



Conservation Area Appraisal
Osney Town

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Introduction

Osney Town (also known as Osney Island) is a riverside community in the west of the city of Oxford, located off Botley Road. The conservation area is partially sited on an island at a point where the River Thames splits into several channels.

The residential aspects of the conservation area known as Osney Town were laid out in 1851 by GP Hester, Town Clerk, who had acquired the land from Christ Church College and laid out the streets much as they appear today. Most of Osney's 300 households live in 19th century terraced cottages, built on Hester's original grid plan, contributing to the special character of the conservation area.



FIG. 1

FIG. 1 Aerial view of Osney Town Conservation Area



Osney Town Conservation Area map

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Osney Abbey, once one of Oxford's most important religious institutions, was located on the opposite (eastern) bank of the Thames from the island, in the area now known as New Osney. The only visible remains of the abbey complex is one small building, thought to be a surviving bay of one of the ancillary domestic agricultural buildings.

Reasons for appraisal

Local planning authorities are under a statutory duty to designate "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" as conservation areas (s.69 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). S.71 of the Act further requires local authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of all designated conservation areas. The Appraisal has therefore been produced in compliance with this requirement.

S.72 of the Act specifies that in determining any application for development within the conservation area, due regard shall be had to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area. The adopted Appraisal will therefore be a material consideration when determining any application for planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent within and adjacent to the conservation area.

The document should be read in conjunction with the Historic Environment policies and Core Policies as set out within the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001–2016.¹

The Appraisal seeks to define and record the special architectural and historic interest within the conservation area. It also seeks to identify any opportunity for enhancement. Additional information regarding conservation areas and their management can be found in English Heritage's publications 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas' (August 2005). Government guidance on conservation areas and listed buildings is set out within PPG15 – Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment.

The Appraisal cannot make mention of every building, feature or space within the conservation area. Omission of any feature does not imply that it is not of any interest.

Local community involvement

In recognition of English Heritage's guidance² the local community and stakeholders have participated in the production of the appraisal. An initial meeting was held with the local residents association, Osney Island Residents Association, and a local City councillor in 2005. The draft



FIG. 4



FIG. 5

FIG. 4 Towpath, barges and lock

FIG. 5 Staggered frontages on East Street

FIG. 2 The view into Osney across the River Thames



FIG. 2

FIG. 3 The church of St. Frideswide

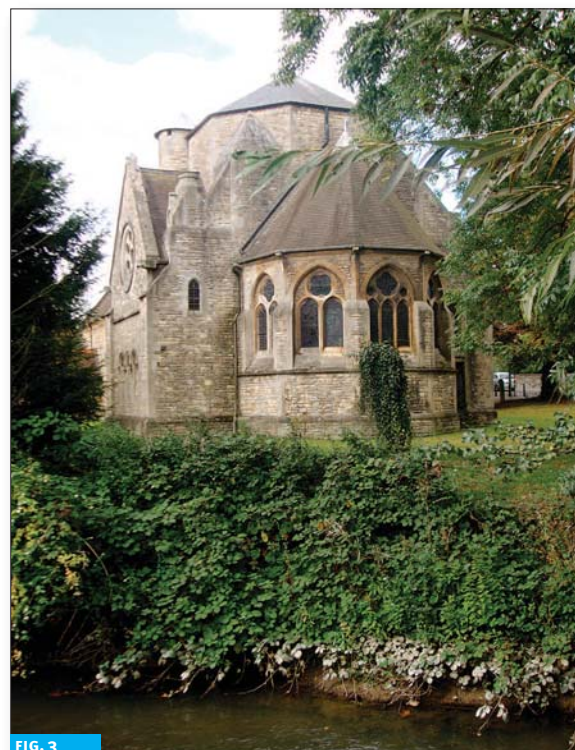


FIG. 3

¹ www.oxford.gov.uk/planning/localplan.cfm Policies HE.1-11 and CP.8

² Guidance on Conservation Areas - English Heritage August 2005

appraisal was issued for comment in August 2006. An exhibition was held at the Osney Day September 2006. Comments on the draft were received November 2006/January 2007. The amended draft was reissued for comment on 5 July 2007 with all representations to be received by 1 September 2007 which following a request from the residents, was duly extended to 29 February 2008.

Key issues raised from consultation can be found on Oxford City Council's website.³

Summary of significance

1. Unique 19th century development of tightly packed terrace housing, constructed as a result of the opening of the railway stations and the influx of related workers to the area.
2. Important archaeology relating to the former Augustinian Osney Abbey, the remains of the church are buried under Osney Cemetery.
3. Limited bridge access to a settlement surrounded by water lends a sense of containment and isolation, adding to the individual identity of the conservation area.
4. Distinctive townscape and landscape character due to its island location close to the historic city centre, accessed from a main arterial road into

the city that has strong suburban qualities.

5. Important relationship with the River Thames, in terms of setting and character.
6. High townscape quality resulting from the retained street and block pattern and architectural integrity with limited 20th century interventions.
7. Regularity of fenestration, doorway details, roof forms and chimneys and materials contribute to the integrity of the development by establishing a regular rhythm and giving unity and continuity to the streets.

Vulnerability

8. The distinctiveness, regularity and integrity of the streetscape of Osney are highly sensitive to change. Small-scale changes can impact greatly on both the character of the individual buildings and the street as a whole. The Article 4 Direction seeks to limit changes that would result in harmful alterations to what is predominantly an intact streetscape.
9. Poor or inadequate maintenance of the original built fabric eg. timber sash windows, panelled doors, roofs etc and subsequent replacement with unsympathetic styles and materials.

³ www.Oxford.gov.uk/planning/conservation-Osney-town.cfm

10. New development that conflicts with the historic street and block patterns, neither responding to the rhythm, consistency and continuity of architectural elements nor reflects the scale of existing buildings.
11. Ageing and/or loss of trees along the Thames.
12. Poor quality street furniture and materials in the streets, loss of traditional materials and details eg. the loss of stone kerbing and loss of traditional cobbled gulleys running alongside the roads.

Enhancement opportunities

13. Encourage regeneration of the fabric of the buildings eg. windows, sills, roofing slates etc in appropriate styles and materials. Where facades have been rendered or painted, these should be kept in good order for both aesthetic and structural reasons. The Article 4 Direction guidance is to be revised and reissued to assist residents with appropriate repairs and treatments.
14. Secure an appropriate management regime for the trees and other vegetation along the Thames and its various channels around the island.
15. Treatment of streets - use of appropriate surfacing materials, retain traditional and historic features and detailings.

16. Rationalisation of street furniture and signage. Road name plates should be of a style more appropriate to the age and character of the locality ie. black metal plates.
17. Additional landscaping/planting to soften certain features of the built environment.

Location

Osney Town Conservation Area is located approximately 1 mile to the west of Oxford city centre, to the south of the western arterial road of Botley Road. Access to the island is via a road bridge leading into Bridge Street together with a number of footbridges at various points around the island.

The island is situated between the main navigation stream of the Thames to the east and Osney Stream to the west. Osney Cemetery, Gibbs Crescent and the lock can be accessed via Mill Street and Osney Lane to the east of the Thames.

Botley Road provides access to the city from the west via the A420 and A34.

Topography

Alluvial floodplains of the Thames occasionally flood due to their proximity to the river and their low-lying nature.

Designation and boundaries

Osney Town was designated as a conservation area on 16 July 1976 in recognition of its special townscape quality, its relationship with the Thames and its archaeological interest. The boundaries were drawn to include the main island extending south-eastwards to include the mill complex of the former abbey and Osney Cemetery bordering the railway track.

Article 4 direction

Following an approach by the Osney Island Residents' Association to Oxford City Council in 1989 an Article 4 direction was introduced in January 1994 to further protect the special character of Osney. It does not cover the whole of the conservation area, only the main residential streets of the 'island' and St Frideswide's Church. Serious concern had been raised as to the gradual

erosion of the character through unsympathetic and inappropriate works to the houses including loss of timber framed sash windows being replaced with uPVC styles, loss of the original doors, introduction of dormers, rendering and painting of facades etc. Although conservation area designation gave some protection to the area, further controls were deemed appropriate. A guidance note has been published by Oxford City Council explaining the implications of an Article 4 direction on householders and will be reissued by the Council.

Archaeological interest

Osney Cemetery, associated architecture and the lock are of archaeological importance. Carved stone, tiles, glazing, lead etc have all been discovered in the cemetery and on the mill site, some of which are now on display in the Ashmolean Museum.

Historical development

In the early 15th century, a jury found that Osney was outside the liberty of Oxford and was only brought within the liberty following the boundary extensions of the early 17th century. The name 'Osney' seems to have had various meanings and spellings through the ages but is accepted to mean 'Osa's Island'⁴, (land of Osa and 'ey' meaning island) and has been variously spelt as 'Osanig' (1003), 'Oseneia' (1130), 'Osneia' (1230) and 'Osney'.

There are two main development phases within the conservation area: the 12th century development of Osney Abbey and the 19th century residential development of Osney Town.

Osney Priory, a house of Augustinian canons, was founded in 1129 by Robert D'Oilly who had donated all his land in the Manor of South Osney to the foundation. The priory was promoted to abbey in 1154.

The abbey had been regarded as 'second to none in the kingdom for magnificence'⁵ and became one of the wealthiest monasteries in Oxfordshire. At the height of its existence, the abbey church was over 300 feet long incorporating an impressive west tower whilst the complex as a whole dominated the landscape of the western approaches into the city. The main access into the complex was via Osney Lane.

Oxford had previously been part of the diocese of

FIG. 6 Map of Osney from 1889, extract from A. Wood



FIG. 6



FIG. 7

FIG. 7 Osney Abbey as it appeared in 1640



FIG. 8

FIG. 8 The remains of Osney Abbey today

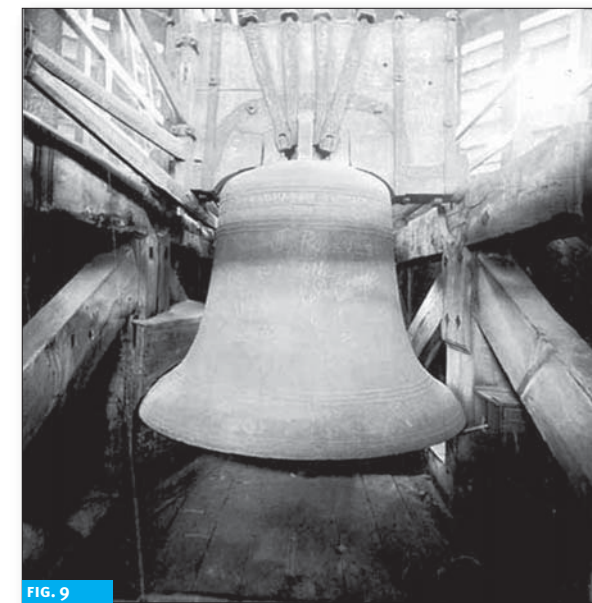


FIG. 9

FIG. 9 Great Tom Bell, Taunt 1906

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⁴ Oxford Street Names Explained – Paul J Marriott

⁵ 'In West Oxford: Historical notes and pictures' T. Squires, 1928

Lincoln, a large diocese covering much of England from the Humber southwards. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, Henry VIII established six new bishoprics including Oxford. Osney Abbey briefly became the cathedral of Oxford in 1542 being transferred to Christ Church in 1546, together with the Great Tom Bell.

Whilst the church buildings fell into decline, the mill buildings continued operating until the 20th century, being used variously for cloth production, as corn and fulling mills, saw mills, grist mills and finally as a flour mill from 1876 until its closure in 1965. During the Civil War in 1643, the mills were used as gunpowder mills, with an explosion causing further damage to the buildings. The last standing elements of the abbey church were brought down in 1650. Although Christ Church had leased the buildings, they had reserved the right to use the fabric in the construction of their own college buildings including stone from the great gate, great hall and abbots hall.

With only the mills standing, the remainder of the abbey site reverted to meadowland for many years. In 1847, part of the site was sold to the Commissioners

for Building Churches for the cemetery, the remains of the church being buried below the site. The remainder of the land was sold off in 1929 for the residential developments of New Osney.

The second phase of development occurred on the next 'island' to the west from the abbey site shortly after the arrival of the Great Western Railway in Oxford in the 1840s. George Parson Hester, Town Clerk, obtained the site from Christ Church c.1850 with the view to laying out the site for residential development, capitalising on the increased demand for housing, which in part was caused by the influx of rail workers. Adverts were placed in the local press for soil and rubble to increase the height of the low lying meadowland. The first land auction was July 1851, the remaining 40 plots were auctioned in August with the first houses being built by 1852.

The first streets to be developed were Bridge Street and parts of East Street and the east side of West Street with the west side of the street remaining as a market garden until the 1880s. Building of the tightly packed terraces continued until 1908 with Doyley Road being the last to be completed. At the time of the first census in Osney in 1861, 795 people were recorded as living in the area in 141 houses.⁶

Osney grew into a virtually self-contained community

FIG. 10 Remains of mill complex



FIG. 11 Mill from Osney Island



FIG. 12 Internal remains of mill



FIG. 13



FIG. 14

FIG. 13 Osney Bridge

FIG. 14 Destroyed Osney Bridge, Taunt, 1885

© Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

FIG. 15 Osney Lock, 1885, Taunt

© Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive



FIG. 15

with its own stores, church, schools and public houses. The stores included a bakery at no. 34 Bridge Street, a general store at no. 69 Bridge Street and further stores at no. 71 and 76 Bridge Street and 24 West Street. There were four public houses including the Waterman's Arms on East Street and the Holly Bush Inn on Bridge Street.

The first place of worship was established by the Reverend Thomas Chamberlain who had purchased a plot of land at the junction of Bridge Street and South Street for use as a chapel and school, opening for worship in 1854 and schooling in 1861. New Road Baptist Church established a Sunday school on the island in 1857, with a purpose built school being constructed in 1864, closing in 1922. The site is now occupied by no. 77 Bridge Street.

Christ Church College provided the land for St Frideswide's Church, Botley Road, in 1870, with services being held from 1872. The former baptist chapel and school were converted into St Frideswide's Infant School. Due to a growing child population, a new boys and girls school opened next door in 1872, closing in 1914 following the construction of West Oxford Primary School in Ferry Hinksey Road.

Summary of surviving historical features

Osney Cemetery - established in the 1840s on the remains of the former abbey church.

Osney Abbey - the remnants of the abbey complex dating from the 15th century, Grade II listed and Scheduled Monument.

Osney Mill House – early 19th century rendered and painted house. Grade II listed.

Osney Lock dating from the 1790s, constructed by the inmates of Oxford Prison.

St Frideswide's Church - designed by SS Teulon on its own 'island' accessed from Botley Road. Teulon's design was never fully completed. As a result, the spire was not built, leaving a short octagonal shaped tower. The church door contains a carving by Alice Liddell, 'Alice' from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland'. Grade II*

Botley Road - ancient causeway into the west of the city. First mentioned as a 'seasonal path' in 1210 with the first causeway being constructed in 1541. The road was turnpiked in 1767 and was reconstructed at a higher level to minimise flooding incorporating a number of arches, earning the alternative name of 'Seven Bridges Road'. The turnpike was set up by Osney Bridge, moving to the west of Binsey Lane in 1868 and to the foot of Cumnor Hill in 1877 being removed completely in 1880.

Osney Bridge - a stone bridge was constructed in the 17th century incorporating 3 arches and was widened in 1777 following the turnpiking of Botley Road. Floods in December 1885 caused the bridge to collapse with the present iron bridge being completed in 1889.

⁶ 'Changing Faces of West Oxford' - Malcolm Graham

Osney Town Conservation Area

-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Grade II* Listed Building
-  Buildings of Local Interest
-  Enhancement Opportunity
-  Group Value
-  Late 20th/early 21st century development
-  Retained Shop Fronts
-  Stone-built Houses
-  Detached Villa
-  Important View
-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Article 4 Boundary

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Bridge Street Enclosed space, affording long straight views towards Botley Road



Osney Cemetery Area of tranquil, public green space



Osney Bridge Constructed in 1888 and provides high level views into the conservation area



Gibbs Crescent and Marina A private residential development and marina to the south of the cemetery, hidden from clear views by trees and planting



Osney Lock The river forms an important setting to Osney with the lock being an important and vital feature of river life



East Street Varied terraced houses benefiting from open views across the river



North Street A short stretch of road running parallel to Osney Stream



Church of St. Frideswide Grade II* listed church designed by S.S. Tuelon, built on a semi-island setting with access from Botley Road



West Street Characterised by terraced housing of various styles including some of the earliest houses on the island and two ranges of rubble stone houses



South Street A road of architectural diversity extending between East Street and West Street, benefiting from a river setting to both ends of the street



Osney Mill The mill complex sited on the banks of the Thames incorporating the surviving 15th century remnants of the former Osney Abbey

Character appraisal

For the purposes of the Appraisal, five character areas have been defined. Each of the character areas should be considered in the context of the conservation area as a whole and not taken in isolation.

- Area 1: Osney Cemetery
- Area 2: Osney Mill / former Abbey complex
- Area 3: St Frideswide's Church, Botley Road
- Area 4: The river, lock and tow path
- Area 5: Osney Island

Area 1: Osney Cemetery

Osney Cemetery has an unkempt and overgrown quality, enhanced by the random placing of the gravestones. The scattered trees and bushes are havens for birds and other wildlife. The cemetery is accessed by a small gatehouse off Osney Lane constructed of timber on a stone plinth with a steep pitched slate roof. As well as being a functional space, it is an area of important open green space within the conservation area. Its proximity to the railway line does not detract from the tranquillity of the area.

Area 2: Osney Mill/former Abbey site

The prominent 4-storey red brick structure of Osney Mill can be clearly seen from the lock. The building

was gutted by fire in 1946 but despite its roofless condition, makes a bold and positive contribution to the conservation area. It is of additional importance as it is one of the few remaining examples of a mill sitting on the River Thames and is of key significance to Oxford's industrial past. The dominant red brick building dating from the 19th century, forms only part of the mill complex but the remainder of the site cannot be seen from the river nor is public access permissible. The only surviving element of the former Abbey, a rubble stone and building with queen post roof and a stone archway dating from the 15th century is situated to the rear of the main range.

Area 3: St Frideswide's Church, Botley Road

Although this is the main church for Osney, it can only be accessed from Botley Road. It stands on its own 'island' site to the north-west of Osney Town, separated by Osney Stream. The green setting contrasts with the dark and sombre appearance of the church, the mature trees and shrubbery spilling out over the river creating an inviting and mystical image. The solid and stocky church nestles amongst the trees, shielded from view from the main road. The church was designed by SS Teulon in 1870 and is of stone construction. Teulon's church was never fully built to design due to lack of funds, with the full tower and spire not being built, resulting in a distinctive low octagonal stump of a tower. The church is now Grade II* listed. The church grounds provide an area of green space and relief from the busy Botley Road and it is enhanced by its river setting.

Area 4: The river, lock and towpath

The river forms an important setting to the conservation area. The Thames separates Osney from the rest of Oxford and creates an air of tranquillity despite its proximity to the main road. The roar of the water passing through the sluices under Osney Bridge can drown out the noise of traffic with the trees and other vegetation along the banks and walls of the stream acting as a buffer between the two elements.

The character of an area comprises the physical eg. the buildings, land, vegetation etc as well as the intangible elements eg. the way an area is used, specific sounds and smells associated with that area etc. River life adds to the intangible character of Osney eg. the smells and sounds of boat engines; the distinctive aromas of wood burning stoves;



FIG. 17

cooking smells escaping from the cabins of moored boats. The ducks and swans, people meandering along the towpath and the various moored boats all combine to create a vibrant and distinctive element of the unique and more seasonal character of the conservation area.

The 19th century iron bridge over the river has the lowest head-height of any bridge on the Thames at only 7'6". As a result, only limited traffic can pass under the bridge, many of the larger boats choosing to moor along the riverbank of East Street before turning back, or not progressing further up the river than Folly Bridge.

A lock was first mentioned at Osney in the 13th century. The Thames Navigation Commissioners constructed the original pound lock in 1790 with the labour force coming from Oxford prison and it was rebuilt by the Thames Conservancy in 1905. Long views up and down the river can be gained from the lock area, as well as clear views to the remaining mill buildings on the eastern banks of the Thames.

The towpath forms part of the Thames Path, passing over Osney Lock, weaving its way through Oxford and beyond. In Osney, it is an important element of local amenity providing a rural escape from the nearby city. Trees, meadows, wildlife and boats enhance the long views of the river and help mask Osney Mead Industrial Estate to the south of the island. Along the towpath the grade II listed obelisk commemorates 21 year old Edgar George Wilson who died rescuing two boys from the Thames on 15 June 1889.

The private Osney Marina is tucked away in front of Gibbs Crescent, accessed via a private road running alongside the cemetery.



FIG. 18

Area 5: Osney Island

Oxford's Victorian suburbs are generally typified by a blend of terraced housing along tightly packed narrow streets, traditionally associated with the development of the canals and railways or by detached suburban villas in spacious landscaped gardens originally associated with academic life and the rise of the wealthy middle classes. Osney is one such tightly packed suburb but benefits from a unique and special character, its origins and watery setting create a wholly different character from other terraced suburbs and this is further enhanced by its diversity of architectural styles, the multi-coloured facades and relaxed atmosphere.

Vehicular access onto the island is via a bridge from Botley Road into Bridge Street, leading into the narrow streets of the island. Bridge Street forms the spine of the island, extending south to the Environment Agency yard at the southern tip. Pedestrian access is via three footbridges at various points around the island.

The roads are narrow, made more so by the parked cars creating an enclosed and intimate streetscene. The sense of enclosure is further heightened by the building line being directly onto the pavements with few exceptions, resulting in a predominantly suburban character. East Street benefits from an open river setting, whilst West Street has a partial river setting with an enclosed central section. South Street is fully enclosed and although North Street runs alongside Osney Stream the road still benefits from a more enclosed character.

FIG. 17 Lock, mill and cottage

FIG. 18 Marina and Gibbs Crescent

FIG. 16 Osney cemetery and tomb stones



FIG. 16

FIG. 19 Long view along North Street

FIG. 20 Former manor house

FIG. 21 Democrats Club, western elevation

a. North Street

North Street is a short stretch of road between Bridge Street and East Street, running parallel with Osney Stream and Botley Road. The houses are built along the southern side of the road resulting in a mixed architectural character. Cars park along the northern side of the road, often shielded by the overhanging trees along the riverbank. Osney Stream acts as a buffer between Botley Road and North Street, the lower level of the island protecting it from the intrusion of the main road. North Street is an enclosed space of varied character with an open view towards the river, terminated by the River Hotel on the far bank of the Thames.

The large detached Victorian villa at no. 1 North Street sits in the prominent corner plot of North Street/East Street, now occupied by the West Oxford Democrats Club but was originally constructed as a single family house. The house was once surrounded by garden but this has now been converted to hard standing for parking which does not enhance the setting of the building. Despite the loss of garden and the unsympathetic alterations to the building, the house still makes a positive and commanding contribution to the streetscene.

Nos. 2-4 North Street were built on the gardens of the Manor House in 1898 comprising a group of three red brick houses, set back from the pavement behind low brick boundary walls. The houses benefit from a positive group value, enhanced by the retention of their original architectural features, which has only been slightly impacted upon by the way the houses have been treated: two have painted the stone detailing surrounding the windows, doors etc white with the last house has retained the natural stone.

The corner of North Street/Bridge Street is occupied by the former 'Manor House'. (32) Built directly onto the pavement, the rendered and painted Victorian house has been converted into flats but has retained its classical style main entrance. Although the three housing types have different plot positions and styles, the boundary walls of the West Oxford Democrats Club and nos. 2-4 North Street are in line with nos. 5-6 North Street creating a continuous frontage and strengthening the sense of enclosure.

b. East Street

Although dominated by terraced houses, East Street



benefits from a much more diverse architectural character ranging from the more elaborate nos. 1-5 East Street with their classical entrances and increased heights to the more traditional small scale terraced houses. The Article 4 Direction removed the



permitted development rights to alter the façade of any residential dwelling house in Osney Town. The existing painted and rendered facades have added an extra element to the character and appearance of the streetscene, however, the façade treatments must be kept in good repair to continue making a positive contribution. These houses were built in ones or twos, their slight variation to a common terrace theme adding to the architectural diversity. The terraces are flanked either end by individual buildings, the West Oxford Democrats Club to the north and the Waterman's Arms public house to the south, whilst half way along the road, a small gable end garage breaks up the continuous row of houses.

Towards the southern end of East Street, the road curves gently towards the west, altering the way the buildings are positioned along the pavement. The resultant staggered frontages still open directly onto the pavement but benefit from being set further back enabling small planted borders to spill out on the pavement eg. Bronwen Cottage, softening the suburban form of the houses.

East Street benefits from a dual character: tightly packed houses along the western side of the road and the open green character of the riverbank and Thames setting. A number of the large willows along the bank have been removed impacting on both the leafy character and appearance of the street. Where these



FIG. 22 Long view down East Street from Osney Bridge

FIG. 23 The Waterman's Arms

FIG. 24 1-5 East Street

FIG. 25 Garage on East Street creating an important break in the uniformity of the streetscene

trees once contributed to a more enclosed character of East Street, their removal has created a much more open space, with uninterrupted views of the river. Replacement willows have been planted which in turn will recreate the leafy and more enclosed character of the street.

The Waterman's Arms at the southern end of East Street is an important social hub of the island. The pub is an important local facility attracting customers

from Osney, across the city and from the river users, with its patrons often spilling out on to the benches and riverbank opposite. The late 19th century building has undergone alteration and extension but its corner position and distinctive chamfered corner entrance still positively dominate the space.

c. South Street

The contrast between East Street and South Street is instantly recognisable: the open river setting of East Street turns into the enclosed space of South Street with both sides of the road densely developed. The houses have a more distinct architectural diversity and

despite the density of development, the suburban form is softened by green boundaries. The road does benefit from green views to both ends: towards the east the view is of the raised river bank and treed setting of the Thames whilst to the west, the road is terminated by the green setting of Osney Stream.

The houses along the southern side of the road are all set back behind low boundary walls with small planted gardens, the greenery contrasting with, and softening the appearance of, the red brick of the terraced houses. Again the diversity of building styles adds to the character of the street. Like all the streets on the island, alterations were carried out prior to the introduction of the Article 4 direction that are not wholly in keeping with the age and traditional character of the houses, the replacement windows and doors impacting on the individual buildings and street character as a whole. On both sides of the road there are sites that could be regarded as being ‘negative’ or ‘neutral’ elements providing future opportunity for enhancement eg. painting, reinstatement of traditional windows and doors etc.

The houses beyond the Bridge Street junction, heading towards West Street, benefit from a very strong character and large group value that does not exist elsewhere on the island. The block of 10 houses sit gable end to the road behind small well-planted gardens and low boundary walls. The decorative bargeboarding, the steep pitched roof with extra accommodation, the retained architectural features, window boxes and tiled garden paths combine to create a focal point of the street. As a result of their design features and gardens, these houses are less suburban in character.

Part of the north side of South Street consists of the more traditional small scale terraced house fronting directly onto the pavement and beyond the Bridge Street junction, a 1960s block of accommodation formerly for the elderly stands in a very prominent corner position. The group of houses (nos. 33-38 South Street) is set back from the pavement behind a narrow stretch of garden and a low wooden fence. The concrete roof tiles and uPVC windows are not characteristic of the area and although built as a terrace, the style of the houses is not in keeping with the architectural character of the island. The mature trees and bushes in the garden help soften the harsh appearance of the houses but additional planting may enhance the neutrality of the block. In essence, these houses face inwards, turning their backs

FIG. 26 Watery setting of South Street - western end



FIG. 27 South Street - group value



FIG. 28 33-38 South Street



FIG. 29

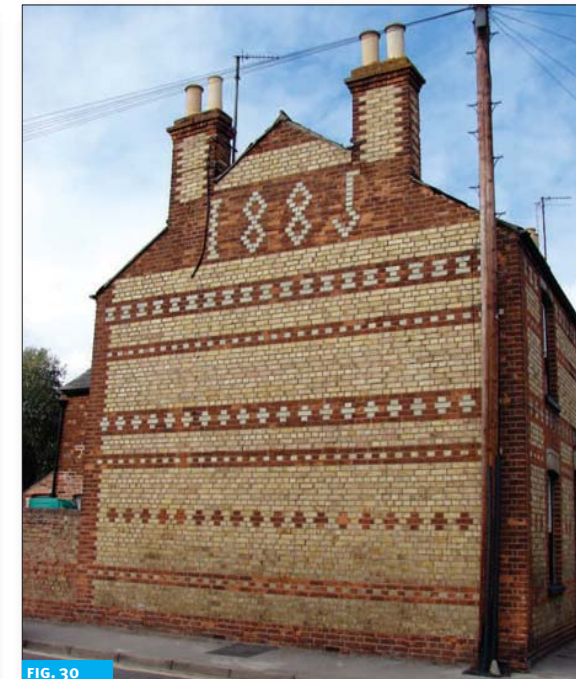


FIG. 30

FIG. 29 Unfolding view along West Street

FIG. 30 1885 polychromatic brick work, West Street

FIG. 31 3-storeyed rendered stone houses, West Street

FIG. 32 West Street

towards the road with the entrances being on the northern elevation. This is a rare feature on the island as all the houses open onto the road and has resulted in a more institutional façade to the visible southern elevation which is out of keeping with the more domestic residential nature of the island.

d. West Street

West Street benefits from a partial river setting. The southern end of the street abuts Osney Stream with trees and plants hanging over the railings and brick wall, creating an important green view along South Street. The mature trees hang over the river, the banks being full of smaller plants and wildlife, reinforcing the tranquil atmosphere of the conservation area. The railings allow views over the river strengthening the integration between the built elements and the watery setting.

The east side of West Street contains some of the earliest houses to be built on the island whilst the west side contains some the last plots developed. The market gardens that dominated the western side of the road have long since given way to terraced houses with the former Ice House site to the rear of nos. 42-45 West Street having been developed with the 1960s West Court block of flats. Like the other two blocks of 1960s development on the island, West Court does not take into account the scale and form of the existing architectural character being a large flat roofed red brick development accessed via a concrete



FIG. 31



FIG. 32

driveway. Unlike its contemporaries, the development is partially shielded from the road due to its set back positioning, soft landscaping and mature trees, and as a result its negative impact upon the conservation area has been reduced.

The remainder of the road has been developed with a diverse range of Victorian and Edwardian terraced housing opening directly onto the pavements, including 3-storey houses, stone built terraces, double fronted houses and innovative use of polychromatic brickwork at no. 50 West Street. The central section of the road is enclosed with houses and parking on both sides. Towards the northern end of West Street, with the road layout reflecting the curve of Osney Stream, the space is more open with a green river setting and glimpsed views across to St Frideswide's Church. Again alterations have taken place that are unsympathetic to the age and style of the houses impacting upon the integrity of the street's character but due to the number of distinctive features within the streetscape, West Street makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

Nos. 13-16 West Street are a group of 3-storey rendered stone built terraces, one of only two stone

built blocks on the island. The houses are a focal point of the streetscape due to their increased height. Nos. 19-23 West Street are also constructed from stone but are of the more characteristic 2-storey height. The timber sash windows have been retained but some doors have been replaced with inappropriate styles. These houses are more rural in character with a softer appearance than their red brick neighbours, the yellow stone adding texture and colour to the street.

The majority of the houses are a combination of rendered or natural brick terraced houses, many of which have undergone some of alteration or 'improvement' over the years. On the curve of the road, no. 4 West Street is an impressive double-fronted 'detached' house with bay windows and rendered façade. This was one of the earliest houses on the island benefiting from extensive gardens to the rear. The individuality of the house adds to the architectural diversity, the distinctiveness strengthened by its key position on the road.

e. Bridge Street

Bridge Street is the spine of the island, perceived to be the main road with direct bridge access from Botley Road in the north to the Environment Agency yard in the south. The building line is clearly defined, with the houses opening directly onto the pavement creating a strong sense of enclosure, further strengthened by parking along both sides of the road. The straight road enables long views in either direction, the view to the north being terminated by greenery in contrast with the urban form of the street, the view to the south terminated by the more industrial form of the Environment Agency buildings.

The northern end of Bridge Street has seen a significant amount of late 20th century development

impacting on the integrity of the streetscene. In the case of nos. 105a and 105b and nos. 107-112, the new build has attempted to emulate their older counterparts in terms of scale, material and form but the smoother modern bricks lack the texture and depth of colour of the older bricks, and there are slight inaccuracies in architectural design detail and use of uPVC windows, the contribution of these houses has been weakened. Nos. 107-112 have been built in the gardens of the former Manor House on North Street and still benefit from a semi-open setting to the south with an area of parking and garden space being provided. A stone boundary wall and black wrought iron gates mark the division between public and private realm. The mature horse chestnut tree in the garden contributes an element of greenery and a rare glimpse to the rear of the properties of East Street is also possible, the private space providing a much greener character than the public space to the front.

Mallinson Court, a late 20th century development of flats does not make a positive contribution to the more historic streetscape of Bridge Street. The dark brown brick development was constructed on the former site of the boys school, and is now a dominant presence along the road and does not incorporate any of the traditional architectural features prevalent throughout the island.

Predominantly a residential road, Bridge Street was the most commercial of the streets on Osney Island with remnants of the non-residential features still visible. The road was home to schools, a bakery, general stores and public houses with nos. 16 and 69 having retained their associated architectural features eg. the façade of no. 16 is characterised by its brown glazed bricks and large window whilst no. 69 has incorporated the shop window and door into its residential use. These features are important reminders of historic uses of the property and now contribute to the streetscene.

The Article 4 direction limits the changes that can be made to the street facing elevation of any dwelling house on the island. The changes that have taken place pre-Article 4 are all the more prominent due to such a distinctive building line and narrow pavements.

The lower section of Bridge Street, known locally as the Bridge Street extension, dates from the late 19th century and incorporates additional design features creating a different and more open character. The two short ranges of terraces all incorporate bay windows

to the ground floor whilst the four end houses have distinctive double height bays pushing into the roof. Some of the houses remain in their natural state of polychromatic brickwork (yellow with red brick detailing) whilst others have been rendered, painted

FIG. 33 View north along Bridge Street towards Botley Road



FIG. 34 Rear of Bridge Street extension, Osney Mead and river



FIG. 35 New houses on Bridge Street



FIG. 36 Bridge Street extension



FIG. 37 Entrance to Mallinson Court, Bridge Street



FIG. 38 Former shop front, Bridge Street

or pebble-dashed. The front doors are recessed with fanlight, with a suspended lintel below the door arch and tiled door well. The stone mullioned bays incorporate timber framed sash windows with 2-over-2 windows to the main bay windows and upper windows. The small front gardens behind low brick walls and one-sided parking add to the more open nature of the road. The tiled garden pathways add to the appearance of the houses.

f. Doyley Road and Swan Street

Doyley Road and Swan Street were the last roads to be developed and only contain a few houses each. Doyley Road is accessed from the Bridge Street extension comprising five red brick Edwardian houses, clustered around the western end of the road. Development is only on the southern and western sides of the street with nos. 1-3 looking over the open rear spaces of the South Street houses. The semi-detached nos. 4-5 Doyley Road form the terminating view along the short road. Despite the small number of houses and the open aspect of the South Street gardens, Doyley Road has a sense of enclosure due to the short nature of the road and the proximity of the houses to the pavements. The mature trees and planting soften the red brick of the houses.

Swan Street is the only other road that benefits from a 'group value' of a uniform terrace. Constructed in 1892 by Charles Bossom, these are very modest terrace houses with few architectural details though built in pairs with the front doors placed in the centre of each pair, adding a rhythm to the houses. The brick window arches have been painted in some instances and doors have been replaced with incorrect styles. The continuity of brick façade has been interrupted due to one house having been rendered. The roofs are uniformly slate with red brick chimneys. All houses have retained their timber framed sash windows. The

single terrace of 8 houses fronting directly on to the pavement and built along the southern side of the road with views over the rear gardens of the West Street houses. The view along the road terminates in dense tree planting and a footbridge across the Osney Stream providing access to Ferry Hinksey Road and the West Oxford Community Primary School. The road is a predominantly open space with an airy and quiet character.

Townscape features

Enclosed suburban streets with limited public open space.

Predominantly modest 2-storey 19th century terraces.

River setting providing attractive views and public green space.

Soft green boundary to the conservation area contrasting with the hard suburban streets within the boundary.

St Frideswide's Church set on its own 'island' in a dense green setting.

Dense development facing onto pavements with long private gardens to the rear creating green 'spines' away from the public eye.

Long gardens to the rear of the houses contrasting with direct pavement access to the majority of the houses.

Low boundary walls with small front garden spaces predominantly along South Street.

High red brick boundary wall enclosing no. 1 North Street creating a distinctive feature of the streetscape.

Cemetery site is away from the main residential streets of the conservation area but provides an important area of public green space both within the conservation and for the wider area.

Granite setts and stone kerbs to the roads.

Architectural styles and detailing

The main development period on the island was between 1850 and the turn of the century with the last phase being completed in 1905, Doyley Road. Since then 1960s incremental developments have taken place impacting upon the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The vernacular is 2-storey terraced houses, predominantly constructed from red/yellow brick with slate roofs. Traditional windows are timber sashes of the 6-over-6 or 2-over-2 varieties, the variation reflecting the advancements in glass production techniques through the century resulting in larger panes with fewer glazing bars. Doors from the mid-19th century were of solid multi-panel design or incorporated glazing to the upper panels. Doors and window frames were painted with window frames being white and doors a variety of colours including black, dark green and dark blue. Many of the houses on the island have undergone some works of alteration resulting in the loss of traditional features.

In addition to the predominant red/yellow brick terrace, there are two blocks of stone built terraces along West Street, one of which includes a terrace of 3-storey houses. The 2-storey houses have been left in their natural stone state whilst the neighbouring 3-storey properties have all been rendered. Slate roofs are common to both. The increased height of the 3-storey houses (nos. 13-16 West Street) contributes to the streetscape by interrupting the continuity of form and rhythm but rather than being a negative intrusion, these houses add to the overall streetscape and incorporate many of the design features of the smaller houses eg. brick chimneystacks, timber sash windows, fanlights etc.

The terraced houses were generally built in isolation or in pairs and as a result, there is a high degree of architectural diversity within a general theme of 2-storey brick built terraces. The houses differ in terms of use of material, placement/size of windows, roof



FIG. 41

FIG. 41 East Street on the river front

pitch etc. Brick has been used in a variety of ways adding distinction to the streetscene. Variation of brick includes solid red or yellow brick houses, red brick houses with yellow brick stringcourses and vice-versa, polychromatic use of red and yellow brick, and in the case of no. 50 West Street, use of contrasting brick to create patterned stringcourses and date in the gable end of the building.

Nos. 1-5 East Street are a prominent feature of the streetscene due to their design. The group are still 2-storey terraced houses but are of a grander scale and design than the neighbouring properties. Their design includes a simple classical style entrance with recessed front doors and accessed via two or three steps. The upper windows are pointed arched timber sash openings. They are of red stone construction with a rendered base plinth, slate roofs with small gabled dormers and brick stacks.

There are few examples of a uniform terrace row eg. nos. 20-30 South Street, the houses of the Bridge Street extension and Swan Street. Nos. 20-30 South Street are distinctive for a number of reasons, the main being that they face gable end to the road, incorporating additional accommodation in the attic space. Architectural details include decorative bargeboards, red brick stringcourses, triple-pane fanlights above the doors, stone detailing to window and door surrounds and timber framed sash windows. The group value of the row is further enhanced by being set back slightly from the road behind low boundary walls and small, planted gardens. Continuity of the row is strengthened by the use of similar treatments to all but one of the houses, the majority have white painted window frames, window surrounds, door surrounds and bargeboards.

FIG. 39 Doyley Road



FIG. 39

FIG. 40 View along Swan Street



FIG. 40

Architectural features

Predominantly 2-storey, small-scale Victorian and Edwardian terraced houses

Predominant use of red or yellow brick, used as solid colours, contrasting brick string-courses or polychromatic patterns.

Later additions of rendered or painted facades, now controlled by Article 4 Direction, interrupting the continuous brick facades.

Slate roofs, with slightly varying pitches.

Timber framed sash windows, mainly 6-over-6 or 2 over 2, some with margin panes.

Stone detailing to door and window surrounds.

Solid panelled doors, four and six panels with glazed upper panels in some instances.

Red brick chimney stacks.

Low boundary walls with small front gardens and tiled garden paths.

Strong building lines, the majority of houses opening directly onto the pavement.

Views and open spaces

Due to the compact nature of Osney, long views through the conservation area are limited. The elevated position of Osney Bridge affords the passer-by with long views down the Thames and East Street. The towpath also provides views of the ivy covered mill, marina and more far-reaching views out towards the southern boundary of the conservation area.

The views on the island are more restricted, being limited to views along the tightly packed enclosed roads dominated by the coloured terraces, differing roof heights and pitches, long rows of chimneys and continuous building lines.

Public open space is limited to the riverbank on East Street, towpath along the Thames and the cemetery space. A distinctive element of the conservation area is formed by the compact nature of the town juxtaposed to the linear/green qualities of the Thames corridor. There is a band of greenery

surrounding Osney rather than greenery being a key feature of the streetscene. The softer green setting around the edges of the conservation area enhances the hard materials of the built character of the island.

The rear gardens, although entirely within the private realm and mostly out of public sight, create an important area of green space. The aerial photograph below illustrates this point and whilst they do not contribute to the public character of the island, they do add to the green and tranquil nature of the conservation area. The long open gardens also create opportunity for views from the upper storeys of the houses. Again these are private views but they are still an important aspect of the overall character of the area.

Views between buildings are not widely available on the island but where glimpses of the private green areas do exist these should be preserved eg. corner sites, the open north side of Swan Street and the gap between nos. 112 and 1 Bridge Street.

Osney Cemetery is the only formal area of public green space within the conservation area. Despite the proximity of the railway line there is an air of tranquillity about the space, strengthened by its sense of detachment from the rest of the conservation area. The only means of access is via a gatehouse on Osney Lane, which in turn can be accessed via Mill Street or the footbridge over the rail track, both of which are outside the boundary of the conservation area.

Negative and neutral features / areas of future enhancement

Inappropriate alterations to buildings: the terraces of Osney have suffered in the past from incremental loss of architectural detailing including the installation of replacement doors and windows, addition of dormers, change of roofing material, rendering/painting of facades etc. The introduction of the Article 4 Direction withdrawing certain permitted development rights now prevents householders from carrying out such alterations and where windows/doors have been replaced with inappropriate styles, these are now opportunities for future enhancement schemes reinstating traditional windows and doors. Inappropriate windows styles include uPVC 'sash' style windows, top-hung casements and metal framed double

glazing units. Incorrect replacement doors include uPVC doors, full glazed doors, mock-Georgian incorporating fanlights etc.

Removal of render is not recommended as this could be harmful to the building but it is important that existing render is kept in sound repair and good decorative order. Although these houses were not originally intended to be rendered or painted, properties treated in such a way have added an extra dimension to the character of the conservation area. The choice of paint colour on such treatments or paint in poor condition can be detrimental to both the individual house and the street as a whole. Where paint is flaking or render is cracked/in poor condition, opportunities exist for future enhancements.

The terraces of Osney Island have proportional openings in their facades; alterations to the dimensions of these openings can have a negative impact on the harmonious qualities of the house. The Article 4 Direction now prohibits such alterations and future opportunity may arise for the reinstatement of the original window dimensions and styles.

Negative buildings: the majority of the post-war developments on the island do not make a positive contribution to the special character of the conservation area and their prominence is all the more noticeable due to the scale and size of the buildings.

Public realm: road and pavement surfaces are often in poor and patched conditions detracting from the appearance of the area. Traditional features such as granite setts and stone kerbs should be retained as they are of historic importance. Pavements and roadsides are littered with a surplus of road signs and markings. The poor quality of the street name plates can also have a negative impact upon the overall streetscape.

Traffic/parking: there is no means of through access on the island and therefore, Osney does not suffer from traffic volume in the same way that other Oxford suburbs do. However, the Environment Agency requires access to its premises and the large vehicles travelling along Bridge Street do impact on the tranquil nature of the conservation area.

Legislative controls are only part of the process involved in preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area. A collaborative arrangement is required involving local



FIG. 42

FIG. 42 The entrance to the cemetery - enhancement opportunity



FIG. 43

FIG. 43 Public realm enhancement



FIG. 44

FIG. 44 Enhancement opportunity

FIG. 45 The green buffer between Osney and Botley Road

residents, the City and County Councils, utility companies, stakeholders/landowners etc if the established special and historic character of conservation areas is to be maintained and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

Conclusion

The Osney Town Conservation Area is a unique area with a strong sense of place. Historically known for the impressive abbey, Osney has become widely appreciated for its island setting amidst the various tributaries of the River Thames and its uniform layout of densely packed terraced houses both of which contribute to the distinctive character of the conservation area. The residential aspects of the island today have stayed relatively true to the original layout planned by George Hester in 1851. Change has inevitably taken place and not all has been positive, the cumulative effects of the inappropriate alterations was gradually eroding the important and cherished character of the area until the additional planning controls of the Article 4 Direction were introduced.

Designation as a conservation area and the introduction of the Article 4 Direction are not enough in themselves to preserve the special character of Osney. The withdrawal of certain permitted development rights ensured that inappropriate development and alteration no longer takes place and the integrity of the area is retained. Oxford City Council has a successful record of enforcement on the island and will continue to take action against any unauthorised works. With greater understanding of the important character of Osney as a conservation area and of the individual properties, the special qualities that warranted the designation in 1976 will be maintained and enhanced for future generations.

Many of the ‘improvements’ carried out to the houses of Osney Town prior to the introduction of the Article 4 Direction were to the detriment of the character and appearance of the individual properties and the area as a whole. Following the introduction and the subsequent removal of certain permitted development rights, the remaining unaltered houses have retained their original character. As house owners have changed and the understanding of the character of buildings has increased, houses that have previously been unsympathetically altered are now being restored to their original design eg by



FIG. 45

reinstatement of traditional timber sash windows and appropriate doors etc.

The introduction of the Article 4 Direction imposes additional responsibilities on house owners and poses a number of challenges for those looking to change their properties to meet modern living standards. Whilst this has been difficult to achieve in some instances, with some flexibility and realistic expectations it has generally appeared not to have imposed overly onerous burdens on house owners. In terms of the appearance and character of the buildings, the results have been very positive. Where challenged, planning decisions have been strongly and consistently supported by the Planning Inspectorate.

The Article 4 Direction has successfully stemmed further deterioration of the character and appearance of Osney. Whilst the Direction only governs development and alterations to the front of the houses, in a recent planning appeal for a property on West Street 7, the Planning Inspector highlighted the importance of applying as much care and attention to the detail of alterations to the rear of properties as to the front, thus confirming that the special character of a conservation area is deeper than the visible façade. Views out of houses across rear gardens are just as important as those along the roads and the river. Although being firmly in the private realm it is harder to define this hidden element of character but where opportunities exist for glimpses into these areas ie. through gaps between buildings, they should be preserved. The Article 4 Direction is an important step in ensuring the effective management of the conservation area and Oxford City Council is mindful of the need to help with practical advice about sources of materials, finding appropriately skilled and experienced builders, using appropriate repair techniques etc.

Listed Buildings

Buildings are listed for their special architectural or historical interest, for close historical interest or for group value. They are classified by grades to show their relative importance:

Grade I	(A) Exceptional interest.
Grade II*	(B) Particular importance with perhaps outstanding features.
Grade II	(C) Buildings of special interest which warrant every effort being made to preserve them.

(Grades A to C refer to ecclesiastical buildings only.)

Appendix 1

Listed Buildings

Bridge at north end of Bridge Street, forming the junction with Botley Road – Grade II

19th century, single span coursed rubble bridge with ashlar parapet walls.

Seven Arches Bridge (St Frideswide’s Bridge) Botley Road – Grade II

Originally probably 16th century or earlier, widened in 1960 on the south side when it was much rebuilt. 7 stone arches, plain parapet walls. North face rubble with cutwater and ashlar parapet. South face all ashlar with keystones.

Thames Towpath – Memorial 300 yards south of Osney Lock – Grade II

1889. Stone obelisk on plinth with inscription to the memory of Edgar George Wilson who drowned after rescuing two boys.

Church of St Frideswide, Botley Road – Grade II*

1872 by SS Teulon. An unusually powerful design, apsed with plain detail. Stone built. A very good example of this architect’s work. In the Romanesque style. Coursed rubble with ashlar dressings. Vestigial crossing tower.

Vicarage at the Church of St Frideswide, Botley Road – Grade II

Possibly by SS Teulon but more likely by HG Drinkwater. Late 19th century. Joined to the church by a covered walkway. Coursed rubble with ashlar dressings. 2 storeys. 2 light mullioned windows. Semicircular bay. Gable, tiled roof, stone stacks. Lower south wing.

Osney Abbey, Mill Street – Grade II

The Augustinian Priory was founded 1129. All the buildings have been destroyed except a rubble and timber-framed structure which may be 15th century in date; it has a queenpost roof (C16th) and a blocked 2-light window. Joined to it by a wall on the north-east is a stone 15th century archway with a 4-centred head and moulded jambs. There is a commemorative plaque to Haggai of Oxford, martyred in 1222.

Osney Mill House, Mill Street – Grade II

Early 19th century. Rendered and painted. 2 storeys, 4 windows, 3:1, the single one being lower and set back. Small paned sash windows. Plain door, central to the 3 window section. Modern tile roof, red brick stacks.

Buildings of Local Interest

Osney Mill, Mill Street

Early 19th century. Redbrick, three storeys. Various windows, sashes, with glazing bars. Weatherboarded gable with weathercock. Tiled roof. In a partly ruinous state.

Osney Bridge, Botley Road

Dated 1888, WH White Engineer. Single span cast-iron bridge on stone abutments and with pierced parapets. Two stone arched culverts on west. Parapet with two panels of balustrading on the west and one on the east.

7 Reference: 04/01847/VAR