

St. Catherine's College
MCR Accommodation Guide
2015



1 Introduction

Dear Fresher,

This guide aims to help new graduate students starting at St. Catherine's College in 2015 who did not receive a room within the college itself. Not being offered college accommodation is by no means the end of the world; in fact we have gone through and listed some great places to live and included honest opinions from our previous and current graduates at St Catherine's - something you won't find online!

Two frequently used nicknames (amongst students and staff) which we use throughout are 'St Catz' for St Catherine's College and 'MCR' which on the one hand refers to our very own Graduate Middle Common Room, but is also frequently used to refer to the entire body / society of graduates themselves, so we are actually called the St Catz MCR.

We would like to draw your attention to three things in particular:

1. Our college graduates' website: <http://mcr.stcatz.ox.ac.uk>
2. Our college graduates' Facebook page: Search for "Catz MCR" and click on "Ask to join". The website is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/141914569212222/>. Here you can see what is going on in the St Catz MCR in general.
3. Your Facebook page: Search for "St Catherine's College Oxford: New Graduates 2015" and click on "Ask to join". The website can be found at:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1650838535148144/>. You can then find housemates, discuss accommodation and ask any question in general.

Please take some time to have a read through our advice here as it should answer a lot of questions you may have and could potentially save you a lot of time. If there are any questions we have not managed to answer, feel free to contact us. We very much look forward to meeting you soon.

Good luck and happy house-hunting

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2 Catz Accommodation

Although this guide is primarily related to non-Catz accommodation, a quick word on what college offers its graduates. Grad accommodation is available in two locations, on site and the newly developed (MT15) Catz House, on Bath Street, St Clements. Combined there are 72 rooms available, all single study bedrooms. More details can be found here: <http://www.stcatz.ox.ac.uk/Postgraduate-Admissions/Live-At-Catz>

3 University Accommodation

Although St Catz is part of the University, it is just one of the 38 colleges in Oxford. College accommodation refers to the rooms that are available within the college itself, while university accommodation refers to rooms that are available in certain buildings around the city of Oxford for any student of any college. As a result, you may have other residents from different colleges.

University accommodation can range from small rooms to larger 14 person buildings with a shared kitchen, although usually no communal space. Couples and families can usually obtain housing through the university, however for single rooms the waiting list is very long (sometimes over a year). Hence it is worth exploring other forms of accommodation.

A large amount of the university's accommodation is located at the Castle Mill development, just to the west of the rail station. For more information about university accommodation, the website is:

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/accommodation/graduate>

3.1 Feedback

- *University graduate accommodation at Wellington is good in terms of the rooms (although quite expensive) and location, but it is extremely anti-social, so don't go there unless you're happy there being no one around ever!*
- *Castle Mill is 'not bad, not bad at all'; potentially cheaper than college, rooms for couples, but quite anti-social*

4 Renting Privately in Oxford

4.1 Background

Renting privately is the usual course of action for most graduates who do not get a room within their college. This is usually done via a letting agency or directly with the landlord.

There are lots of letting agencies in Oxford; these are companies that manage many properties and deal with the landlords for you, however they do ask for administrative charges (often £150/person). The agency will deal with the landlord for you. You will find a lot of these websites by just googling Oxford Student Landlords or Oxford Student Letting Agents.

Also, official renting information from Oxford is given at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/accommodation/private> along with a living out guide provided by our student union, available at <http://www.ox.ac.uk->

/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/studentgateway/documents/living_out_guide.pdf. Before you search though, we recommend you read the rest of this document (*genuine unedited feedback from our MCR survey in June 2011 is displayed in italics*).

The other option is to just deal with the landlord directly yourself; these don't tend to ask for the admin fees, and often have lower rent prices. You do then have to deal with the landlord/lady yourself

4.2 Who do I live with?

You can group up with others by going to your facebook page: Search for "St Catherine's College Oxford: New Graduates 2015" and click on "Ask to join". The website is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1650838535148144/>

- *Group together with other Catz people and choose a house, but make sure one of them is in the UK and can go to Oxford to see the properties. Do not take a property you have not seen.* We agree with this and continually hear comments about how it is so much more sociable to live with people from your college.
- *Always live with students (of Oxford) as otherwise you may end up having to pay council tax.* Council tax is used to support local services and is (very roughly) around £1000 a year at the moment, however if you live in a house with others who are classed as full-time students, you are indeed exempt from paying it.

Note on council tax: IMPORTANT! You must still register with the council & confirm your student status to be exempt! Otherwise they will get cross and try and take you to court! See here:

http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decCB/Students_occw.htm

- *The quality of accommodation in Oxford is generally quite low so don't expect the best (especially compared to the US) but by living with college friends you can pretty much ensure you'll have an enjoyable time.* Many houses are perfectly ok, but you need to be quick to arrange one for the following year often, as many undergrads arrange theirs' in Michaelmas term for the following year

Oxford is an expensive place to live. There's no getting around it. £350/£450 for a single/double room is very reasonable in east Oxford; expect (much) more elsewhere. Colleges often charge £500/550 for single rooms.

4.3 Communal areas

- *Try and get a place which has a communal area that you can socialize with your housemates in.*

Although you may end up spending most of your time in departments, libraries and our MCR so it might not be a big issue.

Many houses in Oxford have had their sitting room/living room/dining room converted to another bedroom – watch out for this!

4.4 Bathrooms

A strange feature of many houses in Oxford it to have the toilet at the back of the house on the ground floor, often only accessible through the kitchen. This is irritating. Avoid if possible!

4.5 Letting agencies and landlords

Letting agencies are a contentious issue in Oxford. Some have very bad reputations, but experience can vary from person to person.

Some people have very bad experiences with renting a house; this is often due to disagreements when leaving the property relating to damage etc. When you move in, you should be given an inventory. Check everything in the house. *Everything*. Write down on the inventory anything that is missing/wrong/damaged, and take photos of the condition of everything. Make copies of these on a cd/dvd so that you can prove they are original. Time taken at the start of the tenancy can save you a great deal at the end.

4.5.1 Feedback

- *It's always worth viewing a property, no matter how much the letting agents try to threaten you with it not being available any more by the time you come back from the viewing. (This generally happens with North Oxford Properties and their Jericho list release only though.)*
- *I think smaller letting agents are much friendlier than some of the bigger ones. All the letting agents will of course charge ridiculous fees for doing very little work (e.g. £100 for 'preparing your contract', which is identical every year!), but the smaller ones seem to be more accessible.*
- *Most landlords don't do what they say they will when you expect them to - (maybe this is a pessimistic outlook) but in our case we were told the bathrooms renovations would be done in the first two weeks of arriving here and it took over 6 months and there are still things that need to be completed.*

Agencies we've had complaints about: Chancellors, James C Penny, North Oxford Property Services

4.5.2 Deposits

All rental properties will require a deposit, normally 1-2 months. This should be kept in a Tenancy Deposit Scheme, which doesn't allow the landlord to just take the money at the end without your agreement.

4.5.3 International students and guarantors

Students will in general have no reliable source of income so letting agencies require students to provide a UK based guarantor who will be capable of paying the rent if they are unable to do so. For British citizens this is not a problem as they will have family in the country willing to take on this role. However, this is a major issue for anyone from outside the UK. If you have been awarded a maintenance stipend then some agencies will accept this as income, but this is not always the case (the more reliable agencies tend to accept it though). If you do not have a stipend then the usual procedure is to pay between

three to six months worth of rent upfront or to pay a larger deposit so do not be surprised if you get asked to do this.

4.6 Can I get a room in an existing house?

If you are looking to get a room in an existing house, use either spareroom.co.uk, or dailyinfo.co.uk or gumtree.com. A good website to find properties is globrix.com - you can specify rent levels etc. and view the resulting properties on an interactive map. Very convenient! You can also look at the OxGradHousing Facebook page: Search for "OxGradHousing" and click on "Ask to join". You can then find housemates from St Catz or other colleges.

4.7 General advice

- *Make sure you talk to the people in the house and see pictures before you agree to anything. If someone can go check it out for you, do that.* This would tie in to the comment earlier suggesting that it is good to have a UK resident in your house so they can go and check things out.
- *I'd suggest getting a bike, it makes places that seem really far away much more manageable...* There are loads of bike shops in Oxford so if you are coming from abroad, do not worry about transporting a bike over; just wait until you are here to look for student deals. Many people also sell their old bikes as they leave – watch dailyinfo.co.uk.

5 Areas of Oxford

5.1 Before you choose an area

One of the biggest questions is where to actually live! We have listed some typical areas for you below, although some helpful comments from current students include:

- *If you find it difficult to wake up in the mornings, get somewhere near your department otherwise you'll just end up missing lectures!*
- *It's worth looking at street layouts rather than just pure distances and having shops nearby can be much more helpful than actually living closer to the city centre.*

5.2 Cowley and Iffley Roads, St. Clements

Cowley, Iffley and St. Clements all converge at the Magdalen Roundabout and, along with their various connecting roads, are definitely one of the most popular areas to live in Oxford for students and is the closest area to our college, St Catz. More on the 'cheap and cheerful' side of accommodation, the houses typically tend to be larger and so are designed for sharing with many people, which helps keep the cost down. However, people who live there tend to enjoy doing so.

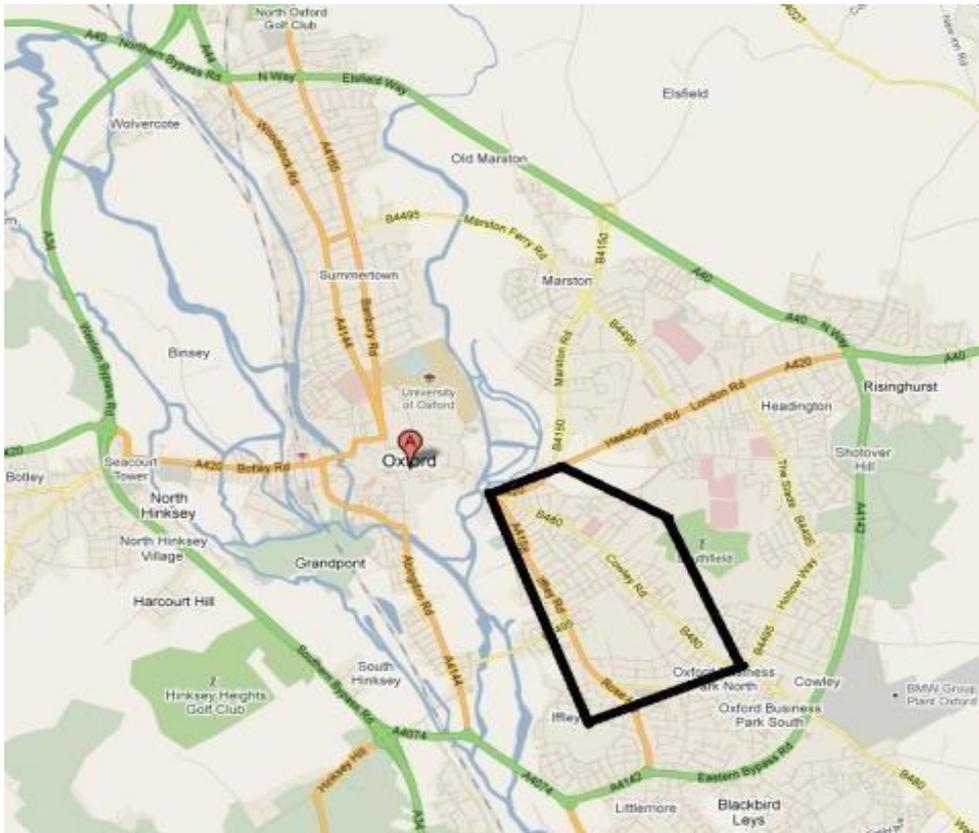


Figure 1: The areas students typically live on Cowley Road, Iffley Road, and St. Clements enclosed in black.

St Clements and the surrounding areas, including Cowley and Iffley Road, have all the amenities you will need during your stay in Oxford. St Clements itself has pubs, bars and restaurants as well as a small supermarket. On Cowley road you will find banks, a large supermarket, pharmacies, cafés, a multitude of cycle shops and restaurants from all corners of the world. If you are interested in night life there are a number of pubs and bars as well as the O2 Academy for live music. Only 5 minutes away, on Iffley Road, you will find the University sports centre with a gym, pool, climbing walls and more. If you are looking to relax Catz house is only a few minutes' walk from South Park and Headington Hill Park, perfect for picnics.

Planning a trip to London or abroad? The Oxford Tube and X90 bus services provide a quick and easy link to London. The bus stop is conveniently located on St Clements Street, on the doorstep of Catz House, and services are frequent. If you are travelling abroad there are coach links to London Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted departing regularly from St Clements.

We would recommend cycling for getting to and from your department and the MCR in College as buses can be inefficient and it could take a while to walk (around 30 minutes).

Table 1: Some facts and figures about Cowley, collected from past students in 2011.

Average Rent (per person, per month)	£376
Average Bedrooms	4.25
Average Deposit (per person)	£332
Approximate time to walk to College	20 to 25 minutes
Main method of transport to College	Bike
Approximate time to cycle to College	10 to 15 minutes
Happiness with accommodation (out of 5)	4
Happiness with price (out of 5)	3.75
Would you recommend your accommodation?	Maybe/Yes
If you had to live somewhere in Oxford	Cowley Road (or surrounding side roads)

5.3 Jericho, Banbury and Woodstock Roads

Jericho – Oxford’s faux-bohemian quarter. Nicer and quieter than east Oxford, but more expensive.

- *I think the main thing I learnt from looking for accommodation is that the fact that you’re a bit further out of the city centre isn’t a bad thing at all.*
- *Beware of Jericho - it’s such a popular area that most flats and houses seem to be maintained to a much lower standard than elsewhere in Oxford, simply because they can still charge pretty much whatever they like for poor quality accommodation. I’m sure there are exceptions to this rule, but this is what we were told by a letting agent when she took us round a few properties in the area, and that’s what it looked like when we were there.*

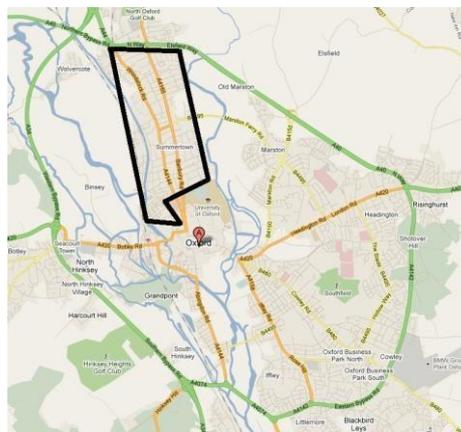


Figure 2: The areas students typically live in Jericho and on Banbury and Woodstock Roads enclosed in black.

Table 2: Some facts and figures about Jericho, Woodstock Road and Banbury Road, collected from past students in 2011.

Average rent per person, per month	£477
Average Bedrooms	4
Average Deposit (per person)	£636
Approximate time to walk to College	15 to 20 minutes
Main method of transport to College	Bike
Approximate time to cycle to College	10 to 15 minutes
Happiness with accommodation (out of 5)	3.5
Happiness with price (out of 5)	3.1
Would you recommend your accommodation?	Maybe
If you had to live somewhere in Oxford	Woodstock Road, Botley Road, Jericho

5.4 City Centre

It is obviously tempting to live right in the city centre, however the prices are considerably higher and the accommodation quality is usually quite poor. Moreover, there is actually very little accommodation available in the city centre. Although the historic buildings are stunning, the interiors are usually quite cramped and residents tend to suffer from the noise of drunken students at 3am!

Table 3: Some facts and figures about the City Centre, collected from past students in 2011.

Average rent per person, per month	£443
Average Bedrooms	2.6
Average Deposit (per person)	£671
Approximate time to walk to College	20 to 25 minutes
Main method of transport to College	Bike/Walk
Approximate time to cycle to College	0 to 5 minutes
Happiness with accommodation (out of 5)	2.8
Happiness with price (out of 5)	3.3
Would you recommend your accommodation?	Maybe
If you had to live somewhere in Oxford	Woodstock Road, Botley Road, Jericho

5.5 Other

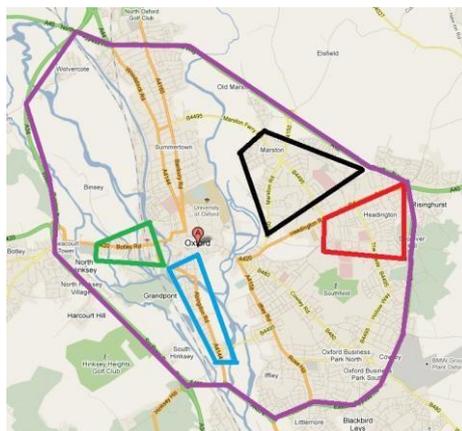


Figure 3: The areas students typically live on Marston (black), Headington (red), on Botley Road (green) and Abingdon Road (blue). The Oxford Ring Road is enclosed in purple; some students live outside of the ring road but this is quite uncommon.

5.5.1 Marston, Headington

Marston is a residential area, reasonably close to college (via University Parks) and the science areas and the housing tends to be fairly good. Headington is usually quite useful for medics as the area is near the main hospitals in which students are based and there is a well-equipped high street. Plus, by living there, you are up on a hill so you can avoid going up and down each day if you work at the hospitals! Headington is also a popular choice for accommodation for students at the neighbouring Oxford Brookes University (not to be confused with The University of Oxford in the city centre where we are).

5.5.2 Botley Road, Railway Station

There are a few student locations around the railway station however there is a notable lack of choice when it comes to shops compared to other areas in Oxford. On the other hand, it is ideal for business students who will be working at the Said Business School and in the evenings you will be close to the lively clubbing district of Park End and Hythe Bridge Street. The area has quite a busy crossroad too though which can be fairly noisy if you live too close.

- *In my 4th year as an undergraduate, I lived near the railway station, in what is classified as 'city centre' (and has an OX1 post code); however, my walk from there to the lab was 35 minutes each way.*

Table 4: Some facts and figures about the other areas of Oxford, collected from past students in 2011.

Average rent per person, per month	£407
Average Bedrooms	3.2
Average Deposit (per person)	£526
Approximate time to walk to College	30 to 35 minutes
Main method of transport to College	Bike/Walk
Approximate time to cycle to College	10 to 15 minutes

Happiness with accommodation (out of 5)	4.3
Happiness with price (out of 5)	3.6
Would you recommend your accommodation?	Yes
If you had to live somewhere in Oxford	Cowley, Woodstock Road, Botley Road, Jericho

5.5.3 Abingdon Road

Although there are not many shops or restaurants, quite a few students live near the city centre end of Abingdon Road and the houses are generally ok. There is also easy access to parks and the local countryside. 15 mins walk to town and 25 mins walk to Catz.

6 Closing remarks

When asked where they would live if they had the choice now, current students gave the following responses:

- *If you can't live in college, live in Cowley. It's cheaper than city centre, lots of students live there, it's got a great atmosphere and lots of restaurants*
- *Being closer to town just makes getting involved in MCR activities a lot easier. We agree with this point, especially given the number of MCR events that run throughout the term time.*

We wish you the best of luck in finding your housemates and locations. There is a lot of information available on the web but hopefully this document has given you a flavour of what the current students actually think!