

## OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD REPORT OBR.360

**Gardencroft  
5 Roman Road  
Wheatley  
OX33 1UU**



**Figure 1 Gardencroft**

### **Introduction**

The Oxfordshire Buildings Record are grateful to the owner, Graham Smith for allowing us access to his house for the purposes of compiling this report as a contribution to the better understanding of Oxfordshire's buildings. David Clark was able to spend about an hour and a half there on 22 March 2018.

The objectives of the survey were to understand the dates and phases of the building.

We made a visual inspection of the exterior and such internal spaces as were accessible. Photographs were taken of significant features. Unless indicated otherwise, text and images were created by members of the recording team. A limited number of historical sources were consulted. A copy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1899 survey) Ordnance Survey map at 1:2500 annotated for the 1910 District Valuation was obtained from the Oxfordshire History Centre.

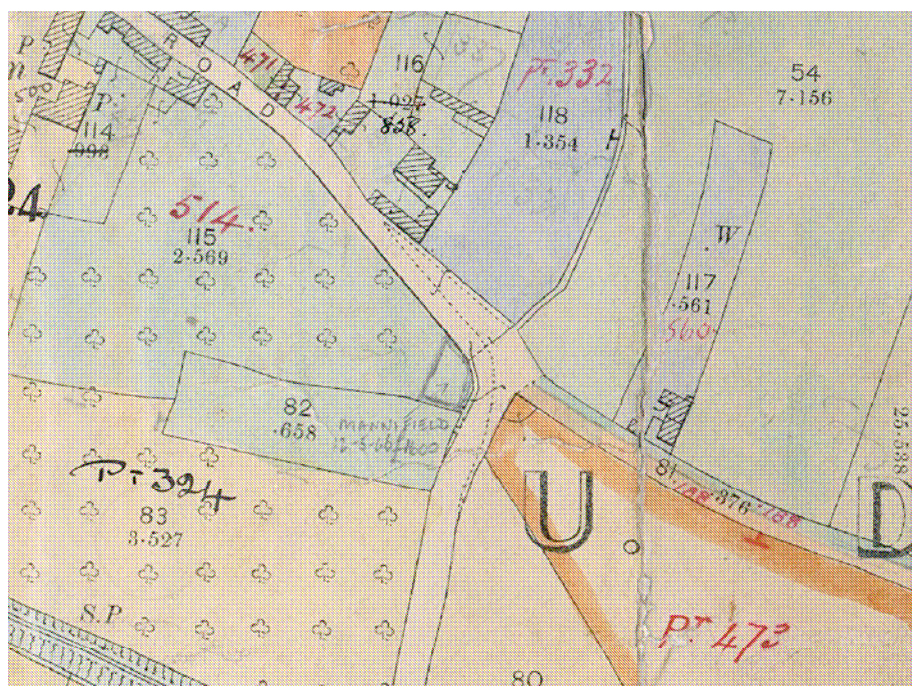
Under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, the OBR retains the copyright to this document. Where copyright remains solely with the originator this is indicated by © and permission must be obtained from that person before any reproduction may take place.

Please note that this building is private property.

### **Location (NGR SP 60156 05435)**

Gardencroft lies on the north side of what is now Roman Road, an eastward extension of Crown Road. On the 1910 District Valuation map (Fig.2) it is on plot no.560. The plot shown on that map is two acres in extent and is long and narrow; the house itself lies near and parallel to the eastern boundary, with a gable end to the road. The plot

lies within a larger open field, bounded on the west by a stream (Fig.3). This belonged to Ambrose Farm,



**Figure 2 Extract from 1910 DV map (Reproduced by courtesy of the Oxford County Council – the Oxfordshire History Centre)<sup>1</sup>**



**Figure 3 Stream to west of plot**

### **Description**

Fig.1 shows the house from the south-west. The west wing forms an L shape with the main range. The building material is limestone, probably mostly the local corallian ragstone, with some larger dressed stones, particularly for the south-west quoins. In the west gable of the wing the line of a lower roof slope can be discerned – the earlier stonework is smaller and has a greater rubble content. The roof is covered with plain red tile. In the west elevation (Fig.1) are two doorways to the main range, that to the south with a tiled pentice hood; a tiled porch shelters the northern door and a adjacent one to the west wing.

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/leisureandculture/history/collections/districtvaluation/DV-IX-51\\_Oxfordshire\\_XL-2.pdf](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/leisureandculture/history/collections/districtvaluation/DV-IX-51_Oxfordshire_XL-2.pdf)



The stone archway/buttness seems modern and has an inscribed plaque ('Peace be to all who come this way') on the east side (Fig.4).



**Figure 4 Inscribed plaque**



**Figure 5 North elevation**

The north elevation is shown in Fig.5. This shows the pitched roof over the main range where it joins that of the wing. There is a modern stone lean-to outshut against the end of the main range, with the remains of an earlier structure embedded in the wall to the west. The roof is plain red tile. There is a brick chimneystack at the west gable of the wing, and a tall brick stack rising from the roof-slope at the northern end of the main range. The windows are casements throughout; to the ground floor at this elevation the tripartite window has a stone lintel.



**Figure 6 East elevation**



**Figure 7 East elevation, south window**

The east elevation is shown in Fig.6. To the south is a further lean-to outshut, of stone, with a weatherboarded west wall. The main range has three windows to each floor, all slightly different. The ground floor has a modern casement under a long timber lintel to the south (Fig.7) another in the centre (Fig.8) and an older one to the north (Fig.9). Each of these is at a different height. The first floor windows are all at



**Figure 8 Central window**



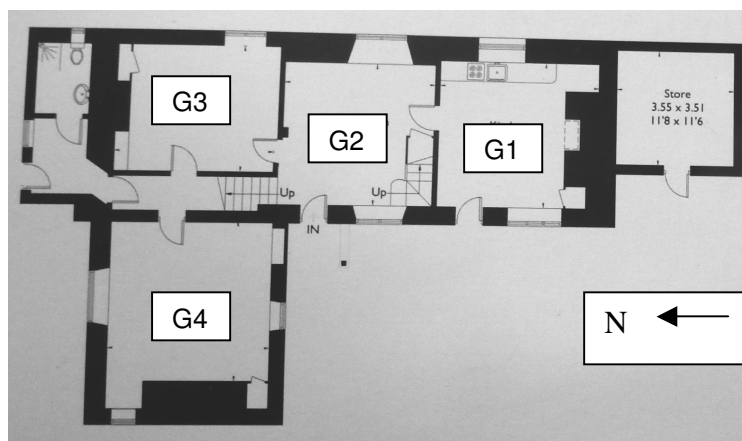
**Figure 9 Northern window**

the same level and are tripartite casements. There is a brick stack at the centre of the south gable wall (Fig.10).



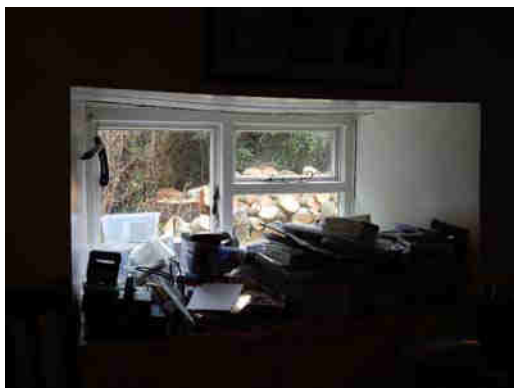
**Figure 10 South (street) elevation**

Interior



**Figure 11 Ground floor plan (Fine & Country, 2016)**

The ground floor plan is shown at Fig.11. The front door opens to the central unit (G2) of three, which form the main range of the house. The rear (east) wall of this space has a thick wall (not measured, but about 3ft. – see Fig.12). There is a deep spine beam across the room (Fig.13) supported by inserted posts at either end. The floor joists are of varying sizes, some flat-laid, some chamfered.



**Figure 12 East window reveal in G2**



**Figure 13 Spine beam and joists in G2**

The lintel of the doorway is above the height of the joists, so those near it terminate at a trimmer (Fig.14) and the joist pattern in this area is somewhat irregular. This suggests that the doorway was inserted after the room was floored in.



**Figure 14 Joist arrangement at front door**



**Figure 15 Fireplace in G1**

G2 has no fireplace, but seems to have been used as a circulation space, since there are two staircases to first floor rooms and there are doorways at either end to G1 and G3 in the main range.

There is a timber stud partition wall to the south of G2 through which a doorway gives access to G1 (Fig.15). The west wall of G1 is not as thick as in G2. G1 also has a deep, chamfered spine beam, but the joists are mostly square in section and are lodged over the lintel of the exterior doorway in the west wall. To the south is a (blocked) fireplace with a timber lintel.



**Figure 16 G3 looking north**



**Figure 17 Chamfer stop in G3 main beam**

To the north of G2 is a further timber partition, with a doorway to G3 (Fig.16). The wall thicknesses here are considerably less than in G1 and G2, and the ceiling beam is set transversely across the space. This has a good quality chamfer and delicate stop (Fig.17). The ceiling joists are square, chamfered and to the south are lodged over the partition to G2. At the north wall is a further chimneystack with a modern brick fireplace. To either side are cupboards, one open with an elliptical arched head, the other with a panelled door.

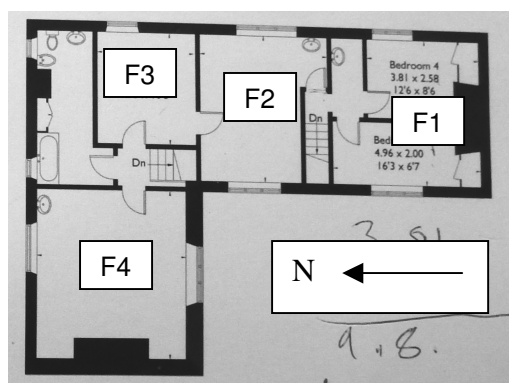
A plank door leads to the west wing (G4) and an access corridor to a utility room and shower room in the outshut behind the stack.



G4 has a spine beam aligned with that of G3, but with a slightly simpler chamfer stop. It has a large blocked fireplace at the west end, with a cupboard to the left and a casement window to the right.

### First Floor

The first floor plan is shown in Fig.18. From G2, a boxed-in winder stair – the treads and risers supported on a carriage – rises against the partition wall to G1 to the southern rooms F1 and F2.



**Figure 18 First Floor plan (Fine & Country, 2016) Figure 19 Staircase south wall**

Along this wall is a thick beam (Fig.19) that has been truncated at the landing to allow access to F1. As shown on the plan, F1 is now divided by a thin partition – which intersects the chimneystack – into two rooms. In the western room, part of a timber roof truss is visible (Fig.20). The horizontal timber is the rear of that in Fig.19, and seems to be a tie-beam, which supports a queen-strut, above which is a collar with an angled end, presumably where it was pegged in to the principal rafter.



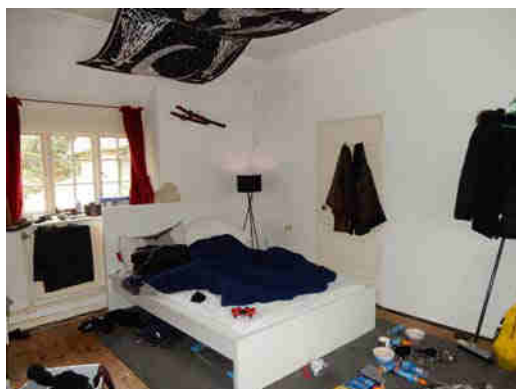
**Figure 20 Part of truss in F1**



**Figure 21 Door latch to F1**

As elsewhere in the house, the door to F1 is formed of vertical planks joined by timber battens, and has wooden door furniture (Fig.21), mostly in situ. The hinges are mostly hand-wrought blacksmith work, but most are screwed in place, and so even if of an early date, may have been moved or altered.

F2 (Fig.22) has windows to east and west elevations, a door to F3, but no fireplace.

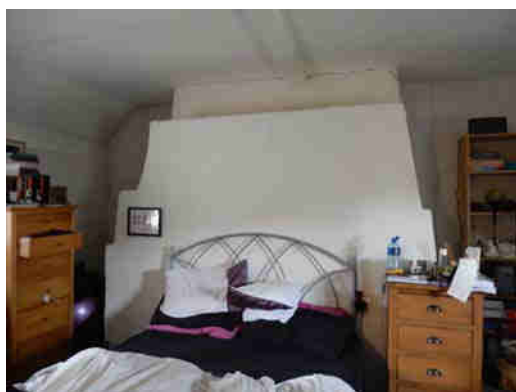


**Figure 22 F2 looking north – door to F3**



**Figure 23 Staircase to F3 and F4**

Returning to G2, a straight flight of stairs (Fig.23) within a boxed-in section of G3 leads to F3 and F4. F3 has also been partitioned into two rooms, the upper part of the G3 chimneystack being visible at the north end.



**Figure 24 F4 looking west**



**Figure 25 Window catch in F4**

F4 (Fig.24) is the upper room in the west wing, the end of which is again dominated by the chimneystack, which does not seem to have had a fireplace at this level. The south-facing window (Fig.25) has a catch fixed to the iron frame of the casement. This could be 18<sup>th</sup> century in date, but this design is found well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

## Roof



**Figure 26 Eastern roof truss of west wing**

The roof, often indicative of the earliest phases of the history of a house, was almost entirely modern. The timbers were softwood of thin scantling, with only one truss (Fig.26) surviving from an earlier phase. This comprised a pair of elm principal rafters, with a considerable amount of bark and pegged at the apex. The western face was smooth, but had no distinguishing features such as assembly marks.

---

<sup>2</sup> see Hall (2005) p.90.

## History

Wheatley was in the parish of Cuddesdon until the Reformation, after which it gradually gained its independence.<sup>3</sup> Crown Road was once part of the London to Oxford road that passed along the top of Shotover Plain. Ambrose Farm in Crown Road has a wide stone Tudor-arched fireplace, and there are some other 17<sup>th</sup>-century houses along the road, including Rectory Farmhouse, tree-ring dated to 1630.<sup>4</sup> Until the turnpike by-passed the village, coaching and associated trades were an important source of income, while before that, quarrying was the major industry, with ochre as well as the local coral ragstone being the main products.

In 1910, the owner/occupier of Gardencroft was Benjamin Thornton, the property having a gross annual value of £8.<sup>5</sup> The dividing line across the building and the garden fence suggests that at the time the base map was surveyed (1899) it was divided into two holdings. Ambrose Farm was owned by William Boughton, 1 Mortlake Rd, Kew, and was farmed by Charles Shepherd. No further research has been carried out into the previous owners and occupiers of the property. This can be done by working backwards from recent information using street directories, census returns, title deeds and other documents. See Alcock (2003).

## Discussion

There follows a set of disconnected thoughts about the dates and phases.

1. It is clear from the external and internal evidence that at some date the walls of Gardencroft were raised in height by about 3ft. The modern construction of the present roof suggests that this was done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but other evidence points to a much earlier date.
2. In particular, the staircases must date from this roof-raising, since otherwise the attic spaces would have been unusable. The doors and their wooden latches, could date from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the ceiling beams and joists visible on the ground floor could all be contemporary.
3. However, it seems that the earliest fabric in the house is the thick east wall of G2, though unfortunately there are no features that can point to a specific date. It could be a fragment of a medieval building, though there is no evidence for the traditional cross-passage/hall with upper and lower end bays that one might expect. Careful examination of the floor (if that is to be replaced) may locate evidence for a hearth or datable pottery. On the other hand, the siting of the house at right angles to the road seems to suggest that its builder was constrained by the long narrow plot – medieval houses are more usually along the roadside front, perhaps three perches (15 metres) in width.
4. The fragmentary stone wall to the side of the present northern outshut also deserves closer study – it may in fact be part of a continuation to the north of the west wall of the main range. Some geophysics and a test pit or two in the

<sup>3</sup> For more on the outline in this paragraph see *VCH Oxon* 5, pp. 108-115.

<sup>4</sup> Miles (2007)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/leisureandculture/history/collections/districtvaluation/DV-XII-19.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Hall (2005) pp. 60-1



garden to the north of the house may locate foundations for other parts of that structure.

5. Another possible phase is that of the erection of the west wing. While there is now no obvious evidence for a time difference between the main range and the wing, such features are often later additions to earlier in-line structures. The similarity of the beams that form an almost continuous timber from east to west between G3 and G4 suggest that they are contemporary.
6. An early doorway to the house seems to have been that to G1 – the present one was clearly cut into G2 after its ceiling was in place. However, if the building extended northwards, circulation within it would not have been easy.
7. A later phase seems to have been the insertion of extra doors – presumably to permit subdivision into three small cottages. In 1899 it have become only two, but by 1910 it had a single occupier.

## Conclusion

A tentative conclusion might be that an earlier house had a major makeover in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; its walls were raised in height, floors were inserted, chimneystacks built and staircases added to provide a significant amount of additional accommodation. The west wing was also probably part of this scheme. A later phase seems to have been the insertion of extra doors – to permit subdivision into three small cottages. By 1910, however, the house had reverted to single occupancy.

## Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by member(s) of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record, a voluntary organisation whose objectives are to advance education and promote research on the buildings of Oxfordshire. Whereas every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, it is based only on evidence which was visible at the time of the recording. The information and discussion contained in it is intended as a contribution to research, and the OBR takes no responsibility for any other use to which it may be put. Advice should always be sought from those professionally qualified to give it.

Prepared by: D R Clark FSA, 21 Walton Street, Oxford OX1 2HQ

secretary@obr.org.uk

Approved for OHC by: D Thynne

24 March 2018

## Bibliography

Alcock, N W (2003) *Documenting the history of houses*. British Records Association.  
Hall, Linda (2005) *Period House Fixtures and Fittings 1300-1900* Newbury  
Miles, D (2007) Tree-ring dates *Vernacular Architecture* **38** p.131  
Victoria County History (1957) *Oxfordshire Vol 5 Bullingdon Hundred*