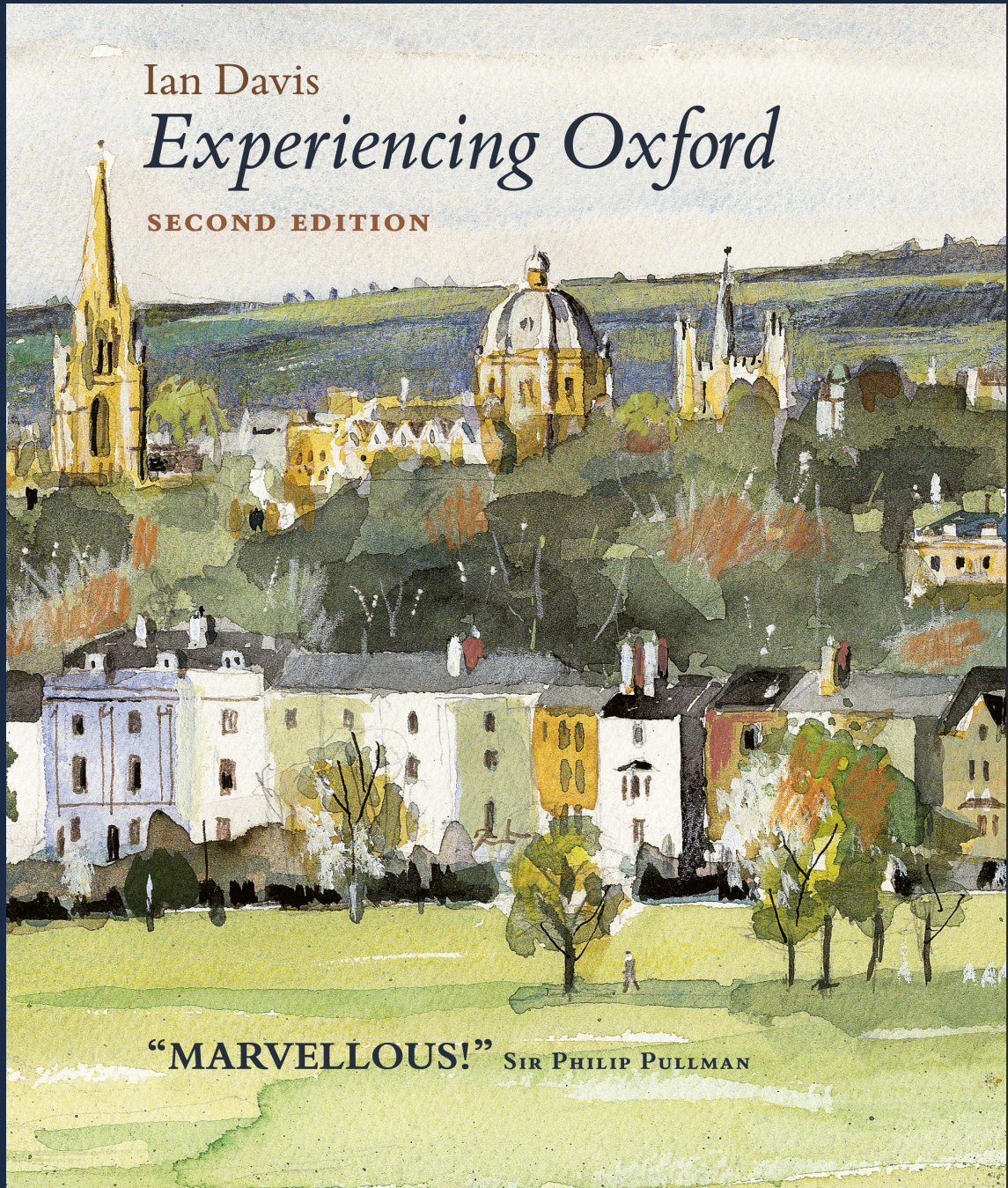


'EXPERIENCING OXFORD' SECOND EDITION

Ian Davis

# *Experiencing Oxford*

SECOND EDITION



"MARVELLOUS!" SIR PHILIP PULLMAN



**THE PAST GIVES TEXTURE TO THE PRESENT AND CONSTRAINTS TO THE FUTURE...**

Places where people have lived and worked together over long periods of time have an intangible quality difficult to define. It may simply be that the imagination is stirred by knowing that humans have bustled and buffeted here for hundreds of generations. But often it is more than this. In the fabric of our historic cities, like Oxford, there are constant visual reminders of the past. Not just the grand buildings that have been allowed to remain, but in barely-noticed hints like the stretch of old wall that has been incorporated in a more recent boundary, very old trees that were thriving long before the present streets and houses were built, surprising open spaces, like St Giles, where fairs were held outside the city gate (and still are), and names, like 'The Gardeners Arms', conjuring a memory of the market gardens that provided fresh food for the townspeople, and were swallowed up by urban growth as Oxford spread north in the late nineteenth century. These unobtrusive scraps remind us that, in subtle ways, the past gives texture to the present and, in a society that understands and cares, will offer some necessary constraints to the future.

To learn how to appreciate and enjoy this texture of place we need guidance and I know of no better guide than this outstanding book, *Experiencing Oxford*, created for us by Ian Davis. It is a sheer delight to have – to dip into and be astonished or to immerse oneself in and be drawn into the city's many narratives. It works on so many levels. The illustrations, a great many of them paintings by the author, balanced by his photographs, give us a unique vision of the city from its great buildings to its quirky corners. We see it through the eyes of an artist and an architect – the colours, the spaces and the volumes – in a way in which Oxford has never before been presented. And in the generous, enthusiastic, text this fabulous urban stage comes alive through the tales of the people who have passed through it and have made their contributions, and the many who linger for a lifetime unable to resist its inexhaustible fascination. We are fortunate, indeed, that Ian Davis has written this book to share with us his deep knowledge, love and perspective vision of his city.

Enthusiasm for the first edition very soon exhausted supplies. The author has responded with this Second Edition, adding much that is new including eight paintings and many drawings, thus ensuring that, whether we are visitors to Oxford or long-term residents, *Experiencing Oxford* will continue to entrance and open our eyes to the wonders all around us.

**Sir Barry Cunliffe, CBE, FBA, FSA**

*Emeritus Professor of European Archaeology, University of Oxford.*

### *Snapshots of additions to various chapters*



#### CHAPTER 1 PAINTINGS OF VICTORIAN HOUSES IN NORTH OXFORD

One enjoyable consequence of the book has been a series of commissions from readers to paint the splendours of Christ Church, Corpus Christi and Magdalen Colleges (*see pages 51, 53, 228, 288 and 292*) as well as interesting North Oxford Victorian houses by two of Oxford's most original nineteenth architects: Clapton Crabbe Rolfe and Stephen Salter (*see pages 30, 33, and 34*).



#### CHAPTER 2 ADDITIONAL REACTIONS TO OXFORD

The new edition is enriched by additional insights from authors omitted from the first edition: Colin Dexter, Patrick McGuinness, Dorothy Sayers, J.R.R. Tolkien and Evelyn Waugh.



#### CHAPTER 3 EVOLVING OXFORD

Dynamic changes continue to shape Oxford at an accelerating pace. *On page 80* new 'college towers' are discussed and on *page 90* the notorious Castle Mill Flats are reluctantly revisited to review progress in reducing their visual damage to Port Meadow. Wealthy benefactors continue to endow new buildings or colleges with the inevitable proviso that their name is attached. The Hall of Jesus College has been enriched by a remarkable painting following the restoration of a full-length portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, the college founder, the work of the Nicholas Hilliard Studio.



#### CHAPTER 4 GAIA MODEL EARTH IN THE NAVE OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN

In June 2022, as part of the Oxford Festival of the Arts a 6m diameter model Earth - wonderfully blue with flowing white clouds captured by NASA cameras appeared within the nave of the church as an incongruous and magical experience.



#### CHAPTER 5 TAINTED VALUES

Heated campaigns continue to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes from Oriel College and anti-slavery pressures on All Souls College over the tainted bequest from the slave owner Christopher Codrington resulted in a new plaque and a re-named library.



### CHAPTER 6

#### OXFORD'S WIDER CONTEXT

The sublime beauty of Addison's Walk in Magdalen College is revisited with sketchbook and the company of a student who enjoyed the Walk for eight years while resident in Magdalen. Four long-distance walks have provided a wider understanding of the geology, vegetation, topography and land-use surrounding Oxford, as well as evocative joys of cloud formations, windswept fields, woodlands and meandering rivers.



### CHAPTER 7

#### UNAFFORDABLE OXFORD

Traffic congestion, polluted air, unaffordable housing and risks to cyclists- Oxford continues to pay a heavy price for its own success.



### CHAPTER 10

#### MORE METAPHORS

Creative, amusing and perceptive descriptions of Oxford and its architecture continue to flourish, with some choice new discoveries added to this chapter. For example, in the first edition I missed Francis Bacon's apt description from 1605 of the Bodleian Library as *'an ark to save learning from the deluge'*.



### CHAPTER 11

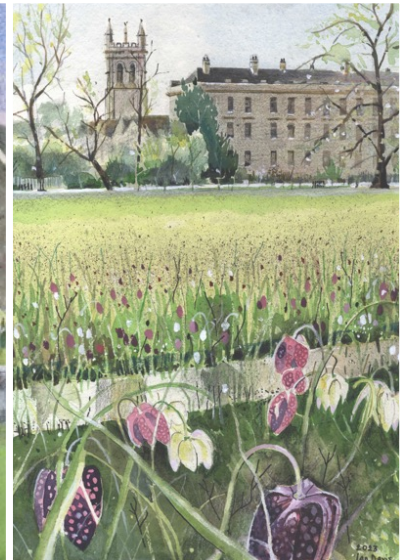
#### SENSORY OXFORD

To conclude this Second Preface, I return to the central theme of the book - 'Experiencing Oxford'. Since writing the first edition, increased attention is being given to our experience of 'sensory architecture' reflected in recent buildings, publications, architectural education curricula and in meeting the needs of people with sensory impairment (*page 359*).



## NEW PAINTINGS...

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*“Experiencing Oxford is without doubt the most stimulating book about the city and its university that I have come across. He knits ancient and modern into a multi-layered collage rich in historical, literary and visual reference that is guaranteed to shake up your thinking. It is a wonderful book, and the paintings are glorious...”*

**Christina Hardyment,**

Author, former editor, *Oxford Today*.

*“... page after page of incomparable illustrations. I love the watercolours and photographs from the cityscapes to the tiniest details...a life’s work of writing and artistic talent.”*

**Jacky Penning-Rowell,**

Retired Lecturer, London Borough of Barnet.

*“I am simply in awe of the production values. Any publisher would have been proud to have produced such a stunningly beautiful volume – a wonderfully harmonious whole.”*

**Paul Clifford,**

Retired Managing Director, Lion Hudson Publishing.

*“... so rich, a truly monumental achievement, I have not seen a book of Oxford to equal it... a wonderfully immersive journey through Oxford. And Ian Davis’s lucent watercolours convey light on stone and architecture with rare distinction.”*

**Tim Pears,** Writer.

*“I love the book, scholarly and yet accessible: wide ranging and yet personal; visually gorgeous, a ‘must-have’ for everyone who loves the city.”*

**Peter Lovesey,** Crime Writer.

*“.... a feast for all the senses, and for the intellect. No-one will see Oxford in quite the same way again.”*

**Hilary French,**

Former music critic, *The Times*.

*“Ian Davis has given us a wonderful treat, he invites us to slow down, to use all our senses to experience both the ordinary and the extraordinary in Oxford, to see new views and discover fresh perspectives... we savour its treasures.”*

**Mark Williams,** Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford.

*“... a sensualist’s delight, observing and celebrating the light, texture, taste and smell of buildings, stone, meadows and rivers, food and drink, sky and earth. Copious illustrations with atmospheric and vibrant watercolours by the author are not just an addition but in so many ways the point. A special book indeed as well as a love letter to the great university city.”*

**Richard Lofthouse,**

Editor QUAD, Oxford University Alumni Journal.



## SPECIFICATIONS

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<b>PUBLICATION DATE</b>	Wednesday, February 7th, 2024
<b>PRICE</b>	£30.00 (\$40.00/€35.00)
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Ian Davis
<b>EDITION</b>	Second (First Published, May 2020)
<b>ISBN</b>	978-1-5272-5318-4
<b>SIZE</b>	216mm x 256mm
<b>BINDING</b>	Sewn paperback with French flaps
<b>PAPER</b>	UPM Fine Wood Free Offset 140gsm (inside) Silk Coated 300gsm with 170mm flaps (cover)
<b>LAMINATION</b>	Matt laminated
<b>PAGES</b>	384pps
<b>CREDIT TERMS</b>	Invoice is supplied with books with payment within 30/60 days.
<b>PRINTER</b>	Gutenberg Press, Malta
<b>DESIGN</b>	Eyecon Design Consultants, Dublin <a href="http://www.eyecondesign.ie">www.eyecondesign.ie</a>
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	The book is written for any reader - whether visitor, student, professional or resident, who has appreciated and experienced the riches of Oxford and would like to expand that encounter.
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<b>PAYMENT</b>	Ian Davis Sort Code: 20-65-21 A/C No: 63500691 IBAN: GB58 BUKB 2065 2163 500691 SWIFT: BUKB GB22

## THE AUTHOR

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**IAN DAVIS** trained as an architect and has enjoyed painting buildings and landscapes throughout his life. He taught in the School of Architecture, Oxford Brookes University (formerly Oxford Polytechnic) for twenty years and more recently he led watercolour classes in the Byron Fellowship Summer Schools held in Indiana and North Carolina, USA. During the 1990's he illustrated Oxford Colleges in the Oxford University Alumni Journal: 'Oxford Today'.



*114-118 KINGSTON ROAD, 2022 by architect C.C. Rolfe (1872) (with thanks to the owners, Jonathan and Julia Patrick)*

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