

THE HISTORIAN

The magazine of the Historical Association

Issue 133 | Spring 2017



The Man from Keighley

Asa Briggs' Birmingham

Asa Briggs and Labour History

Asa Briggs: an appreciation

Asa Briggs and political history

Raising the bar

Asa Briggs and the Age of Improvement

Is it a Maze or a Labyrinth?

William Coltman VC the most decorated non-combatant of the Great War

The eighteenth-century Lying-in Hospital and the unmarried mother

**Celebrating the
life and work of
Asa Briggs
1921-2016**



Historical Association
The voice for history

New podcasts from the HA

Global Maoism



Dr Julia Lovell of Birkbeck, University of London, discusses the role and significance of Global Maoism in the development of the Cold War, including the Sino-Soviet split and rapprochement between China and the USA.

www.history.org.uk/go/globalmaoism

The Great Depression



Professor Peter Fearon of the University of Leicester discusses the economic and social impact of the Great Depression in the United States, from the failure of the Federal Reserve and the victory of FDR to the loss of faith in the Free Market.

www.history.org.uk/go/greatdepression

The Women's Movement



Dr Anne Logan, Professor June Hannam and Ms Jean Spence look at the Women's Movement in the UK from its early origins through to the end of the twentieth

century, including the Victorian Women's Movement, the Suffragette Movement and New Wave Feminism.

www.history.org.uk/go/womensmovement

Good Evening Sweetheart



When Sue and Peter Mowforth were clearing out their parents' attic, they discovered hundreds of letters exchanged between 1941

and 1945, unravelling a captivating story about life, and love, on the front line and at home during WWII. In this podcast Peter and Sue read extracts from their parents' letters with commentary.

www.history.org.uk/go/sweetheart

Tang Dynasty



Lance Pursey, Chen Xue and Jonathan Dugdale of the University of Birmingham look at the culture, influence and the significance of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), from Early Tang Emperors,

Buddhism, Taosim and Confucianism to the An Lushan Rebellion.

www.history.org.uk/go/tang

The LGBT Movement in the USA



Joshua Hollands of University College London discusses the early LGBT civil rights movement in the United States from the end of the Second World War, through the Stonewall Riots

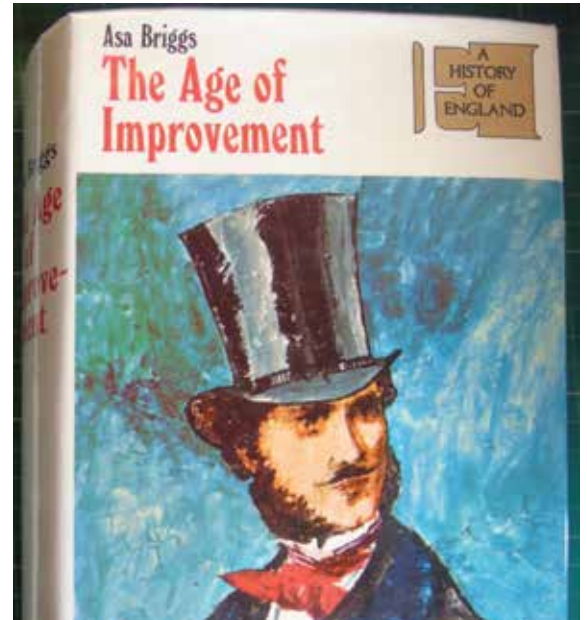
to political mobilisation and Gay Pride.

www.history.org.uk/go/lgbtus

Listen to hundreds of other podcasts here:
www.history.org.uk/podcasts

Articles

- 6 The Man from Keighley**
Trevor James
- 10 Asa Briggs's Birmingham**
Roger Ward
- 12 Asa Briggs and labour history**
Chris Wrigley
- 16 Asa Briggs: an appreciation**
Stephen Yeo
- 22 Asa Briggs and political history**
Peter Catterall
- 26 Raising the bar**
Hugh Gault
- 28 Asa Briggs and *The Age of Improvement***
Boyd Hilton
- 30 Two branch members...**
- 34 Is it a Maze or a Labyrinth?**
Richard Stone and Trevor James
- 40 William Coltman VC – the most decorated non-combatant of the Great War**
Edward Green
- 42 The eighteenth-century lying-in hospital and the unmarried mother**
Marie Paterson



Regulars

- 4 Reviews**
- 5 Editorial**
- 21 The President's Column**
- 31 Obituary**
- 32 HA Conference**
- 36 My Favourite History Place: York Watergate**
Trevor James
- 37 Empress Matilda – 'Lady of the English' (1102-67) in ten tweets**
- 38 HA Tours**
- 39 News from 59a**



The Historical Association
59a Kennington Park Road
London SE11 4JH
Telephone: 020 7735 3901
Fax: 020 7582 4989

PRESIDENT Professor Justin Champion
DEPUTY PRESIDENT Dr Michael Maddison
HONORARY TREASURER Richard Walker
HONORARY SECRETARY Dr Tim Lomas
CHIEF EXECUTIVE Rebecca Sullivan

© The Historical Association 2017
all rights reserved.
Registered charity 1120261
Incorporated by Royal Charter

Advertising
telephone: 020 7820 5985

Printed in Great Britain by
Stephens & George Print Group
Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 3TD

ISSN 0265-1076 (Print)
ISSN 2398-158X (Online)

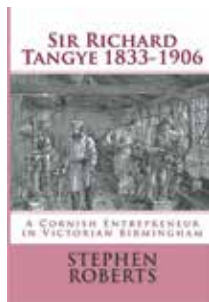
EDITOR
Trevor James and Hugh Gault

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Alf Wilkinson, Paula Kitching, Rebecca Sullivan, Dave Martin
and Maggie Wilson

PUBLISHER Rebecca Sullivan
DESIGN AND LAYOUT Martin Hoare

Contact us c/o The Historical Association's office at:
59a Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4JH
or email us at: thehistorian@history.org.uk

Contributions to *The Historian* are welcomed for consideration for possible publication but the Association cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts nor guarantee publication. All enquiries should be sent initially to the Association at the above address. The publication of a contribution by the Historical Association does not necessarily imply the Association's approval of the opinions expressed in it.



Sir Richard Tangye 1833-1906: a Cornish entrepreneur in Victorian Birmingham
Stephen Roberts
 Birmingham Biographies,
 2015, 65p, £4.99.
 ISBN 9781512207910

For those interested in the industrial and commercial history of Birmingham, Eric Hopkins's *Birmingham: the first manufacturing town in the world 1760-1840* (1989) has been our essential starting point. In contrast what Stephen Roberts offers us is a different perspective on the economic development of Birmingham, albeit from a slightly later period.

Richard Tangye, although deeply involved in engineering by his personal and family interests, was primarily an entrepreneur. It was through such people that Birmingham was able to prosper, and its people to achieve employment, in the later nineteenth century. One of the early achievements of his business was to provide the hydraulic jacks for the launch of Brunel's *Great Eastern* in 1858. The increased level of trade which followed enabled the Tangye Brothers to construct their extensive Cornwall Works factory in Smethwick, reinforcing their pride in their Cornish origins as they prospered in Birmingham.

Tangye participated in the Liberal politics of late nineteenth-century Birmingham, serving as a councillor in the Rotton Row ward between 1878 and 1882 but his civic memory is to be seen in his philanthropy to

his adopted home. Along with many other smaller charitable contributions within Birmingham, in 1880 he announced that, if the council was to build an art gallery, he would donate £5,000 towards the purchase of exhibits. Further he indicated that, if his donation was to be matched by subscriptions from elsewhere, he would double his gift. The council moved very quickly to respond and by 1885 the art gallery was opened, to huge popular acclaim. He was also the initiator of the move to provide the School of Art in Margaret Street, to which he donated £10,000. His knighthood in 1894 was for his services to the arts; this was fully deserved because he was instrumental in making the arts much more accessible to the people of Birmingham.

Trevor James



King John and the Road to Magna Carta
Stephen Church
 Pan Macmillan,
 2016, 456 pp, £9.99.
 ISBN 9781447241959

Stephen Church has written a biography of England's most reviled monarch, trying very hard to understand his character against the background of thirteenth-century English society and the troubled times over which he had little control. In particular John succeeded to an ungovernable inheritance as 'Lackland', the last of Henry II's sons, and thus was the least expected to succeed.

Yet John squandered his legacy: rebelling against his father, betraying his brother Richard I, murdering his nephew Arthur and alienating the pope, following a quarrel with the English Church over the appointment of a candidate to the see of Canterbury. Moreover he failed to control his British territories, and lost almost all of his French ones. Civil war raged at the end of his reign with a French army loose in eastern England.

Professor Church's great virtue is his mastery of contemporary documents which are often patchy and contradictory. He has examined recently-revealed household papers but he is still admirably cautious in reaching definite conclusions from them. He writes particularly well about Magna Carta, the greatest text of all, which he regards

as John's great, if unintended, legacy and 'the beginning of English constitutional monarchy'.

His conclusion remains that John was indeed 'a catastrophic failure', having given the reader a fair and rounded picture fleshed out with inevitably extensive forays into Poitevin politics, and comprehensive descriptions of John's frequent journeys in both Britain and France. Thus this volume is a worthy addition to the debate recently entered also by David Carpenter and Marc Morris, and building on the biographies of W.L. Warren (1961) and J.C. Rolt (1965). It would be rash, perhaps, to expect the setting up of a King John Society any time soon.

Edward Towne



1851 Asa Briggs
 Historical Association,
 this Classic Pamphlet
 is now available in
 digital format free for
 HA members. Non-HA
 members buy it for
 £3.49 see the Historical
 Association website.

This Classic Pamphlet is being republished in digital format to coincide with this special edition of *The Historian* devoted to the memory of Asa Briggs. He was one of the most illustrious members of the Historical Association and a devotedly loyal member all his life.

One historian has said that Asa Briggs's writing retains the freshness it had when it was composed. Those of us who still refer to his *Age of Improvement* will attest to that feeling. This pamphlet especially reflects that sense. Written over 50 years ago, it reads in a very accessible, helpful and modern manner.

In reflecting on a critical year in Britain and Europe, Briggs examines 1851 with an engagement which reveals his analytical skills as an historian but also his undoubted skills as a researcher. One particular aspect reveals this for me. The public view of Sir Robert Peel is largely conditioned by the televisual priorities which are determined to represent him as having a negative relationship with Queen Victoria. As a researcher who has discovered that in 1843 Queen Victoria and Prince Albert took the

earliest possible opportunity to travel from Windsor to Watford to join the newly-established railway to Tamworth, where they went to stay with Sir Robert Peel at Drayton Manor, this portrayal has always seemed dubious. In composing this pamphlet 50 years ago, Briggs's research evidence from the Royal Archives of letters written by the queen in 1851, in which she comments that some of the political difficulties that were being encountered would not have been experienced if the wisdom of 'dear Peel' had been available, turns the televisual representation on its head. This attention to detail is one of the hallmarks of Asa Briggs's work and is fully represented in this pamphlet.

Trevor James

editorial



Asa Briggs, January 1999
© National Portrait Gallery, London

This edition of *The Historian* sets out particularly to celebrate the life of Asa Briggs. It focuses on his work and achievements as an historian, in the widest possible sense of being someone who shaped the discipline as well as inspiring others through his research, teaching and writing. This is not a Festschrift: it is offered as a series of reflections by various historians on how they were influenced by Asa Briggs.

Most historians will name a figure who has deeply influenced their work, either as teacher or writer, or indeed as mentor. The belief of the co-editors of this issue of *The Historian* is that Asa Briggs will be among the handful of the most prominent, possibly the most prominent of all.

One of your co-editors only ever heard Asa Briggs speak once: this was the occasion when the Historical Association gave him a special award at Senate House on the evening when Peter Hennessy received the Medlicott Medal. In a few minutes Asa Briggs, despite being ninety, captivated us and proved why he was the most influential and perspicacious historian of the age. His award that evening was to recognise his unique role in supporting the Historical Association so strongly throughout his professional life, as well as a personal tribute to his scholarship.

For this tribute to Asa Briggs the contributors are colleagues and fellow researchers, several of whom are well-known historians themselves who, in their individual ways, pay tribute to this most prolific, creative and inspirational historian. What they say will speak individually but their collective commentary confirms the degree to which he had influenced a generation of researchers. To complement their very welcome and fulsome tributes, there are two short comments from two branch members who explain, as is the case for many of us, the degree to which Asa Briggs' most celebrated, and used, textbook *The Age of Improvement* has influenced their studies and understanding.

Asa Briggs's reputation as an energetic scholar and activist has produced its own mythology. In his obituary to Asa Briggs, offered in *The Historian* last year (no. 129, Spring 2016), Professor Donald Read mentioned that, when Asa Briggs was professor at Leeds University, the departmental secretary was often to be found hovering on the station platform to secure signatures on letters and papers as he rushed through, always on his way somewhere. This is matched by the story that he wrote a book review half an hour before his wedding, and another that he read a book, and reviewed it, on an hour-long express train journey from London Victoria to Brighton. So busy was he that many wondered how he found time to sleep or indeed whether he did at all. Mythology and legend always follow essential truths: in this case that he was truly prolific and creative, and, with full justification, the most celebrated historian of our time.

We are extremely grateful to all our contributors who have, as always, given freely of their time and devoted their skills to *The Historian*. Several have shared their thoughts about Asa Briggs with us but we also have three further items which reflect the full range of the Historical Association's interests: a further item to extend our commemoration of the Great War, an article on a particular aspect of women's history and an exploration of a social and environmental phenomenon.

The full range of what we offer is encompassed by our rarely used Latin motto – *quidquid agunt homines* – which is broadly translated as 'whatever mankind does'. This itself would be a ready motto to have to mind as we complete our tribute to Asa Briggs because in many ways that phrase reflected his historical range and enthusiasms.

Trevor James and Hugh Gault

Members can also refer to former HA President Donald Read's Focus on Asa Briggs which appeared in *The Historian* no. 115 Autumn 2012.

The man from Keighley

Our Out and About feature is an exploration by **Trevor James** of Asa Briggs's Keighley birthplace and of the elements which may have shaped his life and values.

Crossing the Yorkshire moors northwards from Halifax on a summer's day, Keighley is revealed in its slight hollow, with the sunlight helping to emphasise the substance and grandeur of its predominantly stone architecture. Of course on a deep winter's day, the contrasting bleakness and desolation of the surrounding moorland reminds us that this is also the landscape from which the three Brontë sisters from nearby Haworth also derived their literary inspiration.

The reason for choosing Keighley as a setting for an 'Out and About' is that it was the birthplace in 1921 of Asa Briggs. My thinking behind this has been about whether it would be possible to make any connections between his birthplace and his most productive intellectual contribution to the wider historical and academic world. This may seem rather optimistic but Professor Donald Read, student, colleague and friend of Asa Briggs, has commented that 'he was particularly well-disposed towards historians and others with a sense of place', naming Maurice Beresford as an example. Many years ago in an article in *The Historian* (no. 6, Spring 1985), published as he retired, Beresford commented on his good fortune in having been born a 100 yards to the north of the Chester Road, and therefore in Sutton Coldfield, rather than being born in Erdington to the west. His reason was that, as an undergraduate, his research for a paper on local economic history was blessed by having been born within the parish of Sutton Coldfield where he discovered, to the benefit of his later reputation, an unusual agricultural system based on 'in-field, out-field' methods. Had he been born in Erdington, he would merely have been exploring a more traditional system of crop rotation. Bringing together that sense of place, and that it can help to shape an historian's thinking and direction, what Keighley had to offer Asa Briggs will be explored and readers will have to decide whether the formative evidence is as strong as I will argue.

Asa Briggs was the son of an engineer in a local mill. He will have been acutely conscious of the presence of mills. Keighley was relatively late to develop its industrial landscape, which finally arrived in the form of some very substantial mills. Awareness of the world of the industrial worker will have been part of his everyday life.

In 1931 he gained a scholarship to Keighley Boys' Grammar School. He was not the first famous historian to emerge from this school: he was preceded by Herbert Butterfield in 1911, but the latter was not a Keighley boy, having been born at nearby Oxenhope. It was from this School and its preparation that Asa Briggs would win his place at the age of 16 at Sidney Sussex College at Cambridge.

In view of Asa Briggs's later enthusiasm for self-help education he will have been aware of two local institutions, the Mechanics Institute and Keighley's public library. The Keighley

Keighley War Memorial.



Mechanics Institute, built on land donated by the Cavendish Family, had become Keighley Technical College in 1871 but its presence dominated the centre of the town and its changed role helped Keighley people to improve themselves. It would be with an awareness of this reality that in later life Asa Briggs dedicated himself to supporting the Workers Educational Association (WEA), with its commitment to self-improvement, and to the Open University, of which he served as Chancellor, with all it continues to achieve in terms of flexible routes to learning.

Opposite the Technical College was Keighley Public Library. Asa Briggs will have known that this building represented a landmark in the provision of public libraries in Britain. It is the first library to have been substantially funded by the Scottish-born American industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie was persuaded by a local spinning mill proprietor, Swire Smith, to make Keighley the first British destination of what would eventually be the funding



Victorian-era terraced buildings on Cavendish Street, Keighley.

of over 2,500 libraries across the world. It is said that, before his death, in 1919 he had donated more than \$350 million to the provision of libraries, which he saw as the means by which working people could achieve self-improvement. What Carnegie offered in 1899 was £10,000 towards the cost of a public library but the townspeople had to match his gift with the purchase of the land, a commitment to funding the running costs and to the purchase of its books. Carnegie was already familiar with Keighley because he had visited the Keighley Technical College and, based on what he had seen, he founded the Pittsburgh Technical College, which was in its time the largest technical college in the world.

The architecture of the building given to Keighley, and opened in 1907, was seen by some as being rather understated in style but its exterior design is very much influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement. As one climbs the steps, one enters the spacious lending library, a contrast with the busy street outside. Above this is the reference library, with its barrel-vaulting, columns and sumptuous wall paintings. This architectural delight is a total surprise to a visitor. It would be wrong to say that it is unique but it is very extraordinary, especially to find that it had been provided in 1907 in what was basically a mill town. One writer has said that it contains reminiscences of Christopher Wren: to me it has all the characteristics of an exclusive college library, yet being wholly accessible to the public that it was designed to serve and support. It is not overstating it to say that this reference library in its exuberant setting will have been very familiar to Asa Briggs, forming part of his educational and academic development, and where his enquiring mind was given much



Keighley Public Library.



support and encouragement.

Just along from Keighley Public Library on the other side of North Street is Keighley Picture House, opened in 1913. Its exterior, and substantially also its interior, is little altered from when it first opened to the people of Keighley. The image which it conveys is well worth a few moments' contemplation: it takes

us back to the early days of small local cinemas, indeed to the world of the young Asa Briggs. He will have been familiar with this picture house and its offering of visual media before the advent of television, the transforming effect of the latter being part of his later research into the history of the BBC.

When Asa Briggs accepted James

Callaghan's invitation in 1976 to become a life peer, he will have been conscious that, in joining the House of Lords, he would have been joining the Duke of Devonshire whose Cavendish forbears had been substantial landowners in the area around Keighley. He will also have known that the Cavendishes had been significant benefactors to the people of Keighley. On the outskirts of the town can be found Devonshire Park, now a conservation area. This was given and laid out by an earlier Duke of Devonshire for the people of Keighley to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and opened the following year. The Cavendish family

Dalton Mills, Keighley.





Keighley Railway Station.

were also associated with the local attempts to achieve self-improvement. In 1842, the Earl of Burlington, son of the duke, donated the land for the substantial rebuilding of the Keighley Mechanics Institute and, when this was again replaced, the opening ceremony in 1870 for the new structure, diagonally opposite the public library, was carried out by the Duke of Devonshire, literally as this vehicle of self-improvement was about to be transformed into a technical college. Positive community support from what might be regarded as the aristocratic establishment will have been something that resonated with this historian of the Chartists and their struggle for political rights.

The Cavendish name also survives in the elegant shopping street which stands to the north of the town centre. Cavendish Street is a substantial line of well-built structures, with some elegant

ironwork canopies.

Passing along Cavendish Street brings the visitor to Keighley Railway Station. Its exterior is recognisably traditional and the interior structures and architecture on its south side are wholly unchanged. This has been helped by the fact that its platform provides the terminus on the preserved Keighley and Worth Steam Railway which takes passengers back in time on their way to the tourist and literary attraction of the Brontë Parsonage at Haworth. It is from this railway station that the young Asa Briggs would have embarked on his journeys via Leeds to Cambridge.

On my visit to prepare this article I was accompanied by Philip Johnston who insisted on guiding me up a side street to a very seemingly ordinary terraced house. This house in Devonshire Street has a significance beyond Keighley because this is Bob

Cryer House, the local office of the Labour Party, named in honour of a very popular and independent-spirited former MP who is still remembered with affection in Keighley.

Because of its relatively and unaltered remote location, it is possible to explore this stone-built mill town and understand the influences that prevailed in that community. There are visible signs of that spirit of determination to achieve self-improvement, which has been so strong in England's recent history, and the clear indications that the local aristocracy played their part in achieving the major social developments that have occurred in modern times. It was in this context that Asa Briggs was nurtured and what he observed there can be identified in the themes of his later research and published work.

Trevor James is a Leicester University-trained local historian who was inspired as an undergraduate by Professor W. G. Hoskins.

The former Temperance Hall.



The staff of Keighley Public Library were extremely helpful when Philip Johnston and I made our unheralded fieldwork visit. This was much appreciated: they are justifiably very proud of their historic library and readily welcome visitors who come to enjoy this architectural and cultural jewel.

My thanks also go to Philip Johnston for accompanying me on my preparatory visit and for sharing his local knowledge with me.



The Round Room at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery including Jacob Epstein's *The Archangel Lucifer* (1944–45).

Asa Briggs's Birmingham

Roger Ward discusses Asa Briggs's interest in Birmingham's history and reveals the assistance he received as a young researcher

Probably the last thing that Asa Briggs wrote about Birmingham was his introduction to James Dixon's biography of his ancestor George Dixon in 2013.¹ In his piece Asa Briggs twice uses the word 'fascinating', refers to 'the remarkable history of Victorian Birmingham' and recalls his own role in writing the city's official history – originally intended to be published in 1938 to celebrate the centenary of the city's incorporation but postponed until the 1950s. His mind as sharp as ever, he criticised Michael Hurst's description of Birmingham as Chamberlain's 'grand duchy' and calls for further research into the lives of George Dawson and John Morley. Plainly, Victorian Birmingham still intrigued him and was never far from his thoughts. George Dixon was a fitting subject on which to focus his mind at the end of his long and productive life for I think they were not unlike: Asa Briggs like George Dawson was industrious, liberal-minded, tolerant and approachable, and both were dedicated in their own ways to the cause of education.

Briggs's researches into Birmingham had begun well before he received the invitation to write volume two of the official history, the first volume by Conrad Gill, with both volumes being published in 1952.² Three years earlier, while a Fellow of Worcester College Oxford, he had published a study entitled *Press & Public in Early Nineteenth Century Birmingham*.³ Its readability, its depth of learning in a short space and obvious empathy with Birmingham citizens and movements convinced a prestigious committee that here was the man to take the city's story on from 1865 to 1939. At a time of growing interest in urban history, the resultant book was rightly hailed as a model biography of one of the greatest of nineteenth- and twentieth-century cities and a template for other similar studies. It remains as readable

today as it did when first minted and it contains a wealth of insights which, in my view, still makes it one of the first ports of call for anyone proposing to work in the field of Birmingham history. Asa Briggs's interpretation of the city's distinctive, interlocking social and economic relationships, which I have called 'the Briggs model',⁴ to my mind remains valid in spite of subsequent criticisms. Of course there are gaps and, after nearly 70 years, parts of his work can appear outdated, but it must be remembered that he did not have the wealth of research and the monographs available to him which are comprehensively listed in the most recent study of the city.⁵ It was a very personal *tour de force*.

Asa Briggs's contribution to Victorian history, of course, did not end with his history of Birmingham. Alongside two well-thumbed and heavily-marked copies on my study bookshelf can be found *Victorian People* (1953) and, perhaps the most popular of his many books, *Victorian Cities* (1963), as ever lucid and learned, models of how to communicate with an audience well beyond the ranks of professional historians.

My own acquaintance with Asa Briggs was slight but characteristic of his openness and generosity. I first met him in the early 1960s at a dinner given by Professors Bindoff and Robert Leslie at Queen Mary College London, at which he was the principal guest. At that time I was school-teaching, while he had become Vice-Chancellor of the new University of Sussex. In conversation

The Industrial Gallery at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.



he encouraged me to persuade my sixth-form students to apply for places at Sussex. Subsequently I moved to Birmingham and was searching around for a suitable research topic. Warned that Michael Hurst had staked out my preferred choice of Joe Chamberlain and West Midland politics, I turned instead to the tariff reform movement.⁶ Beginning to investigate the local scene I first equipped myself with Asa Briggs' history, obtained with some difficulty from a second-hand bookshop in Sutton Coldfield. Wisely, I contacted him at Sussex to ask for his advice and this was, of course, freely given. He remarked on

the paucity of monographs available to him at the time he worked on Birmingham and stressed the need for more detailed research, just as he did in his recent introduction to James Dixon's book.

Asa Briggs remains for me the doyen of Birmingham historians.

REFERENCES

- 1 James Dixon (2013) *Out of Birmingham: George Dixon (1820-98), father of free education*, Studley: Brevin.
- 2 Conrad Gill (1952) *History of Birmingham, vol. 1, Manor and Borough to 1865*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Asa Briggs (1952) *History of Birmingham, vol. 2, Borough and City, 1865-1938*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 3 Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, no. 8, 1949.
- 4 Roger Ward (2005) *City-State & Nation: Birmingham's political history 1830-1940*, Chichester: Phillimore, p. 9.
- 5 Carl Chinn and Malcolm Dick (eds) (2016) *Birmingham: workshop of the world*, Liverpool University Press.
- 6 Roger Ward, 'The Tariff Reform Movement in Birmingham, 1877-1906', MA Thesis, University of London, 1971.

Professor Roger Ward is this year's President of the Birmingham and Midland Institute and has been a member of the Historical Association since he was a student in the 1950s. He is author of *City-State & Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-1940*, [Chichester, 2005], and *The Three Chamberlains: Joseph, Austen and Neville, 1836-1940* [Fonthill, 2015], and co-author (with Stephen Roberts) of *Mocking Men of Power: Comic Art in Birmingham 1861-1911* [Amazon, 2014]. He also very recently contributed a chapter, 'Birmingham: A Political Profile', to Carl Chinn and Malcolm Dick [ed], *Birmingham: Workshop of the World* (L.U.P., 2016).



Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham.

Asa Briggs

and labour history

Chris Wrigley emphasises the role of Asa Briggs in the development of the study of Labour history and other aspects of social history.

Asa Briggs was ubiquitous where new and fresh developments in history were occurring in the decades after 1945. His was a fertile mind which regularly came up with fresh connections between aspects of history. His was social history that emphatically was not with the politics left out; indeed, his was an all-embracing history, as displayed memorably in his *The Age of Improvement* (1959).

Briggs was intellectually at the forefront of the post-Second World War expansion of higher education. He was the epitome of the first-generation university student, in his case a scholarship boy who became an undergraduate at Cambridge University at 16. He was also proud of being from the north of England, Keighley. His earnest, scholarly countenance seemed at one with such other great achievers from Yorkshire such as Alan Bennett (born in Leeds, 1934) and David Hockney (born in Bradford, 1937).

In the academic year, 1937-38, that Briggs started at Cambridge, there were 3,907 academic staff and 14,063 students in British universities. By 1954-55 when Briggs went to Leeds, the number of staff had risen by 151 per cent and the number of students by 60 per cent over 1937-38 levels. In 1965-66, the year before he became the Vice Chancellor of Sussex University, the number of staff had risen by a further 34 per cent, and the number of students by 43 per cent, over 1954-55.¹

With the expansion of universities, and the accompanying expansion of the teaching of history within them, there was a tendency for history to divide into many specialist areas. The Economic History Society (1926) spawned the British Agricultural Society (1952), Urban History Group (1962), Oral History Society (1970), Social History Society (1976), The British Banking History Society (c. 1980), The Association of Business Historians (1990), and other areas as new bodies. Similarly, the Historical Association (1906) lost some academic support as several societies committed to the study of individual countries, themes or centuries sprang up, as well as losing some potential academic support to a reinvigorated Royal Historical Society (1868). Looking back on his life, Asa Briggs wrote that 'Victorian Studies... are not the only field where I deliberately limited my attendance at scholarly meetings that were designed to promote specialized fields of knowledge... as urban studies developed I was more anxious to write about cities than to be involved in committees seeking to organise a new field.'² Nevertheless, he readily accepted presidencies and chairs of learned societies, including being



President of the Social History Society, 1976-2016, and of the Victorian Society, 1983-2016.

Asa Briggs was notable for combining opposite trends in the writing of post-war history. He was fertile in stimulating the study of such areas as urban history, along with the south Londoner, Professor Jim Dyo. Yet he was also notable for the breadth of his work, not only in *The Age of Improvement* but in shorter spans, including in Victorian Studies.

His commitment to the study of Victorian Britain took him into studying Victorians. His book on the 'high Victorian' period, *Victorian People: a reassessment of persons and themes, 1851-67* (1954), included an essay on Robert Applegarth. Briggs appears to have warmed to the moderate trade union leader who believed in the effectiveness of negotiations rather than militancy in industrial relations, seeing him as a representative figure of the relative social stability after the turmoil of 1812-48 and before the tensions of the 1880s. He went as far as to write, 'To understand the English working classes of the middle years



The Great Chartist Meeting on Kennington Common, London in 1848.

of the [nineteenth] century, there is little need to go beyond Applegarth.³

Asa Briggs was a prominent figure in the renewed popularity of labour history after the Second World War and was the first holder of the chair of the Society for the Study of Labour History on its foundation in 1960. By then, he had edited two very influential collections of essays, *Chartist Studies* (1959) and *Essays in Labour History* (1960).

Among the many historians who influenced Asa Briggs was G.D.H. Cole. Cole had been Director of Tutorial Classes for London University, 1922-25, before becoming Reader in Economics at Oxford University, 1925-44, and Chichele Professor of Social and

Economic Theory, 1944-57. Cole had written biographies of William Cobbett (1924) and Robert Owen (1925), followed by *The Common People* (1938), co-authored with Raymond Postgate, and a collection of essays, *Chartist Portraits* (1940). Cole urged further research on Chartism, commenting, 'there is room for a dozen local studies in Chartism'. Briggs, when eagerly researching Victorians who were mostly outside London, took this up in his own edited book on the Chartists and wrote the introduction to a reprint of Cole's volume.⁴

Briggs made another major contribution to labour history when he edited with John Saville what was

intended to be a Festschrift for G. D. H. Cole, *Essays in Labour History* (1960) but became a memorial volume on Cole's death in January 1959. This collection of essays became the landmark volume for those researching labour history in the 1960s. Briggs wrote of the book that 'the essays have had a life of their own. They have been read and commented upon in many countries.' He further noted that in the decade between the first and the second volume of *Essays in Labour History* 'a new generation of labour historians in the universities has turned increasingly to "history from below", sometimes collecting new kinds of historical source materials, sometimes interpreting afresh familiar themes,



usually in local or national contexts, less frequently comparatively with reference to different countries.⁵

Many who were to be the early leading figures in The Society for the Study of Labour History were contributors to the 1960 volume of *Essays in Labour History*. These included Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, John Saville, Sidney Pollard and Royden Harrison, with Asa Briggs contributing 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth Century England.' This essay was one of several essays that he published on the social history of language between 'Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846' (1956) and 'The language of "mass" and "masses" in Nineteenth Century England' (1979). Briggs explained, 'Out of the crucible of early industrialisation in England there emerged, along with much else, a new language of social "class".⁶ Briggs's language of class essays, along with Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958) and *Keywords* (1976), were very influential in the study of vocabulary and culture. However, as Rohan McWilliam has observed, more recently scholarly views have suggested that the social use of language is more complex and language contributes to the construction of reality.⁷

Asa Briggs was the first eminent academic to head the new society. He was not only suitably eminent but provided evidence that the new society was not the Communist Party History group in a new guise. As J.F.C. Harrison put it, Asa brought 'respectability'. However, as John McClroy has argued in his well-researched study of the history

of the Society for the Study of Labour History, only Eric Hobsbawm and John Saville had been notably active in both the Communist Party History Group and in the formation of the Society for the Study of Labour History. At Leeds, Briggs had already been active in this area. He had been instrumental in setting up the Northern History group, followed by a Labour History Group, both with John Harrison. The two of them were the first chair and secretary of the Society for the Study of Labour History, which included Edward Thompson.⁸

Briggs was highly sympathetic to another feature of the Society, its close relationship with adult education.

Robert Applegarth



Briggs was the successor but one to R.H. Tawney as President of the Workers' Education Association (WEA), 1958-67. He was Chancellor of the Open University, 1978-94. Prominent members of the Society such as E.P. Thompson, Dorothy Thompson, Royden Harrison, J.F.C. Harrison, John Halstead and Malcolm Chase had worked in adult education, as had other socialist historians such as Raphael Samuel and Sheila Rowbotham. 'History from below', as Briggs noted, was a major development in the writing of history in the later 1960s and 1970s. It was notably advanced by the History Workshop movement, which grew out from Ruskin College in the mid-1960s, and from 1976 by the journal, *History Workshop*. Raphael Samuel, Sheila Rowbotham, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin, Alun Howkins, Gerry White were among many who took social history in new directions. Asa Briggs' studies in *Victorian People* were all of men. Sheila Rowbotham attacked such male myopia in her book *Hidden from History* (1973) as well as her earlier pamphlet *Women's Liberation and the New Politics* (1973). At Sussex issues of gender, and much more, were taken up by Briggs's younger colleagues. Many Sussex postgraduates were contributors of essays to Eileen Yeo's edited *Radical Femininity: women's self-representation in the public sphere* (1998)

Asa Briggs fits into the sequence of a wide variety of Labour historians running from at least Beatrice and Sidney Webb to the present day. There were echoes of the Webbs in Briggs's career. While the Webbs wrote an 11-volume history of English Local Government (1906-29), Briggs wrote his five large volumes (1961-95), on another institution, the BBC. He also studied industrial welfare in his *A Study of the Life and Work of Seebohm Rowntree* (1961) and, earlier, in his history of Birmingham covering 1865-1938 (1954), in which he wrote of the Cadburys and Bournville. Briggs later recalled, 'I loved to visit the Cocoa Works in York and the nearby community where many of his workers had lived, as I had enjoyed visiting Bournville.'⁹ Like the Webbs, with such publications as *Industrial Democracy* (1897) and Sidney's *The Works Manager Today* (1917), Briggs was interested in both sides of industry and industrial relations.

In the immediate post-war years, Briggs was familiar with other newly appointed academics at Oxford who were influenced by G.D.H. Cole but went in the direction of the study of industrial relations or the history of trade unions. Prominent among these were Hugh

Clegg and Allan Flanders. Briggs wrote 'Social Background' for their *System of Industrial Relations in Britain* (1954), a book which went in to several editions but without Briggs.¹⁰ When Clegg went on to publish in 1964 the major history of trade unions from 1889 to 1910, very much a successor to the Webbs's classic history of 1894, he did so with Alan Fox, with A.F. Thompson providing the political history.¹¹ Briggs was not alone in emphasising the importance of the social background to industrial disputes. Henry Phelps Brown did so in his impressive study of the pre-First World War period, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (1959).

Asa Briggs was one of many non-Marxist historians writing on labour history in the 1950s and early 1960s. These authors included Henry Pelling, a year older than Briggs, Ted (A.E.) Musson, a year younger, and Donald Read, nine years younger, whose first two books were *Peterloo: the massacre and its background* (1958) and *Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist* (1961). Unlike Briggs and Pelling, Musson did not favour the Labour Party. Briggs was comfortable with the moderate Labour politics of Denis Healey and James Callaghan, his Sussex neighbours, and John Smith. Both Musson and Briggs were as interested in business history as in labour history. Briggs did not care for committee work or for the political wrangles in the early Society for the Study of Labour History, observing in his autobiography, 'I preferred to write about topics in labour (and business) history than to watch over the affairs of the Labour History Society, of which I had been a founder, or of business history societies, of which there was more than one.'¹²

E.M. Forster's words 'Only connect!' in his *Howard's End* (1910) seem very appropriate for a major feature of Briggs's history: his strong sense of the interconnectedness of aspects of periods he studied and of various academic disciplines. At Leeds University (1955-61) and Sussex (1961-76) Briggs vigorously promoted interdisciplinary studies. He also urged the desirability of comparative historical studies. He did look beyond Britain to France in such articles as 'Social Structure and Politics in Birmingham and Lyons (1825-1848)' (1950) and 'Cholera and Society in the Nineteenth Century'.¹³ But he did not go in for detailed comparative international history. However, in terms of labour history, his studies of provincial cities and towns led to his insights into the different natures of Chartism and other working class movements in different urban areas. His *Chartist Studies* brought



together much local research but the authors pursued the details of their own localities rather than the comparative analyses that Briggs hoped for.¹⁴

Asa Briggs's multi-disciplinary approaches to history fostered fresh and broader approaches to labour and social history among younger colleagues and postgraduates at Sussex. John Harrison, formerly of Leeds, also played his part in developing new approaches to Labour history at Sussex. With Eileen Yeo, Harrison taught a Chartist Special Subject. Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo developed a course focused on keywords. Eileen Yeo, whose doctorate was supervised by Asa Briggs, exhibited similar flair to him in her history. Her publications included *The Contest for Social Science: relations and representations of gender and class* (1996). Malcolm Chase, supervised by Briggs and Harrison, went on to publish superb histories of early trade unionism and Chartism, while John Belchem, supervised by Briggs, did justice to 'Orator' Hunt and wrote a rightly acclaimed survey of the working class from the era of the industrial revolution to 1900. Rohan McWilliam went on to publish *The Tichbourne Claimant: a Victorian sensation* (2007) and to be President of the Victorian Studies Association, while Merfyn Jones later published, *The North Wales Quarrymen, 1874-1922* (1981) and became Vice-Chancellor of Bangor University.

Asa Briggs was a remarkably productive historian whose career was marked by a dazzling array of fresh approaches. He was frequently ahead of trends in history-writing. Matthew Arnold, when writing of poets, commented, 'genius is mainly an affair of energy'. Asa Briggs certainly had energy, but he had much more, including insight and flair.

REFERENCES

- ¹ B. R. Mitchell (1988) *British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.811-12.
- ² Asa Briggs (2012) *Special Relationships: people and places*, Barnsley: Frontline, p.219.
- ³ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: a reassessment of persons and themes*, Harmondsworth, Pelican edition, 1965, p. 204.
- ⁴ L. P. Carpenter (1973) *G.D.H. Cole: an intellectual biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 224.
- ⁵ Asa Briggs (1971) 'Introduction' in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds, *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, London: Macmillan, p.1.
- ⁶ *Past and Present*, 9, 1956, pp 65-74. David Martin and David Rubinstein, eds (1979) *Ideology and the Labour Movement Essays: Presented to John Saville*, London: Croom Helm, pp. 62-82.
- ⁷ Rohan McWilliam (2015) 'The Interconnectedness of Things: Asa Briggs and Social History' in Miles Taylor, ed., *The Age of Asa: Lord Briggs, public life and history in Britain*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 33.
- ⁸ John McLroy (2010) 'The Society for the Study of Labour History, 1956-85: its origins and its heyday' in John McLroy, Alan Campbell, John Halstead and David Martin, eds, *Making History: organizations of labour historians in Britain since 1960*, Huddersfield: Society for the Study of Labour History, pp. 37-38.
- ⁹ Briggs, *Special Relationships*, p.134.
- ¹⁰ John McLroy, 'Asa Briggs and the Emergence of Labour History in Post-War Britain' in Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.114. On Clegg and his associates see also, William Brown (1994) 'The High Tide of Consensus: *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain* (1954) Revisited' in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 4, pp.135-49, and Peter Ackers (2007) 'Collective Bargaining as Industrial Democracy: Hugh Clegg and the political foundations of British industrial relations pluralism' in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 46, pp. 77-101.
- ¹¹ H. Clegg, A. Fox and A. F. Thompson (1964) *A History of British Trade Unionism: Volume 1: 1889-1910*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- ¹² Briggs, *Special Relationships*, p.219.
- ¹³ *British Journal of Sociology*, 1, 1950. *Past and Present*, 19, 1961, pp. 76-96.
- ¹⁴ Eileen Yeo (2016) 'Asa Briggs: Recollections and Reflections' in *Labour History Review*, 81, no. 3, pp. 275-76.

Chris Wrigley is Emeritus Professor of Modern British History at Nottingham University and a former President of the Historical Association (1996-99).



Asa Briggs, January 1992.
© Norman McBeath / National Portrait Gallery, London

Asa Briggs:

An appreciation

Stephen Yeo reveals his personal appreciation of the various ways in which Asa Briggs affected and helped his career.

I first met Asa at a meeting of the Society for the Study of Labour History in Birkbeck College. This was an early meeting of the society, to whose academic – rather than politically committed – standing Asa was vital at that time. I think it was in 1962 or 1963. With his legendary memory, he would never have fished for a date like that. Looking back on it now, however, I do remember what a determining event it was for me.

The volume of *Chartist Studies* which Asa edited had come out in 1959. His contributions to that book were typical: first a chapter on ‘the local background to Chartism’ and then, in the middle of the book, a chapter on ‘national bearings’, putting up some signposts. As a 20-year-old socialist and student of history, I remember this book as an event. So was Asa’s *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867* which came out in the same year and is still in print. How could a single, unexpected word, ‘improvement’, make sense – for and against, from above and below – of a whole society transforming itself? In his hands, it did. I relished the breadth of the footnote references. How could anyone forage to such effect? Asa was to do a similar job with the language of ‘class’ and, later on, with the language of ‘mass’ and ‘masses.’ He prepared the ground for

his subsequent work on class with a pioneering article in *Past and Present* in 1956 on 'Middle-class consciousness in English politics, 1780-1846'. 'Class' and 'Mass' became keywords in Raymond Williams's sense, that is to say words 'the problems of whose meanings... are inextricably bound up with the problems they are being used to discuss'.

Case studies of Chartism – and local studies of labour movements more generally, by activists as well as students – were to multiply during succeeding years. They looked out for more than 'local history' as background, and for social, as well as national bearings. 'Mapping' might be the best word to describe Asa's skill, particularly in perhaps his single most creative intervention, made during the early days of Sussex University, namely his essay on 'A New Map of Learning'. This was written for the book which David Daiches edited in 1970, *The Idea of a New University, an experiment in Sussex*.

For labour history, the three volumes of *Essays in Labour History* which Asa co-edited with John Saville in 1960, 1971 and 1977 served a similar function. Labour history was encouraged to become a field in its own right, while also locating itself, at best, in and against employers', business, political, cultural and comparative histories. The excitement of Asa's 'Politics and Social Structure in Birmingham and Lyons' (and in the *British Journal of Sociology* to boot) is easy to remember, as is 'The Background to the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds' (1948). As he mused in *Victorian Cities* (1963), if Engels had gone to Birmingham rather than Manchester, might Marx have become a currency reformer (like Thomas Attwood) rather than a Communist? Discuss.

Asa preferred early impulses and 'turning points' to sustained institution-building. He was an eager traveller all his life; I picture him more in 'Departures' than 'Arrivals' and hurrying along corridors, making notes on the back of an envelope, rather than sitting in lounges, VIP or otherwise. He liked to talk about people he knew, from Rupert Murdoch to Seamus Heaney, but he had very little self-importance about him. From where I stood, by then a lecturer in history at Sussex, 1976 was too early for him to leave that university (which he often referred to subsequently as 'my university'), to become Provost of Worcester College in Oxford where he remained until 1991. When Asa became Vice-Chancellor at Sussex in 1967, moving on from being professor of history, I thought he delegated too

An aerial view of the University of Sussex campus, September 1965.



much authority to newly-appointed, Pro-Vice-Chancellorial barons of Science, Arts and Social Studies. Sussex was the first university to invite McKinsey and Company to cut their teeth on universities as quasi-business organisations, and listened to them too much.

As part of a wider set of changes, the School of Social Studies quickly became the School of Social Sciences and, as an historian in that School, I watched as political scientists, economists and social psychologists in particular, flexed their single-disciplinary muscles against the idea of a cross-disciplinary School of Studies. The idea of a 'School' was original. There were many of them at Sussex: Cultural and Community (originally Educational) Studies, European Studies, African and Asian Studies, Maths and Physics, Biology, Engineering, and so on. They served as the primary unit to which a student belonged and as cluster of Major subjects (history, anthropology, mathematics, biology etc.) which could also be studied in other Schools. A degree in history could be studied in a wide variety of Schools.

Militant single-disciplinarians began to resent their own and their students' time being subtracted from single, would-be scientific professionalisms. Departmental (a no-no word at Sussex) attitudes; Subject Groups (a Sussex

phrase but whispered at first rather than proclaimed, in order not to detract from the idea of Schools of Study); and single-subject degrees, all began to assert themselves against Asa's New Map. Surprisingly quickly, the dominant sociology of British academic life and then the dominant economics of British higher education began to push back against Sussex undergraduate degrees which were designed in the early days as problem-based explorations rather than discipline-based qualifications.

On Asa's New Map, every School of Study had its own 'Contextuals' all of which had a strong historical dimension. Students were obliged to take these, and they were seen, by them as well as by enthusiastic faculty members, as at least as motivating as their 'Major Subject' courses. Schools 'owned' almost as much of a student's time (and final assessments) as Subject Groups or Majors, in degree courses which were designed to be cumulative rather than modular. There was a strong sense at Sussex of being on some kind of a critical, intellectual frontier. Long after Asa left, this sense survived, particularly in some of the sciences and in literary studies. In the latter, during the 1980s, it donned quite un-historical, even anti-historical clothes. But it was the map of knowledge itself which was in play, particularly perhaps among some social historians. Knowledge for whom and for

what? And how had the idea of what constituted 'learning', in Francis Bacon's 1605 sense, come about? What was its history?

Remember that 1976 was before structuralists on the Left turned against history *tout court*. My mouth still waters at contextuals like 'Contemporary Britain' offered in the School of English and American Studies, 'Westernisation and Modernisation' in the School of African and Asian Studies, and 'The Modern European Mind' in the School of European Studies: all of them with a strong historical, and therefore a *class* and hence a *power* component. And, while students belonged to Schools, faculty could teach across them. This was demanding but energising; more so, I felt, than the Oxford history degree as I had experienced it between 1958 and 1961. A lot of the energy came from Asa. This is not to forget the critical work which people like John Maynard Smith (1920-2004) and Harry Kroto (1939-2006) were doing with biology and chemistry students. In the very early days it was possible to major in an arts subject in a Science School and vice-versa.

The New Map originally included Arts-Science courses for everyone. And during the 1970s and early 1980s, controversies concerning structure and agency within the life sciences were homologous with – and as 'political' as – related controversies within history and the social sciences. An event posing the ideas of the evolutionary biologists Brian Goodwin (1931-2009) and Gerry Webster against those of John Maynard Smith stays in the mind. History was at stake there too. I remember a brave 'Arts-Science Coordinator' looking increasingly stranded in meetings of Senate, until his remit lost any kind of institutional significance.

So Asa is to be celebrated for 'collecting' and being quietly charismatic among many creative minds during the pioneer days at Sussex. He encouraged faculty to learn as well as teach, and to work outside the university as well as on campus. When he offered me my first academic job in 1965 (without interview), I asked to start in January rather than October because of the demands of being the Parliamentary Labour candidate in Hornsey, North London... *autre temps*. Incidentally, like many historians, Asa was a great collector, of political and social ceramics as well as of people. He collected post-

Arms of the Open University



1911 SunYat Sen and Maoist Chinese figurines, as well as English Staffordshire and civil society memorabilia. As a lover of music, he also left an unpublished volume on *Victorian Music* to accompany *Victorian Things*, *Victorian Cities* and *Victorian People*.

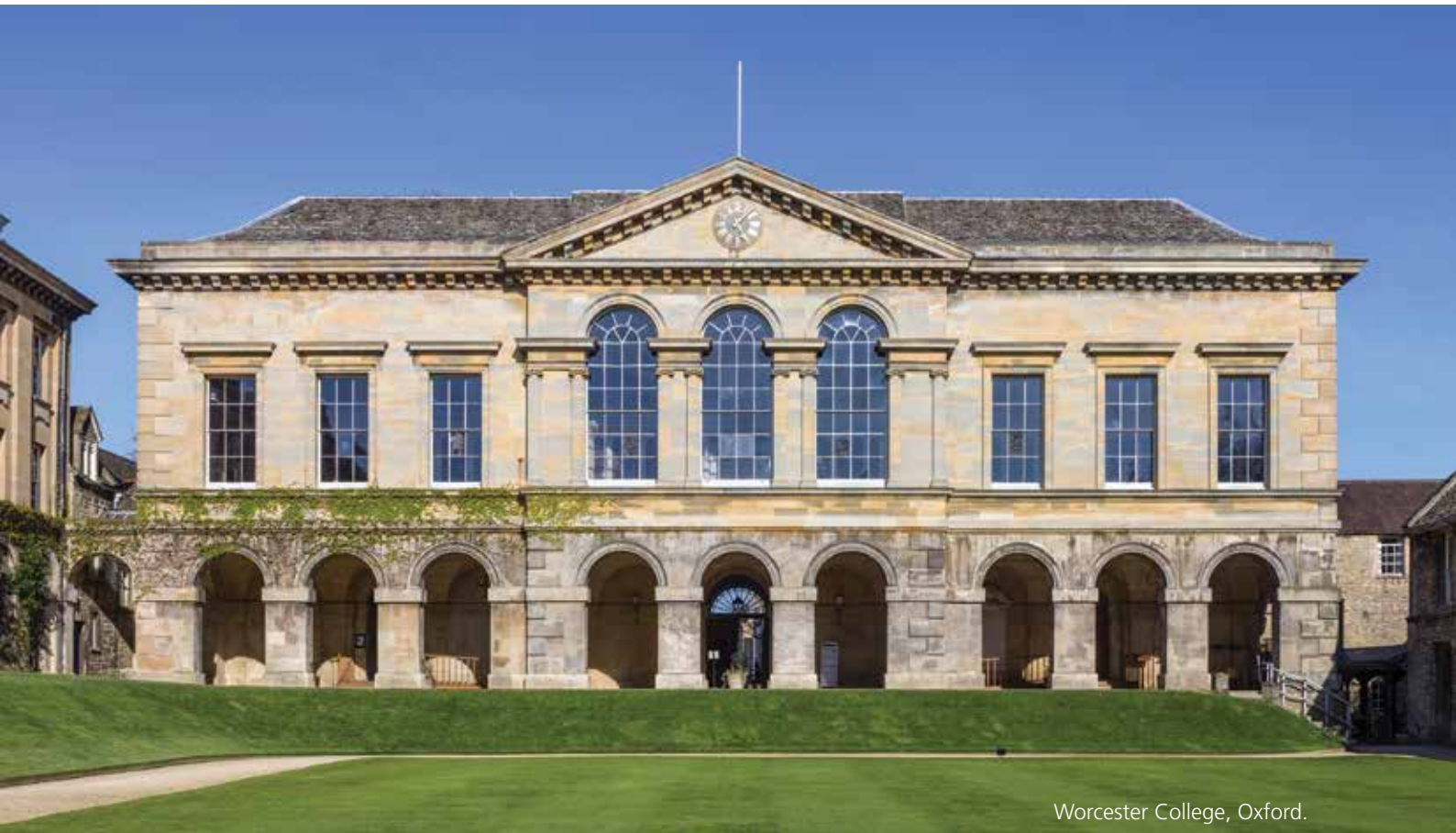
So why the regret at 1976? Historians of history during the second half of the twentieth century may want to look closely at Asa's work before and after his move to Oxford. How does context shape what goes on in and comes out of an historian's study? Was it as early as the 1970s that Asa's work became less analytical, sometimes as if 'uttered' or compiled at a single sitting? From conversations with him, I picked up that he never felt fully part of 'Oxford history' during his years at Worcester. Certainly the reservations about his years in that city which I picked up among Oxford historians, did not serve to nourish what could have been the crucial 15 years in the development of his work from 1976 through 1991 and beyond. It may also be that Sussex, and the Open University – on whose early Working Party he was influential and of which he was to become Chancellor from 1978 to 1994 – would have been set for longer in a radical-Briggsian mould – as the BBC was set in a Reithian mould – had Asa been able to stay still for longer and to broadcast, as it were, on a single channel at a time.

But this was not his nature. He helped Labour History, Local History, Victorian Studies, Urban History, the history of Leisure and Sport, Communications, Retailing, Broadcasting and Publishing History ... on to the agenda from the late 1940s

onwards. All of them were present as seeds in his early work and in every conversation. The seeds are detectable as early as his *History of Birmingham 1865-1932*, published by Oxford University Press in 1952. The packet containing them all was Asa's notion of social history, not as Trevelyan's 'history with the politics left out', but as the history of society with the politics and the economics embedded in it. Some time before the Cambridge School of Intellectual History surfaced, Asa was enthusing to his graduate students, of whom I was one, about G.M. Young's insistence on getting close enough to the sources to hear contemporaries talking. He urged us to read C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological*

Imagination (1959) with its insistence on 'the knife-edge of the present'. He wanted to get C. Wright Mills to teach at Sussex before his tragic early death. Asa also promoted what would now be seen as an intellectual history course – a Contextual – to students in all disciplines in the School of Social Studies called *Concepts, Methods and Values in the Social Sciences*. For 20 years at Sussex all students in every arts and social studies discipline began their studies with a preliminary course called Introduction to History, later known as Historical Controversy. This took off from a single text, like Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Burckhardt's *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* and Turner's work on *The Frontier in American History*. The course followed concepts through into historical practice, digging up the roots of intellectual differences which had world-changing implications.

The Labour History Society meeting with which I began this appreciation was on Chartism. Asa was in the chair, pulling things together in the eager, rapid-talking, lucid way he had of doing exactly that – making patterns as in the title of his first book: David Thomson, E. Meyer, Asa Briggs, *Patterns of Peacemaking* (1945, reprinted in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2002). One of the best known of his books on the nineteenth century constructs such a pattern, using it to define or set the unities and disunities to a perceived cultural 'moment'. *Victorian People: a reassessment of persons and themes 1851-1867* (1955) uses figures like Samuel Smiles, Robert Applegarth, Thomas Hughes, John Bright, Robert Lowe and Benjamin Disraeli to characterise



Worcester College, Oxford.

the mid-Victorian years. In *Social Thought and Social Action* (1961), Asa used the life of Seebohm Rowntree (1871-1964) in a similar way, alternating chapters on Rowntree's life with chapters on the history of twentieth-century social policy and social investigation. Inevitably, a city – York – featured largely in this book too. Forty years later in Asa's career, however, *Michael Young, Social Entrepreneur* (2001), worked much less well. It could have been a masterpiece, written by a kindred spirit about another. A textbook in the same series as *The Age of Improvement* was advertised for years, on the cover of the other books in that series. Seebohm Rowntree and Michael Young would, no doubt, have featured in it. The book was intended to cover 'welfare and warfare' in twentieth-century Britain, but it never came out. It could have been a quintessentially Briggsian, synthesising text, addressing many courses on his New Map of Learning. It is unlikely that it would have looked much like a volume in the *Oxford History of England*, with the possible exception of A.J.P. Taylor's *English History 1914-1945* (1965) – now replaced – which Asa reviewed appreciatively.

During an interval in that 1960s Labour History Society meeting, I went up to Asa to talk about my first six months of puzzled doctoral work at King's College London. The puzzlement included my then supervisor telling me that the parish magazines I intended to use among the sources for my thesis could not be regarded as 'primary'. This is because they were printed and not manuscript. As the editor of the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, he told me, secondly, that 25 years was too short a time for an historian to be dealing with. For a sociologist, maybe, but ...

As soon as I told Asa about my research, which eventually became *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (1976), he asked me to come to Sussex during the next week and talk further. The meeting resulted in me transferring my registration from Kings to Sussex, meeting Eileen Janes Yeo who had come from Wisconsin as a Marshall Scholar to do her doctorate

with Asa, and 25 years of rewarding work as an historian at Sussex. I was even encouraged to teach the sociology of religion for a while. Teaching within the history degree Asa had designed with his first colleagues – I was in a second wave, starting in 1965 – provided me with years of fulfilling life in the community of east Brighton as well as in the university. Undergraduates and graduate students of that era remain intellectual as well as personal friends. Studying for my own History degree in Oxford (1958-61) I would have killed for the array of 'Topics in History and Literature' which students could choose from in the School of English and American Studies. These were taught in small seminars conducted by a literature specialist and an historian working together. The topic which I inherited from Asa was 'The Late-Victorian Revolt in Literature, Politics and Culture'.

The 'general subjects' students had to choose from were designed as exercises in comparative history. The one I inherited from Asa and Roger Morgan (an International Relations specialist) was on 'Labour Movements'. In any future study of Asa's work as an historian, and of what is now known as its impact, the entire Sussex syllabus open to students of history in all Schools of Study between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s would be worth publishing, alongside his essay on 'A New Map'.

I left Sussex in 1989 to become Principal of Ruskin College, so for the three years until 1991, Asa and I overlapped as Walton Street neighbours. During that time he accepted an invitation from Ursula Howard and me to lecture to – and lunch with – all the available descendants of Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), the prophet of the Garden City movement. Asa sat with his copy of *Tomorrow: a peaceful path to real reform* (1898) on the table in front of him busking, one might say, but in a way which encouraged Ebenezer's grandson, Geoffrey Howard, to talk on equal terms, and everyone else in the room to feel that we were learning. 'Unequal who is free?' as Milton asked

in *Paradise Lost*. A similar atmosphere prevailed at a lunch in Worcester in October 1990 to which Asa invited all the participants in a ceremony at Oxford station when two locomotives of equal size and weight were launched, one named Ruskin College Oxford, the other the University of Oxford. This was partly thanks to Jimmy Knapp of the National Union of Railwaymen. Asa enjoyed the irony more than the then Chancellor of Oxford, Roy Jenkins. His coal-miner father, as I reminded Roy, took the Marxist side in the famous 1909, Ruskin College, Plebs League strike – an industrial dispute which was, at least in part, about knowledge.

Asa was one of those rare human beings, particularly among ‘authorities’, who always wanted to say ‘yes, yes’ (a favourite phrase of his) rather than ‘no, no’ to any request. He also had the capacity to speak, or so it seemed, not in sentences, not in paragraphs, not in pages or chapters, but in whole books. No wonder his extraordinary mind, with its photographic memory, was needed at Bletchley Park, code-breaking during the Second World War. But saying yes and producing so fast had consequences in the nature of his historical work during decades when it could have been, should have been, at its best. He sometimes seemed impatient, though seldom nervous, but I recall how, at one of our personal lunches in his lodgings at Worcester, as he reached to his bookshelves to lend me his copy of G.A.N.Lowndes, *The Silent Social Revolution* (1937), he said something like, ‘I have so many books I am supposed to be writing, they’ll send me to prison one day’. I then asked him about his impending Ford Lectures (1990-91) on ‘Culture and Communication in Victorian Britain’. He seemed a bit agitated. He told me he had bought six large notebooks, one for each lecture, and was filling them as material came to mind, on a topic which, surely, fitted him perfectly. When the time came to deliver the lectures, however, they turned out to be more like the freewheeling, not to say free association, of *Victorian Things* (1988) than they were like the successful conjuring of *Victorian Cities* (1963) or the tighter argumentation of *Victorian People* (1955). The O.U.P., unusually for Ford Lectures, declined to publish them even when they had been re-worked. So what he considered to be the best material in them was confined within Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media; from Gutenberg to the Internet* (Polity, 2009). This was a pity, given the huge promise of a pregnant lecture he had



given in Adelaide as long ago as 1960 on ‘Mass Entertainment: the origins of a modern industry’. This lecture, along with an article in the *European Journal of Sociology* in 1961 on ‘The Welfare State in Historical Perspective’ are examples of his bold mapping, pattern-making at its best. I say at its best because of the ideas in them, the range of disparate sources he used and his resistance to easy, historicist or teleological patterns in history. There was no inevitability about the shape of what Archbishop William Temple was the first to call a ‘welfare state’. Beveridge, who was not consulted by the post-war Labour government, had strong reservations about it. Broad- and narrow-casting technology could have been used in other ways, shaped by different cultural forms.

Like G.D.H.Cole before him, Asa’s unusual compulsion to produce had its pitfalls. The five volumes of *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* stretched between *The Birth of Broadcasting* in 1961 and *Competition* in 1995. I could never understand why he would refer to these BBC books as his best work. For whom and for what? The 1960 Adelaide lecture contains the brilliant observation that it is on the frontier ‘between taste and the market’ that good economic and social history needs to be done. From the mid-1970s onwards the BBC books read more and more as if they were dictated, with one thought, one fact, one quotation, one damned thing, indeed, after another. His last three autobiographical books, another trilogy produced in his nineties, were actually composed, in part, in longhand, sitting at the kitchen table. Asa never learned keyboard skills, any more than he learned to drive a car.

In one of my doctoral supervisions with him in 1964, while he was still professor of history rather than Vice-Chancellor, he showed me, with pride

mixed with sadness, a brand new volume in the Victoria County History of England. This was Volume 7 of *A History of the County of Warwick, The City of Birmingham*, edited by W.B. Stephens (London: Victoria County History, 1964). Resplendent in its characteristic red and gold, octavo format, Asa had contributed pages and pages of unmediated civic, business, cultural, ecclesiastical, voluntary associational FACTS to it, further to his own and Conrad Gill’s *History of Birmingham Volume 2, Borough and City 1865-1938*. With a regretful smile, he said something like ‘no one will ever read this or know it as part of my CV as an historian, but it is’. ‘Complete’ was an important word to him, as verb as well as adjective, as in the book which came out shortly before he died, *The Complete Poems of Asa Briggs*. This contains one hundred poems, from his schooldays in Keighley to his nonagenarian days in Lewes, all expressing, in plain language, a quite simple, trusting, loving curiosity. It was as though he was driven by an idea of completion, inflected by – dare I say sometimes damaged by – an inability to stop starting something new.

Stephen Yeo was at Sussex University from 1965 to 1989 and Ruskin College Oxford from 1989 to 1997. Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo’s *Popular Culture and Class Conflict: explorations in the history of labour and leisure* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981) was dedicated to Asa Briggs, arising from a conference at Sussex in 1975 for which he had raised the funds. Stephen’s *Victorian Agitator, George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906): co-operation as ‘This New Order of Life’* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root) will come out in the summer of 2017.

The President's Column

It has been a stimulating and exciting business over the last few years, both as President of the HA, and indeed being an early modern historian with a platform to speak with teachers, school pupils and local branch members.

Evidently seventeenth-century historical debates are still very much with us: the roots of contemporary debates about the powers of parliament, prerogative, civil war and perhaps most importantly the moral and political rights of consent, protest, sovereignty and freedom, all have deep historical origins, traditions and even, perhaps, lessons in the crises of seventeenth-century Britain in particular. This was initially manifest in 2015 when the nation, if not the world, paused to reflect on eight centuries of liberty in commemorating the events and persisting legacy of Magna Carta.

There will be more this year – the Charter of the Forests, 1217 – and next – the Representation of the People Act 1918 – ensuring that well-informed historians engage with schools, universities and local communities to offer a resource for challenging and celebrating some of the prejudices and values sometimes seen as traditional or authoritative. It's ever more important as we see consensual values of tolerance, freedom and protest subjected to potential fracture under the pressure of uncivil public discourse about migrants and other religions.

The imminent break with the cosmopolitan European project, which, of course, did not commence in the 1960s, but in the Reformation and Renaissance, leaves the United Kingdom to explore and valorise its own native historical traditions. As any well-informed historian will explain, those 'native' origins were formed of diverse global communities from Roman times: indeed the genetic 'history' now possible explores the even more global origins of British culture. Historians, archaeologists and those mapping out the human genome are better equipped than many public figures to speak with confidence and authority. The HA has, since its foundation, had as a central mission to connect deep academic learning with audiences in schools and communities: to explain, inform and encourage. The times have never been more urgent for such a role. We, as a very broad community of scholars, teachers, local historians and schoolchildren, should be congratulated for keeping the flag of independent critical historical thinking alive and viable.

This was brought home to me very recently by reading a brief tweet from the eminent historian Simon Schama, who as many of you will know is a distinguished writer and broadcaster, but also started his academic career by exploring the politics and culture of seventeenth-century Holland. His *The Embarrassment of Riches* is still the standard for exploring the tolerance and pluralism of that maritime community. Schama tweeted at the end of February 2017, just as Donald Trump was assuming presidential office that 'I've been thinking a lot about *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1572) lately. Well, how can one not?'

It must have been a thought occurring to early modern historians around the globe. Even in England, post-Brexit, public debates about the rights or wrongs of the issue were framed in languages of sovereignty, the people, consent and prerogatives. Most of that political vocabulary was first articulated in the later sixteenth and seventeenth century by those communities being confronted with oppressive

and persecuting political authorities. The *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* alongside works like the *Droit des Magistrats* and Francois Hotman's epic discussion of the historical origins of a free constitution in *Francogallia* (again 1572, composed as his oppressors were beating at his door) offered the first conceptual defences of the fundamental role that the free consent of the people had in constituting a legitimate public authority. These so-called 'monarchomach' works (loosely translated as king-killing) formed both the foundations of modern democratic political theory, but also by being reprinted, translated and edited many times in England, Scotland and even in North America, provided a tradition of thinking about the freedoms of individuals and communities.

They are barely known today. In brief they argued that political authority and legitimacy was not derived directly from God, but made, conventionally, by the free consent of those to be governed. Consent was transferred upon contractual conditions, that the sovereign would govern in the collective interests of the commonwealth (common good). If the sovereign breached or ignored the injunctions of the contract, the people might withdraw their consent and resist illegal law with force. These principles are still at the heart of our democratic institutions, although many politicians, and newspaper editors, remain blissfully ignorant at times. Most of the 'monarchomach' works are freely available in full text editions online. They underpin the 1689 Bill of Rights and the defence of the free constitution found in the 1701 Act of Settlement: but these constitutional histories are no longer core to the education of our young people in schools. The values of freedom, in the much-repeated phrase, for 'life, liberties and estates', was a commonplace in political discourse into the nineteenth century. Built upon these freedoms were values of religious tolerance, political trust and self-government. Out of these texts also grew the assertion that 'the people' were the source of political legitimacy: but this involved the full participation of such 'people' (usually, however men of some property!) in self-government, and the rotation of political office.

It was for example core to this 'commonwealth' discourse, that no holder of political office, magistrate, M.P., judge and the like might take private reward out of their office-holding. If this simple rule was broken such office-holders were rendered illegal and subject to deposition and punishment. The great slogan of this approach was summarised in their collective adoption of an ancient principle from Roman Law – *salus populi suprema lex esto* (the safety or welfare of the people is the highest law). Alongside the private law principle *vim vi licet repellere* that it is just to resist illegitimate violence with force, it provided legitimacy for those who in self-defence wished to oppose acts of public tyranny. Killing a tyrant was a similar act to defending oneself or family either from the assaults of a burglar or a fierce tiger. Perhaps if more people understood the historical origins and contexts for the vocabulary and slogans bandied about today, we might have a more civilised, well-informed and deliberative public debate?



Justin Champion
President of the Historical Association

Asa Briggs

and political history

Peter Catterall celebrates Asa Briggs's contribution to the study of political history.



Asa Briggs, January 1970.
NPG x4301 © National Portrait Gallery, London

It might be argued that Asa Briggs's main contribution to political history was to reduce its significance. Certainly, Derek Fraser notes that Briggs helped to break the stranglehold political theory had over intellectual history, including by introducing a class on economic thought when at Leeds between 1955 and 1961. Similarly, Fraser argues, his role around the same time in developing labour history was for Briggs a means of breaking out of a straitjacket of political and constitutional history concerned primarily with institutional biography of political structures and the development of the legal concepts and frameworks through which they operate.

In the process, however, what Briggs was doing was not reducing but increasing the ambit of political history. Power, how it was managed and represented, what was done with it and how it could be democratised, was a running theme of Briggs's work. He did not set out to found new sub-disciplines in areas such as urban history, although these seem to have emerged almost in spite of Briggs's own intentions. Indeed, the importance of *Victorian Cities* (1963) lies as much in its elegies to a local political world that was passing, as in its contribution to opening new fields of historical enquiry.

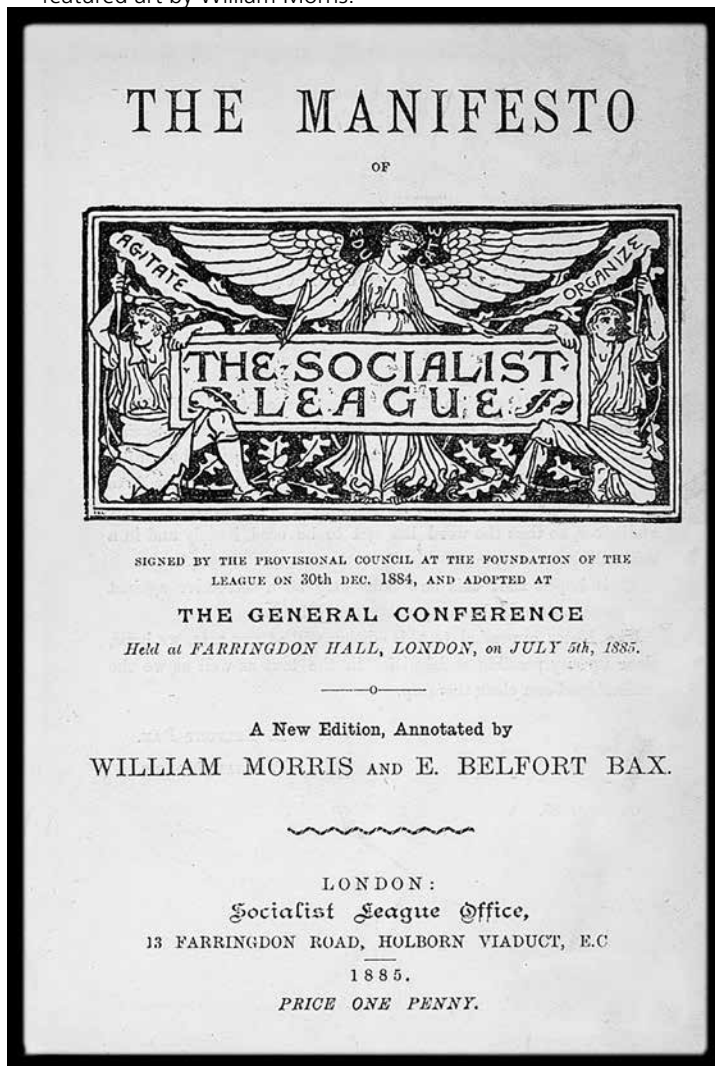
Briggs himself both deprecated this development of sub-disciplines and resisted being pigeon-holed. As J. F. C. Harrison observed, Briggs' particular genius as an historian lay instead 'in his ability to grasp the relationship between hitherto discrete events or personalities'. Towards the end of his life Briggs noted: 'I see history as a continuum'. As an example Fraser referred to Briggs illuminating in *Victorian Things* (1988) 'the relationship between the material culture of a society and its broader social and political character'. Politics was thus in Briggs's work connected to the activities and aspirations of a much broader range of actors in wider society.¹ Consider his criticism of R. H. Tawney for seeing William Lovett's tract *Chartism: a new organisation for the people* (1840) as essentially an educational rather than a political manifesto. Briggs, like Lovett, did not separate the two.²

This approach reflected two influences: Marc Bloch and G. M. Young.³ From both Briggs derived the lesson that the initial purpose of history is to study, not the past, but how the people of the time lived in it. The *histoire totale*, inspired by Bloch, Briggs aspired to write was thus shaped by a desire to understand how people felt about and managed the stuff of their lives, including its political dimensions. Often, he observed, the latter could be significantly reshaped by developments not usually formally associated with political life. Thus he ended his introduction to a volume on the fraught global politics of the 1930s with the comment that 'the twentieth century revolution in physics was even more decisive than diplomacy or ideology'. This was a view no doubt informed by his encounters with Einstein while at Princeton in 1953-54. Politics was not a closed sphere but hugely affected by the unlocking of the power of the atom in that decade.⁴

What is often seen narrowly as political history, the jockeying for party advantage in parliament or on the platform, Briggs characterised as 'half-truths, evasions and rhetoric'. His low opinion of this type of politics is reflected in his comment that Tollemache should have finished his book of Gladstone's table talk with the following quote from the great man: 'Nowhere does the ideal enter so little as into politics; nowhere does human conduct fall so far below the highest ethical standard'. In contrast, Briggs's political history was not institutional biography or infighting, but an account of individuals' ideas, ideals and aspirations. It is an approach encapsulated

The cover of the Socialist League's manifesto of 1885 featured art by William Morris.

William Morris
© National Portrait Gallery, London



in the quote from William Morris with which Briggs closes his introduction to a selection of the writings of that socialist visionary, an approach which explores 'how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name'.⁵

This focus helps to explain Briggs's relative imperviousness and initial hostility to the Marxisant history which attracted so many of his peers. He was resistant to their structuralist view of society and argued that their approach meant that 'the pluralism of society is somehow missing....the sense of freedom and the complexities of individuals which defy categorisation'.⁶ Briggs was not writing taxonomies nor, despite all his work on labour history, did he instinctively think in terms of abstract social categories like class. As Briggs quoted approvingly from Lovett's writings, the aim must be to humanise these abstractions: 'we must feel an equal interest in the *political enlightenment* of the most distant and indifferent

inhabitant of our island as in that of our nearest and best disposed neighbour'.⁷

The undogmatic social democracy Briggs himself espoused was thus focused instead on an ethical emphasis on elevating and creating opportunities for people. Reflecting a lifelong enthusiasm for adult education he shared with Lovett, he warned that merely passive leisure would rather prove 'a parody of social democracy'.⁸ Accordingly, a key theme of his writings on labour history was that the labour movement was about more than material advancement. A second key theme is that political change is about more than bureaucracy and mechanics, it is about the link between politics and people. He therefore approvingly observed that Fred Jowett wanted to smash the cabinet system because it represented bureaucracy rather than popular control. However, and this is the third theme, he saw the labour movement as aiming to use the state for social advancement, rather than just addressing the needs of the working classes. This emerges forcefully from his criticism of Henry Pelling for underestimating the interest

of labour organisations in creating a more equal society.

That the latter objective was important to Briggs is clear from his comments on William Morris. Noting that Morris was better at foreseeing the problems of bringing socialism about by instalments than by revolution, Briggs added: 'he would have wished to judge both kinds of Socialism by the same criteria – their success in creating "a society of equality"'. In this Briggs both signalled his distance from those historians who focused exclusively on the struggles of the working class and the criterion he used to measure their advancement. He was similarly admonishing the more theory-driven of his contemporaries when reflecting: 'It is necessary to remember....that there were many working men who joined a wide variety of labour organisations and cared little about the varieties of socialism they expressed. For Briggs it was important to re-capture the political culture that shaped their involvement in the labour movement, rather than just examine the theories of its leaders, or the applicability of the theories of those who wrote about it'.⁹

CHARTIST DEMONSTRATION!!

“PEACE and ORDER” is our MOTTO!

TO THE WORKING MEN OF LONDON.

Fellow Men,—The Press having misrepresented and vilified us and our intentions, the Demonstration Committee therefore consider it to be their duty to state that the grievances of us (the Working Classes) are deep and our demands just. We and our families are pining in misery, want, and starvation! We demand a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work! We are the slaves of capital—we demand protection to our labour. We are political serfs—we demand to be free. We therefore invite all well disposed to join in our peaceful procession on

MONDAY NEXT, April 10,
As it is for the good of all that we seek to remove the evils under which we groan.

The following are the places of Meeting of THE CHARTISTS, THE TRADES, THE IRISH CONFEDERATE & REPEAL BODIES:
East Division on Stepney Green at 8 o’clock;
City and Finsbury Division on Clerkenwell Green at 9 o’clock; West Division in Russell Square at 9 o’clock; and the South Division in Peckham Fields at 9 o’clock, and proceed from thence to Kennington Common.

Signed on behalf of the Committee, JOHN ARNOTT, Sec.

Every Hitcher, Printer, 3, Edward Street, Hoxton Road.

After all, as Briggs noted elsewhere, much of human life did not get into the history books.¹⁰ Nor would it if historians insisted on treating their subjects as abstractions: as workers or politicians first and foremost, rather than as people. People, with all their foibles, were on the other hand central to Briggs’s humanistic approach to history. His first major work, *Victorian People* (1954) made this focus clear. This was not some kind of Namierite prosopography, exploring power through networks. Instead Briggs presented the mid-Victorian age through a gallery of nine of its luminaries.

These portraits are, as with all of Briggs’s work, lavishly illustrated with telling anecdotes. ‘I love to quote’ he records in his memoirs.¹¹ This reflects two aspects of Briggs’s view of history. First, ‘what matters most in history is not what happened, but what people said about it when it was happening.’¹² The quotations are thus not just illustrative; for Briggs they were the very stuff of history themselves. They indicated not the truth of what happened, but how those who lived through and shaped events understood them. Second, more broadly, they are accordingly part of a kind of *bricolage* approach to history, in which Briggs sought to reflect the past through assembling the material and

written texts remaining into an attempt to represent its various aspects as it was experienced at the time. This assemblage then becomes a rich and allusive portrayal of the times and the thought-worlds of those who lived through them. Thus he concluded a general work on the nineteenth century: ‘According to Burkhardt, “History is the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another.” The object of this volume, Burkhardt notwithstanding, has been to allow the nineteenth century to speak for itself.’¹³

This fondness for quotation and observation of human actors comes out particularly in what he described as a favourite book, Lionel A. Tollemache’s *Talks with Mr Gladstone* (1898). Briggs writes: ‘It ranges over as many topics and anecdotes as Harold Macmillan’s talk.... It covers books as much as people and it is packed with significant allusions and assessments’. Tollemache thus fed Briggs’s appetite for the telling aperçu, an appetite Briggs clearly indulged in his voluminous writings. Briggs was also attracted to those quotations which spoke not just to the time at which they were uttered, but his (and ours). For instance, he notes Gladstone’s reply to a question about the ‘Yellow Peril’: ‘If the cultivated races cannot defend themselves without appealing to brute force, God help them.’

Briggs not only enjoyed Tollemache’s book but was himself something of a Tollemache himself, only on a much larger scale. He did not apply theory, or master narratives. Nor, despite the fondness for quotation, did he see himself as examining what would now be called discourse, in order to establish the contours of political culture. These emerge in his work, but are not central to how he saw political history. Instead, through looking at how people responded to and understood the times they were living in, Briggs sought to build up portraits which conveyed the key characteristics of an age or movement; portraits in which political relations and order are placed in relationship to society as a whole. He quoted a New York reviewer praising Tollemache’s book for demonstrating ‘the rare gift of being able to paint portraits instead of making photographs.’¹⁴ In essence, Briggs in his histories was similarly painting portraits of both men like Gladstone and of their era.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Derek Fraser (ed) (1990) *Cities, Class and Communication: essays in honour of Asa Briggs*, Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, pp.2-5 and review by J. F. C. Harrison in *History Today* (accessed online at www.historytoday.com/jffc-harrison/cities-class-and-communication-visions-people, 2 February 2017); Asa Briggs (2014) *Loose Ends and Extras* Barnsley: Frontline, pp.7, 18.
- ² Asa Briggs (1969) ‘Introduction’ in William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: a new organisation of the people*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, pp.17-18.
- ³ Briggs, *Loose Ends*, p.8; Asa Briggs (ed) (1970), *The Nineteenth Century: the contradictions of progress*, London: Thames & Hudson, p.38.
- ⁴ Asa Briggs (1993) ‘Introduction’ in Peter Furtado (ed), *Depression and Dictatorship*, London: Hamlyn, p.9.
- ⁵ Asa Briggs (ed.) (1962) *William Morris: selected writings and designs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.14, 20; Asa Briggs (ed.) (1984) *Gladstone’s Boswell: late Victorian conversations by Lionel A. Tollemache*, Brighton: Harvester, p.xxi.
- ⁶ Asa Briggs (1964) ‘Mapping the World of Labour’ in *The Listener*, 3 December, pp.894-95.
- ⁷ Briggs, *Chartism*, p.19.
- ⁸ Cited in Miles Taylor (ed.) (2015) *The Age of Asa: Lord Briggs, public life and history in Britain since 1945*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p.8.
- ⁹ Asa Briggs (1971) ‘Introduction’ in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds) *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, London: Macmillan, pp.1-16; Briggs, *William Morris*, p.17.
- ¹⁰ Briggs, *Gladstone’s Boswell*, p.xiv.
- ¹¹ Briggs, *Loose Ends*, p.20.
- ¹² Briggs, *Gladstone’s Boswell*, p.xiv.
- ¹³ Briggs, *The Nineteenth Century*, p.344.
- ¹⁴ Briggs, *Gladstone’s Boswell*, pp.xiii, xv, xvii.

Peter Catterall is Professor of History and Policy at the University of Westminster. He has written extensively on modern British political history and his latest book is *Labour and the Free Churches 1918-1939: radicalism, religion and righteousness* (Bloomsbury, 2016).

National history book competition



Following the competition's successful launch in 2016, the Historical Association and Amberley Publishing are delighted to announce details of the competition for this year. The aim of the competition is to find the best unpublished history book from either an aspiring or an established author.

Whether you have a completed manuscript or just an outline of the book you want to write, we want to hear about it. This is your chance to become a published history author and to find a wide readership for the subject that fascinates you.

Jon Jackson, publishing director at Amberley, says, 'This competition taps into enormous grassroots interest in local and national history. We are looking for a winning entry that tells a new, fascinating story.'

Proposals can cover any aspect of history. The competition is free to enter and open to everyone. The winning author will receive a £1,000 advance and a contract with Amberley Publishing, who will publish, promote and distribute the finished book. The winner will also have the opportunity to write an article about their book for *The Historian*.

Author Amy Licence, one of the competition's judges, says, 'This is a fantastic opportunity for a new author to debut their talent, and just the sort of competition I wish had been around when I was starting out. I'm very excited about this chance to help discover the authors of the future.'

How to enter

You should include:

- A 200-word summary of the subject.
- A chapter plan with a brief description of what will be covered in each chapter.
- A 50-word biography of yourself including any relevant experience.
- 2,000 words of sample writing from the start of the book.
- Some sample images, if images are integral to the book.

Deadline for entries: 1 June 2017.

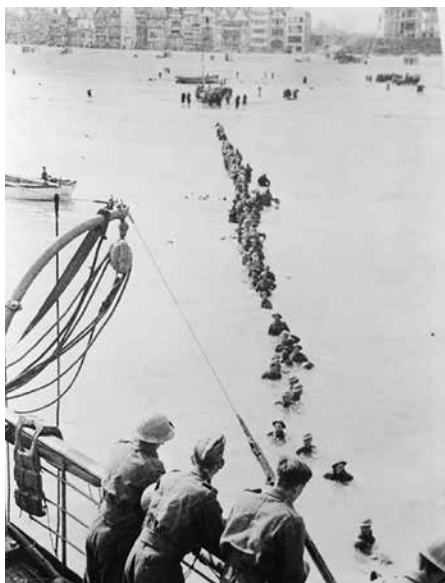
The winner will be announced in the July 2017 issue of *The Historian* magazine.

Please email your submissions to competition@amberley-books.com or post them to:

Competition, Amberley Publishing,
The Hill, Merrywalks,
Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 4EP

Raising the bar

Hugh Gault reveals the impact that Asa Briggs's approach to historical research has had on his own methodology.



British troops evacuating Dunkirk's beaches.

'Raising the bar' has several meanings. Perhaps the most obvious is about the standards of research, teaching and guidance. Another is about removing barriers, perceived or actual, that widen access and encourage people in. There may be several others and it would be entirely typical of Asa Briggs if he fitted those too – as he certainly does the first two.

When researching and writing history, especially when you come to it relatively late in life as a second or third career, as was my case, you need inspiration, a helpful guide or guides, and access to credible sources, the originals ideally but certainly reliable interpreters.

Inspiration can come in various forms, often just a paragraph or sentence that you decide to follow up. This might be in a novel, for example, or even if not, it is these that can give a real feel for the conditions of the time. Trollope, George Eliot, Dickens, Mrs Gaskell for the nineteenth century; Wells in social realist mode, G.B. Shaw the novelist and many others for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sometimes though it is an historian's explanation that illuminates the circumstances and rationale. Briggs was particularly good at switching the spotlight on and directing it to the action. For example, in his book on the social reformer Seebohm Rowntree, he wrote: 'Dunkirk was "the year of greatest national danger", but also the year that made the post-war welfare state possible "when values changed as well as mood"'¹

An arresting comment and not the most obvious one to make about the evacuation of 300,000 troops from Dunkirk in 1940, but one that makes more sense the longer you reflect upon it.

You need a guide who can help focus your efforts. This might be a mentor and several of the contributors to this issue have pinpointed their debt to Briggs in this respect. In my case it was one of the contributors, Boyd Hilton, who filled this role. One of the things that any aspiring historian relies on is the wisdom of others and their preparedness to share their learning freely. Teachers at all levels have this mind-set, but to benefit in your 50s and 60s as I have done from the willingness of others has been remarkable nonetheless. Briggs provided this for his students and many others.

Another sort of guide comes through those who have been there, done that and written it down. They've left a trail through the labyrinth for others to follow. However, any aspiring researcher needs to be conscious of the difference between an apparent trail that cuts corners and crashes through barriers when it comes to a dead-end rather than retracing its steps. Populist history that relies on secondary sources, and digital history compiled by non-professionals, are particularly prone to misleading errors of this sort. Writing for a general readership may increase sales, but it can also distort, perhaps for the mistakes to be regurgitated uncritically by others. But even academic historians can be guilty of this for 'History is lived forwards but written and sometimes even read backwards.'² The use of *post hoc* explanations, footnotes that relate to a later time and the adoption of contemporary norms to explain a time when values were different are examples. Most of us are guilty of this sometimes, but it is a matter of degree. It is rarely if ever the case with Briggs. This makes his books and articles particularly reliable. Others have written here of the impact of *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*, still in print nearly 60 years on from its original publication in 1959. This was invaluable in my case too and, in addition, I can immediately point to *1851, Friends of the People*, his books on Victorian times (cities and people in particular), and the *Social History of England*.³ Several of these were read for pleasure but most recently one part of my work has depended on his research into the history of the BBC.

When Kingsley Wood was Postmaster-General 1931-35, he not only transformed the Post Office, particularly telephones, but oversaw the BBC for the government, leading the Charter renewal process in 1936 for example. Sir John Reith, the Director-General of the BBC, and

Sir (Howard) Kingsley Wood, 1935.
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Wood did not get on, so while Reith was agitating for Charter renewal discussions to begin in 1934, Wood resisted. Briggs refers to a meeting in June 1934 which Reith thought 'most unsatisfactory' because of Wood's 'political expediency' and assumption that the new Charter should not be very different from the existing one.⁴ Just one example and there are many others that help explain the context.

Unrelated to Wood but relevant to some attitudes to the BBC in the 1930s, Briggs refers to a complaint from the Bishop of Southampton in the *Manchester Guardian* (7 October 1935) that radio effectively inoculated with the 'mildest form of Christianity yet discovered', thereby preventing the country 'from catching the real thing'.⁵ Briggs included this for a purpose not just so that his history of the BBC would be comprehensive.

Briggs not only studied the original sources but the clarity and quality of his analysis should not be underestimated. This is invaluable for any researcher following in his footsteps. Indeed, I would go further and say that there are relatively few historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that can be relied on almost without question. Briggs is one, Keith Middlemas another and the latter had benefited himself from Briggs's work. In both cases the story they tell reflects the facts, rather than selecting facts that fit the story the writer prefers to relate. There is a huge difference between being engaged and being biased, and

Broadcasting House in Portland Place, London, the headquarters of the BBC, completed in 1932.



readers can tell the two apart. No observer will be able to conceal their views and perspective totally, nor should they necessarily, but there is a chasm between a passion that lets the sources speak for themselves and a disengagement that moulds the evidence presented. Briggs could balance the detachment of the professional historian and the conclusions that he drew. His enthusiasm shines through many of his books, but his legacy will and should be the enthusiasms he wrote about and the students (in the broadest sense) he inspired.

REFERENCES

¹ Asa Briggs (1961) *A Study of the Work of Seeborn Rowntree 1871-1954*, London: Longmans, p.191.

² Peter Lyon, then Secretary of the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, University of London in D.K. Adams (ed) (1992) *Britain and Canada in the 1990s*, Aldershot: Dartmouth, p. 16.

³ Briggs's Classic Pamphlet *1851*, first published in 1951 has been republished in digital form by the Historical Association to coincide with this special edition of *The Historian*. See the HA website: www.history.org.uk/student/resource/9059/1851 Asa Briggs (1956) *Friends of the people: the centenary history of Lewis's*, London: Batsford. Asa Briggs (1991) *A Social History of England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

⁴ Asa Briggs (1995) *The History of Broadcasting in the UK: Vol. II – The Golden Age of Wireless, 1927-1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.442.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

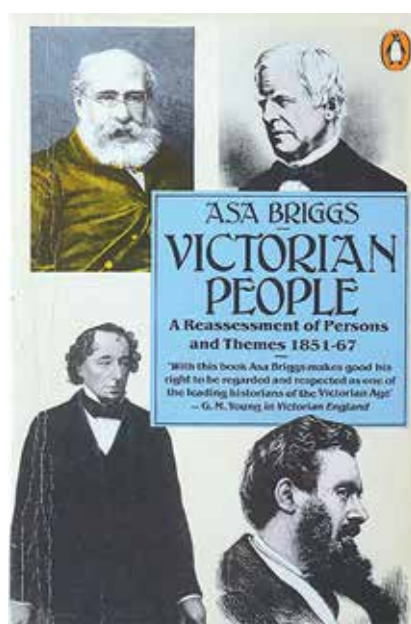
Hugh Gault is a writer and historian. The second and concluding part of his biography of Kingsley Wood covering the years 1925-1943 will be published in April 2017.

Asa Briggs and The Age of Improvement

As with so many other historians **Boyd Hilton** has been very much influenced by Asa Briggs's *The Age of Improvement*.

A striking example of historiographical snap occurred in 1948 when Asa Briggs and Sydney Checkland independently published articles on the then obscure politician and currency reformer Thomas Attwood.¹ Asa once told me that he thought the common stimulus was Birmingham, the city where Checkland was living at the time and in which Asa was beginning to get interested. Whatever the reason, the issues that preoccupied Attwood would play a central explanatory role in both men's interpretations. Like many others, I have always regarded Asa's *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867* (1959) as the premier general history of the period, the one that I should do my best to get somewhere near touching distance of when I came to write my own account, and it is probably not coincidental that my personal runner-up is Checkland's *The Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815-85* (1964), which has never seemed to me to receive the accolades it deserves.²

My tutor in nineteenth-century British history at New College, Oxford was an exceptionally clever late seventeenth-century specialist, the Revd Gareth Bennett. I believe Garry had read only one book on the nineteenth century, but fortunately that book was *The Age of Improvement*. Like all his students I was taken through the mysteries of that quintessentially Briggsian insight, the clash between 'dear money' and 'cheap money', which together with his formulation 'Cash, Corn, and Catholics' guided my own historical steps for a long time. Even when I moved beyond those paradigms into religious realms that Asa barely explored, as I did when describing the first two-thirds of Asa's period as an *Age of Atonement*, my aim was partly to explore the psychological price that so many Britons had to pay for their belief



in material social progress and moral self-improvement.

The reasons I particularly admire *The Age of Improvement* are roughly the reasons Norman Gash gave for disliking it in his distinctly ungenerous review in the *English Historical Review* (1960):

[Briggs's] partialities are readily apparent. He is more interested in social than administrative, diplomatic or military history; in 'the people' rather than in persons; in the north rather than the south; in industry rather than agriculture; in dissent rather than the establishment; in economics rather than religion. A page on the Oxford Movement, nearly four on the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, illustrate not unfairly his scale of values... Mr Briggs has written a lucid and intellectual book; its chief lack is perhaps humanity.³

The obverse point is that Gash was incapable of detecting humanity

in people *en masse*, or in the north, industry and trades unionism. To Gash these things were merely 'problems' which it was the heavy lot of superior 'persons' to try to solve as best they could. A clue to the distance between Gash's own general history of the period and Asa's is to be found in its title: *Aristocracy and People* (1979). Whereas Asa saw the middle classes as central to understanding the nineteenth century, Gash still envisaged a two-class society of patricians and plebs. The middle classes, insofar as they existed at all, were crippled by the false consciousness of commoners who had not managed to buy or marry into aristocratic society.

The fact that Briggs and Gash had different partialities is not itself important, since these are what make any general history interesting. What makes Asa's work so much the more penetrating as interpretation is his instinct that by the nineteenth century, unlike in the eighteenth century, capitalism had created political and social markets into which most aspects of public life and thought were integrated (with perhaps a few recondite safe spaces, such as the Oxford Movement). A key section of *The Age of Improvement* refers to 'the clash of interests', a phrase also used by Geoffrey Holmes in his equally seminal *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, published eight years later.⁴ Likewise Asa depicts the less tempestuous 1850s and 1860s, often known the 'age of equipoise', in terms of the 'balance of interests'. His conception of social history as 'economic history with the politics put in' was – like Hobsbawm's, but unlike that of most historians of his day – totalising. However, there was nothing crudely Marxisant about it. In one of his subtlest essays he showed how the middle class, far from being forged by access to capital or the means of production, was reified discursively in debates over legislation

such as the Reform Acts and Corn Law repeal. This reminds me that the best way to sum up Asa Briggs is as a prefigurer of future trends par excellence. His essay on 'the languages of class' prefigured the 'linguistic turn'. *Victorian Things* prefigured the turn to material culture. *Chartist Studies* greatly stimulated the study of local history. *Victorian Cities* anticipated the growth of urban history. His volumes on the BBC give the lie to Gash's sneer that he was uninterested in administrative history. And, despite its title, *Victorian People* was about what even Gash would have to admit were 'persons' in all their humanity. That book of essays, incidentally, has all the poise of an A.J.P. Taylor and much better judgement.

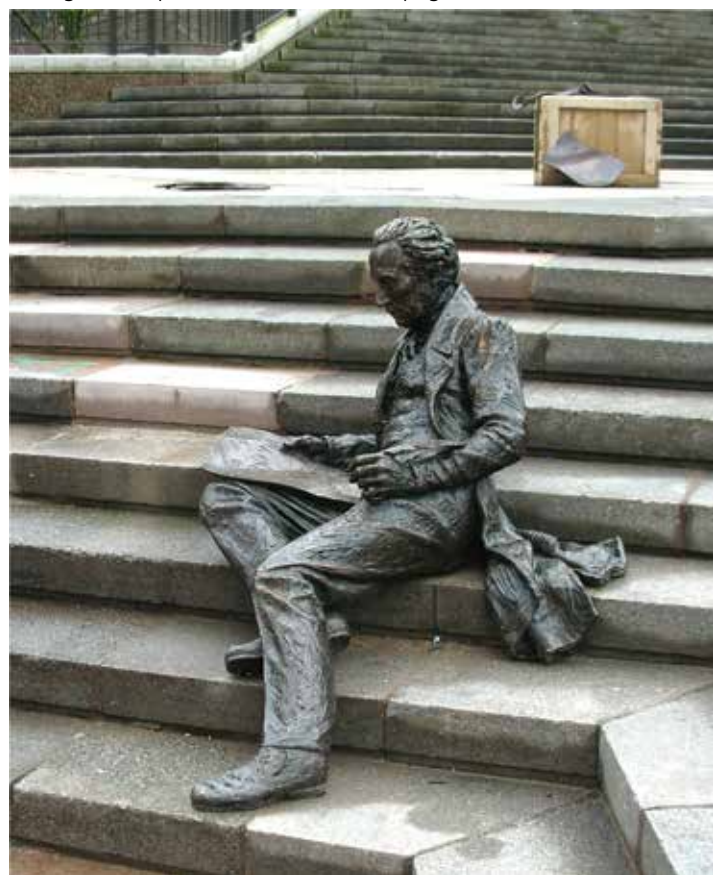
I only got to know Asa personally during his years as Provost of Worcester College, Oxford (1976–91). I had moved to Cambridge by then, but felt enormously privileged to be invited to join the 'Asacabal', an eating and drinking discussion group of mainly Oxford modern Britain-ists with a sprinkling of country members from Sussex, Cambridge and elsewhere. What seemed to me to be the essential Asa on those occasions combined good fellowship and above all zest with a fundamental intellectual seriousness, especially about history. But more than that, for me he will always be the premier historian of nineteenth-century Britain.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Asa Briggs (1948) 'Thomas Attwood and the economic background to the Birmingham Political Union' in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9, pp. 190-216; S.G. Checkland (1948) 'The Birmingham economists, 1815–50' in *Economic History Review*, 1, pp. 1-19.
- ² S.G. Checkland (1964) *The Rise of Industrial Society in England 1815–1885*, London: Longman.
- ³ *English Historical Review*, 75 (1960), pp. 173-4.
- ⁴ Geoffrey Holmes (1967) *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, London: Macmillan.

Boyd Hilton was Professor of Modern British History at Cambridge and is a Fellow of Trinity College. His volume in the New Oxford History of England series covers a large part of the period dealt with in Asa Briggs's *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*.

A bronze statue of Thomas Attwood in Chamberlain Square, Birmingham. The politician sits on the steps, having left his plinth and scattered his pages around him.



Get Connected!

Follow us on social media and join the conversation



@histassoc



@histassoc



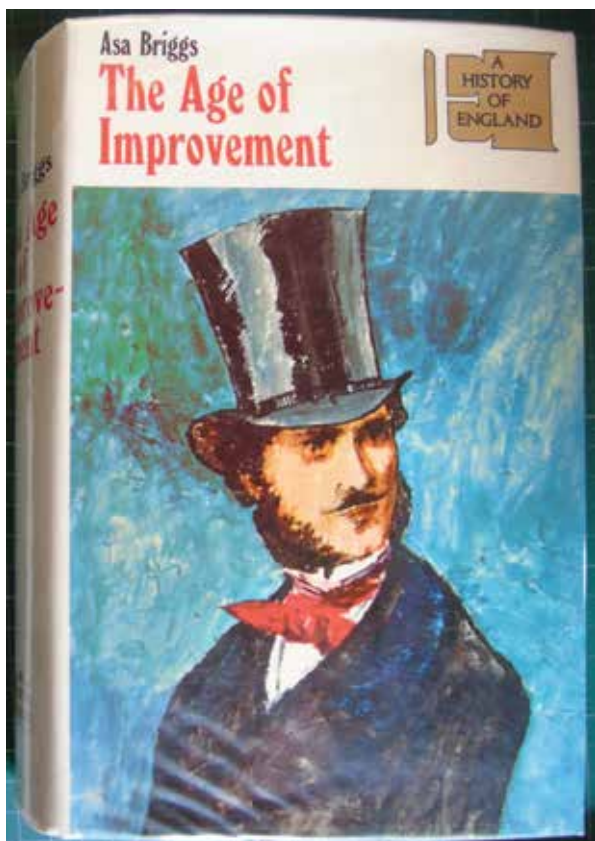
Search 'Historical Association'



Keeping you in the loop with all the activities at 59a and beyond!

Two branch members...

In response to our appeal for comment two members of our Nuneaton Branch offered their individual thoughts on how they had been influenced by *The Age of Improvement*.



Michael Arnold

I was ambivalent about history in the early years of my secondary schooling. Between studying Roman settlements in the first form to the First World War in the fifth there is, astonishingly, nothing that I remember. Then I started A-levels at King Edward VI College and I was given *The Age of Improvement* as my textbook. Here was history as an understandable and exciting story, beautifully told: Pitt and Fox, the under-estimated Lord Liverpool, the Reform Act, Peel and then the rivalry of Disraeli and Gladstone.

Of course, there were other books but none told the story so well. *The Age of Improvement* managed that rare feat, a narrative but analytical work told in an engaging way in a wholly persuasive style. I bought a copy when I left the sixth-form college, which may be as good a commendation as there is.

David Paterson

My earliest memory of Asa Briggs's *The Age of Improvement* was when working for my A-levels in the 1960s. Pursuing a commonly studied period of nineteenth century British History (1815-1914), I was intrigued by Briggs's selected dates, 1783-1867. He asserted in his introduction that 'the division of history into distinct periods is of necessity arbitrary and unconvincing'. However, he made an excellent case for his *Age of Improvement*, though his persuasive power never succumbed to a simplified Whig interpretation of history. His use of footnotes, included luxuriously at the foot of the page, introduced me at a suitably early age to the concept of backing up your sources.

My own copy, marked September 1968, was acquired while studying history at Leeds University, a few years after Briggs had left his professorial post there. The suitably worn dust-cover has a sticker proclaiming '42/- net Longmans' and the book increased its value to me at degree level. The chapter on Victorianism was much thumbed and helped to confirm the direction of my particular historical interests. The clear layout and accessible style were noteworthy: over 500 pages unrelieved by illustrations were not seen as the barrier they would be today.

It has struck me how many of his ideas subconsciously found their way into my own teaching of history. Having by this time seen him on TV and listened to his insights on Victorian subjects on the (then high tech) Sussex Tapes I could now hear his voice as I read *The Age of Improvement* again. I still can. Studying the Victorian period of course meant enlightenment from other parts of the Briggs oeuvre such as *Victorian People* and *Victorian Cities*, though there was a frustrating wait for *Victorian Things*. But it was the *Age of Improvement* which grabbed my attention, and inspired and accompanied me for many years.

The approach was civilised, liberal-leaning and free of an Establishment feel, though never Marxist, a combination (*pace* A.J.P. Taylor) that was not as common in historical writing in the 1970s and 1980s as it might have been. The clear structure, analytical sharpness and feel for sophisticated narrative resound on every page. Above all his ability to understand the period under study on its own terms and without condescending hindsight should still serve as a model for all historical studies. His apposite quotations from little-known writers were matched by his clever use of familiar ideas. In the brilliant final section of the book he argues that 'England in 1867 was divided not so much between Liberals and Conservatives as between optimists and pessimists.'

I found on re-reading some sections recently that the book has dated a lot less than many contemporaries, with valuable insights remaining even after over half a century of additional research. Recently, in studying English Radicalism in the 1860s for some work on the influences on George Eliot I still found Briggs' analysis of the causes of the Second Reform Act, much pored over since 1959, to be a sound guide. It is hardly surprising that the book was re-issued only a few years ago. Let's hope another generation can drink of its wisdom.

Obituary

William Arthur Speck, 1938-2017

Members will be saddened to learn of the death, on 16 February 2017, of Emeritus Professor William Speck, universally known as Bill, President of the Historical Association from 1999 to 2002, and also a distinguished former Editor of both *History* and *The Historian*.

Bill's research interests lay in what happened in Britain and her colonies in the 'long' eighteenth century, generally taken to refer to the period between the build-up to the 'Glorious Revolution' and the Battle of Waterloo. His initial field was politics, but he soon branched out into literature, much of his writing characterised by the intertwining of the two perspectives.

He was born in Bradford, and from 1948 he attended the Grammar School where staff encouraged and developed his talent for history. From there he won a scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford, which has a 600-year tradition of encouraging northern scholars. He achieved his BA in 1960 and his D.Phil in 1966. At Oxford Bill was part of a group of students who reinvigorated the University Cycling Club, dormant since the war, that satisfyingly marked its rebirth by out-racing Cambridge.

Bill's career began with a Tutorial Fellowship at the University of Exeter in 1962. The following year, he was awarded a Lectureship in History at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and promoted to a Readership in 1974. His first major published works were *The Divided Society: parties and politics in England, 1694-1716, 1694-1716* (with Geoffrey S. Holmes, 1967), and *Tory and Whig: The Struggle in the Constituencies 1701-1715* (Macmillan, 1970). These ground-breaking works were followed by *Stability and Strife: England, 1714-60* (Edward Arnold, 1977).

He was appointed in 1981 to the G. F. Grant Professorship of History at the University of Hull. His publications in this period included *The Butcher: the Duke of Cumberland and the suppression of the '45* (Blackwell, 1981) which ran to a second edition in 2013. His final full-time academic post came in 1984 with the Chair in Modern History at the University of Leeds, from where he took early retirement as Emeritus Professor in 1997.

Bill also held short-term visiting posts in the USA: at the College of William and Mary, the Universities of Iowa and

Bill Speck presenting Antonia Fraser with the Medlicott Medal at the HA Annual Conference in York 2000.



Portland State, Oregon, and a sabbatical year at Yale. This last visit consolidated his interest in literature, where he worked on satirical verses that typified the political outlook of Jonathan Swift.

After retirement Bill did not just remain 'research active' (in the jargon), he significantly increased his output. He moved home to Carlisle primarily to be close to the material for his biography of Robert Southey held at Southey's old home, Greta Hall in Keswick. This was published in 2006 to great critical acclaim (*Robert Southey: entire man of letters*, Yale University Press). It resulted in his appointment as Honorary Professor in the School of English Studies at the University of Nottingham from 2006 to 2012. Most recently he published a study of Thomas Paine (*Thomas Paine: a political biography*, Routledge, 2016).

Bill Speck was widely regarded as an excellent teacher and lecturer. He could always spare time for those who wished to pursue further matters raised in class, and took care to foster and encourage younger colleagues. At the funeral, one of them – Dr Stephen Baskerville – described Bill's facility for 'gathering in' younger colleagues, who invariably were delighted by the process.

In fact – decades before the modern university imposed a bureaucratic imperative on outreach and wider access – Bill had embraced the desirability of reaching out his scholarly knowledge beyond the confines of academia. His principal vehicle for this was the Historical

Association, into which he poured passion and enthusiasm, but was not confined to it. He never felt it necessary to succumb to the tyranny of the PowerPoint presentation, letting his natural gifts as a communicator tell the story. He could always distinguish between an academic lecture suitable for a scholarly conference and a talk to a non-academic group thirsting for insight into his subject matter.

Bill Speck had a rich hinterland of interests outside his professional life. He was passionate about jazz, inculcated in his West Riding days at Wakefield Jazz Club. He played the clarinet and to the end of his life he was involved with a group in Hexham that came together to play small-scale classical pieces for their own enjoyment. He loved walking the Lakeland fells. Each month he met with others for lunch and debate at what he termed the 'Carlisle's Victor Meldrew Appreciation Society', which mulled over the precarious state of the contemporary world. He was a noted cat-lover and Chairman of the Carlisle branch of the RSPCA. He often participated competitively in pub quizzes in the Carlisle area. Although his cycling days were over in recent years, a veteran and much-travelled drop-handled bike was in the shed at the time of his death.

The day before his death he had been to the Whitehaven archives, searching out more material. He leaves unfinished drafts of articles, but his partner Mary Geiter, familiar with his projects, is tasked with seeing what can be rescued. It has been agreed that his papers and relevant books would be transferred to Greta Hall, where the Southey and Speck collections would be housed together.

Bill Speck will be greatly missed by his family, and his many friends and colleagues in and outside the Historical Association, not least in the Cumbria branch. Justin Champion, the HA's current President, has written that as long as scholars, students and interested members of the public continue to care about affairs in the long eighteenth century, Bill's work will be a benchmark in the exchange of ideas. We can predict that these transactions will be a permanent memorial to an outstanding scholar and a charming and delightful man.

Robin Smith, Chairman, Cumbria Branch

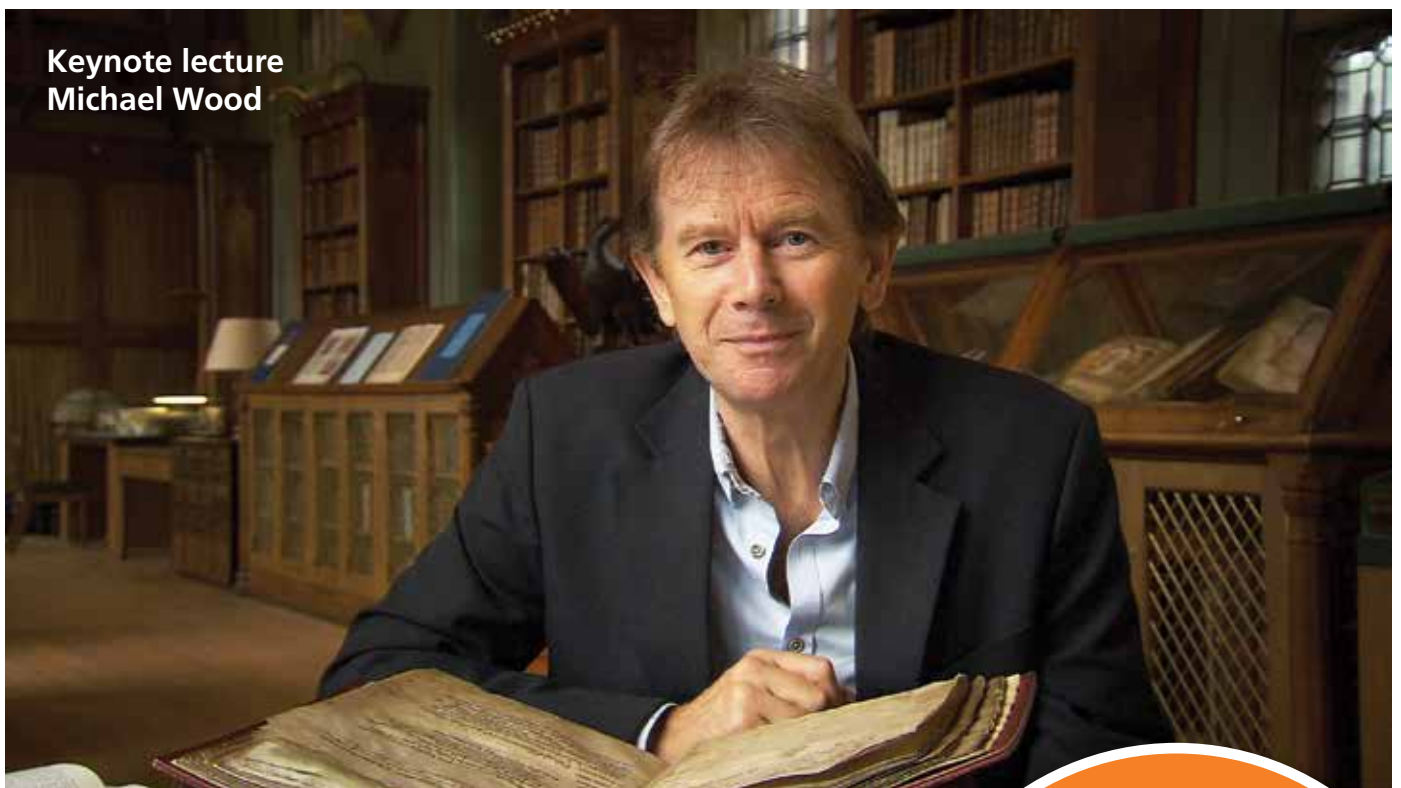


Historical Association
The voice for history

Annual Conference

Friday 12 and Saturday 13 May 2017
Mercure Manchester Piccadilly Hotel

Join us in Manchester for a weekend of talks, visits and workshops for history enthusiasts of all periods, places and persuasions.



Keynote lecture
Michael Wood

The Historical Association Annual Conference brings you a weekend with some of the finest historians:

The Saturday keynote speaker is the fantastic **Michael Wood**. Michael has presented numerous well-known television documentary series including *The Great British Story* and *The Story of India*. He enjoys the distinction of being both highly respected and immensely popular as a historian, and received the HA's Medlicott Medal in 2011. He looks to return to his roots – and ours – in his lecture *King Alfred and the Anglo-Saxons – The Making of England*.

Friday evening sees our round table discussion on the question **Parliament, people or privilege: do we need a better understanding of constitutional history?** Chaired by Dr Michael Maddison, Deputy President of the HA, the panel will include Professor Tony Badger, Dr Alix Green, Nick Hillman and Professor Justin Champion. Submit your questions and join the debate – followed by a lively drinks reception!

Reduced
rates for HA
Members.
Book now
from just £90

Supported by AQA and Pearson





Exceptional talks from leading historians

Consider a medieval symbol of European unity in **Charlemagne, Europe and Britain**

Immerse yourself in sixteenth-century society with **Singing the News in Tudor England** (featuring performances!)

Uncover historical habits of **Sleep in Early Modern England**

Explore a changing city in **Modernising Calcutta: technology, the spectacular and the unexpected**

Challenge your preconceptions in **Winston Churchill and the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945**

Plus many more...

Discover Manchester's history on a visit

Unearth local stories at the **Manchester Jewish Museum**

Experience some cast bronze history on a guided walk of **Manchester's statues**

Join us for dinner

An ideal opportunity to network with fellow delegates and speakers while enjoying a three course meal with wine. The evening commences with the HA wine reception followed by dinner in the International Suite of the Mercure Manchester Piccadilly Hotel. A fantastic menu with wine is offered for just £40.

Delegate fees

	One day	Both days
HA Member Conc*:	£90	£170
HA Member:	£135	£255
Non-Member	£205	£380

* Concessions apply: Full Time Students, NQTs, Retired, Unemployed

View the full programme and book at:

www.haconference.com

Telephone: 01904 702 165

Is it a Maze or a Labyrinth?

Richard Stone and Trevor James – The Maze is a cultural phenomenon enjoyed across civilisations over several millennia, and it has played a role in various forms of spirituality.

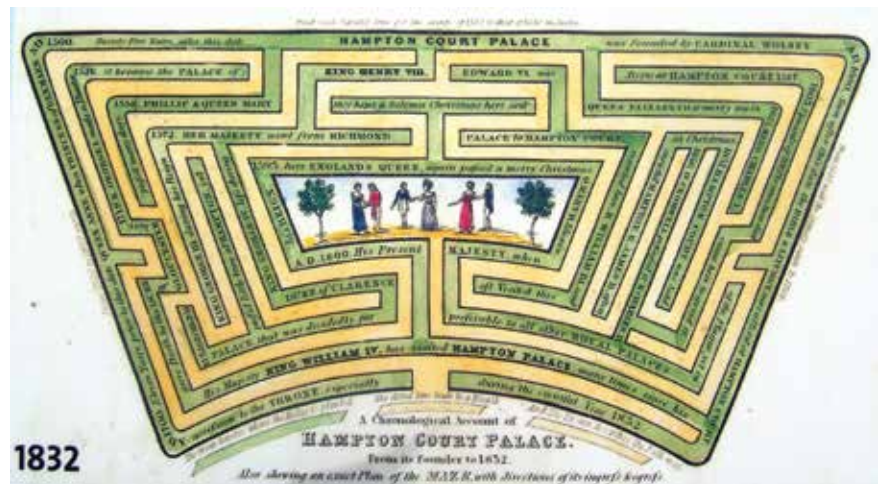
Connoisseurs of Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) will remember, and relish, the delights of his comedic account of his travellers being lost in the Hampton Court Maze and the difficulties that ensued in trying to rescue them.

Hampton Court Maze is a small component of the 60 acres of Wilderness Gardens laid out for William III in the 1690s. Itself covering about one-third of an acre, with about half a mile of footpaths, it is technically a multi-cursal *hedge maze*. Designed by George London and Henry Wise, it offers a challenge, or puzzle, to visitors because it offers them a baffling range of potential wrong turnings and alternative routes to the centre, thus demonstrating that it fully warrants its multi-cursal status. Tradition offers the possibility that it actually replaced an older version laid down for Cardinal Wolsey or Henry VIII. Its significance lies in the fact that it has been providing healthful entertainment for over 300 years from its late Stuart design; but this form of entertainment could have been located here for virtually 500 years. With social and recreational traditions that endure for such lengths of time, there are usually a number of factors which combine to secure its longevity as part of popular culture.

Alongside the existence of hedge mazes, of which Hampton Court is probably the most famous, there is another parallel English phenomenon known as the 'turf maze'. The body of evidence associated with these turf mazes will help to inform the wider picture and further interpret what it is that has been inherited.

Popular labelling has blurred the difference between a maze and what we understand to be a labyrinth, indeed the confusion probably makes it imperative that we consider both recreational forms as one large phenomenon! Basically there are two parallel forms: the multi-cursal, as at Hampton Court, and the turf maze which is generally unicursal. Somehow the labelling of the two forms has lost its accuracy.

To explain. Ancient Crete's Labyrinth of classical mythology, designed according to legend by Daedalus to



contain the Minotaur within a complex network of branches and blind alleys, is what modern theorists would now define as a maze because it followed a multi-cursal path. Ironically, by contrast what we label the turf maze, however convoluted, follows a single path. This is how one would ordinarily define a labyrinth.

In reality we only know what form the Cretan Labyrinth took because of the telling and retelling of the legend. By contrast Herodotus (484-424 BC) in his *Histories*, reported visiting a labyrinth in Ancient Egypt which he judged to be more impressive than the pyramids but he did not describe precisely what he saw.

The fact that these two forms existed in parallel with each other can be traced back to the time of Pliny the Elder (died AD 49) who, in his *Natural History*, described observing classical labyrinths, which he qualified by commenting that they should not be compared with mazes formed in the fields for the entertainment of children.

In England over 30 reliably-documented mazes have been recorded but have been lost due to ploughing or neglect. For example a maze known as 'Robin Hood's Race' at Sneinton in Nottinghamshire was ploughed out in 1797. The neighbourhood name of Maze Hill at Greenwich is another haunting clue.

There are however eight surviving turf mazes for us to observe and enjoy. Documentary evidence confirms that

they are several centuries old but precise dating has been difficult because they have had continually to be recut. These surviving historic turf mazes are to be found at:

- Julian's Bower, Alkborough, Lincolnshire
- City of Troy, Dalby-cum-Skewsby, North Yorkshire
- Mizmaze, St Catherine's Hill, Winchester, Hampshire
- Mizmaze, Breamore, Hampshire
- Hilton Maze, Hilton, Cambridgeshire
- Saffron Walden, Essex
- The Old Maze, Wing, Rutland
- Troy, Somerton, Oxfordshire

The possibility that the origins of turf mazes may lie significantly in the past, that is from the time of Herodotus, is suggested by the persistent association with classical names – the turf maze at Somerton in Oxfordshire is known as 'Troy', another at Dalton-cum-Skewsby in North Yorkshire is 'City of Troy'. The now vanished mazes at Dorchester, Bere Regis and Edenbridge were all labelled 'Troy Town'. The precise link with the eastern Mediterranean is not known but it is very consistent, thereby implying a link via the Roman settlement of England with cultural practices much further afield.

Evidence of how they were used in a recreational sense can be provided by antiquarian John Aubrey [1626-1697] in his *Monumenta Britannica*. Describing

a turf maze at Pimperne, near Blandford in Dorset, known as 'Troy Town', he says it was 'much used by the young people on holidays and by schoolboys'. Aubrey also mentioned a maze on Dover's Hill, Chipping Campden, where Captain Robert Dover initiated his 'Olympick Games' with royal approval in 1612. The existence of this maze is confirmed in a compilation of poems and drawings, 'The Annals of Dover' (*Annalia Dubrensis*), which celebrated the games, gathered together by Dr Robert Burns in 1636. This contains several references to a maze, although none say whether the maze was used as part of the games, or indeed how.

John Aubrey also identified a maze at Tothill Fields in Westminster which he described as being 'much frequented in summertime on fair afternoons', more than a hint that it was a scene of entertainment and diversion. The Tothill maze is referenced earlier in a play of 1614 by John Cooke – *Greene's Tu Quoque* or *The City Gallant* – and in the churchwarden's accounts for St Margaret's, Westminster in 1672 there is reference to payment to 'Mr Brewer for making a maze in Tuttlefields – £2'. Presumably this payment was for maintaining rather than cutting, given the evidence from the earlier literary source. Mazes in that proximity are also mentioned in the diaries of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, suggesting that they were tea garden attractions.

An unusual square turf maze on the summit of St Catherine's Hill, Winchester, known as 'Mizmaze' is set within the ramparts of an Iron Age hillfort. This implies some continuity from an earlier period. Certainly it was part of the traditions of Winchester College where 'treading the maze' at St Catherine's Hill was one of the pursuits of their pupils in the eighteenth century.

An inscribed stone at the centre of a turf maze on the village green at Hilton in Cambridgeshire commemorates its creation by William Sparrow in 1660. With communal revelry being discouraged while Puritans were in the ascendant during the Interregnum, this could easily mark the reinstatement of an earlier maze. Certainly Robert Dover's Olympick Games at Chipping Campden were halted in 1643 and then reinstated after the Restoration, so the Hilton example would match this pattern.

The location of the turf maze at Hilton and also one at Saffron Walden in Essex – the largest surviving turf maze at 43 metres diameter and recorded as being recut in 1699 – on their respective village greens, in other words common land, suggests a communal purpose.

White's *Directory for Leicestershire and Rutland* in 1846 notes an 'ancient' maze at Wing, known as the 'Old Maze', in which 'the rustics run at the parish feast', confirming this communal usage. Such recreational activities within the community historically were a mechanism for social cohesion.

A turf maze at Julian's Bower at Alkborough in Lincolnshire was recorded as being connected with May Day celebrations in the nineteenth century. This location is particularly significant because the site overlooks the confluence of the Rivers Trent, Ouse and Humber. Its name is also derived from a Trojan allusion: according to Homer, Ascanius Julius was the son of the Trojan hero, Aeneas, and some legends maintain that the walls surrounding Troy were complex, thereby associating him with complex patterns. Given the tidal vulnerability of the riverside areas below this location, this may well have been a place of spiritual significance. Community events were often drawn to such locations.

The maze, whether multicursal or unicursal, has undoubted longevity in being utilised by people for well over 2,000 years but this last English example provides the context for a much wider interpretation. The medieval church adopted the maze as an allegory of the search for truth or to represent a symbolic pilgrimage. The best-known example in a Christian building is on the floor of Chartres Cathedral, which was built in c. 1235. It is designed in 11 concentric circles in symmetrical quadrants. Penitent pilgrims, many of them English pilgrims on their way to the Shrine of St James at Santiago de Compostela, would follow the maze on their knees. Pilgrims still follow this ancient discipline in their meditations within the cathedral. As the turf mazes

at locations such as Alkborough, Wing and Hilton mirror the Chartres pattern, it is quite reasonable to assert that part of the impetus behind the existence of the 40 or more English mazes that we can identify may well have been inspired by Christian reflective practice.

Popular culture is what people generally experience and enjoy. Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [Act 2, Scene 2] reveals his awareness of the maze in the culture of everyday Tudor life when he has Titania bemoan 'the quaint mazes in the wanton green for lack of tread'. It was something that this most observant of men had noticed.

Popular culture is what people experience and enjoy but there will be deeper reasons why such phenomena as labyrinths or mazes occurred originally. The strong presence of the use of this form of expression within the spirituality of pilgrimage may be a strong indicator that this was a spiritual expression initially and that it became a vehicle for social and community pleasure, much as May Day began with spiritual overtones and became an opportunity for community exuberance over the centuries.

The creation of mazes is not an activity only fossilised in the past. Amongst various contemporary examples, a turf maze has been cut within the cloisters of Norwich Cathedral; and hedge mazes are being developed at Mary Arden's House at Stratford-upon-Avon and at Trentham Gardens in Staffordshire.

Richard Stone and Trevor James have been leading Local History Saturday Schools at Burton-upon-Trent for almost twenty years



Modern-day pilgrims following the maze at Chartres Cathedral.



My Favourite History Place

York Watergate – **Trevor James** introduces us to one of London’s topographically very significant features to be found in the Victoria Embankment Gardens.

The York Watergate has two directly-linked resonances for me, both of which explain why the building is one of my favourite structures. I was taken there by my father in the year after the Coronation, aged seven, as part of a determined effort on his part to introduce me to all the curiosities and unusual features in London with which he was familiar. My father had an encyclopaedic knowledge of what was to be seen – he took me to see Roman mosaics under a parish church, to see an escapologist performing his skills at Tower Hill and to many other features, such as the York Watergate. Father was an instinctive Londoner and he demonstrated similar levels of awareness to those needed by London taxi-drivers when they have to reflect the ‘knowledge’ of the London street pattern and locations to secure their licence. He had probably inherited these genetically from his grandfather who had plied the streets of late Victorian and Edwardian London as a self-employed and highly successful carriage-driver. The second reason for my enthusiasm is that I was captivated by

the notion that this structure reflected a previous, and lost, river bank alignment, and I continue to marvel at this prospect.

In reality I suspect that my father knew very little about this structure beyond what was reported on its information plaque!

York Watergate is a crucial piece of evidence. It reveals that in the 1620s the tidal River Thames really did reach to this location, about 150 yards from the present-day river bank. In one sense it reflects a stage in a much longer story when The Strand, to its north, really was ‘the shore of the river’ and Westminster Abbey really did stand on Thorney Island.

York Watergate was constructed as the river entrance to York House which itself stood on The Strand. The house had been constructed for George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, in 1620 and the Watergate was provided in 1626. The Duke’s coat of arms is still evident on the top of the gate arch.



York Watergate and the Adelphi from the River by John O'Connor (1830-89).
Museum of London

There is controversy over who exactly was its designer. With its Italianate style it has been attributed to Inigo Jones, the architect of the nearby Whitehall Banqueting Hall, or to Sir Balthazar Gerbier, the painter, but at the heart of the construction was Nicholas Stone, a sculptor and master mason, to whom the structure is generally attributed.

York House was sold for development by the second duke in 1672 but the Watergate remained. In its day, in the era when the River Thames was possibly one mile wide at this point, this

Watergate will have stood witness to the various late Stuart era 'Frost Fairs' held on the wholly frozen river.

Even in the 1660s and 1670s, as London was rebuilt after the Great Fire, plans had been discussed by Sir Christopher Wren and John Evelyn to remodel the riverside to incorporate this major feature but these plans were never realised.

Two centuries passed before what we see today was created. The impetus to construct the ornamental gardens – the Victoria Embankment Gardens – of which the York Watergate is a focal point, rather came with the prosaic, but dramatic, construction by Sir Joseph Bazalgette of his very substantial southbound sewer built into the northern bank of the River Thames. In creating the Victoria Embankment, the low-lying and potentially unhealthy riverside was removed, improving river flow. This provided the opportunity to create the riverside gardens which still exist as an urban oasis, stretching from Waterloo Bridge to Westminster Bridge.

Those of us who enjoy urban irony relish the thought that, as we enjoy what the ornamental gardens surrounding the York Watergate continue to offer us, underneath our feet the personal discharges of millions of Londoners rush on their way south, more recently joined by the tunnelling of the District Underground line.

Having reached these gardens, if you have the time, dispersed throughout, you will find a veritable pantheon of famous figures whom Londoners have chosen to celebrate, from scientist Michael Faraday at the eastern end, beyond the Savoy Hotel, to Bible translator William Tyndale much further to the west, interspersed by others such as Robert Burns, Robert Raikes and Sir Arthur Sullivan. One particular memorial to enjoy is the very attractive commemoration of the Imperial Camel Corps, which helps us to remember in the heart of London that in the Great War our support came from all corners of the globe.

It is possible that my abiding interest in topography was spurred by my father introducing me to the York Watergate and the questions that it inevitably provoked.

Trevor James is a Centenary and Jubilee Fellow of the Historical Association

If you would like to tell us about your history place in a future edition of *The Historian*, in about 700 words, please email: alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk

Empress Matilda – ‘Lady of the English’ (1102 - 1167) in ten tweets

It's her anniversary and she has nothing to do with an Asa Briggs book.



Portrait of Empress Mathilda, from *History of England* by St Albans monks (15th century). Cotton Nero D. VII, f.7, British Library

- Matilda was born in 1102 in England, the daughter of Henry I, King of England and Matilda of Scotland.
- As a princess her role was to be married to create alliances – aged 8 yrs she was betrothed to Holy Roman Emperor Henry V of Germany.
- In 1120 her brother died, in 1125 her husband died, in 1127 her father made her his successor and all the English noblemen agreed.
- In 1128 her father arranged for her to marry Geoffrey of Anjou. Matilda was 25yrs and Geoffrey was 14 yrs.
- She had 3 sons, Henry (1133) Geoffrey (1134) and William (1136). Her father died in 1135 and her cousin, Stephen, claimed the English throne.
- Matilda's claim to the throne was upheld by her half-brother Robert of Gloucester and her uncle, David I of Scotland.
- England's nobility split in their allegiance many swapping sides regularly according to whose armies or supporters were nearby.
- At one point she captured Stephen and took London, but was not crowned and civil war continued. In 1148 she returned to Normandy.
- Matilda agreed that Stephen would rule but he would be succeeded by her son, who became Henry II in 1154.
- Matilda died in 1167 etched on her tomb was that she had been the daughter of King Henry, wife of King Henry and mother of King Henry.

Summarising an event or person using ten statements of only 140 characters (including spaces!). Compiled by Paula Kitching
Follow the HA on Twitter @histassoc

Historical Association Tours

Belgium

Tuesday 10 October to Monday 16 October 2017



Tour leaders: Edward Towne and Charles Linfield

Travelling by coach from Victoria we shall take the Channel Tunnel to the Flemish city of Ghent for a walking tour that will include the Cathedral of St Bavo, home of van Eyck's 'Adoration of the Mystic Lamb'. We move on to Leuven (Louvain) for a three-night stay at the Park Inn, our base to explore the town, the site of the Battle of Waterloo and the city of Antwerp with its fine cathedral (containing several paintings by Rubens), the Rubens House and the Plantin-Moretus Museum.

The tour then continues to Liège for the final three nights at the Ramada Plaza Liège City Centre Hotel. Visits will be paid to the Collegiate Church of St Barthélemy and the Cathedral with its Treasury. Over the next two days excursions will be made to the historic town of Spa, the Gileppe Dam, to the Château de Vêves and the town of Namur. The journey on the final day will be broken at the Château de Belœil, residence of the Princes de Ligne and surrounded by a fine Baroque garden, before we return to the Channel Tunnel and arrival into Victoria Coach Station in the early evening.

Accommodation: We shall be staying at two 4-star hotels.

Cost: £1,100 per person sharing a twin/double room and £255 single room supplement. The price includes dinner, bed and breakfast, coach travel, entry fees and guided tours.

Organised with Heritage Group Travel of Bath, ATOL and ABTOT protected.

For full details and booking forms please contact:

Charles Linfield, 'Southfields', Bakers Road, Wroughton, Swindon, SN4 0RP
Tel: 01793 812464. Email: linfield245@btinternet.com

Manchester and south-east Lancashire

Monday 26 June to Monday 3 July 2017

Tour leaders: Kathleen Morris and Elizabeth Yarker

The powered manufacture of cotton put the towns of south-east Lancashire at one of the centres of the industrial revolution in Britain. Manchester was their commercial centre and grew to become the world's first industrial city. It was to have a major influence on the development of transport, engineering and science and play a part in world trade, parliamentary and local government reform and the provision of civic amenities. Today it has redefined itself as a modern, vibrant city known for its commerce, science, football clubs, music and theatre and is to be the hub of the planned 'Northern Powerhouse'.

We will see evidence of the area's early modest prosperity with visits to Manchester's medieval cathedral and

Chetham's Library and houses such as Smithills, Townley and Astley Halls and Hoghton Tower. The basis of its later prosperity will be seen at the water-powered mill at Helmshore and a steam-powered mill at Burnley. In the city centre a tour of the magnificent Town Hall will reveal Manchester's wealth and civic pride and there will be time to visit other sites such as the Museum of Science and Industry, the Art Gallery and John Ryland's Library. The latter is an example of a special collection made possible by personal commercial or manufacturing wealth now made available for all. Among other visits we will see more of art, Tiffany glass and needlework and textiles at Whitworth and Howarth Art Galleries and Gawthorpe Hall respectively and also Blackburn Museum.

The tour will be based at the Best Western Cresta Court Hotel at Altrincham on the outskirts of Manchester. The provisional cost, depending upon the number of participants, is £650.00 per person with a single supplement of £160.00 and deposit of £50.00. The price includes 8 nights' dinner bed and breakfast, coach travel, entry fees (except for National Trust properties) and guided tours.

Your contract will be with Greatdays Holidays Ltd. of Altrincham who are members of ABTA and ATOL. For details and booking please contact Kathleen Morris: telephone: 01244 813211 (evenings) or e-mail: kathleen_morris3@hotmail.com

Mary Beard to be awarded the 2017 Medicott Medal for Services to History

An outstanding scholar and communicator, Mary Beard has inspired young and old – and everyone in between – with an enjoyment of and curiosity about the ancient world. Her books, her television programmes and her radio programmes always provide lively and engaging routes into a world both distant and immediate. Her work questions our tired ideas of Roman military strength and peers into the murkier and more complex life of the Roman world.

Individual members of the association and local branches are invited to nominate potential recipients and the final decision is made by the Executive Committee of the HA. The award seeks to recognise individuals from a diversity of backgrounds in their service to history. Past recipients of the medal are all distinguished and outstanding individuals in their fields whether it be scholarship in the sense of original research, publication through specialist writing and lecturing, popularisation of history through writing, TV or radio or through their teaching.



We are delighted to be awarding the 2017 Medicott Medal for Services to History to Mary Beard. The medal will be presented along with our Honorary Fellowships and the Young Quills at Foyles on the Charing Cross Road in central London on 15 June. We have a small number of tickets available for members. If you wish to attend please contact Joanna Dungate: Joanna.dungate@history.org.uk

Great Debate 2017

The much anticipated final of this year's Great Debate was held on 11 March at the Imperial War Museum in London. After 20 fascinating talks and much deliberation from the judges, lead judge Professor David Stevenson announced that Hannah Boyle from Benton Park School in Leeds was winner of the 2017 Great Debate. Hannah spoke eloquently about medical developments from the Thomas Splint to CBT with a well-researched and thoughtful argument.

The two runners-up were Amy Brookes from Barr Beacon School in Walsall and Sophia Arora from Withington Girls' School in Manchester. A further four students were highly commended: Cai Fôn Davies from Ysgol Tryfan, Evelyn Dunne from Scoil Phobail Bhéara, Bella Priestman-Bennett from Sandringham School and Emily Hall from Bishop Luffa School.

The question that the students addressed was 'How did the First World War affect me and my community?' and that provided 20 very different five-minute talks, each with a differing emphasis and conclusion. The issue of community inspired ideas about local history, age groups, ethnicity, ideals and gender.

The overall standard was really quite impressive, making the job for the judges challenging to say the least. There are clear guidelines on the judging criteria and that was very important with such strong finalists across the whole day. In the end it came down to who had answered the question the most successfully and identified their arguments and presented their conclusions coherently and within time.

All the presentations, along with those from previous years, can be found on our website. If you, your branch or your school would like to get involved with the 2018 Great Debate please contact Maheema Chanrai: maheema.chanrai@history.org.uk



AGM Notice

The association's AGM will be held on Friday 12 May from 16:30 (formal start at 16:40) and is open to all members.

Venue: Mercure Hotel Manchester

If you wish to put forward a motion please email or write to Rebecca Sullivan by 3 May 2017

The Annual Report and Accounts will be available on the HA website by 12 April 2017. If you require a printed copy please contact Joanna Dungate: Joanna.dungate@history.org.uk



William Coltman VC

the most decorated
non-combatant of the
Great War

Edward Green considers the life of a soldier who set 'the highest example of fearlessness and devotion to duty' and explores his own personal response to him.

Lance Corporal William Coltman, Victoria Cross (VC), Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and Bar, Military Medal (MM) and Bar (and a Mention in Dispatches) is generally considered to be the most decorated 'Other Rank' of the First World War. That he achieved it without firing a shot is particularly noteworthy. He enlisted as a Private in his local Territorial Force Battalion, the 6th Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire) Regiment in January 1915, moved to France in June 1915 and joined the 1st/6th Battalion there in October, as a reinforcement after the heavy loss of life at the Battle of Loos. After several months as an infantry soldier he decided that it was incompatible with his religious beliefs as a member of the Brethren and asked to become a stretcher-bearer, which he did until the end of the war.

Billy Coltman was born in 1891 in the country hamlet of Rangemore, near Burton-upon-Trent in Staffordshire, one of five brothers, who all fought in the war. As a child he helped his widowed mother to deliver milk and, at 13, he became a jobbing gardener at various houses around the Staffordshire/Derbyshire border. He married in 1913 and already had a son when he enlisted. After the war he was employed by Burton Council Parks department, where he stayed until retirement at the age of 70. He worked as a special constable and accepted a commission in the Army Cadet Force during the Second World War.

1st/6th North Staffords was part of 137 (Staffordshire) Brigade, 46 (North Midland) Division and took part in the ill-fated Gommecourt diversionary attack on the First Day of the Somme (1 July 1916). That is the first occasion Coltman is recorded as carrying casualties across no man's land under fire. It may have influenced his decision to ask to be a stretcher-bearer as he was carrying out that work only a few days later. He was mentioned in dispatches for his activities on the Somme. His first MM was awarded in February 1917 for rescuing a badly-wounded officer under close enemy fire and the second came four months later for a series of actions over several days at Lens when the battalion was under heavy mortar fire. He personally moved bombs and pyrotechnics from the region of a dangerous fire, organised the digging out of buried men, treated wounds and supervised casualty evacuation. His first DCM was awarded a few weeks later, still at Lens. He did what he always did, working tirelessly for the wounded over several days, often under artillery and machine-gun fire, including scouring no man's land at night for wounded men.



Coltman in 1919.

His citation records 'His absolute indifference to danger had a most inspiring effect upon the rest of his men.'

The sacking of GOC 46 Division after Gommecourt for lack of offensive spirit was a very contentious decision, given the impossible task that the men faced, and it left a stain on the Division's record that it was to erase at the end of September 1918, when it broke a vital element of the Hindenburg Line by crossing the St Quentin Canal at Bellenglise. It was here that Coltman was awarded the bar to his DCM; once again he was in the thick of the fighting for over 24 hours, tending the wounded and ensuring that all casualties were found and treated. This time his citation says 'He set the highest example of fearlessness and devotion to duty to those with him.' The photograph of the Staffordshire Brigade on the steep banks of the canal at Riqueval Bridge, which was captured intact, is one of the iconic images of the war.

The Hindenburg Line was a massive defensive position with line after line of trenches, redoubts and machine-gun posts, prepared over nearly two years, and no single attack could break it. Therefore the North Midland Division was only a few miles east of the canal in early October when Coltman was

finally awarded his much deserved VC. His citation reads:

For most conspicuous bravery, initiative and devotion to duty. During the operations at Mannequin Hill, north-east of Sequehart, on the 3rd and 4th of October 1918, Lance Corporal Coltman, a stretcher bearer, hearing that wounded had been left behind during a retirement, went forward alone in the face of fierce enfilade fire, found the casualties, dressed them and, on three successive occasions, carried comrades on his back to safety, thus saving their lives. This very gallant NCO tended the wounded unceasingly for 48 hours.

It is clear that his moral authority was very great as he seems to have taken charge time and time again in moments of crisis, even though he was only a Lance Corporal. It is recorded of him that he refused to obey an order from his Commanding Officer, when called to guide a visiting officer around the trenches. He was tending a wounded man at the time and sent back the message 'Tell the CO I can't come. This chap needs me more.' It was a famous Regimental story and the two men became firm friends, to the extent that the CO left Coltman a small legacy many years later.

So what drove this man to his continuing feats of bravery? Certainly his Christian faith was a major factor and he believed that his life was in God's hands. He opted not to bear arms but he wasn't a pacifist. The Brethren has been described as a 'peace church' but individual members, as with the Quakers, made their own decisions. Coltman enlisted as a soldier and, even after becoming a stretcher-bearer, he acted as a regimental guide (a well-known saying was, 'If anyone can find you if you cop it, it'll be Billy. He don't get lost.') and brought in valuable intelligence from no man's land.

I was privileged to meet him in his later years and I believe that his sense of duty was the overriding factor throughout his life. He was a shy man, happiest with his family, gardening and teaching Sunday school at the meeting house; yet he regularly attended the VC Association, met the king and members of the royal family on several occasions, and supported his regiment and his town whenever asked to do so. He even sat for his portrait by a Royal Academician at the request of the North Staffords. He did all these things because he believed that it was his duty to do them, not because they gave him any great feeling of importance. He said 'I don't want



Brigadier-General John Vaughan Campbell VC addressing men of the 137th Brigade (46th Division) on the Riqueval Bridge over the St Quentin Canal. © IWM (Q 9535)

Coltman medals and stretcher bearer brassard.



any of that fuss' when I first saluted him. That is why he worked as a special constable and accepted a commission in the Second World War to look after the Army Cadets. He left his medals, now worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, to the Regimental Museum because he felt it was the right thing to do.

Bill Coltman chose a simple gravestone for his wife and himself and I often received complaints, as Regimental Secretary, that it didn't befit such a hero; but it was right for him. It has recently been restored but the essential simplicity has been retained. Perhaps he was a product of his time, with firm beliefs and a strong sense of duty; it's just that these qualities were brought together in an extraordinary man.

Major Ted Green served in The Staffordshire Regiment as a regular officer and finished his career as Regimental Secretary and Museum Curator. He is now researches, writes and lectures for the Museum as a volunteer



Coltman in later life.

The eighteenth-century lying-in hospital and the unmarried mother



The background to this article lies in two separate contexts. The huge population growth of the eighteenth century was not a product of increased fertility but of a variety of improvements in such areas as medical care and cleanliness which consequently affected survival rates. In researching her family history, **Marie Paterson** became interested in a seeming disagreement about the origins of a lying-in hospital, and this has led her into a wider investigation into the development of midwifery and the provisions for caring for pregnant women and their infants in the eighteenth century.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw great developments in scientific learning and enquiry, especially following the founding of the Royal Society in 1660, and, with it, a more questioning approach to matters religious and scientific. Ideas were being disseminated more widely through pamphlets and the growing number of newspapers, due to an increased degree of literacy. Alongside these developments came a growing concern for the poor and needy, resulting in the setting up of voluntary institutions for the care of the sick. Before this time the only hospitals already in existence in England were St Bartholomew's and St Thomas' which had both been established before 1700. It was also at this time that many specialist hospitals were founded, among which the 'lying-in hospitals' were some of the first, with most of these only treating the 'respectable' married women. There was a notable, if controversial, exception to this; the hospital that came to be known as the General Lying-in Hospital.

One of the reasons for this area of growth was that the knowledge of obstetrics was being widely disseminated at this time with many of the prominent surgeons and apothecaries of the day going to Paris to learn from the techniques practised at the Hôtel Dieu.¹ This was an institution where mothers were invited to be delivered of their babies, and where physicians taught midwifery. Many of these physicians were to become 'man-midwives'. The first hospital in Britain and Ireland to treat maternity patients was the Dublin Lying-Hospital, later known as the Rotunda. It was established in 1745 under the Mastership of its founder Bartholomew Mosse.² The history of the hospitals established later in London is not so easy to chronicle, especially as many of them were often begun in the physician's own house, and moved locations many times. This is certainly true in the case of Felix Macdonogh's establishment which will be looked at in more detail. However we know that the distinguished obstetrician of the day, Sir Richard Manningham (c. 1685-1759), set up a ward for lying-in patients at the parochial infirmary of St James's, Westminster, in 1739.³ His establishment, later housed in Jermyn Street, and his subsequent involvement in the lying-in hospital at Duke Street, adds to the later confusion about whether they were one and the same establishment, from which sprung the later Queen Charlotte's Hospital.

The emergence of the 'man-midwife' at the beginning of the eighteenth century demonstrates how obstetrics was beginning to be professionalised. Before this, midwives – all female – were uneducated and learnt on the job.⁴ However this did not mean that the man-midwives actually delivered babies themselves, but rather instructed their mainly female assistants in their hospitals in the art of midwifery, and would only intervene in the most difficult of births. With growing medical knowledge about childbirth, many more surgeons and apothecaries sought instruction in midwifery. These qualifications were often acquired by becoming an apprentice, quite possibly the route that the focus of this article took.

Irishman Felix MacDonogh first came to notice in England when he placed an advert in a newspaper in 1752, for a series of lectures on midwifery that he was about to give. According to Sir John Dewhurst,⁵ Felix first appeared before the examiners of the Company of Surgeons in May 1757, and was listed in *The Universal Director* in 1763 as a 'Surgeon, Medicine'. So in 1752 when he posted his advert promising instruction in midwifery, Felix was probably not fully qualified. However, an assertion

in a pamphlet of 1768, mentioned below, quotes Felix as 'Surgeon and midwife to the Lying-in Infirmary in Jermyn Street' who had 'first planned and set [it] on foot'. This claim from Felix's Will of 1786, that he actually founded the Jermyn street infirmary, is discussed in some detail by Sir John Dewhurst.

Dewhurst's article in *The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology: 'Felix MacDonogh, man-midwife, Paragon or charlatan?'* (1987), cast doubt about Felix's claim to be the founder of the hospital that eventually became Queen Charlotte's. Dewhurst argues that the hospital had been founded by Sir Richard Manningham, and that it was more likely that the seemingly, as yet, unqualified MacDonogh was merely one of his assistants. Manningham's Infirmary, possibly in Jermyn Street, west London, moved several times and at some stage came to be known as the General Lying-in Hospital. Some authorities believe that Manningham's establishment was closed down sometime between its inception in 1739 and 1752 when Felix MacDonogh posted his advertisements for his lectures in midwifery, and therefore his hospital would have begun in 1752.⁶

Whatever the truth about the origins of the hospital, MacDonogh's declared intention to treat 'unmarried as well as married women', changed the very nature of the General Lying-in Hospital.⁷ This decision caused much consternation among the Guardians of the Parish of St George, Hanover Square, not least because of the financial consequences of such a policy, given the support that they were obliged to provide for the, often abandoned, offspring of these mothers. By 1754 this new trend had become enough of a drain on the resources of the Vestry of St George's that the churchwardens and the Overseers of the Parish felt impelled to make a plea that the women be removed 'to the place of her last legal settlement'. And in 1765 they brought a case against Felix MacDonogh, first for turning his house into a hospital, and second for 'taking in and delivering lewd, idle and disorderly women who . . . deserted their children', causing them to be 'chargeable to the parish'.⁸ Lord Chief Justice Mansfield dismissed their case, asking, 'is it criminal to deliver a woman when she is with child?'⁹

In the light of this, Dewhurst, while maintaining his belief that Manningham founded the hospital in 1739, does acknowledge the part played by MacDonogh in carrying out this work.



He said that MacDonogh may have been 'a "nuisance" to the Vestry of St George's' but, under his care, the hospital flourished and remained solvent, and also 'must have provided much needed help for thousands of married and unmarried women'. For as Felix wrote in his will, 'of the said hospital' that 'was carried on and supported by my endeavours . . . and under the grossest Calumny and abuse . . . I have now . . . in a prosperous and flourishing state'.¹⁰ As Felix more than implied in this statement from his will, the hospital had been subject to even more troubling scrutiny when complaints of neglect and cruelty were made by several witnesses at a coroner's court held at the 'General Wolfe' in Oxford Street in 1766. It was then decided that the hospital grounds should be dug up, which resulted in the discovery of several children's skulls and a woman's body. This was seen as an opportunity for the parish authorities to bring a case against the hospital for not using monies provided for decent burials to be carried out; owing to a reluctance of any witnesses to come forward, however, the case was never pursued.

Soon after this, in 1768, the hospital produced a pamphlet entitled *An Account of the Rise, Progress and State of the General Lying-in-Hospital, the Corner of Quebec Street, Oxford Road*. As well as singing its own praises, it also set out to show how low their mortality rates had been compared with similar establishments. It was stated that in the 16 years covered by the report, out of the 8,768 women helped only 55 had died – a rate of 1 in 160. Given the poor circumstances of many of the women, the figures seem unfeasibly low compared to those of Brownlow Lying-in Hospital (which only treated married women) that had a rate of 1 in 46 over 19 years. Whatever the truth about MacDonogh's claims to be the hospital's founder, he appears to be correct in claiming that it is now 'in a prosperous and flourishing state', for, as Dewhurst tells us, 'after his death, the

charity went into a steep decline'. He also concedes that, although mired in controversy, MacDonogh's decision to change the usual admission policies of similar institutions, 'must have provided much needed help to married and unmarried women' and 'kept the hospital going in the face of formidable difficulties'.

Apart from one or two exceptions, there was a general reluctance to admit unmarried women to these establishments until well into the nineteenth century, mainly in order for them not to be seen to be encouraging vice.

Whether Felix could be called a 'paragon or charlatan', is difficult to judge, but his decision to help unmarried women as well as married marks him out from most of the physicians of the day, despite this being a cause of trouble with the parish authorities. Perhaps wearied by the troubles besetting the hospital and suffering from the ills of old age,¹¹ Felix MacDonogh set off for the Continent, some time during 1787.¹² He died at the Hôtel de Mirabeau in Paris, the home of his son-in-law, Gabriel Antoine de Becdelièvre on 29 November 1790.¹³

REFERENCES

- ¹ Alistair Gunn, 'Maternity Hospitals' in F.N.L.Poynter (ed.) *The Evolution of Hospitals in Britain*, p.78.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ 'It appears likely that the matron, her assistant, and her students managed about half of the difficult deliveries at the British Lying-in Hospital themselves.' Lisa Forman Cody (2004) 'Living and dying in Georgian London' in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, no. 2, Summer, pp.320-21.
- ⁵ Sir John Dewhurst, Institute of Obstetricians & Gynaecology Trust (1987) 'Felix MacDonogh, man-midwife. Paragon or charlatan?', in *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, pp.8, 99-103.
- ⁶ Much of the argument about who founded the General Lying-in Hospital hinges on whether Manningham's establishment, begun in 1739, had been closed before Felix posted his advertisement in 1752. J. E. Donnison's 1971 article 'Note on the Foundation of Queen Charlotte's Hospital' in *The Journal of Medical History*, 15, no.4, October, pp. 398-400), states there is 'contemporary evidence' that proves it ceased to exist by 1749, but frustratingly doesn't say what it is!
- ⁷ From a second advert posted by MacDonogh on 17 February 1753 in the *Daily London Advertiser*. See Dewhurst, *op.cit.*, p.100.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Felix MacDonogh's Will of 1786: The National Archives.
- ¹¹ Letter to MacDonogh from H. Higgins, 19 February 1788; who says that he 'is pleased to hear that your health is much improved'. Archives Nationales, Paris.(A.N.)
- ¹² Letter from George Boleyn Whitney, of Newpass House, County Westmeath, Ireland, 23 August 1887; wishing Felix 'bon voyage'. A.N.
- ¹³ Inventory of 22 January 1791. A.N.

Marie Paterson is distantly related to Felix MacDonogh and is a supporter of the Nuneaton Branch of the Historical Association.

Historical Association Membership

*The gift that
lasts all year*

Historical Association membership is a great gift for anyone who studies, teaches or simply has a love of history. Not only is it a unique and personal gift but it also supports the future teaching and learning of history in schools. Your lucky recipient will receive:

- A personalised gift card with space for your own message
- A welcome pack including a HA membership card, the latest edition of your chosen journal – *The Historian*, *Teaching History* or *Primary History* – and other goodies
- Exclusive digital resources including online copies of your chosen journal(s), historical pamphlets and publications, plus access to a library of over 350 history podcasts
- Free access to our network of over 50 branches across the country offering walks, talks and social opportunities
- Details of the charitable work of the HA



Historical Association
The voice for history

Gift Membership starts from as little as £37

Call us on 0300 100 0223

www.history.org.uk/go/gift17