THE ALIENS’ GUIDE TO OXFORD

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Abstract

This guide gives some information about Oxford, particularly for visitors to the Programming Research Group. It was originally written for two collaborative ESPRIT projects, so some parts are targeted in a European and research project context. However it should be of general interest, particularly to overseas visitors who are attempting to unravel the mystique of Oxford (although the authors are still trying to do likewise!).

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1 Information about Oxford

Oxford is a city without many pleasant lakes, but ... there are about thirty ‘castles’ in town – the colleges of the University. In term-time, however pretty, these are occupied by people whom you may wish to avoid if your student days are happily behind you now. If you ever need to know, the few university policemen are called ‘bulldogs’, but do not bother whistling if you need one! The ordinary police (and towns-people) will generally be more helpful, depending on how many lost tourists they have already redirected that day. ‘Bulldogs’ used to patrol the streets in olden times, but nowadays you have to know where their ‘kennel’ is, if you are looking for a photo.

Each of the colleges is guarded by a ‘porter’ whose job is apparently to say ‘no’ to every request, on the grounds that no-one who has to ask can possibly be entitled to the privilege. Do not approach these people! The same principle applies to the many notices about town telling you what is or is not forbidden – do not read these! They are only intended for those whose conscience tells them to look at notices (who therefore must be the people to whom they apply). If you want to look around the colleges without argument, try and look like a student, which means; dress peculiarly, and argue loudly about philosophy and beer. Of course, all the colleges are open to all the world almost all the time, so this advice is merely just that; advice, not diktat.

During your stay you may well be mistaken for an inhabitant of Oxford by one of the many foreign language students, and asked to help them answer a questionnaire about the history of the town as part of their language course – so be prepared, answer them in their own language, and they will be very pleased! Where Richard I was born, and what ‘beating the bounds’ means are useful facts to get hold of in advance if you want to play in this game.

About half of Oxford is devoted to shopping and commerce, one half consists of the scattered colleges and university buildings, and the other third comprises the inner city residential areas. Arithmetic is no longer taught at the University. North Oxford (towards Summertown, at the top of the map on page 32) is very different from west and east Oxford (Jericho and the Cowley Road respectively). It was built for the subsequently large families of dons after they were first allowed to marry in the last century, but nowadays most new appointees cannot possibly afford to live there! Jericho (the walls come tumbling down) is the area of town near the University Press; this is where the servants for North Oxford used to live. Now it too is very expensive because it is so central. The PRG is situated just to the north of centre, next to the University Parks, and about two hundred metres from the main thoroughfare of St. Giles. If you find all this somewhat unhelpful, don’t worry ...

The city is well supplied with cafes, bars and pubs; the worst of these are often considered the best, and there are plenty of the worst. University and Town Societies arrange public and private events in profusion throughout the year – and a news sheet (‘Daily Information’) appears every day listing these. The sheet will be found at the venue you are attending.

1.1 Visiting arrangements for travellers

For those visitors already staying in Oxford we include a list of better accommodation (see page 10). Rooms are not always easy to obtain, especially during the tourist season in the summer.

1.2 Travel arrangements for visitors

It is difficult to get to Oxford, but once you are here you can look at the maps on pages 8 and 32 to see how you did it. For comparison, experienced commuters typically leave London after rush-hour and arrive later still. The railway station is situated within the city boundaries, as is the bus station, and the last train to Oxford (from Paddington) leaves very late at night indeed, as does the last bus. A bus ticket (from Victoria) will cost about half as much as a rail ticket and provide better views (during the daytime). The café in the bus station is not pleasant but it is impossible to avoid.

Travellers from abroad may choose to arrive by plane at Heathrow or possibly Luton airports (Gatwick and Stanstead are not recommended). It is certainly possible to hire a car at the airport. For comparison, a taxi from Heathrow to Oxford will cost up to or upwards of £40. If the taxi driver asks you which route to take, promise that the map will be provided on arrival (make sure that he travels west and up a bit out
of London though, and keeps going). There are direct coach connections from Heathrow and Luton (and a coach from Heathrow Airport to Heathrow coach station [Surely this is wrong. JB. {Do you know how far it is from gate 31 to the main concourse? PB.]}).

1.3 Requirements for workshops

Visitors must bring all participants in workshops with them and take them away again afterwards. Sandwiches at the desk are permitted, but it is generally preferred that meals be eaten in restaurants. Would visitors please advise us of any moral difficulties with this policy so that we can arrange alternatives (other preferences should be advised). Visitors wishing to sleep next to a workstation should bring other companions as the building is locked at night.

2 Local sights

Most sights, museums and university/college buildings are free unless otherwise indicated, although donations are always welcome! The sights are listed in an approximate order in which they could be viewed if you were very keen to see them all!

- The house with the shark through the roof, in the suburb of Headington. May be spotted on the left from the London/Heathrow coach into Oxford. The cause of much controversy, it may have been removed by the time you get here, so come soon! The domicile of the owner of ...

- The Penultimate Picture Palace (Jeune Street). Cinema with a lot of the action on the outside, looking as though it is climbing up the walls. In the style of the Not The Moulin Rouge cinema (which used to be opposite the shark), by the same artist. Unfortunately this has now been destroyed to make way for some ghastly new office block.

- Gloucester Green: next to the bus station. Newly created square ("piazza") surrounded by trendy shops and restaurants, and overlooked by overpriced flats looking for buyers that aren't there. The Old Fire Station there has also been done up and reopened as a restaurant, bar, etc. Wednesday is market day so it is a bit packed then.

- Little Clarendon Street (or 'Little Trendy Street' as it is know locally). Lots of trendy shops and restaurants. Also the University Offices who launder our ECU's for us are located here.

- The University Museum: across the road from the PRG on Parks Road. Famous for dinosaurs and the Dodo's head and foot that they rescued from the ashes in 1795¹ (turn left at the entrance). The museum is housed in a beautiful Victorian Gothic building. Unfortunately part of the glass roof was damaged by the storms this year, so please give generously! Also note the carving round the windows at the front. This is only half finished because the University was short of money even in Victorian times. Also visit ...

- The Pitt Rivers Museum: at the back of the University Museum - don't miss it! Famous for mummies and shrunked heads, this is a museum of a museum - a 19th century explorer’s collect-o-rama containing everything from dugout canoes to the latest craze in wooden clothing. Find out how to tell the difference between a fake shrunked head and the real thing! At one time the demand for shrunked heads by explorers (early tourists) was so high that there was a market for such things.

- Balfour Building: up the Banbury Road set back from the road on the right hand side. Fairly recently opened overflow collection of musical instruments originally in the Pitt Rivers Museum. You can wear radio headphones which play the music of the instruments you are viewing. Look out for the whistling kettle and squeaky frog, although I have yet to hear these on the headphones!

¹The curators had the last remaining stuffed Dodo burnt because it was too moth-eaten!
• All the colleges you could ever wish to see, and more besides. Christ Church is the biggest, but they try and charge you if you look like a tourist. (In fact it is so big that the College chapel is Oxford Cathedral!) Most (all?) colleges prefer visitors in the afternoons and will have large signs indicating this at the main gate, especially in the tourist season (follow the advice in section 1). A genuine ‘bulldog’ (wearing a bowler hat) may often be found at the main entrance of Christ Church in St. Aldates warding off the tourists and making them go round to the side entrance to pay. Avoid wearing Bermuda shorts and a large camera if you wish to walk past him without paying!

• Keble College: Victorian brick college opposite PRG Keble Road site. Go into the chapel. Holman Hunt’s (Pre-Raphaelite) ‘Light of the World’ may be found in a small room on the right. Press the button to switch on the light! The other version of this picture may be seen in St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, if you can’t get to Oxford.

• The Bodleian Library. Bits to be found all over town, connected by underground tunnels. It is so extensive that there used to be an underground railway to transport the books. Guided tours start next to the Sheldonian and finish in the pub opposite. For a particular thrill, try and join. There are also tours of Duke Humfrey’s Library (/1/4/8/8/). Start by entering the door marked ‘SCOLA NATURALIS PHILOSOPHIAE’ Here you can view a small exhibition of (normally old) books and attempt to obtain a ticket (for a fee).

• Divinity School: attached to Bodleian Library. A display of old books used to be on view inside; however due to lack of money for new cases this is no longer so. They is a reasonably good tourist shop for Oxford souvenirs immediately outside. Sometimes called ‘the most beautiful room in Europe’ in Oxford. See also Radcliffe Square (‘most beautiful square in Europe’) and High Street (‘most beautiful street in Europe’). Decide for yourself!

• The Sheldonian Theatre: on the south side of Broad Street, guarded by a row of stone Roman Emperors, this is the University’s site for ceremonies of all kinds. Climb the cupola for a view over Oxford. Small entrance charge unless you are with a member of Oxford University (or look like one!). Named after Gilbert Sheldon, Warden of All Souls College and later Bishop of London. At the time it was built (1664–69) people thought that Christopher Wren, the architect, would never be able to support the roof without any extra supporting columns inside the building. Luckily they were proved wrong. This was one of his first buildings and helped make him famous. There are good concerts many Saturday evenings if you are short of something to do.

• Edmund Halley’s house: just past Hertford College’s ‘Bridge of Sighs’ (opposite the Sheldonian), down New College Lane on the left. You can spot the extension in the roof where I presume he had his observatory and spotted his comet!

• Blackwell’s: The bookshop, on the north side of Broad Street opposite the Sheldonian. They also own most of the other bookshops in the same street as well! Go downstairs to the scientific section (including computing). This is contained in a huge underground room under the next door college (Trinity). This is worth visiting at least once during your time in Oxford. Blackwell’s can be used as a reference library for recent books because the sales assistants will not bother you until you bother them; they know you will probably find one to buy anyway, even if you didn’t mean to! Books can be shipped to anywhere in the world, and even within the EC.

• Broad Street: site of most of Oxford’s bookshops and also where three martyrs (Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer, all educated at Cambridge!) were burnt at the stake several centuries ago (1555–6). Look for the metal cross in the middle of the road opposite the Children’s Bookshop for the exact site. Also, see the more modern Martyrs’ Memorial round the corner at the bottom end of St. Giles. It looks like a giant church spire sticking out of the ground.

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2 Also, more boringly, the ‘EXHIBITION ROOM’.
3 The Bodleian Library is currently trying to raise £10 million as part of the ‘Oxford Campaign’.
4 You might notice a number of references to Cambridge scattered throughout this document. There is a ‘friendly’ rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge and comments about Cambridge should not be taken too seriously. This also applies to Cambridge itself!
• Ashmolean Museum in Beaumont Street: the oldest museum in the world (although moved from
the original site). Look out for King Alfred’s jewel, Paulo Uccello’s ‘A Hunt in the Forest’ and Guy
Fawkes’ lantern. There is also a good range of Pre-Raphaelite pictures.

• Museum of the History of Science: next to the Sheldonian in Broad Street. This is the original site
of the Ashmolean (Museum). There is a good collection of microscopes and other scientific instruments.

• The Oxford Story: tourist attraction in Broad Street. Travel round viewing historical Oxford scenes
in the comfort of your own Walkman on a moving ‘medieval’ scholar’s desk. Various languages are
available, but you get Sir Alec Guinness if you listen in English. Synthetic (?) smells of mediaeval
Oxford are included at no extra charge. Make sure you pick up one of the numerous discount vouchers
before paying the huge entrance fee. Part of the proceeds go to the University, who are co-owners,
so it’s all in a good cause. Roll up, roll up! The shop isn’t bad, as tourist shops go.

• The Botanic Gardens: opposite Magdalen College, High Street. Second oldest in Europe. Good
glass houses open in the afternoon. Don’t steal the plants!

• Magdalen College: Deer Park, riverside walks. You could be in the middle of the countryside in
places, but actually you are still in the middle of Oxford. Beautiful tower, quite recently restored to
its former glory, from the top of which Magdalen College Choir sings a carol at 6 a.m. on 1st May
each year – don’t ask me why; followed by Morris Dancers, buskers and general merriment, especially
from students. Magdalen Bridge close by is currently being restored at huge expense. Contact the
Oxford Preservation Trust, 10 Turn Again Lane, if you wish to contribute. You can buy old pillars
from the balustrade if you want a memento of your visit!

• Punting: from Magdalen Bridge at the end of the High Street. Also from Cherwell Boathouse in
north Oxford for a different stretch of river, but that is quite a walk away from central Oxford. Large
queues form on sunny days in the summer, especially in the afternoon and at weekends. If you have
a contact with access to College punts, make use of this. For example, Wolfson College has its own
punt pool.

• Christ Church Meadow: riverside walks, Boat houses, jogging if you must. Excellent for a leisurely
stroll on a sunny afternoon, with good views of the Oxford spires in the distance.

• Alice’s Shop: opposite Christ Church College in St. Aldates. Reputedly frequented by the original
Alice of ‘Alice in Wonderland’ fame. Lots of Alice and other Oxford knick-knacks. Very useful for
presents if (like me) you have a daughter called Alice. Lewis Carroll (or Charles Dodgson to use his
real name) was a Mathematics Fellow at Christ Church. Alice was a daughter of the Dean.

• Blenheim Palace: a big house at Woodstock, several miles north of Oxford. Owned by the Duke
of Marlborough and given to the original Duke for winning some battle or other. The trees are
supposedly laid out in the formation of the battle, although you wouldn’t know unless you had been
told. Winston Churchill was born here by accident! Woodstock itself is a small town which is quite
pretty but touristy. You need a car or to take the bus and have at least half a day and some pounds
in your pocket to see this one.

• The Railway Station: We now have a brand new railway station, the third within my lifetime! The
first was Victorian and was knocked down in the ‘60s; if it had survived it would now be lovingly
restored. The second was ‘temporary’, but lasted a good 25 years. The new one is shaped like a
shed with lots of glass bits; not worth a special trip, but you can admire it if you happen to arrive
by train – it is better than many a BR station, so if you’re travelling and have hit upon an enforced
hiatus, you can sit it out there!

5 Of Gunpowder Plot fame. He tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament but got caught, and is celebrated with fireworks
and a ‘Guy’ on a bonfire every November 5th.
6 Pronounced ‘Maudlin’.
3 Culinary guide

- The Alternative Tuck Shop: Holywell Street. Not to be confused with the Tuck Shop (on the other corner of the block). Sells home-made food to the hungry – the nearest food shop to the South Parks Road section of the PRG.

- Bar Celona (note the pun!): Little Clarendon Street. An unvaried range of Spanish and Mexican tapas is relieved by the circumstances – a real Spanish tapas bar in an Oxford street! The potato bravas is hot enough for my taste, so be prepared. The nervous should avoid looking up at the ceiling with its horizontal racks of empty wine bottles, or sit in the middle of the room. Recommended, and not only for the waitresses.

- Bath Place: just off Holywell Street on the alleyway to the Turf Tavern. Named after the alleyway, and not to be confused with Parson’s Pleasure! Quite expensive nouvelle cuisine for project managers only in general, but the set lunch is a reasonable price for the quality. Good for celebratory workshops with a long lunch ‘hour’. You can stay here as well, but again, it is fairly pricey.

- Ben’s Cookies, in the Covered Market between Market Street and the High. Best cookies in town, freshly made on the premises. Coffee is also available. This is ideal for very informal workshops since there are no seats!

- The Blue Coyote: St. Clements, just across Magdalen Bridge. Wild, wild night life and prices to match. Well worth the effort!

- Browns: at the bottom end of Woodstock Road (top of St. Giles), very popular mid-range eating house in the pseudo-literary scene. Good (but invariant) selection of dishes. Wonderful waitresses. Afternoon tea also served.

- Dôme: Small-scale Browns in Little Clarendon Street, round the corner. The portions are smaller and neater, but the prices are bigger. Someone must play the pinball machine in the entrance soon!

- The Elizabeth: St. Aldates. Expensive French cuisine; definitely for Project Managers only. Go here for traditional quality with excellent service, rather than something novel. The set lunch is good value, but you may still need a Project Manager in town or some other good excuse.

- Freuds: Walton Street. A must for the serious tourist and not-so-serious academic, the only church where they serve drinks – a piano stands where the priest used to preach, and the angels are only plaster statues, but the atmosphere is still all there.

- Gee’s: just round the corner from North Parade on the Banbury Road. Set in a glass house with no air-conditioning, but they do open the windows on hot days. Prices similar to 15 North Parade.

- Halifax House: next to the PRG, South Parks Road branch. Choice of two vegetables and fish or meat. Recommended for poor walkers and undiscriminating eaters.

- Hero’s: Ship Street, off Cornmarket Street in the centre of town. Useful and cheap sandwich bar without smoke and with newspapers and iced water. Good for workshops. Very crowded (mostly with students) at lunchtime. Go mid morning or mid afternoon if possible.

- Maison Blanc, French patisserie: Next to Browns on Woodstock Road and worth every exorbitant penny. French spoken by imported shop assistants! They now have automatic doors to play with on the way in and out.

- Le Manoir aux Quat’ Saisons: In the Manor House at Great Milton a few miles outside Oxford. Raymond Blanc’s top-notch restaurant: probably the best in the country. For ultimate kudos, arrive by helicopter on the private heli-pad. Only for use on the successful completion of well-funded research projects within budget – it’s bound to use up whatever is left, but you won’t be disappointed. The attention to detail is incredible and you can finish up with handmade petits fours. If you go for lunch, you can have an amble around the grounds afterwards (where many of the vegetables are
grown) or have a leisurely game of croquet if the weather is good. You can now buy the book if you want to try to do the cooking at home.

- Michael’s Restaurant/Bar: St. Michael’s Street, at the New Inn Hall Street end. The restaurant downstairs is the posher and more expensive bit; the bar upstairs has a cheaper menu, although you can ask to see this in the restaurant. Upstairs has a glass roof – nice on sunny days no doubt. This is the sort of place you would expect to find in Little Clarendon Street (cf. next entry). You can get your thesis bound at Maltby’s next door (not quite while you eat, I’m afraid). Also, browse through Mallam’s Auction Rooms just a little further up St. Michael’s Street after lunch if it’s open and you don’t have to get back quickly. You can put in a written bid if you find something you want.

- Michel’s Brasserie: Little Clarendon Street. Highly acceptable food ranging from the basic steak to delicate nouvelle cuisine dishes. Affordable by rich and poor alike, but it’s better to be rich.

- McDonalds, Cornmarket Street: fewer queues than the one in Moscow, but otherwise of no special interest. Now there is a competing Burger King just down the street and plans are afoot for a genuine American-style drive-thru McDonalds down the Cowley Road; that’s progress I suppose. Ho-hum …

- Munchy-Munchy, on the north side of Park End Street towards the station. Good Malayan food, cooked in front of you. If you go back again, they add a bit of extra chilli each time. Try the ‘Dragon’s Eye’ tea with real dragon’s eyes in the bottom of the pot.

- 15 North Parade (named after the address), north of the PRG (but south of South Parade of course7). Nouvelle cuisine and the way to empty your pocket in style. For Project Managers and entourage only. The set lunch is relatively reasonably priced and could be afforded by mere workers at a pinch! Includes air-conditioning – recommended on hot summer days.

- The Opium Den, at the bottom of George Street. Ask for the dim sum menu of Chinese nibbles which may be shared between several people. Order 2–3 dishes per person. The chicken feet are delicious, but not for the faint hearted! It’s best to go in a crowd; then you get a big round table with a rotating centre for the food – much more fun. This provides a different version of the Dining Philosophers problem which has yet to be solved.

- The Poor Student. Next to Hero’s – no poor students allowed in, but there are better ways to pick the company in which you wish to dine. Looks good on expense forms.

- Queen’s Lane Coffee Shop, on Queen’s Lane(!) and High Street: much better than the one in St. Giles (see below). You may spot a famous author or two (or not, as the case may be).

- Rick’s: Cowley Road. One of a number of fine restaurants down the Cowley Road, this one serves Caribbean food with style. Try the clams or the sprats, and always order a side dish of plantain.

- Rosie Lee: On the High Street, too up-market to be a café, but that’s what it is! Try somewhere else.

- St. Giles’ café:8 In a nice place, and unpretentious, but only because it actually has no claim to excellence. Best to walk past quickly!

- Taylor’s: shop at the top end of St. Giles on the corner of Little Clarendon Street, much frequented by PRG people because of its proximity to Keble Road. Try a pitta sandwich or a vegetable pastie if you are a first-timer. You can have food heated in the microwave here or in the Keble Road Common Room where most Taylor’s food is consumed by PRG’ers.

- Thai Orchid: St. Clements. Just past Angel Pavement and the sadly demised Alexander’s Jazz café, the coach to London stops outside on its way out of the city centre. The superb décor prepares one for the superb Thai cuisine. Best hurry, in case it goes too.

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7 The story goes that these are where the Royalists (who held Oxford) and the Parliamentarian Roundhead troops lined up in the Civil War – hence the anomalous names.

8 Actually it doesn’t deserve the accent.
• The Wykeham Coffee Shop: opposite New College in Holywell Street. The nearest approximation to a Devon Cream Tea in Oxford may be had here. Worth going if you can’t get to Devon during your visit.

• The café in the bus station: not the plastic one with the clean tables and glass windows, but the real café where the bus-drivers wait for their shifts. They will cook anything you ask for, but think hard before eating it.

• The chip shop next to Carfax on the High: at the commercial centre of town, and discreetly set back along a short alleyway, you can smell your way to this place place.

4 Pubs

The following may be deemed to be of special interest. All the others are merely peculiar. Most pubs serve some sort of food for lunch. Certainly all the ones below do if you want to sneak off. Don’t expect any service in a pub. You have to go to the bar if you want a drink or any food. However they have a unique charm all of their own.

• The Bear: off the High next to Christ Church and Oriel colleges, the owner collects ties and displays them on the walls. A new tie will win you a drink in exchange. Make sure there are no Oriel hearties around! Very cramped with low ceiling – therefore not for tall people, although drinkers normally spill out into the street in the summer.

• The Kings Arms (or ‘K.A.’), at the bottom end of Parks Road, quite near the PRG (only the bar in Halifax House is closer). This is the student pub and provides an interesting mix of Town and Gown – Gown in the front, with non-smoking section (hooray!), and Town in the back room. Owned by Wadham College next door and therefore a ‘free house’ – no free drinks I’m afraid, but not owned by a brewery, and thus able to serve a good selection of ales. Try Wadworth’s 6X or Murphy’s Irish stout. The pub stays open all afternoon now that licensed opening hours have been relaxed. It can be rowdy later in the evening. You sometimes have to pay the bagpiper to go away!

• Eagle and Child, sometimes know as the ‘Bird and Baby’, or worse. Half way up St. Giles on the left. This pub used to be frequented by J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis et al. (the ‘Inklings’). It has quite recently been refurbished in the style of Tolkien’s day with lots of small rooms. (He stopped using the pub when they got rid of the little rooms since he and his cronies used to like to take over one of them.) There is a small courtyard at the back for sitting outside. Rather cramped: try the Lamb and Flag (or ‘Ram and Rag’) opposite if there isn’t enough room.

• Royal Oak: on Woodstock Road opposite the Radcliffe Infirmary and quite close to the PRG. Sometimes frequented by doctors on call since their bleepers can just reach the premises!

• Turf Tavern: hidden away in an alleyway between Holywell Street and Queen’s Lane next to one of the best surviving bits of town wall. Rather touristic, but good choice of beer (try Hook Norton) and seats outside for warm summer evenings. Lunch-time food is available.

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9 A Wykehamist is a past or present member of Winchester College, one of the oldest “public” schools in England. Named after the founder (of the school rather than the coffee shop!), William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (died 1404). New College has associations with Winchester and many Wykehamists end up here. “New” College itself is no longer new of course, being founded in 1379. See also the “New” Buildings at Magdalen. It just goes to show that “New” is not a good name to choose in the long term!

10 Scones, jam and clotted cream, and tea of course!

11 This café (pronounced ‘kaff’) doesn’t deserve the accent either.

12 I haven’t seen a Queen’s Award for Technological Achievement tie yet! [See page 19.]

13 Until recently, pubs had to close in the afternoon; this was a leftover from the First World War when it was decided to close the pubs after lunch to encourage people to go back to work in the afternoon. Unfortunately the one place where the bars did stay open all afternoon was the Houses of Parliament, so there was little incentive for the politicians to change the law!
Figure 1: Map of England

- The Turl Bar, in Turl Street. Jazz on Mondays, but safe the rest of the week. Many tiny little bars in a maze of a building.

- Vicky Arms: way up the River Cherwell. The ultimate resting place of many punters (in both senses of the word). Serves Wadworth’s 6X, so it is well worth the punt there; getting back can be more difficult! The food is not bad if you want to go for lunch.

- The Trout, Wolvercote; you really need a car for this one since it is a couple of miles north of central Oxford. (There is a very large car park.) It is in a very pretty location by the river. Pimm’s and salmon sandwiches outside are recommended on a hot summer’s day. Afterwards (or before) you can take a leisurely stroll down the river past the lock, Godstow Priory and Port Meadow, with a view of Oxford in the distance.

5 Nightclub

- Rumours: St. Clements. Don’t go!\textsuperscript{14} Probably not for academics used to a sheltered life, the ambulance seems to put in a call here at 12pm every night just on the off chance of a customer or two (there usually are two involved), but it has been going upmarket. And, come to think of it, one could say just the same of College bars.

6 The Boring Bits

6.1 Where is Oxford?

Oxford lies in the heart of England, a lesser known province of the EC. The picture will give you an idea of where to look on your map. This is strictly topological (if that!) – distances and directions should be taken with a pinch of salt. Any similarity to any other part of Europe is purely coincidental!

\textsuperscript{14}This used to be called Bogart’s. Luckily it has just closed – by the time you read this the name may have changed again!
6.2 How to get to Oxford

by car from Heathrow Airport, London:

Although the M25 can be appalling in rush-hour, we recommend going M4–M25–M40 into Oxford. Remember to turn off at the “Oxford” exit now that the M40 extension has been completed; otherwise you will end up in Birmingham! Parking is notoriously difficult and you are better off without a car within Oxford, although it could be useful if you want a few trips out of Oxford during your stay. It is possible to get a temporary car parking permit for the Science Area Car Parks. However the permits are restricted in number and the parking places are normally full by about 8.30 a.m. Therefore we recommend not bringing a car to Oxford if possible.

by taxi from Heathrow Airport:

A taxi from Heathrow to Oxford will cost you about £50. Most taxis take four passengers. This is a rather expensive way of arriving at Oxford.

by coach from Heathrow Airport:

This is the recommended method of travel. The X70 coach service leaves Heathrow every hour (or even 1 hour at peak times). Some of the coaches stop at Terminal 4 and others stop at the main coach station (for Terminals 1, 2 & 3). The journey takes just over an hour on a good day (a little longer from Terminal 4). Buy a period return ticket (£10) to save money. Note that there is a free shuttle service between Terminal 4 and the other terminals.

Ask to be dropped off at the High Street stop as you get on to the coach if you are staying at one of the older colleges in the middle of town. This is the first stop after crossing Magdalen Bridge and passing Magdalen College (big old tower on the right!). Stand up at this point to indicate that you want to get off because the coach may not stop otherwise. If you miss the stop, take a taxi from Gloucester Green bus station (the coach terminus); or take a walk (c10 minutes) through central Oxford if you don’t have too much luggage to carry and can follow the map. Both the High Street and Gloucester Green are about 10 minutes walk from the PRG at Keble Road.

by train/coach from London:

Fast trains leave Paddington Station for Oxford about every hour and take 1 hour to arrive. They are relatively expensive compared to the coach service. The Oxford CityLink 190 coach leaves Victoria coach station (5 minutes walk from Victoria railway station) every 20 minutes, takes a claimed 100 minutes, but in practice longer, especially in rush hour. There is also a competing service, the ‘Oxford Tube’, which leaves from just outside Victoria railway station. Both services also stop at Marble Arch at the end of Oxford Street. The ‘Oxford Tube’ includes a loo!

by coach from Cambridge and/or Luton Airport:

Very few Cantabrigians will admit to making the journey willingly, but some undeniably do. The ‘other place’ has attractions too, but you may wish to know of the existence of this direct coach connection, the National Express ‘747’ which also connects to Luton Airport, half way along the route. But beware! This coach trip has been passed by NASA as suitable for the final stages in advanced astronaut training – you have to be able to survive three hours of being pitched from side to side as you make your way through the side lanes of the English countryside. Why they don’t go via London, I cannot imagine. No sane person would choose that route if they had any alternative (I can say this safely as I am just about to set out on it for the second time this week), but then who plans coach routes, anyway? This one’s planner ensured that there would be a roundabout every 200m, all of which the coach navigates via the third exit of four, then hits both inner and outer kerbs as it straightens out, if it didn’t just travel straight across the top of the whole thing.

Try and persuade the driver to turn on the ventilation and turn off the heating. It helps. Coffee will not be served. Masochists may wish to know that the Oxbridge journey is not the whole of the 747’s route.
It cuts a diagonal swathe across England from Bristol early in the morning to Norwich or Thetford late in the evening at two hourly staggered intervals between coaches, all day, all week.

6.3 How to stay in Oxford

If you don’t wish to stay in college or have booked too late, try one of the following hotels:

The Eastgate: +44-865-248244. On the corner of High Street and Merton Street, at the old East Gate of the city! Conveniently central, opposite St. Edmund Hall and the Examination Schools.

The Old Parsonage: +44-865-310210. At the bottom of the Banbury Road opposite Keble Road, and thus ideal for the PRG, but slightly north of centre for other attractions. The hotel has recently been refurbished and is thus more expensive than it used to be.

The Randolph: +44-865-247481. In Beaumont Street. Top hotel in Oxford. Probably only for Project Managers. There is a special Oxford University rate which is well worth having; contact our administrator (Mike Field, tel +44-865-273895) or his secretary (see below) for further details and the correct incantation to quote.

Useful telephone numbers:


Oxford Association of Hotels and Guest-houses: +44-865-722995. A local accommodation enquiry service open 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

PRG secretaries: One of the secretaries at the PRG may be able to help you out if necessary. In particular, it is possible to book into Queen Elizabeth House (in St. Giles, cheapest) or Halifax House (in South Parks Road, a bit more) which are both convenient for the PRG if you wish to stay somewhere cheaper than a hotel.

Jane Ellory: Prof. Tony Hoare’s secretary at 11 Keble Road. Tel +44-865-273840, FAX +44-865-273839.

Sue Charlett: The administrator’s (Mike Field) secretary at 11 Keble Road. Tel +44-865-273898, FAX +44-865-273839.

Joan Arnold: The Industrial Liaison secretary at 2 South Parks Road, an outpost of the PRG (known as “Tasmania!”) about 5 minutes walk from Keble Road. Tel +44-865-272579, FAX +44-865-272582.

Frances Page: Prof. Joseph Goguen’s secretary at 2 South Parks Road. Tel +44-865-272568, FAX +44-865-272582.

6.4 How to get out of Oxford

Drive in ever increasing circles until you hit the ring road. It is well known that there are no road signs to speak of within Oxford itself.

You can also leave by the town drain. Alternatively, you can be ‘sent down’ – the worst that the University authorities can do to a student. Try writing a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism* or some such subject, for example. This was the method used by the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). A memorial to him may be found in University College (turn right through the front entrance), but his wife had to provide it!

\[\text{down train in Spooner-speak. In Oxford, everywhere is down, even London. Sorry for any confusion!}\]
Acknowledgements

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This document draws on sources too numerous to mention individually, but thank you to them all anyway.

Note that some of the information in this guide is necessarily subjective and ephemeral\textsuperscript{17} in nature and the authors can accept no responsibility for the (in)accuracy of the contents of this document. Corrections and suggestions are welcome.

We look forward to seeing you and hope you enjoy your stay in Oxford.

\textsuperscript{16}And also the map of 'England' on page 8.

\textsuperscript{17}The information is approximately correct as of May, 1992.
Bibliography

1. *The Programming Research Group at Oxford University*, ed. Carroll Morgan, Programming Research Group. A general guide to the PRG available from the PRG. This includes information on personnel, courses and research projects, and is updated annually.


7. *Oxford: Inspired Images*, Jon Davison, Jon Davison Communications, 1987. A good souvenir of Oxford with excellent colour photographs. £4.95, but it seems to have become unavailable in most shops now. But see next entry …


12. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, OUP, 3rd edition, 1979. All (almost all) the quotations you could ever want. Also known as the “Oxford Dikker of Quotaggers”!


14. *The Oxford Shorter English Dictionary*, OUP. 2 largish volumes, based on the OED (above), but it can be carried!

15. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, OUP, 8th edition, 1990. 1 reasonably sized volume, recommended for normal use. This is the first edition to be computerised and contains many new terms. A bargain at £10.95 hardback.\(^\text{18}\)


17. *Dictionary of Computing*, OUP, 3rd edition, 1990. Probably the best computing dictionary that I have seen, particularly for related mathematical terms, but more expensive than most at £20.00 (hardback).

All OUP books are available from the Oxford University Press Bookshop, 116 High Street. Books in general are available from Blackwell’s and Dillon’s in Broad Street. Blackwell’s has specialist shops for art, paperbacks, maps/travel and children’s books as well as the main bookshop, all in Broad Street, and a music shop in Holywell Street nearby. Oxfam, 56 St. Giles, and Thornton’s, 11 Broad Street, are good for cheap and expensive second-hand books respectively. There is a cheap bookshop (“Book Bargains”) for remaindered new(ish) books at 2 St. Ebbe’s opposite the Westgate Shopping Centre.

\(^\text{18}\)One of the authors had a hand in this, but unfortunately doesn’t get a penny in royalties!
A Your handy I-Spy list

First person to get past the 100 points total deserves their first hot shower since arriving in England. This can normally be found across the quad from your room in most colleges.

- An undergraduate student. 1 point
- The Warden of Magdalen. 10 points
- A Prime Minister. 100 points
- A future Prime Minister. 50 points
- The Fritillaries in Magdalen. 5 points
- The deer in Magdalen deer park. 3 points
- An hour in the company of the peripatetic outdoor wine-tasting club. 60 points
- Paying for your beer in Oriel College bar. 8 points
- 20 Japanese tourists. 1 point
- A helpful British Rail porter. 6 point
- An empty parking space. 10 points
- The Ashmolean. 1 point
- The inside of the Ashmolean. 4 points
- A Hunt in the Forest. 6 points
- King Alfred’s Jewel. 8 points
- The Light of the World. 10 points
- A bulldog. 20 points
- An invitation to take tea in the SCR at St. Edmund Hall. 15 points
- An ESPRIT project meeting. 2 points
- A Queen’s Award for Technological Achievement tie. 5 points
- A fake shrunken head. 1 point
- A real shrunken head. 5 points
- A whistling kettle. 3 points
- A squeaky frog. 3 points
- A member of Congregation. 1 point
- A member of the Hebdomadal Council. 10 points
- Salman Rushdie. 1000 points
- A Dodo foot. 2 points
- A Dodo skull. 3 points
- The rest of the Dodo. 2000 points

19 Sorry, this is a trick question – there is no Warden at Magdalen. However, a President will do at a pinch. Each College insists on giving the head of the College a different title for added confusion.

20 OK, it’s a rare flower, but you will have to go to the Bod if you want more information.

21 Believed to have been spotted at Halifax House, although it may have just been a look-alike. Try also St. Antony’s College, one of his supposed refuges.

22 Try the city rubbish dump and contact the curators of the University Museum immediately if you do find it!
B Glossary of terms

Aegrotat. Sick note used for missing exams but still passing. Much sought after, but you usually have to have something horrible to get one.

Aesthete. Non-sportsman. (cf., heathy.)

The Ashmolean. The main museum in Oxford (and oldest in the world) founded by Elias Ashmole.

B.A. Bachelor of Arts. Letters you can put after your name when you get a degree at Oxford (in most subjects, including science!). See also M.A.

Bags. See ‘Oxford bags’.

Balls. Held in the summer at a number of colleges. D.J. or ball gown are the standard attire, depending on your sex. These used to go on all night, with breakfast included. Sadly many now finish in the small hours because of complaints about the noise. Tickets are normally sold for two, so you have to find a partner; actually you will have more fun if you go with a crowd of people you know. It can be expensive, but it is worth going at least once in your life if you get the chance.

Batells. College bill. If you are still not sure what this is, you will be receiving one shortly!

Beating the bounds. A strange ritual of beating the ground with willow sticks to impress important boundaries upon the peasants. Only done for “fun” nowadays.

Black Tie. Formal evening attire. See ‘Dinner Jacket’ for more information. (cf., White Tie.)

Boater. Hard flat-topped rimmed straw hat worn in the summer, especially by the river.

The Boat Race. Annual competition between two eights rowed by students from Oxford and Cambridge held on the River Thames in London from Putney to Mortlake. Oxford has had a winning streak over the past few years by importing large so-called students from America. Cambridge has complained but to no avail so far. Note that “boat” is Cockney rhyming slang for “face” – boat = boat race = face. (Just though you might be interested.)

The Bod. Short for ‘Bodleian Library’, the main library at Oxford University. The easiest way to get a library card is to spend three years lolling around at Oxford. The difficult way is to apply at the admissions office.

Blue. Award for sporting prowess. Half-blues are given for lesser sports like tiddly-winks(?).

Bump. The river at Oxford (and Cambridge) is not wide enough for several Eights to row abreast so races are conducted by starting at equidistant points along the river and trying to ‘bump’ the eight in front. This involves simply catching up rather than (necessarily) literally bumping it. See also ‘over-bump’. In Cambridge you do actually have to bump them apparently. (See the appropriate spot to stand’, by A. Cambumpswatcher, of Grassy Corner, Fen Ditton, Cambs.)

Bump supper. Celebratory dinner if an eight manages a bump (up) on every day of Eights Week or Torpids. Each member of the crew also gets an oar to keep as a memento and an (old) eight may be burnt as part of the festivities (a boat that is!). A highly recommended shindig which often results in a shindy. (That should send you to your dictionary!)

The Broad. See the High.

Bulldog. Choose from:

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23 Try Anna-Belinda in Gloucester Street if you want a fancy expensive one.

24 Prices are often in guineas, which are £1.05, or £1/1/0 in pounds, shillings and (old) pence. The extra shilling was meant to be the commission, particularly at sales, but now it just means they can pocket a bit extra without you noticing too much.

25 Confusingly marked ‘Scola Musicae’ in the Old Bodleian.
1. University ‘policeman’ in a bowler hat.
2. Churchillian canine beast.
3. Pub in St. Aldates (see both sides of the pub sign for more information).

Cambridge. The other place. Oxford view: a cold damp place in the Fens founded by a group of people thrown out of Oxford. (They tell a rather different story in Cambridge!)


Cantab. Nothing to do with Canterbury, but short for ‘of Cambridge (University)’ in Latin (Cantabrigiensis).

Carfax. The centre of the city of Oxford, where the High, St. Aldates, Queen Street and Cornmarket Street meet. There is a good view from the tower here.

Chancellor. The head of the University who isn’t here. Currently Lord Jenkins of SDP (RIP) and ‘dawet’ fame. Normally somebody you have heard of. (cf., Vice-Chancellor.)

The Cherwell. (Pronounced “charwell”.) The other river in Oxford (cf., the Thames, of which it is a tributary), recommended for punting. Also a student newspaper for those with less literary pretensions than Isis.

Class. You can get a first second or third class honours degree or a pass degree. You used to be able to get a ‘fourth’ as well. Supposedly it was only worth going for a first or a fourth at Oxford, depending on how you wanted to spend your time. Anything between was wasted effort.

COD. Concise Oxford Dictionary from the OUP.

Collections. Not money-raising for charity, but beginning of term exams for students to see if they have done any work in the vacation.

College. One of thirty or so institutions which make up the University. Beware of the imitations on the outskirts of the city which (ab)use the name of Oxford.

Come up. To arrive as a student at Oxford. See also ‘go down’ and ‘sent down’.

Commem. Ball An extra-special Ball commemorating something, but most attendees would be hard pushed to tell you what.

Commoner. Student who does not have a scholarship or exhibition.

Congregation. The legislative body consisting of most of the academics in the University which refused to give Maggie Thatcher her honorary Oxford degree. It also decides on various other University matters. You must wear a gown to attend so not many people do – except where the ex-Prime Minister is concerned.

Convocation. All Oxford M.A.s. You can elect the Chancellor and Professor of Poetry, but you must turn up in person.

Daily Information. Daily (in term time) news sheet which appears on various college and University notice boards. Worth reading if you find one. It becomes ‘Weekly Information’ out of term time.

Dame’s Delight. Female equivalent of Parson’s Pleasure, now sadly defunct.

The Dean. Head of Christ Church College. Other colleges have a variety of different names for the head of the college to confuse visitors.

Debag. To remove someone’s trousers (‘bags’). An ancient student sport.
Dinner Jacket. Special dark suit worn with a black bow tie and fancy shirt for formal dinners and most college balls. Try Shepherd and Woodward (109 High Street) or Walter’s (10 The Turl) if you need to buy or hire one. This attire is also known as ‘Black Tie’, especially on invitations.

D.J. Short for ‘Dinner Jacket’.

Don. College tutor. Derived from the Latin dominus meaning variously master, lord, owner, host and despot!

D.Phil. Doctor of Philosophy. Most Universities call this a Ph.D., but Oxford has to be different.

Eight. A rowing boat with eight oarsmen (or women) and a cox to steer.

Eights Week. Rowing between the colleges in the summer. Like a junior Henley Regatta. The river is the place to be on the Saturday. Held in 5th week of Trinity term. Drink Pimm’s from one of the college boathouses and dress up in a boater and blazer. Torpids is the other rowing event earlier in the year.

Encaenia. Funny ceremony in which important academics dress up in all their finery and parade from some College (where they have congregated for pre-show drinks) down the Broad before dunning out honorary degrees in the Sheldonian. The Chancellor gets the prettiest gown and also has a page boy to hold it up for him. Often a famous face or two can be spotted. Note that the show doesn’t actually happen till about half an hour after the announced start time to give them time to down their sherry, adjust their gear, etc. Worth seeing if you are in Oxford at the time, although tickets to actually get into the Sheldonian are hard to come by (and then you would miss the parade anyway). The ceremony is held in the summer so the gowns are less likely to get wet! The Vice Chancellor holds a garden party in one of the colleges during the afternoon where you can spot gowns in various states of decomposition, and also judge (or even enter) the silliest hat competition. (Turquoise and orange with lots of braid and twiddly bits are favourites!)

Exam Schools. Or Examination Schools. Building where Prelims, Mods and Finals are held. Also used for lectures and other purposes throughout the rest of the year.

Exhibition. Lesser scholarship.

Fellow. Member of the governing body of a College. Basically, all the college tutors. A fellow can be female in this context, rather like a Californian ‘guy’!

Filibuster. A large hard biscuit, recommended by dentists.

Finals. Final examinations at the end of 3 or 4 years as an undergraduate student. Your degree depends (almost) entirely on your exam result.

A first. See class.

A fourth. See class. No longer available.

Frank Cooper. The original maker of ‘Oxford Marmalade’. There is now a tourist shop selling souvenirs (and marmalade) in the High Street on the site of the original shop. You can have marmalade sent anywhere in the world. There is a small exhibition including tins of marmalade taken by Scott to the Antarctic! Worth dropping in if you are passing.

Fresher. First-year student.

Freshers’ Fair. Stalls for all the University Societies and Clubs held in the Exam Schools at the beginning of each academic year.

Gated. Confinned to college as a punishment. Not used much nowadays.

27Every good dictionary has at least one deliberate mistake in it to avoid copying without detection. Plagiarists beware!
Gaudy. A jolly good (normally annual) college dinner for old members.

Go down. Leave as a student at Oxford (either temporarily or permanently). See also ‘come up’ and ‘sent down’.

Gown. Robe worn by academics to avoid having soup spilt on them at meal-times. Thus, the larger the gown, the more prestigious it is; the more colourful it is, the more meals the owner has been served.

Greats. Study of classics or philosophy at Oxford.

Half-blue. See ‘blue’.

Hall. Communal eating place in college.

Head of the River. Winning crew or college in Eights Week or Torpids. A Bump Supper may be in order.

Hearty. Sportsman, especially a keen rower. (cf., aesthete.)

Hebdomadal Council. Administrative council of the University.

JCR. Junior Common Room – for undergraduate students. (cf., MCR and SCR.)

The High. Short for the ‘High Street’. Also ‘the Broad’, ‘the Turl’, etc.

High Table. Dinner for Dons and guests only. Highly recommended experience if your liver can take it. Don’t drive home afterwards!

Hilary. Spring term. (cf., Michaelmas and Trinity.)

Isis. Confusing name for the River Thames at Oxford (especially when rowing on it). Also the name of an Oxford student magazine for those with literary pretensions. (cf., Cherwell.)

The K.A. Short for the King’s Arms, probably the pub most frequented by students in Oxford.

LMH. Short for ‘Lady Margaret Hall’, one of the (ex-women’s) colleges.

Long Vac. Nothing to do with laborious house cleaning, but instead, summer holidays. See ‘vacation’.

The House. Pompous name for Christ Church.

M.A. Master of Arts. You simply have to survive 21 terms (7 years) after you matriculate to get this degree, with a few provisos, like getting your B.A., not being in prison, etc. See ‘convocation’ for your rights. You have to pay extra if you don’t turn up in person to collect your M.A., since you are then not doing your bit for the tourist trade. Most colleges also give you a good lunch so it’s worth making an appearance.

The Master. See the President.

Manciple. One of the most important people in a college, responsible for the food! A little-used word that seems to be making a minor comeback.

Matriculation. Ceremony in the Sheldonian for admission to Oxford as a student.

May morning. 1st May when a large number of people get up very early in Oxford, listen to a carol sung from the top of Magdalen College Tower at 6 a.m. and then do generally silly things, especially if they are a student. Worth getting up for if you have never been or it is a nice sunny morning.

MCR. Middle Common Room – for graduate students. (cf., JCR and SCR.)

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28 Pronounced ‘tems’.
Medic. Short for ‘medical student’. When you have met a few of them, you’ll never want to be ill again. Normally the booziest collection of students in the University.

Mercury. The statue in the middle of the main quad of Christ Church. This is surrounded by a small pond which the more aesthetic undergraduates sometimes frequent after a contretemps with a group of hearties.

Michaelmas. Autumn term. (cf., Hilary and Trinity.)

Mods. Short for ‘Moderations’. Intermediate exams, normally at the end of the first year. A class is awarded but it doesn’t count towards your finals.

Mortar-board. Not for brick-layers, but an academic cap with a hard flat square top and a tassel in the middle. It sounds silly and it is silly! Women wear a floppy equivalent.

OED. The Oxford English Dictionary from the OUP.

The other place. Cambridge. The less said, the better!

O.U.D.S. Oxford University Dramatic Society. (Pronounced ‘owds’.) Many famous actors and actresses have acted in OUDS productions including Dame Peggy Ashcroft, Sir John Gielgud, Vivienne Leigh, Richard Burton, Diana Quick, Dudley Moore, Rowan Atkinson and even the greatest actor of them all, Nigel Lawson!

OUP. The Oxford University Press in Walton Street. Recently much of the printing side of the operation closed down apart from local work for the University, but the publishing side of the business is still flourishing. In particular, its dictionaries are world famous; see the Bibliography on page 12 for more information. There is an OUP shop in the High Street if you want to buy one.

Over-bump. If two eights bump, the following eight could still ‘bump’ the eight which was three in front, thus causing an ‘overbump’. Still confused?


Oxfam. Short for ‘Oxford Committee for Famine Relief’. Charity founded and still based in Oxford. There are several shops around Oxford, including one in Broad Street and a second-hand bookshop half way up St. Giles on the left hand side. Recommended.

Oxford. Yes there was a ford here once and I suppose oxen probably did cross it. See Oxford city coat of arms for a picture.

Oxford Bags. Trousers that are several sizes too large. Not so popular nowadays. (See also ‘debag’.)

Oxford Blue. A good dark blue colour, as on the University coat of arms. Not to be confused with Cambridge Blue, a pale imitation of the real thing!

Oxford Campaign. Appeal by the University for £200 million. Have you any money to spare? £4 million is allocated for a new Computing Laboratory building behind 8-11 Keble Road, so if you are feeling generous please contact our administrator!


The Oxford English Dictionary. The biggest dictionary in the world (16 volumes). Recently reissued. It has also been computerised and is available on Compact Disc (two of them!). If you want an Oxford Dictionary, try the Oxford University Press shop on the south side of the High Street.


Oxon. Short for the Latin for ‘of Oxford (University)’ \emph{(Oxoniensis)}. 

Oxymoron. Not what you think – you can look it up if you don’t know. You’ll find it boringly interesting.

The Parks. University Park, north of the Science Area. Locked at night. Good place to sit in a deck chair and watch cricket in the summer. Excellent for informal workshops!

Parson’s Pleasure. On the river, where men can sport themselves in their altogether. Only embarrassing if you recognise your tutor! Ladies may alight on the bank and walk round instead of punting, but rarely do. Best enjoyed when travelling with a medic who knows all the Latin names of their various ailments! (cf., Dame’s Delight.)

Pimms. Cocktail of spirits, lemonade, mint, fruit, ice, etc. Best enjoyed outside on a hot summer’s day. Worth trying at least once. If you like it, you can buy a bottle at the Heathrow Duty Free Shop on the way home.

The Playhouse. The Oxford University theatre in Beaumont Street, sadly closed recently due to lack of funds, but now happily reopened. Do go – you may see a future star from O.U.D.S.

POD. Pocket Oxford Dictionary from the OUP. Probably only pocket-sized if you are wearing Oxford bags!

Porter. Guard at the front door of each college. Can be helpful if you don’t look like a tourist.

Praelector. Senior fellow.

Prelims. Short for ‘Preliminaries’. Like Mods but you don’t get a class.

The President. See the Principal.

The Principal. See the Provost.

Proctor. The University authorities in charge of the bulldogs, University rules, etc.

Procurator. Procurer of money.

The Provost. See the Rector.

Punt. Flat-bottomed boat for enjoyment on the river in summer months. Strawberries and Champagne also recommended. You ‘punt’ (with a pole) from the sloping end at the back rather than the flat end. In Cambridge they punt from the other end, but to avoid confusion both ends are flat in Cambridge. You can draw your own conclusions. First rule of punting: always hang on to the punt rather than the pole. You’ll have to find out the rest of the rules by trying it.

Quad. Rectangular courtyard in the middle of a college. Don’t walk on the grass – this is reserved for Dons! (cf., ‘court’ in Cambridge.)

Queen’s Award. Recently awarded jointly for Technological Achievement to Inmos Ltd and the Computing Laboratory for work using formal methods to design the \emph{transputer} floating-point unit. Much coveted by British industry, very few academic institutions have won this award.

Rag Week. Students doing various silly things for charity.

The Rector. See the Dean.

A second. See class.

Scholarship. This used to pay for your time at Oxford if you were poor and clever. However, inflation being what it is, a scholarship is now mainly honorary (you get about £50 a year) but you do get a bigger gown for extra protection at meal times.
Sconce. From the Concise Oxford Dictionary: (Oxford Univ.) inflict forfeit (or penalty involving drinking) of beer etc. for offence against table etiquette upon (member of company or his offence).

Schools. Short for ‘examination schools’. The ultimate horror for many students. You may request a pint of ale during the exam, but only if you are wearing your ceremonial sword!

Scout. Person who cleans college rooms. Used to be more like a servant in the ‘good old days’. Tip recommended for good service. (cf., ‘bedder’ in Cambridge).

SCR. Senior Common Room – for Fellows. (cf., JCR and MRC.)

Sent down. To be forcibly expelled by the University or College authorities. See also ‘come up’ and ‘go down’.

The Sheldonian. Short for the Sheldonian Theatre, where matriculation and degree ceremonies are held.

Shepherd and Woodward The University clothes shop on the south side of the High. The place to go if you want a D.J., (new) gown, mortar-board, college scarf, tie, sweat-shirt, cuff links, etc. If they don’t have what you want, you could also try Walter’s in the Turl.

Spoonerism. The accidental or deliberate transposition of the initial letters etc. of two or more words in a phrase. E.g.,

“You have tasted a whole worm. You have kissed my mystery lectures. You were caught fighting a liar in the quad. You will leave by the next town train.”

Named after Revd. William Archibald Spooner (1844–1930) who was Warden of New College, although many ‘original’ spoonerisms are now known to be apocryphal.

Sporting the oak. Many (some – oh alright, a few) college rooms have two doors. If the outer door is open, then the occupant is willing to receive visitors; if closed, the occupant is ‘sporting the oak’ and does not wish to be disturbed.

Statutes. Normally strange set of rules set down by the founder of each college. For example, the laundress at New College must be “of such age and condition that no sinister suspicion can, or ought to fall on her.”

St. Giles’ Fair. A traditional fair held on the first Monday and Tuesday of each September in St. Giles. Recommended if you are around then, but go before 6 p.m. since the prices increase dramatically then, as do the crowds and pickpockets. The Parks are closed for the day during the fair to prove that they are owned by the University and are not a public right of way.

Subfusc. Dark suit, white bow tie, gown and mortar-board worn for matriculations, exams and degree ceremonies. Women wear something similar. From the Latin subfuscus meaning dark brown, although actually a brown suit would never do!

The stacks. A system to squeeze more books into the Bod. Books are stored on shelves which are right next to each other but may be rolled about to get at the books. You have to order a book which is in the stacks and somebody will go and try to find it for you. Rumour has it that the Bodleian is down to its last 10 miles of shelving and it fills them up at a mile a year. The normal remedy is to dig a new hole somewhere and attach it to the rest of the system by a tunnel. The vast majority of the Bodleian is underground so you may not be impressed by its size from the top. It is one of six copyright libraries in Britain, so it automatically gets a free copy of every book published in Britain. Hence the reason why it fills its empty shelves so fast.

Student. Lowest form of life at Oxford, but some aspire to greater things.

Tails. Formal dark suit with long dangly bits (the “tails”) at the back of the jacket. See ‘White Tie’.  

29 College porters are a better source of old gowns, for hire or sale.
Teddy Hall. Affectionate name for St. Edmund Hall. I’m afraid there are not many teddies to be found here, although you can now buy a Teddy Hall (and other college) teddies in the local gift shops.

A third. See class.

Torpids. The other college rowing event, held in Hilary Term. Eights Week is the big event.

Town. Not referred to in polite University circles.

Townee. Towns-person who is not a member of the University.

Town and Gown. Oxford City and University, especially in opposition to each other.

Trinity. Summer term. (cf., Hilary and Michaelmas.)

The Turl. See the High.

Tutor. College teacher. Most students have a ‘tutorial’ with a tutor at least once a week in term time when they have to think of excuses for what they have been doing all week. There are normally only one or two students present at a tutorial, so it is the one time of the week when they have to be on their toes. Otherwise a student life is quite a restful one.

The Union. Confusing name for the University debating society. Not a Student Union in the usual sense. Many famous and infamous British politicians have started their careers here.

Univ. Short for ‘University College’. This is not to be confused with the University; however it is of course the oldest college. Legend has it that King Alfred founded it, but unfortunately he lived a couple of hundred years earlier than the generally agreed foundation date (1249)!

Vac. Short for ‘vacation’. Name for holidays, because the students are also meant to work for their ‘collections’ during these. Full term (when lectures are held) is only eight weeks long, so you get quite a lot of vacation time for extra study.

Varsity. ‘University’, especially when concerned with sport (e.g., varsity match).

Vice-Chancellor. The head of the University who is here. Normally somebody you haven’t heard of. (cf., Chancellor.)

The Visitor. The equivalent of the Chancellor for a college.

Viva. Short for ‘Viva Voce’. Oral exam, especially a D.Phil. or if you are a borderline case.

White Tie. Formal attire with white bow tie and tails for very posh occasions. Worn at the more exclusive college balls. (cf., Black Tie.)

A yard of ale. Nowadays officially known as a ‘metre of lager’ due to EC regulations, you normally have to drink one of these if you are ‘sconced’. In essence, it is a lot of beer in a very long glass.

C Quotes about Oxford

This section gives some quotes either about Oxford or by people from Oxford, or in many cases both. Don’t use this section to learn English spelling since apart from typographical errors the spelling here is original.

30 OK, tell me who he is then!
C.1 Tourism

The following may be useful in deciding whether to come to Oxford or whether you should go to Cambridge or somewhere else instead:

Welcome to Oxford, city of dreaming spires and screaming tyres!

Welcome to Carbon MonOxford!

- "On an advertising hoarding on the Botley Road into Oxford" (1992)

Oxford is on the whole more attractive than Cambridge to the ordinary visitor; and the traveller is therefore recommended to visit Cambridge first or to omit it altogether if he cannot visit both.

- "Baedeker’s Great Britain" (1887)

Cambridge is a prettier university town than Oxford, because it has no Morris Works.

- Muriel Beadle, These Ruins Are Inhabited

When the point had been duly settled, that Mr. Verdant Green was to receive a university education, the next question to be decided was, to which of the three Universities should he go? To Oxford, Cambridge, or Durham? But this was a matter which was soon determined upon. Mr. Green at once put Durham aside, on account of its infancy, and its wanting the prestige that attaches to the names of the two great Universities. Cambridge was treated quite as summarily, because Mr. Green had conceived the notion that nothing but Mathematics were ever thought or talked of there; and as he himself had always had an abhorrence of them from his youth up, when he was hebdomadally flogged for not getting-up his weekly propositions, he thought that his son should be spared some of the personal disagreeables that he himself had encountered; for Mr. Green remembered to have heard that the great Newton was horsed during the time that he was a Cambridge undergraduate, and he had a hazy idea that the same indignities were still practised there.

- Cuthbert Bede, The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green

In a house on this site between 1654 and 1668 lived Robert Boyle. Here he discovered Boyle’s Law and made experiments with an air pump designed by his assistant Robert Hooke, Inventor Scientist and Architect who made a microscope and thereby first identified the living cell.

- Edmund J. Bowen (1898–1980), on a plaque in the High Street.

... the most English of all cities. Mother Oxford, Venus-Minerva, triple-haunted, hundred-tongued.

- John Fowles (b. 1926), 1977

... it is very difficult to leave a place like Oxford, and there is so much more to do here.

- C. A. R. Hoare, 1990

[Oxford] ... typifies to an American, the union of science and sense—of aspiration and ease. A German university gives a greater impression of science, and an English country house or an Italian villa a greater impression of idle enjoyment; but in these cases, on the one side, knowledge is too rugged, and on the other, satisfaction is too trivial. Oxford lends sweetness to labour and dignity to leisure.

- Henry James (1843–1916), Portraits of Places (1883)

We spent two very pleasant days at Oxford. There are plenty of dogs in the town of Oxford. Montmorency had eleven fights on the first day, and fourteen on the second, and evidently thought he had got to Heaven.

- Jerome K. Jerome (1859–1927), Three Men in a Boat

Very nice place, Oxford, I should think, for people that like that sort of place.

- *George Bernard Shaw*(1856–1950)

“I don’t know which one came first, the Italian one or this.”

- American tourist talking to her husband and struggling with a camera opposite the Hertford College copy of the Bridge of Sighs, 16 July 1985.

C.2 Alumni

Here’s what some famous and not so famous alumni have had to say about Oxford:

Not that I had any special reason for hating school. Strange as it may seem to my readers, I was not unpopular there. I was a modest, good-humoured boy. It is Oxford that has made me insufferable.

Undergraduates owe their happiness chiefly to the fact that they are no longer at school... The nonsense which was knocked out of them at school is all put gently back at Oxford...

- *Sir Max Beerbohm* (1872–1956), Merton College

Then, then shall Oxford be herself again, Neglect the heart and cultivate the brain—Then this shall be the burden of our song ‘All change is good — whatever is, is wrong’—Then Intellect’s proud flag shall be unfurled, And Brain, and Brain alone shall rule the world.

- *Charles L. Dodgson* (1832–1898), Fellow of Christ Church College

I’m privilég’d to be very impertinent, being an Oxonian.

- *George Farquhar* (1678–1707), Sir Harry Wildair

To the University of Oxford I acknowledge no obligation; and she will as cheerfully renounce me for a son, as I am willing to disclaim her for a mother. I spent fourteen months at Magdalen College; they proved the fourteen months the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life.

If I inquire into the manufactures of the monks of Magdalen, if I extend the inquiry to the other colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, a silent blush, or a scornful frown, will be the only reply. The fellows or monks of my time were decent easy men, who supinely enjoyed the gifts of the founder.

...in the university of Oxford the greater part of the public professors have for these many years given up altogether even the pretence of teaching.

- *Edward Gibbon* (1737–1794), Magdalen College

There is not a man who has passed through the great and famous University that can say with more truth than I can say that I love her, I love her, I love her from the bottom of my heart.

To call a man an Oxford man is to pay him the highest compliment that can be paid to a human being.

If I am to look back upon the education of Oxford as it was, it taught the love of truth, it provided men with those principles of honour which were nowhere perhaps so much required as amid the temptations of political controversy. It inculcated a reverence for what is ancient and free and great...

- *William E. Gladstone* (1809–1898), Christ Church College

Oxford is the only town I would live in apart from London.

- *Andrew Johnson* (who lives in London!)
“Sir, we are a nest of singing birds”
- Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), Pembroke College (1730)

In 1929 when I first lectured in Oxford no training was available. It was assumed you had learnt all that could be taught by being lectured at; only practice might make a perfect end.

I recollect an acquaintance saying to me that ‘the Oriel Common Room stank of Logic’.

On the morning of the 23rd I left the Observatory. I have never seen Oxford since, excepting its spires, as they are seen from the railway.
- Cardinal Newman (1801–1890), History of My Religious Opinions from 1841 to 1845

At ten to nine we heard a distant roar of voices and knew that there was something on foot so we dashed out of College and were in the thick of the fun for two hours. We “ragged” the town and the police and the proctors all together for about an hour. Geoffrey and I “captured” a bus and drove it up to Cornmarket making various unearthly noises followed by a mad crowd of mingled varsity and “townese”. It was chockfull of undergrads before it reached Carfax. There I addressed a few stirring words to a huge mob before descending and removing to the “maggars memuggers” or the Martyr’s Memorial where I addressed the crowd again. There were no disciplinary consequences of all this!
- J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973), Fellow of Exeter College

ADVICE FROM A FOURTH-YEAR MAN:
‘You’re reading history? A perfectly respectable school. The very worst is English literature and the next worst is Modern Greats. You want either a first or a fourth. There is no value in anything between. Time spent on a good second is time thrown away… Clothes. Dress as you would in a country house. Never wear a tweed coat and flannel trousers—always a suit. And go to a London tailor; you get better cut and longer credit… Clubs. Join the Carlton now and the Grid at the end of the second year. If you want to run for the Union—and it’s not a bad thing to do—make your reputation outside first, at the Canning or the Chatham, and begin by speaking on the paper… Keep clear of Boar’s Hill…”
- Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966), Hertford College, Brideshead Revisited

One cannot live at Oxford because of the dons—in all else it is a most pleasant city.
- Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Magdalen College

C.3 General

Some general quotes, fact and fiction about Oxford:

First Class letters will normally secure first delivery in the Oxfordshire area if posted before:
Midnight (Head Office), 12:15 a.m. (Sorting Office)

Motion passed at the Oxford Union, 9 Feb. 1933:
“That this house will in no circumstances fight for its King and country.”

Silicon Valley: the original, south of San Francisco in California.
Silicon Ranch: the Dallas–Fort Worth area in Texas.
Silicon Gulch: Austin, Texas.
Silicon Swamp: Florida (it’s true!, there are many high-tech companies here).
Silicon Vale: our very own version of Silicon Valley, although not quite on the same scale, west of London and close to Heathrow.

Silicon Glen: in Scotland, being a government ‘enterprise zone’.

Silicon Fen: around Cambridge using talent from the university.

Silicon Ford: Oxford?

Handel was invited to Oxford by the Vice-Chancellor for the University Act of 1733. In modern Oxford that annual event has shrunk to the one-day ceremonies of the Encaenia, at which honorary degrees are distributed to famous people outside the university, and prizes to the industrious moles within it. In Handel’s day it lasted over several days, and was the occasion of a number of assemblies for which Handel was invited to provide the music. It is also known that Handel was offered an honorary degree and declined it. We have no sure information as to the reason, but the likeliest guess seems to be that he was being asked 100 pounds for the ‘honour.’

The oratorio ‘Athalia’ was first conducted by Handel in the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford on 10 July 1733 when it is reported that 3700 audience attended. The tickets were five shillings each which was undoubtedly a considerable sum in those days, but to be fair to Handel it was only about half the going rate in London. The performance was a great success and was repeated later that week.

On 10 July 1985, the tercentenary year of Handel’s birth, the performance of Athalia was repeated to a capacity audience in the Sheldonian and recorded for the first time ever, by the BBC. The tickets cost from four to eight pounds, considerably cheaper than the first performance in relative terms. Again the performance was a great success. However, nowadays the Sheldonian is licensed for a maximum audience of only 1000 people!

The colleges set a better table than any woman can, and the after-dinner conversation of fellow-scholars in a senior common room is likely to be more interesting than the domestic trivia of a wife’s day. So the successful Oxford wife is the one who early accepts her husband’s college as his mistress.

- Muriel Beadle, These Ruins Are Inhabited (1961)

I speak not of this college or of that, but of the University as a whole; and, gentlemen, what a whole Oxford is!

- Lord Coleridge (1820–1894)

Lord Curzon thought that Oxford University ought to be “a focus of culture, a school of character, and a nursery of thought.”

You will hear more good things on the outside of a stagecoach from London to Oxford than if you were to pass a twelvemonth with the undergraduates, or the heads of colleges, of that famous university.

- William Hazlitt (1778–1830), The Ignorance of the Learned

The austere serenity of Shangri-La. Its forsaken courts and pale pavilions shimmered in repose from which all the fret of existence had ebbed away, leaving a hush as if moments hardly dared to pass. … When the High Lama asked him whether Shangri-La was not unique in his experience, and if the Western world could offer anything in the least like it, he answered with a smile: “Well, yes – to be quite frank it reminds me very slightly of Oxford.”

- James Hilton (1900–1954), Lost Horizon (1933)

There Shelley dream’d his white Platonic dreams.

- Lionel Johnson, Oxford
When told that Wolfson is the only man, other than Jesus and St. John, to have a college named after him at both Oxford and Cambridge, he looked glazy-eyed and blank. 'Jesus?' he asked. The Bursar actually felt called upon to clarify it. 'Jesus CHRIST, that is,' he explained.

- Jonathan Lynn & Antony Jay, Yes Minister

Until 1950 Oxford sent three members to Parliament in London – one from the city and two from the University: the latter were elected by the vote of all living Oxford graduates, wherever they lived, and at one time or another included in their roster Peel, Gladstone and A. P. Herbert.

- Jan Morris, Oxford (1965)

The oldest of Oxford battles is the battle between Town and Gown, which is as old as the University itself, and has often erupted into bloodshed. In 1355 there was a riot between students and citizens on the Feast of St. Scholastica (not, as you may suppose, a kind of abstract holy person, but the sister of St. Benedict).

More than 60 students were killed; we are told, and most of the others ran away, but the result was an overwhelming victory for the University. For 500 years after the event, each St. Scholastica’s Day, the Mayor and 63 citizens – one for each dead student – were obliged to process in penitence to St. Mary’s Church, to bow before the Vice-Chancellor and pay a fine of a penny each. They often found it difficult to muster 63 citizens, but it was only in 1825 that the ceremony was abolished – the City returning ‘the warmest acknowledgements to the University for this act of grace.’

- Jan Morris, Oxford (1965)

The next time I saw Ray he was dressed in full academic regalia, ready to receive an honorary degree from Oxford – only the second film director to be so honoured after his hero Chaplin. He looked much sterner than he had in London the year before, somewhat ill at ease, and carried his mortar-board in his hand rather than wearing it like the others (so scared was he that it would be blown away, as he later told me). Nor had he, unlike his fellows, brought a camera to the ceremony; he thought it would be forbidden in the Sheldonian Theatre.

- Andrew Robinson (b. 1957), Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye

Once you are on the North Oxford property board, the advice thereafter is always “Go East, old man” and the winner is the first one who gets nearest to the Dragon School in the least number of moves.

- Peter Snow, Oxford Observed: Town and Gown

C.4 Others

‘... a perfectly good second-rate chemist.’

- Maggie Thatcher’s tutor, Somerville College

What I tell you three times is true. (The Hunting of the Snark)

No! No! Sentence first – verdict afterwards. (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland)

If you’ll believe in me, I’ll believe in you. (Through the Looking Glass)

I only took the regular course ... the different branches of Arithmetic – Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision.

- Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

Farwell, farewell, dear Oxford! God bless thee, and increase thy sons in number, holiness and virtue.

- Elizabeth I (1592)
It is as absurd to argue men, as to torture them, into believing.

- Cardinal Newman (1801–1890), Sermon at Oxford, 11th December, 1831

When men understand what each other mean, they see, for the most part, that controversy is either superfluous or hopeless.

- Cardinal Newman (1801–1890), Sermon at Oxford, Epiphany, 1839

C.5 Poetry

He that hath OXFORD seen, for Beauty Grace,
And Healthiness, ne’er saw a better place.
If God himself on earth abode would make,
He Oxford, sure, would for His dwelling take.

- Anon

Coy city, that doth swathe thy summer self
In willow lines and elmy avenue,
Each winter comes, and brings some hidden pelf,
Buttress or Cross or gable out to view!

I’m nuts on sport, whatever it is, I’m keen on the
boat-rice dye,
When I tikes my third ter Putney Bridge
and it’s first-class all the wy.
There’s some as changes and chops about, but
mine’s no turncoat gime—
I’ve allus bin Orxfud Collidge myself,
and my mother were just the sime.

O in these quadrangles where Wisdom honours herself
Does the original stone merely echo that praise
Shallowly, or utter a bland hymn of comfort,
The founder’s equivocal blessing
On all who worship Success?

- Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973), Oxford

O
stands for Oxford. Hail! salubrious seat
Of learning! Academical Retreat!
Home of my Middle Age! Malarial Spot
Which People call Medeeval (though it’s not).
The marshes in the neighbourhood can vie
With Cambridge, but the town itself is dry,
And serves to make a kind of Fold or Pen
Wherein to herd a lot of Learned Men.
Were I to write but half of what they know,
It would exhaust the space reserved for “O”;
And, as my book must not be over big,
I turn at once to “P,” which stands for Pig.

MORAL

Be taught by this to speak with moderation
Of places where, with decent application,
One gets a good, sound, middle-class education.

— Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953), Balliol College, from ‘A Moral Alphabet.’

Zeek w’ere thee will in t’Univ’rsity,
Lad, thee’l not vind nór bread nór bed that matches
Them as thee’ll vind, roight züre, at Mrs. Batch’s …

— Max Beerbohm (1872–1956), To an Undergraduate Needing Rooms in Oxford
from ‘Zuleika Dobson’ (A Sonnet in Oxfordshire Dialect)

Belbroughton Road is bonny, and pinkly bursts the spray
Of prunus and forsythia across the public way,
For a full spring-tide of blossom seethed and departed hence,
Leaving land-locked pools of jonquils by sunny garden fence.
And a constant sound of flushing runneth from windows whence
The toothbrush too is airing in this new North Oxford air.

— Sir John Betjeman (1906–1984), May-Day Song for North Oxford

Pink may, double may, dead laburnum
Shedding an Anglo-Jackson shade,
Shall we ever, my staunch Myfanwy,
Bicycle down to North Parade?
Kant on the handle-bars, Marx in the saddlebag,
Light my touch on your shoulder-blade.

— Sir John Betjeman (1906–1984), Myfanwy at Oxford

While Sandy Lindsay from his lodge looks down
Dreaming of Adult Education where
The pottery chimneys flare
On lost potential firsts in some less favoured town.

— Sir John Betjeman (1906–1984), Oxford Ode

Between the winding willow
To a city with spires:
It seemed the path of pilgrims
To the home of earth’s desires.

— Laurence Binyon (1869–1943)
A clerk ther was of Oxenford also,
That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.
As leene was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
But looked holwe, and thereto sobrely.

- *Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400)*, The Canterbury Tales

Noght o word spak he more than was nede
And short and quik, and ful of hy sentence

- *Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400)*, Clerk of Oxenford

Our mathematics will to Oxford bring
The cutest members of the betting-ring—

- *Charles L. Dodgson (1832–1898), alias Lewis Carroll*

Five fathoms square the Belfry frowns;
All its sides of timber made;
Painted all in grays and browns;
Nothing of it that will fade.
Christ Church may admire the change—
Oxford thinks it sad and strange.
Beauty’s dead! Let’s ring her knell.
Hark! now I hear them—ding-dong, bell.

- *Charles L. Dodgson (1832–1898), Christ Church College*

So poetry, which is in Oxford made
An art, in London only is a trade.

- *John Dryden (1631–1700)*, Prologue to the University of Oxon (1684)

Noon strikes on England, noon on Oxford town,
Beauty she was statue cold — there’s blood upon her gown:
Noon of my dreams, O noon!
Proud and godly kings had built her, long ago,
With her towers and tombs and statues all arow,
With her fair and floral air and the love that lingers there,
And the streets where the great men go.

- *James Elroy Flecker (1884–1915)*, The Dying Patriot

The clever men at Oxford
Know all that there is to be knowed.
But they none of them know half as much
As intelligent Mr Toad.

- *Kenneth Grahame (1859–1892)*, The Wind in the Willows
I saw the spires of Oxford as I was passing by,
The gray spires of Oxford against a pearl-gray sky.
My heart was with the Oxford men who went abroad to die.

- Winifred Mary Letts, The Spires of Oxford

So we came...
To a place where three ways and two seasons met,
In spring at the edge of Oxford.
‘Here,’ said the Fox, ‘is a city of screaming tyres,
Where lorries piled with motor-shells
Fly like clumsy Maybugs through the streets,
And the river drumbles past exotic barges.
The smoke of learning rises with the river-mists
And spires like funnels carry praise to heaven.
Thin and rare is the rising praise
But the heavenly thought descends in flesh and blood.

- Anne Ridler (b. 1912), Pegasus in the Botanic Gardens

Those twins of learning that he rais’d in you,
Ipswich and Oxford!

- William Shakespeare (1564–1616), Henry VIII

That Fair city wherein make abode
So many learned imps that shoot abroad
And with their branches spread all Britain.

- Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), 1596

Here colleges in sweet confusion rise,
There temples seem to reach their native skies;
Spires, towers, and groves compose the various shew,
And mingled prospects charm the doubting view.

- Thomas Tickell (1686–1740), Oxford

The King, observing with judicious eyes,
The state of both his universities,
To Oxford sent a troop of horse, for why?
That learned body wanted loyalty;
To Cambridge books, as very well discerning
How much that loyal body wanted learning.

- Joseph Trapp (1679–1747)

On George I’s Donation of the Bishop of Ely’s Library to Cambridge University

The King to Oxford sent a troop of horse,
For Tories own no argument but force.
With equal skill to Cambridge books he sent
For Whigs admit no force but argument.

- Sir William Browne (1692–1774), Reply to Trapp’s epigram

30
Yet, O ye spires of Oxford! domes and towers!
Gardens and groves! your presence overpowers


Though cold December rains draw vanishing rings
On the choked Isis that goes swirling by,
These academic gowns flap like wings
Of half-fledged blackbirds that attempt to fly.

- Andrew Young (1885–1971), At Oxford

C.6 Limericks

There was once a man who said ‘God
Must think it exceedingly odd
If he finds that this tree
Continues to be
When there’s no one about in the Quad.’

- Ronald Arbuthnott Knox (1888–1957), Limerick on Idealism

Dear Sir, Your astonishment’s odd:
I am always about in the Quad.
And that’s why the tree
Will continue to be,
Since observed by Yours faithfully, God.

- Anon. The Answer

If you’ve made it this far, you deserve a couple of rude limericks:

A beauty, a perfect divinity,
Till twenty retained her virginity.
The boys up at Magdalen
Must have been dawdling;
It couldn’t have happened at Trinity.

There was a young student at Johns
Who attempted to fondle the swans.
Whereupon said the porter,
“Oh, pray take my daughter.
The birds are reserved for the dons.”
100 metres is very roughly 3–5 characters. * = no through road, < > = one way street.