

The Contents of  
**THE FORMER SACK HOUSE**

KING'S WHARF, MILL STREET, WANTAGE  
OXFORDSHIRE



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for  
JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

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# **THE CONTENTS OF THE FORMER SACK HOUSE, KING'S WHARF, MILL STREET, WANTAGE, OXFORDSHIRE**

## **Introduction**

This report on the contents of the former Sack House, King's Wharf, Mill Street, Wantage, was commissioned by Oxley Conservation consequent to an *Overview Condition Assessment Report* which they produced in May 2009 (para 4.5, p6). The building is not listed but is of historic interest as it lies within a conservation area on a former wharf that served a branch of the Wilts and Berks Canal. It is currently vacant but has a large number of objects stored within it and the purpose of this report is to assess whether any of these are of historic interest and related to its former use; an appropriate future use is being sought. For its protection prior to repair the building, which is in poor condition, is fully enclosed by hoarding; there are currently no available survey drawings. The interior was too congested to allow the examination of all the contents at this stage and some items would need to be cleared before this could be completed. However it has proved possible to assess the relative significance of most of the contents.

## **History**

The building which probably dates to the early 19th century has an enamel sign mounted on its principal elevation reading 'The West of England Sack Hiring Company Ltd'. It served as a depot for hiring sacks of a standard size to farmers, corn merchants and the like who wished to transport their goods over more than local distances by canal or railway (Wilkinson 1984). The company was set up in the earlier 19th century and took on the G.W.R. contract for counties from Cornwall to Buckinghamshire; it was liquidated in 1920 (London Gazette 10/12/1920). Initially sacks were deemed to hold a standard four bushel measure, subsequently sacks were individually weighed and a table of weights per bushel for different crops established (Wilkinson 1984). The basic requirements of the building were space for sack storage and an office for conducting the hire transactions.

## **Description**

### ***Building (Fig 1)***

The sack house is built of brick with a Welsh slate roof and the principal elevation faces east; it bears an enamel sign reading 'The West of England Sack Hiring Company Ltd'. The rear west elevation is built off a pre-existing stone boundary wall and the south end of the building is wedge-shaped following the line of the path. The central door leads into a passage with a room to either side. The northern end of the building was storied with an office on the ground floor and a storage loft above, open to the roof. The office had a fireplace in the west wall and plastered walls and ceiling above a boarded wooden dado.

On the other side of the passage there is a wide opening through into the triangular south end of the building where the walls are plastered and the space is open to the roof. The floor is slabbed with a channel (function currently unknown) adjoining the passage.

### ***Contents (Figs 1-2)***

Stacked in the acute-angled corner at the south end of the building are lengths of timber, iron and old guttering; those at the top of the heap are 20th century and of no significance but they obscure other items of cast iron further down which may be of greater interest; it is not possible to examine these without the removal of the upper items.

Next to the door there is a piece of cast iron machinery comprising a columnar base, a narrow platform at right angles supported by an ornamental bracket and a cylindrical upper section with a moveable arm (Fig 2). The cylinder has raised lettering; H POOLEY & SON PATENTEES LIVERPOOL around a coat of arms. This identifies it as a weighing machine (see below). Behind it is an old sack.

In the passage is an assortment of guttering and scaffold poles and an old wooden ladder-type staircase missing several treads and out of position. Below this is the remnant of a second sack containing a quantity of large old handmade square-section nails. In the office is an assortment of 20th century building materials, an iron bed frame, a modern door frame and a 19th century boarded door decayed at one end.

### **Items for Retention**

The majority of the contents are of no historic significance, however a few items merit retention (they have been labelled):

**1** The most interesting object is the Pooley & Son weighing machine. Pooleys was a firm of mechanical engineers founded in Liverpool in the 18th century who began to make platform scales c.1835 and came to dominate the market for weighing machines throughout the 19th and into the 20th century (gracesguide); they were extensively used by railway companies. This object appears to be part of a platform weighing machine, as illustrated in trade catalogues (Fig 2) and preserved at Malvern station (Worcs; geograph) and Aberfeldy distillery (Perthshire; RCAHMS).

It is not yet clear whether this weighing machine was set up inside or outside the sack house and comparison with complete examples makes it clear that some parts (such as the terminal to the cylinder) are missing. A search for associated parts of the machine should be made when the stack of objects in this corner of the building is cleared and the items at the bottom become accessible.

**2** Associated with this machine is one reasonably complete sack which should be retained as a sample of the building's original function.

**3** The pile of handmade nails in the corridor should be investigated and a sample retained.

**4** The boarded door in the office could be retained if it is proposed to reuse it but is not otherwise of intrinsic interest.

### **Proposals for clearance**

**1** An archaeological presence should be maintained during the clearance of the building, primarily to establish whether there are any further parts of the Pooley weighing machine which are not currently visible or accessible.



2 When the floor in this corner of the building has been cleared it should be examined to establish whether the weighing machine was mounted here and the function of the channel. A record should be made of the fabric.

### **References**

Geograph; [www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1427478](http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1427478)

Gracesguide; [www.gracesguide.co.uk/wiki/1862\\_London\\_Exhibition:\\_Catalogue:\\_Class\\_V.:\\_H.\\_Pooley\\_and\\_Son](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/wiki/1862_London_Exhibition:_Catalogue:_Class_V.:_H._Pooley_and_Son)

Oxley Conservation, May 2009 *The Former Sack House, King's Wharf, Mill Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire, Overview Condition Assessment Report*

Wilkinson, R, (1984) *Sacks for Hire*, Vale and Downland Museum; Local History Series [www.wantage.com/museum/Local\\_History/local\\_history.php](http://www.wantage.com/museum/Local_History/local_history.php)



**Fig 1**

(clockwise from above)

East elevation (Oxley Conservation)

Interior looking north into office

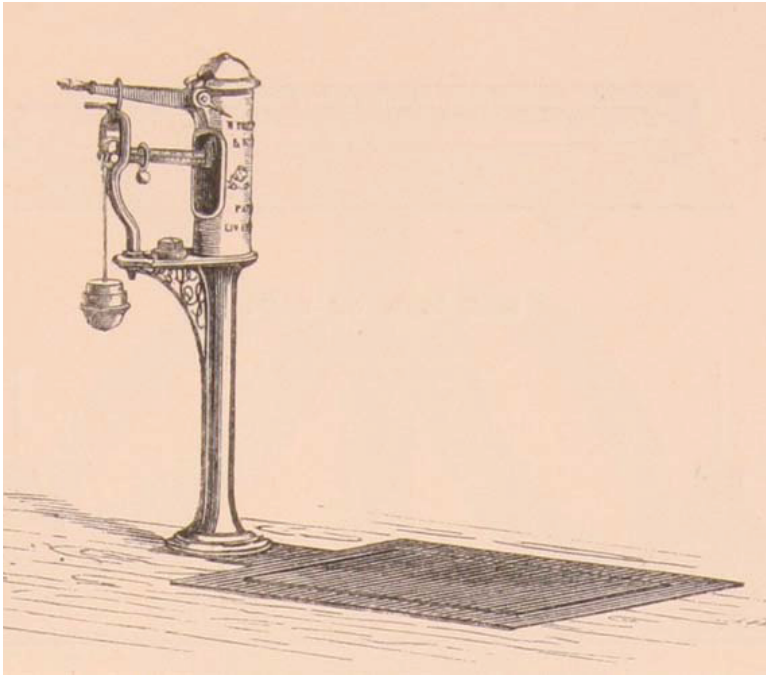
Interior looking south with weighing machine on left

Weighing machine detail; cast iron bracket with sack behind

Pile of nails in passage







Weighing machine by Pooley & Son  
propped against south wall of Sack house

Aberfeldy distillery (Perthshire;  
RCAHMS, C/35428)

Malvern station platform (Worcs;  
geograph)

### Advertisement in Kelly's Directory 1884

1862 London exhibition catalogue

