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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 June. Please send any contributions or comments to Richard Farrant at [newsletter@obr.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@obr.org.uk) Contributions need to be Word or Pages documents with accompanying photographs sent separately in high resolution jpg format.*

## OBR News

### **OBR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The AGM will be held at St. Kenelm's Church in Church Enstone on 14 May, followed by lunch and a walk around the village. See flier attached to this OR for further details of the agenda and 2021 annual accounts.

### **DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH**

When we record buildings, we generally concentrate on studying the historic fabric, trying to identify elements that can be reliably assigned to particular dates and phases, in order to create its 'development history'. Where possible, we carry out some elementary pieces of documentary research, such as identifying the owner and occupier in 1910 from the District Valuation, and a map regression that sometimes shows what was there at particular dates. And for general background, we use the invaluable Victoria County History (though this is less useful for the former Berkshire parishes). But a more nuanced interpretation can often be produced by a detailed knowledge of the people responsible for the alterations, and their possible motives.

In some cases, the owner of the building is keen to find out about previous owners and occupiers and is happy to pursue this themselves or in conjunction with their local history society. But occasionally we are asked whether we have members who would like to take on a more detailed historical research project on the building, and the purpose of this note is to ask if any members would like to volunteer, please, to go on a list of potential researchers? I am aware that some members do such work professionally, and others have specific interests such as individual locations and record types such as probate inventories. So if you would like to put your name on the list, please indicate whether you would charge a fee for such work, or not; and if you have specific interests, a brief note of what those are would suffice. Do please also let me know if you would like your name to appear in the newsletter (or on the website) as a volunteer, or whether you would rather wait to be asked.

Responses, questions etc to [secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk) please.

### **A NEW 'SAXON HOUSE' BUILD**

Cogges Manor Farm, Witney, a Heritage Centre Trust, has some Heritage Lottery funding to make a community-build Saxon House for educational purposes. They are currently looking for expressions of interest to research and build a smallish 2-bay timber-framed structure. The location is already fixed, and McCurdy & Co, builders of *The Globe Theatre*, are contracted to construct the building, with a strong emphasis on teaching volunteers some of the necessary skills and offering hands-on experience. The website <https://www.cogges.org.uk/News/cogges-build-saxon-house> has more information, and links to register or volunteer.

### **HENLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL GROUP BUILDINGS RESEARCH**

The HAHG has published summaries of its extensive research of buildings in Henley, with links to their underlying reports. Go to their website <https://hahg.org.uk/building-list-full/>

## **EDITOR OF OXON RECORDER STILL WANTED**

As announced in the last OR, after a long tenure Richard Farrant is standing down as OR editor at the latest by the end of this year. The Committee is looking for a replacement to take over during 2022.

The OR is published quarterly, and emailed to all OBR members, and a few others - total circulation a little over 200. The editor is a member of the OBR committee, so is party to all that we are doing, and has direct access to key office-holders, so there is usually no lack of material to publish. The editor can also commission or write content. Thereafter it is a matter of getting it into a suitable form for publication using whatever program you are familiar with, and then distributing it using email addresses provided by the Membership Secretary.

This is a rewarding task at the heart of the OBR's communication with members (and the outside world, as copies of the newsletter go on our website and are valuable in recruiting new members). To learn more, contact Richard at [richardfarrant@waitrose.com](mailto:richardfarrant@waitrose.com) for a full job description and further information.

## **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](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk), and applications should use the form available on the website.

## **Dating is fun; a light hearted look at buildings with dating inscriptions**

What better way of using one's time in the second (or was it the third) lockdown and when the weather began to improve earlier last year than pounding the streets looking for inscriptions that date buildings?

I volunteered to survey Headington in Oxford, only to be told that Stephanie Jenkins, the indefatigable online historian of Oxford and Headington, was already on the job. We made contact and she told me which roads she had tackled and which were still there for me to wander around. It gave purpose to my daily walk and was fun. In the next few weeks I discovered side roads and closes that I'd not seen in my thirty years living in the area. And suddenly I began to *look* at buildings, not just for inscriptions but also to *really* see (split infinitive for emphasis - sorry) the varied building styles of the area and the often elaborate decorative brickwork of many of the houses. Constant looking up led to several near mishaps but no actual tripping over my own feet or stepping into the road.

During last summer Felix Lam and I joined forces on some of her forays into South Oxfordshire towns and villages. Together we spotted more dated buildings than if we had been working separately, so it pays to work on a project with someone else. It also shared the work: one of us to take notes, the other to photograph and both to chat up the locals and ask about houses. 'What are you doing?' they ask. 'Making a survey of buildings with dates on



them ....' we answer. (It sounds as improbable as the answer another group I was with thirty years ago gave to a farmer who asked why we were on his land. 'Walking an Anglo-Saxon charter boundary' our leader said.) In one village the owner of a house treated us to the detail of his research into when the dates were cut into the bricks and who the accompanying initials belonged to, then offered us coffee in the back garden and told us more about the house and the village.

Given the piecemeal nature of repair, extension and rebuilding, it is surprising that few churches commemorate those major events. An exception is the church tower at Warborough, where the date is so obvious that we missed it several times when driving past.

Few grand buildings are dated. It is probably true to say that none of the country houses or wealthy urban houses we've seen has a date of construction on it, neither do the university and college buildings in Oxford (with one or two exceptions). It is left to more modest buildings to record their purpose and date of construction, such as the temperance pub in Headington.



**Church tower of St Laurence Warborough constructed in 1666. © Felix Lam**



**Date stone on the front of 67A Old High Street, Headington, the site of the new British Workman temperance pub in 1880. © Barbara Tearle**

The survey has produced some delightful finds. Above the door of a building called the Old Post Office in Wallingford (and now a pub) was a crown, the letters ER and 1936 with viii just visible below the letters. There are unlikely to be many buildings so precisely dated. Oblique dating has included the Millennium House in Witney (spotted on the OAHS excursion to Witney in the summer) and backed up by a planning application in the late 1990s. It makes a change from Jubilee Cottages and Coronation Cottages, marking other significant events. Dates are not always inscribed on the buildings. There is one on the clock at Chiselhampton church recording that the church was rebuilt in 1762 (an exception to the conclusion on churches above) and another in Headington set in the original, early 1900s, front path.



The Old Post Office,  
Wallingford © R Farrant

As winter drags on with spring not far away, Felix and I are continuing to ramble round the villages and towns of south and east Oxfordshire. We have found dates on all types of buildings - houses, nonconformist churches, schools, a police station, twenty-first century garage extensions - but no dated public convenience yet!

*Barbara Tearle*

## Datestone gazetteer - update on parishes covered so far

OBR members have been assiduous in tracking down, photographing and recording datestones on buildings, to the extent that we now have a growing database of nearly 1100 entries. Although this is a significant number, the geographic coverage over the county is rather patchy.

Below is a list of the settlements that have been looked at, with varying degrees of thoroughness. These represent less than one third of the county. Offers to take on some of the 280 more settlements which have not been covered yet will be gratefully received, email Heather at [hahwindrush@aol.com](mailto:hahwindrush@aol.com) with offers. Zero results are also important. To check what datestones have been recorded in an area you are familiar with, go to <https://obr.org.uk/date-stones/>; we are always interested in extra ones that our recorders have missed. Many places with some recorded dates have not been fully explored, though we respectfully acknowledge the very thorough coverage walked by several of our intrepid members.

Abingdon	Headington	Oxford Old Marston
Adwell (0)	Henley-on-Thames (part)	Oxford Osney
Ambrosden	Highmoor	Oxford St Thomas's
Appleton (1 only yet)	Horspath	Oxford Summertown
Aston Rowant	Horton-cum-Studley	Radley
Bayworth	Huntercombe	Sandford-on-Thames
Beckley	Ickford (0)	Shillingford
Benson	Ipsden	South Hinksey
Binfield Heath	Islip	South Leigh (0)
Bix	Kennington	Southmoor
Bletchington	Kidlington	South Weston (0)
Burford	Kingston Blount	Stadhampton
Chalgrove	Lewknor	Stanford-in-the-Vale
Charlbury	Long Wittenham	Stanton St John
Chesterton	Marcham	Stoke Row
Chipping Norton	Merton	Stoke, South
Chislehurst (0)	Milton Common (0)	Stoke Talmage
Cholsey	Milton, Great and Little	Sutton Courtenay
Crowmarsh Gifford	Murcott	Sydenham
Cuddesdon	North Hinksey (1)	Tackley
Culham	North Moreton	Tetsworth (0)
Deddington	North Weston	Thame
Denton (0)	Nuneham Courtenay	Tiddington (0)
Dorchester	Oxford Binsey	Towersey
Drayton by Abingdon	Oxford Botley	Wallingford
Drayton St. Leonard	Oxford City	Wantage
Dunsden	Oxford Cowley	Warborough
Elsfield	Oxford Cutteslowe	Waterperry
Eynsham (1 only yet)	Oxford East	Waterstock
Faringdon	Oxford Grandpont,	Watlington
Garsington	Oxford Headington	Weston-on-the Green
Harpsden	Oxford Iffley	Wheatley
Haseley, Great	Oxford Littlemore	Wootton
Haseley, Little (0)	Oxford New Marston	

If your neighbourhood is not listed, it is probably one of the 280 more places in Oxfordshire that have not yet been recorded, please volunteer. If you know there are NONE, then please tell me at [hahwindrush@aol.com](mailto:hahwindrush@aol.com) so that we can record zero results.

Many of you will have enjoyed David Clark's talk to Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society (OAHS) members on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022 covering aspects of the information to be gleaned from the datestones database when it is more universal, and introducing some of the background history to put datestone inscriptions into context, including associated ceremonial traditions. A recording of the Zoom talk is available to OAHS members at [OAHS - Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society](#) .



David poses you some questions:-

- What is the earliest date that has been recorded? (and it must as far as possible be shown to be *in situ*, not a later addition)
- What is the building with the most inscribed foundation stones? (Stephanie is in the lead on this with 7)
- Do the dates tell us anything about particular phases of prosperity, either nationally or locally?
- Has anyone identified houses that might be amenable to study in order to determine whether the inscribed date refers to the original building or a rebuilding phase?
- Has anyone been able to link the initials on a date stone with a specific person or persons, and discovered whether the date links to a marriage or a building phase or both?

David notes that the ceremonial laying of a foundation stone has rather gone out of fashion, its place has been taken by the 'opening ceremony'. There is usually a plaque to be unveiled, with the date (of course) and the name of the person performing the ceremony. It is also an event with a considerable potential for Murphy's Law to apply (if it can go wrong, it will go wrong), though thankfully not for OBR member Vic Allison who, when he was deputy surveyor at Oxford University, had to organise the unveiling of a commemorative plaque in 2001 by (ex) President Bill Clinton at the Rothermere American Institute in South Parks Road. But it was a close call - the curtain refused to budge when Clinton pulled the string, thanks to Vic's addition of extra Velcro because of the windy conditions. Vic shouted 'pull', and thankfully for all concerned this did the trick - and the stone remained poised on the parapet. The consequences if it had crashed down on to the surrounding dignitaries do not bear thinking about.

A more famous (or infamous) example in Oxford was the breaking of the key in the lock at the New Bodleian when King George VI tried to open the door in 1947.

The Covid pandemic has taken its toll - a last-minute requirement to self-isolate meant that Chancellor Patten was unable to unveil the plaque at St Hilda's new building in September 2021. The plaque bears his name, but has not been set in place. The world awaits the college's decision - whether to replace the plaque with a new one, or just leave its niche empty.

Opening ceremonies are occasions for congratulation, recognising the efforts of all those associated with the building, including its sponsors, architects, builders and owners. Receptions or dinners are obligatory, musical entertainment less so. Few opening ceremonies, however, can match those of the Old Gaol leisure centre in Abingdon in 1975, when its owners, the Vale of White Horse District Council, put on an eight-day festival, commemorated in a booklet printed for the purpose. It began on Friday 29 November with the formal opening by the chairman of the district council, Councillor E J S Parsons, B.Litt, M.A, J.P. The Duke of Edinburgh sent a congratulatory message, and was scheduled to turn up for an 'informal' visit on 5 December. Sports, music and arts events were scheduled throughout the period, including performances by violinist Manoug Parikian and flamenco guitarist Paco Pena. Sixty-seven subcontractors were named in the booklet. This was obviously a major event for the Vale, though it had only come into being in 1974 when

Abingdon was in Berkshire and the scheme had been conceived and largely built by the earlier regime. The opening event was thus a blatant piece of political appropriation by the new council of the legacy of its predecessor.

With Jesus College's new building opening 'soon', and a number of other big projects getting under way in Oxford, there is much potential for opening ceremonies - and for Murphy's Law.

*Heather Horner and David Clark*

## The Story of Oxfordshire Buildings Record

“It isn’t going to be what we expected.” These are the opening words of E M Forster’s novel, *Howard’s End*, which begins with a clear and detailed description of the house that gives the book its title. It also reflects the way in which the Oxfordshire Buildings Record (OBR) was conceived, and how it has developed over the past twenty-one years since its formal launch. But the seed was planted two years before, in 1998, on a warm summer afternoon when John Steane and I [David Clark] sat chatting on a patio in Rewley House after a meeting of the Listed Buildings committee of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society (OAHS). John, by then well into retirement as County Archaeologist for Oxfordshire, was chairman of the committee and I was its caseworker for Oxford City. The conversation turned to our growing collection of building plans and reports that in those long-lost days were sent to us by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA), statutory consultees for cases involving demolition or partial demolition of a listed building, for whom OAHS acted as agents in Oxfordshire. These were all, naturally, in hard copy – sometimes for complex cases arriving in large cardboard boxes – on which we based our analysis of the proposals in order to form a view. As the planning system required more and more documentation – not just plans but detailed ‘Design and Access statements’, ‘Heritage Impact Appraisals’ and the like – we were building up large quantities of material that was too interesting to just throw away once the case had been dealt with.

John was aware that Wiltshire County Council ran a repository of building information called the Wiltshire Buildings Record, and suggested that Oxfordshire should have a similar resource. But Wiltshire was a special case – a unique collaboration between the County Council and a local amateur building recording group. It had a paid council employee, who managed the repository and carried out building investigations for the council on important cases. The recording group followed their own researches, and had produced a set of focussed publications on medieval rural houses, agricultural buildings and early town houses in Wiltshire, aimed at a wide audience and identifying the main features of the local vernacular, and, in the case of farm buildings, recording them before loss or conversion into domestic use. In the council offices was a row of filing cabinets organised by parish in which all this material was kept – not only original building reports, but planning documents and estate agents’ brochures – anything and everything of potential interest relating to the built heritage of the county. This was the gold standard to which we aspired – though in the event its main legacy was our name – the Oxfordshire Buildings Record (OBR).

The first thing that John and I did was to meet with the then Oxfordshire Studies and County Record Office (ORO) to talk about storage of building records. As we might have



expected, they had no space or funds to create a new entity. The Record Office, however, was happy to accept original building records, though could not store estate agents' brochures or architects' plans – unless of course as part of a company archive or the like.

This glimmer allowed us to make a start. John chaired a small working party under the auspices of the Listed Buildings committee, and we set to work in June 1999. We began a series of meetings with conservation officers in the districts: Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire to discuss access to their files, whether they would find this sort of repository valuable, and what the relationship might be between OBR and the planning system. This provided valuable feedback and strong support. We wrote to estate agents for sponsorship – on the basis that they might be interested in the history of the houses they were selling. This produced nothing – neither interest nor money. In the event, OAHS gave us a start-up grant, and Oxford Preservation Trust helped enormously by allowing us to use their printer to produce a newsletter.

By the end of 1999 we had produced a four-page newsletter – containing a short building report – and sent copies to everyone we could think of who might be interested in historic buildings in Oxfordshire – The National Trust, conservation officers, archaeologists, local historians, students on related OUDCE courses – and received in return a great deal of encouragement. We had by now decided that the OBR should be a stand-alone membership organisation with a constitution, though still operating under the auspices of OAHS. Our next move was to hire a room in Rewley House and to invite all who had expressed an interest to a launch meeting on 6 May 2000. 44 people turned up and a further 20 expressed an interest. John Steane set out his vision for the OBR and Pam Slocombe talked about the Wiltshire Buildings Record. The necessary votes having been taken, the Oxfordshire Buildings Record was formed and a committee was elected, with John as chairman and me as secretary.

Knowing that ORO might accept company archives, we embarked on two early attempts to rescue building information, which allowed us to start a relationship with them that has continued today in its current incarnation as the Oxfordshire History Centre (OHC).

The first of these were the pub plans produced by the drawing office of Morland's brewery in Abingdon. Following the closure of the brewery in 1999, the bulk of the company's records had been deposited in ORO, but someone found the architects' drawings in a skip, and rescued them. John hired a church hall in Summertown, and a group of friends and members of the embryonic OBR sorted them out and catalogued them. ORO accepted the Oxfordshire drawings as a worthwhile adjunct to the main company records.

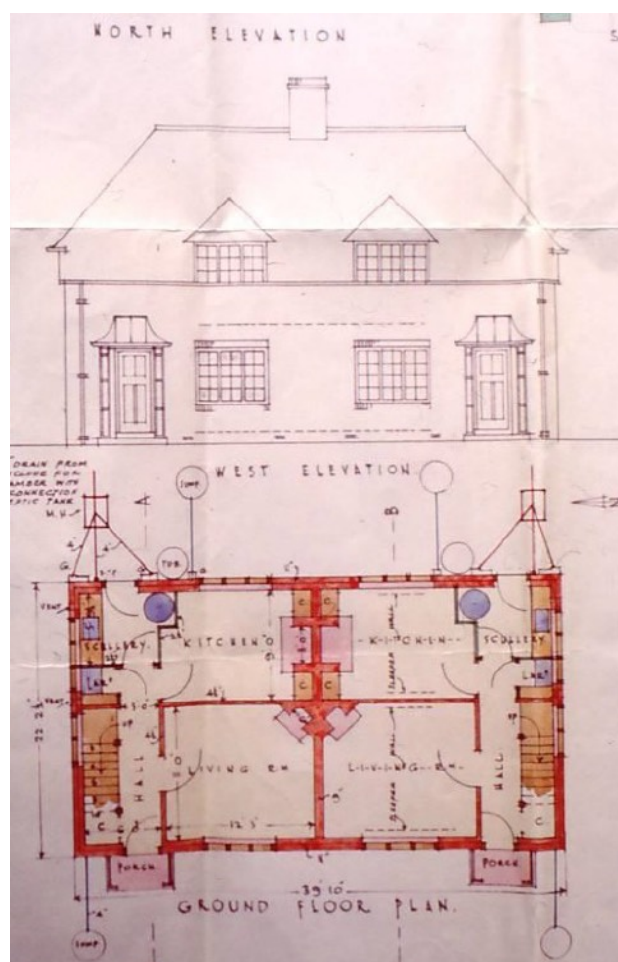
Buoyed by this success, when we received a tip-off that a huge number of South Oxfordshire's building control plans were scheduled for destruction, we arranged a day in a shed in Wallingford to have a look at them. Confronted by a huge heap of boxes, this was daunting, but also rewarding. Many of the documents pre-dated the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, and so the building control records contained the only surviving original plans of many buildings from the first half of the twentieth century – and before. We found an original drawing from 1852 by Sir George Gilbert Scott's office for a new church at Forest Hill, details of a 1935 barn conversion in Sandford-on-Thames and at the

other end of the architectural scale – but, like Scott's, beautifully drawn and coloured – builders' plans for all the 1930s houses on Gatehampton Road in Goring. We separated out the later plans for such things as housing estates on the outskirts of Wallingford, but catalogued all the older, more interesting documents, and again, ORO kindly agreed to take these. So we had begun to do something positive.



**Boxes of SODC files awaiting destruction**

**Architect's plans for Mr Hallett's new houses in Gatehampton Road, Goring, 1937.**



But we still had no original building records – all our casework had been based on plans drawn by others, and although we may have researched some of the building's history in order to better understand the age and significance of the historic fabric that was going to be altered or removed, this, too, was generally from published sources, so our photocopies of pages from the Victoria County History or Buildings of England were also inadmissible. We had to go out and record some buildings.

John Steane was our guide in this. Throughout his career in the county archaeological service, he had made records of historic buildings as part of the planning process. I had recently completed the postgraduate certificate in architectural history at OUDCE, but had as part of that only recorded one building. Neither of us had tried to record a building with a group of a dozen or so volunteers, most of whom had no previous experience. But it was clear that we had to start somewhere, so we persuaded a member to let us record his house: we did some measuring, photography, and a limited amount of historical research, and learned a lot in the process.

By August 2000 we had organised our first proper group Recording Day, looking at two houses in Long Wittenham, and we were away! Later that year we had a Presentation Day – with members showing the results of their work to each other – an event that has taken place every year since then – even in 2020 with a handful of buildings recorded and reported on via Zoom. In March 2001 we had the first of another annual event – the 'OBR Lecture' – part of the winter OAHs lecture series, where we invite an expert (usually of national standing) on some aspect of architectural history to speak on a topic - always with an Oxfordshire angle.



**Church Cottage, Long Wittenham – with medieval cruck framing inside**

We have also taken on some major projects. The first of these was in conjunction with the Victoria County History's lottery-funded project in Burford. The VCH did the people and OBR researched the buildings. With around 200 historic buildings this kept us busy for many months, and the results were published in 2008 as 'Burford: buildings and people in a Cotswold town'. We have continued to work with the VCH on their main publications – the 'big red books' that detail the histories of the Oxfordshire parishes – sometimes just looking at a few of the more important houses in an area, but more recently, as currently in Hook Norton, aiming for a more comprehensive Burford-like survey of as many houses as possible. Experience in Burford also led us to bid for Historic England support for a similar project in



Chipping Norton as part of their national initiative on Historic Fabric in Historic Towns, which started in 2013 and is now nearing completion. Its first spin-off book was 'The Making of Chipping Norton' by Jan Cliffe and Adrienne Rosen, published in 2017. And in 2011 we hosted the annual conference of the Vernacular Architecture Group, showcasing our work to a hundred or so experts from all over the country.



**Burford High Street**

One of the lessons from our early recording efforts was that we needed some proper equipment. The OBR had limited funds – we took an early decision to make our membership fee as low as possible in order to encourage people to join (and it has remained at £5 a year ever since) – but we learned of a new Lottery initiative, Awards for All, and with the help of Lauren Gilmour at the County Council, put together a bid. This was – eventually – successful and we soon took delivery of measuring tapes, halogen lamps, a measuring pole, as well as a good quality camera, and office equipment including a computer, slide scanner and printer. Awards for All helped us again a few years later when we created a travelling exhibition, Discovering Oxfordshire's Buildings, the panels for which are still available on the front page of our website <https://obr.org.uk>.

So, 21 years on, with almost 200 members and 450 building reports, it was not quite what we expected – but it has all been a great adventure, and most importantly, the results are gradually getting published, either online or in the form of hard copy books and articles.



OBR travelling exhibition

Recording using the new equipment

*David Clark*

## Book Review: Victoria County History volume XX; “South Oxfordshire Chilterns: Caversham, Goring and Area”

The Victoria County History was founded in 1899 as a national project to write the history of every county in England. It aims to complete authoritative, encyclopaedic histories of each county, from the earliest archaeological records to the present day, as well as topics such as topography, landscape and the built environment. Work began almost immediately in 34 counties and volumes of ‘red books’ appeared regularly from 1900. They are still being produced, and the latest volume covers the South Oxfordshire Chilterns. This is the twentieth volume in the series on Oxfordshire.

Simon Townley, the VCH series editor for Oxfordshire in the flyer appended to this OR outlines how his team organised the material covered by this volume. It devotes a chapter to each of the twelve ancient parishes covered, preceded by an overview chapter. The chapter for each ancient parish is organised under the same or at least similar headings: brief introduction to the parish; boundaries; landscape; communications; population; settlement; landownership; economic history, distinguishing between agriculture and non-agricultural activities; social history, covering social character and communal life, education and welfare; religious history, covering religious life and buildings; and local government. The time span is from pre-Norman to the 2010’s. There are comprehensive footnotes on sources, a useful glossary of terms, and good general index. It is an ambitious work, and gathers a huge amount of detail into one place.

How does all this work for the non-academic reader? The fear is that so much factual information in one place becomes a dry as dust list of facts and dates, for example in tracing the ownership of manors or church officers. It then becomes more difficult to connect with the reality of living at the time being described. That danger is largely avoided and there is

always a place for insignificant but revealing detail. For example, in 1584 churchwardens in Caversham were cited for allowing pigs in the churchyard and for failing to suppress a brothel. Such detail stirs the imagination and breathes life into a picture of social life in the past. Other details may be pointers to the future. In the first half of the C20 the area was well covered by bus services usually first organised by local resident initiative, and several mills on the Thames were converted to produce hydro-electricity. Is it time to do that again?

The challenge of such deep research is always to marshal the facts into a coherent narrative. Inevitably there is some overlap between chapters, reflecting the fact that individual parishes are not islands but subsist alongside their neighbours. Owners of land and holders of important positions often resided far away from the area, and their ownership and positions could span several parishes.

The overview chapter brings the material of the individual chapters together into a broader picture of the history of the area, and it succeeds well. It follows the thematic headings of the individual chapters, drawing together the different elements such that one gains a good view of the whole area as a combination of Thames river valley and Chiltern chalk wooded hills. A notable common structural feature of the parishes is that they are 'strip parishes' - much longer than they are wide, each stretching up from the Thames into the hills, so have varied agriculture. The settlement pattern was well established by the C13, focussed on nucleated riverside villages and scattered upland farmsteads or hamlets. This only began to change following the arrival of the Great Western Railway in the 1840 which opened up the lowland areas to non agricultural based activities such as tourism, providing some relief from agricultural depression in the late C19. Urban Caversham now would be unimaginable to an early C19 resident.

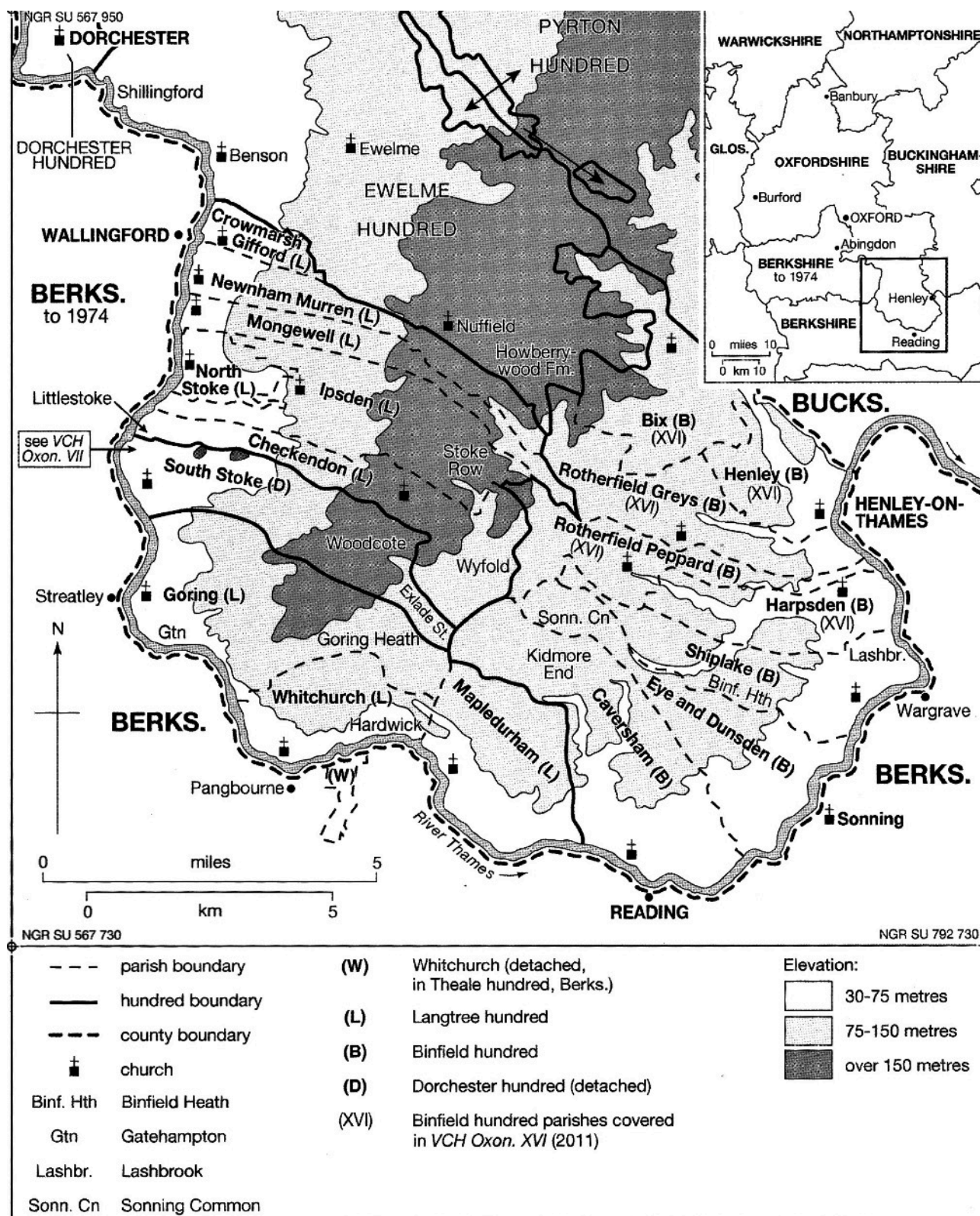
The impression I gain from this volume is that a number of great national events and developments had limited effects on this rural area. The area was a frontier zone between Wessex and Mercia in Anglo-Saxon times, but nothing has come to light that this caused trauma. The Norman revolution seems to have little disturbed the rhythm of the ordinary man's life. There seems to be little evidence that the Black Death and subsequent plagues had the dramatic impact one would expect given that the national population fell by over one third. The Reformation seems not to have caused major economic dissonance in this rural area, and Catholic recusancy on a reasonable scale seems to have been largely tolerated. Proximity to Oxford meant the Civil War was rarely far away, but it does not feature in a major way in the historical narrative of the area. Used as we are to growth of population, wealth and income now, the relative stability of the population and its geographic distribution from Norman to Victorian times is very striking. The picture is of a very slow progression from a feudal to a wider tenanted property based economy by the mid C19, still largely based on sheep, arable farming and woodland management, and then acceleration into a very different modern society.

Coverage of vernacular architecture will be of special interest to OBR members. The volume is very comprehensive in its coverage of ownership and descriptions of larger manors and estates, and church related matters. But it delves down into smaller scale properties where the evidence exists. Much of this evidence is in the form of surviving houses, and it is difficult to know how typical they are. What survives of smaller scale buildings typically started as timber framed, which continued well into the C17, with brick



being added later for fireplaces, infilling and refronting. Most began as small, single storey open hall houses, often combining elements of cruck and box frame construction. The vast majority of the area's houses, however, were the cramped cottages of labourers and small holders, whose numbers seemingly increased during the C17. The poor quality of much rural housing was still attracting comment in the early C20.

The narrative is well illustrated, and each parish has an excellently crafted and very informative map.



The South Oxfordshire Chilterns c. 1845 hundreds, parishes, and relief © VCH

**Foundry Cottages, Checkendon**

© VCH

All in all, this volume brings together in one place a well researched and comprehensively source footnoted history of this part of the Chilterns. It fully delivers the aim of the Victoria County History series to provide an authoritative, encyclopaedic history of the area. The only downside is its bulk. Even if you don't buy the book, it will be available in full on the BHO (British History Online) website :<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/vch--oxon?page=1>

***[Further information on this book and how to obtain a 25% discount on its cost is contained in the flyer by its editor, Simon Townley, appended to this copy of the OR.]***

*Richard Farrant*

## **Book Review : “The Historic Heart of Oxford University” by Geoffrey Tyack (published by the Bodleian Library, 2021; £35)**

Geoffrey Tyack's “Oxford; an architectural guide”, published in 1998, has long been my go to guide on Oxford's architecture, and so I was intrigued to discover what more his new book “The Historic Heart of Oxford University” could add. The answer is - a lot.

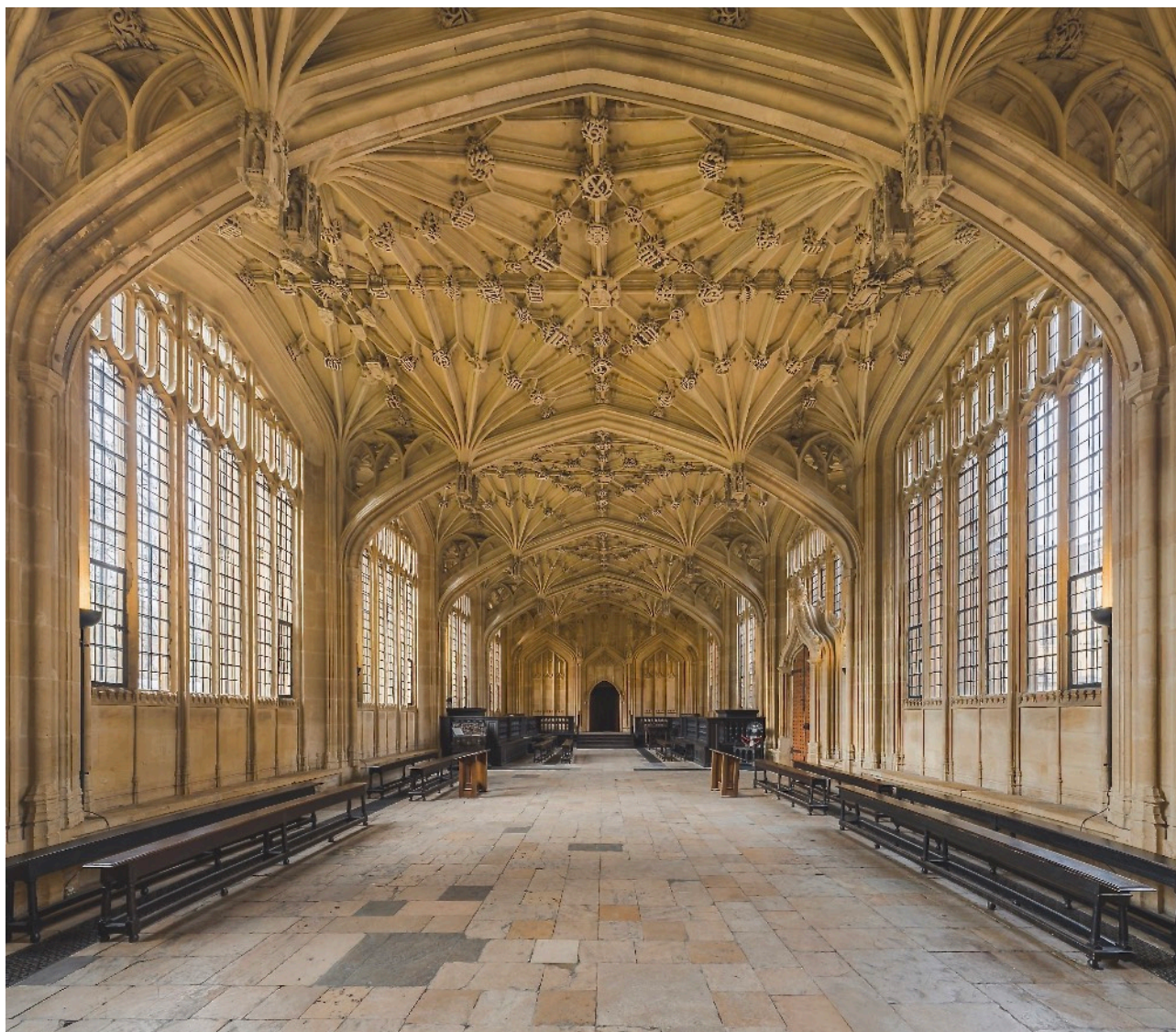
Least important is that it is a much more luxurious production - hard cover; quality paper; larger print and wonderful illustrations. But that matters; the illustrations in particular are good enough to enable you to check his descriptions of architectural detail visually, and thereby hugely enrich one's appreciation of the building he is describing.

The book focusses narrowly on the university buildings around Radcliffe Square: St Mary's, the university church; the Radcliffe Camera; the Divinity School and Duke Humphrey's Library; the Schools Quadrangle; Sheldonian Theatre; Old Ashmoleum Museum; the



Clarendon Building; and the New Bodleian/Weston Library. Each building has a chapter of its own, in broad chronological order. Other significant university buildings are mentioned but not further analysed in detail, for example the Examination Schools in the High Street, the Ashmoleum museum in Beaumont Street and the Radcliffe Observatory off the Woodstock Road. Colleges are not covered unless incidentally to provide information relevant to the university building he is describing.

I always admire Tyack's ability to describe architecture interestingly, and this book is up to his highest standards. It is easy to see the quality of most of the buildings he covers without further guidance, but Tyack's descriptions and illustrations add to one's awareness and understanding. He describes who and what influenced the architects and builders, how long they took and what difficulties cropped up. Long delays from conception to completion of these buildings was commonplace, but the result was often blissful. For example, chronic underfunding meant that the Divinity School took over fifty years to finish, the first and second master masons having died in the process.



**The Divinity School © David Iliff**



For me, the acid test of his architectural descriptions is the Clarendon building at the junction of Catte and Broad Streets. Despite its bulk, it is so easy to pass by without really noticing it. My previous impression was that it was austere, an under-appreciated assembly of classical elements. Tyack's description of its many design subtleties completely overturns this for me, and in conjunction with the illustrations brings it to life. And who would have guessed it was designed to - and did - function as a printing works. It prompts me to go back and take another much longer on the spot appraisal, with book in hand.



**South front of the Clarendon Building © John Cairns**

Architectural description is only half the content of this book. The other is to put the buildings into their historical context. The book opens with a succinct description of what a collegiate university is, how it came into being, and in Oxford's case, how the university embedded into the wider town. Initially relying on spaces in churches, monasteries and private houses, the university did not acquire its own buildings until the C14. Initially most students lived in rented lodgings, some licensed by the university as 'academic halls'. Starting in the middle of the C13 students started to take up residence in colleges - endowed, independent residential institutions found for the most part by church and later by royalty and nobility. Colleges did not award degrees - that was the prerogative of the university as was teaching of the established academic curriculum by means of lectures, initially delivered in rented rooms ('schools'). The main business of administering the university started to take place in St Mary's Church (which became known as the University Church), and lectures, examinations and degree ceremonies were also held there until the 1660's. As the university prospered and grew, new buildings were constructed to take over housing these functions, until over a period of 600 years we have the "forum universatis" from the University Church on the High Street, through Radcliffe Square, to the Clarendon

Building and Old Ashmoleum Museum on Broad Street. The stuttering but inexorable expansion of the Bodleian Library is a major background theme. Tyack interweaves this history of the use of these buildings between his architectural descriptions in a most informative and interesting way.

The result is a book which prompts you to go back and take another look. It drives home that in the buildings he covers (for some with the exception of the New Bodleian/Weston Library), and their juxtaposition with each other and near-by collegiate buildings, we have an assembly of architecture and ground planning which rivals anywhere in the world.

It's a good book.

*Richard Farrant*

## Forthcoming Events

### Oxford History Centre blog

Oxford History Centre has a well illustrated blog drawing from the collections of historical topographical images of Oxford and Oxfordshire by John and John Chessell Buckler and Henry Minn. Go to the OHC website at [https://www.oxfordshirehistory.org.uk/public/blog/blog\\_015.htm](https://www.oxfordshirehistory.org.uk/public/blog/blog_015.htm)

### 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.

### Oxford Architectural and Historical Society

OAHS has a programme of lectures and local guided walk excursions throughout the year for its members (£18 pa individual membership). Go to [oahs.org.uk](http://oahs.org.uk) for further details.

### OBR Contact details

Membership - Paul Clark ([membership@obr.org.uk](mailto:membership@obr.org.uk))

General - David Clark ([secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk))

Newsletter - Richard Farrant ([newsletter@obr.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@obr.org.uk))

Webmaster - [admin@obr.org.uk](mailto:admin@obr.org.uk)

Website: [www.obr.org.uk](http://www.obr.org.uk)



## OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The twenty-second Annual General Meeting of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record will be held on Saturday 14 May 2022 at St. Kenelm's church in Church Enstone, starting at 11.30 am. Further details will be circulated before the meeting.

Please let the Secretary know if you have any further items you wish to place on the agenda. Motions should be proposed and seconded.

### Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the twenty-first AGM on 8 May 2021 (on pp. 23-24 of Oxon Recorder no.85 (Spring 2021) – if you have lost your copy, please visit [www.obr.org.uk](http://www.obr.org.uk) to download another).
3. Matters arising
4. Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the year 2021
5. Secretary's Report
6. Membership Secretary's Report
7. Election of Officers and Committee for 2022/3  
The following Officers need to be elected at the AGM (present incumbent in brackets)  
Chairman (Paul Clark),  
Secretary (David Clark),  
Treasurer (David Hughes).

**The Committee currently consists of the following (present roles in brackets): Kathy Davies, Richard Farrant (Newsletter Editor), Heather Horner, Felix Lam (Events) Sally Stradling, Donna Thynne (Archivist), Simon Townley and Emily Tucker. All retire annually but are eligible for re-election. Abigail Lloyd and Nick Wright were co-opted as committee members during the year.**

8. Election of Examiner  
**The OBR accounts examiner, Ian Workman, has been nominated to the post.**
9. Any other business

We welcome offers from members to join the committee. In particular Richard intends to stand down from his role shortly, and we would welcome expressions of interest from members wishing to take on the job of newsletter editor. Please contact him for a 'job description.' If you would like



to serve on the Committee, please complete the slip below and return it, if possible before the AGM. to the Secretary, D Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ. ([secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk))

**After the AGM, a buffet lunch will be available - further details to come later**

After lunch there will be a walk around the village, starting about 2.00pm and finishing around 4.00pm.

✂.....

Nomination of candidate for election at the Annual General Meeting, 14 May 2022

.....(Name)

is nominated for Committee Membership\*/the post\* of.....

Proposed by.....Seconded by.....

I accept nomination and will serve as above if elected.....

Date.....2022

(\*delete as appropriate)

(signature of nominee)

Please return to D R Clark, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ ([secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk))

# Profit & Loss Report

Oxfordshire Buildings Record

01-Jan-2021 - 31-Dec-2021

	Current Yr	Current Yr	Prior Yr	Prior Yr
<b>INCOME</b>				
<b>4000 MEMBERSHIP INCOME</b>		<b>1,535.00</b>		<b>1,823.00</b>
4005 Membership Subscriptions	940.00		980.00	
4010 Joining Fees	75.00		60.00	
4015 Donations (note 1)	520.00		783.00	
<b>4300 OTHER INCOME</b>		<b>309.18</b>		<b>831.41</b>
4305 Tax Reclaimed on Gift Aid	258.45		247.42	
4310 Bank Interest	0.73		12.94	
4315 Other Income (note 1)	50.00		151.05	
4320 Insurance Claim	0.00		420.00	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>1,844.18</b>		<b>2,654.41</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
<b>7000 ADMIN COSTS</b>		<b>-265.30</b>		<b>-1,351.97</b>
7005 General Admin	0.00		-244.67	
7010 Insurance (note 2)	-265.30		-187.30	
7015 Insurance Claim	0.00		-920.00	
<b>7100 VISITS &amp; MEETINGS</b>		<b>-303.88</b>		<b>-150.00</b>
7105 Cost of Visits (note 3)	0.00		-150.00	
7110 Cost of Meetings (note 4)	-303.88		0.00	
<b>7300 MEMBERSHIP SERVICES</b>		<b>-466.46</b>		<b>-2,267.12</b>
7305 WEB Site Costs	-466.46		-2,231.12	
7315 Recruiting & Publicity	0.00		-36.00	
<b>7400 RECORDING COSTS</b>		<b>-41.82</b>		<b>-106.80</b>
7410 Equipment Maintenance	-41.82		-106.80	
<b>7600 PUBLISHING</b>		<b>-55.00</b>		<b>-110.00</b>
7605 Report Clearance Costs	0.00		-110.00	
7610 Book Publishing Costs	-55.00		0.00	
<b>7700 AFFILIATIONS</b>		<b>-128.50</b>		<b>-100.00</b>
7705 VAG	-20.00		-20.00	
7710 CBA	-95.50		-67.00	
7715 Other	-13.00		-13.00	
<b>TOTAL PAYMENTS</b>		<b>-1,260.96</b>		<b>-4,085.89</b>
<b>NET PROFIT/(LOSS) FOR PERIOD</b>		<b>583.22</b>		<b>-1,431.48</b>

# Statement of Asset & Liabilities Report

Oxfordshire Buildings Record		Period Ending 31-Dec-2021		
	Current	Current	Prior Yr	Prior Yr
<b>ASSETS</b>				
<b>SAVINGS AND INVESTMENTS</b>		<b>10,189.05</b>		<b>9,493.87</b>
CAF Bank	10,189.05		9,493.87	
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>		<b>0.00</b>		<b>0.00</b>
<b>CASH AT BANK AND IN HAND</b>		<b>262.84</b>		<b>374.80</b>
NatWest Bank	262.84		374.80	
<b>OTHER ASSETS</b>		<b>0.00</b>		<b>0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>10,451.89</b>		<b>9,868.67</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>				
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>0.00</b>		<b>0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS @ 31-DEC-2021</b>		<b>10,451.89</b>		<b>9,868.67</b>
<b>REPRESENTED BY FUNDS</b>				
Chipping Norton	389.93		389.93	
General Fund	10,061.96		9,478.74	
<b>LONG-TERM LIABILITIES</b>				
<b>TOTAL FUNDS BALANCE @ 31-DEC-2021</b>		<b>10,451.89</b>		<b>9,868.67</b>

## Notes to the Accounts

1. Member's donations remained similar, however donations for members speaking and reports were down.
2. We changed insurance company with improved cover and lower excess, following our claim in 2021
3. The cost of our AGM deposit in 2020 is carried forward into 2022.
4. The cost of meetings covers our Zoom license fees and speaker's fees at our meetings.

This statement of receipts and payments was approved by the Executive Committee and signed on its behalf.

Paul Clark (Chair)

Date

### EXAMINER'S CERTIFICATE

I have examined the statement of Receipts and Payments for the year ended 31 December 2018 and I certify that it is in accordance with the records, vouchers and information supplied to me.

Ian Workman

Date



## Victoria County History of Oxfordshire Volume XX: The South Oxfordshire Chilterns: Caversham, Goring, and Area

The latest volume in the VCH Oxfordshire series is now available to order, at a 25% discount until 30 April (see details below).

Encompassing a dozen ancient parishes stretching from Crowmarsh Gifford (near Wallingford) through to Shiplake (south of Henley-on-Thames), the new book completes the VCH's coverage of the Oxfordshire Chilterns, following on from our earlier volumes on [Ewelme Hundred](#) (Volume XVIII, 2016) and the [Henley area](#) (Volume XVI, 2011). Much of the area remains rural, with the very obvious exception of Caversham, which from the 19th century emerged as a densely settled suburb of neighbouring Reading (across the Thames). Caversham too began as a rural 'strip parish' extending from the river up into the Chiltern hills, however, and even in the 1720s Daniel Defoe could describe the main riverside settlement there as 'a little hamlet by the bridge'. Twentieth-century development has similarly turned the tiny upland settlement of Sonning Common into one of Oxfordshire's most densely settled non-urban centres, while riverside villages such as Goring and Shiplake experienced less dramatic growth particularly after the arrival of the railway. The faster links helped boost burgeoning tourism and gentrification, based in large part on the combined attractions of the river and of the wooded and still thinly settled uplands, all increasingly within easy reach of London.

As usual with the VCH, the individual parish histories explore a broad range of themes including landscape, settlement, landownership, farming and trade, social history, and religious life. For OBR members, however, the main attraction may be the area's varied buildings, which in common with the Chilterns as a whole combine timber framing, brick, flint, chalk clunch, clay tile, and (now less frequently) thatch. Medieval domestic buildings are particularly well represented at Mapledurham, which (thanks to Dan Miles) has seen an intensive programme of building investigation and dendro-dating over many years. Most began as small, single-storey open-hall houses, often combining (as elsewhere in this transitional zone) elements of cruck- and box-frame construction, with the earliest dated example dating from 1335. Isolated examples survive elsewhere, and timber-framing (using both oak and elm) continued across the area well into the 17th century, to be increasingly superseded by brick (some of it locally made) from the 17th century. Patterning in variegated brick is common particularly in gentry houses, which by the 18th century generally featured classically influenced symmetrical fronts with sash windows, dentil cornices, or parapets, while the 17th and 18th centuries also saw the erection of some sizeable barns and other farm buildings, some timber-framed, but others of brick and flint. Notable 'set pieces' include Mapledurham House (Oxfordshire's largest surviving Jacobean house, built 1608–12), and the multi-phase Hardwick House near Whitchurch (recorded by the OBR), both brick-built with stone dressings, and retaining high-quality 17th-century plasterwork.

The late 19th and early 20th-century influx of wealthy businessmen and others saw extensive new building near the Thames, encompassing detached villas, terraces, boathouses, and small country houses. Reading-based and other local architects played a prominent role, employing wide-ranging styles which regularly combined brick with half-timbering, hung tiles, and shaped barge boards. Other large houses were built in the hills or in other outlying areas, notably Wyfold Court ('a stupendous essay in French Flamboyant Gothic' according to Pevsner), and smaller examples such as Bozedown House in Whitchurch. Notable late 20th-century additions include some striking modernist buildings for the then recently established Carmel College in Mongewell park (1960s–70s), the Institute of Hydrology building in Howbery park (1972), and (as earlier) detached houses for wealthy clients, encompassing modernist as well as neo-Georgian designs. Several notable lost buildings are known from descriptions, drawings, or archaeology, amongst them predecessors of the present-day Caversham Park, the medieval buildings of Goring priory (known through fragments of high-quality Romanesque stonework), and at Caversham a partly stone-built manorial and chapel complex which incorporated a popular Marian shrine, the stone brought presumably by river.

**To obtain the 25% discount** (bringing the price to £71.25), visit [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com) (search for 'South Oxfordshire Chilterns'), and **enter the code BB985 at the checkout**. The book as a whole (509 pp. including 117 b/w maps and illustrations and 8 colour plates) covers Caversham (with Kidmore End); Checkendon (with Wyfold); Crowmarsh Gifford; Eye and Dunsden

(with Sonning Common); Goring (with Goring Heath); Ipsden (with Stoke Row); Mapledurham; Mongewell; Newnham Murren; North Stoke; Shiplake (with Binfield Heath); and Whitchurch.

*Simon Townley (County Editor, VCH Oxfordshire)*

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