



Oxford

Oxford is a beautiful city and one of Britain's major tourist attractions. Around two million tourists a year go there to visit the colleges, parks and museums.

Oxford is not as old as London, Cambridge or York, but it became an important market town in the tenth century. By the thirteenth century the town was a rich centre that sold cloth and wool. During this time scholars were attracted to Oxford and built three colleges there: University College (1249), Balliol College (1263-8) and Merton College (1264). These colleges looked like religious buildings because at that time religion and education were closely connected. By the end of the thirteenth century there were 1,500 students and the university became famous all over Europe.

Most of the university's buildings were built between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first two women's colleges, Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville, opened in 1879. At that time women could not



Hertford College, Oxford.

receive a university degree, but in 1920 the first woman got her degree at Oxford.

Today there are thirty-nine colleges and more than 23,000 students. A lot of famous people have studied here: twenty-two British prime ministers, ex-President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton, Oscar Wilde and Lewis Carroll are only a few. C. S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and J. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, were both professors of English at Oxford, and they were also good friends.

The Bodleian Library is one of the most important historical buildings in Oxford. It opened in 1602 and was the first national library of England. It receives a copy of every book published in Britain. In 1946 the New Bodleian, that can hold five million books, was added to the Bodleian. Oxford has some interesting museums, too. The Ashmolean Museum (1845) has important works of art and was the first museum in Britain to be open to the public.

Rowing¹ is an important sport at Oxford. 'Eights Week'—so called because there are eight rowers in the teams of the rowing boats—takes place in May on the Isis, which is what the Thames is



called as it passes through Oxford. The colleges compete² against each other to become the 'head of the river', as the winner is called.

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge compete against each other at several sports. The team colour of Oxford is dark blue and Cambridge teams wear light blue. The annual Boat Race between the two universities take place in the spring. The tradition of the Boat Race began in March 1829. The two teams race on the River Thames in south-west London, between Putney and Mortlake, over a distance of 6.8 kilometres. Thousands of people watch the race on the river and millions of others watch it on TV.

1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What did Oxford sell in the thirteenth century?
- 2 Which three colleges were built in the thirteenth century?
- 3 When did the first woman get her degree at Oxford?
- 4 Name three famous people who have studied at Oxford?
- 5 Why is the Bodleian Library important?
- 6 Where does the annual Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge take place?

1. **rowing** : the sport of driving a boat by means of oars.

2. **compete** : take part in a sport with the intention of winning.