

**Hana Benesová, Charles University, Prague**

**Bursary to visit Oxford in 2018**



This year, I applied for a short-term research stay in Oxford. This position was listed by the Centre for the Study of Political Philosophy, Ethics and Religion. To my great happiness, my project was selected, and I received a month's scholarship there.

The project is a part of my dissertation, 'The Relation between Desire and the Sacraments of the Church.' Due to the time limit, I narrowed the subject to the chapter, "Desire in the Sacraments of the Church in the Sermons of St. Augustine".

An important prerequisite for obtaining a scholarship was a pre-arranged collaboration with an Oxford professor. I addressed myself to Professor Carol Harrison, a prominent St. Augustine specialist at Christ Church who generously offered me both her help and her time.

I arranged accommodation at a convent of religious sisters, an Anglican community, living a contemplative and monastic life. Such a peaceful place was a wonderful environment for reflecting and studying.

The first day in Oxford, I met Mrs Susanne Heinrich at the Weston Library café. She is the administrator of the Europaeum. Mrs Heinrich provided me with important information and gave me written recommendation for obtaining a library card. One of the requirements for obtaining a reader's card was to read the ancient Rules of Conduct for a university reader. To my great surprise, one of the librarians had a Czech version as well.

When I first sat down to study at the Bodleian Library, surrounded by silence and academics totally focused on the subject of study, I was completely captivated by this inspiring and creative environment. Professor Viviano once wrote to me: "The Bodleian is my idea of heaven, the great Bodleian in the sky." And indeed, every day, when I entered the main entrance of one of Europe's oldest libraries, I was flooded with feelings that were both joyous and paralysing. The possibilities offered by the library are endless.

Most of my days began at six o'clock with morning prayer in the chapel, followed by breakfast, a holy mass in the church of St. Edmund and St Frideswill, adoration, and at nine o'clock I entered the library where I studied all morning. After my lunch break, I continued to study either in the Bodleian Library or in the library of the convent. The day ended at eight o'clock with night prayers.

The consultations with Professor Carol Harrison were very friendly and her kind approach helped me to shed my tensions and worries.

Our first meeting took place during a working lunch with other academics from Christ Church. During lunch, Professor Harrison suggested that I should prepare questions about my research for the next meeting. Articulating good and logical questions is a key concept. A teacher can help a learner with both his/her knowledge and experience through well-formulated questions. At our next consultation, we discussed the text I had written, and Professor Harrison gave me very valuable advice on how to continue: what literature to use and in which sources to search for key ideas. Without her guidance I could easily lose myself in the amount of available material.

It was an extraordinary experience - to have time simply for studying or for pondering more deeply over new concepts. After this experience, the Bodleian is also my idea of heaven.