Welcome to St John's!

We're delighted to welcome you for Oxford Open Doors 2023. 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.

There are also refreshments available at stop 8, Kendrew Café, payable by card only, and an exhibition on 'Nostalgia' at stop 9, our Barn Gallery.

Enjoy your visit!
Programme

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)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>Video screening: the making of the 'Stone Drawing' (Susanna Heron, 2019)</td>
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<td>12.00</td>
<td>‘The History of St John’s’</td>
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<td><em>Professor William Whyte, Tutorial Fellow in History</em></td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>‘A look behind the scenes of St John’s Library Digitization Project’</td>
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<td><em>Dr Petra Hofmann, College Librarian; Dr Sian Witherden, Resource Description Librarian; Sophie Bacchus-Waterman, Special Collections Photographer</em></td>
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<td>2.00</td>
<td>‘Finding space for a drawing: Stone Drawing and other work’</td>
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<td><em>Susanna Heron, artist</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Followed by a tour of the work with the artist</em></td>
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<td>3.00</td>
<td>‘Jane Austen’s family at St John’s’</td>
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<td><em>Michael Riordan, College Archivist</em></td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>‘The Architecture of St John’s, 1555–2023’</td>
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<td><em>Dr Geoffrey Tyack, Architectural Historian</em></td>
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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.

Kendrew Barn (9)

Nostalgia

The fourteenth century was a period of cataclysmic change: pandemic, climate change, war, intense inflation. Many medieval people responded nostalgically, by expressing their longing for 'the good old days'. This small exhibition draws on Professor Hannah Skoda's British Academy-funded project to present some of these fourteenth-century nostalgias: ranging from grumpy comments about how much better people used to dress in the past, to very serious political weaponisation of nostalgia for times of greater fairness or less corruption.

The exhibition also provides an opportunity for us to reflect on our own nostalgias.
Exhibitions (cont.)

Canterbury Quad (2)

Inspire: St John's College's outreach and access programme

Find out about Inspire, St John's pioneering range of access and outreach programmes for schools, in a display in the portico of Canterbury Quad.

Special Events & Tours

11.00
Tour of portraits in St John's Hall
Dr Georgy Kantor, Keeper of Pictures
(Maximum 35 people)

11.00, 12.00 & 2.00
Special tours of St John's gardens
Michael Lear, Garden Consultant
(Maximum 12 people per tour; priority to those who have pre-booked)

2.00
Music in St John's Chapel: talk and organ demonstration
David Bannister, Choir Director

Self-guided tours

Enjoy exploring the quads and gardens of St John's (see the map on p. 1). For children there is a Find the Lambs Treasure Hunt – with prizes! Visit the Lodge (1) for information.

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 that could counter the Reformation. That place would become St John’s.

A devout Catholic, Sir Thomas wanted to train priests who would be able to confront the intellectual arguments of the 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

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

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.

A major restoration of Canterbury Quad and of the Old Library has just been completed. With the scaffolding now removed and the grass restored, come and admire this beautiful quad in all its glory.

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.
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 Sprot. A stretch of the Sprot Wall survives today, behind the rock garden.

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


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 College’s collection of medieval embroideries, the 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.

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

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.

The Library is not open to visitors this year as books are currently being moved into the restored Laudian Library and Old Library.

Susanna Heron, the creator of the beautiful abstract relief carving 'Stone Drawing' (2019), will be giving a talk about this and other recent work at 2.00 in the Auditorium today, followed by a personal tour of the artwork.
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.
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.