

THE OXON RECORDER

Issue 15

SUMMER 2003



Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM on 18th May at Mapledurham, with a programme of visits afterwards arranged by Dan Miles, was a great success, attracting some 20 members and friends. **Gillian Harrison** reports on the day, with photographs and some additional material from David Clark:

Rough winds were having a go at the darling buds of May when we gathered in the timber-framed hall of the Old Manor on the Mapledurham estate - only just in Oxfordshire; another few yards would have taken us into the alien territory of Berkshire. We were there by kind invitation of Mr John Eyston, a descendant of the first owners (and also, incidentally, of Sir Thomas More), who together with Lady Anne Eyston owns the estate.

Chairman John Steane took us quickly through the business and when the meeting finished we were free to explore the main house and grounds.



Mapledurham House

The house itself has several curious features, not least the gable gleaming with oyster shells which in the days of Catholic persecution could be seen by traffic on the nearby river and indicated to those in the know that here lived a recusant family. On coming

into the entrance hall the visitor is met by a collection of animals' heads mounted on the wall, in the convention of many stately homes. But these are not flesh and blood, nor are they modern, as they look – a couple of centuries have passed since they were fashioned by hand, to illustrate various fables and sayings. They have a fanciful, slightly humorous, presence and undercut the potential for solemnity in a grand building such as this, so that it seems an informal family house rather than a museum.

The original handsome strapwork ceiling in the dining room echoes the wooden strapwork panelling which appears rather incongruously on the wall of a ground floor passageway, having been saved from a fire elsewhere in the house and needing a

home. More surprising is the last flight of the great oak staircase, on the top floor, which apparently gave the architect a headache – either that, or he got his sums wrong. It has two parallel sets of banisters. Only one serves the stairs; the other is purely decorative, to ensure that the view from the floor below is properly symmetrical.

A pretty little Strawberry Hill Gothic chapel is still in use by the family, built to look like servants' quarters from the outside to conceal the owners' religion. A disconcerting picture of a smirking Salome taking delivery of John the Baptist's head on a charger adds a robust touch to this otherwise delicate room.

In the grounds the small church of St Margaret contains an unusual side-aisle, built in the 14th century as a chantry chapel for the Blount family who owned the estate. It has fragments of decorative medieval glass, some from French monasteries (though unexpectedly secular in style), medieval floor tiles and family tombs, including a pair of the most sumptuous alabaster tomb effigies that I, personally, have ever seen. Though structurally part of the church, the Bardolf Aisle is still in family ownership and as a Catholic area of a C of E parish church, can only be accessed via a separate entrance.

Dan had 'laid on' several interesting buildings on the estate. The must-sees were Dan Miles' 14th century cruck cottage and his 18th century workshop, where between them his dendrochronology business is carried out. Dan demonstrated the slow and careful process of tree-ring dating. A sample core from a main section of the timber frame of a building displays the history of the original living tree in the pattern of growth rings from heartwood to sapwood. This can then be compared with records of the growth of similar trees elsewhere whose dates are known, to give the felling date of the piece of timber under study. This was particularly interesting to members because of the relative newness and importance of this method of dating buildings. The expertise of Dan and his colleagues is called upon all over the world.

The 17th century wooden watermill still grinds flour for its weekly output of bread and cakes. It is pervaded by the homely smell of grain and wood, with the soothing, regular clank of shaft against cog powering the great revolving millstones. The structure is sufficiently open for there to be levels at which the machinery can be seen in some detail by the visitor, aided by drawings that show the way the various parts relate to each other. There is something oddly moving about this simple and ancient technology, which has a beauty quite unlike that of 20th century equivalents.



Barn of ca1600 at Mapledurham Chazey

Also available on the estate were two magnificent barns, one from around 1600 in brick at Mapledurham Chazey, with massive tie-beams spanning the threshing floor, and another at Park Farm, dated by Dan to 1722/3, with - you've guessed it- truncated inner principals, but of a slightly different type from those reported in the last issue.



Aisled barn at Park Farm

Farm building recorders also noted a number of other structures at these two farms, never missing a chance to add to the dossier.

Such an embarrassment of riches could not be completely appreciated in one day. Perhaps those members who could not manage to attend the AGM will be able to find time during the summer to arrange their own visits to those parts of the estate which are open to the public, while some at least of the rest of us will make sure we return one day to see what we missed.

Editor's note: coincidentally with the above, OBR member Fr. Jerome Bertram, has provided the OBR with a collection of drawings, photographs and notes which he made while living at the farmhouse in Mapledurham Chazey. The domestic buildings here contain some very interesting features, some possibly dating from the 12th century, and Fr. Jerome's material will provide a valuable starting point for any future research on these structures.

UDCE Events

31 October – 2 November Housing for the Masses 1800-2000

A weekend school at Rewley House, in conjunction with the Vernacular Architecture Group. No-one can ignore the housing estates of the past 200 years, yet they represent changing responses to the demands of mass housing, and embody the aspirations and reflect the lifestyles of ordinary people in ways which are continually changing. This series of case studies from different parts of the country, including inter-war council housing in Oxford and the Railway Village in Swindon, should put this topic back on the agenda for serious consideration before demolitions, DIY and 'changing rooms' remove all vestiges of the original ideas and uses of these buildings. Information from ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society events

7 October: Beauty, Utility and Profit – the English Model Farm and Agricultural History. Susanna Wade-Martins, whose book on the English Model Farm came out last year, will give the annual OBR lecture to the OAHS at Rewley House, at 5.30pm. There were a number of agricultural initiatives in Oxfordshire which might be called model farms, but what exactly were these, and what part did they play in the wider development of agriculture in the 19th century? Details on www.oahs.org.uk

Burford Project

Another successful recording day was held on Saturday 3 May in Burford, during which most of the remaining tenements were measured and recorded externally. This completes the first phase of the project, and the information collected is being processed by VCH and OBR to underpin the next stages, which will involve a closer examination of some of the buildings, features and themes which are emerging.

There are two main areas of opportunity for those who would like to get involved in this stage of the project.



Hidden Burford. Guess where!

1. Detailed examination of individual buildings. The idea here is to look at one or at most two buildings per day over the summer, with small teams of three people. Most of the work will be internal and will involve some measuring, drawing and photography. As many of the buildings are commercial, many of these dates will have to be during the week. The first group of dates are as follows: Monday 14 July, Tuesday 29 July, Wednesday 6 August, Monday 1 September.
2. Work on individual topics. For those whose interests lie more in the area of exploring themes, there are also some research topics to get your teeth into, for example,
 - ❖ Cellars and Undercrofts
 - ❖ The Gothic Revival in Burford
 - ❖ Burford's garden history
 - ❖ Working class housing in Burford in the 19th and 20th centuries

Work done in either of these areas will contribute to the Victoria County History volumes on Burford, either the proposed paperback on the town tenements, or the 'red book' which will appear later. David Clark is responsible for the buildings parts of these publications, and will provide more details and full guidance on what is required, but all contributions will be acknowledged if they are used in the final output. Please ring David on 01865 516414 or e-mail to david.clark3@which.net if you would like to know more or sign up for a project.

Recording Days 2003: 12 July at Harwell – see flier enclosed. **20 September** – to be decided - send any ideas/suggestions to David Clark. We are keen to target unlisted buildings at risk, particularly of unusual types – Elliston and Cavell's former funeral parlour in Bainton Road, Oxford, drawn to our attention by Nancy Drucker, is a recent case in point, but unfortunately there was no time to do more than take some rapid photographs.

Oxfordshire Farm Buildings Survey

Since the last newsletter, John Rhodes has started on a database, and some recording has been done. Note that our first recording day this season will be on 12 July at the **Bishops Manor Barn in Harwell** – see enclosed flier. On the topics raised last time, **Heather Horner** writes:

In Issue 14 our Secretary introduced the Oxfordshire Farm Building Survey. The suggested way forward is to start with a quick recognisance of your parish. This is fine in principle, but could easily miss some of our more ancient farm buildings. It's sometimes a question of where to look.

In any area under study, the changing pattern of landholding has a profound effect on the siting of farm buildings. For instance, much of the ownership of land in west Oxfordshire has for centuries been in the hands of absentee landlords – very large private estates, Oxford Colleges, investment companies, etc. This meant that a fair proportion of villages had no resident Lord of the Manor, no Manor Farm or Home Farm. Almost all the farmed land was let out to tenant farmers, who in the 19th and 20th centuries at least were often incomers to the area. As old Farmer X found he could no longer manage his far field, tenancy was transferred to young Farmer Y, leading to fragmentation of holdings, and sometimes dramatic redistribution. Here's a couple of examples from near my home in South Leigh, between Witney and Eynsham.

South Leigh has several isolated farmsteads, typical of post-enclosure establishment of new farms on former open fields and village common lands. The present buildings, excluding some modern additions, appear to be 'Model' farmsteads, of local brick, dating from the third quarter of the 19th century. But the siting of these buildings was not arbitrary; enclosed in the farm complex are earlier stone-built field barns, as yet with few identifiable dating features. They appear on the earliest Ordnance Survey and tithe maps, and could well predate Enclosure at the end of the 18th century. If so, who built them, and what were they used for? Were they communal threshing barns? It is easy to miss these older barns on a brief inspection.

In the 1950's there were eleven working farmsteads in Eynsham, all sited in the village. The holdings had become extremely fragmented, and at milking time each day several herds would be simultaneously trying to pass each other to reach their respective milking parlours from outlying fields on opposite sides of the parish. The Land Agent for the owners, Oxfordshire County Council, carefully studied the maps of scattered holdings, and reallocated almost the whole of the parish into manageable units, building new 'green field' farmsteads on each holding in the currently practical materials: - sheet asbestos and breeze block, with a bungalow for the tenant. The old farmsteads in the village were mostly sold off, and are now barn conversion homes and trendy offices. The exception is Abbey Farm, on the site of Eynsham Abbey Home Farm, where the buildings, shelter sheds, barns and yards are still standing empty as they were left 35 years ago. They are in a poor state now, ripe for recording and probably due for development.

So the trick is to find out if there have been major changes to the farms in your area. A good starting point is to actually ask the farmers there now – quite often they're

delighted that someone is taking an interest, and you won't be able to stop them talking! I fully endorse the suggestion of approaching an unknown building on a bicycle, especially a farm: - you're not an 'official' on a bicycle, and hence not a threat. If you do have to approach by motor vehicle, try to do it on a weekend: - 'officials' don't work Saturday and Sunday, farmers do!

Thanks also to members who sent in reports of sightings of cranked inner principals. I now have 84 examples, mostly from South Oxfordshire, but also Bucks and Berks. Keep them coming, please – preferably with a sketch or photograph, as we are now identifying sub-types and need more detail.

Visit to the Chiltern Open Air Museum at Chalfont St.Giles, Bucks. 12 April.

Member **Alan Brodrick** sent in this report on the OBR visit:

The Museum has a large collection of vernacular buildings, both domestic and workplaces, of past generations from within the Chilterns area. They have largely come from sites under threat, but some have been donated from private estates. The site covers 45 acres of parkland and woodland and is a delight in itself.

The Chilterns being extensively wooded gave rise to buildings and industry employing timber. One building here involved both: Elliotts furniture factory from High Wycombe, being timber-framed and clad and producing hand made wooden furniture. There is also a Bodger's camp complete with pole lathe, where round chair legs & stretchers were made in cabins in the woods.

There are some 30 rescued and re-erected buildings and other objects on display and they are grouped mainly in "The Village Green", "The Working Farm" and "Wood End" areas, an excellent idea which makes them seem "alive" instead of being exhibits in cold isolation.

What is now the Museum admin. centre was a medieval timber framed hall house which had a first floor inserted before it came to the museum, and is now brick clad. The first floor has generous office space but because of the inserted first floor its users are presented with substantial timbers at tummy level, bearing notices saying "please mind your head." In 1913 the house was moved ¼ mile to avoid a new reservoir, and in the 1990s was given to the museum, including dismantling, transport and rebuilding costs, when threatened by quarrying.



The Leagrave Cottages at the Chiltern Open Air Museum

There are many other buildings such as large farm barns and byres, but it is the lesser buildings which are particularly appealing, for example the Leagrave Cottages. This early barn conversion has been re-erected to show in one cottage the c.1785 arrangement, and in

the other their state in the 1920s, the latter being founded on information from living memory. Domestic buildings in the museum are usually furnished appropriately, making a social as well as an architectural presentation. The 1950s pre-fab looks snug too, with its complete period furniture including the ducks on the wall. Although it has ducted warm air heating one can't help wondering what it must have been like in winter with paraffin heaters and steel framed single glazed windows.

A particularly endearing exhibit is a 2-storey timber framed and clad granary from Berkhamsted. The 2 storeys feature must be unusual in itself, but this building has markings inside showing the heights of the children to whom it was once given as a Wendy house!

Another is a compact Toll House from High Wycombe. Brick built in 1826 with faceted walls to facilitate watching the road approaches, it has many splayed bricks as well as a castellated roof line. I asked how they had managed to dismantle such a complex brick structure and put it together again correctly. I was told an out-of-control car had done half the job for them by reducing the front half to brick lumps which could only go together one way, and the rest was facilitated by the old lime mortar which lets go quite easily.

A large shed of 1919 houses the waiting-to-be-erected buildings. There are quite a number; appealing to those who like 3-dimensional puzzles. Financial restraints now force the museum to only accept buildings that come with funds for transport and re-erection. One nearly complete cruck barn needs £40,000 for the thatching alone, and they already have the straw: a specially grown mediaeval variety.

Items other than "proper" buildings add delight to the collection. A timber well-head mechanism, a K6 telephone box, the Tennis Pavilion from a private house. Privvies feature quite strongly, and, surprisingly, the cast-iron panelled public convenience from Caversham Bridge, Reading, is here. This latter was a great technical challenge as panels of cast iron do not willingly leave the frames they have been weathered into for 80 years. Only 6 of the hundred plus panels were damaged during dismantling and the rebuild was greatly helped by a very long list of specialist firms and individuals who gave their help and services free. The museum learnt new skills in the process - like welding cast-iron with stainless steel. The convenience is complete with all its original fittings and is available for visitors. The only lack is a sufficiency of helpers to keep the brasswork polished.

The Caversham Convenience with its delicately wrought ventilation fretworks, and decorative bas-reliefs all in cast iron, to say nothing of its splendiferous finial, highlights a problem for us all: how to make the mental jump from admiring an object seen daily, to realising it is becoming unloved or threatened and must be rescued or lost forever.

There are a couple of salvaged London Coal Duty posts on display. Do you know what they were for? Answer next time!

Editor's note: Our Chairman also wrote up this visit – it clearly brought out an urge to put pen to paper. It will appear next time if there is space.

AGM Report

Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the year 2002

Jessica Brod distributed copies of the audited accounts for 2002. OBR's funds on 31 December 2002 stood at £2322 and we had a surplus over the year of £240. The OBR's main expense during 2002 was £4999 spent on equipment and almost entirely financed by a lottery grant. In addition we spent £462 to support our archiving activities. The main running costs in 2002 were recruitment and publicity (£177 for the recruitment leaflet) and insurance, (£176, now including insurance for equipment).

Membership had risen to 90 by the end of 2002. 59 members had filled in Gift Aid Forms, which have the effect of increasing their subscriptions by 28 percent. 40 members were paying their subscriptions by Banker's Order. The treasurer ended by thanking the auditor, Martin Greenwood, for his audit of the 2002 accounts.

Secretary's Report and matters arising

The Secretary reported that in 2002 OBR had built on the groundwork laid in the previous year very successfully. As most activities have already been reported in the newsletter, this note highlights key points. Lottery Bid for equipment - measuring, safety and photographic equipment, is available for loan to all members and groups.

Building Recording – the report on Hill Farm, Little Wittenham was submitted to the Northmoor Trust at the end of the year. A number of members had examined other buildings in the county and reported on these at a presentation day held in November. Members were encouraged to seek out and record buildings on their own initiative, without waiting for an official recording day.

Local Groups - a number of local initiatives were in place; the future of OBR probably lies in this direction. Getting to understand how things work locally was the basis of developing wider understandings, but there needed to be continuous interchange and feedback. The Committee was keen to assist local groups to get started with building recording, usually by setting up recording days for a pre-existing local history society. Ruth Gibson drew attention to the need to re-invigorate the Henley group, which had done much valuable work in the past. There was probably a need to find a local person with the time and energy to lead it. Any volunteers?

Dendrochronology - the OAHS scheme for part-funding of dendrochronology work on Oxfordshire buildings was now in place. Anyone interested in finding out more should contact John Steane on 01865 514044 in the first instance.

The following were elected to the committee for 2003/4:

John Steane	Chairman	Tim Cockerill	Safety Officer
David Clark	Secretary	Pat Harding	Committee Member
Jessica Brod	Treasurer	Gillian Harrison	Committee Member
Grant Audley-Miller	Committee Member	Heather Horner	Newsletter Editor
Tony Blay	Committee Member	Bridget Rudge	Events Secretary
David Birkett	Committee Member	Simon Townley	Committee Member

The OBR are extremely grateful to the Oxfordshire Preservation Trust for their generosity in supporting the production of the Oxon Recorder and to Awards for All in supporting our work to record the built heritage of Oxfordshire