



# OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

# NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2007

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In February 2006, the Oxford Magazine published an article written by John Ashdown, Trustee, and Debbie Dance, Director, expressing concern over a planning application to site a large building to house the books of the University Library at Osney Mead which would spoil the views of the Dreaming Spires.

Objections were made by the City Council and English Heritage and this application was withdrawn, and the University looked again. Sadly, they concentrated on the building's design, and not an alternative site. And so Oxford is faced with a further application. It is a different colour and it has an undulating roof, but it remains essentially a very large warehouse in the wrong place.

Sophisticated techniques are employed to demonstrate that the impact won't be too bad, computer generated techniques with which the Local Plan's dated view cones policy cannot compete, relying principally on triangular cones drawn on a plan. There are many photographs, and much explanation, but none of it replicates the truth of what the eye will see. A trip northwards along the A34 towards the M40 gives a clear view of the blue and white Newsquest building (*see above*). Now imagine a further building, of similar height and seven times the size, albeit designed to blend in, but nearer to Oxford's University core and its spires.

We do not dispute that a new depository is necessary for a University of such world-class status, and we wholeheartedly support this, just not on this site.

Could it be that the initial choice of this site was a mistake? From within the City, even from the main Botley Road, this area is hidden. And what better place for a large warehouse than alongside others of a similar nature. The Newsquest building had just been built, a mistake in our view, but nevertheless giving out a message to others that such buildings could be allowed here. The University must have been delighted to have found their ideal site.

However, a more detailed knowledge of the city tells a different story. Osney Mead lies on the western edge of the city centre, built in the low lying raised flood plain of the River Thames, which has been the subject of the extraordinary flooding this summer, and alongside the village of North Hinksey. And it lies in the foreground of the world famous views of Oxford seen from the surrounding hills of Wytham, Botley, Hinksey and Boars Hill. The site is simply not suitable for a building of this size, whatever techniques are employed to disguise it.

We have asked questions about alternative sites for the building, and are told there are none. But the information supporting this is not robust, and has more of a feel of justifying this site, than of a thorough campaign to find an alternative. We believe another site should be found, and the University and the Colleges, with their various and considerable land holdings around the City, must surely be able to do this.

What legacy otherwise that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the University destroyed the views of Oxford that it created over 700 years.

## PIXEY MEAD



Photograph: Jim Asher, BBOWT Reserve

The Trust is delighted to have been able to purchase a share in Pixey Mead, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest—SSSI.

There is a fascinating history to the management of the Mead, under which owners share the right to the hay crop and aftermath grazing on the land. The exact plots of land from which the hay could be taken were decided annually through the drawing of numbered balls to link an owner to the land to be cut. Grazing was unrestricted over the whole field.

Although the Mead is now managed as a whole, the Trust is keen to restore the tradition of drawing the lots.

## LAND NEWS

Recognising the need to increase our access to environmental conservation skills we have entered into a partnership with **BBOWT**, the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, who are working with us to assess each of the Trust's land parcels with the intention of having a conservation and management plan for each of these. Their appointed officer, Rachel Sanderson, will be providing us with advice and suggesting practical ways in which we can manage our land in an environmentally friendly way while still making a commercial return. Even at this early stage we are seeing the positive benefits of having her on board.

We were pleased to hear that the opening of **26a East St. Helen Street, Abingdon**, as an **Artweeks** venue was a great success. Despite mixed weather, hundreds of visitors were welcomed and were able to enjoy a look round the house and its beautiful courtyard garden as well as delight in, and purchase, stunning ceramics and woodturning.

A bench in memory of former Trust Secretary and Trustee Helen Turner has been placed in the garden of the Abingdon house, of which she was very fond.

We are also pleased to report that The 17th century boy's doublet found during restoration of the house has returned from its 'tour' with 'Hidden House History', an exhibition by the Textile Conservation Centre, University of Southampton and Hampshire County Council Museum and

Archive Service. It is now back on display in the house.

The house and garden are open to visitors on Saturday 8 September as part of **Heritage Open Days** (see back page for programme).

A new tenant has been found for the **Old Berkeley Golf Course** and a great deal of general improvement work is under way thanks to David Haynes and Lynne Hollier. Works this summer have included new fencing and the creation of a circular walk through **Abraham Wood**, so delightful at bluebell time in May.

A new **Interpretation Board** has been put up at the Golf Course charting the Trust's long association with the 'dreaming spires', from the purchase of the Old Golf Course at the creation of the Trust to the recent purchase of Chilswell Fields. An interesting touch is the guide to the spires that can be seen in the distance.



The interpretation board. Photograph: Eluned Hallas

We hope to put up more boards on Trust land, as and when funds allow.

We were delighted when the **Lincombe Lane Field** was confirmed as a County Wildlife Site, and a new kissing gate here has allowed better access to the walk down from Boars Hill to Bayworth.

At Kennington the Trust has assisted with the costs of re-fencing the **Kennington Memorial Field**. Sadly this has since been vandalised. The cost of such repeated repair is a sad fact of life and often diverts funds from other vital land management and improvements.

In April, representatives of the **Flood Risk Management Strategy** for Oxford gave a presentation to an invited audience of Trustees, Land, Planning & Executive Committee members, and representatives of the City, District and Parish Councils, the University and other interested groups. It was good to be able to arrange for such a wide range of interested parties to be present at the same meeting, and it is to be hoped that the results of the discussions will feed beneficially into the planning process.

## LAND ACQUISITION FUND

With the increasing pressures to build around Oxford, the Trust has become acutely aware of just how valuable it is to be the owner of land within the setting on the City, ensuring that there are green fields for us, and for future generations, forever.

With this in mind, it is the intention to set up a Land Acquisition Fund in order to build up sufficient reserves to buy land when it becomes available. We are aware that there are many calls for funds and bequests, but are hopeful that this will strike a chord with supporters of the Trust who love Oxford and want to help keep its special character.

We will be getting in touch later in the year, but if, in the meantime, you would like to know more, Debbie Dance would be pleased to speak with you. Ring 01865 242918, or email [info@oxfordpreservation.org.uk](mailto:info@oxfordpreservation.org.uk)

## OXFORD CASTLE

The Castle has had a busy spring and summer packed with activities and events.

The site came alive with song and dance when the **Oxford Folk Festival** came to the Castleyard in late March. In April over 500 Scouts saw the flag raised on the Tower to mark **St George's Day** and visited again in August for the raising of their special centenary flag.

In June a vintage bus visited the site as part of the launch of the Trust's **Opening Doors Opening Minds** week, which culminated in a weekend of festivities. On Saturday the Castleyard was transformed into a bustling medieval market place, while on Sunday the site was a sea of activity as hundreds of people came to enjoy the walks, talks and children's storytelling.



Photograph: Peter Wolfes Design and © Creation Theatre Company Ltd.

Throughout July and August the space has been transformed into a stage for **Creation Theatre's** stunning production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. On 26 July there was a **Gala Performance** in aid of Oxford Preservation Trust, which ended in a successful party with the cast.

Finishing touches to the Castleyard continue as time and funds allow, and have included the setting of two splendid benches, one of which was donated by the estate of **Hugh Walton**, in memory of his contribution to Oxford Castle. The bench is dedicated to:

Hugh Mercy Walton 1912-2006  
Trustee of Oxford Preservation Trust  
and Friend of Oxford Castle

**Education at the Castle** builds in strength and reputation with the support of Oxfordshire County Council who provide the post of Learning and Access Officer. This was recently recognised with an **Investors in Education Award** by the Education Business Partnership for Oxfordshire.

Of particular note is a cross-curricular project by pupils from **Pegasus School, Blackbird Leys**, involving classroom work and site visits. A project with pupils at **St. John Fisher RC Primary School, Littlemore**, was made possible through a grant from MLA South East. Visits to the Castle were embedded in new units for the school's creative curriculum including opportunities for parents and children to learn together.

At GCSE level two local schools are now using the Castle site for their History coursework units with the support teaching and materials that are available. There have been **Inset Days** for Teachers of Business Studies and Design and Technology – ‘excellent .... a great springboard for ideas’ ‘...visionary and very uplifting’—and pupil visits linked to **Careers in Construction**.

The **Adult Lecture Series** grows in popularity and a new series for the coming months is included with this newsletter.

The Heritage attraction, **Unlocked**, is becoming ever more established, with its first complete summer season coming to an end. Feedback from visitors remains enthusiastic.

## OXFORD CASTLE CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTION

Why not give a Mug with the Christ Church map of the Castle c1615 – available from the shop at Unlocked, Oxford Castle.

Price: £4.99



© Christ Church

## GARGOYLE COMPETITION

The deadline to enter the ‘Design a Gargoyle’ competition has been extended to Friday 19 October. Run by Oxford University to create replacement gargoyles for the Bodleian, the competition is open to anyone between the ages of 8 and 18 who lives, studies or works in Oxfordshire.

For details, visit:

[www.ox.ac.uk/publicaffairs/gargoyles/](http://www.ox.ac.uk/publicaffairs/gargoyles/)

## We were delighted by the success of our Opening Doors Opening Minds week.

There were over 8,000 visits to special events, from discovering the history of Oxford Jam and making and tasting rivals, to youth public speaking, and a highly professional concert by members of the Oxfordshire County Music Service. Over the weekend of 23 and 24 June, over 25 venues opened their doors with trails, teas and music. With venues opened by the City Council, the County Council, both universities and Oxford businesses, there was something for everyone.



Feedback was hugely positive and is encouraging us to consider something similar in the future.

We would like to thank our partner Oxford University, all our supporters and the Heritage Lottery Fund who made this celebration of Oxford possible.

*See our ODOM supplement for more details or look at our website for feedback and images.*

[www.openingdoorsopeningminds.org.uk](http://www.openingdoorsopeningminds.org.uk)

Photograph: K T Bruce

## PLANNING

At a **national level** the Trust has made representation on the Heritage White Paper, *Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which seeks to unify the listing of buildings and scheduled ancient monuments, something that the Trust supports. Subsequent to this the Planning White Paper, *Planning for a Sustainable Future*, came out. This does not easily join up with the earlier paper, something that the Trust highlighted.

Within the **South East Region** there is continued pressure from Government to develop land for housing, with the underlying threat to Oxford's Green Belt.

The Examination in Public into the **South East Plan** has taken place, with the Trust reiterating its view that the City's housing targets can be met within the existing City boundaries and that there is no need for a review of the **Green Belt**. This has raised concerns over the areas of land within the City which appear within the Local Plan as safeguarded for development\*. The EiP findings are due out this summer, and will be passed to the Government Office for the South East (GOSE)— the outcome of this will be known this autumn. The draft South East Plan was prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA), which is made up of elected representatives from the region and until recently was led by Councillor Keith Mitchell, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council and Trustee, who is a strong defender of the Green Belt, as is the County Council. Recent central government announcements suggest that SEERA are to lose their powers to the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), a unelected and government-led agency. We will continue to exert any influence we can, though this is not always easy from our local position.

*\*Safeguarded land can be a confusing term, as it refers to land that is 'safeguarded FOR development' and not land that is 'safeguarded AGAINST development'. There are a number of people who do not agree that these areas should be threatened in this way, and, indeed, the Trust made earlier representations to try to prevent them being included in the Local Plan.*

At **local level** the City Council has recently consulted on its *Oxford 2026 Core Strategy* with the Trust asking for a commitment to protecting the

Green Belt. At the same time the Trust questioned the effectiveness of the existing View Cones Policy in the current local plan, which was intended to protect Oxford's skyline but has been failing in recent years (*see front page article*).

All local authorities are now required to carry out **Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments**. The City and District Councils' draft SHLAAs include developments promoted by the City Council, the University, Colleges and others, including safeguarded land and Green Belt sites to the south of Oxford, at Yarnton/Begbroke and in the 'Kidlington Gap' between North Oxford and Kidlington, showing the importance of strong policies in favour of the Green Belt .

We welcome **Masterplans**, which are encouraged by new planning legislation for larger sites. These are intended to simplify and speed up the time for later detailed planning applications. This has changed the way in which the Trust deals with planning issues as these early plans need considerable thought if the Trust is to engage in any meaningful way. We are also aware that any comments made, or not made, will be noted in later discussions. Recent masterplans include Oxford Brookes, the University of Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary and Science Area and the Oxford and Cherwell Valley College sites.

On the **Radcliffe Infirmary Site and Science Area** the Trust emphasised the need for the sites to integrate into the city and for good quality public realm, whilst raising concerns over the potential loss of important views of the Radcliffe Observatory. At **Oxford Brookes** the joined-up approach was welcomed, with more thought given to the public domain and considerable improvement to the Headington Hill Hall site.



Headington Hill Hall. Photograph: Greg Smolonski/Photovibe

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College's masterplan for the redevelopment of their city centre campus includes plans to open up the Castle Mill Stream, an important element for the success of the West End.



Castle Mill Stream. Photograph: Debbie Dance

A Development Plan Document which will set the agenda for the development of the **West End** has been prepared in consultation with the West End Steering Group, which includes the Trust's Director. The City Council submitted the *West End Area Action Plan* (AAP) to GOSE and the public consultation period on this has just closed.

The Trust has formed a policy on **wind turbines** in response to the increasing number of applications for renewable energy devices, seen most recently in the Mid Counties Co-op application for a wind monitoring mast at Botley.

We have seen increasing **pre-consultation** with the Trust before applications are submitted. We welcome this but often find that it comes too late, and can lead to the Trust's name being used in a way which implies its endorsement of the proposals. We now have a policy of writing and asking that any reference has our prior consent.

We have liked the new development at **St John's College**, and plans for **Keble College at the Acland site** have recently been submitted.

The proposed development at the **Jericho Boatyard** would improve the setting of St. Barnabas Church, but is too high with poor elevations to the canal and a rather ill-designed bridge across the water which could be done so much better.

Within the **St Clements and Iffley Road Conservation Area** we were pleased by a refusal of permission to demolish the **Coach & Horses** and a refused appeal to demolish **190 Iffley Road**.

On the City's **Conservation Area Appraisals**, the Wolvercote with Godstow Appraisal has been published. It can be viewed on the City Council's website:

[www.oxford.gov.uk/planning/conservation-areas.cfm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/planning/conservation-areas.cfm)

The Trust has entered into a partnership with the City Council and English Heritage in an new project to '**Measure Significance**' which will greatly aid the appraisal process for the Central Conservation Area.

### **Conservation Plan: Worcester Street Car Park and Macclesfield House**

Further to the success of the regeneration of the Castle and in order to assist with the West End, the Trust has commissioned a Conservation Plan for the Worcester Street Car Park and Macclesfield House sites in partnership with the landowners, Nuffield College and Oxfordshire County Council.

This is being jointly funded, and the Trust has been pleased to receive a donation from the Oxford Civic Society.

Oxford Archaeology are carrying out the study, which will assess the historic significance of the sites in order to inform any future use and development of these sites as they come forward, and work is now well under way.



Worcester Street Car Park. Photograph: Debbie Dance

## TRUST NEWS

We were delighted when **Keith Mitchell**, Trustee and Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, was awarded a CBE in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours List in recognition of his work throughout the south east, most recently as Chairman of the South East England Regional Assembly, SEERA.

At the AGM, **Dr Camilla Lambrick** retired as a Trustee, though she remains involved at Boars Hill, where she lives. We are delighted that **Dr Tim King**, environmental conservationist, will take her place on the Land Committee, and we welcome **Frank Marshall**, Estate Bursar at University College, and member of the Investment Committee, as Trustee.

Our AGM at Maison Française in July was once again very well attended, with the attraction of the marvellous tea and our guest speaker, Peter Pearce, Director of the Landmark Trust.

### Support for the CPRE Oxford Green Belt Way

The Trust has been delighted to give a grant to support the publication of a **leaflet and guidebook** which highlights a walk around the City's Green Belt, much across Trust owned land, and which includes a map drawn by Alun Jones, Executive Committee representative of our Marston Area Committee. *See enclosed leaflet.*

### Environmental Awards 2007

We were pleased to receive an impressive 26 entries for the Environmental Awards 2007. All the entries were visited by the Awards Panel, who met under the chairmanship of Trustee Mr John Ashdown to discuss their views. The Awards Presentation will take place on **Tuesday 2 October** at the Catholic Chaplaincy, Rose Place, St Aldates, from 5.30pm. Members are welcome to attend.

### Membership News

The Trust's membership continues to grow steadily and we are particularly pleased that so many of our members have recommended us to their friends. Please give the enclosed form to a friend or relative and encourage them to support us.

We have been offering a wider variety of **trips and talks** this year in both daytime and evening to try

to provide something for everyone. Highlights include the '**Badger Watch**' in Wytham Woods in May, and walks by Trustee Geoffrey Tyack around **Oxford's Observatories** and by Trustee John Ashdown around Oxford's **greener edge**, bringing in the Trust's own Vicky Arms at Marston. Dr William Whyte and Richard Lethbridge led tours of the **Cowley Road** and **Oxfordshire Churches**, and in August there was a tour of **All Souls**.



*Visit to St Mary's Church, Thame. Photograph: Holly Kilpatrick*



*Detail of Croke Monument, St Mary's Church, Chilton. Photograph: Holly Kilpatrick*

We continue to run regular tours to the **Painted Rooms** in Cornmarket and to give free access to **26a East St. Helen Street** in Abingdon.

Please ring the office for further details of these and other events.

Our **Spring talks** at the Castle Key Learning Centre attracted appreciative audiences to hear Mr Paul Roberts speak on the 'The Future of the Radcliffe Infirmary' and Oxford Civic Society President Mark Barrington-Ward giving a fascinating talk on 'Post War Oxford Planning – What has it Achieved?'

We have begun to record a number of these talks digitally, particularly where they draw on John Ashdown's extensive slide archive of Oxford across 30 years.

*Details of our Winter talks are given overleaf.*

## Forthcoming Events

### HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September

All events are FREE

but **BOOKING** is sometimes necessary

**Saturday 8 September 10am-4pm**, 26A East St Helen's Street, Abingdon  
Trust-owned 15<sup>th</sup> century house with medieval wall paintings. **No booking necessary.**

**Saturday 8 September 10-11.30am**, *Felicia Skene, 'A Woman Ahead of her Time'*  
Talk by Trustee Ann Spokes Symonds at Key Learning Centre, Oxford Castle. **Please book** on enclosed 'Lifelong Learning Programme' sheet.

**Sunday 9 September**, morning tours of the Tudor Painted Room, 3 Cornmarket Street, Oxford  
See where Shakespeare stayed with the Davenant family en route between London and Stratford-upon-Avon. **Please book** through Trust office 01865 242918 (office hours only, no messages please).

**Sunday 9 September, 2.15pm**, Carfax Conduit at Nuneham Park, Nuneham Courtenay and the Well House at Hinksey Hill  
Tour led by Trustee John Ashdown to see early 17<sup>th</sup> century Conduit, moved here in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a Folly. Meet in Car Park to Nuneham Park. **No booking necessary.** Visitors need own transport to travel to the Well House.

Full details of all Heritage Open Days events can be found on the website:

<http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/>

For Oxfordshire events go to:

<http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/ed/oxfordshire>

### FRIENDS OF NORTH HINKSEY AND BOTLEY WALK

The annual walk of the Friends of North Hinksey and Botley will be on Sunday 9 September 2007 at 2.30 p.m. for two hours. Meet at Diocesan House, North Hinksey Village (next to North Hinksey Church) where there is ample parking.

### WINTER TALKS

at the Key Learning Centre,  
Oxford Castle at 6 p.m.

**£6.00 to Trust members, £7.00 to non members**  
Tickets available from Trust office. Please enclose a cheque and SAE. The Castle Café will remain open until the start of these talks, so why not arrive a little early and enjoy a pre talk coffee and cake?

**Tuesday 16 October - Future Traffic Access to Oxford** - David Robertson, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport

**Tuesday 13 November - How Can Local Groups Contribute to the Planning Process?** - Michael Crofton-Briggs, Business Manager Oxford City Council Planning Department

**Tuesday 15 January - Old and New Architecture of Oxford City Churches** - Geoffrey Tyack

**Tuesday 5 February - Who Guards our Green Belt in the Future?** - Keith Mitchell, Leader Oxfordshire County Council and Trustee



## OXFORD CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL 07

*At Oxford Castle*

**FREE OUTDOOR PERFORMANCES!**  
**Thursday 27 & Friday 28 September, 3.30 pm.**

As part of the 2007 Oxford Chamber Music Festival there will be two free performances of chamber music given by international musicians taking part in this four-day Festival.

Performance last approximately 45 minutes, and will take place under the marquee in Castleyard.

**No tickets required**

**– just turn up and enjoy the music!**

For full details of the Festival visit: [www.ocmf.net](http://www.ocmf.net)