

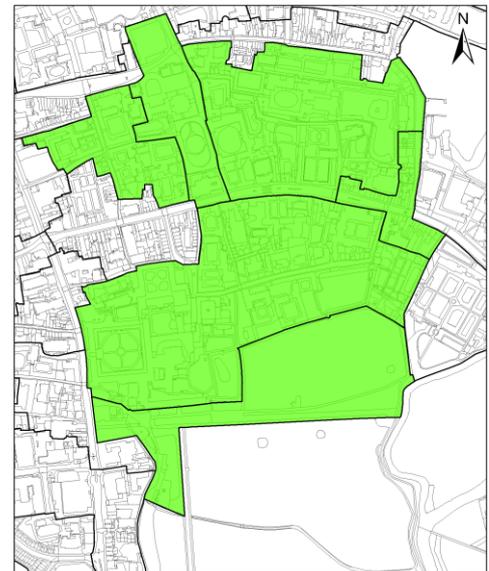
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 33:
EASTERN COLLEGES- UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS**

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

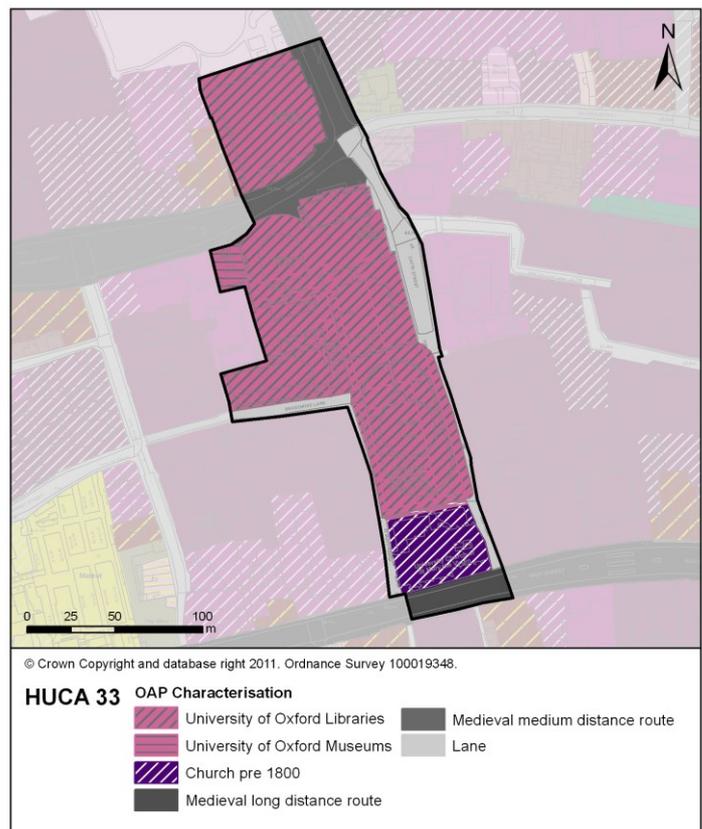
The broad character zone comprises of the eastern part of the historic city which is dominated by the enclosed quadrangles, gardens and monumental buildings of the medieval and post-medieval University and colleges.

Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: Post-medieval (with important medieval elements).
- Designations: Nine Grade I and nine Grade II listings. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: The area has high potential for significant archaeological remains despite extensive localised truncation resulting from the construction of the Bodleian underground book stacks. It has potential to preserve remains relating to the Late Saxon and medieval defences, also Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval tenements and the medieval churchyard of St Mary’s, the University church. The area formed part of the medieval University “schools” area and also the printing and book binding quarter. It contains exceptional standing medieval and post-medieval built fabric.
- Character: Forms a north-south ‘spine’ of University of Oxford structures comprising of library buildings, University meeting house, Science museum and the University church.
- Spaces: Notable area of publicly accessible paved open space created by linkage of Broad Street, Radcliffe Square, the Schools Quadrangle, Clarendon Quadrangle and St Mary’s Churchyard.
- Road morphology: Preserves elements of rectilinear Late Saxon to medieval street network, altered by the formation of 18th century Radcliffe Square.
- Plot morphology: Large regular and curvilinear plots for monumental University structures.
- Geology: The character area lies on the central ridge of the Summertown-



The eastern colleges (Zone K)
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Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

Radley Second Terrace at a height of around 64m OD.

- Survival of townscape elements:
 - Elements of Late Saxon and medieval street network.
 - Many notable listed medieval and post-medieval University structures built on a monumental scale.
 - Central drain in Brasenose Lane reflects medieval 'kennel' drain.
 - Early modern cobbles and street furniture.

Description

The character area contains a distinct group of large two-to-four storey medieval, post-medieval and modern University buildings forming a north-south spine running from the High Street to Broad Street. Unlike the surrounding college precincts this sequence of buildings; St Mary's Church, the Radcliffe Camera, the Old Bodleian Library, the Sheldonian Theatre, the New Bodleian Library, the Science Museum, the Clarendon Building, the Divinity School and the Convocation House occupy spaces normally accessible to the public. With the exception of St Mary's Church and the late medieval Divinity School and Duke Humfrey's Library, the buildings inhabit post-medieval designed spaces that replaced earlier medieval tenements and the in-filled city ditch.

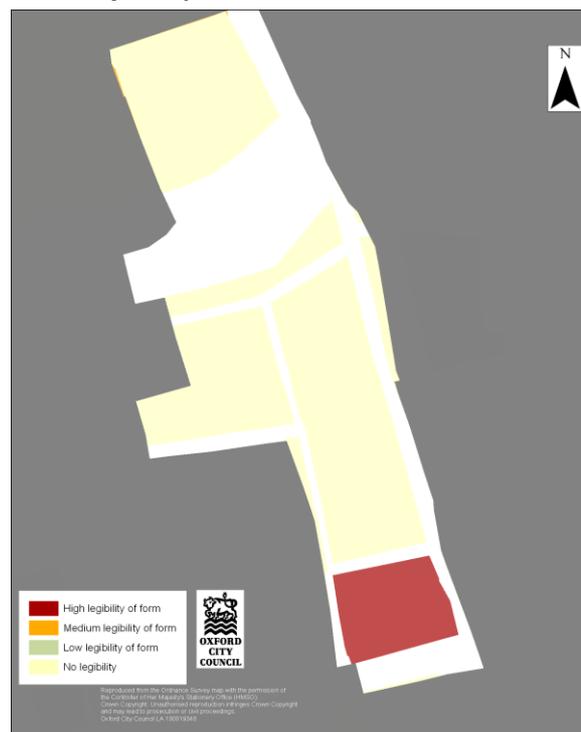
The cobbled Radcliffe Square and the churchyard of the University Church of St Mary's are accessed from the High Street via the parts of Catte Street and Brasenose Passage that retain their medieval dimensions. Access to the square from the west is from Brasenose Lane which is the only street to retain a central street drain, known from the late Norman period as 'the Kennel'.

Radcliffe Square retains iconic views of the Radcliffe Camera, also into All Souls College and of the simpler frontages of Brasenose College and the Bodleian Library. The Old Bodleian Library is laid out around the Schools Quadrangle and located in an irregular walled precinct along with the Clarendon Buildings, Sheldonian Theatre, Divinity School, Convocation House and the Museum of the History of Science (the Old Ashmolean Museum). These form another exceptional group of iconic buildings.

The Bodleian precinct is enclosed to the east by shallow walls with railings, entrance steps and gate piers and to the northern by a curving neo-classical screen of grotesque 'Emperors' set on a plinth with railings. This group of buildings lie partially over the line of the city wall and reflect the 17th century expansion of the University



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



Assessment of medieval tenement survival

around the medieval Divinity School and Duke Humfrey's Library.

To the north of this group of buildings lies the east end of Broad Street, an important central junction for visitors and students, joined from the east and north by the medieval route to Holywell and Parks Road which leads to the Natural History Museum and Science area. The junction has been narrowed to create a wide paved pedestrian walkway in front of the steps of the Clarendon Building. The 1930s New Bodleian Library forms the northern end of the character area and below ground extensive basements and linking tunnels connect the book stacks of the Old and New Bodleian and the Radcliffe Camera.

Green space is provided by the churchyard of St Mary's Church and the precinct of the Radcliffe Camera, both these spaces are enclosed by railings. Tree cover is limited to the churchyard of St Mary's, here a series of medium-small semi mature trees and a large mature tree contribute significantly the character of Radcliffe Square and the High Street..

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

The character lies within the historic core of the Late Saxon burh, established at Oxford by the early 10th century. Following the Norman Conquest Oxford enjoyed economic success based on the cloth trade, which began to wane in the late 13th and 14th centuries. The tradition of teaching established by the 12th century and more fully developed in the 13th century led to the formation of religious and secular colleges and the further development of the hall and collegiate system in the 14th century as economic decline made land available especially in the eastern part of the town.

By the early 13th century, traders dependent on the colleges congregated in the eastern end of the town and notably the book trade was centred around Catte Street close to the University Schools. For example bookbinders, parchment makers, limners, a copyist and a scrivener are recorded on Catte Street. The wealth of documentation for 13th century Oxford allows the partial reconstruction of tenement plot boundaries in the town and in this character area the historic plots have notably been eradicated by the development of University buildings, although the churchyard of St Mary's and elements of the medieval Street pattern remain.

There are few surviving medieval University buildings due both to their initial modesty and to later 17th and 18th century redevelopment. However the 14th century Convocation House (attached to St Mary's Church) and 15th century Divinity School and Duke Humphrey's Library survive. In the 17th century the Divinity School and Duke Humphrey's Library range was revived by the creation of the Bodleian Library in 1602, the extension to the Dukes Library (The Arts End in 1612 and The Seldon End between 1634-7) and the creation of the Schools Quadrangle (1613-1624). The 18th century saw the addition of the Sheldonian Theatre, the Old Ashmolean Building (built in to hold the collection curiosities belonging to Elias Ashmole and now the Museum of the History of Science) and the Radcliffe Camera and Radcliffe Square.

The medieval Convocation House, Divinity School and Duke Humphrey Library are the oldest surviving University buildings and are uniquely illustrative of the character of the medieval University. The character area is strongly illustrative of the expansion of the University in the 17th and 18th century and the adoption of classically inspired architectural traditions in a city dominated by gothic continuity. It also presents an opportunity to appreciate the work of nationally important architects (see below). St Mary's Church is also of notable historical significance for its association with John Henry Newman and the 'Oxford Movement'.



Brasenose Lane showing retention of medieval kennel central drain route in modern street design.

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The character area has high potential for significant archaeology relating to the Late Saxon burh, the medieval town defences, and medieval and post-medieval tenement activity. The built heritage, from the medieval church of St Mary's through to the Victorian book stack systems of the library is also of great interest.

There have been seventy-one archaeological events recorded in this character area. The most notable investigation to-date was undertaken in 1899 in the Clarendon Quadrangle. This identified the east-west line of the northern Late Saxon and medieval defences, including a possible returning wall heading southwards implying the presence of a smaller Late Saxon defended settlement (burh) that was subsequently expanded.

Excavations have also recorded Late Saxon to post-medieval features and pottery. Post-medieval evidence has been recovered in substantial quantities; of particular note is an assemblage of human and animal anatomical specimens and chemistry/alchemical glassware dated to the late 17th and early 18th century recovered from the basement of the Old Ashmolean on Broad Street.

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

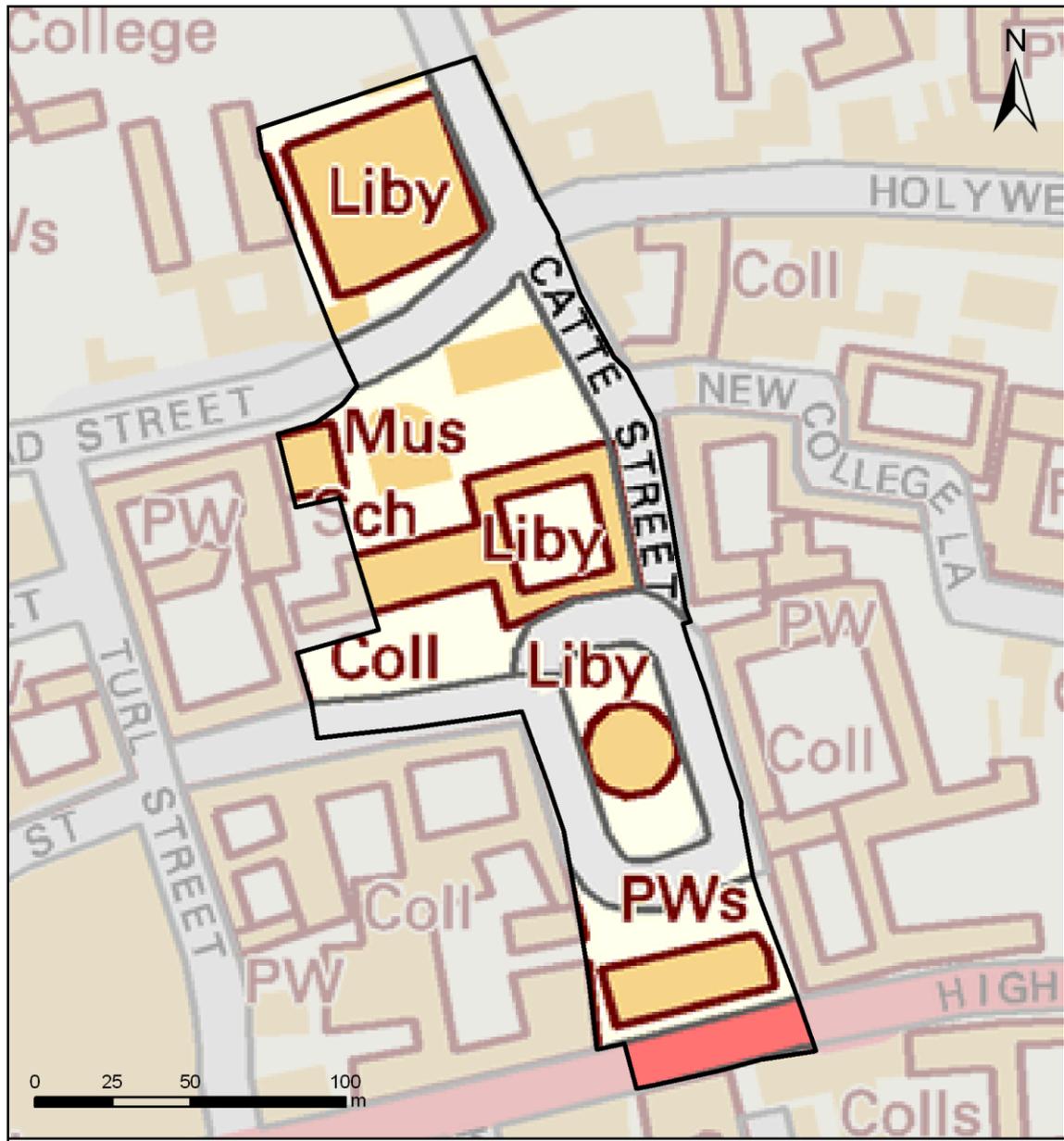
The area has exceptional aesthetic qualities. It contains a series of monumental designed spaces and architectural work by nationally renowned architects such as Christopher Wren (The Sheldonian Theatre, 1663-4), Nicholas Hawksmoor (University Printing House now the Clarendon Building, 1772-5) and James Gibbs (Radcliffe Camera, 1737-49). The vaulting of the 15th century Divinity School has been described as 'one of the tours de force of late medieval architecture in Europe' (Geoffrey Tyack). The façade of schools quadrangle, built in 1610 is a notable example of Oxford's Late Perpendicular Gothic. The New Bodleian Library (1937-40) represents Oxford's largest architectural project of the inter war years with classical and art deco motifs designed by Giles Gilbert Scott. A full discussion of notable architectural features in this character area is beyond the scope of this assessment.

The character area contains several important views and notable structures that contribute to the skyline of Oxford e.g. the tower of St Mary's Church, the Radcliffe Camera, the domed turret on top of the Sheldonian and the accentuated pinnacles and tower of the Schools Quadrangle. The built character of the area is highly distinctive and the Radcliffe Camera is perhaps the most internationally recognisable symbol of the University. There is a high degree of conformity in built character, with the extensive use of limestone and sandstone, much of it refaced in the late 20th century due to the impacts of pollution. As noted above the tree cover and lawn in St Mary's Churchyard and the lawn around the Radcliffe Camera make significant contribution to the aesthetic appeal of the area.

Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The character area has exceptional communal value as a series of monumental public spaces linking the High Street and Broad Street. The character area contains a publicly accessible University Science Museum and Bodleian temporary exhibit gallery as well as the University Church of St Mary's which incorporates the medieval University Convocation House, now a coffee shop, and a notable viewing point in the church tower. The area is a major visitor attraction and the buildings and spaces in this character area retain an international resonance as symbols of learning and part of the collective experience and memory of residents and visitors. The area has numerous associations with significant theological and political movements. The internationally renowned Bodleian Library, one of the UK's principal repositories of all published material, is located within this character area. It has exceptional significance as a centre of learning and research.

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HUCA 33 Orientation map