

Allen Leeper's Letters Home, 1908–1912

An Irish-Australian at Edwardian Oxford

Allen Leeper, Oxford undergraduate and future Foreign Office mandarin, wrote regularly to his family in Australia from 1908 until he left university in 1912. His letters, in Balliol archives and the State Library of Victoria, record his experiences at Balliol College, among a 'golden generation' decimated by the First World War, and on his extensive travels in Europe. They give a vivid picture of a continent on the eve of war, written by someone whose background afforded a degree of objectivity. Superficially, Oxford was still 'the apotheosis of the amateur', but Leeper's middle-class friends shared a progressive and socially responsible outlook and a scholarly attitude. While he enjoyed college balls and tennis parties, his letters testify to a world shaken by political crisis and social change, and provide glimpses of emerging modernity, bringing out the complexities of a critical period in British and European history.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ISBN 978-1-009-49363-5



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