

Oswestry & Border History & Archaeology Group

Newsletter

Issue 26

Summer 2023



Witley Court Craigthorner, CC BY-SA 3.0 Creative Commons Wiki Media

The Perseus and Andromeda Fountain, Witley Court

OBHAG Summer Visit

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this Newsletter.

Website <http://obhag.org.uk> Secretary Gill Barrow Email: gillbarrow246@gmail.com

Chairman's Introduction: John Pryce-Jones

Welcome to our latest newsletter – and thank you once again Heather for editing and generally pulling together the material that has gone into it. This is a newsletter for us all as members of OBHAG, and we always welcome contributions from our members so, if you are working on any topic within the range of history and archaeology which would be of interest to other members, please let Heather know.

At the time of writing this short note, we have had our first visit of the year, to the Museum Collection Centre in Ludlow (you will find a report elsewhere in this newsletter), and our second visit, to Witley Court and the Firs, Elgar's birthplace, is only three weeks away. It has been good to get back to having group visits such as these once again. And we will be visiting Professor Gary Lock's excavations at Nesscliffe once again in mid July, and have a further guided walk around Oswestry, focussing on the 19th century, on Sunday September 3rd, before our programme of talks resumes on Friday September 3rd with what promises to be a fascinating talk by the Rev. Richard Hayes on the life of Lord Hill and the building of Lord Hill's Column on the outskirts of the Shrewsbury.

Your committee is already discussing options for outings, and for talks and lectures, to be included in our 2024 programme of activities. If you have suggestions, either for talks (possible subjects, or possible speakers) or for visits, please let me know.

At the risk of sounding like a badly scratched record, we remain desperately short of committee members. The committee meets only four or five times a year, on Wednesday evenings, to discuss and to take decisions on the group's activities, and other routine business. Committee members also assist at our monthly talks, taking fees, laying out the room, and providing refreshments after the talk. If you would like to join us, contact our secretary Gill Barrow for more details.

We are very grateful to members who assist us to set out the chairs before our talks, and help put those chairs away at the end of the evening, and for the help provided with refreshments. With the latter, we have noticed that, since our return to 'live' talks the number of members taking teas and coffees has dropped significantly, often to only a handful, so we are keeping this under review. Personally speaking, I can never have too many cups of tea or coffee, all too often with a biscuit, so it surprises me to find that I am one of just a handful making use of the refreshments we provide

Our visit to the Shropshire Museums Collection Centre

On May 17th fifteen members travelled to Ludlow – some by train, others by car – for a pre-arranged visit to the county museums service's Collection Centre, which shares a building with Ludlow public library.

We were met by Museum Curator Emma-Kate Lanyon who gave us a very interesting and informative talk on the development of the Collection Centre in Ludlow, on the range of material stored on site, also telling us about the service's work to involve the community as volunteers in their work. The centre has well over 200,000 items in store, collected and donated over 180 years, including significant natural history and geology collections – these being the main interests of the first advocates of a local museum service - alongside collections reflecting Shropshire's archaeology and social history."

The service is working to update how these items are recorded, electronically and in great detail, and with photographs, so that access to the collection can be increased, and awareness of the range of material held can be expanded, both locally and worldwide. As an example, we learned how the newly acquired Gobowen Hoard of 337 silver denarii, dated to around 69 -70 A.D., will generate 337 separate collection records.

We heard about how, through discussions between the county museum service and the British Museum focussed on the sun pendant, or bulla, and other North Shropshire Bronze Age finds, Shrewsbury Museum is now working with both the British Museum and the National Museum of Wales to redevelop its prehistory gallery, which is exciting news.



Emma-Kate also talked about the new Archaeology Lab, launched earlier this year, which is reviewing and re-evaluating material held in the archaeology collection so as to better understand the holdings, making those items more easily accessible to current archaeologists and researchers, and bringing new techniques to bear on items held in store for very many years. On our tour of the building Project Officer Katie Miller shown us around the Archaeology Lab where we saw volunteers working re-cataloguing and photographing the Lily F. Chitty collection of flints, and heard about plans to expand the Lab's work across the county, enabling volunteers living elsewhere in the county to get involved.

The tour of the collection store was fascinating – we saw so much, and in such variety. Each member will have their own highlights, but my own would probably include the skull of a hippopotamus, several glass cases of fish, the latter caught in the Scottish highlands and preserved for posterity in Shropshire, a portrait of Lord Hill stored on its side and too large to be displayed at Shrewsbury Museum, and a stuffed albatross (impressively large).

All in all, a very enjoyable day out. Many thanks to Emma-Kate Lanyon for such an interesting tour. Members wanting to learn more should refer to the website.

<https://www.shropshiremuseums.org.uk/shropshire-museums-collections-centre/>.



Obituaries

Former OBHAG Chairman Jessie Hanson died peacefully in her sleep on the 1st of June, aged 98 years. She was born in 1925, the only daughter of Lena and Tom Howells of Perry Cottage, Milford, in Little Ness parish. She was a clever child and lucky that her father, a talented joiner and cabinet maker, believed in educating women for she gained a place at the Priory School, Shrewsbury. In 1943 she progressed to Teacher Training College at Hereford, it was war time and her parents had to pay for the two year course.

She began her career at Ruyton, and then taught in Bridgnorth where she met her future husband Arthur Hanson, an electoral engineer who worked on the development of radar. In 1947 she moved to Baschurch where the classes were large with up to 48 pupils. She taught infants who came in knowing nothing and were expected to leave reading, writing and knowing their tables.

Jessie and Arthur were married at Baschurch before Arthur's work took him to Nigeria where their children Leanne and Clive were born. On their return the family lived near Newbury and Jessie was head hunted to go and work at a new Secondary School, The Kennet School, in Thatcham. When the school became a comprehensive school she became the first female Head of House.

Jessie and Arthur retired to Llansilin where Jessie developed her great passion for history research. She went on a course for writing and researching local history, led by Barrie Trinder and put her knowledge to very good use, producing three books: one on the early life of Charles Darwin, another on the Darbys of Little Ness and the last one on Baschurch School and the founder Eleanor Harris.

She belonged to several history groups and supported OBHAG with her characteristic enthusiasm, serving on the committee for several years and taking over as chairman for a

time. Her forte was leading visits to her favourite places including the Berth, the enigmatic hillfort at Baschurch. She had a encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of the Harlech family and their estate at Brogyntyn was a venue for many excursions culminating in a vastly oversubscribed event as part of Heritage Open Days week. Jessie led a group of almost 200 on a guided tour and as usual she was completely unfazed, easily coping with closed five bar gates.

She was always ready to share her wide knowledge and her wit, warmth and amazing energy will be greatly missed.

With thanks to Jessie's daughter Leanne Seward.



Jessie demonstrates the view from the roof of Brogyntyn Hall



Earlier this year came the sad news of the death Terry White, who served for many years on OBHAG's committee.

An Oswestry native Terry worked first in medical science and with the prison services before returning on his retirement and pursuing his interest in archaeology. He was a founder member of CRAG, (Clwydian Range Archaeology Group) and excavated with them for several years on Moel Arthur, one of the hillforts in the Clwydian mountains. The team received the prestigious Marsh Award for Community Archaeology, a national award sponsored by the Council for British Archaeology, for their work which included the discovery of a new type of stone tool, made from the local limestone and probably dating to 4,500 BC.



Eas Well, Baschurch, Shropshire: Zia Robins

I had read of Eas Well in Charlotte Burne's 1883 book 'Shropshire Folk-Lore' and in the 1980's Jessie Hanson, who was born nearby in Milford, in Little Ness Parish in 1925, and lived there as a child, took me to Eas Well, as her father had previously taken her there, so that its position would not be forgotten.

There are lots of Holy Wells in Shropshire, but many of them are not a deep well, but a spring that often fed into a stone trough. Water has always been important to people. Some of these wells were the sites of Pagan celebrations, but later they were often taken over by the Christian religion for their own celebrations. It seems likely that Eas Well is no exception.

In the collections of Georgina F Jackson, gathered around 1870 when she was writing her 'Shropshire Word Book' and then passed, when her health was fading, to Charlotte S. Burne to edit, and publish in 1883 as 'Shropshire Folk-Lore', Eas Well at Baschurch is mentioned in chapter XXX p. 432: "Traces of Well Worship".

"The Eas Well at Baschurch, in a field beside the river Perry, a mile west of the church, was frequented till twenty years ago by young people who went there on Palm Sunday to drink sugar-and-water and eat cakes. A clergyman who was present in 1830 speaks of seeing little boys scrambling for the lumps of sugar, which escaped from the glasses and floated down the brook, which flows from the spring into the river. At that time the gentry of the neighbourhood still visited the little Wake, but they had ceased to do so before it was discontinued. The young men had a jumping contest, both 'high jump' and 'long jump,' the winner becoming the champion jumper for the year. No prize was offered, but 'the honour of the thing' was eagerly coveted, and the marks of the jumping are still visible on the ground."

Palm Sunday was also celebrated at Pontesbury Hill. Cakes were baked for "going Palming", and on P331 of 'Shropshire Folk-Lore' it says that they "*race down the hill to the Lyde Hole where a little brooklet, which winds down a lovely narrow glen on the eastern side of the hill, suddenly turns and falls into a basin-like hollow at the foot of steep walls of rock forming a deep circular pool, of which folk used to say as there was no bottom to it. Who ever could run at full speed from the top of the hill down the steep side of the Hole and dip the fourth finger of his right [left?] hand into the water, would be certain to marry the first person of the opposite sex whom he or she happened to meet*".

Eas Well lies just across the River Perry from Ruyton Mill, at Grid Ref SJ 405 215, on the rising slope beside FP15B, part of an ancient path that led over the River Perry from Ruyton XI Towns, past the spring, and then on east, on a now unregistered path, to join Whitmore Lane, also known as World's End Lane, just before it enters Baschurch. Another path branches off south near to the well, to where three cottages once stood at the west end of World's End Lane. The Baschurch vicar used to ride that way, and those attending the celebrations at the Well, no doubt used these paths. The brook that ran down from the spring to the River Perry is not evident now. When I visited in the late 1980's, just a lump of concrete by a clump of bushes marked the spring, with a wet area there, but in 2023 the spring now flows into a stone trough.



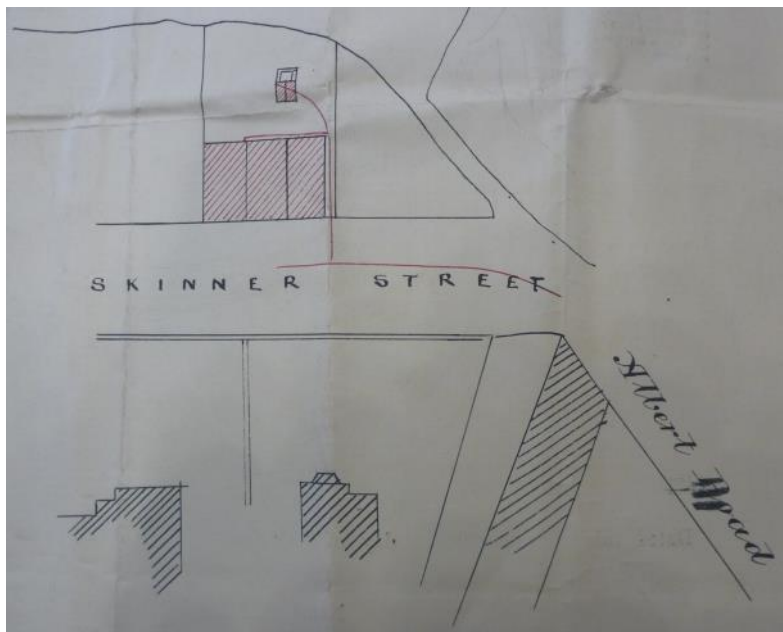
It has been conjectured that the name 'Eas Well' might come from 'east', as it lies on the east side of the River Perry. Gough's 'History of Myddle' mentions 'a well called Ast-well or asta-well, and by some Easter-well,' equidistant from the three hamlets, of Balderton, Alderton and Newton, near Myddle. If the ceremonies held at Eas Well do date from Pagan times, perhaps its name is derived from Eastre, who was said to be the goddess of dawn, spring and fertility, and worshipped, so the Venerable Bede, born 672, tells us, by our heathen forefathers in the month of April, and from whom the word Easter is said to be derived. Whether she was a Dawn-goddess is uncertain, but her festivities were at the vernal equinox and her name is related to east, the quarter of the sun-rise. (W.W. Skeat, Concise Etymological Dictionary, p.158)

Oswestry street names—one that got away: John Pryce Jones

In the past couple of years I have begun to make regular use of a set of approximately 4,000 building control plans, held at Shropshire Archives, submitted to Oswestry Borough Council between 1879 and 1967¹. Shropshire Archives also holds a number of these plans for Oswestry Rural District Council, from 1930 to 1937², covering a large area of north-west Shropshire including parts of the town such as Morda Road and Oakhurst Road beyond Oswestry's historic borough boundaries.

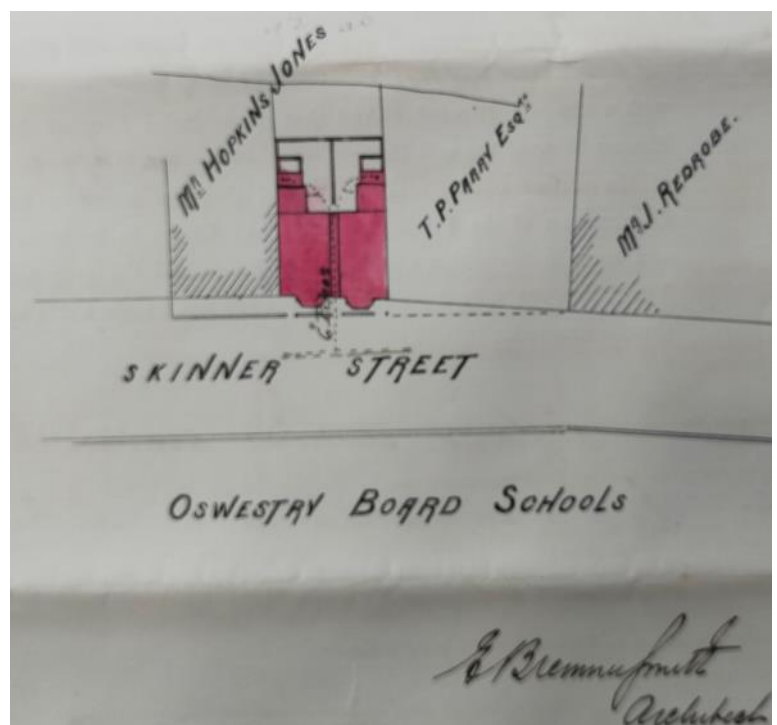
Victorian legislation including the Public Health Acts of 1848 and 1875, and the Local Government Act of 1858 required details of new building work to be submitted to the relevant local authority for its approval. Initially, prior to the town planning laws of the twentieth century, which have required a focus on a range of important issues, the focus was much narrower, looking particularly at arrangements for sanitation and drainage.

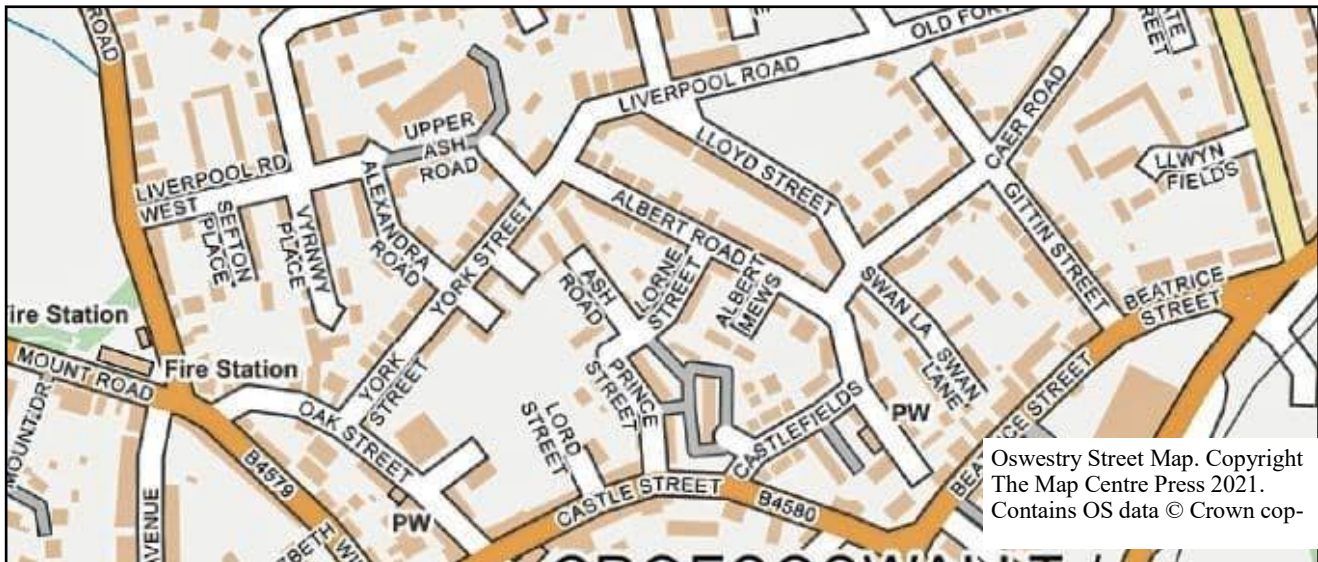
Looking through the schedule of plans listed in the catalogue, I came across five from 1879 and 1880 relating to proposals for Skinner Street³, Oswestry, four being plans for terraced cottages, and one to proposals for a schoolroom associated with the United Methodist Free Church. Setting aside any frustration I may have felt about having omitted Skinner Street from my *Street names of Oswestry* (1997), this was a puzzle. The address no longer exists, and a quick search via the British Newspaper Archive identified only two entries for a Skinner Street in Oswestry, both from 1880, and both relating to the Borough Council's consideration of these building plans. The name Skinner Street clearly had a very short life, and does not feature in the 1881 Census.



Shropshire Archives, DA4/710/43

Shropshire Archives, DA4/710/59





So, where exactly was Skinner Street? All but one of the submissions place it either in, or near, to Albert Road, and an examination of the location plans, part of these submissions, confirms that the name relates to what became the upper part of Albert Road, developed in the final two decades of the 19th century, between Albert Road's junction with the later Caer Road and its junction with York Street. However, the remaining application shows the proposed schoolroom located at the junction of Oak Street and a "proposed new street", suggesting that in 1879/80 there may have been thoughts for a new road called 'Skinner Street' which extended from what is now the lower part of Albert Road right around to Oak Street. If so, this might help explain the name, as at the junction with Oak Street stood a sizeable tannery belonging to the Parry family⁴. In the event, the schoolroom application was turned down, and a street running between Oak Street and what was by that time the top of Albert Road was not developed until the early 1890s, when it was given the name York Street.

Researchers seeking to make use of these building plans should pre-order the documents that they wish to see at least a week ahead of a planned visit to Shropshire Archives, as the plans are stored off site.

Albert Road today, looking towards the junction with York Street.



¹Shropshire Archives, DA4/710/1-4252, ²Shropshire Archives, DA24/710/1-389, ³DA4/710/20, DA4/710/43, DA4/710/48, DA4/710/59, DA4/710/192, ⁴Watkin, p160-161. DA4/710/59 indicates that Thomas Pryce Parry owned land on this road, directly opposite the Albert Road Board School

A visit to Llandyfrydog, Anglesey: Tom Lerwill

I have spent 50 years visiting Anglesey and enjoyed its rich variety of historical monuments, especially the prehistoric. This spring we spent a week in Llandyfrydog, a parish inland from Amlwch. It is now a scattered area of farms with no real centre, other than its church.

The Buildings of Wales mentions three sites of interest. The oldest (possibly) is Carreg Leidr, Welsh for 'Rock of the Thief'. Unusually for Anglesey, it is a standing stone with a story attached. A thief, who stole a bible from a church, was caught and turned into stone, Carreg Leidr. Every Christmas Eve, he comes to life and runs around the field. It is assumed by most that it is a bronze age monument but it does have an odd shape being bent over at the top.

Its location is interesting. It is less than a mile from Clorach, the site of two holy wells where saints Cybi and Seriol used to meet, having walked from opposite sides of the island.



Courtesy of Paul Blades, Megalithic Portal



The stone is also a mile from the Parish's church, which I visited one evening. Unlike the standing stone, we know precisely how the church was used. But sadly, this church now stands as unused as any prehistoric monument. It has many interesting medieval features, and its saint's name and circular churchyard sets it firmly in Wales' Age of the Saints. But now its many rusty railings surrounding the graves are set in a sea of unkempt wild garlic. A tired notice-board advertises services that no longer occur. And when I was there, the only sound was wind in the large surrounding sycamores and an angry parent calling to a recalcitrant child in English.

Fron Goch Interment Camp: David Stirling

A few miles north-west of Bala lies the village of Frongoch, which once had a railway station and a distillery. A prisoner of war camp was set up there to take German prisoners in 1915. It acted as a parent camp under which other work camps for prisoners across Wales were organised and in June 1919 held 2,106 German prisoners.

It is, however, most famous for a short period in 1916 when the German prisoners were moved out and replaced by Irish ones. In 1916 Republican groups occupied the Post Office in Dublin in what was known as the Easter Rising. This started on Easter Monday, 24th April, and the Republicans held out for 6 days before surrendering. The British authorities arrested a large number of men, many of whom had not been directly involved in the attack, and a large proportion of these ended up at Frongoch, among them such notables as Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith.



Courtesy of <http://www.theeasterising.eu> .

There was a maximum of 1,800 Irish prisoners at the camp, but by August 1,200 had been released, the rest being released just before Christmas. This short period of time was of considerable significance to Irish history because prisoners from several different Republican groups were held together and could mix freely. Later the camp became known as the "University of Revolution" or sometimes "Sinn Féin University". The camp was emptied in December 1916.

Part of the camp used a building originally built as a distillery for Welsh Whisky in 1889, while the rest of the camp was composed of wooden huts on a field to the north. Very little now survives and Ysgol Bro Tryweryn now occupies the site of the distillery. The field that held the northern part of the camp was also used as accommodation for workers building the dam across the Tryweryn that flooded the village of Capel Celyn and created the Llyn Celyn Reservoir in the 1960s.



Currently on sale for £5000
Royal Welsh Whisky bottled in Bala c. 1900.
(Courtesy of The Whisky Exchange)





Irish memorial to the Easter Rising at Frongoch.

The stone which supports a plate in three languages, Irish, Welsh and English was erected at a lay-by beside the A4212 Bala to Trawsfynydd road in 2002. In 2016 the monument was enhanced, and an interpretation board and flagpoles added.

OBHAG member Jane Stirling with John Scorer of Oswestry U3A are pictured at the memorial in 2016 with wreaths which had been laid to mark the centenary.

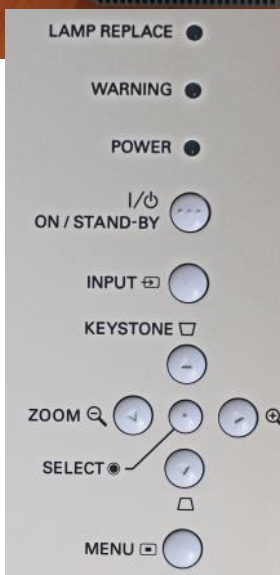
Fully functional projector in search of a new owner



Detail of controls



Detail of connection panel



As OBHAG has bought a new projector for the showing of presentations at its meetings, the old projector which is still fully functioning is looking for a new home. It is eminently suitable for home use, and comes together with owner's manual disc and booklet, remote controller, leads to electricity and to computer. If you are interested in acquiring this equipment please contact Gill Barrow. Email: gillbarrow246@gmail.com.

This is a free offer to OBHAG members but of course a small donation towards our funds would be very acceptable!

OBHAG Autumn Programme 2023

Meetings are at 7.30 pm on the second Friday of the month at the Methodist Church Hall



- 8th September ‘Lord Hill and the Column in Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury’
 Rev. Richard Hayes
- 13th October ‘Weston Park— the house, the families and the influence’
 Gareth Williams
- 10th November ‘Oswestry Castle: the Excavation’
 Roger Cooper, Oswestry Castle Community Research Project.
- 8th December OBHAG Christmas Social Evening and Quiz.

OBHAG Membership

Adult£12.00
Senior Citizen/Full Time Student...£10.00 Junior(5-17years)..... Free

Subscriptions are due annually on January 1st and should be paid at the January meeting or sent to the membership secretary. Cheques are to be made payable to ‘OBHAG’. Please do not send cash in the post. For details of payment by bank transfer (preferred method) please see the membership form which is available on the website or from the membership secretary.

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