

Spiced Beef & Chestnut Pie

For the filling:

1oz butter and 2 tbsps oil/2 large onions, sliced/2lbs braising steak cut into small chunks/2 tbsps plain flour/1 heaped tsp ground allspice/1 tsp juniper berries, crushed roughly/2 tps green peppercorns/1 level tbsp caster sugar/1/2 pt red wine and 3/4pt beef stock

To finish

1 pack of vacuum wrapped chestnuts/500gm pack of puff pastry/1 beaten egg/Salt and black pepper

Heat half the butter and oil in a heavy frying pan and evenly brown the steak a few pieces at a time, over a high heat. Transfer to a casserole. Heat remaining butter and oil. Add the onions and cook over low heat until brown and caramelised. Sprinkle and stir in the flour, adding a little more butter if necessary. Add half the stock and the red wine, stirring to make a thick smooth sauce. Add the spices and sugar. Season. Pour over the beef in the casserole and cook in the oven at 150C/300F for 2 hours. Allow to cool completely, covering with cling film to stop it drying out. Leave in the fridge overnight to allow the spices to mature.

When completely cold add the chestnuts and turn into a pie or lasagne dish adding more stock if needed. Roll out the pastry. Cut some strips off to put around the edge of the dish moistening it with beaten egg. Cover the meat with the pastry and seal at the edges. Cut a slit in the top to allow steam to escape, and decorate with leaves shaped from the left-over pastry! Put in the fridge for 30 mins, heat the oven to 220C/425F, brush the pie with beaten egg and bake for 20 mins. Turn the oven down to 180C/350F and bake for a further 15- 20 mins until golden brown.

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Village Voices moves on

Mary Chapman

Our dedicated team of volunteers is working on the book which will include memories of everyone who kindly made a recording with us. The design of our exhibitions imposed limits which meant we could include only a little of the wealth of the memories which people had shared with us. Since the exhibitions, more people have contacted us with offers to contribute.

Heather Gale has very kindly been transcribing some of the recordings for us, but we will need to use some of the fund of money being held to pay for further transcription as this part of the project is very time-hungry.

Identification of people in the pho-



tographs is another interesting and time-consuming job - if anyone with a long memory is prepared to help with this, we'd be grateful.

We still have copies of the DVD on sale, available from Judy Baldwin on 0118 969 2329. We also intend to produce and sell a compilation CD of some of the recordings but have yet to start on that.

If anyone would like us to make a recording of their

family history for their own use, we are happy to take this on, and similarly, if there is an event in the village which people would like to have recorded, they should let us know. We fully expect our work will be ongoing!

Another great AGM & Supper

Executive Committee

About 33% of the membership enjoyed the Annual General Meeting and supper on 20 November. Bob Hine, Brian O'Callaghan, Andy Bell and Alan Furness were re-elected as Chair, Vice-Chair, Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer respectively. Diana Coulter, Annabella Marks and Gary Robinson were all re-elected to the Executive, and Penny Feathers was formally elected after being co-opted last year.

Carole Barnett and her team produced a splendid meal on 20 November. The pie was so good that the Editor thought many of you would like to have it.

Sadly Carole has decided that after

6 years of preparing wonderful ideas and recipes for the AGM suppers and our occasional lunches, she would like to take a back seat from now on. The search is on for someone to fill Carole's shoes and bring their own distinctive style to our successful social events.

Brian O'Callaghan gave an entertaining and thought-provoking talk after dinner, in which he gave a brief introduction about his background in architectural history and his current role at the Royal Town Planning Institute. This offered a springboard for Brian to promote a joint Sonning Parish Council & Society initiative to undertake a Conservation Area Appraisal in 2011.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

8 December 2010

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

February 2011 (Date tbc)

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

19 March 2011

Ring Happy Bells! A talk, St Andrew's Church (Time tbc)

April 2011 (Date tbc)

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

Early May 2011 (Date tbc)

Thames Walk with Alastair Driver

June 2011 (Date tbc)

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

August 2011 (Date tbc)

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

September 2011

Village Show

All are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

World prize for Thames

Alastair Driver

The River Thames has been selected out of a record number of entries from across the world as the winner of the A\$350,000 International Theiss Riverprize, which celebrates outstanding achievement in river management and restoration. In the finals our beloved and historic river was up against the Yellow River in China, Hattah Lakes, Australia, and the Smirnykh Rivers Partnership, from Russia.

The Thames scooped the prize thanks to its

dramatic recovery from a biologically dead river in the 1950's to today's thriving waterway, teeming with fish, and with healthy otter and sea trout populations.

The chemical quality of the rivers

within the Thames catchment classed as 'Very Good' or 'Good', has improved from 53% in 1990 to 80% in 2008, while the estuary supports viable shellfisheries and is a nursery for commercial sole and bass stocks. Fish numbers are increasing, with 125 different species recorded, including internationally important smelt and shad.

The Environment Agency submission for the Riverprize focused on five innovative projects put in place to further improve the quality of the Thames and its tributaries:

- Catchment Sensitive Farming - has helped to reduce rural pollution from nutrients and pesticides.

- Jubilee River Flood Alleviation Scheme - created a new 11 km stretch of naturalistic river and habitats, while delivering flood protection to 5,500 homes.
- London Rivers Action Plan - helping restore London's urban rivers, with 58 new river restoration projects.
- London Tideway Tunnels - a £3.6bn scheme tackling the 39 million tonnes of storm sewer overflows.
- Thames Estuary 2100 - 100-year



Remember you heard it here first - Alastair shows off the Theiss Riverprize at the AGM on 20 November. (Courtesy: Mark Green)

adaptable plan ensuring future sustainable management of tidal flood risk.

As the Environment Agency's National Conservation Manager, I spearheaded the bid to win the prize. I took holiday

in Australia to present the bid and ultimately received the trophy at a gala event in Perth.

In the last 150 years, the Thames has been to hell and back. It has taken thousands of people from hundreds of organisations many decades to restore it to this point. Our Society is one group that can justifiably share in the celebration of this success. We are, in effect, joint custodians of this little stretch of the Thames and our care and vigilance in maintaining its wildlife, landscape and historic environment all contribute towards making the Thames the globally recognised, sustainably managed, world-class river that it is today.

»Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Brian O'Callaghan, Vice-Chair

Our AGM was well attended, as ever, and efficiently co-ordinated. Special thanks go to Carole Barnett and Penny Feathers for devising such a splendid meal.

I would like to highlight an initiative that the Society and Sonning Parish Council plan to take forward in 2011. The Conservation Area was created in 1971, and extended in both 1980 and 1996; a review on its 40th anniversary would be timely. English Heritage emphasises that re-appraising a Conservation Area every few years is good practice: "The designation of a conservation area is not an end in itself. Local authorities need to develop policies which clearly identify what features of the area should be preserved or enhanced, and set out how this can be done."

Even before 'The Big Society' idea was mooted, residents of Cranbrook, a historic town in Kent, took on this task, with the result that their appraisal was adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

A similar document for Sonning would have many benefits. It would be a positive statement. It would allow us to say how some developments might threaten the character of the conservation area (because we would know what that character was) as well as to identify enhancements and threats. If you would be interested in assisting, please contact me on 969 2132.

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

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»Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Gary Robinson

PPS5 now published

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5) sets out the Government's planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment, and replaces *Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG15)* published in 1994 and *Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16)* published in 1990. PPS5 is supported by a *Practice Guide*, endorsed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and English Heritage.

Residential gardens

Major changes in planning policy see the removal of residential gardens from the 'brown-field' site classification and the scrapping of minimum housing density, which should help in fighting 'garden grabbing' and high-density developments that have threatened Sonning for many years. With the accompanying devolvement to local level of decisions about the types of development people would like (the 'Big Society'), there will be a greater reliance on community-devised guidelines such as the Design Statement and the earlier Conservation Area Study. Consequently, the Society are considering revising and updating these two key documents.

New Urban Design & Conservation Officer
Wokingham Borough Council has

appointed Giles Stephens as Urban Design & Conservation Officer. Although his responsibilities are borough-wide, and the resources available to him are limited, we still hope to draw on his services, especially in advising on PPS5. His presence will become increasingly important as the 32% reduction in funding for English Heritage may impact on their ability to quickly 'spot list' architecturally and/or historically important buildings.

Mineral working strategy

Of concern to Sonning Eye residents is the recent announcement by Oxfordshire County Cabinet that they have agreed an interim preferred strategy approach for mineral working in the short to medium term. For sand and gravel this is to concentrate working at existing sites, including Caversham, i.e. Playhatch. However, this is subject to the ability of these areas 'to provide for the medium to longer term being re-assessed when the requirement for sand and gravel supply has been established'. New areas will be considered if the re-assessment indicates that this is necessary. We may therefore expect an application from Lafarge shortly for the extension of gravel extraction to the east of Spring Lane.

Joint SPC/S&SES Highways Group

The joint Sonning Parish Council and Society Highways Group continues to

meet to tackle the serious traffic issues that plague our two villages. Progress has been slower than hoped, partly because of the current uncertainty in local authority funding, and partly in having to persuade the powers-that-be that the solutions the Group has come up with are feasible and cost-effective. However, Wokingham have recently agreed to install a central island at the Sonning Lane/A4 junction in order to reduce accidents there. Further measures, such as redirecting the flow of traffic through Sonning, depend on limited funding streams, again because of highways decisions by Wokingham.

The reduction in sign clutter is still a priority and we have completed an initial audit of all signs within Sonning. This has revealed an incredible 120 highways-related signs and markings along a one mile stretch of the A4 between Shepherds Hill and Pound Lane roundabouts! The next step is to develop a systematic approach in deciding which ones are redundant and making a case to Wokingham for their removal, or at least rationalisation. In this we hope to adopt tools developed by Civic Voice.

» Annual subs due now & new Members

In January we would like you to renew your subscription, which will be the same in 2011 as this year. Forms are enclosed with all the details. If you have already set up a Standing Order or joined the Society at or after the Village Show in September, there is no need for further action.

A warm welcome to several new members: Mrs J Crouch, Mr T Farncombe, Mr W Harrigan, Mr & Mrs R Johnson, Mr & Mrs A Littlechild, Mr & Mrs J Longridge, Mr P Moore, Mr O Perry, Mr & Mrs J Richards, Mrs S Steele, Messrs C & F Vooght

Welcome packs for new residents are available from the Membership Secretary, Carole Barnett, on 969 6693.

where? This marker in the south aisle records Joshua Payne. Did he too reside in Eye or Playhatch? And when die he lose his wife and daughter?

In Memory of
JOSHUA PAYNE Gent.
who died April ye 17th 1784
in the 72 Year of his Age.

Also near this Place
lies MARY his Wife
and their Daughter
who died in her Infancy.

Paynes from Playhatch

Jean Milbourne & Diana Coulter



Three Payns or Paynes are buried in the aisles of St. Andrew's and each is described as a 'gentleman'. Those in the north aisle came from Eye, possibly Playhatch. Does anyone know

Rod acres: Sonning Eye's lost craft

Diana Coulter

As commercial gravel extraction starts to claim the landscape of Sonning Eye, it is useful to reflect on an earlier industry that would have been a significant



feature of the flood plain – the growing of osiers. The late Brian Law, in *Eye & Dunsden: two centuries of change*, suggested that in seasonal peaks upwards of 100 people would have been employed in this occupation, and so for many this was an important livelihood.

There were three areas in Sonning Eye where osier cultivation took place, the major place being the triangle of land bordered by Playhatch Road, the Henley Road and Spring Lane. These areas supported a number of family businesses with the calling 'rod merchant'. While a small number of people would have been permanently employed on maintenance of the beds, harvesting (autumn and winter), planting (spring) and 'finishing' the rods (winter), would provide additional employment for larger numbers of people, including women and children (see the illustration above).

Willows

There were three principal commercial willows used according to region and end-product.

— Almond leaved or French willow is most prized by basket makers and growers. It is easily distinguished by its bark, which flakes revealing a bright orange colour underneath. It seems likely this was grown in Sonning Eye.

— Common osier is familiar to us as willow trees. It is chiefly cultivated in the Midlands and East Anglia, and the resulting rods tend to be used for 'rough' basketry, i.e. for agricultural and industrial containers.

— Purple willow is a variety mainly cultivated in the north-west.

The osier bed (or rod acres)

Osiers or willows require a well-watered, but not saturated, soil. This would be laid out in trenches, well manured and kept free of weeds. By its very nature an osier bed was self-fertilising. Keeping the area weed free required allowing the land to lie fallow between plantings and assiduous maintenance once planted. This job would be carried out by the permanent workforce. Additional help would be provided during the planting in Spring – osier cuttings would be spaced evenly in rows 27 inches (approx. 670 mm) apart, and in each row 14 inches (or approx. 340 mm) apart. Generally the cuttings would 'take' quite quickly, and once planted would yield annual harvests for 30-50 years. An acre could contain about 16,500 cuttings. Beds however took 2-3 years to 'mature'.

Harvesting occurred in the winter months before the sap rose again in the spring. Cutting was considered to be a skilled job as the shape of the coppiced 'stool' was important for future growth. A heavy backed sickle hook would be used (as seen below). Additional labour would collect, grade and sort the cut osiers. Once cut the osiers could be used for hurdles, but for basket-making a number of further processes would be necessary.



What type of willow do basket-makers use?
To achieve white willow, the rods were placed in free-flowing water for about

three months. Because they 'take easily' once the rods started to bud their bark would be stripped using a 'brake'. This process was eventually mechanised. The result would be **white** (see left hand example in picture below). **Buff** willow would be boiled and then stripped of its bark resulting in an orange-coloured rod (second from right).

Brown willow is confusingly also called green willow (second from left). It is not stripped but steamed for a



short period. The longer it is steamed, the darker brown a rod becomes (right hand example). As this type also retains its bark, it is eminently suitable for baskets exposed to the weather. Both white and buff willows are not suitable for outdoor use, and so would be used for washing baskets, cribs and bakers' baskets.

Where were the rods used locally?

An historical atlas of Berkshire shows evidence for basket-makers in Reading and Twyford (1830), as well as in Sonning in 1847. Basket-making was still an occupation in Reading and Twyford in 1887, but come 1939 had retracted to Reading only. These small details reveal the extent of change in the countryside over a 100 year period.

Perkins in *The book of Sonning* mentions by name various people connected with the industry. The 'rod acres' were first cultivated by Mr Talbot and later by Walter Fitch, while 'Old Mr Thorp sat in dry weather, outside the thatched barn at the corner of Pit Lane, making up baskets from the 'rods' stored in the barn'. So basket-making of various receptacles for domestic and agricultural use continued here right up to the 20th century.