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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

The next copy date for contributions is 1 March. 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

OBR ARCHIVING

We are sad to report that after many years of sterling service Donna Thynne will be stepping down in January from her role as OBR Archivist. We thank her for all she has done to get our reports ready for deposit in the Oxfordshire History Centre and for publication on the OBR website - a major contribution to promoting the study of architectural history in Oxfordshire.

There is still ongoing work to clear a backlog of reports, but this task is becoming easier over time as they get into a standard format, and we exclude third-party material which can easily be found online or in published books and articles. The main task in future will be contacting property owners to seek permissions for displaying or depositing the reports in various places.

If this activity sounds like something you would like to do, please contact Donna archivist@obr.org.uk (yes - you get your own dedicated e-mail address!) for further information. This is a committee post, so volunteers will be co-opted until election at the next AGM.

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. Further details are available from the Secretary at secretary@obr.org.uk, and applications should use the form available on the website.

CAST-IRON FIREPLACES

The National archives have just published an interesting blog "Cast-iron cosiness: Designs for the Victorian hearth". Go to https://clicks.econnectmail.com/email/S-1031@93280@ajfNuA9f2gb0GNUrHS9xzkreaXEmxzmyfi5Z2JeH3A4.@

OBR lecture: Standards, Spikes and Swedish Ironstamps

Designed to protect private spaces yet be transparent, iron railings are an important element of the city's streetscape. However, they have been variously ignored, mistreated, wilfully removed, replaced with replicas, and misinterpreted. This year's lecturer was David Clark, and his talk showed that despite these issues, Oxford has a rich ironwork heritage that deserves greater recognition.

Attributes of railings

David noted a number of attributes of railings relevant to the historical researcher. Railings create a protective barrier intended to still allow what is behind it to be seen. It is easy to ignore and disregard them. Not long after the Martyrs' Memorial was completed in 1841 it

was surrounded by protective iron railings, but some artists chose to omit them when depicting the scene.

Their invisibility implies that they are insignificant. For example, the New College garden screen is described in detail in the literature – we know the designer was the gatesmith Thomas Robinson of London, and it was built in 1711. But while the gates themselves are probably as Robinson made them, no-one mentions that the railings to either side were replaced in replica by Wm Lucy and Co. in 1894.

New College garden gates

When damaged or corroded beyond repair, ad hoc replacements/repairs have been made, sometimes on an apparent 'like for like' basis, but often there are various clues to suggest that this has not been exact. For example, the churchyard of St Mary Magdalen has 19 different types of railing: but even those to the north and south churchyards are not the same, and the repaired sections are clearly different – largely due to the use of lower rails – where sometimes the broken stubs of the earlier railings can still be seen beneath.

St. Mary Magdalen railings……

……broken stubs of earlier railings

The downgrading of the traditional blacksmith's art in wrought iron by the standardised productions of the cast iron foundries produced inferior copies, made worse in modern

times by the replacement of historic railings by mild steel or even non-ferrous materials. Deliberate attempts are made to make the new look like the old. Thus the railings around the coffee stall in Cornmarket at St Michael at the North Gate are of mild steel and were approved in 1997, on the basis that they 'shall match those adjoining, erected in 1992, including hammering of the metalwork to imitate the appearance of wrought iron.'

Railings are easily moved from place to place, which can make dating tricky, as it is too easy to give the railings the date of the building associated with them. A specific example is the rather obvious re-use of medieval tomb railings at the gates of the Danby Arch to the Botanic Gardens (1632). First thought to have been from the tomb of Lady Montacute around the time the Arch was built, all the pictorial evidence points to the gates having been timber until 1847, and iron from 1870. If they are Lady Montacute's railings, they were kept in storage somewhere for over 200 years.

St. Michael at the North Gate; modern imitation in hammered mild steel

Danby Arch; reuse of medieval tomb railings

Then there was the wanton destruction of railings during the Second World War. There is plenty of evidence of iron stubs and holes in stone plinths where they once were, such as around a narrow garden in front of the Catte Street screen of the Clarendon Building, and at St Mary Magdalen.

There were two ways in which the railings were taken, the first a voluntary salvage scheme run by the WVS. Thus the Curators of the University Parks 'donated' two cartloads of iron early in 1940 (presumably under the salvage scheme), arguing that those railings along Parks Road were too important to lose because they protected the valuable trees and plants in the Parks.

But the crunch came when Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Supply, requisitioned railings (with minimal compensation). One of his motivations was their symbolism as protecting the property and amenities of the urban elite. Thus in 1941 the Ministry of Supply carefully choreographed the removal of 20 tons of iron railings from Buckingham Palace, highlighting the lead shown by the King in agreeing to this.

WW11 destruction

The evidence: filled-in holes

In Oxford the city council identified candidates for removal, to which the owner could object. The Curators of the University Parks failed to sustain their argument about the importance of their railings, so, apart from a small section at the North Lodge, these were removed. On the same list were the railings around the Clarendon Building and the quadrangle between it and the Bodleian library, but thankfully, these were saved.

What saved many sets of railings was the fact that they protected entrances to areas such as the deep lightwells, storage areas and below-ground access doors to many properties in the city. Examples can be seen in London Place (from 1830s) and in Walton Street (from 1858). Railings are regarded as utilitarian, not 'decorative'. Although there are some 23 sets of separately listed gates and railings in Oxford, they are almost never mentioned in books on Oxford's architecture. Often this is only because they are associated with gates, gate piers or other more 'architectural' features. These list descriptions often show signs of having been made on the basis of a cursory glance without doing any research to verify the statements made. Two glaring examples are the railings north of the tower of St Michael at the North Gate, listed as 'mid C19', yet there were buildings hard up against the tower until 1900. Even worse is the Peckwater Quad screen to Oriel Square, listed at Grade II*. The description states, 'probably by Dean Aldrich (1648-1710). C18'. Yet this is based on a misconception, as the screen relates to the construction of King Edward Street in 1872, with the screen erected seven years later in 1879.

Walton Street lightwell

Peckwater quad / King Edward Street screen

On the other hand, some sets of railings are given a C19 date, whereas they may be considerably earlier. For example the railings at the library of Lincoln College – the former All Saints church – where the railings are somewhat similar in design to those of 1730 at Senate House, Cambridge, and could quite easily be of this date in Oxford as at this time Lord Crewe donated money to erect the steeple, and there may have been spare funds for railings at the same time.

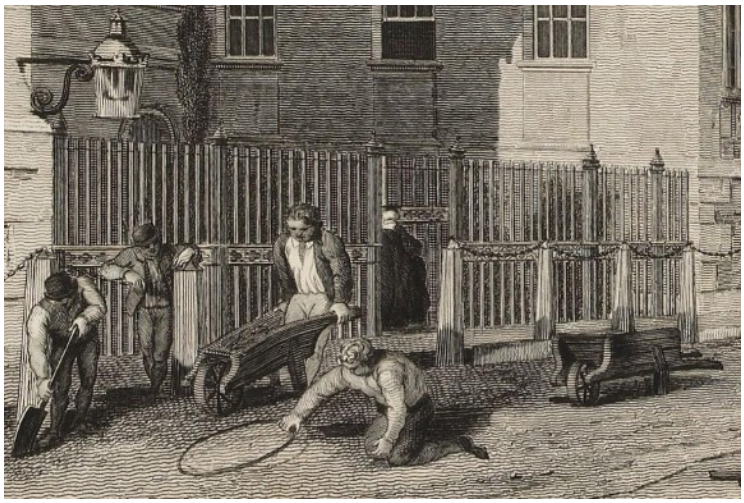
Railings at Lincoln College library (formerly All Saints Church)

Worcester College screen

Worcester College - a case study of confusion

An excellent case study example is the chequered history of the gate and railings at the front of Worcester College. Listed as 'C18', this is indeed the date when the college was refounded and the grand entrance façade of chapel, hall and library behind, was constructed. But neither Hawksmoor's drawing (Colvin 467) nor Burghers plan (1720) shows a screen, though there is a Thomas Gough (of London) design of 1735 in the college archives (Colvin 471) and another of 1775 by Henry Keene (Colvin 476).

But the earliest representation of the college in William Williams' 1733 engraving in Oxonia Depicta shows a stone wall with central gate which may well never have been built. J M W Turner's watercolour of 1804 (Ashmolean), later engraved by James Basire may be a more accurate image of the building at that time. This shows a narrow central gate with no overthrow, and a screen of standards with thick posts topped with finials, all standing on a low stone plinth, and with a decorated central rail. This was probably still there when Beaumont Street was built in the 1820s, as shown in a Hollis engraving of 1823.



Worcester College screen, engraving by James Basire after JMW Turner
©Ashmolean museum

However, in 1870 Richard Lynch Cotton (a Fellow from 1816 and Provost from 1839) donated a new gate and railings, including a shield with his initials and a number of rosettes. William Drake, who started work at Worcester College in 1881 at the age of 13 and retired as college butler in 1946 recalled: 'I can't express my feelings of sorrow when I saw five men breaking them down with hammers and carting them off to a marine-store dealer as scrap-iron.'[1] Cotton's screen is shown in a Taunt photograph of ca. 1900. In 1938 Cotton's screen was removed – but the timing was unfortunate, as during and after the war the front of the college became a car park and it was not until 1951 that new railings and the gate were erected – using the 1735 Gough design as a model. So again the listing is wrong.

So, in this landscape of uncertainty, falsehoods and fakery what can be said with reasonable certainty about Oxford's historic railings? The answer is quite a lot – even though this is 'work in progress'.

Early railings - the era of wrought iron

There are candidates for some really early ironwork in Oxford. The Botanical Gardens' Danby Arch gates were made using medieval ironwork, although they were not installed until the nineteenth century. The railings around the Sheldonian Theatre were first erected in 1669, and the Judge's Lodgings in St Giles dates from 1702, but what is now there is unlikely to be as early as this – except perhaps for some at the north side of 16 St Giles. However, David identified as definitely 18th century railings around the Clarendon building quadrangle and the gate and screen of St. Mary the Virgin. As already noted, the railings at All Saints (now Lincoln College library) may also be 18C.

Gate

Railings

Clarendon Quad

There are many more candidates as survivals at least in part since the early 19c. 14-15 St Giles (ca. 1820); Hertford College (ca. 1822); Christ Church Meadow - Rose Lane gates (before 1820); Folly Bridge (ca. 1827); University Press, Walton Street (1828); 34-36 St Giles (1829). These railings have a number of typical features: wrought iron, with some cast iron

[1] 'A Few Memories of the Life and Traditions in College Since 1881 by an Old College Servant' in *Worcester College Record 1949-1950* pp. 16-18. David is grateful to Mark Bainbridge, college librarian, for a copy of this article.

for finials; no lower rail - set directly into the base plinth - often diagonally; grouped standards as piers; simple spikes with decorated necks; spearhead tops.

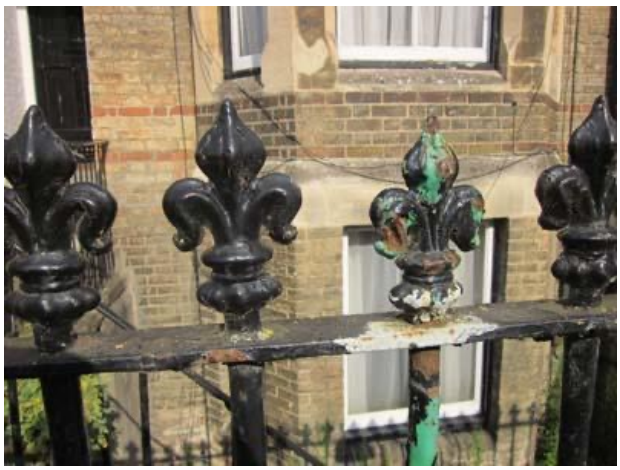
15 St Giles

Hertford College

After 1830 - cast iron

After 1830 cast iron becomes ubiquitous. Examples are St Benet's Hall in St Giles (1830); St Pauls in Walton Street (1836); St Thomas' Girls School (1842); 132-170 Walton Street (1858 onwards); University Parks (1865); New Road Baptist Church (1874). Typical features: almost universal use of cast iron; lower rails more common; spear tops give way to flowers and leaves; green paint popular.

St Benet's Hall



Green paint in Walton Street

The Clarendon quadrangle and Swedish ironstamps

David took us further into the dating of the Clarendon quadrangle ironwork. Although often attributed to the famous French gatesmith Jean Tijou, the man responsible for the gate was Richard Booth, and a smith called Ireland for the railings (1715).

Gate **Ironstamp on railing**

Clarendon Quad

Booth took over the Tijou business in 1712, and was familiar with his working methods and suppliers. The railings contain cast and wrought elements, but what is particularly striking is the number of marks stamped into the wrought iron standards. They are Swedish ironmasters' identification marks, and acted as both origin and quality identifiers.

In 1604 the Swedish government required each town to have an 'iron controller'. In 1637 each forge was required to mark every iron bar that it made, in order to safeguard the quality and to track it through weigh-houses and bonded stores to export. It was also the basis for a quota system. The mark was applied to the iron bar during hammering.

The import of Swedish iron was at its peak in the eighteenth century. A significant proportion of Swedish iron exports came to the UK. In 1750, 41,200 tons was produced, of which 24,500 was exported to GB. Thereafter , imports from Russia became dominant.

Ironstamps have been recorded on Tijou's great screen of 1702 at Hampton Court. They are difficult to record and compare with those in the Swedish Ironmasters federation stampel-bok (stamp identification book), but the HOOP L mark from Leufsta is common in both Oxford and at Hampton Court, while the double circle from Osterby also appears in Oxford. There are more stamp marks to be identified.

Turret clocks may help identify stamp marks, as they are often dated and the ironwork does not need painting as often as railings, so the marks may be clearer. There are two clocks by the famous London clockmaker Thomas Tompion which have frames with Swedish Ironstamps, one with the Hoop L of Leufsta. Interestingly there are four turret clocks near

Oxford which also have these marks. The best are at Childrey, where the clock by George Nethercotte of Wantage, in 1763, has marks from the forge of Ferna, SE of Uppsala. The same mark can be seen on the clock at Sparsholt, and although we do not know the name of the maker, its design is identical to that at Childrey, so almost certainly also by Nethercotte. The clock by Thomas Reynolds of Oxford (8 Holywell Street) ca. 1750 in the church at Lechlade has marks from the Logdo forge, in northern Sweden.

Concluding

There remains much to study, in particular on the documentary sources essential to identifying dates, smiths and founders. The Swedish Ironstamps will prove to be a difficult subject to get to grips with. David hoped he had stimulated interest in an under-researched area, and of course he would welcome comments, information and help.

Summary by Richard Farrant
Photos © David Clark unless otherwise specified

OBR Presentation Day

51 members participated in a virtual 2020 presentation day on Zoom, to hear presentations from David Clark, Abigail Lloyd and Paul Clark. Despite the ascetic character of meeting virtually, the lack of gathering for lunch and the usual tour, all welcomed getting back together and looked forward to being able to meet in person again.

APPLE ACRES, EYNSHAM ROAD

David Clark reported on what turned out to be the last OBR group recording before the first COVID lockdown.

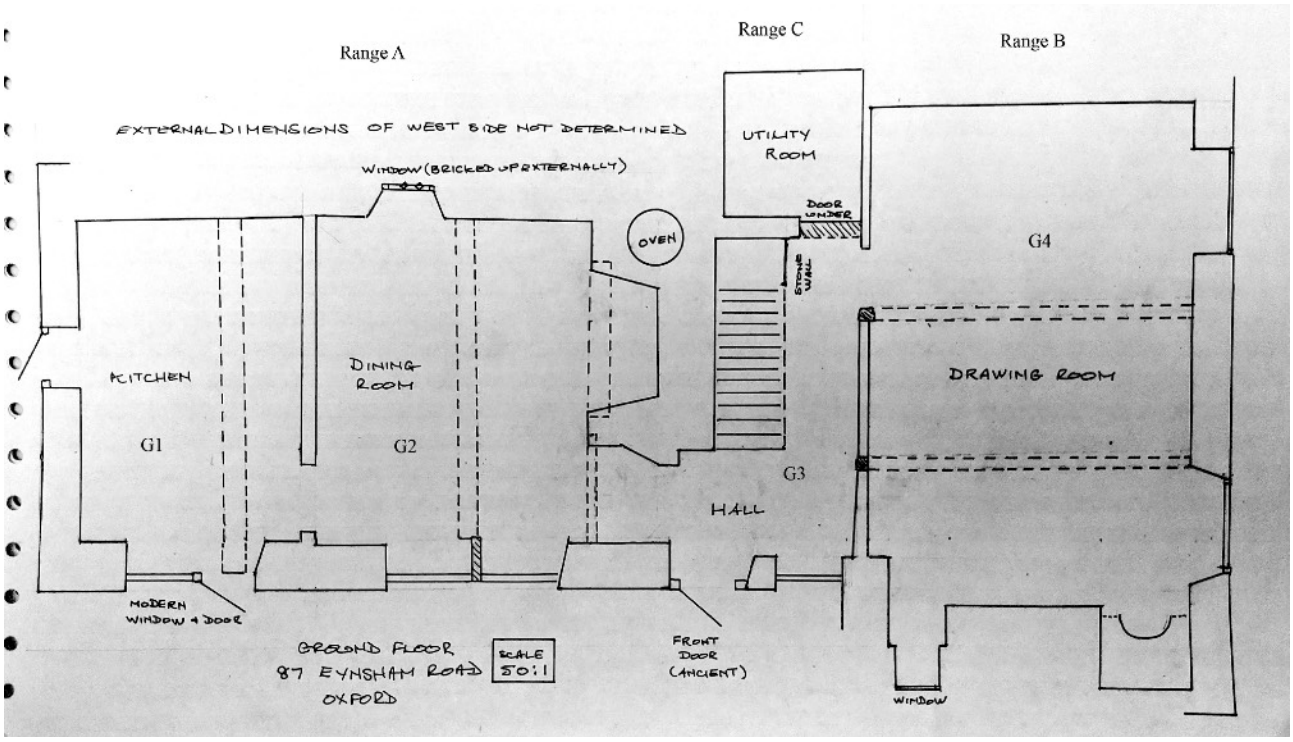
South range

North range

Apple Acres

Apple Acres is an intriguing building which formed part of Dean Court, once a grange of Abingdon Abbey. Dean Court House had medieval origins, and passed with the manor of Cumnor to George Owen after the Dissolution, and thereafter to the owners of Cumnor, culminating in the Earls of Abingdon, until sold in 1912 to freehold owners.

What is identifiable in the 1876 1st edition OS map is now a 1 1/2 storey thatched cottage with a 2 storey tiled north range, connected to each other by what is now the main entrance hallway range. Both main ranges are built of rubblestone - the north range being more regular, and both have brick chimney stacks.



Ground floor plan

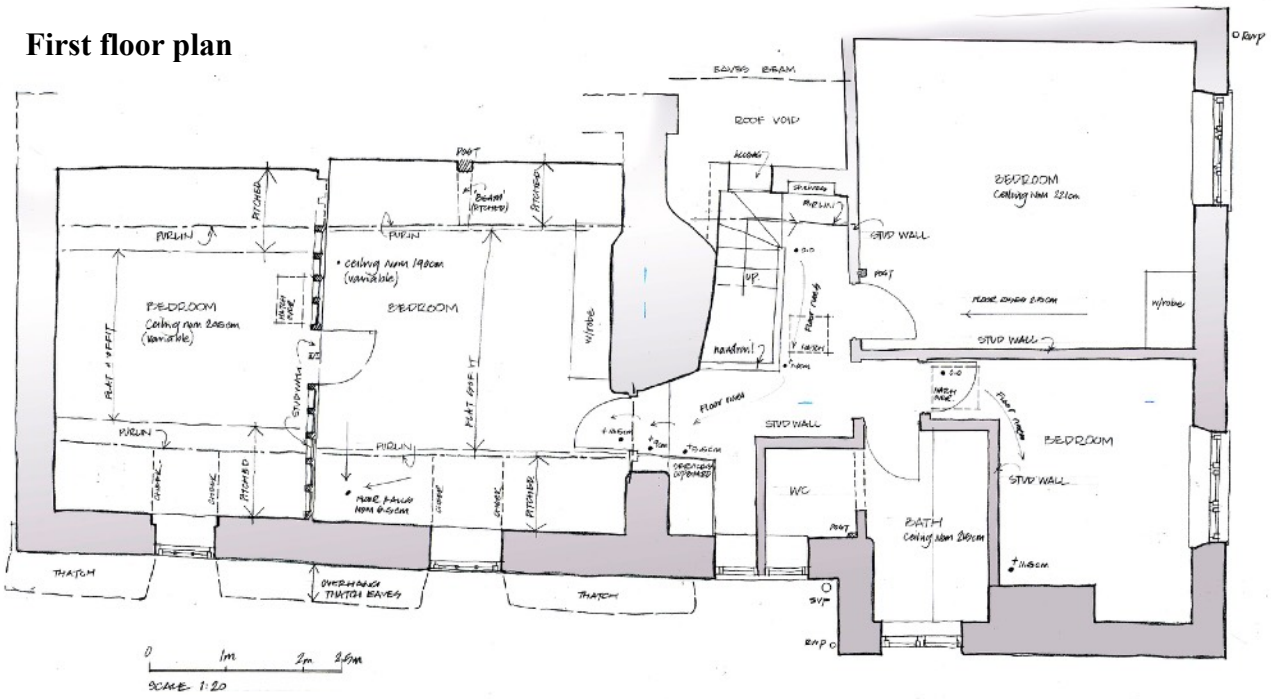
The thatched range has a blocked window on its western elevation, while the north range has no external door. The wide fireplace in the dining room of the thatched range has a burn mark on its large bressumer and a brick bread oven. The blocked window internally is still visible in the dining room, with a diamond mullion window with leaded glass still in situ. Also in this room is a casement window with king mullion supporting the transverse joist supporting beam. This might have been part of the original structure, or a subsequent addition when the windows were inserted. The internal spaces are separated by thin timber framed partitions.

Casement window with king mullion

Blocked window

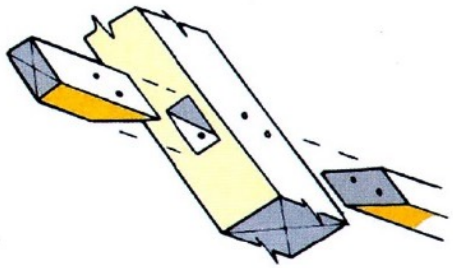
The tiled north range internally is a single space, with 2 transverse beams, chamfered and stopped, but asymmetrically placed. The first floor of this range has stud dividing walls. In the thatched range the two bedrooms are divided by an exposed stud partition with rails at different heights and reused timbers with unused mortices. The lower purlins are visible within the bedrooms at ceiling height.

First floor plan



The thatched range features threaded purlins, a missing collar, and one straight wind brace. There is some sooting of timbers. Possibly the purlins extended beyond this range into what is now the connecting hall range. The rafters have scratched assembly marks. Now covered by thatch is a diamond mullion window frame with stanchions still in place and pintles

Diamond mullion window frame



Threaded purlin

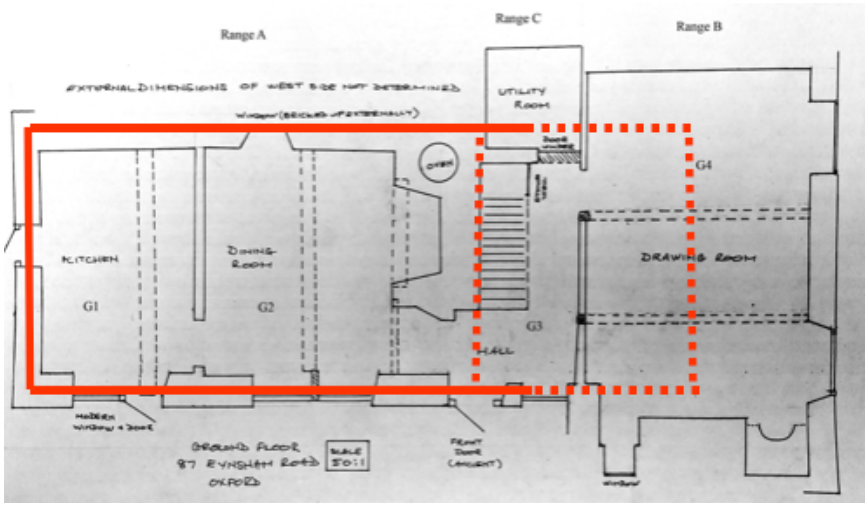
The main timbers of the tiled range are elm, with two tiers of purlins fixed using loose tenons. there are chiselled assembly marks and an axed level mark. The central truss is an A frame with added timbers.

Tiled range

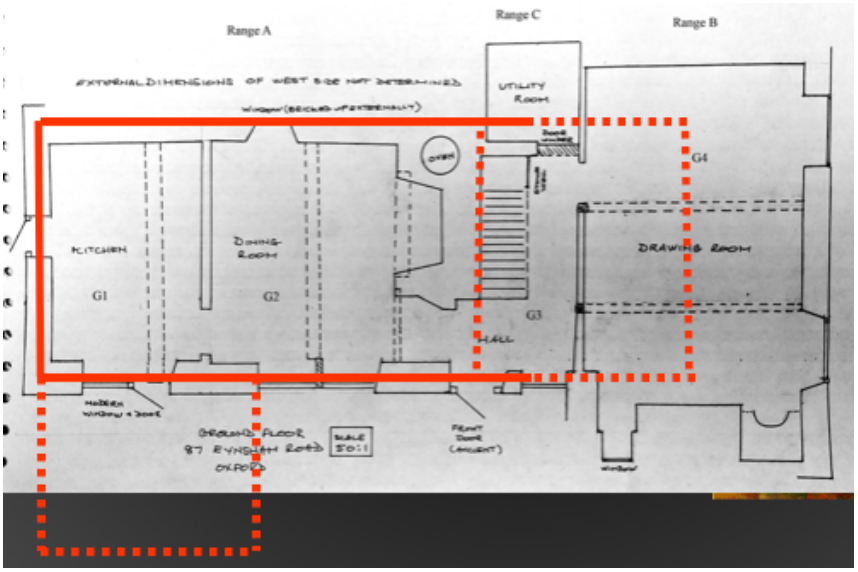
Central truss

Loose tenoned purlin

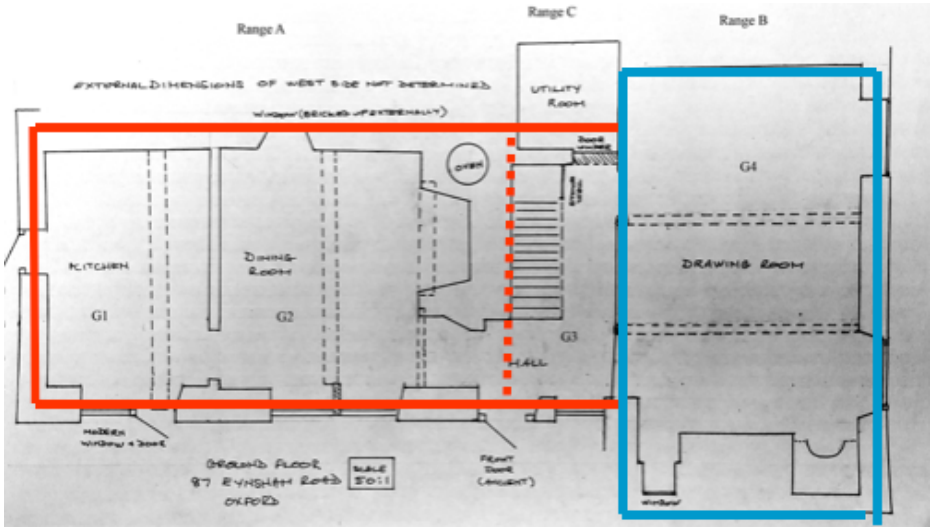
How to interpret all this? The documentary evidence suggests Apple Acres may have started as a C15/16 detached kitchen or provider of other services to Dean Court House, then converted to cottages in around 1600. In 1840 the then tenants, the Inness family, demolished the northern range and built what is now the tiled range. Around 1945 it was converted to a single dwelling. On this basis a possible development sequence is the following:



C15/C16 kitchen and services



c. 1600 cottages



c. 1840 Range B

Images © OBR or David Clark

38 PEMBROKE STREET, OXFORD

Abigail Lloyd reported on her research into 38 Pembroke Street with David Clark. Its Grade 2* listing describes it as "C17 in origin. 3 storeyed stuccoed rubble and timber framed with cellars, an overhang on 1st and 2nd floors and two gables…Inside, there is some C17 panelling the design of which is thought to be unique in Oxford…There is a winding oak staircase…This and no 39 probably forms the house 'lately built' in 1690." One purpose of the research was to validate these particulars.

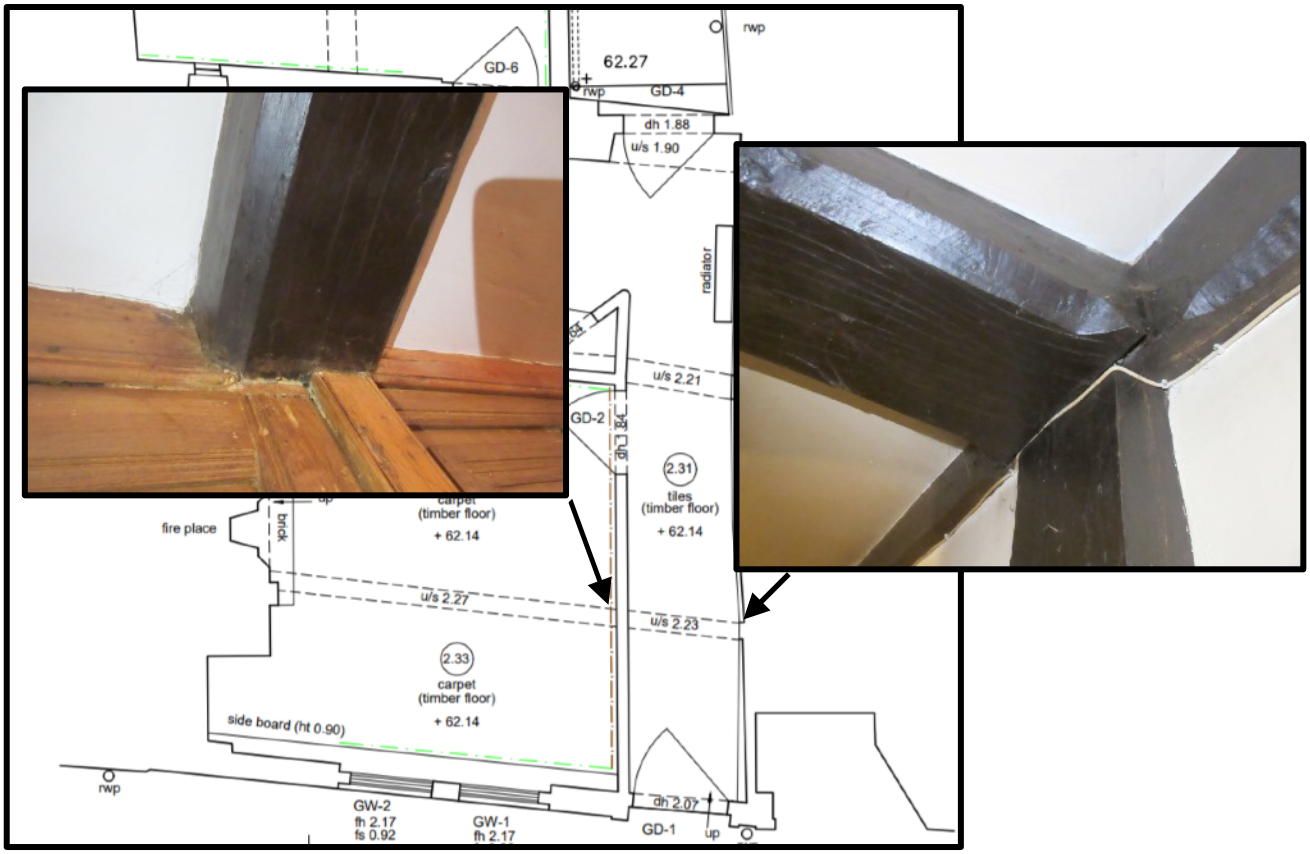
38 Pembroke Street, southern elevation

© D Clark

The documentary evidence for the site goes much further back, with the earliest mention in 1210, when the site was part of the Jewish quarter. In 1244 it was given to the Hospital of St John, and then on to newly founded Magdalen College in 1458. In 1484 the tenement is reported to have been empty and "ruinous", and in an indenture of 1487 the tenant is instructed to rebuild. More building is documented in the C17. The site is identifiable in maps from Agas in 1578 to Hoggar in 1850, the last of which displays the house in still recognisable plan.

The rear (north) elevation is built with rubble stone, with later extensions having differently pitched roofs. One or both rear gables may have originally been stair towers, with a deeply recessed window aperture lighting one of them. The western tower still does house the stairs. Another 2 light window is blocked up.

The front elevation is jettied with its timber framing covered by render. The first floor sash windows are cut into the primary framing and are flush with the exterior, with heavy glazing bars, suggesting C18 insertion. Internally, a passage from the front door appears to be a secondary construction, as the chamfers to the main transverse floor beam pass through the partition wall but are stopped at the timber framing of the main side wall of the house. That the pegs of the timber framing of this wall are inserted from the inside rather than the outside of this wall suggests it was constructed from within the house, as outside access was prevented by the neighbouring property.



Chamfer and stop on the main transverse floor beam © A Lloyd

There is similar evidence that the first floor was originally a single room, as the chamfers of the main longitudinal floor beam run through the dividing partition wall and are stopped at the main rear wall.

As the listing particulars note, the panelling of the ground floor partition wall is of special interest. This was first documented as unusual by an unpublished survey by Bunney and Pearce in the 1930's, relied on by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in its 1939 inventory of monuments in Oxford. The panelling features two slightly different designs, and glued on additional decorations, some of which have been detached but are indicated by shadows of less faded wood. These geometric lozenge decorations are typical of the 1620s or 1630s.

Panelling and glued on lozenge decoration

There is a rubblestone cellar, with a small remnant of a re-used chamfered and pegged stair newel post with empty mortices, aligned with the staircase up to the higher floors.

HOOK NORTON

Paul Clark reported on survey work in Hook Norton, where the OBR is helping the Victoria County History in preparing its volume 21 Chipping Norton and Hook Norton area.

Hook Norton is a large village of 3,000, 5 miles from Chipping Norton but relatively isolated away from any main routes. Building material is almost exclusively stone, being in the Jurassic limestone belt on the border of ironstone/marlstone and lighter Cotswold stone. Thus the stone is characteristically darker than in Chipping Norton.

Stone buildings are inherently difficult to date, so we rely very much on the timber sub-structures, especially the roof, and a number of roof constructional structures were

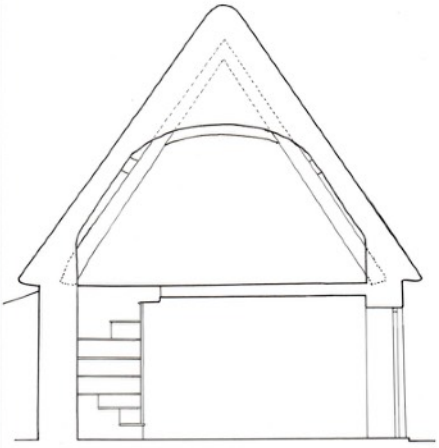
catalogued by Raymond Wood-Jones in his "Traditional Domestic Architecture in the Banbury Region" published in 1963. He recorded 6 buildings in Hook Norton itself, but 3 have since been demolished. A common feature is raised crucks, and an absence of tie beams.

The current survey team have looked at 24 houses so far, some of which are potential OBR recording opportunities. 16 of the 24 buildings surveyed are listed. The choice of houses is largely chance and/or opportunistic, but they are widely distributed across the village. 18 of these have timber roof trusses, the further north the location the more likely that stone walls extend to the apex of the roof.

The first house he described has gable chimneys, a symmetrical facade and cast iron Victorian gothic window frames and glazing bars, suggestive of construction in the century up to about 1850. It has small hearths, suited to coal burning, which would support dating construction in this period. However, it features a raised cruck roof truss which is clearly older, with pit saw marks which could be medieval, probably reused from elsewhere.

Victorian Gothic…

…hiding something much older

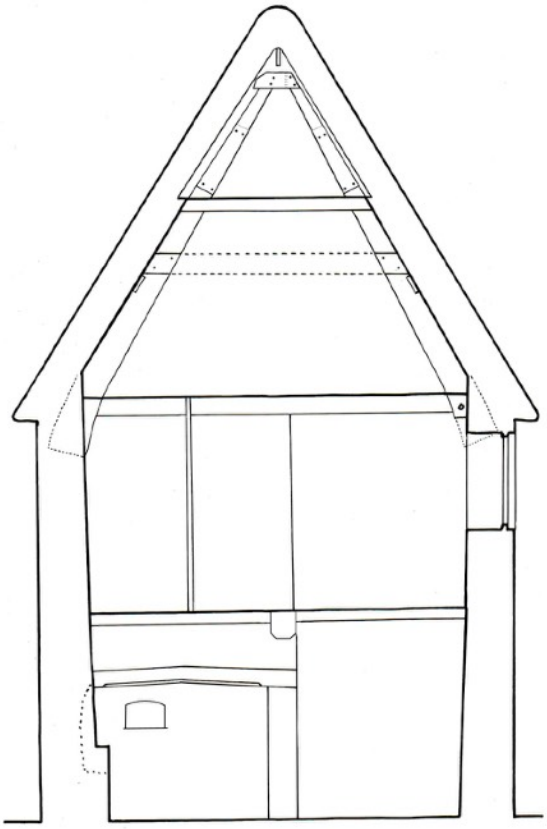


Opposing pit saw marks - in one direction they reach across the full width of the timber; the opposing marks are much shorter

The second house has a date of 1676 carved into a principal floor joist, and the label moulds over stone mullion windows support an estimate of construction in the C16 or C17. Here again there is a raised cruck, topped by a cross piece, and a scarf joint at the junction of an upper and lower cruck rafter. Another apparent example of a build - in this case perhaps around 1676 - reusing a C14 or C15 raised cruck truss.

Label moulds over stone mullion windows

Scratched date



Raised cruck topped by cross piece

Another house, the outside of which could be early C17, also features a raised cruck roof truss, with ends crossing at the roof apex.

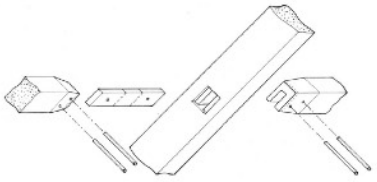
Raised crucks crossed at apex

Another house with similar C17 external appearance has random reused smoke-blackened timbers and very thick walls which might have been part of an earlier building within.

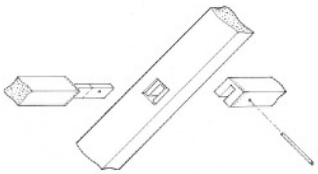
Paul contrasted these examples with a building where the roof was younger than the building. In this case the construction and use of iron straps indicated a C19 roof with raised eves on top of older stone walls. The purlins were originally attached to the upper side of the principal rafters, although one truss featured a loose butt purlin, indicative of C18. Subsequently these were replaced by through butt purlins, indicated by a lack of peg holes on one side (and therefore part of the purlin).

Raised eves on older stone walls

C19 iron straps



Loose butt purlin joint



Through tenon butt purlin joint

Overall, so far the team has identified little constructed before C17, but much re-use of medieval timber. They have found no evidence of timber box framing, and no full cruck frames with clasped purlins. However, about one third have raised cruck trusses, and quite a few tie beam collar trusses with butt purlins. But this is still a work in progress.

Photos © P Clark

ST. LAWRENCE'S CHURCH, BESSELSLEIGH

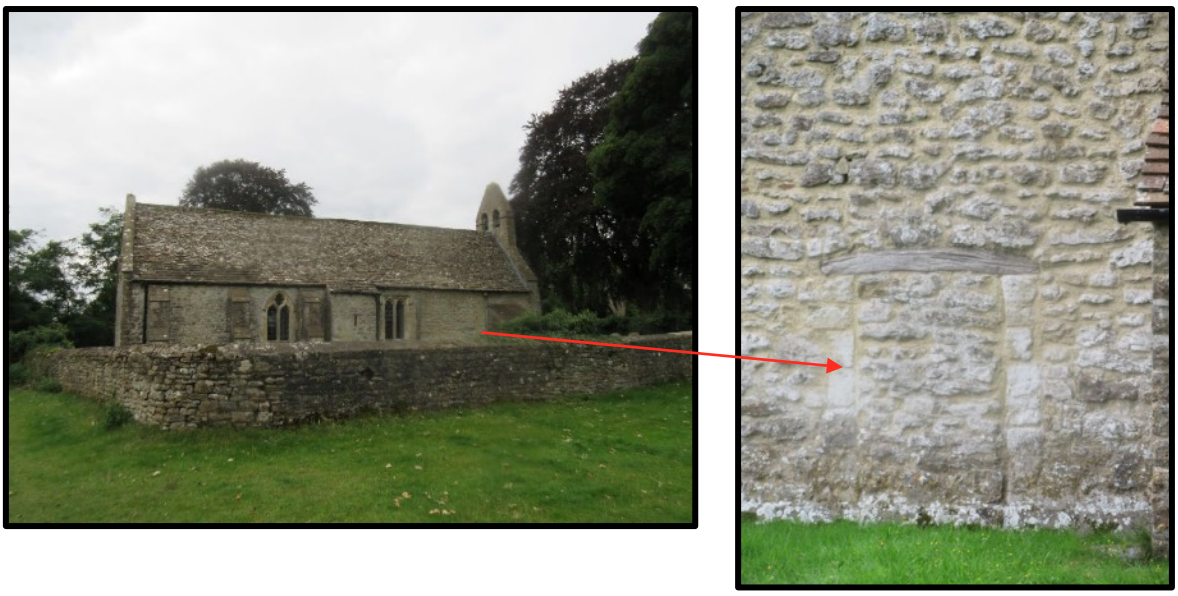
Abigail Lloyd noted that her survey of St. Lawrence's church with David Clark was part of the wider archaeological project on Appleton, looking in particular at its isolated location away from the village or any habitation now. Was there originally a settlement by the church, or was it always separate, if so most likely a manorial chapel?

Geophysical research has produced evidence of an old manor just outside the church precincts, and an estate map of John Lenthall dated 1724 indicates a substantial house next to the church and a range of farm buildings behind the house. A remnant of these farm

buildings survived to be recorded on the First Edition Ordinance Survey map 1866-1883. A drawing by John Pridden of 1780 shows an abandoned and tumble down manor adjacent to the church.

St. Lawrence's Church © Dan Hunt

If it was a manorial chapel, where was the access from the manor? There is a filled in door frame on the north wall of the church nearest the site of the manor, but it is small and utilitarian.



North door access to the church from the former manor © A Lloyd

The church has a single cell appearance, but closer examination of the roof line and interior indicates that the chancel is slightly wider than the nave. Typically, parishioners are responsible for the nave and the rector - often better off - for the chancel. Could this indicate a parish role for the church in the past?

Chancel / nave internal division © A Lloyd

Abigail described some of the more interesting features of the church. The round arch of the south door could be C12. The top door strappings is typical C12 design. Evidence of sun dials on the door arch suggests the porch was a later addition. The western gable end is supported by thin buttresses. Within the church a piscina , formerly embedded in a wall, is now revealed as sitting on top of a liberated Romanesque pillar shaft typical of C12.

South door

Former sun dial

© A Lloyd

Besselsleigh is mentioned in the Domesday book (1086), but the first mention of a chapel comes in the late C12. , with further citations of a church in the late C13. The chancel end window is C13 design, and the suggestion is that the nave is C12, with the chancel added in C13. There is a narrow priest's door exit from the chancel, and projecting stairs (now blocked) with internal vaulting into a rood loft suggestive of C14.

In C17, Besselsleigh came into the ownership of the Lenthall family, the scion of which was William Lenthall, a Master of the Rolls. It would seem that he undertook work to minimise the distinction between nave and chancel, the result of which gave more credence to it having been a manorial chapel. However, although, the precise origin of the church might not yet be clear, it seems likely that by C12 it functioned as a church. But more work needs to be done to find the original medieval settlement.

MINCHIN COURT, FOREST HILL

David Clark described a survey of Minchin Court in Forest Hill, a building with several elements, most clearly shown on its west elevation, which features uncoursed rubble stone walls, rendered first floor, wide former doorway, changes in roof pitches, and an appearance of being a succession of additional extensions. However, the present ground plan is similar to that deliniated in the 1910 District Valuation map, so major changes are Victorian or earlier. The south and east elevations are also rubblestone with render above with exposed timbers above ground floor level, and a buttress at the south east corner. The north west elevation is a blank uncoursed rubble stone wall. A bay window range in the east elevation has large plate glass windows.

Minchin Court; West elevation (composite)

South elevation (composite)

East elevation (part)

East elevation

East elevation (part)

Inside, the central range has thick walls and five massive transverse beams, with an unexplained void to the north. However, in the wall of what is now a toilet is a bressumer with burn mark, strongly suggestive of a fireplace in the void, heating a room to its north.

As regards the first floor, questions are how much of the first floor were later insertions? Where was the staircase? Were the exterior walls raised later to accommodate a first floor? The timber frame in the main part of the house sits on a timber plate on the stone ground floor and has jowled posts and a tie beam clasping the wall plate. There are chiselled assembly marks. A door cut into one of the trusses had nailed hinges. The roof timbers are

not smoked, rafters not paired and there is one wind-brace. Purlins extend to the north beyond their supporting trusses.

Purlin extension

Documentary history indicates that the house belonged to the prioress of Littlemore (Minchin was an early word for a nun). Minchinery farmhouse at Littlemore is the surviving dormitory. Minchin Court was acquired by New College, Oxford after the Dissolution, and occupied by various tenants, mostly non-resident until sold in 1884 to John Thompson of Woodperry. It was repurchased by the college in 1939, but sold again in 1989.

David suggests that the central part of the house was a medieval hall and cross passage, possibly with a lost room to the south and detached kitchen to the north-east. This was rebuilt in early C17, reusing the medieval stone ground floor. Possibly the kitchen was moved to the south east end of the house. Finally, the house was Victorianised by John Thompson after he purchased it in 1884.

Photos © D Clark

Reports by 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.

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