St Hilda’s was founded by Dorothea Beale in 1893 as part of the movement to promote women’s education within Oxford University. It was the last of the Oxford colleges to go mixed in 2008. Today, our diverse College community includes around 400 undergraduate and 200 graduate students.

Hall Building

The grounds of St Hilda’s have a hallowed history stretching back to the Middle Ages, when Edmund Rich, the first Oxford don to be made a saint, used to wander through Cowley fields. Hall Building was the site of St Edmund’s sacred well from the 13th to the 17th Century. A chapel can be seen on the grounds from maps of that period.

In 1893, Dorothea Beale bought Hall Building, Cowley House, as Hall Building was originally called, is the oldest part of the College. It has had a distinguished list of owners and visitors since 1783, when Humphrey Sibthorpe, a botanist who famously gave the same course for nearly 40 years and his son John, who set off on a quixotic adventure to record the 700 plants he had seen in a 1st century book, to Benjamin Brodie, the king’s surgeon and his son Benjamin, the Don Quixote of Chemistry and beeswax fanatic. Hall Building also had visitors such as Gladstone’s cabinet minister, Sir William Harcourt and the writers George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. The spectacular foyer - Regency Square - is the heart of the original Cowley House, built in the 18th century. It has carvings by the sculptors who decorated Oxford’s Natural History Museum. Kathleen Major Library and Archive is named after a former Principal of the College whose legacy in 2002 funded a modern extension. Other donors sponsored a special garden in honour of English Fellow, Anne Elliot. The JCR Bar and Buttery, opened in 2014, is the social centre for student life. The MCR for graduates above the Lodge was built in 1971.

Milham Ford

Milham Ford was first mentioned in 1512 as a mill with a ford, allowing traffic across to Christ Church meadows. It was a school until 1938 and during the war the building was used for housing evacuated children and as an ARP post. In 1945, it became the architecture department of the College of Technology, Art and Commerce. The building was acquired by St Hilda’s in 1958 and it is now home to students and Fellows’ rooms, as well as the College Chapel.

The first College Chapel was a room on the top floor of Hall Building. By 1921, the Chapel could no longer accommodate all the students. In 1924, a ‘temporary’ pre-fabricated Chapel was constructed in the garden of South Building. This was dedicated in 1925 and stood for another 45 years. The Chapel was moved to make way for the construction of Garden Building. A room in Milham Ford became its new home in 1969. South Building

In 1920, St Hilda’s leased from Christ Church Cherwell Hall, a teacher training college, which was originally built as Cowley Grange in 1879 for Augustus Vernon Harcourt, Christ Church don, model for the White Knight in Through the Looking Glass, and nephew of one of Gladstone’s great cabinet ministers – Sir Vernon Harcourt. The College finally acquired the house and grounds in 1949. The house was later remodelled to provide students’ and Fellows’ rooms and a Dining Hall and became known as South Building.

Wolfson Building was opened in 1964, thanks to a grant from the Wolfson Foundation. Garden Building is an additional residential block between South and Wolfson Buildings. It was designed by Peter and Alison Smithson and formally opened in 1971. Christina Barratt Building is our newest accommodation building and was opened in 2015.

Jacqueline du Pré Music Building

This building commemorates the contribution made by Jacqueline du Pré, who was an Honorary Fellow of St Hilda’s. Opened in 1995, the JdP is Oxford’s first purpose-built concert hall since the time of Handel.