

Walking On With Malcolm Graham

Walk round into Osney Lane, passing nos. 1-7 The Hamel (1868, E. G. Bruton?) 2½ storey brick "cottages" similar in character to Old Christ Church Buildings. Beyond the footpath which leads through to the Oxpens Cattle Market - opened on April 6th 1932, notice the former St. Thomas' School (1904, P. A. Robson) a building with Art Nouveau inspired facade and railings which was planned to be "the best possible building without any extravagance in the character of the structure or internal decoration". Next to the school stood a corrugated iron building used originally in North Oxford as a temporary St. Andrew's church. It was then re-erected here as a miniature rifle range by Captain W. E. Mills in 1908, and became a military hospital in World War I.

On the corner of Woodbine Place and Osney Lane, notice the former Oxford Crèche and Invalid Kitchen (1893, Symm & Co.) provided for working mothers by Miss Mary Jephson of Gunfield, Norham Gardens (d.1895) who was well-known for her charitable works in the neighbourhood. Continue along Osney Lane to Hollybush Row, and glance across the road at New Christ Church Buildings (1893, E. Hoole) a 4-storey block, displaying a curious mixture of brick, rendering and tile-hanging with some timbering in the gables.



The Oxford Crèche (1893)

Turn right into Hollybush Row and cross by the pedestrian crossing. Terraced houses on the right, like all those bounded by Woodbine Place, St. Thomas' Street, Hollybush Row and Osney Lane, were built in the 1890's. Away to the left, the inexorable expansion of the Post Office Sorting Office from Becket Street has claimed all the buildings of the Community of St. Thomas, a High Anglican sisterhood, founded by the Rev. Thomas Chamberlain in 1847. Notice, on the north-east corner of Hollybush Row and St. Thomas' Street, the rebuilt Chequers public house (1913, Wilkins & Jeeves) and on the north-west corner, The Lodge, a 2-storey rubble stone building built as St. Thomas' Girls' School in 1841. The contemporary ironwork in front is signed by Nathaniel Dean of Abingdon.

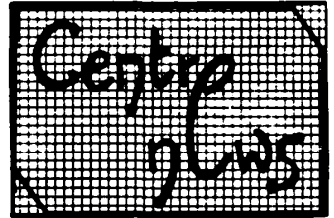
Walk down towards St. Thomas' church, but, before you reach it, glance left along the former Church Street (closed 1892) to the surviving gateway of the St. Thomas' sisterhood. Beside the churchyard is the former St. Thomas' parish school, now Coombe House, a 2-storey stone building. Enter the churchyard to examine a dated inscription panel on the North front which explains that the school was erected in 1702 "at the charge of Mr. John Coombe citizen plasterer of London born in this parish and free of this city for the benefit of as many poor children as the rent of this house will pay for their teaching to read and write..." St. Thomas' church was probably founded soon after Thomas Becket's martyrdom in 1170, and the late 12th century chancel may belong to this original building. External features of interest include the 13th century doorway in the South chancel wall, the South porch of 1621 and the West tower of c.1540. The main body of the church was substantially rebuilt in 1825 and 1846-8. From the 16th century until c.1850 St. Thomas' church stood out on a limb at the Western edge of Oxford, so much so that in 1773 the churchyard had been described as being "encompassed with streams and rivulets and ornamented with shrubs and flowers, thus resembling a garden..." In the 19th century, it was still "the favoured spot of many birds, whose songs are a great delight to early worshippers", and even now it retains to a surprising degree, "the quiet and seclusion of the country". North of the churchyard is St. Thomas' vicarage (1893, C. C. Rolfe), a delightful red brick house with stone dressings, a tiled roof and brick chimney stacks.

St. Thomas' Churchyard and surroundings

Leave the churchyard, and turn left down Becket Street to the Osney Lane railway bridge, noticing as you climb the steps, the former Great Western Railway goods station re-sited from its original position South-West of Folly Bridge in 1872. The footbridge is a vantage point offering no mean variety, with views of the castle motte and Dreaming Spires to the East and close-ups of a scarpyard immediately to the North. Cross the main railway line, recalling perhaps that the foundations of the Augustinian Abbey church at Osney lie buried to the South beneath the railway and Osney Cemetery. The timbered gateway of the cemetery is its only surviving structure, both the chapel (1848, H. J. Underwood) and the lodge (1867) having been demolished.

MORE
NEXT
MONTH

New social programme



A LIVELIER SOCIAL programme was the principal item on the agenda of the Community Association committee at its June meeting. The Association also decided to invite the so-called 'affiliated organisations' who are represented on the committee to share in these social events, and to share in the profits any of them may make.

WIDE MEMBERSHIP

The affiliated bodies have a considerable membership, but are mostly quite small in themselves. They include:

- * West Oxford Residents' Association
- * St John Ambulance West Oxford Division
- * Abbey Road and Mill Street Jubilee Committee
- * Oatlands Road Jubilee Committee
- * Osney & St Thomas Allotment Association
- * West Oxford Ladies Bowls Club
- * Oxford Campaign for Homosexual Equality
- * Oxford Gingerbread Group
- * West Ward Labour Party
- * Oxford Chileans
- * St Frideswide's Church

The idea is that each of these bodies can take part in the social programme planned by selling tickets among its members, and helping to plan events through its representative on the committee.

MONTHLY SOCIALS

From September we shall be holding a monthly social event. The first will probably be a river trip and disco: we are trying to estimate likely ticket sales at the moment, as we need to sell 100 if we book the boat.

Here's what the river disco involves:

- 7 pm coach from West Oxford to Reading
- 8 pm - midnight: river trip on boat with disco and fish-and-chip supper included: licensed bar on boat
- midnight: coach returns to West Oxford

The cost for coach+boat+meal will be £3 or £3.50 per head according to the date booked: if you are interested in going please ring Pauline Bourgein on 42618 as soon as possible.

Later in the year, a Barn Dance will be held on October 21, and a disco is planned for November. Details of a Christmas Party will be given nearer the time.

If you have ideas for social activities, or talents you can offer, then our social organisers would like to hear from you: Roger Bourgein (25 Binsey Lane, tel. 42618) or John Chambers (102 Ferry Hinksey Road, tel. 46891)

SOME READERS THOUGHT that the article in the last issue of WON, 'Does the congregation come before the building?', was written by Tom Comber. We are sorry they should have thought that: it was in fact written by Jon Carpenter.

Letter



Dear WON,

As Fr Comber's "100 Hymns for Today" were published in the dear dead days of 1969, wouldn't they be better entitled "100 Trendy Hymns from Yesterday"?

Nevertheless, I've written to the Church Commissioners protesting against the scrapping of St Frideswide's.

Yours,

John Gillard Watson
32 Beech Croft Road, Oxford.

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DO YOU HAVE a photograph of historic local interest? If so, WON would like to know. We would like to publish old pictures of the people and places of West Oxford: can you help?