

The Old Barn, Whitchurch

On the western side of Whitchurch High Street, the comfortable properties named **Old Barn Cottages** mark the spot where a magnificent ancient barn stood for many centuries, before being demolished in the 1960s.

Fortunately, the appearance of the building was well captured in 1863 by the artist George Price Boyce (1826-97). The photograph below shows his watercolour painting of the barn, on display in 2022 in an exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite Art at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



A sales brochure of 1955, prepared for Mrs Lilian Howard of the Coombe Park Estate, described “A fine old barn reputed to be one of the oldest in Oxfordshire. It is on brick foundations, timber framed with massive oak supporting beams and pillars under a mellow tiled roof, and the overall measurement is about 100ft by 25ft.”

It seems that, following the sale, no one rose to the challenge of converting the barn to a modern purpose and one day in the early 1960s it was damaged by fire. Afterwards, the owner at the time seems to have convinced the authorities that the surviving timber structure was affected by death watch beetle and they agreed that the structure could be demolished. A photograph from that time (below) shows that much of the timberwork was still standing, despite the fire.

Frances Dixon, who lives in one of the cottages today and has checked the paperwork, says that planning permission was granted in 1965 for four cottages on the site and that these were on sale in 1967.

There is more on the barn, including local suspicions about its demise, on pages 120-125 of *Relics & Monuments* by Peter Hawley, 2017, obtainable from the Whitchurch History Society (contact details [here](#)).



The barn after the fire

Colour photo and text by Richard Wingfield, January 2023