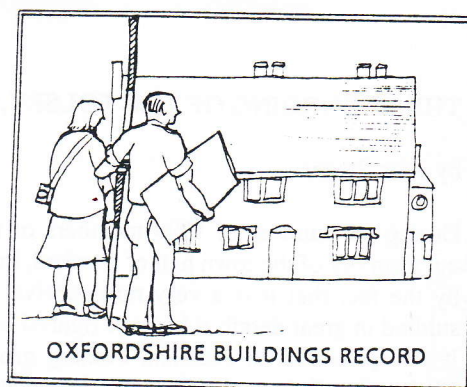


THE OXON RECORDER

Issue 2

February 2000



Enclosed with this newsletter is information about our launch afternoon on May 6. It would greatly help in planning this if you could return the slip right away. This will also ensure that you receive future copies of *The Oxon Recorder*, for, as you will see, the idea is to move to a more structured format, with various categories of membership.

We have had a very positive response to requests for newsletter items and in the next issue hope to report on a conference on architecture and salvage held in Oxford, and give an example of how searches of documentary sources can cast light on the history of a rural dwelling.

Below: Fig 1. A die for the Burford Town Seal - see over



Certificate in Vernacular Architecture

Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education is aiming to launch a new undergraduate-level course in vernacular architecture, starting in October, 2000. Aimed at the non-specialist, the course will offer students a range of tools, including theoretical, historical and practical, to assist in understanding vernacular buildings of town and country, from the earliest survivals to more recent times. It will focus on the South Midlands, from the Cotswolds to the Chilterns and beyond. The course will be taught in partnership with the Chiltern Open Air Museum, through evening sessions, day and weekend study trips. It will extend over two years, and successful completion will attract 120 CATS points.

This course will be of particular interest to those interested in Oxfordshire buildings, or who have already studied the subject through one of the Department's shorter courses, and who wish to deepen their knowledge.

To receive full details when these become available later in the year, please contact the Manager, Public Programmes, OUDCE, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA,

tel: 01865 270360, e-mail: pp@conted.ox.ac.uk

Thank You

We are extremely grateful to the Oxford Preservation Trust for their generosity in supporting the printing of our newsletter.

OXFORDSHIRE ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Listed Buildings Sub-committee

THE RECORDING OF THE TOLSEY, BURFORD

by John Steane

During the summer of 1999 members of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society carried out a survey of the town hall of Burford, known as the Tolsey. Our choice of this building was triggered by the fact that it is a very rare survival from the late Middle Ages and had apparently never been studied in great detail: it had not figured in Michael Laithwaite's survey of medieval Burford buildings. It also provided an excellent training ground for would-be recorders. We were materially helped by Christopher Baines, the curator, who greeted us on each visit, and whose wife provided welcome tea in their home at the end of each afternoon.

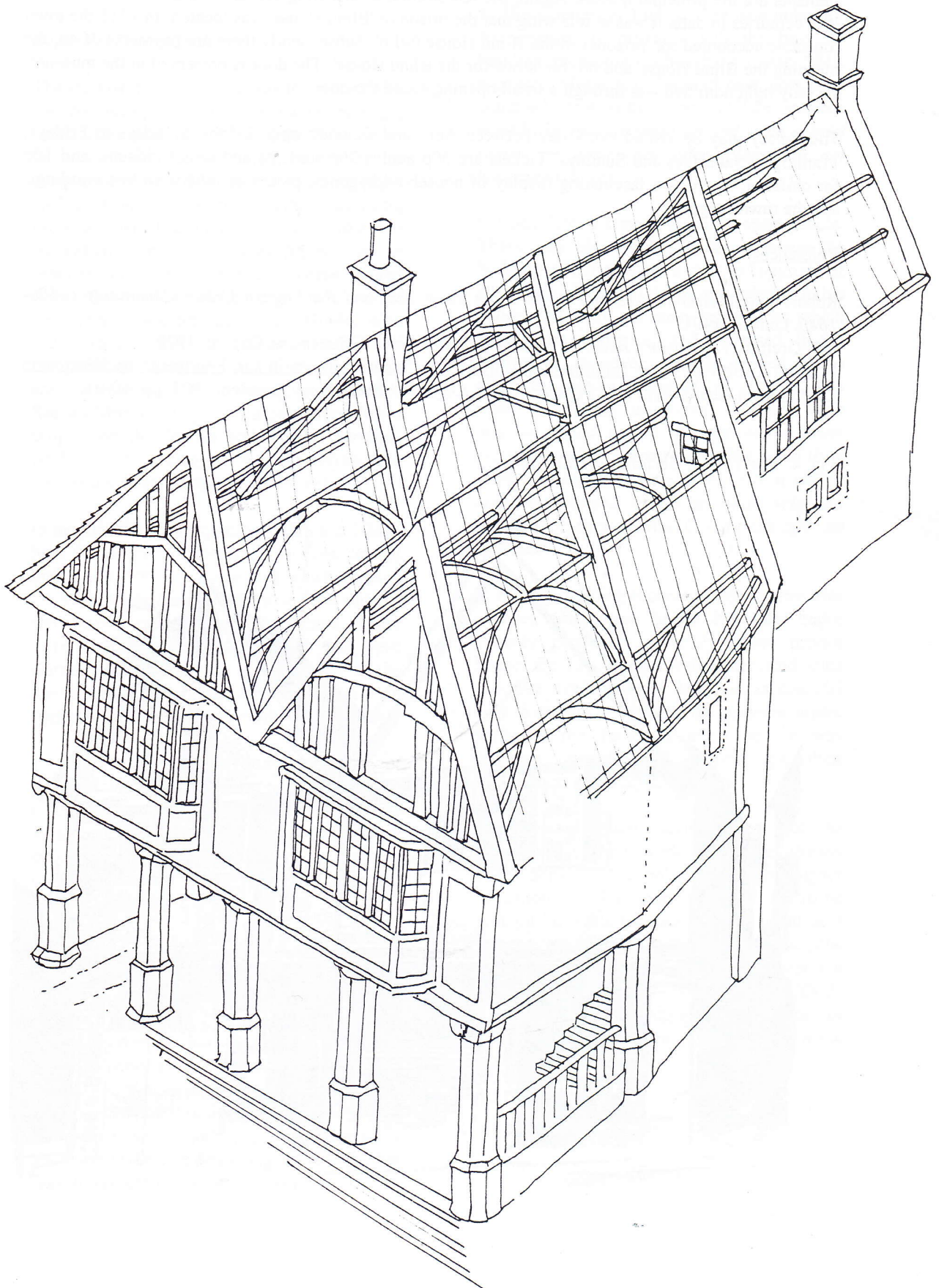
The Tolsey (the Oxford English Dictionary suggests it is an 'ancient name' for a 'guildhall' in Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, and might be a small edifice used more or less exclusively for collecting tolls) seems to have been first mentioned in 1561, but close study of the building puts it ca. 1500 or within 25 years of that date. Over the past 500 years it has performed a number of useful functions, those of market hall, court house for the bailiff, council chamber and prison; it has housed the town's records and regalia, and, in the 19th century, its fire engine. Fig.1 shows the die for the town's seal. Its ground floor is now used as a covered market, the upper as a museum and parish meeting room. The engraving (Fig.2) of ca. 1800 shows the Tolsey with the stocks nearby.



Fig. 2 The Tolsey, Burford, ca. 1800

Architecturally, it is of great interest. Its location in the middle of the town at the point where two major east-west routes join the main spine street makes it a prominent building. It consisted originally of a rectangular block lying parallel to the street with its roofing in two ranges at right angles. The lower part was originally supported on eight octagonal columns, the front being open to the public. The upper part is timber-framed and has two bay windows facing the High Street, each with a gable above. From one protrudes a town clock; the present stairs are a modern and more convenient form of access to the upper floor. The first floor has been much altered and cut about when the tie beams were removed to heighten the ceiling, but the stumps of the ties and the jowled posts are still in place. The walls at first floor level were formerly of plastered wattle and daub, and the holes and grooves for this can still be seen on the main timbers.

Fig. 3 The Tolsey, Burford (J Steane, 1999)



The roof is of a common type for the late Middle Ages in West Oxfordshire: two ranges of two bays of A-frames, that is to say principal rafters with chamfered collars, horizontal stiffening provided by two ranges of purlins, butt-jointed into the principals, and braced (Fig.3). Some of the wind-braces are interesting: most are curved but one or two are straight. The asymmetrical rear section is evidently later, possibly early 17th century: the timbering has survived much less well and indeed the only ancient elements are the principal trusses. Again, the fenestration of this wing seems to be all from the 19th or 20th centuries in date. It was in this wing that the prison or 'Blind House' was located. In 1715 the town constable accounted for 'prisoner in the Blind House 0-0-6'. Subsequently there are payments of 4d. for 'cleaning the Blind House' and 6d. for 'straw for the Blind House'. The door is preserved in the museum; the only light admitted was through a small opening above the door.

The Tolsey may be visited every day between April and October; open 2-5pm, Mondays to Fridays, 11am-5pm, Saturdays and Sundays. Tickets are 50p adults, 20p students and senior citizens, and 10p for children. There is a fascinating display of household by-gones, pieces of otherwise lost buildings, and the town's regalia.

References

Robert Tittler, *Architecture and Power: The Town Hall and the English Urban Community c1500-1640*. Oxford, 1991.

R H Gretton, *The Burford Records, a Study in Minor Town Government*. Oxford, 1920.

Michael Laithwaite, *The Buildings of Burford. A Cotswold Town in the Fourteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, in Alan Everitt (ed) *Perspectives in English Urban History*. London, 1973, pp. 60-91.

Fig. 4. The Tolsey, Burford, ca 1900



Weaving the Tapestry: a Conference on Thematic Recording organised by the National Monuments Record and the Archaeological Data Service in London on 29 October 1999.

Report by David Clark

The idea of the conference was for people who are recording aspects of Britain's heritage, particularly those which are themed, ie. focus on a particular building type, or feature, to share experiences. The lessons which emerged are, however, relevant to other recording projects, too. The first part was devoted to individual thematic recording projects which reported on their experiences. These ranged from the national-scale and wide scope recording of wartime defences 1940-44, with professional and volunteer staff and computerised databases, to a 2-man team who are drawing all the remaining fragments of Roman Mosaics. Of more limited scope was a project on the Jewish architectural heritage, while the recording of war memorials had involved a large number of volunteers.

In the afternoon, the sponsors, ADS and NMR, both providers of information services, set out their stalls, within a framework which stressed the need to ask basic questions such as why we were doing recording and for whom. There were a number of lessons which had been learned, some of which were relevant to the recording of vernacular buildings in Oxfordshire. My own comments are in italics.

1. There ought to be some objective or research framework for the recording work, otherwise it will be a long time for any results to appear. *(We have recognised this, but it must not inhibit the recording effort; some of us will be thinking how to do this over the coming months)*

2. Recorders need to be kept informed and enthusiastic, and newsletters are essential tools. *(Here we are!)*

3. The need to tap into the work of Local and Family History groups was essential, both as a source of volunteers and of pre-existing information (for building recording, it is also necessary to show how this can help their other interests) *(We are beginning to do this, but need to recognise the two-way traffic)*

4. There are a number of grant-giving bodies, some of which will put conditions such as the work must be published or be made publicly available, and the material generated deposited in an appropriate archive.

5. The Council of Europe core data index for Architecture is probably still the best for building recording, although two new NMR products, Midas and Thesauri have now been launched. (free on the internet) *(If any member would like to look these up and write a brief report on what they offer, please do not hesitate to do so)*

6. Copyright is a major issue for some people. There may also be circumstances where the building owner also has a right to copyright of all photos, plans and documents relating to his house, and there are many sensitivities which need to be recognised and addressed. In the long term, however, thought needed to be given to vesting copyright of records with some 'permanent' institution. *(I would hope that we could get to a point where living recorders would allow royalty-free use of their work by bona-fide researchers with a simple acknowledgement, assigning the copyright to the OBR on their demise. Can anyone offer an alternative?)*

7. Putting building records on the internet was also an issue, some feeling this posed major security problems, especially where private houses are concerned. On the other hand some saw free availability of databases as essential now to getting results into the academic arena, while in the future it might be the way 'ordinary' people and schools got their information as a matter of course.

8. The education sector must not be overlooked. Much work may have already been done in schools and further/higher education establishments, which needed to be brought in, while the data resource could be a valuable teaching aid in these institutions. *(The OBR will inevitably benefit from interaction with students on courses at OUDCE, particularly the proposed Certificate in Vernacular Architecture - see the note on the front page)*

Priory Farm: another perspective.

In the last issue we reported on work carried out at Priory Farm, Cold Norton. This view of the day is by another of John's students, David Dunford.

At the bottom of a farm lane near Chipping Norton, overlooking the remote valley of one of the headwaters of the River Glyme, stands Priory Farm. The old farmhouse had been unoccupied for a decade or so, until purchased recently by the present owners, who are renovating the property as a family home. By their kind invitation, in March 1998 students of the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education's Vernacular Architecture course assembled there, under the tutelage of John Steane to survey and record the building. After a welcome cup of coffee, we made an initial appraisal of the building, which is stone-built, of two storeys, and L-shaped in plan, with a fairly steeply pitched roof, tall chimney stacks and large cellars under the kitchen.

Next we divided into pairs to record the various rooms, staircases and windows of the farmhouse, both inside and out. Mr Steane, meanwhile, disappeared into the roof space to record the construction of the beams and rafters - taking advantage of the fact that the roof was temporarily sheathed in plastic, giving more light than would normally be available. My partner and I were allocated two upstairs rooms above the kitchen to survey. Measuring the second of these rooms proved somewhat perilous, as a large area of floorboards had been temporarily removed. Meanwhile, all over the rambling building, other groups were wielding their tape measures and graph paper, recording the precise dimensions of the building, inside and out, upstairs and down.

Once we had recorded the plan of the building, we were allotted some of the more interesting corners and details of the house to record. My task was to record an interesting and imposing fireplace, with moulded stone surround, in an upstairs room.

Over a packed lunch in the walled garden overlooking the stream valley below, and entertained by a resplendent peacock displaying to his mate, we puzzled over the various riddles our investigations had revealed. One interesting feature of the building was a number of wooden beams embedded at odd heights within the walls. These had caused much bafflement; did they indicate the level of earlier floors or ceilings? Mr Steane enlightened us: such beams were included in stone buildings to allow room for expansion and contraction of the stonework, a common technique in stone buildings in this locality.

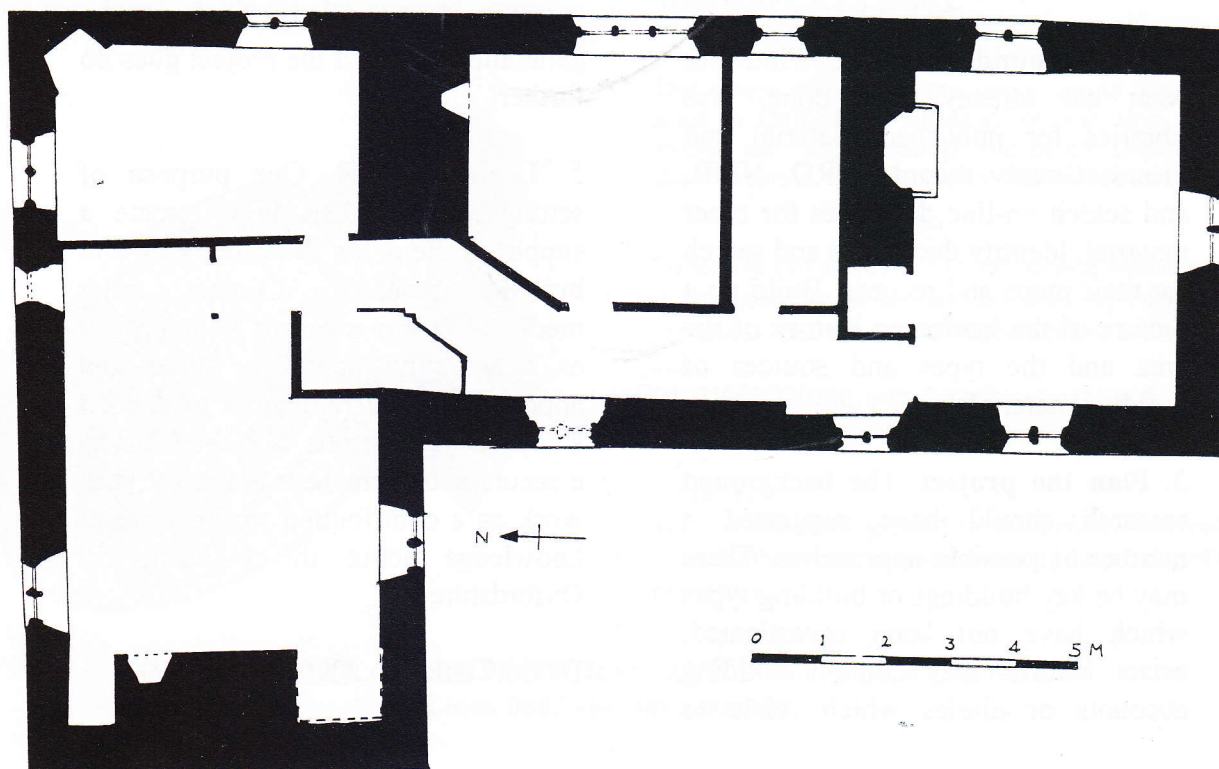
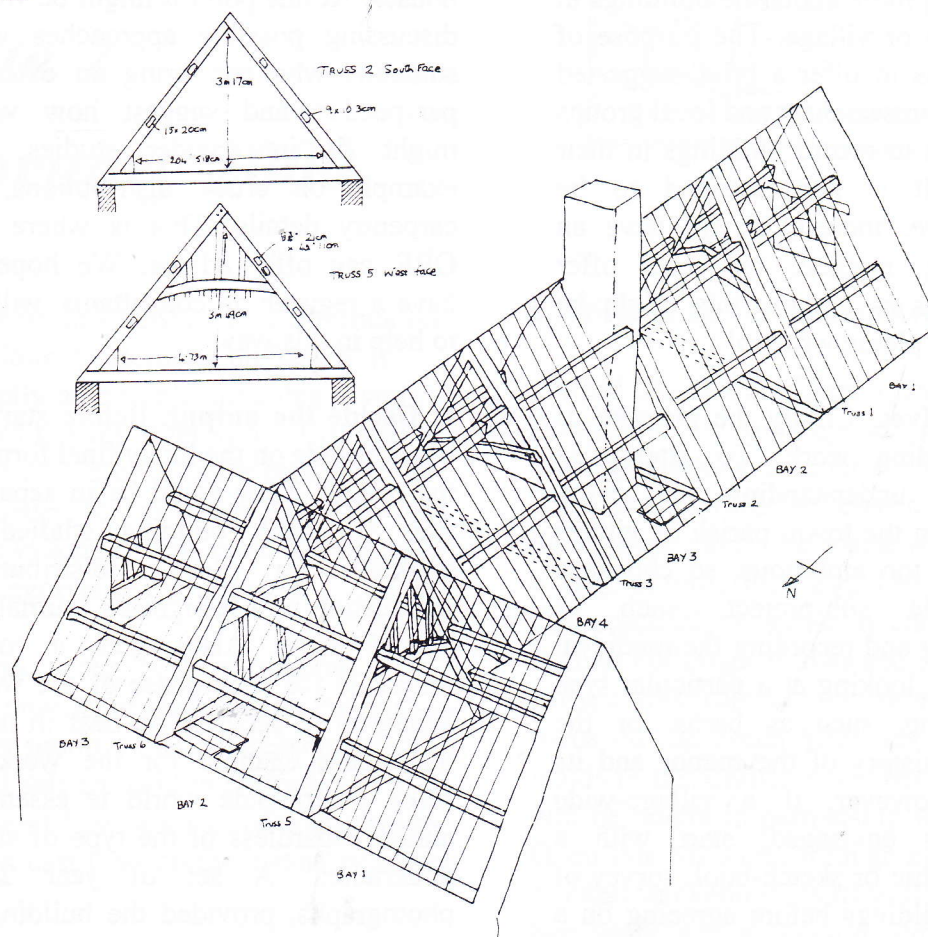
The building was clearly not all of one period; from a modern porch and internal walls, to some suspiciously aligned windows, the building bore the signs of a long and changing history. My fireplace proved something of a talking point; the consensus was that the crisply carved lintel was a comparatively modern replica, perhaps Victorian, but the uprights may have been original. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner says of the building that it has "no details earlier than the C 17"; although we found nothing definitely predating this, we surmised that parts of the building, including the fireplace, may incorporate material salvaged from the earlier Augustinian priory that gave its name to the farm. The remains of the priory were still visible enough to be recorded in a print of 1729 by Buck. Before we departed, with merry thanks to our hosts, we took the two large-scale floor plans of the building, measured and drawn independently for the upper and lower storeys. Tempting fate, we laid them one on top of the other, and lo and behold, to our surprise and satisfaction, the outer lines of the external walls matched almost to the millimetre!

In summary, our morning spent at Priory Farm was a most interesting and fruitful one, and I would encourage you to grab any opportunity you get to undertake similar work.

Editor's note: all contributions to the Oxon Recorder are welcome. Copy date for the May issue is 20 April. Please send to David Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ, or e-mail david.clark3@which.net

Priory Farm, Cold Norton

Two products of the work done by John Steane's students at Priory Farm: an axonometric diagram of the roof structure, and the ground floor plan. Drawn up by John.



Recording Framework

"What buildings should I record?", is a question often asked by those keen to understand more about the buildings in their town or village. The purpose of this note is to offer a brief suggested outline for researchers and local groups setting out to record buildings in their locality. It is not intended to be prescriptive: indeed, if you have an alternative method, or can offer suggestions as to how this might be improved, please write in!

1. **Objectives.** Clarify the purpose of the recording work. To attempt a complete understanding of every structure in the town, parish or village would be too ambitious, so choose a manageable sub-project, such as identifying and recording the medieval structures, looking at a particular type of building, such as barns, or the building history of the manor and its estate. However, if a village-wide project is envisaged, start with a photographic or sketch-book survey of all the buildings before agreeing on a suitable sub-project.

2. **Background research.** Find out what has already been done. Use libraries for published material and theses; County records, PRO, NMR, and search on-line databases for other material. Identify the estates and search for their maps and records. Build up a picture of the landscape history of the area and the types and sources of building materials.

3. **Plan the project.** The background research should have suggested a number of possible approaches. There may be key buildings or building types which have not been investigated; estate records may contain building accounts or diaries which relate to

standing structures and probate records may describe the contents of their rooms; photographs may give clues to common or rare features of village houses. At this point it might be worth discussing possible approaches with someone who can bring an external perspective and suggest how work might fit into wider studies, for example on cruck distributions, or carpentry details. This is where the OBR can offer advice. We hope to have a register of 'consultants' willing to help in this way.

4. **Decide the output.** Before starting work, decide on the likely final form of the results. They could be in separate files for each building studied, a booklet for local distribution, publication in a recognised journal, or all of these. Also agree a rough timescale for each phase of the work. Whatever is decided, do bear in mind that some channel for the work to reach the outside world is essential, almost regardless of the type of study undertaken. A set of year 2000 photographs, provided the building is identified and the date written down, will be invaluable to future generations, even if the project goes no further!

5. **Use the OBR.** One purpose of setting up the OBR is to create a support system for those carrying out building research. Contact other members at any stage of your project as a sounding board for ideas and approaches. And remember to deposit a copy of your results with the OBR as a secure and permanent home for your work as a contribution to the fund of knowledge about the buildings of Oxfordshire.

David Clark Feb.2000