

From the everyday to the extraordinary

Oxford Open Doors goes from strength to strength, writes Debbie Dance, director of the Oxford Preservation Trust

With Oxford Open Doors now in its fifth year, some might be in danger of thinking that the enthusiasm would begin to wane or that, heaven forbid, the Oxford Preservation Trust, organisers of the event, might begin to run out of new ideas for places to open and events to happen.

Not a bit of it. Plans for September's event will make this popular event bigger and better than ever.

Oxford Open Doors 2010 was the third best

attended public event in the country. Last year saw 50,000 visits to 175 different places and venues in the city.

In fact, Magdalen College, All Souls College and the Bodleian were the fourth most visited buildings in the UK.

Over the course of the past four years the success of the partnership between Oxford Preservation Trust, who run Oxford Open Doors, and the University of Oxford has enabled more than 116,000 visits to many of the University's own buildings and collections, to the colleges, to church, mosque and synagogue and to a whole array of other places

that give Oxford its special character.

The event is designed to give access to places that are not usually open to the public or that a visitor might not feel too comfortable walking into off the street, giving access to some of the best buildings in the world, and also to those places that make Oxford the living and thriving place that it is.

Not just the old or the special, but those places that make the city tick, from the extraordinary to the everyday.

What other place can offer Christopher Wren's 17th-century Grade 1 listed buildings

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This year's Oxford Open Doors will have a sporting theme to begin a year-long celebration of the Olympics

Photograph: Greg Smolonski/Photovibe



Left, visitors to All Souls College, Oxford, last year. Below, meeting the fire crews at Rewley Road Fire Station and bottom, inside the Real Tennis Court at Merton College, Oxford

Photographs: KT Bruce and Greg Smolonski / Photovibe



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at the Sheldonian and the 21st-century listed buildings of Sir James Stirling, who gives his name to the famous architectural prize, and who designed the Florey Building in St Clements for The Queen's College.

Nationally renowned for our climate change initiatives, we all recycle but what happens next? Learn more on a visit to the City Works. Or see into the very buildings where cutting edge research goes on in the University Science Area, including the School of Pathology and the place where penicillin was founded, science we use and connect with every day.

From feedback we know that over 70 per cent of visitors were local people with resounding support for the weekend. Oxfordshire told us that it valued the event bringing the chance to learn more about Oxford, an awareness of a shared heritage, pride and a feeling of belonging to a local community. And more than 100 volunteer stewards joined us to make it all happen.

Once again the colleges and University of Oxford will open their doors and this year Oxford Brookes University will be giving everyone a chance to learn more about the contribution that they make to the city.

New to Open Doors 2011 are the Bate Collection, one of the best collections of musical instruments in the world, the Oxford

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Mike Walker, chairman of Oxfordshire 2012

Union in St Michael's Street where so many famous debates have taken place, and a chance to get a sneak preview of the Egyptian Gallery at the Ashmolean which is due to open to the public at the end of this year.

Christ Church are holding their Open Day and Balliol College will be showing off their work in restoring and rejuvenating the Church of St Cross which begins life again as their archive, but preserves the chancel so that it can still be used for services.

Oxford City Council is a key partner in the event and will be opening the Carfax Tower over the weekend. Visitors will also be able to discover more about the exciting project to turn the Old Fire Station in George Street into a creative space and hub for Oxford people.

The Fire Station at Rewley Road will also be open, thanks to the continuing support of Oxfordshire County Council who will also open Old County Hall.

Canal trips and interesting railway facts will all form part of a weekend full of family fun. Visitors will be able to find out more about the hidden history of transport which has played such an important part in Oxford's past development.

The 2011 event also has a special theme – Oxford's sporting history. Organisers are working alongside Oxfordshire 2012 to make Oxford Open Doors the start of a year-long celebration of the Olympics, which will



Balloons at Oxford Castle Unlocked

Photograph: Greg Smolonski/Photovibe

culminate in the Olympic torch coming to the city.

The Oxford University rugby pavilion and, cricket pavilion will be open to the public, as will the Roger Bannister Running Track at Iffley Road and Vincents Club in King Edward Street. Vincent's Club was founded as a result of an indignant exchange between Oxford University sportsmen, bellowed across the River Isis in 1863.

The club continues to unite leading sportsmen elected to membership for their sporting prowess and contributions to the club's character. Oxford Open Doors gives non-members a rare chance to visit.

There will also be a display of Olympic memorabilia at the Bodleian, and the chance to see the Roger Bannister Collection at Pembroke College.

There will be gymnastic displays at the town hall in St Aldates – and a chance to learn more about Oxford City Football Club which is celebrating its 130th anniversary next year.

Thanks to Oxford Brookes you can have a go at a sport, including rowing at the Falcon Rowing and Canoeing Club at Donnington Bridge, or have a go at the climbing wall at the Gipsy Lane campus, or swim in the pool at Westminster College.

Mike Walker, chairman of Oxfordshire 2012, said: "The eyes of the world will be on the UK in 2012 and I am delighted that sport and the build-up to the 2012 Olympics is a key theme for Oxford Open Doors. This will be the inaugural event for Oxfordshire 2012 and I recommend everyone to get involved."

Debbie Dance, director of the Oxford Preservation Trust, added: "We and our



Football fans will be able to find out more about the history of Oxford City Football Club during this year's Oxford Open Doors in September

partners work hard to make sure Oxford Open Doors is for everyone and to encourage everyone to take part.

"If you have not joined in before then may I personally invite you to come along this year. I guarantee you will have fun, and will feel just a little more connected with the city we call home."

If you would like to volunteer to help during the event, e-mail volunteer@oxfordpreservation.org.uk

■ The Oxford Open Doors 2011 brochure is due to be published at the end of July. The event takes place over the weekend of September 10-11. For more information visit the website: www.oxfordopendoors.org.uk