

THE OXON RECORDER

Issue 16

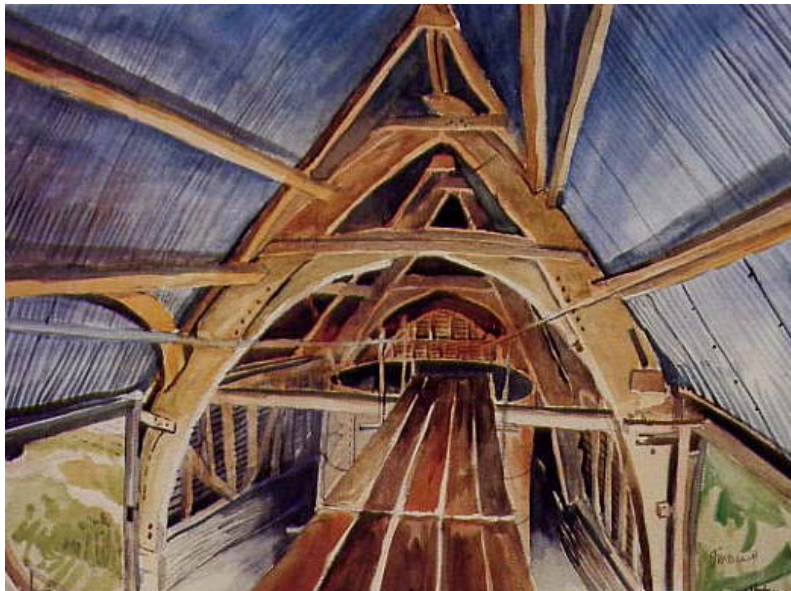
AUTUMN 2003



Farm Buildings – note by the Secretary

I hope you have been able, despite the very hot spell, to get out and about and have a look at some farmsteads and farm buildings. I have managed to see a few, partly as a result of following up some examples of ‘cranked inner principals’ – see Issue 14. One aspect of this, however, was to note the number of barns which have been converted to domestic use. Some conversions have respected the original structure quite well - Lower Farm in Denton comes to mind, while others retain one ‘agricultural’ elevation, while totally destroying the integrity of the other – look at Court Farm, Warborough if you want an example. Thanks to everyone who supplied examples, photos and drawings of barn roofs – we now have a database of over 100 examples of this type of roof.

For an excellent overview of barns, their use and history, do not miss the exhibition, *Crucks, Flails and Rats* created by our Chairman, John Steane, illustrated with some of his wonderful watercolours of a number of Oxfordshire barns.



The 14th century cruck barn at Rectory Farm, Northmoor. Copy of watercolour by John Steane

The exhibition is currently doing the rounds of Oxfordshire museums and will be at Woodstock until mid October, then the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies in November and December, the County Record Office in January and February 2004, at Cogges Manor Farm from March to May, Wantage in June and finally at Great Coxwell Barn in July and August next year.

John draws attention to animals in barns and to unsuitable barn conversions. In this context I came across these two press items, which make an interesting, if sad, contrast.



While the existence of a bat colony can help ensure that the barn is not converted, there is another side to this coin, as another recent press report showed. The Paston Great Barn in Norfolk, from 1581, is one of the finest barns in England. Its association with the Paston family, whose letters provide such human insights into life of a major family in the Middle Ages, adds to its interest. I was privileged to visit it some years ago on a Vernacular Architecture Group conference and marvelled at its confidence and presence in this small Norfolk village. It was acquired by the Norfolk Buildings Trust in 1996 and restored with a grant of £250,000 from English Heritage which should have ensured public access. However, English Nature have now designated it as an SSSI because a colony of rare barbastelle bats have taken up residence, and taken a 50-year lease on the barn to prevent public access which they argue will damage the breeding prospects of the bats. *Sub specie aeternitate*, however, the barn is preserved and available to future generations, which is what really matters.



The Paston Barn, 1581, Paston, Norfolk, in 1997

One very interesting group of buildings caught my eye near Rowstock, in the heart of the fruit growing area of Milton Hill above Steventon. There are three identical structures, largely derelict, off a farm track parallel to the A417 road at SU 474 895. At one time thatched, with a gabled roof, two large doorways on one side and an hexagonal porch on the other, what on earth could they be? See the picture on the next page.

Closer inspection showed the remnants of fruit-picking ladders, not unexpected as the maps show orchards in this area until a few years ago, but there were also large water tanks and the remains of some form of structure around the walls at waist height with a concrete splash-back.

As we seem to be creating a tradition of leaving readers with questions to be answered in the next issue, this will be the ‘puzzle picture’ for this issue. Come to the Presentation Day in November – see the flier enclosed - and you will get the answer somewhat earlier!



Field barn at Rowstock

While on barns and picking up on loose ends from earlier issues, Dan Miles has reported that he has managed to dendro-date the barn at Mapledurham Chazey (issue 15, p.2) to 1610.

At the other end of the farming spectrum is the so-called ‘model farm’. The OBR Lecture for the OAHS this year is on this subject and will be given by Susanna Wade-Martins on 7 October – 5.30pm at Rewley House. Do come. The study of the model farm in Oxfordshire was given extra impetus this summer when a group of my students on the Certificate in Vernacular Architecture recorded a number of the structures and features of the model farm at Coleshill, their work feeding in to a wider examination of this huge complex by the National Trust in order to guide its future use.

The farm at Coleshill was innovative in a number of ways, and made use of a sloping site to save energy in preparing food and transporting it to the animals which were fattened indoors. Come and hear more at the Presentation Day.



Cattle fattening stalls at Coleshill with central passageway for a tramway

I hope this long editorial has triggered off some ideas about what to do in looking at farm buildings, and why it is important. The survey of Oxfordshire’s farm buildings will be an on-going project for OBR, so do write in with your own ideas and findings. We will have a session on this at the Presentation day on 15th November, too.

Burford Project

Only one (correct) answer was received to the ‘guess where?’ puzzle photograph in the last issue. It showed the 15th century north wing behind 111 High Street – Castle’s Butcher’s shop as it is usually known. This, and its neighbour, 113, have early origins, and at one time formed a superior dwelling, probably for a merchant, in a key location in the town.

Work has continued during the summer on a number of aspects of the project. Five significant buildings were examined in some detail: for Calendars in Sheep Street, 109 and 115 High Street, we had the benefit of the expertise of Elizabeth Williamson, Architectural Editor of the Victoria County History and Nicholas Cooper, an architectural historian and author of a fine book on the houses of the gentry. David Sturdy helped sort out some of the complexities of the Bull Inn and on the way by bike to the Cotswolds, my wife and I spent a night in the Highway Hotel which allowed a closer examination for the roof trusses – almost too close as we were in one of the upper rooms which was enlarged in the 1920s, leaving a huge principal rafter sticking up through the floor in the centre of the room!



Inside one of the bedrooms of the Highway Hotel

The list of topics given in issue 15 still stands, and other suggestions are invited. Please contact David Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ, 01865 516414 or david.clark3@which.net if you wish to help on this project over the winter.

Newsletter Editor

It is with great pleasure and a degree of relief that I am able to announce that Heather Horner will be taking over as Editor from the next issue. Please send letters, articles, etc to her, at Windrush Cottage, Station Road, South Leigh, Oxon OX29 6XN, telephone 01993 773819 or e-mail either to hahwindrush@aol.com or heather.horner@physiol.ox.ac.uk.

The tentative copy dates in future will be 1 December, 1 March, 1 June and 1 September.

Visit of OBR to Chiltern Open Air Museum. Saturday 12 April 2003

Although we have already had a report on this visit, our Chairman, John Steane, also wrote about it, and I make no apologies for printing it here, as it offers a contrasting perspective on the museum and its prospects.

Ten of us, led by Bridget Rudge, our committee member in charge of events, gathered in bright sunshine amidst the vernal treescape on the forecourt of the Chiltern Open Air Museum (COAM). Our guide for the tour was bearded John Hyde-Trutch who welcomed us with coffee in his office and answered with courteous efficiency shoals of questions before starting the tour. We benefited from his profound understanding gained from a 'hands-on' approach; he had personally been responsible for the re-erection of a number of structures on the site.

The Chiltern region is particularly vulnerable to development inimical to the retention of vernacular buildings; its proximity to London, the blight of the motor-car which brings thousands of visitors, its ready attraction to wealthy (and often ignorant) commuters who convert ancient buildings beyond recognition, the extractive industries of chalk, brick-earth and gravel, all mean that the shrinking stock of vernacular buildings is constantly under pressure. Moreover, the traditional way of life of the Chiltern woodsman is also fast vanishing. The museum performs a triple function. It involves the locals in recording and thus conserving their local environment, particularly its historical dimension; it rescues buildings otherwise eliminated without trace; it records a culture otherwise quickly forgotten.

COAM has been going now for twenty years and has gathered into its fold some thirty buildings threatened with demolition. They included the iron sheeted, cast-iron framed public lavatory from Caversham, complete with ceramic urinals and washbasins dating from 1906, and the minute timber framed and tiled Maidenhead tennis pavilion of 1926. Set amongst characteristic Chilterns landscape of coppice, scrub, woodland and floratically rich hay meadow are farm buildings, timber framed on dwarf brick walls, weatherboarded and covered with thatch or tiles. Most of the buildings have been dismantled from their original sites and re-erected by volunteers. The boys from Berkhamsted School, for example, had helped to take down the Rossway granary. It was heartening to think that so many friends of the COAM had given freely of their time for this major communal project. The OBR, we felt, had lessons to draw from this in terms of long term voluntary commitment to a worthwhile project.



The COAM does not have all the answers about the buildings in its care. As we walked round we noticed that the Arborfield barn, a magnificent example of cruck construction, ca 1500, from Berkshire, was shrouded in a blue tarpaulin. The thatch, only 20 years old was already slipping badly and £40,000 was needed to renew it.

The Arborfield barn in better days

Similarly, the first attempt at reconstructing an Iron Age house had ended in disaster with the roof falling sideways and the whole needing to be demolished. Also, as a special privilege we were taken inside the yawning hangar which was stuffed full of the bits from fifteen buildings, dismantled but not yet erected. Each, we were told, would stay there gently decaying and prone to mix-up, until sufficient finances could be raised for re-erection. There was a feeling that COAM had bitten off more than it could chew.

We ended our visit by lunching on excellent soup and sandwiches at the museum café sited in the High Wycombe furniture factory. OBR wishes COAM well and we thank Bridget for arranging such an enjoyable and informative visit.

John Steane, Chairman

Forthcoming Events

13/14 September: Heritage open days. See local press or websites for details of which buildings will be open to the public this weekend.

20 September: From Jacobean to Georgian: the evolution of the Georgian house. Day school at Cressing Temple organised by the Essex Historic Buildings Group. A wonderful collection of medieval barns, and a day packed with insights and information from some of the leading experts in the field: James Ayres, David Yeomans, David Martin, Neil Burton and David Stenning.

Recording Day probably in the Boar's Hill area, with farmhouse and farm buildings—see flier enclosed. Those expressing interest will be sent full details.

7 October – Model Farms – Rewley House 5.30pm. See Issue 15 for details.

11 October – Oxfordshire Local History Association day in Goring-on-Thames with the Oxfordshire Buildings Record.

The OBR have joined with OLHA to put on this day event which will show how the study of standing buildings can help the local historian, give some pointers on how to record buildings, and some case studies. In the afternoon there will be a walk in Goring to look at some of the buildings of the village and explore how it developed. OBR members are welcome. To attend, see the flier enclosed.

25-26 October: Tudor and Stuart Handwriting

A practical weekend school at Rewley House, providing hands-on guidance in reading and transcribing documents of the 16th and 17th centuries written in the Secretary Hand characteristic of the period. Information from ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

8 November: Private Lives, Public Places

A day-school at Rewley House celebrating the work of Joan Dils, whose contribution to many aspects of local history, particularly in Oxfordshire and Berkshire will be well known, I'm sure. Information from ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

15 November: Presentation Day – see enclosed flier

18 November: The Oxford Canal at Banbury

For this OAHS lecture at Rewley House, Steve Litherland, of Birmingham University, whose team carried out an appraisal of the historic canal buildings of Banbury, will explore some aspects of the canal which are now being celebrated in style at the new Banbury Museum and newly restored Tooley's Boatyard. Details on www.oahs.org.uk

2 December: New Dates for Old Buildings – Dendrochronology in Oxfordshire

Dan Miles and Julian Munby will present the results of tree-ring dating in Oxfordshire to the OAHS at Rewley House at 5.30pm. With a leading exponent of the scientific dating of timbers and one of our foremost building historians, this meeting is unmissable. Details on www.oahs.org.uk

Coal Duty Posts

Alan Brodrick's report in issue 15 of our visit to Chiltern Open Air Museum ended with the question "Do you know what Coal Duty posts were?" He gives now the following answer:

The simple answer is that they were of cast iron or stone, set up in the C19 to mark the boundary where tax was payable on coal being brought in to the City of London.

But what was coal duty for? In the Middle Ages, the City of London exercised its right of "metage" to tax coal being brought into the Port of London. Coal invariably came from Newcastle by sea, so no marker posts were needed at this stage.

A chronology is the most concise way to illustrate their history:

- 1200's Orphans' Fund established. For orphans.
- 1666 Great Fire of London. Funds needed for rebuilding.
- 1667 First Rebuilding Act. Coal Duty is increased. This and the Orphan's Fund allowed the rebuilding of St. Paul's, many City churches, Guildhall, Newgate Prison & City Markets.
- 1694 Act for "The Relief of Orphans and Other Creditors to the City of London" as the City was still in debt. This act allowed a further increase in Coal Duty, and additionally, a Wine import tax.
- 1851 Act sets up Coal and Wine Duty marker posts to define where duty became due, as coal etc. was now coming in to the City by road and rail as well as sea. The posts were approximately 20 miles from the Central Post Office.
- 1861 Coal & Wine Duty Continuance Act re-sets boundaries at Metropolitan District limits. The funds raised in the C19 were used for many public works such as street paving, bridge building, new roads, The Embankment, Holborn Viaduct, and the purchase of many Thames bridges to free them from Tolls.
- 1889 Coal Duty repealed.

There are some 200 Coal Duty Posts existing today (2 in COAM), mostly Grade II listed. There are 4 types:

Type 1. The majority. Cast iron, 1m above ground, 1m below. Beside roads & footways, including in woodland for the benefit of smugglers trying to avoid them.

Type 2. 4.2m long, of stone or cast iron, beside railways before 1861.

Type 3. 1.5m high, cast iron with City shield to each of four faces, beside railways after 1861

Type 4. 1.2m high, granite, with metal shield with City Arms. Only a single example, on Thames towpath at Walton-on-Thames, believed to have been relocated there from New Haw Lock in 1861.

Websites

More and more people are using the internet to obtain up-to-date information. This is the case even for a subject like vernacular architecture and in the past (issues 4, 12) we have printed lists of useful sites. Now that most the listed building descriptions are available, and in many cases, photographs, the Images of England website (www.imagesofengland.org.uk) is a very useful data source for listed buildings, but it has some annoying features and the proof-reading of the entries is appalling. Special interests are well catered-for example in sites like that for the stone-roofing association (www.brookes.ac.uk/geology/stonerroof) or the corrugated-iron club (yes, really) at www.corrugated-iron-club

Local authorities are also putting information on websites; some materials from planning departments giving guidance on care and conservation of historic buildings can give useful insights into the vernacular character of an area, including the use of traditional materials. One site drawn to my attention by Gillian Harrison is East Hertfordshire – at www.eastherts.gov.uk/guidnote/timber_framed_buildings/introduction.htm. You can also download and print a booklet on Small Rural Dwellings in Wales – Care and Conservation, from the CADW website. Of course this information is usually also available in hard copy, and the Chilterns Conservation Board have recently produced an excellent Technical Note on Flint buildings, written by James Moir. For further information visit www.chilternsaonb.org

Finally, do look at the websites of other building recording groups. For a model, try Norfolk at www.nhbg.fsnet.co.uk

Publications

David Clark has a supply of back-numbers of ‘Vernacular Architecture’, the journal of the Vernacular Architecture Group, which are available for sale to non-members and at discounted rates over the original prices. They are even cheaper if he can give them to you in person at an OBR meeting. For a price-list e-mail, phone or write. 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ, 01865 516414 or david.clark3@which.net.

The Vernacular Architecture Group is the national body for the subject. As well as the journal, members can attend two annual conferences, a winter one in London on a specific topic, and a spring one in a different part on the country. This involves visiting a wide range of buildings in an area – town and country, domestic, agricultural, and industrial where appropriate – all giving a unique insight into the building history of the area, and always a very stimulating and sociable event. Membership forms also available from the Secretary.

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