

## Oxford University Summer School for Adults

Title: The Architectural Secrets of Oxford's Classical Buildings

Dates: Week 4, 1-8 August 2026

Tutor: Robert Adam



### Course Overview

Classical architecture is based on a tradition expressed in every classical building, old or new. The composition of classical buildings has developed alongside the tradition and we will learn from old and new examples, both to understand the work of past architects and take this forward into contemporary design.

Alongside the development of composition, a rich vocabulary of symbol has evolved. Symbols had specific meaning in classical architecture and understanding them enlightens us about architecture of each period including our own. Oxford is a rich repository of composition and symbolism in architecture for teaching and experimenting with new classical design.

The course will look analyse Oxford architecture to see how the original architects composed the design and the often-forgotten meanings they put into them. There will be guest lectures from practitioners on how they compose their buildings and from academics on the study of symbols.

Students will finish with an essay or a design of their own.

### Course Outline

<b>Seminar 1</b> Sun, 9.00 am – 10.30am	Introduction to the Course, students and tutors
<b>Seminar 2</b> Sun, 11.00 am – 12.30pm	Classical Architecture and the Orders, an introduction.
<b>Seminar 3</b> Mon, 9.00 am – 10.30am	Symbolism and Classical Architecture.
<b>Seminar 4</b> Mon, 11.00 am – 12.30pm	1. From antiquity to the present, the evolution of Classical Architecture 2. How Oxford's Classical Architecture represents classicism and has changed over time.
<b>Seminar 5</b> Tue, 9.00 am – 12.30am	Field trip, looking at Oxford's classical buildings 1.
<b>Seminar 6</b> Tue, 14.30 am – 16.30pm	Field trip, looking at Oxfords' classical buildings 2.
<b>Seminar 7</b> Wed, 9.00 am – 10.30am	The analysis of the composition of key classical buildings in Oxford.
<b>Seminar 8</b> Wed, 11.00 am – 12.30pm	1. Sharing ideas behind the meaning and symbolism of key classical buildings in Oxford. 2. Analysis and design.
<b>Seminar 9</b> Thu, 9.00 am – 10.30am	Compositional and symbolic ideas from students
<b>Seminar 10</b> Thu, 11.00 am – 12.30pm	Compositional and symbolic ideas from students
<b>Seminar 11</b> Fri, 9.00 am – 10.30am	Review and discussion of student compositions
<b>Seminar 12</b> Fri, 11.00 am – 12.30pm	Course review

## Tutor

Professor Robert Adam has practiced architecture for 45 years and has an international reputation as one of the leading exponents of contextual urbanism and modern traditional design. In 1992 he founded ADAM Architecture, now the largest architecture practice specialising in traditional design in Europe. He has written six books, including a textbook on classical architecture and an analysis of how globalisation has affected world architecture, and is a regular contributor of papers, articles and chapters to books, journals and newspapers. He has won numerous prizes including the prestigious Richard H. Driehaus Prize, for “the highest ideals of traditional and classical architecture in contemporary society”. Robert holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Westminster and a doctorate from Oxford Brookes University.

## Course Aim

This course aims to give students an exceptional depth of understanding of classical architecture.

## Course Objectives

The course will enable students to read the composition and symbolism of classical buildings. For those with drafting skills, to design using compositional techniques and include symbolic meaning. For those without graphic skills, to describe compositional techniques and analyse symbolic meaning.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be expected to understand:

- The principles of classical architecture.
- The history of classical architecture.
- The evolution and response to social change in classical architecture.
- Compositional principles in classical architecture.

## Recommended Reading

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publisher
Robert Adam	1990	Classical Architecture: a complete handbook	Viking
John Summerson	1980	The Classical Language of Architecture	Thames and Hudson
James Steven Curl	2002	Classical Architecture	Batsford
J.J. Coulton	2014	Ancient Greek Architects at Work	Cornell University Press

## Assessment

Students are required to submit pre-course and on-course assignments as follows:

### *Pre-course assignment (c. 1500 words):*

Write about one or two classical buildings that you have visited or that greatly interest you. Discuss their location and history, provide some illustrations and explain what it is about the architecture and features of the buildings that interests you.

**Please note that the submission for the pre-course essay is Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2026 and should be submitted as Word format to [oussa@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:oussa@conted.ox.ac.uk).**

**Also complete the Declaration of Authorship or the Assignment Cover Sheet form and add it at the beginning of your essay.**

### *On-course assignment (c. 1000 words):*

To be agreed upon with your tutor on arrival.