

Renaissance Oxford as it is

ON THIS SECOND ITINERARY IT WILL BE MOST APPROPRIATE TO start at Magdalen, as the birthplace in Oxford of the new age. It is certainly the most beautiful of all the colleges, and preserves in every feature and in its stately atmosphere a feeling very akin to Eton among schools. Its name, incidentally, is pronounced Maudlin.

It is an untidy college. Fronting the road is a row of buildings which incorporate some bits of an old Hospital of St. John which stood there when Waynflete bought the site. Within the low entrance you will find a straggling courtyard, known as St. John's Quad after the old hospital. In the corner to your right is an open-air pulpit from which a sermon is preached on St. John the Baptist's day; the congregation used to seat themselves on a floor of rushes below. Adjoining is the west window of the chapel, which seems to have been so set as a termination to the view down the High Street. The west door of the chapel is rarely used; you must gain access by a side door beneath the adjoining muniment tower. This chapel was finished some twenty years after the college had been founded, that is to say, a hundred years after New College chapel; but you will once again observe how closely the Wykeham plan is followed. Here again is the spacious ante-chapel set at right angles to the choir and the great east wall without a window. But beyond the bare plan, there is little inside it that is old. Wyatt destroyed the ancient roof, just as he did at New College; and in the 1830's the rest of the interior was gutted. The old embellishments were put up to auction in the college stables; and what you see now is the work of an architect named Cottingham. Even the remarkable glass in the ante-chapel is only Jacobean. But one treasure Magdalen chapel has always preserved, and that is its music. The choral services are famous even in this musical city. So keen is the pride of Magdalen in this tradition that one choirmaster in Elizabethan times got into



23 Magdalen : St. John's Quad



24 Magdalen : the Cloister



25 Bishop King's Palace

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trouble when he " captured a poor boy at Malmesbury and brought him in chains to Oxford " to serve as a chorister.

The hall, as at New College, stands in line with the chapel and to the east ; it is reached along one side of the cloisters and up a flight of stairs. It contains some good linen-fold panelling dated 1541 and a Jacobean screen ; the roof was here also destroyed by Wyatt.

Magdalen cloisters cannot compare with those at New College ; their layout is far more reminiscent of those at Eton. Just as at Eton, they are dominated by a single entrance tower ; here it is called the Founder's Tower, and a lovely Perpendicular block it is. The arch below has not for centuries been used as an entrance ; and the great room above it, intended for the head of the college, now constitutes part of a suite reserved for visiting royalty. Magdalen numbers among its members the Duke of Windsor, who was in residence as an undergraduate from 1912 to 1914 ; but though he visited the college when he was King, the occasion could hardly be described as royal. Another feature of the cloisters is the array of carved animals which surmount the buttresses. The story goes that when one of these figures was being repaired, the undergraduates bribed the sculptor to make it a likeness of the senior fellow, Dr. Ellerton, a remarkable character. So soon as the resemblance was noticed, the doctor commanded the sculptor to remove it by hollowing the cheeks and deepening the lines. Many years later he looked once more and found that he had grown to be the very image of the gargyle.

To this same Dr. Ellerton we probably owe the present existence of this quadrangle. In the year 1822 he returned from a vacation to find that the north range was being busily demolished. Those were great days for rebuilding ; and some busybody, alleging that the old work was dangerous, had planned to open out the whole quadrangle. As it was, Dr. Ellerton's insistence saved the east wing ; the north side was rebuilt also, but in a less picturesque shape than formerly.

This was not the only narrow shave that Magdalen's old buildings have survived. As early as 1724 we find the excellent Hawksmoor writing to announce that he has plans for a whole new college at Magdalen, as the old buildings are " so decrepit." Apparently the fellows thought so, too, for they allowed a certain Edward Holdsworth, who was one of their number, to prepare a grandiose scheme of vast classical quadrangles on the lines of what Hawksmoor actually carried out at Queen's. They actually built one wing of Holdsworth's design in 1783, and you will find it facing you if you leave the cloisters by a narrow passage or tunnel on the north side, that is to say, opposite the chapel and hall. Here is an extremely eighteenth-century corner of Oxford. To your left an immense plane tree ; to your right a very fine herbaceous border fringing a branch-stream of the Cherwell ; in front a wide expanse

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of grass and the solid plain front of the New Buildings, as they have ever since been called. They are not one of Oxford's masterpieces ; but the rooms inside them are ample and comfortable, and on the other side they command a quite enchanting view of Magdalen Grove, which is a really very extensive deer-park, cool, lush, and dark with elms. The Grove, which visitors may not enter, is one of the features which give Magdalen its feeling of grandeur. Christ Church has its meadows, Worcester its lake, and Merton its fields ; but only Magdalen has a park.

Any visitor is at liberty, on the other hand, to cross the little bridge beside New Buildings and explore the Walks. These constitute a complete circuit of an island meadow, just about a mile round and extremely pretty. The northern section of the pathway goes by the name of Addison's Walk, having been frequented by the sanctimonious Joseph when he was a fellow of Magdalen in Queen Anne's reign. But if you want historic associations, Magdalen can go better than Addison. Gibbon had rooms in the New Buildings just twenty years after they were built : what he thought about Magdalen and about Oxford in general will be told elsewhere. In Magdalen Hall one day in 1649 Cromwell and Fairfax were entertained at dinner, and afterwards they played a game of bowls ; Cromwell, a lover of music, took a fancy to the fine organ in the chapel, and, like the true Nazi that he was, carried it away for his own pleasure at Hampton Court. A few years earlier and Charles I had been paying many visits to Magdalen to mount the Tower and scan the slopes of Shotover for signs of his enemies ; while Prince Rupert's artillery had been set up in the Grove beneath. It was over Magdalen Bridge that Charles made his last dash for London, leaving Oxford in the disguise of a servant. And farther back yet there is a curious notice in the Annals of the University for 1586 : " Certain Scholars of Magdalen College stealing deer in the Forest of Shotover belonging to the King, one of them . . . was carried before the Lord Norreys and by him imprisoned." Lord Norreys duly visited Oxford for the quarter sessions, and lodged at the Bear Inn by All Saint's Church, where some of the scholars assaulted his retinue, but were beaten back by Norreys' son Maximilian " as far as St. Mary's Church." However, " Binks the Lord's Keeper was sorely wounded." When the time came for Norreys to leave Oxford by the eastern road, the scholars were ordered to stay in their colleges. " But the Scholars of Magdalen College being not able to pocket these affronts went up privately to the top of their Tower and waiting till he should pass towards Ricot sent down a shower of stones that they had picked up, upon him and his retinue, wounding some and endangering others of their lives." His Lordship, who barely escaped with his life, was " with much ado pacified by the sages of the University."

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This tower of theirs is certainly one of the jewels of Oxford. Its subtly tapered form and placid detail characterise late Gothic at its best. It is worth while to climb it to the top, though you will see a view of miles of unspeakable suburb out to the east where Charles saw the slopes of Headington and his forest of Shotover. This tower was started after Waynflete's death, and completed in 1504. From that day to this it has been customary each year on May Day to greet the sunrise with a concert on the roof of the tower. Formerly this concert was a two hours' performance of "catches and instrumental music"; but since the eighteenth century it has been nothing but a Latin anthem chanted into the wind by a phalanx of blue-nosed choristers, while the girls of St. Hilda's, dreamy but tense, hug their thick mufflers and listen from the bridge below.

Before leaving Magdalen, you may notice in the first quadrangle, by which you came in, a sort of doll's house, standing by itself and fairly reeking of antiquity. This is the Grammar Hall, relic of a preparatory school attached to Magdalen, which has now so much bettered itself that it has moved to the other side of Magdalen Bridge. The small scale and advanced decay of this particular block make it appear older than its surroundings. On either side of it are modern Gothic buildings—to the right the President's lodging, to the left St. Swithin's quad, both built by the scholarly and tasteful partnership of Messrs. Bodley and Garner some fifty years ago. Beyond St. Swithin's quad is a still newer block built in strict conformity by the present Sir Giles Gilbert Scott some ten years ago. There is also an archway, designed but not used as a gate, which Bodley and Garner substituted for an earlier work by Pugin, who in his turn replaced a massive portal built by Inigo Jones.

As you walk up the High Street from Magdalen, you will be able to enjoy some of the most celebrated views in Europe, as the wide curve exposes its stone panorama. On your left the East Gate Hotel marks the point where the city confines ended. Before you on the right-hand side is the great classical pile of Queen's. But just before you reach it, I would have you turn up Queen's Lane for a few yards and look in at St. Edmund Hall.

"Teddy Hall" has little history, but it fits in with the period of the renaissance very well. Being a Hall, it has no date for its foundation, since nobody ever founded it. At some time, long before the Reformation, it merely started itself. Its name is taken from Oxford's first saint, Edmund Rich of Abingdon, later Archbishop of Canterbury, who is supposed to have held his school on this site. The Hall was famous at a very early date as a Wyclifite centre. The actual house belonged to Osney Abbey; so that when Henry VIII took away the property of Osney, the Hall found itself just a part of the plunder. From this

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predicament it was rescued by its wealthy neighbour Queen's. Queen's had for some time past appointed each successive Principal of St. Edmund Hall, though by custom rather than by right: now in 1557 they bought the freehold, and assumed the legal right to appoint a Principal. Their title recited the undertaking of Queen's that "henceforth and for ever they will preserve the aforesaid Hall and preserve it to literary uses." Beneath this kindly protectorate, St. Edmund Hall has flourished. The north range of buildings, which presents a charming front to the churchyard beyond, was built in 1596: after the Restoration were built a chapel and library and hall. With all the characteristics of a college, "Teddy Hall" retained the status of a mere lodging-house. Finally, in the nineteenth century, there were only four Halls left in Oxford, and a Royal Commission of radical busybodies decided in 1877 that they should all be swallowed up by one or other of the colleges. So St. Alban Hall became part of Merton, St. Mary Hall part of Oriel, and New Inn Hall was abolished by Balliol. But St. Edmund Hall survived through the longevity of its Principal. It was thought that it would not be "done" to extinguish his Hall in his lifetime; and by the time he died, people were less keen about the removal of anomalies. Lord Curzon, a great Chancellor of the University, championed the cause of this last Hall; and in 1913 an Order in Council recognised its unique status. Since then it has trebled its membership; now it has nearly 150 undergraduates, and they put up a good show in athletic competition with far larger bodies. In 1987, they celebrated the seventh centenary of Edmund Rich's archiepiscopal appointment. The present Archbishop came down and opened a new block called Canterbury Buildings. At the same time Queen's College handed over their freehold and relinquished their legal rights over the Hall. Now it stands entirely on its own feet, lacking nothing but a founder. The reason why all the other Halls have gone under is that the colleges were endowed and they were not. St. Edmund Hall is still unendowed; and lately it has issued a statement that it requires the fairly modest sum of £5000 a year. Here is a grand opportunity for some Wykeham or Waynflete of the present day to display his piety or celebrate his celibacy. I do not vouch that they will substitute his name for that of Edmund Rich, but they will make better use of the money than all the museum-curators and archæologists in the world.

Passing Queen's College and All Souls once more, you come to St. Mary's Church, whose spire is of the Middle Ages and the rest of it nearly two centuries younger. The church itself was built between 1400 and 1500, that is to say, at the same time as Magdalen. It is a very handsome Perpendicular church, and gains in effect from the fact that so many of the windows have been spared the insertion of stained glass.



26 St. Mary's : the Baroque South Porch



27, 28 Two Views of Christ Church Hall



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It has been described how the two bishops were tried in this church after their unsuccessful dispute in the Divinity School, and how Cranmer here recanted his recantations. There is a legend that on one of the pillars you can see the marks where his platform was erected : but this is all nonsense. The truth is that St. Mary's has been put to all sorts of odd uses. It was always the university church ; and until the Sheldonian Theatre was built, St. Mary's was used as a theatre as well as a church. Here the Mayor came for five centuries to atone for St. Scholastica's day. Here came Queen Elizabeth to listen to three solid days of academic discourse, and to wind them up with a Latin harangue. Here were held the degree-giving ceremonies, accompanied by a great deal of gross buffoonery. One way and another, dozens of platforms must have been erected in St. Mary's besides Cranmer's.

Now the church is used entirely as a church, except that in 1936, when the Sheldonian was under repair, it was used once more for the degree-giving ceremony. On Sundays in term the university sermons are preached here. They were a great draw in the days of the Tractarians, when the eloquence of Newman and Keble shook the university to its foundations : but nowadays they attract less attentive audiences.

The entrance porch of St. Mary's, as you will observe, is not of the Perpendicular period ; far from it. This fulsome specimen of the baroque was added, somewhat astonishingly, a full hundred years before the real era of baroque : but the story of that porch belongs so inevitably to the next chapter that it should be left for then.

Down Oriel Street, which is opposite St. Mary's, you come to Corpus Christi, a miniature college squeezed between Merton and Christ Church, though it has now some modern extensions by Sir Thomas Jackson on the other side of the road. Corpus, as has been said, was founded in 1516, and the whole of the front quad was built within the next twelve years. It is small and bare, with a curious mathematical sundial in the centre. The small chapel is reached by the far left corner ; its altarpiece is said to be a Rubens, and at the west end is a delightful gallery-pew which opens out of the library on the first floor. Beyond the chapel are a cloister and some eighteenth-century rooms whose handsome elevations are marred by the extreme decay of the stonework. Though Corpus is a very distinguished college in its scholastic tradition, it is not really a very interesting college to visit. It has one outstanding historical association in that a Dr. Reynolds, who was President of Corpus, was one of the translators of the Authorised Version, and entertained his collaborators here.

Next door to tiny Corpus lies immense Christ Church, of which the Canterbury Gate adjoins. This gate, however, is not always open, and will lead you into the least historical portion of the

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college. A more satisfactory approach is by Christ Church Meadows, which you can reach by the pathway which divides Corpus from Merton. Across the Meadows runs the Broad Walk, an immemorial avenue of elms. Another avenue runs southwards to the Thames bank. Where these two avenues meet there stands a vast and prickly pile of brick, well clothed in merciful creepers, which is the Meadow Building of Christ Church, the work of one Thomas Deane in 1863. These buildings present a second subsidiary entrance to Christ Church: but I would ask you to carry on to the end of the Broad Walk, which has quite lately been extended right along to St. Aldate's by one of those ingenious schemes which widen our streets at the same time as they commemorate our wars. As you come out on to the street, there is opposite you a remarkable Tudor domestic building, whose gables, woodwork, and plasterwork are all very perfect of their kind. This is called Bishop King's Palace, and is reputed to have been used for a short period by Robert King, when Henry VIII transmuted him from last Abbot of Osney into first Bishop of Oxford. It is now the residence of Monsignor Ronald Knox, the Catholic Chaplain to the university.

The southern end of the frontage of Christ Church on to St. Aldate's roughly marks the position of the old south gate of the city. Brewer Street opposite actually ran beneath the city wall. Facing little Pembroke stands one of Oxford's incomparable architectural treasures, Tom Tower, the joint work of Wolsey and Sir Christopher Wren. What sort of gateway Wolsey planned, nobody knows. He built the curious and elaborate turrets at either side, as high as the level of the adjoining balustrades: between them he foreshadowed a great oriel window. In all probability he meant to carry out some soaring conception such as Lupton's Tower at Eton: but the work was stopped at the time of his fall. The turrets were covered with makeshift lead roofs, and the great porch itself was left open to the sky for over a century. It was not until 1681 that Sir Christopher Wren was commissioned to complete the work. In the confidence of his great genius, he set aside the formal Tudor tower, and made play with the "ogee" form in capping the twin turrets as they stood, abandoning the oriel for a great recessed window, and carrying the central mass up to an octagonal bell-chamber. He also built an uncommonly fine fan-vault over the actual entrance-space.

Attempts were made to induce Wren to house an observatory in his tower, but he wisely refused. Instead it contains the great bell from which it takes its name, Great Tom, once the giant bell of Osney Abbey. At the time when this bell was recast and hung here, Christ Church had 101 scholars; and every evening at five past nine the bell strikes out 101 strokes. At that sound every college in Oxford closes its gates, and thereafter admits only those



20, 30 Christ Church : the mediæval kitchen (*above*) in 1814 (*Ackermann's "Oxford"*) and (*below*) to-day





31 Christ Church Hall (*Ackermann's "Oxford"*)



32 Staircase, Christ Church : from a drawing by Thomas Rowlandson

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who have lawful business. The tolling of Great Tom is like a symbol of the predominance of Christ Church over the university. It is easily the most important, the most delightful of all Oxford's foundations. It has the largest revenues, it provides the best food and the most spacious rooms, it sends forth the most successful alumni of any college. Yet it is not strictly a college at all. It is a solecism to speak of "Christ Church College"; for by its foundation it was named simply "Aedes Christi," the Church or House of Christ; and colloquially it is always spoken of as just "the House." Its head is a Dean; its disciplinary authorities are not Deans, but "Censors"; and its Fellows are "Students."

Tom Quad magnificently represents the grandeur and arrogance of the House and its splendid founder. Nearly a hundred yards square, it wholly dwarfs the ancient spire of the Cathedral tucked away in the far corner. Wolsey intended Tom Quad to be even grander than it is now. It was to be circled by a cloister, as the springers in the walls are meant to indicate, though they were in fact touched up by Sir George Gilbert Scott. Its north side was to be the site of a lofty chapel, intended to rival the superb chapel of King's at Cambridge; and this in spite of the presence of a full-blown Cathedral already at hand. Wolsey did not live to build the north side of the Quad, which was completed a little before Tom Tower. Nor did he build the low square tower in the south-east corner; this was raised about thirty feet not sixty years ago, in order to house the bells of the Cathedral. The work was well done by those skilful practitioners of the Gothic revival, Messrs. Bodley and Garner; but it is a pity that they thought fit to put pinnacles on the hall, which had till then been crowned by a classical balustrade which continued to the very corner of the block.

Another feature of Tom Quad which Wolsey never knew is the pool in the centre, known as "Mercury" from the statue which adorns it. This little fountain has served a valuable purpose for many generations. In other colleges, those who refuse to conform with the prevailing standards of decency are solemnly "debagged," or relieved of their trousers. At the House the cry is to "Put him in Mercury!" and the waters of Mercury have wrought many miraculous spiritual cures.¹

Christ Church Hall is reached by the arch beneath Bodley's bell-tower. Here will be found a great stone stairway, folded round a single column; and resting on the column is one of the most remarkable specimens of fan-vaulting in the whole world. Remarkable not only for its effect but in its origin; for it was built in the 1680's, some two centuries after the era of fan-vaulting, by a London stonemason of whom about all we know is that his

¹ Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, gave the statue of Queen Anne which faces Mercury from the inner side of Tom Tower.

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name was Smith. How Wolsey would have delighted in this splendid piece of work.

At the head of these stairs is the Hall, undoubtedly the finest in Oxford, with its wide hammerbeam roof and the tall vaulted bay which lights its dais. Some of the woodwork and glass is of more recent dates; but the space and dignity of the room are just what they were when Henry VIII banqueted here, after his refoundation of the House, or when Charles I used to dine here during the Civil Wars, and to assemble his loyal followers about him. This hall is also particularly rich in portraits. Every college has its treasures of this kind, which for some reason are always displayed in the appropriate eating-place. In the dingiest halls you will find Reynolds and Lely hidden away. But Christ Church has an incomparable collection, including a triple portrait by Lely, a Kneller of John Locke, a profusion of Gainsborough and Reynolds, and a Romney of John Wesley.

Beyond the hall is the well-known kitchen which caused so many jokes at Wolsey's expense. It is a favourite sight—a vast workshop full of massive implements and enormous fireplaces in which electric cookers now sizzle. The other passage leading from Mr. Smith's stairway conducts you to the ancient cloister, some of which belongs to the old St. Frideswide's, and so beyond to the horrific Meadow Buildings.

All the remainder of the Christ Church buildings belongs to later periods and later benefactors, of whom the most famous were the two Doctors Fell. Everybody knows the tag about "I do not like thee, Dr. Fell"; but this epigram was apparently composed by an undergraduate in fulfilment of an imposition. There is no reason to suppose that anyone disliked either of the Doctors at all. Samuel Fell the elder was Dean of Christ Church in the reign of Charles I, and died of a broken heart upon the execution of that king, whom he must have come to know well during the Civil Wars. It was he who commissioned Smith to glorify his staircase. John Fell his son was Dean and later Bishop as well throughout the reign of Charles II.¹ These two good Anglicans completed Tom Quad between them. Wren's tower was built; the north side was added in harmony with the others; the whole quad was crowned by a graceful balustrade, which survives on the street front, though on the interior it has been scrapped in favour of fake battlements. The north range was dignified by a small tower of its own, once known as "Kill-Canon Tower." This is because Tom Quad accommodates no undergraduates, but only the Canons of the Cathedral; and the north-easterly draughts

¹ John Locke, the philosopher, was student (i.e. a fellow) of Christ Church from start to finish of the same reign. He made himself objectionable to the Crown by his association with the unscrupulous Shaftesbury; and in spite of the good offices of his friend Fell, he had in the end to be dismissed.

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admitted by this entrance were held to be fatal to their sheltered constitutions.

Leaving Tom Quad by this same tower, beneath a statue of the younger Fell, you come to a highly formal and regular eighteenth-century quadrangle, which has lately been refaced with new stone. This is Peckwater Quadrangle, named after the inn which Henry VIII gave to the foundation. It was begun in 1705, the money being given by a Canon Radcliffe and the design that of Dean Aldrich, an excellent amateur architect who did great things for Oxford. The rooms in "Peck" are as spacious and ample as the design suggests, and their arrangement shows how very far ideas had changed about the comfort of the undergraduates. Now there is a tendency to revert to mediæval simplicity; an attempt is being made to introduce the hateful "bed-sitter." But "Peck," with its wide staircases and tall rooms, remains the model of what an Oxford quad should be.

The Library which fills the open side of Peckwater is also the work of an unprofessional architect, that same Dr. Clarke whose work we have seen at All Souls. Begun only ten years later than the quadrangle itself, it is a far more massive and showy design, though its present rather oppressive effect might be mitigated if it also received the refacing which it so badly needs. To judge the building properly, one must remember that the ground floor was first intended to constitute an open piazza as at Trinity College, Cambridge. This was the classical formula for libraries. From Merton onwards, every library earlier than the Codrington was housed on an upper floor for fear of damp; and the eighteenth century improved this notion by planning open cloisters and porticos to occupy the vacant ground floor. This was the intention not only here, but at Queen's and at the Radcliffe Camera itself. But the books always overflowed their shelves, and damp or no damp, the space below was always filled in the end.

It is very well worth while to enter this great library. On the ground floor are some interesting marbles, a varied collection of paintings, mostly Florentine, and Wolsey's red hat. The staircase is a graceful elliptical design. The upper room, the library itself, is a splendid room in every respect—in its proportions, in its furnishing, and particularly in its sumptuous ceiling.

There remains but one corner of Christ Church to explore. Canterbury Quad, alongside of Peckwater, is a group designed by Wyatt about 1780 to frame the east end of the library. It also provides a worthy side entrance from Merton Street and Oriel Street.

Such is "the House," which is bigger, better, richer, and cheaper than any college in Oxford. The tremendous personality which appears in its buildings appears also in its personnel. Its

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deans have been illustrious and well paid,¹ its undergraduates illustrious and well born. In a single century it educated Canning, Peel, Gladstone, Salisbury, and Rosebery. It has a strong connection with Westminster School, dating from the foundation by Queen Elizabeth of a number of close scholarships. A large number of Etonians also go up to the House. The life is easy-going and tolerant; the company is intelligent and gay. To crown all, the college revenues are well over £100,000 a year.

¹ Dr. Gaisford was a great Greek scholar as well as Dean of Christ Church. He once ended a sermon in St. Mary's by urging upon his audience "the study of Greek literature, which not only elevates above the common herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument."



33 The Divinity School
(L. Kerrmann's "Oxford")



34 Oriel Street and St. Mary's
Spire

