The OXON RECORDER



The Newsletter of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record

Issue 100 December 2024

.

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

Contents

Secretary's note
Upcoming Events
Buildings Forum 25 September
Presentation Day 24 November

OLHA Newsletter
OBR Bursaries
Contact details

Secretary's note

A 'proper' newsletter editor would have commissioned special articles for our 100th edition. Please let me know if you are interested.

David Clark

Buildings Forum in 2025

Our plan for 2025 is to have a programme of four meetings of the Forum, provisionally on the following dates (Wednesdays at 7.30pm):
5 February
9 April
16 July
8 October

Zoom links will be sent out to OBR members via Mailchimp nearer the time, but we hope to widen participation (and perhaps attract new members) by publicising them via other organisations. If you know people who might be interested, please give them these dates and pass on the meeting link when it appears.

Any building-related topic can be raised – a new discovery, a puzzling find – a question. It's informal, though if you give us advance notice we may be able to invite

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

an expert on the subject to help out. Some participants show images illustrating the topic they wish to discuss, and use the 'share screen' function in Zoom to do this.

Building dates in North Newington

I am told that there are some houses in North Newington with date-stones on them. If anyone lives nearby, it would be great if you could record them for the database, please – the format and instructions can be found on our website.

Oxfordshire Buildings Forum 25 September

A wide range of topics featured in the Forum meeting on 25 September. I thought these two were particularly worth recording here. (It is our policy not to make recordings of the forum meetings, in order that discussion can be free-ranging and not inhibited by the thought that off-the-cuff comments and questions would be available for all to see.)

Air Raid shelters

The recent discovery of a large air raid shelter in the grounds of Bignell House in Chesterton triggered a discussion at the last forum meeting of the significance of these structures, and whether enough was in place to ensure that their history was known and important examples were recorded or preserved.

Joyce Christie, the Cherwell Conservation Officer, writes, 'The Bignell example is a sizeable subterranean chamber with a brick barrel vault in the garden of Chestnut Cottage (formerly the laundry and maid's accommodation) near the boundary wall with the main road, within the grounds of Bignell House. The shelter is much bigger than average and was likely built for Bignell House as a private shelter. There are ghosts for brick piers around the perimeter which may have supported a bench for sitting and sleeping. It has a central drain and some ventilation holes. It is in very poor condition.'



Figure 1 Bignell House shelter – interior



Figure 2 Entranceway to Bignell House shelter

Although interest in WW2 structures and history continues to be researched as first-hand memories fade, there is clearly much to be done to understand more fully the

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

remaining evidence for air raid shelters. The broad background is well-known and readily available online, for example at Battle of Britain WW2 | Air Raid Shelters | RAF Museum. This describes the main types of shelter – the out-door Anderson, set into the garden and covered with earth, the indoor Morrison, a prefabricated box, and then the various types of communal shelter, some erected in streets, but others were in existing buildings where cellars were adapted as shelters. In London, the underground stations were popular locations.

Listed Air Raid Shelters

For a building type that was ubiquitous 80 years ago, there is very little protection for the surviving examples. The NHLE list has 52 buildings that purport to be identifiable under their 'air raid shelter' search criteria, and as far as I can see, none are Andersons, and most are parts of other buildings, for example,

Wrencote, Croydon (Grade II*) Wrencote, Non Civil Parish - 1079291 | Historic England was a 'public shelter' in WW2, but nothing in the description indicates whether any fabric in the building survives as evidence of this use.

Friern Barnet Town Hall FORMER FRIERN BARNET TOWN HALL, Non Civil Parish - 1360822 | Historic England. The building dates from 1939, and when it opened it was used as a shelter for up to 600 people. Nothing in the description indicates whether any fabric in the building survives as evidence of this use.

PART OF FORMER HOUSE OF DETENTION, BELOW KINGSWAY COLLEGE CLERKENWELL CENTRE, Non Civil Parish - 1025279 | Historic England

This is the basement of a prison building of 1845-7, used as a shelter during WW2.

Oxfordshire has only one listed example, in Cherwell:

BUILDING NO 23 AND 25 (TYPE H BARRACKS BLOCK), Caversfield - 1393030 | Historic England



Figure 3 Anderson shelter, Woodstock Road



Figure 4 Shelter from Southampton at Hill End

OBR did record one Anderson shelter (Fig. 3), in the garden of 255 Woodstock Road, Oxford, almost 25 years ago, and I imagine it has been removed since then. You can view the report in the Member Area at 9.-WW2-Bomb-shelter-255-Woodstock-Road-

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

Oxford-revised.pdf (obr.org.uk). And just the other day the Secretary came across one at Hill End, on the Wytham estate just outside Oxford that had been brought there from Southampton as a shelter for this children's outdoor centre (Fig. 4).

If any OBR members would like to follow this up – and there is an article for one of the local historical journals waiting to be written, I think – then please contact secretary@obr.org.uk for further information and suggestions for what we might do. One place you might look at to start with is Home – Subterranea Britannica.

Making clotted cream at home

Nick Wright showed some images of an intriguing object in a former farmhouse in Worcestershire on an estate once owned by Evesham Abbey. This was a stone bowl-like feature situated within the fireplace, but with a hole right through it! Heather Horner immediately identified this as the support for a metal bowl in which milk was heated in the process of making clotted cream – or perhaps some other dairy product. Even those of us who have trailed round farmhouses galore on VAG conferences and in recording Oxfordshire buildings had never seen such an object, so either they were generally removed when no longer needed, or they were specific local features – for example Devon and Cornwall are particularly noted for making clotted cream.

2024/5 OBR Lecture Kathy Davies on *Artisan Art in Oxfordshire – insights into early modern, everyday life.*

This year's OBR lecture was given by Kathy Davies at Rewley House on 5 November.



Figure 5 Design from the Painted Room, 3 Cornmarket Street, Oxford

As smoky open halls gave way to rooms with enclosed fireplaces in the late 16th and early 17th century, people were able to decorate their houses with a degree of certainly that the design would be visible for a few years at least. These wall-paintings usually had big bold designs and were often in strikingly bright colours. Kathy wrote about examples of these in her book, *Artisan Art: vernacular wall paintings in the Welsh Marches, 1550-1650* (recently re-issued in a second edition), but in her OBR lecture, concentrated on Oxfordshire evidence to illustrate her thesis that looking at these in conjunction with other aspects of early modern life, we can gain some insight

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

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.

This is a challenging topic. What at one time may have been ubiquitous now survives in only a few, often fragmentary, examples, about which there is very little documentary evidence. Nevertheless, Kathy's collection of known examples – a few hundred of which are illustrated in her book – shows some common features that suggest ways in which they can be interpreted. The incorporation of religious texts and symbols, for example, may point to the presence of a 'godly household', sometimes (as at 3 Cornmarket, Oxford, which was, as the Crown Tavern, where William Shakespeare stayed when visiting Oxford) reflecting the turbulent nature of the times as Latin (Catholic) symbolism, such as IHC or IHS initials are painted over in favour of full-size patterns with religious texts in Protestant English featured in the frieze.

A few wall-paintings incorporate a date, while others can be quite closely dated using clues such as Royal coats of arms (Fig. 6) or clothing fashions. One popular style in the early part of her period was 'antique work' such as can be seen at the Golden Cross in Oxford (Fig. 7). This comprises grotesques, pillars and arabesques with foliage and heads, in white on a black ground, and dates from 1550-60. The design was probably copied from one of the many pattern-books available at this time, or from the frontispiece of a book such as Shute's *The First and Chief Grounds of Architecture*, published in London in 1563.



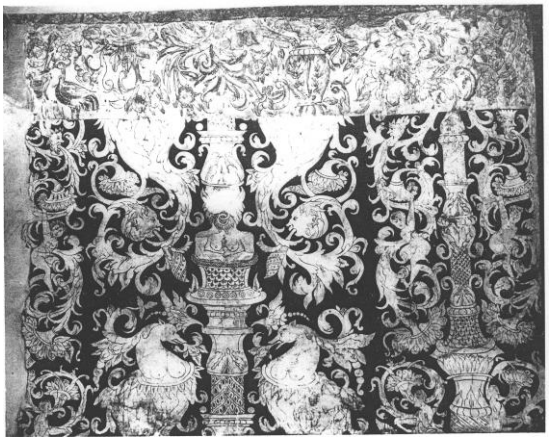


Figure 6 Charles I arms (1632) Red Lion, Henley. Figure 7 Golden Cross (Pantin & Rouse, 1955)

In towns there are sometimes opportunities to link particular paintings with specific occupants, as in the Golden Cross where in the westernmost first floor room the monogram PVA in the circle over the fireplace relates to Pierce and Anne Underhill who leased the Cross Inn here between 1595 and 1604.

Some insight into the early-modern mindset is possible where it is clear whether the painting is in a reception room (and hence would be seen by visitors) or in a private space such as a bedroom or parlour. The choice of subject may also be significant, portraying favourite scenes or animals and plants which may have meant something to the owner – or they may simply have been the fashionable design of the moment.

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

Some Oxfordshire wall-paintings are in buildings that are open to the public (those marked * need an appointment or visit on a Heritage Open day: Do try to visit these and see the paintings for yourself – noting their context and try to work out what they might mean.

1. Pizza Express, Golden Cross, Cornmarket, Oxford (1550s, 1595 ...). Pantin, W A & Rouse, E Clive (1955) 'The Golden Cross' in *Oxoniensia*, **XX** pp.46-89; Steane, John (1987) 'Golden Cross, Cornmarket' in *South Midlands Archaeology* vol.17 pp. 56-61; OBR report no. 355.
2. 3 Cornmarket Street (Painted Room) Oxford Preservation Trust.* (https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/painted-room)
3. 28 Cornmarket Street (Prêt a Manger) – fragment. Munby, Julian et al (1993) "Zacharias's: a 14th Century Oxford New Inn and the origins of the Medieval Urban Inn" *Oxoniensia* **LVII** pp. 245-310 (pp. 290-4)
4. Long Gallery, Abingdon Abbey (post-Reformation domestic painting, Fig. 8, made when the eastern bays were converted to domestic use by William Blacknall, the miller who had acquire the abbey outbuildings after the Dissolution) https://www.abingdonabbeybuildings.co.uk/history/



Figure 8 Painting on plaster in Long Gallery, Abingdon

5. 26A East St Helen Street, Abingdon (Oxford Preservation Trust)* East St Helen Street, Abingdon | Oxford Preservation Trust

6. Thame museum https://thamemuseum.org/elizabethan-wall-paintings-gallery

Others that can sometimes be open on Heritage Weekends include

1. Red Lion, Henley (https://www.therelaisretreats.com/henley/the-relais/history)
2. 118 High Street, Oxford (first floor office)
3. 128 High Street, Oxford (ground floor office)

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

Victoria County History Volume XXI Chipping Norton

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



Figure 9 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 'wool churches' in the Cotswolds. 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.

Simon Townley (County Editor, VCH Oxfordshire)

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

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

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

Sunday 24 November OBR Presentation Day at Sutton Courtenay

Perhaps attracted by the imposing venue of the 'Abbey' almost 40 members gathered in the Great Hall for refreshments, and then split into two groups, one braving Storm Bert for a short walk around the village, while the other was able to remain dry while exploring some parts of the building.



Figure 10 Sutton Courtenay Abbey, west elev.



Figure 11 Norman Hall, Sutton Courtenay

Sutton Courtenay lies on the Berkshire bank of the Thames a short distance from Abingdon, for which it was probably named its 'south ton'. It has early origins – nearby was one of the largest Saxon halls in England, possibly Royal. Of course nothing remains of this above ground, and even most of the important standing buildings in the village are hidden from public view – including the Abbey (Fig. 10) – which isn't an abbey but was a grange of Abingdon Abbey and later the rectory house. The church of All Saints has some early work – though the west doorway is imitation Norman, the window above is the real thing.

Across the road from the church, the Norman Hall (Fig. 11) is hidden away behind a stone wall, but its hall range (c. 1190) has a good late twelfth-century doorway. It is an aisle-less ground floor building, and so stands apart from other stone buildings of the period with are mostly either aisled or chamber-blocks to timber-framed halls. It seems at one time to have been a chapel – and this may have been its original purpose.

The other important medieval house is the Manor, also hidden from sight, but on the road-side, however, Manor Cottage is an interesting vernacular structure (Fig. 12) comprising a cruck-framed open hall of 1317-18 parallel to the street and a contemporary cross-wing with a crown-post roof at right angles to it. This house is described at Microsoft Word - SUC-A_P2.DOC and in Nat Alcock and Dan Miles (2013) *The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England*. Note that the house John Steane and James Ayres confusingly called Manor Cottage in *Traditional Buildings in the Oxford Region* (2013) is a converted structure close to the Manor House.

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024



Figure 12 Manor Cottage



Figure 13 Elderfield's Almshouses

What can be seen in this part of the village is a rewarding streetscape of houses of a range of periods and styles, yet where nothing jars: it is this aspect of English villages that gives them their character which is cherished by residents and visitors. And this is what we appreciated on the rest of the walk. As well as a row of 1820 almshouses (Fig. 13), we would – if the weather had been better – seen some grand eighteenth-century houses, a timber-framed (and dated) house of 1631, a Victorian school, and an early twentieth-century Congregational Church. All these buildings and more are described in more detail in the Berkshire volume of the Buildings of England (Tyack, Bradley and Pevsner, 2010).

After lunch we started the presentations with an overview from Kathy Davies of the recent research on the Abbey – Dan Miles had dated the hall timbers to 1334/5, thereby providing a firm base from which to try to identify earlier work (perhaps indicated by thicker stone walls) and the later phases. Our intention is to build on this through further recording days to which members will be invited – and the results will feed into a report on the development of the house that will be used to inform its conservation needs and guide its future evolution.

Nick Wright then summarised the main features of the roof structures, suggesting that the crown-post roof of the north range (Fig. 14) was contemporary with that of the hall and made by the same carpenter, though of a somewhat inferior quality. There were smoke-blackened timbers in the south range and in the end bay of the east range.

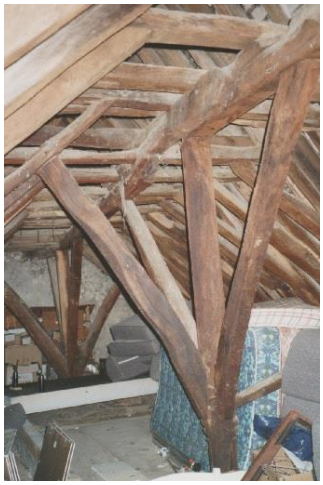


Figure 14 North range crown-post



Figure 15 Panelling in Great Hall

The Secretary then described some of the fixtures and fittings, including the panelling in the Great Hall (Fig. 15) which, while likely to be seventeenth-century, was not in

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

situ, was perhaps continental, and which seemed to have been bought 'by the yard' and installed by the late nineteenth-century owner, Theobald Theobald.

Chairman Paul Clark then summarised the findings at the Iron Buildings at Sarsden in West Oxfordshire. These innovative structures of ca. 1834 seem to pre-date later roof developments and could be very significant in the history of structural ironwork. There were three buildings, each of which had a slightly different form of wrought iron roof structure, the details showing how their makers had developed the technology, culminating in the Polonceau roof trusses in the threshing barn (Fig. 16). These were named after their French 'inventor', though the Sarsden examples were 5 years earlier!

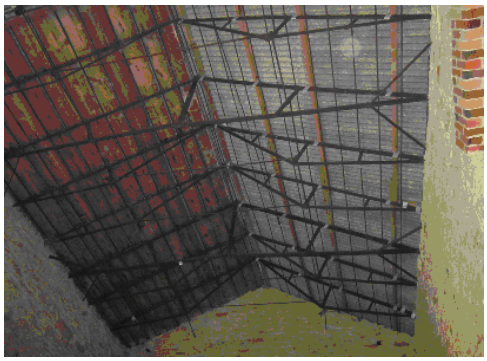


Figure 16 Polonceau roof trusses in threshing barn



Figure 17 14 Park Crescent, Abingdon

We than heard from Nick Wright some of his findings about the work of two architects working in Abingdon, Edwin Dolby and J H Woodman. Most of their buildings were houses around Albert Park, and his aim was to expose a number of mis-attributions that he had uncovered. Starting with Dolby's own house, 14 Park Crescent (1868, Fig. 17) he was able to show which features characteristic of Dolby's work (such as the distinctive window arches) appeared in other houses. In contrast, Woodman's houses were quite different, and his ensemble of church, school and linking buildings at Trinity Church, Conduit Road showed him also to be a church architect of great flair.



Figure 18 Saunders boathouse, Goring



Figure 19 Yew Tree cottage, Nuney Green

The Secretary then wound up the afternoon with a short report on Samuel Saunders' boathouse in Goring (Fig. 18), now empty with an uncertain future, and the sad case of Yew Tree Cottage, Nuney Green (in Mapledurham) recorded during its demolition (Fig. 19).

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024

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 2024 after 7am on 1 December.

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)

Website: www.obr.org.uk

© Oxfordshire Buildings Record and contributors 2024