

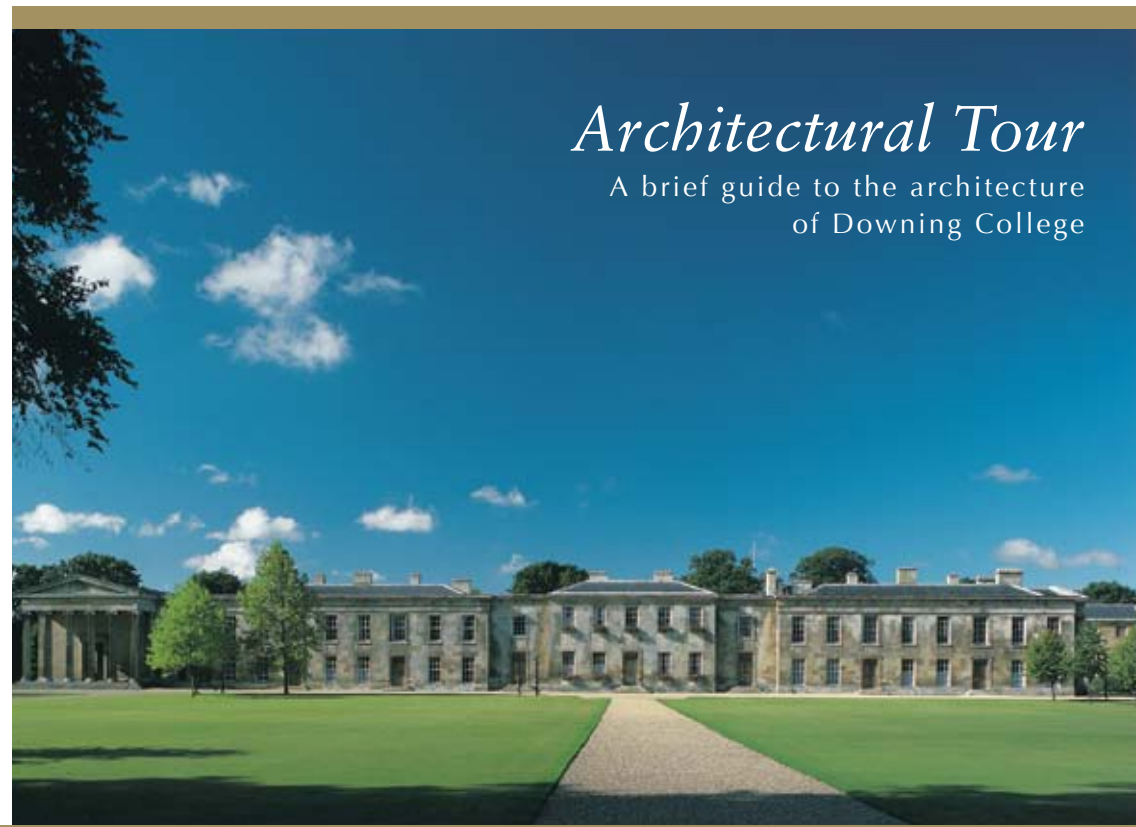


DOWNING COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

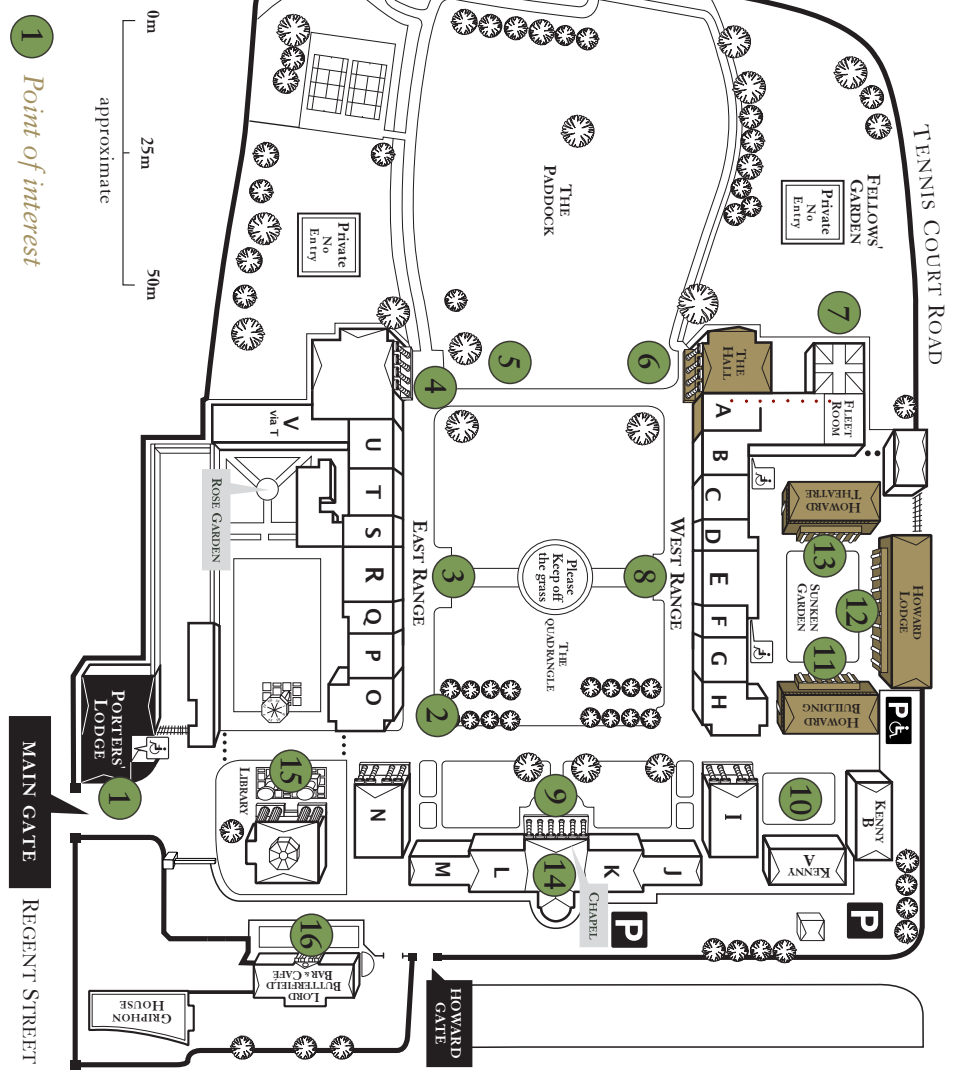
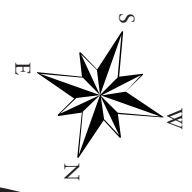
DOWNING COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE CONFERENCES & FUNCTIONS

Architectural Tour

A brief guide to the architecture
of Downing College



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The University of Cambridge came into existence in 1209, largely as a result of Oxford University having been closed by the King for five years. Teaching was often undertaken in churches – and many of the staff and students of the time were in religious orders. Lodging houses became Colleges, as did some religious orders such as monasteries and a nunnery (Jesus College). In the course of the following four centuries, sixteen Colleges were founded, the last of these being Sidney Sussex, a former Franciscan monastery, in 1596.

There then followed two centuries where the University grew only very slowly. No new Colleges were founded until Downing College in 1800 as a result of the will – and then protracted litigation – of Sir George Downing, 3rd Baronet. From the outset, the College was intended as a break with the past, set in thirty-one acres of parkland, and the first ‘campus’. Unfortunately, aspirations were greater than assets, and thus the original vision developed only slowly and has deviated from the plan over the subsequent two centuries.

Although the main entrance was originally on Downing Street, the Regent Street entrance was increasingly used throughout the 19th century due to the location of the College’s stables near the Porters’ Lodge ① and the arrival of the railway in 1845. Entering the Quadrangle, one walks around the 1873 stone-finished completion of the East Range by Edward Barry ② and can enjoy the view of the original - neo-Classical design by William Wilkins. The southern two-thirds of the East Range was built between 1807 and 1812, starting with the Master’s Lodge ④ and including housing for Fellows (T and U staircases) and a house for the Professor of Medicine ③, the first of whom – Sir Busick Harwood – is buried in the Paddock ⑤ under the original site for the Chapel.

Crossing to the Hall ⑥, one comes to the West Range, built between 1818 and 1821, during which period the first undergraduates were admitted. The Hall – now occupying the entirety of the space – was originally

subdivided. The Eastern two-thirds was the refectory, whilst the remainder provided a Senior Combination Room at ground floor level, with the Chapel above it, accessed by an external spiral staircase.

The Hall was only opened up to its current form in 1969 when the new SCR ⑦ was built. Passing the West Lodge ⑧, where Tchaikovsky stayed in 1893, one has a view of the North Range ⑨, designed by Sir Herbert Baker in 1930, originally as part of a more grandiose scheme which included monumental entrances to the College from both East and West. By this stage, the College had sold off the northern fifteen acres to the University and leased the Lensfield Road strip for private development. A lack of funds meant that Baker’s original design – in a style showing some Roman influence – was reduced to the two staircases at each corner (I and J and M and N) built in 1932. This Range was not completed until 1953, with K and L staircases (now significantly deeper to accommodate corridor access to all rooms) and the Chapel ⑭ designed by Baker’s partner, Alex Scott.

Turning left by H staircase, one first enters the Kenny Court (1961) ⑩ designed by Vernon Helbing, also in the Baker and Scott practice, and donated by Agnes and Muriel Kenny in memory of their late father, C S Kenny, the Downing Professor of Law. Turning left again, one enters the Howard Court, flanked by the West Lodge, and three buildings designed by Quinlan Terry – the Howard Building (1986) ⑪, Howard Lodge (1994) ⑫ and the newest addition, the Howard Theatre (2009) ⑬.

Retracing one’s steps to walk along the North Range, back towards the Porters’ Lodge, leaving the Quadrangle one finds two further Terry-designed buildings. The Maitland Robinson Library (1992) ⑮ echoing the Tower of the Winds in Athens, eclipses the more modest Lord Butterfield Building (1993) ⑯ – a café, bar and social centre for the students – and from there exit the classical tranquillity for the hurly-burly of Regent Street and into the 21st century.