

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CORPUS CHRISTI

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CORPUS CHRISTI

Name: CORPUS CHRISTI

County: Oxfordshire

District: Oxford (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.750648
Longitude: -1.2535259
National Grid Reference: SP 51628 06036
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001094
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

College quadrangle and small college garden, laid out C16 to C18.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Bishop Fox of Winchester founded the college in 1517, siting it where previously had stood six decayed Academic halls, and beginning work on Front Quad some time after 1512 (completed 1520s). Agas' map (1578) shows Front Quad completed, with a small, rectangular, enclosed 'Gardaine' to the rear. This 'Gardaine' lay on the south boundary, adjacent to the City Wall, on the site of the current college garden. The internal layout of the garden has altered over the centuries, but like Front Quad, it has retained its C16 college use.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Corpus Christi lies at the centre of Oxford, 150m south of the High Street, on level ground raised c 2-3m above the level of Christ Church garden to the south. The 0.1ha college garden is bounded to the north by college buildings; to the east by a raised stone retaining wall (C18, listed grade II) adjacent to the narrow Merton Grove path out of Merton Meadow; to the south by the City Wall, lowered to the level of the lawn along the east end, with iron railings along the top; and to the west by the small Fellows' Garden (which was known as part of the President's Garden during the C20 before the 1980s) adjacent to Christ Church's Cathedral Garden. Front Quad is surrounded by C16 college buildings. The college is set within a group of other city centre colleges, the closest of which are Christ Church (qv) to the west, enclosing the cathedral, with Christ Church Meadow running down to the Thames to the south, Merton (qv) to the east, and Oriel to the north, across Merton Street.

ENTRANCES, APPROACHES AND QUADRANGLES The college is approached from the north, off Merton Street, through a gateway beneath the central tower in the north range of Front Quad. Front Quad is dominated by the range of C16 stone buildings enclosing it, with, at the centre of the paved open rectangle (paved late C20), a tall pillar sundial (1581, restored several times, listed grade I) with the college's pelican emblem on top. From Front Quad a passageway at the south-east corner leads through the partly cloistered Fellows' Quad (1706(12)), to a passage through the centre of Fellows' Building. At the south

end an ornamented wrought-iron gate and grille (dated 1782) gives on to the college garden with a view revealed of Christ Church Meadow below to the south.

GARDEN On the south side of the college, the garden, which before 1517 was Merton College's Bachelor's Garden, is dominated by Fellows' Building (William Townesend 1706(12, listed grade I) standing at the east end of the north side, an eleven-bay Palladian building with a three-bay pediment and giant Ionic pilasters facing south and overlooking the garden. The rectangular garden, known in the C19 as Fellows' Garden, is entered through the central passage in Fellows' Building, past the C18 wrought-iron grille, and is largely laid to lawn with a perimeter gravel path and flower borders. A stone wall extends west from the south-west corner of Fellows' Building, with a gateway giving access to the Small Garden to the north, returning south to the south-west corner of the garden, almost meeting the City Wall. A raised terrace (erected 1623(4, The Pelican) lies along the west half of the south boundary, against the City Wall, surmounted by a straight path alongside the parapet, reached by stone steps from the perimeter path at the east end and a concrete-paved ramp at the west end. The raised path is planted with a line of lime trees close to the parapet, with the remains of large lime stumps still evident in between. The sloping, north-facing bank is planted with shrubs (late C20), and a magnificent copper beech tree. The mount at the west end was still in existence in 1933 (CL), but is not now detectable, being partly covered by two concrete-paved ramps down to the west and north. The east end of the south wall has been lowered to the level of the lawn, retaining decorative iron fencing along this lowered stretch. The garden overlooks to the south the adjacent Christ Church Masters' Garden, prior to the 1920s part of Merton Field, and beyond this Christ Church Meadow, leading down to the River Thames. The elevated south terrace, together with the pavilion at the west end (now (1997) gone), were designed to provide these views before the City Wall was lowered. There are also views west into Christ Church, particularly of the east end of the cathedral.

Agas' map (1578) shows the 'Gardaine' containing trees planted regularly below the wall, and a smaller, rectangular, formally laid-out area adjacent to the east. The raised terrace in this area, constructed c 1623-4 (The Pelican) against the City Wall, is shown in 1675 (Loggan) with an elaborate two-storey pavilion at the west end, a line of trees growing along the top, and two rows of shrubs growing on the level, open area to the north, parallel with the trees. A similar layout is shown in 1726, behind Front Quad with its central sundial and the newly-built Fellows' Building to the east, which retains the smaller enclosed area east of the terrace garden, shown formally laid out in 1733 (Williams). By 1814 (Ackerman) most of the formal elements in the garden south of the Fellows' Building, including the internal divisions, had been removed and the east end of the City Wall lowered, leaving an open lawn partially bordered by the raised terrace to the south.

REFERENCES

R Ackerman, *A History of the University of Oxford* (1814) E Sinclair Rohde, *Oxford's College Gardens* (1932) *Country Life*, 73 (10 June 1933), pp 628-33; (17 June 1933), pp 652-7 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), pp 129-33 *The Pelican* (1979-80), pp 20-9

Maps [all held at Oxon Centre for Local Studies] Agas/Bereblock, *Map of Oxford*, engraved 1728 from 1578 original Hollar, *Map of Oxford*, 1643 Loggan, *Map of Oxford*, 1675 W Williams, *Oxonia Depicta*, 1733 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 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: November 1997 Amended: March 1999; April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 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.