



SOONER AT OXFORD

PART TWO

of a continuing series

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Our Rhodes Scholar writes about a journey into the English countryside, a visit to Cambridge, an Oxford Union debate, among other things

OCTOBER 11, 1965. Michaelmas Term. Today was the first day of term (the "fall trimester," Oxford's school year, is composed of three eight-week-long terms: Michaelmas, Hilary, and Trinity), and, consequently, lectures began. Although Oxford has no formal enrollment or coursework, a full complement of lecture series is offered in each subject. Attendance is entirely voluntary, and the first week is a critical one for the lecturer who wants to keep an audience. How different this seems from custom in the United States, where a student is stuck for a semester, regardless of the instructor's abilities. I decided to try David Vowles's "Introduction to Comparative Psychology" this morning, and the result was a happy surprise.

12:30 p.m. Three of us from the department of zoology, all graduate students, left for a three-day trip to Ravensglass peninsula, the site of a field camp used by the animal behavior group. It is in Cumberland, a northwestern county of England and part of the Lake District, an area made famous by Wordsworth and other English pastoral poets. We were to drive up and "break down" the camp for the winter, then bring the equipment back to Oxford for storage until next spring.

Not long after leaving, I had my first experience with English driving, that is, on the "wrong" side of the road. Adding to the initial unfamiliarity was the vehicle, a Land Rover (something between a Jeep and a small truck) and the road, a high-speed dual carriageway (super highway). It was disconcerting, but when one is forced to adapt hurriedly, one does.

We arrived at the seaside village of Ravensglass just after sunset, following a beautiful drive through the Cumbrian Mountains. They were remote, windswept, and covered with sheep and heather.

OCTOBER 14, 1965. 7:30 p.m. The Oxford Union held its first debate of term tonight. Nominally only a debating society, this organization is one of Oxford's most famous institutions, fulfilling many of the same functions that OU's Memorial Union does. It has a bar, library, dining

room, reading room, billiards room, etc. But its primary function still is to debate, and many Members of Parliament cut their oratorical teeth here.

Tonight's question was: "The Independence of a Nation State should be the basis of Foreign Policy." An innocent sounding statement perhaps, but the speakers interpreted this as a question of Britain's role in NATO as well as the corresponding presence/absence of U.S. dominance in that organization. One of the opposition speakers was Guy Parkhurst, another OU Rhodes Scholar.

Those of us expecting an American-style debate were quickly jolted. Here a speaker relies more on quickness of wit than recitation of fact, on emotion more than reason. He is expected to ridicule humorously the opposition and parry the sarcastic questions of spectators as well as deal with the question itself. And English debating *is* definitely a spectator sport, for there are frequent noisy outbursts of cheering or jeering and cries of "Hear, hear!" or "Shame!" A point scored is duly applauded, but the audience is quick to seize upon a slip of the tongue or a double entendre.

After hearing the scheduled speakers, who included a pair of distinguished guests, members of the audience were recognized to give extemporaneous speeches. Finally, almost at midnight, discussion was closed, and the audience recorded its verdict. This was done by each individual's filing out through either the "Aye" or "No" door. (The results appeared the next day in the *Cherwell*, Oxford's student newspaper; the Aye's had it.)

OCTOBER 15, 1965. 8:00 p.m. Most of us went to a wine and cheese party at Rhodes House tonight. It was given by a couple of second-year Scholars, ostensibly to enable them to meet this year's class, but I suspect it was a welcome excuse for all to get together. Once again, I was positively impressed with the friendly, down-to-earth attitudes of this diverse group.

OCTOBER 16, 1965. 3:00 p.m. This afternoon, the OUBC (Oxford University Basketball Club) opened its

season. We played the Watford Royals, a club team, and won, 80-49. Our home court is at an American Air Force Base, Upper Heyford, which is fourteen miles from Oxford. Inconvenient to be sure, but there is no full-sized court in Oxford. This is a good indication of the degree of popularity enjoyed by basketball in Britain—not much. But seeing Bill Bradley, the three-time Princeton All-America and Olympic star, in action was a pleasure in itself. In my opinion, he was never over-rated.

OCTOBER 19, 1965. Matriculation Day. Today marked the official admission ceremonies for all freshmen. Dress was "sub-fusc" (dark suit, white shirt and tie, academic gown, mortar board). Together with the Exeter and Brasenose first-year men, we Mertonians filed into the Sheldonian Theatre at 10:25 a.m. The Vice-Chancellor of the University presided. His introductory remarks included a Mark Twain quote. ("A cauliflower is only a cabbage with a college education.") He then mumbled a few Latin words as we all stood, we filed out, and it was over. The actual ceremony took about thirty seconds and cost each of us ten pounds (\$28). It made one glad that it happens only once in an Oxford career.

OCTOBER 20, 1965. I met with my supervisor, Dr. Niko Tinbergen, today. He "suggested" a list of readings which totalled almost 2,000 pages "for the next few days." I guess that should keep me busy.

OCTOBER 25, 1965. 8:00 p.m. The Royal Ballet is in Oxford for a week, and I saw their last production of *Swan Lake* tonight. It was the best ballet performance I've ever seen, but most amazing were the admission prices. I paid five shillings (70 cents) for a balcony seat which was excellent. This inexpensiveness seems to be true of entertainment in general here—movies and plays are similarly priced, if not lower.

NOVEMBER, 2, 1965. One of my best Rhodes Scholar friends, Brian Fay (Los Angeles St. Mary's and St. Edmund Hall) seems to have the right idea. A few days ago, he got especially lonely for his fiancée, who's in California, so he called her from a pay telephone booth (a feat of manual dexterity in itself). He must have been convincing, for she flew over a few days later. They came by tonight, happy as kids.

I was more than slightly envious, since my fiancée, Penny Isom, is 4,500 miles away, in Norman.

NOVEMBER 11, 1965. Today, I made my first foray into opposition territory—I visited Cambridge. There is a long-standing rivalry here, for Oxford and Cambridge are England's oldest and best-known universities. The competitiveness is most apparent in a Varsity Match—the official athletic confrontation between teams from the two, whether it be table tennis or cricket. For an Oklahoman, it brings back memories of an OU-OSU wrestling match, for instance.

After seeing to the business of the trip (a visit to an electronics firm about research equipment), I wandered around a while. The colleges looked very similar to Oxford's, although the city itself is smaller and less industrialized. After supper, I caught a train home.

NOVEMBER 16, 1965. C. P. Snow, the famous scientist and author, spoke tonight at the Oxford University Scientific Society. His topic was "Science and the Advanced

Society," a commentary on automation, cybernetics, etc., and their effects on the human condition. Speakers of this caliber seem to be an Oxford tradition. In this same building, T. H. Huxley confronted Bishop Wilberforce in a famous debate over Darwin's evolutionary theory in 1860.

NOVEMBER 17, 1965. 8:00 p.m. Tonight, the Rhodes Trustees hosted a dinner for all the incoming Scholars at Rhodes House. It was so completely formal that we were each handed a printed seating plan of the hall as we entered. It was a full-fledged banquet, with six courses and four different wines. Mercifully, the speeches were short.

NOVEMBER 19-20, 1965. London. I spent this weekend in London, attending a symposium sponsored by the Association for the Study of Animal Behavior and the Zoological Society of London. It was entitled, "Exploration, play, and territoriality in mammals," and papers were presented on everything from weasels to preschool-age children. Many well-known scientists were there to speak, including Sir Julian Huxley, and some excellent films were shown. Best of all, the meetings were held at the London Zoo, so between sessions, I wandered around looking at the animals.

NOVEMBER 21, 1965 1:00 a.m. I called Penny tonight—\$9.40 for four minutes, but it was well worth it.

NOVEMBER 23, 1965. 1:30 p.m. Each Tuesday, a member of the zoology department gives a short, illustrated talk on some aspect of biology, usually associated with travel. This afternoon, I gave one on my April trip to Bimini and the Lerner Marine Laboratory in the Bahamas. (The trip, a reptile-collecting expedition for OU's Animal Behavior Laboratory, was partially supported by the Alumni Development Fund at OU). It made a strange contrast, my standing there shivering slightly in an underheated room while snow fell outside, showing slides of sunny beaches and palm trees.

NOVEMBER 25, 1965. Thanksgiving Day. 3:00 p.m. This afternoon, four of us Rhodes Scholars took part in filming a television show for NBC. It's to be a documentary special about a typical American student at the University of Oxford. They had rented a student pub, the Turf Tavern, for the afternoon, and we four were supposed to sit around a table drinking beer and talking. After over an hour of preparation (rigging lights, hiding a microphone behind the sugar bowl, etc.) we had a "spontaneous bull session" about our reactions to life in England.

Thanksgiving is not a holiday in England. So, most of us had been looking forward to a holiday in spirit only and attempting to put thoughts of turkey and pumpkin pie out of our minds. Happily, however, one of the married Rhodes Scholars, a third-year man, took note of our plight, and he and his wife invited us over. The result was a delicious, full-fledged turkey dinner complete to the point of imported cranberry sauce. Needless to say, we didn't let the distance from home affect our appetites. Afterward, we tape-recorded a Thanksgiving greeting to Dave Boren, a former Oklahoma Rhodes Scholar, now studying at the OU Law School.

DECEMBER 3, 1965. Today was the last day of term. I only hope the future ones are as good as this first one has been. END