

**An Apology**

The Education Panel apologise to anyone who turned up for Rob Needham's bells talk on 19 March only to find the church door with its unfortunate 'closed' sign seemingly shut. The talk did take place and started promptly, but due to the church being unheated, we had closed the door to keep the chill wind out. Brownie points to the intrepid punters who expected us to be inside!

**A Distributor needed**

We have a vacancy for a distributor to cover the lower end of Thames Street as well as the High Street. Alternatively it may be possible to offer one of the other streets in the centre of the village. If you can spare half an hour five times per year, please contact Diana Coulter on 0118 969 2132.

**Care and repair of old buildings**

The Vice-Chair recently attended a 6-day course on the care and repair of old buildings. Organised by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the course raised as many questions as it answered and included site visits, for example to a lead casting workshop and looking at various works at Stowe.

**Successful walk on the wild side**

Over 25 people joined Ali Driver for the Thames-side walk on 2 May. Opening with the results of a moth trap set the previous evening, which left everyone amazed by the variety of these fragile creatures, the group learned a lot about bird calls and trees. The 'pond'-dipping exercises in the river and the nature reserve were illuminating with the latter 'winning' for cleanliness of the water and variety of wildlife.



**Future Events**

**Free September walks**

Education Panel



Courtesy: Lesley Green

Once again we have organised our popular walks around the village as our contribution to the nation-wide Heritage Open Days Weekend 8 - 11 September 2011.

The Society's team of experienced Guides are offering three walks. They all start in the Churchyard near the entrance from The Bull and are free, but booking is essential as group sizes are limited. Please contact Diana Coulter or Brian O'Callaghan on 0118 969 2132.

There will be one tour each day:

- Friday 9 September - 2:00 pm
- Saturday 10 September - 11:00 am
- Sunday 11 September - 2:00

Newer Society members may find this a useful way of discovering more about our very interesting buildings and history. We look forward to welcoming you.

**Explore the old parish: Woodley**

Education Panel

Plans are coming along to start a series of walks that explore the old parish of Sonning. When in St Andrew's, many of you will be reminded unconsciously of the extent of the old parish when you look at the top row of figures in the reredos behind the high altar. Represented there are St Andrew (Sonning), St. Peter (Earley), St. John (Woodley) and All Saints (Dunsden). These statues remind one of the huge extent of the old parish taken on by the young Hugh Pearson in 1842. No wonder he had a 'retinue' of minor clergy to help him fulfil his pastoral cares.

The Education Panel is proposing to offer walks which look at some of these areas in more depth. The first walk will be in Woodley, one Sunday afternoon in the autumn, when the

focus will be Woodley Green. After tea in the parish rooms, we hope to have a short presentation on the Airfield, now largely remembered through the



The old School, adjacent to St. John's Woodley, by Henry Woodyer who restored St. Andrew's in Sonning 1852-53. (Courtesy: Brian O'Callaghan)

names of the roads in the new estates. Watch out for more details which will be published in the next issue.

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES**

**6 June 2011**

Jubilee Photo competition begins (deadline 30.06.12)

**8 June 2011**

Executive Committee St Sarik Room 8:00 pm

**25 June 2011 (REVISED DATE)**

Champagne Tea at Dunsden Lodge 3.00 pm (See p. 2)

**3 August 2011**

Executive Committee St Sarik Room 8:00 pm

**9, 10 & 11 September 2011**

Sonning: Architectural & Historical Walks (See above)

**10 September 2011**

Village Show Sonning Primary School 2.00 - 5.00 pm

**5 October 2011**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

**26 November 2011**

Annual General Meeting Pearson Hall  
All are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive

**bridge**

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

**Tell us what you think**

Brian O'Callaghan & Diana Coulter

We would probably all agree that Sonning is a beautiful village which, despite the gradual loss of facilities like the Post Office and shop, still feels rural. The river provides a natural boundary to the north and west, the Farm provides a green barrier on the east, while the Blue Coat School and sports clubs provide a green buffer on the south. Many are interested in seeing the character of the village maintained and managed properly. Hence Sonning Parish Council and the Society jointly spearheading an appraisal of the Conservation Area (CA).



Views are a characteristic that you can evaluate in the appraisal of a zone. In this case you might consider the view out of the High Street (Courtesy: B O'Callaghan)

The Sonning CA was first designated in 1971, extended in 1980 and again in 1996, which appears to be the last time that an appraisal was undertaken. There is the excellent and complementary Design Statement of 2004, which looks more widely across the whole parish.

English Heritage encourages a cyclical approach to appraising CAs. In an ideal world these would be undertaken every 5 years by the local planning authority (LPA). Given the present economic climate and constraints on valuable resources, like historic environment teams in LPAs – Wokingham has a team of one! – the Society and SPC inspired by Cranbrook in Kent will do this ourselves.

The existing CA has been divided into 12 manageable zones. These are listed on the form which you will shortly be able to access from our website. Society members are encouraged to use the form to evaluate a zone of particular interest. If you would like to examine more zones, please download as many copies of the form as you need. If you

require more space, attach extra sheets, or expand the white spaces of the downloaded version. There is a longer, 6-page version, which a core team will use to cover every zone. If Members would like to try this

version, please download it from the website, again using one form per zone.

You are asked to consider 6 characteristics for each zone: spaces, buildings, views, green features, light & shade, and noise & smell. Please evaluate these in words, and then score each characteristic overall on a scale of +5 (exceptional features) through 0 (neutral) to -5 (detractive features).

Please return forms by 31 August 2011, so that we can analyse the data and start preparing a draft for consultation. We will use *Bridge*, the *Parish Council Newsletter* and the *Parish Magazine* to bring you updates. For those with Internet access please consult the website regularly for updates.

**»Eye on Sonning  
a view from the Bridge**

Bob Hine, Chairman

Welcome to this edition, which follows the 5 May Election of Councillors in the Parish of Sonning. I'm pleased to report that the Planning and Traffic Panel Chairman, Gary Robinson, was elected. He has served the Society well over the last two years successfully combining the activities of the Planning and Traffic Panels into one. Whilst this will leave a hole in the Executive I am confident that at our June meeting we will co-opt his successor. Our thanks go to Gary for all that he has contributed and achieved to preserve and enhance the surroundings in which we live whilst we also congratulate him on his election.

The rescheduled talk on Sonning's Bells held in March was well attended and we look forward to welcoming the Hand Bell Ringers for a special performance at our AGM on 26 November 2011.

Many of you will be familiar with the benefits of completing a Conservation Area Appraisal. It is anticipated that a joint working group involving the Society and the Parish Council will soon be in a position to embark on a detailed appraisal which it is hoped will include many volunteers to ensure a balanced result. Your involvement I'm sure will be welcomed.

Lastly I hope we will see many of you for a small celebration at the Champagne Tea in Sonning Eye on 25 June.

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

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# »Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Gary Robinson & Diana Coulter

## A farewell message

Gary Robinson writes, "This is my last article for *Bridge* (in theory!), following my recent election to Sonning Parish Council. As I will sit on their Planning Committee there would be a conflict of interest with my role as chairman of the Society's Planning and Traffic Panel, so I am having to hand over this baton reluctantly. I have enjoyed my spell as chairman of the P&T Panel and serving on the Executive Committee, and thank all my colleagues for their invaluable assistance with both planning and traffic issues. However, I will also still sit on the SPC Highways Group, albeit with a different hat!"

## Planning Update

On the Planning side, we welcome the return of the wrought iron gates at North Lodge, Sonning Lane, which have been repainted in an attractive Victorian-style mid-red, which nicely complements the supporting brickwork. We are also about to see the launch of a very important one-year

long project to revise the Conservation Area Appraisal, which will form one of the future benchmarks for evaluating planning applications within the Conservation Area. This is being carried out jointly by the Society and SPC.

## Traffic and Transport update

As for Traffic, the Panel has continued to work extremely constructively with the Highways Groups of SPC in two main areas. Firstly, in developing methods to mitigate the impact of the high volume of traffic through our two villages: current progress will have been reported at the SPC Annual Parish Meeting on 25 May. Secondly, through the tremendous efforts of Bob Hulley, we now have a detailed map of the traffic signs within Sonning. These amount to over 650 - nearly one for every property in Sonning! You may have heard of the recent 'Adopt a Street' campaign, which encourages residents to keep their own streets, so perhaps we could instigate a similar scheme, whereby

each household 'adopts' a sign? By linking this map to photographs, also mainly taken by Bob, we will hopefully be able to start reducing signage clutter by identifying and having redundant signs taken away.

## Lights, camera, action from 6 June!

Don't forget that our Jubilee Photo Competition starts on Monday 6 June and runs until Tuesday 5 June 2012. Full details are on the enclosed form.

## Heritage Open Days Weekends

With the collapse of The Civic Trust in 2009, management of the Heritage Open Days Weekends programme passed to English Heritage. Due to the 32% cuts facing EH, a new home for HODs had to be found, and it was announced in May that a consortium consisting of The National Trust, The Heritage Alliance and Civic Voice will be running these from 2012. EH is continuing to support the event in 2011.

## Farewell also to Carole Barnett

As many of you know, Carole & Gordon Barnett will be moving away from Sonning in the summer. They hope to attend the Champagne Tea, when individual Members can catch up with them. Their departure signals a period of change as Carole has served as Membership Secretary since our early days. We hope you will join the Executive in thanking her for her excellent contribution that has helped to keep membership levels at about 200 for some time. Good luck to them both.

## » New Members

A warm welcome to two new members: **Mr & Mrs Dyson**.

Welcome packs for new residents are available from the Membership Secretary or the Editor.

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

the enclosed booking form or from Penny Feathers on 0118 9343193. Please ring soon to avoid disappointment.

Parking should be on the left-hand side of the road outside the house unless you are a helper or bringing someone with mobility difficulties. Please try not to block the turning bay at the end of the road.

# Champagne Tea

Penny Feathers

Thanks to the generosity of Nick and Annabella Marks, the Society's Members-only summer event on Saturday 25 June will be a Champagne Tea in the beautiful grounds of Dunsden Lodge at Sonning Eye (please note the revised date).

It is hoped to have entertainment, and during the afternoon

a treasure hunt will be available for those wishing to take part, or you could try your hand at croquet. Alternatively, just enjoy tea and a summer's afternoon in beautiful surroundings.

The afternoon will begin at 3 pm and tickets at £10 each, sold on a first come first served basis, are now available using



# The last Barker memorial

Pauline Simmonds

## Who were the Barkers?

This important Sonning family can be traced back to the 16th century. William Barker of Wokingham, who died in 1549, is thought to be the founder. He and successive generations provided Sonning and the surrounding area with Stewards, Sheriffs or JPs for many generations. Some were City merchants, or court printers, many married well and had large families. The Dower House was probably their first home when built c 1500, but records also link the Vicarage, the Old Deanery and the Old Cottage to the Barker name. By the 18th century family numbers had greatly declined and large parts of their estate were sold. The monument, shown opposite and dated c.1797, records the last of the Barker line.

## What other memorials did they leave?

The Barkers left a wide variety of memorials over the years including a large family vault in the chancel. During the 16th and 17th centuries fine floor brasses recorded their names and heraldic connections, but when William Barker's great grand-daughter, Lady Litcott, died in 1630, an impressive wall monument was also left in her memory. She is shown within an architectural frame of classical columns and alabaster drapery, kneeling in profile in contemporary dress – a funerary style fashionable in the reign of Charles I.

A later Barker monument may be less well known. It is situated behind the organ in the corner of the south chancel aisle. The inscription on a curved tablet, is dedicated to Sir Anthony Barker and other family members who died between 1630 and 1694, but this time it is framed by garlands of foliage,



crowned with cherubs, a large heraldic cartouche and impressive baldacchino. Its references are secular, theatrical and bold - typical of the Baroque period but like the Rich Monument, it was hidden by alterations made during the last half of the 19th century.

## Where is the last Barker Monument?

In a very different style but still in the south chancel aisle, a Lady, scattering flowers over a sarcophagus, is shown on the wall against a tall grey pyramid. She stands on a white marble base bearing the inscription and sculptor's name. Like the Litcott memorial, this was originally in the chancel near the family vault, but when the vault was closed and the chancel re-furbished during Pearson's time both memorials were moved to the side aisle. According to the latest edition of Pevsner's 'Buildings of England' it is "not an inspired piece" but other critics describe it as "an attractive composition" and "one of the most agreeable". Georgian monuments often used Roman sarcophagi, urns, or tombs to signify immortality and this example, by Sir Richard Westmacott, is in the more restrained late 18th-century Neo-Classical style. Mourning female figures in Greek-style drapery were popular along with broken columns and steeple-type shapes, as can be seen on another Westmacott monument, in nearby Ruscombe Church, dated 1799.

## Who was Sir Richard Westmacott?

Born in 1775, he was sent at the age of 18 to study sculpture in Rome. There he came under the influence of one of the greatest Neo-Classical sculptors, Antonio Canova, and in particular his 'Monument to Pope Pius XIII' in St. Peter's. The monument in Sonning was one of Westmacott's first funerary designs on his return, and art historian Margaret Whinney, feels that the "sharp cutting of the small folds [are] much in the manner of Canova". Westmacott was only about 22 at the time and went on to design over 250 funerary monuments before his death

in 1856. He succeeded Flaxman as Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy in 1827. Examples of his work can be found in Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square.



## Who commissioned the memorial and why?

The memorial was commissioned as a 'tribute of Filial Affection' by the now wealthy heiress and last member of the Barker family – Dame Harriott Reade. Born in 1727, she spent her early years in Sonning, the only daughter of William Barker, who died in 1758 and his wife Olivia, who died aged 80 in 1780. In 1759, aged 32, Harriott married the 5th Baronet, Sir John Reade of Shipton Court, Shipton-under-Wychwood in Oxfordshire. She was evidently "proud and high-spirited". Twin sons were born in 1762 and a daughter in 1768 but the twins' birth was shrouded in mystery. "A Tourist", writing in the 19th century, records that Harriott soon withdrew "from the polished circle of society in which she had been reared". Sir John died in 1773 and records indicate that Harriott, as a wealthy widow went on to become "an eccentric and idiosyncratic lady", spending "much money on jewellery and her much loved pets". Buried in Shipton in 1811 she left money in her Will "for the setting up of Charities to benefit the poor children of Sonning". Her other legacy to the village was this final monument to her parents in St. Andrew's, a fitting memorial to the last of the Barker line.