

## **‘HISTORY IS MORE OR LESS BUNK’**

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That, according to the best authorities, is what Henry Ford said. And that is how Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) regards the historical services it runs or supports.

Those services are now being squeezed to the bone and in one case perhaps to extinction. At the end of last year we learned that Oxfordshire Studies (OxS) would lose about half its space in the refurbished Westgate library. At the same time it appeared that the fashionable style of librarianship ruling in the Westgate required that the specialist staff in OxS should be diluted – and doubly so. First they would deal with general library material as well as local studies; second the local studies desk would be manned jointly with non-specialists.

The news came through nods, winks and shuffled papers, for the council said we must wait until their plans ‘crystallised’ before being consulted – too late to influence anything by then. Keith Mitchell, the council’s leader, an accountant, says on the council’s web-site that services should be run for the benefit of users, but has shown absolutely no concern for the views of users of OxS in the last nine months. Beans are being counted and history weighs little against them.

Within a few weeks of writing this (4 November) there will be – hallelujah! – a sort of consultation meeting. It is stressed that it is to be informal and that it is held on a ‘what if?’ basis, a phrase which we interpret to mean that the officials present cannot be held to anything they say. But, at this meeting we shall welcome the return from sabbatical of Martyn Brown, County Heritage Officer, a known friend of the history services.

It looks now (more nods and winks) as if OxS and the Record Office (about whose limited opening and other deficiencies the National Archives is already officially concerned) will be permanently brigaded together at St Luke’s – to the inevitable detriment of both. A modish high-tech ‘information’ operation, with little or no space for reading, researching or consulting big maps, is all that is likely to remain of OxS at the Westgate.

It costs OCC little to promote the county’s millennium, but real history? That’s bunk.

**‘Clio loci’**