival.co.uk">www.sonningfestival.co.uk</a> for more
5 <sup>th</sup> June 11am	Jubilee Service at St Andrew's Church	
5 <sup>th</sup> June from 2.30pm	Jubilee Street Party on Pearson Road	See <a href="http://www.sonning-pc.org.uk">www.sonning-pc.org.uk</a>
15 <sup>th</sup> June at 7.45pm	S&SES Executive Committee meeting in Pearson Hall	Members of the Society are very welcome
21 <sup>st</sup> June 10.30am	S&SES Visit: Tour of Fairmile Vineyard in Henley to hear how their famous sparkling wine is made and, of course, to taste it	Members of the Society and guests are very welcome

### >> Membership information

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaney, our Membership Secretary ([membership@sonning.org.uk](mailto:membership@sonning.org.uk)), so please mention the Society when you chat to your new neighbours. We can also be found on Facebook and at [www.sonning.org.uk](http://www.sonning.org.uk).



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