OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD REPORT OBR.44

Queens Row, Grove Street, Wantage

Introduction

The Oxfordshire Buildings Record are grateful to the owner, Mr Rowles, for allowing us access to this property for the purposes of compiling this report as a contribution to the OBR. Tim Cockerill and David Clark were able to spend about an hour there on 3 April 2008.

Figure 1 Queens Row, Grove Street, Wantage

Location

Queens Row was a terrace of cottages at right angles to Grove Street on the west side, south of the Abingdon Arms public house and separated from it by a further terrace parallel to the street, and Crooks Terrace, at right angles to it. See 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps at figures 2 & 3.

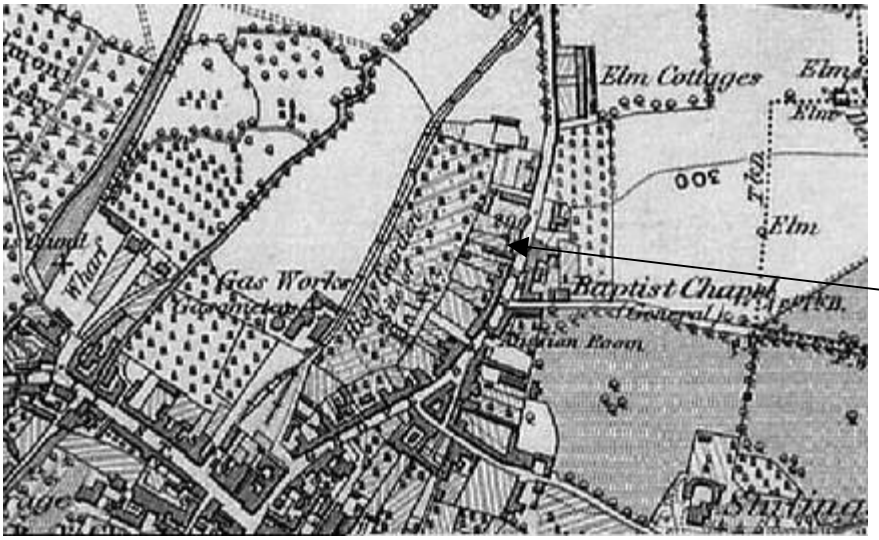


Figure 2: 1st edition OS (1876)

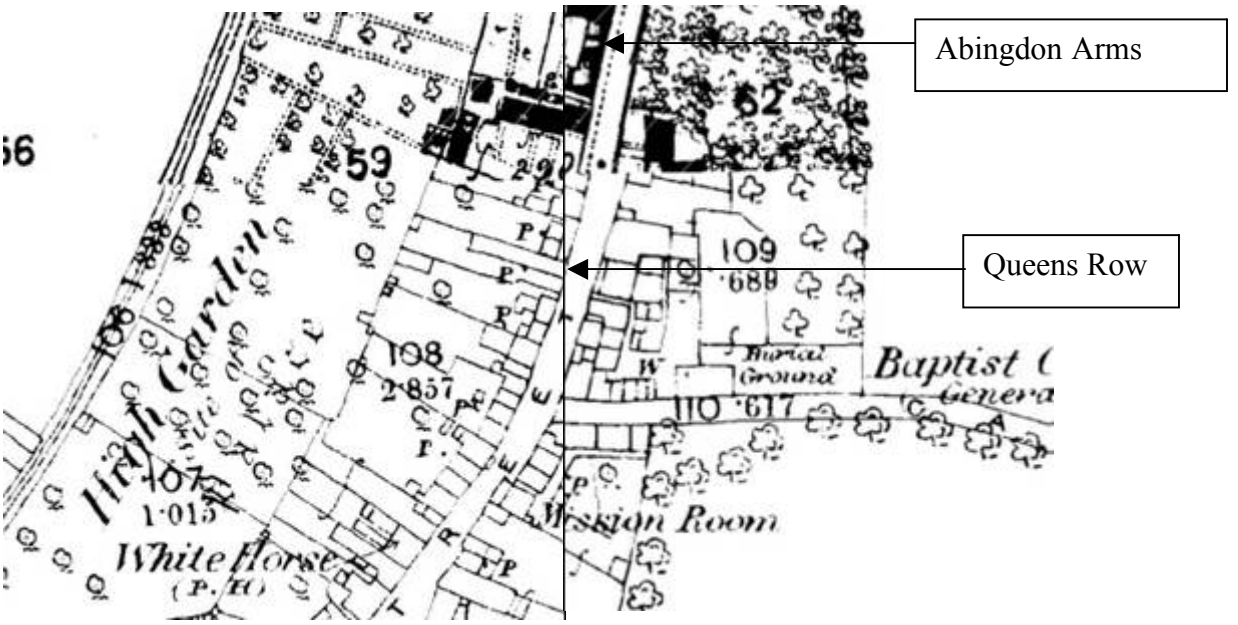
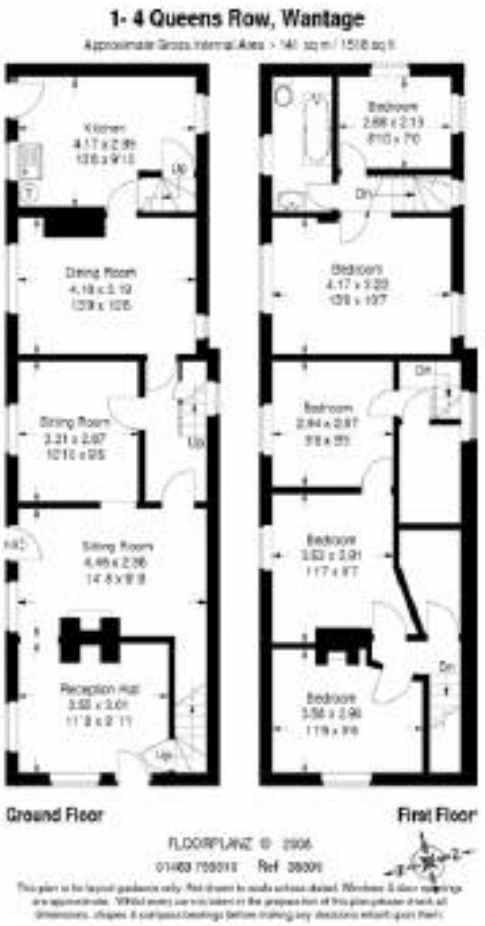


Figure 3 Detail of 1st edition OS map showing relationship of Queens Row to White Horse and Abingdon Arms public houses

Description



The Row seems to consist of a larger cottage at the Grove Street end, then three single-bay cottages. See floor plans in figure 4. These have now been connected at ground floor level, but one first floor partition survives.

Beyond these, and now demolished, were four further one-bay cottages, the footings of which can be seen in the yard behind. In addition, there was a wash-house and (presumably) toilets.

Figure 5 shows where two of the cottages were replaced by an open shed or garage.

The houses are brick-built, with a plain red tile roof.

Figure 4 Queens Row floor plans (Right Move)

Figure 5 Garage in foreground built on foundations of a cottage pair

Although there are significant differences in layout and construction (external wall thicknesses vary between the cottages) the internal walls are mostly stud partitions, and there are no party wall gables between the cottages (see figure 6 showing the roof space looking east).

Figure 6 Roof space looking east

The building history is complex, as many additions and alterations were made by the family of the present owner when it was used as part of a scrap and general dealer's business. Mr Rowles remembers much of this history, such as brick thicknesses, beams put in by his father, alterations to the staircases, the position of former doorways, and the provenance of features such as a 1950s fireplace from Swindon (figure 7).

Figure 7 1950s fireplace from Swindon

The internal doors are mostly of plain planks with Suffolk latches (no baseplates). One, however, is 17th century, but hung upside down. It has rails with paired pegs and run-out mouldings, small panels, but the dust ledge is at the top of the panel rather than at the foot (figure 8)

Figure 8 Internal doors in central cottage - a plank door on the right, and 17th century panelling on the left - both with Suffolk latches.

There are two stacks, one between the rooms of the front cottage serving four fireplaces, although only one of these has a grate *in situ* (figure 9). The other stack is between the last two cottages, where there were fireplaces to each of the ground floor rooms. There was also apparently a stack serving the ground and first floor rooms of the central cottage, but this has been removed.

Figure 9 Fireplace in upper front room

Although most of the fenestration is modern – some even consisting of metal windows laid on their sides – there is one small window to the rear (north) elevation (figure 10) with a turnbuckle catch. Although such catches can be found from the late 16th century onwards, the design is similar to one noted in a house of 1849 in Wiltshire (Hall (2005) p.90). The window itself seems much later, however.

Figure 10 Window in rear wall and turnbuckle catch

Some floorboards survive, and a survey of them might cast light on an earlier room arrangement, but this initial brief survey posed more questions about this than answers.

At the top of the central stairs – which had at some point been moved – was an unusual carved rail shown in figure 11.

Figure 11 Carved rail at the top of the central stairway -the stairs are to the left, the landing to the right.

Outbuildings

To the rear of the plot is a further garage-type building, now empty, but which at one time covered a manufacturing facility for concrete products. A set of old doors shown in figure 12 still has the prices of various items chalked up.

Figure 12 Doors with concrete item prices

The remains of a former wash-house were converted into a workshop, but all internal fittings had been removed by the date of this inspection.

History

It is believed that the buildings belonged at one time to William John Butler (1818-1894) who made Wantage into a model Tractarian parish and who founded the sisterhood of St Mary the Virgin in the town. As the terrace seems later to have had a bad reputation, things may have gone downhill after Butler went to Worcester in 1880 and subsequently to become Dean of Lincoln in 1885. His work in Wantage is recorded in a set of detailed diaries[1], and reference to Queens Row may possibly be found there.

The terrace lies between two public houses, the White Horse and the Abingdon Arms, which makes it possible to attempt an interpolation of census data to determine the number of inhabitants and their occupations during the period 1841-1901. This work has not been carried out.

[1] 'The Wantage Parish Diaries, 1846-80' Berks. RO

Discussion

Even with Mr Rowles detailed knowledge of the buildings and their history, there are features of the building which remain puzzling, such as the apparent different position of the west partitions to ground and first floors of the large front cottage. The west gable wall also needs examining to see whether it is original – and if so why there is a proper party wall here and not elsewhere. Nevertheless, the row seems to be the remnant of a terrace of the mid 19th century. It may have had a larger house next to Grove Street, and 6 or 7 small one-up-one-down cottages behind, but the room layouts are also consistent with a small end house and 8 cottages behind. The later alterations using salvaged materials make interpretation very difficult, but the building has considerable character.

Conclusion

The main consideration is whether the purchasers of the building will wish to retain it or demolish in order to create a modern residence. If demolition is proposed, then the building should be properly recorded, with documentary work on the census and Butler diaries and further oral history material from Mr Rowles.

D R Clark
10 April 2008

Bibliography

Hall, Linda (2005) *Period House Fixtures and Fittings 1300-1900* Newbury