

Wadham College Chapel: a self-guided tour

rev. 12.ix.25

WADHAM COLLEGE WAS FOUNDED in 1610 by Nicholas and Dorothy Petre



Wadham, wealthy Somerset landowners, whom you can see carved in stone as you enter the College, underneath King James I. For many years Wadham drew its Fellows and students from the West Country of England, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells remains our episcopal Visitor.

COLLEGE AND CHAPEL were built over a three-year period from 1610 to 1613.

The Chapel, dedicated to St Nicholas, was consecrated on 29 April, 1613. It was the first Oxford chapel to be built after the Reformation. Dorothy Wadham provided for her chapel to be adorned with elegantly carved wood and richly coloured stained glass, which survives to the present day almost entirely as it began at the foundation.

FOR OVER 400 YEARS, Fellows, students, and staff have worshipped in this space, and many have been baptised and married here. The Chapel has also watched over the final journey of members of the community by holding their funerals. In the Ante-Chapel, you will see many memorials to past members of the Wadham community.

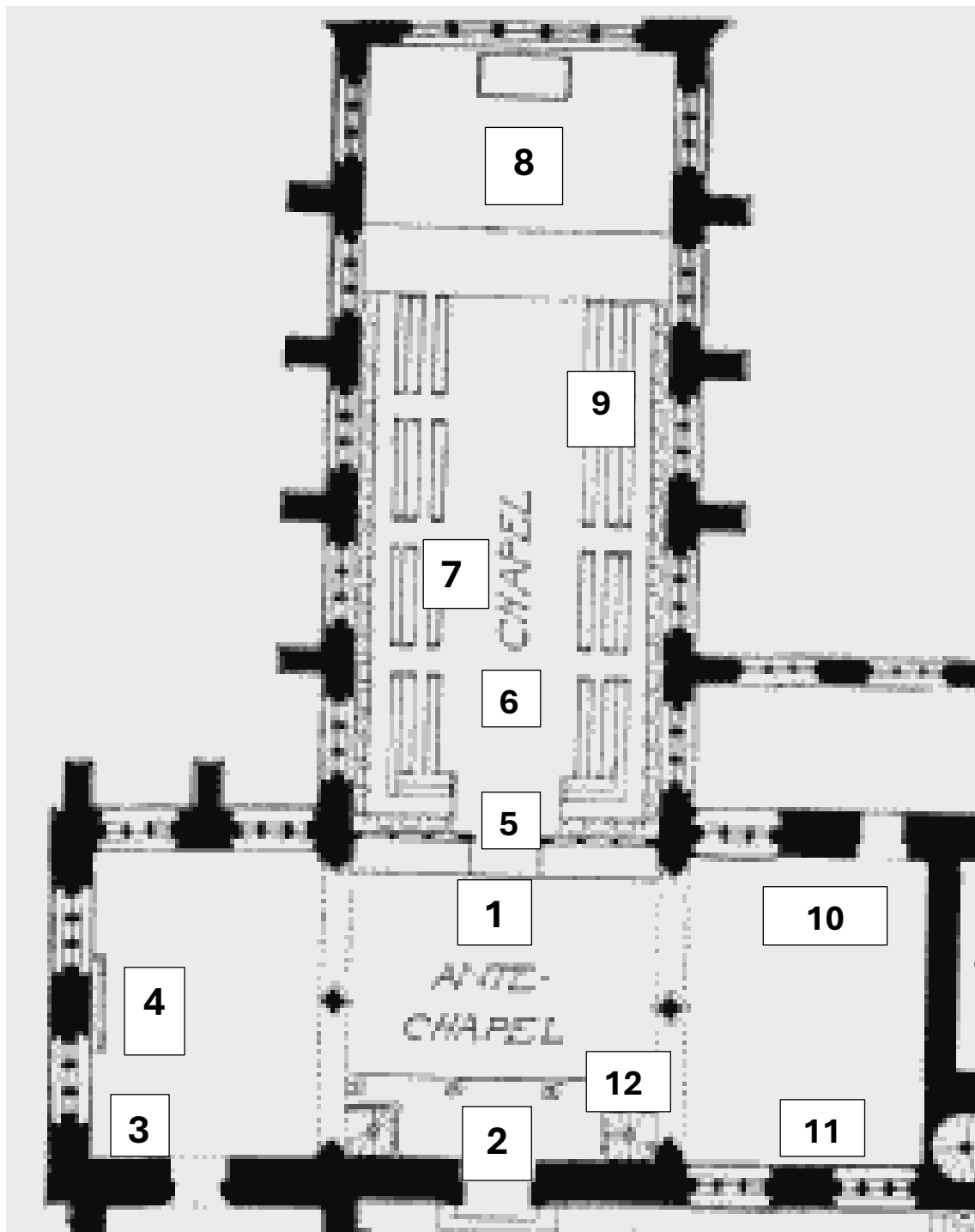
THE CHAPEL CHOIR sing full Choral Evensong every Sunday evening in term time, bringing together students, Fellows, staff, alumni and friends of the College for an hour of readings and music by candlelight.

We still follow the traditional Book of Common Prayer, in continuous use in our Chapel from the start. A Roman Catholic



Mass is celebrated once a term in the Chapel, and there are numerous special services and events throughout the year. The Ante-Chapel offers a festive space for celebration to our diverse college community, hosting Ramadan break-fast parties, and celebrations for Diwali and Chinese New Year, as well as teas, plays, readings, and concerts.

We hope you will enjoy exploring these twelve highlights of our Chapel!



1. The Ante-Chapel and Chapel

Standing in the centre of Ante-Chapel, take in the immense scale of the space, around and above you. Look towards the vast expanse of richly coloured glass that is the great East Window. *Now turn around to appreciate the richly-carved case of:*

2. The Father Willis Organ

The Chapel pipe organ dates from the 1877. It is especially prized as one of the few instruments made by the foremost Victorian English organ builder, Henry Willis, that survives without substantial modification of its original tonal design. Be sure to note the mermaid blowing a trumpet in the centre of the bottom of the organ case.

3. T. C. B. Joy Memorial: Wadham in the World Wars

Thomas Cyril Bruce Joy was one of 68 men of Wadham killed in World War I. Their names, along with the 40 Wadham men who died in World War II, are carved into stone plaques outside the Undergraduate Centre (not open to the public). Joy was killed in action in December 1915 in Mesopotamia. His younger brother, George Bruce Joy, was killed in France in May 1915.

4. Sir John Portman, Baronet (died 1624)

Wadham student Sir John Portman, who died at the age of 19, is commemorated by this splendid alabaster and marble monument. (See the laminated sheets for description, and translation.). Note the talbot, a hunting hound, at his feet; figures of the four cardinal virtues above—upper pair, Justice and Fortitude; lower, Prudence and Temperance; and the grim figure of Time on top wielding his terrible scythe, having cut down Sir John in the flower of his youth.

Now enter the Chapel proper through the screen and turn back to admire:

5. The Chapel Screen

The magnificent Jacobean screen marks your entrance into the holy sanctuary of the Chapel. It was carved by John Bolton, who also created the Hall screen, as part of the original decoration. Look for the Wadham arms, 9 lions, 4 bird heads, 4 fantastic coiling dragons, and two cherubs (*hint: look up under the canopies above the stalls*).

6. The Eagle Lectern (1691)

We read the Bible every Sunday in term-time from the great eagle lectern. The eagle has many symbolic meanings for Christians, and also stands for St John the Evangelist (look for him in the apostle windows!). Our eagle is made of brass, and was the gift in 1691 of “Thomas Lear of Lindridge in the County of Devon, Knight and Baronet”. Note the four lions crouching around the base.

7. The Prophet Windows (c. 1614, c. 1622)

The windows on the north side of the Chapel feature 15 prophets from the Bible; see the laminated card for details. Looking closely, you'll see that they are the work of several different glass-painters, of varying skill, and many have suffered from crazy-quilt repairs. Don't miss Jonah and his sea monster, a huge eel-like creature with terrifying electric-blue eyes and sharp teeth.

8. The Chancel (altar area)

The Chancel was originally paneled in wood, which the Fellows decided in the 1830's to replace with a faux Gothic stone reredos of mediocre quality. The oak altar table, from the early 17th century, was given to us by Ilminster Church (see no. 10 below). Note its characteristic Jacobean bulbous legs. The great East Window (1622) is the crowning glory of our Chapel. It narrates the Passion of Christ, surmounted by scenes

from the Hebrew Bible which were thought to prefigure the events of the Passion. (See chart on laminated sheet for details.) Don't miss our second sea monster/whale, spitting out the prophet Jonah onto the beach! The elevated carved wooden pulpit, from which sermons were preached, is also from the early foundation.

9. The Apostle Windows (1616)

The 15 windows on the Chapel's south side feature the 12 apostles of Jesus, plus Jesus himself (at the beginning), and ending with St Paul and St Stephen, the first martyr. The words of the Apostles' Creed in Latin run underneath the windows. (See card for details.) Note the miniature cities in the backgrounds of the windows.

Re-entering the Ante-Chapel, turn left to see:

10. The Wadham Brasses

These are modern replicas of the original, life-sized brass monuments to our founders, Nicholas Wadham (d. 1609) and Dorothy Petre Wadham (d. 1618), copies of the original brasses on their splendid tomb in the Church of St Mary, Ilminster, Somerset, in "the other" Wadham Chapel.

11. The Biblical Hero Windows (1840's)

These vividly-coloured windows of Biblical patriarchs, kings, priests and prophets were installed in the mid-nineteenth century. They were made by the Welsh glazier David Evans of Shrewsbury, for the huge sum of £212.2.0, which included the four windows of 3 lights each, a large packing case, 12 days of labour, and coach fare and expenses for the labourer. Abraham, Moses and Aaron start the series, followed by Saul, Joshua (trumpet), and Samuel (flask). David (with a harp) and Solomon (with a plan of his temple) are just visible to the left of the organ case. The window to the right of organ, mostly hidden, shows John the Baptist and two evangelists (gospel writers).

12. Sir Christopher Wren's Clock (1671)

According to tradition a gift to the College from our most famous alumnus, Sir Christopher Wren, the 1671 original Chapel clock is the oldest known instrument using the 'anchor' escapement, invented by Robert Hooke, who was one of the group that met regularly in Warden John Wilkins' study for philosophical discussion and scientific experimentation. The 1671 mechanism, replaced in 1870, is now kept across the road in the History of Science Museum, but the Jacobean clock face with its cherub, possibly designed by Wren, still watches over the front quad.



*We hope that you enjoyed your visit to Wadham Chapel,
and wish you many interesting discoveries for the rest of your day!
If you do not wish to keep this leaflet, please leave it for others to use.*