

OSNEY DIAMOND OLYMPICS T-SHIRT

Eleanor, Bridge Street

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“Early one grey rainy February morning sitting opposite fellow islander Elizabeth on the 8.06 am, the idea came to me. What better way to celebrate the upcoming double of the Queen’s Golden Jubilee and the London Olympics this summer than to have our own Osney Island Diamond Olympics? We quickly realised that this could be something special, and so the scene was set for staging an ambitious community event that would be fun for spectators and competitors, right across the age ranges. Very quickly volunteers came in droves adding their creativity and sage advice on subjects such as how far one might be able to throw an egg, the best types of sock to make a hobby horse, health and safety considerations for a set-up crew, and where to find a costume fit for a Queen. Regular Monday evening meetings at The Punter created momentum and enthusiasm that carried through until the day itself, with Islanders’ hitherto hidden talents coming to the fore. With sporting, musical, cultural and culinary delights including the now famous teas and cakes.”

Olympics booklet, Annabel Dunstan, September 2012.

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THE CANTERBURY TALES

'The Miller's Tale', Geoffrey Chaucer

Osney is mentioned in *The Miller's Tale*, in which Alison uses the absence of her carpenter husband, working at Osney, to cuckold him with the youth Nicholas:

*Now sire, and eft, sire, so bifel the case
That on a day this hende Nicholas
Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye,
While that hir housebonde was at Oseneye...
And so bifel it on a Saterdag,
This carpenter was goon til Osenay;
And hende Nicholas and Alisoun
Acorded been to this conclusioun,
That Nicholas shal shapen hym a wyle
This sely jealous housbonde to bigyle;*

VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN GLASS BOTTLES

Alan, North Street

Nos. 2-4 North Street were built in 1901. The two bottles on display were found in the garden (the smaller) and under the kitchen floor (the larger) while an extension was being built at no.2. They may be contemporary with the house or slightly later. Two one penny pieces dated 1901 have also been found in the house and garden.

The smaller bottle is marked on the front: BEDFORD & Co. [Their trademark with the wording 'TRADE MARK REGISTERED' and the device of the letters A, C, and P intertwined] OXFORD

Bedford & Co. were merchants and bottlers of local soda/mineral water and seltzers. The internet only knows of them from rare examples of their bottles. Sykes Macvay & Co. are much better known with many examples. They seem to have specialised in soft drinks bottles. Lamonts Patent was an aerated (mineral) water bottle invented by John Lamont of Glasgow, Scotland. He first designed the closure mechanism in 1874 and formally patented the bottle design in 1876.

The larger bottle is marked on the front: JONES BROTHERS, REGISTERED, [Their device which shows a rowing eight], TRADE MARK, OXFORD & READING.

Jones Brothers of Oxford and Reading were historical Victorian and Edwardian makers of ginger beer, mineral water, and aerated beverages. Redfearn Brothers was a major historical glass bottle manufacturer founded in Barnsley, Yorkshire, in 1862. They were famous for their Codd-neck bottles which used an internal glass marble and gas pressure to seal carbonation – this larger bottle is probably an example of one.

TYPEWRITER

Simon, Bridge Street

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This typewriter was found in a skip after clearing out a house in West Street.

JILL HOOPER

‘The Mahogany Pod’

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The Mahogany Pod, a memoir by Jill Hopper published by Saraband in 2021, is set on Osney Island.

“When Jill first met Arif, they were living in a shared house on the island of Osney in the River Thames. Surrounded by willow trees, birds and reflections, it was an idyllic home. But no sooner had they begun to fall in love than Arif was given the news that he only had a few months to live. Everyone told Jill to walk away, but she was already in too deep.

Years later, Jill rediscovers Arif’s parting gift – an African seedpod – and finally sets out to trace the elusive patterns that shaped their relationship.”

Inside leaf of dust cover, *The Mahogany Pod*.

NEOLITHIC FLINTS

Simon, Bridge Street

A collection of worked flints found in Simon's garden.

JOHN WAIN

'Where the Rivers Meet'

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The twentieth-century poet and novelist John Wain lived in Wolvercote and used to drink in The Waterman's Arms (now The Punter). The parents of the central character of Wain's Oxford trilogy *Where the Rivers Meet* keep a pub on Osney Island called The Bargeman's Arms. The novels describe social change in the city between the 1920s and 1950s.

STONE WEIGHTS

Simon, Bridge Street

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These stone weights were found on the banks of the river Thames. The larger of the two – possibly an anchor – was found opposite Medley Boatyard in the sandy beach. The smaller one was found washing out of the river bank opposite Godstow Nunnery. They are impossible to date but the Ashmolean has some similar ones described and medieval fishing weights.

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Lewis Carroll

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The story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* had its origins on 4 July 1862. It was on that day that the Christ Church don Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and his friend Robinson Duckworth rowed the daughters of Dean Henry Liddell - Ina, Alice, and Edith - past Osney on their way to and from a picnic at Godstow. Carroll began the story en route, and an aspect of the reality of the occasion is no doubt reflected in the opening line of *Wonderland*: 'Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do.'

This was the seventh of eight summers in which Carroll treated the three sisters to boat trips on the Thames. Usually they went downstream to Nuneham, but this one passing by Osney was by far the most important.

A comprehensive assessment of these river trips and the general importance of the Thames in the creation of the two *Alice* books can be found in *Alice in Waterland* by Mark Davies.

Sarah, our OIRA chair, is also a distant relative of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.

PABLO HONEY, RADIOHEAD

Sarah, Bridge Street

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This record is the first album that Radiohead released on the 22nd February 1993. It is included in this display to commemorate the band's gig in the Hollybush on the 22nd of July 1991 when they were called 'On a Friday'. The band members Tom Yorke (vocals), Jonny Greenwood (lead guitar, keyboards), Colin Greenwood (bass), Ed O'Brien (guitar and backing vocals) and Phil Selway (drums) all met as teenagers when they were at Abingdon School. Their original name 'On a Friday' was chosen because this was the only day they could rehearse in the school's music rooms.

They adopted the name Radiohead in December 1991 when they signed a six-album deal with EMI. The new name was taken from the Talking Heads song 'Radio Head' on the 1986 album *True Stories* and marked their transition from a local band to the most critically acclaimed bands to come out of Oxford. Journalists highlight Oxford's academic intensity and introspective culture, suggesting it shaped the band's lyrical themes: alienation, intelligence, emotional restraint, and a sense of being slightly out of step with mainstream youth culture.

PAINTING

Simon, Bridge Street

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This painting by Simon Pressey used to hang in Waterman's Arms, now The Punter.

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS

Pauline, Bridge Street

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“My great grandfather came to Jericho in the 1880s, escaping the agricultural depression in Shropshire. My grandfather, Harold Watkin Perks, was brought up in Canal Street. He worked as a miner in Gloucestershire during the first world war. I believe there was a colliery office in Park End Street. My grandmother, Kate Louisa Perks, born in Headington Quarry, was alarmed at so many deaths and injuries down the mine and, fearful for her growing family, insisted they return to Oxford.

They rented 21 Bridge Street in 1916. My grandfather worked on the GWR, as did many Osney neighbours. He helped to repair steam engines. Stones would be thrown at his bedroom window at night if there was an emergency call out.

The island flooded regularly in winter. Residents in South Street were given a bag of coal to dry their houses. I often had to 'walk the plank' over floodwater to get to school. Duckboards were fun. You were never sure whether you might fall in! My mother, another Kate Louisa, used to speak of 47, when floodwaters came up to the centre of Bridge Street.

The old power station was still functioning when I was a child. Its great black presence and the cranking and hauling of the coal shovels was somewhat alarming to a child. My mother would regularly complain of black smuts on her clean sheets.

I left 21 when I was 18. Wherever I lived, I sought out rivers. I love this watery place. Growing up in a tight knit working-class community was special. When I eventually returned to the island, change was already afoot. Gentrification had begun.”

MILK BOTTLES

Quentin, West Street

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"The milk bottles come from the Thames tributary behind West Street. When the river settles down - usually in the Spring - after a period of strong currents, interesting things are uncovered on the shifting riverbed. One of these bottles was found 5 years ago, and the other two last year. We have also found old milk bottle carriers (completely rusted) a milk churn (without a bottom) and fragments of old porcelain Oxford Marmalade pots. None of this is surprising - as stated in the Osney Island newsletter of July-August 2015: "In the single extension to 45 West Street, George Venables and George Hudson ran their small dairy business". This was apparently active in the 1930s and 40s, and, as with many other objects, these bottles ended up in the river as part of a Fugitive archive."

OBJECTS FOUND HIDDEN IN A WEST STREET HOUSE

Simon, Bridge Street

1850 map of London found behind panelling.

An early copy of The News of the World.

1863 supplement to the Oxford Chronicle giving railway times and mail deliveries, obviously from the days before radio, so an important source of information. The First rail link London to Didcot was in 1844, before Osney was built in 1851.

Found with them was an 1860 leather bound diary, well used, some pages torn out, with faint scribbled pencil notes - looking like prices possibly?

A knife in a home-made leatherette scabbard, with a lanyard and float attached, well used - by a railway worker? Or someone on the canal?

NO TIME & THE MORTAL MAN

Kieron, Bridge Street

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Poet Kieron Winn has lived on Bridge Street for 33 years. He is a teacher, and a poet whose work has appeared in e.g. *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Spectator*, *The New Statesman*, in various anthologies and on the BBC.

“View from the Bedroom Window is about the view of Osney Island from the house on Bridge Street where I’ve lived with Amanda Holton since 1993. I’ve always loved the way the houses are half hidden by the trees. The last stanza considers evidence of previous inhabitants, including shards of crockery dropped, perhaps, by Victorian predecessors whose names are in the census: Mary Richardson, a laundress, or Frank Belcher, a telegraph linesman with GWR.

In the Garden is a sonnet about a summer evening in our garden, where in the end the speaker feels as happy as a boy on the beach. We don’t yet have the fountain.

View from the Bedroom Window appears in *No Time* (Howtown Press, 2025); *In the Garden* appears in *The Mortal Man* (Howtown Press 2015). They are available for £13.50 each from kieronwinn.com or in person at 32 Bridge Street (or leave a note).”

THE BEANO

In memory of Ray Brown, 1954-2016

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Ray Brown ran the Waterman's Arms – now the Punter – in South Street from 1995 to 2003. A former gas engineer before he became a publican, he was also a keen snooker player and angler, as well as a fan of Beano comics. Under the management of Mr Brown and his wife Jennifer, the Waterman's became known for its pies, which received glowing reviews from food critics in the local press.

INKPOT
Elizabeth, North Street

This salt glazed ink pot was found in Elizabeth's garden.