

The National Buildings Record

The Early Years

by

STEPHEN CROAD

The fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the National Buildings Record (N.B.R.) was celebrated in 1991. Despite the fact that responsibilities for the N.B.R. were transferred in 1963 from an independent Council of Management to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, for all practical purposes the direction of the Record throughout the half century has been in the hands of four people: Walter Godfrey, 1941–60, Cecil Farthing, 1960–76, Eric Mercer, 1976–81, and Stephen Croad from 1981. Cecil Farthing joined the newly-formed N.B.R. in 1941, became Deputy Director after the war in succession to Sir John Summerson, and Director in 1960 following Walter Godfrey's retirement. In this article Stephen Croad brings together reminiscences by those most closely involved with the foundation of the N.B.R. and introduces Cecil Farthing's memoir of those momentous wartime years.

The announcement has just been made of the establishment of the National Buildings Record as a centre for making, collating and indexing records of buildings of all kinds—among them medieval churches, Georgian squares and palaces, Victorian banks and clubs, and even, in certain circumstances, buildings of our own day.

Thus, *The Builder* in March 1941 recorded the formation of the N.B.R.,¹ and followed a detailed description of the intended work of the Record with a prophetic statement: 'Although the National Buildings Record has come into being as the result of the present emergency, it is expected to become a national institution of considerable importance'.² This expectation has been amply fulfilled, as publicity attendant upon its anniversary celebrations in 1991 has demonstrated.

'The National Buildings Record contains what is probably the greatest collection of architectural photography in the world', *Blueprint* stated unequivocally.³ 'If asked to define the nerve centre of the Heritage movement in this country, I would nominate the National Buildings Record in Savile Row—not only in its capacity as an indispensable inventory of the stock of historic buildings . . . but as a vital meeting place for everyone concerned with architectural conservation', was Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd's comment.⁴ Another well-known architectural historian, John Harris, wrote: '. . . what is so invaluable about the Record is its vast panoramic picture book of every parish, village by village, town by town, so that . . . [there] . . . is a visual history of English architecture in all its manifestations . . . in all we are considering

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an archive of near seven million items.⁵ This is an heroic achievement . . .'.⁶ The architect Roderick Gradidge summed up the feelings of many:

If one ignores the brutalities of war, the early 1940s seem to have a romantic tranquillity that we have now quite lost. As a direct reflection of the horrors of that war, people turned back to what would then have been called 'the spirit of England', and tried to save everything worthwhile from that maelstrom. So there were films like Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale*, John Piper's painting, and on a perhaps more practical plane, the National Buildings Record, that excellent institution, founded to make a photographic record of all the best buildings in the country before they were destroyed by bombs.⁷

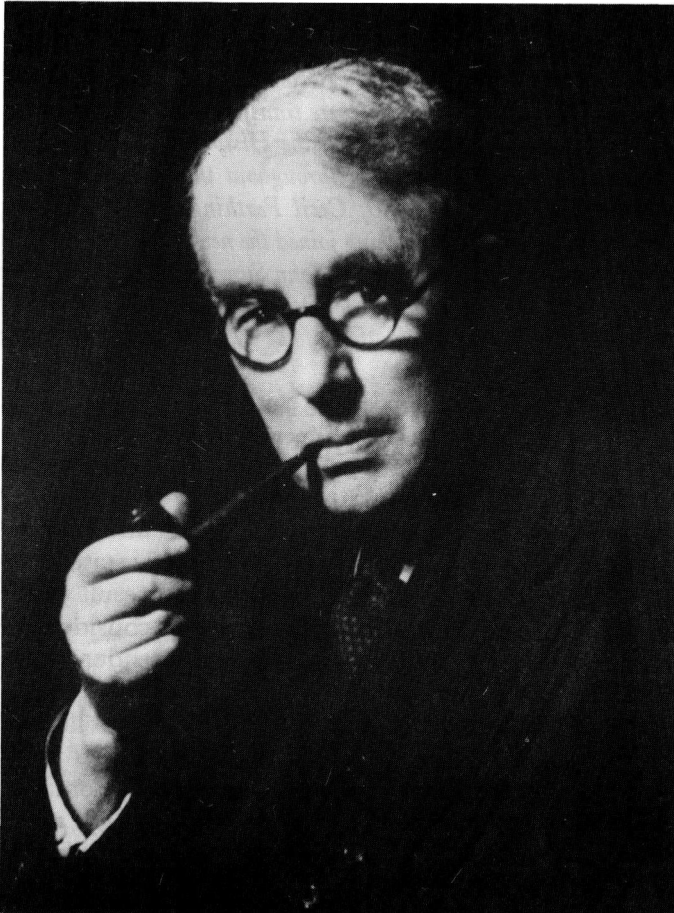


Fig. 1

Walter Godfrey (1881–1961) the founding Director of the N.B.R.: an architect and antiquary with a passion for recording architectural antiquities. Described by Sir John Summerson as 'amiable and obstinate—just the qualities needed to overcome wartime restrictions and shortages'

Mrs Millicent Godfrey

A description of the work of the N.B.R. and an outline of its history has already been given by the present writer in these *Transactions*.⁸ However, research for the jubilee exhibition and its associated publication has brought forth some additional accounts and reminiscences from those most closely concerned with the foundation of the National Buildings Record.

Sir John Summerson's recollections of the establishment of the N.B.R. have been published as the introduction to a book commemorating the Record's first half century of achievement.⁹ Sir John was the prime mover in the creation of the national record, but with characteristic modesty his account gives equal credit to those whose interests he fired and who were instrumental in obtaining official backing and financial support (Fig. 2).

The N.B.R.'s first Director was Walter H. Godfrey,¹⁰ architect and antiquary, described by Sir John Summerson as an excellent choice, amiable and soft-spoken, but with a strain of stubborn egotism: 'wartime restrictions and the stupidity and indifference of people who did not come up to his expectations made him a chronic grumbler, but in the circumstances his quiet obstinacy had a good deal to recommend it' (Fig. 1).¹¹

Walter Godfrey's own memoirs exist in manuscript¹² and his account of the events is as follows:

It was the intensification of the destruction by air raids which caused a conference to be held at the Royal Institute of British Architects . . . on November 18th [1940]. I had lunch with John Summerson and Carter¹³ of the R.I.B.A. and some 33 delegates chosen from 18 societies and institutions attended. After a lengthy and serious discussion it was arranged to form a committee of four (Sir Kenneth Clark,¹⁴ W.H. Ansell,¹⁵ John E.M. Macgregor¹⁶ and myself) to meet Lord Reith.¹⁷ The result was the formation of the National Buildings Record with the initial support of the Treasury and the Rockefeller and Leverhulme Trusts. A Council was appointed and the first meeting took place on January 31 [1941], when I was appointed Director, at £1000 a year with Summerson my deputy. We were at first given a room in the R.I.B.A. new buildings at 66 Portland Place, where for some weeks we worked with the acrid smoke of bombed and half-burned buildings forever in our nostrils. I invited Miss Griffiths¹⁸ to be my secretary (she had spent the first part of the war with the Hearts of Oak Society which had moved from London to Herstmonceux Castle) and Summerson asked Dorothy Stroud, who was working with *Country Life*, to be the fourth of our first small staff.

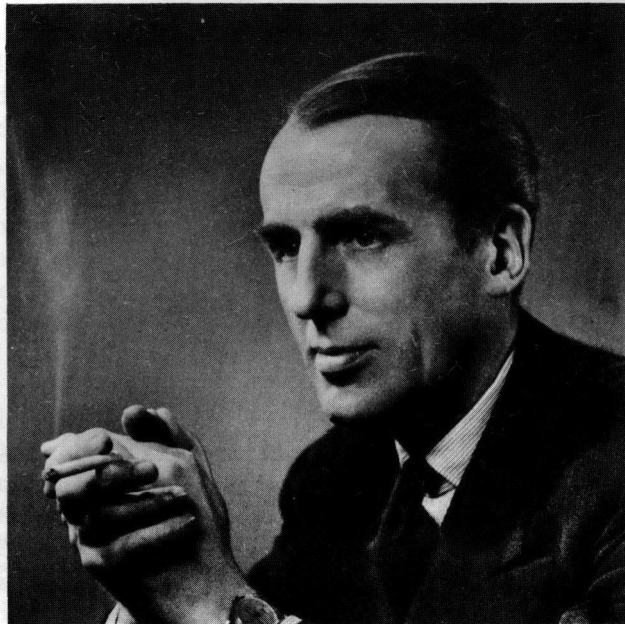


Fig. 2

Sir John Summerson, photographed at about the time he became Deputy Director of the N.B.R. in 1941. Sir John was the prime mover in the creation of the Record, being one of the first to recognize the wartime threat to historic buildings and to do something about it
Sir John Summerson

Dorothy Stroud was living in Primrose Hill in the autumn of 1940. When dining with friends one evening in November, she heard on the wireless an announcement of the proposal to create the National Buildings Record. She wrote to Sir Kenneth Clark expressing her desire to help. He passed her letter to John Summerson, whom she had known since about 1930. Dorothy Stroud had worked for *Country Life* for nearly fourteen years, but was happy to change jobs, as although she had begun to sub-edit the magazine when the men on the staff had left for the war she continued to be paid only a secretarial salary. In the February of 1941, John Summerson wrote to say that he was looking for secretarial help and Dorothy Stroud joined the N.B.R. a fortnight later (Fig. 3).¹⁹

Sir John Summerson has described how, on 3 February 1941, he and Walter Godfrey sat down at the R.I.B.A. and began to map out how they should proceed. It soon emerged that they had different priorities and the two broad areas of the Record's activities took shape at its inception.

Godfrey's main concern was with the co-ordination of existing records. I was more anxious to set photographers to work without delay on buildings in London and other vulnerable areas. . . . As it turned out, this divergence of interests made it possible for us to work in harmonious inter-dependence, Godfrey undertaking the administration and co-ordination, I the executive recording.²⁰

Dorothy Stroud worked with John Summerson at the R.I.B.A. (Fig. 4). Her typical day would involve dealing with correspondence for an hour or two followed by the listing of buildings of architectural significance in the suburbs of London (John



Fig.3

Dorothy Stroud. Miss Stroud joined the N.B.R. at its inception in 1941 and worked throughout the war on listing and photographing historic buildings at risk. She is seen here at the Soane Museum, where she moved in 1945
Miss Dorothy Stroud



Fig. 4
Number 37 Portland Place
photographed by Sir John Summerson
after bombing in 1943. Note the
barrage balloons floating over the
skyline. This view was taken from
the roof of the R.I.B.A., where Sir John
was based during the war. Recording
wartime devastation from your own
office illustrates the immediacy of the
work and the dangers of the situation

Sir John Summerson

Summerson having been allocated the central London area). On Tuesdays she would go to Great Peter Street in Westminster, where the complete lists of bomb damage were kept up to date, and would check which buildings on the London lists had been bombed. These were highly confidential documents and gave detailed descriptions of damage. Dorothy Stroud recalls hating these visits as the papers were kept in the bowels of the building, down long gloomy corridors and through dark basements.

The regions for listing had already been divided up by the Ministry of Works. Outer London was sub-divided into sixteen areas extending from St Albans in the north to Croydon in the south, as far west as West Drayton, and to East Ham and Ilford in the east. Dorothy Stroud travelled around London by bus and train, encumbered by a respirator and a tin hat, and armed with a notebook and a very ancient camera, with which she took 'some bad photographs'.²¹

One building she remembers well was Wayneflete's Tower near the River Mole in Esher, where she tried without success to discover who was the owner. Arriving at the building she was startled to be addressed from an upper window by a blonde-haired lady. She received a very friendly reception and was much amused to recognize the occupant as Francis Day, who was a well-known night-club singer and song-writer of 'uncertain reputation'.²² During the visit the lines of one of her best-known songs—'Me and my dog, lost in the fog—won't some kind gent see me home'—kept buzzing through Dorothy Stroud's head. One wonders what effect this distraction had on the record of Wayneflete's Tower.

From August 1941, John Summerson spent much time travelling around England. His diary for that period records visits, often more than once, to over thirty

towns and cities throughout the country. The compilation of the lists of historic buildings at risk was seen as being of the utmost urgency. During the Baedeker raids of 1942, Dorothy Stroud was diverted from her work in London and sent to Bath to try to list the important buildings before it was too late, but she found a good few already 'burning away furiously'.



Fig. 5

Herbert ('Leo') Felton (1888-1968). The N.B.R.'s first photographer, appointed in 1941, with the whole-plate camera he used for all his record photography. This portrait was taken just after the war by Fred Palmer, another of the N.B.R.'s photographers

Richard Palmer

The lists were marked up for photography and arrangements made for professional photographers to undertake the work. The N.B.R. was extremely fortunate to find competent photographers willing and able to travel. Herbert ('Leo') Felton was the first staff photographer, appointed in May 1941 (Fig. 5). John Summerson had known Herbert Felton for some years and much appreciated his photographs of modern buildings in the 1930s. Dorothy Stroud remembers him as a 'great bear of a man',²³ Sir John as 'a ruddy, grey-haired bohemian with a generous heart, a schoolboy sense of humour',²⁴ and with 'scant regard for the form-filling . . . needed to cope with the essential bureaucracy'.²⁵ At the time of his appointment to the N.B.R., Felton was using a thatched darkroom built alongside his cottage at Cookham Dean in Berkshire, where he was assisted in printing by his wife Ruby, known to everyone as 'Tuppenny'. The N.B.R. did not have its own photographic printing facilities at the start of operations in 1941 and was allowed the use of darkrooms at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Later demands required Felton to be nearer London, where he worked from the premises of architectural photographer George Green in Marchmont Street, Bloomsbury.²⁶ George Green also undertook photography for the N.B.R. in London. Another great find 'and the champion producer of results of the highest competence'²⁷ was G. Bernard Mason, an experienced craftsman with his own business in Birmingham, for whom photography had formerly been a side line.

Perhaps the most famous photographer who produced work for the N.B.R. during the Second World War was Helmut Gernsheim. He was a refugee from Nazi Germany who had arrived in England in 1937. In July 1940 he had been interned (sharing a tent with Nikolaus Pevsner) and was later shipped off to Australia. However, he obtained his release and returned to England in November 1941. Having already heard of the establishment of the National Buildings Record, he approached John Summerson seeking employment as a photographer. It was arranged that he should work for the Warburg Institute, which was contributing to the N.B.R., and he made records of lasting importance of the monuments in Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral. Helmut Gernsheim also photographed such outstanding historic buildings as St James's Palace, Chiswick House, Hampton Court, the British Museum, and many more besides.

During an interview in 1977 he recalled his most memorable encounter when photographing 10 Downing Street for the N.B.R.:

I photographed the historic cabinet room with Churchill's study leading out of it, the wrought-iron staircase, and various details from the bedroom on the top floor to the fortified cellar, where the Allied heads of Europe had their consultative meetings with him. I had a strange experience, finding myself at the nerve centre of the war against Hitler so soon after my internment. I had not yet finished my work when Churchill returned from one of his meetings with Roosevelt. Seeing me in the hall, he asked: 'What are you doing here?' I replied, 'Taking photographs for the National Buildings Record'. Next question: 'Where do you come from?' 'Well,' I replied, 'the last place of residence was Australia'. 'But you are not an Australian, are you?' 'No, sir, I'm not. I am a refugee from Germany, volunteered to go to Canada and found myself in Australia instead'. 'Ah', he said, 'I remember. That matter caused us a lot of trouble. But we brought you back. I hope everything is all right now', whereupon the great man vanished into his study.²⁸

The N.B.R. was overseen by an Advisory Council²⁹ of twenty-four representatives of learned societies and public bodies, and what might be termed the great

and the good in the architectural field, under the chairmanship of the Master of the Rolls, Sir Wilfrid Greene (Fig. 6). Greene, though one of the junior Lords Justices, had been appointed Master of the Rolls in 1937. This office included responsibility for the Record Office, and the custody of the national muniments particularly interested him.³⁰ His zeal in seeking safe havens for all manner of records when at risk in wartime made him an obvious choice to chair the N.B.R. Council of Management. However, Lord Greene deserves another footnote in the history of twentieth-century architecture, for when still a barrister he had commissioned Oliver Hill to design Joldwynds at Holmbury St Mary in Surrey. The preliminary designs were made in 1930, when few modernist houses existed in Britain, and Joldwynds was Oliver Hill's first large-scale work in the International Modern style.³¹ The family interest in the avant-garde may also be illustrated by the fact that Lady Greene (the actress Nancy Wright) was an early translator of Pirandello into English.



Fig. 6
Lord Greene of Holmbury
St Mary (1883-1952),
Master of the Rolls.
Chairman of the N.B.R.
Council from its foundation
in 1941 until 1945. A pencil
drawing made in 1944 by
Gluck
Times Newspapers

Walter Godfrey recalled Lord Greene's most practical contribution to the National Buildings Record in 1941:

Lord Reith and Sir Kenneth Clark were very helpful and our greatest prize was the acceptance of the chairmanship of the Record by Sir Wilfrid Greene. I can safely say that I have never met anyone with greater intelligence or skill in tackling all the difficulties which we came across. Sir Wilfrid, or as he later on became, Lord Greene, was always ready to see me, when the Courts of Justice had risen, and he would take infinite pains to sift each subject thoroughly before arriving at the precise solution that was required. We often had to go to the Treasury together, but wherever we were I always had someone of the highest character to fall back on, whatever the emergency, who would not fail. But I had even a greater benefit from the Master of the Rolls than his perfection as my Chairman. An arrangement had been made with All Souls College that if necessary the Law Courts would move down to Oxford if conditions became impossible, but as this was deemed unnecessary it was suggested to move the National Buildings Record to the college where accordingly Miss Griffiths and I moved on Tuesday the 2nd September [1941]. The Master of the Rolls being a Fellow of All Souls he arranged for me to become a member of the Common Room, to live at the College and share in practically all the privileges of the Fellows.³²

The move to Oxford of the N.B.R.'s embryo collection saw the arrival of Cecil Farthing, who was to remain with the Record until his retirement in 1976.³³ An historian by training, he brought to the N.B.R. the special skills acquired when in charge of the Conway Library of the Courtauld Institute of Art and gave to the collection the particular character which it retains to this day. He wrote the account which follows as a contribution to the N.B.R. anniversary celebrations. It appeared to the present writer that the recollections and insight contained therein deserve a wider audience.

Cecil Farthing begins with a personality who has become notorious in a very different context.³⁴

Through the good offices of Anthony Blunt, Deputy Director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, it was agreed that the Institute's collection of about 100,000 photographs of English architecture and sculpture, mostly of medieval and Renaissance interest, should be made available to the Record. As a member of the Courtauld library staff with particular responsibility for the photograph collections, I agreed to join the Record at Oxford.

The Courtauld Institute's collection of photographs of architectural subjects—the Conway Library—takes its name from the donor of the original nucleus, Lord Conway of Allington. The former Sir Martin Conway (1856–1937) began buying postcards and photographs as early as 1886, and in 1931 gave a quarter of a million photographs to the newly-formed Courtauld Institute of Art.³⁵ He was greatly concerned with the classification of the illustrations, insisting that they should be arranged chronologically. As we shall learn, this posed a particular problem for Cecil Farthing:

Together with much other academically valuable material, the collections (which covered the chief Continental countries as well as England) had been taken down to Hatherop Castle in Gloucestershire for safe custody at the outbreak of war. Hatherop was chosen simply because it was owned by a relation of Blunt's who wanted to help. I brought this material by lorry to Oxford in the autumn in 1941 with a driver who drove at an alarming pace because he wanted to get home before his wife gave birth. With the photographs came the shelving. Some ingenuity had to be used to get it into the accommodation available at All Souls College (Figs 7 and 8). The negatives were eventually deposited in the basement of the New Bodleian Library, out of reach of bombs, where space was lent to us by the courtesy of Bodley's Librarian, Dr [later Sir Edmund] Craster.³⁶

The Courtauld collection presented an immediate difficulty for the Record. It was arranged in

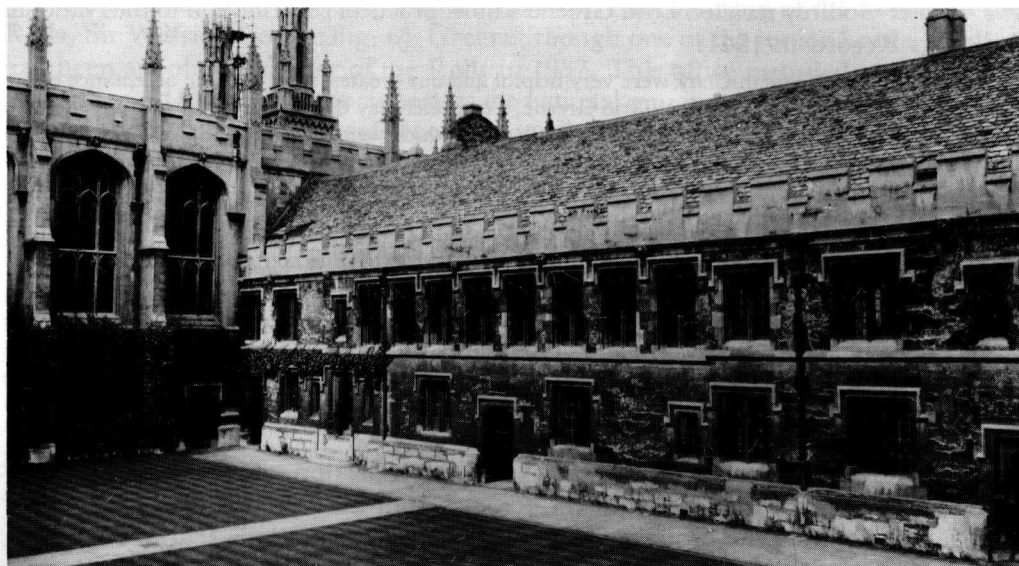


Fig. 7

The east range of the Front or South Quadrangle of All Souls College, Oxford, where the N.B.R.'s growing collections were housed from September 1941 until October 1945. The door on the right led to the rooms provided by the college authorities

Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

categories for teaching purposes. For example, a cathedral would be found in half-a-dozen places in the files according to the various periods it comprised. The geographical location was of no consequence. Broadly speaking, the same thing applied to the secular material. Windmills were kept together, as were all the works attributed to Inigo Jones. On the whole, Christopher Wren was considered the last architect of any importance. After a week or two it became clear that the whole collection would have to be taken to pieces and re-arranged in topographical order in each county if it was to be of any use to the Record for rapid reference purposes. It took me about a month to re-arrange this single-handed. Only then could we think about engaging clerical staff (Figs 9 and 10).

Walter Godfrey and I came from different generations and different backgrounds. To my astonishment I found his devoted secretary Miss Griffiths in tears from time to time. This appeared not to be uncommon in his private architectural practice. Coming from what Godfrey evidently considered the relatively indulgent and exotic background of the Courtauld Institute I did not care for his somewhat proprietorial attitude, especially as I was being paid by the University of London. After a few weeks of bickering I walked out and waited for a written apology. It took him three days before he could bring himself to send me one. I have it still. From then on we got on quite well.

Perhaps the turning point came when one day soon after I managed to prove to him he had got his facts wrongs. He was reminiscing, for instance, about his having seen St Mary Redcliffe [Bristol] before the spire was added. As it was built in the year of his birth this was obvious rubbish and on checking it in the reference books he had to admit it. He became thoughtful: he was not used to being pulled up. In view of his seniority Godfrey was allocated a bedroom in the college and a scout. I found digs in north Oxford with Walter Menpes and his wife; Menpes was the son of Mortimer Menpes, Whistler's friend, so it was all very congenial. Our first winter in Oxford was, however, a bitter one. As Godfrey and I usually worked together until midnight I found tramping back to my digs two miles away through the snow, long after the last bus, arduous to say the least. By the following spring the college authorities appreciated this and allocated me a bedroom and scout. But unlike my chief, who

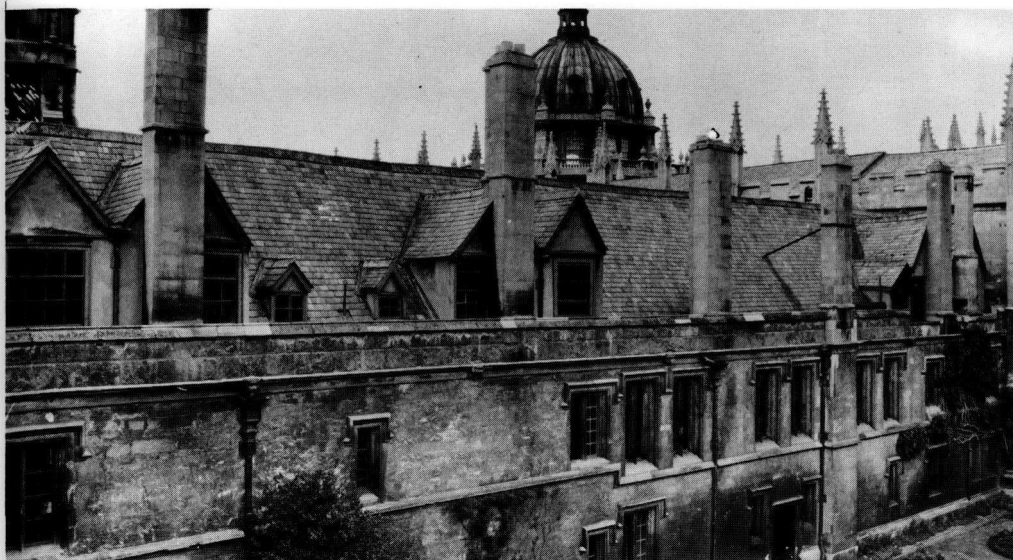


Fig. 8

All Souls College: the west side of the east range, showing the window to Walter Godfrey's attic bedroom. This and the preceding illustration were taken during survey work for the Royal Commission's Inventory of the City of Oxford, published in 1939
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

quite rightly was accorded the further privilege of dining with the Fellows, I continued to eat outside from morning to night for the next three years. Usually my day began with a chilly breakfast at Lyons in the Cornmarket. As by then we both slept in the college, we virtually lived 'over the shop' and worked together closely after dinner in, I am happy to say, increasing amity as we got to know and understand each other better. I made tea about ten o'clock, which helped.

About once a month Dorothy Stroud went to Oxford to report to the Director. One day on her arrival at All Souls she found both Walter Godfrey and Sir Charles Grant Robertson, the Acting Domestic Bursar, whom she remembered as having been a Governor of her school, in the Quad busily practising working the Minerva fire-fighting pump [see Appendix]. She later remembered someone asking Walter Godfrey whether they had had any raids in Oxford, to which he replied 'No, but we have had some very nasty alerts'! Compared with life in London, life at All Souls seemed to her very calm and easy (Fig. 11). For example, they were able to acquire extra delicacies unobtainable in London such as hot-house grapes and pots of honey.³⁷

Hardly a day passed during the first year or two without some jaundiced or envious antiquary or retired architect writing to tell Godfrey what a mess he was making of it and how much better it would be if he followed their suggestions. His steadfastness in the face of this abuse and (usually) fatuous advice was extraordinary and a lesson to me. He too could dish it out when required. Some of our happiest moments were when concocting together late at night some saucy response just this side of the libellous. The All Souls after-dinner port often inspired him in this respect.

Like most of us, he was not without fault. There was a strong streak of Victorian parsimony in him which led on one momentous occasion to an open rebellion in the main quad by the college servants



Fig. 9

All Souls College: one of the rooms provided for the N.B.R. showing the red box files and their shelves 'fitted with some difficulty'. Mr Cecil Farthing, who came with the files from the Conway Library, is seen working on their rearrangement for the Record

Mrs Millicent Godfrey

when they thought they were being put upon. It took all the emollient diplomacy of the Warden, Dr W.G.S. Adams, to settle it. Of all this Godfrey remained completely unaware. On another occasion the Record's paid staff, promised wage rises being continually ignored, sent him a round robin couched in such vigorous terms that it had the desired effect.

It must of course be remembered that he had to run the machine with a minimum of oil. In the Record's first year the grant from the Treasury was £2,750. In the last year of the war it was £7,000. Life would have been impossible without substantial aid from the beginning from, above all, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Leverhulme Trustees, and the Pilgrim Trust who between them contributed many thousands of pounds. Our chairman Lord Greene, Master of the Rolls, was instrumental in getting the Treasury grant increased from year to year. He looked in at All Souls from time to time and on one occasion brought in the Archbishop of Canterbury to see our ecclesiastical material. Godfrey sometimes managed to entice in distinguished people after they had been entertained to a vinous lunch in the college. They ranged from Sir John [Lord] Simon to the young King of Yugoslavia, but with no very solid benefits to the Record except on one occasion when a friendly visitor slipped us a cheque for a hundred pounds.

The clerical staff's duties consisted chiefly of mounting and titling photographs, giving them negative numbers, and matching them with the appropriate negatives, usually glass, which had to be similarly handled and then transferred to the New Bodleian basement. This last task was easier said than done, as the glass was heavy and fragile. It was usually done by the odd male assistant we took on board. The current negatives and photographic prints came primarily from the photographers whose activities



Fig. 10

All Souls College: the other end of the same room shown in the previous photograph. The author has been unable to identify the two N.B.R. helpers illustrated and would welcome information from anyone who knows who they are

Mrs Millicent Godfrey

were being directed by John Summerson all over the country. In addition, great quantities of negatives were sent to us by enthusiastic antiquaries and these all had to be printed as opportunity offered, by one of our staff in the dark room at the Institute of Forestry, kindly lent us by Professor Champion. The elderly and rather hysterical German lady who did our printing frequently rushed into the office imploring us to get her more rubber gloves, an essential item for her work. These were in very short supply. Her wail for 'rubber gloves' became, I am afraid, a standing joke, but somehow they were obtained for her from time to time by back-door methods. The friendly butler at All Souls had a genius for procuring unobtainable articles for the Fellows, such as bananas, and rubber gloves were child's play though none were to be found anywhere in Oxford. Probably the daily propinquity of several attractive young women inspired him.

Walter Godfrey was not always successful in obtaining the co-operation he sought. On one occasion he hoped to obtain brief use of the darkroom at the Ashmolean Museum for a German lady refugee, Dr Muller. The response was not exactly tactful: 'Dear Mr Godfrey, I am getting tired of German refugees pushing their noses into this building'.³⁸ However, as Cecil Farthing describes, the acquisition of important collections of negatives requiring printing was less of a problem, although not without hazard:

There was one near-disaster when the celebrated antiquary Fred Crossley offered us the custody and use of the thousands of negatives he had made over a life-time in connection with his books on medieval craftsmanship and monuments. They were glass half-plates of top quality. He was justifiably very proud of them. I went up to his home at Chester and spent a day or two packing them under his eagle eye in four chests. They were very heavy. Getting them to the station was an arduous job as little by way of portage was forthcoming. Somehow I got them off the train at Banbury and on to the connection for Oxford which was packed with boisterous young soldiers. By the time we got to Oxford two of the chests had disappeared. As they were adequately labelled we waited anxiously for them to turn up. After several fruitless days I paid for an advertisement in the local paper. A don rang me to say there were a couple of chests lying about his college which had been thrown on one side by the soldiers occupying it. To my intense relief they proved to be the missing chests. Crossley was not a man to be trifled with. In due course we became good friends as he found the resources of the Record of great use to him.

The clerical staff were for the most part ladies of all ages recruited locally. None of them had ever worked as a team, some had never worked in their lives. By the end of the war they numbered about fifteen, occupying three or four rooms in the college. There was an occasional man medically rejected from the forces, one of whom eventually became a Professor at London University and is still proud to note his service at the N.B.R. in his *Who's Who* entry. Most were paid a modest wage; a few were able to work in a voluntary capacity. They came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were hard-up refugees. One or two were professional writers like Christina Hole whose books on English traditions and folk-lore are standard popular works. She smoked furiously and perpetually, which provoked some people, but she was a useful dab hand with a typewriter. Most were middle-aged, middle-class Oxonians. At least one had been presented at Court a year or two earlier. One stunningly handsome woman took the female leads in the open-air production of *Measure for Measure* at Christ Church, with immense success. The *Oxford Times* was ecstatic. Even A.L. Rowse, whose rooms were above our office, was visibly moved. The male lead was carried off with aplomb by a dashing eighteen-year old called Richard Burton, as yet unknown to fame.

Dorothy Stroud remembers various other ladies who helped sort out the photographs: one being notable as the first legitimate daughter of an Oxford don (dons having been first allowed to marry in 1870), and another known as the 'Egyptian Queen', a sobriquet she earned from some romantic attachment. Cecil Farthing recalls that matters did not always run smoothly:

They were all willing and enthusiastic, with occasional bouts of feminine temperament. Most of them developed a hitherto unsuspected love for old English buildings. Only one had to be sacked, a glamorous young Austrian woman from a distinguished academic refugee family. She kept the others in such fits of laughter that it seriously interfered with their work. She left in a flood of tears and there was gloom for a week.

County committees were set up all over the country, usually drawn from regional antiquarian societies. Most architects were too busy on current war work to help us much. The effectiveness of the committees invariably depended on their secretaries: when they were good they were very good. Peter Spokes, later Lord Mayor of Oxford, was an exceptionally helpful one. So too was Billy Pantin, a Fellow of Oriel College, a somewhat individualistic bachelor with an unusual technical knowledge of medieval timber-framed buildings.

The N.B.R. collections left Oxford for London in the autumn of 1945. The Record existed on an exiguous Treasury grant until the spring of 1963 when, after twelve months of tortuous legal negotiations which were not helped by the sudden death of the Chairman,³⁹ it came under the permanent aegis of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England). The Welsh section, which included fine surveys of the castles of Wales by Bernard Mason, was sent to the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (Wales) at Aberystwyth.

It was no mean achievement to conceive and create such an institution as the National Buildings Record in the darkest days of the Second World War. That hard work and dedication has been amply rewarded by the continuing and increasing value



Fig. 11

The Buttery at All Souls College, described by Walter Godfrey as shaped like an egg, and designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, whose portrait bust looks down from its niche. This photograph was taken by Herbert Felton on 5 November 1941, very soon after the N.B.R. moved to All Souls
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and use of the Record today. Therefore, it is to be hoped that the publication of the memoirs of those most closely involved in the events which were of lasting significance will help illuminate the background to one of the nation's major cultural assets.

Appendix

Letter from W.H. Godfrey to Mrs George Hodgson, his wife's aunt:

All Souls College, Oxford
16 November 1941

Dear Auntie Emma

I am starting this letter at Lewes on Sunday evening. We have just listened to the news & Gertie & I are having a quiet little time before the weekend closes. Saturday & Sunday at home mean a lot to me now for although Oxford is full of interest it is still exile for me, & I don't relish tomorrow's early rise in the dark to catch a train that leaves before the black-out ends. There is a terrific wind tonight & it sounds very stormy out of doors, but within it is very cosy & peaceful. I am thankful that we had such a convenient little place as Thebes to retreat to, and Lucy has thrown herself so wholeheartedly into the job of managing everything—including her little farm—that we could not well be more comfortable.

The other part of my life at Oxford is rather like a dream, for I can never quite persuade myself that it is real. I had always longed to go to Oxford, where my best school friend went to Trinity, but my Father did not approve & so I went into business with all this Paradise forbidden me. And now I am actually living in College & mixing every day with the learned folk who are Fellows of All Souls. My 'offices' are the two rooms on the ground floor in the front Quad which are known as the probationers' rooms, since they are usually occupied by newly-elected fellows.⁴⁰ There are two rooms, the first a Sitting Room which is the General office, the walls of which are now lined with shelves having the bright red boxes of the Conway Collection that has come to us from the Courtauld Institute. Lord Conway, better known to us as Sir Martin, started it, & it now contains about 100,000 photographs of architecture. Mr Farthing, a most charming man who looks after it has joined me too, & he and Miss Griffiths & my other assistant Mrs Wall work in this room. My little room (the former bedroom) opens off it & gives me a little privacy. There is a flight of stairs outside which leads up to General Sir Ernest Swinton's room (which he has lent me as a Sitting room) & above that is my little attic bedroom with an arched beam over it dating from 1435 or thereabouts when Archbishop Chichele founded the College. It is a bit cold up there, but Miss Griffiths sees that I have some hot water bottles in my bed & a Thermos flask of tea, which I am very grateful for in the early mornings when I wake with my usual headache. I generally manage to feel quite fit by 8.45 when I walk across to the Common Room for breakfast. We lunch in a delightful little Buttery, built by Hawksmoor, the architect, in the shape of an egg, oval in plan and vaulted, to remind us of the egg of the mallard which is the badge of All Souls. I work till 6.30 and then we dine in the Common Room at 7.00 & I get back after our talk & coffee to a bit more work before bedtime. I have only once dined in hall—it is used only on Saturdays and Sundays—and that was when I stayed in Oxford to meet Lord Greene, & was introduced to Lord Simon & other notabilities who came to the College for the All Souls' Day celebrations.

Gertie says you mentioned the reredos in the Chapel. It is a magnificent affair but the statues are all modern. The Gothic reredos was defaced in the 18th century & plastered over to take a painted scene by Sir James Thornhill.⁴¹ It was discovered by accident & the plaster removed & the carved figures & canopies restored. The College is full of beauty & I am having some special photographs taken of it, but of course its great charm is that it stands next to St Mary's Church (the lovely spire is seen from my window), the Radcliffe Camera & the Bodleian. The whole group is one of the most wonderful things in the world. During those lovely sunlit days of a week or two back the feast of architecture was almost too much for one to take in.

I resume this letter at Oxford on Monday night, having just come from dinner. Lewes seems a long way away & I am back amid all my problems here—trying to do the work of ten people with only my small staff to help. I hear today that Mrs Wall is ill & may not come back so that is another problem. I could set a lot of people to work if only they were available & I had the means.

Emil came to see me last week & we had a nice little lunch together.⁴² He expects to go to some tropical place pretty soon now, & we all wonder what his experiences will be. Things do not seem to be much clearer than in those days when we used to go down to the air-raid shelter together in Lewes House. But England is now better prepared & we ought to have a better chance.

I join in the fire-drill here—we have an engine of our own & I know my way about the roofs round the two quadrangles. I wish there were a few more able-bodied men about. We are all getting on in years, & fire-hoses are not easy things to manipulate. But I do hope Oxford will be spared any serious raids, for if it were badly hurt I think I should despair of the recovery of England's architecture.

I see my old friend Sir Charles Oman pretty frequently & Lady Oman is always wanting me to come to tea. I think Sir Charles became a fellow here when I was born, so you see he belongs to the place.⁴³ I have been to see my cousin Elizabeth Rendall who has a Roman Catholic school in Oxford, but I have not yet been to see Gertie's cousins.

Oxford is full of evacuees—the streets thronged with unseeing crowds who simply look upon the city as any other place. Food is difficult to get (except in College) & tobacco is non-existent, but the butler seems to discover it somewhere & keeps us supplied. There is some advantage in belonging to a well organised little community & in peace time when there is proper service & the boilers are going it must be very nice. Now we have to suffer some of the rigours of a war time economy & I find home more comfortable.

I hope you are keeping well & that you have friends who can help you in the many ways you need. It would be nice to be able to have a chat as we used to & put on some gramophone records again. I do not listen to the wireless unless I am at home, & only do crossword puzzles at weekends. So you see how a change of scene can alter one's habits.

Well I must turn to some other sorts of letters now & get a little work done before I go to bed. I send you my love & all good wishes for a comfortable & undisturbed winter.

From your affectionate nephew

Walter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Mr Cecil Farthing for allowing me to publish his memoir. It was this which prompted me to bring together the other reminiscences which form the basis of this paper, and I am most grateful to Miss Dorothy Stroud, Sir John Summerson and Mrs Millicent Godfrey for their individual contributions. Also I should like to thank Mrs Jill Bassham, Ms Phillis Rogers, Mr John Simmons, Emeritus Fellow and sometime Librarian, All Souls College, Oxford, and Miss Priscilla Boniface for their help. Lastly, thanks are due to the Editor of these *Transactions*, Professor Gwyn Meirion-Jones, for suggesting publication in this form.

REFERENCES

1. *The Builder* (March 7, 1941), 245; I am grateful to Kathryn Morrison for bringing this and other contemporary references to my attention.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Sim, A., 'Collected Memories', *Blueprint* (May 1991), 26-9.
4. *Weekend Telegraph* (20 April 1991).
5. This total includes some 4½ million air photographs, over 1½ million architectural photographs currently accessible, with further collections awaiting cataloguing, including 600,000 negatives transferred from the Property Services Agency in March 1991.
6. Harris, J., 'It must not happen', *Apollo* (May 1991), 299.
7. Gradidge, R., 'No Follower of Fashion', *Country Life* (21 March 1991), 132.
8. Croad, S., 'Architectural Records in the Archive of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 33 (1989), 23-44.
9. *50 Years of the National Buildings Record 1941-1991* (1991).
10. See Summerson, Sir J., 'Walter Hindes Godfrey 1881-1961', *London Topographical Record*, XXII (1965), 127-35.
11. *Op. cit.* (note 9), p. 4.
12. I am indebted to Millicent Godfrey, widow of Walter Godfrey's son Emil, for transcribing relevant parts of the manuscript in her possession.
13. E.J. ('Bobby') Carter, Librarian of the R.I.B.A., remembered by Sir John Summerson as 'one of the most energetic and enthusiastic officers of the Institute, always ready to promote cultural or humanitarian initiatives within the architectural field'. *Op. cit.* (note 9), p. 3.
14. Sir Kenneth (later Lord) Clark, Director of the National Gallery and member of the N.B.R. Council of Management, 1941-6.
15. W.H. Ansell, President of the R.I.B.A., Vice-Chairman of the N.B.R. Council, 1941-60.
16. John E.M. Macgregor, Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, member of the N.B.R. Council, 1941-60.
17. Lord (formerly Sir John) Reith, best remembered as the founding Director General of the BBC, but in 1940 the newly-appointed Minister of Works and Buildings in the wartime cabinet.
18. A.P. ('Griff') Griffiths had previously been Walter Godfrey's secretary, she later married the N.B.R.'s draughtsman, W.G. ('Bill') Prosser, who had also worked for Godfrey's architectural practice.
19. Dorothy Stroud has very kindly allowed me to quote from notes compiled by Phillis Rogers, who undertook research for the N.B.R.'s anniversary; subsequent references are from the same source (August 1990).
20. *Op. cit.* (note 9), p. 5.
21. See above note 19.
22. *Ibid.* Francis Day (she spelt her christian name thus) was famous in the 1940s for her popular songs, but is better remembered today as the model for the most striking of Angus McBean's surrealist photographs; I am grateful to Anna Eavis for information on Francis Day.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Op. cit.* (note 9), p. 5.
25. Buchanan, T., 'Archive Photography', *The Photographic Journal* (May 1991), 210-12.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Op. cit.* (note 9), p. 6.
28. Hill, P., and Cooper, T., *Dialogue with Photography* (1979), 176.
29. A complete list of those who served on the Council of Management throughout its independent years, 1941-63, is given in *50 Years of the National Buildings Record 1941-1991*, see above note 9.
30. Obituary in *The Times* (18 April 1952).
31. Powers, A., *Oliver Hill: Architect and Lover of Life 1887-1968* (1989), 27.
32. Godfrey MS, see above note 12.
33. I am unable to resist adding a personal note to illustrate the peculiar attachment which the N.B.R. engenders, for it was Cecil Farthing who appointed me to a six-month temporary post—I started work on 1 January 1968 and have remained ever since!

34. See Costello, J., *Mask of Treachery* (1988).
35. Hill, C., 'The Conway Library', *Friends of the Courtauld Institute of Art Newsletter* (Autumn 1990), 4-5.
36. The All Souls connection again: Craster was a Fellow from 1903 to 1959.
37. See above note 19.
38. Buchanan, T., op. cit. (note 25), p. 212.
39. Sir James Mann, Director of the Wallace Collection, Master of the Armouries, H.M. Tower of London, and Past President of the Society of Antiquaries; he had been a founder member of the N.B.R. Council of Management in 1941, succeeded to the Chairmanship in 1951, and died suddenly in December 1962.
40. The rooms are towards the southern end of the east range of the front quadrangle (now Stair V, left) J.S.G. Simmons, pers. comm.
41. More is now known about the history of the chapel. The reredos was 'defaced' at least as early as the 1660s (probably much earlier) for in 1665 John Evelyn recorded seeing Isaac Fuller's fresco *Resurrection* which had recently covered it (*Diary*, ed. de Beer, E.S., iii, (Oxford, 1955), 386). This painting was superseded by James Thornhill's *Apotheosis of Archbishop Chichele* in 1715-16. This in its turn was removed during the 'restoration' of the chapel by Henry Clutton and, later, George Gilbert Scott, which lasted from 1869 to 1876. The work included the filling of the vacant niches (between 1873 and 1875) with stone figures carved by E.E. Geffowski. These latter are the 'modern statues' to which Walter Godfrey refers. See Colvin, H.M. and Simmons, J.S.G., *All Souls: an Oxford College and its Buildings* (Oxford, 1989), 67, 70, 83. I am greatly indebted to John Simmons for these details.
42. For Emil Godfrey see note 12 above.
43. Sir Charles Oman was elected a Fellow of All Souls in November 1883, two years after Godfrey's birth.