

Two walking tours in central Oxford



Michael Pierre de Villiers

Cartoon Collection

Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: Top to bottom, left to right; Broad Street Tourist Information location, Sheldonian Theatre, Clarendon Building, Radcliffe Camera & Brasenose College

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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Introduction

I had to attend an afternoon Royal Meteorological Society (RMetS) Weather editorial board meeting on Wednesday 16th January 2019. This time the meeting was held at the publishers Wiley and Sons in Oxford, instead of the usual venue at the RMetS in Reading. It was also a farewell meeting for the incumbent editor. My wife and I decided that she accompany me and we make it a 2 day trip. We left mid-morning from Birmingham International Station returning the following afternoon.

Wednesday was a grey and mild day with showers during the afternoon, the cloud clearing later in the afternoon in time for the farewell drinks at the Jolly Postboys followed by a starry and dry evening when I met my wife at the George Street Hotel after her day of sightseeing. While the George Street Hotel was not noteworthy from the outside it was and pleasing inside, including the rooms. Situated over shops one had to go to the 1st floor to reception.



The George Street Hotel and entrance.

We then went to dine at The Four Candles and an after dinner walk before retiring to the hotel. The following day was sunny, but cold in a northerly wind, the temperature around 1°C when we set out sightseeing and did not get above 5°C. We had lunch at the Wig & Pen. Photographs of the Four Candles and the Wig & Pen in George Street have been included (shown below).



The Four Candles and the Wig & Pen in George Street.

It is worth explaining why the name Four Candles was chosen. To quote verbatim a display notice “The eye-catching building next door but one to these premises in Oxford University’s history faculty. It was originally the city’s High School for Boys, which opened in 1881. The comic actor Ronnie Barker was a former pupil and later one of the Two Ronnies. Probably their best-known sketch was ‘Four Candles’. Barker walks into a hardware store and ask’s for and gets ‘four candles.’ However, he really wanted fork handles – ‘andles for forks’.”

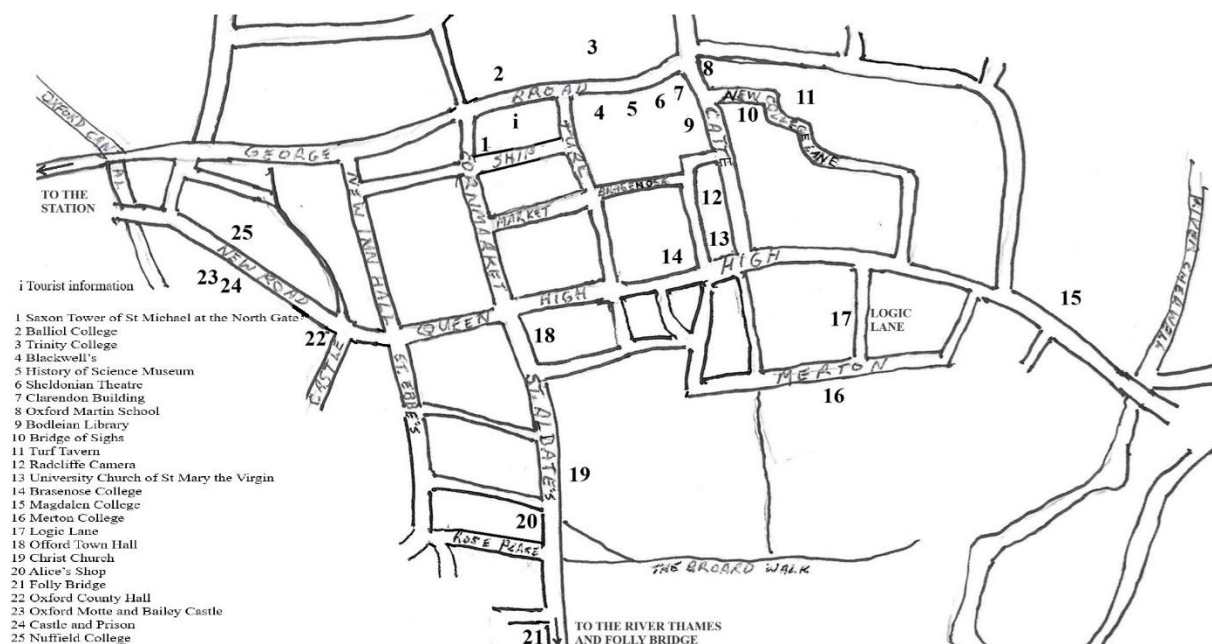
In time long gone, bridges to cross the Thames did not exist and this was the most suitable place for ox wagons to ford the river. Hence the name Oxford. In Saxon times, during the 8th century, a priory was built near the ford, which is now the site of Christ Church, the cathedral and the university college. In Norman times, its position on the Thames and Cherwell rivers made it an important military site between Mercia and Wessex.

Late in the 12th century, the first university in the English-speaking world was established, the University of Oxford. During the 12th and 13th centuries, Oxford was a town noted for its cloth and leather. However, by the 14th century Oxford’s economy was reliant on the university. The proliferation of 38 colleges and their ornate buildings make central Oxford the beautiful place it is today. The buildings did not suffer much damage during World War II. It is said that Hitler was going to make Oxford his England capital.

Below is a selection of places we visited during the 16th to 17th January 2019 trip to Oxford and the one-day trip close to two years earlier on the 21st January 2017.

For the previous earlier trip in 2017, we booked from Solihull to Banbury return then Banbury to Oxford return. By splitting the booking, it was nearer half cheaper than booking Solihull to Oxford. Another bonus was that day parking the car park at Solihull railway station was much cheaper than at Birmingham International (£2 on Saturdays and Sundays). The weather was a misty low cloud day and cold. Temperatures around 3°C, brighter toward midday and sun showing when we left. Both not feeling the best with colds, Roz especially. Had a pub lunch at the Four Candles.

The sights



The hand drawn map shows the location of places visited and/or simply photographed because they appealed.



The Saxon Tower and Tudor building.

Walking from the railway station, at the corner of George and Cornmarket streets, turn right into Cornmarket Street and walk a short distance to the corner of Ship Street. No! Not what you were thinking. Ship Street. On the corner is the **Saxon Tower of St Michael at the North Gate (1)**. The Anglo-Saxon tower is Oxford's oldest surviving building. Built in 1040 from rubble and coral rag, it is still as strong as when built. When built, the tower was next to the North Gate of the wall around Oxford. The wall being no more. There are 97 steps to get to the top, where there is a panoramic view of the city.

The Tudor timber frame building on the opposing Ship Street corner, numbers 26 to 28, dates from the around 1450. It was originally three shops. They were altered in the 17th and 18th centuries. Heavily, restored around 1950, in particular number 28 which is grade II listed. According to British Listed Buildings, listing in descending order of importance is Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II. Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest. Grade II* groups particularly important buildings of more than special interest. While Grade II lists buildings that are of special interest. The Saxon Tower is Grade I listed. See Appendix A for more about listed buildings.



Balliol College.

Returning to George Street and continuing east is **Balliol College (2)** on the left of what has now become Broad Street. The various colleges are all parts of the University of Oxford. Balliol college was founded in 1263. The oldest parts of the college buildings date from the early 15th century. The photograph shows the building on the south front of the college in Broad Street. The entrance is at the tower building in the distance. I do not know the age of these buildings. Probably 19th century.

The college is host to the annual Tortoise fair and race, in which college pets compete to be the first to reach a circle of lettuce. The tortoises are usually named after famous Marxists, because of Balliol has historically left-learning affiliations.

Opposite is the Tourist Information Centre at 15 Broad Street.

Trinity College (3) was founded and funded by a wealthy merchant Sir Thomas Pope in 1555, as a college for students who could not afford the fees at other colleges. It stands on the site of what was Durham College, founded in 1291, for benedictine monks from Durham Cathedral. Pope was a Catholic with no surviving children. At the college's inception it provided for a

president, 12 fellows, 12 scholars and a maximum of 20 undergraduates who were required to take Holy Orders and remain unmarried.

Nearby is **Blackwell's (4)** bookshop (50 Broad Street). When established it was 12 square feet (3.6m^2). Now, behind the façade is an immense floor space, including a basement that extends under Trinity College and has 5km of shelving.



Trinity College in Broad Street and Blackwell's.

The Grade I listed **History of Science Museum (5)** in Oxford, located in the Old Ashmolean Building in Broad Street, contains a collection of early scientific instruments from the Middle Ages (roughly from the 5th to 15th centuries) to the 19th century.

Established in 1683, it is the “world’s oldest surviving purpose-built museum building.” It is open to the public Tuesday to Sunday 12:00 to 17:00 free of charge.

The distinctive, at the time revolutionary design horseshoe shape **Sheldonian Theatre (6)**, was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and built between 1664 and 1668. The same Christopher Wren who designed the new St Paul’s Cathedral, London, after the Great Fire of London in 1666. The Sheldonian Theatre is mostly used for university ceremonies, but also concerts and lectures. Its horseshoe shape tiered seating provides excellent views of the stage from any angle. It is Grade I listed.



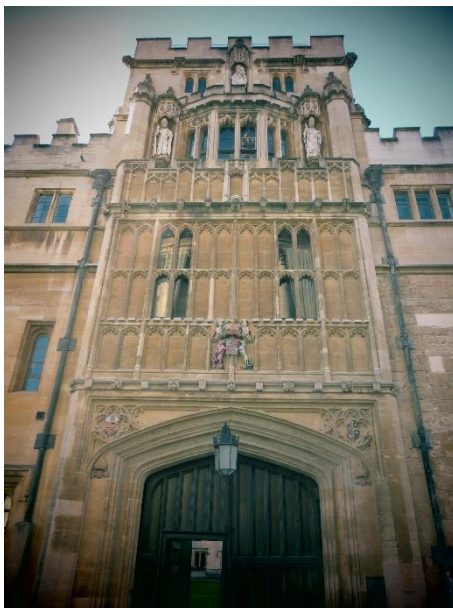
The History of Science Museum with the Sheldonian Theatre and Oxford Martin School in the distance. On the right, the Sheldonian Theatre seen from Catte Street.

The **Clarendon Building (7)**, on the corner Broad and Cattle streets, is a Grade I listed building built between 1711 to 1713. It was built to house the Oxford University Press. It is named after Lord Clarendon who partly paid for the building. It was known as “The Printing House” until the Oxford University Press moved to Walton Street in 1832.

Oxford Martin School (8) is housed in the former Indian Institute building at the eastern end of Broad Street at Cattle Street. The Indian Institute, part of the University of Oxford, was formed in 1883 to provide training for “the Indian Civil Service of the British Raj.” Oxford Martin School, founded in 2005, is a Social Sciences research and policy unit and part of the University of Oxford. The building is named after benefactor and author James Martin.



The Clarendon building and Oxford Martin School.



Tower of Five Orders.

Dating back to 1602, the world-famous **Bodleian Library (9)**, between Broad and Cattle streets, usually known as “The Bodleian,” comprises numerous libraries. The Bodleian Library, located in various buildings, has 368km of shelves above and below ground. The “Old Library” was built between 1613 and 1619. The entrance is the Tower of Five Orders, so named because it displays in ascending order the five columns of classical architecture, namely, Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.

The Bodleian Library and Schools Quadrangle, including the Divinity School and the Convocation House, are Grade I listed. Inside the School Quadrangle, are entrances marked above the doors with their academic schools, such as; Schola Logicae, Schola Mvsicae, Schola Naturalis Philosophiae, Schola Moralis Philosophiae, Bibliotheca Bodleiana Schola Vetvs

Medicinae and Schola Grammaticae Et Historiae.

Part of the Bodleian Library, the ornately decorated Divinity School building, opposite the Sheldonian Theatre, is Oxford’s oldest purpose-built university building. The Gothic architecture structure was built between 1427 and 1483.



Top left, the Divinity School and entrance with the statue of the Earl of Pembroke seen from the School Quadrangle. Some school entrances in the quadrangle are: Top right, Schola Logicae; middle left, Schola Musicae; middle right, Schola Naturalis Philosophiae and Schola Veteris Medicinae; bottom left, Schola Veteris Iurisprudentiae and Schola Moralis Philosophiae; bottom right, Schola Grammaticae Et Historiae and Schola Lingvarum {Hebraicae et Graecae Schola {Geometriae et Arithmeticae.

The **Bridge of Sighs (10)** in New College Lane at Hertford College jokingly gets its name from students sighing on their way to tutorials or exams. The ornate covered bridge spans two parts of Hertford College. The attractive Grade II listed structure, completed in 1914, combines Gothic and Renaissance architecture.



The Bridge of Sighs looking toward Catte Street and the Radcliffe Camera.

Meanwhile, Oxford Visit says the “Turf Tavern has been around since the 16th century.” Somewhat contradictory origin dates.

Notice boards also lists the names of famous visitors. Including a doubtful statement that former Australian prime minister Bob Hawke, while at Oxford University, in 1963 entered the Guinness Bok of Records after downing a yard of ale in 11 seconds at the Turf Tavern. There is evidence that it was achieved elsewhere. It is also stated that the name Turf originated because it is here that horse race gamblers would meet their “Turfmen” or “Turf accountants”, although bets could be placed on “pretty much anything.”

Past the Bridge of Sighs, is an alley to the left, St Helen’s Passage. It leads to the **Turf Tavern (11)** at 4 Bath Place. A notice board at the pub states it is probably the oldest pub in Oxford and that a there was malt house and drinking tavern dating back to 1381 as proven by a tax imposed by King Richard II. It is also believed that it was established outside the city wall to escape the jurisdiction of the local college’s governors. A plaque below the St Helen’s Passage sign indicates the direction to the tavern and states “12th Century Turf An Education In Intoxication.”



Whatever its age, or origin, it is an interesting and pleasing place to visit and partake of its refreshment.

The Turf Tavern in the alleyway.



The Radcliffe Camera.

Back at Catte Street is the neo-classical **Radcliffe Camera (12)**, built 1737 to 1749 for the Radcliffe Science Library. An impressive and immediately recognised building with its Corinthian columns and distinct lead covered dome made of wood. Construction and maintenance of the library was financed by the estate of the physician John Radcliffe. The Grade I listed building and library is now part of the Bodleian Library.

The **University Church of St Mary the Virgin (13)** (corner of Catte and High streets) has been the site of a church since before 1068. Lectures and services took place in the same St Mary’s church building from early in the 13th century. It is where Oxford University began. Lectures moved to designated buildings around 1420. The tower dates from 1280. The spire was added about 40 years later. The church is Grade I listed.



University Church of St Mary the Virgin.



Brasenose College.

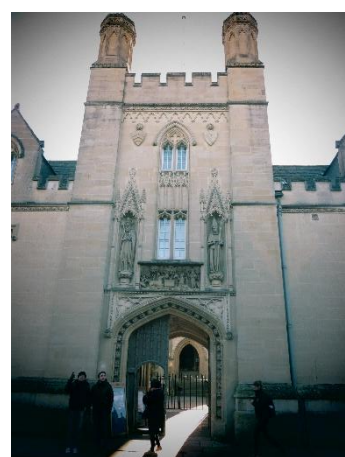
Brasenose College (14) is next to St Mary (on the High Street). Founded in 1509 it is on the site of a medieval academic hall (Brasenose Hall) established in the 13th century. Situated on the west side of Radcliffe Square (opposite the Radcliffe Camera), it is home to one of the oldest rowing clubs in the world. The college sided with the Royalists during the English Civil War (1642 to 1651).

Magdalen College (15), pronounced Maudlin and sited some distance to the east on the High Street next to the River Cherwell, was founded in 1458. It is on the site of Magdalen Hall founded by William of Waynflete, Lord Chancellor of England and Bishop of Winchester, in 1448. Its bell tower and façade facing High Street date from the early 16th century.

Merton College (16), also a bit off the beaten track in Merton Street, was founded in 1264 by Walter de Merton, Lord Chancellor of Henry III and Edward I and Bishop of Rochester. It contains buildings from 1288. During the English Civil War (1642 to 1651) the college was occupied by King Charles I's court as the capital of the Royalists.



Magdalen College.



Merton College.

Immediately to the east of Merton College is **Logic Lane (17)** facing north toward High Street. So named because it was the location of a school of logicians. It is of interest simply because

it has a covered bridge between two buildings of the University College, similar to the Bridge of Sighs, although not as attractive. It looks more like a bridge with a building on top.



Logic Lane looking toward High Street.



Oxford Town Hall.

Back at High Street a good distance west and turning left into St Aldate's Street is the **Oxford Town Hall (18)**, the seat of the City Council, as well as public meetings and events. The Grade II listed Jacobethan architecture building was completed in 1897. In 1932 an extension was built to the north (left side of the original building when viewed from the front).



Christ Church on St Aldate's Street and the entrance under the Tom Tower



Christ Church Great Hall completed in the 1520s.

Further south is **Christ Church College (19)**. Arguably the most famous, prestigious and historic university college in Oxford. The original college dates back to 1515 when the Lord Chancellor and Cardinal Archbishop of York disposed of the Augustin canons who had been there since 1122. In 1532 King Henry VIII re-established it as King Henry VIII's College to be renamed Christ Church in 1546. In modern terms this probably means re-branded each time. The title Christ Church combines the college, chapel, all the facilities and about 71 hectares (175 acres) of ground.

The college chapel, or Grade I listed Christ Church Cathedral, is also Oxford's cathedral. The magnificent buildings combine medieval, Renaissance and Baroque styles with "elaborate carvings and decorative details." Various parts of the Christ Church complex are Grade I listed. For example, the Great Quadrangle, or Tom Quadrangle. The Tom Tower, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, at the entrance to the quadrangle houses the Great Tom bell. The bell is rung 101 times every night at 9 pm in the former Oxford time (21:05 UTC or 21:05 BST) in commemoration of the 100 original scholars of the college, plus one added in 1664.



Alice's Shop.

Still further to the south is **Alice's Shop (20)**, now selling curios. It was a grocer's shop that Alice Liddell would visit as a child and lived in the area. She was the daughter of the Dean of Christ Church. The shop features as The Old Sheep Shop and her full name appears in Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass." Lewis Carroll (real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) was an English author, mathematician, and poet, most well-known for his "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the looking glass." He attended Christ Church College.

During the evening walk, went further south past Alice's Shop to the River Thames and the **Folly Bridge (21)**. The bridge was erected between 1825 to 1827. Next to it is The Head of the River hotel housed in a converted boathouse on the bank of the river. The name is the title given to the winning crew in a rowing race. A peaceful scene.



Folly Bridge and Head of the River.



Oxford County Hall.

Returning north to Queen Street, heading west via Bonn Square to New Road, is the **Oxford County Hall (22)**. It is a Grade II listed Gothic Revival style building completed in 1841.

All that remains of an original moated, wooden **Oxford Motte and Bailey Castle (23)** is the Grade I listed motte. A motte and bailey castle was a fortification that consisted of a surrounding defensive large walled area, the bailey, wherein soldiers and animals lived. Sometimes the bailey had an external ditch, or water filled moat that increased the difficulty to

reach and attack the wall. Within the bailey, usually offset to one side was the defensive motte a steep sided mound of earth on top of which was the Keep, a fortified wooden or stone tower.

A notice board states that it was built in 1071 by Robert d'Oilly who came to England from Normandy with William the Conqueror in 1066. It was surrounded by a moat the excavated earth was used to build the mound, the motte, as well as the ramparts of the bailey on the eastern side. On top of the motte was a stone Keep. A vaulted well chamber and well survive and can be seen inside the motte.



The remaining motte.



St George's Tower.



The 18th century remains of the castle, the prison D-wing and Debtor's Tower. In the background St. George's Tower.

A new prison was built in the late 1700s, expanded in the 1800s and closed in 1996. The rectangular coral rag stone St George's Tower is believed to pre-date (circa 1020) what remains of the castle and believed to be an earlier watch tower and Saxon west gate of the city.

Opposite the castle is **Nuffield College (25)**. Nuffield College was founded in 1937 by William Morris (also Lord Nuffield) of Morris Motors fame. My first motor car was a Morris Mini 1000. It was the first college to admit men and women. The college is one of the newer

East of the Motte and Bailey Castle in what was the bailey stand remains of the 12th or early 13th century **Oxford Castle (24)** and **St. George's Tower**. By the 14th century the castle was used for administration and as a prison. Most of the castle was destroyed during the English Civil War (1642 to 1651).



Nuffield College's distinctive tower.



At Oxford station waiting to go home.

colleges and the smallest. It was also the first college to consist of only graduate students. Its first fellows were appointed in 1939 and first students in 1945. Construction of the college was delayed by World War II to 1949

The layout of the college conforms to the traditional design. The typical traditional design being a main quadrangle with gateway, chapel, dining hall and library with accommodation for fellows and students. Nuffield College's striking feature is its square tower with a slender copper-covered tower.

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Appendix A

This article does not attempt to identify all the listed buildings mentioned. It simply refers to a Grade I listing depending on the whim of the author.

According to British Listed Buildings, a listed building may not be demolished, extended or altered without special permission from the local planning authority in consultation with the relevant central government agency. The building must be man-made and at least approaching its original state. Keeping this in mind, all buildings built before 1700 are listed and most up to 1840. It becomes much more difficult for more recent buildings to be listed, particularly after 1945, they must be at least 30 years old and be exceptional to be listed. Structures such as bridges, monuments, sculptures, war memorials, milestones and mileposts may also be listed. Ancient structures, such as Stonehenge, are usually classified as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The listing in descending order of importance is Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II. Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest. Grade II* groups particularly important buildings of more than special interest. While Grade II lists buildings that are of special interest, usually private residential buildings. There was a non-statutory Grade III until 1970.