

Oxford Writers: From Shelley to Tolkien

Who would not be inspired to write amid Oxford's famous 'dreaming spires', tranquil water meadows and timbered halls? Even the college architecture is structured to allow contemplation and thought: from the secluded gardens hidden behind high college walls to the cloisters, designed to allow light for study even in inclement weather.



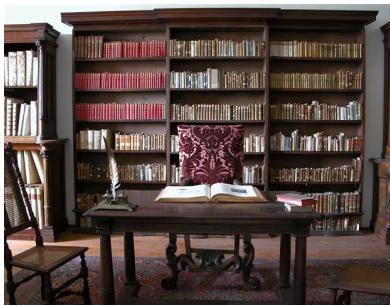
Oxford has been a fertile ground for many creative writers. From **John Wycliffe**, early translator of the Bible, and **Geoffrey of Monmouth**, recorder of traditional tales of King Arthur and his Knights, ... to **Lewis Carroll**, the pen name of the mathematics don who composed stories of 'Alice in Wonderland', writers have lived in almost every corner of this beautiful city. Still other writers have simply been inspired by Oxford's hidden treasures. Hogwarts Hall is said to have been based on Christ Church's Tudor Great Hall and the Pitt Rivers museum with its meticulously labelled treasures tucked neatly into drawers and cupboards, to have been the model for shops in Daigon Alley.

Some colleges have particular literary associations. **J.R.R. Tolkien**, author of 'Lord of the Rings' and 'The Hobbit' was an undergraduate at Exeter College. So was **Philip Pullman** who used Exeter College (under the name 'Jordan College') as the starting point for his trilogy 'His Dark Materials'. **Martin Amis** and **Alan Bennett** (whose 'History Boys' is currently showing in the West End), are contemporary writers educated there. The first female Head of a former all-male college in Oxford, **Marilyn Butler**, was herself an expert on the English novel. You can find her name carved on the outside of Exeter college ... if you know how and where to look...

Children and adults who love **C.S. Lewis'** books are drawn to Magdalen College, where carvings reminiscent of Mr. Tumnuss and other characters in 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' overlook quadrangles and cloisters. C.S. Lewis was a Fellow of this college where he lived during the week, only making the journey to his own house, the Kilns, at weekends. The Kilns in Headington, just outside the ring road, can be visited by arrangement. Also, associated with Magdalen College is the celebrated wit and aesthete, **Oscar Wilde** whose play 'The Importance of Being Ernest' and morality tale 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' are his best-known writings.

Scandal has dogged the heels of other writers educated at Oxford – **Percy Bysshe Shelley** was sent down (i.e. sent away from) University College for publishing 'The Necessity of Atheism' in 1811 while the

poems of **John Wilmot**, Lord Rochester, who studied at Wadham College, range from the risqué to the frankly obscene.



Oxford has produced many women writers: **Wendy Cope**, whose clever and whimsical verse appeals to a wide audience, read history at St Hilda's. Other writers who studied at this formerly all-female college (one of only five compared to around 30 for men) include **Barbara Pym** whose newly-fashionable novels are set in a world genteel poverty and Church of England Christianity. **D.K. Broster**, who wrote novels of the Jacobite Highlanders and **Val McDermid**, the best-selling crime writer, both studied at St Hilda's.

Undoubtedly the most famous Oxford crime writer must be **Colin Dexter**, whose tales of Inspector Morse, the curmudgeonly but analytical Chief Inspector of police, are set amid Oxford's colleges, halls, pubs and waterways.

This article mentions but a few of Oxford's famous authors; there are too many to list. Oxford University Press (OUP), the University's own publishing house, has played a major role in making publications available to the general public. Fascinating tours of the OUP museum can be arranged.

All the places mentioned in this article are open to the public, the majority free of charge. You can find opening hours and days on the official Oxford Tourism website www.visitoxford.org and download a 'What To See and Do' free of charge.



The best way to explore Oxford's literary links is on foot with one of the qualified Blue/Green badge guides. Tours are offered, both for individuals and for groups, at the Tourist Information Centre on Broad Street, right in the heart of the city. You can book online. All Blue/Green Badge guides have a thorough knowledge of Oxford's literary figures so you can take any of the walking tours (offered every day at 11.00am and 2.00pm) and tell the guide you are interested in Oxford writers. There is also a special programme of Themed Tours, some of which focus on literary figures such as CS Lewis and JRR

Tolkien, William Morris and Victorian Oxford while others give over-views such as Oxford's Children's Stories or a Literary Tour.

Several excellent guidebooks which feature Oxford writers such as 'Oxford's Famous Faces' and 'Oxford Rogues' can be purchased online via the Tourist Information Centre's E-shop.

Agatha Christie's home opens to the public

The southwest county of Devon has a new tourist attraction this year in the shape of Agatha Christie's much-loved holiday home, Greenway, which the best-selling author described as 'the loveliest place in the world'. After a €5 million restoration funded by the National Trust and private donations, visitors will be able to visit the crime-writer's house and 12-hectare garden which slopes down to the River Dart. The house was bought in 1939, and stayed in the family until the death of her daughter and son-in-law

in 2004 and 2005. ITB Berlin English Daily

By Heather Armitage

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