

CHAPTER 2
Oxford University

October 1907 – June 1909

LAWRENCE entered Oxford University on 12th October 1907 as an exhibitor at Jesus College. Since he had lived in the city for eleven years it may have been a less momentous step for him than for most of his fellow students. His elder brother Bob was already at St John's College, and Will would go up, also to St John's, in 1909.

The expense of maintaining and educating three fully grown children (with two younger boys following on) placed an increasing strain on the family budget. As Lawrence's Exhibition would not cover the full cost of residence in college he continued to live at home. In one way this decision would greatly diminish the effect of being at university. Normally students learn about living with their peers by being thrown together in an enclosed college environment, but Lawrence was never to participate fully in this life. Moreover, during his three undergraduate years he would take no part in sport or other college activities.

Like many of the most talented undergraduates, he concentrated on his subject and tended not to be gregarious. He belonged to the intellectual élite of scholars and exhibitors which, in 1907, had less in common with the mass of students than would be the case today. Many of his contemporaries who came from wealthy families did not see academic achievement as the main purpose of attending university. Of the twenty-eight freshmen at Jesus that autumn, four won First Class Honours in Finals. But only seven of the remainder attained Seconds, whereas eleven were awarded Thirds, two received Fourths, and four failed to get an Honours degree.¹

From the start Lawrence's main academic contacts were outside the college. His principal tutor, Reginald Lane Poole, was a Fellow of St John's. Lawrence also continued to see a good deal of L. C. Jane, although he did not resume regular coaching with him until the last few terms before Finals. Through his archaeological activities he had long-standing friends at the Ashmolean, notably C. F. Bell and, from March 1908 onwards, E. T. Leeds, a new assistant keeper. Several schoolfriends, such as Beeson, were also up at Oxford, though only E. F. Hall was at Jesus. There was moreover a strong contingent of Welsh students in the college, among whom Lawrence may have felt something of an outsider. p. 43

For all these reasons it is unlikely that he spent much time in college during his first two terms, particularly as he was busy with university examinations. Yet it was probably quite difficult to concentrate on academic work at home, since the house was also occupied by three younger brothers. In the summer term of 1908, therefore, he moved into rooms at Jesus. It was only then that he made friends among his fellow undergraduates.

Student behaviour is traditionally unconventional and, taking this into consideration, not many of the exploits credited to Lawrence deserve special mention.² During the summer that he spent in college in 1908 his most notable prank was canoeing along the Trill Mill Stream, which runs

under the streets of Oxford.³ Like many undergraduates before and since, Lawrence posed deliberately as an eccentric. One remarkable scholar, A. T. P. Williams, who later became Bishop of Winchester, recalled meeting Lawrence 'almost always late at night, walking in the quadrangle at Jesus. I do not know when he went to bed; some nights, I am pretty sure, not at all, certainly seldom till well on in the small hours.'⁴ Another contemporary, A. G. Prys-Jones, wrote that Lawrence 'sat cross-legged on the floor quietly explaining that he never sat on chairs if he could help it, that he never indulged in the meals known as breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner, nor smoked nor took drinks; in fact he did nothing which qualified him to be an ordinary member of society. But he added, drolly, that he had no objection whatsoever to my doing any of these things'.⁵

One aspect of university life has changed beyond recognition since Lawrence's day: the nature of relationships permitted between the sexes. Although there was a small number of women's colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge, the two sexes had few opportunities to mix freely, and emotional friendships during the undergraduate years were strongly discouraged. These constraints formed part of a wider attitude towards relationships between men and women which was generally accepted, and which could easily be justified as a rational response to progress in medicine. Infant mortality had fallen greatly, notably in the middle and upper classes; yet there was still no sure method of contraception except sexual abstinence. As a result, the emphasis in marital life was on the virtues of companionship rather than on sex. Young men were taught that women were a fit subject for romantic admiration, but that a desire for sexual gratification was sinful. Lawrence would recall how, 'at Oxford the select preacher, one evening service, speaking of venerary, said, "And let me implore you, my young friends, not to imperil your immortal souls upon a pleasure which, *so I am credibly informed*, lasts less than one and three-quarter minutes."⁶ Lawrence was echoing views held sincerely by many Englishmen of his generation when he later wrote scathingly of those 'who regarded our comic reproductive processes not as an unhygienic pleasure, but as a main business of life.'⁷

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Young men of the ruling classes were taught that abstinence in general would prepare them for their duties; moral leadership would fall to those who could resist the temptations to which others succumbed. The basis for this view came directly from the Protestant Christianity which Lawrence so wholeheartedly accepted. Before going to university he had taught at St Aldate's Sunday school and served as an officer in the Church Lads' Brigade. Canon Christopher had retired from St Aldate's in 1905, but the Lawrence brothers continued to attend weekly Bible classes which he gave at his home.

During Lawrence's three years as an undergraduate he increasingly practised self-denial, exploring and stretching the limits of his physical capability. He tried staying awake for long periods and, in addition to vegetarianism, experimented with fasting. While he took no part in formal sport, he built up his strength and stamina by arduous cycling over long distances. He made no secret of his desire to subjugate his body to his will. E. F. Hall, whose rooms at Jesus Lawrence often used, recalled that: 'He came one evening into my rooms . . . and began to fire a revolver, blank cartridge fortunately, out of the windows . . . one glance at his eyes left no doubt at all that he told the truth when he said that he had

been working for forty-five hours at a stretch without food, to test his powers of endurance.¹⁸ Ch. 2

By June 1908, the end of his first year at Oxford, Lawrence's tutors had formed a good idea of his academic potential. For his final history examinations he would have to sit various set papers, and also to select one of ten alternative special subjects. This choice would not have to be made until mid-November 1909, but Lawrence began to explore the topics long before then. It seems likely that he was at first attracted by the paper on Military History and Strategy. This would have been a natural extension of his enthusiasm for military architecture; he later told Liddell Hart that he had become interested in the subject while still at school.⁹ At Oxford he read some French study of Napoleon's Italian campaign, and then browsed in his despatches, a series of about twenty-five vols. These interested me in his text-books, and so they got me to Bourcet (?), Guibert, and Saxe, in that order. Then I read other "manuals of arms" of the 18th century . . . I made a series of maps of, and visited, Rocroi, Crécy, Agincourt, Malplaquet, Sedan and two other Franco-German War places whose names I forget. But my interests were mainly mediaeval, and in pursuit of them I . . . went elaborately into siege-manoeuvres . . . I also tried to get an idea of the bigger movements, and saw Valmy and its neighbourhood, and tried to refight the whole of Marlborough's wars.¹⁰ p. 45

When a subject attracted him he would study it with immense energy; but otherwise his work was sound rather than exceptional. L. C. Jane, who probably knew Lawrence's academic abilities as well as any of his university tutors, later wrote: 'I found out in the first week or two that the thing was to suggest rather out-of-the-way books – he could be relied on to get more out of a suggestive sentence in a book than an ordinary man would get from a volume . . . He had the most diverse interests historically, though mainly mediaeval. For a long while I could not get him to take any interest in later European history – was very startled to find that he was absorbed by R. M. Johnston's *French Revolution* . . . Lawrence was not a bookworm, though he read very fast and a great deal: I should not call him a scholar by temperament and the main characteristic of his work was always that it was unusual without the effort to be unusual.'¹¹

In 1908 the examiners in Modern History introduced a new option allowing candidates to present a thesis on some question within any special subject offered by them in the Examination.¹² If Lawrence chose 'Military History and Strategy' as his special subject, he would be able to display his knowledge of medieval military architecture in depth, both in a thesis and in the ensuing viva.

Accordingly, in the summer of 1908 he went on the longest of his French cycling tours, to examine medieval castles and fortifications. Bicycles (which could be taken to a distant starting-point by train) had revolutionised European tourism, and Lawrence's 2,400-mile journey was not exceptional. He crossed to Le Havre in mid-July, having worked out a route which would take him to see the most important castles he had not already visited. First he cycled eastwards via Château Gaillard, Gisors and Pierrefonds to Coucy. Then, turning southwards and avoiding Paris, he made for Provins, the third city of medieval France. It had a most puzzling twelfth century keep [the Tour César], and remains of town walls. I was in and around them for hours, and came to the conclusion that

the architect was making experiments when he built them . . . the keep Ch. 2
would have been almost incapable of defence, and yet in spirit it is half p. 46
a century ahead of its time. It ranks with Château Gaillard in importance for
my thesis.¹³ He continued southwards along the level roads of the Seine
Valley as far as Châtillon, and then turned west to see Montbard and the
cathedral at Vézelay. He had taken a camera with him, and managed to
take photographs of the interior of this great medieval church, built to
serve the needs of pilgrims eight hundred years before.

Letters home show that he found the journey very enjoyable, despite
the fact that he was cycling long distances every day in the summer heat:
'I'm riding very strongly, and feel very fit, on my diet of bread, milk and
fruit . . . I begin on two pints of milk and bread, and supplement with fruit
to taste till evening, when more solid stuff is consumed: one eats a lot
when riding for a week on end at any pace. My day begins early ('tis
fearfully hot at mid-day), there is usually a château to work at from 12-2,
and then hotel at seven or eight. I have no time for sight-seeing: indeed
sometimes I wonder if my thesis is to be written this November or next, I
find myself composing pages and phrases as I ride. The roads have been
almost uniformly bad, but the hills all rideable.'¹⁴

From Vézelay he continued south to Nevers and thence onwards up the
valley of the River Allier. After Thiers his route was hilly, with a very
long climb up through pine forests to La Chaise Dieu. At Le Puy he had to
turn eastwards across very difficult country to reach Tournon in the
Rhône valley. The hilly country was sometimes spectacular: 'Part of my
ride was up a superb gorge, with river foaming in the bottom, and rock and
hill on each side: it was the finest scenery I have ever come across: truly
the Auvergne is a wondrous district: but *not* one for a cycle: I'll take a
walking tour there some day I hope . . . From Le Puy I rode up for ten
miles more (oh dear 'twas hot!) consoling myself with the idea that my
sufferings were beyond the conception of antiquity, since they were a
combination (in a similar climate) of those of Sisyphus who pushed a
great weight up hill, of Tantalus who couldn't get anything to drink, or any
fruit, and of Theseus who was doomed ever to remain sitting:— I got to the
top at last, had fifteen miles of up and down to St.
Somebody-I-don't-want-to-meet-again [St Agrève], and then a rush down
4,000 feet to the Rhône.'¹⁵

Next he visited Crussol, 'a fine xii century castle on a 500 feet
precipice over the Rhône.'¹⁶ He wrote home that he had spent the night
there, without mentioning that the castle was a roofless ruin. Then in one
day he cycled down the flat roads of the Rhône valley from Valence to p. 47
Avignon, 'glorious with its town walls and papal palace'.¹⁷

At Arles it was the medieval rather than the massive Roman buildings
which impressed him: 'The thing in Arles is the cloister of St Trophimus:
it is absolutely unimaginably fine with its sculptures and its proportion:
all other architecture is very nearly *dirt* beside this Provençal
Romanesque, when the scale is small (Provence has never done anything
big in anything at all) . . . The amphitheatre (Roman) at Arles is
magnificently and gigantically ugly, as everything of that sort must be.'¹⁸

At Les Baux de Provence, a ruined medieval hill-top town, he thought
he caught his first glimpse of the Mediterranean, 'a grey line far away on
the horizon'.¹⁹ Since leaving Southampton he had travelled more than five
hundred miles south, and he was experiencing a truly hot climate for the

first time. He now did some of his cycling after sundown, and saved Ch 2.
money from time to time by sleeping rough.

Lawrence reached the coast at Aigues-Mortes in the Camargue: 'It is a lovely little place, an old, old town huddled along its old streets, with hardly a house outside its old walls, still absolutely unbroken, and hardly at all restored or in need of it. From it St. Louis started for his crusades, and it has seen innumerable events since. Today it is deserted by the world, and is decaying fast: its drawbacks are mosquitoes (a new experience for me, curtains on all the beds) . . . It is however almost on the sea, and exceedingly pleasant (above all, if one could get acclimatised quickly to these brutes, I'm all one huge bite).

'I bathed today in the sea, the great sea, the greatest in the world . . . I felt that at last I had reached the way to the South, and all the glorious East; Greece, Carthage, Egypt, Tyre, Syria, Italy, Spain, Sicily, Crete... they were all there, and all within reach... of me. I fancy I know now better than Keats what Cortes felt like, silent upon a peak in Darien. Oh I must get down here – farther out – again! Really this getting to the sea has almost overturned my mental balance: I would accept a passage for Greece tomorrow'.²⁰

However, he turned westwards to continue his tour. The Roman amphitheatre at Nîmes, the best-preserved in France, 'proved fair, no more'.²¹ He was more interested in the Maison Carrée, a rectangular building nearly two thousand years old in the style of a Greek temple: 'I never saw a handsomer little place; it makes one marvel what the Parthenon must be'.²² The fortified medieval church at Agde was more relevant to his purpose: 'It has a front seat in my thesis'.²³

The walled city of Carcassonne exceeded all his expectations: 'It is of p. 48
all dates: much Roman work: much Visigothic, a splendid Saracenic tower, some Carolingian work, and mediæval of all sorts to the end of the fourteenth century: *nothing later* except a very little modern resto'ration. This makes it the most interesting and most valuable object-lesson in military architecture (for at all periods it was a first-class fortress) and it happens also to be wonderfully picturesque . . . Also I have a superb plan, showing the different periods of the buildings . . . there is much of the twelfth [century] for me; so much that I cannot satisfy myself upon it: in fact could only do so by carting it back to Oxford and fixing it on Brill hill'.²⁴ This letter, written after an afternoon's exploration of the city, suggests that Lawrence underestimated the extent to which Carcassonne had been restored by Viollet-le-Duc in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is now recognised that some of these restorations, while scholarly in concept, were almost certainly inauthentic. Lawrence's comment about 'very little modern restoration' seems to disregard a great deal of obviously new stonework in the upper levels of the fortifications. Perhaps he thought this unimportant, as his prime interest was in the layout and main structure of the defences which in most places were clearly original. Moreover Viollet-le-Duc was regarded at that time as the greatest authority on French medieval architecture, and Lawrence had already studied his lavishly illustrated accounts of Carcassonne. Without the preconceptions derived from this reading, Lawrence might have looked at some of the restorations with a more critical eye.

From Carcassonne Lawrence turned north and rode via Toulouse to Albi, 'where the Cathedral disappointed me, inside: the sculptures of

which I had heard so much were Renaissance, and certainly second class: Ch. 2
there were however yards and yards of them; 'tis wonderful they managed
to do so many . . . Outside it is marvellous, and reminded me much of a
beer-barrel, or a huge series of beer-barrels, piled round a blanc-mange
mould. It is all of rose-coloured brick, and one of the most strikingly
original buildings extant.¹²⁵

He continued northwards through the Tarn. When he reached Cordes
he sent his family a long description of this, 'the most picturesque town I
have come across in my travels.' The letter shows that he already
possessed the powers of observation and description which would be so
evident in his later writing.

'Imagine a valley, formed by the space between four ranges of hills: in
the middle of this place a hill, about as steep as Mont St. Michel, and a
matter of 400 feet high. Cover this with houses, all over, and you have a p. 49
fair idea of the general view. The house-roofs are almost flat, and of red
semicircular tiles:—

'Inside, the streets (two streets paved) are so steep that one can only
maintain one's balance with great difficulty, and a strange horse cannot
mount. Join these streets by narrow alleys of flights of broken, irregular
stairs alternating with tiny squares of gravel about one house (say twenty
feet long) each way. In places throw archways over the streets, or make
them run under tunnels for fifty yards. Put in eight or ten fortified gates of
the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and fairly complete town walls, built
over and round with a tangled ramshackle mass of hovels and ruined
cottages. Let every other house be of stone, and of the fourteenth century,
with charming Flamboyant windows of two lights, divided by exquisitely
carved pillars and shapely capitals of a bunch of vine leaves or other
naturalistic foliage. Half these windows are blocked up with a mass of
broken tiles and mortar; over the others are worm-eaten shutters with
splendid iron-work, and hinges of the Renaissance time. Between the
windows are string courses, often carved with grotesques, of animals with
human heads, hunting scenes etc. The roofs project a couple of feet, with
gargoyles grinning down into the middle of the tiny streets, only a matter
of two yards wide. These houses are usually of three storeys, and are
mixed up with modern houses (modern for Cordes that is), perhaps of the
sixteenth century with transomed and mullioned windows, and
square-headed or ogee doorways. The market hall is fourteenth, the
church fifteenth century. Some of the houses are in ruins, others tottering.
There are only three straight ones in the town (these are now the *Mairie*),
all the rest lean backwards and forwards, or are shored up by a stable, or a
buttress thrown across the streets to a similarly affected house: and so two
sick men support each other. Some are of brick, plastered, or have been
plastered, for it has usually fallen away, revealing blocked doors and
windows, niches, and sculptured blocks built into the later work. All the
wood-work is old and weather-warped, much of it quaintly carved, with
all sorts of dilapidations.

'The streets are all grass-grown, and full of piles of dirt and rubbish:
there are no drains, hardly even surface ones, but the sun quickly dries a
little damp, and in winter the rains will carry all down to the bottom of the
hill. Every wall is hung with grass and creepers, all the house windows
are full of flowers, growing in rusty tin cans or earthenware jugs, broken
and worn with use, and with half their brilliant glaze worn off. Each house

has its little trellis of vines, and each is a subject or half a dozen for a painter. The colouring is simply unequalled. One could stay here for months, painting every day, supposing one escaped fevers or other trifles of that sort. A visit here is a glimpse back three centuries'.²⁶ Ch. 2
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From Cordes Lawrence rode north-west, visiting Najac ('a splendid thirteenth-century castle entirely unrestored');²⁷ Cahors, where he found the fortified Pont Valentré 'curious rather than beautiful';²⁸ Bonaguil ('a castle of the middle fifteenth century, most interesting')²⁹ and Pujols, another twelfth-century castle. Then on via Montaigne and Hautefort to Chalusset where he spent his twentieth birthday. The castle here was 'a most wonderful thing of the thirteenth century . . . with *donjon* of the twelfth century and a large beak on the front of it. "Eureka" I've got it at last for the thesis: the transition from the square keep form: really it is too great for words'.³⁰ After this he went to Montbrun, 'a most charming little castle with twelfth-century keep: it is really, architecturally a most important place'.³¹ Then to Niort 'which was magnificent; nothing could possibly have been more opportune or more interesting for my thesis',³² and on to Montreuil-Bellay and Loches. By this time he was six days ahead of his original timetable. He zig-zagged on, visiting Lavardin, Mondoubleau, Vendôme, Frétéval, and Orléans: 'all monuments and picture postcards of Joan of Arc, the cathedral is however good in spite of it'.³³

On August 28th he went to see Chartres, expecting it to be 'like most French cathedrals spoilt by restoration, so I slipped out before breakfast to "do" it'.³⁴ The letter he wrote home that evening is one of the most interesting to have survived from this period; its uninhibited expression of religious feeling contrasts sharply with the reserved tone of other letters to his mother.

'What I found I cannot describe – it is absolutely untouched and unspoilt, in superb preservation, and the noblest building (for Beauvais is only half a one) that I have ever seen, or expect to see. If only you could get an idea of its beauty, of its perfection, without going to look at it! Its date is late twelfth and early thirteenth century. It is not enormous; but the carvings on its three portals are as fine as the best of all Greek work. Till yesterday I would put no sculptors near the Greeks of the fifth century. Today the French of the early middle ages *may* be inferior, but I do not think so: nothing in imagination could be grander than that arrangement of three huge cavernous portals, (thirty-odd feet deep), of gigantic height, with statues everywhere for pillars, bas-reliefs for plain surfaces, statuettes and canopies for mouldings. The whole west wall of the cathedral is chased and wrought like a Florentine plaque, and by master hands! You may think the individual figures stiff – the details coarse – everything is hard and narrow I admit, but when you see the whole – when you can conceive at once the frame *and* the picture, then you must admit that nothing could be greater, except it were the Parthenon as it left the hands of Pheidias: it must be one of the noblest works of man, as it is the finest of the middle ages. One cannot describe it in anything but superlatives, and these seem so wretchedly formal that I am half tempted to scratch out everything that I have written: Chartres is Chartres: – that is, a gallery built by the sculptors to enclose a finer collection than the Elgin Marbles. I went in, as I said, before breakfast, and I left when dark: – all the day I was running from one door to another, finding in each something p. 51

I thought finer than the one I had just left, and then returning to find that the finest was that in front of me – for it is a place absolutely impossible to imagine, or to recollect, at any rate for me: it is overwhelming, and when night came I was absolutely exhausted, drenched to the skin (it had poured all day) and yet with a feeling I had never had before in the same degree – as though I had found a path (a hard one) as far as the gates of Heaven, and had caught a glimpse of the inside, the gate being ajar. You will understand how I felt though I cannot express myself. Certainly Chartres is the sight of a lifetime, a place truly in which to worship God. The middle ages were truer that way than ourselves, in spite of their narrowness and hardness and ignorance of the truth as we complacently put it: the truth doesn't matter a straw, if men only believe what they say or are willing to show that they do believe something. Chartres besides has the finest late xvi and early xvii [century] bas-reliefs in the world, and is beautiful in its design and its proportions. I have bought all the picture postcards, but they are of course hardly a ghost of the reality, nothing ever could be, though photography is best for such works. I took a photo myself of Philosophus, a most delightful little statuette, about eighteen inches high . . . it may give one an idea of how the smallest parts of the building are finished with as much care as the centre-posts of the main doorways, and if Philosophus were of Greek marble there would be photographs of him in every album, between the Hermes of Praxiteles and the Sophocles of the Lateran. He is great work. I also tried to take a photo of the masterpiece, the Christ of the south portal, but that cannot be worth looking at. I expect I will burn my photos of Chartres as soon as they are visible. Yet perhaps with care and time, one would get something worthy from a photograph. We must return there (I would want assistants) and spend a fortnight in pure happiness.¹³⁵

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From Chartres Lawrence cycled to Brittany, where he spent a few days before returning to England on September 8th. His tour had been very successful and he brought back a large number of picture postcards, photographs, notes, sketches and plans for his thesis.

In the autumn of 1908 the Oxford University Officers' Training Corps was formed. This was one of many such units advocated by the Secretary of State for War, Lord Haldane, as part of a programme of army reforms. By the following summer 626 members of the University had volunteered; Lawrence had been among the first to do so. His decision came as a complete surprise to many of his friends, though possibly not to those who knew that he had already been an officer in the St Aldate's Church Lads' Brigade. After the lessons of the Boer War, there were many in Britain who preached the need for renewed national commitment to combat a growing threat from overseas. Lawrence, like most other young men of his social background, felt deeply patriotic.

Although he joined this military scheme, there are few signs elsewhere that he took any greater part in undergraduate life during his second year at Oxford. He did not take rooms in Jesus College when he came back from France, preferring to live at home. Yet there were no spare rooms available in the house at Polstead Road, and he had now reached the stage where he needed a separate study. His parents knew that this problem of space would continue, since there were three younger brothers to follow. They therefore decided during the autumn to build a two-room bungalow for Lawrence at the bottom of the garden. When this was completed it had

a grate, electricity, water, and a telephone to the house.

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To make his new study quiet, Lawrence hung the walls with green cloth. He slept and worked in this bungalow for the next two years, gaining not only a degree of independence, but also the habit of isolation. During this time he read voraciously; like many other students he stayed awake late into the night and often slept through the morning. His choice of books went well beyond the scholarly works required for the history course. He studied medieval writings such as the *chansons de geste*, and also enjoyed historical romances about the Middle Ages, reading Maurice Hewlett's *Richard Yea and Nay* over and over again.

That autumn he discussed his survey of French castles with C. F. Bell at the Ashmolean. Bell later wrote: `We were talking one day about what his next step should be and I said "Why don't you go to the Holy Land and try to settle once and for all the long contested question as to whether the pointed arch and vault were copied or developed from Eastern sources by the Crusaders, or whether it was they who taught their use to the Arabs?" . . . The suggestion was the origin of Lawrence's first visit to the Levant.¹³⁶

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The idea of travelling to the Holy Land appealed greatly to Lawrence. In writing a thesis along the lines Bell had suggested he could incorporate all the research he had already done in France. Moreover, he could change his chosen special paper from 'Military History and Strategy' (which, in 1910, was to include a paper he found of little interest, about the Waterloo Campaign) to 'The First Three Crusades, 1095-1193', a medieval subject already close to his heart.

Before the end of the year he had made up his mind to go to the East if possible. By good fortune, an archaeologist and traveller with personal knowledge of the areas he would need to visit had just been appointed Keeper of the Ashmolean. This was D. G. Hogarth, to whom Lawrence was introduced at the beginning of January 1909. The following account of their first conversation was given by Hogarth to Robert Graves some years later: `Hogarth . . . said, "This is the wrong season to visit Syria: it is too hot there now." "I'm going", said Lawrence. "Well, have you got the money? You'll want a guide and servants to carry your tent and baggage." "I'm going to walk", Lawrence said. "Europeans don't walk in Syria," said Hogarth, "it isn't safe or pleasant." "Well, I do", said Lawrence.¹³⁷

Nonplussed, Hogarth suggested writing to C. M. Doughty, one of the most distinguished Arabian travellers then living, for advice about the practicality of the journey. Doughty's reply was hardly encouraging: `I have not been further North in Syria than latitude 34°. In July and August the heat is very severe by day and night, even at the altitude of Damascus, (over 2,000 ft). It is a land of squalor, where a European can find little refreshment. Long daily marches on foot a prudent man who knows the country would I think consider out of the question. The populations only know their own wretched life, and look upon any European wandering in their country with at best a veiled ill-will.

`The distances to be traversed are very great. You would have nothing to draw upon but the slight margin of strength which you bring with you from Europe. Insufficient food, rest and sleep would soon begin to tell . . .

`I should dissuade a friend from such a voyage, which is too likely to be most wearisome, hazardous to health and even disappointing.

‘A mule or horse, with its owner should, at least in my opinion, be hired to accompany you.

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‘Some Arabic is of course necessary . . .¹³⁸

It is known that Lawrence originally intended to take someone with him on this journey. The most likely person would have been Beeson, who had taken part in many of his expeditions and was good at drawing buildings. However the proposed companion, whoever it was, now backed out of the project. Lawrence replied to Doughty on February 8th: ‘My little pleasure trip appears to be more interesting than I had bargained for: I have fortunately a few months to think about it in.¹³⁹

Lawrence began preparing himself for the journey by reading Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* in the Bodleian. Since he would need some spoken Arabic he consulted David Margoliouth, Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, and was recommended to a Syrian Protestant clergyman, the Rev. Nasar Odeh, from whom he took lessons. Lawrence also took lessons in drawing from E. H. New, a well-known architectural illustrator. Lawrence had found that it was not always easy to photograph the features of castles he wished to illustrate, and this problem had been a handicap during the 1908 French tour. For example, he had written to Beeson about Chalusset: ‘it was impossible to photo: but I can plan, and have a *sketch* which it shall be your duty to render presentable.¹⁴⁰ New was an ideal drawing teacher and Lawrence surely found him excellent company. According to Gilbert Murray, New ‘was well read, especially in poetry, and talked about art and literature with a sincerity that was very charming.¹⁴¹ He had recently illustrated a biography of William Morris and was beginning his ‘New Loggan’ drawings of Oxford colleges. These were bird's-eye views, and it was said that no one knew better than he did where to find good vantage points for such work. It was probably with his encouragement that Lawrence took to climbing Oxford buildings: ‘I used to go up all the towers and roofs, to get new angles of photography for architectural reasons.¹⁴²

It may also have been through New's influence that Lawrence now began to take an enthusiastic interest in the work of William Morris. His letters show that he read works by Morris extensively during the next four years and was strongly attracted by the ideals of neo-medievalism and craftsmanship they advocated, though he seems to have been less affected by their utopian socialism, which was quite alien to his own upbringing.

The notion of running a printing press after Morris's example appealed to Lawrence's romantic nature. Commercial printing had long since abandoned the standards of the early craftsmen who had tried to make their printed books as beautiful as medieval manuscripts. Morris had revived hand-printing and had aimed to ‘produce books which would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of printing and arrangement of type.¹⁴³ Lawrence had no experience of printing, but discussed the idea of setting up a press with several friends, one of whom was Leonard Green: ‘We decided that we would buy a windmill on a headland that was washed by sea. We would set up a printing press in the lowest storey and live over our shop. We would print only rather “precious” books . . . they would not be bound except to suit the temperament of the possible purchaser, and then only in vellum stained with Tyrian dye.¹⁴⁴ When Lawrence heard of a private collection of Kelmscott Press books in a house near Broad Campden, he cycled to see it with another friend, Vyvyan Richards, who

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later recalled: 'Above all, on a special oak lectern, lay open the great Morris / Burne-Jones *Chaucer*, the book we had come specially to see, a feast to us then in itself.'⁴⁵

As the date of his departure for Syria approached, Lawrence worked through useful books such as *Practical Hints for Travellers in the Near East* by E. A. Reynolds-Ball.⁴⁶ In May, Hogarth provided an introduction to H. Pirie-Gordon, who had toured Syria the previous year on horseback; Pirie-Gordon lent Lawrence an annotated map. In the meantime Sir John Rhys, Principal of Jesus College, had asked Lord Curzon to arrange with the Turkish authorities for *irades*, or letters of safe conduct, to facilitate Lawrence's journey.

Notes for Chapter 2. Oxford University

October 1907 – June 1909

1. Source: *Oxford University Undergraduate Register, 1908*. Oxford University Archives.
2. In Lawrence's lifetime and the years immediately following his death relatively few people had been to university. Consequently it appeared to the general public that Lawrence's reported eccentricities at Oxford were exceptional. Some of his contemporaries, notably Vyvyan Richards, fuelled this legend by telling stories about him which were clearly exaggerated.
3. For accounts of this expedition see H. F. Mathers in *Jesus College Magazine* (Oxford) Vol. IV, No. 49, June 1935, p. 344; E. F. Hall in *Friends* pp. 47-8; T. W. Chaundy in *Friends* p. 42.
4. A. T. P. Williams, 'Lawrence in Oxford' *The Oxford Magazine* (Oxford) Vol. 53, Feb.-June 1935, p. 696.
5. A. G. Prys-Jones, 'Lawrence of Arabia: Some Personal Impressions' (typescript). Jesus College, Oxford.
6. T. E. Lawrence, *The Mint*, Part 2, ch. 2, p. 109.
7. T. E. Lawrence, *SP* ch. LXI p. 348.
8. E. F. Hall in *Friends* pp. 46-7.
9. T. E. Lawrence, written reply to B. H. Liddell Hart's 'Queries I' *B:LH* p. 50.
10. *Ibid.* pp. 50-1, cf. *SP* ch. XXXIII p. 188.
11. L. C. Jane to R. R. Graves 26.7.1927. Bodleian R.
12. *Oxford University Examination Statutes* 1908, p. 97.
13. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 23.7.1908 *HL* p. 61. Bodleian MS Res C13.
14. *Ibid.* *HL* pp. 61-2.
15. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 2.8.1908 *HL* pp. 63-4; *MB* p. 14. Bodleian MS Res C13.
16. *Ibid.* *HL* p. 64.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.* omitted from *MB* p. 14.
19. *Ibid.* *MB* p. 15.
20. *Ibid.* *HL* pp. 65-6.
21. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 6.8.1908 *HL* p. 67. Bodleian MS Res C13.

22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.* pp. 67-8.
25. T. E. Lawrence to his family 9.8.1908 *HL* p. 69. Bodleian MS Res C13.
26. *Ibid.* *HL* pp. 70-2.
27. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 16.8.1908 *HL* p. 73. Bodleian MS Res C13.
28. T. E. Lawrence to C. F. C. Beeson 16.8.1908 *DG* p. 60.
29. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 16.8.1908 *HL* p. 73. Bodleian MS Res C13.
30. T. E. Lawrence to C. F. C. Beeson 16.8.1908 *DG* p. 61.
31. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 23.8.1908 *HL* p. 76. Bodleian MS Res C 13.
32. *Ibid.*
33. T. E. Lawrence to his mother 28.8.1908 *HL* p. 80; *MB* pp. 16-17. Bodleian MS Res C13.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.* *HL* pp. 80-1.
36. C. F. Bell, notes on LH:TEL. BL Add. MS 63549. This conversation probably took place very shortly after Lawrence's return to Oxford: he consulted C. M. Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* in the Bodleian on October 20th and 23rd 1908 (Bodleian readers' records).
37. R. R. Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1927) p. 18. It has frequently been claimed that Lawrence's first meeting with D. G. Hogarth was earlier than January 1909. There are two sources for this error. The first is B. H. Liddell Hart's biography '*T. E. Lawrence' in Arabia and After* (LH:TEL) in which it is stated (p. 19): 'Contrary to what has been said, T.E. had known Hogarth some time before he conceived this visit to Syria'. Liddell Hart was incorrect, however, and appears to have based this statement on a misreading of his own jottings of a conversation with Lawrence (*B:LH* p. 72): 'Knew Hogarth long before he went to Syria'. It is clear from the context of this note that Lawrence meant 'long before I went to Carchemish'. The other source of confusion is Lawrence's letter to Dick Knowles of 7.12.1927 (*DG* p. 553): 'I owed [Hogarth] everything I had, since I was seventeen'. In this case Lawrence was simply wrong about his age when he met Hogarth. Apart from the reference in Graves, the date of the first meeting between Lawrence and Hogarth is confirmed independently by both E. T. Leeds (*L-L* p. 4) and C. F. Bell (BM Add. MS 63549). Hogarth spent very little time in Oxford in the years immediately before taking up his appointment as Keeper of the Ashmolean in January 1909.
38. C. M. Doughty to T. E. Lawrence 3.2.1909 *LTEL* p. 37.
39. T. E. Lawrence to C. M. Doughty 8.2.1909. Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.
40. T. E. Lawrence to C. F. C. Beeson 16.8.1908 *DG* p. 61.
41. G. G. A. Murray, preface to *The New Loggan Guide to Oxford Colleges* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1932) p. 5.
42. T. E. Lawrence, written reply to B. H. Liddell Hart's 'Queries I' *B:LH* p. 52.

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43. W. Morris: *A Note by William Morris on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press . . .* (London, Kelmscott Press, 1898) p. 1.
44. L. H. Green in *Friends* p. 68.
45. V. W. Richards, *Portrait of T. E. Lawrence* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1936) p. 43.
46. Bodleian readers' records.