



NEWSLETTER

SPRING / SUMMER 2025

BEAUTY
AND
UTILITY

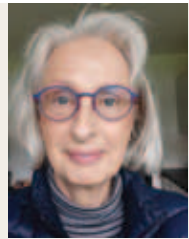
OXFORD
PRESERVATION
TRUST

RIVER THAMES AT SWINBROOK
PHOTO: KEVAN MARTIN

ERICA PARSONS

Erica joined us in November as our new Administrator.

She previously worked in business administration in London and Berlin and as a Podiatrist in the NHS. She enjoys yoga and swimming, opera and German culture.



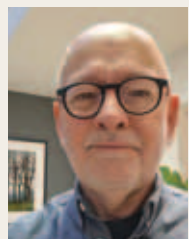
TRACEY PRIOR

Tracey joined us in March as our new Finance Officer. She comes to us from Critchleys (now Gravita) where she worked for many years auditing and preparing the accounts for a wide range of charities and companies. Outside of work she is usually to be found cycling around the countryside or running along the riverbank.



JOHN STEVENSON

John joined our board of trustees in January. A qualified architect, he taught at the Oxford School of Architecture, as Principal Lecturer and Head of Design. John is passionate about contemporary architecture and supports good sustainable design at every level. He chairs the OPT Planning Committee.



BEAUTY AND UTILITY

Our beautiful front cover shows the River Thames as its snakes its way towards Swinford Toll Bridge, and thence to Oxford. The fields on the right-hand side of the photograph belong to Oxford Preservation Trust.

More than a third of OPT's land is meadow. We own over 200 acres of floodplain meadow around Oxford, as well as upland meadows at Boars Hill, Harcourt Hill and Shotover. They are precious places, ecologically, historically and culturally – and they're almost all accessible to the public, who derive great pleasure from them. These are fragile landscapes and we've been thinking about how we can ensure that they flourish, as Hannah explains in this issue.

William Shakespeare understood the importance of good meadow management; the hay cut is critical. In his play Henry V the Duke of Burgundy laments that, with so many men away at war rather than tending the land, the meadows suffer:

*The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness, and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,
Losing both beauty and utility.*

It's hard to think of something that better embodies beauty and utility than a species-rich meadow, but Walton Well Drinking Fountain is a strong contender. We're delighted to be restoring it to full working order, thanks to the support of many local people. In this issue we also consider the beauty and utility of Broad Street, the fascinating story of Slade Camp and the enriching experience of volunteering.

We hope you enjoy 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/donate to make a donation or scan the QR code to buy a gift membership!



WALTON WELL BEFORE 1885
PHOTO: HENRY TAUNT, HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE

WALTON WELL DRINKING FOUNTAIN

In the early 1800s Walton Manor was still predominantly agricultural. At its northern tip, where the land fell away towards the canal, there was a natural spring. Its water was captured in a low-lying stone trough, where it was enjoyed by carters' horses. Said to possess medicinal properties, the spring-water was also used by local women to bathe their children's eyes.

By the 1880s the area was transformed into a thriving suburb, rapidly developed to accommodate Oxford's growing need for housing. The natural spring was sealed in the process. William Ward was a wealthy local coal merchant who remembered with affection the scattered smallholdings, orchards and paddocks of his childhood. A public-spirited citizen, Ward chaired the Local Board

responsible for public health improvements. He paid for a drinking fountain to mark the site of the well – and to provide an amenity for local people.

The fountain was designed by Harry Moore, one of North Oxford's most active architects. Carved from Portland stone and topped with a half dome, one of the masons claimed to be covering the old well 'with a fireplace to keep it warm.' It was apparently similar to the half dome fireplaces Moore and his masons had installed in houses nearby. By the time the drinking fountain was completed in 1885, Ward's eyesight had severely deteriorated. At the opening ceremony he was assured that it was 'well worth looking at'.

140 years on, we're repairing Ward's drinking fountain, restoring it to full working order. With advice from the Heritage of London Trust, an old hand

at restoring drinking fountains across the Capital and assisted by John Sutton's excellent book on the history of Walton Well, we aim to complete this project by September in time for Oxford Open Doors Weekend, once again providing fresh drinking water to all who pass on the way to Port Meadow.

We're grateful for the overwhelming support of the local community and gifts from generous donors, including the Lord Lieutenant, Lucy Group Ltd, Oxfordshire Buildings Trust, the CPRE Oxfordshire Buildings Trust and local Councillors James Fry and Louise Upton.



Charlie Jacobs
Planning &
Projects Officer



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Hannah Brockwell
Green Spaces Manager

FLOODPLAIN MEADOWS

In early summer the display of grasses and flowering plants at Hinksey Meadow is one of Oxford's most beautiful sights. Floodplain meadows like Hinksey evolved over many hundreds of years for good economic reasons. On the fertile soils of regularly flooded lowland valleys they provided nutrient-rich hay for animals during the winter and, after the summer hay-cut, good quality pasture. As livestock grazed the fields, they prevented taller and coarser species from becoming dominant, enabling a wide variety of plant species to flourish.

The attractive tapestry of flowers is – like many 'natural' phenomenon – the result of the relationship between generations of people, the local

climate and the land on which they made their living.

Often older than medieval parish churches, floodplain meadows were so important to rural communities in the Middle Ages that they were valued much more highly than arable land. They are still valued for their nutritious hay crop. They provide nectar for pollinating insects and are a vital source of seed for meadow restoration. As flood storage areas and stores of carbon, they are more important than ever. Historically, they evoke the traditions that shaped our rural landscapes.

Sadly, only 4 square miles of species-rich floodplain meadow survive in the UK. Hinksey Meadow itself will be partly destroyed if the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme goes ahead. As around 250 acres of OPT land lies on the floodplain, we want to help restore these rare habitats if possible. On the Thames we own land at Kennington, Sandford,

Wolvercote and Swinford. On the Cherwell we have five fields at Marston Hamm.

All meadows need careful management to create the unique conditions for rare species to thrive, so we're working closely with our graziers to ensure that the hay-cut and aftermath grazing take place at the right times. Last year we examined each field with Catriona Bass, a floodplain meadow expert and member of our Green Spaces Committee. We found potential for restoration, especially at Marston Hamm where rare plants like Great Burnet and Meadow Foxtail were present. In 2025 we'll be working with Catriona and members of the local community to propagate rare plants for our meadows at Marston Hamm.

If you'd like to help grow rare plants for our meadows please contact h.brockwell@oxfordpreservation.org.uk



BROAD STREET - WHAT NEXT?

One of the best views of Broad Street is from the rooftop bar of the Store Hotel (formerly Boswells). If you look towards the Sheldonian, you can see fragments of the old city wall and the line of the ditch, filled with buildings from the 1600s when the walls fell into disrepair. In the 1200s the wide area outside the ditch was a horse market, lined with tenements on its north side. Known first as Horsemonger Street, then as Canditch, it was named Broad Street in around 1750, by which time the Sheldonian, Clarendon and Old Ashmolean buildings clustered around its east end.

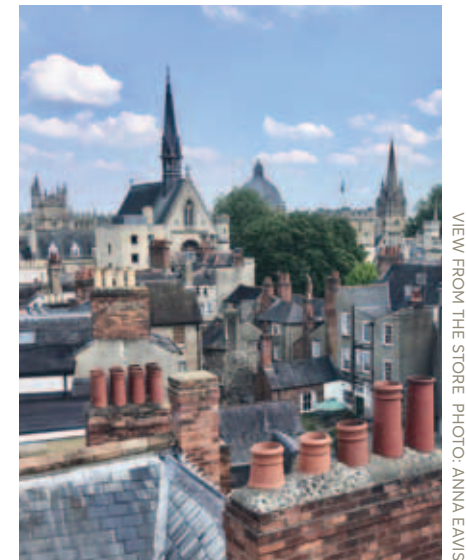
A place shaped and used for assembly since its time as a market, it's a street of magnificent contrasts, with great University and collegiate buildings to the east and north and terraced townhouses (now shops) to the west. It combines

the ceremonial with the day-to-day and is home to a wealth of architectural styles ranging from the medieval to modern periods. Described by Pevsner as 'unique in the world', it deserves to be treated with respect and sensitivity.

In 2003 we worked with others, including the landscape architect Kim Wilkie, to produce the 'Broad Street Plan'. The plan is essentially simple, allowing Broad Street to flourish as a space for people to gather, linger, and to enjoy the architecture – in the manner of a European city square. It includes proposals to pave the eastern end, open the platform outside the New Bodleian (now Weston Library) as a café and reduce the accumulated clutter of street markings, signs, furniture and lights.

Over the last 20 years things have moved on. The Weston Library development delivered the proposed café and has made the east end of the street

welcoming and accessible. The council have removed the car park and worked hard to make the street more pleasant for pedestrians. But it remains cluttered and compromised. As the county and city councils collaborate on COMPF, a new strategic framework for our urban spaces, we'd love to revisit the Broad Street Plan with stakeholders and colleagues. It offers us a vision worthy of what is – after all – one of the great urban spaces of Europe.



Laura Warden
Senior Planning Officer



FOURTH STREET, 1966 PHOTO: OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - OXFORDSHIRE HISTORY CENTRE

SLADE CAMP

Hidden in the woods at the foot of Shotover Hill are the remains of Slade Camp, a former WW2 army training facility. From 1948-1970 it provided homes for Oxford families, in response to the post-war housing crisis. Since then, its history has remained hidden – quite literally – because the site, now part of Shotover Country Park, has been reclaimed by nature. During lockdown, as local residents went on their daily walks, their curiosity grew about the concrete building platforms and household objects they encountered.

During the war, the soldiers of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry were lodged in wooden huts. Neatly tarmacked roads linked these buildings with the rest of the site, which included a parade ground and a rifle range. By the mid-1960s, when

this photo was taken, Slade Camp was a thriving residential neighbourhood. The military roads and huts remained, but washing lines and wooden fences show where domestic gardens were cultivated. Planting from these gardens is still visible in Shotover's woodland today.

In 1968, Oxford's new bypass cut through the camp. In time, buildings were dismantled, families moved out and the site became overgrown. In the last year volunteers have uncovered key buildings, revealing information about their functions. Former residents have vividly evoked life at Slade Camp, with family stories of resilience and recollections of childhood fun in what was a unique place to live. What emerges from their experiences is a picture of Oxford as a growing industrial city responding to war and forging new communities in its aftermath.

We're working with Shotover Preservation Society to record

the story of the camp and those who built their lives there. This will include oral histories, a short film, an exhibition and information panels on site. We're making a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support this work.

Tours of the site by local historians and former residents were one of last year's most popular Oxford Open Doors events. You'll be able to visit again this year.

If you have a connection to Slade Camp, we'd love to hear from you. Contact Anna Clark at a.clark@oxfordpreservation.org.uk

Anna Clark
Engagement Manager



OUR GUY ON THE GROUND: VOLUNTEERING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Two years ago, after nearly thirty years in a demanding job, Guy Hudson took early retirement, keen to escape his desk and reconnect with nature. Having been involved with conservation volunteering in the 1990s, Guy was looking for similar opportunities when OPT acquired Larkins Lane Field, practically on his doorstep in Headington. When a call for volunteers went out, he didn't hesitate to get involved.

Since then, Guy has played a crucial role in our volunteer team, working at our green spaces across Oxford. "I've helped with meadow and woodland management, pond creation, hedge-laying, and fenland restoration which can mean everything from wielding a pair of loppers to using a scythe to cut a grass meadow." Guy has also helped with Oxford Open Doors, welcoming visitors to the Rewley Road Swing Bridge and telling them about this important piece of our industrial history.

Guy enjoys the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering, as well as the knowledge that he is helping conserve Oxford's beautiful natural environment.

Volunteering is a sociable activity and involves outdoor exercise too! Each of our sites has its own charms, but Larkins Lane remains special for Guy. "It was my first volunteering experience with OPT, and seeing it transform has been incredibly rewarding."

If you have been inspired by Guy's story and would like to try volunteering with us, there are many opportunities to get involved. Over the summer we'll be maintaining the Rewley Road Swing Bridge and its meadow. We'll be opening up the area around the ponds at Heyford Meadow and we'll continue dam building and grassland restoration at Larkins Lane. In Marston this year we're starting a project to propagate floodplain meadow plants. We'll be growing rare plant species for planting in the floodplain meadows at Marston Hamm. We'll also gather seed ready for propagating the following year.

If you'd like to get involved in our Green Spaces or to volunteer at Oxford Open Doors, head to our website to register your interest: www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/volunteer

GUY AND DAVID MATHER AT THE SWING BRIDGE PHOTO: HANNAH BROCKWELL



GUY AT LARKINS LANE PHOTO: HANNAH BROCKWELL



Louise Lockyer
Membership & Communications Manager



SPRING / SUMMER EVENTS PROGRAMME 2025

APRIL

04 2pm **TOUR**
Elizabeth Sandis
The Ashmolean Museum

09 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room

11 12pm & 12.45pm **TOUR**
Elizabeth Sandis
The Museum of Oxford

16 5pm **WALK**
Historic Inns & Taverns
Julian Munby

19 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House

23 11am **SPECIAL EVENT**
Shakespeare's Birthday
Parade
Oxford Castleyard

25 2pm to 4pm **DROP-IN**
North Hinksey Conduit
House

26 2.30pm & 6.30pm
SPECIAL EVENT
Unversed...Beckis Cooper
Painted Room



BECKIS COOPER IN UNVERSED
PHOTO: MARC GASCOIGNE

MAY

01 8am **SPECIAL EVENT**
Magdalen Tower Climb

07 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room

14 5.30pm **SPECIAL EVENT**
Women of Wolf Hall
Dr Janet Dickinson and
Dr Lynn Robson
Painted Room

17 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House

JUNE

06 2pm to 4pm **DROP-IN**
North Hinksey
Conduit House

17 5.30pm **SPECIAL EVENT**
Kathy Davies
Painted Room

18 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room

21 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House

24 2pm **WALK**
Walton Well & Jericho
Mark Davies

26 4.45pm tea, 5.15pm start
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Nicola Stacey, Director
Heritage of London Trust
Pembroke College

JULY

03 5.30pm **TALK**
Oxford Libraries
Geoffrey Tyack
Key Learning Centre

15 3pm **TOUR**
The Library and its
Stained Glass
Merton College

16 12.30pm **TOUR**
Painted Room

19 2.30pm **TOUR**
Merchant's House

22 2pm **WALK**
The Harcourt Hill Estate
Malcolm Graham

24 5.30pm **TALK**
Recent Archaeological
Discoveries in Oxford
David Radford
Key Learning Centre

25 2pm to 4pm **DROP-IN**
North Hinksey
Conduit House



NORTH HINKSEY CONDUIT HOUSE

AUG

02 11am **WALK**
Medieval Oxford from
Northgate to Eastgate
Julian Munby

SEPT

SAVE THE DATE
OXFORD OPEN DOORS
SAT 13 & SUN 14

Details of Member Events for
OOD 2025 will be sent out with
your Annual Report mailing
ahead of the AGM.

Go to www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/events
to book events. For any
enquiries contact Louise at
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or 01865 242918