

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

NEW COLLEGE

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**NEW COLLEGE**

Name: NEW COLLEGE

County: Oxfordshire

District: Oxford (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.754318  
Longitude: -1.2510170  
National Grid Reference: SP 51797 06446  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: I  
List Entry Number: 1001100  
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

## Details

C16 and later college gardens, with C14 and later quadrangles.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, founded New College in 1379, using waste land in the north-east angle of the city walls, made vacant after demolition during the C14 Black Death and subsequent economic decline. One of the conditions of the grant of land was that the college should maintain this stretch of the walls in perpetuity. The college was innovative in several ways, including that students and fellows lived together (rather than students living in Halls and the Fellows occupying the college), and that the college was built in one session, enclosing the Great Quad with all the buildings needed for the life of the college: hall, library, chapel and domestic accommodation. Later colleges followed these leads. College gardens and orchards were present by 1578 (Agas), the main areas covering the land in the angle at the junction of the north and east arms of the city wall. The present garden was gradually developed in a formal style during the C16 and C17 centuries, including the formation of the earth and rubble mound, reaching its formal zenith in the early C18. The formality was gradually softened between the 1760s and 1820s, the garden being landscaped c 1780s, until by the mid C19 the mound had been planted informally with trees and shrubs and was surrounded by open lawns, much as it is now (1997). The site remains in college use.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** New College lies close to the centre of Oxford, along the south side of Holywell Street. The c 4ha college and its gardens lie largely on level ground, falling slightly to the north beyond the northern city wall, which formed the north boundary of college before the mid C19. The college is bounded to the west by New College Lane, and beyond this Hertford and All Souls Colleges, to the south by a continuation of New College Lane which runs into Queen's Lane, and south of this by Queen's College, to the north by Holywell Street, and to the east by the east arm of the city wall and beyond this the buildings along Longwall Street. The college is thus set within a group of medieval and later colleges, located at the north-east corner of the enclosed medieval city. Being enclosed by buildings, views over the city and east towards Headington Hill are obtained from elevated parts of the gardens and buildings.

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**ENTRANCES, APPROACHES AND QUADRANGLES** The main approach, until superseded by that through the C19 Holywell Buildings on the north boundary, was from the west, off Catte Street into New College Lane, and between Hertford College buildings joined by the covered Bridge of Sighs (early C20). The lane runs east, towards the blind west side of New College's cloister, turning south and continuing east along the south side of the cloister towards the college entrance through an archway into a passage beneath the gate tower (the first of the Oxford college gate towers, 1380-6, listed grade I). This opens through the centre of the west range onto the large, stone-built Great Quad (1380-6, listed grade I), the earliest of New College's quads, containing an oval lawn surrounded by gravel. A further passage in the centre of the east side of Great Quad, opposite the gate tower, gives onto Garden Quad, and from there the college garden itself. From the entrance passage beneath the gate tower, an axial vista east across Great and Garden Quads gives a narrow view of the mound in the centre of the college garden. Above the entrance passage the upper floors of the gate tower, part of the Warden's Lodgings, may once have had views east of the mound, before the third storey of Great Quad was added in 1674.

The enclosed cloister (c 1400, listed grade I), lying at the west end of the chapel, is reached through a passage in the north-west corner of the Quad. The square, stone cloister surrounds a central lawn with a large ilex (*Quercus ilex*) tree in the north-west corner, and is overlooked by the stone bell tower (1396-1405, listed grade I) standing adjacent to the north. It is an unusual feature. The covered walk around a green enclosure (intended as the Fellows' burial ground) resembles the monastic garth, but it is entirely for perambulation, with no functional buildings leading off it as is customary in a monastery.

The current (1997) main college entrance is via a passage in the gothic Holywell Buildings (Gilbert Scott 1875, listed grade II) which extend along the south side of Holywell Street, parallel to the city wall to the south. The passage, running south off Holywell Street, through the Robinson Tower (Basil Champneys 1898), emerges onto Holywell Quad, bounded to the south by the medieval, stone city wall with several projecting curved bastions, and faces a projecting gateway in the wall. A straight drive linking the Robinson Tower and the city wall gateway is flanked by rectangular lawns separated by straight paths between them. That panel to the east is sunken. A road runs along the north side of the city wall, the Slype, being the remains of a public lane called New College Slip, closed to public use by C19 development. Holywell Lawns and the inner quads are linked by passages through the buildings.

**GARDENS** The college garden is reached from Great Quad through Garden Quad (listed grade I) to its east, laid out in the 1680s and largely built by the mason William Byrd (1685), with later work by William Townesend (1707). The buildings of Garden Quad are stepped back in progression east from the west range, open on the east side where they are bounded by an elaborate wrought-iron screen (listed grade II\*) with gates of 1711 by Thomas Robinson, the screen being a late C19 replica of his original. The central part of the screen curves outwards, opening onto the gravel perimeter path of the L-shaped college garden which extends east and then returns south, bounded to the north and east by the city wall (medieval, listed grade I, scheduled ancient monument). The wall dominates and is an integral part of the garden. It includes several curved bastions projecting outwards, and is topped by exaggerated crenellations, below which runs a raised path, giving views outside the old city and of the distant hills. The south boundary is largely formed by the stone wall of St Peter's in the East churchyard, with the church and tower overlooking the garden. Internally, the garden is dominated by the 8(10m high, artificial, square Mound thrown up towards the centre of the garden, now planted informally with trees and shrubs and with a flight of stone steps (1990s) ascending its west side, leading to the paved stone summit. From here views of the surrounding college are obtained through the boscage, opening out towards Magdalen tower to the south-east, Headington Hill to the east, and west over the college roofs towards the Bodleian Library buildings and the dome of the Radcliffe Camera. The Mound is set in a sunken lawn surrounded by a gravel path, with an herbaceous border on the north side, immediately below the city wall. A further lawn runs south from the Mound, surrounded by an extension of the gravel perimeter path, with mature specimen trees planted informally around the perimeter.

In the C16 (Agas, 1578) what is now the L-shaped college garden was divided into two. That area to the south, running parallel with the east city wall was laid out as an orchard; the area to the north, on an axis with the gate tower, was laid out as 'New Colledge Gardaines', in small rectangles, with a central path running east to west. The Mound was not shown on Agas' map, although it is said (Buxton 1976) to have been started in 1529-30, when 500 waggon loads of rubbish were tipped in the garden

for its foundation. In the 1590s the college gardener was paid 'towards the making of the Mount', with further payments during the early C17 for work on the Mound, and its completion in the 1640s. Loggan (1675) depicts it as a three-tiered, ziggurat-shaped feature, formally planted with hedges and ascended by several sets of steps, standing at the east end of a sunken parterre. Below it to the west lay four elaborately laid out, square knots: one quarter was laid out as a sundial, two others with the arms of the Founder and Charles II, and the fourth with a very elaborate knot pattern. The sunken area was surrounded by a formal walk shaded by a row of trees, and connected to Great Quad via a yard or lane to the west from which the garden was divided by a high stone wall with a raised central archway. The area to the south was still separate, called the Bowling Green. The construction of Garden Quad late in the C17 provided the impetus for the college, in 1700, to make a new north gate through the city wall to the north-west, re-routing the service access from Queen's Lane, where it passed the entrance to the garden, to Holywell, as it is now (1997). The new approach enabled the removal of the west garden wall and archway, opening the garden to Garden Quad, and the erection of Robinson's screen in 1711. By the 1730s (Williams, 1732) this plan had been greatly embellished with myriad topiary specimens and a raised, arched hedge on the north side, and was described by William Gilpin in 1742 during his residence as a student at Queen's. A less elaborate version of this layout appears to have survived at least until the late C18 (Davis, 1797), but by the mid C19 (Hoggar, 1850) the Bowling Green was no longer separated from the ornamental garden by a wall, and both were laid out informally with the perimeter path around open lawns, much as now (1997).

The Warden's Garden lies at the south-west corner of the college, separated from it by New College Lane to the north and east, and bounded to the west by All Souls' Codrington Library. The garden is enclosed to the north, east and south by stone walls. Beyond the north wall is a small stable yard, with the two-storey, stone Warden's Barn (c 1402, listed grade I) forming the north side. The Barn is reached from the Warden's Lodgings, in the south side of Great Quad's west range, via an enclosed stone connecting bridge, giving access to the garden from first-floor level at the south-east corner of the Barn. A doorway gives onto a flight of steps down into the north-east corner of the Warden's Garden. The Garden is largely laid to lawn, with a central oval pond, entered from the stable yard to the north through a doorway in the stone wall, with a classical, stone summerhouse (William Townesend early C18) facing north, standing adjacent to the south wall, on an axis with the elevated entrance door and steps from the Barn. The current layout (Pippa Irwin 1980s) replaces an informal lawn with perimeter path and adjacent trees and shrubs probably laid out in the C19. Before this, in the C18 (Davis, 1797), the axis between the elevated entrance and summerhouse appears to have been defined by a straight path, flanked by three rectangular beds or lawns on either side. The area is shown by C16 and C17 mapping to have been used as a productive garden or orchard (Agas, 1578; Hollar 1643).

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 165 (12 April 1979), pp 1066-9; (19 April 1979), pp 1186-9 Victoria History of the County of Oxfordshire 3, (1954), pp 144-54 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), pp 166-75 J Buxton, *New College, Oxford, A Note on the Garden* (1976) Buxton and Williams, *New College, 1379-1979* (1979) M Batey, *Oxford Gardens* (1982) D Sturdy, *Twelve Oxford Gardens* (nd), pp 21-4

Maps Agas/Bereblock, *Map of Oxford*, engraved 1728 from 1578 original Hollar, *Map of Oxford*, 1643 Loggan, *Map of Oxford*, 1675 R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1901 1926 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880 OS 1:500: 1st edition published 1876-8

Description written: December 1997 Amended: March 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: March 2000

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.