Silver Street

A narrow street once the home of the city's silversmiths.

Silver Street's name is derived from its occupation by silversmiths from as early as 1798, according to William Custance's map. The street line has changed little since the C16 when buildings bordered both sides as far as the bridge. The lane now marks a break between the intense focus of collegiate buildings and the market place area to the north, and the historical industrial enclave around Mill Street to the south.

Street scene

SIGNIFICANCE - HIGH

General Overview

Silver Street is an important route for pedestrian and motorist access into and out of the city centre. However it is now controlled by rising bollards to reduce the overnight through traffic and to manage peak flows during the day. Tourist coach parties often begin their tours of Cambridge there. It is naturally divided into east and west parts by the course of the River Cam.

At the eastern entrance to the street, the buildings retain some of the character of the historic high street areas of King's Parade and Trumpington Street, with C18, C19 and early C20 townhouses, and including two shopfronts. These have a mixture of different frontage materials that help to emphasise the pattern of tall, narrow-fronted buildings which are evidence of the even earlier medieval tenement plots that would have characterised this street in its early history.

Eastern end of the street

North side of the street

The majority of the north side of the street is made up of buildings and spaces of Queens' College and St Catharine's College, on sites that developed from the mid C15 as part of the core area of Cambridge's colleges. The C15 college buildings of Queens' College Old Court, as well as the mid C18 building of Pump Court still make up a significant portion of this frontage, rising from the rear of the pavement and creating a strong sense of enclosure, channelling views up to the bridge and the riverside. This sense of enclosure is reinforced on the south side by the long ranges of laboratory buildings that were constructed in the late C19 and C20. The dark red brick used for the laboratory buildings, and the short row of early C20 shops on the approach to the bridge, mirrors the red brick of St Catharine's College Master's Lodge and Queens' College Old Court buildings to create a unified character. The white plaster of the Anchor Public House is a strong contrast that helps to form a bookend to the south side of the street before the bridge.

Historically Silver Street Bridge (also called Small Bridge) would have represented an important gateway to the town from the south west, whilst the road westward was the most direct link from the town centre to the small settlement of Newnham beyond the low lying ground in the floodplain. Silver Street Bridge provides dramatic views over the mill pond and weirs to the south, which also accommodates the distinctive feature of one of Cambridge's punting stations. It also provides views along the river to the

north, including the Mathematical Bridge crossing the river from a doorway of the C15 west range of Queens' College's Cloister Court, which rises sheer from the water. Although the bridge has been rebuilt on several occasions, it retains its distinctive geometric construction designed by William Etheridge in 1749. Trees on the river banks around the bridge helps to emphasise the division between the east and west ends of the street by creating a green break in views.

Views to the Mill Pond

The Mathematical Bridge

Queens' College Cloister Court

Since the early C19, the growth of Newnham as a suburb has created a ribbon of town houses along the south side of the road west of the river. Darwin College, established in the 1960s, occupies a number of these converted town houses as well as having its own purpose-built buildings. Of the latter, the Darwin Study Centre in fact presents a rather bland frontage to the street, but terminates at the more interesting early C19 Newnham Grange, representing an historic farmhouse on the edge of the city. The building includes the use of the idiosyncratic wall arcading motif that is found in several of Cambridge's early C19 large houses. This also has a large garden creating another break in the frontage, with greenery seen rising above the high garden wall. All the buildings on the south side of the street and west of the river are built in Gault brick, providing consistency that unites the buildings. The remaining buildings on this side of the road form a continuous terrace that acts as a limit to the large open space of Queen's Green that extends northwards along The Backs. This is a large area of common land forming part of The Backs and maintained as grassland, with a woodland fringe to the west and a line of mature trees on the north side of Silver Street that help to channel views to Queen's Road, as well as providing vertical interest and greenery.

Darwin Study Centre

The Fisher Building of Queens'College

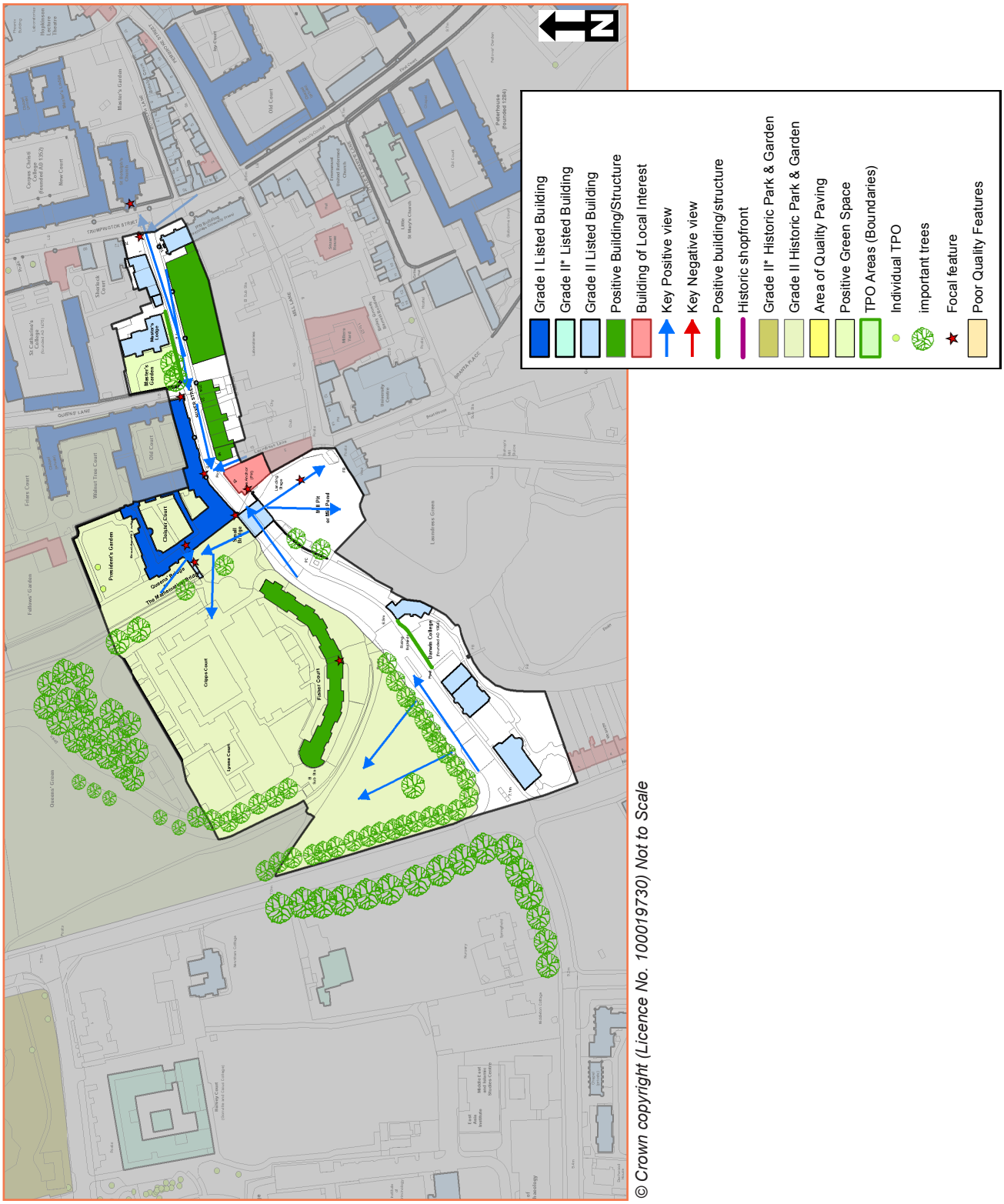
The large Fisher Building of Queens' College on the west bank of the river is an ambitious building constructed in a Jacobean Revival style using red brick that helps to unite it with the older college buildings. It presents a long, curving frontage to the road punctuated by the gabled returns of forward breaking bays. The building stands back from the road behind railings and a hedge, providing overlooking but little other interaction, which at this point helps to promote a more relaxed open townscape as the definition of the urban spaces breaks down towards the more open common land to the west. It also helps to screen the large modern buildings of Cripps Court and Lyon Court to the north, preserving a traditional image of the city. The Cripps building behind is a good example of the work of Powell, Moya and Partners, who specialised in buildings for the Oxbridge colleges during the latter half of the C20. The exposed concrete frame and recessed curtain wall helps to create a geometrical grid across the surface of the building, articulating the internal division and functions of the building as well as creating a rhythm

in views of the building that is particularly pleasing when seen from the river. The skyline seen from Queen's Green is less attractive however, due to the jarring angularity of the roof looming beyond the tree lined fringes of the open space.

This is a busy road with lots of through traffic of pedestrians and cyclists, and whilst traffic is now managed, it is still busy and pedestrians tend to congregate in the broader area of paving on the bridge, admiring the views along the river.

The scale of development varies slightly but is generally three storeys plus attics on the north side and two storeys on the south side, which allows more sunlight into the east-west aligned street. The Pitt Building at the entrance to the road is three storeys but represents part of the Trumpington Street frontage, providing a strong corner feature before the lower scale development to the west.

Richardson Candles on brackets in the eastern part of the street provide a distinctive form of street lighting. The wooden-block paved tunnel entry through between the shops at Nos. 16 – 21A



Silver Street are a special form of paving used in industrial areas to quieten the noise of iron wagon wheel rims where they passed close to residential areas. Their survival is very rare and represents an important feature of the historic industrial character of the area.

Townscape Elements

- From the Trumpington Street end, the buildings are predominantly on the back of the footway creating a strong sense of enclosure and channelling views along the street.
- The buildings are unavoidably apparent, which forms an important element of the urban character of the space on the edge of the town's historic core. The change in character west of the bridge, with the Fisher Building set well back from the road, therefore creates a strong contrast and sense of transition.
- Nevertheless, the large garden space of the Master's Lodge at St Catharine's College provides an attractive green gap in the frontage, providing a glimpse of just one of the many green spaces otherwise hidden within the college grounds behind this frontage.

Ornamental architecture

- The use of a limited palette of materials and a relatively consistent scale helps to unite buildings of very varied date and architectural styles.
- The level and quality of ornamental architectural detailing is high, particularly at the frontages of Queens' College.
- Long frontages of college and laboratory buildings are interspersed with narrower townhouses at either end of the street, providing a transition to areas with a different history of development.
- Queens' College Fisher buildings are set well back contributing to a more open feel.
- St Botolph's Church provides a good visual stop to the street at its junction with Trumpington Street.
- Lime trees on Queen's Green define the space, as well adding vertical interest and greenery, while filtering views.
- The informal green space of Queen's Green, without hard surfaced paths is a pleasing contrast with the hard urban landscape of the street, emphasising the transition to the historic rural boundary of the city centre.

Wooden block paved tunnel

- Passages through to other areas, including Queens' Lane, Laundress Lane and a number of tunnel entries to routes through to Mill Lane, provide a high degree of permeability and reflect the historical intensity of activity in the former industrial enclave to the south.
- The wooden block paved tunnel between Nos. 20 and 21 Silver Street is a rare form of surface illustrating a response to the mixed industrial and residential use of the area in the past.

Streetscape Enhancement

Control of traffic access has made an important contribution to reducing the impact of cars on the street. Given its high value as a pedestrian route for tourists entering the city centre, upgrading the surfaces to reflect the historic character of the street (part of the city's medieval street plan) could further enhance visitors' and residents' experiences.

The yellow road markings appear unduly prominent where the street narrows at the east end.

Building No./ Name	Status	Age	Height (Storeys)	Wall Materials	Roof Form / Materials	Architect	Notes
1 (Ede and Ravenscroft)	Positive building	early C20	3 + attic	red brick & render	gabled / tile		
2-4	Listed Grade II	C19	3 + attics	Gault brick	mansard / slate		
5	Listed Grade II	C18	3 + attic	plastered front	dormers / slate		
St Catharine's College: The Master's Lodge	Listed Grade II	1875-6	3	red brick with stone dressings	tile	W M Fawcett	
Queens' College: Old Court: South Range	Listed Grade I	1448-9	2 + attic	red brick	tile		
Queens' College: Pump Court	Listed Grade I	1736-60	3	white brick, ketton & portland stone dressings	balustraded parapet / slate	James Essex	
Queens' College: Fisher Building	Positive building	1935-6	3 & 5	red brick	dormer / clay tile	N Drinkwater	
Queen's Green	Registered Grade II	C16 / C17	open area of grass - registered common land, public open space				
Darwin College: The Hermitage	Listed Grade II	early / mid C19	2/3	grey Gault brick	hipped / slate		
Darwin College: Rayne Building	none	1966-70	3	grey brick	mansard		
Darwin College: Newnham Grange	Listed Grade II	early C19	2	Gault brick	tile		
Darwin College: East Wing of Newnham Grange	Listed Grade II	1885	2	grey Gault brick	slate		
Darwin College: The Old Granary	Listed Grade II	early C19; remodelled c1895	3	grey Gault brick	tile		one of the original granaries of Newnham Grange
Darwin College: Study Centre	none	1993-4	1-2	brick	slate	Jeremy Dixon & Edward Jones	
15 The Anchor Public House	BLI	C19 altered 1930s?	2	painted brick	slate		
16-21	Positive building	late C19	2	red brick	dormers	Richard Reynold Rowes	
laboratories	Positive building	C19 / C20	2-3	red brick with stone dressings	slate		
laboratories extension		1980s	3 + attics	red brick	mansard / dormers		
2 telephone kiosks outside Pitt Building	Listed Grade II	designed 1935	N/A	cast-iron		Sir Giles Gilbert Scott	Type K6
Pitt Building	Listed Grade II	1831	3	ashlar-faced	castellated	Edward Blore	wings, fenestration & interior altered 1934-7 by Murray Easton
Richardson Candle (south-east corner)	Listed Grade II	1957		tubular translucent glass on plain metal brackets, cast iron cap and base		Designed exclusively for Cambridge by Sir Albert Richardson	
3 Richardson Candles (21A and the north side of the Mill Lane Site)	Listed Grade II	1957		tubular translucent glass on plain metal brackets, cast iron cap and base		Designed exclusively for Cambridge by Sir Albert Richardson	
Richardson Candle (south-east corner)	Listed Grade II	1957		tubular translucent glass on plain metal brackets, cast iron cap and base		Designed exclusively for Cambridge by Sir Albert Richardson	
Silver Street Bridge	Listed Grade II	1958 - 59	reinforced concrete clad pale ashlared Portland stone			Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens	