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Oxford City Council
LA 078921
July 2000



Scale 1:4000

Osney Town Conservation Area

Designated 16 July 1976

Osney Town Conservation Area, No.10

Osney Town is situated on an Island, formed by several branches of the River Thames or Isis, just to the south of the Botley Road causeway. Its Island situation has given it an individual character of its own, dependent on a single road bridge for its vehicular access. The streets which form the present pattern were laid out in September 1851 by G P Hester, Town Clerk of Oxford. By 1852, advertisements were appearing for earth and rubbish to raise the land above flood level. Some houses were occupied by October 1852, and much of Bridge Street completed by the mid 1850s. Development also continued into the 1880s and 90s and, in the case of Doyley Road, 1908.

The main development took place in three long streets running parallel with the rivers and comprised two and three storey terrace houses. The existing buildings are tightly placed on the street frontages and are constructed mainly of brick, with some render and painted wall surfaces.

The character of the area is distinct. While the urban quality of the small houses can be found elsewhere in Oxford, their relationship with the island has resulted in a special quality of townscape. The grassed riverside quay to the Thames in East Street, contrasts with the sunken relationship of the Osney Stream in West Street or in the moat-like defence to the Botley Road. The long vista of Bridge Street contrasts with both. The island has had, and retains, its own identity with a strong sense of community.

The church of St Frideswide with its vicarage lies in the north-west of the area surrounded by streams. This listed group contains an important work by the Victorian architect, S S Teulon (church) with vicarage house thought to be by H G W Drinkwater. Two of the older, stone bridges are also listed as being of special architectural or historic interest.

Also within the Osney Town conservation area is a long stretch of riverside to the south, and the land covering most of the site of Osney Abbey.

Osney Abbey was the largest and most important of the medieval monasteries of Oxford. At the Reformation, its church served for a short period as the Cathedral before its demolition in the 16th century, and the transfer of the Bishop's throne to Christ Church in 1545. Today, only a wall and a fragment of a late medieval hall, with an excellent timber trussed roof, survive above ground just east of Osney Mill. The position of the abbey church is known to be under Osney cemetery (found when digging graves in the last century) and the whole area between the railway and the Mill contains the site of the buried church and the associated monastic buildings. To the south of the Abbey is the area of monastic precinct containing the sites of its fishponds.

Osney Lock with the various remains of Osney Mill and Mill House, and the associated riverside islands and weirs form a link between Osney Town and Osney Abbey. The riverside character predominates and the industrial activity associated with the river does not detract from its character.

In order to preserve and enhance its special townscape quality and archaeological interest, the City Council designated Osney Town a conservation area on 16th July 1976.