



BARRIE DOBSON

## Richard Barrie Dobson 1931–2013

R. B. DOBSON, known universally as Barrie, died in 2013, at the age of eighty-one. Over a long and distinguished career, he contributed distinctively and substantively to an understanding of the ecclesiastical, religious and social history of the English Middle Ages.

Born at Stockton-on-Tees on 3 November 1931, Barrie was the son of Richard Henry and Mary Victoria Dobson. The Dobsons had long been established at Brough and Middleton-in-Teesdale; Barrie's first name, Richard, had been given to the eldest son over successive generations. Barrie spent some of his early years in South America, where his father worked for the Great Western Railway of Brazil: some of the memorabilia of this great engineering adventure remained his proud possessions to the end of his life. In 1939 Barrie's mother brought him and his sister, Margaret, back to England to prepare for the birth of the youngest child, Marybelle; they first lived at Redcar, but after the outbreak of war evacuated themselves to Mickleton, a Teesdale village then in the North Riding of Yorkshire and later transferred to County Durham. His mother and sisters subsequently moved to Middleton, but Barrie remained with his aunt at Mickleton and made the daily journey from there to Barnard Castle School. Barrie's strong sense of personal and scholarly identity with Yorkshire and County Durham were developed through his early experience of the dramatic landscapes of Low Force and High Force in upper Teesdale. After school, Barrie went straight on to military service in the Army, including time in Malaya during the Emergency, where he was in the Education Corps teaching English.

In 1951, Barrie went up as a Scholar to Wadham College, Oxford, to read Modern History. While still on National Service, Barrie had written to the Warden to ask what he should bring with him. The response from Maurice Bowra, FBA, was just what was needed: ‘Yourself and a tooth-brush.’<sup>1</sup> Under Bowra, Wadham flourished as a diverse, cosmopolitan and intellectually vibrant community. Although Barrie was tutored for medieval papers by Lawrence Stone, his intellectual formation owed most to A. F. (Pat) Thompson, who had made his own academic journey from the Middle Ages to nineteenth- and twentieth-century labour history, and who became a life-long mentor and family friend. Among those of Barrie’s group at Wadham who went on to professional careers teaching History at school and university were Alan Forey, Aubrey Newman and David Parry. His contemporaries remember Barrie’s rapid emergence as an assured historian and the natural conviviality of a young man who delighted in walking, reading, music and the cinema—pleasures that remained with him throughout his life. The retired Wadham medievalist, R. V. (Reggie) Lennard, a distinguished expert on agrarian history, was a founder member of the Friends of the Lake District and organised reading parties there. It was on these occasions that Barrie first fell under the spell of Helvellyn and developed his lifelong passion for hill and fell walking. Much later, in 1989, Barrie became an Honorary Fellow of Wadham.

Barrie took a first in Modern History in 1954, and in 1957 was elected a Senior Demy at Magdalen College, where he later became Junior Lecturer. For his doctoral work he originally proposed a study of a bishop’s register, but the Regius Professor, V. H. Galbraith, FBA, took a dim view of this and Barrie eventually fixed upon ‘The Priory of Durham in the Time of Prior John Wessington, 1416–46’. His supervisor was W. A. (Billy) Pantin, FBA, whose own studies of the late medieval English Church remain classics of the genre today. Medieval history at Magdalen (and across Oxford) was dominated by the figure of K. B. McFarlane, an expert on the English nobility, and although Barrie never became an acolyte, he was clear that his own use of prosopographical method owed much to McFarlane’s inspiration. The thesis was completed in 1963 and examined by Dom David Knowles, the mid-century doyen of monastic studies, who had become Regius Professor at Cambridge in 1954. Barrie’s copy of Knowles’s inaugural lecture, *The Historian and Character*,<sup>2</sup> contains a number of letters that track the evolution of a scholarly friendship. In 1972 Barrie sent

<sup>1</sup> Pers. comm., David Parry.

<sup>2</sup> Dom D. Knowles, *The Historian and Character: Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1955).

Knowles the first chapter of the reworked thesis, then in preparation for publication. 'Father David' wrote back to say that 'I began thinking it a chore, but read on with growing satisfaction and improvement of the mind ... You have lived with it and thought about it, and you bring its characters to life.' He recommended the inclusion of good maps, since 'Those unlucky people who have never seen Durham will need them.' The book appeared two years later as *Durham Priory, 1400–1450*.<sup>3</sup> The experience of working intensively with the remarkable archive of the community of St Cuthbert established Barrie's abiding interest in the records of the northern English Church. With their searching analysis of the membership, the economic management and the intellectual life of Durham Priory in a period often cast as one of monastic decline, the thesis and the first book offered a different way of thinking and writing about the fifteenth century and helped set in train a major reassessment of the role of the religious orders in general, and the Benedictines in particular, during the last century of Catholic England.

Oxford gave Barrie intellectual purpose and friends; it also made him a family man. Early in 1958, Menna Prestwich introduced him to Narda Leon, a St Hilda's graduate who was completing a B.Litt. at the Institute of Colonial Studies and was about to take up a post in Paris. Barrie and Narda married a year later, by which time Barrie had moved to a lectureship at the University of St Andrews. While St Andrews was emphatically an ancient institution with an exceptionally strong sense of its special traditions (the insistence of Barrie's newly adopted department on the spelling of 'Mediaeval' in its title was a case in point), it was also undergoing a significant period of change. Under an inspiring and energetic Head of Department, Lionel Butler, Barrie had the chance to contribute fully to the new styles of teaching that were being introduced and to hone his skills in the lecture, the seminar and the tutorial. It was in St Andrews that Barrie and Narda's children, Mark and Michelle, were born, and the family entered with relish into their life in the bracing environment of the Kingdom of Fife.

In 1964 Barrie accepted the offer of a lectureship in the Department of History at the University of York. It was a big decision, and in many ways a very risky one: to leave an ancient and world-famous place of scholarship for one of the new group of 'plate-glass' institutions being developed in the wake of strong government determination to expand

<sup>3</sup>R. B. Dobson, *Durham Priory, 1400–1450*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3rd series 6 (Cambridge, 1973).

higher education across the United Kingdom. Barrie joined the University of York in only its second year of operations, with much of the physical infrastructure and intellectual agenda still in development: he later described the four-fold increase in the staffing establishment of the Department of History over the first seven years of its existence as ‘an exhilarating, if at times exhausting, expansion’.<sup>4</sup> But it was clear to everyone that York offered a mix of tradition and innovation that appealed strongly to Barrie’s temperament. On the one hand, York was an ancient city whose fabric and resources were themselves a constant inspiration to the medievalist. The Minster, parish churches, walls and guildhalls conjured up York’s great days of wealth and political importance in the later Middle Ages, and the exceptionally rich civic and ecclesiastical archives housed within the city’s bounds were a natural attraction to the documentary-minded historian. Barrie quickly added studies of church life in York and Selby to his on-going work on Durham.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the chance to contribute to the formation of a distinctively modern academic community was both an initial draw and a lasting stimulation.

The dual perspective was typified in the new working environment to which Barrie was inducted. The Department of History started life in the King’s Manor, which had once been the abbot’s lodging of the great Benedictine abbey of St Mary’s and, after the Reformation, was the headquarters of the Council of the North. History soon moved to its new premises on the emerging Heslington campus, where the modernist vision of the young architect Andrew Derbyshire was articulating in concrete and glass the purist intellectual ideals of Barrie’s own generation. If the subsequent foundation of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the King’s Manor in 1968 offered Barrie the chance for a regular commute, as it were, between the twentieth and the fifteenth century, there was never any sense

<sup>4</sup>R. B. Dobson, ‘Claire Cross: a tribute’, in D. Wood (ed.), *Life and Thought in the Northern Church, c.1100–c.1700: Essays in Honour of Claire Cross*, Studies in Church History Subsidia, 12 (1999), pp. 1–9 at p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>R. B. Dobson, ‘Richard Bell, Prior of Durham (1464–78) and Bishop of Carlisle (1478–95)’, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, NS 65 (1965), 182–221; R. B. Dobson, ‘The last English monks on Scottish soil: the severance of Coldingham Priory from the Monastery of Durham, 1461–78’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 46 (1967), 1–25; R. B. Dobson, ‘The foundation of perpetual chantries by the citizens of medieval York’, in J. G. Cuming (ed.), *The Province of York*, Studies in Church History, 4 (1967), pp. 22–38; R. B. Dobson, ‘The election of John Ousthorp as Abbot of Selby in 1436’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 42 (1967), 31–40; R. B. Dobson, ‘The first Norman Abbey in Northern England’, *Ampleforth Journal*, 74 (2) (Summer 1969), 161–76.

of withdrawal into the past, but instead an energetic embracing of the endless possibilities that History offers for its own reinvention.

Like other colleagues who joined the department at York in these early days, Barrie was motivated by the vision of the founding Vice-Chancellor, Eric James, and of the first Head of History, Gerald Aylmer, FBA. This, however, was to be no 'top-down' organisation. The historians, like their colleagues in other departments, worked in productive partnership to formulate an undergraduate curriculum that captured a shared vision of the discipline and its future. Long before such things were expressed in these ways at a national level, the resulting programme met all the benchmarks now considered essential to an excellent undergraduate training in History. Barrie played an important role in helping to ensure that the curriculum was at once utterly true to the intellectual ideals of History and sufficiently diverse and challenging as to test students' potential for the world of work that lay beyond. A major innovation was the compulsory course in Comparative History, where students studied a theme or phenomenon over time and space. The methods of assessment were especially bold, with open examinations the norm for most research-led courses. The challenges of delivering—and receiving—such a curriculum were significant. A natural collaborator, Barrie was a powerful advocate of team-teaching. He also strongly identified himself with the system of pastoral supervision that emerged as a hallmark of the department and the University, and gave significantly of his own (and his family's) time in supporting those students who found the going difficult. Among those who helped Barrie determine his direction of travel during these years was the charismatic Gwyn Williams, who joined the department in 1965; Williams's early training in the history of medieval London and his subsequent work on modern radicalism and revolt had a significant impact both on Barrie's teaching and on his emerging research interests. Over the following years, Barrie was to draw particular inspiration from close collaboration with the outstanding group of historians of medieval and early modern religion that gathered in York, including Peter Biller, FBA, Claire Cross, John Bossy, FBA, Richard Fletcher, Gordon (Bunny) Leff and David Smith.

The other major influence on Barrie's intellectual progress as a medievalist during his first decade at York was the emergence of interdisciplinary studies. In the mid-1960s Elizabeth Salter, founding professor of Medieval Literature in the university, began to formulate plans for a graduate Centre for Medieval Studies. Salter was a gifted literary historian with a very strong command of the artistic as well as the literary legacy of the Middle Ages. Barrie's special skills as negotiator were drawn on, first

to ensure that the new centre should be a genuine collaboration between the Departments of English and History and, later, that its commitment to the visual should be supported by specialist appointments in the History of Art. The interdisciplinarity that is now regarded as a hallmark of York's intellectual culture across the Arts and Humanities owes itself in a very real and lasting way to Barrie Dobson's work in the pioneering Centre for Medieval Studies. With his great colleague and close friend, Derek Pearsall, Barrie co-directed the Centre from 1977 to 1988 and developed, within its taught graduate programme, the various specialist options that helped train a new generation of aspiring medievalists.

The quickly emerging international reputation of the Centre for Medieval Studies, coupled with Barrie's personal reputation as a stimulating and sympathetic supervisor, also brought many able young doctoral students to York. Among those whom Barrie guided in their doctoral work over his time at York and who subsequently went on to careers in universities and archives on both sides of the Atlantic were Lorraine Attreed, Margaret Bonney, Janet Burton, Patricia Cullum, Sarah Rees Jones, Heather Swanson, Brigitte Vale and Juliet Vale, along with students of other universities who sought him out as an external supervisor, including Jeremy Goldberg (Cambridge) and Rosemary Hayes (Bristol). Barrie's supervisees remember his characterisation of their lot as that of the 'lone wolf', and the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which he encouraged them out of their isolation into sociable lunches, visits to archives and historical sites, and the generous round of parties that he and Narda held at their home on Stockton Lane. One recalls being whisked away from a supervision to help Barrie load into his car a recently acquired interwar edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, only rapidly to realise (as Narda could have told her) that he had given no thought to how he was going to find shelf-space for it at work or home. The increase in his institutional and public responsibilities put pressure on Barrie's diary, but everyone emphasises the way that he made them feel important and gave validity and significance to their academic efforts. And he emphatically observed the adage that a supervisor is for life, busying himself in the writing of references and taking enjoyment and pride in the group's professional accomplishments and family lives.

The almost quarter-century of service that Barrie Dobson provided at the University of York saw both the maturing and the diversification of his own scholarly work. The medieval Church remained the abiding and dominant interest. Working intensively with the York archiepiscopal records held at the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (now the

Borthwick Institute for Archives) and the records of the Dean and Chapter of York Minster, Barrie developed a detailed knowledge of the prosopographical, institutional and cultural history of the churches and religious houses of York in the late Middle Ages, and made fruitful comparisons between these and their counterparts in other major cathedral cities, especially Durham.<sup>6</sup> His 1977 contribution on this topic to *The History of York Minster* (itself a model for other scholarly cathedral histories to which Barrie contributed) was a particular highlight, as was his article on York's residentiary canons in 1979.<sup>7</sup> In 1982 he helped to host an important colloquium on the late medieval English Church at York, and edited its proceedings in a successful volume published in 1984.<sup>8</sup> He also continued his fascination with intellectual and educational developments during the later Middle Ages: his 1985 article on the university connections of the cathedral chapters of Durham and York heralded later contributions to the histories of both Oxford and Cambridge, and his 1995 article on the educational interests of Archbishop Rotherham of York stands as the definitive study of this great benefactor of learning.<sup>9</sup> The study of 'Richard III and the Church of York' published in a 1986 Festschrift for the eminent scholar of the Yorkist period, Charles Ross,

<sup>6</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'Cathedral chapters and cathedral cities: York, Durham and Carlisle in the Fifteenth Century', *Northern History*, 19 (1983), 15–44; R. B. Dobson, 'Mendicant ideal and practice in late medieval York', in P. V. Addyman and V. E. Black (eds.), *Archaeological Papers from York Presented to M. W. Barley* (York, 1984), pp. 109–22; R. B. Dobson and S. Donaghey, *Historical Sources for York Archaeology after AD 1100, Part I: The History of Clementhorpe Nunnery*, *The Archaeology of York* 2 (1) (York, 1984); R. B. Dobson, 'The authority of the bishop in late medieval England: the case of Archbishop Alexander Neville of York, 1374–1388', *Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 8 (1987), 181–91; R. B. Dobson, 'The political role of the Archbishops of York during the reign of Edward I', in P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England III: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference, 1989* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 47–64; R. B. Dobson, 'The Church of Durham and the Scottish Borders, 1378–1388', in A. Goodman and A. Tuck (eds.), *War and Border Societies in the Middle Ages* (London, 1992), pp. 124–54; R. B. Dobson, 'English Cluniac houses towards the end of their story', in G. Constable, G. Melville and J. Oberste (eds.), *Die Cluniacenser in ihrem politisch-sozialen Umfeld* (Münster, 1998), pp. 559–73.

<sup>7</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'The later Middle Ages, 1215–1500', in G. E. Aylmer and R. Cant (eds.), *A History of York Minster* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 44–109; R. B. Dobson, 'The residentiary canons of York in the fifteenth century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 30 (1979), 145–74.

<sup>8</sup>R. B. Dobson (ed.), *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1984).

<sup>9</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'Recent prosopographical research in late medieval English history: university graduates, Durham monks, and York canons', in N. Bulst and J.-P. Genet (eds.), *Medieval Lives and the Historian: Studies in Medieval Prosopography* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1985), pp. 181–200; R. B. Dobson, 'The educational patronage of Archbishop Thomas Rotherham of York', *Northern History*, 31 (1995), 65–85.



became widely cited a quarter-century later in the vigorous public debates that followed the exhumation of Richard's remains at Leicester.<sup>10</sup> Among the many honours that Barrie accrued over his career, the Presidency of the Ecclesiastical History Society (1990–1) was one that most surely captured his profound and enduring commitment to the history of the medieval Church.

Alongside the ecclesiastical was an equally abiding research interest in urban history. York's records again provided much of the stimulus for Barrie's early work in this field, the City Archive being located especially conveniently next door to the Centre for Medieval Studies' base at the King's Manor. In the 1970s, the history of late medieval towns was dominated by the 'growth or decline' debate, and there was much sparring over the methodology for testing the relative economic strength or weakness of any given community. Barrie's 1973 article in the *Economic History Review* championed a prosopographical approach by using admission to the freedom of the city of York as an index of urban prosperity.<sup>11</sup> But it was in his invited lecture to the Royal Historical Society on 'Urban decline in late medieval England', published in the Society's *Transactions* in 1977, that he fully demonstrated his more general powers of critical analysis. The discussion of the building of town walls captures brilliantly the aspirations, as well as the vulnerabilities, of English urban communities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and helped move forward the debate over 'growth or decline' from one based (even supposed that we had them) on absolute numbers to one focusing on the aspirations, reputations and 'worship' of towns.<sup>12</sup> In 1980 Barrie published his acclaimed edition of the *York City Chamberlains' Account Rolls*, and later in life planned (but did not finish) a parallel volume for Cambridge.<sup>13</sup> In 1997 he contributed a significant essay to a publication marking the six-hundredth anniversary (in 1996) of the royal charter that elevated the city of York to the status of

<sup>10</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'Richard III and the Church of York', in R. A. Griffiths and J. W. Sherborne (eds.), *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages: a Tribute to Charles Ross* (Gloucester, 1986), pp. 130–54.

<sup>11</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 26 (1973), 1–22.

<sup>12</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'Urban decline in late medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series 27 (1977), 1–22. See also R. B. Dobson, 'Yorkshire towns in the late fourteenth century', *Thoresby Society Miscellany XVIII*, Thoresby Society, 59 (1985), 1–21; R. B. Dobson, 'The City of York', in B. Ford (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain, II: The Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 200–13.

<sup>13</sup> R. B. Dobson, *York City Chamberlains' Account Rolls, 1396–1500*, Surtees Society, 192 (1980 for 1978–9).

an independent county and published an important essay on the historical context of the York Mystery Plays.<sup>14</sup> His wide-ranging contribution to the history of medieval towns, and his ability to work through the historiographical debates with both sensitivity and determination, made him the obvious author of the overview of the later Middle Ages in the relevant volume of the *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, published in 2000.<sup>15</sup>

The legacy of the medieval Church and the medieval town, so evocatively summoned up on the streets and in the historic buildings of York, prompted in Barrie a further and, as it proved, abiding interest in the Jewish communities of England in the Middle Ages. His interest in the field had been awakened by a series of lectures given by Cecil Roth at Oxford, and by a reading of Roth's significantly revised 1964 edition of his *History of the Jews in England*.<sup>16</sup> In 1974 Barrie published, in the Borthwick Papers series, a masterly and compelling study of *The Jews of Medieval York and the Massacre of March 1190*.<sup>17</sup> The notoriety of the events at York in 1190 and the sensitivities that they continue to arouse both in the city and in a wider debate about the victimisation of religious minorities might have caused others to shy away from confronting the historical record and challenging received opinions. But Barrie managed to combine the proper disinterest of the professional historian with an innate (and, importantly, non-aligned) humanitarianism to tackle with honesty one of the most vexed moments in the history of York. The study has remained in print continuously for nearly forty years, and while its findings have inevitably been expanded, modified and sometimes challenged, it remains one of the great set pieces of modern Anglo-Jewish history.

Alongside the Borthwick Paper, Barrie also wrote a closer, academic study (eventually published in 1979) of the York Jewry in the century after 1190, thus establishing his position on the reasons for, and the consequences of, Edward I's general expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290.<sup>18</sup> He was

<sup>14</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'The crown, the charter and the city, 1396–1461', in S. Rees Jones (ed.), *The Government of Medieval York: Essays in Commemoration of the 1396 Charter*, Borthwick Studies in History, 3 (York, 1997), pp. 34–55; R. B. Dobson, 'Craft guilds and city: the historical origins of the York mystery plays reassessed', in A. E. Knight (ed.), *The Stage as a Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 91–105.

<sup>15</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'General survey, 1300–1540', in D. M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, I: 600–1540* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 273–90.

<sup>16</sup>C. Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1964).

<sup>17</sup>R. B. Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York and the Massacre of March 1190*, Borthwick Papers, 45 (York, 1974).

<sup>18</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'The decline and expulsion of the medieval Jews of York', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 26 (1979), 34–52. See also R. B. Dobson, 'The medieval York Jewry reconsidered', *Jewish Culture & History*, 3 (2) (2000), 7–20.

also instrumental in the campaign to erect a memorial tablet to the Jews at the site of the 1190 massacre, Clifford's Tower;<sup>19</sup> when the Chief Rabbi arrived at York Railway Station in preparation for the resulting ceremony, he immediately asked Barrie's opinion on the myth that Jews were formally forbidden from residing in the city. His work on the York Jews, and his strong support for other medievalists working on English Jewry, led to Barrie's election as President of the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1990. His presidential address on 'The Jews of medieval Cambridge' (consciously chosen to complement—and compliment—Roth's earlier study of *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*) was delivered 'more or less seven hundred years to the day since the last persecuted survivors of the once substantial medieval English Jewry were crossing the channel into involuntary exile'.<sup>20</sup> Barrie's strong sense of occasion, and his deep determination to mark and make sense of the events of 1190 and 1290, led him, as incoming President of the Ecclesiastical History Society, to nominate 'Christianity and Judaism' as the theme for the 1991 summer meeting of the Society. His own address was on 'The Role of Jewish Women in Medieval England', a topic that he also addressed in one of his two contributions to the Sewanee Medieval Colloquium of 1991.<sup>21</sup>

The final area to which Barrie Dobson brought his particular talents and perceptions as medieval historian was the study of outlaws and revolutionaries. As with Jewish history, so with this topic, the choice was at once personal and political. In 1970 Barrie published a landmark collection of translated texts on *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*; much in demand as a tool both for teaching and for research, the book was revised to mark the anniversary of the Great Revolt and reissued in 1983, and remains in print to this day.<sup>22</sup> Inspired by Gwyn Williams, Barrie worked his way through a series of sometimes contradictory accounts of the events of the summer of 1381 found in chronicles, official documents and imaginative literature, organising them into a helpful sequence that at once allowed

<sup>19</sup> Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York, SC Pamphlet Box 124/15.

<sup>20</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'The Jews of medieval Cambridge', *Jewish Historical Studies*, 32 (1993 for 1990–2), 1–24 (quotation at p. 1); C. Roth, *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*, Oxford Historical Society, ns 9 (1945).

<sup>21</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'The role of Jewish women in medieval England', in D. Wood (ed.), *Christianity and Judaism, Studies in Church History*, 29 (1992), 145–68; R. B. Dobson, 'A minority ascendant: the Benedictine conquest of the north of England, 1066–1100' and R. B. Dobson, 'A minority within a minority: the Jewesses of thirteenth-century England', in S. J. Ridyard and R. G. Benson (eds.), *Minorities and Barbarians in Medieval Life and Thought*, Sewanee Mediaeval Studies, 7 (Sewanee, TN, 1996), pp. 5–26, 27–48.

<sup>22</sup> R. B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 1st edn. (London, 1970); 2nd edn. (London, 1983).

the student to make sense of the material and yet adamantly resisted any notion that what emerged ought to be treated as a definitive account. Other than in his commentaries in this book, Barrie did not write extensively on 1381, though he was a significant participant in the public events around the commemoration of the Great Revolt in 1981 and contributed a particularly important study of the uprisings in York, Beverley and Scarborough to the volume of essays produced by the Past & Present Society to mark the occasion.<sup>23</sup> It is in his ruminations on the legacy of 1381 in *The Peasants' Revolt* that we can see most directly the human and political values that he shared with Wat Tyler, John Ball and their fellow rebels, and his deep understanding of the longer-term influence of the Great Revolt on the English intellectual and political tradition.

Similar instincts readily account for Barrie's fascination with the Robin Hood legend in medieval England. When Barrie was a research student, there had been a particularly highly charged debate in the pages of *Past & Present* over the figure of the medieval Robin Hood, and those who entered upon the subject a decade later did so not without some intellectual bravery and professional risk. In 1976 he and John Taylor, a medieval historian at the University of Leeds with whom Barrie had developed a long academic and personal friendship, published *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, in which they set out a critical edition of the earliest surviving outlaw ballads and an extended analysis of the historical contexts in which the original Robin Hood legends may have developed.<sup>24</sup> Taylor later described Barrie as 'the major partner in this enterprise', commenting that his co-editor was driven to the subject in part by his own instinctive search for 'the just society'.<sup>25</sup> The Robin Hood ballads have been re-edited several times since 1976 by literary scholars, but the historical notes in *Rymes* have become a classic source of reference. The title of the volume derived from the earliest known reference to the Robin Hood ballads in

<sup>23</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'Remembering the Peasants' Revolt, 1381–1981', in W. H. Liddell and R. G. E. Wood (eds.), *Essex and the Great Revolt of 1381* (Chelmsford, 1982), pp. 1–20; R. B. Dobson, 'The risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, 1380–1381', in R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (eds.), *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 112–42. See also R. B. Dobson, 'Beverley in conflict: Archbishop Alexander Neville and the Minster clergy, 1381–8', in C. Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Art and Architecture in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, 9 (1989), 149–64.

<sup>24</sup> R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor (eds.), *Rymes of Robyn Hood: an Introduction to the English Outlaw* (London, 1976). Their first joint publication on the subject was R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, 'The medieval origins of the Robin Hood legend: a reassessment', *Northern History*, 7 (1972), 1–30.

<sup>25</sup> J. Taylor, 'Richard Barrie Dobson: an appreciation', in R. Horrox and S. Rees Jones (eds.), *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200–1630* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 1–10 at p. 4.

the B-text of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, written around 1377; and it was Barrie's special interest in how the legends might in turn have influenced some of the ideology of the rebels of 1381 that led him to posit a relatively early genesis for texts otherwise known to survive only from the late fifteenth century. He was always inclined to locate Robin Hood in the Barnsdale setting of some of the early legends, and conjured evocative descriptions of the topography, society and culture of south Yorkshire in his support of a distinctively northern genesis for the outlaw hero. In the 1990s he and John Taylor were persuaded to prepare a new foreword for a revised edition of *Rymes*, published in 1997.<sup>26</sup> In the same year the Dobson–Taylor team contributed a review essay to *Northern History* in which they considered the extraordinary levels of scholarly and public interest that had developed over the twenty years since the publication of *Rymes* as a 'transformation of Robin Hood from medieval outlaw into heritage hero'.<sup>27</sup>

It was in his work on Robin Hood that Barrie established himself most obviously as a public intellectual, and some of the obituaries that appeared in the press in the weeks after his death concentrated on the undoubted contribution that he had made to that particular part of the English national heritage. For him, though, the lasting significance of the outlaw hero, as of the events and people of 1381, lay in his own profound commitment to an inclusive and thoughtful socialism. He was comfortable in the 'beer and sandwiches' culture of Labour Party activism and enjoyed lengthy sessions in the pub with friends such as Colin Richmond, where they would debate their commitment to progressive politics (and, in this particular conversation, the rights and wrongs of Philip Larkin's views on the history of jazz). Ultimately, his political vision owed most to Thomas More's *Utopia* (which he taught intermittently throughout his career), and his model of university life echoed his socialist principles in its complete commitment to freedom of opportunity and freedom of speech. In one of the Festschriften prepared for Barrie on his retirement, Rosemary Horrox

<sup>26</sup>Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robin Hood*, rev. edn. (Stroud, 1997). In 1991 Dobson had written an appreciation of Taylor as well as a substantive essay on medieval historiography for the latter's Festschrift: R. B. Dobson, 'John Taylor: a tribute', and 'Contrasting chronicles: historical writing at York and Durham at the close of the Middle Ages', in I. N. Wood and G. A. Loud (eds.), *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to John Taylor* (London, 1991), pp. xi–xxiii, 201–18.

<sup>27</sup>R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, "'Merry men at work": the transformation of Robin Hood from medieval outlaw into heritage hero', *Northern History*, 33 (1997), 232–7. See also R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, 'Robin Hood: the genesis of a popular hero', in T. Kahn (ed.), *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 61–77.

commented on the debate among the contributors as to an appropriate theme and title for their collective enterprise. What emerged was a series of studies 'of pragmatic idealists, looking to achieve salvation or improvement within the structures of this world'.<sup>28</sup> Everyone who knew Barrie Dobson would readily recognise the type.

The national and international acclaim for the emerging body of work, coupled with his growing reputation for academic management, brought Barrie both honour and responsibility. In 1972 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and in 1979 a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He held a British Academy-funded visiting fellowship at the Folger Library, Washington DC, in 1974, when he travelled to so many universities to give lectures that he was dubbed 'the Kissinger of the East Coast'.<sup>29</sup> He was also Visiting Professor at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, in 1987, when he and Narda again enjoyed the pleasures of extensive travel in the United States. In 1977 he was promoted to the title of Professor of Medieval History at York, and from 1984 to 1987 served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University, working closely alongside another historian, the Vice-Chancellor Berrick Saul, and playing a key role in forging closer links between town and gown. His prominent contributions to the study of northern archives, cities and cathedrals also brought a range of offices, including the co-General Editorship of the Yorkshire Archaeological Record Society (1981–6) and the Presidency of the Surtees Society (1987–2002). His service to the wider historical profession led him to a term as Vice-President of the Royal Historical Society (1985–9) and to other roles including membership of the Victoria County History Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee for the Public Records, and the chairmanship of the Friends of the Public Record Office. He was a prominent member of the York Archaeological Trust and was chair of the Trust during one of the busiest and most challenging periods of its development, between 1990 and 1996. His distinction as a scholar and his outstanding contribution to the profession were recognised in a high moment of his career with his election, in 1988, to the Fellowship of the British Academy.

The same year saw Barrie's appointment to the chair of Medieval History at the University of Cambridge. The move from York was a wrench, in several ways. Barrie had just taken over as Head of the Department of History, and his departure was a source of genuine sadness to his colleagues

<sup>28</sup>R. Horrox, 'Preface', in Horrox and Rees Jones, *Pragmatic Utopias*, pp. vii–viii, at p. viii.

<sup>29</sup>Pers. comm., Nigel Ramsay.

and friends in the North. The housing market also militated against a quick move, and it was only after some delay that Barrie and Narda were able to settle in their flat in Bateman Street, with its view (admittedly available only to those prepared to hang from the study window) of the spectacular roofscape stretching away to the chapel of King's College in the distance. After the relative informality of York's governance and the adaptability of its curriculum, the complexities of Cambridge and the Tripos system were a shock. So too with academic politics: a relatively cohesive group at York gave way to a strong tradition of individualism at Cambridge. Barrie's naturally conciliatory approach and quiet determination worked wonders, and he became a recognised force within the Faculty of History. He aimed to establish a firmer place for the history of the Church in Part I of the Tripos, and developed a new Special Subject on late medieval towns in Part II. He provided important leadership and direction for the taught M.Phil. in Medieval History, which had only recently been introduced. In all of this Barrie was guided and energised by two old friends: Christopher Brooke, FBA, who held the Dixie Chair of Ecclesiastic History, and Patrick Collinson, FBA, who arrived from Sheffield to the Regius Chair in Modern History in the year of Barrie's own appointment.<sup>30</sup>

Above all, the decade at Cambridge offered Barrie the opportunity to perform daily acts of assistance and kindness both to those in his charge and to those who, from across the globe, sought out his general advice and support. He was especially active in promoting the interests of the community of postdoctoral fellows and non-university teaching officers whose presence was so important to the success of the Cambridge History Faculty. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw few opportunities for the young generation of scholars to find positions in United Kingdom universities, and Barrie was indefatigable in his efforts to assist—not least by writing what must literally have been many hundreds of references. The counsel and encouragement offered to so many created its own virtuous circle, and medieval history continued to thrive across the university, with Barrie taking on the supervision of another generation of research students who went on to academic and writing careers, including John Aberth, Ruth Frost, Anthony Musson, Ben Nilson, Andrew Wines and Irene Zadnik. Barrie's decision to take a fellowship at Christ's College, driven initially by a natural affinity with a society founded at the end of the Middle Ages, also

<sup>30</sup> Barrie's contribution to the Brooke Festschrift was R. B. Dobson, 'Citizens and chantries in late medieval York', in D. Abulafia, M. J. Franklin and M. Rubin (eds.), *Church and City, 1000–1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 311–32.

proved socially and intellectually fruitful, and Barrie and Narda settled into a series of college friendships, above all a renewed acquaintance with the bursar, Graham Ballard (a contemporary of Narda's at Oxford and, like Barrie, a Wadham alumnus), and his wife Domini. Beyond Cambridge, Barrie was also much in demand as a speaker and session chair at important conferences organised by colleagues from North America, and increasingly from Japan, where Barrie did a lecture tour sponsored by the British Council in 1992. In 1994 he was able to develop a new set of international contacts when he took up a short Visiting Fellowship at Trinity College, Toronto.

Barrie's inaugural lecture at Cambridge, given in February 1990, had the title 'Preserving the Perishable: Contrasting Communities in Medieval England'.<sup>31</sup> It offered the opportunity to consider two lasting preoccupations in his work: the historian's responsibility as custodian of the historic fabric and the historic memory; and the nature and quality of community life in the Middle Ages. Margaret Thatcher's denial of the existence of society and the rampant individualism of the 1980s had raised interesting debates in academic circles about the cosier connotations of 'community' and provoked questions about the legitimacy and utility of the term in relation to the past. The medieval communities on which Barrie focused—monasteries, towns and universities—were formal collectives with their own corporate existence and their own strong sense of identity. None of this, of course, guaranteed that they were always necessarily functional and harmonious: as Barrie appreciated, major social or political disruptions such as the Peasants' Revolt or the depositions of medieval kings could often serve to expose and exacerbate latent stresses and blatant factionalism in a range of religious and secular institutions. This historical awareness, coupled with his acute perceptions of how collectivities flourish or fail, meant that the lecture had both deep historical insights and important contemporary resonances.

The lecture did more than inaugurate a period of office: it heralded a new phase of productivity in Barrie's scholarship. His Royal Historical Society lecture on 'English Monastic Cathedrals in the Fifteenth Century', published in 1991, drew together important work that had been in gestation over the previous decade on the prosopography of the religious orders

<sup>31</sup> R. B. Dobson, *Preserving the Perishable: Contrasting Communities in Medieval England. An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Cambridge on 22 February 1990* (Cambridge, 1991).



in the later Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile he had also further developed his longstanding interest in the monastic presence at the universities. 1992 saw the publication of his chapter on ‘The religious orders, 1370–1540’ in the official *History of the University of Oxford*, and this was followed up with a further detailed study of the members of Durham and Canterbury Colleges in 1997.<sup>33</sup> In 1995 came another magisterial study of monastic lives and personalities in his chapter towards the *History of Canterbury Cathedral*.<sup>34</sup> In 1999 Barrie published an illuminating study of ‘The monastic orders in late medieval Cambridge’ in the Festschrift for his esteemed York colleague, Gordon Leff.<sup>35</sup> The first of a number of volumes of Barrie’s collected essays, *Church and Society in the Medieval North of England*, was published in 1996.<sup>36</sup> With further publications on urban history, medieval Jewry and Robin Hood, discussed above, the 1990s marked one of the most prolific periods in Barrie’s writing career.

All of this was managed alongside an ever-expanding portfolio of duties and offices. A newly emergent feature of scholarly life in the Humanities during the 1990s was the large-scale project led by senior academics and staffed by specialist researchers. Barrie was in the vanguard of such developments. With the Cambridge historical geographer, Robin Glasscock, and a senior medievalist at the Public Record Office, David Crook, he set up the project known first as ‘Lay Taxes in England and Wales’ and later as ‘Records of Government Taxation in England and Wales’, which aimed to provide a definitive listing and complete place-name index of the extensive materials, covering the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, in the Public Record Office series E 179. The existing search tools for the series were notoriously unreliable, and meant that a wide variety of users—local and family historians, historical geographers, social, economic and institutional historians—were often thwarted in their efforts to track down vitally important evidence relating to people,

<sup>32</sup>R. B. Dobson, ‘English monastic cathedrals in the Fifteenth Century’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series 1 (1991), 151–72.

<sup>33</sup>R. B. Dobson, ‘The religious orders, 1370–1520’, in J. Catto and R. Evans (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford II: Late Medieval Oxford* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 539–79; R. B. Dobson, ‘The Black Monks of Durham and Canterbury Colleges: comparisons and contrasts’, in H. Wansbrough and A. Marett-Crosby (eds.), *Benedictines in Oxford* (London, 1997), pp. 61–78, 287–89.

<sup>34</sup>R. B. Dobson, ‘The Monks of Canterbury in the later Middle Ages, 1220–1540’, in P. Collinson, N. Ramsay and M. Sparks (eds.) *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 69–153.

<sup>35</sup>R. B. Dobson, ‘The monastic orders in late medieval Cambridge’, in P. Biller and R. B. Dobson (eds.), *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life. Essays in Honour of Gordon Leff*, *Studies in Church History Subsidia*, 11 (1999), 239–69.

<sup>36</sup>R. B. Dobson, *Church and Society in the Medieval North of England* (London, 1996).

places and taxes in medieval and early modern England. As the project developed it drew funding to Cambridge, London, York and Bangor from a wide variety of sources, including the Leverhulme Trust, the Economic and Social Research Council, the British Academy and the Arts & Humanities Research Board. Indeed, it took on an extraordinary life of its own that survived changes of name and function both among its funders and at its own archival headquarters, which transformed itself from the Public Record Office to The National Archives in 2003. The E 179 database is now a major online resource in the wider repertoire of search facilities offered by The National Archives, and the 'Records of Government Taxation' project has itself sponsored significant research in fiscal social and ecclesiastical history. Barrie remained active in the project throughout, and his 2000 article on aliens in York reflected his keen interest in the reconstruction of medieval lives from tax records.<sup>37</sup>

The energy and interest that Barrie gave to the E 179 project made him much in demand as adviser and chair for other major historical enterprises. He had long been involved with the British Academy's project, English Episcopal Acta, in which David Smith and Christopher Brooke were strongly associated, and he chaired the project from 1995 to 2007. The English Monastic Archives project, based at University College London, was similarly indebted to Barrie for his strong support over a decade of activity from its inception in 1999, as was Jeffrey Denton's major project housed at the University of Sheffield to edit the major assessment of clerical wealth in medieval England, the *Taxatio* of 1291. Barrie also became closely involved in the Harlaxton Medieval Symposium, an annual interdisciplinary conference founded by Pamela Tudor-Craig in 1983 and held at the British campus of the University of Evansville, outside Grantham. Barrie co-chaired the Symposium Committee with Andrew Martindale and after the latter's death in 1995 continued as chair until 2008. He worked closely with stalwarts of the symposium such as Janet Backhouse and Nigel Morgan and helped to bring in many new organisers and speakers from his extensive range of contacts in the UK and North America, including old friends such as Caroline Barron and Joel Rosenthal. He was especially attracted by the symposium's commitment to interdisciplinary studies, and contributed several important articles to the annual volumes of Harlaxton's proceedings: his 1999 essay on

<sup>37</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'Aliens in the city of York during the fifteenth century', in J. Mitchell and M. Moran (eds), *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: Studies in Memory of Andrew Martindale*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 8 (Stamford, 2000), pp. 249–66.

monastic bishops and his 2003 study of 'Henry VI and the University of Cambridge', along with his article on aliens in York, nicely exemplify the continuing themes of Barrie's scholarship through the 1990s and on into the new millennium.<sup>38</sup>

In 1999 Barrie retired from Cambridge and he and Narda returned to live in York, taking up residence on St Olaves Road within a short walk of the city walls. The move brought them back into close contact with the University of York, which elected Barrie an Honorary Professor in the year of his return. Equally importantly, it enhanced family life. With Michelle and her husband Conrad close at hand in Leeds, Barrie was able to spend time with his young grandson, Theo; Mark, working in Bratislava, also bought a house in Leeds and was a regular visitor to his parents' new home. The retirement was marked with multiple appreciations of Barrie's extraordinary contribution. Sarah Rees Jones at York, and Barrie's Cambridge colleague, Rosemary Horrox, organised a memorable Festschrift under the title *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200–1630*, which considered the lives and mental worlds of a wide variety of men and women from clergy and intellectuals, via Lollards and puritans, to indigents and criminals. The respect and affection that all the contributors shared was summed up in a notably warm appreciation from an old and trusted friend and collaborator, John Taylor.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, a number of other colleagues and former students drew together to publish *The Church in Medieval York: Records Edited in Honour of Professor Barrie Dobson*.<sup>40</sup> The 1999 Harlaxton Symposium chose to honour Barrie by adopting the theme of 'The Church and Learning in Later Medieval Society', and the resulting volume of essays, published in 2002, was formally dedicated to him.<sup>41</sup>

Barrie's retirement coincided with the honouring of a number of other esteemed former colleagues at York and other long-standing collaborators; Barrie co-edited the Festschrift for Gordon Leff, contributed the tribute to Claire Cross in the volume of *Studies in Church History* dedicated to her, and wrote a thoughtful comparison of the cults of St Cuthbert

<sup>38</sup>R. B. Dobson, 'English and Welsh monastic bishops: the final century, 1433–1533', in B. Thompson (ed.), *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 6 (Stamford, 1999), pp. 348–67; R. B. Dobson, 'Henry VI and the University of Cambridge', in J. Stratford (ed.), *The Lancastrian Court*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 13 (Donington, 2003), pp. 53–67.

<sup>39</sup>Horrox and Rees Jones, *Pragmatic Utopias*.

<sup>40</sup>D. M. Smith (ed.), *The Church in Medieval York: Records Edited in Honour of Professor Barrie Dobson*, Borthwick Texts & Calendars, 24 (York, 1999).

<sup>41</sup>C. M. Barron and J. Stratford (eds.), *The Church and Learning in Later Medieval Society*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 12 (Donington, 2002).

and Thomas Becket for the essays in honour of John Bossy.<sup>42</sup> Slightly later he also published essays in the Harlaxton volume dedicated to Pamela Tudor-Craig and in the series of studies of medieval documents presented to Colin Richmond.<sup>43</sup> The irony of all this activity was not lost on this group of old friends: Claire Cross noted at a party in Barrie's honour how busy she had been kept writing not one but three essays for his *Festschriften*. Barrie's appreciation of the offerings made to him on his retirement was limited only by his own modesty in accepting them and by his own very clear determination—evident in the setting up of not one but two studies at the new house—to press on energetically with his own work. His conversations around this time suggested that his major ambition in retirement was to complete a book on cathedral chapters in England in the high and later Middle Ages. But while a number of the articles cited above were markers of this route, the final destination eluded him. Much in demand as fund-raiser, committee member and general public figure, Barrie continued to take genuine pleasure in helping others to achieve their personal and organisational goals. One journal that benefited greatly during this period from his general support was *Northern History*, which also published his study of 'The Northern Province in the later Middle Ages' in 2005.<sup>44</sup> In the same year he had the satisfaction of contributing the essay on the early years of his Cambridge college to the volume commissioned to mark the five-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Christ's; his learned yet vivid evocation of the late medieval world of piety and learning provided a strong historical base to an intrinsically teleological project.<sup>45</sup> Barrie's last publication, a co-authored article on the religious houses of Kent, appeared in 2010, and in the same year Helen Birkett gathered together Barrie's earlier essays on medieval Jewry in a volume titled *The*

<sup>42</sup> Biller and Dobson, *The Medieval Church*; Dobson, 'Claire Cross: a tribute'; R. B. Dobson, 'Contrasting cults: St Cuthbert of Durham and St Thomas of Canterbury in the fifteenth century', in S. Ditchfield (ed.), *Christianity and Community in the West: Essays for John Bossy* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 24–43.

<sup>43</sup> R. B. Dobson, "'The clergy are well lodged": the transformation of the cathedral precinct at late medieval Durham', in J. Backhouse (ed.), *The Medieval English Cathedral: Papers in Honour of Pamela Tudor-Craig*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 10 (Donington, 2003), pp. 2–40; R. B. Dobson, 'John Shirwood of York: a common clerk's will of 1473', in M. Aston and R. Horrox (eds.), *Much Heaving and Shoving: Late Medieval Gentry and their Concerns. Essays for Colin Richmond* (Chipping, 2005), pp. 109–20.

<sup>44</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'The Northern Province in the later Middle Ages', *Northern History*, 42 (2005), 49–60.

<sup>45</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'The foundation', in D. Reynolds (ed.), *Christ's: a Cambridge College over Five Centuries* (London, 2005), pp. 3–34.

*Jewish Communities of Medieval England*, with an appreciation by Joe Hillaby.<sup>46</sup>

A collaboration that bore particularly rich fruit after Barrie's return to York was that with the Director of the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, David Smith. Barrie had been associated with the Company of Merchant Taylors of York since the 1980s, when he had been drawn in to assist with the ordering of the Company's archive and became a member. Two decades later, Barrie and David developed a plan for an academically robust and attractively presented account of the Merchant Taylors from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. Barrie recruited several former students and colleagues, including Heather Swanson, William Sheils and Edward Royle, wrote the chapter on the emergence of the company in the later Middle Ages, and organised much of the editing and production.<sup>47</sup> By the time of the launch in 2006, at a splendid event in the medieval surroundings of the Merchant Taylors' Hall, David Smith had retired, and in the meanwhile Barrie had collaborated with Christopher Brooke and with David's colleague at the Borthwick, Philippa Hoskin, to publish another notable volume of essays on English medieval ecclesiastical history.<sup>48</sup> In 2009 the Merchant Taylors' Hall was also the natural choice of venue for the generous party that Barrie and Narda organised to celebrate their golden wedding.

In December 2011 Barrie suffered a serious cardiac arrest that necessitated a long and difficult period of hospitalisation and rehabilitation. He was hugely relieved to return home but found some of the daily round difficult. He made sufficient recovery to enjoy a number of holidays, including a memorable trip to St Andrews with his son Mark. But some of the impairments were more lasting, and it was a particular source of frustration to all that he found it increasingly difficult to read. Family and friends rallied to assist: Barrie loved spending time with his grandson Theo, and close friends such as Mark Christodoulou and Beth Izak would share conversation and read aloud. Barrie became increasingly frail over the following winter and eventually died, at home, on Good Friday, 29 March

<sup>46</sup> R. B. Dobson and E. Edwards, 'The religious houses of Kent, 1220–1540', in S. Sweetinburgh (ed.), *Later Medieval Kent, 1220–1540*, Kent History Project, 9 (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 79–110; R. B. Dobson, *The Jewish Communities of Medieval England: the Collected Essays of R. B. Dobson*, Borthwick Texts and Studies, 39 (York, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> R. B. Dobson (ed.), *The Merchant Tailors of York: a History of the Craft and Company from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century*, Borthwick Texts and Studies, 33 (York, 2006), including Dobson's 'The tailors of medieval York: from craft to company', pp. 23–51.

<sup>48</sup> P. M. Hoskin, C. N. L. Brooke and R. B. Dobson (eds.), *The Foundations of Medieval English Ecclesiastical History: Studies Presented to David Smith* (Woodbridge, 2005).

2013. The funeral was held at the St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel in York on 16 April. Friends and colleagues, including David Parry, Peter Biller and Caroline Barron, spoke thoughtfully and affectionately of the different stages and aspects of Barrie's life; and Theo, rapidly emerging as an exceptionally talented young musician, performed a touching tribute to his grandfather.

If Barrie Dobson's public legacy lies in his enduring contribution to the study and understanding of medieval history, the abiding memory for all those who knew him rests inevitably in the integrity and warmth of his personality. Barrie had many pleasures in his life. When their families were young, he and John Taylor would take the boys off to watch Leeds United play at home; throughout his life, he enjoyed chess and took a serious interest in the game, playing avidly with John Bossy and other friends. The regular retreats to the Lake District for long, vigorous regimes of walking continued for many years; his other great outdoor pursuit was architecture, and his students and friends appreciated his special ability to 'bring stones to life' on tours of the great cathedrals and monasteries of the British Isles. The interest in film that Barrie had developed as a young man in Oxford and London also made him a leading campaigner for the development of an arts cinema in York. He was instrumental both in the foundation of a branch of the National Film Theatre in the city in 1968 and in seeking out civic support and participation in the venture. His passion for jazz led him, when in London, to Ronnie Scott's; and his penchant for a variety of literary forms from poetry to detective novels made him an avid book collector. His delight in words is evident in his academic writing and his private correspondence. He wrote and spoke in highly complex sentences: in the higher reaches of the university administration at York, he was affectionately known as 'Subordinate Clause Barrie'.<sup>49</sup> He had a wonderful story about being mistaken for Marlon Brando in the Harlem Apollo, which he recounted with a sharply self-deprecating wit. And his letters were full of mischievous asides. In 2008 he wrote to invite some friends from London to visit him and Narda: 'We could drive to all parts of Yorkshire from Holderness and Whitby to Haworth—which apparently worshippers of the Brontës now only visit at the cost of having their cars clamped.'<sup>50</sup> In his conversation, he was a master of the dry aside and the revealing anecdote, without ever resorting to the spiteful or the merely gossipy. Above all, he never dwelt on his own achievements or tribulations

<sup>49</sup> Pers. comm., David Foster.

<sup>50</sup> Pers. comm., Nigel Ramsay.

but always inquired about others: as everyone who knew him remarks, he was genuinely interested in the world around him and had the special gift of making one feel the most interesting and important person in the room. His fortunate and unusual combination of intellectual power and personal modesty made him an impeccable scholar, an inspiring teacher and a delightful friend.

W. MARK ORMROD

*University of York*

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