

**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 31:
ST GILES AND THE NORTHERN SUBURB- MEDIEVAL COLLEGES**

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

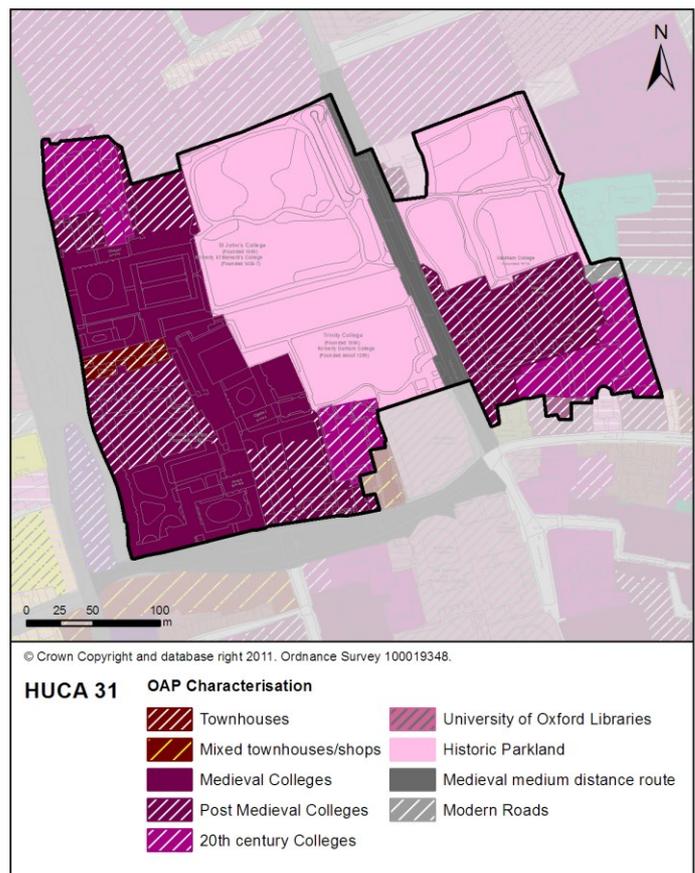
The broad character zone comprises of the expansive northern approach to Oxford, the northern medieval suburb and subsequent modern expansion within the former line of the Civil War defences.

Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: post-medieval.
- Designations: Fourteen Grade I, three Grade II*, forty Grade II listings; 3 Registered Parks and Gardens. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: Potential for medieval and post-medieval archaeology associated with tenements, early academic halls, religious and secular colleges and religious precincts. The archaeology of the Civil War defences and post-medieval gardens is also of notable interest.
- Character: Medieval colleges, post-medieval colleges, historic parkland.
- Spaces: Significant enclosed open space comprising of large designed college gardens and lawns. Notable public glimpsed and panoramic views into these spaces through college gates and railings.
- Road morphology: medieval north-west street pattern of possible greater antiquity creating irregular urban blocks.
- Plot morphology: Large irregular plots.
- The character area lies on the central ridge of the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace at a height of around 63-64m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
 - Limited survival of tenement boundaries in college boundaries.
 - Multiple medieval to modern listed buildings and designed landscapes.
 - Medieval and post-medieval quadrangles.



St Giles and the northern suburb (Zone G)
© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.



Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

Description

The St Giles extramural college character area represents a coherent group of medieval and post-medieval colleges incorporating arrangements of traditional quadrangles and landscaped grounds. The area includes the bulk of historic St John's College, Balliol College, Trinity College and Wadham College.

Largely comprised of stone built ranges and walled gardens, the area is a predominantly enclosed private space although notable public views into college grounds are provided by railings and gates on Broad Street and Parks Road.

The colleges collectively share cohesive and traditional designs with three and four storey quadrangles associated halls, chapels and libraries. Medieval and post-medieval college buildings have generally maintained Oxford University's predominant gothic style with a small number of notable classical, Baroque and modernist exceptions.

The plot morphology is irregular with the former Austin friary precinct and monastic colleges that amalgamated earlier frontage tenement boundaries. These large institutional plots were subsequently extended in the post-medieval and modern periods. Building density is medium to low with substantial college buildings set within well proportioned designed landscapes.



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

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

There is currently no evidence for Saxon activity in this character area which is located beyond the northern defences of the Late Saxon burh. Documentary evidence suggests that the suburban settlement in this area developed along the north side of Broad Street and along St Giles in the 11th-12th century as the town enjoyed economic growth related to the cloth trade.

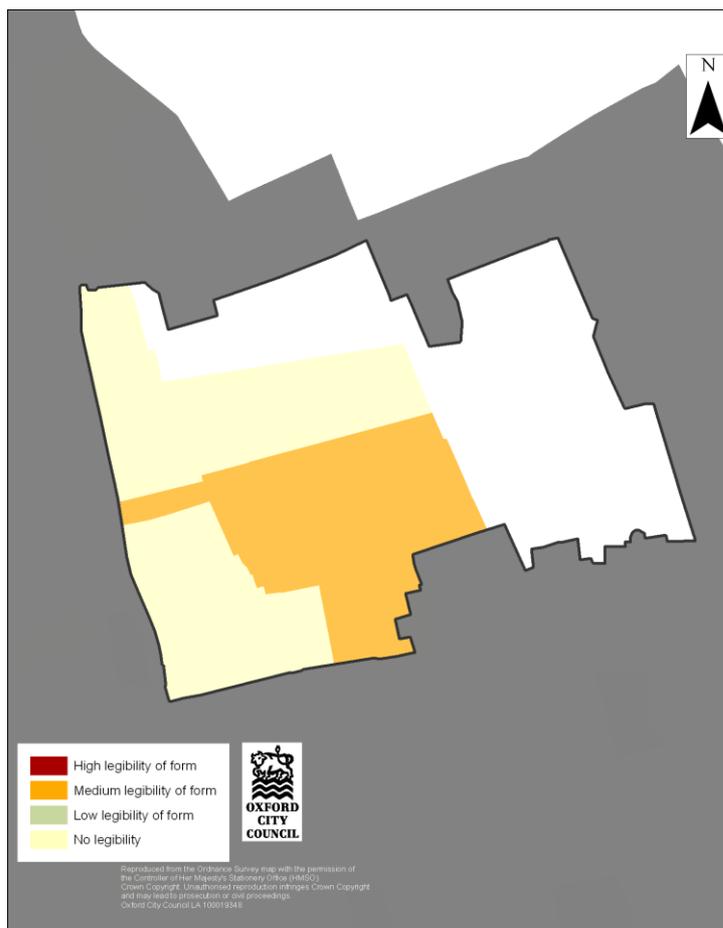
Balliol College is the earliest foundation north of the town wall, founded around the 1260s. The Benedictine Durham College was founded in 1291 to the rear of settlement on Broad Street, re-founded as Trinity College in 1555. Another religious college, the Cistercian college of St Bernard's was founded in 1437 on St Giles and re-founded as St John's College in 1555.

The early 17th century saw the foundation of Wadham College on the site of the former Austin Friary in Holywell Street. Agas' 1578 map of Oxford shows three colleges (Balliol, Trinity and St John's) as three simple quadrangles surrounded by garden plots. Of these three Balliol College is notable for having been subject to substantial Victorian remodelling and expansion.

The character area allows for the appreciation of post-medieval expansion of the extra-mural colleges and contains a large number of exceptional buildings that are illustrative of development in medieval, post-medieval and modern building styles, notably Victorian Gothic.

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The character area has good potential for medieval and post-medieval remains relating to the expansion of the northern suburb, the foundation of the Austin Friars and the religious and secular college foundations. The Urban Archaeological Database records sixty-three archaeological events within this character area. Previous archaeological work area has recovered an important collection of medieval pottery from 12th-13th century pits and a well at St John's College. Other finds include the remains of late medieval outbuildings associated with the Austin friary that occupied the later site of Wadham College, also two burials perhaps associated with the friary and later Wadham college structures. At Trinity College traces of the cloister of the 16th century Durham Hall have been noted along with medieval to modern rubbish pits and post-medieval wall paintings. A substantial ditch recorded at St John's College may relate to the Royalist Civil War defensive line however its identification remains uncertain as its location does not correspond to 17^h century illustrations of the defensive arrangement around the city. .



Assessment of medieval tenement survival

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

This character area has strong aesthetic qualities created by pleasing college buildings, quadrangles, lawns and gardens. The area is notable for external glimpsed views and vistas of college gardens and grounds provided by gates and railings on Broad Street and Parks Road. The visual character of this area is dominated by the colleges. Largely re-fronted in the 19th century in Gothic style they comprise a core of medieval quadrangles expanded across suburban gardens and open land in the post-medieval period. The gardens, presently largely 19th century in design, have their origins in the post-medieval period. Of the many notable structures in this character area the classical design of St John's Canterbury Quadrangle (1631-6) and the Baroque chapel at Trinity College (Late 17th century) are notable exceptions to the Oxford tradition of gothic continuity. A tradition exemplified by the chapel and Fellows Quadrangle of Wadham College



St John's College Frontage

which opted for traditional gothic features despite its late foundation in 1610 and also the Victorian gothic designs of Balliol Colleges 1860s-1870s rebuilding. A notable break with the otherwise stone built traditionalism of this character area is the modernist 'Beehive' block in the North Quadrangle at St John's College, built in 1958-60.

The present designed landscapes of the four colleges are of high quality and are well maintained. All are designated on the register of parks and gardens. Despite the scale of the built character on St Giles, the gardens and open spaces contribute to the appearance of low to medium density suburban settlement.

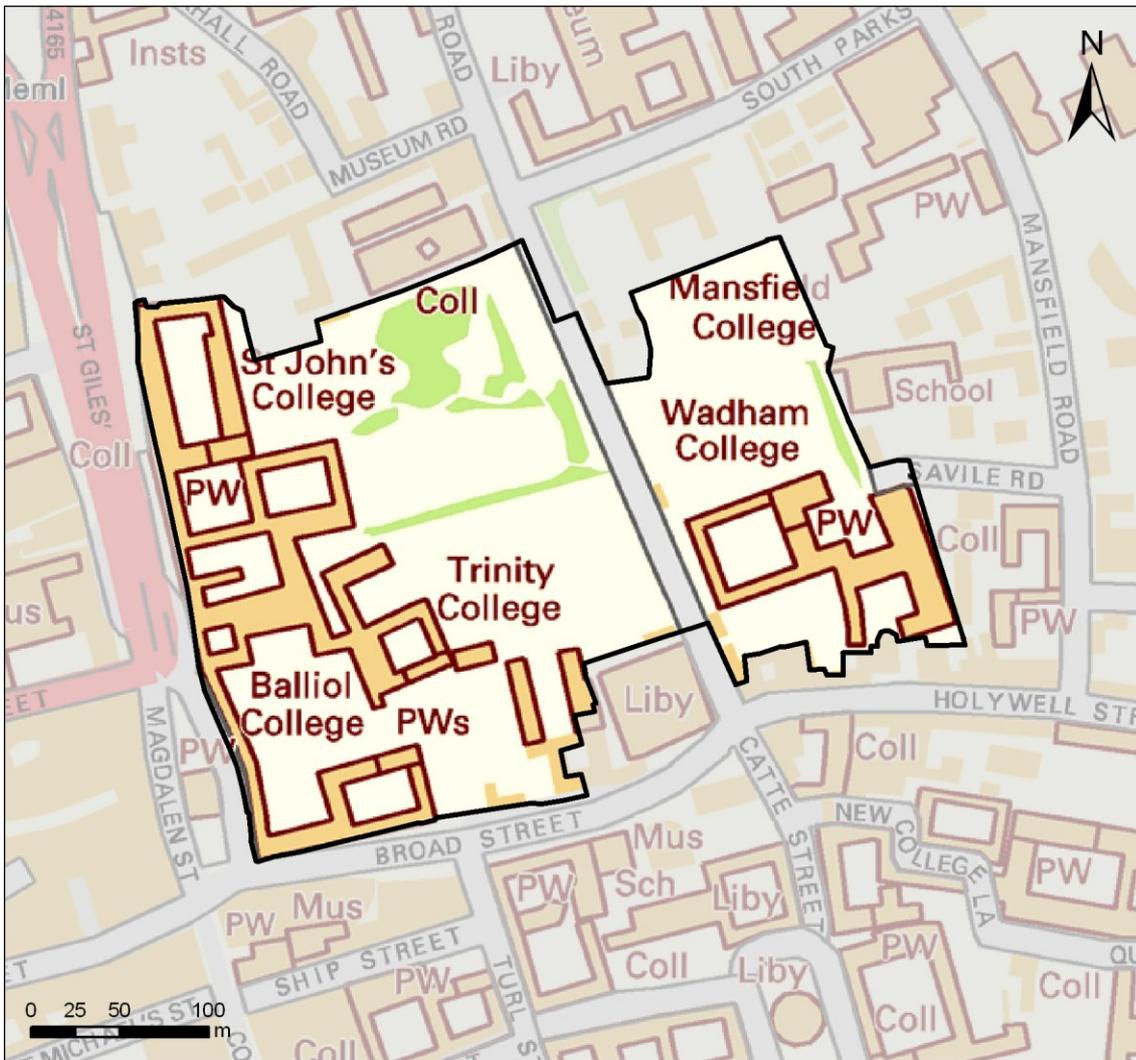
Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The character area is largely enclosed college space with limited public access however important views and vistas are provided by gates and railings on Broad Street and along Parks Road. Broad Street, Parks Road and Madgdalen Street east are all important thoroughfares providing visitors with impressive monumental vistas as they follow routes from the city centre to the large University museums.

Version: 18/2/2012



View into the grounds of Trinity College from Parks Road



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

HUCA 31 Orientation map