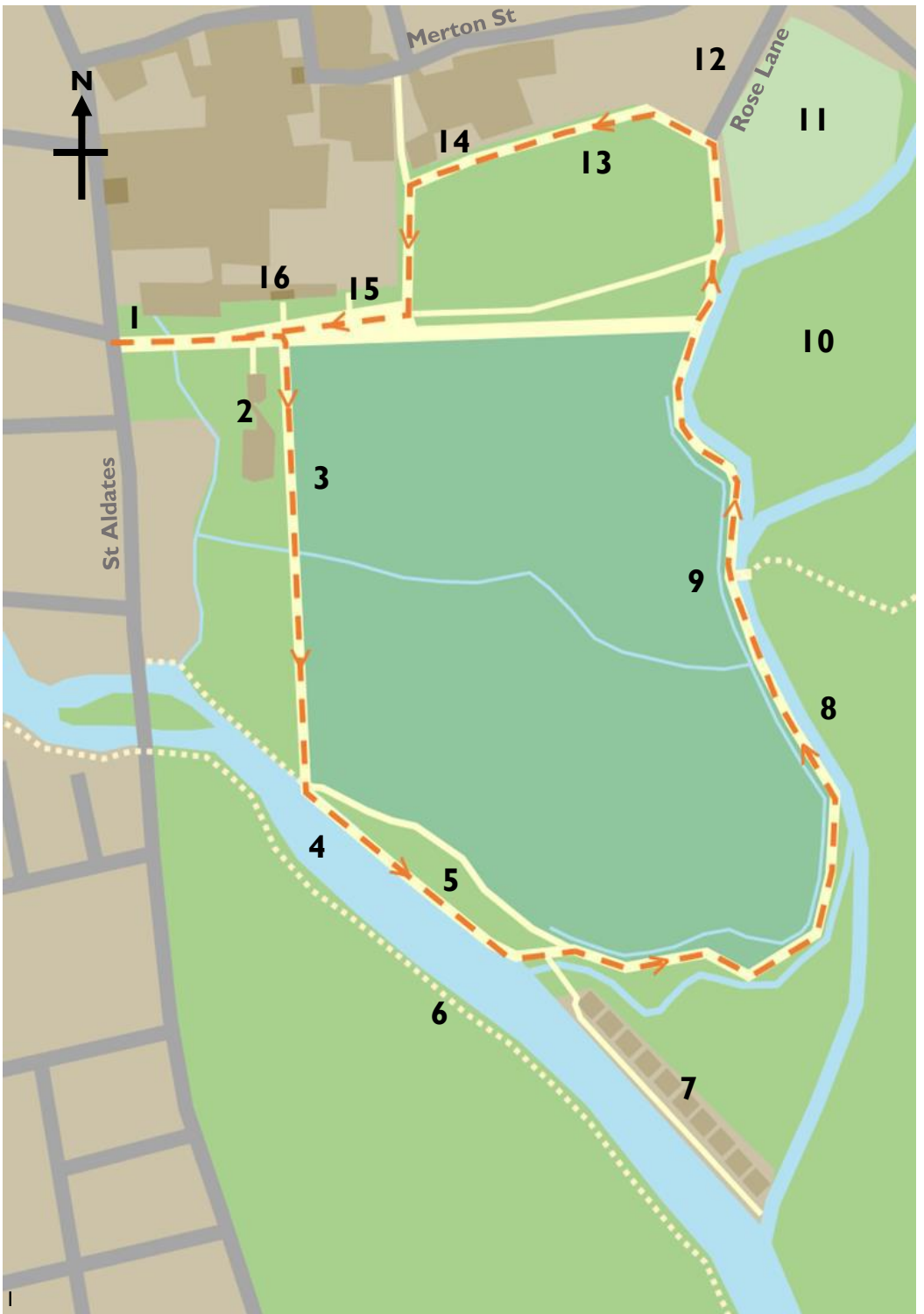




A brief guide to **Christ Church Meadow**



Welcome to Christ Church Meadow, a beautiful and historic open space at the heart of Oxford, one of Britain's most famous cities.

Suggested Route

Approx. 1.5 miles / 2.4 km

Around 30-40 minutes

The rustic paths in the Meadow are flat and well-maintained. The Meadow is accessible to all via the War Memorial Garden (1), which leads onto St Aldate's in the centre of Oxford. Please bear in mind that Rose Lane Gate (12) and Merton Gate (14) exits are via narrow gates and are therefore not currently accessible for wheelchairs or buggies. Benches are available along the suggested route.

Please note that bicycles are not allowed in the Meadow. Well-behaved dogs on leads are very welcome. Bins are provided for you to clean up after them.

Please recycle and dispose of any rubbish in the bins provided.

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| (1) War Memorial Garden & Rose Garden | (9) Jubilee Bridge |
| (2) Shop | (10) Magdalen School Playing Field |
| (3) New Walk | (11) Oxford Botanic Garden |
| (4) River Thames | (12) Rose Lane |
| (5) The Dean's Ham | (13) Merton Field |
| (6) Thames Path | (14) Deadman's Walk |
| (7) Boathouse Island | (15) Broad Walk |
| (8) Cherwell Path | (16) Christ Church |

The War Memorial Garden and Rose Garden

I At the main entrance to Christ Church Meadow from St Aldates, you'll find the War Memorial Garden. This is a permanent memorial to the men and women who died in the First World War and subsequent conflicts.

In the mid-1920s, a War Memorial Fund was set up to commemorate those members of the college who had died in the Great War. However, funds were slow to come in, and there was insufficient money to undertake any significant building work. By the end of 1926 the fund stood at only £4,000 and the then head of Christ Church, Dean White, proposed a war memorial garden - something which had previously been suggested when Oxford City Council were planning to widen St Aldates in 1924.

The proposal was met with a mixed reception. Some donors requested that their money be returned, but others were very much in favour. His Majesty

the King of Siam, for example, donated £500.

It was decided to create a garden, and open up the previously hidden south front of Christ Church. The garden as you see it today is largely unaltered from the original design, taking the form of a yorkstone central path leading from the ornamental gates on St Aldates to the Broad Walk. The raised planting areas and sh to the north, the limes to the south, and the two separate gardens at the eastern end are all part of the original plan. The only relatively minor alterations to the initial design are the lavender borders along the lawns, and the chain-link fence to deter visitors from walking on the grass.

The small enclosed garden on your right at the end of the central path is still known as the "Rose Garden" despite only containing one rose! It was originally planned as a Dutch garden, but was ultimately built as an iris garden. Today it is one of the few locations within Christ Church where seasonal bedding plants are still grown.



View of the War Memorial Gardens, towards the Great Hall



The Rose Garden

The Memorial Gardens are now a very busy area. More than a million people pass through every year, taking in the iconic views towards the Great Hall. The long herbaceous border is now planted to maximise interest throughout the year, with emphasis placed on more restful colours. Plants with unusual seed heads provide winter interest.

In the mid-twentieth century, there was great controversy over a proposed bypass being built through the Meadow, which would have gone through the War Memorial Garden. Happily, the proposals were rejected by the government, and today the Meadow remains open for all to enjoy.

Christ Church Meadow is a Grade I listed landscape. This designates the area as being of “exceptional interest”. Of the 1,600 sites included in the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, only nine per cent are classified as Grade I. The Meadow sits within the Oxford Green Belt, and is also covered by the Central (University and City) Conservation Area, as well as the Nature Conservation Area.

Christ Church Visitor Centre & Shop

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Before you enter the Meadow, make sure to visit our Visitor Centre in the thatched barn.

Shop for exclusive Christ Church items, *Alice In Wonderland*-themed gifts, *Harry Potter* memorabilia and a multitude of products related to the University and the Cathedral; we have an exciting range of souvenirs for every occasion.

The barn itself stands on the site of a coach house and stables. It has been a working part of the Christ Church site for over 250 years. Since the 1870s, much of it was obscured by trees from the New Walk, as the area had become unsightly and unattractive. Luckily, the barn has recently been refurbished and extended to create the building you see today. The design of the buildings and the use of traditional building materials pay tribute to the history of the site and ensures it sits harmoniously within the landscape.



Christ Church Visitor Centre

New Walk

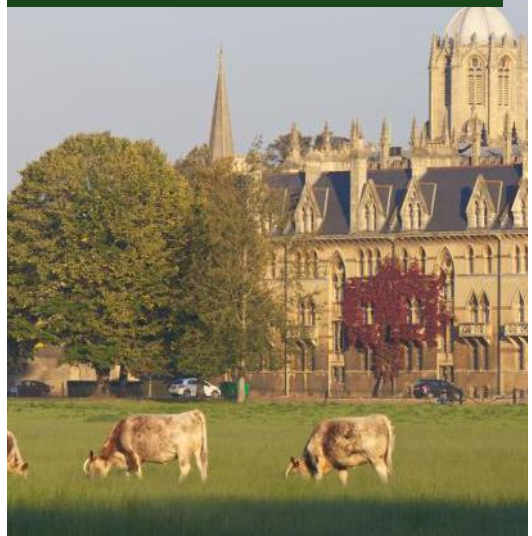


New Walk

3 Trees were originally planted here in 1865, to form a path down to the river from the newly-completed Meadow Building. This replaced a less direct route along the Trill Mill stream. None of the original trees survive - they may well have been elms, which are very susceptible to disease. Today, the avenue is a mix of lime and poplar trees. Many of the poplars are reaching the end of their lives and are now being replaced by a more appropriate lime species (*Tilia x europaea* 'Pallida'). The floodplains in the centre of the Meadow, to the east of the New Walk, are home to Christ Church's herd of

pedigree Old English Longhorn cattle. This historic breed was the first type of cow specifically dedicated to the production of beef in England, after famous eighteenth-century agronomist Sir Robert Bakewell realised their potential to gain weight. They are also perfectly suited to living in the British weather and landscape. This herd is managed on behalf of Christ Church by Charlie Gee, who runs Medley Manor Farm in Binsey. The longhorns spend the winter on the farm, and return to the Meadow in early spring. This arrangement gives the Meadow a chance to recover, and provides the cows with shelter in the colder months. This area of the Meadow is carefully managed with low-intensity grazing, and no use of chemicals or fertilisers. The northern field is cut for hay in mid-July to encourage diversity of flowering plants, and the hay is used to feed the cows through the winter months when they are away from the Meadow.

Longhorn cattle grazing in the Meadow





A Christ Church rowing crew on the river Thames

River Thames

4 Oxford's two rivers – the Thames and the Cherwell – run along either side of the Meadow. It's a beautiful and inspiring place. In 1862, on a boat trip along the Thames, Charles Dodgson – who would later write under the name Lewis Carroll – invented the story of *Alice In Wonderland*. Dodgson was accompanied by his friend Reverend Duckworth, and the three daughters of Henry Liddell, who was Dean of Christ Church at the time. Looking after the girls (Alice, Lorena, and Edith) was their governess, Mary Prickett.

One summer afternoon, the group decided to row from Christ Church Meadow to Godstow. Along the way, Dodgson entertained the children with stories of a little girl called Alice, who went looking for adventure. If you have read the story, you may be able to

identify the people in the boat that day as the inspiration for some of his wonderland characters - for example, he may have had Alice's governess in mind when creating his Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Alice begged Dodgson to write the story down for others to enjoy. *Alice In Wonderland* was first published in November 1865, with illustrations by John Tenniel. It has never been out of circulation since. Tenniel was a renowned illustrator, who contributed extensively to publications, including *Punch*. Like Dodgson, Tenniel was inspired by some of the locations at Christ Church.

5 The Dean's Ham

This open area of grassland with scattered trees is named after the Anglo-Saxon word for meadow – 'ham' – and the fact that profits from the hay cut here went to the Dean of Christ Church.

Historically, the Oxford Botanic Garden used the Meadow as an overspill area for tree planting, with many trees planted in the Dean's Ham over the years. Sadly, very few of these trees have ever survived, partly due to the very high water table in this area. This is, however, another area where extensive wild flower restoration is being successfully carried out.

Until the twentieth century, the Dean's Ham and Boat House Island were the main mooring sites for the college barges used by the various university boat clubs. Since then, they have been replaced by the boat houses that you see today.

The Thames Path

6 The Dean's Ham runs parallel to the Thames Path, on the opposite side of the river. The Thames Path is a National Trail (not owned by Christ Church), which you can follow for 184 miles from the source of the Thames near Kemble in Gloucestershire, to the Thames Barrier at Charlton, south east London. Access to the Thames Path from this area of Oxford is via Folly Bridge, at the south end of St Aldates.

Boathouse Island & Rowing

7 Thirty-nine colleges make up the University of Oxford, and rowing is an essential part of life at all of them. During term time, you can come and watch the rowers in training early in the morning. In addition to the highly prestigious university crews training for the annual Boat Race, the college crews will also be training for the two main Oxford-based competitions which are held annually.

One is known as 'Torpids', which takes place in Hilary Term (spring), and the other is 'Summer Eights', which is held in Trinity Term (summer). They are wonderful social events and both attract vast crowds, not just students and staff from the individual Colleges cheering on their crews, but also followers of rowing from all over the world. The winning college boat of 'Summer Eights' is given the title of 'Head of the River'. The winning crew traditionally celebrate their victory by burning an old wooden substitute boat—rather than their expensive racing boat—in their college grounds. These

competitions are 'bumps races', meaning that the boats chase each other up the river, trying to 'bump' the one in front of them. If a crew bumps every day of the competition, they are awarded blades - an oar painted with the names of the crew. If, however, they get bumped every day, they receive a rather less prestigious prize - spoons.

As you walk along the Cherwell Path, you will come to a steep footbridge. If the bridge is open, you are welcome to go across to Boathouse Island to see the college boathouses, but we ask that you do not disturb any of the crews if they are training. Christ Church's boathouse is the one located at the end of Boathouse Island.



Cherwell Path

The Cherwell Path forms part of the ornamental Meadow walk, visible in **8** maps of the area as far back as 1578. The trail along the Cherwell Path back towards the city runs parallel to a drainage ditch for the flood Meadow; the old channel of the River Cherwell is to the right, with Boat House Island beyond. This island was formed in the 1880s, when the Cherwell New Cut was dug to take flood water more quickly to the River Thames. The largely untouched woodland in this area is a haven for wildlife. This area was also used by the Botanic Garden for tree planting, and the notable specimen of Caucasian Elm (*Zelkova carpinifolia*) dates from this time.



Punts on the river by Jubilee Bridge

Jubilee Bridge

9 This bridge links Christ Church Meadow with the Christ Church sports ground and Liddell Annexe (a student accommodation site) on the Iffley Road. The bridge was installed in 2013 thanks to a generous donation by Christ Church alumni. Prior to the bridge being built, the only way to cross the river at this point was by pulling a punt across on a wire! Although the route across the bridge is only accessible to Christ Church members and staff, the bridge itself provides extensive views of the river and surrounding areas for anyone visiting the Meadow.

Magdalen School Playing Field

10 This island, formerly known as Milham Mede, is leased to Magdalen School as part of their sports facilities. It regularly floods.

Rose Lane and the Botanic Garden

11 12 Connecting the Cherwell Path and Broad Walk to the High Street, Rose Lane separates the Meadow from the Oxford Botanic Garden. Established in 1621, this is the oldest botanic garden in Great Britain.

Rose Lane was originally planted with lime trees in the 1870s, which were

pollarded after World War II. However, after much debate, these were felled in the 1990s and replaced with hornbeams. The hornbeams turned out to be a poor choice as they have a very wide crown, which impeded access for large vehicles into the Meadow. This, coupled with irregular planting distances and poor early management, led them to be replaced with a new avenue of limes (*Tilia x europaea* ‘Pallida’) in 2018. These new trees will be high pruned to allow large vehicle access and retain views across the Meadow.

Sadler’s Balloon Ride

As you make your way to the next stop you may spot a plaque commemorating James Sadler’s balloon flight. On 4 October 1784, Sadler ascended in his hot air balloon from Christ Church Meadow to a height of 3,600ft, above Oxfordshire’s beautiful landscape. He landed safely about six miles away in Woodeaton. He was the first English man to make such a trip.



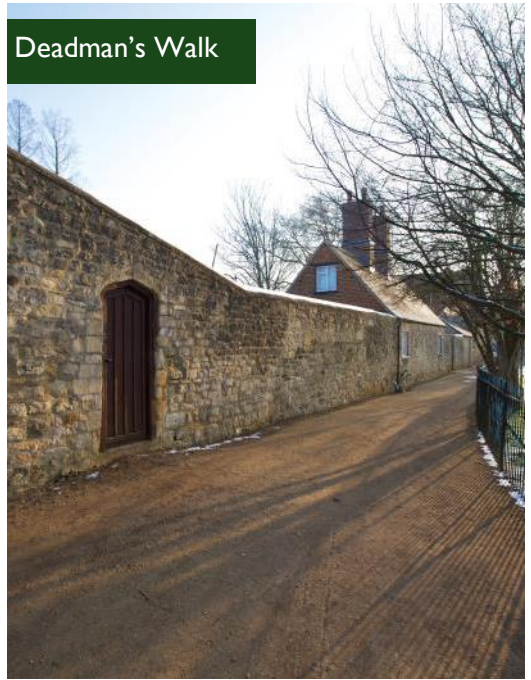
Deadman's Walk and Merton Field

13 14

This walkway was used for medieval funeral processions as it led from the synagogue (near to Tom Tower on St Aldates) to the Jewish burial ground on what is now the site of the Botanic Garden.

To the north of Deadman's Walk is Merton College, and to the south is Merton Field. In the seventeenth century, the field was home to timber yards and victualling houses, but by the late nineteenth century it became a playing field for Christ Church Cathedral School. Apart from a brief spell as allotments in World War I, the field has continued to be used by the school ever since.

Deadman's Walk



Aerial view of the Broad Walk



Broad Walk

15

In the mid-seventeenth century, this walk was created from material dug out to lower the height of Tom Quad, inside Christ Church. It became a relatively narrow avenue of elm trees, enjoyed as a promenade by members of the college and city. Following the death of these trees in the 1970s, as a result of Dutch Elm Disease, the walk was replanted as a wider pathway with alternating London and Oriental Planes. Whilst decorative, this has partly lost the original avenue character of the area. As a result of this, there is now a long-term plan to restore the narrow elm avenue using modern disease-resistant elm varieties, trial plantings of which can be seen along the southern verge of the walk. The open area in front of the Meadow Building was once part of the avenue, and then included trees planted by Dean Liddell's family (including Alice) and members of the Danish royal family.

Christ Church

16

As you come back towards the War Memorial Garden, take a moment to enjoy the architecture of Christ Church itself. Christ Church is a unique dual institution – both the Cathedral of Oxford, and one of the colleges that make up the University of Oxford. As you may have noticed while wandering around the city, Oxford University doesn't have a campus – instead, all the university buildings are woven throughout the shops, museums, cafés, and restaurants that make up the city. The University is broken down into different colleges, of which Christ Church is one.



While some of the earliest colleges date back to the thirteenth century, Christ Church was founded in 1524 by Cardinal Wolsey, who was Lord Chancellor during the reign of King Henry VIII. At this time the college was called Cardinal College, and was built on the site of St Frideswide's, a medieval priory. After Wolsey's fall from grace, Henry VIII took over the college, refounding it as Christ Church in 1546. He designated the old priory church the Cathedral for the newly

created Diocese of Oxford, and from this point on the dual institution as we know it today has existed.

The building pictured here is known as the Meadow Building. It was purpose-built in the 1860s to house undergraduates, as the student body across the university was expanding. Today, there are around 420 undergraduates at Christ Church, and some of them are lucky enough to live in this building, with beautiful views of the Meadow from their windows. The building was designed by T.N. Deane, who is well-known in Dublin for his work on the National Museum and Library. He designed the building in the Venetian Gothic style, which had been popularised in the Victorian period by the artist and philanthropist John Ruskin, who was himself a Christ Church alumnus.

It was around the 1860s that Oxford's famous tutorial system was developed, whereby students meet up with their tutor for intensive teaching in small groups of 1 or 2 each week. This system continues today. Nearly all subjects are taught at Christ Church, so students will be studying anything from law to medicine to physics to history. Tutorials will be taking place and students will be studying in rooms in this building so please keep noise levels to a minimum when walking past.

Christ Church is temporarily closed to visitors due to the pandemic. Explore the College and Cathedral from the comfort of your own home on a live guided virtual tour. For more details and information on re-opening, please check our website: <https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/visit-us>



Projects and Keeping up to Date

Recent work in the Meadows has concentrated on replacing lost flora, with extensive sowing of wild flower species (such as cowslips, red campion and meadow cranesbill), and planting of native bulbs including snake's head fritillaries, wild daffodils and wild tulips. This work has been very successful. A programme of reintroducing flood plain meadow flora to the fields is now under way, using green hay supplied from a local ancient flood meadow near Eynsham.

Find out more about Christ Church Meadow and gardens on our Head Gardener's blog or follow him on Instagram:

<https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/blog/category/gardens-&-meadows>

@christchurchgardener

