



# FRESHERS' GUIDE

2025-26

By the Merton MCR



Welcome to Oxford, and a huge **congratulations** on getting this offer! We know that moving to a new city can be stressful, so we have created this guide to help you prepare for your time at Merton. Please read through carefully, to make sure that you are well prepared for being here, and that you can make the most of your time!

We have split this guide up into multiple handy sections, but make sure to read through everything, to give you a good idea about your time here.



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## The MCR

The Middle Common Room (MCR) is an amazing organization made up of graduate students at the college, to which you now belong. Welcome!

We organize many events each year, which are usually **free** for you to attend. We are also responsible for representing your interests to the College and the University. There are similar organizations for the undergraduates (the Junior Common Room JCR), and for fellows (the Senior Common Room SCR).

The term MCR community is also used to refer to the graduate students in general, and there is also a specific room in college called the MCR, which is used for MCR events. The MCR is one of the oldest rooms in college, though unfortunately it is currently undergoing renovations. We hope to have it back before March, hosting regular events. In the meantime, we have relocated all the same beloved events to other rooms.

## The MCR Committee

The MCR is managed by an elected group of student volunteers known as the MCR Committee. We handle everything from organizing social events to representing your views within the College and the University. We also run many of the Freshers' events, so you'll get to know us quickly! If you have any questions, issues, ideas, or suggestions, we're here to help – feel free to reach out to any of us at any time. Remember, we are also just students, so you don't need to be afraid. You can find all our contact details on the MCR website at <https://mertonmcr.co.uk/mcr-committee>

The committee is split into two parts: the 9-person executive committee are responsible for running the MCR and also organise many of the largest events. We are elected each year in February. There is also a larger non-executive committee, who handle many specific areas of representation, as well as organizing many events. These positions are elected throughout the year, so there is always a chance to get involved!

At our very first meeting, we will be electing a Freshers' Officer, who is responsible for organizing events for freshers throughout the year. Could it be you? Just attend our first OGM and announce your candidacy, no need to prepare anything else.



The executive committee is:

Marcell Szakaly  
*President*

Laura Bartková  
*Vice-President*

Florian Peters  
*Treasurer*

Natalie Koscelanská van IJcken  
*Welfare Officer*

Milly Starky  
*Welfare Officer*

Luis Alonso Armesto  
*Social Secretary*

Cosmin Andrei  
*Social Secretary*

Kathryn Hempstead  
*Social Secretary*

Taisiia Sazonova  
*Information and Returning  
Officer*

The non-executive committee is:

Sepehr Razavi  
*Access Officer*

Tjaark Siemssen  
*Admiral of the Fleet*

Katherine Hearne  
*Arts and Culture Officer*

VACANT  
*BAME Officer*

Sebastian Dohnany  
*Charities Officer*

Luisa Haiss  
*Disabilities Officer*

Sarah Ware  
*Food, Environmental and  
Ethics Officer*

Oliver Douglas  
*(Outgoing) Freshers' Officer*

Ciaran Duncan  
*LGBTQ+ Officer*

Lara Hankeln  
*Oxford Student Union Officer*

Julia Lorenz  
*Sports Officer*

VACANT  
*Gender Officer*

Lucie Vaslet De Fontaubert  
*Part Time and Mature  
Students Officer*

Some positions are currently vacant. You can help us by running for these positions! Just show up to the first OGM, no need to prepare anything else!



## Events

Don't believe the myth that Merton is where fun goes to die! Our amazing MCR committee organizes a variety of events, from parties to tea and board games to cultural activities – all for free. We also welcome your event ideas! Please see below for a selection and description of our signature events. If you have any questions about MCR social events, feel free to get in touch with our lovely social secretaries, at [mcr.social@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:mcr.social@merton.ox.ac.uk)!



**Second Desserts:** Merton's signature – extravagant cheese board, cakes, pastries, fruits, port, liquors, and non-alcoholic drinks. A must!

**Exchange Dinners:** We have a formal dinner and tour at their College, and we invite them back – a great chance to explore other Colleges, and get two Second Desserts!

**Pre-BOPs:** MCR party before BOPs with music, drinks, snacks – and a costume theme with prizes.

**Garden Parties:** Outdoor fancy cocktails & snacks in Fellows Garden, in Trinity Term.

**BBQs & Picnic hikes:** Don't forget our legendary BBQs in the Pav! Or picnic hikes to various parks.

**Pub Crawls:** Visit multiple pubs in one night.

**Afternoon Teas:** Welfare, LGBTQ+ Officer, and Social all hold them – who doesn't love one?

**Brinner:** A 'brunch' – but after the workday ('dinner'). A chance to enjoy comfort food at 5.30-7.30pm.

**Games Nights:** Board games with snacks in the MCR

**Movie Nights:** Enjoy a movie in our very own TS Eliot theatre or at Westgate.

**Ice skating & Mini golf:** Oxford does have an ice rink & golf arena which Merton graces!

**MCR Colloquium:** Hear about your peers' research or present your own!



## The College & Facilities

Merton is divided into three main sites:

- [The Main site](#) on Merton Street, which houses most of the College's facilities: libraries, dining hall, chapel, bar, and the MCR
- [The Holywell site](#) on Holywell Street, where most Freshers' accommodation is located, as well as the KCR
- Manor Place site: houses where some graduates live, and our main sports ground.

Like most Oxford Colleges, Merton offers a variety of great facilities. We are lucky to have many of them located in convenient places, and most are available to use for **free**.

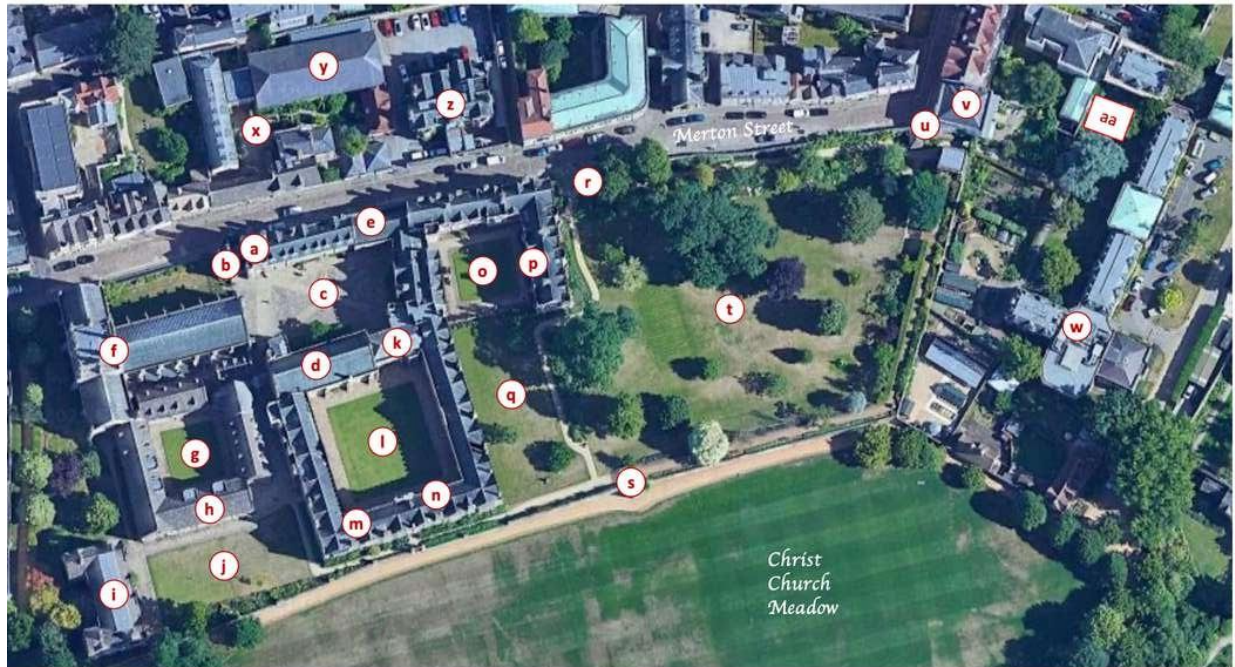
- [The Sports Grounds](#) on Manor Road, with Football, tennis, and squash. We also use the Sports Pavilion for various events.
- [The Punthouse](#) in Manor Place, where you can find punts, kayaks and canoes.
- The Boathouse by the Thames, where the rowing team is based.

We'll be running several orientation tours during the first week, starting from Holywell Quad, so be sure to join one and get a full tour of Holywell and the main site! To help you navigate, we've also created maps of each site with key locations marked.



## The Main Site

As you'll discover during your time here, Merton truly stands out as the best of all Oxford colleges. Its rich history (founded in 1264, making it one of Oxford's oldest!), stunning architecture, and beautiful gardens are certainly impressive – but what makes Merton special is its warm and welcoming community!



### Key

a Main lodge  
b Pidge/post room  
c Front quad  
d Hall  
e MCR

f Chapel  
g Mob quad  
h Mob and upper libraries  
i Grove building (Nurse)  
j Chestnut lawn  
k Fitzjames arch

l Fellows quad  
m Academic office  
n Chaplain's office  
o St Alban's quad  
p Music rooms  
q Sundial lawn

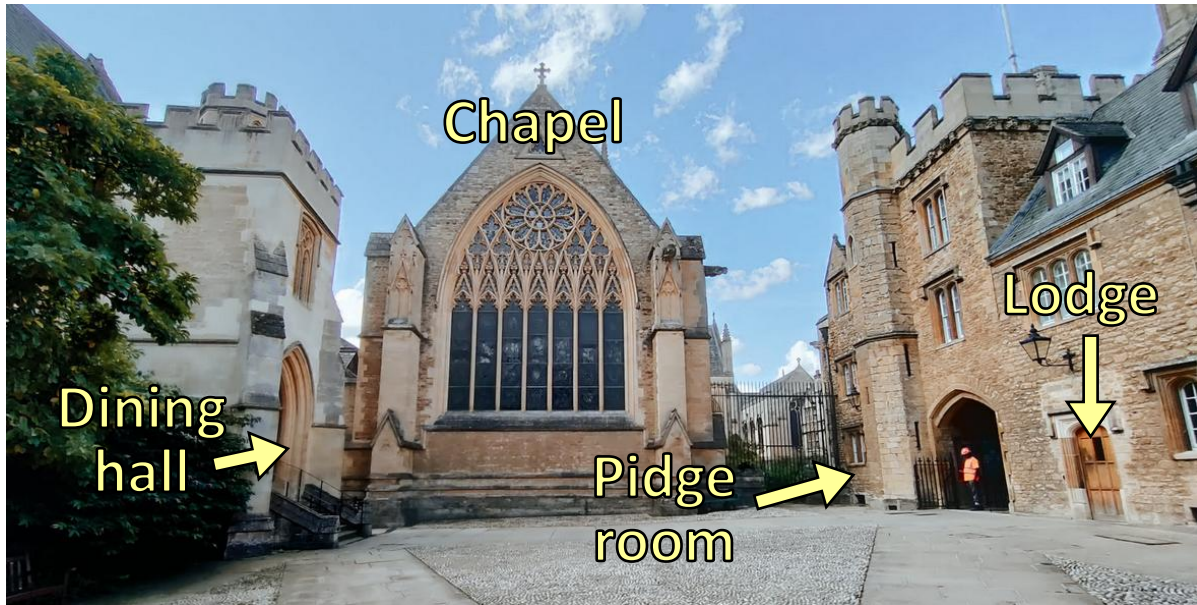
r Late gate  
s Tolkien table  
t Fellows garden  
u Gate  
v Warden's lodgings  
w T S Eliot theatre

x Finlay building (bursary)  
y Real tennis court  
z OWL library  
aa Gym

Map of  
main site

## Main Lodge, Front Quad

This is the main college entrance, and where you can find the Porters – at least one of them will be in the lodge 24/7. The Lodge team are essential to college life, providing everything from security to first aid – when in doubt, ask at the lodge. They are super friendly and always happy to help you out – especially in the first few weeks! There are also porters on duty at the Holywell Lodge. On the left of this picture is the entrance to the Pidge room, or post room, which is where your mail goes. If you live in Holywell, you'll have a second pidge (mail slot) in Holywell.



## Front Quad

The word 'quad', short for 'quadrangle', refers to a rectangular courtyard surrounded by buildings on all four sides. Merton has 4. The oldest quad in Oxbridge is Mob Quad, which can be found here in Merton. To the left is Front Quad. The entrance to the MCR is underneath the archway on the left (Benefactors' arch) which is also where the bar is. The wide arch on the right is the Fitzjames arch, home to our war memorial.

## Fellows' Quad

Fellows' Quad is home to the Academic Office, where you will need to go for some admin tasks. It is also surrounded by the offices of many fellows, the SCR (Senior Common Room). Once a year, it is also the site of the mysterious Time Ceremony.

## Mob Quad

Mob Quad is the oldest quad in Oxford, and where you can find both the Mob Library (Merton's smaller library) and the Upper Library (the oldest continuously functioning academic library in the world!).

## St Alban's Quad

St Alban's Quad is home to our music rooms. You can use them to practice a variety of provided instruments (guitar, piano), or bring your own. Just pick up the keys at the lodge.



## Merton Chapel

Our beautiful chapel is open to everyone for individual prayer or quiet reflection. Our chaplain is The Revd. Canon Justin White. The chapel holds daily services open to all, including morning prayer, Eucharist, and choral evensong, featuring our outstanding college choir. At the end of Michaelmas term, we also celebrate with festive Christmas carol services in the chapel! You can find out more about chapel life here: <https://www.merton.ox.ac.uk/chapel>

## Fellows' Garden

Merton isn't just known for its stunning buildings – it also boasts beautiful gardens! Fellows' Garden is the perfect spot to relax on a sunny day (and yes, you're allowed on the grass, unlike the immaculate lawns in Fellows, St Albans, and Mob Quads!). Merton also borders Christ Church Meadow, so if you fancy a stroll along the river, it's just a short walk away!



## The Holywell Site



**Graduate blocks A/B/C:** Completed in 1995, this is where most Freshers' accommodation is located.

**KCR:** Located in the A block basement, Kris Kristofferson Common room. As a BPhil graduate of Merton, he generously donated to help create another Common Room for us.

**Post room:** our second pidge area, with a printer.

**Laundry room:** You can just pay by card, or download an app. Currently it costs £1.80 for a wash or drying cycle. To locate the laundry room, walk from the main Holywell quad eastward, along the backdoors of the undergraduate houses. You'll go through a small archway made in a brick wall. Immediately turn right, where you should see a set of stairs going down to the laundry room.

**Bike rack:** Note that you should register your bike at the Lodge and get a sticker.

**Kitchens:** There are various kitchens throughout the buildings. There are large basement kitchens in A1, A2, A3, A4 and B, as well as kitchenettes on most floors.

**Summerhouse:** a place to relax on a sunny day and to have a BBQ. Currently used as the MCR storage room but will become available for booking as a social space from the spring.

## Post

All students have an individual post box, called a “pidge”, these are in the Pidge Room on the main college site. Your name will be listed alphabetically by last name. The address for the main site is:

*Merton College, Merton Street  
Oxford  
OX1 4JD  
United Kingdom*

In addition, if you live in Holywell, you will have a second Pidge in the basement of the Holywell A block. The address for this is:

*7 Holywell Street  
Oxford  
OX1 3SA  
United Kingdom*

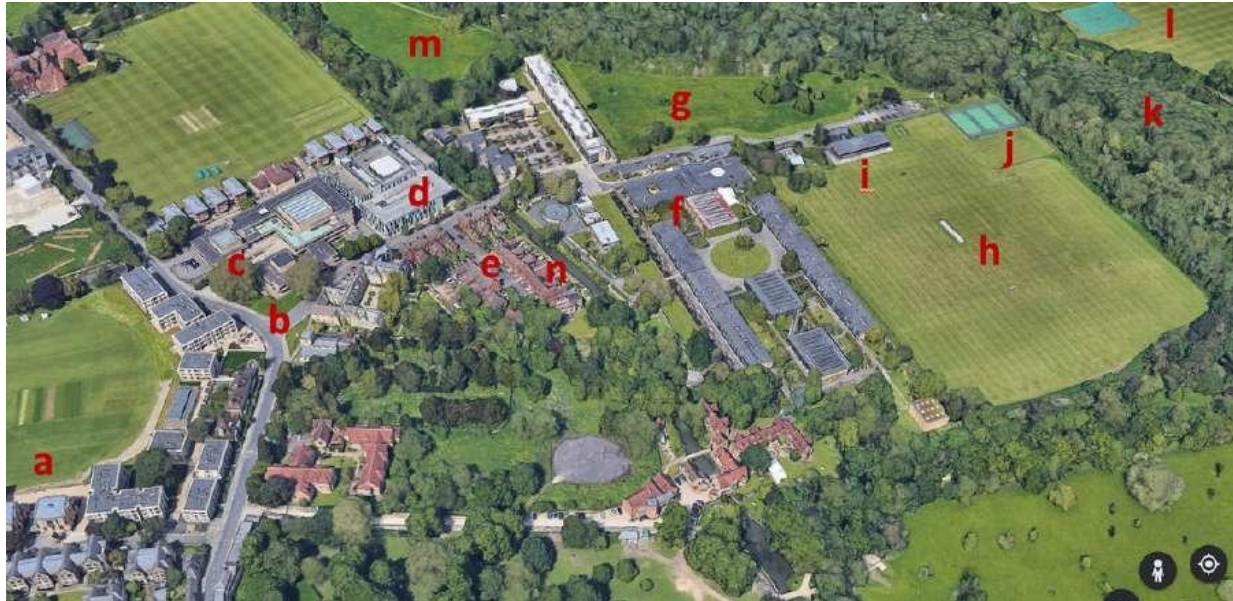
If you order packages, these will often be placed under your pidge. A small card will be put in your pidge, so you know when you need to look. If you order something particularly large, this may be left at the lodge- they will email you to pick it up ASAP, please do so within a day.

The lodge will not accept takeout or grocery orders, you must be in college to accept these yourself. Meal kits, or other deliveries that come in properly packaged boxes should be fine.



## Sports

Merton is incredibly lucky to have a very spacious, well-equipped, and nearby Sports Ground! It's located just up near the Manor Place houses (5-10 minute walk from Holywell). Alongside the Sports Pav (where BOPs happen), it has a whole gamut of facilities. The Grounds are open to all current Mertonians.



**A - Holywell buildings**

**D - Social Sciences Library**

**G - Great Meadow**

**J - Tennis & Netball courts**

**M - Music Meadow**

**B - St Cross church**

**E - Manor Place houses**

**H - Merton Sports Ground**

**K - Cherwell River canal**

**N - Merton punts & kayaks**

**C - English & Law Libraries**

**F - St. Catherine's College**

**I - Merton Sports Pav**

**L - Magdalen Grounds**

### Sports Facilities

1. Tennis: on the three tennis courts (j). Courts are bookable [here](#). MCR Racquets & Balls can be borrowed at Holywell Lodge.
2. Netball: on one of the tennis courts (j). Bookable [here](#).
3. Basketball: on one of the tennis courts (j). Book [here](#).
4. Squash: in the Sports Pav (i). Bookable [here](#).
5. Football: on the Recreation Ground pitch (h).
6. Cricket: on Recreation Ground pitch and two nets (h).
7. Rugby: on the Recreation Ground pitch (h).
8. Rowing: at the Boat House on Boat Island (ChCh Meadows)
9. Hockey: on the Recreation Ground pitch (h)

10. Croquet: on Fellows Garden. Bookable [here](#).
11. Punting: during Trinity term, kayaking all year. Book [here](#).
12. Gym: in Rose Lane (main site) – good range, if small.

For more info, including joining Merton's teams, get in touch with our MCR Sports Officer and JCR Sports Rep. Look for their teams at Merton's Freshers Fair

## Punting

Punting is a very popular activity in Oxford, particularly over the summer months. It involves moving a boat by using a long stick. Most colleges have Punts, that are available for you to book. In Merton, we have 3 punts, which are available from the start of Trinity Term (mid-April), to start of Michaelmas (early October). They can be booked [here](#) for free.

The Merton punthouse is located in Manor Place by the river [here](#). There is no front door, you need to access it from the side facing the river.

Each punt can carry 6 people, but you can book multiple if you have a larger group. Additionally, it is recommended to book more than one hour, so you can really explore the river. The Merton punt house is located on a quiet section of the Cherwell River: it is bordered by trees and parks most of the way. If you get far enough north you will pass University Parks, Lady Margaret Hall, and the Victoria Arms.

It is recommended to take some snacks with you while punting: strawberries, crisps, and lemonade are a common choice. Be sure to remove all trash from the boat when you are done.

Look out for an email from the Admiral in April, who will explain how to use punts, and all the associated safety rules.



## Laundry

Merton has two laundry rooms, one on the main college site, and one in Holywell. Additionally, Manor Place houses each have a washing machine. You can find the Holywell laundry room in the basement of Holywell Street 2, accessible via stairs from the quad. There are washing machines, driers, as well as an iron. Using the washing and drying machines currently costs £1.80. You can get the circuit laundry app or pay directly by bank card.

To do laundry:

- Choose an empty machine. If all machines are full, but one has already finished, you can remove the contents into one of the communal metal baskets. Load the machine and select the program you want.
- Put your detergent into the machine. The laundry machines do not have a drawer for liquid or powder detergent. We recommend that you use a pod-based detergent, which you place in the machine's drum prior to loading your clothes.
- Check the number on your machine, you will need this to pay.

Payment using bank card:

- Locate the payment terminal in the corner of the room
- Select the correct machine by number
- Follow the instructions on screen to pay. Contactless Visa/Mastercard and Google pay/Apple pay should work.

Payment using Circuit laundry app:

- Check that your balance on the app is enough to cover the cost of the load. Additionally, ensure that your location is set to Holywell laundry room, and that your Bluetooth is on.
- On the app, select the correct machine by number. It should indicate that it is connecting to the machine.
- Once connected, choose in the app which cycle you'd like to run. This must match the program you've selected on the machine itself.
- Slide the button on the app to pay. Once payment is taken, the machine should prompt you to press "start."

In both cases, remember to **press "start" on the machine**. The machine will not start unless you press the start button, even if your payment has been processed. Check how long your machine will run and return promptly. Don't be annoyed if someone removes your laundry after it is done.

## Printing

Merton offers free printing at OWL library, Mob library, and the Holywell post room. Here's how to print:

### Web Printing:

- Go to <https://printing.merton.ox.ac.uk> and log in with your Oxford SSO.
- Click 'Web Print' > 'Submit a job', upload your document, and select print options.
- At any printer, scan your university card and choose your job.

### Email Printing:

- Email your document to [printing@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:printing@merton.ox.ac.uk).
- Scan your bodcard at any printer and select your job.

To scan your card, locate the transparent dark plastic section next to the screen. It should also have a small light inside.



You can also print from USB, scan, or photocopy. Detailed info is on the [college intranet](#).



## Dining

Amongst many other things, Merton is famous for having excellent food – and dining in our beautiful 13th-century hall is always a delight. Meals are served in the Hall seven days a week.

You need to book for most meals, this is done via [EPOS](#), please see our guide on how to use it below. Some meals (particularly Formals) can book out fast, so pay attention to when booking opens.

The time of meals can be found on EPOS and prices are as follows:

- Breakfast £2.60 for college members, £3.96 for guests
- Lunch £4.73 for college members, £7.10 for guests
- Early supper £5.82 for college members, £8.77 for guests
- Formal hall £5.82 for college members, £8.77 for guests

Merton lunches are one of the best in Oxford: A fixed main and a dessert, as well as a buffet of salad, soup, sides and fruit, all included in the price. Merton caters for 23 dietary requirements, these can be selected on EPOS when booking.

If you miss the chance to book a meal, sometimes a Queue will be available. If you join the queue and someone cancels their booking, you will be in line to automatically get their spot. You will get an email if you are successful.

If you prefer to cook, there are kitchens with basic equipment: induction stove, oven, microwave, kettle, toaster (usually), fridges & freezers. Everyone uses their own pots, pans, plates, cutlery, .... Bring your own or buy them in Oxford. Some kitchen items will also be available in the Merton Bank Sale at the beginning of Michaelmas term.



## Formal Dinner

Formals are a quintessential part of Oxford life, but they can be strange if you have never experience something like it.

**What?** A Formal is a three-course seated meal. It is served after regular early supper, and happens 3-4 times a week within term time. Merton is unique that our formals cost the same as regular supper. Spaces will fill up quickly when booking opens!

**Dress Code:** The dress code is “Jacked and Tie or equivalent”. For some special events, the code may be Black Tie instead. You should also wear your **gown**. The dress code is the same for any guests you bring, but they don’t need a gown – even if they are from Oxford. While Merton is a bit more formal than other colleges, don’t stress too much, just make an effort to be formal!

**Arrival:** You must arrive by the start of the meal, and expect a large queue to get into the hall. It is strongly recommended to be at the Hall 10 minutes before the official start of the meal. As you arrive, say your name or show your bodcard. You will be given a card with your dietary requirements on it, please display this.

**Seating:** There is usually no seating plan. You should come slightly earlier if you are in a group, to make sure you can sit together. Feel free to sit down once you found a place.

**Start of the Meal:** You will hear a loud bang, at which time everyone stands. A short grace is read in Latin, you are not required to say or do anything. After grace you may sit again.

**Wine:** At most meals, wine is not provided, but you can bring your own bottle if you want. You can collect a free wine glass from a large box in the corner of hall. For some special meals, wine will be provided by the College or the MCR. In this case, there will be wine glasses on the table. If you would not like wine, simply turn your glass down as you arrive. Wine will not be offered to you, and your glass will be removed after service starts.

**Bread:** Your bread is to your left. Butter (and vegan alternative) are available on the table. If you are gluten-free, the hall staff will replace your bread once service starts. You may start the bread before you are served, but it often goes well with the starter course.

**Cutlery:** Use a new pair of cutlery for each course. Start with the outermost pair and work your way inwards. Don’t worry if you drop something, just ask the hall staff to replace it.

**Coffee:** You will be given a choice between Tea and Coffee at the end of some meals. Simply turn your coffee cup down if you would not like any.

**Toilets:** There is a toilet in the hall, please ask for directions. You may use it at any time during a meal.

## Special Formals

There are many different special formals throughout the year. These are particularly popular times to attend, so make sure that you book on time.

### Exchange Dinners

These are formal swaps with other colleges, where we dine at their college and they return the visit. It's a fun way to meet new people, with Merton impressing guests with special second desserts. In Trinity, we usually have a swap with our sister college in Cambridge - Peterhouse.

### High Table

Fellows dine here during formal hall. Graduate students can join on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays by winning a ballot. High Table offers finer food, pre-dinner drinks, wine, and an exclusive second desserts experience in the Senior Common Room.

### The President's Black Tie Dinner

Held once a term this is the most extravagant event, organized by the MCR President, featuring prosecco, fine dining, wine, and luxurious second desserts.

### Guest Nights

These formals, held twice a term, let you invite friends and family. They also include prosecco as pre-drinks, 3-course dinner and second desserts.



### Themed Formals

Organized for major religious and cultural events, these meals usually feature special decorations and an appropriate menu. Some of them include: Christmas Formals, Thanksgiving Formal, Chinese New Year supper. Booking and price are usually the same as for all other meals.

### Christmas Formals

The most special of the Themed Formals, these feature a traditional English Christmas menu, mulled wine, and Christmas crackers. There is a formal where the choir sing, and guests are generally not allowed.

## Meal booking using EPOS

Meal booking is all done through an online system called EPOS. It's a pay-as-you-go system, so you top up your account every so often and then the price of each meal is deducted when you book it. To get started, go to <https://epos.merton.ox.ac.uk> and log in using your SSO.



### Meal Booking

Merton Staff, Fellows and Students  
Click here to log in using SSO

Emeritus Fellows, Choir and additional members  
enter your EPOS login details below

Card Number/Username

Password

Log In

Once you're in, you'll see two tabs in the top left corner – 'Meal booking' and 'EPOS'. The 'Meal booking' tab is exactly what it sounds like.

Home

Meal Booking

EPOS

< September 2025 >

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5

**Tuesday 09 Sep 2025**

BreakFast - Breakfast  
Lunch - LUNCH HALL 1  
Lunch - STAFF LUNCH  
Dinner - Early Supper

Closed on Monday 08 Sep 2025 @ 10:31  
You have no meals booked

To book a meal, simply select the day you want, the meal you want, and click 'Book'.

You'll then be prompted to select the meal type (Vegetarian/Non-vegetarian) and any dietary requirements, as shown here. As you can see, the Hall caters to a wide range of requirements! You'll also be asked to complete a form letting the college know your dietary requirements before you arrive at college so that they're aware of anything not listed here.

**Thursday 11 Sep 2025 - Lunch - LUNCH HALL 1**

**Available Meals** Select meal type... ▾

**Dietary Requirements**

<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Celery	<input type="checkbox"/> HALAL BEEF
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Crustaceans	<input type="checkbox"/> HALAL CHICKEN
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Eggs	<input type="checkbox"/> HALAL LAMB
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Fish	<input type="checkbox"/> SCR Kosher 3 days notice
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Gluten	<input type="checkbox"/> JCR/MCR Kosher Chicken
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Lupin	<input type="checkbox"/> JCR/MCR Kosher Lasagne (V)
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Milk	<input type="checkbox"/> MCR/JCR Kosher Beef
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Molluscs	<input type="checkbox"/> No Alcohol
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Mustard	<input type="checkbox"/> No Beef
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Nuts	<input type="checkbox"/> No Pork
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Peanuts	<input type="checkbox"/> Pescatarian
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Sesame Seeds	<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy restricted diet
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Soya	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan
<input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Alternative	

**Access And mobility**

Cancel Click Here To Book

Once you've successfully booked, you'll be able to see your name on the list of people attending that meal. You can book, edit your dietary requirements (press "Change") or cancel your meal by pressing "Remove" (and be refunded) up until quite late. At the moment, it's 10.30am the day before OR 10.30am on Friday for Sunday and Monday. To edit or cancel, simply click on the day and meal you've booked, and the options will appear.



**Thursday 11 Sep 2025**

BreakFast - Breakfast

Lunch - LUNCH HALL 1

Lunch - STAFF LUNCH

Dinner - Early Supper

**Booking closes on Wednesday 10 Sep 2025 @ 10:31**

You have 1 meal booked

33 spaces available, 2 Max guests per member

Book Guest

Remove Bookings

**Meals booked**

NON VEGETARIAN

Change

Remove

The 'EPOS' tab is where to look if you want to view your balance, top up your account, or see your transaction history. If you get the message 'Your balance will be exceeded, booking refused. Please top up your college account when trying to book', this is where to sort it out!

Home Meal Booking **EPOS**

**Balances**

**Available Funds**

Meals 40.57 GBP

**Payments**

Card Top Up/Deposit ▾

☒ TOPUP ITEM

**Method** Credit/Debit Card ▾

**Amount**

Make Payment

**Transaction History**

☒ Meals

**Date from** 09/08/2025

**Date to** 09/09/2025

Get Transactions

Print



## The City of Oxford

Oxford is a beautiful, historic city, known for its unique architecture, green spaces, and hidden gems. It's compact, so you'll quickly get your bearings. Join a city tour during Freshers' Week, to see the most important parts of the city center!

The core of Oxford is made up mostly of university buildings: various colleges, departments, accommodation, and libraries. There are also huge green spaces within the city centre, both in the various colleges, as well as public parks. You can visit most colleges during the day simply by showing your Bod card. Many also allow for free guests, make sure to ask!

Oxford is a safe city, you should not be afraid to go out at night. However, you should still practice common sense: make sure your phone doesn't stick out of your pocket, hold your bag securely, and avoid alleyways at night.

## Things to do

### Food & Drink:

- **Restaurants:** George Street has a wide range of chain restaurant options, or head to the rooftop terrace at Westgate for more. For cheaper, independent options, try Cowley Road. Visit the Gloucester Green market for a quick bite.
- **Cafes:** Vaults and Garden (Radcliffe Square) has great views, and Art Café (near Westgate) serves excellent cakes. For coffee, try Missing Bean (Turl Street), Jericho Coffee Traders (High Street), or Columbia Coffee Roasters (Covered Market).
- **Pubs/Bars:** Popular spots include Turf Tavern and King's Arms on Holywell Street. I would recommend also checking "The Oxford Pub Crawl Map" with all pubs in Oxford. For cocktails, visit The Varsity Club (with rooftop views), Duke of Cambridge or The Alchemist at Westgate.

### Groceries:

- **Tesco** (Magdalen Street) is a go-to for students.
- **Sainsbury's** (nearby) is also convenient. For more variety, visit the larger Sainsbury's in Westgate or M&S (Queen Street).
- **Gloucester Green market** (Wed-Sat) is great for fresh produce.

### Hidden Gems:

- **The Duke Humphry's Library:** A beautiful old part of the Bodleian. You can just go in with your Bod card. To take guests, you need to get a visitor permit from the admin office in the Weston Library.
- **The Sheldonian Cupola:** Free with a Bod card for you + 3 guests, it's a beautiful view of the city center.

### Homeware Shops:

- **Tesco:** Selection of basic kitchen equipment and bedding
- **Robert Dyas:** Kitchen equipment, tools, gardening
- **John Lewis:** Kitchen equipment, bedding, furniture. More expensive.
- **Dunelm:** Kitchen, bedding and furniture. A bit further out in Botley.

### Indoor Activities:

- Visit Oxford's **museums** like the Ashmolean, Pitt Rivers, or the Museum of Natural History. Weston Library often hosts fascinating exhibitions, or explore Oxford Castle and Prison. Most museums in the UK are free to attend.
- For **entertainment**, try the escape rooms at Westgate or mini-golf at Junkyard. Thirsty Meeples board game café is a fun spot at Gloucester Green.



- For **cinemas**, check out Ultimate Picture Palace (Cowley), Curzon (Westgate), or Phoenix Picturehouse (Jericho) for indie films. Avid movie-goer? Most theatres have student membership programs for discounted tickets. For live performances, see what's on at Oxford Playhouse or Holywell Music Room, one of the oldest concert halls.



The Spires of Oxford, from South Park

### Green Spaces:

- University Parks: 5 mins from Holywell, by the Cherwell river
- Christchurch Meadow: behind Merton, and by the Thames river
- Botanic Gardens: free with a Bod card
- Port Meadow: Huge open field towards Jericho
- South Parks: Large park in a hillside



Port Meadow during a rare aurora

## Transportation and cycling

Oxford is a city of cyclists, with many bike racks, including at Holywell and OWL library. Other transportation options include walking, buses, trains, and cars.

Where to get a bike:

- OxBykes (<https://oxbykes.co.uk/>): Second-hand bikes. Buy online, collect instantly.
- Cycle King (Cowley): New and second-hand bikes, repairs.
- The Broken Spoke (Osney): Second-hand bikes, workshops.
- The Handlebar (St. Michael's St): New bikes and a café.
- Walton Street Cycles (Jericho): More expensive.
- Decathlon (Botley): New bikes, repairs and cheap accessories.
- Facebook groups or ask students who are leaving.

Front and back lights are mandatory at night, and many streets are dimly lit. Bike theft is an issue in Oxford, so always safely lock your bike. While the racks inside Merton are quite safe, you should still lock it. Respect red lights, wear a helmet, and be aware of pedestrians walking on roads.

After getting a bike, take it to the college lodge for registration. You will receive a sticker, which you must display. This is necessary to park long-term in the college. Guests coming for a few hours don't need a sticker.

**Buses:** Frequent services in Oxford, including the Oxford Tube to London and The Airline to Heathrow/Gatwick.

**Trains:** A quicker, pricier option; the station is a 20-min walk away. Don't forget to get your railway card for discounts.

**Cars:** Do not use a car regularly in Oxford, it is fine for moving in and out. Be aware of the Zero Emission Zone, Traffic Filters, and Low Traffic Neighbourhood restrictions within the city. You can apply to get a parking spot at the Merton Sports Pav. University buildings will not have parking throughout the day.

## Sub fusc

Sub fusc is the official academic dress at Oxford, worn for events like matriculation, exams, and graduation. At Merton, it's also worn for the Time Ceremony.

Sub fusc includes:

- Dark suit, skirt, or trousers. Dark means grey, navy, or black
- Plain white shirt or blouse
- Black shoes
- White or black tie, or black ribbon
- Academic gown. Different based on your academic standing and degree.
- Mortarboard or soft cap. Carry it but do not wear it unless instructed.

All clothes must be plain. Special arrangements are available for religious and military dresses, find out more at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/dress>

You can buy sub fusc at shops in Oxford like Shepherd & Woodward or Walters. If you don't already have an Oxford degree, you will likely need the 'graduate gown'. The shops will help you choose the correct gown!



## Oxford Terminology

When you first arrive in Oxford you may well find yourself baffled by some of the curious new expressions you'll hear all around you. What on earth is a pidge, a blue or the time ceremony? Fear not - here's a handy guide to some of the most common Oxford-isms to help you translate!

**BATTELS** College bills, paid at the start of every term.

**BLUE** If you represent the University at the highest level in sport, you win a blue.

**BOD** The Bodleian Library. Has over 13 million books

**BOD CARD** Your University Card. Used as ID within the university, to gain access to libraries and take out books, and to access some sports facilities and areas within your department. At Merton, it's also used to pay for meals, to give to the porters in exchange for keys to certain facilities (e.g. music rooms) and to gain access to BOPs... Try not to lose it!

**BOP** a fortnightly-themed dress party at the PAV with drinks, dancing, and music. Preceded by the PRE-BOP in the MCR. Stands for 'Big Organised Party' or 'Breach Of Peace'.

**DPOP** Deputy Principal of the Postmasters, in charge of disciplinary procedures within the college, along with the POP (Principal of the Postmasters).

**EIGHTS** Inter-college rowing competition held in Trinity term.

**EXEC** Executive Committee of the MCR.

**FORMAL** A fancy three-course meal served in the hall – dress up smart, and wear your gown!

**HILARY** The second term of the academic year, in spring. Abbreviated along with year – this year will be HT26.

**JCR** Junior Common Room. The body of undergraduate students, and also their actual common room.

**MATRICULATION** University admissions ceremony, held in the Sheldonian Theatre.

**MCR** Middle Common Room. The community of graduate students, as well as our actual common room.

**MICHAELMAS** The first term of the academic year, in autumn. Abbreviated to MT.

**OGM** Ordinary General Meeting. Fortnightly meetings in which MCR matters are discussed.

**OTHER PLACE** You-know-where, they who shall not be named, The Dark Place (\*whispers\* Cambridge).

**OXMAS** Oxford Christmas, celebrated on November 25th. Mulled wine and mince pies galore!

**PAV** Our sports pavilion, over by St Catz – location of BOPs and lots of our sports facilities.

**PIDGE** Pigeon hole – where your mail goes. You'll have one in the pidge room on main site, and a second in Holywell (if you live there)

**PORT** Strong, sweet fortified wine from Portugal: quintessential Oxford drink. Popular in SECOND DESSERTS and the TIME CEREMONY. Unpopular with mornings-after.

**PRE-BOP** Party in the MCR prior to the BOP. Drinks on the house, prizes for best themed costumes!

**SCR** Senior Common Room. The body of fellows, and where they hang out (presumably).

**SECOND DESSERTS** Exactly what it sounds like. Drinks, chocolate, cake, cheese and crackers served in the MCR after guest nights, exchange dinners and the President's black tie dinner.

**STASH** College or university branded clothes and accessories.

**SUB FUSC** Academic dress worn for matriculation, examination and graduation; also for the TIME CEREMONY. See <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/dress> for details.

**SUSPENSION** Taking time out on health or welfare grounds. Not to be confused with being "sent down", permanent expulsion for academic or disciplinary reasons.

**TIME CEREMONY** Unique and crucial Merton tradition; consists of walking backwards around Fellows' Quad at 2am when the clocks go back in order to preserve the integrity of the space-time continuum. Favorite drink: PORT.

**TORPIDS** Inter-college rowing competition held in HILARY term.

**TRASHING** Post-examination celebration in which you get covered with champagne, foam, powder paint, flower garlands, you name it (disclaimer: this activity has now been banned by the University)

**TRINITY** The third and final term of the academic year. Abbreviated to TT.

**VAC** Vacation, or the holiday in between terms. Described by some tutors as an 'inter-term study period' (related: LONG VAC = the summer vacation)

**WARDEN** Head of the college (NB different colleges have different names for this, confusingly). Merton's warden is the fantastic Professor Jennifer Payne.

For even more strange vocabulary, check out the [Oxford glossary](#).

## Moving Internationally

We know that many of you will be coming to Oxford from abroad. In fact, roughly [60% of Oxford's graduate students](#) across all colleges come from abroad, so you're in good company. Moving internationally, as you're already aware, presents unique challenges, and for those for whom this is your first international move, the process can be a bit daunting.

As you look forward to your move to Oxford, keep in mind that you do not need to have absolutely everything in place immediately upon arrival. In fact, there are some things (like setting up a bank account or a phone plan) that are much easier to do once you've physically arrived in Oxford. Below, you'll find some notes on aspects of your international move. We hope they'll help you get settled. And, as always, your MCR community is here to help; don't hesitate to reach out to us if you need some extra support.

### Banking and Money

In many cases, students moving to Oxford choose to open a bank account. Even if you intend to pay for many things on a credit card, international debit card, or in cash, it might be helpful to have an account to electronically transfer money to friends in the UK or to pay battels. The university has provided a bank guide [here](#), which this section intends to supplement.

Credit cards in the UK are less common than they are in countries like the United States, and they often require a longer residency period. Debit cards, however, are relatively easy to set up and are tied to "current accounts" (also called "checking accounts"). For most people, a current account is sufficient for day-to-day needs (regular transactions, money transfers, and recurring UK-based payments, such as phone plans).

There are a number of banks located around Oxford (mostly around Cornmarket Street) that offer current accounts for international students, and each bank has their own requirements for opening an account. Check on their websites for up-to-date information regarding what documents you'll need to provide. In general, you will be asked to provide:

- A student enrolment certificate, stamped by Merton College
- A valid visa and/or passport
- A bill or bank statement to prove your address in Oxford. If you live in college accommodation, your enrollment certificate can count as this letter, if it includes your UK address. You can also request a letter from the college certifying that you live in college accommodation.

For many banks, you can begin the application process for opening a current account online, but you will likely need to visit the bank in person at some point to complete the application. It might be useful to also have:



- Proof of funds, such as an existing bank statement from your home bank
- An additional form of identification

Some banks might require you to already have a UK phone number in order to complete your application. You can provide them with a temporary phone number, such as your non-UK number, as long as you still have access to it in the UK (i.e., you can receive confirmation text messages to that phone number).

Once you have successfully opened your account, you will need to put money into it. If you are converting from a different currency, you might use a service like Wise (formerly TransferWise) to transfer money from a different account into your UK account. Note that the exchange rate fluctuates, and that many electronic transfer services charge a fee. It's worth taking some time to research and compare services to find one that suits your purposes. Reddit can be a useful tool for this research process!

Note that there are some things that you might run into during your time at Oxford that require a UK bank account. These include some recurring expenses that rely on a "direct debit" system, including phone plans, App Store payments, and subscriptions. In a weird, circular way, some accounts require a UK number to open, but you'll need a UK bank account to get a UK number. This can be confusing at times, so talking with a service representative at the local bank branch might be helpful.

## Phone Plans

Compared to some other countries, phone plans (for cellular data, texts, and voice calls) are cheaper in the UK. That, in addition to the good service coverage within the UK by phone companies, means that it might be both more cost effective and easier to have a UK-based plan. There are a few major cellular companies in the UK: O2, Vodafone, EE, and Three.

Most phone plan can be divided into two categories: **Pay-as-you-go (PAYG)** and regular **contracts** (e.g., pay monthly). Pay-as-you-go plans don't lock you into a contract, so if you don't like the service or don't need it for a period of time, you can turn off "auto-renew" (if applicable) or simply choose not to top up. Contracts *can* be less expensive, but they often offer the same amount of data/texting/calling as other PAYG services. The upside to signing a contract is that you don't need to worry about changing or checking your plan each month or each time you need more service.

Contract plans tend to require a UK bank account in order to set up recurring payments. While PAYG plans tend to be a bit more flexible (you can purchase physical PAYG SIMs in supermarkets and at the airport as one-off purchases), each plan is a bit different. Be sure to check the fine print of any plan you're considering.

**E-SIM or physical SIM card?** This depends on your phone and your needs. Some companies only offer PAYG plans on their physical SIM cards, though this is slowly changing. Your phone might be able to handle two physical SIM cards at once (sometimes called “dual SIMs”), in which case you can keep your original SIM card and add your new one for the UK. Some phones may be carrier locked, which means other SIM cards won’t work in it, and some phones do not support E-SIMS. Be sure to check what your phone’s compatibility with different SIM cards is before purchasing a plan.

If you’d like to avoid incurring **hefty international fees** from your original phone plan, be sure to have a plan for that original line. Consider deactivating your original SIM card, moving the number to a cheaper service, or turning off its cellular service, allowing it to only receive things via your UK service. This can take some fiddling around, so be prepared to be without cell service for a little while until you can get it sorted. Luckily, Oxford has eduroam internet access in all university buildings, so you’ll be able to access the internet while out and about. You can [set up eduroam](#) before coming to Oxford. Additionally, The Cloud is a public internet service available throughout Oxford, if you find yourself without internet.

Something else to consider is whether you’ll need a UK phone number, in addition to UK cell service (data, text, call). As mentioned above, some bank accounts require a UK number for activation. Your NHS GP office and pharmacies like Boots also prefer a UK phone number to reach you. If you’re thinking about not getting a UK phone plan, perhaps reconsider if you would like an easier time with these services.

While purchasing a UK-based phone plan is easy, it’s understandable that, depending on your needs and travel plans, you might prefer a different sort of plan. Companies like Nomad, Airalo, GiffGaff, and Smarty also offer plans similar to PAYG, which are linked to UK cell services but are operated by these companies. If you’re not a fan of any of the regular PAYG and contract plans, consider checking out these other companies.

# Final Remarks

Well, I know that was a lot, congratulations on making it through! Don't worry if you didn't remember everything, save this document and consult it throughout the year. If you have any questions, feel free to ask the MCR committee. We are available in the MCR WhatsApp groups (you should receive joining instructions separately), or via email.

I look forward to meeting all of you as you arrive! We have prepared a dense and packed **Freshers' Week** (it's actually over 2 weeks long), full of fun activities that help you experience Oxford and get oriented. It is also a great time to make friends with all the other lovely people at Merton.

Remember to make the most of your time here, by becoming an active part of the MCR community. You can enjoy a lot of amazing (and free) events, share stories over a meal in Hall, or become best friends with those sharing your kitchen. Your college is an essential part of your social life in Oxford, so I strongly recommend that you use this opportunity to its fullest.

**Marcell Szakály**

MCR President 2025-26

With thanks to my predecessors Taisiia Sazonova and James Hua for some of the content



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