

THE OXON RECORDER



SUMMER 2020

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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 with accompanying photographs sent separately in high resolution jpg format.

OBR News

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. As you will know, the AGM scheduled for 16 May was deferred indefinitely due to the Coronavirus lock-down. No objections to the accounts and reports circulated with OR 81 were made, so these are assumed to have been adopted. Similarly, no objections were made to the proposal that the committee members and officers remain in post and so they do so.

OBR BURSARIES. A reminder that OBR offers bursaries of up to £500 to pay part or all of the fee for courses or conferences which will improve the applicant's ability to record and interpret a vernacular building. Applicants must be OBR personal members, and will be expected to demonstrate commitment to support and promote the OBR's aim [*"to encourage the better understanding of Oxfordshire's built heritage, and to this end its members carry out building recording, teach courses, give talks, and write articles (or even books) on the subject."*] A condition of the award is that applicants make a report on the course or conference which may be published in the Oxon Recorder.

Applications should be made to the Secretary at secretary@obr.org.uk, using the form available on the website.

Historic iron railings; help needed

Looking for 'something to do while doing your daily exercise'? Why not study the historic iron railings in your local area?



The Rose Lane gates to Christ Church Meadow appear in a drawing of ca.1830, and on a 1789 map

Railings are an important feature of the 'public realm', and add character to towns, villages and country houses. But they are not well understood. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. There was a major loss of historic railings requisitioned under Regulation 50 of the Defence (General) Regulations, 1939 to provide materials for armaments during the war. Many of these were subsequently replaced, but unless pre-war photographs are available, one cannot be sure whether those we see today are exact copies or not.
2. Drawings and paintings made before the advent of photography may not show railings at all – either due to laziness or the artist's wish to show the building or streetscape without them. Where they are drawn, they may not be an accurate representation.
3. Listed building descriptions may not mention historic railings – either because it was known that the railings were not in fact 'historic', or because it was not deemed necessary to mention them. Even where gates and railings are listed in their own right, the descriptions can contain errors and omissions.
4. The planning system does not always capture changes to railings, either because decisions are deemed not to require permission (like-for-like replacement), or permission has not been sought, or because there is no definitive guide to railings and their dates.

It was to try to fulfil this last requirement that we have been piloting a project in Oxford to create a database of historic (pre-1900) dated iron railings. The aim is to try to identify datable characteristics – such as when did 'lower rails' appear, when did cast iron become more popular than wrought iron, and is there a chronology of decorative features? We have learned a lot, and would like to extend it to towns, villages and country houses throughout Oxfordshire.

Experience in the city has found that this project is not simply a matter of walking about taking pictures. Historic photographs must be sought out, listed building descriptions and planning applications consulted, and some detailed measurement and recording may be needed. But be warned – things are often not what they seem to be.

Take the railings at the Hensington Gate to Blenheim Palace, for example.



Railings at the Hensington Gate to Blenheim Palace

The gateway is attributed in the List Description (ref. 1368005) to Nicholas Hawksmoor and dated to the period 1706-1710. But then it goes on to say that the ‘carriage gates’ are ‘late C19’ and that ‘The gate piers originally stood in the garden to the east of Blenheim Palace and were moved to their present position in the 1770s.’ The railings are mentioned, but with no indication of a date: so are they Hawksmoor’s, or did they come with the gatepiers in the 1770s, or are they nineteenth-century like the gates? This is the sort of problem we need your help with.

If you would like to help, please contact David Clark (secretary@obr.org.uk) with the general location you would like to research. He will take you through the process, and give you a spreadsheet to complete.

David Clark
Photos © David Clark

New online resources at the Oxfordshire History Centre; tithe maps and much more

Oxfordshire History Centre has just launched a new public portal giving easy access to a wide range of digitised resources, including several which were previously available only at the Centre or in county libraries.

For building historians, one of the most useful will be the full colour digitised versions of all the Centre’s tithe maps, which allow users to zoom into the fine details at fantastic resolution. (The accompanying schedules are unfortunately not yet freely available, but no doubt that’s a plan for the future.) There is also easy access to all the main 16th- to 18th-century printed county maps (Christopher Saxton, Thomas Jefferys, Richard Davis et al.), and to a cornucopia of other links and resources. Those freely available are clearly distinguished from links leading to restricted or subscription sites.



Tithe map detail of Goring; 1848 © Oxfordshire History Centre



Jeffrey's map of Oxfordshire detail of Whitchurch and Hardwick House; 1766-7

© Oxfordshire History Centre

The main index page is at: www.oxfordshirehistory.org.uk. For the tithe and other maps, follow <<Maps - Oxfordshire>> and the relevant links.

Simon Townley

Transcribing District Valuation Surveys: the OBR needs you!

The OBR is looking for members interested in transcribing District Valuation surveys for particular parishes – invaluable for anyone interested in the history of a place's buildings, since they give details of owners, occupiers, and (where relevant) attached acreage c.1910–15. All of those for the pre-1974 county are available online on the Oxfordshire History Centre website, which makes this a perfect lockdown project for anyone with time on their hands!

The surveys were produced for the whole country under the 1910 Finance Act, which imposed new rateable values on property. All of the survey books have accompanying maps, creating (like the tithe surveys of the 1830s–40s) an invaluable snapshot of who owned and occupied which buildings, what the buildings were used for, and (if they were farmhouses) how much land they had. The information can then be easily expanded using the 1911 census and printed trades directories.

There is no particular order of priority if people have a particular village or town in mind – perhaps their own! All else being equal, though, we are keen for someone to tackle Hook Norton, where the OBR was involved (pre-lockdown) in intensive building recording in partnership with the VCH – and the VCH, too, has a number of particular west Oxfordshire parishes in mind.



Parish of Over Norton														
No. of Assessment	No. of Poor Rate	Christian Names and Surnames of Occupiers	Christian Names and Surnames of Owners with their Residences	Description of Property—If an Inn, &c., the name or sign by which known	Street, Place, Name and Precise Situation of Property	Poor Rate			Reference to Map	Extent as determined by Value				Original Val
						Estimated Extent	Gross Annual Value	Rateable Value		Acres	R.	P.	V.	
13	12	Meale Wm J	Walnut P. Walford Over Norton, Clipping Norton	Land	Chiswell Hill Farm	39 2	56 -	50 8	14 6 1/2	40	1	38	0	9
14	13	Walford Walnut P.	"	House & Bldgs	"		13 -	11 14	14 7 1/2					
15	14	Saplin Walter H	William G. Dawkins	Land	Chapel Farm	52 2	32 -	28 16						
		Same	"	House & Bldgs	"		13 -	11 14						
16	15	Webb James & Thomas	"	Land	"	42 2	38 13	35 7						
		"	"	Buildings	"		9 -	8 2						
17	16	Honour James	"	Land	The Park	80 -	50 -	47 10						
18	17	Webb James & Thomas	"	"	Wells Farm	23 -	13 14	13 3						
19	18	Webb William	"	"	Farmer's Surge	29 -	21 -	19 19						
20	19	Toy William	Godfrey A. Littlehale The Vicarage, Clipping Norton	Pasture Land	Vicar's Close	5 -	11 5	10 12 1/2						
21	20	Walford Walnut P.	Walnut P. Walford	House & Bldgs	Over Norton	30 1	24 1	24 1						

District Valuation map and accompanying survey detail; 1910 © Oxfordshire History Centre

If you're interested, contact me at simon.townley@history.ox.ac.uk, and I'll be happy to give further information and send you a pro forma in Microsoft Excel. The survey books are all arranged in a standard format, so transcribing the data into an Excel spreadsheet is fairly straightforward, save for some occasionally wayward handwriting.

For more background see <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/leisure-and-culture/history/oxfordshire-history-centre/collections-archives-and-records/district-valuation> where you can also access any of the survey books or accompanying maps.

Simon Townley (OBR committee and VCH Oxfordshire)

The making of a field archaeologist; Part 2 1949-1976

Editor's note. What follows is the second instalment of a departure from the Oxon Recorder's normal fare, being an autobiographical memoir by our Honorary President, John Steane. His eminence as a field archaeologist of vernacular building of very long standing will make the origins of his motivation relevant to most readers; and his account is also a vignette on past times which will be of interest to many. A third part will appear in a future Oxon Recorder.

I joined the army to do 18 months National Service in April 1949. The first three months were spent in the Napoleonic camp at Shorncliffe, Kent. During the meagre amounts of leave I made the acquaintance of Dover Castle and the Norman church of St Margaret at Cliffe, but most of the time we spent parading on barrack squares, cleaning our equipment and learning how to shoot straight on the ranges at Hythe. I was directed into the Royal Army Educational Corps and spent the next three months teacher training at Bodmin in Cornwall, to be a sergeant instructor (or "schoolie" as our contemporaries called us). This enabled those of us so inclined to hitch hike round Cornwall visiting medieval churches and Henrician fortifications. I also took the opportunity of painting in watercolours 'en plein air' (out of doors). This attracted the attention of our cultivated commanding officer, Major the Viscount Keren who realised that soldiers could be other than killing machines. He introduced me to the poetry of TS Eliot which Dulwich had somehow left out.

I was sent on "passing out" to Edinburgh to help man the army education centre. I was fortunate to be housed in the mighty castle; my memories were of great warmth during a freezing winter. I was welcomed by the hoary old N.C.O's into their sergeant's mess. My work involved a weekly visit by train to Berwick to teach the skeleton staff of the King's Own Scottish Borderers regiment. This enabled me to explore the amazing Elizabethan fortifications. I also went weekly to Galashiels to teach three warrant officers who wished to improve their chances of promotion by gaining Army Certificates of Education.

Despite the 'plum job' of being stationed in Edinburgh I wanted to experience being sent abroad so I applied for a foreign posting, and in March 1950 I was sent to Trieste. This baroque city at the head of the Adriatic had been the sole warm-water part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was consequently of great strategic importance to the allied forces who garrisoned it with a condominium of British and American forces. I was introduced for the first time in my life to archaeology being used (or abused) for political purposes. Mussolini had spent large sums restoring the considerable Roman remains and thus to fortify the somewhat slender claims of Italy to the city whose population was largely Slavonic.



Piazza Unita d'Italia in Trieste

I arrived in Trieste in March 1950 and was promptly given a welcome railway warrant to take me to the major historic cities such as Venice, Padua, Florence and Rome. I introduced myself to the major Renaissance painters and sculptors, which I was later to study in my second year as an undergraduate at Oxford. The soldier whom I was to replace had another month of service to run so the army took the opportunity of educating me in the month between my arrival and his departure.

On my return I settled down in earnest to teach; once a week I went to the military corrective establishment where I taught would-be murderers and Yugoslav deserters.

My 18 months of National Service ended in September 1950 and I went up to Magdalen College to read Modern History in October. The course is proverbially tough but I had



Magdalen College, © watercolour by John Steane

inspiring, if eccentric, teachers and still had time to pursue my own interests. These included experience at digging at a professionally led excavation at Cassington Iron Age fort, and cycling round the upper Thames basin investigating the churches described in Parker's Architectural Guide. The college paid for me to spend two months at Perugia where the Università per Stranieri helped to carry on Italian language teaching enabling me to read the set books on Renaissance Italy. I (and Nina, who became my wife) attended Christopher Woodforde's lectures in the iconography of English decorations in the Middle Ages.

By far the most significant, however, of the experiences undergone was the six seminars of English Landscape History by William G. Hoskins. Until now I had limited my studies of the landscape to significant houses and medieval churches.

Now, the whole landscape was seen as a field of study.

The next eleven years was taken up with marriage, children, and learning how to teach History at school and extra mural level. I started with a year at an independent school, Tonbridge, and then two Lancashire grammar schools each with high academic reputations (Alsop High School, Liverpool and King George V School, Southport). In each I founded Local History and Archaeological Societies which met for field work at weekends and during holidays. Aspects of the historic landscape which interested us were moated sites, historic gardens, medieval fishponds. We met for lectures and one of the boys, Brian Dix and I wrote a book for the Council for British Archaeology examining our techniques, entitled 'Peopling Past Landscapes'. We were lucky to discover an important medieval pottery-making and iron smelting site at Lyveden near Oundle. This we excavated over nine seasons 1964-1973. My mentor, W.G. Hoskins heard of our work and commissioned a book in a series he was editing entitled 'The Northamptonshire Landscape'. We also were interested in industrial technology and over a period of three years excavated and reconstructed pot kilns and iron smelting furnaces.



Northamptonshire kissing gate



Whites Barn, Letcombe Bassett

© watercolours by John Steane

So how did a schoolmaster with his career in midlife become County Archaeologist of Oxfordshire? The answer is that I was scrubbing out down our hall (Victorian tiles) and spied in the sodden copy of the Guardian an advertisement for Field Officer for the Department of Museum Services. I wrote off immediately. A month later I had moved from teaching history to recording Oxfordshire's archaeology.

John Steane

A country architect: John Cheney of Chipping Norton; 1766-1809

The profession of 'architect' might well be found in Georgian London, or perhaps in Oxford, but it is unusual to come across an architect in a small eighteenth-century market town. Documentary research on Chipping Norton's buildings led to the unexpected discovery of John Cheney, who lived in the town in the 1790s and stated his occupation as 'architect'. This brief account summarises what we know of his career. We would be interested to hear from anyone who has come across him elsewhere.

John Cheney was born in Nantwich (Cheshire) in 1766 where his father was a successful timber merchant and builder. John left Nantwich as a young man and Colvin's *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* tells us that from 1788 to 1793 he was Clerk of Works (the architect's deputy on site) to the London architect Samuel Pepys Cockerell at Daylesford House in Gloucestershire. Daylesford had been bought by Warren Hastings on his return from India, and Cockerell was commissioned to build his country house as soon as the purchase was concluded in 1788.

In 1791 Cheney married Isabella Day, daughter of a Chipping Norton carpenter, and settled in the town. He was admitted as a freeman of the borough in 1793 and set up his yard between Spring Street and Horsefair in workshops and warehouses formerly used by a wool broker. Documentary evidence provides clues to his activities in the 1790s: designs signed in 1795 for work at Stoke Bruern Park (Northants), apparently not carried out; the sale of deal and oak timber in 1797 for work at Luckley Farm, Longborough (Glos); and in 1799 he took an apprentice, describing his trade as 'builder etc'. Cheney also returned to employment with S.P. Cockerell for the early phases of work at Sezincote (Glos) in 1795-8.

John Cheney and his family left Chipping Norton in 1801 and moved to Kingston-upon-Thames to take over the business of a carpenter/builder. The end of his story is a sad one: John Cheney died aged 43 in 1809, followed by his wife Isabella in 1810. Cheney's will confessed that he had used family legacies intended for his children to fund his business in Kingston, so his move to the capital may not have been as profitable as he had hoped.

Having found a Chipping Norton architect, we would like to identify any of his buildings in the town and particularly those at the 'polite' end of the spectrum. These are some possible candidates:

36 *New Street* was rebuilt in the 1790s. It has elegant tripartite windows, the elements of which are separated by unusual shafts in the form of Doric columns.



36 New Street



Tripartite window with doric column shafts

Photographs © John Marshall

15 Market Place is a more sophisticated building, the front range of which is thought to have been rebuilt in the 1790s. Its tripartite windows share the unusual Doric shafts found at 36 New Street. The stone doorcase is also particularly distinctive.



15 Market Place

© John Marshall



15 Market Place window



15 Market Place doorcase

Photographs © John Marshall

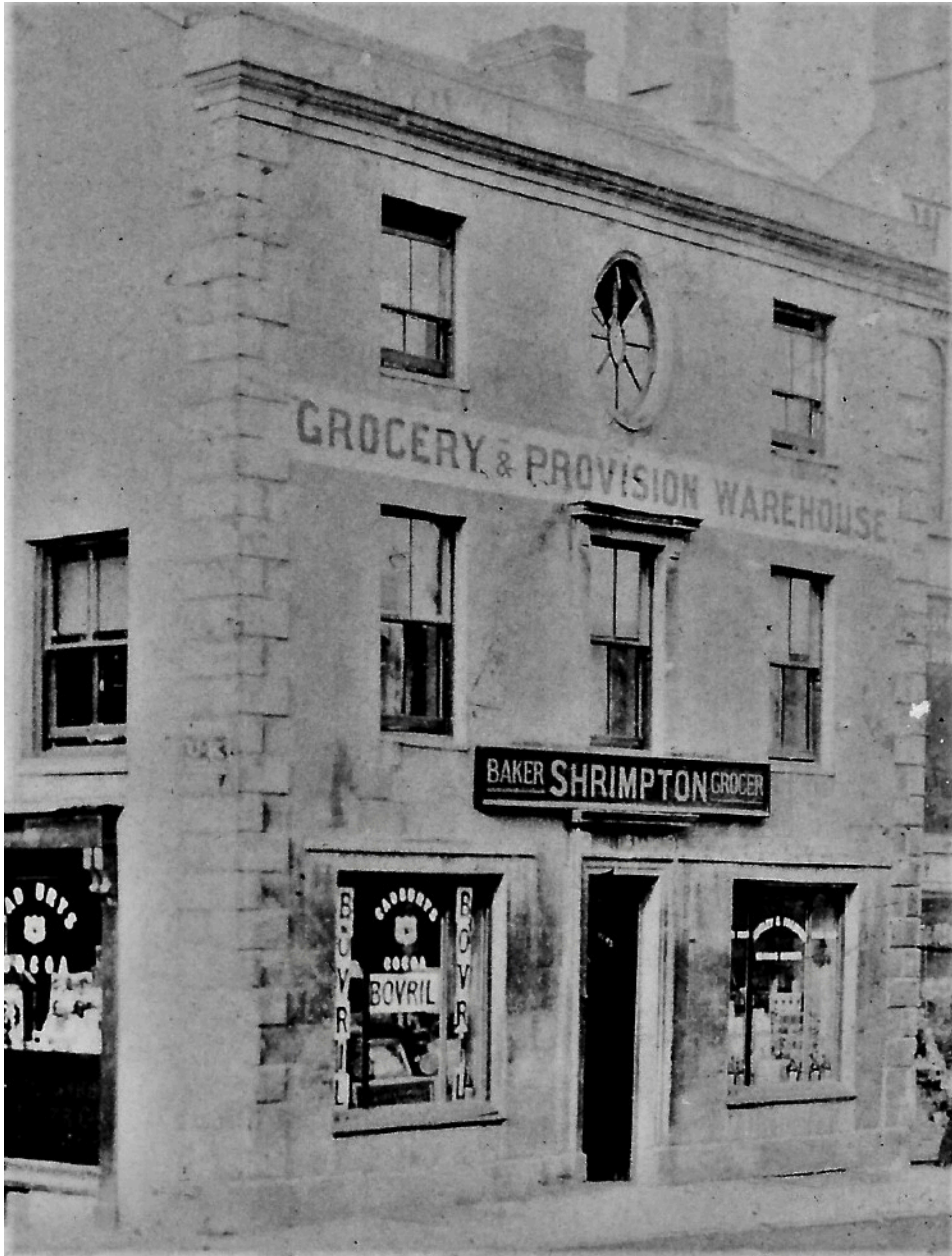


Oculus

16 Market Place

16 Market Place is thought to have had an attic storey added to its c.1750 façade in the 1790s. The oculus is an unusual feature, and has parallels at Daylesford House.

11 Market Place was probably constructed in the 1790s and was demolished in the 1960s. It had a very distinctive bullseye window or *oeil de boeuf*, set vertically.



11 Market Place

Image © John Marshall from original photograph of 1909

Have you seen any of these features elsewhere, or found references to John Cheney and his work?

(With thanks to John Marshall and Allen Firth, and the Chipping Norton OBR buildings group.)

Adrienne Rosen
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Building styles in Windsor

A row of houses I saw in Windsor last year make an interesting horizon of at least three different building styles. These are on Castle Hill, no 1 being Castle's Pantry, no. 2 the Ice Queen shop, no. 3 the King and Queen Gift Shop and no. 4 The Horse & Groom. They are all listed Grade II.



The house row on Castle Hill, Windsor © Donna Thynne

No. 1 Castle Hill forms the corner of a block of buildings with nos. 47 and 50 of the High Street that comprises 16th and 17th century buildings altered in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Its southerly gable is presented to Castle Hill.

Castle's Pantry is of three storeys with mathematical tile elevations on a timber-frame, it has a parapet coping and slate mansard attic roof.¹ The second storey sashes are recessed but have their sash boxes revealed, thus can be dated after the 1709 London Building Act. The Act prompted by the Fire of London, stated that all sash windows had to be recessed by a minimum of 4 inches from the façade of the building.

¹ From listing HE ID 506108

The listing was carried out in 1975 and no interior survey was done. To me there are some hidden treasures to be discovered especially as the building has been refronted, probably covering an earlier jetty.

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101392975-1-castle-hill-castle-without-ward#.XtTj6i5KjIU>

Nos 2 and 3 Castle Hill although listed together are different styles and probably dates too. Both have four storeys and are brick.

No 2, the King and Queen gift shop, is made of deep red bricks with decorated swags and moulded bricks below and around the sash windows. It has a decorated string course (perhaps terracotta²) between the second and third storeys. The roof has a central pedimented dormer, with swept back flanking ornamental brickwork of a decorated gable. The building is probably late 19th century.

No 3 next door is shoe-horned into a single bay space that could well have been an alleyway. Again of brick but this time painted, with a gabled parapet and toothed brick bands. The sashes are later 19th century 6 on 6 panes. The top sashes also have dog tails (horns), also denoting a later date.²

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101319300-2-and-3-castle-hill-castle-without-ward#.XtTk4y5KjIU>

The last building in the block is the gable end of The Horse & Groom. Thought to be 16th/17th century, it is a timber-framed three storey building with a rough cast render and old tile roof. The gable has carved barge boards surrounding a plain tile clad upper gable, with a cross casement window. The first and second storey windows are both sashes although the first storey window is a triple window with two lights flanking the central sashes. From the main entrance, in Market Street (to the left in the photo), it can be seen that the building is jettied, with irregular windows and doors and irregular bays.

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101204126-the-horse-and-groom-public-house-castle-without-ward#.XtTmAy5KjIU>

All in all the four buildings exhibit the changing range and character of buildings in Windsor, with high status features, excepting no 3, which has more of the look of a semi-industrial building, built to a budget with no frills.


Donna Thynne

² From the middle of the 19th century changes in the manufacture of glass where large sheets could be made more cheaply, meant that windows could have larger panes but this made them heavier. Dog tails were invented to reinforce the window frames

Ancestry on-line

Ancestry is a search on-line facility, now available free to Oxfordshire library members on its website. You can search all the UK censuses, many birth, marriage, death and military records and more. It is a formidable database, as the screenshot of the home page indicates. Explore it!

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Source Information
Ancestry.com, UT, USA; Ancestry Original data: U.S. Records, and C

Description:
The U.S. Public all 50 states in


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1841		

Richard Farrant

Forthcoming Events

Oxford Architectural & Historical Society Oxfordshire Local History Association

OBR belongs to these bodies and members can participate in their events. If you are not an OAHS member personally, you should check first with OAHS about availability, noting your OBR membership. At present of course, events are affected by the Coronavirus lock-down. See websites (http://www.oahs.org.uk/new_program.php and (<http://www.olha.org.uk/events/talks-and-meetings/>) for listings and details of events, and talks.

Council for British Archaeology

2020 Festival of Archaeology digital events on 11-19 July; on the ground events 24 October - 1 November. See <https://festival.archaeologyuk.org/find> for information and registration

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