

From the Chair

We have been offered an opportunity to play a role in a most interesting event: Family Learning Week takes place 8 - 16 October, and Rosemary Arnold, our branch librarian, has invited the Society to participate in an open day devoted to local history: don't be surprised if we contact you to ask if you would be willing to take a turn at the library, passing on your immense store of local knowledge.

Peter Sheasby, our October speaker, describes the survey that he and our member Walter Meagher undertook of the River Swere. It has resulted in a magnificent book that members will, I am sure, want to buy. 'Pioneering' (like 'seminal') is an overworked word, the academic equivalent of the *jus* that is now ubiquitous on menus, but fully justified in this case. *Portrait of a river* is a local study of the best kind and an extract forms the bulk of this issue.

Talking of local publications, member Sylvie Nickels has set her new novel *Another kind of loving* partly in a village 'not unlike' Deddington. It's not local history, though it's a good read, but the depiction of Deddington might one day make an interesting historical document in its own right

Chris Day

Programme for the rest of 2005

12 October, Peter Sheasby: The River Swere project

9 November, Malcolm Graham: The photographic collections of the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies

14 December: Christmas social

Portrait of a river: the River Swere project

For this issue we are very pleased to be able to reprint member Walter Meagher's final chapter from this recent title, the more so as Peter Sheasby, its photographer, is this month's speaker. While we have done our best to reproduce his beautiful pictures, some of which are not in the book, the printed version of 224 has to make do with monochrome. For this issue we have chosen mostly topographical photographs, though most of those in the book are botanical or entomological.

The River Swere in Deddington parish

The River Swere enters Deddington parish under cover of a shady wood, quietly and unseen from any place of public access. It forms the northern boundary of Deddington from Deddington Mill to the River Cherwell. Greater spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*) England's largest buttercup, grows in the shallow water of the mill pond on the grounds of a private residence. Leaving the mill pond, still water becomes animated and frothy, rushing down a sluice beside the mill house, and then again becoming the meandering Swere. The alternation of straight and sinuous reaches, of pool and riffle continues, as do the characteristics of the stream: its firm silt and clay banks on which grow grasses, herbs, crackwillow and hawthorn trees. Past Adderbury Bridge, the river is confined by a channel periodically dug out, made to obey the requirements of landowners who would limit flooding of low-lying fields.

With the first heavy autumn rains, the river rises quickly, perilously, ending the indolent dry days of August. On 14 October 2002 the river depth was 8 cm; after 38.3 mm of rainfall on 15th October, the depth the next day was 35 cm, 101 cm on 20th October, 138 cm on the 21st. The small floating plant, common duckweed (*Lemna minor*), which gathers in bays of the summer river, was swept away; branched bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), tall plant of summer's river edge, and coagulant of the shallow channel was pressed beneath the rising tide of water.

Near Adderbury Bridge

In this reach of the river, below and west of Adderbury Bridge, caddisfly larvae are plentiful beneath the gravelly stones, and branched bur-reed has crossed mid-stream, forcing summer's river to lace through its stems. The water below the bridge is yellow-green where the elliptical rosette-leaves of a dense colony of common water-starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*) has congregated; common duckweed, with similar conglomerative ten-

dencies, occurs above and below the bridge, idle in the slow stream. Perfoliate pondweed (*Potamogeton perfoliatus*) is growing in shallow (3-4 cm deep) rapidly-moving water east of the bridge, its only site in the river

It is characteristic of the lower course of the river, almost anywhere from Adderbury Bridge to the *A swan on the Swere near Little Barford Mill, the book's frontispiece.*



Cherwell, that trees and shrubs are infrequent and are irregularly spaced on the high banks: one or two alders, an apple, ash and a few crack-willows give the appearance of parsimony more than richness. But the dog-rose (*Rosa canina*) that festoons common hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and bends toward the water, heavy in fruit, gives the pleasure of wildness. Herbaceous species seen in many places along the river include bitter-sweet (*Solanum dulcamara*), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), reed sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*), water figwort (*Scrophularia auriculata*) and water mint (*Mentha aquatica*).

The old paper mill on Adderbury Grounds Farm

The Old Paper Mill was one of the three mills recorded for Deddington in 1086; called the 'Duchy mill' in 1583, it was leased to Nicholas Tripper, who built a new corn mill on the site of one that had fallen into decay in the mid 16th century. In the late seventeenth century, the corn-mill was converted to a paper mill, but by 1835 the paper making equipment was sold as bankrupt stock. The damp brick wall below the mill is the site of an impressively large population of an attractive fern, maidenhair spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*), with ever-green fronds and growing in neat rosettes.

The River Swere from Paper Mill Cottages

Just past the old mill there is a bridge over the river; from here the river passes between high unscalable banks, and measures between 4-6 cm deep in the shallows and 20 cm mid-stream in early summer. Young sycamore (*Acer pseudo-platanus*) trees reach out from both banks forming a canopy of shade. On the high banks where openings occur, reed canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) grows to 2 m high.

On a shallow muddy shore we found blue water-speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*), water-cress (*Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*) and water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*)—habitués of this habitat in every course of the river. In other sites of the river-margin vegetation, with waterlogged mineral soils, there occurs fool's watercress



Top left: St Mary, Swerford in its village setting; the church spire rises above the fellowship of cottages and houses in a landscape of wooded hills and upland pastures.

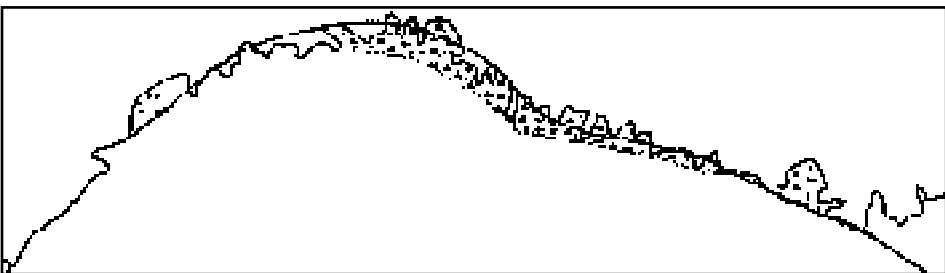
Bottom left: A clutch of derelict buildings, at the site of Little Barford Mill, forms a stopping point and a moment of reverie for the walker along the footpath by the leat. The canalised river carries its deep solemn load to the ancient mill pond, and then, without turning a water-wheel, spills the water pellmell through a sluice gate, whereupon the river resumes its meandering course.

Top right: Crack-willow (*Salix fragilis*) at Daeda's Wood.

Middle right: The end of the story—the River Swere in flood just before it joins the Cherwell with a bridge over the Oxford Canal in the distance.

Bottom right: The nearly straight line of the Swere today superimposed on the meandering river of 1881. There are 29 mashes associated with the river but not one in Deddington, for here the adjoining fields are wide and gently sloping, and investment in land-drainage is more likely to be profitable.

The river may have been straightened, but today the parish boundary between Deddington and Adderbury remains just as it was in 1881—meandering—and the Swere now enters the Cherwell at a point about 150 metres south of the 1881 confluence.



(*Apium nodiflorum*), which is much more common in the upper course of the river—at Little Bridge Marsh, for example. Even in a small area, such as the length of the Swere, each species has a habitat, or variety of habitats, and a geographical distribution particular to it.

The river edge on Castle Farm

Castle Farm is the last farm to border the Swere before it joins the River Cherwell; along its edge the

river is mostly straight but in 1881, as the OS map of that date is witness, the Swere meandered and marsh plants grew on its sides. The work of deepening and straightening the channel, and draining the marsh, was carried out in the 1950s as part of a national effort to increase crop production.

The sparse and irregular spacing of trees that began above Adderbury Bridge continues to the Cherwell: a few alders, hawthorns, a good-sized oak and three oak saplings. Grey willow (*Salix cinerea*) is

more common than crack-willow; of special interest, because of its size, is the buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) tree on the edge of Bourne Field, handsomely proportioned and laden with fruits.

Journey's end

As it did east of Little Barford Mill, reed sweet-grass, tall and graceful, grows densely, sometimes in the channel, close to mid-stream; but then moving towards the confluence of the two rivers, its abundance diminishes, and branched bur-reed appears. Just as quickly there is another change, a signal that the Swere is only moments away from joining the larger tributary of the Thames: dense clumps of tall dark stems of common club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*). Common club-rush is widespread in the Cherwell, conceals moorhen and suggests the hiding place of baby Moses.

Joining the River Cherwell without foam or foment, the Swere sheds the water it has collected from springs, streams and run-off over a distance of 25.3 km. The precise location of the confluence is obscured by common reed (*Phragmites australis*), which may grow to 3.5m tall, perhaps the world's commonest giant grass. As soon as the Swere enters the broad-shouldered and fast-moving Cherwell, it is lost in the hurry of a larger world, and our story ends.

When we first showed photographs of the river, at an exhibition in Wales, a man from Devon studied them carefully: 'We could do that!' he said. And that is our hope, that the pleasure we have had in tracing the course of a small neighbourhood river will be repeated in other parts of the British Isles.

Acknowledgments

The text is taken from pages 164-69 of *Portrait of a river: The River Swere in Oxfordshire*, by Walter L Meagher & Peter Sheasby. The map is by Wendy Meagher.

It is available from English Landscapes, 71 Courtington Lane, Bloxham OX15 4HS @ £10.95 + £4.95 p&p; cheques payable to River Swere Project. It is a community project sponsored by Local Heritage Initiative.

Daeda comes of age

When the Woodland Trust launched their Woods-on-Your-Doorstep Millennium project in 1995 (the aim being to create 200 new woods by the year 2000), the first acreage to come within their sights was a cornfield of some nine acres on the north boundary of our parish. In order to qualify for Millennium funding we needed to pledge £9000 in a very few weeks. By dint of persistence and creative persuasion, we reached the magic figure and, on 24 November 1996, in the middle of a mini-blizzard, over one hundred stalwarts of all ages converged on the site with spades and began to dig for Daeda. Now it is well on the way to being a mature wood. Someone even claims to have got lost in it.

The name, as most readers will have deduced, comes from the Mercian who gave his name to Deddington: the accepted meaning nowadays is 'Daeda's tun', not 'the tun of Daeda's people'. Parishioners not only chose the name but the special Millennium feature of a wildflower meadow at its heart. The Cherwell District Council chipped in with a stretch of path suitable for wheelchairs, and a couple of seats.

Since those early days, Daeda has had a full diary of visitors: family picnics to celebrate the Millennium and the Queen's Jubilee; foreign forestry students researching community woodlands; BBOWT building a holt to attract otters (the jury is still out on that one); picnicking senior citizens or nature-studying groups of young; our damselfly monitoring team, bird and butterfly buffs, and of course the flora enthusiasts who, to date, have listed over sixty species (excluding grasses). Topping the visitors' list are dog walkers and followers of Deddington Circular Walk's Hempton loop which passes this way.

Woodland Trust contractors come regularly to cut the grass and pollard the willows by the Swere. There is talk of future thinning.

Monitoring the wood's overall well-being are the Friends of Daeda's Wood who mastermind events and maintain an on-going display illustrating Daeda's development for school, library, Church or any other venue to express interest. Occasionally problems need addressing. There have been battles against rank vegetation and dog faeces; and once, a few years back, there was a phantom pruner.

Most agree unreservedly that it has been a huge asset to the parish. The full story of its birth and development will hopefully be recorded in *Daeda's Diary* to be published next year to celebrate Daeda's tenth birthday.

Sylvie Nickels

For more information see:
www.deddington.org.uk/community/daedaswood.html



Above: *The corn field before its last harvest* (photo George Spenceley) and below: *the wood as it is today with a mature hedge oak in the background.*



If undelivered please return to: Deddington & District History Society, c/o 37 Gaveston Gardens, Deddington OX15 0NX. **224** is the newsletter of the Deddington & District History Society, published three times a year and distributed free to members.

The Society meets on the second Wednesday of the month during the season, normally at the Windmill Centre in Deddington. Membership £9/16 pa single/couples, or £2.50 per meeting at the door.

Editorial address: 1 South Newington Road, Barford St Michael, OX15 0RJ. e-mail: editor224@nehoc.co.uk

