

# ***THE OXON RECORDER***

***Issue 20***

***Autumn 2004/3***



Editorial reminder on contents of this issue, so you can come back later for more information

Recording Day Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2004 (enclosure)

Presentation Day at Radley, Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2004 (enclosure)

Scarfs and Cranks

Radley Old Vicarage

Proposed excursion to Hampshire buildings and brickworks Tues. 16<sup>th</sup> August 2005

Signet Farmhouse & note on recording farm features

Burford update

Virgil in Abingdon

Carpenter's cutting list for a 3-bay house c 1600. Preliminary note.

Heather Horner

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**Chalgrove Visit**



The OBR visit to Chalgrove church and manor on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2004 had maximum support from members. In the morning, the unique series of medieval wall paintings in St Mary the Virgin church were ably explained by Robert Heath-Whyte, author of a recent book on the murals. After a walk around the village guided by useful notes abstracted by our secretary, we reconvened at the Manor (photo above), to be guided round in 2 groups by owners Paul and Rachel Jacques This included a caving-type squeeze through an aperture beside one of the

chimneys, well worth the effort when we found ourselves inside the roof trusses of the open hall, complete with housings for the smoke lantern. The extensive tour was delightfully rounded off by our hosts serving tea and home made cakes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century dining room. Our thanks to all concerned, not least David Clark for organising the visits.

Owners Paul (centre) and Rachel (right) Jacques introduce fellow OBR members to their house.

(Some of you may have noticed the manor featured in the TV series *Midsomer Murders* on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2004)



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**Scarfs and Cranks**

One of our guests on the Chalgrove trip owns The Malt House in Garsington, and he invited me to visit it. What a glorious building! Altered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to house a wheelwrights', the general form of the maltings survives, including the kiln stack and remnants of the walls. For collectors of carpentry examples, three of the roof trusses are of the dropped tiebeam with cranked strut variety which we have seen in the stables, Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, and elsewhere. (Malcolm Airs noted them in the Co-op stores in Dorchester recently while building work was going on.) The purlins were joined with secret-bridled scarf-joints, squint-butted with edge-pegs. This terminology comes from Chris Currie's 1972 article on 'Scarf-joints in North Berkshire and Oxford Area' *Oxoniensia* 37 pp.177-186. When the Abingdon Buildings group were looking at the roof of an office building in Ock Street a few days later, the same joint turned up again, so two more examples to add to the list. Unfortunately this scarf-joint seems to have a long time-span, so cannot be used to date buildings. There is a project here for someone to revisit Chris's article and try to expand on the examples – surely work done in the past 32 years should allow an update to be made?

David Clark

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**Radley Old Vicarage**

Four OBR members helped the Radley History Club develop their interests in building recording by leading teams working on the medieval timber-framed Old Vicarage. Jessica Brod, Heather Horner, Gillian Harrison and the secretary guided them on what to look for and how to record it. A few days later, Dan Miles took a look at it as there had been a suggestion that the internal timberwork might be of softwood. He confirmed, however, that it was elm, with oak only for the exposed exterior posts and studs. None of it seemed datable by tree-ring analysis. Since then, I have sat in on the group's meetings. They have a collection of high definition

photographs, and have drawn up a workable floor-plan from which a basic chronology has been worked out. Some members of the group will now investigate documentary sources: as an Abingdon Abbey property before the Dissolution, there may be surviving documents relating to it either in the Abbey or St Helen's records, or in the various papers relating to the Dissolution in the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (copies in the Bodleian) or in the records of the Court of Augmentations (which managed the disposal of monastic property). Finally, the group will also try to determine the original function of the building by looking at similar buildings elsewhere: what functions were exercised in a jettied building close to a church in the Middle Ages? Answers on a postcard, please!

David Clark



Radley Old Vicarage

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## New Book

There is a new book out (at least, new to me) this year by R. W. Brunskill, the most accessible writer for both novices and experts in the study of vernacular architecture. It is called **TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS OF BRITAIN; an introduction to Vernacular Architecture**, and is a revised edition of the volume first produced in 1981. This time it has been published by Cassell and costs £25 (soft-back). It differs from his **Vernacular Architecture; An Illustrated Handbook** in that its approach is different - instead of categorising buildings by features (doors, roofs etc), it has chapters with such headings as 'How did the buildings develop?' and 'How can we arrive at a date?'. I find this very helpful, even though some of it inevitably overlaps with the **Illustrated Handbook** in details. Lovely photographs, too.

Gillian Harrison

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## Hampshire Excursion Tuesday 16 August 2005

As you know, we don't have an events secretary at the moment, and so our activities have been based on ad hoc arrangements as and when I can get round to doing something. However, the committee have agreed that as an experiment, we would try to organise a joint excursion with OAHS next year to Hampshire, visiting a working brickworks in the morning and some worthwhile buildings in the area in the afternoon. At Micklemersh we will see various manufacturing technologies, including those for hand-made bricks. In Romsey there will probably be a choice of tours: one to the magnificent Romsey Abbey, the surviving part of a massive nunnery, and another to 'King John's House', a very interesting multi-phase building incorporating 13<sup>th</sup> century and later elements. You will be able to choose which tour to take, but there should be time for a quick personal visit to the other property at the end of the day. The excursion will be by coach, starting from Oxford (centre and Redbridge P&R) but there will be a self-drive option (no reduction in cost, however). OBR members will get priority booking when the official notice comes out before Christmas, but please book early, as spare places will revert to OAHS in April.

David Clark



**King John's House, Romsey**

### **Signet Farmhouse**

Following our work on recording this building in May, John Guest followed up the documentary material and has shown that the farm was of 257 acres, belonged to the Reverend Caswall and was first leased to the Tuckwells in 1795. We know a great deal about the agriculture practiced at Signet around 1800 as Arthur Young, the Secretary to the Board of Agriculture reported extensively on it in his Oxfordshire volume. Tuckwell's use of oxen was notable at this late date, but he held they could work as fast as horses. He also bought rags in Witney to plough in to improve the soil. We concluded that the original house was at right angles to the road, and then extended by a range parallel to the road. The rear windows were consistent with a late 18<sup>th</sup> century date, so perhaps the Tuckwells were responsible for its construction. The lack of a threshing barn on the farm suggested that perhaps at one time it formed one farm with that to

the south, but John's work showed that they had been separate from the start, and that the barns for the northern farm were some way from the farmhouse.

The front range was re-roofed in 1857 (there was a date on a tiebeam) and this date also marked a change of ownership, always a good time to rebuild or alter a house. Further changes were made with a new owner around 1871, when Tuckwell's distant shelter sheds were replaced with those now standing in the centre of the hamlet.

John also recorded in some detail the barn at Signet South, a valuable record of a building likely to undergo conversion in the future. It had been used as stabling in the 1970s, if not before. Gandolfo, the trainer of 'The Dickler', which won the Cheltenham Gold Cup in 1973, ran his business from the farm.

David Clark

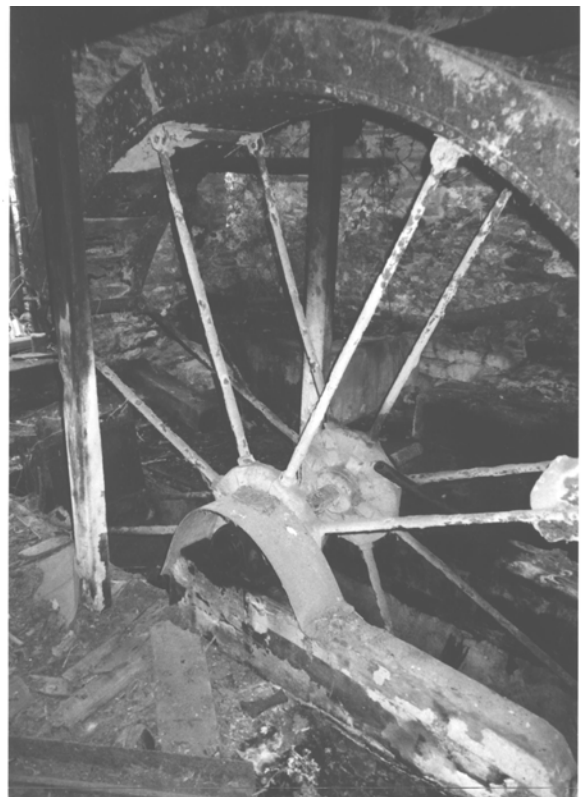
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### Recording Farm Features

Right: The remains of the breast-shot water wheel at Signet Farm. It probably supplied the motive power for a separate ram pump to lift clean water to a tank on the valley side.

The report on Signet Farm (above) reminds me that adjacent to the farmhouse, the extended farmyard retains an extensive system of water management features. These include a set of watercress beds, a pumphouse with breast-shot water wheel for supplying clean water up to a tank on the valley slope above the farmhouse, and an intact sheepwash with sluices. Our limited resources at the farm did not give us time to record these features fully. OBR member Mary Castell, who is an authority on sheep husbandry through the ages, recently sent me this letter.

Heather Horner



Dear Heather

I wonder if it is possible for you to remind your readers, that when farm buildings are recorded the farm pond should not be forgotten. Farm ponds and village ponds were often paved or cobbled to allow carts to be driven into them, in order to swell the spokes, which often became loose in hot weather. Fords were also used for this purpose, as in Constable's painting *The Hay Wain*. I have asked the Wychwood project to make volunteers on their *Pond Restoration Programme* aware of farm ponds, and to poke around in them with a metal rod, before a cobbled base is discarded under the impression that it is yet another dumped load of builders' rubble. The cobbled base of Wilcote Farm pond shows clearly when the pond dries out.

Mary Castell  
Ramsden Heath Farm

### Abingdon Oddment

If you're waiting for the bank to open or are just hanging about in Abingdon, take a look at the first floor level of **Ciro Citterio**, the building on the corner of Bridge Street and the Market Place. Just above the signs telling you that you are in the Market Place and how to get to the Parish Church you will see a short, rather dark nameplate reading GEORGICS V. How old is it and what on earth does it mean?

You'll never guess. For a start, it is quite modern - put up in the early 1990s. It has no connection with King George V, as some people have suggested. But it does refer to Virgil's set of poems about agriculture, known as *The Georgics*, although he only wrote four.

The building was bought a decade ago by a local agricultural company (they bred pigs, among other things). The new owner's wife had studied Latin literature and thought that it would be a good idea to pay tribute to Virgil by giving the company the name of an imaginary fifth *Georgic*. I don't know if Virgil was very sound on pigs but he might have been tickled by being associated with Italian fashion.

Gillian Harrison

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### Carpenter's Cutting List for 3-bay House, c 1600

A couple of months ago, I chauffeured my partner to a local record office. While waiting for him to complete his particular project, I was idly flipping through the card index of deposited records when one description caught my attention – *Detailed notes of scantling of timber for frame of 3 bays. c1600*. I requested the document and waited with some trepidation while it was fetched from the controlled environment storage. I have never had occasion to examine the genuine written artefact of this age before, and did not know what to expect. A large cushion was placed before me, and a set of weighted beads to hold open the very stiff pages of the document. To my untrained eye, it appeared to be a fairly random collection of accounts and bills, on various sizes of paper and parchment, some folded, and roughly sewn into a booklet. On the reverse of an account for some building repairs submitted by a carpenter, there is a list in the same hand which appears to be the numbers and dimensions of timbers for a complete 3-bay framed dwelling. I transcribed as much as I could decipher, though I have yet to learn the conventions of both the handwriting of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the accepted style of translating into modern typescript. It is premature to try to fully model the frame without confirming some as yet unrecognizable words. Still, I have enough information to see that there is a recurring dimension of *16 fots and a half in length*, for sills and wallplates, possibly the bay width, another of *19 fots* which I think is the depth, and a third of *14 fots* which is probably the height. At least part of the structure was floored with *66 joists 9 fots in length 5 inches one way and 4 another*. which, if supported on a spine beam, should just span front to back, but the only 'spare' timbers in my preliminary sketch are *Two simmons [?] 16 fots and a half in length, one fots one way and 11 inches another way*. I am puzzled by *Two paire of blades in length 15 fots and a half and 5 inches in thickness and in breadth 8 inches*, and *Two beams 19 fots and a half in length in thickness 7 inches in breadth 14 inches in the middle and 9 inches at the small*. If these are the roof trusses, why only two? An open hall bay? A combination of cruck and box framing? By this date an integral chimney is likely. And of course the bays don't all have to be the same width. There's quite a way to go before I can visualize the whole frame, and hopefully produce a scaled drawing. I shall be seeking help both with the handwriting and the carpentry jointing conventions. Any offers?

Heather Horner

### Burford update

A number of you may be wondering what has happened to our joint project with the Victoria County History on the buildings of Burford. This has been 'on-hold' for the past year because of delays with the VCH lottery bid, and so any work done by OBR volunteers, although the results would be valuable in themselves, would not figure in the 'collaborative' work required under the bid rules. One benefit of the 'gap year' has been that we have been working through the tenement survey OBR did last year, Robert Peberdy of the VCH adding names of owners and occupiers, while I have been relating this data to the buildings to identify any further recording requirements for when we can start up again. Watch the newsletter for details of future activity in Burford.

David Clark

[Editor's note: I intend to participate in the OUDCE course which plans to relate surviving wills and inventories from Burford to the buildings, and even rooms, in the tenements. See 'Forthcoming events' p8 this issue]

Heather Horner

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### Reversion to cruck technology

On a recent visit to Woods Hole, Cape Cod, USA, I spotted this interesting reversion to the old technology using the strength of the cruck frame. My rather hazy photo is of the inside of a settler's barn of 1857. The tie beam has an original integral turnbuckle and chain tensioning system to the roof truss. When the barn was re-sited recently to use as a museum, a new cruck of laminated timber has been added as reinforcement.



Heather Horner

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### Forthcoming Events

**Certificate in Vernacular Architecture** 2-year part-time OUDCE course, Thursday evenings at Rewley House, + field trips and recording time. Year 1 starts October 2004. Contact course convener David Clark (address below) or Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA. Tel 01865 270308

**Vernacular Buildings Worldwide** 10 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> October, Mondays 7.30 – 9.30. John Steane (OBR Chairman) introduces students to the worldwide ways in which people shape buildings, and buildings shape people. Factors such as building materials, climates, economics and ideologies all affect the form, style and decoration of dwellings. More information from [ppweekly@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ppweekly@conted.ox.ac.uk)

**Exploring Burford's Past 1550-1700.** A 10-week course on researching the probate inventories of Burford, starting on September 30th. The tutor is Mary Hodges, whose knowledge and experience will help guide participants through the intricacies of the documentary side of building research. This will be of interest to OBR members who have worked on the buildings themselves. The group will meet on Thursday mornings from 10-12 and the results will feed in to the VCH work on Burford, as ours will. The meeting place will be the Quaker Meeting House, Pitts Lane, Burford. More information from weekly class enrolments office, Ewert House, Ewert Place, Oxford, OX2 7DD, 01865 280893/280895.

**Families, Fields and Farms: Sources for Village History.** 10 weeks from 4<sup>th</sup> October, Mondays 2 – 4pm at Church House, High Street, Bodicote. Deborah Hayter will guide both experienced and novice historians into sources for researching village and community history. More information from weekly class enrolments office, Ewert House, Ewert Place, Oxford, OX2 7DD, 01865 280893/280895.

**Oxfordshire Small Towns: Henley and its Counterparts.** 10 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> October, Mondays 7.30-9.30 at Christ Church Centre, 46 Reading Road, Henley-on-Thames. Dr Simon Townley [VCH and OBR] will explore the development of Oxfordshire small towns from the Middle Ages to the present, focussing on Henley and making comparisons with other small towns such as Witney and Burford. Details Sandra Clarke, Wildwood House, The Ridgeway, Boars Hill, Oxford, OX1 5EZ Tel 01865 735560

**29<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> October : Vernacular Buildings and the Hearth Tax.** The annual Oxford meeting of the Vernacular Architecture Group, this year in association with the Centre for Hearth Tax Studies, Roehampton. Held at Rewley House, Wellington Square, Oxford. More information from [ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk) **Note : filling up fast – all residential places already full.**

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2005: The Making of the English Landscape.** A one-day conference celebrating 50 years since the publication of Hoskin's book, and his influence on subsequent landscape studies. Speakers include several distinguished OBR members. To be held at Christ Church, Oxford 10am – 4pm. Contact [www.academic-study.com](http://www.academic-study.com) or Academic Study and Travel, 3 Whites Forge, Appleton, Oxon OX13 5LG

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### **Copy date and contacts**

Copy date for Issue 21 is 1<sup>st</sup> December 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](mailto:hahwindrush@aol.com)

The Secretary is David Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ, e-mail [david.clark3@which.net](mailto:david.clark3@which.net)

Do have a look at our expanding website at [www.obr.org.uk](http://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