



ROLAND OLIVER

Photograph by Merrick Posnansky

Roland Anthony Oliver

1923–2014

IT IS GIVEN TO FEW to create a field of learning, but this was the achievement of Roland Oliver, Emeritus Professor of the History of Africa in the University of London, who died aged ninety, on 9 February 2014. As a scholar and teacher, as a writer and *animateur*, he did as much as anyone to establish the African past as an academic subject, not only in Britain but around the world. To be sure, he belonged to a cohort of eminent British historians of Africa born in the early 1920s and significantly shaped by service in the Second World War, but it fell to Roland to enjoy a whole career in London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). He was thus strategically placed to make the connections which sustained his vision of African history in terms of the whole continent and across millennia.¹

Roland Oliver was born in Srinagar, Kashmir, on 30 March 1923, the only child of Douglas Giffard Oliver and Lorimer Donaldson. They had married in Bombay in 1921; Douglas Oliver was forty-one and Lorimer twenty-two. She was the daughter of a ship-owner with houses in Ayrshire and Stirlingshire; he was a soldier who had worked for twenty years in the Indian Political Service, that body of British officials who were accredited to the rulers of princely states.² In 1909 Captain Oliver had been British Joint Commissioner for Ladakh, on the eastern frontier of Kashmir. He

¹I first met Roland in 1960, and joined the history department at SOAS in 1971. Much detail in this memoir is derived from Roland's autobiography, *In the Realms of Gold* (Madison, WI, and London, 1997).

²Cf. P. Woodruff (Philip Mason), *The Men who Ruled India*, vol. 2: *the Guardians* (London, 1954), pp. 270–2.

was keen to promote trade across the Karakoram Pass to Turkestan, and he joined forces with Dr Tom Longstaff in the expedition which revealed the Siachen glacier as the largest outside the polar regions and Alaska. Acknowledging Oliver's help, Longstaff observed that: 'The people looked on him as their natural protector and would do anything to help him.'³ Roland Oliver never heard from his father about this high point in his career, nor indeed did he learn much about his father's family, though in his own last years he wrote, 'I have long supposed that my Oliver ancestors were sturdy Danish Olavs who crossed the North Sea to settle in the delectable Scottish borderlands of upper Teviotdale.'⁴

Douglas Oliver took early retirement in 1922 and settled in Srinagar, in the Vale of Kashmir. Here the most important person in Roland's early life was neither of his parents but a 'nanny', Mrs Watson, who gave hard-headed answers to his disconcerting questions about relations between Indians and the British. In 1930 the family moved to England, where it was Roland's maternal grandmother who provided a 'fixed point in a constantly changing world'.⁵ During a sojourn of six months in Dinard, on the coast of Normandy, the Olivers' Swiss maid taught Roland to speak French. From 1932 to 1936 he attended a boarding school in Gloucestershire. All in all, this was 'not a happy time'; but he did acquire a serious interest in butterflies and moths which trained his lifelong alertness to the countryside. Meanwhile his parents were drifting apart. From September 1936 Douglas Oliver lived on his own, in Suffolk; he died two months later.

By then, Roland was in his first term, with a scholarship, at Stowe School. This had opened in 1923, in a mansion built in the eighteenth century for a Duke of Buckingham, with a park designed by 'Capability' Brown. Following ducal bankruptcy in 1848, the place was left to rot.⁶ The school saved the house from demolition, but schoolboy minds were enlarged by more than the grandiose setting, more even than the Temple of British Worthies. The headmaster, J. F. Roxburgh, had recruited highly talented staff, most recently a brilliant young historian, Bill McElwee; he had worked alongside A. J. P. Taylor and was the author—at twenty-nine—of a book on the Emperor Charles V.⁷ Roland responded eagerly to

³T. Longstaff, *This My Voyage* (London, 1950), p. 190.

⁴Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 249.

⁵Ibid., p. 16.

⁶P. Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1997), p. 101.

⁷B. Rees, *Stowe: the History of a Public School, 1923–1989* (London, 2008), p. 75.

McElwee's tutorial style of teaching; he read much in French and German and learned how to 'gut' a book.

In November 1940 Roland won a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, which he entered in January. Anxious to make the most of a college depleted by war, he chose to read English under the supervision of the charismatic George ('Dadie') Rylands.⁸ Not that history was forsworn; Rylands encouraged Roland to go to lectures by Basil Willey, who had just published *The Eighteenth Century Background*. Neither Roland nor Rylands had much taste for the strenuous literary criticism expounded by F. R. Leavis. Roland also developed an interest in church history, prompted by his new-found commitment to Anglican worship. He had been confirmed in his first year at Stowe; now, a solitary moment in King's chapel gave him 'a glimpse of the Christian church at its faithful work throughout the centuries'.⁹ King's nurtured him in other ways. He was welcomed by the Ten Club, a play-reading group of dons and students. In the summer of 1942 he gained an Upper Second in part I of the English Tripos; he also received two sets of call-up papers.

Roland had joined the University Training Corps, and had hoped for a commission in the Welsh Guards. But the army's medical examiners classed him C-3 in view of an injury to his left elbow, sustained in a riding accident when he was twelve. He seemed destined for a humdrum war; he was rescued by Donald Beves, the senior tutor at King's (and prominent in Cambridge theatricals). Beves arranged an interview with John Tiltman, from military intelligence; as a result Roland was able to ignore a summons to the Glasgow barracks of the Pioneer Corps. Instead, he reported at Bedford for a six-month course in cryptography, supplemented by language study, during which he made friends with Angus Wilson and Edward Boyle.

Early in 1943 Roland's intake at Bedford was transferred to the Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park. Here he began work in the Naval Section, mostly translating decrypted signals, but he was soon assigned to a team which decrypted hand ciphers. His colleagues were mostly academics, but by the end of the year the team included Caroline Linehan. Aged thirty-three, she had become an expert on wireless intelligence, and was prominent in the social life of Bletchley. She lived with a female colleague in lodgings at Woughton-on-the-Green; they

⁸N. Annan, 'The Don as performer: George Rylands, 1902-99', *The Dons* (London, 1999), pp. 170-92.

⁹Oliver, *In the Realms*, pp. 30-1.

had a room to spare and before long Roland moved in. He met up again with Wayland Young, a friend from Stowe and King's, through whom he became a close friend of Elizabeth Jane Howard. She was already beginning to write fiction, but Roland thought her ill-read and brought her a book list ranging from miracle plays to *Middlemarch*.¹⁰ For lighter entertainment, Bletchley could call on its own resident wits. Many years later, Roland could recite satirical verses about life at Bletchley, composed for Christmas revues. One such piece gently mocked Jack Plumb, who had been a research fellow at King's and now ran his own section of code-breakers. He was the oldest of several Cambridge historians at Bletchley who later achieved distinction: among them were Asa Briggs, Peter Laslett and Harry Hinsley.¹¹

During the last year of the war, Roland was employed on various short-term cryptographic jobs. In October 1945 he returned to Cambridge for a final undergraduate year. He was now determined to become a historian, and he switched from English to read for Part II of the History Tripos. Together with Wayland Young, he chose as his special subject the life of St Francis, taught by Dom David Knowles; he also took a new course on 'The expansion of Europe'. He worked very hard, in order to gain the First Class degree which would allow him to do research. In the last of his examination papers he could write nothing, so that his performance overall placed him in the Upper Second class. All the same, King's was well aware of Roland's ability and awarded him a research fellowship.

In a general way, Roland knew what he wanted to do: investigate the history of Christianity in the context of European expansion overseas. As to the particular field of study, sub-Saharan Africa seemed suitable since the Christian impact there had been much greater than in Asia. Further definition was needed if the project was to be manageable, so Roland focused on eastern Africa in view of the relatively short time-span—since the 1870s—of missionary work there. Access to primary sources was also a critical factor: his archival research mostly related to the Anglican Church Missionary Society and the non-conformist London Missionary Society, though he maintained an ecumenical perspective, drawing on a wide range of missionary publications to keep in view French Catholics and German Lutherans. Roland found it extremely satisfying to be engaged in such path-breaking work, but he was very much on his own. His nominal supervisor, Professor Norman Sykes, had no competence in

¹⁰E. J. Howard, *Slipstream* (London, 2002), p. 142.

¹¹For connections between Cambridge and Bletchley, see A. Briggs, *Secret Days* (Barnsley, 2011).

mission history, and Cambridge provided no seminar or other *point d'appui* for research students in history. Thus Roland was scarcely acquainted with contemporaries who were also working on African topics: John Fage and Ronald Robinson (both of whom had also gained Upper Seconds) and Jack Gallagher (who had got a First).

By this time the most important person in Roland's life was Caroline Linehan. She had continued to work at Bletchley after the war, and still lived at Woughton. In June 1946 they jointly bought her cottage and began to make improvements. Regular meetings were obstructed by the harsh winter of 1946–7, and in the summer of 1947 both were preoccupied by work. Caroline had a demanding job with the British Council, while Roland spent six weeks in Hamburg. Here he read printed missionary sources, but in this ruined city under British occupation he was well aware that he was himself living in a colonial situation. In a letter to Caroline he remarked, 'One sees only too clearly how all these colonial race problems grow up. How can one expect to have satisfactory relations with people when one's standard of living is their wholetime envy?'¹² Back in Cambridge, Roland wrote up his research. In October he and Caroline were engaged. There was some family resistance; she was thirteen years older; but in December they were married.

Roland's prospects were uncertain. He intended to submit a dissertation to King's; he had also, on advice, registered for a Ph.D. to maximise his chances in the academic job market. However, he had meanwhile heard of an advertisement by SOAS, in London, for a lectureship in the tribal history of East Africa. He was interviewed on 20 January 1948, and offered the post the next day; he accepted. There had been at least one other contender, George Shepperson, who on the face of it was better qualified. Not only had he graduated from Cambridge, in 1947, with a First in History, he had learned a good deal of Chinyanja and Swahili from East African soldiers under his command in Burma. However, he had as yet no research plans, and Roland may well have seemed a more mature scholar.¹³

The new lectureship was modestly titled but portended much. It was a well-considered response to post-war anxieties. In 1944 SOAS had pressed the case for rapid expansion, anticipating post-war upheavals in Asia and Africa. The argument was taken up by the Scarbrough Committee, which

¹² Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 53. John Fage had the same impression in 1948: see J. D. Fage, *To Africa and Back* (Birmingham, 2002), p. 75.

¹³ Information from Prof. G. A. Shepperson, October 2014.

reported in 1946. As a result, the history department at SOAS grew from two teachers in 1947 to twenty-two in 1952. Moreover, it so happened that its head, Cyril Philips, had spent two months in East Africa in the summer of 1947, on an educational mission. He was a historian of India, and esteemed the pioneer work of James Tod and Grant Duff in recording tribal tradition. He firmly believed that it was possible, and necessary, to write the history of Africans, as distinct from that of Europeans in Africa.¹⁴ Hence the post which Roland took up in April 1948.

Roland's first task was to learn his subject. He was expected to spend a year of travel in East Africa, looking for African historical sources. He prepared for this by reading widely in the ethnographic literature and taking lessons in Swahili; he also pressed on with his thesis for Cambridge. In October 1949 Roland set off for Africa, with Caroline. They now had a baby daughter, Sarah; she was entrusted in their absence to the family of Caroline's brother in Melrose, in the Scottish Borders.

The Olivers flew by stages to Stanleyville (now Kisangani) in the eastern Belgian Congo. Here they took over a Ford station-wagon that had been used by Malcolm Guthrie, a SOAS colleague. Their introduction to Africa was abrupt. They soon heard that local peasant farming was really forced labour; and as they drove east through the equatorial rainforest the pygmies gave them some idea of a hunting and gathering economy. In Uganda, they made Kampala their base for journeys across the length and breadth of East Africa, taking in most of Uganda, reaching southwards through Rwanda as far as the southern shores of Lake Tanganyika, and driving across Kenya to Mombasa. Caroline returned to Kampala, but Roland pressed southwards towards the Mozambique border, before heading back north by way of Tabora and Lake Victoria.

The very diversity of East Africa—ethnic, political, economic—invited large questions about the past. The region straddled the frontier between Bantu and 'Nilotic' languages. In the lake kingdoms of Uganda the Olivers recorded narratives by custodians of royal tradition and had fruitful discussions with local pioneers in writing down oral traditions. In district offices they copied records of such histories made by administrators. In Dar es Salaam, Roland located German archives and ran into William Macmillan, the radical historian of missions in South Africa. In Zanzibar, he met the chief justice, John Gray, who had written with great

¹⁴C. Philips, 'A history of SOAS, 1917–67', in D. Arnold and C. Shackle (eds.), *SOAS since the Sixties* (London, 2003), pp. 33–5; C. Philips, *Beyond the Ivory Tower* (London, 1995), pp. 144–5, 154–8, 164; cf. Oliver, *In the Realms*, pp. 57–8.

learning and insight on the history of Gambia and Uganda as well as Zanzibar. A district commissioner who had also been to school at Stowe enabled Roland to look at the ruins of a medieval Arab town on Kilwa Island. Visits to missions sharpened Roland's appreciation of the work of Catholics and Scots Presbyterians as well as Anglicans. And at Makerere College, in Kampala, he exhorted the senior teachers to give their courses much greater African content.

This intensive *tour d'horizon* convinced Roland that it was possible to trace the history of Africa far enough to recapture 'the momentum of change in precolonial societies'.¹⁵ On his return, he spent the academic year 1950–1 mostly at home in Woughton. He completed his thesis, and *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* was published by Longman in 1952. The book was enriched by the year in Africa. Roland duly acknowledged Reginald Coupland's studies of East Africa in the nineteenth century as 'a constant guide and example', but he took his own analysis up to the present day, examining the missionary role in education, the emergence of an African Church, and missionary relations with government, especially over African labour. Meanwhile, Roland joined the seminar run by Keith Hancock, director of the newly founded Institute of Commonwealth Studies. Still more significant for the future, Roland got to know John Fage, then teaching at the University College of the Gold Coast. In the course of 1952 they agreed to convene a conference on African history which would bring together teachers from African colleges and scholars in Europe.

Roland's teaching career began in 1951, when his first research student arrived. This was Richard Gray, also a Cambridge graduate, who worked on missions in the southern Sudan; the next year, three more came, and in 1953 Roland's first African research student. In 1953–4 Roland also looked after several Nigerians working at King's College London. They had taken their first degrees in Africa, through the 'special relationship' introduced in 1948–50, whereby London degrees could be obtained on the basis of courses approved by London. (Back in 1947, a determined Nigerian, Kenneth Dike, had to persuade the University of Aberdeen to set a paper on Nigerian history just for himself.¹⁶) From 1952 it was possible in the Gold Coast to take history examinations validated for a London

¹⁵R. Oliver, 'African history: SOAS and beyond', in A. H. M. Kirk-Greene (ed.), *The Emergence of African History at British Universities* (Oxford, 1995), p. 16.

¹⁶K. O. Dike, 'The study of African history', in C. C. Ifemesia (ed.), *Issues in African Studies* (Awka, 1988), pp. 92–101.

degree; Ibadan followed in 1955 and Makerere in 1960. It was thus part of Roland's remit to oversee the teaching and examination of African history in Africa; and by 1953 he was assisted by Robert Hamilton and Douglas Jones, whose respective interests lay in Central and West Africa.

In July 1953 SOAS hosted the first conference on history and archaeology in Africa.¹⁷ With John Fage, Roland had convened an international assembly of scholars in several disciplines. Among them were two archaeologists from French West Africa, two from British West Africa and four from Britain; museum curators from Belgium and Uganda; three British social anthropologists, three teachers of African languages from SOAS and numerous teachers from the university colleges in British West Africa. The conference papers and discussions focused on archaeology and oral traditions, while setting them where possible in the context of literary sources. Resolutions regarding the conservation of monuments and archives were brought to the attention of the Colonial Office. A key participant was Revd Gervase Mathew, a Byzantinist from Oxford who had taken part in excavations along the East African coast. It was thanks to his connections that *The Times* carried an editorial about the conference, and it was Mathew who floated the idea of a research institute in East Africa; this was adopted as a formal resolution by Mortimer Wheeler, then secretary to the British Academy.

In September 1954 the Oliver family moved from Woughton to West London. Their neighbours included the Hancocks, who became close friends, and 38 Newton Road soon became familiar to visitors from all over the world. Over the next few years, Roland supervised the research of several graduates who used diplomatic and missionary sources to reveal African as well as European agency. His own research topic was congruent and congenial: a biography of Harry Johnston. As a British official, between 1885 and 1901, Johnston played a key role in the partition of Africa, in what became Southern Nigeria, Mozambique, Nyasaland, Tunisia and Uganda. He was trained to be an artist, not a ruler of men, but when he first went to Tunis, aged twenty, a decisive moment in a Moorish arcade made him an empire-builder. There too he learned to see the Mediterranean as the beginning of Africa; northern Africa was essentially part of the whole continent. Soon afterwards, Johnston conceived the abiding interest of his life: the comparative study of Bantu languages. In his last years, two volumes on this subject completed a succession of

¹⁷R. A. Hamilton (ed.), *History and Archaeology in Africa: Report of a Conference held in July 1953* . . . (London, 1955).

compendious books based on his African travels. All this appealed strongly to Roland. *Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa* (London, 1957) was a work of scholarship written with an easy grace, in which the reader can share the author's enjoyment of his story. And while it may not have brought Roland 'much closer to African history', it engaged with his own interest, encouraged by Guthrie at SOAS, in the historical inferences to be drawn from the Bantu language map.¹⁸

The momentum achieved by the first SOAS conference on African history was sustained by a second, much larger, conference in July 1957. This time, Roland managed to convene over a hundred participants. Most came from Britain and the university colleges in Anglophone Africa, including two Nigerians with London doctorates. The Belgians included Jean Stengers, already a friend of Roland, and Jan Vansina, an expert on oral tradition now working in Rwanda. Five came from the USA. The main emphasis was on the teaching of African history, and there were two important sequels. The conference exposed the need for a journal of African history, and Cambridge University Press was ready to oblige. Yet the conference was not exclusively academic: the journalist Basil Davidson was there, and turned it to account in *Old Africa Rediscovered* (London, 1959), a lively yet erudite conspectus of pre-colonial Africa which inspired a generation of students.

In September 1957 Roland and Caroline began their second journey across Africa, again by car, but this time with their daughter Sarah, aged eight. Roland's plan for a year's leave of absence from SOAS was to see for himself something of western and southern Africa, and everywhere to reinforce and extend personal networks of friendship and collaboration. At the invitation of John Fage, the Olivers spent the first months in Africa at the University of (newly independent) Ghana, where Roland taught undergraduates for the first time. In the company of extra-mural tutors, he visited Asante and the Muslim north. Early in 1958 the Olivers spent a month in Nigeria. At the University College of Ibadan, they mingled with historians, all active researchers; at Ife, Roland helped Frank Willett by cleaning a recently excavated terracotta head. In Benin he played billiards with the *Oba*; in Jos he admired the archaeological museum created by Bernard Fagg. From Enugu, the Olivers drove eastwards, over the Cameroun highlands to Bangui and across north-eastern Belgian Congo, where Italian Catholic missionaries were genial hosts.

¹⁸ See H. Carter, 'Malcolm Guthrie, 1903–1972', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 59 (1973), pp. 473–98.

Once in Uganda, the Olivers made for Makerere, where the anthropologist Audrey Richards directed the newly founded East African Institute of Social Research. At the college, Roland conferred with Anthony Low, a historian already enlisted to contribute to a multi-volume *Oxford History of East Africa*. This was a project underpinned by colonial development funds. Roland himself, with Gervase Mathew, was editing the first volume, devoted to the pre-colonial past, and he also sought out fellow-contributors at Tanga, on the coast, and in Zanzibar. In the company of archaeologists, he visited important sites on the coast and in the interior, and in western Uganda sought to collate the evidence of local traditions with that of ancient earthworks.

In July, the Olivers set off on a long journey south. In Rwanda they called on Jan Vansina, who was directing a large-scale scheme for collecting and analysing oral traditions. In Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) they visited the principal stone ruins, and at the University College, in Salisbury (Harare), Roland had discussions with Eric Stokes and Terence Ranger. The Olivers traversed South Africa by way of the University of the Witwatersrand, Natal and Transkei. At the University of Cape Town they met the historian Leonard Thompson before sailing home in September.

Roland came back to SOAS as a Reader in the History of Africa. In 1958 he arranged a series of talks for the General Overseas Service of the BBC (later published as *The Dawn of African History*, London, 1961); this led to a further series in 1967 (*The Middle Age of African History*, London, 1967). He spent much of 1958–9 on the *History of East Africa* (Oxford, 1963). His own chapter, on the interior from c. 1500 to 1840, was the most innovative: from local traditions and ethnographies, he sought patterns of migration, settlement and state-formation. (He admitted later that the chapter was ‘marred by a vestigial diffusionism’.¹⁹) He was also busy planning the *Journal of African History*. Roland and John Fage had been appointed editors, and in 1959 Fage left Ghana for SOAS, replacing Hamilton who had resigned. The journal was launched in 1960; there was no formal statement of policy, but the contents made clear the editors’ large conception of the subject, spanning all parts of the continent from the beginnings of food production to the twentieth century. Subscriptions were assured by the growth of African studies in the USA. At first there were two issues a year; by 1968 there were four; and from 1971 four editors. Roland and John Fage stepped down in 1973.

¹⁹ Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 228.

Meanwhile Roland strengthened his teaching team. SOAS was under pressure to increase student numbers, so Roland and John, with Douglas Jones, set to work devising an undergraduate programme in African history. Their proposal was approved by the London History Board in the autumn of 1960, despite a show of resistance from Dame Lillian Penson, a former chair of the Board and its chief envoy to African universities. In support of this programme, Richard Gray was recruited in 1961—the year in which the Hayter Committee (a sequel to Scarbrough) opened the way for a new phase of expansion at SOAS. Hayter indeed was the cause of Fage moving to Birmingham in 1963, but his place was taken by Shula Marks, who had come from Cape Town to work on the 1905 African rebellion in Natal. In 1963–4 the appointment of Anthony Atmore and Humphrey Fisher provided coverage of North Africa and Islamic sub-Saharan Africa; in 1966 David Birmingham, whose thesis on Angola before 1800 had been supervised by Roland, brought expertise on Lusophone Africa.

The supervision of research students at SOAS was crucial for the growth of African history at home and abroad. Numerous Africans gained Ph.D.s in London and returned to Africa to pursue academic careers. Among Roland's own students, three stand out. Adu Boahen was the first student to come to SOAS with a London degree gained in Ghana. His thesis on Saharan trade in the early nineteenth century, accepted in 1959, explored the historical connections between North and West Africa. Allan Ogot, from Kenya by way of St Andrews, successfully submitted the first of several theses based wholly or largely on oral traditions. Taddesse Tamrat, from Ethiopia, drew on texts in Amharic and Ge'ez for a thesis on church and state in Ethiopia, 1270–1527.

Students and teachers gathered every week in term-time in the African History Seminar. This had been started by Roland in 1952, in emulation of Hancock's seminar, and for many years it also met in the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. Besides discussing individual research projects, Roland's seminar prepared the ground for conferences and for the *History of East Africa*. From time to time, broad themes promoted continuity of argument: firearms, climate, communications, the family. Papers were usually circulated in advance, to maximise time for discussion. For a novice, the atmosphere could be intimidating; as the seminar grew, discussion might be confined to an inner circle of teachers. Not everyone appreciated the discipline of a collective performance in what John Fage aptly called a

theatre.²⁰ One learned to expect the unexpected. The study of food crops could lead to a disquisition on xylophony, and a series on the horse in African history prompted a visit from Glubb Pasha—Sir John Glubb, erstwhile leader of camel-riding Bedouin in Jordan.

In August 1960, with John Fage, Roland flew to Moscow for the twenty-first Congress of Orientalists. Neither got much from the meetings, but Roland cherished the memory of going to the Bolshoi Theatre with Melville Herskovits, the elder statesman of Africanists in the USA. Soon afterwards, Roland was off once more to Africa, to a conference at the university college in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. On the way, he paused in Addis Ababa and met the Jesuits who ran the new university college there. This eventually led to the appointment of three historians with Ph.D.s obtained at SOAS. In Salisbury, the Leverhulme conference brought together the heads of history departments in the colleges of Anglophone tropical Africa. In a crowded bus which included George Shepperson, Ronald Robinson and three African colleagues, Roland revisited the major stone ruins. It was a rough ride, and the erudite tourists unwound by singing soldiers' songs under the direction of Jan Vansina. On the way back to London, Roland stopped in Uganda, where the archaeologist Merrick Posnansky was running a dig at Bigo: Roland assisted by counting paces around earthworks. At Makerere he heard about the new University of East Africa: there would be new history departments, in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, for which SOAS might be able to train African teachers. A final stopover in Khartoum led to Sudanese students coming to SOAS for Ph.D.s.

From January to May 1961, Roland was a visiting professor at the Université Libre in Brussels, at the invitation of Jean Stengers. Caroline came too; Sarah was mostly in London, at St Paul's Girls' School. Roland lectured in French, on pre-colonial Bantu Africa, but got little feedback. On returning to London he helped John Fage in the last stages of preparing a third conference on African history. Over 150 people attended, and Africa was well represented; so were the four centres of African studies in the USA. Much attention was paid to the diffusion of food crops and connections with language history.

Roland spent much of the summer on *A Short History of Africa* (London, 1962), a commission from Ronald Segal to help launch the Penguin African Library. It was written with John Fage, and a draft was finished in six weeks. The first third of the book shares common ground

²⁰Fage, *To Africa and Back*, p. 121.

with Davidson's *Old Africa Rediscovered* (London, 1959), but it then provides the first survey of the rise and retreat of colonial rule. And it encompasses the continent: the links between northern and tropical Africa are firmly held in view. As a terse yet lucid exposition of complex and controversial material, it stands alongside de Kiewet's *History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (London, 1941); as a joint performance at high speed, it might be compared to Longstaff's ascent, in 1907, with three other climbers, of Trisul, in Garhwal: from over 17,000 feet they climbed 6,000 feet in a day.²¹ The *Short History* found a world-wide readership: by 1997 sales approached 400,000 and it had been translated into eleven languages (including Arabic and Catalan).

Teaching African history to undergraduates at SOAS began in the autumn of 1961; Queen Mary College provided three courses in European history. One such student became a chartered accountant and thought he had been well prepared: he had been taught 'to look at a lot of ropey evidence and to write comprehensibly about it'.²² In December a conference on 'ethno-history' in Dakar, Senegal, enabled Roland to explore the possibility for SOAS students of research in Francophone Africa.

In the spring of 1962 Roland took stock of African studies in the USA. He began on the west coast, meeting James Coleman and Leonard Thompson of UCLA and Desmond Clark at Berkeley; he then made for Evanston, near Chicago, where Herskovits had invited him to give a course of undergraduate lectures at Northwestern University. Caroline and Sarah joined him there. Roland also made side-trips to Boston University, to Gwendolen Carter at Smith College and to Madison, Wisconsin, where African history was flourishing under Jan Vansina and Philip Curtin. In New York, the Rockefeller Foundation sought Roland's advice on the role of history in promoting national identity.

In December, Roland returned to Accra, Ghana, for the first International Congress of Africanists. This was conspicuously an African occasion; the president was Kenneth Dike (already a vice-chancellor in Nigeria) and nearly half the members were African, from all over the continent. At the University, Roland had long talks with the vice-chancellor, Conor Cruise O'Brien, and with Thomas Hodgkin, who was setting up an Institute of African Studies. Early in 1963, hearing that Terence Ranger was about to be deported from Southern Rhodesia, Roland offered him a job at SOAS, but Ranger had already agreed with the university college at Dar es Salaam to become their first head of history.

²¹ Longstaff, *This My Voyage*, pp. 101–3.

²² Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 254.

Roland's tireless promotion of African history was formally recognised by the University of London when in April 1963 he was appointed to the first chair in Britain in the history of Africa. At the same time, he took the lead in forming the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom. In July he had high hopes of recruiting Jan Vansina for SOAS; in the end Vansina decided not to apply, which strained relations between them for some time.²³ That summer, Roland turned to a new research project, a biography of Charles Arden-Clarke, the last governor of the Gold Coast. In November, this project (which later he had to abandon) took him back to Accra, and to South Africa, on his way to serve as an external examiner at Salisbury.²⁴ In Northern Rhodesia (soon to become Zambia), Roland got to know the archaeologist Brian Fagan, and off the east coast he revisited the island site of Kilwa. This time he was accompanied by Terence Ranger and Neville Chittick, who had been excavating there as the first director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa; this had been founded by the British Academy in 1960, and Roland was a founding member of its governing council.

In the spring of 1964 the Oliver family acquired a new home: a prefabricated wooden cottage at Frilsham, near Newbury, Berkshire. Thereafter, Roland would spend no more than three days a week in London in term-time; reading and writing were now pursued in rural quiet, in a garden hut overlooking the Pang valley. He briefly visited Ibadan in April, for a seminar at which he was much impressed by the French anthropologist and film-maker Jean Rouch. Soon after his return, Roland delivered his inaugural lecture. The timing was felicitous: it was just six months since Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, had—on television—dismissed African history as 'the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes'. Roland delighted in rising to this provocation and produced a quotation to show 'how much more humane is the outlook of the eighteenth-century slave trader [Alexander Dalzel] than that of the twentieth-century Regius Professor'.²⁵

Roland's next two summers were devoted to a collaboration with Anthony Atmore: *Africa since 1800* (1967), a textbook commissioned by Philip Harris at Cambridge University Press. It was Harris who had set in motion the *Journal of African History*, and it was he, early in 1965, who

²³ J. Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison, WI, 1994), pp. 103–4.

²⁴ However, he did publish 'Arden-Clarke and Nkrumah, 1949–1957', *Études africaines offertes à Henri Brunschwig* (Paris, 1982), pp. 411–21.

²⁵ Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 292. Advocates of American studies in England faced similar prejudice: see also M. Cunliffe, *In Search of America* (New York, 1991), pp. 1–17.

persuaded Roland and John Fage to be general editors of a Cambridge History of Africa. In September Roland was once again in Dar es Salaam, for a conference convened by Ranger but chaired by Roland's former research student, Allan Ogot. On the way home, Roland visited Neville Chittick in Nairobi, to which the British Institute had recently moved its headquarters. At SOAS, in 1965–6 the African History Seminar prepared the way for an out-of-town conference, in the summer of 1966, on chronology: it weighed the evidence from genealogy, radio-carbon dating and eclipse maps.

In September, Roland was back in Africa, this time with Caroline. For the past three years she had suffered from arthritis, and the prognosis was bleak, but over the summer of 1966 her condition greatly improved. She was determined to share with Roland a moment of glorification in—and by—Africa: he was to receive from the Ethiopian Emperor half the annual Haile Selassie Prize for African research.²⁶ On 16 October the ceremony took place in the assembly hall of the Organisation of African Unity, in Addis Ababa. It was preceded by a purposeful international conference: a brilliant gathering of more or less old Africa hands, including the journalists Basil Davidson and Colin Legum.

At SOAS, undergraduate courses in African—and Asian—history were well under way. They were now complemented by the introduction, in 1965, of one-year interdisciplinary master's courses, clustered round centres of area studies. Roland became the first chairman of the African centre. The programme attracted a growing number of graduate students who had worked in Africa as volunteers; it appealed strongly to North Americans.

From February to May 1967 Roland, with Caroline, was in the USA. Their base was Harvard, where Roland found undergraduates more responsive than their teachers. At the University of Wisconsin he lectured on the expansion of Bantu language speakers, a subject on which he had recently published an article and which he had been mulling over for a decade. He leaned heavily on Guthrie's assumption that languages with the highest proportion of common roots were the oldest in a language family. This assumption underpinned Roland's contention that the main phase of Bantu population growth and dispersal occurred to the south of the forest belt of the Congo basin. Roland was therefore quite unprepared when a student (Joseph Miller, the future historian of the Angolan slave

²⁶The other recipient, Henry Pereira, a soil physicist, became chief scientific adviser to the British government.

trade) suggested, to the contrary, that the highest incidence of common roots in a language family was most likely to be found around the centre of its habitat. Resemblances, in turn, might be due to borrowing rather than a common path of transmission. Roland confronted this line of argument in March 1968, at a conference on Bantu origins convened in Chicago by Brian Fagan. Here the Guthrie–Oliver hypothesis was stringently criticised, chiefly by archaeologists and a botanist. Yet heuristically it had served its turn: the conference firmly linked the study of Bantu expansion to the history of food production.²⁷

In June 1968 Roland made a brief African tour: he visited the university at Ife, Nigeria, as an external examiner, and flew on to Kinshasa, Zaïre, to look at Lovanium University, from which one of his research students had graduated. Here African history was being developed by Jean-Luc Vellut, who became a life-long friend.²⁸ Roland pushed on to a conference at the new university in Zambia and came home by way of Nairobi.

At SOAS, African history continued to flourish. By 1972 there were ten teachers of the subject and around forty research students. Half of them came from Africa, thanks in part to Roland's sedulous networking around African campuses. Between 1963 and 1973 Roland himself supervised eight doctoral theses based on oral evidence gathered in Uganda and Kenya. In 1970–2 Roland joined Brian Fagan in writing another textbook for Cambridge University Press: *Africa in the Iron Age* (1975). He also experimented with a novel medium for lectures to undergraduates: the tape recorder. Later, he hoped to interest colleagues in Paris with a view to exchanging taped lectures with France and Africa, but by 1984 European Community politics had defeated him. For the family, the 1970s were trying times. Caroline's arthritis grew worse. From 1968 to 1975 Sarah was away from home much of the time, at Somerville College, Oxford, and then teaching in Germany. By 1970 it made sense to sell the London house and instead take a flat near SOAS. All the same, Caroline pressed on when she could with writing of her own: a series of essays, *Western Women in Colonial Africa* (Westport, CT, 1982).

During much of the 1970s Roland was occupied with the *Cambridge History of Africa*. This was to consist of eight volumes, composed of

²⁷ Oliver, *In the Realms*, pp. 316–20; Vansina, *Living with Africa*, pp. 128–30. Cf. R. Oliver, 'The problem of the Bantu expansion', *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), pp. 361–76.

²⁸ J.-L. Vellut, 'Roland Oliver', *Bulletin des Séances de l'Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outremer*, 60 (2014), pp. 91–9.

chapters of around 20,000 words, allowing authors room to survey meaningful areas and time-spans. Such a plan was indeed a tradition of the Press; it certainly agreed with Roland's concern for literary form. The first volume, edited by Desmond Clark, was written by Egyptologists and archaeologists of the Stone Age: it was very much a world of its own. Volumes 2 to 7 ranged from a notional 500 BC to c.1940; half of their chapters were entrusted either to teachers at SOAS or to their former students. This was logical since such authors had usually been pioneers in the fields assigned to them. Volumes 2 to 5 came out between 1975 and 1978; volume 1 (nearly twice the length of volume 5) only in 1982. Volumes 6 to 8 came out in 1984–6; they had been planned somewhat later, so that they could reflect the growth of research on colonial Africa. Roland himself edited volume 3 (c.1050–1600), for which he wrote a chapter on the East African interior. With Brian Fagan, he also wrote a chapter for volume 2, on the spread of iron-working and food production; here he took due account of recent criticism of Guthrie's inferences from the language map regarding Bantu expansion. Inevitably, the *Cambridge History* was compared to the UNESCO *History of Africa*, also in eight volumes, which came out in the 1980s. In this, the chapters were much shorter, and there were many more authors. Most were African, and they came from all over the continent. The Cambridge series, by contrast, had few African contributions, but these included two chapters by Taddesse Tamrat, and there were two chapters by the Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney.

Meanwhile, Roland's life became more strenuous than ever. Examining at Ife took him to Nigeria in 1972 and 1976, and a British Council invitation took him to Cameroun in March 1978. He collaborated with Anthony Atmore to produce *The African Middle Ages 1400–1800* (1981) for Cambridge University Press. Meetings of the International Congress of Africanists took him to Ethiopia late in 1973, and to Zaïre in 1976 and December 1978—the year in which Roland became head of the history department at SOAS; with thirty-five teachers, it was the largest in the school. Caroline's condition had got much worse. Live-in help was obtained, and Sarah was within reach, with a job in London, but Roland himself bore much of the burden of care, and with great fortitude. At SOAS, he got expert clerical help from Ruth Cranmer (wife of a former professor of music). In the course of 1983 Caroline was received into the Roman Catholic Church (Roland followed in 1984). During the autumn, Caroline was visited each week by a monk from the Benedictine Abbey of Douai, near Frilsham; she died at Frilsham on 7 December.

As head of the history department, Roland had the depressing task of scaling it down. From the late 1970s, financial stringency obliged SOAS to encourage early staff retirement: this caused the loss of six historians between 1982 and 1986, and a haphazard loss of regional expertise. Astutely, Roland raised morale by convening, at least twice a year, a departmental seminar to discuss topics of interest to more than one region: one memorable session considered ethnic patterns of recruitment to Ottoman bureaucracy. By 1986, Roland had decided that it was time for him to go. One farewell party at SOAS was hosted by Cambridge University Press: it celebrated the completion of the *Cambridge History of Africa*. John Fage was there, with most of the volume editors.

In retirement, Roland could give more time than before to the affairs of the British Institute in Eastern Africa.²⁹ Succeeding Laurence Kirwan, he served as President from 1981 to 1993, visiting East Africa nearly every year. On-the-spot acquaintance with the work of Institute staff and associated researchers enabled him to take a lead in shaping Institute strategies. In December 1982 he found that the Institute had been asked to vacate its site on the Nairobi campus; it moved to a suburb, Kileleshwa, in 1984. Meanwhile Neville Chittick, in his final year as director, took Roland to Lamu, and then flew with him to Khartoum to look at Derek Welsby's excavation of a ninth-century church at Soba, the capital of the Christian Nubian kingdom of Alwa, on the Blue Nile.

In January 1985, the new director, John Sutton, took Roland to Iron Age farming and pastoral sites in northern Tanzania and western Kenya, including the stone terraces of Engaruka. At Olduvai Gorge they stayed in Mary Leakey's field base. In Kenya, Roland also visited Peter Robertshaw's project on early pastoralism in Lemek and Gogo Falls. These expeditions raised Roland's spirits after a depressing trip to Uganda (including a meeting with President Obote). Early in 1986 Roland discussed with Sutton the need to raise the Institute's profile in East Africa, following a report by a visiting mission from the British Academy. Part of the answer was Sutton's own research plans, focusing on specialised and irrigated farming sites in the highlands between eastern Zimbabwe and southern Ethiopia. At the coast, near Lamu, Mark Horton showed Roland the sites on Pate Island which were yielding early dates for the origins of Islam in East Africa. In 1989 Roland and John Sutton looked at the resumption of archaeological work in western Uganda. In 1990 they visited Graham Connah's team at Kibiro, a salt-working site beside Lake Albert; they also

²⁹I am grateful to Dr John Sutton for advice on the next two paragraphs.

visited Addis Ababa, to prepare the way for the Institute's return to Aksum (where Chittick had worked in 1972–3).

The African Iron Age had by no means displaced Roland's long-standing interest in the Scramble for Africa. In 1985, the centenary of the Berlin West Africa conference was marked by meetings in Berlin, Uppsala and Brussels, all of which Roland attended; at the last two, he spoke about European and African interpretations of Partition.³⁰ And in 1988 Roland made his first visit to Malawi: a territory he had first got to know about through his study of Harry Johnston. The invitation came from the university, where the head of the history department, Owen Kalinga, had been one of Roland's research students. And it was a group of his former students who in 1988, for his sixty-fifth birthday, contributed to a special Festschrift issue of the *Journal of African History*. The following year, in Atlanta, Roland received the Distinguished Africanist Award from the African Studies Association of the USA. In a speech of thanks, he emphasised that America, rather than Europe or Africa, had become the 'centre and guardian of African studies'.³¹

At Frilsham, meanwhile, Roland had been working on a book—the first in thirty years to stand in his name alone. This was a survey of the African past for a series on the history of civilisation, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Roland broke away from the history of events and regions; instead, he devised a sequence of themes, in twenty-one short chapters. Thus 'Men of Iron' and 'Peoples of the Book' lead on to 'Cities of the Plain', in which recent archaeology illuminates the origins of urbanism right across western Africa. For much-needed refreshment, Roland allowed himself five summer holidays visiting friends in Scandinavia. They were mostly much younger than Roland, but included, in Uppsala, Bengt Sundkler, a former missionary and author of seminal studies of African churches in South Africa and Tanzania.

The African Experience appeared in 1991; it was dedicated to Suzanne Miers. She and Roland were married, at Douai Abbey, in July 1990. They had known each other for many years. Suzanne, as a widow with young children, had obtained a Ph.D. in 1969 under Roland's supervision, and in due course published *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade* (London, 1975). She taught at Wisconsin and Ohio Universities, and co-edited two collections on slavery in Africa and its abolition. Roland put them to good

³⁰R. Oliver, 'The partition of Africa', *Le centenaire de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo: recueil d'études* (Brussels, 1988), pp. 41–9.

³¹Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 406; cf. p. 265.

use in *The African Experience*. Suzanne and Roland settled happily into a new life in two homes: they spent the winters in Florida, on the Gulf Coast, and the summers at Frilsham, to which Sarah, her husband and their daughter moved in 1996.

In June 1992 Roland became an Honorary Fellow of SOAS. In 1993 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. He was still writing, and had lost none of his skill, and patience (he called himself an ‘agonisingly slow’ writer³².) His autobiography, *In the Realms of Gold*, came out in 1997; it is a polished and meticulous record of a lifetime’s effort—and a harvest of friendships. For several years, Roland and Suzanne attended the annual meeting of the African Studies Association of the USA. They also made tours in Europe, planned around a historians’ conference at Aix-en-Provence. From 2012 Roland stayed put in Frilsham for the winter. By then he was rather deaf, and dependent on carers. Suzanne (who was slightly older than Roland) was in the USA, visiting her family, when Roland died, peacefully, at Frilsham on 9 February 2014.

* * *

Much of this memoir has been a chronicle of exploits in a golden age—of foundation largesse and airline flexibility: of ‘circular tickets and unlimited stopovers’.³³ Roland’s standing as a scholar must be measured by other yardsticks, but a large part of his contribution to knowledge was precisely the constant networking—and not just networking but the creation of networks (some might call it empire-building). He helped to shape a great many careers, especially in Africa, and his own career was a masterpiece of careful construction. His autobiography completed it, yet omits one formative moment. When Roland became a professor in 1963, he took himself to Savile Row, to be measured for suits. Awaiting the attentions of tailor and cutter, Roland realised that he was sitting in the former premises of the Royal Geographical Society; indeed in the very room in which the remains of David Livingstone had rested on their way to Westminster Abbey.³⁴ So, for the author of *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, a distinguished but wholly mundane event would be a sacral investiture. In old age, he sometimes mocked his younger self: ‘People in mid-career are so self-important.’³⁵ But from the outset Roland under-

³² Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 252.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

³⁴ Roland told me this story in about 1990.

³⁵ Oliver, *In the Realms*, p. 325.

stood that at SOAS he was uniquely placed to advance the cause of African history.³⁶ In so far as he aspired to be at the centre of a collective brain, he may have reacted against his wartime experience at Bletchley, when for security reasons knowledge tended to be confined to one's own corner in a great thinking machine.

Roland's publications, as author, part-author or editor, constitute a formidable *oeuvre*. They do not include a monument of original research, such as George Shepperson's *Independent African* (Edinburgh, 1958), a seminal study of the African rising in Nyasaland in 1915. Nor can it be said that Roland showed much interest in current debate about the proper concerns of the historian. In 1967 Ranger urged historians of Africa to attend to 'ideas and methods developed inside European studies'.³⁷ Such cross-fertilisation enabled John Iliffe to write *The African Poor* (Cambridge, 1988). Roland's most enterprising venture was of a different kind. In his writings on Bantu expansion, he brought the perspectives of a historian to bear on disciplines of which he was not himself a practitioner.³⁸ In his inaugural lecture he recalled a recent moment of illumination at an Iron Age site in Zambia. He had sensed there a closeness to 'the men who, as the propagandists constantly remind us, never invented the wheel. But for all that, during these seven centuries they mastered their own unusually harsh and isolated environment, and passed from a parasitic existence to a productive one.'³⁹ Here indeed we see at work the best sort of historical imagination. Moreover, beyond his own fields of intensive study, Roland deployed his erudition to open new paths for other scholars. In the early 1960s Humphrey Fisher's father, the economist Allan Fisher, had retired and needed intellectual occupation. 'Does he read German?' asked Roland, and learning that he did suggested that he translate Gustav Nachtigal's *Sahara und Sudan* (1879–89). Allan Fisher set to work at once; when the first volume was published in 1971 he was 'a changed man'.⁴⁰ And while Roland's relations with social anthropologists were not always easy, he was well aware of possible meeting-points. It was Roland, who, soon after we first met, told me to read Ian Cunnison's brief but profound essay on oral tradition in central Africa, *History on the Luapula* (Cape Town, 1951).

³⁶ In 1949 he turned down a readership at Makerere, and in 1955 a chair at Salisbury.

³⁷ T. O. Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes in African History* (Nairobi, 1968), p. xiii.

³⁸ See his chapters in the *Cambridge History of Africa*, vols 2 and 3, and R. Oliver, 'The Nilotic contribution to Bantu Africa', *Journal of African History*, 23 (1982), pp. 433–42.

³⁹ R. Oliver, *African History for the Outside World* (London, 1964), p. 18.

⁴⁰ Information from Dr. H. J. Fisher.

From his early thirties, Roland saw himself as a public intellectual. Bringing the African past into the mainstream of historical scholarship was, after all, just part of a greater convulsion: the downfall of European empires. There was work to be done beyond the classroom in changing public perceptions of Africa. Roland began writing letters to *The Times* in 1955 and continued until 1991; from 1959 many were datelined from the Athenaeum. In 1968 no fewer than six of his letters were published. Central Africa was a perennial concern. Occasionally, Roland took issue with his seniors: in 1960, with Mortimer Wheeler, over the relations between history and archaeology; in 1968 with Margery Perham over her support for Biafra's bid for secession from Nigeria. (Nonetheless, he gave the address at her memorial service in 1982.) By the 1970s Roland had also established himself as the reviewer of choice on African topics for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Between 1978 and 1985 he wrote for it three or four times a year; his last review appeared in 2005.

Roland gave much time to institutions beyond the academy. From 1959 to 1965 he was on the council of the Royal African Society, and from 1959 to 1972 on the council of the Institute of Race Relations. In 1965–6 he helped to found the Minority Rights Group, which he chaired until 1970 and again from 1975 to 1989. Yet another field in which he made contacts beyond the campus was a dining club, the African Private Enterprise Group. Early in 1974 Roland surprised David Birmingham by hinting that Lisbon, not Mozambique, would be where the Portuguese lost their empire in Africa. So indeed, it proved. 'Who told you?' asked David. 'A banker', said Roland.⁴¹

For Roland, the recovery of Africa's past was essential to the intellectual decolonisation of Africa. He could be bitingly sarcastic about reactionaries in Whitehall or Central Africa. But he had no sympathy with socialism, and this distanced him from other historians who were also critics of empire, notably Basil Davidson.⁴² Besides, he deplored the growth of the one-party state in Africa as a threat to intellectual freedom, especially to Africans trying to implant international standards of scholarship: for Roland, such transfer was part of the tutelage which had been the moral justification for colonial rule. As time went on, certain eminent African academics who had been taught by him came to regard him as an old-fashioned paternalist. Suspicions of this kind also surfaced in the

⁴¹ Information from Professor D. B. Birmingham.

⁴² Despite reservations, they held each other in high regard.

Institute of Race Relations in 1972 when Roland and most of the rest of the council resigned.

Roland's single-minded dedication to his life's work left him little time or energy for other pursuits. I recall conversations at Frilsham with Caroline as she sat in her wheelchair; she wanted to hear about life in London: theatre, music, exhibitions. Roland listened to such talk with mixed admiration and envy. London for him was a place to get things done; Frilsham was where he felt at home. At SOAS he could seem unduly formal, even aloof; at Frilsham, hospitality flowed freely, often between walks in the woods. For most of his long life, Roland enjoyed good health. At Frilsham, he played tennis; in London, he preferred walking to public transport. In Africa, he learned to appreciate the 'open door' informality of African hospitality. He was delighted by the spectacle of eminent Africans dancing the night away. He was not what is usually called 'musical', but certain poignant musical moments remained in his memory.

Living as long as he did, Roland knew disappointment. He looked back on the hopes and illusions of the 1960s. Later in the century African universities were being emasculated by politicians—and by rapid population growth. But he had achieved a great deal. As both author and editor, he communicated, with consistent grace and clarity, the results of his own pioneering researches, but he also enabled the results of research by many others to reach a wide variety of readers. As a teacher, he had a fructifying influence on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Journal of African History* flourishes under international editorship. At SOAS, the African History seminar meets regularly and can still exert a magnetic attraction around—and beyond—the University. And the work of the British Institute in Eastern Africa attests that Roland's comprehensive view of the African past is not forgotten.

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