

DARBISHIRE BUILDING REFURBISHMENT OF SANITARY ACCOMMODATION
SOMERVILLE COLLEGE, OXFORD

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ISSUE 01

APRIL 2024



Bruce Architecture Ltd

THE APPLICATION SITE

Darbishire Building

Somerville College

Woodstock Road

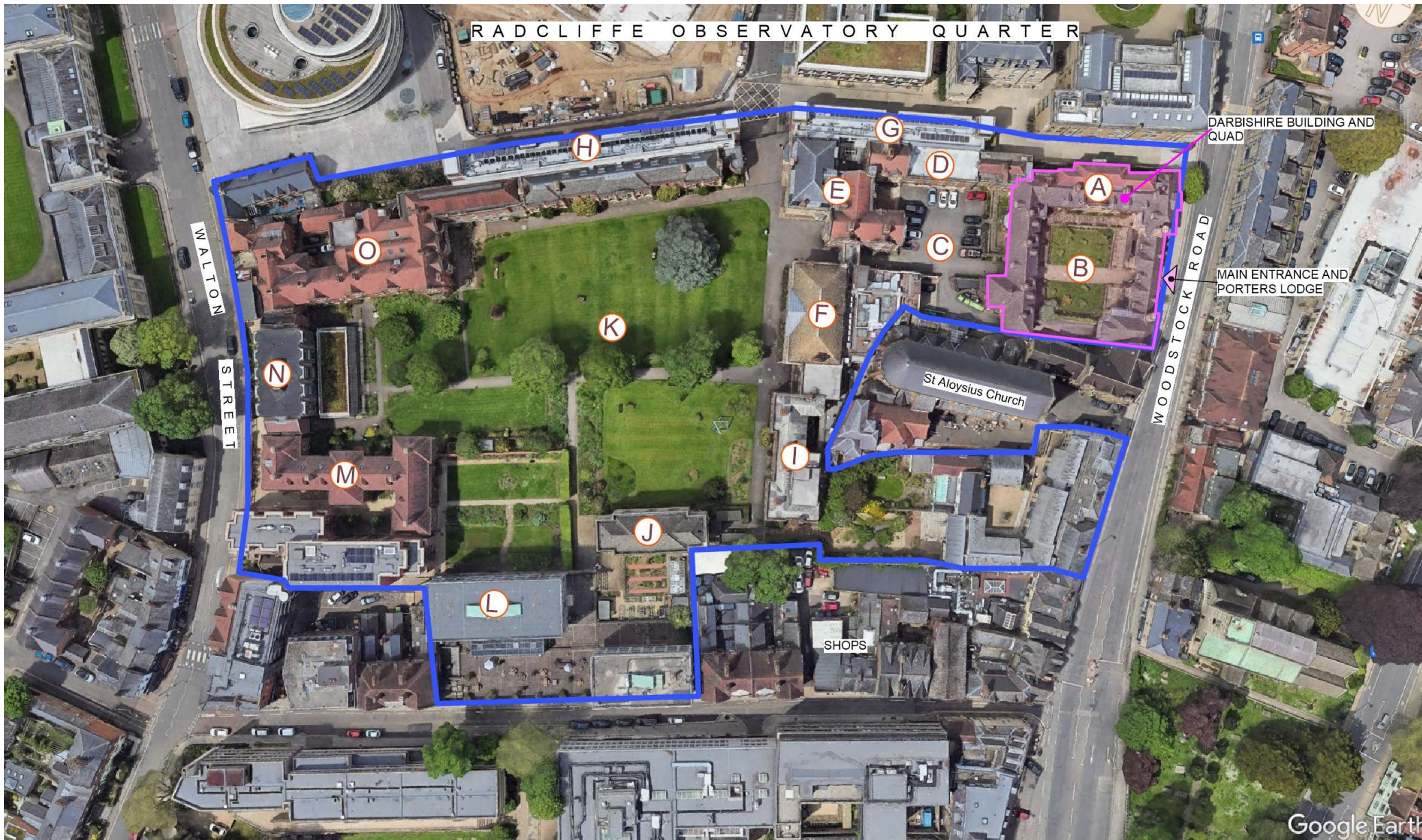
Oxford

OX2 6HD

LOCATION

The Somerville College site is located to the north of the Oxford city centre and spans between the Woodstock Road and Walton Street. The east elevation of Darbishire building forms the principal college entrance and street frontage onto the Woodstock Road. The building contains the porters lodge and encloses the entrance quad. The north side of the building faces onto the adjacent Radcliffe Observatory Quarter.



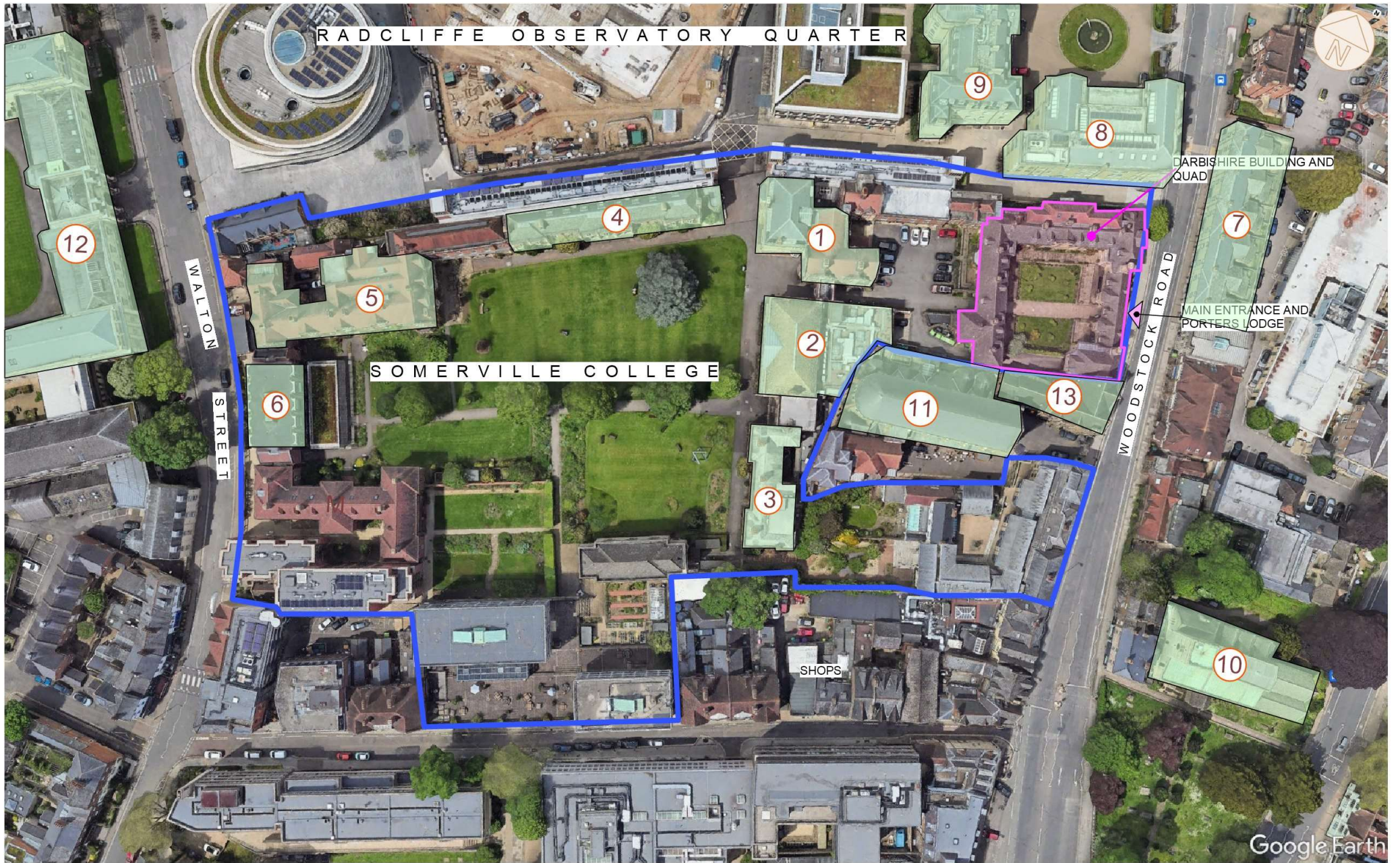


SOMERVILLE COLLEGE SITE

- A. Darbshire Building.
- B. Entrance Quad.
- C. Traffic Quad.
- D. Hostel
- E. House Building (Walton House).

- F. Maitland Hall.
- G. ROG East.
- H. ROQ West.
- I. Maitland.
- J. Chapel.

- K. Main Quad.
- L. Vaughan.
- M. Penrose.
- N. Wolfson.
- O. Park.



LISTED BUILDINGS

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The college site and surrounding area contain a variety of listed buildings:

1. Somerville College, House Building (Walton House) Grade II.
- 2 & 3. Somerville College, Hall And Maltland Grade II.
4. Somerville College Library Grade II
5. Somerville College West Building Grade II
6. Somerville College Wolfson Building Grade II
7. St Giles Terrace Grade II
8. The Radcliffe Infirmary, Former teaching and Outpatients Block, Grade II
9. The Radcliffe Infirmary Main Block, Grade II*
10. Church of St Giles Grade I
11. Church of St Aloysius Grade II
13. Presbytery to Roman Catholic Church of St Aloysius Grade II
12. Screen of the University Printing House Fronting Walton Street Grade II & The University Printing House (The Clarendon Press) Grade II*

CONSERVATION AREAS

Somerville College is included in the Central (City & University) Conservation Area, first designated by the Council in 1971. Somerville is located at the northern boundary of the Central Conservation Area, which wraps around the college site on Woodstock Road to the east and on Walton Street to the west.

The Jericho Conservation Area, designated in February 2011, is adjacent to the west boundary of the college site.

THE NATURE OF THE ASSET

Constructed 1933 the Darbishire building replaced dilapidated buildings on the north west corner of the site including cottages and the Gatehouse and Waggon and Horses former public house. The demolished buildings had provided unsatisfactory accommodation for twenty eight students and were in constant need of repair.

Architect: Percy Morley Horder

Builder: S Hutchins and Sons Oxford.

The new buildings provided accommodation for thirty undergraduates, two sets of fellow's rooms a new arched entrance, porters lodge and new council room.

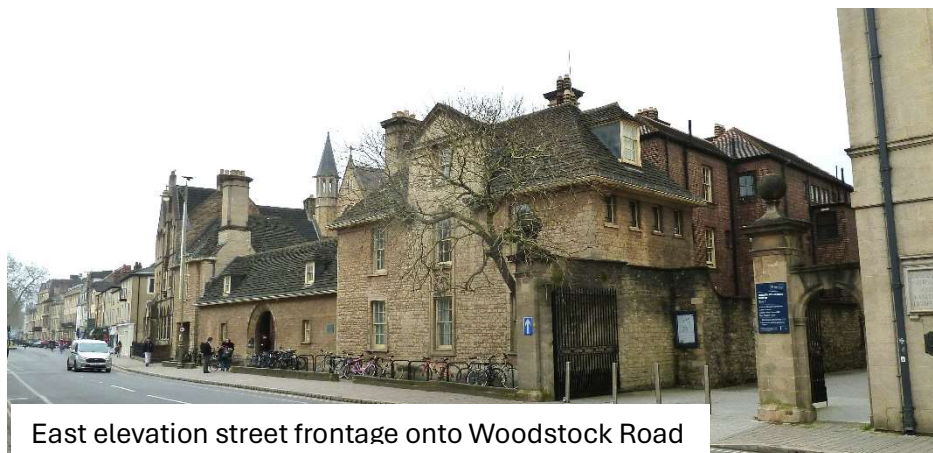
Materials:

Walls: Generally, squared rubble stone with plain ashlar dressings to windows and plinth in limestone from Bladon Quarry. North and west elevations are in red/brown handmade clay stock brickwork laid in English bond.

Roof: Generally, Hipped roofs covered with Stonesfield slates. North elevations have plain clay tiles.

Windows: Generally, painted timber double hung sash, casements to dormers. North and West elevations have steel frame windows.

As set out above the north and west elevations were finished in stock brickwork to integrate them with Maitland Hall and House buildings. The north elevation also uses plain clay tiles in place of the Stonesfield slate used elsewhere. These materials combined with the steel framed windows give a utilitarian appearance to this section of the building in contrast to the arts and crafts domesticity of the main elevations. This utilitarian expression is appropriate for the function of this section of the building containing the sanitary accommodation and scouts' stores/pantries. Sanitary pipework is exposed on the outside of the walls.



East elevation street frontage onto Woodstock Road



West elevation into Entrance Quad



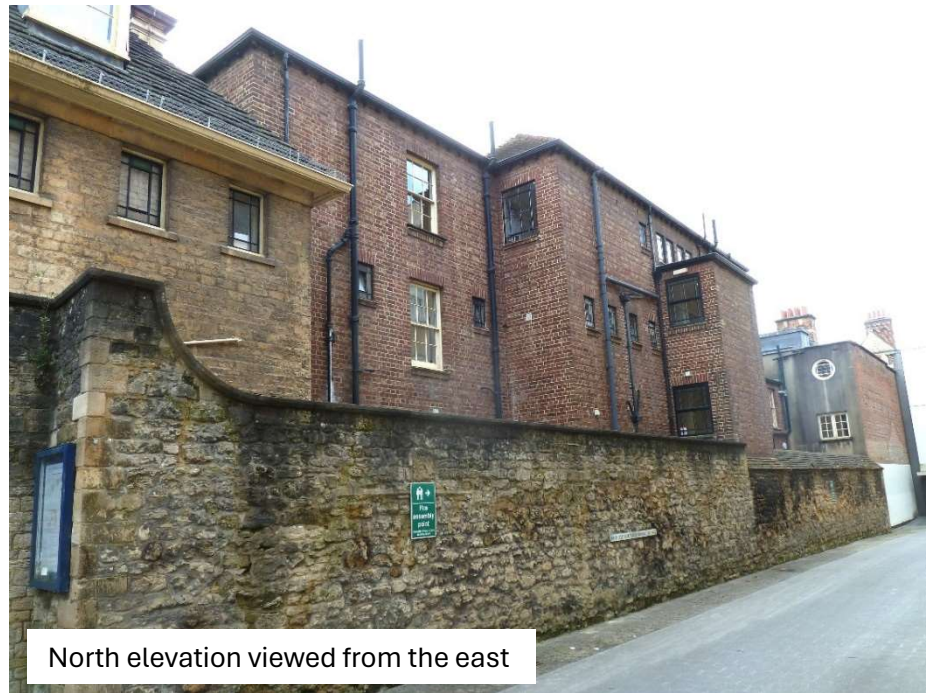
West elevation into Traffic Quad



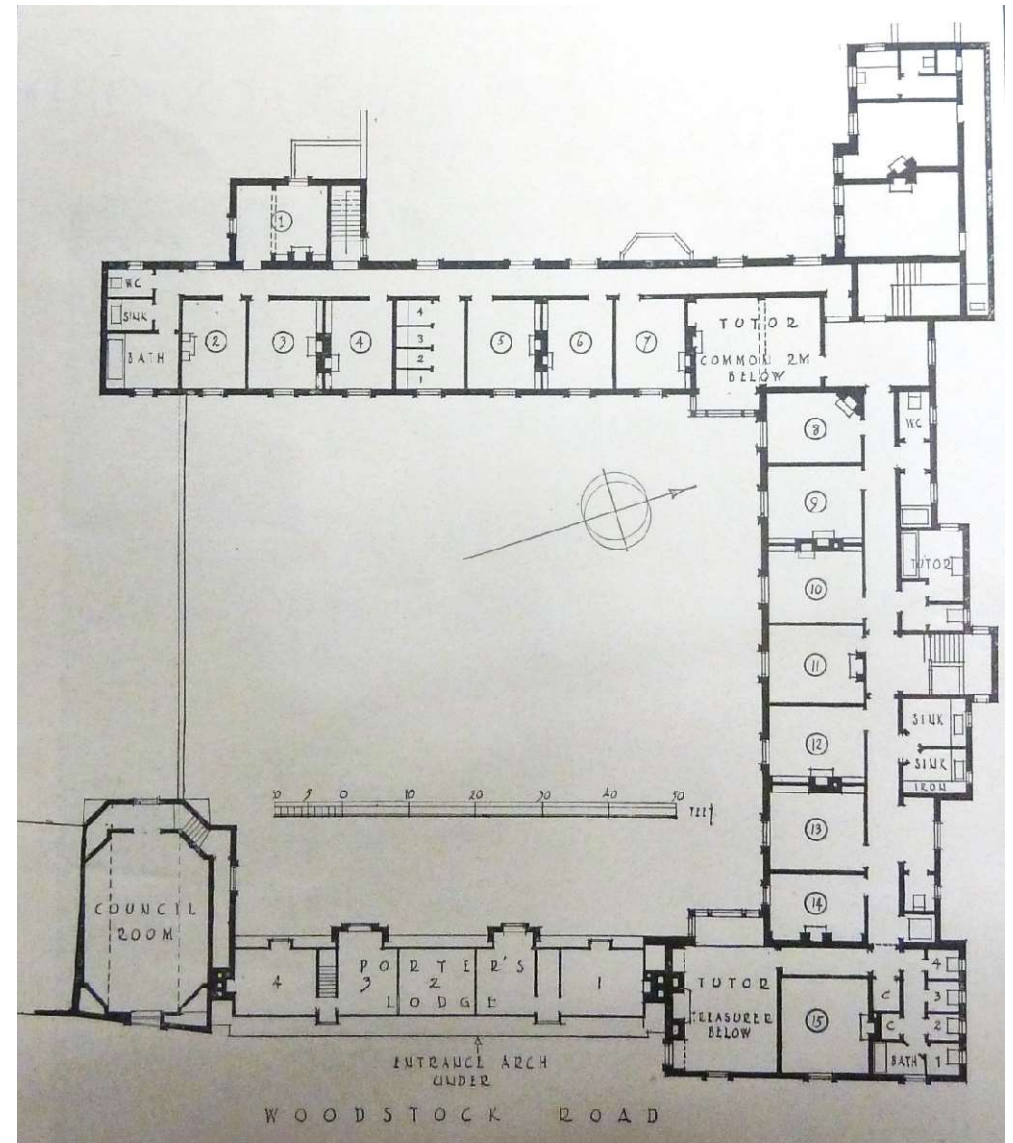
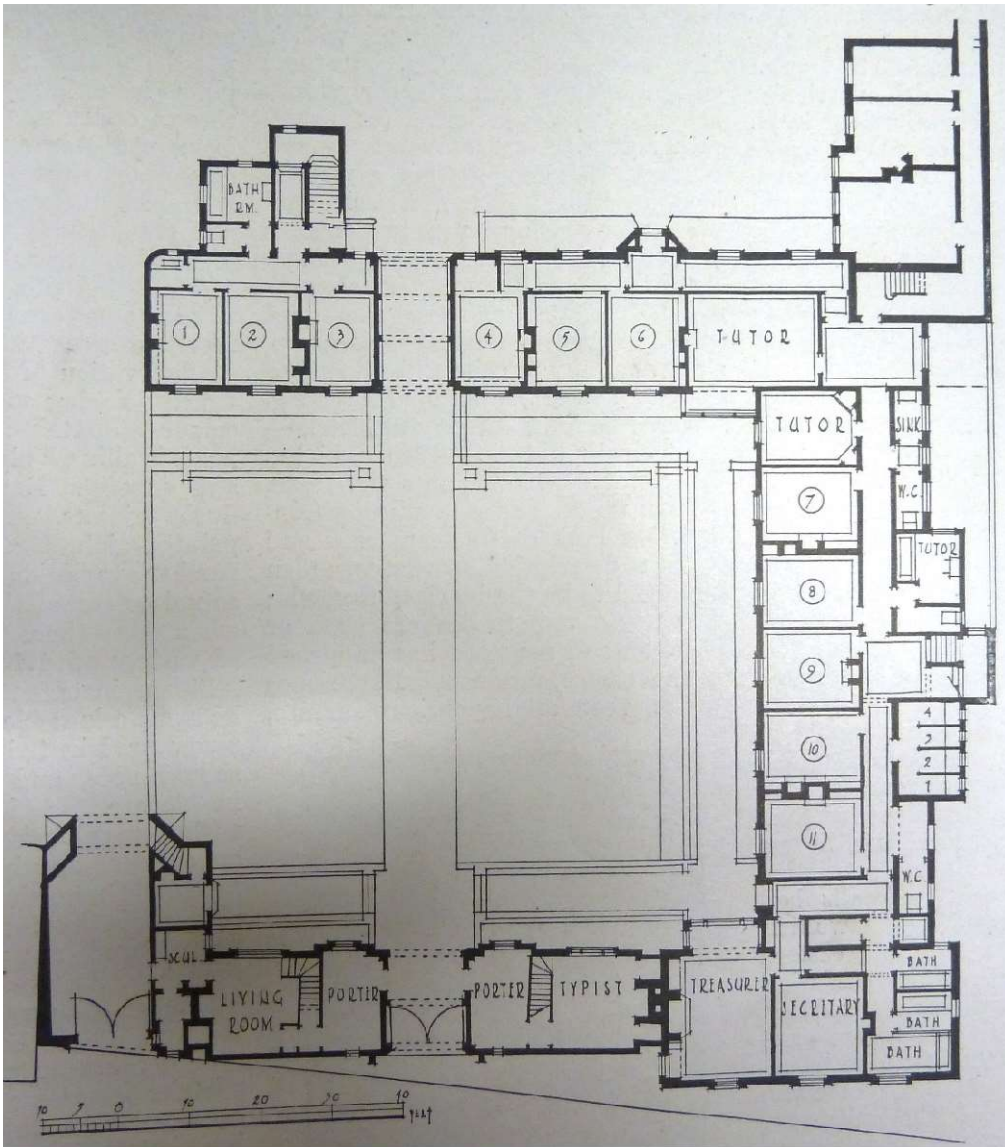
South elevation into Entrance Quad



North elevation viewed from the west



North elevation viewed from the east



Ground floor plan published in the Architect and Building News July 13 1934

First floor plan published in the Architect and Building News July 13 1934

SIGNIFICANCE

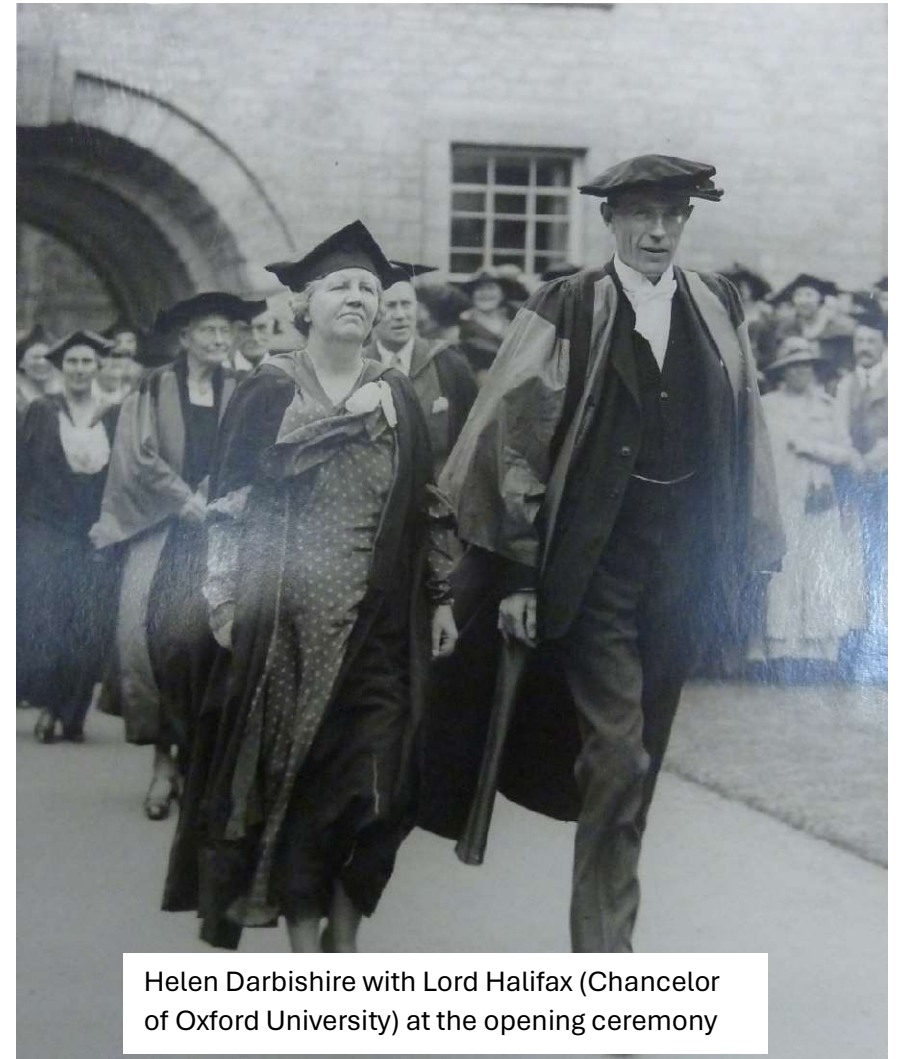
Historical Value:

Helen Darbishire, Somerville College Principal 1931-45. Helen Darbishire entered Somerville as a scholar in 1900. She achieved a first in English and taught at Somerville, eventually becoming Principal of the College. Her two passions were Wordsworth and Milton and she was honoured for her work on both poets, being awarded the Rose Mary Crawshaw prize twice by the British Academy: in 1935 for her work on Milton, and in 1950 for that on Wordsworth. She was the first woman to be chair of the faculty board of English at Oxford University. After retiring as Principal, Helen Darbishire carried on working on editions of Milton and Wordsworth, becoming a trustee of Dove Cottage, Wordsworth's former home. She eventually moved to the Lake District for the last few years of her life.

The buildings were originally known as the East Quadrangle but renamed in 1962 in memory of the Principal Helen Darbishire. She was principal in the chair at the emergency meeting of the Structural Sub-Committee on 8th June 1932 when the requirement for the new buildings is first recorded in the College records.

The Arts and Craft style of the buildings reflect some of the values and culture of the College and Oxford at the time. There was a preference for more traditional styles imbued with the values of good craftsmanship and traditional materials and forms that would harmonise with their surroundings rather than the more progressive modernism of the inter-war international style.

The buildings are evidence of the improving standards and expectations for college accommodation, the rooms and sanitary facilities were a great improvement on the general standard of Oxford College accommodation at the time. New residents enthusing about 'the interesting and, convenient, varied and beautiful rooms, decorated in schemes of green or blue or yellow,... the cleverly devised cupboards and book shelves, and the luxurious washing and bathing arrangements.'



Helen Darbishire with Lord Halifax (Chancellor of Oxford University) at the opening ceremony

Aesthetic Value:

The east elevation along the Woodstock Road forms the main entrance to the College and is the public face of the college. The buildings are significant elements in the streetscape contributing to the character of the area and continuing the varied domestic and vernacular style and scale of the street before the change to the more formal elevations of the Radcliffe Infirmary.

The street entrance and quadrangle create a strong sense of place and identity on entering the college, a unity which breaks down as you progress deeper into the campus.

The brick faced elevations of the north elevation are viewed obliquely and fleetingly from the Woodstock Road. The simple forms and limited, subdued pallet of materials on the north elevation means they are experienced as background in the peripheral vision whilst the eye is drawn to the scale and vertical emphasis of the east elevation of the recent ROQ East Building. Similarly, the narrowness of the access roadway between the boundary wall and the buildings of the Radcliffe Infirmary restricts head-on views of the north elevation and focus attention on the vistas at either end of the route.

THE PROPOSED WORKS

The works consist of internal alterations and refurbishment of the sanitary accommodation on the first and second floors with the resultant need for alteration to the external sanitary pipework and extract fan terminations. Three of the existing windows will be replaced whilst scaffold is erected as part of the ongoing College programme to improve the thermal performance of the windows.

PLANNING HISTORY

The building was altered in 2003/4 with the addition of 8 study bedrooms within the existing roof space of the southwest range requiring 10 additional dormer windows within the existing roof. See planning application 02/01414/FUL.

IMPACT ON THE HERITAGE ASSET

Externally the proposals will result in minor changes to the elevations which will have a positive impact in simplifying the layout and reducing the amount of the external pipework resulting in a less cluttered and visually “busy” elevation. This will assist in maintaining its place as a background building whilst continuing to express the functional nature of this element of the building.

Internally changes will have a neutral impact on the heritage asset. The sanitary facilities have undergone multiple phases of refurbishment, the last of which was in the first decade of this century. These changes reflect the periodic need to refurbish/renew the facilities and reconfigure to suit the current preference to have all appliances in one space. These facilities remain in the portion of the building where they were originally located.

SOURCES

BOOKS

Somerville College, 2013, *Breaking New Ground*, A history of Somerville College as seen through its buildings.

Tyack, Geoffrey, 1998, *Oxford: An Architectural Guide*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York

COLLEGE ARCHIVE

Somerville College New Buildings East, Pamphlet from the opening ceremony.

The Architect and Building News Friday July 13, 1934. Page 38.

Somerville College, minutes from Structural Sub-committee June 8th 1935.