

The Knee Building (formerly known as New Building)

The first-year student accommodation building opposite Chavasse is now called **The Knee Building**.

In case you are (reasonably!) wondering, ‘Why is it called The Knee Building?’, here’s what lies behind its name.

Has it always been called The Knee Building?

When it opened in 1989, this student accommodation building was called ‘New Building’. This was intended to be a temporary name until a better one was found. But the place-holder name, ‘New Building’, then accidentally got stuck for the next 36 years.¹

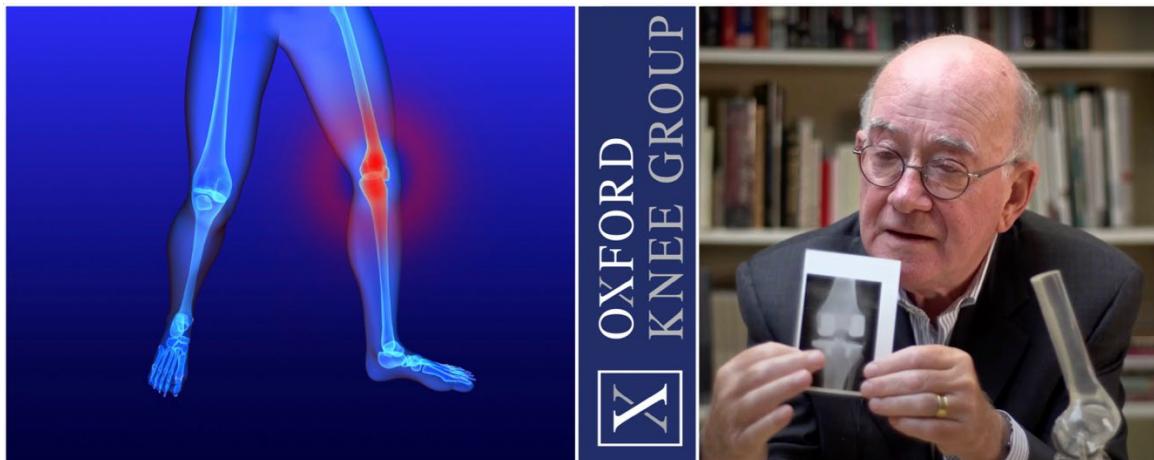
Last year in St Peter’s College we opened two new student accommodation buildings, Damazer House and Westfield House. Since these buildings were then newer than the building that used to be called ‘New Building’, this started to cause some confusion, prompting us to think that it was time to find another name for ‘New Building’.

‘The Knee’ pays tribute both to a life-changing invention that was made by an academic fellow of the College, Professor John O’Connor, and to the achievements of the first Master of St Peter’s, Christopher Chavasse. You can read more about both below.

John O’Connor

Professor John O’Connor was the Fellow and Tutor in Engineering at St Peter’s from 1964 to 2001. He was a well-loved tutor and colleague, and his work has had world-wide impact. Professor O’Connor died in 2024.

Professor O’Connor co-invented the ‘Oxford Knee’, a radical new idea for a replacement knee joint which has given renewed life and mobility to over a million people worldwide through knee replacement surgery. His work is a high-profile example of the ground-breaking research conducted by Peter’s academics.



Professor John O’Connor explains the transformative workings of The Oxford Knee.

Christopher Chavasse

Revd Christopher Chavasse was the first Master of St Peter’s. He was also an Olympian and was decorated in World War I. Following an accident he lost his lower leg and was fitted with an artificial knee and lower leg. His artificial knee and lower leg were no impediment to his ongoing achievements and became a recognisable part of his identity. This also prompted him to take a special interest in the welfare of others who had also undergone amputations. His artificial limb is celebrated in the East

¹ By way of comparison, the name New College, which is over 600 years old, has acquired its own anachronistic charm over time. At only 36 years old, our New Building was still within the period in which it was feasible to replace its place-holder name without overturning hundreds of years of history in the process.

Window of the College Chapel, in a small image in the stained glass window above the altar, as part of a wider tribute to our first Master.



An image of Chavasse's prosthetic knee and lower leg, in the East Window of the College Chapel.

What significance does 'The Knee Building' have for College?

As well as adding a little humour to the estate, the name reminds us of the creative solutions that academic research can provide to real-world problems and that disability need be no bar to achievement.