

THE OXON RECORDER

SUMMER 2018



Eynsham - in 1910 © Oxfordshire History Centre

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The Oxon Recorder is the newsletter of Oxfordshire Buildings Record and is published four times a year. OBR aims to advance education and promote research on the buildings of Oxfordshire by encouraging the recording of buildings and to create and manage a publicly accessible repository of records relating to such buildings. The Oxon Recorder is also available in the members' section of our website: www.obr.org.uk

Next copy date for contributions is 1 September. Please send any contributions or comments to Richard Farrant at newsletter@obr.org.uk Contributions need to be Word or Pages documents and photographs in jpg format.

OBR News

- The minutes of the OBR Annual General Meeting in Eynsham on Saturday 12 May are appended to this newsletter.
- OBR Presentation Day will be on Sunday 25 November in Oxford. More details in the next Oxon Recorder.
- Dan Miles will give the next OBR Annual lecture at Rewley House on Tuesday, November 27 at 5.30pm. The title is “Three decades of dendro-dating in Oxfordshire”

Eynsham explored - the AGM walkabout

A key – some might say the only – objective of the AGM day is to explore a new location in the company of someone with knowledge and understanding, and with the ability to go with the flow as opportunities arise and members offer suggestions and insights. And so it was in Eynsham on May 12th when, the formal business having been completed, Heather Horner led us on a walk through the town.

Eynsham is perhaps not as well known as it ought to be, despite its long history and good transport links – at one time it was not only an important river crossing, but also had a wharf and a railway station. But the dominant feature of the town throughout the Middle Ages was the abbey, one of the richest in Oxfordshire. (For the definitive history, see the VCH Vol.XII pp.98-158, and for the Abbey, Alan Hardy, Anne Dodd and Graham Keevil, *Aelfric's Abbey: excavations at Eynsham Abbey, 1989-92*, Oxford Archaeology, 2003). We were to see some fragments of the abbey buildings later in the day.



Figure 1. Extract from 1910 DV map (Reproduced by courtesy of the Oxford County Council – the Oxfordshire History Centre) (https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/leisureandculture/history/collections/districtvaluation/DV-VIII-351_Oxfordshire_XXXII-8.pdf)

But we started at The Gables (Figs.1 and 2), in whose Music Room we had held the AGM.



Figure 2. The Gables

Although given a unified exterior in 1838 by James Swann, who also owned and operated Eynsham Mill, behind the gabled façade is evidence of four timber-framed structures – two cross-wings at each end, a central range, and a 19th-century pentice corridor linking these at the rear. It has a complex development history, with some datable in situ features such as an early 17th-century open-well staircase with splat balusters and an early 18th-century bolecion-moulded fire surround. In Swann's time, the mill specialised in paper-making, and one of its products was praised by J C Loudon in the early 19th century as an innovative roofing material, which we noted had been used on the very low-pitched roof of the maltings (ca.1820) just behind the Gables at the corner of Queen Street and Newlands – Fig.3. (For more on this, see Malcolm Airs, 'The Strange History of Paper Roofs' in Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society 42 (1998) pp.35-62).



Figure 3. The Malthouse

In the main, walls in Eynsham are of limestone rubble, though there are a number of brick cottages, such as a pair opposite the entrance to The Gables, the clay probably having come from Eynsham Heath. Some thatched roofs survive, though most were replaced by stone – and later Welsh – slate after a series of fires in the 17th and 18th centuries. Member Tim Jordan then led us on a short detour into the courtyard of his thatched barn on Newland Close where he showed us a piece of abbey stone – look carefully at the walls in Eynsham and you will see many more.



Figure 4. OBR members in front of Cobden - one of the surviving thatched houses

Reaching Mill Street the heavy traffic stopped us wandering across the road as we had done in Newlands, so after a short briefing by Heather we made our way down past former farmhouses, 17th century cottages (now shops) and the grand 18th-century Vicarage to the Acre End crossroads.

In Acre End those of us still with the group were invited by Eleanor Chance to see some very interesting fragments in her house on the street. There was another abbey stone fragment built into a wall and a moulded timber lintel with an incised hexfoil roundel on the soffit. Where might this have come from, we wondered – racking our brains to come up with analogies. It seemed to be part of a ceiling beam, the carving being a variant of the common ‘daisy wheel’ ritual protection mark, now shown to have medieval origins and not just a reflection of the early 17th-century obsession with witchcraft (Matthew Champion, *Medieval Graffiti* London, 2015).

In Abbey Street we saw some more reset stones, and the recently renovated and converted buildings of Abbey Farm – a complex we had hoped to record some years ago having realised that the barns were basically medieval – but sadly this was not possible. We were then able to spend a few minutes in the parish church of St Leonard – where a large choir and orchestra were rehearsing for a performance of Haydn's Creation. There was only time to seek out another hexfoil symbol on one of the jambs of the tower arch – this one clearly six-petalled and definitely not a consecration cross.

Our last visit was to the Bartholomew Room, endowed in 1700 as a schoolroom/courtroom above an open market area (like Watlington). The upper room – now the parish council meeting room – still has the boards listing the donors, a valuable list of the great and the good.



Figure 5. Reset stone on Bartholomew Room

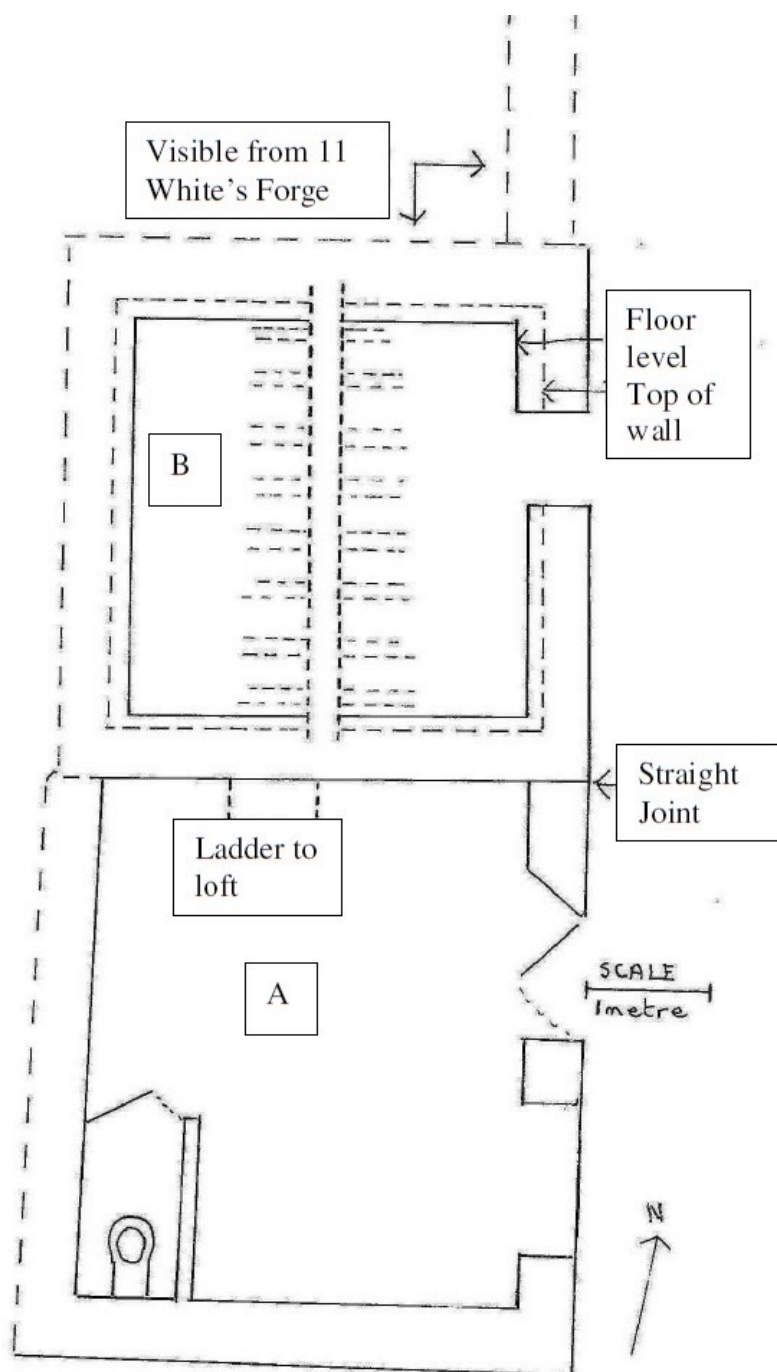
David Clark

Granary or dovecote? An outbuilding in Appleton

An OBR working group recently had the opportunity to survey a small outbuilding in Appleton. The aims were to understand the dates, phases and uses of the building. Of these, pinning down the original use of the building became the most problematic, and provides the focus of this article. The full report will be Report 357 in the OBR database.

The two parts of the outbuilding

The outbuilding consists of two distinct parts, that to the northwest (B) being more interesting than the stone and more recently modified lean-to building (A) to the south.



Outbuilding plan © H Horner

This article concentrates on structure B. It has a square plan, and consists of a stone basement with a weatherboarded timber superstructure topped by a truncated pyramidal roof clad with plain red tiles containing a roof-light. At first glance it looks like a dovecote.



The outbuilding © D Clark

However, the Grade 2 listing describes it as “*Granary, now outhouse. Early C18. Weatherboarding over close-studded timber frame of light scantling, above high limestone plinth; pyramidal old tile roof. 2 storeys. One-bay range. Timber lintel over entry to ground-floor store, and first-floor side-entry to granary. Interior: exposed timber framing, with notches cut on posts which marked the amount of grain stored. Included for group value.*”

Structure B - ground floor

The masonry of the ground floor is of roughly coursed rubble bound with a pebbly lime mortar; there is much later repointing with a finer aggregate mortar. Quoins are unshaped though longer stones have been chosen. The walls are vertical externally, but display a distinct batter internally. Access is by a doorway in east wall, which has no evidence for a door frame or any closure.

The space inside has a cellar-like feel, with no windows, low doorway, low ceiling, and earth floor some 0.4m lower than current outside ground level. The stonework towards the south west corner has some suggestion of rebuilding, though it could not be determined whether this was to repair collapse or to close a former opening. Much of the internal wall surface had at some stage been plastered and lined out, perhaps keying for a later coat. Eroded vertical channels in the soft plaster implied that liquid had drained from above at some time in the building's history.



Ground floor plaster lining and erosion © H Horner

A continuous timber sill for the upper floor timber framing is visible from inside, placed towards the outer edge of the top of the stone wall. Peg holes are visible in the sill plate, coinciding with the studs of the upper walls. A central spine beam runs from north to south, tenoned into both sills and resting on the stone walls. The beam is heavily weathered on its upper face (only) in the centre of the building, which progressively lessens towards either end (and very little weathering at either end).



Spine beam decay © H Horner

The beam supports 8 pairs of joists, the central ends of which are each dropped into a mortice in the spine beam, and the outer ends lodged over the E and W stone walls and butted up to the sill plate. The joists over the doorway are softwood replacements, nailed to an added timber lintel; however, all the other timbers are of elm, converted with a pit saw and side axe. On one side of the spine beam, the joists support elm planks of varying widths; several of the planks have been firred up over the joists, suggesting re-laying at some time. On the other side of the beam all the planks are softwood replacements, without close butting or tongue-and-groove; these form the floor of storage bins on the floor above.

Structure B - upper floor

The upper space is entered through a doorway from structure A by means of a wooden stepladder. It has a plank floor, and wall-frames of vertical timbers – with no bracing – to which weatherboarding (and asbestos sheeting to the south) is nailed.

At each corner is a thick post 23cms (9 ins) square, supporting the wall plates and hip rafters. The northern and southern wall plates rest on top of the posts and are clasped to them by the western and eastern plates. These are pegged in place to tenons at the top of the post. The hip rafters are also pegged to these wall-plates. The central post of each wall-frame is wider than the others (15cms, 6 ins) and is double-pegged to the wall-plate. Between these posts are 5 studs in each part of the frame single-pegged to the wall-plate and to the sill below. All these timbers are elm.

There is a single transverse tie-beam between the east and west wall frames. The tops of the hip rafters are supported by a pegged timber square in the centre of the roof. This also supports the two full-length common rafters of each roof-frame. The other rafters are truncated and nailed to the hip rafters. Most of the rafters appear to be oak, pit- or machine cut with sharp arrises and no sign of insect damage.



Upper floor © D Clark

It was not possible to examine the square structure at the top of the roof at close quarters, but its outer surface is clad in lead or zinc and it may have at one time been open and have supported some form of louvre.

The eastern half of the space is taken up by two large storage bins with wire mesh covers. These were clearly later insertions, and are presumably the basis for it being listed as a granary.



Storage bins © D Clark

In order to try to understand what this space was used for, the wall frames were examined in detail, paying particular attention to the western frame, which was the most easily accessible. The following observations were made:

1. Down the left-hand side of each stud and post was a carefully cut U-section groove (1/8in. wide).
2. This groove was carried upwards into the wall-plate with a crudely chiselled groove on the same alignment.
3. At intervals on the left-hand face of the posts and studs were further U-section grooves. The distances between these were approximately 9 ins, but with differences of 1-2 cms. Some were perfectly horizontal; others had a slight slope. They had been made while the exterior was not weatherboarded, as the outer edges were clean-cut.
4. While almost all the timbers had signs of insect attack, this was particularly concentrated in a section of ca. 2ins deep at and above these horizontal grooves. This area also had discoloration and the timbers were degraded, but it was not clear whether the insect attack had preceded the degradation, or vice-versa.
5. The corner posts had signs of a different type of insect damage – the bore-holes were of larger diameter than the woodworm-like flight holes on the studs.
6. Near some of the horizontal grooves were small wooden blocks fixed to the studs using a single wrought-iron nail.
7. There were two rows of empty augured holes in each of the vertical timbers in the wall. They were 1in in diameter – as against 5/8 in. for the pegs in the structural timbers.



Vertical and horizontal grooves and timber discolouration © D Clark

The other walls were broadly similar, although some replacement timber was evident and modifications had been made to support the storage bins inserted subsequent to the original building.

Documentary evidence

The main documentary evidence available to the team are maps; they do not help to determining the original use of structure B. The property encompassing the outbuilding is shown on the 1832 enclosure map, 1842 tithe map and 1876 first edition Ordinance Survey. The present structure B could be part of a building first shown on the 1842 tithe map, and structure A appears to be part of the building shown in the first edition Ordinance Survey of 1876. There is good evidence that the property was used as a garage in 1935, and previous occupants may well have been blacksmiths.

Determining the use of structure B

Whereas from the map and structural evidence it is clear that the structure A post-dates the structure B, there are some elements of the former that may belong to earlier walls or structures on the site. Nevertheless, although a building was present in 1876, in its present form, structure A is basically a mid 20th century structure.

Two key features of structure B are that the grooves in the structural timbers must have been made before the building was erected, and that the doorway – at its present size – is not a primary feature but a later insertion. Thus the questions that need to be addressed are what were the grooves for, and is the floor also a later insertion?

The evidence for the floor is ambiguous. If it were primary, access to the first floor space would have had to be through a smaller doorway than the present one; if it is secondary, then why is the axial beam tenoned into the sill plates? The resolution of this may be as follows: the axial beam is primary, but it acted as a tie-beam and did not support a floor. The other features are consistent with this: the joists are lodged in cutouts rather than morticed into the beam, so are part of the later flooring, and the heavy weathering of the centre of the beam could have been caused by rain and other matter dropping from the central roof louvre before the floor was inserted.

Key to the answer to the first question is the insect damage around the horizontal grooves. Of the various possibilities, four types of insect could have been responsible:

- Lyctus powderpost beetle, found in oak and elm sapwood, often in stockyards.
- Ptilinus beetle, also found in hardwoods in stockyard contexts.
- Wood-boring weevils, who favour damp conditions, and attack following fungal decay.
- Moths, also in damp conditions with holes where infected material is in contact with wood.

Detailed study of the bore-holes and residues may refine this analysis, in particular whether the holes and timber decay are contemporary, but it seems clear that the differential attack pattern on the posts and studs is related to shelving in the grooves, and although it is difficult to see how nesting boxes were fitted into the structure – and why such a complicated method was employed – the conclusion that the primary purpose of the building was as a dovecote seems incontrovertible. This would also explain the square structure at the apex of the roof, which would have supported the Glover or louvered structure through which the birds entered the building.

It is significant that the two tiers of augured holes and the pegs which they supported are distributed so that there would be four nesting boxes above the floor and each peg. Also, the position of the augured hole is adjacent to the under surface of the base of the nesting boxes. This would argue against them being a later addition to support later shelving and, as these holes go all round the building, they pre-date the storage bins. Each wall of the building shows evidence for 12 nesting boxes across the width with 3 rows of 4 boxes above the floor and each row of pegs. This gives 144 boxes per wall or 574 in total.

The nesting boxes have no known direct analogies – in most of the timber-framed dovecotes recorded by John McCann in Suffolk (see McCann John (1998) ‘The dovecotes of Suffolk’. Ipswich) the boxes are supported by pegs in augur holes in the vertical timbers. In his ‘Encyclopaedia of Agriculture’ (1825) J C Loudon suggests that removable front panels set in grooves for easy cleaning of the nesting boxes might be a good idea, but he does not illustrate this. However, he does recommend putting straw in each box for the birds and eggs to rest on.

The McCanns reported examples of nesting boxes with one-inch thick wooden bases at Clarendon Park (Wilts.) (see McCann J and P (2011) ‘The dovecotes and pigeon lofts of Wiltshire’. Salisbury), although these were separated by chalk blocks and not wooden dividers. The width of the Clarendon boxes is 12 inches, typical of many of the Wiltshire dovecotes, and very close to the width of the suggested boxes at Appleton at about 13 inches. The Wiltshire Dovecotes are reported as being built of every building material available, from sarsen stone through chalk to brick. Only one timber framed Dovecote is recorded, at Enford, and the McCanns comment that if there were others of timber framing they have not survived.

Another observation from the ‘Dovecotes and Pigeon Lofts of Wiltshire’ is that two, at Lacock and Sutton Benger, are built over privies. These look remarkably like the Appleton dovecote with the square plan shape, the low door to the ground floor (privy) and the door to the upper dovecote being on a different aspect to the privy door. Both these dovecotes were built of brick in the late 18th century.

It should be added that dovecotes with a primary wooden floor are rare – though a seventeenth-century example was recorded by James Bond at Cleveley (near Enstone) (see CBA Group 9 Newsletter (1979) pp.87-8). In Wiltshire, the McCanns refer to the insertion of wooden floors after 1793, primarily to reduce the size of the flock to prevent nuisance to neighbours. They speculate that many of these may have been removed due to decay in the flooring. They identify at least 11 dovecotes in the county that had wooden flooring.

Thus, it is possible to envisage a phase in which the building continued to operate as a dovecote after the floor was inserted. However, there is no evidence for this phase, apart from a possible date difference between the floor and the storage bins.

It is difficult to postulate a date for the primary phase of structure B. Where visible, the timbers were largely pit-sawn; there are no assembly marks, though the fair-faces of the walls are external – the pegs have been hammered in from outside – and some marks may be visible on that surface. The roof timbers may also have been replaced, but if so it would seem rather perverse to retain the square Glover base after the dovecote function had ceased. The relative cleanliness of the timbers may simply be due to the insects preferring the easier meals available in the elm posts and studs. We would suggest a date of around 1800 (\pm 20yrs).

The next stage may have been the introduction of the floor, with a doorway cut into the frame at the southern end – perhaps for a ground floor privy, or to reduce the number of nesting boxes. The only evidence for this is the possible date difference between the floor and the storage bins.

The removal of the nesting boxes and installation of the storage bins could have been done towards the close of the 19th century. The latter are well-made and have a turn-of-the-century 'feel' – tongue-and-grooved planking came into general use after 1885, and although a machine for making chicken wire netting was apparently developed in 1844, its relative thin-ness suggests a later date for this, but the use of wrought iron nails suggests that the blacksmith was still working in the traditional way, and had not yet moved into servicing motor vehicles.

Despite its apparent simplicity, this building has proved quite difficult to understand. Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions can be drawn. The building began life around 1800 as a dovecote; later it was floored with a doorway to the upper floor inserted in the south wall. It was fitted with new storage bins around 1900, perhaps for domestic animal feed. The southern building was added at this time, but rebuilt later in the 20th century.

D Clark, edited by R Farrant

Book review: British Historic Towns Atlas: 6, Winchester

Edited by M. Biddle and D Keene, for the Historic Towns Trust and the Winchester Excavations Committee by Oxbow Books. Oxford, 2017

One of the most eagerly awaited historical and archaeological projects of interest to O.B.R. members is the British Historic Towns Atlas volume for Oxford. The Atlas series, now in its sixth volume, charts in rich detail the extent of modern knowledge of Britain's major historic towns. Now, closely following York in volume five, is Winchester.

This town, 45 miles south of Oxford, has been particularly fortunate in the last half century to have been the object of intensive archaeological examination led by Professor Martin Biddle and others who have written the excellent essays in the volume founded on a comprehensive review of the physical and documentary sources. The result has been summarized in the form of seventeen maps tracing the major phases of the town and its surroundings drawn by Oxford-based Giles Darkes. The quality of these is outstanding.

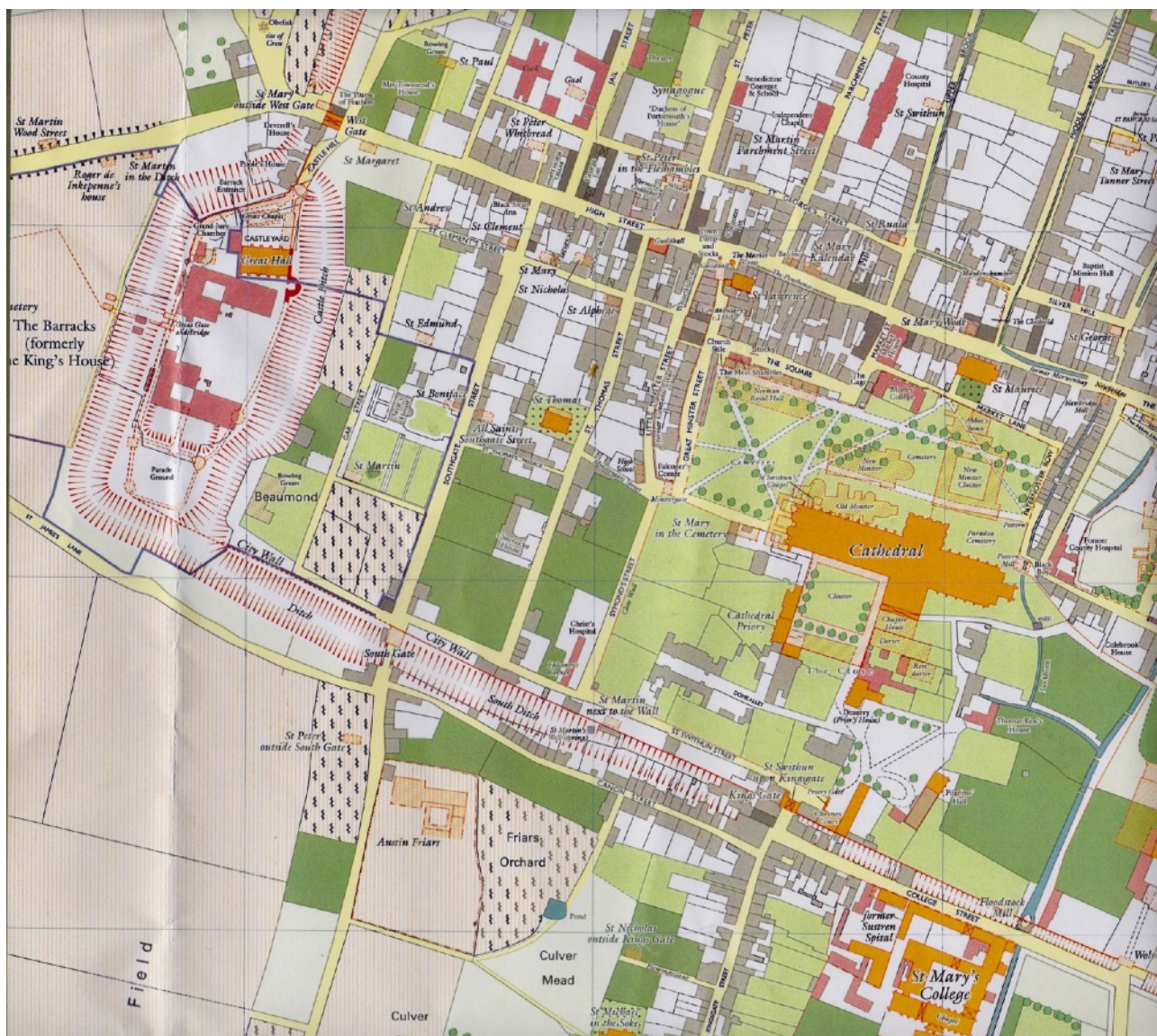
Accompanying the maps are a series of colour plates illustrating walls and gates, castle, palace and barracks, street scenes, cathedral and close, Wolvesey Palace, public buildings and mills, houses, churches and ending with three remarkable air photographs. The maps and illustrations are fortified by nine brilliant essays. But to me the most valuable part of the atlas, apart from the maps, is the gazeteer.

Interesting differences and similarities emerge between Winchester and Oxford. The evidence for a regular Anglo-Saxon street layout imposed on but not following the layout of the Roman town is seen at Winchester. The layout of Oxford with its late Saxon streets was more that of a border town of the ninth century on the edge of two competing kingdoms. A similarity between the two towns is the enormous influence of church, whose major institutions in Winchester (such as cathedral, Nunnaminster, bishops palace) occupied about a quarter of the walled city as well as supporting multiple parish churches. Winchester, from being, in effect, the capital of late Saxon England experienced its political and economic

apogee in the twelfth century. Like Oxford its population and trade declined in the late Middle Ages when many of its parish churches were demolished. The strength of the collegiate system in resisting the disruption of the Reformation is seen in both places. Wykeham's foundation of St Marys College at Winchester survived to become one of England's most famous public schools because, like a number of its Oxford contemporaries, it was well endowed, its statutes thoroughly thought out, and its position outside the walls enabled it to expand. Some of the maps show that Winchester's strategic position, near the major ports (Southampton and Portsmouth) and vulnerable to attack from the country's traditional enemy, France, necessitated protection especially in times of wars in the 18th century. A whole German army from Hesse was hired and camped outside the city. Similar encampments were pitched for the militia. Oxford's position as the temporary royalist capital in the civil war was similarly encompassed around with fortifications.

In short this splendid Atlas whets the appetite for that dealing with Oxford, which we hope will soon see publication.

John Steane



Example of map © M Biddle and D Keene

Forthcoming Events

OBR Presentation Day

Sunday, 25 November in Oxford. More details in the next Oxon Recorder.

OBR annual lecture

Dan Miles: “Three decades of dendro-dating in Oxfordshire” at Rewley House, Oxford at 5.30pm on Tuesday 27 November.

OBR Contact details

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OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual General Meeting of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record held on Saturday 12 May 2018 in The Music Room, The Gables, Eynsham at 11.30 am.

The Chairman, Paul Clark was in the chair. 30 members were present.

1. Apologies for absence had been received from Richard Bidgood, Diane Charlesworth, Kathy Davies, Richard Farrant, John Harris, David Hughes, Sally Stradling and Russell Weston

2. Minutes of the seventeenth AGM held on 13 May 2017.

No amendments were proposed and adoption was proposed by J Hine, seconded by T Jordan; they were approved *nem con* and were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Treasurer's Report and Accounts for 2017

The Treasurer, Tim Peacock, introducing the accounts said that the surplus of £365 for the year was less than in 2016 because of additional payments of £340 for leaflets and of £67 for new LED lamps. Most of the 'other' payments were for publication expenses. The committee was considering possible uses for the total balance at the year end of some £10,250 and the proposed bursary scheme (AoB below) was one strand in this.

D Fielding proposed that the accounts be adopted, J Bailey seconded and a motion to adopt them was carried *nem con*.

5. Secretary's Report

The Secretary, David Clark, reported that 2017 saw the completion of fieldwork in Chipping Norton for the Historic England project on Early Fabric in Historic Towns, and the publication of a book by Jan Cliffe and Adrienne Rosen was the first tangible result. Locally-based project support was given in Chalgrove, where to date 28 houses had been recorded; in Abingdon, where there were now 42 recorded buildings, and in Appleton where we were recording buildings in association with community archaeology.

Group recording days were held at The Gothic House in Drayton, The Great Barn and College Barn in Chalgrove (as part of Martin Bridge's project on the potential for tree-ring dating of elm timbers), two buildings in Appleton, and in the summer we had a training day using a simple WW1 airfield building on Port Meadow. The locations were mainly in the south, and he asked for ideas for future work in the north in order to offer opportunities to members living in different parts of the county.

Work to get our building reports into a form suitable for archiving at the Oxfordshire History Centre had continued, with some 50 reports now ready for deposit. This involved much detailed admin to ensure all necessary permissions were in place, and he thanked Donna Thynne for her work on this.

He also thanked Tim Peacock for his work on the website and Donna for posting information on the OBR Facebook page.

Simon Bradley had been the OBR lecturer in 2017, sharing his thoughts on Nikolaus Pevsner's descriptions and understandings of Oxford city buildings, as he worked on the revision of the Oxfordshire Buildings of England volume on the city, south and east.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

Paul reported that membership stood at 185, including five corporate members. Although 13 new members had joined, these were offset by resignations and failures to renew. He recorded also the deaths of Roseanne Bonney, Gillian Harrison and Stella Welford.

7. Election of Officers and Committee for 2018/19

Nominations had been received for the posts of Chairman (Paul Clark), Secretary (David Clark) and Treasurer (Tim Peacock). There being no further nominations, J Casson proposed and H Horner seconded a motion that they all be elected. This was carried *nem con* and the Chairman declared them duly elected.

Offering themselves for election to the committee were:

Kathy Davies, Richard Farrant (Newsletter Editor), Heather Horner, David Hughes, Donna Thynne (Archivist) and Simon Townley.

C Robinson proposed and P Mothersole seconded a motion that they be elected en bloc, and this was passed *nem con*.

John Steane has been a co-opted member and the Chairman hoped he would continue to act in this role.

8. Election of Examiner

Malcolm Lucas was proposed as examiner by H Horner, seconded by D Thynne. There being no other nomination, he was declared duly elected.

9. Any other business

a. Proposed training bursary scheme

A note had been circulated with the agenda. The Chairman said that the idea was to offer an annual bursary for a member to attend a suitable course or conference. For the first (trial) year we hoped to offer a bursary to attend a VAG training course in Gloucestershire in September. Full details would be circulated when available.

b. Data privacy statement

The Chairman said that this note set out OBR's position on the GDPR regulations. It was for information and no questions were raised.

c. Excursions

John Hine said that OBR members were very welcome to join OAHS excursions, but members wishing to do so should e-mail him first to ensure places were available.

The Chairman thanked Heather Horner for putting in place the arrangements for the day, and the volunteers who had managed the catering arrangements.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 11.58am.

David Clark, Secretary, 12 May 2018.