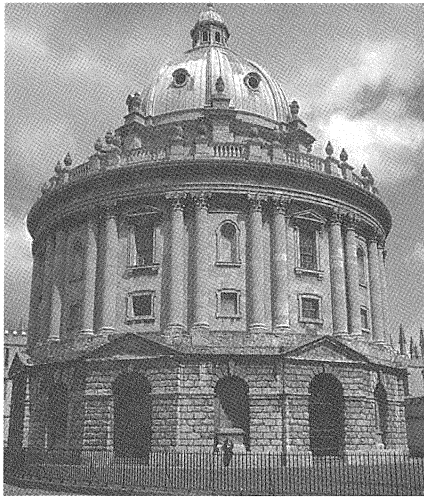


# A Circuit Town: Oxford

*In the latest of our series of 'circuit towns', Tim Boswell of King's Bench Chambers, Oxford and 13 King's Bench Walk gives us a tour of one of the most civilised places to go to court*



Radcliffe Camera

Oxford is a perfect size: large enough to have all the facilities one would expect from a modern city, yet with an historic centre compact enough to make getting round on foot easy. The visiting barrister will also be impressed by some of the finest architecture in the country, an excellent selection of pubs and a crown court that is housed in a former showroom for Morris cars.

## Getting there

The railway station is about 15 minutes' walk from both the Combined Court Centre (crown court and county court) and (just around the corner in Speedwell Street) the Magistrates' Court. Trains leave London Paddington every half an hour and take approximately one hour to get to Oxford. However, with a standard peak day return costing an eye-watering £39.30 it may be that pupils and others of a sensitive financial disposition will want to explore alternatives. The Oxford Tube coach service leaves London Victoria every half hour in the early morning and costs a far more reasonable £14. But be warned: with rush hour traffic, the journey can take about two hours. For those driving, beware Oxford's impenetrable one-way system. The best option for motorists is to use one of the five park and rides that are scattered around the ring road.

## The courts

The Magistrates' Court consists of five courts. Advocates should sign in at reception when they arrive. The advocates' room, CPS and Probation are all located on the main concourse. If your case is listed in court 5 then you will need to go through the door to the right of the reception desk. It's normally controlled by a swipe card but smile sweetly at the ushers and they'll let you through.

The crown court's robing room and canteen are on the first floor on the left (ask security for the code to get through the door), around the corridor from the CPS office. Probation is on the main concourse, as are the court rooms and access to the cells. There is the normal Xhibit computer system in the robing room. Plans for a further court room are in the works, although rumours that the development will include a roof top terrace for the judiciary remain unconfirmed.

## Lunch

The crown court canteen is of the standard one would expect, so if time permits, turn left out of the building and head north. You will pass La Croissanterie which serves an excellent range of baguettes. Remember, if the weather is good, that the court happens to be across the street from Christ Church Meadows which is as fine a picnic ground as you will find anywhere.

When you reach the High Street ('the High') turn right and go to the Covered Market which has a huge number of sandwich shops and salad bars. Particularly recommended are the Oxford Sandwich Co. and Ricardo's (who do a fantastic hot ciabatta with roast chicken and stuffing). For those with healthier tastes I'm told there is a very good salad bar which will fill a bowl with your selection of ingredients.

If you have a bigger appetite then the Old Tom on St. Aldate's has a good, reasonably priced pub menu and the High Street has several bars which serve a filling lunch (All Bar One, Quod etc).

## Drinking

Oxford provides many options for the barrister in need of liquid refreshment after a hard day in court. In summer the obvious choice is the Head of the River. Turn right out of the court building and a two minute walk will take you there. It has a large riverside terrace that is an excellent place to sip a pint of London Pride in the evening sunshine. In the winter you would be best advised to go to the city centre. Braziers, mulled wine and toasted marshmallows are available at the Turl Tavern, which can be found in the alleyways between Holywell Street and New College Lane. Walk along Broad Street ('the Broad') and you will see the White Horse, an eccentric little pub located in the middle of Blackwell's bookshop. It boasts a cosy atmosphere and a good range of real ales – the pub that is, not Blackwell's.

Carry on down the Broad, turn right and then left into the unfortunately named Friar's Entry and you will discover Far From the Madding Crowd, where members of the local Bar can generally be found in various states of disrepair. Past highlights of FMC's frequent beer festivals include a bright orange cider that tipped the scales at 7.8% abv. One for weekends only I suspect. Just past the railway station is The White House which has re-invented itself as a new-style bistro-bar with an impressive menu. Traditionalists will prefer to cross the road and head down Mill Street to the Kite, as friendly a neighbourhood local as exists in Oxford and only a five minute walk to the train station.

## Eating Out

If you are feeling peckish after your post-court pint, then Oxford caters for a broad range of tastes. The best Chinese in town is the Peninsula on George Street, whilst connoisseurs of Indian cuisine should head for Chutneys on the corner of St. Michael's Street and New Inn Hall Street.

However, the best selection of restaurants in one space can be found in the recently re-developed Castle complex, which is less than ten minutes' walk from the railway station, via Park End Street and New Road. There is a lively bar called the

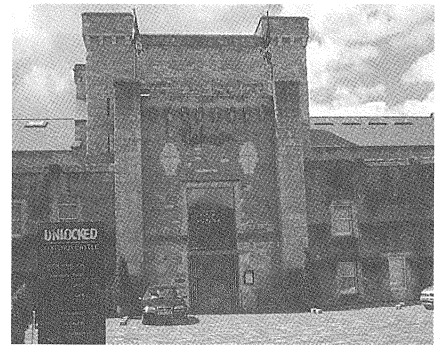
Living Room after which there is the choice of Italian food, a tapas bar, and a restaurant specialising in chargrilled dishes. The Castle also has an open air theatre which is very popular in the summer months.

## Places to Stay

Also in the Castle complex is the strangest addition to Oxford's hotels, Malmaison ([www.malmaison-oxford.com](http://www.malmaison-oxford.com)), but not a normal Malmaison. Converted from the former Oxford prison many of the rooms are former cells that have retained original features such as bars on the windows. Prices start at about £150 for a double bedroom. There are plenty of cheaper options in Oxford. Of particular interest are the wide variety of bed and breakfasts on the Abingdon Road; some are only a few minutes' walk from the courthouse. [www.dailyinfo.co.uk](http://www.dailyinfo.co.uk) is an excellent website that contains full details of a wide range of places to stay and details of any current special offers.

## Sights to See

There is plenty to see and do in Oxford for those with time to spare. Walk up St. Aldate's from the court, turn right into the High and you'll find yourself walking into the historic heart of the city. There are more college quads than you can shake a mortar board at and the architecture is, at times, stunning. Turn left off the High, past the University



An unusual hotel

Church and wander through Radcliffe Square, where you'll find the grandeur of the Radcliffe Camera and All Souls' College. Carry on out of the square via Catte Street and pass the smaller scale beauty of Hertford College and the famous Bridge of Sighs (which looks more like the Rialto, but there we are). Stop off for a well earned pint at The King's Arms before sampling the delights of the Natural History Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum (shrunk heads included), both located on Parks Road. Turning back to the Broad and then onto Beaumont Street the Ashmolean Museum, with an outstanding collection of painting and decorative arts.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Oxford is a city of almost infinite delight and an unplanned wander through the side streets can often be just as interesting as a planned walk around the major sights.