



From the Ride and Stride Administrator:
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Dear Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust Supporter

We felt that we wanted to send out a special newsletter about a very special event that took place recently.

Report and Pictures from our Royal Event at Dorchester Abbey

As some of you will know we were invited at short notice to arrange a Jubilee event at Dorchester Abbey on 25 April with Their Royal Highnesses the Earl and Countess of Wessex. The Earl celebrated his 50th birthday in March and OHCT celebrates its 50th birthday this year. We decided that this was a unique opportunity for us to show our thanks to the Ride and Stride community although even Dorchester Abbey could not hold more than a hopefully representative sample of all the many hundreds who make the Ride and Stride happen every year.

In the event some two hundred were able to attend despite appalling weather. After a short service with an address by the Bishop of Dorchester, the congregation were all able to meet their Royal Highnesses. The Earl and Countess cut our elaborate OHCT birthday cake for us. The Countess was then presented with a little posy of flowers and the Earl with a large commemorative mug specially created for us by Emma Bridgewater.

Gillian Argyle has given us a vivid report on the occasion and excerpt from the Chairman's remarks before the Royal visitors arrived set the context for the event. Please do read both sections and look at the pictures as they are both worthy and completely different articles.

You can also now view and purchase pictures of the event from the photographers' website (www.weddingsbynicolaandglen.com). The instructions on how to do this can be found on the link below:

<http://ohct.org.uk/about-us/50-anniversary-celebration/>

The Day it Rained Like Never Before on our Right Royal Occasion by Gillian Argyle (OHCT Council Member)

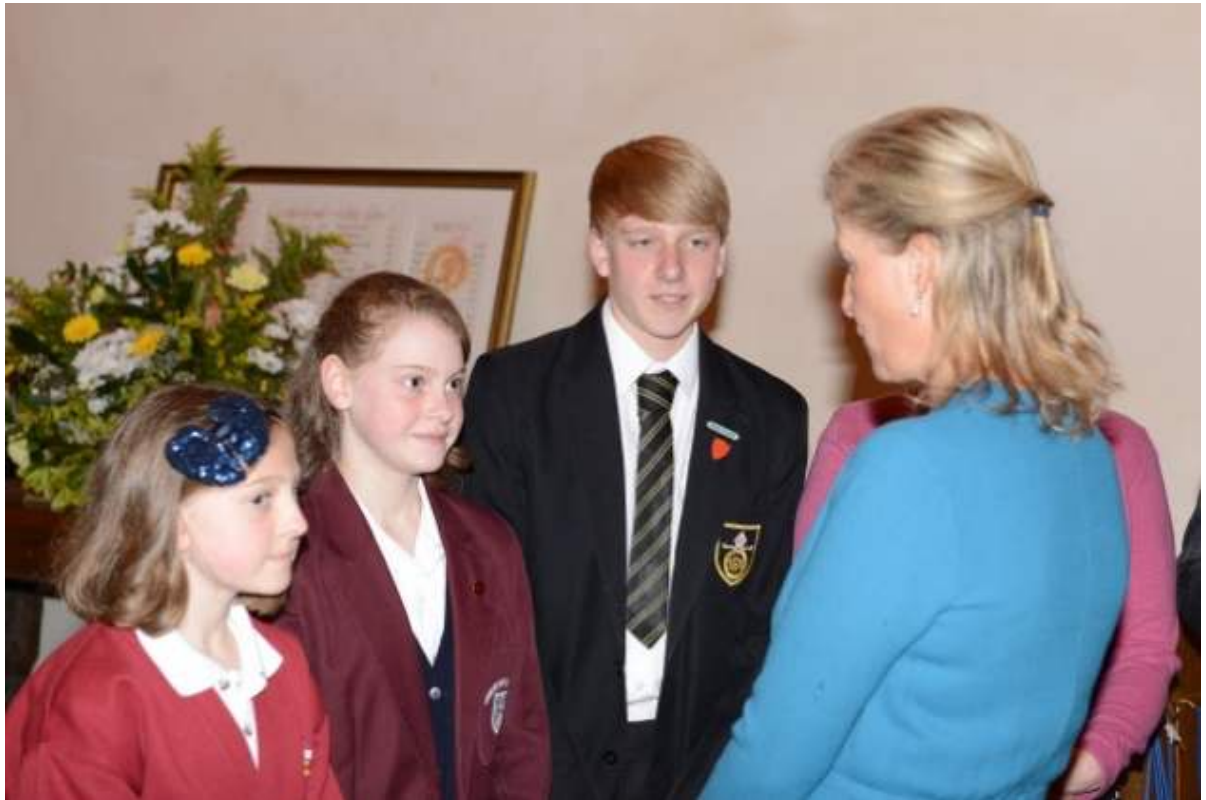
Didn't we have a lovely day the day we went to the Abbey? Yes, it was unforgettable.... it was the day the heavens opened and absolute torrents beat mercilessly down... through the roof of Dorchester Abbey, flooding the floor: pools of it (had it been arranged ready for the next grant application to OHCT?). It was all hands to the deck, and never have I seen such a distinguished line-up mopping away (our Chairman Basil, and Sir Hugo Brunner, and Canon Sue Booyes, all in their glad-rags....). And was it my imagination, or was it colder out than in? We'd all arrived ever so early and felt a bit shy at that stage anyway. We sat in beautifully-orchestrated order, dripping gently. BUT.... we are Riders and Striders; we let nothing get in our way, and the Earl and Countess of Wessex evidently feel the same and their helicopter did eventually get through the storms to us.

The moment they arrived, all was forgotten and we exhaled deeply, enjoying the small amount of necessary pomp surrounding their entrance; Lord Lieutenant MP, High Sherriff, Chair of District Council, OHCT President and Chair, the vicar of the Abbey and the local Monsignor (complete with vermilion and black robe and immaculately-ironed cotta – this is the sort of thing your correspondent notices). There was a right-on, smart Equerry and a very correct RAF cadet, who had earlier turned out to be a whizz at mopping.

So ... the Earl looked handsome, tall and lean. Countess Sophie in a turquoise coat-dress, not a hair out of place. We sang 'Now Thank We All Our God' (translated from the German by your proud correspondent's great great aunt, Catherine Winkworth) at the tops of our voices (OHCT needs NO choir) and the short service of Thanksgiving for our Jubilee included the Bishop of Dorchester's exhortation to keep up the good work, and prayers from the Monsignor.

Then, whilst the Royal couple looked at The Gallery, a project supported by OHCT, there was a tremendous, organised, intricate movement of people ('Stately as a Galleon' was what came into my mind) as we Riders and Striders got into our pre-determined roughly 8-person horseshoes according to area to be presented to either the Earl or the Countess. And it worked; Richard Lethbridge and Sue Tyser shepherded them round and everybody got their bit of what really seemed to be sunshine emanating from our visitors; they were brilliant at chatting informally and asking people about Ride and Stride. I think everyone there must have felt personally encouraged to do more this September as a result.





Then the cutting of the cakes (arranged as a bike); the commemorative mug for him presented by Robin Fieth in full cycling gear and a posy for her presented by Chloe Bramwell; they had done us proud. Thank you, Edward and Sophie!





After they'd gone we had a tremendous time meeting each other, drinking our coffee and eating our delicious cake. Your correspondent met lots of people she needed to know, and she hopes everyone else did, too. We went out into the continuing deluge well satisfied.
Roll on, Saturday September 13th!

Remarks for Dorchester, 25 April 2014 by Basil Eastwood (Chairman OHCT)

With your help we can make this a really record Jubilee year for the Ride and since this is a Ride and Stride occasion I should also thank its originators.

In 1986 Robin Cotton brought the idea back after visiting Suffolk. He persuaded the Trustees to "give it a go" and George Russell to organise it. Robin thought it might raise about £5,000. In fact we probably owe the two of them a couple of million pounds! George set up the whole Ride and Stride operation in Oxfordshire and was the County Organiser for many years. It is because of Robin that we have a Ride and Stride at all and because of George that ours is one of the most successful in the country. George announced at our last meeting that he was stepping down from the Council. Thank you George. We will miss you. You join Robin as one of our revered elder statesmen.

Finally and most important of all I must thank you for coming today and through you the whole Ride and Stride community. Last year's Ride and Stride raised a magnificent total of £127,343.95. All of that goes to help the hard-pressed churches and chapels of Oxfordshire, just over half of it via OHCT. The Ride and Stride is OHCT's single largest source of funding for the £150,000 or more of grants which we make every year to the churches and chapels of Oxfordshire for essential repairs and practical enhancements. We are very aware of all that we owe to the Riders and Striders, but today is the first opportunity we have really had to show our appreciation. So please take a message of thanks back to your villages and towns, to your congregations, your welcomers and of course to your Riders and Striders. Thanks and congratulations are very much in order – but complacency is not.

A year ago the OHCT Council went through an elaborate planning process and concluded that sadly we must base our plans on the assumption that many congregations (in country areas perhaps most)

would be less and less able on their own to muster the human and financial resources needed to keep their buildings fit for their threefold purpose – for worship, as valued heritage assets and as community resources. We need to do more both to broaden the basis of support for these buildings and in terms of money.

As a start we want to raise our grant-making from an average of 7.7% of the costs of the projects we support to at least 10%. That means an extra £100,000 a year - from £150 to £250 thousand a year. And the costs of those projects are inevitably going to increase. As some of you may know we are about to launch a campaign to kick-start an endowment fund by raising cash and pledges of legacies amounting to £3million. When we succeed that should produce an income of about £100,000 - eventually.

But that is a long term plan and a long-term investment. Even if we succeed, it will take at least five years to start producing a really significant income and it will do nothing to reduce the need for a steadily increasing income from the Ride and Stride for our current grant-making. 2013 was almost a record, but to keep pace with inflation we need every year to be a record.

To make this happen, the Ride and Stride needs to attract new participants and new sponsors - and not just from church-goers. I hope therefore that you can take back a message not only of thanks and congratulations but also that this year we should celebrate our Jubilee by attracting cycling groups, walking groups, toddlers groups, families and others. After all it is quite simply a wonderful fun day in the open air with some moderately healthy exercise interspersed with visits to interesting and welcoming buildings.

Why not stimulate healthy competition between parishes? Or pre-plan routes for group rides? Or have celebratory teas at the end of the day? Or copy the parish which organises a bikers' breakfast at the start of the day? And whatever you do, make sure it is all advertised in your local parish magazines or other local media. Churches should see this as an opportunity to bolster their roles in the communities around them.

For the really keen cyclists, Chris Brennan is planning a route which touches all five counties around Oxfordshire. For the IT enthusiasts there is our brand new website where interactive mapping enables them on computer or Smartphone to home in on all the churches in their area, to plan a route around them and to learn all about them before they get there.

Incidentally Bishop Colin and I will be following a pre-planned route for a sort of cycling pilgrimage around some of the churches in his new deaneries in the south of the county. We will post the route and timings on the OHCT website and others will be welcome to join us. We will probably be wearing these high viz jackets with OHCT and StRide logos. These latest fashion accessories will be available through our website for £8.00 each for adult sizes and £6.00 each for children's sizes (see www.ohct.org.uk Ride and Stride Paperwork section).

And don't forget to get all your Riders and Striders to get sponsorship through JustGiving. This has several advantages: it is much easier to collect the sponsorship; it is much easier for us to administer; and, above all, it makes it easy to attract sponsorship from outside the parish. Last year we even had some sponsorship money coming in from Australia.



Our website team is always on the look-out for good new photographs of the Ride and Stride for the website. Take lots of pictures and send the best ones in.

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