



## Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013–2018

Building a world-class city for everyone



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This report highlights the exciting recent discoveries and conservation challenges resulting from development driven archaeological investigation in Oxford. It sets out a 'framework of encouragement' for institutional landowners and major developers and identifies a number of strategic considerations for the effective long term management of Oxford's exceptional above and below ground archaeology.

The document includes an action plan for archaeological development control service delivery with the aim of facilitating the provision of rapid and effective heritage advice within the planning system. The plan focuses on the need to enhance public access to information about the historic environment and to improve the quality and scope of this information.

The report also provides a short historical overview of the city's evolution. Links are provided to an online information resource developed by the council's Heritage and Specialist Services Team, comprising summaries of recent archaeological work, research questions for future investigation and historic landscape and urban character studies. This information forms part of a wider evidence base for the historic environment being developed as part of the Oxford Heritage Plan.

# Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013–2018

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**Councillor Colin Cook**  
Board Member City Development

Oxford is a city where the seemingly timeless continuity of the historic core and an underlying dynamic of change and renewal combine to create an internationally recognisable urban environment. The city continues to attract increasing numbers of residents and visitors, in turn driving demand for affordable housing, improved infrastructure, sustainable economic growth, green energy provision, the renewal and rationalisation of existing facilities and for green space and leisure facilities.

At the same time there is an expectation that Oxford should retain and conserve a historic environment of the highest quality. This expectation has been true of the world-famous historic core since it was popularised by writers and artists of the Enlightenment. However, interest and appreciation of the rich historic environment to be found across the modern city is developing rapidly. This interest has been demonstrated by the level of community involvement in the development of a Local Heritage Asset Register<sup>1</sup> and the large numbers of people attracted to participate in the East Oxford Community Archaeology Project.<sup>2</sup>

Oxford's historic environment is a resource that enables us to advance our understanding of the past. It is also an asset that we need to steward and conserve for future generations if we are to achieve the desired outcome of sustainable development. Achieving an appropriate balance between conservation and investigation (and therefore removal of historic remains) is difficult and requires accessible, high-quality information about the historic environment and a clear vision of what is important.

With this objective in mind this document represents an important point-in-time review of Oxford's archaeological heritage and provides a framework for archaeological heritage management in the planning process over the next six years.

## **Archaeology and the government's vision for sustainable development.**

The National Planning Policy Framework<sup>3</sup> states that the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development. Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations. It is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment. Sustainable development is about positive growth: making economic, environmental and social progress.

The presence of the physical remains of the past around us and beneath our feet is an essential element of a thriving spirit of place. The ministerial foreword to the National Planning Policy Framework states that our historic environment: buildings, landscapes, towns and villages can better be cherished if their spirit of place thrives, rather than withers.

Above and below ground archaeology can provide inspiration for design and enhance our sense of connection with the past. The National Planning Policy Framework states that planning must be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which we live.

<sup>1</sup> [www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/HeritageAssetRegister.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/HeritageAssetRegister.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [www.archeox.net/](http://www.archeox.net/)

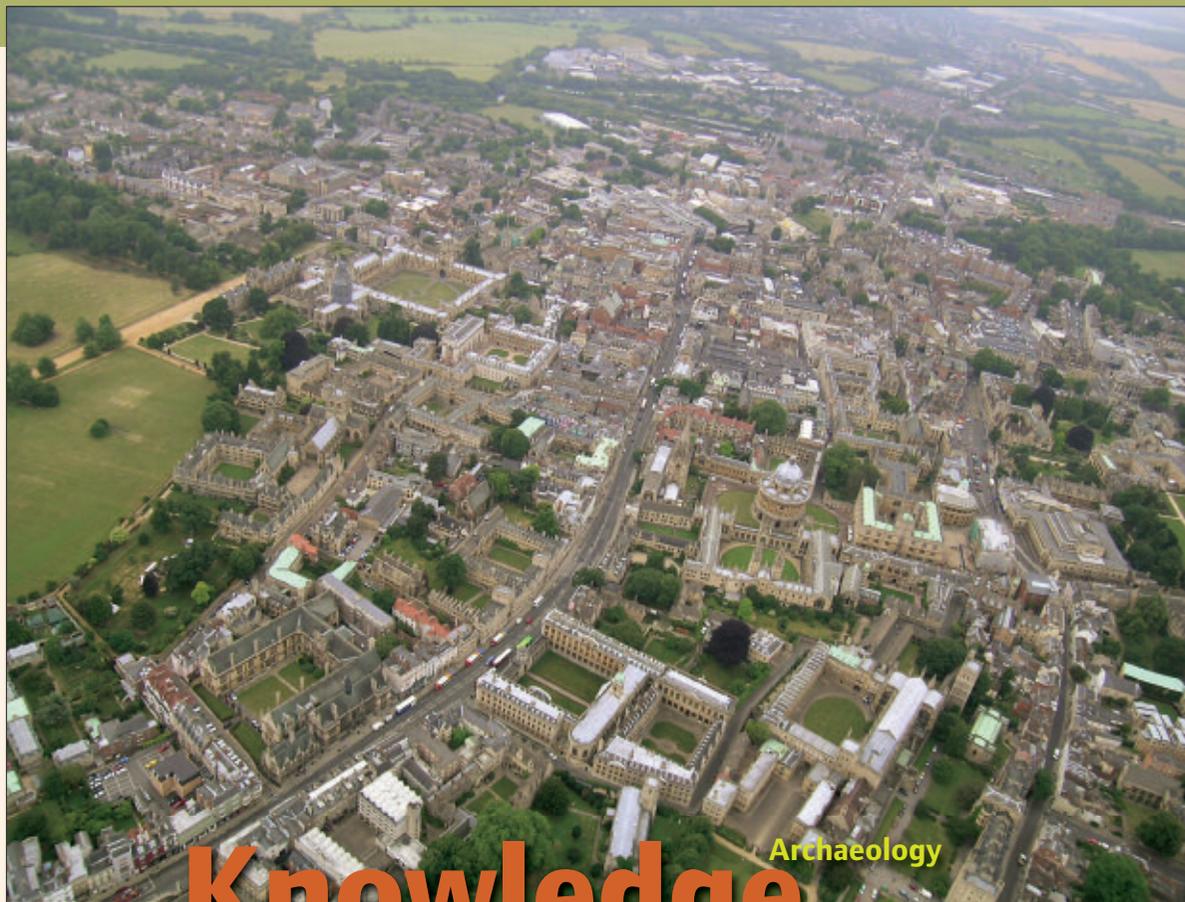
<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework-2)

Oxford is a world-famous university city well known for its historic buildings and landscapes. The city also preserves a rich archaeological heritage. Buried and standing archaeological remains are a source of new knowledge, an educational resource and a tangible link to the past for both visitors and residents. These remains also have the potential to make a positive contribution to the evolution of a dynamic modern city by generating public interest, inspiring and informing creative design and enhancing the quality of experience described by the government as 'spirit of place'.

Archaeological remains can be seen as finite and non-renewable 'assets' that have evidential, aesthetic, historic, communal and economic value. Defining these values at any given time presents a considerable challenge. Oxford's archaeological remains are extensive and complex. If they are to be effectively managed and an appropriate balance struck between investigation and conservation, then an ongoing process of information gathering and review is required. There is a recognised need to bring together the growing body of information that is being collected about the local historic environment and make this accessible to a wide range of users, from interested residents and visitors through to architects, developers and heritage managers.

As part of this process the City Council's Heritage and Specialist Services Team has produced a series of documents aimed at synthesising and summarising information on the historic environment of Oxford:

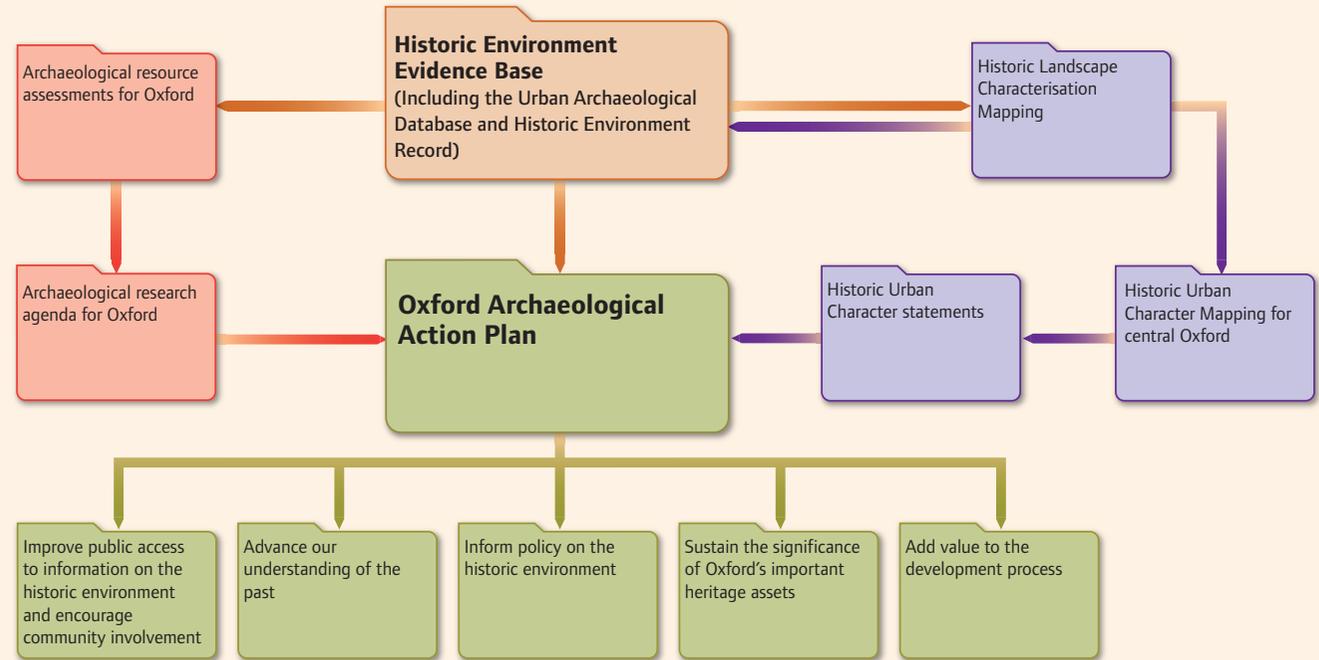
- An archaeological resource assessment. This summarises the archaeological investigations in the city to-date.
- An archaeological research agenda. This sets out the questions that might be answered by investigating the city's remaining archaeology.
- A Historic Landscape and Urban Characterisation study. These map the built environment from the Victorian period to the present by looking at changes in land-use and built-form.



**Knowledge** Archaeology  
**Education**  
**Leisure and tourism**  
**Health and well-being**  
**Design excellence** Community  
**Sense of place**

The production of an archaeological resource assessment, research agenda and the completion of historic landscape characterisation mapping for the Oxford Local Authority Area are the results of two long-running national English Heritage projects.

- The Urban Archaeological Strategy (UAS) project was initiated because of a recognition that the historic towns in England preserve complex archaeological remains and that the collation and synthesis of the information accumulated about these assets was necessary to ensure effective future management.
- The Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) project, which uses digital maps to pick out broad spatial patterns in the landscape and built environment, evolved out of a recognition by archaeologists that the historic environment needs to be understood in a holistic way rather than as a series of individual sites, buildings or monuments.



**Fig. 1** Flow chart showing the components of the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan.

1990	2002	2010	2011	2011	2012	2013
The government introduced Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 which made archaeological remains a material consideration in the planning process. The result was a significant increase in the production of archaeological information.	English Heritage fund and the creation of an Urban Archaeological Database for Oxford.	A review of archaeological reports, journals and database evidence was undertaken to produce a summary of archaeological knowledge by period (archaeological resource assessments).	An archaeological research agenda for the city was produced.	Historic landscape and urban characterisation mapping was completed.	Period of sector and public consultation.	Production of Archaeological Action Plan.

**Fig. 2** The process of data collection and review leading up to the production of the plan.

The heritage management sector has developed a range of methodologies for capturing information about the natural and built environment which complement the approaches of urban archaeological assessment and historic landscape characterisation. These approaches can be combined to allow us to build up an evidence base of synthesised information that more closely reflects the complexity of the historic environment in all its dimensions (see Fig. 3).

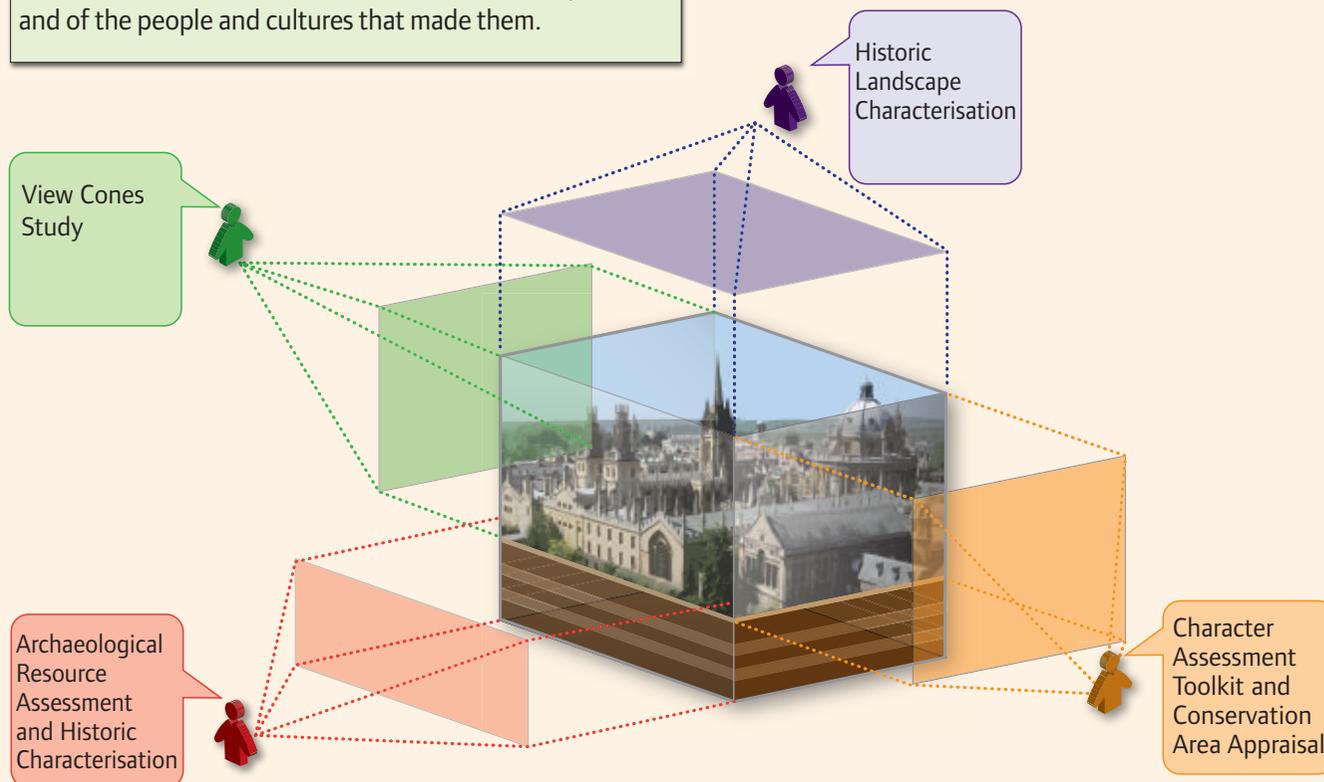
## The use of this document

This document provides a short introduction to the city's rich history and archaeology and signposts the information about Oxford's heritage that can now be accessed online (see page 32). The document also sets out a 'framework of encouragement' for institutional landowners and major developers which is mindful of the current challenging economic climate and seeks ways to add value to the development process. An action plan is provided (page 31) setting out a pro-active agenda for improved service delivery and promoting greater public access and engagement with Oxford's outstanding heritage.

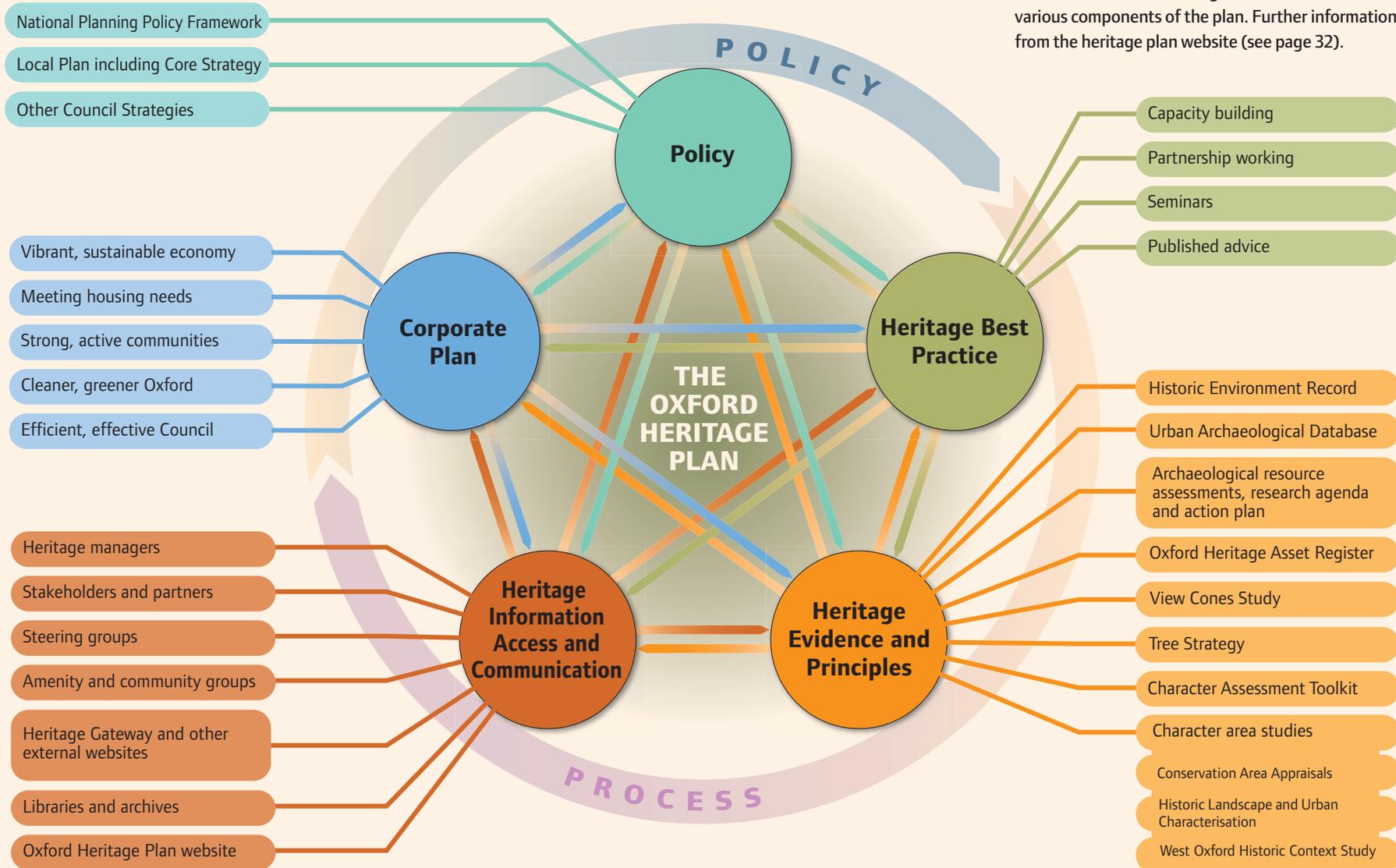
**Fig. 3** A number of studies have been produced or are ongoing that provide information about the historic environment for property and heritage managers, developers, architects, urban designers, and interested members of the public. The diagram right illustrates the holistic approach being developed.

### What is a heritage asset?

The National Planning Policy Framework Heritage describes a heritage asset as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially may hold, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point. Heritage assets with archaeological interest are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them.



**Oxford Heritage Plan relationship diagram**



**Fig. 4** The studies undertaken in order to produce the archaeological action plan form part of the evidence base for a broader heritage plan for the city. This is being developed by the City Council and Oxford Preservation Trust. This diagram sets out the relationship between various components of the plan. Further information can be obtained from the heritage plan website (see page 32).

## What makes Oxford special?

Antiquarian interest in Oxford's historic environment dates back to the 17th century, with much detailed information being recovered as the town has grown, especially over the last 200 years. Early Oxford archaeologists pioneered the study of medieval (and post-medieval) urban archaeology in relation to both below ground remains and standing buildings. More than a century of excavations and exploration have uncovered structures, artefacts, and environmental remains that have provided evidence for the changing patterns of human life and death in the town. This process continues with some remarkable recent finds demonstrating there is much of interest that remains to be uncovered. This page provides a short summary of Oxford's evolution and its rich archaeological heritage.

Stone axes and the remains of cold and warm climate animals from before the end of the last Ice Age have been recovered from important Lower Palaeolithic sites in Oxford at Magdalen Grove, The Wolvercote Channel and from Cornish's Pit in Iffley. As the climate changed after the last Ice Age hunter gatherer groups utilised the resources of the Thames and Cherwell river valleys. As an Upper Thames gravel peninsular site, Oxford later attracted a 'sacred landscape' of large earthwork monuments which were in use from the 4th through to the 2nd millennium BC. In the Iron Age and Roman periods the landscape remained rural in character, although a major regional pottery industry comprising work compounds and kilns spread across eastern and southern parts of the modern city.

The origins of Saxon Oxford are not yet fully understood. The appearance of a settlement by the river crossing at St Aldate's (perhaps the original Ox-ford) made it a site worth defending in the late-Saxon period. A trading settlement and early religious centre (or minster) may have been established here by the late 7th or 8th century. The regular street plan of central Oxford was laid out in the late 9th or early 10th century when a fortified town (or 'burh')



**Fig. 5** Pottery from the 18th century Radcliffe Infirmary, excavated by Museum of London Archaeology in 2008.

was established. The town was bounded by the floodplain and served by other river crossings at Magdalen Bridge and Ferry Hinksey (another candidate for the original 'Ox-ford'). Beyond were a ring of Anglo-Saxon and medieval villages with their fields, pastures and woodlands, a royal vill at Headington and Royal Forest at Shotover.

The subsequent growth of the town, and the appearance of shops, houses, castle, numerous churches, monastic sites, hospitals, a royal palace and then the University with its halls and colleges, has added to the rich diversity of the archaeological record. The impact of institutional land-ownership has contributed to Oxford's unusual urban morphology, and has had the effect of preserving much of the archaeology of the medieval town under college quadrangles and gardens. Oxford is also exceptional for the quality of its medieval documentary archives, which were kept by the colleges and other significant landowners.

The rapid pace of development in recent decades has been matched by a vigorous archaeological response to recover information about Oxford's early history, with increasing interest now being shown in the city's later industrial heritage as we progress into the 21st century.

The archaeology of Oxford's historic core is recorded in detail on the City Council's Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) while the County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) holds information and resources on the surrounding area of Oxford City. The Local Authority Area includes twelve Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including Port Meadow. Oxford's archaeological remains are protected by national and local planning policy (See Appendices 1-3).

# Over a thousand years of urban change

## Patterns of change: a selective history of development trends

### Prehistoric

- Monumental earthworks influence later routeways.
- Farmsteads and field systems are established.

### Roman

- Roman roads and pottery manufacturing compounds.

### Saxon

- Religious and trading centre established by a crossing point over the Thames.
- Oxford established as a planned defended settlement (or burh) with an orthogonal street grid centred on Carfax.

### Norman

- 1066. The Norman invasion leads to the construction of a motte and bailey castle over the western part of the town.
- The 1086 Domesday Survey records large areas of waste ground within the town.
- Subsequent growth leads to the division of existing tenements, the creation of new streets and big infrastructure projects like the Grandpont causeway over the floodplain, new religious buildings and hospitals.
- Oxford enjoys Royal patronage with the construction of the Royal Beaumont Palace north of the town.

### Medieval

- Monastic houses and friaries are attracted to Oxford and establish precincts outside the walled town, some on land reclaimed from the floodplain.
- The town wall is rebuilt in the 13th century with bastions and unusual double (concentric) line along the north-east part of the circuit.
- Oxford's economy falters in the 14th century with increasing areas of the town recorded as waste.
- The 13th and 14th centuries see the growth of academic halls and colleges associated with the University.

### Post-medieval

- The Dissolution of the Monasteries leads to the closure of the friaries and abbeys leaving the west and south-western suburbs of Oxford economically disadvantaged.
- Oxford becomes a city with a Cathedral established first at the former Osney Abbey church then at Christ Church.
- During the Civil War Oxford is chosen by Charles I as his temporary capital and consequently defensive and siege earthworks are built around the town, clearing part of St Clement's.
- In 1644 a major fire destroys many properties between George Street and Queen Street.
- The 17th century sees the expansion and rebuilding of the town, with land inside the town wall and the in-filled town ditch newly developed.
- The canal reaches Oxford in 1790.
- A major clearance of obstructions was undertaken by the 1771 Paving Commission including the demolition of remaining gates. New drains were laid and an indoor market replaced the historic street market.

### Modern

- The railway arrives in Oxford in 1844.
- The 19th century sees the reform and expansion of the University and its colleges and the rapid expansion of the suburbs to cater for wealthy trades people, academics and those in domestic service.
- In the early 20th century the development of the Morris Motors and Pressed Steel plants transformed east Oxford.
- After the first world war the city authorities reluctantly engage in slum clearance and a programme of council house building which continued until the 1980s.
- Between 1938–1966 the outer ring road is completed. Major plans for inner ring road and city redevelopment were subsequently abandoned.
- Between 1957–1974 a major project was undertaken to replace decayed stonework on historic buildings.
- In the 1960s and early 1970s the 19th century suburb in St Ebbe's was demolished and the Westgate Shopping Centre was constructed.

### 21st century

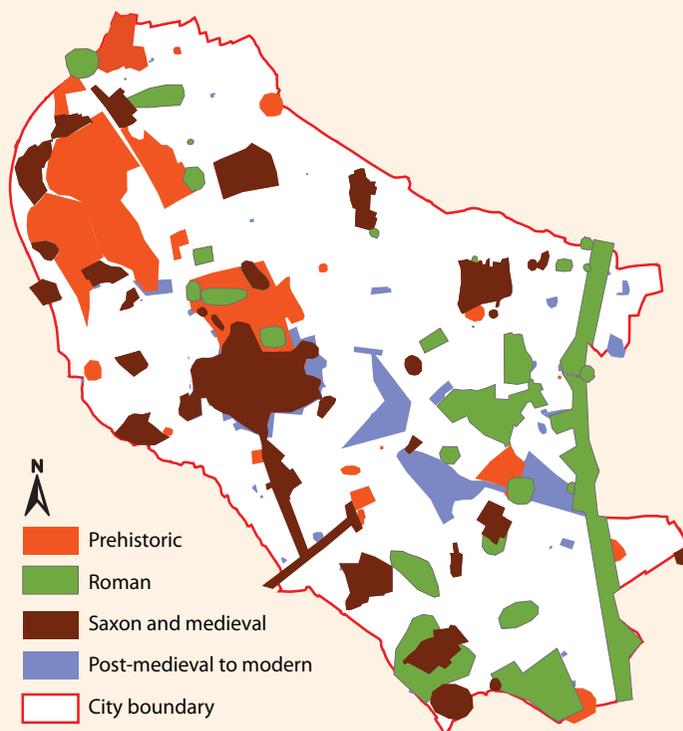
- The late 20th–early 21st century has seen the expansion and renewal of college and University facilities.
- There is pressure to redevelop and infill urban space in order to meet housing needs.

Oxford's exceptional heritage is not just confined to its historic core. To the north of Oxford the Wolvercote Channel has produced nationally important Lower Palaeolithic remains. The expanse of grazing land at Port Meadow protects extensive prehistoric and later remains including extant Bronze Age and Iron Age earthworks. The site is also an exceptional example of an Upper Thames grazing meadow that has been in near continuous use since at least the Late Saxon period.

The river floodplains either side of Oxford have demonstrated the potential to preserve the remains of early human activity under later alluvium and on gravel islands between former channels. Peat deposits survive along the stream valleys and river floodplains with the potential to preserve earlier structures and organic remains. Furthermore the gravel terrace north of Oxford preserves an extensive monumental landscape of Middle Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date, the full extent of which has yet to be established.

Oxford also contains a range of prehistoric, Roman and Saxon settlement and burial areas. Of particular note are the remains of a nationally important Roman pottery manufacturing industry, with kiln sites located across the eastern and southern parts of the local authority area.

Several historic villages of Late Saxon origin are located within the city boundary (Upper and Lower Wolvercote, Binsey, Walton, Marston, Barton, Headington, Temple Cowley, Church Cowley, Littlemore, Iffley and the deserted village of Seacourt). Also the sites of medieval Rewley and Osney abbeys, Godstow and Littlemore Nunneries, St Bartholomew's Leper Hospital and a Templar preceptory at Temple Cowley. The remains of Oxford's distinctive industrial past and later medical, civic, educational and religious buildings are also of notable interest.



**Fig. 6** Zones of known archaeological interest by period.



**Fig. 7** A simplified geology map. This shows broad zones of potential where different types of site may be present. For example, prehistoric monuments may be present on the gravels, prehistoric occupation sites may be located beneath the floodplain alluvium, prehistoric and Roman occupation sites (including Roman kilns) may be present on the limestone, sand and nearby clays.



**Fig. 8** A small Roman kiln (with collapsed stoke hole visible on the right hand side). Recorded at Rose Hill in 2010.

A large complex of monumental earthworks was constructed at Oxford on the gravel terrace between the Thames and Cherwell rivers between the Middle Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age (approximately between 3600–1800BC). The complex comprised of alignments of enclosures and mounds (and probably trackways and post built structures although the evidence for these have yet to be found). The earthworks appear to have been used as ceremonial meeting places and for selected burials. A debate continues as to whether the builders of these earthworks were semi-nomadic herders or more established agriculturalists. These earthworks required a considerable investment in time and labour to build and form part of a distinctive pattern of complexes located at intervals along the Upper Thames.

Exciting new evidence for the scale and layout of Oxford's prehistoric monument complex was discovered at St John's College in 2008 when part of a Neolithic henge was excavated. Subsequently excavations at the former Radcliffe Infirmary site on Woodstock Road in 2009 revealed a sub-rectangular enclosure that may have been used for laying out the dead for natural decomposition (excarnation). A radio-carbon date from a bone recovered from the enclosure ditch suggests that this earthwork is Middle-Neolithic in date, the earliest yet found in the complex. The Infirmary site also revealed cremation burials and four Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age burial mounds. Three of these formed part of a linear barrow cemetery known to extend eastwards under the University Parks.

Limited evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age domestic activity has been recovered from central Oxford, which tends to respect the 'sacred landscape'. By the Middle Iron Age (c.400–100BC) rural settlement is recorded on the fringes of the monument complex and by the 2nd century AD fields had been extended over parts of it. Roman roads are likely to have converged on crossing points over the Thames at Oxford although archaeological evidence for these has not yet been recovered.



**Fig. 9** An aerial photograph of north Oxford showing known Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age monuments (in blue). The B represents a burial, more of which are recorded further north. These may yet prove to be related to further barrows or simpler flat graves. The shaded area represents a known concentration of Roman farmsteads, fields, enclosures and burials.



**Fig. 10** A Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age barrow being excavated at the Radcliffe Infirmary site in 2009.



**Fig. 11** A Middle Neolithic enclosure, perhaps a funerary enclosure for laying out the dead. Discovered at the Radcliffe Infirmary site.



**Fig. 12** A Neolithic henge discovered at the St John's College Kendrew Quad in 2008.

# The Saxon and Viking town

In the post-Roman period Saxon migrants established new settlements along the Thames Valley. Evidence for short-lived rural settlement of late 5th–6th century date has been recorded from east and north Oxford. A more substantial settlement may have existed at Thornbury, near Binsey on the floodplain to the west, where the remains of a contemporary enclosure have been identified.

The precise origins of Oxford itself remain unclear. A settlement emerged in the middle Saxon period, strategically located next to a crossing point over the Thames floodplain. The name 'Oxnaforda', recorded in the 10th century Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, denotes its role as a fording point for cattle which can be contrasted to other specialised crossing points along the Thames, like Swinford (swine-ford) and Shifford (sheep-ford) upstream.

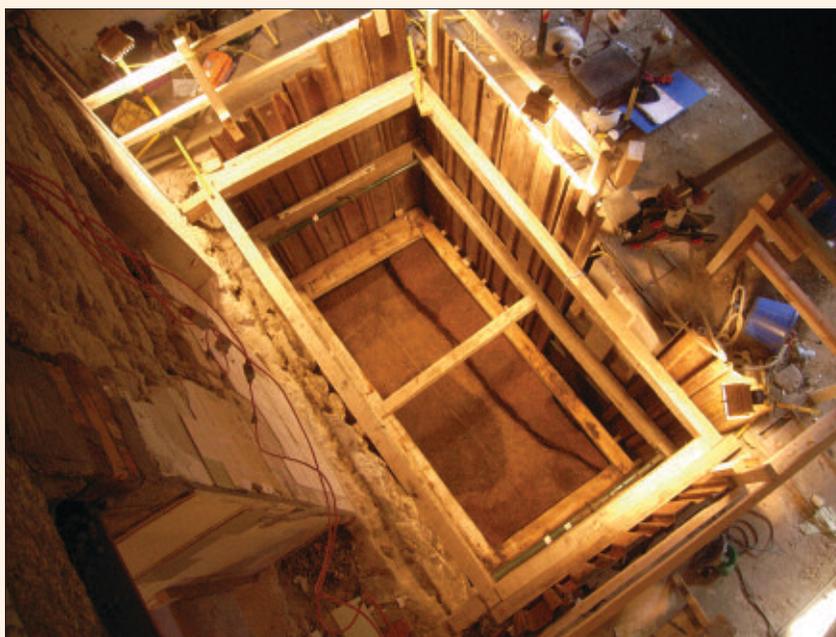
A 7th century radio-carbon date from a burial at Christ Church is a rare clue to the town's early origins. Oxford may have been established as a trading centre and or a minster (religious centre) by the 8th century, with the minster located on the site of the later St Frideswide's Priory, now the site of Christ Church Cathedral.

The town passed between Mercian and Wessex overlords and by the late 9th or early 10th century a defended settlement (called a burh) had been established with a street grid orientated on the crossroads at Carfax.

In the 10th and 11th centuries the town attracted Danish settlers and experienced short periods of Viking rule. Settlers of Scandinavian origin mixed with Anglo-Saxon residents and in 1002 a massacre of Danish residents is documented on St Brice's Day. A remarkable and gruesome mass grave excavated at St John's College in 2008 may be evidence of this massacre.



**Fig. 13** A mass grave discovered in 2008 at St John's College on St Giles' may be related to the St Brice's Day massacre of the local Danish community in 1002.



**Fig. 14** A sherd of 6th century pottery from an early Saxon rural settlement at the former Radcliffe Infirmary site on Walton Street.

**Fig. 15** The excavation of a lift pit at Jesus College in 2008 shows the depth of archaeological deposits in the city centre. The dark amorphous shape at its base is a rubbish pit cut into the natural gravel. To the right are a line of stake holes representing the remains of a Late Saxon building fronting onto Market Street.

## The Norman town

Although Oxford was not directly involved in the military campaigns of the Norman Conquest the Domesday Survey records an unusually high level of waste property here by 1086. The reason for this remains unclear. In 1071 the Norman overlord Robert d'Oilly constructed a motte and bailey castle over part of the western street grid, clearly intending to dominate and intimidate the Saxon townspeople. D'Oilly also undertook another great building project in the form of a stone causeway across the Thames floodplain known as the Grandpont (The Great Bridge). His son and namesake, along with fellow noble Robert d'Ivry, were subsequently responsible for establishing the oldest recorded institution for higher education in Oxford, the Collegiate Chapel of St George at the Castle, in the late 1090s. In the early 12th century the collegiate chapel attracted notable scholars like Geoffrey of Monmouth to teach. At this point Oxford was one of several towns in England developing a tradition of local teaching, and it later emerged as one of the most successful of these centres.

The 12th century was notable for the expansion of civic and religious institutions in the town, for example the important religious houses of Osney Abbey and St Frideswide's were founded and re-founded respectively. New hospitals were established, notably the Leper Hospital of St Bartlemas at Cowley Marsh and the town's principal hospital of St John the Baptist, located next to the River Cherwell on the current site of Magdalen College. The Norman period also saw several principal streets re-aligned, new streets laid out and the emergence of a central stone lined street drain known as 'The Kennel'.

At least three substantial fires are known to have devastated the town in this period; two during the period of unrest known as The Anarchy (1135–1154) during which Oxford Castle was besieged and one at St Frideswide's in 1190. Despite these events the town appears to have economically prospered in the 12th century, successfully trading in



**Fig. 16** A mitred arch belonging to the Norman Grandpont Causeway exposed in Abingdon Road in 2004.

commodities such as wool, cloth and leather. A merchant guild was in existence at Oxford by 1100 and the first known Royal Charter was granted in c.1155 confirming existing privileges. Oxford obtained the oldest known municipal seal in Britain in 1191 and the town was formally granted to its citizens by King John in 1199. Oxford became favoured by the Royal family as a stopping-off point between Windsor and the Royal Hunting Lodge at Woodstock and a Royal Palace (known as the Royal Beaumont Palace or The King's Houses) was constructed outside the Northgate by 1132.

Oxford gradually established itself as a minor centre for teaching in the later 12th century and it became an important clerical centre and favoured as a venue for ecclesiastical courts. Established European centres of learning like Paris remained the preferred destinations for scholars wishing to study Roman and Canon law until war with France in the 1190s made access to such universities difficult. This proved a stimulus to the development of a local scholastic tradition which eventually sought to protect its interests and the livelihoods of those involved, by forming a kind of guild, the University of Oxford.



**Fig. 17** Repair works to the Norman motte in 2008.

# The 13th century town

By the early 13th century Oxford was well established as a commercial centre with an emerging University. The economic focus of the town remained the regular street market held on the roads leading off the central crossroads at Carfax. These principal streets attracted the highest property values and represented the commercial heart of the town, encouraging the creation of subdivided properties with shops in cellars and booths fronting the street and with workshops and living quarters behind and above.

In the western suburb Osney Abbey was joined by Rewley Abbey in 1281 and a number of the mendicant religious orders established precincts on the edges of the town in the 13th century (e.g. the Dominicans, Franciscans, Crutched Friars, Austin Friars, Carmelite Friars, Friars of the Sack and Trinitarian Friars) adding additional impetus to the development of learned study and teaching. The arrival of the friaries led to the further reclamation of land from the floodplain south and west of the town and was accompanied by an extension of settlement on reclaimed land southwards along St Aldate's. This later area in particular has proved rich in archaeological material because of the survival of waterlogged conditions that preserve organic remains.

The town was also home to a sizable Jewish community that was concentrated along the 'Great Jury Street' (now St Aldate's) and Jury Lane located near to the Synagogue (located roughly under the north tower of Christ Church). In the late 12th century a burial ground or 'Garden of the Jews' was established outside the east gate. This was later displaced by Henry III who granted the site to the Hospital of St John the Baptist. The burial ground then moved to the south of Bridge Street (now High Street). In 1290 the Jewish community was expelled from England by Royal decree. In Oxford many Jewish properties came into the hands of the emerging colleges.



**Fig. 18** Map showing zones of activity in Oxford in the 13th century.

0 0.5 1 km

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Bridge         |  Jewish burial ground |
|  Castle         |  Market               |
|  Colleges       |  Open/wasteground     |
|  Defences       |  Religious precinct   |
|  Hospital       |  Suburb               |
|  Jewish quarter |  Urban settlement     |

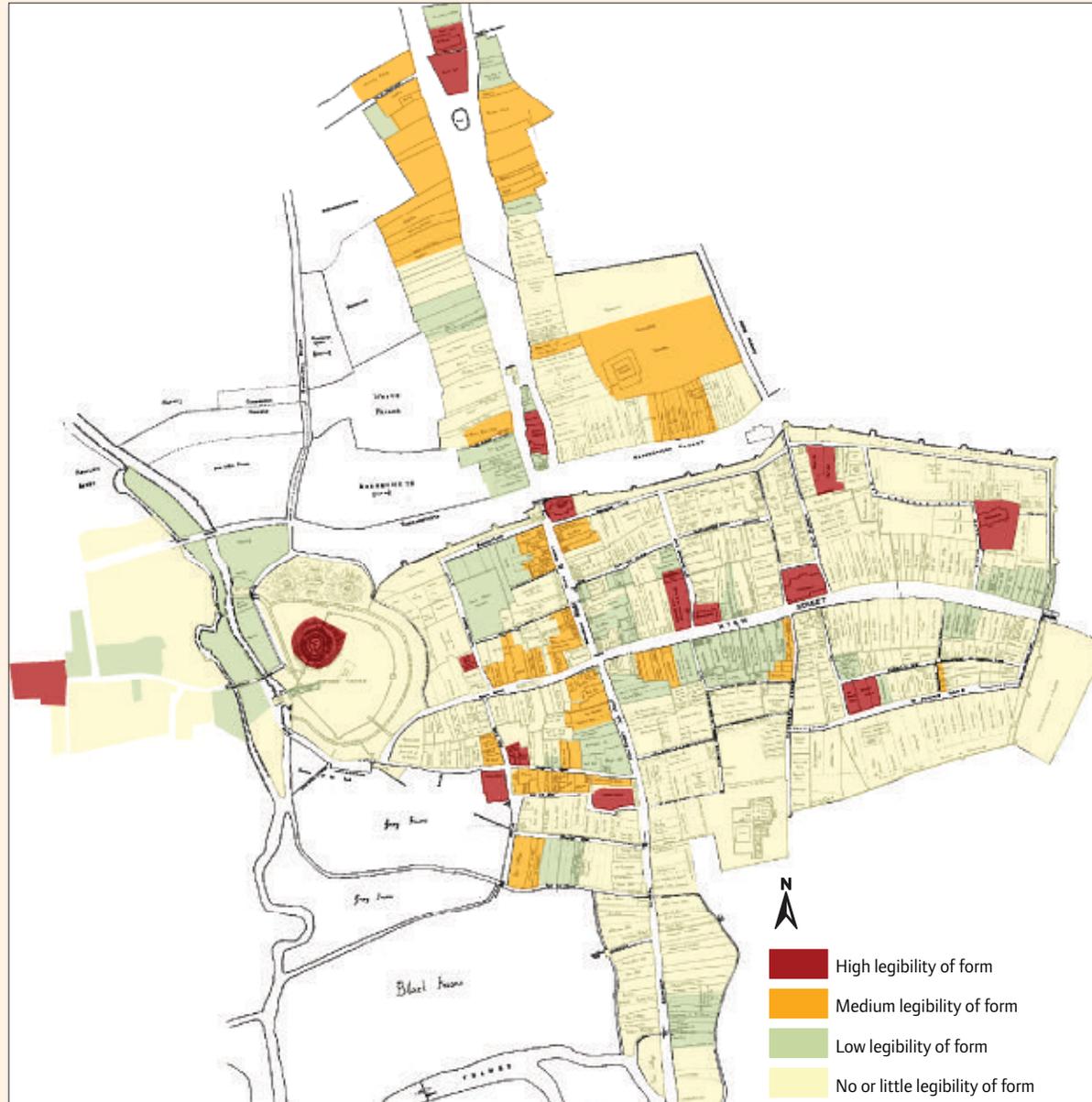
A symbol of the town's identity and wealth at this time was the town wall. A series of murage grants recorded in the 1230s provide evidence for the wholesale rebuilding of the wall with the subsequent addition of bastions and an unusual second (concentric) line of defence along the north eastern part of the circuit in the later 13th century.

By the end of the Norman period the original large Late Saxon plot divisions had been subdivided and rationalised to create a pattern of tenement boundaries fronting on to the main streets and side streets. Using the detailed documentary survey of 13th century and later records undertaken by the Rev. H. E. Salter in the 1930s, it is possible to map the broad survival of these historic boundaries. Figure 20 to the right is an assessment of survival as part of the current townscape.

The expansion of the colleges since the 14th century, especially in the east end of the town, has had a dramatic impact on this pattern by amalgamating and removing boundaries. This is a process that has continued into the 21st century.



**Fig. 19** Part of H. E. Salter's plan showing the division of the market frontage into small shops around Carfax.



**Fig. 20** Map showing areas of tenement boundary survival.

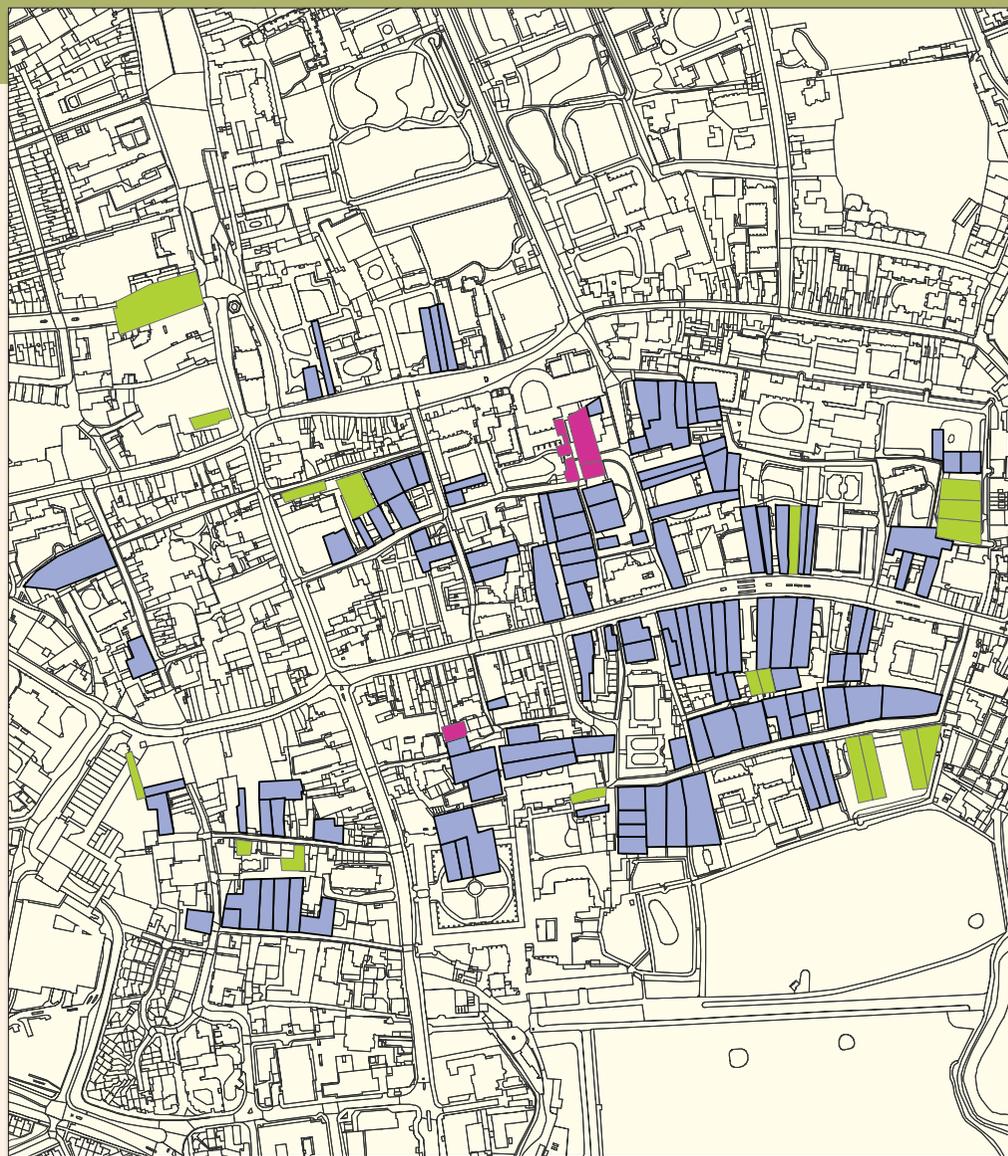
# The medieval town: the University of Oxford and its academic halls

The medieval University emerged from a tradition of local schooling associated with the development of Oxford as an ecclesiastical centre attracting legal work in the 12th century. When conflict with France closed down the option of foreign study, Oxford benefited and emerged as a scholastic centre with formal institutions emerging in the early 13th century.

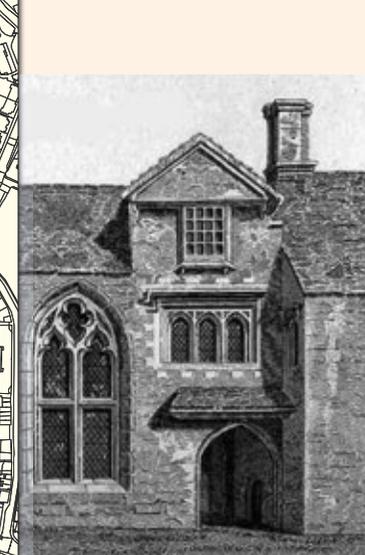
Teaching was concentrated around a series of University 'schools', the main focus being in School Street, now part of Radcliffe Square. In the 14th century the first purpose-built University structure, a Convocation House and first floor library, was built against the north side of St Mary's Church.

In the earliest period of the University students lived in private houses. By the middle of the 13th century, set against the backdrop of sporadic violence between students and townsfolk, they began to congregate in academic halls, often town houses owned by the local monasteries. Hall rooms could either be rented directly by students themselves or let from a Master of Arts who would take on the overall rent as a 'Principal' for the Hall and who made a profit from letting rooms and providing meals. Their purpose was primarily as a place of residence although instruction was often included. Eventually all the halls became licensed by the University.

At the high-point of the academic halls in the 14th century there were over a hundred such establishments. Numbers declined as student numbers dropped in the later 14th century, but around seventy survived through the 15th century. Throughout the greater part of the medieval period, the academic halls, rather than the colleges, housed the bulk of students. The 16th century saw their rapid decline with only eight remaining in 1537. The reason for this rapid decline remains to be adequately explained.



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**Fig. 21** Tackley's Inn, 107 High Street, built in 1320. One of the very few surviving examples of a medieval academic hall, it was re-fronted in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

- N
- Medieval academic halls (based on H. E. Salter survey)
  - Medieval academic halls (Catto additions)
  - Medieval schools (based on H. E. Salter survey)

**Fig. 22** Plan showing the location of recorded academic halls.

Only fragmentary remains of academic halls now survive above ground, the notable exception being the 14th century former Tackley's Inn at 107 High Street. There is considerable potential for the further study of the material culture of these institutions through archaeological investigation.

# The colleges

Enclosed arrangements of specialised buildings designed for communal student living emerged in the later 13th century. These new institutions were distinct from academic halls in that they were established with an endowment that gave them greater economic stability and ultimately, longevity.

Over time a distinctive arrangement of residential and study areas developed, usually encompassing a gatehouse, dining hall, kitchen, library and chapel, with support structures used for the management of food, drink and fuel. Colleges developed arrangements of staircases accessed from a quadrangle with residential rooms leading off. Of the new colleges Merton College was the first to develop a quadrangular form as a result of piecemeal additions to an initial more ad hoc arrangement of structures. In the 14th century New College became the first purpose-built college arranged around a quadrangle. This then became the standard arrangement adopted by later colleges and a defining characteristic of Oxford's urban layout. Magdalen College (founded in 1474) represented a further stage of development in collegiate architecture, retaining the basic quadrangle format but also incorporating a cloister.

16 The colleges are notable for preserving both early college remains and earlier medieval structures beneath their extensive precincts. This rare survival of earlier medieval streets and buildings below later quads and college buildings is of even greater interest because of the exceptional level of documentary information that survives about the town from the medieval period.

**Fig. 25 (right)** An early 14th century pottery assemblage from a stone lined garderobe associated with Vine Hall (now under Christ Church Peckwater Quad). The garderobe assemblage included heated bottles, furnace fragments and glass distilling equipment that may have been used for chemical/alchemical experiments.



**Fig. 23 (left)** The distinctive pattern of college quadrangles in the eastern part of the town.



**Fig. 24 (above)** A 14th or 15th century copper-alloy book clasp from Christ Church (front and back).



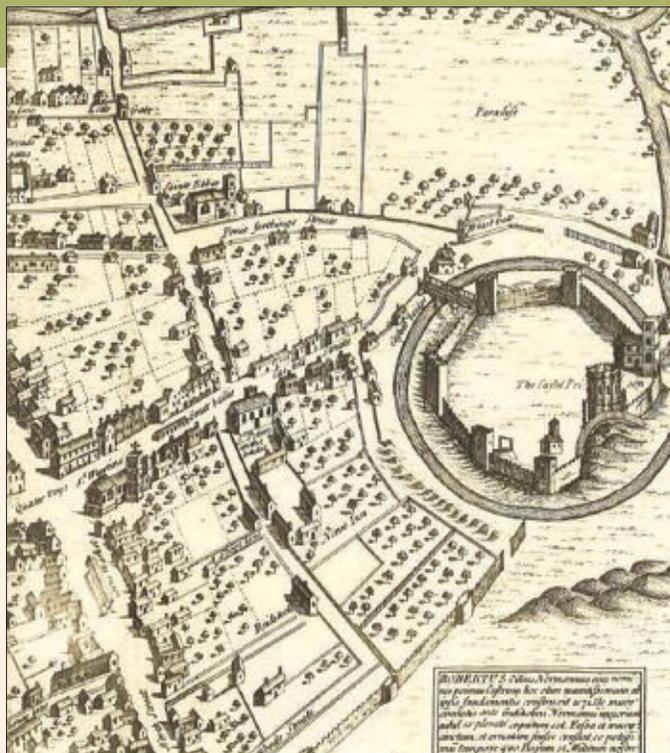
**Fig. 26 (above)** 14th–15th century drinking jugs found in Oxford and made at Brill of Boarstall in Buckinghamshire. College pottery assemblages demonstrate that above-average alcohol consumption was taking place in these institutions, reflecting both the affluence of the scholars and students but also the presence of builders and artisans involved in construction work. © Copyright University of Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 2001, AN1935.636 and AN1891.7.

# The 16th and 17th century town

The Dissolution of Rewley and Osney Abbeys in the 1530s had a long-term effect on the western suburb. Having lost the patronage of the abbeys it became poorer and remained less developed until it later became a focus for industrial and communication infrastructure. The abbey church at Osney briefly became a cathedral as Oxford was elevated to the status of city in 1542. In 1546 Henry VIII transferred this role to the former priory church at Christ Church. The Dissolution of the friaries, notably the Black and Grey Friars, had a similar impact on the south-western part of the town. Their precincts became a source of building stone and then areas used for small-scale gravel quarrying and as urban gardens.

Between the late 16th and the middle 18th century central Oxford was transformed by an intensive period of redevelopment and rebuilding. This was largely driven by the increasing affluence of the University and a revival in river trade. Previously open land within the medieval walls was further subdivided and developed and the former town ditch was in-filled and built on. Much of the medieval town vanished, to be replaced by three- and four-storey town houses and the monumental architecture of the University and colleges. Tenements became more crowded with the addition of jettied frontages, the insertion of chimneys, and the extension of building ranges further backward along plots. The colleges took on their modern form, expanding sometimes outwards but mostly upwards with the insertion of attics and cock-lofts to house more students.

In the 1640s Oxford was adopted by King Charles I as his temporary capital during the English Civil War. Lines of Royalist defences earthworks and Parliamentarian siege works were constructed around the city. Parts of St Clement's were cleared to facilitate the defence of Oxford but in general the town did not suffer extensive damage during the war. Greater destruction was caused by a fire that spread from George Street to Queen Street in 1644 with perhaps 200 houses damaged.



**Fig. 27** Part of Agas's 1578 map of Oxford looking from the north, showing the extent of open space at this time.



**Fig. 29** Loggan's map of Oxford from 1675 showing the density of development by this time. The map is drawn viewed from the north.



**Fig. 28** A vaulted cellar and entrance chamber discovered in 2009 during building works at The Queen's College. Dated to the 17th century but perhaps containing fabric of earlier origin.



**Fig. 30** Painted panelling and a door from a previously unknown 17th or early 18th century student study exposed at Brasenose College during building work in 2010.

The creation of a Paving Commission in 1771 radically transformed the city, leading to the removal of the street market to an indoor location, the demolition of the surviving medieval gates and the removal of other street impediments. The Commission oversaw the wholesale removal of overhanging signs, stalls, pumps, porches and other projections along the main roads. The medieval central street drain or 'kennel' was superseded by cambered cobble streets and stone lined drains. The sewage system was improved again in 1873.

At the start of the 19th century Oxford had grown little from its medieval boundaries, with the exception of the construction of the Radcliffe Infirmary and Radcliffe Observatory to the north of the city in the 1770s. The 19th century, however, saw rapid suburban growth and in-filling. St Ebbe's, St Thomas', St Clement's and St Giles' parishes expanded to provide housing for small tradesmen, craftsmen and college servants. More spacious suburbs were created along the gravel terrace north of Oxford to house wealthier citizens and scholars. The University also began to expand its infrastructure of laboratories, libraries and centralised teaching facilities, particularly because of the growth of science-based disciplines.

In the 18th and 19th centuries Oxford's industrial base remained quite small-scale, with tanneries, breweries and maltings located south, east and west of the historic town. The arrival of the canal in 1790 led to a surge of waterborne trade but the resistance of the University to the construction of a rail link delayed its arrival until 1844.



**Fig. 31** An excavation at Brewer Street in 2011. Here excavators from Oxford Archaeology are examining the remains of walls, ovens and stone channels belonging to a building recorded on the 19th century Ordnance Survey map as a malthouse.



**Fig. 32** The Salters Steamers Boatyard at Donnington Bridge, built in the 1930s and still in use as a boatyard.

Oxford remained a predominantly service industry economy until the early 20th century with domestic service the biggest source of employment. The Oxford University Press was the biggest single employer. This situation changed rapidly and decisively with the establishment of Morris Motors in 1914. The subsequent growth of the car industry in Oxford led to rapid population growth and suburban expansion east and south of the historic town in the 1920s and 1930s.



**Fig. 33** Community volunteers excavating at Minchery Farm in 2012.

Millions of people regularly watch archaeological programmes on television or visit excavated objects in local museums. The scale of local interest in the subject has been clearly demonstrated by the Archeox (East Oxford Community Archaeology and History Project) begun in 2010. This Heritage Lottery-funded project initiated by the University of Oxford Continuing Education Department has attracted over 500 active participants from east Oxford and beyond. The project has undertaken a comprehensive study of the archaeology of east Oxford, involving extensive test-pitting, geophysical survey and archaeological excavations at St Bartholomew's Leper Hospital and Minchery Farm Nunnery.

Public interest has also been demonstrated by the success of open days held during developer-funded archaeological investigations in the city. It is hoped that public engagement in the active process of investigation can be further encouraged in order to utilise the educational potential of such work and get greater value out of the process for the developer.



**Fig. 34** An aerial shot of the community excavation at Minchery Farm, Littlemore, the site of a 12th century nunnery. This community dig has greatly improved our understanding of the nunnery and its occupants and helped generate information that should help us to manage the site more effectively in the future. ©2012 Adam Stanford/Aerial Com



**Fig. 35** Visitors examine an excavated artefact during a site tour at the Clarendon Centre excavation in central Oxford in 2012.

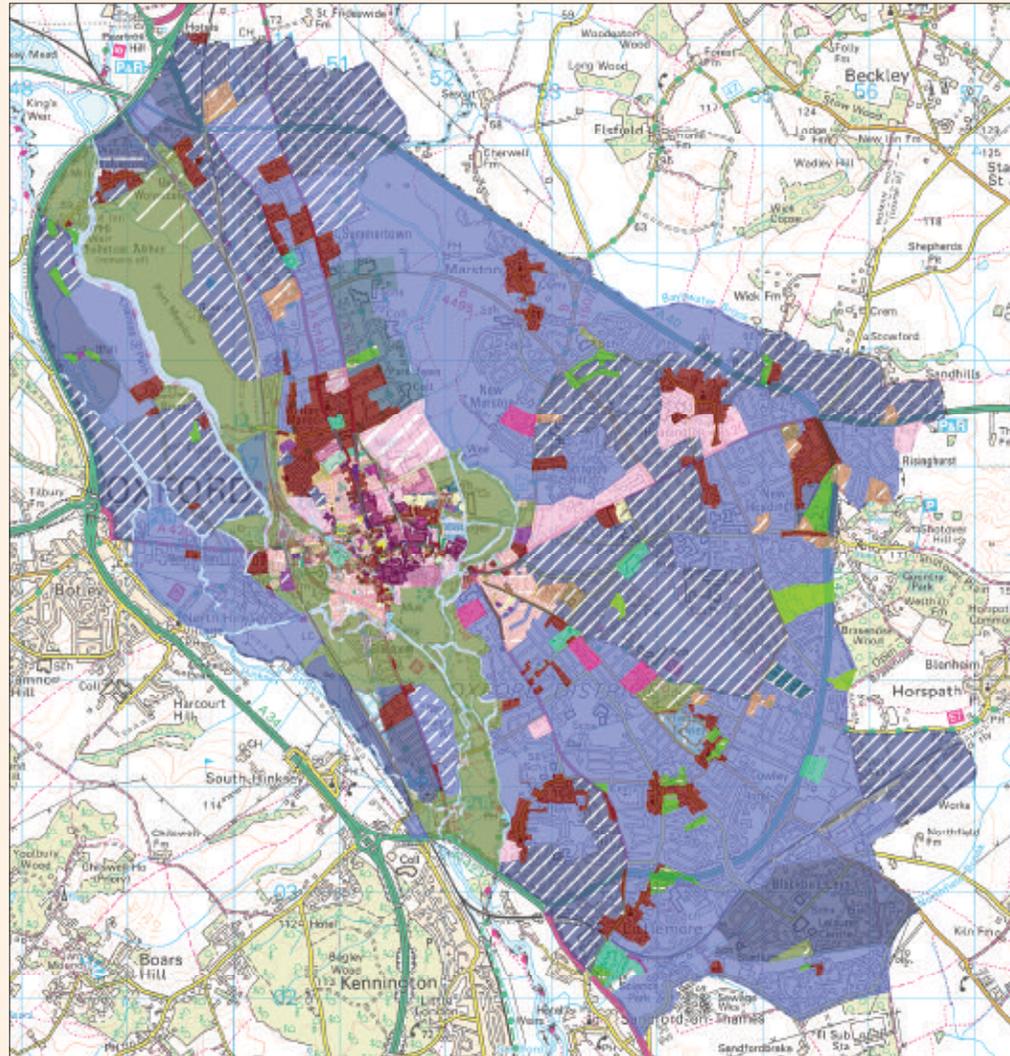
There is archaeological interest in the visible landscape and townscape, as well as buried below the ground. Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) studies are designed to enable analysis of change and continuity in the landscape since the development of accurate Ordnance Survey maps in the later 19th century. The studies record spatial relationships in the built environment and also aspects of the natural environment that have been shaped by human activity. They are designed to allow the identification and quantification of change across large areas of landscape.<sup>1</sup>

Most of England is now covered by this kind of mapping. The HLC mapping for Oxford is currently being extended to cover the remainder of the county by Oxfordshire County Council. This will in turn link with studies undertaken by neighbouring counties.

Landscape characterisation reflects a transition in thinking in the discipline of archaeology away from the consideration of isolated finds and sites towards a more holistic understanding of the evidential qualities of the landscape as a whole. The significance of landscape characterisation projects is highlighted by the National Planning Policy Framework which cites this type of study as an important part of the evidence base for informing and assessing the impact of development on the historic environment.

In addition to the HLC mapping for Oxford a more detailed urban characterisation study has been undertaken for the historic core of the city. This covers an area defined by the 17th century Civil War defences, which broadly define the extent of the town before the rapid expansion of its suburbs in the 19th century.

Urban characterisation involves making difficult choices about simplifying and mapping complex information about land-use, building type and plot forms. Its aim is to allow the identification and quantification of patterns of change and continuity, which in turn can inform decisions about the conservation and enhancement of the city's heritage.



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## Selected character types

-  Settlement pre-1880
-  Early 19th century and Victorian terraces
-  Enclosure pre-18th century regular
-  Enclosure pre-18th century irregular
-  Enclosure parliamentary
-  University parks
-  Commons and greens
-  Meadows
-  Woodland ancient semi natural
-  Historic parkland
-  Recreation
-  Hospitals and schools

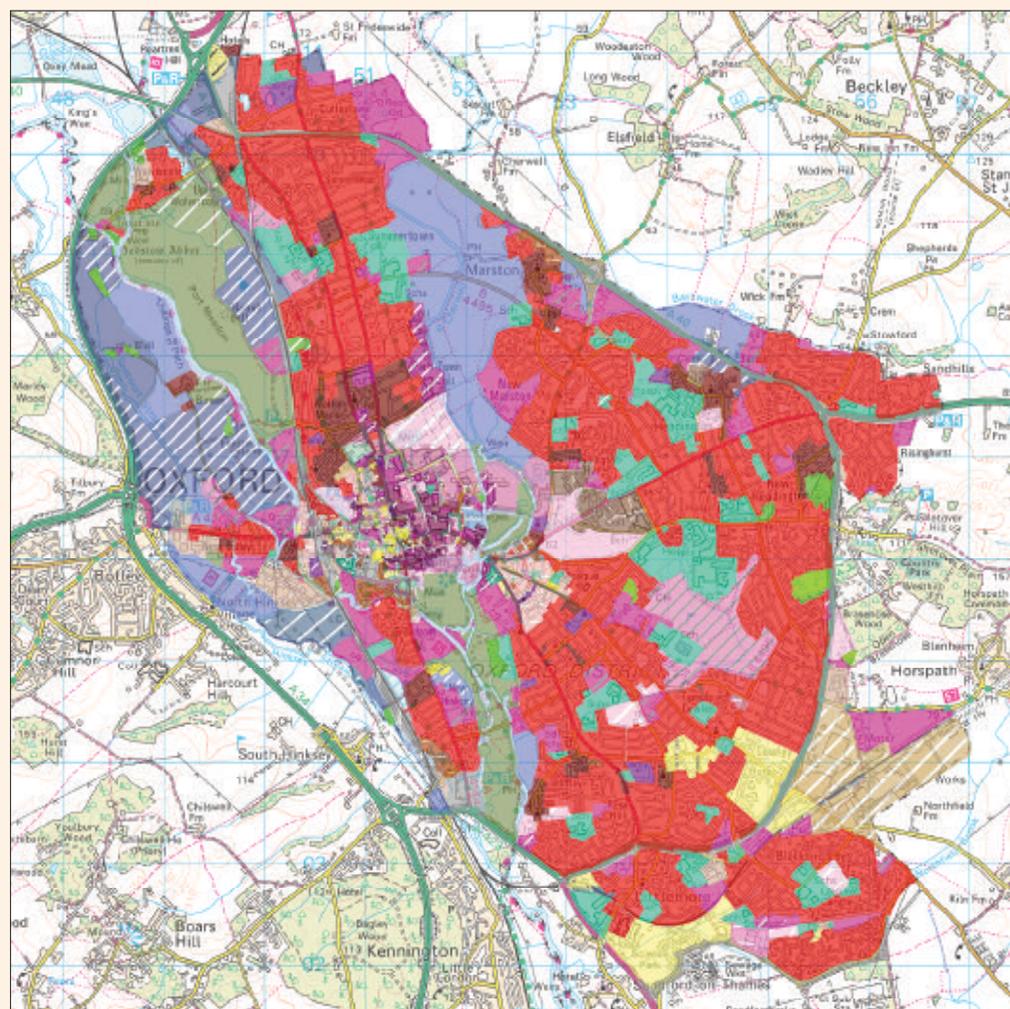
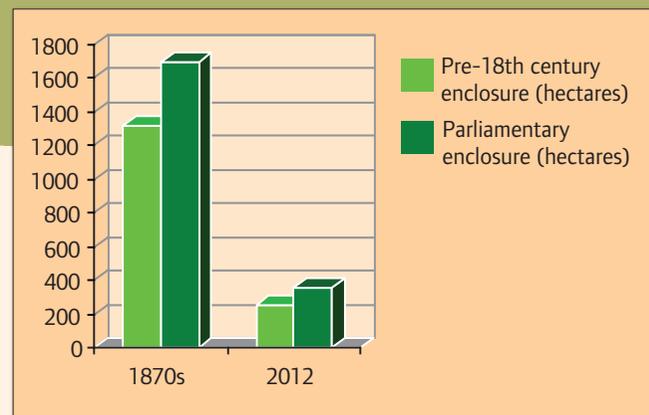
**Fig. 36** Historic Landscape Characterisation for Oxford in the 1870s.

<sup>1</sup> [www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/characterisation/historic-landscape-character/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/characterisation/historic-landscape-character/)

## Patterns of change and continuity in the Local Authority Area 1876–2012

- The 1870s map captures the pattern of early enclosure around the city instigated in the medieval and post-medieval period by religious institutions, colleges and other landowners.
- The eastern, southern, western and northern suburbs have spread infilling enclosure fields, leaving only fragments remaining.
- The spread of urban development (red) reflects a concerted programme of Council House building 1918–1985 and the piecemeal development of private residential estates.
- The Cowley Car and Pressed Steel plants have been established, expanded and contracted in this period, leaving behind the BMW plant and ring road business parks.
- The survival of the meadow land along the Thames around Binsey and Wolvercote is noticeable. The landscape between Botley Road and Wolvercote has changed little in this period.
- There is notable survival of meadow land and parliamentary enclosure along the Cherwell floodplain.
- College and University expansion has been centred on the historic core, the Oxford University science area and at Headington Hill.
- Changing leisure patterns are visible: from a small number of college cricket grounds in east Oxford in the 19th century to a diverse and dispersed pattern of allotments, parks, open space and golf courses in the 21st century.
- There has been a 90% increase in the amount of land used for hospital, school and University buildings.
- There has been a 400% increase in the amount of land used for industrial purposes; however, this still accounts for only four per cent of the local authority area.

**Fig 37** This shows the loss of parliamentary enclosure and pre-18th century enclosure as the Local Authority Area has urbanised.

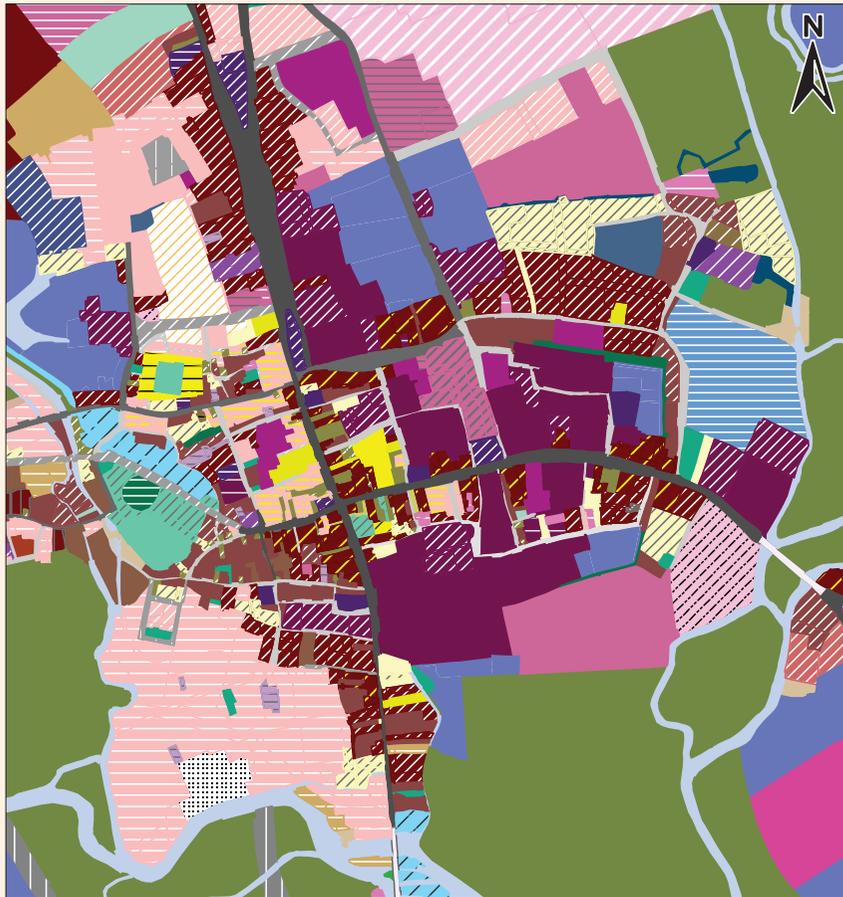


### Selected character types

-  Settlement pre-1880
-  Settlement post-1880
-  Car plant/factory
-  Industrial
-  Transport infrastructure
-  Business/retail parks
-  Offices/commercial
-  Allotments
-  Leisure
-  Commons and greens
-  Meadows
-  Enclosure pre-18th century irregular
-  Enclosure pre-18th century regular
-  Enclosure parliamentary
-  Enclosure parliamentary 19th century
-  Woodland ancient semi-natural
-  Government and civic
-  University parks
-  Hospitals and schools
-  Historic parkland
-  Golf courses
-  Universities post-1800

**Fig 38** Historic Landscape Characterisation for Oxford in the 21st century.

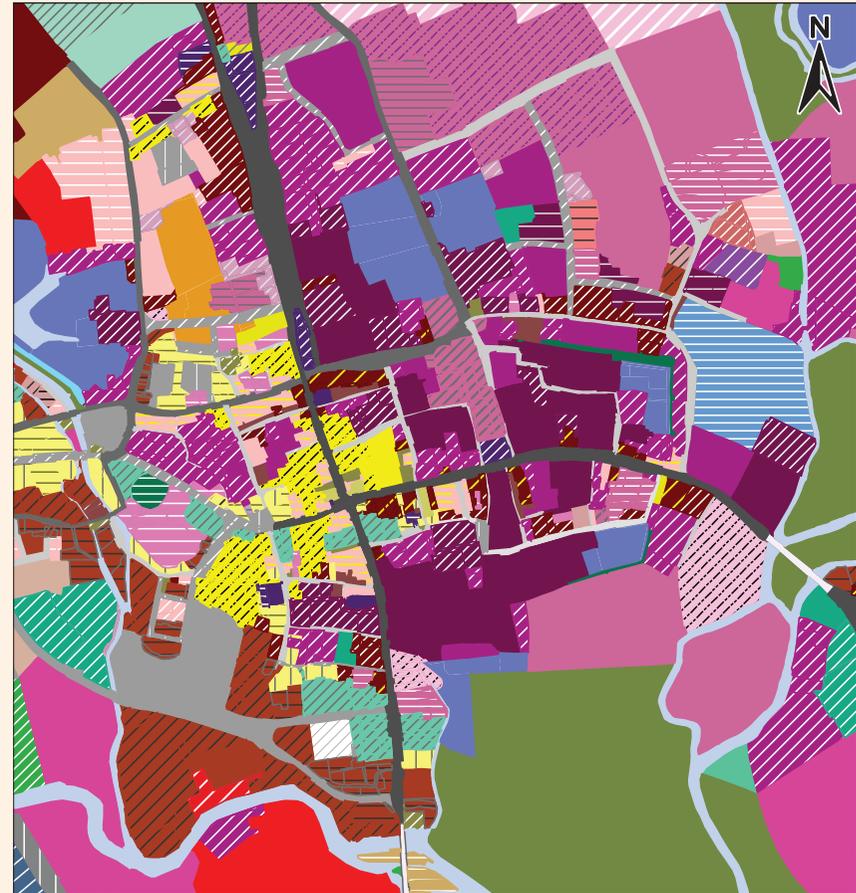
**Oxford in the 1870s**



**Fig. 39**

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**21st century Oxford**



**Fig. 40**

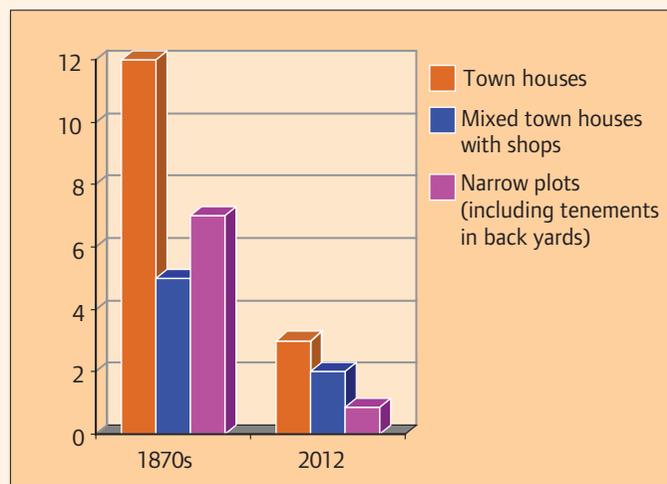
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**Selected character types**

- |   |  |  |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|
|  Mixed town houses/shops (historic)        |  University and college sports fields |  19th century college expansion       |  Private housing post-1980       |  Indoor market                        |  University science buildings   |
|  Town houses (historic)                    |  Larger college parks and gardens     |  Post-medieval deer park              |  Transport infrastructure/links  |  Modern shopping centre               |  Canal and river infrastructure |
|  Mixed housing & shops (Victorian)         |  Meadows                              |  Late Regency town houses (1822-1833) |  Government and civic buildings  |  University of Oxford structures      |  Church pre-1800                |
|  Town houses (Victorian)                   |  University parks                     |  Town defences Civil War              |  Private housing (1945-1980)     |  Oxford Castle (Heritage and Leisure) |  Church pre-1086                |
|  Early 19th century and Victorian terraces |  Medieval college precincts           |  Urban/College gardens                |  Terraces and cottages 1900-1919 |  20th century colleges                |  Canal infrastructure           |
|  Narrow plots                              |  Post-medieval college expansion      |  Gas works                            |  Schools and colleges post-1945  |  University of Oxford libraries       |  University of Oxford museums   |
|  Legal                                     |  |  |   |  |  |

## Some patterns of change and continuity in the historic core 1876–2012

- The street grid remains essentially as established in the Late Saxon and Norman period, with a limited number of post-medieval and modern link roads.
- The retail core of the city remains focused on Cornmarket Street and Queen Street.
- The west end continues to reflect its former industrial character.
- College precincts have continued to expand and renew whilst retaining their underlying historic form.
- There is a clear contrast between the changing west end and stable east end of the city.
- Pembroke Street, Holywell Street and Ship Street are notable for their preservation of post-medieval town houses.
- Cornmarket Street has become a pedestrianised street of established retail chains.
- George Street retains a distinctive Victorian and inter-war character as an area of former civic, commercial and entertainment related buildings.
- Tenement yards, courtyards and alleyways, once a common feature of the town, have been extensively infilled or redeveloped with exceptions, for example, areas at the south end of Cornmarket Street and along the west end of the High Street.
- The early 19th century and Victorian suburb of St Ebbe's has been demolished. By plot area some 85% of the terraced housing in the historic core and 90% of low status tenements located in narrow plots have been demolished.
- The medieval Castle and former Oxford Prison have been renovated to incorporate a heritage and education centre, luxury hotel and restaurants.
- A number of historic churches have now been converted into college libraries and archive stores (All Saints, St Cross, St Peter in the East).
- The area covered by town house plots (including town houses with shops and rear gardens) has reduced by over 60%. Nevertheless the pattern of town houses interspersed with college precincts is still distinctive.



**Fig. 41** This table shows the loss of distinctive building and plot forms since the 1870s (in hectares). In the case of narrow plots, including rows of low status tenements in back yards, these have been demolished. With town houses the picture is more complex, for example some have been demolished, others have been converted to another use or had their gardens developed. The area figure therefore reflects the size of the town house plot, not just the building itself.

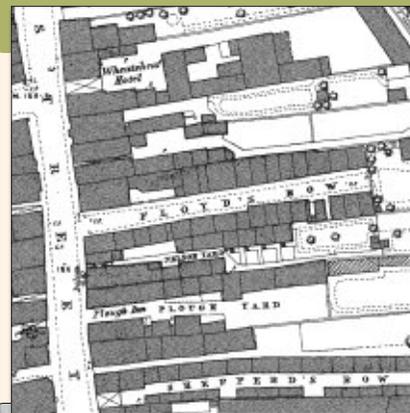
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**Fig. 42** Broad Street.  
 All photographs © Oxfordshire History Centre



**Fig. 43** Holywell Street.



**Fig. 44** Floyd's Row, located off St Aldate's.



**Fig. 45** George Street, St Clement's.

## Town houses with shops

In the medieval period the main streets of the town attracted frontages of small shops with larger halls, solars and kitchens located to the rear. As the town expanded in the late 16th and 17th centuries larger town houses replaced much of the medieval building stock. These buildings often had multiple functions, as shops, inns, student accommodation and town houses for the wealthier burgesses. The subsequent expansion of retail provision and of the University and its colleges has led to a significant reduction of these built forms, notably on the Cornmarket, along the north side of Broad Street and on the High Street.

## Town houses

The post-medieval expansion of the town saw the construction of town houses along the side streets by wealthier burgesses, including brewers, butchers, and drapers. Many of these town houses have now been demolished but notable groups survive along Holywell Street, Ship Street and Pembroke Street.

## Narrow plots

Narrow plots is a term that has been used to describe the smaller lower status-housing that in-filled side streets, back yards and marginal spaces in the post-medieval, Regency and Victorian periods. This term encompasses the smaller town houses that colonised the in-filled city ditch and the spaces next to the city wall, also constrained plots fronting onto side streets and the rows of low-status tenements, that became prevalent in the parishes of St Aldate's, St Thomas' and St Clement's in the 19th century.

## 19th century terraces

Large numbers of brick terraces were built in low-lying and poorer areas of the town during the 19th century to house the growing population, largely employed in brewing, printing and domestic service. The map on page 22 (bottom left) shows the extent of terraced housing in St Ebbe's Parish. This housing was cleared in the 1960s to make way for the Westgate shopping centre and newer housing developments.

Over the last one hundred and fifty years Oxford has seen considerable change, a process that is perhaps not obvious given the impression of solidity and continuity provided by the monumental frontages of the colleges.

Unsurprisingly the colleges have historically been the focus of conservation efforts whilst the industrial and residential areas of the town have been transformed around them. There is now greater awareness that the character of the town is created by a subtle balance of University and college architecture and the less high profile remains of industrial, commercial and residential structures and related yards, routeways and boundaries. This page highlights just some of the varied aspects of the historic environment of Oxford.



**Fig. 46** Ranges of 15th century and later date around a courtyard at the Golden Cross, located on the east side of Cornmarket Street.



**Fig. 47** Town houses with shops on the High Street.



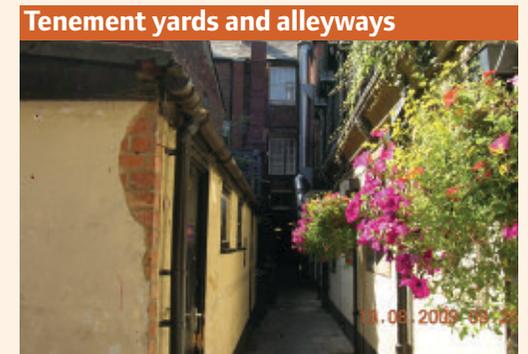
**Fig. 48** The 16th–17th century stone built Postmasters Hall, Merton Street.



**Fig. 49** The Swan Brewery malthouse, located off Paradise Street.

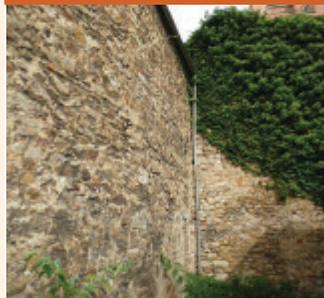


**Fig. 50** Ancient grazing land at Port Meadow. This part of Oxford has seen little change over the last 1,000 years.



**Fig. 51** A tenement alley located south of the High Street.

## Limestone outbuildings and tenement walls



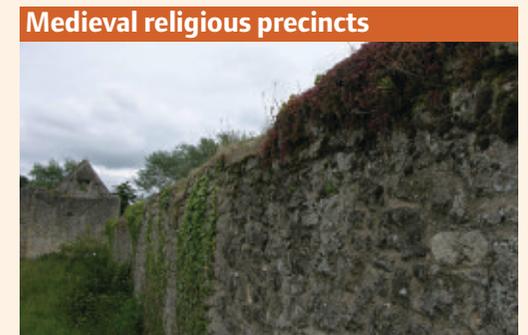
**Fig. 52** Limestone tenement and outbuilding walls located west of St Aldate's.



**Fig. 53** A cobbled surface at Bath Place.



**Fig. 54** Traces of the Royalist Civil War rampart at Mansfield College.

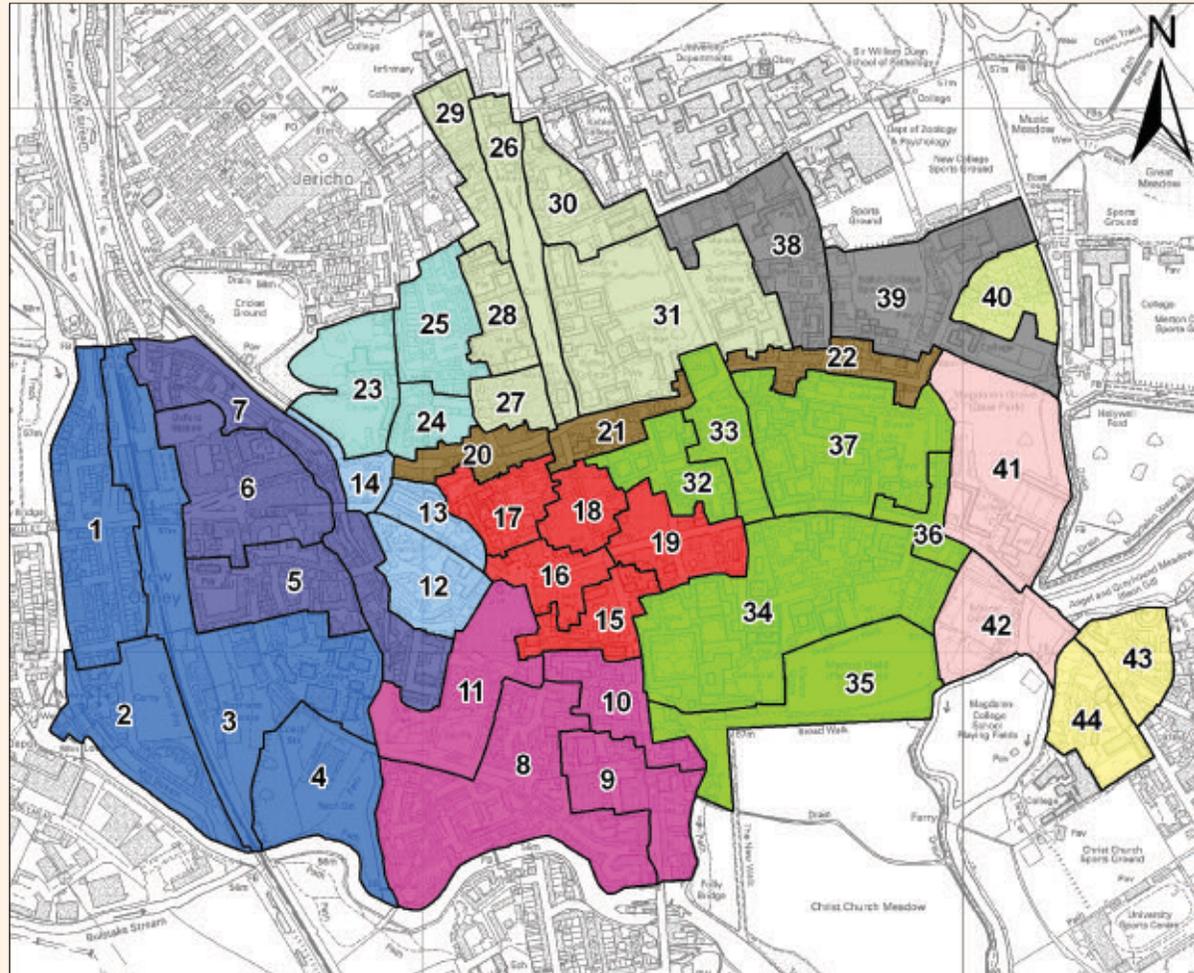


**Fig. 55** The medieval stone precinct wall at Godstow Nunnery.

The completion of Historic Urban Characterisation mapping for central Oxford has enabled the identification of 13 broad character zones. These have been defined by examining mapped patterns of land use, built form and plot type. The zones can be further subdivided into 44 smaller character areas. A series of character area statements have been produced providing a summary of the historic, evidential, aesthetic and communal value of each area. The statements can be downloaded as individual pdf files via the archaeology page of the Oxford City Council website.<sup>1</sup>

Historic Urban Characterisation mapping simplifies complex patterns into blocks of urban character and therefore should not be used as a definitive guide to historic fabric. The process is designed to facilitate the broad categorisation of urban character and to allow the quantification of urban change. The mapping provides a useful tool for identifying patterns in the historic environment which may be of interest to planners, developers, architects and the general public.

This type of characterisation mapping is undertaken by examining oblique and vertical aerial photographs and also modern and historic maps. The approach requires a degree of subjective assessment and generalisation and provides only a point-in-time snapshot of an ever-changing urban landscape.



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### Urban character zones

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | Osney Island                           |  | Modern colleges and the edge of the science area |
|  | St Thomas' and the western suburb      |  | Holywell Manor and St Cross Church               |
|  | Thames crossing and floodplain         |  | The former northern city ditch                   |
|  | Castle and former canal basin          |  | The eastern colleges                             |
|  | City centre commercial core            |  | The eastern suburb                               |
|  | Worcester College and Gloucester Green |  | St Clement's                                     |
|  | St Giles' and the northern suburb      |   |  |

**Fig. 56** Central Oxford Historic Urban Character Areas.

<sup>1</sup> www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/Archaeology\_occw.htm

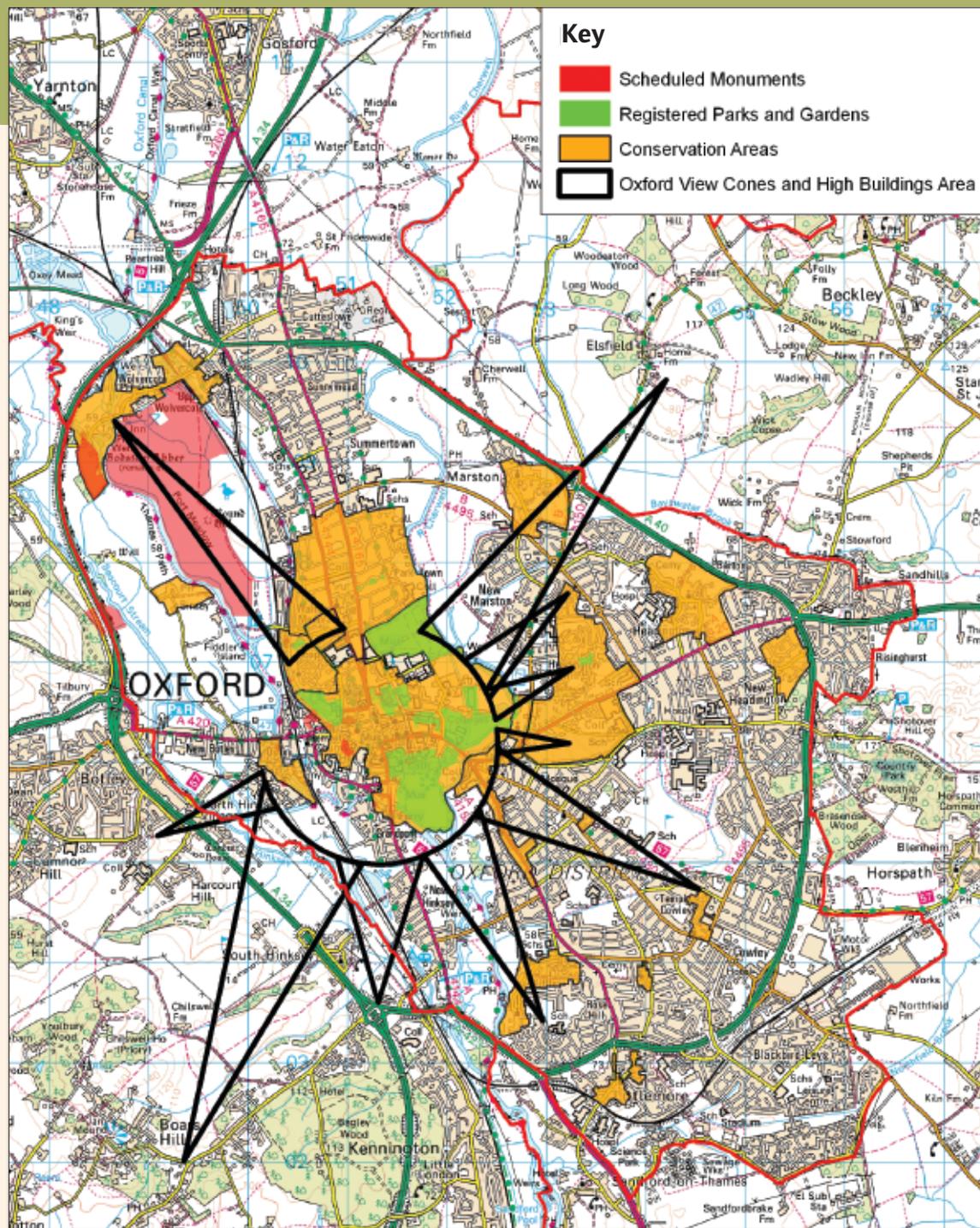
# Managing complexity

The designated assets within the Oxford City local authority area comprise:

- Over 1,600 listed buildings:
  - 12% grade I (national average 2%)
  - 8% grade II\* (national average 4%)
- 17 conservation areas – 20% of city area
- 12 scheduled monuments
- 11 registered parks and gardens

In addition to these designated assets 2,075 archaeological events and 1,532 monuments are recorded on archaeological databases covering the city. At present two databases store complementary information about Oxford: The Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) which covers the historic core and the County Historic Environment Record (HER). The City Council is also in the process of establishing a Local Heritage Asset Register to record locally valued heritage assets.<sup>1</sup>

**Fig. 57** Map showing view cones, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens, and Port Meadow Scheduled Ancient Monument.



<sup>1</sup> [www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/HeritageAssetRegister.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/HeritageAssetRegister.htm)

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# Central Oxford's listed buildings

Oxford has a large number of grade I (exceptional) listed buildings. The need to protect the setting of these structures places a strong pressure on architects to consider the use of basement constructions to maximise the use of space in the constrained historic core. This in turn poses a challenge if we want to conserve important archaeological remains for future generations to investigate.



Fig. 58 Panoramic view of the Radcliffe Camera and adjacent colleges. © 2012 Oliver Woodford

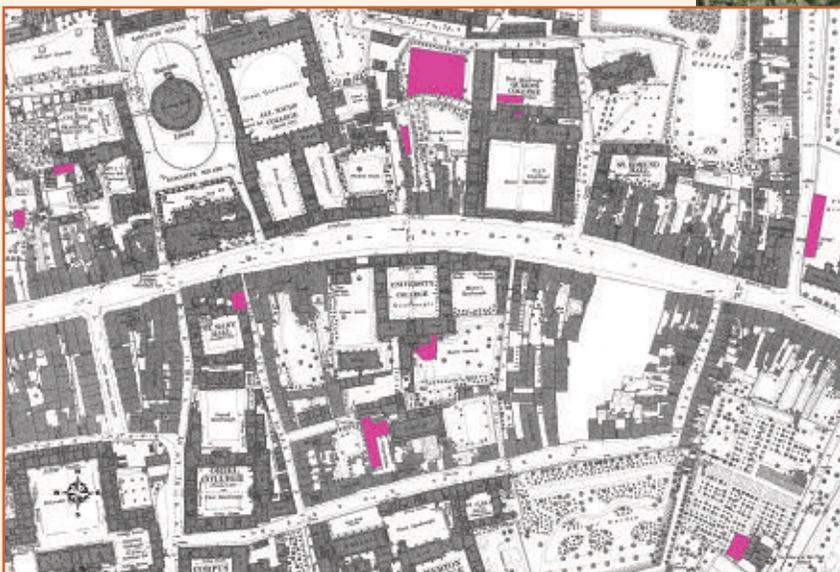


Fig. 59 The grade I listed buildings in central Oxford.



Fig. 60 The listed buildings of central Oxford colour coded by the date of their earliest recorded fabric.

The need for the higher education and retail sectors to upgrade and evolve whilst at the same time preserving the setting and integrity of surrounding listed structures has created a strong trend towards basement construction which can be seen in these two illustrations. They show a selection of developments with new basements across central Oxford that have received planning permission since the year 2000. A challenge for the future will be to support the development of new educational and commercial facilities whilst avoiding the significant cumulative loss of important buried remains.



**Fig. 61** Basements consented in the east end of the historic city shown on a 1 : 500 1876 OS basemap.



**Fig. 62** A selection of basement constructions receiving planning permission since the year 2000.

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A key challenge for developers, owners and managers will be achieving the right balance between sustaining Oxford's important heritage assets for future generations whilst both enabling sustainable growth and enhancing our understanding of the past in the present. In order to achieve this balance the City Council will work with external partners to sustain the significance of Oxford's important heritage assets by:

- Providing clear and timely advice on the archaeological implications of development proposals.
- Encouraging major landowners and heritage asset owners to develop their own integrated conservation plans, incorporating assessments of below ground asset survival that can help inform and shape options for future development and expansion.
- Encouraging the identification of heritage asset value prior to costly investment in detailed design in order to ensure that an adequate understanding of impacted assets can contribute positively to the design process.
- Encouraging developers to take into account the impact of cumulative loss on important heritage assets by providing appropriate contextual as well as site specific heritage assessments where necessary.
- Supporting an integrated and cooperative approach between educational institutions regarding the provision of facilities and renewable energy resources in the constrained historic core.
- Supporting creative design solutions aimed at conserving asset significance.
- Monitoring the impact of development on heritage assets and producing an annual report.
- Seeking to add value to the processes of archaeological investigation by promoting community engagement and outreach.



**Figs. 63 and 64** Creative design: A 17th century or earlier vaulted cellar discovered during works at The Queen's College in 2010 was integrated into the new design by BGS Architects.



# An Archaeological Action Plan

## Corporate priorities

- A vibrant and sustainable economy
- Meeting housing need
- An efficient and effective council
- Strong and active communities
- Cleaner, greener Oxford

### Archaeological Action Plan Objectives

**1.** Further public access to, and understanding of, Oxford's rich heritage.

**1a.** Maintain and develop the historic environment evidence base for Oxford.

**1b.** Improve online access to information on the historic environment.

**1c.** Encourage community participation, enjoyment and appreciation of Oxford's archaeological heritage.

**1d.** Support and encourage the appropriate storage and display of artefacts and the dissemination of information arising from developer-funded investigation.

**2.** Sustain the significance of Oxford's important heritage assets.

**2a.** Provide timely and clear advice.

**2b.** Provide clear policy guidance.

**2c.** Monitor impacts on heritage assets.

**2d.** Provide effective management.

Actions	Timescales	Delivery	Risks
1. Develop and update online resource assessments summarising the city's archaeology.	Review by 2017	CA	Resource implications for officer time.
2. Develop and update online period based research agendas.	Review by 2017	CA	Resource implications for officer time.
3. Provide an annual update for Heritage Gateway.	Ongoing	CA	Resource implications for officer time.
4. Maintain OASIS validation (provides online access to archaeological reports).	Ongoing	CA	Resource implications for officer time.
5. Revise and update the resource assessment reports in light of the results of East Oxford Community Archaeology Project.	By 2017	CA	Resource implications for officer time.
6. Provide joint archaeological data provision between UAD and HER. Develop partnership working with HERO	Initiated 2013 By 2017	CA and HERO	Resource implications for officer time in resolution of ICT and financial issues.
7. Undertake programme of UAD enhancement and ensure compliance with national standards.	Ongoing	CA	Resource implications for officer time.
8. Maintain programme of public outreach including talks, walks and media engagement.	Ongoing	CA	High level of interest, careful time management required.
9. Support the legacy of the East Oxford Community Archaeology Project and encourage public engagement with a focus on the archaeology of science and learning.	Ongoing	HSST and CA	Resource implications for officer time, competing demands for developer and other funding.
10. Engage with partners to encourage a unified approach to the storage and presentation of Oxford's material heritage, seeking funding streams where appropriate.	Ongoing	HSST	Resource implications for officer time, competing demands for funding streams.
1. Maintain planning application response targets.	Ongoing	CA	High volume of applications with archaeological interest.
2. Input into the heritage plan and local plan policy review.	By 2017	HSST	Changing policy environment at national level creating uncertainty.
3. Produce an annual monitoring report on heritage asset sustainability.	Initiate in 2013 then annually	HSST	Resource implications for officer time.
4. Source external funding and develop partnership working with other heritage and community bodies.	Ongoing	HSST	Resource implications for officer time, competing demands for funding streams.

CA = City Council Archaeologist, HSST = Heritage and Specialist Services Team, HERO = Historic Environment Record Officer.

The Heritage and Specialist Services Team at the City Council has produced a series of period based resource assessments with the intention of providing a point-in-time synthesis of archaeological information for the Local Authority Area. These have in turn informed the production of archaeological research agendas for each period.

- Palaeolithic to Mesolithic Oxford (500,000–4,000BC)
- Neolithic and Bronze Age Oxford (4000–800BC)
- Iron Age Oxford (800BC–43AD)
- Roman Oxford (43–410AD)
- Saxon and Viking Oxford (early medieval) (410–1066)
- Norman Oxford (1066–1205)
- Medieval Oxford (1205–1540)
- Post-medieval Oxford (1540–1800)
- Modern Oxford (1800–1950)

The period based resource assessments and research agendas are available as pdfs on the Oxford Archaeological Plan website: [www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordArchaeologicalPlan.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordArchaeologicalPlan.htm)

Resource assessments and agendas for the wider Thames-Solent region can be accessed via the Oxford Archaeology website [www.thehumanjourney.net](http://www.thehumanjourney.net)

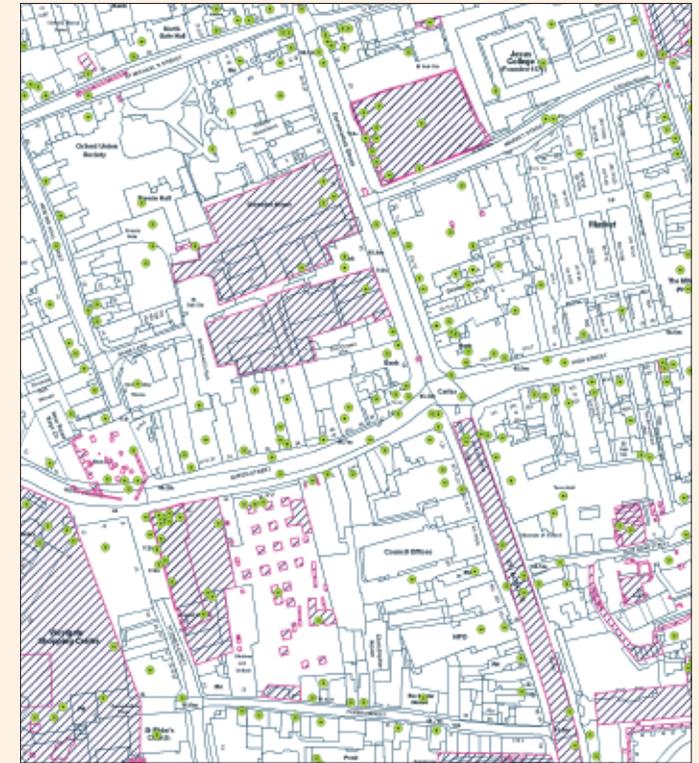
Further information on the heritage of Oxford can be accessed through the Oxford Heritage Plan and Heritage Gateway websites: [www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordHeritagePlan.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordHeritagePlan.htm) and [www.heritagegateway.org.uk](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk)

Further information on the history and archaeology of the county, including Oxford, is available on the County Council Heritage Search website: [www.publicapps.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/portal/publicapps/applications/heritage](http://www.publicapps.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/portal/publicapps/applications/heritage)

Information on Oxford is also held on the English Heritage Pastscape website [www.pastscape.org.uk](http://www.pastscape.org.uk)

Information on designated assets in Oxford can be obtained from the National Heritage List for England: [www.list.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.list.english-heritage.org.uk)

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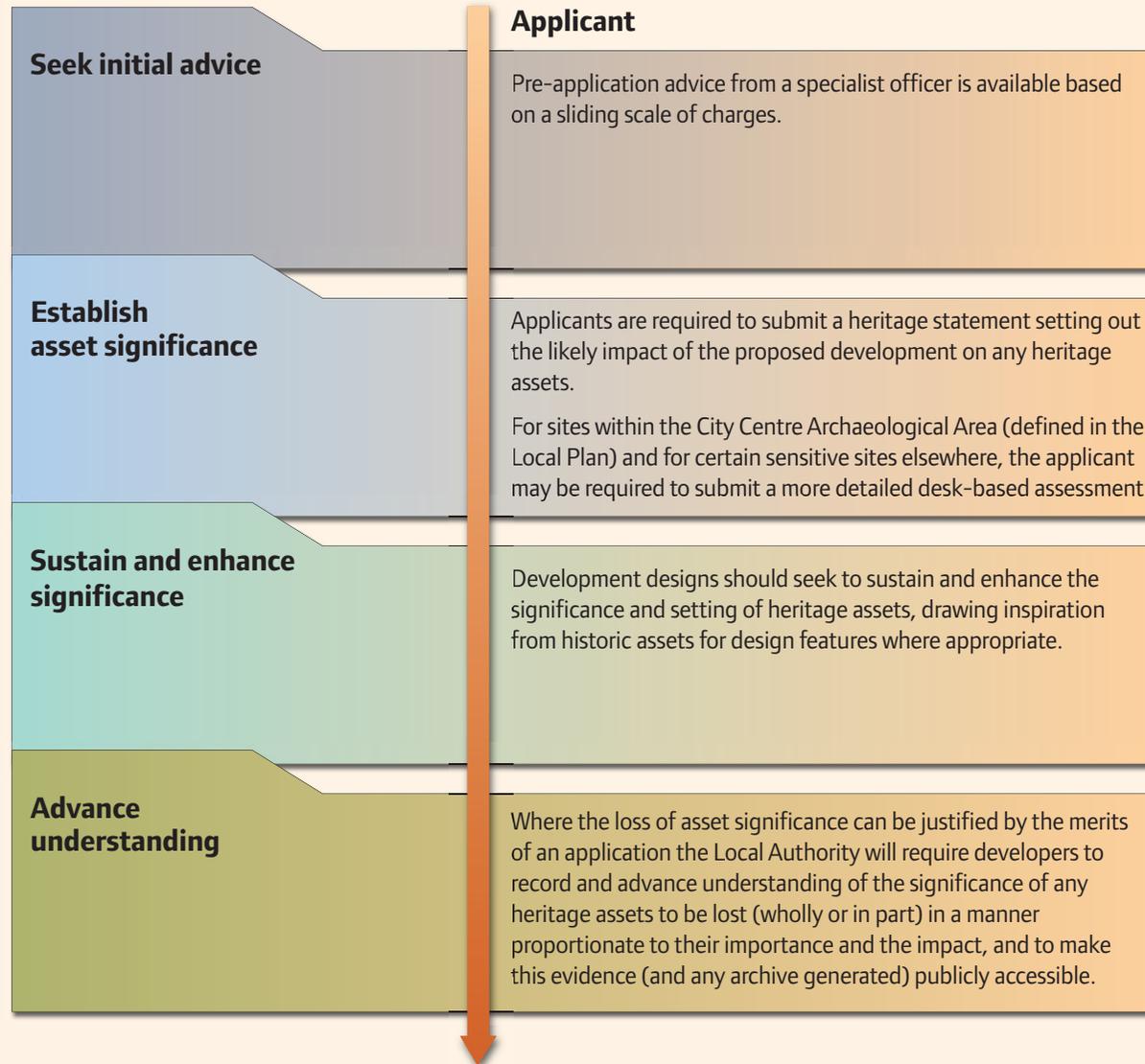
**Fig. 65** Screen shot of part of the Urban Archaeological Database showing the mapping of archaeological events (events are activities that record archaeological information, for example excavations, watching briefs or building recording).

Oxford's archaeological heritage is a finite resource. Once disturbed it is irreplaceable. For these reasons the current Local Plan (Policy HE 1) states that the Local Authority will not grant planning permission for any development that would have an unacceptable effect on nationally important remains, whether scheduled or not, or their settings.

Where a development proposal is permitted on an historically sensitive site it will typically be subject to a planning condition requiring archaeological recording, storage and the dissemination of the knowledge recovered. Further guidance on this process is provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The diagram to the right explains the process for developers.

If you require the services of an archaeological contractor a full list of registered organisations can be found on the Institute for Archaeologists website: [www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net).



### Oxford Core Strategy 2026 Policy CS18

#### Urban design, townscape character and the historic environment

Planning permission will only be granted for development that demonstrates high-quality urban design through:

- Responding appropriately to the site and its surroundings.
- Creating a strong sense of place.
- Being easy to understand and to move through.
- Being adaptable, in terms of providing buildings and spaces that could have alternative uses in future.
- Contributing to an attractive public realm.
- High-quality architecture.

Development proposals should respect and draw inspiration from Oxford's unique historic environment (above and below ground), responding positively to the character and distinctiveness of the locality. Development must not result in loss or damage to important historic features, or their settings, particularly those of national importance and, where appropriate, should include proposals for enhancement of the historic environment, particularly where these address local issues identified in, for example, conservation area character appraisal or management plans. Views of the skyline of the historic centre will be protected.



**Fig. 66** Investigation of the cemetery of the medieval hospital of St John the Baptist at Magdalen College in 2012.

**Aesthetic value:** Value deriving from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

**Archaeological interest:** There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially may hold, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point. Heritage assets with archaeological interest are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them.\*

**Archeox:** The East Oxford Archaeology and History Project, a community archaeology project initiated by the University of Oxford Department of Continuing Education.

**Communal value:** Value deriving from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

**Conservation (for heritage policy):** The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.

**Evidential value:** Value deriving from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.

**Heritage asset:** A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including through the local heritage asset register).\*

**Historic environment:** All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.\*

**Historic environment record:** An information service that seeks to provide access to comprehensive and dynamic resources relating to the historic environment of a defined geographic area for public benefit and use.\*

**Historic landscape characterisation:** The spatial mapping of modern and historic land-use and plot form.

**Historic urban characterisation:** The mapping of modern and historic building plot form, land-use and building type using digital maps.

**Historic value:** Value deriving from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

**National Planning Policy Framework:** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The NPPF states that Local planning authorities should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.

**Research agenda:** Research questions that we would like to answer by investigating archaeological remains.

**Resource assessment:** A summary of the information produced by previous archaeological fieldwork.

**Setting of a heritage asset:** The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance, or may be neutral.\*

**Significance (for heritage policy):** The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.\*

\* Definitions taken from the NPPF

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## Illustrations

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**Fig. 67** University of Oxford Vice Chancellor Professor Andrew Hamilton (left) visiting the Minchery Farm Nunnery excavation with Dr David Griffiths, the Archeox project co-organiser.





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ENGLISH HERITAGE