Christ Church, Oxford
COLLEGE & CATHEDRAL
CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD - COLLEGE & CATHEDRAL

Key
- Information Point
- WC
- Disabled Access
- Disabled WC
- Disabled Lift
- Shop

CCTV
Closed circuit television surveillance is in operation. Images are recorded for the purposes of crime prevention and public safety. Please contact 01865 276151 for further information about the scheme which is controlled by Christ Church.

Accessibility
Not all parts of Christ Church are presently accessible to wheelchair users, but the college has introduced a number of measures to support visitors with disabilities, and further improvements are being planned.

Front cover: View of Meadow Building across a flooded Christ Church Meadow.

Practical Information
- You are welcome to take photographs, without tripods, for personal, non-commercial use.
- Smoking, including e-cigarettes, is not permitted.
- Please keep all personal belongings, including prams and pushchairs, with you at all times. Any unattended items should be reported immediately to a member of staff.
- Please take care. Steps and paving may be uneven. Surfaces may be slippery, especially when wet.
- Eating and drinking are not permitted within Christ Church.
- Please obey all notices and do not enter any areas marked private.
- In the event of a fire or other danger, or if you hear a fire alarm or warning, please leave the building without delay. Do not run. If it is safe to do so please leave the college by the nearest gate. At all times please follow the advice of the Custodians who are here to help you and answer questions.
We are delighted to welcome you to Christ Church. It is a unique place, combining in one institution both a college of Oxford University and an Anglican Cathedral. I hope you will enjoy the absorbing atmosphere of the place, and come to appreciate one of the most iconic colleges of Oxford. Christ Church has a vibrant history, rich culture and wonderful buildings. Shaped by the past, we continue to educate the next generation of students who will help to shape our future. As the head of Christ Church, I live at the Deanery in the very centre of the college - so have a good idea of all the things going on around us. We aspire to be welcoming and accessible to all who come here. I hope that you will learn much from your visit - and enjoy your time with us.

The Very Revd Professor Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church

If you have any queries, comments or concerns please speak to a member of the Custodial team who will do their best to assist you. Otherwise, please contact the Visitor Manager on tourism@chch.ox.ac.uk.

For details of B&B availability and upcoming events please visit the Christ Church website: www.chch.ox.ac.uk.

Timeline

- c. 710: Foundation of the Saxon priory of St Frideswide
- 727: Death of St Frideswide
- 1122: Priory refounded by Augustinian monks
- 1524: Closure of priory on the orders of Cardinal Wolsey
- 1525: Foundation of Cardinal College. The priory church becomes the college chapel
- 1529: Downfall of Cardinal Wolsey
- 1532: Foundation of King Henry VIII’s college on Wolsey’s site
- 1546: Henry VIII refounds the institution as Christ Church, combining college and cathedral
- 1682: Construction of Tom Tower, by Sir Christopher Wren
- 1713: Peckwater Quad completed
- 1862-65: Construction of Meadow Buildings
- 1968: Opening of the Picture Gallery
- 1980: Women admitted as members of the college
- 2002: Reconstruction of St Frideswide’s shrine
The Tour

Although Christ Church attracts many thousands of visitors each year, its purpose remains twofold: the pursuit of learning and the worship of God. In this sense Christ Church preserves the ethos of Cardinal Wolsey’s original Cardinal College which sought to renew both education and spirituality.

The Meadow and Meadow Building (1)
The Meadow Building, through which you entered, was built to provide undergraduates in the nineteenth century with more and better housing. The rooms are still used by students and staff and overlook Christ Church Meadow, a tranquil area of pasture and tree-lined paths bordered by the rivers Cherwell and Thames. The Venetian Gothic style was reputedly favoured by the famous Christ Church art historian John Ruskin. Ruskin was an undergraduate at the college between 1837 and 1842 and may well have seen the often flooded Meadow resembling a Venetian landscape (see front cover).

The Hall Staircase (2)
Generations of students have ascended the magnificent staircase to Hall. The broad flights enable large groups to climb the steps together, tall mullion windows illuminating the route and the delicate fan-vaulted ceiling above.

A door at the bottom of the staircase has the words ‘No Peel’ studded into it. This was a protest against the Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel (a Christ Church man!) who in 1829 proposed greater freedom for Catholics.

The Great Hall (3)
The Hall is at the centre of college life; the academic community congregates here to dine each day and banquets are held on special occasions. During these times the Hall is closed to visitors. Breakfast, lunch (brunch at weekends) and dinner are all eaten in Hall.

‘House’ and Home

Christ Church (also known as ‘the House’) is home to our students while they are in Oxford. This is where they study, live and eat. Visitors are therefore requested to be as quiet as possible and to keep to the designated route. Students also work in libraries, laboratories and departments elsewhere in the University, which provide facilities for members of all colleges.
Dinner consists of a served two or three course meal. There are two dinner sittings: Informal Hall at 6.20pm and Formal Hall at 7.20pm. At Formal Hall gowns are worn, a Latin grace is said at the lectern by an undergraduate scholar and senior members dine at High Table. Wine, beer and other drinks can be bought before dinner from the adjacent Buttery.

The Hall is the largest pre-Victorian college Hall in Oxford or Cambridge and seats up to 300 people. It has a magnificent ‘hammerbeam’ ceiling and portraits of many famous members of Christ Church can be seen on the wall, including a few of the thirteen Prime Ministers educated at the college.

Christ Church is a royal foundation. The reigning British monarch acts as the representative of the Founder and is known as its ‘Visitor’. A bust of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II can be seen behind the High Table, as can a portrait of the college’s Founder, King Henry VIII.

Tom Quad - South Corner (4)
Passing back down the Hall Staircase you emerge into Tom Quad. Originally known as ‘the Great Quadrangle’ due to its grand scale, it is the largest quad in Oxford and measures 79.5 x 80.5 meters. It became known as Tom Quad in the seventeenth century after the six-ton bell ‘Great Tom’ was installed in Sir Christopher Wren’s new tower.

The Christ Church Year

1 academic year at Christ Church is divided into
3 terms

Michaelmas
October to December

Hilary
January to March

Trinity
April to June

each comprising
10 weeks (noughteth to ninth week)

100 academic staff

240 graduates

430 undergraduates

= c.80,000 meals produced and served to the Christ Church community every year in Hall

Literature and Filming
The architecture, people and way of life at Christ Church have inspired authors and film makers. Christ Church’s strongest literary link was forged by Charles Dodgson - Lewis Carroll - in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

Dodgson studied, taught and lived at Christ Church for 47 years. The then Dean’s daughter, Alice Liddell, was immortalised in his stories. The Dining Hall has many connections with Carroll’s fantastic tales. High on the left-hand wall, the fifth window from the entrance shows portraits of Alice (below) and creatures from the book.

The Quads, Cloister and Hall Staircase have been used in a number of films including The Golden Compass and Harry Potter. Professor McGonagall welcomes Harry and his classmates to Hogwarts at the top of the Hall Stairs and in the Cloister, Harry is shown the Quidditch trophy his father won when he was a seeker.

The Hall inspired the appearance of Hogwarts’s Hall and was recreated in a studio for filming.
The Cathedral (5)

Much of this ancient priory church was rebuilt between 1170 and 1190. The Cathedral used to extend towards the space now occupied by Tom Quad. Wolsey knocked down three bays of the nave to make way for his grand college.

Thankfully, the rest of the ancient twelfth century church was spared. It is unique in being not only the diocesan Cathedral but also the college chapel for Christ Church.

The Jonah Window (a) (Abraham van Linge, 1630s) is of great interest because only the figure of Jonah is made of stained glass. The rest of the window consists of small panels of painted glass, showing the city of Nineveh in minute detail.

In the North Transept, the St Michael Window (b) (Clayton & Bell, 1870) is the Cathedral's largest window. It contains Victorian glass showing the Archangel Michael leading his army of angels to defeat the devil, who is depicted as a dragon beneath St Michael's feet. The window illustrates a scene from Revelation, the final book in the Bible.
Christ Church’s twelfth century cathedral, with its intimate acoustic, is home to the Christ Church Cathedral Choir, directed by Stephen Darlington. The choir has performed in some of the most prestigious places in Britain and internationally. Choristers, part of an exciting living musical tradition, are educated at Christ Church Cathedral School. The choir sings regular services and at major celebrations during the year. Many award-winning CDs are available from the Chapter House Shop.

The ‘Watching Loft’ (e) dating from the 1500s, is thought to be either a Chantry Chapel or a Watching Loft, and is an exquisite example of medieval woodwork.

Not far from the shrine is the Bell Chapel (f). Its altar and the free-standing cross carved from its base are in memory of Bishop George Bell who, in 1942, protested against the bombing of German cities.

Near the High Altar (g) you will find the Bishop’s seat, the sign that this is the mother church of the Oxford Diocese.

The vaulted ceiling (h) above you is the chief architectural glory of the Cathedral. Its beautiful ribs splay out from 12 stone lanterns which appear to hang miraculously in mid-air. In the centre of the vault small interconnecting ‘lierne’ ribs create eight-pointed stars, forming an image of heaven high above the Cathedral.

The window in the Chapel of Remembrance (i) is another of Burne-Jones’ works (1878). The face of the central figure, St Catherine of Alexandria, is that of Edith Liddell (Alice Liddell’s sister).

The South Transept contains the Becket window (j) (c.1320). This medieval window is the oldest in the Cathedral, and contains a rare panel showing the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket, who died at Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. Becket is kneeling between a monk and the four knights who murdered him. The panel was defaced in the sixteenth century in order to protect it from Henry VIII’s orders to destroy all images of Thomas Becket. The original face of Becket is now missing.

The brightly coloured east window (d) (left), which tells the story of St Frideswide, is by Edward Burne-Jones (1858). Other windows around the east end of the Cathedral show Burne-Jones’ very different later work (above).
The Cloister (7)
The Cloister, like the Cathedral, is part of the original Priory of St Frideswide, which stood here before the college was built. Human remains from the time of St Frideswide (the eighth century AD) were found in the central plot. The olive tree (a traditional symbol of peace) and the fountain are contemporary additions to the Cloister and mark the threshold of the Cathedral’s sacred space.

Tom Quad - North Corner (8)
Imagine that the raised walkway around this Great Quadrangle was roofed in, to form an enormous cloister. This was Cardinal Wolsey’s plan, but it was never completed. The arch-shapes around the walls and protruding bases are all that remain. Wolsey also intended to build a new chapel for his college along the north side of the quadrangle, but this too was never realised. For 100 years the north side remained completely open with townspeople and cattle passing by on a muddy lane.

Peckwater Quad (9)
In contrast to the Gothic splendour of Tom Quad lies the classical sophistication of Peckwater Quad. These elegant eighteenth century buildings stand on the site of a medieval inn, which was run by the Peckwater family. Undergraduate accommodation is provided in the symmetrical buildings occupying three sides of the quad. On the fourth side is a magnificent library. As students live and study here, visitors are requested to be as quiet as possible and not to enter the buildings.

The Picture Gallery (10) (separate admission charge applies)
Do not forget to visit Christ Church Picture Gallery when you are here. It is one of the most significant private collections of Old Master paintings and drawings in Great Britain. The collection is housed in an award-winning modern building (Powell & Moya, 1968) – believed by many to be one of the most exciting spaces of twentieth century architecture in Oxford. The building and its contents (Van Dyck, Tintoretto, Veronese, Carracci, Lippi and many, many more) are somewhat hidden and, as in Alice in Wonderland (in whose garden the gallery is situated), only reveal themselves from within. Entering the gallery is almost like going through the rabbit hole, one has to pass through a corridor under a Georgian building to resurface in a different world – one of art, light and tranquillity.