

<https://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle>

# The Oxford Medieval Mystery Cycle

27 April 2019, 12noon to 5pm

St Edmund Hall

Free to all. Turn up any time!

Performed by a variety of groups with links to Oxford Medieval Studies  
Directors: Henrike Lähnemann & Lesley Smith  
Manager: Eleanor Baker

1. Creation & Fall (Iffley Players) - Chapel - 12 noon
2. Noah (English Faculty Staff) - Old Dining Hall - 12:40
3. Abraham (Magdalen College School) - Well - 1:20pm
4. Annunciation & Visitation (Cuddesdon) - St Edmund Statue - 1:50pm
5. Shepherds (English Faculty Students) - Churchyard - 2:20pm
6. Crucifixion (Lincoln College) - Churchyard - 2:50pm
7. Lamentation (Italianists) - Churchyard - 3:15pm
8. Harrowing of Hell (Medieval Germanists) - Crypt - 3:30pm
9. Resurrection (UCL) - Tomb behind Church - 4pm
10. Judgement (St Edmund Hall) - Garden behind Church - 4:30pm

## Welcome to the Oxford Medieval Mystery Plays

How did this enterprise come about? When TORCH announced its key theme for 2018/19 as 'Performance', Lesley Smith (Professor of Medieval Intellectual History, Harris Manchester College) proposed the staging of a Mystery Cycle with different groups from Oxford. A similar formula has worked for decades now as a focus for groups of medievalists in Toronto where Lesley worked previously - having been, as she recalls, "more singing angels than I can count." Henrike Lähnemann (Professor of Medieval German, St Edmund Hall) as Director of Oxford Medieval Studies (OMS) Programme at TORCH was eager to undertake more ventures which would bring together medievalists from a number of different disciplines. Her own drama experience comes from the time spent co-directing a group called 'Komediävisten' in Tübingen which grew out of a reading group for Fastnachtspiele, the exceedingly bawdy plays performed at carnival time in medieval German towns. The two were joined by Eleanor Baker (DPhil student in English, St John's College) who master-minded the whole production.

For binding the Oxford Mystery Cycle together, we are grateful to Joel Lipson (doctoral student at Wolfson College, Cambridge) for writing some linking verses in faux Middle English. To give you a taste, this is his introduction to the Creation:

Hearken, gentils, how bigan  
All thynges on erthe, and eke of man  
Bifor his sory fall -  
How God made all, and all was gode;  
How all the Word was understode;  
How Satan felle withal.

It has been really exciting to see the plays taken on by such a diverse group of people; to design a banner for the trumpet and tabards for the stewards; do numerous site visits; and bounce ideas around with a huge number of colleagues, students and enthusiasts. We are very much looking forward to the whole action which is excitingly unpredictable.

A huge thank-you to all those who contributed - nearly a hundred active participants provided time, creative enterprise and energy as actors, directors, musicians, stewards. A special thank-you to the Principal and the Fellows of the College of St Edmund Hall who allowed us to use the wonderful setting with spaces ranging from medieval to modern, and provided financial and moral support; the Teddy Hall students who put on their own production, took on the stewarding and provide the angelic choir; with particular gratitude to the staff from the porters to the gardener who put up with numerous site visits and crazy ideas, and above all the brilliant PR power of Dr Claire Hooper for building up the website and organising the logistics for the whole cycle.

If the enterprise has whetted your appetite for medieval studies in Oxford, sign up for the medieval news mailing list under [torch.ox.ac.uk/medievalstudies](http://torch.ox.ac.uk/medievalstudies). All welcome to a plethora of activities!

Lesley Smith, Henrike Lähnemann, Eleanor Baker

## Cast for the whole Cycle

Henrike Lähnemann - Herald  
Karl Kinsella - Herald  
Lesley Smith - Herald

Timothy Powell - Head Steward  
Janette Booth, Francis Leneghan,  
Janet Walwyn, & al. - Stewards

## 1. Creation & Fall (Iffley Players) - Chapel - 12 noon

We will perform a shortened version of a single pageant which features in the 15th century East Anglian N-Town cycle. After God has created the world, the downfall of the angel Lucifer anticipates the fall of humankind when Adam and Eve eat the apple. Or was it really a fig? Or a pomegranate? At all events, we human beings will never live in paradise again. We do not know exactly how or where this pageant was first performed. Although the play was not originally written for a three-person God, our staging points up aspects of the text that were important in the 15th century. And of course God is female; we all know that.

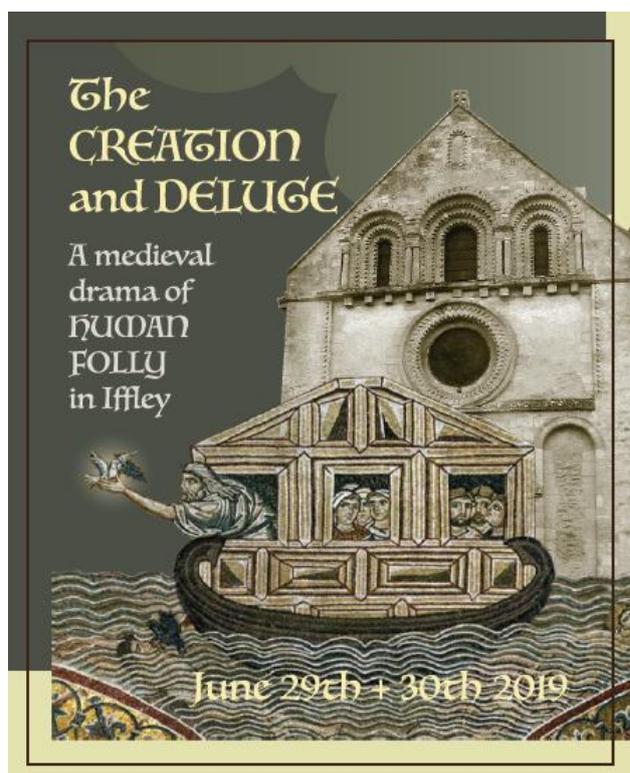
### Cast

God the Father - Hilary Pearson  
God the Son - Deborah Burrows  
God the Holy Ghost - Marianne Puxley  
Lucifer/Serpent - Andrew Stilborn  
Angels - Fiona Nevola, Martin Noble  
Adam - Nicola Borthwick  
Eve - Laurence Nagy

Musicians - The Ghaetta ensemble:  
Penny Terry - crumhorn, flute, recorder  
Suzanne Higgins - concertina  
Val O'Sullivan - bladder pipe, recorder  
Ann Clarke - cortol, recorder  
Annabel Donat - lute harp  
Andrew Harvey - frame drum  
Sophia Welsh - fiddle

Andrew Honey - Bell ringer

Director - David Wiles  
Producer on behalf of Living Stones  
- Penny Tyack



### About the Performance

This performance is work in progress. It will culminate in a production of *The Creation and Deluge* to be performed in St Mary's Churchyard, Iffley, on Saturday 29 June at 7pm and Sunday 30 June at 3pm. The production is a community event, and its linking theme is human beings' lack of care for their environment. The venial Mrs Noah is a reworking of the Eve figure. The production is part of the Living Stones project, which seeks through different creative activities to reanimate the stones of

Iffley's famous Romanesque church. We relish the beauty of medieval verse which will be brought to new life in front of the west door.

We are delighted that this initiative by Henrike Lähnemann and Lesley Smith has created the opportunity for making some of the glories of medieval theatre available to an Oxford audience, and for allowing us to stage this preview, which we expect to find instructive.

## 2. Noah (English Faculty Staff) - Old Dining Hall - 12:40

God ('Deus') warns Noah that he is about to flood the world to destroy its wickedness. He advises Noah, the only virtuous man, to build a large ship, the Ark, to save his family from the flood. He also asks him to save inside the Ark two specimens of each species, so that they might repopulate the natural world after the flood. Noah sets to work. His wife ('Uxor Nos') is doubtful about Noah's claim to have a divinely ordained mission and refuses to help; even when the rain comes, she refuses to get onto the Ark. They fight violently, but after advice from the obedient children, she and the rest of the family climb aboard and set sail over the flood. When the rain stops, the waters subside and Noah releases birds to search for dry land. God's power and forgiveness are proven.

### Cast

Deus - Vincent Gillespie

Noah - Nicholas Perkins

Uxor Nos - Annie Sutherland

*Son et lumière* - Daniel Wakelin

First child of Noah - Jeremy Dimmick

Second child of Noah - Helen Spencer

Third child of Noah - Siân Grønlie

### About the performance

Ours will be a reading of the play in the original Middle English pronunciation. This is usually comprehensible after a minute or two's adjustment. The performance will be accompanied by images of the story from medieval art and modern life.

## 3. Abraham (Magdalen College School) - Well - 1:20pm

Abraham is a good man, dearly loved by God. One day, God sends an angel to test Abraham's faith. The Angel commands him, in the name of the Lord, to sacrifice his youngest son, Isaac. Abraham is reluctant, but his faith overcomes his hesitation and he sets out with his son to do as the angel had instructed him. At the last moment, God intervenes to deter Abraham from this act, praising his faith and resolution. As a reward, Abraham and Isaac are told that they will have as many descendants as there are stars in heaven or grains of sand on the seashore.

### Cast

Abraham - Joey Hollis

Isaac - Rachael Rajah

God/Angel - Isabel Fincham

### About the Performance

“The Medieval Reading Group at MCS was formed in 2018 and this is our first opportunity to explore a text designed to be performed in a public setting. We wanted to use the rehearsal process to learn a little about the history and cultural context in which mystery plays emerged and to practise articulating the language in which our medieval ancestors spoke. This is the youngest (most modern) text we have encountered in the reading group so far, and we’re excited to see how it slots into today’s bespoke cycle.”

### 4. Annunciation & Visitation (Cuddesdon Players) - Statue of St Edmund, Churchyard - 1:50pm

The first scene begins with God in heaven hatching a plan to redeem humanity by becoming fully human in the form of a baby. The angel Gabriel is dispatched to invite Mary, an unmarried young woman to carry the baby. She accepts, potentially bringing great shame upon herself and her fiancé Joseph. The scene follows Joseph’s disbelief, anger, paranoia and self-pity as he tells the story of how he came to be forced into an engagement with Mary, against his better judgement, only to find her seemingly pregnant by another man. Fortunately, Gabriel shows up again and convinces Joseph that Mary’s tale of angels is true. The second scene sees Mary discussing her pregnancy with her much older cousin Elisabeth, also miraculously pregnant later in life with John the Baptist, who leaps with joy in Elisabeth’s womb at being in the presence of Jesus.

### Cast

God - Solveig Sonet  
Mary - Laura McAdam  
Joseph - Alex Huzzey

Gabriel - Lyndon Webb  
Elizabeth - Tansley Jordan

### About the Performance

“Whilst much of the first scene is Joseph’s own neurotic psychodrama, our challenge was to lend dignity, strength and agency to Mary, and to bring to life the diversity, creativity and relationality of a triune God, rather than the old man in the sky we all expect.”

### 5. Shepherds (English Faculty Students) - Churchyard - 2:20pm

On a cold winter’s night, three shepherds complain of the state of the world whilst their flocks wander around them. Their musings are rudely interrupted by the arrival of Mak, scoundrel and robber, who convinces the shepherds to let him stay with them for the night. As they sleep, Mak sneaks off home to tell his slovenly wife Gill that he plans to steal a sheep. Together they plot that Mak will bring a lamb to Gill who will pretend to have just given birth to a baby boy. Mak successfully secures the sheep, but the shepherds are keen to pay him a visit and check his house for the missing lamb: hilarity ensues. After the episode at Gill and Mak’s house, the play returns to a more sombre mood, the shepherds hearing an angel’s song and spotting

a bright star in the sky, which they follow. The shepherds meet the baby Jesus and Mary in a devotional mirror of the farcical scene in Mak and Gill's house.

### Cast

Shepherd 1 - Alexander Bridge	Angel - Sigrid Koerner
Shepherd 2 - Kathryn Peak	Mary - Cosima Gillhammer
Shepherd 3 - Rowan Wilson	Lamb - Florrie the Dog
Mak - Eleanor Baker	Costume - Sigrid Koerner
Gill - Rebecca Menmuir	Props and Set - Heidi Mannikko

### About the Performance

“As a play requiring a great deal of messing about with a sheep, we had to find a suitable stand-in for the real thing. This arrived in the shape of Florrie, a lovely (and rather sheep-like) dog walked by our very own Gill (Rebecca Menmuir). Our favourite aspect of the play has been incorporating our animal friend into our diverse cast of medieval literature Master's and DPhil students, and making sure that our comedic play still finished on an emotional and touching high.”

## 6. Crucifixion (Lincoln College) - Churchyard - 2:50pm

Four soldiers undertake the gruesome and difficult task of pinning Christ on a cross in which the holes have been bored too far apart. By pulling his limbs while discussing the details of their workmanship with a fair amount of complaints, they reveal to the audience the hard conditions of their labour without paying much attention to the subject of their work, Christ, who lays himself down on the cross and endures his plight without objection. After much effort in lifting up the cross and dropping it upright in the mortice, Christ's words concerning “all men that walk by way or street” invite the audience to face their own implication in the Crucifixion as they look up to the crucified Christ.

### Cast

Jesus - Liam McDowell	Soldier 3 - Emily Clarke
Soldier 1 - Antje Carrel	Soldier 4 - Maryann Pierse
Soldier 2 - Bond West	

### Off-Stage Help

Stage and Costumes/Props Manager - Alexandra Plane  
 Rehearsal-space-lender 1 - Lincoln College, 2 - Pusey House  
 Source of Funding - Vivian Green Student Assistance Fund

### About the Performance

“Realising that there were a few medievalists gathered at Lincoln College, we started having dinners in Hall and wondering how we could communicate our shared passion for the long Middle Ages - from Old Norse sagas and Anglo-Saxon texts to

fifteenth-century Middle English literature. The ideas of forming a dramatic society, which we affectionately call the Pinner, came to mind. We look forward to performing in the Oxford Medieval Mystery Cycle and we hope that this will be the beginning of a new tradition for medievalists at Lincoln College to jointly share their interest in the Middle Ages.”

## 7. Lamentation (Italianists) - Churchyard - 3:15pm

Jacopone da Todi's *lauda drammatica* 'Donna de Paradiso' depicts Mary's lament over the dying Christ. It begins with a messenger (often identified as John the Apostle) confronting Mary and telling her of Judas' betrayal and Jesus' subsequent capture. Mary hastens to the foot of the cross and finds Jesus being crucified. The *lauda* finishes with Christ's death and Mary's heartfelt lament.

### Cast

Messenger - Jonny Wiles  
Mary - Rebecca Bowen  
Jesus - Liam McDonnell

Crowd - Lachlan Hughes (& al.  
- see below)

### The Text and Translation

This play will be performed in Italian. A translation is available on <https://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle/lamentation>

Audience participation: Anybody who feels confident is encouraged to join in the shouts of the crowd to crucify Jesus.

Mary: «O Pilato, non fare  
el figlio meo tormentare,  
ch'eo te pòzzo mustrare  
como a ttorto è accusato».

**Crowd: «Crucifige, crucifige!  
Omo che se fa rege,  
secondo la nostra lege  
contradice al senato».**

Mary: «Prego che mm'entennate,  
nel meo dolor pensate!  
Forsa mo vo mutate  
de que avete pensato».

**Crowd: «Traiàn for li latruni,  
che sian soi compagnuni;  
de spine s'encoroni,  
ché rege ss'è clamato!».**

Mary: Pilate, I beseech you, do Him no harm; I can show you that those who accuse Him lie.

Crowd: Crucify Him, crucify Him! According to our law He who claims to be king must be punished.

Mary: Listen to me, I beg of you, look at me. Have you ever seen any suffering like mine? Will you not be moved to pity?

Crowd: Bring out two thieves to be His companions; Crown the pretender, crown Him with thorns!

## 8. Harrowing of Hell (Medieval Germanists) - Crypt - 3:30pm

The Harrowing of Hell is a dramatic interpretation of the Christ's storming hell to release the souls of the faithful since Adam and Eve. The scene starts with the angels approaching hell, getting into a dramatic dialogue with Lucifer who tries in vain to keep the souls behind locked gates. Christ triumphs and takes Adam and Eve with him. To refill the empty space, Lucifer then sends out Satanas to capture him new souls from among the contemporary audience (watch out!), each of which have to confess their faults before being locked up.

### Cast

Lucifer - Linus Ubl	Animae - Anna Branford, Sam Dunnett,
Jhesus - Alex Peplow	Tiziana Imstepf, Andrea Huber, Chris-
Sathanas - Mai-Britt Wiechmann	toph Huber, Ed Wareham, Xuhui
Adam - Alyssa Steiner	Zhang, Marie Zöckler.
Eua - Jens Müller	Costumes - Mai-Britt Wiechmann and
Angeli - St Edmund Hall Chapel Choir:	Natascha Domeisen
Timothy Bourns, Olivia Payne, Oliver	
Riordan, Jack Spence & al.	

### Text

The play is performed in Middle High German. Read the [original text](#) (together with an English translation) of the play, taken from *Das Innsbrucker Osterspiel*, on <https://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle/harrowing-of-hell>

### About the Music

The music for the play was composed by Dr Andrew Cusworth, who writes: Like so many broadly creative things, this setting of the 'Tollite portas' text arose from an informal conversation over coffee - on this occasion at a coffee morning that for scholars takes place each week at the Bodleian Libraries' Centre for the Study of the Book, during which Henrike Lähnemann invited me to write a piece for the Oxford Medieval Mystery Cycle. In subsequent conversations, we discussed the approximate parameters for the piece: the 'Tollite portas' text, its context in the play, the context of the performance and the needs of the choir, all of which would be critical in the process of writing the piece. Concurrently, I perused existing settings of the text, best known to present-day audiences from its appearance in Handel's 'Messiah' ('Lift up your heads, O ye gates'). From all of this, I made a list of aims for the composition, seeking to write something: simple enough to be sung with relatively little rehearsal; that reflected the text; that would add dramatic impact in the context of the play; that allowed a certain amount of leeway in terms of time for movement and so on. Beyond these immediate concerns, I felt that whatever I produced should be recognisably contemporary, suitable for use in other contexts; I also thought that it would be fun to make (optional) use of the natural trumpet used ceremonially at St Edmund Hall. The piece is also available at [andrewcusworth.com/scores/tolliteportas.pdf](http://andrewcusworth.com/scores/tolliteportas.pdf).

Trumpet in C

Choir

Tol-li- te!\_\_

## 9. Resurrection (St Peter's Ensemble, University College London) - Tomb behind Church - 4pm

### Cast

Pilate/Angel - Marlow Stainfield  
 Caiaphas/Soldier 3 - Will Beynon  
 Annas/Soldier 2 - Iain Russell  
 Centurion/Soldier 1 - Jack Spencer

Mary 1 - Geraldine Curtis  
 Mary 2 - Ola Forman  
 Mary 3 - Zarima McDermott

### Production Team

Director - Eoin Bentick

With thanks to Poppy Crumpton and Emma Deshpande; to Preston Lofti for costume hire; and Marlow Stainfield for casting and rehearsal space

### About the Performance

“We have really been struck by the complexity of this piece. Without being too glib, it is a fascinating play to work with in an age of ‘fake news’. It is very hard to track the thought process of Soldier 1. He wakes up to see Jesus gone. He needs to lie so that Pilate doesn’t kill him. He goes along with the suggestion that a hundred men came and overpowered them. Then, he decides to tell the ‘sooth’. This truth is nothing but a hunch that Jesus rose alone. His descriptions of the resurrection to Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas are then extremely detailed and concordant with the Centurion’s descriptions of Jesus’s death. He is then, however, willing to drop this truth for a thousand pounds.

“By not casting a Jesus character and not visualising the resurrection itself, we have tried to recreate the feeling of the half-hunch, half-truth. As with Mary 1’s need to see the body of Jesus in comparison to the other Marys’ willingness to proclaim, the play is concerned with a willingness to believe without bodily proof. It is also concerned with the manipulation of truth and belief. It is hard not have a picture of certain public figures in mind with Pilate’s final ‘counsel’ about buying and selling truth.”

## 10. Judgement (St Edmund Hall) - Garden behind Church - 4:30pm

For the last play in the cycle, a group of Oxford students from various disciplines present their imagining of Judgement Day, when the good souls are to be taken to paradise while the evil are damned to an eternity of punishment. While the original sense of the story has been preserved, some of the details presented in this version differ, bringing the tale into the modern age to suggest who might be at risk if this cataclysmic event were to take place here and now. Featuring good and evil human souls, demons, an angel and Jesus himself, this play will bring the cycle - and time itself - to a very permanent end.

### Cast

Tutivillus - Alex Gunn	Devil - Dhea Bengardi
Devil - Amy Hemsworth	Jesus - Macks O'Byrne
Evil Soul - Ana Silvia Gheorghe	Evil Soul - Nikita Baryshnikov
Evil Soul - Ben Goldstein	Director - Emma Hawkins
Good Soul - Bertie McIntosh	
Script adaptors - Alex Gunn, Amy Hemsworth and Benedict Mulcare	

### About the Performance

After our farce-style performance last term in the University Drama Cuppers, *The Last Judgement* has presented our group with a completely new genre of drama to grapple with. Nevertheless we've enjoyed working on this play and can't wait to show it to others. In order to make the text more suited to our group we've had fun altering it so that it's true to the original message but with the humour and joy that we've found in rehearsals, and we hope you feel this too.

### A final word from the Directors

The whole performance will be filmed; while the camera will naturally focus on the actors, occasional glimpses of the audience might occur. If you would not like to be visible in any footage, please let the steward at the entrance know! There you can also sign up for the medieval studies newsletter and to be notified when the films are uploaded to [torch.ox.ac.uk/medievalstudies](http://torch.ox.ac.uk/medievalstudies) and to [seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle](http://seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle).

We hope you enjoyed the performances as much as we did putting them together! We would be very grateful for any feedback you could provide. There is a visitors book at the entrance (and any feedback will earn you a hot cross bun!) but we would also be delighted for any feedback via email to [henrike.laehnemann@seh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:henrike.laehnemann@seh.ox.ac.uk), mentioning on twitter under the hashtag [#OxfordMysteries](https://twitter.com/OxfordMysteries) or simply a chat after the performance - there will be a picnic in the churchyard for all participants from 5pm!

## Coming Up: Access Hall Areas



# Access Hall Areas

Saturday 4 May / 11am-5pm  
Sunday 5 May / 2-6pm

**St Edmund Hall**  
Queen's Lane, Oxford, OX1 4AR

**All welcome - all ages - free entry!**  
[www.seh.ox.ac.uk](http://www.seh.ox.ac.uk)

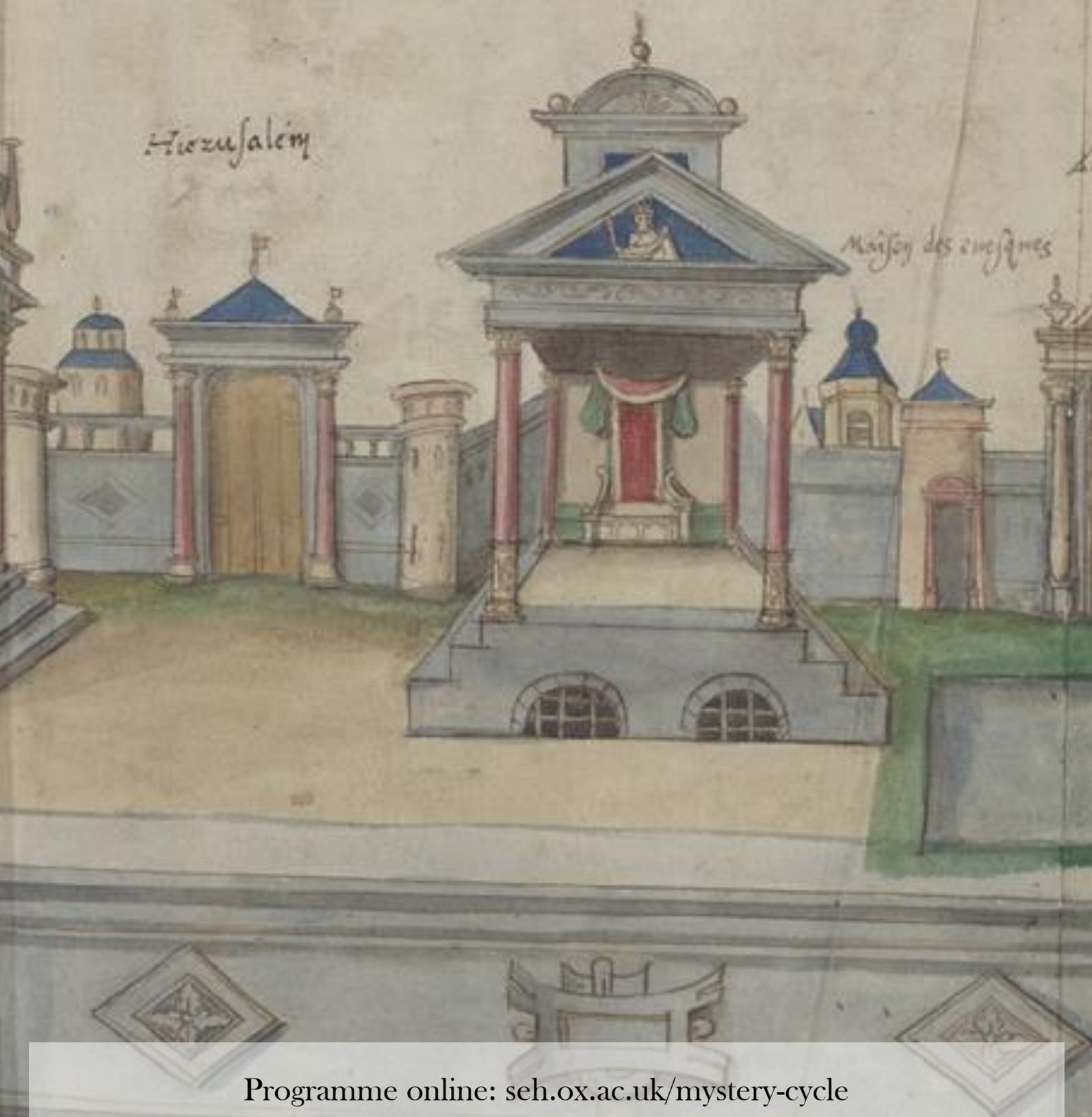
Access Hall Areas is a brand new event for 2019. We will be opening up St Edmund Hall to the wider Oxford community, showcasing the College's 'Hall spirit' and the diverse day-to-day life of the members of Teddy Hall.

We have an exciting schedule of activities taking place across the May Bank Holiday weekend on Saturday 4 May (11am-5pm) and Sunday 5 May (2pm-6pm).

There will be a variety of interactive stalls for visitors of all ages to get involved with, e.g. to try your hand at printing with a historic printing press. Throughout the days there will be Teddy Talks (10 minute research presentations), College Tours and various Performances, including the St Edmund Hall Chapel Choir as featured in the Harrowing of Hell as angels.

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Programme online: [seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle](http://seh.ox.ac.uk/mystery-cycle)

Twitter: @OxMedStud #OxfordMysteries