**INTRODUCTION**

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Eight hundred years of intellectual endeavour have given Oxford University its worldwide reputation as a place to which scholars come to study, teach and do research in a wide variety of disciplines. Pride in the achievements of the University has led over the centuries to benefactions of many kinds, some of great munificence, which have had a striking impact on Oxford's architecture. Unlike so many other European university cities, Oxford has been fortunate to be spared the ravages of war, avoiding both damage in the English Civil War and aerial bombardment in the Second World War, and the result is a city of architectural delight.

The Oxford of today comprises not only fine University buildings, both ancient and very modern, but also college buildings with their quadrangles and gardens, exemplifying the variety of the thirty-eight different colleges. This architectural heritage was created as a consequence of groups of students gathering together at the feet of renowned scholars, and this practice in effect continues today, with the result that the colleges are neither museums nor mere halls of residence, but living communities of scholars, young and old. Not only do new generations of students year by year enjoy this heritage of University and colleges combined; so also do thousands of visitors, and so may you through the pages of this book, with its splendid and evocative photographs. Handsome buildings, exquisite detail and engaging vistas – all are portrayed here – and all make up the beauty that is Oxford.

**Oxford**

Oxford has been the home of England's oldest university since before the year 1200. There were then three monastic schools with some tradition of learning, and when in 1167 the English scholars at the University of Paris were obliged to leave, King Henry II persuaded many of them to come to Oxford. They brought their experience of the ancient curriculum of studies in force at Paris and they set up a similar course in Oxford.

The system was based on a guild of Masters to which scholars, after seven years' studies in the liberal arts, would be admitted with a licence to teach, and some obligation to do so. All teaching was under the Church (of Rome) and all scholars, Masters, and Doctors were in holy orders, tonsured, and wearing a long black gown.

The scholars were of humble parentage; in an age when the nobility were illiterate and there were no middle classes, the administration of Church and State depended on educated clerks in holy orders. The monastery schools offered intelligent boys a way into the University as scholars; a degree would enable them to become teachers or to aspire to comfortable church livings or well-rewarded offices of State.

At Oxford the Masters' guild, known as universitas, was well established by the year 1200; it was confirmed by the Church in 1214 with the appointment of a Chancellor. Once the University was recognized, Oxford attracted an influx of scholars, many of them very young, who engendered some disorder and friction with the townspeople; this broke out from time to time in violent "town-and- gown" riots. The University owned no buildings before 1320 and was free to move; some of the riots caused migrations of Masters and scholars to other towns, including Cambridge where in 1209 they founded or enlarged the nucleus of another university.

The Masters began in the 13th century to gather the young scholars into halls of residence where they might have adequate living quarters and protection from a hostile town, and would be subject to some discipline. Eventually a certain amount of teaching was done in the halls and some of them gained a good reputation, but they were impermanent since each depended on the enterprise of a Master who in turn had to obtain the approval of the guild. Academic halls came and went; the names of some two hundred have been recorded, though probably not more than eighty existed at any one time in the 13th and 14th centuries.

By the beginning of the 15th century the halls had academic status, and in 1420 a Royal Statute decreed that students would be admitted to the University only when they were matriculated (enrolled) at a recognised Academic Hall or College.

The first endowed colleges appeared at the same time as the halls, in the 13th century, but their origins and aims were different. The secular priests who had become rich churchmen and ministers of the Grown were under Church rules celibate, and had no openly recognised progeny to inherit their wealth. A commendable act was to found and endow a college, primarily for "Founder's Kin", to prepare priests for rewarding places in Church and State, and for scholars to pray for the Founder's soul.

The first colleges in Oxford – up to the Reformation – were not in competition with the halls, but they were a secular reply to the monasteries, with their secure buildings, good living, and internal discipline; besides this the colleges could encourage more adventurous thinking than was normal in a monastery. That was important, and the founders of two colleges expressly forbade their members to make any monastic vow.

Though not in calculated competition with the halls, the colleges' financial resources, ownership of their buildings, and above all their permanence, with statutes and elected Fellows, meant that they were able to do more effectively everything that the halls did, especially from the 15th century when scholars as well as Masters were lodged and boarded all under one roof. The medieval halls slowly disappeared; with one exception they were either closed or bought and absorbed by their rich college neighbours.

The first three colleges were founded within a few years of each other in the 13th century: University College ("Univ"), Merton, and Balliol. The question of which is the oldest rests on the definition of foundation: the endowment; the ownership of permanent buildings; or the royal approval of statutes. However, St Edmund Hall, the sole survivor of the medieval halls, can claim to be the oldest teaching establishment, already in existence half a century before the first three colleges.

Four colleges were set up in the 14th century: Exeter, Oriel, Queen's, and New College. The founder of this last, William of Wykeham, set a pattern for college life when he stipulated that scholars should live in college and be taught by resident Masters, who would cover the whole university curriculum in the Faculty of Arts that is, for a Master's degree. The practice of scholars living in college and "reading with a Master" became general.

In the 15th century three colleges were founded by rich prelates: Lincoln, All Souls, and Magdalen. They were set up on medieval lines, the members being enjoined to pray for the Founder's soul and to prepare themselves to defend the Faith and combat heresy Two more colleges were founded early in the 16th century before the Reformation: Brasenose and Corpus Christi.

The 16th century is remarkable for the founding of Christ Church by King Henry VIII in 1546, despite the upheaval of the Reformation. He completed part of the great college conceived by Cardinal Wolsey and thereby gave his approval to the University which some "greedy souls" would have dissolved for its revenues.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries had the effect of cutting off Oxford's supply of young monastic scholars; however, from the Elizabethan age the rising middle classes increasingly demanded a university education for their sons, and were willing to pay for it; the colleges were glad to accept the fees, and the "gentleman commoner", who was not a member of the foundation but more like a paying guest, crowded out the tonsured indigent scholar.

 After the Reformation and the founding of Christ Church three colleges were set up in the 16th century: Trinity, St John's, and Jesus, bringing the total to thirteen.

The rather rapid expansion of the colleges, each with its group of buildings, was not accompanied by a parallel material growth of the University. From its beginnings in the 12th century for more than a hundred years the Masters' guild owned no building; important ceremonials, ecclesiastical trials, and even the day-to-day business of the Masters – including making loans to scholars from the University Chest – all were conducted in the nave of St Mary the Virgin, known as the University Church. The modest Congregation House built in 1320 adjoining the north-east corner of the church provided a sort of committee room for the Masters, with an upper floor for the incipient library, but for major events they still used the church, and the University had no visible material presence.

Similarly the teaching side had no lecture-halls of its own until a century later, when about 1420 the Masters began to build proper lecture-rooms to replace the inadequate medieval hovels that were still being used. These early "schools" (faculty) buildings, standing where the Old Schools Quadrangle is today, were the first visible expression of the University in a town that already had several impressive college buildings.

The 16th century saw no university building until 1598 when Sir Thomas Bodley began the restoration of Duke Humfrey's Library – part of the 1420 buildings – and eventually the rebuilding of the schools quadrangle with three floors, the topmost storey being reserved for the rapidly growing library.

The expansive character of the Elizabethan age saw a great increase in academic activity and a rapid broadening of the fields of learning. This continued under James I; the University basked in his patronage, and Jacobean architecture sprang up all over Oxford. Two colleges were founded: Wadham and Pembroke; and in 1624 Sir Thomas Bodley's great library scheme was completed.

With Charles 1 on the throne, William Laud – successively Fellow and President of St John's, Chancellor of the University, confidant of the King, and Archbishop of Canterbury - drafted a new Statute for the University, known as the Caroline or Laudian Code of 1636; it created some resentment but it effectively regulated the University for many years.

During the Civil War the occupation of Oxford by the King, his Court, his army, and all the hangers-on, brought academic activity virtually to a standstill; many of the Fellows and most of the students disappeared. The colleges, in their royalist fervour, contributed loans to the King's exchequer – never repaid – and handed over much of their enormously valuable silver to be melted down for coinage.

The rule of the Commonwealth, though bitterly resented by staunch Royalists, brought about a revival of academic activity. Oliver Cromwell was Chancellor in 1650-57; as a Cambridge graduate he took Oxford's needs seriously, and the Parliamentarian appointments to vacated fellowships were acknowledged, even by Royalists, to be good scholars.

The Restoration revived Oxford's confidence, and Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon, a former Warden of All Souls and later Chancellor, commissioned another All Souls man, Christopher Wren, to design an assembly hall for the ceremonials and sometimes rowdy celebrations that were still being most unsuitably held at St Mary's Church. The Sheldonian Theatre, opened in 1669 was the University's second major building, and it has lost none of its importance over the years.

The 17th century also saw great building activity among the colleges and the emergence of two talented amateur architects: Henry Aid rich, Dean of Christ Church, and George Clarke, Fellow of All Souls, who both, with advice from the professionals such as Wren and Hawksmoor, greatly enriched Oxford architecturally.

The University maintained its sense of importance during the 18th century and was able to add majestically to its material presence with the Clarendon Building and the Radcliffe Camera. The trustees of Dr John Radcliffe's estate also gave Oxford the Radcliffe Infirmary (1770) and the Radcliffe Observatory (1794) with its beautiful Tower of Winds.

These additions to the University's material presence may have stimulated the science faculties but they did little for the Arts, where academic standards were low. The prevailing indolence also affected religious observance, and this deeply offended John and Charles Wesley, both graduates of Christ Church, who in 1729 with some equally indignant friends formed the Holy Club to encourage the primitive spirit of Christianity, and they some years later laid the foundations of the Methodist Church.

Only two colleges were founded in the 18th century – more correctly; refounded, since both had ancient antecedents and some buildings – namely Worcester and Hertford. Building work also went on at All Souls, Queen's, Magdalen, and the Radcliffe Camera.

The 19th century brought in radical reforms and far-reaching changes in university life. When college Fellows were no longer obliged to be in holy orders, were free to marry, and were required to undertake serious teaching or research, men of a different calibre were attracted to university work; the colleges began to elect Fellows for their intellectual capacity rather than for their capacity for port wine, and there were soon erudite men in the colleges.

By the 1870s university life was respectable and interesting and the teaching was serious. The scene was set for the greatest revolution in the University's history: the admission of women. Between 1878 and 1898 four colleges for women and the Society of Home Students (later St Anne's) were founded; resistance to the advent of women delayed until 1920 their right to receive degrees, and the women's halls – as they technically were – did not acquire full college status until 1959.

The 19th century was remarkably expansive; besides the women's colleges, several major university buildings were put up, including the new Examination Schools in the High Street, the University Press building in Walton Street, the Ashmolean Museum in Beaumont Street, and the University Museum in Parks Road. Virtually all the existing colleges were enlarged, and Keble College was founded and built.

Fourteen new colleges were established in the 20th century; seven of these already existed in another form. The logical, even inevitable, outcome of the 19th-century decision to admit women to the University has been the 20th-century admission of women to the men's colleges, and then of men to the women's.

In the 21st century, Oxford's research aims to address some of the major challenges facing humanity in modern times. Global health is one aspect of this work: with one of the largest medical research centres in Europe, Oxford runs world-leading programmes on cancer, stroke, malaria, HIV, heart disease, and musculoskeletal and neurological disorders. The Oxford Martin School, set up in 2005, carries out interdisciplinary research into global issues ranging from climate change to the ageing population of the developed world. The University has also extended the range of its teaching, with the new Blavatnik School of Government set to train future world leaders.

The ongoing development of scientific research has been matched by the provision of improved facilities, with major new buildings in the Science Area. The University's purchase of the Radcliffe Infirmary site has also enabled the creation of a new central campus, the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The first buildings planned for the site are for mathematics and the humanities, with further development expected to take place over several decades. The University's extensive library system, managed by the Bodleian Libraries, is being modernised, bringing improvements in access, efficiency and conservation standards, not least through the refurbishment of the New Bodleian Library, due to reopen as the Weston Library, and through major digitisation projects. The University's museums have also focused on improving research facilities and public access, with major extensions at the Pitt Rivers Museum and at the Ashmolean Museum, which has doubled its exhibition space with an award-winning redesign.

One new college, Green Templeton College, was founded in 2008 following the merger of Green College and Templeton College. Other colleges have continued to extend their facilities through conversions and new buildings.