

## Character Zone Assessment 7

# Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

### Zone includes:

- Beaumont Street, St John Street and Beaumont Buildings
- Little Clarendon Street and Wellington Square
- Walton Street, Walton Lane, Worcester Place



## Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter Character Zone Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

### Contents

7.1	An overview of character and special interest
7.2	A brief history
7.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
7.4	Further useful information

### Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

-  relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping
-  relevant character themes in the appraisal
-  relevant sections in the appraisal
-  suggestions for further reading
-  information relevant for planning
-  sources of further information

### Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

### Picture Credits

All images are copyright of Alan Baxter Ltd. unless otherwise acknowledged.

## 7.1 Overview of character and significance

This area north of the medieval city and west of St Giles' was not extensively developed until the early nineteenth century, when St John's College laid out Beaumont Street and St John Street behind handsome Bath stone façades, with Walton Street and Beaumont Buildings as secondary streets. Development continued with the Ashmolean Museum, the Randolph Hotel and Wellington Square. The planned Georgian streets are unique in Oxford, and today are mixed with post-war University buildings to create a distinctive character.

The following aspects of the zone are of considerable historical, architectural, townscape or social significance and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The mixture of calm and handsome residential streets and their modest mews, combined with the University presence, which gives this zone its distinctive character.
- Little Clarendon Street, with its independent businesses in modest nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings, which is valued as a small local social and commercial hub.
- The Oxford Playhouse and Ashmolean Museum on Beaumont Street, which are cultural destinations that contribute strongly to the character and dynamism of the area.
- The Randolph Hotel, which brings a note of Gothic exuberance to the otherwise calm and classical streetscape in this area.

Some aspects of the character zone harm the character and appearance of the area:

- Inactive frontages of post-war University buildings.
- Change of use from residential to professional and institutional, which undermines historic character.
- Loss of historic architectural detailing including historic ironwork, railings and timber doors.
- The weight of through-traffic on Beaumont Street and Walton Street.



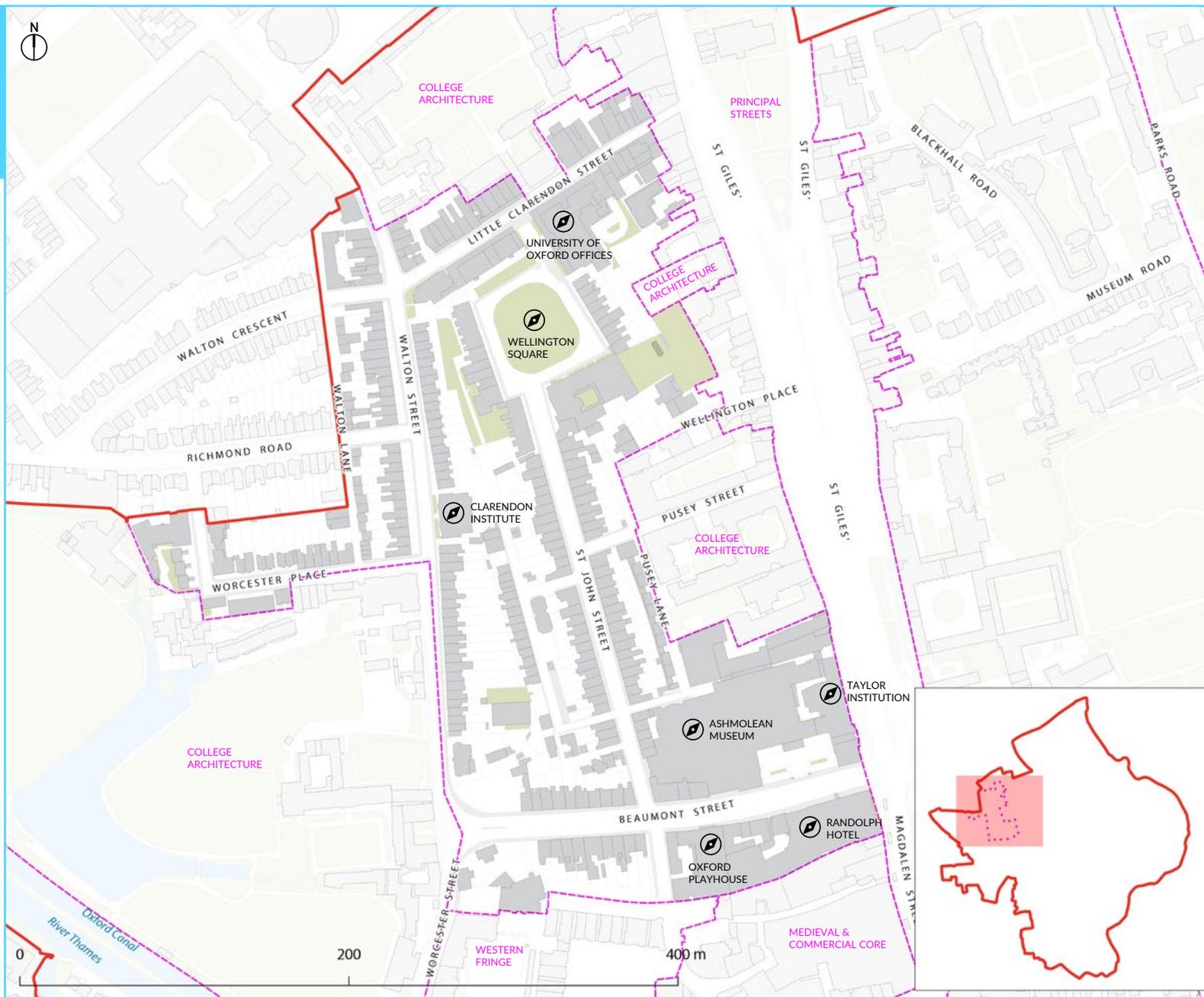
Well preserved Victorian residential terrace on Walton Street

# Overview

## Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

### Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
-  Neighbouring character zones
-  Reference point



This drawing incorporates information from the Ordnance Survey which is © Crown Copyright, supplied by Oxford City Council.

## 7.2 History

### 7.2.1 Middle Ages

- During the medieval - early modern period, the land making up this character zone was part of the parish of St Mary Magdalen.
- The land to the west of the suburb lining St Giles' was occupied from the early twelfth century by the walled precinct of the royal residence of Beaumont Palace (used en route to the royal hunting lodge at Woodstock).
- Beaumont Palace was later granted to the Carmelite White Friars (the last fragments were demolished in the early nineteenth century).

### 7.2.2 Georgian development

- Post medieval development began with the erection of a workhouse on part of the Palace site, but started in earnest when Beaumont Street and St John Street were laid out as a planned development between 1822–37 on land owned by St John's College. Speculative developers bought plots, but their plans had to be approved by the college, ensuring a consistency of front façade design and materials.
- At the same time, more modest brick-built terraces were laid out by St John's College along Beaumont Buildings and the west side of Walton Street for 'superior artisans'. Houses on Walton Street were provided with small front gardens, as the college anticipated that likely owners would want to be able to grow things for themselves.
- All the houses in Beaumont Street, St John Street and Walton Street were provided with back lanes or mews with coach houses or cart sheds.

### 7.2.3 Victorian growth

- Expanding collections prompted the construction in 1841-45 of a new Ashmolean Museum on Beaumont Street to designs by C. R. Cockerell. The Building is now listed at Grade I.
- North of St John Street a larger Workhouse was built, but the site was sold in the 1860s to the University, which undertook the speculative development of Wellington Square (completed 1874) and the east side of Walton Street.
- The Randolph Hotel was completed in 1864 on a site opposite the Ashmolean Museum in an exuberant pointed Gothic style to designs by William Wilkinson, who also designed many buildings in North Oxford.

- Beyond, Little Clarendon Street emerged haphazardly as modest local shopping district, the north side mostly completed by 1850.

### 7.2.4 University replanning

- The Oxford Playhouse was inserted into the south side of Beaumont Street in 1938 on land leased by St John's College, sensitively designed in Bath Stone by Edward Maufe to harmonise with the surrounding terraces.
- When the 99-year leases around Wellington Square fell in, the University commissioned Sir Leslie Martin to prepare a masterplan for the comprehensive redevelopment of the area.
- The first phase comprising the University Offices and graduate accommodation on the north side of Wellington Square was completed in 1974, but the remainder was not implemented.
- University development continued in the early twenty-first century with the construction of the Sackler Library in 2001, designed by Adam Architecture as a research library for Classics and Archaeology. This was tucked behind the Ashmolean Museum and the terraces on the east side of St John Street.



Ashmolean Museum by C. R. Cockerell, 1841-45

## 7.3 Character

### 7.3.1 Use and access



1876 1st Edition OS; Historic urban characterisation



Theme 11: living

- Although designed as a residential quarter, over the last century and especially since the Second World War the character of the area has become increasingly institutional, especially around Wellington Square, which has been largely colonised by University departments e.g. Rewley House (the Department of Continuing Education) on the south side of the square.
- Residential use continues in Walton Street and Beaumont Buildings, but many houses on Beaumont Street have been turned over to professional or institutional use. Beaumont Street also hosts important cultural, education and leisure uses, such as the Oxford Playhouse, Ashmolean Museum, Taylor Institution and Sackler Library, and the Randolph Hotel.
- There is historic commercial use along Little Clarendon Street.



Shops and restaurants along Little Clarendon Street



University buildings on the south side of Little Clarendon Street. Only part of Sir Leslie Martin's comprehensive masterplan was realised

## 7.3.2 Streets and townscape

### Topography



#### Topography



#### Theme 23: topography and geology

- Largely flat, on the top of the terrace on which Oxford is built.

### Street pattern



#### Building lines and gaps; Saxon and medieval streets; 1876 1st Edition OS

- Unusually for the Conservation Area, a number of the streets in this character zone are planned and straight. Combined with the flat topography and development close to or on the pavement line, in streets such as Beaumont Street and St John Street, the resultant character is highly urban and enclosed.
- Part of the early nineteenth-century development is another distinctive characteristic: mews, which are rare in Oxford. They are characterised by modest garages and service buildings lining quiet streets. Some of these garages are increasingly being replaced with small mews houses, which is eroding the rear service yard character.
- Wellington Square is the only planned residential square in the conservation area, and unique in the city.
- Pavements are fairly narrow, especially along Little Clarendon Street where there is a fairly high footfall and pedestrians frequently spill into the street.

### Plots and building line



#### Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps; 1876 1st Edition OS

- Plot sizes in the character zone are mostly small and regular, reflecting their nineteenth-century residential origins.
- This footprint is interrupted at the east end of Beaumont Street where plots have been amalgamated to create the larger-scale developments of the Ashmolean Museum and Randolph Hotel, and at the north end of Wellington Square for late twentieth-century developments for the University.
- Beaumont Street and St John Street are tightly built against the back of

the pavement. The Ashmolean Museum breaks the prevailing building line: the main range of the building is set back for architectural effect behind a generous forecourt bounded by a balustraded stone plinth.

- In Wellington Square and the east side of Walton Street properties are set back behind a shallow area with railings. Plots are mostly enclosed either by dwarf brick walls or railings.
- Houses on the west side of Walton Street are unusual in the conservation area for having small front gardens, bounded by railings set on dwarf brick walls.
- High stone walls enclose private college spaces at Worcester College along Walton Street and at St Cross College along Pusey Lane and Pusey Street.

### Pavements and street materials



#### Street materials



#### Theme 14: materials

- Street materials are mostly modern with tarmac roads and concrete pavers or tarmac pavements, some in relatively poor condition.
- There is some survival of older materials, notably surviving stone setts on the mews lanes of Walton Lane and Pusey Lane, York stone paving on St John Street, iron kerbs in St John Street, and red granite setts at the corner of Pusey Lane.
- Some of these streets have been poorly patched with tarmac, e.g. on Pusey Lane, harming their historic character.
- There is a good survival of cast iron cellar grilles on St John Street.
- Some roads retain stone setts as gutters and there may be more surviving under later road surfaces.

### Street furniture

- Street lights are mostly modern and of a variety of designs, including traditional lantern-style standards and modern columns.
- There are some surviving historic lamp standards in Wellington Square produced by the Eagle ironworks (Lucy & Co.) and Dean and Co.
- Some lanterns are attached to buildings, reducing street clutter and forming an attractive feature.

### 7.3.3 Green space



Public access to green spaces



Theme 25: green space

- There are very few public spaces: the most significant is the University-owned gardens in Wellington Square, which are open to the public during daylight hours, and the Ashmolean forecourt, which provides welcome off-street benches where the public can rest and linger.
- Houses on west side of Walton Street are unique in the conservation area in having front gardens, which provide an attractive green setting for the modest terraces.
- Most of the nineteenth-century houses are built up to the street line, but the townscape is frequently softened by glimpses of planting and trees in private gardens, such as the garden of 24 Beaumont Street on the corner with Walton Street.
- Several mature trees provide important softening to the streetscape, for example, at the corner of Walton Street and Little Clarendon Street, and between Little Clarendon Street and Wellington Square.
- Some streets are too narrow for street trees, and they would be unsuitable for the highly ordered and architectural character of St John Street and Beaumont Street.



Walton Street front gardens that are unique in the conservation area



Wellington Square gardens, one of the few areas of publicly accessible green space in this part of the city centre

### 7.3.4 Buildings



Designations; 1876 1st Edition OS



Theme 14: materials

Theme 15: architectural details

Theme 17: post-war architecture

#### Terraced housing

- The characteristic building type in the character zone is terraced housing, which display a variety of materials depending on the date and status of the street: Bath stone facing is used on the primary streets, Beaumont Street and St John Street, with red brick with variegated brick details on secondary streets such as the early nineteenth-century terraces on Walton Street and Beaumont Buildings.
- Victorian buildings, such as those around Wellington Square, typically use buff brick with stone dressings, with bay windows giving variety to the front elevations.
- Painted render is also used on terraces at the south end of Walton Street.

#### Public buildings

- This zone also contains public buildings which occupy larger sites and are often more dominant in the streetscape:
  - the Ashmolean Museum and Taylor Institution, built of Bath Stone with Portland Stone pilasters to harmonise with the surrounding terraces, is one of the most important examples of museum architecture of the nineteenth century
  - the characterful Randolph Hotel introduces an exuberant Gothic flourish to this zone, with lively details including oriels, bays, gables, dormers, prominent chimneys and cast iron balconies.
- Later infill buildings are more restrained:
  - the Oxford Playhouse has an unassuming façade of Bath stone which was sensitively designed to harmonise with the surrounding terraces
  - the Sackler Library was constructed of Bath stone and designed in a Classical style sympathetic to the Georgian terraces and adjacent Ashmolean Museum.

#### Architectural details

- There is generally a good survival of historic features, including timber sash windows, timber doors and doorcases, fanlights and cast iron boot-scrappers along St John Street and handsome cast iron balconies along Beaumont Street and Walton Street.
- Evidence of window shutters of various types, both external blinds or shutters and internal shutters particularly on St John Street are of exceptional interest where evidence of these survives. Particularly unusual are examples of upward external sash shutters, located in a box under the sill, with sash cords to pulleys.
- There is also a good survival of historic railings along Walton Street, some of which may be original to the development of the street. Some handsome examples of Victorian cast iron railings survive, especially to houses around Wellington Square.
- Modern iron railings in an appropriate design have been installed around the central garden in Wellington Square.
- Little Clarendon Street also retains some interesting traditional shopfronts.

#### Post-war University buildings

- The concrete framed modernist buildings constructed north of Wellington Square by the University, to Leslie Martin's masterplan.
- Reflecting the era, function and architectural philosophy in which they were conceived, they introduced a new scale, a new emphasis on horizontally, new forms of planning via deck access, new materials in the predominant use of concrete, and a new flat, roofscape without chimneys.
- The colonnades along Little Clarendon Street provide a sense of intimacy to the streetscape and as such make an important contribution to the character of this part of the area.

### 7.3.5 Positive contributors



#### Positive contributors

The majority of unlisted buildings within this character zone make a positive contribution to the character of the zone because of their age, use, materials and scale.

- Wellington Square is a rare example of a garden square in Oxford and is enclosed on two sides by three storey Victorian terraces, articulated in buff brick and stone dressings. Although largely in university use, the residential appearance of the terraces contribute to the character of the zone.
- Rewley House holds the third side of Wellington Square, with gables and bays facing the road, also in the Victorian gothic style.
- Walton Street is lined by nineteenth-century terraces ranging from two to three storeys in brick or render. The rhythm of frontages, divided by brick chimneys, and the strong building line give consistency and formality to the street.
- The Clarendon Institute an attractive Victorian landmark on Walton Street of red brick, stone and shaped gables which breaks the regularity of the terraces.
- Away from the main routes, Beaumont Buildings and Worcester Place are attractive examples of Victorian terraces designed for artisans and workers, featuring a regular fenestration and patterned brickwork.
- Shops on Little Clarendon Street give an intimate scale to the street at two to three storeys, with some sensitively designed shopfronts and a lively roofscape of gables and pitches.
- Throughout the character zone, historic streetlamps and street materials enhance the appearance of the zone and aid interpretation of the historic buildings in their setting.



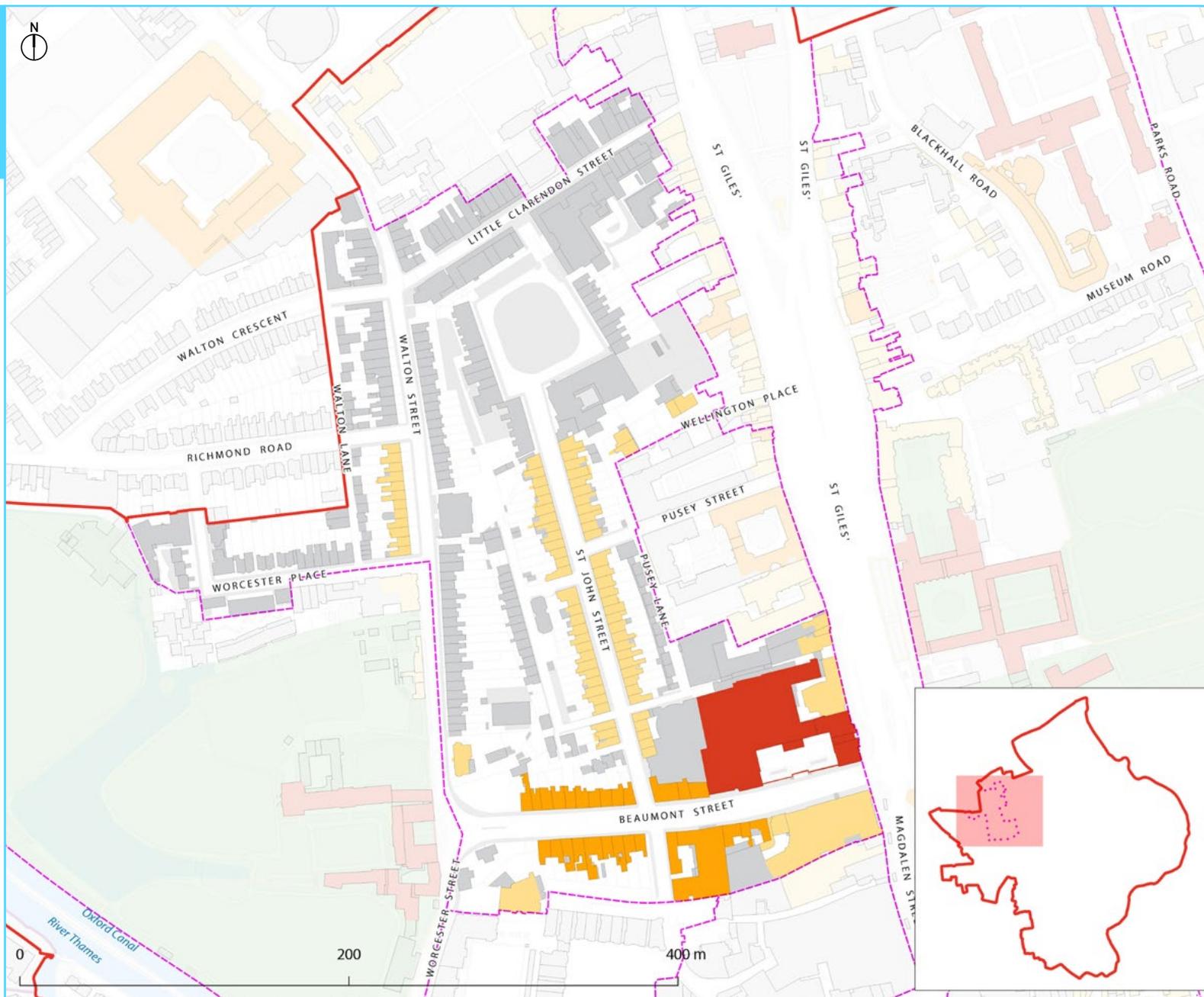
The Clarendon Institute, an attractive Victorian landmark on Walton Street

### Designations

Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

#### Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
-  Grade I listed
-  Grade II\* listed
-  Grade II listed
-  Scheduled monument
-  Registered parks and gardens

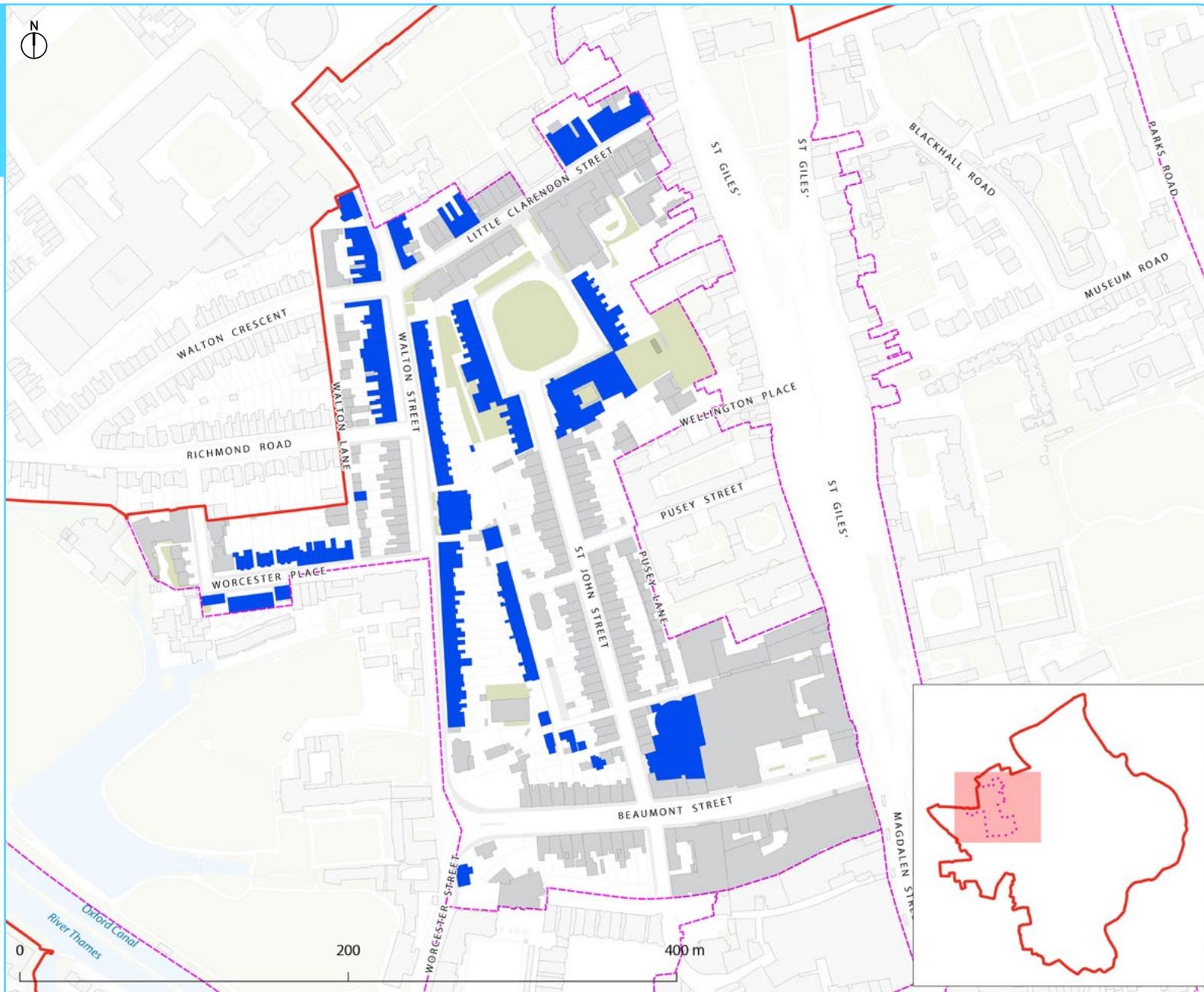


This drawing incorporates information from the Ordnance Survey which is © Crown Copyright, supplied by Oxford City Council.

### Positive contributors Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

#### Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
-  Positive contributors (non-designated)



This drawing incorporates information from the Ordnance Survey which is © Crown Copyright, supplied by Oxford City Council.

### 7.3.6 Roofscape



#### Roofscape



#### Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

#### Building heights

- Building heights range from two to three storeys in most streets, often with dormers above. Many terraces also have basements.
- Public buildings such as the Ashmolean Museum have storey heights of generous dimensions, reflecting their function.
- Mews streets are a contrastingly modest with single storey garage buildings, sometimes with flats over.

#### Roofscape and skyline

- There is a lively and varied treatment of roofscape across the character zone.
- Common characteristics include pitched roofs (slate and tile), dormers and gables, and chimneys.
- The terraces in Beaumont Street, St John's Street, Walton Street and Wellington Square are unusual for the conservation area because they were mostly designed to have a uniform appearance, with roofs punctuated by a regular rhythm of party walls and chimney stacks.
- The exceptions to the prevailing character are the post-war buildings along Little Clarendon Street with long flat roof profiles.



Varied roofscape along Worcester Place



Regular roofscape on the terraced houses of Wellington Square

## Roofscape

Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

### Key

Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

### Building heights

0m

5m

10m

15m

20m

Flat roofs

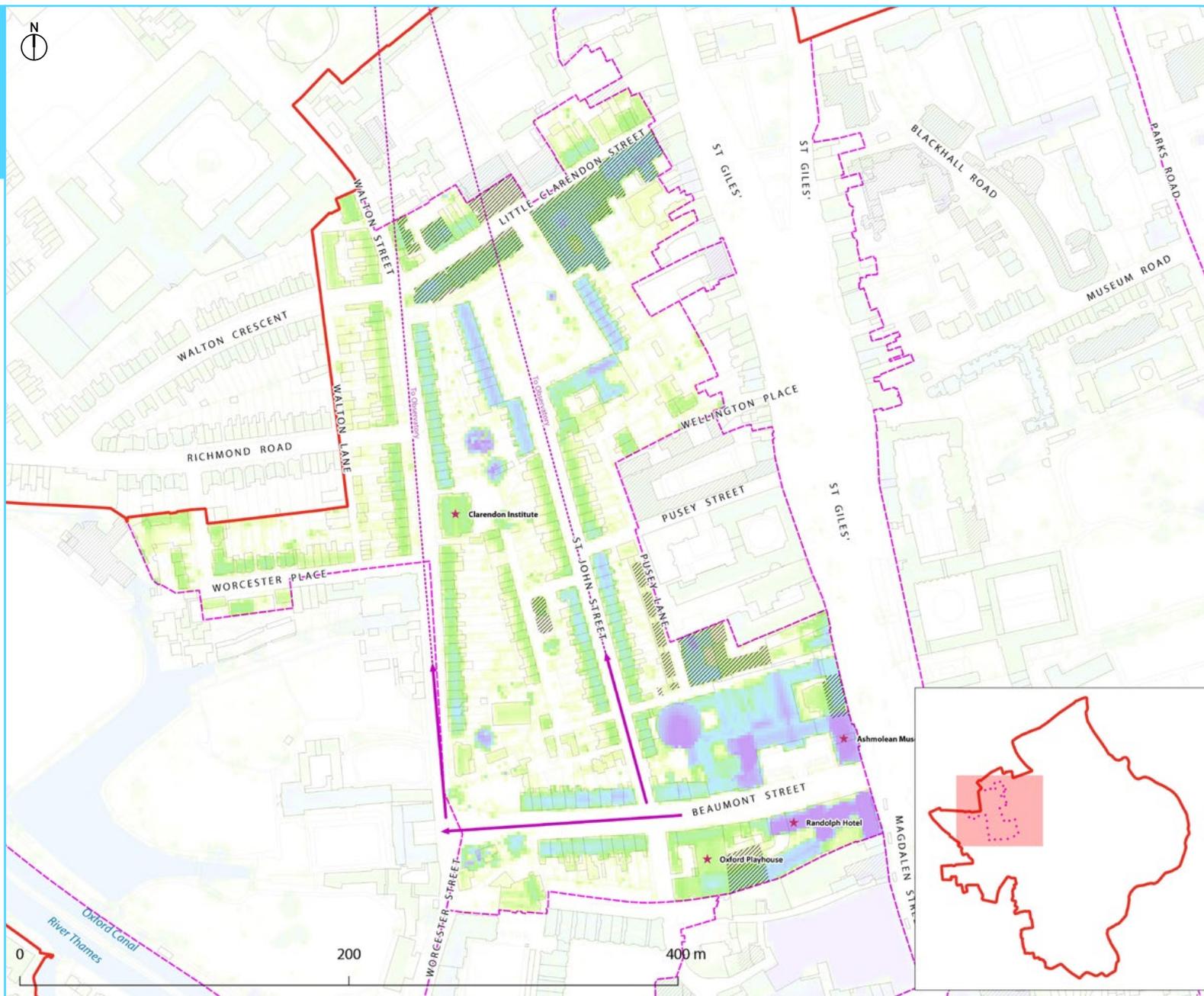
Elevated panorama

Designed public view

Focal point

Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m



This drawing incorporates information from the Ordnance Survey which is © Crown Copyright, supplied by Oxford City Council.

### 7.3.7 Landmarks



#### Roofscape



Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Theme 22: views in the conservation area

Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

#### Landmarks within the character zone

- The Clarendon Institute, Walton Street.
- The Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street.
- Randolph Hotel, Beaumont Street.
- Oxford Playhouse, Beaumont Street.

#### Landmarks outside the character zone

- Former Ruskin College (now Exeter College's Cohen Quadrangle), Walton Street.
- Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, New Inn Hall Street.
- Worcester College, Walton Street.
- Martyrs' Memorial, St Giles'.

### 7.3.8 Views

#### Designed views:

- The character zone is unusual in the conservation area for containing several streets with designed views.
- Beaumont Street was laid out to frame the front of Worcester College to the west.
- St John Street was aligned to terminate with a view of the Observatory to the north (now partially obscured by mature trees in Wellington Square and buildings on the north side of Wellington Square and Little Clarendon Street).
- There is also a designed view of the Observatory turret from the south end of Walton Street; the height of houses in Walton Street was restricted to ensure that the view of the meridian line between the Observatory and Worcester College was uninterrupted.

#### Unfolding views:

- Experienced progressing northward along Walton Street and continuing into the adjacent Jericho Conservation Area.

### 7.3.9 Movement and activity



#### Theme 26: tranquillity

#### Traffic

- The character of streets is affected by whether or not they form a through-route for traffic. Beaumont Street and Walton Street are heavily trafficked with queuing vehicles, which is harmful to their character and appearance and the setting of the listed buildings lining the streets.
- The setting of the Ashmolean Museum is harmed by the weight of traffic on the adjoining streets, including waiting buses and coaches.
- Little Clarendon Street is one-way but has a regular stream of traffic moving along it. Other streets, such as the mews, are quieter access roads.
- Most streets have controlled street parking but the streetscape is not overly dominated by parked cars.

#### Pedestrians and cycling

- There is a regular flow of pedestrians along most of the streets, although Wellington Square is noticeably quieter.
- There are numerous parked cycles but these are mostly in dedicated racks and do not impact on the pedestrian realm.

### 7.3.10 Archaeology



Theme 12: archaeology



Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- This character zone has the potential to preserve deposits relating to the extra-mural development of this area from medieval times, including evidence of the royal Beaumont Palace, subsequent monastic development and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century workhouses.
- There may also be remains relating to the extensive Civil War defences that were constructed in this area.
- The below-ground archaeological potential of the zone is therefore considered to be high.

## 7.4 Useful documents and further guidance



Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

- HUCA 24 Worcester College and Gloucester Green: Gloucester Green.
- HUCA 25 Worcester College and Gloucester Green: Beaumont Street and St John Street.
- HUCA 27 St Giles': Western Frontage Commercial.
- HUCA 28 St Giles': Ashmolean Museum and Colleges.
- HUCA 29 St Giles': Townhouses.



**Other useful documents include:**

*Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles'*, Malcolm Graham 2013

'Building on the Beaumonts: an Example of Early 19th-Century Housing Development' by A. Osmond in *Oxoniensia* XLIX (1984) pp. 301–326  
*North Oxford*, Tanis Hinchcliffe (pub. Yale University Press, 1992)

