NORMAN GASH

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1912–2009

Born on 16 January 1912 at Meerut, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Norman Gash was one of seven children, two of whom died in infancy; his mother Kate Hunt, a bootmaker's daughter, had married his father Frederick Gash in 1902. From a family long established as agricultural labourers in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, Frederick was stationed in Meerut. Rising from private to regimental sergeant major in the Royal Berkshire Regiment, he retired from the army in 1921, and then worked for the Inland Revenue. So authoritarian was he that his son, even when a professor in his forties, would be summoned when needed with the cry 'Boy! Boy!' Yet Norman was deeply upset when his father died, and in 1982 asked a colleague, then about to visit India, to find the elderly Sikh ex-soldier who maintained the baptismal font in Meerut's old Garrison Church, and 'give him some annas from me'. The favourite children were (for Frederick) the eldest, Billy; and (for Kate) the youngest, Tim. So Norman's childhood saw relative emotional deprivation. All the Gash children received a good education, however, and Norman attended two elementary schools in Reading, Wilson Road School and Palmer School, before winning a scholarship to Reading School, an ancient grammar school. There he excelled at Latin, French and English, canvassed for the Liberal Party, and published at seventeen in the school magazine a rather mannered but eloquent and learned essay on 'Meredith's and Hardy's conception of Napoleon'. Yet in this somewhat cold, unpolished, and unintellectual family, scholarly achievement did not improve relations with his brothers; their uncomprehending reaction was more to jeer than tease. Norman escaped into books, taking them with him on solitary cycle

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rides in the country, and later on solitary cycling holidays. A lifelong pattern was already established: emotional and intellectual self-sufficiency combined with an almost obsessive valuation of his privacy.

A Sir Thomas White scholarship from Reading School took Norman to St John's College, Oxford (founded by White) in 1930 with fifty-two others, and in 1933 he won a First in modern history. He and his fellow-historians owed much to the well-known history tutor W. C. Costin, and included Frank Barlow (launched with a First as a distinguished medieval historian), the prominent civil servant Sir Martin Flett (also with a First), Norman's friend Arnold Taylor (later Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings, nursed by Norman through examination nerves into a Second), and C. L. Mowat (also with a Second, and later a pioneer of contemporary British history); one other among his history contemporaries won a Second and two got Thirds. Gash was for two seasons in the College's football team and was elected to its Essay Society, yet his undergraduate life was not happy, perhaps because his rough-edged personality and manners ill-suited what was then a highly class-conscious community. None the less, he embarked on a B.Litt. thesis, supervised by the Oxford agricultural historian Reginald Lennard, on 'The rural unrest in England in 1830 with special reference to Berkshire'. A fast worker, he had completed it by 1934. His topic reflected his local roots and loyalties, and decades later Douglas Hurd, who knew the area well, could detect in Gash's accent a Berkshire flavour.[1]

Situating the unrest geographically in its agricultural and poor-law context, Gash found that 'everywhere poverty was the driving force behind the riots'. Owing little to outside influences or radical agitators, the labourers were uniformly practical in their grievances: 'there should be work for all, and … all work should be justly rewarded'. In a fractured society, the gentry were losing influence to farmers who increasingly substituted commercial for traditionalist values. Symbolic of this was the farmers' treatment of their men in winter, when poverty was at its worst: as one labourer said, 'they keep us here like potatoes in a pit and only take us out for use when they can no longer do without us'. Gash thought the less literate labourers naive to expect the authorities' sympathy and even endorsement for their protests, yet noted that the justices were more lenient to the rioters

[1] Brian Harrison's interview with Lord Hurd, 10 Sept. 2010. This memoir relies heavily upon Brian Harrison's interviews and correspondence with Norman Gash's relatives, colleagues and students. Though they are too numerous to mention here, we are deeply grateful to them all. The footnotes indicate where any individual has been quoted.

than central government recommended, even bringing pressure to bear upon the farmers. From its epigraph onwards, Gash's thesis showed marked sympathy with the rioters: they were neither vindictive nor thirsting for violence.[2] The one publication growing out of the thesis was Gash's short article on 'Rural unemployment, 1815–34' in the *Economic History Review* for October 1935. There he saw the labourers as 'not entirely unreasonable' in regarding threshing machines as a primary cause of unemployment and poverty in winter. For the most serious riots in the county, at Kintbury, the death sentence was pronounced upon three rioters, but it was implemented in 1831 only on William Winterbourne: 'life had not dealt so tenderly with him', wrote Gash, 'for death at last to hold much bitterness' (p. 79). As for agricultural labourers who chose to emigrate, 'those who know the conservatism and intense local feeling of country people, can appreciate the courage and the sacrifice involved in such a decision. It was a venture undertaken only by a valiant few' (p. 85).

With hindsight, the thesis is remarkable in at least three respects. First, its empathy with organised labour in its more primitive forms was more akin to a paternalist Tory Radical or leftish orientation than to the Peelite Conservatism whose historian Gash became, and still less to the free-market Thatcherism that he later espoused. No doubt such empathy owed much to the Hammonds, whose *Village Labourer* (London, 1911) is the one secondary source Gash's bibliography cites. Second, the thesis anticipates in its agenda, its technique, and its findings the historiography of the Sixties.[3] Its attempt to interpret popular protest from the inside, its geographical and even topographical approach, and its embracing of a highly analytic and close-textured social history became fashionable only decades later. Its resourceful research involved consulting original records for Berkshire in the County Record Office and in what was then the Public Record Office in London, together with Berkshire newspapers and parliamentary papers. Its eighty-five single-spaced pages with four learned appendixes and a set of maps were a labour of love, and Gash typed it himself. It has been frequently sought out: consultations before November 1972 are not recorded, but fifty-one people read it between then and February 2011, a large number for a B.Litt. thesis examined in 1934. Why, then, was it never published? The Oxford University Press did after all publish Beloff's *Public Order and Popular Disturbances 1660–1714* in 1938.

[2] Quotations from, respectively, pp. 33, 37, 22; see also pp. 6, 8, 11, 13, 59–60, 68, 74–7.
[3] See, for example, E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969), pp. 180, 203, 288 on the limited nature and incidence of violence and arson.

Gash's reception from the examiners, J. L. Hammond and G. N. Clark, may provide the answer. Their report was bland enough: his research was assiduous, his interpretation original, and his style and arrangement 'well up to the required standard'.[4] Years later, however, Gash complained that Lennard had known too little about his subject, and that in the oral examination Clark (whose views before 1914 on Oxfordshire's class relations had been far more radical than anything in Gash's thesis) had been aggressive and inaccurate in his criticisms.[5]

Gash taught for two terms at Clayesmore School, Iwerne Minster, and first met his first wife, (Ivy) Dorothy Whitehorn, at a gathering of Oxford undergraduates from Reading. After holding a scholarship at the girls' section of Christ's Hospital, she was reading French at St Hugh's College, Oxford, and a contemporary told Gash afterwards that on this occasion he had behaved badly to her. To apologise, he invited her out to tea, and soon fell deeply in love. He persuaded her to abandon her studies before her Finals term; to fund this term she would have been required to teach in a school for two years, which precluded marriage. They married on 1 August 1935. It was a union of opposites: she spontaneous, good-looking, vivacious, gossipy, opinionated and fun: he quiet, measured and scholarly. She fascinated him, and the marriage went ahead despite hostility from both Gashes and Whitehorns. Education had enabled both families to rise in the world, but the Whitehorns had risen further, and to them Gash seemed bad mannered: as her mother told Dorothy, 'he may be a diamond, darling, but he's a very *rough* diamond'. Dorothy's young husband felt socially insecure, and she gave him polish: 'you've done wonders with him', his history master at Reading School, J. W. Saunders, confided to her when visiting several years into the marriage. Gash gradually developed a courteous manner towards women which in later life seemed old-fashioned and even unintentionally patronising. He preferred the separation of spheres then usual in academic circles: children and housekeeping were the wife's responsibility, men did the breadwinning. Dorothy received an allowance which was not always updated for inflation. She was an excellent housekeeper, cook and hostess, and did much to smooth his way. Though never overtly feminist, she eventually came to regret his curtailing her degree course, and often felt lonely and unfulfilled.

[4] Oxford University Archives: Modern History agenda papers 1934 (OUA, FA 4/11/2/9), f. 186 Examiners' report in Clark's hand. We are grateful to the University Archivist Simon Bailey for generous help here.

[5] Brian Harrison's interview with Professor Bruce Lenman, 5 Oct. 2010.

A secure income was now essential, and Gash explored several options before getting on to what later seemed the right track. He hankered to write fiction: the half-written novel begun in the 1930s was discarded after the war, but in the 1970s he published four short stories with a Buchan flavour in *Blackwood's Magazine* under the pseudonym 'William Hunt'. He considered joining the Indian Civil Service, but thought it doomed, and disliked the idea of the home civil service.[6] He wanted to write, and was enabled to do so as temporary lecturer in history (1935–6) at the University of Edinburgh and as Assistant Lecturer (1936–40) at University College London under Sir John Neale. Gash soon settled upon his lifetime preoccupation: the early nineteenth-century aristocratic political system whose values his thesis had defended against the Webbs and Hammonds. The Peel papers in the British Museum nearby were a goldmine. He exploited them in two short articles for the *English Historical Review*;[7] and his two articles of 1938–9 in lesser-known Oxford periodicals first brought Peel to the fore.[8] Already evident was his skilful and meticulous integration (more widely publicised from 1953 in his *Politics in the Age of Peel*) of research in leading politicians' papers and in constituency sources.

For some months the Gashes lived in Exeter, where University College was evacuated. Norman Gash disliked Neale's authoritarian style, which lacked any paternalist justification. The distaste was mutual: in a much retailed episode, Neale told Barlow in a urinal that his assistant lectureship could not be renewed, 'nor Gash's, for that matter, although I can say to you what I could not say to Gash, that you are a good scholar'.[9] War closes many options but opens others, and to Gash and Barlow it offered liberation: on the day after war was declared, they went to the local recruitment office to join up. Many years later Gash explained how they had been turned away with 'we won't be calling up gentlemen for a while yet, sir',[10] so as poor eyesight ruled out his first choice (the navy), he volunteered in 1940 to enlist as a private in the army. He could now make his

[6] Here we draw upon ff. 3–4 of Professor W. Arnstein's typescript interview with Gash on 10 June 1985 which he generously made available to us, and which lay behind his essay 'Norman Gash. Peelite' in his *Recent Historians of Great Britain. Essays on the Post-1945 Generation* (Ames, IO, 1990), pp. 147–72.

[7] 'Ashley and the Conservative Party', *English Historical Review*, 53 (1938), 679–81; 'The influence of the Crown at Windsor and Brighton in the elections of 1832, 1835, and 1837', *English Historical Review*, 54 (1939), 653–63.

[8] 'Oxford politics in the Chancellor's election of 1834', *Oxford Magazine*, 28 Apr., 543–4 and 5 May 1938, 574–5; 'Peel and the Oxford University election of 1829', *Oxoniensia*, 4 (1939), 162–73.

[9] P. Collinson, *The History of a History Man* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 79.

[10] Geoffrey Parker, email to Brian Harrison, 10 Dec. 2010.

own way within the army on merit, like his father; given that his father was recalled as RSM during the war, enlisting as a private had the additional advantage of avoiding potential family embarrassment. As a good linguist, however, Gash could not remain a private for long, and in 1941–3 he served as an intelligence officer at HQ Southern Command, then on the General Staff (War Office) in 1943–6. He was well qualified, as his German was good: in 1930 he had used a leaving scholarship to take a six-month German language and literature course in the University of Berlin, and when at Oxford he had joined a reading party in the Black Forest. He joined MI14 (the department concerned with intelligence about Germany) and focused on the Waffen SS.

This was a difficult time for Dorothy: her husband spent long hours away on secret work which he could not discuss; they lived in London during the bombing; in 1945 their flat was wrecked in a rocket attack; and in 1944 and 1946, respectively, their two daughters Harriet and Sarah were born. At least as alarming for Dorothy must have been Gash's intelligence work in Germany immediately after the war. Stories of Gash's speeding into Berlin across Russian-occupied Germany on his motor-bike seemed incongruous to subsequent acquaintances, yet hearsay evidence suggests that through interviews he was (among other duties) gathering information on events in the bunker shortly before Hitler's suicide. When compiling his *The Last Days of Hitler* (London, 1947), Hugh Trevor-Roper used the report compiled by himself and fellow intelligence officers without acknowledging colleagues' roles. Many years later, several of Gash's academic colleagues independently recall his indignant claims about his substantial and unacknowledged contribution to the report. Gash was not the sort of man to make such claims lightly, but he never provided or preserved a written record of his role, and no independent evidence corroborating his claims has been found. Trevor-Roper's *Last Days* is so brilliantly and distinctively Trevor-Roper's that Gash's claims can refer only to the book's raw material. Though he shared Trevor-Roper's Conservative alignment, three factors may have fuelled Gash's long-standing distaste for the man: Gash's upright and patriotic reticence, which chimed in with a secretive temperament; an inevitable ignorance about how the secret service had itself encouraged Trevor-Roper to publish the book under his own name; and a failure to recognise how limited was Trevor-Roper's freedom in 1946–7 to publicise the names of colleagues. Compiling for a world readership a document with a vital practical purpose, he was far indeed from wishing to prepare an academic article respectably peppered with footnotes freely acknowledging help from others. Yet such restraints need

not have shaped the book's many later editions because Trevor-Roper's former tutors included J. C. Masterman, whose *Double Cross System* (London, 1972) opened up wartime intelligence to public view.

The war's many other consequences for Gash included an enhanced taste for the military virtues; the latter led him to provide much-valued insider help to the Officer Training Corps from the 1950s as Convenor of St Andrews University's Military Education Committee. When asked in 1946 by the head of the university's history department Professor Williams why he wanted its advertised lectureship, Gash is said to have disarmingly and puzzlingly replied that he was not sure that he did, yet he got the job. This remark may reflect the marked salary cut involved, and perhaps also his equivocal experience of pre-war academic life in Oxford, Edinburgh, Exeter, and London. However, once appointed, he threw himself into the task; indeed, as with many in his generation this was essential if he was to recoup six lost years of academic study. The early years at St Andrews were happier for Dorothy, who enjoyed entertaining young people and visitors, saw more of her husband, and helped him in his first book with proofreading and constructive suggestions; she was one of two singled out in the book for generous acknowledgement. Gash took a genuine interest in his students and postgraduates as individuals, holding coffee evenings in his home for those in his pastoral care, and later taking them sailing in the Dysart yawl which he owned in the late 1950s.

With his articles on the Conservative Party manager 'F. R. Bonham' in the *English Historical Review* for 1948 and on 'Peel and the party system 1830–50' in the Royal Historical Society's *Transactions* for 1951, Gash sketched out much of the ground his publications covered later, and in the second he brought out the themes that he soon rendered familiar: the consistency of Peel's objectives, his determination to ensure stable government in difficult times, and hence his subordination of party to what he saw as the national interest. It now seems extraordinary that Gash submitted the book which made his name, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (London, 1953), to twelve publishers before Longmans Green took it.[11] In its three parts, 496 pages, and ten appendixes, it developed its major theme: the fact that 'landmarks are usually more conspicuous at a distance than close at hand', and that 'turning-points rarely show any abrupt change'.[12] For Gash the first Reform Act exemplified the continuity in British politics that he so valued, though he was not the first to pursue this line: J. R. M. Butler, for

[11] Arnstein interview, f. 5.
[12] *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p. x (Introduction).

one, in his classic study published in 1914, saw the Bill as a measure designed to perpetuate aristocratic rule.[13] But until 1953 there was no full-length, thoroughly documented study of politics at national and local level which forced the point home. Governments might move more warily after 1832, but both before and after that year small pocket boroughs, corrupt constituencies open to the highest bidder, extensive political patronage, electoral violence and bribery all persisted, together with the monarch's electoral involvement.

Part 1 ('The representative system') drew heavily and fruitfully on parliamentary debates, but the book was especially pathbreaking in its second section ('The working of the system'). There Gash carried his investigation down to the humblest levels of day-to-day party-political practice, with studies of electoral expenditure, violence, 'influence' and corruption. As recently as 1950 J. A. Thomas had found it 'curious that so little attention has been paid, by historians and political theorists, to the rise of party organization in Britain':[14] three years later he could not have written thus. Spurning facile generalisation, alert to local diversity, the book provided brisk well-informed vignettes of individuals where needed, but focused primarily upon evoking lost values and forgotten patterns of conduct as seen through an empathetic, non-censorious, almost social-anthropological eye. Its third section ('Direction from above'), looser in structure than its precursors, returned to the national level, and described how the parties tried to control the new situation through exercising political patronage, court 'influence', and the formation of party clubs. Oddly truncated, the book lacked an integrating conclusion. And yet the conclusion was in a sense subsequently provided by others, for this was one of those books which, with few secondary sources to draw upon, prompt their rapid creation. *Politics in the Age of Peel* prised open a whole new research area. It was Gash's personal influence which in the 1950s urged E. J. Feuchtwanger to write about urban Conservatism;[15] and it was from Gash's work that J. R. Vincent, K. T. Hoppen, Royden Harrison, D. A. Hamer and many others took their cues for transcending 'constitutional' history through studying political practice.

It was often alleged that Lewis Namier provided Gash's inspiration, yet Gash's work is more akin to Moisei Ostrogorski's, though the latter

[13] *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* (London, 1914), p. 266.

[14] 'The system of registration and development of party organisation, 1832–1870', *History*, 35 (1950), 81.

[15] Letter to Brian Harrison, 28 Sept. 2010. We are grateful for Dr Feuchtwanger's letter and for his permission to cite it.

nowhere features in Gash's indexes. Namier does not feature in the index to *Politics in the Age of Peel*, which Gash had largely drafted before reading Namier's *Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London, 1929). While respecting Namier, Gash did not view himself as a disciple, and criticised Namier's approach to politicians' motives, his valuation of collective biography, and his faith in collaborative research. Only after his first book was published did Gash make personal contact with Namier, whose respect for Gash stemmed from their experience in jointly examining Manchester students.[16] Gash contributed to *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (London, 1956) on 'English reform and French revolution in the general election of 1830'. This was an incisive appendage to both Gash's B.Litt. thesis and his *Politics in the Age of Peel*. It exemplifies how Gash in his prime could combine economical argumentation with deep knowledge of the British electoral system, at local and national levels, to crack a clearly delimited problem. Little more than a quarter of the seats in England and Wales had been contested in 1830, nor was there any chronological fit between the revolution and its British domestic impact. Long before 1830, Roman Catholic emancipation had opened the way to parliamentary reform, and the new government was formed on the day after the riots in Paris, yet by then most of the electoral contests were over. Only after the election did Radicals liken English reform to French revolution; it was widely assumed in Britain that France was merely catching up with England's revolution in 1688; and during the election campaign domestic issues predominated. Dr Quinault's critique of Gash's article rightly stresses the scale of the revolution's overall impact on Britain, but Gash would have agreed.[17] His concern was, rightly or wrongly, to focus more sharply on the election itself, as one would expect from the historian of the electoral system, and his aim was characteristically and convincingly to illustrate how complex was the early nineteenth-century relationship between public opinion and public policy.

In the *Times Literary Supplement* on 3 July 1953 Roger Fulford's two-page review of *Politics in the Age of Peel* offered 'the warmest acclamation' to the book's 'unflagging skill and zest' in unravelling a complex area of British history. But instead of advancing further along his pioneering path, Gash in his next major work *Mr. Secretary Peel. The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830* (London, 1961) and *Sir Robert Peel. The Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830* (London, 1972) for a second time in his career as historian

[16] This discussion owes much to Brian Harrison's interview with the late Professor F. A. Dreyer on 16 Dec. 2010 and to Hamish Scott's e-mail of 5 Apr. 2011.

[17] 'The French Revolution of 1830 and parliamentary reform', *History*, 79 (1994), 377–93.

stepped back to take a more traditional course: this time into high-political biography. In doing so, he did not anticipate the insights of Cowling and Vincent into the complexities and mixed motives of politicians manoeuvring within a closed system: Gash's focus rested upon a single individual, his relationship to policy and to a single political party. Nor is there any echo here of Namier's rather cynical outlook on the political process, for Gash's politicians, most notably Peel, are committed to public service, as highlighted by the biography's epigraph: they are doing their best in very difficult social and constitutional circumstances. A new biography was much needed. Among the big Victorian political biographies, C. S. Parker's three-decker on Peel (*Sir Robert Peel from his Private Papers*: London, 1891–9) was a Trabant, not a Rolls Royce, and the biographies by Anna Ramsay (*Sir Robert Peel*: London, 1928) and Kitson Clark (*Peel and the Conservative Party*: London, 1929) did not rise fully to the occasion. Much as he admired Kitson Clark, a dedicatee of his *Aristocracy and People* (London, 1979), Gash found this 'very Christian gentleman' too moralistic in his perspective, with 'no feel for the real problems of politics'.[18]

Where Gash's biography did innovate, by mid-twentieth-century standards, was in its scale. Of the fifteen prime ministers from Liverpool to Salisbury, only four received authorised biographies in fewer than two volumes, but eleven of the seventeen from Salisbury to Callaghan. Asquith's biography (Spender and Asquith, *Life of Henry Herbert Asquith*: London, 1932) was the last in the two-decker mould: twentieth-century prime ministers have received on average half as many volumes in their authorised biographies as his predecessors. With his two volumes on Peel, however, Gash was doing for political biography what Michael Holroyd was simultaneously doing for literary biography: restoring the genre to its Victorian scale. The complaint that Gash did not sufficiently control his material in the last part of *Politics in the Age of Peel* reappeared in criticism of his 1965 Ford lectures,[19] but biography relieves this problem by prescribing its own shape, and in its 1,436 pages Gash's two-volume *Peel* adopts a broadly chronological arrangement. Especially in the first volume it opened up neglected areas of Peel's career: his private life, marriage, friendships, aesthetic interests and intellectual connections. None the less, Gash's perspective as biographer is, like Peel's, 'executive and governmental'.[20]

[18] Arnstein interview, f. 5
[19] D. Beales in *Historical Journal*, 10 (1967), 314.
[20] Gash, *Peel*, II. 707.

The biography highlights the neglected importance of Peel's period as Chief Secretary for Ireland (1812–18), and always stresses the complexity of a governmental structure which reformers were complicating still further. In a society changing at an unprecedented rate, Gash's small group of beleaguered politicians struggles to operate a political system with its earlier props removed. Peterloo is barely mentioned, and Irish unrest during the Napoleonic wars and after is, like Chartism, seen as a 'problem' for government to tackle. Beset by irresponsible backbenchers and by fractious and uncomprehending monarchs with waning electoral influence, Gash's men of government deploy party structures with only precarious control over an increasingly restive public opinion. Yet in 1890 W. E. Gladstone had famously and somewhat mischievously remarked that 'in point of ability and efficiency … the country had never been better governed than in the period preceding the first Reform Bill'.[21] Gash was intrigued to see how it was done, and in his *Peel* he seemed at times to be combining two books in one: an account of Peel's career, but also a manual of statesmanship with Peel as exemplar, Peel's 'maxims and reflections' being deployed in six pages at the end of the second volume.

Gash tried not only to see the problems of government through Peel's eyes, but felt an instinctive sympathy with the sheer difficulty of governing in any period, an outlook that fell increasingly out of fashion during his career. 'In terms of mental capacity alone', Gash wrote, Peel 'was one of the ablest prime ministers in British history';[22] his 'master passion in politics', however, was not theory, but 'the desire to get things done', and he aimed always for 'the practical measure rather than … the political gesture'.[23] He 'throve on power, responsibility and action', his 'fundamental courage and … spirit' were evoked by 'action and responsibility, especially when spiced with danger'.[24] By 1817 Peel had perfected his administrative technique: first question the knowledgeable to collect the relevant facts, then use them to test generalities and opinions, then pursue consensus pragmatically through a judicious compromise which gets people to work together, then reach a decision only cautiously and slowly, aim to present it as a middle course, choose effective agents through recognising that 'the great art of government' is 'to work by such instruments as the world supplies', and then act energetically once decision has been reached: 'Facts

[21] C. R. L. F[letcher], *Mr. Gladstone at Oxford. 1890* (1908), p. 43.
[22] Gash, *Peel*, I. 712.
[23] Ibid., II. 711, 297.
[24] Ibid., II. xvii; I. 548.

are ten times more valuable than declamations' said Peel.[25] Gash illustrates Peel's methods by dwelling upon his successful introduction of the Metropolitan Police, on his penal reforms and on his Forgery Bill when Home Secretary (1822–7, 1828–30), and likewise on his constructive approach to Irish policy and banking reform when prime minister (1841–6). Although public opinion was for Peel 'something to scrutinise rather than to follow', his 'sense of timing … was one of his superlative qualities as a politician'.[26]

Gash credits Peel with setting up the mid-Victorian 'age of equipoise', a workable settlement that had never been inevitable. He presents Peel's government of 1841–6 as more effective than its Whig precursors in enforcing public order while tackling the underlying causes of unrest. Peel's doubts in 1842, that perilous year, about the continued viability of the Corn Laws indicated that 'not Ireland but the Condition of England Question was the underlying motive' for their repeal. Paisley was 'a town that haunted Peel all through 1842', and his courageous reintroduction of the income tax enabled him to pursue the cheap government, free trade and lower taxes that the Chartists wanted, for they 'were, in fiscal matters at least, good Peelites'. Gash later claimed that Peel's budgets of 1842, 1845 and 1846 probably 'did more for the working classes of Britain than all Shaftesbury's reforms put together'.[27] The invitation to deliver Oxford's Ford Lectures in 1964, which Gash proudly accepted, enabled him to consolidate this position at the denominational and party-political levels. Published as *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics 1832–1852* (Oxford, 1965), the lectures explained how Peel and the Whigs marginalised militant dissent and energised the established church by pressing it to make concessions at its weak points, creating 'in the complex, divided, and emotional society of early Victorian England a kind of self-acting principle of equilibrium which prevented any party or interest from gaining too much power'.[28] In party politics, too, consolidation and a move from the extremes towards the centre had occurred in the Reform Act's aftermath, with the Whigs digesting their radicals and the Conservatives digesting their Ultras. A rather carping anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* (14 April 1966, p. 331) regretted the lectures' somewhat myopic focus, but could not deny Gash's mastery of his subject

[25] Gash, *Peel*, II. 717; I. 226.
[26] Ibid., I. 4; II. 615.
[27] Ibid., II. 554, 358, 362; Gash, *Aristocracy and People. Britain 1815–1865* (first pub. 1979, pbk edn. 1987), p. 4.
[28] Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics 1832–1852*, p. 91.

matter; J. R. Vincent saw them as providing 'a classical example of the genre of consolidation, of scholarship recollected in tranquillity, which Ford lectures ideally should provide'.[29]

Peel's consensual omelette required him to break party eggs: for him 'the essence of Conservatism was a governmental ethic and not a party interest', and in his parlance the word 'mere' often preceded the word 'party'. The need in dangerous times to strengthen the executive accentuated in Peel the tendency among so many prime ministers to gravitate towards seeing themselves as national rather than partisan leaders. For Gash the paradox of Peel's position lay in his role as 'defender of a system of which he was the intellectual critic and active reformer; which he upheld in principle and amended in detail'. [30] Gash fully acknowledged how serious was the friction between Peel and his party well before 1846. In forcing the House of Commons in 1844 to reverse its vote on the sugar duties, for instance, Peel's manner 'was sharp and offensive, and he spoke as though completely detached from the benches behind him', handling the episode 'as badly as any in his long parliamentary career'.[31] He 'tended to overestimate the influence of reason in human affairs', seeming sometimes 'more anxious to win support among his opponents than to make friends among his supporters'.[32] Overworked, plagued by hearing problems, and alert to the scale of national dangers, Peel in his stiff pride grew increasingly impatient with the backbenchers on whom he depended.

Where does this leave him in Conservative Party history? Not seriously damaged for, on the widest definition of Conservatism, Gash's Peel even in 1846 was promoting its long-term interests: his Conservatism 'was not a party label, still less a class interest, but an instinct for continuity and the preservation of order and government in a society . . . confronted with the choice between adaptation or upheaval'.[33] Gash later claimed that 'Peel's diagnosis of the true interests of Conservatism cannot easily be faulted':[34] his strategy from 1830 safeguarded church, state, social stability, and aristocracy. Yet there were casualties from such an interpretation: not just Whigs and radicals, but broad swathes of his own party—Ultra Tories, Tory Radicals, Lord George Bentinck, Lord Shaftesbury, and above all

[29] *Victorian Studies*, 10 (1966), 89.
[30] N. Gash, 'Peel and the party system 1830–50', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 1 (1951), 56; Gash, *Peel*, II. xx.
[31] Gash, *Peel*, II. 450, 453.
[32] Ibid., II. 706.
[33] Ibid., I. 14.
[34] In R. A. Butler (ed.), *The Conservatives* (London, 1977), p. 104.

Disraeli. Gash later saw Bentinck as possessing 'few qualities necessary for a political leader and many which positively disqualified him for such a position'. It was 'at least arguable' that the savagery of protectionist attacks on Peel in 1846 had ultimately been counterproductive, failing to advance protectionism, further discrediting Disraeli, and inflaming ill-feeling within a party that long remained divided thereafter.[35] Gash had no time for Disraeli, 'the most cynical and unscrupulous of all the men who have held the leadership of the Conservative party'. Opportunistic in his quest for inter-party parliamentary alliances, short-term in his perspectives, bereft of constructive ideas on policy, unprincipled in pursuing his own career, Gash's Disraeli pursued power with 'very little notion of what to do when he had it'; if he led the Conservatives out of the wilderness, 'he had originally led them into it'.[36] He was 'essentially a comedian', 'a political impresario and actor-manager' and phrase-maker who bewitched posterity with the romance of his career, the glitter of his speeches, and the sparkle of his novels, for 'with posterity literature is more potent than history'. Hence Disraeli's prominence in Conservative historiography.[37] This view clashed with that of another glittering Victorian whom Gash undervalued—Walter Bagehot, whose diffuse but famous essay on 'The character of Sir Robert Peel' (1856) claimed that Peel lacked imagination and originality; Gash saw such complaints as betraying 'a curious misconception. A politician is not a mother but a midwife.'[38]

Gash conducted his defence of Peel as founder of the Conservative Party at a second level, by respectfully chronicling the long-distance voyage he devised for his party, trimming to catch the Liberal wind through a middle-class alignment. A class-hybrid himself, Peel was well equipped to stabilise aristocratic government by aligning aristocrats with the middle classes. It was 'a curious feature of the Conservative Party' that 'though its practice has almost invariably been Peelite, its myth has been largely Disraelian'. Because Disraeli's re-education of his party after 1846 'was inevitably a return to Peel's principles', Peel as founder of modern Conservatism was 'unchallengeable'.[39] Gash's was also the view taken by

[35] N. Gash, 'Lord George Bentinck and his sporting world', in N. Gash, *Pillars of Government and Other Essays on State and Society c.1770–1880* (London, 1986), p. 175; Butler (ed.), *The Conservatives*, p. 102.
[36] 'The founder of modern Conservatism [Peel]', *Solon* (Jan. 1970), 11.
[37] Quotations from Gash's 'Review of Blake's *Disraeli*', *English Historical Review*, 83 (1968), 363; *Solon* (Jan. 1970), 11.
[38] Gash, *Peel*, II. 711.
[39] *Solon* (Jan. 1970), 11; Gash, *Peel*, II. 709.

the prominent mid-twentieth century historians of Disraelian Conservatism, Robert Blake and Paul Smith.[40] Gash dismissed Young England as electorally impracticable, and Disraeli's franchise reform option of 1867 as 'an astounding piece of opportunism'. As for the 'Tory democratic' alternative taken by Disraeli's disciple Lord Randolph Churchill in the 1880s, it was merely 'pseudo-radical': the genuinely radical strategy was for 'a new line of policy which will outflank your opponents and force them back on the defensive'.[41] Lord Salisbury despised Peel, yet Gash thought that Salisbury 'in many respects … carried on the Peelite Conservative tradition': like Peel he invoked the state to improve the condition of the people, and like Peel he demonstrated 'that political pessimism and a sense of history could be combined with a shrewd grasp of electoral realities, utilitarian common sense, and active reform'.[42] Ultimately, then, the Conservatives 'returned to the road along which he [Peel] had guided them; but belatedly and without gratitude'.[43]

Gash's critique of Peel as party leader has already been noted, but Gash highlighted other faults too. Drawn from outside the aristocracy, Peel resented aspersions on his honour and integrity, and 'on several occasions his sharp and sometimes unreasonable resentment at insult led him to the time-honoured demand for satisfaction or apology'.[44] Peel's 'curious self-consciousness and lack of assurance … formed the one great flaw in his emotional equipment'.[45] Insecure in relation to his social superiors, he could be arrogantly dismissive of inferiors denied his financial security and educational background: Peel 'never had to struggle; and he had too much scorn for politicians who could less afford to be nice in the methods they used in making their careers'.[46] As an idealist in politics, with an 'ambition … not just for power but for the right use of power', Peel made enemies through his high-mindedness, and in lacking flexibility 'he lacked an instinct for political self-preservation' and skill 'at the manipulation of private interest for the public good which is an indispensable feature of representative politics'. Yet in outlining Peel's defects Gash often comes near to portraying them as virtues. In Peel's two notable reversals of

[40] Blake, *Disraeli* (first published, London, 1966, pbk edn. 1969), p. 211; Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform* (London, 1967), pp. 3–4.
[41] N. Gash, *The Radical Element in the History of the Conservative Party* (Swinton Lecture, Conservative Political Centre, 1989), pp. 7, 5.
[42] N. Gash, 'Review of Robert Taylor's *Lord Salisbury*', *Victorian Studies*, 20 (1977), 341.
[43] *Solon* (Jan. 1970), 18.
[44] Gash, *Peel*, II. 187, cf. 103.
[45] Ibid., I. 5.
[46] Ibid., I. 667.

view—on Catholic emancipation and the Corn Laws, for instance—'his sense of public duty drove him to take up large issues; his intelligence provided him with radical solutions; his integrity denied him ordinary safeguards'.[47] In truth, Peel became Gash's hero: 'to read some of his parliamentary speeches, still more some of his cabinet papers, is to be conscious … of an outstanding intellect at work. Few things are more impressive in an examination of Peel's career than the actual quality of mind which he brought to bear on every aspect of administration.'[48] Is it fanciful to detect an affinity between these two upwardly mobile but socially insecure men launched on the world from Oxford? Suffice it to say that, like many biographers who home down on one person, Gash eventually came to resemble his subject, evoking the sympathetic jokes which circulated widely among students at St Andrews.

Gash's indictment of Peel's contemporary critics was formidable, but given the British historiographical mood of the 1960s and after, so provocative a case could hardly go unchallenged. The challenge had been mounted by Disraeli: when confronted by Peel's high-mindedness, he had seen the roots of political integrity as being institutional rather than personal: it was 'only by maintaining the independence of party that you can maintain the integrity of public men'.[49] Peel, by contrast—in pursuing consensus, national rather than party interest, and ultimately coalition—undermined the directness of Parliament's responsibility to the electors. As for Peel's twentieth-century critics, even Blake thought there was 'a better case for dating the modern Conservative party from 1846 than from 1832',[50] if only because Peel as leader had failed to prevent a major split; from 1846 there emerged what was in effect a different party with the same name. The Whigs, too, had their defenders. Reviewing *Reaction and Reconstruction*, Derek Beales praised Gash's deep learning in the parliamentary politics of the period, but thought the contribution made by the Whigs (especially Lord John Russell) to the mid-Victorian compromise more positive than Peel's: 'the book's greatest weakness … lies in its author's strong Conservative bias'.[51] Beales and Boyd Hilton later adduced statistics to show that as the criminal law worked out in practice, the Whigs

[47] Quotations from Gash, *Peel*, II. xvii, 706.
[48] Ibid., p. 712.
[49] W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli* (first published London, 1910–20, rev. 2-vol. edn. 1929), I. 754–5 (speech on 22 Jan. 1846, countering Peel).
[50] R. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London, 1985), pp. 58–9.
[51] *Historical Journal*, 10 (1967), 314.

(and especially Russell as Home Secretary, 1835–9) contributed far more to mitigating its severity than Peel's much-lauded legislation.[52]

Gash's view of Peel as founder of modern Conservatism was also readily challenged. What precisely was involved in 'founding' the party? How could Peel be credited with the growth in the 1830s of a party grass-roots organisation which sprang up largely spontaneously from below? Could Peel really be exonerated from seriously damaging his party when in the mid-1840s he almost wilfully accentuated its internal divisions? Was he not partly to blame for its languishing in opposition for nearly three decades after 1846? Gash did not conceal the fact that Peel spent four years 'propping up a Whig administration' (1846–50); that 'the natural outcome' of twenty-five years of weak government would have been Peel's consent (if he had survived beyond 1850) to head a coalition of Whig and Peelite Liberals; and that Peel's leading disciples gravitated not to the Conservative but to the Liberal party.[53] Hence Peel's subsequent neglect by his party: his name 'Salisbury and Balfour could hardly bear to hear mentioned, regarding him as little better than a traitor'.[54] Gash himself later scaled down Peel's role from the opposite end by including Liverpool with Peel as 'the great though unacknowledged architects of the liberal, free-trade Victorian state',[55] unacknowledged, because unintended.

Bruce Coleman's *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1988) unobtrusively challenged Gash by stressing the need for a closer and more sympathetic focus on the party's periods out of power and on its rank-and-file, though Coleman scarcely mentions Gash by name.[56] More direct was the challenge from Hilton. Like many young history postgraduates in his day, he found Gash's work stimulating, and in 1979 referred to Gash's 'marvellous biography'.[57] Gash had been one of the two examiners for Hilton's Oxford doctoral thesis (1973), which in 1977 became his first book: *Corn, Cash, Commerce. The Economic Policies of the Tory Governments 1815–1830* (Oxford, 1977). Hilton and Gash both knew that Peel as early as 1830 favoured restoring the income tax as facilitating a tariff-cutting programme.[58] They disagreed only on how far Peel's

[52] Beales, *Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 880: cf. B. Hilton, 'The gallows and Mr. Peel', in T. C. W. Blanning and D. Cannadine (eds.), *History and Biography. Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 91.
[53] Gash, 'Peel and the party system 1830–50', 69; *Solon* (Jan. 1970), 12.
[54] B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1840* (Oxford, 2006), p. 513.
[55] Gash, *Lord Liverpool* (London, 1984), p. 253.
[56] See especially pp. 4–5.
[57] B. Hilton, 'Peel: a reappraisal', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), 588.
[58] Gash, *Peel*, I. 618; II. 299. Hilton, 'Peel: a reappraisal', 606.

economic outlook had been fully formed by the early 1820s. Hilton emphasised that Peel's doubts about preserving the corn laws also dated from the 1820s, and constituted a potential source of division within his Party that was masked in the 1830s by the salience of franchise and Church issues. When later in the decade such issues faded from prominence, and when Whig/Liberal commitment to free trade advanced, the protection issue increasingly threatened Conservative unity.

At the general election of 1841 Peel publicly upheld protection, and at this point the disagreement between Hilton and Gash opens out. Whereas Gash's Peel gradually thereafter became more flexible on the Corn Laws, Hilton's Peel had been flexible all along, though only in his own mind: on the Corn Laws in 1841, as on Catholic emancipation in 1829, Peel's resolute public stance diverged from his private views.[59] As with most politicians, Peel's public statements could not be taken at face value: he was 'uncandid and self-deceiving', says Hilton, and 'ideologically so reticent that his beliefs and assumptions have often to be inferred (with caution) from those of his closest associates'.[60] Hilton's Peel remained in 1841 what he had been in the 1820s: not pragmatic, but doctrinaire: not Cobdenite but 'liberal tory'; that is to say Malthusian, moralistic, providentialist, and ultimately pessimistic on prospects for sustained economic growth. Not until later in his 1841–6 ministry does Hilton's Peel find in the 'condition of England question' and the Irish famine, with help from the Anti-Corn Law League, a heaven-sent opportunity to emerge in his true colours, and repeal the Corn Laws in 1846. If Gash saw Peel as gradually and incrementally moving towards repeal in an empirical response to what he saw as changing circumstances, with a liberal-Conservative destination in the longer term, Hilton saw repeal as the logical end-point of a political economy that Peel had espoused since 1819. The secularised and more optimistic ideology of free trade that Cobden was advancing in the early 1840s, later espoused by Gladstone, never captured Peel the liberal Tory. For him, free trade duly rewarded intelligence and hard work, and rendered the economy natural by removing the artificial stimulus of protection; but he never claimed that it would bring economic growth or even stability.[61]

Gash had impatiently dismissed Bagehot's interpretation of Peel: 'rarely can such a clever character sketch by such an intelligent man have been

[59] B. Hilton, 'The ripening of Robert Peel', in M. Bentley (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine. Essays in British History Presented to Maurice Cowling* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 70–1.
[60] 'Peel: a reappraisal', 605, 606.
[61] Ibid., 612–14.

based on such false premises'.[62] Not only had Bagehot exaggerated the importance in politics of constructive imagination (as distinct from administrative and executive skills): he too readily implied that Peel should have moved faster towards the obvious Liberal destination, an assumption that left no ongoing role for 'liberal Conservatism' as a distinct grouping or political location. For Hilton, however, it is the moral imperatives of free trade that shape Peel's stance in 1845–6, not 'the claptrap about a new conservatism, based on national consensus, sound government, and universal caring'.[63] Hilton therefore shares with Blake the view that the Conservative Party of Derby and Disraeli was not Peel's, but a reinvented party. Not till the 1920s did historians begin to think otherwise, and rediscover Peel as ancestor of a party whose anti-socialism was by then causing it to cultivate Liberal individualist recruits.[64] For Hilton, therefore, Peel could be seen as founder of the Conservative Party only through bypassing a large Liberal detour between 1846 and the 1920s.

Rare is the scholar who relishes being controverted, and within his family Gash found it difficult to deal with criticism, seldom confessing to a mistake. Professionally, he was intellectually self-contained, and little affected by fashion or criticism. Self-sufficiently he held aloof from controversy, seldom engaging closely with other historians. He was an exemplary reviewer, bearing in mind the author's intentions, and well aware of how difficult it is to write a good book. His reviews were careful, fair-minded, shrewd, well-versed in relevant earlier publications, alert to errors large and small. He almost always qualified criticism by finding something to praise. There was, however, one exception: his long review of Hilton's *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford, 1988).[65] Acknowledging the 'impressive display of erudition' in this 'fresh and original book', he chose to offer a battery of objections to the small part of it that concerned political aspects, thereby failing adequately to acknowledge its extraordinary range. Gash might have reflected that to have prompted controversion of this calibre testified to the importance of his own achievement. For whatever detailed objections Gash's work might encounter, they did not preclude his bestriding for four decades the political history, broadly interpreted,

[62] Gash, *Peel*, I. 14.
[63] Hilton, 'Peel: a reappraisal', 615.
[64] See Hilton *Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, p. 513. Our discussion in these two paragraphs owes much to Brian Harrison's interview with Boyd Hilton on 21 Feb. 2011 and subsequent correspondence.
[65] *English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), 136–40.

of Britain from the 1810s to the 1850s with his meticulous scholarship and firm grasp of the period.

How was Gash able single-handedly to conduct such powerful research on such a scale? He used his time efficiently, answering letters promptly and working quickly, though his departmental and domestic work-space looked chaotic, and was beset by heaps. Yet he could always find what he wanted, and his typing skills, developed in the early 1930s when quite rare in academic life, remained with him for life. On technology he was deeply conservative. He and his pre-QWERTY Remington machine aged together into the twenty-first century, with no thought of computers and word-processors. The absence of 'Gash papers' is misleading: he threw little away, and used extensive card-indexes, but his daughters obeyed his instructions and destroyed everything at his death. During his last eleven years at St Andrews he worked harmoniously with his self-effacing and very efficient departmental and personal secretary, Miss Elizabeth Anderson; she was among the few who could decipher his handwriting. While holding tightly to professorial power, he was good at devolving; he trusted subordinates to do what was asked, encouraged them to consult him about their difficulties, and then staunchly backed them. 'Whatever you do, don't upset my secretary', he told the department's new recruits; colleagues were reminded that 'she could get another job at any time, which is more than any of us could do.' She devised a filing system for his departmental papers, and soon learned to draft letters which he could confidently sign. He was fluent in dictating, but typed the first drafts of his books himself, then sent chapters one by one for Miss Anderson to produce a fair copy, never bridling at her suggestions and corrections tentatively offered; his *Peel* (London, 1976) and *Aristocracy and People* (1979) were both produced in this way.[66] In retirement he relied upon a secretarial agency for his fair copy.

Gash conserved time and effort at a second level, through being highly focused. He had few interests outside work, the media did not seduce him, and he did not fuss about historical method or diffuse his energies by publishing long review-articles. Nor did he spread himself into publishing on non-British history, or outside the first half of the nineteenth century, or beyond political history (broadly defined). He was focused by temperament. When in later life he did take up leisure interests, they sometimes came to resemble research projects, and he would read around enjoyed

[66] This paragraph owes much to Brian Harrison's interview with Miss Anderson on 8 Oct. 2010 and subsequent correspondence.

experiences before moving on. His single-mindedness may help to explain why Gash's career culminated in a CBE (1989) rather than a peerage (like Lords Briggs and Blake) or a knighthood (like R. C. K. Ensor and E. L. Woodward). He was neither prominent for public duties undertaken, nor popular for cultivating a gentlemanly amateur image, nor did he pronounce publicly upon things in general. His public visibility may also have suffered through being remote from the centres of power. Travel to London libraries and archives in England was expensive, and there was little time or taste for metropolitan social, professional and political distractions. Yet this in itself conserved Gash's time, and he warned ambitious young colleagues contemplating a southward move that Oxbridge colleges' clever pupils would never compensate them for the burdens of collegiate teaching and administration, and their research would suffer.

Furthermore, like many scholars in his day, Gash was cushioned at home. He was good at winning research grants, and for much of the time when not on research trips he was alone in his study while Dorothy shielded him from distractions. From the early 1950s onwards Gash's family paid a price for his success as an historian, for the family picnics and swimming expeditions became less frequent, family holidays were rare, and as a parent he became remote. Helpful when advice was needed, encouraging and proud of his daughters' careers, but distant from their daily lives, he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to be companionable. Well able to rebuke an undergraduate for eating in the street, Dorothy was no doormat, but her self-assertion took the form of identifying closely with her husband's career, of which she could be fiercely defensive. She was devoted to her daughters, but given the academic potential which marriage had terminated so early, she felt intellectually unfulfilled and often lonely; she loved company, whereas Gash fended people off, and did not accumulate friends, often not perceiving how his manner affected others. Much historical research is necessarily solitary, but its solitude also reflected Gash's preference acquired in teenage years for his own company: for him, to be alone was never to be lonely. As a young professor when sailing in races in the bay he would begin with the others at the start line, but whereas they would sail to a marker buoy, turn to another and then return home, he kept sailing out to sea alone and returned hours after the rest had gone home. In later life, when sea-bathing, he would alarm companions by swimming far out on his own.

Gash put much of the emotional energy denied to his family, much of the public work absent at national level, into local causes where his scholarly reputation could enhance his influence. At St Andrews, heads of

department were powerful. 'Participation' even of lecturers, let alone of students, had yet to become the vogue word, and Gash's sense of hierarchy within university and department was firm. Going with the post initially was a big house in The Scores, the street where three professorial houses were located, as well as a seat in the Senate. The informality of decision-making left much discretion to the professors, and Gash's was an unusual combination: skill and productivity in research, efficiency in administration, successful lecturing, sympathetic tuition, and influence in university politics. Yet his departmental success was hard won. In 1953 he had applied successfully for the chair of modern history at Leeds with the aim of qualifying as an external candidate for the chair of history at St Andrews, which he knew would become vacant in 1955. The plan succeeded: he returned to St Andrews, much to Dorothy's relief. She had found Leeds an unfriendly place, its schools were less good, and Sarah had a serious road accident there. Yet Gash's second move in two years brought trouble, for he returned to St Andrews with two Leeds colleagues, Anthony Upton and Cedric Collyer, in a threesome nicknamed 'Leeds United'. They soon became decidedly disunited, with Gash and Collyer notoriously at loggerheads within the department for many years until Collyer departed. Gash's appointment of John Erickson and Margaret Lambert also caused trouble: both felt under-appreciated, friction turned into hatred, and both departed. None of this was good for Gash's self-confidence, a situation worsened by the St Andrews structure of historical study. Gash was Professor of History, and head of the modern history department, and his letter-heading throughout his time described him as '*The* Professor of History'. There were two other history departments outside his parish, however: for mediaeval and Scottish history. This prompted argument about the professors' relative status, with yet more bad feeling and departures. The department's internal relations were sometimes so bad that outside conciliators were invoked.

During the 1960s, however, things improved: younger appointments were made, enemies departed, and Gash's self-confidence grew. 'Formidable' was a word that came to be used about him. His old-fashioned steel-rimmed spectacles with thick lenses sharpened his gaze on interlocutors, and he reminded Bruce Lenman of Velasquez's cardinal inquisitor.[67] Always formal in dress, speech, manner, and modes of address, he had little taste for gossip. With a large head and grey hair brushed back rather severely, he inspired awe among colleagues even when posthumously

[67] Brian Harrison's interview with Bruce Lenman on 5 Oct. 2010.

recollected in tranquillity. Yet beneath all this there was an elusive humour: he could tell a good story, and then there would be a thin smile and a slight laugh. 'He had an engaging way of putting his fingertips together and considering a point carefully before answering in measured tones', Madsen Pirie recalled. '… Sometimes his eyes would twinkle as he made a humorous point, his face only just betraying the humour. He spoke slowly and with gravitas. His immaculate greying hair added to his authority.'[68] In the 1970s Gash's growing power within the department accorded more closely with his authoritarian style; there was never any doubt that it was *his* department, and to younger colleagues he was never 'Norman', always 'Professor Gash'. His sense of mutual responsibility, however, made the outcome very different from what he had observed in Neale during the 1930s. With his strong sense of duty and justice, Gash gained the trust of his staff, and they came to realise how deep was his concern for their welfare, and how resolutely he would defend them against outsiders.

Students knew that as a teacher he set high standards and commented carefully and honestly on their written work; the more closely they knew him, the more they realised how much he cared about them as individuals. His lectures to the second year were delivered in a good carrying voice, and were clearly arranged. By the 1970s their audience was shrinking because their nineteenth-century British subject matter was moving out of fashion, but he showed no sign of resenting the success of younger and more charismatic lecturers with more fashionable subjects. Not for him the fireworks, the slides, the mischievous asides, and the latest news from the research front; students felt instead the weight of his years of learning. Yet he never talked down to them, and commanded respect from his powerful reputation and patent seriousness. Gowned behind a podium, he came to seem rather old-fashioned in style, perhaps too unremittingly erudite, and his personality was (if only for reasons of age) somewhat austere and remote by comparison with colleagues. 'He seemed foreign both in terms of place and century', writes Andrew Gailey (1973–7). 'I remember thinking that if Robert Peel was to walk in, the Professor would have felt far more at ease with his hero than with his own time or his contemporaries [and certainly his students]. Indeed he could have been, perhaps was, Peel.'[69] In the 1970s students who attended his seminars later in the course were struck with how misleading was his student image as 'Gash the Fash'. He could unravel complexity and require high standards while simultaneously

[68] Interview with Brian Harrison, 19 Oct 2010.
[69] E-mail to Brian Harrison, 21 Feb. 2011 which Dr Gailey kindly allowed us to quote.

showing himself intellectually receptive and rather kindly; indeed, his way of leading them on by planting subversive but stimulating questions in their midst was almost mischievous.

High standards were also applied to colleagues, and there was some resentment at Gash's reluctance to promote, and even complaints that he had failed to honour promotion promises. But to students and colleagues alike, he was receptive to sensible suggestions for curricular change, ensuring that history at St Andrews harmonised old with new. Upton found that his own strongly socialist views never complicated relations: what mattered to Gash was the quality of Upton's teaching and scholarship. With Dorothy's help, Gash did his best to overcome subordinates' small-scale personal difficulties, storing colleagues' property in his house in emergencies, entertaining them at home, and reducing teaching commitments in situations of overload. He was keen to leave his younger colleagues space to research and publish, and was at his best when colleagues sought careers advice. Geoffrey Parker thought him 'a wonderful mentor', and discovered that he had been thinking more about his subordinates than he had revealed.[70] In recruiting staff Gash preferred a broad specification which would attract a wide field of candidates who could adapt later to departmental need. Thus did St Andrews become a first-rate history department for studying the so-called 'middle period'. Claims that Gash disliked appointing women were unfounded. He was susceptible to flattery from women, who appreciated his old-style courtesy, but his women colleagues were appointed on merit. One of them had twice quietly to remind him (with ultimate success) that, with one woman present at his Friday coffee mornings for staff, 'gentlemen' was not an appropriate way in which to begin; after initially being wary of him, she came to admire his way of running the department, and appreciated a wry sense of humour so quietly subtle that it sometimes went unperceived.[71]

The coffee mornings in his office were his way of holding the department together, and became larger and rather more formal as staff numbers grew. Collyer, who had earlier made embarrassing scenes at them, eventually ceased to attend. Their purpose was more to inform than decide, since Gash kept decisions almost entirely in his own hands. He served the coffee

[70] E-mail to Brian Harrison, 15 Nov. 2010. We acknowledge here the enormous trouble Professor Parker has taken to illuminate for our benefit every aspect of Norman Gash's personality and career, and to encourage former colleagues to do likewise.

[71] M. J. Rodriguez-Salgado, 'Recollections of Norman Gash' (e-mailed to Brian Harrison, 28 Nov. 2010). We are most grateful to Professor Rodriguez-Salgado for permission to cite her valuable memoir.

himself, then sat behind his large desk and colleagues sat on chairs and sofas around it. Some of the meetings were quite long, with questions answered and incoming letters sometimes read out. In discussion Gash led from the front, but where there was disagreement he usually got his way by not weighing in until everyone had talked themselves out, and sometimes prevailed with the aid of a joke. Keith Wrightson recalls that 'his manner when chairing these meetings was that of an affable laird. He could be very witty, and encouraged the same manner in others, and the room was often filled with laughter.'[72] One of his woman appointees recalls that at the end of his career many colleagues were in awe of Gash, 'some revered him, many were afraid of him. It was rare to hear of someone who disliked him … I never saw anyone treat him or refer to him with anything less than respect.'[73] For Parker, Gash's courtesy to colleagues is exemplified in the care he took in 1980 to tell them individually about his impending resignation before making the news public.[74] When Gash announced this at his Friday coffee morning, Wrightson recalls that 'we were stunned. A long silence followed; then rather stuttering efforts to respond to this bombshell … many of us shared an inability to envisage the department without Gash. Where would the university find someone of his stature? … It was clear that an era was over.' Serving under Gash for five years before he retired, Wrightson thought him 'head and shoulders the best head of department that I have ever encountered. He had enormous authority.'[75]

There was a two-way traffic between departmental authority and influence within the university. Gash's secure departmental power-base made him a major figure in the university senate, especially given his wit and forcefulness as debater, and from 1978 to 1980 he held a key post as Dean of the Faculty of Arts. He felt little respect for J. Steven Watson, Principal of St Andrews from 1966 to 1986, either as historian or as Principal. This became clear in several much-relished senatorial exchanges between two wily operators: the easy-going and somewhat disorganised Labour sympathiser and the efficient and astringent Conservative scholar. In the circumstances, Gash's memoir of Watson for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* is generous indeed. In 1980 Gash's relations with another

[72] 'Some memories of Norman Gash' (e-mail to Brian Harrison, 21 Nov. 2010). Professor Wrightson allowed us to quote from this valuable memoir.
[73] Rodriguez-Salgado, 'Recollections of Norman Gash'.
[74] 'Remembering Norman Gash' (e-mail to Brian Harrison, Dec. 2010).
[75] 'Some memories of Norman Gash'.

prominent St Andrews personality, Sir Kenneth Dover, President of the British Academy,[76] became of major importance in the Academy's discussions about whether the art historian Sir Anthony Blunt's espionage for Soviet Russia should invalidate his fellowship. Historians were at the heart of the controversy, not least Gash, who had been a Fellow since 1963. The annual general meeting (which Gash was unable to attend) decided on 3 July 1980 not to expel Blunt. This prompted four resignations, and Gash publicly and inaccurately claimed that the meeting had been 'packed' by Blunt's supporters from the south-east. With three other Fellows, he threatened to resign his fellowship at the end of the year if Blunt then remained a Fellow.

Dover despised pressure of this kind, but feared a mass exodus, so on 13 August in St Andrews he visited Gash, 'a resolute man'[77] with whom he had not always agreed. This meeting turned out to be crucial. Dover, perhaps unduly scrupulous as President of the Academy in forcing himself to conceal his personal views on Blunt, had been surprised that nobody at Council or at the annual general meeting had used what he saw as the crucial argument. For Dover 'there was only one justification for expelling Blunt: that he had worked treacherously for the supremacy of a totalitarian nation which has consistently frustrated and persecuted scholarship, and by so doing he tried to defeat the purposes for which the Academy exists'. Dover held this view strongly: as he later recalled, 'I have always felt, and still feel, that a nation which fails to tear a traitor to pieces is doomed.'[78] He recalled that at their meeting Gash 'said something which touched my sorest nerve' when pointing out that what Dover saw as 'the real charge' against Blunt had not been raised at the annual general meeting, and that when people were alerted to this, as they would be, many would resign. Dover then told Gash that he would encourage Blunt in the course which Gash recommended in the *Daily Telegraph* two days later: to rescue the Academy from 'the worst crisis in its 80-year history' by resigning.[79] In 'one agonised afternoon' some ten days after meeting Gash, a meeting to which Dover did not subsequently refer in public, he confessed that 'I had gone to see Gash to tell him to stop [*sc.* encouraging resignations] and had come away one hour and two sherries later prepared to do his bidding.'[80]

[76] See the memoir of Sir Kenneth in this volume, pp. 153–75.
[77] British Academy archive, BA2249: President, Correspondence etc. 1979–81, f. 91.
[78] Ibid., f. 219. For Dover's published recollections see his *Marginal Comment. A Memoir* (London, 1994), pp. 212–21.
[79] Ibid., f. 91 (Dover's notes).
[80] Ibid., f. 92.

Dover's letter to Blunt produced the desired result and terminated public debate on the main issue, though not without controversy about Dover's conduct. His and Gash's recollections of the episode illuminate their personalities as vividly as their conduct. Gash's reflections appeared in the Winter 1981 number of *Policy Review*, organ of the American right-wing Heritage Foundation. In criticising 'the liberal progressive mind' in western societies, Gash identified with 'the less intellectual people' who 'have simpler ideas and more direct instincts', and distanced himself from the professionalised scholarship that breeds 'a certain exclusiveness and distortion of values … Scholarship is not a religion but scholars sometimes behave as if it is, with themselves as a kind of priesthood immune from conventional obligations.' Deploring what he saw as declining standards, Gash claimed that in the 1930s Blunt would have been forced out of public life or even out of the country, and regretted 'the fashionable tendency to regard moral standards as purely subjective.… The only test seems to be the sincerity of the doer, not the consequences of his actions.' Noting 'the sudden tenderness which comes over left-wing intellectuals when the Soviet Union is implicated', he was surprised that the Fellows were so coy about publicly taking a resolute line during the affair.[81]

Gash's conservatism was multilayered. In his personal life he relished his daily routine, dressed conservatively, discouraged his wife and daughters from using make-up, loved being in his study with his books and ancient typewriter, and deplored change at home and elsewhere. J. B. Conacher, reviewing his *Reaction and Reconstruction* in 1966, saw him as 'a conservative historian in the best sense … sceptical, discriminating, detached, ever on his guard against easy generalizations or sentimental enthusiasms, cautious and clearheaded'.[82] In the Blunt affair Gash regretted that the governmental perspective so prominent in his publications was now less central to scholarly values. He deplored 'the tendency to be critical of all traditional and prescriptive authority both in society and in the state. For many self-conscious liberals,' he continued, 'loyalty and patriotism have become intellectually indecent words which, uttered in public, cause mild embarrassment.'[83] In his historical writing Gash was not above taking the occasional unobtrusive pot-shot at anti-governmental attitudes: 'few things are so dangerous in politics as the enunciation of principles', for instance; or his reference to Peel's twenty-year experience by 1830—'in

[81] 'Over there. A scholar and a traitor', *Policy Review* (Winter 1981), 159–60.
[82] *American Historical Review*, 72 (1966), 191.
[83] 'Over there', p. 159.

the art of getting things done; an asset which idealists do not usually acquire'.[84] Common sense, that supreme governmental quality, Gash often praised in conversation, together with (in his writings) political continuity. The more extreme radicals in the 1830s were, he thought, 'distinguished, as political crusaders are apt to be, more by obsessive zeal than by practical sense'.[85]

The villagey mood and somewhat secluded location of St Andrews in the 1950s suited Gash, as did its students' rather traditionalist outlook in the 1960s and 1970s. It witnessed no major 'Sixties' protests, and even his support for Ian Smith in Rhodesia could not make Gash a hate-figure. St Andrews students liked wearing their red gowns, their procession to the pier on Sundays, and their 'Raisin Monday'. They were distinctive for supporting a Student Conservative Association much larger and more influential with students than in other universities.[86] This lent the Association national influence, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when the university became a cauldron of free-market Conservative ideas. Free-market student meritocrats were particularly influential, privately but not maliciously labelling the more traditionalist and privileged Conservative students as UCTs ('upper-class twits') or 'Yahs' (mimicking their English public-school way of speaking). Here was a breeding-ground for key figures in the 'Thatcherite' revolution such as Douglas Mason, Michael Forsyth and Madsen Pirie, with close links to Enoch Powell, Michael Fallon, Christopher Chope, Ralph Harris, Rhodes Boyson, and the Institute for Economic Affairs. From St Andrews came the three graduates who founded the influential free-market Adam Smith Institute in 1977, and several Conservative founder-members of the No Turning Back Group. Whatever their earlier views, the Gashes by the 1970s were in student circles 'sort of "royalty", in a way', Lord Forsyth recalls: they were interested in young people, and enjoyed holding an annual garden party in their garden. For Pirie, Norman Gash was 'an avuncular figure, a kind of godfather', and 'a benign presence' if there were disputes with authority. The Gashes took a proud, close and generous interest in Pirie's unusual self-help career, and it was to them that he dedicated his first book.

Gash was sceptical about the history of ideas and the political role of abstract thinking. He knew well enough that intellectuals can be influen-

[84] *Reaction and Reconstruction*, p. 68; *Peel*, II, xvii.
[85] *Aristocracy and People*, p. 162.
[86] This paragraph owes much to Brian Harrison's discussions with Lord Forsyth of Drumlean on 14 Dec. 2010, Dr Madsen Pirie on 19 Oct. 2010, and Professor Michael Prestwich on 9 Oct. 2010.

tial: dissolving conventional thinking, harnessing discontent, stimulating action, forming 'the cutting-edge of social and political movements, enabling them to move faster and with more assurance', and sometimes prevailing even when in a minority.[87] Unlike Blake or Beloff, however, Gash focused his contribution to Conservative national politics where he felt best qualified: through publishing in the right-wing press on relevant historical topics. In his long-ranging analysis of political-party evolution published in 1978, he argued that 'the ratchet effect of collectivist legislation' had ended the mutual accommodation which had hitherto made the two-party system practicable. A corporate state entailed the end of the Conservative Party because the 'logical end' of collectivism is a one-party state. He put little faith in such devices as written constitutions and electoral reform as shields against socialism, and like the rest of his party soon found an alternative way out through Thatcher's vigorously anti-socialist leadership.[88]

Gash's expertise seemed still more relevant in the mid-1980s when Peel, Disraeli, and Salisbury became short-hand terms for factions within Thatcher's Conservative party. In 1984 Edward Heath urged 'the pragmatism of Peel, not the dogmatism of "There is no other way"' in his speech to the Peel Society on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Peel's Tamworth Manifesto: Conservatives should steer between 'doctrinaire radicalism from the left, and the reaction of … Tory ultras'.[89] By contrast, Gash and St Andrews students likened Peel's free-trade campaign to Thatcher's move towards the free market: both had forced their way from minority status to become the intellectual mood of the moment, and it was Thatcher's 'wet' critics who were the aberration, straying from the true Conservative path.[90] For Gash, Baldwin's decision to join the National Government coalition in 1931 had entailed 'a certain intellectual flabbiness'; Macmillan's *Middle Way* 'represented a slip-way to Socialism rather than a new path for Conservatism';[91] and in the mid-1980s centrist Conservative attempts to discover a radical Disraeli in their pedigree were doubly mistaken, for the radicals were Peel and Thatcher, not Disraeli and

[87] N. Gash 'The power of ideas over policy', in A. Seldon (ed.), *The Emerging Consensus …?* (London, 1981), p. 236.
[88] N. Gash, 'The British party system and the closed society', in W. H. Chaloner *et al.*, *The Coming Confrontation. Will the Open Society Survive to 1989?* (London, 1978), pp. 53–4; see also pp. 56–8.
[89] *The Times*, 1 Dec. 1984, 4.
[90] Gash, 'Power of ideas', pp. 236–7; *Radical Element*, p. 6.
[91] Gash, *Radical Element*, p. 11.

the 'wets'.[92] Thatcher's was the third Conservative 'radical initiative' to force the Party's enemies on to the defensive, Peel's being the first, and Chamberlain's tariff reform the second.[93] Historical parallels are never exact, however, and from this particular political parlour game no convincing winners seem in retrospect to have emerged.

There were push and pull impulses behind Gash's early retirement from St Andrews in 1981 to Langport in Somerset. Pushing him was a university scene decreasingly attractive in a world of funding cuts and even less attractive for the protests against them; he soon came to feel that there were too many universities, and that they tried to fund too much arts research.[94] Pull factors included concern for Dorothy's health; desire to publish more; and a yearning to get closer to his roots in southern England, Langport being the nearest he could get to them in a house that he could afford. He was, after all, still fit: Miss Anderson recalls a man who always ran up and down stairs, never walked, and was 'always in a hurry'. He told his former graduate student, Fred Dreyer, that he would 'rather get out while I am reasonably sound in wind and limb—a good deal more so than some of my younger colleagues, I like to think. And the next ten years in university life in this country is [*sic*] going to be a difficult one.'[95] In the relative isolation of Langport he inevitably drew largely upon materials already collected, but if his many publications in retirement did not enhance his reputation, they left it intact.

In the mid-1970s, despite all his administrative distractions, Gash was still writing high-quality history; by then his earlier publications were so important that in new publications he could often paraphrase his own conclusions, though with a tendency to move back in time and showing more interest in Liverpool and Wellington than in Peel. As one of four authors, he contributed eighty-seven authoritative and lucid pages on 'From the origins to Sir Robert Peel' to the synoptic collaborative history of the Conservative Party edited by R. A. Butler, *The Conservatives* (London, 1977). Then, in 1979, he published *Aristocracy and People. Britain 1815–1865* in Edward Arnold's 'The New History of England', a series which he edited jointly with A. G. Dickens. Alert in this volume to the formidable difficulties experienced by governments after 1815, he saw the Napoleonic wars as compounding the problems presented by rapid

[92] N. Gash, 'The enigma [Macmillan] who strayed', *The Times*, 31 Dec. 1986, 12; see also Gash's 'Myth of the two Tory parties', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 Oct. 1984, 18.
[93] Gash, *Radical Element*, pp. 7, 12.
[94] See Arnstein interview, f. 8.
[95] Photostat of t/s letter, 27 Jan. 1980.

industrialisation, urbanisation, and population growth. Yet for Gash, industrialisation in the long term brought its own cure, for in the historians' 'standard of living controversy' of the 1950s and 1960s he was an optimist. After two descriptive chapters he adopts a narrative approach while admiring the resilience, pragmatism and flexibility with which aristocratic politicians prolonged their influence. Far from idle, they were thoroughly integrated into national life, and helped to secure the mid-Victorian 'age of equipoise' with which the volume's final chapter (in revived descriptive mode) 'takes stock'. Never inevitable, this peaceable outcome had seemed improbable in 1815.[96]

Early in retirement Gash published a substantial two-part article in *Parliamentary History* for 1982: it filled out his earlier work by fully explaining how the Conservative Party had evolved at parliamentary and constituency levels between 1832 and 1846. He moved on to Lord Liverpool, on whom he had contributed an informative, concise and respectful essay to Van Thal's *The Prime Ministers* (London, 1974), stressing Liverpool's continuous influence and the unimportance for policy of the ministerial changes in 1822.[97] In *History Today* for May 1980 and March 1982 he published two incisive articles illuminating aspects of Liverpool's career, but his *Lord Liverpool* (London, 1984) was smaller in scale than his two volumes on Peel. It complemented them, though, through portraying Liverpool as Peel's exemplar and precursor in (admired) personal characteristics, in surmounting constitutional and social problems, and in economic remedies devised. This unassuming, likeable, unself-advertising prime minister infused public life with 'qualities which in aggregate few prime ministers have equalled. In grasp of principles, mastery of detail, discernment of means, and judgement of individuals he was almost faultless,'[98] so he 'clearly ranks as one of the great though unacknowledged architects of the liberal, free-trade Victorian state, second only to Peel in importance' (p. 253). Gash had found another hero, and his biography's main aim was to rescue Liverpool from undue neglect. Its wartime narrative chapters were unexciting, but the book perks up when Liverpool becomes prime minister, and there is a fine chapter on Liverpool's personality, prime-ministerial methods, and cultural interests. Gash found in Liverpool's career, as in Peel's, an object lesson in the art of politics, for Liverpool 'had learned the most valuable lesson that politics has to teach:

[96] For a shrewd and nuanced review see B. Hilton in *Welsh History Review*, 10 (1980–1), 435–7.
[97] N. Gash, 'The Earl of Liverpool', in H. Van Thal (ed.) *The Prime Ministers*, I (London, 1974), p. 289.
[98] Ibid., p. 287.

to see men for what they really are and to know how, with all their faults and weaknesses, they can be used for a common purpose' (p. 102).

Gash's *Pillars of Government* (London, 1986) was a stocktaking or mopping-up operation: most of its articles had already been published, but one was new and important: an essay on 'Cheap government'. Peel's achievement was again highlighted, this time with contributions hostile to his antagonist, Lord George Bentinck. Gash never sought to limit his readership to other scholars, and his three articles for the *Modern History Review* in 1990, 1992 and 1994 show him concisely and clearly unravelling for a wider public complex issues that he had earlier discussed at length: on Peel and the Conservative Party, on Peel and Ireland, and on the Peelites, respectively. His lightly footnoted book *Robert Surtees and Early Victorian Society* (Oxford, 1993) is his first publication to show a certain loss of grip. Concerned more with context than with Surtees himself, it was a social history of Britain in disguise; indeed, Gash discussed Surtees almost as an afterthought, giving his novels no close analysis, and never really integrating them into the book. Furthermore, he came near to subverting his book's purpose when he confessed that Surtees was a decidedly untypical Victorian.[99] To an expert reviewer the book seemed slightly anticlimactic, containing little new material, and citing no recent sources on social history.[100] Yet Gash was still publishing substantial articles in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* in his eighties, most notably on Wellington and Liverpool, together with an article on Peel in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Gash's contribution to Anthony Seldon's *How Tory Governments Fall* (London, 1996), published in his eighty-fourth year, showed no loss of grip on his chosen period, and in his nineties he performed the signal service to J. T. Ward's widow of compressing Ward's biography of the Conservative MP and factory reformer W. B. Ferrand into publishable shape; it came out in Gash's ninetieth year (*W. B. Ferrand: 'the working man's friend', 1809–1889*: East Linton, 2002). This had indeed been a fruitful 'retirement'.

The Old Gatehouse, close to the busy main road from Langport to Taunton, was originally an eighteenth-century toll house, somewhat awkwardly set at different levels on the ground floor, with three rooms below, one of them a much-valued wine cellar. The house was comfortably but not lavishly furnished, with maps, paintings and engravings on its walls.

[99] Gash, *Robert Surtees*, p. 389; see also Gash's article on Surtees in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26791>.
[100] D. C. Itzkowitz, *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), 161.

Gash had a library built on at the back, with book-filled shelves and a big working table, and in the garden he enthusiastically cultivated roses and apple trees. In retirement he led a quiet life, and when not in his study or garden he enjoyed watching televised sporting occasions, and followed the fortunes of Reading's football team up to his death. In the 1960s the World Cup had been the occasion for his first hiring a television, and a year or two later he had bought one. With his savings he was careful, but he had no taste for shrewd investment, let alone tax avoidance. He lacked practical skills, and at fifty-three had obtained a driving licence only after several attempts. He was adventurous behind the wheel: the old road from St Andrews across Fife to the motorway was slow and winding, Wrightson recalls, and 'more than once while trundling along in my Mini I was overtaken by a Peugeot dancing through the traffic at high speed. It was Gash.'[101] To some passengers he could as a driver seem frighteningly unobservant, yet no accidents occurred.

Gash in retirement was still mobile enough to promote several good causes from Langport. His interest in the Prince Albert Society grew naturally out of his expertise on the history of early nineteenth-century monarchy. The Society promoted contact between British and German historians of Britain through regular conferences in Coburg, and Gash not only backed it from the outset but addressed its meetings in 1983 and 1984. He put even more into Southampton University's care for the Wellington papers, joining the advisory committee on its formation, and attending its meetings until he retired from it in 2002. He also spoke at its conferences, and edited the proceedings of one. His third cause was the R. S. Surtees Society, formed in 1980 to keep Surtees' novels in print. Again he backed the Society from the start, staunchly supported Lady Pickthorn in running it, and gave the Society the paperback copyright to his *Surtees*. His favourite cause, though, was the Peel Society, founded in 1979 to keep Peel's memory alive in the Tamworth area. Yet again, Gash was a firm backer from the outset; he also made donations to its museum, published pamphlets for the society, and gave expert help when asked. He and Dorothy attended and always seemed to enjoy its social events, and in his will he left the Society his Peel-related books and some of his papers.

Gash was lucky with his health, gave up smoking in the 1970s, did exercises every morning, and was still swimming in the sea in his early nineties. Usually tight-lipped, he seemed every inch 'the professor', the epithet he often attracted, but he smiled easily, and in 1982 he described

[101] 'Some memories of Norman Gash'.

himself as leading 'a kind of mellowed undergraduate life', in his study in the morning, exercising in the afternoon and writing letters and reading in the evenings, with no tutorials to give or essays to mark. He was living in 'a private All Souls of one's own, with one's colleagues conveniently dead or immured between the covers of books to be taken up or laid down at one's convenience'.[102] It was a misleading self-portrait because strokes and other problems were by then causing Dorothy's mental and physical health to disintegrate; he had to run the house and teach himself to cook, and eventually she needed constant nursing care and moved into a nursing home nearby. There he visited her devotedly until she died from pneumonia on 30 December 1995.

He now lived alone, but he loved cats, and adopted one from next door. He had never cultivated close relationships with friends or relatives, and was often curt on the phone. Yet he was assiduous in keeping up contacts with former students and colleagues through message-bearing Christmas cards, ideal vehicles for protecting privacy while enjoying a firmly controlled sociability. The occasional scholarly visitor would be welcomed to tea or something more: Douglas Hurd seeking advice and receiving encouragement for his biography of Peel; Paul Smith pursuing local colour at Bagehot's nearby family home, Herd's Hill, for his edition of Bagehot; an annual affectionate visit from the President and Director of the Adam Smith Institute. His daughters, living far away, worried about him and maintained a tactful oversight, but he resolutely maintained his independence. In 1997 he married a widow, Ruth Jackson, whom he met locally through friends, but neither this nor their divorce in 2004 greatly affected their life-styles: each retained a separate home, but together they continued to entertain friends, attend concerts, go on outings and conduct long phone conversations in the evenings. Only towards the end of his life did he substitute a siesta for gardening in the afternoon, and experience the stiff joints and the macular degeneration which made reading and writing difficult, and in his last two months (much to his distress) impossible. His morning walk into Langport to collect the newspapers persisted into the last year of his life, and his growing deafness made him seem more confused than he really was. He was well able to issue instructions to his carer about the shopping he required on the day of his death, 1 May 2009, and on her return she found him dead, sitting upright in his favourite chair, alone. At his own wish, his gravestone was inscribed 'In loving

[102] G. Parker, 'Remembering Norman Gash', quoting Gash to Parker, 3 Nov. 1982.

memory of Ivy Dorothy Gash 1914–1995 and Norman Gash 1912–2009 Historian.'

Norman Gash lived well into the tape-recording age, yet Walter Arnstein's is the sole surviving interview, and many puzzles about Gash cannot now be solved. Wanting his papers destroyed at death reflects Kipling's injunction: 'seek not to question other than the books I leave behind'. Yet Gash's attitude to history is readily inferred from his abundant writings. In Archilochus's famous dichotomy between the fox who knows many things and the hedgehog who knows one big thing, Gash is a fox. Specialisation such as Gash's on Peel does not make him a hedgehog because no single driving idea shaped his view of Peel; Gash's cast of mind was empirical rather than theoretical, and about British society in Peel's time he knew many things. A consistent mood in all his writing was empathy: like the social anthropologist, he soaked himself in the context of his subjects, reached out for the implicit and often unconscious attitudes moulding their conduct, and was never seduced by familiar vocabulary into neglecting important shifts in meaning. In the 1830s, for example, patronage was morally distinct from bribery, and attitudes to electoral bribery varied with social location. Again, absurd as the opponents of Roman Catholic emancipation in the 1820s might now seem, they should be comprehended rather than merely condemned: their view of British history, their patriotism and their concern for social stability should be acknowledged. Gash sometimes tried to widen sensitivity to contemporary context with deftly provocative remarks: in their high hopes of reform, the emancipationists in 1829, like the electoral reformers in 1832, were wrong and Peel was right.[103] During Gash's career such provocation from the right was thought decreasingly acceptable, though it was less often condemned when emanating from the left. Gash fought against the 'ethical association' conveyed by the word 'reform': it might have purified British politics after 1832, but change by then had already begun, and was not rapid thereafter.[104] Gash opposed condemning the Victorians out of their own mouths; in their reforming zeal, they publicised what was bad about their society, but were 'virtuous propagandists', not to be taken at their own valuation. Nor should the 'social novelists' receive undue attention, given their tendency to exaggerate: 'they have done more to confuse than enlighten posterity on the real nature of Victorian society'.[105]

[103] Gash, *Peel*, I. 596. *Politics in the Age of Peel*, pp. 3–4.
[104] *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p. x.
[105] *Aristocracy and People*, p. 1.

Historiography was not Gash's strong point, and his essays on biography and history are thin.[106] None the less the importance of human agency is a second theme running through his published work, as through that of many Conservative historians. When he thought it underplayed by other authors—as, allegedly, in Asa Briggs's *Age of Improvement* (London, 1959)—he said so: the book's 'chief lack', he wrote, 'is perhaps humanity'.[107] He thought biography a broadening art form, in that the biographer must follow wherever his biographical subject goes, and must 'make himself master of a number of different activities … which left to his own devices he might never have felt any inclination to explore'.[108] Yet biography is a difficult art, if only because the biographer must not lose sight of the man when describing his times, and must 'give the physical appearance, the voice, the gestures, the little human touches familiar to contemporaries'.[109] In praising Blake's *Disraeli* (London, 1966) Gash outlines biography's essentials: 'to portray a human being in the round, to make a dead figure live in the printed page, to dissect a complex temperament with subtlety and judgment, to give the reader a sense of seeing as vividly as contemporaries but with more knowledge'.[110] Some would say that Gash's *Peel*, especially its second volume, does not meet these stringent demands: that it is unduly narrowing in its high-political preoccupation, and in its failure to portray Peel as others saw him.

Like G. R. Elton, Gash saw politics as 'the Queen of History', given its power, together with war, to shape social change.[111] This lent higher status to political than to social history, but such a pecking order both exaggerated politicians' influence and neglected the many impulses to change that stem autonomously from social structures and attitudes, whether demographic, recreational or cultural. It also played down his own achievement, for in his own publications he had blurred the arbitrary distinction between political and social history; as he himself pointed out, politics is 'after all only one aspect of society itself'.[112] He more than anyone opened out the study of early nineteenth-century British politics beyond 'constitutional' history towards politics at the electoral and grassroots level, arguing that 'only on an established basis of local history can national

[106] Chaps 14–15 of Gash's *Pillars of Government*.
[107] *English Historical Review*, 75 (1960), 174.
[108] *Pillars of Government*, p. 181.
[109] Ibid., p. 183.
[110] *English Historical Review*, 83 (1968), 360.
[111] Arnstein interview, f. 7.
[112] *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p. 152.

history of this kind be written'.[113] His historian exemplars, Kitson Clark and W. L. Burn (both dedicatees of his *Aristocracy and People*), took a broad view of history, seeing it as a rich brew which did not segregate the political from the social, the social from the economic, or the history of men in action from the history of the mind. Towards the end of his long scholarly life Gash with his *Surtees* returned more overtly to the social history with which he had begun, though without the originality and penetration that his B.Litt. thesis had displayed.

Gash repeatedly distanced himself from the history of ideas, distinguishing it from 'ideas in history'; even when he did focus upon politicians' ideas he showed less interest in their substance than in the political intention that lay behind them. He thought it 'an occupational weakness of intellectuals to attach excessive importance to ideas in the abstract', and took a Tocquevillean view of the link between British pragmatism and British social and political stability. The only ideas that interested him as historian were 'ideas in action' as distinct from 'ideas in the head', and he often teasingly feigned puzzlement at Fred Dreyer's interest in great thinkers. Indeed, Gash's playing down of 'ideas' sometimes elided into a playing down of 'ideals': dismissing the notion that benevolent ideas produce a benevolent outcome, he claimed that 'most people, once they emerge from adolescence, tend to shed ideals and, as recompense, acquire motives.'[114]

None of this led Gash to shelter coyly from public affairs in scholarly reticence, as witnesses his conduct during the Blunt affair. He devoted his professional life to pioneering the scholarly historical treatment of Britain in the nineteenth century at a time when most respectable history stopped at 1815 or even earlier, and he long outlived his fellow pioneers W. L. Burn and Kitson Clark.[115] Gash believed that professional scholars should not hold themselves aloof from controversial company: historians should fertilise public debate.[116] Here there was shared ground with left-wing historians such as E. P. Thompson, whose *Making of the English Working Class* Gash praised in the bibliography (p. 355) to his *Aristocracy and People* as 'eminently readable' and as providing 'a quarry of information even for those who do not accept his interpretation'. Gash was not starry-eyed about history's influence, telling Arnstein in 1985 that though undoubtedly

[113] Ibid., p. xvii.
[114] Quotations from Gash, 'Power of ideas', pp. 230, 232; see also pp. 231, 233–4 and *Peel*, II. 711.
[115] We owe this point to Professor Arnstein.
[116] N. Gash, 'The state of the debate', in R. M. Hartwell *et al*., *The Long Debate on Poverty* (London, 1972), p. xxiii.

interesting, its study has little impact upon 'how a society behaves'. Still, a society with no knowledge of history would, he thought, be 'intellectually lamed or crippled'. For him, history is related to other arts subjects as is mathematics to the natural sciences: 'it is the common language, the essential framework', and given that, 'it must be studied for its own sake by those who have no other motive'.[117]

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[117] Arnstein interview, f. 6.