



**PURITAN PLEASURE
WHEEL MEET AGAIN**

Pedalling beside the Thames while fours and pairs row past, powerfully pulling their oars through the water, is a quintessential English summer moment. To one side, horses graze in a meadow; on the other bank are the rowing clubs of Oxford University colleges.

I am on a guided bike ride past the dreaming spires and through the backwaters on a sunny Sunday. We start along the Isis, as the river is known here, following a newly surfaced path. A narrowboat chugs by. The captain sports a black cap and smokes a pipe. He looks like Popeye. On our three-hour guided tour we follow the river, the Oxford Canal and the streets. We see Jericho and its canal-side boatyard. It is now boarded up, ready to be turned into luxury flats – against the wishes of nearby residents who tried unsuccessfully to stop British Waterways selling the site.

We reach Port Meadow, the oldest common in a city. Freeman of Oxford have the right to graze one horse and one cow on its 400 acres, explains our guide, Mike. Posters are pinned

to a fence: they bear pictures of horses that have been impounded by the city council until their owners provide evidence that they are freemen.

In the centre of town, we pass college after graceful college, all pretty as a picture. The Radcliffe Camera and the Bodleian Library are swarming with tourists. The Sheldonian Theatre is having its ceiling renovated at a cost of £1m. Mike leads us through alleyways to the Turf Tavern. We bump down the cobbles of Merton Street. We see the expansive lawns of the gardens of Trinity College and peer through the gate of the Oxford Union. Everywhere there are bike lanes and locked bicycles. Oxford is a two-wheel-friendly place. If you've never explored it this way, these new tours give you the chance.

Paul Miles

Capital Sport's three-hour guided Sunday bike tour costs £20 including bike hire. Depart Cyclo Analysts bike shop, 150 Cowley Road, at 10am, 01296 631671. www.capital-sport.co.uk www.visitoxford.org