DISCOVERING BRITAIN

Royal Geographical Society with IBG

Nature in the heart of the city

A self-guided walk around botanical Oxford

Discover unusual stories about Oxford's trees, plants and animals
See how many species you can spot in parks and gardens
Explore natural history collections in the museums

www.discoveringbritain.org

the stories of our landscapes discovered through walks

Contents

Discovering Britain is a project of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)
The digital and print maps used for Discovering Britain are licensed to the RGS-IBG from Ordnance Survey

Cover image:Flowers in Oxford University Botanic Gardens © Rory Walsh

Nature in the heart of the city

Discover a greener and more exotic side to Oxford

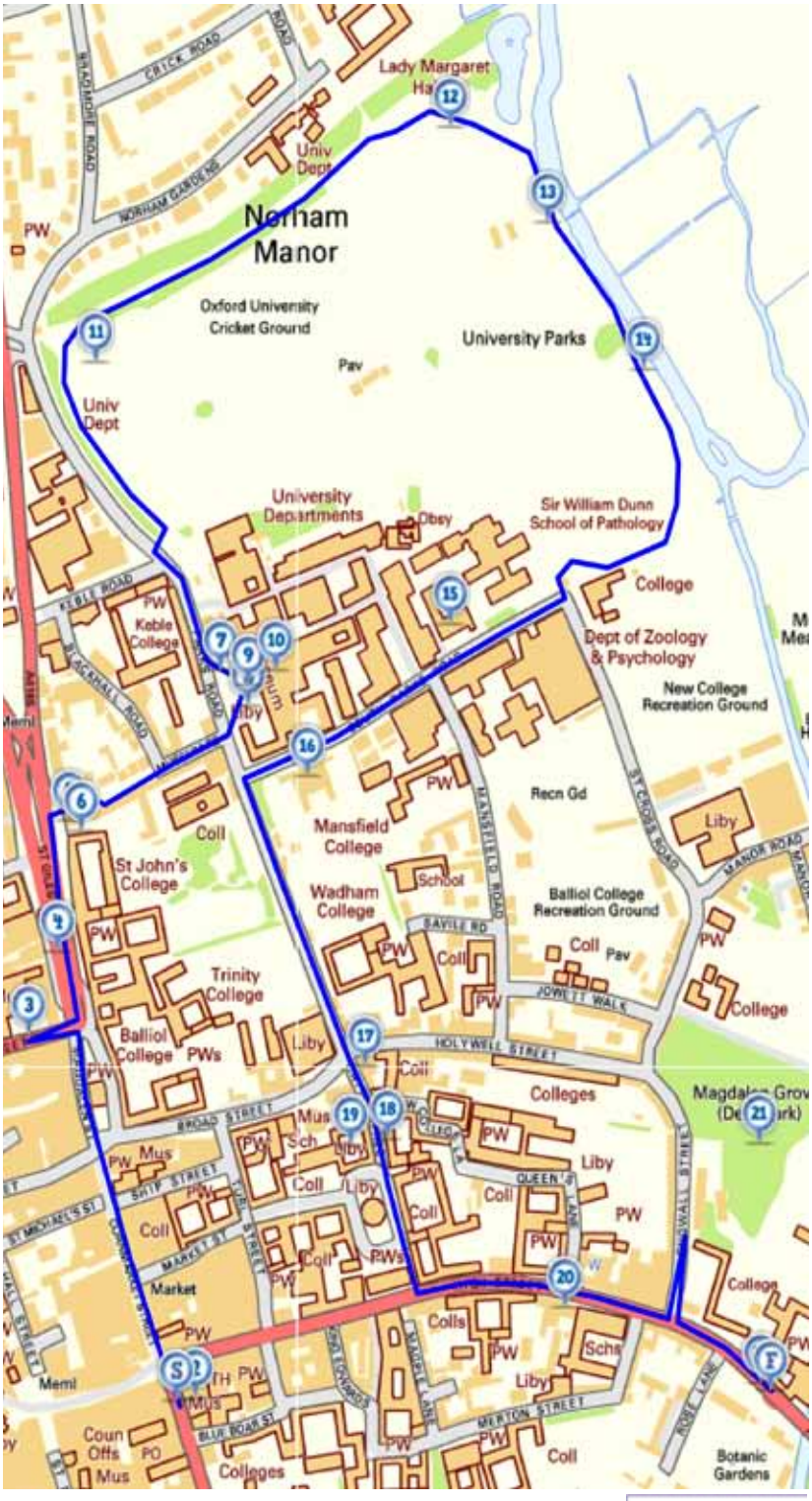
Oxford is one of Britain's most visited tourist destinations, famous for the 'dreaming spires' of its university which dates back 800 years. This walk however is designed to show a different perspective of the city.

Discover some unusual stories about the trees, plants and animals of Oxford and their connections to countries round the world.

Find out how different animals have been used symbolically in architecture and sculpture. See how many real live species you can spot in the parks and gardens. Explore natural history collections in the museums. Learn about the characters that travelled the world to collect specimens of trees, plants, seeds and animals.

Scenes from botanical Oxford
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Route map



Stopping points

S. Oxford Town Hall
2. Oxford Town Hall
3. Ashmolean Museum
4. Plane trees, St Giles
5. Lamb & Flag pub, St Giles
6. Lamb and Flag Passage
7. Museum of Natural History tower
8. Megalosaurus prints
9. The 'Great Debate' monument
10. Museum of Natural History
11. Giant Sequoias, The University Parks
12. The University Parks
13. Mesopotamia, The University Parks
14. Willow trees, The University Parks
15. Department of Plant Sciences
16. Rhodes House
17. The Indian Institute
18. Hertford College
19. Bodleian Library
20. 83 High Street
21. Magdalen Grove
22. Danby Gate, Botanic Garden
F. Danby Gate, Botanic Garden

Practical information

Location	Oxford, Southeast England
Getting there	**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. **Bus** - many city centre routes and long distance coaches, including routes to Heathrow, Gatwick and Victoria coach station 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) **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. **Bicycle** - Oxford is a very popular cycling city and features on National Cycle Route number 5 among others
Start point	Oxford Town Hall, OX1 1BX
Finish point	Oxford University Botanic Garden, OX1 4AZ
Distance	2 ½ miles
Level	Gentle – a mostly flat city centre and parkland route
Suitable for	**Families** – family-friendly but some busy roads **Pushchairs / wheelchairs** – a completely step-free route **Dogs** - must be kept on a lead

Conditions	The whole route is on pavements and paths. Make sure to take care when crossing busy roads
Getting from the railway station to the walk start	The walk starts 1 mile from the station. From the station, turn right and exit onto Park End Street. Turn right into Hollybush Row then take the first left onto the continuation of Park End Street. Continue ahead (along New Road then Queen Street) up to the junction with St. Aldate's. Turn right here, following signs for Oxford Town Hall.
Onward journey	Please use Directions 23 (on page 32)
Refreshments	There are numerous cafes, pubs and restaurants in the town centre, including inside the museums
Toilets	Public toilets in the town centre and museums
Other info	The city centre can be very busy at weekends and in the summer tourist season.
Family-friendly activities	**The Ashmolean Museum** (Stop 3) is open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 6pm. Free entry. Tel: 01865 278002 **Oxford University Museum of Natural History** (Stop 10) is open daily from 10am to 5pm. Free entry. **Note -** *closed 2013 for roof repairs for more information call 01865 272950* **Oxford University Botanic Garden** (Stop 23) is open daily from 9am. Closing times and ticket prices vary throughout the year. Tel: 01865 286690
Tourist information	**Oxford Visitor Information Centre**, 15-16 Broad Street, OX1 3AS (Tel: 01865 252200)

1. Welcome to Oxford

Oxford Town Hall

Welcome to Oxford! This walk is designed to give you a different perspective on Oxford and introduce you to some lesser known corners of the city. The walk focuses on international connections through flora and fauna.

Footprints of dinosaurs, exotic fruits, gargoyles of mythical creatures, miniature deer, trees that caused a diplomatic incident and birds that fly 14,000 miles a year.

We will discover a range of trees and plants from around the world. Find out how different animals have been used symbolically in architecture and sculpture. See how many real live species you can spot in the parks and gardens. Explore natural history collections in the museums. Learn about the characters that travelled the world to collect specimens of trees, plants, seeds and animals.

The walk is about 2 ½ miles long. The route is mostly on the fringes of the city centre. Oxford can get very busy with visitors and tourists as well as residents and students. Please take care on busy pavements and when crossing busy roads. We hope you enjoy the walk!

Look for beasts, birds and mythical creatures
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 1

Make your way to Oxford Town Hall on St Aldate's. Stop when you have a good view of the building (the best is probably across the road). Take care crossing the road here as traffic can be busy.

2. Strong as an Ox

Oxford Town Hall

We start at Oxford's Town Hall. There has been a municipal hall on this site since the thirteenth century, though the current building dates from 1893. This very elaborate building is in a style called Gothic Revival. Just look at the detailing. In particular have a look up.

First look above the doorway at the coat of arms and see if you can spot an ox. Now look further up, at the weathervane on the roof. Did you find the ox up there as well? There are other oxen on the building too.

Oxford Town Hall (c.1905)

These oxen are on the Town Hall because of the city's name. 'Oxford' comes from the old English word *oxanforda*. It means a shallow crossing in the river (ford) where cattle (oxen) could cross safely - hence Ox-ford. Long before the spires of academic Oxford had even been dreamt about, this was a small trading settlement located between fertile agricultural areas. There are places called Oxford in New Zealand and Canada, plus 21 Oxfords in the United States.

Oxen were an important part of agriculture, not just in Anglo-Saxon Britain but long before. Humans domesticated cattle in order to harness their power to plough and transport, grind grain, pull logs and lead wagons. There is evidence of oxen being used on field terraces by the River Nile in ancient Egypt and in the paddy fields of ancient China. In fact, in Chinese culture, the ox is the second sign of the zodiac cycle. Those born in the Year of the Ox are characterised by strength and hard work.

Because of Oxford's name origins, the ox has long been the symbol of the city. As well as on the Town Hall, you will see many other images of an ox on signs and buildings. There is even a bronze statue of one outside the railway station. See how many you can spot today. Throughout our walk, we will be looking for images of animals on and inside buildings. Before we leave the Town Hall, why not have a closer look for more oxen and other animals - including elephants and dragons!

Directions 2
From the Town Hall walk uphill and all the way along Cornmarket. At the junction with George Street, go straight across with shops on the left and a church on the right. At the junction with Beaumont Street, cross over at the traffic lights and turn left. Go into the entrance courtyard of the Ashmolean Museum.

3. A wealth of world connections

The Ashmolean Museum

The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology first opened in 1683. It was the UK's first ever public museum!

The museum moved to this spectacular building in 1845. After a recent interior makeover there are now 39 different galleries and temporary exhibition spaces inside.

We could spend all day inside exploring all the different collections from around the world. Given the theme of our walk, why not look for some specific international exhibits relating to animals.

Horse exhibits from (clockwise top left) taly, China, Iraq and Tibet
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

See if you can find four different horses. In Room 9 is the ghostly outline of a horse's head decorated with bronze bits from Lucera in the Apulia region of southern Italy. Next to it is a sculptured relief of an Assyrian horse being led by an archer dating back to around 700 BC. In Room 32 see if you can find a Tibetan statue of Kuvera, the Hindu god of the north direction – seated on a horse. In Room 38, look for a Chinese ceramic roof tile in the shape of a horse dated somewhere between 1600 and 1700.

Although not every town or city has a museum quite like the Ashmolean, many do have local history collections or exhibitions. So why not explore one near you and see what international connections you can find?

Directions 3
When you are ready, leave the museum by the main entrance. Go down the steps and turn left onto Beaumont Street. At the traffic lights you need to go straight across to the opposite side of St Giles. Use the pedestrian crossings and take care. Once on the opposite side, turn left up St Giles. Outside the main entrance to St John's College is a raised area under some trees. Stop there.

4. A tree from east and west

London Plane trees, St Giles

Lining this wide road – which is known as St Giles – are a type of tree known as London Plane. They are characterised by being tall – usually 20 to 35 metres with a trunk of up to 3 metres or more in circumference. Often you will see the bark exfoliating and the patchy grey and green colours look a bit like khaki army camouflage.

An exfoliating London Plane tree, St Giles
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The London Plane was created by crossing two types of plane tree from two continents – the Oriental Plane tree and the American Sycamore.

The Oriental Plane was first recorded in the literature of ancient Greece, from whose name, Platane, our modern tree's name originates. The tree is also recognisable from Turkey to India, although named as the Chenar, following a root of Iranian language.

The American Sycamore is native to North America and can grow to massive proportions and great age. One of the oldest is in the city of Buffalo, New York and is claimed to date from the year 1700.

The first written account of the cross-pollination of these two trees was in Spain in the seventeenth century. As a hybrid, the London Plane has better tolerance to cold weather and is more disease resistant than its two parents. It is also very tolerant of urban pollution which is why it is found throughout central London – hence the name London Plane – as well as other cities in temperate regions such as Buenos Aires, Shanghai, Chicago and Sydney.

Directions 4
Continue along the right hand side of St Giles until you reach the Lamb & Flag pub. Stop outside the pub.

5. Sacrificial lamb

The Lamb & Flag pub

This pub gives us an example of animals being used symbolically. In this case, the lamb represents the Lamb of God – or *agnus dei* in Latin. In ancient Israel, lambs were highly-valued possessions. But under the traditions of Abrahamic religion they were sometimes sacrificed to God in order to request forgiveness of sins.

Jesus Christ was represented as being the perfect sacrificial lamb whose death brought forgiveness for all humankind. In the Bible John the Baptist says of Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). The lamb and flag has therefore become symbolic of St John the Baptist.

The Lamb & Flag pub sign, St Giles
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The college that we just passed – St Johns – is named after him. In fact, the college manages the pub and the profits from behind the bar fund scholarships for doctoral students!

The Lamb and Flag was also the heraldic symbol of the Knights Hospitallers, also known as the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. This order of knights was formed after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 to take care of knights who had been injured or were suffering from diseases. The order provided hospitals and shelter for pilgrims on their way to the Holy Lands and also had powerful military units who fought in almost every battle of the Crusades.

Directions 5
Go down the Lamb and Flag Passageway at the side of the pub. Take are for cyclists. Before the passageway bends is a large tree. Stop by the tree.

6. Beyond conkers

Lamb and Flag Passage

Right here in Lamb and Flag Passage is a splendid horse chestnut tree. Horse chestnuts are easy to recognise because of their leaf shape - a fan of between 5 and 7 leaflets which spread from the base of the leaf.

The name of the tree is rather misleading. It is thought to originate from the erroneous belief that the tree was a kind of chestnut together with the equally false observation that eating them cured horses of chest complaints!

Horse chestnuts actually originated in mountainous areas in south-eastern Europe, including northern Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria - although they are now found across countries where summers are not too hot, or else in the cooler mountain areas of warmer countries.

Horse chestnut tree in Lamb and Flag Passage
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

You probably know horse chestnuts best for their fruit – conkers. A glossy brown nut grows inside a green spiky capsule then falls from the tree in autumn. The children's' game of conkers developed in Britain and Ireland. There are other uses for the nut though. The nuts are available in food supplements and were even eaten during the two world wars as a source of starch. They can also be used to treat some health issues such as varicose veins, edema and sprains. Meanwhile in the Ukraine you might see the nuts in animal models and chunky children's jewellery.

Directions 6
Continue along Lamb and Flag Passage and straight along Museum Road. Cross Parks Road at the pedestrian crossing and turn left. Stop on the grass outside the Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

7. Long distance travellers

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

This is the University's Museum of Natural History, built in the 1850s. It's not only home to a large natural history collection but also to a live species. Look up at the tower. Inside the ventilation flues are the nests of swifts which come here in the spring and summer to breed.

Common Swift in flight
Wikimedia Commons

Swifts are quite remarkable because they spend almost all of their lives in the air – day and night, winter and summer. A swift can spend the first two or three years of its life in the air before making its first landing to breed.

Swifts are migratory birds which breed across Europe, Asia and Northern Africa during the summer then fly to Southern Africa for the winter. They can be seen here in the UK from the end of April until early September. Our UK swifts migrate through France and Spain to spend their winter in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Congo and Tanzania, with some going as far south as Zambia and Mozambique. Their annual round trip is about 22,000 kilometres, or 14,000 miles.

This swift colony is part of the Oxford Swift Research Project. It started in 1947 and is one of the longest running studies of any bird species. It has contributed greatly to our knowledge about the bird. There is even a webcam inside the nesting boxes. Between May and August you can view live pictures either inside the Museum or on the website.

Directions 7
Go towards the building and look for some large footprints in the grass. Stop when you have found them.

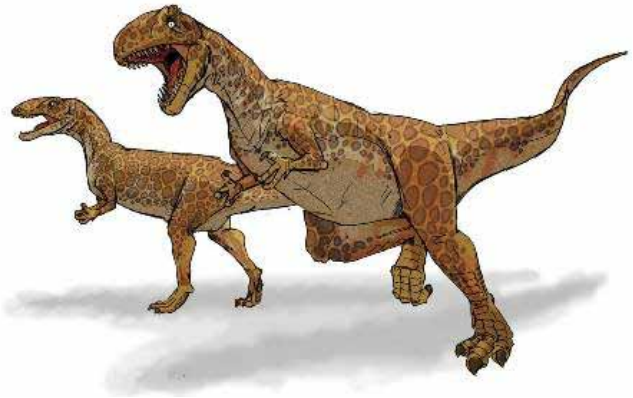
8. Watch out for the Megalosaurus!

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

These giant footprints belong to a Megalosaurus – a dinosaur that was right here in Oxford millions of years ago! In 1997 a set of footprints was found in an old limestone quarry 20 kilometres north of Oxford. They had been created 166 million years ago when the area was covered by shallow sea, lagoons and mudflats. The footprints outside the Museum are a cast of those found in the quarry.

Megalosaurus footprint
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The Megalosaurus was nine metres long and walked on its hind legs much like the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Its name is from the Greek for 'great lizard'. As you can see it had three toes and big claws. The Megalosaurus was the first dinosaur species ever recorded in Britain when a femur was found in Chipping Norton near Oxford in 1676.



A modern reconstruction of Megalosaurus
Wikimedia Commons

Inside the Museum are spectacular displays of four species of dinosaur that lived in Oxfordshire, as well as other dinosaurs from around the world. These include a Triceratops skull from South Dakota in the USA, a skeleton of an Edmontosaurus which lived between Alaska and Mexico, and the cast of an Iguanodon skeleton from Belgium.

Directions 8
Go over to the stone pillar outside the Museum's main entrance.

9. The Great Debate

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

This monument commemorates a 'Great Debate' between science and religion.

The naturalist Charles Darwin set off in the ship HMS *Beagle* in 1832. On his five-year voyage around the world, he visited the Azores, Tenerife, the Cape Verde islands, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, the Falkland Islands, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia, Mauritius and South Africa. Along the way he collected many different plants, animals, rocks and fossils. He also made observations about the behaviour or different species. As a result of this voyage he formulated his theory of natural selection. This was published in 1859 entitled *On the Origin of Species*.

Darwin's idea of evolution went against the commonly-held view that God was in control of creation. A year after his book was published there was a 'Great Debate' here in Oxford between the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, and the biologist, Thomas Huxley. They debated natural selection in front of a vocal crowd of 500 people.

The 'Great Debate' monument
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

This memorial stone commemorates that debate. Over 150 years later the debate between evolution and creation continues. You can also find a statue of Darwin inside the museum.

Directions 9
Go inside the museum if it is open. Stop in the entrance lobby.

10. Cathedral of science

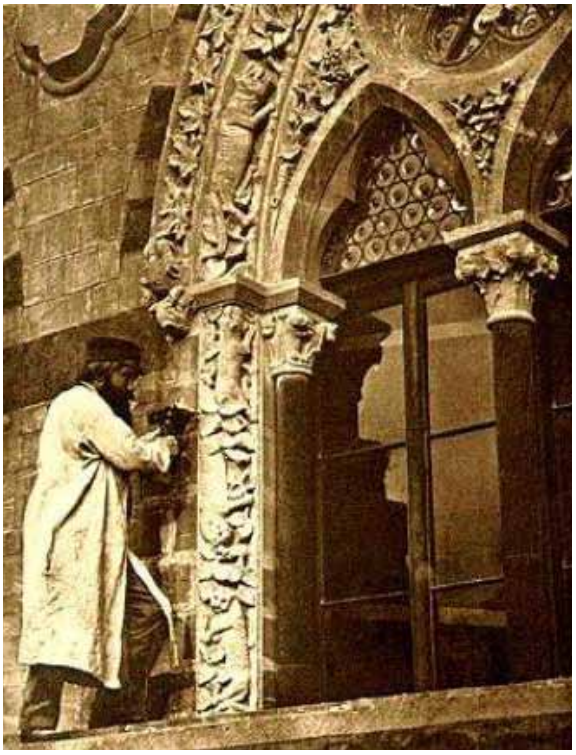
Oxford University Museum of Natural History

As we found in the Ashmolean Museum earlier, museums are a treasure-trove of international connections. The collections here are broadly divided into four main areas of natural history.

The first theme is entomology, or insects. There are over five million specimens here making it the second biggest collection in Britain.

The second theme is geology, which includes fossils of flora and fauna. The third theme is mineralogy and petrology, which includes over 30,000 mineral specimens from all over the world as well as collections of gemstones, meteorites and mineralogical instruments.

The Oxford University Museum of Natural History Dinosaur Gallery
Wikimedia Commons



Sculptor James O'Shea working on some of the Museum's animal carvings
Wikimedia Commons

The fourth theme is zoology, which includes more than 250,000 specimens of mammals, birds and crustaceans. It's not surprising that this museum has been described as a 'Cathedral of Science'.

Natural history is also inscribed into the building itself. In the lobby look out for a stork, pelican and snake carved in stone. Many of the carvings were made by the Irish company O'Shea and Whelan.

In the main court look on the 30 pillars, each of which has different species of plant weaving around. Here are two suggestions to look for. Once you have identified them see how many other examples from around the world you can find on the other pillars.

On column 3 is the date palm which originated in the Persian Gulf and has been cultivated since as early as 4000 BCE across the area between Mesopotamia and Egypt. In later times traders spread dates around South and Southwest Asia, northern Africa and Mediterranean Europe. They were introduced into Mexico and California by the Spaniards in 1765. Today the leading date producers in the world are Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

On column 30 is a pineapple plant which is said to originate from the area between Southern Brazil and Paraguay. Natives spread it throughout South America and it eventually reached the Caribbean where Christopher Columbus discovered it in 1493 and took the first examples to Europe. The Spanish then introduced the plant into the Philippines, Hawaii, Zimbabwe and Guam. Today the world's leading producers are Thailand, the Philippines and Brazil.

One of the museum's well-known exhibits is the world's most complete dodo which is to the left of the Main Court. The flightless bird was endemic to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. When humans settled on the island they destroyed much of the forest where the birds made their homes, while dogs and cats brought by the settlers plundered their nests. It became extinct in the late seventeenth century just over 100 years after its discovery and is now often used to symbolise the extinction of a species as a direct result of human activity.

The Museum's Dodo reconstruction
Wikimedia Commons

Directions 10
When you are ready, leave the museum by the main entrance and turn right along Parks Road. Turn right through the ornamental Keble Gate into the University Parks. Pick up a leaflet from the information board which contains a map of the park. Turn left along West Walk. Shortly before the corner with North Lodge are a group of six tall trees. Stop at the six trees.

11. Six giants

Giant Sequoia trees, The University Parks

From the early 1600s this area was used as a 'pleasure ground'. The 70 acre park that we can see today was created in the 1850s as a free recreational space for members of the university, Oxford residents and visitors to the city. Although the park has a variety of uses, particularly for leisure and sport, it is an arboretum – a collection of trees. Species have been brought here from all around the world.

A lithograph showing 32 people dancing on the stump of a giant sequoia found in California in 1853
Wikimedia Commons

This group of six tall trees are Wellingtonia trees, or giant sequoias. Their Latin name is *sequoiadendron giganteum*. In the Victorian era, it became fashionable to have these giant trees in gardens.

They originated in the Sierra Nevada, California. Cornish plant hunter, William Lobb, first heard about them at a meeting of the California Academy of Science in San Francisco and immediately recognised the commercial potential. In 1854 he shipped the first specimens back to the UK and marketed them as the 'Monarch of the Californian Forest'.

But the name of this tree went on to cause an international diplomatic incident between Britain and America. In Britain the tree was named *Wellingtonia gigantea* after the Duke of Wellington who had defeated Napoleon. But the Americans wanted to call it *Washingtonia*, to honour the first American President, George Washington. After years of botanical wrangling, it was finally given the name *sequoiadendron giganteum* because of its similarity to the Californian redwood, which is *sequoia sempervirens*.

Directions 11
Make your way along the North Walk. After a short distance read Stop12.

12. International roots

The University Parks

As we have already heard this arboretum has species from all around the world. As we continue look out for the Coronation Clump which was planted to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Various tree species at the University Parks
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

It includes an Italian Maple (native to countries such as Spain, Italy, Morocco and Algeria), the Aleppo Pine (native across the Mediterranean including Croatia, Greece, Tunisia and Libya), the Valonia Oak (also native to the Southern Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Greek Islands), and the American Smoke Tree (native to the southeastern United States).

In the section of the park called Lazenbee's Ground are some more examples of trees brought from overseas. There is a Turkish Hazel, which is native across a belt from southeastern Europe and the Balkans through Turkey to Iran. The Serbian Spruce is a rare species local to a valley in western Serbia and eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Oriental Plane is noted in ancient Greek history but also eastwards as far as India where it was used in Islamic gardens as well as being symbolic of a Hindu goddess. Meanwhile, the Himalayan Birch is found in the Himalayas in India and Nepal where the bark has a variety of uses including butter packaging, umbrella covers and bandages!

So, as we can see, many of the trees around us did not originate in the UK. Why not look around your local park or garden and see what plants you can identify from around the world.

Directions 12
When you reach the river, turn right, following the footpath parallel to the river. Stop at the bridge.

13. Parklife

Mesopotamia, The University Parks

This is the River Cherwell. Most of the University Park is on the west bank of the river but across the bridge is a small four acre extension. Because this area lies between two branches of the river it is known as Mesopotamia after the area in modern-day Iraq, northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey and southwestern Iran between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, where human civilization is thought to have first begun.

A Mute swan in Lake Killaloe, Ireland
© Alfredo Encallado via Flickr.com

On the river see if you can spot ducks and swans. The type of swan seen in Britain is the Mute swan which originated in Eurasia. According to the United Nations Environment Programme the Mute swan is found in 70 different countries, breeds in 49 of these places and is vagrant in 16 countries. In total there are about 500,000 mute swans worldwide, of which 70 per cent are in the former Soviet Union. The largest single breeding area is the Volga Delta on the Caspian Sea where there are about 11,000 pairs. Britian has about 22,000 of the birds. Other significant populations in Europe are in Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland and Ukraine.

The most commonly-seen duck in Britain is the mallard. The males are distinctive for their bright green head and yellow bill, while females have a light brown head and orange bill. Mallards are found throughout the temperate and subtropical areas of the Americas, Europe, Asia and North Africa. There are thought to be at least 10 million breeding mallards worldwide. In Britain the native population is joined by migrants in winter escaping the harsh weather in Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

As you continue you're bound to see some squirrels too. Red squirrels were the native type in the UK and across Europe but you will be lucky to see one today. In Britain most of the native population of red squirrels have been wiped out by the grey squirrel which was brought from North America in the nineteenth century.

Directions 13
Continue a short way along the footpath, keeping the river on your left. Stop when you see willow trees overhanging the river.

14. Heavenly trees

Willow trees, The University Parks

One type of tree to look out for in the Park is the willow. Willows can be spotted easily by their drooping shape with branches bending downwards. They are often found on the banks of rivers and canals. Although willow trees are a common sight across the UK they are found across temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere.

Willow branches over the Cherwell
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Many centuries ago people discovered that the leaves and bark of the willow tree had medicinal properties. There is mention of it in ancient texts from Assyria, Sumeria, Egypt and Greece.

Willow was used in concoctions to relieve fever and rheumatism as well as serving as an antiseptic and disinfectant. These days the chemical salicin found in the bark is used to make aspirin. So next time you take an aspirin tablet for a headache, think of the graceful willow tree.

Willow trees have long been very important in Eastern mythology and beliefs. Willow trees symbolise a kind of Buddhist heaven. Across China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and Vietnam, people carry willow branches during the Qingming Festival when they visit the graves of their ancestors. They also put willow branches on gates and front doors to help ward off the evil spirits that are thought to wander on Qingming. You will also have seen willows on pen and ink paintings from China and Japan.

Many other trees and plants in Britain that we take for granted – or may not even notice - originate in other countries. Why not find out more about the trees or plants in your local park and find out where they came from. You may be surprised by the results!

Directions 14
Keep the river on your left then follow Lucas Walk to the right along to the South Lodge Gate. Leave the park at South Lodge and turn right along South Parks Road. Keep on the right hand side. Just before the pedestrian crossing, stop outside the University's Department of Plant Sciences building

15. Saving the forests

Oxford University Department of Plant Sciences

This building is the University's Department of Plant Sciences. It was originally known as the Imperial Forest Institute, later the Commonwealth Forest Institute, and then the Oxford Forestry Institute. We can see the word Forestry inscribed above the door. It became part of the Department of Plant Sciences in 2002.

One of the research programmes within the department is 'Plants for the 21st Century' which addresses questions in three major areas of global concern – crop production, species conservation and forest management.

Aerial view of the Amazon rainforest, Brazil
Wikimedia Commons

Researchers look at species of plants, crops and trees from all over the world. Some important research is carried out in tropical forests such as the Amazon rainforests of Brazil. These forests make a vital contribution to stabilising the world's climate. But they are under threat from commercial logging and converting land for agriculture to sustain a growing population.

Directions 15
Continue along South Parks Road. Stop outside the University's Department for Inorganic Chemistry. Look on the opposite side of the road at the building with columns and a green domed roof.

16. Bird on a tightrope?

Rhodes House

The building with the columns and green dome is Rhodes House. It is home to the famous Rhodes Scholars programme which was created from the will of Cecil John Rhodes. He was a graduate of the university who went on to establish the De Beers diamond company in South Africa. Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia – now Zambia and Zimbabwe – were named after him.

The scholarship programme, dating back to 1903, selects 83 scholars each year from America and some of the Commonwealth countries who are identified as being potential future leaders.

The Bateleur eagle on Rhodes House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Of interest to our walk is the distinctive bronze bird on top of the dome. It is a Bateleur eagle commonly found in the open savannah country of sub-Saharan Africa. The word 'bateleur' is French for 'tight-rope walker' because during flight the bird tips its wings as if balancing on a wire. The Baleteur eagle is the national emblem of Zimbabwe and therefore also known as the Zimbabwe Bird. It appears on the Zimbabwean flag, coat of arms, banknotes and coins.

Stone carvings of this emblematic bird once stood on the walls of the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe, founded by the ancient Shona people of Africa. When the site was discovered by European archaeologists in the late nineteenth century five of these stone-carved birds were taken to South Africa by Cecil Rhodes. Four of the statues were returned to Zimbabwe by the South African government on Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. The fifth remains at Groote Schuur, Rhodes' former home in Cape Town.

Directions 16
Continue along South Parks Road. Turn left at the traffic lights along Parks Road. Stop at the junction with Holywell Street, Catte Street and Broad Street. Look at the building with the animal carvings on the walls.

17. Elephant ride

The Indian Institute

This building on the corner of Holywell Street and Catte Street is the Indian Institute. The Institute was established in 1875 when India was the crown jewel in the British Empire. The purpose of the Institute was to promote Indian studies at the university: "...making Englishmen, and even Indians themselves, appreciate better than they have done before the languages, literature and industries of India."

In particular it was a training place for those entering the Indian Civil Service and managing Britain's greatest colony. This building was constructed in 1883 and certainly reflects the Indian influence.

The Indian Institute weathervane
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Look out for the heads of animals carved in stone – tigers, lions, elephants and bulls. Some animals are particularly important in the Hindu religion because they represent deities – such as Ganesh the elephant god and Hanuman the monkey god.

And look on top of the dome at the weathervane – it is in the shape of a howdah, a seating carriage fixed on top of an elephant. Howdahs were widely used in India as a means of transport for the aristocracy and in hunting and warfare.

Directions 17
Go past the Indian Institute and along Catte Street. Pass the Bridge of Sighs and stop outside the entrance to Hertford College.

18. The hart of Hart Hall

Hertford College

Hart Hall was founded here on Catte Street by Elias de Hertford in about 1282. It provided lodgings for students of the university in medieval times although it did not become a full College of the university until 1874. Look at the animal carved above the door. This is a hart, the emblem of the college. There are six more carved in the stone just below the balustrade.

Hertford College coat of arms
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

A hart is a male red deer more than five years old. The red deer is one of the largest deer species. They are found across the United Kingdom and Ireland, much of mainland Europe, the Caucasus Mountains region and Asia Minor. They are also found in the Atlas Mountains in northwest Africa. In the nineteenth century red deer were introduced along with other game species for hunting to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Chile.

The inscription around the College coat of arms reads ad fontes aquaram sicut cervus anhelat or 'as a hart doth pant for streams of water', another reminder of the city of Oxford's name deriving from a place where animals could be taken across water .

As well as these sculpted deer there are actual specimens elsewhere in Oxford. Magdalen Grove has been home to deer herds since the eighteenth century. We will hear more about them later. But before we leave Hertford College note the ornate detailing on the main doors. These flowers and plants were carved in the mid seventeenth century. In this period Oxford became the home to Britain's first botanical gardens. We will hear more about these later on the walk as well.

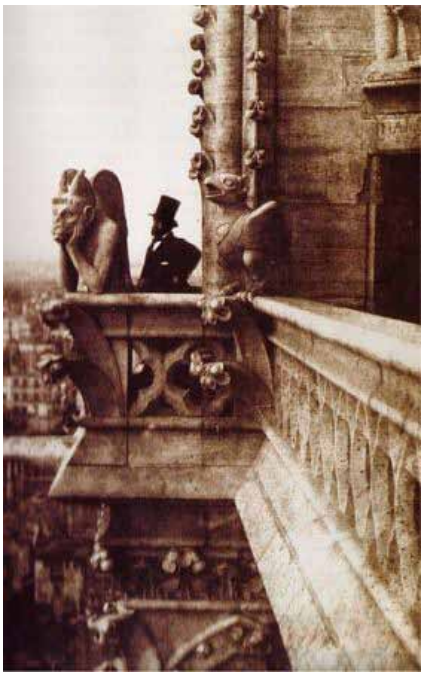
Directions 18
From the entrance to Hertford College, go straight across the road to the Old Bodleian Library. Stop in the courtyard.

19. Funny faces

Bodleian Library

Some of the Bodleian Library gargoyles
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Look up to the walls of this spectacular courtyard at the stone faces staring down at you. These are gargoyles. The word gargoyle comes from the French *gargouille* which means 'throat' or 'gullet' and similar European language words relating to gargle and swallow. Gargoyles are waterspouts designed to channel rainwater away from the walls. Although functional they are also decorative.



Gargoyles on Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, photographed in 1853 by Henri Le Secq
Wikimedia Commons

Gargoyles can be found throughout Europe, particularly on churches and public buildings. They first started to appear on European buildings in the twelfth century. They were often made in the style of animals - such as lions, dogs, wolves, eagles, snakes, goats and monkeys which were attributed with mystical powers. Some of the best examples are on the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

Gargoyles have been here at the Bodleian Library since it was built in 1435 but the history of gargoyles goes back much further. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Etruscans and Romans all used animal-shaped waterspouts. A French legend from around 630 AD runs that St Romanus saved the town of Rouen from a dragon called Gargouille. There are many versions of the story but they all end with the head of the monster being mounted on the walls of the newly-built church to ward off evil spirits. Gargoyles were often given grotesque or humorous faces to scare away evil spirits.

Over time some of the Bodleian Library gargoyles wore away. So in 2009 a competition was set up for children from Oxford schools to design some new ones. The designs had to be based on myths, monsters or people with a historic connection with Oxfordshire. Of the 500 entries nine were chosen. Try to spot them on the northwest wall – look for stone that is lighter in colour than the surrounding features. The designs include a dodo based on the one at the Natural History Museum that you saw earlier, a wild boar inspired by a local tale of a wild boar choking on a book, Aslan the lion from *The Chronicles of Narnia* by CS Lewis, and the 'Green man', a mythological creature symbolising nature.

Why not look for gargoyles on churches, monuments and public buildings near where you live?

One of the Bodleian Library gargoyles
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 19
Leave the courtyard of the Bodleian Library and turn right along Catte Street. Go through Radcliffe Square and through the passageway to the High Street. Keep on the left hand side and pass Queens College. Then look across the road and find number 83 on the right hand side immediately before the University Examination Schools.

20. A taste that travelled the world

83 High Street

So far we have looked at some of the trees we can find in Oxford and the rest of Britain. The by-products of trees can also have international stories. A good example is marmalade. Marmalade is made from the juice and peel of citrus fruits.

Frank Cooper marmalade jars
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Most marmalade is made from Seville oranges which originated in Spain. The name 'marmalade' derives from *'marmeleda'*, a type of Portuguese jam made from quinces. Although the origins of marmalade go as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman empires, the first marmalade - made from quinces - probably arrived in Britain from Portugal in the early 16th century.

Oxford was home to one of the world's most famous marmalades - Frank Cooper's. The story started from a family grocer's shop here on the High Street. In 1874 Frank Cooper's wife, Sarah-Jane, made a batch of marmalade to her own recipe.

It proved so popular that by 1903 production moved to a purpose-built factory. The factory survives; if you arrived in Oxford by train you may have seen it opposite the station. Frank Cooper's Oxford Marmalade travelled the world and was enjoyed at literally the ends of the earth. In 1912 Robert Falcon Scott took some with him on his journey to the South Pole. Many years after his ill-fated expedition the jar was found buried in the ice. In 1953 the Nepalese mountaineer Tenzing Norgay packed some when he accompanied New Zealander Edmund Hillary to the top of Mount Everest. The brand has become a staple of British embassies and fans include the Queen and James Bond!

Frank Cooper's Oxford Marmalade is still available today though production stopped in the city in 1967. The former shop here in High Street was briefly a museum and now a blue plaque outside celebrates Sarah Cooper's inception of Oxford Marmalade.

Directions 20
Continue along the left side of the High Street. At Longwall Street, turn left. A short way along the right hand side is the side gate into Magdalen College. Go in if it is open. Stop by the railings overlooking the garden.

21. Oh deer!

Magdalen Grove

Magdalen College was founded in 1458. Some people consider it the most beautiful of the Oxford colleges and it is certainly the most-visited but there's more to it than the spectacular buildings.

To the northwest of the college's grounds is a large meadow known as Magdalen Grove. In the sixteenth century the grove consisted of gardens, orchards, and bowling greens. During the Civil War it was used to house a regiment of soldiers. At one point in the nineteenth century it was home to three traction engines belonging to the works department of the college. By the twentieth century it had become well-wooded with many large trees.

Fallow deer in Magdalen Grove
© collision.theory via Flickr.com

Despite changing uses there have been herds of deer here ever since 1710. The deer in Magdalen Grove today are fallow deer. This species originated in Turkey and were introduced to central Europe by the Romans. There is evidence that the deer arrived in southern England in the first century AD although it is unknown whether they died out and were reintroduced by the Normans. There are historic herds in Ireland and Sweden and more recently fallow deer have been introduced to the United States.

Fallow deer can be found across Britain though the oldest and biggest herds are in the south such as in the New Forest, Epping Forest and the Forest of Dean. Their colouring varies from white to black though the most common species have a reddish coat with white patches. The herd in Magdalen Grove were introduced in the early eighteenth century. You should be able to spot them here during the winter and spring.

Directions 21
Retrace your steps back down Longwall Street. Turn left along the High Street and cross over at a safe place. Just before the bridge over the River Cherwell, stop by the elaborate stone entrance to Oxford University Botanic Garden.

22. A seedy place

Danby Gate, Oxford University Botanic Garden

The Oxford University Botanic Garden is the oldest botanic garden in Britain. They were founded in 1621 by the first Earl of Danby, originally as a source of herbs for use in science and medicine.

The first two 'keepers' of the garden, Jacob Bobart and his son (also called Jacob), managed and increased the collection to over 1,000 specimens over a seventy-eight year period and established a cataloguing system. Bobart Junior also began a seed list which made it possible to exchange seeds between international collections. Even today the Botanic Garden exchanges seeds with over 400 gardens around the world.

Famous visitors have included the eighteenth century Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus who developed a system for the naming of plants which is still the international standard today.

Literary visitors included Lewis Carroll who loved the gardens and drew inspiration from them for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Later JRR Tolkien was a regular visitor. His favourite tree, the Austrian Pine, was probably inspired the walking talking tree people in *The Lord of the Rings*. More recently Philip Pullman set a critical scene right at the end of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy on a bench in the Gardens.

A woodcut of the 'Great Gate of the Physic Garden, Oxford', now known as the Danby Gate
Wikimedia Commons

You need to pay to go into the garden. The price varies according to the time of year but it is well worth a visit. Inside are over 7,000 specimens from around the world grown for scientific and conservation research. In the Tropical Lily House you can see examples of cash crops such as bananas, sugar-cane and rice, while the Palm House features ginger, cocoa, coconut and oil palm.

Directions 22
Remain by the University Botanic Gardens.

23. The green heart of the city

Oxford University Botanic Garden

The Botanic Garden is an appropriate place to end our walk about the flora and fauna of Oxford. Along the way we have seen evidence of all sorts of trees, plants and animals right here in the centre of the city.

We saw footprints of dinosaurs and gargoyles of mythical creatures; some trees that caused a diplomatic incident and other trees that soak up air pollution; graceful swans and miniature deer, animal gods and migrating birds, exotic fruits and glossy nuts. We also discovered that many of these trees, plants and animals have international links.

A Red Admiral butterfly visits American asters, Botanic Gardens
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Along the walk route we found links to more than 80 different countries from around the world. We also suggested some ideas of how to search your local parks, gardens and riversides for flora and fauna with international connections. We hope you have enjoyed the walk and found this rather unusual perspective on Oxford interesting. If so, why not visit the Walk the World website to try another walk or even create one of your own.

Directions 23

You can now explore the Botanic Gardens or retrace your steps along the High Street to revisit some of the parks, gardens, museums and colleges. **To return to the start of the walk** follow the High Street and turn left at the end into St Aldate's. The Town Hall will be on your left.

Further information

Find out more about the walk story and places of interest along the route:

Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology
www.ashmolean.org

Bodleian Library
www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley

Hertford College
www.hertford.ox.ac.uk

Magdalen College
www.magd.ox.ac.uk

Oxford University Museum of Natural History
www.oum.ox.ac.uk

Rhodes House
www.rhodeshouseoxford.com

The University Parks
www.parks.ox.ac.uk

The University of Oxford Botanic Garden
www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk

University of Oxford Department of Plant Sciences
http://dps.plants.ox.ac.uk/plants

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Walk the World walk:

- **Alasdair Macleod, Jenny Macleod, Kate Macleod and Bella Macleod** for researching the walk
- **Jenny Lunn** for compiling and editing the walk materials
- **Rory Walsh** for additional research, providing photographs and compiling walk resources
- **Nick Stanworth, William Dyson** and **Christine McKenna** for assistance with compiling walk resources
- **Caroline Millar** for editing the audio files
- **Stephanie Jenkins** at **www.headington.org.uk.** for kind permission to use archive images
- **Mike Baird**, **collision.theory**, **Alfredo Encallado**, **Bill Nicholls**, **Andrew Oakley**, **David Quick** and **Peter Trimming** for additional photographs

DISCOVERING BRITAIN

Britain's landscapes are wonderful.
There is a tremendous variety within our shores – whether in the countryside, in towns and cities or at the seaside. And every landscape has a story to tell about our past and present.

Discovering Britain is an exciting series of geographically-themed walks that aim to bring these stories alive and inspire everyone to explore and learn more about Britain. Each walk looks at a particular landscape, finding out about how forces of nature, people, events and the economy have created what you see today.

The self-guided walks are fun, informative and inspiring. Prepare to discover something new, to be surprised and to find the unexpected.

Visit www.discoveringbritain.org to

Send your review of this walk
Search for other walks
Suggest a new walk