

VISIONS

No 133, March 2016

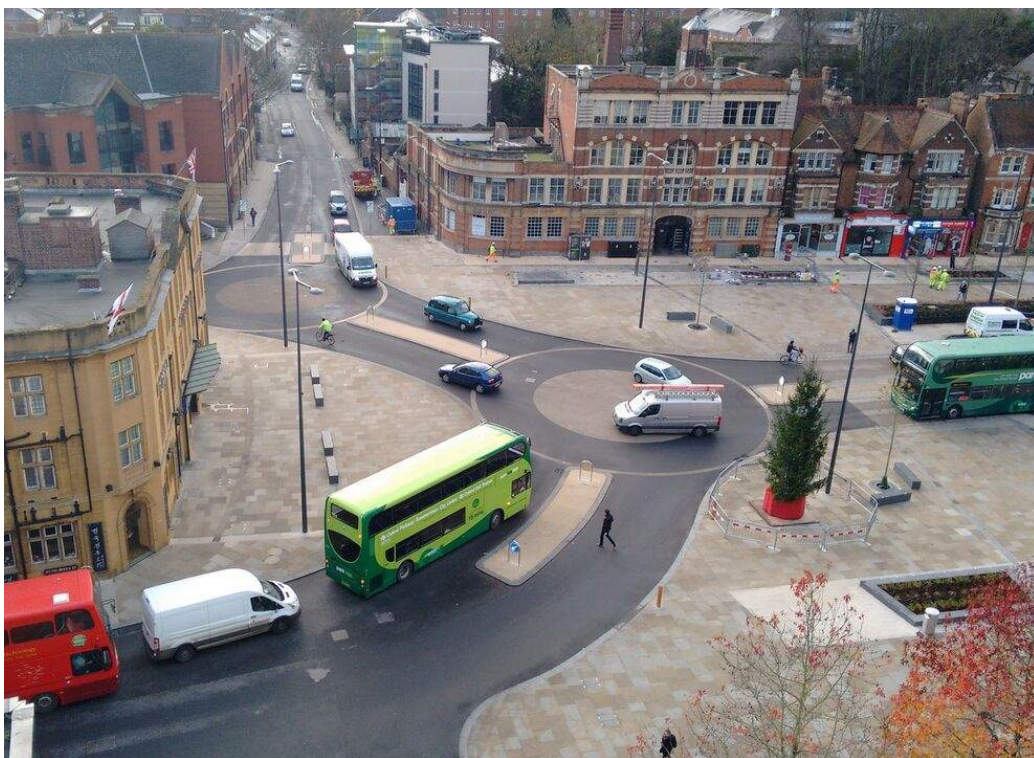
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Frideswide Square just before completion in December. Time will tell whether its principles of 'shared space' will benefit all road users.

See page 4

Photo courtesy of Oxfordshire County Council



Conflict or cooperation?

By Peter Thompson, Chairman

Please join us ...

AGM and talk

Wednesday 9 March 2016

All welcome – see page 5 for the agenda and the enclosed review of 2015. The speaker will be **Alistair Fitt**, the new Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University. *Note new venue!*

Spring Clean 2016

4, 5 and 6 March – see our website www.oxclean.org.uk
There's still time to register to take part in this great community event.

What lies ahead for us in 2016? Do we face the prospect of mounting conflict? Or can local authorities work creatively together to plan for a sustainable future for our region?

Some see our county as a rural paradise under threat from a conspiracy of complicit regulators and rapacious business interests. Others see it as a 'golden goose' which needs only to be fed with affordable housing and decent communications to lay golden eggs for our economy. Still others lament the problems in recruiting staff for public services because of the scarcity and cost of housing, while everyone seems to decry the traffic congestion.

One piece of good news in terms of cooperation is that the four authorities adjacent to Oxford have agreed that, collectively, they will accommodate 15,000 of the new homes required by the city, in addition to those they need for themselves.

But the housing needs assessment on which authorities are planning is widely disputed and the clamour to scale back development is mounting. Fears are rising that planning controls and Green Belt designation (where it exists) will not protect the county's towns, villages and beautiful landscapes from the destructive attentions of developers.

West Oxfordshire District Council, after initially accepting the projected housing



figures, subsequently prepared its draft Local Plan on the basis of much less housing development than the assessment suggested. But the Government-appointed inspector not only refuted the Council's rejection of the housing needs assessment (which it had earlier 'signed off'), he also confirmed that in order to align with Government policy, the most ambitious projections for local economic growth should be adopted. Projected economic growth is one of the key drivers of the housing needs assessment, along with the requirement for affordable homes. It was a major blow for 'growth deniers'.

Who needs a golden goose?

'Growth' is habitually cited as the biggest villain of this piece. Oxfordshire is economically buoyant, has few areas of deprivation and low levels of unemployment; who needs its economy to grow?

The answer is: the entire nation. Despite years of austerity, the economy is still in a dire state – £1.6 trillion debt, publicly-owned assets largely disposed of and a persistent deficit which cuts have failed to redress.

In 2012 Lord Heseltine produced his *No stone Unturned in Pursuit of Growth* report, which set out the imperative for growth after the biggest global financial disaster since the 1930s. The Oxford region, with its knowledge-based scientific and engineering potential not only offers the opportunity to contribute substantially to a national recovery, but to diversify the basis of the nation's economy away from its dangerous dependence on the financial sector.

The economic projections for Oxfordshire are based on the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for the county, prepared by the Local Enterprise Partnership (see Ian Green's article on page 3 for clarification of the organisations involved). Its purpose is to provide evidence to the planning authorities, which they are required to take account of in setting policies, but it is currently being 'refreshed', having been first published in 2014. Its revision, less than two years after preparation, indicates the pressure and the pace with which economic growth is now being promoted.

We have been urging that the public consultation process for this revision should be used as an

opportunity to explain the situation and to ensure a wider and better understanding of the issues.

However opinions on the need for growth might vary, there is no doubt that the status quo is not an option. The housing crisis is real, growing and affects us all. In Paris in December 2015 the world finally agreed to aim to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The way we live and how we travel is going to change. Our housing is energy-wasteful; our transport infrastructure is decrepit, overloaded, obsolete and inadequate. Something must be done – something is being done, but it has to be paid for. Thus, whatever the local concerns, it seems unlikely that government will allow Oxfordshire's particular growth potential to remain unexploited.

For several years we have been calling for properly-integrated development and transport planning, coordinated across the region. We still don't have it, but the idea is gaining momentum. The uncoordinated and piecemeal approaches of the past will not serve for the future. **We must determine to better accommodate the high-productivity, high-value deliverers of the 21st century economy which the country needs while preserving all that is truly special about our city and county.**

We consider that openness, engagement and the development of better understanding is the best way forward. Bitter trench-warfare and a slow retreat into disconnected semi-urban sprawl across the county will not leave a legacy of which we might be proud.

All change in the city ...

Meanwhile Oxford is changing fast, especially in the area to the west of the city centre. The new Westgate development has been progressing upwards, not downwards, for several weeks. Resolution of land ownership issues at Oxpens and on Park End Street will lead the way to major development opportunities in the heart of the city. Re-engineering has transformed Frideswide Square and ideas are moving forward on the new railway station (see page 4). These offer the prospect of eliminating the 'black hole' of the Botley Road bridge, an aspiration held

by all for decades. The University is considering its holdings at Osney Mead; the County Council is exploring improvements to Botley Road itself, and new development proposals for Botley, hopefully more acceptable than those refused consent in 2015, will be forthcoming.

All this opens up prospects for the regeneration of a large area of central Oxford, extending westwards, with the station at its heart. We have been lobbying for the development of an effective transport interchange for several years and for re-location of the station to relieve the constraints.

The key to the provision of a station and a transport interchange worthy of Oxford is the commercial opportunity it represents. It remains to be seen what emerges as the preferred solution for the new station and whether this can elicit the funding necessary to deliver it.

The emergence of opportunities in the western area of the city prompted us to work with the Academy of Urbanism to organise a workshop to open up communications and encourage coordination of objectives, through some 'real planning'. This event, taking place in mid-March, has generated much interest from all the invited parties, which is highly gratifying. We hope that the event might represent the dawn of a new era of 'consultation' in planning the way the city develops.

Clearly, the view forward suggests that 2016 is not going to be a year short of new visions for Oxford and its region, with all the interest and inevitable controversy these are bound to engender.

Peter Thompson
Chairman

PS Do join us at our AGM on 9 March to hear Alistair Fitt, the Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University, talk about 'the innovation eco-system' in our region. We'd also welcome your support on constitutional change as outlined in November's newsletter.





Development planning – unravelling the complexity

Development planning in our city and region is nothing if not complex. Ian Green, a member of our Executive Committee and urban planner, shines a light on who does what and the challenge of working jointly.

The Society's *Oxford Futures* report, published a year ago, noted that Oxford and its wider region are failing to realise potential opportunities for sustainable growth primarily provided by their science-based industries. Although the city region has the potential to be a key driver of the regional and national economy this century, it was concluded that the city and region are being held back by the lack of a shared vision of what truly sustainable growth can offer to everyone across the region.

One of the constraints to the expansion of the debate is the complexity of the current responsibilities for development planning in Oxfordshire. As a precursor to encouraging wider community participation, we have made an analysis of current and emerging arrangements. **The analysis is now available on the [OCS website](#) and we are preparing a pamphlet summarising the analysis.**

Localism rules!

Strategic planning which used to be undertaken by regional planning agencies is now subordinate to 'localism'. In Oxfordshire it is now the **district and city councils** that are responsible for strategic planning, with a mandatory 'duty to cooperate'. The National Planning Policy Framework and Localism Act 2011 spell this out.

This puts the statutory **Local Plans** of the districts and city at the centre of countywide strategic economic, social and environmental development planning.

Enter the LEPs ...

However **non-statutory agencies** have now been created throughout the country to lead local economic planning – **Local Enterprise Partnerships**. Led by the private sector and with local government participation, the Oxfordshire LEP has formulated a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for Oxfordshire in

a process which was not subject to wider community consultation and which was separate from the preparation of Local Plans. The LEP is powerful as it links strategic economic planning to central government and EU funding for strategic investments and liaises directly with central government.

We see the announcement of a January–June 2016 'refresh' of the SEP as an opportunity to develop a shared vision by expanding the economic growth debate to include, for the first time, the wider Oxfordshire community.

... and the Oxfordshire Growth Board

The **Oxfordshire Growth Board** could help with this. It is a new joint **statutory body** between the Oxfordshire local councils and its role is to achieve the development priorities established in the SEP. This includes facilitating collaboration and delivering cross-boundary programmes, monitoring the implementation of the SEP and linked investment programmes, although the districts and city council retain total control over their Local Plan processes for their areas.

In the meantime the County Council retains responsibility for transport planning and in October 2015 adopted *Connecting Oxfordshire*, its transport policy and strategy.

To date, the SEP 'refresh' and the preparation of the county-wide transport strategy have not been synchronised with the completion of the revised Local Plans of the districts and city, which will run through most of 2016. There is growing evidence of wider community dissatisfaction with the LEP-led growth strategy, which is driving the employment and housing growth which now needs to be reflected in the Local Plans. The Local

The Organisational Framework of Planning in Oxfordshire



www.oxfordfutures.org.uk | Oxford Civic Society

The Society has recently produced Ian Green's analysis of the planning arrangements in the county and you can see it on our website. A summary is also in preparation. You'll find links to both documents on the [home page](#)

Plan consultations in the course of 2016 could see entrenched positions and conflict – a result of inadequate explanations, justifications and debate to date.

We are now seeking ways to encourage the kind of debates which could lead to a shared vision of what truly sustainable growth can offer. All our futures are at stake.



Will we get the main railway station we deserve?

Our Transport Group has been looking at the designs submitted for the new station. Andrew Pritchard updates us.

In December the public were able to see brief exhibitions of ideas for the design of the new railway station, based on the Station Masterplan first revealed in December 2013. Six (unidentified) groups of architects presented their outline ideas on poster boards and citizens were asked to record their preferences.

Though the total amount of information was limited, and differed between ideas, all the presentations showed less connectivity between buses, taxis, cycles, cars and trains than at the existing station. This is totally unacceptable.

In most cases there was inadequate space to meet and greet passengers and limited space for booking offices. None of the designs met the objective of producing a worthy gateway for travellers arriving at the city: like the present station, they all showed a gateway for those *leaving* it, with just a minor entrance on the west side. The general level of design was unimaginative, some designs using rectangular office blocks as landmarks.

We have submitted our response to this consultation exercise and you can [read it on our website](#) (see Travel/Transport).

Finished at last!

On the positive side, trains to London Marylebone are now departing regularly from **Oxford Parkway station** at Water Eaton, though access on foot and by bicycle still needs to be improved. And the completion of **Frideswide Square** is cause for celebration.

As noted by Christopher Gray of the *Oxford Times*, simply turning off the traffic lights at Frideswide Square a year ago freed up the flow and transferred the eastern pinch point to the junction of George Street and Worcester Street. Bottlenecks to the west remain unaffected.

Cyclists seem to prefer using the main carriageways in the square rather than the poorly-signed shared spaces on either side. There do not appear to be problems with buses turning in and out of the stops, though they regularly overrun the central reservation. It is to be hoped that as winter turns to spring the rather bleak aspect of the square will be somewhat softened.

Oxford Parkway opened for business in October 2015 offering a new route to London

Photo courtesy of The Herald



Joined up development?

On a wider scale, an alliance between the City Council and Nuffield College has been announced that promises to create a single masterplan for the **Oxpens, Frideswide Square**, the area around the **Westgate Shopping Centre** and the land between **Hythe Bridge Street** and **Park End Street**. With the station, and the developments proposed by the University at **Osney Mead**, this would offer the prospect of the joined-up development of a large area in the western part of the City, and better solutions to the transport problems of the area. The existing West End Area Action Plan, which has concerned the Society for some time, would be superseded.

Your letters: alleviating our flood risk

Greg Birdseye writes:

I just couldn't let Peter Rawcliffe's apology for the 'Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme' pass without some response (*Visions* 131). I can understand his concern about the impact of flooding but he is unfortunately just plain wrong when he claims that "the amount of water passing Oxford will not change". If there is any point to building a water channel round Oxford at all it is to channel water round Oxford!

There are other solutions, including upstream water management schemes. Water, particularly when spread out on

existing or enhanced water meadows, sinks down to the water table, is absorbed by plant growth, or not least simply evaporates. Those of us old enough might remember the criticism levelled at the proposals for Rutland Water in the 1970s, one of the shallowest reservoirs ever conceived. "It'll be just like laying water out to dry" was one of the most succinct comments at the time.

At least Peter Rawcliffe and I agree on one thing – "The cost of the OFAS scheme is ... immense". Currently estimated at £125 million before even any detailed hydrological modelling

and design work, or even route selection, and no doubt double that by the time it ever gets built, not to mention ongoing maintenance costs. The point is that for 'immense' amounts of money, there are other solutions that wouldn't require despoiling swathes of countryside around Oxford's fringes.

And without taking it too personally, while I'm sure Dr Rawcliffe is proud of his self-penned cartoon, it misses the point again. Nobody is unaware of the problem of flooding in Oxford but to try to caricature those of us who think OFAS is not the right solution as ostriches is at best just plain silly.



Of parks and people – planning matters

Oxford's new head of planning has taken up her post as Barton Park begins to take real shape. Clive Booth reports.

"Does Oxford want to be like Cambridge?", asked the *Cambridge News*, announcing that Patsy Dell, Cambridge City Council's head of planning, had been 'poached' by Oxford City Council. She took up her new, equivalent, post in Oxford in December 2015. Happily twisting the knife, the *Cambridge News* pointed out that the appointment followed a series of media reports suggesting that Cambridge was streets ahead of Oxford in terms of how it is managing its economic and housing growth (see our Chairman's commentary in the last issue of *Visions*).

A small group from the Society, led by chairman Peter Thompson, met Ms Dell at the turn of the year. It was a cordial meeting. We assured her that our top priority was enhancing the quality of life of the people of Oxford and we look forward to working with her to that end.

Meanwhile, the largest housing development in Oxford for many years, **Barton Park**, has taken a step forward with the submission of detailed plans for the first phase of development. The artist's impression (shown right and on page 3 of the *Oxford Times* of 7 January) shows that this phase will include some high density development, but the developers have been at pains to offer green spaces and views that should make for a pleasant environment: the Park will have many park-like features. From the very inception of the project we have been very actively involved in the successive stages of consultation and we are pleased that many of our suggestions have been adopted.

Elsewhere, we have been concerned about a series of separate speculative proposals for **student housing**, not directly sponsored by the universities or colleges. Developers see profit in student housing, not least because there is no requirement to provide



affordable housing. It is unclear as to whether the demand exists for the additional rooms likely to become available, particularly because the rooms may be very small and social facilities limited. There may be a speculative bubble here, which, if it bursts, could leave a regrettable legacy.

The Society's Planning Group examines some 900 planning applications annually. We comment on perhaps 200. Yet we don't have a good measure of our impact. In 2016, for the first time, we will monitor the planning decisions taken by the City on applications on which we have submitted comments and we will report the results.

Annual General Meeting – Wednesday 9 March 2016

Please join us for the pre-AGM talk at 7pm and the AGM at 8pm

The Society's 46th Annual General meeting will take place at Rewley House, St John Street, OX1 2JA

The pre-AGM talk *The Oxford innovation eco-system* will be given by Professor Alistair Fitt, Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University

Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm

Agenda

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|--|---|
| 1 President's opening remarks | 7 Reports of Working Groups |
| 2 Apologies for absence | 8 Election of Officers for 2016-17 |
| 3 Minutes of the 2015 AGM | 9 Election of Committee Members for 2016-17 |
| 4 Matters arising from the minutes | 10 Proposed changes to the constitution |
| 5 Chairman's report | 11 Any other business which has been notified |
| 6 Treasurer's report and accounts for 2015 | |

Please bring this agenda and the enclosed *Annual Review 2015* with you. The Review constitutes our report to members. Minutes of the last AGM, the full accounts for 2015 and the current and proposed changes to the constitution are on our website and will be displayed at the meeting.

Vernon Porter, Honorary Secretary, info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Booking form: April – July ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **Saturday 26 March**. Please enclose:

- 1 cheque/s payable to Oxford Civic Society, one for each event
- 2 one stamped, addressed envelope for all tickets

Member's name

BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

2nd member's name (if applicable).....

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Email

Event	No. of tickets	Amount enclosed
For events on more than one date, please delete any dates you <u>can't</u> do and indicate your preferred date/s		
Osney Lock Hydro Monday 25 April, 11.45am@£5	
Cassington food waste facility Thursday 5 May, 10am Tuesday 10 May, 2pm <i>Please let us know if you: need a lift / can offer a lift (circle as appropriate)</i>@£8	
Jeremy Montagu's instrument collection Wednesday 8 June, 11am Thursday 9 June, 5pm@£5	
Diamond Light Source Thursday 9 June, 5.45pm Thursday 14 July, 5.45pm <i>Please let us know if you: need a lift / can offer a lift (circle as appropriate)</i>@£8	
Blavatnik School of Government Tuesday 28 June, 2.30pm Wednesday 20 July, 2.30pm@£5	
Brasenose College Thursday 28 July, 2.30pm@£8	

Note: Tickets are allocated soon after the closing date but if you miss it, it's always worth asking if there are places left. Cheques are banked three weeks after ticket issue; after that no refunds can be given.

Send this completed form to Alan Hobbs, 66 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1PA

OCS programme

Calendar March – July 2016

Wednesday 9 March 6.30 for 7pm

The Oxford innovation eco-system, a talk by Alistair Fitt at Rewley House
Followed by the AGM at 8pm

** ticketed events – book now*

† events sold out

Thursday 17 March[†] 10.30am
Rycote Park and Chapel, a tour

Tuesday 12 April 10am[†]
Tuesday 19 April 10am[†]
Wallingford: museum and tour
led by Judy Dewey

Monday 25 April * 11.45am
Osney Lock Hydro, a visit led by Saskya Huggins

Thursday 5 May * 10am
Tuesday 10 May * 2pm
Cassington food waste facility, a visit

Wednesday 8 June * 11am
Thursday 9 June * 5pm
Jeremy Montagu's instrument collection, a visit

Thursday 9 June * 5.45pm
Thursday 14 July * 5.45pm
Diamond Light Source, a visit

Tuesday 28 June * 2.30pm
Wednesday 20 July * 2.30pm
Blavatnik School of Government, a visit

Thursday 28 July * 2.30pm
Brasenose College, a visit

Contact for booking/tickets only:

Alan Hobbs, 66 Southfield Road
Oxford OX4 1PA, Tel: 01865 248 105

If you have booked but can't attend, please phone Alan Hobbs.
We always have a waiting list.



Programme April – July 2016

Members-only visits

Tickets are needed for these events – bookings by Saturday 26 March

Osney Lock Hydro

Monday 25 April 11.45am

Now generating clean, green energy, Osney Lock Hydro is the first community-owned hydro plant on the Thames. This visit will start with a talk about the project by its Director, **Saskya Huggins**, followed by a chance to see the hydro's workings.



The Cassington food waste facility

Thursday 5 May 10am

Tuesday 10 May 2pm

If you have ever wondered what happens to the food waste you 'recycle' every week, now is your chance to find out. The facility at Cassington converts our food to methane which is used to generate electricity. A by-product is a liquid fertiliser used on farmland. The visit will start with an explanatory talk before seeing this progressive enterprise. Stout footwear is advised, as is car sharing, as parking is limited. *Please let us know if you need or can offer a lift.*

Jeremy Montagu's instrument collection

Wednesday 8 June 11am

Thursday 9 June 5pm

Jeremy Montagu was Curator of the Bate Collection of Musical Instruments from 1981 to 1995 and now is Emeritus Fellow of Wadham College. He began collecting on National Service and has collected ever since. We will be shown this fabulous personal collection of instruments crammed into his Oxford house – and hope he will play some of them!

Diamond Light Source

Thursday 9 June 5.45pm

Thursday 14 July 5.45pm

Based in Harwell, Diamond is the national synchrotron, one of the world's most advanced scientific facilities. It speeds up electrons to almost the speed of light then uses the beams to study everything from viruses and vaccines to fossils and jet engines. After an introductory talk by **David Price**, a two-hour visit will take you right into the heart of the giant facility. Please note that, though most areas are wheelchair accessible, there are no resting places on the tour. Good walking shoes are recommended. *Please let us know if you need or can offer a lift.*

The Blavatnik School of Government

Tuesday 28 June 2.30pm

Wednesday 20 July 2.30pm

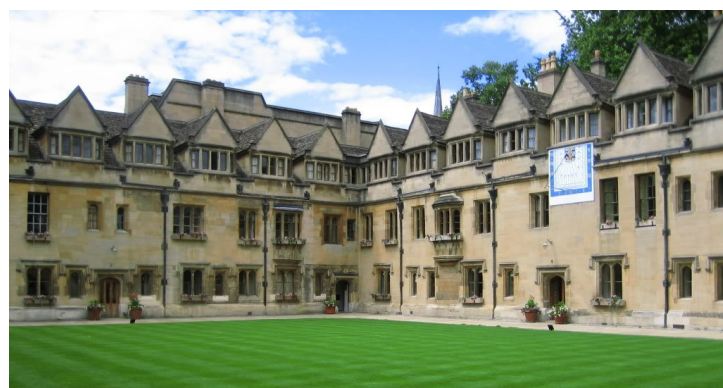
The Blavatnik School of Government recently moved into a spectacular new, glass-clad building in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The building has been constructed to be as sustainable as possible with innovative features such as heating from deep bore holes. This one-hour tour of the building will include a talk on the building's environmental credentials.

Brasenose College

Thursday 28 July 2.30pm

Brasenose College was founded in 1509 by Richard Sutton, a lawyer and William Smyth, Bishop of Lincoln. The College's unusual name refers to the 12th century 'brazen' (brass or bronze) door knocker in the shape of a nose.

After a brief talk on its history by the college archivist, **Georgina Edwards**, we will be shown round the college including its chapel and spectacular library.



Blue Plaques in 2015

The Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board appreciates the support of the Society for basic costs. Eda Forbes, Secretary to the Board, reports on 2015 plaques.

Olive Gibbs (1918–1995), twice Lord Mayor of Oxford, was a tireless campaigner for social causes and stalwart defender of Oxford's urban landscape. Her plaque was unveiled at Christchurch Old Buildings, St Thomas's, where she was born and lived as a young woman. A resounding tribute was paid by former fellow councillor and friend, the Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP.



Olive Gibbs' sons, Simon and Andrew, with the Lord Mayor and Andrew Smith MP at the plaque unveiling

In Abingdon **Arthur Edwin Preston (1852–1942)**, long-serving councillor and antiquarian, was honoured at his fine house in Park Crescent. In her tribute Jackie Smith, the town archivist, said much knowledge of Abingdon's history comes from his research and the documents he amassed. He also restored many of the town's ancient buildings.

Another antiquary, artist and architect **John Chessell Buckler (1793–1894)**, was honoured at 58 Holywell Street. Dr Geoffrey Tyack, architectural historian, said in his address that the 13,000 exquisite topographical drawings done by Buckler and his father continue to provide an invaluable resource for restorers and historians.



The world is deeply indebted to **Sir Richard Doll (1912–2005)**, Regius Professor of Medicine, who discovered the main hazards of smoking, saving millions of lives and establishing epidemiology as a vital new medical science. His plaque was unveiled at 12 Rawlinson Road where his

friend and colleague of many years, Professor Sir Richard Peto FRS, spoke in his honour.

General Sir Kenneth Darling, GBE, KCB, DSO (1909–1998) saw distinguished service with the airborne forces in 1944, was a most effective commander in Cyprus in 1958 and was appointed Commander in Chief Allied Forces Northern Europe 1967–69. The residents of Chesterton were delighted to revive his memory at Vicarage Farmhouse, his home of many years. The address was given by the military historian Professor Sir Hew Strachan FBA, with representatives of the Parachute Regiment, the Royal Fusiliers and the Royal British Legion in attendance.

Contact us/who's who

Oxford Civic Society

67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ

075 05 756 692

info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

oxcivicsoc.org.uk | oxclean.org.uk | oxstreets.org.uk

President: *Sir Hugo Brunner*

Vice-President: *Tony Joyce*

Chairman: *Peter Thompson*

85 Lonsdale Road, OX2 7ET (558 616)

chairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Vice-Chairman: *Sir Clive Booth*

43 St John Street, OX1 2LH (557 762)

vicechairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Hon Secretary: *Vernon Porter*

67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ (557 660)

info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Hon Treasurer: *Richard Dodd*

81B Five Mile Drive, OX2 8HN (512 607)

treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Membership Secretary: *Liz Grosvenor*

15 Lime Walk, OX3 7AB (765 453)

membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Newsletter Editor: *Hilary Bradley*

24 Beaumont Road, OX3 8JN (762 418)

newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Oxford Streets for People Co-ordinator: *Richard Bradley*

24 Beaumont Road, OX3 8JN (762 418)

info@oxstreets.org.uk

Programme Group Convenor:

Terry Bremble

Chapel House, 11 Cothill, Oxon OX13 6JN (390 489)

programme@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Transport Group Convenor:

Andrew Pritchard

33 Laburnum Road, North Hinksey,
OX2 9EL (240 014)

transport@oxcivicsoc.org.uk



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