

# Locals' Guide To Oxford

**Calendar**  
 England: what's on where and when  
[guardian.co.uk/travel/england](http://guardian.co.uk/travel/england)



Oxford is a hive of honey-coloured heritage at the **heart of England**, laced through with water, stone and grass. What do the Oxford **spires dream of**? Everything under the sun. It's all here: on display in the **comprehensive museums**; shelved in the many libraries, or met with in the **teeming streets**. Walk, cycle or sail away from the centre and you'll find its arteries of interest: the river Thames and **Port Meadow**; Magdalen bridge and the **river Cherwell**; the kaleidoscopic Cowley Road. Everyone dreams about Oxford differently. For some it is dotted with doors to alternate realities, for others the streets are layered with memories. **Compiled by Henry Eliot**

## 1 OPEN-MIC NIGHTS AT THE CATWEAZLE CLUB

**Brian Briggs**  
*lead singer of indie band Stormway*

Briggs, an ecologist with a PhD in wildfowl conservation, lives near the vibrant Cowley Road, which features in many of his lyrics. "Cowley Road is about as alternative as Oxford gets: it has blues nights, jazz nights, reggae nights. There's a pretty diverse mix of people. The best music night in Cowley is the Catweazle Club every Thursday. It's the ultimate open-mic night. Poets and mandolin players share the stage with beatboxers. You're not battling with people standing at the bar; people go there to listen. It's where we started as a band and we still try out new material there."  
 ● *Catweazle Club, East Oxford Social Club (Princes Street, Cowley Road, catweazleclub.com), admission £6, free for performers; Stormway (stormway.eu)*

## 2 LUNCH AT THE OXFORD HUB

**Dominic Collingridge** *literary tour guide*

"One of my favourite spots, when I'm not leading literary walking tours, is Turl Street. It attracts everyone: students, regulars, tourists. The street itself is like a living room. The Oxford Hub has a members' room, a library and the wonderful Turl Street Kitchen, with a different menu every day. Until recently the building was a members' club run by the team behind QI. The Missing Bean does fantastic artisan coffee and don't miss the shoe shop Duckers & Son, with its old-fashioned leathery aroma. Ask to browse their ledgers: they'll show you shoe sizes for Evelyn Waugh, JRR Tolkien and Lawrence of Arabia."  
 ● *Turl Street Kitchen, Oxford Hub (16-17 Turl Street, 01865 264171, turlstreetkitchen.co.uk); Missing Bean (14 Turl Street, themissingbean.co.uk); Duckers & Son (6 Turl Street, duckersandson.co.uk); Oxford Monocle Literary Tours (07814 895415, omlt.co.uk)*

## 3 SHRUNKEN HEADS AT THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

**Richard Dawkins** *zoologist and author*

"One of my favourite places is the University Museum of Natural History. The vertebral ribs of the Victorian gothic ceiling mirror the dinosaur fossils and cabinets below, one of which contains the dodo that inspired Lewis Carroll. Unfortunately it is closed for refurbishment but the excellent Pitt Rivers Museum remains open. This anthropological museum is organised by type, so all the flutes or fish hooks or canoes from around the world are displayed together. Each time you discover new treasures; the shrunken heads are particularly memorable. On certain evenings you can explore by torchlight."  
 ● *Oxford University Museum of Natural History (oum.ox.ac.uk), reopens early 2014; Pitt Rivers Museum (01865 270927, prm.ox.ac.uk.), open daily, free admission; the next torchlight visit will be in May, check website for details; Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (richarddawkins.net)*

## 4 CHORAL MUSIC IN CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

**Colin Dexter** *crime writer*

Like his famous detective, the curmudgeonly Inspector Morse, Colin Dexter has a passion for classical music. "One of my earliest Oxford memories is a Summertown choir concert of 1966: when the organist didn't show up 13 members of the audience offered to step in. Oxford is known everywhere for the excellence of its singing. Go to hear Christ Church choir. They are absolutely first class. Many of the colleges hold frequent recitals. I used to be involved with a liedertafel group; we performed "song tables" of words and music. Kevin Whately read one of my stories at a charity Christ Church concert in December; I've finally arrived."  
 ● *Christ Church Cathedral Choir (01865 276155, chchchoir.org); Summertown Choral Society (summertownchoral.org.uk); Liedertafel in Oxford (liedertafel.org)*

## 5 ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

**Philip Pullman** *author*

"There are still places I come across that I've never seen before. I once saw the most marvellous garden through an open door and I never found it again." For the author of His Dark Materials, Oxford is peppered with parallel worlds, and one of his favourites is the Ashmolean Museum. "The collection is inexhaustibly interesting. I have several favourite paintings: a little snowy landscape by Courbet [room 66] and a Canaletto view of Dolo [room 49]. Walk through Jericho and you'll find a parallel view: the Castle Mill boathouse, sadly threatened by developers, with the Italianate campanile of St Barnabas's rising behind the canal."  
 ● *Ashmolean Museum (Beaumont Street, 01865 278002, ashmolean.org), open Tues-Sun 10am-6pm, free admission; Jericho Community Boatyard (jcb.y.co.uk); Philip Pullman (philip-pullman.com)*



**FIRST IN HISTORY**  
 The Ashmolean Museum, opened in 1683, was the world's first public museum

**LOW CHURCH**  
 Oxford Cathedral is England's smallest cathedral

**SPRINT FINISH**  
 Ifley Road sports ground hosted the world's first successful attempt to run a sub four-minute mile

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX GREEN/FOLIO  
 FACT BOXES BY CHRISTOPHER WINN, AUTHOR OF I NEVER KNEW THAT ABOUT ENGLAND

## 6 SAILING PAST PORT MEADOW

**Christina Hardyment** *author and journalist*

Port Meadow, mentioned in the Domesday Book, is an expanse of common land that affords unexpected vistas of Oxford, grazing cattle and vast spans of open sky. "I sail north from here on the Thames but you can take the steamer south from Folly bridge. This stretch of river is where Lewis Carroll first told the Alice in Wonderland stories. Have lunch at the Perch pub and visit the Dormouse's treacle well at Binsey church."  
 ● *Medley Sailing Club (The Towpath, Binsey, medleysailingclub.co.uk); Salter's Steamers (Folly Bridge, 01865 243421, salterssteamers.co.uk); Oxford-Abingdon adult return costs £18.90; The Perch (Binsey Lane, 01865 728891, the-perch.co.uk); Binsey church (binseystmargaret.org)*

## 7 SYMPHONIES IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE

**Right Reverend John Pritchard** *bishop of Oxford*

When the bishop was an undergraduate, he heard Fauré's Requiem for the first time in the Sheldonian theatre. "I was sitting up in the gallery, almost on top of the orchestra, with the trebles' voices swirling around me. I knew that this was a special place; although it's tiny, it has a character all of its own. Since coming back to Oxford in 2007, I have heard three Tchaikovsky symphonies there. Don't miss a visit to the cupola. After climbing through the rafters in the dome, the view from the windows is extraordinary."  
 ● *Sheldonian Theatre (Broad Street, 01865 277299, ox.ac.uk/sheldonian), adult admission £2.50, concessions £1.50*

## 8 PUNTING UPSTREAM FROM MAGDALEN BRIDGE

**Timothy Walker** *director, Oxford University Botanic Garden*

"Bring a picnic, rent a punt from Magdalen bridge and head up the river Cherwell. You get away from Oxford remarkably quickly. Go before 10am to be first on the river and you'll see bright kingfishers on the banks. In mid-April, you get a stunning eye-level view of the fritillaries blanketing Magdalen Meadow."  
 ● *Magdalen Bridge Boathouse (01865 202643, oxfordpunting.co.uk), punts for up to five, from £16 an hour, February-November; Botanic Garden (Rose Lane, botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk)*

## 9 LAWN TENNIS IN THE UNIVERSITY PARKS

**Isabelle Westbury** *student, cricketer and former president of the Oxford Union*

"I love playing tennis in the University Parks; I'd never played on grass before. The setting is beautiful and you have to wear whites. The cricket pitch is also stunning. Go to the county matches; with the road nearby they rack up really high batting scores. I like running around the Parks too and there are often big impromptu frisbee games."  
 ● *Oxford University Parks (parks.ox.ac.uk), free admission; Oxford University Parks Tennis Association (sport.ox.ac.uk), summer membership £32*

## 10 CYCLING AND COFFEE AT ZAPPI'S BIKE CAFE

**Flavio Zappi** *former Italian pro-cyclist*

Flavio Zappi, who won a stage of the Giro del Trentino in 1981, moved to Oxford 15 years ago and set up a cycling club. The cafe in his clubhouse, owned and run by Dan Williams and Dan Roiser, serves some of the best coffee in town. "When you're walking you end up most of the time in the city centre but there's so much more to see. I like to cycle around the back streets of Jericho - the former red-light district has great hidden pubs and cafes. The Mamma Mia even serves a pizza that I invented!"  
 ● *Zappi's Bike Cafe (28-32 St Michael's Street, zappisbikecafe.com; flaviozappi.com); Mamma Mia Jericho (102 Walton Street, 01865 311211, mammamiapizzeria.co.uk)*

## 11 SILENT MOVIES AT THE ULTIMATE PICTURE PALACE

**Becky Hallsmith** *owner, Ultimate Picture Palace*

When this cinema was put up for sale in 2011, local resident Becky Hallsmith was concerned it might lose its charm, so she bought it. "We're proud to be an independent cinema for cinema-lovers. We screen Friday night lates and often show silent films with a live quartet. Make an evening of it and eat at Door 74 on Cowley Road."  
 ● *Ultimate Picture Palace (Jeune Street, 01865 245288, uppcinema.co.uk), standard adult ticket £8; Door 74 (74 Cowley Road, 01865 203374, door74.co.uk)*

### BREAKFAST

The best place to head for is the Covered Market, Market Street ([oxfordcoveredmarket.co.uk](http://oxfordcoveredmarket.co.uk)). The top spots are Brothers, Brown's and Georgina's

### LUNCH

There are a few choice spots dotted around the city. If you find yourself in a hurry then try Olives Deli (42 High Street) or the Alternative Tuck Shop (24 Holywell Street). Or visit the Vaults and Garden Cafe (University Church, High Street, thevaultsandgarden.com), where you can also take afternoon tea (served from 2.30pm)

### DINNER

The Cherwell Boathouse (50 Bardwell Road, 01865 552746, cherwellboathouse.co.uk), is a punt station as well as a cafe and restaurant, with a river terrace open "in season". Edamamé (15 Holywell Street, 01865 246916, edamame.co.uk) offers authentic Japanese, while if your food requirements are more mobile try Ali's Kebab Van on Woodstock Road

### PUBS AND BARS

Tolkien's favourite, the Eagle and Child (49 St Giles, nicholsonspubs.co.uk); the Kings Arms (40 Holywell Street, youngs.co.uk); the Rusty Bicycle community pub (28 Magdalen Road, therustybicycle.com)

### GREEN SPACES

In the centre of the city and bordering the river is Christ Church Meadow - access via St Aldate's or Rose Lane. Magdalen Meadow in the east of Oxford is bounded by the river Cherwell

### LANDMARKS

Old: Radcliffe Camera (Radcliffe Square, bodleian.ox.ac.uk) and new: Bill Heine's Shark (2 New High Street, Headington, headington.org.uk/shark)

### HOTELS

The Head of the River at Folly Bridge, St Aldate's, is a Fuller's real ale pub that also features clean and stylish rooms, a terrace overlooking the Thames and excellent food, including a venison burger with Oxford blue (01865 721600, headoftheriveroxford.co.uk, doubles from £120)