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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.

Keep in touch: visit our website at https://obr.org.uk for more information as well as back copies of the Oxon Recorder, or our facebook page @oxfordshirebuildingsrecord

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

EDITOR OF OXON RECORDER WANTED

The present editor is standing down after a long stint and the Committee is looking for a replacement to take over during 2022. The job requires ensuring there is sufficient quality material (the easy part) before wrestling it and accompanying images into a publishable document four times per year (the hard part). The current editor uses standard word processor software; no doubt there is an easier way for a more accomplished PC user. The editor would become a member of the Committee. For more information contact richardfarrant@waitrose.com or David Clark at secretary@obr.org.uk

LISTED BUILDING CASEWORKERS WANTED FOR SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (NORTH) AND CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL (SOUTH)

OAHS are seeking someone interested in historic buildings to join their Listed Buildings subcommittee to comment on planning applications in the north part of South Oxfordshire District and the south part of Cherwell District. The same person could do both. The role involves keeping an eye on the applications submitted, and commenting on those that involve significant interventions and/or loss of historic fabric. The committee itself meets in Oxford four times a year, but all correspondence is by e-mail. Although it could be helpful if you live in the area, this is not essential, as site visits are not always needed or possible. For more information please contact David Clark (chairman - drc@davidrclark.plus.com)

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.

Cornerstones - another thing to collect

Note by the Secretary

Cornerstones are those clearly 'special' stones that stick out from a building and look as if the building was built on top of them. They are often found at the corners of barns, stables and churches. Two examples are shown below.

Figure 1 Aston Tirrold, St Michael

Figure 2 Northcourt barn, Abingdon

They may serve a purely utilitarian purpose – keeping cartwheels away from the walls of barns and other agricultural buildings – or beefing up the land under the corner to increase stability. Some may also be pre-existing stones that once served another purpose, such as boundary markers, or, in the case of the sixteenth-century market hall in Pembridge, Herefordshire, the base of a medieval cross which supports one of its timber posts. (see THE MARKET HALL, Pembridge - 1081729 | Historic England).

Some cornerstones seem to be symbolic – for example the church at Aston Tirrold (Fig. 1) has eleventh-century origins and the stone may have come from an earlier building – perhaps even pre-Christian – and thus may represent the continuity of worship on the site.[1] The Encyclopaedia Britannica suggests that 'Early customs connected with cornerstones were related to study of the stars and their religious significance. Buildings were laid out with astronomical precision in relation to points of the compass, with emphasis on corners. Cornerstones symbolized "seeds" from which buildings would germinate and rise.'[2]

But before we get carried away by speculation and surmise, we need to collect some data, and would like your help in doing this, please. The information we would like for each Oxfordshire example is as follows:

1. National Grid reference of location – you can get a ten-digit number from the interactive map on Grid Reference Finder.
2. Place, parish – if a town with more than one parish or suburb, use (say) 'Oxford, Iffley' as the identifier.
3. Street
4. Building – its name (e.g. Church of St Michael)
5. Date – approximate date of the building (if Listed, the description may offer a clue, or try the Buildings of England)
6. Long Axis – the orientation of the long axis of the building (usually east-west for early Anglican churches, but the barn alignments may prove interesting)
7. Location of stone – for example, south-east corner. This may also be a significant factor.
8. Lithology – what type of stone is it? In parts of the county where they occur, sarsens are sometimes used as cornerstones. If they are not stone – are you sure it is not something added after the building was built?
9. Listing – if the building is listed, please copy the URL from the Historic England website.
10. Notes – any further relevant information – for example the stone at the Northcourt barn (Fig. 2) is at a corner where the ground slopes downwards, so this stone may simply be a structural support.
11. Photograph – please take a digital photograph of the stone that shows it in context, and if there is an interesting detail, such as initials or a date, please take another showing that. (Note that the two photographs above fulfil neither of these requirements!)

[1] CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL, Aston Tirrold - 1286159 | Historic England

[2] cornerstone | architecture | Britannica

What we propose to do is to put a spreadsheet on the OBR website showing what has been collected. So please look at this before you go exploring, and see what has already been done. Then please send your findings (using the 1-11 headings above) to secretary@obr.org.uk, and we will try to upload them to the spreadsheet as soon as we can.

OBR Lecture; Baltic Timber Marks

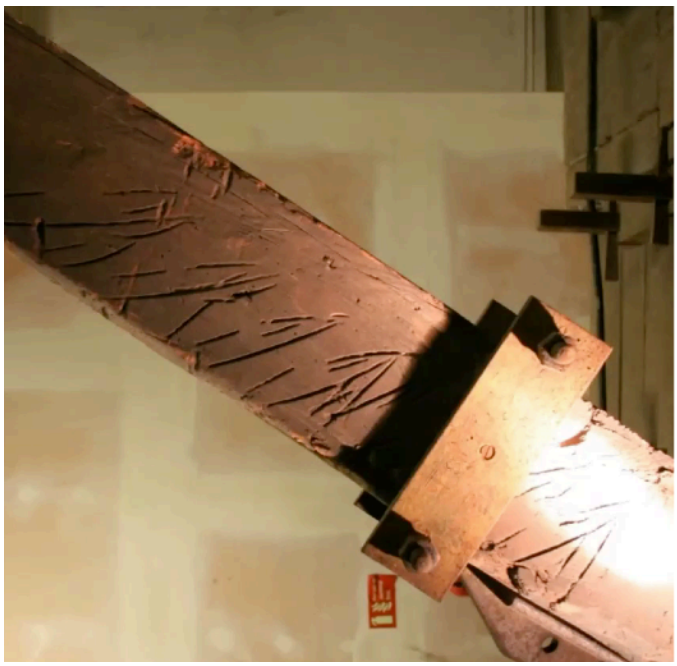
This year's OBR lecture on Baltic Timber Marks was again on Zoom, attended by around 50 people. It was given by Lee Prosser and Tansy Collins. Lee is Curator of Historic Buildings at Historic Royal Palaces, and Tansy is principal archaeologist at Wardell Armstrong, an environmental, engineering and mining consultancy, specialising in historic buildings. She wrote an influential MSt thesis on the Baltic timber trade, which as described by Lee began to 'crack the code' and has markedly improved our understanding of these marks.

Lee spoke about the background to and process of the Baltic timber trade, while Tansy focussed more closely on the timber marks themselves and how to interpret them. For the last 20 years both have been recording and collecting timber marks and slowly learning more about what they mean.

The marks come in a variety of different forms, usually in softwood but with some in oak. More usually scribed with a race knife, they can also be painted or there are even some rare survivors marked in chalk.

What sparked Lee's interest was his study of the roof of the Banqueting House in Whitehall, which was re-roofed during renovation by Sir John Soane in the 1830's. The roof is now a mixture of some oak and much more softwood with hundreds of Baltic marks. Despite Soane's careful documentation, frustratingly there is no documentary record of the timber's origin. But what has become clear from their studies of buildings that can be securely dated is that timber marks began to appear in increasing numbers in the 1780's, and only tailed off in the third quarter of the 19C. However, there are outliers, one being a floor joist in Kensington Palace, securely dated to 1691. Analysis of timber both in Kensington and Hampton Court palaces indicate that Baltic timber is common in both.

There is little literature on marks, although it is now increasing. Gabri van Tussenbroek in 2008 was one of the first to try to decipher marks. In one case, an unpublished thesis by Dan Atkinson in 2007, there is a conflation of Baltic marks with those of timber management and shipwrights marks at the Royal Dockyards which has caused some confusion to later students. Some 'ready reference' books of Baltic shipping marks were published in the later 19C which although theoretically helpful have until recently rarely been capable of alignment with marks which have been found. A report of a select committee of the House of Commons in 1835 is a good source of information on the Baltic timber trade more generally, which at the time was suffering from much higher duties than timber from north America. By the time of that report, imports from north America had grown to four times that imported from the Baltic.



Baltic mark in a Banqueting House roof timber

Kensington Palace floor joist

Lee identified two major factors behind the growth in Baltic timber trade. The first was the progressive partition of Poland/Lithuania in the late 18c, opening up the timber resources of the region to much greater trading exploitation. Prussia in particular gained control of key Baltic ports standing at the mouths of key rivers and access to the interior of the Russian empire. The other factor was settlement by Jews, who were denied access to professions and so many specialised in timber trade. They dominated the trade, from origin in the interior to export from Baltic ports.

The partitions of Poland

Prussia's control of Baltic ports

Nearly all the timber was on land owned by Polish aristocrats, who negotiated with Jewish traders who then took responsibility for cutting, removing and transporting the timber to a Baltic port. The rafts could take up to two years to float down, navigated by professional rafters living on them. For the English trade the timber was often squared at source, before being floated down the river.

At the port the timber rafts would be broken up and graded, and the Jewish specialists responsible for getting the timber to the port would negotiate with shippers. A key question is when would the marks be made, which Tansy then addressed.

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, sygn. 1-G-4292

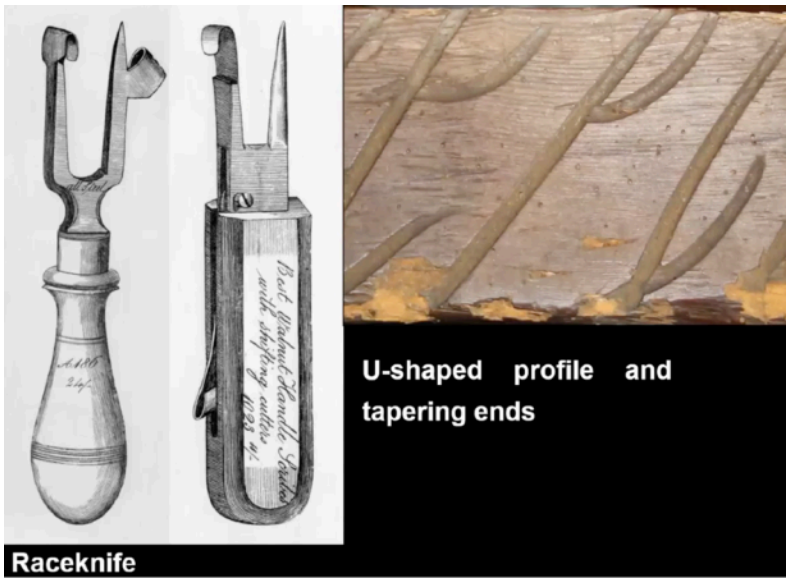
Living on board the rafts

Jewish dominance of the trade

Aleksander Gierymski (1850-1901) Feast of Trumpets, 1880. National Museum, Warsaw.

Tansy identified three broad categories of marks. The first is bracking. It includes a port mark, quality indication, raft or float number, yard number, and the bracker's (quality inspector) initials. The second is ownership, which could include forest owner, transporter, buyer, broker, ship name, often accompanied by a quality mark. The third category is measurement: tallies, cubic volume, duties, length and scantling, applied at any point in the process.

Three marking systems can be distinguished: scribed, with a race knife - the most common; branded (more usually associated with north American timber); and chalk or painted. Some stamped and stencilled marks have also been seen. The timber might be hewn or sawn, with a variety of different sawing techniques. Stamping and painting is often on the ends of the timber, and so more likely to have been removed when the timber was used.

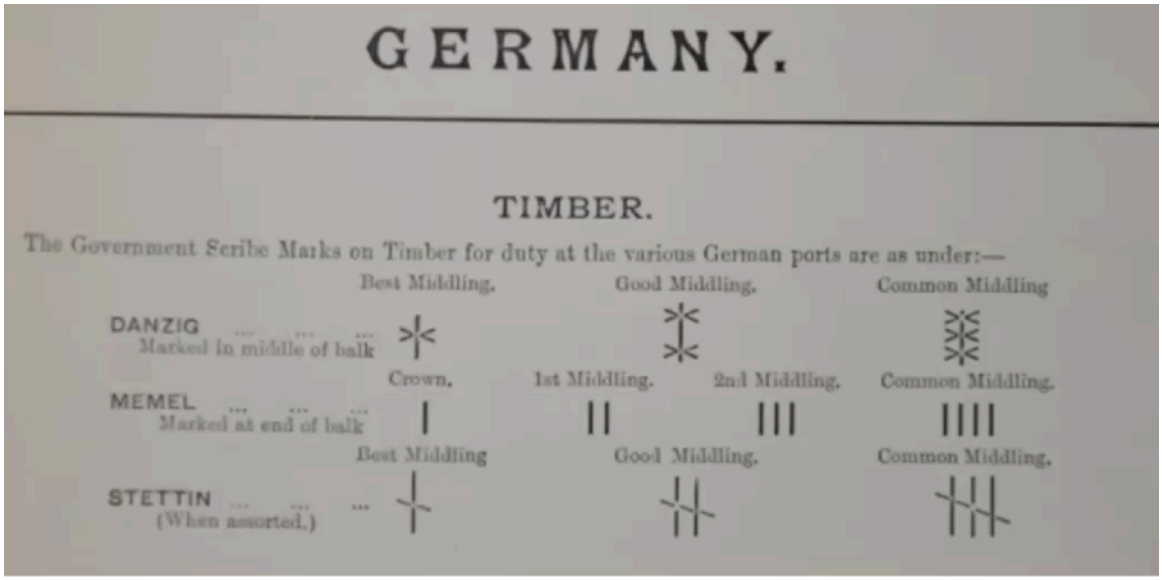


Raceknife

U-shaped profile and tapering ends

Taking these broad categories in turn, she illustrated different measurement marks, for cubic content or length of timber. Most used a system based on Roman numerals. Brackers marks often featured different types of marking, for example, Arabic or Roman symbols. The most common brackers marks represented the port, Gdansk (Danzig) being the most often found. The marks of other ports can be much more difficult to identify, being less

distinctive from other sorts of marks. Adding one or two port marks to the first indicates decreasing quality of timber.



GERMANY.

TIMBER.

The Government Scribe Marks on Timber for duty at the various German ports are as under:—

	Best Middling.	Good Middling.	Common Middling
DANZIG ... ... Marked in middle of balk	✳	✳	✳

	Crown.	1st Middling.	2nd Middling.	Common Middling.
MEMEL ... ... Marked at end of balk	I	II	III	IIII

	Best Middling	Good Middling.	Common Middling.
STETTIN ... ... (When assorted.)	✳	✳	✳

Marks indicating ownership can represent owners any point in the journey of the timber - origin, river rafting, merchants as sellers or buyers, brokers and intended recipients. They are often in letter form and sometimes painted on timber ends. They can also identify quality. Company ownership marks are often the initials of the company, although not always easily deciphered, as she amply illustrated in her photographs.

The most satisfying marks are shipping marks, not least because they are usually less hieroglyphic, and are often the name of the ship, which can be verified through shipping records. They are also more easily deciphered. For example, 'Georgina' appears in the Banqueting House roof. Another example at Preedy's Farm in Tadmartin became identifiable when it was discovered to be divided between two pieces of timber.

© Julian Munby

Tansy speculated that trading in the 19c may have been influenced by the development of two different approaches to insurance cover; cost insurance freight (CIF - covering the whole of the transport journey, including shipping) or free on board (FOB - just covering to final shipment). That needs to be explored further.

Many questions remain to be answered. For example: how do you distinguish Baltic timber marks from timber management and shipwright marks known to have been made at Chatham Royal dockyard and possibly elsewhere? Does a broad arrow with vertical line dropping from the apex indicate British government commission or ownership? Why are some marks scribed and painted? Why use paint rather than scribe with a race knife? Are some hieroglyphic looking marks more likely to be apotropaic than Baltic timber trade marks?

Tansy suggested a field survey recording sheet for those discovering marks. The more hard evidence we have the more likely we can make progress in interpreting marks.

Lee concluded by noting that only because of Tansy's diligence have we begun to translate these marks. As a closing shot, he displayed a complicated mark, which once closely studied becomes obvious - Queen of the Ocean.

APPENDIX 5 BALTIC TIMBER MARK FIELD SURVEY SHEET

Address:		**NGR:**	
BTM number:	**Building number and type:**	**Phasing:**	**BTM date:**
Method:	**Fabric:**	**Feature:**	
Conversion: Pit sawn / circular sawn / mechanically reciprocally sawn / side-axed	**Face:**	**Accessible:** Yes / no	
Position: side middle / side end / cut end	**Truncated:** yes / no	**Size:**	
Linked BTM numbers:	**Photographic ID numbers:**		
Sketch:			
Notes:			

Richard Farrant

OBR Presentation day

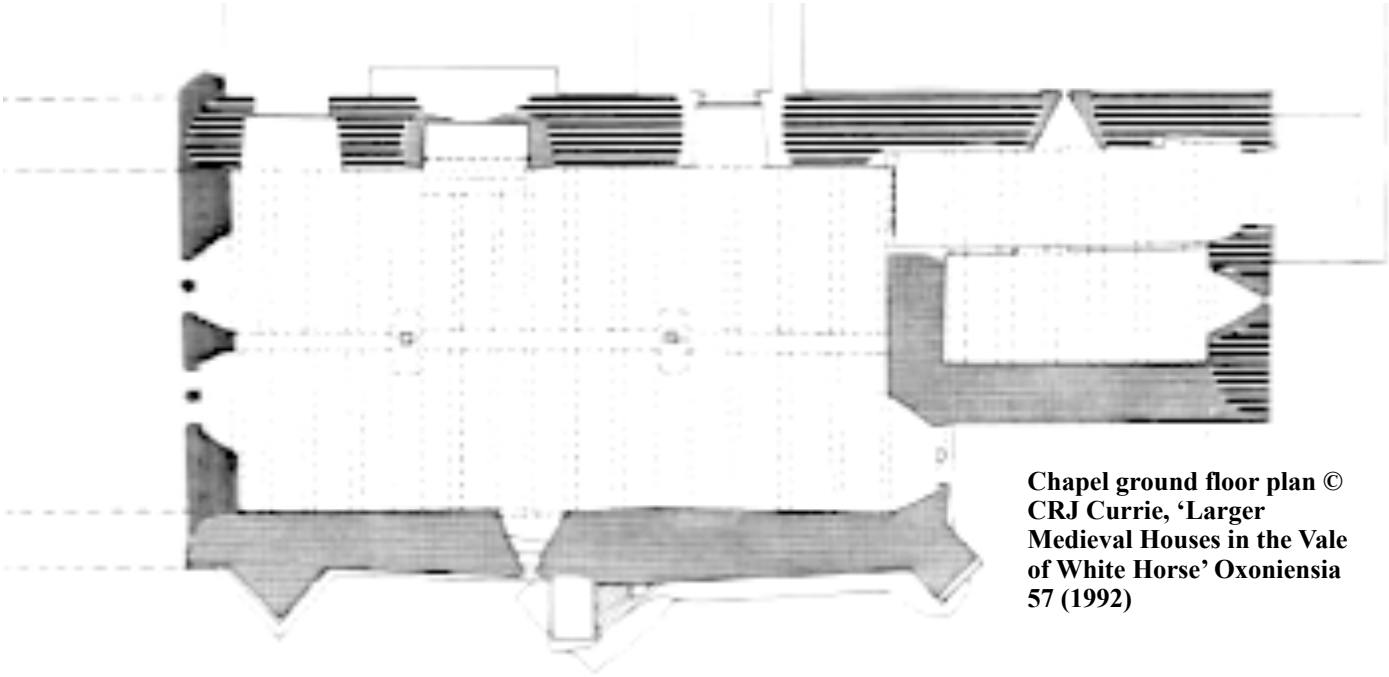
The OBR Presentation Day was held on 20 November, again on Zoom. 37 people heard presentations on five buildings which have been the subject of research in the last year.

David Clark opened with a report on **the Manor at Charney Bassett.**
The Manor is one element of the medieval core of Charney Bassett village, adjacent to the church and near the mill. It was a Grange of Abingdon Abbey from before 1066 until the Dissolution. Thereafter it was owned by two families until 1804, since when it has seen less continuity of ownership until being acquired by the Society of Friends in 1948, who still own it. Major remodelling took place in 1906, by the then owner William Price who employed William Weir. Little has been done since then, so the house remains much as it was following this major remodelling.

It is the south wing which is of most interest, comprising what is described as a chapel and a larger solar at first floor level., with an undercroft under both. . Key questions are: did the chapel predate the larger room behind? Was the chapel actually a chapel or something else?

West elevation

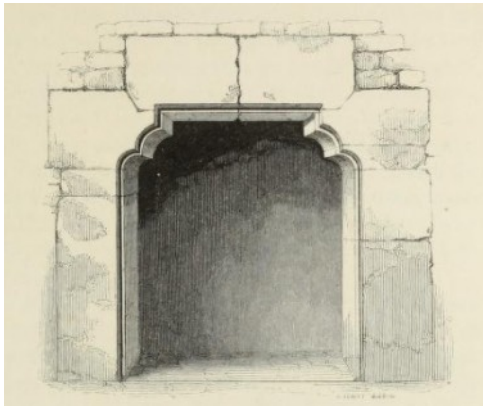
South wing



Chapel ground floor plan © CRJ Currie, 'Larger Medieval Houses in the Vale of White Horse' Oxoniensia 57 (1992)

The undercroft has a fireplace which could be 13C. It has been said that an opening in the fireplace comprised a wafer oven, suggesting religious use. It also has a window opening with an asymmetric splay adjacent to the adjoining chapel, which may be a clue to whether the chapel predates or postdates the solar. This asymmetry appears to be repeated in the first floor solar window. Documentary evidence indicates that access to the solar was by an external staircase, since removed. The solar has an exposed crown post roof, possibly inserted into a pre-existing paired rafter roof. The chapel roof is much simpler.

Fireplace © Turner, T Hudson, Some Account of Domestic Architecture in England from the Conquest to the end of the 13th Century, (1851)



Solar roof

Chapel roof

Possible indications of use as a chapel include a scratched cross and a niche that may have been a piscina.

Scratched cross

Piscina?

David's tentative conclusions are that the ground floor could have been late 11C or early12C, with the first floor added in the late 12C or early 13C. The external staircase to the solar was removed in the 1906 remodelling. Possibly part of this space was an external kitchen to the main house. Further work would be worthwhile, notably on the solar roof, fireplace and wafer oven theory and the splays to the windows. In summary, a good candidate for a future recording day.

Abigail Lloyd reported on **39 Pembroke Street, Oxford**, next door to no. 38, which she reported on at last year's Presentation Day (written up in OBR 424 and 426 reports and Oxon Recorder 84). This year no 39 was visited during renovations by its owner, Christ Church College, so she had the opportunity to put the two sites side by side and examine both. They share the same documentary history as a tenement plot. The question is how this has been reflected on the ground in the fabric, and her talk looked at similarities and differences, and possible phasing/dating implications.

No 38

South elevations

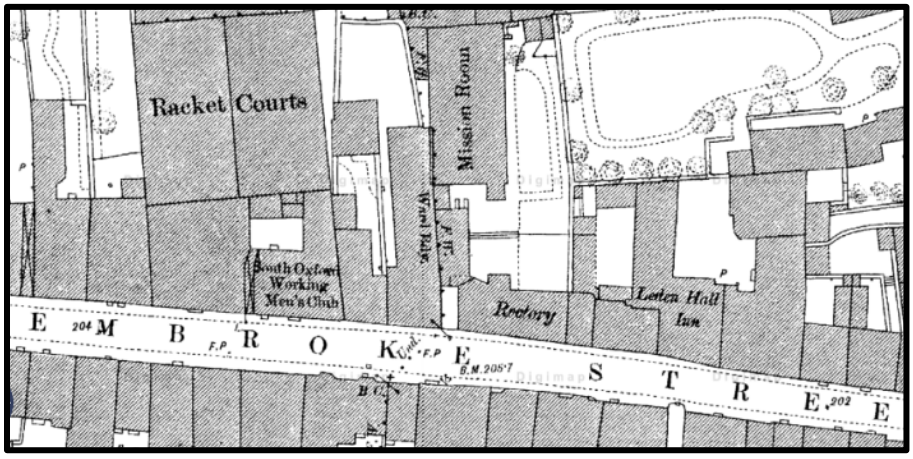
No 39

The documentary history was described in last year's presentation. In brief, the earliest mention is in 1210, when the site was part of the Jewish quarter. In 1244 it was given to the Hospital of St John, and then passed over 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 17C in that in 1690 Thomas Crutch took out a new lease and a memorandum in the fine book stated that the tenement is "lately built". Buildings are identifiable in maps from Agas in 1578 onwards. Christ Church bought the property in 1972.

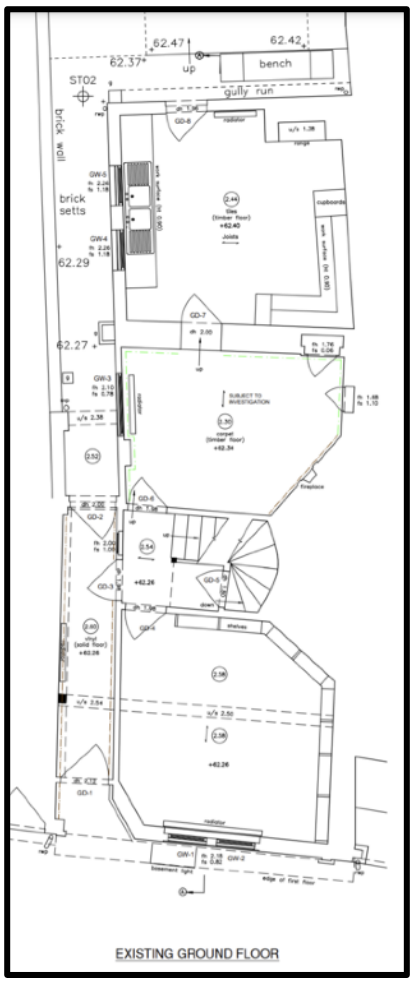
A map by Taylor in 1750 indicates the presence of a narrow passage between nos. 38 and 39, confirmed in a map by Hoggar in 1850. But there is confusion about whether this passage was over-sailed by the front range of no 39 from the start or was later covered over and incorporated in the building. Taylor suggests the buildings always over-sailed the passage. Hoggar is the only map which is different and suggests the passage was open to the elements. However, importantly, the fabric investigated internally confirmed that the front (southern) range had always covered over the passage – there are two transverse spine beams in the ceiling of the ground and first floor which span the entire width. The latter (at first floor) has a lamb's tongue chamfer stop at the point of meeting the post over the passage (on the west side of the passage). The first edition OS map confirms the passage was covered by 1876, while indicating a narrow passage remained at the rear next to later additions to the property.

Taylor map enlargement 1750 © Oxfordshire history Centre

Hoggar map enlargement; 1850 © Oxford History



OS map 1876 © Nat. Library of Scotland and Oxfordshire History Centre



No 39 ground floor plan

Ground floor passageway

Timber framing proud of the wall

Internally, the ground floor passage features timber framing which is proud of the wall and has very little pegging. The timber framing is likely to be primary. As in no. 38, the transverse floor beam spans the passage as well as adjoining front room. The staircase behind this room is stylistically suggestive of the late 17C, as are the H hinges to a cupboard in the panelling behind the staircase.

There are evident differences in both north (rear) and south (street) elevations of the two buildings. At the rear, later extensions add to the differences. On the south elevation no 38 has two gables and no 39 one; differences of jetty levels; different window arrangements; no 39 has a cornice whereas no 38 has none; no 39 has pilasters, the positioning of which is explicable as being a visual frame for the shop window that features in old photographs.

In conclusion, the survey has been invaluable in being able to compare two buildings which share a common documentary history but over time have developed differently on the ground.

Nick Wright reported on **Champ's Chapel, East Hendred**. The chapel - formal name the Chapel of Jesus of Bethlehem - had long fascinated him. It stands apart from any other church building but was not the village church . However, it is attached to a cottage, Old Chapel Cottage. The chapel is now a museum, well worth visiting.

The Chapel south elevation west elevation

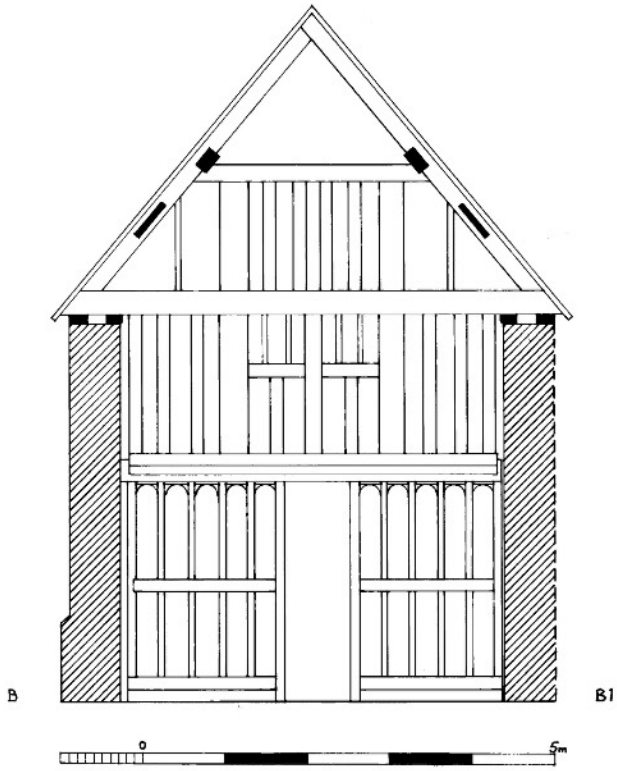
The cottage west elevation Photo by John Dunn in 1901

The chapel was said to be early 15C, serving Carthusian monks who received King's Manor from Henry V in 1414. However, dendrodating by Dan Miles of a floor beam, purlin and jetty bressummer of the cottage indicates slightly later felling dates of 1464 to 1466. The chapel and adjoining cottage would seem to be contemporaneous.

The buildings appear in a 19C enclosure map, and the chapel was surveyed by JH Parker in 1859. There is an article on the cottage by Jo Cormier in Oxoniensa LX, 1995. After the Reformation, the ownership of chapel and cottage became divided, and the chapel was at different times used a pigeon loft, wash house and bake house. In 1901 both were purchased by John Dunn, who took photographs in 1901/2 - now in the chapel museum, which gives a good record of the state of the buildings at that time.

Nick illustrated a number of details of the chapel. The upper section of the west gable is rubblestone in contrast to ashlar below. Sockets in the soffits of the arch of the entrance may be evidence that the door was surmounted by a tympanum. The south window has a fine hood moulding, and a curious small aperture on this elevation is now now bricked up. The east window has typical 15C tracery, but its principal and smaller mullions above are the same size and the higher lights alternate from the lower ones, an unusual feature more often found in the West Country. The 3 bay roof has clasped purlins with an archbrace above the central section and full truss with a number of unused mortices above a first floor section of the building. The screen at ground floor level of the full truss has shaped heads and moulding, as do the floor joists above, although Nick said this was not original. There is what seems to be a statue bracket on the east wall, aumbry in the south wall, and the structure of a window now blocked up on the north wall.

East window



Full truss with ground floor screen

The adjoining Old Chapel cottage has medieval close studding at first floor level, formerly jettied, with the dragon beam still evident inside. Bracing on the outside means there are uninterrupted vertical posts inside. The purlined roof has some chiselled assembly marks. A chimney was inserted after the original build, but is nevertheless unlikely to be later than early 16C.

Nick pointed out stylistic similarities between the upper floored end of the chapel and the chapel remains at Godstow - could that have been an upper chamber or private pew for someone privileged? This chapel was not in a domestic setting, so could it have been for clerical use? Its later use as a pigeon loft is evidenced by the remains of pigeon roost holes, and smoke blackening is suggestive of having been a wash house.

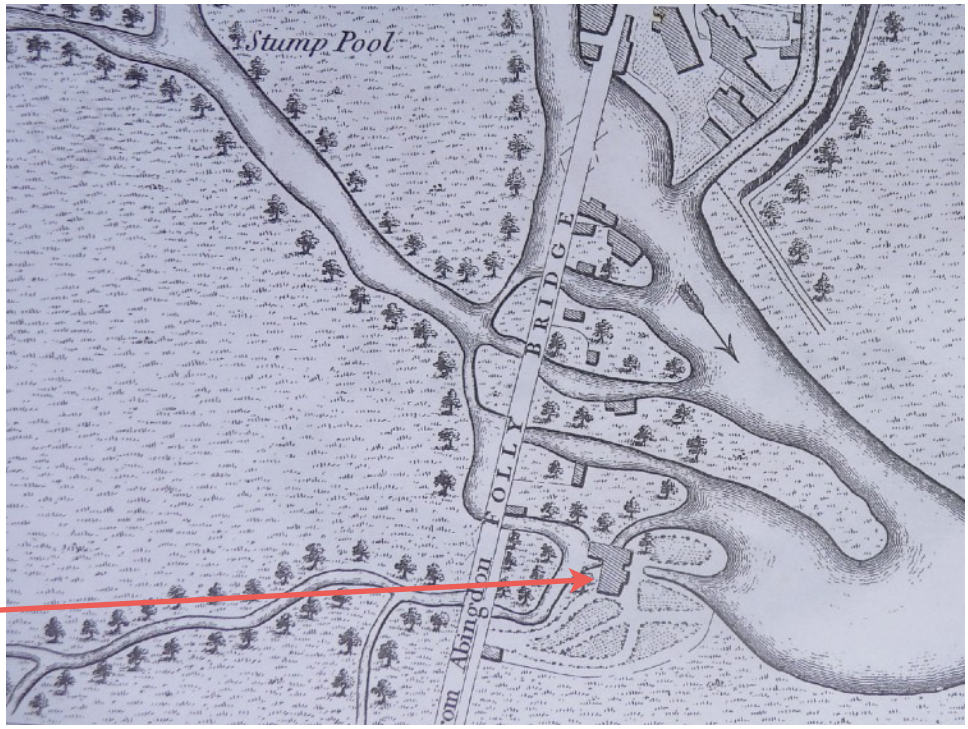
Nick's report on the chapel has now appeared in this year's Oxoniensia. The museum has many photographs of its past and present state.

David Clark reported on **Grandpont House**, south of Folly Bridge in Oxford, to which he had had limited access so far.

This 3 bay, 3 storey building is timber framed , covered with cement rendering and marine-ply. The site was bought from Oxford City Council by William Taunton, Oxford's town clerk, in 1785. He already leased a garden to the south. The house first appears on a map by Davis, dated 1797, which also depicts a garden to its east and south. It straddles a minor stream of the Thames where earlier maps contain no indication of any archway bridging the stream, and one question is who built the archway and when. The archway is brick, with stone infill.

Grandpont House

Davis map of 1797



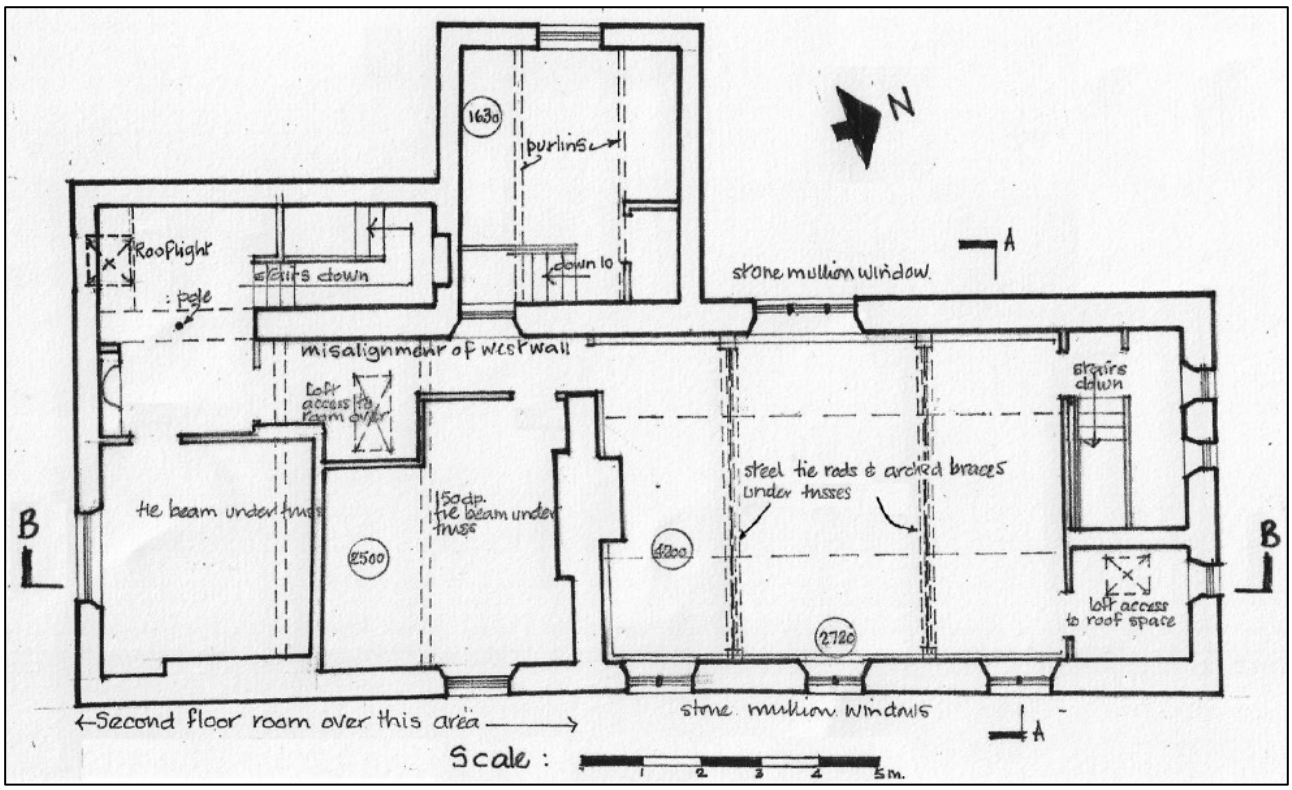
The building exhibits many 18C details and later 19C alterations made between 1825 and 1831 following the death of William Taunton and his son. In 1807 the Taunton family advertised the house for sale, but it remained in the family until 1846, when it was sold to Brasenose College. In 1863 it was leased to Thomas Randall (said to have been the model of the Mad Hatter in Alice in Wonderland). A map of 1875 show house and garden still intact. Around 1900 the house was occupied by fellow of Brasenose. Shorn of its garden, the house was acquired in 1959 by Opus Dei and is now occupied by the Netherhall Educational Association.

So far so good, but David identified some features that are not easily explained. The top floor cuts into the Venetian window at first floor level. A joist cuts into the top of a door frame. One window is out of character with the others. All in all, a candidate for survey should the opportunity arise.

Paul Clark reported on the **Guildhall in Chipping Norton.** Its survey by a team of volunteers formed part of the much larger Chipping Norton project which is now in its final stages.

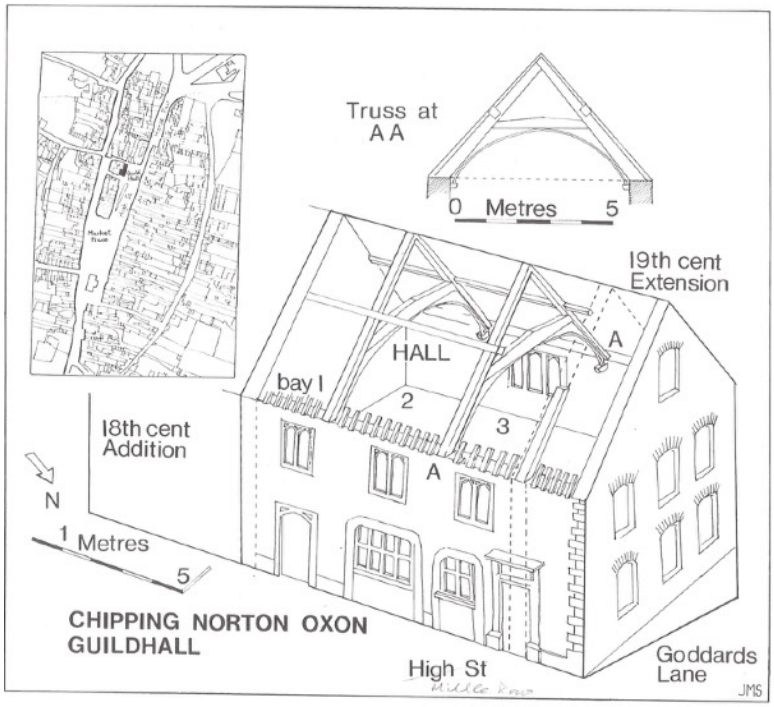
The Guildhall

The Guildhall, now owned by the District Council and used as its offices, stands at the opposite end of the market square from the much later town hall. It ws built around 1520, based on dendro evidence. There is ample documentary evidence of its history. The guild it housed was founded in 1450, but dissolved in 1547 and the guildhall messuage was sold in 1549. In 1562 it was given for public use and thereafter found several uses and occupiers, notably as a town hall and public rooms until the new town hall was built in 1842. The Horse & Groom pub now demolished abutted the rear (west) of the building. This mix makes for an intriguing piece of detective work to identify the various phases of what remains.



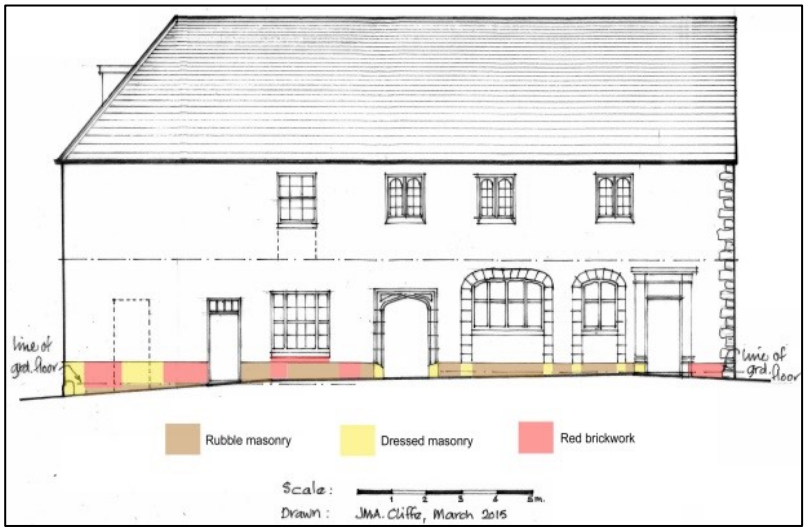
Plan

There have been two previous survey reports, one in 1937 by Rayson commissioned by the Council, and one in 1984 by Steane and Aylwin. Rayson noted it retained its original main doorway, but the original form of the structure has nothing definite to establish its arrangement. He identified three definite phases of building. Steane and Aylwin agreed, identifying the central block as the oldest; this was then enlarged by lengthening northwards in the 18C, 19C and early 20C, and the building extended to the south and a hipped roof added; in the third phase a ceiling was inserted and arch braces added to make an assembly room, probably in the mid 19C.



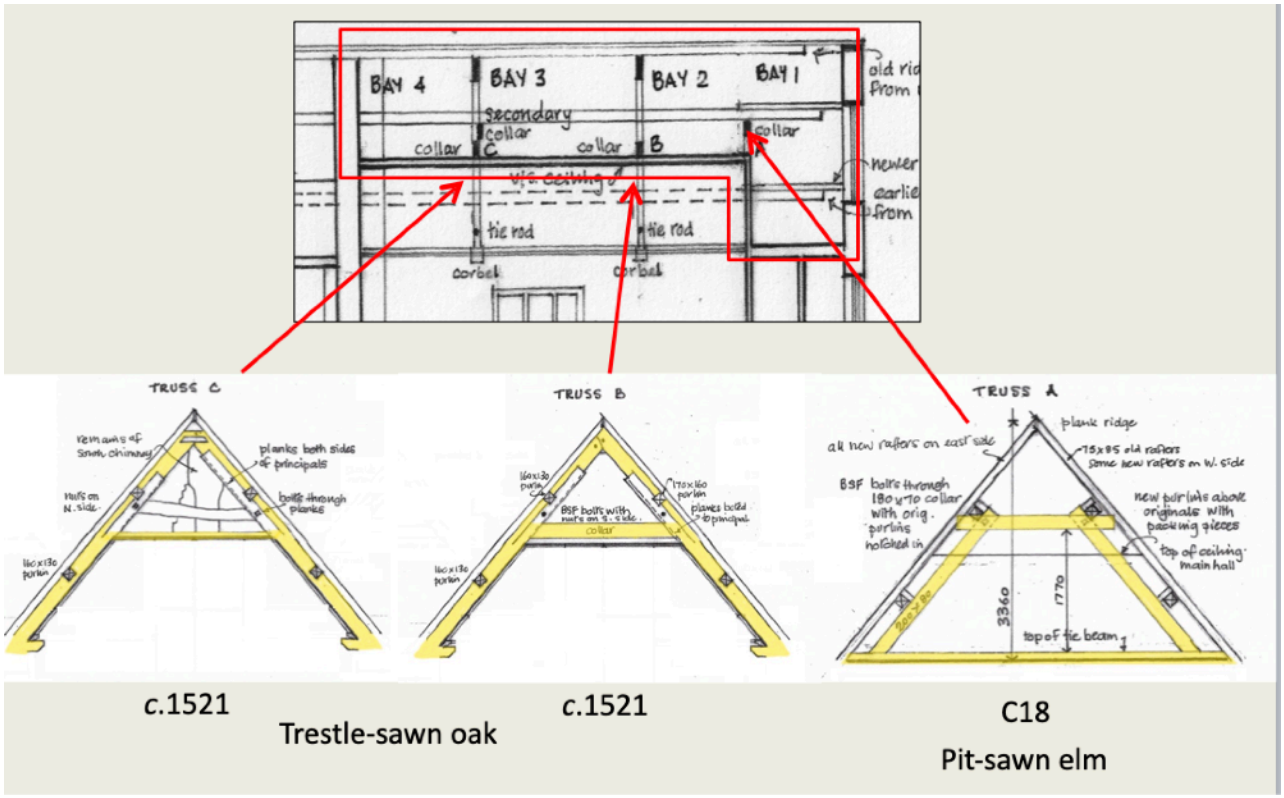
From John Steane and Daphne Aylwin, 1984

Recent renovation allowed inspection of the east elevation wall at ground level which revealed differences in building material along the base of the wall, the central portion being rubble masonry and probably more recent dressed masonry and red brickwork towards either end.



Materials used at base of east wall

The west (rear) wall of the hall would seem to be the remains of another building and not an original part of the guildhall. It is slightly misaligned with the rest of the building, which might be evidence of an earlier building. The main chamber, with arch braced roof, originally 3 bays, is at the north end of the building, and was later extended with a fourth bay. The roof features butt purlin joints - clasped purlins being notably absent in this region.



The south end of the building would seem to have been a more domestic range, although not quite what one would expect domestically, with a roof stylistically typical of the late 17C. This part was in single ownership since 1776. 19C additions form a rear range on the west side of the building, their layout influenced by the Horse & Groom building which then abutted the Guildhall.

Paul summarised the conclusions from the survey work:
- Built c. 1521 as a Guildhall, possibly against another building to the south
- From 1547 in and out of public ownership, sometimes the Town hall
- South range rebuild in mid 18C. Extended north with new doorway
- 1901 refurbishment included a further north extension.

Summaries by Richard Farrant
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Forthcoming Events

Oxfordshire Local History Association

OBR belongs to the OHLA and members can participate in its events. See its website ((http://www.olha.org.uk/events/talks-and-meetings/) for listings and details of events and talks at local history societies throughout Oxfordshire.

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