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

Congratulations to member Catherine Hitchens on the BEM awarded to her in the New Year Honours for services to the community in Fifield.

OBR celebrates its twenty-fifth birthday in 2025. We have quite a lot to celebrate – some 530 completed building survey reports, loyal membership support of around 200 people, and an ongoing programme of depositing reports in the Oxfordshire History Centre, with extracts published in Oxoniensia and South Midlands Archaeology. But our AGM this year – initial details below – signals a need for change, as our three officers – Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer – have each expressed a wish to retire. We are doing our best to streamline what we do, and how we do it, and committee membership is not particularly time-consuming, but we do now need some more volunteers, so please let me know if you are interested.

David Clark

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2025 AGM

The 2025 Annual General Meeting will be held this year in the opulent surroundings of the Roysse Room in Abingdon Guildhall on Saturday 17 May. Please put the date in your diary. The Agenda and detailed programme will be circulated at the end of March, and will include a buffet lunch and walk to explore historic sites in Abingdon.

Buildings Forum

The next meeting of the Forum will be on Wednesday 9 April, at 7.30pm via Zoom. Please let me know if you have any particular topic to raise.

Zoom links will be sent out to OBR members via Mailchimp nearer the time, and we are keen 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 the date 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 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.

Oxfordshire Buildings Forum 5 February

Detached Kitchens in Oxfordshire was the main topic at this meeting of the Forum. It was great to welcome 25 attendees. For those unable to attend, this is a brief summary of the discussion.

We began with a short introduction to the subject. The ever-present danger of fire in an (often) timber-framed medieval hall-house meant that those who could afford it built a separate kitchen, usually somewhere near the 'service end' of the house. While high status examples have survived virtually intact – in Oxfordshire, Stanton Harcourt and a number of college kitchens in Oxford – most humbler examples have now been lost or incorporated into the main structure or repurposed for other uses.



Figure 1 Stanton Harcourt C14 kitchen



Figure 2 Lincoln College kitchen roof (1436-7)

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Members of OBR have, over the years, identified a number of candidates for former detached kitchens. The current list is as follows:

Burford: Dove Cottage
Caswell: 'granary' at Caswell Farm (OBR.29)
Dorchester: Willoughby House (OBR. 95); c. 1550
Outbuilding at Cranmer Cottage (OBR.42)
9 Rotten Row
13 Rotten Row
East Hagbourne: Sundial Cottage (OBR.64)
Hornton Manor (Wood-Jones pp. 282 and Pl. 16c.)
Newnham Murren: 'Cottage' at farmhouse
Roke: Russetts, 1468

There was also probably one at Church End Farm, South Leigh, accessed via a covered passage (Fig.3) – by analogy with that at Landmark's Gurney Manor in Somerset (see https://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/search-and-book/properties/gurney-manor-8189/#Overview). Part of the south range of Sutton Courtenay Abbey (Fig. 4) may also have been a kitchen, later attached. The kitchen at Shutford Manor was attached only at one corner (see Wood-Jones pp. 73-4) The VCH team had also identified documentary evidence for one at the rectory house in Kiddington.



Figure 3 South Leigh, Church Farm (Heather)



Figure 4 Sutton Courtenay Abbey (S Range)

There is clearly a project here for someone to pick up, as definitive identification can be difficult. In some cases it can be just a 'feeling' that a structure does not look quite right to be a domestic building – small size, lack of ground floor windows, odd roof structure. Occasionally, inventories and other documents may help.

For those wishing to investigate the topic further, articles by David and Barbara Martin in Vernacular Architecture 28 (1997) on Detached Kitchens in Eastern Sussex – which produced an alternative view from J T Smith in VA32 (2001) – and by John Broad (Making sense of Detached Kitchens; the implications of documentary evidence from seventeenth-century Wiltshire, in VA46, 2015). John's article contains illustrations of the kitchen at Willoughby House, Dorchester, but the discussion is based on records from the Earl of Pembroke's estates in Wiltshire. His conclusion was that – as in Sussex – these buildings were likely to have been common, even at lower status social levels. It also seems to be the case that there are regional variations in the size and style of such kitchens.

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Vernacular Architecture Group Conference 4-5 January 2025

Pioneers in vernacular architecture: examining the legacy of *English Vernacular Houses*, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* and other early scholars,

2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of two seminal works in vernacular architectural studies – Eric Mercer's 'English Vernacular Houses' and Peter Smith's 'Houses of the Welsh Countryside', which were both published in 1975. This year's conference discussed the genesis of these books, and a number of other locally-focussed studies by others, many working on their own without the resources of national bodies.

The conference opened with two papers on the Welsh experience – in effect the origin of the study (and rescue) of vernacular houses in the UK. Observing the erosion of 'folk life' in Scandinavia, and the creation there of open-air museums, initially to display traditional artefacts and clothing in an authentic setting, there were a number of people who felt that this was also happening in Wales, and that something should be done about it. The first paper was given by Eurwyn Wiliam, formerly keeper of the National Museum of Wales. He looked at some of the early studies of Welsh houses, starting, as in England, with illustrations of the picturesque. By the 1880s, however, the losses of traditional buildings had become serious and the publication of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales* in 1896 with an extensive section on farmhouses by Sir Daniel Lleufer Thomas was seminal in setting out an initial typology for the different types of buildings that we now call longhouses.

This work continued into the 1930s with Sir Cyril Fox's book, *The Personality of Britain*, (1932) and in Iorwerth Peate's *The Welsh House*, first published in 1940. These, said Wiliam, were of their time: they espoused geographical determinism, yet Peate abhorred distribution maps, '...such maps would not only be useless for the purpose intended, but might be very misleading unless every example in existence of the various types were marked on each map…' Someone later said that looking at a world distribution map of railways could be interpreted as proving that they originated in Russia! The plans in his book show no straight-joints, and he was not interested in dating or phasing them.

By the 1950s, however, Fox, with Lord Raglan, published *Monmouthshire Houses*, a three-volume study based on the detailed recording of 470 houses. This, in focussing on a specific county, and looking at developments from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, took the subject to a different level. They also addressed some of the 'why?' questions, and their study pre-dates W G Hoskins' analysis of the economic basis of the 'great rebuilding'.



Figure 5 Snowdonia farmhouse (VAG conference 2005)

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Finally, in 1963 appeared the first of seven parts of an extensive study of the *Houses of Breconshire*, by Stanley Jones and J T Smith, all published in the local historical journal, Brycheiniog.

Richard Suggett, formerly senior architectural investigator with the Welsh Royal Commission, then talked about Peter Smith, his book, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*, and its legacy. Peter was born in County Durham in 1926 and read modern history at Oxford before joining the Royal Commission in 1949. By 1975 he had recorded 7000 buildings – enough to justify the distribution maps that are the basis of the book. A larger second edition was produced in 1988, three years before his retirement. He died in Devon in 2013. Peter always began recording by drawing the ground plan, moving on to the details only when he had grasped what was going on. He would not be drawn to quick conclusions – asked the date of a building I heard him once say, 'Let the fox see the rabbit'. The survival and restoration of rural Welsh houses (occasionally by moving them to St Fagan's) owes much to Peter's books, and Richard took the torch forward into the twenty-first century with further regional studies, for example of Snowdonia and Radnorshire.

Sarah Pearson: Eric Mercer and *English Vernacular Houses*.

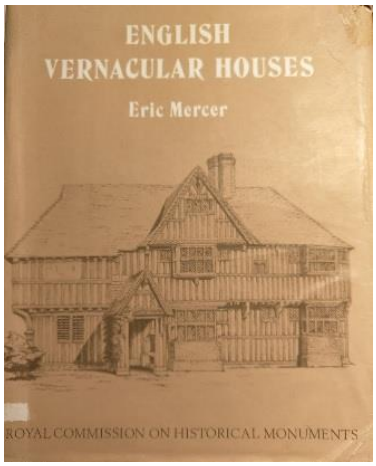


Figure 6 Mercer's 1975 book

William Eric John Barbour-Mercer was born in Chipping Norton on 31 May 1918. He read History at Cambridge, graduating in 1939 with a double first. After the war he joined the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments of England, retiring as its deputy secretary in 1981; he died at Shrewsbury in September 2001. There are touching personal memories of him in the VAG Newsletter (No. 42) of January 2002. Sarah joined the Royal Commission in 1969 and soon found herself working with Eric on his major book. He wrote touchingly about her contribution in its acknowledgements, 'To Miss Sarah Pearson, who has assisted me for the last five years, I owe as much as to anyone. She has been the most candid and persistent of critics, the most tireless of workers, and the most helpful of colleagues, and she is responsible for everything in Chapter VIII except its faults.' In her conference paper, Sarah played down her contribution, but supplied some valuable insights about the man and the ideas that shaped his interpretations of the buildings described in *English Vernacular Houses*.

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Adrian Green: Does Mercer's account of housing change in England still stack up?

Eric Mercer's view of how vernacular buildings developed over time was that of a social historian with a Marxist world-view, for example regarding the open hall as a 'gentry ideal'. The emergence of the lobby-entry house would change the way people used their houses, losing the medieval distinction between 'high' and 'low' ends, which he regarded as reflecting the breakdown of the old social order. Yet, Adrian said that Mercer had little to say about gendered spaces or about the role that might have been played by the craftsmen. He also eschewed distribution maps.

Heather Horner contributed the following comment about the influence of 1950s politics in the early days of the VAG.

This year's conference introduced us to some of the personnel involved in the early discussions to set up a national organisation which became the VAG. I was intrigued to hear that the strongly felt politics of the day had to be carefully circumvented in conversations and minute-taking. I recall that this undercurrent was close to the surface in many aspects of everyday life, in a way that is not nearly so evident in the modern day. Post-war communism and fascism were polar opposites, and everyone was expected to take sides. My personal family circle had strong views that a communistic democracy was a much fairer way of giving everyone equal status, It seemed to us that fascists wanted to *tell* everyone what was good for them, rather than allow free choice. In the end, of course, both doctrines have proved themselves open to abuse. Nevertheless, politics influenced and shaped the strong characters who were pioneers of building recording in the third quarter of the 20th century.

[In a real sense, the study of vernacular architecture was a reaction to the obsession of architectural historians with named architects of elite buildings, and it is not surprising that those who felt that the houses of 'the common people' had been neglected, yet had much to say about building techniques and earlier ways of life. *Ed.*]

Nat Alcock: The VAG: the early decades

The first meeting of what was to become the VAG was held in Shaftesbury in May 1952, which concentrated on the definition of a cruck. The Group was formally established the following year and held its first AGM in London in 1954. J T Smith was elected Librarian, and Peter Smith, Editor. In 1955 the second AGM was held in Oxford; Peter Spokes was President. Spokes toured North Berkshire (as it then was) recording buildings that might be considered for the first official lists of 'buildings of architectural or historical interest'. He was also involved in local politics and was Lord Mayor of Oxford 1968/9. See more at Lord Mayors of Oxford, 1962 to today. His daughter, Anne Spokes Symonds, also a Lord Mayor, wrote a short biography of him. The record of this AGM does not survive, nor the list of buildings 'in and around Oxford' that they visited. Spokes wrote a valuable article on the houses of Abingdon – 'Some notes on the domestic architecture of Abingdon, Berkshire' – published in the Berkshire Archaeological Journal (Vol 58-61, 1960/64) and a similar article on Wallingford. (see also OR 87).

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Nat also drew attention to the collection of date-stones as an early VAG project. By 1969, 1250 had been collected, a third of them by someone trawling the Listed Buildings of Gloucestershire. This indicated that the collection of sufficient examples to allow valid conclusions to be drawn as to distributions over time would be an enormous task, so the project was abandoned. Let's hope our more focussed county project can fill a small gap in the overall picture.

Duncan James: Madge Moran and the buildings of Shropshire.

Kathy Davies writes: The conference provided a useful reminder of the amazing debt we owe to former VAG members who were pioneers in their field, and especially the non-professionals who were unpaid but produced remarkable work. Duncan James talked about Madge Moran and her work in Shropshire. I owe a special debt to Madge who was extremely generous in sharing her work and I benefitted hugely from this. I was working in building conservation in Shropshire at the time and also researching domestic wall paintings, of which there are many examples in Shropshire. At the time there was no published work on vernacular buildings specific to the county and Madge shared much of her knowledge with me.

Madge had attended evening classes in vernacular architecture run by Jim Tonkin, another early member of VAG and former president, and she was inspired by him to carry on this work, essentially for the rest of her life. Working in Shropshire, she had plenty of wonderful buildings to feed her passion. The county is characterised largely by timber-framed buildings, though there is some stone, notably the outcrop of Grinshill stone which runs from north the south through the county. It is also characterised by a high survival of early buildings.

Madge made good use of J.T.Smith's MA dissertation of 1953 at Birmingham University (*Shrewsbury's Topography and Domestic Buildings*) on the vernacular buildings of Shrewsbury but otherwise, she did all the research from scratch. With plenty of buildings to survey, Madge ran her own evening classes for recording vernacular buildings and, with the Whitchurch group, published an account of these buildings in the Whitchurch area in 1999. However, she is best known for her exhaustive survey of Shropshire buildings which resulted in the *Vernacular Buildings of Shropshire* (Fig. 7). Here she analyses vernacular buildings of all types, materials, dates and detailing with superb illustrations including her extensive and comprehensive drawings.

One pioneering, and extremely important aspect of her work, was setting up the Shropshire dendrochronlogy project, with Dan Miles undertaking the work. Raising the funding for this and drafting in the help as needed, was no mean feat and it is a huge credit to her and those working with her, that so much has been achieved. In all, 186 dates were achieved yielding valuable information on the typical dates for Shropshire buildings.

Her acute observation, meticulous drawing and deep understanding of Shropshire's buildings underpinned her work. Her determination to capture all this information and interpret it and to secure the funding for the dendro project was extraordinary. She warrants all the worthy tributes given in Duncan's excellent talk.

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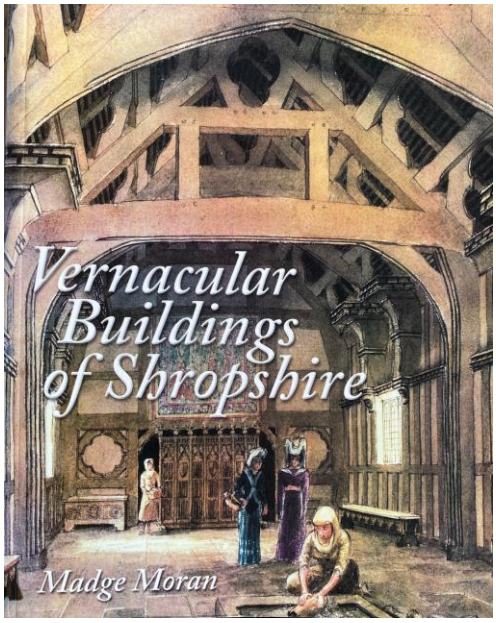


Figure 7 The cover of Madge's great book



Figure 8 Chris (to right of left-hand column) with VAG members waiting for a train in Ffestiniog (2005)

Peter Thornborrow: Christopher F Stell: A pioneering study of the vernacular buildings of the Upper Calder Valley (1955-60)

While most people will remember Chris Stell (1929-2014) for his four-volume *Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in England* published between 1986 and 2002, Peter reminded members that his 1960 thesis was on Pennine communities and one of his earliest publications (in 1965) was on Pennine houses (Pennine Houses: An Introduction). Indeed it was while working on Yorkshire houses that Peter got to know Chris, and his talk was a fond memoir of those days – and their findings.

Joe Thompson: R T Mason, a pioneer of understanding the timber-frame buildings of the Weald

Reginald Thomas Mason (c. 1900 – 1980) is probably not well-known outside his 'patch' of south-east England, in particular the Weald of Kent and Sussex, where he began publishing his findings in local journals in 1937-8. In 1939 he surveyed the houses of East Grinstead and after the war turned his attention to rural houses. The book for which he is best known, *Framed Buildings of the Weald*, was first published (privately) in 1964, with a second edition in 1969. It was designed to be 'accessible' for the interested reader, particularly those who owned a timber-framed house. Thus there is plenty of useful information on plan forms, carpentry details, and other features. But he also argued for two phases of rebuilding, one in the 15th century when the 'Wealden' house with its distinctive recessed hall starts to appear – and the later early-modern period which became known as the 'great rebuilding'. Joe ended by reporting that many of Mason's house dates have been confirmed by dendrochronology.

For a cameo of Mason's involvement in one of the buildings re-erected at the Weald and Downland museum, see David Martin's article on p. 4 of the Museum's

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newsletter of Autumn 2012 at: https://www.wealddown.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2012-WDOAM-Magazine-%E2%80%93-Autumn.pdf

New Insights into 16th and 17th century British Architecture.

January was popular for architectural history conferences, and a few days after the VAG, a few of the same people met up again in London with their 'polite' colleagues for the fifteenth edition of the popular conference on New Insights into 16th and 17th century British Architecture, held at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House on 18 January 2025 and organised by Dr Olivia Horsfall Turner and Dr Jenny Saunt. For further information on past and future conferences, visit www.newinsightsconference.co.uk

Presentations last only 30 minutes, and so the 'new insights' are highly focussed on details. Thus, although grouped thematically, the topics range over a wide field, but whether or not your particular interests are catered for, the result is always stimulating. The following snippets draw heavily on the notes provided by the conference organisers, to which I have added some relevant images and a few random thoughts. I hope they give a flavour of what was discussed.

Session 1: Renaissance Traces

The Temporary Palace at Guisnes erected for entertaining during the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520 (Ian Bristow)



Figure 9 The Field of the Cloth of Gold (Royal Collection Trust © His Majesty King Charles III 2025 (RCIN 405794)[1]

The temporary palace at the Field of Cloth of Gold of 1520 has long intrigued scholars. As part of his work on architectural colour Ian needed to consider the veracity of the anonymous depiction of c. 1545 in the Royal Collection (Fig.9).

[1] British School, 16th century - The Field of the Cloth of Gold

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For another look at the painting see Julian Munby's article on the depiction of the Calais Pale:
(PDF) The Field of Cloth of Gold: Guînes and the Calais Pale Revisited

A close examination of the picture, using an image which allowed measurements to be taken, revealed significant setting-out relationships. These were collated with the dimensions mentioned in contemporary English letters together with Edward Hall's later (1548) published account of the building and connected festivities. In essence it is possible to conclude that, subject principally to abbreviation of the building in length, the depiction is carefully composed, and appears broadly accurate. The main problem is that the picture shows what seems to be a gatehouse, whereas the palace was a large square building round a courtyard. Ian's 'reconstruction' of this structure was plausible.

The High Renaissance in West Yorkshire: the Painted Chamber at Calverley Old Hall (Caroline Stanford)



Figure 10 The wall-paintings in Calverley Old Hall (Landmark Trust)

In 2021, during the Landmark Trust's restoration of Calverley Old Hall in Leeds, a mid-16th century painted chamber was discovered (Fig. 10), dated stylistically to c. 1560. The paintings have now been fully revealed, gently cleaned and consolidated.

Their early date makes this a remarkable find (especially this far North) but they are made exceptional by the style and sophisticated design of the wall paintings. The scheme is of Antique work, tightly and vertically planned to the studwork, making them unlike other surviving wall paintings of the period. The repeating motifs indicate familiarity with Italian Renaissance engravings, here transmuted to Yorkshire vernacular. They are executed in black, white and red on a gypsum plaster substrate. The walls were panelled over soon after the scheme's execution, which accounts for its excellent state of preservation.

The Calverley wall paintings were probably commissioned by Sir William Calverley (1506-1572) around the time when he became Sheriff of York. For further details see the report on the paintings on the Landmark Trust's website:
Bringing Tudor art back to life at Calverley Old Hall | The Landmark Trust

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Session 2: Planning on Paper

Plans for 'the House in the form of a cross': proposals for development of the Savoy Hospital? (Jill Husselby)

In the Hatfield archives are two plans of the ground and lower floor 'of a house in the form of a cross' (CPM1:7 & CPM:8). These are by the same hand as the plan of Cecil House in the Strand, confidently dated to the 1560s (Burghley Archives M358). Like the Cecil House plan, they are annotated by William Cecil. This paper explored the possibility that the 'House in the form of a Cross' was a proposal for a development of the Savoy Hospital into a domestic residence, drawn up for Sir William Cecil (as he then was), also in the 1560s. The hospital, built 'in the form of a cross', was founded by Henry Vll but constructed by Henry Vlll (Fig. 11)



Figure 11 The Savoy Hospital in 1747 (Wikipedia)

Many changes had been made by 1754 when the only known plan of the Savoy was made, hut there are still strong similarities with the Hatfield plans, including a free-standing range spanning the whole south front. Cecil had great ambitions in Westminster. In 1561 he became High Steward and took direct control of the Savoy. His newly developed house on the Strand was directly opposite but lacked the Savoy's desirable river frontage. He was buying up parcels of surrounding land and it seems reasonable to think that he was considering the Savoy itself as a future residence and accordingly had plans drawn up. The plans are interesting of themselves as an inventive deployment of traditional interiors into an unusual scheme.

'Re-tackling the beast': The Book of Architecture of John Thorpe, c. 1596 - c. 1623, in Sir John Soane's Museum, London (Manolo Guerci)

In his 1976 response to Sir John Summerson's Gold Medal Acceptance Speech, Mark Girouard reflected on the development of architectural history in the first part of the 20th century, praising Sir John as a game-changer, and for unravelling what, till then, had been 'a kind of mythical beast called John Thorpe'. Specifically, Girouard was referring to Summerson's 1964-6 catalogue of the so-called 'Book of Architecture of John Thorpe', consisting of some 295 drawings from the 1590s to the 1620s, covering 168 buildings, mainly but not only English, and amongst the greatest of the period, acquired by Sir John Soane in 1810 and since preserved in the Soane Museum. One of only two such collections extant, the other being the Smythson Collection at the RIBA, catalogued by Mark Girouard himself in 1962, Thorpe's remains, as Summerson stated, 'perhaps the most important relic in existence of architectural drawings and designs in the reigns of Elizabeth and James l'.

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The paper reported results of some detailed research on the book itself, that showed, though examination of the watermarks on the pages, that they were mostly late 16th century in date and that the book was made by binding together a number of blank notebooks, on which the drawings were made – and all seemed to by in Thorpe's own hand.

For updates on this research see the Soane website. The current research is at A new critical edition cum catalogue of the Book of Architecture of John Thorpe | Sir John Soane's Museum

Session 3: Royal Agendas

Bramshill, Hampshire: reconsidering the plan, interiors and function of an early 17th-century country house. (Emily Cole and James Rothwell)



Figure 12 Bramshill House (Bramshill House)

This paper presented recent research undertaken for Historic England and the National Trust on Jacobean and Caroline Bramshill, as rebuilt by Edward la Zouche, 11th Baron Zouche (Fig. 12). Lord Zouche was one of the most prominent courtiers of the early 17th century and his Hampshire home reflected his status, attracting visits from James l, Charles l and Henrietta Maria. The house was in private hands until being converted in 1953 into the police training college - a role it fulfilled until 2015. It was subsequently the subject of planning applications and inquiries, before returning to private ownership in 2023 - a major landmark in its history.

The first part of the talk, delivered by Emily Cole, focussed on the planning of Bramshill - considering the state apartments but also other high-status rooms, family lodgings, guest rooms and service rooms. This included reconstructions of the plans of all floor levels, which have been recently produced - something rarely possible for a country house of this date. The second part of the talk, delivered by James Rothwell, dealt with the interiors - how they were decorated, furnished and used in the 1620s and '30s. It looked in particular at the state and family rooms and included consideration of the hierarchy of different spaces within the house.

I was taken by the fact that the house had a 'Great Dancing Room' (surely a must-have for the upwardly mobile?) and a 'Hercules Labours Room' – not a gym, but a room with tapestries depicting the labours. A full report on the research has just been published in *The Antiquaries Journal* (Vol. 104, 2024).

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New Insights into the early work of lnigo Jones at Newmarket (Chris Garibaldi)

Almost nothing survives of the Palace of Newmarket, built for James I from 1609 and only a modest portion of the later sporting palace of Charles ll, built by William Samwell between 1668 and 1671, is extant. This paper was based on the speaker's doctoral research on the architectural history and significance of the palaces and concentrated on the Jacobean Brewhouse, Stables, Dog-House, Prince's Lodgings and other buildings constructed between 1615 and 1621 under the Surveyorship of lnigo Jones. The Brewhouse was completed shortly after Jones returned from his seminal 1613/14 visit to Italy and his appointment as Surveyor in 1615. The speaker showed new evidence for continuity between the pre- and post-Civil War structures proposing that parts of the Restoration palace represent repaired and re-built elements of the earlier complex. See also James I & Charles I Palace - Newmarket

Session 4: Mediation through Architecture

"We Never Have Intrigue Enough": Grinling Gibbons, The Empress of Morocco, and Frames for Frames (Christine Stevenson)

The Duke's Theatre in Dorset Gardens, London, opened in 1671, but is known only as one of Grinling Gibbons's earliest commissions. This was the carving on the proscenium arch illustrated in the 1673 publication of Elkanah Settle's spectacular *The Empress of Morocco,* first staged the year before (Fig. 13). The plot of this popular 'dramatick opera' combined visions of imperial expansion along with the 'endemic Restoration nightmare of a divided people' helpless in the face of external attack.



Figure 13 The proscenium arch



Figure 14 Elias Ashmole (Ashmolean Museum) SEARCH THE COLLECTION | Ashmolean Museum

William Sherwin's and William Dolle's illustrations for the book are detailed, but not enough to sustain much attention from Gibbons's historians. This paper used them as a point of departure for a wider examination of the way in which theatricality operated within analyses of later seventeenth-century English architecture. More specifically, it asked how Gibbons's proscenium arch operated, visually, in relation to the production's side shutters and if that operation has anything to tell us about the fashion for the type of carved picture-, often portrait-, surrounds for which the carver

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soon became famous (Fig. 14). Both were effectively frames for frames. All this raised a number of questions, though I did not record too many answers.

Rising from the Ashes: The Monument as Consolatory Landmark (Catriona Murray)

The great fire of London's catastrophic effects were materially memorialised through paintings, etchings, woodcuts, household and institutional objects, as well as architectural interventions. Arguably, the culmination of this commemorative programme was the Monument, a giant Doric column, completed in 1678, and raised on Fish Street Hill, in close proximity to the fire's point of origin (Fig. 15). Recent scholarship has tended to focus on two strands of enquiry when considering the Monument. The first assesses the personalities and relationships that shaped its design and the second evaluates the visual and textual idioms that articulated its meanings. This paper focussed on an exploration of why it was built. One of its purposes – as a scientific instrument (Hooke's idea) was not mentioned in the talk, which concentrated on its role as a consolatory landmark. Since the Protestant Reformation, no permanent architectural structure had been erected in England to public conflict or catastrophe. In opting for a monumental column, it was suggested that London's authorities demonstrated a conscious concern with extracting meaning from disaster. They looked to precedents on the Continent, where, from the end of the sixteenth century, a wave of honorific columns, both ancient and modern, had sprung up in public squares, church forecourts and palace courtyards, from Papal Rome to imperial Prague. These evoked a potent sense of place, and several of them also commemorated recent local tragedies averted or assuaged. They were designed to mediate communal loss, offer comfort and foster resilience. The Mariensäule in



Figure 15 The Monument (Helen French, 2016)

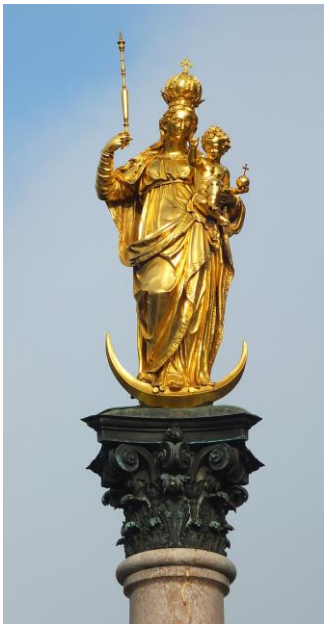


Figure 16 Mariensäule, Munich 1638)

Munich (Fig. 16), for example was erected in 1638 to celebrate the survival of the city from the invading Swedes and from an outbreak of plague. The statue of Mary Queen of Heaven, dating from 1580, was set on top. This column inspired further Marian examples in Prague and Vienna. Catriona argued that the Monument should also be viewed as a consolatory landmark, a potent symbol of deliverance against a backdrop

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of disaster overcome. She did not, however, allude to the rather obvious phallic imagery of the column as symbolic of resurrection in this case of the city of London after the fire.

It seems to me that these columns are a specific type of structure, akin to war memorials and triumphal arches, that have no function other than commemoration. They are, in that sense, follies – but neither the Folly Fellowship nor Headley and Meulenkamp's gazetteer of Follies (1999) include the Monument. Yet Hawksmoor's Column of Victory in the park at Blenheim is a folly, while Nelson's column in London is not. I have not tried to make sense of this, but it does seem that Catriona's term, 'consolatory landmark' may have some traction – it would exclude the two columns on the grounds that they celebrate great men and their victories. Indeed, I wondered whether there is such a thing as 'the architecture of consolation'. I think there may be, but for many candidate structures there is no contemporary evidence that the builders consciously had 'consolation' in mind. And even where they did fulfil this role, it was often only temporarily, as grief generally diminishes over time. One of the few genuine British examples of a 'consolatory landmark' is the Cenotaph in Whitehall, which, with no list of 'the glorious dead' on it, stands as a pure symbol of the horrors of war and can console not only recent war widows, but those who still remember those who suffered in the World Wars. Do let me know if you can think of other examples.

David Clark

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, March 2025 after 7am on 1 March. You will find details of a number of upcoming events and talks.

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

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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.

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