

Notes and queries

Important date for your diaries

The Society is planning a social event on Sunday 26 June in the lovely gardens of Dunsden Lodge in Sonning Eye, courtesy of Annabella and Nick Marks. More information will be available in the next issue.

Paynes of Sonning Eye

Following the illustration in the last issue of the ledger stone for Joshua Payne, the Editor is grateful to David Woodward for this: William Payne was responsible for several local charities, including an apprenticing charity, the funding for which was raised by a fee due for use of grazing land. This was initially paid by the owners of the Mill before being devolved to the owners of individual properties, after the auction of Mill properties in 1969.

The charity was wound-up in the late 1970s/early 1980s after the nominal annual payment due from each of the Mill Farm and Waterside Cottages amongst others was commuted with a once and for all payment.

Payne Landholdings can be seen on the enclosure award for Sonning Eye which is held at the Berkshire Record Office. They include osier beds on the 'triangle' of land where gravel is about to be extracted by Lafarge.

Another Payne charity required the Vicar of Sonning to preach a sermon on St James' day - perhaps a custom that might be revived in his memory!

Nation-wide traffic signs review

The web-savvy might wish to consult the following: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/tss/policyreview/>. Led by the Department for Transport, English Heritage is a key member.



Future Events

Summoned by 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 bell-ringing is part of our cultural heritage, and is a sound familiar to us all. It originated in England 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.

An experienced bell ringer and Vice-captain of Sonning's bell ringers, I will be



Courtesy: Jim Reed

giving a talk on the history of Sonning's bells and the art of bell ringing on Saturday 19 March in St. Andrew's at 4.30 pm. I

will cover the history of Sonning's church bells and their handbells. Then I will talk about how English-style ringing evolved, how bells work, and the music of change ringing. I will give glimpses into the world of ringers and the fascination that ringing can offer.

Please use the enclosed booking form to secure your ticket, returning it to Diana Coulter as directed.

The ticket includes refreshments in the St. Sarik Room after the talk.

Another Walk on the Wild Side

Alastair Driver

Join me for an afternoon walk along our International Riverprize-winning river, to enjoy the amazing variety of wildlife that flourishes there. We will look for signs of otters, river-dip for freshwater mussels and check-out springtime flowers in bloom, including our local speciality Loddon Lily and the Orange Tip butterfly's favourite food-plant, Hedge Mustard.

We'll do some pond-dipping at the Thames Valley Park wetland nature reserve and sneak up on grass snakes basking in the spring sunshine (can you tell I'm an optimist?!). Early



Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve newly constructed in 1990.

butterflies and damselflies will be on the wing and the spring birdsong will be bursting from every tree, hedge and reedbed. Everyone will recognise the now rare Cuckoo but who can say they know the difference between the songs

of a Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and Whitethroat. On the 2nd May you will!

We will meet in the churchyard near The Bull at 2 pm. Please use the enclosed booking form

to reserve a place, returning it to Diana Coulter as directed. The ticket includes tea and cake at the lock afterwards.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

19 March 2011
Ring Happy Bells! A talk, St. Andrew's Church, at 4.30 pm (see above and inserted booking form)

5 April 2011
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

2 May 2011 (Bank Holiday Monday)
A Walk on the Wild Side: Take 2, with Alastair Driver, at 2.00 pm (see above and inserted booking form)

8 June 2011
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

26 June 2011
Champagne Tea, Dunsden Lodge, Details tbc

3 August 2011
Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

10 September 2011
Village Show Sonning Primary School 2.00 - 5.00 pm
All are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Snapping Jubilee year

Education Panel

We are excited that the Executive Committee has supported our proposal for a photographic competition as the Society's contribution to the celebrations of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The theme will be "A Year in the life of Sonning and Sonning Eye". The idea is to capture life in the two villages between the Queen's Birthday in 2011 and the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012. The output may eventually be published as a calendar.

It is therefore proposed that competitors should take such photographs as they think sum up the months of the year. So that would be something for June, for July, for August and so on.

The subject of the photographs must be taken within the specified dates in the parish of Sonning and within Sonning Eye in the



area bounded by the Henley Road and the river. The Society sees this as an opportunity to record and remember the everyday as well as the significant events of the two communities, so anything from life on the village pond, through congestion at the lock, to snowdrops in the churchyard and the Remembrance Day parade etc.

Photos should be taken between Monday 6 June 2011 and Tuesday 5 June 2012. The deadline for entries will be 30 June 2012. The rules will be published in the next issue of *Bridge*

but it will be a requirement that images should be accompanied by a short sentence explaining why the photographer feels a shot represents the selected month.

There will be an opportunity to see all the photos at the Village Show in September 2012, when members of the public may vote for their overall favourite, and a panel of judges will nominate the best in each group so that we have

12 images, one for each month of the year. As the Village Show tends to coincide with the annual Heritage Open Days event, we hope there will be another opportunity to view the photographs on the next day.

The Society is aware that the RNLI are currently running a Photographer of the Year Award, and in discussion with the

organisers we have agreed that the two competitions have a slightly different focus. The Society is looking to get the 13 best photographs (if possible) of this very exciting year, a sort of visual *Village Voices* for future generations. The prize will be recognition in a publication, the favoured format currently being a calendar for 2013.

If you think you might be interested in submitting entries for our competition or have any queries please do feel free to contact Diana Coulter on 969 2132 or diana.coulter@mac.com.

»Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Bob Hine, Chairman

We proudly reported in the Summer 2010 issue that a special meeting of the Executive Committee had agreed that the Society should join "Civic Voice". In October we requested from "Civic Voice" a review of their membership subscription structure, particularly as we felt in this first year of the new body there was an opportunity to influence it. Extracts from the Vice-Chair's letter follow:

"Sonning and Sonning Eye are two small villages on the Berkshire and Oxfordshire sides of the River Thames. The membership of the Society is 205. Our annual subscription is £5 for individuals and £8 for households. Most members pay the household subscription, thus the actual membership income is between £4 and £5 per member. We are able to keep our membership fee low, because we are successful in attracting a high volume "Civic Voice" charges a membership fee to the Society of £1.50 per member, thus penalising us for this success. ... this represents at least one third of our subscription income. If we are to retain our membership ... then the Executive feel that a substantial increase in our subscriptions may be necessary.

"We can only conclude that with the £500 cap the tiny villages of Sonning and

Continued overleaf

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

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»Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Bob Hine & Gary Robinson

a view from the Bridge (continued)

Sonning Eye must be amongst the largest contributors to the subscription income of "Civic Voice". ... the Membership as a whole will wonder if this is just, particularly if faced with a choice between continuing our membership and raising our subscriptions.'

"Civic Voice" responded: 'There is no easy funding solution and a majority of those involved in the debate last year supported the principle of a per capita membership fee.'

I'm pleased to confirm that although we were unsuccessful in our attempt to encourage "Civic Voice" to review the membership rates, our annual subscriptions remain unchanged. Having reviewed an alternative to "Civic Voice" that will give us

the support we require, the Executive has agreed to join "The Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages of the United Kingdom" – ASHTAV. Membership is much more structured and accordingly our Society qualifies for the category: 100 to 500 members with a Parish Council of 1000 to 5000 population. The annual membership cost is £25.00. Your Executive believes that if we are to continue attracting new members, value for money is paramount. I hope you will agree.

Planning: a Judicial Review

The past few months have been relatively quiet with very few planning applications of concern. However, there has been one significant development, or rather hiatus, at a political level.

This is being caused by a Judicial Review lodged with the High Court by a group of Southern Parish Councils in the Wokingham Area, who apparently wish to have more influence over the finer details of the two remaining Supplementary Planning Documents that form part of Wokingham's 'Masterplans'. These support the now-adopted Core Strategy. You may have read or heard about this in the local press and on TV. However, this legal hiccup should not directly impact on planning issues involving Sonning, apart from perhaps tying up some of the Planning Department's time and resources.

Signage update and A4 improvements

We are still working actively with the Highways working group of Sonning Parish Council. At the next meeting we hope to start addressing the issue of excessive signs within the two villages via a survey, which will be greatly assisted by the advent of lighter evenings. For those who haven't noticed, Wokingham Highways have now completed the changes to the junction of the A4 with Sonning Lane. These included the introduction of a new central island to separate traffic turning into and out of Sonning Lane, and to dissuade traffic from the Shepherd's Hill direction from trying to overtake vehicles turning left into Sonning Lane and encountering oncoming right-turning traffic. The left turn exit from Sonning Lane has also been re-profiled to help traffic. Pedestrian access has been improved with dropped kerbs and dimpled paving and the curious addition of white and red posts at the road edge.

» New Members

A warm welcome to a new member: **Miss N Sheridan.**

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 2011 subscription, this will be the last issue of *Bridge* that will be delivered.

Localism protects West Drive trees

Gordon Jones

The Big Society and the Localism Bill are today's hot topics. Indeed the Bill may have interesting implications for our communities to be explored in a future newsletter. However Gordon Jones introduces here a part of Sonning that may have been playing its part in these locally based agendas before the present government even suspected it would share the reins of power.



This newsletter usually focuses on the centre of Sonning or on Sonning Eye, but for those of us who live in that bosky part of the village between the A4 and Sonning Cutting, we were pleased to be asked to share what we have been doing for the past few years to protect and enhance the greenness of West Drive. We hope it will inspire others to think of areas that they would like to protect.

West Drive is a private street rather than a private road. This means that the residents have to pay for the upkeep of the road but allow traffic to use it. A private street has to remain a thoroughfare, and cannot easily be closed; a private road can be closed.

Local councils are usually responsible for making sure roads and pavements are free from hazards so as to ensure public safety including gritting in icy conditions, replacing broken slabs, pruning overhanging trees etc. Wokingham Borough Council, however, is not responsible for maintaining a private street such as West Drive. The responsibility for a private street lies

with the owners, usually those who live on the street. However, if a problem is thought to be a 'danger' (for example, a deep hole in the road suddenly appearing) the council can arrange to make it safe by placing barriers or road closures around the hazard. Permanent repairs must then be carried out by the owners.

It may come as a surprise to some readers to realise that up until about 25 years ago the Drive belonged to Sonning Golf Club, which would be worth researching as an entity in its own right. West Drive has its own company with typically five residents elected as Directors to manage it. Every resident holds a share in the company, so that every householder has a stake in how well the road and its verges are maintained.

The Directors manage carriageway repair, road-sweeping, trees, verges, and safety etc. At the AGM residents discuss and agree policy matters and subscriptions. We recently adopted a 'policy statement' on the trees in the Drive, which we hope will help to preserve its look for the long term. This may be of interest to other residents of Sonning and Sonning Eye. It is set out below.

Introduction to the tree policy

West Drive is an unusual and exceptionally attractive Drive with a rural atmosphere in an urban environment. A major contribution to this unique character is the 90 or more trees on the verges owned by the West Drive (Sonning) Residents

Company, that border the whole length of the Drive. The majority of the trees are mature and well established.

It is the wish of the residents that the long term continuity of a tree-lined Drive is essential and the policy set out below strives to do so.

The Tree Policy

1. The company will arrange a detailed inspection of all the trees by an arboreal consultant approximately every 5 years.
2. The survey and recommendations will take note of the health of the trees and the safety of residents, visitors and trades-people.
3. The company should action any safety recommendations having regard to the safety of residents, visitors and our third party insurance.
4. The trees should be tagged with numbers for ease of identification.
5. Trees that need to be removed will be replaced, where there is appropriate space for them, with English varieties to ensure the maintenance of the overall style of the Drive.
6. Pruning, crown lifting or other actions will be programmed according to the urgency recommended by the surveyor and the cashflow of the company.
7. The survey will be made available to all residents on request.
8. The directors will endeavour to keep residents informed of actions especially for those trees close to residents' property.

December 2008



Learning from Oxford

Brian O'Callaghan

The Society is developing its approach to undertaking an appraisal of the Sonning Conservation Area and will be working out the detail with Parish Council representatives in the next few weeks. One of the most important aspects of this will be to identify what makes the Conservation Area special. What needs to be conserved? What could be improved or enhanced?

Oxford University Department for Continuing Education recently ran a day school on tools for appraising conservation areas, sponsored by English Heritage. This introduced a 'toolkit' developed by Oxford City Council to evaluate conservation areas. The toolkit consists of a series of questions designed to help individuals identify what features are present in an area and to explain how those features contribute to or take away from its character. Character comprises a number of elements that combine to create the overall significance and value of a place. Not all elements are physical features, for example: materials, walls, windows, buildings, etc. Some are more sensory in nature, calling on an individual's emotions or perceptions of a place to create value; for example,

personal or historical associations, or smells or sounds. Many people with a wide range of experiences and expertise can use the toolkit. During the pilot, a conservation professional teamed up with a biochemist. Their overall score about the pilot area was broadly similar, but their views about the character were radically different.

The toolkit has also been designed to promote understanding of the historic environment and inform the management of change. It is intended to help people engage with the planning system and articulate their opinions. It can help to generate an evidence base to inform the design process and to facilitate communities in becoming involved in local heritage projects. It provides a snapshot of the character, on the ground, at a defined moment in time. All age groups and levels of expertise can participate.

There seems to be ample scope to use the toolkit in Sonning. While not an end in itself, it can provide good evidence of what people feel is special. To serve its purpose it will be backed up with a photographic record and research into what has shaped the place as we now experience it.