

# The Trinity Hall Accommodation Guide

## Introduction

Welcome to this accommodation guide! Over the next few pages we hope to provide you with unbiased and practical advice on Cambridge accommodation to help you choose whether to live in college or out privately. We draw on our collective experience of living in and out to share our perspectives on the different living options you have in Cambridge, and some important ways that you can optimise your stay. We have divided our booklet into three sections: 'Living In'; 'Living Out'; and, 'Renting Hacks'. Then, we talk briefly about the MCR resource to help you find the right housemates (if renting privately), and describe our own housing experiences in Cambridge. Whether you choose to live out or in, we think you can have a brilliant time and make the most of this great city!

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Trinity Hall MCR Accommodation Advisory Sub-Committee (ASC)

### **Disclaimer**

Whilst we've made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this guide, we cannot be held responsible for any mistakes herein, nor for the consequences of any action taken as a result of reading this guide.

# 1. Living In

## The Benefits and Costs

For many people, living in college accommodation is what makes their time at Trinity Hall special. It offers the opportunity to live with fellow students (all accommodation for the MCR is graduates-only) and to have a straightforward transition into college life. It's the easiest option if you're moving to Cambridge from another city or from abroad because all the rooms are furnished (including bed linen) – and you only need to provide kitchen equipment like plates and chopping boards, all of which are sold in the supermarkets in the first weeks of term. You only pay one bill every term that includes both rent and utility costs. College provides a maintenance team so you won't ever have to worry about dripping taps or a broken oven. Part of your rent also covers a cleaning service, so you don't even have to vacuum your floor!

Of course, there are downsides. College only provides single beds (unless you move into couples accommodation) and living and socialising with MCR members can get claustrophobic for some, particularly around exam time! Whilst you might assume living with college people means instant friends, it's not automatic and you can make just as many by living out and actively participating in the MCR.

Most Trinity Hall graduate accommodation is at two sites: Wychfield and Bateman Street. In addition, college also provides a limited amount of couples' accommodation at Herrick House on the Wychfield site.

## Wychfield Site

The scenic Wychfield Site is nestled between Huntingdon Road and Storey's Way. Grads, undergrads and fellows all make their home there amid the beautiful Wychfield gardens (so fancy the Open Garden scheme has an event every year). It's especially convenient if your department is on the West Cambridge site (e.g. Maths), and you're also only an 8-minute cycle to the College MCR (which is located in the centre of town). You're on the outskirts of the city centre so you're limited in local amenities to a few small supermarkets. In return though you get the college sports ground, which includes a small gym (mainly for stretching and erging (machine rowing for the uninitiated) – but it also has a few machines) and football fields, a computer room and music practice space. There's a porter's lodge onsite where you

can collect your post. The porters also provide 24-hour security, first aid and general Cambridge advice.

### **New Builds**

As you can guess from the imaginative name, these houses are the newest in Wychfield. Rooms are relatively expensive but each has an en suite bathroom, modern furnishings and equally modern fittings. Four bedrooms share each kitchen and the rooms are light and airy. Each house also has a spacious lounge and dining area on the bottom floor. The New Builds are conveniently located adjacent to the Porters' Lodge and MCR members are generally housed in the same block. The vast majority of New Builds residents are very happy with their accommodation.

2015/2016 Rent Prices: £128 - £134 per week.

### **Lancelot Fleming (LF) and Walter Christie (WC)**

The more reasonably priced of the Wychfield grad accommodation; LF and WC were built in the 90s and provide window-filled housing. Furnishings are somewhat tired but clean, and there's a large common room in each of the houses that encourages socialising. Rooms are organised in clusters of five with a shared kitchen for each group. Bathrooms and showers are generally shared between two to three people. Bathroom facilities are functional, but generally do not receive any natural light. The amount of natural light in bedrooms is variable with east and west facing rooms receiving the most (although residents on the bottom floor may all have less light because of Wychfield's lush foliage). Being close to Huntington Road means it's an easy downhill cycle to town, but means you'll also likely hear faint traffic noise as you're falling asleep. In both LF and WC there are 'penthouse' rooms that offer a loft with double bed, balcony and extra floor space - in return for the highest Wychfield rent. Whilst very comfortable the rooms are also the furthest of any from the bathrooms, so something to bear in mind if you're inclined to use the bathroom a lot!

2015/2016 Rent Prices: £108 - £130 per week.

(Split-level penthouse £150 per week)

### **Bateman Street**

Close to the train station, Bateman Street provides budget accommodation in terraced housing. Location wise, it's convenient for those working in south Cambridge departments

such as the Education Faculty and Addenbrooke's Hospital. It's also just a 5-minute flat cycle (20 minute walk) to college. Rent is cheap (for Cambridge!) but you get what you pay for; furnishings are tired and overdue an upgrade. Nevertheless, not having a porter on site gives the houses a more liberated feel. The gardens of the houses are joined up and have been paved, so it's good for barbeques in the summer. College intends to take Bateman St out of use from the 2016/2017 academic year, subject to the completion of its new WYNG Gardens facility.

2015/2016 Rent Prices: £87 - £102 per week.

### **Herrick House**

Herrick House is Trinity Hall's couples accommodation. It is generally considered good value for money. Flats comprise a double bedroom, bathroom, large wardrobe, kitchenette and multi-purpose living/lounge area. The building's somewhat retro façade is nicely juxtaposed with its leafy surrounds. Whilst an older building, Herrick House has won awards for its functionality – its storage spaces and retractable bedroom/lounge wall – are particularly well thought out. Another benefit is that each house comes with its own window seat, ideal for long afternoons spent reading and sipping coffee. Flats come almost fully furnished (you will have to buy your own kitchen utensils), and are generally functional.

2015/2016 Rent Prices: £200 - £210 per week.

## **2. LIVING OUT**

### **The Benefits**

Having read about the advantages of living in college accommodation, it's time to also consider some of the many benefits of living out of college. Top of the list has to be independent living and the sense of normalcy it brings. Living in the wider local community can help balance what can be the very academic-focused (and sometimes slightly neurotic) "bubble" life of a Cambridge graduate student. The second key benefit is extra living space that you can genuinely call your own. Renting an apartment or house will, most of the time, mean you get your own living room, kitchen and perhaps even a garden (in addition to your

own room of course), all of which you can personalise to taste. Oh, and you'll likely get your own double bed! Perhaps related to both the previous two points, renting privately also means more flexibility in how and when you use your space – there is generally more freedom to invite people over, have parties or have guests stay over.

Another factor is location. While Wychfield is set in beautiful gardens, it is an 8-minute cycle out of town and quite far from the train station and many departments and faculties (especially Addenbrooke's). Cambridge has many beautiful nooks and sub-cultures, so there is plenty of scope to really find a location that fits you. Last but certainly not least, you can choose who you want to share your living space with. While living with your best friends may not always be the best idea, sharing a flat/house with the kinds of people who are right for you can be a really fun and rewarding experience! More on choosing housemates later...

## The Costs

Living out is not necessarily more expensive (although *average* private rent prices are more expensive). In fact, it can be particularly good value if you choose an unfurnished place in a location that's not right in the centre of town. Everyone's experience will be slightly different, and there are many variables involved. You can get a sense of this from Julie, Matt and Sarah's stories at the end of this booklet.

At the same time, you should be mindful that there are quite a few indirect costs of living outside of college. For example, if you rent a place through a real estate agency, you will have to pay a hefty deposit (at least a full month's rent + a deposit holding fee), a tenancy administration fee, check out charges, and probably end-of-tenancy cleaning fees too. For an example of agency fees, see <http://www.rah.co.uk/lettings/tenant-fees>

In addition to financial costs, renting privately also requires extra time and effort. If you live out, you will have to arrange to pay your own bills (i.e. water, gas, electricity, internet, phone, TV licence, etc). This will require coordination with your housemates, for example to set up monthly direct debit payments. If you move into an unfurnished place, you will also need to factor in the time required to furnish your home. Finally, while Cambridge is generally a very safe place, it has to be acknowledged that college-owned accommodation does have more security measures, including porter's lodges, gated entrances and CCTV.

## Finding a House

By now we hope that you are developing a clearer sense on whether you would like to live in or out of Trinity Hall accommodation. Below is a list of websites for those of you who are considering moving out. In addition to these resources, do be mindful that some of the best rental arrangements come about through word of mouth! Don't be afraid to reach out to your friends and colleagues in the first instance.

***The University of Cambridge Accommodation Service.*** You will need your Cambridge Student ID to sign up (email the Trinity Hall Tutorial Office to confirm when you will receive this). It generally features houses that are tailored to the student experience. In addition, by using it you avoid agency fees. Advertisers are generally well vetted, but it is still essential that you inspect any prospective houses before you sign on the dotted line.

Website: [www.accommodation.cam.ac.uk](http://www.accommodation.cam.ac.uk)

***Gumtree.*** Less regulated than the University's Accommodation Service, but also with more variety. It is possible to find a gem, but you may have to wait patiently for something to come up.

Website: <http://www.gumtree.com/flats-houses>

***Spare Room.*** Subletting often gives you many of the benefits of living privately, with less responsibility for managing the property yourself. Often sub-letters value household harmony over getting market rent for the room, and may thus offer some really good deals. However, you do enter the housemate lucky dip. Most have really good experiences. Some, not so much. Whilst sub-letters also advertise on the Accommodation Service and Gumtree, we recommend you start with Spare Room.

Website: [www.spareroom.com](http://www.spareroom.com)

***Commercial Websites.*** There are a variety of estate agencies in town that rent to students. Whilst there are additional costs associated with a commercial agent, houses are generally professionally cleaned and in full working order. In addition, the agents you deal with are experts at providing client-tailored rental experiences. A good place to start is with a price comparison website (the majority of major estate agents advertise on these). There are also

Cambridge specific websites where you can find subletting opportunities as well as whole houses to rent.

Comparison websites: [www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk); [www.zoopla.co.uk](http://www.zoopla.co.uk);

Cambridge specific: <http://www.brettward.co.uk/canb/index.html>

## Choosing Your Housemates

You can generally choose who you live with when renting privately. Living with friends or friendly people can make your house feel like a real ‘home’. Alternatively, you can live with housemates who you have little interaction with, which affords more privacy and “boundaries”. The key factors to consider when evaluating housemates are: finance (can they pay rent on time every month?), hygiene, social and work habits (do you have different work/play patterns?), partners (will you end up living with their partner too?) and student-status (non-students make the household pay council tax (although you will still be exempt); students may spend a lot of time at home). Perhaps most important is choosing people who are going to have the same length of stay as you (if not longer than you). The last thing you want is people coming and going constantly; it’s very disruptive and creates a lot of loose ends to tie up in terms of finances and time spent looking for new housemates.

There are a variety of ways you can find housemates: ask within your programme/department and college; Spare Room; and, Trinity Hall’s own ‘Housemates’ Facebook page (more below). Remember, the ideal housemate relationship is functional and trusting. Your housemate does not have to be your best friend. Oh and it might sound obvious, but do make sure you meet your prospective housemates before signing a contract with them (don’t just rely on email or Facebook)!

## General Advice

As you can see, there is a bit extra to do to set up your private accommodation. However, the benefits can also be enormous. If you value a sense of normalcy, larger and more diverse living spaces, independence and living with friends then you may find living privately especially rewarding. Here are three more pointers that can really help make your time living out amazing:

1. Don’t be shy about money with your housemates.
2. Stay on good terms with your landlord. Be the bigger person, but fight your corner!

3. Make sure you have a bit of extra money on call for a deposit.

### 3. Private Renting Life Hacks

For the uninitiated, negotiating the Cambridge rental market can seem pretty tough. The aim of this section is to offer practical advice on everything from doing a house inspection to finding the right linen for your bed. These handy hints come from our personal experiences. We hope they help!

***Important Criteria when Inspecting a House.*** There are many things that are up to you, like location and the size of your bedroom. However, we think there are six commonly neglected essentials that are important for you to check in every house you visit.

1	The shower runs with good pressure and is consistently hot. Trust us, this is NOT a given.	
2	The walls are insulated and the windows are double or triple glazed.	
3	There is no mould (make sure you check the cupboards).	
4	The kitchen is well ventilated (e.g. fan above the stove, sufficient windows).	
5	Washing and cooking facilities are both sufficient and functional. Make sure there is a clothes dryer!	
6	The building is structurally sound (check for big cracks in the walls and ceiling). You don't want to be held liable for a building that is months from being condemned!	

***Move Quickly.*** The Cambridge rental market is very active, especially in the months leading up to Michaelmas Term (which starts around the beginning of October). If you see something that you like, be prepared to secure it with a deposit almost straight away. There are great deals to be had, provided you are ready to capitalise at a moment's notice!

***Endear Yourself to Your Prospective Landlord.*** Good value properties are usually in high demand. When you speak with the landlord and inspect their house, it is always good to show that you will be a responsible tenant (e.g. arrive to the inspection on time) and will be friendly and easy to deal with. Also, do tell them of any ideas you might have about improving the house during your stay. For example, one of our friends mentioned he'd like to

tidy the overgrown garden - which allowed him to secure the house ahead of the three other groups who had already made offers.

**Utilities.** Once you've signed your tenancy agreement, it's important your house is liveable. Check with your landlord to confirm the previous gas and electricity, and Internet suppliers. Cambridge Water supplies the water. You will have to call these suppliers to transfer the existing accounts to your name, and also provide up-to-date meter readings. Regarding gas and electricity, it is possible to change suppliers and there are a number of helpful price comparison websites to facilitate (e.g. <http://www.ukpower.co.uk/>). Another thing to note is that energy prices can really add up, especially if you're living in older houses (which are often poorly insulated) or if you're using a lot of appliances. You generally get a discount for paying by direct debit.

**Managing Your Liability.** As well as setting up utilities, it's important to document the state of your house as soon as you arrive. This will help you to secure the full return of your deposit at the end of your tenancy. Be as thorough as you can. It is often useful to take a comprehensive video of your property with commentary, as well as extensive photos. Make sure you also store the footage securely, and that it is backed up! You should also provide written commentary on any additional concerns that you inherited from the previous tenants. Finally, when maintenance issues arise, make sure you raise them with your landlord right away. Your landlord will appreciate this, and this way they won't be surprised by any unexpected damage when they come to inspect your house (inspections can happen routinely, or just at the end of your tenancy).

**Your Deposit.** The landlord is required by law to put your deposit in the Government-backed Tenancy Deposit Scheme. This scheme ensures that if there are any disputes, your deposit is protected until there is resolution. At the end of your tenancy, you and your landlord will agree on how much of the deposit you will get back and your landlord must pay this to you within 10 days. There is more information here: <https://www.gov.uk/tenancy-deposit-protection>.

**TV Licence.** If you wish to own a TV, you are required by law to pay for a UK TV licence. The cost is £145.50 per year for a standard colour TV. The fee helps to fund some TV channels (the BBC is fully funded by the licence fee, and other terrestrial channels receive

some funding), as well as access to a range of online content. There is more information here: <http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/>. Note you also have to log your desire *not* to have a TB through the same website. Make sure you do this at the beginning of your tenancy.

**Council Tax.** University students are exempt from paying Council Tax, but must lodge a waiver through <https://www.gov.uk/council-tax>. Part of this waiver requires written confirmation of your student status from College. You can easily get a letter confirming as much from the College Tutorial Office. Do end them an email in advance of when you need the letter because it can sometimes take up to 2 weeks to process your request.

**Furniture For Your House.** You may wish to buy additional furniture for your house (or all furnishings if you're in an unfurnished house). The cheapest options are almost always Freecycle ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)) and Gumtree ([www.gumtree.com](http://www.gumtree.com)). However, many suppliers on these platforms require you to pick up the items yourself (although some sellers on Gumtree offer delivery), which can pose logistical problems. Alternatively, the British Heart Foundation in Cambridge offers discounted second-hand furniture with delivery (<https://www.bhf.org.uk/shop/our-local-shops/furniture-and-electrical-shops>). Another good alternative for large purchases is to order online, from sites like [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

Also, do make sure you factor in the extra cost and time of furnishing. It might take up to a month to furnish everything from light bulbs to sofas! (It took Julie about a month to furnish her unfurnished house; Matt took a couple of weeks to settle into his furnished house, which included doing the garden up to make it BBQ friendly (he's Australian)).

**Smaller Furnishings.** Primark (<http://www.primarkonlineshop.net/primark-cambridge-store/>) offers the cheapest linen in town, and you can purchase additional small furnishings from the big supermarkets (most also offer delivery). There are also lots of charity stores that may offer particularly good deals, many of which are located near the Grafton Centre (<https://www.graftoncentre.co.uk/>) and along Mill Road (e.g. the Salvation Army's charity store *Sally Ann's*, <http://camsa.org.uk/>). Otherwise, ordering online from Amazon etc. is again an option.

**Good Buys.** Do be sure to buy a first aid kit and a basic toolbox. Both will definitely come in handy throughout the year. If you're living on a busy street, it could also be worthwhile to

invest in earplugs or even a white noise generator (e.g. the Marpac Dohm). If you think you might struggle to get through the dreary winter months, consider buying a happy lamp.

***Get a letter of recommendation.*** Landlords will often ask for references before offering you a room to check that you've been a good tenant when you've rented previously. If you're moving out of Trinity Hall accommodation, college will often provide a reference for you. Just email staff at the Tutorial Office in advance to get the blessing.

## 4. Trinity Hall MCR Accommodation Facebook Group

The MCR has set up a Facebook page for members of Trinity Hall to join. It is dedicated to putting those interested in renting privately in contact with one another. It can be used both to seek advice, and to find prospective housemates. The page is moderated by the Trinity Hall MCR Committee.

Webpage: <https://www.facebook.com/TitHallLink>

## 5. Our Stories

Everyone's renting experience is different. It can be useful to learn about others' experiences to get a sense for the kinds of experiences they have had, and thus the kinds of experiences you might come to have. We have each been in Cambridge for at least two years and lived in both College and Private accommodation. We hope you find our experiences useful (but do also remember that they may be unrepresentative).

### Julie's Experience

I have lived in two houses since moving out of college accommodation (Walter Christie, Wychfield). I found the first house with friends via the Cambridge Accommodation Service. It took a relatively short time, the location was amazing and the price equally so. The catch was that it was only a six-months tenancy. Our landlord was a lovely Cambridge academic and we didn't have to go through an agency (so no fees and just one month's deposit). The house was already furnished, which was very handy having just moved out of college and not having any furniture. The hot water boiler was the only other drawback – it was very temperamental!

I found my housemates by asking around college and at my department. Two months prior to the end of our tenancy I started looking for another house. It took the full two months to find the ideal place, which was a rather stressful period. House viewing was particularly time consuming because the agencies often have limited timeslots and there was a lot of pressure to view the houses quickly (good houses go fast!). Being able to view the house was essential, and having a bike and a flexible schedule helped me a lot.

After two months of searching, we stumbled upon an unfurnished small house near the Trinity Hall Boat Club. It had a fantastic location and great price, so we snapped it up immediately. To secure the house we paid a security deposit straight away and had to quickly find a third person to share the house with. We wanted another student who we both knew, and someone who was staying at least as long as we were in Cambridge. Luckily we found her! After moving in, the priority was to set up utilities. Water and power were running, we just had to let the suppliers know we had moved in. Annoyingly, there was a lag before we could set up the Internet. We all had to sign the housing contract, provide an inventory of house contents and have a background check, which was time-consuming and required a lot of coordination.

The house was unfurnished when we arrived, but we were able to fill it almost completely from freecycle. We don't interact directly with our landlord but deal with an agency. Despite the hassle, we are really happy with our arrangements!

## **Matt's Experience**

In my first year in Cambridge I opted to live in College. Coming from Australia, it was by far the most convenient option. All I had to do was pick up my key from the Wychfield Porter's Lodge and unpack my bags. All of my housing charges were added to my College bill. I lived in the Launcelot Fleming House at Wychfield, where I made a load of good friends. My accommodation was very comfortable.

However, towards the end of my first year I decided that I'd like to spend my second year living privately. I'd grown tired of the cycle of tenants who came through during the summer

months and wanted to have my own kitchen and living room. I also liked the idea of picking my housemates, having a double bed and living closer to town. Around the time I was evaluating my housing options a then peer (now friend) posted on our program's Facebook group, asking for prospective sharers. I responded and after a few brief Skype conversations we decided to live together. We teamed up with a third guy, who had also responded to my friend's post.

I was the only one of us already in Cambridge, so I took responsibility for looking for houses. I inspected a number of places advertised both privately and through the University Accommodation Service. We ended up settling for a Victorian terrace house advertised on the University Accommodation Service, which was right off Parker's Piece in the centre of town. Aside from a great location, we each got big bedroom and ample kitchen space. Additionally, our landlord was very accommodating; he allowed us to defer our rent payments on multiple occasions to give us time for our scholarship stipends to come in. House maintenance was also done in a timely fashion. However, there were also trade offs. The location meant we each paid £625 per month. In addition, the house wasn't well insulated and thus our energy bills were high, particularly during the winter months. Nevertheless, I've had a tremendous experience living out. My housemates are now amongst my best friends in Cambridge and by virtue of its location, our place has become a social hub for our broader friendship group.

## **Sarah's Experience**

I lived in Walter Christie for my MPhil year and loved living with a large group of peers who soon became best friends; we're all still in touch now! But when it came to starting my PhD, I wanted a change; I'd found living in college accommodation too intense at times and liked the idea of living with non-students who kept typical 9-5 schedules. I now live in a 4-person house-share with young professionals and really love it, especially the sacredness of our Friday evenings. Our house is near to the station and the vibrant Mill Road. It's also just a short cycle to my department and the MCR. Moving in with people I didn't know was daunting but it didn't take long to settle in. We're an eclectic bunch – some I don't have much in common with besides a desire to have a tidy house, whilst others have become great friends. I have a big bedroom and only share a bathroom with one other. As for communal space, we have a large kitchen-diner and a living room. My landlord sorts out our small

garden and has always been really helpful if we've had a problem in the house. Whilst I've had to put in more effort to feel part of college, I really enjoy living out for the freedom, normality and the opportunity to meet non-students it brings!