

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

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

David Clark

Upcoming events

Heritage Open Days/Open Doors

September has become the traditional month for towns and cities to invite the public to visit buildings that are normally closed. In Oxfordshire this year there are a number of places to visit on 14/15 September, with some in Oxford in the preceding days. The national site is [Search events \(heritageopendays.org.uk\)](http://Search%20events%20(heritageopendays.org.uk)) where you will find a map showing the locations that you can visit. There are also individual websites for Oxford ([What's on | Oxford Preservation Trust](http://What's%20on%20|%20Oxford%20Preservation%20Trust)) and Abingdon ([heritage festival programme \(abingdonheritage.org.uk\)](http://heritage%20festival%20programme%20(abingdonheritage.org.uk))).

Oxfordshire Buildings Forum

The next scheduled meeting of the Forum will be on Wednesday 25 September at 7.30pm. Please let me know (secretary@obr.org.uk) if you have a specific topic to

raise, so we can try to find an expert to help. The Zoom meeting link will be sent out nearer the time along with the topics about which we have been notified.

2024/5 OBR Lecture

This year's OBR lecture will be given by Kathy Davies in person at Rewley House on 5 November. Put the date in your diary. Her title is *Artisan Art in Oxfordshire – insights into early modern, everyday life*.



Figure 1 Design from the Painted Room, 3 Cornmarket Street, Oxford

Nearly all houses in the late 16th and early 17th century had some form of painted decoration on their walls, usually in big bold designs and often in strikingly bright colours. Looking at these in conjunction with other aspects of early modern life, we can gain some insight into what mattered to the people who lived in these houses, what they wanted to show off to their neighbours and how they lived their everyday life.

Victoria County History Volume XXI Chipping Norton

Volume XXI in the VCH Oxfordshire series (*Chipping Norton and Area, including Hook Norton and the Rollrights*) will be published in October, and is available to order with a 25% discount until 31 January 2025 (see below).



Figure 2 Chipping Norton in the mid 19th century, showing the striking Baroque frontages on the market place's upper side and (straight ahead) the new town hall of 1842, replacing an earlier market house.

Chipping Norton was laid out as a planned market town probably in the mid 12th century, and flourished in the Middle Ages through its involvement in the Cotswold wool trade. It later benefited from coaching, and in the 19th century the textile industry resurfaced in the form of the famous Bliss tweed mill, which continued in business until 1980. The volume also covers the surrounding villages of Hook Norton (known for its brewery and former ironstone workings), Over Norton, Great and Little Rollright (the latter famous for the prehistoric Rollright Stones), Salford, and Swerford.

The Buildings sections for Chipping Norton and Hook Norton draw on intensive investigations by the Chipping Norton Buildings Group (a sub-group of the OBR) and by the OBR itself, in conjunction with Hook Norton Museum and Local History Group. The area also contains some striking industrial architecture, notably the Bliss mill and Hook Norton Brewery, while Chipping Norton church (substantially remodelled in the mid 15th century) is amongst the finest of the Cotswolds' 'wool churches'. Other features include the earthworks of two motte-and-bailey castles, one at Chipping Norton itself and the other in Swerford, both of them adjoining the respective churches. As always with the VCH, the buildings are set into a wide context which encompasses landscape and settlement and the area's broader economic, social, and religious history.

The 403-page volume (ISBN 9781904356578) includes 109 maps and other illustrations and 4 pages of colour plates. **To order it at discount** (£71.25), go to <https://boydellandbrewer.com> (search VCH Chipping Norton) and enter offer code **BB003** at the checkout. Alternatively, phone 01243 843291 or email boydell.csd@wiley.com.

Saturday 16 November: Chipping Norton Day School – Archaeology, History and Buildings

To mark the volume's publication, the VCH has also jointly organized a day school with Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, to be held at Rewley House, Oxford, on Saturday 16 November. OBR Chairman Paul Clark will be speaking about Chipping Norton's (and Hook Norton's) buildings, the other speakers include the County Archaeologist Richard Oram and all four members of the VCH team.

For further information and to book, visit <https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk> (search Chipping Norton). Please note that ticketing and pricing is handled by OUDCE.

Simon Townley (County Editor, VCH Oxfordshire)

Other local events

20 October Thame History Fair

This will take place from 10-4 on Sunday 20 October in Thame Town Hall. See [Thame History Fair - Thame Museum](#) for details.

26 October 2024 Oxfordshire Family History Fair

This year's family history fair will take place on Saturday 26th October at The Cherwell School, North Site, Marston Road, Oxford, OX2 7EE. Doors open at 10:00 and close at 16:00. Entry is free and refreshments will be available. For details of the event including travel and a link to organisations who have already signed up please see the [OFHS website](#).

Letters to the editor

Member David Hibberd noticed in OR 98 the ironwork associated with the cycle park in Magdalen Street East and wrote to say, 'did you know, according to issue number one of *The Cyclist*, February 19th, 1936, it was 'the first municipal cycle park in the country'? A sub-heading to the article reads, 'Oxford Shows the Way with a New Enterprise', and what follows is a plea for the provision of more such parks for the convenience of the growing popularity, in the Thirties, of that mode of transport. The article concludes with the information that it was, 'supplied by Constrictors (sic) Ltd, of Birmingham, who specialise in cycle-storing equipment. Another of this company's parks, holding several thousand bicycles, is at the works of the Ford Motor Co., at Dagenham.'

And, continuing the archaeology of cycling theme, when some of us visited Yew Tree Cottage – the small house at Nuney Green in the course of demolition (see OR 98) – we noted a metal 'certificate' issued to Mrs Harper by the Cyclists' Touring Club (Fig. 3). David has looked thus up in the 1939 *Cyclists' Touring Club Handbook*. It says, 'Mrs Harper, of Nuney Green, Mapledurham was appointed as a CTC recommended farm house providing accommodation and refreshment for members. Prices were as follows: Single bedded room, 2/6, B&B 4/-, Tea 1/-, Lunch (cold) 1/6, Supper 1/6, Terms per day 6/-, Per week 35/-.' It is interesting to note a discount on the price of a room could be had if two persons shared a bed!



Figure 3 CTC Certificate

Recording activities in the summer

Yew Tree Cottage, Nuney Green

The CTC certificate takes us neatly to the latest news from Yew Tree Cottage.

Our investigation of the cottage at Nuney Green continued over the summer as demolition work progressed. In July we noted the only example of traditional carpentry in the building – four identical scarf joints in the front and rear wall-plates.



Figure 4 Wall-plate scarf joint II



Figure 5 Assembly mark and setting-out lines

The form of the joint (Fig. 4) was stop-splayed with under-squinted abutments held together by a loose tenon, the setting-out lines for which can be seen – lightly scratched on the upper face – in Fig 5. On the same face were assembly marks – II in Figs. 4 and 5 – made using a race knife. The loose tenon was hammered in through both parts from one of the edges. Fig. 6 shows the exposed end of one of these.



Figure 6 Shadow crossing end of loose tenon

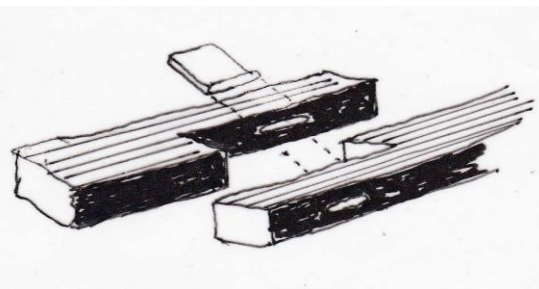


Figure 7 Exploded drawing of joint

Fig. 7 shows the joint in detail. It did not feature in Chris Currie's article on Oxfordshire scarfs.¹ The nearest we have noted is Cecil Hewett's no. 266 'edge-halved scarf with undersquinted abutments' (impaled with a tenon like 265, but similar in some ways to 259 and 260 which have 'keys'.)² There is also one in the stable of the King's Arms in Henley (1603) which is stop-splayed with squinted abutments and (probably) a peg holding it together. The Yew Tree Cottage joints do not have pegs – in a wall-plate they are not really needed.

So, unless someone knows of other examples, we have a hitherto unrecorded scarf joint, of uncertain date, though probably early nineteenth-century. This will probably be one of the topics for discussion at the next Forum, so if you can shed further light on it, do please join in on the 25th.

¹ Currie, C R J (1972) 'Scarf-joints in the North Berkshire and Oxford Area' *Oxoniensia* **37** pp.177-186

² Hewett, Cecil (1980) *English Historic Carpentry* pp. 267-8.

Schotten Antiques, Burford

When we recorded some of the buildings in Burford for the VCH paperback, *Buildings and people in a Cotswold town*, which was published in 2008, we examined, but did not ‘properly’ record this important timber-framed building (Fig. 8) in a key position in the town. We drew attention to its vaulted undercroft, and postulated that it might have served as a tavern (as in Oxford).³



Figure 8 109 High St, Burford



Figure 9 Dan Miles drilling a roof timber

What brought us back to Burford was some further work by Abigail Lloyd and Rebecca Lane (HE and VAG) on understanding the undercroft in the context of their work in Gloucester that Abigail spoke about in last year’s OBR lecture. They also made some observations of the timber frame, so OBR agreed to part-fund some tree-ring dating (with OAHs) in order to try to understand the building’s primary phase.

Dan Miles took some samples on 26 June (Fig. 9) which produced a felling date of Spring 1459, somewhat earlier than we had previously thought, and showed that the frame was all of one build. The Victoria County History will soon be returning to Burford for the last of its ‘big red books’ so these results will feed into their section on the built environment of the town.

The recording also drew attention to a doorway in the stone north wall of the building, raising the question of whether this connected with the building next door. There was, however, no evidence of shared ownership of these plots, so we concluded that it probably opened to a passageway, such as can be seen in many other Burford buildings.

Coincidentally, when the render was recently removed from the south gable wall of 30 East St Helen Street in Abingdon, a previously unknown doorway was exposed – behind the fibreboard sheets in Fig. 10. Although today it faces the driveway of the adjacent property, early documents refer to a ‘lane’ and a narrow passage is shown on an 1844 map (Fig. 11). This may have been the 1450 arrangement in Burford.

³ Catchpole, A, Clark, D and Peberdy, R (2008), *Burford: buildings and people in a Cotswold town*, pp. 58, 64, 70, 179.



Figure 10 South wall, 30 East St Helen Street 1844

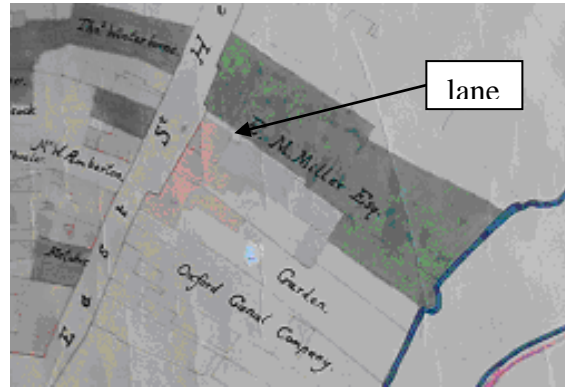


Figure 11 Narrow gap shown S of Miller's

Larkhill House, Abingdon

This house (Fig. 12) has a remarkable history. It was built in 1826 in the grounds of what is now Abingdon School. Its owner in c.1903, Mrs Rahmeh Chamberlain, a wealthy widow, wanted its site for a garden so she had it demolished and rebuilt a few hundred yards away on Faringdon Road.

I have been unable to find any contemporary account of what was done: is it a new house built using the materials from the old one, or is it a replica with all the original materials and features in the right place, or was the opportunity taken to modernise the new house during rebuilding? Or, indeed, had the house been modernised before it was moved?

It was clear that some features had been modernised – such as the door furniture – but one item was puzzling. The staircase (Fig. 13) has a ramped handrail – good for 1826 – but also square-section balusters, the like of which I have not seen before (or for that matter, illustrated in books of period features).



Figure 12 Larkhill House, Abingdon



Figure 13 Larkhill – staircase

And how were they made? I did not have a magnet with me to check whether they were made of cast iron – by far the simplest way to do this – but if they are wooden, could you turn them on a lathe then square them off? The staircase also ascends with identical balusters for all three floors – so no simpler ones for the servants in the attic – all suggesting that perhaps cost was not an issue.

Another topic for this month's Forum, perhaps?

Past Events

Oxfordshire Past (Bicester, 15 June)

The annual round-up of historical and archaeological reports included the usual updates from David Radford (city archaeologist), Simon Townley (VCH), Vicky Green (county council), and me (for OBR). Full reports of the archaeological work will doubtless appear in *Oxoniensia* and/or *South Midlands Archaeology* in due course. It will be interesting to see how some of the archaeological finds will be interpreted: for example it was reported that most of the burials in the C12/13 Jewish cemetery on the Magdalen College site were female.

There were three special talks related to work in the Bicester area – Steven Lawrence (OA) on the archaeology of Graven Hill, Lucy Lawrence (Bucks. CC) on recent finds near the HS2 line at Chetwode and Twyford – with a remarkable wooden figure 70cm tall found in a deep ditch at Three Bridge Mill – perhaps a deliberate deposition c. 45-60AD of a type sometimes found in France. Finally, Julian Munby presented the results of the various historical and archaeological work done on Bicester Priory over the years in the form of a comprehensive analysis of the site and its history. Let's hope he gets this published in due course.

John Steane obituary in The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/aug/12/john-steane-obituary>

Trees in England. Management and disease since 1600. Tom Williamson, Gerry Barnes and Toby Pillatt. University of Hertfordshire Press, 2017.

I don't often get the chance to say a book has changed the way I see the world. It's been 30 years since Oliver Rackham's *The History of the Countryside* [1986 Dent] opened my eyes to the palimpsest of agricultural changes that make up the landscape history all around us. Now *Trees in England* has done it again, describing the way changes in management have altered our treescape, particularly over the last 150 years. Contrary to popular perception, there are actually more trees in our landscape now than there have been for many hundreds of years. The driver for change is that their economic importance as fuel (wood) and building construction (timber) has waned. Thus, without a financial return, the imperative of tree management has drastically reduced, to be replaced with amenity, environmental and aesthetic values.

The authors, Williamson, Barnes and Pillatt, describe the ways in which trees were actively managed. They distinguish three main situations – forest, hedgerow and wood pasture – each with a different cropping scheme but emphatically regarded as an economic resource. Forest understorey was coppiced on a 15 – 20 year cycle, harvesting for hurdles and fencing, firewood and charcoal, and increasingly for industrial fuel, though always as a renewable resource, not ravaged to destruction. Hedgerow trees, of which there were many more than at present, were almost universally pollarded well above the browsing line, and allowed to re-grow on a cycle that fitted local needs. These were the trees which provided the long straight poles

that we see in historic roofs as rafters, often with bark still *in situ*, recorded as ‘hedge pole rafters’. Wood pasture was a form of timber and wood production that we do not encounter in the modern landscape other than in parkland, again the trees were pollarded, combined with livestock grazing. The intensive management meant that timber was harvested young, rarely over 60 years old. Maybe our dendrochronologist friends could comment on this:- what is the average felling age that is encountered in historic buildings?⁴ Interestingly, the authors consider there were never many more veteran trees than there are now, and in the same places – parks and gardens of the wealthy who could afford to forgo an economic crop.



Figure 14 An isolated oak tree, a survivor of wood pasture, much lopped in the past, then abandoned.

The authors then go on to describe the decline in wood and timber production forced by economic and social changes, the timing varying around the country, influenced by the industrial revolutions, agricultural revolutions, enclosures, developing transport systems, the rise and fall of the landed gentry. Coal replaced wood as the fuel of choice, eventually reaching all areas as the canal and rail networks spread, leaving both the coppiced woodland and pollarded hedgerow trees unmanaged as the market for their produce decreased. One result was the almost total loss of wood pasture, other than in a few private parklands. What we now recognise as parkland with individual and clumps of trees was previously a widespread landscape feature. I’m pretty sure that our childhood drawings of an archetypal tree with a long bare trunk and a set of branches all radiating from the same crown point are vestiges of neglected pollard trees; formerly, these branches would have been lopped off as a crop for construction, fencing and fuel. Such regenerated pollards are still visible in the landscape, even though this is not the natural form that trees would take.

With the decline in management, by the 20th C farmers started to resent the overgrown hedgerow pollards taking the goodness from their crops, and a high proportion were

⁴ Editor’s comment. See Nat Alcock and Dan Miles, *The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England* (Oxbow, 2013): ‘trees were generally chosen to be of the smallest size necessary for their particular function’ (p. 14), and for most of the houses studied, the number of tree rings is given - at Mill Farm, Mapledurham they range from 24 to 83.

grubbed up. At the same time, the Forestry Commission was given leave to replant large areas of derelict borderline land that had previously been intensively used for grazing before the import of American and Australian meat swamped the home market. Again, this destroyed a recognisably man-made habitat of heath and wood pasture. Earlier, the influx of cheaper timber from the Baltic States and the North American continent had destroyed the home market for construction materials, A few local niche markets hung on, e.g. pit props, hop poles.

These days we stress a lot about the apparent increase in pests and diseases. Our authors are of the opinion that these have always been around, but sickly trees would be immediately felled whilst the timber was still useable, and new young plantings made. Thus pests and disease were contained and rarely reached epidemic proportions. Without a routine management policy, much of our current tree population is ageing, more susceptible to pests and diseases. There are some younger and maturing plantings; the ones I notice most are along modern through roads, where some good varied plantings show potential.

Considering the future, the authors are gently sceptical about the current vogue for re-wilding, given that the landscape proponents are trying to reproduce what is in fact the result of centuries of human selection pressures. Even the understorey in ‘ancient’ woodland has been drastically reduced in species range. Thus they doubt that Nature will produce the kind of forest landscape which the re-wilders think of as wildwood. They stress that the species found in woods and hedgerow is highly selected for economic reasons, dominated for millennia by oak, ash and elm. They encourage more diverse planting to avoid such modern catastrophes as Dutch elm disease and ash chalara. They also point out that previously there were large numbers of fruit trees incorporated into hedges, a feature I for one would love to see reinstated.

Heather Horner

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, September 2024 \(mailchi.mp\)](#) after 7am on 1 September.

Mills Archive Book Sale

If you are interested in mills and milling, then visit the website of the Mills Archive Trust to see what's on offer in their current book sale.

[Books – The Mills Archive](#)

Oxfordshire Family History Society

The OFHS are about to release their latest initiative, a searchable database of Oxfordshire names. Take a look at [Oxfordshire FHS - Launch of Big Oxfordshire Names Database BOND \(mailchi.mp\)](#) to see what it does. Particularly impressive is

that their 'sounds like' function has been created using their knowledge of Oxfordshire dialects.

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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