

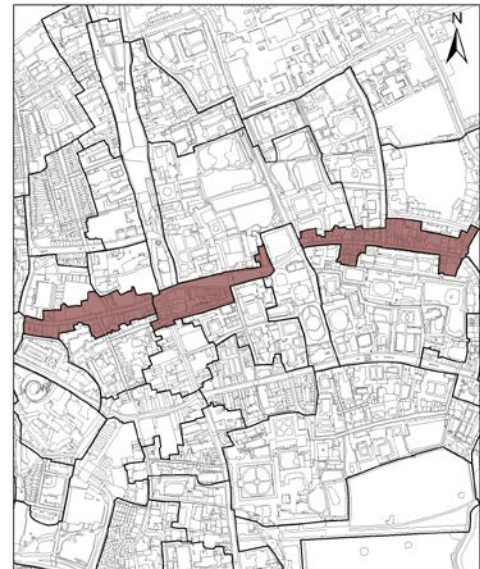
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 22:
FORMER NORTHERN CITY DITCH - HOLYWELL STREET**

This HUCA is located within broad character Zone J: Former northern city ditch.

The broad character zone is comprised of tenements and plots that broadly reflect the post-medieval colonisation the in-filled medieval city ditch and extra-mural land adjacent to it.

Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: post-medieval.
- Designations: One Grade I, two Grade II*, fifty-two Grade II listings. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Potential: Medieval city ditch with limited contemporary settlement to the north and extensive post-medieval (predominantly 17th century and later) settlement including built structures.
- Character: post-medieval townhouses and tenements.
- Spaces: Little open space. Narrow streets with continuous frontages limit the public space, with the exception of the designed lawn in front of the Holywell Music Room. There are small areas of private open and green space to the rear of the properties.
- Road morphology: Long narrow broadly straight medieval Holywell Street narrowed by post-medieval infilling and the colonisation of town ditch. Mansfield Road is modern north-south road.
- Plot morphology: Short narrow plots along the southern frontage with formerly long narrow plots on the northern side now truncated to different lengths by college development.
- Located on the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace the natural topography of the area falls gradually away eastwards from the ridge towards the Northmoor First Terrace from a height of 64m OD at the junction with Catte Street to 62m OD at Longwall Street.
- Survival of townscape elements:



The former northern city ditch (Zone J)
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HUCA 22 OAP Characterisation

Townhouses	20th century Colleges
Narrow plots	Inns pre 1800
Victorian Townhouses	Leisure
University Halls	Lane
Post Medieval Colleges	

Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

- Former wide medieval extra-mural route (serving as eastern approach to Beaumont Palace) survives as narrow street.
- Post-medieval tenement pattern survives.
- Notable survival of post-medieval townhouses.
- Post-medieval cobbled lane at Bath Place.
- Remnant Victorian low status houses survive to the rear of Bath Place on in St Helen's Passage (Hell's passage).
- Distinctive back alley route to the 17th century Turf Tavern.
- Holywell Music Room (built 1748) – is one of the first purpose built places for the public performance of music in Europe.
- Multiple listed structures.

Description

This character area is comprised of distinctive, often stuccoed, town houses, fronting onto narrow pavements, forming largely continuous frontages along the long a gently curving Holywell Street. Many of the town houses are college owned and in college use. The built character is dominated by three storey 17th and 18th century houses, with predominantly Georgian style facades. Other notable buildings in this area include the 18th century Holywell Music, enclosed parts of Wadham College including the former Blackwell's Music Shop, the 18th century Kings Arms Pub and the 17th century Turf Tavern. The Turf is notable for its location set back behind the street frontage. It is located over the former town ditch and approached through back alleys off Bath Place or St Helen's Passage. Bath Place retains a cobbled lane and notable arrangement of post-medieval buildings, one currently used as a hotel. The densely built tenements and three storey town houses in this area create a narrow enclosed residential feeling on the street compared to the expansive Broad Street to the west.



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

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

In the medieval period Holywell Street formed part of a wide extra-mural road running the length of the northern defences. The route provided access to the north of the town for travellers who did not wish to enter the walled town. Extra-mural settlement developed along the north side of Holywell Street at least from the 12th century.



Bath Place

A defended burh had been established at Oxford by the early 10th century. The Late Saxon town wall was replaced by a new stone wall and outer ditch in the 13th century and in the later 13th century a second line of defences was begun along the north-east quadrant, south of Holywell Street. This concentric style of defence reflected the siege architecture of Edward I as employed in his Welsh castles, under the supervision of stone masons from Savoy (Switzerland). The application of concentric design to a town wall is unique in England and the purpose of the second wall remains unclear. The second wall line does not survive above ground.

The town's economic growth in the 12th and early 13th century based on the cloth and leather was arrested in the late 13th and 14th century when vacant plots appeared across the town. The town's economic problems may be the reason that the concentric wall line was never extended around the circuit. The fledgling colleges of the University were subsequently able to take advantage of low land values to expand and consolidate, decisively altering the balance of power between 'town and gown'.

The town ditch appears to have been filled in by the 16th century but was then re-excavated during the Royalist garrisons re-defence of the city during the Civil War. The ditch was subsequently backfilled by the 1650's and tenement plots established along its line creating the narrow form of Holywell Street seen today. The tenement boundaries along the northern part of the street were established by late 16th century although there is also piecemeal evidence for earlier medieval activity. Agas' 1578 map shows squat plots with fenced yards containing trees. By the time of Loggan's 1675 map the tenement plots appears to have subdivided and extended to create distinctive pattern of long narrow plots that extended a considerable distance northward to join the line of the former Civil War entrenchments. A further curiosity is the angled nature of several of the plots which kink westwards to allow them to meet the entrenchments. This pattern has subsequently been truncated by later development.

In the 19th century the street was occupied by a mixture of educational establishments, tradespeople, professionals and a large number of college servants.

The character area is illustrative of the 17th century rebuilding of Oxford, driven by the growth of the University, and contains an important group of post-medieval buildings. It also retains narrow back alleys to the Turf Tavern which preserve rare examples of the low status Victorian town house that once filled yards and courts in the poorer areas of town e.g. in St Clements, St Aldates, St Thomas' and St Ebbes. The Holywell Music Room, an apsidal building with white pedimented three bay front built between 1742-8, is one of the first purpose built places for the public performance of music in Europe and the first such building in England.

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The character area has potential for Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains relating to the burh and town defences and extramural settlement. The Urban Archaeological Database records forty-seven archaeological events in the Holywell Street character area.

Previous investigations in the character area have recorded limited evidence for late 11th century activity and for 12th-14th century occupation on the north side of Holywell Street. The tenement boundaries on the north side of Holywell Street appear to have been established by the 16th century, if not earlier. Recorded features in this area include medieval cellars, drainage ditches and small gravel quarry pits. A number of post-medieval finds and features have been recorded including ceramic wig curlers, a single knuckle bone floor with patterns in the form of lettering at 19 Holywell Street and evidence for an old lane or trackway.



Holywell Music Room

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

Holywell Street retains a visually coherent and pleasing street scene that has a more tranquil domestic character than nearby thoroughfare of Broad Street. The domestic character of the street has been reduced on the southern side where the frontages of Hertford and New College have replaced earlier townhouses. The tarmac road (with restricted vehicle access) is flanked by narrow pavements. Tall, well maintained, three storey town houses form largely continuous frontages along much of the road which has little street furniture except for a number of Victorian style lamp posts. The raised lawn and mature tree in front of the Holywell Music Room is the only area of green space along the road. The narrow lane and back passages leading to the Turf Tavern provide an evocative Oxford experience.

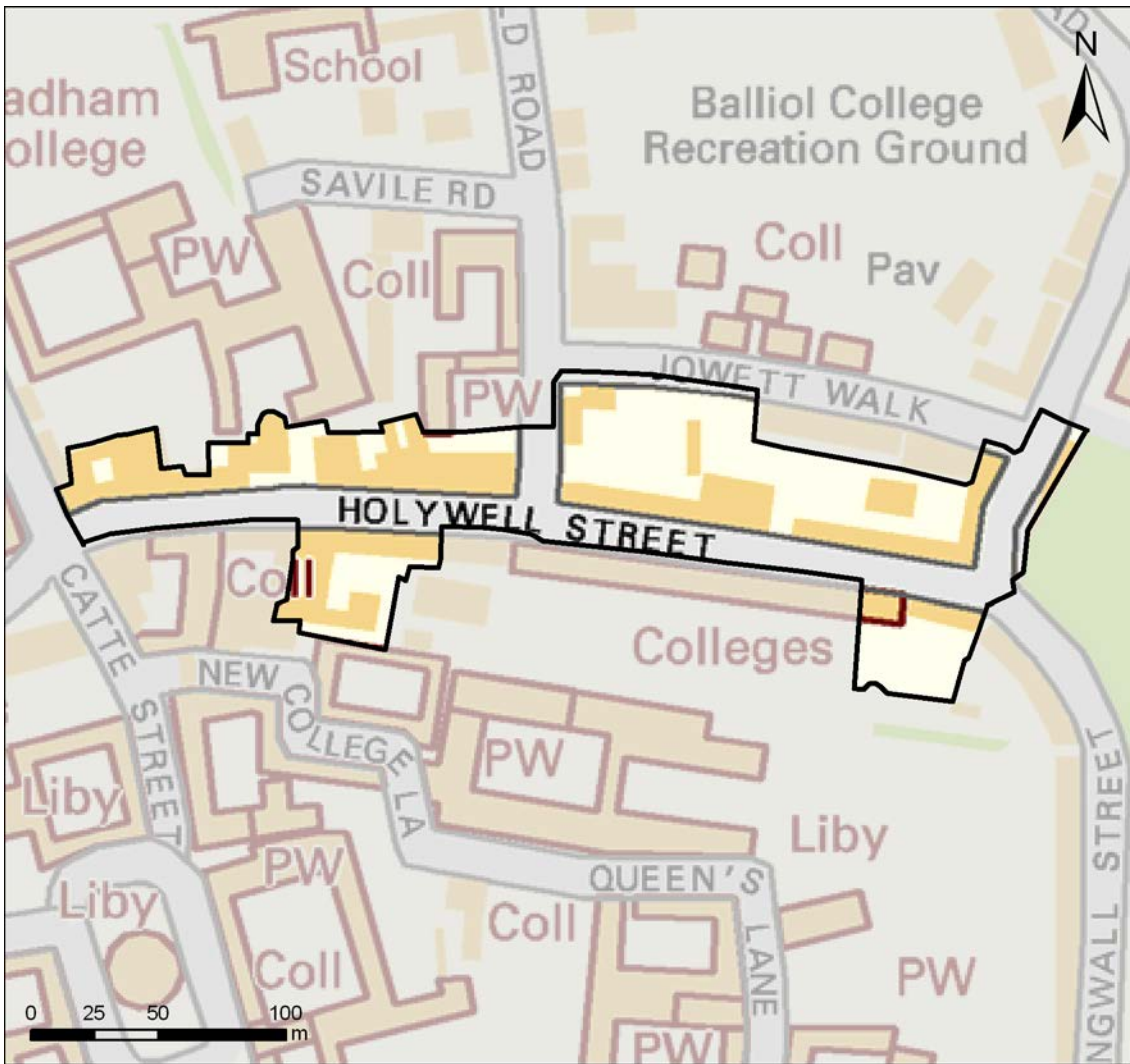


Holywell Street looking west

Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

Holywell Street represents a popular but restful route-way for residents and visitors which benefits from restricted vehicular access. The character area contains The Kings Arms and Turf Tavern pubs and also the 18th century Holywell Music Room, still a popular music venue.

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HUCA 22 Orientation map