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## 1 | Origins 900–1350

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The causeway was probably made during the reign of Offa, King of Mercia from 757 to 796, and led across the swampy flood-plain to the north of the Thames crossing; even today the low-lying ground near the river floods frequently in winter, and the city has long been notorious for its damp, stagnant air and enervating climate, conducive, some would say, to academic introspection and melancholy. Overlooking the causeway from the edge of the gravel terrace was a church, which stood near the present Christ Church Cathedral. According to medieval legend, a Mercian princess, Frideswide, escaping the unwanted attentions of a royal suitor, founded a community of holy women here, and after her death in 727 a religious community of some sort grew up around her shrine; recent dating of skeletons dug up from the cloister of Christ Church suggests that the community already existed in the 9th century. So, even before it became a town, Oxford was a centre of religious observance, with a minster church (monasterium) and a local saint of its own.

The Anglo-Saxon town was laid out with a grid plan of metalled streets enclosed within a defensive wall of earth and timber, strengthened with stone in the 10th century. The wall was pierced by narrow gates across the main routes leading north, south, east, and west: Cornmarket Street to the north, St Aldate's to the south, High Street to the east, and Queen Street to the west, to give them their modern names. The streets intersected at a crossing place later known as Carfax, probably meaning 'four forks', from the Latin *quadrifurcus*. The market was here, later spreading out into the surrounding streets. Elsewhere were the detached houses of merchants and rural landlords, interspersed with churches, some of which seem to have started life as private chapels. And in the south-east corner, just within the walls, was St Frideswide's minster.

By the middle of the 11th century Oxford had become one of the more important provincial towns in England, ranking with places like Winchester and Lincoln, though smaller than York or Norwich. There were over 1000 houses and perhaps 4000 or 5000 people.

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# Glossary of Architectural terms

**aisle** A passageway flanking the central area of a building, usually a church, and separated from it by an *arcade* or *colonnade*.

**antechapel** The western portion of an Oxford college chapel, separated from the main body of the building by a screen.

**apse** The rounded eastern end of a church's *chancel*.

**arcade** A row of arches resting on *piers* or columns.

**ashlar** Stonework cut in such a way as to present a smooth appearance, with the joints scarcely visible; the opposite of rubble masonry.

**balustrade** In Renaissance architecture, a row of stone balusters supporting a rail, often used at the roof level of a building.

**bargeboard** A carved wooden panel under the eaves of a *gable*.

**battlement** An indented parapet in medieval or medieval-inspired architecture, originally used as a means of fortification.

**boss** A raised carving at the intersection of the ribs in a medieval *vault*.

**buttress** A piece of masonry built against a wall, and usually at right angles to it, so as to add extra strength or to counteract the outward thrust of a roof.

**capital** The carved head of a column or *pilaster*.

**chancel** The eastern arm of a church, containing the main altar.

**clerestory** A row of upper windows lighting the inner parts of an aisled building, usually a church.

**cloister** A covered walkway around a quadrangular space, usually attached to a monastic or collegiate church.

**colonnade** A row of columns.

**corbel** A projecting block of wood or stone used as a support.

**cornice** A projecting moulding on the roof-line of a classical building

**course** A layer of masonry or brickwork in a wall.

**crenellation** See *battlement*.

**crocket** An embellishment of a *pinnacle* or spire in a medieval building.

**crossing** The central space in a cruciform church, at the intersection of the nave, chancel, and *transepts*.

**crypt** See *undercroft*.

**door-case** The carved surround of a doorway, usually in classical architecture.

**gable** The end of a pitched roof, often triangular but sometimes embellished with curved forms.

**giant order** A row of classical columns or, more commonly, pilasters carried up through two or more storeys of a building.

**groin** See *vault*.

**hammer-beam** A beam projecting at a right angle from the top of a wall in a timber roof, designed to support one side of an arch.

**jetty** The projecting upper storey of a timber-framed building.

**lancet** A thin narrow window in medieval architecture, without any *tracery*.

**loggia** A covered space in a Renaissance building with one side open to the elements, often demarcated by an *arcade* or *colonnade*.

**lunette** A window or opening in a Renaissance building in the form of a half-circle or half-moon.

**mullion** A vertical post within a window.

**nave** The western arm of a church, furthest from the main altar.

**ogee** A double S-shaped curve, often used in English late medieval architectural decoration.

**oriel** A projecting bay window in a medieval building, often, but not invariably, upstairs.

**pediment** The gable-end of a classical temple, often used in diminutive form as an embellishment (e.g. over a window) in Renaissance architecture.

**piano nobile** In Italian Renaissance architecture, the main upper floor of an important domestic building.

**pilaster** A flattened, two-dimensional, classical column used as decoration on a building.

**pinnacle** A small spire on the roof-line of a building, usually at the top of a *buttress*.

**portico** A porch or entrance to a building designed in the manner of a classical temple front.

**reredos** A carved screen behind the altar of a church.

**rotunda** A circular, usually classical, building or part of a building, often covered by a dome.

**rustication** In Renaissance architecture, the practice of either leaving masonry deliberately rough in order to convey an impression of strength or of carving deep indentations between blocks of masonry for the same purpose.

**tie-beam** A horizontal timber beam spanning the width of a building.

**tracery** The intersecting embellishment of the upper part of a Gothic window. Bar tracery is made up of bars of carved stone, plate tracery (found only in early Gothic) is pierced through the wall surface at the top of the window, and blind tracery signifies traceried forms applied as decoration to the wall-surface of a building.

**transept** One of the two cross-arms of a *cruciform* church, between the *nave* and *chancel*.

**transom** A horizontal bar within a window.

**triforium** An arcaded wall-passage inside a medieval church, between the main arcade and the *clerestory*.

**undercroft** A vaulted space underneath the main room in a building; in a church, often called a *crypt*.

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