



The Plain and the Victoria Fountain

The Victoria Fountain has stood at the gateway to East Oxford for over 100 years. This charming little building on The Plain roundabout, close to Magdalen Bridge, has become a much loved local landmark.

Built as a drinking fountain, it no longer supplies water but continues to add much to the character of the area – never more so than since the 2009 restoration and lighting project.

Yet the fountain is not the first building to have occupied this site, which has a rich hidden history.



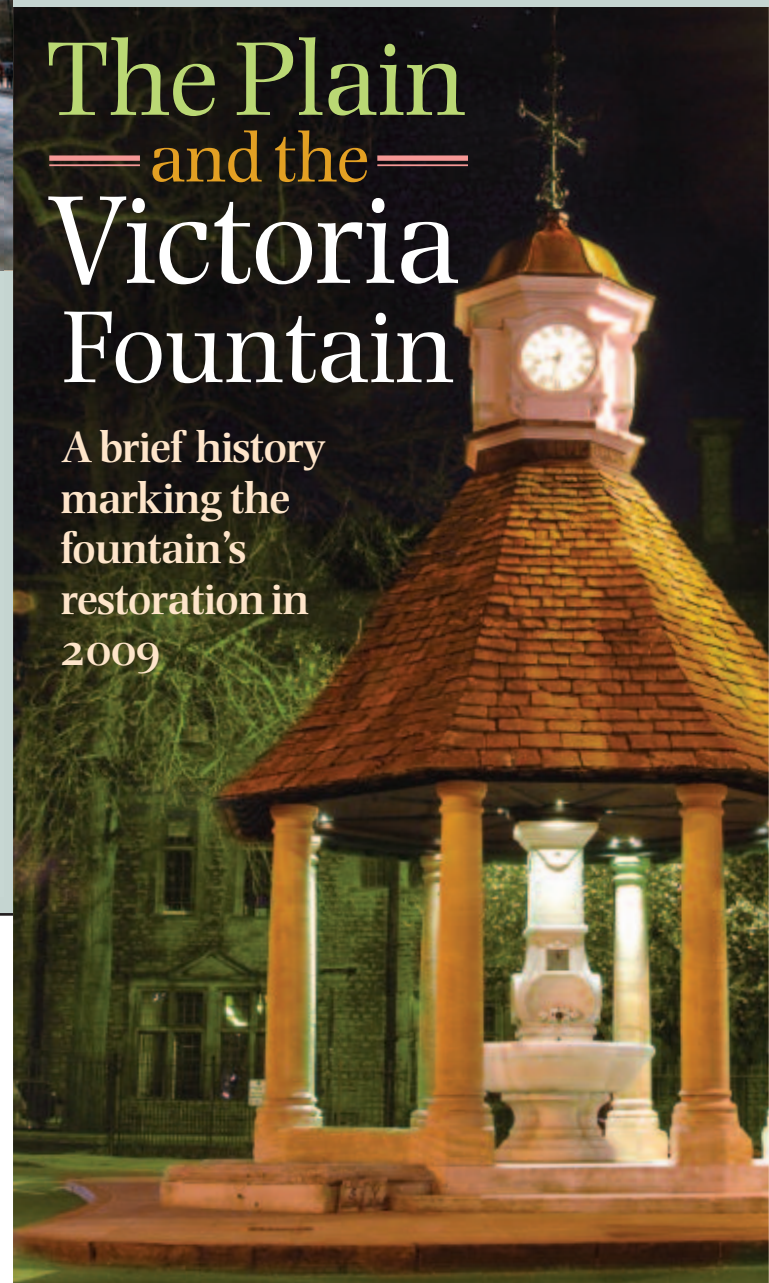
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The Plain — and the — Victoria Fountain

A brief history
marking the
fountain's
restoration in
2009



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Project supported by
East Area Parliament, Magdalen College and
CPRE Oxfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust

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The Plain marks the entrance into East Oxford, with the roundabout leading to St Clement's, Cowley Road and Iffley Road. The building in front of the roundabout is the Victoria Fountain.



St Clement's Church 12th century–1830



St Clements toll-house 1771–1874



Victoria Fountain designed 1897



Victoria Fountain opening 1899



The Plain c. 1908



Victoria Fountain prior to restoration in 2008



Victoria Fountain restored 2009

St Clement's Church

The Parish Church of St Clement stood near the site of the present roundabout until the 19th century. The original St Clement's Chapel is first recorded in 1122. There is evidence that there might have been Danish settlement in the area in around 1000. St Edmund's Well, a place where miracles were said to have occurred, was sited next to the church. Some 700 years later, the church had become too small for the parish's growing population, and in

1830 it was demolished. A larger church was built on Marston Road, where it remains today, housing three original bells, one of which dates back to the 13th century and is the oldest in Oxford.

St Clement's toll-house

In 1771 St Clement's was turnpiked and road users had to pay tolls. A new Henley road, later Iffley Road, was formed in the 1770s to link up with the rebuilt Magdalen Bridge and many houses around the church were demolished.

A toll-house was built in 1818 in front of the Church, with gates on either side to control traffic. When the railway came, the income from roads lessened, the turnpike was abolished, and the toll-house was pulled down in 1874.

The Victoria Fountain

1897 was the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, but it was not until 1899 that the Victoria Fountain was built to mark the occasion. It was designed as a drinking fountain by architect E. P. Warren, who

was also responsible for the Eastgate Hotel and buildings at the Radcliffe Infirmary and at Balliol, Magdalen and St John's Colleges.

This elaborate little building is constructed of stone, octagonal in shape, with its eight columns supporting a tiled roof. This is topped with a timber cupola carrying a four-faced clock, crowned with a weather vane. Around the clock tower can be found a Latin inscription which translates as: 'The water drips, the hours go by. Be warned,

drink, catch them 'ere they fly'. The fountain itself features scallop decorative details and four basins which used to be lined with copper. On the outside, four troughs provided water for horses and dogs.

The Victoria Fountain was paid for by George Herbert and Emily Morrell, owners of Morrell's Brewery in Oxford, who lived nearby at Headington Hill Hall. It was inaugurated on 25 May 1899 by Princess Louise, Queen Victoria's daughter. Responding to a short speech by G. H. Morrell,

she turned to Lord Mayor Thomas H. Kinglerlee and said: 'I entrust this fountain to your safe-keeping'.

20th century development

Although the fountain survives to this day, there have been many changes to the area in the intervening years. In 1908 a monument to the Boer War was erected behind the fountain, since moved to the Territorial Army Centre. Horse trams stopped running in 1914 and

traffic levels shot up between the Wars. The retained St Clement's churchyard behind the fountain was cleared in 1950 when The Plain was converted into a roundabout. Magdalen College's Waynflete Building was built on the north side of The Plain in 1960–61.

The restoration project

In 2009 the restoration of the Victoria Fountain was completed in a partnership between Oxford City Council and Oxford Preservation Trust, with the support of the East

Area Parliament, and additional funds from Magdalen College and the CPRE Oxfordshire Building Preservation Trust. Access to the original plans assisted the work, which was enhanced by a careful lighting scheme so that the fountain now shines like a lantern in this important gateway to East Oxford.

Photographs of restored building by Greg Smolonski

Historical archive images from English Heritage NMR Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive