

GRIMSBURY CONSERVATION AREA: EXPLORING THE FAÇADE OF FREEHOLD LAND SOCIETIES

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On the 8th January 2007, Cherwell District Council approved parts of Grimsbury, the eastern inner suburb of Banbury, as a Conservation Area.¹ Such designation brought public and official attention to an area of nineteenth century housing which, with varied social perceptions, has long provided a first step on the local housing ladder.

Earlier, two authors writing of Oxfordshire, had put the area firmly in place. Frank Emery² on Banbury, ‘... it grew to be a Victorian manufacturing town of the familiar Midland kind ... as its townscape still testifies’ and Sherwood & Pevsner³ on Grimsbury, ‘a suburb laid out in the second half of the C19 with red brick terraced cottages of the most dismal kind.’

As is evident in the latter quotation, Pevsner’s ‘Buildings of England’ series established and maintains the battleground between ‘architecture’ (the cathedral) and a mere ‘building’ (the bicycle shed ... or, in this case, Grimsbury). The latter receive short shrift and Grimsbury, as architecture, has hardly roused even the local enthusiast.

Confirmed as ‘on the wrong side’ by the nineteenth century tracks, Grimsbury has, of course, been extended in several directions with new homes applied to the current (2006 on) Cattle Market site development.

Any association of buildings is identified and estimated at various levels, from dismissive generalisations, to the weaving of stories around every door, post and gap by those who daily pass by, or live there. The

¹ Cherwell D.C.: Grimsbury Conservation Area Appraisal: Consultation Draft, Sept. 2006. p.9; (On Line) Retrieved 7:II:2007 from <http://www.cherwell-dc.gov.uk/talktous/publications.cfm/publication/778/>

² Emery, Frank: *The Oxfordshire Landscape*, London: Hodder & Stoughton – The Making of the English Landscape, 1974, p.199.

³ Sherwood, Jennifer & Pevsner, Nikolaus: *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire*, London: Penguin (1990 edn), p.444.