

NEWSLETTER

SPRING / SUMMER 2024

OXFORD
PRESERVATION
TRUST

INTO THE
GREEN





OPT AWARDS 2024

We launched the 47th OPT Awards recently at the Bullingdon Community Centre in Headington (one of last year's winners). The awards celebrate the best in new design, sustainability and historic conservation in Oxford. Anyone can enter a project. Visit our website for full details. Closing date is 31st May.

WOOD FARM COMMUNITY PROJECT

We've begun a new community history project in the Wood Farm area and would love to hear from residents past and present. Anna Clark, our Engagement Officer, writes about the history of Wood Farm on page 5.

PLANNING

Find out about our response to the latest consultation on the City Local Plan and the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme on page 7.

INTO THE GREEN

In my first few months at OPT one of my greatest pleasures has been to discover the extent and variety of OPT's landholdings. I've so far encountered woodland, grassland, fenland, grazed pastures, flood meadows, arable land, allotments and a wild garden.

We care for around 1000 acres of green space in and around Oxford, land acquired to prevent development and so preserve the city's green setting and historic views. These precious pockets of land are important pieces of heritage in their own right, of course, shaped by human intervention over centuries, if not millennia. Some are species-rich, while others have the potential for increased biodiversity. With the help of our dedicated volunteers, we're already doing great nature recovery projects across the OPT estate. In this issue Hannah Brockwell, our Green Spaces Officer, reports on the Larkins Lane fen restoration and the Swing Bridge meadow. We plan to do more, so watch this space. For information about all of our green spaces visit <https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/greenspaces>

Observant readers will notice that the newsletter looks and feels a little different. I'm keen that you hear from my committed and capable OPT colleagues about the excellent work they do on your behalf, so the articles are written by them. We've redesigned the newsletter to showcase their work and we're using a new paper, made from trees grown in certified and sustainably managed forests. The newsletter is still designed and printed in Oxford. We hope you like it!



Anna Eavis
Chief Executive Officer



Your membership is vital. It enables us to promote, protect and celebrate Oxford's heritage. We're very grateful for your support. Please encourage your friends to join – and consider making a donation. A gift today is an investment in Oxford's future.

Go to www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/join to buy a gift membership or scan the QR code above to make a donation!



HIDDEN OXFORD

Stephen Dawson,
Operations Director



In 2016 I visited the Painted Room for the first time, walking up a grotty set of stairs from the street in Cornmarket as if to have a flutter at Bet Fred. Once through a doorway and up a twisted staircase, I entered a low-ceilinged room and the wall paintings – a decorative scheme of flowers, fruit and religious texts – were revealed. Eight years on I am still astounded by this rare survival, an evocative glimpse of a medieval tavern, decorated by local painters in the late 1500s, hidden behind a Georgian façade.

The tavern was frequented by Shakespeare, as you know, but by his time the paintings were covered by panelling. They were rediscovered in 1927, the year OPT was formed. The Painted Room was OPT's office until the 1970s. For over thirty years the Painted Room was let as office space with little public access.

In 2017 we secured a lease, enabling us to take possession, conserve the wall paintings and provide public access to them. The remnants of the office days remained, so last year we restored the rooms. We removed the grubby office carpets, big electric lights and conduiting, refitted the kitchen and decorated throughout. Today you will see beautiful wooden floors, a new stair carpet and elegant light fittings. We are grateful to the William Delafield Charitable Trust and the Eyre Estate, who funded this work, and to Richard Ward Ltd who undertook it to such a high standard.

You can visit the Painted Room on one of our monthly tours, as part of our annual Shakespeare birthday celebrations and during Oxford Open Doors. Do come and take a look, even if you have visited before, perhaps for one of our Shakespeare themed events (see page 6).



Hannah Brockwell,
Green Spaces Officer

WOOD FARM

As part of our new community history project at Wood Farm, in east Oxford, we've been finding out about the changing use of this area over time.

This photo from 1953 shows early building work on the housing estate that exists there today. The trees at the bottom edge of the picture are part of Magdalen Wood. In the medieval period they were part of a larger area of managed woodland owned by Magdalen College. The land included Open Magdalen, an area of pasture with a tradition of common use. The farm which gave the area its name

was built in the late 1700s and tenant farmers worked the surrounding land until the mid-twentieth century. Road names such as Three Fields Road and Broad Oak are traces of this rural past.

CHANGING USE

Throughout its history there has been competition for the use of land here. From 1861, farmer Richard Pether expanded into Open Magdalen. This caused conflict with the local people from Headington and Cowley who relied on the area for food and fuel. In the twentieth century, industrial expansion and a growing population meant that, by the end of the Second World War, up to five thousand Oxford families were without homes. Many were forced to squat in makeshift camps around the city. One

of the City Council's solutions to this problem can be seen in the centre at the top of this image. Huts belonging to the Old Road POW camp, only recently vacated by Italian and German soldiers, were converted into council flats. In 1953, the Council began to lay out new streets in Wood Farm around the former POW camp and the woodland (now protected for public use). The Laing Easiform houses they built were made from concrete poured into frames on site. This technique was an efficient way of building new housing and the estate quickly took shape, marking a new period in Wood Farm's history.

We'll update you on our project as it develops. If you're interested in getting involved, please contact Anna (a.clark@oxfordpreservation.org.uk).

A VALLEY FEN

In Autumn 2022, thanks to the generosity of our members and supporters, we bought Larkins Lane Field in Old Headington Village.

The field is a mix of grassland, woodland and scrub, with a shallow stream running through it. This stream is evidence of a surviving spring-fed valley fen. Alkaline fenland is formed when acidic rainwater passes through limestone, dissolving calcium on its way. On reaching impervious material the water moves sideways until it emerges from the ground as a mineral-rich spring, which encourages plants to grow. As the ground stays waterlogged the plant remains don't decompose fully, eventually

forming peat. The calcium in the water is deposited as a form of crust, like the limescale in our kettles. It encourages the growth of brown mosses, flowering plants, grasses, sedge, rush and algae.

RESTORING THE LANDSCAPE

We're restoring this precious landscape. We need to keep the fen wet to preserve the existing peat and enable more peat to form. As peat is a wet carbon store, creating more helps tackle the effects of climate change. We've widened and flattened the land around the stream to restore the valley profile and we're controlling the flow of water with a series of small leaky log dams. We've sown wetland plants with seed donated by our friends at the

Lye Valley. As the leaves die each year, they sink into the water and will eventually turn into peat.

Across Europe much of this important habitat has been lost, so rare survivals like ours are important. We plan to install a boardwalk to enable visitors to view this area more closely. In the meantime, you can see our valley fen restoration project at Matthew Arnold reserve (Boars Hill).

Our project depends on the hard work of our dedicated band of volunteers and ecologist Rod d'Ayala. We're very grateful to them. If you would like to get involved, please contact Hannah (h.brockwell@oxfordpreservation.org.uk).



WOOD FARM
IN 1953

© HISTORIC ENGLAND



Anna Clark
Engagement Officer



ALL ABOARD!

We've set up a new volunteer group at the Rewley Road Swing Bridge to care for this important monument and to enhance the biodiversity of the green space in which it sits.

The Swing Bridge is a unique cast-iron railway bridge, built in 1851 to allow trains across the Sheepwash Channel which links Oxford's canal to the river. It is the earliest surviving mechanism of its kind in Britain. When in use, the railwaymen swung the bridge open to let boats through and then swung it closed to allow trains to pass. It fell out of use during the 1950s and was recently restored by OPT.

In 2019 it was turned for the first time in decades and in 2022 it won the Railway Heritage Trust Conservation award.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers meet monthly and, advised by experts, undertake small maintenance tasks on the bridge, abutment and tracks as well the creation of small areas of meadow. Tasks will vary with the season.

We welcome all volunteers to help us look after this space. As with all our work parties you will receive instruction and do not require any particular tools or skills, just enthusiasm! If you would like to get involved in helping us please get in touch with Hannah (h.brockwell@oxfordpreservation.org.uk).

Hannah Brockwell,
Green Spaces Officer



MEET THE MEMBER

Margaret Simpson has been a member since 2010, participates in many OPT events and regularly volunteers during the Oxford Open Doors weekend. When Margaret moved to Headington in the 1980s she didn't expect to stay long, but as with many who set foot in Oxford the pull to stay was too strong. Four decades later, Margaret has established strong roots in Oxford and is an energetic member of the community.

Margaret volunteers for other local charities. She's a trustee at MyVision Oxfordshire and is the Chair of OxTalk, the Oxford talking newspaper for the blind. Her services to the community were recognised in January 2024 when Margaret was awarded an MBE. Following a friend's recommendation Margaret joined as a member of OPT in 2010 and has never looked back. *"OPT has so much to offer. My favourite event is whatever I have booked in next as I know I will learn so much!"* If you know someone who would love to get involved with OPT, let them know how they can join us today!

Louise Lockyer,
Assistant
Heritage &
Membership
Officer



Fritillaries in Hinksey Meadow

OXFORD CITY LOCAL PLAN 2040

The local plan came out for consultation before Christmas. Our response focuses on heritage, views in and out of the city, public realm, tourism, green setting, green spaces and sustainability. We question some of the proposed housing allocations, arguing that housing should take higher priority in the mix of uses considered for brownfield sites. We ask that the city work with other Oxfordshire councils to ensure that Oxford's green belt is not incrementally eroded by the pressure for development. You can read our response at www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/planning

OXFORD FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME

Although we understand the need to reduce flooding in Oxford, we are deeply concerned, as custodians of Hinksey Meadow, about the irreparable damage which this scheme will cause to its exceedingly rare MG4a grassland, of which only 192 hectares remain nationally. We do not believe that the Environment Agency has adequately considered alternative options. Our excellent legal team made this case to the OFAS Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiry before Christmas. The closing arguments were held in January and we now

await the Secretary of State's decision. Meanwhile the planning application for the proposed Scheme has yet to be determined. We are grateful for the support of our members and the local community in trying to protect Hinksey Meadow for us all to continue to enjoy.

Stephen Dawson,
Operations Director



SPRING / SUMMER EVENTS PROGRAMME 2024

APRIL

- 08** 5.30pm **SPECIAL EVENT**
Hamnet: Extraordinary
Tudor Lives
Dr Janet Dickinson and
Dr Lynn Robson
Painted Room
- 13** 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House
- 17** 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room
- 20** 2pm & 6pm
SPECIAL EVENT
Unversed...
Beckis Cooper
Painted Room
- 23** 11am **SPECIAL EVENT**
Shakespeare's Birthday
Parade
Oxford Castleyard
- 25** 5.30pm **TALK**
Shakespeare's Arabic
Sonnets
Dr Robert Stagg
Key Learning Centre

MAY

- 01** 8am **SPECIAL EVENT**
Magdalen Tower Climb
- 15** 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room
- 18** 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House
- 21** 5.30pm **TALK**
Chairman's Lecture
Clare Wright (Wright &
Wright Architects)
Key Learning Centre

JUNE

- 01** 5.30pm **WALK**
Hidden Heritage Graffiti
Nina Holguin
- 06** 10.30am **TOUR**
Reuben College
- 12** 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room
- 14** 6pm **TALK**
Stained Glass
Anna Eavis
Merton College Chapel
- 15** 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House
- 20** 4.45pm tea, 5.30pm start
OPT AGM **SPECIAL EVENT**
Pembroke College

JULY

- 04** 6pm **TALK**
Monuments &
Memorials
Veronika Vlková
All Souls Antechapel
- 13** 11am **WALK**
Straight Line
Archaeology: from the
Parks to the Meadows
Julian Munby
- 18** 5.30pm **TALK**
Recent Archaeological
Discoveries in Oxford
David Radford
Key Learning Centre
- 20** 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House
- 24** 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room

AUG

- TBC** Oxford Lives podcast
Key Learning Centre

SEPT

SAVE THE DATE **OXFORD OPEN DOORS** **SAT 14 & SUN 15**

Booking for Oxford Open Doors
events opens for members on
Thursday 22 August

- 09** 3pm **TOUR**
Queen's College
- 09** 5.30pm **TOUR**
Schwarzman Centre for the
Humanities site visit
- 10** 11am **TOUR**
GLAM Collections
Teaching and Research
Centre (CTRC)
Reuben College
- 10** 5.30pm **TALK**
RIBA lecture
David Kohn Architects
Gradel Quad, New College
- 11** 11am **WALK**
OPT Awards Walk
John Stevenson
- 11** 5pm **TALK**
Muses of the Clarendon
Building
John Rolfe
Key Learning Centre
- 12** 2pm **TOUR**
Tom Tower, Christ Church
- 12** 4pm **TOUR**
Malcolm Graham
Covered Market
- 13** 11am **TOUR**
Bodley's Librarian Richard
Ovenden
Radcliffe Camera