

THE OXON RECORDER

Issue 22

Spring 2005



Reminder of the contents of this issue, so you can come back later for more information

Recording day at Caswell, Saturday 16th April 2005. Flier enclosed

OBR AGM, Saturday 21st May 2004 (with walking tour of Henley) at The Chantry House, Henley. Flier enclosed. Those planning to attend please let David Clark know by 18th May, so that we can organise your free lunch. Guests welcome

Recent Investigations :- Lower Berrick Farm, Church End Farm, Kettell Hall.

Oxford City Group. Report from a new group monitoring buildings at risk, including boat-building and car repair workshops.

Burford project update

Raising the profile of OBR. Reports of 2 public 'local history' events at Wheatley and Abingdon

OBR deposit agreement with ORO

Lots to squeeze into this edition, so rather tight layout! Heather Horner, newsletter editor

Lower Berrick Farm – dendrochronology

Members may recall that some years back, we held a recording day at Lower Berrick Farm, a house with many interesting and unusual features. We also tracked down a lot of documentary material, but in the end were still puzzled as to the dates and phases of the building. The roof structure consisted of two quite different parts, and a timber-framed building seemed to have been encased in clunch at some



later date. Now, thanks to the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society's scheme for grant-aiding dendrochronological work, we have firm dates for some of the timbers, and a basis for a clearer understanding of the building's history. In essence, the left-hand structure dates from around 1550, and the right from 1613. The latter is perhaps confirmation of the initial ownership history which we proposed after our recording day. John Hambleton was a churchwarden in the village in 1615, and the family owned a six-hearth house in the 1660s. However, we were originally led astray in our assessment of the dates and phases by the apparently early carpentry of an arch-braced collar-beam truss in the right hand part. This shows that only scientific techniques such as dendrochronology can give reliable dating evidence, and that one must be wary of dating on stylistic grounds alone.

David Clark

Oxford City Group

The group (seven members and two guests) met for the first time on 19th February 2005. We agreed that proposed demolitions, particularly of workshops, were a major priority, but alterations and demolitions of pubs, shops and houses might also contain features of interest. We would review this as we gained experience. We will follow up an offer from OPT to let us (*via* Peter Ledwith) know of potential recording candidates, and will try to get a direct line to applications from the City Council. All members were invited to look out for candidate buildings and inform David Clark (contact details at end).

Building champions

When an interesting building was identified, Pete and David would try to find a member of the group to ‘champion’ the building. The main job was to contact the owner and arrange to visit it. If seen to be worthwhile, they would call on other group members to help record the building. The initial list is as follows:

Osney Mill turbine building.
 River Hotel, Botley Road
 Swan Brewery (former malthouse)
 Hutchins and Green (Builder’s yard)
 Salter’s Boat-building shop, Brook Street.
 Jericho boatyard forge

If you were unable to attend the meeting, don’t hesitate to join up – as either an ‘eyes and ears’ and/or as a ‘champion’: the more people who join, the better the jobs can be spread around. Contact David Clark for further details.

Salter’s Boat-building shop



Norma Aubertin-Potter briefly exchanged her usual workplace – Hawksmoor’s immaculate classical Codrington Library – for the dusty and semi-derelict boatbuilding shop of Salter’s Steamers down by the Thames at Brook Street. This was a purpose-built structure probably of the 1930s in concrete, with concrete houses attached at either side. Joined by the Secretary, a brief survey of the upper and lower shops was carried out, both almost

entirely devoid of architectural features, but intriguing as to the way they were used – there being only one stairway to the upper floor - and that accessible now only from the street. Follow-up will include interviews with long-serving staff members to try to capture the atmosphere of the building – where many of the university and college boats were built.



Car workshops, Worcester Place



Another structure scheduled for demolition, the Secretary visited this to compare the structure with the original plans. These – and those for many other city buildings – can be found in the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies. The plans were dated 1878, but were missing the name of the original owner and the intended use of the building. It comprised a long open work area on the ground floor at right angles to the street, with a ‘shop’ above. At the rear were a stable with three stalls, and a harness room. In a wing along the street frontage were the office and a store.

A wide doorway led through the plot to the stable and dung container to the rear. There was no evidence that the stable and associated structures were ever built. A few years later we know it was W F Parker’s cycle workshop, then a car repair shop. Perhaps the day of the horse passed away between the submission of the plans and the construction of the building? The interior of the workshop in 1935 is shown in a photograph in ‘Changing Faces of Jericho’ by Julie Kennedy (1997), page 31.

Alterations to the office included the creation of an additional doorway from the street opening into a counter area which can be served in two directions, one from the former office, another from the store. This may have been to separate ‘spares’ from ‘service’ activities. There was also evidence that this was a staff area where workers came in to ‘clock on’.

To the south is a further office in a lean-to building originally part of R J Johnson’s timber and builders’ yard. When the timber yard closed, the financial aspects of the motor business seem to have migrated, as indicated by the wall-safe. A segregated vestibule, with no connection to the office behind was clearly a waiting space, possibly where cars were collected and bills paid.



This was a fascinating structure with a number of building phases and uses. Its ‘low road’ flexibility had ensured its survival for over a hundred years, despite its owners being in the changing road transport trades. As ‘gentrification’ of the inner suburbs of Oxford proceeds apace, and the colleges seek out ways of sheltering their students from town life by accommodating them on campus, such buildings are vulnerable. It is unfortunate that this particular structure had been allowed to decay to the point where demolition is thought to be the only option. It is doubly

unfortunate that no business use could be found for it. While some local residents resent a degree of noise and traffic which such businesses generate, they forget that these workplaces act as guardians in the neighbourhood when they are away at work. The variety of business premises adds great character to areas such as Jericho, and it is very short-sighted to demolish them in the interests of ‘progress’.

Church End Farm, Church End, South Leigh

Extensive repairs needed to maintain the late 15th century timber framed house at Church End Farm, South Leigh, have brought to light a number of interesting discoveries. The close studding of this 8-bay house is an impressive demonstration of late medieval carpentry. It sits on a beautifully masoned plinth course about 2ft high, which is chamfered and has a roll moulding, on top of which rest the sole plates. The house is entered through a two storied porch, clearly a 16th century addition, and so past a fine iron-studded door into the cross passage. A late medieval screen stands here, which has been adapted (with a hatch) to service the farmer's office, from which he paid his labourers. The screen passage led into a ground floor hall, which was open to the roof in the first phase. It was subsequently floored and a massive chimney stack inserted. The roof of the solar is decorated with painting in orange, white and black bands and chevrons, dating from *circa* 1560.

Beyond the through passage, a very early pentice (covered walkway) runs at right angles to the main hall block. This has all the signs of having led to a detached kitchen, although the area which such a building might have occupied is now under a modern farmyard. The site of the house, in the highest



part of the village on top of a gravel outcrop shared by the church, is an interesting demonstration of the geography of power – the two contenders, ecclesiastical and manorial, vying for the high status location.

John Steane

*Interior, west gable of hall
Church End Farm, South Leigh*

Kettell Hall, Broad Street, Oxford

Visitors to Oxford recently will have noticed that in Broad Street, next to Blackwells bookshop there has been a building totally obscured under scaffolding and plastic sheets. This is Kettell Hall, now a part of Trinity College, which the college has been refurbishing for undergraduate accommodation. An archaeological/historical survey was carried out during the works which has resulted in a number of features being recorded.

The kitchen was formerly in the basement, following Sir Roger Pratt's advice to relegate the lowly tasks of storing and cooking foodstuffs underground, with their smells, heat and proximity of servants.

The house itself was built by President Kettell in *circa* 1620 and is well placed on the street frontage to provide a vantage point for university processions advancing along Broad Street. One of the big rooms overlooks Broad Street and is heated by a 17th century fireplace and furnished with contemporary panelling. The roof, largely 17th century in date, with multiple gables, has been strengthened by a series of gallows brackets. There were signs that the last two bays to the north had been destroyed by fire and replaced by a 19th century kingpost roof. Another structural feature of interest was the presence in the walling of bonding timbers, designed presumably to strengthen and level up the limestone rubble walling but were now after 400 years rotting and destabilizing.

John Steane

Burford Project

As readers will be aware, work at Burford on the joint VCH/OBR project has slowed down since the great efforts made in 2003 to measure all the burgage plots and examine the buildings systematically. The time has not been miss-spent, however. Robert Peberdy of VCH has been pulling out all the occupation details from the 19th century censuses and trade directories, and David Clark has been relating these to the architectural evidence. One exciting discovery was the possibility that a non-domestic building on one of the back plots of High Street might have been a photographer's darkroom and studio in the 1860s. If you have a knowledge or interest in this early period of photography, do get in touch – we need help in understanding the building and the processes which might have been used.

As time permits, and opportunities arise, David has been visiting other buildings in Burford. Another discovery was a roof structure in which the principal rafters have an accentuated fattening around the rectangular mortice through which the purlin ran (photo right).

Initial research has shown only two other examples: one in the detached kitchen at Shapwick House in Somerset (1428); the other at Corpus Christi Farmhouse in Littlemore (1424). Does anyone know of any other examples?



Recently, OBR members who are also active participants in their local history group have been instrumental in helping to organise 'open' meetings, at which the public have been invited to come and see displays of local history studies, and share memories of their village.

Wheatley Local History Day

In March, OBR member Elizabeth O'Sullivan was one of the organizers of an open 'Local History Day' at *The Merry Bells*, a former temperance establishment which now houses the Wheatley village archives. OBR were invited to have a presence, so I went along for the day as our representative.

County Archivist Mark Preedy was there with some fascinating documents and maps that he'd brought from the Oxfordshire Record Office, and gave an interesting talk on the kinds of records held at ORO.

Keith Chandler, a social and cultural historian, gave a couple of talks, one on the 19C Morris dancing in Wheatley, and another on the tradition of Christmas Mumming, also recorded in the village. Keith often finds that his talks can stimulate a dialogue, using it as a means to tap into long forgotten memories of social events, and sometimes to gain access to previously unknown documents and photographs as well.

On display were photographs and plans of several village houses, their owners having consulted OBR committee members John Steane and David Clark. *Mulberry Court*, *The Old Crown*, *Rectory Farm* and *The Manor House* all seem worthy of further investigation – maybe we can even suggest organizing a local buildings tour some time. There were also displays on various aspects of the stages of village development, which in Wheatley was particularly affected by changes in transport patterns, including bridges, turnpikes, railways and bypasses, all of which had knock-on effects on local industry. The

expanding area of family history interest was well represented, as was the previously underused historical resource coming to light with the transcription of wills and inventories.

The highlight for me was the hands-on-history of artefacts, the small items of the kind you find under floorboards in buildings or dig up in the garden. It's one thing to see a beautifully preserved specimen labelled in a glass case, but quite a different experience to try to identify an isolated shard of pottery or a lump of rusty metal. Being able to handle a worked flint core and flint tools (broken, of course), and to *feel* the difference between Iron Age, Roman, medieval, Tudor, and 19C pottery (broken, naturally), was a great education.

Heather Horner

Ock Street Then and Now

Members of the Abingdon Buildings Record have now held two evening meetings open to the public devoted to the past of Ock Street. The first in November attracted so many visitors that a large number had to be turned away. A second meeting was therefore arranged on 4th March in St Helen's Church Hall, able to accommodate a much larger number, and this too attracted a capacity audience. Many of those attending the meetings had lived in or known Ock Street for many years so there was much discussion and exchanging of reminiscences on both occasions following the talks and stimulated by the displays of maps and photographs.

Jackie Smith, Abingdon's Town Archivist, gave the first talk, briefly outlining the history of Ock Street. Until the A34 Abingdon By-pass opened in 1973 Ock Street was a major thoroughfare for traffic between the Midlands and the Southampton docks dating back at least to the Middle Ages. The Saxon *Eoccenford* had been replaced with a bridge by the 11th century when Abbot Faritus, arriving in Abingdon, is said to have dismounted and walked barefoot from Ock Bridge to the Abbey.

There are deeds describing property leases of messuages and pastures dating back to the mid 13th century. The 16th century survey by Roger Amyce records about 30 houses on both sides of the street with barns, orchards and gardens, backed on the south side by meadows down to the River Ock and on the north by Conduit Field and Lacies Court Farm. At the town end, which was more built up, were several large inns. In the 18th century a new square was laid out at this end where a Sheep Market was held.

From the 17th to the 19th centuries Ock Street established itself as the industrial centre of Abingdon. Sheds and workhouses on the long narrow plots were used for sack weaving, rope making, leather working, malting and brewing. Courts created along narrow alleyways off the street housed the workers whose poverty is recorded in church and charity accounts. One of the first areas of the town to have fresh drinking water, the Carswell originally stood between Mr Warwick's Arms and The Crown, fed from the Conduit House* in Albert Park. The brick arch, dated 1719, has since been moved to the wall of the Tomkins Almshouses in Conduit Road.

Ock Street was also the home of nonconformity in Abingdon. The Baptists, Quakers and Independents all established meeting-houses there in the 17th century, many of which were rebuilt in the 19th century. In 1847 the Wesleyans too built a chapel near Leach's the printers. The nonconformists encouraged universal education and the Baptists inaugurated the British School in 1824, erecting a building still standing behind their chapel. The Mechanics Institute, providing adult education, was there too from 1854-79 before moving to larger premises in the Clock House, a Georgian house built by the Tomkins, a leading Baptist family.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries Ock Street housed a close-knit community led by the Hemmings family, electing a mock Mayor (Woodstock is the only other local town to do this.) and enjoying a Morris Dancing tradition which continues today. But the vitality and character of the street has been eroded with the loss of its industries, the closure of many public houses and the demolition of many buildings after the Second World War.

Keith Chandler followed this talk by describing in more detail the election of the Mock Mayors and the Morris dancing tradition. Abingdon Morris Dancers, described as "Berkshire husbandmen" had

danced at Richmond, Surrey, in 1783. During the 19th century there were many disputes between rival parties when the Mayor was elected annually. The successful candidate was paraded along Ock Street attended by the Morris men carrying the decorated Ox Head in a tradition said to date back to 1700. According to a 1901 article in "The Herald" the celebrations included many "queer" games, including wrestling, backword play, and Morris dancing. Thomas Hemmings started dancing in 1840 and was Mayor from 1860-84, to be succeeded by his son William.



By 1900 the custom had become more sporadic but Morris dancing was revived in 1910 by the Hemmings brothers. The present Mayor, Stuart Jackson, is their direct descendant.

Ock Street, Abingdon, looking towards the town centre.

From an old postcard, undated, probably 1930s.

The final talk was given by Norman Holmes who came to live in Ock Street aged five, when his father bought the bakery at number 100 in 1927. Norman continued to run the family business until his retirement a few years ago, during which time he has seen many changes. He described the street he grew up in as a very poor and rough area with cottages crammed together close to the roadway, with 13 or 14 courts running off it of which only one now remains. The pavements were narrow but he remembered a dog lying asleep in the road for much of the day undisturbed by the few cars, horses and carts that passed. Nevertheless it was a busy place with 10 public houses, 2 breweries, 3 fish shops, 6 bakers, 3 grocers, 2 butchers, a barber, a cobbler, a junk shop, a rag and bone merchant, a dress shop and several other general stores. There were also 2 doctors, 2 chapels, a coal yard, a stone mason and an undertaker. Cherries from Harwell and watercress from Ewelme were sold on trays or barrows and gypsies brought holly and mistletoe at Christmas. Four milkmen delivered twice a day and the muffin man plied his wares. Every evening the lamplighter lit the gas lights using a long pole and extinguished them later.

Mr Holmes described all of this as though he was walking along the street from Ock Bridge towards the town. He mentioned the various inns, many of which have now disappeared, 2 garages one of which also had a charabanc business, the Pig Row cottages so called because pigs had to be taken through the houses to the gardens behind, the Tower Brewery where Morlands kept their horses and drays, a sweet factory and a golf club factory. Towards the town were better quality houses and businesses, among them on the north side, Dr Woodford's house and surgery in what is now the Conservative Club, Wiggins' builders yard, the Baptist Chapel, Manse and school, and a solicitor. On the south side was the Strict Methodists' Chapel, a grocer where large round cheeses arrived on carts from the railway, Morlands Brewery, Gibson's Garage (now a tyre centre), an ironmonger (later Beadles), a chiropodist, a jewellers and Trotman's bakery.

The talks were accompanied by a display of old and recent photographs and maps which evoked many further memories while tea and coffee were served. Altogether it was a fascinating evening recalling a community who had lived, worked and danced in a street where much post-war development, particularly at the west end, has destroyed many of the properties its members had once occupied.

Bridget Rudge

*See Oxon Recorder 17, Winter 2003/4

ORO Deposit Agreement

The OBR have now concluded an agreement with the Oxfordshire Record Office under which they will accept material from us on deposit. The ORO is thus where our archive material will be kept, so if you have original reports, drawings, photographs and other material associated with a building you have recorded, this is the place for it to be kept. The procedure is to consult the secretary for advice on how to prepare the material for deposit – things like no paperclips or staples, how to conserve photographs, and so on. Your deposit will then be given a number and can enter the OBR collection.

David Clark

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 16th April 2005 : OBR recording day, a farm complex at Caswell. These days are specially geared to encourage less experienced members to get a feel for recording; experienced recorders on hand, equipment available. Full details in flier (enclosed).

Saturday 16th April 2005 : **The Making of the English Landscape.** A one-day conference celebrating 50 years since the publication of Hoskins' 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 or Academic Study and Travel. 3 Whites Forge, Appleton, Oxon OX13 5LG

Saturday 7th May 2005 : **Oxfordshire Past.** The annual review of archaeological recording work in Oxfordshire will this year be held in Eynsham, marking the millennium of the establishment of Eynsham Abbey. The programme and booking form should be available by the time this newsletter reaches you. Booking essential. For a copy send your details to Tony Dodd, 53 Radley Road, Abingdon, Oxon. OX14 3PN, tel. 01235 525960, e-mail tony@oahs.org.uk

Saturday 21st May 2004 : OBR AGM at The Chantry House, Henley, and guided tour round the historic buildings of Henley. Flier enclosed. Please tell David Clark by 18th May if you can come, numbers needed for **free lunch!** Guests welcome.

Tuesday 16th August 2005 : **Hampshire Excursion.** In conjunction with OAHs. Visit to a working brickworks, King John's House and Romsey Abbey. **Already fully booked**

Friday 28th – Sunday 30th October 2005 : **Diffusion and Invention: Vernacular Building in England and the New World.** The Oxford meeting in conjunction with Vernacular Architecture Group at OUDCE, Rewley House, Wellington Street. Contact ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

Copy date and contacts

Copy date for Issue 23 is 1st June 2005. 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, telephone 01865 516414 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