



MAURICE HUGH KEEN

Maurice Hugh Keen 1933–2012

THERE MAY HAVE BEEN OTHER Fellows of the Academy described in fiction under their own guise but probably none shown in such seemingly mundane activity as the start of a tutorial on the Hussites. So Maurice Keen appeared in Frederick Forsyth's 1989 novel *The Negotiator*.¹ The scene is appropriate. Maurice was one of the great university tutors of the twentieth century, not just in History and not just in Oxford where he spent the whole of his professional life. This he unassumingly combined with research and publications that placed him in the top flight of historians of his generation. Some distinguished scholars seek the validation of repeated preferment, chasing advancement across institutions, countries and continents. By comparison, Maurice's professional trajectory appears flat, as a tutor for four decades in the same Oxford college where he had himself studied as an undergraduate. Yet his ambitions were of a different order. The apparent parochialism of his curriculum vitae belied a deeply fulfilled academic life in which devotion to teaching formed a natural complement to scholarly research of international reach and impact that transformed (he would probably have disapproved of the term 'revolutionised') understanding and appreciation of the culture of the people who ruled Western Europe for over half a millennium. His historical legacy rests equally in the hundreds of pupils he inspired within and beyond historical studies and in major works of subtle, sophisticated scholarship of the highest pedigree and quality. His most important book,

¹F. Forsyth, *The Negotiator* (London, 1989), p. 57.

Chivalry (1984), which won the Wolfson Prize (1985), remains one of the outstanding works of anglophone historical writing of the last seventy years.²

I

Maurice Keen was born on 30 October 1933 at 18 Regent's Park Terrace, London, the first child of Harold Hugh Keen (1902–74) and Catherine Eleanor Lyle Keen, née Cummins (1907–91); there were two other children, Charles (b. 1936) and Geraldine (b. 1940). Hugh Keen was an accountant, as his own father had been. Catherine Keen, of Anglo-Irish descent, was a talented artist who had trained at the Slade. Though based in London, during the disruptive years of the Second World War, as a retreat the Keens bought a house in North Devon on the banks of the River Torridge. This became a lasting and important feature of the rest of Maurice's life; a place to enjoy and relax with his family, to think and read and above all to fish. In 1946, the family moved to Oxford when Hugh Keen was appointed Secretary to the Curators of the University Chest—essentially the university's chief financial officer. Hugh and Catherine Keen's contrasting talents rubbed off on their children. Charles read English at New College, Oxford, before going into banking. Geraldine read Maths at St Anne's College, Oxford, and became a statistician before entering the world of journalism covering sales rooms and art collecting. Maurice initially read English at Balliol and retained a sharp sense of the importance of material culture and artistic display in understanding the past. His relationship with numbers was less clear. Colleagues attest to his extraordinary capacity to remember such things as telephone numbers. However, Maurice himself disclaimed any mathematical skill: 'I, from my schooldays on, have always found myself bewildered in the world of numbers', an excuse if not reason for eschewing the normal accompaniment to social history of tables and graphs in his history of English society in the later Middle Ages.³

Maurice's family exerted lasting influence, not least his Irish heritage. Catherine Keen's father, Stevenson Lyle Cummins, from a medical family in County Cork, had had a most distinguished career in the Royal Army Medical Corps, retiring with the rank of colonel before becoming

²M. H. Keen, *Chivalry* (London and New Haven, CT, 1984).

³M. H. Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348–1500* (London, 1990), p. vii.

Professor of Tuberculosis at the Welsh National School of Medicine (1921–38). He and his wife Eleanor played an important role in Maurice's youth when he was evacuated to live with them in North Wales during the Second World War. They stimulated an appreciation of his Irish ancestry, an Irishness which grew with passing years, sometimes even manifesting itself in an Irish lilt to his pronunciation (as in 'fillum' for film). Ireland supplied a sort of second or extended identity, a place for frequent visits to lecture, to see friends and to fish. One of his closest friends, his Oxford contemporary Dennis Bethell, for many years lectured at University College, Dublin. Maurice externally examined for the National University of Ireland between 1971 and 1978 and was briefly tempted to accept a chair at Trinity College, Dublin—perhaps the only time he seriously considered leaving Oxford. Many of the chapters of *Chivalry* first saw the light of day as lectures to, as he put it, 'patient, courteous and generous' audiences in Irish universities.⁴ In Oxford, he supported the establishment of the Carroll Chair of Irish History in 1991, the first of its kind in an English university, serving on its first electoral board.

Beside Ireland, Balliol College provided another constant focus of loyalty and identity also closely associated with his family. Both Maurice's father and his uncle, Allen Keen, who was killed in the First World War, went to Balliol. Maurice followed suit as a Scholar (1954–7). Maurice's aunt, Barbara, married Allen's best friend at Balliol, G. N. (later Sir George) Clark, one of the most powerful historians of his generation. Hugh Keen, by virtue of his office at the University Chest, became a professorial fellow of Balliol (1946–64), overlapping with Maurice in the fellowship from 1961, an unusual father and son coincidence. These extended links with Balliol were enshrined in Maurice's later insistence that the fellowship in medieval history there, endowed by alumni donations in his honour, should be named not just for him but for the Keen family. More intimately, the much-remarked-on ancient green-tinged MA gown Maurice wore had been his father's. Maurice's devotion to Balliol was intrinsic: 'cut him in half and you will find the college crest running through him, as in a stick of Brighton rock'.⁵ Yet his loyalty was not of the arid, blinkered, sentimental, reactionary kind so often encountered in professional old alumni, self-appointed guardians of the flame of some imagined institutional purity. Institutions for Maurice comprised people,

⁴Keen, *Chivalry*, p. x.

⁵M. Conway and S. Skinner, 'Multiple Maurices', in P. Coss and C. Tyerman (eds.), *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen: Essays in Honour of Maurice Keen* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. xx.

to be respected and cherished not uncritically but for themselves. Beside its higher purpose—educational or military for example—any institution's value lay in providing a setting for the lives of individuals—academics or officers, staff, students or squaddies. Maurice's loyalty to school, regiment or college embodied his loyalty to people.

A further loyalty came from his family's military connections. Apart from his grandfather and uncle Allen, another uncle, Maurice Cummins, served as a professional soldier, gaining the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Royal Ulster Rifles, the regiment in which Maurice was commissioned during his National Service between 1952 and 1954. This provided Maurice with insights into a wider social range than he had previously encountered, including an improbable period in command of a platoon of Mauritians. As well as giving him a settled admiration for the ordinary soldier, Maurice's experience of the army confirmed a clear-eyed sympathy for the military life and mentality, extending his sustained engagement with the martial culture of the past: aged thirteen his holiday reading included the memoirs of Marshal Ney. This empathy with the warrior classes allowed for occasionally incisive contemporary parallels, as in his seminal 1977 reappraisal of the idea of the later medieval decline of chivalry:

Mock battles and ceremony are things almost inseparable from martial life in any age. And in every age they find their critics, as in modern times some are distrustful that the full glory of cavalry mess dress is no more, really, than a cover for effete snobbery.⁶

This is vintage Keen: personal, direct, accessible, lit by a desire to communicate past realities as a feature of the continuum of human experience.

Maurice's education followed the predictable path of preparatory and public school. However, from very early on, the young Maurice Keen found special excitement and fascination, as he recalled, in listening to stories of 'knights in shining armour'.⁷ From stories he read or were read to him as a small boy, to the reading that acted as some solace during the dismal years he spent miserably at prep school in the mid-1940s, Maurice thought what he found worthy of serious response. Perhaps this fascination acted as a form of escapism in a childhood that swung from deep enjoyment of family to evacuation, then to uncongenial boarding school.

⁶M. H. Keen, 'Huizinga, Kilgour and the decline of chivalry', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series, 8 (1977), 15–16.

⁷Keen, *Chivalry*, p. ix.

His later attachment to institutional structures suggests a profound desire for the comfort of community. From childhood, too, came his passion for the countryside. On his Medical Admission Form at Balliol in 1954, in answer to the question: ‘What exercise does he normally like?’ Maurice simply offered: ‘Country pursuits’.⁸ Fly fishing in particular provided deep pleasure and contentment, whether on the Torridge, Itchen or other streams in Britain and Ireland. A photograph survives of a beaming thirteen-year-old Maurice flourishing his first large trout, caught in the Torridge at the bottom of the Devon cottage’s garden. The pleasure conveyed is almost tangible.

II

In 1947 Maurice won a scholarship to Winchester College. There, in contrast to his dismal experience at prep school, supported by a sympathetic housemaster and scholarly teachers, Maurice found intellectual stimulus and personal fulfilment in a setting aesthetically appropriate to his youthful enthusiasm for the Middle Ages. In later years Maurice paid especial tribute to his headmaster, Walter Oakeshott, who ‘turned my childish excitement over the idea of knights into a serious interest’.⁹ Oakeshott, a younger Balliol contemporary of Maurice’s father, a notable medieval scholar and the only Headmaster of Winchester to become a Fellow of the British Academy, had famously discovered a unique manuscript of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* at Winchester when an assistant master there in 1934. Maurice always acknowledged him as one of his two most significant medievalist mentors, a connection that lasted a lifetime. One of Oakeshott’s children, Robert, was later a Balliol contemporary; members of the Oakeshott family attended his funeral. Walter Oakeshott recognised Maurice’s particular talent for literature, both Latin and English, noting, in his reference for Balliol, that ‘Keen seems to me to have a touch of inspiration’. Winchester was not all academic work. Maurice proved himself an ‘enthusiastic archaeologist and a passionately enthusiastic bell-ringer’ as well as, possibly less probably, showing ‘sufficient energy and vigour in playing football and in cross-country running’.¹⁰ True to form, Maurice retained great loyalty and affection for Winchester, its

⁸ Balliol College Archives, File ‘Keen M.H’ (hereafter BCA).

⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. ix.

¹⁰ W. Oakeshott Reference, 4 December 1951, BCA.

educational values and for those who taught him. He served as a Fellow of Winchester (i.e. a governor) from 1989 to 2002, taking especial active concern for the rearranging and conservation of the college archives. In 2011 he, along with twenty-four other Old Wykehamist Fellows of the Royal Society and British Academy, received his old school's 'highest honour' of being received 'Ad Portas'. Maurice was chosen to give the speech of thanks, during which he singled out the 'intellectual awakening and excitement' he had received from Oakeshott.¹¹

In December 1951, Maurice was elected to two scholarships at Balliol, the Deakin and the Frazer, to read Modern History. However, both his headmaster and housemaster had suggested in their references that he might be better suited to read English, his housemaster commenting on his 'special interest in medieval English writers, a curious taste for a boy'.¹² The Balliol examiners tacitly concurred, commenting that 'his best work was done in his non-historical papers' (he received α marks on all papers except English History, on which he obtained $\beta+++$), provoking the singularly unprecise comment that he would prove only a 'competent historian'.¹³ In fact when he went up to Balliol after his two years' National Service, Maurice indeed chose to read English for a year before changing to History after a Distinction in Prelims. His literary studies left their mark. Maurice retained enough Anglo-Saxon to be able much later to recite chunks of it verbatim. More significantly, his enthusiasm for literature fed directly into the direction his historical tastes developed. This bore early results. Between the army and Balliol in the summer of 1954, Maurice had excitedly read the fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn*, a Middle English verse romance that deals with very real issues of inheritance and social conflict. At Oxford, inspired by a lecture by Gervase Mathew and a tutorial on the Peasants' Revolt with Richard Southern (a highly improbable conjunction to a later generation of specialism), this excitement became a 20,000-word college prize essay on the social context of the Robin Hood stories. This in turn evolved into his first book, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, finished while he was a Junior Research Fellow at Queen's and published in 1961. Although later, with characteristic but professionally rare self-effacing honesty, he more or less completely repudiated his interpretation of the aristocratic milieu for the

¹¹ <<http://www.winchestercollege.org/UserFiles/pdfs/AdPortasSpeeches2011>>, p. 3 (accessed 24 October 2015).

¹² Reference, 4 December 1951, BCA.

¹³ A. B. Rodger to W. Oakeshott, 19 December 1951, BCA.

Robin Hood stories, Maurice's ability to extract serious social history from literary texts remained a cornerstone of his study of the culture of the medieval nobility.¹⁴

Changing to read Modern History in 1955 brought Maurice into contact with a formidable group of tutors including senior figures such as A. B. Rodger and Christopher Hill, the youthful John Prest and, most significantly, Richard Southern with whom Maurice established a defining relationship. Although from very different backgrounds, Southern was Maurice's second acknowledged academic mentor. Rather than trying to mould his pupil in his own image, Southern, like Oakeshott before him, fostered Maurice's own existing interests. As in the best tutorial relationships, the exchange was less of information or knowledge than of example, friendship, mind and personality, of the possibilities in the subject, of how to do history. As Maurice recalled the experience: 'it was not like being *taught* in the pedagogic sense, more like being guided on an expedition into unfamiliar, sometimes surprising, but endlessly interesting territory', Southern possessing an 'extraordinary knack of knowing what would stimulate and interest a particular pupil at a particular stage'.¹⁵ The model for Maurice's own tutorial style is clear. So too is the wider intellectual and academic legacy. Southern's influence lay behind Maurice's ease with intellectual history, his adept use of academic, literary and documentary texts to illumine actual lived experience, resting wide reinterpretations of medieval society on the close study of individuals' ideas, characters and circumstances. When Maurice wrote of Southern that 'he was consistently more concerned with understanding people who lived in the past than with explanation in terms of causes and trends', he might have been describing himself.¹⁶ Both took personal beliefs seriously and delved into the pathology of emotion—spiritual and secular. Both were skilled and unabashed, if polite, iconoclasts. Neither was bound by unnecessary demarcations between political, social and intellectual history or between different types of administrative, literary and academic evidence. Both pioneered cultural history based on the attempt to see the medieval world through the minds and eyes of those they studied. While Maurice always retained a robust independence of view, and was nobody's acolyte,

¹⁴M. H. Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, revised paperback edition (London, 2000), Introduction, esp. pp. vii, xxi.

¹⁵Quoted by A. Murray, 'Richard William Southern 1912–2001', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 120 (2003), pp. 413–42.

¹⁶M. H. Keen, 'Southern, Sir Richard William (1912–2001)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/75440>> (accessed 19 January 2016).

Southern remained an active presence as advisor and supportive critic, including the labour of affection of reading draft typescripts, a 'debt of gratitude' fully acknowledged in *Chivalry*, a work in its own way as seminal in changing views of the Middle Ages as Southern's own *Making of the Middle Ages*.¹⁷

Maurice's capacity for hard work, noted by Southern in a reference for a State Studentship in 1957, was matched by an equally energetic commitment to enjoyment.¹⁸ At Balliol, he developed a lifelong attachment to college social life which he was always eager to share, as an undergraduate with a lively circle of friends as later, when a fellow, with colleagues and pupils. He always regarded the pursuit of fun as wholly compatible with the parallel conduct of serious scholarship and learning. Maurice played a full part in Balliol's bibulous debating and social club, the Arnold and Brackenbury, one of his tutors remarking that he was 'an amusing and attractive speaker'. In a later reference, Christopher Hill mentioned how helpful Maurice was when others were in trouble, a generosity of time and spirit that later underpinned his quiet but effective exercise of pastoral assistance as a college tutor.¹⁹ As an undergraduate, as at school, Maurice formed close and lasting friendships. Much socialising, in college, at the Gridiron Club or elsewhere, in fact tended to revolve around more potent refreshment. 'Drunken' was the word used by his closest Balliol friend, Tom Bingham, to describe the college debating society.²⁰ For undergraduates with a little money, mid-1950s Oxford, shaking free from the shackles of post-war rationing and austerity, with a large proportion of undergraduates with National Service experience, offered adequate scope. It is said that on one occasion Maurice's raucous singing of Orange songs was punished by having to dig the garden at Holywell Manor. Later, as a young fellow, his late-night al fresco duets with his sympathetic colleague Richard Cobb became the stuff of legend. Many of the social habits that marked Maurice's life as a hospitable and gregarious don were already laid down during his undergraduate days.

¹⁷ R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London, 1953).

¹⁸ Reference, 1 April 1957, BCA.

¹⁹ Job references 1957, BCA.

²⁰ <<http://www.alanmacfarlane.co./DO/filmshow/bingham1-fast.htm>> (accessed 24 October 2015).

III

In the summer of 1957, Maurice received the top First in the School of Modern History. Already such was Maurice's academic reputation that he put in for a tutorial fellowship at Worcester in his final undergraduate year before successfully applying for a Junior Research Fellowship at Queen's. Hill's reference, after praising his prize essay on medieval outlaws, identifies as already apparent some distinctive qualities familiar from Maurice's later scholarship: 'He has a sympathetic insight into the human problems of men and women of the past, and a sensitivity and delicacy in his analysis of those problems, which are much rarer than technical brilliance'. John Prestwich, the medieval tutor at Queen's, later described what then happened: 'After seeing the evidence produced ... our committee agreed that Maurice Keen was so far ahead of a large and pretty strong field that there was no point interviewing any other candidate,' adding: 'philosophers in particular do not usually surrender their claims so easily'.²¹

Maurice spent four happy years at Queen's, with one intercalated year, 1959–60, as a lecturer (i.e. non-fellow tutor) at Trinity. At Queen's, he began work on his doctoral thesis on the law of arms in the later Middle Ages, submitted in 1963 under the slightly Delphic title 'The usages of war in the period of the Hundred Years War', published in 1965 as *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages*.²² The subject was suggested and the thesis supervised by K. B. McFarlane, fellow of Magdalen, another dominant figure amongst Oxford medievalists, doyen of the study of later medieval England. Thus Maurice came under the direct influence of what many might regard as the two most distinguished yet contrasting medievalists of post-war Oxford: the scholar of cosmopolitan ecclesiastics, affective spirituality and academic learning, pupil of Powicke, against the student of the secular world of English politics, finance and war, influenced by Marx and Namier. Although McFarlane never exerted anything like the same intellectual or personal attraction on Maurice as Southern, his historical approach is subtly evident in much of Maurice's own, not least in the centrality of war in the careers of later medieval nobles and gentlemen and, technically, in the importance and potential of archival detail and prosopography in recreating past lives and behaviour in what Maurice later described as an 'encyclopaedic approach'.

²¹ Hill's reference for Queen's in 1957 and Prestwich's for Balliol in 1960, both in BCA.

²² M. H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1965).

Maurice contributed a warmly sensitive appraisal of McFarlane's ideas and influence in the Academy's *A Century of British Medieval Studies*.²³ He quoted approvingly McFarlane's insistence that it was neither possible nor desirable 'to study the history of institutions apart from the activities, opinions and passions of the men who used them'. Maurice went beyond McFarlane in his international and comparative approach and his concentration on the mentalities to which McFarlane alluded. On occasion, he could veer towards the politely oedipal, as when he remarked in an essay of 1989 that the records left by Sir John Fastolf, with which McFarlane famously made such play, 'have perhaps allowed him to colour too much our vision of his age'.²⁴ However, Maurice defended McFarlane from the revisionists of the new constitutionalism school of later medievalists whose work, he slyly suggested, 'is a direction still very much in harmony with the framework of enquiry that McFarlane so influentially initiated'. Maurice himself was wary of constructing a new set of intangible conceptual institutions to explain individual actions of politicians.

McFarlane admired Maurice's research and intellectual calibre even though he stood apart from McFarlane's closest coterie of graduate pupils. Yet, at times, as with any doctorate, the work seemed to go badly, and Maurice at one point despaired of the thesis and his prospects of gaining a permanent academic post. Wishing, nonetheless, to leave behind, in his words, 'something between hard covers if I had to alter my career dreams', he seized on a suggestion from Colin Franklin, then at Routledge, to work up and publish his material on English outlaw romances which appeared as his Queen's fellowship came to an end.²⁵ At Queen's, Maurice also cut his teeth as a tutor, overcoming his native shyness and diffidence to become a liked and respected teacher both of outline and specialist papers, including the Special Subject on Richard II. If the resources had been available, Queen's history tutors would have liked to have kept him there permanently. At Queen's, too, Maurice developed a style of ebullient entertainment, often in partnership with his college neighbour, Alastair Parker, parties not infrequently lasting long into the night. Maurice retained a strong affection for Queen's and the friendships forged there,

²³ M. H. Keen, 'English political history', in A. Deyermond (ed.), *A Century of British Medieval Studies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 56–63.

²⁴ M. H. Keen, 'The end of the Hundred Years War: Lancastrian France and Lancastrian England', in M. H. Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London, 1996), p. 242 (hereafter NKM).

²⁵ Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, p. vii.

his memories tinged with anecdotes of its distinctively comfortable collegiality. Queen's assisted his doctoral research with financial support for forays into French archives, where his taste for the racetrack at Longchamp intrigued Parisian archivists as much as it amused fellow researchers. As always with Maurice, scholarship and pleasure were congenially compatible.

Occasionally they could contradict, as on the epic (at least in Maurice's retelling) occasion of an encounter with John and Elizabeth Armstrong in the archives in Dijon. John, a friend of both McFarlane and Prestwich, was a fellow of Hertford and historian of later medieval France and Burgundy; his wife Elizabeth, a modern linguist, fellow of Somerville and expert on Renaissance French. John helped Maurice with his research with the loan of his microfilms of the manuscript Registers of the Order of the Golden Fleece. One lunchtime in the Dijon archives, the Armstrongs, breaking off from transcribing manuscripts side by side, spotted Maurice and invited him to share a meal at a local restaurant they specially favoured. After significant *apéritif*, wine and *digestif*, Maurice assumed that research was over for the day and looked forward to a post-prandial nap in his digs. The Armstrongs were made of sterner stuff, sweeping him back to the archives for an afternoon session with the manuscripts. While Maurice could hardly see the text before him, he could not help noticing that his lunchtime hosts appeared to have resumed their methodical transcribing seemingly wholly unaffected. Maurice was impressed, but it was not a habit he followed. A heroic smoker who understood and enjoyed the social quality of drink, he never allowed his conviviality to cloud the necessary discipline of scholarship. Research formed a discrete activity that, unlike some scholars, he preferred to keep apart from social intercourse.

Conquering moments of doubt, Maurice's doctoral research bore fruit despite the technical challenges posed by the bulk and miscellaneous nature of much of the manuscript material, especially the departmental collections and Parlement records in the French archives, mostly uncalendared. Mastery of lengthy and complex manuscripts, from chivalric treatises to records of court cases, remained a hallmark of Maurice's work. In 1961, his last year at Queen's, his essay 'Treason Trials under the Law of Arms' won the Royal Historical Society's Alexander Prize, as Southern had in 1933.²⁶ Before that, in July 1960, Maurice had received a letter from his old tutor A. B. Rodger about the medieval history fellowship at Balliol

²⁶ M. H. Keen, 'Treason trials under the Laws of Arms', *NKM*, pp. 149–66.

in succession to Southern, who had been elected to the Chichele Chair at All Souls (in Rodger's view 'the only honest and sensible election to a History Chair since that of Powicke'—to the Regius Chair in 1928). In effect Rodger was offering Maurice the job.²⁷ As it transpired, the college advertised later in the year, but it was clear that Maurice was the outstanding as well as appropriate candidate. Clear, that is, to all except McFarlane whose reference, whilst praising Maurice's scholarship (on a topic, he was careful to mention, he had proposed), and forecasting a future as 'a really outstanding scholar' provided he learnt to 'assert himself', cast aspersions on the suitability of his personality and ability to teach: 'as a man and as a teacher he seems to me immature and in some ways far less promising'. In direct contradiction, John Prestwich's reference, while recognising his initial shyness, more perceptively described Maurice as a 'born teacher'. On 19 January 1961, Maurice was elected, to be admitted to the fellowship on 13 October, a date that allowed Maurice, in his letter of acceptance, to give rein to his irrepressible self-effacement: 'I can only hope that from the college's point of view I shall not prove to be a Friday 13th choice as that seems to be the day of choice in October.'²⁸ He did not.

IV

Maurice remained a tutorial fellow of Balliol until retirement in 2000. During that time he held most college offices including Junior Dean, Tutor for Admissions, Tutor for Graduates and Vice-Master. He stood as a pillar of the Balliol Society and provided a ready source of information on old members for successive Masters. His concern for all things Balliol reached into every aspect of college organisation and life, including the admission of women as undergraduates in the 1970s which he resisted but, once in place, accepted with friendly equanimity. By nature and conviction a conservative, Maurice was never a reactionary, described by one obituarist as possessed of 'a chequered conservatism and radicalism'.²⁹ Neither was he interested in wielding power. He assessed issues on their merits and, unlike some academics, was guided by loyalty to the corporate interests of the institution and, perhaps above all, by personal loyalty. This explains the superficially improbable support he maintained for his

²⁷ A. B. Rodger to MHK 4 July 1960, copy, BCA.

²⁸ McFarlane ref. 22 Oct. 1960; Prestwich ref. n.d. 1960; MHK to Master n.d. January 1961, BCA.

²⁹ 'Maurice Hugh Keen', *The Queen's College Record*, vol. 8, no. 9 (2013), 75.

old tutor, the Marxist Christopher Hill, as Master, as well as his lesser enthusiasm for other, apparently ideologically more attuned, incumbents. Loyalty to his pupils was profound, sincere and reciprocated. He always sought to think well of the young, again in contrast to some in his profession. To a degree unusual in donnish circles, he lacked cynicism, jealousy or malice. With his history colleagues in Balliol, he forged lasting supportive friendships, especially with Richard Cobb and, in different register, Colin Lucas. Across four decades Maurice provided generous support, advice, hospitality and companionship to the changing galaxy of colleagues as well as to a relay of talented research fellows and college lecturers. The chores he dealt with efficiently and without complaint, despite the inevitable exasperations of coping with a community of fellow academics whose opinions, prejudices and judgements often failed to coincide with his own. Temper was reserved for injustice or, on one occasion, an attempt to stop him smoking in the quad.

In Maurice's professional life, the roles of history tutor and college fellow formed one whole, whether pedagogic, pastoral, academic, administrative or social. His strong ethic of duty was balanced by undiminished enjoyment of college and university, warts and all. Maurice enjoyed the company of the young on whom he expended limitless reserves of sympathy, patience and friendship, understanding their problems and rejoicing in their achievements. In part this reflected an innate optimism—a 'wise optimism' one pupil called it—about people despite the dilemmas and difficulties of life.³⁰ Yet, for all his kindness and generosity of spirit, Maurice was no pushover. His sharp mind cut through pomposity and intellectual sloppiness, in pupils, colleagues and friends alike. To each he paid the compliment of intellectual challenge. While always polite, Maurice, despite his diffidence of manner and speech, could be distinctly brisk in exposing what he considered meretricious or flabby ideas and wrong-headed posturing. Maurice's assumption of the essential egalitarianism of an academic community found expression in his famous end-of-term lunchtime drinks parties for pupils, ex-pupils, colleagues and friends across the university: bibulous, rollicking occasions where grand professor could unaffectedly engage sociably with the humblest first-year undergraduate. Invitations were highly cherished.

³⁰ L. Rawlinson, in Coss and Tyerman, 'Mémoire', *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen*, p. xiv. For MHK at Balliol see also Conway and Skinner, 'Multiple Maurices', and A. Kenny, *A Life in Oxford* (London, 1997), esp. p. 6.

Outside college, Maurice proved an equally good citizen. He regularly examined in Schools and for Higher Degrees. He served his time on Faculty committees and as Chairman of the Faculty Board during a period of change in the 1980s. As a Faculty representative, his fair-minded clarity of judgement was repeatedly employed on tutorial fellowship appointment panels. In retirement he held the honorific position of Clerk of the Market (2002–6). Beyond Oxford, as well as being external examiner for the National University of Ireland, he had earlier acted in the same role for the University of Khartoum, an adventure that included being stung on the behind by a scorpion after a dip in the Nile. He was always in great demand as a lecturer, and profligate in accepting invitations to venues grand and obscure across the British Isles and beyond. Many of his published papers were trialled in this way. A believer in independence in education that included independent schools, besides his Fellowship of Winchester, between 1970 and 1989 Maurice sat as a Governor of Blundell's School near Tiverton, Devon, a school with strong Balliol connections as well as a convenient West Country location. Public recognition came in his Fellowship of the Society of the Antiquaries of London (1987) and his election to the British Academy in 1990, to which he responded in typical fashion in a letter to Baruch Blumberg, then Master of Balliol: 'I feel a bit bewildered by it but I hope it is good for Balliol history.'³¹ Outside academia, he did some work for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and supported the British-Irish Association. In 2004 he was awarded the OBE for his academic distinction.

Maurice's whole career and personality contradicted the modern higher education mantra that presents research and teaching as hostile competitors. A productive historian of international renown (ten books, with numerous second editions; over thirty published papers and articles; book reviews, more than a score in the *English Historical Review* alone), Maurice was simultaneously a teacher of indefatigable brilliance. Central to both was his humanity, recorded again and again by pupils and evident throughout his writing. For Maurice, the study of the past did not revolve around recitation and analysis of dead information and anecdotes, but concerned human engagement across the centuries. This did not rest on bogus sentimental empathy or a form of refined fiction: 'the historian is not like the story-teller, the master of his sources; rather he is at their mercy'.³² As he wrote in an early essay (of 1968, published in 1973), the

³¹MHK to Master of Balliol, 10 July 1990, BCA.

³²Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, p. 208.

historian's 'object is not simply to record facts, but to sift and select them, so as to ensure that those he passes on are not merely true but significant also—facts that will help men to understand more about what has made them as they are'.³³ Maurice sought to tease out the significance of the past for what came after, whether the change from medieval knight to early modern and (Maurice suggested) modern gentlemen, or the creation of a different English society that emerged from the later Middle Ages 'more English, more insular and more individual, and with a consciousness of its individuality that had not been there before', a conclusion he focused at the end of his elegant 1990 survey by quoting two individuals, John Fortescue and Robert Hallum.³⁴ This was typical of Maurice's humane vision of historical study. In teaching and research, ideas and interpretations were repeatedly focused on lived individual opinions and experiences. This allowed for direct, active engagement with the past. One Balliol pupil remembered how an essay on Henry II's administration was greeted with the question 'But did you *like* him?'³⁵ There lay more in this than a pedagogic trick. Maurice's universe was bound by firm ethics; responses to the past were not neutral. One good example of this comes from his review of J. R. Strayer's *The Reign of Philip the Fair*: 'Professor Strayer's urbane erudition does, I think, half-conceal some of the real awfulness of Philip's reign ... it was a nastier period, in politics at any rate, than he allows'. Even more explicit was his reaction to F. R. H. du Boulay's *The England of Piers Plowman: William Langland and his Vision of the Fourteenth Century*: 'rich rewards are to be found in it, not only in its fine scholarship but also in its humane perception of the spiritual dilemmas of a past age, and of the ways in which these can relate to our own wrestlings with the human dilemma in a later age'.³⁶

Such conviction never clouded empirical assessment of evidence but certainly helped to make his teaching at once captivating and illuminating while not precluding unapologetic forensic rigour. If he thought you were writing or talking nonsense he would politely but firmly say so, patiently explaining why. It is never easy to convey the essence of tutorial style

³³ M. H. Keen, 'Medieval ideas of history', in D. Daiches and A. Thorlby, *Literature and Western Civilisation*, vol. 2: *The Medieval World* (London, 1973), p. 285.

³⁴ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 303.

³⁵ Rawlinson, 'Mémoire', p. xiv.

³⁶ M. H. Keen, 'Review of *The Reign of Philip the Fair* by Joseph R. Strayer', *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982), 353; M. H. Keen, 'Review of *The England of Piers Plowman: William Langland and his Vision of the Fourteenth Century* by F. R. H. du Boulay', *English History Review*, 109 (1994), 703.

behind the near-inevitable parade of anecdotes. However, consistent themes emerge from pupils' accounts. First the physical impression: the seemingly eternal boyish figure who, as young don, was once confused with being an admissions candidate; dilapidated furniture in the paper-strewn room by the Library; the quixotically patriotic carpet and picture of the British Grand Fleet; the fug of cigarette and later pipe smoke; before the pipe became the ubiquitous prop, a large bowl accommodating a mound of butt ends. Yet the sharp-eyed would also notice a filing cabinet of index cards, a signal of the highly ordered mind beneath the superficial clutter. Maurice's tutorials confronted the demands of pupils and historical issues with flexibility, each pupil an individual. Maurice inspired, but rejected deference. He was the least vain, self-regarding or grand-standing of teachers. Shared interest in history was what mattered, not being clever about it. Maurice was the most positive tutor, managing to salvage something encouraging to say; never criticising through demolition, even when puncturing youthful pomposity and pretence; serious but not solemn; entertaining without frivolity; leading not bullying pupils towards greater understanding and enjoyment of the subject. The truest assessment of Maurice as a teacher lies with the hundreds of pupils who recall their tutorials with fondness, admiration and usually a grin of remembered pleasure.

Maurice's range of teaching was old-fashionedly comprehensive, the familiar lot of conscientious Oxford tutors in the twentieth century when teaching stints were heavy and research a less jealous god. His coverage spanned half a millennium, British and European, Bede to Bayard, as it were. Faculty teaching included, from the late 1960s, the Further Subject on the Crusades, which he often taught in tandem with Henry Mayr-Harting. Earlier, he had cut his teeth on the Richard II Special Subject and had to take over its replacement on Henry V in 1966 after McFarlane's sudden death. From 1967 he was joined in conducting the classes by Gerald Harriss and later Jeremy Catto. In 1987, Henry V was in turn replaced by Lancaster and York. In gobbet tutorials, Maurice's precision of analysis was shown to its best advantage. Despite having produced a major study of the period himself in 1973 (*England in the Later Middle Ages*), he never browbeat his pupils into following his own interpretations. It always remained a joint exploration of the texts, even if, in response to a suggested interpretation that revealed that the undergraduate had improvidently failed to consult Keen, Maurice would gently remark 'well, as you know, I take a different view', understanding full well that the pupil

knew precisely nothing of the sort. Yet Maurice never pushed this or any other of his books. Over the decades, these Special Subjects attracted many who went on to do research and gain academic posts.

In one area of teaching Maurice preferred the informal. The most generous of scholars in sharing ideas, answering queries and helping tyro researchers, he supervised relatively few graduate students of his own. On occasion, he could be quite adept at side-stepping even quite obvious associations. This may have been a consequence of his perfectionism and exaggerated modesty confronting his existing busy commitments or his deferring to more senior figures, such as John Armstrong, who continued supervising 'Keen' type theses into the mid-1970s. When prevailed upon, as for example with Juliet Barker's thesis on English tournaments, he showed his usual inspiration, flair, concern, expenditure of time and meticulous standards. When given, his commitment was total. After Glynis Donovan was tragically killed in a car crash in 1974, he embodied her doctoral work on John of Legnano's *Somnium* in an article that appeared under both their names in *Traditio* declaring 'my object in writing has been to make sure that some witness of her work remained'.³⁷ Yet Maurice's influence on Oxford graduates—and others—researching subjects adjacent to his interests was enormous. He always seemed available to give advice or read some draft. As with his tutorial teaching but with greater weight, he gave those seeking his wisdom the impression of a meeting of equals in a joint quest to uncover truths about and from the past. Like his own mentor Southern, he created no magisterial school but, also like Southern, his influence on generations of medievalists was as profound as it was quietly delivered, not just through publications, sometimes at seminars, but more usually in private correspondence or sociable chats. Maurice kept his social and academic lives separate, abhorring the intrusion of 'shop' into the rituals of entertainment. However, when helping youthful scholars or visiting scholars who sought him out, the two were gently permitted to elide. He showed unwavering, unaffected courtesy to fellow historians and their work. Disagreement or disbelief was couched in the politest terms. So, in a review for the *English Historical Review*, he dismissed what he clearly regarded as an absurdly extravagant claim linking a scene in medieval romance to the idea of the modern state as being 'calculated to elicit from the historian at least a sharp intake of

³⁷G. M. Donovan and M. H. Keen, 'The "Somnium" of John of Legnano', *Traditio*, 57 (1981), 325–45.

breath, perhaps even a long, low whistle'.³⁸ In reviews, criticism did not emerge *ex cathedra* or without balancing praise, and tended to be hedged about with placatory subjunctives and personal disclaimers ('I think' or 'I cannot help wondering', etc.).

Early contact with the few fellow researchers who shared some of his then uncommon interests over time grew into an extensive international network. In retrospect Maurice commented: 'When I started out as a researcher, I was more than once given the impression that chivalry was not, among my elders and betters, regarded as a very serious topic.' Even his uncle G. N. Clark, in conversation with a youthful Maurice, had dismissed heraldry 'being for a historian about on the same level as stamp collecting'.³⁹ At the time, even Maurice had agreed. However, by the 1950s the combined reaction to the deadweight of high political and administrative history and the influence of continental, particularly French *Annales*, scholarship on mentalities had begun to encourage new approaches. At Oxford, the old-style constitutional straitjacket had been cast aside, not just by Southern and other pupils of Powicke, but also by cultural historians such as Gervase Mathew and John Armstrong. McFarlane studied Hans Memling. Michael Maclagan at Trinity was a Herald and assisted Maurice's early researches. Ernest Jacob, Southern's predecessor as Chichele Professor (and, like Maurice, a Wykehamist), encouraged serious study of later medieval Europe and was to help Maurice over his *A History of Medieval Europe* (London, 1967). Rather pointedly in view of the hostile reception given Jacob's Oxford History volume, *The Fifteenth Century, 1399–1485* (Oxford, 1961), Maurice posthumously dedicated *England in the Later Middle Ages: a Political History* (London, 1973) to him, paying characteristic tribute to the insights generously shared in casual conversations especially in 'talks near the banks of rivers, where he was as full of wisdom on the ways of fish as on the ways of the past, and always had much to say of both'.⁴⁰ Maurice soon found others engaged in similarly innovative study of continental war, culture and society. From an older generation came G. W. Coopland, who also helped with Maurice's doctoral research. Among contemporaries and younger scholars, came Christopher Allmand, Kenneth Fowler, Malcolm Vale and John Palmer. As well as those he encountered in teaching, locally, colleagues in the Oxford History Faculty

³⁸ M. H. Keen, 'Review of *Medieval French Literature and Law* by R. Howard Bloch', *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), 407.

³⁹ Keen, *NKM*, p. ix; M. H. Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman. Heraldry, Chivalry and Gentility in Medieval England c.1300–c.1500* (London, 2002), p. 7.

⁴⁰ M. H. Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1973), p. vii.

such as James Campbell, Karl Leyser or his star Balliol pupil Patrick Wormald provided continued opportunities for sharing and honing ideas. Coming away from hearing a paper by Leyser on the early medieval beginnings of knighthood, Maurice was heard to mutter admiringly 'what a clever man'. As Maurice's own researches expanded in scope, to embrace wider social history, so did his influence and academic connections that included among others Adrian Ailes, Rowena Archer, Andrew Ayton, Peter Coss, David Crouch, Anne Curry, Michael Jones, Linda Paterson, Simon Payling, Randall Rogers, Nigel Saul, Matthew Strickland, Craig Taylor and Simon Walker. Maurice's sort of history entered the mainstream, not limited by Anglocentricity. Georges Duby admired his *Chivalry*, even though he disagreed with some of Maurice's interpretations. With French historians Philippe Contamine, Jean Flori or Dominique Barthélemy there existed considerable mutual respect. His influence was clear and acknowledged amongst German scholars such as Werner Paravicini. Although holding contrasting views, Maurice engaged fruitfully with Richard Kaeuper in the USA. Peggy Brown was an early fellow hewer at the coalface of the Paris archives. From an eccentric fascination in an ephemeral social peculiarity, Maurice's academic interests, if not his conclusions, became standard to an extent that could conceal the radical and pioneering originality of his scholarly enterprise and its transformative impact on medieval studies.

V

One of the most profound youthful influences on Maurice had been reading at school C. S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love*. Lewis took the culture of, in particular, medieval noblemen on its own terms, investigating, in the words of his peroration, 'the peculiar flower of a peculiar civilization, important whether for good or ill and well worth our understanding'.⁴¹ Like Lewis, Maurice was always seeking to enter the minds of the people he studied, how and what they thought, believed, hoped and desired, their psychological (a word he did not shun) forces and associations, 'atmosphere and preoccupations'.⁴² His early reading laid a lasting foundation of

⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1958), p. 360.

⁴² Keen, 'Chaucer's Knight, the English aristocracy and the Crusade', *NKM*, p. 119; for psychology, cf. Keen, 'Chivalry and courtly love', *NKM*, p. 41; Keen, 'Brotherhood in arms', *NKM*, pp. 61–2.

interest and excitement, providing his imaginative leaps with concrete evidence of an uncommon sort. Maurice's engagement with medieval literature and thrill at knightly heroics not only determined his lifetime's academic study; it supplied his research with its unique flavour of respect for the people, events and ideas he studied. This respect remained unsentimental and honest, lit by the attempt not to judge but to understand. This empathy with the nuanced realities of human experience, ambitions and contradictions forged a profound, original and subtle analysis of cultural behaviour informing his famous pitch perfect description of the nuances of chivalry, first essayed in 1977 and repeated in his *magnum opus* of 1984, as 'tonal rather than precise in its implications'.⁴³

Until the Second World War, most British medieval historians avoided cultural history, more concerned with the church, government or the law; institutions and politics. What might have made medieval people beyond the educated elite tick was treated as self-evident, immaterial or unknowable, a farrago of stereotypes, clichés and ill-supported generalisations. In the subsequent revolution of approaches, Maurice went further than his mentors Southern and McFarlane in studying social behaviour and conventions, what individuals thought and did. From treatises, court records, charters, the archives of government and war, chronicles, romances, the evidence of chivalric orders, Maurice demonstrated that chivalry existed as a serious feature of medieval politics, religion, nobility and society, not, as previously understood, an exotic distraction. Using a vast array of literary, visual, legal, academic and archival evidence from across Europe over three centuries, he dismantled the then prevalent view, especially associated with the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga, that chivalry was a decadent or ludic expression of the 'waning of the Middle Ages'. In a regular stream of studies produced over forty years, he transformed understanding of a subject hitherto characterised by the limply impressionist visions of Leon Gautier and Sidney Painter. Maurice demonstrated the practical importance of chivalric ideals and institutions such as tournaments, dubbing, orders of chivalry and heraldry, revealing how the chivalrous life stood at the centre of later medieval society not at some peripheral imaginative remove.

Introducing his collected papers in 1996, Maurice described his chief historical concerns as 'the military vocation in the time of the Hundred Years War and the late medieval culture of chivalry', including 'military

⁴³ Keen, 'Huizinga, Kilgour and the decline of chivalry', p. 1; cf. Keen, 'Chivalry and courtly love', p. 41 ('tonal; impression'); Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 2.

and heraldic law' and the related concept of nobility. He confessed 'how little my tastes have changed over the years'.⁴⁴ This did not lead to static repetitiveness, as he moved from early study of jurist theory and practice to investigating the wider expressions of noble culture, from literature and chivalric institutions to display, to discussing the social history and fate of gentility more broadly defined. It is true that on occasion late in life he lamented that he had found it difficult to find a new research topic after *Chivalry*. He returned throughout his writing career to the settings of courts of chivalry, chivalric orders, tournament lists, army camps and battlefields, visits accompanied by a familiar recurring cast of characters such as the lawyers John of Legnano or Bartolus of Sassoferrato; theorists Honoré Bouvet, Geoffrey de Charni or Nicholas Upton; Dante, Chaucer, Froissart; the great commanders and heroes of the Hundred Years War, but also, and often more revealingly, lesser figures, such as Richard Waldegrave or Jean de Bueil. This intimate familiarity with the knightly universe allowed for precise analysis of how nobles and gentlemen behaved derived from what they thought, allowing them to speak for themselves. Maurice did not confuse or dilute chivalry with more generalised courtliness. When he wrote on courtly love it was to explore the relationship of literature to life, its erotic 'psychological associations', its harnessing of competitive 'self-esteem and sexuality', an influence and ingredient of, he argued, the distinctive individualism in Western culture.⁴⁵ This was the history of emotion not court ritual. When reviewing Malcolm Vale's *The Princely Court* he was especially drawn to 'the relationship between the material and the mental in the noble life'.⁴⁶

Maurice's central argument measured the lived military experience of the fighting classes against legal and literary constructs through the evidence of the practical exercise of such law and social convention. Understanding the values behind the actions of real people cut through previous assumptions that saw only form not substance. Such subtlety was evident in his doctoral thesis, published as *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1965). This compellingly lucid virtuoso piece of mature scholarship, remarkable in an academic tyro for its control of international archival, academic and literary sources, demonstrated how the law of arms, while reflecting the international freemasonry of chivalry,

⁴⁴ Keen, *NKM*, p. ix.

⁴⁵ Keen, 'Chivalry and courtly love', pp. 41–2.

⁴⁶ M. H. Keen, 'Review of *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts in North West Europe, 1270–1380* by Malcolm Vale', *English Historical Review*, 117 (2002), 904.

was actively employed in regulating how wars were actually fought, a legacy that fed subsequent theories of international law. The concern to connect the medieval past with later social developments remained a notable aspect of Maurice's writing down to his last important work, *Origins of the English Gentleman: Heraldry, Chivalry and Gentility in Medieval England, c.1300–c.1500* (Stroud, 2002), which delicately traced how, between 1300 and 1500, the warrior knight transmogrified into the aristocratic gentleman. *Laws of War* not only redefined chivalry as possessed of a legal as well as theoretical basis, but began to show how this could be demonstrated to have operated in practice, not least by studying actual cases fought in the courts of chivalry and a raft of active knightly institutions, mundane associations not idealised constructs. Wars were conducted at the very least with the laws of arms in mind.

Such accepted and frequently enforced rules of conduct existed as part of a much more extensive code of social, legal and political behaviour. The Alexander Prize essay of 1961 on treason trials illustrated one aspect of chivalry in practice, the legal nature, definition and consequences of disloyalty. His 1964 paper on contracts of brotherhood-in-arms took the analysis of the chivalric milieu a stage further, beyond the institutional to the psychological. While literary depictions of brothers in arms 'tell us what was *understood* by the relation' (Maurice's italics), archival evidence established that the practice could be a 'legal bond' not a 'chivalrous promise', an unsentimental means of profit-sharing. At the same time Maurice observed that it created an affinity not based on the then fashionable model of feudalism but on 'the natural relationship of the family' which 'gave such bonds a psychological force'.⁴⁷ This understated perception held huge potential to reorder understanding of the structures of medieval society, indicating paths of social and anthropological analysis energetically followed by others over the following half century.

However, Maurice was no anthropologist. His technique was severely empirical, showing how much can be learnt from a continued close critical scrutiny of sources unencumbered by theoretical constructs but driven by a sensitive appreciation of context which ensured his work transcended mere assemblages of examples and anecdotes. Unafraid to suggest wide-ranging conclusions, Maurice rewrote understanding of medieval chivalry and the practical origins and force of its cardinal virtues: 'prouesse, loyauté, largesse, courtoisie, franchise'.⁴⁸ A running theme, he

⁴⁷ Keen, 'Brotherhood in arms', *NKM*, pp. 43, 45, 46, 61–2.

⁴⁸ Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 2.

argued that the chivalrous culture that emerged in high medieval Western Europe rested on secular experience and practice of war, its values representing a 'secular code of honour'. Laymen not priests dubbed knights. This secular interpretation challenged previous assumptions. While the relationship with religion was seen as intimate, that with the institutional church was more contested, the ecclesiastical ban on tournaments serving as an obvious illustration. Even the motives of crusaders were seen as rooted predominantly ('nine knights out of ten') in 'the glamour of martial glory and social esteem'.⁴⁹ The features evident in his earliest work persisted to the end: the blend of literary, legal, chronicle and documentary evidence to uncover the motives of behaviour, not just what people did but why, in every case supported by a meticulously constructed chain of evidence and argument, always rested on the human reality.

Unlike those many scholars who serially progress from one discrete research topic to the next, Maurice's interests advanced as one, across a broad front, all aspects of his interests apparent through four decades of publications: the theorists, lawyers and commentators; the institutions of chivalry, notably tournaments and heraldry; the individual chivalrous themselves; the context of military organisation and campaigns. The extraordinary variety of sources employed to demonstrate the fusion and exchange between ideal and practice coloured all his study of chivalry, its distinctive quality comprehensively shown in his most significant work, *Chivalry*. This proceeds as a form of biography, charting the beginnings, maturity and legacy of his subject, the chief characteristics and the influences on and from the historical context. Beneath the attention given to religious justification, literary fancies and extravagant display, the central themes are relentlessly tangible, secular and practical: the inherited martial ethos of the early medieval aristocracy; the practicalities and technologies of combat; the social status of dubbing and knighthood; the usefulness of tournaments, heralds and heraldry; the development of conventions, laws and theoretical analyses; the emergence and taxonomy of cohesive ideas of nobility; the association of honour, bravery, war and social power; the ways literature reflected and conditioned aspirations and conduct; the serious investment in secular orders of chivalry; the inescapable determinants of finance and the economics of warfare; the debates over social exclusivity and the boundaries of acceptable as well as honourable behaviour in war and peace. Not all the conclusions drew approbation. Critics could challenge the chronology of chivalry as a

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 252.

product of social and military changes in the twelfth century; the emphasis on crusaders' secular motives; the absence of wider social and economic critique or theoretical anthropological models. The unashamed respect and admiration for aspects of the aristocratic mores of the *ancien régime* with which Maurice concluded *Chivalry* were not to everyone's taste. Nevertheless, it was impossible to cavil at the scholarship, intellectual elegance, academic integrity, critical acumen or nuanced historical empathy of a book that changed perceptions of medieval noble culture while opening new paths for further exploration. Given how far these paths have been followed since, it is easy to forget just how innovative and original *Chivalry* was.

Chivalry had brought together two decades of thought and presaged another two of continued exploration and exposition. Throughout, fresh interpretations were wrung from rebarbative material. Thus, from the dry, voluminous accounts of cases in the court of chivalry, Maurice could infer the declining popularity of the French wars in the early fifteenth century. From a prosopography of English involvement in fourteenth-century wars, the context of Chaucer's Knight could be more sensibly established. A quotation from Dante in Nicholas Upton provoked an exposé of international transmission of legal treatises and concepts of nobility. The polite 1977 demolition of the Huizinga/Kilgour construct of chivalric decline operated by resetting the terms of debate by concentrating on the serious implications of chivalric ethos and mystique, on chivalric images, illusions and associations, forming (in a neat borrowing from Huizinga himself) the 'model of social life'. Direct aphorisms make the point: 'display was necessary to make power meaningful'; 'there cannot be shadow without substance'; 'games that people play can be very serious indeed'.⁵⁰

The importance of display provided an increasingly prominent theme. In a report on a year's sabbatical leave in 1979, Maurice admitted that 'the more entertaining material that I have come across concerns dressing up and display in the Middle Ages'.⁵¹ It could also prove some of the most revealing evidence: 'Heraldry was a sign language, which could be used to reflect the facts of social life and ideas about them, their meaning and justification.' Observing who used heraldic coats of arms allowed Maurice

⁵⁰M. H. Keen, 'English military experience and the Court of Chivalry: the Case of Grey vs. Hastings', *NKM*, pp. 167–85; Keen, 'Chaucer's Knight', *NKM*, pp. 101–19; Keen, 'The debate over nobility: Dante, Nicholas Upton and Bartolus', *NKM*, pp. 209–22; Keen, 'Huizinga, Kilgour and the decline of chivalry', pp. 10, 16, 17.

⁵¹MHK Report on Sabbatical, 4 October 1979, BCA.

to identify a process of chivalric acculturation amongst the lesser gentry as an effect of widespread service in the French wars, an association indicated by the originally martial term 'esquire' to mark the status of gentlemen, which was embraced even by those lacking military credentials.⁵² As well as confirming Maurice's insistence on the importance of war in later medieval society, heraldry thus became a tool for serious social historians. More generally, using visual material as evidence rather than mere illustration was uncommon among historians at the time. Amongst successors to Maurice, it is now standard.

Like those he studied, Maurice enjoyed the aesthetics of chivalrous culture, part of his empathy with its thought world. However, he was not blind to the darker side of chivalry. He recognised that war, which could be regarded as worthy and just if 'waged to right a greater wrong', was nonetheless 'a brutalising and degrading business in which the innocent will continually suffer'.⁵³ Warriors fought for mixed motives, which included honour, glory, the pressure to conform, adventure and profit. Writing of Richard II's Ordinances of War of 1385, he emphasised that 'for a high proportion of those serving the main purpose of their presence was not to get to grips with the enemy but their own gain'.⁵⁴ These incentives may have appeared contradictory, but were not necessarily hypocritical, merely human. He accepted that the 'formalisation and ritualisation' of chivalry in the fourteenth century reduced appreciation of the value of peace, leading to what he called a 'crisis of chivalry'.⁵⁵ His study of John Hawkwood, 'knight or robber', demonstrated an unsentimental acceptance that chivalry, 'for all its idealism and because of it', tended to make the horrors of war endemic, the Free Companies, 'parasites on society' with their 'tinsel glint of chivalry', serving as a 'useful reminder of the difficulty of applying any touchstone in order to distinguish the gold from the base metal in chivalry. The good and ill in its ethic were alike products of a single framework of ideas'.⁵⁶

'Chivalry was an essentially upper class mystique', attractive to the aspiring non-nobles as much as to the gentle born, synonymous with

⁵² Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, p. 165 and chap. 5; M. H. Keen, 'Heraldry and hierarchy: esquires and gentlemen', in J. Denton (ed.), *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval Europe* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 98–100.

⁵³ Keen, 'War, peace and chivalry', *NKM*, p. 19.

⁵⁴ M. H. Keen, 'Richard II's Ordinances of War of 1385', in R. E. Archer and S. Walker (eds.), *Rulers and Ruled in Medieval England: Essays Presented to Gerald Harriss* (London, 1995), p. 40.

⁵⁵ Keen, 'War, peace and chivalry', *NKM*, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁶ M. H. Keen, 'Chivalry, nobility and the man-at-arms', in C. T. Allmand (ed.), *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages* (Liverpool, 1976), pp. 32, 45.

social power.⁵⁷ The extent of violence epitomised by the Free Companies but promoted by the French wars presented theorists and politicians alike with acute dilemmas over how to curb chivalry's inherent excesses. Maurice, following sources such as the ever-present Bouvet, argued that, in the long run, the tension was resolved by an increase in central political control of the means, finances and mechanics of warfare, a result both of official action and technological change. The transformations and continuities of chivalry in the later Middle Ages and beyond, signalled in the last pages of *Chivalry*, became a theme of later work, notably his last major work, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, a subject close not just to his academic interest alone. Here Maurice confirmed his acute awareness of the simultaneous importance and fragility of conventions; of the evolution of cultural norms; and of the delicate play of social and political forces. Regardless of, perhaps because of, his personal sympathies, he never sought to construct a simple apologia in his exposition of knightly values.

For most scholars, especially those with heavy teaching commitments, Maurice's work on chivalry alone would have provided sufficient scholarly employment. However, he also produced three substantial general works, still widely consulted. Each revealed his scope and ability at lucid historical synthesis, the marks of an outstanding tutor. While *A History of Medieval Europe* betrays a certain youthful over-confidence in generalisation, *England in the Later Middle Ages* remains a major and notable interpretation of later medieval England, placing the French wars at the centre of politics. The fruits of thoughts stimulated by tutorial teaching are evident throughout. However, when asking for sabbatical leave from Balliol in 1971, Maurice admitted working on it had interrupted his researches on chivalry. Similarly, his declared long-term project on the late medieval nobility in Europe was deflected in the late 1980s by the production of *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: 1348–1500* (London, 1990), an elegant survey of the three orders of commons, clerics and knights, idiosyncratic in its removal from the usual register of social historians and concentration on vignettes of lived experience rather than aggregate statistics.⁵⁸ Maurice disclaimed expertise in social and economic history and pointedly praised a subsequent more conventionally framed study of what he self-mockingly noted was a 'well-trodden' field.⁵⁹ In tutorials on

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁸ MHK's undated reports 1970–1, 1987–8, BCA.

⁵⁹ M. H. Keen, 'Review of *Medieval England: a Social History, 1250–1550* by P. J. P. Goldberg', *English Historical Review*, 120 (2005), 1040–2.

English society, after the usual, possibly rather *mezzo forte* talk of economic conditions and the fate of the peasantry, Maurice was known to ask with much greater *brio*, ‘but what about the knights?’ In fact, *English Society* contains a convincing portrayal of the lives of different social groups. Maurice pursued his own brand of social history, a history of experience not econometrics, of mentalities and ideologies, of conventions and aspirations, of anxieties and of beliefs.

Maurice took great care over his own literary style. Even in short reviews, he always sought euphonious *mots justes*. His eulogy on Powicke, whom he remembered as an old man pottering about the Balliol Senior Common Room, could almost have been a self-portrait: ‘His care with his choice of words and his elegant literary style expressed evocatively sensitivities and sensibilities of his very personal perceptions: his insights into the complexities of human character...his alertness to the ways in which political development and the history of ideas can interact. He had a very keen eye for vivid and telling detail.’⁶⁰ However, whereas Powicke’s sentences tended to the sonorous and marmoreal, Maurice’s were unaffected, direct, accessible, even aphoristic, conveying subtlety without abstraction or jargon. Frequently, an almost conversational tone intruded, partly a legacy of the origins of many of his articles in lectures, partly to make clear that he was expressing an opinion not delivering *ex cathedra* orthodoxy. He was unafraid to employ the personal pronoun and tended to avoid the timidity of the passive tense, the stylistic redoubt of many other scholars. Occasionally he indulged in self-parody; few others would write of a ‘fair crack of the whip’ when introducing an important collection of conference papers. His reviews show more of this relaxed vein. One book of translated sources is ‘a godsend’; another on war and public order ‘pretty unexceptionable’; another missing the ‘awfulness’ of the period in question.⁶¹ The apparent artlessness of tone was achieved with care and effort and, as he acknowledged on more than

⁶⁰ M. H. Keen, ‘Maurice Powicke: medieval historical scholarship and Queen’s’, in A. Jackson and D. N. Livingstone (eds.), *Queen’s Thinkers: Essays in the Intellectual Heritage of a University* (Belfast, 2008), pp. 85–92.

⁶¹ P. Coss and M. Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 1; M. H. Keen, ‘Review of *Unity, Heresy and Reform 1378–1460: the Conciliar Response to the Great Schism* by C. M. D. Crowder’, *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), 202; Keen, ‘Review’, *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982), 353; M. H. Keen, ‘Review of *War, Justice and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages* by Richard W. Kaeuper’, *English Historical Review*, 105 (1990), 121.

one occasion, the help of ‘my trusted guide in grammar and style as in all else’, his wife Mary.⁶²

VI

Maurice was a very private man. He maintained clear unforced divisions between his life as tutor, scholar and family man. The public Maurice was a familiar Oxford figure in college, pub and street. His slight frame and ageless boyish looks; the tweed suits, sometimes upholstered with imaginatively placed leather patches; the cloth cap; invariable shirt and tie; his father’s gown green with age; the purposeful stride; the ambient tobacco smoke, often with the accompaniment of a glass of stout, or ‘whisk’ or wine; the cheerful grin; the twinkle of interest, amusement, pleasure and occasional mischief; the hesitant speech that failed to conceal the force of intellect; the egalitarian courtesy and natural politeness, rare in the driven individualism of academic communities. Against donnish stereotype, his tastes, like his convictions, were simple and straightforward; he preferred plain food. As with all veteran dons, his legends were legion and some were true, speaking of a more relaxed, convivial, less solemn world, in which strenuous fun and serious thought were not mutually exclusive, nor the combination especially disdained. As with his friend and companion in bachelor extravagance, Richard Cobb, a price was paid, but consciously given. His *largesse* of spirit touched all who knew him.

The public persona revealed something of the inner person, most obvious and most mysterious in his unshakable, adamant modesty and self-deprecation, wholly unaffected and wholly unwarranted. It was a constant. ‘Diffident almost to a fault’ commented Christopher Hill in 1957. McFarlane worried lest he would professionally be held back by his reluctance to assert himself; John Prestwich noted his initial shyness.⁶³ Maurice’s writing gives repeated testimony of a reluctance to accept his own worth that went far beyond formal disclaimer or rational humility. When presented with the list of contributors to the *Festschrift* prepared for him in 2009, he appeared genuinely overwhelmed. He did not seem to recognise or even accept the cause of their deep admiration. Expressions of respect provoked inarticulate response. All who knew him, especially perhaps those closest to him, found this exasperating, not least as it sat so

⁶²Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, p. 8.

⁶³BCA.

awkwardly with the quiet confidence with which he presented his views, argued academic points, reached decisions and guided his pupils. This extreme refusal to see himself as others saw him figured some profound if hidden trait of identity.

Maurice possessed a vivid awareness of what he described as ‘the human dilemma’. He wrote of *Piers Plowman* that it ‘lays before us that doubts and unease and the spectre of spiritual despair could be no less pressing on an individual in an “age of faith” than they can be in an age of scepticism’.⁶⁴ Maurice was a man of religious faith, quietly sustained in traditional Anglican guise; he was a regular in Balliol Chapel. His two brief essays on John Wyclif reflect this personal engagement with theology and belief as much as with Wyclif the Oxford don. In what could be seen as an exercise in historical empathy, he rejected McFarlane’s material careerist explanations of the evolution of Wyclif’s eucharistic views and chose to emphasise the intellectual rather than sociological roots of Lollardy. Wyclif developed his ideas on transubstantiation because ‘he really was angry’ at the non-scriptural basis of Catholic teaching.⁶⁵ As he grew older, such issues increasingly occupied Maurice too. His final months found him reading the Bible. As he observed of medieval knights, faith was intrinsic to the personality of the gentleman.

The bedrock of Maurice’s life and happiness was formed by his family. In 1968, he married Mary Keegan, younger sister of his old Balliol friend John Keegan, the journalist and military historian. Mary, a Somerville classicist, had first met Maurice a decade earlier. Over the next forty-five years their partnership glowed with warmth and companionship. For Maurice’s academic work, Mary acted as sounding board and literary advisor. Their easy enjoyment of each other’s company was evident to all who knew them. Maurice was devoted to his daughters Catherine (b. 1969), Harriet (b. 1971) and Clare (b. 1973) and took huge delight in his grandchildren. The homes in St Cross Road and later Walton Street, along with the house in Devon, provided a supremely important private focus; unless duty called, Maurice would tend to walk home for lunch with Mary rather than eat in college.

Maurice Keen shared the values of the knights he studied—loyalty, duty, service, generosity. He bore witness that these were by no means hollow or redundant. His indelible charm, with his advanced sense and

⁶⁴ Keen, ‘Review’, *English Historical Review*, 109 (1994), 703.

⁶⁵ M. H. Keen, ‘Wyclif, the Bible and transubstantiation’ and ‘The influence of Wyclif’, in A. Kenny (ed.), *Wyclif and His Times* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 1–16, 127–45.

capacity for enjoyment and fun, made him an irresistibly attractive figure as teacher, mentor, scholar and friend. In upbringing, career and inclination, an Establishment figure, he entirely lacked hauteur or pomposity. He hid his academic distinction behind a shield of genuine modesty. Because he thought the best of those he knew, he was loved in return. Sadly, his last years were clouded by prolonged ill-health. He died of heart failure on 11 September 2012 at the Spencer Court Care Home, Woodstock.

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Note. Apart from those indicated in the footnotes, sources for this account include Sir Colin Lucas's address at Maurice Keen's memorial service at St Mary's University Church, Oxford on 19 January 2013, obituaries in the national and local press, the reminiscences in the 2009 Festschrift, *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen*, and personal information. For permission to examine and quote material in their archives, I thank the Master and Fellows of Balliol College, Oxford, and the college archivist, Anna Sander, for her help. Many others have assisted in the preparation of this memoir, in particular John Jones, Peggy Brown, Peter Coss, Jeremy Catto and, especially, Mary Keen.