

The OXON RECORDER

The Newsletter of the Oxfordshire Buildings
Record

Issue 94 June 2023



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Secretary's Note

I am grateful to all contributors for supplying enough material to make this a reasonably full edition of the Oxon Recorder. We have the final reports from the Winter VAG conference, a short report on the VAG Spring conference in the Manchester area, a report and draft minutes from the AGM on 13 May, and a list of forthcoming events.

We still need a 'proper' editor, though. Please let me know if you are interested.

OBR AGM at Cumnor 13 May 2023

After tea and cakes provided by Heather Horner, our 23rd AGM was managed by our chairman with his usual efficiency and we were soon ready to explore Cumnor village.

After the meeting, the Secretary said that the village hall in which we had held our meeting had been designed in 1937 by the Oxford architect Thomas Rayson, following a long period of fund-raising by the villagers. Heather pointed out the key features of the location of Cumnor on its 'shouldered hill' with ancient Thames crossings at Swinford and Bablockhythe leading to routes into west Oxford. Kathy (on her bicycle) then led car-driving members from the village hall to the Bear and Ragged Staff for lunch.

Fortunately, we were able to enjoy some respite from the unseasonable chill by having our lunch within the historic building, and the staff were happy to allow us to climb the newel staircase to examine the roof timbers and other historic features of this Grade II* structure. (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1368591>). Its date of construction is not known precisely, but it seemed to have a basic medieval layout of hall and cross-passage, though the roof carpentry was post-medieval, and most of the datable features – fireplaces, ovolo-moulded window

mullions, and the remarkable collection of carved window and door lintels on the road elevation – were from the seventeenth century.



Figure 1 Lintel of main entrance – ball and ellipse at the top; dog-tooth and brattishing below

The village walkabout was focussed on two houses by Clough Williams-Ellis – Cutt’s End House and Hurstcote. Cutt’s End House was built in 1911/12 for Lily Dougall, a Canadian novelist and feminist who by the time she and her partner Sophie Earp came to Cumnor was seeking to build a ‘conference centre’ in which academics and theologians could discuss matters such as the role of the church in modern society and write up the results for publication. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/55574>) Lily and Sophie first bought the seventeenth-century Cutt’s End Cottage, and the plans in the RIBA collection show that the new building went through a number of iterations before the clients were satisfied that the result would be suitable. The earliest drawings were for a self-standing building, but the design later changed to include a link to the old cottage. The house as built is wrapped around it, but the connection between the two was discreet, allowing the building to be divided in the later twentieth century into two separate ownerships.

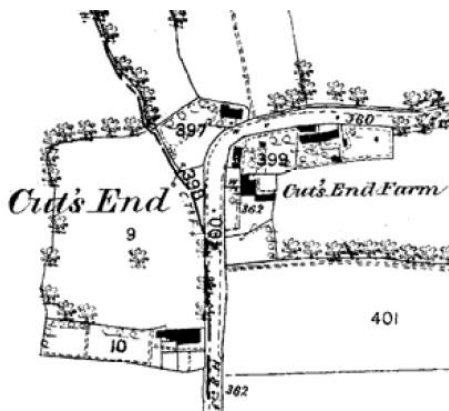


Figure 2 Cutt’s End in 1877,¹ the C17 cottage to the south



Figure 3 Cutt’s End House

The unusual ‘date-stone’ in the gable (Fig. 3) reads GR / V / LD – so simply George V (who had become king in 1910) and Lily’s initials. Below is an east-facing sundial that only works for the morning hours (*Dies Ortu*).

In 1923 Lily encouraged the writer and illustrator, Leslie Brooke to buy a plot of farmland to the north of Cutt’s End for his house, and she must also have recommended her architect, as the next house on our walk, Hurstcote (Fig. 4), was also designed by Clough, along with its garage and ancillary accommodation above. We were warmly welcomed by owners Catherine and Ted Mott, who showed us around the garden and ground floor of the house. They had also just acquired (from

¹ Map by courtesy of the National Library of Scotland

the Arkell family who had lived there after the Brookes left) a set of drawings of the house by Williams-Ellis, which were very much closer to the house as built than those in the RIBA collection. This therefore filled a previous gap in the architectural history of the house which we were very pleased to be able to fill.



Figure 4 Hurstcote east elevation

If members would like a rare opportunity to visit Hurstcote, the gardens will be open on Saturday 17 June from 1pm to 9pm for the Cumnor Festival of Performing Arts ([Positively Pink Oxford - News & Events \(google.com\)](#)) Tickets £10.

On our way to the church we passed the site of the former Abingdon Abbey barn, some fabric from which is incorporated in Tithe Barn House. It is worth reading about this in [Impey.pdf \(oxoniensia.org\)](#) as it also contains much material of wider interest.



Figure 5 Dougall memorial, St Michael's



Figure 6 Queen Elizabeth I

Our final visit was to St Michael's church, almost at the highest point of the village, where Lily and Sophie are buried, the ledger stone identifiable by lettering by Eric Gill on each side. In the south transept is a memorial to Dougall, also by Gill (Fig. 5). Near it is the relocated life-size statue of Elizabeth I (Fig. 6), which Mark Davies has shown to have at one time stood in the forecourt of Medley Manor, on the Thames near Binsey, built by Benjamin Swete in 1720 and demolished in 1772. Just by the door are two further memorials, to Anne Wynne Thackeray and Mary Venables who also played a part in the story of how Clough Williams-Ellis came to build the group of houses in Cumnor parish – their house, Larkbeare, is at 87 Cumnor Hill – but that is another story.

**OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD
TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Minutes of the twenty-third Annual General Meeting of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record held on Saturday 13 May 2023 in Cumnor Village Hall, starting at 10.30am.

The Chairman, Paul Clark, was in the chair. The following members attended the meeting: Janet and Mark Casson, David Clark, Kathy Davies, Mark Davies, Ruth Gibson, Heather Horner, David Hughes, Ken Hume, Felix Lam, John and Kanta Marriott, Cynthia Robinson, Donna Thynne and Simon Townley.

1. Apologies for absence had been received from Malcolm Airs, Laurence Balbes, Paul Barnwell, Richard Bidgood, Richard Farrant, Paul Gilboy, John and Sue Hine, Chris Howlett, Abigail Lloyd, Peter Mothersole, Sue Richards, Sally Stradling, Barbara Tearle, David Wheeler and Nick Wright.

2. Minutes of the twenty-second AGM on 14 May 2022.

These were agreed to be a true record and were accordingly signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the year 2022.

These had been circulated and had been approved by the Examiner. The Treasurer, David Hughes, commented that with the relaxation of Covid restrictions in 2022 OBR had slowly returned to a more normal activity and expenditure profile.

Income from subscriptions, joining fees and members donations remained essentially constant at £1525 and he was grateful to members for their undiminished support for the OBR. Additional income in 2022 came from the refund of our deposit for the 2020 AGM (£150) plus the sale of our film camera and lens (£200) which had not been used for many years.

In support of the objectives of the OBR, we agreed to make donations to the Abingdon People and Buildings project and to the Mills Trust. We also have agreed to support tree-ring dating of 12-15 High Street, Wallingford. This payment will be made in 2023.

In summary, he said that the OBR remained in a sound financial position with an excess of income of £1053.68. Our reserves now stood at £11505, of which £389 was reserved for the publishing costs of the Chipping Norton recordings. He reminded members that grants were available for attending conferences or courses relevant to the work of the OBR, and for tree-ring dating if required for a full understanding of a building.

The Chairman thanked David for his report. Heather Horner proposed, and Simon Townley seconded a motion formally to adopt the accounts. This was agreed *nem con*.

5. Secretary's Report

The Secretary reported that for most of 2022 the pandemic continued to inhibit group recording work, though a total of 20 buildings were recorded. Four houses were recorded in Abingdon and three were studied in South Stoke, in South Oxfordshire, as part of the research on the vernacular buildings for the forthcoming Buildings of England volume on the area.

Unusually, we were also invited to record two non-Oxfordshire buildings, one in Beedon (Berks) and the other in Weston Turville (Bucks), the latter a medieval building with ogee- shaped roof trusses and part of its roof reconstructed in the eighteenth century entirely in Baltic softwood, with a remarkable collection of timber-marks. We were also invited to study a number of houses of some status in their communities, and perhaps due to periods of ownership by people with resources and ideas, these in most cases entailed such radical changes as to make interpretation difficult. In this group were Hall Farmhouse (Begbroke), Manor House (Enstone) and Bainton Manor (Stoke Lyne). Reports on all these buildings will be available in due course at the Oxfordshire History Centre.

Our research project to record Inscribed Dates on buildings had continued to add to our collection, and as at December 2022 there were almost 1350 dates on the database.

2022 also saw the culmination of OBR research projects in Chipping Norton and Hook Norton, the combination of which were now providing new evidence for the contrasting nature of Oxfordshire's historic urban and rural built environments. The first, in Chipping Norton under Historic England's Early Fabric in Historic Towns project, saw a programme of 75 historic building surveys completed, successfully supported by 12 dendrochronological and radiocarbon analyses. The second project in Hook Norton, in support of VCH Oxfordshire's Volume XXIII, resulted in a programme of 37 historic house surveys. The large sample had highlighted contrasts in the architectural characteristics of the region when compared with the rest of Oxfordshire and had also shown how urban and rural economics affected local historic building structures, notably in their roof designs.

The annual OBR Lecture on "Concealments, graffiti, ritual marks and witch marks; taking a social historical perspective on folk building magic" was given by Professor Owen Davies of the University of Hertfordshire, in which he considered the evidence that concealed objects - eg. shoes – and graffiti on buildings have apotropaic significance. What he has sought to do is to seek hard evidence, rather than rely on hypotheses that may have acquired credibility over time on no or little basis of fact. The problem was that there is virtually no contemporary documentary evidence for the apotropaic use of symbols such as hexafoils and VV marks, and there is also a confusion in the literature between 'ritual protection' from evil forces and folkloric 'house blessings', the motivations for which were quite different.

Richard continued to produce our quarterly newsletter, The Oxon Recorder, which is invariably full of much interesting material as well as reports of past events and notices of forthcoming ones. He has retired after a number of years in the post and a successor was needed.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

Paul Clark reported that membership during the year stood at 198, with 14 new members replacing 13 who had resigned or who had allowed their membership to lapse.

For the current year, 171 subscriptions had been received. Members who had not yet renewed their subscriptions were invited to do so without delay.

7. Election of Officers and Committee for 2023/24

The Chairman declared that nominations had been received for Paul Clark as Chairman, David Clark as Secretary and David Hughes as Treasurer. There being no further nominations, Janet Casson proposed and Donna Thynne seconded a motion that they all be elected. There being no objections, he declared them duly elected.

Offering themselves for election to the committee were:

Kathy Davies, Heather Horner, Abigail Lloyd, Sally Stradling, Donna Thynne, Simon Townley and Nick Wright. There being no further nominations, Mark Casson proposed and Mark Davies seconded a motion that they be elected *en bloc*. This was agreed *nem con*. The Chairman thanked Felix Lam (Events), Richard Farrant (Newsletter Editor), and Donna Thynne (Archivist) for their work over the years.

8. Election of Examiner

The OBR accounts examiner, Ian Workman, had been nominated to the post. Donna Thynne proposed and Heather Horner seconded a motion that he be elected as the examiner for the 2023 accounts. This was agreed *nem con*.

9. Any other business

No items were raised.

The meeting closed at 11.15 am.

D R Clark, Secretary, 15 May 2023.

Vernacular Architecture Group Conference (7-8 January 2023, Leicester) Trans-National Connections: Vernacular Architecture in Britain and Beyond. Further reports:

Cruck Buildings in Europe: Coincidence or Connection? (Nat Alcock)

This talk was based on the sporadic references in the literature to cruck buildings in continental Europe which were summarised in pp. 114-120 of *Cruck Building: A Survey* (Alcock, Barnwell and Cherry, 2019). Many of the maps and images presented can be found in these pages, and further details on some of the areas mentioned have been published in *V&A*, for example the group of 125 in Limousin (*V&A* 10.22-28). The distribution of known crucks is scattered and apparently random: other groups in

Brittany and Flanders, some in NW Germany, solitary examples in Romania, Italy, and two in Bulgaria. Many of the eastern European examples are in ephemeral buildings where lashing curved timbers together to make a temporary shelter is contrasted to the fully carpentered crucks found in the UK and in southern France. There was no discussion as to how representative these examples might be, though it is clear from *Cruck Building* that fairly extensive fieldwork has been carried out in France, and so the Limousin group is a true 'cluster' and not an accident of recording.

Nat suggested that the Limousin group arose directly from English carpentry traditions (citing Devon and the NE where apsidal ends are found), while the Flemish group may have derived from Limousin.

He ended with a discussion of base crucks – timbers with an apparent similarity to 'true crucks' but which have a distinctly separate tradition (see *Cruck Building* pp. 70-96). These also have a continental distribution, perhaps the most famous being the roofs of St John's Hospital in Bruges (1228-40d) and the Bijloke Hospital in Ghent (c.1251-5d)



Figure 7 Upper room St John's Hospital, Bruges

But there are differences – the Belgian examples are far wider than any of the English base cruck trusses, are associated with 'reversed assembly', and do not have the double tie-beams seen in many English roofs. *Cruck Building* did not discuss the origins of the European examples, but Nat speculated that they had an English origin.

David Clark

Crown-posts and Box-frames in South-East Britain: France, German, native, or what? – and why? (Chris Currie)

After a rapid review of the development of English roof structures, Chris focussed on the crown-post, found in England from c.1260, uncommon in Germany, but with probably a genesis in France, where the earliest ones are found. Their concentration in south-east England reinforced this view, with a rise in decorative display examples to c.1380, and thereafter a return to simpler styles.

David Clark

Moullins aisled hall: so French, or not? (Philippe Favre)

Philippe reported on work at his house, Moullins, at Saint Rémy-du-Val, in Maine since the VAG visited it in 2016. More restoration has taken place, and 3-D digital representations created to show what it might have looked like. My notes on this visit may help to illustrate the buildings.

Philippe's researches have shown that the estate was bequeathed in the late 10th Century by Hughes II, count of Maine, to the abbey of La Couture in Le Mans as part of a strategy to secure this border area by 'sanctuarizing' it in the hope that this would deter attack by the Bretons.



Figure 8 Aula as barn/byre



Figure 9 West wall undergoing restoration

The first building we studied on the site was thought to be the second stone hall of the complex. The internal structure was an aisled timber frame, which had been burned out and in 1408 the abbot removed the aisles and used the stone to build the two long walls of the building we see today.



Figure 10 Northwest corner of aula



Figure 11 East gable

The western entry was through a pair of doorways, one into an aisle, the other into the nave. To the east were three doorways, with a row of corbels above to support a timber lean-to containing the service rooms – from left, into the nave from the buttery/cellar, the central one to a corridor to the kitchen (as at the bishop's palace in Lincoln), and the right hand one to the pantry.



Figure 12 Gatehouse, La Grande Courbe



Figure 13 La Grande Courbe

He then illustrated a transition between the hall and chamber block separate but touching at a corner (Bishop's Palace at Wells?). At Chatillon-sur-Aisne (1274-1278) the chamber

block and services were partly underground, with the great hall beside. And at Eleanor of Aquitaine's hall at Poitiers had a high dais. There was no common plan, the aim being to impress by being different. Only at La Grande Courbe was there a more 'English' plan. Like the Logis des Moullins, this was a reconstruction site, owned by a member of the team, François Dever. It is situated within a great bend in the river Jouanne – hence its name – with probably also fed the moat. The oldest surviving building is a ground floor hall of the 13th century. This was open to the roof – the floor is an insertion of ca.1420. The present fireplace dates from the C14, the original one having been replaced by a window. To either side were roundels with fragmentary designs, one part of an allegorical scene common in 13th century bestiaries where a knight fools a chasing tiger into thinking its reflection in a glass sphere is its 'lost' cub. It appears in the Aberdeen Bestiary (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/8r.hti>) and in the Bodleian (MS Ashmole 1511. f12).



Figure 14 C13 hall

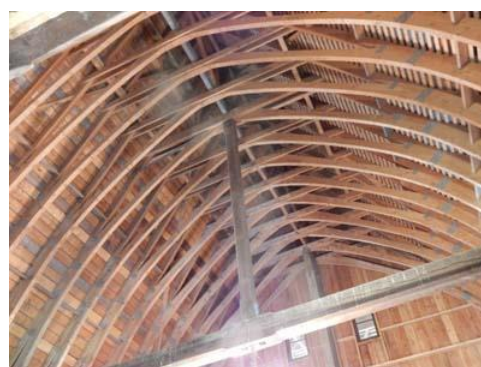


Figure 15 Hall roof

The conclusion was that Moullins was perhaps an English design.

David Clark

John Allan's talk on Breton Woodworkers in SW England 1500-1550 was published in 2014: *Post-medieval archaeology*, ISSN 0079-4236, Vol. 48, N°. 2, 2014, pp. 320-356, so those who were unable to stay could read it at leisure.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/0079423614Z.00000000060?journalCode=ypma20>

SUMMARY: The paper assembles documentary evidence which shows that there was a substantial community of immigrants in south-west England in the early 16th century. In Cornwall these people came largely from Brittany; in Devon their origins were more varied. They included a surprising number of carpenters and carvers — many Breton, some 'Dutch'. Various examples of ecclesiastical and domestic woodwork surviving in the region, including some of the finest examples of craftsmanship of the period, are attributed to these immigrants, and stylistic and technical features are proposed for distinguishing their output from local English work.

VAG Conference in Manchester 11-15 April 2023

When this conference was first planned - for 2020 - Covid-19 had not emerged, and there was no cost-of-living crisis. The three year gap, however, had meant a hefty increase in costs while the effects of Covid had caused some householders to be reluctant to admit strangers, and some VAG members probably stayed away for the same reason. Nevertheless, those who made it to Manchester were treated to a rich

diet of houses and other buildings displaying the wealth of the region from the medieval period onwards.

Kevin Illingworth opened proceedings on the first evening with a talk on the vernacular decorative features of the Greater Manchester area. These included cusped roof struts (Fig. 1), ogee window frames, vertical flagstone walling, and decorative brickwork (Fig. 2).



Figure 16 Roof of Ordsall Hall



Figure 17 Church House, Warburton

We would also be seeing a number of cruck frames, some fragmentary (Fig. 3), and others spectacularly complete – if not in situ, as there was evidence that the massive barn at Rivington Hall (Fig. 5) had been rebuilt (perhaps from somewhere else) by the estate's former owner, Lord Leverhulme.



Figure 18 Cruck in Firwood Fold



Figure 19 Rivington Hall cruck barn

Finally, we would see a lot of inscribed dates. In particular there had been a local project collecting date-stones dated to the day, for example Adam/Gaskell/Octob 21 1681 on a tablet at Brick Farmhouse, Unsworth.² In our Oxfordshire database we have so far only one example (apart from Victorian foundation stones) in Marcham (IHE / March ye ii / 1740). Unfortunately no-one was able to shed light on the significance of the specific day indicated, though it is most likely the date of a marriage.

Day 1 was based in Warburton, a dispersed settlement to the south-west of Greater Manchester. This was ideal for viewing a varied collection of vernacular buildings – despite the rain. In particular the interior of the old church of St Werburg had much to

² <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1067266?section=official-list-entry>

offer.³ St Werburg was a seventh-century Mercian princess who became an abbess and patron saint of Chester. She also has dedications in churches in Cornwall, Bristol and Derbyshire. The nave is essentially a timber framed aisled hall (Fig. 5), so one of the 27 timber churches in England – mostly in the Cheshire area, but although the church leaflet mentioned dendrochronology in 1999, no record appears on the VAG database.



Figure 20 Nave of St Werburgh's

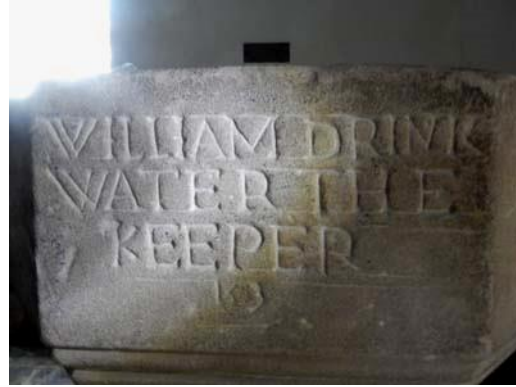


Figure 21 Carved sandstone font

The sandstone font (Fig. 6) is inscribed for 'William Drinkwater the Keeper, 1603'. The Drinkwater family were the bailiffs of the Warburton estate and lived at Bent Farm in Warburton (Fig. 7). Fig. 8 shows the date of the restoration of the house by REEW (Roland Eyle Egerton-Warburton) the owner, in 1880.



Figure 22 Bent Farm



Figure 23 RD = Richard Drinkwater

Day 2 was spent largely in the north of Greater Manchester, in Bolton, Rivington and Salford. Here we had our first experience of the timber framed hall houses for which the area is famous. These owe their survival – and in many cases public ownership – to their acquisition in the nineteenth century by rich businessmen who extended them to their own requirements but largely retained the earliest parts intact. Many were gifted or acquired by the local councils on their owner's death. Their fate thereafter has been varied: Hall i' th' Wood (c.1480) was closed and 'undergoing restoration' for which there seemed no urgency, while Ordsall Hall has 'benefited' from a major Lottery-funded restoration some years ago.

³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1067865?section=official-list-entry>

But our first visit of the day was to the entirely unexpected semi-rural hamlet of Firwood Fold, a group of post-medieval cottages, some built for handloom weavers (Figs. 3, 9 & 10).



Figure 24 Firwood Fold



Figure 25 Early C18 cottages

One, the Grade I listed birthplace of Samuel Crompton, inventor of the cotton spinning 'mule', has C16 origins and was being rethatched during our visit.

Next was one of the most rewarding of the medieval halls – Smithills (Fig. 11). Its great hall (Fig. 12) is similar to that at Baguley to the south of Manchester and is probably mid-C14 in date. The four doors opened to the pantry, buttery, detached kitchen and staircase to the solar.



Figure 26 Smithills Hall exterior



Figure 27 Smithills Hall service end

The highlight of Smithills is the panelled east range, possibly added 1485 (Simon Jenkins gives 1537) when the estate passed to Andrew Barton by marriage. The 'withdrawing room' on the ground floor (partitioned to the south in the C19 to form a vestry for the chapel) is fully panelled, with what the listing calls an 'enriched linen fold design' incorporating busts and emblems and rebus (bar-tun) of the Barton family in low relief (Figs. 13 & 14). It was clear, however, that the panelling did not fit the room, but some sleuthing in the historic photograph collection showed that it had been in the 1875 dining room by George Devey (now the obligatory visitors' tea-room) until returned to the east range in the C20. The craftsmanship was remarkable, and some of the designs suggested Islamic models; the carvers appear to have been Flemish.



Figure 28 Bar-tun panelling



Figure 29 Further medallions and designs

Lunch consisted of Lancashire Hot-pot (with mushy peas) in the cruck barn at Rivington Hall (Fig. 4), after which we were free to wander round the dispersed village. Nowhere can there be more inscribed dates in such a small area. Some were *in situ* – Fig. 15 gives the initials of the six governors of Rivington grammar school in the year it was built (1714), and William Breres put his over the door to his house, Rivington Hall in 1694 (Fig. 16)



Figure 30 1714 Rivington Grammar School



Figure 31 1694 William Breres, lord of the manor

Many of the stones, however, were not *in situ* – having come from demolished buildings or 'rescued' from those inundated by the nearby reservoirs.



Figure 32 1704 doorhead in churchyard



Figure 33 1732 stone from Rivington stables

Fig. 17 is one of a group gathered together in the Holy Trinity churchyard. The initials are of the Anderton family of the eponymous local farm, the off-centre 'P' being for their son, Peter, added apparently as an afterthought. More usual are the initials of John and Abigail Andrews (Fig. 18) on a stone in the graveyard of the Unitarian

chapel, commemorating his new stables at Rivington Hall in 1732, the year John became lord of the manor.

The final visit of the day was to Ordsall Hall, in Salford (Fig. 19) surrounded by modern housing, but a stone's-throw from Manchester United's stadium at Old Trafford and the modern redevelopment of Salford Quays.



Figure 34 Ordsall Hall (N elevation)

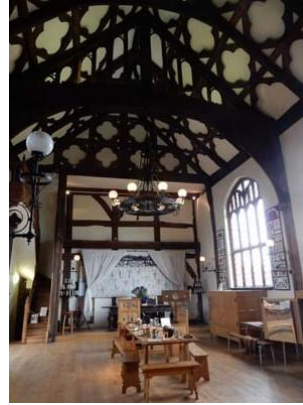


Figure 35 Great hall at Ordsall

In 2009-11 a great deal of money was spent on the restoration of Ordsall Hall - and it shows. Nevertheless, it allowed a full investigation of its dates, phases, and former uses to be carried out. The roof of the earliest part was dated to 1348-73; the present hall dates from a 1512 rebuilding (Figs. 1 and 20). I was particularly interested to see that the Radclyffe bed (Fig. 21), bought at auction by a Lebanese businessman in 2014 and lent to the museum for five years – was still there after nine (I don't think it is a replica).



Figure 36 Radclyffe bed



Figure 37 Bed in the Star Chamber

The bed is currently in the 'Star Chamber', one of the surviving C14 apartments, but the gilt stars in the ceiling are probably from around 1700 (those in Rycote chapel are painted on and somewhat earlier in date).

The final day was spent in the east and south of Manchester, starting with the remarkable survival of the Fairfield Moravian Settlement – a religious community first founded in Germany in 1457, but which took its later form in the C18, creating this settlement in 1785 and a self-governing community dedicated to Christian life and fellowship, with a strong emphasis on education. Although it has lost its original

purpose, the layout of 50 houses around the church and former school buildings survives (Figs. 23 & 24) making the Settlement is an enclave of calm shielded from the modern bustle of the city. I was reminded of the large beguinages in Ghent. One of the school buildings houses an excellent museum.



Figure 38 Fairfield congregational hall



Figure 39 Fairfield Settlement

Nearby was the Ashton canal, opened in 1796, with a lock, bridge and a group of associated canal buildings mostly dating from the C18 (Figs. 25 & 26).



Figure 40 Lock and bridge, Ashton canal



Figure 41 Agent's House, Ashton canal

Clayton Hall (Fig. 27) was the next port of call, a much-altered house on a former moated site but with a surviving late medieval timber-framed range. It was associated with the Byron family (before they acquired Newstead Abbey) and the Chethams, a Manchester family perhaps better known for their medieval school and library in the centre of the city near the cathedral.



Figure 42 Clayton Hall



Figure 43 Clayton, floored medieval hall

The small square timber-framed panels were a notable feature of Clayton, which we had not encountered elsewhere, but no explanation was forthcoming.

The town centre of Stockport was the next stop, focussed on the Staircase House, on the medieval market place. The earliest fabric dates from 1460 – a three-bay open cruck hall – but is an excellent example of how later owners packed in at least five more buildings to maximise use of this key location. Restoration was forced by a fire in 1995, but the conservation work aimed to retain as much historic fabric as possible, as can be seen in the charred remains of the staircase from which it gets its name, and was clearly one of its most important interior features (Fig. 29).



Figure 44 Staircase



Figure 45 Exposed walling



Figure 46 Restoration

Care had been taken to ensure that where possible structural details were left exposed, in order to allow various phases to be studied (Fig. 30). There they are open to the elements (Fig. 31) appropriate conservation materials and techniques have been used.

Our final house was the magnificent Bramall Hall, the older parts largely the work of the Davenports, while its late C19 owner, Charles Nevill, made further additions. It came into public ownership in 1935.



Figure 47 A section of wall-painting



Figure 33 Solar roof

The highlight of the visit was the solar (Fig. 32) with its magnificent set of wall-paintings. Research work is being undertaken on these in which our member Kathy Davies is involved. Pending the results of this, the present view is that they date from the 1530s and as well have iconography related to moralising messages, there is also a linked theme of music-making illustrated by contrasting the rougher external players such as bagpipers with the more refined instrumentalists playing indoors.

David Clark

Forthcoming Events

2 to 15 June. York Festival of Ideas is an annual award-winning cultural Festival. The 2023 Festival offers over 150 free talks, panel discussions, performances, and more, inviting audiences to 'Rediscover, Reimagine, Rebuild'. Details at: [York Festival of Ideas](#)

Seminar in Material Culture and the Historic Built Environment: Trinity Term Programme

The seminar in Material Culture and the Historic Built Environment provides a unique forum whereby academics, museum and heritage professionals and community groups interested in built heritage and material culture will come together to discuss current research and issues in the field and sector. By conceiving of Oxford's material and built heritage community in the broadest sense, the seminar will seek to draw on the city's strong yet disparate expertise in these areas to share and build knowledge across boundaries.

Convenors: Dr Rachel Delman and Dr David Frazer Lewis

Location: In-person at St John's College (session 1) and online on Zoom (session 2)

1. Monday 5th June, 12-1pm: D.Phil presentation seminar, title(s) tbc. Location: St John's College, North Lecture Room

2. Monday 12th June, 5-6pm (on Zoom): Professor Abigail Van Slyck, Dayton Professor Emerita of Art History, Connecticut College, 'Staging and Effacing Royal Childhood at Victoria's Osborne'

To request the Zoom link for the final session, please contact ntpartnership@humanities.ox.ac.uk with the subject line 'Historic Built Environment Zoom Link' by Monday 5th June at the latest.

17 June Oxfordshire Past - annual round-up of last year's work (buildings, history and archaeology). Abingdon 17 June - for details see [OAHS - Oxfordshire Past](#)

Contact details

Contributions for the newsletter – should be sent to secretary@obr.org.uk

Copy dates are 1 March, 1 June, 1 September and 1 January.

Membership – Paul Clark (membership@obr.org.uk)

General – David Clark (secretary@obr.org.uk)

Website: www.obr.org.uk