

THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS

The Walker's Guide

to

THE MAIN STREET
OF OLD OAKVILLE



Looking West From George St. 1902

The Buildings Of the Original Commercial Area
and Their History
From Navy Street to Trafalgar Road

The Main Street of Old Oakville

Walking Tour Itinerary

The walk covers the original business section of the town which extended from the Sixteen Mile Creek to Trafalgar Road. The street was mainly residential from that point eastward to Allan Street until the growth of the 1950's and 1960's.

From the Archives and Office at 110 King Street, the tour follows Navy St. to Lakeshore Rd. East, with comments on three sites, Market Square, the location of the original Town Hall, The Murray House and the old Granary. From Navy Street the tour of The Main Street of Old Oakville proceeds along the south side of Lakeshore Rd. to Trafalgar Rd. to view the north side, returning on the north side to view the south. Originally, the main street was named Colborne St. and, at various times, Trafalgar Rd. was named Dundas St. and Station Road.

Using The Walker's Guide

- The Guide is intended to be used during the tour only to compare the historical pictures with what we see to-day. The verbal narrative provided by tour guides parallels the text of this Guide. Do not attempt to read the text during the tour. It can be read later.
- Buildings are listed in the Guide in the order of the walk, grouped by block. The street numbers are shown to indicate what building is being viewed as the tour progresses.
- For orientation purposes the name of the present occupant is displayed in small italics.
- Building date of construction is shown in larger type.
- Accompanying the text for each building on the walk is a historical photograph from the OHS Archives which shows a view of a present or demolished building at a point in time which is given in the text.
- Some dates provided are estimated and are subject to change as specific information becomes available.

The Main Street of Old Oakville

Historical Notes

The original Village of Oakville was founded in 1827 by William Chisholm, an energetic entrepreneur. After purchasing the site from the Crown, Chisholm gave priority to the building of a harbour, a shipyard and a water-powered grist mill and to establishing an orderly layout for the new village.

The earliest plans for the village were dated July 20, 1833, although some sites had already been designated. The rectangular street plan was divided into blocks of 1 1/2 acres, each sub-divided into six quarter-acre lots. A promotional plan was published in colour in 1835.

In the early years, the pioneer economy provided high growth particularly from the shipping of lumber and grain. During this period, which lasted until the 1850's, the main street was made up of wooden buildings situated on spacious lots with gardens and family living quarters.

The prosperity of the 1850's resulted in the construction of many brick commercial buildings. The population of about 550 persons in 1846 almost doubled to about 1,000 by 1854 and doubled again to about 2,000 by 1857 when the village was incorporated as a town.

The railway had come to Oakville in 1855 and was instrumental in causing a decline in harbour activity. By 1860, depression was setting in and the town did not grow for many years. Not until the boom of the 1950's and later did Oakville experience a high level of growth.

In the area covered by the walk there are 66 buildings of which 30 were constructed between the 1830's and 1939. This Guide relates the history of the principal surviving and lost buildings and many of the people associated with them. Changes over the years have resulted in a vibrant and distinctive streetscape. At the same time, some older buildings have suffered unsuitable alterations and some new buildings are incompatible in design and scale with the rest of the street.

2.

NAVY ST. TO THOMAS ST. - North Side



Centennial Centre

Central School (shown left) was built in 1850 as the “Common” or elementary school. It was enlarged in 1854 to accommodate “grammar” (high school) students who transferred in 1910 to

the new Oakville High School on Reynolds St. Central School was demolished in 1950 and in the 1960’s, the public library, swimming pool and Oakville Centre were built to commemorate Canada’s centennial.

125 Oakville House

The Oakville House was built in 1827 as the first tavern and hotel in the new village. Built by Wm. Chisholm, it had a long series of owners. The view right is from 1897. The original building was replaced in 1984 by the present replica .



131-141 Built 1950’s These two buildings were erected following a fire which destroyed the earlier buildings. No. 141 was the Oakville Dairy.



145 Civello- Aveda Built 1855

This site was purchased by James Reid from the original owner in the 1840’s. Reid replaced the original frame structure with the present solid brick building in 1855. When Reid moved to Manitoba, the building was purchased by W.H. Young, cabinet maker and undertaker. In the early 1900’s this was a large and busy automobile showroom operated by A. & G. Hillmer, in the final stage of the Hillmer livery stable and bus service business. The building has survived quite well although some details have been changed and the brick stuccoed.

149 & 155 *Big Poppa Pistola and Berlio European Food*

Built c. 1840 These are in the two buildings to the left in the view right from c. 1880. They survive today in somewhat altered form.

159 *Bank of Montreal*

Built 1910

The church in the c. 1880 view right was dedicated in 1840 as Oakville's first Methodist "chapel". It was built in an American colonial style with a 110-foot high steeple which was the dominant landmark on the street for almost fifty years. The Methodists, finding that the building was beyond their means, sold it in 1841 and it became St. Jude's Anglican Church. The Methodists moved to Dunn St.



After the new St. Jude's was built in 1884, the spire was removed and the building became a hardware store. In 1898 the Merchants Bank bought the frame store, using it until 1910 when it was replaced by the present building. The Merchants Bank merged with the Bank of Montreal in 1922.

THOMAS ST. TO GEORGE ST. - North Side

**165-169 *Butchery and Cobs Bread*. Built c.1850**

Two brick buildings here before 1840 burned in 1868 and the site was vacant for some years. In 1878, the former Methodist church, constructed 1850, was moved here from Dunn St. The frame building was converted into the three stores that survive.

Faced with brick c. 1910, it is now stuccoed. The above view of Gilliland's barber shop No. 165, is c. 1900. This became a United Cigar store and later Hennessy's Variety store.

171 *House of Flowers* Built c.1860. In the early 1900's this was Phoebe Baker's toy shop which, with its dusty stock, was a favorite spot for Oakville children for many years.

4. THOMAS ST. TO GEORGE ST. - North Side (Continued)

179-189 *Victoria's Lace & Design, Abbozzo Gallery, Garveys , Flowers by the Dozen and Ten Thousand Villages .*

Built in stages 1903-1922

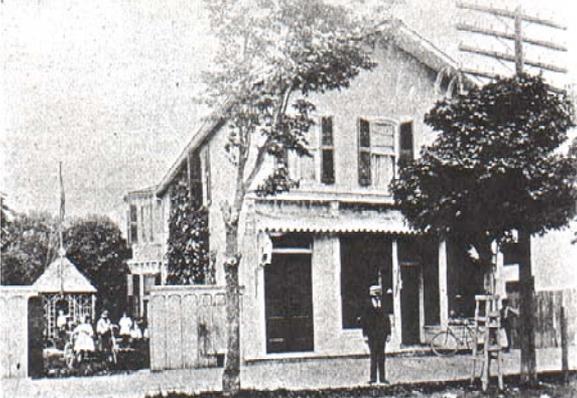
In the early years this was the garden for Robert Balmer's house on Church St. In 1856, Balmer built a frame building on part of the site which was Oakville's second post office until about 1890.

The solid brick structures now standing on this site were all built early in the 20th century and are relatively unchanged except for storefronts and some unsuitable painting. The Lunau Block was built in 1922 as a dry goods store. The W.S. Davis Block (east section) was built in 1903 with a later addition (west section). The third post office was located here until 1910. W.S. Davis was a prominent Oakville businessman and the building also housed his real estate business and the Bank of Hamilton branch which he managed.

191 *Majenta Home Furnishings* **Built 1915**

This was the candy store and ice cream parlour of L.A. Wilkinson. The telephone exchange was on the second floor until it was moved to the existing larger building on the northwest corner of Randall St. and Trafalgar Rd. In 1909 Oakville had 100 telephones, increasing to 200 in 1911 and to 500 in 1915. This site is the former garden of William Busby (see No. 195).

195 *Starbucks Coffee* **Built c. 1881**



This handsome 19th century building shown left in 1897 was the jewellery store and garden of William Busby, a prominent citizen. Until 1912, Busby was also the manager of the local office of Bell Telephone whose switchboard and other equipment was in the back of the store. Externally, the building has been well preserved.

197 *CIBC* **Built c. 1960**

Charles Davis, one of the first shoemakers in Oakville, erected a building (probably in the 1830's) on the north west corner at George St. with a garden to the west. When he died in 1880, it became the barber shop of Charles Bradbury (shown on page 5 top left). Newspapers and tobacco were sold, and there were some agencies and a pool hall. Other barbers succeeded Bradbury until W.S. Davis (no relation) purchased the property in 1922 (see more on him on Page 5).

197 CIBC (Continued)

William Sinclair Davis came from Milton in 1883 at the age of 14 to become the assistant to the postmaster. In 1900 he set up a real estate business and during the ensuing years became one of the most important businessmen in Oakville, active in property development, banking and manufacturing. In 1910 Davis became manager of the Oakville branch of the Bank of Hamilton which merged with the Canadian Bank of Commerce in 1923. Davis erected a substantial building on this site which was demolished in the 1960's when the present bank building was erected.

GEORGE ST. TO DUNN ST. - North Side

**207 Scotiabank
Built 1950's**

The building shown left was demolished when the present bank was erected in the 1950's. It probably dated from c.1845 and had many different owners over the years. As with many older buildings it was stuccoed at some time.

209 Barrington's Built 1860 (picture on page 6 top left)

Erected by Obadiah Marlatt, grain merchant, in 1860 and sold to John A. Williams c. 1870. Williams sold to three Robinson brothers in 1893 for a dry goods store and the view on page 6 top left dates from 1897. The original brick exterior with its fine detailing has been hidden beneath inappropriate cladding. Renovations are currently planned.

215 Murrion's Cabinetree Built c. 1830's (see page 6 top right)**217 Swiss Interiors Probably built pre-1850** (same picture)

No. 215, was built c. 1830 as a frame building with brick veneer added in 1879. The facade was meticulously restored in the 1980's. No. 217 in the 1960's view shows traces of the full mock Swiss treatment received in the 1980's. These present a radical contrast in approach to preservation.



Nos. 209 (left) and 215 & 217
For details see page 5.



221 Jam Asian Kitchen & Colossus Greek Taverna Built 1980's

The original building on this site dated from the 1830's and had many owners. It burned in 1905. Louis Cote, postmaster 1904-1937, built Oakville's fourth post office here in 1910.

225 Accessory Place Built 1980's for Birks Jewellers.

229 Lollipop Kid Culture This appears to be an older building that has been refaced but specific information is not available.

235-239 RBC Dominion Securities Built late 1940's



A house here was converted into a hotel about 1860, first the Victoria House and later the Queen's Hotel which closed c. 1900 and is shown left in 1897. In 1903, William A. Buckle purchased the frame building and applied a brick facing. Here he operated his meat market

through the early decades of the 1900's. The shop occupied the east half of the first floor, with windows along Dunn St. Living quarters were in the west half and on the second floor and to the west was a fenced private garden. The present building was occupied from the late 1940's to the mid- 1970's by the F.W. Woolworth Co. It was renovated extensively for Royal Trust and again more recently for the present occupant.

245 *Pinocchio Pick of the Crop Toys & Books* Built c. 1830-40

In the early 1900's this was Joe Mitchell's grocery and feed store and No. 249 was his spacious lawn. At the corner stood a handsome drinking fountain which was designed to serve horses, dogs and people. It was the gift of the Ladies' Sunshine Circle. This building dates from the earliest days, however, the stucco and simplified details have erased the character of the original frame building underneath.

251 *Harrison's of Oakville* Built probably pre-1900

Although giving the appearance of a contemporary structure, the building dates at the very latest from c. 1900 and retains the style of window formerly found on older stores in the mid-19th century.

257 *The Beauty Supply Outlet* Built probably 1950's

Set back from the street was "Sandy" MacDonald's blacksmith's shop. This was busy with the important and noisy work of horses' hoofs being shod which made exciting watching for children in the early 1900's.

267 *Gold Craft and Medicine Shop* Built c. 1830's and moved here in 1887

When Knox Presbyterian Church was built in 1887, a section of the White Oak Hotel which occupied that site was moved here. In 1911 it became the Oakville Garage and car sales agency of Robin & Bath. The view here in 1912

shows an impressive array of motor vehicles including the grocery delivery truck of J.L. Hewson, grocer. Note the original second floor windows.

277 *White Oak Centre and Royal Bank* Built 1970's

Since the late 1800's this was the site of the home and business of Wm. Whitaker & Sons extending back to Church St. This 1897 view shows the home, blacksmith shop and carriage shop on Trafalgar Rd. With the coming of the automobile in the early 1900's the business converted to a garage and show room for cars. The present over-bearing structure, out of scale on the street, went up in the 1970's.

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8.

LAKESHORE RD. & TRAFALGAR RD. - East Side

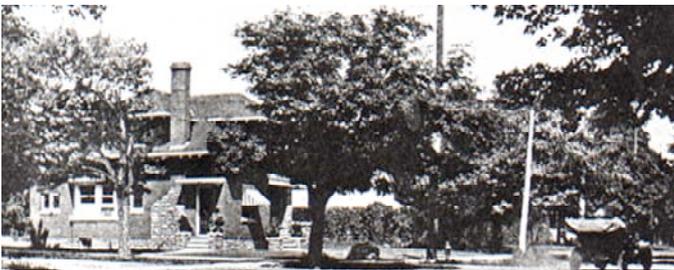
The business section of the original village extended only to Trafalgar Rd. Few businesses were east of Trafalgar until the high growth of the 1950's, when the Ford Motor Company located in Oakville, resulting in extensive construction eastward. Only a few buildings of historic interest remain.

283 Morrison House Built 1950's



From the earliest years this was the location of a series of mostly metal-working businesses: a blacksmith shop, foundry, manufacturer of stoves and ploughs, wagon works and carriage works. The imposing Commins Music Hall shown left stood here briefly from 1894 until it burned down in 1898. Early in the 1900's, a large brick house arose on the ashes of the Music Hall.

The pleasant scene below c. 1912 shows the house and a large tree which appears to be dangerously close to the roadway. The view characterizes the quiet residential nature of the street eastward from Trafalgar Rd. at this point in time. No. 283 was erected in the 1950's by the TD Bank with a heavily logo-oriented renovation in the early 1990's.



282 TD Canada Trust Built c. 1960

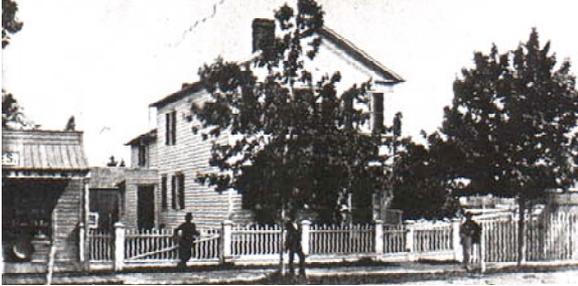
In the early 1920's, the very up-to-date Gregory Theatre for both stage productions and moving pictures was built here. For over 30 years it was the centre of town entertainment. This view is c. 1960 before the theatre was demolished.



276 LCBO Built 1997

The son of Justus Williams (see below) was a medical doctor who built his residence here. A gas station occupied the site from about the 1950's until the present building was erected in 1997.

270-268 Eat, Enjoy Etc, Thyme Restaurant



Built 1950's

In 1831, Justus Wright Williams bought this lot and the adjacent one to the south on Robinson St. Here he built a home and, to the east, a store for the sale of drygoods, hardware, groceries and medicines. Williams was

a prominent citizen active in the Methodist church, the school board and town affairs until his death in 1875. The view above is from 1870.

260 TD Waterhouse Investment Advice Built 1950's

Built for Loblaw's when it relocated from No. 172. Loblaw's moved in the 1970's and the building was a retail store and then vacant. The massive building has been renovated as offices with a second floor for future use.

250 Knox Presbyterian Church Built 1887

A hotel and tavern was located here from the 1830's. The most notorious owner was Thomas Lloyd who featured a black bear chained to a pole. Much sport was provided for the customers when a live pig would be fed to the bear with many grunts, squeals and drunken shouts. Ironically, Justus Williams, who lived next door, was a leader in the cause of temperance in the community. The building was remodelled in 1870 and became the White Oak Hotel. It should be noted that taverns and hotels proliferated during Oakville's early days and there was a great deal of drunkenness. This aroused the crusading instincts of those who advocated temperance.

The Presbyterians built Knox Church here in 1887 and the frame hotel was split into three sections which were moved to other locations. The church is an outstanding example of the Gothic Revival style. The spire and the fine design and detailing make the building a key landmark today.

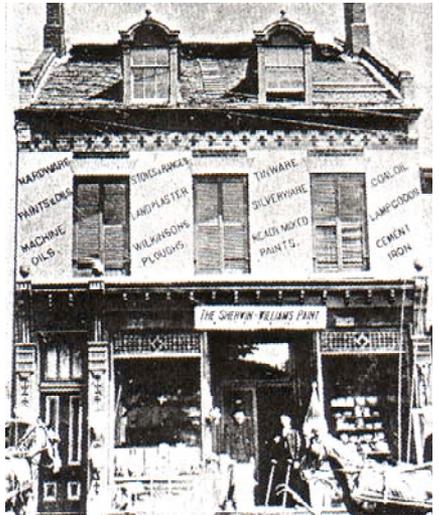


240 White Oak Restaurant Built c. 1850's

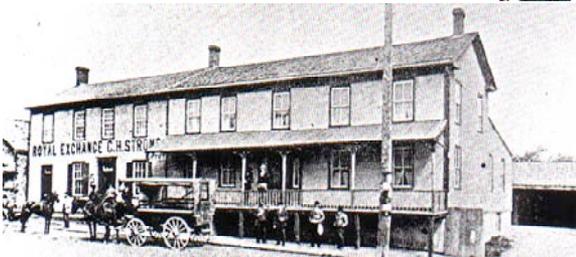
Constructed by Duncan Chisholm during the boom of the 1850's, this was a "high-class" furniture store owned by Peter Kelley from 1880 to the early 1900's. The Kelley family lived on the upper floors and the area now occupied by No. 236 (the Wool Bin) was their good-sized lawn. The view left is from 1880. Six three-storey brick buildings were erected during the boom. Many original features have been destroyed. One building was demolished.

234 Prime Time Built probably c.1860

The building right housed the hardware business of John Kelley. In the early decades of the 1900's it was owned by James N. McGregor who stocked a wide range of items, including stoves, and had a tinsmithing and plumbing business. Some of the operations were carried on in other buildings to the west - a large operation in a small town.

**216 Tommy Bahama's Built 1937 and Towne Square (part)**

In 1831 a tavern was built on this site which became known as the Royal Exchange Hotel. The hotel operated for many years and the view below is from 1897. A large drive shed to



house buggies and horses can be seen behind the building. By the early 1900's it had become dilapidated and one of its last tenants was a Chinese hand-laundry. The remains of the Royal Exchange

hotel were demolished in the 1930's and the fine stone building now on part of the site was built in 1937 as Oakville's fifth post office. From 1956-1967 it served as the public library.

200 Burrows Mens Wear Built c.1981

Previous buildings on this site were destroyed by fire in 1981 and replaced by the present building. The Public Library was located here 1908-1956.



196 Fuel Clothing & 194 Built c. 1850's

Mrs. Moulton's candy store, here in the early 1900's, was a favorite spot for children.

194 Bernard Caillebaut

This was the location of Hillmer's Meat Market shown left c.1880's. Later, E.H. Gullidge moved his shoe and harness store here from No. 166 after he was burned out c.1910-15.

182 To Set a Table Built 1835

John Urquhart, having some medical training, came to Oakville to help with a cholera epidemic and opened his "Medical Hall" in 1835. This was a combined medical practice and drug store. His son (also John), a qualified medical doctor, carried on the business until 1933 - a total of 98 years.



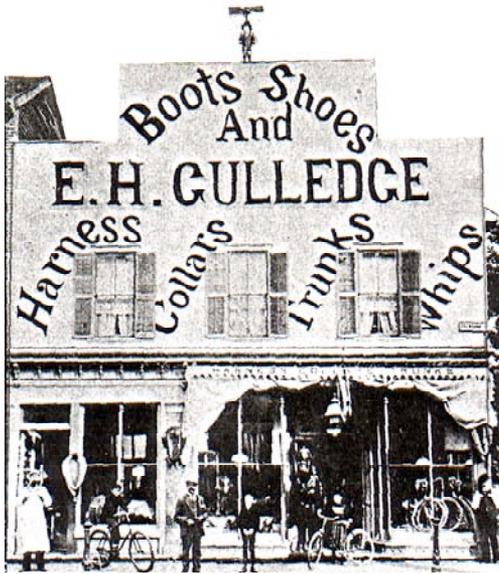
174 Colborne St. Cafe and Crawford Opticians Built 1890's

Ferrah's Bakery was located here. A display case from the store is now used at the OHS Archives.



172-170 Bookers Built 1922

Henry Wilson set up a grocery business in 1871, shown left in 1897. This fine building was demolished c. early 1920's and the present building housed Loblaw's Groceries until the 1950's.



166 Silkeborg Built 1921
Merrick Thomas built his "town house" here in 1835. William Chisholm, Oakville's founder, rented the house in December 1839 when he moved his family from Nelson Twp. to the new village. In January 1840 it burned down. A¹ later building on the site housed the boot, shoe and harness store of E.H. Gulledge whose store-front is shown left in 1897. Fire struck again c. 1910-15 and Gulledge continued in business at No. 194. The lot was vacant until the Bank of Toronto (now TD Bank) built here in 1921. TD sold the building in 2001.

THOMAS ST. TO NAVY ST. - South Side

162 The Foot Shoppe, The Bronze Frog Gallery & Oakville Inn Hotel Built 1942

A store was built here in 1835 which housed millinery and tailoring shops until 1906 when it was converted to a hotel, first the Hotel Decker and later the Gibson House. The present building was erected in 1942 after the Gibson House burned down. A new building went up in 2000 at No. 156 which had been the parking lot for the Hotel and recently a summer patio.

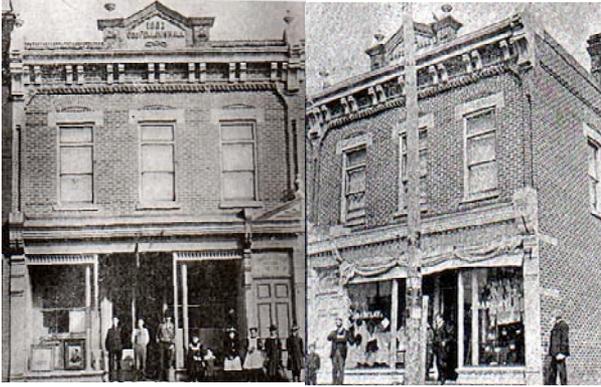
142 The Rude Native Bistro Built c. 1890

This building housed the "first class" grocery business of J.L. Hewson from 1895 through the early decades of the 1900's (see page 7, No. 267).

134-138 Benvenuto and Seasons Built c. 1890

This double building, known as the Anderson Block, is seen right in 1897, when the chief occupants were the C.W. Anderson bank (right) and the Morden Fuel Co. office (left). The Town Hall on Navy St. burned in 1911 and offices moved to 134 & 136 until the 1950's.





**126 Second Cup
132 Hennessy's
Built 1883**

W.F. Romain, a prominent businessman built the "Navy Block" on this corner in 1854. It was an imposing, four-storey building said to be almost identical to that of Gage & Hagaman across Navy St. (see No. 100 below). In 1883, a

disastrous fire destroyed much of the business section including the Navy Block and other buildings to the east. Two well-designed, identical buildings were constructed promptly on the site. They are shown above in 1897 when No. 126 was John Barclay's General Store and No. 132 was the office of the Oakville Star newspaper. Two fraternal organizations were on the second floors, the Masons at No. 126 and the Oddfellows at No. 132. The original external details have not changed except for storefronts and the buildings are among the best-preserved on the street.

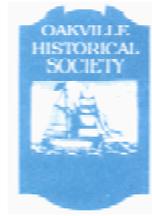
NAVY ST. TO SIXTEEN MILE CREEK - South Side

100 The Granary Condominiums Built c, 1980

The buying and shipping of grain was big business in early Oakville and the firm of Gage & Hagaman was one of the most successful. About 1840 it had a frame store at this location. Prompted by success, they built an impressive, well-designed three-storey storehouse. The building was acquired by the Marlatt & Armstrong Leather Co. in the 1890's for the manufacture of leather gloves, purses and other items. Later, it was bought by James R. Kendall who manufactured patent leather. The view right is c. 1900. The building burned in 1948 and there was a garage and car dealer here until the present building was constructed about 1980.



Oakville's First Post Office was located just west of the Gage & Hagaman building from 1835 to 1856. It was moved to Lakeside Park in 1952.



The Oakville Historical Society hopes that you have enjoyed your walk along the "Main Street" and that you have gained an appreciation of the buildings and people involved in its history since the earliest days.



The Society's Archives & Office
(Watercolour drawing by Donald Sutherland)

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