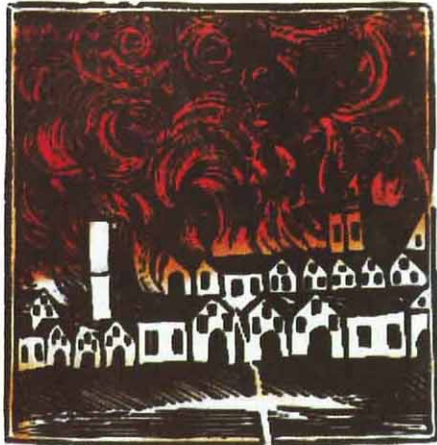


FIRE FILE



One spring day last year, fire swept through part of a much-loved ancient manor house in Oxfordshire. Repairs are well underway. *Andrew Brookes*, of conservation architects Rodney Melville & Partners, reports

GRADE II* listed Wardington Manor, Oxfordshire, was badly damaged by fire on 16 April 2004. Had it not been for the heroic efforts of friends and neighbours, who formed a chain to rescue the house contents, the loss would have been far worse. The fire caused extensive damage to the much-altered medieval wing of the manor, destroying the roof and ceilings, which collapsed into the bedrooms – spreading fire and causing extensive damage to floor structures below. Saturation of the building fabric during fire-fighting quickly led to a virulent outbreak of wet rot that attacked the medieval ceiling beams, joists and ceiling lathes to ground-floor rooms. Panelling in these rooms buckled under the loading from debris on the floors above.

Wardington Manor dates from at least the 16th century. It was remodelled in 1665, with alterations by Clough Williams-Ellis in 1905-14, and from 1917 to the early 1920s by Randall Wells. Lord and Lady Wardington were away on holiday when the fire broke out. However, their daughter, Helen Pease, was at home. Helen was alerted to the fire by the postman, who reported seeing smoke escaping from the wing of the house occupied by the Wardingtons.

Within hours of the fire, insurers and loss adjusters were surveying the damage. Gifford & Partners, structural engineers, were appointed to advise on immediate safety works and to provide a specification for an access scaffold and temporary roof. Conservation architects Rodney Melville & Partners were appointed as lead consultant, with John Austin & Partners providing quantity-surveying services. Completion of the project is anticipated in Spring 2006.

Repair work at Wardington Manor has presented many challenges to the design team. Four applications for listed building consent have been submitted to Cherwell District Council, and meetings held on site with both the local authority and English Heritage to discuss the proposals.



IMAGES: JOHN LAWRENCE



Above and left, Wardington Manor this spring, with the early stages of conservation work underway in the aftermath of the fire that swept through part of the historic Oxfordshire house in April 2004

The manor's origins are obscure, but the fire and salvage works have exposed the structure, providing an opportunity for study. Oxford Archaeology has provided archaeological investigation and recording. Survey drawings have revealed anomalies to suggest the sequence of development. Dendrochronology has also provided an estimate of the age of timbers.

A full report on the Wardington Manor repairs will appear in the next Cornerstone

Sell-off, decay, inferno: how to lose a London mansion

BRITAIN'S urban heritage continues to be prone to unfortunate blazes. One of the most disturbing recent cases of mysterious spontaneous combustion is St Mary's Lodge, a much-loved early Victorian mansion at Stoke Newington, within the north and east London borough of Hackney.

The last of a series of late Georgian and early Victorian mansions in this now heavily urbanised area, St Mary's, built circa 1840, was designed by the prominent architect and surveyor John Young as his family home. The house featured stylistic flourishes used in his other buildings. It was later owned by the Crabb family – Royal Navy diver Lionel "Buster" Crabb gaining fame for his Second World War exploits, then being found headless and handless near a Soviet ship in Portsmouth Harbour in 1957.

After the war, the house was owned by the local council, and from the 1960s was a women's refuge. Hackney Council closed the refuge in the mid-1990s and the building, unsecured, was squatted. Though of local,