

Gazetteer of Historic Ironwork in Abingdon

This note describes and discusses the historic (pre-1900) ironwork of central Abingdon under a number of headings:

1. Domestic Ironwork
 - a. Gates and railings
 - b. Balconies and porches
 - c. Boot scrapers
 - d. Door knockers and letterboxes
 - e. Fanlights
 - f. Rainwater goods
 - g. Miscellaneous domestic
2. Public Ironwork
 - a. Gates and railings
 - b. Street lighting
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1. Domestic Ironwork

a. Gates and railings

Clock House, Ock Street (ca.1728)

Perhaps the earliest railings in Abingdon are those in front of the Clock House in Ock Street (Fig. 1), which was built around 1728 for the maltster, Benjamin Tomkins.¹



Figure 1 Clock House, Ock Street



Figure 2 Clock House railings

¹ <https://abingdon.gov.uk/history/buildings/22-28-ock-street-clock-house>

The standards are set orthogonally into a low stone plinth and are linked by an upper rail (Fig. 2). They have distinctive spear-shaped heads (Fig. 3) and the posts – which are round in section – have elegant cast iron urn finials (Fig. 4). Some of the standards have ‘ears’ near the upper rail (Fig. 3).



Figure 3 Standard with 'ears'



Figure 4 Detail of Clock House railings

There are also two special posts at either side of the steps to the front doors – these have bulbous vase-like lower sections (Fig. 5). There is some uncertainty about whether the double door arrangement of the Clock House is a primary feature, and the somewhat awkward linkages between the railings around the front steps suggests that the railings here may be from a later rearrangement of the entrance. A photograph from 1908 seems to show the steps coming much further down into the street, and with a central set of railings between the two doors – this set was still there in 1942.²



Figure 5 Clock House steps



Figure 6 Clock House gates, Ock Street

The design of the Clock House gates (Fig. 6) mirrors that of the railings to the Ock Street façade, but they may possibly be a modern copy, as the verticals are $\frac{3}{4}$ in. wide, whereas those of the railings are $\frac{15}{16}$ ins.

Another set of railings which we can be reasonably confident are *in situ* and can be firmly dated are those at Twickenham House (Fig. 7), built for Benjamin's son, Joseph in 1756 and designed by Sir Robert Taylor.³

² Thomas and Drury (2008) pp. 83, 84

³ <https://abingdon.gov.uk/history/buildings/20-east-st-helen-street-twickenham-house>



Figure 7 Twickenham House with railings



Figure 8 Detail - Twickenham House

The railings and overthrow with a lamp holder above the entrance are listed grade II*.⁴ The railings are set orthogonally into a low stone plinth and are linked by an upper rail. The standards have simple spiked heads, but the posts have decorative urn finials with gadrooning (Fig. 8). The railings continue as balustrades to the steps that lead to the front door, and at the wide top step are gates within the railings to (former) steps down to the areas to either side (Figs. 9 and 10). Close to the door there is a horizontal bar between two standards on each side – presumably boot-scrapers (Fig. 9)



Figure 9 Gate to area



Figure 10 Corner posts



Figure 11 Pier detail

The posts at the corners where the upper rail is ramped up to the steps have scrolled ornamental bases (Fig. 10), while to either side the posts form the centrepiece of the supports to the overthrow (Fig. 11). The overthrow (Fig. 12) is basically two wrought iron four-centred arches with decorative scroll infill, and clasping a lantern in the centre. The supports seem to have toothed anti-climb bars (Fig. 13).

⁴ List Entry Number: 1048904



Figure 12 Overthrow



Figure 13 Overthrow detail

Included in this section are some railings at two of the town's almshouses. Firstly, a dated set at St John's Hospital in the Vineyard (Fig. 14). The four stone garden piers and low brick wall with iron railings are listed Grade II.⁵ These simple standards with spikes are set orthogonally into the top rail and the coping stones of a dwarf brick wall. The posts are round with urn finials (Fig. 15). The almshouse was rebuilt by Bernard Bedwell in 1801, and there is no reason to doubt that the railings were installed then.⁶



Figure 14 St John's Hospital



Figure 15 Railings detail

Tomkins Almshouses in Ock Street were built in 1733, and its central wooden gates are topped by a set of wrought iron spikes set into a rail (Fig. 16). This is a traditional use of iron from a time when many gates were of timber, but the date of the arrangement here is uncertain.

While there must have been some form of infill between the brick piers to either side of the gates, the present railings there seem to be a later addition, probably installed to keep miscreants from making inappropriate use of the alcoves. The railings have an upper and lower rail, and spearhead spikes (Fig. 17).

⁵ List Entry Number: 1048808

⁶ List Entry Number: 1048807



Figure 16 Gates at Tomkins Almshouses



Figure 17 Tomkins' front railings

Another probably early gate is in the wall of Caldecott Road, near the bridge over the Ock (Fig. 14). This led to the Mill Orchard, which, as the name suggests, was associated with St Helen's Mill, and where there was a small lodge by the gate in the nineteenth century (Figs. 18 and 19).



Figure 18 Gate in wall of Caldecott Road

[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 19 Location of Caldecott Road gate

This has arrowhead dog bars, spikes, and a centrepiece with scrolls.



Figure 20 Gate to Appledore Cottage



Figure 21 Gate at 54 Bath Street

Another domestic wrought iron gate guards the entrance to Appledore Cottage in Ock Street (Fig. 20). This is part of the listed 12 Ock Street, but the gate is not mentioned in the description – if it was there in 2002 when the 'Images of England' photograph was taken it is virtually invisible in the image.⁷

⁷ List Entry Number: 1048862

A difficult feature to interpret is the iron gate at 54 Bath Street, on the corner of Stratton Way and the northern part of Bath Street (Fig. 21). This is largely made from standards with spearheads, and has some early features such as dog bars, an urn finial and at the posts, shaped spikes with an incised X (Fig. 22). Houses were demolished here in 1969 when the new road was built, so it is not *in situ*. The central angle-iron may be later, although it has an (indecipherable) stamped maker's mark (Fig. 22c).



Figure 22 Gate at 54 Bath Street a. spike with X, b. urn finial, c. maker's stamp

Although the main gates to Old Abbey House (see 'Lost Ironwork' below) have gone, what has survived is the gate into the garden to the right of the house (Fig. 23), which has unusual decorative cast iron finials in the form of a spray of leaves (Fig. 24) – so realistic that they have confused a modern ladybird.



Figure 23 Garden gate, Old Abbey House



Figure 24 Leaf spray finial

Similar finials can be seen in the railings at the former Argyle dairy at Park Road House, 14 Victoria Road, a building that probably dates from the early nineteenth century (Fig. 25).



Figure 25 Argyle Dairy, Victoria Road⁸

The mid nineteenth-century lodge at 272 Ock Street also has a gateway with some early features such as the urn finials and spearheads (Fig. 26).⁹ This may be modern – a gate here would have been a target for requisition during WW2 – but it does seem to include some old iron. While the finials look like early nineteenth-century examples, the iron in the rest of the gate is somewhat thin for that period.



Figure 26 Lodge gate



Figure 27 St Ethelwold's, East St Helen Street

Another set of domestic gates can be seen at St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street (Fig. 27). These have an interesting story, and are an excellent example of conservation at work. They were installed in 2014 using mild steel gates bought at auction and refurbished by A C Grace of Clifton Hampden, who added the spikes along the top and refixed the decorative cast iron handles that came off the previous wooden gates that had rotted away.

Victorian Railings

Once far more common than they are today, many Victorian houses and public buildings boasted attractive iron railings. Local wholesale and retail ironmongers Brind Gillingham, who had a shop in Ock Street (later Beadle's) included 'iron railings' as one of their advertised products.¹⁰

It is certainly the case that Abingdon lost many historic railings that were requisitioned under the 1939 Defence (General) Regulations, to provide materials for

⁸ <https://abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/george-argyle-and-beginnings-argyle-dairy> (accessed 20.7.20)

⁹ List Entry Number: 1048826

¹⁰ Hammond (1996) p. 101

armaments during the war. The postcard of Bostock Avenue (now Road) below (Fig. 28) shows that before the war, most of the houses in the street had railings on the



Figure 28 Bostock Road (Jackie Smith)



Figure 29 Evidence for former railings

dwarf brick walls in front. The evidence for these is still there in the form of filled-in holes in the bricks (Fig. 29).

A firmly datable set of Victorian railings can be seen at Bedwell Place, a row of three villas now numbered 12-16 East St Helen Street, which were built in 1865 (Fig. 30). The railings of this group of houses have round cast iron standards set into a low stone plinth. They have an upper rail and the heads have a fleur-de-lys design with a gadrooned base. The posts have a thicker section, and some have a lotus-like finial (Fig. 31). The railings outside no.14 also have some standards with ball finials – possibly modern replacements. As these houses have deep ‘areas’, we can be fairly confident that the railings were not removed in the 1940s and that these date from 1865.



Figure 30 Bedwell Place railings



Figure 31 Outside no.14

Albert Park

Although Albert Park was laid out in 1860, the houses in Park Road, Conduit Road and Victoria Road were not built until later in the century. There were (at least) two designs of railings around these houses. Preserved due to their function in supporting the street sign in Conduit Road, the first set has a ‘tulip and arrowhead’ design (Fig.32). These have been reproduced in modern copies for the houses on the north side of Park Road between the school lodge and Stratton Way (Fig. 33).



Figure 32 Survivals in Conduit Road



Figure 33 Replica railings in Park Road

The other design can be seen in another small set of survivals in Victoria Road that also support the street sign. The finials here have a wavy spike with scrolls to either side (Fig. 34). They can be seen before their removal in a postcard view of the junction between Park Road and Victoria Road (Fig. 35).



Figure 34 Victoria Road railings



Figure 35 Gates and railings in Park Road (Jackie Smith)

The cast iron railings set into an iron base plate off the beaten track at 19-23 Winsmore Lane are a remarkable survival (Fig. 36).



Figure 36 19 and 21 Winsmore Lane



Figure 37 Detail of base plate

There is no maker's name cast into the base plate, but the use of a tenon or dovetail joint is unusual, and may point to a specific maker if other examples can be found (Fig. 37). (Named examples in Dorchester, Wallingford and Preston Crowmarsh by Wilder of Wallingford and in Oxford by Nathaniel Dean of Abingdon are butted, not tenoned).

The houses themselves are difficult to date from external evidence as, although the Flemish bond brickwork suggests a date in the mid nineteenth century, the doors are modern and the windows have been replaced with upvc. They stand on a plot shown as a garden on a map prepared for a property sale in 1850,¹¹ but are shown on the 1874 OS map. The railings themselves are hooped cottage pattern panels, similar to those illustrated in Hill and Smith's early twentieth-century advertisement (Fig. 38).¹²

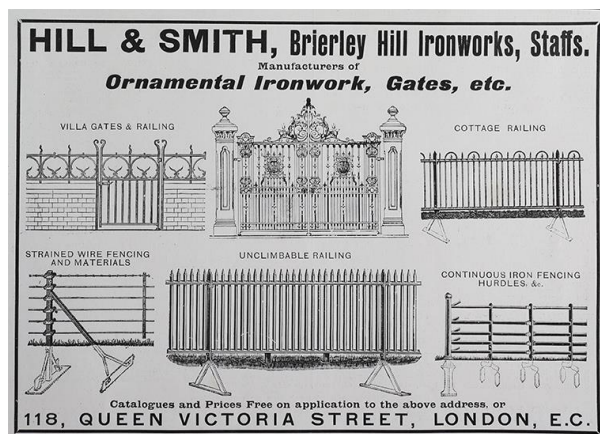


Figure 38 Hill and Smith advertisement (December 1907)¹³

It may be relevant that on the 1874 OS Town Plan, the Windsmore Iron Works is shown just a short distance to the north (Fig. 39). William Dean is shown there in 1854, while Simeon Crook, a blacksmith moved to Winsmore Lane between 1871 and 1881 from Abbey Close and perhaps lived in one of these houses.¹⁴ He was born in Blewbury in 1835 but by 1871 had moved to Abingdon, living and working initially in the Abbey.

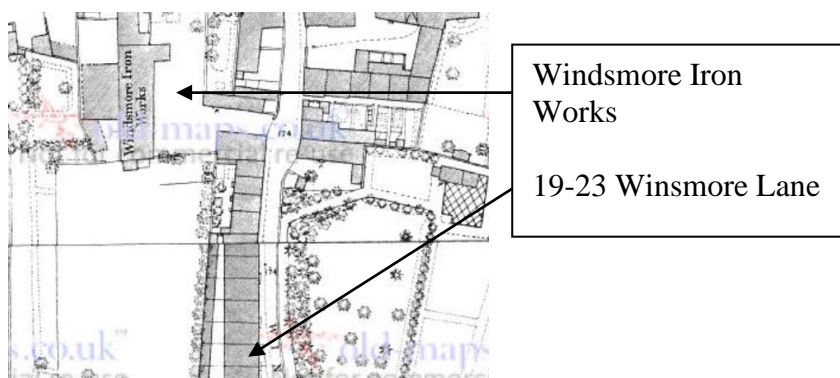


Figure 39 1874 OS plan (www.old-maps.co.uk)

4 St Helen's Wharf (Fig. 40) is a mid-nineteenth-century cottage, part of the Christ's Hospital almshouse complex, and at its southern end is a short stretch of cast iron railings.¹⁵ The finials have a distinctive design (Fig. 41), though it does not appear in Ballantine's catalogue, one of the most comprehensive of the period.

¹¹ Hedge (2007) p.51

¹² an illustration of similar railings in the Army & Navy Stores Ltd. General price list for 1939-40 (p. 990) calls them dog-kennel railings.

¹³ <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/File:Im19071225BJ-Hill.jpg>

¹⁴ Billing's Directory and Gazetteer (1854); St Nicolas census 1871; St Helen's census 1881.

¹⁵ List Entry Number: 1048832



Figure 40 4 St Helen's Wharf



Figure 41 Finial details, 4 St Helen's Wharf

Bella Napoli, Bath Street

Another short set of wrought iron fencing (Fig. 42) – one can hardly call them railings – is in front of Bella Napoli at the corner of Bath Street and Broad Street - the home in the nineteenth century of solicitor George Bowes Morland. It consists of an upper and lower rail, between which are verticals set some 2 feet apart, with an infill of wrought iron scrolled work. On the upper rail is anthemion-like cast iron cresting (Fig. 43).



Figure 42 Fence at Bella Napoli



Figure 43 Anthemion detail, Bella Napoli

At the entrance to the Conservative Club at 59 Ock Street is a set of four steps with handrails (Figs. 44 and 45). As there is a very deep entrance to a basement at the right, these rails would probably not have been removed in the 1940s. The list description suggests that the building dates from the early nineteenth century, but does not mention the handrails.¹⁶ A sale notice of 1891 highlighted 'iron palisading' at the street frontage:¹⁷ today, however, the front of the house is surrounded by a thick hedge, but its railings are still there deep within, though they can be seen in a 1910 photograph.¹⁸

¹⁶ List Entry Number: 1048856

¹⁷ Ock Street Remembered p.43

¹⁸ Thomas and Drury (2008) p. 111



Figure 44 Entrance to Conservative Club



Figure 45 RH side

At 68 Spring Road is an interesting collection of ironwork, including a gateway with large gadrooned finials (Fig. 46), a lamppost and handrails to the front door (Fig. 47).



Figure 46 Gate at 68 Spring Road



Figure 47 Handrail and lamp - 68 Spring Rd

Some of these features – such as the handrail to the front door – are clearly essential for safety and thus probably original, but some of the other ironwork may have been repurposed from elsewhere.



Figure 48 Abingdon Joint Hospital



Figure 49 Gate and post

There are attractive cast iron railings at the Abingdon Joint Hospital, of 1900 (Fig. 48). The architect was J G T West, and the builder was J Buckle. There is no maker's name visible on the railings. The design contains fleur-de-lis and scrolls within a geometric framework, and this is carried over to the gate, which has some additional scrolls (Fig. 49). The gateposts are more architectural – fluted lower sections with an

ellipse above, and on top a pyramid and ball finial. The stanchions include boot scrapers – one inside and one outside (Fig. 50).



Figure 50 Stanchion with scraper

b. Balconies and Porches

Balconies – or, more correctly here, balconettes – became popular in the nineteenth century, especially when houses were designed so that the main reception rooms were located on the first floor, and extended windows allowed owners and guests to enjoy some fresh air and a small degree of outdoor living. There are good surviving examples in 31-33 East St Helen Street and at the Barclay's Bank building at 2 The Square, formerly the house of the Knapp family, grocers, bankers and local politicians.¹⁹



Figure 51 33 and 31 East St Helen Street



Figure 52 Balcony of 31 East St Helen Street

The East St Helen Street houses were built in the early nineteenth century but their balconettes (Figs.51 and 52) were probably later additions, while those at 2 The Square, which was built between 1800 and 1811, were definitely inserted later, as the sills now impinge on the pediments of the ground floor windows in an awkward manner; more subtly, the bricks next to the jambs below the plat-band are not quite in the same alignment as those above (Figs.54 and 55).

¹⁹ List entry numbers: 1199412 and 1199828 respectively

The design at 31-33 East St Helen Street is similar to one illustrated by Cottingham in his pattern book of 1824 (Fig.53). The same motifs also appear at 2 The Square, but in an entirely different pattern.

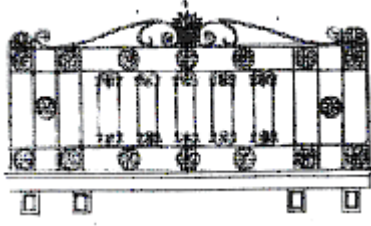


Figure 53 Design from Cottingham's pattern book²⁰



Figure 54 2 The Square



Figure 55 Balconette at 2 The Square

More wrought iron balconettes can be seen at Rose Cottage, 12 Victoria Road (Fig. 56), which also has a cast iron porch (Fig.57).



Figure 56 Rose Cottage balcony



Figure 57 Rose Cottage porch

Further balcony railings can be seen on the houses in Park Crescent. Whitefield (Fig.58), Charles Richardson's house at no.18 was built in 1871 and has delicate iron guard rails to the first floor windows facing south. These have posts with decorative spiked finials, and a simple motif of circles between.

²⁰ Cottingham (1824) Plate 1



Figure 58 Whitefield



Figure 59 Victoria Lodge, 8 Park Crescent

More spectacular are the later balconies at nos. 8, 9 and 10 Park Crescent. Victoria Lodge, 8 Park Crescent (Fig.59), has a rooftop balcony around a doorway to what seems to be a modern extension, though the anthemion motif in the curving balustrade is similar to that at no.10 further along the road (Figs.60 and 61).



Figure 60 9-10 Park Crescent



Figure 61 10 Park Crescent

The balcony of no.9 – with its cast iron columns supporting the roof – is a heavy late Victorian design (Fig.62). These houses were erected in 1897.²¹



Figure 62 9 Park Crescent

Perhaps not really balconies, but serving a similar safety purpose, are the iron balustrade (Fig. 63) to the tower of Glyndwr at 19 Park Crescent (1881, Edwin Dolby for George Shepherd), and the short cast iron guard railing (Fig. 64) at the porch of

²¹ Jackie Smith (pers. comm.)

the former Trinity vicarage in Conduit Road (probably c.1875, the date of the church, by W H Woodman).



Figure 63 Glyndwr turret



Figure 64 Trinity vicarage, Conduit Road

Returning to the town centre, there are also balconies in High Street, for example at nos. 6 (HSBC, Fig.65) and 10 (Davis Tate).²² Although no. 6 is early nineteenth-century in date, the balcony may belong to the stone ground floor frontage to the bank, which is modern, though an iron balcony does feature in early photographs – for example in the Taunt view below (Fig.66).



Figure 65 HSBC balcony



Figure 66 High Street (Henry Taunt)²³

Similarly, balconies can just be discerned at no.10 in the painting of the street by George Sidney Shepherd (1784-1862) from the early nineteenth century (Fig.67).



Figure 67 High Street (Shepherd)²⁴



Figure 68 Davis Tate balcony

The semicircular bay windows at No. 10 (Fig.68) were added in the late eighteenth century, but the balcony may not be contemporary. It is rather plain, with thin standards.

²² List entry numbers: 1048876 and 1368307 respectively

²³ Oxfordshire County Council - the Oxfordshire History Centre PictureOxon [POX0089320](#) Taunt made other images from almost the same viewpoint in 1890 but this one is undated

²⁴ Oxfordshire County Council - the Oxfordshire History Centre PictureOxon. [POX0123260](#)

In Bridge Street, the former premises of Woodbridge, saddler and corn merchants, built in 1880, has a delicate iron balconette above the entrance between the first floor bay windows (Fig.69).



Figure 69 Former Woodbridge's shop



Figure 70 Former library, High Street

Also quite delicate for its date (1895) is the first floor balcony of the Free Library in High Street, designed by Abingdon architect J G T West (Fig.70).

Other balconettes in central Abingdon are at 15 Market Place and Bella Napoli in Bath Street – now almost totally obscured by vegetation (Fig.71).



Figure 71 Balconette at Bella Napoli



Figure 72 Oriel brackets at 40 Spring Road

One of the distinctive features of an early balcony was its supporting brackets. Most of those illustrated above are fairly plain, but the scrolled wrought iron brackets at Rose Cottage in Victoria Road (Fig. 56) are particularly striking.

While they do not support a balcony, the brackets of the oriel window at 40 Spring Road are good examples of cast iron work (Fig.72). The author of a paper on decorative ironwork in Kent described this design as having 'A very pretty use of subsidiary scrolls inside a strong 'S' scroll. It combines lightness with strength and high decorative value.'²⁵

²⁵ Stephenson (1976) pp. 79-80

c. Boot scrapers

Before the advent of purpose-made cast iron boot scrapers, a suitable iron bar was often inserted in the railings near the front door. One of these can be seen to the left hand side of the steps to the Clock House in Ock Street (Fig.73), and there are others at Twickenham House (see Fig.9) and at the steps to 59 Ock Street (Fig.45). A self-standing version can be seen at the garden door to Old Abbey House (Fig.74). These were sometimes made of cast iron with a wrought iron bar inserted as the scraper due to the greater strength of that material.



**Figure 73 (left) Boot scraper Clock House railings Figure 74 (centre) Boot scraper at Old Abbey House
Figure 75 (right) at 31 E St Helen Street**

Self-standing cast iron boot scrapers come in two main types: those like the ones at 31 and 33 East St Helen Street that sit beside the front door on the pavement (Fig.75), and those that are built into the wall of the house (wall scrapers), such as can be seen at no. 37 and nos. 46 and 48 on the opposite side of the road (Fig.76).



Figure 76 Bootscrapers, East St Helen Street (a) 37 (b) 48 (c) 46 East St Helen Street

Both types were catalogue items supplied by all the leading manufacturers (Bullock, Carron, Izons, Kenrick...), but I have not been able to locate the designer of the very fine example at 46 East St Helen Street or the Art Nouveau version at no. 37.

d. Door Knockers and letterboxes

There are many different designs for door knockers, which became standard items in the catalogues of the cast iron producers, but only one – the ‘Wellington’ – was given

a name.²⁶ It was probably designed for William Bullock and Company of Spon Lane Iron Foundry, West Bromwich, and it contains features which seem to reflect the iconography of the Duke of Wellington's coat of arms – the wreath may be of strawberry leaves that featured in his ducal coronet. The earliest date is thus likely to be 1815 (Waterloo) or possibly 1814, when he was ennobled.



Figure 77 'Wellington' knocker at 51 Bath Street Figure 78 27A East St Helen Street

Two good Abingdon examples can be found at 51 Bath Street (Fig.77) and 27A East St Helen Street (Fig.78). Other firms copied the design – for example Izon's 1840 catalogue shows two versions (Fig.79).

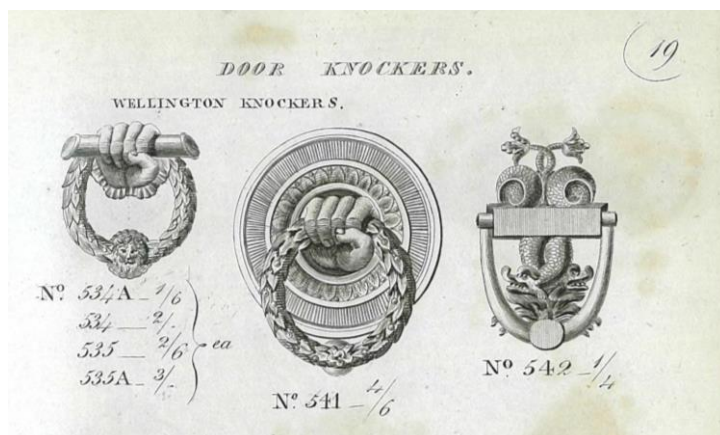


Figure 79 Extract from Izon's 1840 catalogue

Izons also illustrated the popular lion's head knocker, examples of which can be seen at 33A Bath Street and at 143 and 79 Ock Street (Fig.80). There were a number of different designs – the first two illustrated have the knocker ring through the jowls and nose respectively – while that at 33A Bath Street is a jowl version with a bar and an accentuated knocker head, similar to design 547 from the Izon catalogue of 1840 – which is the same as that on 10 Downing Street in London.

²⁶ Stephenson (1981) p. 143



Figure 80 Lion's head door knockers (a) 143 Ock St, (b) 79 Ock St (c) 33A Bath St (d) Izon catalogue (1840)

With the introduction of the Penny Post in 1840, letterboxes were needed – before then the recipient paid for the letter. Letters were very small, and the earliest combined with a door knocker, such as those designed by another well-known firm, Archibald Kenrick and Sons Ltd. One of these was the bat knocker and letterbox combination, an example of which can be seen in East St Helen Street (Fig. 81). The maker's name and the serial number are cast into the rear of the knocker (Fig.82). It was illustrated in their 1887 catalogue.²⁷



Figure 81 Bat knocker



Figure 82 Kenrick mark and number

Another letterbox and knocker combination is that at 59 East St Helen Street (Fig.83a) with two cherub heads and a miniscule letterbox. There is another small letterbox across the road at no.36 (Fig.83b). Cherubs also feature on the (reused) door fittings at the gates of St Ethelwold's, East St Helen Street (Fig.84).

²⁷ Stephenson (1981) p. 148 (catalogue 422)



Figure 83a Knocker and letterbox, East St Helen Street; **b.** letterbox, East St Helen Street
Figure 84 Reused knocker, St Ethelwold's

e. Fanlights

There are two fine cast iron fanlights near each other in central Abingdon, at the Abingdon Surgery (Fig.85) and at Stratton House (Fig.86).



Figure 85 Abingdon Surgery

Figure 86 Stratton House

As both these fanlights seem to be late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century in date, and Stratton House was built in 1722, its fanlight must be a later insertion. The designs are similar to some of those produced by Joseph Bottomley (Fig.87), who had set up on his own in Cheapside in 1795, having previously been in partnership with Underwood and Hamble in High Holborn as 'fanlight makers'.²⁸

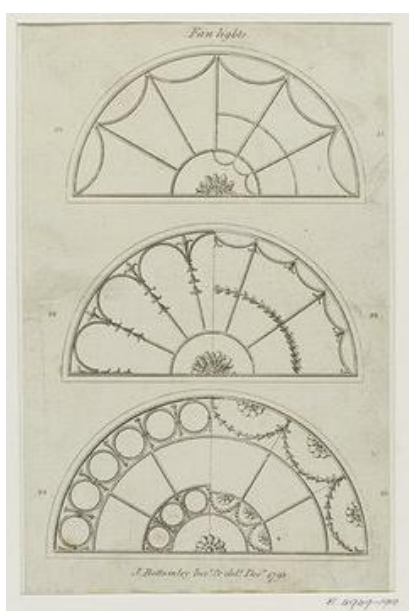


Figure 87 Fanlight designs (Bottomley)²⁹

²⁸ Sambrook (1989) p. 19

²⁹ Joseph Bottomley, from 'Book of Designs', London 1793-94 (V&A)

f. Rainwater Goods



Figure 88 Clock House, Ock Street



Figure 89 Stratton House (1722)

Cast iron rainwater goods, while often plain, sometimes have decorative features such as the cherubs on those at the Clock House (Fig.88), while the hoppers often have dates or initials, though these of course only date the installation, not necessarily the building itself. Thus there are hoppers at 7 Ock Street that are very similar to those at Stratton House (Figs.89 and 90), and the list description suggests that it also is of the early eighteenth century, so providing some support for the ironwork to be contemporary.³⁰

Another eighteenth-century hopper can be seen on the north side of the Council Chamber with the Cross patonce of Abingdon above the date of 1733 – when John Stevens of Wantage, working with Samuel Westbrook and Charles Etty, rebuilt the upper storey of the former hospital of St John to create the new council chamber. [I am somewhat suspicious of this – perhaps it is twentieth-century?]



Figure 90 Hopper at 7 Ock Street



Figure 91 1733 hopper on Guildhall

A particularly fine nineteenth-century example is the hopper at Cosener's House with the date (1868) and the initials of George Bowes Morland (Fig.92). In 1841 Mary Spenlove lived at Cosener's House (having inherited the nearby Abbey Brewery from her father John Francis Spenlove) until her own death in 1862. In a codicil to her Will, she sought that "my highly esteemed friend and cousin, George Bowes Morland, do on my decease immediately purchase all my property, brewery, etc., at one fourth less than its value". In 1866 it passed to George's brother, Edward Henry Morland, who

³⁰ List entry number: 1048851

already owned the former Eagle Brewery in Ock Street.³¹ George Bowes Morland (1808-1878) was a lawyer, but seems to have funded much of his brother's business



Figure 92 1868 hopper with GBM initials



Figure 93 Hopper of 1888 at the Plough

expansion, and his name appears on the house since he probably paid for a major rebuilding in 1868, perhaps because his son (confusingly another Edward Henry Morland – who was destined to run the brewery business) was about to marry and needed a house of his own.³²

On the former Plough public house at the corner of Stert Street and Old Station Yard is a hopper dated 1888, likely to be the date of the building (Fig.93).³³

f. Miscellaneous domestic

There are some good pieces of cast ironwork in the brick arched openings in the wall around the former lodge to Caldecott House (Figs.94 and 95). The building dates from before 1877.



Figure 94 Caldecott Lodge



Figure 95 Iron grille at Lodge

Very common in some other local towns – Woodstock is particularly well-supplied – are iron brackets supporting door hoods. But whereas in Woodstock they seem to be a

³¹ Bond and Rhodes (1985) p.32

³² see <http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/george-bowes-morland>

³³ Smith and Carter (1989) p. 62.

local wrought iron product, the only example in Abingdon is the pair of cast iron brackets (Fig.96) at the former Barley Mow in Lombard Street – certainly a pub in 1854.³⁴



Figure 96 Barley Mow, Lombard St

Iron pattress plates are used to fix the ends of tie-rods to the walls of buildings – usually because there is structural movement – often caused by the refacing of a timber-framed house in brick. There are many examples in the older streets.



Figure 97 Pattress plates, 16 Bath Street



Figure 98 Pattress plates, 90 Vineyard

2. Public Ironwork

a. Gates and railings



Figure 99 Vehicle gate to Albert Park



Figure 100 Detail of vehicle gate

Albert Park vehicle gates (Figs.99-103)

³⁴ Billings, 1854 directory (Jackie Smith, pers. comm.)



Figure 101 Gate at Faringdon Road



Figure 102 North gate to park

The vehicle gates to Albert Park at Conduit Road and Victoria Road are good examples of the use of wrought and cast iron to create functional yet decorative objects. They do not bear a maker's mark, and are not mentioned in the literature on the park, though Christ's Hospital did agree in 1865 to erect 'a bar gate across the new road in Bath Street' and a similar one near the Tomkins almshouses.³⁵ Were these moved to their present positions nearer the park at a later date?

Those to the external roads (Conduit, Victoria and Spring Road) have circular modern reflectors bolted on. The gate at the entry from Faringdon Road (Fig.101) is a simpler design – without the CH (Christ's Hospital) monogram in black that is a feature of the other vehicle gates. There is a similar gate, however, just to the south, at the northern entrance to the central area of the park – but with the CH monogram. There is yet another design in the western entry gate to the park. Being the narrowest entry it is the simplest – bearing a family resemblance to the others but with fewer scrolls and no CH monogram (Fig.103).



Figure 103 Gate at western park entrance



Figure 104 Pedestrian gate to Albert Park

Albert Park pedestrian gates

There are pedestrian gates to the south entrance from Park Road. These may date from 1860, when the park was laid out, but have been fixed in a half-open position by an iron overthrow.

There were railings around the park when it was opened; they were made at the Brierley Hill Ironworks, near Dudley, Staffordshire, owned by Hill and Smith.³⁶ The

³⁵ Challenor (1898) p.289 minute of 4 July 1865; King (2015) p. 53

³⁶ Jackie Smith, pers. comm..

firm was established by Edward Hill in 1824, and in 1853 after his death, became a partnership between his widow, Emma, and his brother-in-law Henry Smith.³⁷

St Helen's Churchyard

There are gates and railings in profusion in and around St Helen's churchyard. There are differences between the different parts, perhaps relating to the various extensions made to the churchyard in the nineteenth century.

North side and Twitty's Almshouses



Figure 105 Set near north church door



Figure 106 In front of Twitty's almshouse

Railings are shown here in a Taunt photograph of ca. 1890.³⁸ All the railings at the north side of the churchyard are set diagonally into a top rail (Fig.105); some – such as those leading to the doorway at Twitty's (Fig.106) – have a lower rail, but most seem to be set into a low stone plinth. The heads of the standards are plain spikes, but the posts are round and have urn finials, although the two illustrated above have slightly different designs. None of the other railings in the churchyard have urn finials.

East side and Brick Alley



Figure 107 Gate to south churchyard

³⁷ https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Hill_and_Smith (accessed 21 July 2020)

³⁸ Hammond (1996) p. 66

The railings along the west side of the church are set orthogonally into a top rail and a low stone plinth. The heads of the standards are plain spikes. In the centre is a gate to the organ blowing chamber, with cast iron posts to either side (Fig.107).

West side and Long Alley

Railings are shown here in a Taunt photograph of ca. 1890. They are set orthogonally into a low stone plinth and an upper rail (Fig.108).



Figure 108 Railings at Long Alley



Figure 109 SE gate to St Helen's churchyard

Finally there is an iron gate of unknown date to the east of St Helen's Churchyard, opening to East St Helen Street near St Helen's Wharf.

b. Street lighting

Many of the early remains of street lighting in Abingdon appear to be lamps on individual buildings where the owner was acting philanthropically by supplying light to the public realm. Thus as well as allowing visitors to Twickenham House see where they were going, the lamp over the steps (Fig.13) would have spilled some light out over the street. More obviously in the public domain is the lamp in the overthrow at the southern entrance to St Helen's churchyard (Fig. 110).



Figure 110 S entry to St Helen's churchyard



Figure 111 Lamp under floor of County Hall

Another lamp on a public building is supported by an ornate wrought iron arrangement hanging under the floor of the County Hall (Fig.111). Very little seems to be known about this – Gale describes the lantern as Victorian, but the ironwork

seems earlier, and a lamp here would have served a useful purpose in the winter.³⁹ We know much more about the wrought iron brackets with lamps at each corner of the building – now lost (Fig.112) – but which may be contemporary. These were erected in 1806, and the Bellman, whose duties had been formalised to include ‘cleaning and lighting the Corporation’s lamps’ ordered to light them every evening from Michaelmas to Lady Day, except during the period of the full moon. Two years later he was granted an extra £2 a year for this additional task.⁴⁰ They were converted to gas in 1834, but were subsequently removed.⁴¹

[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 112 County Hall - corner lamp brackets⁴²

Similarly, the lamp over the entrance to the magistrates’ court in the abbey gateway (Fig.113) was primarily to light the doorway, but part of the road would have benefited as well. [No evidence of date].



Figure 113 Lamp over entrance to court



Figure 114 Lamp on south side Park Road

Likely to be later is a lamppost (Fig.114) at the entrance to 16 Park Road (1880). This has a Windsor style lantern and a ladder bar – but is it *in situ* and of any significance? Note its similarity to the one at 68 Spring Road.

The usual development of street lighting began with whale or seal oil lamps in the eighteenth-century, then in the nineteenth gas was introduced (first in London in 1807, and in Oxford by 1819), with Abingdon getting its first gas lights in 1834, with the public lamps previously oil to be converted to gas.⁴³ Improvements such as the invention of the mantle kept this technology alive until well into the twentieth century, long after electricity was used (from 1892 in Oxford) – the last gas light in Oxford was switched off in 1979.

In the eighteenth century street lighting was a corporation responsibility, and the earliest reference in the Abingdon borough records is in 1738 when the council decided to light the lamps on 20 October of that year although the person responsible, Robert Mayo, was to cleanse and light them ‘as usual’, so they must have been in place before then.⁴⁴ There follow various references to the Chamberlain being invited to erect further lamps in the Square (in 1767) and in the Market Place (1788).⁴⁵

³⁹ Gale (2006) p. 79

⁴⁰ Challenor (1898) 24 March 1808

⁴¹ Gale (2006) p. 56 Challenor (1898) pp. 228 (6 December 1798) and 233 (20 January 1806)

⁴² from an etching in Abingdon Museum

⁴³ Commissioners’ resolution 2 May 1834.

⁴⁴ Challenor (1898) p. 197 (27 September 1738)

⁴⁵ Challenor (1898) pp. 206 and 218 respectively.

The introduction of gas light in Abingdon was overseen by the Commissioners of the Act for lighting and paving the borough. The key player was a Mr Stears, who proposed to the Commissioners in February 1834 that he be permitted to erect a gasometer and lay down mains so that the town could be ‘well lighted, at a cost not exceeding that of the present oil lamps by more than 30 per cent.’⁴⁶ On 2 May the council resolved that ‘the Public Lamps be now lighted by Gas’.⁴⁷

On 30th May 1834 the Town Council agreed to pay £35 to erect an obelisk in the Market Place ‘according to plan by Mr Stears’ (and a similar one in the Square for £25) on which there were two gas lamps.⁴⁸ The obelisk in the Market Place (Fig.115) was replaced in 1887 by the statue of Queen Victoria, and the council resolved to erect two new lamps to replace those on the obelisk.⁴⁹ Two years later the council resolved to sell the obelisk and weighbridge in the Square for £15, although the War Memorial was not erected there until 1921.⁵⁰



[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 115 Market Place obelisk

Figure 116 Lantern on October House, Abbey Close

It seems that almost all the gas lamps from 1834 have now gone, though it is not easy to determine whether the lampposts and wall-mounted lanterns one sees today are *in situ* or are modern replacements, as replicas are readily available. They are also easily removed without trace: there was, for example, until 1964 at least, the supporting structure for a possible gas lamp on the wall of 44 East St Helen Street (Fig.117).



[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 117 East St Helen St (1964)⁵¹

Figure 118 Bracket on no. 48

⁴⁶ JoJ 15 February 1834

⁴⁷ Challenor (1898) p. 253

⁴⁸ Photographs of the obelisks can be seen in Thomas (1979) nos. 26 and 60 respectively

⁴⁹ Challenor (1898) p.350 (5 July 1887)

⁵⁰ Challenor (1898) p 360 (4 January 1889)

⁵¹ Drury and Thomas (2003) p. 33

Just around the corner, on the wall of no. 48, is a bracket (Fig.118) with a twisted bar, and where the stone plat-band of the house has been chased out below it – all suggestive of a lamp, perhaps supplied by a gas pipe, though it is not the same design of that at no. 44.

Others, such as the lantern on October House, Abbey Close (Fig.116), may be a gas lamp converted to electricity. But its design – the ‘Windsor’ – is available today in replica. There is indeed very little evidence for historic street lighting in Abingdon – almost everything one sees is modern, though carefully chosen to appear ‘historic’, especially in the older parts of the town.



Figure 119 Abingdon Joint Hospital



Figure 120 Lantern detail

One probable survival – from 1900 – is the lamppost in front of the Abingdon Joint Hospital. This has a twisted cast iron stem, twisted iron ladder bars and a Windsor lantern (Figs.119 and 120). No maker’s name is evident.

c. Street furniture (signs, benches, bollards)

Boundary markers

These have been described elsewhere, and may be summarised as follows.⁵² The boundaries of the borough of Abingdon were first defined by its charter of incorporation dated 24 November 1556.⁵³ Four stones with an iron letter A set into them – probably replacing earlier ones with a lead A – survive from some attempt to define this boundary.⁵⁴ The description of the boundary starts from the Abbey Locks – that is, at the point where the abbey mill stream takes off from the Thames near the present lock on the main river, and a marker stone with an iron A can be seen near the lock on the south (Oxfordshire) bank (Fig.121).

⁵² <https://abingdon.gov.uk/feature-articles/abingdons-boundaries> (accessed 4 August 2020)

⁵³ Townsend (1910) gives the date as 1555 (p.107), as does Challenor (1898)

⁵⁴ Cox (1993) p.13 refers to the A being in lead but does not give a source



Figure 121 Stone near lock entrance



Figure 122 Stone south of the bridge

The boundary then went down the south bank of the Thames to Abingdon Bridge, where another stone survives (Fig.122) at the north of an area called the Rookery where there is a further stone (Fig.123) in a patch of nettles at the southern point of the Rookery ditch opposite the confluence of the Ock.

All the other boundary stones mentioned in the documents have gone, apart from one in the garden of a private house.



Figure 123 Stone with metal A at south end of the Rookery

Street signs



Figure 124 Conduit Road street sign



Figure 125 Lombard Street sign

We have already seen an example of a Victorian cast iron street sign in Conduit Road (Fig.124), and there are a number of other ‘originals’, but many of that period have been replaced. The Albert Park area signage uses a serif font with large letters squashed together; elsewhere the font is sans serif, similar to today’s Arial Bold (Fig.125).

On the Market Place is a sign, ‘Georgics V’, (Fig.126) that puzzled me for a long time, as Virgil’s poem *The Georgics* had only four parts, and what was a reference to this doing here anyway? There are (at least) two theories, one that this is a signmaker’s mistake for ‘Georgius V’ and that it was erected to commemorate the coronation of King George V in 1911 – it does not appear in earlier photographs of the building. The other is that it is indeed a classical allusion to a fifth Georgic, and

was erected in the 1990s by a pig-breeding company who had premises on this site. Neither of these is entirely plausible, but someone must know the answer!



Figure 126 Georgics V sign in Market Place

Benches

Cast iron benches were an important part of street furniture, but almost all those in the public domain in Abingdon are now modern replacements. However there are notable exceptions – the set in the formal garden to the rear of Old Abbey House (Fig.127), and a couple of Great Western Railway station benches. One of the benches at Old Abbey House has been ‘lost’ (Fig.128) – and another is badly in need of repair.



Figure 127 Bench in Abbey Gardens



Figure 128 Base of lost bench at Abbey House

One of the GWR benches is in the garden of the County Council offices in Stratton Way (Fig.129), and the other is in Albert Park; the latter bears a plate indicating that came from the station in Steventon, and was presented by the late A J P (Tony) Chappell on 12 April 1986 (Fig.130).



Figure 129 GWR bench in Stratton Way



Figure 130 GWR bench in Albert Park

Bollards

There are bollards all over Abingdon – around the County Hall, in front of shops, beside the Market Place, and in particular around Albert Park (Fig.131) – though only the two last of these are likely to be ‘historic’, and a magnet test shows that a number are not made of a ferrous metal. One dated example is the one in the Market Place commemorating the Mayoralty of William Ballard in 1879 (Fig.132). This is not all it seems to be, either – it stood on the pavement in St Edmund’s Lane for many years (Fig.133) – though this may not have been its original location either.



Figure 131 Albert Park bollards



Figure 132 Ballard bollard in Market Place



Figure 133 The Ballard bollard in St Edmund's Lane (Elizabeth Drury)

For the story of the bollards at St Helen’s Wharf, see below (‘Lost Ironwork’)

Post boxes

Once ubiquitous, cast iron letterboxes have been disappearing recently with the growth of electronic mail, internet banking and other methods of communicating. There is a Victorian survival on the wall of the Old Anchor on St Helen’s Wharf (Fig.134). Although it seems to have lost something from the upper panel, an example on the website of the Letterbox Study Group shows an almost identical box in Buckinghamshire dating from the 1880s with just a plain blank panel.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ <http://lbg.org/heritage/>

There is another Victorian wall-mounted box in Conduit Road near its junction with Ock Street (Fig.135). This has the maker's name – W T Allen & Co, London – cast into the base of the frame. This company were architectural ironfounders, based in Upper Thames Street and operated from 1881 to 1955. (There is one of their George V wall letterboxes in Park Road). Some of their letterboxes were made by James Maude and Co, of Mansfield.⁵⁶



Figure 134 VR letterbox on Old Anchor Figure 135 VR letterbox in Conduit Road

This is not the place for a full history of the post box – there are societies, museums, guidance notes and plenty of other sources of information.⁵⁷

d. Pavement and road ironwork

Iron kerbs

Iron edging was used to prevent iron-rimmed cartwheels from damaging the stone pavements, and there are some survivals in Abingdon, notably along the north side of East St Helen Street where it turns down to the wharf (Fig.136), and at the north end of Winsmore Lane. There were malhouses in both locations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries so the narrow roads were in heavy use. There is more edging at the corner of Lombard Street and West St Helen Street in front of the former Barley Mow pub (Fig.137).



Figure 136 East St Helen Street

Figure 137 Iron kerb at Barley Mow

⁵⁶ [https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/W. T. Allen and Co](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/W._T._Allen_and_Co) (accessed 3 August 2020)

⁵⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/royal-mail-post-boxes/heritage-agreement-for-royal-mail-post-boxes/> and <http://lbg.org/heritage/> (accessed 21 July 2020)

Despite being of some historic interest, the iron kerb around the platform outside the King's Head and Bell in East St Helen's Street (Fig.138) was removed some years ago.



Figure 138 Iron kerb at King's Head and Bell



Figure 139 Iron guard at bridge

Serving the same purpose of preventing vehicle damage to structures is a massive lump of iron at the corner of the bridge over the abbey mill stream to the island on which were sited at various times a hemp and rope works, the gas works and a carpet factory (Fig.139). This may be an old mould – these and redundant cannon were often used.⁵⁸

Drain and manhole covers

There are many examples of road and pavement furniture in Abingdon from local and national firms. Many have makers' names – it seems to have been a favourite place for advertising. The local foundries of Ballard and Davis are represented, although neither the Windsmore Iron Works nor Nathaniel Dean & Sons (iron & brass founders, ironmongers and timber dealers of Stert Street and Spring Road) have their names on any ironwork visible today. 'Dean Abingdon' does, however, appear on the base plate of the railings to the former St Thomas's girls' school in Oxford. He also features in the Post Office Directory of 1854 for Berks, Northants etc, and his foundry was near St Nicolas' church at 1 Stert Street.

Some drain covers (branders) bear the words 'Borough of Abingdon'. That illustrated (Fig.140) is in Edward Street, and there is another outside 46 Bath Street.



Figure 140 Borough of Abingdon, Edward Street



Figure 141 B Ballard cover (ESHS)

⁵⁸ Fearn (1990) p. 25

Inspection covers by Benjamin Ballard and Son, Ironfounders, Abingdon can be seen in East St Helen Street (Fig.141) opposite no. 60 and elsewhere in the street. The firm survived in 1970 as 'Agricultural and General Engineers' (Fig.142) at Phoenix Works, 70-78 Ock Street (the site of the present Sydenham's premises). Before that their works was in Bury Street and offices at 24-28 Bath Street – both these buildings have now gone.⁵⁹



Figure 142 Ballard advertisement in Hooke's 1898 Directory

The Davis Engineering Co. Ltd. Abingdon was probably best known for building engines for boats – Gabriel Davis's father lived at 46 East St Helen Street and two Davis inspection covers can be seen in that street (Fig.143). Gabriel was also the father of stained glass artist Louis Davis. In 1898 he advertised the fact that he had lately erected a 'complete foundry' at his St Helen's Works and was 'able to undertake all kinds of iron and brass castings'.⁶⁰ What is left of the ironworks is the block of flats that was the Hygienic Laundry until 1970 (Fig.144) and the street name, 'The Old Foundry'. In the wall of the building on Wilsham Road is a cast iron door that perhaps dates from the foundry phase.



Figure 143 Davis cover in East St Helen Street



Figure 144 Former Davis iron foundry

From slightly further afield is a brander by W Wilder of Crowmarsh, Oxon., outside 11 Ock Street (Fig.145), and a drain cover in Stratton Way (Fig.146). This firm is not to be confused with Richard Wilder (b.1805) of Wallingford – or James Wilder (b.1789) of Reading. All three were probably related to the original Wilder, an ironmonger in Ipsden.

⁵⁹ Drury and Thomas (2003) pp. 28, 64. Ballard was born in Kingston Bagpuize in 1827 and was living in Park Road in 1891; there is no evidence that he was related to William Ballard, Mayor in 1879.

⁶⁰ Hooke's Abingdon Directory (1898)



Figure 145 Drain by W Wilder of Crowmarsh



Figure 146 Wilder cover in Stratton Way

Another local firm, Boyd and Hadaway, iron founders of Steventon, also supplied drain covers to Abingdon – one can be seen in Bridge Street outside the Crown and Thistle (Fig.147), and another, almost identical to the Ballard design, in St Edmunds Lane.⁶¹



Figure 147 Boyd and Hadaway in Bridge Street



Figure 148 (right) Ham Baker drain cover (Bostock Road)

The work of two national firms, Ham Baker, and Haywards, both based in London, also feature in ironwork in Abingdon. There is a Ham Baker drain cover in Bostock Road (Fig.148). The firm of Ham Baker & Co. was founded in 1893 by Frederic George Sison Ham (1856-1912).⁶² He was born at Greenwich in 1856, and was educated at the Greenwich Proprietary School and the City of London College. Thereafter from 1874 to 1880 he worked for the engineering firm of J Stone and Co, of Deptford. After working on various sewerage and water projects elsewhere in England he set up his company in Grosvenor Road, Westminster, and Langley Green, Worcestershire. In 1901 the business became a company, of which Ham was a director, becoming chairman and managing director in 1903. The firm supplied all the fire hydrants used in London by the Metropolitan Water Board, and the made penstocks and ironwork for various Corporations and District Councils of Great Britain.⁶³

⁶¹ The firm is listed in the 1911 Kelly's Directory for Berks, Bucks and Oxon., but the foundry, which was just to the north of Stone Cottage in Hugh Street, was not recorded on the 1912 OS map. Their name also appears on a cast iron lamppost in the churchyard of St Peter and St Paul, Wantage.

⁶² https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Frederic_George_Sison_Ham#cite_note-1

⁶³ A penstock is a sluice or gate or intake structure that controls water flow, or an enclosed pipe that delivers water to hydro turbines and sewerage systems.



Figure 149 Hayward Brothers manhole cover



Figure 150 Cellar light - Market Place

Haywards' work can be seen in a number of places, and the way they display their name is significant. Thus the East St Helen Street manhole cover (Fig.149) which reads 'Hayward Brothers 187-189 Union Street Borough' dates from between 1857 (when the company moved from Blackfriars Road to Union Street) and 1880 (when the company became Hayward Brothers and Eckstein).⁶⁴ The cellar light at 1 Market Place (Fig.150) bears the name 'Haywards – Limited – Makers – London', which places it after 1896 when the limited company – now under Eckstein's control – was formed .

Hayward Bros. were notable for inventing a prismatic glass block that provided a waterproof covering for basement lightwells, while directing sunlight down into the cellar. This can be seen in the late example in Fig.150 and at a number of properties in East St Helen Street (Figs.151 and 152), some with both plain and prism glass, and all are datable to the period between 1857 and 1880.



Figure 151 5 East St Helen Street



Figure 152 Haywards, 25 East St Helen Street

e. Weathervanes

There are some wrought iron weathervanes in Abingdon, though it is not easy to tell how old they are. The earliest may be that on Long Alley Almshouses (1605). While some of it – the sphere supporting the cross – may be brass, and the main pointer is gilded, the compass points and the scrollwork below are wrought iron (Fig.153). The pointer has the form of a flag, with an openwork cross and the initials ER6 – for Edward VI who gave Christ's Hospital its charter. One problem with this, however, is

⁶⁴ <http://glassian.org/Prism/Hayward/index.html>

that the cardinal points do not normally appear on weathervanes until ca. 1700, so it may have been reconstructed at that time.⁶⁵



Figure 153 Long Alley weathervane



Figure 154 Twitty's almshouses

Twitty's almshouses were founded in 1707, and it is likely that the weathervane – the pointer is a pennant – is a survival from that date, though the cardinal points seem modern (Fig.154).

The example at Tomkins Almshouses (Fig.155a), built in 1733, bears the initials CH (for Christ's Hospital), but these were acquired by the charity only in 1987, and until then the weathervane had Benjamin Tomkins' initials and the date of 1733.⁶⁶ The present base and cardinal points seem very new.

Across the road at the Clock House there is a weathervane on the cupola over the carriageway through to the rear (Fig.155b). This part of the complex probably dates from the Robert Taylor extension of the 1750s, and the vane may well be part of this work. Although it has a cross-piece at its base, this does not bear the initials of the cardinal points.



Figure 155 Weathervanes (a) Tomkins almshouses (b) Clock House (c) County Hall

Another early survivor may well be that on the cupola of the County Hall (Figs.155c and 156). The original was built in 1681 by blacksmith Steven Wright and a coppersmith called Phipps.⁶⁷ We know that the cupola has been rebuilt and that the weathervane was repaired in 1711 and 1739, with further alterations in 1853, 1864

⁶⁵ Campbell (1997) p, 66 and Gardner (1911) pp. 300-320

⁶⁶ <https://historicensland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1368299> I have not been able to find a planning application for this change.

⁶⁷ Gale (2006) p.40

and 1956.⁶⁸ Again, the fact that it shows the cardinal points may indicate that these are a later addition, but it is the only one in Abingdon where W is a pair of overlapped Vs, so this may indicate an early date.

[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 156 County Hall and Market Place (ca.1850) (Parsons, Bridge St, Abingdon)

The County Hall weathervane is not the same as that shown in early drawings – though these may not be trustworthy – but the definitive description of it suggests that is from 1681.⁶⁹

There is a weathervane just visible on the roof of Stratton Lodge – the northern extension of Stratton House (1722), but it dates from 1974 when the Town Council, acquired the building as office accommodation. It seems to have lost its pointer (Fig.157).

Finally, there is a weathervane on the chimneystack above the Council Chamber at the Guildhall (Fig.158). Like that at Twitty's Almshouses, it is a pennant, and probably dates from the rebuilding of 1733 – supported by the lack of cardinal points.



Figure 157 Weathervane, Stratton Lodge



Figure 158 Council Chamber weathervane

3. Miscellaneous Ironwork

a. Trade and industry

The iron sign bracket (Figs.159 and 160) at 18 East St Helen Street is mentioned in the list description of this early nineteenth-century house.⁷⁰ The census shows that Richard Stone was there in 1851, 1861 and 1871. Perhaps the sign was for his business – he was a ‘tailor/hatter/woollendraper and outfitter’ in Billing’s 1854 Directory.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Gale (2006) pp. 27, 55, 59,

⁶⁹ Gilyard-Beer (1956) p. 11

⁷⁰ List Entry Number: 1283367

⁷¹ Jackie Smith (pers. comm..)



Figure 159 18 East St Helen Street



Figure 160 18 East St Helen Street (detail)

Inn signs and their supporting brackets can still be seen around the town, but the dangers of jumping to conclusions about them is evident at a number of places – for example at the south end of Bridge Street is an old-looking ‘empty’ post for an inn-sign (Fig.161), but this was for the ill-fated ‘Upper Reaches’ hotel created in the twentieth century on the site of the Abbey Mill. And at the Grapes in High Street is a very traditional-looking sign (Fig.162), which was installed very recently (after 2008). It replaced a painted timber sign, but before that there was one displaying the name of the ‘Old Grapes’ (Fig.163). The iron support, however, does seem to have withstood these changes.



Figure 161 Upper Reaches



Figure 162 The Grapes, High St

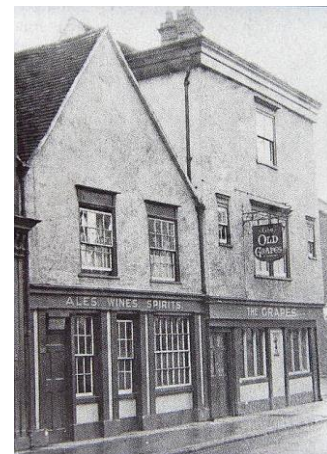


Figure 163 The Grapes (undated)

One historic inn sign is that on 15 Bridge Street, the site of the Seven Stars (Fig.164) – and although there is only one star on the bracket, there is no reason to doubt that this is a survival – the earliest recorded date for the inn was 1821, and it closed in 1949.⁷²

Another possible piece of historic ironwork is the lion’s head fixed to the gate to the passage at 15 High Street (Fig.165). This passage led at one time through the buildings to the cattle market behind. It is now closed and contains the staircase to the upper floor of a restaurant. The gate itself seems modern.

⁷² Smith and Carter (1989) p. 115.



Figure 164 Seven Stars sign



Figure 165 Lion's head at 15 High Street

Other industrial ironwork

More tangible evidence of trade and industry can be seen in former industrial buildings now converted to other uses, such as the crane at the first floor taking-in door of the former maltings in Bath Street (Fig.166). The large ground floor doors also have fine Victorian hinges and other contemporary door furniture (Fig.167).



Figure 166 Crane at maltings



Figure 167 Door hinge

An enigmatic iron relieving arch can be seen in the south gable wall of the small industrial building at the eastern entrance to Old Station yard (Fig.168).



Figure 168 Iron arch at Old Station Yard



Figure 169 Iron tracks at 1-3 Ock Street

And in the carriageway to the side of 1-3 Ock Street are two iron tracks – indicating a former industrial use (Fig.169). Built in the late eighteenth century, by 1911 it was the

home and office of Harry George William d'Almaine, a solicitor.⁷³ No research has yet been done on the earlier owners.

There is a cast iron water pump hiding behind a doorway in the entrance to the courtyard of Twickenham House (Fig.170).



Figure 170 Twickenham House pump



Figure 171 Cast iron windows in Morland brewery

Former industrial buildings often retain their cast iron windows, a number of which can be seen in the converted buildings of the former Morland brewery off Ock Street (Fig.171), and at St Helen's Mill (Fig.172).



Figure 172 St Helen's Mill



Figure 173 Window bars, Guildhall

Window ironwork – usually called ferramenta – is another wide subject with early origins. None of the Abingdon examples has been dated – they are included here simply because they look old. Thus the ferramenta of the Guildhall windows (Fig.173) appear contemporary with the refurbishment of the building in 1733. The ferramenta at St Helen's (see below, churches), could on the other hand be of almost any date.

While some windows have bars or a grid to deter thefts, other window ironwork was to prevent those inside the building from escaping – hence the wrought iron bars on the three windows to the rear of the former County Police Station (J B Clacy, 1856-7)

⁷³ <https://chriswilmshurst.wordpress.com/category/1-3-ock-street/> (accessed 25 July 2020)

in Bridge Street, which guard the corridor running along that wall and off which are three cells, deep in the heart of the building (Fig.174).



Figure 174 Barred window former police station Figure 175 County Hall door hinge

Door furniture can also be historic, though if exposed to the weather, may have been replaced. One example in Abingdon that may be ‘original’ are the door hinges at the County Hall (Fig.175). They are of the H design, consistent with the 1683 date of the building – and they are also nailed in place.⁷⁴

The largest piece of visible industrial ironwork in Abingdon is probably the bridge over the river Ock at St Helen’s wharf (Fig.176) by William Daniel and William Edward (W D and W E) Acraman of Bristol.⁷⁵ This has cast iron arches and railings, but although the latter are supported by stanchions fixed into brackets riveted on to the arches, they do not date from 1824 as they are not shown in an early (but undated) photograph of the bridge (Fig.177). The bridge was widened in 1891 and again in 1991, so the railings could be from the earlier date, then replaced at the later. In 1915 the railings were painted white to reduce accidents during the wartime black-out.⁷⁶



[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 176 Bridge over the Ock (1824) Figure 177 Ock bridge (Diprose and Robbins)

Shops provide some further evidence for the historic use of iron. There are two shopfronts that appear to be made of cast iron – Added Ingredients in Stert Street (Fig.178) and Idlewild hairdressing at 20-21 Market Place (Figs.179-180).

⁷⁴ Hall (2005) p.53

⁷⁵ [https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/W. D. and W. E. Acraman](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/W._D._and_W._E._Acraman) (accessed 21.7.20)

⁷⁶ draft article for ABP by John Foreman.



Figure 178 Added Ingredients



Figure 179 20-21 Market Place

In both cases, however, there was no magnetic response when tested, possibly due to the thickness of the paint.



Figure 180 Detail of 20-21 Market Place



Figure 181 Dean of Putney on awning

In danger of rusting away if not used and maintained are the iron mechanisms for raising and lowering the sun-blinds to shops. A set manufactured by Dean of Putney can be seen at 20-21 Market Place (Fig. 181) and there are a few survivals in Bath Street and High Street (Figs.182-4).



Figure 182 00 Bath St



Figure 183 20 Bath St



Figure 184 High Street

c. Churches

Ecclesiastical ironwork is an entire subject on its own, and while much is inside the buildings there are often examples that can be seen from outside, such as door furniture and rainwater goods.



Figure 185 St Helen's tower door



Figure 186 Rainwater hoppers, St Helen's

Tempting though it might be to ascribe a medieval date to the tower door ironwork at St Helen's (Fig.185), this is almost certainly Victorian – at least the S H in the upper quadrants is of that period.⁷⁷ One of the rainwater hoppers is dated 1871, so from the period of the major restoration of the church (1869-73) by Henry Woodyer (Fig.186).



Figure 187 Door ironwork, west porch



Figure 188 Ferramenta, St Helen's

The door handle of the west porch (Fig.187) also looks Victorian, but a protective iron grill over the eastern window of the south elevation (Fig.188) seems earlier, though the architectural history of this part of the church does not seem to have been fully investigated.



Figure 189 St Nicolas railings fragment



Figure 190 Stump of railing post

⁷⁷ Tyack et al (2010) is strangely silent about the ironwork

Outside St Nicolas there is a short stretch of iron railings on top of the churchyard wall along Stert Street (Fig.189). As this was the site of a pub until the 1880s, the present arrangement probably dates from that time. The design is very simple, with three rails and spiked standards alternating with spiked dog-bars. Most of the set has been removed – probably in the 1940s – a crudely broken-off stump survives near the gate (Fig.190).

On the east wall of St Nicolas are two iron pintles (Fig.191) – supports for the hinges of a former gate in this position that closed off a roadway (roughly on the line of the present Abbey Close) that led between the churchyard and the garden of Old Abbey House to a number of probably industrial buildings backing on to the railway station property.



Figure 191 Gate pintles on E wall

The door furnishings of St Michael and All Angels in Park Road (Fig.192) can all be ascribed to George Gilbert Scott, from 1864-7. There is also an iron clock dial high up in the west end gable (Fig.193).



Figure 192 St Michael's - north door



Figure 193 St Michael's – clock

d. Graveyards

In the graveyard of the Roman Catholic community of Our Lady and St Edmund at the junction of the Oxford and Radley Roads are some iron grave markers to members of the convent of the Sisters of Mercy who came here in the 1850s. The two

illustrated in Fig.194 commemorate M(ary) Evangelist(a) Barton (1885) and M(ary) Baptist(a) Dunne (1901).⁷⁸



Figure 194 Grave markers, Our Lady and St Edmunds

There is also surviving ironwork in the Spring Road cemetery (from 1860). The entrance lodge has a delicate roof terminal (Fig.195), and the door furnishings of the chapels include Gothic Revival hinges and handles (Fig.196).



Figure 195 Roof terminal – lodge



Figure 196 Door furniture – chapel

Some of the graves have also retained their railings. Around the slab over William Tiptaft (d. 14 August 1864) is a full set of decorative cast iron railings still in good condition (Fig.197). Tiptaft was a notable Baptist minister in Abingdon.⁷⁹



Figure 197 Tiptaft grave railings



Figure 198 Peisley grave and railings

There is another (almost) complete set around the Peisley grave (Fig.198), though John Peisley (a ‘proprietor of houses’ in 1851), who is referred to on the stone, died in

⁷⁸ <https://abingdon.gov.uk/history/buildings/our-lady-and-st-edmunds>

⁷⁹ <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/william-tiptaft>

1857, before the cemetery was opened. His wife Catherine and daughter Margaret were buried here; the finial of one of the corner posts has broken off and lies forlornly beside it.

There are also railings around the Harris grave – a large plot surrounded by a low plinth, but only the names of Edward John Harris (13 Nov 1883 - 9 Jan 1922) his sister Fanny Gertrude Harris, and daughter Margaret are legible (Fig.199). Edward in fact emigrated to Canada and died there in 1932 (not 1922 as on the grave). Earlier burials are likely – his father Frank Henry Harris was a clothier (in 1881 at 22-24 High Street).⁸⁰



Figure 199 Harris graves

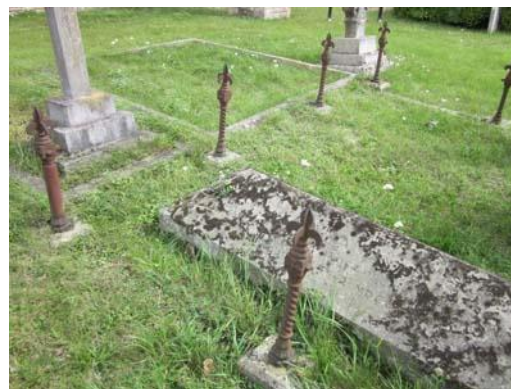


Figure 200 Payne graves

Another family plot with iron markers – the rails are missing – is that of the Paynes – the headstone of Charles Payne (1803-1880) stands in the plot and is still legible, while a ledger with the name of Mary Ann Payne (his sister, 1805 - 1872) is only partially legible (Fig.200). Charles was a jeweller and watchmaker with a house and shop in High Street.

Next to the Paynes are some Morland graves, also with similar iron posts, though here as well the rails have gone (Fig.201). The most legible is that of Walter Holroyd Morland, (1847-1880) the son of George Bowes Morland, the solicitor (Fig.202).⁸¹ Nearby is that of his brother John Thornhill Morland (1838-1923).

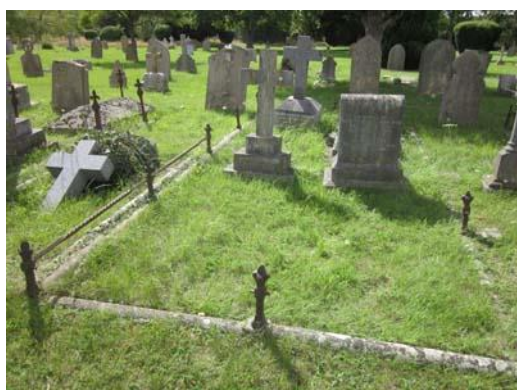


Figure 201 Morland graves



Figure 202 Walter H Morland (1847-1880)

⁸⁰ <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/beesley-and-barrett-families>

⁸¹ <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/george-bowes-morland>

Other graves have railings, too, but their inscriptions are illegible, while in some places only the stumps of iron posts show where the railings once were (Figs.203-4).



Figure 203 Anonymous grave



Figure 204 Anonymous posts

4. Lost Ironwork

We have seen evidence for a number of fragments of lost ironwork, and the requisition of railings during WW2 is of course a well-known story, but there have also been other major significant losses over the years.

One of the most public of the decorative arts, wrought iron gates to grand houses were once an important aspect of the townscape. In Abingdon there were magnificent wrought iron gates to Old Abbey House, probably dating from the late eighteenth-century, though they may have been installed by Edwin Trendell after 1860, as they do not appear in a photograph of that date (Fig.205).⁸²

They can be glimpsed in some of the many later nineteenth-century photographs of the Abbey Gateway, such as that made by Henry Taunt around 1890 – so they predated the arrival in 1903 of the Rt. Revd. Leslie Randall, Bishop of Reading – and were still there on 19 April 1935 when Beatrice Vernon took a photograph of the gateway (Fig.206).⁸³

[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 205 Gates to Old Abbey House

[image removed for copyright reasons]

Figure 206 Abbey Gateway⁸⁴

The Russian Gun

The story of the acquisition, display and final loss of this object can be seen on the ABP website [The Russian Gun | Abingdon-on-Thames](#)

Standpipes (one formerly in the Square – see Winship long)

St Helen's Wharf Bollards

The 'almshouses over the water' that stood at the eastern end of St Helen's Wharf were demolished in the 1884/5, and 'a grand embankment has been formed and protected with massive iron railings with ornamental supports and gas standards,

⁸² Thomas (1979) no.12

⁸³ PictureOxon reference [POX0550624](#)

⁸⁴ Hammond (1996) p. 76

which were supplied by Mr. Benjamin Ballard, of Bath-street. The effect is very gratifying, and during the summer months it will, doubtless, be the most popular promenade in or near the town'.⁸⁵



Figure 207 St Helen's Wharf bollards



Figure 208 Maker's name - St Helen'arf

A photograph taken by Henry Taunt around 1890 shows a set of bollards linked by rails.⁸⁶ However, although apparently identical to those erected in 1885, the bollards we see today all bear plates for 'The Great British Bollard Company'. Moreover, they are made of a non-magnetic material – apart from the terminal steel supports. Although the present company of that name was founded in 2010, the originals were probably replaced by these replicas in 1991 when the Ock bridge was widened.

Old photographs are the most reliable record of lost ironwork. A notable example is the Queen's Hotel, which had a small turret with a balcony, like that which survives at Glyndwr in the Park, as well as numerous delicate terminals on its hipped roofs. And the railings that surrounded the statue of Queen Victoria in the Market Place did not survive her removal to the Abbey Gardens. Also in Market Place, the shops at 20-21 had iron balconies – ideal for watching (if not catching) the buns thrown from the roof of the County Hall.

5. Ironwork that never was

It seems that Abingdon never had a cast iron public water fountain (such as can be seen in Wallingford) or a bandstand (as in Wantage).

Conclusions

The study of historic ironwork in Abingdon has been both fascinating and frustrating. As a 'lockdown' project the major frustration has been the inability to access historic records in order to establish firm dates, but the vast amount of online material has been immensely helpful, and I have benefited greatly from the local knowledge of Jackie Smith and Roger Thomas. Nevertheless, it is with some trepidation that these conclusions are drawn – they must be regarded as tentative until extra work has been done.

At first sight it would seem that Abingdon has little to offer the visitor seeking examples of historic ironwork, but as ever, if you look, you will find. But

⁸⁵ Jackson's Oxford Journal 7 March 1885.

⁸⁶ Hammond (1996) p. 9

understanding what one is looking at in historic ironwork is not straightforward. Railings are easily moved from one place to another, and are often not included in drawings made before the era of photography. They do not appear on historic maps, and 'like-for-like' replacements are sometimes not included in planning applications. Building descriptions often ignore them, even if they are part of the historic structure.

Chronology

Possibly the earliest surviving exterior ironwork in Abingdon is the weathervane at the Long Alley Almshouses, which was erected when the cupola was introduced in 1605. Indeed, weathervanes are very much a part of the townscape, and parts of the others (County Hall 1681; Twitty's almshouses, 1707; Council Chamber, 1733; Clock House, 1750s; Stratton Lodge, ca.1800) probably survive from the given dates. It is sad that the 1733 weathervane of Tomkins almshouses that bore the date and Benjamin Tomkins initials has been replaced by one with the initials of Christ's Hospital. The town was so proud of these weathervanes that a guide from the 1960s illustrated four of them (Fig.209).

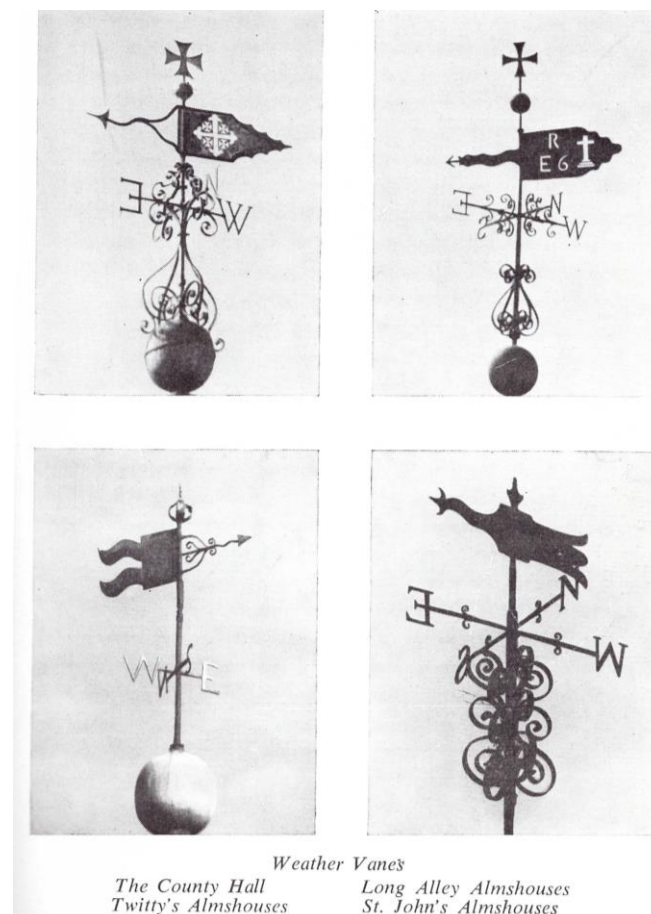


Figure 209 Abingdon Weathervanes (with thanks to Jackie Smith)

But coming down to earth as it were, the most obvious ironwork consists of railings, lamps, balconies and other items associated with buildings. There are two surviving sets of railings from the eighteenth century – those at the Clock House (ca.1728) and, with an overthrow supporting a lamp, at Twickenham House (1756). The earlier ones have thick standards (almost an inch) of wrought iron, but these are associated with cast iron features such as urn-shaped finials and posts with bulbous vase-like sections.

This mixture of metals was common in the early eighteenth century, and can also be seen in the railings of the Senate House in Cambridge (James Gibbs, 1730).

By the 1750s and with Sir Robert Taylor involved at Twickenham House, the standards have become thinner, with simple spike heads. The posts are slightly thicker, but have cast iron finials of a Baroque design with gadroons around the central section topped by a fruit-like object. Similar railings and finials can be seen at St John's Hospital in the Vineyard (1801).

Also from the eighteenth century are some surviving examples of rainwater goods – almost identical hoppers at Stratton House (1722) and at the contemporary 7 Ock Street, while the Clock House downpipes (1728) are decorated with cherubic heads.

Iron also features strongly in the history of street lighting, but in Abingdon we seem to have lost almost all the historic examples, save perhaps the huge wrought iron hanging lamp above the market area of the County Hall and the lamps on the overthrows at Twickenham House and to the southern entry to St Helen's churchyard.

From the early nineteenth century we have the dated survival of the iron bridge over the Ock, built by Acraman of Bristol in 1824, though the railings at either side are later. Some cast iron fanlight designs resemble those of the Bottomley factory in the early years of the century and L N Cottingham's influential 'Smith and Founder's Director' of 1824 supplied designs for balconies what seem also to have been adapted and used in Abingdon.

As we might expect, there are more survivals of Victorian ironwork, especially later in the century when manufacturers of cast iron objects advertised their products through illustrated catalogues to feed the demand of a mass market. Cast iron was a favourite way of decorating otherwise plain railings so the standards sported various designs including spearheads sprouting from tulips (Conduit Road), leafy sprays (Old Abbey House), fleur-de-lys (Bedwell Place, 1865) and ornate twisted snakes (4 St Helen's Wharf). We can be fairly sure that the examples quoted are *in situ* and were not removed in the 1940s as they fulfil practical functions such as supporting street signs, guarding deep 'areas' and so on.

Finding out who made the various pieces of Victorian ironwork in Abingdon is not a straightforward task. None of the railings have makers' names – unlike many in North Oxford where Lucy and Dean advertised their wares, and around Wallingford where Wilder's did the same. Perhaps the only set that can be linked to a manufacturer are those at 19-23 Winsmore Lane, near the Windsmore (sic) Iron Works shown on the 1874 OS map lying back from the lane just a short distance to the north. But there are two possible founders – William Dean who was there in 1854 and Simeon Crook, who had moved to Winsmore lane between 1871 and 1881 from Abbey Close. Perhaps one of these men built the houses – or lived in one of them.

We also know a little about Nathaniel Dean (of Stert Street and Ock Street), and Benjamin Ballard at the Phoenix Works (1884 in Bath Street, later in Ock Street). We have also noted Gabriel Davis's foundry in Wilsham Road.

What does seem clear, however, is that Abingdon residents were aware of the opportunities to acquire the latest fashions in decorative ironwork. We have already seen examples of the use of pattern books in the early years of the century. Later, manufacturers' catalogues became available and examples of door knockers, letterboxes and boot scrapers from some of the major suppliers – Izon, Kenrick and Bullock – can still be seen in some of the central streets. Interestingly, Charles Coxeter described his business in 1854 as a 'Birmingham and Sheffield Warehouse' – suggesting that metal goods from these places were his stock-in-trade. The sign under the eaves of his shop in Ock Street remained there after it was acquired by Brind, Gillingham & Co. Ltd, wholesale and retail ironmongers, who specifically mentioned the supply of iron railings in their advertising.

And also important for Abingdon where cellars abound, was the invention by Hayward Bros., Union Street, Borough, London, of a prismatic glass block that provided a waterproof covering for basement lightwells, while directing sunlight down into the cellar. A number of properties in East St Helen Street have these, some with both plain and prism glass, and most are datable to the period between the company's move to Union Street in 1857 and 1880, when it became Hayward Bros. and Eckstein.

Conservation

It has to be said that what we see today is a fraction of what can be seen in historic photographs of the town, so it is important that we recognise what we have and ensure its conservation for the future. The major loss was of course deliberate – it is certainly the case that Abingdon lost many historic railings that were requisitioned under the Defence (General) Regulations, 1939 to provide materials for armaments during the war. But there is also an issue of invisibility – railings are designed as a transparent barrier – ensuring privacy and safety while allowing the building behind to be seen and admired. So while for Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Supply in 1940, part of the motivation for their removal was that they symbolised the privileges of the urban elite, later conservation is hampered by the fact that ironwork – no matter how historic – is often overlooked: it may be a weathervane high on a cupola, it may be on the road or pavement and difficult to see, it may not be mentioned in a list description or in a church guidebook. So it is all vulnerable to loss, partly through, being external and sometimes difficult to reach, it is affected by the weather, and lack of regular maintenance - or because no-one has appreciated its significance.

Part of this significance is what might be called the semiotics of railings – the message that they are intended to convey. As has already been noted, the practical requirements of privacy with transparency are the fundamental drivers, and the former is achieved by height, close spacing – sometimes with intermediate dog bars – and a degree of deterrence through spikes of various kinds. In the 1890s the Borough council sought to ensure that the fence that they resolved to erect along the riverbank at Thames Street be 'unclimbable'.⁸⁷ Unfortunately the present fence does not meet this criterion, but early photographs show it was achieved by plain spike-headed standards.⁸⁸ Many eighteenth-century domestic railings also used plain spikes, as can

⁸⁷ Challenor (1898) p. 370

⁸⁸ Horn (1987) p. 23

be seen at Twickenham House, but the Clock House standards have spear-like heads, suggesting a palisade or early defensive barrier. Did Benjamin Tomkins feel threatened by the population of Abingdon, or was he making a statement? But in both these examples, the palisade effect is modified by the inclusion of posts of a different character – rounded in section with decorative urn-shaped finials – and in the case of the Clock House, the two front posts with a slightly bulbous thin vase-like shape. While there were probably practical reasons for this – easier to grasp if one slipped – the message comes across strongly that the defensive aspect of the arrangement is to be considered as having a softer aesthetic – perhaps feminine – side.

With the growing popularity of cast iron in the nineteenth century, householders were spoilt for choice when it came to selecting a design for their railings. Whereas spearheads of various kinds were popular, floral designs – including the ubiquitous fleur-de-lys – appeared in profusion, possibly reflecting the growing interest in gardening and as well as showing off one's horticultural skills in the front garden, also indicating that interest in the choice of railing design.

This survey has attempted to draw out some aspects of this significance, but there is much yet to be researched – what is the enigmatic iron relieving arch that can be seen in the south gable wall of the small industrial building at the eastern entrance to Old Station yard, for example, and what activity at 3 Ock Street required the iron rails that can (just) be seen under the carriageway building next to the former Congregational chapel?

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