A Brief History of the Oxford University

Oxford is a unique and historic institution. As the oldest English-speaking university in the world, it lays claim to eight centuries of continuous existence. There is no clear date of foundation, but teaching existed at Oxford in some form in 1096 and developed rapidly from 1167, when Henry II banned English students from attending the University of Paris.

In 1188, the historian, Gerald of Wales, gave a public reading to the assembled Oxford dons and in 1190 the arrival of Emo of Friesland, the first known overseas student, initiated the University's tradition of international scholarship. By 1201, the University was headed by a magister scolarum Oxonie, on whom the title of Chancellor was conferred in 1214, and in 1231 the masters were recognized as a *universitas* or corporation.

Map of Oxford dated 1644

In the 13th century, rioting between town and gown (students and townspeople) hastened the establishment of primitive halls of residence. These were succeeded by the first of Oxford's colleges, which began as medieval 'halls of residence' or endowed houses under the supervision of a Master. University, Balliol and Merton Colleges, established between 1249 and 1264, were the oldest.

Less than a century later, Oxford had achieved eminence above every other seat of learning, and won the praises of popes, kings and sages by virtue of its antiquity, curriculum, doctrine and privileges. In 1355, Edward III paid tribute to the University for its invaluable contribution to learning; he also commented on the services rendered to the state by distinguished Oxford graduates.

Oxford early on became a centre for lively controversy, with scholars involved in religious and political disputes. John Wyclif, a 14th-century Master of Balliol, campaigned for a bible in the vernacular, against the wishes of the papacy. In 1530, Henry VIII forced the University to accept his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. During the Reformation in the 16th century, the Anglican churchmen Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley were tried for heresy and burnt at the stake in Oxford. The University was Royalist in the Civil War, and Charles I held a counter-Parliament in Convocation House.

In the late 17th century, the Oxford philosopher John Locke, suspected of treason, was forced to flee the country. The 18th century, when Oxford was said to have forsaken port for politics, was also an era of scientific discovery and religious revival. Edmund Halley, Professor of Geometry, predicted the return of the comet that bears his name; John and Charles Wesley's prayer meetings laid the foundations of the Methodist Society.

The University Church in 1726

The University assumed a leading role in the Victorian era, especially in religious controversy. From 1811 onwards The Oxford Movement sought to revitalise the Catholic aspects of the Anglican Church. One of its leaders, John Henry Newman, became a Roman Catholic in 1845 and was later made a Cardinal. In 1860 the new University Museum was the site of a famous debate between Thomas Huxley, the champion of evolution, and Bishop Wilberforce.

From 1878, academic halls were established for women, who became members of the University in 1920. Since 1974, all but one of Oxford's 39 colleges have changed their statutes to admit both men and women. St Hilda's remains the only women's college.

In the years since the war, Oxford has added to its humanistic core a major new research capacity in the natural and applied sciences, including medicine. In so doing, it has enhanced and strengthened its traditional role as a focus for learning and a forum for intellectual debate.

Structure of the University

Oxford is an independent and self-governing institution, consisting of the central University and the Colleges.

The **Vice-Chancellor**, who holds office for seven years, is effectively the 'Chief Executive' of the University. Three **Pro-Vice-Chancellors** have specific, functional responsibility for Academic Matters, Academic Services and University Collections, and Planning and Resource Allocation. The **Chancellor**, who is usually an eminent public figure elected for life, serves as the titular head of the University, presiding over all major ceremonies.

The principal policy-making body is the **Council of the University**, which has 26 members, including those elected by Congregation, representatives of the Colleges and two members from outside the University. Council is responsible for the academic policy and strategic direction of the University, and operates through four major committees: Educational Policy and Standards, General Purposes, Personnel, and Planning and Resource Allocation.

Final responsibility for legislative matters rests with **Congregation**, which comprises over 3600 members of the academic, senior research, library, museum and administrative staff.

Day-to-day decision-making in matters such as finance and planning is devolved to the University's five **Academic Divisions** - Humanities, Life and Environmental Sciences, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Medical Sciences and Social Sciences. Each division has a full-time divisional head and an elected divisional board. **Continuing Education** is the responsibility of a separate board.

The **Colleges**, though independent and self-governing, form a core element of the University, to which they are related in a federal system, not unlike the United States. In time, each college is granted a charter approved by the Privy Council, under which it is governed by a Head of House and a Governing Body comprising of a number of Fellows, most of whom also hold University posts. There are also six Permanent Private Halls, which were founded by different Christian denominations, and which still retain their religious character. Thirty colleges and all six halls admit students for both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Seven other colleges are for graduates only; one, All Souls, has fellows only, and one, Kellogg College, specialises in part-time graduate and continuing education.

Oxford's current academic community includes 78 Fellows of the Royal Society and 112 Fellows of the British Academy. A further 100 Emeritus and Honorary College Fellows are Fellows of the Royal Society and 145 Emeritus and Honorary College Fellows are also Fellows of the British Academy.

The University of Oxford has more academic staff working in world-class research departments (rated 5\* or 5 in the RAE 2001) than any other UK university.

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Students

The University of Oxford's total student population numbers just over 16,500 (students in residence, 2000-2001).

Almost a quarter of these students are from overseas.

More than 130 nationalities are represented among our student body.

Almost 5,000 students are engaged in postgraduate work. Of these, around 3,000 are working in the arts and humanities.

Every year more than 16,500 people take part in courses offered by the University's Department for Continuing Education.

Latest figures show that only 5.5 per cent of Oxford graduates were unemployed six months after graduation, compared with the national sector average of over 6 per cent.

Oxford has a higher number of first degree graduates (36%) entering further training than the national average (20%).

Our students and staff are currently involved in over 55 initiatives, including visits to more than 3,700 schools and colleges, to encourage the brightest and best students to apply to Oxford, whatever their background.

Studying at Oxford

Graduate study at Oxford

Across both the Arts and the Sciences, Oxford research is consistently in the top rank both nationally and internationally. As well as being in the forefront of scientific, medical and technological achievement, the University has strong links with research institutions and industrial concerns both in the United Kingdom and overseas. The University's income from externally funded research grants and contracts in 2000-1 totalled over £142-4 million. The University's great age also allows its teaching staff and research students to draw on a heritage of magnificent library and museum collections.

In all these fields, Oxford attracts scholars from many parts of the world to join its teaching and research staff, and values also the important role of overseas graduate students (approximately one quarter of the total graduate body) in providing intellectual stimulation and creating and maintaining academic links with colleagues abroad. A hundred countries are at present represented in this way.

The development of graduate studies has largely taken place in the 20th century and in the last 30 years seven new graduate colleges have been set up. However, most graduate students still belong to a traditional undergraduate college where their presence is valuable to teachers and undergraduates alike.

Graduate courses

The University offers a wide range of taught graduate courses and research degrees, ranging from one to three or more years in length. While the Master of Studies (MSt) degree is awarded after examination at the end of three terms' work, three or more years are normally required to complete a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

For all diplomas and degrees, except the few offered as part-time courses, students must spend a period in residence - which means postgraduate students live in term time within 25 miles of Oxford. There are no external degrees and there are only a few part-time courses in specific subjects. The minimum period of residence for most diplomas or the degrees of MSc or MSt is three terms. The minimum period of residence for the degrees of MPhil (BPhil in Philosophy), MLitt, or DPhil is normally six terms.

The academic year runs from October to September and is divided into three terms, Michaelmas, Hilary, and Trinity, and three vacations. The dates of Full Terms, eight-week periods during which lectures and other instruction are given, are as follows for the next two years:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Academic year 2003-4** | **Academic year 2004-5** |
| Michaelmas Term  | 12 Oct to 6 Dec | 10 Oct to 4 Dec |
| Hilary Term  | 18 Jan to 13 Mar  | 16 Jan to 12 Mar |
| Trinity Term  | 25 Apr to 19 June | 24 Apr to 18 June |

The graduate, however, unlike the undergraduate, will normally be in residence for most of the year. In many departments formal lectures, seminars and classes for graduates continue into the vacations.

**Teaching & Research**

In 2002, Oxford University claimed first place in the annual Times Good University Guide, which ranks universities according to the quality of teaching and research, as well as indicators including staffing levels, facilities spending and graduate destinations.

In the Financial Times 2002 MBA ranking, the Saïd Business School's one-year MBA course received the highest rating for value for money of all the international schools surveyed.

In 2002, Oxford University topped the annual league table of teacher training providers for the fifth successive year.

Oxford University was named the UK's most innovative University in the Launchit2001 competition, in recognition of the greatest achievements in innovation and enterprise across the broadest range of activity.

In the academic year 2000-2001, Oxford's overall research income from external sponsors rose by 10 per cent for the second successive year, reaching £142.4 million.

In the most recent national Teaching Quality Assessment exercises for 2000, Oxford was awarded top marks in six out of ten subjects assessed.

Oxford, Stanford and Yale Universities have recently become partners in a joint 'distance learning' venture, the Alliance for Lifelong Learning, which will provide on-line courses in the arts and sciences initially to their combined 500,000 alumni.

The University of Oxford has more academic staff working in world-class research departments (rated 5\* or 5 in the RAE 2001) than any other UK university.

Oxford has recently received its fourth Queen's Anniversary Prize, in recognition of the Refugee Studies Centre's contribution to the study of forced migration and refugees.

Isis Innovation, the University's technology transfer company, files on average one new patent application a week and spins out a new company from University research every two months.

Oxford has spun out more companies than any other UK university. Our spin-out companies are collectively worth around £2 billion, and have helped produce some 30 multi-millionaires.

Oxford is the UK pioneer in developing a university intellectual property policy.

Latest research: Revolutionary new test to help eliminate tuberculosis

3 December 2002

A revolutionary new test for identifying people infected with tuberculosis (TB), one of the leading causes of death worldwide, will shortly be launched by Oxford Immunotec Ltd, a new Oxford University spin-off company. The test radically improves the speed and accuracy with which the disease can be identified. It has been developed to replace the existing skin test for TB, which is given to 600,000 UK schoolchildren every year.

Oxford Immunotec's test has come from discoveries made over the last seven years at the University of Oxford by Dr Ajit Lalvani and collaborators at the Nuffield Department of Medicine, John Radcliffe Hospital. A replacement for the 100-year-old skin test is long overdue but, until now, there has not been a better way of diagnosing infection.

The Oxford Immunotec test is based on patented technology which provides a simple and extremely accurate way of studying a person's cellular immune response to an infection. Every time someone becomes infected with a disease, the body produces specific cells (white blood cells) to fight the infection. The new test looks to see if the body has produced these cells in response to TB and monitors how their numbers change over time. In this way, it is possible to determine if a person is infected and whether they are effectively fighting the infection. This powerful technique can be used not only for diagnosis of infections, but also for prognosis of disease and monitoring of treatment.

Crucially, the Oxford Immunotec test will also make it possible to accurately identify people who are carrying TB infection, but who have not yet gone on to develop disease. Diagnosing and treating infected people before they go on to develop severe disease and infect others is essential to prevent the spread of TB and save lives. TB kills between two and three million people each year, and the death toll is increasing. TB in the UK has risen almost every year for the last 15 years, with 6,500 newly diagnosed cases each year.

Since 1998, Dr Lalvani has used this rapid blood test in double blinded, randomised studies to prove its effectiveness in over 2,000 TB patients and healthy controls in eight different countries. These studies demonstrate that the new test is a radical improvement on the current skin test, and that, unlike the skin test, it works well in people with weaker immune systems, such as children, the elderly and those immunosuppressed with diseases like HIV.

Dr Peter Wrighton-Smith, CEO of Oxford Immunotec, said: 'We are extremely excited about this new test which we believe will revolutionise TB control. This test is needed as never before because TB is resurging in the developed world and already parts of the UK have TB rates as high as India. The huge amount of clinical data gathered to date proves this technology works and we are already looking to apply it to other diseases where the cellular immune response is critical, such as HIV, Hepatitis C and Cancer.'

Life in Oxford

The city of Oxford

Oxford lies about 57 miles (90km) north-west of London. A medium-sized city with a large student population, Oxford has a lively and cosmopolitan atmosphere, with excellent cultural, leisure, sport and retail amenities.

Oxford's historic architecture is well renowned. Amongst its beautiful buildings and modern facilities are parks, gardens and waterways. In addition to those offered by the University, the city of Oxford has its own cultural facilities, including the Museum of Oxford and the Museum of Modern Art. Drama productions are performed at, amongst others, the Oxford Playhouse, and the Apollo Theatre, and there are several cinemas. Sports fans enjoy county cricket in the University Parks and third-division football at Oxford United, as well as punting, swimming, and ice-skating in the city centre.

There is heavy traffic in Oxford, and much of the city centre is now closed to private traffic. Fortunately, most of the University area can be comfortably covered on foot or bicycle. Secondhand bicycles can be hired or bought and local bus services are excellent.

Oxford is also well served by national road and rail links. A direct 24-hour coach service connects the city with London, and with Heathrow and Gatwick airports.

The city and surrounding area are home to various industries including a growing number of high-technology companies in areas such as IT and biosciences, which have developed from University research or are attracted by the proximity of the University. Oxford is also a major tourist centre.

Music

Students at Oxford enjoy a wealth of opportunity to involve themselves in music, as listeners and performers, and at all levels. At the top end the University boasts student orchestras of professional calibre (notably the Oxford University Orchestra and the Philharmonia), and choirs of renown (Christ Church, Magdalen and New College, along with the Schola Cantorum).

Other levels of accomplishment are catered for by college music societies, many of which run ambitious programmes of chamber, orchestral and vocal music. Opera is represented by at least two University-based organizations. Other organizations within the University cater for almost every other conceivable interest, from Soul to Jazz, from Indian to contemporary.

Oxford plays host to musicians from far and wide, including opera companies from Glynbourne and Cardiff, and orchestras of distinction such as the CBSO and the orchestra of St John's Smith Square. And if you feel there is something missing, Oxford is the ideal place to do your own thing with the unlimited musical talent the University has at its disposal.

Sports

The University provides a spring-board for sportsmen and women to achieve at county, national and international level, partly because of excellent sporting facilities at college and University level. The majority of colleges provide sports grounds, squash courts and boat houses on the river Isis for the annual inter-college rowing competition, 'Eights'.

The University provides generous sporting facilities in all areas including sports not normally available at college level, such as volleyball, athletics, fencing and judo. Many of these facilities are located at the Iffley Road Sports Complex, which also boasts a modern multi-gym, an all-weather track, and a newly-opened artificial hockey pitch. Association football, lawn tennis and rugby are also catered for at this site, along with a rowing tank and gymnasium. A 25-metre swimming pool should be completed soon.

Sources of Knowledge

Bodleian Library

The Bodleian Library is the principal library of the University, taking its name from Sir Thomas Bodley who refounded it on the site of an earlier library. It was opened in 1602 and has an unbroken history from that time. When publishing and copyright became subject to statute the Bodleian became, and remains, one of the libraries of legal deposit. Material published elsewhere than in Great Britain and Ireland is extensively acquired, mainly by purchase.

The Library's collections are housed in several buildings. The central group consists of the Old Library, the Radcliffe Camera, the New Library, and the Clarendon Building. A large part of the Library's holdings of some seven million volumes is housed in the bookstacks of the New Library. Reading rooms on the central site contain on open access selected material on English language and literature, history, theology, classics, bibliography, education, music, geography, philosophy, politics and economics, management studies, Latin American studies and Slavonic and East European studies. Western manuscripts and early printed books are normally consulted in Duke Humfrey's Library within the Old Library, and the Modern Papers reading room in the New Library. Oriental books and manuscripts are consulted in the Oriental Reading Room.

Books on science and medicine, law, South Asian studies, Japanese studies, the Middle East and China (teaching and loan collection) and Eastern Art, and American and Commonwealth history, are kept in other libraries within the group, described separately below.

The majority of printed accessions are listed in the OLIS online catalogue, which may be consulted on terminals throughout the Bodleian. Terminals in all reading rooms in the Bodleian may be used to connect to OxLIP, a range of electronic resources, bibliographic and full-text, in all subject areas, mounted both on the local network and on remote computers. These resources are also available from other workstations connected to the University network in colleges, faculties and departments. Workstations also give access to the Bodleian catalogue of pre-1920 books, both via OLIS and on CD ROM. The Chinese and Japanese catalogues are partially recorded in original script on the Allegro system and may be accessed via the network or the Internet. Work on converting the card catalogues is well advanced.

Students formally registered with the University are entitled to readership upon complying with certain formalities; arrangements will be made through their colleges. The central Bodleian is not a lending library, nor are readers in general admitted to the bookstacks. There are facilities for reading microform material, and photographic and photocopying services. Readers may use their own laptop computers.

More detailed information about the Library as a whole may be found in A general guide to the Bodleian Library and its dependent libraries, and about the Central Bodleian in Guide to the Central Bodleian Library. Both are obtainable free at the Library and in PDF format from the Library's web pages.

Museum of the History of Science

The Museum of the History of Science, housed in the Old Ashmolean Building in Broad Street, is primarily a museum of scientific instruments of historical interest. The very fine building was erected by the University to house the collections of Elias Ashmole (1617-92), and to serve for lectures in natural philosophy and as a chemical laboratory; it was opened in 1683. The Ashmolean Museum (now in Beaumont Street) remained in the building until the end of the 19th century. The building became a museum again in 1925, after the Lewis Evans Collection was accepted by the University and placed in the upper gallery; in 1935 the scientific collections had so increased in size and scope that the name was changed to the Museum of the History of Science.

Substantial donations, loans, and purchases have continued to augment the collections, which comprise:

1. The Lewis Evans and Billmeir collections of mathematical, time-telling, and surveying instruments, including a remarkable collection of armillary spheres, astrolabes, quadrants, and sundials, dating from the medieval period to the 19th century
2. The Barnett and Beeson collections of clocks and watches, especially rich in clocks and watches made by Oxfordshire craftsmen
3. Astronomical instruments derived from the Savilian and Radcliffe Observatories, from the Royal Astronomical Society, and other sources, including exceptionally interesting instruments from the 17th and 18th centuries
4. The Clay collection of optical instruments, which includes many early microscopes, the Royal Microscopical Society's collection of early microscopes, and a large collection of telescopes and other optical instruments

Beyond these discrete collections, the Museum contains a wealth of apparatus and instruments covering a broad spectrum of the history of science. Its collections are especially strong from the medieval period until the early 19th century.

The Museum has recently undergone major refurbishment, with new displays, and, in the basement, a special exhibitions gallery, education room, public toilets, and library. The basement area is entirely accessible for wheelchair users, and is reached by a lift in the Sheldonian Yard. An MSc course in History of Science: Instruments, Museums, Science, Technology is taught within the Museum by the curatorial staff.

The Museum is open to the public, from 12 noon to 4.00 pm, Tuesday to Saturday, throughout the year, except for Bank Holidays, and for about a week after Christmas. The library may be used, on application, by students and others engaged in research. It is open regularly to the Museum's own graduate students.

All information was taken from the Official University of Oxford Site

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