Introduction

The College was founded by the University of Cambridge in 1965 as ‘University College’. The University gave Bredon House, with its long narrow garden running from Selwyn Gardens to Barton Road, and an annual grant for a ten-year period, and the College then bought property on the eastern side of its boundary. In 1973 a major benefaction from the Wolfson Foundation helped fund the construction of the main central buildings and the East and West Courts. The College was renamed ‘Wolfson College’ and was formally opened by Her Majesty the Queen in 1977.

Further acquisition of neighbouring properties continued during the 1980s, culminating in the purchase of Sir Vivian Fuchs’s house and garden. This provided space for student rooms on what became known as the ‘Western Field’, and for the Chancellor’s Centre, completed in 2004.

Throughout its short history the College has received generous financial support from the other Cambridge colleges, philanthropic foundations, many members of the College, and from other individuals. Dr Lee Seng Tee deserves particular mention: he contributed towards the cost of the Lee Hall and its garden, and he built the Lee Library.

The Tour starting at the Porters’ Lodge

This guide is to help you find your way around the College. The tour starts at the Porters’ Lodge and we will set out in an anti-clockwise direction. As you look south (towards the flagpole and Barton Road) there is an old mulberry tree on the left, laden with fruit in the summer, and beyond that is the Old Library Building. On the ground floor is a multipurpose Seminar Room with a piano and table-tennis tables; and upstairs is the Lee Room, a comfortable sitting room with a television and snooker table.

Leave the Old Library Building, turn left and left again into the Old Library Garden. The magnolia tree on your right at the entrance is a wonderful sight in early spring, and the
The path leads you round into Lee Court with student rooms on the left, and the Lee Library facing you. Walk under the pergola, covered with wisteria, and in front of you is Norton House, named after Frederick Norton, Fellow of the College, once responsible for the modern language collections in the University Library, and a distinguished scholar of Spanish literature and cultural history.

Continue round the back of the Lee Library. The President’s Lodge and garden is on your right, and at the gateway into the Lodge garden is a Buddhist sculpture on loan from the Fitzwilliam Museum. Further on there is another Buddhist sculpture. Continue and turn left under the archway into Lee Court, and left again to enter the Library. In front of the building are two marble Chinese Guardians (one military, the other civilian). On the ground floor of the library is a study room – the Sir David Williams Room – and the Computer Room. An armillary sphere occupies the centre of the lobby and on the walls are portraits of Dr Lee Seng Tee and of Professor Sir David Williams, President of Wolfson College 1980-1992, and Vice-Chancellor of the University 1989-1996.

In the basement, which houses the photocopying room, there is an 18th-century book press, the gift of Dr Raymond Lister, Fellow of Wolfson and a recognised authority on William Blake and Samuel Palmer.

The Library reading room occupies the whole of the first floor. Facing the entrance to the room is a portrait bust of Tan Sri Dr Lee Kong Chian, Dr Lee’s father, an eminent businessman, philanthropist and Chancellor of the University of Singapore. The Library holds teaching collections, and is a popular place to work, with wi-fi access to a wide range of e-resources for students.

Leaving the Library, cross the Court and look behind you to the clock and bell tower. The bell has the College motto ‘Ring True’ embossed on it. If you turn to your right (heading north) you come to a water fountain in the form of a statue of Temperance in the northwest corner of Lee Court.

Turn right again, keeping Selwyn Gardens House on your left. This contains offices and forms the northern side of Lee Court. You will see that the Library building itself joins onto Toda House, containing student rooms, built with a gift from the Toda Corporation of Japan. Leave the Court by the narrow passage between Selwyn Gardens House and Toda House, and facing you will be the side of the Lee Seng Tee Hall. Turn right and follow the path towards the President’s Lodge. The trees in the shrubbery on the left are medlars, which have delicate flowers in spring and unusual fruits in the autumn. The fruits have to be partly rotted or ‘bletted’ before they become edible.

Lee Hall and Plommer House
Walk as far as the winter garden and the tennis court, passing the President’s Lodge on the right. Follow the path around the back of the Lee Hall into a garden laid out in a harmonious blending of English and Chinese design and named in honour of Mrs Betty Wu Lee. A T’ang Dynasty-style horse adorns the lawn; the eastern border, alongside the tennis court, contains weathered limestone from China; and on the north is a miniature bandstand designed to hold a string quartet, modelled on the bandstand in Singapore’s Botanic Garden.

On the west side of the garden is Plommer House, named after Dr Hugh Plommer who left his own house to the College in his will. He was a founding Fellow of the College, a noted Classical scholar, and voiced critical opinions about most modern architecture. Plommer House has meeting rooms and offices on the ground floor and, upstairs, accommodation for students and visitors.

The Lee Seng Tee Hall is where College receptions, meetings of the Governing Body, concerts and many other events are held. Inside are some of the College’s Chinese paintings, and above the main doors hangs Ivon Hitchens’s celebratory painting Aquarian Nativity, kindly lent by University College London.

The Kindersley Stone and Bredon House
Opposite the Selwyn Gardens entrance to the College is a stone monolith with the letters of ‘Wolfson College’ carved by the Cardozo-Kindersley Workshop. This was a gift to the College by Faith and Gordon Johnson, to mark Gordon’s retirement as Wolfson’s fourth President in 2010.

Next you come to Bredon House, a handsome Arts and Crafts-style house built in the early 20th century by John Stanley Gardiner, Professor of Zoology, who bequeathed it to the University on his death. The President, Bursar, Senior Tutor and Development Director have their rooms here on the first floor, together with the Tutorial Office. The College Office, the financial hub of the College, is on the ground floor to the left as you come in from the Selwyn Gardens entrance.
At the western end of the Combination Room hangs a portrait of John Morrison, the founder of the College. The view through the window in the picture is of his house in Great Shelford, combined with a reference to oarsmen manning an ancient Greek trireme. His research into the design of this type of warship led to a modern working reconstruction of the vessel. John Morrison is also commemorated by a plaque set into the paving outside the Old Combination Room in East Court.

From the Combination Room, cross the landing and enter the Council Room, used for meetings and for small dinner parties. The wood panelling is from chestnut trees cut when the site was prepared for building.

Returning to the landing at the top of the main staircase, look first at the mural on the south wall by Gordon Davies which commemorates the foundation of the College. It is a fanciful depiction of Cambridge views, together with a symbolic representation of philosophy and the various subjects studied at Wolfson, and, at either side, members of the College in the second half of the 1960s. On the opposite wall hangs an unusual late 18th-century clock, made by J Bolton of Durham, with its pendulum and weights boxed in, and the case decorated in a Chinese fashion. It was purchased in 1976 from funds donated by Pilkington Brothers plc, the sheet glass manufacturers.

Going downstairs brings you back to the main entrance to the College. Through to the left is the Club Room and bar – the social centre of the College – adorned with student memorabilia.

**Porters’ Lodge to the Chancellor’s Centre and back**

Set out again from the Porters’ Lodge, towards the flagpole, past a Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*), spectacular when in flower before coming into leaf in the spring. Turn right, leaving the flagpole behind you, with first Morrison House, and then Williams House, on your left. The gym is on the right, at the end of the low range of buildings, and the Western Field development on the former Fuchs land lies beyond. This part of the gardens is notable for the presence of several large specimen trees, which were retained during the development of the Western Field.

A small circular stone laid in the grass on the right commemorates Darkie, Sir Vivian Fuchs’s lead dog during his first Antarctic years 1947-1950, who travelled over 2,000 miles during that time. Sir Vivian later led the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-1958, which made the first land crossing of the Antarctic continent. These events are also celebrated in the weathervane on the cupola of the Octagon ahead of you to the right. If you turn left before Fuchs House and then right into its front garden, you will see a topiary penguin with an egg at its feet cut out of yew.

Continue around Fuchs House and you will see the dome of the Chancellor’s Centre, which was opened in 2004 by His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, Chancellor of the University and Visitor of the College. Above the main entrance is a hand-forged stainless
steel rendering of the College coat of arms. The marble statue in the foyer is of Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria and Chancellor of the University 1847-1861, by John Henry Foley. It was commissioned by the University on the Prince’s death and has been placed on long loan to the College. The statue was originally housed in the entrance hall of the Fitzwilliam Museum until it was moved to the grounds of Madingley Hall in 1956. In 2004 Dr Owen Edwards, Vice-President of the College at that time, arranged for it to be moved from there, cleaned and installed in its present position. Its plinth is in the lobby of the Octagon, which you can enter through the corridor behind the statue. Upstairs, on the first and second floors, are seminar rooms: the large room beneath the dome on the top floor commemorates Professor Roger Needham, a founding Fellow of the College, for many years Head of the University Computer Laboratory and the first Director of Microsoft’s European Research Laboratory.

On leaving the Chancellor’s Centre head back towards the flagpole and on your left is a large bell. This is the old 11th bell of the University Church of Great St Mary’s, which came to Wolfson in 2009 when the University received a bequest of a new full peal of bells for its 800th anniversary.

As you pass the gym, go diagonally to your left through an archway and into the West Court. Look upwards to the top of the main building and you will notice five lead downpipes. At the top of the first four are the letters R – I – N – G, with the College crest on the fifth. If you follow the building round to the East Court, you will see a further four downpipes with the letters T – R – U – E, thus completing the motto and your tour of Wolfson College.