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

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Secretary's note

Quite a lot has happened since the last edition, and I hope you find this one of interest. Thanks are due in particular to Sally and Malcolm for their contributions. We still need a 'proper' editor, though. Please let me know if you are interested.

As we approach the year end, subscriptions fall due to be paid on 1 January, so please get your cheque in the post to the membership secretary, Paul Clark at Grove End Farm, Henbrook Lane, Upper Brailes, Banbury OX15 5B before the Christmas rush. Better still, complete a standing order form (and gift aid form if you are eligible) from the website MEMBERSHIP - OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD (obr.org.uk) We recommend doing this given the present unreliability and high cost of postage.

Finally, our best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

David Clark

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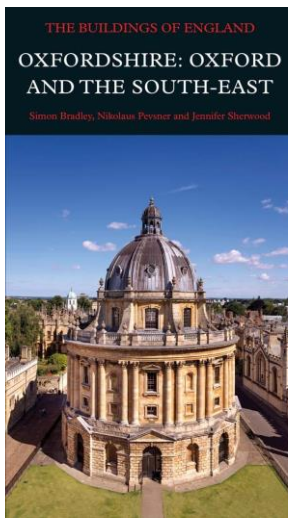
Buildings of England – Oxfordshire: Oxford and the South-east

The long-awaited final part of the Oxfordshire 'Pevsner' revision has now been published. At 844 pages, of which 520 cover the city and its suburbs, this volume, largely rewritten by Simon Bradley, takes the description and understanding of the buildings on to a new level. Thanks to the development of dendrochronology – and as this is Dan Miles' home patch, this means thanks to him – dating of many of the buildings has been confirmed (or transformed) since the first edition in 1974. Many new photographs (by James O Davies, whom some of you will recall from our work in Burford many years ago) are included and James gave the audience at the 'virtual launch' of the volume on 2 November a fascinating insight into how they were taken – such as placing a row of traffic cones along a stretch of Dorchester High Street in front of the Bull Inn extension to ensure there were no parked cars there when the picture (plate 40) was taken and stopping a huge articulated truck on New Street, Henley, in order to hold the traffic back while he photographed Camden House and Bishop's House (plate 70). James seems to specialise in undercrofts – you can see his work in Gloucester below in Figs. 3 and 5 – and he explained how he used a two-minute exposure and 16 separate flashes for his image of the crypt at St Peter in the East in Oxford (plate 5), hiding behind the columns to ensure he wasn't in the shot.



The volume should now be on sale 'at all good bookshops' and also from your favourite online bookshop. Don't wait – rumour has it that the Pevsners are all going up to £60 in May 2024.

The publicity blurb says, 'This updated guide addresses half a century of change and development since the previous edition, including a wealth of ambitious new buildings for the University and its colleges. Familiar buildings such as the Bodleian Library and the Radcliffe Camera are reinterpreted, and the many renovations and extensions are described and assessed. Oxford's commercial buildings, suburbs, and houses are also explored in depth, including much that is published here for the first time. The county area extends from the outskirts of Oxford to Henley-on-Thames, following the historic Thameside boundary of Oxfordshire and taking in the hills of the southern Chilterns. Here the new volume includes fresh accounts of major country houses such as Nuneham Courtenay and Thame Park, new assessments of church restorations, furnishings, and stained glass, more inclusive coverage of commercial buildings in the towns and a fuller selection of vernacular and rural buildings across the whole of this attractive and rewarding part of England.'

As a postscript, take a look at Thom Airs' film of Malcolm explaining the work of George Gilbert Scott in Dorchester – not just the restoration of the abbey, but a number of other buildings in the village. (https://youtu.be/X9ZAfbyGeDg)

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Three new mapping initiatives

While the Abingdon Buildings and People (ABP) project celebrated its tenth birthday last June (History – Abingdon on Thames Town Council) it has now been joined by a new project which will add further material relevant to the history of the town's buildings. The Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society's (AAAHS) online archaeological map, is now live on the Town Council's website, and can be found on the society's history pages, and ties in with ABP. Abingdon Map – Abingdon Map. A hidden advantage of this site is that one of the mapping options is the 1899 six-inch Ordnance Survey map, which covers the whole country, not just the Abingdon area.

The second is the new mapping platform on Heritage Search – the County Council's digital gateway. You can find it at Heritage Search mapping (oxfordshire.gov.uk) Various historic maps are available, and in the 'Feature' layers you can find PictureOxon images, HER site locations, and historic parish boundaries. This takes the Abingdon initiative county-wide. It is also a gateway to District Valuation Maps and records, and many other goodies. Mark Lawrence at OHC has plans for further developments, such as bringing the Oxford City HER into the ambit of the map.

The third is a new website www.archiuk.com which holds old maps, Lidar scans, and archaeological sites for the whole of the UK. There is a membership fee for full access, but simple searches are free.

Ghost Signs

Figure 1 Ghost sign in Walton Street, Oxford

This is a new Historic England initiative to collect images of the (gradually fading away) advertising signs painted on buildings. Their definition is, 'historic hand-painted advertising signs, or old shop signs preserved on buildings which have since changed use'. The latter part of this rubric seems to me to refer to a different class of inscription, and as some of them are ceramic hardly deserve the 'ghost' descriptor. Some of the details of former shops (and other repurposed buildings) we have already recorded through our 'Inscribed Dates' project.

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But if you are interested, see: Ghost Signs: Share Your Images and Stories | Historic England for a map showing those that have been submitted so far. Oxfordshire is not particularly well represented – one each in Banbury, Milton-under-Wychwood, Thame, Wallingford, Whitchurch, Woodstock, and (following some uploads of mine a few weeks ago) there are now eight in Oxford city, five in Abingdon and one in Bicester). If you know of others, please upload them – it's quite straightforward. However, it takes a couple of days for them to appear – and I suggest waiting until your entry has appeared before submitting another one.

Heritage Views

Provoked by my article on the Archaeology of Covid-19 in OR95, Sally Stradling has set out some further thoughts on the meaning of 'heritage'. If you would like to contribute to the debate, the 'Letters to the Editor' slot awaits.

What does 'heritage' mean to you? Why does it matter or not matter? So much of what we do in the OBR is about heritage assets – buildings in our case (but they can be parks and gardens, archaeology, wrecks) – designated or not. Since the pandemic much has changed in the way we work and appreciate heritage. For example, it is now acceptable to work mostly from home and a day or two a week in the office. Walking in a public park may have been unknown or a rarity for some in the past but the mandatory hour permitted in lock down gave this space a sense of value where, trees, historic buildings, spaces and flowers could be appreciated from enforced solitude or cramped living conditions. Is this the time to re-evaluate what Oxfordshire Buildings Record stands for, why we exist, where we are going, what we offer members? Since the Covid pandemic struck many heritage organisations have taken the lead to do just that with Audience Insight surveys and updated annual strategies and work programmes to investigate whether they can be more relevant in a changing and ever competitive world.

Sustainability and climate change are now common themes and in a local context, increasingly the importance of community. There are National Lottery funded oral history projects such as 'Witney Remembers, What Cogges Means to You' chronicling the importance of the farm museum now heritage trust to the local community since it opened in the 1970s. At the National Trust Coleshill and Buscot Estate, Royal Holloway College recently partnered with the National Trust to undertake a survey of members views to understand what the Trust meant to them or what historical event, character or place meant to them and why. The questioning went wider than just interest in a particular person, building or garden, the interest was in the emotional response to sites and how visits might evoke thoughts, feelings and emotions to what occurred in the visitor experience. Experiencing the atmosphere in the great hall of an ancient manor house with smoke blackened timbers, the kitchen with the copper for washing clothes and bread oven or spit racks, a WWII pill box, line of thatched cottages, barns and pig sties in a farmyard, medieval wall painting or swirls and swags of an ornate plaster ceiling – are all connections with our common heritage. How we experience them and are taught about them can affect our response to them- think of Colston in Bristol and the Lascelles at Harewood House, or closer to home English Farm, Nuffield was also owned by a West Indies plantation owner, and slave trader.

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Figure 2 The Colston statue (Channel 4)

What is it that matters and why? These are the questions. We live in times of much turmoil and change at home and abroad. The strength of our joint heritage, our roots and connections with those that came before us - and their worlds - gives us pause for thought. What comes next is up to us.

Sally Stradling

OBR Lecture 17 October

Our annual lecture was given this year by Abigail Lloyd, based on work she did on a placement with Historic England last spring as part of her doctoral research on the historic landscape with a particular focus on old buildings, churches and medieval place-names. Her title was **New Light on the Early Undercrofts of Westgate Street, Gloucester, and Comparisons with Oxford.** This was an in-person event at Rewley House, Wellington Square, Oxford, as part of the OAHS autumn lecture series.

Numbers in the lecture theatre at Rewley House were (almost) back to pre-pandemic days and it was good to see many OBR members present. Also present was Rebecca Lane who supervised Abigail's work in Gloucester, and who is currently president of the Vernacular Architecture Group.

I was asked to chair the proceedings in the absence of Geoffrey Tyack, OAHS President, who was unable to attend. In my introduction, I said, ‘the study of undercrofts nationally is a fascinating one in which Oxford has a particularly rich heritage. Recent work in Gloucester has looked in detail at three late-12th-century undercrofts on Westgate Street. Each of them has been compared to later Oxford examples. This research sheds new light on these undercrofts, and the comparison between Oxford and Gloucester is illuminating in helping us to understand these medieval structures.’

Abigail’s lecture began, of course, with location: Westgate Street being the main route into Gloucester from the bridge over the Severn to the west - an important route with Roman origins. She then focussed on three of the undercrofts – and compared each with an Oxford counterpart.

First was the basement of the Fleece Hotel at no. 19 Westgate Street. This was of a similar size and date (1180s) to Frewin Hall in Oxford, and also set some way back from the street. However, whereas Frewin Hall has three wide (5m) bays, the Fleece has seven narrow bays. At the Fleece, the presence of an intramural stair demonstrated that the undercroft was intended to be used in conjunction with

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whatever trade the owner was conducting in the building above, but it also had an entry from an external open space.

Figure 3 Undercroft of the Fleece (© Historic England) **Figure 4 Frewin Hall undercroft**

The building had been owned by a wine merchant in 1200, and she felt that the undercroft must have been used in conjunction with that – perhaps as a ‘tasting room’, as it seemed too ornate to simply be a store room, and lacked the facilities needed for a tavern. Here, there were clear differences with Frewin Hall, where there was no evidence of commercial use. However, she pointed out that the end walls of undercrofts were prone to alteration – they could be relocated, and openings made or blocked within them – making the interpretation of Frewin Hall quite difficult.

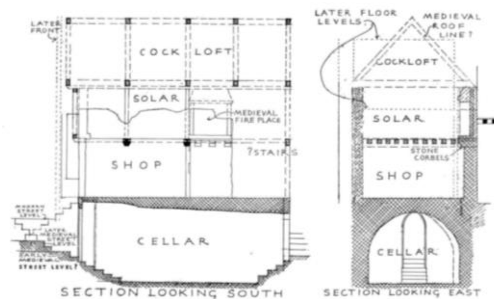

Figure 5 (left) Undercroft of 76 Westgate Street (© Historic England)
Figure 6 (right) Setreton’s, Oxford (OAHS – Oxoniensia XXIII, 1958 p. 111)

Street-fronting undercrofts were represented by 76 Westgate Street in Gloucester and Setreton’s beneath the Clarendon Hotel in Oxford's Cornmarket. In both cases the undercroft seems to have been used separately from the building above. The Oxford building is known from recordings made when the Clarendon Hotel above it was demolished in the 1950s, during which a twelfth-century arch was noted (see Oxoniensia XXIII (1958) pp. 106-111.

Figure 7 Undercroft of 47 Westgate (AL© Historic England) **Figure 8 Tackley’s Inn, Oxford**

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Finally, the undercrofts at 47 Westgate and Tackley's Inn (106-7 High Street, Oxford) were both parallel to the street – and as the long walls were clearly primary, and openings were also likely to be indicative of the original use. But the common feature of these two structures was the attention that had been given to the vaulting: in Gloucester the ribs were only a metre apart, whereas at Tackley's Inn there is quadripartite vaulting, with a carved corbel on one of the bays. This expression of affluence suggested that these spaces were intended to be used by clients who would appreciate their surroundings, and indeed the Oxford example was known to have been used as a tavern for a significant period.

David Clark

To read the full report on Abigail's project, go to:
https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/31-2023?searchType=research+report&search=31%2F2023

W G Hoskins day, 28 October

W G Hoskins will always, for building historians, be remembered for coining the term, The Great Rebuilding' – except that he didn't. At the recent day-school on the life and work Malcolm Airs looked back on this aspect of his work, and has kindly submitted the following resumé for the newsletter.

The Great Rebuilding Revisited

It is as a great generaliser that Hoskins will always be remembered and which provides the enduring importance of his concept of the Great Rebuilding. That concept is now firmly lodged in the literature of the subject, but its nuances – and the caveats that Hoskins himself strongly signalled – are often ignored or imperfectly understood so that in recent years its general validity has been challenged. In order to meet that challenge I intend to set his essay in the context of the date when it was written and to examine in a very brief and general fashion the reactions of the last 70 years to its central thesis.

Hoskins' paper on the Great Rebuilding was published only five months before the formal inaugural meeting of the VAG in London on 8 April 1954 and he was an active member in its early years. There can be little doubt that his paper was a seminal influence on the development of vernacular studies from the moment of its publication and in that light it is worth examining exactly what he said. In his own words he presented the thesis that:

> 'Between the accession of Elizabeth I and the outbreak of the Civil War, there occurred in England a revolution in the housing of a considerable part of the population'.

In his view, the evidence was more abundant in the countryside, but he was sure that it originally applied equally to the towns. Its approximate time-span was between 1570 and 1640, and the greatest activity probably took place between 1575 and 1625.It took two principal forms: the rebuilding or modernisation of the houses themselves and an increase in household furnishings and domestic equipment. His evidence was both documentary and literary supported by personal observation in the field by himself and others.

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Having examined the country region by region, he concluded that the great period of rebuilding in the four most northerly counties of England did not take place until the C18, but elsewhere – from Cornwall up to Lancashire and from Herefordshire across to Suffolk – he found the evidence for the period 1570-1640 both abundant and inescapable.

He was well aware at the time of the superficial nature of many of his conclusions and of the need for detailed research in order to properly substantiate it. Indeed, by the time of the publication of his *Making of the English Landscape* in 1955, he had already modified it to take into account a 'second rebuilding that flourished in the late C17 and the early C18' – a development which has been more clearly defined by several later regional studies. But this recognition does not of itself diminish the enduring importance of his essay. It merely emphasises the complexity of building history and draws attention to the predictable observation that subsequent population increases had to be housed in a manner that has left tangible evidence of discrete periods of construction activity.

However, no matter what modifications have had to be made to the simplicity of his original thesis in the light of subsequent research, Hoskins' essay remains significant for two principal reasons. Firstly, it was important for the typical breadth of scholarship across several disciplines which enabled him to put forward the thesis in the first place. At a simple level, this meant that at the very outset of the new field of vernacular building studies, there was a national theory against which all the developing regional studies could be tested. In almost every part of the country, anyone coming new to the subject had at the very least a notional concept to assist them in trying to make some sense of the bewildering evidence with which they were faced.

Secondly, in attempting to come to grips with the evidence, Hoskins had indicated the proper tools for the job – the need for documentary research to substantiate and complement archaeological investigation and for fieldwork on the buildings themselves to make sense of the documentation.

In the final analysis, of course, it is not simply a question of debate about what conclusions can be validly drawn from what will always be inadequate statistics capable of being interpreted in a number of different ways. Undoubtedly, the simplicity of the original thesis has been rendered far more complex by detailed research and there are significant parts of the country where it does not apply. But what Hoskins was really charting was a profound change in domestic living standards. From a medieval way of life centred on the open hearth and largely led on the ground floor he saw a radical change to the modern preference for going upstairs to bed – a change which was only made possible by the universal adoption of the enclosed chimneystack. If there was a single catalyst for Hoskins' housing revolution it was the adoption of this sophisticated means of heating the house at a vernacular level that made it all possible.

For him it was not simply a question of the number of houses and when precisely they were built. It was principally about how they were lived in. And there can be no doubt that during the period that he identified they became more comfortable with different

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patterns of circulation, more defined functions in different rooms and, above all, greater personal privacy. As Nat Alcock put it in his balanced article on ‘The Great Rebuilding and its Later Stages’:

‘In this sense, as the major step from medieval to modern living, the Great Rebuilding is still a valid concept, even if it was only synchronised regionally’.

Malcolm Airs

Presentation Day, Hook Norton November 25

This year’s presentation day was 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 possible 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. To date, 38 buildings have been recorded.

The programme for the day followed the usual pattern. Our walk through the village started at the Sun Inn at its centre, opposite the church and near the busy village shop. We were lucky in the weather, which although chilly, gave us beautiful sunshine throughout. Chairman Paul Clark showed us a number of the houses that the group had recorded, concentrating on external features such as building materials, doorways and windows. One theme that related to many houses, however, was the ease with which past owners could add or remove features in stone houses in such a way that only documents or early photographs could show how they once looked.

Figure 9 The group at Wisteria House (1690s)

Figure 10 The Tite at Down End © OHC

A particularly interesting enclave was Down End, where there was one possible medieval house, the site of an early lunatic asylum – of which more below – and a communal watering hole (Fig. 10), locally called a ‘tite’ (a term unknown to OED), which largely survives – although now blocked in.

The presentations started after lunch in the function room. Paul compared the buildings here with those that had been studied for the *Early Fabric in Historic Towns* project in Chipping Norton sponsored by Historic England. These had been definitely of an affluent urban character – with oak roofs that had stood the test of time, whereas Hook Norton, had a poorer, rural feel, with most of the earlier buildings having been either lost or are unidentifiable due to renewal of roofs through the use of poorer timbers.

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The survey work had produced a considerable amount of evidence of possible value for the dating of features and the identification of local fashions – for example there was a range of chamfer-stops from plain to complex with the lamb's tongue and notch seeming to be typical of Hook Norton in the late seventeenth century. Another local feature was a crude type of roof truss, akin to a raised cruck – with the feet of the principal rafters embedded within the stone side walls of the house, and at the apex lapped over one another and cradling a ridge. Features such as external stair-towers, loose tenons, battered walls and cross-passages had all been noted, and some hypotheses were emerging as to their periods of popularity. Unfortunately, however, as most of the *in situ* timber was elm, and there was considerable evidence of timber reuse, precise dates using tree-rings were unlikely to be possible.

Don Radcliffe, chair of the Hook Norton Local History Group, then gave an overview of the development of the village, emphasising that there were considerable uncertainties about the earliest settlement, its date and location. In October John Blair had talked to the society about Hook Norton's Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque church and had suggested some new lines of investigation. Even such obvious anomalies like the large size of the church were difficult to explain, though its role at the centre of a royal estate and – in the 12th century – as a property of Oseney Abbey, must have played a part. As a supply of pure drinking water is a *sine qua non* of a viable settlement, the presence of the *tite* in Down End was clearly of significance.

The evidence of church improvements in the 15th century suggested a period of relative prosperity, but the early (1774) Enclosure favoured the larger landowners at the expense of the peasant farmers, and by the 19th century the growing population was impoverished.

He ended with some insights into the somewhat unique history of care for those with mental health issues in Hook Norton – which had a lunatic asylum as early as the 1720s. At this time such provision was made by private enterprise, under licence, and he showed plans of these such as the one whose site we had seen in Down End. This seemed to be a 'local industry' the aim of which was to manage the health of the inmate to the point where they could be 'released' to play an active part in 'normal' society. The Hook Norton asylums took patients from outside the village, such as the Banbury workhouse, as it became clear that it was inappropriate for such institutions to house the mentally ill. These private asylums were replaced by public institutions in the later 19th century.

For more on Hook Norton's history, see https://hook-norton.org.uk/history/ and of course the forthcoming Victoria County History volume (21) due to appear in 2024. Early drafts of the chapters are at https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history/county-histories-progress/oxfordshire/oxfordshire-vol-xxi-chipping-norton-and-environs

Mike Evans then took the floor to outline a project he was involved with to create a gazetteer of the Victorian elementary schools in Berkshire built between 1870 and 1914. This was an important period for school building. Following the 1870 Education Act, more children than ever before were brought into the education system, and new schools were provided in areas where there had previously been a

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lack. Existing schools were frequently enlarged. As the century progressed, new standards for accommodation demanded by the Board of Education resulted in enlargements and alterations, and new approaches to educational provision led to significant changes in school design. After 1903, the newly established Berkshire Education Committee embarked on a major campaign of school-building.

The idea is to create histories of each of the 300 known examples – some of which no longer survive. The information would cover the building history, architects, materials, style, sources of funds, numbers of pupils, classrooms, provision for teachers' housing, and so on. A wide range of documentary sources were being used, many in local repositories such as the Berkshire Record Office and the Oxford Diocesan archives, but there were also national archives that contained relevant material. Volunteers were needed to research these sources – see below for how to get involved.

In order to illustrate what was emerging from the project, Mike used four schools in Abingdon as case-studies. One had been completely demolished, at another only a later classroom survived (as a store); of the two survivors, only one was still being used as a school, while the other was now a parish centre for the local Catholic community (Fig. 11).

Figure 11 The former Roman Catholic school in Abingdon

Building Schools for Berkshire – call for volunteers

The Berkshire Local History Association, in partnership with Berkshire Record Society and Berkshire Record Office, is sponsoring a project to investigate elementary school building in the county between 1870 and 1914. Research is being carried out by a small group of volunteers, prepared to give a few hours a month working mainly in sources in the Berkshire Record Office, under the general direction of Peter Durrant and Mike Evans.

We are looking for a few more people to join the team. Would you be interested in helping? If so, get in touch with Peter (Contact: durrant.peter@gmail.com). Full instructions and guidance will be offered to anyone taking part.

Our final paper was given by Michael O'Reilly and Lawrence Kelly, who had completed a repair to a section of the plaster ceiling in the 1764 chapel at Milton Manor. They began by carrying out a survey of the condition of the ceiling in order to assess the amount of work that was needed, and how best to go about it, given that the damaged section was being supported by acro-props.

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Figure 12 (left) Milton Manor
Figure 13 (right) Milton Manor chapel (Sutton Courtenay Local History Society)

They first inserted fine stainless steel wires supported by rods resting on the joists above the ceiling and used these to support the damaged part so that the props could be removed. The nature of the plaster mix was determined, and permanent fixings introduced using screws rather than nails to minimise vibration. The new plaster was then laid in layers, finally building up the ribs starting with a rough base coat before using a template taken from the originals to shape the fine grain top coats of gypsum and lime putty. We were shown the tools they had used, and handled samples of the damaged ribs. This was an exceptional insight into the sensitive repair of historic fabric.

Stone deterioration in Blenheim Palace

This was the subject of the first seminar this term in *Material Culture and the Historic Built Environment*, held at Lincoln College, Oxford. The speakers were the members of the project team, Dr. Richard Grove, Dr. Sterling Mackinnon, and Dr. Nicholas Carter, all of the University of Oxford.

There are three parts to this project, the most advanced being that on understanding the role of lichens in protecting or attacking stone – see below. Another is the effects of iron cramps on stone deterioration, and the third is to digitise the historic building accounts to identify what materials were introduced and when, so that the effects of damage can be assessed.

The walls of Blenheim Palace are home to an extraordinary ecosystem, including a variety of lichen species both common and rare. Blenheim Palace and researchers from the School of Geography and the Environment, at the University of Oxford, are currently developing innovative methods to investigate which lichen species are growing on the stone, why they grow in some places and not others, are they helping or hindering, and what stories they might tell. A rare British lichen has also recently been discovered on site; it is the first recorded for the whole county of Oxfordshire.

More about the project can be found at https://www.blenheimpalace.com/restoration/ and the report on the lichens found there can be read at:
https://www.blenheimpalace.com/flipbook/palace/lichen-report/

Lichens are not plants, but ‘Stable self-supporting associations of a fungus (known as the mycobiont) and an alga or cyanobacterium (known as the photobiont), they are the result of a symbiotic relationship such that the fungus provides moisture and shelter for the algal cells allowing them to live in places that otherwise would be unsuitable

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for them. These algal cells, on the other hand, provide food for the fungi cells. … Like conventional plants, lichens join themselves to soil, bark and rock for stability and nutrients.'

Figure 14 Stone feature at Blenheim **Figure 15 Black (endolithic) and other lichens**
(both from https://www.blenheimpalace.com/flipbook/palace/lichen-report/)

Lichens that attach to rock and stone, such as those found on the walls and sculptures at Blenheim, are known as saxicolous lichens. The word saxicolous derives from the Latin 'saxum' (meaning stone) and 'cola' (meaning inhabitant). There are two main types, endolithic lichens which grow below the surface and arguably contribute more to the weathering of the stone, and epilithic lichens which sit on top of the stone and, over time, can have a more protective role. (Figs. 14 and 16).

Four locations at Blenheim were chosen for the research project – each allowed for a tall surface facing in a different direction, NE. SE, N and W. 30 different types of lichen were found, with each surface having about 15 varieties. Luckily epilithic varieties predominate. But what, you may ask, is the point of this? One obvious area is in stone replacement, since an inserted stone can act differently from its neighbours as a habitat for lichens, so possibly encouraging the endolithic varieties that can cause damage. But in any event, different stone can result in the building ending up with a patchwork of different coloured lichens, not necessarily in an aesthetically pleasing way. This raises all sorts of issues for building conservation. While the local Cotswold stone vernacular building derives much of its charm from the 'patina of age' supplied by lichens native to that stone, and it would seem obvious that ant replacement should also be sourced locally, for grander buildings, whether or not the original stone was local, it is often now replaced by what is felt to be a 'close match' – but only for colour, not as a lichen habitat. This can have unfortunate unintended aesthetic consequences (Fig. 16). Does this matter? Perhaps not, even in some of Oxford's iconic buildings, with stone replacement over centuries, where we have grown to accept the patchwork effect – 'it will weather over time'. But Blenheim Palace is a World Heritage Site, and the bar is even higher – though of course there is no public financial support for the cost of 'doing the right thing'. Lichens also contribute to the 'patina of age', which adds another dimension to the aesthetics of historic structures (Fig. 17).

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Figure 16 Potential site of future problems **Figure 17 Lichen aesthetics**
(both from https://www.blenheimpalace.com/flipbook/palace/lichen-report/)

Work on the other areas – the effects of iron on stone deterioration, and the digitising of the historic building accounts – is at an early stage, so perhaps in a year's time, when the project is scheduled to end, we will have a similar understanding of the building history of Blenheim, and will know what materials were introduced, when, and where they came from so that they, too, can be properly conserved in the light of that understanding. *David Clark*

Future events you may be interested in

VAG Winter Conference 6-7 January (College Court, University of Leicester) New developments in Dendrochronology and its impact on the study of Vernacular Architecture.

There have been significant developments in dendrochronological dating over the past 10 years and much of this has had important implications for vernacular building research. New complementary techniques have opened up opportunities to date other wood types and timbers derived from short-lived trees and increased the number of buildings that can be accurately dated. This has allowed dendrochronology to contribute to vernacular building studies in a wider number of areas, moving beyond the dating of individual buildings to contribute to studies of settlements and regions and contribute to other debates. VAG Conferences

Saturday 20 January 2024 at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, London. **New Insights into C16th and C17th British Architecture (**an annual event where scholars and students of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British architecture can present their current research, discuss ideas, and meet one another). Programme and booking at Home (newinsightsconference.co.uk)

11-14 June, 2024 VAG Spring Conference in Northern Ireland, followed by the annual conference of the **Historic Farm Buildings Group** (14-16 June). The overlap

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day will be at the Ulster Folk Museum (Visit the Ulster Folk Museum | Ulster Folk Museum)

OLHA Newsletter

OBR is a member of OLHA and as such all members have access to Liz Woolley's excellent newsletter. The current issue has details of lots of upcoming activities - read it here: OLHA e-bulletin, December 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

Contact details

Contributions for the newsletter (including 'letters to the editor' – should be sent to secretary@obr.org.uk

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

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

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

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