Hythe Bridge Street, Park End Street, and their Connecting Streets: Changing Transport and Changing Architecture in the Parish of St Thomas, Oxford

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SUMMARY

Hythe Bridge Street, Park End Street (or New Road), and short portions of Rewley Road and Fisher Row form an 'island' between the city and the railway in the suburban parish of St Thomas in Oxford. This article will determine the influences on its development and change, concentrating on its architecture and its place as a focus for transportation in Oxford – first river and canal, and later rail and road – with its consequent mix of transient and settled populations. The article then considers the wider issues surrounding the area's development, including the influence, if any, of Christ Church as the principal landowner. The article will concentrate on the period between 1850 and 1950.

St Thomas's parish is large and, until the mid nineteenth century, was divided into two distinct areas: a small, densely populated suburb centred on its High Street (now St Thomas's Street), under the walls of the city and castle, and a considerable area of open meadow land interlaced with the meandering streams of the River Thames.[1] During the Middle Ages, the parish was dominated first by Oxford castle and then by a number of monastic institutions: the Benedictine Gloucester College, Cistercian Rewley abbey, and the Augustinian abbey of Osney, which was, for a short while in the mid sixteenth century, Oxford's cathedral (Figs. 1 and 2).

The parish had two principal manors: North and South Osney. The four streets (or parts of streets) under discussion – Hythe Bridge Street, Park End Street (or New Road), Rewley Road and Fisher Row – fall into the manor of North Osney which was, until the Reformation, the property of Rewley abbey. Most of Rewley abbey's land, along with Osney abbey's holdings in the parish, was given to Christ Church when that new college-cum-cathedral was founded in 1546 by Henry VIII, as part of its substantial endowment. The remainder – including nineteen houses at the centre of this site – was granted to Edmund Powell of Sandford-on-Thames. Thirty years later, Edmund's son, Christopher, passed the property to Thomas Dutton of Sherborne. Dutton's land was still known as 'Dutton's Holdings' in 1821.[2]

THE MIDDLE AGES

During the medieval period and, in fact, well into the eighteenth century, the focus of St Thomas's was around the River Thames, in particular the branch of the river which flowed

[1] An earlier version of this article was submitted as a dissertation for the Post-Graduate Certificate in Architectural History at OUDCE, August 2015.

[2] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 279.

Fig. 1. The Hythe Bridge Street/Park End Street site in the late 1920s/early 1930s, showing the canal basin with warehouse centre right, and Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street converging towards the railway stations on the far left. Fisher Row, with its ancient cottages, follows the line of the river (with a secondary stream behind) in the centre. Park End Street has been built up with its motor showrooms, shops, and hotels on the north side, and its more industrial buildings on the south. Hythe Bridge Street has late nineteenth-century dwellings on the north and mainly commercial premises on the south. (Oxfordshire History Centre, POX 0081756).

around the west wall of the city and castle (the Castle Mill Stream). Hythe Bridge Street was the principal road into the city from the west, connecting Oxford with the market and coastal towns of the west, and Osney abbey had built a bridge for it certainly by the first decade of thirteenth century.[3] The 'hythe' element of the name denotes the wharf owned by the city and used for goods – particularly timber and other building materials – coming down river to be unloaded before reaching the castle mill and the other obstructing weirs and mills further downstream which made navigation difficult.[4] In the late fourteenth century, the associated bridge, called Hythe Bridge possibly from the beginning but definitely by 1286, was rebuilt

[3] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 288; H.E. Salter (ed.), *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey,* 6 vols., OHS (1929–36), vol. 2, pp. 360, 449–50. The dog-leg at the west end of the street, which appears to undermine the importance of Hythe Bridge Street, must have been necessitated by the wall surrounding Rewley Abbey.

[4] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 291; A. Clark (ed.), *"Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford" Composed in 1661–6 by Anthony Wood*, 3 vols., OHS (1889–99), vol. 1, p. 434; T.W. Squires, *In West Oxford* (1928), p. 138. On some maps, the bridge and road are called 'High Bridge', presumably a corruption of 'hythe'.

Fig. 2. The earliest map in the Christ Church archive showing the whole of the area under study, dated 1785. Hythe Bridge Street is labelled 'Baron Close' after the major property on the south side of the street. Only a single property occupies the north side. CCA, Maps St Thomas 4.

in stone, and then again in 1861 in iron. Just to its west, across another narrow branch of the Thames, is Little Hythe, or Quakes, Bridge.[5] To the east, over the bridge, Hythe Bridge Street continued to meet the city at the North Gate. Although the road must have had some importance, Hythe Bridge Street was remarkably undeveloped until the nineteenth century.

The influence of the abbey, as well as the congested river course below Oxford, prompted the development of Fisher Row, a ribbon community on an island between two branches of the Thames which was known as the weir-ham, or Warham Bank, with both a resident and a transient community of boatmen, builders, and brewers. There were residents there in the early twelfth century, and definitely fishermen by 1278.[6] These were probably in the Lower Row, closer to the castle mill and where the breweries were first established. Middle Fisher Row is shown as undeveloped on Agas's 1578 map but this had changed by 1617, when Christ Church commissioned a map of the castle area.[7] David Loggan's map of 1675 shows a distinct row of cottages and one larger property.

Rewley Road (also known as Rewley Lane) historically ran southwards from the gate of Rewley Abbey to join up with St Thomas's High Street. The portion of the road dealt with in this paper passes between Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street, and very slightly northwards towards the abbey site. Map evidence indicates that during the Middle Ages it was largely undeveloped.

[5] Not to be confused with the present-day Quaking Bridge which crosses this branch of the river beneath St George's Tower.

[6] M. Prior, *Fisher Row: Fishermen, Bargemen, and Canal Boatmen in Oxford* (1982), p. 2.

[7] Christ Church Archives [hereafter CCA], Maps St George 1.

Fig. 3. Middle Fisher Row c.1885. Used by permission of Malcolm Graham (Graham, Oxford Old and New *(1976), p. 59).*

THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Of the four streets under discussion, Fisher Row is the one which changed least, certainly from the seventeenth to the mid twentieth century. By 1667 there were seven tenements facing the river and two larger houses on the island between Hythe Bridge and Quakes Bridge. One of Christ Church's tenants, the boatman, William Pemerton, built on vacant land around this time. He could, perhaps, be seen as one of Oxford's earliest speculative builders, following in the footsteps of men like Nicholas Barbon who responded quickly to the opportunities offered for redevelopment in London after the Great Fire of 1666, and pre-empting nineteenth-century lets for building.[8] The cottages shown in a photograph of 1885 (Fig. 3) appear to have been built at different times or, at least, by different builders, and much altered. At least one was jettied; several had dormer windows added to the roof-lines; and others appear to have been extended upwards. Steep roofs were covered in local stone 'slates'. A few properties had just shutters on the windows, but others had casements or sashes. All had doorways at street level, and may have been prone to flooding unless management of such an important and well-used waterway eliminated such a risk.

In an article in *Oxoniensia* Pantin is concerned with the houses of Lower Fisher Row, but there is no reason to suggest that they were, in any significant way, apart from later alteration and individuality, different from those in the middle section. Built probably around 1658 when the properties were let together, the houses were timber-framed, on a low stone plinth, with chimneys and cocklofts. The Lower Row was probably designed as four houses but was later sub-divided into seven. A similar pattern emerges from the leases of Middle Fisher Row; originally seven residences which, once the canal had opened, became fifteen and remained

[8] W.C. Baer, 'Is Speculative Building Underappreciated in Urban History?', *Urban History*, 34:2 (2007), pp. 296–316.

Fig. 4. The Nag's Head on the corner of Middle Fisher Row and Hythe Bridge Street, as rebuilt in 1939, with the small public garden on the site of the cottages. The reconstruction of Pacey's Bridge in 1925 (centre left) was a final nail in the coffin of the Fisher Row community as the connection between Middle and Lower Fisher Rows was broken. Used by permission of Malcolm Graham (Graham, Oxford Old and New *(1976), p. 60). Compare Fig. 3 above.*

as such until sold to Halls & Co. in 1898.[9] The houses were evidently well-built, certainly not shabby or poor-quality, even if they were to deteriorate into slums in later years. In the seventeenth century 'the only thing that was sub-standard about Fisher Row was its site' – which, like much of St Thomas's, was damp and low lying.[10]

The Nag's Head was the local hostelry. It would seem that it was there from the time of the mid seventeenth-century redevelopment. A large building is shown on this site on Loggan's map, and the inn is known to have been patronised by Thomas Hearne and his friends in the early eighteenth century.[11] 'The Fishes', as the Nag's Head was originally known, is recorded in the *Universal British Directory* in 1797 in the tenancy of William Beesley. A publican is listed on the corner of Hythe Bridge Street in the 1851 census by which time the whole Row was leased to the Morrell's brewing family.[12] The Nag's Head was important to the riverside community, not just as a social centre, but also as a temporary residence for those travelling on the river (Fig. 4). The tenant landlords were usually boatmen themselves.[13]

In the late eighteenth century, the arrival of the canal underlined Fisher Row's identification with boat and bargemen. Much as it had been in the medieval period and into the eighteenth

[9] The 1790 lease of Middle Fisher Row is the first to show the alteration from seven to fifteen – CCA tenements 12 & 13, no. 9: CCA xx.c.45, p. 323.

[10] W.A. Pantin, 'Houses of the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, 25 (1960), pp. 121–32.

[11] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 438. Hearne (1678–1735), diarist and antiquary, came up to Oxford in 1695. The pub has had numerous names throughout its history: The Fishes, the Nags Head, Antiquity Hall, the Hole in the Wall, and, most recently, the Oxford Retreat.

[12] William Beesley was assigned the lease of tenement 12, which included the pub, on 10 September 1789, and the Row was leased to Morrell's from January 1843.

[13] Prior, *Fisher Row*, p. 225.

century, the passage of goods across country by river was difficult, and by road almost impossible. As the Industrial Revolution flourished, so the need for a more reliable and cheap form of transport grew. The new wharf at Hythe Bridge was opened in January 1790, accessed by a brick bridge carrying the street, and was soon followed by a substantial warehouse, eighty feet long and with a clear span of thirty feet. Its pillars and foundations were of stone, with brick arches. Just outside the area covered by this paper a canal office was constructed, on land purchased from Christ Church.[14]

In 1767, just two decades before the opening of the canal, a new turnpike road between Oxford and Witney had received royal assent in two Acts of Parliament. The first plan was for the Oxford end to come up Hythe Bridge Street, following the ancient approach to the city from the west, but this met with some opposition, and a petition was presented to Parliament proposing that it would be better if the new road out of Oxford continued in as straight a line as possible from the end of Butcher Row [Queen Street], past the castle, to connect with the Botley Road causeway. Surprisingly little evidence survives for the building of New Road, considering its importance to the town and the fact that it was only the second new street to be constructed in the city since the Norman Conquest.[15] Even at Christ Church, who were the owners of the castle and much of the land over which the road was to pass, it is mentioned only incidentally where it affected leaseholds (the owner of the Hollybush, for example, was excused an entry fine when the lease was renewed as the tenant had been obliged to build a new house); in a letter expressing concern for the castle as an ancient monument and for the preservation of the motte; and on a map showing some redistribution of land after the road's construction (Fig. 5). The New Road, Park End Street being its western portion, was probably completed in 1770.[16]

Much of what would become the western end of Park End Street was occupied by the Hollybush tavern, its outbuildings and grounds. Presumably these were accessed before the creation of New Road via an alley or carriageway from Rewley Road. The property was a guardhouse in the sixteenth century before becoming an inn in the early seventeenth. It reverted to military use briefly during the Civil War. The buildings fronted onto Rewley Road and its premises stretched back eastwards. The Turnpike Trustees purchased the house and part of its land for the road, and the lessee, John Maynard, built a new house and outbuildings in 1771, turning the Hollybush into a coaching inn.[17] In 1829, the inn occupied a substantial site, including gardens, stables, a wash house and privy, a separate cellar, and a skittle alley.[18] Very soon after the arrival of the railway, the inn was rebuilt and changed its name to the Railway Hotel (Figs. 6 and 7).[19]

On Hythe Bridge Street, the late eighteenth century saw the beginning of more intensive development. Fire had destroyed properties on the south side of the street in 1652 and by 1772 much of this side was taken up with gardens and the parish poorhouse.[20] But, between the drafting of the 1785 map (Fig. 2) and Badcock's just forty years later (Fig. 8), the Oxford Canal had been dug and the wharf created. The number of residences on Hythe Bridge Street began to rise and, by 1829, although plot 75, at the west end of the street, was leased to Widow

[14] H.J. Compton, *The Oxford Canal* (1976), pp. 7–9, 38–40. Now the main entrance to St Peter's College on New Inn Hall Street.

[15] The first was Blue Boar Street, constructed by Cardinal Wolsey to compensate for the closure of Jury and St Frideswide's Lanes: H. Salter, *Survey of Oxford in 1772, with Maps and Plans* (1912), p. 6; J. Munby and H. Walton, 'The Building of the New Road', *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), pp. 123–30.

[16] J. Munby and T. Dodd, 'Survey of West Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, 71 (2006), pp. 461–98; The Park End name derives from the Parkend colliery in the Forest of Dean, which was bringing coal down the Thames and Severn canal into its wharf in Oxford by 1821: http://lightmoor.co.uk/forestcoal/CoalParkend.html, accessed August 2015.

[17] CCA, North Oseney Hollybush lease 8.

[18] Ibid. viii.c.2, f. 34.

[19] C. Hibbert (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (1988), pp. 186–7.

[20] Squires, *In West Oxford*, p. 130; Salter, *Survey*, p. 37.

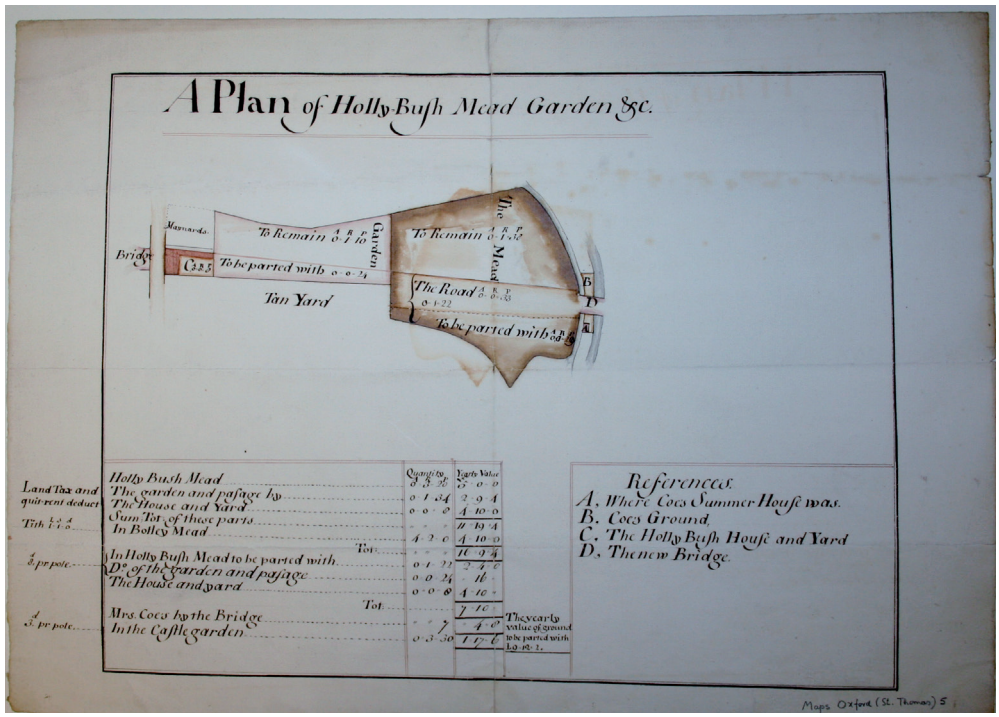


Fig. 5. The only map evidence in the Christ Church archive of the effect of the New Road, showing an exchange of land. The exchange does not appear to have taken place; Christ Church did not sell the plot labelled 'To be parted with' until 1880. CCA, MS Estates 78, f. 282.

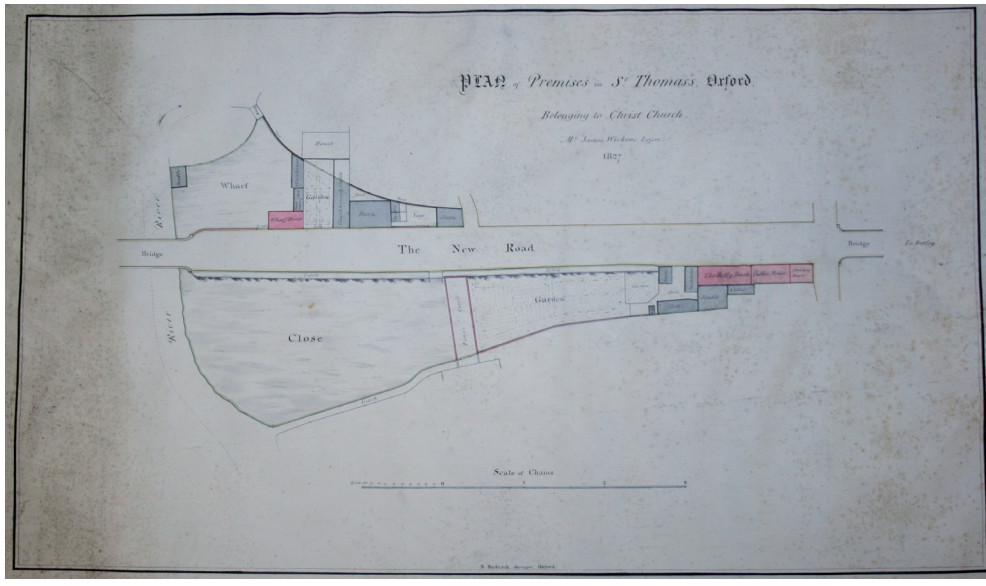


Fig. 6. This plan of 1827 shows that, although the road was busy with trade, the filling in of Christ Church's 'Hollybush estate' did not take place until the mid nineteenth century. James Wickens held not just the Park End wharf but the Hollybush, too. CCA, Maps St Thomas 7.

Fig. 7. The mid nineteenth-century Railway Hotel, formerly the Hollybush, on the corner of Rewley Road and Park End Street, in 1919. In 1829 (see Fig. 8), Badcock mentions a small dwelling right on the corner, with the inn facing Park End Street, and shows what appears to be a porch or large bay protruding into the street. Its appearance has a touch of the seventeenth century about it, with its gables, three-light windows, and drip mouldings with returns. OHC, POX 1015901 (Henry Taunt).

Bossom, and does appear to have been just a single residence with a yard and wash-house attached, plot 76 now consisted of twelve separate residences (shown only as four in 1785), all sub-let by Henry Hall, with yards, stables, pigsties, gardens, and sheds. Of the poorhouse, there is no sign; once the Board of Guardians had been created in 1771, uniting eleven parishes for poor relief, and the new workhouse established in what would become Wellington Square in 1772, the need for parish houses was no longer.[21]

On the north side of the street, the principal tenant was William Rowland, but much of the property was sub-let to a Christopher Collier. There was a yard belonging to the Street Commissioners – presumably the body of university and corporation men established after the passing of the Oxford Improvement Act of 1771 – in the centre.[22] At the west end were a coach yard and a timber yard with a sawpit at the west end, small businesses which flourished with the transport of building materials down the river and canal, but odd enterprises for what had been the principal road out of town. Hythe Bridge Street was in decline before it had even risen from little more than a lane.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

On Fisher Row, little changed architecturally with the arrival of the canal, but the 1850s and 1860s saw a decline in the river and canal community, in Oxford as it did across the country. The arrival of the railway was the principal culprit, undermining first the market in fish: the

[21] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 347.
[22] Ibid. p. 232.

Fig. 8. Badcock's 1829 map of the area under discussion, annotated with later sales and purchases. Although the canal had been opened some years before, Badcock has not included it. CCA, Maps Oxford 21.

number of fathers calling themselves fishermen in the baptism register of the parish dropped from thirteen in 1851–60 to only four in the following decade, and dropped to zero only ten years after that. The picture was the same for boatmen.[23]

The early census records show the community on the river just before its terminal decline. In 1851, Hythe Bridge wharf was occupied by boatmen, boat builders, coal merchants and labourers, fishermen, and laundresses. By 1871, the focus had moved away from the river towards the breweries and railway. The use of the river for sport and leisure was already focussed below Folly Bridge – on the more 'university' side of town. It was only the carriage of heavy goods, including coal, which kept water transport alive. Christ Church, as the landowner, must have noticed the beginning of the end for the community of the Row and, as soon as the current lease had expired in 1898, made the decision to sell the properties.[24]

The New Road, on the other hand, boosted by the opening of the canal, offered opportunities for both commercial businesses and residences. Properties were constructed along both sides of the street in the early nineteenth century. The south side of the street developed differently from the north, and it was here that the first larger commercial buildings and enterprises could be found.

On the corner of Park End Street, by Pacey's bridge which carried the New Road over the river, was the Park End wharf, functioning probably very soon after the opening of the canal, but definitely in the early nineteenth-century as a coal wharf. It was evidently, however, used for purposes other than coal; in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, in 1825, there was an advertisement for the sale of several thousand carriage and wagon spokes, Forest paving stone, and Barnstaple

[23] Prior, *Fisher Row*, pp. 298–9, 319.
[24] CCA, GB i.b.3, p. 7.

ovens.[25] Later advertisements were for seasoned hardwoods and furniture.[26] New houses were being erected on the street at the same time.[27] In 1827, the property consisted of warehouses, coach-houses and stabling, and a dwelling house constructed along the stream bank and the new road.

The wharf was offered for sale, as a freehold, in 1880, by which time it had been sub-divided into several tenancies.[28] It was purchased by Phillips & Son, brewers, and a new brewery erected on the site,

> designed to suit the improved tower system of brewing . . . with new machinery of the most approved character, beer stores, shop and malthouses, offices, stables, glass-covered yard, etc. The street front is very neat and attractive in design, and is a welcome addition to this not, at present, very architecturally bright, although important thoroughfare.[29]

It was designed by H.J. Tollitt, the county surveyor, and built by Phillips themselves.[30]

The next major building to be erected on the south side of the street, next door to Phillips's brewery was the Archer, Cowley & Co. furniture depository (Fig. 9). This considerable building, which began as a warehouse constructed in 1894, must have resulted in the demolition of numerous smaller houses and shops;[31] the 1851 and 1871 censuses show a row of respectable working-class shopkeepers and artisans. The warehouse was considerably altered and extended to designs by John Wooldridge in 1901, and served as a furniture store and base for the removals company. It was a steel-framed construction at a time when this method of building was still met with some caution by architects who often insisted on the walls being load-bearing, even when this was strictly unnecessary.[32] The frontage is brick with stone dressings around the doors and the round-headed windows, which have king mullions and transoms. The motifs are Flemish Renaissance, and the roof line, particularly of the two, grander 'pavilion' ends, have an element of Dutch style to their gables. The office door at the west end sits on the corner of the building and the window has elaborate Edwardian engraved glass.[33] The style is not dissimilar to that of much larger warehouses such as the Newton Buildings in Manchester (1907).[34] Archer, Cowley must have begun its trade with horse-drawn vehicles connecting with the railway but it was in a prime position to take advantage of the advance of the motor car in the early twentieth century.

At the west end of Park End Street, near the corner of Hollybush Row, was another brewery: the Eagle Steam Brewery.[35] A rather forbidding brick-built structure, the brewery was established by 1867, and was sold to the Weavings in 1869 when it was described as having a six-horse-power steam engine and fixed plant, a new malthouse, barley and malt garners, stores, offices, stables, yards and premises along with a very comfortable residence. Its proximity to the railway was an added selling point (Figs. 10 and 11). The brewery underwent constant extension and alteration, embracing new ideas and technologies, such as a new glass roof to the bottle washing room in 1911 and a beer-in-cask store in 1928 built of

[25] Barnstaple ovens were made in one piece from potter's clay and were apparently not only cleaner and cheaper than other ovens but also baked more evenly and were economical on fuel. See: http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MDV813&resourceID=104

[26] *JOJ*, 23 July 1825 and 22 Feb. 1834.

[27] Ibid. 23 and 30 Aug. 1828.

[28] Ibid. 12 June 1880; CCA, MS Estates 78, f. 282.

[29] The tower system allowed the flow-process to operate by gravity once the ingredients had been taken to the top floor by steam engine.

[30] Ibid. 17 Oct. 1885; L. Pearson, *British Breweries: An Architectural History* (1999), p. 195.

[31] OHC, city engineer's plan 2341A OS.

[32] Ibid. city engineer's plan 87 NS; K. Hudson, *The Archaeology of the Consumer Society* (1983), p. 38.

[33] OBR reports 6 and 7 (2006); OHC, city engineer's plan 1395 NS. Since the first writing of this paper, the glass has been damaged and is no longer in place.

[34] S. Taylor et al., *Manchester: The Warehouse Legacy* (2002), pp. 3–4.

[35] OHC, city engineer's plan 1897 NS.

Fig. 9. The architect and builder on the roof of the Archer, Cowley & Co. building during construction. OHC, POX 0071235.

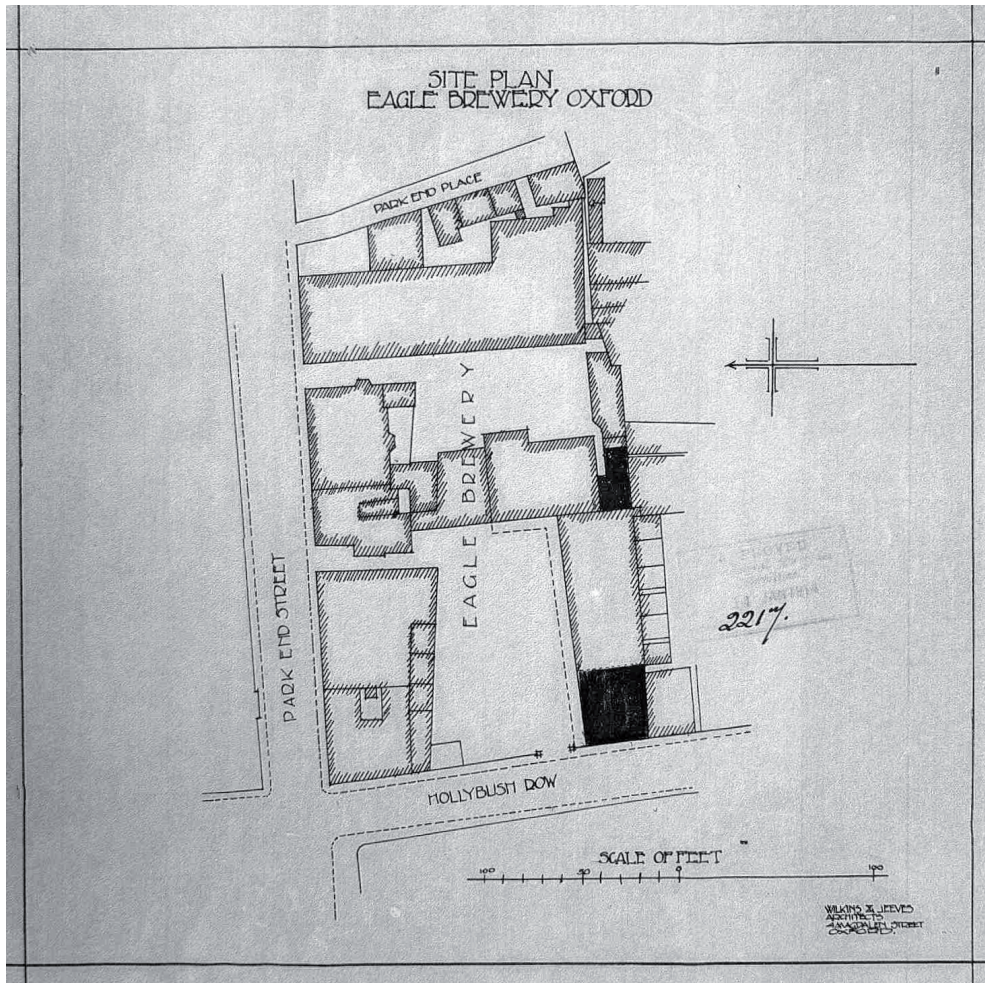


Fig. 10. City engineer's plan 2217 NS showing the ground plan of the Eagle Brewery in 1914. Reproduced by kind permission of Oxford City Council.

galvanised steel sheets with sliding wooden doors, a steel-trussed roof with asbestos sheets, and roof glazing.

The north side of Park End Street was slower to develop larger businesses. At the east end, twelve tenements were built soon after the New Road was cut through. In 1829, all were residences, except No. 6 which was a carpenter's yard in the occupancy of George Castle. Within a short space of time, however, many of the properties had become small shops and businesses including, in 1907, confectioners, hairdressers, tailors, a bootmaker, a fishmonger, refreshment rooms, a fruiterer, a saddler, a cycle maker, and a chemist.[36]

On Hythe Bridge Street, things were changing, too. The 1851 census records eighteen properties along the street occupied by a succession of labourers working in local industries such as the coal trade, building, and brewing. One or two were still occupied on the river as boatmen or boat builders; one was an agricultural labourer, evidence that St Thomas's still had a considerable quantity of agricultural land at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most

[36] *Kelly's Oxfordshire Directory* (1907).

Fig. 11. The Eagle Steam Brewery in the early decades of the twentieth century. Further down the street is the Archer, Cowley warehouse.

were local men, but others were from Leicestershire and Warwickshire further north on the canal network. By 1871 there were thirty properties, with another nine under construction.

At the back of Badcock's survey is a plan showing proposed development along the north side of Hythe Bridge Street, indicating the change in its appearance from a semi-rural road, to a more urban environment with terraces of brick and slate properties, with an inn at one end of the street and a church school at the other (Fig. 12). Although Badcock does not date these alterations, they must have occurred soon after 1850 (they are not shown on Hoggar's map: Fig. 13), when the Oxford local board and the collegiate landholders became increasingly concerned about the conditions in St Thomas's parish especially after the arrival of the railway.

In January 1866, at a meeting of the local board, the warden of New College, James Sewell, proposed that

> the Commissioners considering the great importance of securing a good thoroughfare at the entrance of Oxford by the Hythe Bridge Street would suggest to the dean and chapter of Christ Church that it would be desirable if possible to have a roadway including the paved street of not less than 45 feet at least.

The clerk was given the task of approaching Christ Church to ask how much they would charge the board for an additional five feet.[37] The dean and chapter seem, however, to have been one step ahead and, in late 1865, had drawn up a plan for dividing the north side into

[37] CCA, MS Estates 78, f. 123.

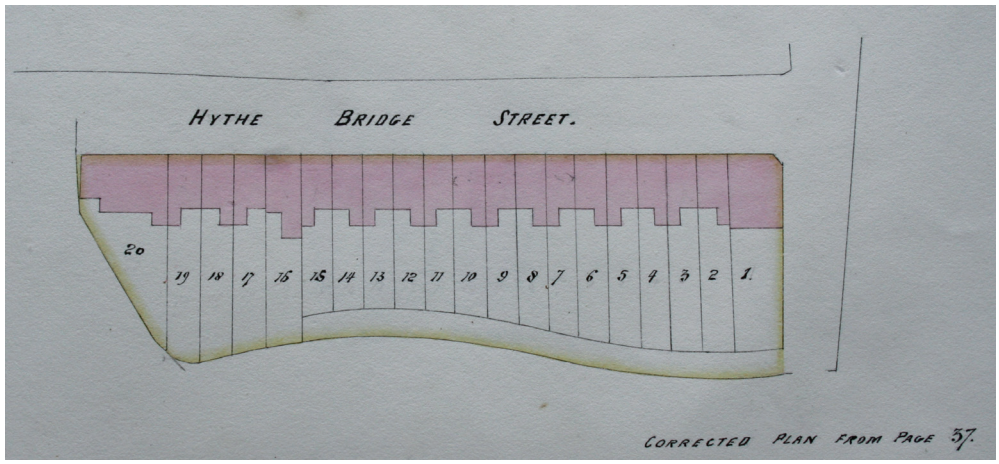


Fig. 12. Badcock's 'corrected' but undated plan of the north side of Hythe Bridge Street. CCA, viii.c.2, f. 49. Plot 16 was the Revd Thomas Chamberlain's house, and plot 20 a new church school. Compare with the plan of 1865.

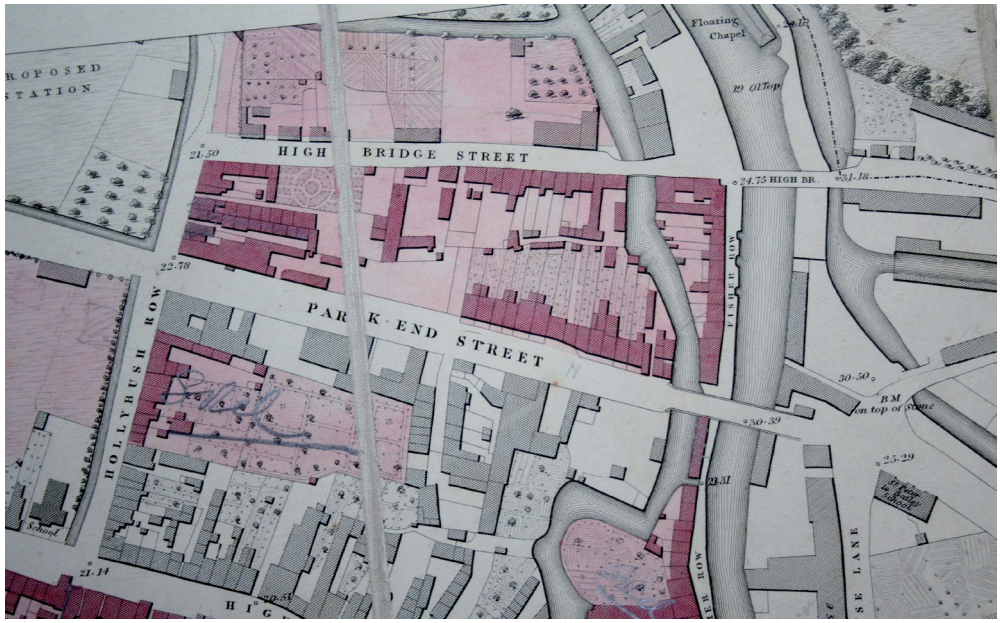


Fig. 13. Hoggar's map of 1850 shows the north side of Hythe Bridge Street (here High Bridge Street) still undeveloped. The south side, however, is showing signs of infilling, mainly with stables and workshops. CCA, Maps Oxford 61.

lots for auction on building leases (Fig. 14).[38] The plan is comparable with the amended one of Badcock (Fig. 12), showing regularised building plots and building line. However, this plan was not implemented until 1869 when one or two variations retained Chamberlain's house,

[38] CCA, Maps St Thomas 22.

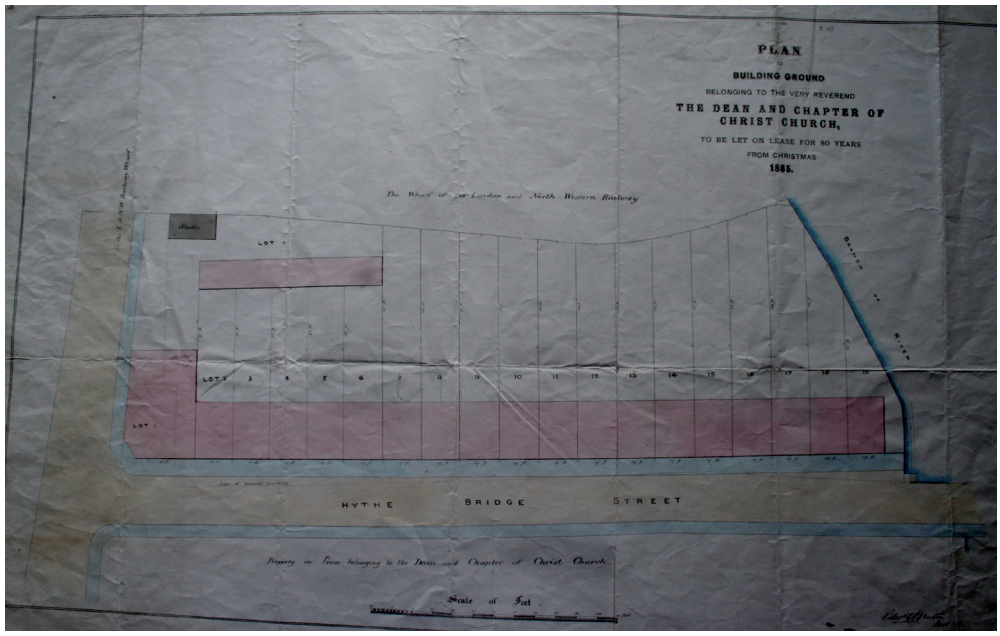


Fig. 14. Plan of building plots on the north side of Hythe Bridge Street to be let from Christmas 1865. CCA, Maps St Thomas 22 and 23.

the school, and a double-sized plot at the west end, designated for a hotel. The conditions stipulated that the houses were to be completed, to the satisfaction of the architect, Edward G. Bruton, within two years and in accordance with plans, elevations and specifications first approved by Bruton. All the houses were to have front, back, and party walls of not less than nine inches, and were to cost not less than £250. No house was to be used for the sale of 'beer or spirituous liquors'. Drainage and sanitary works had to meet the requirements of the local board.

The westernmost plot became the Great Western Hotel, built by William Allen for the Wethereds, brewers of Great Marlow, but soon assigned to Morrell's. The lease dated from 24 June 1868, and the build had to be completed by 29 September 1869. The agreement is not very detailed on the construction merely stating that the work had to be done in a 'good substantial and workmanlike manner with good and proper materials of all sort and the timber of proper quality and size and with proper walls and fences.'

The 1869 terrace of houses is clearly visible on the aerial view (Fig. 1, above), with the larger plot for the hotel at one end, Chamberlain's taller and more imposing property towards the east, and the school close to the back stream.

As Christ Church was initiating the building work on the north side of Hythe Bridge Street, it was taking its responsibilities to its tenants elsewhere in the parish seriously.[39] Spurred on, no doubt, by the anxiety of the local board concerning sanitation and the rather unsavoury reputation of the residents of St Thomas's, the dean and chapter commissioned Bruton to build the Model Dwellings on The Hamel to re-house some of the poorest inhabitants. This was a three-storey block of thirty tenements, well-built in polychromatic brick with slate roofs, not unattractive in a utilitarian way, with open staircases for better ventilation and a large drying yard-cum-playground, and indoor sanitation.[40] More were

[39] Christ Church was a diligent landlord when it came to basic maintenance and improvements.
[40] G. Tyack, *Oxford: An Architectural Guide* (1998), pp. 238–9.

planned, but Christ Church's charity only went so far; a return of just five per cent gross was not sufficient.[41]

The construction of the Model Dwellings demonstrates a very Victorian change in the emphasis of charitable giving from the support of individuals to wider causes, coinciding with the closure of the Christ Church almshouse which had housed twenty-four poor men – usually from the armed forces – since 1525.[42] Similarly, the new (1868) Gothic revival school on Hythe Bridge Street, next door to the vicar's house, was just one of several in the parish supported by Christ Church and other local benefactors.[43]

Not long after the completion of the terrace on the north of Hythe Bridge Street, a portion of the south side was put up for development. As we have seen, between Badcock's 1829 survey and Hoggar's 1851 map, there was considerable infill. Seven lots were made available in 1873 for completion by December 1874, with the same conditions as before.

Very few of the Victorian buildings on either side of the street survive but their changing uses can be traced in the censuses, lease registers, and street directories. In 1871, most of the properties on the street were occupied by tradesmen or labourers. One or two properties, in spite of Christ Church's stipulation that leases were not to be granted for the sale of liquor, were public houses: in addition to the Great Western Hotel on the north side and the Robin Hood on the corner of the south side, there were the Bricklayers' Arms and the Nottingham Arms. Another public house, the Running Horses, was on city land on the junction of Hythe Bridge Street and Upper Fisher Row.

On Rewley Road, between Christ Church's Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street properties, were two small areas not owned by the college; the larger was known as Dutton's Holdings, held in 1829 by Thomas Bricknell, and alongside this was a passageway called, in the nineteenth century, Norman Passage.

The Hollybush area was notorious for its poor sanitation and for its impoverished and semi-criminal class of residents. The first real enquiry, in 1848, revealed that St Thomas's, with St Ebbe's, were by far the worst areas, with open drains and heaps of night soil.[44]

Almost as soon as the railway stations were proposed, a house improvement committee was established. It included university men; city men such as Charles Tawney (alderman brewer, and philanthropist), and William Ward, alderman; clergy, including Thomas Chamberlain (a Christ Church man and vicar of St Thomas's, who was active in improving the lot of his parishioners); Henry Acland, regius professor of medicine; and local newspaper magnate, Joseph Vincent who, with Acland, petitioned for Oxford to adopt the Health of Towns Act of 1848.[45] Oxford was notorious for its poor sanitation, and Christ Church's response (other than the new building on Hythe Bridge Street) was to purchase Dutton's Holdings (in the 1871 census known as Rewley Place) in April 1870, at which time it consisted of twelve 'substantially erected' cottages occupied by a community of working-class families. A note by Christ Church's agent suggests that the college was concerned that the low status of these premises had a negative effect on the value of Christ Church's own property in the vicinity, and proposed the purchase of the houses in order to bring them up to a decent sanitary state at the same time as improving their own houses as the leases fell in.[46] Norman Passage, purchased in 1881, was similarly peopled. Residents included scavengers, agricultural labourers, market

[41] M. Graham, 'The Suburbs of Victorian Oxford: Growth in a Pre-Industrial City', University of Leicester Ph.D. thesis (1985), p. 125 [available on-line at https//lra.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/8427]; CCA, v.b.1; Maps St Thomas 25.

[42] J. Curthoys, '"To Perfect the College. . ." – The Christ Church Almsmen 1546–1888', *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), pp. 379–496.

[43] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 453. Chamberlain was a staunch fan of Gothic architecture and a Tractarian, as well as a campaigner for the improvement of the lot of his parishioners.

[44] Ibid. p. 236; W.P. Ormerod, *On the Sanatory* [sic] *Condition of Oxford* (1848), pp. 15, 24.

[45] CCA, MS Estates 78, f. 78.

[46] Ibid. f. 156.

Fig. 15. Rewley Lane, between Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street, looking beyond to what would become Hollybush Row, photographed in 1907 by Taunt. OHC, POX 0105912.

porters, and one remaining canal boatman. However 'substantially erected' the premises may have been described by the auctioneers, the two plots consisted of almost back-to-back dwellings, with narrow passages down each side and a yard at the back. The cottages survived into the 1920s.

This short stretch of street included at least four hospitality businesses. On the northern corner of Hythe Bridge Street and Rewley Lane, built in the redevelopment of the 1860s, was the Great Western Hotel. The short stretch between Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street included the Robin Hood, first mentioned in Christ Church leases as such in 1864, but the premises was recorded as 'newly erected' in 1684 (Fig. 15).[47] Next to the Robin Hood was the Five Alls separated only by a barber's shop from the Railway Hotel, formerly the Hollybush. The Railway Tap was just around the corner of Park End Street.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the early twentieth century, unlike the rest of the 'island', Fisher Row still looked much the same as it had done centuries before, but the railway had taken away business. Additionally, the widening and lowering of Pacey's bridge (or New bridge, leading over the river into Park End Street) to take increased road traffic meant that boats could no longer pass down-river to the mill. The Castle mill was pulled down in 1929, followed by the Nag's Head in 1938. A year later, the pub was rebuilt, the timber-framed building being replaced with one of brick and

[47] Munby and Dodd, 'Survey'.

Fig. 16. Park End Street in 1920 by Henry Taunt, just before its redevelopment (OHC, POX 0105971). The photograph shows nineteenth-century buildings and some evidently older structures that have been re-fronted. The shops on the north side of the street are recorded in Kelly's directory of 1920 as a bootmakers, two confectioners, an antiques dealer, a fishmonger, a beer retailer, a house divided into apartments, and some refreshment rooms, finishing at the west end with the Railway Tap and the Railway Hotel.

slate (Fig. 4, above), but, significantly, the front door now opened on to Hythe Bridge Street. The influence of the river had finally gone.

In 1954 the canal basin was filled in, by which time only sixteen commercial boats were using the waterway.[48] Nuffield College – funded by the car manufacturer, William Morris, was built over most of the wharf site, and the remainder became a car park.[49] At the same time, the seventeenth-century timber-framed cottages on Middle Fisher Row were demolished, to be replaced by a public garden rather than with residences or businesses.

On Park End Street, just as Kelly's published its 1920 directory, the north side of the road began to change markedly (Fig. 16). The first companies to move in were Hartwell's and King's, two motoring businesses, and the two which sealed Park End Street's reputation as the 'street of wheels' (Fig. 17).[50] Morris was, of course, a pioneer of the manufacture of cars from brought-in parts; the area, including Birmingham, Coventry, and Oxford, was ideal as parts could be obtained easily from all over the country.[51] Retailing soon followed.

[48] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 294.

[49] The loss of the warehouse was not unlamented: a letter to the *Oxford Times* in 1955 implied that, had this grand brick and stone structure been a university building, it would not have been demolished: Oxford Preservation Trust/OA, *Castle, Canal and College* (2008).

[50] C. Newbigging, *The Changing Faces of St Ebbe's and St Thomas, Book 2* (1997), p. 34.

[51] Hudson, *Consumer Society*, p. 75; K.A. Morrison and J. Minnis, *Carscapes: The Motor Car, Architecture and Landscape in England* (2012), pp. 14–15.

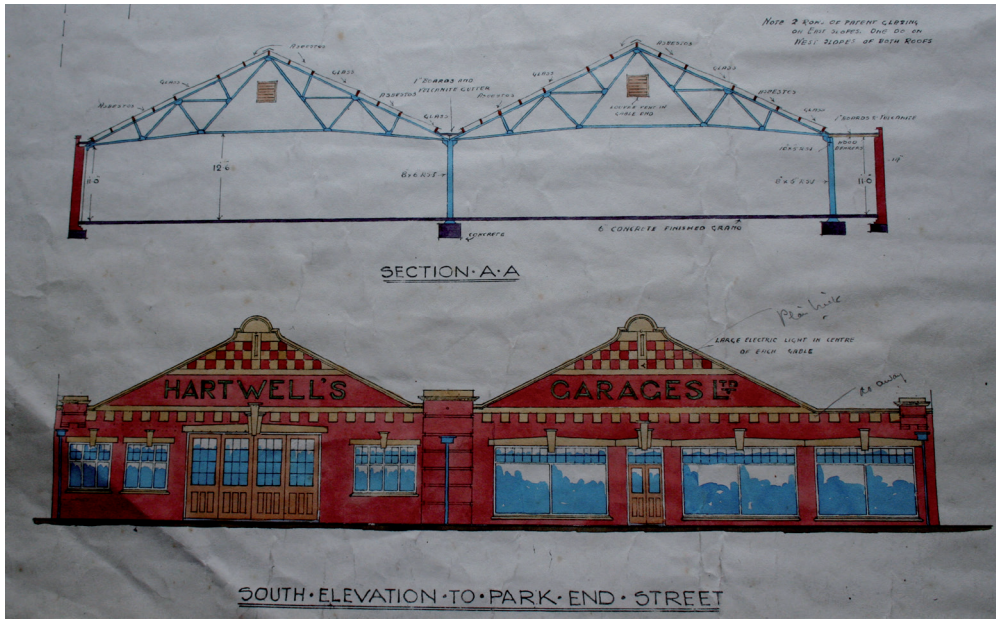


Fig. 17. The original design of Hartwell's Garage (visible in the aerial view, Fig. 1), and the more easterly portion of Hartwell's, showing the 1930s façade (CCA, Maps St Thomas 32).

Hartwell's, originally an agricultural ironmongers, moved from Chipping Norton to Oxford in 1919. Its original showroom was on Queen Street, right in the centre of the city, which followed the nationwide trend for displaying vehicles in a conventional shop, often over two floors and serviced by hydraulic lifts or, if there was space, long ramps.[52] They soon moved out, though, to a wider road, closer to the country, on a major junction.[53] But, while some showrooms of the time were adopting a timber-framed, mock rural look reflecting the new drivers' fondness for country jaunts, Hartwell's chose something slightly more urban. The first design did, however, have an Art Deco prettiness about it, in red brick with stone and tile dressings, and large glass windows for display. The structure was simple with a rolled-steel frame, roofed with asbestos and glass, resting on a six-inch concrete block. Larger areas of glass, crucial to the development of the new showrooms, could be used once steel framing was accepted and mastered.[54]

The application to build was approved by Christ Church, as landowners, in October 1919, with the building agreement sealed a year later. John Coleridge, the London architect responsible for the design of the Memorial Gardens on St Aldate's, having been asked for his opinion of the design and specification, commented that:

> They appear to be going to build it quite properly and I can see no objection to it except that it is very ugly. I suppose that they want something that will catch the eye, and they have certainly got it. I cannot see any way of altering it without redesigning the whole front, and I suppose we cannot make them do that.

Coleridge would have been pleased to know that this façade was not to last long.

[52] Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, pp. 49, 51. The Queen Street showroom was at No. 22, a rather imposing and elegant early twentieth-century building on the corner of St Ebbe's Street, now housing Top Shop.
[53] Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, p. 62.
[54] Hudson, *Consumer Society*, pp. 38–9.

Fig. 18. Nicholls's shop and flats on the corner of Park End Street, in 1930. OHC, POX 0063682. Compare Fig. 16.

Modifications were made to the premises in 1934, when the Park End Street showroom became exclusively for the sale of Austin cars. First-floor workshops were added to those on the ground floor; garage facilities were expected along with the showroom, and the showroom was extended.[55] The appearance of the building was altered to match the favourite style for the period: a 'neutral, pared-down Neoclassicism, often faced in off-White Portland or Empire stone'.[56] Although the building has been altered, Hartwell's (now Staples) still retains the Art-Deco detailing of its frieze and central 'H' above the main door, and a mosaic of the company name on the floor at the entrance.[57] At the same time, Park End Street, Hythe Bridge Street, and Rewley Road were all widened.[58]

At the opposite end of Park End Street, new shops, hotels, and apartments were proposed and, over three years, between 1925 and 1927, building leases were granted to T.H. and Alice Ward, G. Nicholls, and J.R. Wilkins.[59] The Wards had a furniture, pram, and toy shop on the site from 1919 until 1972, and Nicholls was a boot-making business.[60]

Nicholls's building was constructed of brick with a concrete and asphalt roof in a pared-back classical, if asymmetric, design.[61] The parapet has a suggestion of pilasters, voussoirs and a string course picked out in a slightly brighter brick. Round windows and a 'Dutch'-shaped chimney give added interest, and the pilasters between the shop windows and doors have Ionic decoration supported by rather apologetic cherubs (Fig. 18).

[55] Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, p. 55; H. Barrett, *50 Years of Hartwells: A Brief History* (1979). Hartwell's changed the frontage of its Summertown showroom at the same time, and gave both a very similar simple modern appearance.

[56] Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, p. 59.

[57] OBR reports 6 and 7 (2006), p. 60.

[58] CCA, Maps St Thomas 32; OHC, city engineer's plan 2559 NS.

[59] Allowances were, it would seem, paid to those who lost their shops and homes in this redevelopment. Christ Church also applied for and received redemption of land tax when approval was given for the granting of building leases for the whole of the north side of Park End Street: CCA, GB i.b.5.

[60] M. Graham and E. Gollnast, *On Foot from Paradise Street to Sheepwash* (2016), p. 68.

[61] OHC City engineer's plan 3356 NS.

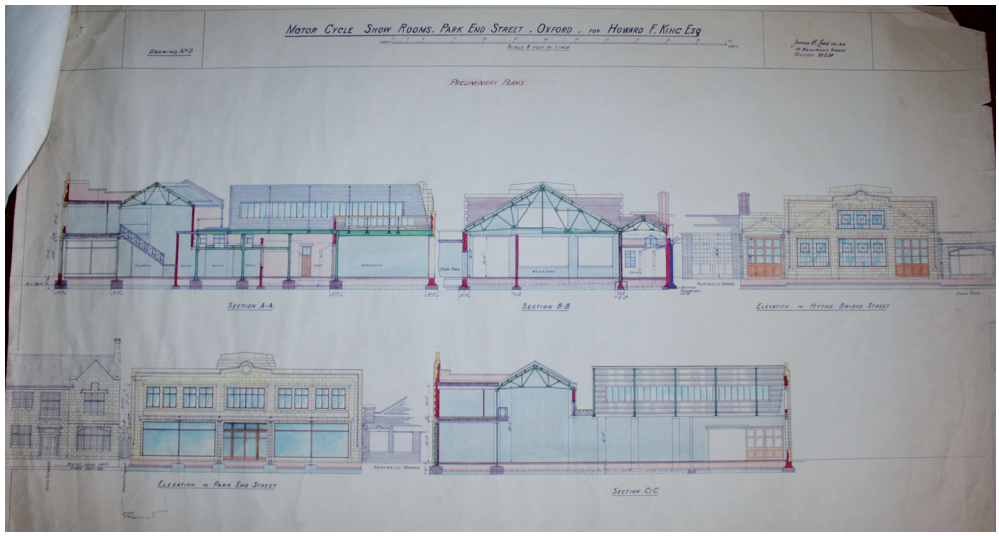


Fig. 19. Leed's design for the King's showroom which stretched back to Hythe Bridge Street. It was, once again, a steel and concrete construction behind more elegant façades. CCA, Maps St Thomas 40.

The next block of nineteenth-century houses were taken by J.R. Wilkins, a local architect, in 1927 (Fig. 19). He proposed a private hotel with shops below. Not dissimilar in design to Nicholl's shops, Wilkins's plan included four shops on the ground floor, two on either side of the entrance to the rooms above. Each shop had a store room behind, a cloakroom, and a yard. Upstairs, the plans appear to have been amended at least once; the first proposal was for flats, each with a kitchen, dining room, bathroom and three bedrooms. Within a year, though, Wilkins had altered the designs to create a hotel with the communal rooms and kitchen on the first floor, and small bedrooms with shared bathrooms on the second and third floors. Each room was centrally heated, and had hot and cold running water. The rooms at the back had iron balconies. Floors were of reinforced concrete within a steel frame, and the mansard roof was steel, covered with slates.

The next construction project along the street, between Wilkins's hotel and Hartwell's, was Ward's stores, also planned and built in 1927/8. Built along very similar lines to Wilkins's hotel, the ground floor has been much altered, but the first floor has large windows which would have been used for displays visible to those passing by on the upper decks of trams and buses. In 1931, a large extension, designed by another local architect, Gilbert T. Gardner, carried Ward's through to Hythe Bridge Street. This was completely constructed of steel and concrete, with artificial stone stairs, concealed behind another Neoclassical façade.

Last was the showroom designed for King's Motorcycles, constructed at the same time as the Royal Oxford Hotel (see below) and by the same architect, James C. Leed, in 1934 (Fig. 20). Now Kwik-Fit, the façade is almost as Leed envisaged: four-bay Neoclassical in Guiting stone. The second bay is accentuated and topped with cornice, and the company name is laid out on the floor in coloured mosaic. Originally, there were glass panels with contemporary motoring scenes.[62]

At the end of the nineteenth century, on Hythe Bridge Street, there appear to have been very few shops – a tailor and grocer appear in the census, and a journeyman baker. It was largely residential. But, by 1920, things were very different: some properties were lodging houses;

[62] OBR reports 6 and 7 (2006), p. 6. The panels are now in the National Motor Museum.

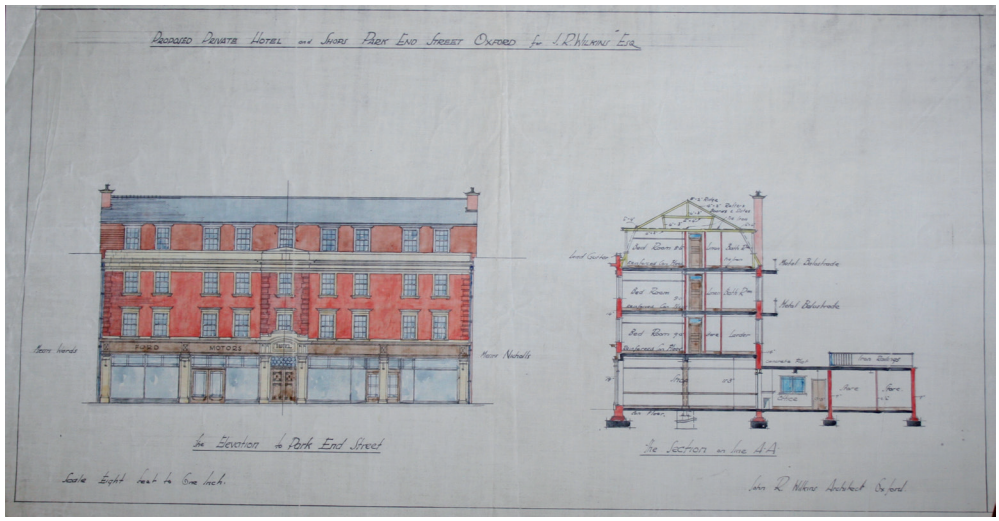


Fig. 20. Wilkins's design for shops and hotel on Park End Street. Like Nicholls's, the design is simple, but this time symmetrical, Neoclassical with two shades of brick and concrete providing the features. CCA, Maps St Thomas 36.

some were small businesses particularly in the motor trade (including Cross & Sons at No. 6, and Slingo Richard, a motor cycle engineer, at No. 11) but there were also two confectioners, dining rooms, a temperance hotel, a homeopathic dispensary run by John McLachlan (MD, FRCS, BSc), and two plumbers.[63] Several of these shops and small businesses were demolished to make way for larger premises during the first three decades of the twentieth century beginning with the ice factory.[64]

In 1911, the Oxford Ice and Cold Storage Company applied for permission to build an ice factory on a plot which extended nearly sixty feet along Hythe Bridge Street and back towards Park End Street. It had a small front onto Middle Fisher Row.[65] The factory was covered with vulcanite, a new form of roofing which, according to an American newspaper advertisement, was suitable for use on flat or pitched roofs and consisted of wood felt, saturated with asphalt, and finished on both sides with sand or flint.[66] The construction was of brick, in a very simple Neoclassical style, with a decorative blind arcade on the first-floor façade. Now much altered and housing a club and bar, the upper storey shows its original brick construction with stone dressings and parapet.

Harry Edmund Cross, coach builder, next door to the ice factory at No. 6, was the first in the area to concentrate on the motor trade, replacing the boat builders of the canal era. He began as a carriage builder, but moved over to cars. In 1897 Cross applied for a small shop front, and he was still working on the site, with his sons, in the 1930s.[67]

The remaining Victorian properties on the south side of the street, such as Mr Banner's forge, built in 1883, were demolished, and the open space filled with the building of and extensions to the larger businesses on Park End Street.[68] In the 1920s and 1930s, Ward's department store, and Hartwell's and King's showrooms and workshops filled in the gaps between the

[63] *Kelly's Oxfordshire Directory* (1920).
[64] Other demolitions, including that of the Great Western Hotel, took place in the 1970s, when Beaver House was built for Blackwell's in 1970.
[65] OHC, city engineer's plan 1907 NS; CCA xlviii.a.57.
[66] *The Bryan Times*, 9 April 1909.
[67] OHC, city engineer's plan 3003 OS.
[68] Ibid. city engineer's plan 863 OS.

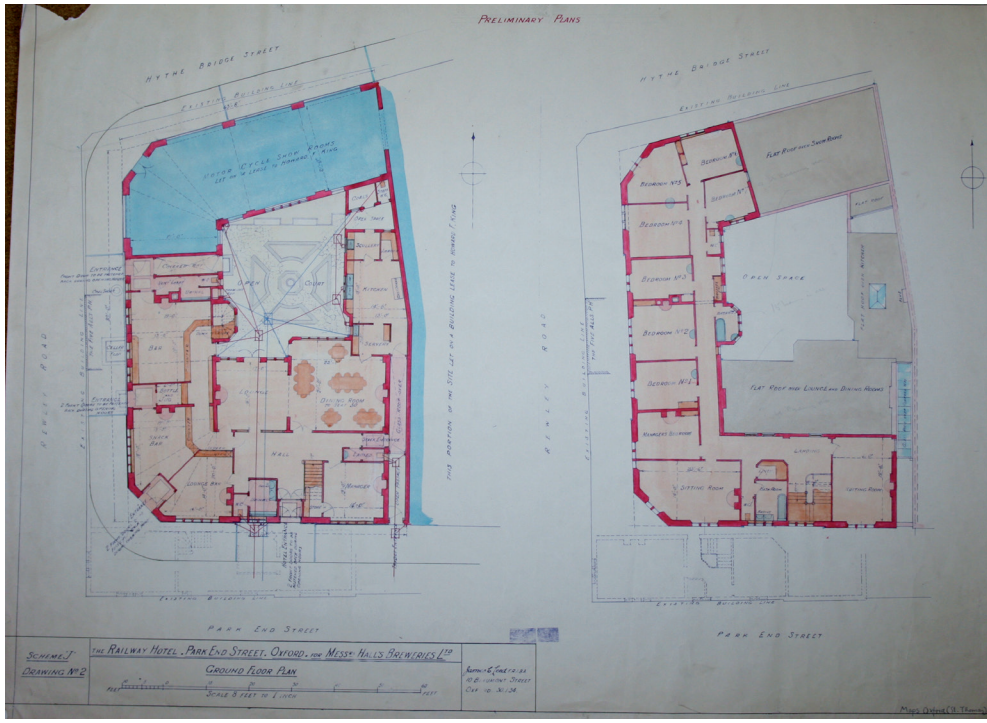


Fig. 21. Leed's drawing for the Oxford Hotel shows the new and old building lines, and the location of the Five Alls public house, demolished, along with the Railway Hotel and the Robin Hood public house. CCA, Maps St Thomas 41.

two streets, turning Hythe Bridge Street into a rather unappealing urban landscape. In 1970, the north side suffered the same fate with the construction of Beaver House on the corner, resulting in the demolition of the Great Western Hotel. At the city end, modern alterations to divert traffic away from the city centre, cut the street off from George Street. Hythe Bridge Street's life as principal entrance to the city was well-and-truly over.

Rewley Road saw similar drastic changes. All the old seventeenth- to nineteenth-century premises were swept away in 1935 when the Royal Oxford Hotel was constructed to the designs of J.C. Leed (Fig. 21). Probably the first building intended to impress arrivals by rail, the hotel was built of Guiting stone, matching King's showroom, in a Neo-Georgian style.[69]

DISCUSSION

Urban development is often determined by topography, and Oxford was hindered in its growth by its position. In the eighth century, the gravel spit surrounded by rivers and wet meadowland on three sides proved ideal for the monastic community of St Frideswide's. Later, however, these low-lying environs, subject to flooding and with poor drainage, inevitably became the home of those who could not afford to live in the city or on the drier land to the north, and to those whose trade depended on the water.[70]

[69] Tyack, *Architectural Guide*, p. 297; OBR reports 6 and 7 (2006), p. 5.
[70] Prior, *Fisher Row*, pp. 30–5; Graham, 'Suburbs of Victorian Oxford', pp. 19–20.

Early maps reveal the parish's development (see Appendix). Agas's 1578 map shows a few houses clustered around the castle's mill and on the street to the parish church. The city was only just beginning to recover from the devastating effect of the Black Death and the economic crisis of the early sixteenth century, both of which had left undeveloped or ruined plots throughout.[71] By the 1670s, however, land-hunger caused mainly by migration, saw the suburb begin to fill, often with rows of houses, with long plots or densely populated yards behind. Still, much of the area covered by this paper remained to be built-up; only the riverside cottages of Fisher Row formed any substantial area of housing.

In later years, there were further stimuli to the development of this more northerly part of the parish: the digging of the canal in the 1780s, the pushing-through of the New Road in 1770, and the arrival of the railway in 1850. Other priorities, like slum clearance and a need to improve the respectability of St Thomas's residents, were also drivers for change.

Badcock's 1829 survey and map of Christ Church's property in Oxford and its suburbs reveal the state of the parish of St Thomas's just before the beginning of major development. It stretched from the castle stream just outside the city walls to the river and the meadows of Botley.[72] To the west and south of the church, the land was largely agricultural but between the city and the church, St Thomas's was a mass of small, closely packed dwelling houses often with pigsties and privies behind interspersed with small businesses (bacon houses, bakeries, sawpits, and so on), and numerous public houses including the White Horse, the Lamb and Flag, and the Ox on St Thomas's High Street, the Hollybush on New Road, the Robin Hood on Rewley Lane, and the Nag's Head on Fisher Row. The survey does not mention any shops, but early censuses reveal that the area was the home of small tradesmen, artisans, and labourers employed in the breweries, brick manufactories, and in agriculture. Unlike other parishes in the city, few worked in the colleges, and the piecemeal development, often with timber-framed rather than stone houses, only increased the separation of the 'town' suburb from the 'gown' city.[73]

The canal and river, joined to the Trent and Mersey Canal in the Midlands and the Thames and Severn and Kennet and Avon Canals to the south, gave this part of Oxford a connection to the wider world, and the influence of both watercourses is evident in the number of boat-builders, cordwainers, bargemen, coal merchants and labourers, carpenters, and even a marine equipment supplier. Building trades were particularly well represented.[74] Most men and many of the women were in work of some sort, but there were a number reliant on the parish, and the area, particularly around Hollybush Row, was infamous for its lawlessness, squalidness, and drunkenness.

In the three decades before Badcock's survey, the population of St Thomas's increased dramatically, stimulated by the canal and the creation of Park End Street; the number of births quadrupled from around 40 to 150. New parishes – St Paul's and St Barnabas – were carved out of the north-east of St Thomas's in the 1830s to serve the growing population. In the 1870s, St Frideswide's parish, just over the river to the west, was created to serve the burgeoning residential community on the Botley Road.[75]

The first railway station in Oxford was on Marlborough Road, just south of Folly Bridge. Although it did not affect the Fisher Row community, the bargemen's wharves at Folly Bridge and in St Ebbe's closed immediately.[76] But the death knell for the river and canal had been sounded and, once the Great Western Railway (GWR) and the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) moved their focus from south to west Oxford, the end of Fisher Row was in

[71] Tyack, *Architectural Guide*, p. 116.
[72] CCA, Maps Oxford 21; viii.c.2.
[73] Tyack, *Architectural Guide*, p. 118.
[74] CCA, Maps Oxford 21; viii.c.2; Prior, *Fisher Row*, p. 184.
[75] *VCH Oxon*. 4, pp. 408, 411; Prior, *Fisher Row*, p. 32.
[76] Prior, *Fisher Row*, p. 307.

sight. The sinking of the floating boatmen's chapel, just above Hythe Bridge, in 1868 may well have seemed significant.[77]

Christ Church, as principal landowner in St Thomas's parish, benefitted financially from the extension of the GWR from Didcot into Oxford and from the LNWR coming down from the Midlands. Eleven and a half acres were sold to the GWR in the 1840s, and another nine acres before 1870. Twelve acres, valued at £12,355, were sold to the LNWR for their station. Both of these stations stood immediately west of the area under study.[78] The need for accommodation was urgent, and G.P. Hester, the town clerk – presumably in-the-know – purchased Osney Island in 1851, just as the LNWR station opened and as plans to build the GWR station became public.[79] Within a decade, Osney Island housed 795 people in 141 houses.[80]

Unlike the town clerk, Christ Church was slow to begin its development of the area. One, if not the principal, reason for Christ Church's reluctance to build in St Thomas's was the inevitability that the area's topography, its historic shabbiness and poverty, its semi-industrial working-class nature, and its proximity to all forms of transport would inform its development. An ancient college could take its time, and an institution as 'establishment' and aristocratic as Christ Church would not want to be remembered as the creators of a slum.[81] Unlike north Oxford, developed by St John's College, every factor militated against fashionable development, and the dean and chapter feared that a low-class estate would not retain its reversionary value.[82] However, by the mid 1860s, Christ Church had succumbed – perhaps seeing from Hester's example that there was money to be made – and allocated land on the west side of the railway for artisan houses and light industrial development to the south and west of the station, prompting first the development of Mill Street and its side roads, followed in the next decade by Abbey Road and Cripley Road, and to the east along Hythe Bridge Street.

Another difficulty that all the colleges faced was the permitted length of leases. Suburban leases of longer than forty years had been forbidden under the Ecclesiastical Leases Act of 1572. Understandably, builders were reluctant to take on a building lease of such a short length which offered little hope of recouping the costs of construction. If they did sign such a document, the results could be of poor quality.[83] St John's College took an expensive option in 1855 by applying for a private Act of Parliament to increase the length of their leases to ninety-nine years. Christ Church had followed this route earlier, in 1851, in order to build on its valuable Middlesex estate of Kentish Town, but did not attempt the same for poorer St Thomas's. In 1858, however, the right to grant longer building leases was made general.[84]

Other than outright sale to a developer, the granting of building leases was the obvious way for a landowner to develop rural property. By taking a low ground rent for a given period, the landowner could pass the risk of development onto the builders while hoping for a good return, with rack-rentable properties, at the reversion of the lease.[85] The

[77] The Floating Chapel was funded by the great and good of Oxford for the 'spiritual wants of a numerous body of persons employed in the Inland navigation': *JOJ*, 25 May 1839.

[78] Graham, 'Suburbs of Victorian Oxford', p. 121.

[79] CCA, MS Estates 77, f. 347.

[80] Graham, 'Suburbs of Victorian Oxford', p. 122.

[81] The Prince of Wales was an undergraduate at Christ Church from 1859 to 1861.

[82] H.T. Dyos, 'The Speculative Builders and Developers of Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 2 (1968), pp. 641–90; Graham, 'Suburbs of Victorian Oxford', pp. 119, 124; C.W. Chalklin, 'Urban Housing Estates in the Eighteenth Century', *Urban Studies*, 5:1 (1968), pp. 67–85.

[83] Graham, 'Suburbs of Victorian Oxford', p. 34; D.A. Reeder, 'The Politics of Urban Leaseholds in Late Victorian England', *International Review of Social History,* 6 (1961), p. 416.

[84] M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys, *History of the University of Oxford, Vol. VI. Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 1* (1997), p. 428; CCA, MS Estates 45, f. 331. Christ Church opted for an eighty-year lease as its standard.

[85] Dyos, 'The Speculative Builders'; Chalklin, 'Urban Housing Estates'.

expected quality of the building was often stipulated by the landowner and, in spite of popular tradition that the developers often jerry-built, the evidence suggests that this was not usually the case.[86]

The creation of the New Road accelerated Hythe Bridge Street's diminution as the principal route to the west. Before then the street had, arguably, always been the beginning of the countryside, with George Street providing the more suburban stretch. Even the New Road was slow to build up, but it was a wider street, and much more direct from the centre of the city (Hythe Bridge Street had connected with the north gate on the outside of the walls). It lent itself to businesses which required larger vehicles and to the hospitality trade. Even today, its focus is towards transport, partying, and refreshment.

The arrival of the railway should have provided a much-needed boost to a poor area of town. Certainly the LNWR saw the potential of the site and built its station using the same architects and techniques as the Crystal Palace which was opened in the same year for the Great Exhibition. Such modernity should have had a knock-on effect.[87] Larger, industrial cities encouraged the railway right into the centre as a symbol of technological advancement.[88] But not Oxford.

It is often said that the university discouraged the railway, and there certainly were elements of both the academic body and of the city who wished to keep Oxford a small market community with the added bonus of beautiful university buildings.[89] It was not long, however, before Oxford – both 'town' and 'gown' – saw the benefits that the railway could bring. As we have seen, it was concern for the appearance of the city that prompted improvements on Hythe Bridge Street and probably the purchase and improvement of Dutton's Holdings.

One obvious effect of the railways on the area was the establishment and redevelopment of hotels, inns, and lodging houses. Christ Church did not want a proliferation of pubs – even if some did slip through the system – but did promote hotels, both new and old. On the 'island' site, the Hollybush and the Nag's Head were long-standing, but others soon followed, including the Great Western Hotel.[90]

So why did St Thomas's parish fail to respond to the gift of the railway and the road? Through no fault of its residents, the canal and river community diminished once the railway had arrived and would have been doomed regardless once motor transport became commonplace. It would appear that history and geography militated against the area. In the Middle Ages, while the suburb was still poor and topographically disadvantaged, it had the benefit of its monastic landlords to keep its residents in employment. After the Dissolution, Osney abbey was made the cathedral for the new diocese of Oxford but this fell victim to the whims of Henry VIII. Had the cathedral survived in St Thomas's, it may have saved the area from its decline. However, after just four years, the cathedral was moved to the centre of the city and the parish was left, if not to its own devices, then to the management of landlords whose concerns were primarily for profit. Although Christ Church showed concern for the residents of the poorest area of Oxford, it was really not until the arrival of the railway, and the newly aroused interests of the rest of the city and university, that any real changes were considered.

Christ Church saw St Thomas's, then, as a chance for commercial development. There are no recorded discussions, or even brief minutes of meetings, which can prove this but it is evident from the architectural development of all the streets that the promotion of business was the priority. For Hythe Bridge Street, though, it was too late. The creation of the New Road had sealed its fate long before building had even begun. Private enterprises, such as the

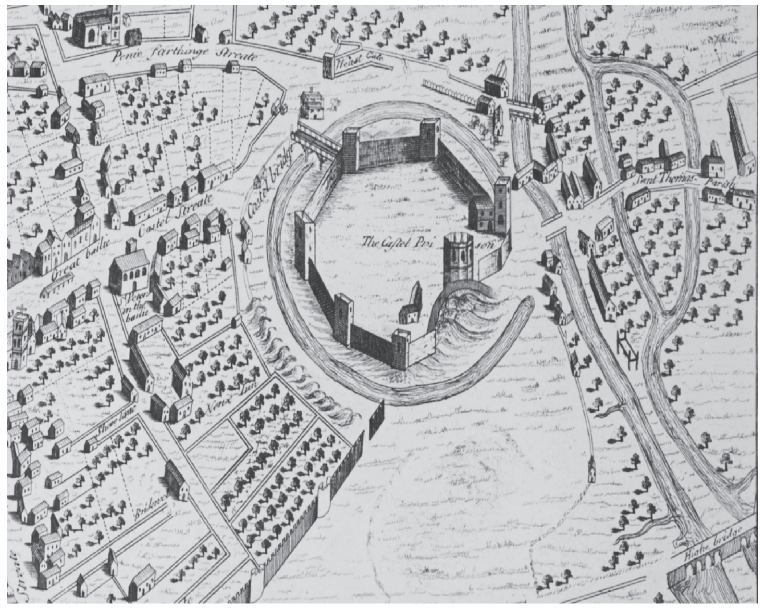
[86] Dyos, 'The Speculative Builders'.
[87] J.R. Kellett, *The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities* (1969), p. 289.
[88] Ibid. p. 12.
[89] Brock and Curthoys, *History of the University of Oxford, Vol. VI*, pp. 458–9.
[90] Graham, 'Suburbs of Victorian Oxford', p. 125.

breweries, launched the success of the new street followed by the granting of long building leases, in the early twentieth-century, to new concerns in retailing and the motor trade.

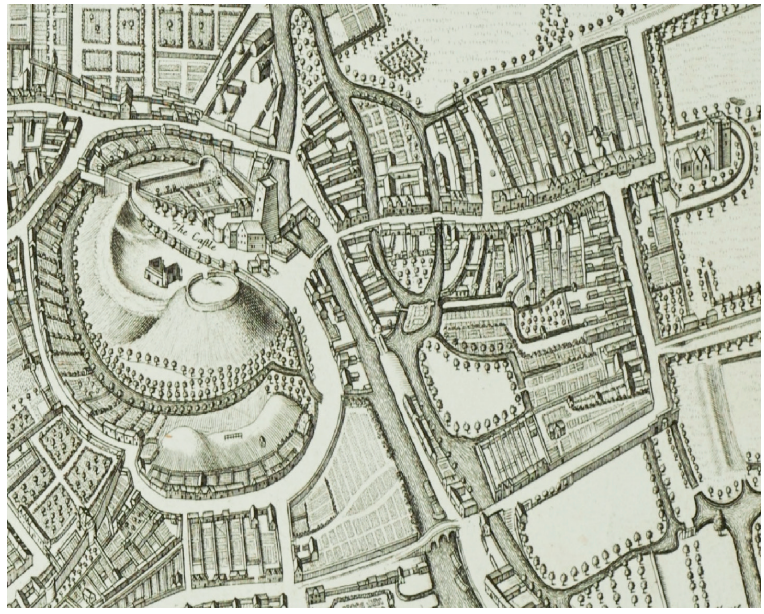
But even Park End Street ultimately failed to bring a new dawn to the west end of Oxford. The road contains most of the surviving Art Deco buildings in Oxford, most of which are to do with retailing, hospitality, or motoring, and must for a short while have been very fashionable. But, ultimately, it failed to bring St Thomas's parish up from its place as the poorest community in Oxford. The focus for the upwardly mobile was always to the north of the city in the area historically and currently more affluent and more desirable. Only the short stretch of Rewley Lane, with its pubs and hotels, survived as a place of welcome for those coming in from the west, whether by road or rail. It remains to be seen whether this will change.[91]

[91] During the writing of this paper, the 'island' site was sold by Christ Church. The area immediately outside the station and the Royal Oxford has recently seen major re-construction as part of the city's redevelopment plan for the west end. It will be interesting to see if this initiative is any more successful than those that have gone before.

APPENDIX: CHANGES TO THE HYTHE BRIDGE STREET/PARK END STREET 'ISLAND' FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



Agas's map of Oxford, 1578 (engraved 1732) showing the castle, St Thomas's High Street middle centre, and Hythe Bridge Street bottom right. South at top.

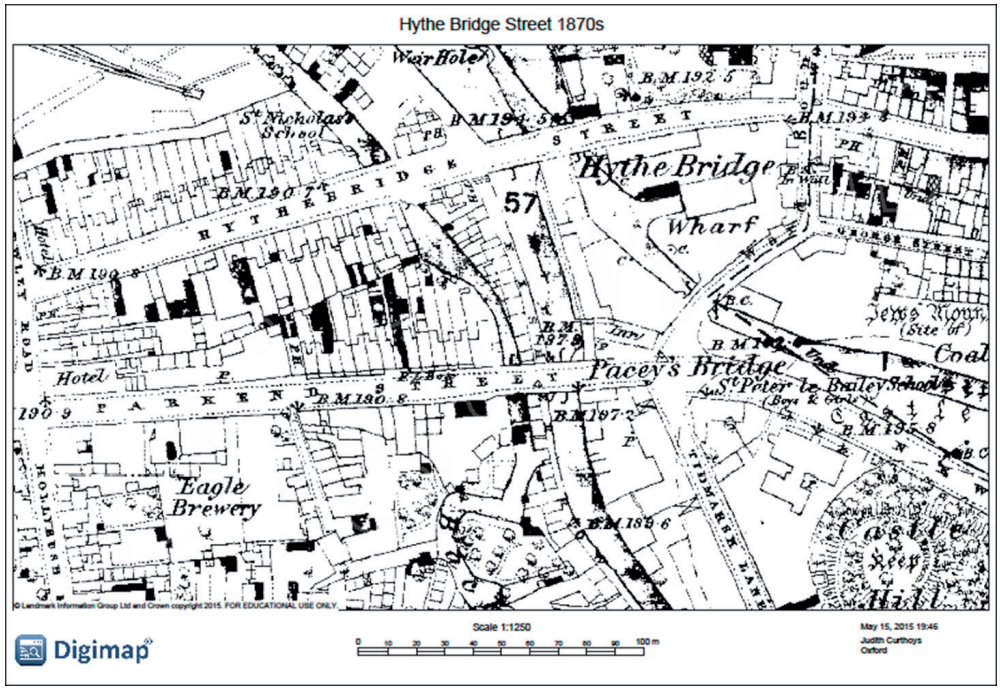


Loggan's 1670s map of Oxford, showing the castle, St Thomas's High Street centre, and Hythe Bridge Street bottom right. Middle Fisher Row was then beginning to develop. South at top.

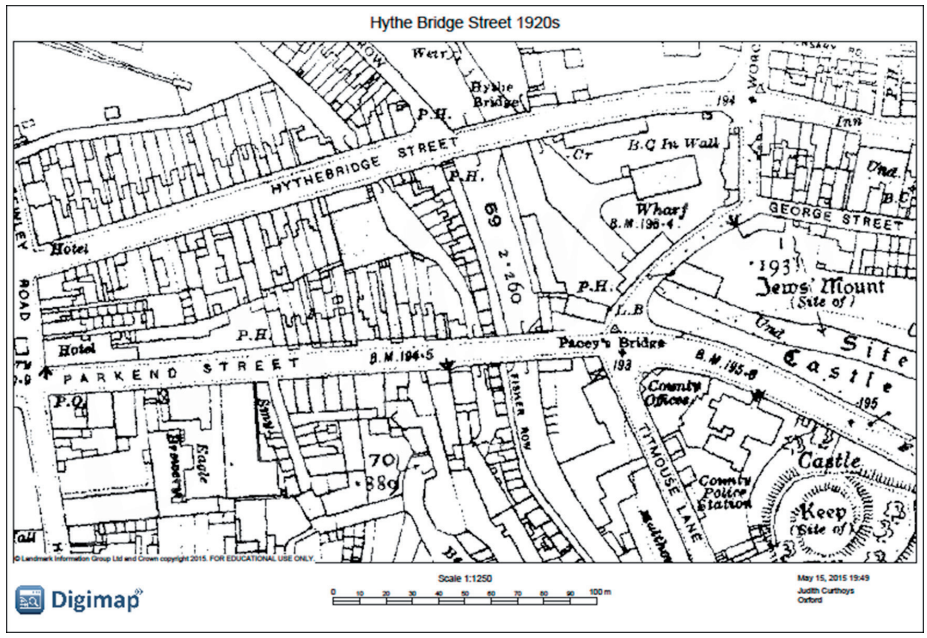
A 1785 map of the 'island' site. The New Road/Park End Street has been cut through the Hollybush estate, but the area still remains to be developed.

Badcock's 1829 survey of Oxford showing the beginnings of development on the New Road/Park End Street and the growing number of properties on the south side of Hythe Bridge Street.

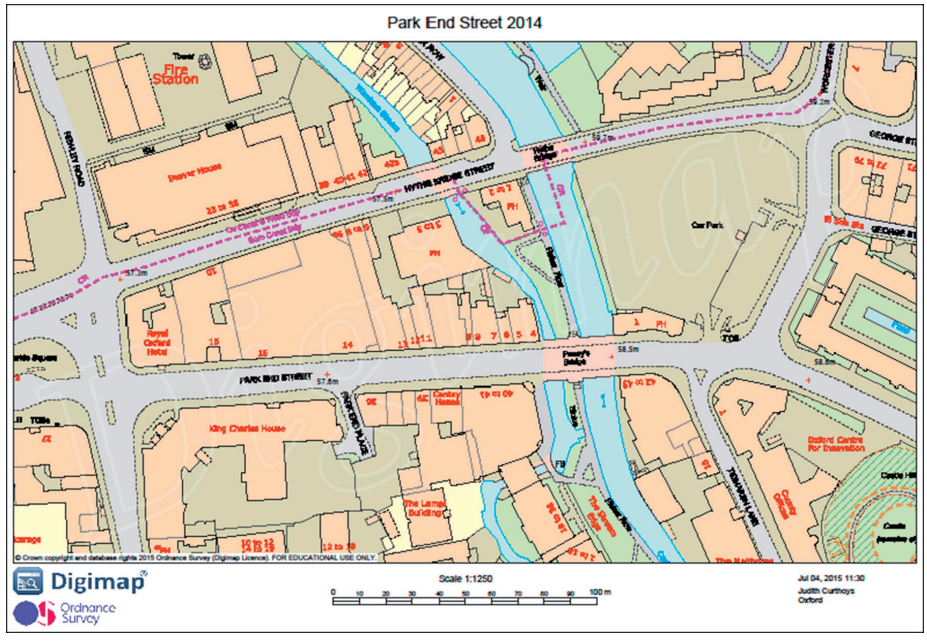
Hoggar's 1850 map showing the rapid development of the 'island'. Annotated with Christ Church's sales and purchases up to c.1890. The canal is marked for the first time, and the 1830s floating chapel upstream from Hythe Bridge.



Ordnance Survey map from the 1870s. Hythe Bridge Street was by then completely built up but the Hollybush Inn retained some open garden space on Park End Street. © An Edina supplied mapping service.



Little changed on either street between the 1870s and the 1920s, with the exception of the construction of the ice factory on Hythe Bridge Street which resulted in the demolition of several Victorian properties. The factory is clearly shown south of the words 'Hythe Bridge'. © An Edina supplied mapping service.



By 2014, few of the Victorian buildings remained, replaced either in the 1920s and 1930s, or, much later, in the late twentieth century. The Park End Street/Hythe Bridge Street 'island' is one of the few areas of Oxford with a notable collection of Art Deco period premises. © An Edina supplied mapping service.