



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF HIGH STREET

upper stratum of Her Majesty's Government, was another worthwhile lecture. The list of lecturers was most impressive. A.H. Halsey, Christopher Ricks, M.E. Ceadel, Thomas Docherty, Micheal Hart, and an enigmatic Valentine Cunningham accompanied Ellman and Crowther-Hunt. Although my interests lie mainly in history, I found the literature talks most invigorating. One lecture, however, titled "The Short Story as the Laboratory of the Novel: The Case of Bakhtinian Dialogism," left me in a state of bewilderment. Even after several hours of discussion with fellow students, the lecture remained a mystery.

In true Oxford style, students often entertained small gatherings in their rooms. As our second night at the college also coincided with Canada Day, I and a few other Canadians decided to have a champagne party. We started out at the Turf Tavern then moved onto the King's Arms and finally drifted into my room where 20 people crowded in to drink three bottles of champagne. Great fun was had by all, especially when we sang a rather off-key rendition of "O, Canada." My room later smelled of champagne, bitter and rank cigarette smoke, and two weeks passed before the foul smell subsided.

I have, perhaps, given a seemingly false impression that the summer school is simply another fun summer vacation. On the contrary, the workload is very heavy. Each student is expected to write two papers in their respective tutorials. In the six weeks of tutorials, some students read to less than 12 novels including James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a formidable book in itself. I myself read five books on British social and economic history and countless isolated chapters on various topics. Papers were often 10 to 12 pages in length, single spaced and handwritten. An overzealous friend even turned out a paper of 30 frightening pages.

No compliment is too high for the Oxbridge tutorial system. Groups are very small, consisting of three or four students to a tutor. Discussions are relaxed with a high group involvement.

One derives a real sense of accomplishment learning in such a small group, unlike the impersonal note-taking frenzy in large lecture halls. Tutors often came down to the college pub with the students, and even invited them to dinner at their homes. York professors may be just as cordial, but the size of some classes makes it almost impossible for them to get to know their students.

Students intending to study abroad should, however, get to know their professors, as two letters of recommendation are a requisite of your application. Transcripts are also necessary, and preparatory reading will come in handy. Visit York's Office of Student Programmes for information and all the necessary forms.

The next major obstacle, if one is accepted to the program, lies in financing such a trip. Tuition was £1120 (\$2240) including room and board. I also planned to do some travelling while I was there. With my savings, a £120 scholarship, and a loan from my dad, I budgeted the whole trip at \$4,000. I should warn those students considering this or any foreign summer school that if you require OSAP in the next year, you are still required to come up with a minimum income even if you won't be working. This unfortunately discourages many students from summer school abroad.

Yet after much of the initial overexcitement subsided, I quickly fell into the Oxford undergraduate way of life. When not in tutorials, my afternoons were spent either reading in the Radcliffe Camera or exploring the "quintessential" Oxford.

Reading in the Radcliffe Camera (built in 1748) was an overwhelming experience. A large circular domed building, whose design was started by Hawksmoor and finished by James Gibbs after Hawksmoor's death, the Radcliffe Camera is lavishly designed in a Palladian style. Up the circular stairs and inside the upper chamber there is a beautiful ornate ceiling that resembles, according to a friend, a fancy Wedgewood dinner plate. Each and every sound uttered echoes through the vast vault.

Part of the Bodleian Library, the Radcliffe Camera is one of the few places where books can be found on open shelves. Most of the library's books are actually stored in an immense, elaborate system of caves below ground. Books have to be requested with a slip indicating which reading room you would like them delivered to.

Ordinary visitors are prohibited from the library but as a summer student, you have access to one of the world's greatest libraries. Typical of almost everything English the Bodleian has its own eccentric customs. To enrol as a reader in the Bodleian, you have to swear an oath and sign your name in its registry:

*I hereby undertake not to remove from the library, or to mark, deface, or injure in any way, any volume, document, or other document, or other object belonging to it or in its custody; not to bring into the library or kindle any fire or flame, and not to smoke in the library; and I promise to obey all rules of the library.*

Moreover, if you want a book, you will have to look in the grossly oversized leather-bound reference books, where each entry is meticulously pasted on a page. In about six hours to a day, your book should surface from its catacombs.

Close to the Bodleian is Hertford College, architecturally noted for its "Bridge of Sighs." Hertford was once home to one of Oxford's most notorious undergraduates, Evelyn Waugh, who later became one of the most popular English writers ever. Many of his books, especially *Brideshead Revisited*, depict Oxford in the 1920s as Bacchanalian—prone to heavy drinking, eating and boyish antics.

Waugh used to torment the Principal of Hertford by barking under his window because he believed Cruttwell had an unusual affection for dogs.

Exeter College is also only steps away from the Bodleian. The college chapel is appealing to those who do not mind its Gothic architecture. I was told that it was modeled after the St. Chapelle Cathedral in Paris. Another beautiful feature of Exeter is its Fellows' Garden, a large grassy lawn bordered by floral bushes and dominated by a gigantic tree.

One college which should be passed over is Keble, a mass of Gothic Revivalism at its absolute worst. John Betjeman writes in *An Oxford University Chest*, "whatever criticisms admirers of

Renaissance may level against Keble college, they cannot say that it is a copy of anything." Its patterns of light and dark brick look like some Victorian ran amok with a two-coloured Lego building set.

Other colleges that should be visited are Merton (1264), New College (1379), Lady Margaret Hall (1878), University College, Corpus Christi, St. John's, Balliol and Magdalen.

When tired of touring the city's architecture, there are always the pubs to visit. The British take an attitude quite different from ours on the subject of alcohol. A night at the local pub is an integral part of life on that island.

One of the most interesting pubs in Oxford is the Turf Tavern, a 13th century pub, which "enjoys one of the quaintest positions of any pub in the country—tucked among the leaning 16th and 17th century houses of Bath Place," according to one tourist guidebook. There, friends and I met a character dressed in black and covered in tattoos. He called himself Peanut but spelled it Penut. Dressed in black and cowboy hat he sang "I wanna be a cowboy, and you can be my cowgirl . . ." followed by yipee-ays and yipee-as.

When asked what he thought of the Queen, he coaxed an imaginary shotgun and fired it. The same subtle reply came when asked about the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Royal Wedding. However, when asked about Margaret Thatcher, "Boom, boom, boom!" was the answer.

A favourite of mine was the Whitehorse Pub which was very small and cosy; a great place to hang out and have a filling meal. A rather eccentric pub is The Bear, which displays walls covered with snips of neckties from unwary customers. If the pub staff like your tie, then snip, off it comes. This pub was filled with loud language students, much like the Haed of the River which resembles a meat market on the weekends.

The next pub should be the Nag's Head, although I discovered this pub too late to really appreciate it. Board games are readily available, including the British version of Trivial Pursuit, with cricket and rugby questions. For more literary minded people, the Eagle and Child was frequented by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Some more distant pubs worth visiting are the Perch and the Trout, about an hour's walk from Exeter. Another pub recently re-opened this summer is the Victoria Arms on the River Cherwell. The way to get there however is by punt (a long boat) from the Cherwell Boathouse.

One of the favourite past-times at Oxford is punting. This ancient form of water transportation looks damn easy but wait until you actually try it. Steering the punt with only a pole is extremely strenuous. Most of the time these punts either bump their way down the Cherwell like a pinball or go endlessly in circles. One hazard is that in certain parts of the Cherwell the bottom is very silty. If the pole gets stuck in the bottom and the boat is moving away, it is wise to let go. The obstinate few who insist on pulling it free, end up swimming.

Another hazard is the low branches that extend out over the river. Since you have to stand to punt, anyone not paying attention ends up as another water-fowl. Places where you can rent punts are at Magdalen Bridge (next to Magdalen College), Salter Brothers at Folly Bridge, and at the Cherwell Boat House.

Like punting, rowing is a verifiable institution at Oxford; part of the public school breeding. Rowing receives a great deal of attention, especially when colleges compete in April and May. So much pride is invested in these races that victories or "bumps" are recorded on college walls. The rowing season climaxes when Oxford competes against arch-rival Cambridge in an annual race on the Thames in London. Partisan crowds gather along the route cheering on their respective schools. This event is as much a social event as sporting. Oxonian socialites mingle while gulping champagne and nibbling on strawberries.

Another rowing-social event is the Henley Regatta, held during July at Henley-on-Thames. Men attend in blue blazers, white pants, and straw boaters. Most people rarely pay any attention to the races except when their alma mater is in a close battle. Here the drink is Pimm's Punch, a very tasty mix of Pimms, lemonade and vegetables.

Now, whenever I read and see anything related to that fabled institution, Oxford, I always feel peevisish, wondering when I shall return to that quintessential place which I found.

