



St John's College  
Oxford



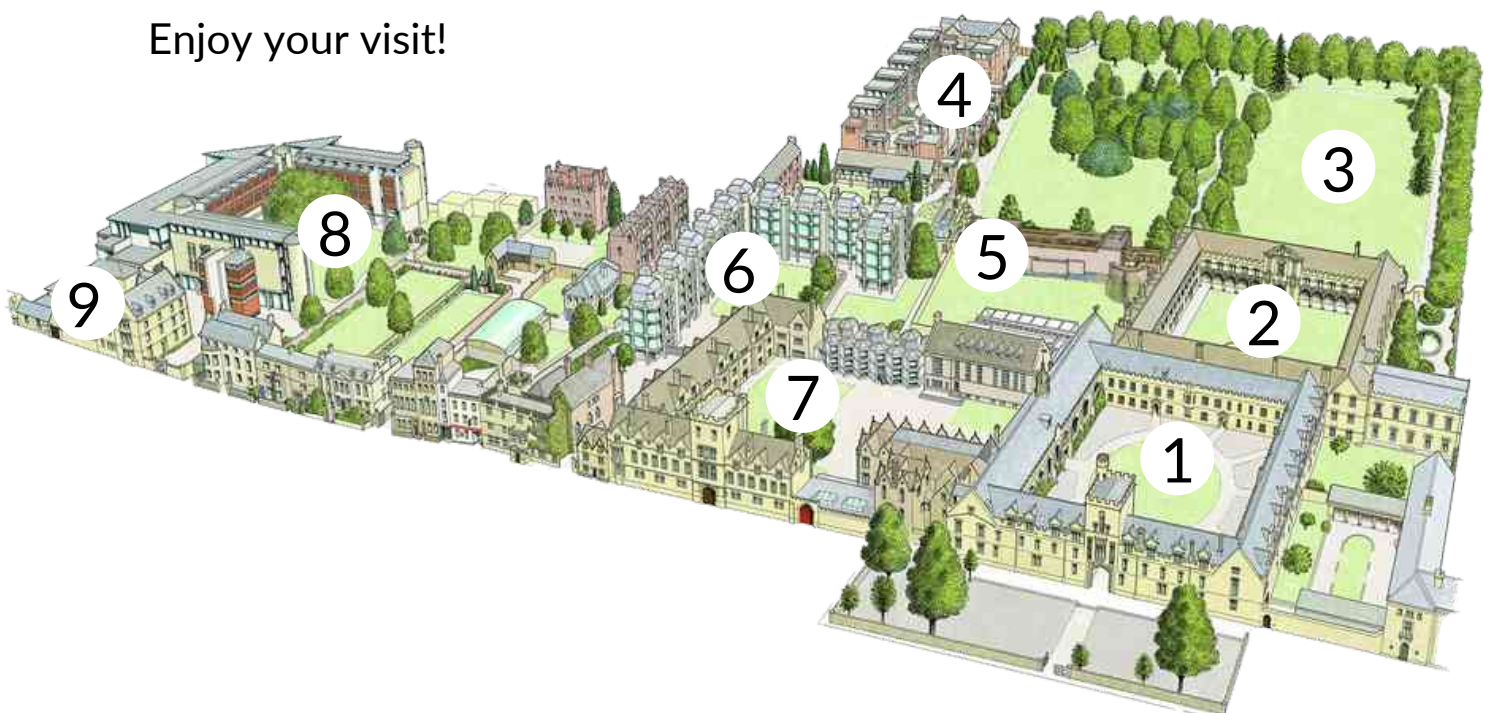
# Welcome to St John's!

We're delighted to welcome you for Oxford Open Doors 2022.

This booklet begins with a programme of the free talks and exhibitions we're hosting today, which we very much hope you will join us for.

It will give you all the information you need for a self-guided tour of College, following stops 1–7 below. Stop 5 is our new Library and Study Centre, which is housing several exhibitions today and which has its own self-guided tour booklet available. There are also refreshments available at stop 8, Kendrew Café, payable by card only, and an exhibition on at stop 9, our Barn Gallery.

Enjoy your visit!





# Programme

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The College is open from **10.00–5.00** today with an exciting mix of talks, self-guided tours – including a children’s treasure hunt – and exhibitions.

## Talks

### *Garden Quad Auditorium (4)*

<b>11.00</b>	<p>‘Stone Drawing (St John’s, 2019) and other work’ <i>Susanna Heron, artist</i> <i>Followed by a tour of the work with the artist</i></p>
<b>12.00</b>	<p>‘The History of St John’s’ <i>Professor William Whyte, Tutorial Fellow in History</i></p>
<b>1.00</b>	<p>Video screenings: the making of the Silver Futures commissions and of the Stone Drawing</p>
<b>2.00</b>	<p>‘Treasures from the Archive’ <i>Michael Riordan, College Archivist</i></p>
<b>3.00</b>	<p>‘The Architecture of St John’s, 1555–2022’ <i>Dr Geoffrey Tyack, Architectural Historian</i></p>

### *Canterbury Quad (2)*

A major restoration of Canterbury Quad and of the Old Library is currently in progress.

Meet Ian Stokes, Works Bursar, and members of the project team working on this Grade I listed building to find out more about the project: **11.00–12.30** and **2.00–3.00**.



# Exhibitions

## *Garden Quad Reception Room (4)*

### Laudian Vestments

A display of the College's remarkable collection of late medieval liturgical vestments and embroidery. This includes examples of cloaks and hoods that are some of the finest surviving examples of their kind in England.



### St John's Masterplan

A display of the College's future plans to improve its resilience, simplify services and reduce its carbon emissions.

Ian Stokes, Works Bursar, and members of the Masterplan team will be available from **10.00–1.00** to answer questions about the plan.

### *Kendrew Barn (9)*

### Ecstatic Fields

This exhibition of work from Masters dissertations in Architecture at Oxford Brookes University shows a range of made objects, framed prints, and short films. The theme, 'Ecstatic Fields' explores how architecture can create a sense and response in ourselves, seeking to elevate and extend our sensations, perceptions, and thoughts about the world in which we live. How might architecture exist to stimulate and propel us towards an ecstatic experience for the future?



## Exhibitions (cont.)

### *Library and Study Centre (5)*

#### **Life Stories from St John's: the famous and the forgotten**

St John's College's lifeblood has always been the people who lived and worked inside its walls – for over 450 years now.

This exhibition showcases a few of those lives linked to St John's between its foundation in 1555 and the 20th century.

Highlights are the renowned 12th-century Thorney Computus, a letter by Jane Austen's father concerning *Pride and Prejudice*, and newly acquired letters by Robert Graves.

View the newly commissioned tapestries by Susan Morris (*Silence*, 2021) and Mary Lum (*St John's Primer*, 2021).

Enjoy a unique preview of the College's new Silver Futures commissions. Project Curator, Amanda Game, will be available to talk about the new pieces at **10.30, 1.00–2.00** and again at **4.00** – meet her by the Sidonie Thompson Bridge on the upper floor of the Study Centre.

Find out about *Inspire*, St John's exciting range of access and outreach programmes for schools, in the Mark Bedingham Room.

## Self-guided tours

Tours of the quads and gardens and of the Library and Study Centre. For children there is a **Find the Lambs Treasure Hunt** – with prizes! Information available from the Lodge (7).

## Refreshments

The Kendrew Café (8) will be open for snacks, cakes, coffee and cold drinks (payable by bank card only).



# An introduction



Like all good stories, the history of St John's begins with a dream. Sir Thomas White, the remarkable self-made founder of the College, dreamt one night of a group of ancient buildings next to a row of elm trees and became convinced that he had been called to found a place in Oxford which would combat the Reformation. That place would become St John's.

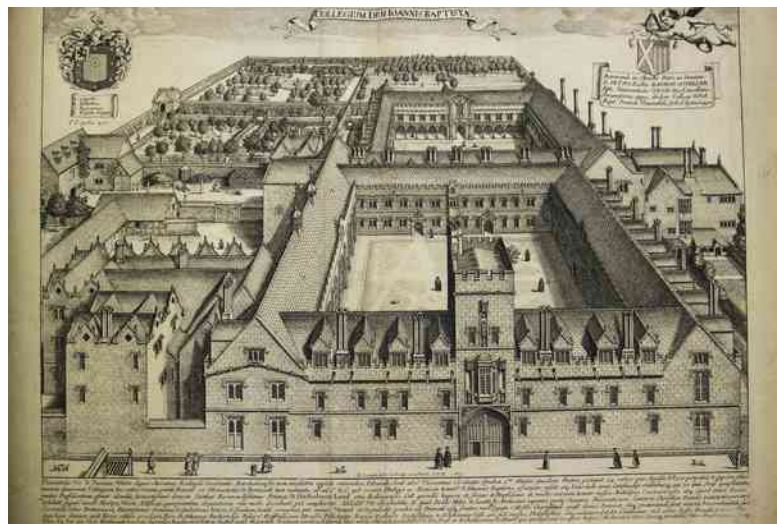
A devout Catholic, Sir Thomas wanted to train priests who would be able to confront and defeat Lutherans and Calvinists. The College was founded in 1555.

White bought the old buildings of St Bernard's College, set up in 1437 by Archbishop Chichele, the founder of All Souls.

This monastic college was built gradually over the subsequent century,

and the Chapel was only consecrated in 1530.

*'Oxonia Illustrata',  
St John's College  
by David Loggan,  
1675*





# 1. Front Quad

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Front Quad is effectively all that remains of St Bernard's College. Although the windows have been changed and the east range completed, it looks rather as it must have done when Sir Thomas first dreamt about it, with the notable exception of our new Front Lodge, completed in 2020.

Visitors still enter through the original door and pass under statues of Archbishop Chichele, Sir Thomas White, and St Bernard. All that the founder needed to do was turn St Bernard into St John the Baptist, and this was done by attaching a plaster beard.

The quadrangle follows a conventional collegiate plan. On entering, you will see the Hall (1437) and Chapel to your left, both open today, with the President's Lodgings (c. 1560) ahead of you. The remainder of the quad is given up to rooms for Fellows and students. These are all built on what became known as the staircase system: with rooms leading off from separate flights of stairs.

Originally, the larger windows lit sleeping accommodation, with the smaller providing light for studies. Three or four people might share the space, sleeping together but working separately. Now the process is reversed: with students sleeping in the smaller rooms and using the larger for their studies. Prospective applicants will be glad to hear that they also no longer share!



## 2. Canterbury Quad

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Canterbury Quad (1631–6), perhaps the most remarkable building in the college, was built by Archbishop William Laud, who was a Fellow and the President of St John's before his preferment.

As you can see, significant works are currently underway to replace the columns in Canterbury Quad and refurbish the Laudian Library, above the columns on the east side. The works are expected to end in early 2023.

The quad originally cost more than £5,500 and was intended to advertise Laud's importance as much his benevolence. Indeed, it was opened with a dinner that set him back half as much again. The result of all this is a quadrangle which seeks to reconcile the Renaissance with the Gothic, Laud's ambition with the practical needs of the college. This you can see in the eclectic mix of battlements and classical columns, Gothic windows and Baroque sculpture.

There are two statues here by Hubert Le Sueur of Charles I and his queen Henrietta Maria, and Laud's coat of arms appears everywhere. The busts of women in each spandrel symbolise the subjects and the virtues which students were meant to absorb. To the east (ahead of you) are the seven liberal arts – plus theology; to the west (behind you) are the seven cardinal virtues – plus religion.



## 3. The Gardens

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Continuing through Canterbury Quad, you come to the College Gardens, also known as the Groves. These were laid out in the latest style between 1722–8, and are greatly enjoyed by students in the summer months.

The gardens were first laid out in the 16th century, on the site of Canterbury Quadrangle. Beyond them was the Grove, stretching to the east. In 1600 four acres to the north were acquired by the College and enclosed, together with the original Grove, by a stone wall built in 1613 with money left by a former fellow, Edward Sprott. A stretch of Sprott's Wall survives today.

With the building of Canterbury Quadrangle, the enlarged Grove was laid out as three distinct gardens: the President's Garden, the Masters' Garden or outer grove (the original Grove) and the Bachelors' Garden, or inner grove. The outer grove, now also known as the Great Lawn, consisted of trees randomly scattered around a lawn, while the President's Garden was more formally arranged.

A local man, Robert Penson, provided the plants and advised the fellows on the plans. In the early 20th century a rock garden was added in the north-west corner by the Bursar, Henry Jardine Bidder, aided by the well-known botanist R. J. Farrer. This was remodelled in 1986.

Follow the gardens around to reach Garden Quad, the next stop on the tour.





## 4. Garden Quad

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The Garden leads into Garden Quad, built between 1991–4 to designs by Sir Richard MacCormac of architects MacCormac Jamieson Pritchard.

Voted the most popular modern building in Oxford, it is one of the most significant pieces

of late twentieth-century architecture in the country.

The ground floor contains reception rooms, including a purpose-built exhibition space for the so-called Laudian Vestments (open today 10.00–5.00), given to the College by Sir Thomas White at the foundation. Above this is a roof garden, and a series of staircases providing student accommodation. To the left there is also an auditorium which hosts lectures and events both within and outside the college community. Recently, it played host to Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei on a visit to Oxford.

The building is testament to the architect's interest in the history of architecture. Its towers make reference to the country houses of Thomas White's own time. Its concrete columns echo the designs of Piranesi and its saucer domes follow the example of Soane. Yet this is also a modern building, too, which owes much to Frank Lloyd Wright, to contemporary Japanese architecture, and even to the Brutalism of the 1960s.

Today the Auditorium in Garden Quad is playing host to a range of talks. Take a look at the programme at the beginning of this leaflet to see if anything takes your fancy!



# 5. The Library

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One of the largest and most modern libraries in Oxford, our Library and Study Centre was completed in October 2019 and acts as the intellectual heart of the College. It has won several architectural awards, including a 2021 RIBA National Award, recognising the building's sustainable design and the way it successfully links the old and new parts of the College whilst providing an excellent study environment.

There is a separate self-guided tour to the Library available at the welcome desk, along with an exhibition on 'Lives of St John's: the famous and the forgotten', which you are warmly invited to.

The Library proudly features 'Stone Drawing', an artwork by artist Susanna Heron. Susanna will be giving a talk in the auditorium at **11.00** today, followed by a personal tour of the artwork.



## 6. TW Quad

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Passing under the delightful Middle Common Room by Berman Guedes Stretton (1996–8), you will come to the Thomas White Building, built by Arup between 1972–5. This shows the College embracing modernism at its most brutal, and the structure relies on the striking contrast between concrete and plate glass.

Yet it is also a traditional building too. It incorporates wood and stone as well as pre-stressed concrete and is built on the staircase system. Although not universally loved, it is well-planned and well-landscaped, and in many ways transformed the fortunes of the College. By making it possible to offer three years accommodation to all undergraduates, it made St John's even more attractive to applicants from a wide range of backgrounds.

Regular visitors to College will know that TW Quad is often visited by Missy the Harris Hawk, who helps keep the rafters clear of pigeons.



## 7. North Quad

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Finally, we come to North Quad. This is a heterogeneous mixture of structures: from Cook's Building (1612–16) in the right-hand corner to the Senior Common Room in the left, which was most recently added to just a couple of years ago. You will also see the New Building to your right, built between 1882 and 1900 by G. G. Scott Jr, and E. P. Warren, and – behind you – the Rawlinson Building (1909–11) by N. W. Harrison.

Perhaps most striking is the Beehive Building (1958–60) to your left. Built to designs by the Architects' Co-Partnership, this was the first modernist building put up in an Oxford College. But although it is strikingly modern, it also continues a tradition: it is clad in Portland stone and still built on the staircase system.

Thus, all these buildings – however different they may look – can be seen as part of a long and vibrant tradition, one that goes back at least 450 years and one that continues to develop. In that sense, at least, Sir Thomas White's dream came true.