

**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 28:
ST GILES AND THE NORTHERN SUBURB - ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM AND COLLEGES**

The HUCA is located within broad character Zone G: St Giles and the northern suburb.

The broad character zone comprises of the expansive northern approach to Oxford, the northern medieval suburb and subsequent modern expansion within the former line of the Civil War defences.

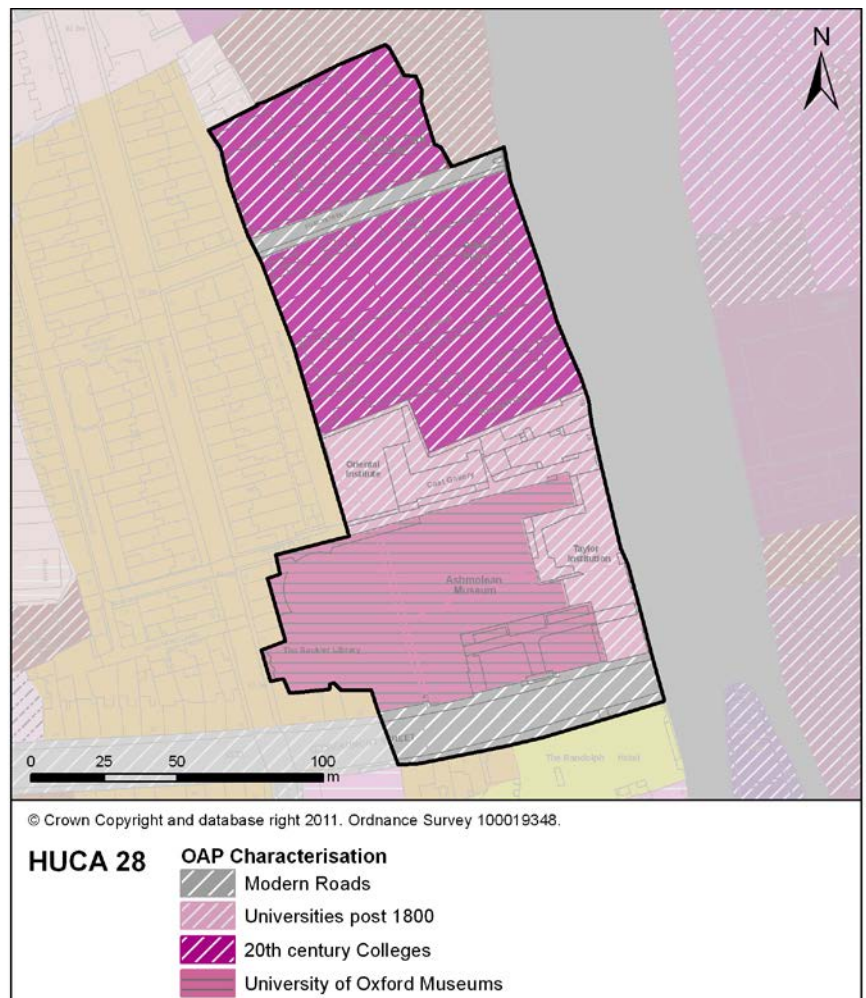
Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: 19th century.
- Designations: Two Grade I, one Grade II*, six Grade II listings. Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: Previous evidence for 8th century activity. Adjacent to site of the Royal Beaumont Palace and subsequent Carmelite Friar. Medieval and post-medieval tenement activity fronting onto St Giles.
- Character: University of Oxford Art and Archaeological Museum, 20th century colleges.
- Spaces: Medium density development with some open, green spaces to the within the colleges.
- Road morphology: main medieval thoroughfare with modern 19th century roads at right angles.
- Plot morphology: Large modern plots and long wide plots, significant amalgamation of medieval plots.
- The character area is located on the central ridge of the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace at a height of around 65m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
 - Multiple 17th-20th century listed buildings including 19th century Ashmolean Museum
 - 17th-18th century buildings incorporated into the 20th century



St Giles and the northern suburb (Zone G)

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HUCA 28	OAP Characterisation
	Modern Roads
	Universities post 1800
	20th century Colleges
	University of Oxford Museums

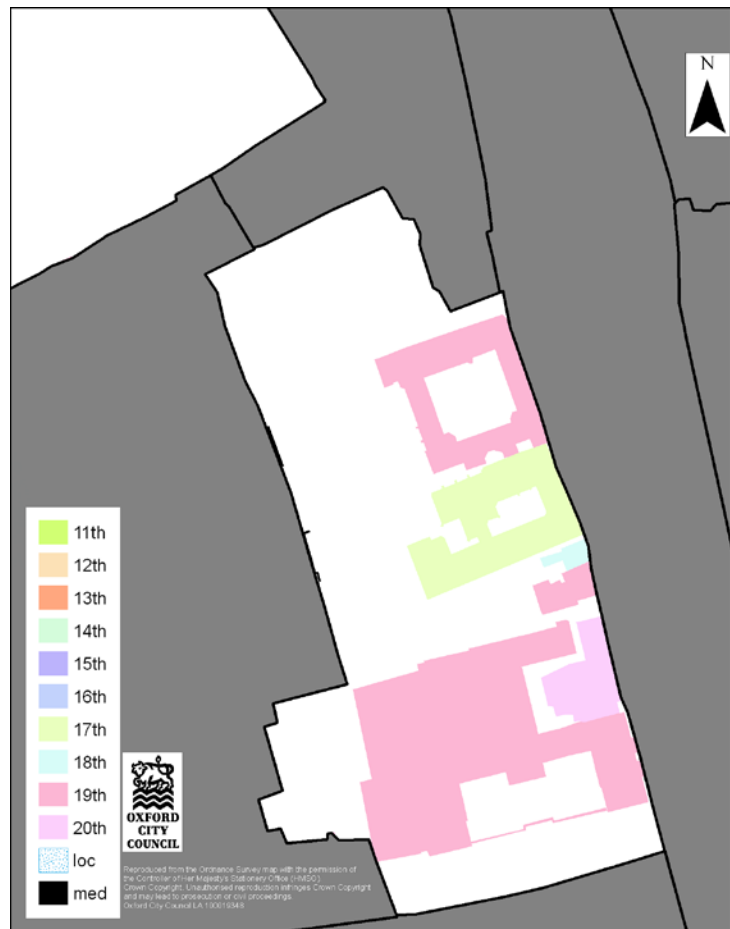
Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

Blackfriars (The frontage is 1921-9).

Description

This character area comprises a group of post-medieval and Victorian University and College structures fronting onto St Giles and Beaumont Street. The dominant structure is the 19th century Ashmolean Museum complex with the east wing housing the modern languages faculty of the university (Taylorian Institute), and to the west the new 2001 Sackler Library housing the old Ashmolean Library collection. An early 21st century rear extension designed by Rick Mather Architects has created a dense agglomeration of buildings between Beaumont Street and Pusey Place. On the north side of Pusey place this density is continued by the modern University four storey Oriental Institute and Classics Centre.

To the north the character area St Cross College, Pusey House, Blackfriars and Regents Park College represent late 19th and 20th century institutions utilising two and three storey post-medieval, Victorian and 1930s buildings comprising of traditional inward facing quads and gardens. The built character is a mix of Greek revival and Neo-classical, gothic revival and vernacular revival at the Ashmolean and Sackler Library, early 20th Gothic at Pusey House/St Cross, early 20th century regency style of Regents Park College and the 17th-18th century buildings re-fronted and occupied by the Blackfriars who returned to Oxford in the early 20th century. The urban morphology comprises large regular plot with elements of medieval tenement plots fronting onto St Giles street. A number of semi mature and mature trees are located in the college gardens which retain lawned quads and gardens.

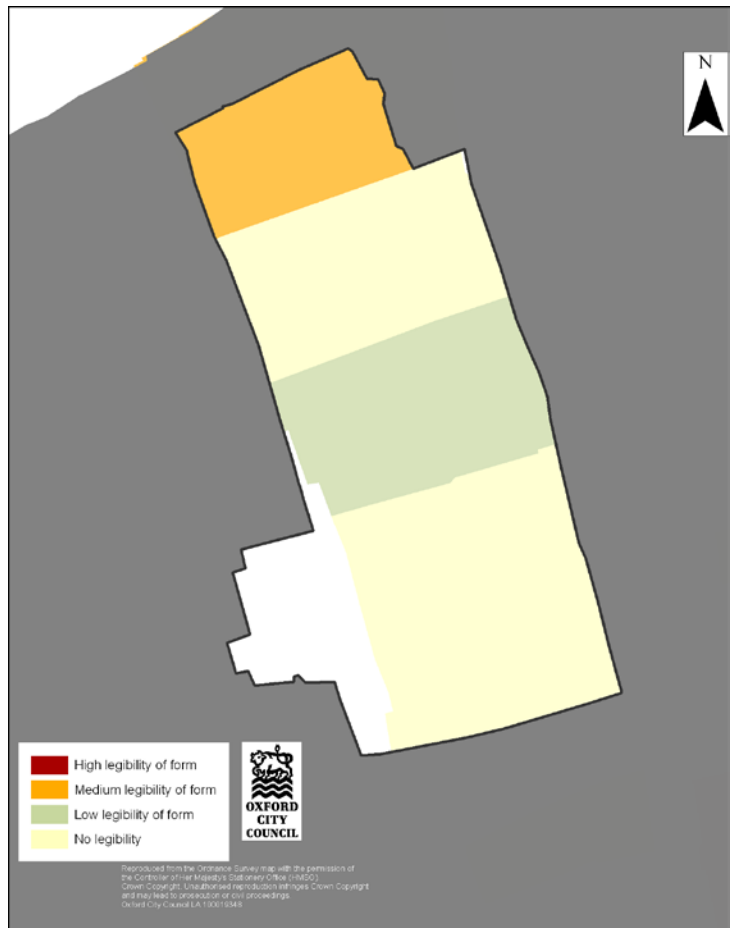


Listed buildings by date of earliest identified fabric (based on listing description)

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

St Giles lies on a central north-south axis that runs along the top of the Summertown Radley gravel terrace towards crossing point over the Thames floodplain. The date of this north-south route is not known however there is good reason to believe prehistoric and Roman routes along this alignment. St Giles lies within an extensive Middle Neolithic-Early Bronze Age complex of ritual and funerary monuments. Two Bronze Age barrows belonging to this complex were excavated prior to the construction of the Sackler Library in 2001.

Subsequent to this there is little evidence for activity in the vicinity of St Giles until the post-Conquest period, with the notable exceptions of small amounts of 8th century pottery found at the Ashmolean Museum and Sackler Library, suggesting perhaps an early focus of activity in this area. A defended burh was established at Oxford by the early 10th century. Documentary evidence suggests that the suburban settlement along St Giles developed in the 11th-12th century. The construction of the Royal Beaumont Palace, located just to the west of the current Sackler Library by 1132 would have provided an additional stimulus to development. Medieval and post-medieval tenements fronting St Giles were demolished in the early 19th century to allow the insertion of Beaumont Street. This was laid out in Regency Style with the Ashmolean Museum constructed in the 1840s. The Ashmolean is illustrative of the intellectual confidence of the early Victorian era and one of the last great examples of classical architecture in Oxford, a city where the gothic tradition predominates. Pusey House can be seen as last great monument to Oxford Anglo-Catholicism.



Assessment of medieval tenement survival

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The character area has high archaeological potential despite the extent of previous disturbance and investigation. The character has potential for prehistoric, mid-late Saxon, medieval and post medieval remains relating to the Middle Neolithic-Early Bronze Age monumental landscape, 8th century Saxon activity, post-Conquest expansion, activity associated with the adjacent Royal Palace and Carmelite Friary, and subsequent medieval and post medieval tenements fronting onto St Giles. Twenty-four archaeological events are recorded in the character area including one recorded observation, eight 19th and early 20th century records of evidence during construction and fifteen modern archaeological investigations of various sizes.

The museum site has been subject to a number of excavations since the 19th century, producing evidence of 8th century Saxon pottery and medieval to post-medieval occupation. Excavations on the site of St Cross College in 1991 recorded evidence of medieval property boundaries and several pits possibly as a result of quarrying to the rear of the plots. An



The Ashmolean Museum looking north-west

excavation in 2005 at 65-67 St Giles' revealed five 11th-13th century pits sealed by disturbed brick earth which could represent cultivation of the yard areas. Post-medieval evidence in the Ashmolean area was somewhat limited although a dump of cattle bones indicated possible industrial activity such as tanning to the rear of the tenements. Excavations at 63 St Giles in 1959 noted evidence of several inhumations and grave cuts associated with the 17th century Quaker Meeting House. The remains of a 19th century Quaker Meeting House on the nearby site at St Cross College have also been recorded. The medieval plot morphology has largely been lost in the 19th century following redevelopment.

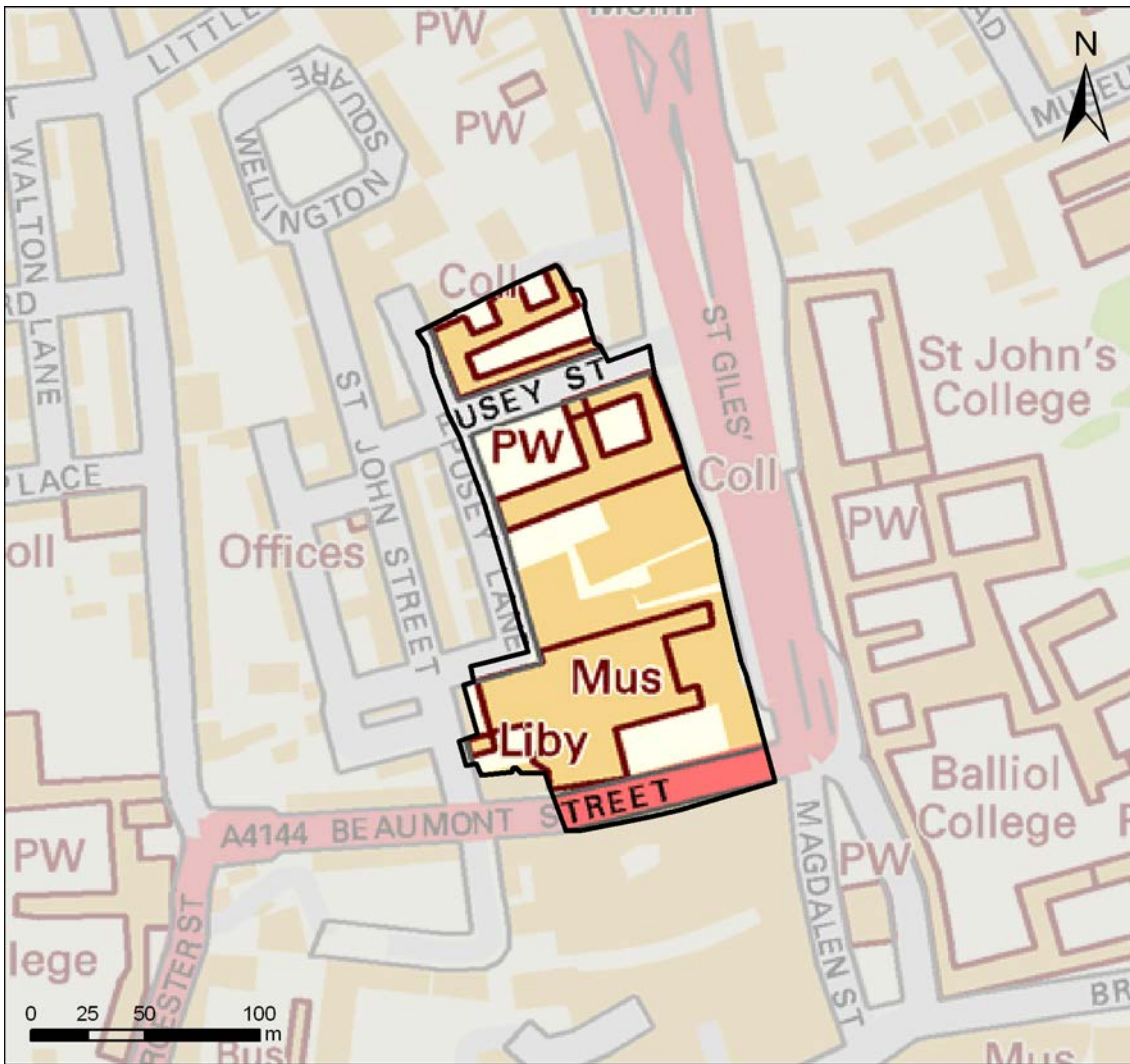
Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

The Ashmolean museum is a very imposing Greek revival inspired building, faced with white Portland stone, constructed in 1841-5 to a design by Charles Robert Cockerell, with exceptional aesthetic qualities which also forms part of an important street scene along the late Regency Beaumont Street. The smaller 20th century colleges also have aesthetic qualities forming pleasant private enclosed quads and gardens. The southern part of the character area now has a high density of tall University structures; the northern area has smaller quadrangle courtyard arrangements that have utilised amalgamated narrow suburban tenements.

Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The Ashmolean Museum is an internationally important museum which maintains free access and has recently been subject to an acclaimed redesign and extension. The character area therefore has high communal value despite the restricted access to adjacent college and University spaces. The area has a notable association with the Blackfriars who were only allowed to return to Oxford in the early 20th century.

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HUCA 28 Orientation map