

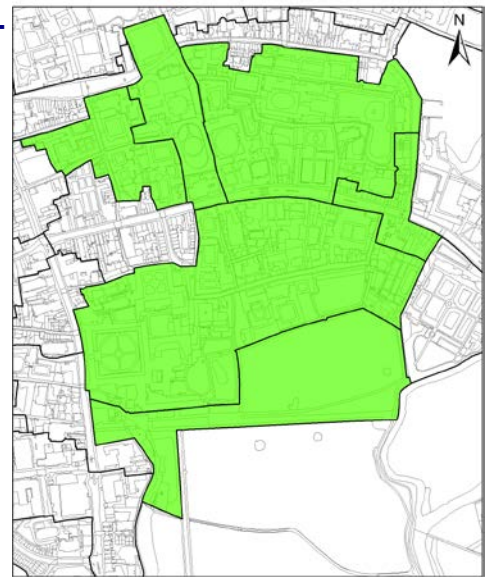
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 34:
THE EASTERN COLLEGES- SOUTH OF THE HIGH STREET**

The HUCA is located within broad character Zone K: The eastern colleges.

The broad character zone comprises of the eastern part of the historic city which is dominated by the enclosed quadrangles, gardens and monumental buildings of the medieval and post-medieval University and colleges.

Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: Post-medieval.
- Designations: Forty-two Grade I, eight Grade II*, seventy-eight Grade II listings. Part of medieval town wall, a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Central Conservation Area. Two Grade II and one Grade I Registered Parks and Gardens.
- Archaeological Interest: Previous archaeological investigations have recorded an exceptional range of evidence for the evolution of the city from the Saxon to the post-medieval period. Contains the site of Middle-Late Saxon St Frideswide’s Minster or Monastery, part of Late Saxon burh, medieval Jewish Quarter, several medieval and post-medieval colleges and exceptional medieval and post-medieval built fabric.
- Character types: Medieval colleges, post medieval college, University of Oxford buildings, post-medieval and Victorian townhouses.
- Space: Open space is largely restricted to the enclosed quadrangles and gardens of the colleges. Glimpsed views of these from adjacent streets and lands are an important component of the character area. Oriol Square provides a large sub-rectangular space and roadway surfaced with historic cobbles and modern cobble sets.
- Road morphology: Late Saxon main thoroughfare with slight curve. Late Saxon and medieval street rectilinear grid with a number of historic streets enclosed or removed by the colleges.
- Plot morphology: Limited survival of medieval tenement plots, mostly large regular and irregular plots.
- The highest point of the area is at Corpus Christi College at a height of 62m OD on the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace, the ground then gradually drops away towards



The eastern colleges (Zone K)
© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100015045



© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.

HUCA 34

OAP Characterisation			
	Townhouses		University of Oxford Structures
	Mixed townhouses/shops		University of Oxford Sports Areas
	Narrow plots		Hotels pre 1945
	Victorian Townhouses		Sports/Fitness
	Detached Villas 1900-1919		Historic Parkland
	Medieval Colleges		Town Defences Medieval
	Post Medieval Colleges		Medieval long distance route
	19th Century Colleges		Lane
	20th century Colleges		Back lane
	University of Oxford Libraries		Square or Place

Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

the southwest and southeast to height of around 60m OD at the Northmoor First Terrace and then to a height of around 57m OD on the alluvial floodplain at Christ Church Meadow.

- Survival of townscape elements:
 - Medieval and post-medieval college buildings and quadrangles.
 - Post-medieval designed college gardens.
 - Norman Priory Church of St Frideswide's now the city cathedral.
 - Former Merton College stables, now 'Postmasters Hall'- late 12th or early 13th century stone building.
 - Elements of Late Saxon and Medieval street pattern.
 - Elements of medieval street pattern enclosed within colleges (e.g. Logic Lane).
 - Contains part of Deadman's Walk which linked Jewish Burial Ground with the Jewish Quarter at St Aldates.
 - Listed cobbles in Merton Street.
 - Stretch of medieval city wall and surviving bastions, part of the Late Saxon Rampart may survive within Merton College.
 - Tom Tower contains Osney Abbey Cathedral bell.
 - Notable veteran trees in Christ Church garden.
 - Tackley's Inn, No 106 High Street, is a notable survival of a late medieval hall.
 - Monumental stone built college buildings contrast with the surviving pos-medieval townhouses.

Description

This character area represents a coherent area of enclosed medieval colleges located to the south of the High Street. Together with Character Area 37, located north of the High Street, this area represents a distinctive zone in the eastern part of the city where medieval tenement patterns have largely been replaced by collegiate architecture. The domination of the colleges is contrasted by occasional surviving blocks of post-medieval townhouses. To the south of the character area college precincts are bounded by the route of the 13th century medieval wall which divides this character area from the sports field and meadow further south. The area contains numerous notable buildings and designed spaces.

The St Aldates frontage is dominated by Christ Church Tom Quad and Tom Tower. On the High Street many of the three or four storey townhouses have shop fronts on the ground floor. The High Street, known as The High, preserves a distinctive street scene (comprising of character areas 19, 33, 37 and 34) which Nikolaus Pevsner described as 'one of the world's greatest streets'. Both the



Listed buildings by date of earliest identified fabric (based on listing description)

townhouses and college buildings front directly onto adjacent pavements and form largely continuous frontages. The east frontage of the University Examination Schools is an exception with a small hedge enclosed lawn. Also small areas of lawn next to Merton College chapel and east of the Christ Church on Oriel Square are enclosed by wrought iron railings.

Whilst the colleges retain notable medieval structures and alignments, including extensive medieval fabric at Merton College, the external public frontages are dominated by post-medieval to modern structures, facades and enhancements often in gothic architectural design. For example the northern frontage of Merton College is largely early 19th and early 20th century reworking of medieval and 16th century buildings. Christ Church Tom Quad is 16th-17th century in date. At Oriel College the Front Quad is 17th century and the High Street frontage is 20th century. The Corpus Christi frontage onto Merton Street is 16th century with 18th heightening. The High Street frontage of University College is 17th-18th in date. The character area includes the late 19th century University Examination Schools on the High Street and a stretch of post-medieval town houses on the north side of Merton Street. Of these No's 1-4 Merton Street, a former academic hall now used by Merton College represents a notable area of tenement plot survival.

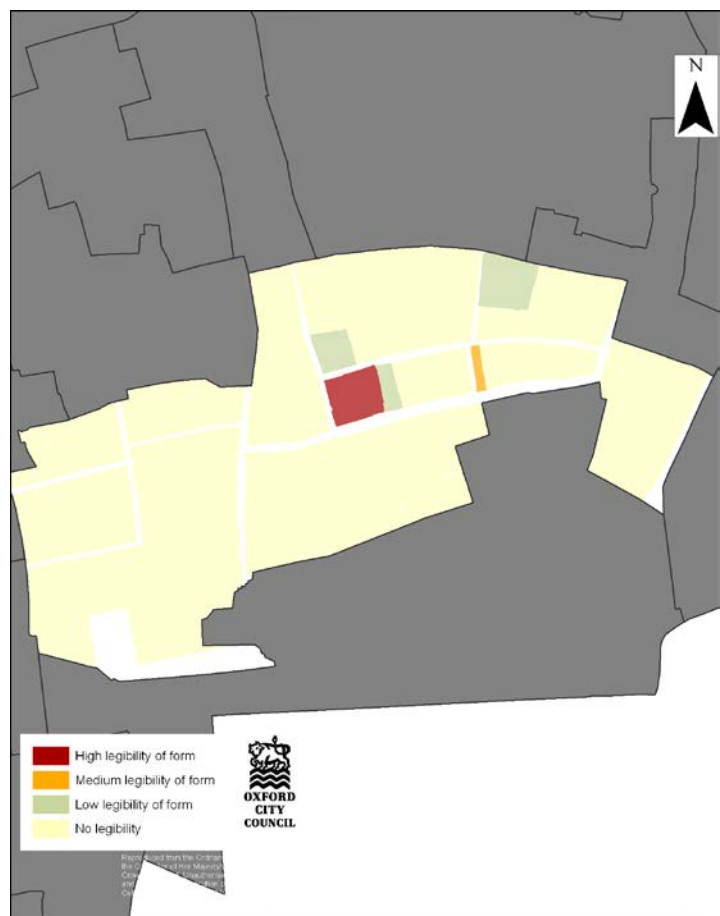
Many surviving townhouses have distinctive pastel coloured stuccoed or rendered fronts. The area has a medium building density with mostly enclosed open space in the form of college quadrangles and gardens. The public experience of the area is characterised by narrow lanes, some still cobbled, college walls, gateways and wrought iron railings providing partial and glimpsed views of buildings and quadrangles. Many of the back streets have narrow pavements with distinctive iron street bollards and Victorian style street lamps. Buildings and street furniture are well maintained. Most of the quadrangles are comprised of neat lawns; tree cover is mostly restricted to smaller and large gardens.

The Tom Tower, Christ Church Cathedral Spire and the Merton College Chapel Tower form important components of Oxford's distinctive skyline.

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

The character area takes up much of the south eastern quarter of the Late Saxon burh and subsequent medieval walled city. A minster or monastery of St Frideswide's is believed to have been established near to the Thames Crossing at St Aldates by the 8th century. Subsequently a burh was established by the early 10th century and in the 12th century St Frideswide's was re-founded as a Priory. The town experienced economic growth after the conquest driven by the cloth and wool trade. A tradition of teaching was established at Oxford by the 11th century and academic halls flourished in the 13th-14th century.

The University and Collegiate system took shape in the 13th century and when the town experienced economic problems in the later 13th and 14th century colleges they were able to expand across the eastern part of the town taking advantage of cheap property away from the principal market frontages (located around the cross roads at Carfax and along the adjoining



Assessment of medieval tenement survival

streets). In the 12th and 13th century the western part of the character area was a focal point for a Jewish Community, with a Synagogue located on St Aldates, until the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290. A lane known as Deadmans Walk runs along the southern edge of the character area linking St Aldates with the site of the Jewish Burial Ground outside the former Eastgate.

The character area contains two of the earliest 13th century secular colleges, Merton College and University College. In addition to preserving important medieval and post-medieval buildings, quadrangles and designed landscapes the area provides an excellent illustration of the expansion of the medieval colleges from the 13th century onwards, with significant renewed growth in the 17th and 19th centuries. Mob quad at Merton College dates to the 13th-14th century and is claimed to be the earliest quadrangle in Oxford although Merton's Front Quad may have been enclosed earlier. Christ Church College which dominates the north-south axial Thames Crossing route of St Aldates, is located over the site of St Frideswide's Priory. The 12th century former Priory church of St Frideswides at Christ Church now serves as the city's Cathedral.

The surviving post-medieval town houses along the High Street and side streets provide a contrast to the monumental college structures that have replaced blocks of medieval tenements and earlier academic halls.

The area also retains stretches of cobbled lane that illustrate the post-medieval character of the University city. The character area is illustrative of the domination of gothic monumental architecture in college design, with notable classically inspired exceptions. The Examination Schools on the High Street are illustrative of the 19th century reform of the University whereby following the publication of new Examination Statutes in 1849-50 written examinations replaced now widely derided oral examinations that had been practiced since the Middle Ages.



Magpie Lane looking north

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The character area has high potential for Late Neolithic-Bronze Age, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains. A likely Bronze Age barrow has previously been recorded at Logic Lane. The area contains the site of the likely 7th or 8th century foundation of St Frideswide's minster or monastery (a single burial from Christ Church has been radio-carbon dated to the 7th century providing the earliest evidence for the site to-date).

The area has potential to preserve remains relating to the early development of Oxford and the foundation of the Late Saxon burh (or defended settlement) in the 9th or 10th century. The area encompasses parts of the burh and later 13th century defences, the Norman Priory of St Frideswide's, the sites of medieval and post medieval tenements along the principal frontages and back lanes, and part of the zone around St Aldates which was a focus for the towns medieval Jewish community with the Synagogue being located on land now occupied by the northern tower on the Christ Church frontage. There is also good potential for the built fabric of the colleges to reveal further information and for buried remains to preserve further evidence for structures, material culture and diet relating to the development of these medieval and post-medieval institutions.



Entrance to Merton College

The Urban Archaeological Database records one hundred and thirty-four archaeological events within this character area. Previously evidence for Middle and Late Saxon burials have been recovered from Christ church along with other remains relating to the evolution of the medieval Priory. Evidence for Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval domestic settlement activity has been recovered from several locations including the remains of medieval academic halls that and of disused medieval streets. Material culture reflecting the academic traditions of the medieval town has been recorded at a number of excavations, for example evidence for college brewing from Christ Church, 13th century medicinal plants recovered from waste pits at Merton College, an assemblage of 14th century glass alembics used for distilling or alchemy from recovered from Christ Church Peckwater Quad and early evidence for hopped beer from the Provosts Lodgings at Oriel College.

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

The character has exceptional aesthetic qualities with a large number of nationally important buildings and designed spaces located within the historic colleges. A number of college towers and spires make a significant contribution to the Oxford skyline (e.g. The Tom Tower, Christ Church Cathedral Spire and the Merton College Chapel Tower). The narrow lanes and streets within this character area are distinctive, especially for the glimpsed and partial views of college quadrangles and structures. The college buildings are predominately constructed of limestone in Gothic or Gothic Revival style, notable exceptions include the Christ Church Peckwater Quadrangle (1707-14) influenced by the ideas of the Italian Renaissance and the late 18th century classical designs of James Wyatt at the Christ Church Canterbury Quadrangle and the Library at Oriel College. The character also contains a number of distinctive modern college buildings, including the study bedrooms in Christ Church Blue Boar Quad (1964-7) and Picture Gallery (1967-8) by modernist architects Powell and Moya.

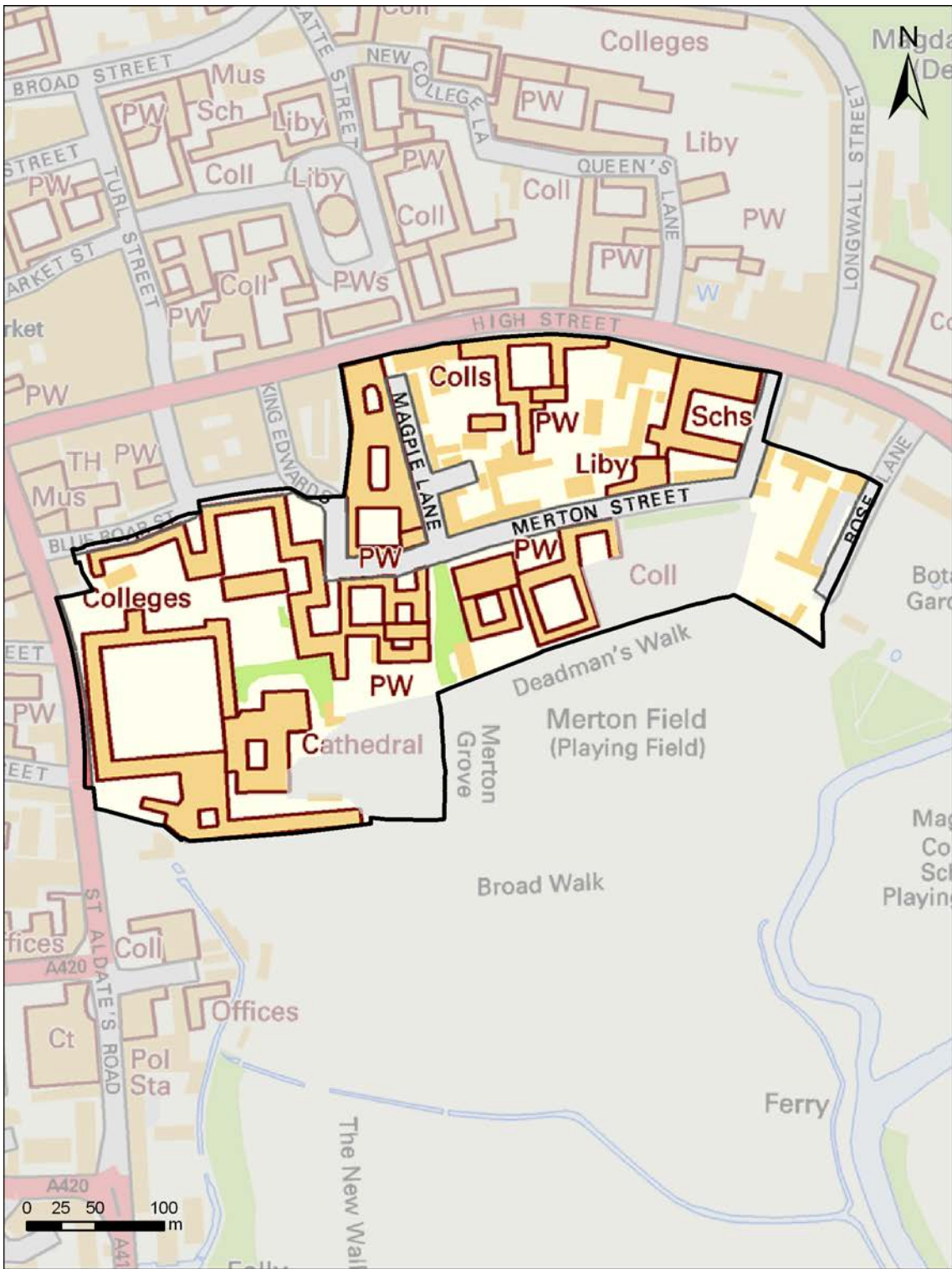
Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The character area is a popular visitor destination being a college zone that retains strong medieval and post-medieval character. Public access to the colleges is restricted, although some offer limited controlled access. The area contains numerous notable landmarks, including Tom Tower and the Cathedral at Christ Church. The qualities of this character area have been recorded in poetry and prose, notably from the 17th century onwards, and it has strong associations with important religious and political movements and individuals. It therefore has exceptional communal value.



Postmaster's Hall, Merton Street

Version: 18/2/2012



© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.

HUCA 34 Orientation map