

Olive Jacks Memorial Field & Risinghurst Recreation Ground

**Urban/Recreational Park Project
Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Group**

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COUNTY	Oxfordshire	Site name Olive Jacks Memorial Field & Risinghurst Recreational Ground
DISTRICT	South Oxfordshire District Council & Oxford City Council	
PARISH	Risinghurst & Sandhills	
NGR	OJMF: SP 562 068 RRG: SP 563 069	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A small recreation ground, known as Olive Jacks Memorial Field (OJMF), was gifted by Dr L P Jacks in memory of his wife Olive in 1951, as a safe place for children to play. OJMF is joined to a larger recreation ground opened in the 1960s known as Risinghurst Recreation Ground (RRG). Both recreation grounds play an integral part in the community of Risinghurst and Sandhills.

Artistic interest

Whereas trees and hedges enclose OJMF, giving it an air of intimacy and privacy, RRG is a large open space on the edge of Oxford City, with a sweeping view and public access to Shotover Park. There is a spinney with the remains of a pond in the north-east corner of the ground.

Historic interest

Both grounds are less than a hundred years old and the historic value is rooted in the history of Headington Quarries and the brick and tile industry that flourished in the area.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Historically these two grounds were not within the city of Oxford but included in the parish of Forest Hill. The 1881 Ordnance Survey (OS) map shows large fields and smaller strip fields. In this report we are concerned with two fields running from north to south, the southern field being divided into three strips. We will also consider a strip field off Kiln Lane (see Figure 1, overleaf) and the field with Shotover Lodge outlined in orange on the map.

Olive Jacks Memorial Field

OJMF is the small strip field outlined in red in Figure 1. Now 70 years old it is the oldest part of the area. The land was a gift from Dr Lawrence Pearsall Jacks in memory of his wife Olive

Cecilia. He was a notable English educationalist, philosopher and Unitarian minister and principal of Manchester College, Oxford from 1915 to 1931.

The land was not given without several stipulations – one of which required that voluntary or paid helpers were to be 'responsible for assisting and guiding the children in their games. . .' (Conveyance, 4 Dec 1950). The field lies to the east of Kiln Lane and close to 'Greatstones' house, which he built and where he lived from 1928/9 to c. 1935, although at the time of his gift he was living at 'Far Outlook' on Shotover Hill (see Appendix 2 for a timeline on the life of Dr L P Jacks).

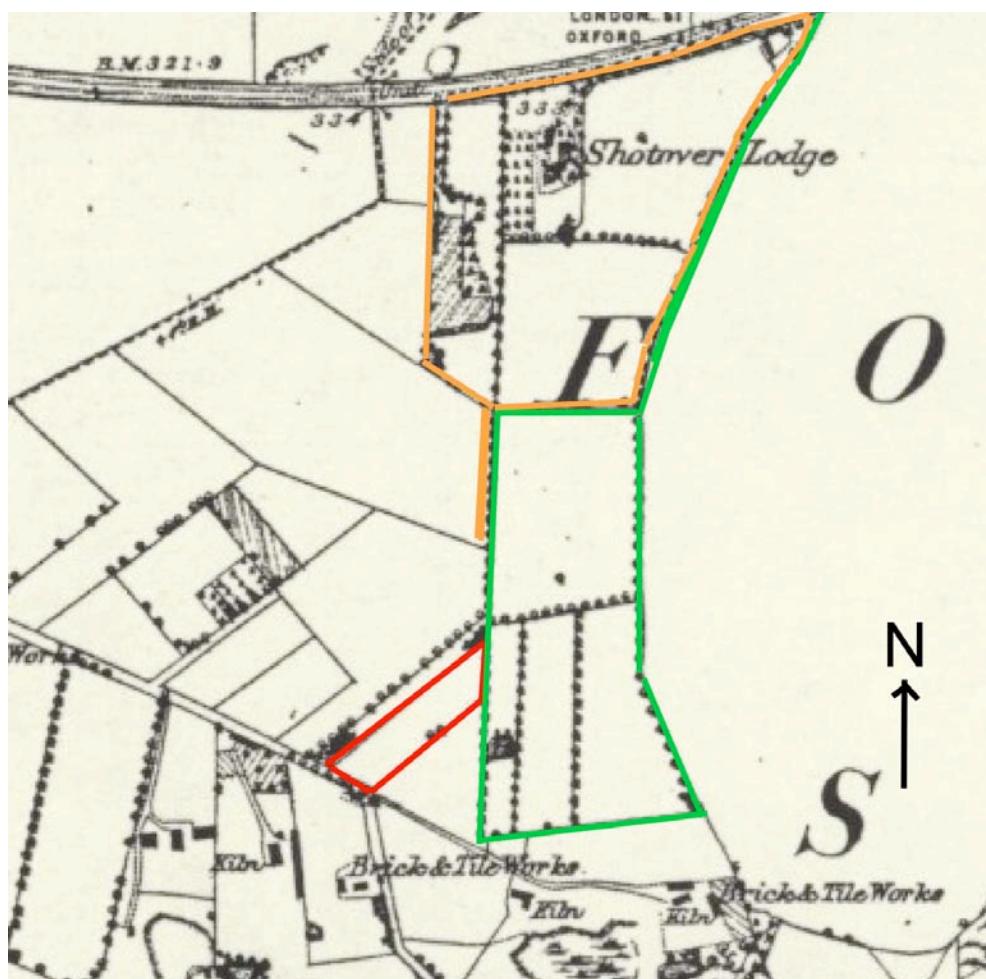


Figure 1: Detail from OS, (1st edn) 1:2500 1881. Landmark information Group and Crown Copyright

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

RRG is the middle and southern field of the three fields that were a small part of the estate of Shotover Place (Figure 1, outlined in green). These two fields are known locally as 'Top Field' and the 'Playing Field'. The fields were close to the historic clay pits and brick kilns around Kiln Lane and to the extensive Headington Quarries. A series of ponds, across the area, remain as

evidence of the years of quarrying. However the pond lying in the south-western corner of the 'Playing Field' may have pre-dated the quarrying (see Figure 2). Nearby are two further ponds of some size, located in the C S Lewis reserve and Monks Wood, amounting to approximately one hectare of water (Wright, Wright & Bee, 2018).

In the mid-1800s a substantial house called Shotover Lodge was built in the northern field (Figure 1, outlined in orange). The house changed hands several times until 1881 when Colonel James Miller, who had purchased Shotover House in 1871, bought the estate. By 1924 the house had been renamed Forest Lodge and from 1941 to 1956 the Forest Hotel. In 1955 the three fields, including Forest Hotel, were bought by Nielsen Holdings plc (Nielsen) the international market analyst company, from Alexander Alfred Miller of Shotover Estate. Modern offices were built in 1958 close to the original house. Nielsen sold the site to a developer in 2018. The offices have now been converted into flats and the development renamed Thornhill Park.

The parish raised the money to purchase the middle and south fields from Nielsen, for the "purposes of the Physical Training and Recreation Act, 1937." (Conveyance, 24th March 1959). The purchase also included a 2.44m wide strip stretching from the north-east corner of the middle field to the London Road for access to the recreation ground (Figure 1, green line). Amongst the various stipulations in the conveyance perhaps the most unusual was that:

"The Vendor shall be entitled to retain the iron gates or iron gateway in the present position opposite Grovelands Road and to remove the same at any time it may wish to do so until the said gates shall have been removed by the Vendor as aforesaid the Parish Council shall be entitled to use the entrance way through the same gates for the purpose of vehicular access to the said property and the Vendor will furnish the Parish Council with keys to the said gates"

There were several obstacles to overcome before the land could become a viable playing field. The committee had to clarify their right to fell trees and to understand the legal situation of the 2.44m strip – its purpose first and foremost to give public access to the recreation ground – not as public footpath. The Field Officer of the Oxford Playing Fields Association (OPFA) reported on 24th March 1959, 'that he had visited the site and suggested a tentative layout. It was hoped that it would be possible for the levelling to be done when 'Messrs Nielsen next-door were levelling their own site' (OPFA minutes, March 1959). Later he advised that 'they should get a good surface on the part of the ground that seemed least problematic' (OPFA, minutes 26th May 1959).

The complexities of the site became apparent and the Management Committee ran into financial difficulty fairly quickly. The first drainage system installed, at the time of levelling was not satisfactory and a second contractor had to be engaged at further expense. However the Committee applied for grants wherever possible and commissioned architectural plans for a pavilion with changing rooms. The recreation ground was not ready for a formal opening until 1965. The Committee approached OPFA requesting help to engage HRH Duke of Edinburgh at an opening ceremony (OPFA minutes, 14 Dec 1965), which does not seem to have come to fruition.

SITE DESCRIPTION

With the expansion of housing in Risinghurst and Sandhills in the 1930s there was a need for a recreation area for both children and adults. Although RRG lies in South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), both RRG and OJMF are owned and managed by Risinghurst Parish Council. In 1959 a charity was set up to protect both OJMF and RRG and the management committee included representatives from the community including members of the church, guides, Scouts, cricket club etc. This folded in 1990s and the management of both fields returned to the Parish Council. Both charities are currently being merged.

Geology

Both OJMF and RRG are on the edge of land consumed by Headington Quarries and the Kiln Lane clay pits, which were not in-filled until housing expanded in the 1930s. The geology has presented problems since the beginning. Bee, Howlett and Wright explain:

'Shotover is capped with 250 ha of porous Whitchurch sand and Portland Limestone. Generally water percolates readily into the topmost stratum, and only flows over the surface during the heaviest rain. However, as the cap is nowhere more than 30 metres deep the percolated water is forced to emerge, still quite high on the hill, at the next stratum down – a seam of Kimmeridge clay. The interfacing of these two strata, therefore, forms a halo of springs, marshes and flushes all around the Hill, which include the majority of spring water outlets, including those in the Country park and Shotover Estate.' (Wright et al 2018, p 20)

The land of RRG and OJMF is Kimmeridge Clay with a small area of Ampthill Clay in the southeast corner and on the north western corner an area of Head deposit. (Note: 'Head is poorly sorted and poorly stratified angular rock debris and/or clayey hillwash and soil creep, mantiling a hillslope and deposited by solifluction and gelifluction processes' (*BGS Lexicon of Named Rocks*) (see also Appendix 1)).

A consequence of the 'spring water outlets' from Shotover Hill is the ditch on the eastern boundary and several ponds within RRG and OJMF. Four ponds are marked on the 1881 OS map, two within RRG and two adjacent to OJMF. These ponds are distinctive in that they are not marked as clay pits and may have been present before clay extraction. There are a further two ponds near Shotover Lodge. The one closest to the Lodge may have been ornamental.

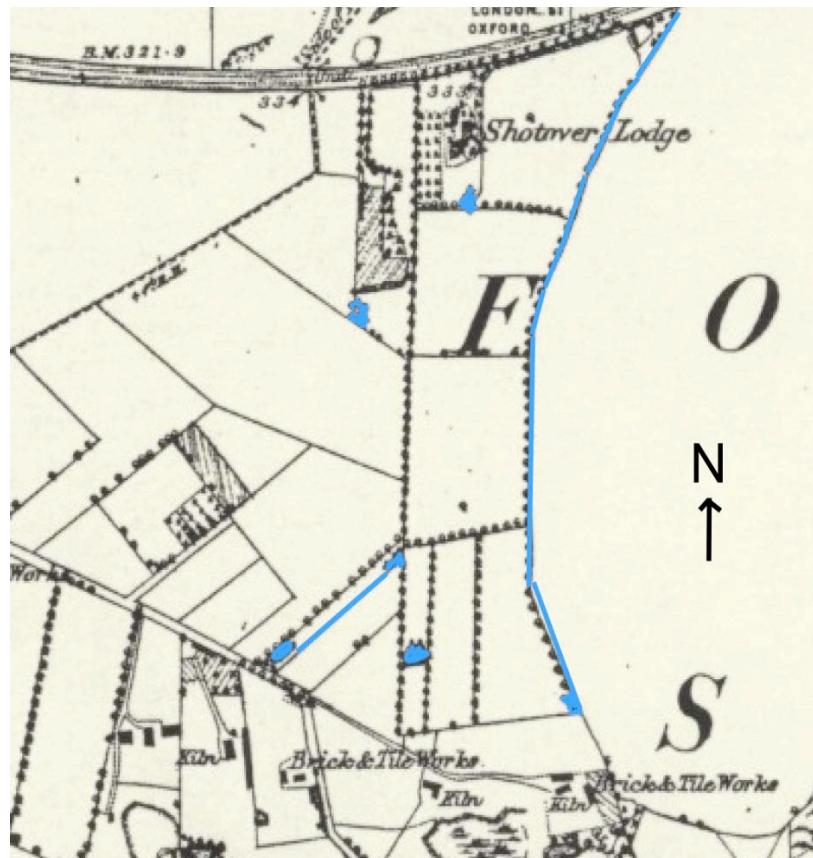


Figure 2. Detail from OS (1st edn) 1:2500 1881. Landmark Information Group and Crown Copyright

The clay is problematic for both the Playing Fields and OJMF. The ground becomes easily waterlogged. The parish council have implemented interventions over the years. During November 2020 the ditch on the east boundary was excavated and a large drain laid underground across the ground from west to east. The water from the ditch used to flood the pedestrian underpass to Sandhills (under the A40 road) but has now been diverted to the rear of the Thornhill Park and Ride, into neighbouring fields.

In OJMF there was a ditch on the north side (see Figure 2), running along the bottom of the Grovelands Road gardens. Overtime part of the ditch was filled and the Parish Council took the decision to plant a hedge – the 'Millennium' hedge – to mitigate the excess water.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM SETTING

Olive Jacks Memorial Field

The 0.5 ha OJMF lies on the eastern side of Kiln Lane. It is sub-rectangular in form, orientated approximately north-east to south-west. Tucked between gardens in Kiln Lane and Grovelands Road, the land falls gently from the west to the east. The north side of the OJMF runs along the edge of a small electricity sub-station and Grovelands Road gardens. In front of the garden fences is the 'Millennium' hedge'. The south side of OJMF runs along the garden fence of 'Harewood House', Kiln Lane. Between the garden fence and a post and mesh fence there is a mixture of trees and scrub. The south boundary curves northwards around the edge of the spinney to a 2 metre wide exit into the RRG.

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

The 4 ha RRG lies on the eastern edge of Risinghurst estate. The north boundary of the ground meets the edge of the Thornhill Park. To the north of the Estate runs the A40 road, originally The Stokenchurch Turnpike constructed in 1775 to relieve the strain on horses travelling up the steep incline over Old Road, Shotover. One of the original 13 milestones, as required by the Milstone Act 1767, is extant in the central reservation of the A40.

The east boundary of the park is a ditch which may date from the 19th century when the field was likely to have been drained for agriculture. At the initial draining of the recreation ground in 1961, water was channelled under the A40 road. Recently it has been redirected into fields beyond Thornhill Park and Ride. On the far side of the ditch in the south-east is agricultural land belonging to the Shotover Estate.

The west is bounded by the rear of houses in Grovelands Road (including an inaccessible 4.5 metre strip of land attached to the Thornhill Park, see Figure 1, orange line) and Kiln Lane. The south edge of the ground meets a private field, locally known as 'Mr Goble's field'. Monks Wood is adjacent on the southern border of this field in which is one large inundated clay pit.

The land of the recreation ground rises from the north to the south with an embankment on the junction of the two original fields, rising 1 metre over 3.7 metres. There is a second smaller rise approx 60 metres from the southern boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Olive Jacks Memorial Field

There are two entrances to OJMF. The main entrance from the west leads directly from Kiln Lane. It has a pair of 20th century locked iron gates (approx 2.5 metres wide and 2.3 metres

high) and a pedestrian opening on the north side. Outside the gates to the south is a low memorial made of brick with two inset limestone blocks inscribed with a dedication to the field from Dr Jacks in memory of his wife Olive. This is not the original gate to the field. A photo dated 1969 shows two brick pillars with a wooden half moon gate (see Appendix 3). In the photo the two limestone blocks are inset into the pillars. The wording on the blocks reads:

<i>left pillar</i>	<i>right pillar</i>
PRESENTED BY	IN MEMORY
DR L P JACKS	OF HIS WIFE
1951	OLIVE

There is a footpath from OJMF into the spinney following the south-western edge of the garden ends of the Kiln Lane houses. The second entrance to the OJFM is directly from RRG through a two metre wide entrance – c. 50 metres from the main gate and adjacent to RRG buildings.

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

The main entrance to Risinghurst Recreation Ground is central to the west boundary (c. 135 metres from the north west corner) at the junction of Grovelands and Ringwood Roads. A pedestrian entrance flanks a pair of wrought iron double gates, 4m wide. Both open onto a hard surface rectangle of 12m x 33m, for vehicle parking. Railings with the same design as the gates run for 73 metres and then change to a different style. They stretch along the west boundary to the north-west corner, edging a hardcore path. On the gates is a plaque stating:

THESE FACILITIES WERE PROVIDED
WITH THE FINANCIAL HELP FROM THE
NATIONAL PLAYING FIELDS ASSOCIATION

Between the railings and the end of the gardens is a slipway approx 4.5 metres wide, owned by the present Thornhill Park (see Figure 1, orange line). Following the boundary southwards from the main entrance you can enter into the OJMF.

The north entrance to the ground follows the footpath leading from the London Road, between the Park and Ride and Thornhill Park for c. 280 metres. (It is of note that the footpath belongs to the recreation ground and is 'public' in the sense that it gives access for those wishing to use the recreation ground). To the right is a hardcore path along the northern boundary between the RRG and Thornhill Park and to the south the public path follows the eastern boundary of the ground beside the ditch.

The south entrance to the ground is the footpath from Shotover Country Park. The entrance is through a metal kissing gate and across a wooden bridge over the ditch. The south boundary is a mixed hedge of bramble & hawthorn (c. 75 metres) when it joins the south edge of the spinney.

BUILDINGS FEATURES AND FACILITIES

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

The recreation ground has a Clubhouse (pavilion), a garage, a breezeblock storage facility and a metal shipping container. A bike shelter attached to the west end of the pavilion previously belonging to Nielsen, is used as a general shelter. The oblong pavilion is orientated west to east and faces the north. Anecdotal evidence says the building is in fact an old classroom left by the Canadian Army who used it for training in Shotover Woods in WW2. By 1965 the Management committee had submitted architectural plans for a pavilion at a cost £5000. Their application for a grant from the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) was met with criticism as it was felt that the 'changing rooms' should be suitable for both winter and summer use (OPFA minutes).

Sports and play amenities

Olive Jacks Memorial Field

The OJFM has an enclosed play area (c. 500 sq. m). The play equipment is modern and includes swings, climbing frames and a roundabout. The initial equipment was a single climbing frame. It was renewed in 1968 with a 50% grant aid from the Local Education Authority (OPFA minutes 29 April 1968). The approach is by a concrete path from the Kiln Lane entrance.

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

The recreation ground is home to Headington Youth Football Club and Risinghurst Cricket Club. The local parish council has mounted autumn fireworks nights for approximately 15 years and more recently there has been a popular summer fete organised by the local community.

To the west of the clubhouse is an outdoor table tennis facility. The lower field of the recreation ground is designated as both a cricket and a football pitch.

Benches

Olive Jacks Memorial Field

There are three benches in OJMF – three in the play area (two on the south side of the enclosed play area and one on the north). An additional bench is under the ash tree on the north-east corner of the enclosed play area.

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

RRG has seven benches on top on the embankment, facing north over the cricket/football field. Two more face the cricket pitch on the eastern edge of the ground. Further single benches are at the northern and southern entrances to the ground and one is also placed in front of the pavilion.

All the benches are of modern construction of concrete and wood.

HORTICULTURE

Olive Jacks Memorial Field

Flanking the entrance from the RRG to OJMF are two ash trees. Centrally in the field is an ash tree and at the west boundary are from the north to south two beeches, a horse chestnut, a cherry and a hawthorn. The hedge bounding the northern side of OJMF, the 'Millennium' hedge, is a mixture of privet, blackthorn, hazel, elder, acer campestre and cornus – to recreate an Old English Hedgerow. The planting was instigated by Nicola Boudillon of the Risinghurst and Sandhills Wildlife Group. The Hedgerow Project, as it was called was funded by a conservation grant. Cllr Paul Phipps who is honoured by a small plaque and a cherry tree in the centre of the embankment, was a great supporter of the project. He was a councillor for c. 18 years and the plaque is in recognition of the time and effort he contributed to the maintenance and development of the ground.

The southern boundary of the OJMF has, from the west to the east, a hawthorn, two oaks, an apple, an ash and six poplars. At the junction of the boundary and the footpath into the spinney, a wild flower area (c. 6 metres sq.) has recently been sown (2021).

Two ponds were present just outside the field boundary – one at the north-east corner and one at the north west corner of the field (see Figure 2). The one at the north-east corner is now covered with a small electricity substation. The water from this, the larger pond would have flowed into the ditch and into the second small pond.

Risinghurst Recreation Ground

Trees in the ground are planted around the periphery and include a number of mature and younger specimens. Surviving mature oaks may have been planted along the old parish boundary. Notably there are three mature chestnuts along the western edge of the ground, two mature turkey oaks and two limes on the northern boundary. There is a mature horse chestnut and ash at both the north eastern entrance and the centre of the eastern boundary. At the south-eastern corner entrance is a mature oak. Close to the north side of the pavilion and adjacent to the main entrance of the ground are three oaks and a horse chestnut. Across the centre on the embankment are more recently planted cherries and crab apples. The trees along the footpath from the London Road include hawthorn, ash, chestnut and five mature oaks.

Two ponds are shown on the 1881 OS map. The first, no longer extant, was at the south-eastern corner entrance and the second in the spinney, c. 300 sq. metres. There is small ditch channelling water into the pond from the field to the south – perhaps an overflow from the pond in Monks Wood. This, like the pond, has now become full of debris and only retains a significant amount of water in the winter months or at times of heavy rainfall. The Parish Council filled in the pond c. 30 years ago, for safety reasons but discussions are now looking at its restoration.

The spinney, c. 7328 sq. metres, around the pond area has a mixture of native trees including rowan, oak, hornbeam, sycamore, holly and a large number of poplars. An aerial photo shows trees present round the pond and along the field hedges. Scrutiny of the photo indicates that many trees were felled in the southern field, c. 1960/1. Trees were also felled in the spinney (see Appendix 3). Within the last c. 15 years, 25 poplars have been planted at the eastern edge of the spinney down to the storage huts.

In 1993 the parish council decided to create a wild flower meadow in a section of the 'Top Field'. Seed was broadcast and a rich and diverse landscape developed. At present the grass is only mown once a year in the autumn.

In 2007 five of the oaks were logged as 'notable' on the Woodland Trust ancient trees register and in 2018 a tree survey was carried out on the instigation of the Parish Council

FLORA

A brief survey in May 2021 recorded the following:

Bramble, dock, white dead nettle, cow parsley, ground ivy, dandelion, nettle, wood avens, cleavers, lords and ladies, speedwell, garlic mustard, forget-me-not, cranesbill, coltsfoot, red dead nettle, daisy, groundsel, yarrow, plantain, herb robert, chickweed, mallow, thistle, ivy, bittercress, lesser stitchwort, slender speedwell, geranium molla, mouse eyed chickweed, creeping cinquefoil, goldilocks, stonecrop, hogweed, creeping buttercup.

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Maps

Ordnance Survey (1960) 1:2500. SP60 - C series, Survey/Revised 1919-1956, published 1960. © Crown copyright and database rights 2021

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Conveyance of land between Dr L P Jacks to the Forest Hill with Shotover Parish Council 4th December, 1950 (Parish Council)

Conveyance of land between Alexander Alfred Miller and Risinghurst and Sandhills Parish Council 24th March 1959 (Parish Council)

Photographs

Oxford Parks: Kiln Lane Gateway to Olive Jacks Play Park with plaques, Picture Oxon (POX0104340) 1969.

Vertical aerial view Risinghurst, Picture Oxon (POX0450684), Fairey Surveys Ltd., 1961

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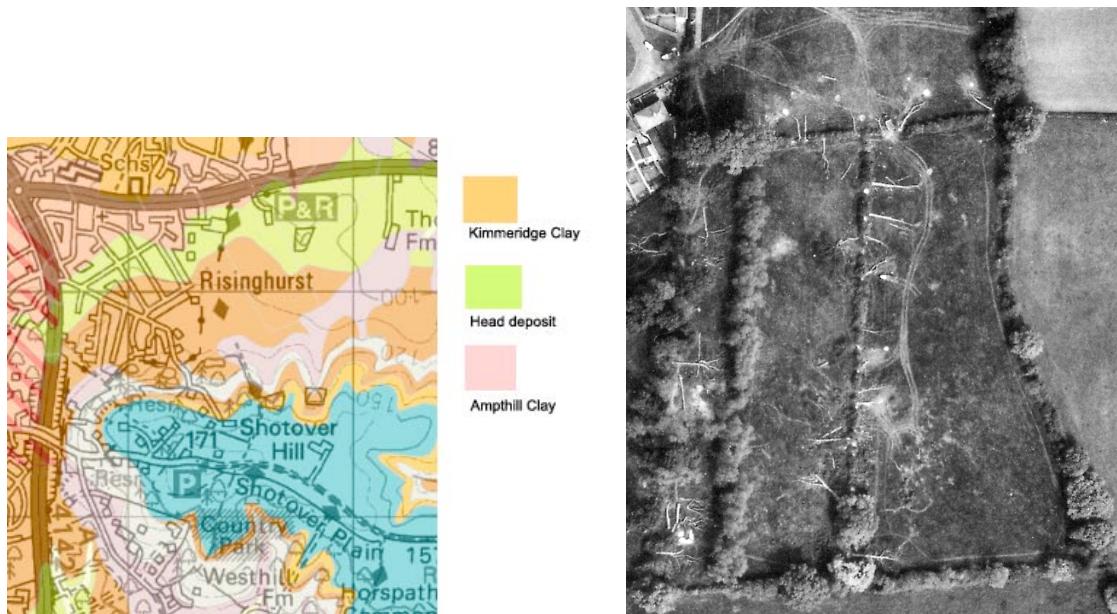
Bev Field, Parish Clerk Sandhills and Risinghurst Parish Council

Barbara Naylor, Sandhills and Risinghurst Parish council

Ivan Wright

and numerous other kind and generous people.

Appendix 1



Geology of the Risinghurst area.
Geological Map Data BGS© UKRI 2021

Detail from: Vertical aerial view of Forest Hill with
Shotover, Oxford covering Ordnance Survey
1km grid squares: SP5506, SP5507, SP5606, SP5607.
Fairey Surveys Ltd, 12.5.1961



Detail from OS 1960. Landmark Information Group and Crown Copyright

Appendix 2

Dr Lawrence Pearsall Jacks time-line

1860	L P Jacks born, Nottingham
1888	Working in Liverpool
1889	Married Olive Cecilia Brookes, London, (6 children)
1901	census: living Edgebaston
1903	Appointed lecturer at Manchester College, Oxford
1907	Listed in Kelly's Directory as living @ Mansfield Rd, (College address) & 28 Holywell St, Oxford
1911	Kelly's Directory still Mansfield College & Holywell St
1913	Conveyance of land on Shotover Hill, 9th May, between Samuel Randall ¹ , The Dean and the Cathedral Church of Christ Church in Oxford and Olive Cecilia Jacks.
1914	Recorded as living at 'Strete', a cottage on Shotover Hill, from where he could supervise the building of 'Shotover Edge'
1914	Residing 'Shotover Edge', Shotover Hill, which he had built – architect Thomas Rayson ²
1915	Appointed Principal at Manchester College, Oxford
1920	Conveyance, 7 July, between The Rev Henry Gow ³ L P Jacks (Vendor) and Robert Benedict Bourdillon ⁴ (Purchaser) (Unclear what he is selling from Property Register) (Bourdillon, of 'The Oaks'- appears with Oxford Preservation Trust and the sale of a piece of land on Shotover Hill).
1928	Sale of 'Shotover Edge', 1st October, to Jane Peek Ballance (maybe not all the land). Possibly moved to 'Greatstones' in '28 or '29, which he built, (because disliked the view of Cowley industrial development)
1930	Kelly's Directory listed L P Jacks living at 'Greatstones', architect Thomas Rayson, again
1931	Retired from Manchester College
1931	Lease from L P Jacks (of 'Great Stones') to Oxford Preservation Trust 11th November 1931. Lease of a field at Shotover Hill in the county of Oxfordshire 29th September 1931 with option to lessee to determine. (OS 1921 enclosure 57). Yearly rent of £7.10 on the 29th Sept every year. Land was for agricultural purposes "in the best system practised in accordance with the custom of the county and to keep it in good heart and condition".

¹ The District Valuation map 1910 lists plot 93 in Randall's name, including West Hill Farm and 115 acres of land

² Architectural practice still exists in Cave Street, St Clements, Oxford

³ Reverend Henry Gow was principal of Manchester College before L P J was appointed

⁴ Robert Benedict Bourdillon was a WW1 pilot and a gifted medical researcher. He started the mountaineering club at Oxford University and developed the oxygen apparatus that was used in the 1953 British Everest Expedition

1931	Conveyance 29 April between (i) Alexander Alfred Miller (Vendor) (2) Alfred Douglas Miller and other Trustees and (3) The Rev Lawrence Pearsall Jacks (Purchaser). This refers to land opposite 'Greatstones', west side of Kiln Lane, including OJMF.
1932	Letters indicate moving to 'Far Outlook' (third house he built, architect, again, Thomas Rayson)
1935	Conveyance, 27 May. Monks Farm to Kathleen Helena Mary Roberts. Kelly's Dir lists the Jacks as living at 'Greatstones'(?). Olive had a weaving barn and textile business under the name of 'Samarkand'
1936/7	On OS 'Greatstones' marked (and 2 houses opp. entrance to OJMF)
1939	Kelly's Directory lists the Jacks living at 'Far Outlook' Shotover Hill (Golden wedding anniversary party definitely at 'Far Outlook')
1945	Mrs Balassa living at Greatstones. Was she a weaver?
1945	Olive dies
1947	Mr Goble living at 'Greatstones'. Conveyance, 17 April, between L P Jacks (Vendor) and Marion Elizabeth Goble of land north of 'Far Outlook' and land around 'Greatstones' to (i) Marian Elizabeth Goble, (2) Robert John Goble and (3) Edward Andres Goble & Rosa Una Goble
1950	Conveyance, with conditions of land for OJMF
1951	Olive Jacks Memorial Field gifted/opened
1954	Conveyance 26 July, between LP Jacks and Marian Elizabeth Coble of land north of 'Far Outlook'. (No map with Property Register)
1955	L P Jacks dies – 'Far Outlook' sold
1960	OS, OJFM marked as Recreation Ground and land to the south divided into three plots Possibly at the time of building Shotover Edge L P Jacks bought c. 30 acres of land. The land was farmed under his supervision (he registered as a milk-dealer). He also kept bees and pigs. He planted 10,000 trees on the hill slop at 'Greatstones'. Is this Monks Wood? On the 1898-1900 OS 6" map there are far fewer trees than on the 1919 map. 500 apple trees were planted on the grounds of 'Far Outlook'. OS 25" 1919 surveyed, published 1921 does mark an orchard, so planted before 'Far Outlook' built.
	Children: Oliver (1892-1963), Maurice (1894-1964), Stopford B L (1896-1988), Evelyn (1899-1978), Graham V (1901-1977), Hector B (1903-1994)

Appendix 3



From the top left, clockwise: OJMF original gates, (*PictureOxon*); OJFM present gates; water in the remains of the pond in the spinney in winter; the south exit to Shotover, with bench and illustration of water clogging of land; OJMF play space (*other photos authors own*).