



Royal
Geographical
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Workers' playtime

A self guided walk exploring Victorian Oxford's leisure pursuits



Discover how leisure activities grew in Victorian Oxford

Find out where the city's workers spent their free time

Learn where reformers tried to cure 'habitual drunkards'

Visit the pubs, museums, theatres and galleries where vice battled virtue

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Workers' playtime

Discover how Oxford's 'habitual drunkards' were reformed into model citizens

Introduction

Travel back in time to the Victorian era and discover an alternative Oxford beyond its dreaming spires.

In the mid-nineteenth century the industrial revolution swept across Britain. As farm workers deserted the countryside for new jobs in towns and cities, places like Oxford were transformed. New urban lifestyles meant more money and more free time. For the first time working people discovered the concept of leisure. Pubs, theatres, music halls, travelling fairs and other 'low brow' entertainments boomed. But the middle classes had other ideas. Leisure should not only be respectable but also productive – good both for the soul and the country.



The Ashmolean Museum portico
Rory Walsh © RGS-IGB Discovering Britain

Find out how ordinary working people spent their free time. Discover why middle class reformers tried to lure them away from sinful pleasures towards more 'improving' leisure pursuits. Visit pubs and museums, theatres and libraries, hotels and gymnasiums where the struggle between vice and virtue was played out.

Route overview



Stopping points

1. The Mitre pub, High Street
2. The Bear pub, corner of Blue Boar Lane and Alfred Street
3. Former Oxford Gymnasium, corner of Blue Boar Lane and Alfred Street
4. Former public library, corner of the old Town Hall, St Aldates
5. 36 & 37 Pembroke Street
6. 36 & 37 Pembroke Street
7. The Royal Blenheim pub, corner of Pembroke Street and St Ebbe's
8. Former Wilberforce Temperance Hotel, Queen Street
9. The New Theatre, George Street
10. Former YMCA building, George Street
11. The Grapes Pub, George Street
12. Ashmolean Museum
13. The Randolph Hotel, Beaumont Street
14. St Giles
15. Former Big Game Museum, Woodstock Road
16. Former Big Game Museum, Woodstock Road

Practical information

Location	Oxford, Southeast England
Getting there	<p>Train - Oxford station is well served by the railway network with services to London Paddington, Reading, Didcot, Newcastle, Bournemouth, Manchester Piccadilly and Birmingham New Street.</p> <p>Bus - many city centre routes and long distance coaches, including routes to Heathrow, Gatwick and London Victoria coach station</p> <p>There are 5 park and ride depots around the city centre; Pear Tree (route 300), Redbridge (route 300), Seacourt (route 400), Thornhill (route 400) and Water Eaton (route 500)</p> <p>Car - Oxford is accessible via Junctions 8 and 9 of the M40. The city is surrounded by the Oxford Ring Road. Drivers are advised to use park and ride services into the city centre.</p> <p>Bicycle - Oxford is a very popular cycling city and features on National Cycle Route number 5 among others</p>
Start point & postcode	The Mitre Pub, High Street, OX1 4AG
Directions from railway station to start	<p>From the station turn right. Take care crossing between the bus and taxi stands and join Park End Street. Use the pedestrian crossings outside the Said Business School to cross over the road.</p> <p>Turn left in front of The Jam Factory and continue along the pedestrianised section of Park End Street. Continue into New Road then pedestrianised Queen Street which joins the High Street. The Mitre is on the left hand side before Turl Street.</p>
Finish point	Former Big Game Museum, Woodstock Road

Onward journey	The route is almost circular - to return to the start please use the directions on page 10
Distance	1 ¼ miles
Level	Gentle - an easy flat route through the city centre
Conditions	The city centre can be busy at weekends and in the summer tourist season. Take care by busy roads.
Suitable for	<p>Families - take care of children by busy roads</p> <p>Dogs - must be kept on a lead</p> <p>Wheelchairs / pushchairs - an entirely step-free route</p>
Refreshments	There are plenty of cafes and restaurants along the route, including The Art Cafe (after Stop 8) and Greens Cafe (between Stops 14 and 15). Pubs include The Mitre (Stop 1), The Bear (Stop 2), The Royal Blenheim (Stop 7) and The Grapes (Stop 11)
Facilities	Public toilets available in the Town Hall (Stop 4), The Art Cafe, The Ashmolean Museum (Stop 12) and Greens Cafe. Also ladies toilets at Magdalen St East (after Stop 13)
Other info	The Ashmolean Museum is open Tuesdays to Sundays 10am - 6pm. Closed Mondays except Bank Holidays. Free admission. www.ashmolean.org (Tel: 01865 278002)
Tourist information	Oxford Visitor Information Centre, 15-16 Broad Street, OX1 3AS (Tel: 01865 252200)

Directions

These directions are for use with the Oxford Victorian Leisure walk audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

1. Let me entertain you

The Mitre pub, High Street

Directions 1

Cross the road and walk down Alfred Street (the road directly opposite The Mitre pub). Listen to Track 2 as you're walking and stop when you get to The Bear pub.

2. Time Off

The Bear pub, corner of Blue Boar Lane (off St Aldates) and Alfred Street (off the High Street)

Directions 2

Walk just past the Bear Pub. Stand with your back to the old stone wall and look over at the stone building with the rounded windows. Listen to Track 3.

3. Healthy body = Healthy mind

Former Oxford Gymnasium, corner of Blue Boar Lane and Alfred Street

Directions 3

With the Bear Pub on your right, walk down Blue Boar Street until you reach the end and stand under the street sign reading 'Blue Boar Street'. Look across at the stone building opposite and listen to Track 4.

4. Rescued by books

Former public library, corner of the old Town Hall, St Aldates

Directions 4

Remain here and listen to Track 5.

5. A little light music

Former public library, corner of the old Town Hall, St Aldates

Directions 5

Cross St Aldates, taking care as the traffic is often heavy. Turn left and walk down St Aldates then turn right into Pembroke Street. Stop outside Pembroke House and listen to Track 6.

6. Cleanliness is next to Godliness

36 & 37 Pembroke Street

Directions 6

Continue along Pembroke Street until you reach the junction with St Ebbe's St. Stop outside the Royal Blenheim Pub and listen to Track 7.

7. The curse of the working classes

The Royal Blenheim pub, corner of Pembroke Street and St Ebbe's

Directions 7

Continue up the hill along St Ebbe's Street and then turn right into Queen Street. Stop outside Marks and Spencer's and turn to look at the red brick and stone building with the three gable windows across the street. Listen to Track 8.

8. Sobering up

Former Wilberforce Temperance Hotel, Queen Street

Directions 8

Retrace your steps back to the intersection then turn right and walk down New Inn Hall Street until you reach George Street. Turn right along George Street and stop outside the Grapes pub. Look at the theatre on the opposite side of the road and listen to Track 9.

9. The play's the thing

The New Theatre, George Street

Directions 9

Remain here and turn to look at the redbrick building with bay windows. It's the second building on the right from the New Theatre. Listen to Track 10.

10. Muscular Christianity

Former YMCA building, George Street

Directions 10

Cross back over George Street and stand at the corner of the YMCA building to look back at the Grapes pub. Listen to Track 11.

11. A street of pubs

The Grapes pub, George Street

Directions 11

Retrace your steps back past the theatre. Turn right into Gloucester Street and then right into Beaumont Street. Immediately cross the road and continue along Beaumont Street until you come to the steps of the Ashmolean Museum. Stop here to listen to Track 12.

12. Cabinet of curiosities

Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street

Directions 12

Remain where you are but turn to look at the Randolph Hotel on the other side of Beaumont Street. Listen to Track 13.

13. Gothic grandeur

The Randolph Hotel, Beaumont Street

Directions 13

Continue along Beaumont Street then turn left into the wide thoroughfare of St Giles. Walk up St Giles and listen to the next track as you walk. Stop when you get to the St Aloysius Church about a quarter of a mile further along.

14. All the fun of the fair

St Giles

Directions 14

Standing outside St Aloysius Catholic Church (the Oratory) look across the street to the building with the white-glazed porch and blue plaque on the front wall. Listen to Track 15.

15. (Un) Natural History

Former Big Game Museum, Woodstock Road

Directions 15

Remain here and listen to Track 16.

16. That's entertainment

Former Big Game Museum, Woodstock Road

Directions 16

If you want to return to the starting point go back along St Giles towards the city centre and continue straight ahead along Magdalen Street and Cornmarket. At Carfax turn left into the High Street, cross at the pedestrian crossing and then turn right into Alfred Street.

Credits

This walk was created in collaboration with the Oxford Preservation Trust. For more information about their work please visit www.oxfordpreservation.org.

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