

Letter



Dear WON,

Since Osney Town became a Conservation area two years ago, you might well think the residents don't know we are living in a Conservation Area, for sash windows are frequently taken out and replaced by often unsuitable windows. Indeed there is no legal reason why they should not be, as the City Council does not control this 'change of appearance' and advertisements for new windows are often dropped through our letterboxes. This is a pity, for the character of the area is being spoilt and it is up to the local residents to conserve and indeed improve the area.

The Church has made a good start in clearing up the overgrown churchyard and the Council has replaced two trees in South Street, but more planting could be done, some by the Council, some privately: shrubs in front of the Mallinson Court flats on the narrow strip of grass on the left (that on the right is always cared for by one of the residents), trees planted on both sides of the entrance to the new flats at the bottom of West Street. Shrubs on the grass in South Street would look better than uncut grass littered with paper. It's very fascinating to look round and see where a tree or shrub can be planted - and our narrow terraced houses do need every possible bit of greenery.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Powell
(Planning Secretary,
Oxford Civic Society)

16 Bridge Street, Osney.

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Does the congregation come before the building?

FEW BUILDINGS AROUSE such strong feelings in so wide a cross-section of their neighbours as a prominently sited church.

St Frideswide's is no exception. In addition to the small nucleus of Christians who use it regularly, there is a much larger body of self-confessed believers who make no use of - or contribution to - the building that is there, but for whom it has a personal spiritual significance.

And the third - and by far the largest - group value the church building for the character or 'tone' it gives to the area, perhaps also the historical aura of it, and maybe too the belief that it enhances the value of their property if they happen to live close by.

Finally, one must remember those stalwart defenders of a threatened church, the conservationists. These are in a class of their own, rallying from far and wide to the call of 'save and preserve'.

A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The trouble is, of course, that the interests of these groups conflict with one another. The worshipping congregation, being small and

with virtually no influence within the unbelievably authoritarian structure of the Church of England, needs a building as closely suited to its needs as possible, small in size and economical to run. The inherited edifice is usually most inappropriate.

But with everyone else in the conservation stakes running to save the building rather than the congregation, the small band of the faithful must toe the line or fear to lose all. In an case, within each Christian congregation is a significant number of people who would prefer to spend time on flowers, brass and fund-raising than on other matters more challenging to the Christian conscience; and the unwieldy extravagant building is a useful let-out for them.

NOSTALGIA AND CONSERVATION

Those who value the building for its spiritual 'oomph', or for the visual amenity which it affords, probably take a very conservative view by and large of churches and what goes on inside them. Nostalgia is an important factor in what they think.

The outsiders are a more unstable ingredient! They overbalance the weight of argument in favour of con-

servicing the building in the interests of historical preservation and visual amenity. They also take the issue further from the arena of local discussion.

FRIENDS OF ST FRIDESWIDE'S

Thus the cause of St Frideswide has been taken up by Lady Joan Wheare, and at the inaugural meeting of the Friends at least three quarters of the seventy-odd people present were not members of the congregation. A 'CAUSE CELEBRE'

So St Frideswide is now to become a 'cause celebre'. There is talk of art exhibitions, concerts, meetings: anything that will make the retention of the building appear a social need. The Friends of St Frideswide's are sure of friendly links with the congregation at the church, many of whom are pledged to support these activities. Already giant new strides have been made in clearing the churchyard and removing dangerous trees, and Lady Wheare has arranged finance to enable urgent repairs to the roof to be carried out at once.

A TINGE OF SADNESS?

A tiny minority of believers will be saddened that so much play is now being made of preserving the building, while the question of the future of the congregation is so much less glamorous and yet (to them) so much more important.

SHOTOVER COUNTRY PARK

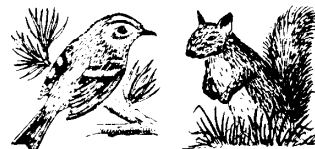
IF YOU THINK a country park is a cross between a zoo and a picnic site, you're wrong! And if you think that Shotover must be all the worse for becoming a 'country park' - well, I'm glad to say you're wrong again.

A trail leaflet has been produced to help you find your way, and it's free from the Information Centre in St Aldate's. I thought I knew Shotover, but a visit last weekend with the leaflet showed me just how little of it I had ever seen. It's possible to walk for three or four miles through very varied countryside without threat from barbed wire or guard dogs. Shotover is 500 feet up, and the air certain-

ly feels good too after our low and rather damp atmosphere!

BADGERS AND DEER ARE HERE

There is some dense woodland where shy deer are lurking, and badgers have a sett within the park. The walker may also see foxes, and of course rabbits and squirrels.



We were confronted with a splendid array of spring flowers, and later in the season the flora will include orchids. Overhead such

diverse birds as woodpeckers, jays and long-tailed tits can be seen: listen for the woodpecker's rapid hammering as his beak penetrates the decaying wood, and for the first - or last! - cuckoo of the season.

A CHILDREN'S HAVEN

A note for anxious parents: the children will love it. There is a big natural sand-pit with a stream running through it, and other streams elsewhere too.



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