

6 Winchester College

6.1 Historical development



The College was founded by William of Wykeham in 1382 and was intended, along with its associated institution New College, Oxford, to help provide the church with well-educated clergy. The first buildings, which still form the core of the College, were completed in 1387-94 and were designed for seventy "poor and needy scholars", sixteen choristers and ten commoners, along with the warden, headmaster and fellows. They were accommodated around two courts, Outer and Chamber Court (photo 1), and beyond them a cloister. Within the cloister was added the Fromond chantry chapel in the 1420s (photo 2).



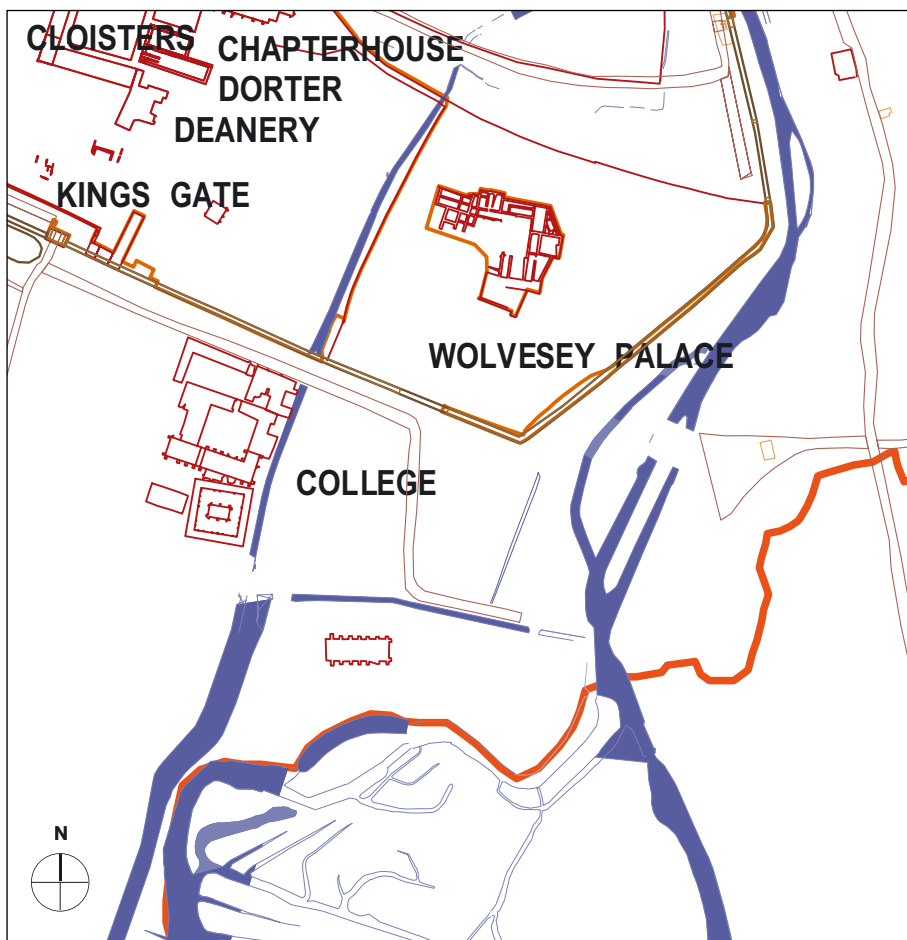
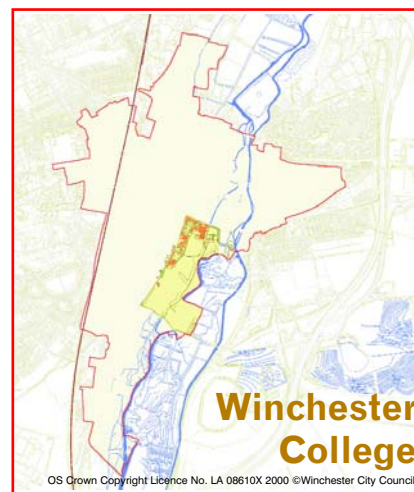
Under the Tudors and Stuarts the College appears to have enjoyed greater stability than the City, and by the late 17th century the number of commoners had risen to seventy. New accommodation was added by building southwards—the teaching block known as School in 1683-7 (photo 3) and, at a distance, the Sick House of 1656. The same progression followed during the expansion of the College in the Victorian period, for instance with the building of the Sanatorium (now the art department) in 1884-93 and the Science School in 1902-5 (photo 4).

The influence of the College has spread well beyond its immediate confines. College houses have been built to the west and south—the first was in Edgar Road in the 1850s— and the College has bought many houses in the Kingsgate Street/Culver Road area for its teaching staff. Above all, College ownership of the meadows and playing-fields towards the river has been one of the main influences in the shaping of the City.



6.2 Building uses

The principal landowner in this area is Winchester College whose grounds and splendid historic buildings provide its principal focus. The predominant building use is therefore educational; many of the nearby residential buildings provide accommodation for masters. A small number of shops and the Wykeham Arms pub are grouped around the north end of Kingsgate Street (photo 9).



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Above: Medieval Development

6.3 Building character



The College contains a number of striking buildings grouped around a series of cloisters and courtyards and representing a variety of periods from the late medieval through to the present. From outside the College, the use of stone and flint walls predominates with some important red brick buildings such as School and the science building, designed in 1904 by Henry Hill, and the former Sanatorium (now the art department) with its round towers and conical tiled roofs providing contrasting colours and textures. The College itself is characterised by an intricate series of courtyard spaces (photo 6). These are not ordered on an axial composition but rely on linking archways, a continuity of materials and textures, and the orienting landmark of the College tower to provide a dramatic series of spatial experiences.



The buildings convey the medieval characteristics of stone buildings: string courses, strongly modelled windows with hood moulds, windows and doorways of enormously different size and scale, united under great roofs, stone-paved courtyards, the corner stairs to the dining-hall starting outside in stone and finishing in wood where it is under cover. There are strong contrasts of light and shade through the sequence of arched gateways. These have stone vaulted ceilings incorporating carved stone bosses, wonderful oak doors, and the silhouette of parapets, stair turrets and buttresses; together with a great wealth of stone carving in niches on principal elevations (photo 10).

The cloister around Fromond Chantry has a remarkable roof with arched ribs of chestnut. The War Memorial Cloister was designed by Sir Herbert Baker and built in 1924 (photo 5).



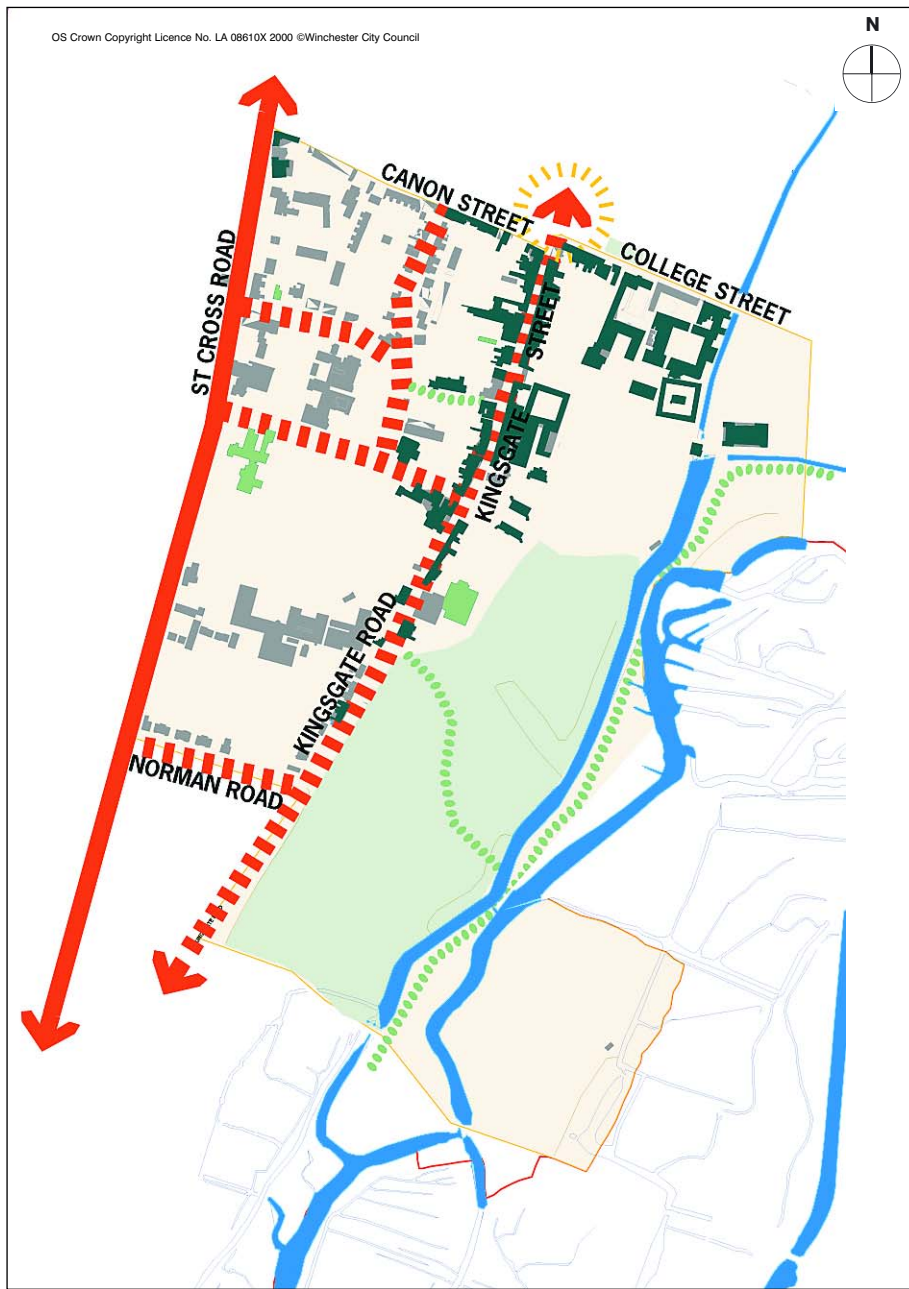
Further down the path immediately beyond the War cloister is "Museum" with a tiled roof, designed by Basil Champneys to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the school (photo 8). Sick House in 17th century brickwork with stone window dressings is set back within its rather fine formal garden.

The Warden's garden is a very peaceful brick-walled space with magnificent trees on the eastern and southern sides and a view of St Giles Hill in winter. The Lockburn stream coming through from Abbey Gardens, and the Cathedral Close runs down its western side. On the south side beyond the trees is New Hall which houses panelling originally created by Pierce for the College Chapel in the 17th century.

South of High Street, Canon (photo 14) and College Streets are lined with Georgian and Victorian houses, built of brick, stone and pastel painted stucco, with undulating rooflines clad in plain clay tiles.

The King's Gate is a 14th century gateway in the City wall with a castellated parapet. The 16th century church of St Swithun upon Kingsgate sits above the gateway.

Kingsgate Street has a distinctive, largely 18th century character, with buildings featuring parapets, string course details and door and window detailing and use of sash windows. These include Nos 62 and 16, which have full round wooden columns supporting a decorative entablature and flat hood moulds with deep panelled reveals to match their six-panel doors. No. 13 has flat pilasters and No. 15 has stone steps and railings, narrow pilasters supporting a pedimented hood. No. 8 has only thin pilasters with a decorative fanlight and decorative timber mouldings, and a place for a glazed lantern. In addition to these there is a double bow-fronted shop window and other details, such as window shutters, boot scrapers and early insurance signs. Many chimneys have decorative pots.



Left: Urban Structure



The approach to the Kings Gate starts with two-storey buildings to the west and College buildings set back from the street along the east side. The view through the art school reveals the little, tiled centrepiece by Ted Cullinan built in the 1980s (photo 7). Building heights increase and frontages are increasingly narrow as the route culminates with a tight, urban space at the King's Gate, creating a dramatic approach to the Cathedral and College Street. Building plots are again defining and important, as is the evidence for earlier medieval buildings within brick façades; early chimneys, projecting ranges to rear, and steep roofs. Windows and doors along these streets are almost without exception timber, traditional, and of simple design.

College Street features a very fine collection of apparently 18th century houses, the first being the house where Jane Austen died in 1817. The Winchester College Music School on Culver Road built in 1903 to a design by E.S. Prior, is a striking stone building with a high conical roof surmounted by a lantern. St Michael's Road was an ancient mediaeval street that is now a wide residential road, its north end terminated by the gable of Hawkins House.



6.4 Public realm

Kingsgate Street retains its sense of history and a superb view of St. Catherine's Hill at Ridding Meads. A memorable view of the cathedral roof dominates the narrow streets defined by Kingsgate Arch, the impressive flint and stone College walls and 18th century houses. The contrasting inter-relationship between the historic College buildings, Wolvesey Palace and the adjoining water meadows is one of the defining elements of the City. Lush water meadows and mature trees provide a strong pastoral setting to the complex of buildings.

Although public access is permitted across the College's playing fields, there is a limited provision of public open space in this area. A small, landscaped garden on College Street is maintained by the College but its usefulness is largely decorative.

Whilst the College grounds to the east of the area limit movement east-west, west of Kingsgate Street, a series of pedestrian routes add to the permeability of the street network. St Michael's Passage which curls around St Michael's church is a notable and well-used route.

In general, there is a high quality public realm notable for the avoidance of intrusive signage and high quality paving, for instance, along College Walk.

6.5 Natural features and topography

The lush greenness of the southern water meadows provide an important backdrop. The view from the end of College Street exemplifies a sense of the country penetrating the City.

6.6 Neutral and negative features

Although the high blank walls of the medieval College grounds are an essential part of the area's character, the scale of the buildings (mostly College-owned) and Kingsgate Park along St Cross Road provide less interest and animation to the street scene. St Cross Road is more traffic-dominated and divides the College area from the Christchurch Road area to the west.

Timber fencing around some of the College playing fields is an incongruous and unnecessary curtailment of sight lines across otherwise open space and would be better replaced by well-designed railings.

6.7 Potential for enhancement

The replacement of timber fencing with visually open metal railings would allow the playing-fields to contribute visually to the public realm.

The open space on College Street could be reconfigured.



Left: Environmental Assets