

Housing Development on the Urban Fringe of Oxford 1850–1914

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SUMMARY

The rapid industrialisation of Oxford after the First World War and the consequent expansion of the urban area have tended to overshadow the steady but less spectacular growth that took place before 1914. This paper examines the extent to which the earlier growth of population was channelled into new housing areas beyond the contemporary city boundary. Within Oxford the spread of house building was checked by large areas of low-lying and flood-prone land and by the preponderance of corporate landowners who were reluctant to allow speculative development. Developers were therefore encouraged to look further afield for land with more favourable characteristics and they generally found it easier to deal with private landowners who might be more inclined to accept short-term profits. The case studies show a familiar exaggeration of the size of the middle-class housing market, and some developments, conceived in a spirit of optimism, bore little fruit or made progress only by adopting a more realistic approach. For completion most had to await the period of faster urban growth and growing personal mobility between the Wars.

Between 1851 and 1921, the population of Oxford increased from 27,843 to 57,036¹ and the area within the municipal boundary was enlarged from 3,510 acres to 4,719 acres.² The enlarged boundary established in 1889³ incorporated the newly built-up areas of Summertown, New Hinksey and Cowley St John, but took no account of the remoter residential developments which were already beginning to encircle the city. The development of Victorian suburbs within the city is dealt with elsewhere⁴ and this article is primarily concerned with the origins of suburban areas beyond the 1889 boundary. Some of these residential districts, for example Headington, Cowley and New Marston, were incorporated into the city in 1929 after a decade of faster growth fuelled by the motor industry;⁵ others such as North Hinksey, Boar's Hill and Kennington remain outside the city boundary despite being virtual dormitory suburbs (see Fig. 1). Why were these areas developed when much potential building land was still available within the city boundary? Who were the developers and what were their motives? How did

¹ *Victoria History of the County of Oxford* (hereafter *V.C.H. Oxon.*), iv (1979), 182.

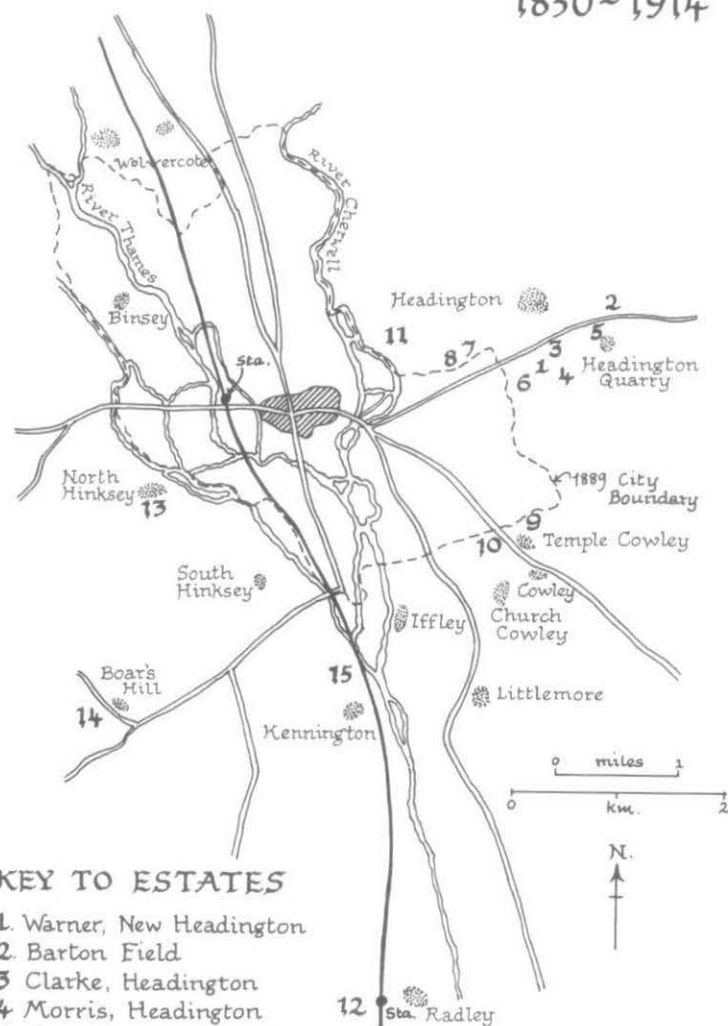
² *Census of Great Britain, 1851. Population tables I...* (1852), 30; *Census of England & Wales, 1921. County of Oxford* (1924), 2.

³ *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 263.

⁴ M. Graham, 'The suburbs of Victorian Oxford: growth in a pre-industrial city', University of Leicester Ph.D. (1986), *passim*.

⁵ *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 206; R. Whiting, *The view from Cowley: the impact of industrialization upon Oxford, 1918–1939* (1983), *passim*.

Some Estates on the Oxford Fringe ~ 1850~1914



KEY TO ESTATES

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Warner, New Headington | |
| 2. Barton Field | |
| 3. Clarke, Headington | |
| 4. Morris, Headington | |
| 5. Powel, Headington Quarry | |
| 6. Taylor, Highfield | 12. Bowyer, Radley |
| 7. Davenport, Headington | 13. Harcourt, N. Hinksey |
| 8. Morrell, Headington | 14. Boar's Hill |
| 9. British Land Company, Cowley | 15. Disney, Kennington |
| 10. Clarke, Cowley | |
| 11. Oxford Industrial & Provident Land & Building Society, New Marston. | |

Fig. 1. Key to Estates.

development proceed? Why did some developments fail, at least for the time being, while others prospered? Definitive answers to such questions are not to be expected because the sources for urban areas and major estates are not available in these cases; rather, the study resembles a jigsaw with many pieces missing. The incomplete picture does, however, provide some insight into development on the urban fringe before the First World War.

Both the topography of Oxford and the pattern of landownership contributed to the spread of development beyond the municipal boundary. The old city is located on a gravel terrace at the confluence of the rivers Thames and Cherwell, and the verdant meadows to the south, east and west contributed to the beauty of its setting.⁶ This meadowland was, however, low-lying, liable to regular flooding and difficult to drain. These land characteristics tended to increase the potential costs of development⁷ and were only suitable for industry and poor quality housing.⁸ Builders looked more favourably upon moderately sloping land of gravel or sandstone, with natural drainage and a ready supply of water from wells.⁹ In the Oxford context, the gravel terrace extending south-eastwards beyond Magdalen Bridge and northwards towards Summer-town offered healthy and salubrious sites, but the rising ground in Headington, Cowley and Iffley parishes was reasonably accessible; to the west, also, the hills above Botley and the Hinkseys beckoned more distantly to intending suburbanites with a love of 'fine views, trees and open country'.¹⁰

If the local topography tended to attract development beyond the built-up area, landownership was perhaps a more potent force. Corporate bodies (especially the Oxford colleges) and aristocrats accounted for 21 out of 56 of the identified owners of potential building land in the Oxford suburbs; in addition, three estates were rectorial or vicarial glebe land.¹¹ By comparison with 19th-century Reading, where only three out of 26 landowners were corporate bodies,¹² this gave Oxford a very high proportion of landowners who could afford to take a long-term view of estate development; these owners tended, moreover, to have the larger and more strategic estates. In North Oxford, for example, St John's College held some 380 acres of potential building land, much of it with a frontage to Banbury and Woodstock Roads, and the college was clearly in a strong position to influence the character of the suburb. St John's also owned a substantial part of Jericho, and Christ Church was a major landowner in both East and West Oxford. South of Folly Bridge, Brasenose College and University College shared between them the most strategic estates nearest to the city.¹³ Such landowners regarded it as their duty to preserve and if possible to enhance their property for the benefit of future generations.¹⁴ They were therefore reluctant to sell land and also displayed an

⁶ *Universal British Directory* (1790/8), 112.

⁷ B. Goodall, *The economics of urban areas* (1972), 188.

⁸ S.T. Blake, 'The physical expansion of the borough of Reading, 1800-62', University of Reading Ph.D. (1976), 95; David Cannadine, *Lords and landlords: the aristocracy and the towns, 1774-1967* (1980), 260.

⁹ C.W. Chalklin, *The provincial towns of Georgian England: a study of the building process, 1740-1820* (1974), 70.

¹⁰ M.A. Simpson, 'The West End of Glasgow, 1830-1914', in M.A. Simpson & T.H. Lloyd (eds.), *Middle class housing in Britain* (1979), 50-1.

¹¹ M. Graham, op.cit. note 4, 22-8.

¹² S.T. Blake, op.cit. note 8, 60-1.

¹³ M. Graham, op.cit. note 4, 22-30.

¹⁴ C.W. Chalklin, 'Urban housing estates in the eighteenth century', *Urban Studies*, v (1968), 75; R.J. Springett, 'The mechanics of urban land development in Huddersfield, 1770-1911', University of Leeds Ph.D. (1979), 128; F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The rise of suburbia* (1982), 18.

unwillingness to initiate development on badly-placed sites because the resulting low status area might not retain its reversionary value; personal, social and aesthetic considerations reinforced this fear, since the creation of a slum might reflect badly upon its creator. Such anxieties probably help to explain why Christ Church failed to develop the St Thomas's area more intensively in the later 19th century.¹⁵ In the context of urban growth, the dominant presence of these cautious landowners was bound to generate 'leapfrog sprawl'¹⁶ as builders were forced to look beyond undeveloped land to the holdings of more amenable private individuals.

The probability of extended development was translated into reality by the growth of an effective demand for suburban living. The pull of the suburb pre-dated the Victorian period,¹⁷ and the Oxford printer, Harman Evans, had a house in Headington as early as 1551. In about 1660, William Finch upgraded a 16th-century house in Headington into a gentleman's residence which became known as The Rookery.¹⁸ In the 18th century, successful businessmen like William Jackson, printer and proprietor of *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Edward Hitchins, a tailor, and Joseph Lock, a goldsmith, established estates in Headington and Iffley which combined rural charm with easy access to the city.¹⁹ This element of the middle class brought the lifestyle of the country gentleman into an urban setting and displayed an obvious concern to merge itself with a superior class. Once established, suburban growth of this kind became self-sustaining, because urban growth and increasing real incomes led to a social deepening of the suburban market.²⁰ Paradoxically, a demand for housing in remoter areas also came from those who were looking for cheaper accommodation. In 1687-8, for instance, cottagers moved from Oxford to Headington because they could live more cheaply outside the city.²¹ Early 19th-century suburbs were not exclusively wealthy²² and, in Summertown for instance, less favourably situated lots were filled with labourers' cottages, creating small pockets of poverty within yards of the new villas.²³ Greater social exclusiveness became a feature of Victorian middle-class estates, but remote sites with few positive externalities still offered cheap land and the opportunity for builders to evade the tiresome and expensive building byelaws which applied within the Oxford Local Board area from 1866.²⁴ For those who worked on the urban fringe or were able to live at a distance from their workplace, the lack of amenities in the resulting houses was more than offset by lower rents and rates.

The growing demand from middle-class suburbanites and others looking for cheap housing depended for its satisfaction upon the many decision makers in the development process. The crucial role of the landowner in urban land development has been recognised in many studies²⁵ and stemmed largely from his ability to decide when, and

¹⁵ M. Graham, *op.cit.* note 4, 123-4.

¹⁶ B. Goodall, *op.cit.* note 7, 186-8.

¹⁷ David Reeder, *Suburbanity and the Victorian city* (1980), 3; F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *op.cit.* note 14, 7.

¹⁸ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v (1957), 164-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 165, 190.

²⁰ F.M.L. Thompson, *op.cit.* note 14, 16-17.

²¹ M.S. Gretton, *Oxfordshire justices of the peace in the seventeenth century* (Oxfordshire Record Soc. xvi), 55.

²² David Ward, 'Victorian cities: how modern?' *Journal of Historical Geography*, i (1975), 137.

²³ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c.240, f.13.

²⁴ Bodl. G.A. Oxon 8° 850(7): Byelaws made by the Local Board of Oxford ... (1865), *passim*.

²⁵ H. Carter, 'A Decision-Making Approach to Town Plan Analysis: a Case Study of Llandudno', in H. Carter & W.K.D. Davies (eds.), *Urban essays: Studies of the Geography of Wales* (1970), 66-78; G. Rowley, 'Landownership in the spatial growth of towns: a Sheffield example', *East Midland Geographer*, vi (1975), 200-10; M.J. Mortimore, 'Landownership and urban growth in Bradford and its environs in the West Riding Conurbation, 1850-1950', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, xlv (1969), 105-19; D. Cannadine, *op.cit.* note 8, 391-2.

indeed whether, development was to take place. This decision was most easily taken by private individuals with meagre financial resources or by absentee landowners with no permanent stake in the area.²⁶ Such landowners tended also to sell their land outright for an immediate return instead of becoming more deeply involved in the development process.²⁷ On the urban fringe of Oxford no penurious landowners were evident, and the majority seem, in fact, to have been landed gentlemen or at least well-to-do. Some were absentee landowners, and Edward Smith, an artist from Gloucester, was prepared to sell land in Temple Cowley in 1864 without any preliminary development.²⁸ On the other hand, other absentees such as Edgar Disney from Essex and Daniel Clarke from High Wycombe judged it worthwhile to undertake some preliminary work in the expectation of increasing their overall profit.²⁹ Most of the identified owners were men of means living near to the sites which they sought to develop. They therefore had a natural aversion to planting a slum on their doorsteps and tended, like most housing suppliers, to aim for the upper end of the market for aesthetic and social as well as financial reasons.³⁰ By laying out the roads and determining plot sizes, they were able to influence the spatial pattern of development; by framing restrictive covenants as, for example, the Rev. John Taylor and Charles Morris did, they could also hope to influence the social character of the neighbourhood.³¹ Landowners were not, however, in a position to determine completely the course of development, and were constrained both by the location and topography of the land that they owned and by the size and nature of the local population.³² Thompson has argued that if 'Landowners proposed, developers disposed',³³ and it was all too easy to exaggerate the size of the middle-class market for housing.³⁴

Developers remained virtually unmoved by the claims which were made for estates at Barton, North Hinksey and Radley, and landowners settled back to await more favourable conditions;³⁵ on the other hand, the absentee landowner William Warner could perhaps look on with greater equanimity as his New Headington estate failed to achieve the social status that he had envisaged.³⁶ Development on the urban fringe of Oxford was therefore subject to the immutability of market forces and, in Cannadine's phrase, to 'topographical determinism'.³⁷ The case studies also demonstrate the vital role which individual enterprise, indecision and sheer idiosyncrasy played in the formation of new housing areas.

²⁶ C.J. Arnison, 'The Speculative Development of Leamington Spa, 1800-1830', University of Leicester M.Phil. (1980), 34; S.T. Blake, *op.cit.* note 8, 200; B. Goodall, *op.cit.* note 7, 188.

²⁷ C.W. Chalklin, *op.cit.* note 9, 113; S.T. Blake, *op.cit.* note 8, 60-3.

²⁸ Below, *Table 1*, p.152.

²⁹ Below, 154, 157, 165.

³⁰ C.W. Chalklin, *op.cit.* note 14, 79; F.M.L. Thompson, *Hampstead: Building a Borough, 1650-1964* (1974), 73-4.

³¹ M. Shaw, 'Reconciling Social and Physical Space: Wolverhampton 1871', *Trans. of the Inst. of British Geographers*, n.s. iv (1979), 194; below, 154-5.

³² D. Cannadine, *op.cit.* note 8, 406.

³³ F.M.L. Thompson, 'Hampstead, 1830-1914', in M.A. Simpson & T.H. Lloyd (eds.), *Middle-Class Housing in Britain* (1977), 112.

³⁴ R.J. Springett, *op.cit.* note 14, 217-18; F.M.L. Thompson, *op.cit.* note 30, 73-4.

³⁵ Below, 153, 159, 162-3.

³⁶ Below, 152-3.

³⁷ D. Cannadine, *op.cit.* note 8, 407.

TABLE 1: LANDOWNERS AND DEVELOPERS OF SITES ON THE FRINGE OF OXFORD, 1850-1914

Site	Landowner	Developer (if different from landowner)	Date development began
New Headington	William Mead Warner Banbury, gentleman		1851
Temple Cowley	Edwin Smith Gloucester, artist	British Land Company	1865
Headington Quarry	Executors of W. Powel		1868
New Marston	Mark Rippington Marston, farmer	Oxford Working Men's Benefit Building Society	1871
Radley	Sir George Bowyer Radley		1875
Highfield	Rev. John Taylor Headington		1876
North Hinksey	Col. Edward Harcourt Nuneham Courtenay		1877
Headington Hill	J.M. Davenport, Oxford		1879
Headington Hill	G.H. & A.M. Morrell Oxford		1889
Cowley	Daniel Clarke High Wycombe, gentleman		1893
Headington	Charles Morris Headington, builder		1907
Headington	Daniel Clarke High Wycombe, gentleman		1910
Kennington	Edgar Morton Disney Ingatestone, Essex, gentleman		c.1910

THE CASE STUDIES

1. *Headington*. The principle of planting new settlements on land which was quite detached from the city was successfully established at Summertown in 1820 and at New Hinksey in 1847. In the first case, the Oxford developers William Kimber and Crews Dudley were able to acquire old enclosures to the north of St Giles' Field and make the land available for building; in the second, Henry Greenaway, a Newbury gentleman, sold two fields to create a low-lying suburb which was far beyond the built-up area but close to the railway which had reached Oxford in 1844.³⁸ William Mead Warner, a Banbury gentleman, probably envisaged a similar speculation in 1848 when he acquired a 22-acre site in Headington from John Latimer, heir of the late Edward Latimer, an Oxford wine-merchant. The land was divided into four fields, one of which provided a narrow

³⁸ R. Fasnacht, *Summertown since 1820* (1977), 3; M. Graham, *op.cit.* note 4, 105-6.

frontage to London Road just east of the wayside Britannia Inn and another more extensive frontage to Windmill Road.³⁹ The Reverend William Latimer retained a ten acre field on the corner of London Road and Windmill Road, and this helped to determine the lay-out of the new village. In May 1851, the auctioneer, Frederick King, announced to builders, mechanics and members of building societies the impending sale of two acres in the centre of the estate, remarking upon its proximity to the Headington turnpike and its elevated position with beautiful views to the south-west. Three auctions took place during 1851, but some lots with 30-foot frontages were still unsold when the last sale of the season was announced in October. In May 1852 development in New High Street was preceded by the announcement that purchasers could now obtain 'freehold building villa lots, with 60 foot frontage and 100 feet deep, containing about 700 square yards each lot, with every advantage that land can possess of situation, air, prospect, water, soil and distance'. Seventy lots were put up for auction in August but when approximately 50 lots were advertised for sale by private contract in March 1853, reluctant purchasers were wooed by the alternative offer of building leases and by the promise of finance.⁴⁰ House-building in New Headington began immediately on some lots, and John Cross, a carpenter from Little Clarendon Street, built no. 6 New High Street by May 1854 when he mortgaged his 'lately erected' house to the Oxford & Abingdon Permanent Benefit Building Society.⁴¹ By 1871 the new village had 93 houses and a population of 444,⁴² but the quality of the development had fallen far short of the proprietor's original ambitions with just a few small villas at the northern end of New High Street. The availability of bricks and tiles from nearby Headington Quarry had been seen as an advantage in 1851,⁴³ but the reputation of that community may have deterred respectable families from settling in New Headington⁴⁴ and its proximity encouraged the growth of a village where 'the greatest number of our men and lads are engaged in the building trades, mostly working at Oxford'.⁴⁵ Warner imposed no restrictive covenants which might have checked this kind of development, and the near-contemporary provision of attractive building sites in Iffley Road and Park Town would have siphoned off some of the middle-class demand that he had anticipated.

New Headington set a modest pattern for other estates in the area and served to discourage development of a more exclusive nature. No buyers were found for the ten-pole or larger plots on the Barton Field Estate which were offered in the mid 1880s when the Oxford, Aylesbury and Metropolitan Junction Railway Company seemed likely to provide a station at Barton.⁴⁶ The new railway between Oxford and London failed to materialise⁴⁷ and the land, which was uncomfortably close to the Headington Union workhouse, remained undeveloped.⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1878, no purchaser was found for ten acres of land on the corner of London Road and Windmill Road which were suggested as

³⁹ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P 230: 88-90 Windmill Road and Mattocks' site, Conveyance, 14.2.1852.

⁴⁰ *Oxford Chronicle* (hereafter O.C.), 24 May, 25 Oct. 1851; 15 May, 17 July, 12 Mar. 1852.

⁴¹ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P790: Mortgage, 24.5.1854.

⁴² P.R.O., R.G.10/1434/37-46.

⁴³ O.C. 24 May 1851.

⁴⁴ R. Samuel, "'Quarry roughs' - life and labour in Headington Quarry 1860-1920", in R. Samuel (ed.), *Village Life and Labour* (1975), 147-51.

⁴⁵ *Headington Parish Magazine*, Sept. 1892.

⁴⁶ O.C. 1 Sept. 1883; 7 Mar. 1885; C.E. Lee, 'The Duke of Buckingham's railways', *Railway Magazine* (1935), 238.

⁴⁷ C.E. Lee, *op.cit.* note 46, 238-40.

⁴⁸ Ordnance Survey (hereafter O.S.) 1:2500, Oxfordshire XXXIII. 16 (1898).

being ideal for a gentleman's mansion or villa residences.⁴⁹ Instead, the land was acquired in 1887 by Daniel Clarke, a gentleman from High Wycombe,⁵⁰ who pursued a policy of releasing it for development in small lots as demand presented itself. By 1898, 16 houses had been built on the Windmill Road frontage⁵¹ and these included, on the corner of London Road, a branch of the Oxford Co-operative Society which had opened amidst general rejoicing on Easter Monday in 1892.⁵² By 1910, it had become necessary to draw up plans for developing the estate's backland and, in June that year, Clarke sold a lot on the corner of Windmill Road and the modern St Leonard's Road.⁵³

Further south, 11 acres of building land with a 789-foot frontage to Windmill Road were put up for auction in June and October 1900 by direction of the trustees of the late William Morris.⁵⁴ The land was eventually purchased in December 1901 by Charles Morris, a Headington builder, with the aid of a £750 loan from a Berkshire farmer, Selby Cornish.⁵⁵ Morris laid out the Windmill Road frontage in 36 lots each 20 feet wide, leaving room for two roads, Alexandra Road, now Gathorne Road, and Margaret Road to exploit the centre of the estate. Purchasers had to agree to build only one house per lot and to erect houses with a minimum value of £200. In December 1907, Morris and Cornish, to whom £400 was still owing, sold lots 35 and 36 for £50 each, and nos. 155 and 157 Windmill Road were built there by 1914.⁵⁶ Indeed, by that date, much of Windmill Road had been completely built up, and house-building was spreading into the new side streets, foreshadowing the great expansion of Headington in the 1920s.⁵⁷

More house-building had taken place on the fringe of Headington Quarry where, in September 1868, the executors of the late W. Powel offered for sale 51 lots, most of them fronting 'the new Cross Street', now New Cross Road, and 'the new street from the Turnpike Road to the Village', the modern Pitts Road.⁵⁸ To the south and west of New Headington, however, the Highfield estate offered much greater opportunities which were exploited by the Rev. John Taylor, a retired headmaster who had come to live at The Rookery in Old Headington in 1859.⁵⁹ Like most housing providers, Taylor was keenest to provide for the needs of the upper end of the market,⁶⁰ and the first advertisements in 1876 and 1877 offered substantial lots in Old Road and London Road.

Some building was generated, and two freehold properties on the Highfield Estate, namely Ellerslie in London Road and a cottage in Old Road, were put up for auction in November 1878. In August 1879, an advertisement offered potential buyers the alternative of purchasing lots outright or of leasing them for 99 years; at the same time, the Highfield Estate was described as being 'within easy walking distance of Oxford, in

⁴⁹ O.C. 31 Aug. 1878.

⁵⁰ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P147: Windmill Road, Abstract of Title 1922, reciting conveyance, 27.9.1887.

⁵¹ O.S. 1:2500 Oxfordshire XXXIII.16 (1898).

⁵² O.C. 23 Apr. 1892.

⁵³ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P147: Windmill Road, Abstract of title 1922 reciting conveyance, 21.6.1910.

⁵⁴ O.C. 12 May, 19 Oct. 1900.

⁵⁵ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P16: 155 Windmill Road, Conveyance, 16.12.1907 reciting conveyance, 1.12.1901 and mortgage, 2.12.1901.

⁵⁶ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P16: 155 Windmill Road, Conveyance, 16.12.1907; P55: 157 Windmill Road, Conveyance 16.12.1907.

⁵⁷ O.S. 1:2500 Oxfordshire XXXIII.16 (1919).

⁵⁸ Bodl. G.A. Oxon. b.4 (35): sale particulars, 2.9.1868.

⁵⁹ J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses . . . part II, 1752-1900*, vi (1954), 127.

⁶⁰ Above, p. 151.

the most desirable building site in the neighbourhood of the city'. A similar advertisement in May 1880 tacitly admitted that too much was being attempted at once by offering to let portions of the estate on short terms for garden purposes from the following Michaelmas.⁶¹ Realizing perhaps that there was a greater local demand for artisan houses, Taylor catered for this in 1881 by laying out a new street, Lime Walk, which ran north from Old Road and was linked to New High Street by a short stretch of the road now known as All Saints' Road.⁶² Initially, 78 lots were provided in a street which petered out beyond All Saints' Road and continued as a field path to London Road.⁶³ In New Headington 30 years earlier, William Warner had not tried to impose any conditions upon the development or use of his lots, but Taylor was determined not to prejudice the value of his adjoining land by creating a slum. Conveyances therefore included covenants stipulating that a building line should be maintained and that house plans should be signed by the vendor's surveyor before building could commence. For the sake of uniformity, he required all front fences to be built to the same design and he planted the street with the lime trees which gave it its name. A final condition warned that no plot or building was to be used for the sale of intoxicating liquor or 'for any immoral purposes so as to become a nuisance'.⁶⁴ The Rev. Taylor moved to a new house in Headington called Stoke and died there in April 1886,⁶⁵ but gradual development of the Highfield estate continued. By 1898, most of the lots in Lime Walk were built on, and three houses existed on the west side of an embryonic Stapleton Road. Latimer Road led from London Road to Brookside Nursery, but contained as yet no other buildings. By 1914, Lime Walk had been extended through to London Road, and housing development in Old Road, Bickerton Road and Stapleton Road was beginning to encircle Highfield Farm.⁶⁶

In complete contrast to the artisan housing of New Headington and Lime Walk was the leafy and select area that was created in Pullen's Lane prior to World War I. This land had formed part of the Headington manorial estate,⁶⁷ which was gradually sold off by Thomas Henry Whorwood after 1836 to repay debts incurred by his profligate ancestors.⁶⁸ The first sale took place in August 1836 and included substantial building or garden allotments in fields lately known as Brockless Field and Bushy Piece. Six of these lots fronted the Headington road, but others possessed frontages to new roads, one created by improving Cuckoo Lane and the other by forming the beginnings of Pullen's Lane.⁶⁹ In 1838, the land east of Pullen's Lane was purchased by George Davenport, an Oxfordshire land surveyor, who built a house at the corner of Headington Road for his own occupation.⁷⁰ The portion of his estate north-west of Cuckoo Lane, an ancient green lane between Oxford and Headington, was probably let as arable land until it could be profitably developed. An attempt to force it into the market appears to have been made in November 1853, when Mallam & Son announced the forthcoming sale of 13 acres of

⁶¹ O.C. 28 Oct. 1876; 24 Mar. 1877; 16 Nov. 1878; 23 Aug. 1879; 22 May 1880.

⁶² Oxon. R.O., MS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers c.1967/1: All Saints', Highfield Church site, Conveyance 30.8.1881.

⁶³ O.S. 1:2500. Oxfordshire XXXIII. 16 (1898).

⁶⁴ O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept P725: 95/101 Lime Walk, Abstract of title 1917 reciting Conveyance 3.10.1883.

⁶⁵ J.A. Venn, *op.cit.* note 59, 127.

⁶⁶ O.S. 1:2500 Oxfordshire XXXIII.16 (1898, 1919).

⁶⁷ Oxon. R.O., Vol. F: Headington inclosure award, 1804.

⁶⁸ H.M. Harris, *Beyond the white gates*... (1975), 34-5.

⁶⁹ Oxon. R.O., SC 35, Particulars and conditions for the sale of Headington estate... 3.8.1836, 4-6.

⁷⁰ H.M. Harris, *op.cit.* note 68, 23.

arable land near Joe Pullen's Tree which were to be divided into several convenient lots for building or garden purposes. A later advertisement, postponing the auction until January 1854, stated that the land had been divided into nine lots of between one and two acres each.⁷¹ No demand was forthcoming, however, and it was not until 1879 that George Davenport's son, John Marriott Davenport, began to sell substantial lots with frontages to Pullen's Lane. The most southerly lot was sold to Sir William Markby in March 1879, and the newly-appointed Reader in Indian Law soon commissioned the building of The Pullens.⁷² Sir William and his wife moved into their new house in September 1880,⁷³ and in the same year, The Croft was built on an adjoining lot for Sir Arthur Willert. Torbrex, now known as Pullen's End, was built for Patrick Henderson, the subwarden of Wadham College in 1883, and Langley Lodge, occupying the last of Davenport's lots, was built between 1895 and 1899. West of Pullen's Lane, manorial land had been purchased by a certain William Peppercorn in 1849, and it was eventually sold by his children to the trustees for the marriage settlement of George Herbert and Alicia Morrell in 1874.⁷⁴ Inspired no doubt by the character of the development on the opposite side of the lane, the Morrells laid out similar plots, and development began in 1889 with the building of Pollock House which was designed by Henry Wilkinson Moore for Professor Sydney Vines, Sherardian Professor of Botany. By October 1890, another house by Moore was being built for Arthur Napier, Merton Professor of English Language and Literature⁷⁵ and this became known eventually as Napier House.⁷⁶ The exclusive neighbourhood thus created in Pullen's Lane provided its wealthy residents with the ideal blend of privacy and convenience, since it combined seclusion with easy access to the city and university.

The foregoing estates substantially increased the number of inhabited houses in Headington from 326 in 1851 to 1,171 in 1921; during the same period, the parish population rose from 1,653 to 5,328.⁷⁷

2. *Cowley*. Between 1852 and 1861 the National Freehold Land Society and its subsidiary the British Land Company bought and sold four estates in East Oxford.⁷⁸ In August 1864 the British Land Company purchased from Edward Smith some 34 acres of rising ground at Temple Cowley and laid out Crescent Road, a 'new road leading from Oxford to the high road from Headington to Garsington', and Junction Road, which linked Crescent Road to pre-existing Temple Road.⁷⁹ The first auction of land was held in March 1866, offering 19 freehold building plots in Hollow Way with frontages ranging from 30 feet to 46 feet and six larger parcels of land in Junction Road and Crescent Road.⁸⁰ In May 1866, other lots in Crescent Road were to be auctioned and a regular series of sales was held until 1871.⁸¹ The frontages of lots in Crescent Road ranged from

⁷¹ O.C. 19 Nov., 10 Dec. 1853.

⁷² H.M. Harris, op.cit. note 68, 23, 40.

⁷³ *Memories of Sir William Markby K.C.I.E. by his wife* (1917), 75. The house, later renamed Fairfield, was demolished c.1974.

⁷⁴ H.M. Harris, op.cit. note 68, 34-5, 47-8.

⁷⁵ O.C. 12 Oct. 1889; 11 Oct. 1890.

⁷⁶ O.S. 1:2500 Oxfordshire XXXIII.16 (1919).

⁷⁷ *Census of Great Britain 1851. Population Tables, 1...*; (1852), 30; *Census of England and Wales, 1921. County of Oxford* (1924), 5.

⁷⁸ M. Graham, op.cit. note 4, 86-97.

⁷⁹ O.C. 6 Aug. 1864; 28 Sept. 1866.

⁸⁰ Bodl. G.A. Oxon b.4 (32): sale particulars, 8.3.1866.

⁸¹ *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (hereafter *J.O.J.*) 11 Aug. 1866; 10 Apr. 1869; 24 June 1871; O.C. 27 Apr. 1864; 28 Apr. 1866; 25 Apr. 1868.

30 feet to 150 feet and the average depth from 128 feet to 302 feet,⁸² and the size and consequent expense of these lots may have deterred builders from buying them. Although the Company's auctioneer could justifiably claim that the estate was well adapted for building and possessed extensive views of the city and county⁸³ it was quite remote, and hundreds of building plots were available in estates much closer to Oxford. In the 1890s, however, the pace of house-building in Cowley began to quicken as builders were attracted by cheaper land and fewer building controls and tenants by the prospect of lower rents and rates.

For the slightly better off, the tramway terminus at Magdalen Road made Cowley more accessible, and the apparent distance between the village and Oxford was further diminished by the introduction of a connecting horse-bus service in 1894.⁸⁴ Between 1891 and 1921, the population in the parish of Cowley, excluding Cowley St John, rose from 1,823 to 2,790.⁸⁵ The increasing numbers were to some extent accommodated on the British Land Company estate, but other development also took place in Pile Road, now more euphoniously known as Oxford Road. Beyond Marsh Lane, a substantial estate of 11½ acres on the south-west side of Oxford Road was purchased in at least two stages by Daniel Clarke, a High Wycombe gentleman, who bought land similarly poised on the verge of development in Windmill Road.⁸⁶ Clarke bought the last 8 acres with frontages of 586 feet to Oxford Road for £1,012 in December 1888, and disposed of the land gradually during the next two decades.⁸⁷ In May 1893, for example, he sold a piece of land to the Oxford builder, Noah Capel, reserving space in the centre for a 40-foot wide road which became New Road and is now Littlehay Road. The conditions of sale included a minimum value of £150 for each house built on the land, a building line of seven and a half feet to Oxford Road and a provision that, until houses were built, the land was only to be used as an orchard, garden or meadow.⁸⁸ Two houses were built on a plot measuring 38 feet by 120 feet before January 1913, when the executor of a retired policeman conveyed them to Henry Cullen, a market gardener from Garsington.⁸⁹ Other lots were clearly sold during the 1890s and formed the sites of the 8 houses that had been built by 1898.⁹⁰ Such sales continued until well into the next decade, and in September 1906 Clarke sold land on the north-east side of George Street, now Hendred Street, to David Benford, a local carting agent.⁹¹ In the following month, he sold over two acres behind Oxford Road to Francis William and Arthur Edmund Cullum, builders and contractors from Wheatley, for £300.⁹² Cullum Bros. built nine houses on the south-east side of Edmund Road, and in the late 1920s they were to dispose of the rest of the land very profitably to William Richard Morris, who paid £1,325 for the site of the first purpose-built sports car factory in Europe.⁹³ On the north-eastern side of Oxford Road,

⁸² Bodl. G.A. Oxon b.4 (38): sale particulars, 8.11.1870.

⁸³ *J.O.J.* 27 Apr. 1867.

⁸⁴ *O.C.*, 23 June 1894.

⁸⁵ *Census of England & Wales, 1891: Areas, Houses and population*, i(1893), 290; *Census of England & Wales, 1921: County of Oxford* (1924), 5.

⁸⁶ Above, p.154.

⁸⁷ *O.C.C.*: City Secretary's Dept. P749: Edmund Road, Copy conveyance, 20.12.1888.

⁸⁸ *O.C.C.*: City Secretary's Dept. P809: 24 Oxford Road, Abstract of title 1956, reciting conveyance, 19.5.1893.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Abstract of title, 1956, reciting conveyance, 15.1.1913.

⁹⁰ *O.S.* 1:2500 Oxfordshire XXXIX. 4 (1898).

⁹¹ *O.C.C.*: City Secretary's Dept. P745: 26 Hendred Street, Abstract of title 1957 reciting conveyance, 29.9.1906.

⁹² *Ibid.* P749: Edmund Road, Conveyance, 5.10.1906.

⁹³ *Ibid.* P749: Edmund Road, Conveyances, 14.6.1927; 20.4.1929; F.W. McComb, *MG* (1979), 57.

frontages near Marsh Lane had been awarded at enclosure to Thomas Smith, an Iffley farmer, and to the Reverend Thomas Evetts of Monks Risborough.⁹⁴ In May 1895 part of this land, including a 295-foot frontage to Oxford Road, was put up for auction, all but one of the main road lots being 16 feet wide.⁹⁵ No steps had been taken to develop this land by 1898, but by 1919 49 houses had been erected in a series of terraces.⁹⁶

3. *New Marston*. Like the National Freehold Land Society and its subsidiary, the British Land Company, the Oxford Industrial and Provident Land and Building Society played a major part in the development of Oxford's Victorian suburbs.⁹⁷ The local society was founded in 1860 as the Oxford Working Men's Land and Building Society⁹⁸ with the aim of enabling thrifty working men to purchase freehold plots for gardens or building purposes by paying a small entrance fee and one shilling a week for six years.⁹⁹ Land was purchased and subdivided on the Smith and Hurst estates in East Oxford during the 1860s,¹⁰⁰ but the Society's work was hindered by the rising price of land in the suburb; in 1867 it was claimed that prices had gone up from £160 per acre to £500 or £600 per acre in six years.¹⁰¹ The building byelaws of the Oxford Local Board came into effect in 1866 and, by adding significantly to developers' and builders' costs¹⁰² they further encouraged the Society to look for remoter land which would cost less to develop. In November 1870, the directors announced that they were negotiating for 'a freehold field' which they hoped to purchase and divide in the following Spring.¹⁰³ This field proved to be in Marston Road and was purchased from the local farmer, Mark Rippington, for £1,300.¹⁰⁴ The land was divided into 103 lots fronting Marston Road and a new street called William Street, and the success of the first ballot in February 1871 encouraged the Society to purchase a second low-lying field opposite for £840 early in 1872. This field provided a further 67 allotments, bringing the total number created by the Society to 420 in 12 years. By November 1873 the Society had purchased a third estate on the Marston Road and had laid it out in 70 allotments with 24-foot frontages. Like the first field, these estates had roads made through them, which were the primitive forerunners of Ferry Road and Edgeway Road. Inspired by talk of a road from North Oxford to Marston Road which could be continued with little expense to Joe Pullen's Tree, the directors considered purchasing another field in the locality,¹⁰⁵ but the failure of this scheme probably deterred them. Housing development in New Marston was exceedingly slow and the deterrent effects of remoteness and unlit streets which sometimes ran with water 'as high as the top of one's shoes' perhaps outweighed the advantages of low rates and unregulated building. The continued predominance of allotment gardens in the area led to its sometimes being called the New Marston Gardens Estate,¹⁰⁶ and many lots

⁹⁴ Oxon. R.O., Bk.24: Cowley inclosure award, 1853.

⁹⁵ Bodl. G.A. Oxon. b.4(76): Sale particulars, 8.5.1895.

⁹⁶ O.S. 1:2500 Oxfordshire, XXXIX. 4 (1898, 1919).

⁹⁷ M. Graham, *op.cit.* note 4, 72-3, 78-9, 91-8.

⁹⁸ O.C. 18 Aug. 1860; the Society re-registered under its later name following the Industrial & Provident Societies Act, 1871.

⁹⁹ O.C. 27 Oct. 1860.

¹⁰⁰ M. Graham, *op.cit.* note 4, 91, 93-4.

¹⁰¹ O.C. 9 Nov. 1867.

¹⁰² M. Graham, *op.cit.* note 4, 173-8.

¹⁰³ O.C. 5 Nov. 1870.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 4 Nov. 1871; O.C.C.: City Secretary's Dept. P237: 232 Marston Road, Conveyance, 27.11.1882.

¹⁰⁵ O.C., 18 Feb., 4 Nov. 1871; 2 Nov. 1872; 8 Nov. 1873; 7 Nov. 1874.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 22 Oct. 1898; 24 Nov. 1888; 7 May 1887.

remained vacant at the turn of the century.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, 82 houses were said to have been built there by 1888,¹⁰⁸ and the number of people in Marston parish rose from 447 in 1871 to 729 in 1921.¹⁰⁹

4. *Radley*. If New Marston was seen from the first as an artisan suburb, the proposed development of a new suburb at Radley 4½ miles south of Oxford was designed to attract a more prosperous clientele. The landowner and intending developer was Sir George Bowyer (1811-83) of Radley House whose family had inherited the extensive local estates of the Stonehouse family in 1794.¹¹⁰ A twenty-acre site was selected to the west of the railway station and was divided into 40 lots of between a quarter and three-quarters of an acre each. These lots were put up for sale in July 1875 on 999-year building leases, being subject to a ground rent of £10 per acre. Covenants were designed to ensure buildings of a certain value, which varied according to the size and position of each lot, and all but a few residences were to be detached or semi-detached private dwelling houses. The vendor hoped that the directors of the Great Western Railway would be prepared to allow residents special rates for journeys to Oxford, which was only ten minutes away by train. Under these auspicious circumstances, the sale by Galpin & Son was well attended and every lot was said to have been purchased. 'A new suburb for Oxford' was confidently anticipated, but, in the event, only a single pair of semi-detached houses was built 'within about two minutes walk of the station'. Each house had a drawing room, a dining room, eight bedrooms, stabling and a coach-house when offered for letting as newly built in February 1879.¹¹¹ The failure of this estate, like that of Colonel Harcourt in North Hinksey,¹¹² is probably to be explained by a customary exaggeration of the size of the middle-class housing market.¹¹³ Interest in the Radley estate may well have been further diminished by the relatively sordid situation of Oxford station,¹¹⁴ and the Great Western Railway, which was generally indifferent to the development of suburban services,¹¹⁵ did nothing to encourage the scheme.

5. *North Hinksey*. By the mid-Victorian period, landowners and their professional advisers were beginning to appreciate the development potential of the hills to the west of Oxford. In 1867, for example, Lincoln College offered 99-year building leases on nine plots 'for the erection of villa residences near the entrance to Wytham Park',¹¹⁶ but, like John Gibbs' scheme for Boar's Hill in 1871,¹¹⁷ this seems to have attracted no interest. The middle-class wish to flee to the hills¹¹⁸ also encouraged Colonel Edward Harcourt, owner of a large estate at North Hinksey, to consider the development of his land. In July 1872 Clapton Crabbe Rolfe agreed to act as architect to the Hinksey building estate on

¹⁰⁷ O.S. 1:2500 Oxfordshire XXXIII. 16 (1898).

¹⁰⁸ O.C., 24 Nov. 1888.

¹⁰⁹ *Census of England & Wales, 1871: Population tables: Area, houses and inhabitants*, i (1872), 300; *Census of England & Wales, 1921: County of Oxford* (1924), 5.

¹¹⁰ Sir B. Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage* (1897), 176.

¹¹¹ O.C. 22 May 1875; 31 July 1875; 22 Feb. 1879.

¹¹² Below, p.163.

¹¹³ F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), op. cit. note 14, 22; G. Tindall, *The Fields Beneath* (1980), 137.

¹¹⁴ P. Dearmer, *The Cathedral Church of Oxford* . . . (1899), 127.

¹¹⁵ J.R. Kellett, *The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities* (1969), 63-4.

¹¹⁶ O.C. 23 Mar. 1867; 13 Apr. 1867.

¹¹⁷ Below, p.163-4.

¹¹⁸ F.M.L. Thompson, op.cit. note 33, 88.

terms similar to those which his uncle William Wilkinson had established on the St John's College estate in North Oxford.¹¹⁹ In October, he submitted a report and plans for the 80-acre estate, describing its several fields in glowing terms both for their existing trees and for their outstanding views of the city. He suggested a more direct route from Botley Road to North Hinksey by seeking to upgrade the existing private road to Osney Mead and then to run a new road across a Brasenose College meadow which lay north of and parallel to the medieval pedestrian causeway. The latter he wished to preserve as a 'pretty rural walk' either by linking it to the new road at North Hinksey or by building a footbridge at the site of the ferry. The new approach road would give 'a nice view of the church' as residents arrived and would pass the existing farmhouse at a convenient distance so that it could eventually be converted into a private house with adequate garden ground. A more tentative suggestion was to apportion the lower part of the estate for artisan houses let on 66-year building leases for ground rents at the rate of £25 per acre. The rest of the estate he envisaged being let for villa residences on 99-year leases at £20 per acre if the lessee agreed to spend over £2,000 on a house or £25 if he did not. These figures compared with £30 per acre on the St John's College estate, but Rolfe shrewdly felt that reduced terms might 'be the means perhaps of inducing more people to become lessees'.¹²⁰ Harcourt seems to have been fired with enthusiasm and at once proposed to spend £600 on the smaller of the two bridges required for the new road. Rolfe replied with a certain lack of tact that this 'was not quite the best way of going to work' and estimated that the two bridges could be built in the most substantial manner for £800.¹²¹ In February 1873, Rolfe obtained consent from Christ Church, as one of the landowners concerned, for the conversion of the private Osney Mead road into a public roadway,¹²² but negotiations with Morrell's Trustees for some 3½ acres of land east of Bulstake Stream proved both difficult and protracted. Harcourt may have begun to lose interest and raised no objections to the building of a cow-house to the north of Manor Farmhouse, which Rolfe had wished to see converted into a private residence. In September 1873 Rolfe reluctantly approved its siting, but feared that it would spoil the approach to the estate and 'may perhaps tend to discourage some people (especially ladies who hate cows) from taking land about the lower parts of the estate'. In June 1874, the estate enjoyed brief and irrelevant national attention when John Ruskin inspired a group of his undergraduates to feel for themselves the delight of muscular toil by seeking to improve part of the village road. Despairing, perhaps, of any early progress towards development, Rolfe submitted an account for 25 guineas for two years' work on the estate in November 1874, charging nothing for his duties in connection with Ruskin's scheme because 'I felt that you had derived but little benefit from the Ruskinites and their work'.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: North Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-1891. Letter from C.C. Rolfe, 30.7.1872; for biographical details of Rolfe *vide* Andrew Saint, 'Three Oxford architects', *Oxonienia*, xxxv (1970), 62-8.

¹²⁰ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: North Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-91: 'Preliminary plan shewing proposed new bridge and road from the Botley Road to North Hinksey village, October 1872'; 'Proposed building estate at North Hinksey belonging to E.W. Harcourt, Esq. . . . October 1872'; 'Report on Hinksey Building Estate [9.10.1872]'.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* Letter from C.C. Rolfe, 25.10.1872.

¹²² Christ Church MS. Estates 77/360: Letter from C.C. Rolfe, 21.2.1873, endorsed with Dean & Chapter's consent, 26.2.1873.

¹²³ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: North Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-91: Letters from C.C. Rolfe, 24.9.1873, 30.11.1874, 10.8.1877, 17.8.1877.

The proposed Hinksey building estate was then forgotten for a time, but surfaced again as the depression of the Oxford building trade in the mid 1870s gave way to a boom.¹²⁴ A first trace of its rebirth is perhaps to be found in April 1876, when the solicitor Percival Walsh wrote to Edward Harcourt with the information that Morrell's Trustees were at last prepared to sell the required 3½ acres for £535.¹²⁵ In May, University College agreed to Ferry Hinksey Road being made into a public highway on condition that all costs were to be borne by Harcourt.¹²⁶ The line of the approach road to the estate was now determined, but for the detailed layout of the estate Harcourt turned not to Rolfe but to a new architect, Charles Smith of Hastings. Rolfe had clearly offended Harcourt by presuming a formal status as estate architect, and the account that he submitted in 1874 caused a simmering resentment which exploded into a series of acrimonious letters three years later.¹²⁷ Smith's plan for the Hinksey building estate followed Rolfe's in proposing artisan houses and shops for the low-lying area south of Manor Farm, but it was altogether much bolder in concept, envisaging the creation of approximately three acres of ornamental lakes and suggesting the retention of forest trees so that Oxford's Belgravia might become a 'town in the woods'. A substantial perimeter road was to encircle the estate, and internal roads would include that now known as Harcourt Hill and a further three radiating from a Circus where Oxford's 17th-century Conduit house could serve as an architectural feature.¹²⁸ Work began on this ambitious scheme during the summer of 1877¹²⁹ and was undertaken under Smith's superintendence by a Hastings contractor, Alfred King. By October, a quarry had been opened on the upper part of the site and road-making in progress included the building of a stone bridge at North Hinksey on the new road from Ferry Hinksey Road to the village. The cost of laying out the estate was estimated at about £6,000, and work was thought likely to continue for a year before the land could be divided into building plots and offered either freehold or leasehold. Work was still being 'rapidly pushed on' at the end of 1877, but the death of the contractor led to the suspension of activity in 1878 after between £7,000 and £8,000 had been expended on the infrastructure of the estate. No further work was undertaken for some years,¹³⁰ but in August 1882 the Thames Conservators approved the design of a timber road bridge over Bulstake Stream. This bridge was probably built shortly afterwards and formed the last link in Rolfe's long-planned access road, the modern Willow Walk. Prospects for developing the estate were therefore enhanced and Rolfe, who had apologised to Harcourt in 1878 for his intemperate correspondence, clearly hankered still after involvement in it. In August 1882, he wrote to Harcourt, having mentioned the Hinksey estate to a gentleman 'who is interested in some large speculations of the sort elsewhere.' In October, he offered to build a house on the estate for his own occupation, doubtless hoping that his house would serve as bait to lure more substantial prey from fashionable North Oxford. His proposal, accompanied as it was by detailed criticism of the over-large plots on the estate,¹³¹ seems not to have been

¹²⁴ M. Graham, *op.cit.* note 4, 200-1.

¹²⁵ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: N. Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-91: Letter from P. Walsh, 29.4.1876.

¹²⁶ University College, Oxford, MS. Ledger, vi (1870-1900), 107-8.

¹²⁷ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: N. Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-91: Letters, 9.8.1877-3.12.1877.

¹²⁸ Fig. 2; O.C. 13 Oct. 1877, p.6.

¹²⁹ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: N. Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-94: Letter from C.C. Rolfe, 5.7.1877.

¹³⁰ O.C. 13 Oct., 22 Dec. 1877; 12 Oct. 1878; 18 Oct. 1879; 23 Oct. 1880.

¹³¹ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: N. Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-91: Report and estimate on building a wooden bridge over Bulstake Stream, 1882; letters from C.C. Rolfe, 8.8.1878, 4.8.1882, 31.10.1882.

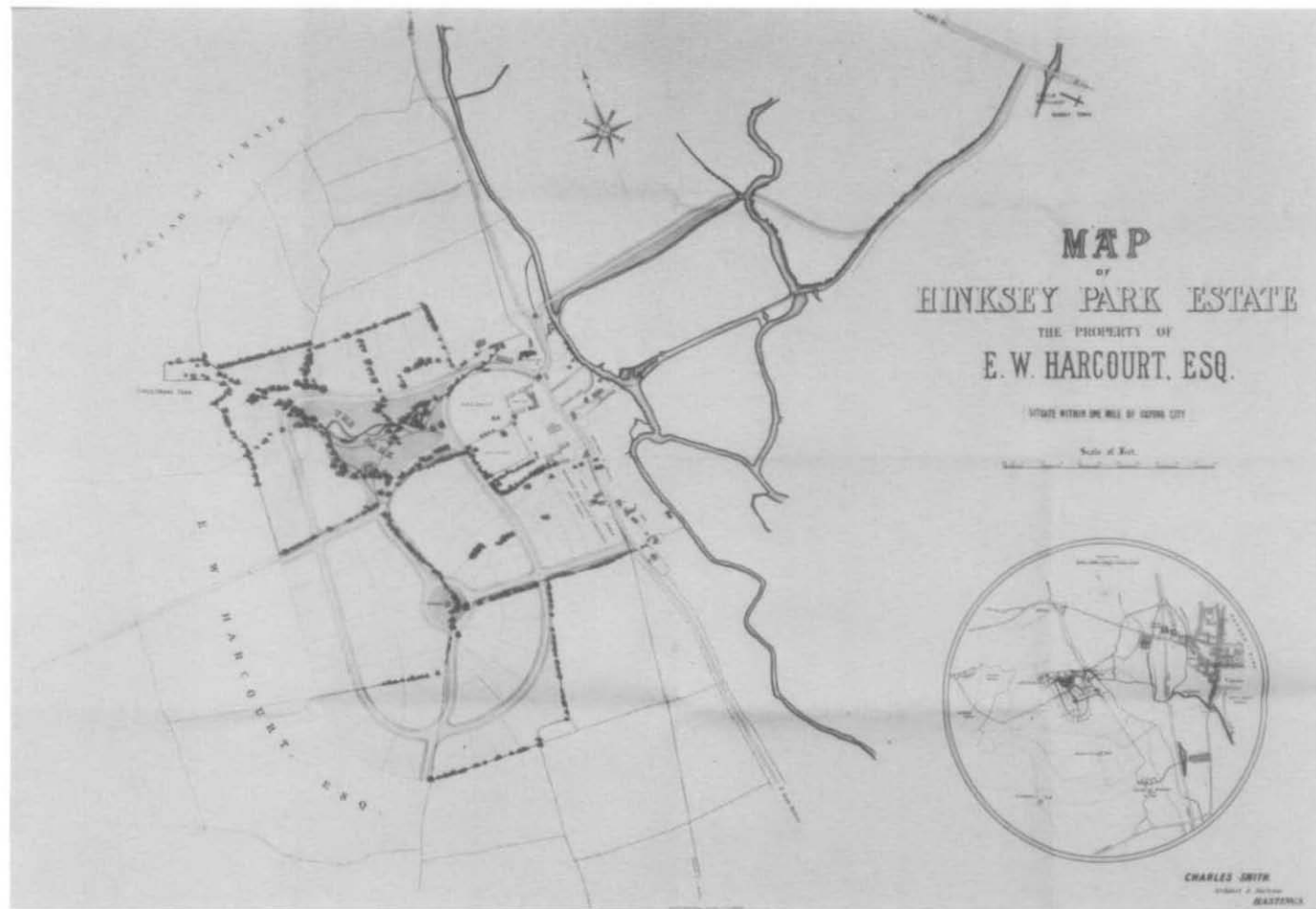


Fig. 2. Proposed North Hinksey Development, 1877 (case study 5). (Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c 298; reproduced by permission of the Hon. Mrs. C. Gascoigne and the Curators of the Bodleian Library.)

entertained, and Harcourt received no return for his considerable expenditure. No houses were built on Harcourt Hill until about 1910, when Sir Walter Raleigh, Professor of English Literature, built *The Hangings*¹³² and became the first resident in an area made gradually more accessible by the motor car. Willow Walk, proposed as a 50-foot wide road 'fringed by a noble avenue of trees',¹³³ remained for years a private world, generating by its very seclusion local fables that it was perhaps Roman or medieval or the work of Ruskin's under-graduate labourers. By the 1900s the cheap timber bridge over Bulstake stream was in a state of collapse,¹³⁴ and it was only after the construction of a footbridge at that point in 1923¹³⁵ that Willow Walk at last usurped the role of the nearby causeway and ferry to North Hinksey.

The initial failure of Colonel Harcourt's estate, although it seemed 'almost unsurpassed for position, healthfulness and beauty of scenery in the neighbourhood of Oxford',¹³⁶ had a variety of causes. Little consistency of purpose or decisiveness was evident in the early stages of development, and Harcourt's attempt to form the entire infrastructure for an ambitious estate before obtaining any return was clearly over-optimistic. The situation of the estate was possibly a little remote in the 1870s, or it was made to seem so by being cut off from polite Oxford by the seedy streets which led to the railway station.¹³⁷ In view of this, it was more than usually important that builders should be at first lured to the estate by very low ground rents and Rolfe encouraged Harcourt to follow this course in 1877 so that building could be seen to be in progress. He returned to a similar theme in 1882, remarking that 'The class of buildings to start with should be small houses of good design - with two or three sitting rooms and four or five bedrooms - which many married College Fellows, and widow ladies, etc., would be content with'. The plots laid out by Charles Smith west of North Hinksey vicarage were, he felt, much too large and 'practically unlettable as planned. Who in these hard times can *afford* to take on lease a plot 400 feet deep? People nowadays really cannot afford to pay £30 a year for ground rent, for that is what it amounts to if they take a plot the size of those shown on the plan'. He contrasted the plot sizes with the much smaller ones in Norham Manor and on the Bedford Park Estate in London, and warned Harcourt of an unsuccessful building estate near London where over-large plots had set back a scheme by ten or twelve years.¹³⁸ Rolfe's advice seems to have fallen on deaf ears, and the failure to heed it must have further jeopardised the chances of the estate. It is conceivable, however, that the limited demand for middle-class housing in Oxford was already being met on the St John's College estate and, for example, in South Parks Road or on Headington Hill, so that the Hinksey building estate had no real chance of success.

6. *Boars Hill*. Although it was three miles from the centre of Oxford, Boars Hill, high above South Hinksey, enjoyed peculiar advantages for development since it had been divided into large freehold estates at enclosure in 1796¹³⁹ and was situated near, but not

¹³² Bodl. G.A. Oxon 8° 850(29): Johnson Soc. visit to Oxford, 31.5.1913.

¹³³ O.C., 22 Dec. 1877.

¹³⁴ H.W. Taunt, *The Oxford Poems of Matthew Arnold* . . . (1910), 82.

¹³⁵ H. Paintin, *Articles on Oxford and the District* [n.d.], no. 25.

¹³⁶ O.C., 13 Oct. 1877.

¹³⁷ M.A. Simpson, op.cit. note 10, stresses (p.52) the importance of direct access by road to a fashionable estate, avoiding poor districts.

¹³⁸ Bodl. MS. D.D. Harcourt c.298: N. Hinksey, Estate papers, 1870-91: Letters from C.C. Rolfe, 3.3.1877, 31.10.1882.

¹³⁹ Oxon. R.O., B.P.C. I/1a: Wootton (Berks.) inclosure award, 1796, *passim*.

too near, the Foxcombe Hill brickyard.¹⁴⁰ For the potential resident, the site was well-drained, and Sir Henry Acland, King Edward VII's physician, sent patients to convalesce there because the air was 'the best in the three kingdoms'. The treeless expanses of heather and gorse also offered delightful views of Oxford and the Vale of the White Horse.¹⁴¹ A first attempt to initiate development seems to have been made in August 1871, when 32 acres of Joseph's Heath were offered as 'One of the healthiest and most beautiful sites in the kingdom'.¹⁴² This land had belonged to William Stone in 1851¹⁴³ and he may have been the client for whom John Gibbs, the Oxford architect, was preparing plans and particulars of the estate. The proposed auction must have attracted little interest, and, at the end of September 1871, the land was offered for sale by private contract for investment, occupation or development into building sites. In July 1872, an attempt was made to auction for building or garden purposes 33 acres of freehold accommodation land on Boars Hill together with a small dwelling-house and buildings which formed part of a market garden.¹⁴⁴ These efforts were perhaps a little premature in the 1870s, and Joseph's Heath, for example, remained undeveloped in 1895.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, general interest in Boars Hill was heightened by Matthew Arnold's poem *The Scholar Gipsy* which had been published in 1853, and a Baptist Minister from Abingdon, the Rev. Edward Jeffrey, had a Swiss Cottage built there by 1883.¹⁴⁶ The crucial importance of personal decision-making in the development process is indicated by the way that the Oxford artist and engraver, Michael Angelo Mathews, was introduced to the area by the Salters, Oxford boatbuilders who also farmed at Wootton. Mathews and his family enjoyed summer picnics with the Salters at Picket's Heath in about 1880 and were so enchanted by the cottages skirting Boars Hill and by the views that they rented an old house as a summer residence. In 1886 an architect condemned the building as unsafe and Mathews had a new house, Westview, built on the site by the Oxford architect and builder, Charles Curtis.¹⁴⁷ This house was one of a little colony of new residences which the *Oxford Chronicle* noted in 1887. The others included a picturesque cottage on Wootton Heath which Harry Wilkinson Moore, architect to the St John's College estate in North Oxford, designed for the President of Trinity College, the Rev. Henry Woods. The Oxford banker, Gilbert Wootton-Wootton, had commissioned Moore to convert Jeffrey's chalet into a gentleman's residence and new houses had also been built for Councillor Jesse Hughes and Arthur Shrimpton. Another local businessman to settle in Boars Hill at about this time was George Randle Cooper, the successful proprietor of the City Dust Pan in St Ebbe's who purchased a 12-acre estate near Henwood, built Woodside, and laid out extensive pleasure grounds. In the 1890s, Boars Hill received titled approbation when the Earl of Berkeley acquired the late Councillor Hughes' house and made it the nucleus of a suitably baronial residence that became known as Berkeley Castle.¹⁴⁸

With no overall plan, Boars Hill was therefore launched as a suburb for a small social elite which had its own transport or could, in the case of Mathews' son, afford the time to

¹⁴⁰ O.S. 1:1,0560, Berkshire. VI (1876-8).

¹⁴¹ M.B. Rix, *Boars Hill, Oxford* (1970), 5-6.

¹⁴² O.C., 26.8.1871.

¹⁴³ Oxon. R.O., Tithe Award 445: Wootton (Berks.) 1851.

¹⁴⁴ O.C. 26 Aug., 30 Sept. 1871; 6 July 1872.

¹⁴⁵ O.S. 1:10,560, Berkshire. VI (1898).

¹⁴⁶ *Kelly's Directory of Berkshire* (1883), 182.

¹⁴⁷ M.B. Rix, *Life of Emma Mathews* (1960), 33-35; O.C. 22 Oct. 1887.

¹⁴⁸ O.C. 15, 22 Oct. 1887; 16 Sept. 1893; 31 Mar., 14 Apr. 1894; 12 Oct. 1900.

walk four and a half miles each way daily.¹⁴⁹ The area was sufficiently remote to deter lower class development and although practically all the earlier inhabitants were farm labourers or market gardeners¹⁵⁰ they were perhaps too picturesque to be seen as a social threat.

7. *Kennington*. Kennington lies 2½ miles south of Oxford just above the flood plain of the river Thames and beside the railway line from Oxford to Didcot.¹⁵¹ The Kennington Estate, comprising Manor Farm and the village, was acquired in 1889 by an Essex landowner, Edgar Disney, and he decided to initiate development of the land north of the village during the 1900s. The site was convenient for small-holdings which could supply the markets at Oxford and Abingdon,¹⁵² and the bicycle made Kennington much more accessible; in 1908, development was further encouraged when the Great Western Railway began an Oxford suburban railway service with halts at Abingdon Road and Ifley.¹⁵³

By May 1911 Disney had laid out the roads now known as Upper Road, Edward Road and Kenville Road, and was offering 50 lots for sale by auction, most of them having 60-foot frontages.¹⁵⁴ Two years later, in May 1913, he auctioned the rest of the estate in 38 lots, selling land to the south of the village and the Manor House as a viable farm while completing the sale of building plots to the north. The auctioneers declared that 'The demand for Cottages and Bungalows in the neighbourhood of Oxford is far in excess of supply, and the sites on the Estate offer every facility for the profitable erection of this class of property, being near to the City and within a few minutes walk of the Halt Station'. Covenants instructed purchasers to fence their plots and to maintain a building line and also prohibited the use of any building as an asylum, hospital or advertising station or for any noisy, noxious, dangerous or injurious trade or business. As befitted an absentee landowner with no long-term interest in his estate, Disney did, however, give himself the option to vary or dispense with these stipulations. The plan accompanying the sale particulars showed 28 small villas along the Kennington Road north of the village¹⁵⁵ and the number of houses in Radley parish, including Kennington, rose from 111 in 1901 to 163 by 1921; during the same period, the population of the parish increased from 592 to 1,074.¹⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

The case studies have shown that, despite false starts in Radley and North Hinksey, there was considerable development on the urban fringe of Oxford before 1914, foreshadowing the faster growth which was to take place between the Wars. In a context of declining rural populations, the growing numbers of people in parishes around the city emphasise

¹⁴⁹ M.B. Rix, *op.cit.* note 147, 34.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* *op.cit.* note 141, 8.

¹⁵¹ W.M. Henwood and I. Williams, 'Kennington', in Oxford University Department of External Studies, *The Landscape of Oxford's Green Belt* (1981), 77.

¹⁵² Buckell, Son, & Ballard: Kennington Estate sale catalogue, 13.5.1913.

¹⁵³ Laurence Waters, *Rail Centres: Oxford* (1986), 76-7.

¹⁵⁴ Buckell, Son, & Ballard: Kennington Estate sale catalogue, 13.5.1911.

¹⁵⁵ Buckell, Son & Ballard: Kennington Estate sale catalogue, 13.5.1913.

¹⁵⁶ *Census of England and Wales, 1901. County of Berks* (1902), 17; *Census of England & Wales, 1921. County of Berks* (1924), 3.

that even non-industrial Oxford exercised a larger attraction as a regional centre than could be measured by its own rising population.

The development process has been compared to the work of actors on a stage,¹⁵⁷ and both played a crucial role in the finished play, as the case studies have shown. The topography of Oxford helped to determine the course of urban growth, discouraging development in the low-lying river valleys while positively enticing builders and developers to the surrounding hills, especially at a time when there was a growing effective demand for suburban housing. At the same time, building land within the city boundary was limited by the predominance of collegiate and other aristocratic land-owners who generally adopted a very long-term view towards estate development and might indeed ignore financial opportunities that presented themselves. Outside Oxford in plausible and not so plausible locations, it was generally the private individual who initiated development and hoped to receive some reasonable return on the investment during his life time. Most lived close to the estates that they planned and, for personal as well as aesthetic and financial reasons, tended to prefer high-class development. Those who lived at a distance were perhaps least troubled when developers and builders adopted a more hard-headed approach and built for a less socially exalted clientele.

The contemporary failure or at least under-development of some of these extra-suburban estates was due mainly to a general exaggeration of the demand for such remote housing. Angelo Mathews might have relished his nine-mile circular walk between Boars Hill and Oxford each day but few would have chosen or been able to add this trek to their long working day. By the end of the century, however, the bicycle was widening the horizons of working people and, soon, the suburban trains, the bus and, above all, the car were to bring such estates within easy reach of the city. In the new industrial Oxford of the 1920s and 1930s these Victorian and Edwardian estates became the nuclei of larger scale and more intensive developments; they also helped to channel growth away from Oxford itself and to preserve a precious part of the city's green setting.

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¹⁵⁷ G. Gordon, 'The shaping of urban morphology', *Urban History Yearbook* (1984), 3.