

»Bridge ends

Notes and queries

More ideas for thinking global, acting local

- I will compost even more kitchen waste for organic vegetable gardening.
- I will hold more "conference calls" and "e-meetings" and so reduce the number of ... meetings and, when they do take place, car share where possible.
- I will print fewer e-mails and use re-cycled paper when printing is necessary.
- I will have at least one meat free day each week.
- I will put a notice where I hang my car keys saying, "Could I do this journey by foot or bicycle?"
- I will endeavour to drive as fuel efficiently as possible.
- I will turn off all electrical equipment at the wall socket.
- I will purchase an "Owl" meter to monitor electricity consumption.
- I will take bags to shop with, rather than use their plastic bags.
- I will encourage my children to wear warm clothing at home and have less heating in the house.

Source: <http://www.hereford.anglican.org/404.aspx?aspxerrorpath=/index.aspx>

Near miss for Village Voices

We were delighted but sad to discover in the Heritage Open Days winter newsletter, that *Village Voices* was a joint runner-up in an internal Best Event Directory Title. The winning spot went to Birmingham's Soho House Museum's *How Clean is your House?*

Oops, inevitable plagiarism?

Imagine the shock of finding that the Diocese of Southwark's newsletter is called "The Bridge", and that it's key page 2 column is entitled "A view from the Bridge"! Their newsletter just happens to contain more pages than ours.



Future Events

'Ring, happy bells, ...'

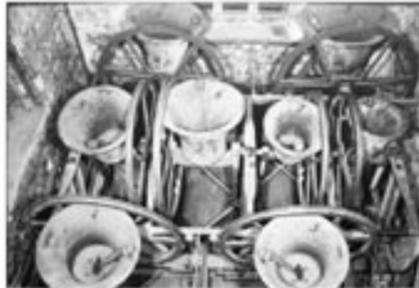
Rob Needham

What is the history of Sonning's bells? When were they made and who made them? How are bells rung? Does one need to be strong or brainy? What is myth and what is fact?

English-style bellringing is part of our cultural heritage, and is a sound familiar to us all. It originated around 400 years ago and has spread to many parts of the world. Ringing requires skill and teamwork, and gives much satisfaction to ringers - gentle exercise of mind and body, and a great feeling of achievement.

Two experienced bellringers will be giving a talk on the history of Sonning's bells and the art of bell ringing on Friday 16 April in The Buttery at Reading Blue Coat School at 8.00 pm. Rob Needham, Vice-Captain of Sonning bellringers, will talk about the history of Sonning's church bells and their handbells. John Harrison,

Foreman (Captain) of All Saints bellringers, Wokingham, will complement Rob's talk by explaining how English-style ringing evolved, how bells work, and the music of



The bells of St Andrew's (Courtesy: Paul Tyrrell)

change ringing. He will give glimpses into the world of ringers and the fascination that ringing can offer.

If you would like to attend, please use the enclosed booking form.

Summer Lunch at Sonningdene

Penny Feathers



Sonningdene (Courtesy: Lesley Green)

social event. More information and a booking form will be included in the next edition of *Bridge*, to be distributed during Scarecrows Weekend 2010.

MERL Private View!

Mary Chapman & Diana Coulter

Village Voices runs at MERL until Sunday 25 April, so we do hope many of you will be able to find some time to go. The Museum is located in Redlands Road opposite the west side of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Entrance into the Museum is free. It is open Tuesday-Friday, 10am-4.30pm and Saturday-Sunday, 2pm-4.30pm.

There is a 'private' view on Saturday 20 March from 2pm. If you would like to attend, contact Diana Coulter on 0118 969 2132/diana.coulter@mac.com.

Thanks to the generosity of Tom and Ann Mills a Summer Lunch will be held in the garden of Sonningdene, Pearson Road on Sunday 20th June.

A Members-only event, tickets will be available from Penny Feathers (934 3193) on a first come first served basis. Please make a note in your diary and come and join us for an always popular

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Saturday 20 March 2010

Village Voices: Private View - Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading, 2:00 pm onwards

Wednesday 14 April 2010

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

Friday 16 April 2010

Sonning Bells and the Art of Bell-Ringing - Buttery, Reading Blue Coat School, 7:45 for 8:00 pm

Sunday 25 April 2010

Bix Bluebells with Alastair Driver - BBOWT Warburg Reserve, Bix, Oxfordshire, 2:00 pm onwards

Wednesday 12 May 2010

Joint presentation on traffic strategy - Sonning Parish Council, Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 9 June 2010

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm
All are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Issue 22 • Spring 2010

Nature's prizes for us

Alastair Driver & Diana Coulter

Coming in April is an opportunity to take a guided walk around the Warburg Nature Reserve at Bix. This flagship site for the Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is hidden in a peaceful Chilterns valley, where it is possible to forget the proximity of Reading,



Bix bluebells capture on an earlier visit (Courtesy: Alastair Driver)

Heathrow or London. Alastair Driver will accompany the group, and we hope a BBOWT warden will give us an informed insight into the reserve and its seasonal specialities.

Fingers crossed that after this long hard winter, we will get early sightings of the Reserve's famed bluebells, immortalised by Anne Bronte in her poem celebrating them: "When bluebells seemed like fairy gifts/A prize among the flowers."

According to its website, <http://www.bbowl.org.uk/content.asp?did=23596>, the reserve is a mixture of chalk grassland and ancient woodland, making it an ideal site for birds and butterflies. More than 2,000 species of plant, animal and fungus have been recorded. It yields many other spring delights, which we hope will appeal to Members,

who would like to enjoy a stimulating walk in informed company.

We suggest meeting at the Reserve on Sunday 25 April at 2 pm. If you would like to join in and can also perhaps offer a lift to someone, please let us know on the enclosed form. The site, which is about 265 acres in size, has steep paths mostly covered in loose flint, while 'on the flat' they are grassy; the valley bottom can be muddy after rain. There are gates and stiles to negotiate, so sensible footwear is advised, and perhaps walking sticks. If the weather is kind to us, bring something to drink and we can wrap up the event with an informal chat in the picnic area. The event is free but the Reserve would welcome a minimum donation of £2.00 per person.

Otters are back!

Alastair can report the return, after almost 50 years, of the Eurasian Otter to the Thames near Sonning. A recent early morning sighting just downstream of the village, was backed up by confirmation of several fresh spraints (droppings) near the Bridge. An EA colleague, carrying out surveys of this part of the river for the Otter Survey of England, also confirmed the likelihood of there probably being a resident pair occupying the stretch of floodplain between Reading and Henley. Happy riverside walks for all!



Courtesy: Environment Agency

»Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Bob Hine, Chairman

Recently a number of Villagers have become actively involved with the applications for the Fire Station site redevelopment. This has turned into a very controversial issue and I feel it would be wrong of me not to mention the Fire Station in this "View from the Bridge".

The applications generated strong differences of opinion. Although I believe debate can be healthy, it is important to remember that all those most closely involved - the Sonning Volunteer Fire Brigade Trust, the Parish Council and the Society - are volunteers who give freely of their time to work for the overall benefit of our village. The Trust has withdrawn their applications and I believe that this was the best course of action in the circumstances. I hope that it will provide a very welcome opportunity for all of us to pause and reflect.

When such differences of opinion occur, it is important that we deal with them in a transparent and constructive way, without the need for emotions to run high. I sincerely hope that any future proposal for the use of this site can attract widespread support and provide benefit for the village in years to come.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the Society's next talk on Sonning's Bells scheduled to take place at Reading Blue Coat School on Friday 16th April.

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

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web: www.sonning.org.uk

»Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Gary Robinson, Annabella & Nick Marks, and Diana Coulter

Emerging traffic strategy

The Planning and Traffic Panel is working with Sonning Parish Council to draw up a long-term strategy for reducing the effects of the high volume of traffic passing through our villages. In addition to the direct physical damage to roads and buildings, rush-hour congestion leads to noise and pollution from vehicles as well as noise from the radios and mobile phones of inconsiderate drivers - not to mention litter! The source of this problem is, of course, the Bridge. After nearly 80 years, relief in the shape of a new Thames crossing may finally be in sight, but this is by no means certain. Our joint initiative is therefore looking at solutions that will be consistent with either outcome.

Recently, two members of our Panel and the Highways Working Group of the SPC have been holding 'brainstorming' sessions. In the first the key issues were identified and prioritised as 'high', 'medium' or 'low'. Top of the 'high' category, not surprisingly, was traffic volume. Interestingly these issues are often linked through 'knock-on' effects. For example, increasing traffic throughput by making it flow more easily might actually increase traffic volume by encouraging more commuters to use Sonning Bridge. Likewise, measures to decrease traffic volume may worsen the speeding problem.

The second session, during which technical, financial and even legal limitations were put to one side, saw a variety of possible solutions proposed, cen-

tring on managing traffic flow. These ranged from totally 'off the wall' ideas, such as our villages declaring 'UDI' - along the lines of the Ealing comedy *Passport to Pimlico* - to more practical (and legal!) ideas such as changing the phasing of the traffic lights on Sonning Bridge, or even introducing a Toll.

Instead of tackling problems in isolation, as has unfortunately been the tendency in the past, future sessions will concentrate on devising 'holistic' approaches that address linked issues. Hopefully these solutions will include reducing the number of road signs and other traffic-oriented paraphernalia that blot our village landscape (some of you may have seen the front-page article on road signs in the *Twyford Advertiser*). This will probably result in a number of alternative scenarios, each with advantages and disadvantages that may affect some residents more than others. The joint group intends to present these ideas at the next Sonning Parish Council Annual Meeting on 12 May.

Gravel extraction update

Currently Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is performing a detailed appraisal as to how it is to fulfil its obligations for sand and gravel extraction. OCC are drawing up a strategy and is assessing the broad areas where future workings should take place. OCC is inviting interested parties to a series of meetings soon enabling them to then produce a refined set of options. A briefing paper is available at <http://>

portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/planning/planning_policy/minerals_waste_policy/briefingnote.pdf. The workshop for Sonning Eye is due to be held on 17 March.

Lafarge have already submitted a site nomination for the land east of Spring Lane for inclusion in the strategy. OCC are under pressure from central Government to increase their contribution to regional minerals production and is anticipating a significant uplift for sand and gravel demanded from the county.

Local groups are watching events with interest and, once again, would appreciate relevant expertise in assessing the threat to our local environment.

Heritage Open Days Weekend 2010

The Executive has agreed that we will participate in Heritage Open Days Weekend on Sunday 12 September 2010. This year's 'entry' would enable visitors to do a heritage trail under their own steam or to join a guided walk. More details will follow.

STOP PRESS: Civic phoenix announced

We have heard that *Civic Voice* will be the umbrella organisation replacing *The Civic Trust*. We will carry a full report in the next issue of *Bridge*.

» New Members

A warm welcome to several new members: **Miss Cassingham & Mr. Abrams, Mr. & Mrs. Holt, and Mrs. Jacobs & Partner.**

Very occasionally we need to email Members. If you would prefer not to be contacted by email, please let the Membership Secretary know. If you have not heard from us, and would like to be included in our lists, please confirm your correct email address

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Membership Secretary on 969 6693.

It is with regret that for those who have yet to renew their 2010 subscription, this will be the last issue of *Bridge* that will be delivered.

An old school's revival in Sonning

Peter van Went, School Archivist

In 1646 at the height of the English Civil War, a wealthy London merchant, Richard Aldworth, left the Corporation of Reading the sum of £4,000, the proceeds of which were to be devoted to "the education and upbringing of twenty poor male children, being the children of honest, religious poor men in the town of Reading." From this substantial bequest originated the Aldworth's Hospital charity school known to us today as the Reading Blue Coat School. Aldworth, who had been a governor of Christ's Hospital in London,



Reading Blue Coat School today (Courtesy: Brian O'Callaghan)

modelled the new foundation on this school, the boys being required to wear the familiar attire of blue gown, yellow stockings, and buckled shoes. His will further stipulated that the Master of the new school should be "an honest, Godly and learned man" who for his "paines" would receive a stipend of £30 a year. His duties were to include the instruction of reading, writing and ciphering and to "teach the Catechism in the points of Christian Religion."

Origins in Reading

The School was originally accommodated in an old building known as "The Talbot", situated at the corner of Silver Street and London Street, one of the oldest parts of Reading. The house, a former inn, had known better days. Owing to litigation in connection with Aldworth's will, it was not until 1660, the year of Charles II's Restoration, that the first boys entered the School. Despite many difficulties at the outset, the School flourished and even received generous subventions from local benefactors such as William

Malthus and John West. Malthus also left a certain sum for an annual sermon to be preached to the boys, a tradition still maintained in Reading at the end of each summer term.

In 1666, Sir Thomas Rich of Sonning gave £1,000 to "maintain six poor boys in Aldworth's Hospital, three of whom were to be chosen from the parish of Sonning". By happy coincidence, the new School was to find its current home on the site of Rich's estate.

"The Talbot" was a mean and uncomfortable building not at all suited to the needs of a growing school, and soon the Corporation, as Trustees, decided to replace it with a more modern structure in 1723. A place "where the rays of the sun never penetrate, and where the atmosphere must have been particularly noxious from want of circulation..." was hardly conducive to the healthy upbringing of youngsters. That the School's reputation and circumstances stood at a low ebb is further confirmed by an order of the Trustees that "the Master of the Blue Coat School do not suffer the boys to play about the streets but that they be kept within the limits of the said School between and after School times, and that the Master go with the said children to the Parish Church of St. Laurence every Sunday", something they unfailingly did until 1946! The School remained at "The Talbot" until 1852 when it moved to more commodious premises at Brunswick House, Bath Road. For nearly 90 years, boys were to be educated there in 'the three Rs', many proceeding to a variety of local apprenticeships, trades and professions.

The move to Sonning in 1947

The impact of the 1939-1945 war, combined with rising education expectations, posed immense challenges to the School. It was faced with the fate of eventual closure unless it removed to more extensive premises outside Reading and met the terms of the 1944 Education Act. Described by the Headmaster, Bernard Inge, as "an act of faith", and following a local fundrais-

ing appeal sponsored by the Bishop of Reading, the Mayor, and Corporation, the Trustees acquired the Holme Park estate and the School began a new and initially uncertain lease of life. 150 boys, of whom 100 were boarders, with nine teachers eventually made the move to Sonning on 21st January 1947, the headmaster's 44th birthday!

The early days at Holme Park represented something of a race against time. Buildings and facilities had to be updated in haste if the Ministry of Education's stringent regulations were to be met and its much coveted 'Recognition of Efficiency' accorded. New classrooms were opened in 1955 and dedicated to the Dunster brothers, two Old Blues who had laboured so hard since 1947 to turn that "act of faith" into reality. In 1961, the School's first Sixth Form was opened. A major new science development was built in 1973, closely followed by a brand new Sixth Form Centre and enlarged library. Further classrooms including modern facilities for technology and computing were added in the 1980s in response to rising educational expectations and



Remember the winter of 1946/47? Here the boarders gain a taste of the fun side of snow in their first winter. (Courtesy: Reading Blue Coat School)

growing pupil numbers. In 2001, the new Allan Sanders Science Centre was completed and a brand new Sports Hall opened in 2004.

In 2010, its 360th anniversary, and with pupil numbers approaching 680, the School anticipates with optimism a further phase of building development under Michael Windsor's Headmastership.

Village Voices: next steps

Mary Chapman

Since the *Village Voices* event in September, several more people have offered to record their memories of Sonning and Sonning Eye to add to the collection to be sent to the Wessex Film and Sound Archive. We want this to be a comprehensive record of life in our community so please let me know (0118 969 7398) if you too would like to have your memories recorded.

We have been given some fascinating

memories. We are conscious, however, that we were unable to include everything in the two exhibitions, in Sonning and now at the Museum of English Rural Life, so are working on the publication of a book. We would very much like to include some of the photos which people kindly lent us. If you are not happy for yours to be reproduced, I should be grateful if you would let me know.