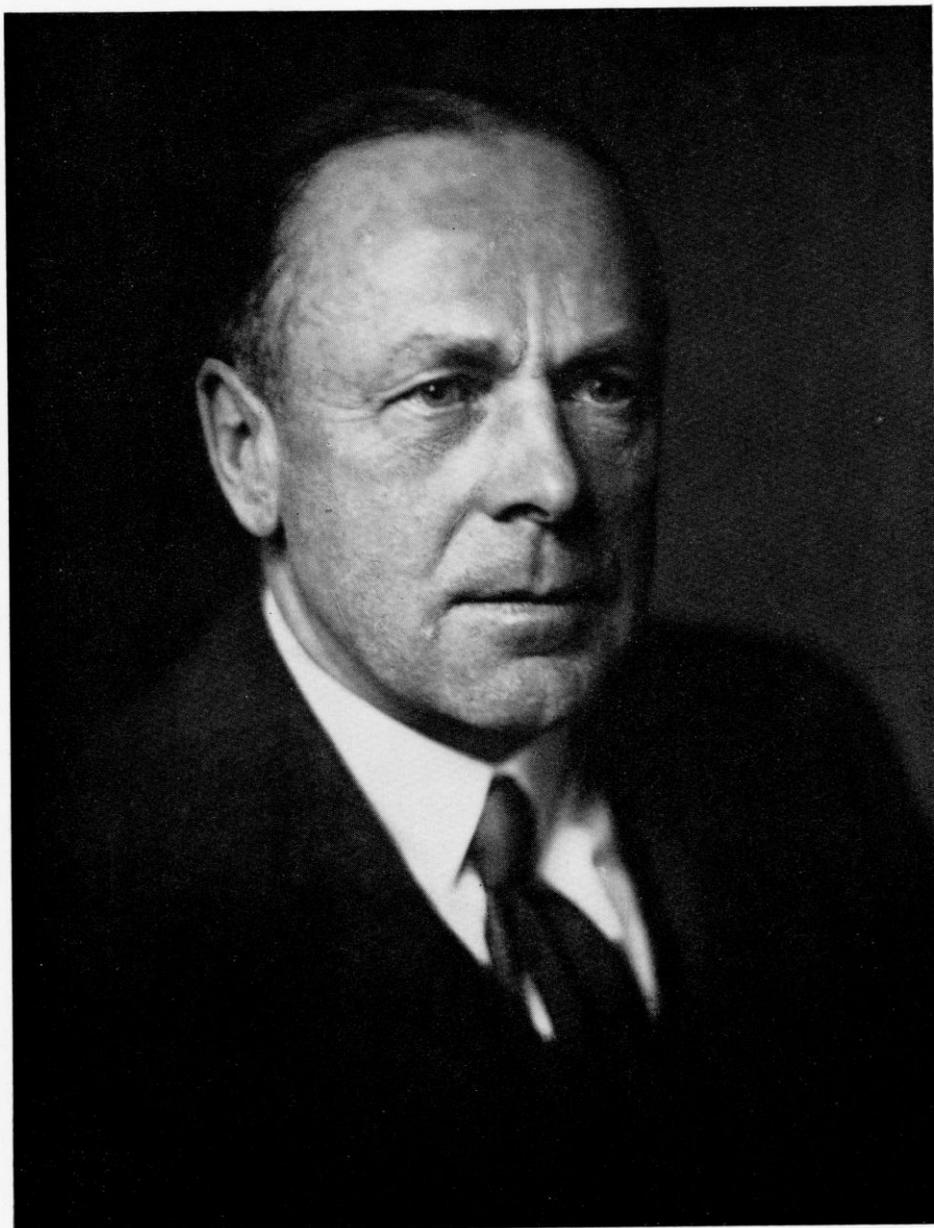


PLATE XII



Walter Stoneman

SIR GEORGE CLARK

GEORGE NORMAN CLARK¹

1890–1979

THREE English historians of great distinction were educated early this century at Bootham School, York: Geoffrey Barraclough, G. N. Clark, and A. J. P. Taylor. All three later went to Oxford where Clark, the oldest, gave tuition to the others. Although he never created a historical school, Sir George Clark influenced a large number of people, by no means all of them historians, through his writings; and during his long life he superintended three major series, wrote seventeen books and almost fifty articles, as well as reviewing several hundred books and editing the *English Historical Review*. This rich achievement, which few other historians of our time can match, merits explanation as well as admiration.

I. 1890–1919

George Norman Clark was born at Halifax, of solid Yorkshire parentage, on 27 February 1890. His father, James Walker Clark, CBE, was a prosperous and influential businessman of that town, and his mother was an alderman's daughter. The elder Clark served the community in many ways—civic, commercial and religious. In the course of his long life (he died in 1936) he was Justice of the Peace, town councillor, Chairman of the local Income Tax Commissioners, President of the Halifax (and for a time the National) Chamber of Trade, and President of the National Federation of Plate Glass Insurance Societies. As a deeply committed Baptist he devoted much time to the management of his denomination's affairs—which meant more committees. Indeed, he gave 'committee work' as one of his principal recreations, and his shrewdness and energy were enlisted in all sorts of causes.

¹ The author is grateful to a number of people who have supplied him with information and anecdotes for this notice. Some wish to remain anonymous, but I am pleased to acknowledge my debt to Geoffrey Barraclough, John Bromley, Lady Franks, Sir John Habbakuk, Denys Hay and A. J. P. Taylor. My main source, however, has been a long typescript left with the British Academy by Sir George Clark, entitled: 'Notes on my Education and Historical Studies'.

The Clarks had five children, George being the second, and there is a delightful description of their house and its occupants in the autobiography of the Halifax novelist, Phyllis Bentley, who was a close friend of one of the daughters. 'The Clarks were unashamedly intellectual in their interests' she recorded. Even the games they played 'required intelligence and knowledge. All the young Clarks were fluent in talk; . . . they all—particularly George—preferred the calm, quiet, accurate statement voiced in words chosen with precision, even if this precision required some hesitation before utterance.' This impressed her, as did the fact that they all had 'light, non-Yorkshire voices' and that 'they tended to address each other austere by initials'. Above all, Phyllis Bentley was impressed by the way that a university education and a degree were presented as desirable and attainable objectives.¹

Clark received an excellent education, first at a local school (where he enjoyed French lessons from the age of ten because they included daily discussion of the latest news of the Boer War carried in *Le Petit Journal*) and, from the age of thirteen, at Bootham. The school, then as now, was run by the Society of Friends, and Clark was given (as he later put it) 'a religious education in some ways strict to the point of narrowness'. Although he made many life-long friends among the Quaker boys at the school, among them Horace Alexander, Philip Noel-Baker (later Lord Noel-Baker), and Malcolm Rowntree, after his third year at Oxford Clark lost touch with the Quaker movement. In 1936 he joined the Church of England.

Perhaps he was not at Bootham for long enough, for at the age of sixteen he was sent to spend his two pre-university years at a school more experienced in preparing boys for Oxford and Cambridge. While Philip Noel-Baker went to the Quaker College at Haverford, Pennsylvania, before going up to Cambridge, Clark was sent to Manchester Grammar School, long famous for winning scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge for its pupils. The experience proved fruitful. His new school taught him a great deal about the attractions of literary scholarship and excellence, and it even engaged a bright young historian—F. M. Powicke, then a junior lecturer at Manchester university—to bring young Clark's essays up to the standard of Scholarship Entrance. And Manchester itself had much to offer. Although, after York, he found the city 'unspeakably ugly', living there (as he did during the week)

¹ Phyllis Bentley, *O dreams, O destinations. An autobiography* (London, 1962), 57-61.

showed Clark something of the social problems and economic conditions of a large industrial complex, and also exposed him to a wider culture than either York or Halifax could boast. As he wrote later: 'Certainly if I had stayed at Bootham I should not have seen Miss Horniman's Company acting in Ibsen's *Ghosts*'.

In 1908, Clark won a Brackenbury scholarship to Balliol to read Lit. Hum. This he did, achieving a first in Greats in 1911; then he spent a fourth year studying Modern History, in which he again obtained a first. Later that same summer (1912) he won a prize fellowship to All Souls, and never went back to Balliol. But his first college made a lasting impression upon Clark, and it was among its undergraduates that he found many firm friends. He went for long walks in the countryside with an almost exact contemporary from Austrian Galicia, later known as Sir Lewis Namier, who taught him much about eastern Europe and its history; and he shared lodgings in Holywell with G. D. H. Cole (leader of the Oxford Fabians), Trev Huxley (brother of Julian and Aldous), Alan Keen (whose sister he was later to marry) and Kingsley Griffiths (his first friend at Oxford). He also moved freely among the glittering élite of those days, such as Harold Nicolson, Patrick Shaw Stewart and the other members of pre-war Oxford's *jeunesse dorée*. For a Bootham boy, it was a considerable achievement. Two first-hand descriptions of Clark's Balliol days have been published. Aldous Huxley, while he was temporarily blind in 1911-12, received private tuition from his brother's friend, whom he recalled as being 'very remarkable. He was extremely well-read, and a highly civilized young man.' Similar praise came from Ivor Brown, a fellow undergraduate at Balliol, who recalled in later years Clark's enormous erudition and effortless exposition: 'He did not cultivate the polished irrelevant epigram; his wit was native to the subject and lifted history and philosophy out of the curriculum and into the world of entertainment.' Clark, with his light, musical voice 'was the star of our unofficial colloquies in that once tranquil lane [Holywell]'.¹

In 1910, after some time as an Associate of the Oxford Fabian Society, Clark signed the 'Fabian Basis' and became a full member. After his graduation, he and G. D. H. Cole put their socialist principles into practice (and drew some attention to themselves) by organizing support for two local strikes, one by the

¹ Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley. A biography*, i (London, 1973), 35; Ivor Brown, *The way of my world* (London, 1954), 202.

tramway staff in Oxford and another, a year later, by the textile workers in Chipping Norton.¹

Also in 1910 he joined the Officers' Training Corps, rising to the rank of corporal thanks to his serious determination to master the unfamiliar drill and training, and he was part of the OTC contingent that lined the route at Edward VII's funeral. Clark was also active in other aspects of undergraduate life. He coxed one of the Balliol boats and played small parts in the Oxford University Dramatic Society's productions. He attended debates regularly at the Union, although he never spoke there, and he became president of the Balliol debating society. He also rose to be president of two inter-collegiate societies: the Jowett, which discussed Philosophy, and the Shaftesbury, which ranged widely over intellectual matters. These activities all helped to widen Clark's horizons and to provide experience of explaining complex ideas in public, which was to be one of his greatest gifts.

Nor was history neglected. Clark had not found, in his undergraduate courses, a suitable research topic, but he asked some of his senior colleagues for advice, and eventually followed the suggestion of C. H. Firth, the Regius Professor of History, that the relations between England and the Netherlands in the later seventeenth century were both interesting and relatively unstudied. Clark already possessed contacts in Europe: his elder brother James (who later became Professor of German in the university of Glasgow) was reading for a doctorate at the university of Heidelberg, and his mother's sister had married in 1905 the Dutch philologist, A. J. Barnouw. So it was relatively easy for him, after doing some preliminary reading, to spend much of 1913 and early 1914 abroad, visiting the Low Countries, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. He spent no less than four months living in Venice, learning Italian (his French and German were already fluent). Shortly after his return to Oxford, he had an opportunity to prolong and extend his travel: McGill University in Montréal offered him a temporary, well-paid job teaching history for the session 1914-15. He accepted, and booked a passage for October, intending to return by Japan and the Trans-Siberian railway. But on 4 August, war was declared and the same day Clark set about applying for a commission in the army and resigned his Canadian post (it was later taken by Harold Laski).²

¹ G. N. Clark's papers concerning the latter have been deposited at the Bodleian Library.

² In *Harold Laski 1893-1950: a biographical memoir* (London, 1953), 26, Kingsley Martin suggested that 'G. N. Clarke' [sic] engineered Laski's

As a second lieutenant in the first battalion of the Post Office Rifles, Clark soon saw active service in France, being wounded twice in 1915 and sent home to convalesce. Finally, as a captain, he was captured in May 1916 after heavy fighting on the Vimy Ridge. The horror of those years, in which many of his friends (including Alan Keen) were killed, overshadowed the rest of Clark's life, and he could never bring himself to speak of it.¹

During his two years as a prisoner-of-war, first at Gütersloh and then at Krefeld, he learnt enough Russian from his fellow prisoners to carry on a simple conversation and to read some Russian historical works. He also met the Flemish historian Paul Frédéricq, who was detained in a civilian camp adjoining the military compound at Gütersloh, and discussed Netherlands history with him. And Clark played a full part in camp activities, serving as a member of the Escape Committee and doing some teaching; but he spent most of his time reading, mainly history. This pattern continued even after he was paroled to neutral Holland, in April 1918, and was allowed to live in The Hague with his aunt and uncle, the Barnouws: Clark perfected his Dutch and worked almost full time on seventeenth-century Anglo-Dutch relations. By the end of the year, he had virtually completed his studies in the Dutch archives for a survey of William III's war at sea against Louis XIV. After the Armistice, Clark moved from The Hague to Rotterdam where, as well as researching, he helped to organize the repatriation of allied prisoners-of-war and provided some intelligence for the British Military Attaché at The Hague. He returned to England at the turn of the year and lived in London.

II. 1919-31

Early in 1919, Clark was offered a college lectureship and tutorship in modern history at Oriel. He accepted, and at the same time he married Barbara Keen, sister of his late friend, and resumed his interest in Fabian causes. His first book, *Unifying the World*, published in 1920 in the Fabian 'Swarthmore' series, examined the effects of the communications revolution of the previous century upon the conduct of international relations. It was an appointment in order to force McGill to release him for military service. Clark himself denied this. There is perhaps a note of regret about the trip-round-the-world that he never made in Clark's first book, *Unifying the World* (London, 1920), chap. 1.

¹ He did, however, write a history of his battalion—the first battalion of the Post Office Rifles—during the Great War. The typescript is at the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, California, and the Post Office Rifles Association has a photocopy.

was a work of considerable erudition and displayed both the broad approach, and the gift for the convincing, almost self-explanatory example, which became the hallmarks of his style. In 1926 he lent his car to the Oxford strike committee during the General Strike, and he twice addressed Labour meetings about the strike. But although Clark remained the good friend of G. D. H. Cole, the attitude of the Labour Party during the strike alienated him from socialist politics, and later in 1926 he declined an invitation to stand as the Labour candidate for Oxford City.

By then, G. N. Clark was already a professional historian of repute. At Oriel he completed his book on King William's War, which was published in 1923 as *The Dutch alliance and the War against French trade*. A loose collection of papers rather than a sustained monograph, this book dealt more with international relations than with economic history; but Clark was the first British historian to write seriously about such matters as privateering. He covered much new ground. Now, however, he was faced with the most difficult choice facing a professional historian: selecting a suitable topic for a second book. The complexity of this decision is often overlooked. Whereas a promising young scholar, with plenty of time for research, can take on almost any subject, an established historian, tied to his institution by teaching and administration, must be more careful. Clark himself once observed that it was an advantage for a doctoral thesis to be kept down to a limited length, because it enabled the young historian more easily to 'step clear of his accumulated notes and begin afresh with a new subject'.¹ But where was the fresh beginning to be made? Clark was not to find his second great academic love for forty years, although the intervening period was immensely productive.

He immediately ruled out a general history of the Low Countries, although he became a close friend and supporter of Pieter Geyl, Professor of Dutch History at the University of London, and although he continued to write articles and to review books on The Netherlands. 'I never had any ambition to write Dutch history in general, however briefly,' he later claimed, 'because I had a strong sense of the limitations of the foreigner who writes about another country'. This was an excessively cautious view: it ignored the different perceptions and insights which the foreigner also brings. How much poorer modern European history would be without the work of British scholars such as Charles

¹ Clark was writing about Mark Thomson in J. S. Bromley and R. M. Hatton, eds., *William III and Louis XIV. Essays by and for Mark A. Thomson* (London, 1968), 3.

Wilson, John Elliott or Richard Cobb; how much poorer Dutch history would be without the books and articles that Clark himself wrote. His *Birth of the Dutch Republic*, given as the British Academy's Raleigh lecture in 1946, is a masterpiece that still provides the best short introduction to the subject in any language. But then, Clark was always a cautious historian. He was also a busy one. In December 1919 he became assistant editor of the *English Historical Review*, rising to be sole editor from 1920 to 1925 and joint editor for a further year. In 1929–30, he was also plunged into university administration when he became junior proctor and, therefore, an *ex officio* member of many boards and committees. At the same time, he was carrying an exceptionally heavy load of undergraduate teaching since there were unusually large numbers of students at Oxford just after the Great War, as ex-servicemen flocked back to complete their education. They required not only lectures—which Clark provided on seventeenth-century Europe and on political science—but also tuition (not yet called tutorials). Clark was responsible (in his own words) for 'the whole of English history and a variety of other subjects'. Not surprisingly, he found the burden heavy. A. J. P. Taylor, whom he tutored at Oriel from 1924 to 1927, recalls that when they reached the Glorious Revolution, Clark breathed a sigh of relief and said 'You know all the rest from your work at school. You don't need to have any more tuition.' Yet students less able to cope by themselves received every attention. Harold Hobson, Taylor's near-contemporary at Oxford, has recorded a warm tribute to Clark's inexhaustible kindness, as well as to his erudition: 'He was so bright and cheerful, he bore his learning with so unostentatious an air, he was so uniformly considerate, that merely to come into his presence was an exhilaration'. Nor was this enjoyment reserved for undergraduates. When Oriel's Annual Fellows' dinner was held at John Fothergill's inn at Thame in 1923, it was noted that 'Clark did most of the entertaining'.¹

None of these activities, however, prevented Clark from writing. He and his wife preferred the countryside to the noise of the city, and they lived in part of a converted seventeenth-century house at Marston which had been Oliver Cromwell's headquarters

¹ H. Hobson, *Indirect journey: an autobiography* (London, 1978), 158. When Hobson's tutorial overran one afternoon and threatened to make Clark late for High Table, his genial mentor defined a gentleman as 'a man who can bathe and change for dinner in fifteen minutes', and proceeded to do so. On the Fellows' Annual Dinner, see J. Fothergill, *An innkeeper's diary* (London, 1931), 52.

in 1645. Clark made a brief excursion into local history on behalf of his new parish and its neighbours, but again, he decided that this was not to be his road. 'I had learnt a lesson: no kind of research can consume more time in proportion to the results than the topography of your own countryside'. In fact he did write some studies of the other parishes in which he lived, including a history of Elsfield church and village, where he is buried; but they were neither numerous nor substantial. Instead, during a sabbatical term in 1928, 'G. N.' (as he was now known in academic circles) revised his European history lectures for publication as *The Seventeenth Century*. This was a most precocious work: on the one hand, there was an amazing breadth of learning, drawn from work published in many foreign languages at a time when most British historians saw European history in a largely English context; on the other, the material was arranged into novel categories which still seem congenial today—'Armies', 'International Law and Diplomacy', 'Frontiers'—although at the time almost every other textbook was arranged chronologically. After fifty years, *The Seventeenth Century* is still the best single-volume history available, and it continues to sell several hundred copies a year.

Just as 'G. N.' finished this venture, another came his way. Late in 1929, he accepted an invitation from the Delegates of the Oxford University Press to edit a new history of England: the years of teaching 'the whole of English history' had brought an unexpected reward. His series was to contain fourteen volumes, running from the Romans to 1914 (later extended by a fifteenth volume to 1945) and he engaged as contributors some former teachers (F. M. Powicke for *The Thirteenth Century*), some friends (A. L. Poole for *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta*), and eventually some pupils (A. J. P. Taylor for *English History 1914-1945*). Clark himself took on *The Later Stuarts 1660-1714* because, he thought, 'It would give me a chance of bringing home to readers the importance of external relations in English history.' He completed it, with commendable promptitude, in 1934. It was the first volume of the series to go into print; by 1939, there were six more.

For almost half a century, the Oxford History of England has been a standard work of reference at every level, from university professors and foreign dignitaries to interested school-children and laymen. In great measure, the excellence and durability of the series is due to Clark's editorial skills. At the *English Historical Review* he was always firm, rewriting (often

extensively) contributions whose style he found obscure or opaque. With the *Oxford History*, he read every word of every volume, sometimes suggesting new points of his own and querying the more outrageous or ambiguous remarks. He was very broad in his interpretation of history, allowing far greater space for cultural and intellectual developments than had, for example, Lord Acton's *Cambridge Modern History*. He also welcomed new perspectives. When A. J. P. Taylor wrote about sex and contraception in the final volume, Clark told him: 'I never thought these subjects could be treated with complete frankness, and yet in a scholarly way. I wish I could have done that.' He also tried to keep the series up to date, commissioning second editions of volumes that had been seriously overtaken by subsequent scholarship. By 1965 there were second editions of nine volumes, prolonging the active life of the series considerably. Only in 1985 will the *New Oxford History of England* begin to appear.

III. 1931-47

Between planning the Oxford series and publishing his own volume in it, Clark was elected in 1931 to Oxford University's new Chichele Chair of Economic History, associated with a Fellowship at All Souls. It was the need to concentrate on Economic History, as well as the desire to set a good example to his contributors, that led him to finish *The Later Stuarts* as quickly as he could. He wanted to write next a large-scale economic history of England from 1660 to 1714, and he decided to carry out two preliminary studies which would clear the way for the larger enterprise: *Science and Social Welfare in the Age of Newton* was published in 1937 and *Guide to English Commercial Statistics, 1696-1782* the following year. He also edited the *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company for 1679-1684*, in two volumes; supervised several doctoral dissertations on economic history; and gave courses of lectures on the subject (partly published in 1946 as *The Wealth of England from 1496 to 1760*). But of the major project only the points concerning war and the economy were eventually printed: they formed a substantial part of Clark's 1956 Wiles Lectures, *War and Society in the seventeenth century*. As with his work on Dutch history, he became convinced that his project could not be carried through satisfactorily, that there was simply not enough work being undertaken on the economy of later Stuart England to support a definitive survey.

Further honours came his way during the '30s: he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1936 and a foreign member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences; he became a

Curator of the Bodleian and a Delegate of the Oxford University Press. In 1937–9 he served a brief second term as the editor of the *English Historical Review*. Clark seemed to be firmly established in his new chair, but his life was very much changed by the Second World War. In 1938, after Munich, he decided to join a Chatham House working party to handle non-secret intelligence concerning the Low Countries: the Foreign Research and Press Service. Released by Oxford from most of his university duties, Clark became the Deputy-Director, working under his friend, Arnold Toynbee. He also edited, from 1941 to 1943, the group's newsletter, *Agenda*, and a Dutch journal produced for the Low Countries by the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office.¹ He also wrote articles for both journals, gave some lectures to troops in the Middle East and served in the Home Guard.

In 1943 Clark was appointed Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge, and was able to return to his first interest, European History. He began to lecture on the subject; he continued the seminar on seventeenth-century Europe that he had run at Oxford; and he taught historical methods. There were far fewer committees and faculty board meetings to attend, and Clark later wrote that 'At no stage of my life have I been so happy in my work'. He wrote only one book at Cambridge, *Early Modern Europe*, which included much of his undergraduate lectures and originally formed part of an internationally planned volume which he helped to edit (*The European Inheritance*); but he took on two major editorial tasks. First came the 'Home University Library of Modern Knowledge', already a distinguished series, in which both *The Wealth of England* and *Early Modern Europe* appeared. At first, Clark was one of three editors (the others being Sir Julian Huxley and Gilbert Murray, both friends of his since before the Great War), but after a time he became sole editor and served until 1962. Countless English-speaking people owe a great debt to the clearly written, slim volumes of this important series which introduced, and made interesting, innumerable complex subjects; many of them were chosen, commissioned and scrupulously edited by Clark. It was a tangible monument to his earlier Fabian and Labour sympathies.

But if he enjoyed his work for the Home University Library, he later confessed that 'There was more duty than pleasure in one considerable task that I took on [at Cambridge], the planning of the *New Cambridge Modern History*.' He was the obvious candidate

¹ G. N. Clark's papers concerning *Agenda* have been deposited in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics.

for the task: a reputation in European History that was second to none in Britain; an unparalleled range of knowledge in an impressive variety of languages; and a long and distinguished career as an academic editor. Furthermore, in his Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor, in 1944, Clark had drawn attention to certain subjects that historians should study more closely: he singled out for mention the history of the Far East, the Slavonic lands and Latin America. He also called for the inclusion, in the historian's range, of the fine arts, science and music. Of course, all this is now commonplace; but in 1944 it was not. It is precisely the attention to such matters as medicine and music, to Europe East of the Elbe, and to armies and navies, that distinguishes the *New Cambridge Modern History* from its predecessor. Clark wished to produce a history of European civilization, and although the editors of each volume were free to depart from the detailed plan that he devised, none abandoned the broader approach which he pioneered. By 1970, the *New Cambridge Modern History* was completed, in thirteen volumes, with the publication of a special *Atlas*; and a *Companion* was added in 1979. Few serious students of modern European history would choose to be without a copy of the *New Cambridge Modern History* on their shelves: its value and its quality are universally acknowledged.¹

IV. 1947-79

In 1947, G. N. Clark firmly intended to spend the rest of his working life in Cambridge but when his old College, Oriel, invited him back to Oxford as their Provost, he decided to accept, and for the next ten years much of his time was necessarily spent on College and University business, including membership of the Hebdomodal Council. In 1953 he was knighted 'for services to the study of history' and he was made a Commander of the Order of Orange-Nassau. He also became a Trustee of the British Museum (1949-60), a member of the University Grants Committee (1951-8), President of the Northamptonshire Records Society (1958-65), and—the greatest honour that can come to an arts scholar in Britain—President of the British Academy (1954-8). Any spare time he had was taken up with editing his three major series. But he still gave lectures, and published them afterwards: the Creighton Lecture at London in 1948 ('The cycle of war and peace in modern history'); the Ford lectures at Oxford in 1949-50

¹ G. N. Clark's papers, and those of E. A. Benians, concerning the series are deposited in the Cambridge University Library, where they may be consulted with the permission of the Secretary of the University Press.

(‘The colonial conferences between England and the Netherlands in 1613 and 1615’), the David Murray lecture at Glasgow in 1952 (‘The idea of the Industrial Revolution’); the Wiles lectures at Belfast in 1956 (‘War and Society in the seventeenth century’); the Whidden lectures at McMaster University, Canada, in 1960 (‘Three aspects of Stuart England’). None of these was the product of recent research. He had worked before the war on the subject of the Ford lectures, for example, with a Dutch scholar, W. J. M. van Eysinga: the latter published the texts of the ‘colonial conferences’ in 1940 and Clark’s lectures were published as a sequel in 1951, although both volumes were issued under both authors’ names.

Although he had the right to continue as Provost of Oriel until he was seventy, Clark favoured early retirement for heads of colleges and in 1957 he decided to step down and devote himself once more to full-time writing. To his delight, he was re-elected to a fellowship at All Souls, and he began his retirement by finishing off another book which had been almost completed before the war: *The Campden Wonder*, an account of the ‘historical mystery’ which surrounded the disappearance of the bailiff of Chipping Camden (Gloucestershire) in 1660. Three persons were hanged for his murder before the bailiff suddenly returned to the village; and Clark’s slim volume brought together, and examined critically, various attempts to explain the mystery.

But G.N. soon discovered a new and consuming interest in his retirement: he was commissioned to write the *History of the Royal College of Physicians of London*. He began work on ‘the doctors’, as he called it, in 1960 and completed his part (Volumes I and II, a total of more than eight hundred printed pages) in five years. He also served as adviser to the series until it was finished in 1972. It was the work of which he himself was most proud, and it brought him into contact with many new friends (particularly the President of the Royal College, Lord Moran). Clark pursued the Royal College’s history from its foundation in 1518 to the Medical Act of 1858 (which created the General Medical Council) through the goals which the College as a body set itself, its efforts to fulfil them, and the ways in which it was helped and hindered by other institutions. He adopted this approach deliberately in order to make the history of the medical profession a part of English intellectual and social history, a part of the history of civilization. His account forms a fascinating and informative account of the struggle to improve the health of the English people.

When his work on ‘the doctors’ was coming to an end, and he

was wondering what to do next, the Oxford University Press persuaded him to write one more 'plain tale': *English History: a survey*, published in 1971. This substantial volume (567 pages) was intended to show interested non-historians how the English people came to form a community, and how that community interacted with its neighbours—the Scots and the Irish, as well as the French and the Dutch. Although after completing this book he continued the established routine of work in his study from 9 until 1 and from 5 until 7 until the day he was taken ill (three weeks before he died), *English History*, published when he was 81, was Clark's last major work.

V. *A Classical Historian*

During his professional career of 52 years (1919–71), despite the interruption caused by the world wars, Sir George Clark published, on average, one article and many reviews a year, and one book every three. In addition he edited, taught, lectured and administered; and he and Lady Clark brought up a family (a son and a daughter). He also led an active social life. He was particularly happy at All Souls in Oxford and at Trinity in Cambridge, since both colleges offered a high table where academic conversation blended with a knowledge of the world, thanks to the regular visits of politicians, diplomats, and others concerned with public affairs. Clark was a witty and amusing conversationalist, invariably courteous, the perfect dinner companion. It is small wonder that several colleges made him an honorary fellow in order to enjoy his company more often. He was also very approachable, and many a casual visitor to All Souls quadrangle was charmed to be shown around the college by the octagenarian former President of the British Academy (usually incognito). Clark never sought the limelight; he was the least pompous of men. He was even reticent about his name—'Sir George' on formal occasions; 'James' to his intimates; 'GN' to his close colleagues; 'Nobby' during, and for a few years after, the First World War. His emotions, too, were disguised by the urbane, relaxed dignity which struck almost everyone who met him. As A. L. Poole, a life-long friend wrote in *The Times* obituary: 'His charm of manner, his ready wit and his genuine kindness made him to be regarded with deep affection by a wide circle of friends, though he was a man of great reserve.' Another colleague noted recently: 'His stocky figure and high-domed forehead and delightfully musical voice do stick in one's memory'.

But both writers proceeded to comment on the 'disciplined life

of scholarship' that Clark led. He certainly had many interests outside history—he enjoyed golf for many years and walked a great deal in the countryside; he was very knowledgeable about church architecture and loved looking at it; he enjoyed the theatre and even (in his prisoner-of-war camp) wrote and produced a 'thriller'—but the consuming passion throughout his professional life was the study of the past.¹ In his Cambridge Inaugural Lecture, *Historical Scholarship and Historical Thought*, he urged his audience never to limit their reading of sources or books by date, but only by relevance to the subject under study. He himself set a good example. He read voraciously, and a good deal of the interest of his books and articles arose from the careful selection of material from the different periods and different languages at his command. But still, at the core of his learning, lay an unrivalled acquaintance with the printed sources and historical writing of the seventeenth century, much of it available on the shelves of his own library. Although his reading was wide, it was not random. He was highly economical in his working methods, always planning his research and his writing in advance and not forgetting to leave time for the unexpected. Nor did he often waste material: most of it got into print, sooner or later. His research assistant on the *Guide to Statistics* and the *Royal College* projects remembers that 'he always knew what it was he wanted researched [and] he usually had a surprisingly good idea of the probable source'. He was prolific in ideas which might complement and enlarge particular subjects on which he was working, and he was quick to see roads to possible allied problems with a bearing on the research on hand.

And always the results of Clark's research were presented to the public with clarity and elegance, totally without pretentiousness. He had an uncanny gift for unearthing the out-of-the-way fact or quotation that added a new dimension to an old subject, often making a major point simply by the statement of a fact. *Three aspects of Stuart England*, for example, covers very familiar ground and yet every page contains something to strike even old hands as fresh and new. Again, in *The Seventeenth Century*, unfamiliar details abound which are still unavailable anywhere else. But the broader perspective was never overlooked. With a few deft sentences, and in luminous prose, the chapter on 'Armies' began, typically, with a general statement which set the issues in their wider context:

¹ The play was produced in the West End, shortly after the war, for a Sunday evening performance, but no producer took it on for a run. The typescript was unfortunately lost many years ago.

During the whole course of the seventeenth century there were only seven complete calendar years in which there was no war between European states, the years 1610, 1669–71, 1680–2 . . . Several of the great powers were at war for more than half the whole period. The wars in which two powers fought a simple duel were few, and comparatively short: the commoner type of warfare was that between two groups of allies. Wars, therefore, may be said to have been as much a normal state of European life as peace, and the history of armies was one of the hinges on which the fate of Europe turned.¹

The reader is referred, at the end of this paragraph, and in subsequent footnotes, to works in six different languages.

A third characteristic of Clark's historical writing, to be set beside his clear exposition and wide reading, was its happy equilibrium. He was never an archive-based historian, preferring to read widely in printed works and then ruminate. Taking stock of conflicting points of view gave his writing balance and *gravitas*. And he was interested not only in history books but also in the historians who wrote them. The many obituaries he wrote show this, and other historians often entered his conversation. But he was never malicious about them, and had little time for those who were:

In my view [Clark said in 1962], history should be written without any thesis to prove. It should be a collective, co-operative effort to search out the evidence and write it up in felicitous language. But nowadays scholars dash off books with incredible mistakes in them, and other scholars wait to catch them out in reviews, when by reading the manuscript in advance of publication they could have corrected them, cleared them up.

He abhorred academic controversy, and refused to become involved in it. Despite his close ties with the participants, he took no public part in the battles of the late 1950s between Trevor-Roper and Toynbee or Taylor, or between Butterfield and Namier's followers. He once gave his reasons for this reluctance:

When I was an undergraduate, we had a very eminent speaker at a college society . . . After he had finished speaking, like a typical undergraduate—and scholars today—I stood up and made a pretty little attack on his speech, which I concluded by quoting a line from Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Patience': 'Nonsense, yes, perhaps—but oh, what precious nonsense'. To my great amazement, the eminent speaker dissolved into tears.²

¹ G. N. Clark, *The Seventeenth Century* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1947), 99.

² Ved Mehta, *Fly and the Fly-bottle: encounters with British intellectuals* (London and Boston, 1963), 247–8.

After that, Clark confessed, he had only become involved in two minor controversies, one of which was still-born since his opponent died before he had an opportunity to reply!

This should not be taken to suggest that Clark lacked fire or fight. He gave extensive support to a wide range of causes. To give three examples from the academic field: in the 1920s he laboured to improve the Oxford tutorial system; in 1930, as a member of the Bodleian extension committee, he visited several European countries and the United States in order to see how other library systems worked and to find the best model for Oxford; and in the 1950s he supported the efforts of a group of young dons to create a special subject in the history of science, despite the indifference and hostility of many senior members of the Faculty. Clark never forgot that history is but a part of human knowledge. He could make use not only of foreign languages, but also foreign disciplines. In one of his later works, *The Campden Wonder*, he wrote (p. 2): 'Historians are not an isolated body: they are one formation in the vast army of organised thought.' And he secured chapters by a distinguished legal historian and by a noted psychologist, in order to shed a new light on this complex mystery. That delightful book shows the historian acting—quite properly—just like a fictional detective: unravelling evidence with clarity and order, calling in expert witnesses, summing up the balance of probabilities with fairness and firmness. It was a typical example of Clark's style: modest, clear, convincing. In his last book he wrote: 'Reading English history is an inexhaustible source of enjoyment.' One could say the same for any history written by Sir George Clark.

GEOFFREY PARKER

PUBLISHED WORK

Since no complete bibliography of Sir George Clark's work has been published, it seems proper to include one here. It does not include reviews and other notices of books: most of these are in the *English Historical Review*, others in *History*, the *Cambridge Historical Journal*, the *Economic History Review*, the *Economic Journal*, the *Journal of Theological Studies*, the *Oxford Magazine*, and the *Listener*. They are all signed or initialled, except for a few 'short notices' in the *English Historical Review*. The only unsigned review he ever wrote could not be signed because it appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Also not included are short articles in the *Oriel Record*, and obituary notices in *The Times*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Agenda*, *Balliol Record*, and elsewhere.¹

¹ This bibliography is based on the typescript list attached by Sir George Clark to his 'Notes on my Education and Historical Studies' mentioned above.

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