

03

The Site and Context

3.1 History of the Surrounding Area

3.1.1 History of the Site Over Time

The Walton Street site at the junction of Walton Street and Worcester Place has evolved over 400 years from open farm land originally owned by St John's College, to a timber yard, small houses and finally to the 1909 clearance of the site for the new Ruskin College. The following paragraphs describe the site in the context of Oxford's development since the seventeenth century.

John Speed's map of 1612 shows Oxford in its setting. Colleges such as Magdalen, St John's and Balliol are gradually developing beyond the city walls, yet Gloucester Hall (the predecessor of Worcester College) is the furthest away, in open land to the west. Our empty site is beyond Gloucester Hall with woods between it and the river.

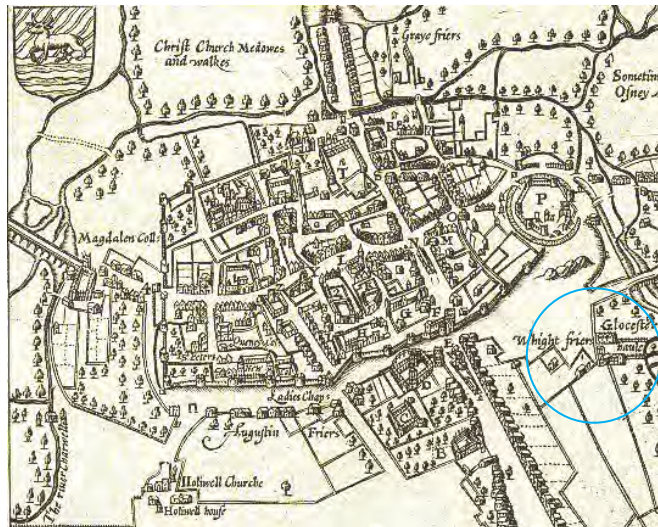
The de Gomme map (probably dating from 1644) shows the actual and proposed defences of Oxford during the Civil War. The map is accurate enough to be superimposed on a modern map, to show exactly where the fortifications ran. In fact our site is located exactly over the route of the western fortification ditches of the City.

Loggan's map of 1675 shows the remains of the fortifications. Gloucester Hall is still surrounded by orchards and wooded fields. In 1713 it becomes Worcester College and buys its site from St John's College. In 1744 the College expands again to the north and west, up to its present boundary. In about 1817 Worcester's ornamental lake and garden was made, and in 1897 the cricket-ground was drained and levelled.

The terraced streets of Jericho are in progress by 1850. The little houses at the east end of Worcester Place have been built, and our site is now developed with a mixture of housing and workshops. The 1873 Ordnance Survey map shows further building, but Worcester Place and Worcester Terrace are only fully developed at the end of the nineteenth century.

Ruskin College acquires its site on the corner of Walton Street in 1903. For the first decade it occupied the existing buildings on the site. The first phase of its purpose-built accommodation is in place by 1913, and further phases follow in 1936, 1967 and 1982.

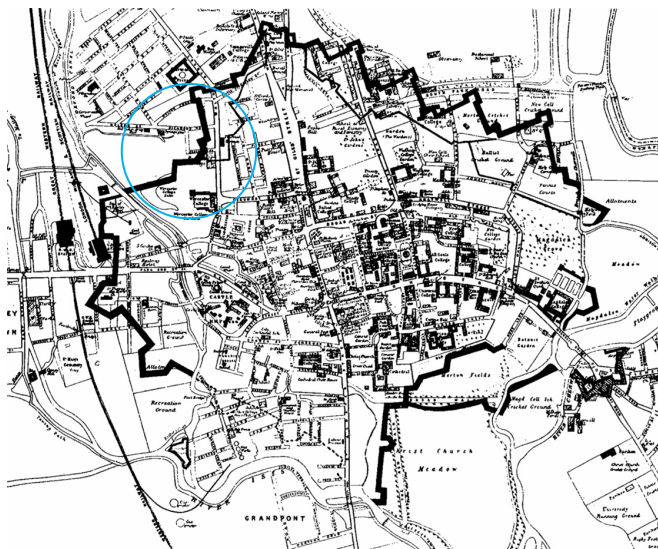
In 2007 Ruskin College announced plans to develop a £16m scheme consolidating all of Ruskin College's facilities within one campus at Old Headington. The masterplan was endorsed by Oxford City Council in 2008. Stoke House will be used for new BA and MA courses in international labour and trade union studies and to house the newly sponsored Webb Institute for Leadership in Democracy. The new campus will feature a £5m library to be named after former Prime Minister Jim Callaghan.



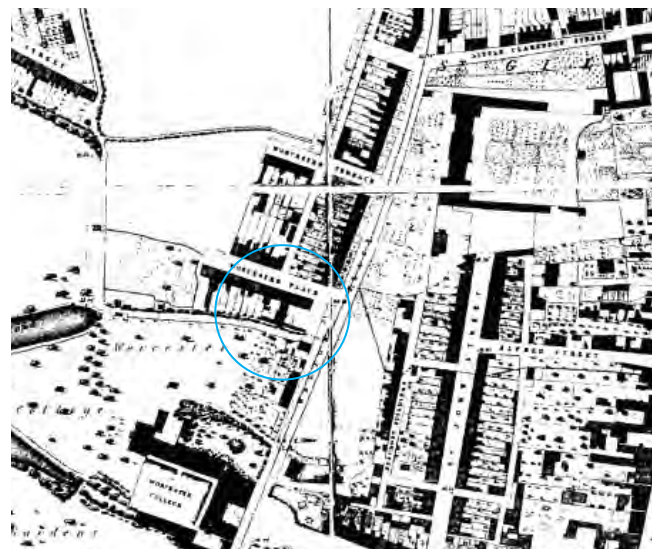
John Speed Map of Oxford 1612



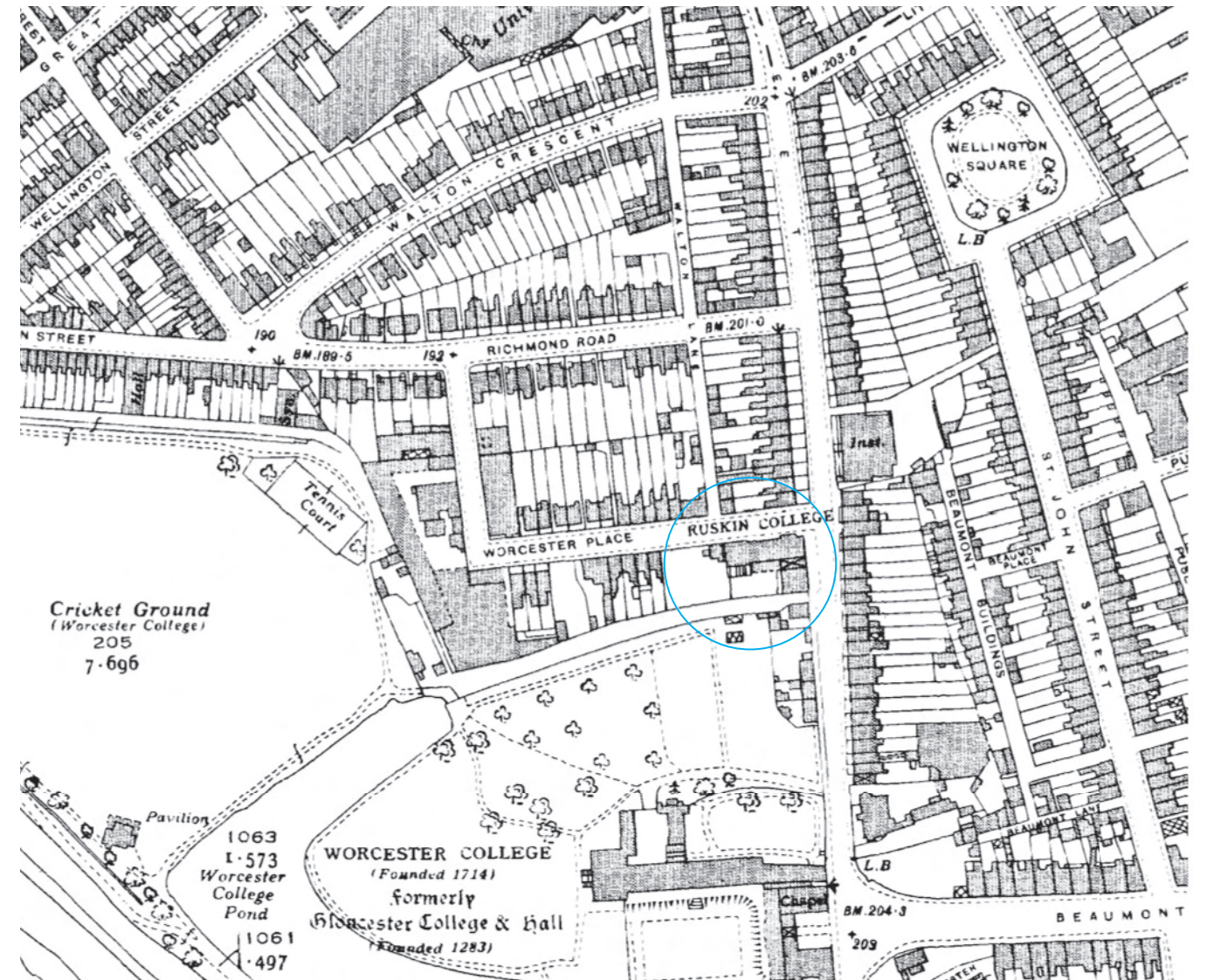
Loggan's Map of Oxford 1675



De Gomme Map of Oxford 1644



Hogger's Map of Oxford 1850



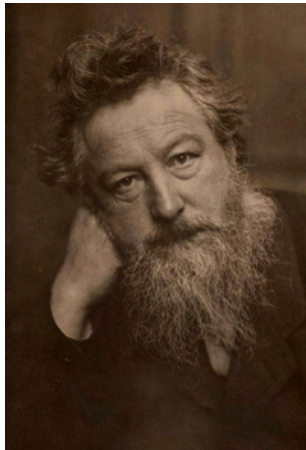
Ordnance Survey Map 1937

3.3.3
John Ruskin and William Morris

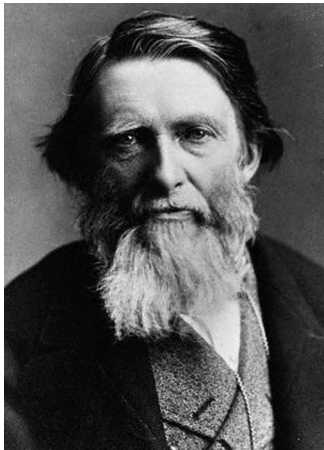
The historic association of William Morris with John Ruskin will reinforce Ruskin College's continuing presence at Walton Street. Morris was a student of Exeter College, enrolling in 1852. Morris was deeply influenced by John Ruskin's essay "The Nature of Gothic" from the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*. He eventually fulfilled his mentor's advocacy of artisan production with his work as a publisher, illustrator and textile designer. As a key figure behind both the Gothic Revival and the English Arts and Crafts movement, Morris was also an active participant in Britain's early Socialist movements with which his creative efforts were always intertwined. With this significant and deeply influential historic relationship between Ruskin and Morris, Exeter College is committed to commemorating Ruskin College's social and political legacy at the Walton Street site.

3.3.4
The Ruskin Room at Walton Street

To physically represent the ongoing historic association of Ruskin College at Walton Street, the new building will incorporate a large seminar room at the front of the building as a dedicated 'Ruskin Room' for the use of Ruskin College. It is intended that this room will incorporate the bronze plaque commemorating the founding of Buxton Hall by Sydney C Buxton, as well as the timber panelling from the College's existing stage. This room will closely reflect the original Ruskin College Reading Room according to the 1909 designs of Joseph & Smithem.



William Morris



John Ruskin



Oak Panelling in Ruskin Room - To be re-used



Morris & Co Tapestry at Exeter College



Buxton Hall bronze plaque - to be re-used

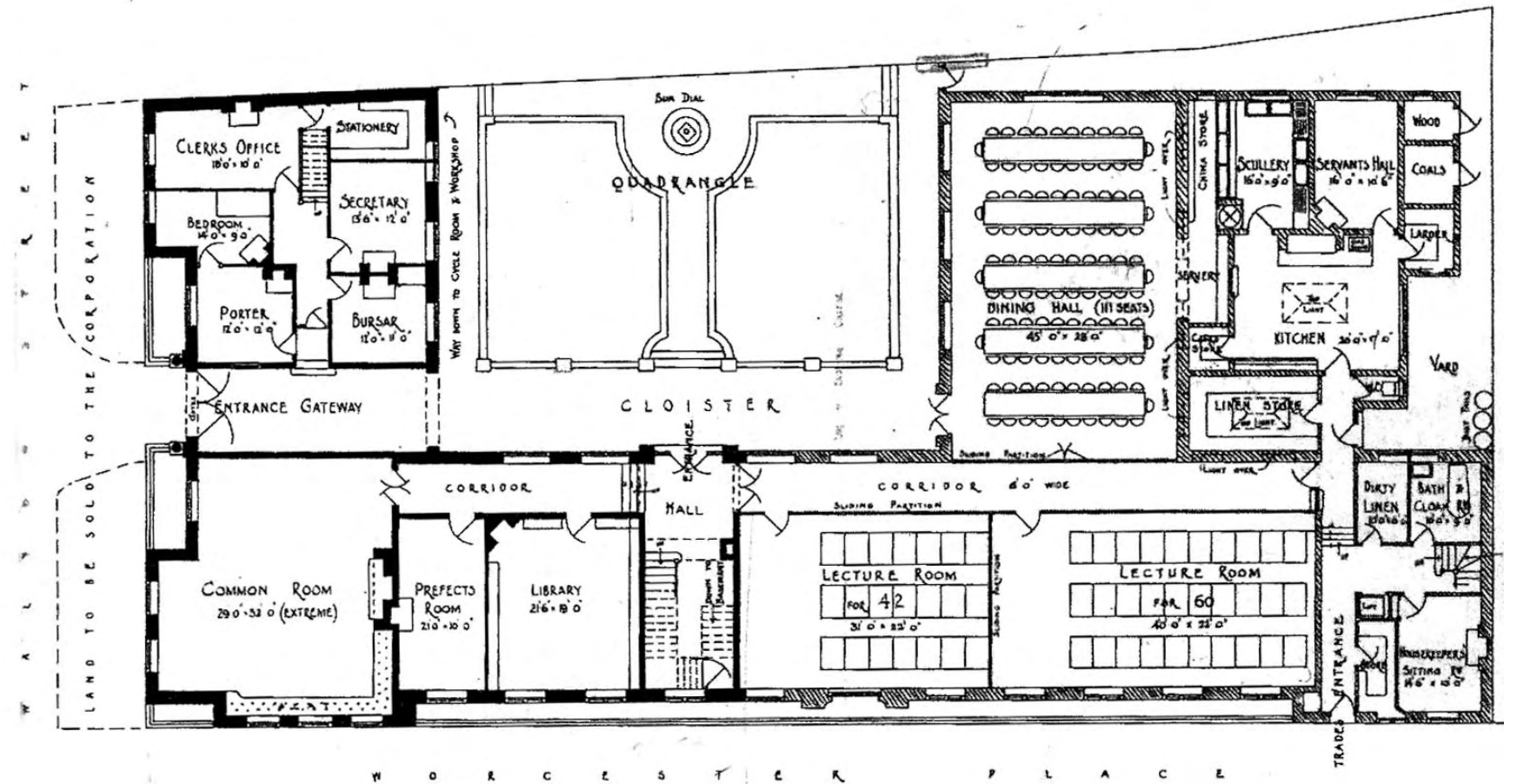
3.3 History of the Walton Street Buildings

3.3.5

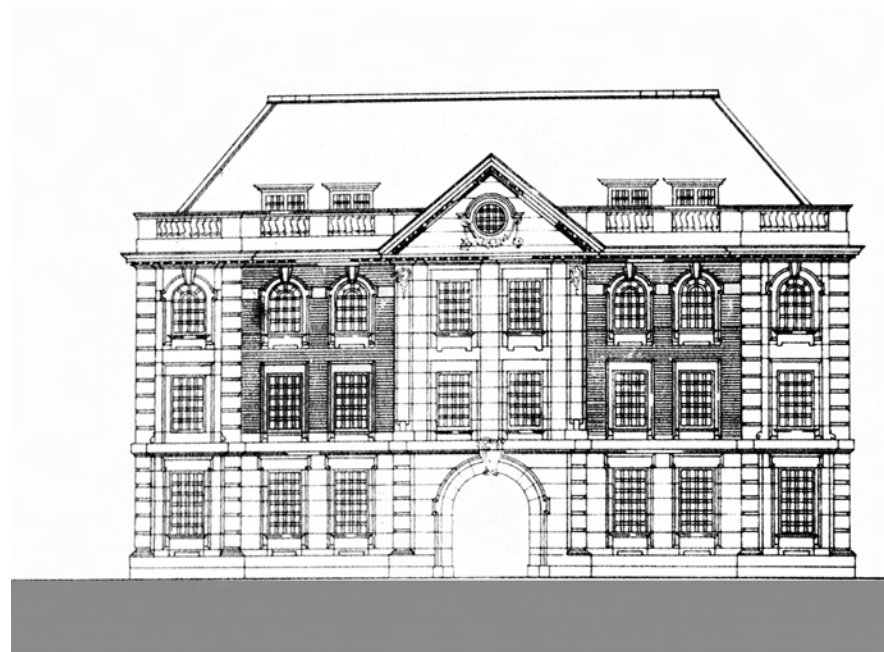
The 1907 Architectural Competition for the new Ruskin Building – An Incomplete Vision

The architects for the College's 1913 building were Joseph & Smithem. It is not known how the competition of 1907 was organised but designs by two other firms are known: the RIBA has a drawing dated 1907 by Buckland & Haywood Farmer. Charles Seward Smith submitted his design to the Royal Academy in 1909 and it was published in the Builder in 1910 (5 February 1910, p.146).

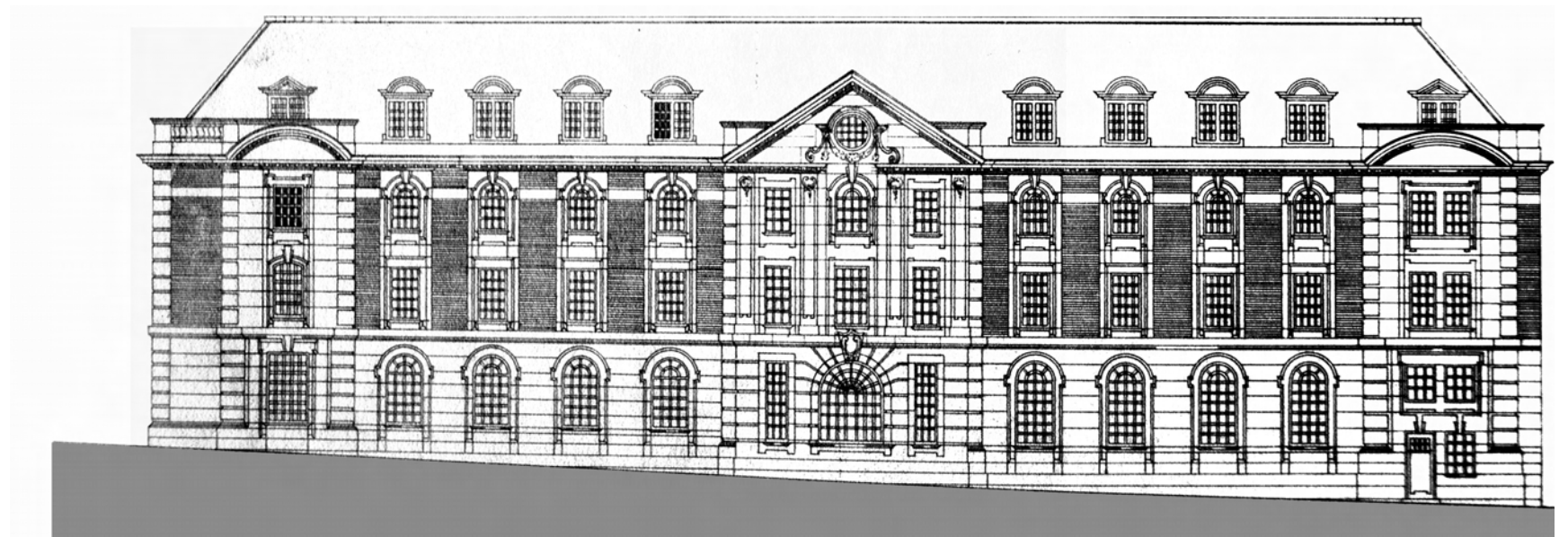
Joseph & Smithem proposed a U-shaped building around a central quadrangle, open to the South. The quadrangle was entered through a level outdoor gated passageway from Walton Street and the building itself was entered from the quad. This is the typical arrangement for an Oxbridge College. The original designs featured two primary symmetrical facades; four brick and dressed stone storeys plus a fifth storey within a mansard roof. The central and end bays were embellished by pediments and stone balustrading at the cornice level. These classical compositions for both the Walton Street and Worcester Place facades reflected the ambition of Ruskin's founders to establish a College with a significant, if not monumental, institutional presence on its site.



Worcester Place Competition Plan 1907

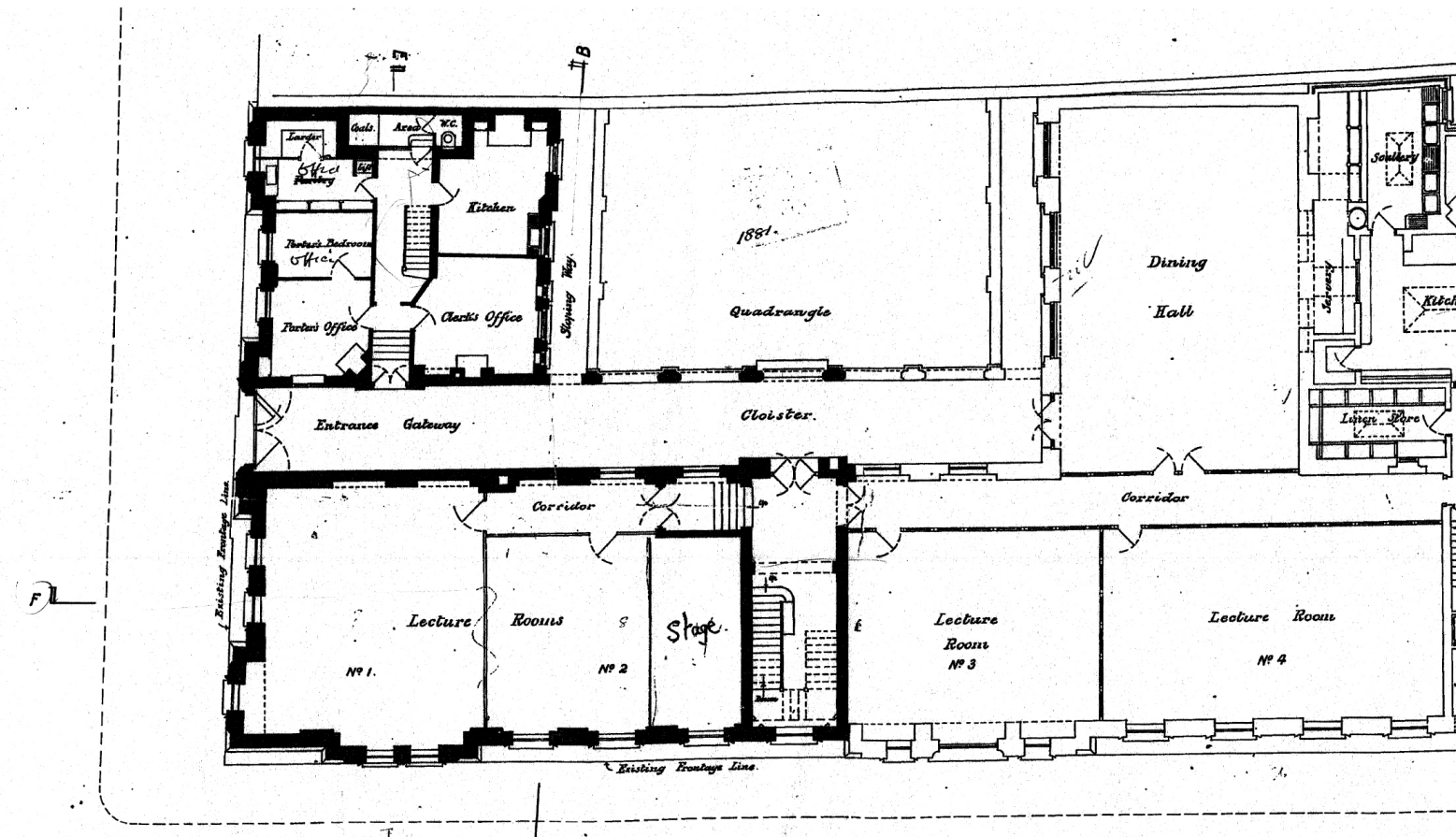


Walton Street Competition Elevation 1907

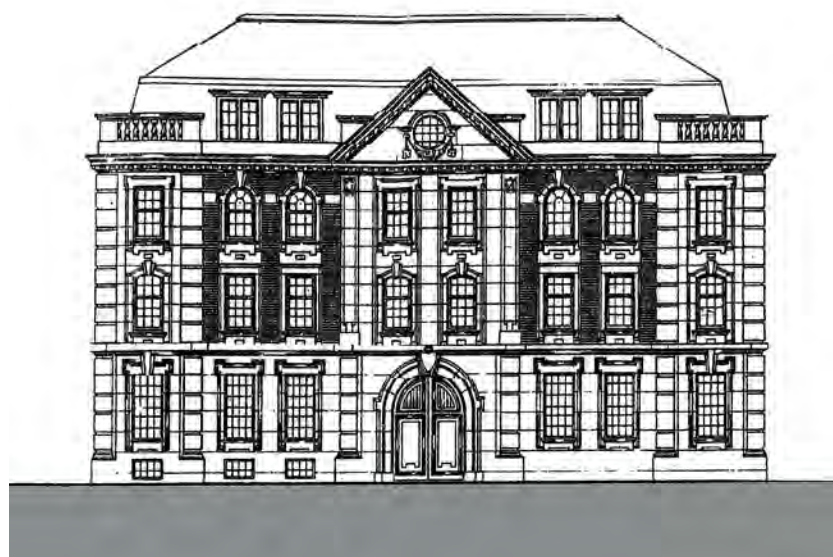


Worcester Place Competition Elevation 1907

It is clear from the competition plan that phased development was anticipated, the first phase comprising the east wing fronting onto Walton Street and part of the north wing along Worcester Place. This is the building that was opened in 1913. The original 1907 plan placed the College's public rooms on the ground floor – the common room, library, lecture rooms and dining hall. Three upper floors had double-loaded corridors for residential accommodation. When the first phase was built the library and common room were combined to form a large lecture room which could be divided by a folding partition. Presumably the existing buildings on the site continued in use for the dining room and kitchen until the 1936 wing provided additional space. The remainder of the competition plan was never completed, with post war development on the site reflecting the 1960's spirit of modernity followed by a 1980's neo-vernacular without merit of any kind.



As Built Scheme - Ground Floor Plan 1913

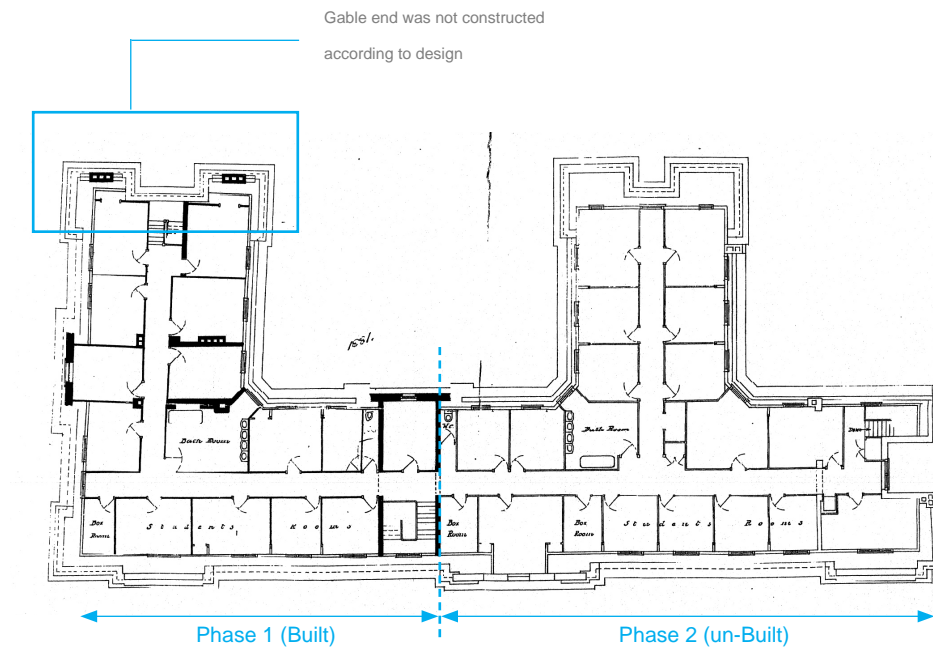


Walton Street Elevation 1913

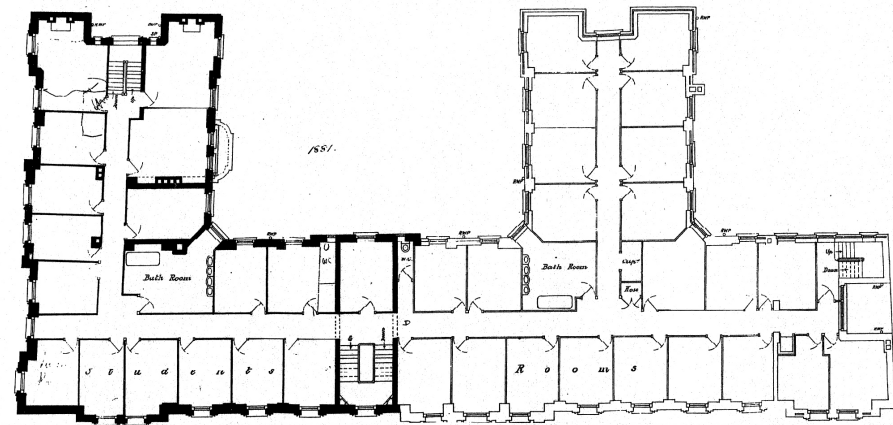


Worcester Place Elevation 1913

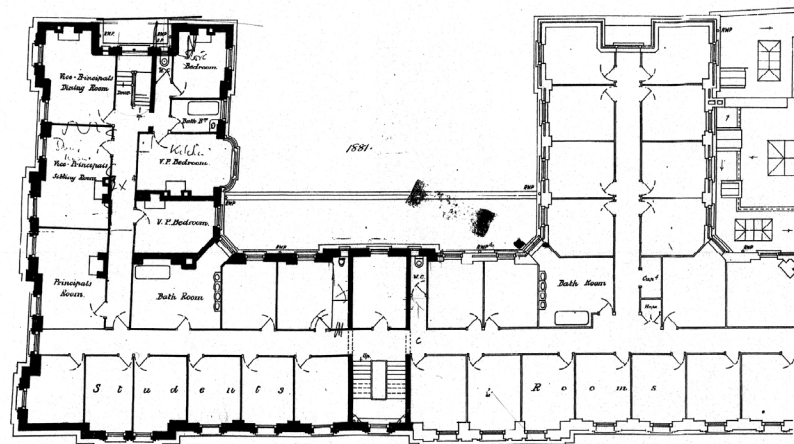
3.3 History of the Walton Street Buildings



As Built Scheme - Third Floor Plan 1913



As Built Scheme - Second Floor Plan 1913



As Built Scheme - First Floor Plan 1913



Ruskin College as seen from Walton Street - 2013

3.4.1

Development over time, Entrances, Accessibility, Services

The Ruskin Building has undergone a series of extensions throughout the last 100 years, each of which reflects the architectural styles of the era in which it was constructed as well as the constraints of the site and costs. Thus resulting in the collage that is the current ensemble of buildings.

3.4.2

The 1936 Extension

The 1936 extension was designed by Brook Kitchin. It was opened on 24 October 1936. It added three bays to the north range of the Joseph & Smithem plan, up to the point where the range would have turned to close the quadrangle. However, although the drawing submitted to Oxford City Council in 1935 states that the west wall of the 1936 extension was temporary, there is no sign of preparations for the west wing anticipated by Joseph & Smithem. No drawings have been found to indicate what would have been added beyond the temporary west wall.

The north elevation facing Worcester Place continues the architectural vocabulary of the 1913 building, but with variations. The three bays step forward slightly, as in Joseph & Smithem's plan which showed a grand stone centrepiece with a pediment – this would have been the centre of the north elevation of their design. Perhaps the curious way that Kitchin's cornice was left completely blank was to allow for a pediment to be added later.

The south elevation facing the quad is an accurate replica of Joseph & Smithem's earlier work. Internally there were two ground floor rooms, a library and common room. There was a two bedroom flat on the first floor with an access staircase tacked onto the west gable end wall. The second and third floors were divided into small rooms.

Brook Taylor Kitchin (1869-1940) was not a prominent architect. 'He was Chief Architect of the Ministry of Health and the Welsh Board of Health, retiring in 1925 after thirty-two years of service, when he carried on practice privately' (Builder, 1940). He was brought up in Oxford, the son of George Kitchin of Christ Church, later Dean of Winchester. His sister Alexandra or Xie was a favourite model for Lewis Carroll's photographs.

The 1936 extension is solidly built but is of minimal architectural significance.

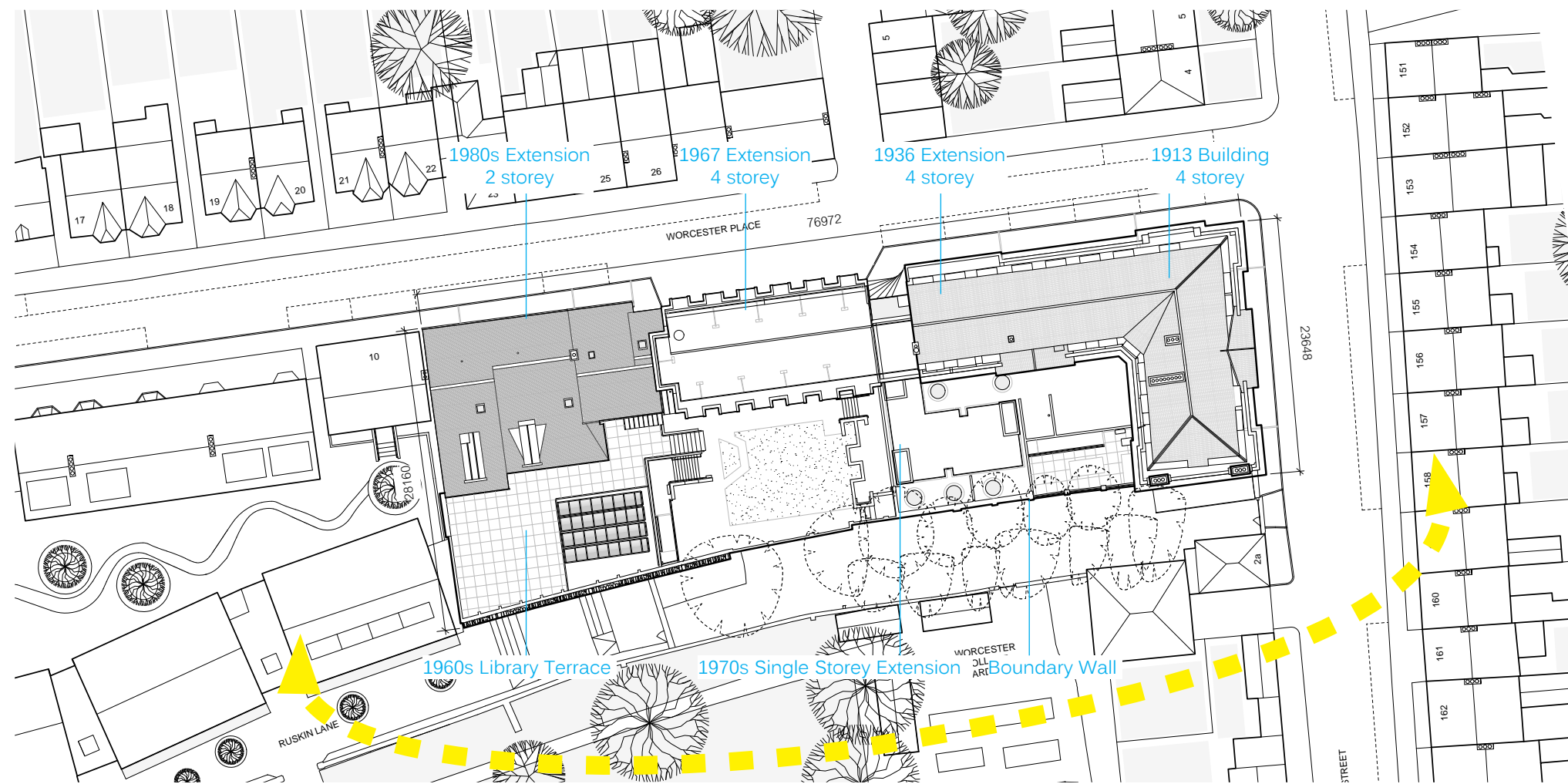
3.4.3

The 1967 Building

The 1967 building was designed by Peter Bosanquet & Partners. It is a three-storey concrete framed building over a low undercroft, which is at ground level due to the gradient in Worcester Place. The mass of the building approximates to the unbuilt part of Joseph & Smithem's design facing Worcester Place. The building has study-bedrooms on double-loaded corridors on the top two floors, continuing the pattern of the 1913 and 1936 buildings. The ground floor level over the undercroft is used for a dining room and kitchen. The building was opened on 30 June 1967.

The architectural style is very characteristic of the 1960s and makes a complete break with the buildings of 1913 and 1936. This may reflect the low esteem in which the 1913 building was held at the time. It was then about fifty years old, often a stage when architectural styles are most reviled, and approximately the present age of the 1967 building.

There are identical facades facing Worcester Place and the internal garden, with strong accentuation of the building's six bays. Between the windows there are lightweight panels forming continuous vertical bands, and the precast concrete cladding panels crank out to further emphasise the vertical rhythm. There are no sill or cornice features – the main facade hangs in mid-air. The facade has weathered well, with little staining or rusting.



Site Plan of Existing Ruskin Building

Diagram of the building extensions over time

3.4 Ruskin College - Architectural Analysis and Significance

One of the most successful architectural practices in this 1960s idiom was Howell Killick Partridge & Amis (HKPA), who designed many university buildings (Cantacuzino, 1981). St Anne's College, Oxford (listed Grade II), has facades of precast concrete units with projecting windows – more elegant than Bosanquet's at Ruskin College, but no doubt with a higher budget.

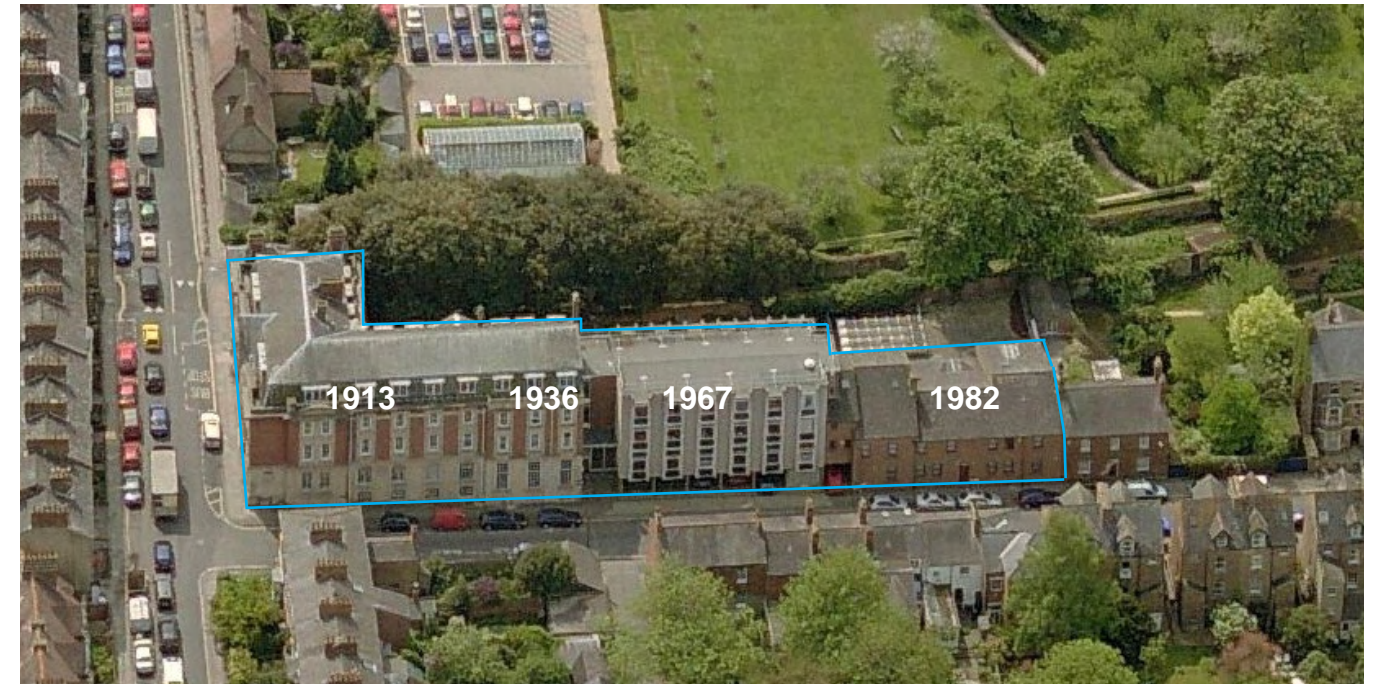
Another HKPA building, for Darwin College, Cambridge, is an infill adjoining existing buildings and uses a strongly vertical articulation of the facade; but in this project HKPA used brick rather than concrete. By comparison with these exemplars Ruskin College's 1967 building is a very competent example of its period and style, but not outstanding.

Other alterations were carried out in 1967. A single-storey building was added in the eastern part of the garden, with an accessible roof terrace. It was built up against the 1913 and 1936 buildings, cutting out some light. It created a small courtyard in the south-east corner of the garden, next to the boundary wall with Worcester College. To avoid the courtyard being too gloomy, brick panels in the boundary wall were replaced with wrought iron screens.

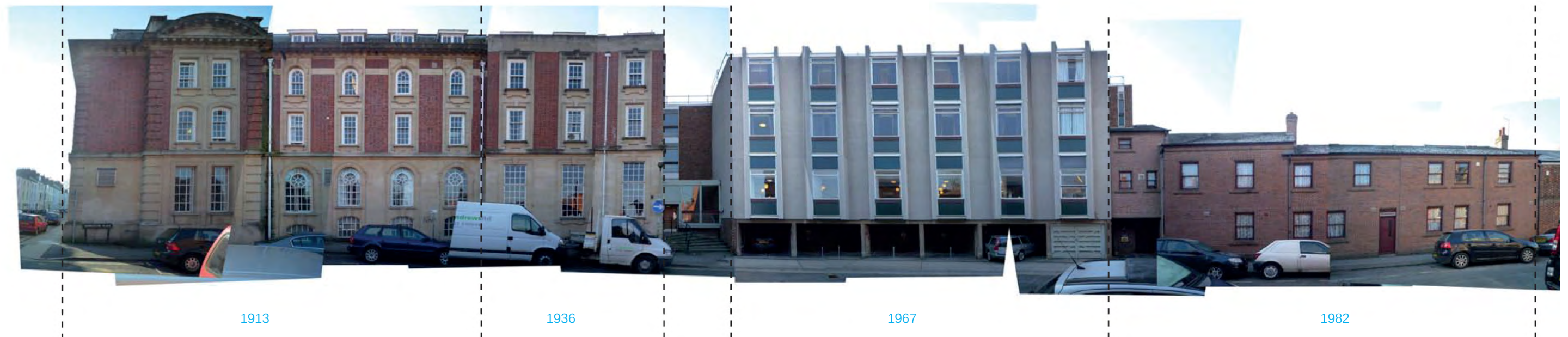
The open air entrance passage, which had gates at the street frontage and was almost level with the pavement, was altered. The gates were removed and three steps were added up to a new entrance at the level of the ground floor hall in the north-east corner of the building; this allowed new doors to be opened into the hall so that it could be used as two independent rooms.

3.4.4 The 1982 Buildings

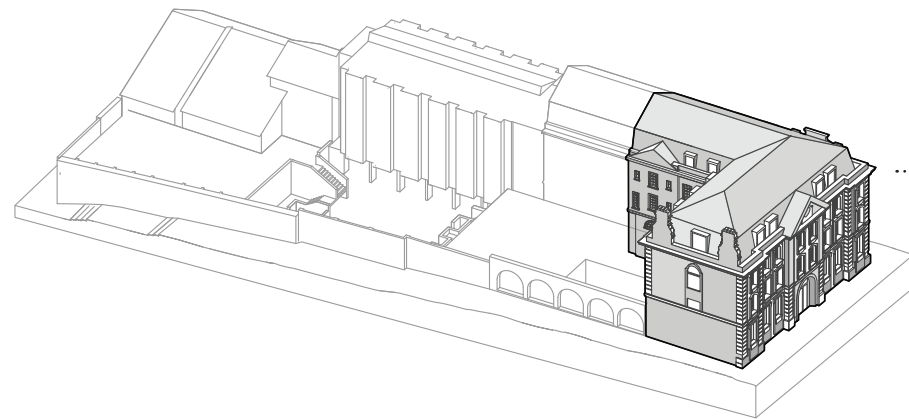
These were designed by Peter Bosanquet and John Perryman. The two storey elevation to Worcester Place follows the scale of the adjacent 19th century residential buildings, with an abrupt change of scale from the 1967 and 1913 buildings. Inside the site is a semi-basement library, a purely utilitarian building. The buildings are of no special architectural significance.



Ariel photo showing phasing of Ruskin Building expansion

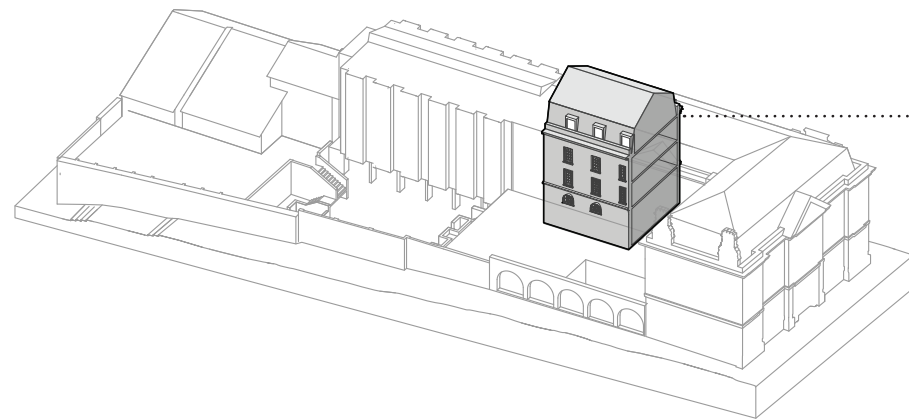


Worcester Place montage



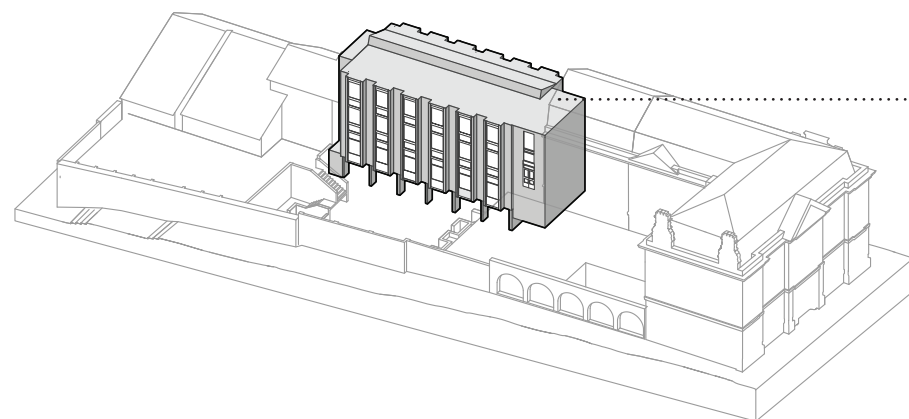
1913 Ruskin Building

Solid masonry Edwardian collegiate building with stone detailing. Most notable for its social history and relevance to Ruskin College.



1936 Extension

Solid masonry building based upon original Ruskin Building. Obviously of a lesser quality of construction and lacking details eg stone corning.

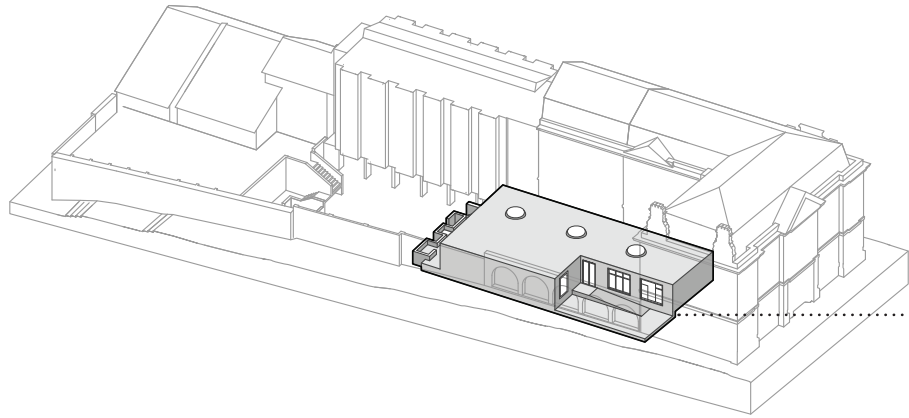


1967 Extension

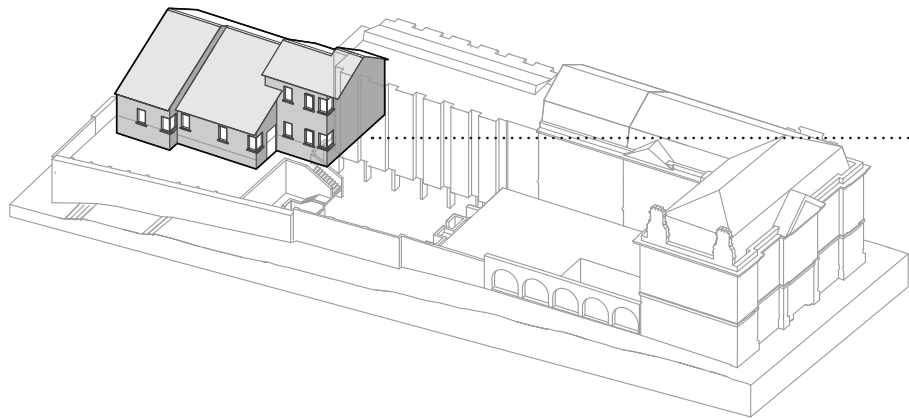
Low quality exposed concrete block construction. Of little if any architectural significance, interior dated and no longer fit for purpose.



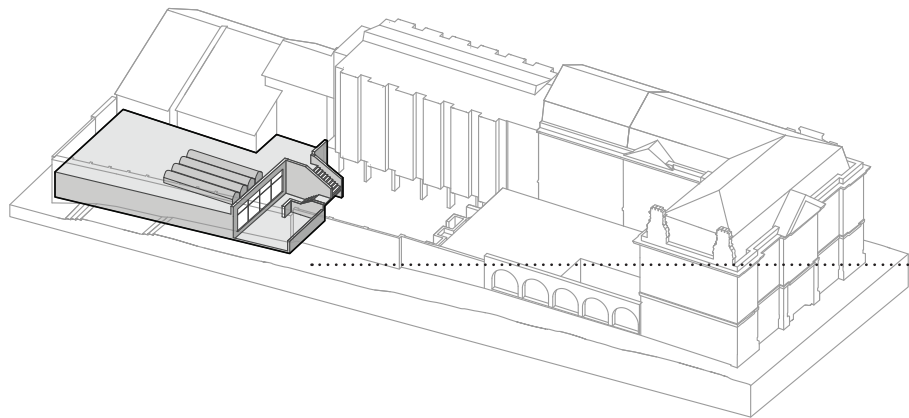
3.4 Ruskin College - Architectural Analysis and Significance



1970s Extension
Low quality single storey addition to the rear of Buxton Hall.



1980s Extension
Low quality building of domestic scale and unremarkable architecture of poor quality materials and detailing.



1980s Extension
Sunken library building to rear of the site, poor quality addition no longer fit for purpose.



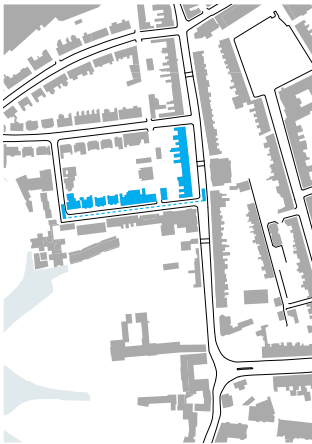
3.5.1

Contrasts in Scale

The contrast in scale between Ruskin College and its neighbours on Walton Street and on Worcester Place is marked, and the building has a major presence as seen in long views along Walton Street from the north and south.



Walton Street Elevation



Worcester Street Elevation

3.5 Streetscape Context

3.5.2

Approach to the Site from the South on Walton Street

The building is largely screened on approach from the south. When it reveals itself, the building is marked by its prominent brick and stone-dressed gable end wall. The chimneys form a symmetrical crest to the wall, screening a tiled mansard roof and modest leaded dormer beyond. The chimneys rise from a cornice of stone dentils and cornicing. A single central Palladian window centred on the brick wall within a dressed stone surround provides a strong central focus to this largely unassuming façade that overlooks the lane and gardeners sheds of Worcester College. Only fleeting glances of the entirety of the facade are possible as the pedestrian moves northwards.



Approach along Walton Street heading North

3.5.3

Approach to the Site from the North on Walton Street

The view of the site from the north on Walton Street reveals an immediate change in scale from the two storey residential streetscape to an imposing institutional scale. However the symmetry of the Ruskin College frontage is indistinguishable from this view, with the façade seen only obliquely. The primary impression is of a four storey building mass with a heavy stone cornice, topped by a squat tiled mansard. The projection of the central pediment from the main roof massing is the predominant element along the roofline. The east facing aspect of the Ruskin façade means it is mostly seen in shadow, emphasised by the dark red brick. As one approaches the building the projecting cornice conceals the roof entirely, revealing only the tops of the leaded dormers.

3.5.4

Approach to the Site along Worcester Place

When viewed from the corner of Worcester Place the four storey scale is maintained along the length of the 1913 building, the 1936 extension and the new building of 1967, then drops suddenly to the 1980's range that reflects the height of the residential buildings further down the street. The 1936 extension to the College is apparent by its lack of articulation at the cornice level and change in fenestration. Seen from the western end of Worcester place, the site appears as a piecemeal aggregation of buildings from various periods, all of which have a poor relationship to the street, with service and loading bays and only one public entrance. The street elevation is a motley collection of materials ranging from brown brick and slate tiled roof, to precast concrete with a flat roof, to the projecting gable end or gambrel roof shape of the 1936 brick edifice.



Approach along Walton Street heading South



Approach along Worcester Place Street heading West



Approach along Worcester Place Street heading East

3.5 Streetscape Context

3.5.5

Relationship to Worcester Place

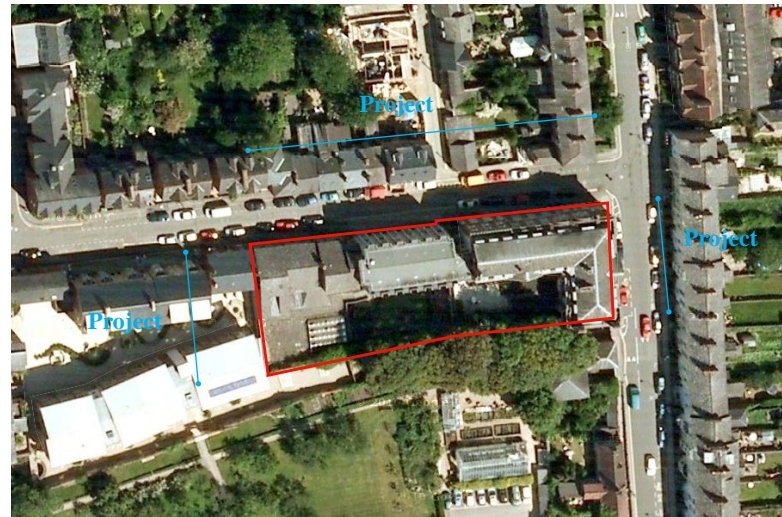
The Walton Street site is a long narrow site averaging 25 metres wide. It is oriented east-west and sits along the northern boundary of Worcester College gardens. Due to its east-west orientation the site benefits from it's long boundary facing south. As a result the current college building is set along the northern site boundary and the building footprint sits hard on the pavement of Worcester Place to allow a south facing courtyard or quadrangle. The site's frontage on Walton Street is untypically narrow for an Oxford College, and therefore the corner view of the building as seen from the north on Walton Street is its primary aspect.

3.5.6

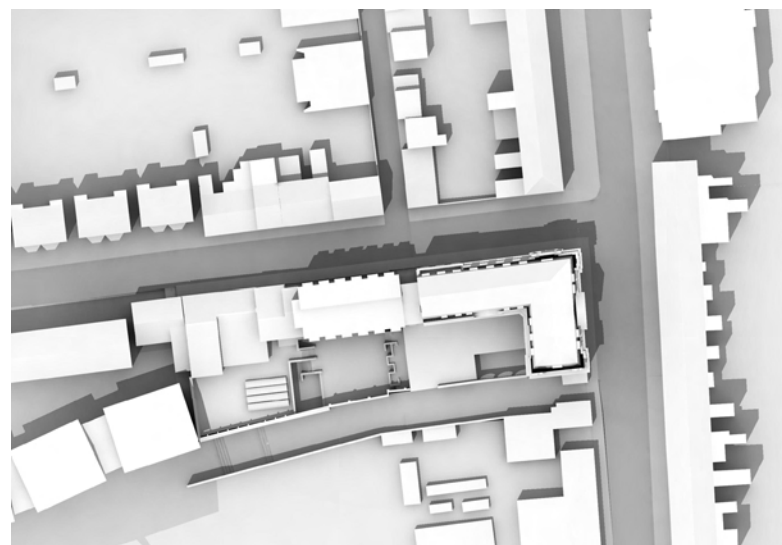
Daylight and Sunlight

Given the position of the existing building in relation to Worcester Place, there is no significant difference in terms of sunlight and daylight to surrounding properties. Indeed, there are some improvements arising from the imaginative use of the S-shaped floor plan.

Key to the successful redevelopment of this site is the intention to improve the quality of the streetscape along Worcester Place, to increase the sense of permeability to the site and to allow more sunlight to enter the street. The potential of a garden quad accessed from Worcester Place was identified early in the design process to increase the sense of openness and greenery along this street to the benefit of local residents and existing Worcester College students all of whom use Worcester Place as their main point of access to their homes.

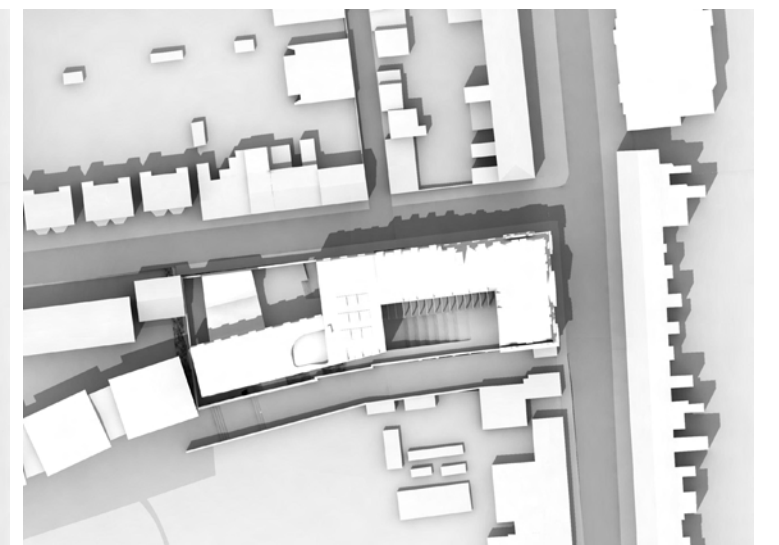


Site Dimensions



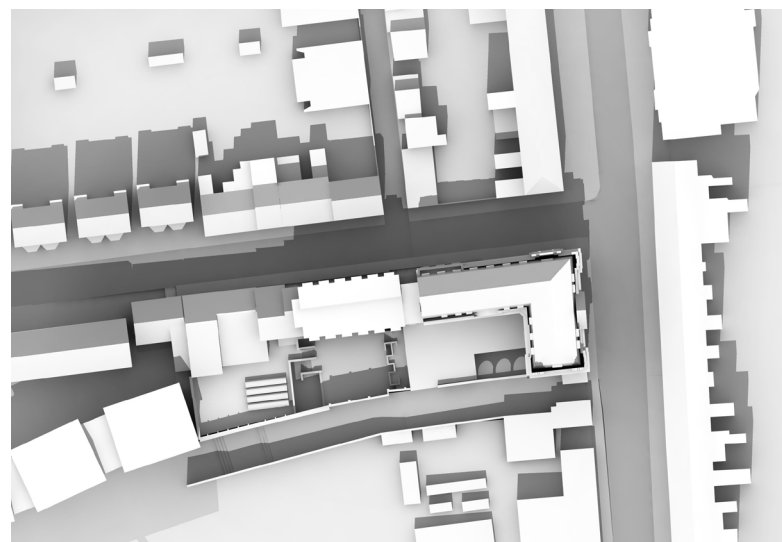
1200 hours

June 21st - Existing



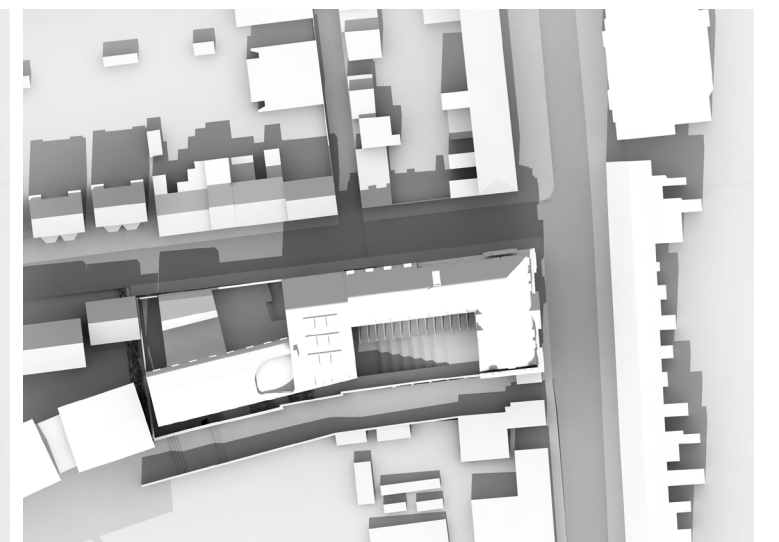
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June 21st - Proposed



1200 hours

September 21st - Existing



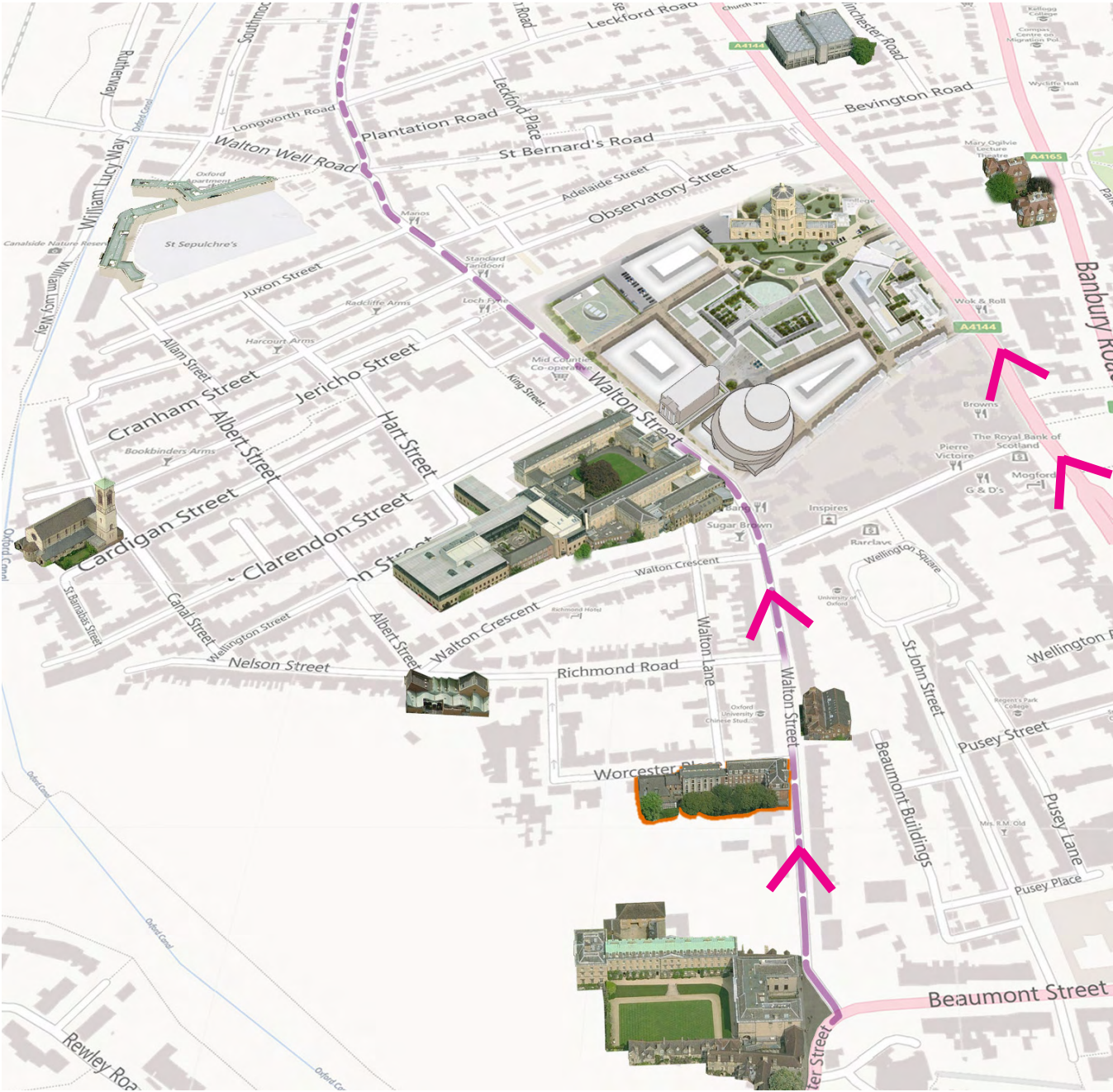
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September 21st - Proposed

3.5.7

The Future of Walton Street – R.O.Q

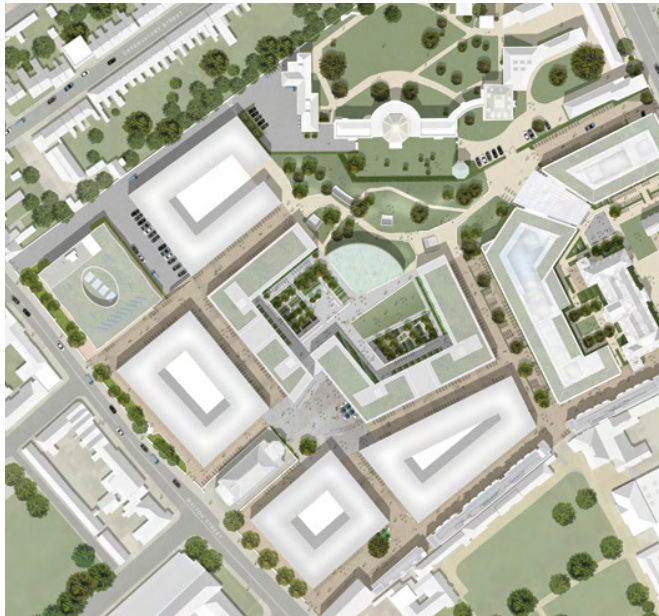
The character of Walton Street, presently relatively quiet, will change in the near future as the University's Radcliffe Observatory Quarter is gradually built. The ROQ will provide a vast new resource for teaching and research and Walton Street will become a far more significant route for students, teachers, researchers and university staff. From the street the radical shift in the University's centre of gravity will feel like a modification, a new layering of the urban structure.



Walton Street as Primary Route to ROQ



Approved Humanities Building and Library



Radcliffe Observatory Quarter masterplan



Proposed Blavatnik School of Government



Approved Mathematical Institute

3.6 Planning Context

3.6.1 Planning Context

This section seeks to provide a summary and explanation of the site's planning context at the national and local level.

3.6.2 Site-specific Designations

The entire site is located within the Central Conservation Area and in close proximity to the Jericho Conservation Area. The Ruskin College building is not statutorily listed, though it is identified as a building of local interest in the Local Plan. It is also currently being considered by English Heritage for inclusion on the National Heritage List for England. The Design Team have nonetheless elected to treat the building as though it were already listed, given its recognised heritage significance. To the south of the site, lie the listed buildings and Registered Park of Worcester College.

3.6.3 National Planning Policy Framework

Redevelopment of the former Ruskin College site, for use by Exeter College, is considered wholly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In particular, the scheme will adhere to the principles of sustainable development, seeking to deliver good quality design which makes a positive contribution to the surrounding area, whilst conserving significant aspects of the buildings heritage, in an appropriate manner.

By seeking to effectively re-use the previously developed site and significantly improving student and staff experiences, providing suitable access to modern rooms and facilities, the scheme will ensure the optimal long-term viable use of the site for higher-education and make a positive contribution towards expressing and preserving the buildings social significance as a higher-education institution.

All the time the Design Team will seek to progress plans through engagement with the local community, including neighbouring residents and key stakeholders, to ensure the proposals take account of the views of the community and follow to the NPPF's desire for active community engagement.

Overall, the proposed scheme will have positive economic, social and environmental effects; providing modern accommodation and facilities for Exeter College, which will attract high-calibre students to Oxford; improving the range of fully accessible spaces available to disabled students; positively contributing to an interpretation of the building's historic significance; and improving its environmental credentials through the production of a suitable sustainability strategy.

3.6.4 Oxford Core Strategy 2026

In principle, planning policy at the local level is supportive of the redevelopment of sites already in use for higher-education, increasing density whilst being respectful to the character and setting of Oxford's historic core (Policy CS29: The Universities). This scheme will seek to enhance the setting the building and contribute towards a positive expression of its social significance, whilst also ensuring that it is able to meet the modern demands of its students and staff.

The proposals will also seek to comply with Policy CS9: Energy and Natural Resources, minimising the buildings energy consumption and carbon emissions.

Finally, following the guidelines of CS18: Urban Design, Townscape Character and the Historic Environment, the proposals should ensure that there will be no damage to important historic features. A review of the scheme's visibility from designated viewpoints has been undertaken and has confirmed that there is no impact on long views of the historic city centre skyline. Further details are provided in the Townscape and Views section of this statement.

3.6.5 Sites and Housing Plan

The City Council's Sites and Housing Plan was adopted on the 18th February 2013. The Plan updates the Council's approach to housing and student accommodation development. Among these is Policy HP5- Location of Student Accommodation, which provides that new student accommodation should be located on or adjacent to an existing University or college academic site.

Policy HP6 sets out the circumstances whereby contributions towards affordable housing will be sought from student accommodation schemes. The proposed scheme meets the exception criteria and therefore the policy requirements do not apply.

3.6.6 Adopted Local Plan 2001-2016

As identified above, adopted Local Plan Policy DS.72: Ruskin College Site, Walton Street related directly to the site and sought development for uses related to the University, including teaching/research/university administration uses, and student accommodation. Although the policy has not been carried forward in the Sites and Housing Plan, it is considered that continued education and student accommodation use remains the most appropriate use for the site.

Other key policies of the Local Plan are summarised as follows:

Policy CP.1 – Development Proposals

- high standard of design, including landscape treatment, that respects the character and appearance of the area
- uses materials of a quality appropriate to the nature of the development, the site and its surroundings
- acceptable in respect of access, parking, traffic generation, pedestrian and cycle movements
- suitable access for members of the community with special access needs

Policy CP.6 – Efficient Use of Land and Density

"Planning permission will only be granted where development proposals make maximum and appropriate use of land."

- development proposals must make the best use of site capacity, in a manner compatible with both the site itself and the surrounding area
- built form and site layout suitable to the site's capacity

Policy CP.8 – Designing Development to Relate to its Context

"All new and extended buildings should relate to their setting to strengthen, enhance and protect local character."

- the siting, massing and design of proposed development creates an appropriate visual relationship with the form, grain, scale, materials and details of the surrounding area
- specific to site context, respecting, but not replicating, local characteristics
- should not rule out innovative design
- proposed development on sites with high public visibility enhances the style and perception of the area, particularly by retaining features which are important, and removes features which detract from, the character of the local area

Policy CP.13 – Accessibility

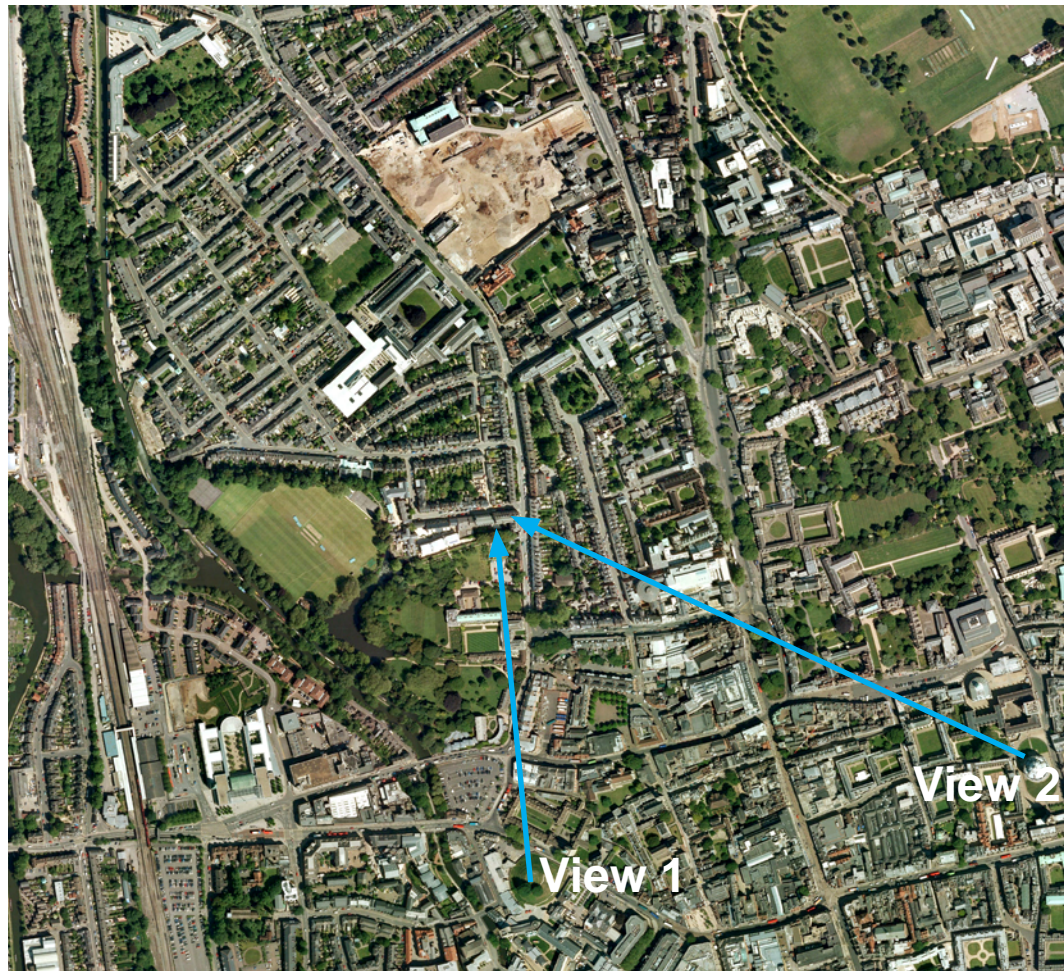
"The City Council will require proposals to ensure that the particular needs of different groups are incorporated into the design of new buildings, facilities and the layout of sites."

Policy HE.10 – View Cones of Oxford

“The City Council will seek to retain significant views both within Oxford and from outside.”

Policy HE.10 – View Cones of Oxford: seeks to protect important views within and from outside the city (the “view cones”) from development that would detract from them. Of the high points that are available to the public on a regular basis within the city centre, two have been identified for assessment in relation to the proposed development: the Castle Mound/St George's Tower and the Carfax Tower. They are significant monuments in Oxford and from the top of them a visitor has spectacular views over the city, albeit that when built, they were planned to provide strategic views for defensive reasons rather than as a pleasant place from which to view the City.

As the Castle Mound and St George's Tower provide a similar view, the assessment was made from the former only. As the images opposite show, the application site will not be seen in either view as it is screened by trees and other buildings. Therefore, the proposals will have no impact on mid-range views from within the City Centre.



Location of views



1. View from Castle Mound - Site Not Visible



2. View Carfax Tower - Site Not Visible

