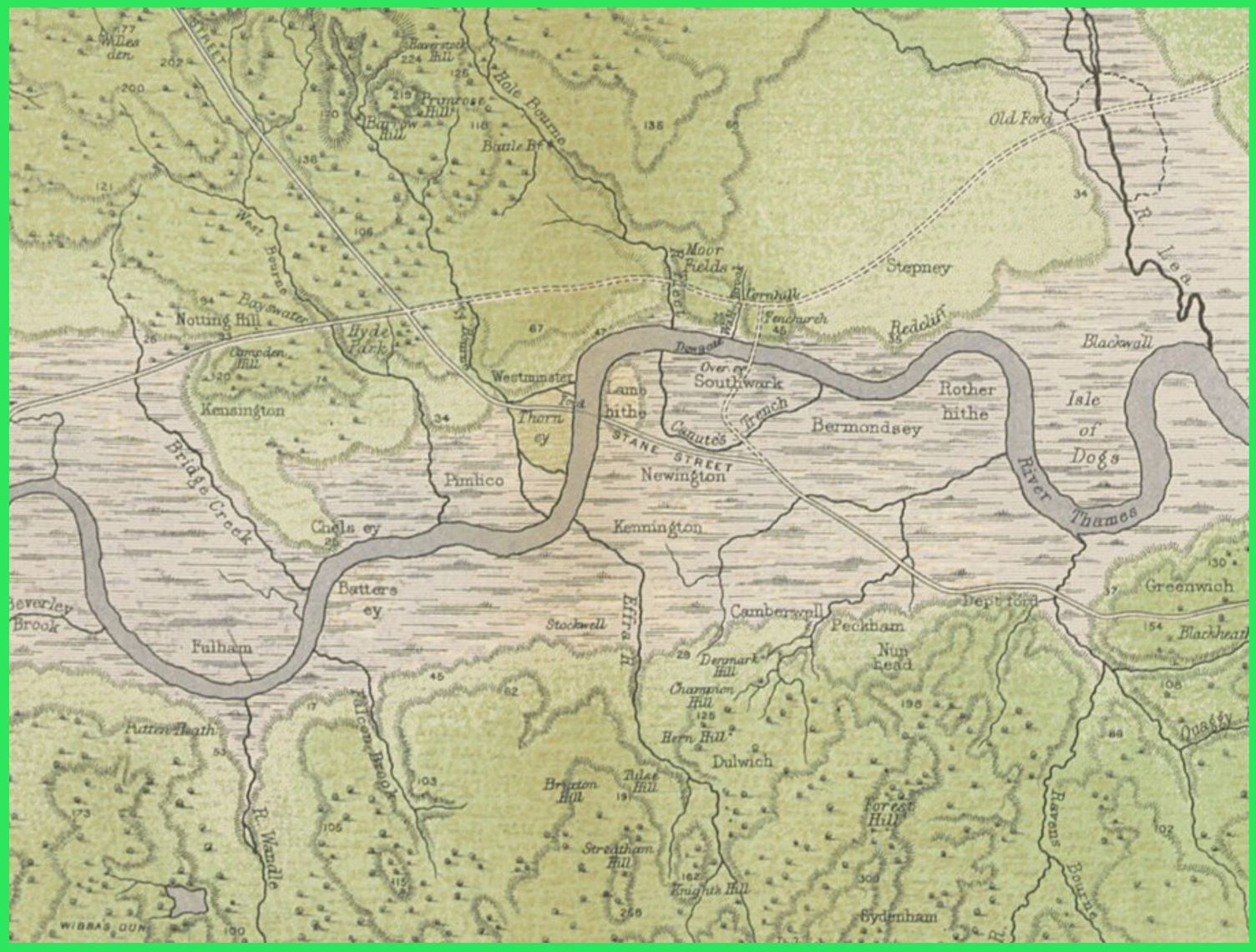
OXFORD ST ONE AND ALL

OXFORD ST

OXFORD STREET
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

MAYOR OF LONDON

OXFORD ST
ITS PAST, ITS PRESENT, AND FUTURE:



A History of London by William John Loftie, second edition, revised and enlarged. Published in London by Edward Stanford, 1884. Collection of the British Library.

Long before Oxford Street became London's busiest shopping street, and ahead of its transformation into a traffic-free space, it had a far less glamorous reputation.

Its story stretches back nearly 2,000 years.

The street follows the line of an ancient Roman road[1] that connected Londinium with settlements to the west.

In the medieval period, its identity was closely tied to the gallows at Tyburn[2], near present-day Marble Arch. The condemned were paraded from Newgate Prison through the streets, attracting huge crowds, before meeting their fate at Tyburn.

1. Oxford Street, Volume 53 in the Survey of London's main series. Published by the Paul Mellon Centre for the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London.

2. Oxford Street, Volume 53 in the Survey of London's main series. Published by the Paul Mellon Centre for the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London.



Entrance to Oxford Street or Tyburn Turnpike with a View of Park Lane, an aquatint print by Heinrich Joseph Schütz, 1798. Hand-coloured. Collection of the Yale Center for British Art.

WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN A GRIM EXECUTION ROAD ON THE CITY'S MARGINS WAS NOW ON ITS WAY TO BECOMING LONDON'S HIGH STREET!

In 1729, the road was formally renamed Oxford Street[1], most likely in recognition of its role as the main route leading to Oxford via Uxbridge Road.

By the late 18th century[2], Oxford Street was evolving into a popular promenade for carriage traffic and fashionable strollers, laying the foundations of its retail identity.

1. Edward Walford, 'Oxford Street and its northern tributaries: Part 1 of 2', in Old and New London: Volume 4 (London, 1878), British History Online.

2. Sophie von La Roche, Sophie in London, 1786: Being the Diary of Sophie V. la Roche, trans. Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933).

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At the Shoemaker's, an anonymous English painting from around 1825, depicting a young woman trying on shoes at Pattison's shoe shop, 129 Oxford Street. Photograph by Roy Fox, courtesy of the National Trust Photolibrary.

During the 1800s, Oxford Street underwent a dramatic transformation[1] becoming one of London's busiest and most prestigious commercial arteries. The Industrial Revolution and London's rapid population growth created an unprecedented demand for consumer goods, leisure and transport. Oxford Street became a natural centre for these new urban needs.

From the 1810s onward, gas street lighting[2] was gradually introduced and by the mid-century Oxford Street was one of the best-lit streets in London. Illumination not only improved safety but also created a more vibrant evening economy, encouraging theatre-going, promenading and late-night shopping.

1. McWilliam, Rohan, London's West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800-1914 (Oxford, 2020; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Oct. 2020).

2. London Museum, "How Gas Lamps Illuminated London".

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BUILT BY ROMANS CONQUERED BY PIGEONS

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Marshall & Snelgrove Winter Sale Advertisement, an original vintage advertisement for women's fashion clothing, published in an English magazine around 1924.

The early 19th century saw Oxford Street become home to a mixture of trades and entertainment venues, which helped establish Oxford Street as a destination for both leisure and commerce.

By the 1850s, smaller workshops and artisanal trades were giving way to larger showrooms and specialist shops. One of the earliest department store-style enterprises was a drapers shop called Marshall & Snelgrove[1], which opened a large purpose-built department store in 1870.

1. London Museum. "London's Lost Department Stores."



Oxford Street, an unsigned photograph taken around 1889–1890. Published in Beecham's Photo-folio: 24 Choice Photographic Views of London and Suburbs by Thomas Beecham.

Another pivotal figure in Oxford Street's retail history was the arrival of John Lewis[1], who opened his first draper's shop on Oxford Street in 1864.

By the late 19th century, Oxford Street had firmly established itself as a hub of commerce, fashion and entertainment. The theatres, music halls and exhibition spaces gave Oxford Street a lively evening culture that rivalled its daytime shopping scene.

1. Jonathan Blatchford, "John Lewis and the Foundation of the Oxford Street Shop, 1864," John Lewis Memory Store, last updated June 17, 2019.



Ladies' dresses department at the time of opening in 1909 (from a glass slide acquired by the Survey of London).

The early 1900s marked Oxford Street's transformation into a true symbol of modern retail. One of the most decisive factors was the arrival of the Central London Railway, better known as the Central Line, in 1900. Nicknamed the "twopenny tube"[1] for its flat fare, the line revolutionised access to Oxford Street.

For the first time, shopping on Oxford Street was not the preserve of those living in Mayfair or Marylebone. Customers from all across the city could travel cheaply and quickly to its shops. Retailers were quick to respond to the arrival of new customers. The most famous development was the opening of Selfridges in 1909.

1. TfL Corporate Archives, "A Twopenny Tube: The Central Line," Google Arts & Culture.

REMADE OXFORD ST WANDERING

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Sales in Oxford Street, London, circa 1910. Photograph by Pictorial Press Ltd.

DESPITE AIR RAIDS AND ECONOMIC STRAIN, OXFORD ST CONTINUED TO DRAW CROWDS, SERVING BOTH AS A PLACE OF EVERYDAY NECESSITY AND AS A SYMBOLIC REMINDER OF RESILIENCE.

By the 1910s, Oxford Street became increasingly animated with street performers, buskers and entertainers.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 many shops adapted to wartime shortages by scaling back on luxury goods and promoting practical items needed on the home front.[1]

Selfridges became a centre of patriotic activity, with the store remaining open as a morale-boosting space for Londoners. John Lewis and Debenhams likewise shifted their stock to selling textiles and household essentials instead of high-end fashion.

1. Jordan Landes, "Department Stores, Fashion and Consumption in the First World War, Institute of Historical Research".

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Customers buy low-wattage elctric light bulbs in the Woolworth's store in Oxford Street, London, Feb. 11, 1947, in response to the Prime Minister's appeal to the nation to economise with their electricity supplies. Laurence Harris

THE DETERMINATION TO REBUILD AFTER 1945, IS TESTAMENT TO THE RESILIENCE THAT LONDONERS HOLD DEAR.

The Second World War left a deep mark on the area. Oxford Street, being central and densely built, was struck during the Blitz of 1940-41.[1]

John Lewis was hit in 1940 and burned almost completely to the ground. Debenhams and Selfridges also endured significant bomb damage, however they continued to trade in reduced form throughout the war.

1. Daniel Pembrey, "Step Back in Time – Blitz Spirit: Oxford Street, 1940–43," Oxford Street, April 22, 2025.

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Golden tapestries linked by festoons of lights shining over the traffic in Oxford Street, London, after the shopping street's Christmas illuminations had been officially switched on by Lord Geddes, chairman of the British Travel Association. 1966.

THIS WAS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN THE POSTWAR DECADES, WHEN CONSUMER CULTURE WAS INCREASINGLY TIED TO IDEAS OF LEISURE, TOGETHERNESS AND PROGRESS.

The years following the war brought an ambitious programme of reconstruction, which infused Oxford Street with an air of modernity. First lit in 1959, the festive decorations became a symbol of joy after decades of austerity, attracting throngs of Londoners and tourists alike.[1]

1. Survey of London. "Christmas Shopping on Oxford Street." UCL The Survey of London, 18 December 2015.

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THIS STREET HAS CHANGED NAMES, SHAPE'S AND PURPOSES OVER CENTURIES, BUT IT HAS ALWAYS ATTRACTED PEOPLE WHO WALK SLOWLY IN GROUPS OF FOUR

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Traffic, cyclists and pedestrians fill this busy urban landscape in Oxford Street in London's west end. 1990. Richard Baker Street Photography.

IT WAS A PLACE THAT REPRESENTED THE SHEER DIVERSITY THAT MAKES LONDON THE MAGNIFICENT CITY IT IS.

By the 1960s and 70s, Oxford Street was no longer just a shopping destination, but a space where fashion, music, politics and spectacle converged. The rise of subcultures (including mods, punks, skinheads and new romantics) was evident on Oxford Street.[1]

In the 1970s and 80s, established department stores were joined by a new wave of fashion-led chains.[2] By the 1990s, the opening of the vast Topshop flagship store at Oxford Circus captured the energy of a generation with a new style of fashion.

1. London Museum. "How London Shaped The Clash." London Museum.

2. The London Archives. "London Department Stores: A History." The London Archives.

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OXFORD ST NEXT CHAPTER



For over 2,000 years, Oxford Street has evolved with London. From a Roman road and medieval route to the nation's premier shopping destination, it has continually adapted to meet the needs of each new generation.

Today, Oxford Street stands at another pivotal moment in its history. Now free from traffic, one of London's most iconic destinations is set to become greener, safer and more welcoming than ever before.

Changing shopping habits, the impact of the pandemic and growing demand for high-quality public spaces have highlighted the need for a renewed vision. At the same time, improved public transport connections, including the Elizabeth line, have transformed access to the area, creating a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine Oxford Street for the future.

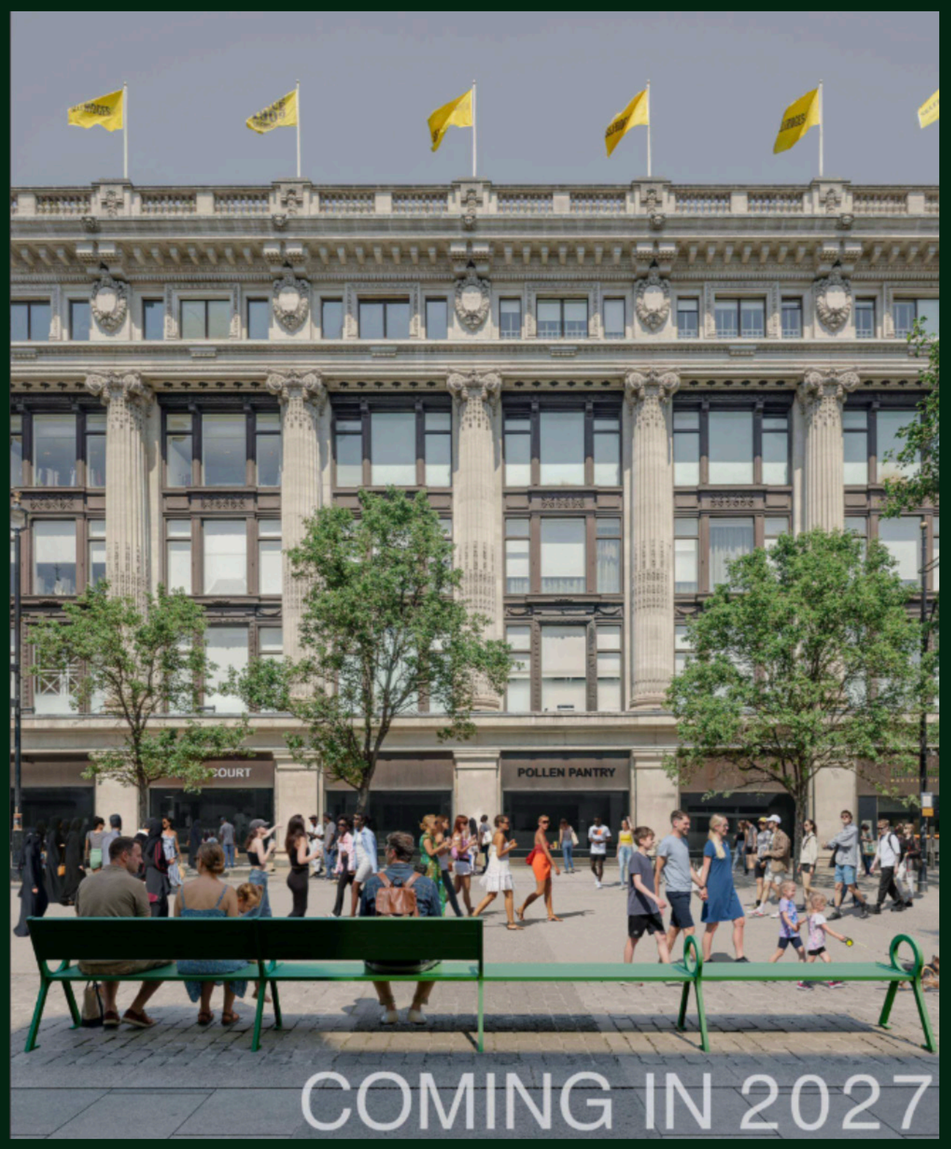
Public support for change has been strong, in a public consultation, two thirds were in favour of pedestrianisation of the street.

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A STREET REIMAGINED



The vision is bold: nearly one kilometre of vibrant, people-focused public space where people can walk, shop, relax, meet friends and enjoy culture in the heart of the capital.

To deliver this transformation, the Mayor of London established the Oxford Street Development Corporation (OSDC) in January 2026. OSDC is leading the regeneration, transformation and pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, helping to create a world-class destination for future generations.

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A STREET REIMAGINED

Over the coming months, Oxford Street will begin its transformation into a traffic-free public space, starting with a temporary test phase, where the architects will assess how people use the new pedestrian space. This will inform the final designs for the area and the permanent redesign of Oxford Street.

In time, reimagined public spaces will sit alongside flagship retail, next-generation workplaces, leisure, culture and hospitality, creating a destination with a distinctive character and more reasons for people to visit, stay longer and return more often.

The transformation will attract investment, support jobs, strengthen London's economy and help Oxford Street once again set the global standard for great city streets.

A place that is extraordinary every day, for everyone.

The next chapter in Oxford Street's story starts here.



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MORE STREET. LESS ROAD.

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