

# The OXON RECORDER

The Newsletter of the Oxfordshire Buildings  
Record

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*The Oxon Recorder is the newsletter of Oxfordshire Buildings Record and is published four times a year. OBR aims to advance education and promote research on the buildings of Oxfordshire by encouraging the recording of buildings and to create and manage a publicly accessible repository of records relating to such buildings. The Oxon Recorder is also available in the members' section of our website: [www.obr.org.uk](http://www.obr.org.uk)*

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## Secretary's note

I have cobbled together some items that I hope will be of interest. We still need a 'proper' editor, though. Please let me know if you are interested.

## Future events

### Through the Looking Glass – a conference on historic windows

Friday 22 to Saturday 23 September at Warwick University.

Details for the programme and for booking are both  
here: <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/subopheventsltd/873461>

### OBR Lecture 17 October

Abigail Lloyd will talk about her research earlier this year on *the medieval undercrofts of Gloucester, and their wider context*. This will be an in-person event at Rewley House, Wellington Square, Oxford, as part of the OAHS autumn lecture series. It will start at 5.30 pm. All are invited and there is no charge.

## Archaeology and Antiquarianism

A day of talks exploring this topic on 21 October 2023 in Peterborough

For details see [2023 Conference - Archaeology and Antiquarianism Council for British Archaeology \(archaeologyuk.org\)](#)

### **Presentation Day, Hook Norton November 25**

This year's presentation day will be held in the function room at the Sun Inn in Hook Norton, where OBR have worked with a local team to record as many buildings in the village as necessary to gain a proper understanding of the local vernacular to inform the 'built character' section of the forthcoming volume of the Victoria County History (XXI) covering Chipping Norton and the surrounding area. You can read and comment on the draft chapters at [Oxfordshire vol. XXI - Chipping Norton and Environs | Institute of Historical Research \(history.ac.uk\)](#) and the section on Hook Norton is at [1. Hook Norton Landscape etc June 2021.pdf \(history.ac.uk\)](#)

The programme for the day will follow the usual pattern. Provisionally, we shall meet at the Sun Inn at 10.30. It is in the centre of the village, opposite the church and near the busy village shop. After a walk through the village – and perhaps a visit to one of the houses (to be confirmed) – there will be a buffet lunch at the Sun from 12.30pm. Our meeting will commence following lunch in the function room at about 1.30pm, ending at 4.30pm at the latest.

The cost is likely to be in the region of £15 per head, but there will be a further circular nearer the time with a booking form and programme details.

If you would like to give a talk on a topic you feel would be of interest to other members, please let the secretary know ([secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk)) It does not have to relate to Hook Norton – anything interesting you have recorded/noted during the last 12 months will be fine!

### **OLHA Newsletter**

OBR is a member of OLHA and as such all members have access to Liz Woolley's excellent newsletter. This month's issue has details of lots of upcoming activities - read it here: [OLHA e-bulletin, September 2023 \(mailchi.mp\)](#)

### **OBR Bursaries**

A reminder that the OBR run a bursary scheme which offers a total of up to £500 to individual OBR members towards the cost of training courses which will benefit OBR's aims. The criteria are:

- Applicants must be OBR personal members;
- Applicants must demonstrate that the bursary is being used to pay for course/conference fees and for no other purpose;
- Applications should demonstrate how the course/conference will improve the applicant's ability to record and interpret a vernacular building;
- Applicants will be expected to demonstrate commitment to support and promote the OBR's aims;

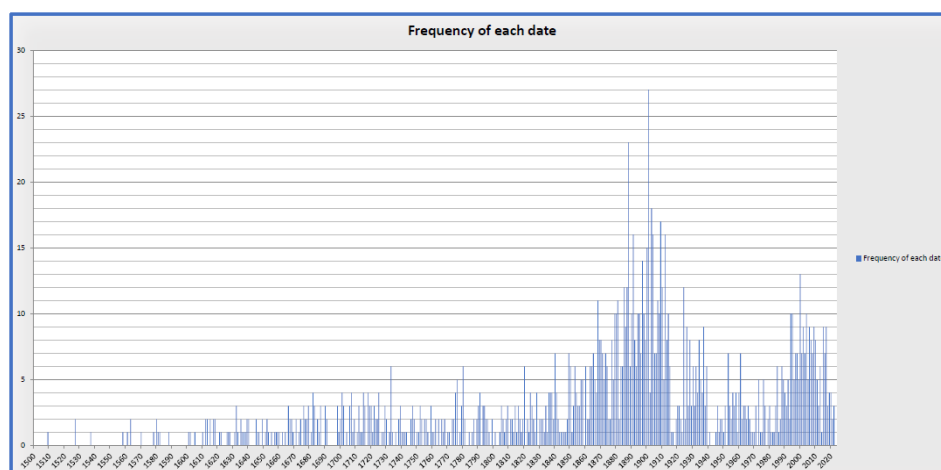
- Applicants commit to make a report on the course or conference which may be published in the Oxon Recorder.

Applications can be made at any time. Applications, using the form available on the OBR website, should be made to the Secretary at [secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk)

## Inscribed Dates

The Inscribed Dates project that OBR has been running since lockdown in 2020 is still going strong. The latest update went live on the website in June, and has almost 1400 entries ([Date Stones and other Inscribed Dates - OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD \(obr.org.uk\)](#)) As you will see, there are big gaps in the coverage, so do check with Heather ([hahwindrush@aol.com](mailto:hahwindrush@aol.com)) that you won't duplicate work others are doing, and then go out with camera and notebook to add more. There's no better way to get to know your county than by getting a bus, taking your bicycle or car, and going to somewhere you have never visited before.

We are also now beginning to think about what sort of analyses might be possible based on the dates collected so far. Clearly without a county-wide coverage, these can only be tentative, but they can give pointers to what we might look for when going to 'new' areas, and also some general hypotheses that further results might test. For example, this chart (Table 1) plots the frequency of dates found so far - and shows two clusters in the late nineteenth-century and in the early twenty-first. Were these actual building booms, or are they a reflection of people's interest in dates as a century ends or begins – you may remember the great interest taken in 2000 about such matters (the millennium bug, the argument as to whether the new century was being celebrated 365 days too soon...)



**Table 1 Frequency of collected dates – June 2023 (Paul Clark)**

And if you have a little more time, it is often worthwhile to try to find out a bit more about the dates and what they mean – and pop it into the 'notes' box. This is really helpful as it allows people to understand a bit better what they are looking at – the following example from Mapledurham gives six dates, each of which relates to an event – the decoration of a new house, the building of another, the installation of a clock, the commemoration of a War, the planting of a tree, and the completion of a restoration.

## Some dates in Mapledurham

On a recent visit to Mapledurham in South Oxfordshire I recorded six dates ranging from 1612 to 2017. Each of these has a different story but they all illustrate the fascination of dates on buildings and give an idea of what they can tell us.



**Figure 1 1612 date in plaster ceiling**

The date of 1612 (Fig. 1) is in the ceiling plasterwork of two of the rooms in Mapledurham House. Once thought to have been built in 1585, dendrochronology carried out by Dan Miles has shown that the house was indeed built in the early seventeenth century, starting about 1610 and probably completed by 1612. So these ceilings were put in place in the final stages of construction. We do not know who the plasterers were, but comparisons can be made with similar ceilings at Hardwick, a couple of miles upriver to the west of Mapledurham, and in London. Thus some of the floral designs seem to have originated in London, and were copied – though using different moulds as the Mapledurham examples are more finely carved than those at Hardwick ([VI - Transmission and Diffusion - British Renaissance Plasterwork](#) ([clairegapper.info](#))). On the other hand it seems that some of the Mapledurham work used moulds that were made in 1599 for the ceiling of Canonbury House in London (Buildings of England, Oxfordshire South and East - forthcoming). And comparisons have been made with the ceiling of Bromley-by-Bow (1606), now in the V&A ([Survey of London Monograph](#) | [British History Online](#) ([british-history.ac.uk](#))).

But the dates in the Mapledurham ceilings give away the somewhat provincial approach to the job. In both rooms the ‘2’ of the 1612 is reversed – the person who carved the mould, while reversing the ‘6’ so it would produce the correct finished result, forgot to do this for the ‘2’ – or perhaps found it too difficult to make and thought no-one would notice the reversal. And in one of the rooms the whole date is upside down!

In the tiny village of Mapledurham is a house of flint and brick with the date 1691 picked out in these materials on the façade (Fig. 2). Forge Cottage is a typical lobby-entry house – it featured in Eric Mercer’s ground-breaking survey of vernacular houses in 1975 – so the date is not surprising. But is this the full story? One school of thought is that the house is a late C17 re-fronting, but Dan Miles has pointed out that as the brick and flintwork is consistent around the entire building it is most likely that the exterior is contemporary with the inside. The roof consists of queen-strut clasped purlin trusses either side of the central chimney stack, but virtually all of the roof

structure is constructed of re-used timbers, the upstairs ceiling joists are larger timbers sawn into tall thin joists.



**Figure 2 Forge Cottage**



**Figure 3 Church Clock**

The next date is on the church clock – 1832 – with the initials W R to either side. A quick check shows that William IV was on the throne (just) at that date, and these are his initials. The date is also significant as that of the first Reform Act – to which William was vehemently opposed. But there is more to the story than this. The rector at the time was Lord Augustus FitzClarence, who was none other than one of the king's ten illegitimate children with the actress Dorothy Phillips (who was also known as Mrs Jordan though she never married) with whom (as Duke of Clarence) he had lived from 1790 to 1811 before becoming king (in 1830). FitzClarence had somewhat reluctantly accepted the inevitability of this banishment to an inaccessible parish, though he also served at court as chaplain to his father and later to Queen Adelaide. He had the vicarage at Mapledurham built for himself in 1830. The king not only paid for the clock, but also for the vicarage and some 'restoration' work on the church building.



**Figure 4 War memorial gates**

The western gates to the churchyard (Fig. 4) bear the dates 1939 and 1945, thus clearly denoting that they were intended as a war memorial, and a stone plaque on the left gate-pier confirms this, while that to the right gives the names of seven men of the parish who gave their lives in that conflict. The gates were installed in 1949.

Hanging on the panelled walls of the great entrance hall of Mapledurham House is a pristine Spear and Jackson spade (Fig. 5), bearing the inscription,

H M Queen Elizabeth  
The Queen Mother  
visited



Mapledurham House  
and  
Planted a Cedar of Lebanon  
21<sup>st</sup> June 1982

While at the foot of the spade has been added,

HRH Prince William of Wales  
was born this day

We are left to wonder whether this spade was in fact used by the Queen Mother to dig a turf for the tree, or symbolically to ‘earth it in’ after planting. And to wonder why the footnote was added – it was clearly engraved in 2022 or 2023, Prince William having been given the title Prince of Wales on 9 September 2022.



**Figure 5 Ceremonial spade**



**Figure 6 Balustrade in Old Manor**

Finally, in the Old Manor, the predecessor of Mapledurham House, is a balustrade of oak from trees felled on the estate and dated 2017 with the initials of John Joseph (Jack) Eyston (1934-2019) who did so much to keep the estate going through difficult times – see ‘Restoring Mapledurham: A South Oxfordshire Estate and its Buildings, 1960-2019’ by Stephen Miles and Dan Miles in *Oxoniensia* 87 (2022) pp. 105-126. This must have been one of the last projects he completed before his death.

*David Clark*

## **The Archaeology of Covid-19**

As everything has a history, so most things also have an archaeology. By this I mean that there are standing or demolished buildings that were used for aspects of the activity, there are also the tangible remains of artefacts associated with it, and inscriptions and graffiti of various types. This note attempts to capture some archaeological aspects from that two-year period from March 2020 during which the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing.

### **Buildings**

One of the main architectural features were a series of ‘testing centres’, which were portable temporary structures deployed for the purpose. They appeared during 2021 (previously, during lockdown, one was not supposed to leave one’s house except for ‘essential work’ and exercise).



**Figure 7 Testing Centre in Osney Lane, Oxford      Figure 8 Your local walk-through testing site**

The testing centre in Osney Lane (Fig. 7) was erected on a former car park, and was festooned with signage: 'Test and Trace', 'Welcome: thank you for coming to get tested today'. Another sign said 'Welcome to your local walk-through testing site' (Fig. 8). This had a scary logo of a stylized (likely) male with a detached (but masked) head, who was shown waving emoji-like for no apparent reason.

No-one came and no-one went, although the barriers had been set up to manage queues. A sign said, 'please show your QR code and/or ID', which seemed to imply one had to be invited to turn up at these places, but how, and why? (Fig. 9) I was never told.



**Figure 9 Instruction sign**

**Figure 10 Test centre in Clarendon Centre**

By 2022 the outdoor testing centre had gone – but one had popped up in an empty shop in the Clarendon Centre (Fig. 10). But now test kits were available to buy at chemist's shops, and it was not clear what the purpose of this new one was. Since Fig. 10 was taken the centre had closed – the landlords having given notice in October 2022 that they would secure the unit and prevent anyone from entering.

Other temporary structures included the 'rest area' in Broad Street (Figs. 11 and 12).

Perhaps it was the sheer awfulness of this concept that led to the creation later in the year of the Broad Meadow – also temporary but with a greater degree of joyfulness, even when the weeds grew.



**Figure 11 Rest area sign in Broad Street**



**Figure 12 Rest Area (February 2021)**

Another building type was the Covid-safe ‘dining pod’, which appeared in some pub gardens during 2020. Those at the White Hart in Wytham were made with recycled materials and were formally opened in July 2020 by Dame Prof Sarah Gilbert, Oxford University’s vaccine team leader (Figs. 13 and 14). It remains to be seen whether these, too, will be temporary, but those at Wytham proved very popular and may attract customers even after the pandemic is over.



**Figure 13 Dining pod at Wytham**



**Figure 14 Prof Sarah Gilbert at Wytham<sup>1</sup>**

While shops and hospitality venues were kept afloat by the furlough scheme and other measures in 2020, it is likely that some permanent closures will be blamed on the pandemic, though in practice it will be difficult to disentangle this effect from the growth in internet shopping, fast local delivery services, the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, and (in 2022/3) the cost of living crisis. One example of expensive redundant assets can be seen on the HS1 rail link to the Channel Tunnel. In September 2020, Eurostar blamed the pandemic and subsequent collapse in ticket revenue (down by 90%) and both Ebbsfleet and Ashford International stations would not be served by Eurostar services until at least 2022. A further update in August 2022 confirmed that both stations were unlikely to reopen before at least 2025.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic also had effects on the construction industry, though not perhaps in the way one might have thought. Speaking at the opening of St Hilda’s ‘Anniversary Building’ in September 2021, Mark Beard, of the eponymous construction company, said that the project had been completed to time and within budget, despite the Covid-19 restrictions. His remarks about being safer on a building site than in a supermarket

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/18565859.white-hart-wythams-dining-pods-get-thumbs-head-oxfords-coronavirus-vaccine-programme/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbsfleet\\_International\\_railway\\_station#Opening](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbsfleet_International_railway_station#Opening) (accessed 1 October 2022)



during the height of the pandemic were a vignette from the period that perhaps in a few years' time will be almost forgotten. But there were more serious lessons – the trust between the parties involved that allowed projects to continue safely and advance ordering of materials was also crucial. Fewer people on site led to a calmer atmosphere and greater individual productivity.

As the work of restoration of historic buildings continued during the pandemic, sculptors could incorporate reminders of the period in their work. Restoration of the shrine of St Amphibalus at St Albans Abbey began in 2019 and its completion was marked by a special service to 'bless and re-hallow' the shrine on 7 February 2021. The 'restored' – or rather reconstructed – shrine consists of some fourteenth-century stonework (about 55% of the original survived in a late nineteenth-century rebuilding after the pieces had been removed from a blocked window) and new stone carved by craftsmen at the Skillington Workshop of Grantham. One of the new carved heads wears a face-mask, in recognition of the period during which the work was executed.

### Fixtures

The main fixture was the hand-sanitizer dispenser (Fig. 15).



**Figure 15 (left) Hand-sanitizer dispenser, Clarendon Centre, Oxford**

**Figure 16 (right) Covid precautions at Churchill hospital (St Luke's bench)**

People were prevented from sitting too close to one another on chairs and benches (Fig. 16)

### Inscriptions and graffiti



**Figure 17 (left) Glued strips in Little Clarendon Street, Oxford**

**Figure 18 (right) Painted strip with directional arrow, St Michael at the North Gate, Ship Street, Oxford**

Many businesses painted or glued strips to the pavement outside their premises to show what the 2-metre 'social distancing' meant in practice (Figs. 17 - 21)



**Figure 19** Glued strips with 'Be safe: keep 2m distance' sign on floor nearby



**Figure 20** Social Distancing in pictures



**Figure 21** Reminders still in place October 2022

In many shops, stickers showing pairs of feet in circles performed this service (Fig. 22)



**Figure 22** Please wait here – feet in circles. Gloucester Green (L) and W H Smith (R)

In Oxford, a few streets with narrow pavements had 'one way' signs stenciled on the paving slabs. These were universally ignored by most people, who were totally oblivious to them or to being told when they were going the wrong way. They soon wore off, and their presence a year or more later has become ghostly, the arrow and lettering known only to the few who remember them (Fig. 23).



**Figure 23 'One way' sign, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford**



**Figure 24 'Keep your Distance' reminder, Magdalen Street, Oxford**

More common, but again ignored and now almost illegible were the 'Keep your Distance' reminders, again stenciled on to the pavement (Fig. 24)

There were also other reminders, for example this sign on a bus, still in place in September 2022 (Fig. 25).



**Figure 25 'Please remember to wear your face covering on board'**

## Artefacts

The main items associated with the pandemic were face-masks, surgical gloves, and testing kits. These can still be purchased, and so examples are more appropriately memorialized in museums of contemporary culture than in an archaeological paper, but the pristine items are available and can be helpful in understanding the nature of the archaeological record.



**Figure 26 Face masks. Bottom: a. Sainsbury's give-away; top: b. FFP1 (left) c. FFP2 (right)**



Face Masks varied from the free give-aways to shoppers in Sainsbury's who had forgotten to bring their masks with them (Fig. 26a) – almost totally useless – to the various FFP types under the CE0086 standard. FFP1 (Fig. 26b) was not much use, and FFP2 (Fig. 26c) offered more protection to their contacts than to the wearers.



**Figure 27 Discarded face-mask, Oxford**



**Figure 28 Discarded surgical gloves, Oxford**

An archaeological paper would not be complete without an examination of the things that are thrown away, and at one time the detritus was everywhere (Figs. 27 and 28)

For a time, test kits were given away free of charge (Fig. 29). Ironically, given the apparent source of the virus, these were made in China.



**Figure 29 (left) Flowflex Covid-19 test kits**



**Figure 30 (right) Completed tests. Left: a. serology test; right: b and c. Lateral flow tests (DSCN 0004)**

Fig. 30a is an invalid test result from April 2020. This was used for a serology test, an early type used by a research team at Oxford University to try to understand the extent of the infections in its first month. It used a drop of blood extracted from the finger and dropped into the square aperture. A 'clear liquid' was then put into the circular aperture, and after ten minutes red lines were supposed to appear on the test strip (though in this case nothing happened, presumably due to insufficient blood). The University study also used a throat swab test, which was similar to the lateral flow test except using samples from the throat rather than the nostril, but the samples had to be sent off to a laboratory for processing. One sample was sent for PCR results at the University of Oxford; the other for nanopore sequencing in Vancouver, Canada where the results would be analysed by the British Columbia Center for Disease Control and the University of British Columbia.

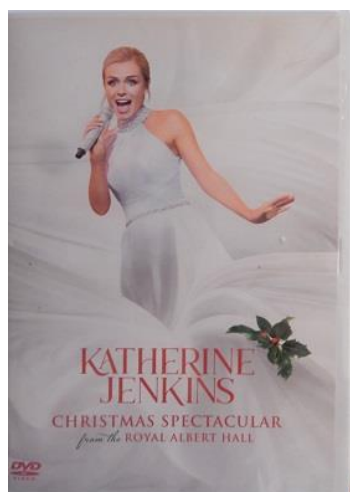


Figs. 30b and c are negative lateral flow tests from 2022.

In some places these could be found discarded in the street.

This is not the place for a survey of the documentary evidence, though it is to be hoped that in due course such a study will be carried out. Free newspapers such as *The Light* peddled a heady mixture of anti-vax propaganda, cynicism about the role of big-pharma and (possibly) hard facts that undermined the basis for lockdown as the only true path for freeing us from the plague. As the Public Enquiry gets under way it will doubtless take some years to get to the truth, but meanwhile the pile of discarded newspapers adds to the archaeological record.

Finally, there are some artefacts that record something of what life was like during the pandemic. Some exist only virtually, like Thom Airs' bike rides through a silent and deserted Oxford (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAxtn9dw0QA&t=14s>) and so are symbolic not only of the dystopia that we felt at the time, but also of the way in which formerly real, lived experiences, teaching, and discussion all went online. They also raise the question as to whether intangible archaeological records have the same validity as peer-reviewed articles in academic journals.



**Figure 31 Katherine Jenkins' Christmas Spectacular 2020**

One highly evocative video made during the pandemic and released for Christmas 2020 was a 'concert' by Katherine Jenkins at the Royal Albert Hall (Fig. 31). Mostly socially-distanced, this was also eerie as the players were seen in the empty auditorium and in the circular corridors and spaces around it. The artefact (available from your local charity shop for 10p) is part of the archaeological record.

So, what are the lessons, if any, we might draw from all this? Firstly, as the images above show, capturing some of the physical or graphic aspects of the archaeology must be done when these phenomena start to appear – many had disappeared after two years. And gone also are the behavioural aspects of these interventions: did anyone use the testing stations, and what was their experience of them? A photograph of the crowds disobeying the 'one way' signs and (if one were permitted to conduct interviews) some understanding of why they were being ignored (looking at their phones rather than at the pavement, non-English-speakers, or what?). Creatures of habit, disregard for undemocratic authoritarian diktats, avoidance of undesirable

detours – clearly the plethora of exhortations had little effect on behaviour – even (as we know) of those who made the regulations.

The casual disposal of Covid-related artefacts is also of archaeological interest. Even in cities where rubbish bins abound, these items are found in the street. Perhaps some flimsy face-masks got blown off in the wind, but even so, one might have thought the wearers would notice their loss and retrieve them? The street disposal of surgical gloves is another matter – perhaps they fell out of a pocket or handbag, but if the disposal were deliberate, what might that tell us? And might the answers cast light on such ‘real’ archaeological matters such as the distribution of Roman coins found in fieldwalking?

There will be some long-term tangible reminders of the pandemic – the face-masks on the figures in St Albans Abbey, for example. Some of the pub dining pods may also survive, as they also offer protection from the weather. There may also be less obvious effects, such as closed shops (and railway stations) and the increased use of electric scooters. One of the lessons one could draw is that archaeology is not just a digging up of the past; it can also be a process for monitoring the evolution of the built (and discarded) environment.

*David Clark*

#### **Contact details**

Contributions for the newsletter (including ‘letters to the editor’ – should be sent to [secretary@obr.org.uk](mailto:secretary@obr.org.uk)

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

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