

## A Note on Building Investigations at 113-119 High Street, Oxford

By JULIAN MUNBY

These works by Lincoln College have allowed a closer look at another series of houses in the High Street, and although a fuller report will appear elsewhere, it will be useful to provide a brief note of discoveries alongside the archaeological record of below-ground activities. The archaeological building recording was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit under a legal agreement between the college and the city council.

The site consists of long tenements reaching back from High Street, some of which reached through to Bear Lane. The series of medieval houses to the east, at Nos. 106-112 High Street, mostly the property of Oriel College, were recorded by J.C. Buckler in the 1870s before the creation of King Edward Street, and have been published.<sup>1</sup>

Nos. 113-114 High Street, the Ram Inn (Salter SE 20), was acquired by Lincoln College in 1445 and was in use as an inn during the 16th century. Little survived the rebuilding in 1934, but at the rear of No. 114 there is a small stone and timber-framed wing extending from the north side of Emily Carr's House in Quatremain's Stables. This is perhaps of 17th-century date and was thought to be the back wing of the south-facing Carr's House, which had been investigated as part of the 1970s redevelopment by Lincoln of Quatremain's Stables.

No. 115 High Street was chiefly of interest as the home of James Wyatt, carver and gilder, patron of Turner and Millais, who gave the Oxford Union its first home. Some additions to the house reflected Wyatt's antiquarian interests, as did the collection of stonework rescued from Oxford buildings and rebuilt in his back garden. The front part of the house was a well-built timber frame of 18th-century date, built against a new stone wall in the centre of the building. In opening out the rear half a complete 17th-century framed building was found hidden beneath later work, roofed parallel to the street, with four trusses buried in the later softwood framing of the attic; this was recorded before being covered over.

No. 116 High Street produced little significant information about earlier buildings on the site, as most had been rebuilt in the 19th century, but part of a 17th-century roof survived, its street end gable truncated by a later parapet.

No. 117 High Street produced a small amount of evidence of exceptional interest for its medieval building history, though interestingly this was not altogether reflected in the archaeology beneath it. The discovery of a smoke-blackened ceiling partly covering the back room (and now rebuilt in the Oxford University Press bookshop) led to the realisation that this was a very small open hall of a type known from other towns. The hall occupied the full width of the property at ground level, but the chamber or gallery above reduced the upper part of the hall to a smokebay. The surmise from the ceiling timbers was later confirmed by the discovery of the end roof trusses buried higher up in the east and west walls. The open hall had been discontinued in the 16th century by flooring over the smoke bay with distinctive chamfered joists.

<sup>1</sup> J. Munby, 'J.C. Buckler, Tackley's Inn and Three Medieval Houses in Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xliii (1978), 123-69.

No. 118 High Street is well known for its remarkable wall paintings of delicate filigree, which it has been suggested were the work of Walter Wilkins in 1621, the goldsmith who leased the house from New College.<sup>2</sup> Repairs in the attic revealed that the first roof was an east-west gable, later replaced by a higher north-south roof with two gables.

No. 119 High Street produced little of significance in the structure though elements of 17th- or 18th-century framing were observed. However, a rather unusual discovery was a printed Civil War passport, signed by Fairfax, allowing a royalist soldier to leave the city after the siege in 1645; this had been tucked up behind a chimney for safe keeping and never recovered.

<sup>2</sup> E.C. Rouse, 'Some 16th- and 17th-century Domestic Paintings in Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1975), 201-2, and note by C. Cole, 205-7.