

NOTES

WHAT MILLENNIUM ARE WE CELEBRATING?

To assert confidently that Oxfordshire was 'founded' a thousand years ago goes beyond the evidence. There are, however, persuasive indications that the midland shires as they existed until 1974, with their familiar names and boundaries, crystallised in or around 1007.

The pattern of shire names that do not commemorate former kingdoms or peoples, but comprise the name of the county town with the suffix 'shire', is especially characteristic of Mercia, and it is noteworthy that whereas not a single one of these shires is mentioned in a source earlier than 1006, three-quarters of them occur between then and 1016: for instance, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1010, Northamptonshire in 1011, and Gloucestershire in 1016. A plausible inference first made by C.S. Taylor in 1957, and developed by J. Whybra in 1990,¹ is that the Mercian shires were established as an act of administrative reform – partly to meet the escalating demand for levies to fend off Viking attack – when Eadric Streona was appointed ealdorman of Mercia in 1007. As James Campbell has recently observed, 'the layout of the Midland shires is such that a river forms the spine of each and the shire town lies at a nodal point on the river system':² a pattern to which Oxford, at the confluence of Thames and Cherwell, is of course no exception.

Below the surface of this simple, orderly scheme lie older complexities. Some sort of dependent districts must have been attached to the new burghal towns from their foundation at the end of the ninth century, at least to the extent that territories obliged to maintain them, and assessed in round numbers of hides, are assigned to them in the Burghal Hidage: 1,300 or 1,500 hides in the case of Oxford. This proto-Oxfordshire, if that is what it was, was scarcely more than half the size of the eleventh-century county, which, like Cambridgeshire, Gloucestershire and Shropshire, comprised a regular 2,400 hides. These symmetrical territories may have been allocated by Eadric Streona, but there is just a hint that something like the eventual Oxfordshire existed by 995. In that year, according to a charter of Æthelred II, two brothers killed in an affray at Ardley were allowed Christian burial by Æthelwig my reeve in Buckingham and Wynsige the reeve in Oxford'.³ Ardley is in Oxfordshire, but near the Buckinghamshire boundary: it looks very much as though the reeves of the two burghal towns had authority extending up to that boundary, and were therefore not merely town-reeves but something like sheriffs (shire-reeves).⁴

If, therefore, we wish to mark a single year as emblematic of Oxfordshire's origins, 1007 is probably better than any other. But whatever reorganisation took place in or near that year made use of older, perhaps far older, territorial entities.

JOHN BLAIR

¹ C.S. Taylor, 'The Origin of the Mercian Shires', in H.P.R. Finberg (ed.), *Gloucestershire Studies* (Leicester, 1957), 17-51; J. Whybra, *A Lost English County: Winchcombeshire in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (Woodbridge, 1990), 4-5, 11-12.

² J. Campbell, 'Power and Authority 600-1300', in D.M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: I: 600-1540* (Cambridge, 2000), 51-78, at pp. 53-6.

³ D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents I* (London, 1979), 571-2.

⁴ This argument was previously rehearsed in J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), 102-11.

BURIALS AT KINGSTON LISLE, 1883

In the summer of 2005 I was one of a party being taken round the Frilford Heath excavations. We were shown where a skeleton had been discovered, which was then being examined in a laboratory in Oxford. We were told that when the examination was complete, the remains would be returned and reburied in the original place. It was not always so. Over thirty years ago the late Edward Walker, Vicar of Sparsholt and Kingston Lisle, showed me some interesting 19th-century letters about the disposal of human remains from an excavation.

In the summers of 1857 and 1858 Edwin Martin-Atkins, the landowner of the nearby Kingston Lisle estate, was in charge of excavations on White Horse Hill. He was 'a rather accomplished archaeological excavator by the standards of the time'. A long mound between the White Horse and Uffington castle was excavated and skeletons found. There were 46 inhumations recorded from 42 graves. At the time there was considerable interest in phrenology, and Martin-Atkins gave twenty-five skulls to the fellow-excavator, John Thurnam, MD. Thurnam kept half of these and passed the remainder on to various people and institutions.⁵ After Edwin Martin-Atkins died in 1859, without leaving any notes about this that have survived, artefacts he had brought down to his house were sent by his widow to the British Museum.⁶ There was no mention of any human remains being taken to Kingston Lisle.

Kingston Lisle church is small, without a graveyard, and until the end of the nineteenth century parishioners were buried in adjoining Sparsholt. No burials had ever been recorded in Kingston Lisle churchyard,⁷ but when a vestry was added in 1883 human remains were discovered. Enquiries were made, and Miss A.M. Martin-Atkins, daughter of Edwin Martin-Atkins, confirmed in writing that human remains from the excavations had been brought down to Kingston Lisle by her father, and after her father's death had been buried 'with his own hands' by her brother.⁸ This would have been her eldest brother, Edwin (1838-1875). The undated page of the letter is presumably late November or early December 1883. A different letter implies the remains were re-interred in the churchyard.⁹ It is not clear if the remains were skulls or skeletons.

I know of no published account of this re-interment. Since I first saw them the letters have been deposited with the Berkshire Record Office.¹⁰

JEAN LOUDON

⁵ D. Miles et al., *White Horse Hill*, chapter 2, p.7; A.M. Cromarty, D. Miles, S. Palmer & R. Bailey, 'Documentary evidence, work of antiquaries and previous investigations', in D. Miles et al., *Uffington White Horse and its Landscape* (Oxford Archaeology, Thames Valley Landscape Monographs No.18, 2003).

⁶ A. Martin-Atkins, *Kingston Lisle: a fragmentary history* (1904), privately printed, annotated copy in Reading Central Library.

⁷ Berkshire Record Office, D/P 115B/6/1/25 and D/P 115B/6/1/31.

⁸ Berkshire Record Office, D/P 115 28/28.

⁹ Berkshire Record Office, D/P 115B/6/1/32.

¹⁰ My thanks to the late Revd. Edward Walker, Simon Palmer, the Revd. Alan Wadge, and the staff at the Berkshire Record Office.

WAS STEPHEN OF OXFORD AN ADVISOR ON CASTLE BUILDING IN 1208 IN THE CHANNEL ISLANDS?

On March 25th 1208, King John ordered the crediting to his bailiffs of Southampton of the money that they had paid for a vessel in which a Stephen of Oxford ('Steph de Oxon') had crossed to the islands of Guernsey and Jersey at the King's command ('per preceptum nostrum').¹¹ – *Rot. Lit. Claus. Johannes Anno 9, Memb. 5* – included in an 1891 publication of La Société Jersiaise of Close Rolls pertaining to the Channel Islands.

The Channel Islands had been lost to France in 1204 though regained around 1206. It is therefore more likely than not that the unspecified mission of Stephen of Oxford to the other side of the English Channel was in connection with the start of building of a castle on each main island, rather than any other particular royal task.

Only five years later in March 1213 a 'Stephen the mason' was 'master of the work' at Corfe Castle, and it is known that there was heavy expenditure there in that year. It is tempting to suppose that this Stephen had started life in Oxford, had perhaps acquired castle building experience at Oxford Castle and come to the notice of King John there.

This note is published to alert future researchers to the fact that the first mention so far known of Stephen of Oxford is not in connection with Oxford itself but with his mission to the Channel Islands at a time when they were being fortified against the threat of continuing French aggression, for the first time seriously.

M. T. MYRES

TREE-RING DATING SUPPORTED BY OAHs

In 2004 the Society agreed to set aside funds to support the dendrochronological analysis of Oxfordshire buildings. A panel was formed and expressions of interest were sought from tree-ring dating laboratories. Following this, the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory run by Dan Miles was selected as contractor to the Society. Under the scheme, anyone can put forward a building for sampling, but must state the contribution accurate dating will make to the understanding of the building and its context, and indicate the financial contribution which can be expected. After consideration by the panel, the Society makes a 'top-up' contribution to successful cases.

By June 2006, nine buildings had been sampled under the scheme. Short reports have been prepared for *Vernacular Architecture*, the journal of the Vernacular Architecture group. Two appeared in VA36 (2005) and seven will be in VA37 (2006, forthcoming). Since June, a further roof, at St Giles' church, Oxford, has also been dated with support from the Society. The Society would also like to ensure that the result of this work is made available to readers of *Oxoniensia*, and this note sets out the findings on three of the buildings studied as part of the project. Another six buildings were sampled as part of on-going research for the Victoria County History's project on the buildings and people of Burford, and the results will be published by them in a forthcoming volume. The remaining building is still the subject of research by the Oxfordshire Buildings Record.

¹¹ *Rot. Lit. Claus. Johannes Anno 9, Memb. 5* – included in an 1891 publication of La Société Jersiaise of Close Rolls pertaining to the Channel Islands.

WEST HANNEY, The Old Dower House (previously known and listed as the Old Post House) (SU 406 928)

Felling dates: **Winter 1517/18 and Spring 1518**

Plate XXVI

The present house consists of four bays built at the same time, with a fifth bay added at the south end at some later date. The original bays appear to have always been ceiled, except for a smoke bay in the southern half of the fourth bay. This range was close-studded and the roof has a double row of side purlins, windbraces and a collar. A gallery originally ran along the east side of the building at first floor level, accessed from the outside, lit by a continuous series of windows. Both the internal and external walls are close-studded. The roof trusses comprise a tiebeam and collar, again close-studded. There are two sets of butt purlins with large chamfers, with curved plank windbraces. There is no ridge beam.

One of the brick stacks carries the badge of the Yates family – who are recorded as owning property in the village in 1511, but the stacks are thought to have been inserted.

Sampling took place in February 2005. The tie at the southern end of the building had two samples taken from it as it retained complete sapwood, but 7 mm. of the outermost rings was lost on coring. The second sample also lost about 7 mm. on coring. Given the average ring-width for the series, this equalled about 6 or 7 rings, and it was assumed that the tree from which this timber was formed was felled along with the other matching series, although a five year range of felling dates is given as it is not possible to be completely accurate about the year of felling using this method. Similarly, whilst a further sample retained complete sapwood, this was heavily decayed, and only the first 4 rings could be measured accurately. The remaining 32 mm. was thought to contain about 26 rings (32 mm. divided by the average ring width) which would also mean that it was felled at the same time, or within a few years of the other trees.

The series were combined to produce a 128-year long chronology which was dated to the period 1390-1517 by comparison with a large number of independent chronologies.

Interpretation and Discussion

The individual timbers do not actually match each other particularly well in some instances, reflecting the relatively sensitive nature of several of the series (that is to say that they showed high year-to-year variation in growth) which may reflect some degree of management of the parent trees. Nevertheless, individual series were dated independently as a check, before the eight series were combined into the site sequence, which gave strong matches with a range of regional multi-site and individual site chronologies. It is interesting to note that, despite the extensive Oxfordshire database of chronologies now available, the best matches were mostly with Hampshire sites, suggesting perhaps that the timbers for this building may have been brought from south of the site. West Hanney is in the old county of Berkshire, and is on lowland in the Vale of the White Horse, which has a different geology to the higher Chiltern Hills or Cotswolds.

Five of the timbers sampled appear to come from a batch of timbers felled over several months, during the winter of 1517/18 and the following spring, with the others having felling date ranges consistent with this date. As the wood was used 'green', this strongly suggests construction in the year 1518, although it is possible that it may have been in the one or two years following this date. This begs the question as to whether the fireplaces and chimney stacks are original features or were inserted at a very early date in the building's history.

WANTAGE, 57 Grove Street (SU 922 989)
Felling dates: **Winter 1448/9** and **Spring 1449**
 Plate XXVII and Fig. 1

This building has been at various times a house, public house, shop and hairdressing salon. It retains two of a possible three bays of an initial phase shown below. Two cruck trusses survive, at the north end and in the centre of the building. The north truss appears to have been the end of the building, but was cut down from full height at a later date to form a half-hip with a type W apex. The middle truss has a type V apex, and may also be a truncated full cruck. Smoke blackening on the north end crucks suggests that a smoke bay existed here before the insertion of a first floor and chimney. The roof was later reconstructed. The south wall has also been reconstructed with many re-used timbers, one of which gave the same 1449 date as the north end crucks.

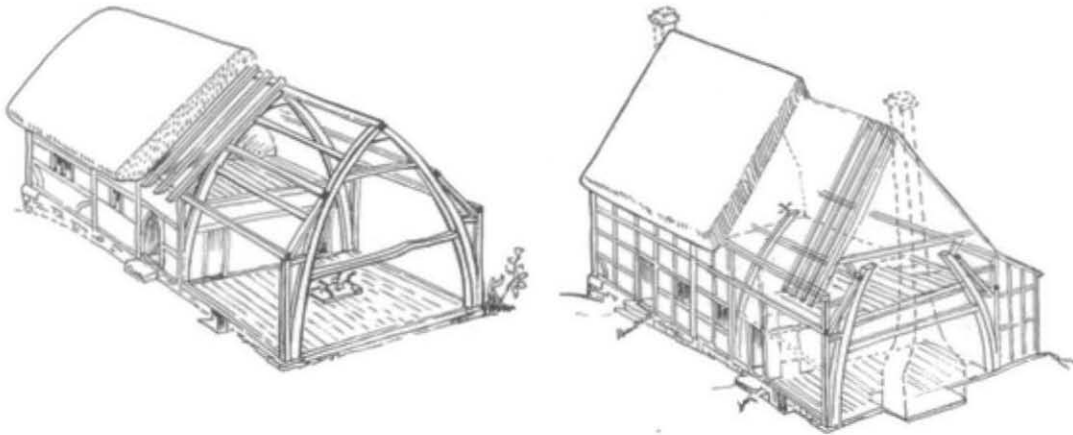


Fig. 1. 57 Grove Street, Wantage from the north. Left – Phase 1 (1449); right – Phase 2 (17th century)

The building is thus of one original phase, but its layout suggests it may have been built as two cottages rather than a single house. Such cruck terraces survive in Dorchester-on-Thames and at Much Wenlock.

In the 19th century the brick chimney from phase 2 was re-worked to incorporate a first-floor fireplace, and further chimneys were added at the south. A long, single-storey wing was built to the rear as a bakery. The front was raised to incorporate windows to the upper floor and given a Georgian-style parapet. The thatch was replaced with tile. It became a public house in the first half of the 20th century.

OXFORD, The Church of St Giles (SP 511 070) Chancel Roof

Felling date: **Spring 1288**

Plate XXVIII

The Church of St Giles dates back to the 12th century, with the west tower being added shortly afterwards towards the end of the century, and the aisles extended. In the early 13th century the chancel was rebuilt along with north and south aisles and the south porch. In the middle of the 13th century, the south chapel was added, and towards the end of the century the external walls of the chancel were rebuilt, along with the roof. During the ensuing centuries the nave roof was raised to form a clerestory, and the various roofs replaced with the exception of the chancel. This roof consists of 21 collar-rafter couples with

ashlars and soulaces on double wallplates. All joints are mortice and tenon. St Giles church belonged to Godstow Abbey, and it was the nuns of Godstow who collected the tithes and appointed the Vicar. The Abbey, as Rector, would have been responsible for the upkeep of the chancel, and the nuns may have been prevailed upon to pay for a re-roofing as a final stage of rebuilding after completion of the nave and aisles. Whether it was contemporary with the addition of the Lady Chapel is uncertain (the Lady Chapel roof is Victorian).

The dating of St Giles' chancel is significant in the context of the development of roof carpentry in Oxford. The 1260 roof of the Chapter House of the nearby monastery of St Frideswide (now within Christ Church) is superficially similar, with rafter couples with two collars and soulaces to the lower of these. But the apexes have simple half-lapped joints and the collars and soulaces have open notched laps.¹² At Merton College the somewhat old-fashioned scissor-braced paired rafter roof of the chapel is of 1296-7, while only a few years later the warden's hall had a remarkable crown-post roof, a type which thereafter became widely used in higher status houses.¹³ St Giles thus sits transitionally between the paired rafters and the crownpost, using the advanced jointing of the latter but failing to employ its added structural stability, as can be seen in the considerable degree of 'racking' towards the east at St Giles.

DAVID CLARK, DAN MILES and JOHN STEANE

THE FATE OF THE TRILL MILL

While the first author was secretary of the Society he was approached by Mrs June Lee about a piece of furniture that she had bought while furnishing a house in Scotland; although much remains unexplained the authors were able to supply some of the information Mrs Lee asked for. As the authors know of no similar pieces of furniture it seems worth noting the circumstances here.

The item in question (Plate XXIX) is in Mrs Lee's words 'a corner, open shelved unit with carved out flower shaped holes'. Its interest lies in a label attached, now partially illegible, reading:

'Portion of the Trill Mill which was destroyed about AD 1500 on the building of Ch. Ch. This wood is from the platform of the overshot Mill; and found in making a sewer, (this word can't be read) Green Dra- (this word can't be read either).'

A small surviving separate portion reads '81 & 82 OXFO'.

The Green Dragon Public House stood at 10-12 St Aldates; 81-82 was more or less opposite.

The sewage system of the city, constructed in 1877, consists of five main arterial sewers feeding the outfall sewer, which starts near the eastern end of Broad Walk and runs to the Sewage Works at Sandford upon Thames. The component referred to in the label is the Western sewer, flowing from Osney to the point where the outfall sewer starts.¹⁴ It intersects the course of the Trill Mill Stream once to the west and once to the east of St Aldates.

¹² J. Munby with John Ashdown and Ian Fisher, 'The Roof Carpentry of Oxford Cathedral', *Oxoniensia*, liii (1988), 195-204.

¹³ R.L. Highfield, *The Early Rolls of Merton College Oxford* (Oxford Hist. Soc. ns xviii, 1964), 59 ff (as modified by his subsequent note 'The Aula Custodis', *Postmaster* IV.4 (1970), 14-22).

¹⁴ W. H. White, 'The Main Drainage of Oxford' (Oxford, 1877).

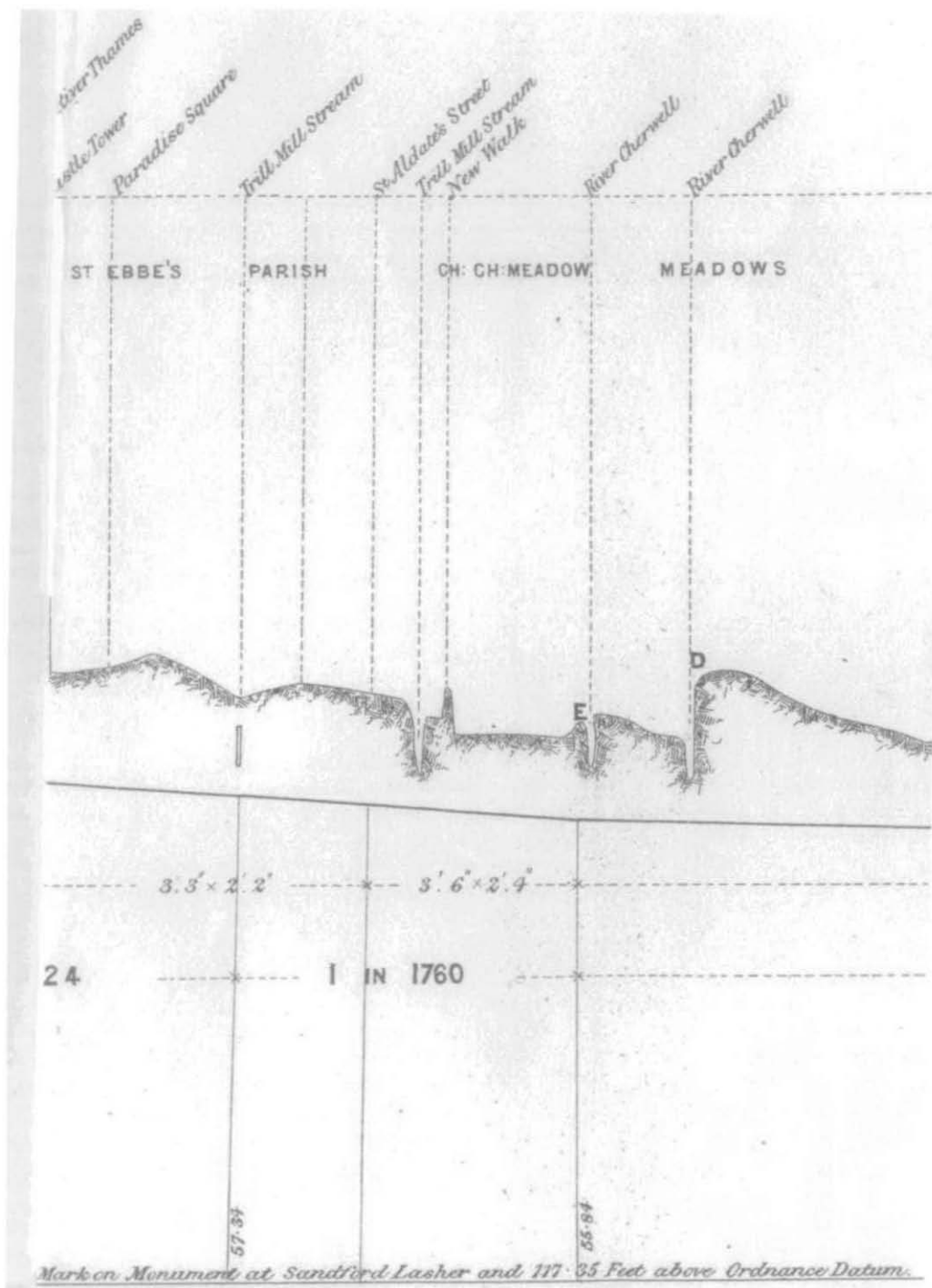


Fig. 2. Cross section of the Western sewer from Castle to the Cherwell, from White, Main Drainage.

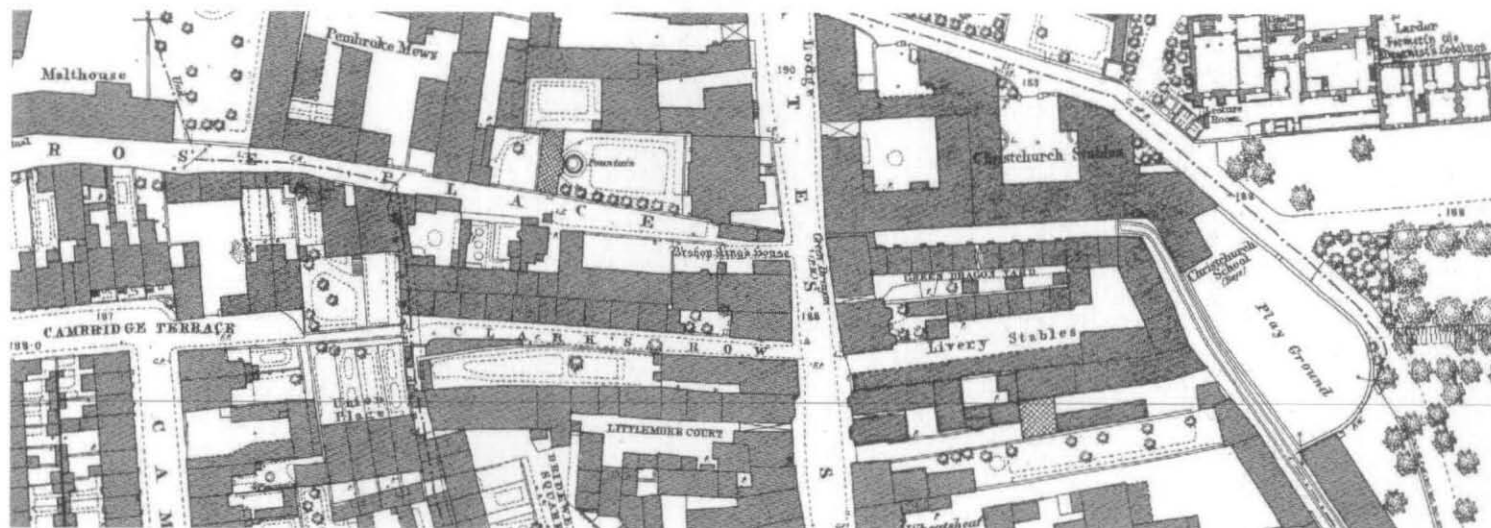


Fig. 3. Detail of OS 1st series sheet 34-03-02

The Trill Mill Stream¹⁵ is a branch of the Thames running to the north of the main channel; it leaves the Castle Mill Stream a little to the south of Paradise Street, flows under Rose Place and then makes a sharp right turn at what used to be the north east corner of the Green Dragon and flows south to join the main course of the river. It was once one of the major channels of the river but various factors diminished its volume; for example Hurst records that the southern part 'had for many years been a place of deposit for bones and horns of oxen, leg-bones of sheep, some of deer, reducing the width of the street from fifteen feet to about six'.¹⁶ In 1858 it was culverted from its start as far as the point where it turns south.¹⁷ As the cross section in Fig. 2 shows the intersection of sewer and stream east of St Aldates occurs where the stream is open.

The topography of this area has been much obscured by the construction of the memorial garden, which involved the demolition of the Green Dragon. However, the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 3) makes the layout tolerably clear: and the sewer must then have run under the unnamed lane marked Livery Stable.

In the absence of other evidence we can only make conjectures about the claimed discovery. It does not appear credible that the ruins of a mill, well enough preserved to identify its component parts and with timber suitable for the making of furniture, should have stood in or by the stream unnoticed for more than three centuries; nor does it seem at all likely that such timber might have been excavated in digging the sewer itself.¹⁸ However, we can tell from the map that at least one building at the back of the Green Dragon must have been taken down to allow the digging of the sewer, and it may be that parts of a mill were discovered there. In fact there appears to be no evidence that the mill was demolished for the making of Christ Church – it did not stand in the way of the college and no record of such a demolition survives in the Christ Church archives.¹⁹ The diminution of the volume of the stream already referred to and the filling of the substantial drop that existed to the south of the priory in the Middle Ages would eventually have made the running of an overshot mill impossible and it is not impossible that the redundant building was somehow incorporated into one of the outbuildings of the Green Dragon.

On the other hand it seems most unlikely that such a discovery would have been unknown to Hurst; and it is hard to see what contemporary authority might have identified the remains with such certainty yet have permitted their reuse as furniture rather than securing their deposit in the Ashmolean.²⁰ It was a practice not uncommon in the 19th century to sell items allegedly recovered from historic ships and buildings to collectors at suitably inflated prices; in the absence of any other report of the discovery of the mill we are inclined to dismiss the claims made in the label as excessively zealous marketing.

TONY DODD and JULIAN MUNBY

¹⁵ See Dodd (ed.), *Oxford before the University* (Oxford, 2003), 80-6.

¹⁶ H. Hurst, *Oxford Topography* (1899), 35.

¹⁷ Hurst (p. 33) records that during the culverting remains of the Blackfriars Mill 'or a sluice belonging to it' were discovered.

¹⁸ Dan Miles, commenting on the first draft of this note, qualifies this view: 'if the outer part of the timber was cut away, the inside might be still good. But I would have expected some of the timber to be dark or black if waterlogged.'

¹⁹ The authors are grateful to Judith Curthoys for her help searching for references.

²⁰ G. A. Rowell, whose broad range of interests included both local history and civil engineering, and who did not hesitate to take up his pen in either cause, wrote to the *Oxford Journal and Chronicle* in July 1873 suggesting that 'as there can be no doubt that during the excavations for the drainage of Oxford, many interesting relics of "old times" will be found...means should be adopted for securing the deposit of them (as far as possible) in the Ashmolean Museum'.



Plate XXVIII. The Church of St Giles, Oxford: Chancel Roof. [Notes p. 503]



Plate XXVIX. The remains of the Trill Mill? [Notes p. 504]



Plate XXVI. The Old Dower House, West Hanney. [Notes p. 502]



Plate XXVII. 57 Grove Street, Wantage. [Notes p. 503]

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