

A portrait of


# **BROOKSIDE**

**Writings from Brooksidiers**

Edited and with a history of the road

by

Pauline Hodson and Vanessa Kenyon



## Thanks

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And to Stephanie Jenkins, for her help and permission to use some of the images in the book. Her website, [www.headington.org.uk](http://www.headington.org.uk), has been compiled over many years and is a great resource for anyone wanting to find out more about Headington

We acknowledge permission to reproduce the following illustrations:

Stephanie Jenkins for the photograph of Napier House

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Westoning

## Did you know that...

Once upon a time Dana, 1970 Eurovision song contest winner, rented The Pines

There used to be a walk through from Brookside to Bickerton Road

The Miss Schieles' house was built by their family in the 1920s and remains unaltered apart from the solar panels

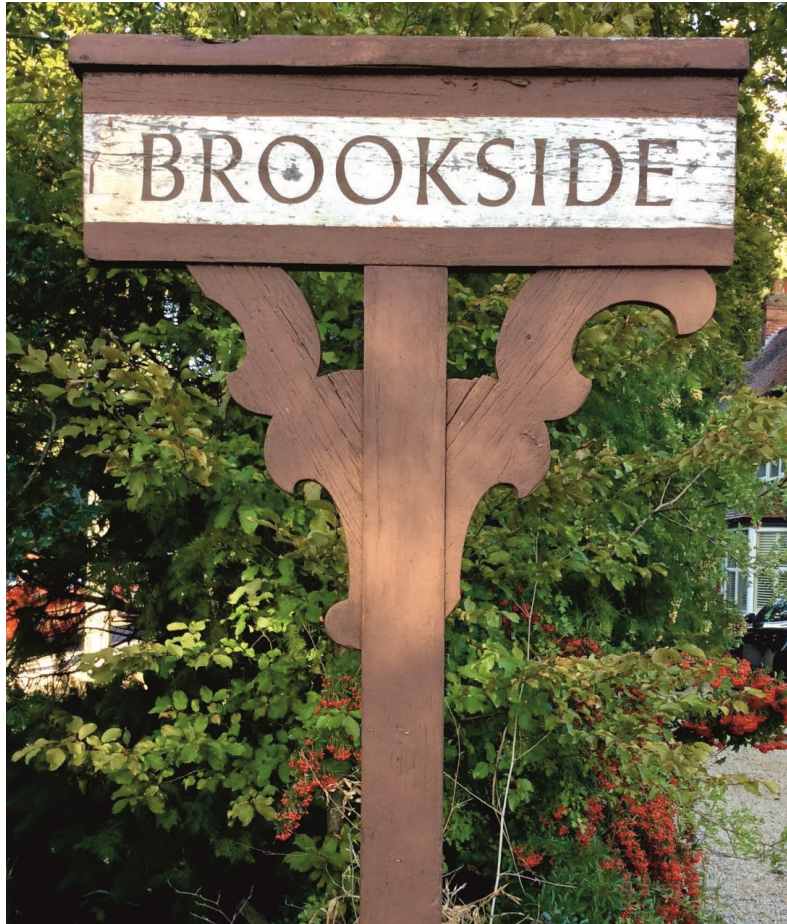
The brook, from which the street takes its name, was at one time a parliamentary and city boundary. It was not fully culverted until 1975

A lot of notable people have lived in the street at one time or another. We counted up twelve Wikipedia entries. There may be more

No 13 is called Windfall Cottage. Some of us assumed for years that this referred to windfall fruit. No, it seems it has always referred to the original owner, who came into some money

In the 1890s Brookside House had a fruit orchard and extensive glasshouses and was noted for its fuchsia arcade







## INTRODUCTION

### In praise of Brookside

Our cul de sac is easy to miss, just a small turning at the traffic lights off the busy London Road, but a quirky hand-made sign lets you know you are in Brookside.

There is a new house on the right as you enter the road, with a five-barred gate and next to that a long strip of land which has been adopted by our residents. Contributions to what is fondly known as “the Brookside Hedge Fund” have enabled this small wild area to be planted up with trees, shrubs and lots of bulbs. Many birds now call it home and as you move further into Brookside, you notice that the traffic noise has been replaced by bird song.

It is easy to imagine how appealing this quiet winding road would have been to the residents who first chose to build a house here. The London Road was much quieter then and choosing to build at the top of the hill in Headington would have fulfilled the desire for fresh air and healthiness that prevailed in the 1920s.

The thirteen original houses are all different, apart from four which are of the same design. They were all built between 1925 and 1928 and had very large gardens by today’s standards. The houses on the left hand side of the road as you enter Brookside have a high Victorian wall bordering the gardens to their rear. In some cases, the houses were built on a double plot and gradually seven new houses have taken ownership of them. The earliest was built in the 1960s and the latest just two years ago. It is fair to say that there are no more building plots left in Brookside.

Of course, the houses have been altered to accommodate new ways of living over the years, but some look from the outside as they would have done all those years ago. Many still have the large Crittall windows, so popular in the 1920s, the glass in them faintly wavy, and curiously a few of the houses had very modest front doors tucked away at the side or back of the house.

It was during the dreary days of the Covid pandemic in 2020 that a small group of us were having a sociable, socially distanced get-together. We thought it might cheer things up if we tried to collect as much information as we could about the history of our houses and the people who had lived in them. It has proved to be a fascinating exercise and an excellent distraction from the relentless news about Covid. Almost all the residents of Brookside, and some who no longer live here, have contributed to the project, foraging in their attics for clues about the origins of their houses and triumphantly producing documents to prove or disprove our understanding of the facts. We realised as we gathered more and more information about the history of Brookside that we are custodians of the houses for a

relatively short time and that it is the houses themselves that hold the continuity for the street. It is the houses that are the star of the show.

We are proud that many of the residents have been very distinguished. To date there are 12 entries in Wikipedia. People are loyal to Brookside; many of the houses at the moment have been lived in by the same residents for 30 years or more. We are also sociable, meeting regularly for Bonfire night and Carols at Christmas and enthusiastically putting on street parties for national events. On the Queen's diamond jubilee in June 2012 some 40 people gathered on a wet afternoon for a meal in the garden of no 15, and on one memorable November evening, a firework display was organised in the road. Imagine the party we will have to celebrate the end of Covid.

Realising that this little book is not an historical document has freed us up to include some wonderful information and stories, even if they can't always be verified.

Nevertheless much work has gone into researching the land that Brookside was built on, the brook from which it got its name and the people who have inhabited the houses. We have drawn heavily on Stephanie Jenkins' marvellous website about Headington.

However, it is the current – and some past – owners of the houses who have unlocked the history and contributed so generously to the project.

Thank you, Brookside.

Queen's diamond  
jubilee party,  
2012



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF BROOKSIDE

Unlike many other areas of Oxford, for example Old Headington, there is little early documentary evidence about the area that became known much later as New Headington.

Indeed, there is little to be said about this area of Headington prior to the very early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Victoria County History says:

*The modern suburb of New Headington had its origin in the rectangle made by London Road, Windmill Road, Old Road, and Gipsy Lane, although it has now outgrown these boundaries. Apart from the Britannia Inn, on the corner of Lime Walk, which is mentioned in 1828 and appears to be on the site of an older building marked as the "White House" ...there was little or no building in this area before 1860, and expansion was not rapid until the present [i.e. 20<sup>th</sup>] century.*

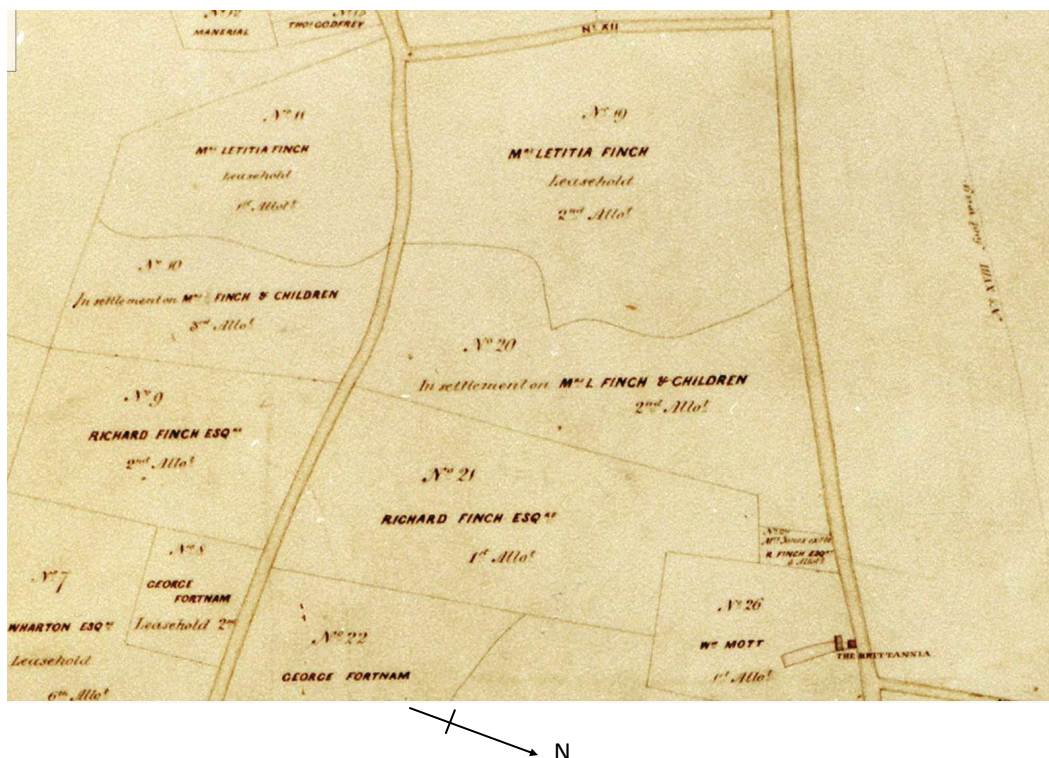
The area of land now known as New Headington was well off the beaten track until the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before 1789 coaches leaving Oxford for London had to turn right halfway up Headington Hill onto Cheney Lane which led to Old Road and thence to Shotover and Wheatley. It was not until 1789 that coaches were able to travel on the new road to London, which followed the route of the present A40, and in the next hundred years the population of New Headington started to grow, especially after the auctioning of land for building which began in earnest in 1851.

The documentary evidence we have for the plot of land that became Brookside starts with a map of 1802. It was in this year that a map was drawn up to effect the enclosure of land in Headington. Between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many areas of Oxford were enclosed, that is, areas of land which were previously common fields or waste ground were awarded by Commissioners to new owners.

Headington became the subject of this process in 1802. The Headington enclosure act of 1801 allowed

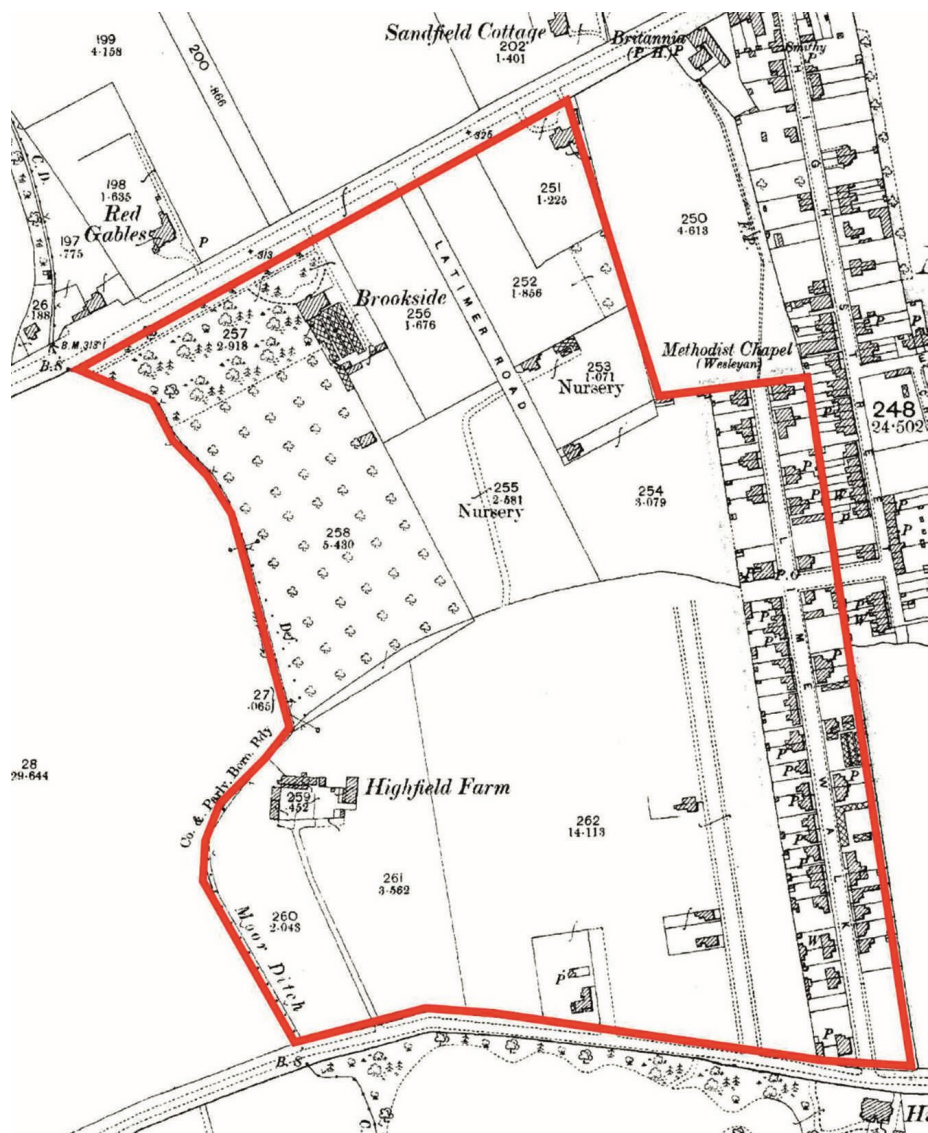
*for the dividing, allotting and laying in severally the open and common fields, common pastures, common meadows, commons and waste grounds within the parish of Headington in the county of Oxford*

and under this act the Finch family were awarded most of the land of the Highfield estate which included Highfield Farm (the farmhouse itself still stands and is off Highfield Avenue). The land was parcelled out in plots. Plot 20, which comprised 20 acres and included what is now Brookside, was awarded to Mrs Letitia Finch and her children.



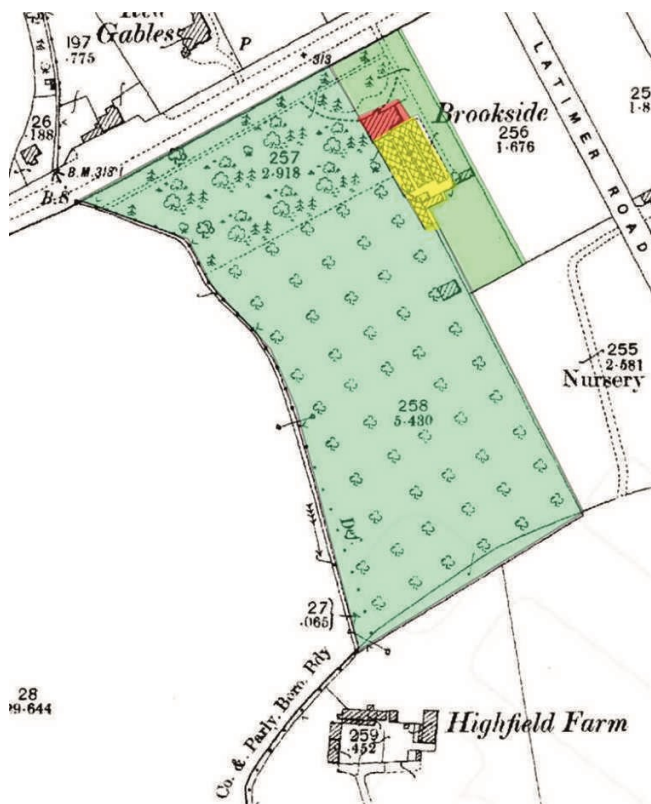
Detail from the 1802 enclosure map showing plot 20 which later became Brookside

The topmost boundary of plot 20 in this enclosure map follows the boundary brook which was an important marker. In 1889 the brook became a city and parish boundary, separating Oxford from Headington. This lasted until 1929 when the Oxford boundary moved outwards to include the whole of Headington.



Ordnance Survey map of the Highfield Farm estate 1899

From 1875 onwards parcels of land in the Highfield Farm estate were offered for sale in lots, and in 1884 Thomas Arnall, Head Postmaster at Oxford, bought eight acres of land which subsequently became Brookside Nurseries (his purchase is shown in green on the following map).



Map of Brookside house and nursery gardens in 1899 (detail from previous image), showing Brookside nurseries (in green), Brookside House (red) and glass-houses (yellow)

Arnall moved to Headington from Bradmore Road, where, according to *Jackson's Oxford Journal* he had created a very attractive garden,

*but being somewhat disposed to indigestion he, for exercise sake, decided to live at Headington Hill, where in 1884 he purchased a squarish block of land of some 8 acres extent, devoting fully six and a half acres to fruit trees which he cultivated assiduously on scientific principles.*

Arnall's apples and pears won prizes in local shows throughout the 1890s, with his pears getting a special mention for their unusual size and weight; fruit from an old English variety, Uvedale's St Germain, remarkably weighed in at two pounds each.

APPLES AT OXFORD.—Under the above heading the *Gardeners' Magazine* of December 15 contains the following :—"Some of the largest and handsomest apples exhibited at the Oxford Chrysanthemum and Fruit Show were grown by Mr. Thos. Arnall, at his villa garden, Brookside, Headington Hill. Mr. Arnall is head post-master at Oxford, and within the past three years has built a bijou mansion, and converted an eight-acre plot of arable land into a very paradise of horticulture. His two and three-year-old trees have borne grandly. The soil is a sandy loam on yellow clay, resting on limestone coral rag. The following lines are posted up in one of the long glass houses, and admirably describe the place :—

Close to the gates a spacious garden lies,  
From storms defended and inclement skies,  
Eight acres is the allotted space of ground,  
Fenc'd with a green enclosure all around.  
Tall thriving trees confess the fruitful mould ;  
The ripening apples ripen into gold.

Extract from Jackson's Oxford Journal, 22 December 1888

Even more remarkable than his pears were Arnall's glasshouses, built at the rear of the house (see map above). We estimate that these were about 111 feet long and 75 feet wide. His fuchsia arcade was especially celebrated.

The *Gardeners' Magazine*, 1899, praises the arcade extravagantly:

*The longest span-roof house (of which an illustration is given) is one hundred feet by thirteen feet, and is rendered most attractive by the continuous lines of fuchsias which are trained to the rafters, the clusters of depending flowers forming an arcade of surpassing beauty. The fuchsias are grown singly or in pots, allowed to attain a fair height, then placed on the far sides of the stages and, as they grow, are kept in place by a neat tie of bast. They are judiciously pruned on the spur system, fed with liquid manure, the blooms being produced freely, of large size, often developing a tendency to duplicate of the sepals, six and sometimes seven, divisions are produced. The method of training fuchsias in this way may not be new, but it is a charming way of partly clothing the woodwork, and appears to commend itself to the bulk of visitors to the gardens.*

This article also describes the glasshouses:

*All through the year these structures are bright with colour, produced by masses of lilies, fibrous and tuberous begonias, zonal pelargoniums (a speciality here), streptocarpus, azaleas, fuchsias etc. These houses terminate and open out into a lofty conservatory and corridor to a higher level, where standard and fan-shaped peaches luxuriate amid overhead grapes and specimen stove or greenhouse plants in variety.*



Fuchsias trained to the rafters

Arnall also drew his own plans and superintended the erection of his villa called Brookside in 1886. In the census of 1891, Arnall was recorded as living there alone apart from a servant. From about 1900 he suffered from serious heart trouble, and died in May 1908.

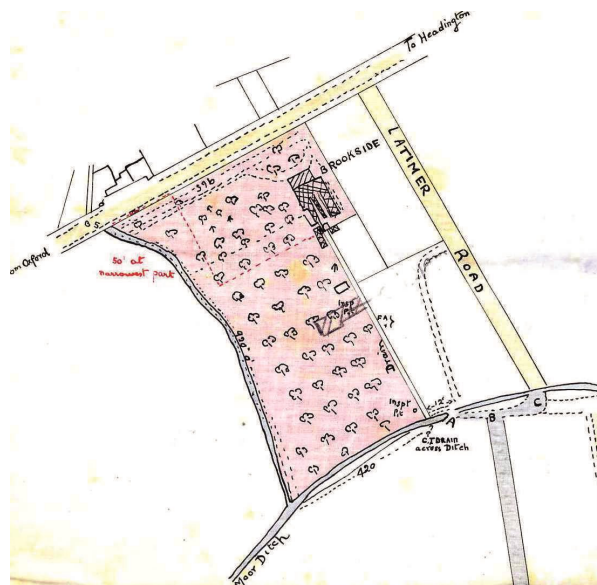
Though the glasshouses are no more, Arnall's house still stands. Headington School moved in in 1916 and have been there ever since. Renamed Napier House, the building now houses the junior school. Sometime between 1921 and 1939 the glasshouses were pulled down and school buildings erected on their footprint.



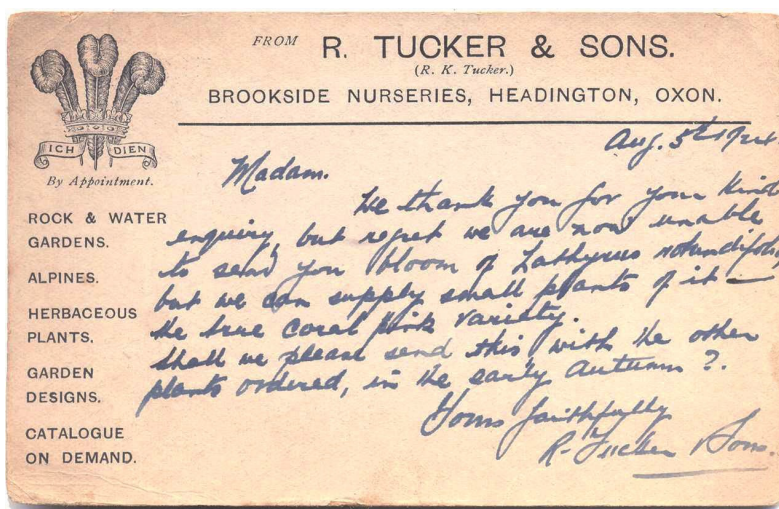
Napier House, formerly Brookside (photo taken in 2008)

On 25 March 1909 Arnall's executors sold to a Mrs Maria Clarinda Edwards both Brookside house and the plot of land which later became Brookside, apparently less a third of an acre, as shown on the plan below. The price paid was £3,000 and the documents mention glasshouses. The total plot amounted to 8 acres, 1 rood and 32 poles.

Robert Kent Tucker, who was probably Mrs Edwards' son in law and a nursery seedsman, lived in the house with his family from 1911 to 1916, and cultivated the land adjacent to the house that became the Brookside estate.



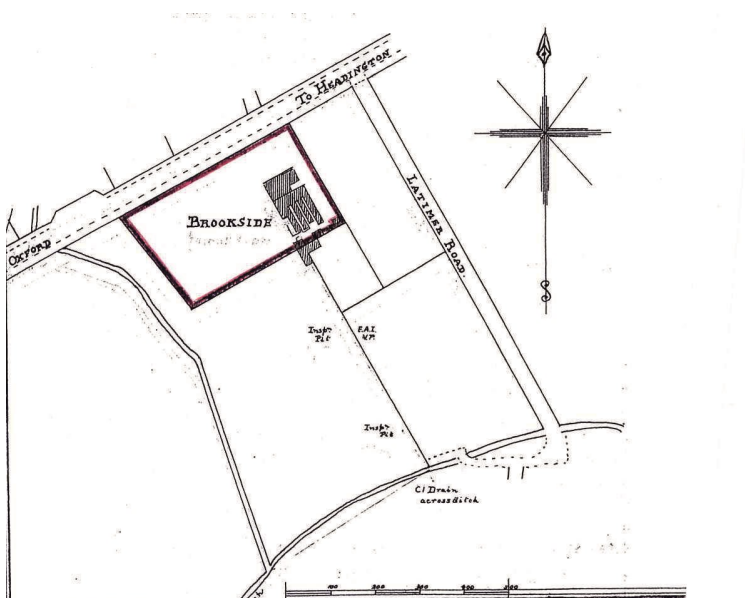
Plan of land conveyed in 1909



Mr Tucker's reply to a customer, 1924. By this time Brookside Nurseries had moved across the London Road.

In 1916 Headington School moved into Brookside house from White Lodge in Old Headington, and in 1921 Mrs Edwards sold Brookside house and some land surrounding it to Headington School. The price was £3,700 and the land amounted to 2 acres, 1 rood and 38 poles.

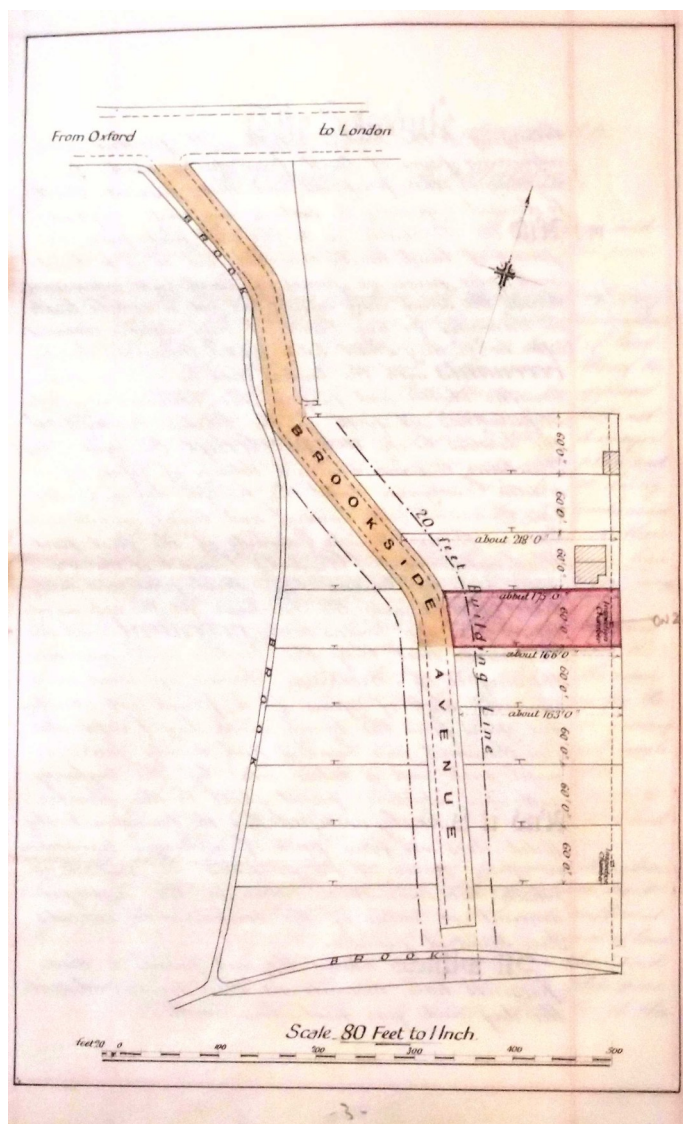
On 12 November 1921 Mrs Edwards sold to developers Messrs Benfield, Walker and Fletcher the remainder of her land comprising 5 acres, 3 roods and 34 poles. The price paid was £1,100.



Plan of house and land sold by Mrs Edwards to Headington School, 1921

One of these three developers was William Charles Walker, who moved to Oxford in about 1903 to work for the building firm Benfield and Loxley. In 1925 he was living in style in a large house, 46 Hill Top Road, which he had built for himself and his family. He served as mayor of Oxford from 1952–3.

By 1925 the land the developers had bought was divided into building plots which were offered for sale. The land was described as the Brookside Estate and the roadway as Brookside Avenue. This plan, which is part of a conveyancing document dated 1926, shows what was for sale.



1926 plan of the  
Brookside Estate

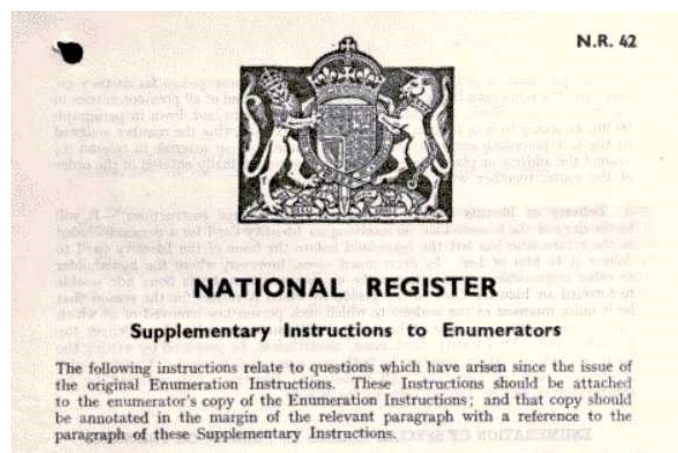
The plots sold quickly, and by 1928 thirteen houses had already been built.



This aerial photo of 1928 shows the 13 houses already built in Brookside Avenue  
(Valentia Road is in the foreground)

The 1931 English census was unfortunately destroyed by fire, and no census was taken in 1941, but a Register was compiled in 1939 at the outbreak of the second world war. The website *findmypast* provides the following names of Brookside residents. (The information is not entirely consistent with what we have discovered in our own searches.)

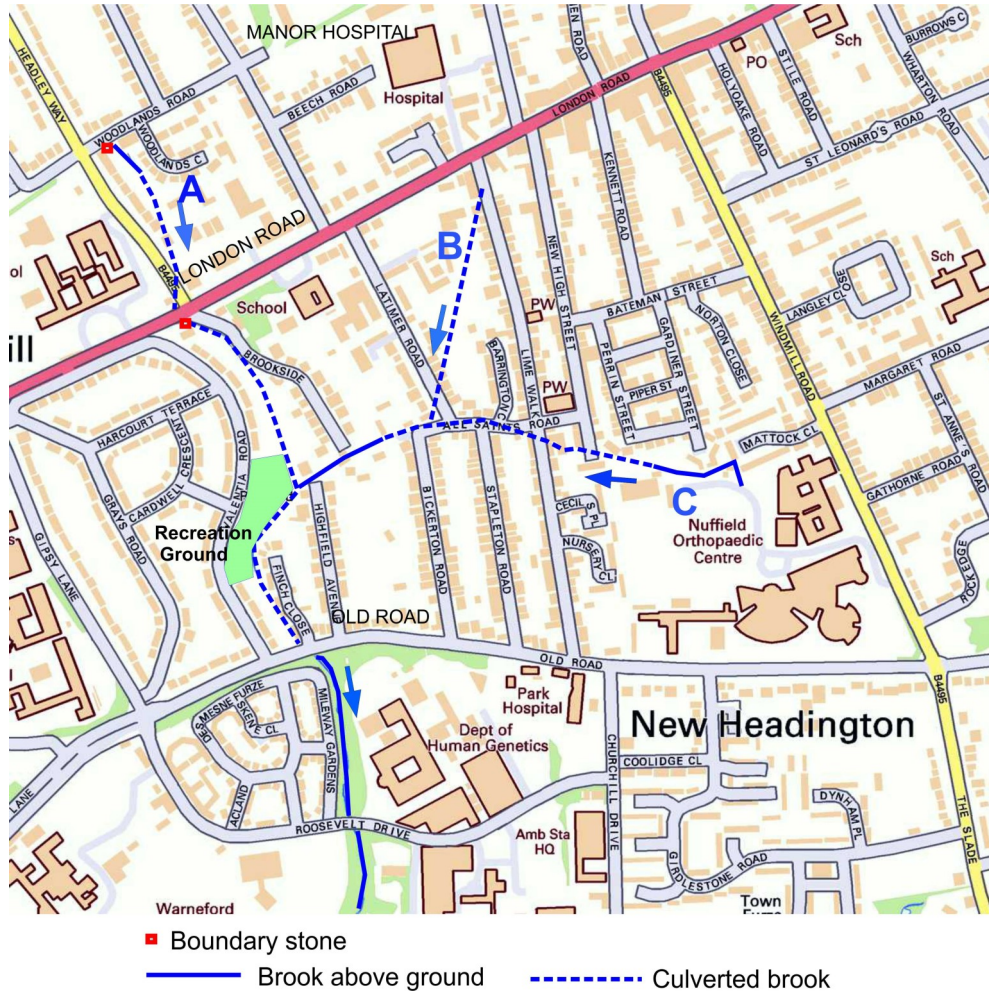
- 2 Kathleen M Chapman and Elsie U Chapman +2
- 3 Percy E Matheson and Ivy C Joslin +2
- 4 Albert U Franklin & Louisa Franklin +3
- 5 Cyril J Wrist & Sybil M Trezise (Wrist)
- 5A Eliza F Brown & Edith M Clarke
- 6 Herbert G Williamson & Florence E Williamson
- 7 Sarah Nelson & Jean M Nelson +2
- 8 Albata Higgins & Florence U Higgins +3
- 10 Evan E Mearig-Doris & Annie P Bramley +2
- 11 Edward A Franic & Annie H Franic +2
- 12 Alexander L Baines & Adelaine Ellis Baines
- 13 John Kyffin & Dorothy Kyffin
- 14 Sir Rudolf A Peters & Frances W Peters +3
- 15 William C Burnet & Harriet Burnet +2 and Herta Ilse Faerber



Brookside remained a street of just 13 houses until Yvonne and Paul Reeves built a house in 1960. Originally the entrance to their new home was on Bickerton Road, but a deal was done to change their entrance from Bickerton Road to Brookside to accommodate the building of two new houses, thus number 17 became the full stop at the end of our cul de sac.

In 1961–2, a bungalow designed by Thomas Rayson was built at the other end of Brookside, and numbered 1. It was built on a plot nearly the whole of which had been acquired as building land over 30 years previously. The Pines was built by a Mr Wiggins who lived at 2 London Road. He purchased a small extra piece of land from Headington School to enable him to build a new house. Two new houses were built on what had previously been double plots occupied by house numbers 7 and 4. A new house at the end of Brookside was built on a small part of the garden of number 14, and most recently of all Togor House was built at the London Road end of the street. Many nearby areas of Oxford have a rapid turnover of households, but we Brooksidiers are loyal residents, many of us have been here for over 30 years. One resident was born in the house he now occupies, and one couple has lived in the same house for nearly 70 years. Even those who have left Brookside during the past decade or two have enthusiastically contributed to our project.

## BOUNDARY BROOK



Course of Boundary Brook and its tributaries

Brookside runs, of course, by the side of a brook, now mostly culverted underground in Headington. The brook, once known as Moor Ditch but now called Boundary Brook, starts as one of several streams linked to the street surface water drains under most Headington streets. Boundary Brook (marked A on the map above) is fed by two other streams; one (stream B) comes from near the Manor Hospital (under the old Oxford United football grounds) and the other (stream C) comes from an easterly direction and can be seen near the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre. All three streams are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1830. Stream B starts at the Britannia Inn and joins stream C in the region of the



The 1830 OS map shows three brooks top centre

present Latimer Rd. By 1878 only the northern half of B is shown, the rest presumably culverted, and none shows above ground by 1898.

Boundary Brook, as its name implies, used to be an important parliamentary and later, city boundary. In 1868 the parliamentary boundary moved to Boundary Brook and in 1889 the city boundary followed suit when Oxford became a County Borough. The boundary followed Cuckoo Lane, then turned south following the whole length of Boundary Brook all the way across Cowley Marsh to the Thames. In 1929 the city boundary moved out to take in Headington, Cowley, Iffley and New Marston but the brook still bears the name 'Boundary Brook'.

Two stones were set up to mark the new parliamentary boundary. One still stands where the boundary joins the brook at Woodlands Road; the second can be seen at the entrance to Brookside. They mark the Mayor and Sheriff beating the bounds in 1892. The Brookside one is badly eroded, but the inscription seems identical to that at Woodlands Road.

The gardens of the houses in Brookside are separated from those of Valentia Road by the brook. That brook, once an 8-foot-wide, 3-foot-deep channel, is now completely culverted from near Woodlands Road until it re-emerges south of Old Road. The culverting along Brookside and beside the Valentia Road recreation ground was carried out in 1974–5, and the



Brookside boundary stone inscription:

1892  
F W Ansell  
Mayor  
W S Carter  
Sheriff

process was a source of irritation to at least one Brookside resident (see Keith Waters' entry). In 1992 Queenie Hamilton, councillor for Cherwell Ward (and later Lord Mayor) wrote that in 1974:

*The brook was culverted on my instructions years ago after a small dog drowned and tenants in Valentia road feared for the safety of their children.*

The brook can now be seen via two manholes in the garden of number 2. It flows vigorously and cleanly.

Streams B and C together flow unculverted through three gardens at the end of Brookside (numbers 15, 16 and 14). In 2007 Brookside residents were particularly informed of the precise course of this stream by frequent meetings with Thames Water and The Environment Agency, following about a hundred raw-sewage spills. It took two years to trace the spills back to the new Manor Hospital built between 2007 and 2009. The stinking sewage, containing very unpleasant detritus, was coming from the large holding and treatment tank constructed for the hospital under the old football ground on the north side of the London Road. Eventually the faulty connections were found and the pollution stopped.



Flooding between numbers 14 and 15, July 2006

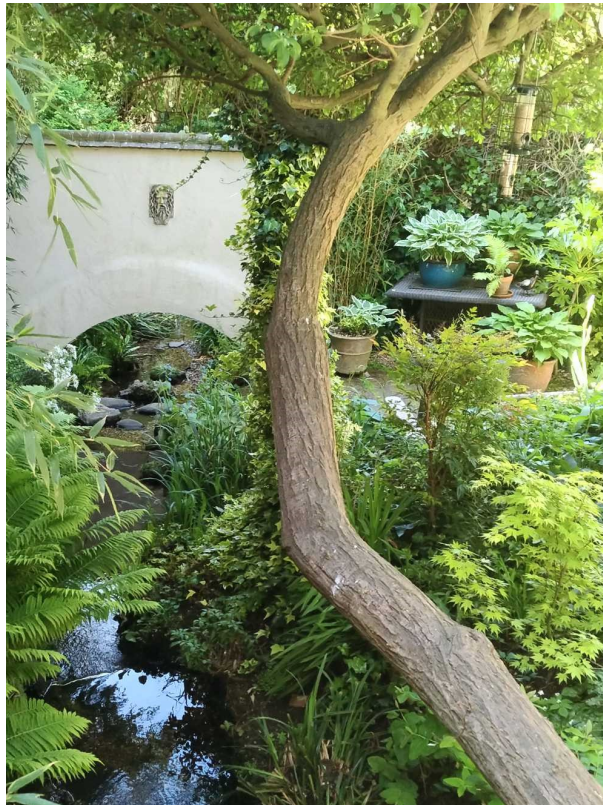
Brookside also suffered from overflowing surface rainwater, which in heavy rainstorms surged down the London Road, turned left into Brookside, and flooded the entire street to a depth of about two feet. So much so that in the 1990s several times the residents in number 15 could not cross the street to number 14, even when wearing wellington boots. On one occasion a visitor's car parked outside number 14 was flooded up to the seats; fortunately, it was started and able to drive to higher ground. The problem was solved in 2010 by new, large dimen-

sion surface water pipes running under the London Road.

Housing development after 1920 blocked many of the streams' outlets. The architect who designed the house between the Valentia Road recreation ground and the rear of number 14 erected a low brick wall across number 14's garden, stopping natural drainage to the west and swamping the soil. The stream was inadequately culverted 3ft under the garden of the newly built house, through a Thames Water grill that invariably blocked at the slightest rainfall. Lobbying from 1978 until 1990 eventually persuaded Thames Water to lift the grill 6 inches – and it has never blocked since. Thus, the Nile-like floods in Brookside have been cured.

Fortunately, the 1920s architects and engineers who designed the original Brookside houses knew about ground water – and built the houses high above the stream levels. Brookside homes are high and dry. Very occasionally, the gardens of numbers 14 & 15 are flooded about 2 inches. They are both very green gardens with flourishing trees.

Impede their flow at your peril. Water and Boundary Brook will not be stopped.



Gardens flourish

## BROOKSIDE COMMUNITY HEDGE

The hedge in  
2020

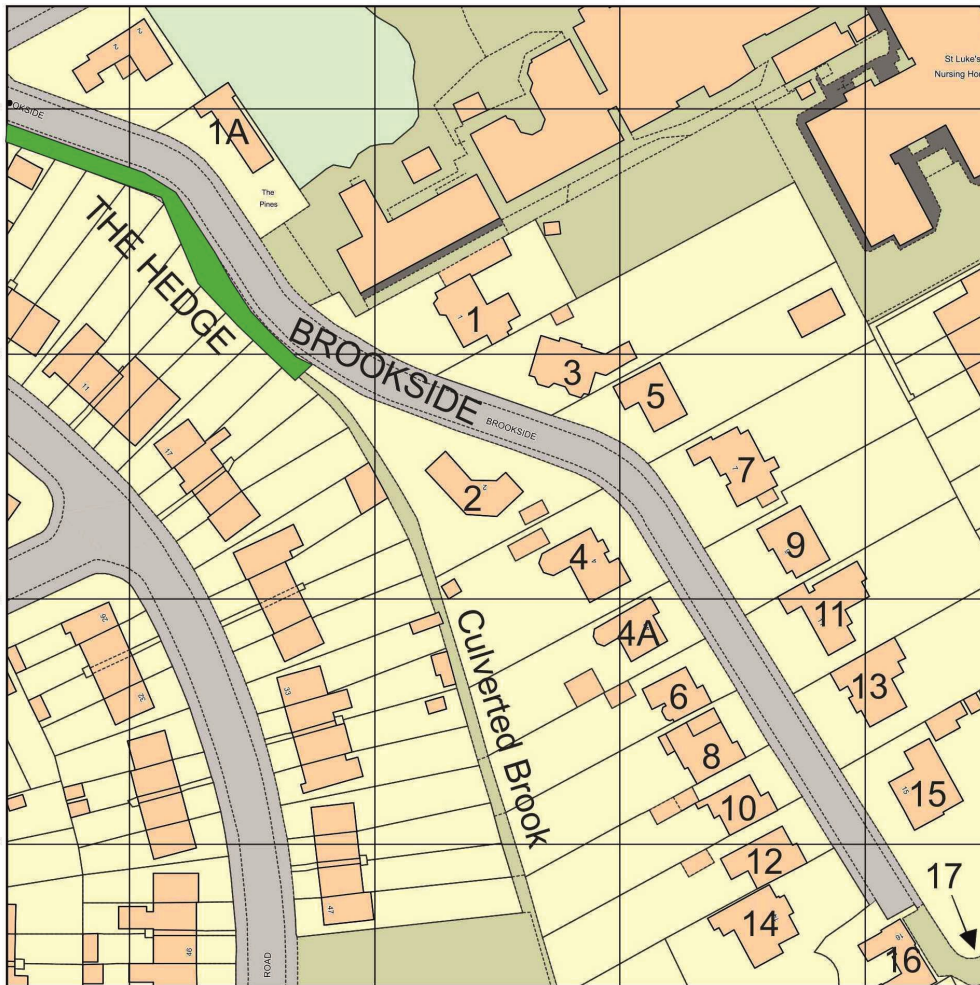


The narrow rectangle of road, which runs 50 metres from the London Road end of Brookside on the west side, following the line of Boundary Brook, is known as the Brookside hedge and has been adopted and replanted with money raised by the residents, fondly referred to as the Brookside Hedge Fund.

About twice a year a few hardy Brooksidiers don their wellington boots and, armed with forks and spades, set about clearing the undergrowth, planting bulbs and any excess shrubbery saved from our gardens. The job entails much to-ing and fro-ing to the recycling centre, but it is enormously rewarding work and great fun, as we imagine ourselves to be country folk tilling the land. It is hard to believe that we are just about 50 metres from the London Road.

The modern Ordnance Survey map on the following page shows the culverted brook that borders the rear gardens of Valentia Road and Brookside houses. The Brookside hedge is added in green.

Where a watercourse forms a boundary, each riparian owner has title to the land up to the mid-point. After the brook was culverted it was not possible to see exactly where that mid-point lies, which has since been problematic. The city Council owned some part of the hedge land. On 23 July 1990 the City Secretary



This modern Ordnance Survey map shows the culverted brook that borders the rear gardens of Valentia Road and Brookside houses. The Brookside hedge is in green.

and Solicitors' Department wrote: *"when the Council conveyed 5 Valentia Road....it retained a strip of land amounting to the half width of the former ditch."*

In September 1990 a management plan was prepared mainly by Professor Sir (later Lord) John Krebs who lived at 11 Brookside. Krebs noted that he had made 35 telephone calls and written often to the Council to ascertain its policy on conservation of the hedgerow. On 1 October 1990 the city planners wrote: *"...the trees constituting the hedgerow are of sufficient amenity value to warrant amenity protection."*

A tree preservation order was made after number 5 Valentia Road made an illicit entrance through the hedge from their back garden onto Brookside, trampling new planting and tearing up new trees.

In February 1991, residents planted 90 young trees supplied by the Council. The City Engineering and Recreational Services wrote that they “...were pleased to see the cooperation between local residents and my staff regarding the replanting of gaps in the hedgerow.” The ownership of the hedgerow came before the Council Estates Committee on 27 February 1992.

The report said, “The Council purchased the land in 1924 on which the Gipsy Lane Housing Estate now stands. A small stream known as Moor Ditch used to run along the Eastern boundary of this land. The Council ownership extended up to the centre line of the stream, which is now culverted. Therefore, the Council’s ownership ends where the centre line of the stream used to be.”

The hedgerow was at this time in a sorry state – see the photograph at the end of this piece.

Before Brookside residents gardened the hedge, it was a useful no-man’s-land for chucking litter, depositing trash and lost shopping trolleys, shooting up drugs, sleeping off alcohol and – not least – a place for teenagers to smoke illicit cigarettes.

There have been and are emergencies. In 1994 part of the hedgerow was severely damaged in an arson attack. In May 2009 one of the Valentia Road tenants proposed to demolish part of the hedge to provide parking in his garden via Brookside. This scheme was planned for the May Bank Holiday when Council officers would be absent. It was stopped by alert residents and prompt intervention by the police. A house developer bought property in Valentia road and tried and failed for two years or more to break through a resident’s garden to obtain a frontage in Brookside.

We continue to press the council to protect and conserve our hedge.



The hedge in 1992