

THE OXON RECORDER

Issue 17

Winter 2003/4



Rookie Newsletter Editor

It is with some trepidation that I take over editorship of the Oxon Recorder. This represents a totally new challenge for me, not least in learning how to manipulate words and pictures in a computer. It takes several hundred years to create the complexity of alterations and changes that we try to unravel as we examine a building. So far, it is taking just a few minutes to make comparably complex tangles in the computer, with no clear understanding of how I got there. Things will get untangled, though I can make no promises that you will get fancy layout and arty lettering. Thanks for help and support from the previous editor, David Clark, and former editor, Gillian Harrison. Contact information at end.

Heather Horner

Publicity and Membership

We have produced a new edition of our publicity leaflet, which includes a membership application form. If any readers know of a good outlet for targeting potential members, please ask one of the OBR committee for a handful of leaflets.

Subscription renewal

Included with this newsletter is a blue sheet with your subscription renewal request (unless, of course, you pay by direct debit – saves paper and the Hon. Treasurer's sanity). Please consider ticking the **Gift Aid** section, it means we can reclaim tax you have already paid.

Does anyone want a project?



Elizabeth Leggatt began a study of water towers, particularly focussed on Oxfordshire examples, some time ago, but feels now that she would like to hand it over to someone else. This ought to prove an interesting subject, and could be approached from a number of angles. Coincidentally, Barry Barton has just published the results of his 8-year study of the subject – 'Water Towers of Britain', available from the Newcomen Society (01359 242566). Some of Elizabeth's work has been included in the book, but I am sure there is a great deal more work to be done on the Oxfordshire examples. If you would like to pick up the reigns on this, please contact Elizabeth directly on 01993 811334, or write to her at Fletcher's, 116 Grove Road, Bladon, Oxfordshire OX20 1RA.

Left: A concrete helter-skelter water-tower at Wappingthorn in Sussex

A SMALL HOUSE IN ABINGDON



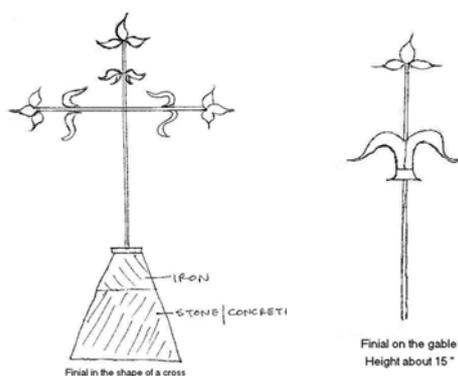
MAP REFERENCE: SU 4997

At the south-east corner of Albert Park in Abingdon there crouches a small stone building with a steep conical roof, facing the road and with its back to the tennis courts. The local children believe that a witch lives in it. Adults usually think it is a rather fanciful garden hut, housing the gardening implements for the park keeper.

It is actually a conduit house, and served the immediate populace with drinking water from at least Tudor times until the late nineteenth century. The Department of Environment listing (grade II) describes it as sixteenth century, although it may be older; sections of the surviving stone channels which led spring water to the building have been dated to the fifteenth century. Certainly the 1554 survey of Abingdon by the King's Surveyor, Roger Amyce, refers to a small stone water-house in the same position, which is taken to be the present building.

At the time of the Amyce survey the area was known as Lacies' Court and was farmland, which had belonged to Abingdon Abbey until its dissolution in 1538. The conduit house was subsequently given by the Crown (then in possession of Abbey property) to the newly founded Abingdon charity Christ's Hospital, which still owns it.

The gravel terrace on which Oxford and its surrounding settlements were built provided plentiful wells and bore-holes for private use. For the public, religious bodies and groups of local citizens sometimes organised a supply of potable water by means of parish pumps, although these did not come into general use until the sixteenth century because of the poor quality of the pumps. Until such time, gravity had to suffice. The conduit houses which were found throughout the country relied on this principle to channel water downhill to local fountains or wells for public consumption. The cisterns inside these conduit houses were fed by springs or streams, providing a head of water and a constant supply.



The stone work show signs of more than 600 years wear and tear

The site chosen in Abingdon was already well provided with such sources, which had been in use for several centuries. A thirteenth century reference in the title deeds of the Guild of Our Lady alludes to “the watercourse of Carswell”, the name Carswell deriving from the watercress which the abundant water caused to grow freely in the area until the late nineteenth century. At some time before the Amyce survey someone – perhaps the Abbey or maybe Abingdon burgesses – decided that the *ad hoc* use of these natural supplies by local people should be ended by creating a more formal system. I have not been able to discover exactly when this was. If any reader can help, I should be very grateful to know.

The output of nearly all the springs was captured and induced to flow into a cistern, over which the conduit house was erected as protection. The contents of the cistern were then channelled southerly downhill in an open course to a fountain which served the Ock Street area of the town. This system worked well until 1875, when a mains water supply for the whole town was installed and the necessary underground work in the area disrupted the supply of water from the springs. The cistern was filled in and the conduit house became a temporary store for ammunition.

This sad small building is presently empty except for the two sections of fifteenth century stone channels mentioned above. Each of its six walls is roughly 7'6" (externally), with a dark green door in one of them. These walls are made of a mixed selection of ashlar, the blocks varying in size and shape and colour, in places clumsily patched with handfuls of concrete. Graffiti (the most accomplished dated 1815) decorate – or scar, depending on your point of view – some of the walls. The green door is less romantic than it may sound. It is probably twentieth century and the top half, where originally there seems to have been glass, has been covered with a sheet of metal crudely tacked on; this deprives the interior of its only source of light, and was perhaps done to inhibit the plants which try to grow inside.

Over the doorway is a small stone gable. The conical roof is half the height of the entire building, covered with stone slates and pleasantly mossy. It is crowned by a delicate iron finial in the shape of a cross (recently renewed), and it juts out over the walls at an angle of 45 degrees to form eaves – there is no gutter. The effect is of a little fairy-tale house in a wood (not a rigorous academic description, admittedly).

The condition of the interior is poor. The internal face is very lumpy; it appears that the building is lined with rubble, haphazardly covered with accretions of plaster and paint, sometimes on top of untidy repairs. In places damp has caused plaster to rot and some stone underneath to crumble. There are a couple of shafts which were obviously designed for ventilation, but they are partly blocked and ineffective. The remains of the cistern are no longer visible, and the floor is covered with a mixture of brick and stone. There is no evidence of any water rising through the

floor of the building, but the damp is pronounced and cannot be doing the place much good. Cobwebs straddle the door, indicating that no-one has opened it recently. It has not even been thought to deserve a notice telling the public what it is. It may be a fairy-tale house but the witches deserted it long ago.

I have used several sources but the most useful is the article by A E Preston entitled 'The Carswell (or Castlewell), Ock Street, Abingdon' in the Berkshire Archaeological Journal number 45.

Gillian Harrison

We make no apologies for reprinting this report from Alan Brodrick, originally written for the newsletter of Twbas, The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society

Summer outing to **CHALGROVE MANOR**, 6th July 2003

Chance and accident seem to be the operative words for the recent story of this magnificent timber-framed mediaeval manor house. Since Paul and Rachel Jacques [founder members of OBR – ed] bought it in 1977 there has been an on-going string of discoveries of hidden timbers, of lost mouldings, of built-over paintings and other delights. A water leak revealed fine timbers behind a ceiling when it fell, and retrieval of a dropped screwdriver from a dark corner uncovered the extraordinary wall paintings. The exterior was completely rendered over when they first saw it but the jettied cross wings signalled the timber frame lurking within.

There was a moated manor on this site in about 1255 but there is no trace of that today. The present building has three basic phases: the right, North, wing has been dendro-dated to 1444-1468; in 1488 the timbers for the roof of the central, Great, hall were felled, and the timbers for the left, South, range were felled in 1503-1505.



Detail of the magnificent roof structure of the former great hall of Chalgrove Manor (photo D Clark, 1999)

The right wing is an oak box-frame with arch bracing to walls and roofs. It was probably the Solar to an earlier hall, now gone. Its upper room, known as the Chapel, was probably consecrated in either 1564 for the dons escaping the plague in Oxford, or in the C17 when the Royal court moved to Oxford, escaping the

plague in London. This structure is bolted, curiously, to the present Hall using iron "forelock" bolts & wedges as are the arch braces to the cambered collars of its roof. The fireplace in the ground floor room was built on in the C16 and is a building in its own right being a huge "inglenook" with seats, and with its own brick and stone walls and its own tiled roof, with the brick chimney towering above that. This room, now the dining room, was later used as the Buttery to serve a new Great Hall which is now the central range of the house.

The "new" Hall of c.1490 had a central hearth and rose up through two storeys into the arch braced roof with central louvres to let the smoke out. At one end of the Hall was the raised dais, now gone, for the lord and his family, and the other end, behind the Screen, was for entry and service, having the Buttery, Pantry and Kitchen as well as the front and back doors. The screen itself is amazing. Not only has it survived, it was "discovered" in its original position, though bricked up in perhaps the C18. The Screen was dated to about 1240. Some of its mouldings had been hacked off so it would fit nicely within the new walls, but enough has survived to show it to be a very fine piece of oak craftsmanship. It has been very well restored and a new section made to replace a missing one.

Paul Jacques is quick to point out the mason's joints in the Screen woodwork as opposed to carpenter's joints. The carpenter would make his joint between horizontal and vertical members at 45deg., at least through the mouldings. The mason though made his joint to run straight through horizontally, so having to carve the turn of the moulding into one member, but having a flat bed on the underside to place it on. This probably stems from the difficulty of handling and placing heavy and chippable pieces of stonework.

The front door itself is framed oak 5'0" wide and 4" thick and hung on the most massive hinges you ever did see. The back door frame presents a problem as it is an unusually fine piece of work for such a position. Was the house turned round? It's missing moulded head piece turned up underneath some floorboards.

The South Wing, added c.1505, was probably the Parlour for the Lord of the Manor. It is of similar construction to the earlier parts, including arch bracing to the roof slopes.

The Parlour walls display extraordinary patterning which at first glance appear to be timber panelling made of the end grain off a 4'0" diameter log. In fact they are painted on the plaster panels and all over the timber framing as well. These panels, feather painted, are probably unique and got the experts very excited. (It was interesting to note that Casein was used in these 1680 paintings mixed with Shotover ochre. The contractors currently renovating the timber framed cottages behind St. Mary's in Wallingford are going to use casein mixed in the render to weather the brick panels between the timbers. I wondered what experience there was for such a new-fangled chemical in building. Chalgrove provided my answer!)

The general arrangement of the Manor is basically similar to Flint House in Wallingford, (the Museum) being a Hall house with a cross wing at each end. There had been a porch over the main entrance with a Porch Room in it at first floor. There were also garderobes, but only their stone channels remain to be inspected today. Apparently one benefit of garderobes positioned near wardrobes is that the ammonia keeps the moths away! "Perfume to be mothballs or ammonia today Madam?" Younger parts of the house employed elm when the oak forests were used up, and it shows. The roof slopes of elm are quite wavy beside the even planes of the older Oak.

Thank you Tracy Roslyn and Judy Dewey for organising this trip, and the sunshine. A big thank you to Paul and Rachel Jacques who have researched their house history most thoroughly, including not just its structure and who owned it but the judicial and administrative aspects over the Manor estates as well. After many years of hard work they were only too pleased to pass on their knowledge, and especially their enthusiasm.

Alan Brodrick

South Oxfordshire Building Plans

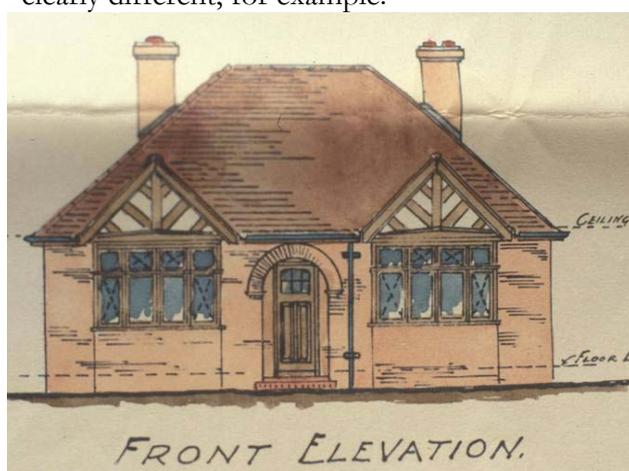
Note by The Secretary

Work has started on the SODC Building Control plans – see *Oxon Recorder* 14 – and to date two sessions have been held at Mapledurham to look at the boxes stored in Dan Miles' garage. We are now very conscious of our responsibilities to the Oxfordshire Record Office in handling this material, so our aim was to interfere with it as little as possible, but to try to identify material which could be of interest to building historians, and make a note of the building, and the nature of the material on it. In this first tranche, most of the boxes we looked at were marked 'for ORO', so we just looked to see what there was, and, to be honest, we felt most of the material was of marginal interest at the moment, and could easily be left for them to catalogue and conserve in the fullness of time.

However, there were some packets of building plans relating to houses, cottages, and farm buildings, from the 1920s to the 1950s which were of more interest, and so we have given these numbers in our own database. Thus, although these will be formally part of the South Oxfordshire Archive, we will know what there is, and be able to direct enquiries to the appropriate place, even if the entire archive has not been catalogued.

As well as the beautifully drawn and hand-coloured plans, the files also contained a number of letters and other documents which shed light on the social history of the times, especially during and just after the second World War. For example, one gentleman pleaded with the local council to approve the building of a house in which he could install his three unmarried sisters who were suffering badly from the bombing in Portsmouth. Appeals on the basis of having served the war effort were features of both domestic and agricultural projects. Among the latter, there were a number of new cow-houses, presumably aimed at supporting a growth in dairying. New houses are often bungalow types, now under threat as they were small with limited facilities.

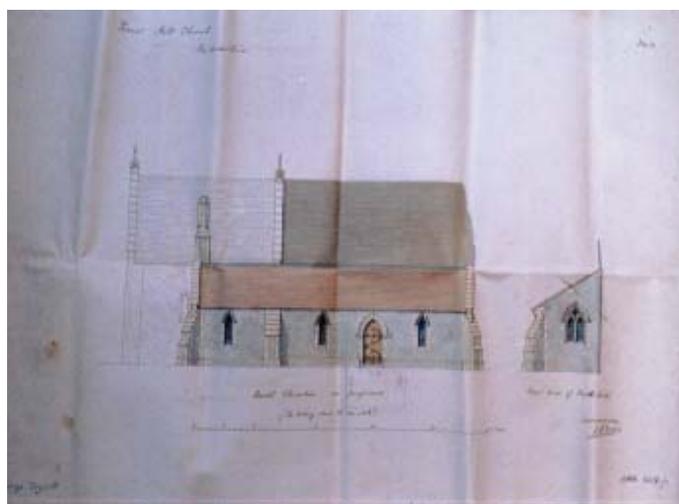
Below are a pair of pictures which show that research on 1930s bungalows may throw up some interesting points – there were a remarkable number of these in Goring, many, as below, virtually untouched since they were built. The availability of these fairly basic houses is clearly still filling a need today, and while some have lost chimneys (central heating) and windows have been replaced (double glazing), there are no large extensions overshadowing the houses. The photographs also suggest that the houses may not have been built exactly as planned – the faux-timberwork is clearly different, for example.



Mr Smith's bungalow, Gatehampton Road, Goring: 1937 plan (top) and 2003 photograph (right)

We have now started to record the architects and builders in our database, especially useful for anyone who wishes to research the early 20th century building industry in Oxfordshire, although it

is noticeable that clients often use architects from elsewhere, notably London. We have also found some gems – the plans of a ‘modern movement’ bungalow of 1963-4 in Harpsden by Francis Pollen, praised by Pevsner (p.635) and a watercoloured drawing of a new part of the church in Forest Hill signed Geo. G Scott. It was also signed by the builder, George Wyatt, and by ‘Soapy Sam’ Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford. We know from Pevsner that Sir George Gilbert Scott built the north aisle in 1852, and this original drawing had been used in 1942 as the basis for some further work.



As we are dealing with plans, there is no guarantee that the buildings were ever built, or that they survive. Even if built, they are generally without a street number or name. It would thus add greatly to the value of this archive if we could find and photograph the buildings as they are today, and note their addresses. If you would like to do this for a parish or village in South Oxfordshire, please contact the Secretary (details at end).

Left: Sir George Gilbert Scott's drawing of Forest Hill church.

Oxfordshire Local History Association day in Goring

On 11 October, members of the OBR led the discussion at a one-day meeting of OLHA focussing on buildings as historical evidence. Chairman John Steane led off with an introduction to the study of vernacular buildings using examples from his deep knowledge of the buildings of Oxfordshire. Then Secretary David Clark opened a session on what the study of buildings can offer the local historian with a case study on Lower Berrick Farm. Jessica Brod then described some work she had done on a Marcham building, and during questions we were able to tell the group about the SODC documents, and showed some of the Goring plans which had been rescued (see O.R.'s *passim*).

After lunch, the group was split into two and John and David led walks around the village, including to the barn of the former Goring Farm, where the owners made us most welcome and took us around the farmhouse exterior as well.

Rowstock Field Barns

In the last issue, David Clark printed a picture of an unusual agricultural building at Rowstock, and asked for suggestions as to what it was for. The answer is as intriguing as the question: the picture showed one of five identical barns built 1910 by Sir Mortimore Singer (an heir of the American sewing machine dynasty) as shelters for brood mares on his newly established stud farm. As such, they are an interesting reflection of a vernacular style adapted to this function. The thatched roofs, in particular, are strikingly ‘local’ in this respect, even if the brickwork is factory produced and functional. The splash backs inside may have been related to washing or drinking facilities for the horses, or may be later installations. In later years they were converted by the apple and fruit growers in the area for use as storage barns. Sadly, two at least are dilapidated and the thatch is decaying. At one time they had planning permission for conversion to holiday homes, but this does not seem to have been implemented.

Presentation Day

We are aware that some of our members have a keen interest in our aims but do not necessarily have the time to commit to taking part in recording. The annual Presentation Day, held in November each year, is our opportunity to demonstrate the results of a year's recording. Saturday 15th November 2003 saw a disappointingly small number of members assemble at West Oxford Community Centre for a series of short presentations, which included an update on the Burford project from David Clark, a synopsis of results of our first 'recording day' of the year at Bishop's Manor Farm, Harwell, from Heather Horner, a fascinating introduction into the use of CAD (computer aided design) for reconstructing Henwood Farmhouse which was the subject of our second 'recording day', from Alan Brodrick, and finally an overview of the sorts of questions that are emerging as we embark on our 'Farm Buildings Survey', from David Clark. Aply chaired by John Steane, and with excellent cakes from Bridget Rudge, it was a pity there were not more members presents to enjoy the occasion. Do suggest how we could make the event more attractive to our less active members. Add on a visit to an interesting building in Oxford? Try to find another venue? WOCC has the advantage of on-site parking within easy reach of Oxford city centre.

Forthcoming Events at Rewley House 2004

More information from ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

3rd & 4th January: The Nineteenth Century Aristocratic Townhouse. Last weekend in a short series on town houses of the wealthy.

10th & 11th January: Victorian Towns and the Census. This practical course will provide guidance on the analysis of census returns for local and family historians. Topics include retailing, growth of industry, domestic service, education, railways. Advice on individual projects available.

31st January: Oxford Parks and Gardens. A day school. The findings of recent research will illuminate some of the Oxford Parks and Gardens of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Tutors include our Chairman, John Steane.

6th – 8th February: Villages and Landscapes in the Middle Ages – Recent Surveys and Explorations A weekend school. The surveys employ various disciplines such as archaeology, history and geography to pose questions concerning how the English countryside evolved between 400 and 1600.

23rd – 25th April: From Rood-screen to Parish Church: The Changing English Parish, 1400 - 1700. A weekend school. The English parish before and after the Reformation, what continued and what changed? Addressing theological, economic and administrative aspects, as well as the liturgy within its changing artistic, architectural and musical context.

OAHS Lectures at Rewley House 2004, all Tuesdays at 5.30pm

20th January John Steane: Abingdon, the built environment 1300-1540

3rd February Robin Darwall-Smith : The lost medieval quadrangle of University College

17th February Dan Poore: Excavations at Oxford Castle 2003

2nd March Alison McDonald: The evolution of a flood-plain landscape: Port Meadow, Yarnton and Pixey Meads

16th March Malcolm Airs: Wallingford in the late C20: conservation and change in a small market town

Copy date and contacts

Copy date for Issue 18 is 1st March 2004. Please send articles, information, letters, reviews, etc. to me, Heather Horner, at Windrush Cottage, Station Road, South Leigh, Oxon., OX29 6XN, telephone 01993 773819, or e-mail hahwindrush@aol.com

The Secretary is David Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford, OX1 2HQ, e-mail david.clark3@which.net

Do have a look at our expanding website at www.obr.org.uk. Comments and contributions welcome.

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