

A BARBARA PYM WALK THROUGH OXFORD

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*And that sweet city with her dreaming spires
She needs not June for beauty's heightening,
Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!* – Matthew Arnold

Through a rift in the trees he caught his first real glimpse of Oxford – in that ineffectual moonlight an underwater city, its towers and spires standing ghostly, like the memorials of lost Atlantis, fathoms deep. – Edmund Crispin

[1] Numbers in square brackets correspond to the numbers on the map.

THE STARTING POINT IS THE ENTRANCE OF **ST HILDA'S COLLEGE** ON COWLEY PLACE **[1]**

St Hilda's is the college of novelists **D. K. Broster** and **Catherine Heath**, poets **Jenny Joseph** and **Wendy Cope**, and detective fiction writer **Val McDermid**. It was founded in 1893 by Dorothea Beale – educational reformer, suffragist, and Principal of the Cheltenham Ladies' College – and it remained an all-women's college until 2008, making it the last single-sex college in the University of Oxford.

When Barbara was a student here in the 1930s the college buildings comprised **Hall** and **South Buildings** (*the former described below*) and a 'temporary' wooden chapel (1925-1969) located where Garden Building now stands. **South Building** was originally a family house named Cowley Grange, built in the 1870s by Christ Church chemistry tutor Augustus Vernon Harcourt. From 1902-1920 it was a women's teacher training college called Cherwell Hall; St Hilda's obtained the leasehold in 1920 and purchased the building outright in 1949. The **Milham Ford** building [*scheduled for demolition as of 2018*] was a school in the 1930s; it was not purchased by St Hilda's until 1958. During the 1950s the kitchen and dining hall in South were expanded and the Principal's House and Porters' Lodge [*scheduled for demolition as of 2018*] constructed. The mid- and late-20th century buildings on the southern side of the campus include the **Wolfson, Garden, and Christina Barratt** residential buildings and the **Jacqueline du Pré Music Building**, a chamber music venue opened in 1995.

WALK DOWN COWLEY PLACE.

On the left is St Hilda's **Hall Building**. Originally called Cowley House, it was built between 1775 and 1783 as the private home of Dr Humphrey Sibthorp (1713–1797), Sherardian Professor of Botany from 1747 to 1783. It was convenient for the Botanic Gardens, the next stopping point.

In November 1892 Dorothea Beale purchased Cowley House, which had been enlarged in the 1860s, for £5,000. St Hilda's Hall was established there in 1893 and the building became known as Old Hall, and later as Hall Building. It was extended in 1897 to provide a new dining room and student rooms, and a new wing was built in 1909 with a legacy from Miss Beale. A final extension to Old Hall, the Burrows Wing, was added in 1935 to provide a new library and further student accommodation.

AT THE ROUNDABOUT (THE PLAIN) TURN LEFT AND WALK ACROSS **MAGDALEN** (pronounced 'maudlin') **BRIDGE** TOWARDS THE TOWN CENTRE. STOP AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE **BOTANIC GARDENS** **[2]**

The Botanic Gardens, aka The Physic Garden, are the oldest in the UK, founded in 1621 – and, of course, the scene of Francis Cleveland and Barbara Bird's hilarious assignation in *Crampton Hodnet*, when they lurked in the bushes to avoid Michael and Gabriel:

At twenty-five past two, Barbara was hurrying over Magdalen Bridge. She stopped and looked down anxiously into the Botanical Gardens and saw Francis Cleveland standing outside one of the hothouses and peering in. ... They walked in silence into one of the hothouses. In the middle of the floor was a raised square pool, full of water plants and goldfish. ... He flung his arm around Barbara's shoulders, but the position was an awkward one, and they stumbled in their efforts to keep in step. Suddenly they heard the sound of familiar voices.

'Michael and Gabriel,' said Barbara quickly. 'We don't want them to see us.'

'Let's hide in these bushes,' said Francis impulsively.

Barbara took Henry Harvey and John Barnicot there in 1935 ('...into the very hot hot houses. But there was nothing exciting there – only a few orchids. We were all rather fractious ...' (AVPE 72).

Three years later, it was the scene of a tryst with Julian Amery (AVPE 92):

When we got into the Botanical Gardens we lay down on the grass under a tree. There were branches [*sic*] of mistletoe in the branches so we kissed. After a while we went into the hothouses and looked at the goldfishes and the palms. Jay kissed me by the orchids and stole a spray for me. They were pinky-mauve with purple centres like velvet. I thought they had a sweet smell but Jay said they smelt like the tomb. I remembered Marvell and so did he:

*The grave's a fine and private place
But none I think do there embrace.*

I said that perhaps it would be nicer to have a marble vault together than a house in North Oxford.

CROSS THE ROAD AT THE TRAFFIC ISLAND, AND PAUSE OUTSIDE **MAGDALEN COLLEGE** [3]

Magdalen College was founded in 1458 by William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor. Among Magdalen undergraduates were **Sir Thomas Bodley**, founder of the Bodleian Library, and **Joseph Addison** whose walk along the river was beloved by **C. S. Lewis** when a Fellow there.

Of **C. S. Lewis** it was said, 'He was a superb lecturer.... The girls adored him and crowded out the benches, lying on the boards at his feet as there was no room to sit. He got them excited and, it was said, your best chance of seducing one was the afternoon of a Lewis lecture on medieval romance...' (–Paul Johnson, *The Spectator*, 13 Jan 2010)

Barbara commented on a lecture by C. S. Lewis that it was 'deep but interesting in parts' (ALTA 30). **Henry Harvey** was tutored by Lewis, who wrote in his diary of **John Betjeman** (another pupil), 'I wish I could get rid of the idle prig.'

On 26 January 1933 Barbara wrote, 'At about 7 coming past Magdalen I saw him [Lorenzo] in the lodge—looking lovely and rather flushed. Oh dear!' (AVPE 26) [*She does not yet know his name.*]

The next entry (29 January) reads: 'During this week Lorenzo – whose real name is Henry Stanley Harvey – has been much in my thoughts – in spite of being very conscious of each other nothing seems to happen!' But three months (to the day) later he would speak to her. [*The location will be noted later.*]

CARRY ON UP THE HIGH STREET. CROSS LONGWALL STREET AT THE TRAFFIC LIGHTS, THEN PAUSE TO NOTE THE **EASTGATE HOTEL** ACROSS THE STREET [4]

The **Eastgate Hotel** is where **C.S. Lewis** and **J. R. R. Tolkien** used to meet weekly. Barbara described a lecture of Tolkien's on Beowulf as 'amusing'. (AVPE 38)

CONTINUE DOWN THE HIGH TO **QUEEN'S LANE**.

Pause at '**the High end of Queen's Lane**' – we'll mention that again later. On the right side of the ancient lane are the Queen's Lane Coffee House, dating from 1654, the unpretentious main entrance to **St Edmund ('Teddy') Hall**, founded ca. 1278, and the 12th century church of St Peter-in-the-East, now the college library.

CONTINUE DOWN THE HIGH TO CATTE STREET. TURN RIGHT AND WALK PAST **THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN** INTO **RADCLIFFE SQUARE**. STOP NEAR THE GATE OF **ALL SOULS COLLEGE** [5].

All Souls College was founded by Henry VI and Henry Chichele (Fellow of New College and Archbishop of Canterbury) in 1438. It is famous for having no undergraduates but only Fellows.

The round building in the centre of the square is the **Radcliffe Camera**, built in 1737–1749 by James Gibbs in the English Palladian style. It was an independent library for 112 years before becoming part of the Bodleian in 1861. Henry Harvey's close friend **John Barnicot** worked there in 1935, and Barbara commented on the changes in the library (AVPE 75).

The north side of the square flanks the **Bodleian 'Old Library'**. The Library dates to 1602 when Sir Thomas Bodley donated funds for a suitable building. The Radcliffe Camera is connected to the Old Bodleian by two floors of underground reading rooms in an area formerly crammed with movable cast-iron 'Gladstone' bookshelves that hung on rollers from the ceiling (so-called because they were suggested by Victorian Liberal

Prime Minister and Oxford graduate W. E. Gladstone). These provide the scene for an exciting chase in **Michael Innes' Operation Pax**.

[6] STOP OUTSIDE HERTFORD COLLEGE, OPPOSITE THE MAIN LIBRARY ENTRANCE ON THE EAST SIDE OF BODLEY'S QUAD.

The Bodleian Library was the scene of Barbara's observations of Henry Harvey, and their first speaking together on 29 April 1933 (*AVPE* 27):

Oh ever to be remembered day. Lorenzo spoke to me. I saw him in the Bod and felt desperately thrilled about him so that I trembled and shivered and went sick. As I went out Lorenzo caught me up – and said 'Well, and has Sandra finished her epic poem?' or words to that effect.

Later, **Robert 'Jock' Liddell** had a job at the Bodleian. Barbara's 21st birthday (2 June 1934) was partly spent at Henry and Jock's lodgings:

Henry had a bath [and it] put him in rather a bad temper. ... I was sitting on the floor reading Goethe when Jockie came in and he was very pleased to see me. He was frightfully funny imitating Bodley's Librarian with whom he'd been to tea. I had supper with them and [then] slipped away. ... in many ways not a happy day.

CONTINUE A SHORT DISTANCE DOWN CATTE STREET TO THE CORNER OF NEW COLLEGE LANE AND NOTE THE 'BRIDGE OF SIGHS'.

The lane beyond the bridge leads to **New College** (founded in 1379, so not terribly new at all). **Lord David Cecil**, Barbara Pym's champion in the 1977 *TLS* rankings, was a Fellow here. **Rupert Gleadow** wrote to Barbara in October 1932:

On Sunday at 4 o'clock you be at the High end of Queens Lane [*previously noted*] and I'll be at the Broad end of New College Lane and when four strikes by St Mary's we'll both walk down and meet where the two lanes meet. (*ALTA* 42)

GO BACK DOWN CATTE STREET AND GO THROUGH THE MAIN GATE (ON THE RIGHT) INTO THE BODLEIAN MAIN QUAD [7]

Note the windows of the Lower and Upper **Reading Rooms** which run all round the north, east and south sides of the quad. In June 1971 Barbara wrote to Philip Larkin, 'The (then) English Reading Room of the Bodleian Library has many sentimental memories for me – I can remember deliberately *not* going there for fear of seeing a certain person or to hope that my absence would be noted.'

Move towards the bronze statue of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (Chancellor of the University 1617-30), designed by Rubens, and look through the main entrance doorway into the **Proscholium**, the entrance to the mid-15th century **Divinity School** building with its elaborate vaulted ceiling.

Then turn round and look at the east wall of the quad, the so-called **Tower of the Five Orders**. This is ornamented, in ascending order, with the columns of each of the five orders of classical architecture: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.

GO OUT THROUGH THE NORTH EXIT INTO THE COURTYARD BETWEEN THE BODLEIAN QUAD AND THE CLARENDON BUILDING.

Directly in front of you is the **Clarendon Building**, home of Oxford University Press from 1715 until the 1820s. Since then it has been used as office space, first by the University and now by the Bodleian.

On the left is the **Sheldonian Theatre** (1664-9, designed by Sir Christopher Wren), scene of degree ceremonies for students and of Encaenia, the awarding of honorary degrees. The seventeen carved figures in front of the Sheldonian, known as the Emperor Heads, were commissioned by Wren when the theatre was built; they have had to be replaced twice due to erosion, most recently in the early 1970s.

EXIT INTO BROAD STREET [8]

Opposite you is the **Weston Library**, formerly the New Bodleian (built 1937-40, rebuilt 2010-5), home of the library's Special Collections, including the Modern Literary Manuscripts department where Barbara's papers

are housed. The New Bodleian housed millions of books – most now moved off-site to a massive new book storage facility in Swindon – on 11 storeys of underground stacks. A tunnel that still runs under Broad Street held a mechanical conveyor system to send books back and forth between the New Bodleian and the reading rooms in the Old Bod. and Radcliffe Camera, as well as pneumatic tubes for sending book request slips.

TURN LEFT AND WALK UP BROAD STREET AS FAR AS TURL STREET, BUT DON'T TAKE IT. INSTEAD, CROSS BROAD STREET TO **TRINITY COLLEGE [9]**

Trinity College was founded by Sir Thomas Pope in 1555. The college to the west of Trinity (on the left if one is facing the main gates) is Balliol.

Balliol College, founded ca. 1263, is one of the oldest Oxford colleges; Balliol, University, and Merton were all established between 1249 and 1264, and the exact dates are disputed. Balliol is where **Julian Amery** was an undergraduate, first met by Barbara on 3 December 1937: 'a young man ... about my height, slight and dark with a quizzical, rather monkey face ... he had so much charm and a kind of childish simplicity, combined with Continental polish that was most appealing.' (*AVPE*, 87-88). He was the son of Leo Amery the cabinet minister (*more about him later*).

GO TO THE CORNER AND TURN RIGHT IMMEDIATELY AFTER BALLIOL. PROCEED DOWN MAGDALEN STREET EAST, KEEPING THE CHURCH ON YOUR LEFT, TO **ST GILES' [10]**

The Victorian **Martyrs' Memorial** on the left honours Protestant Church of England bishops Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer, who were burned as heretics in 1555-6 after the Roman Catholic Queen Mary ('Bloody Mary') came to the throne. They were all Cambridge men.

CARRY ON IN THE SAME DIRECTION TO THE MAIN GATE OF **ST JOHN'S COLLEGE [11]**

St John's was the college of **John Fothergill**, the eccentric hotelier of the Spread Eagle at Thame (which he recorded in the classic *An Innkeeper's Diary*). Barbara went there with Rupert Gleadow and his friend Miles Macadam: 'We ate a marvellous dinner, at which everything ordinary – i.e. fish – tasted extraordinarily good. We finished up with yellow Chartreuse – Rupert laughed at me because it made me cough.' (*ALTA*)

This was also **Philip Larkin's** college in 1941-3. His novel *Jill* (1946), written at the age of 21, is set in the wartime Oxford of his own experience. Barbara read the novel in 1963 and much admired it.

Larkin's college contemporaries and friends were the novelists **Kingsley Amis** and **John Wain**; also **Norman Iles** (folklorist and author of *Who Really Killed Cock Robin?*), and composer **Bruce Montgomery**. Better known as author of amusing crime stories under the pseudonym **Edmund Crispin**, Montgomery set several of his novels in Oxford, basing his eccentric detective Gervase Fen on his own Oxford tutor Will Grayburn Moore and placing his imaginary St Christopher's College just beyond St John's. Fen had a small car called *Lily Christine III* – the name alludes to **Michael Arlen's** novel.

A couple of Oxford quotations from Crispin's *The Moving Toyshop*:

Oxford is the one place in Europe where a man may do anything, however eccentric, and arouse no interest or emotion at all. (p. 16)

Driving with Fen was no pleasure... It was all right in St Giles' because St Giles' is an immensely broad street where it is quite difficult to hit anything, except for the pedestrians who constantly scuttle across its expanses like startled hens, in a frantic and perilous gauntlet race. (p. 32)

Diagonally across the road is the **Eagle & Child pub** (known to locals as 'The Bird and Baby'), haunt of **The Inklings** (**C. S. Lewis**, **J. R. R. Tolkien**, **Charles Williams** and others).

LOOK DOWN TO THE END OF ST GILES' WHERE THE STREET SPLITS INTO BANBURY ROAD (ON THE RIGHT) AND WOODSTOCK ROAD (ON THE LEFT). BEYOND LIES **NORTH OXFORD**.

This is the district so well described by **Robert Liddell** in *The Last Enchantments* (1948). His Christminster (he adopts Hardy's name from *Jude the Obscure* for the city), with its Banstock and Woodbury roads, is clearly Oxford:

North Christminster is long and narrow... [and boasts] some of the most remarkable domestic architecture in Europe. ... [There are] towering yellow brick piles, embellished with Purbeck shafts and

freestone copings ... [and] red-brick mansions, several of which claim Ruskin as their architect. ... Here are the homes of sub-academic people, attached somehow or other, by duty or interest, to the university. ... A certain snobbery makes everyone profess to have more to do with the gown than with the town. ... Among all these ... people there are, inevitably, a fair number of eccentrics, and also among those who have come to live here for the sake of the university library ... Baskets full of notes, brains full of specialised learning, go up and down the Banstock and Woodbury roads on bicycles, twice every week-day. ... Everywhere flourish the lovely trees that are justly dear to suburbia, the horse-chestnut, the lilac, the cherry, the laburnum, the hawthorn and the copper beech.

Liddell could well have mentioned the dripping laurels and *Araucaria* (monkey puzzle tree) which flourished outside **Miss Doggett's** North Oxford dwelling, Leamington Lodge:

It was a wet Sunday afternoon in North Oxford at the beginning of October. The laurel bushes which bordered the path leading to Leamington Lodge, Banbury Road, were dripping with rain. ... The house had been built in the sixties of the last century, of yellowish brick, with a gabled roof and narrow Gothic windows set in frames of ornamental stonework. A long red and blue stained-glass window looked onto a landing halfway up the pitch-pine staircase, and there were panels of the same glass let into the front door, so that, except for a glimpse of unlikely lace curtains, the house might have been a theological college. (*Crampton Hodnet*, Ch. 1)

Here at times Barbara 'went on a Banbury Road crawl' because **Henry Harvey** lived there.

'There was a light in Lorenzo's bedroom – is he ill, or packing, or was he just there. Anyway it gives me a little hope.' (*AVPE* 43).

Later, in wartime, Barbara recalled 86B Banbury Road: 'As I write I can still smell the peculiar smell of paint and carpet and new furniture that used to linger in the hall and see the china horse and the Degas and the long satin curtains in the sitting room. And old Barnicot coughing over a Craven A.' (*AVPE* 151)

At other times Henry lived at 30 Banbury Road, and later at 5 Pusey Street, a small street off St Giles.

CROSS THE ROAD, AND TURN LEFT TOWARDS THE TRAFFIC LIGHTS. STAND OUTSIDE THE **ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM** IN ORDER TO LOOK AT THE **RANDOLPH HOTEL [12]**

The Randolph was the scene of Barbara's parting with **Julian Amery**: 'I met Jay by the Ashmolean and we leaned up against it and stood looking up at the Randolph and the blue sky behind it. We were like two people having a coltish flirtation. He bought me a bunch of violets and I gave him half a dozen – one for every occasion we had met. Then we parted, he to write an essay and I to write him a Betjeman poem.' (*AVPE* 91)

It was also the site of Barbara's first meeting with **Philip Larkin** on 23 April 1975, after 14 years of corresponding. 'I shall be looking rather anxious, I expect', she said, after describing what she would be wearing.

'I had lunch with Philip Larkin at the Randolph sitting in the window looking out towards the Ashmolean and watching ambulances [echo of the PL poem] driving up Beaumont St. What can I say? Wish I were a poet.' (*AVPE* 396-7)

CARRY ON DOWN MAGDALEN STREET WITH THE MARTYRS' MEMORIAL ON YOUR LEFT. PROCEED THROUGH CORNMARKEt TO THE CROSSROADS WITH THE HIGH [13] AND STAND NEAR **CARFAX TOWER**. LOOK DOWN ST ALDATE'S TO **CHRIST CHURCH**.

Carfax (< Fr. *carrefour* < L. *quadrifurcus* = crossroads) is considered the centre of Oxford. The tower is all that remains of the 12th century St Martin's Church, demolished in 1896 so that the road could be widened.

Looking down St Aldate's from Carfax you can see Tom Tower rising above the main gate of Christ Church, **Henry Harvey's** college. Christ Church (known colloquially as 'The House') was founded by Henry VIII in 1546 in buildings taken from Cardinal Wolsey when he fell from grace. Its college chapel, originally the 12th century church of St Frideswide's Priory, is also Oxford's cathedral.

CROSS DIAGONALLY TOWARDS THE EDINBURGH WOOLLEN MILL SHOP AND PROCEED DOWN THE HIGH. PAUSE AT BUS STOP i2 AND LOOK DOWN THE NARROW PASSAGE ON YOUR RIGHT [14].

The building that now houses the Thai restaurant Chiang Mai Kitchen was built in 1637 and called **Kemp Hall**. In the 1930s it was a cafeteria, and Barbara mentions it several times in her diaries. 'I followed Lorenzo

to Balliol – then Jockie down the snicket [=Brasenose Lane?] and we all of us met at Kemp Hall. Poisonous looks from Jockie, amused ones from Lorenzo.’ (24 January 1934)

CONTINUE DOWN THE HIGH TO SHEPHERD & WOODWARD’S SHOP, THEN TURN RIGHT DOWN KING EDWARD STREET, WHICH CURVES DOWN PAST **ORIEL COLLEGE** ON YOUR LEFT AND ENDS AT THE CANTERBURY GATE OF **CHRIST CHURCH** ON YOUR RIGHT [15]

MAKE THE SHARP LEFT TURN ONTO **MERTON STREET**, A COBBLED ROAD FREQUENTLY FEATURED ON THE ‘MORSE’ and ‘LEWIS’ TV SERIES. CONTINUE DOWN MERTON STREET; ON YOUR RIGHT IS **CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE**.

Corpus Christi, Robert Liddell’s college, was founded in 1517 by Richard Fox, bishop of Winchester. If the gate is open, you will be able to see the most famous feature of the college, a gilded statue of a pelican set atop a painted stone sundial column in the centre of the main quad. The Pelican Sundial, built in 1581, has 24 different dials, with signs of the Zodiac, phases of the moon, and the pelican sitting atop an armillary sphere, a hollow framework of rings symbolising the planets orbiting the earth.

CARRY ON DOWN MERTON STREET. YOU WILL PASS **MERTON COLLEGE** ON YOUR RIGHT.

Merton, founded ca. 1264, is one of the oldest and most beautiful colleges in Oxford, with medieval and 17th-century buildings including a 13th century chapel. **T. S. Eliot** was an undergraduate at Merton, and **J. R. R. Tolkien** was a Fellow.

AT THE END OF THE STREET, TURN LEFT AND CONTINUE A SHORT DISTANCE, STOPPING AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE MERCURE HOTEL, OPPOSITE **THE EXAMINATION SCHOOLS** [16]

Here Barbara went to many lectures, and, like all Oxford students, sat her exams wearing the formal *subfusc* clothing (<L. *sub fuscus* = of a dark colour), plus mortarboard cap (‘square’) and gown. (In May 2015 Oxford students voted 3 to 1 to continue wearing formal academic dress for exams.) She also met Henry Harvey there as he came out of Schools in June 1933:

Today I couldn’t resist the lure of the Schools and came out of Bod. at about 12.15. I met Rupert in the High – so I had an excuse for lingering by Schools. ... At last Lorenzo [came out] in his striped suit plus white shirt and tie. I said ‘Have you enjoyed yourself?’ He grinned rather fatuously and waved his square at me... (AVPE 31)

A year later she was taking Schools herself: ‘I enjoyed the experience of Schools and the papers were quite nice, if rather dull at times. I always did the morning ones best. Henry, divinely beautiful in BA gown, white fur etc., was taking B.Litt. papers – but I saw very little of him.’ (AVPE 58)

On 18 July she had her Viva, or oral examination: ‘... short and sweet, purely formal and my class obviously decided – but what? I had tea with Henry and he took me to the station. He said I was part of the background, like Jock and Barnicot, which pleased me. It is what I have always wanted – I love him too but don’t want him for my very own yet awhile.

I got a 2nd. With comparative ease too.’ (AVPE 61)

WITH THE HOTEL ON YOUR RIGHT CONTINUE BACK TO THE HIGH; TURN RIGHT AND GO BACK ACROSS MAGDALEN BRIDGE TO RETURN TO ST HILDA’S.

If you want to see more: The Botanic Gardens, the Weston Library’s Lee Gallery and Treasury, and the Ashmolean Museum are open to the public; there are admission charges for the gardens and for special exhibitions at the museum. Guided tours of the Old Bodleian are available, book online or ask at the Great Gate in the Quadrangle.

Most of the Colleges are open to the public at times and/or offer tours, but opening days and hours vary widely so it’s best to check their websites and plan ahead. There is usually a modest admission charge.

