

Henley Archaeological & Historical Group

NEWSLETTER No 164 October 2025

Message from the Chair

Rounding off the summer, here is our latest newsletter, mixing present and future with the past. There is a lot going on!

We provide, for example, 'breaking news' of our lecture programme for next year, and Christmas party. Our outing to Broughton Castle in bright spring weather reported here seems an age ago now. But there is also news of our forthcoming outing on 20 November, to the Oxfordshire Museum Resources Centre at Standlake, near Witney, coupled with a talk on the portable antiquities scheme. Do put that one in your diary and come if you can.

Thoughts of museum resources have been prompted by the closure last weekend of the Henley Gallery in the River and Rowing Museum. You may have seen the local press coverage. Members acted as stewards, guiding visitors to highlights for a final look. We also gathered information from the visitors about what they'd like to see in any future museum. We are committed to working to bring this about. If anyone would like to join in with this aspect of our future work, do please get in touch.

In anticipation of the closure, we have studied museums in towns around us to see how they work. We are analysing the results and will share them more widely in due course. Meanwhile the newsletter highlights some of the main features of these collections, so that you know what is there, and can support your local museums.

The newsletter also extends the invitation to members to make more use of the Group's excellent archive room, recently redecorated and fitted out, in a room at the back of the Town Hall. You may not even know it exists. Our archivist, Simon Lunn, is keen to encourage members to visit and to use the resources it contains, and to encourage the donation of records so that valuable historical records are not lost. Do please contact him if you are interested.

There is also news of an event in the middle of next year. The Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Association, the main umbrella body for local history in the county, is planning to hold its annual gathering, Oxpast, in Henley. This will bring together local

historians, with a programme of talks and stands. As the host society, our members will be able to attend without charge. We'll keep you posted as we discover more.

The Henley Standard has been prominent in the town since Victorian times. Earlier this year we heard it had been sold to a newspaper group in Maidenhead. The paper is an invaluable resource for local historians. We used it, for example, for the research reported at our seminar, to which many of you came in the summer, on the Second World War in Henley. A piece in this newsletter marks the change which has occurred.

Finally, Annabel Lyell, the editor of the newsletter, has invited members to nominate history and archaeology books they have recently enjoyed reading. The result is the first in what we hope will be a regular feature. Do please let her know of books you are enjoying for reporting in future editions.

We hope you'll find plenty to enjoy and to think about.

Michael

H.A. & H.G. Autumn Outing Tour of Oxfordshire Museums Resources Centre, Standlake

When: Thursday 20 November 2025

Time: 10:30am guided tour starts (tour length between 1.5hrs – 1.75hrs)

Cost: £10 per person includes private tour

and talk on the Portable Antiquities Scheme and a few finds from Henley.

Transport: Take minibus (additional £10 pp) or self-drive to large on-site car park.

Journey takes approximately 1 hour from Henley. Lift shares may be available. Address: Museum Resource Centre, Cotswold Dene, Standlake, Witney OX29 7QG

Refreshments: There is no catering on the site, but the Bell Inn at Ducklington is three

miles along the road towards Witney and able to welcome us. See their

Main Menu at: https://www.thebellinnducklington.com/

The Oxfordshire Museums Resources Centre is a large and fascinating repository of the heritage of Oxfordshire, covering its history, archaeology, agriculture, crafts and

arts and maintained as storage for its museums. Many of the objects on display in Oxfordshire's museums actually belong to the County Museums Service and come from Standlake. The Centre also provides advice and collections management services to a number of museums in the county. The collection of over 110,000 objects can only be visited by appointment for research, study and tours. Our guided tour will include a talk as detailed above. Further information can be found here:

https://www.oxfordshiremuseums.org.uk/museums/oxfordshire-museums-resource-centre/

Contact:

Alexis Rendell-Dunn <u>a.rendelldunn@gmail.com</u> no later than 31st October to join the tour. Please let her know:

- 1. The number of places you would like on the tour.
- 2. If you would like to join the minibus (we will need a minimum number of people to book it).
- 3. If you would like to have lunch at the Bell Inn, Ducklington (paid for individually).

Henley Standard Offices on the Reading Road By Michael Redley

What is the story behind this sign you can see on the building on the corner of Reading Road and Station Road going out of Henley - 'Higgs & Co, Printers and Henley Standard Office'? You may know that the Henley Standard still has an office for its journalists in the building of Higgs, the stationers and printers, but that the paper has been owned since earlier this year by the Louis Baylis owners Charitable Trust, of Maidenhead Advertiser. I thought I'd investigate further and this is what I have found. I am grateful to John Luker and his daughter, Julie Smith, for guiding me through the details.

The Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard was established when the local Conservative Party, with Archibald Brakspear as its leading local figure, took over the Henley Free Press in 1892.



Until March 1956 the main banner title still referred to it incorporating *The Henley Free Press*. The banner today is *Henley Standard*, with a sub-heading, *The Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard*.

The Free Press was a lively Liberal newspaper edited by the town's Congregationalist minister, Revd J.J. Goadby. In fact, leading members of his congregation thought his conduct as a press owner and editor unfitting for their minister. His refusal to give them up may have contributed to his departure from the town. The Conservative Party had paid a subsidy of £250 a year to a paper in Oxford, The Oxford Times, to cover Henley from a Conservative political perspective. Now they could do it for themselves. Their newspaper's declared aims at its launch in September 1892 were 'to assist and forward Conservative and Unionist causes in South Oxfordshire, and encourage habits of thrift and friendly societies'.

Henley then had another newspaper with a Conservative affiliation, *The Henley Advertiser*. It was owned by a prominent spirits merchant in the town, A.R.Awbery, whose advertisements for his own business invariably appeared on the front page. Though opposed to the strong Liberal and anti-drink lobby in the town, Awbery was evidently not considered sufficiently 'true blue' by the local party. And in anticipation of the launch of Conservative competition, he re-established his paper, bigger and better than ever, he claimed, as politically independent, saying that people would always prefer their public affairs conducted in the interest of the town rather than from a party-political perspective.

There was certainly printing work in the town, which included programmes for Henley Royal Regatta. In 1877, a printer who described himself also as a journalist, from Faringdon, Thomas Octavius Higgs, set up in business in Henley. He began in Bell Street, and moved in 1885 to purpose-built premises named Caxton House (see illustration) on the corner of Reading Road and Station Road. Thomas had worked in Faringdon on *The Faringdon Advertiser*, owned by the Luker family, who were also printers and newspaper owners. And in 1894 Charles Luker, the second son of the



family, came to join Thomas in his Henley business as an 'improver' to learn the printing trade. Charles cycled every Monday morning from Faringdon, returning home after work on Saturday. The *Free Press* had been printed in Reading. But in 1892, Thomas Higgs won the work of printing the relaunched paper in Henley.

In 1896 Thomas died unexpectedly aged only 58. He was helping to lift a stair carpet he had just bought at a house in Norman Avenue when he suffered a heart attack. Charles continued to work in the printing business, which was sold by Thomas' widow, Eliza, to the Hobbs boatbuilding

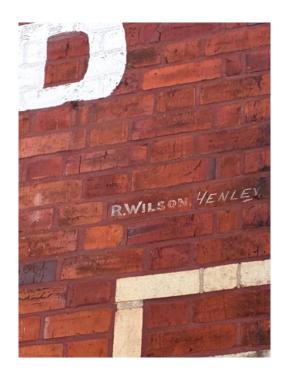
family. But, now fully qualified, Charles became a partner in Higgs & Co, before buying out the other partners in April 1900.

The Henley Standard came Charles's way at the same time. The local Conservative Party had quickly divested itself of the paper to the prominent local businessmen and landowners who had put up the money. But they had also become disenchanted with newspaper ownership. It was announced that *The Henley Standard* would be shut down. The Higgs printing business, newly acquired by Charles Luker, was about to lose a substantial printing contract. So, in order to protect the printing business, Charles took an interest in the *Henley Standard*, emerging as its 'manager and publisher' in 1900. He became editor-in-chief on behalf of the Conservative interest to begin with. But Higgs and Co became sole owner in 1919, from which point Charles was able to take his own, generally independent, line.

Three more generations of Lukers went on to own and operate the paper. In that time there have been competitors. The *Henley Advertiser* had disappeared by the First World War. Offshoots of Marlow and Reading papers existed briefly in the town after the Second World War. But Charles, who acquired the paper as a young man, sustained it over his lifetime as a significant local institution. It is invaluable now as a source for the history of the town. Living across the Reading Road from Caxton House at No 2, Norman Avenue, Charles went on to be mayor of Henley at crucial points, in the First World War and again in the Second. He died in 1968

One interesting detail was discovered during the research for this article. Visible on the brickwork below the painted sign is the name of one of Henley's major builders, Richard Wilson (see illustration). Caxton House had been enlarged twice before, in 1892 to create a compositors room, which is where the journalists still based in Henley now work; and again after the First World War, perhaps to accommodate larger printing machinery. Richard Wilson was also responsible for the row of shops on the opposite side of the Reading Road back into the town.

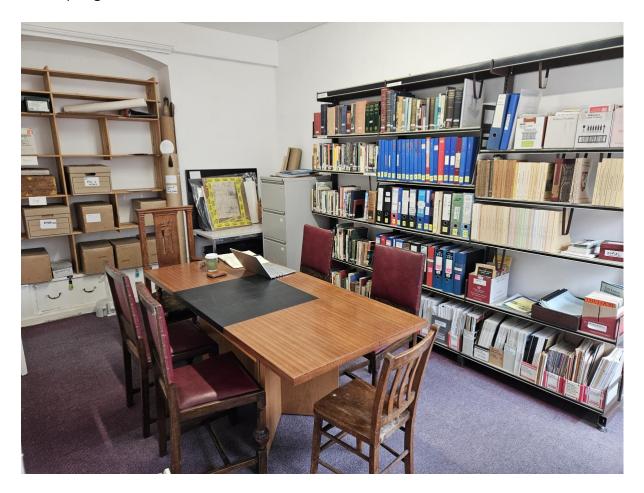
The Henley Standard continues to rent editorial offices from Higgs & Co for now. Whatever happens in future, let us hope that the painted sign remains as it is, like the Brakspear brewery signage in New Street, as a tribute to former glories.



Are you aware of H.A. & H.G.'s Archive? Simon Lunn

H.A. & H.G. has its own archive in a couple of rooms of the Town Hall which hold \sim 2,000 items: books on local and regional history, maps, boxes of photographs from Victorian times onwards and Roman finds from local archaeological digs. There are copies of local records, records of Henley businesses, and research collections of past members dating back to the start of the group. The earliest item from Henley itself is a wooden post carbon dated as 1000 AD.

The archive rooms have recently been refurbished and are now much more welcoming: the Town Hall staff repainted them; we put up new shelving following a donation by the Henley library during its refurbishment and we hung framed prints of Friar Park's gardens and Henley in 1942 following David Feary's kind donations, and the rooms have been spring cleaned.



Current activities include monthly meetings to catalogue the archive's contents. The books and maps have already been catalogued in an Excel workbook. Multiple paper lists of individual collections within the archive are now being added to the workbook as well as some donations being catalogued for the first time - we are always happy to accept items of local interest into the archive. We recently received diaries kept by a Henley couple covering 1940 to 2010. Please email hahg.members@gmail.com if you would like to help with cataloguing or have items to donate.

Everyone is welcome to look around the archive either for your own research or just out of curiosity. Again, please email hahg.members@gmail.com and Simon Lunn, who looks after the archive and will arrange a convenient time for you to visit. Simon can also share the excel catalogue with anyone who would like to see it.

Local Museums in Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Annabel Lyell

With the closure of the River and Rowing Museum, a sub-group of the H.A.& H.G. Committee (David Feary, Simon Lunn, Michael Redley, Chris Whitehead and myself) have been to find out more about other local museums in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. We hope our study will provide some useful insights for all those considering various models for a new Henley museum. As part of our research, we visited several local museums and found the staff at each of them very helpful, knowledgeable and friendly. At present we are still analysing our research data and working out how best to disseminate our findings. We will share more on this in due course. However, in the meantime, we have discovered that there are several very interesting museums not too far from Henley and wondered how many of our Members have been to any of them recently? With this in mind, we would encourage you to visit them while Henley is without its own museum. What follows is a summary of key information on some of the museums we have been to this past summer. Do let us know how your visit goes!



Marlow Museum Lace Exhibition

Marlow Museum (20 mins by car from Henley)

Open: Between March to October open Sat, Sun & Bank Holidays 1-5pm and Wednesdays 2-5pm. Between November and February only open Sundays between 2-4pm.

Entrance Fee: Free.

What to see? Exhibition on Lace and lacemaking from William Borlase to Pamela Nottingham.

Further info: https://www.marlowmuseum.org

Wallingford Museum (30 mins by car from Henley)

Open: 1 March – 30 Nov only: 2-5pm Tues-Fri and

10:30am-5pm on Saturdays

Entrance Fee: £6 Adults, accompanying children free

What to see? There are permanent displays on Wallingford Castle, Agatha Christie, a history of Wallingford from Roman times to the 20th Century and local Roman, Bronze and Iron Age Communities. This year there are also two special temporary exhibitions. The first is Barley to Beer, the story of malting, brewing and pubs in Wallingford. The second is *Ordeal by Innocence*, a display of Laura Hope's eight illustrations created for the new edition of this Agatha Christie book.



Take a seat with Agatha Christie before venturing into the Wallingford Museum (shown in the background)

Further info: https://www.wallingfordmuseum.org.uk

Thame Museum (35 mins by car from Henley)

Open: Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 10am to 4pm and Sunday 1pm to 4pm. They do close at some point over the winter but its yet to be announced. Check website for details.

Entrance Fee: Free







What to see? The Main Gallery (photo above left) is housed in the grand chamber of the former Magistrates Court. The history of Thame from 6,000 to the 20th Century is exhibited here. Then step inside the Elizabethan Wall Paintings Gallery which has been reimagined as the home of an Elizabethan merchant with lots of artefacts to see from the period including a beautiful, well preserved wall paintings from the reign of Elizabeth I (photo above centre). For those who would like to see something more modern, the Robin Gibb Gallery is dedicated to the Bee Gees and is full of artefacts, photographs and memorabilia (photo above right).

Further info: https://thamemuseum.org

Abingdon County Hall Museum (45mins by car from Henley)

Open: 10am-4pm Tues-Sun

Entrance Fee: Free with a suggested donation £2 per adult. A payment of £2 is required to access the roof terrace.

What to see? This museum is housed in the old Guildhall, a Grade 1 listed building, built by Christopher Kempster, a stonemason partner of Christopher



Wren in 1682. It was originally the Berkshire County Hall. The museum claims Abingdon to be England's oldest continually inhabited town – the permanent displays take you through Abingdon's history. There are two current special exhibitions; Late Jurassic fossils and Romans, Britons and Abingdon from AD43 to AD410.

Further info: https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/abingdon-county-hall-museum/plan-your-visit

Summer Outing to Broughton Castle near Banbury: 18 June 2025 Michael Redley







Broughton Castle is nearly perfect. Alan Bennett called it 'almost a standard kit for an idyll'. It has a commanding Tudor front, pleasingly asymmetrical, of beautiful mellow stone, approached across a wide moat through a battlemented gatehouse. A long gallery going the length of the building with beautiful views on either side is one of the greatest glories of the place. What is there not to like? It was the most gorgeous morning for our summer outing. Twenty-four of us assembled in the shade of the trees across a wide lawn from the entrance, 'beneath the lantern', awaiting the appointed hour for our guided tour.

But things are not quite as they seem at Broughton, of which more anon. Entering through the front door into the Great Hall with its amazing two storey Tudor windows, you are assailed immediately by that special smell of old flag stones, slightly musty, which I always associate with heritage. First built by a knight of Edward 1 as his manor house in about 1300, the house has undergone enormous changes in its physical structure and use. As you'd surely expect, there is armour in the niches and portraits of ancestors hanging on the walls.

Occupants have been significant figures in the realm. The first Lord Saye and Sele fought at Agincourt. William of Wykeham, who owned the house in the fourteenth century, built Winchester College, New College Oxford and much of Windsor Castle. William Fiennes, 8th Lord Saye and Sele, was a favourite of the first Stuart king, James I, but then fought at the Battle of Edgehill as an opponent of his son, Charles I, and leading figure in the Puritan, pro-Parliament group during the English Civil War. The pardon he received from Charles II at the Restoration is prominently displayed. The 15th Lord Saye and Sele, another William, was a rake close to the Prince Regent, later George IV, early in the nineteenth century.







All this is real enough. But there is also a lot of showbiz about Broughton Castle. It has often been used as a film set, not least for *Shakespeare in Love*, starring Joseph Fiennes, a direct descendant of the 16th Lord Saye and Sele, and for the television series of *Wolf Hall*. 'We need the money', our guide said, who turned out to be Martin Fiennes, the 22nd Lord Saye and Sele. Early on in the tour, he pointed to a column of what looked like medieval brickwork and said that he was surprised that when Mark Rylance was filmed against it, people hadn't spotted that it was made of painted plasterboard hiding a Victorian cast iron pipe. We quickly discovered more of the same. Many of the picture and furnishings, down to the suits of armour in the Great Hall, had been bought in to add, admittedly tastefully, to the heritage effect.

I began to wonder if that special smell by the front door had come from an aerosol spray labelled 'heritage'. Astonishing alabaster tombs of family members in the church, next door to the castle and contemporary with its original foundation, seemed to me to have an authenticity the house itself occasionally lacked.

But the castle wins you round. It certainly helped that Martin Fiennes was such an engaging guide, leading us through a false door off the Great Hall through his modern private kitchen ('I live through here'), and dealing dexterously with the twists and turns of Britain's history in which his family had been involved. At one point we all sat in a

circle passing round from hand to hand a 16lb cannon ball found in the moat and wondering what would happen if any of us dropped it. It certainly wasn't the fault of succeeding generations that the entire contents of the house, down to the swans on the moat, had to be sold to pay the debts of the rakish 15th Lord Saye and Sele, whereupon furnishing had to start again. (A kindly vicar apparently attended the auction and bought some of the best bits back for the family.) One can only admire the way the Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes' (now simply Fiennes') have kept the show on the road across some pretty rocky terrain.

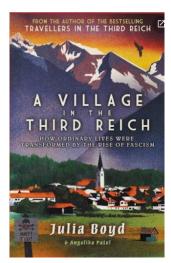
Actually, they have done better than that. Our outing took us to a very special and beautiful place, plasterboard and all, which was full of real historical interest. Having narrowly survived the Restoration, the 8th Lord Saye and Sele had carved above a doorway a Latin inscription which translates as 'There is no pleasure in the memory of the past'. Broughton is a reminder that we are all continually reshaping the past in any case, but that the result can still inspire and entertain.

Good Reads from Our Members

This is a new section in our newsletter. Please contribute! We would love to hear about any history or archaeology books that you, our Members, have read recently. The books do not need to be newly published. The review need not be long or fully comprehensive – a short description of why you liked the book is sufficient. I plan to do October (think Christmas!) and Summer reading lists for our Newsletters so that you all have some additional ideas to add to your own lists. Please send your book reviews to annabel_lyell@yahoo.co.uk. Happy to receive reviews at any time – they will be placed in my Newsletter file for the next publication. Here are some of the books that Members have enjoyed this year.

Julia Boyd & Angelika Patel, A Village in the Third Reich: How Ordinary Lives were

Transformed by the Rise of Fascism, Simon and Schuster 2023
While doing research for our VE Day talks back in May, I went looking for books about other small British towns during the Second World War. In the process of my search, I came across something completely opposite, a book about a small village called Oberstdorf, in the far south of Germany. It is an enlightening history of how ordinary German lives were reshaped by Nazi rule. It gives a meticulous account through documents, letters, interviews and memoirs of how Nazi ideology infiltrated local institutions and changed daily life. There are accounts of several different lives in the village from those who became hardened Nazis, to villagers who helped Jews, to those who simply conformed to survive. A fascinating read from a perspective I had not encountered before. From: Annabel Lyell

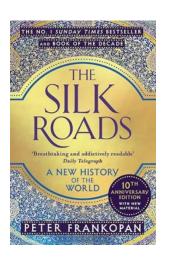


Helen Carr, Sceptred Isle, Penguin Random House 2025

I've just finished 'Sceptred Isle' by Helen Carr, who was our speaker at the Annual Lecture. I found the book both thrilling and unputdownable. It reads like a novel. I knew nothing about the 14th century before and found the deviousness of the kings, and indeed their brutality, eye opening. I thoroughly recommend it. From: *Chris Whitehead*

<u>Daniel Finkelstein, Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad: A Family Memoir of Miraculous Survival,</u> <u>HarperCollins 2023</u>

This memoir was written by Daniel Finkelstein, the son of Jewish parents persecuted during the Second World War. This book follows several different lives in his family through the rise of Nazism, the war and its aftermath. Finkelstein's maternal grandfather had been trying to warn others of the rise of antisemitism for years, collecting huge numbers of books and papers into what eventually became the Weiner Holocaust Library. His mother, a German Jew aged only 10, was detained with her family in the Nazi camps. His father, a Polish Jew also aged 10, was sent to a forced labour collective farm in Kazakhstan. I found it fascinating to follow the lives of this family across Europe, Asia

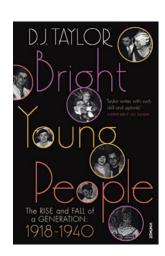


and the USA. I knew little of the struggles of people detained in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Clearly, as their son has written the book, both survive, but the struggle was immense and not only required true grit but as Finkelstein points out several times, sheer luck. An extraordinary read. From: *Annabel Lyell*

Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*, Bloomsbury Publishing 2015 I would recommend The Silk Roads. It has a definite economic and trade orientated way of interpreting history which varies from the standard line, i.e. W. Dalrymple's *The Golden Road*. He is speaking at the Henley Literary Festival. From: *Sheila Dickie*

D.J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The rise and fall of a generation* 1918-40, Vintage 2008

This is a fascinating and at times hilarious account of what upper class young people got up to after the First World War. Evelyn Waugh's stories of the time, like *Vile Bodies*, are where you might have come across them. What the book shows is that the sharp disapproval of the older generation, the outrageous pranks, parties and happenings of a tight-knit group of gilded youth, and the obsession of the popular press with their doings is all absolutely true. And the book is fascinating on why it happened and what it was all about. From: *Michael Redley*



Lucy Ward, The Empress and the English Doctor: How Catherine the Great defined a deadly virus, One World 2022

I was recommended to read the book by a friend, who said it would open my eyes. And they were right. It's about the battle of humanity against smallpox in the eighteenth century, and the unlikely friendship between an English country physician, Thomas

Dinsdale, and the Empress of Russia, Catherine. Their trusting relationship broke the grip of the anti-vaxxers of their day and banished a disease which killed and disfigured millions. You discover a huge amount along the way about the eighteenth century, Russian history, female leadership and scientific discovery. From: *Michael Redley*

Graham Webster, *Practical Archaeology*, Adam and Charles Black, 1965

This volume is not a recent publication as you can see, but it's a model of good printing and clear content, with good illustrations, diagrams and photos. From: *Darius Halpern*



Oxfordshire Past 2026 in Henley H.A. & H.G. Committee

Each year, the annual general meeting of the Oxfordshire Architectural and History Society (OAHS) takes place in a different town in Oxfordshire. In the last three years, it has been in Abingdon, Bicester and Faringdon. For 2026, we have pitched for it to be held in Henley. And it's looking good.

The Society is the main umbrella body for local history in the county. So this event, Oxpast 2026, probably on a Saturday next June, will be a major opportunity to survey local history happening in our area. A programme of talks will be organised by OAHS. This year, they covered current archaeology in the city of Oxford, Roman and Iron age settlements and a villa excavation, current work by the Oxfordshire Building Survey and the Victoria County History, and the history of RAF Brize Norton. As the 'host' society, our members will be able to include one or more papers in the programme. (So anyone who has got some research going might like to take note.) At previous Oxpasts, local history groups have set up their own stalls with information about their activities, selling their own publications. People interested in history from all over the county come, making a lively scene.

The last time Oxpast took place in Henley was in 2012. So it's return is overdue. One reason the committee of HA&HG is keen to attract Oxpast in 2026 is because of the closure of the River and Rowing Museum. We think a debate in that forum, with contributions by other towns which have a focus for their own local heritage activities, will help to emphasise Henley's need. Aside from this, attendance at the meeting with events throughout the day, for which an entry fee is charged, will be free for our members.

It's a work in progress. But we'd like to add this substantial history events to our programme for next year. We'll keep you updated on developments.

Our forthcoming lectures

All lectures will be held at Chantry House, doors open 7pm for 7:30pm start

Details available on the website https://hahg.org.uk/lectures-coming/

2025

7 October The History of Reading Prison, Mark Stevens

4 November Kings, Boxes and Dots, John Rogers

2 December Excavations at Grey's Court, Adrian Cox

2026

6 January Drovers Roads in Oxfordshire and Beyond, Tim Healey

3 February Early Mediaeval Sounds and Instruments, Lucy-Anne Taylor

7 April Oxfordshire's Military Heritage in 50 Objects, Tony Harking

5 May The Vikings and Baghdad: How scientific approaches to silver are

transforming perspectives on Viking origins, Jane Kershaw

2 June Oxfordshire Place Names, Andrew Long

6 October Preservation of Abingdon Abbey (preliminary title), Godfrey Cole

3 November Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Buckinghamshire, Lucy Lawrence

1 December History of Marlow, Geoff Wood

Special events for H.A. & H.G. Members

20 Nov Tour of Museum Resources Centre, Standlake see details on

pages 2-3

10 Dec H.A. & H.G. Christmas Party 7pm-10pm including Members

"Show & Tell", organised by Chris Whitehead, further details will

follow

June 2026 - TBC Oxfordshire Past 2026, Henley TBC, see article on page 13

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