



## OXTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

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Prepared for Wirral Council and The Oxtan Society  
by Donald Insall Associates Ltd

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THE OXTAN SOCIETY



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## **PREFACE**

### **1 Background to the Study**

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council and The Oxton Society. It expands upon the visual character assessment and boundary review previously carried out by DIA (*Oxton Conservation Area Assessment*, Draft, April 2006) for Wirral Council. The purpose of this report is to provide a full conservation area appraisal to inform a management plan, which is to be prepared by The Oxton Society. It is intended that both documents will be proposed for formal adoption by Wirral Council in due course.

### **2 Scope and Structure of the Study**

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage (*Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* and *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- Location and population
- Origins and development of the settlement
- Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- Archaeological significance
- Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- Character and relationship of spaces
- Prevalent and traditional building materials
- Local details
- Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as provision of Article 4 Directions.

### **3 The Planning Policy Context**

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were

considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

*"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".*

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality that should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Council has designated 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clarified by national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment and is supported by more recent Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13), which identifies as a key objective the need to ensure active management of the regions environmental and cultural assets.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Council's local Heritage Conservation policies contained within its Unitary Development Plan.

#### **4 Forthcoming LDF and replacement of PPG15 with PPS15**

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their regions to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over development. It does this in the following ways:

- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the

Council.

- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.
- Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.
- Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

The first step to protecting the inherent qualities of a Conservation Area is having a thorough understanding of its character and Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 advises that "the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it".

This should then underpin local policies for the areas protection. Such a definition requires a thorough appraisal of the area to assess the contribution of each element (e.g. buildings, boundaries, trees, surfaces, etc.) to the areas overall character. PPG15 notes that "the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded, the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions".

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.

In undertaking this conservation area appraisal, age has been estimated on the basis of visual inspections from public areas only, map evidence (c1755 Mainwaring Estate Map, 1840 Tithe map, OS maps from 1876, 1899, 1911, 1936 and the present) and the 2002 publication by Stephen J Roberts, A History of Wirral.

Many buildings have been altered considerably over time and would require detailed study to fully interpret. The dates provided in the gazetteer, unless otherwise stated, are approximate and relate to the original phase of construction or if that cannot be determined the most prominent parts. Unless clear documentary evidence is referred to, the periods ascribed to buildings should not be regarded as definitive. Where the original period of construction has been estimated, fabric from earlier periods may exist. This is particularly true of vernacular buildings in ancient settlements where building facades can have been successively remodelled and roofs changed, for example from thatch to slate. Date stones cannot always be relied upon as they could have been incorporated into substantial rebuilding or mark an important event such as a marriage or change of ownership.

## 5 Summary of Special Interest

The special interest of Oxton Conservation Area is not easy to distil as it contains a surprising degree of variety within a compact urban area. This is reflected later in this analysis by the use of smaller 'character zones' within the whole CA.

However the key elements of this special interest may be summarised as follows:

- Variety within a limited range of building development forms
- Sense of seclusion from the greater urban area of Birkenhead
- General high quality of buildings and structures
- Sense of enclosure provided by boundary walls etc
- Heavy tree canopy providing green-ness and a good air quality
- Generally small scale but unexpected large mature dwellings
- A rural remnant
- Pre-industrial origins and morphology of the village core
- High concentration of neo-Georgian buildings in the centre
- Openness towards the edges, but compactness in the middle
- A largely intact early – mid 19<sup>th</sup> C idyll
- Blue plaque for Sir Patrick Abercrombie, architect and planner



## **SECTION 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

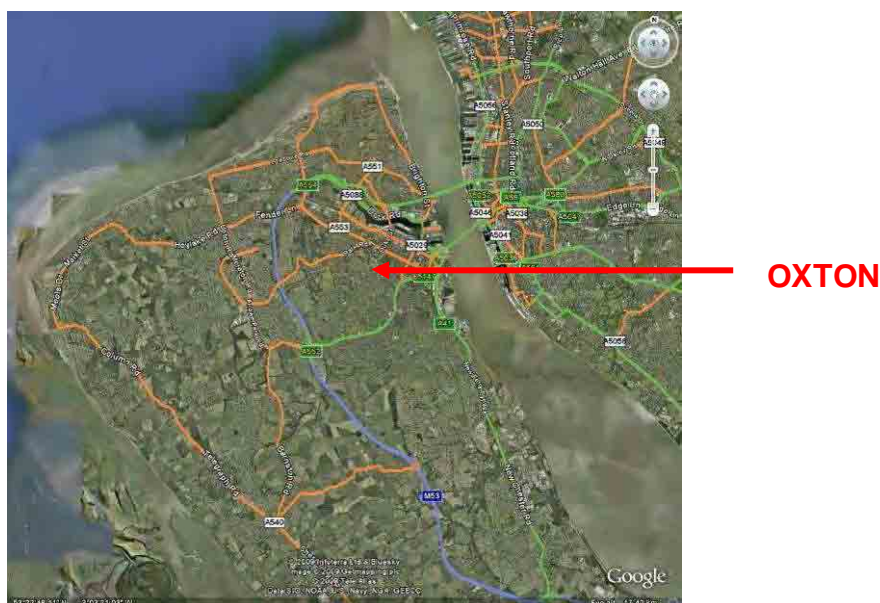
## 1.0 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

### 1.1 Geographic Location

Oxton Village lies on the north-eastern side of the Wirral peninsula, which is a roughly rectangular area of approximately 70 square miles lying between the River Dee and the River Mersey. It is situated approximately 1.5 miles (2.45km) inland on an elevated outcrop overlooking the Mersey

The settlement of Oxton Village pre-dates the large conurbation surrounding Birkenhead, of which it now forms part. It is bordered to the north by Claughton and to the south by Prenton. Birkenhead town centre lies to the east, along the banks of the Mersey.

Oxton originated as an agricultural community, but as nearby Birkenhead and Liverpool grew in importance as a port and centre of commerce during the 19th century, Oxton became established as a desirable location for the middle classes to reside.



### 1.2 Topography and Geology

The Wirral peninsula is a low lying undulating plain, interspersed with wooded sandstone ridges. The highest point at Poll Hill in Heswall is a little over 100m above sea level. The peninsula is formed of Keuper and Bunter sandstones and marls belonging to the Triassic formation, with a small area of Carboniferous sandstone near Neston. The sandstones are generally hidden under superficial glacial deposits of boulder clay.

The historic settlement of Oxton-hill lay on a sandstone ridge, the conservation area varying between approximately 40m and 75m above sea level. Historically, the higher levels would have afforded panoramic views of the Mersey. From within the conservation area, these views are now largely obscured by buildings as land below the ridge was developed for housing.

### 1.3 General Usage

The boundary of the conservation area is approximately 4.45km (2.76 miles) long, within which lies a combination of residential, commercial and public buildings. There is an assortment of residential properties, ranging from small terraced cottages to large villas in substantial grounds. Commercial properties are generally modest local retail outlets, cafés, and restaurants with a number of mid-C19th public houses. Community buildings include three churches, the Conservative Club and the Bowling Club.

### 1.4 Conservation Area Boundary and Statutory Designations

Oxton Village was designated as a conservation area in April 1979; its original boundary was extended in 1981, largely to include the Templemore / Glenmore Road Areas. Proposals for extending the boundary were considered in 2006 and are re-examined in the Conservation Area Management Plan. The extent of the enlarged Conservation Area is Shown as Map A in the Appendices

The current boundary falls broadly within the area bounded by Shrewsbury Road to the north, Fairview Road to the east, Arno Road to the south and Talbot Road to the west. The boundary is somewhat irregular in places, with a number of ‘pockets’ encompassing small groups of properties or parts of streets. The proposed amendments to the boundary in 2006 aimed to consolidate the area whilst ensuring the inclusion of only those properties that make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area.

To the north the current conservation area boundary runs along Shrewsbury Road from near its junction with Palm Hill towards its junction with Gerald Road.



*View west along Shrewsbury Road, looking into the conservation area from its boundary near Palm Hill*



*View east along Shrewsbury Road, looking into the conservation area from the junction with Gerald Road (D872 SHR-RD)*

The eastern boundary runs north to south from Christ Church to South Bank, incorporating some properties around Belfield Drive and Arno Road.



*View east looking out of conservation area towards south Liverpool from junction of Fairview Road, Bennets Hill, Normanston Road, Claughton Firs and Victoria Mount (D182 BEN-HL)*



*Salem View from the east/west, which is the southernmost point of the conservation area (Dxxx SAL-VW)*

To the south, the boundary is less clearly delineated and tends to include sections of a number of roads rather than complete streets.

The western boundary runs from Mount Olive in the south to St Saviour's church in the north, and again includes sections of roads rather than complete streets.



*View south along conservation area boundary adjoining Talbot Road (D881 TAL-RD)*



*View of Ingestre Road from the west at the conservation area boundary*

There are 35 listed buildings and structures within the current conservation area boundary. The majority are listed at Grade II, with the Church of St Saviour listed at Grade II\*.

- Alton Road – 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15
- Arno Road – 14
- Bidston Road – Oxton Hall Cottage, Church of St Saviour
- Christchurch Road – Christ Church; entrance gateway, garden wall and corner tower to No 32
- Fairview Road – 14, 16, 17, 20
- Rosemount – 16, 18, 39, 41
- South Bank – 3, 5, 7, 11, 13
- Shrewsbury Road – 30
- Village Road – 3, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24 and 39 (Holly Lodge)
- Willan Street – 2, 4
- Roslin Road - 2

There are other listed buildings in the immediate vicinity of the current conservation area, including:-

- 20 Talbot Road (Grade II),
- Trinity with Palm Grove United Reformed Church (Grade II)
- St Anselm's Junior School,
- Pillar Box, 23 Lorne Road at junction with Alton Road
- 37 Bidston Road
- 59 Shrewsbury Road
- 20 Talbot Road
- pillar box on Balls Rd E near the gallery

Map B in the Appendices identifies the location of listed buildings.

Only four trees in the conservation area are in the public realm and the significant tree cover is all within private gardens. Of these a significant number of trees within the conservation area boundary are protected by Tree Preservation Orders, in addition to the protection afforded by their being within a conservation area. Map E in the Appendices shows the contribution trees make to the street scene.

### 1.5 **General Character and Plan Form**

The general character of Oxton Village Conservation Area derives from its history as an early rural hamlet and subsequent expansion as a Victorian commuter settlement. The large, detached villas of the C19th business classes sit in generous plots, largely screened from the street. These are interspersed with areas of the more modest terraced housing and cottages built to house workers, and scattered remnants of the earlier agricultural buildings. The busy street scene in the present village centre includes a variety of small retail outlets, cafés, restaurants and public houses.

The conservation area has an unplanned pattern of streets deriving predominantly from former field boundaries and established tracks. The field pattern is irregular, in contrast to the more planned areas of housing surrounding it, particularly to the east. The village originated as a small settlement on a sandstone ridge at the north western boundary of the conservation area. The lack of a strong plan form suggests incremental piecemeal development. As the village expanded into the lower lying areas, small pockets of development occurred along existing tracks.

### 1.6 **Landscape Setting and Relationship with the Surrounding Area**

Although set within an urban context, the conservation area has a distinct village character. This derives from its lack of a strong planned urban form, in contrast to the areas immediately outside the conservation area. Particularly to the east, there are areas of terraced housing in a regular layout which mark the transition from the rural village of Oxton to the planned suburbs of Birkenhead. Extensive tree cover and sandstone walls further add to the rural feel of Oxton village.

The conservation area is bounded to the north by the residential area of Claughton. This was laid out in the late C19th and consisted of large semi-detached houses set back from the road in generous plots. These are in a fairly regular grid pattern between Oxton and the outskirts of Birkenhead Park conservation area to the north. Although a number of the villas have subsequently been lost and replaced with

modern housing, the area still retains a salubrious air with a number of independent schools.

One of the main through routes, Shrewsbury Road, passes through the northern section of the conservation area.

The busy Woodchurch Road and Bessborough Road run along the eastern fringes of the conservation area. They act as a marker for the transition between Oxton Village to the west and the suburbs of Birkenhead to the east. Here there are extensive areas of more modest terraced or semi-detached housing, in a regular layout, much of it built in the late C19th to house Birkenhead's ever-expanding workforce.



*View of terraced housing on Derwent Road immediately outside the conservation area, overlooking housing along Woodchurch Road and Bessborough Road*

The setting to the south of the conservation area is mainly C20th detached and semi-detached houses with small front and rear gardens, an area of allotments and some industrial units. This area represents development within former field boundaries and its extent is confined by the busy A552 dual carriageway to its south, beyond which lies the suburb of Prenton.

The Arno, a public open space, borders the conservation area to the south-west, beyond which lies a belt of open green space that sweeps around to the west. This area includes the grounds to the TA building and to a school.



*Housing along Storeton Close adjoining the southern boundary of the conservation area, viewed from The Arno*



*The setting of the conservation area to the south contains a public open space, part of which is situated in a former quarry*

## **2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

*Much of this chapter is based on John Green's "Oxton in History: A compilation outlining the events of two millennia" (2006) to whom due acknowledgement is made for his useful summary. Further sources of information are included in the Bibliography. John Green's full report is available on the Oxton Society's website and in Birkenhead Central Library.*

*An extended version of this account is included as Appendix B*

### **2.1 Prehistoric**

Although there is evidence of human occupation in Wirral since Mesolithic (1) times, particularly in the north, the earliest evidence of human activity at Oxton comes much later in the form of a Neolithic(2) polished stone axe. This was dug up in 1951 in the grounds of Westridge (off Ingestre Road). A metal axe, which was recovered from the sports field of Townfield Primary School, Noctorum Way, suggests the area may also have been occupied during the Bronze Age (3).

### **2.2 Pre Norman Conquest**

A hoard of coins found during quarrying in 1834 on Arno Hill suggests Roman occupation of the area in the third century. Whether this was an entirely new settlement or the continuation of an earlier prehistoric settlement is not known.

The name Oxton may be a contraction of the Viking 'Oxa' (ox) and 'ton' (a commonly used word to describe a town or village where a Viking took over an Anglo-Saxon place and called it after himself). More likely it is Anglo-Saxon in origin, from "Oxa tun", a farm or enclosure where oxen are kept.

### **2.3 Medieval**

The manor of Oxton does not appear in the Domesday Survey of 1086 but is believed to have been included in that of Eastham. Many of the manors recorded during the Domesday survey displayed the ancient pattern of isolated farms, hamlets and villages scattered over cultivable land. Oxton manor appears to have been one such example with a hamlet on Oxton Hill and some scattered dwellings on lower lands to the east of the sandstone ridge. Immediately following the Conquest Oxton was held by Robert, Baron of Montalt and Dapifer or Seneschal of the Earldom of Chester.

The Domville family of Brimstage appear to have held Oxton Manor until the C13th. Through subsequent marriages of female heirs, Oxton Manor was held by the Holes (or Hulses) of Raby, then the Troutbecks of Dunham and so to Sir John Talbot of

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<sup>1</sup> In Britain, generally 10,000 BC to 5,500 BC

<sup>2</sup> Around 4000 BC to 2000 BC

<sup>3</sup> Roughly 2200 to 750 BC



Albrighton (4). He conveyed it in 1521 along with several other Cheshire manors to his first cousin, George Talbot, the 4th Earl of Shrewsbury (5). (Direct male descendents of Sir John became the 9th Earl and 18th Earl, in 1619 and 1856 respectively.)

The years 1509 to 1547 were marked by a huge upheaval in the English way of life under Henry VIII, who changed the country's religion and introduced new forms of local and national government. The impact of these reforms was widely felt, particularly in settlements that had grown up around monasteries and Abbeys. Although Oxton had developed independently of the Priory at Birkenhead, when it was dissolved in 1536 the lands in Oxton may have been leased with other lands by Ralph Worsley, a member of the royal household (6). In 1545 Worsley purchased the Priory site and most of its lands in Cheshire for £568 11s. 6d.

## 2.4 **Post medieval**

Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries Oxton remained a rural settlement. The oldest extant building is Oxton Old Hall which was built in the early C17th. (7) It was formerly known as Oxton Hall Cottage.

Following the Enclosure Acts of 1750-1860 lands surrounding the settlement began to be divided into rectangular fields. Within the conservation area, smaller enclosures held a number of cottages and gardens. The boundaries of these enclosures remained substantially the same into the mid-19th century and some persist today. (8)

## 2.5 **From the 18th Century**

The hamlet was established on the sandstone ridge leading from Bidston and running towards Storeton. It stood at the junction of the present Bidston Road, Gerald Road, Village Road and Townfield Lane. These, together with Holm (then Home) Lane, appear on the 1795 Shrewsbury Estate plan and would have been little better than tracks.

The soil in the area was thin, light, gravelly and sandy, created by the disintegration of the underlying sandstone. Heathlands of furze, gorse and ling quickly developed, which were then left as common. The ridge, with its occasional rocky outcrops, was generously supplied with springs and wells and rushes abounded in areas that were wet and marshy.

The 300 acres of common noted in 1638 had reduced to about 192 by the time of Bainbridge's survey of the Shrewsbury Estate in 1795. Most of this was to the north west, with 54 acres to the south of the track leading down from the village to Woodside. (The Cheshire acre equalled two acres sixteen poles Statute measure).(9)

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<sup>4</sup> The title was created for a second time in the [Peerage of England](#) in 1442 when [John Talbot, 7th Baron Talbot](#), an English general in the [Hundred Years' War](#), was made Earl of Shrewsbury.

<sup>5</sup> Ormerod pp. 432-433, 527

<sup>6</sup> From: *Houses of Benedictine monks: The priory of Birkenhead*, A History of the County of Chester: Volume 3 (1980), pp. 128-132. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=39974&strquery=Birkenhead> Priory Date accessed: 22 July 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Some give the date as late as 1660

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>9</sup> Varley p.10



The 1795 plan shows little sign of building outside those clustered at the village nucleus apart from crofts and cottages on Oxton Common (near Thurston).<sup>(10)</sup> Comparison between the 1795 Estate Plan, the 1847 Tithe Map and the OS six-inch map (first edition, Cheshire sheet XIII, 1850/51) shows most of the development and in-filling to be on the Heath Hays area, in the area around Shrewsbury Park, along Bidston Road and between there and Claughton.<sup>(11)</sup> Oxton, with its nuclear village was gradually being extended down the hill towards Birkenhead.

## 2.6 Early 19th Century Development

By 1801, the population of the ward in which Oxton is located had grown to a population of 137 with 27 households, employed predominantly in agriculture. By comparison, Birkenhead's population at the time was only 110. <sup>(12)</sup>

Writing in 1819, Ormerod described Oxton in less than complimentary terms. It was *"mean and small, composed of wretched straggling huts, amongst impassable roads"* and *"a scene of solitude"*. William Williams Mortimer in 1821 described the area as *"dreary and desolate, presenting a scene of extreme misery and destitution"* with the inhabitants living in *"the most inferior"* cottages.

The impression is one of a small rural community working the land and keeping cattle in difficult conditions. There was not even a church, the parish church at that time being three miles walk along a track in Woodchurch.

This was to change dramatically though with the growth of Birkenhead, which resulted from the expansion of Liverpool as a major mercantile and commercial centre. The introduction of a steam boat ferry service from Birkenhead Ferry in 1820 and from Woodside Ferry in 1822 were to later have a profound effect on many towns and villages along the eastern shores of the Wirral.

Liverpool's expansion had its downsides. Living conditions were appalling, with the highest mortality rate in the country among inner city residents. By the early 1800s, it was no longer considered desirable for 'gentlemen' to reside at their place of work. Many wealthy businessmen began to seek refuge away from the squalor of the inner cities by building homes for themselves and their family away from the overcrowded centres of cities.

The small village of Oxton, with its views of the river, provided ample opportunity for ship-owners and merchants to build their retreats, from whence they could observe the arrival and departure of ships and cargoes. <sup>(13)</sup> The poor soil was not profitable for cultivation but the barren heathland especially around Thurstons and the area formerly known as Heath Hays appears to have been reclaimed and enclosed.<sup>(14)</sup> to provide well-drained ground for building upon. Between 1803 and 1854, the 15th, 16th and 17th Earls of Shrewsbury granted many leases for building plots, and this provided the impetus for rapid expansion of the village. <sup>(15)</sup> <sup>(16)</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p.13

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p.13

<sup>12</sup> Varley p.8, Robinson p.5

<sup>13</sup> Robinson p.7

<sup>14</sup> Varley p.11

<sup>15</sup> Morrison p.37

The availability of local stone meant buildings could be constructed at reasonable cost.

Oxton Village was served by a number of public houses including The Queen's Arms, which was run by Thomas Hughes (after whom Hughes Lane was named); The Shrewsbury Arms; The Arno Inn; and The Talbot Hotel. This building was in a key location, sweeping around the curve from Rose Mount to Claughton Firs and included four shops.

By the middle of the C19th, most of the land within Oxton had been enclosed. There was a concentration of dwellings and enclosed strips of land around the original settlement along Bidston Road (near St Saviour's). Other dwellings were concentrated in the east, around Victoria Mount, Fairview Road, Rose Mount and Arno Road. The majority of holdings were houses with gardens, outbuildings and land, although there were a number of smaller cottages with gardens, crofts, and individual plots of land.

The Oxton-Claughton boundary on the c1847 tithe map follows a line along Palm Hill and Claughton Hill to its junction with Ashburton Road and Shrewsbury Road. It is believed this may be quite near to the original, which was marked by boundary stones. The "Lyngedale" mentioned in the boundaries was probably the area bounded by Kingsmead Road South, Shrewsbury Road, Ashburton Road and Bidston Road.<sup>(17)</sup>

Prior to 1851, Oxton had been served by the parish church of Holy Cross in Woodchurch. It was some three miles distant from Oxton and accessed by Holm Lane or other field paths, which could be muddy and slippery. A township meeting was held at the Caernarfon Castle in 1844 (18) to discuss provision of a more local place of worship. A barn was converted so that services could be held and in 1848 the Earl of Shrewsbury conveyed a plot of land for the erection of the first Church of St Saviour, which was duly consecrated in 1851. (19)

The first parish hall, "St. Saviour's Institute", was housed in Rose Mount, in the building presently numbered 2b and now occupied by the businesses of Brimark and Coyles.

William Potter, a Liverpool businessman, funded the building of the first parish church of Claughton (Christ Church), which lies within Oxton ward and the conservation area. It was designed by William Jearrad (20) and erected between 1844-49 using red sandstone taken from the adjacent quarry at what is now Bessborough Road. Initially used by an evangelistic group, it was offered to the Church of England and consecrated in 1854. At the time it was built as a chapel to the parish church of St Oswalds, Bidston. It became the parish Church of Claughton when the new parish of Claughton was created from parts of four others in 1876 (21).

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<sup>16</sup> Cheshire Life Nov 1989 p.100

<sup>17</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p.23, Robinson p.80

<sup>20</sup> Robert William Jearrad (c1784-1861) of 260 Oxford St, London, a developer-architect and builder, most noted for his work on the Lansdowne Estate and other prominent buildings in Cheltenham (further details in Howard Colvin, 2006, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, Paul Mellon Centre)

<sup>21</sup> St. Saviour's p.14, Evans pp.1-2, Robinson p.78

Mortimer (22), in 1847, comments on the improved road network:

*Large sums of money have recently been expended in the making and improving of the public roads; one of them – a street called the Shrewsbury Road – is hardly exceeded by any in this part of the kingdom, being about two thousand yards in length, and twenty yards in width, bounded on both sides by land belonging to William Potter, Esq.” (23)*

The leasing of plots at modest rents meant incoming businessmen and professional classes could expend more money on building large homes suited to their needs. By the middle of the C19th Oxton had been transformed from a “dreary and desolate” agricultural community to a desirable commuter settlement. Writing of Oxton Hill in 1848 by Samuel Lewis observed that:

*Comparatively but a few years ago, it was a barren heath; it is now, to a great extent, covered with fine houses and villas, with gardens, fields, woods and pleasure-grounds, and is, in fact, a village of itself. The air in this elevated locality is extremely salubrious, and the prospect from almost any point uninterrupted and delightful, embracing a vast extent of land, and town and marine scenery.*

## 2.7 Mid to Late C19th

Oxton continued its growth into the second half of the C19th and the population expanded from 546 in 1841 to 4,579 by 1901. Despite this, Oxton retained a rural ambience into the 1850s and 1860s, surrounded by fields and countryside. With the advent of the Cheap Trains Act in 1883, the working classes followed their “masters” over the water to live. The manual workers tended to settle in Birkenhead, while the white-collar workers moved into the smaller houses in Oxton, such as in the Fairview Road area. (24) Sulley, writing in 1889, says “It is now a favourite place of residence, the houses being mostly of good class, though less pretentious

Thomas Helsby revised and enlarged Ormerod’s history and in 1882 commented on Ormerod’s earlier account of Oxton:

*“All this is now changed. Within a comparatively short period Oxton has been transformed almost into a town, principally consisting of moderate-sized villas. Building operations, however, being incomplete, the broken-up pastures scarcely add more attractive features to the scenery of the date of the above-written description. (34)*

Despite the expansion of nearby Birkenhead and Liverpool, Oxton survived as a leafy, spacious ‘village’ due in part to Oxton residents retaining control over their own affairs for as long as possible. Major landowners, such as the Early of Shrewsbury, retained a freehold interest in land by renting it rather than selling it. Leaseholders also exercised informal control of development by restricting industrial

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<sup>22</sup> Mortimer p.287

<sup>23</sup> Mortimer p.413

<sup>24</sup> Kavanagh p.6, Robinson p.8. Some railway companies, such as the Great Eastern Railway, actively sought working class passengers. The Trains Act passed by the Board of Trade in 1883 encouraged railway companies to provide cheap early morning and evening workmens’ fares, which also led to the establishment of new suburbs.

development.

By the dawn of the C20th century Oxton's population had increased from 137 to 4,579; however Birkenhead's population had grown exponentially.

## 2.8 20th and 21st Century Changes

By the dawn of the C20th, Oxton was at its peak as a fashionable residential area. However following World War I many of the larger houses were converted into flats and suites of rooms, and their owners moved out. (25) The Great Depression of 1929 to 1935 must have had an effect on building owners' abilities to maintain their large properties and gardens in good repair.

During World War II, 14 bombs are known to have dropped in the conservation area, by reason of its proximity to Merseyside docks. There were five air raids between 1940 and 1941 that damaged or destroyed buildings in Templemore Road, Gerald Road, Poplar Road, Bidston Road, Fairclough Lane, Rose Mount, Spring Villas, Arno Road, Bennetts Hill, Mount Pleasant and Woodchurch Road. There was also damage to properties in adjacent roads: Cloughton Firs, East Bank, Fairview Road, Village Road and Glenmore Road. (26)

Oxton's historic character had remained substantially intact but after World War II many of the larger houses fell into decay and eventually had to be demolished. Their sites were often redeveloped with new high-density housing. (27) Where villas were retained in use, the large gardens were sometimes sold off for housing development (28).

The 1960s saw a fundamental change that was to affect Oxton from thenceforth. The 21st Earl sold the remaining Shrewsbury estates in 1963 to a property company, reputedly as a result of his divorce from his first Countess. This prompted local residents to form the Oxton Leaseholders Association. (29)

The Oxton Society was founded in 1979 to combat development pressures, and the conservation area was designated in the same year. At present there are 64 Grade 2 listed buildings in Oxton, 35 within the Conservation Area and 29 without. (30)

## 2.9 Archaeology

The Merseyside Archaeological Service Historic Environment Record holds details of sites of interest relating to the historic environment of Oxton. The most significant finds include A Neolithic polished stone axe was dug up in 1951 by Mr JN Cartwright in the grounds of Westbridge, Oxton, Birkenhead. It is on loan to the Grosvenor Museum (accession number 53. P.56). was a Roman coin hoard found during quarrying in 1834 on Arno Hill of probably late 3rd century date.

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<sup>25</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>26</sup> A summary of war damage in the Conservation Area, containing detailed mapping of sites, has been published by John Green and is available for consultation in Birkenhead Central Library.

<sup>27</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>28</sup> Robinson cites an example where the demolition of four houses resulted in their replacement by nearly ninety houses or flats.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Pratt p.33

<sup>30</sup> Robinson p.11

As would be expected from a location so close to a major port, some of the archaeological evidence relates to World War II defences, which were surveyed as part of the Defence of Britain Project.

The lack of known finds should not be interpreted as a lack of potential

### **3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS**

#### **3.1 Character and Inter-Relationship of Spaces**

In general, the character of the conservation area can be described as a formerly rural village of medieval origins enclosed within an urban conurbation. It has a range of housing, including small cottages, semi-detached houses and larger detached houses. The public buildings include a sizeable church and former village school, and there is a range of shops and commercial premises. There is not a consistent character across the area due to the changing topography, and the age and density of the dwellings. However in general terms it may be described as small scale, primarily village like, rather enclosed (due to the walls and trees) and with a few exceptions rather quiet. Public spaces tend to be mainly streets and so are linear in character, opening up only at nodes and junctions.

A key feature of the conservation area is the strong presence of mature trees. Indeed, when approached from the south and east, the boundary of the area is virtually marked by the density of tree cover. These trees are on property frontages and in back gardens where they are evident on the skyline above the buildings.

#### **3.2 Views and Vistas**

The easternmost parts of Oxton Village Conservation Area lie below the ridge of Oxton hill. Long-range views into the conservation area are often obscured by the built-up nature of the approach roads.

Most of the views within the conservation area are short-range and may be better described as 'streetscapes' with limited focal points. There are good long range views out of the conservation areas from strategic points.

The key landmark buildings are Christ Church and St Saviour's Church, which are visible from a number of vantage points both inside and outside the conservation area.



*Glimpses of Christ Church tower can be obtained from many points eg from the CA boundary at Normanston's Road (left)*

Both churches stand on busy main roads, from which the body of each is visible.

### 3.3 Views into the Conservation Area



*View of conservation area from Birkenhead, with the spire of Christ Church (left) and St Saviour's tower (centre)*



*View east along Shrewsbury Road, looking into the conservation area from the junction with Gerald Road (D872 SHR-RD)*



*Christchurch Road provides a medium range view into village centre although there is no strong focal point at its end.*

### 3.4 Views out of the conservation area

The density of development within the conservation area often precludes views out to the surrounding landscape. However, glimpsed views can be obtained from a number of locations.

Views from the southern part of Farview Road indicate type of view from villas on S Hill Grove and Rich View. The creation of private not public views is *the raison d'être* for the location of these villas where they are.



*View out from Christchurch Road towards Liverpool, with St John's tower and the dome of the Town Hall*

*View east looking out of conservation area towards south Liverpool from junction of Fairview Road, Bennets Hill, Normanston Road, Claughton Firs and Victoria Mount (D182 BEN-HL)*

## **4.0 CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

The conservation area can be divided into a number of sub-zones, each of which has its own character. The inter-relationships and contrasts between these zones contribute to the character of the conservation area as a whole. A plan showing the division into zones is included as Map C in the Appendices.

Each zone within the Oxton Village Conservation Area has its own grain, which provides physical evidence of its historic development. The village initially grew up in the area around the present St Saviour's church, mainly along Bidston Road, although much of this is now lost. This was accompanied by a scattering of other dwellings towards the eastern part of the conservation area. As transport links improved the area began to develop as a suburb, with a concentration of villas in the east of the current conservation area and the emergence of the present village centre. Further infilling followed as the 19th century progressed and by the mid 20th century most of the land was developed. A phase of redevelopment and infilling of large gardens with intensification of development then began.

The highly irregular street pattern and topography have a strong influence, overlain by the size and shape of plots which reflect pre-existing field patterns. The status and date of the houses built within the plots also has a large bearing on grain, scale, repetition and diversity across the conservation area

### **4.1 ZONE A : VILLAGE RETAIL CENTRE**

In the north east of the conservation area, this zone comprises the commercial centre of the village with some early residential development. It has an urban character, with generally regular and terraced buildings following the C19th street pattern.

Buildings sit at the back of the pavement or are set back behind low brick or stone walls. The roads are fairly narrow, lined with buildings of two or three storeys, creating a strong sense of enclosure. Residential properties are generally of brick, with some stucco rendering and some stone masonry, beneath slate roofs. A good level of historic detail and character is present.

*Shops.* Commercial and former industrial premises are generally modest in size. A number of original shop fronts remain.

The centre of this zone has a slightly more open feel than the streets themselves, where a number of roads converge, a corner group of buildings has been replaced by a car park and there is a large vacant site.

Good views are available from elevated positions at the top of Palm Hill and Christchurch Road to other parts of the Conservation Area and beyond. The bowling green gives an open character towards the west of the zone.

Although there are no listed buildings in this zone, there is a good deal of surviving historic character. Modern infill development generally respects the scale and proportion of existing properties.



*Distinctive building on Palm Hill/Christchurch Road junction*



*Restored shopfronts on Christchurch Road*



*Although modified, terraced houses along Claughton Firs retain good rhythm and visual unity(left) and modern infill development respects the scale and character of the older buildings (right)*



*Date of major development:* The street pattern of the village centre was established by the time of the 1847 tithe map, along with one significant corner building present today. Most or all others present at that time are now lost. The area was further developed by 1876...

*Grain:* The village core has a dense and regular layout, following the 19th century street pattern, creating an urban feel. Plot widths are almost universally narrow. The regular building line is set at back of pavement or slightly back behind low brick or stone wall.

The confinement of the streets is broken to the east of the zone where the open space of the bowling green creates a spacious punctuation.

Some shops, such as those on Rose Mount, were created by building over original front gardens of residential properties, further narrowing the street and creating hard edge between public realm and built form.

*Scale:* The roads are rather narrow in relation to building height. Most buildings are two or three storey. Within Rose Mount and Christchurch Road the single storey shop fronts are all of similar overall size and the majority have large panes of glass with



some subdivision through the use of glazing bars and framing.

*Repetition:* There is a high degree of repetition in the zone with groups of similar buildings of similar age and sharing a common architectural language, generally in short terraces of originally identical buildings, of two and three storeys.

Materials and the size and proportion of openings are also repeated throughout this zone. Windows are of vertical proportion at ground and first floor. Where second floors exist the window proportion is squatter. Most buildings are red or brown brick with slate roofs.

As noted above in relation to scale, the shops are of similar height and width at ground floor giving a repeated rhythm to the retail streets.

*Diversity:* The main aspect of the area that brings diversity is the range of original and current functions. The main uses of the area now are retail, leisure and residential. Originally this was further varied by the presence of industry. The buildings continue to reflect their original functions in their design.

One building stands out from the norm within zone A, which is the Conservative Club on Village Road. Its language, form and status as a local landmark along with its setting adjacent to the bowling green sets it apart.

## 4.2 ZONE B: OXTON HILL

This extensive central zone encompasses a wide variety of residential housing and contains some of the earliest developments in Oxton. Together with Zone A, it formed the basis of the original conservation area designation in 1979.

The zone is characterized by its irregular street pattern of quiet roads lined with high rubble sandstone walls and generous tree cover mixed with unmade back lanes and paths, often with hedges. The buildings are almost exclusively high quality suburban villas, ranging in size from mansions to terraced cottages. This extensive interweaving of unmade roads and high residential quality in an early residential suburb is unusual in Merseyside. The steeply sloping topography of Oxton Hill is also a key aspect of this zone.

There is a wide variety of building types, set within an irregular road layout and plot sizes, indicating incremental piecemeal expansion rather than planned development.

Large elegant detached or semi-detached villas in generous plots are either sandstone or stucco rendered, and generally exhibit good historic character with interesting roofscapes and elaborate chimneys. The grander examples have predominantly classically inspired Regency detailing and proportions. These are found mainly on Mount Pleasant, Rose Mount, Poplar Road and South Hill Grove.



*41 Rose Mount*



*39 Rose Mount*

Substantial dwellings set back in large plots are concealed by a variety of dense mature vegetation, giving a sense of enclosure to the street scene. The irregular road layout and plot sizes indicate incremental piecemeal expansion rather than planned development.

Smaller villas, either detached, semi-detached or short terraces, with Regency detailing are found on Fairview Road, the north side of Arno Road to the east of Fairview Road, the southern part of Poplar Road and South Bank. Examples are found in brick, stone and stucco but the predominant roofing material is slate. Many of these villas, although often of individual design, share a common building line and are set at the highest point of their long narrow plots, so giving long front gardens or unusual back-to-front arrangements. Houses of similar character but more overtly Gothic detail are seen on Victoria Mount.

Smaller and denser residential development, such as at the northern end of Poplar Road, nearer the village centre is still set back from the road with front gardens behind lower walls and hedges along the boundary line.

In the far south of this zone is another area with a significant number of modest terraced houses of various dates. Hughes Lane comprises fairly modest dwellings of 19<sup>th</sup> century origin, including a row of brick terraced houses to the south side with some good original character. Newburns Lane has a similar 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace built into the steep slope to the south and sandstone cottages of earlier date to the north. A short terrace and four pairs of originally identical small semi-detached cottages form a group around Parrs Road and at Salem View is a further row of sandstone cottages.



*Hughes Lane*



*Newburns Lane*

Scattered across the zone are a small number of modest Victorian and Edwardian villas, such as those on Poplar Road, Arno Road, South Bank, Storeton Road and

Victoria Mount. These sit in their plots in a similar manner to the earlier housing with which they mingle.

There are several isolated small sandstone buildings, eg South Bank, which were part of the early Oxton settlement and contribute their own character to this zone. The motor repair premises at the bottom of Fairclough Lane on Village Road is a good example of an appropriate re-use of an earlier building and makes a positive contribution to the variety and interest of the area.

The dominance of roughly coursed sandstone boundary walls gives continuity of colour and texture, and many have original gateposts. A variety of wall copings are found, including crenellated, cock-and-hen, and triangular copings. Often the lower portion of the wall is formed from the sandstone bedrock, which projects from the ground on Oxton Hill. At South Hill Grove a serpentine rock cut driveway has been formed.

There are predominantly stone slab pavements and granite kerbstones, although cobbled or unsurfaced narrow back alleys and paths are notable in the area. There are examples of residual cobbled surface at junctions, with several early patterned cast iron drainage gratings, and cast iron drainage channels.

Alleys and paths give rise to pleasant views and vistas for pedestrians. The raised situation gives long vistas along some roads with good views towards other parts of the Conservation Area and beyond to Liverpool and the Wirral Peninsula.

This zone is generally a quiet residential area, with the exception of higher traffic volumes on main through routes such as Rose Mount and Storeton Road.

*Date of major development:* This zone has no single phase of development. It contains some of the earliest development in Oxton, predating the 1847 tithe map. It appears that there was a continuum of piecemeal development from the second quarter of the 19th century to first quarter of the 20th century. This was followed by a second, shorter period of infill and redevelopment, mainly in the third quarter of the 20th century.

*Grain:* There are two main patterns within Zone B: mansions in spacious grounds (also later flats in large grounds) and smaller houses, often terraced or closely spaced, in long narrow plots.

These two patterns are jumbled together as roughly rectangular plots laid out at right angles to irregular street pattern. Triangular and polygonal corner plots are not uncommon. There is a range of plot size from very large to tiny back yards. The road layout forms highly irregular urban blocks of varying size and shape.

Along with the two patterns of plot size (mansion in grounds and small houses in narrow plots), there are also two common patterns of relationship between buildings and the street. Throughout the zone development is typically either very close to the road or set very well back, nothing in between. Most of the mansions are set well back within their plot, although this is not universal. However smaller houses may be set either hard onto the street (as at the north side of South Bank, backing onto the south side of Arno Road west) or towards the rear of their plot well away from the road (as at Arno Road east). In many cases this was done in order to provide the principal rooms of the house with a view over sloping gardens.

*Scale:* Streets within the zone are either spacious and leafy, bounded by boundary walls and dominated by mature trees, or very narrow lanes. The lanes all have a sense of intimacy, but vary due to their edge treatment, alternating between spacious gardens and buildings hard up the road. Most of the streets are straight giving medium to long views within the area terminated by buildings or mature vegetation.

The majority of buildings are of two storeys with a few of the larger mansions rising to three storeys. Boundaries are generally formed of local sandstone walling, much of it above head height although in some areas, particularly along boundaries to smaller houses, low walls are found.

Many of the roads are asymmetrical in form, with contrasting scales and layouts of development on either side. The sloping topography of the area tends to exaggerate this characteristic.

*Repetition:* There is a high degree of repetition within clusters of buildings, such as the group of smaller Regency villas on Arno Road (east) or within the groups of mansions along South Hill Grove and Rich View. There is also repetition across the zone, where similar types of buildings appear in separate locations, for instance there are similarities between the smaller villas on Fairview Road, Arno Road (east), South Bank (north side) and the short terrace between Village Road and Willan Street. Both the larger mansions and smaller houses share a common architectural language (Regency or simplified classical). In particular window details and proportions are repeated throughout the zone in buildings of the early and mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The range of materials used in the older buildings is limited and brings another aspect of repetition. These include slate roofs of modest pitch, the use of render, brickwork that is predominantly reddish brown and local buff sand stone.

The use of local sandstone for boundary walls is also repeated throughout the zone. Mature trees in private gardens are also part of the street scene across the zone.

Nearly all the buildings within this zone are residential.

*Diversity:* The range of housing types, from large detached mansions through semi detached villas to terraced houses brings a degree of diversity within the parameters described above. There are very few buildings that are not in residential use. Those other uses that are present (a shop, one pub, a chapel and a car repair workshop) are mainly around the edges of the zone. A preparatory school occupies a large mansion within the heart of the zone.

Zone B contains a mix of historic buildings and modern infill. The older buildings typically use local materials while newer buildings mainly employ mass produced materials that are non regional in character.

The local hilly topography and irregular street plan lend further to this zone's diversity. No two streets are alike in their orientation, gradient or mix of houses. There are unexpected views out of the area while other streets are very contained. For the visitor it is difficult to navigate through the area due to the irregular street plan where main roads in the south and east run around the mass of Oxton Hill without cross routes and the number of small lanes which are dead ends.

#### 4.3 ZONE C: GLENMORE ROAD AND TEMPLEMORE ROAD

This residential zone in the west of the Conservation Area developed in the C20th. The buildings are predominantly two and three storey semi-detached houses, often in groups of uniform architectural style. They are typically laid out in a regular pattern along the full length of a road, giving cohesion to the streetscape.

Some of the housing is modest inter-war development, whilst in other areas there are larger semi-detached Edwardian houses. The Edwardian houses, mainly to the west of Kylemore Road, vary from some of extreme simplicity to highly ornamental in design, but are given coherence by the use of render or pebble dash, pressed red brick, casement windows, red plain tile roofs and similar floor to ceiling heights. Some of the corner houses are designed to act as local landmarks, for instance through the use of corner bay windows.

The interwar houses, mainly to the east of Kylemore Road and on Village Road, are typified by the use of dark brown wire cut bricks and casement windows.



*Glenmore Road – general view*



*Glenmore Road, typical house*

Houses are set back from the road with small front gardens behind low brick boundary walls, some with timber infill panels between brick piers. Other walls have terracotta copings and brick gateposts with terracotta ball finials, and well-kept privet hedges behind. The roads are wide in relation to the height of buildings, and vegetation is less profuse than in Zone B, giving a more open, peaceful and suburban character to this zone. Kylemore Road contains some good Arts and Crafts Edwardian houses not shown here.

*Date of major development:* At the time of the 1847 tithe map this area was open fields. The area was developed later than other parts of the Oxton Village Conservation Area and in a more orderly manner in two main phases. The appearance of the buildings the first phase, mainly to the west, was during the first few years of the 20th century with a second phase, mainly to the west, just before the Second World War.

*Grain:* The streets are laid out in a simple rectangular grid iron pattern forming urban blocks of regular and medium size. Plot sizes are similar throughout the area and the houses tend to follow a regular building line. The houses themselves are predominantly modest two storey semi detached houses, with occasional detached houses of similar size.

All the houses have modest front gardens set behind low walls, the spaces between them generally being just wide enough for a driveway (sometimes containing a later garage) or wide footpath to the rear garden.

These factors together contribute to a regular rhythm throughout this zone.

*Scale:* The roads are relatively wide, quiet suburban roads and the houses are mainly two storey, giving an open and generous but unmistakeably domestic proportion to the streets.

Boundary walls at the back of pavement are low, sometimes with timber infill panels between brick piers or backed by privet hedges. The very large mature trees found in other parts of the conservation area are not found in zone C.

*Repetition:* Houses displaying similar architectural features are grouped together and these groups typically extend the full length of a road between junctions, giving cohesion to the streetscape and uniformity of style.

A limited range of materials is found throughout the area. Render (or dash), some red brick, red tiled roofs and timber casement windows are employed on the Edwardian buildings. The interwar houses are all of a similar wire cut brown brick. Similarly low brick boundary walls, matching the material of the house, are found repeated throughout the zone.

*Diversity:* With two or three exceptions around the periphery of the zone all the houses are either Edwardian or inter-war. All the buildings are in domestic use. The zone is therefore broadly homogeneous.

The greatest area of diversity is found on the south side of Templemore Road, where the houses are less uniform in date and style, including some one-off buildings on the corner plots.



*Templemore Road, showing importance of tree cover in this street, but this is not typical of the zone generally.*



*Houses on Templemore Road (17-19)*

Greater diversity is gradually being introduced through the use of alternative designs and materials for replacement windows and roof materials.

#### **4.4 ZONE D: COLUMBIA ROAD, SHREWSBURY ROAD, VILLAGE ROAD AND ALTON ROAD:**

This zone sits on the north side of Oxton Hill and is characterised by substantial villas set back in large, regular plots along a generally consistent building line. High boundary walls of brick or sandstone, with some mature tree cover, partially screen buildings from the often busy roads.





*General view of Shrewsbury Road*



*Large house on Shrewsbury Road*

Shrewsbury Road is a wide principal thoroughfare with a high level of traffic, contrasting with the relative peace and tranquillity of other zones. The former villas are currently in a variety of commercial and residential uses, with a number of former front gardens now given over to car parking.

There is consistency of style and detailing within building groups, which are of mid to late C19th date. Some houses are Italianate in design, with classical detailing such as stone dressings for window surrounds, cornices, keystones, and balconies; others employ the mullioned windows, steeply pitched roofs, parapet gables and arched window heads of the Gothic Revival.

Towards the east end of Village Road are fine large stucco rendered villas. Of particular note is the villa on the junction with Columbia road, which is of three storeys with Regency detailing and arcaded portico. The buildings in Columbia Road are very good examples of 19th century villas with a high level of stone dressings and detailing. The north side of Shrewsbury Road has predominantly 2 and 3-storey villas of similar style comprising brick facades with projecting brick gables with stone dressings, some with classical stone pediments, projecting bays at ground floor, slate roofs and detailed chimney stacks.



*Listed houses on Alton Rd*



*View down Columbia Road*

To the west side of Alton Road are a group of three pairs of more modest villas which are listed. These have roughcast rendered walls with sash windows and some French windows to projecting bays, set in stone surrounds and stone dressings beneath slate roofs. This group are less Victorian and more Regency in character than those on Shrewsbury Road.

The Gothic influence is more prominent along the western part of Village Road, most particularly at Holly Lodge.

There are 13 listed buildings in this zone and a number of unlisted buildings that contribute positively to the character of the conservation area. However, there is also a fair amount of later C20th housing development, which generally does not preserve or enhance the area's character.

*Date of major development:* This area began to be developed a little later than Zone B but before Zone C, mainly in the later part of the 19th century. Two of the main roads within the zone, Shrewsbury Road and Columbia Road, do not even appear on the 1847 tithe map.

*Grain:* A broadly rectilinear street pattern forms street frontages and urban blocks of varying size but generally regular shape. The houses, mainly larger villas, are set back on a generally consistent building line in fairly large plots.

Most of the houses are large semi detached pairs of two or three storeys, giving an overall regularity of texture to the zone. This pattern is partially disrupted by two small infill developments of late 20th century houses planned in an informal layout (Telford and Jarrow Closes) and a few townhouses and bungalows around Kent Street and Alton Road.

*Scale:* The main streets of Shrewsbury Road, Alton Road, Columbia Road and Village Road are broad with the houses set well back behind low to medium height boundary walls and mature trees. The overall scale is large and generous.

More modern development is typically constructed on the sites of earlier, now demolished large villas. The houses are smaller, of one or of two low ceilinged storeys. These newer houses are more closely packed than the earlier phase of development. Mature trees and their location away from main road frontages screen many of these newer houses.

*Repetition:* Shrewsbury Road has predominantly 2 and 3-storey villas of similar style, interspersed with modern flats of similar scale. Columbia Road has villas of similar size and spacing, as does the south side of Village Road near the junction with Alton Road.

The villas on Alton Road are of smaller scale and closer spacing.

The range of materials seen in the historic buildings is limited. The Shrewsbury Road villas are mainly red/brown brick with stone dressings. Some of the dressings are painted. Other villas are rendered, and are typically painted light colours, as are the painted stone details. Most villas have low pitched roofs in welsh slate. Window proportions are vertical and the houses have a shared language of proportion based on simple Classical or Italianate precedent. A small number of houses have Gothic Revival detail, but share the same palette of materials.

*Diversity:* Shrewsbury road has a distinct identity with many repeated features. The character of this zone becomes more diverse away from Shrewsbury Road, with greater variety in the style and scale of the houses.

Uses in the zone are primarily residential, but one urban block in the middle of the zone is used by an NHS Trust for a variety of health services.



#### 4.5 **ZONE E - RATHMORE ROAD, TALBOT ROAD AND VILLAGE ROAD (WEST)**

This zone borders the western extremity of the Conservation Area and is dominated by St Saviours at the junction of Talbot Road and Gerald Road. This is one of the earliest concentrations of settlement within Oxton and forms a gateway to the Conservation Area.

The zone is similar in character to Zone B, both in terms of townscape and building type, but its location on the border of the conservation area gives it different characteristics that make it worthy of its own zone designation.

Roads are open, with buildings laid out irregularly behind tall sandstone walls and mature tree cover. The small size of the zone and the contrasting nature of the surrounding areas mean that it lacks the sense of coherence and enclosure of Zone B. There is a high volume of traffic along Bidston Road and Talbot Road.

There are however several significant buildings in this zone, of which two are listed. These are Old Oxton Hall (C17th) and St Saviour's church which is both a local landmark and is visible from far and wide due to its ridge top location. Oxton Hall, its former stables, Oxton Lawn Apartments and the former vicarage are all attractive stuccoed mansions.



*Oxton Old Hall and converted stable buildings off Talbot Road*

*Date of major development:* This zone coincides with some of the earliest development in Oxton. The 1847 tithe map shows a cluster of buildings on Bidston Road around the junctions with what are now Townfield Lane, Gerald Road and Village Road. A number of these buildings remain today but the majority, running north of the junction with Village Road, have been lost to later development of little interest and are outside the boundaries of the zone.

It appears from visual evidence compared with the tithe map that perhaps five buildings predate the 1840s. Most obviously early in date is the 17th century Oxton Old Hall. A small house on the corner of Bidston Road and Gerald Road would seem to be Georgian, while four larger villas (the former vicarage, Oxton Hall, ?? Wellington Road and the Lawns Apartments) would seem to be early 19th century in origin.

The other main building in the area, the church of St Saviours, is late 19th century.

The grounds around the former vicarage were developed with a small estate of houses around the turn of the 21st century. There is a single late 20th century house/ bungalow

on the corner of Rathmore and Village Roads.

*Grain:* The roads are typically wide and open, with mature trees in many of the gardens and grounds. Plot sizes around the historic buildings are generally large with buildings set well back from the boundary. Exceptions include the small house on the corner of Gerald Road, former stables on the corner of Village Road and off Talbot Road, which all have small yards and sit hard up against one boundary. Recent infill development has sub divided larger historic plots. There is an irregular layout of buildings, with no defined building line.



*New Housing in Duncote Close*

Continuous tall sandstone rubble wall borders most roads, some with dense mature tree cover behind but less of a sense of enclosure than in Zone B.

*Scale:* The wide streets give this zone a wide generous scale. A smaller domestic scale and greater intimacy are only found in the newer developments. Corresponding to this road layout are the four large villas or mansions in spacious grounds (one now subdivided?). The area is dominated by the large mass of St. Saviours which marks the junction between Talbot Road and Gerald Road.

*Repetition:* The four large villas share similar characteristics of scale, Regency architectural style and materials (painted render and slate roofs). Uniformity is also brought to the area through the tall sandstone boundary walls and large plot sizes.

*Diversity:* Other buildings in the area are strikingly different from each other in form, date, architectural idiom and materials. They range from modest vernacular to imposing ecclesiastical Gothic and employ variously rubble and dressed ashlar stone walling, red and buff stone, render and brick, shallow pitched roofs and steep tiled roofs .

Most of the buildings are in domestic use, some as single dwellings and others as flats. The church is the main non domestic use.

The location of this zone on the edge of the conservation area means that its setting, busy roads and anonymous 20th century suburbs to the west, contrasts with the quite and distinct character of the heart of the conservation area.

#### **4.6 ZONE F – CHRISTCHURCH ROAD**

Christchurch Road forms a buffer between neighbouring areas and the core of the

Conservation Area. It forms the eastern gateway, being an open road that gradually narrows and funnels the visitor towards the centre of the village. It is primarily a small collection of mid and late 19th century brick villas, but is visually dominated by the elegant mass of Christchurch itself and the castle folly facing across the road. There are spectacular views across the Mersey to Liverpool from the upper end of Christchurch Road and good views into the village centre from below.



*Large properties on Christchurch Road*

The zone comprises landmark and individual buildings but exhibits no particularly strong unifying architectural styles. It is dominated by the mass of Christchurch which provides a strong visual anchor. This imposing sandstone gothic building has strong verticality throughout and most especially in its slender tower and spire and is set close to the pavement. Due to the local topography the church sits below Oxton village centre but remains prominent in both near and distant views.

The north of Christchurch road is a four storey Victorian dwelling of red brick with contrasting blue and yellow brick detailing and gothic features including circular turret with castellations. This theme is continued with castellated boundary wall and castellated towers set in the grounds which add to the special interest of the area.

Other buildings are fairly substantial of red brick and the 19th century origin. They exhibit good original historic detail including contrasting brick detailing, stone dressings, slate roofs, some original sash windows and wrought iron balustrade with glazed canopies.

Christchurch Road is partially bordered by sandstone rubble walls, although there is no continuous building line. The area in front of the church, partially wide pavement and partially within the churchyard is the focal point of the area. It forms the approach to the church, dominated by the tower and spire and is enclosed by the three storey villas on raised plots to the south.

There are some large semi mature trees and garden planting, but vegetation is not a major component of this zone compared to zones B, D and E.

*Date of major development:* This small zone at the north east corner of the conservation area appears as open field and scrub in the 1847 tithe map. One small building present at this time no longer exists. The buildings seen today date from the mid to late 19th century, with a later phase of modest infill development in the closing years of the 20th century.

*Grain:* The zone is small and has an irregular street plan based on earlier field boundaries and set on a significant gradient. Two and three storey detached and semi-

detached pairs face the street from modest plots with small front gardens.

These cluster around the large church with its tall slender spire and the more open space of the church yard. The larger garden around the bonkers house can also be perceived beyond its castellated garden wall.

Well designed modern infill developments to the south of Christchurch Road behind earlier houses and within the garden of the bonkers house have increased the density of the area without impacting on the main street scene. These also serve to form a transition between the relative openness of Zone F and the more tightly packed pattern on Zone A.

*Scale:* Most buildings in the area are modest houses of two or three storeys, with conventional 19th century domestic detailing. These are in stark contrast to the monumentality of Christ Church, the castle folly and the four storey tower of the house behind it.

Views along Christchurch Road to the east reveal an expansive view towards Liverpool. Looking west up the hill the street scene becomes narrow and enclosed.

*Repetition:* Most of the 19th century houses share similar materials and details, such as red-brown brick, slate roofs and large paned timber sash windows.

*Diversity:* These broadly similar houses contrast with landmark and individual buildings such as the church, and the flamboyant house and its castellated boundary. There is no particularly strong unifying architectural style.

## **5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS**

### **5.1 Prominent styles**

The predominant building type within the Oxton Village Conservation Area are middle class dwellings of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century date, many of a type that could be categorised as “villas”. As such they illustrate aspects of suburban architecture during that period.

Prior to the development of Oxton as a suburb it was a relatively impoverished rural area. A small number of pre 19th century vernacular buildings are also present.

There is strong possibility that earlier pre-industrial buildings have been subsumed into later rebuilds in the Georgian period when materials were still scarce and valuable. No. 17 Fairview Road is an example of this, where a single bay pre-industrial stone building has been incorporated into a two bay rebuild. The origins of the building are visible to the rear where the faint outline of the gable is still visible, and by the thickness of the original external wall now in the interior. This and other examples of Georgian rebuilds are also apparent through a slight asymmetry in the main façade, with a further instance in the Borough at Corner House Farm in Raby village.

The majority of the villas, including a range of house sizes from substantial detached

mansions to modest cottages, semi detached and short terraces, show the diluted influence of Neo-Classicism and the later Italianate Revival (or Palazzo Style) on the work of provincial architects and speculative builders.

The public buildings are typically identifiable as late 19th-century Gothic and Queen Anne Revival. Oxton lacks the imposing classically styled bank buildings that characterise many suburban centres, which helps maintain its rural character. The influence of the Gothic Revival is also evident in some of the villas. In the earlier houses this is the rather whimsical application of medieval motifs to inherently classical forms, often referred to as “Gothick”. Later the free massing, steep roofs and polychromatic materials associated with High Victorian Gothic architecture became more influential. This can be seen in some houses and commercial buildings.

Early 20th century houses and those of the Interwar period show the influence of the overlapping Domestic Revival, Arts and Crafts and Garden Suburb Movements in their design and layout.

- 5.1.1 *Vernacular Buildings* are not defined primarily by date, but by their form of construction based on local tradition rather than imported architectural fashion. Buildings of this type in Oxton range in date from the 17th to the 19th century. They make use of the plentiful and easily quarried local sandstone. The roofs of the earliest vernacular buildings no longer have their original covering, which may have been thatch on a steep pitched roof. The later vernacular buildings may always have had Welsh slate roofs, bearing in mind the proximity of Wales to the Wirral peninsular and the fact that slate was traded in the region even prior to the advent of railways.

Just one high status vernacular building is found within the Conservation Area boundary; the 17th century Oxton Old Hall on Talbot Road. Oxton Old Hall is built of local buff sandstone, roughly squared and coursed, with small stone mullioned windows and parapets to the gable end with kneelers. Decoration is sparse, reflecting the poor quality of the stone, including a projecting course at the eaves. The roof pitch is steep. Now covered in ornamental clay tiles it may originally have been thatched.

Other, lower status vernacular buildings of later date also exist, such as the terrace of cottages on Newburns Lane, semi detached cottages (some badly altered) around Parrs Road and non domestic buildings such as that (now a car repair workshop) at the junction of Fairclough Lane and Village Road and former stable blocks now in residential use at Oxton Mews. The lower status buildings are typified by rubble masonry, sometimes brought to courses and with larger roughly squared quoins, small square window openings and no ornamentation. The roofs are low pitched with flush verges. These are covered in Welsh slate (or modern replacement interlocking concrete tiles).



*Vernacular buildings on Newburns Lane*



Some 19th century buildings of essentially vernacular design were given a more “polite” appearance through the application of render with expressed quoins or other architectural detail and the use of vertically sliding small paned sash windows. They differ from the next categories (Regency and Victorian) mainly in their more irregular layout and less elegant proportions.

- 5.1.2 *Regency Villas.* This category is used to describe the early 19th century houses that formed the first wave of suburban development. In strictly historic terms the Regency period only covers the years 1811 to 1820, but is often used to describe the late Georgian period from 1795 to 1837. Many Oxton buildings in this category are in fact early Victorian, some may be as late as 1850. In stylistic terms however they exhibit earlier characteristics, perhaps representing the timelag of architectural fashions between London and more distant regions.

These Regency villas fall into two types: large detached or occasionally semi detached houses or mansions; and more modest houses and cottages, some detached but mainly semi detached or terraced. Most are found to the south of the village centre with a smaller number to the west.

The mansions are usually located in substantial grounds, often on elevated sites enjoying fine views, such as those on Mount Pleasant, Rich View, Poplar Road, South Hill Grove and Talbot Road.



*Regency style terrace and villa on Village Road*



Smaller houses can be found in terraces close to the village centre on Claughton Firs, Village Road and Victoria Mount. Examples of semi detached villas can be seen on Arno Road (north side, east end), South Bank and Alton Road (west side). Small individual houses are scattered throughout the conservation area and include those at 2 Mount Pleasant, Cliff Cottage on Poplar Road and 14 Fairview Road.





*Poplar Road*



*14 Fairview Road (listed)*

Irrespective of their size all these houses are Regency in character. This period of the early 19th century continued many attributes of Georgian domestic architecture such as: small paned sash windows; taller windows (reflecting taller ceiling heights) on the principal floor with smaller windows on upper floors; regular fenestration patterns; symmetry; and classical ornamentation. These characteristics were augmented by details such as: overhanging eaves; low pitched gables (not pediments) of Italianate flavour; some round headed windows; delicate porches and verandas; occasional “Gothick” motifs; and departures from Georgian norms such as the use of marginal glazing bars. Their overall manner is delicate and playful.

While the majority of these houses and mansions derive their plan form from Classically inspired symmetrical Georgian precedents, there are a small number of houses that break away from this norm and are more free in their planning and massing. They exhibit a growing understanding of Medieval domestic architecture along with the influence of the “Cottage Ornee”. An example of this can be seen at Holly Lodge on Village Road.

Classical stucco buildings were designed essentially for a dry Mediterranean environment, and in the wetter climate of North West England require frequent and often expensive maintenance. Only a pure lime stucco and limewash / lime distemper inside and out should be used in order to maintain the buildings in a comfortable and damp-free condition; the proper maintenance of gutters and rainwater goods is especially critical in these buildings.



*Views of Holly Lodge, Village Road (listed)*

Some of the most modest villas are little different in form or construction from the local vernacular buildings, except in the care taken in the arrangement and

decoration of the main elevation. To the rear exposed rubble stone and small casement windows are frequently seen.

A particular characteristic feature of these houses in Oxton is their location within their plot. The majority are on long narrow plots with the house located towards the rear boundary (and usually at the highest point on the site) with long front gardens. In some cases the house backs onto the principal road, making the “front” of the house entirely private and hidden from public view. An example of this is the house at 1 South Bank which has its entrance in the “rear” elevation to Fairview Road

This orientation of the principal frontage to the garden and towards a view or open aspect is also a feature of the larger mansions. A series of large houses are ranged along the steep ridge above Hughes Land and Arno Road (west). Their elegant main elevations with large windows overlook sloping gardens and spectacular views. Visitors approaching the houses are presented with irregular rear elevations of outriggers and service accommodation.

- 5.1.3 *Victorian Villas.* As the 19th century progressed the architectural debate known as “the Battle of the Styles” emerged. Gothic architecture ceased to be regarded as a pattern book of ornaments applied primarily to domestic and ecclesiastical buildings. As the Gothic Revival it became a fully integrated architectural style to rival the Classical Revival that had, in one form or another, dominated British architecture for some 150 years. While leading architects debated the morality of architecture, for the majority of builders and provincial architects, eclecticism reigned.

Growing wealth, increasing numbers of new middle class households and the confidence associated with the Victorian age were all reflected in the growing suburbs. While there is no clear cut off point between Regency and Victorian design the middle and later 19th century are typified by a more robust approach to design and a range of materials made available by progress in manufacturing and transport. A development of great significance came in around 1840 with the introduction of large sheet glass. Windows no longer required numerous small panes, bringing a significant difference in the appearance of windows.

The range of houses size built in Oxton during the Victorian era is more restricted than in the earlier 19th century. The majority of houses are large semi detached villas, with only a few houses of the large mansion house or small cottage types. Their location also differs from the earlier phases of development. Most mid to late 19th century housing was built to the north and west of the village centre.

Examples include what appears to be a planned speculative development on Shrewsbury Road of brick and stone Italianate villas with low pitched slate roofs. Close by on Columbia Road are two Gothic Revival houses constructed in the same local red-brown brick with stone dressings and a steep slate roof. Despite the stylistic differences the scale and materials provide coherence among these buildings

Included in this category is the large institutional building in a domestic Gothic Revival style on the corner of Village Road and Alton Road, but originally accessed off Kent Street. This now forms part of an NHS complex. Contrasting with this are mansion like houses on Rathmore Road, which represent a continuum with the Regency mansions in the area, both in their style and materials.



- 5.1.4 *Victorian and Edwardian Terraced Houses.* The closing years of the 19th century saw an explosive growth in working class and lower middle class terraced housing in Birkenhead. This is reflected in the appearance of this type of housing within Oxton. These modest houses are found in two parts of the Conservation Area: the village centre, in particular on Claughton Firs, Palm Hill and Prices Lane; and to the south on Hughes Lane and Birch Road.

These are constructed primarily of local red-brown with pressed red brick and /or sandstone dressings, and low pitched slate roofs. Many of them are modest and very similar in appearance to terraced houses of the same date outside the conservation area. Some however are more distinctive, with well thought out detail influenced directly by contemporary architecture, such as polychromatic brickwork to pointed arch windows.

- 5.1.5 *Edwardian and Inter-War Suburbs.* As with other categories of housing in Oxton there is no clear delineation between the end of “Victorian” and the beginning of “Edwardian”. Strictly speaking the date of 1901 marks this point in time, but stylistically the closing years of the 19th century saw a softening of domestic architecture under the influence of the Vernacular Revival and Arts and Crafts Movement that had its culmination in the early years of the 20th century.

Similarly, there is a blurred edge between the most modest Edwardian semi and the better terraced houses of the same date. They were occupied by the same type of household, are often nearly identical in plan form, detail and materials but are distinguished only by plot size.

The unique mark of this group is that which became the ubiquitous suburb of the mid 20th century; regular streets of near identical semi detached houses. The streets around Glenmore Road and Templemore Road illustrate the emergence of this type. Mainly to the west of Kylemore Road are a range of Edwardian houses, predominantly rendered or pebble dashed and with casement windows, that are radically different from their Victorian predecessors and show clearly how the eclecticism of the 19th century ultimately gave birth to a new domestic style.

To the east and on Village Road are inter-war brick detached houses, distinguished by the common use of wirecut brown brick in striking contrast to the bricks found in earlier buildings. In these examples the Edwardian Arts and Crafts origins of this house type are more remote.

The adoption of this new suburban style can be seen in the flats at Oxton Court, between Rose Mount and Willan Street.

- 5.1.6 *Commercial and Industrial Buildings* within the Oxton Village Conservation Area are typically of late 19th century date. The shops have much in common with the Victorian domestic buildings and in some cases are in fact houses that have been converted to retail use. The industrial buildings use similar materials and details to the lower class terraced housing but on a larger scale.

Industrial buildings can be seen on Rose Mount, close to the village centre and on Prices Lane. Illustrate: 19th century industrial vernacular

Purpose built shops and commercial in the heart of the village include some good

three storey corner buildings. The finest of these forms the corner of Palm Hill and Village Road. It uses soft red brick and simple Classical details such as round headed ground floor window surrounds with architraves, scrolled brackets supporting small entablatures above the first floor windows and quoins executed in buff sandstone. On the opposite corner is a building of similar scale and form, but constructed in brown brick with polychromatic brick window heads and stone string courses.

The majority of the shops occupy two or three storey buildings of modest 19th century design, of soft brown brick under shallow slate roofs and with only minimal ornamentation. Others are converted from earlier houses where the small front gardens have been built over to form single storey shops.

A number of original shop fronts remain in the area demonstrating the eclectic use of architectural ornament and high degree of craftwork applied to 19th century shop windows.

5.1.7 *Churches and Civic Buildings.* Public buildings frequently employ the latest and most prestigious architectural styles and are more likely than domestic buildings to be the work of known architects. This is the case with Oxton's three public buildings; two of its churches and the Conservative Club on Village Road represent the latest architectural thinking for their date of construction. More detail is given in the following section (5.2) on the two main churches and their architects. Here a brief overview of their architectural style is given since they are the most prominent buildings within the conservation area

Christ Church dates from around 1844 and is in the "Early English" style which was much revived in the 19th century. "Early English" refers to the fact that this was the first style of Gothic architecture to emerge in England after the Norman period, from the late 12th century to the late 13th century. It is typified by the use of lancets (narrow pointed arches with little or no tracery, often grouped), vaulted stone roofs, buttresses with plain, steeply pitched gables, cusped arches to decorative arcades, circles enclosing trefoils/quatrefoils in the tracery, large rose windows, and decorative foliage to mouldings and capitals.

Many of these features were incorporated into Christ Church. The elevations to Beesborough Road and Christchurch Road are plain and elegant, almost austere, with their multiple lancet windows surmounted by a rose window at the top of each gable. The nave and transepts are of equal height and given nearly identical architectural treatment. The elevation seen looking east down Christchurch Road is spectacular, with its slender tower and broach spire seen to full effect.

St Saviours is rather later, dating from around 1889, and is in the "Decorated" style which flourished between the mid 13th and 14th centuries. This form of architecture was also popular in the 19th century Gothic Revival and is characterised by large pointed windows containing elaborate tracery, either forming geometric or flowing patterns. The wider arches of the style allowed more spacious interiors and the decoration was carried through into ever richer and more complex vaulting and elaboration of mouldings.

St Saviour's windows, in particular the large traceried west window, reflect its medieval inspiration. The church is more massive in its form than Christ Church,

with a large tall nave, modest aisles and transepts and a broad, square tower with corner pinnacles and stair turret.

Oxton's third church (Maitland Evangelical) off Storeton road is a modest brick interwar building, more reminiscent of a village hall.

The Conservative Club on Village Road bears the date 1897 and is in a Queen Anne or Dutch Revival style. Its principle features are its two elaborate gables onto Village Road and the cupola mounted on the main roof ridge. It employs the same brown brick as many of the domestic and commercial buildings in Oxton, with the addition of pressed red brick, moulded terracotta and carved stone detailing.

- 5.1.8 *Later 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development.* The later 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced two new forms of residential building to Oxton: the bungalow; and the block of flats. Both these types have long histories but were, on the whole, late arrivals in Oxton. Just one development of flats did occur in the area in the form of Oxton Court on Rose Mount in the 1930s. However from the 1960s onwards a number of sites were developed or redeveloped with flat roofed tall to medium rise blocks and a significance number of bungalows, some as one-off infill developments but others in large swathes

Further suburban housing developments took place, often infilling the sites of demolished mansions or their grounds. A number of modest town houses also appeared often with prominent front garages. The layouts of these small estates were often open plan with no fixed building line.

Most of these newer buildings used materials that were mass produced remote from the Wirral. These include wirecut bricks in a wide range of colours, concrete roof tiles and concrete hanging tiles. They also introduced new building forms such as prominent dormer roofs, chalet style houses, terraces with gables facing the street and staggered terraces. These, together with the new architectural language of Modernism, represent a dramatic change in domestic architecture following centuries of more gradual change, evolution and stylistic revival.

The closing years of the 20th century brought a sea change in attitudes to the historic environment. Some of the most recent infill developments, such as Nuns' Close off Mount Pleasant, town houses on Claughton Firs and the modern close of houses off Christchurch Road illustrate a move to contextual design and conscious revival of historic styles once more.

## 5.2 **Known architects and designers**

The two churches in Oxton Village Conservation Area are the buildings know to have been designed by known architects. Further research may bring to light the designers of other buildings in the area, such as the Conservative Club or some of the more substantial houses. Outside the boundaries of the conservation area are a few houses by known architects, (some of these are within areas that might be considered for extensions to the conservation area boundary, see Section 7.0).

St Saviours (listed grade II\*) was built between 1889 and 1892 to the designs of CW Harvey, and Pennington and Bridgen. It replaced an earlier church of 1886 which had become too small for the growing population. Within the church are examples

of work by a number of artists and architects, including a war memorial of 1920 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, a triptych by GF Bodley and windows by the firms of William Morris and Kempe.

Christ Church (listed grade II) was design by W Jearrad and built in 1844. The original Willis organ is believed to remain in the church along with a memorial and some glass of interest.

Edmund Kirby was a local resident architect who lived off Beresford Road and built a catholic chapel in his garden. See list of his buildings in Wikipedia. We think he may have designed some of the larger houses in the conservation area.

### 5.3 **Principal buildings and features**

There are a number of notable historic buildings within the conservation area, although not all of them are listed.

All the listed buildings contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area, either through their landmark status or as prime examples of typical buildings in the area. The listed buildings within the conservation area boundaries are set out in Section 1.4 above.

The contribution of all the buildings in the conservation area, listed and unlisted, to the character of the conservation area is illustrated by the Map F in an be seen that nearly every building dating from before the Second World War is considered to make either a crucial or positive contribution to the conservation area. The architectural styles of these buildings, along with a number of examples, have been described in Section 3.1 above.

Those making a crucial contribution are the listed buildings and those unlisted buildings that are important local landmarks or that have a particular townscape function. This includes those good quality buildings that enclose the street scene or terminate a view.

Those designated as making a positive contribution include all the historic buildings that retain all or most of their original character and appearance and/or which contribute to the street scene. These range from those that are virtually unaltered to others may have been subject to changes such as replacement doors and windows of different design, new roof materials, extensions and altered boundaries. Despite these changes, which are individually and cumulatively detrimental to their architectural and historic interest, they are buildings which currently retain sufficient of their original design and fabric to add to the special interest of the conservation area.

The small numbers of older buildings that are considered to be neutral are those that have been very badly altered to the extent that substantial restoration or reinstatement work would be needed for their historic character and appearance to be revealed.

A small number of later 20th century buildings are also considered to contribute positively to the area. These are those buildings that have taken cues in their materials, massing, form, layout and details from their immediate context.

It is not just buildings but other man made features, principally boundary walls and hard surfaces, which make a positive contribution to the area. Cumulatively the sandstone and brick boundary walls found throughout the area are crucial to the character and appearance of Oxton.

Trees make a significant contribution to many street scenes and to the skyline of the area. As these trees are almost exclusively deciduous they bring to the area important seasonal variety and changing interest. These trees also serve to provide screening or a visual diversion from some unattractive views.

There are also 4 zones outside the conservation area that have elements in common with those within the conservation area, and could justifiably be brought within the conservation area boundary. These are discussed elsewhere but include:

- Area 1: Normanston Road/Derwent Road
- Area 2: Birch Road
- Area 3: Village Road and Wellington Road
- Area 4: Talbot Road, Mill Hill and Ingestre Road

Building that detract from the character and appearance of the area are discussed below in Section 6.0.

#### 5.4 **Typical features and details**

*Windows:* Part of the character of a building is derived from the form of its windows. Differences in shape, style, materials and glazing can strongly influence the appeal and aesthetic qualities of a building. Detailing carried through a number of properties enhances the character of, and provides cohesion to, an area.

Regrettably a large number of historic windows have been replaced within the conservation area, although information as to their original form can be gleaned from the structural window openings that remain.

Fairly small, rectangular openings that are wider than they are tall were generally favoured in cottages of the 17th and early 18th centuries. These were subdivided with vertical mullions of stone or timber. They were covered with waxed linen to minimise draughts or, in wealthy households, filled with glazed casements. Such openings appear in Oxton Old Hall and in cottages along Newburns Lane.



*C17th sandstone 3-light ovolo moulded mullioned window, fitted with metal frames and leaded lights*



*Early C19th plain small square window opening with sandstone cill set immediately under eaves, with modern window fitted*

From the later 18th century, window openings became larger with the emphasis on the vertical, and there are numerous examples within the conservation area of this type of opening. The windows themselves were treated in different ways, from the delicate two pane sliding sash to the heavy mullions and transoms of the Gothic revival. One of the defining characteristics of the conservation area is the variety and liveliness of window treatments. From the simple, unadorned windows of early cottages to the lavish polychromy of the high gothic, window treatment increased in exuberance as the C19th progressed.

Within the conservation area, a great variety of window types can be seen. Although replacement uPVC windows are prevalent, they are generally fitted to the original window openings which show the development from the small, horizontal windows of the 17th century and early 18th century to the larger, vertical windows of the later 18th century and 19th century.



*Conventional 12-pane double-hung sliding sash window with fine glazing bars in rectangular opening, given additional character by recessed panel above and projecting cill band below*



*Modern bow window, probably replacing earlier 'flat' window set in crenellated bay structure.*



*Later C19th tripartite sash window set within heavy mullions beneath projecting segmental pediment on ornate brackets, in the style of a serliana*



*16 pane window having central inward-opening casements to lower portion and single-top hung casement to upper, with sandstone cill and lintel, set back beneath decorative brickwork panel beneath segmental brick arch*



*Double-hung sliding sash window with rectangular panes set horizontally and set back in moulded architrave*



*Simple two-pane double-hung sliding sash windows with horns set in full height canted bay with sandstone lintel and cill and contrasting brick quoins*



*Two-pane sliding sash with segmental brick and sandstone arched head over projecting sandstone cill band with 'dogtooth' and polychromatic detailing*



*Four pane sliding sash beneath pointed arch head with polychromatic brick and 'dogtooth' detailing, decorative string course and projecting cill band, an unusual window type within the context of Wirral*



*Typical margin-glazing double casement window – mainly late 19<sup>th</sup> C*

*Doors:* A common feature of many residential properties, particularly the larger villas, is that doorways are contained within porches, often enclosed and to the side elevation rather than the front. For this reason, many doors and door openings are not visible from the public realm.

From those that are, it is clear there is a rich variety of styles and designs within the conservation area, again with some elaborate treatments. More modest dwellings tend to have doors and door openings that are relatively plain and unornamented. Larger villas have a variety of treatments, from fancy balustrades and balconies to porticos. Although there is a variety of doors, there is often a uniformity of design within groups of buildings. Doors are traditionally of wood, although their replacement with uPVC alternatives is becoming increasingly prevalent. New housing in the CA invariably uses non-traditional materials???



*Late Victorian/ Edwardian 5 panel door with heavy mouldings and mathematical glazed panel over.*



*Shell porch canopy.*





*Early Victorian door with elegant tracery porch*



*Six panelled door to wrought iron traceried balcony*



*Mid 19<sup>th</sup> C classical portico with glazed screen*



*Late Georgian / Regency style door with elegant projecting porch canopy*



*Gothick style vertical boarded door with simple hood mould externally*



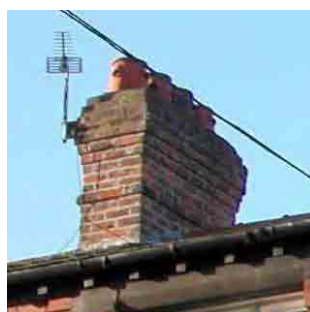
*Mid 19<sup>th</sup> C round headed door recessed into elevation*

A large number of doors have been replaced by more modern styles, either in white uPVC or painted wood. It is therefore difficult to determine the historic form of the doors that would have characterised the area in the past. A few houses have a small shell canopy over the doorway supported by decorative brackets, to afford some protection from the elements.

*Chimneys:* Most of the chimneys are of a plain, simple rectilinear design, although some have oversailing courses. They are generally built of brick (some rendered and painted) and surmounted with clay pots, but the style and colour of pots can vary within the same stack. Semi-detached dwellings typically share a central stack of up to eight flues, passing through the ridge, although the larger villa-style dwellings may also have additional gable stacks. Detached dwellings generally display more variety in both the form and positioning of chimneys, with some particularly striking examples.



*Small, simply detailed stone-built chimney stacks*



*Brick-built chimney stacks with oversailing courses and decorative brick detailing*



*More ornate chimney stacks on detached buildings, with an example of unusual pots (left)*

Tall brick chimney stacks are a predominant feature against the skyline along Claughton Firs and more elaborate chimneys appear in the Oxton Hill and Columbia Road areas.

*Roof details:* The diversity of roof details within the conservation adds variety to the roofscape and contributes positively to the character of the conservation area.

Older cottages, such as those on the north side of Newburns Lane, have shallow-pitched roofs of slate with small windows set immediately below the eaves line. There are some examples of stone copings to flush verges, but these are not a common feature of the conservation area. Within the core of the village centre, the key commercial buildings on corners also have fairly shallow-pitched roofs, reflecting their early origins

Many of the Italianate villas also have shallow-pitched roofs, consistent with their 'classical' style, but here roofscapes are more lively with parapets, pediments, overhanging eaves, hips, gables, ridge tiles and elaborate chimneys. The later C19th Tudor revival houses are noted for their more steeply pitched gables fronting the street, some with brattishing on the ridges.

Although slate is the traditional roofing material within the conservation area, a notable number of roofs have been replaced with tiles. These vary from 'pantile' style designs to plain square tiles, with varying success.

Similar ridge heights among groups of properties helps to give cohesion to the roofscape. This also allows public buildings, such as the churches, to punctuate and dominate the skyline.

*Date stones* are found on a number of buildings, although they are not a particular feature of the conservation area. Some clearly mark the date of, and are contemporary with, the building's construction. However, on dwellings, it was quite common for date stones to commemorate a rebuilding or an important event such as a marriage and so date stones should be considered in relation to other evidence of a building's construction.

The presence of external render, replacement roofs and the insertion of uPVC windows can obscure the legibility of a building. Occasionally there may be map evidence to suggest a property may have been built earlier than its date stone suggests and only an internal inspection might offer clues to the history of the building.

*Trees:* The extensive tree cover is a defining feature of the conservation area and contributes positively to its character. This aspect of the conservation area is considered in Section 5.6 on planting and green space below. A detailed survey of trees was undertaken by the Oxton Society during the summer of 2009.

*Boundaries:* Much of the character of Oxton Village Conservation Area derives from its boundary walls and other boundary features such as gates and gate posts. A detailed survey of the condition and survival of boundary walls has been undertaken by the Oxton Society during Spring 2009.

The results show that the majority of streets and thoroughfares within the area are

indeed bounded by some form of wall – either local sandstone masonry or brickwork. The large majority of these make a positive contribution to the character, with only comparatively short lengths (typically modern brick replacements) making ‘little or negative contribution’. Map D included in the Appendices (surveyed and prepared by Oxton Society) identifies the contributions of the walls.

The style and size of boundary wall generally reflects the type of property it encloses. Larger buildings, particularly villas, tend to have high random rubblestone walls topped with flat or profiled copings of dressed sandstone, which afford a good degree of privacy. Elsewhere there are examples of ‘cock and hen’ copings. Main gateways are marked with dressed sandstone piers. Other openings in these walls contain narrow doorways with lintels over. There are some examples of coursed rubblestone, particularly towards the centre of the village.

More modest houses generally have lower walls. Generally the earlier houses have stone walls while later ones have brick walls, although through the later parts of the 19th century both materials were used.

Along Shrewsbury Road, low brick walls with sandstone copings display a recessed panel detail, which also features elsewhere in the conservation area. The red brick walls to houses along Glenmore Road have moulded terracotta caps.

A large number of original gate piers survive, although in many cases the original gates have been lost. Similarly, there has been a loss of the iron railings that would have topped some of the lower walls.

Whilst there is a good survival of walls within the conservation area, during recent years there has been an increasing trend in some areas of removing front boundary walls and gardens to provide hard-standing for car-parking. Private driveways are surfaced with a variety of materials including pavements, stone slabs, gravel, concrete and tarmac. Whilst this adds variety to the character of the conservation area, the treatment is not always sympathetic to the character of the building. In many cases, vehicular access was not an original feature and many front gardens have been partially, if not wholly, lost to car-parking provision. This is damaging to the character and appearance of the conservation area and is deleterious to its historic form.



*Coursed and squared sandstone with rusticated entrance arch and large ‘mock Tudor’ door*



*Simple boarded gateway in random rubblestone wall*





*Low brick walls with recessed panel detail and a variety of coping stone*



*Typical pressed red and Cheshire brick walls topped with attractive hedges. A wide variety of gate piers can be seen throughout the conservation area.*



*Inappropriate panel fencing atop a brick wall and sandstone wall*



*Rubble sandstone walls are a defining feature of the conservation area, from the high walls with mature trees screening properties along Poplar Road to the low cottage garden walls along Newburns Lane*



*Low squared sandstone wall with copings demonstrating one method of retaining trees*



*Example of 'cock and hen' coping, which adds variety to the streetscape*



*Inappropriate brick infilling and 'crazy paving' retaining wall behind*



*A well-intentioned attempt at introducing iron railings and gates, sadly out of character with both the character of the conservation area and the style of the house.*

**Shopfronts:** Shopfronts are of a similar scale, and although several phases of replacement and alteration are evident the overriding appearance is coherent. Several shopfronts exhibit good early historic character, partly through restoration, particularly on Christchurch Road.



*Shopfronts on Christchurch Road*

Several shops have single-storey extensions at the front which extend to the pavement line, and although this has resulted in concealment of the earlier façade the development happened sufficiently long ago for it to be regarded as part of the area's historic form.

**Prevalent and traditional building materials:** Throughout the Conservation Area a varied palette of construction materials has been used and no single material is

particularly dominant. There are however groups of buildings that share a similar palette of materials, which varies between different zones within the conservation area.

The most common historic materials are:

- Hand made red-brown brickwork and pressed red brick
- Various render finishes, including stucco<sup>31</sup>, pebble dash or cement render
- Exposed rubble or roughly dressed sandstone, generally brought to courses
- Dressed sandstone detailing
- Welsh slate
- Plain red tiles and terracotta ridge tiles
- Painted timber vertical sliding sash windows, side hung casement windows and panelled front doors

Other materials found in some buildings that contribute to the conservation area are:

- 'Mock' timber framed upper storeys and dormers with rendered or painted stone/brick panels
- Wire-cut brown brick
- Moulded terracotta panels or moulded red brick detailing
- Cast and wrought ironwork to verandas

Modern materials that have been introduced in newer properties or as part of alteration to older properties include:

- Interlocking concrete tiles
- UPVC windows and doors
- Pale coloured machine made bricks
- Timber cladding, such as ship-lap boarding
- Tyrolean or other patterned render
- Mock leaded lights

The domestic properties are generally built of common brick or sandstone rubble, or a combination of both. Many dwellings are finished with stucco or painted cement render in generally light, neutral colours. Some later 19th and early 20th century houses have mock timber framing to gables.

The two main churches are of coursed and squared sandstone. The other main public building, the Conservative Club, is of brick with moulded terracotta detail.

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<sup>31</sup> The term "stucco" is used here to describe a type of exterior plaster applied as a two-or-three part coating directly onto masonry. Historic stucco is sometimes incorrectly viewed as a sacrificial coating, and consequently removed to reveal stone or brick that was never intended to be exposed. Even though it is a protective coating, it is particularly susceptible to water damage.

The smaller chapel on Storeton Road is of brick. All have Welsh slate roofs.

*Brick:* The brick used is generally common Cheshire brick of reddish brown colour, with some hard red pressed brick used for detailing such as around window and door openings or for plinths. Some terraces, both commercial buildings and houses in the village centre are entirely of red brick. The inter war semis in around Zone C are built from wire cut brown brick. Throughout the conservation area more recent infill development has employed a wide variety of machine made bricks, many of them unsympathetic to the area as a whole.

*Stucco and render:* Many of the earlier large villas, both the large mansions and smaller houses, employ stucco, sometimes combined with dressed stone detailing. In a number of the smaller houses a textured dash is used for the main wall in contrast with smooth finish to details such as quoins. Later semi-detached Edwardian houses have a painted render finish, sometimes combined with exposed brickwork to the ground floor. Some C18th and early C19th buildings have lost their stucco and now have their rubble construction exposed. Where appropriate, the lime stucco a case could be made for reinstatement.

*Sandstone:* The local sandstone is dressed as ashlar when used on the public buildings, but some domestic buildings are constructed of roughly coursed rubblestone. Dressed sandstone is used for detailing on larger properties such as C19th three-storey terraces and villas.

*Wood:* A few buildings within the conservation area have mock timber framing, which is used for decorative effect rather than being structural framing. These buildings tend to date from the later 19th century, when the Tudor revival in nearby Chester was in full swing. Many houses have painted timber cornices. Where historic doors and windows survive, they too are of painted timber, as are many shop fronts in the village centre.

*Slate:* Historically most roofs would have been of Welsh slate.

*Terracotta:* Terracotta details are found on some buildings within the conservation area, such as decorative panels on the Conservative Club, some houses on Victoria Mount and wall copings on Claughton Firs. It is not however a predominant feature of the area.

*Tiles:* Plain, flat red tiles are a feature of some Edwardian semi-detached houses, in contrast to the slate found on earlier buildings. It is possible that some of the earlier vernacular buildings, such as Oxton Old Hall with its steeply pitched roof may have originally been thatched, as elsewhere in Wirral. However, a number of both slate and tiled roofs have been replaced with inappropriate interlocking concrete tiles, which also feature on more recent buildings.

*Iron work:* There is relatively little historic ironwork in the conservation area. Railings were not a feature of historic boundary treatments in most parts of the Oxton. A small number of original porches and verandas do however employ cast or wrought iron. In some instances there could be a case for reinstating historic ironwork lost as part of the war effort.



## 5.5 The public realm

Oxton does not have any major public spaces, either in the form of parks or squares. The majority of the area is made up of residential roads, of various forms, where it is the combination of ground surface, boundaries to properties, planting and buildings that define the public realm. Of these it is the ground surface which is available to the public and, in most cases, the responsibility of the Local Authority. The buildings, planting and boundaries within the conservation area are described elsewhere. This section deals with those limited elements that are fully within the public realm.



*Simple black top road surfaces and flagged pavements with kerbs (both concrete and stone) make an unobtrusive foil for the trees and walls of the residential areas.*

The majority of streets have a pavement of stone or concrete flags, with stone or concrete kerbs on both sides of a conventional tarmac surfaced road. Street lights are generally of modern design and there is little street signage.

Some street names are mounted on stone walls, but increasingly these are being replaced with standard plastic or steel ones on short posts. Earlier signs are, in many cases in need of painting or other maintenance. These earlier street name signs contribute to the character of the area and should be retained in situ and maintained to their original standard.



*Contrasting street name plates.*

The conservation area is notable for its number of unmade lanes and paths. Crushed stone, ash and earth lanes are evident, often with remnants of an early cobbled surface visible beneath. These unmade lanes and paths contribute to a key aspect of Oxton's special interest; the survival of rural characteristics within what has evolved to become a suburban enclave.



*South Bank, where stone sets and rammed stone make an attractive surface.*



*Arno Road West of Fairview Road is unmade, but heavy use has led to the creation of potholes and some uncoordinated patch repairs*

By contrast in the village core, the public realm is more urban in character and is defined by ground surfaces and buildings, with planting and boundary treatments making little contribution. This is the case in particular Zone A but also parts of the adjoining Zones. The treatment of the ground surface and objects within the street such as signage, road markings and street furniture take on a greater significance. This village core area is also more heavily trafficked, both by pedestrians and vehicles, leading to greater complexity in the public realm, along with more wear and tear.



*Building and hard surfacing mark the public realm of the village centre*



*The requirements of road users and the need for frequent repairs impact on the visual quality of the roads and pavements*

As in other parts of the conservation area the roads are surfaced with black tarmac and the pavements are flagged, mainly in Yorkstone with granite kerbs. There remain several early patterned cast iron drainage gratings, cast iron drainage channels in the roads, and remnants of earlier road surfaces, especially at junctions. There seems to be a regrettable tendency to replace Yorkstone paving with tarmac for ease of maintenance and in connection with maintenance or improvement of sub-ground utilities. This process has a tendency progressively to reduce the character and quality of the urban street scene



*Highly attractive stone sets and slabs at a junction*

Attractive public benches of curved steel, modern but reminiscent of cast and wrought iron street furniture of the past, has been installed in the village centre on wider areas of pavement (initiated and part funded by the Oxton Society). Simple hardwood bollards have been installed at junctions to protect against vehicles mounting the kerb. However a number of these have been demolished and replaced with other designs set into concrete, leading to an untidy appearance.

The clutter of street signs (such as those associated with the one way system) and road markings (including standard with yellow lines) also detract from the visual quality of the environment.

The nearest that Oxton village has to a public space is the car park within the village centre. This was created through the demolition of a number of buildings that previously fronted onto Village Road, so revealing the backs of other buildings not intended for public view. A stone wall of medium height encloses the car park which also contains a few small to medium sized trees. It is well used and therefore dominated by vehicles but does not form a successful public space in visual terms.

## **5.6 Green spaces and planting**

Greenery and tree cover in Oxton are among of its defining features, and the variety within gardens bordering the public realm adds a rural and picturesque quality to the street scene. As only 4 trees are actually in the public realm this important defining feature of the conservation area is solely dependant on trees and planting that lie within private gardens. Thus the maintenance and development of this important feature of the conservation area is the responsibility of private owners.

The main area of public green space in Oxton, The Arno and Arno Fields, lies outside the conservation area.

The extent and impact of the greenery and green space is particularly well illustrated by the aerial photograph below, which shows the contrast with the more urbanised areas surrounding it. The setting of the conservation area on a ridge

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*Google Earth image showing the contrast between the greenery in the conservation area and surrounding areas*

The extent of tree and other vegetation cover is a defining feature of the conservation area and in many zones is crucial to its character. The Oxton Society, whose membership includes a number of tree specialists, has carried out a survey of the trees in the Conservation Area in the summer of 2009 and the main conclusions from their Interim Report (July 2009) are included below. Map indicating the streets where trees make a positive contribution to character is included in the Appendices.

1. Trees make a central contribution to the character of the Oxton Conservation Area.
2. Trees are important to the setting of the built environment, framing and complementing walls and buildings.
3. Many branches and tree crowns overhang pavements and roads lending a special character to those roads.
4. The preponderance of deciduous tree gives great seasonal variation in shape, density and colour to the street scenes and thus the character of the Area constantly changes.
5. As the Conservation Area is on the brow of a hill its extensive tree cover is a prominent feature seen from a distance. This is especially so in many views: (a) from Liverpool across the river; (b) from the west as seen from the M53 and as approached from Arrowe Park (A552) and (c) as approached from the south on the B5151 (the road from Clatterbridge).
6. From many directions the immediate approach to the Conservation Area is signalled by the presence of trees.
7. From within the Conservation Area many trees are not fully visible from the public domain. However, they are often visible between buildings and on the skyline above the buildings. These trees have an even greater



significance when the land is rising above the vantage point. This is especially noticeable within the Conservation Area from locations where the land rises to the highest point in the Conservation Area (at Prenton Prep School, Mount Pleasant). Views from Arno Road and Fairview Road illustrate this point.

8. The tree cover itself illustrates botanical diversity within the Area but also supports a wide diversity of insects, birds and other wild life. The continuity of the tree canopy in many places provides protected pathways for these animals. The character of the Area is enhanced by such biodiversity.
9. The quantity of tree cover makes a major contribution to air quality and the moderation of temperatures below them. Trees also provide significant windbreaks especially at the top of the ridge at the centre of the area. These functions are especially important when climate is forecast to be hotter and more turbulent.



*In much of the conservation area during the summer months the combination of mature (often native) trees and boundary walls defines the public realm. During the winter months the buildings take on greater prominence. The mature trees contribute to the secluded atmosphere, most especially in Zones B, D and E (Oxton Hill, Shrewsbury Road and St Saviour's areas).*



*Within the more urban village core of Zones A and F (Village Centre and Christchurch) vegetation plays a role in softening the urban framework of buildings.*



*The conservation area is characterised by a variety of planting, but in particular mature trees create a picturesque effect in keeping with the late Neo Classical style of many of the houses.*



*Tree cover helps to obscure modern housing developments and protect views out of the conservation area.*



*Manicured hedges above low brick walls afford some degree of privacy for those houses with smaller front gardens. Ornamental trees and hedges together contribute to the suburban character of some streets close to the village core (such as the north end of Poplar Road) and within Zone C.*

Many of the gardens, particularly to the more substantial and concealed villas, are hidden from public view. However, opportunities to view them are provided through the annual “Secret Garden of Oxton” event, which has been organised by The Oxton Society since 2000 and enjoys considerable support. The tantalizing presence of hidden gardens beyond high walls contributes to the area’s character, and contrasts sharply with the open plan lawns around some of the 20th century blocks of flats and cramped estates of modern houses squeezed into former gardens.

In most zones the houses fall into one of two patterns; either well set back from the pavement with substantial front gardens containing mature trees, or located very close to the boundary with little scope for planting. Zone C (Templemore, Kylemore and Glenmore Roads in particular) have a different pattern; modest front gardens typically hedged and with smaller ornamental trees.

The boundaries to most gardens are characterised by sandstone or brick walls, often with a profusion of plants and greenery behind. In some cases modern houses or flats have retained the original boundary treatment and planting pattern, so helping to provide coherence to the overall street scene.

## 6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS

### 6.1 Overview

A study of this nature cannot attempt to identify every element of the built environment that has a detrimental impact on the character or setting of the conservation area. Instead, this report summarises the most visually evident examples and identifies key issues to encourage an understanding and awareness of the challenges.

Map E included within the Appendices shows an assessment of the contribution of the buildings within the conservation area to its overall character.

A: (Red) Buildings that are **critical** to the character of the conservation area – typically these may be landmark buildings and those performing a key townscape function.

B: (Yellow) Buildings that make a **positive** contribution to the character of the conservation area – buildings with most of their original character retained and buildings that may have some alterations but their original character is still prominent

C: (Green) Buildings that have a **neutral** contribution to the character of the conservation area – they neither enhance nor detract from the character or appearance of the conservation area but might have potential for enhancement

D: (Blue) – Buildings where the extent of intrusion or damage is so great that their appearance detracts from the significance or special character of the area and their impact is **negative**

As each zone within the conservation area contributes its own character, so too it faces its own particular challenges and opportunities for enhancement. The extent of intrusion or damage varies and has occurred in different ways. Summarised below are the key aspects of the built environment in which the conservation area has suffered damage to its character.

### 6.2 Recent development

Much of the modern development within Oxton Village Conservation Area is constructed on the former site of now demolished large dwellings, or in the grounds of a large dwelling. Typically the new development is either an apartment block or estate in the case of the former, or a bungalow or small modern house in the case of the latter.

All these types of development result in an increase in density at odds with the spacious layout of the plots in the area. In some cases the original stone wall and vegetation has been retained and the new building is substantially concealed; in other cases the stone wall has been lost. Whilst the concealment of some of this new development, together with the irregular layout of the area, has helped to reduce the effect of new development on the character of the area, significant erosion of character has resulted in some places.

*Small estates* have been created in a number of locations during the course of the later 20th century and early years of the 21st century. They vary in their quality and degree

of impact on the conservation area. The conservation area boundary appears to have been drawn so as to exclude some such small housing developments, recognising their inherently alien character and appearance compared to the historic development of Oxton.

Telford Close, Jarrow Close, Nun Close, Duncote Close and the development off Christchurch Road are all examples of this type of development. Telford Close is fortunately well screened from general view by its location with the garden of a large mansion set back off Shrewsbury Road. The design of the houses, their materials and the layout of the estate are all in stark contrast to the prevailing form, grain, scale and architecture of Oxton. Jarrow Close itself is also hidden, but the houses fronting Village Road that form part of the development are highly visible within the village centre. In their materials and terraced form they reflect some aspects of the smaller Regency villas, but are under-scaled and poorly proportioned by comparison.

Nun Close takes the theme of the small Regency villa as its starting point, with more success than Jarrow Close. Here the houses have more in common with their predecessors and are largely screened behind a high stone wall. The development off Christchurch Road takes the modest terraced houses of the village centre as its starting point and again is well screened on a backland plot behind earlier houses. These two are moderately successful and can be considered as neutral or even marginally contributing to the area through their continuation of prevalent forms and materials.



*Recent development off Christchurch Road. Although the wide shared drive and open plan layout is not typical of Oxton, the modest terraced houses of brick and slate sit comfortably within the village core.*

*Duncote Close* although more recent is perhaps less successful. The houses are highly eclectic and elaborate in their detail, the estate is rather free in its layout, the houses are quite visible due to the lie of the land despite the presence of high walls and they deprive the former vicarage of its proper setting.



*This recent development in grounds of vicarage has attempted to incorporate historic styles. The choice of materials is generally appropriate but the details are fussy and incoherent.*

*Blocks of flats* have also been created in the area, often on the site of a former large house. Again they vary in their impact as a result of their siting, materials, form,



layout and boundary treatments. Ancillary features such as garages, access drives and car parking also have a major effect on the success or failure of these developments in terms of the conservation area. Examples of this type are Oxton Court, Rose Mount Park, Yewdale Park Roslin Court, Woodchurch Court, and the flats on Claughton Firs.

Oxton Court is the earliest example, dating from the interwar period. Set well back behind mature gardens the flats are in a Georgian Revival style. They sit at a transition point between the spacious Zone B of Oxton Hill and the denser Zone A of the Village Centre. Within its context it sufficiently retains the characteristic of Zone B to retain the areas overall character and appearance.

The 1960s and 70s were less successful in terms of flat developments. At Rose Mount Park and Roslin Park the flat roofed blocks are set in flat lawns with no strong boundary treatment. The materials and fenestration patterns are overtly Modernist in character. Similar in appearance are Woodchurch Court, Shrewsbury Road (S side). These three examples are quite damaging.



*Some 1970s flats on the site of a former villa on Rose Mount illustrates typical damaging aspects of this type of development: loss of boundary; manicured open plan gardens with few mature trees; alien materials and architectural idiom; increased density and greater built footprint.*

While similar in design to these, the flats in Yewdale Park benefit from a mature landscaped setting on ground that drops away from Poplar Road behind a high wall and large houses. As such its impact is largely neutralised.

The flats at Shrewsbury Road (N side) and Village Road move a little closer to contextual design in their massing and materials. At Village Road the prominent location makes the poor design particularly damaging while the Shrewsbury Road sits modestly within a line of villas. The most recent flats, in Claughton Firs, directly imitate the scale, form, materials and detail of adjacent 19th century town houses with a considerable degree of success.

Throughout the conservation area individual *bungalows* and *modern houses* have been slipped into cleared sites and large gardens. One or two development of this type may be mildly unfortunate but *en masse* this type of development causes a noticeable level of damage in some parts of the conservation area. The location, siting and boundary treatment have as much bearing on the impact of such developments as the individual design.

*Bungalows* are almost always incongruous features within Oxton, due to their single storey form, horizontal emphasis and, in most cases, contrasting materials and detail. Some examples are highly visible, due to a corner location, siting close to a boundary, lack of mature planting to create a screen or topography.



*At the junction of Village Road and Alton Road all that can be seen of this bungalow is its bright red roof. It fails to add positively to the townscape of this important junction and detracts from the prevalent characteristics of the area.*



*This bungalow on the site of a former villa on Victoria Mount is highly visible due to its elevated position and weak boundary treatment to the adjacent track.*

A large tract of development along north side of Arno Road to the west of Fairview Road comprises modern bungalows and houses. Fortunately the sandstone wall and mature trees has been retained and partly conceals the many of the bungalows and gives coherence to the street. Where new buildings are not screened the character of the area is undoubtedly compromised. Similarly the historic character towards the centre of Zone B is compromised by the modern development associated with the NHS Trust complex that has been established off Columbia Road. However, the single storey utilitarian buildings are fairly well screened by the high sandstone wall and mature trees that exist.



*NHS Health Trust buildings off Columbia Road*

Many of the individual houses and small groups of houses built in Oxton in the later half of the 20th century are of poor design, employing architectural fads of their time and failing to contribute to the architectural quality, grain, scale or other positive qualities of the area. Car related features such as projecting garages and extensive hard standing further detract from the traditional street scene of boundary walls and gardens. As with bungalows, the damaging effect of many post war 20th century houses can be worsened by their location.

### **6.3 Unsympathetic Alterations**

Although relatively few of the buildings within the conservation area are listed, most are historic in form and construction. Many of these have been altered and some of these changes are detrimental to the architectural character of the building. This then

adversely affects the quality and character of the area as a whole. Examples of such changes include:

- Replacement windows and doors of different materials, overall design and proportion and detail to the originals. For example replacing original sash windows with casements made of uPVC
- Replacement roof materials of different type, colour, texture and scale to the original, often associated also with altered materials and details in rainwater good, eaves and verge treatment. For example replacement of original slate or clay plain tiles with interlocking concrete tiles.
- The insertion of new, or alteration to existing, openings that affect the aesthetic appeal and proportions of a building
- Poor quality repairs, such as cement based pointing spreading over the face of stone or brick.
- Alterations to cladding materials for the main structural walls, for example rendering of stone or brick intended to be seen and the removal of render to expose underlying masonry not intended to be seen.
- Alterations to boundary treatments, such as the removal or replacement of sections of boundary wall, gates and railings
- The installation of unsuitable new gates and boundary treatments

Excessive areas of hard-standing in modern materials and basement level garages. Although window and roof replacement or alterations may be well intentioned, eg to improve thermal or acoustic performance or to reduce maintenance requirements, the visual effect can damage the authenticity of the building's original design.

Along with roofs, windows are the most commonly replaced elements in buildings. They are vulnerable to deterioration and changes in popular taste have influenced the loss of original windows in historic buildings. In today's regulatory framework, with increasingly stringent building regulations in force, building owners may consider it more economic to opt for off-the-shelf double glazed uPVC windows than to commission bespoke replacements in the spirit of the original.

The changing influence of fashion can be seen in examples of "cottagey" small paned windows not based on any genuine historic precedent.

In some cases an attempt has been made to emulate the form of original windows but with limited success. The framing elements of a modern, double-glazed uPVC window are by necessity much thicker and differently proportioned to the slim profiles of the originals, and can detract from the true character of the building. The reconfiguration of opening panes can also change the architectural character of a building.



*This pair of houses on Glenmore Road illustrate the impact of replacement windows and roof covering (right) as compared with the originals (left). Concrete tiles have a harsh stepped appearance. The decorative finial and subtle pattern of lapped ridge tiles have been lost. The replacement uPVC windows are flat and lacking in the attractive modelling of sashes with horns, cill and cornice detail and vertical rhythm of sash boxes.*

Several houses have suffered a loss of architectural detail through ill-informed repairs and 'modernisation'. For example, the inappropriate application of cement render has caused the loss of projecting terracotta cill and/or plinth bands.



*Sandstone house on Parr's Road with rendered façade and modern replacement windows*



*(left) Brick terrace on Claughton Firs where the application of painted render and insertion of horizontally proportioned small paned windows, along with vacancy and neglect has had a disastrous effect on the building.*

*Its neighbour (right) is in better condition but remodelling with modern uPVC windows and door and a rendered panel that partially covers the segmented brick window head, all detract from the original character of the building.*

As well as buildings, boundary walls have experienced alterations that detract from their character. Original openings in typically comprise narrow doorways with lintels over. More recent openings tend to be larger and interrupt the continuity of the wall. In some cases openings have been punched in the wall and poor quality garaging built behind



*An original narrow gateway contrasts with a more recent garage off Fairview Road*

In some places brick and sandstone boundary walls have been removed. New boundary treatments such as timber fencing are out of character. Loss of stone gateposts is an ongoing issue.



*Monotonous lapped timber fence on Shrewsbury Road in place of railings backed by garden planting*



*Poorly designed shopfronts, intrusive signage and gaudy colours on the corner of Christchurch Road and Claughton Firs undermine the historic townscape of the village centre.*

The character of older dwellings can be affected by the insertion of modern services installations. Unsympathetic rainwater goods or visible external pipework not only impact upon the simple aesthetics of a rural cottage but can also affect the structural integrity of the building if poorly managed.

#### 6.4 **Unsympathetic Extensions**

There are few recent extensions of any significant size to residential buildings within the conservation area. They tend to be small additions at the rear and do not impact upon the streetscape significantly. Many such extensions are generally well sited and do not confuse or detract from the simple form of the vernacular buildings.

There are however a number of isolated examples of poor quality extensions, which

detract from their immediate environment. These include houses on the south side of Arno Road (west) where unsympathetic alteration and extension at the “rear” has resulted in the disordered collection of components now fronting Arno Road.



*Houses on Arno Road where the main frontage is over their gardens to the south. Their working “rear” entrance elevations are vulnerable to utilitarian extensions such as this garage.*

Garages also create a visually unappealing street scene on Salem View, where they have been constructed at the end of long front gardens, significantly detracting from the appearance of the houses and their garden setting.

Some of the substantial villas have had their integrity compromised by inappropriate extension.

## 6.5 Condition, Loss and Development Pressures

The vast majority of buildings within the conservation areas are well maintained and occupied. Overall poor condition is not a threat to the character or appearance of the area.

However there are some buildings that appear underused or in poor condition. A number of upper floors above shops in the village centre appear to be unoccupied or perhaps used for storage. These upper floors appear neglected and some are becoming shabby. Lack of investment in the upper storeys, and most especially roofs and rain water goods, can be a substantial threat to the fabric of a building.

Degradation of the treescape it is often through neglect, or the result of unqualified and uninformed work on trees, or the planting of species inappropriate to the location. These single occurrences create an intrusion into the continuity of a treescape. Examples can be seen on Arno Road (west of Fairview Road), at Oxton Court, on Christchurch Road and on Alton Road. Where these events take place at a number of locations on a single street the quality of the whole street scene is compromised. Shrewsbury Road is an example where all three reasons for degradation are evident.

When trees with TPOs are legitimately felled there can be a stipulation for replanting of an appropriate species and of specified stature. However, many trees in the area do not individually merit TPO protection and when they are legitimately felled a gap is created. Thus the treescape suffers a progressive decline. Examples can be seen on Roslin Road, Claughton Firs, and Village Road.

A number of sandstone walls in the area are retaining walls, often with large trees behind them. Some of these are now leaning and cracking as a result of the pressure of earth and of trunk and root growth. Careful repair, and in some instances rebuilding, is important to retain the visual integrity of these walls and the contribution they make to the area while at the same time protecting the trees.



A small number of large houses, most especially in Zone D, and their grounds are poorly maintained. Some of these appear to be split into flats and one is in use as a club. Their shabby appearance detracts from the overall qualities of the area and continued neglect of the fabric may lead to damage, requiring high quality repairs if the building's historic character is to be retained.

The sense of village centre and enclosure has been lost at the junction between Cloughton Firs, Rose Mount and Village Road through removal of earlier buildings and replacement with a car park to the Oxton Arms (now Oxton Bar and Terrace).



*Loss of enclosure around car park at village centre*

At present there seems to be relatively little development pressure within the Oxton Village Conservation Area. However such pressure as exists seems to come from:

- Commercial pressures leading to inappropriate shop fronts and in the village centre.
- The desire of individual householders to extend their dwellings.
- The desire of individual householders and businesses to upgrade their buildings and reduce perceived maintenance costs using modern materials
- The desire to provide off street parking through paving over of front gardens
- Infilling of larger gardens with both small estates and individual dwellings.

## 6.6 Changes to Public Realm and Open Space

A notable change to the public realm that has had a detrimental impact on the character of the conservation area is the loss of a number of sandstone walls, both within and outside the conservation area.

Within the village centre:

- There is a lack of unification in style and material of street furniture.
- The signage associated with the one-way system towards the village centre is visually intrusive.

For its size and density, Oxton Village has a relative lack of open space available for communal use. The lack of green-ness is compensated for by the strong presence of tree cover throughout the area, but there are few places to sit and enjoy the village and its environment. The one major exception, which is towards the edge of Oxton is The Arno, a public open space partly on the site of a former quarry.

The one major exception, which is towards the edge of Oxton is The Arno, a public open space partly on the site of a former quarry. Although strictly outside the CA it provides a welcome sense of open-ness and views out of the area. It is important that the quality and character of the space is well maintained so that it can be available for use by all groups. A Friends of the Arno group has now been established and is campaigning for better maintenance and improvement to the open space.

## **6.7 Changes to the Setting of the Conservation Area**

Immediately outside the conservation area, the most significant developments that have impacted on its setting are the alterations along Talbot Road. Large houses have been removed and plots divided, or gardens have been built over. In other cases properties have been sub-divided into apartments. This has resulted in an erosion of quality, particularly at the northern end around St Saviour's church. It is a mark of the effect that CA designation has had that this type of development has not encroached into the village and so resulted in loss of character.

The overall effect of these developments is that the character of the formerly rural village is being gradually eroded.

Within the conservation area statutory regulations requires that all owners of trees give notice of their intention to do work on trees (including felling) this protection is not afforded to trees outside the area. This has had a detrimental affect on the setting of those parts of the area which are located on the area's boundaries, especially where the boundary runs along the centre of a road. Thus significant mature trees have been felled, without warning, on the west side of Rathmore Road, Rose Mount Close, and Palm Hill, before protective action could be taken. Had they been on the other side of the road they would have been subject to the requirement that advance notice be given. There is an opportunity to obviate this situation by placing protective TPOs on such trees.

Whilst conservation of the special character of Oxton Village has to be a major consideration, controlled and positive management of change will allow the area to continue to prosper whilst respecting its special architectural and historic interest. Any opportunity to preserve or enhance its character can be positively encouraged through examples, design guides and positive campaigning. The use of restrictive means such as Article 4 Direction orders should be limited to the more severely damaging and recurrent interventions.



## **SECTION 2 – CONSERVATION AREA RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **1.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOUNDARY AMENDMENTS**

- 1.1 The current boundary encompasses many of the older buildings in the village and its historic origins. It is fairly clearly defined by roads and ownership boundaries. However, it excludes the following key areas which are defined on Map F included within the Appendix:

- Area 1: Normanston Road/Derwent Road
- Area 2: Birch Road
- Area 3: Village Road and Wellington Road
- Area 4: Talbot Road, Mill Hill and Ingestre Road

Each of these areas, and its contribution to the character of the conservation area, is considered below.

### **1.1.1 STUDY AREA 1: NORMANSTON ROAD/DERWENT ROAD**

#### **Overview**

- A street of terraced housing close to the village commercial centre.

#### **Townscape**

- Two storey semi-detached terraced housing closely spaced in a continuous row set back a short way from the pavement and behind a low brick wall (railings missing).
- Narrow road and close proximity of buildings gives strong sense of enclosure and sense of urban street rather than suburban road.
- A strong axis is created along Normanston Road and Fairview Road. A significant view is available from the junction looking along Normanston Road to the stone faced building at the end and particularly focussing on the spire of Christ Church beyond (which is within the Conservation Area.)

#### **Architecture and Materials**

- Buildings are of uniform but different style to the east and west sides of the street. Housing to the west side comprises red brick with sandstone dressings, with distinctive projecting circular bays at ground and first floor level beneath a slate roof with brick dentils at eaves. 2- storey housing to the east side comprises red brick with projecting bays beneath gables and a slate roof.
- A strong sense of visual cohesion is displayed on both sides of the street. Original brick facades remain visible and have not been rendered, which enhances the rhythm of the streetscape.
- A semi-detached house of interest terminates the view at the end of Normanston Road; it is similar in scale to other buildings in the street but has

- a dressed stone façade.
- The north side of Derwent Road comprises houses similar to those on the east side of Normanston Road.



*Housing to the west side of Normanston Road*



*Housing to the east side of Normanston Road, view of spire of Christ Church in distance.*

### **Negative factors and opportunities for enhancement**

- Few houses retain their original windows and doors, many having been replaced with inappropriate PVC items.
- Many of the original slate roofs have been replaced with inappropriate slate tiles and the original ridge tiles have been lost, as have barge boards and finials.
- Some of the stone dressings have been painted.
- Original railings are missing.
- Although in most cases the original stone gateposts remain several of the original gates are missing.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

- The scale and materials of the buildings display similar characteristics to those buildings found in Zone A. The character of the streetscape, although very uniform, is similar to the character of neighbouring Claughton Firs.
- The houses with the circular bays to the west side of the street, whilst not unique in the Merseyside area, are nevertheless distinctive and architecturally interesting.
- Similar houses to those on the east side of the street and down Derwent Road can be found throughout Birkenhead.
- The view along Normanston Road from the junction with Fairview Road to the church spire is a key view and part of the character of the area. The view is available as Fairview Road descends towards the junction. For this reason inclusion of Normanston Road within the Conservation Area is justified. Both sides of the street should be included because both frame the view. However there is less justification for inclusion of the houses down Derwent Road. There is the need to include the two houses (22/24) at the top of Derwent Road which close off the view down Normanston Road.

## **1.1.2 STUDY AREA 2: BIRCH ROAD**

### **Overview**

- Situated to the south of the current Conservation area boundary, this

residential area was developed predominantly at the turn of the twentieth century.

### **Townscape**

- Wide, tranquil suburban road.
- Privet hedges along boundary lines are a strong characteristic of the area, as is some mature tree cover.
- Sandstone boundary walls with vegetation behind are evident towards the upper south end of the road.
- Houses to the north side are set well back from the road behind hedges with long front gardens.
- Houses of uniform architectural style and period are grouped together creating unity of appearance.

### **Architecture and Materials**

- The south side of Birch Road at the upper end comprises a uniform group of semi-detached red brick houses of distinctive character comprising red brick facades, bay windows with projecting slate roof canopy spanning across the front doors, and slate roofs. Windows have dressed sandstone lintels and cills and several of the houses retain their original sash windows.
- The sandstone boundary wall is relatively intact and continuous.
- The north side consists predominantly of substantial slightly later Edwardian housing of uniform style comprising red brick facades at ground floor with roughcast render above, projecting bays at ground floor with cornice and projecting bays over with decorative barge boards and finials, beneath slate roofs with decorative red clay ridge tiles. The detail of the houses at the lower end of Birch Road is similar but simpler.
- Two similar Edwardian semis exist nearby on Fairview road – these are more substantial and highly decorated and generally retain good original historic character.
- Set between modern developments the house with some early character on the corner of Arno Road / Parr's Road is an important anchor to the study area.
- A collection of nineteenth century brick buildings mid way along the south side of Birch road form a u-shaped courtyard and appear of agricultural origin.



*Housing to the south side of Birch Road displaying good historic character*



*Edwardian housing to the north side of Birch Road*



*House on Fairview Road*



*House on corner of Arno Road/Parr's Lane  
(Roseneath)*

### **Negative factors and opportunities for enhancement**

- Three modern semis at west end out of character with earlier adjacent housing; however they are sufficiently outnumbered by the earlier housing not to have a dominating effect on the character of the area.
- The modern detached houses along Fairview Road are out of character with earlier adjacent housing; however, because they are set back from the road behind a hedge and mature trees they do not appear to detract significantly from the character of the area.
- The boundary hedge marking the boundary to properties on the north side has suffered some punctuation to allow vehicle entry.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

- The character of the buildings is consistent with some of the buildings found in Zone B. Similar Edwardian houses can be found along Poplar Road, and terraced housing with similar architectural detailing can be found on Oxton Hill.
- The positioning of buildings within the plots and the vegetation is typical of the character of other areas within the existing Conservation Area.
- Housing along Birch Road borders the existing boundary and exhibits sufficient character to be included. Its inclusion is a straightforward expansion of the Conservation Area and is recommended.
- The modern development does not have a significant impact on the character of the area, and is similar to other recent development along Arno Road already within the existing boundary. Therefore its inclusion is recommended in preference to an island within the area.

## **1.1.3 STUDY AREA 3: VILLAGE ROAD AND WELLINGTON ROAD**

### **Overview**

- A small pocket of housing off Village Road and Wellington Road, bordering the existing Conservation Area boundary.

### **Townscape**

- Village Road is lined on either side with a sandstone wall with vegetation and trees behind, as is the west side of Wellington Road, giving a suburban feel.
- The junction between Village Road and Wellington Road creates a focal point on the corner, with views which contribute to the character of the area

in both directions.



*The north side of Village Road*



*The west side of Wellington Road*



*View up both Village Road and Wellington Road at junction*

### **Architecture and materials**

- The houses to the north side of Village Road exhibit strong character comprising red brick facades with contrasting red brick detailing, sandstone lintels and red tile roofs. Housing of similar materials and similar detailing exists in the same block, bordered by Wellington Road and Gerald Road. This block retains its original late 19th century layout and buildings.
- There are two four-storey Victorian semi-detached Villas along Wellington Road with facades finished in glazed yellow brick and Italianate characteristics to the composition. The buildings are fine examples of their type and contribute to the special interest of the area.



*Victorian Villa on Wellington Road*

### Negative factors and opportunities for enhancement

- The modern housing estate fronting Rathmore Road does not fit with the grain and character of the existing Conservation Area. The entrance to the estate is splayed and the houses are orientated towards the entrance, making them fully visible from Rathmore Road. The estate detracts from the character of the Conservation Area.
- Basements to some houses in Village Road have been made into garages which have a negative effect on the character of the building and should be discouraged, although the alterations have been carried out with some sympathy.
- The continuity of the sandstone wall along Wellington Road deteriorates towards the edge of the study area. Boundary walls have been interrupted to allow off-road car-parking.
- The glazed yellow brick to one half of the end villa on Wellington Road has been rendered. Other alterations to the houses elsewhere in the study area have eroded the original character of the buildings to varying degrees, including replacement windows of inappropriate design, replacement concrete tile roof coverings and PVC cladding below eaves level.
- The area immediately to the west has buildings totally out of scale and character to those within the study area and is visually intrusive.



*Modern housing estate fronting Rathmore Road*



*Basement converted to garage on Village Road*

### Conclusions and Recommendations

- The view along Village Road is part of the character of the Conservation Area.
- The houses and their setting on the north side of Village Road are of sufficient character to warrant inclusion in a revised boundary. Although similar to other buildings throughout Merseyside, inclusion of the similar buildings along Wellington Road and Gerald Road protects the group value of the complete block.
- Extension of the boundary along Wellington Road protects the immediate setting and views to the east of St Saviour's.
- There is insufficient justification for the inclusion of the modern housing estate fronting Rathmore Road. Its exclusion need not create an island within the revised boundary.



#### 1.1.4 STUDY AREA 4: TALBOT ROAD, MILL HILL AND INGESTRE ROAD AREA

##### Overview

- A long narrow area situated to the west of the existing Conservation Area comprising residential properties of 19th century and later. The properties border a continuous road with a north-south axis known as Talbot Road, which sweeps in an eastwardly direction up Mill Hill and along Ingestre Road, where the study area re-joins the existing Conservation Area. This study area encircles an area of twentieth century development which does not form part of the existing Conservation Area.

##### Townscape

- The area is dominated by the wide road on which it is centred, which has significantly higher traffic levels than other roads within the existing Conservation Area and is known as the B5151.
- Topographically Talbot Road is positioned on a terrace on the west side of Oxton Hill, which gives open views to the west between buildings over the River Dee and to the welsh hills and a more enclosed feel to the east due to the higher ground.
- Both sides of the road are lined with tall sandstone walls with a good level of vegetation behind, comprising shrubs, hedges and some mature trees, typical of the Oxton Conservation Area.
- The Little Arno is a green public open space and a focal point on the corner of Mill Hill. Painted cast iron railings and open views to the west characterise this corner.
- Houses are typically set in substantial plots well set back from the road; some are very well screened by vegetation.
- High gateposts and copings to the walls to the larger houses exhibit a fine level of detail



*Talbot Road – lined with sandstone wall and trees*



*Mill Hill/Holm Lane Junction*





*House on Talbot Road well screened by vegetation*



*Large house on Talbot Road at junction with Hillside View*

### **Architecture and Materials**

- There are several examples of large Victorian houses along Talbot Road, including a group of three on the west side which retain good original character and contribute positively to the character of the area. Details include red brick facades with contrasting blue/black brick detailing, sandstone dressings, projecting gables, small areas of mock timber framing and tile hanging, red clay tile roofs and dominant chimney stacks.
- Other large red brick houses of similar character exist towards the south end of Talbot Road set in spacious plots.
- The former Bowler Hat Hotel was undergoing extension and conversion to form apartments at time of survey, although the distinctive red brick façade with stone dressings, projecting gables with stone copings and finials and red clay tiled roof was fully visible.
- A collection of yellow sandstone buildings to the south of the Little Arno terminate the view to the end of Talbot Road and add to the special interest of the area. Together with the distinctive brick villa to the west they form a backdrop to the Little Arno.

### **Negative factors and opportunities for enhancement**

- As with other zones within the Conservation Area, a significant number of large villas have been demolished to allow redevelopment, typically with apartments or small modern housing. This has resulted in a loss of character on the west side of Talbot Road. The group of three large houses towards the centre are the remaining visual reminder of the 19th century development of the area.
- A portion of the east side of Talbot road has suffered a similar fate, although the smaller more recent replacement housing occupies fair sized plots and is sufficiently well set back from the road behind the sandstone wall not to have a significant effect on the character of the area.
- Several of the larger earlier houses have suffered an erosion of character through replacement of windows, doors, roof coverings, and in isolated cases, removal of bays.
- The setting of the Bowler Hat Hotel neither adds to, nor detracts from, the character of the area.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

- Mill Hill corner is fully visible and makes a positive contribution to the character of the area, having its own quality and identity.
- The extension of the boundary to include the long peninsular area along Talbot Road is recommended in order to protect the large properties and plots which contribute positively to the area where damage has not already been done.
- There is no justification for inclusion of the more recent developments on the west side of Talbot Road as they do not contribute positively to the character of the conservation area..

#### **1.1.5 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the four areas described above be added to the existing conservation area. Each small area has its own special contribution, which may be an extension of the existing character, or something of its own, as described above. Together they augment the character of the village as a whole and, by being given additional protection they will strengthen the character into the future.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION FOR ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS**

- 2.1 One of the principal outcomes of the appraisal is the overall quality and variety of the buildings within the conservation area. There are good representatives of domestic building styles from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards often set in close juxtaposition with each other. However with some exceptions the later 20<sup>th</sup> century is not well represented.
- 2.2 Probably the most significant threat to the character of the area is the loss of original detail from the older properties, and the loss of boundaries and a sense of enclosure by removal of walls.
- 2.3 In order to restrict the level of these changes, which are permitted within the current General Development Order, it may be desirable to restrict these permitted rights by the application of Article 4 Direction Orders.
- 2.4 The particular topics which have a significant impact on the character of individual buildings, and which should be brought under control are as follows:
- Replacement of traditional windows
  - Replacement of original doors
  - Replacement of roofing materials with a different type
  - Introduction of solar panels
  - Alterations to chimney stacks
- 2.5 It is recognised that generally there are pressures caused by increasing car use and ownership. The obvious impact within Oxton is the increase in on-street parking. However a secondary and increasing problem is the removal of

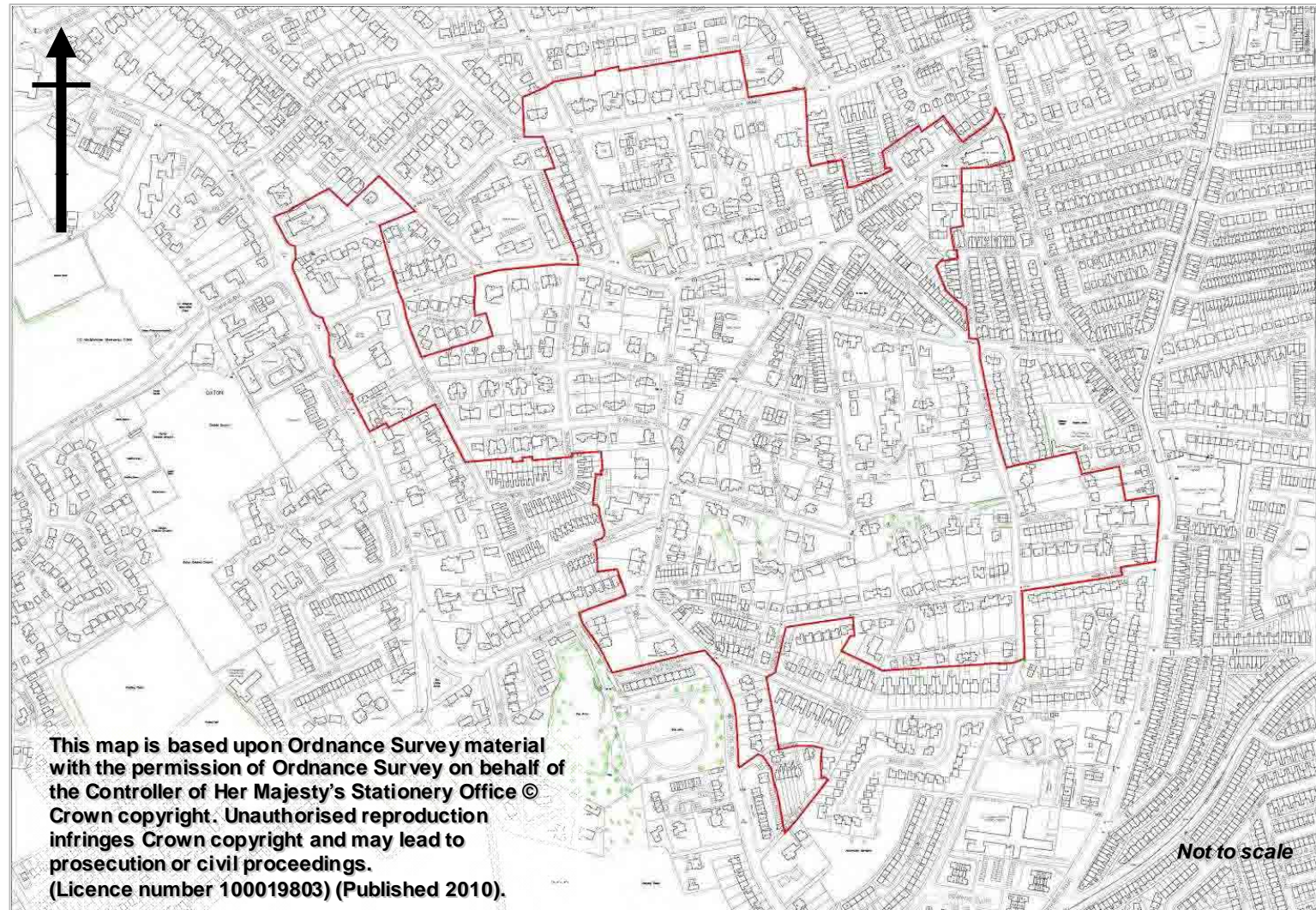
boundary walls, often combined with the paving of front gardens to provide private parking spaces. This is a balance between utility and the aesthetic. However it has been identified that in a conservation area, the aesthetic qualities should be given greater consideration and therefore this issue should also be addressed through the application of Article 4 Directions. It is recommended therefore that they be extended to include:

- Removal of boundary walls
- Paving of front gardens
- Installation of new gates

2.6 It is recognised that the impact of these direction orders will be an increased workload for the development control administration of Wirral Council, but on balance it is felt that this is desirable in the interests of protecting the special qualities of the area.

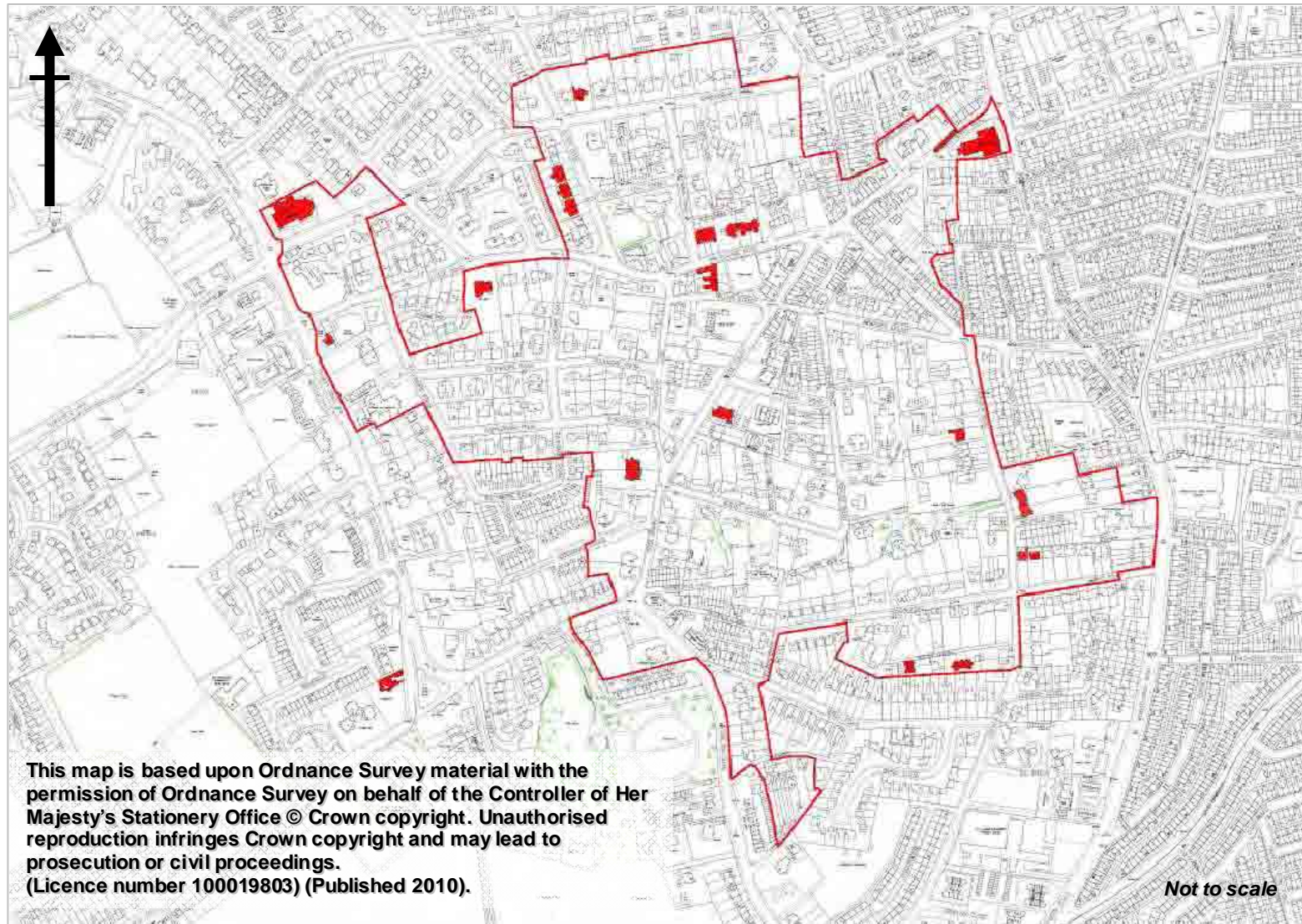
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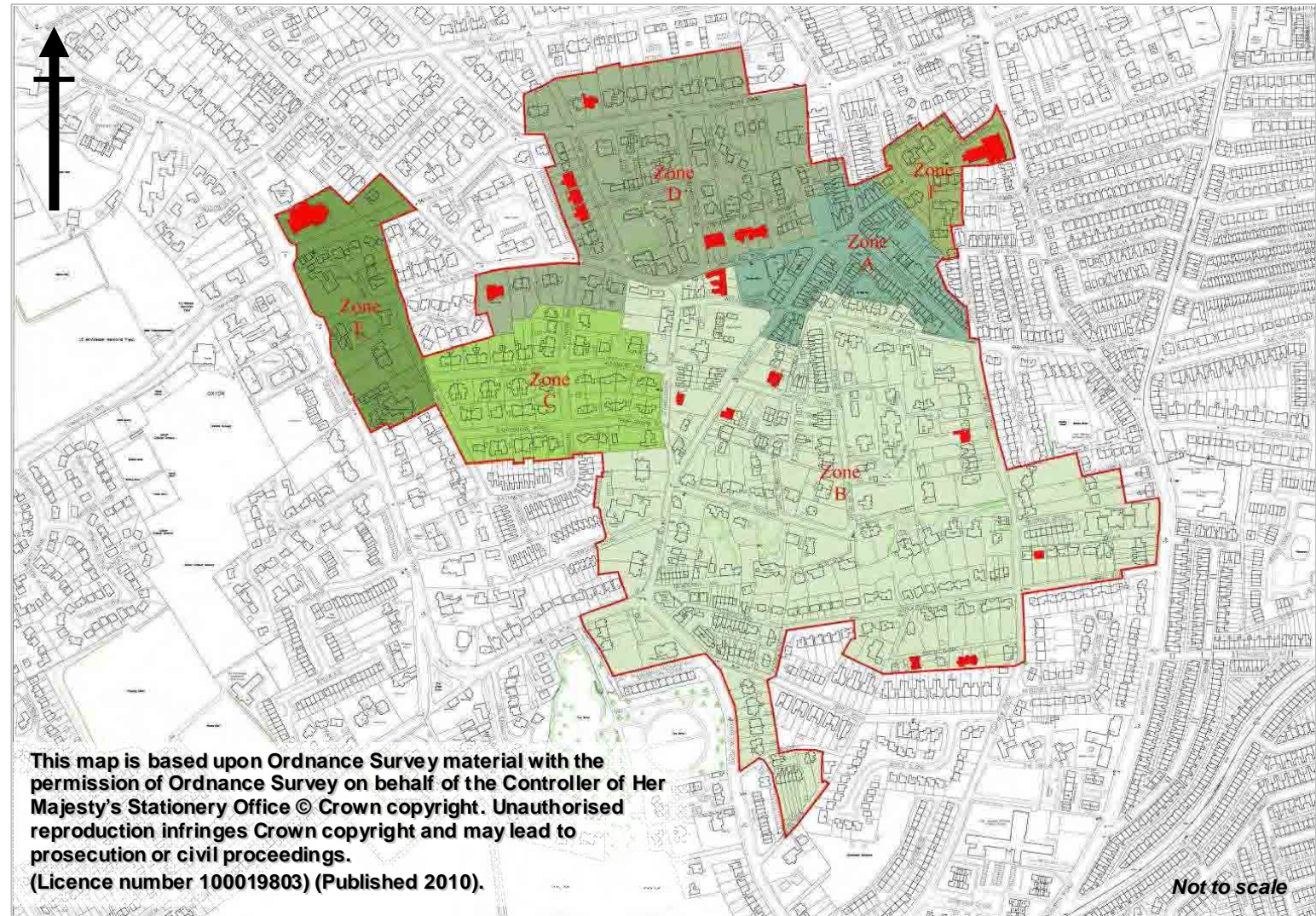
Map A: Showing existing conservation area boundary outlined in red





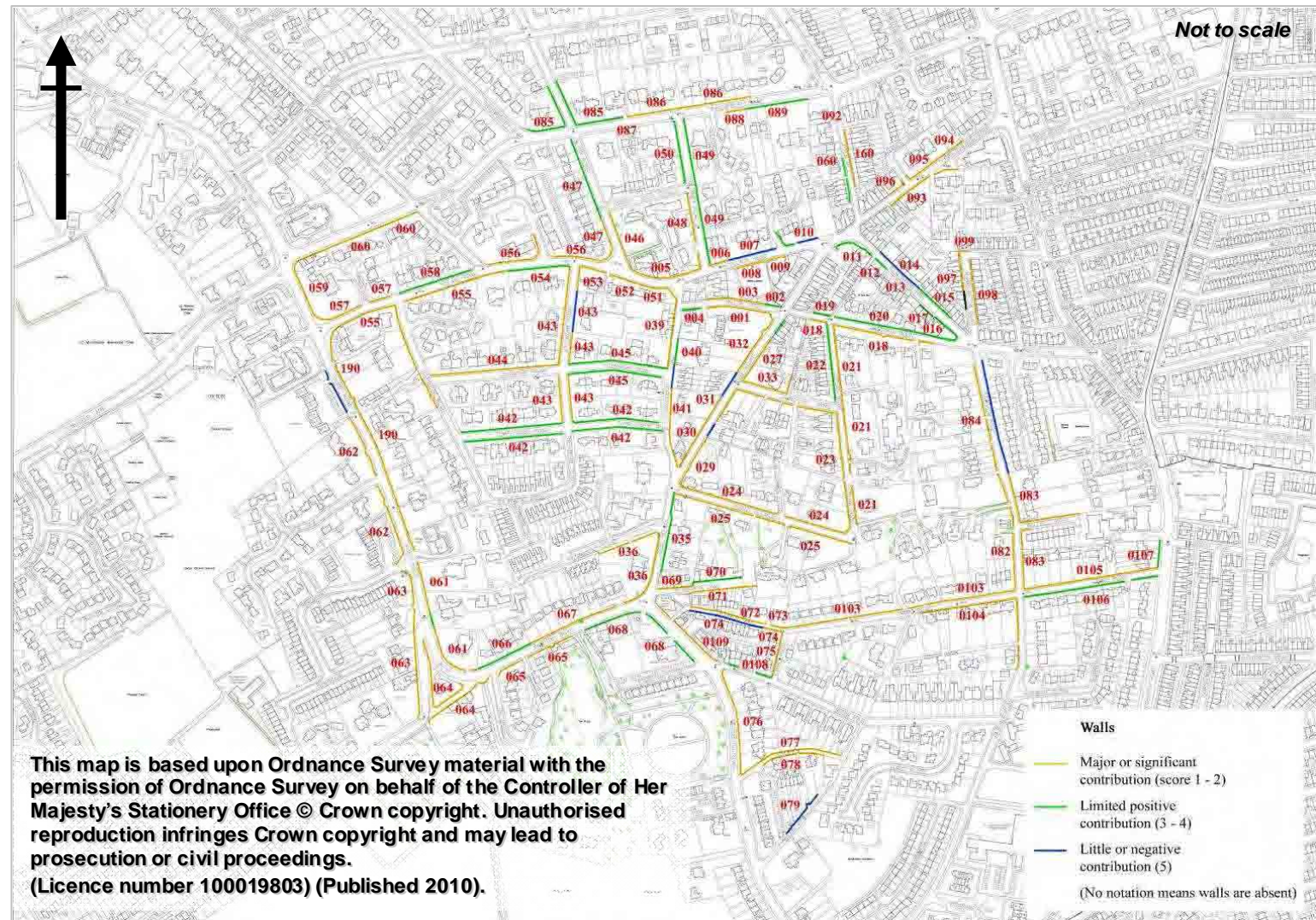
**Map B: Showing locations of Listed Buildings**





Map C: Showing locations of Study zones





Map D: Showing contributions of Boundary Walls

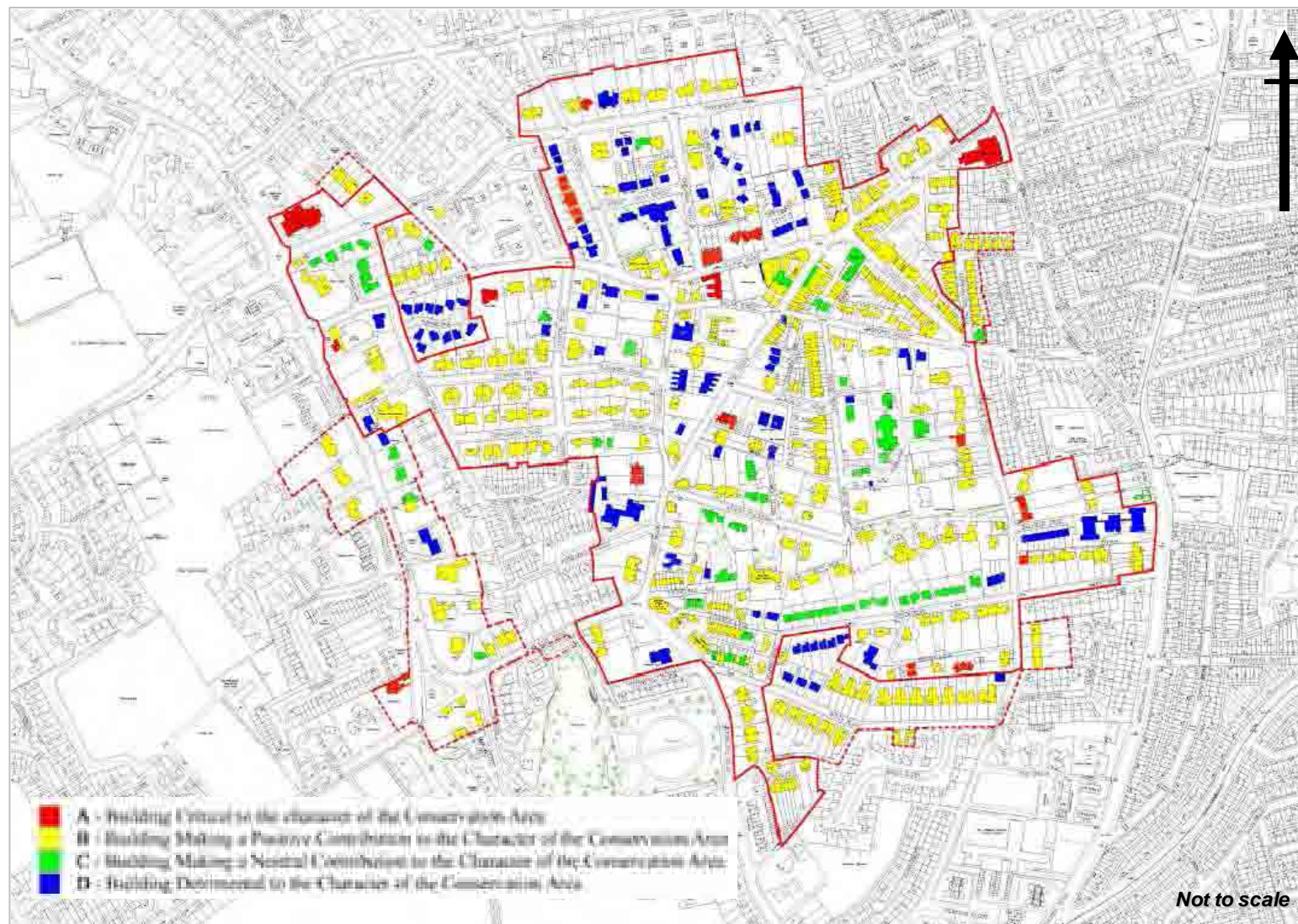




Map E showing tree cover within Conservation Area

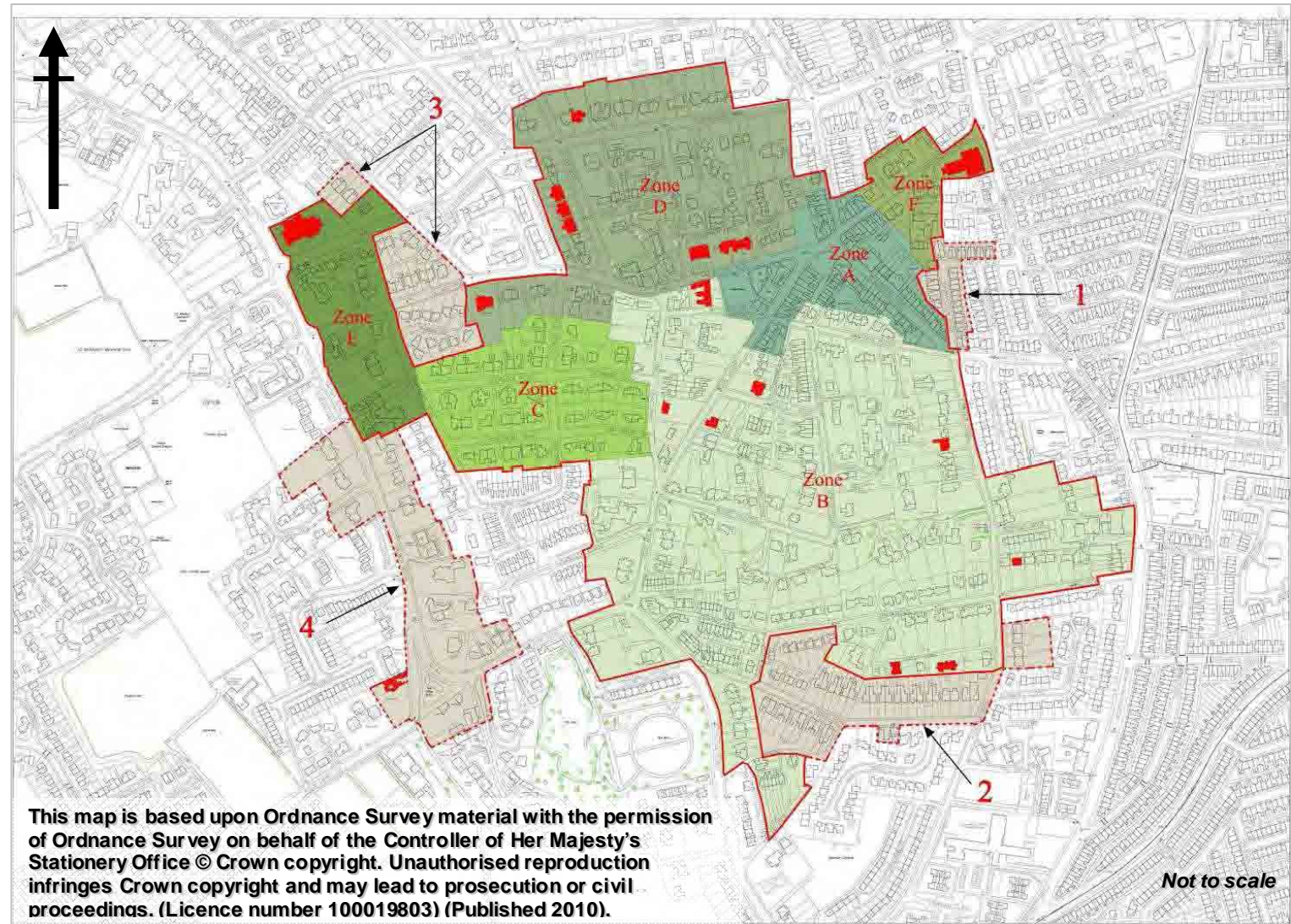


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Map F: Showing building contributions to the Conservation Area





Map G: Showing proposed extensions to the Conservation Area

## APPENDIX B – HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### 1.1 THE ORIGINS AND HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

*Much of this chapter is based on John Green's "Oxton in History: A compilation outlining the events of two millennia" (2006) to whom due acknowledgement is made for his useful summary. Further sources of information are included in the Bibliography. John Green's full report is available on the Oxton Society's website and in Birkenhead Central Library.*

#### Prehistoric

- 1.1.1 Although there is evidence of human occupation in Wirral since Mesolithic<sup>32</sup> times, particularly in the north, the earliest evidence of human activity at Oxton comes much later in the form of a Neolithic<sup>33</sup> polished stone axe. This was dug up in 1951 in the grounds of Westridge (off Ingestre Road). A metal axe, which was recovered from the sports field of Townfield Primary School, Noctorum Way, suggests the area may also have been occupied during the Bronze age<sup>34</sup>.

#### Pre Norman Conquest

- 1.1.2 A hoard of coins found during quarrying in 1834 on Arno Hill suggests Roman occupation of the area in the third century. Whether this was an entirely new settlement or the continuation of an earlier prehistoric settlement is not known.
- 1.1.3 The exiled Norse people may have colonised the Wirral after they fled Dublin in AD902<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, "there are 600 possible examples of Norse names in Wirral – townships, small and lost settlements, field and road names."<sup>36</sup> The name Oxton may be a contraction of the Viking 'Oxa' (ox) and 'ton' (a commonly used word to describe a town or village where a Viking took over an Anglo-Saxon place and called it after himself). Alternatively, it may be Anglo-Saxon in origin, from "Oxa tun", a farm or enclosure where oxen are kept<sup>37</sup>.
- 1.1.4 The earlier plan form of the settlement at Oxton is difficult to determine as comparatively little is known about Saxon settlements on the Wirral. but it is likely to have centred around a water source and cultivable land. It appears not to have centred around a church as other Saxon settlements often did.

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<sup>32</sup> In Britain, generally 10,000 BC to 5,500 BC

<sup>33</sup> Around 4000 BC to 2000 BC

<sup>34</sup> Roughly 2200 to 750 BC

<sup>35</sup> Roberts, Stephen J (2002) A History of Wirral [Phillimore & Co Ltd, Chichester], p55

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p56

<sup>37</sup> insert reference to John Green's article

## Medieval

- 1.1.5 The manor of Oxton does not appear in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and is believed to have been included in that of Eastham, originally held by Earl Hugh.<sup>38</sup> Manors are commonly perceived as compact settlements, centred around a church and possibly a manor house, separated from other settlements by open land. However, many of the manors recorded during the Domesday survey displayed the ancient pattern of isolated farms, hamlets and villages scattered over cultivable land. Oxton manor appears to have been one such example with a hamlet on Oxton Hill and some scattered dwellings on lower lands to the east of the sandstone ridge.
- 1.1.6 In c1070 King William granted the city and county of Chester to his nephew and supporter, Hugh d'Avranche (Hugh Lupus), making him the first Earl of Chester. Hugh d'Avranche created eight Barons to support him, one of whom was Robert, Baron of Montalt and Dapifer or Seneschal of the Earldom of Chester. As first baron by tenure<sup>39</sup> and<sup>40</sup>, he succeeded to the Cheshire lands including Oxton from Hugo de Mara or Hugh Fitz Norman, the first Norman grantee of the lands in Cheshire. Robert was Hugo de Mara's nephew.
- 1.1.7 The Domville family of Brimstage appear to have held Oxton Manor until the C13th. In a charter made in the C12th, Hugh Domville granted Birkenhead Priory a dwelling house and land in Oxton (*unam mensoram et unam cultram*) called Knavenbrec (The Young Man's Hill) "for the safety of his soul and the souls of his ancestors".
- 1.1.8 This grant gave rise to litigation between the priory and the Domville family in 1282<sup>41</sup> and later the prior and Lady Isabel and her son Roger Domville settled the bounds between Claughton and Oxton by charter. The boundary between Oxton and Claughton was determined to run from "Bottislowe" (Bott's Hill) to "Swalewelow" (Swallow Hill) and thence by stones placed there in "Lyngedale" (Heather Vale) to "Raggedestean". Lingdale is the sole survivor of these topographical features.
- 1.1.9 There is evidence of a separate settlement at Lingdale and at Arno Hill. A document dating from the reign of Edward III (b 1312, d1377), dealing with an enquiry into the question of encroachments into the Forest of Wirral, reports that a Richard de Oxton was called to account for having in his possession a quarter of a rood of land in Oxton, near Arnehowe<sup>42</sup>. The effect on the population of Oxton of

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<sup>38</sup> Beazley p.1, Brownbill pp. 21-25 (cited in Green, 2006)

<sup>39</sup> Unravelling the lines and origins of the de Montalt/Mouhaults/Monhalt/Mohant/de la Mare family is a genealogical challenge beyond the scope of this report. Various historical sources provide conflicting information but it seems that Robert assumed his name from the chief place of his residence, a hill called Montalt (now Mold). *Some give the origin of the family as the Lords of Monte Alto in Italy. Eustace de Monte Alto ('the Norman Hunter') was rewarded for services during the conquest with the lordships and manors of Montalt and Hawarden. He was father to Robert and Roger de Mouhaut (a later Robert, born 1119, was Constable of Cheshire). Other sources (Burke???) give the lineage of Robert de Montalt, first baron by tenure, as being son of Ralph de Montalt (4<sup>th</sup> baron) who was the son of Roger de Monte Alto (3<sup>rd</sup> baron). Roger's brother Hugh de Monte Alto was 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron, and they were both sons of Eustace de Monte Alto, 1<sup>st</sup> baron. Yet other sources suggest Eustace had a third son, Ralph and that all three sons used the surname Fitz Norman (ie son of Norman).*

<sup>40</sup> From: 'The chronicle: 1133-86', *Annales Cestrienses: Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburg*, at Chester (1887), pp. 20-35. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=67178> Date accessed: 22 July 2009.

<sup>41</sup> John Green assesses the evidence and concludes this is the most likely date

<sup>42</sup> Article "How the Arno was acquired". Newspaper cutting undated and unidentified

the Black Death is undocumented, although it is estimated to have claimed the lives of between 20% and 50% of the population across the UK.

- 1.1.10 Through subsequent marriages of female heirs, Oxton Manor was held by the Holes (or Hulses) of Raby, then the Troutbecks of Dunham and so to Sir John Talbot of Albrighton<sup>43</sup>. He conveyed it in 1521 along with several other Cheshire manors to his first cousin, George Talbot, the 4th Earl of Shrewsbury in<sup>44</sup>. (Direct male descendents of Sir John became the 9th Earl and 18th Earl, in 1619 and 1856 respectively.)
- 1.1.11 The years 1509 to 1547 were marked by a huge upheaval in the English way of life under Henry VIII, who changed the country's religion and introduced new forms of local and national government. The impact of these reforms was widely felt, particularly in settlements that had grown up around monasteries and Abbeys. Although Oxton had developed independently of the Priory at Birkenhead, when it was dissolved in 1536 the lands in Oxton may have been leased with other lands by Ralph Worsley, a member of the royal household<sup>45</sup>. In 1545 Worsley purchased the Priory site and most of its lands in Cheshire for £568 11s. 6d.

### **Post medieval**

- 1.1.12 Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Oxton remained a rural settlement. The oldest extant building is Oxton Old Hall which was built in the early C17th.<sup>46</sup> It was formerly known as Oxton Hall Cottage.
- 1.1.13 By the C17th, the Talbots held 27 manors in Cheshire and in 1620 Oxton was the 11<sup>th</sup> richest, being worth £5. In 1638 George Talbot married Marie Herbert of Powis Castle, by which time the manor of Ogston [sic] had 570 acres of enclosure and 300 acres of common. This is the first known mention of the area later surveyed by Thomas Bainbridge in 1795 on behalf of the Earl of Shrewsbury.<sup>47</sup>
- 1.1.14 Upon his death in 1689, Dr Sherlock bequeathed £50 to purchase 15 cows for the use of the poor of Oxton township, which suggests the village was still very much a struggling rural economy. Dr Sherlock had been born in Oxton and was a voluminous polemic writer, being persecuted as a royalist during the reigns of Charles I and II.<sup>48</sup>
- 1.1.15 By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, transport links with the larger settlements of Chester, Liverpool and Birkenhead were improved. Coaches ran from Chester to Liverpool via Eastham and to Parkgate.<sup>49</sup> The Old Chester Road between Chester and Birkenhead was turnpiked in 1787 and there may have been regular six-horse coaches running along this route.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The title was created for a second time in the [Peerage of England](#) in 1442 when [John Talbot, 7th Baron Talbot](#), an English general in the [Hundred Years' War](#), was made Earl of Shrewsbury.

<sup>44</sup> Ormerod pp. 432-433, 527

<sup>45</sup> From: 'Houses of Benedictine monks: The priory of Birkenhead', *A History of the County of Chester: Volume 3* (1980), pp. 128-132. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=39974&strquery=Birkenhead Priory> Date accessed: 22 July 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Some give the date as late as 1660 – check, is this the date in the list description?

<sup>47</sup> Varley p.9, cited in Green, 2006

<sup>48</sup> Ormerod p.528, Mortimer p.288

<sup>49</sup> Beazley p.5

<sup>50</sup> Varley p.15



- 1.1.16 Following the Inclosure Acts of 1750-1860 lands surrounding the settlement began to be divided into rectangular fields. Within the conservation area, smaller enclosures held a number of cottages and gardens. The boundaries of these enclosures remained substantially the same into the mid-19th century and some persist today<sup>51</sup>

### **From the 18th Century**

- 1.1.17 The hamlet was established on the sandstone ridge leading from Bidston in the north and running towards Storeton in the south. It stood at the junction of the present Bidston Road, Gerald Road, Village Road and Townfield Lane. These, together with Holm (then Home) Lane, appear on the 1795 Shrewsbury Estate plan and would have been little better than tracks.<sup>52</sup>
- 1.1.18 The soil in the area was thin, light, gravelly and sandy, created by the disintegration of the underlying sandstone. Heathlands of furze, gorse and ling quickly developed, which were then left as common. The ridge, with its occasional rocky outcrops, was generously supplied with springs and wells<sup>53</sup> and rushes abounded in areas that were wet and marshy.<sup>54</sup>
- 1.1.19 The 300 acres of common noted in 1638 had reduced to about 192 by the time of Bainbridge's survey of the Shrewsbury Estate in 1795. Most of this was to the north west, with 54 acres to the south of the track leading down from the village to Woodside. (The Cheshire acre equalled two acres sixteen poles Statute measure).<sup>55</sup>
- 1.1.20 The 1795 plan shows little sign of building outside those clustered at the village nucleus apart from crofts and cottages on Oxton Common (near Thurstons).<sup>56</sup> Comparison between the 1795 Estate Plan, the 1847 Tithe Map and the OS six-inch map (first edition, Cheshire sheet XIII, 1850/51) shows most of the development and in-filling to be on the Heath Hays area, in the area around Shrewsbury Park, along Bidston Road and between there and Claughton.<sup>57</sup> Oxton, with its nuclear village was gradually being extended down the hill towards Birkenhead.<sup>58</sup> *In rural areas, the civil parish, in general, coincided with the ecclesiastical parish and generally had the same boundaries as the manor. This was certainly so in Oxton, where the boundaries, except for a small area on the Claughton border, enclosed the area depicted by Bainbridge in 1795 as the extent of the Shrewsbury Oxton Estate. The boundaries of Oxton Township were coterminous with those of the manor. 59 and the snippet of land described as 'so much of the Township of Oxton not belonging to the Earl of Shrewsbury or his lessees' bounded by Palm Grove, Grosvenor Road and the Oxton-Claughton boundary. 60*

### **Early 19th Century Development**

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>52</sup> Robinson p.10, Varley p.15

<sup>53</sup> Varley p.9

<sup>54</sup> Morrison p.8

<sup>55</sup> Varley p.10

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p.13

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p.13

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* pp. 8, 20

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p.21

- 1.1.21 By 1801, the settlement had grown to a population of 137 with 27 households, employed predominantly in agriculture. By comparison, Birkenhead's population at the time was only 110.<sup>61</sup>
- 1.1.22 Writing in 1819, Ormerod described Oxton in less than complimentary terms. It was "mean and small, composed of wretched straggling huts, amongst impassable roads" and "a scene of solitude". William Williams Mortimer in 1821 described the area as "dreary and desolate, presenting a scene of extreme misery and destitution" with the inhabitants living in "the most inferior" cottages.
- 1.1.23 The impression is one of a small rural community working the land and keeping cattle in difficult conditions. There was not even a church, the parish church at that time being three miles walk along a track in Woodchurch.
- 1.1.24 This was to change dramatically though with the growth of Birkenhead, which resulted from the expansion of Liverpool as a major mercantile and commercial centre. The introduction of a steam boat ferry service from Birkenhead Ferry in 1820 and from Woodside Ferry in 1822 were to later have a profound effect on many towns and villages along the eastern shores of the Wirral. Birkenhead's population increased more than ten-fold between 1821 and 1831.
- 1.1.25 Liverpool's expansion had its downsides. Living conditions were appalling, with the highest mortality rate in the country among inner city residents. By the early 1800s, it was no longer considered desirable for 'gentlemen' to reside at their place of work. Many wealthy businessmen began to seek refuge away from the squalor of the inner cities by building homes for themselves and their family away from the overcrowded centres of cities.
- 1.1.26 The small village of Oxton, with its views of the river, provided ample opportunity for ship-owners and merchants to build their retreats, from whence they could observe the arrival and departure of ships and cargoes.<sup>62</sup> The poor soil was not profitable for cultivation but the barren heathland especially around Thurstons and the area formerly known as Heath Hays appears to have been reclaimed and enclosed.<sup>63</sup> to provide well-drained ground for building upon. Between 1803 and 1854, the 15th, 16th and 17th Earls of Shrewsbury granted many leases for building plots, and this provided the impetus for rapid expansion of the village. <sup>64</sup> <sup>65</sup> The availability of local stone meant buildings could be constructed at reasonable cost.
- 1.1.27 With the arrival of a new wealthy population came the need for more services and amenities. The construction of new villas required tradesmen and builders. Greater demand for food was served in part by a number of market gardens (cite locations). Gas and water were supplied by the Birkenhead and Claughton Gas and Water Works, established in 1841. There was greater demand for transport, churches, shops and hostleries.
- 1.1.28 The Chester to Birkenhead Railway opened in 1838, with a terminus at Grange Lane, equidistant between Woodside and Birkenhead Ferries. In the same year a further ferry service began from Monks' Ferry. Omnibus services – later the street railway – provided regular and frequent connections to the ferry, reducing the

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<sup>61</sup> Varley p.8, Robinson p.5

<sup>62</sup> Robinson p.7

<sup>63</sup> Varley p.11

<sup>64</sup> Morrison p.37

<sup>65</sup> Cheshire Life Nov 1989 p.100

dependency on the private carriage, thus cutting the cost of coach hire, mews and male servants, their accommodation and other associated expenses.<sup>66</sup> Several horse-drawn omnibus operators served Oxton. In 1843 Booth ran a service five times daily.

- 1.1.29 Oxton Village was served by a number of public houses including The Queen's Arms, which was run by Thomas Hughes (after whom Hughes Lane was named); The Shrewsbury Arms; The Arno Inn; and The Talbot Hotel. this building was in a key location, sweeping around the curve from Rose Mount to Claughton Firs and included four shops.
- 1.1.30 By the middle of the C19th, most of the land within Oxton had been enclosed. There was a concentration of dwellings and enclosed strips of land around the original settlement along Bidston Road (near St Saviour's). Other dwellings were concentrated in the east, around Victoria Mount, Fairview Road, Rose Mount and Arno Road. The majority of holdings were houses with gardens, outbuildings and land, although there were a number of smaller cottages with gardens, crofts, and individual plots of land.
- 1.1.31 The Oxton-Claughton boundary on the c1847 tithe map follows a line along Palm Hill and Claughton Hill to its junction with Ashburton Road and Shrewsbury Road. It is believed this may be quite near to the original, which was marked by boundary stones. The "Lyngedale" mentioned in the boundaries was probably the area bounded by Kingsmead Road South, Shrewsbury Road, Ashburton Road and Bidston Road.<sup>67</sup>
- 1.1.32 Prior to 1851, Oxton had been served by the parish church of Holy Cross in Woodchurch. It was some three miles distant from Oxton and accessed by Holm Lane or other field paths, which could be muddy and slippery. A township meeting was held at the Caernarfon Castle in 1844<sup>68</sup> to discuss provision of a more local place of worship. A barn was converted so that services could be held and in 1848 the Earl of Shrewsbury conveyed a plot of land for the erection of the first Church of St Saviour, which was duly consecrated in 1851.<sup>69</sup> The first parish hall, "St. Saviour's Institute", was housed in Rose Mount, in the building presently numbered 2b and now occupied by the businesses of Brymark and Coyles.
- 1.1.33 William Potter, a Liverpool businessman, funded the building of the first parish church of Claughton (Christ Church), which lies within Oxton ward and the conservation area. It was designed by William Jearrad<sup>70</sup> and erected between 1844-49 using red sandstone taken from the adjacent quarry at what is now Bessborough Road. Initially used by an evangelistic group, it was offered to the Church of England and consecrated in 1854. At the time it was built as a chapel to the parish church of St Oswalds, Bidston. It became the parish Church of Claughton when the new parish of Claughton was created from parts of four others in 1876<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Morrison p.39

<sup>67</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p.23, Robinson p.80

<sup>70</sup> Robert William Jearad (c1784-1861) of 260 Oxford St, London, a developer-architect and builder, most noted for his work on the Lansdowne Estate and other prominent buildings in Cheltenham (further details in Howard Colvin, 2006, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, Paul Mellon Centre)

<sup>71</sup> St. Saviour's p.14, Evans pp.1-2, Robinson p.78

- 1.1.34 Mortimer<sup>72</sup>, in 1847, comments on the improved road network:

*Large sums of money have recently been expended in the making and improving of the public roads; one of them – a street called the Shrewsbury Road – is hardly exceeded by any in this part of the kingdom, being about two thousand yards in length, and twenty yards in width, bounded on both sides by land belonging to William Potter, Esq.”* <sup>73</sup>

- 1.1.35 The leasing of plots at modest rents meant incoming businessmen and professional classes could expend more money on building large homes suited to their needs. By the middle of the C19th Oxton had been transformed from a “dreary and desolate” agricultural community to a desirable commuter settlement. Writing of Oxton Hill in 1848 by Samuel Lewis observed that:

*Comparatively but a few years ago, it was a barren heath; it is now, to a great extent, covered with fine houses and villas, with gardens, fields, woods and pleasure-grounds, and is, in fact, a village of itself. The air in this elevated locality is extremely salubrious, and the prospect from almost any point uninterrupted and delightful, embracing a vast extent of land, and town and marine scenery.*

- 1.1.36 Similarly, Birkenhead had undergone a transformation:

*Few places have, in the same short space of time, made such rapid progress as the township of Birkenhead. For centuries an inconsiderable place, it has suddenly become a large and important town; and what was once regarded as an outskirt of the great port of Liverpool, is now going hand in hand with that mart of commerce, in extending the facilities for the trade of the country, and in increasing the prosperity of those residing on the shores of the noble estuary of the Mersey.”*

### **Mid to Late C19th**

- 1.1.37 Oxton continued its growth into the second half of the C19th and the population expanded from 546 in 1841 to 4,579 by 1901. Despite this, Oxton retained a rural ambience into the 1850s and 1860s, surrounded by fields and countryside.

- 1.1.38 Building: The building programme may have been interrupted slightly when the death of the <sup>74</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Earl<sup>75</sup> led to a protracted legal battle. Henry John Chetwynd-Talbot, 3rd Earl Talbot, Viscount of Ingestre was eventually declared 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury in 1860<sup>76</sup>. He challenged the legal validity of leases contracted between 1803 and 1843, with the result that lessees had to pay substantial sums to prove their title.<sup>77</sup> However, he did inform the ratepayers that four roads in the township were

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<sup>72</sup> Mortimer p.287

<sup>73</sup> Mortimer p.413

<sup>74</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Earl Shrewsbury's will was the subject of a prolonged legal dispute between the family and the executors, Charles Scott Murray and Ambrose Philipps De Lisle. He was succeeded by his cousin Bertram Arthur Talbot (1832–1856). On the death of the latter at the age of twenty-four the title passed out of Catholic hands and devolved upon Henry John Chetwynd, third Earl Talbot of Hensol. (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography)

<sup>75</sup> died at Naples on 9 November 1852

<sup>76</sup> died in June 1868, aged 64

<sup>77</sup> Sulley p.399

being dedicated for public use: Mount Pleasant, Poplar Road, Victoria Road and Rose Mount.<sup>78</sup> In 1863, when the last major population expansion took place, the Earl sold off the bulk of the remaining land.<sup>79</sup>

1.1.39 Transport: In 1854 the Great Western Railway started to operate a through route from Birkenhead to London. The extension of the line to Woodside was not constructed until 1878.<sup>80</sup> *The first saloon passenger steamer crossed the river in 1864, and must have seemed a luxury to early commuters.*<sup>81</sup> The river Mersey had become one of the UK's busiest shipping routes, which benefited/impacted upon? villages such as Oxton as wealthy Liverpool merchants and businessmen chose to make their homes on the Wirral. This was the beginning of the 'commuter belt'. In 1868 the Mersey Railway tunnel was completed for under-river, smoky and sooty steam train services between Hamilton Square and James Street, electrification following in 1903.<sup>82</sup> The improved transport links (when was underground built? 1868 Tunnel?) meant the Wirral became a desirable place to have a home. In some cases, eg Rock Park in Rock Ferry, whole new communities were established serving the needs of the wealthier classes. In other areas, long-established villages were developed rapidly with the addition of large villas. horse-drawn trams were introduced in 1860, this pioneer route running from Woodside via Hamilton Street, Conway Street, Park Road and Cannon Hill, to their terminus in Palm Grove. An American, William Starbuck, Europe's first tramcar manufacturer, set up his factory in Cleveland Street, he himself living variously in Devonshire, Kingsland and Balls Roads.<sup>83</sup> Both bus and tram fares were kept deliberately high to suit the affluent middle-class residents. With the advent of the Cheap Trains Act in 1883, the working classes followed their "masters" over the water to live. The manual workers tended to settle in Birkenhead, while the white-collar workers moved into the smaller houses in Oxton, such as in the Fairview Road area.<sup>84</sup> Sulley, writing in 1889, says "It is now a favourite place of residence, the houses being mostly of good class, though less pretentious than those of its wealthy neighbour, Cloughton."<sup>85</sup>

1.1.40 Utilities: The Birkenhead Improvement Commissioners purchased the Birkenhead and Cloughton Gas and Water Works company in the 1860s and the Oxton Local Board then paid them for water supplied from the new Flaybrick reservoir.<sup>86</sup> In 1896 an electricity generating station opened, on a site lying between Bentinck and Craven Streets.<sup>87</sup>

1.1.41 Schools: Oxton was well served by schools. A National Society School, affiliated to St Saviour's, was opened in 1853 on Storeton Road (in the area now occupied by Storeton Close) to serve the lower middle-class and working-class Church of England children. Another primary school, run by the British and Foreign Schools

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<sup>78</sup> Varley p.16

<sup>79</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>80</sup> McIntyre p.91

<sup>81</sup> Robinson p.7

<sup>82</sup> Robinson p.7

<sup>83</sup> Morrison pp.40-41, Varley p.17, Birkenhead History Society Newsletter April 2004

<sup>84</sup> Kavanagh p.6, Robinson p.8. Some railway companies, such as the Great Eastern Railway, actively sought working class passengers. The Trains Act passed by the Board of Trade in 1883 encouraged railway companies to provide cheap early morning and evening workmens' fares, which also led to the establishment of new suburbs.

<sup>85</sup> Sulley p.389

<sup>86</sup> Morrison p.42

<sup>87</sup> McIntyre p.92

Society<sup>88</sup> was established at 75a Woodchurch Road. For the more wealthy families, Birkenhead Proprietary School (later Birkenhead School) in 1860 at Royden House, Park Road North moving in 1871 when it altered its name to the present Shrewsbury Road site. Kensington House, 59-63 Bidston Road accommodated boarders and day pupils and closed in 1937. Lingdale Convent, for the Faithful Companions of Jesus, until 1861, probably moving to Upton<sup>89</sup>. There were a number of schools for boarders and day pupils. There were 20 small, private seminaries active from the 1840s to 1880s, with a further ten in Claughton.<sup>90</sup> Birkenhead High School for girls was established in 1885 in the building previously occupied by the Oxton Local Board, 7 Village Road.

1.1.42 Churches: As the population became more diverse, so too did their places of worship and by the end of the C19th the following additional churches had appeared: Trinity Presbyterian Church (1865), Palm Grove Methodist Church, First Church of Christ Scientist (1874), All Saints (Anglo-Catholic, 1879) and Holy Name of Jesus (Roman Catholic, 1899, by Edmund Kirby). St Saviour's church was pulled down in 1891 and the present church built and consecrated.<sup>91</sup> Welsh Congregational Church.

1.1.43 Governance: For much of its history, the Woodchurch Vestry governed Oxton and choose officers to oversee local affairs. There appears to have been an informal Local Board, mwwting from 1859 to 1863, and from 1863 to 1877 Oxton had its own recognised Local Board of Health. The Board objected to Oxton's incorporation into Birkenhead in 1877, which was upported by the Earl as it meant villagers had free use of sewage, roads, streets and street lighting.<sup>92</sup>

1.1.44 Thomas Helsby revised and enlarged Ormerod's history and in 1882 commented on Ormerod's earlier account of Oxton:

*"All this is now changed. Within a comparatively short period Oxton has been transformed almost into a town, principally consisting of moderate-sized villas. Building operations, however, being incomplete, the broken-up pastures scarcely add more attractive features to the scenery of the date of the above-written description."*<sup>93</sup>

1.1.45 Public Houses included

- The Chetwynd Arms at 86 Bidston Road (by 1861, popularly known as the Quarryman's Arms<sup>94</sup>)
- The Swan, a beerhouse in Holm Lane
- The York Tavern, a beerhouse at the top of Townfield Lane (lost after 1875<sup>95</sup>)
- The Old House at Home, 7-9 Price's Lane, nicknamed The Hole in the Wall, a pub until 1930
- The Queen's Arms (often known as Hughes Hotel) much altered and enlarged by 1875<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> St. Saviour's p.17

<sup>89</sup> Morrison p.55

<sup>90</sup> ibid. p.55

<sup>91</sup> ibid. pp.23, 25

<sup>92</sup> Morrison p.159

<sup>93</sup> Ormerod p.528

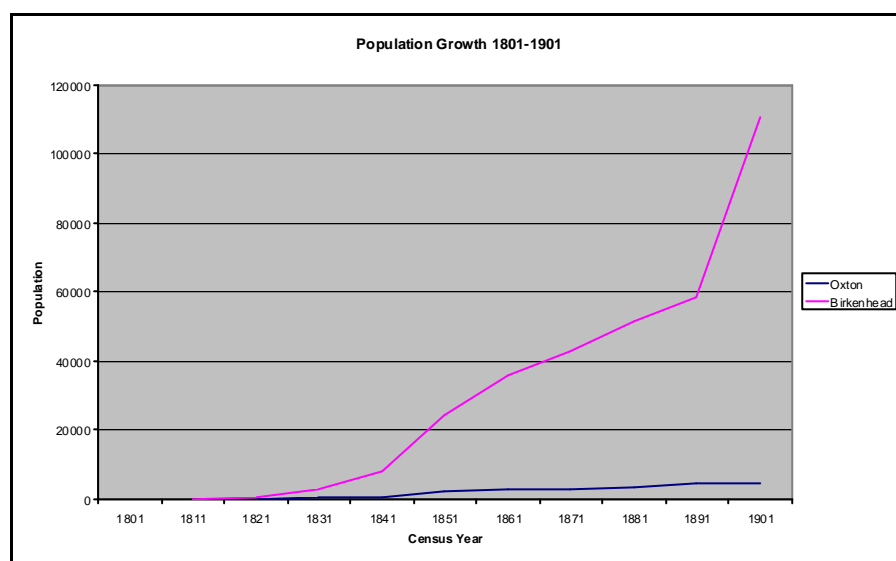
<sup>94</sup> ibid. p.157

<sup>95</sup> Morrison p.157

- The Shrewsbury Arms (occupies a building dating prior to 1847 which was divided into two before 1875. Sometime during the first decade of the nineteenth century the part bordering Claughton Firs became a public house, being enlarged in 1874, when the two parts were reunited.<sup>97)</sup>

1.1.46 Despite the expansion of nearby Birkenhead and Liverpool, Oxton survived as a leafy, spacious ‘village’ due in part to Oxton residents retaining control over their own affairs for as long as possible. Major landowners, such as the Early of Shrewsbury, retained a freehold interest in land by renting it rather than selling it. Leaseholders also exercised informal control of development by restricting industrial development.

1.1.47 By the dawn of the C20th Oxton’s population had increased from 137 to 4,579; however Birkenhead’s population had grown exponentially:



## 1.2 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY CHANGES

1.2.1 By the C20th, Oxton was at its peak as a fashionable residential area.

1.2.2 Transport and communication links continued to improve with an electric tram service being introduced in 1901, which operated until 1937. It ran along Shrewsbury Road with a crossing at Kingsmead Road and also provided an evening mail service.<sup>98</sup> Motorised buses came into service in 1919 and Queensway, the first Mersey road tunnel, was constructed between 1925 and 1934.<sup>100</sup> The telephone became available from 1904.<sup>101</sup>

1.2.3 Two new primary schools were established on Woodchurch Road in 1901 and 1908. Birkenhead High School for Girls moved to larger premises in Claughton in 1905.

1.2.4 St Saviour’s Institute, a dedicated parish hall, was built in Storeton Road in 1910 to replace the informal meeting place at 2b Rose Mount. The hall was extended in

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<sup>96</sup> Robinson p.85, Morrison p.156

<sup>97</sup> Robinson p. 85, Morrison p.155

<sup>98</sup> Robinson p.7, St. Saviour's p.78

<sup>99</sup> McIntyre p.93

<sup>100</sup> McIntyre p.93

<sup>101</sup> Reported by A. Reynolds late of British Telecom



- 1925 and the south wing licenced for worship as St Thomas Chapel the following year.
- 1.2.5 The Catholic church created a new parish of All Saints from parts of Oxton and Bidston parishes in 1910.
- 1.2.6 Following World War I many of the larger houses were converted into flats and suites of rooms, and their owners moved out.<sup>102</sup> The Great Depression must have had an effect on building owners' abilities to maintain their large properties and gardens in good repair.
- 1.2.7 During World War II, 14 bombs are known to have dropped in the conservation area, by reason of its proximity to Merseyside docks. There were five air raids between 1940 and 1941 that damaged or destroyed buildings in Templemore Road, Gerald Road, Poplar Road, Bidston Road, Fairclough Lane, Rose Mount, Spring Villas, Arno Road, Bennetts Hill, Mount Pleasant and Woodchurch Road. There was also damage to properties in adjacent roads: Claughton Firs, East Bank, Fairview Road, Village Road and Glenmore Road.<sup>103</sup>
- 1.2.8 Oxton's historic character had remained substantially intact but after World War II many of the larger houses fell into decay and eventually had to be demolished. Their sites were often redeveloped with new high-density housing.<sup>104</sup> Where villas were retained in use, the large gardens were sometimes sold off for housing development<sup>105</sup>.
- 1.2.9 The 1960s saw a fundamental change that was to affect Oxton from thenceforth. The 21st Earl sold the remaining Shrewsbury estates in 1963 to a property company, reputedly as a result of his divorce from his first Countess. This prompted local residents to form the Oxton Leaseholders Association.<sup>106</sup>
- 1.2.10 The ever-increasing population required more schools, and the 1960s saw the establishment of Townfield Lane (1965), Hillside, Ridgeway Road (1967) and St Peter's Roman Catholic School, St Peter's Way (1968). In 1967 the National Society school was moved to its present position at the top of Holm Lane.<sup>107</sup>
- 1.2.11 The Oxton Society was founded in 1979 to combat development pressures, and the conservation area was designated in the same year. At present, 85 Grade 2 listed buildings in Oxton, 36 within the Conservation Area and 29 without.<sup>108</sup>
- 1.2.12 The Earls of Shrewsbury remained manorial proprietors until 1990, when in the time of the 22nd Earl the manorial title was up for sale by auction.<sup>109</sup> The Shrewsbury connection is commemorated in a sequence of road names derived from subsidiary titles, viz. Alton, Chetwynd, Ingestre, Shrewsbury, Talbot, Waterford and Wexford.

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<sup>102</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>103</sup> A summary of war damage in the Conservation Area, containing detailed mapping of sites, has been published by John Green and is available for consultation in Birkenhead Central Library.

<sup>104</sup> Kavanagh p.6

<sup>105</sup> Robinson cites an example where the demolition of four houses resulted in their replacement by nearly ninety houses or flats.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Pratt p.33

<sup>107</sup> St. Saviour's pp.70-74, Morrison p.55

<sup>108</sup> Robinson p.11

<sup>109</sup> Liverpool Daily Post 12 Oct 1990