

Marina:

I realize that you'll have plenty to do once you get to Cambridge, but perhaps at some point you might fish this note out of the e-mail and head off to see a place or two. Of course, there is no obligation.

I've divided my list into two categories: spots in Cambridge and spots out of town.

SIGHTS IN CAMBRIDGE

Let me give you five famous ones that you would surely find on your own and five lesser-known ones that I thought were of special interest. First, the famous:

King's College Chapel. This is the most celebrated building in Cambridge. Finished in the reign of Henry VIII, it boasts the renowned "fan-vaulted" ceiling that looks like delicate icing but is, in fact, millions of pounds of stone that were somehow carved and then raised into position. It's breathtaking. If you like music, you might want to hear an Evensong in the Chapel, featuring the College's famous choir. I did this once, on a cold February evening in 2009. As the services proceeded, the setting sun turned the stained glass windows aglow. Between this visual treat and the beautiful music, all within an architectural masterpiece, it was quite an experience.

Trinity Great Court. Trinity College is a few blocks north of King's. When you pass through the massive gatehouse, you're in Great Court, the largest academic courtyard in Europe. There's a lovely fountain near the center that has been in place since before Newton was a Trinity undergrad, and the clock in the tower on the north side of the quad is famous for having a double ring. For instance, it strikes two o'clock in doublets: "DING-ding, DING-ding." Wordsworth called it

... Trinity's loquacious clock,
Who never let the quarters, night or day,
Slip by him unproclaimed, and told the hours
Twice over with a male and female voice.

By the way, the bells of Cambridge are wonderful. On the hour, you'll hear them ringing from all sides, for each college has its own chapel, and there are many independent churches scattered across town. To me, nothing says "Europe" like the ringing of church bells, and Cambridge has its own strangely melodious cacophony. When you get there, you'll see (i.e., "hear") what I mean.

The Wren Library. Keep walking through Trinity Great Court, past the Hall, and out to Neville's Court. The Wren Library encloses the west end of this space. It's up on stilts because the Cam has been known to flood. Upstairs, you'll see one of the most beautiful small libraries on earth. When I was there, they displayed documents like Newton's own marked copy of his *Principia Mathematica* and A. A. Milne's draft of *Winnie the Pooh*.

The Corpus Clock. This is right in the heart of town, where Bene't Street meets King's Parade. Sitting at sidewalk level, it's a modern, golden monstrosity. I use the term intentionally because there is, indeed, a monster atop the clock face. This gilded creature is part of the time-keeping mechanism. On the hour, it even does its own little "dance." Supposedly, the clock cost over a million pounds. It is, believe me, unique in the world.

The Centre for Mathematical Sciences. At some point, if you're doing some maths (as they say in England), you might find yourself at what the locals call "CMS." It's about a mile west of old Cambridge and is a modern collection of pod-like buildings on many acres of land. I liked it. In particular, it's the home of the Moore Library, with a great collection of mathematics books and, in the basement, some old journals that are fun to graze through. I have a former Muhlenberg student who lectures at Cambridge, and one day he took me past the CMS office of Stephen Hawking, whose door read "Lucasian Professor of Mathematics." Of course, Hawking is now retired, but that was a "Wow" moment.

OK, now for the less-famous spots in Cambridge -- my faves:

The Bell Tower of Great St. Mary's. The church in question faces King's Parade, with Market Square behind. What's so neat about it is that

for a small fee (two pounds, I think), you can climb the bell tower. Up the stairs you go until you come out on top. The view is the pay-off. You're literally standing above old Cambridge. You'll see King's College Chapel below to the west; Market Square at your feet to the east; and a bewildering thicket of spires and towers and architectural flourishes all around. To the south, well beyond town, is high ground that goes by the improbable name of the Gog Magog Downs (the locals call them "the Gogs"). Meanwhile, far off on the northeastern horizon, an eagle eye can pick out Ely Cathedral, living up to its name, "The Ship of the Fens." (More on that later.) All in all, unless you're afraid of heights or don't like climbing spiral stairs, I'd heartily recommend an ascent of Great St. Mary's.

(A video of the ascent is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH5W9TItuXU> .)

Trinity College Chapel. This is, justly, less acclaimed than its King's College counterpart, but I rarely passed through Trinity without going in. It stands just to the right of the clock tower on Great Court. What I found so amazing was the antechapel with its plaques honoring Trinity alums (you'll spot plaques for Cayley, Hardy, Ramanujan, Russell, and other luminaries from your math books). Also here are statues of such Trinity superstars as Barrow, Tennyson, and Bacon. Best of all, and dominating the antechapel, is Roubiliac's statue of Isaac Newton. This is a memorable likeness of Trinity's -- and perhaps history's -- greatest genius. Again, I'll cite Wordsworth:

And from my pillow, looking forth by light
Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold
The antechapel where the statue stood
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

Sidney Sussex College Chapel. This isn't a great building, but its notable feature lies in the foyer, where a marker indicates that, somewhere nearby, is buried the head of Oliver Cromwell. You might want to google the weird tale of Cromwell's head and how it came to be secretly buried in this Cambridge chapel. Only in England!

Jesus College Chapel. This is the oldest college chapel at Cambridge. You enter Jesus College via a long, straight passage between two high walls (called "the Chimney"), go through the main gate, and turn right to find your way to Cloister Court. The chapel is there. Inside this ancient, crumbling building is a memorial to Thomas Cranmer, the Cambridge man and Archbishop of Canterbury who was burned at the stake in Oxford because he was not a Catholic when it was politic to be one. His demise came at the hands of Queen Mary I ("Bloody Mary"), an ardent Catholic. I found this tribute to Cranmer to be old, creepy, yet somehow touching.

Third Court, St. John's College. This was my favorite Cambridge inner sanctum. You enter St. John's (right next door to Trinity) via the great gatehouse and pass through First Court. Another gatehouse, nearly as grand, carries you into Second Court. But keep going. After one more passageway, you end up in Third Court, smaller and more modest but almost chillingly isolated from the 21st Century. I would stand there, looking around and half believing that the year was 1680.

SIGHTS NEAR CAMBRIDGE

Ely Cathedral. To get there, board a northbound train out of the Cambridge Rail Station (which you'll get to know well). It takes less than half an hour of travel through the pancake-flat fens to get to Ely Station. From there, a 15-minute walk will carry you to the cathedral, which dominates everything for miles around. The building is 900 years old and 537 feet long -- almost two football fields under one giant medieval roof. It features the famous Octagon high above the crossing, the world's greatest (only?) octagonal "dome." Apparently this was built after the original tower fell down one night in 1322. If you like climbing, you can take a tour onto the roof to see the Octagon close up. The timber work that holds it all in place almost a hundred feet above the cathedral floor is a marvel of ancient engineering. And, once atop the roof, the view is great. With binoculars, you can even see the spires of Cambridge to the south. Once you're back down, be sure to visit the Lady Chapel, with the coolest statue of Mary that anyone's ever produced.

Grantchester. This is a very English village lying about a mile and a half south of Cambridge. It is where we lived in 2009. You can get there via the No. 18 bus from the Drummer Street bus station right next to

Emmanuel College, or you can just walk. For the latter, head down to Newnham and find the pathway out across the Grantchester Meadows. Locals call this walk the "Grantchester Grind," although it's not really that bad. Eventually the path carries you to the town itself, where you exit near two nice pubs: the Red Lion and the Green Man. Beyond those, turn left onto the Trumpington Road, walk past the old village church, around the bend, and you'll come to The Orchard, a "tea garden" and Grantchester's most famous spot. Here you sit among the trees in uncomfortable canvas chairs and imagine others who favored this very place: from Bertrand Russell to Virginia Woolf to Ludwig Wittgenstein to Sylvia Plath to John Maynard Keynes. And, yes, the Orchard has the best scones in the world!

So, there are my travel recommendations. There's so much more I could mention, from the Fitzwilliam Museum (of art) to the Whipple Museum (of science). As I walked the old streets, I would think of those who were there before – from Erasmus to Darwin, from Maxwell to Turing. Now you can add your name to the list.

One last point: you might by now have realized that, even if you consign my suggestions to your e-mail trash basket, I've had a blast revisiting these marvelous places in my memory. I hope you have a great time in this English university town with a legacy that nowhere else can match.

B.D.