

OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD REPORT OBR.100



Convent of the Incarnation Fairacres House Iffley Road, Oxford OX4 1TB



Figure 1 Fairacres House

Introduction

The Oxfordshire Buildings Record are grateful to the Sisters of the Love of God for allowing us access to this property for the purposes of compiling this report as a contribution to the better understanding of Oxfordshire's buildings. David and Genefer Clark worked on this when the latter was company secretary to the Sisters of the Love of God Charitable Trust.

The Convent of the Incarnation at Fairacres consists of a complex of buildings erected over a century and a half. Turning the clock back from the modern brick infirmary (Lee & Ross 1990) to the later convent and Spanish Baroque chapel by Paul Waterhouse in 1922/3, one arrives at the 'Old Convent' which became the home of the Sisters of the Love of God in 1911. This building, Fairacres House, is the subject of this study, which is based on work carried out in early 1997, prior to further alterations being made. It has been possible to piece together many aspects of the history of the building, its owners and occupiers, but there are gaps in the evidence and some conclusions remain conjectural.

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 number of historical sources were consulted. A copy of the 2nd edition (1899 survey) Ordnance Survey map at 1:2500 annotated for the 1910 District Valuation was obtained from the Oxfordshire History Centre.

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Please note that this building is private property.

Location (NGR SP 5265 0485)

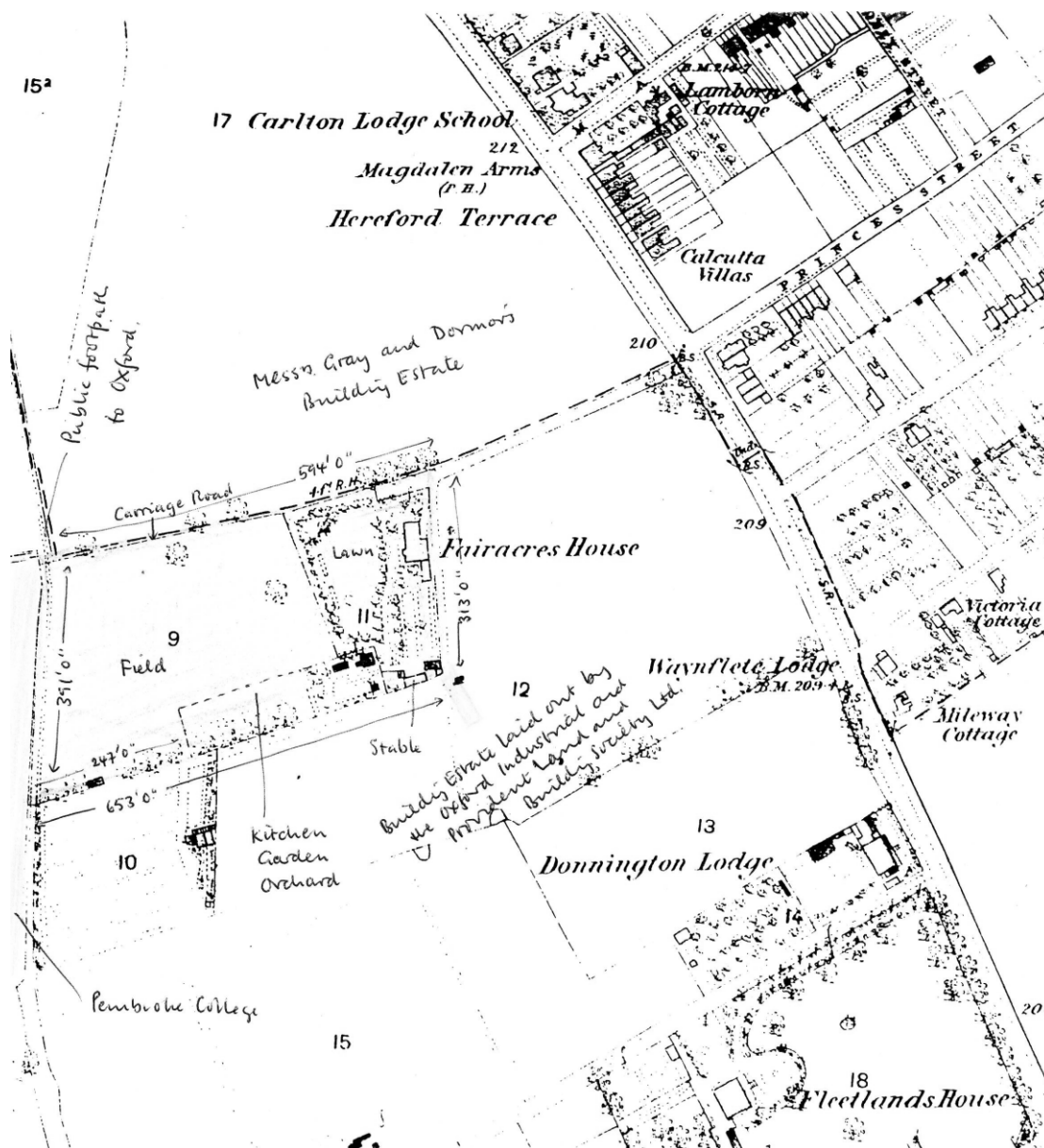


Figure 2 Extract from 1876 OS map (photocopied from the original at the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, 1997)

Fairacres House is situated in the city of Oxford some 150m south-west of Iffley Road about a mile to the east from The Plain at St Clements. Today it is hidden from view by houses on Bedford Street, Parker Street and Fairacres Road and by a tall wall forming its west boundary on Meadow Lane, but it is shown on the 1876 Ordnance Survey map (Fig.2) as surrounded by open land. It was approached from Iffley Road by a track running along the line of the present-day Daubeny Road. This track continued past the house and into a meadow, marked today by two stone gateposts (Fig.3).



Figure 3 Field gateposts in the garden

Figure 4 Looking west from the Old Convent (1997)

The grounds slope gently down towards the Isis to the west (Fig.4). A number of other large houses were also situated in the area (Fig.2), in particular Donnington Lodge and Frelands House (named Fleetlands on the map), both now demolished¹ and so Fairacres House is the unique survival of this group of country villas on the outer fringe of Oxford

Description

The house, built in stone on the top of the river terrace away from flooding, is basically T shaped with a domestic range of buildings lying to the south. The plan of the house as in 1997 is at Fig.5, and the main elevations are shown in the photographs of February 1997 in Figs.6-8.

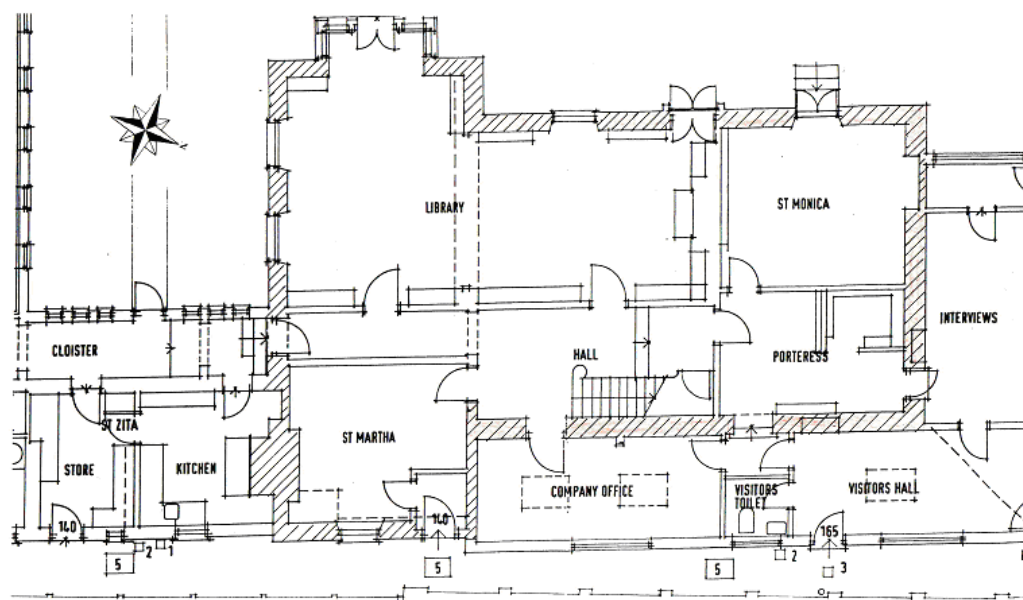


Figure 5 Ground floor plan (Lee and Ross, Architects Oxford, 1997 with permission)

¹The gate piers of Donnington Lodge can still be seen near the corner of Iffley Road and Donnington Bridge Road. There is a photograph of the house in the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, where it appears as a plain building of three storeys. There are also photographs of Frelands House, which appears to be in brick with ashlar quins and window surrounds. It was also of three storeys and had a hipped roof with chimneys on each side wall.



Figure 6 West elevation February 1997



Figure 7 South, February 1997



Figure 8 East, February 1997

Building Materials

It is built in limestone ashlar, of a quality that has in the main withstood the effects of time. Fig.9 shows some deterioration in the pedestal of the south wall. The blocks have been carefully worked and the pointing is neat. The obvious local source would be Headington, although that quarry was nearing the end of its economic life, and already by the end of the eighteenth century its freestone was known to have poor weathering

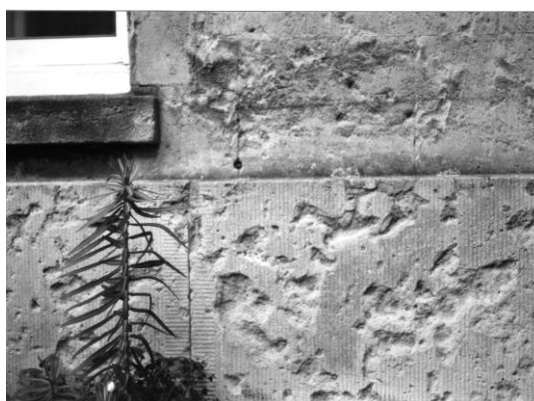


Figure 9 Weathering on stone pedestal in south wall

qualities². As rail transport was not yet available to bring building stone to Oxford from any distance, it is unlikely that Bath stone would have been used. Taynton or another local quarry would have been the most likely source. The cellar walls are of limestone rubble and its floor consists of unevenly laid setts, also probably of limestone. The roof covering was slate and was renewed with Spanish slate in the 1993 Quinquennial Repairs.

Building Style and Stages

There are three distinct elements in Fairacres House.. Whereas the northern part has a Georgian symmetry about its central doorway on the west (garden) front, the southern east-west crosswing looks different. The domestic wing to the south also contains some features like the rubble wall and the rounded windows to the east in particular which are stylistically different from the main building (Fig.10).

These seem to belong to three separate building phases. The builder has taken great pains to disguise the fact for there is a degree of stylistic unity. For example, the distinctive wide eaves of the roof, supported by paired modillions (decorative struts), are carried over both parts of the main house. However, the string course under the eaves does not return on the southern section of the T, and the double modillions do not appear under the pediment of the gable end. Interesting differences in stone patterns can also be seen on the east wall facing the 'cat-run' (Fig.10), where ashlar has been built above a four-foot high rubble wall. It might simply have been built like that for reasons of economy, and because it was not particularly visible to visitors, but it is more likely that it represents a different building period. It was common practice to utilise existing buildings where possible, and evidence for this at Fairacres is discussed below.



Figure 10 Stonework in 'catrun' on east wall

While the exterior of Fairacres House gives some clues, the main evidence for at least two nineteenth century building stages comes from the interior of the roof. The ridge timbers are of different sizes in the northern and southern (crosswing) parts and there is a 12 inch difference in floor level (Fig.11). The thicker rafters in the N/S section, at the top of the picture, can be compared with the thinner ones in the E/W section behind. The difference in floor levels between the north and south sections can just be seen at the foot of the picture where the pipes emerge from the southern section.

² WJ Arkell *Oxford Stone* 1947 p52



Figure 11 Interior of roof looking north

While the northern part has a king-post roof (Fig.12), the southern is supported by a pair of raking struts (Fig.13). Which part is the earlier? At the junction of the two



Figure 12 King post roof in north section



Figure 13 Interior of southern crossing

roofs, there are remnants of hip rafters from the northern part, suggesting that the roof was hipped at one time, and hence that the crosswing is the later. However, the position is complicated by signs that the raking struts in the eastern gable of the crosswing have been set into pre-existing stonework (Fig.13) suggesting that there might have been an earlier building to the south of the main house when it was first built.

Documentary evidence – owners and occupiers

The Land

Looking at the map of the pre-enclosure fields,³ Fairacres appears to be part of Lower Field being close to the Great and Little Kidneys, names which survive today in the area for recreation beside the river. It was in the township of Iffley, at this time not yet part of the City of Oxford, and in a deed of conveyance dated 31 May 1833 was an allotment of land measuring 4 acres 1 rood and 24 perches in Above Brook Field.⁴

³ Victoria County History vol. P.)

⁴ Covenant to levy a fine of land at Iffley between William Bull, Elizabeth Bull, Abraham Chapman and Sophia Chapman and William Biddle. Deed in SLG box at Charles Russell (Solicitors) London.

The owners

Two deeds and a will from the early part of the nineteenth century are helpful in identifying the owners. The first person named is Samuel Dewe, yeoman, who, in his will dated 3 October 1816 left land and premises at Iffley to Elizabeth and Sophia Parker, daughters of his cousin Mary Dewe and her husband Thomas Parker of Oxford, Grocer.⁵ After his death, which was probably in 1821,⁶ the will was proved on 22 June 1821 in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury which met in London prior to 1859 for the proving of wills of those who had property in more than one county, or for those who 'wished to be thought wealthy or whose executors fancied a trip to the fleshpots on expenses'.⁷

As a yeoman, Samuel Dewe was more than just a farmer for he owned land which entitled him to a vote and it seems that he was in fact quite wealthy for he left, apart from land and property, legacies totalling £2,000.⁸ Although there is the record in the parish register of St Mary Magdalen of a Sam Dewe marrying Mary Tubb on 3 October in 1776, witnessed by Elizabeth Dewe and Richard Dewe, no wife or children are named in his will and it was his cousins and cousins' children who benefitted. £1,000 was to go to his cousin Richard Dewe, a pocket-case maker in London, £900 to Richard's daughter, Elizabeth, who was living with him at the time of his death and £100 to his 'good friend P. Tubb' which confirms the connection with the Tubb family. He left the residue of his estate to his cousin, Mary Parker. Although his will is relatively short the picture is drawn of a family with money and connections in Oxford and London.

Thomas Parker had married Mary Dewe, named as Samuel's cousin in his will, on 8 May 1789 in the parish of St Mary Magdalen. They had at least five children of whom Elizabeth and Sophia were the only survivors. Elizabeth was baptised on 6 May in 1797 in St Peter le Bailey and married William Bull on 13 October 1818.

William Bull was baptised in St Clements on 15 May 1795. His parents, Job and Ann, had married in All Souls on 7 July 1794. Elizabeth must have moved to the parish of St Clements to set up home with her husband for, in the Burial Register there are two entries, one in February 1821 of 'William Job Bull aged 5 months son of William and Elizabeth, innkeeper', and a later entry in 1822 of 'Mary Anne Bull, 4 weeks, daughter of William and Elizabeth, grocer', showing that infant mortality was still common and no better than in her mother's day. Their only surviving child, Henry Parker Bull, was born in St Clements in 1828.

The land left to Elizabeth and Sophia was out of town and was presumably grazed or let out to someone like Hedges who had been named in Samuel's will of 1816 as being in occupation.

⁵ The National Archives PROB 11/1644/317. 3 October 1816 Last will and testament of Samuel Dewe

⁶ 11 April 1821 Record in volume 5 of the Parish Register of St Mary Magdalen of the burial of one 'Sam Dewey Opposite St John's College age 72.'

⁷ E McLaughlin *Someret House Wills from 1858*

⁸ TNA PROB/11/1644/317

At this time nationally there was a move to establish ownership of the remaining pieces of common land that had not yet been enclosed and many individual Acts of Parliament were passed allowing for enclosure. Locally, following the Act for Iffley in 1814, the Iffley Inclosure Award confirmed Elizabeth Bull and Sophia Parker as the owners of land in Above Brook Field on 9 January 1830⁹. Despite this award, to establish an unimpeachable record of possession of the land, William and Elizabeth brought a Final Agreement, a technical action in law, to register their title along with Sophia and her husband, Abraham Chapman 'the younger of Islip in the said County of Oxford, Gentleman'¹⁰ whom she had married on 20 July 1830 in the parish of All Saints and Thomas and Elizabeth Baylis¹¹ ten acres of land, fifteen acres of meadow, and fifteen of pasture and commons in Iffley and in the parish of St Thomas in Oxford. This Agreement was stamped 19-3-34. In a lengthy deed dated 31 May 1833 William and Elizabeth bought Sophia's and Abraham's share for £130 and so by early 1834 the land was clearly held by William Bull of St Clements, once innkeeper now grocer like his father-in-law, and his wife Elizabeth.

The builders

There is no date on the deeds indicating the building of the house on the land but the voting registers set up after the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 give more information. Voting was restricted to males owning property and so it was William, not Elizabeth, who was able to vote. The electoral year ran from 1 November and for 1832/33 he is listed as living in St Clements and owning freehold land in Iffley Field. This continued annually until for the electoral year 1835/36 he was resident in Iffley and owned freehold land 'and a house' so this pinpoints the building of Fairacres House to 1834/35.

There are no plans or sketches associated with the earlier deeds so the first sight of a plan comes with the fight against Isambard Kingdom Brunel's proposal in the Oxford and Great Western Union Railway Bill 1837 to run nine and a half miles of track from Didcot to Oxford on the east side of the River Thames¹². The map and papers for the parliamentary review committees show William Bull as the owner and occupier of a house, garden, stables and outbuildings, of a garden, of a yard, cowhouse and outbuildings, of a meadow and of an orchard. Although he was against the Bill he did not speak at the committee hearings but his neighbour William Parker (no obvious relation to Elizabeth and Sophia) did, pointing out that he would not have built Freelands House, into which he had moved in June 1836, if he had known about the railway. The opposition was successful and the Bill failed.

The electoral roll further shows William moving out to Islip, a village about five miles to the north of Oxford, in 1840 where the 1841 census lists the Bull family with him aged 45 and 'Independent'. He maintained his right to vote by registering possession of the land and house in Iffley Field although living in Islip.

So Fairacres House was built in 1834/5 by William Bull, a grocer in St Clements, who

⁹ Deed dated 31 May 1833 to convey land at Iffley to Mr Bull and his heirs – see note 4 above

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Unknown connection – not their cousin Elizabeth Dewe

¹² John Leigh *Iffley, Brunel and the Great Western Railway* Iffley Local History Society 1997

went on to become a 'gentleman'¹³ and to farm 47 acres of land in Islip. It would seem that he was a prosperous shopkeeper and businessman with access to funds to build a substantial house which sold for £1,000 thirty years after it was built¹⁴.

Life in Islip for the Bull Family

Without further research it is impossible to say why the Bulls went to Islip leaving a new house and large garden in a fine setting in Iffley. Sophia, Elizabeth's sister, and her husband Abraham Chapman were well established there with two sons, William Clark and John Parker.¹⁵ Abraham, having been named as a 'gentleman' in the deed of 1833 when William and Elizabeth bought the land left to Sophia by Samuel Dewe, proceeded to become the village schoolmaster at Islip by 1841¹⁶ and by 1845 for the Tithe awards when church tithes in kind were commuted into money payments he was 'also Tax assessor and bailiff to the Dean and Chapter; he owns one dwelling, leases two more (one of them the Fox & Grapes Public House) and is tenant for two gardens and the schoolhouse'.¹⁷ He was also a surveyor in the 1851 census and was obviously busy and involved in the village. In that census return William Bull was 55 and a farmer with 47 acres employing 3 men and 3 boys. He, Elizabeth and Henry lived at 20 Upper Street. He made his will in 1852 and died 16 January 1855 with his will also being proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on 25th May 1855.



Figure 14 The Bull and Chapman graves in the churchyard of St Nicholas, Islip

At the time of the 1861 census, Elizabeth lived at 118 Church Square Islip with a young house servant and is called a 'Proprietor of Houses'. She died on 1 January 1863 and on 23 February Letters of Administration of her personal effects, which were worth under £300, were granted to her son Henry Parker Bull, Gentleman. She and William are buried in the churchyard at Islip and in the adjoining plot are

¹³ Will of William Bull dated 28 May 1852 . TNA PROB 11/2211/434, proved 25 May 1855.

¹⁴ Indenture dated 2 October 1866

¹⁵ Will of William Bull dated 28 May 1852

¹⁶ Census book for 1841

¹⁷ Velda Henman *Islip, Oxfordshire – Written Clues 1662-1851* Thesis for Master's degree

Abraham and Sophia (Fig.14).

Street names and numbering are different today in Islip so it was impossible on a visit to identify the houses lived in by the Bull family in 1851 and 1861, though the '51 house, 20 Upper Street, was occupied by an agricultural labourer aged 74 in '61 which suggests either a modest abode or a fine house with a caretaker.

Owners after 1840

With the departure of the Bulls to Islip, Fairacres House was rented out and as individual properties were not identified in the 1841 census it is very difficult to pick out a tenant for Fairacres House but by the time of the 1851 census, the property was lived in by Joseph Warne, Postmaster in Oxford, his wife Ellen Mary and their three sons. They had two living-in servant girls and in other houses on the estate lived a gardener and a groom, but there is no evidence that these were employees of Warne. After William Bull's death in 1855, his son Henry leased the property in 1859¹⁸ to Joseph Warne with an agreement to purchase after 7 years.

The Warnes were still in residence for the 1861 census and when Joseph died in 1865, his Trustees bought the freehold for £1,000 from Henry Bull¹⁹. His widow Ellen Mary Warne went to live in Herne Hill and the house was let out until her death in 1896. On 4 May 1896, to allow access from the new Fairacres Road a strip of land with 16' of frontage was purchased from the Oxford Industrial & Provident Land & Building Society and then the house and grounds were sold by her two surviving sons for £1,900 to William Frederick Cross, a wholesale confectioner, of 263 Iffley Road.

By 1902 Fairacres House²⁰ had come into the possession of Ernest Pigott, a provision merchant who operated from 21/22 The Covered Market. By 1911 he described his business as 'Bacon Curers, Lard Refiners and Wholesale Fresh Butter Depot', and had expanded by a further three units in the market and a curing and refrigeration works in Denmark Street (Fig.15).

The Sisters of the Love of God took up residence at Fairacres in 1911, renting it from Ernest Pigott (Fig.16), and they built their first chapel near the house in 1912. By 1920 they had acquired sufficient funds to purchase the house and in 1923 extended the property with a new wing and chapel by Paul Waterhouse, at that time President of the RIBA.

Occupants of Fairacres from 1866 to 1896

The thirty years during which the house was let is not without its interest, as quite a lot is known about some of its many tenants.

By 1866²¹ the occupant was Charles Archer, MD, and in 1869 and 1871 Charles Jesse Blake²², a Wine Merchant. He lived at Fairacres with his wife Laura, three children, a

¹⁸ Indenture dated 2 October 1866

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Kelly's Oxford Directory 1902*

²¹ *The Oxford Directory for 1866*. The house is referred to as 'Fair Acre'.

²² *Websters Oxford Directory 1869, 1871. Census book for 1871*.

cook, and a housemaid. Again, the neighbouring houses were occupied by a gardener

TELEPHONE MARKET, 516. Established 1842. TELEGRAPH: PIGOTT, MARKET, OXFORD. BANKERS: BARCLAY & Co., OXFORD.

Ernest E. Pigott & Sons,


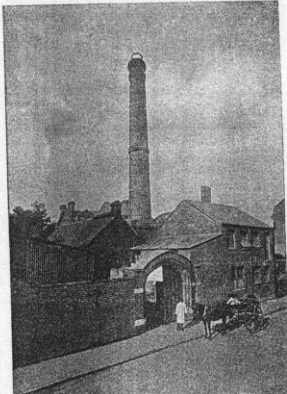
BACON CURERS, Lard Refiners. Wholesale Fresh Butter Depôt.

ADDRESSES.

Registered Offices
127 Iffley Road

Curing & Works
Denmark Street.

SHOPS.
21 to 25
The Market,
Oxford.



Curing and Refrigerating Works, Denmark St.
Local Farm Fed Pigs.
All Dairy Fed.

Our Shops in the Market.
21 to 25 The Market, Oxford.



19

June 23 1911

Rev Hollings
Sir

Incidentally to your I saw Mr Darty have had the clause you refer to altered to the 20% Portumum

Believe me yours faithfully
Ernest E. Pigott

P.S. I think they will appreciate the place as its so very nice also cheap rents

Figure 15 Letter from Mr Pigott to Revd. Hollings, 23 June 1911 (Sisters of the Love of God)



Figure 16 Photo of Mr Pigott and children at Fairacres circa 1908 (Sisters of the Love of God)

and a groom. He also occupied two acres of meadow land on the Pembroke College estate, possibly the part on the west side of Meadow Lane²³. At the time of the 1881 census, a market gardener, William Lander, rented the property and lived there with his wife, a niece, two young nephews, and a 'boarder'.

By 1887²⁴, however, Fairacres had become the residence of Dr. Isaac Bayley Balfour, who had been enticed to Oxford from his post as Regius Professor of Botany at Glasgow University to become Sherardian Professor of Botany, and a fellow of Magdalen College, in February 1884²⁵. He was responsible for the present-day layout of the Oxford University Botanic Garden. In 1888, on being appointed Professor of Botany at Edinburgh, his alma mater, and with it the glorious titles of Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh and the King's Botanist in Scotland, he left Fairacres and was replaced, both as Sherardian Professor and resident of the house, by the appropriately named Sydney Howard Vines²⁶. He, like Balfour, was not an Oxford man, having spent most of his academic life at 'the other place'. Magdalen College certainly made good use of the house in this period for accommodating senior academic staff who had been attracted to Oxford from elsewhere. This may be because Professor Charles Daubeny M.D, a distinguished chemist and botanist who was appointed Professor of Botany in 1834, also owned at least two acres of 'garden land'²⁷ in the area, possibly for botanical experiments. Indeed he also built at his own expense Oxford's first purpose-built botanic laboratory.²⁸ On Daubeny's death in 1867, Cowley House, built by Humphrey Sibthorp as the professor's house, became the Herbarium, thereby making it necessary for later professors to live elsewhere.

In the 1890s, however, the botanic connection to the house ended, although it continues to this day in the name of nearby Daubeny Road, when Vines, continuing as professor, had his own house built in Pullen's Lane. Built by Harry Wilkinson Moore, architect of much of North Oxford, in 1889, it was originally called The Vineyard, but is now known as Pollock House. The directories for 1891-93 show the occupier of Fairacres to be one Colonel the Hon. E A Holmes A'Court, a retired army officer, but in 1894-96 he had also moved to Headington Hill, and his successor at Fairacres was Randolph de Salis, who was the tenant at the time of its sale to Frederick Cross.

The adjoining land

The Fairacres Estate, as the surrounding land was called, had at one time been quite extensive. In 1859 part was owned by Sidney Smith, a Cowley yeoman, who sold for development the area of Catherine Street and Percy Street²⁹. By 1864, a further area of 25 acres (see Fig.2) had been laid out by John Galpin, secretary and surveyor to the Oxford Building and Investment Company, and 'upwards of 500 plots' had been

²³ Revd. Edward Marshall *History of Iffley* 1870 p136

²⁴ *Valter's Oxford Post Office Directory 1887*

²⁵ William Dunn Macray *Register of the Members of St Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*. Vol.VII 1882-1910 London 1911 p40

²⁶ *Ibid* pp44-5 and *Valter's Oxford PO Directory 1890*

²⁷ Marshall, *op cit* p55

²⁸ <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7187>

²⁹ Malcolm Graham *On Foot in Oxford 12. East Oxford* 1987

sold³⁰. Galpin, at one point a Liberal alderman on the town council, was notorious for his sharp business practices, which reached their acme in the exploitation of North Oxford, and culminated in the collapse of the company and with it the savings of its investors³¹. Galpin was living at the neighbouring Donnington Lodge in 1880, and it may be surmised that the profit from the sale of the Fairacres plots went into his own pocket.

Another part of Fairacres Estate was bought from Magdalen College around 1888 by the Oxford Working Men's Building Society for £3500, and consisted of an Iffley Road frontage, where the houses would 'correspond to the existing houses' and two further roads, now Parker Street and Fairacres Road, 'mainly for workmen's cottages'. These houses were intended to be 'superior', and their plans had to be submitted to the college for prior approval. Three building plots on the estate were also sold privately by the college³².

Discussion

We have seen that there is some evidence for a house on the site before William Bull built his house in 1834-5, largely from Samuel Dewe's Will of 1816, in which he left his 'land and premises' to his heirs, suggesting that there may already have been a building on the site, the rubble east wall of the domestic range being its sole surviving part.

We do not know who the builder was. The 1830s were a busy time for Oxford builders as the Victorian expansion of the city was gaining momentum. A major project about the same time was the development of the land west of St Giles with the building of Beaumont and St John's Streets. There were many local firms competing for business and Fairacres was probably built by one of these. Typically, a pattern book would have been used and the house contains many features common to buildings of the period 1800-1830. The understated modelling on the walls, with their emphasised corners and eaves and upper floor delineated by a string course in ashlar, can be seen in other houses of the same period³³. The roof with its wooden modillions in pairs around the wide projecting eaves (Fig.17) is also typical of the period³⁴. The builder was clearly conscious that the house would be seen first from the north, and appreciated most from the garden.

The 1908 photograph (Fig.16) gives an important view of the house before more recent alterations. The southern gable originally had a classical 'broken' pediment and vestiges of which can still be seen. There are at present two main chimney stacks, of which only the southernmost is original. The configuration in 1908 provided for flues at each end of the northern section, although the southernmost chimney stack was below the roof ridge, as can be seen in photographs from 1924 (Fig.18).

³⁰ *Oxford Chronicle* 6 August 1864 p.5, which also contains a wonderful description of the first annual dinner held for the purchasers, in a marquee on the estate, with speeches, outdoor sports, a quadrille band, dancing and 'the whole concluding with a display of fireworks'

³¹ Tanis Hinchcliffe *North Oxford* New Haven and London, 1992

³² *Jackson's Oxford Journal* 13 October 1888 p.6 and VCH Vol 4 p.200

³³ see Appendix 1

³⁴ see Woodforde, John *Georgian Houses for All* London 1978



Figure 17 Double modillions in northern section of house



Figure 18 Photograph of west elevation in 1924 (Sisters of the Love of God)

From building plans of 1972 (Fig.19), a picture of the earlier arrangement can be constructed. The northern stack served four flues, from which fireplaces heated the four rooms at that end of the house. The central stack also had four flues, and from its position, probably served fireplaces in the south wall of St. Faith³⁵, the Novitiate and the common wall of the two rooms which now form the library. The remaining stack to the south-east served St. Martha, St. Zita (the kitchen), St. Agnes and the upper room beyond it to the south. The twelve fireplaces and flues would clearly have provided a lot of work for the servants during a cold winter. The coal would have probably been stored in the cellar which is set only under the north part of the northernmost part of the building. In the east wall is evidence of a blocked entrance, which probably served as the delivery hatch.

³⁵ The room names for the Old Convent are those in use before the 1997 remodelling and are shown on the plan in Fig.19

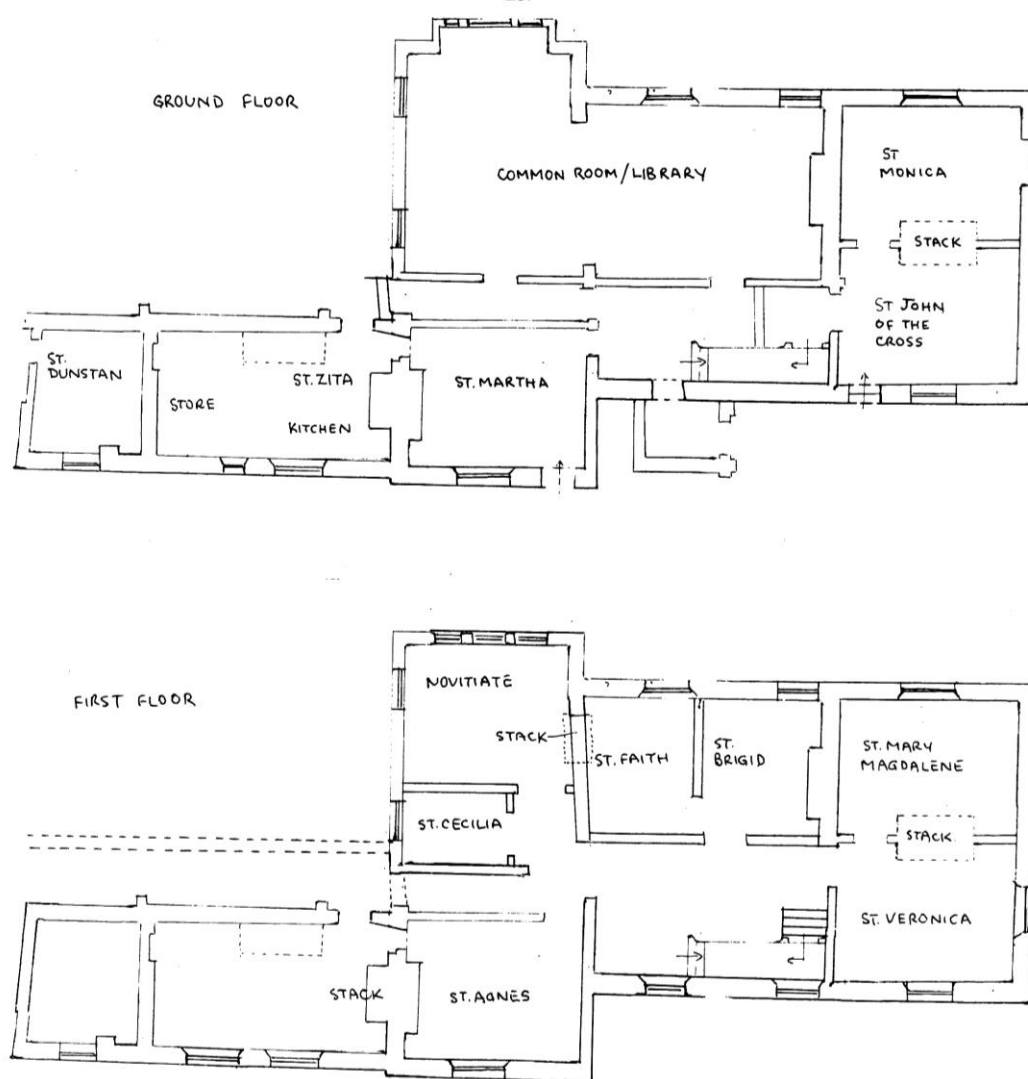


Figure 19 Building plans of 1972 (redrawn)

The fact that the cellar is not under the whole house, together with the higher floor level of the northern part, could be evidence of a two-stage building process or an earlier pre-existing house on the site, but there is no other evidence to support this, and it may have resulted simply from the geology of the gravels on the river terrace, and the costs of excavating a larger cellar.

In the centre of the northern section of the west front was an imposing stone porch with two slim Doric columns supporting a plain entablature (Fig.20). The only remnant of this today is a pair of pilasters flanking



Figure 21 Old porch on west front in 1924 (Sisters of the Love of God)



Figure 20 Stone lintel on west front of northern section

the doorway, supporting a stone lintel which may have been part of the original porch (Fig.21). The large bay window in the southern section, with its central door to the garden is almost unaltered from its appearance in 1908, although at that time there was some sort of sun-canopy on a roller fixed to the entablature. The whole is

decorated with simple square pilasters on all sides (Fig.22), the detailing of which is clearly different from that of the former porch on the northern section of the house.



Figure 22 Stone pilasters on west front of crosswing

The most striking feature of the building is the apparent dissimilarity between the west front fenestration of the two parts of the T. In 1997, the upper storey of the northern section had original 16-pane (eight-over-eight) sash windows, three

facing the garden, one to the north, with two blocked-in, and probably as built, purely for symmetry (Fig.17). On the east, there would also have been three, but one has been largely blocked, and an additional window inserted to bring light into the bathroom. On the ground floor, the northernmost window on the west front has been enlarged to form a doorway.

Figure 23 Rounded windows on east wall in 'catrun'

In the southern cross-wing, the upper windows on the west frontage mirror in a simpler style the triple-light glazing pattern of the ground floor bay window, while on the southern wall, the 1908 fenestration appeared



to be intact in 1997 apart from the replacement of the sashes by modern glazing.

An interesting feature of the domestic wing is a pair of recessed round headed windows in the east wall (Fig.23). Although the lower sections are blocked in, and there are modern insertions of various doors and windows, they appear to have had sills at the level of the top of the rubble wall, and may at one time have been complete windows, although there is no evidence of this from the stonework.

Building plans (Fig.19) from 1972 show that there was a porch to an entrance doorway at the east of the house. This would have led directly into the hallway. Also on this side of the building there is evidence of a further door-case around the door which at one time led into a kitchen (Fig.24).



Figure 24 Evidence of former doorcase on east wall in 'catrun'

Room Uses

If, as discussed above, the first Fairacres House was what is now the northern part of the main convent building, the original house was quite small with drawing room, dining room, study and hall on the ground floor, with a kitchen possibly in an outshot (Fig.25).

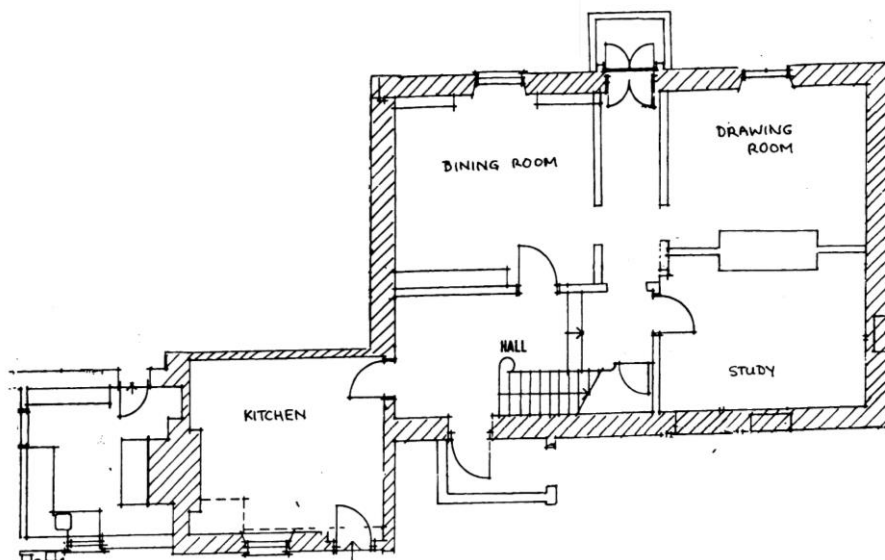


Figure 25 Conjectural arrangement of rooms on ground floor of original house (Plan from Lee and Ross, Architects Oxford, 1997 with permission)

The main entrance is likely to have been on the east side coming into the hallway rather than through the door on the west side. Upstairs, the original pattern is more difficult to discern. When built, it was unlikely that there would have been a

bathroom or toilet³⁶, and St Faith and St Brigid were probably a single room. St Cecilia was probably part of the Novitiate, and the broom cupboard would have been where the passage to the Workroom and blanket store was in 1997.

The main staircase, although elegant with an open string, polished wood and paired iron balusters, is relatively plain, steep and narrow (Fig.26) but nevertheless typical of smaller houses of the period.



Figure 26 Staircase

Later, when the crosswing was built, the configuration of rooms is likely to have been the subject of much change. On the ground floor, the library may previously have been a drawing room to the south, and a dining room to the north³⁷. Visitors would have arrived at the porched door to the east, and be taken into the drawing room down the corridor. The dining room was probably the central room and the formal porch to the garden would have allowed guests to take drinks on the veranda before dinner and to walk around admiring the flowers later in the evening. The northern end might have contained a study for the man of the house and a sewing or music room for the family. The kitchen would have been in St. Martha, where an external door would have admitted tradesmen and

servants. The upstairs rooms would have been bedrooms in the main. With its absentee landlord and variety of tenants, it is almost impossible to reconstruct the nineteenth century room arrangement at Fairacres, but it is fairly clear that the prestigious rooms facing the garden would have been for entertaining, and that the kitchen, scullery and other service rooms would have been consigned to the rear and to the southern wing.

The interior decoration may of course have been richer than it is today, but where earlier plaster mouldings remain, as around the ceiling of St Mary Magdalene, these are simple. The door-frames, too, are well moulded, and a simple round archway supported by pilasters and neat capitals leads from the front hall to the central passage (Fig.27). In the library, the stone external pilasters are mirrored on the interior in wood (Fig.29).



Figure 27 Central hall archway

³⁶ Toilets were external until cast iron roof-tanks came into general use in the second half of the 19th century. Then usually a small bedroom was converted into a bathroom or toilet; prior to that, baths were taken in portable tin tubs.

³⁷ A plan for £670 parsonage in a pattern book of 1855 shows the need for a hall, drawing room, dining room, library, pantry, china pantry, kitchen, scullery, ash pit, WC, stable and gig house at the rear. (Henry-Russell Hitchcock *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain* New York 1976)

Figure 28 Wooden pilasters in the Library

The small cottage-type building to the south has already been referred to, and we believe it was a former carriage-house, extended, converted and linked to the main house at some time before 1840. Today it has two floors, neither of them at the same level as those in the main building. The access to the upper storey is now through what was once a window in the main house, as can be seen from the 1908 photograph (Fig.16). There is archway also evidence of internal stairways within the building itself, one up from the present kitchen to St Agnes, i.e. from the outer building to the upper floor of the main house, presumably for the use of servants, and one connecting the floors within the building. The small, low-ceilinged rooms upstairs (Fig.29) suggests their use as servants' quarters, with scullery, washroom and toilets below.



Figure 29 Low ceilinged room above St Dunstan

Conclusions

The report has attempted to set out the main features of the Old Convent, previously known as Fairacres House. We know that it was built around 1835, by William Bull, a grocer, on a meadow site which he owned through his wife, Elizabeth, and by buying out her sister's share. We can surmise that he used a local builder, who used plans and designs in common use at the time. There are at least three different styles in the house, and there is evidence for different building dates. We have argued that William Bull built himself initially in 1835 a rectangular symmetrical Georgian villa, and a stable or coach-house block and outbuilding incorporating the eastern rubble wall, possibly from an earlier cottage or farm building offset to the south east.

Once the threat of a nearby railway line had passed, and with the growing prosperity of his business, he enlarged the house by building the crosswing in the gap, using the stable wall on which to build up a second storey to form a cottage for servants and probably re-using ashlar from the redundant south wall of the first house. Floors were inserted in the former carriage-house, to make it habitable; stairs and doors were inserted to link it with the crosswing.

Clearly, it was now a house of some status, but, on retiring to Islip in 1840, Bull rented it out. Occupied by people of substance, including the Postmaster and Professors of Botany, it seems to have been suitable for entertaining and as a family

home. It is one of the last of a number of such large houses off Iffley Road, and has been well adapted for its current use, while retaining many original features.

Disclaimer

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Appendix 1: Houses of the 1830s in the Oxford Area

One of the local houses which superficially resembles Fairacres is the Rectory at Cuxham (Fig.1.1). Although a more substantial house, it, too, has a fine Doric porch and double modillions at the eaves.



Figure 1.1 Rectory, Cuxham



Another local house of the period is Townsend House, 50 Church Way, Iffley, a more refined classical building, in pink stucco (Fig.1.2)

Figure 1.2 Townsend House, 50 Church Way, Iffley



In the centre of Oxford, the former Clarendon Arms public house, next to, and now incorporated into the Oxford University Press in Walton Street, has round-headed windows and the double modillions typical of the 1830s (Fig.1.3)

Figure 1.3 Former Clarendon Arms, Walton St

Fig.1.4 shows the £670 parsonage referred to in the text (note 35), by Samuel Hemming, c.1855. Elevation and plan from Hitchcock, Henry-Russell *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain* New York 1976.



Figure 1.4 £670 Parsonage plans

Rectories and parsonages seem to have been a specialty of Richard Pace and Son of Lechlade, whose trade-card (Fig.1.5) of c.1830 shows examples of his work. Pace was a master-builder who built to his own designs as well as to those of professional architects.

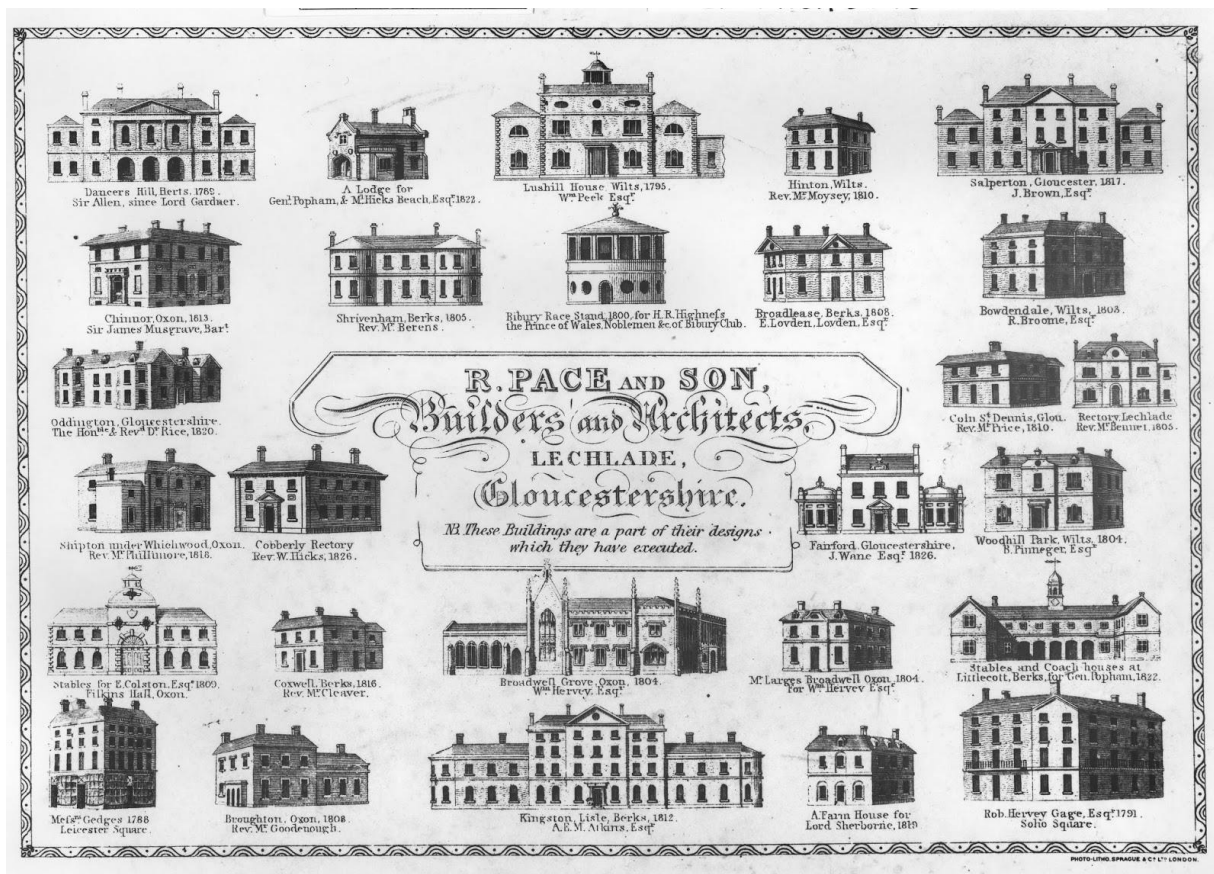


Figure 1.5 Trade card of Richard Pace, Lechlade 1830. (Copyright © Bodleian Library, Oxford University, shelfmark MS Eng. Misc c.298. Creative Commons licence CC-BY-NC 4.0.)