



# North Oxford Railings

## A Guide to Design, Repair and Reinstatement

### What is Special about North Oxford Railings?

Traditional iron railings were once an important and distinctive feature of the North Oxford Victorian Garden Suburb.

Many of the railings were removed during the war and of those surviving many are in need of repair or replacement. Increasingly, many building owners wish to reinstate their boundary ironwork to enhance the appearance of their property, but are unsure where to start.

This guide has been prepared by Oxford Preservation Trust and Oxford City Council and is intended to assist residents in the reinstatement of their railings.



Polstead Road, Oxford. 1895



Restored railings in Park Town, Oxford



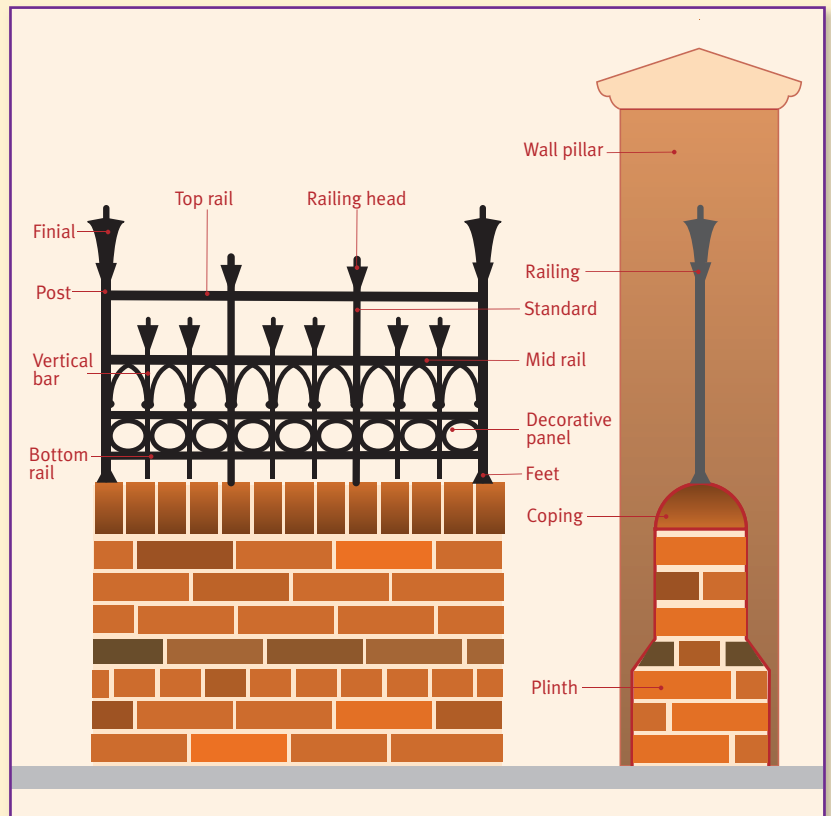
## What is a Railing?

Railings normally consist of a series of vertical bars linked by a horizontal top rail and usually set into a masonry wall or plinth. Their purpose is to define a boundary or as a safety measure.

## Historic Foundries in Oxford

There were two foundries largely responsible for the manufacture of railings in North Oxford – W. Lucy & Co Ltd and Dean & Son, Oxford. Dean and Son became the Cowley Ironworks which closed in the 1980s. Lucy's still exists as Sandawana Castings in Witney.

Foundry marks can usually be found on the standards or top rails of railings and should be retained as important historic evidence.



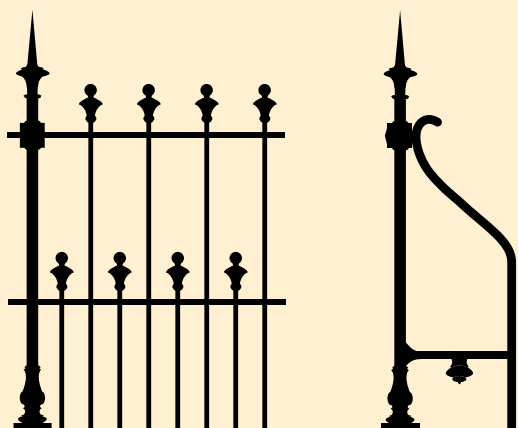
Foundry marks for Dean & Son, Oxford and W. Lucy & Co Ltd.

# Railing Development in North Oxford

The residential suburb of North Oxford was built in four distinct building phases between 1850 and 1914 and the railing design evolved at each stage of development. Whilst the designs in the four phases are distinctive, there is no clear dividing line between the beginning and end of each phase. The use of railings on front garden walls was a deliberate design intent to allow views into landscaped areas behind.

## Phase 1

Beginning with Park Town, these railings follow a pattern that became popular by the middle of the 19th century.



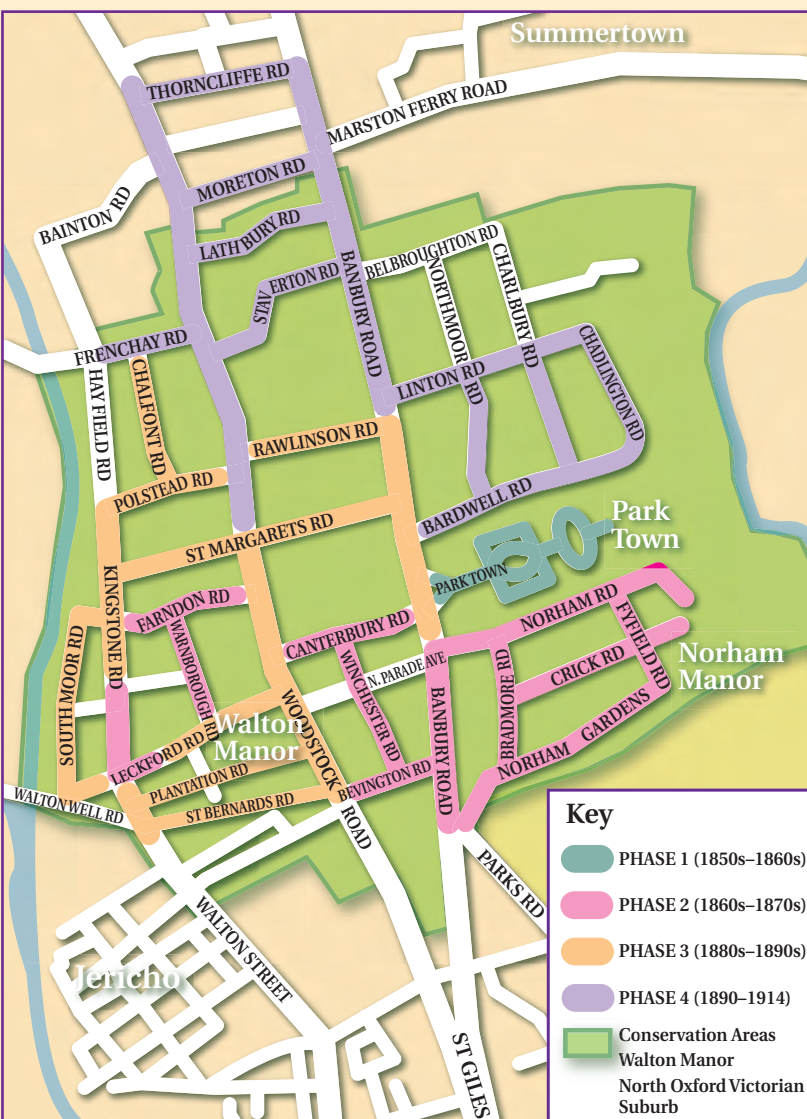
Phase 1 railing design in Park Town

They consist of straight standards set directly into the coping on a low wall, tied with a crossbar at the top and finished with decorative urn finials.

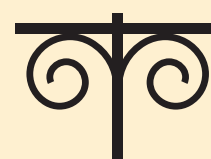
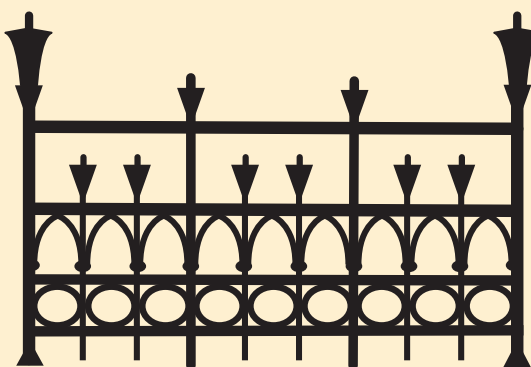
## Phase 2

There is a marked change in the style of the railings in phase 2 of development in North Oxford.

Set in a more elaborate brick wall topped with half round coping bricks with a stepped plinth half way up the wall (see page 2). These railings are designed in panels with decorative crested uprights set at regular intervals along the top of the wall.



Map showing railing development in North Oxford



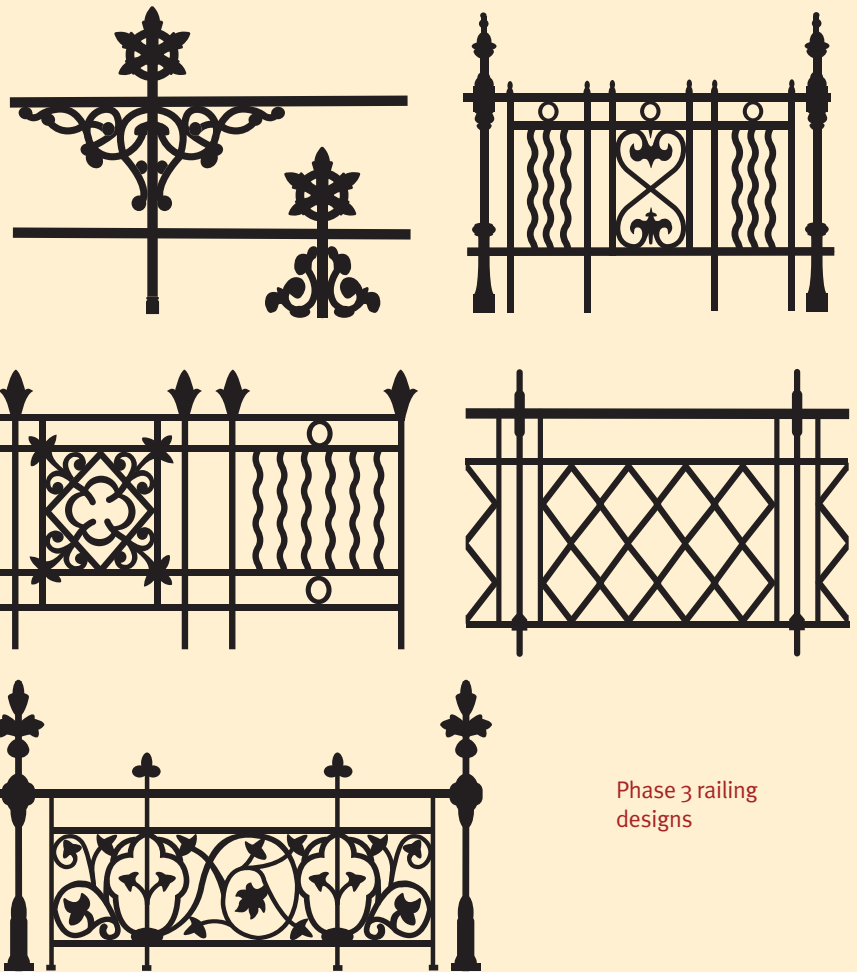
Phase 2 railing designs

### Phase 3

By the 1880s the design of the railings in North Oxford became much lighter compared with the earlier two phases and in many cases forged decorative elements are added in.

The main concentration of phase 3 railings can be found to the west of the suburb and vary in design including circles, quatrefoils, trellising or running leaves. Many also have plain or simple decorative standard supports.

The 'trellis' design is the most popular pattern found in North Oxford as part of phase 3. This design is adjustable and is well suited to street frontages which vary in length and height.

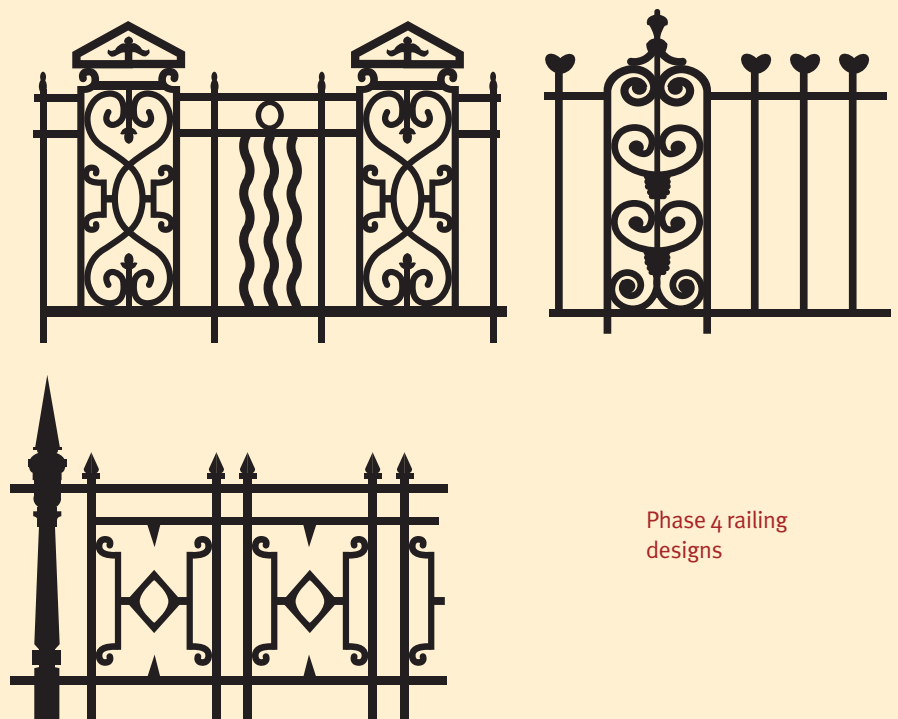


### Phase 4

In the 1890s, railing design evolved to be more robust and the use of wide support standards with panels became common practice.

These railings demonstrate the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement and mimic hand-made wrought iron. Each horizontal bar is also square, not rounded, which is easier to manufacture.

Phase 4 continued up to the beginning of the First World War, after which time timber tended to be used.





## Conservation

### Walls

The boundary walls and piers are an integral element of the overall design and appearance of railings in North Oxford.

The walls range from 650mm to 720mm in height; some have a stepped plinth half way up the wall.

More often brick coursing is laid in alternative courses of headers and stretchers called Flemish Bond brickwork. The bricks are dark reddish in colour, bedded and pointed in a traditional lime mortar. The use of lime mortar is essential for performance, durability and appearance.

### Repair

Although certain parts of a railing may appear particularly rusty and beyond retrieval, there may be enough unoxidised metal left to be reused.

In order to preserve original historic fabric it is important to retain as much ironwork as possible.

### Reinstatement

There is now increased interest in repairing and reinstating boundary ironwork. It improves the appearance and adds value to property. Done successfully, such work reinforces the special character of the historic suburb, adding interest to its historic significance.

Where traditional railings are to be reinstated either because existing railings are beyond repair or have already been lost, this should, where possible, be done following historic precedents (pattern, material, construction and finish). Careful inspection of surviving evidence e.g. sockets in plinths, piers, and walls can provide clues to the proportions and design of the original railing pattern.



*Above, renovated wall and new railings fronting Bradmore Road, Oxford*



*Left, fragment of historic ironwork*



*Left, renovated wall and reinstated railings fronting Kingston Road*





## Painting

The primary function of painting is protection, not decoration. Today, there are a variety of paints available that help reduce the risk of rusting. These are epoxy resin based or in the form of red lead or zinc-rich undercoats. Specialist advice should be taken prior to painting to ensure correct methods and paint type and to meet any health and safety regulations.

Traditionally railings were painted in muted colours. Following the death of Prince Albert in December 1861, it became fashionable to paint railings black as a sign of respect. Black has remained popular ever since.

Ironwork is best stripped using chemical means and then steam cleaned to ensure thorough removal of chemical agents. On the whole the use of mechanical abrasives should be avoided.

## Are Modern Variants Acceptable?

It is important to ensure the correct proportions and scale when reinstating railings and walls.

## Do I Need Planning Permission?

Planning permission and/or listed building consent may be required for the reinstatement of railings and conservation area consent may be required to demolish any wall, gate, or railing depending on the height. Before proceeding with any works further advice can be sought from Oxford City Council including a list of possible suppliers.

Details of the application process and application fees are available on the Council's website at [www.oxford.gov.uk](http://www.oxford.gov.uk)



Above, restoration of historic ironwork in progress



Left, contemporary railing design in North Oxford

## Practical Assistance

Oxford City Council and the Oxford Preservation Trust are working together to encourage the reinstatement of railings in North Oxford. The Oxford Preservation Trust has launched a project to commission and acquire a collection of local railing patterns which can be hired at a reasonable cost. For further details of how to hire a railing pattern, please contact either Oxford City Council or Oxford Preservation Trust.



## Contacts and Further Information

If you would like advice or if you are considering submitting an application for planning permission and/or listed building consent, please contact Oxford City Council.

Details of the history and development of the garden suburb can be found in the North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area Appraisal and the Walton Manor Conservation Area Appraisal, copies of which are available to download from Oxford City Council's website.

A list of local and national railing suppliers and manufacturers is also available from Oxford City Council on request.

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