

THE OXON RECORDER

Issue 34

Spring 2008



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

AGM at Charlbury, Saturday 10 May: short formal meeting, free lunch, buildings to explore, guided town walk - flyer and minutes enclosed

Recording Days: More in the pipeline

John Steane Day report: Our Chairman's long career is honoured.

OAHS/OBR lecture by Paul Barnwell: a thought provoking talk – some random comments

The Charlbury Initiative – could there be a new OBR group a-borning?

Planning for Spring Conference 2011: your ideas still needed

Time Team at Radcot: Update

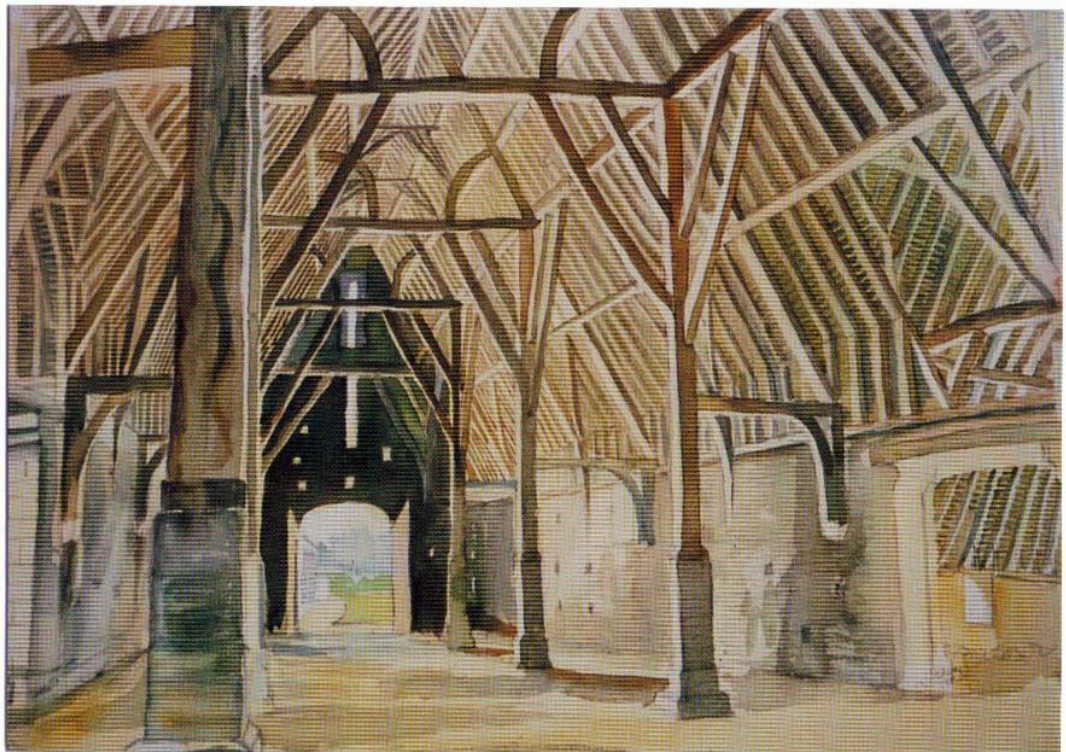
Recent Recording: The Old White Hart, Henley

Building a WWI presence: Building work is making progress

Electronic Resources: Another website for your delight

Forthcoming events: include Burford History Day, Local History Day, & OxPast

The 13C barton barn at Great Coxwell, a watercolour by John Steane (see next page). This building is owned by The National Trust, and is open all year round.



Recording Days

We have several Recording Days in the pipeline, though no details had been confirmed as we went to press. Possibilities include buildings in Kelmscott, Burford, Radley, Shipton, Wantage and East Hanney. Please check the website for updates; www.OBR.org.uk. We will contact you *via* email if you have given us your address (updates and change of address, please, to Membership Secretary David Hughes at all@ldhughes.free-online.co.uk and Secretary David Clark at drc@davidrclark.plus.com

Buildings, Power and Display *A day school in honour of John Steane*

On Candlemas Day, February 2nd 2008, Rewley House was packed with friends, colleagues and students, gathered to thank OBR Chairman John Steane for his remarkable achievements as teacher, administrator, author, innovator and recorder. John's long and continuing career has touched many of us who have been lucky enough to know and work with him. The shape of the day had been planned to reflect some of his special interests, so John Blair kicked off with a resumé of his and John's early work at Cogges which placed the estate and its manorial status firmly in the early 13thC. He went on to describe the dramatic unfolding of the Bishop's Palace site at Witney, and his own research at Bampton church and Deanery. Hot off the press came news from Radcot, where late last year the results of a resistivity survey on land north of the 14thC bridge over the Thames showed spectacular evidence of a tower, a chapel and other structures, all providing material to strengthen his theory of the existence of a number of high-status medieval buildings in the small area of Cogges/Witney/Radcot/Faringdon. Excavations at Radcot are planned for later this year.

OBR Secretary David Clark gave an elegant resumé, finely illustrated, of the unfolding and gathering pace of the Record's work, with emphasis on the recording of buildings which is so strongly advocated by John. David paid generous tribute to John's energy and expertise in getting the Record off the ground in the early days, most especially in training members in proper recording and drawing. He went on to underline the work of the Record in establishing the importance of identifying and recording the many small, undistinguished buildings and workshops that are still to be found in Oxford and other county towns, but with are now so often threatened by demolition and redevelopment.

Yet more of John's abiding interests in landscape studies and seats of power were delightfully illustrated by Tom Beaumont James who since the late 1970s has been uncovering the relics of one of the greatest royal palace sites in England – that of Clarendon, set in a massive deer park. Salisbury, clearly an afterthought, was established on its fringe. Excavations here in the 1930s abruptly ended at the outbreak of war, but illustrious names – Mortimer Wheeler, ET Leeds, Howard Colvin – still survive in the visitors' books. Re-excavation of those earlier spoil heaps is bringing forth an astonishing variety of ceramic and other material, while modern technical and survey work of the palace site and the ruinous mansion is beginning once more to unravel the history of this extraordinary place.

Meanwhile, upstairs, John and Elaine had prepared and set out an exhibition of his paintings and drawings – a tiny fraction of the whole! – where we could see at first hand his admirable facility for combining rigorous mastery of drawing, say, a barn roof in all its complexity with atmospheric application of water colour. Some of the legendary notebooks were on display too, and as sure as night follows day, John could be seen throughout in his seat in the front row of the lecture theatre busily inscribing notes and reflections on the speakers and the day's events into the current edition.



Above: John's watercolour of New College barn at Swalcliffe, which is open to the public in summer months

John and his friend James Ayres have recently been engaged in recording and researching Ashbury Manor, in the SW corner of the county. James gave us a beautifully illustrated description to their work and some of the so far unresolved problems that have arisen. The buildings were constructed for Abbot John Selwood of Glastonbury in the late 15thC, offering overnight accommodation with easy access to both Glastonbury and Oxford. Close examination of the fabric had revealed the likelihood that builders from both Somerset and Oxfordshire had been engaged in the construction of the house. Intriguing questions remain; was, for instance, the later upper room in the porch an oratory? After the dissolution, might this have been a recusant house? Much remains to be elucidated here, a candidate for the synthesis of documentary and building detective work.

The third John of the day, John Ashdown, gave an eloquent discourse, beautifully illustrated by slides, on “Memorials to Departed Scholars”. He ranged widely over Western Europe, drawing attention to details such as the long tradition of memorial surrounds and architraves formed of sculpted books in marble or other stones, details so often missed by the casual observer. Teachers’ memorials often show not only books but canopies over desks and chairs – a tradition first seen in 13thC memorials in Italy and France. John showed us effigies of Francis Bacon going to sleep in St Albans and William Camden at Westminster with his *Britannia* in his hand.

Thus a splendid day drew to a close. Earlier, tributes to John had been paid by Frank Kelsall, one of John’s former pupils and now a respected historian, and by Malcolm Airs, formerly Conservation Officer in South Oxfordshire and latterly Director of Studies in the Historic Environment at Oxford University Department for Continuing Education. It was he who vouchsafed to us this nugget; not for nothing had John been known in the county as ‘the Steane-roller’!

Louise Armstrong

Footnote: some of John’s water-coloured drawings of buildings have been made into postcards. They are available from John, and there will some at the AGM on 10 May in Charlbury. John is generously donating any moneys raised to OBR funds.

Comments on OAHS/OBR Buildings Lecture by Paul Barnwell

This is not a commissioned article, rather a collection of views assembled from emails generated shortly after the event, collated by Heather Horner. They are presented here to stimulate further discussion.

Each year, OBR is invited to nominate a lecturer to present one of the fortnightly public talks for members and guests of *Oxford Architectural and Historical Society*. This season, Paul Barnwell spoke on Tuesday 12 February 2008 at Rewley House. Paul has recently taken up the post of Director of Studies in the Historic Environment at Oxford University Department for Continuing Education. This has coincided with some changes in the part-time courses offered by OUDCE, most notably for OBR members the phasing out of the Certificate in *Vernacular Architecture*. We understand there are plans for a new Masters course, but meanwhile the popular Postgraduate Certificate in *Architectural History* continues. Paul has an extensive knowledge of building history, and is past President of *Vernacular Architecture Group*, the national buildings research group which publishes a peer-reviewed Journal. OBR Secretary David Clark invited Paul to give an overview of how vernacular building research had developed, how he saw it at present, and how he would like to see it in the future.

This, then, was not simply descriptions of buildings – indeed, Paul had no visual aids at all – but a carefully considered synopsis of 50 years of development. Paul himself said that this invitation had made him reassess his own views. The picture of building research and recording that he painted was of a discipline previously seen as the poor relation in academic circles. This came as a shock to me, as my experience here in Oxfordshire with OBR has been of high standards of recording and detailed report writing, undertaken by people who may not have as many formal history qualifications as some academics, but whose questioning minds are capable of looking “outside the box” of a narrow discipline to bring a wide range of skills to bear on building history and development.

Heather Horner

Continued overleaf

Paul Barnwell's lecture was excellent, it was philosophical rather than descriptive - nice to see Sue O there, and she may have some comments to make on the lecture too. I suppose a very brief précis would be to say that it is no good just recording buildings, they need to be put into their environment, as a feature within their landscape, and with their history. Also more lateral thinking is needed about the uses of space within the house - crafts, animals, gender of the inhabitants. For example with farm buildings; what way of life do they, or did they, represent.

We need to ask questions about a building rather than just record it. Apparently farm buildings are dealt with much more fully than urban buildings nationally - this surprised me. Paul said the exception to this was the work that we have done at Burford, which is a complete appraisal of buildings, history, people and landscape.

Ann Atkinson

The Paul Barnwell lecture was thought provoking. I can see that collecting, collating and analyzing known data from a much wider area will enable a much better interpretation of what remains and better inform the conjecture as to what is missing. He talked about dendro-dating taking back more known standing buildings to the 13th century and the tie-up with below-ground architecture. I wasn't sure if he was claiming that Archaeology (which he described as the more powerful academic discipline, as opposed to Local History and Vernacular Architecture which tend to be 'Adult Education' areas) wasn't interested in later evidence, or that was when a large amount of the undocumented built environment was lost. A local heritage initiative similar to Burford showed how wide a body of evidence could be. Geology, landscape archaeology, demography, land ownership, industry, transport, building, documents, etc. etc. Only detailed analysis brings it to life.

Sue O'Dowd

(abstracts from a letter to Paul)

Almost by definition, recorders of vernacular buildings have to squeeze every last drop of understanding from the building itself, with minimal recourse to documentary sources. Thus we need constantly to be noting details – settings, materials, methods of building, marks of all sorts, disposition of spaces and dates of identifiable features – and asking questions as to what these all mean. I think we try to do this when we look at buildings on our recording days.

The 'total recording' approach requires effort and dedication. Up to a point this is what the Burford project was about, but given the size of the task we made no new measured drawings. Current efforts in Henley (with the VCH again), in Abingdon with an active group and at Kelmscott (where we have a project with the Antiquaries in hand) may in time become further examples.

The main problem is that we don't have the people with the recording skills (or do I mean obsessions?) that there are in some counties. We try our best to understand the building and its context, but the writing of reports falls usually to a handful of people with other commitments. We hope to build up our skills in this area in future.

A related issue is publication. We produce a newsletter - which can have some sketchy reports - but that is not its intention. Some work gets printed in *South Midlands Archaeology*, and occasionally in *Oxoniensia*, but for the last of these I think the article has to say something more than just be a building report, and this takes time and effort. I am not convinced we need to produce a regular glossy journal like some county groups – monographs like the one we plan to do on farm buildings may be the best way forward.

Finally, I hope that the VAG conference in Oxfordshire in 2011 will act as a stimulus to enhance our skills, gain more confidence, record more buildings, ask more questions and publish more findings.

David Clark

Paul responded with some highly personal views on some of the current journals from other groups. He suggested that 'projects' culminating in a themed publication was a route to consider:-

I think projects allow a bringing together into a common enterprise of recorders, people who are interested in spending time in archives, and field walkers or other archaeological/landscape types.

Paul Barnwell

Sounds pretty much what we have attempted in Burford (paperback book currently at the printers).

Do add to the discussion. Ed.

OBR LOCAL AREA INITIATIVE – THE CHARLBURY STUDY

Now that the OBR membership exceeds 170, it seemed that there could be an opportunity to create local offshoot groups, concentrating on buildings in a specific area. The suggestion is that subgroups could form informal links with other established groups in their own local area and make people aware of OBR and what it can offer by working in collaboration with these groups. Although some groups have very specific interests, such as local history or archaeology, the key factor is that the area of interest is particular to the locality. This offers the possibility of tapping into and sharing the knowledge and expertise that has been developed.

I volunteered to start a trial project in Charlbury, where I live, as there are at least three OBR members in the town. It has a small museum, which is run as a sub-committee of *The Charlbury Society*. The museum has an impressive collection of artefacts that are specific to Charlbury, and many photographs and maps; there is also a collection of billheads from local businesses and organisations starting in the late Victorian period. *The Charlbury Society* arranges talks on a wide range of topics and does not have any particular focus but this means that any offer of a subject of general interest will be welcomed.

In December 2007 *The Charlbury Society* hosted a ‘Down Memory Lane’ evening for people who had been born in Charlbury and had remained there or had returned after an absence – these are the ‘Charlburians’ and they essentially comprise three local families. The curator of the museum, Ron Prew, who naturally is a Charlburian, brought along part of his collection of billheads from local shops, together with photographs of the premises and sometimes the proprietors; these were used to start the reminiscences - and then the arguments started! Soon the audience, mainly in the sixty-plus age range, was quite relaxed and the stories started to flow. It was very interesting that descriptions followed a pattern... “*Tom Chapman, the butcher, had the shop in Church Street*”...a clear association of person to trade to premises, and this demonstrated how closely inter-related these are. Another reference was made to Tom “...*he was sometimes referred to as Poacher Chapman*” ... that was quite wrong ... “*he was Tom Chapman... and he was a poacher!*”

Right: Charlbury from the south. The prominent site overlooks the Evenlode valley to the west.

Photo Vic Allison

In addition to the Charlbury displays, I had taken along the A3 copies of the OBR exhibition panels and at the beginning of the evening I briefly described the activities of OBR and made the links between the Charlburians and their buildings; many people came up to me afterwards to say that they have the title deeds to their houses



going back to the 18th century and would we like to see them. The combination of reminiscences and the OBR posters created considerable interest and many membership leaflets were taken away. Following the meeting, a short article was published in the March 2008 issue of ‘*The Charlbury Chronicle*’, a local newsletter which has been recording anecdotes from Charlburians, inviting interested people to make contact to cover a range of background material, from old maps and archives through to photographs and plans.

(continued overleaf)

Although there was a limited response to the article, there is now a core group of four people with a range of interests and skills and positive links to key officers of the Charlbury Museum. The next step will be to examine the available material and develop methods for depicting the history of the town; hopefully this will allow us to identify and thus target buildings of particular interest for full recording. The purpose of the study is to create a framework within which historical information can be lodged as it becomes available. It will be an on-going process and the intention is to deposit copies of all material with the museum so that there is a clear indication of ownership within the community and it becomes the repository for the story of Charlbury. The museum already has an on-going oral history project, recording memories from the older residents. A photographer has been recording the frontages of all the buildings in the historic centre and has offered these to us.

What has emerged very early in discussions is that Charlbury was full of farmsteads throughout the town centre, as well as having fourteen pubs! Some of the older residents can remember several working farms in the town during their childhood. It would also appear that the farmhouses changed to purely domestic use fairly slowly, as following the local enclosures of 1761 only three new farmsteads subsequently appeared in the outlying fields.

As part of the launch of our new subgroup, OBR Annual General Meeting (*a very short formal meeting – Ed*) will be held in Charlbury on Saturday 10th May 2008, when we hope to have a complex range of buildings available for members to examine and discuss. As the study progresses we can expect more people to come forward and when we have a good working framework we shall contact other local groups in the outlying villages to add more data. Hopefully by summer 2008 we will be confident that our methodology is working and can offer it to other OBR members to set up local groups. Wider use of the techniques will then bring development and improvement, but above all we will be recording more buildings.

Vic Allison

Editors Note: Abingdon already has its own Building Recording group, with a philosophy similar to that outlined by Vic. OBR has links to several local history groups, with members in common, e.g. Elsfield, Henley, Radley, Steeple Aston, Thame, Wallingford, Wheatley.

Oxfordshire Conference Spring 2011 – Buildings still needed

As announced in the last issue of *The Oxon Recorder*, OBR will be hosting a meeting of the national organisation, the *Vernacular Architecture Group* in Spring 2011.

Delegates expect to visit a selection of local buildings; we would like to have more ideas for these. As well as being of intrinsic interest, we need to find buildings whose owners are sympathetic and who would agree to 100 people coming to visit their properties (not all at the same time but in two coach loads, one in the morning and one in the afternoon). If you know of a building which you think should go on the list of possibilities, please let me know. Ideas, please, by letter, phone or e-mail to David Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ, 01865 516414 or drc@davidclark.plus.com.

Over the coming months we will set out the outline plan and timing for this conference, then start fleshing out the programme. Later, we will be calling for volunteers for Recording Days in the chosen buildings.

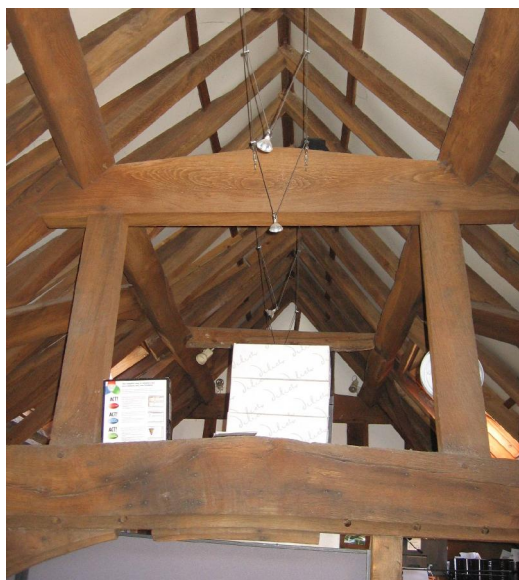
David Clark, Secretary

Time Team at Radcot – Update

We have now heard that *Time Team* is due to visit Radcot on 13, 14, 15 May 2008, to investigate the newly-recognised medieval site (see article on John Steane Day, p2, this issue). John Steane and James Ayres have made an initial examination of one nearby standing building, and a small team of recorders is in place to check out another. Of course, we are aware that many subsidiary *Time Team* projects end up on the cutting room floor, but we will try to keep you informed of any findings.

The Old White Hart, Henley

We had a good turn-out of recorders for The Old White Hart on Hart Street, Saturday 16 February 2008. As parts are now in separate ownership, it took a lot of organising on the part of OBR member Ruth Gibson to arrange access. A complex building which seems to have had a gallery on at least three sides of the stable yard: part gave access to a series of lodging rooms, but it seems to have bypassed other spaces. The group divided into several small teams each with specific tasks; their drawings are now being collated. It has left us with a lot of questions about the sequence of building, though a dendrochronological examination currently underway may help. A full report will be available in due course.



Right: part of an open truss in the W range – a puzzle as the style of timber working and decoration seems earlier than the rest of the brick-built structure. Photo H.Horner

New website for OBR; www.OBR.org.uk

OBR's new website is now up-and-running, though with still quite a few areas to expand and update. Please take a look, make comments, and consider sending us your own photographs and reports to add. This will be the place to look for extra Recording Days and booking information, between *The Oxon Recorder* newsletters. Back issues of *The Oxon Recorder* will be uploaded six months after publication, with the added attraction of full colour from Issue 32 onwards. There is an impressive list of useful web-site links; let us know of others that could be of interest to members

Update on useful websites

In Issue 33, David Clark reviewed some useful websites and other sources for building historians. This has produced some positive feedback from members, such as this one from Mavis Curtis:

I thought I'd just drop you a line and say how useful I am finding the OBR newsletter. I've just been to the library and got the 19th century census data and got various things off another web site recommended in it. Thanks to whoever supplied the information.

And from Nancy Drucker:

Members might like to know about a wonderful website illustrating landscapes and buildings from mid-20thC, containing watercolours, drawings and etchings. It illustrates an exhibition recently held at Chris Beetles Gallery in SW1, and the website address is www.chrisbeetles.com. It was a selling exhibition of works which formed part of the *Recording Britain* project which Sir Kenneth Clarke initiated at the beginning of WW2. The original collection is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, these are some of the offshoots.

Editors note; be wary when using artistic representations of historic buildings; most are historically accurate, but sometimes licence is taken for the sake of composition, or in 'recreating' what the artist thought used to be there. Burford recorders will be aware of the confusion created by the architect and artist John Chesswell Buckler in his 1821 depictions of Calendars and Falkland Hall.

Local History Seminars

OBR committee member Pat Harding has passed on information about bi-annual Local History Seminar Days held at Rewley House each April and September. These are open to all, particularly aimed at previous, present and potential students of part-time history courses of OUDCE, as a platform for presentation of research projects undertaken as part of courses, and to encourage further research by graduates of courses. The next Seminar Day will be Saturday 19 April. The cost for the day is £28.00 which includes lunch (usually 3 courses) or £17.75 for the seminars only, *(continued over)*

coffee/tea available for everyone. The contact for booking is Judith Beverley Tel 01865 27096 e-mail: judith.beverley@conted.ox.ac.uk or alternatively for any further information Pat's number is 01608 676395, e-mail: househistories@btinternet.com.

Burford History Day

History Days are an initiative of Oxfordshire County Council, designed to raise public awareness of the libraries and museums resources available for their area. There will be one in Burford on Friday 16 May 2008, based in the Library on the west side of High Street, and the Methodist Church on the east side of High Street. Venues open 2 – 7pm.

Staff from Oxfordshire Record Office will be bringing some real documents, Victoria County History will be bringing maps based on the recording done by OBR members, and OBR will be represented to answer questions, etc. The Burford Probate Group will have a display and transcriptions available for discussion of the kind of information obtainable from inventories and wills, and the Family History Society will be on hand to advise on tracing people. The Museums Service should be bringing some interesting objects, and no doubt there will be other local groups in evidence. All welcome, no charge, do come along and give support, or even volunteer to help out on the OBR stand. (*contact Editor or Secretary, details below*)

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 19 April 2008: **Local History Seminar** at Rewley House. See above

Saturday 10 May 2008: **OBR AGM & guided town walk, Charbury**. Flyer enclosed

Friday 16 May 2008: **History Day in Burford**. Open day based at Methodist Chapel, E side High St. Displays and exhibitions by ORO, VCH, OBR, FHS, Probate Group, others. All welcome, 2 – 7pm

Friday 16 May 2008: Closing date for applications for next part-time Postgraduate Certificate in **Architectural History**, starting October 2008. Information from www.conted.ox.ac.uk

Saturday 17 May 2008: Society of Architectural Historians: **British Architecture and the Vernacular** A one-day symposium at The Art Workers Guild, London WC1.
http://www.sahgb.org.uk/index.cfm/display_page/EventsSymposium

Saturday 7 June 2008: **OxPast** Update on the year's work in Oxfordshire. Details not available as we went to press, but arrangements in place to enclose a flyer with this issue.

Friday 26 – Sunday 28 September 2008: **Vernacular Interiors in the British Tradition** Annual Oxford meeting of Vernacular Architecture Group. Rewley House, Wellington Square, Oxford. Open to all, but book early. Information and booking ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

Saturday 22 November 2008 **OBR Presentation Day**. The chance for members to catch up on recent research, even if they cannot be active recorders themselves. Venue t.b.c.

Copy date and contacts

Copy date for Issue 35 is 1st June 2008. 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 drc@davidclark.plus.com or david.clark3@which.net

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

