



# TWHAS NOW

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**The Queen's Award  
for Voluntary Service**

Newsletter of The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society

## February 2021

**We begin with a very special announcement!**

### **WALLINGFORD HIGH STEWARD'S AWARD**

We are delighted to be able to tell you that the 2019-20 Wallingford High Steward's Award 'for an outstanding contribution which benefits residents and the community of Wallingford' has been awarded:

***'To the Volunteers of Wallingford Museum and TWHAS'***

The High Steward, Ken Lester, will make the presentation at the beginning of our TWHAS virtual meeting on:

**Wednesday 10 February, at 8.00pm**

This is a very great honour, particularly as it is only the second time this new award has been given. It was due to be announced in spring last year, but because of the Covid Lockdown it was decided to postpone the declaration and presentation until there could be a proper public ceremony in the autumn. As that also proved impossible, the High Steward has now announced the award and arranged to make a 'virtual' presentation at our meeting on 10 February. We hope lots of you will be able to attend!

The actual award (to be engraved each year with the name of the holder) will be on permanent display in the Town Regalia case in the Town Hall for all to see.

This honour is a very special local appreciation for the work of all our many volunteers in the Museum and TWHAS over 40 plus years. Many of us are able to share this accolade today, but we would also like to remember the many who are sadly no longer with us. Most relevant to this award is the work of the late Gerard Latham, who died just a year ago. For 25 years he organised and supported our Museum volunteer custodians and also led our TWHAS excavations - most notably the 100 Test Pits, completed in October 2019.

*You can read more about the history of the role of High Steward on page 2, together with details of the talk on Reading Abbey by John Painter which will follow the presentation.*

## TWHAS Virtual Meeting - 10 February 2021 at 8.00pm

Following the presentation of the High Steward's award and a very brief AGM (see page 1),

**John Painter will be giving a talk on**

### **'Reading Abbey – 900 years and still going'**

He will review the impact of Reading Abbey on the town of Reading, both in its heyday as a royal abbey and one of the 10 leading monasteries in the country, through the dissolution and its subsequent use as a royal palace, to the destruction of the Civil War and the subsequent re-development of the Abbey Quarter and preservation of the Abbey Ruins up to the present day.

The talk will give a sense of what Reading lost with the abbey's dissolution, and what it has gained from the subsequent re-uses of the site. It will also show what is still left of the monastic foundation, and the rich architectural heritage of Victorian and 20th century developments in the Abbey Quarter.

*John Painter retired from local government following 28 years working for Reading Borough Council. He has been actively involved in the Friends of Reading Abbey (FORA) since 2011, and Secretary since 2013. He joined FORA to support the council's efforts to consolidate the Abbey Ruins and get them re-opened to the public, which happened in 2018, in good time for the celebration of the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation in 2021. He is co-author, with Peter Durrant, of the illustrated guide to Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter, published by Two Rivers Press in 2018 to coincide with the re-opening of the Abbey Ruins.*



**Please note the date so you don't miss this interesting evening! A reminder and link for the zoom meeting will be sent out to members by email nearer the time.**

## **Historical note on High Stewards**

The office of High Steward has been recorded in Wallingford since the the 16th century; it is one of less than 30 ancient boroughs where the office still exists and is an important part of the traditions that make Wallingford so very special in a modern world which so often seems in danger of losing its sense of community identity.

The High Steward's role has never been precisely specified. Indeed, in an 1833 report on the Corporation of Wallingford the High Steward was described as being appointed for life by 'a majority of the mayor, aldermen and assistants' and is officially listed as having 'no duties, no salary and no emoluments'! The High Steward today is still appointed by the Town Council but now receives the princely sum of £1 per year and is entitled to retire!

The office has always been awarded to a person of high repute, thought capable of upholding the honour of the town. In the early days, when power in governance belonged only to the aristocracy, nobility and high-born gentry, the High Steward was often chosen as someone who could speak on behalf of the town to those of greater influence, and keep a close check on maintaining the town's ancient rights.

The first known Wallingford High Steward was Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, mentioned in 1569. He was the favourite of Queen Elizabeth I and it is perhaps significant that the Queen actually visited Wallingford Castle the following year on a 'progress', staying in the Christ Church College buildings in the middle bailey (the ruins of which still exist) that were specially renovated for her brief stay. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the following year, 1571, a special bridge charter was issued by the

Queen, allowing the town to charge tolls for boats passing **under** the bridge, as well as the usual tolls for people and goods crossing **over** it [see initial letter right].

The Bridge Charter brought a welcome additional income for the town, which was struggling economically at the time. Perhaps a word at court by the High Steward had played a part? Whether or not this was the case, the office of High Steward was maintained for the future in Wallingford.



Portrait of Elizabeth I on Wallingford Bridge Charter 1571 [BRO W/IC3]

Many of the early holders were favourites at court and several were also Lord Lieutenants of Berkshire or Oxfordshire (or both), with considerable influence through these Crown appointments. In the 18th century the role of High Steward became almost hereditary to the wealthy Earls of Abingdon; when Judge Blackstone was Recorder for Wallingford, he worked closely with the Earl, who was interested in the new 'turnpike' roads, encouraging their expansion, which would eventually help Wallingford.

In later years 'patronage' has been less important, being overtaken by a genuine interest in the well-being of the town and its people. In 1996 Judge Stephen Tumim, highly regarded nationally for his reforming work as Chief Inspector of Prisons, became Wallingford's High Steward. He served the town well, remaining in post until 2001. His obituary in *The Independent* in 2003 mentioned that he was 'rightly proud of the many honorary doctorates he was awarded by various universities, but drew even more pleasure from his historic title of High Steward of Wallingford.'



The next appointment was Sir Colin Imray in 2002.

Sir Colin, together with his wife Shirley, had retired to Wallingford after a full life working overseas for the Foreign Office. They had been together in many challenging roles, which culminated in Sir Colin being British High Commissioner of Tanzania, and then of Bangladesh. The role of High Steward of Wallingford was a real pleasure to him. He always took great interest in the history of the town and in encouraging and supporting the work of Wallingford Museum and TWHAS. He retired from the role of High Steward in 2015. He sadly passed away in December 2020, not long after he and Shirley had moved to Northamptonshire to be nearer their family. He will be much missed.



Our present High Steward, Ken Lester, was appointed in 2015 and is well known to us all. He has lived in Wallingford all his life, running a business and having previously served a term as a Town Councillor. He and his wife Ros (a Town Councillor and former Mayor of Wallingford) are both passionate about the town, its people and its history.

Ken is especially famed for his rowing prowess as a young man, holding the record for being **Great Britain's youngest ever male Olympian**, having represented Great Britain at the age of 13 as a cox in the men's coxed pairs rowing event at the Rome Olympics in 1960!



*The Volunteers of Wallingford Museum and TWHAS are delighted to have been honoured with Ken Lester's High Steward's Award.*

## Tank Goodness!

*Lindsey Bedford, our archaeological liaison officer, shares this special little story:*

Towards the end of October 2020, Richard Dermott contacted TWHAS after reaching out to local companies, to see whether anyone could point him in the right direction to hire a metal detector. Richard had lost something very precious to him in his back garden and was desperate to find it.

Luckily, Richard spoke to Jenny Carpenter who was able to tell him that although TWHAS doesn't have a metal detector she knew someone who did. My email address was passed on and the next day I offered to go to his garden in South Stoke to conduct a search.



The item that had been mislaid was a brass door from a lovely scale model of a World War I tank which Richard's late wife had given him for his birthday some years ago. The item was made in 1916/17 by a man who serviced the full size vehicles in the same workshop in Flanders, and is wonderfully detailed. Unfortunately, the tank had been taken outside into Richard's garden and at some point turned upside down and a door had fallen off its little spigot hinges. Richard told me he had been devastated and could not bear to look at the model knowing part of it was missing.

Sadly my search was unsuccessful. The piece had been lost a number of years ago and as the garden had once been part of a farm, there were a great deal of metal signals in the ground. The proximity to the electrified railway didn't help and there was a lot of buzzy background interference.

I was very disappointed not to have been able to find the missing piece but an alternative option sprung to mind. A very good friend of the family, called Geoff Lines, is a master model maker. He makes tiny locomotives from scratch and quite often you can't tell if a photograph is of a model he has made or the real thing! My husband rang him up and he said he would be delighted to reconstruct the door. Within a few weeks Geoff (*pictured right*) had made the door from brass and even managed to age it to blend in perfectly with the patina on the original tank. I can't actually tell which door he made!



Richard (*below*) was absolutely overjoyed with the result and it can now take pride of place once again in his home.



I declined his offer of payment for my fruitless search but he agreed instead to give TWHAS a donation, which he has kindly done.

Geoff also declined payment but suggested a donation be made to a charity of choice and Richard chose a cancer charity which meant a great deal to him. Although the original door remains lost, he can at least look once more at an intact tank without any of those residual feelings of loss and guilt. It is once again a fine work of art, albeit appropriately battle scarred!

*Many thanks to Lindsey for sharing this lovely bit of joy!*

## New Book Recommendation

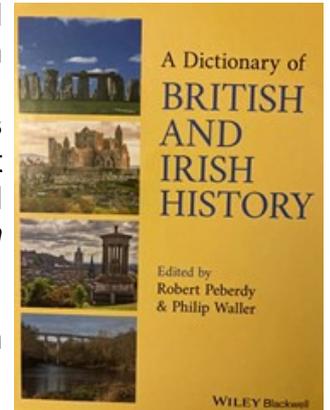
*Charles Dickerson has kindly sent in this review of A Dictionary of British and Irish History*

'This is the title of a newly published work of reference, edited by Dr Robert Peberdy (OLHA member and a former Assistant Editor of the Oxfordshire VCH) and Philip Waller (of Merton College, Oxford).

It is a highly authoritative and extensive resource covering all aspects of British and Irish history; it offers instant access to historical facts, and overviews of historical topics and events - perfect for getting the wider historical background to one's local history researches, also for browsing.

I have found it an extremely helpful book - all periods of history and pre-history are covered, and the authors have done a remarkable job in providing clear, concise but highly readable entries on a wide variety of topics. Definitely recommended as a 'one stop' resource, both for local historians wishing to read up on the historical context, and for all who have an interest in British and Irish history. I would add that the book also contains a useful series of maps drawn by Giles Darkes (co-editor with Kate Tiller of *An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire*).

This book is just great for browsing, but take care - you might be dipping in for longer than you expect!



*A Dictionary of British and Irish History* published 2021 by Wiley Blackwell. ISBN 9780631201557 (paperback). It can be ordered from the Wallingford Bookshop, from major booksellers, or online from the publisher; hard copy also available.

## Dates for your Diary!

Our Speaker's Secretary, Katharine Keats-Rohan, has so far managed to arrange three more TWHAS lectures this year ('virtual' unless things change dramatically!):

### 10 March (Weds)

**Bill King: The Thames At War** (deferred from April 2020)

### 8 September (Weds)

**Andy Hood: Archaeological investigation at the Cross Keys, Wallingford**

### 13 October (Weds)

**Dr Tim Smith: 'Youth grows pale and spectre thin and dies - a history of tuberculosis'**  
(deferred from July 2020)

Katharine hopes to be able to add to this list, and would be grateful for any suggestions for speakers you may have heard. Please contact: [katharine.keats-rohan@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:katharine.keats-rohan@history.ox.ac.uk)

## Finding more Lectures on-line

Many people have been exploring the Internet for interesting talks, and there are a lot out there!  
*Steve Capel-Davies writes:*

'Gresham College (founded in the 16th century) in London has an extensive range of lectures available online dating back several years and covering many topics including history, archaeology, art, science, law etc. There are well known speakers such as Gustav Milne and Simon Thurley and many others. Well worth a look!'

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch/?subject=history&page=3>

## Progress being made despite Lockdown!

### New Museum Website

Sue Wright has devoted very many hours during the autumn and winter Lockdown to building a brand new website for Wallingford Museum! It has just gone live and we hope you will all take a look and send in any feedback. She has many ideas for future use and expansion of the website to encourage more visitors and interaction with the public. [www.wallingfordmuseum.org.uk](http://www.wallingfordmuseum.org.uk)

Congratulations to Sue for getting it live, and very many thanks for all her continuing hard work!

### New Castle Model

We are receiving regular updates from Ben Taggart, our model builder, who is making excellent progress and is on track to finish it and have it in place before we are able to re-open the museum. We have work to do to prepare the area where it will be displayed in the Dewey Room but have plans in place to be able to achieve that in good time.

We are also beginning to prepare the exhibition that will accompany the model, which will tell the story of the multi-layered research that has led to the final layout of the model, including the documentary, archaeological and landscape work. It will also show the process of the actual model-making. It is all very exciting!

### Other work via email and social media

History seems to be very much in people's minds at the moment, perhaps because we are all becoming aware that we are living through a likely turning-point in history! Many people have been using their unusual spare time in Lockdown to investigate family and local history and share stories through Social Media. We have consequently been receiving numerous requests for information which are certainly keeping us busy. It demonstrates that TWHAS and the Museum are well established as a good source for information. Such requests often add to our knowledge too, which is a good interactive process. We very much look forward to being able to re-open the Museum again as a focal point for the town's history.

### Membership of TWHAS

February is usually the time to think about renewing your TWHAS membership, but we are sure you will remember that in the last newsletter we announced a year's free extension, as we have not been able to offer the usual range of talks and activities in 2020. **The next subscriptions will therefore not be due until 1st March 2022.** (Just a quick reminder to anyone who pays automatically by a recurring payment that you will need to inform your bank so your payment is not made).



We very much hope that by 2022 'Normal Service Will Be Resumed'!

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