

Oxford Road Architecture

Victorian Architecture

Many of the buildings on the Oxford Road were built during the Victorian period.

Buildings from different time periods have unique features that can help us identify when they were built.

Use the features listed to make a trail to help others spot Victorian buildings on the Oxford Road!



Iron Railings

The earliest railings were in wrought iron and were usually only reserved for churches and important buildings.

In the Victorian era, steel began to be mixed with iron to make cast iron. This meant it was cheaper to make and lots of houses would now be surrounded in iron railings.

In many cases you can find iron railings in front of terraced houses or individual properties.

With the addition of steel to the mix it became easier to mold the railings into very decorative, intricate, patterns.



Finials

These are a decorative roof ornament or feature. They became very popular in the Victorian era, including designs with spike finishes, ball and scrolled finials.

They tend to have a decorative ridge tile base on which the sculpture fits.

Some even sported the decorative Fleur-de-lis, a stylised lily with 3 petals bound together. It is known for being the royals arms of the former French monarchy.

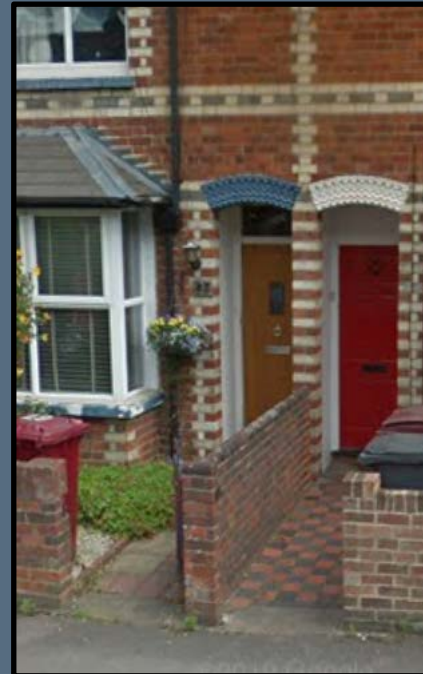


Geometric tiling

Geometric and patterned tiles would often cover the floor of medieval churches and important buildings.

It became possible in the Victorian era to mass produce tiles which made them more affordable. This inspired a 'gothic revival' of styles from the medieval period and it has become extremely common to see geometric tiles laid in front gardens leading to the front door of Victorian houses.

The tiles are often a mix of black, red and white tiles in diamond, square and triangle shapes.



Sash Window

The Victorian era was a celebration of ornate and elaborate designs which was also reflected in the intricacies of sash window design. The fashion was for 'gothic' features based on Medieval design and sash windows were based on oriel windows from the middle ages.

Sash windows, which offered a balance between letting in enough light and being structurally sound, consisted of 4, 8 or even 12 panels of glass supported and separated by metal or wood within a larger frame.

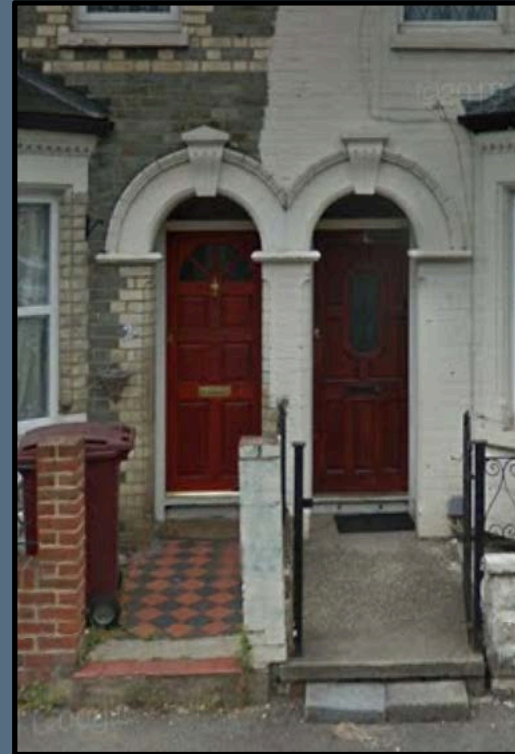
Houses were able to make use of natural light but were not as well insulated as windows today.

Many Victorian buildings have had their windows replaced with double glazed windows to keep the heat in.

Arched Doorways

Front doors were very important in the Victorian era. It made a statement that was visible to anyone who passed on the street.

Doors were elaborately carved and would feature an imposing architrave (archway above the door). They might also include stained glass, very similar to what you find in medieval church windows.



Stained Glass

Designers of the Victorian era revived the dead art of making stained glass windows. What had previously only been used in important buildings like churches could now be spread to ordinary homes.

There were some changes, images of people and creatures no longer featured in the windows. Instead, coloured geometric shapes were arranged in beautiful abstract patterns held together with lead.

Some more wealthy households did have realistic pictures in the glass windows, usually showing plants and heroic figures in the style of stained glass windows that tell stories in churches.

Slate

In the 1830s slate became a popular material used for tiling roofs.

Canals and Railways were introduced in the Industrial Revolution which meant that materials not previously easy to obtain were now quickly available from all areas of the country. Welsh, Cornish and Cumbrian slates for roofs and cladding could be brought by various forms of transportation to become a very common feature of Victorian architecture.

Slate is a light weight a durable material that is ideal for use on the roof. Slate has also become common for use in kitchens, though, it is less durable if walked on!

Stepped Gable

Stepped gable or crow-stepped gables or even a 'corbie step' is the term for the end of a building's roof. It is a stair step pattern at the top of the side (or parapet) wall which then projects above the roof line.

This design feature was initially popular in Belgium in around the 12th Century, they later featured on houses in Britain in the 15th Century.

They became re-popularized in the Victorian era as part of the 'gothic' revival where designers emulated the architectural styles of Medieval period.



Patterned brickwork

Before the 1700s most homes were built using local materials. This can be shown in local people taking stone from the abandoned Reading Abbey to build parts of their houses.

Brick laying became more popular in the Georgian period but really took hold with mass production introduced in the Victorian era.

Red brick properties were really popular but other colour clays were available that made it possible to make intricately patterned brick walls.

These patterns would often be added to the front of a Victorian building but would also feature on property walls facing the street.



Canted bay window

A canted bay window, is a window with a flat front section and two angled sides.

In 1894 a Building Act was introduced that changed the regulations surrounding windows. They no longer had to be flush to the walls of the house. This meant that features of the house could stand proud from the building, creating impressive visual impact.

It created the illusion of a larger room from the inside and imposed on space in front of the house.

As with all architectural choices in the Victorian era, it harked back to s Medieval feature, Oriel windows, and told viewers a story of the occupant's wealth.



Shop windows

Around 1750 shopfronts had begun to look like they do today. Initially small paned windows projecting out from under a canopy appeared in London. Hanging signs also made an appearance letting pedestrians down the street know what and where your business was.

In the Victorian era, as towns began to grow, so to did the number of shops and businesses. In the 1840s tall unbroken panes of glass would cover the front of shops, accompanied by detailed metal or woodwork.

Many shopping developments have removed these historic shop windows but some remain.



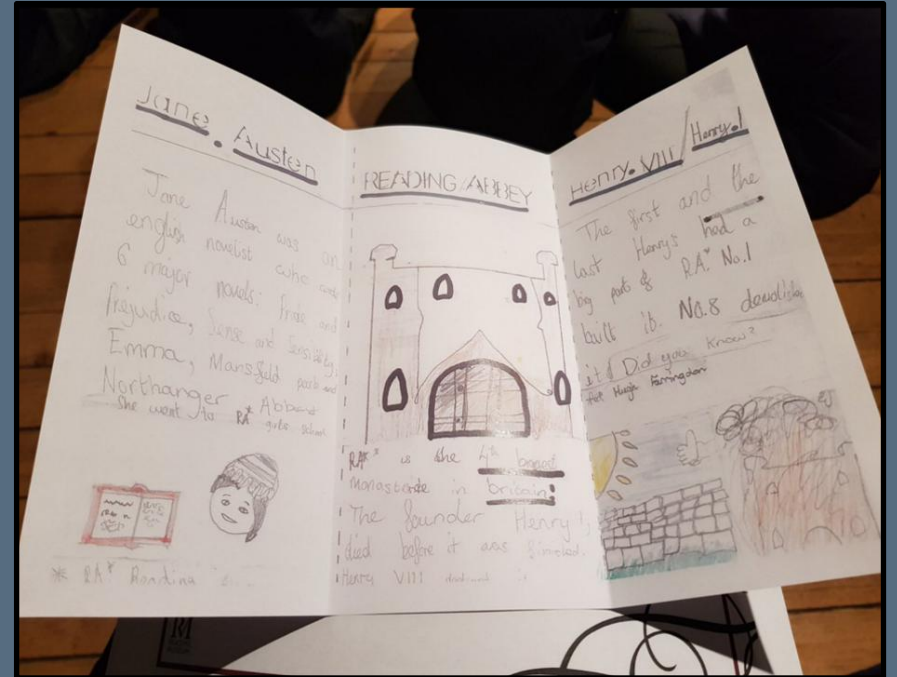
Activity 1: Victorian Architecture - Trail

Make trail of Victorian Architecture on and surrounding the Oxford Road.

Your trail could be an A4 page or it could be a small booklet.

Think about the questions below when making your trail:

- What age group will you make a trail for? People your age, your grandparents or teenagers?
- What would be easy to carry in your bag?
- How many features will you include?
- What information needs to be in your trail?
- Is your trail a challenge? For example 'How many finials can you spot on Russel Street?'
- Could you use your trail on Google Streetview?



Activity 2: Shop Fronts

There are lots of different shops along the Oxford Road and surrounding areas.

Can you make a map or trail of the shops in the area?

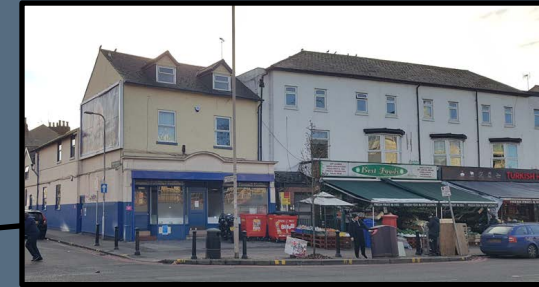
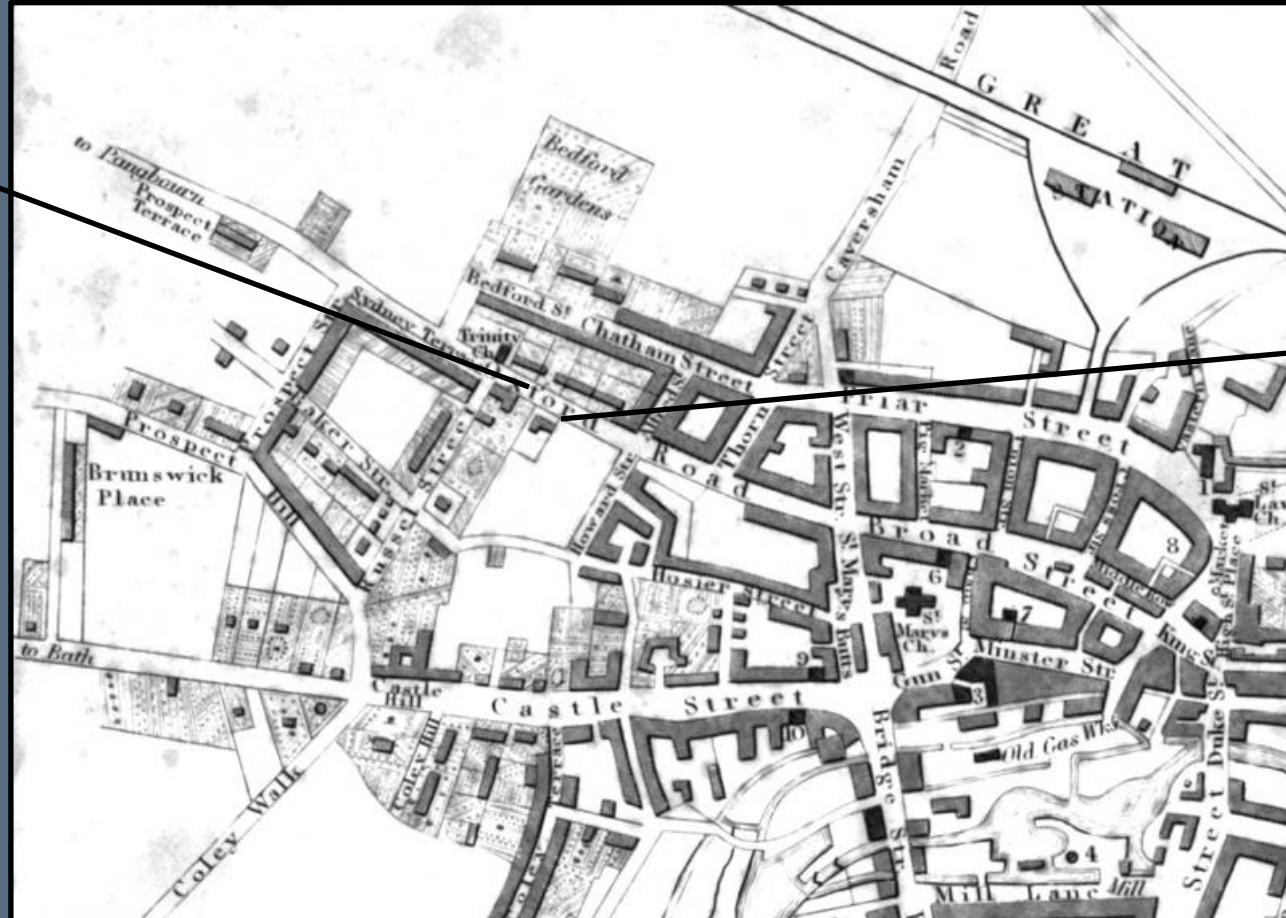
- Pick your favourite shops and add them to the map below or draw your own map.
- Don't forget to add what each shop sells.
- Perhaps you could make a trail of your favourite shops?
- Who would you share this trail with?



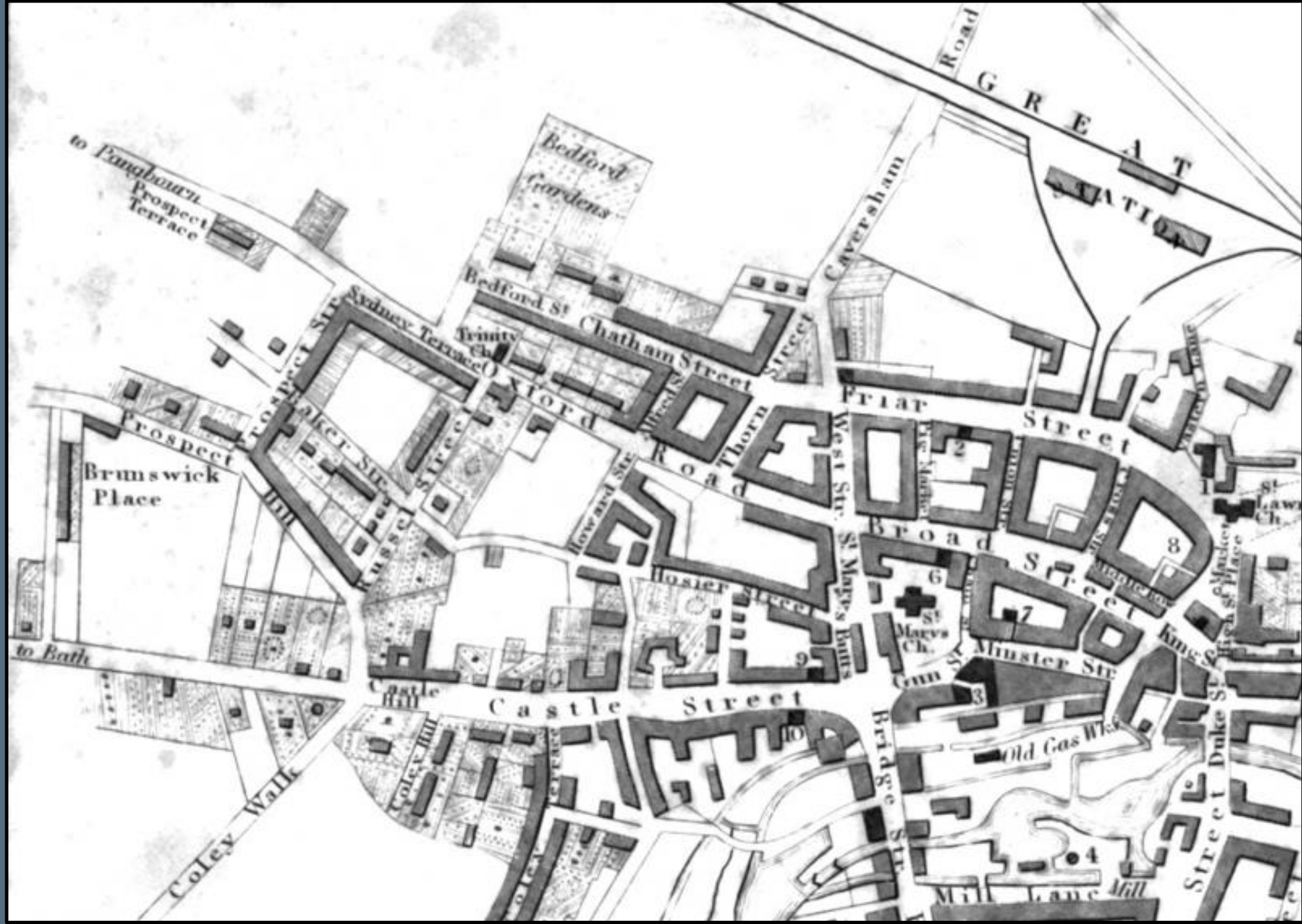
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Harput Kebab
139 Oxford Road
In the 1914 Kelly's directory it shows there was a shopfitters at 115 Oxford Road. Perhaps this shop front was built or repaired by Allaway & Co.



Best Foods
129 Oxford Road
This was the location of a Dairy run by Edwin Hiscock in the 1911 census.



Activity 3: Design a house or business

Now that you have learned all about Victorian architecture. Can you design your own 'gothic' house or business?

To help you, think about the questions below:

- Am I designing a shop, business or a house?
- Who am I making it for?
- If it is a shop, what can I add that will make people want to step inside?
- If it is a house, will a family live here, then who?
- What features do I want to add to make it really stand out?
- Where on the oxford Road would I build it?



Activity 3: Design a house or business

Become an architect!

1. Draw out your design with your absolute wish list of all the features you want to include. Draw it from every angle.
2. Now think about your measurements! Do they make sense? Label your drawings with measurements. Do all the features fit within the measurements you gave yourself for the perimeter of the house? Does it fit where in the street you want to add it?
3. Build a paper model of your house using paper and tape. Does it fit together? Is your house balanced?
4. Make changes based on what you have learned!
5. Finally build your house in a stronger material (card, clay, etc). Does it still work now that you have changed materials?

