I've been in Oxford, England's old university city, now for two weeks. I don't have a car, but I don't need one. I walk everywhere.

Our apartment is close to Oxford's Shambles, mishmash of Harry Potter colleges, medieval walls and churches, gardens, playing fields, riverside meadows, pools, shops and eateries – accessible easily by a maze of cobbled streets, alleys and pathways.

This morning my journey to the School of Geography and the Environment, where I am a research visitor for a short time, started with a walk from St Clement’s across the Magdalen bridge over the River Cherwell and along the high street, competing with earnest walkers, swift buses and filled buses, a few cars. My pace then slowed as I gave in to the temptation to explore a different route, and the chance to look up at the morning sunlight on spires, domes and vaults, walking at times through darkened, damp passages, confined by close stone walls, luxury burned back into the sun as I stepped my way onto a grand forecourt announcing yet another historic cathedral, museum, gallery or stately home. You get the full English package here.

Deliberately, Oxford's planners have narrowed and slowed the few inner routes that are accessible to private vehicles. Pedestrians and cyclists are hybrid-electric powered. They arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road. Or they arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road. Or they arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road. Or they arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road.

Visitors and long-distance commuters dutifully leave their cars and join buses at the numerous park-and-ride facilities around the Oxford ring road. Or they arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road. Or they arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road. Or they arrive in town by rail, delivered around the Oxford ring road.

When you walk, you explore, you see streets that cars drivers miss, you see faces and flowers, you feel the air on your face, you have time to think. And experts tell us that walkers are healthier and live longer.

Oxford is an unusual city, its main activities are packed into a tight four square kilometres. Of course, then, walking, cycling and bussing are easier. Newscastle, Sydney or Wollongong can never be an Oxford.

Yet Oxford's experience does teach a powerful lesson. This is that the quality of a city is formed over a very long time period. We know that the best cities have concentrations of diverse activities in their centres, and that they are filled at all hours by people from near and far. These things don't just happen. They require careful choices and nurturing, and obstinate determination. Patience is important too, for the stakes are high. As this city shows, everything from grand buildings and public spaces to humpback footpaths, each with their own purpose and charm, should serve to make a city for centuries. Expediency should never be an option.

Professor Philip O'Neill is director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

**TOPICS TODAY**

**Today's fact**

Most dust house particles are dead skin.

**Today's word**

Benevolence: geniality, good-natured friendliness.

**It happened today**

From our files – 1967: A detailed report into the the services at Newcastle Post Office will be prepared after complaints about delays in mail delivery and trunk line calls.

**Today in history**

480 BC: After three days' resistance, King Leonidas of Sparta and 300 Greeks are finally beaten by the Persians at the battle of Thermopylae.

2766 BC: Yu Huang becomes a Roman army and kill the emperor at Ado, marking the beginning of serious barbarian invasions on Roman territory.

1529: Britain arrests Mahatma Gandhi and 50 others in Bombay. Gandhi is interned until 1944.

1942: Britain and Germany battle to save Sado Island.

1953: The US drops a second atomic bomb, destroying more than half of the Japanese city Nagasaki.

1968: Actress Sharon Tate and four other people are found murdered in Tate’s Los Angeles home. Leader Charles Manson and his disciples are later convicted of the crime.

2008: Russia and Georgia head towards a wider war as Russian tanks rumble into the contested province of South Ossetia and Russian aircraft bomb a Georgian town.

**Odd spot**

South Korea’s military is planning a new campaign against the use of foul language by young soldiers.

**Odd today**

**How much is too much to spend on the world’s poor, asks Colin Haggar**

As we approach the federal election and go through the process of considering which political party is going to give us the better deal, will we cast our vote purely on the basis of the election promises?

Ten years ago, the nations of the world agreed that it was not only possible but morally achievable to do something significant about reducing extreme poverty in our own world. From this were birthed the eight millennium development goals of the 2000s.

To achieve the goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015, developed nations were asked to commit 0.7 per cent of their gross national income in targeted foreign aid.

The benefits of such positive action include a reduction in both the threat of terrorism and illegal cross-border people movements, the latter a matter of intense attention in the lead up to the election.

Australia, along with the rest of the developed world, signed an agreement in September 2000 stating that we would ‘spare no effort’ to achieve the millennium development goals.

Two thirds of the way to 2015, even though there have been successes in reductions in infant and maternal mortality rates there is still some way to go.

Our foreign aid stands at 0.33 per cent of our gross national income. This means that for every $100 we earn as a nation, we give the poor of the world life.

This record makes me feel ashamed and embarrassed. As an average Australian I not only tread more heavily upon this planet, but my government by its inaction on this promise made in 2000, is undermining our international integrity.

For the sake of life in every $100.

The Millenium Challenge is a movement emanating from the churches of Australia calling upon our federal government to practise what it preached in September 2000. See www.achallenge.org.au.

Both the federal government and opposition have committed to spending 0.5 per cent of Australia’s gross national income on foreign aid by 2015. But when you consider that Australia survived the global financial crisis in far better shape and with far lower national debt than any other developed economy, we look more than just lame – we make Scrooge look like Santa Claus.

Taking up the cause of those who will say that we should look after our own first, that charity begins at home. All the evidence suggests that we have indeed looked after ourselves first, last and every point in between.

We may say we care, but our inaction as international citizens says something else.

Perhaps we consider how to vote this federal election we should be looking for leaders who will commit to extending compassion beyond our borders – to treating refugees more kindly – not because we will get any benefit from it which we want but because it is the right thing to do.

Major Colin Haggar is the communications officer for the Newcastle & Central NSW Division of The Salvation Army. This article is submitted by the Churches Media Association – cmahunter.com.au.

**VOTING FOR THE BENEFITS OF REDUCING POVERTY**

**OPINION & ANALYSIS**