WILLIAM RANULF BROCK

William Ranulf Brock
1916–2014

When William Brock died, aged 98, he was universally acknowledged to rank among the most distinguished British historians of the United States. Although he did not inspire a school of followers, through his dissection of complex issues, assiduous research and luminous style he lent to British writings an authority and reputation from which a later generation benefited. He also gave its study shape and direction. Often influenced by their military experience in 1939–45, many historians of Brock's generation came to American history via British history. The easiest first step to American history came from the broad study of Anglo-American relations, but Brock did not follow this path. From the first, Brock tackled the great issues of American domestic, political and social history. He rapidly established a reputation as the equal of and deeply respected by his most distinguished American peers. Not the least of Brock's achievements lay in his success in establishing the respectability of American history in British universities, where it had been frequently scoffed at as 'cowboys and Indians'.[1]

Brock came from a family with a strong commitment to the Church of England and the British Empire. His parents, Stewart Ernst Brock (1874–1955) and Katharine Helen, née Temple-Roberts (1885–1964), came from distinguished families with strong links to both. The direct line of Brocks

[1] D. H. Burton (ed.), *American History – British Historians: a Cross Cultural Approach to the American Experience* (Chicago, IL, 1978), pp. xx–xxi. Indeed, I overheard just such a comment shared privately (or so they thought) among the heads of a university, the hosts at a drinks reception at my very first American Studies conference which I attended while still an undergraduate in 1974.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy, XV, 345–371.
Posted 12 October 2016.

hailed from the Channel Islands. The historian was descended from an uncle of Brigadier General Isaac Brock, who took Detroit in the War of 1812. His great-grandfather, the Reverend Octavius Brock, was vicar of Dengle in Essex who married Harriet Ernst of Batcombe, Somerset. His grandfather, also called William, followed his father into the Anglican Church and served as an army chaplain and married his grandmother, Mary Anne ('Marion') Webster (1849–75/6), in Reading in 1873. Marion had been born in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, and moved to England in 1854. The grandparents must have spent time in India because Stewart, their only child, was born in Barrackpore in Bengal. The historian's mother, Katharine, was the eldest child of Alfred Temple-Roberts (1857–1911) and Susan Charlotte Catherine Fiennes-Clinton (1859–1936). The latter also came from a long line of Anglican clerics and hailed from a cadet branch via the female line of the Whig Fiennes family. The historian's middle name, Ranulf, had Fiennes echoes but was a fancy of his parents after Ranulf de Broc whom Stewart claimed as an ancestor. De Broc's castle, Saltwood, sheltered the four knights who murdered Thomas Beckett. Katharine's father, Alfred, taught at Winchester College for twenty years before his appointment as Senior Professor and then Acting Rector of Royal College, Port Louis, Mauritius, in 1903. The Brocks thus were a well-to-do and connected family with a strong Anglican and intellectual tradition though not over-endowed with riches. Another branch of the Brock family had owned parts of Tongham Manor in Farnham, Surrey, since 1604. Stewart Brock expected to inherit property from his wealthy great uncle Harry Ernst but Harry married late in life and had a son. Stewart turned to market gardening but his fortunes fluctuated and there were more lean years than good.[2] The subject of this memoir was born on 16 May 1916 at Rose Cottage (later Saltwood), Wrecclesham, Surrey.

William was the elder of two sons. His younger brother, Hugh de Beauvoir Brock (1920–2014), spent much of his life in Africa working for the Commonwealth Development Corporation, initially in Nigeria and later in Kenya. William's early education is difficult to document. It was likely that he was educated at home. In a speech delivered on his 80th birthday, he recalls: 'I was fortunate to be taught Latin by a retired schoolmaster who taught me so much that I was able to cruise along as a budding classicist without learning any more'. In September 1928 he entered Christ's Hospital, based since 1903 in Horsham, Surrey, probably on a full

[2] H. E. Malven (ed.), *The Victoria County History, Surrey* (London, 1909), II, p. 617, notes the division of the mortgage between Sir Richard Weston and William Brocke.

scholarship. Alas, all records of William's time at Christ's Hospital seem to have disappeared—though his intellectual powers were recognised from early childhood. The school prided itself on its Spartan values. Not being of an athletic disposition, William hardly features in the school magazine, *The Blue*. He was a member of Thornton B, one of the fourteen senior boarding houses that each housed about fifty boys aged 11 to 18. His promise had been identified but its direction had not. Brock recalled a conversation with his housemaster when aged 15: 'the mainspring' of his early Latin had 'run down and I could not learn any more. It was a defining moment when my housemaster said, "Brock—you're not much good at Latin, you had better try history". He knew what he was doing and within two years I won an exhibition at Trinity.' A photograph of him aged 18 as a Grecian, a sixth-form pupil destined for Oxford or Cambridge, does survive. He looks lean and studious; but he still manages to exude a puckish air despite the austere sixteenth century garb pupils were required to wear—'dressed up as penguins' as a later Old Blue would describe it. Among Brock's contemporaries were E. C. 'Ted' Tubb (1919–2010), the science fiction novelist, and R. H. Belcher (1916–2002), the distinguished Indian civil servant who grappled with Partition in 1947. After William left Christ's Hospital in July 1934 he retained for it an affectionate regard.[3]

Young William entered Trinity College, Cambridge in October 1934, matriculating as an Entrance Exhibitioner. His college tutor was G. Kitson Clark, who became a lifelong friend and mentor. The teaching of history in the University had been overhauled during the two previous decades by Z. N. Brooke, H. W. V. Temperley, and later by Herbert Butterfield and others. Butterfield would deliver a devastating salvo against the Whig school's interpretation of British history just three years before Brock's arrival, criticising its obsession with 'principles of progress' that led to a 'glorification of the present'.[4] Lord Macaulay's great nephew, G. M. Trevelyan, had been appointed Regius Professor of Modern History in 1927 and Master of Trinity in 1940. Both Trevelyan and Temperley were great influences on Brock's career. The history degree remained very general, with surveys of medieval and modern European history, and a lot of English history, mostly constitutional and economic history, plus a paper

[3] Speech in Brock Papers, in private hands; photographs in Christ's Hospital Archives; a delightful memoir of the school in the 1960s can be found in M. Oates, *In Pursuit of Butterflies: a Fifty Year Affair* (London, 2015), chapters 2 and 3.

[4] H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931; London, 1963), p. v.

on political thought.[5] Brock threw himself diligently and enthusiastically into his studies, but took no American history, as D.W. Brogan did not arrive at Peterhouse until 1939. With a marked skill at delineating the essential features of any period he studied, Brock's aptitude for passing examinations did not desert him. In 1936 he gained a first class in Part I of the Historical Tripos, became Senior Scholar, and repeated his success in Part II the following year. He became Research Student at Trinity in 1937 and Prize Fellow in 1940. His supervisor was none other than G. M. Trevelyan, then the most well-known historian in Britain.

Both *maître* and student shared a similar liberal outlook on the world. Trevelyan projected a formidable and aloof presence, made even more intimidating by his rasping voice. Brock never lacked self-confidence and established a rapport with him. Trevelyan's idea of supervision was rather casual, and usually they met for lunch once a term. After the first, Trevelyan barked, 'Well, my boy, you know where I am if you want me.' Once draft chapters were produced Trevelyan gave them his undivided attention. Brock was summoned to his study at Garden Corner, West Road, to witness a scene described by J. H. Plumb: 'his long legs would twine and untwine impatiently; he would growl a little...while he attacked my prose with a pencil'.[6] Trevelyan's modus operandi suited Brock. He would remain a solitary worker all his life. Even in old age I would watch him ruminating after a conference session talking to no one. He would never communicate his ideas until he was ready and they polished. He never used a conference paper as a means of gathering ideas from others. Trevelyan also helped to hone and purify his style. Trevelyan's life had been devoted to the poetry of history. There is nothing poetic about Brock's prose but it does exhibit a warm luminosity, precision, and gift for metaphor. Trevelyan taught him how to write with verve, colour and pellucidity.[7]

Brock's PhD thesis on the Tory Administration of Lord Liverpool was submitted in 1940 but the arrangements were complicated by Brock's call-up for military service. He was granted 'eligible' status though not formally admitted to the degree until 1947; this turned out to be no handicap as possession of such a higher degree was unusual in British

[5] C. N. L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge* 4 vols (Cambridge, 1993, IV), pp. 235–8, 367; W. R. Brock, Curriculum Vitae 1958, enclosed with Brock to C. Vann Woodward, 18 April 1958, Woodward Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library (MS 1436).
[6] J. H. Plumb, 'G. M. Trevelyan', in his *Men and Places* (London, 1963), p. 242n.
[7] See G. M. Trevelyan, *An Autobiography and Other Essays* (London, 1949), 13; Brooke, *History of Cambridge*, IV, p. 236.

academic life during these years. In the meantime he was awarded the Thirlwall Prize for historical research and Cambridge University Press accepted the thesis for publication. It appeared in 1941 in what Brock called 'a very small edition' after some hurried expansion and rewriting completed during the anxious summer of 1939, and the proofs were corrected 'in a barrack room'. Brock's first book was entitled, *Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism 1820 to 1827*.[8]

Brock's sudden exposure to the harshness of Army life must have been sharp, but he seems to have treated it as an extension of school. He always thrived when thrown back on his own resources. He was commissioned into the Devonshire Regiment on 15 December 1941 as a second lieutenant but was posted to a Holding Battalion which manned coastal defences in Shaldon, Devon, before clearing up war damage in Exeter. This battalion served as the regimental reserve and 'emptied like a bath to provide drafts'. Brock transferred as a substantive lieutenant into the 7th East Kent Regiment, the famous 'Buffs', in April 1942. He reported to its 10th Battalion in October 1943 with promotion to captain just as it, too, was about to be disbanded. He was never to see active service and the following month embarked for Jamaica, serving on the staff of the island's garrison, the 12th Holding Battalion. He joked later, 'no storm trooper landed when I was defending the island'—an unlikely contingency in this 'cushy billet' where he acquired a taste for rum. But the main threat was perceived from within. Jamaica had witnessed serious social unrest, and Brock was kept busy in a headquarters coping with aid to the civil power when internments were made in 1942–4; also the task of administering the prisoner of war camp at Up Park, St Andrew, Kingston, filled mainly with U-Boat crews. Service in Jamaica gave Brock a close acquaintance with black people unusual among historians of his generation. It also fired his interest in his own imperial family connections, and in the ideas, institutions and diverse culture of the British Empire. His post-war research would be directed towards discovering the relationship between all three.[9]

[8] W. R. Brock, *Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism 1820 to 1827*, 2nd edition (Hamden, CT, 1967), p. ix, from which all quotations are taken.

[9] *The Army List 1944* (Army Code 69592-1); Brock, W.R. 134673, Record of Service Card, Archives of the 7th East Kent Regiment, National Army Museum, London; W. J. P. Aggett, *The Bloody Eleventh: History of the Devonshire Regiment* 3 vols (Exeter, 1995), 3, pp. 252–3; C. R. B. Knight, *Historical Records of the Buffs* 5 vols (London, 1957), 4, *1919–1948*, pp. 364–8; K. Post, *Strike the Iron – a Colony at War: Jamaica 1939–1945* 2 vols (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1981), 1, pp. 246–8, 250.

The biggest event in his life while in uniform did not occur on the battlefield but in the world of letters—the publication of his well-received book on Liverpool. Its magisterial opening though marked with some youthful exuberance is worthy of his great mentor. It reveals all the literary qualities found in his later books, especially an ability to capture the period in broad outline in a few sentences: 'If there is a dark age in nineteenth-century England it is the period of five years following the battle of Waterloo.' It was one of fear and discontent, 'a time in which national glory had grown stale, in which the propertied classes were conscious of fighting a rearguard action, and in which a bitter populace' raged, 'ready to follow any inspiring leader'. With a flourish he picks out 'Orator' Hunt, 'a born demagogue and a born autocrat'. With a touch of luck he 'might have been the leader of the English revolution' (p. ix).

His book is dedicated to explaining why this did not happen, for its hero was a figure of a different timbre. The return of prosperity after 1820 allowed a statesman like Liverpool to address the problems that spurred on the revolutionary cause. These passages might be construed as an attack on the Whig interpretation but it is not overt. Liverpool's achievement lay in harnessing the talents of Liberal Toryism, dynamic reforming characters, such as Robert Peel and George Canning, with members of the Tory Party like the Duke of Wellington, who were opposed to their ideas.[10] Brock paints a sympathetic but not overdrawn portrait of Liverpool, who could appear, as he admits, bland and rather colourless, or, as Tennyson put it, 'splendidly dull'. Yet Liverpool's combination of diligence, calm, and ingenuity in managing his party retained the respect of all. He might appear pedestrian but he was irreplaceable. He emerged as the only politician who could harness the talents of Canning and persuade the Tory 'ultras' to work with him. Liverpool's preferred role, Brock suggests, in an echo of Walter Bagehot, was 'to advise, to assent and to coordinate'. Yet he did experiment with mini-cabinets, like that on financial and economic matters, which anticipated later cabinet sub-committees (pp. 2–3, 23, 45, 192).

The book's only cavity is a neglect of foreign affairs. Brock does explore Liverpool's role in encouraging Canning in 1821–2 to distance Great Britain from her old allies in the Holy Alliance and recognise the independence of Spain's former colonies in Latin America. Brock is neglectful of the significance of the Monroe Doctrine declared by the

[10] This represents skill of a high order, for though Liverpool had worked with Wellington since 1807 their relations were often not cordial. See R. Muir, *Wellington: Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace, 1814–1852* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2015), pp. 100, 165–6, 205, 208–10.

United States in 1823, a true irony. For Canning gave firm instructions to the British emissary at the Congress of Panama to thwart any American attempt to seize the leadership of any emergent league of states.[11]

Seventy-five years after its publication *Lord Liverpool* is a remarkable debut as an historian. It remains one of the most elegant and shrewd discussions of this enigmatic Prime Minister. It retains an honourable place in the historiography of the Conservative Party. Later historians attribute Liverpool's eclipse by Canning, Peel and Disraeli to a preference for the 'reforming tendencies' over the more cautious in politics, but such jousts with the 'Liberal ascendancy' undercut the organising principle of Brock's book and the source of its intellectual vitality. Retrospectively, his first book appears as a trial run in pleading the case for politicians who appear at first glance unpromising material. Twenty years later he would find their American counterparts, also exponents of liberal capitalism, in the 1860s.[12]

Demobilised in November 1945 with the rank of major, Brock relinquished his commission in April 1946 on entry to the Territorial general list. Wartime service did not have the same impact on Brock as it had on other historians, such as Michael Howard and Marcus Cunliffe. In 1946–47 he taught briefly at Eton College before his appointment in 1947 to a fellowship at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He was the last of four new fellows recruited by a Master, Rt. Rev. George Armitage Chase, determined to improve his college's academic standing. Brock's strong Anglican heritage must have stood him in good stead in his application, as Selwyn was not a college of the University but an 'Approved Foundation' with intimate links to the Church of England. The Master was always an Anglican divine, and all Fellows and Scholars were required to be members of the Church of England; attendance at Chapel was compulsory. This college was friendly and sporty, and all fellows took a paternal interest in their students; but as Brock observes, the hopes of the new post-war fellows 'were fastened on reputations to be won in the world of learning'. Brock had lost his early religious belief and probably bit his lip many

[11] G. Connell-Smith, *The United States and Latin America: an Historical Analysis of Inter-American Relations* (London, 1975), pp. 65–9.

[12] W. A. Hay, 'Lord Liverpool: alliances, intervention and the national interest', in J. Black (ed.), *The Tory World* (London, 2015), pp. 103–19 (at 119); the Anglo-American parallel was stressed by John A. Thompson, 'William Brock', address at the celebration of his life, 'Professor William Ranulf Brock, 1916–2014', 16 May 2015, Selwyn College, Cambridge, p. 3.

times during his early years at Selwyn. The new fellows would usher in many drastic changes over the next decade.[13]

Brock made an immediate impact at Selwyn, the beginning of a love affair that would last his entire life. In 1949 he was appointed University Lecturer in History. The Cambridge history degree had changed little since the 1930s. He prepared to offer courses along the same lines as those he had once taken: England in the Nineteenth Century (1949–51), Eighteenth Century Intellectual History (1949–52) and the Economy of Britain during the Napoleonic Wars (1950–2). During the early years of his fellowship, breathing in post-1945 idealistic enthusiasm for the Commonwealth and Empire, Brock embarked on a history of Britain's evolving relations with its Empire, *Britain and the Dominions*. Published by Cambridge University Press in 1951, it was the first in a series aimed at students in the Commonwealth.

Brock's work is much more than a textbook. 'This book is a history of an idea', he declares in his preface. He explores 'the historic need for freedom combined with peace, for independence combined with a recognition of international obligations, for common action without centralized control'. Dominion status appeared to reconcile these needs, ultimately 'as an association into which others may be incorporated' (p. xx). This large, expansive work, the longest book Brock ever completed, demonstrates his skill at narrative and synthesis on a wide canvas, dealing not only with British attitudes, ideas and policies but with the individual histories of Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and also India and the Asian and African colonies straddling the globe. He succeeds in drawing the parts of the Empire together in a readable, illustrated survey, explaining its debates in digestible form in the best tradition of Trevelyan. Brock offers, for instance, a lucid exploration of the advantages of free trade (pp. 182–7). He stresses the importance of the trading relationship, as his history 'is concerned less with the doings of soldiers and sailors than with politicians, traders, missionaries and the thousands who left the British Isles to make new homes overseas' (p. 111). He had laid down a marker for several later points of departure in a new context.

This book offers a conventional English approach to Empire which he would later rectify; it certainly draws upon Trevelyan's writing at key points. It lacks a certain trenchancy of earlier discussions of the Empire's weaknesses as a political and economic organism as reflected in its

[13] Brock, Record of Service Card, Buffs Archive; W. R. Brock and P. M. H. Cooper, *Selwyn College: a History* (Durham, 1994), p. 214.

fumbling defence machinery, or later critical dissections of its divisions and lassitude based on sources opened by the end of the Fifty Year Rule, notably Correlli Barnett's *The Collapse of British Power* (London, 1972). Brock's book, though often shrewd—he predicts the rise of the industrial strength of India—appears rather Whiggish. *Britain and the Dominions* is his one work that would age quickly. With the slump in the Commonwealth's reputation, especially in academic circles, Brock became slightly embarrassed by it and dropped it from lists of his publications after 1963.

By the early 1950s the pattern of Brock's career appeared set in a firm direction. Later he might have made an important contribution to the debate over the nature of British imperialism as recast by the writings of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher.[14] Instead his career made a swerve on to an unexpected path. In the early 1950s the numbers of Cambridge undergraduates who wished to study American history increased greatly and the available teachers remained few, reliant on Denis Brogan assisted by visiting Pitt Professors who changed annually. In British and Commonwealth history, Brock's services were almost surplus to requirements. The History Faculty took the initiative and inquired whether Brock could switch to US history. He could have refused but his services might be dispensed with and thus the renewal of his fellowship might be jeopardised; or alternatively, he might have been forced to take on college administrative duties more onerous than the Assistant Tutorship that he had accepted in 1950. He had others to think about besides himself. In 1950 he had married Constance Helen Brown (1916–2000) and two children would soon arrive, Anna in 1952 and James in 1956. Brock agreed to teach US history and in 1953 his title was amended to University Lecturer in American History. This was an auspicious event in his life, but such a drastic change reduced his productivity for almost a decade.

In 1951–2 Brock wrote a survey of English history 1700–60 for the *New Cambridge Modern History* (*NCMH*), though it did not appear for five years.[15] Brock needed time to re-orientate himself and undertake a massive course of reading in American history and come to terms with

[14] Two other Cambridge historians, especially in J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The imperialism of free trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6 (1953), 1–15, and R. E. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (London, 1961). A starting point might have been Brock, *Britain and the Dominions*, pp. 305–13.

[15] W. R. Brock, 'England', *New Cambridge Modern History*, 14 vols (Cambridge, 1957), 7, *The Old Regime, 1713–1763*, pp. 241–67.

some of its complexities and leading issues.[16] His initial studies were in the Early National period, 1787–1832, which parallel his earlier researches; his fine early essay on Alexander Hamilton is a product of this work—and interest in a politician who combined social conservatism with economic dynamism and a conviction that central government should promote economic development.[17] By 1956–7 he became interested in the period 1865–98. Another chapter in the *NCMH*, this time on the United States, eventually appeared in 1962.[18] His interest in this period had stemmed from a domestic engagement with American historians. In 1952–4 he helped organise three Fulbright conferences on American history at Cambridge. They were his first introduction to the very best scholars in the field. In 1954 they included John Hope Franklin who had just completed a revisionist study of Reconstruction; he would return to Cambridge as Pitt Professor in 1962–3. Brock informed C. Vann Woodward that he hoped to write more on this period and produce a 'reassessment' which he envisaged in comparative terms, as 'there are interesting comparisons to be made between the "liberal capitalist" policies in the US and GB'. He gave it the 'tentative title' of *Democracy and Power in late 19th Century America*.[19]

This is the only period of Brock's life when his output consisted of essays. His Historical Association pamphlet, *The Effect of the Loss of the American Colonies upon British Policy* (1957) feels like a reluctant farewell to British history. It draws on his earlier work on the Empire and Lord Liverpool's tenure at the Board of Trade. His concluding reflections on British enforcement of the Navigation Acts, British failure to sign a commercial treaty with the USA combined with a rigid determination, especially among Scots, to pursue the payment of American debts form the germ of another study twenty-five years later.[20]

[16] Some aspects of British Commonwealth history with an expanding frontier of settlement in Canada and South Africa had strong parallels with the USA, as did the evolution of democratic societies in Australia and New Zealand. See Brock, *Britain and the Dominions*, pp. 142, 161–2, 243–8, 273.

[17] W. R. Brock, 'The ideas and influence of Alexander Hamilton', in H. C. Allen and C. P. Hill (eds.), *British Essays in American History* (London, 1957), pp. 41–3; see the comparison with Gibbon Wakefield (p. 59) whose ideas on settlement are discussed in Brock, *Britain and the Dominions*, pp. 146–9, 161–7, 174–5.

[18] W. R. Brock, 'The United States', *New Cambridge Modern History* (Cambridge, 1962), 11, *Material Progress and World Wide Problems, 1870–1898*, pp. 487–515.

[19] Brock to C. Vann Woodward, 18 April 1958, C. Vann Woodward Papers (MS 1436), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

[20] W. R. Brock, *The Effect of the Loss of the American Colonies upon British Policy* (London, 1957; revised 1966), pp. 11–12. 'The famous Navigation Acts...prohibited the importation...of any kind

One of the inducements to change subject was the opportunity to spend time in the USA. His first visit took place in 1952 on a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship semester at Yale. He loved the USA, especially its vitality and vigour. In 1957 he was awarded another Commonwealth Fellowship in American Studies for six months designed, as Brock put it, 'as a "refresher course"' in the teaching of US history, and he intended to spend a semester each at Johns Hopkins and Berkeley. At the former he worked closely with C. Vann Woodward and David Donald and at Berkeley Kenneth M. Stampp—all three had either published or were working on important books on Reconstruction. After six months surrounded at every turn by able and distinguished scholars of the American past, Brock felt inspirited. This American visit was a decisive turning point in Brock's life. When he returned to Selwyn, he had already started a book on Reconstruction; he turned away from British history and never looked back.[21]

Just before departing for the USA, Brock had joined the battle to transform Selwyn. All of the initial engagements were involved in adjusting the College's relationship with the University and embracing the full membership that had been denied Selwyn because of the special conditions of its foundation. The founders demanded that the Master be a Clerk in Holy Orders and the Fellows and Scholars had to pass a denominational test; Council was composed of outsiders acting *ex officio* (one was the Archbishop of Canterbury). The hand of the radicals was strengthened with the abolition of the old Council as the governing body was now composed of the Master and Fellows. The Reverend William Telfer, who had arrived at Selwyn as Master shortly after Brock, remained determined to maintain the link with the Church of England. A test case suddenly blew up when two undergraduates converted to Catholicism and Telfer asked them to leave. At the crucial meeting of the fellows, Brock (the most junior) led the vote to end the tests. The victory was consummated when Selwyn became a College of the University, confirmed by the Queen in Council in March 1958.[22]

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of goods except in English ships or the ships of the country in which the goods originated': G. N. Clark, *The Wealth of England from 1496 to 1760* (London, 1946), p. 124. For Brock on mercantilism, see Brock, *Britain and the Dominions*, pp. 24–8; for a recent study of the consequences of this policy, see A. Lambert, *The Challenge: Britain Against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London, 2012).

[21] In 1965 he issued a 2nd edition of *Lord Liverpool* but he left 'the original text untouched' for he decided 'to leave the enthusiasm of youth undiluted by the caution of middle age' (n.p.).

[22] Brock and Cooper, *Selwyn College*, pp. 220–32, 240.

Brock's family had lived originally at Saxon Barns Cottage before finally settling at the roomier 32 Barton Road. Here he could concentrate on his bigger projects, but he was a very convivial person; he was always interested in people and loved throwing parties; he had a good knowledge of fine wine. He cherished more than his work, being absorbed in antiques and painting, though not particularly musical. He also loved driving, and here the USA brought many pleasures, but the children accompanied their parents on road journeys across Europe on camping holidays where they became acquainted from an early age with many wine-growing areas.

Comfortably ensconced in Barton Road he completed *The Character of American History* (1960). This was based on his lectures but all of his books are individual, interpretative works and the thematic structure of this cogent book results in something more and perhaps something less than the title might suggest.[23] It opens with a summary of the essential, often paradoxical features of American history. This remains one of the best short efforts to express briefly the determining forces that have shaped such a vast and diverse country. Brock's observations are not lacking in irony. He could not avoid the issue of the 'separateness' of the USA which he regarded as 'more apparent than real'; he then continues, that many American citizens might be overjoyed at lacking a foreign policy, but he pointedly remarks that the Civil War (1861–5) 'demonstrated that men can think too much about their own affairs' (p. 30). He makes effective use of his knowledge of British history to demonstrate the enormous significance in American development of the Royal Navy in securing the Atlantic Ocean, of British capital and British industry. Few textbooks emphasised during these years the importance of such foreign influences which were concealed by what a recent scholar has called the 'myth of...an isolationist hermit kingdom concerned only with domestic affairs' oblivious to the world economy.[24] The book is not without fault, as the great upheavals of the twentieth century are covered in less than 100 pages, but Brock had shown how such a survey could be written confidently. Composed within the historiographical framework of the 1950s it remains well worth reading.[25]

[23] W. R. Brock, *The Character of American History* 2nd edition (London, 1965), all quotations are from this edition.

[24] W. E. Weeks, *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, 1, *Dimensions of the American Empire, 1754–1856* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 132.

[25] Years later Brock was severe on Hugh Brogan's *Longman History of the United States* (London, 1985) for its neglect of intellectual history, culture, science and technology. See his review in *Journal of American Studies*, 20 (1986), 129–31.

The period of his mature books on US history was inaugurated in 1963 by *An American Crisis: Congress and Reconstruction, 1865–1867*, his second book published by Macmillan. This will probably remain his single most celebrated contribution to historical scholarship. It was an outstanding, revisionist work and the first major interpretative contribution to American historiography that hailed from British shores.[26] Brock described it modestly to C. Vann Woodward 'as a little book—more of an essay—I have put a good deal of thought into it'. Its impact was the greater because soon after its publication Lyndon B. Johnson launched a legislative onslaught against the white supremacist bastions of the former Confederate states. Brock's own cool and clear-headed analysis is free of sectional rancour. Focusing on the Republican victories in the mid-term elections of 1866, he concludes that such 'sustained solidarity is exceptional in American political history', and therefore he stresses that 'powerful forces [were] at work in the Northern society which produced this measure of support for an extremist policy' (pp. vii–viii). The use of the term 'extremist' is striking because the novelty of his argument is revealed by his use of the language of an older school of historians while rejecting their conclusions.[27]

Brock rejects earlier characterisation of Radical Republican leaders as diabolic figures, corrupt and vindictive. He also rejects a view popularised by Charles A. Beard that the *real* meaning of politicians needs to be decoded. He holds that most politicians 'did mean what they said' but he contends that their sincerity was irrelevant to his argument because he sought to relate Reconstruction policy to 'a whole society and its traditions' and move away from personality-based polemics (p. viii). Consequently, he places reliance on published records, especially speeches in the *Congressional Record*, underpinned by a sampling of private papers, such as those of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thaddeus Stevens. He asserts that 'the primary task in Reconstruction history is now to ask new questions of familiar material and not to expect a discovery which will put the whole episode in a new light' (p. ix). Privately he

[26] See the detailed bibliographies in H. H. Bellot, *American History and American Historians* (Norman, OK, 1952), pp. 210–22, and his coverage is very brief, pp. 193–7; S. G. F. Spackman, 'Beyond the Federal Consensus: a doctrine of national power', in R. Jefferys-Jones and B. Collins (eds.), *The Growth of Federal Power in American History* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 49–50.

[27] See Bellot's reference to 'these arbitrary and despotic proceedings' when describing Congressional Reconstruction legislation, *American History and American Historians*, p. 196.

exhibited anxiety that his book 'is light on MS material' because he could not fit in another research trip to the USA before he had finished it.[28]

Brock's revisionist argument is enhanced by the book's tone and cogent expression. Brock contends that Congress advanced a consistent and high-minded policy based on racial justice that would have altered irrevocably the oligarchic character of the South, aspirations that were captured in the cautious effort in the Fourteenth Amendment to protect the voting rights of the former slaves, and the Radical efforts to impeach President Andrew Johnson. Brock believes the drive to impeach Johnson to be 'a political error of some magnitude' as Congress over-reached itself (p. 277). Yet *An American Crisis* lands some powerful blows on Johnson's reputation and contributed to its drastic decline. Brock considers him a diligent and capable administrator, but too narrow in his conception of his duties, self-absorbed and clothed in a suit of armour of 'defensive arrogance' bereft of understanding. Brock complains that Johnson failed to grasp that 'the Northern people had a deep psychological need to believe that they had made a more perfect Union' (p. 168). As for the other Reconstruction president, Ulysses S. Grant, Brock does not anticipate Grant revisionism, and his final chapter on 'the Waning of Radicalism' is now less convincing than earlier parts of the book. Yet he produced a work finished with a brilliant sheen, arguably the most successful of his books. It was included by David Donald among a list of the best half-dozen books on Reconstruction.[29] His growing renown in the USA was marked by Visiting Professorships at the Universities of Michigan (1968) and Washington (1970) and a fellowship at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California (1965).

The success of *An American Crisis* was not matched by a comparable recognition of his achievement in Cambridge. In the early months of 1963 American friends of the University raised funds to endow a readership in American history. This came at a bad moment for Brock as his book was in proof but not yet published. Though the margin was narrow the readership went to another candidate, J. R. Pole. Brock later reflected, 'I was rather well out of it', as the University tried to renege on a vague commitment to take it over after five years and there was some unpleasantness while Pole won his battle for tenure. So, following his own advice that 'anyone who is frustrated in Cambridge' should 'get out of the place', he

[28] Brock to Woodward, 22 July [1963], Woodward Papers.
[29] D. Donald, 'Reconstruction', in J. A. Garraty, *Interpreting American History: Conversations with Historians* (New York, 1970), Part 1, pp. 366–7.

began to look for an escape route. He found one in 1967 when urged on by Sir Denis Brogan he applied for the Chair in Modern History at Glasgow University. Brogan's patronage was crucial to Brock's success and he assumed the Headship of the Department in October 1967. Leaving Selwyn was a wrench; college members lamented, 'we will all miss his knowledge of fine wine', for he had set up a wine society for undergraduates. He had contributed significantly to the college's growing reputation, not least as director of research students in nurturing a highly able group and as secretary to the History Faculty Board since 1960. With twenty years' service he remained a Life Fellow so he could return to his Cambridge sanctuary.[30]

Brock was a true child of the Home Counties. He was sure of himself and perhaps exuded a certain sense of Oxbridge superiority; he was also sure of what he would expect of his staff. These were the qualities that the Principal, Sir Charles Wilson, was looking for. Wilson wished to raise the research profile of Glasgow; in 1963 the entire Faculty of Arts awarded only two PhDs.[31] But how would Brock, who was not a natural communicator in personal exchanges, be received by colleagues and students in Scotland?

His record as research director was outstanding. His first book as professor appeared in 1969, *The Civil War*, an edited 'reader' popular in the USA published by Harper and Row in their 'Interpretations of American History' series with John Higham and Bradford Perkins serving as general editors. Brock's Introduction serves as one of the best short summaries of the coming of the war I have read, and surveys the 'ideological conflict developed under the impact of war' (p. 9), though the war itself is virtually ignored.

The following year he produced *The Evolution of American Democracy* in a Bicentennial Series, 'Two Centuries of American Life', edited by Harold M. Hyman and Leonard W. Levy and published by the Dial Press. Brock's was one of the first to appear and is a beautifully written history of the interaction of American political institutions with the workings of the political process, the tension between ideas and the way they worked out in practice. He sought to show how the democratic process adapted, incrementally or suddenly, 'as a living, growing, and changing institution'—

[30] These details come from the 'Fragments of autobiography' in Brock to J. A. Thompson, 8 June 1991, Thompson Papers.

[31] M. Moss, J. F. Munro and R. H. Trainor, *University, City and State: the University of Glasgow since 1870* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 287.

one shaped by what he termed a 'national ideology', a cluster of ideas focused on man's relationship to society. 'America was the first modern nation', he reminds us, 'to make ideology the central fact of national existence' (p. 4). Here was a good example of the way Brock marched, to use Anthony Badger's metaphor, 'to his own drumbeat'. He distanced himself from the 'consensus' school of historical interpretation, a conformist and celebratory view that stressed shared values and agreement among Americans, particularly the pragmatist tradition, and minimised conflict and the importance of ideology; the defence of freedom formed the bedrock of the American past.[32] Brock is not blind to the failures of American democracy, its anti-intellectualism, belligerence, persecution of minorities, racial bigotry and intolerance, but he mounts a defence of two features of the American political scene that have long been derided, and still are: political parties and professional politicians. Brock deems the party system of 'abiding importance' but not being inevitable 'deserves close analysis' (p. 107). Within limits he provides this, but Richard Hofstadter would steal his thunder with a more thorough treatment.[33] As for despised politicians, that is, 'dirty politicians', Brock observes of all those candidates who have run against 'the mess made in Washington', none have managed to devise a better system (p. 112).[34]

Brock entertained high ambitions for *The Evolution of American Democracy* but these were unfulfilled. Yet it remains an important assessment of ideas and institutions. It is stronger on the nineteenth than the twentieth century, but it does pay attention to the growing conservatism of American political belief and the rise of intellectuals in the policy-making structure especially since the 1960s, whose real power Brock probably exaggerates (p. 216). He might not have equalled Sir Denis Brogan as an observer of the American political scene, but his book allows him to develop themes that were implicit in his earlier work, especially the 'intellectual rigidity' that he discerns in its workings (p. 132).

[32] See P. Novick, *That Noble Dream: the 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 332–48; it also stressed the importance of 'the facts' and 'scholarly detachment' as a reaction to the 'presentism' of the earlier pre-1939 Progressive school embodied by F. J. Turner, C.A. Beard and V. L. Parrington, all of whom emphasised 'conflict' between the 'interests' and the people (ibid, p. 336). Badger's observation was made at Selwyn College on 16 May 2015.

[33] R. Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: the Rise of a Legitimate Opposition in the United States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1969).

[34] The animus against politicians had been inherited from Britain. See Adam Smith's description of 'that insidious and crafty animal, vulgarly called a statesman or politician', quoted in Brock, *Lord Liverpool*, p. 30.

In other ways Brock fared less well. Glasgow was a conservative institution and stuck in its ways. Until 1978 Heads of Department were still found only among those who occupied the established chairs, a practice that was ending elsewhere. Brock continued to behave like an absolute monarch and occasionally his zeal outran his discretion; he could be tactless and high-handed; he failed to take colleagues with him. Nonetheless, he faced a severe challenge. The rosy glow of ceaseless expansion ushered in by the Robbins Report (1963) was swept away by the chilling winds of recession in 1974. The University attempted to manage contraction while student numbers continued to grow. Staff became alarmed, perplexed and agitated. Even the most diplomatic and subtle of departmental heads would have found this a prickly task to handle. The issue of university governance also became topical after 1968. Student agitation at Glasgow by comparison with many universities, the LSE, Manchester, Hull and Sussex, was positively benign; but demands were made for student representation on the University Court, Senate and the Faculty and Departmental levels. Brock supported this but mishandled the issue, annoying staff by declaring in a booming voice that he had found 'a good working class boy' as departmental 'student rep'. Some staff jumped to the erroneous conclusion that he was appeasing or even sympathising with hard left troublemakers.[35] Brock's growing deafness which he ignored and others failed to notice probably accentuated his difficulties. Brock was more successful at helping to speed up Glasgow's slothful promotions system. He recommended Peter J. Parish for an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Fellowship at Johns Hopkins. Parish admired Brock as an historian but thought him a poor manager and complained that he was treated like a dogsbody, as he taught most of the American history in the department. But fortunately for Brock, the full effects of the financial crisis were not felt until after the end of his time at Glasgow. Staff appointed after 1978, like Bruce Collins, were more sympathetic to Brock's aims.

During these years the Brocks lived comfortably and hospitably in a large house, 50 Dowanside Road, Hillhead, rented from the university. He was better paid than comparable Cambridge professors and he came to have a close attachment to Scotland. Like the present writer he became addicted to the Scottish TV detective series *Taggart*. By 1980 he was

[35] He did not, but he thought the New Left radicals 'presented a case which must be answered' (Brock, *Evolution of American Democracy*, p. 243). For the background, see Moss, Munro and Trainor, *University, City and State*, pp. 288–9, 291, 295–8, 301–3.

self-confident, ebullient, and resilient—not pompous—but a committed scholar of remarkable vitality and dedication. He was a naturally gifted writer, 'Being one of those who likes to think on paper'. He was a less gifted lecturer, often appearing loud and assertive but simultaneously diffident and uncertain, and occasionally difficult to follow. He was a reserved, fundamentally shy man. John Thompson has stressed writing 'was how he best expressed his thoughts—and indeed his feelings'. His writings made a massive contribution to Glasgow's international reputation as a centre for the study of things American.[36]

The previous decade had seen Brock at his most productive. *Conflict and Transformation* was the third in a series on American history published by Penguin and one of the most readable and authoritative.[37] The book reveals his skill at presenting diverse materials for a wider audience. Brock sets his face against developing a universal thesis that would explain all features of the period. He prefers to consider events on their own terms, as 'events have a meaning if one can discover it'; he spurned didacticism in a rather casual aside, 'the essence of historical understanding is the realisation that men stand at the vortex of many forces; this may narrow the field of choice but still leaves some options open' (p. 5). Brock offers neat discussions of the rise of free soil and anti-slavery politics and, as a counterpoint, pro-slavery ideology and the secessionist spirit. As for the final rupture in 1860–61, he observes that the fracture of the Democratic Party served as the 'prelude to disunion'. During the secession crisis he highlights the role of factors that go beyond political decisions—'the shadowy realms of communication, imagery, psychology and character formation' (p. 211). He argues that the years 1844–77 did indeed experience a transformation but his analysis of it after 1865 exhibited a significant cavity. He could only half-heartedly admit the profound, transformative character of war rather than make it a central theme of his interpretation (p. 305).

In 1975 he even found time to publish another book, *The United States, 1789–1890*, a detailed survey of the sources available for political and social history which includes a substantial section on 'The American

[36] Brock to Vann Woodward, n.d., 1958, Woodward Papers; Thompson, 'William Brock', p. 1.
[37] W. R. Brock, *Conflict and Transformation: the United States, 1844–1877* (Harmondsworth, 1973; The Pelican History of the United States, vol. 3, General Editor, Robert A. Divine); also see W. R. Brock, 'Reconstruction and the American party system', in G. M. Frederickson (ed.), *A Nation Divided: Problems and Issues of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Minneapolis, MN, 1975), pp. 81–112.

Mind'. This book might also be viewed as a highly personal statement of his beliefs about the process of writing history.[38]

Much of 1976 was spent as a Charles Warren Fellow at Harvard University where he renewed his friendship with David Donald. While there he began a major study of the decade before 1850, *Parties and Political Conscience: American Dilemmas, 1840–1850*, that appeared three years later. The remote origins of this work can be found in 1962–3 and the effort he had put in to offer a Cambridge special subject on the 1840s—the first ever offered on an American topic—which Brock rightly believed were neglected by comparison with the Age of Jackson or the decade preceding the Civil War. This, too, rested on the utilisation of volumes of published letters and speeches to be found in the *Congressional Record*, but was supplemented by forays in numerous manuscript collections. It is the study of an emergent two-party system.[39] It is dedicated to the proposition that American party rivalries could not be attributed solely to religious or ethnic differences. Party loyalty results from 'the self-evident fact that people support a party because they believe it has better policies, a better grasp of the long-term interests of the country, and more correct attitudes toward public responsibility' (pp. ix–x). Brock identifies the source of the problems that haunted the Whig Party in the catastrophic tussle that erupted after William H. Harrison's death in 1841 between his successor, John Tyler, and the Congressional Whigs led by Henry Clay that resulted in a meagre legislative record and a loss of political momentum. The Democrats contributed to the deterioration of the political system with James K. Polk's decision to declare war on Mexico in 1846, which Brock considers 'the most severe shock' inflicted on the second party system (pp. x, 87, 106, 170, 172).

The failures committed by both parties presented profound problems for the political system by 1848 if the aim of parties was 'to promote party principles' as neither, Brock believed, had succeeded in promoting them. He finds an explanation for their tardiness but simultaneously for the (temporary) survival of the party system in the concept of political conscience. 'As political history is never simple', he explains, clarification 'must be discovered by a close study of the interplay between events and ideas.' In short, Brock set out to discern what could be found in 'the *minds* of individuals or groups': this blending of political and intellectual history

[38] Along the lines of W. R. Brock, *The United States, 1789–1890* (Cambridge, 1975) in the series The Sources of History: Studies in the Use of Historical Evidence, edited by G. R. Elton.
[39] Brock to Woodward, 5 December 1963, Woodward Papers.

is a key feature of Brock's historical outlook and his piercing insight into the American past. He identifies three noteworthy currents of American thought— religion, rationalism and romanticism. He presents interesting discussions of the ideas of George Bancroft, Albert Barnes, Orville Dewey and William Ellery Channing. Rationalism lent the assurance that all problems could be solved after detailed study. But southern rationality and romanticism, 'and the urge to grasp large truths intuitively', demanded that the entire nation took responsibility for slavery as it was sanctioned by the constitution. In these demands lurked the germs of future conflict. The Whigs did not deplore popular support or indignation if the cause be righteous. Increasingly younger northern Whigs voiced harsh anti-slavery views as romantic nationalism became more pervasive. They became seized by the notion that American governance 'must be made acceptable to political conscience' (pp. x–xi, 24, 38–50). In this regard, the Compromise of 1850 sounded the death knell of both the Whig Party and the second party system because many northern Whigs felt that the deal negotiated by their leaders sacrificed 'political conscience to expediency' (p. xvi). It could therefore only attempt to shore up a crumbling political structure rather than restore it.

Parties and Political Conscience is Brock's finest contribution to American historiography. It is his most subtle book and every page illustrates its fine intellectual quality. Almost forty years after its publication it still has a lot to say on the politics of this decade. Whereas most studies of the coming of the Civil War date from 1848 Brock's highlights the importance of the 1840s to the final collapse. But it failed to have the same impact as *An American Crisis*. Brock himself believed that his failure to publish it earlier doomed his application for the Rhodes Chair in American History at Oxford in 1978.[40]

The times were not propitious for Glasgow University to create an American Studies degree. Brock had been a loyal member of the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) for many years. But he showed scant interest in interdisciplinary perspectives and did not advance within the organisation. In 1977 Peter Parish, now Bonar Professor of History at Dundee, was elected Chairman of BAAS. Brock's reaction to this was odd. He walked up to Parish who was quietly celebrating, and boomed: 'I have just had the biggest shock of my life'—not the most tactful way to congratulate the chairman-elect. If Brock felt slighted, in 1978 he was

[40] Brock to Thompson, 8 June 1991, Thompson Papers. J. R. Pole was appointed. The third contender was Marcus Cunliffe who was deemed 'too miscellaneous'.

'delighted' by the award of an Hon. LittD at Keele University. He spent most of 1980 researching at the University of Maryland. He retired in 1981 shortly after his 65th birthday. He caused some annoyance and not just among Scots when he declared his 'civilising mission' complete.

Brock entered his expansive and abundantly productive retirement which allowed him to publish another four books. For the first he remained in Scotland. *Scotus Americanus,* published in 1982 by Edinburgh University Press, was his only book resulting from a funded research project. He had the use of three research assistants. Helen Brock contributed chapter 6 on 'Scotland and American Medicine' and compiled two appendices. The final product is fascinating and diverting and based on a rich collection of manuscript material in Scottish, English and American archives, notably collections in the Chesapeake region.

Brock deems the Scottish-American relationship one of the most significant events in Scottish history. By 1790 260,322 people of Scottish provenance had settled permanently in the American colonies, with greater clustering in the South, so that Scots formed 15.1 and 15.2 per cent of South Carolina and Georgia's population (p. 13). Both the Highland Clearances and the opportunities offered to the disproportionately large number of highly educated professionals produced by the Scottish universities accounted for much of this emigration, and the latter soon earned a reputation for sobriety, efficiency and diligence (pp. 17, 41). Brock also underlines the compatibility of American and Scottish culture, as these two societies 'were both "provincial"', and both were meritocratic and middle class (p. 170). He also addresses the impact in America of the high achievements of Scottish learning—a major point of debate in the 1980s. Brock supports the contention of Garry Wills that the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, represented by David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid and Francis Hutcheson, especially the last two, resonated with the generation that led the American Revolution, notably Thomas Jefferson. Brock notes that the dates of publication of Reid's works gave American readers 'ample opportunity' to read them; but this 'cannot be proved' (pp. 95, 255n13). Ironically, Brock demonstrates that Scots were disproportionately represented among Loyalists, perhaps 20 per cent, and determined to collect debts incurred before and during the Revolution.[41]

[41] The core of Wills' case can be found in G. Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (London, 1980), pp. 175–206, and G. Wills, *Explaining America: the Federalist* (London, 1981), pp. 14–23. See Brock, *Scotus Americanus*, pp. 29, 128–30, 131–2, 134–5, 139–47, 148–50, 155–7.

In 1983 the Brocks moved back to Cambridge and Barton Road, moving in to No. 49. Brock resumed his Selwyn Fellowship (Class E) as if he had never left, taking full advantage of the college library, scholarly companionship and hospitality. During a period of thirty-three years he did not remain idle nor did he brood over lost opportunities. Both the most illustrious chairs in American history had eluded him: the Rhodes chair came too soon and 'the [Cambridge] Mellon chair came too late'.[42] With typical energy he played a major part in College affairs, edited the *Selwyn College Calendar* for eight years and led the Centenary Appeal. He had wide contacts among the older members of the Selwyn Association and these generated many subscriptions. His connections with Trinity were rewarded by the endowment of the Trevelyan Research Fellowship. The total sum raised reached £750,000, an astonishing achievement during a period of recession. Very properly, Brock enjoyed a prominent place alongside the College hierarchy when the Chancellor of the University, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, arrived in June 1983 to deliver the Centenary Address.[43]

Such a record would have satisfied most septuagenarians, but not Brock. His indefatigable dedication to scholarship is the undoubted hallmark of these years. His eminence was marked by three clear signals. The first was the appearance in 1983 of a *festschrift* in his honour, *The Growth of Federal Power in American History* (though the editors attempt to distance it from more conventional examples of the genre). Peter Parish reviewed it politely but his private notes observe sharply that a consideration of this theme could not 'ignore war'.[44] The second was election at the age of 74 in 1990 as a Fellow of the British Academy. The third was close involvement in the early days of the British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH) which had its inaugural meeting at the University of Durham in April 1993 and was formally created the next year at Madingley Hall, Cambridge—an effort to bring British and American historians, and especially postgraduates, into closer proximity. Brock served as its first President. He was an assiduous attendee of its amiable

[42] Brock to Thompson, 8 June 1991, Thompson Papers.

[43] Details of how the money was raised, the celebrations, and on what it was spent can be found in Brock and Cooper, *Selwyn College*, pp. 283–7, 301–2. One of the five Honorary Fellows that year was Professor F.W. Rimmer, Professor of Music at Glasgow, cementing further the two most important institutions in his life.

[44] Jefferys-Jones and Collins, *The Growth of Federal Power*; Jefferys-Jones, 'A Summing Up' does refer to this point, pp. 159, 161, but offers no detailed exploration. Parish's copy of this book is in the author's possession and his review is in *History*, 70 (1985), 443–4.

conferences into his nineties. His lively personality and puckish views attracted a group of disciples among young scholars, some young enough to be his great-grandchildren.

The second of Brock's post-retirement books, *Investigation and Responsibility: Public Responsibility in the United States, 1870–1900*, appeared in September 1985 and marked his late return to Cambridge University Press. It grew out of a desire to provide a reassessment of late nineteenth century America of which Brock had written to Vann Woodward more than twenty-five years earlier. The book deals with significant issues that rippled beneath the surface of the excitement and bustle of national politics. Brock took as his starting point Lord Bryce's reference to the eagerness of states 'to extend state intervention';[45] he greatly admired Bryce's *American Commonwealth* (1888). Brock focuses on the states' desire to create numerous agencies and commissions to investigate a range of issues that emerged from the running of the railroads, charities, agriculture, and health—'a whole world of activity that has been strangely neglected by historians' (p. 4). He argues that the discharge of this duty established important precedents for future reform. It overcame apathy, ignorance and parsimony, mainly due to the post-Civil War 'conviction that something had been gained that should not be sacrificed' (p. 26). Brock is also implicitly critical of the assumption that Social Darwinism remained a dominant influence on American social thought. He pointed out that those who worked on behalf of the poor upheld humane values as a way of reducing their plight.[46] Brock labelled this 'a strong current, near the mainstream of American thought, which favoured government intervention to remedy social ills' (p. 42). The right of states to investigate abuses rigorously rested on 'the police power' which, Brock stresses, was the states' 'exclusive responsibility' (58–9). He provides a wealth of detail in evaluating its effectiveness and significance. He also covers the creation and labours of the bureaus of statistics, as these were regarded by reformers, like Carroll D. Wright, as enjoying 'an almost magic quality' of disinterested impartiality that would pierce the defences of vested interests (153). Once more he underlines the 'great changes in the "collective mind"...[that] began about 1870' (p. 251) as the

[45] Lord Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* 3rd edition, 2 vols (1893; London and New York, 1911), 2, Part 5, p. 597n.

[46] Brock observes that Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York, 1944) had exerted 'more influence than its author expected' in cementing an erroneous understanding of nineteenth-centuries 'certainties' (Brock, *Investigation and Responsibility*, p. 259).

mainspring of reform which anticipates the expansion of state regulation in the following century introduced by central governments.

Investigation and Responsibility is a pioneering book the originality and significance of which was for long underestimated. It not only challenged the established orthodoxy that the late nineteenth century was an 'age of *laissez faire*' but in drawing attention to the existence and scope of the 'police power' that rested with states, it anticipated recent work on the nature of government in the United States.[47]

When Cambridge University Press published *Welfare, Democracy and the New Deal* in 1988, many friends expressed surprise at Brock's choice of topic, but the New Deal had intrigued him since the 1950s.[48] This book carries on from where *Investigation and Responsibility* leaves off. It is a survey of local responsibility for poor relief that in most states was rooted in the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601.[49] He traces the numerous clashes with federal authorities during the Great Depression, especially with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) headed by Harry Hopkins. His wide-ranging analysis underlines the persistence of local authority by 1934–5; moreover, he insists that the most effective federal action had been taken in cooperation with the states, not in competition with them or as a result of federal power having been imposed upon them. Local conditions were also too variegated to assign laurels to heroes (Democrats) or brickbats to villains (Republicans). Democrats (and not just those in the South) could just as easily frustrate Hopkins's field representatives as Republicans. Moreover, the voters preferred the maintenance of local authority as a means of keeping taxes down and as a barrier against centralisation—a pervasive fear. By 1938 Brock shows that the climate of opinion had become hostile to the creation of a comprehensive, national system of social welfare (pp. 334, 342–3). Brock also examines the growing tension between elected officials and the 'experts'. His book ends with a concise survey of four methods of undertaking reform (pp. 363–5). *Welfare, Democracy and the New Deal* is informed by the renewed experience of extensive unemployment in the 1980s. It demonstrates Brock's virtuosity and equal mastery in twentieth century history.

[47] See G. Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: the Paradox of American Government from the Founding Fathers to the Present* (Princeton, NJ, 2015).

[48] See his critical review of A. M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919–1933* (Boston, MA, 1957) in *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, 1 (1958), 89–91; also Brock, 'Hamilton', in *British Essays in American History*, p. 42, for New Deal echoes and continuities.

[49] This law exemplified 'local government by local men' says Sir Geoffrey Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (1955; London, 1971), p. 419.

Brock intended to complete a trilogy with a study of concepts of public responsibility 1865–1940 but it was never written.[50] He had become engaged in *Selwyn College: a History* (1994) written in collaboration with Peter Cooper. It is a model college history, well-informed and garnished with detailed accounts of college buildings, activities and sporting achievements—and even more important, vivid character sketches of all involved in its life. Brock's contribution reveals his powers of exposition and ability to capture atmosphere to be undimmed. It is fitting that his final substantial work is a survey of the Liberal politician and political commentator, Lord Bryce.[51] He continued to attend conferences even after Helen died in 2000. Thrown back on himself he responded with typical resilience; his academic friends became even more important to him. His increasing deafness, alas, inhibited true intimacy, because he tended to hide behind it. 'Now that my hearing is not good', he remarked to a female guest at Selwyn high table, 'I shall have to do all the talking.' Gradually his conference attendance ceased but he made regular appearances at Selwyn dinners. 'Keep it moving', he would instruct with a wag of his forefinger if the port became stalled by earnest conversation. After 2009 his mobility became reduced, his tremendous vitality ebbed though he continued steadfastly to live at home adamant that he would not enter a nursing home. In October 2014 he had a serious fall, declined drastically and died on 12 November 2014.

Brock's work is notable for its inner consistency. Early works, such as *The Character of American History*, introduce themes on which he would enlarge decades later. His projects were pursued with a solitary and single-minded vigour. He was not just capable of hard work but had the determination to see them through to completion. He was not always blessed by his choice of publishers and his books did not always enjoy the impact they deserved. In his approach to the American past, his writing is marked by a disdain for 'muck-raking' tendencies or elaborate conspiracy theories. He casts aside explanations that require the revelation of hidden motives. He had no patience with 'silly stuff' or 'the stupider psychological "insights"'.[52] He never wrote a biography though his books include some

[50] An idea of its approach is offered in W. R. Brock, 'From New Deal to New Liberalism', *Reviews in American History*, 23 (1995), 710–15, reviewing A. Brinkley *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, 1995).

[51] W. R. Brock, 'James Bryce and the Future' [Centenary Essay], *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 115, *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows*, 1 (Oxford, 2002), pp. 3–27.

[52] Brock to Thompson, 27 May 2002, Thompson Papers.

memorable short character studies. Brock displays an acute understanding of politicians and political systems, and as he matured he embraced insights gleaned from intellectual, social and migration history. Sir Geoffrey Elton once observed that intellectual history is 'a vital piece of equipment' and Brock's understanding of the significance of ideas leavens his judgements.[53] His entire *oeuvre*, though, appears as a triumph of the traditional method. He was not deflected by the innumerable fads that came and went during his long working life—Namierism, social science methods, quantification, psychobiography, women's history, post-modernism, to name a few. Brock's work is a contribution to history rather than American Studies. It might be observed that both in Britain and the USA he wrote as an outsider, as a sceptic indifferent to American Studies and as a foreigner. 'I think that an "outsider" can do a good deal', he once reflected, 'by having a new look at problems which have had the first assessment made by "insiders";' such a perspective gave impetus to his revisionist instinct.[54]

Brock once claimed that all US historians were Democrats. His revisionist approach thus links a reappraisal of the Radical Republicans, the Whigs, and *laissez-faire* disciples of the free market, and the classic liberal portrait of the New Deal advanced by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. of a 'pragmatic liberalism' slaying the sterile and obscurantist Republicans. It resulted in a rehabilitation of the Republicans. At the very least, Brock drew attention to the subtler character of political conservatism exhibited by American society.[55] The golden thread running through his works is his understanding of the many faces of liberalism. This formed a source of intellectual vigour in his long and not untroubled course from Lord Liverpool to Harry Hopkins. His ingenuity and imagination are displayed in an effort to rehabilitate the forgotten or the despised. His superb character sketches produce some of his most eloquent and pointed writing. Peter Parish summed up Brock's achievement when he described him as quite simply 'one of the most fertile and restlessly inquiring minds among British Americanists'.[56] The final verdict might be more generous. In conception Brock combined an expansive scholarly range with the

[53] G. R. Elton, *Political History: Principles and Practice* (London, 1970), p. 52.
[54] Brock to Thompson, 15 November 1963, Thompson Papers.
[55] Highlighted by A. J. Badger in 'The New Deal and the localities', in Jefferys-Jones and Collins, *The Growth of Federal Power*, pp. 110–15
[56] Parish's review of Jefferys-Jones and Collins, *The Growth of Federal Power*, in *History* 70 (1985), 444.

most exacting standards. In the execution he displayed sensibility, acute judgement and touches of greatness.

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Note. I am very grateful to Anna Day, William Brock's daughter, for all her help with the details of his life and family background and for giving my memoir such a careful and appreciative reading and not least for permission to quote from her father's published writings and personal correspondence. I am delighted to acknowledge my appreciation for the great assistance rendered by the Director-General of the National Army Museum, Janice Murray, and her staff, in particular, Alastair Massey, in locating Brock's service records. My thanks are due also to Clifford Jones, an 'Old Blue' volunteer, working in the Christ's Hospital Archives. I am deeply obliged to Dr John A. Thompson not only for detailed discussions of points of interpretation in Brock's work and a close, perceptive reading of a final draft, but also for his hospitality and thoughtfulness in passing to me copies of letters written by Brock to C. Vann Woodward that had been accumulated by the late Michael O'Brien for his edition of *The Letters of C. Vann Woodward* (New Haven, CT, 2013). I am also in Dr Thompson's debt for permitting me to read and make use of letters Brock had written to him. I am, moreover, deeply grateful to Sir Richard Trainor and Marguerite Dupree for giving me the benefit of their great knowledge of the Glasgow University scene, and to Richard J. Carwardine, Martin Crawford, Susan-Mary Grant, Michael J. Heale, H. J. Rogers, Roger J. Spiller and David Turley, for suggesting lines of inquiry or for helping me on points of detail. Another source of indispensable help has been Simon Blundell who has gone to great lengths in tracking down books and articles and finding answers to obscure enquiries. My knowledge of these years had been greatly enhanced by my long friendship with Peter J. Parish (1929–2002). I also enjoyed the benefit of knowing William Brock for thirty-five years, but the constant lament throughout my researches has been the wish that I had known him even better.