

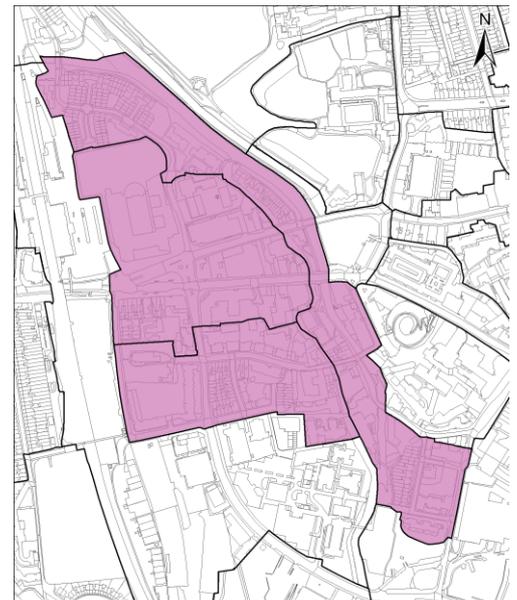
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 5:
THE WESTERN SUBURB - RESIDENTIAL**

The HUCA is located within broad character Zone B: The Western Suburb.

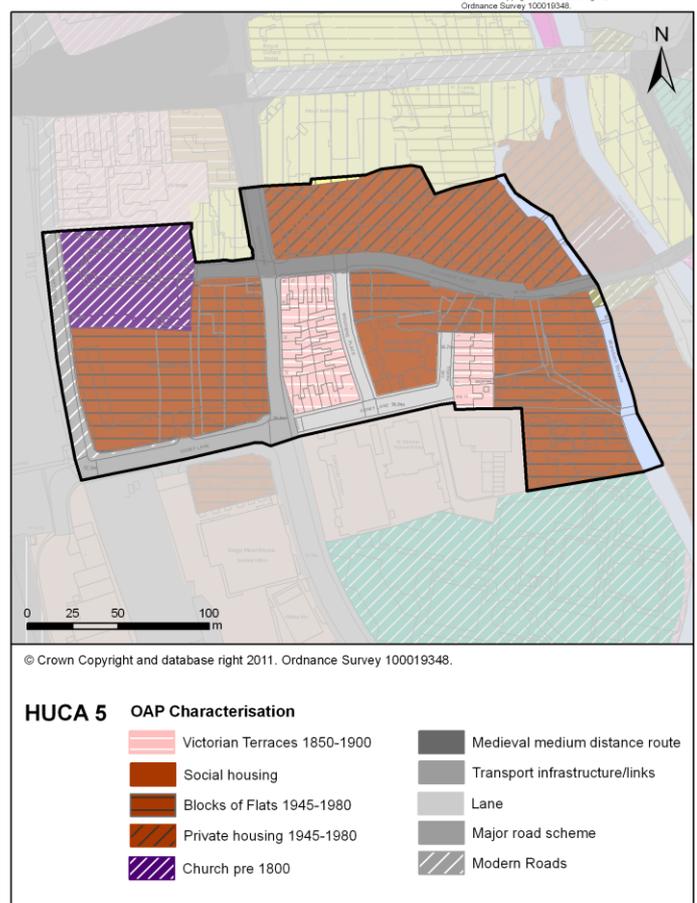
The broad character zone comprises of the medieval suburb of St Thomas and related development south of the castle combined with development on former site of the medieval Rewley Abbey to the north. It forms part of Osney Island defined by the River Thames to the west and the Castle Mill Stream to the east.

Townscape Characteristics

- Dominant period: 19th and 20th century based around medieval street and church.
- Designations: One Grade II listing. Central Oxford Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: Previous archaeological investigations have recorded important Bronze Age (Beaker) activity as well as settlement evidence from the 12th century onwards. The medieval and post-medieval suburb has been well studied archaeologically. The line of the Royalist Civil War defences run through the character area.
- Character: Largely rebuilt in the 20th century with flats and private housing. Although the line of the medieval street orientated on the church is retained. A converted brewery and small areas of 19th century terraced and social housing reflect its low status industrial past. The modern buildings have attempted to capture 19th century design features.
- Spaces: It retains a wooded churchyard and areas of enclosed communal lawn, otherwise there is minimal green space. The building density is generally high. Rear yard spaces have been extensively converted to communal car parking areas for adjacent flats.
- Road morphology: Curving medieval east-west and north-south routes with rectilinear Victorian side streets. It is crossed north-south by Oxpens Road, which was completed in 1931.
- Plot morphology: Mixture of large irregular courtyard designs, medium sized regular flat plots and small regular



St Thomas' and the Western Suburb (Zone B)



Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

terraces. The medieval tenement pattern has largely been lost.

- The natural topography of the Area is low lying alluvial floodplain at a height of around 57m OD surrounding the Castle Mill and Wareham Streams rising gently to a height of around 58m OD over an area of Northmoor First Gravel Terrace at St Thomas' Church to the west.
- Survival of townscape elements.
 - Low medieval plot legibility.
 - Medieval urban morphology of street and church.
 - Elements of 19th and early 20th century Morrell's Lion Brewery retained in a residential development on St Thomas' Street (offices, engine house, chimney, waterwheel and gates).
 - 12th century church and adjacent 18th century school.
 - Christ Church Old Buildings on The Hamel were built in 1866 – they are the only surviving example of this type of early social housing in Oxford.
 - Former crèche and invalid kitchen, No 1 Woodbine Place (c1893)
 - The Chequers Pub, 1913 pub by Wilkins and Jeeves, Hollybush Row.
 - The Hamel- a row of seven small brick cottages built in 1868.
 - The Quaking Bridge- An Iron Bridge on the site of an earlier medieval bridge. Built 1835.

Description

This residential character area is coherent area of linear settlement and infilling along side roads, orientated on the focal point of St Thomas Church. The area is defined by the extent of residential settlement along St Thomas' Street from the Church to the Wareham Stream. The cohesiveness of the suburb has been significantly reduced by the truncation of St Thomas Street by Oxpens Road (A420) in the 1960s.

Extensive clearance of the low status post-medieval and Victorian tenements since the late 19th century has resulted in a total loss of the timber framed townhouses that once characterised the area. St Thomas Street and the west end of Osney Lane is now dominated with three or four storey modern blocks of flats, many with mock carriage entries to allow car access to rear car parks and with brick frontages which are designed to reflect the architecture of the surviving brick terraced housing and brewery buildings. The former Morrell's Lion Brewery site along the southern frontage of St Thomas Street has been redeveloped as blocks of apartments but retains re-used structures from the 19th century Brewery.

To the south of St Thomas Street on the Hammel and the Corner of Osney Lane 1860s brick cottages and three storey brick block social housing known as the Christ Church Model Dwellings front directly onto the pavement creating a distinctive street scene.



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

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

Oseney or Osney Island is believed to have been formed in the late Saxon period as a result of artificial channelling of the River Thames in order to create the channel now known as Castle Mill Stream. The word 'Osney' is first mentioned in 1004 and is thought to be a personal name meaning 'Osa's Island' combining the name Osa or Osna with 'ey' the Old English word for an island. Documentary evidence suggests a small settlement or manor likely existed on the Island in the Late Saxon period. An estate at Oseney was devised by Archbishop Alfric of Canterbury (d. 1005) to St. Alban's abbey. The first firm evidence of settled activity occurs in the 12th century with the foundation of Augustinian Osney Abbey to the west and the subsequent development of the suburb of St Thomas'. A Cistercian house, Rewley Abbey, was subsequently founded to the north of the settlement at St Thomas's in 1281 further stimulating growth.

Historic maps of the suburb indicate a planned layout on the south side of St Thomas' Street with long, narrow tenement plots fronting onto the main street and a back lane for access to the rear, this pattern is repeated on Hollybush Row. The church, founded in 1182, formed part of the Oseney Abbey estate and it is possible that its construction necessitated a diversion of the original east-west aligned road eventually leading to the construction of a new route to the north in 1210.

The parish of St Thomas appears to have grown quickly after the foundation of Osney Abbey and according to the Hundred Rolls of 1279 there were approximately 200 houses here. The Dissolution of the religious houses in the 1540s subsequently took away the economic stimulus for the suburb which did not expand significantly until the 17th century. The area remained primarily low status with a mixed economy based on brewing and butchery. Agas' 1578 map illustrates tenement development along St Thomas' Street (then the main road out to the west of the city), with long narrow tenement plots some 80 metres in length. Logan's map of 1675 shows a similar density. By the late 18th century



St Thomas's Street looking west towards St Thomas's Church.

New Road had been built creating a more direct line out of the city over Hythe Bridge Street, allowing traffic to bypass the centre of St Thomas'. In the 19th century, the suburb was increasingly dominated by factories and warehouses, the narrow plots on St Thomas's Street were ideal for industrial yards and several breweries were established. The 1st edition OS Town Plans (1876) recorded a brewery, eight yards, five pubs, a school, a church and a burial ground.

The character area provides an illustration of Victorian working class suburban housing development close to the town, including a rare survival of an early 1860s social housing block, and provides opportunity to appreciate the industrial significance of the Brewing industry to Victorian Oxford in the form of the converted Lion Brewery.

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

This suburb is one of the best studied areas in the city, having been subject to extensive redevelopment. The character area has high potential for Bronze Age, medieval and post medieval remains. The Urban Archaeological Database records 25 events in the character area including nine building surveys and two stray finds. The remaining archaeological investigations include 2 evaluations, 3 watching briefs and 10 excavations. Prehistoric evidence from the St Thomas' area is represented by the discovery of a single 'Beaker type' burial excavated at The Hamel site. The crouched inhumation was identified as a child and dated to 1520 BC \pm 80. A series of linear features also overlay the burial and have been tentatively interpreted as possible Bronze Age ard marks (plough marks). Evidence of later land reclamation may suggest this area suffered from low lying waterlogged conditions in the Later Iron Age to Saxon periods as at St Aldates and

subsequently saw little activity until the 12th century. Previous investigations have recorded 13th century low status cob walled structures as well as more robust stone built structures. Evidence for contraction of activity in the 14th and 15th century has been noted when rubbish pits and garden soils are evidence over formerly occupied plots. Archaeological investigations have recorded evidence for the replacement of medieval buildings with new structures in the 16th and 17th century. The presence of knucklebone floors at a number of post medieval buildings may suggested the continuation of the medieval tanning tradition in this area.

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

The character area has moderate aesthetic value as an area of Victorian domestic and Industrial buildings whose character is reflected in the design and use of brick in adjacent modern blocks of flats. Enough historic fabric survives to preserve a memory of the past Victorian industrial use. There are few public open spaces except at the churchyard. The streets are narrow enclosed spaces although the buildings allow some views into internal courtyards and private gardens. Three storey flats and terraced houses front onto the pavement without frontage gardens.

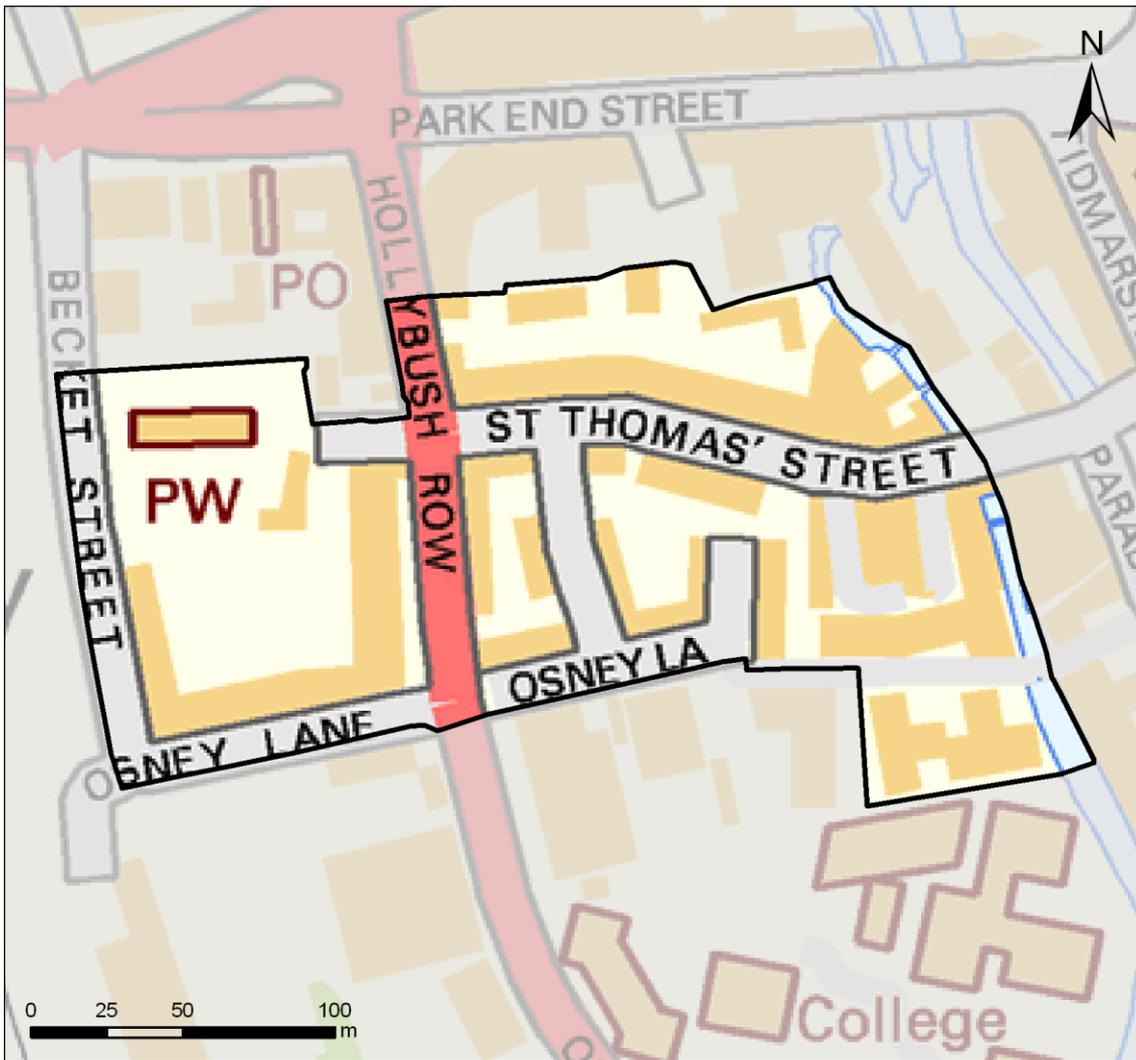
Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The character area has value as a residential area with links to the walks along the Castle Mill Stream and the Castle Precinct to the east. There are a small number of pubs and shops as well as St Thomas' Church that contribute to communal value. The residential redevelopment of this area is a reflection of the communal values of 20th century social planning policy.



St Thomas's Street looking east with St George's Tower visible in the distance.

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HUCA 5 Orientation map