

**Need Christmas stocking fillers?**

We still have copies available of the *Village Voices* DVD and accompanying booklet at £8.00 and £1.00 respectively. Please contact Judy Baldwin on 0118 969 2329 or Diana Coulter on 0118 969 2132 if you would like to purchase them

**A year in the life of Sonning & Sonning Eye**

We are now six months into our Photography Competition, and we hope many of you have are capturing community life. The Education Panel is excluded from submitting entries, but hope others might have thought to photograph summer and autumn events. As we move into winter, there will be no shortage of photo opportunities with the leaves off the trees and the light throwing interesting long shadows everywhere. So get snapping - all you need are images that say everything about a particular month in Sonning or Sonning Eye. Full details are available on our website: [www.sonning.org.uk](http://www.sonning.org.uk).

**Society noticeboard**

The Society's noticeboard at the entrance into the churchyard by *The Bull* is undergoing a little overhaul and will be back in commission soon.

**A lucky loan**

An interesting family possession of an Irish friend of one of our members is the 1912 sale catalogue for the Manor House in Charvil Lane and associated properties. Sadly it has lost the key map for the Sonning properties. It is hoped that in 2012 we might be able to present some further research into the history of this little-known property, significantly altered by Sidney Paddick last century to become the group of residences we know today.

# More on the old parish

Education Panel



Courtesy: Brian O'Callaghan

Fortunately the weather held for a really enjoyable walk around Woodley in October - once again oral history was in the making as people remembered taking their children to the old school and other incidents in their lives.

As the format was so successful, discussions are in hand for similar events focusing on Dunsden in May 2012 - a healthy walk with, it is hoped, a short introduction to the community orchard as well as a talk on Wilfred Owen - and on Maiden Erleigh in the autumn - an opportunity for an environmental walk around the lake. The Panel has been reliably informed that the Earley Environmental Group are highly professional and will offer an interesting alternative to some of our other walks.

## An appeal least we forget

Diana Coulter on behalf of Daphne Payne and John Carnell

A beautiful morning was the backdrop for the annual Remembrance Sunday service on 13 November held in St Andrew's, followed by the parade along Pearson Road. The memorials in the church recalling those who gave their lives not only in the Great War but also in later conflicts were elegantly emphasised with small posies for each named individual.

The Sonning Branch of the Royal British Legion is looking for new members, and would like to draw Society members' attention to the benefits that come with an annual subscription of £15 per annum: preferential rates for all types of insurance and discounted prices for holidays with the Warner Group of hotels to name two.

The primary purpose of the Legion is

of course to provide ongoing medical and welfare support throughout the lives of ex-servicemen and women who have been disabled due to active service in the British armed forces, and to those who have fallen on difficult times or suffer from medical problems.



(Courtesy: The Editor)

For a leaflet or more information, contact John Carnell, Branch Membership Secretary on 0118 969 3926.

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES**

**14 December 2011**

Executive Committee St Sarik Room 8:00 pm

**24 or 31 January 2012 (tbc)**

Presentation by Joint Highways Group Pearson Hall

**February 2012 (tbc)**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

**April 2012 (tbc)**

Executive Committee St. Sarik Room 8:00 pm

**7 May 2012 (tbc)**

Explore Eye & Dunsden

**2-5 June 2012**

Diamond Jubilee events

**5 June 2012**

Last day for photos to be eligible for our Jubilee Photo Competition (deadline for submission is 30 June 2012)

All are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive



Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

## Holding the last trench

Nick Marks

The final consultation on Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) long overdue minerals and waste strategic plan closed at the end of October. The "Caversham" site (really the land opposite Sonning beyond the *French Horn*) was submitted as one of the Council's preferred options.

The land, owned by Lord Phillimore, would be excavated by Lafarge Ag-

gregates which is currently digging to the west of Spring Lane. Most will be aware of the Somme-like nature of the earth works there, and the conveyor bridge to the gravel workings on the other side

of Playhatch Road. This triangle of land is a small extension of the original works at Sonning Eye but gives a glimpse of what the Phillimore-Lafarge partnership is proposing. The area east of Spring Lane will contain about 4 million tonnes of gravel (12 times more than the current area). The project will extend over 12 years plus a further 2 years for restoration.

Many local people, the Society and the Sonning Eye Action Group (SEAG) responded to the consultation. Concerns were raised that planning policy had not been properly followed particularly in respect to flood risk and about industrialisation in this important Conservation Area. Traffic is a major

worry: the need for lorries to both export the gravel and import inert waste will produce huge numbers of HGV movements throughout the project. Clearly the new site was convenient for OCC because Lafarge were already operating nearby. This is politically much easier than identifying a completely new resource, starting from scratch, even though it may look more attractive on an "options appraisal".



A murky October view over the affected landscape, taken from St Andrew's tower (Courtesy: The Editor)

There are large amounts of gravel along the river valley, and there is no doubt that this is not a one-off project but the continuation of a long-term strategy, begun 75 years ago

under the Folley brothers. Lafarge will want to progress much further down river: each new project will be "a small extension" grinding slowly towards Shiplake over the next 30 - 40 years.

Now all the evidence is in, it will be reviewed by an inspector. OCC will publish their final strategy early in 2012. Meanwhile Lafarge have already submitted a planning application for the extension. Details will be published on the its web site and also on OCC's and SEAG's. Please be vigilant and respond. Spring Lane is probably **the last trench available to halt gravel working** on this stretch of the Thames. Once crossed extraction will continue for decades to come.

## »Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Bob Hine, Chairman

Welcome to this edition which follows immediately after the AGM. Those who attended will know there have been a number of changes on the Executive (listed overleaf). I would like to welcome especially our two newly elected members, Pauline Simmonds and Jeremy Gilmore. Both have contributed significantly to the work of the Society but have not previously served on the Executive.

The AGM gave the Society the opportunity to thank retiring Executive members, in particular our Vice Chair, Brian O'Callaghan, and Diana Coulter who have both completed seven years on the Executive. We have benefited greatly from Diana's vision for interesting topics and although acknowledging her request to step back, I'm pleased that she has agreed to continue as editor of *Bridge*.

After the meeting we enjoyed a most pleasant and flavoursome supper prepared by our table hosts. Special thanks go to Penny Feathers and her team for careful planning and co-ordination of the menu.

Over coffee we listened to the Sonning Hand Bell Ringers directed by their captain Helen Price. These century-old St. Andrew's hand bells were last heard in 1997 so it was a great pleasure to hear their magnificent tones again. We hope the ringing team will continue to be heard locally.

Bridge: Newsletter of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society

Education Panel

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## Future Events

# »Executive Committee & Panels: breaking news

Bob Hine, Andy Bell & Diana Coulter

## Christmas Greetings

On behalf of the Executive the Chairman wishes all members a very happy Christmas and New Year.

## A new Executive for 2011/12

As of the Annual General Meeting held on 26 November, there are a number of new faces on the Society's Executive. Bob Hine, Andy Bell and Alan Furness were re-elected to the roles of Chairman, Hon Secretary and Hon Treasurer respectively. Mike Hart returns to the Executive as Vice-Chairman.

Penny Feathers was re-elected to the Executive, while the two recent co-options were formally elected: Lesley Heaney, Membership Secretary, and Colin McCulloch, Convenor of the Planning & Traffic Panel. As noted by the Chairman on the front page, Pauline Simmonds and Jeremy Gilmore are new to the Executive. Pauline, a long-standing member of the Education Panel, contributed extensively to the Henry Woodyer day in 2005 and has researched several fascinating articles

for *Bridge*. Jeremy on the other hand has provided vital technical support for the *Village Voices* project.

## Conservation Area Appraisal

The AGM provided an opportune moment to update Members on the Conservation Area Appraisal joint working group recently formed with Sonning Parish Council. Society members are encouraged to participate and we would very much welcome volunteers to help with this important project. Do please contact the Chairman on bob.hine@bopenworld.com or Colin McCulloch on colineke@btinternet.com if you would like to discover what being involved might mean.

## Traffic & Transport update

Please note an important date for your diary. The Highways Joint Working Group with Sonning Parish Council will be providing an update on traffic in the Pearson Hall in January. The date which will be confirmed in the Parish Council newsletter will be either 24 or

31 January. This will be an ideal opportunity for us all to review the project to date as well as gain an understanding of the next steps.

## Heritage Open Days Weekends 2011

The encouraging growth in membership witnessed in September (see below - the Society now has 233 members) in part occurred as a direct result of our popular Heritage Open Days Weekend walks. Unusually this year, the Friday walk only attracted a small group, whereas Saturday exceeded our normal expectations and on Sunday we took 28 people around the village. As ever most visitors were local, but some American visitors staying in *The Bull* decided to join one of the groups on the spur of the moment. We were grateful to St Andrew's for revealing the brasses in the chancel and the Rich Memorial.

## » 2012 subs now due and a warm welcome to New Members

In January we would like you to renew your subscription, which is being held at the same price for the 8th year running. Renewal forms are enclosed with all the details.

**Please note** that if you have already set up a standing order or joined the Society at or after the 2011 Village Show, there is no need to do anything.

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

- Mrs A Brown & Mr R Olden
- Mr & Mrs P Brown
- Mrs Greenfield
- Dr K Hayward
- Dr & Mrs B Hughes
- Mr & Mrs T Hunt
- Dr H Klemettila & Mr A McHale
- Mr & Mrs Loble
- Mr & Mrs A Potter

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaney, the Membership Secretary, on 0118 969 7231.

and participation. There has always been great pride and enthusiasm for our village and it is anticipated that, although there is much to be done, there will be a sense of fun and enjoyment (see above).



The listed wall of the former Bishop's Palace (Courtesy: B O'Callaghan)

Currently the most obvious threat comes from Oxfordshire County Council's new minerals strategy as discussed by Nick Marks on the front page. This would result in further erosion of the Sonning Eye conservation area, damage the local environment for residents and add to

the risk of flooding. We are actively supporting SEAG's opposition to a plan, which threatens to put short-term commercial interests ahead of all other considerations. It is disappointing to note that, at present, private gain appears to weigh more heavily with OCC than the public good.

# Finding a balance

Colin McCulloch

In the last issue I posed the question, "How do we care for Sonning?". I raised issues of private gain and public good alongside comments concerning the preservation of our historic environment.

Finding the right balance and a way forward is inevitably contentious and difficult but we now have an opportunity to improve Sonning for the future. Sonning Parish Council and the Society are working in partnership to produce the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (SCAA).

This will involve a good deal of work and will not be completed until late 2012.

It is hoped that many local residents will be involved in the SCAA. Volunteer surveyors are needed; all observations and comments will be welcome. We are hoping for a high level of resident input

# Remembering Woodley Aerodrome I

Mark Green

*Mark's talk after tea on our Woodley walk was so interesting, it seemed a good idea to share it with all Members, so do enjoy! Part 2 will appear in 2012.*

My interest in Woodley Aerodrome stems from childhood memories of playing there. Although not a historian, as a qualified pilot, I am sure it played a part in my lifelong passion for aviation.

## Early days

The site was once part of the extensive woodlands of Hadleigh Heath until developed for agriculture in the 18th century. Although regularly used for flying between 1929 and 1963 its aviation history dates back to before WW1. The first powered aircraft was Henri Salmets Bleriot monoplane landing in a meadow at Woodley Farm in October 1913 during the Daily Mail Tour of Britain. One year later Louis Bleriot and Gustav Hamel gave a flying display before landing in the same meadow.

The success of the de Havilland Moth in 1925 was followed by the rapid growth of private flying and interested locals formed the Royal Counties Flying Club, which first met in July 1928. The name soon changed to The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Flying Club. Its aims included 'the training of pilots and the furtherance of civil aviation' despite the fact that the enthusiastic members lacked both aircraft and an aerodrome!

## Phillips & Powis discover flying

Significantly what changed this was the involvement of Messrs Phillips and Powis who owned an expanding motorcycle sales and repair business in Reading. Departing for his annual holiday to France in 1928 Powis told the Reading Evening Gazette, "We became very tired of the fuss and bother of surface travel and decided to be brave and fly". This was his first experience of aviation and recognising that private flying might have a future he took lessons at Brooklands and gained his pilot's licence in October. The Berkshire Chronicle reported on 7 September: 'Aerodrome for Reading - A School for Flying to be Established.'

## The new aerodrome

The company went on to sell the de Havilland Moth and the Cirrus Spartan. Powis 'borrowed' the Hundred Acre Field as a temporary landing site whilst demonstrating these aircraft to prospective customers. The 130-acre site was purchased and in November the local press revealed that a site for Reading Aerodrome had at last been found. "After lengthy consideration by leading world aviation experts, it has generally been agreed that the site in question



The glamorous and modernist Falcon Hotel

is likely to prove to be one of the finest aerodromes in the country".

The new aerodrome took shape and advance publicity for the opening was very favourable. The Berkshire Chronicle in 1929 congratulated Phillips and Powis on their enterprise, proclaiming that the location of the site made it 'an ideal airport'. The earliest students paid a minimum of 12/6d (62.5p) a lesson; today a lesson costs £204 per hour!

Popularity grew. When Cobham's Flying Circus visited, several thousand turned up to welcome the team. It was later reported that Cobham regarded Woodley as 'the best natural aerodrome in the country'. Over two days 500 people were given joy rides.

By the flying school's 1st anniversary its fleet had expanded and instruction had been given to 300 pupils. A bank holiday in June 1930 saw the largest event yet held there when an 'Air Fete' attracted an estimated crowd of 20,000 people! This popularity drew many fa-

mous visitors including Douglas Bader, who became famous when he was seriously injured in 1931, losing his legs in a crash whilst carrying out low-level aerobatics.

## F G Miles moves to Woodley

During 1932 F G Miles paid his second visit to the aerodrome. An engineer by inclination, he became a very successful aircraft designer and constructor. He had spoken with Powis about designing a new monoplane and decided to move to Woodley to begin detailed design work. In just under six months the prototype Hawk M2 was completed and this design was proclaimed an immediate success. When it first appeared in the national papers it was dubbed 'the world's cheapest aeroplane'!

Woodley rapidly became a major aviation centre with the introduction of new aircraft models like the Hawk Major and the Falcon. Over the next few years aircraft design and production continued apace. A new company, Phillips and Powis Aircraft Ltd, was formed. Then the aerodrome's development, particularly its buildings, gained momentum. The transformation of rural Woodley into an extensive township had begun. With the gradual increase in employees the aerodrome soon became a focal point generating a growing demand for new housing in and around Woodley.

## The Falcon Hotel

To strengthen the appeal of the Reading Aero Club a hotel was built to provide accommodation for the club. Built by Collier and Catley for Reading brewers H&G Simmonds, the attractive contemporary design was named 'The Falcon Hotel' after the successful Miles aircraft. Charles Lindbergh flew in one of the 36 aircraft for the opening ceremony. From the outset the hotel proved very popular. Several famous figures enjoyed its hospitality including Amy Johnson, Charles Lindbergh and the novelist Barbara Cartland. This was certainly its heyday!

**Part 2, post World War II, to follow in 2012**