

Notes on first meeting at:
28 Polstead Road on 30 September 2025 between 18.00 and 19.15

Present:

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This document records the first meeting of the group, held on 30 September 2025. This records the main topics raised or discussed. The conversation was free ranging and was only loosely related to the agenda. Consequently, the document records the issues raised, but the ordering has no significance.

Scope.

The project's scope was discussed throughout the meeting. Several ideas were discussed.

The project should include the **houses** on Polstead Road. There was some discussion about adding the St Margaret's Institute and the Anchor pub. The latter are covered in other books, but they are an essential part of the street. The issue was left unresolved, with an implication that they would be mentioned but not examined in detail.

The project should also cover the **people** living in the street. This would include both those currently living on the street and people who have lived on the street in the past. There was some discussion about naming previous residents, living or dead. Most of the information is or would be in the public domain, which reduces difficulties associated with privacy and confidentiality.

The project should certainly cover Polstead Road from its inception. There was some discussion about placing it in a larger historical context, for example, mentioning the presence of a Roman camp in the area and explaining the immediate preceding history of being an orchard belonging to St John's College.

The discussion was informed slightly by the discussion of other similar histories, mostly from Oxford, and some books were available for reading.

Method.

The conversation was interspersed with discussions on how information would be collected and collated.

One discussion concerned interviewing all willing current residents to gather information on their perspectives on the street, including when they arrived, changes they have seen since arrival, and happenings while they have been present.

A further discussion concerned similar interviews with any previous residents who can be traced and who are willing.

Many other sources were mentioned, drawing largely on suggestions made by Graham Harding, and these are listed at the end and were on the agenda.

Methods - details.

There was significant discussion around matters concerning confidentiality, gaining permission from anyone interviewed, respecting the privacy of other people and so on. Further work on this and advice will be needed. This is not a journalistic inquiry, nor is it a systematic history; therefore, some of the strict limitations may not be necessary. At present, the plan is to investigate this further.

We noted that photographs of the street and people were available. We would need to check on copyright before publishing any of these.

We briefly discussed who would undertake some of this work. It is evident that most people are busy and have limited time. No definite plans were made. We (Liz) will draw up a list of potential tasks, and people may volunteer to take on one or more of those tasks.

We discussed communication and meetings. Ideas put forward included a WhatsApp group, already set up by Cecile and using Google documents as a way of collecting and collating material publicly. This should consist of a spreadsheet as a means of organising information, such as contacts and other relevant details. We will have a limited number of meetings, but the next one will be within four weeks, when some further preparatory work has been completed.

A tentative goal of ending the project by Christmas 2026 was discussed.

Relation to similar projects.

Local history projects are carried out in many areas. Jeremy suggested we should record and document our progress and methods, and consider publishing it, probably on the Internet, for other people to use. This idea was supported.

In the meantime, there are various sources of help, including local courses, and Liz has circulated some (documented at the end). Further, there are existing local history publications.

Output.

We discussed what the product would be. No firm conclusion was reached, but a consensus was reached that both a printed book or booklet and an active website were likely to emerge eventually. The website might be continued and updated over time.

Jeremy has experience in website design and the use of the Internet and suggested that the website might include layers of information so that different readers could pursue specific areas of interest, referring to "threads".

Next steps.

- We will compile a list of tasks to be completed.
- We will set up a WhatsApp group (achieved)
- We will start documenting what we are doing and considering how information will be stored and handled
- Liz will send more information about sources with a view to the group deciding what they might wish to do.
- Next meeting: **Tuesday 4 November**, at 28 Polstead Road, at 18.00-19.30hrs

Further information:

Sources of information

- British Newspaper archive
- National archives at Kew
- Office of National Statistics
- National Library of Scotland (plans of Oxford)
- Bodleian map room blog
- Victorian County histories
- Census returns
- House deeds, and names of houses pre-numbering
- Planning docs.
- St John's archive
- Rightmove - access to old records?
- Anecdotal memories e.g. how we acquired our houses
- Current owners' biographies (possibly)
- Famous residents (inevitably T E Lawrence)
- Other street histories e.g. Cowley

Resources: (Liz sent, by email)

- 21 Nov, 2.30-4 pm Oral History Skills Training Workshop
- 28 Nov., 2.30-4pm Building Your Own Community History Project - networking event
- Their website: <https://www.communityhistory.ox.ac.uk/home> https://
- These events: www.communityhistory.ox.ac.uk/article/community-history-hub-autumn-events.
- They are both at the Museum of Oxford. Liz has signed up for both and will send round notes afterwards.