



St John's College  
Oxford

OXFORD  
OPEN  
DOORS

# Welcome to St John's!

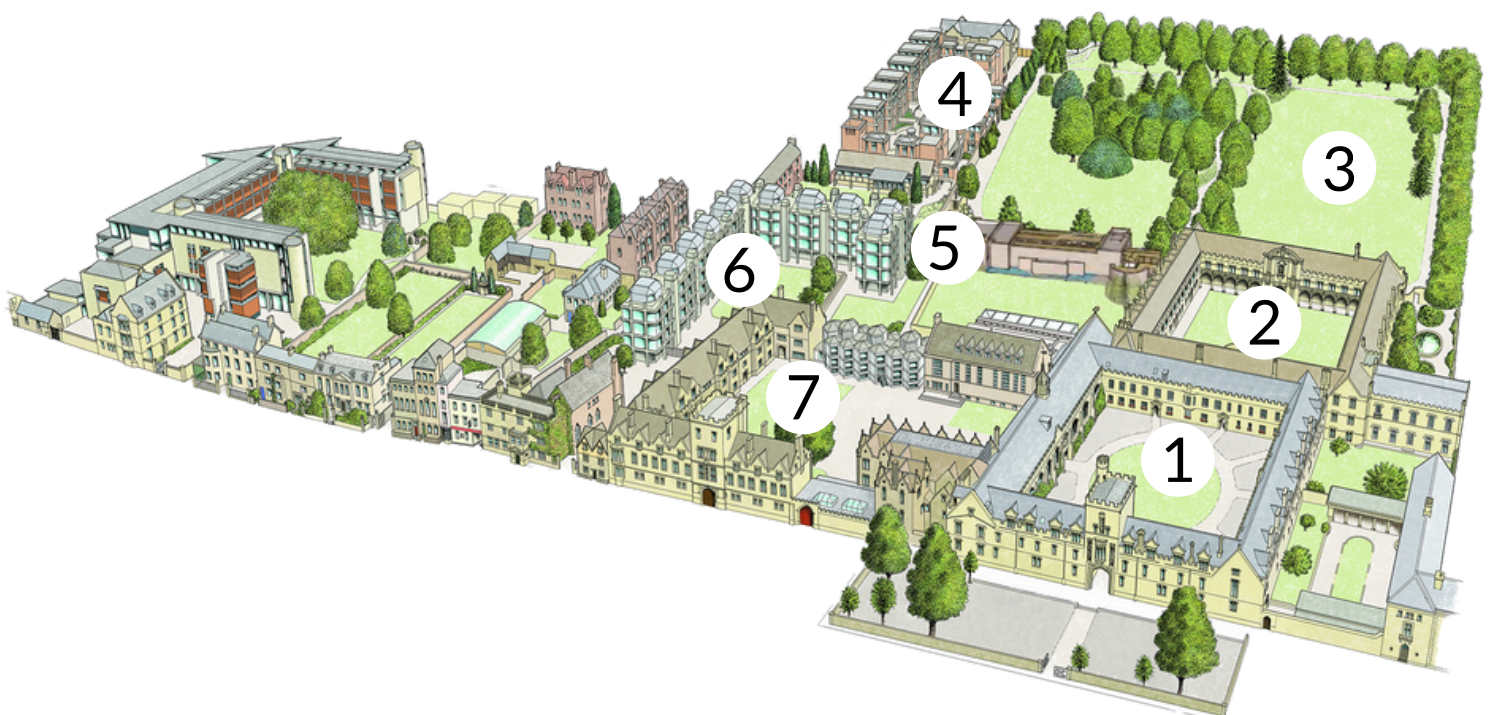
Saturday 14 September 2024.

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

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

It also gives you all the information you need for a self-guided tour of College, following stops 1–7 below.

Enjoy your visit!





# Programme

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The College is open from **10.00 AM – 5.00 PM** today with an exciting mix of talks, special tours by students and Fellows, along with refreshments and opportunities to explore the College grounds.

Prebooking is encouraged for many of these events, although limited spaces might become available last minute. To guarantee your spot, scan the QR code (left). Bookings will be active until the start of each event.

## Special Tours

**11.00 AM**

**The Portraits in Hall**

Dr Georgy Kantor, Keeper of Pictures

*Meet in Front Quad (1)*

*Maximum 30 visitors – priority for those who have prebooked.*

**11.15 AM**  
**12.15 PM**

**The Gardens**

Michael and Beverley Lear, Landscape Architects and Conservation Specialists

*Meet in Canterbury Quad (2)*

*Maximum 18 visitors per tour – priority for those who have prebooked.*

**1.00 PM**  
**2.00 PM**  
**3.00 PM**

**The Library and Study Centre**

Led by Graduate Students

*Meet in Canterbury Quad (2)*

*Maximum 15 visitors per tour – first come, first served.*

**1.00 PM**

**The Architectural History of St John's**

William Whyte, Professor of Social and Architectural History

*Meet in Front Quad (1)*

*Maximum 40 visitors – priority for those who have prebooked.*



# Talks

**All talks will be held in the Mark Bedingham Seminar Room (5)**

Ask one of our student helpers for assistance entering the building.



## **'The Treasurers of the Archive'**

Michael Riordan, College Archivist

*Maximum 50 visitors – priority for those who have prebooked.*

12.00 PM

St John's has had an archive since its foundation in 1555, though some of its records date as far back as the twelfth century. The Archive contains a wide variety of items, from deeds to correspondence, maps to photographs, account books to registers. In this talk, Mike Riordan, the College's Archivist, will select a handful of the most significant, attractive and interesting items from the Archive to display and discuss.

## **'Unearthed: The Mystery Beneath the Quad'**

Professor Lady Sue Black, College President

*Maximum 50 visitors – priority for those who have prebooked.*

2.00 PM

In 2008, when excavating the foundations for Kendrew Quadrangle at St John's, we rather unexpectedly uncovered a mass grave. In this lecture, Professor Lady Sue Black, President of St John's, will follow the story of one of the skeletons and rebuild their life and death to reveal the most unbelievable of modern-day coincidences. Using the sciences of forensic anthropology, stable isotope analysis and facial reconstruction we will show that, no matter how long dead, the stories of our life are written in our bones and - with a little bit of gentle persuasion - they can reveal a remarkable record of a life lived over a thousand years ago.



## Talks (cont.)

### 'Dyslexia and Language: Myths and Reality'

Professor Maggie Snowling

*Maximum 50 visitors – priority for those who have prebooked.*

3.00 PM

All literate societies assume that citizens will learn to read and write - yet dyslexia is a global issue. Low levels of literacy reduce the economic productivity of young people by limiting their career options and ultimately reducing adult mental capital and well-being. It is surprising therefore that not everyone believes that dyslexia is a useful concept. In this talk I will outline the history of dyslexia and how it achieved recognition before describing current research on its nature and characteristics. Dyslexia is a disorder of the language faculty and interventions are required at the foundations of literacy to break a downward spiral of poor literacy, low educational attainment and declining levels of self-esteem.

## Self-guided tours

Please feel free to explore the College at your leisure using the information on pp. 5–12. The route is marked by balloons and our student helpers can provide directions.

For children there is an **adventure trail** – with prizes! Information available from the desk in Front Quad (1).

## Refreshments

'Get Fed Coffee' will be selling hot and cold drinks in North Quad from 10.00 AM. Visit Tim and his team of baristas to enjoy a fresh brew and learn more about the 'Get Fed' enterprise.

*(Payment by Card Only)*





# An introduction

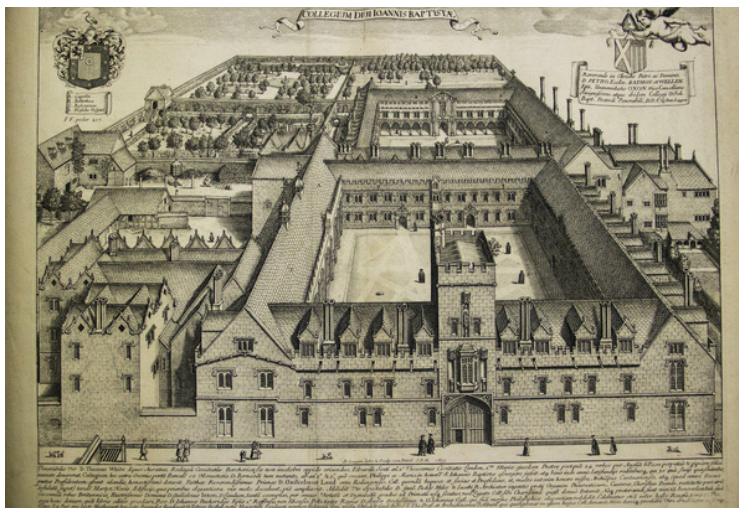


Like all good stories, the history of St John's begins with a dream. Sir Thomas White, the remarkable self-made Founder of the College, dreamt one night of travelling to Oxford where he discovered a pair of elm trees growing from a single trunk, standing before the ruins of a once-great college. This dream convinced Sir Thomas that he had been called upon to found a Roman Catholic college in Oxford, a place where young men could be trained

to confront the intellectual arguments of Lutherans and Calvinists and resist the Reformation. This college would become St John's.

Guided by his dream, Sir Thomas founded the College of St John the Baptist in 1555. St John's took over the premises of St Bernard's College, set up in 1437 by Archbishop Henry Chichele for Cistercian monks studying at Oxford University.

St Bernard's had been suppressed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, with its remains granted to Henry VIII's collegiate foundation, Christ Church, in 1546.



*'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 Lodge, completed in 2020.

Visitors still enter through the original door and pass under statues of Archbishop Chichele, Sir Thomas White, and St Bernard. During the foundation of St John's, the statue of St Bernard of Clairvaux was transformed into the likeness of John the Baptist through the simple addition of a plaster beard. This clever disguise remained unnoticed until the mid-nineteenth century when St John's beard fell off, revealing the clean-shaven St Bernard beneath.

The quadrangle follows a conventional collegiate plan. On entering, you will see the Hall and Chapel to your left (both open for tours this weekend), with the President's Lodgings ahead of you. The remainder of the quad is given up to rooms for Fellows and students. These are 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!

*Meet here for Dr Georgy Kantor's tour of the portraits in Hall (11 AM) and Professor William Whyte's tour of the architectural history of St John's (1 PM).*



## 2. Canterbury Quad



Canterbury Quad, built between 1631 and 1636, is perhaps the most remarkable building in the College. It was built by Archbishop William Laud, who was a Fellow and the President of St John's before his preferment. The quad has recently undergone a major restoration, along with the College's two historic libraries.

With the scaffolding removed and the grass restored, come and admire this beautiful quad in all its glory. Look out for fossils in our new Swaledale limestone columns!

Originally costing over £5,500 – approximately equivalent to £1 million in 2024 – Canterbury Quad was intended to advertise Laud's importance as much as his benevolence. Indeed, it was opened with a grand feast for the royal household that cost him nearly half as much again. The quad itself is a striking blend of Renaissance and Gothic styles, reconciling Laud's ambition with the practical needs of the College. You can see this blend in the eclectic mix of battlements and classical columns, Gothic windows, and Baroque sculptures.

The quad features two statues by Hubert Le Sueur of Charles I and his queen Henrietta Maria, while Laud's coat of arms is prominently displayed throughout. The busts of women in each spandrel symbolise the subjects and the virtues which students were meant to absorb. To the east, you'll find representations of the seven liberal arts plus theology, and to the west, the seven cardinal virtues plus religion.

*Meet here for guided tours of the Library and Study Centre and for special tours of the Gardens. See p. 2 for timings.*





## 3. The Gardens

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The effect is dramatic as you emerge from a dark portal in the eastern front of Canterbury Quad into the expansive College Gardens. For hundreds of years, St John's students and Fellows have appreciated this refreshing transition, as they escape the library and their tutorials to relax in the fresh air.

The College Garden consists of two parts: the outer and inner groves. Although the dividing wall between them was dismantled in the late eighteenth century, you'll still discover a marked contrast between the two. The College President also enjoys a private garden, hidden behind a stone wall funded by Edward Sprot, a former Fellow. Built in 1613, Sprot's wall is the oldest feature of the Gardens.

The outer grove is dominated by the Great Lawn, and is encircled by a graceful walkway. In the eighteenth century, the Lawn was popular throughout Oxford as a rendezvous for ladies and gentlemen, and offered an idyllic retreat for townsfolk and scholars alike. Following the path to the right of the Lawn, you'll find shade beneath a Caucasian oak, an Indian chestnut, an Atlantic cedar, and a weeping lime. Consider pausing in the right-hand corner of the Lawn to look back toward College. From this vantage point, it was once likened to 'a great galleon lying motionless in a Van de Velde calm'.

At the left-hand corner of the Great Lawn, you'll face a choice of paths. The narrow, shaded path directly ahead offers a circular route around the densely-planted inner grove, skirting wildflower meadows before leading you to the gateway to Garden Quad (4). Alternatively, from the left-hand corner of the Lawn, you might take the path to your left and explore the inner grove at a more leisurely pace. Henry Jardine Bidder's celebrated rock garden can be found in the north-west corner.

To learn more about the history of the College Gardens and the flora and fauna of the groves, consider joining one of the special tours led by expert conservationists, Michael and Beverley Lear.





## 4. Garden Quad

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Leaving the Gardens, you pass through an iron gate with a non-inverting glass lens designed by the internationally-renowned jeweller Wendy Ramshaw. Through the Ramshaw gate, you step into Garden Quad.

The quad was built in the 1990s to designs by Sir Richard MacCormac, the architect behind the Sainsbury Building at Worcester College (1980–3) and the Bowra Building at Wadham (1988–92).

MacCormac's design is testament to his interest in the history of architecture. The building's towers nod to the country houses of Sir Thomas White's era, while the concrete columns echo the classical designs of Piranesi, and the saucer domes draw inspiration from James Sloane. Yet this is also a modern building, influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, contemporary Japanese architecture, and even the Brutalism of the 1960s. In 2003, the Garden Quad was voted the most popular modern building in Oxford, and has consistently been recognised as one of the most significant pieces of late twentieth-century architecture in the country.

On the ground floor you'll find reception rooms, including a purpose-built exhibition space housing the College's remarkable collection of late medieval liturgical vestments and embroidery. Above, a serene roof garden and a series of staircases lead to student accommodations. To the left, there's an auditorium that regularly hosts public lectures and events, including a recent performance by the Oxford Gershwin Players, celebrating 100 years of 'Rhapsody in Blue.'



Be sure to check the College's 'Events' page using the QR code (left) for details of upcoming talks and performances.



# 5. The Library and Study Centre

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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.

On the top floor of the Study Centre, you'll find the Mark Bedingham Seminar Room, with its panoramic view of the Gardens. Take a look at pp. 3–4 for information on the talks taking place in the seminar room today. For step-free access, please speak with one of our graduate helpers.

Guided tours of the library, led by current graduate students, are available throughout the weekend. If you're interested in joining a tour, speak to one of our graduate helpers in Canterbury Quad (2).





## 6. TW Building

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The portico entrance to the Library and Study Centre faces the Sir Thomas White Building, built by Arup Associates 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. 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 of 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' (as it is often called) is frequently 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 redeveloped and extended in 2004. 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.

A typical third-year student room in North Quad is open today. Stop by for a look inside!

Perhaps most striking of the structures in North Quad is the Beehive Building (1958–60). 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.