



JOHN HALE

*Sarah Quill*

# John Rigby Hale

## 1923–1999

MANY HAVE SAID OF JOHN HALE that he epitomised the ‘Renaissance man’, *l'uomo universale*, gifted with a many-sidedness which spanned the arts, literature, and public affairs. Such versatility was indeed much admired in Renaissance Italy, both at the level of genius in the case of Alberti or Leonardo da Vinci, and at the level of all-round excellence as described by Castiglione in *Il Cortegiano*. What is less well-known about the Italian Renaissance is that it was the age in which true professionalism and specialisation emerged, in both the civilian and military spheres. The admiration for the all-rounder was, in a certain sense, a reaction to the growing domination of the professional, whether he was a bureaucrat, doctor or career soldier. Hale disliked being alluded to in terms of Castiglione’s *sprezzatura*, ‘an unforced ease of accomplishment’; he once described the *Courtier* as ‘not untainted by self-grooming for effect or snobbish scorn for overt professionalism’<sup>1</sup> But he himself did represent that Renaissance dichotomy; his breadth of interests and versatility were wondrous, making him a brilliant and gracious conversationalist and an eloquent and commanding teacher. On the other hand there was a dedicated professionalism about his scholarship and much of his writing that represented a different side of his personality.

John Hale was born on 17 September 1923 in Ashford, Kent, the youngest child of a family doctor, Edmond Rigby Stephenson Hale. His mother’s maiden name was Hilda Birks, and John had two older sisters,

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Hale (ed.), *A Concise Encyclopaedia of the Italian Renaissance* (1981), p. 74.

Joan and Pauline, of whom the younger was six years older than he was. In these circumstances he was much admired and cosseted by the female members of the family, and from an early age he showed great self-confidence and a passion for writing. His younger sister, Polly,<sup>2</sup> remembers well his early enthusiasm for making up poems and reciting them. Another early passion was ornithology, fostered by a school prize which he received at the age of eleven: T. A. Coward's *The Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs* (1934), a book which remained one of his most treasured possessions. By this time the family had moved to Wales and he was attending the Neville Holt Preparatory School; at the age of thirteen, in 1937, he won a scholarship, with particular distinction in French and German, to Eastbourne College and joined Blackwater House. At about this time his father died and his arrival at Eastbourne was also clouded by the onset of osteomyelitis which condemned him to a wheelchair for eighteen months, and frustrated his youthful enthusiasm for games, particularly rugby football. A long-term weakness of the knee which flared up periodically was to be a permanent legacy of this illness. But the prolonged inactivity enforced upon him was later seen by Sheila, his second wife, as a key factor in developing in him an almost obsessive passion for reading, together with a remarkable fortitude in the face of pain and physical incapacity. A colleague at Eastbourne has commented on the range of his reading and intellectual interests:

While we ordinary souls were discovering the delights of Mozart he was urging upon us the symphonies of Sibelius. Our 78 rpm records included *Tosca*; the equivalent in John's collection was *Les Boréades*. While we struggled with *Le Malade imaginaire* in three evenings, he polished it off in one and a Balzac tale or two.

French seventeenth-century literature was to be a lasting enthusiasm, alongside Shakespeare with whom he was already totally familiar by the age of fifteen.

At the outbreak of the war Eastbourne College was evacuated to Radley, a school with which Hale seemed to establish a better rapport and which he preferred to claim as his own in later years. However, he was later a critic of the public school system and its elitist tendencies, although it clearly gave his intellect space in which to blossom. The combined schools were able to take advantage of the pool of unconventional, volunteer, talent available in Oxford to fill gaps in their teaching staff created by the war. This helped to foster intellectual enthusiasm and a

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Pauline Playford, to whom I am particularly grateful for her recollections of John's youth.

wide range of cultural interests among the boys. In his last year he was editor of the school magazine and wrote the Valetes of all his fellow leavers entirely from memory, having mislaid the original entries. In the same summer of 1941 he made a memorable appearance in a school production of *Twelfth Night* as Feste the Clown. An enthusiastic reporter commented:

Here, as J. R. Hale convincingly showed, is something very close to Shakespeare's heart. His wit and nonsense were as spontaneous as his agility—his sly glance at Sir Toby, as he sang about the toss-pots' drunken heads, being particularly pleasing—but above all he revealed the sensitive nature of the character in his reactions to the slightest suggestions of reproach.<sup>3</sup>

An adviser on this production was Nevill Coghill whom Hale must have met at this time and who was to be a continuing influence on his acting at Oxford. He left Eastbourne College in December 1941 having won scholarships to both Oxford and Cambridge, one in History and the other in English. He finally chose Jesus College, Oxford but postponed going up until the end of the war.

The next three years were spent in the Merchant Navy. Friends who knew him later in life attributed this choice to a determined hatred of war, and it is certainly true that although he became one of the world's leading authorities on Renaissance warfare, he always expressed a deep horror of the violence and destructiveness of war. However, he himself insisted that he had applied to join the Navy, but the weakness in his knee and a slight short-sightedness led to his rejection. Hence the choice of the Merchant Navy and a decision to train as a radio operator. Richard Lyne, who followed him from Eastbourne into the Merchant Navy, remarked:

I remember clearly what his motives were . . . First he wished to make a genuine contribution to the war effort; secondly, he knew that he could never put himself into the position of having to kill someone, and thirdly, he wished to share the dangers undergone by his compatriots.<sup>4</sup>

The two eighteen-year olds enrolled at the London School of Telegraphy in Earls Court to learn their new craft, practising their Morse code in their lodgings. Hale's contribution to the traffic of messages between them tended to be excerpts from Rabelais, either in his own translation or from the 1530 French edition, rather than the prescribed text of specimen nautical messages. Once trained, they separated to go to sea, and John spent the next three years on various ships, mostly in the Atlantic. A vivid

<sup>3</sup> *The Eastbournian* (Summer 1941).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from a letter of Richard Lyne to Sheila Hale of Nov. 1999.

series of autobiographical recollections of these voyages remains in manuscript in the family with the title of *The Waves Between*, and illuminates not only his excited and often lyrical responses to the life at sea and its hazards, but also his undying thirst for travel. It was at this time that he first savoured New York, to which he was to return many times, and experienced exciting visits to Cape Town and Bogota, amongst other places.

In the autumn of 1945 Hale took his leave of the Merchant Navy and went up to Oxford. The three-year gap between school and university had clearly not blunted his intellectual enthusiasm in any way; indeed precisely the opposite, and his undergraduate career was a triumphant success in academic terms. He won the Gladstone Memorial Prize for History in 1947 and gained the top First in Modern History in 1948. These distinctions were achieved despite devoting much of his time to acting and the theatre. The Oxford University Dramatic Society was quickly re-established after the war and in 1947 he became its secretary. In the previous year he had been president of the Experimental Theatre Club and it was in that year, 1946, that he made his first appearance on an Oxford stage as one of the Sicilian lords in Nevill Coghill's production of *The Winter's Tale* in Exeter College gardens.<sup>5</sup> He always used to claim, modestly, that he could not remember whether he had been Cleomenes or Dion on that occasion, but in 1947 there was no doubting his standing in Oxford's drama world when he was cast as King Haakon in Ibsen's *Pretenders*, and then as King Ferdinand of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost* directed by Anthony Besch. There followed in 1948 a memorable performance as the Messenger in Kenneth Tynan's production of *Samson Agonistes* in the University Church of St Mary's, and a spectacular appearance as Neptune in the masque written by Nevill Coghill for the formal visit to Oxford of Princess Elizabeth. Coghill was a huge influence on John in those days and was responsible for obtaining for him the offer of the lead role in the Lauder and Gilliat film *The Blue Lagoon* opposite Jean Simmons. This prospect of a film career coincided with his success in the Final Honours School and the offer of a Fellowship and Tutorship in Modern History at Jesus to fill the position vacated by Goronwy Edwards. The choice must have been a tantalising one for him, but it was Oxford and History that won, although he was able to postpone commencing college tutoring for a year while, with permission of his college,

<sup>5</sup> Much of this information about Hale's engagement with the theatre is derived from Anthony Besch's notable contribution to the National Gallery celebration of his life on 1 Nov. 1999.

he took up a Commonwealth Fellowship to study in the United States. Although as a senior member of the University he did less acting when he returned to Oxford, and became more involved in directing, nevertheless the acting experience gained at this time gave him a command of bodily and facial gestures which was infinitely to enliven his skill as lecturer, raconteur, and conversationalist, and was to help him through his last speechless years.

The year in America was to be followed by many subsequent visits. He was based at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, and at Harvard; but towards the end of his year his lust for travel and the acquisition of a 500cc BSA motorcycle lured him into 16,000 miles of exploration in galleries and national parks across the continent. In the course of this odyssey he took part in a motorcyclists' wedding in Mexico City and was nearly shot as a bandit by the state police on the Redwood Highway in Washington. Once again, as with the experiences in the Merchant Navy, these adventures are grippingly and wittily recorded in an unpublished memoir.

By the autumn of 1949 John Hale and the BSA were back in Oxford and a fifteen-year stint as a college history tutor had begun. In his final undergraduate year he had taken the Italian Renaissance special subject with Cecilia Ady, who was able to transmit the late Victorian enthusiasm for the Renaissance to generations of Oxford undergraduates.<sup>6</sup> In preparation for this he had spent much of the summer of 1947 on a first visit to Italy where he had become totally absorbed and enchanted by the country and its fourteenth- and fifteenth-century art. Here lay the origins of a specialisation which was to colour the rest of his life and most of his published work. He wrote movingly about this experience in the introduction to the second edition of his *England and the Italian Renaissance* (1963) and described how he had abandoned a plan for a leisurely return through France in order to keep the flavour of Italy intact in his mind.<sup>7</sup> It certainly remained intact and was constantly refreshed as he took over Cecilia Ady's teaching in 1952 and soon became widely known in Oxford for his lectures on Machiavelli, and Renaissance diplomacy and warfare. His reputation as an inspiring and mind-broadening teacher both of undergraduates and in the Adult Education department quickly grew.

*England and the Italian Renaissance* was first published in 1954 and was a pioneering essay in the history of taste and of cultural diffusion. It

<sup>6</sup> He wrote a memorial tribute to Cecilia Ady in E. F. Jacob (ed.), *Italian Renaissance Studies* (1960), pp. 484–7.

<sup>7</sup> J. R. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance: The Growth of Interest in its History and Art* (revd. edn., 1963), Preface.

was followed quickly by the chapters on war in the first two volumes of the *New Cambridge Modern History* (1957 and 1958), and the lucid and still valuable *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* (1961).<sup>8</sup> He had already published a translation of Machiavelli's satire *Mandragola* (1956) and directed a performance of the play, using his own translation, by the Merton College Floats in the same year.<sup>9</sup>

In his early years as a don at Jesus he had remained closely associated with the OUDS. In the summer of 1950 he accompanied Anthony Besch's production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* as production assistant on its sponsored tour of West and East Germany. This was for him the starting point for another memorable expedition on his BSA to the Balkans and Turkey to visit the rock churches of Cappadocia. In 1951 he directed the OUDS production of *Cymbeline*, performed as part of the Festival of Britain in the front quadrangle of All Souls, and in the autumn of the same year he directed *The Comedy of Errors* in Merton College. Playing the part of Luciana in this production was Rosalind Williams, an undergraduate at St Anne's College, with whom he fell in love. They were married in the following year.

John Hale, the family man with a large house in North Oxford and with adored children quickly demanding his attention, was a new phenomenon for his colleagues in the Jesus senior common room. They had become accustomed, if not necessarily reconciled, to the elegant bachelor don and auburn-haired extrovert who taught 'foreign' history, roared round Oxford on his BSA, and spent too much of his time on theatricals. Jesus was one of the more staid of the Oxford colleges in a post-war Oxford that was still tinged with austerity. It was unequivocally Welsh in its background and prejudices, even if speaking Welsh at dinner in hall was a 'sconsable' offence, except on 1 March. When Hale was deputed to supervise the redecoration of the senior common room, because of his constant complaints about its dinginess, the resulting Regency style make-over raised some hackles amongst the senior Fellows. Throughout his academic career his outside interests and commitments left him only limited time for college or departmental administration, and even occa-

<sup>8</sup> 'International Relations in the West: Diplomacy and War, 1493–1520', *The Renaissance, 1493–1520*, ed. G. R. Potter, *New Cambridge Modern History*, I (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 259–91; 'Armies, Navies and the Art of War, 1520–59', *The Reformation, 1520–59*, ed. G. R. Elton, *New Cambridge Modern History*, II (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 481–509; J. R. Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* (1961).

<sup>9</sup> *Niccolò Machiavelli, Mandragola: A Comedy*, introduction and translation by J. R. Hale (Swynford, Eynsham, Oxon, 1956).

sionally led to late appearance at, or even missed, tutorials and seminars. His disappointed students were usually mollified by the obvious regret that he showed on these occasions, and by the knowledge that they still enjoyed the attention and enthusiastic encouragement of one of the liveliest tutors in the university. But his colleagues tended to be less understanding. By the mid 1950s a rapidly expanding family, new interests in the revival of the Oxford Playhouse and in editing the *Oxford Magazine* (1958–9), and finally long periods of leave in the USA in 1959–60 and in Italy in 1962–3, led to a certain detachment from the College, and indeed from the Oxford academic scene as a whole. The *Oxford Magazine*, published weekly during term time, bore the imprint of his involvement in the editing quite clearly. Dean Ireland's Professor of Exegesis was castigated as the 'Savonarola of St. Mary's' for uttering dire warnings about the corruption of junior members by senior members; the University as a whole was denounced for woeful discourtesy towards visiting scholars and their wives; the 'Radical Economies Committee' was attacked for threatening the Readership in Criminology and the Ruskin School of Drawing; an 'anonymous' correspondent writing about the teaching of history in Tristan da Cunha provided the opportunity for a tongue-in-cheek assault on the narrowness of the Oxford history syllabus. His final editorial in March 1959 contained a rare moment of self-congratulation; in introducing Mary Warnock, his successor, he noted: 'This will be the first time the Magazine has been edited by a young, flute-playing, mother of four . . . indeed it is the first time it has been edited by a woman at all.'<sup>10</sup> The need to extend the role and status of women in the University, whether undergraduates, staff, or wives, was one of his most deeply held convictions, and the lack of progress in this direction in the 1950s and early 1960s was a source of considerable disillusionment to him.

He gave up editing the *Oxford Magazine* in order to prepare for a year's sabbatical at Cornell University, and in the autumn of 1959 he and Rosalind and their three children took up residence in upper New York State. At this time Hale was developing a major research interest in Renaissance fortifications. The possibilities of parallel research into architectural remains and the documentary evidence for their function, siting, and construction, linked to the geographical range and travel opportunities made possible by Renaissance explorers and conquistadors, appealed enormously to him. During his sabbatical year and in the next three years he travelled widely in search of the fortified relics of European

<sup>10</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, LXXVII (1958–9), nos. 1, 8, 9, 10, 16.

conquest. The project in its entirety was never finished; it became focused, perhaps as a result of a year's work in Italy in 1962–3, attached to the new Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at Bernard Berenson's Villa I Tatti outside Florence, on early Italian gunpowder fortifications. The seminal article on 'The Early Development of the Bastion' (1965) was the result of this fieldwork and research, and was to prepare the way for a series of Italian investigations.<sup>11</sup>

The year in Italy was also marked by a crisis in his life. His prolonged absences on research trips undermined his marriage, and in 1962 Rosalind announced that she was leaving him. The impact on him was devastating; he adored his children, Sophie, Matthew and Charlotte, and while he continued to see a lot of them throughout the rest of his life, he now had to make a fresh start. This, together with the long-held irritations about certain aspects of Oxford life, led in 1964 to his decision to leave Oxford and accept the offer of Jack Butterworth, the Bursar and Law Tutor at New College, but also Vice-Chancellor designate of the new University of Warwick, of the founding Chair of History.

After leaving Oxford Hale's first move was to London. The building of Warwick was getting under way on a large green field site between Coventry and Kenilworth, and the first intake of students was expected in the autumn of 1965. So for a year he had limited responsibilities and was able to plunge into writing; however, there were periodic meetings with the founding professors of the new university, and also the task of appointing the staff of his new department. Warwick, unlike some of its immediate rivals amongst the new universities of the 1960s, opted for an academic structure based on strong single-discipline departments. It was planned to grow quickly and to resemble, in some respects, a large American campus university. The contemporary thirst for interdisciplinarity was met by the establishment of joint degrees, and sub-faculties embracing groups of contiguous departments.

John Hale was not entirely in tune with some of these decisions and would have preferred a more interdisciplinary structure and less initial emphasis on the powerful professors. He was determined from the outset to inject a democratic atmosphere into his department which was to be strongly European and American in its interests. Only two of the first group of staff to take up appointments were British historians; one of

<sup>11</sup> J. R. Hale, 'The Early Development of the Bastion: an Italian Chronology, c.1450–c.1534', in *Europe in the Late Middle Ages* ed. J. R. Hale, J. R. L. Highfield, and B. Smalley (1965), pp. 466–94.

these was E. P. Thompson who was lured by the emphasis that Hale wanted to place on social history, and the other, Robin Clifton, a seventeenth-century specialist, had to spend much of the first year teaching Russian history. All were chosen as much for their teaching skills and potential as for their publications. All were encouraged to spend much of their time teaching what really interested them. Student applicants were astonished by the range of optional courses available to them in their first year. But the most tempting facet of the new type of history syllabus offered was the emphasis on travel and study abroad, and on student exchanges. In those early days all those reading History at Warwick spent a term at an American university on exchange in the second year, and then went to Venice in a group in the third year to be taught by Warwick staff. The presence of the US exchange students for a term was as important in Hale's mind as the experiences offered to the Warwick historians. The original intention of establishing the Italian Renaissance programme in Florence was frustrated by the devastating impact of the 1966 floods on Florentine academic life and facilities, and by the time the first group went to Venice in the autumn of 1967 I had joined the department as a second italianist to help with the new venture. The idea of enabling history students to study abroad for a whole term, and to undertake detailed work on the Florentine and Venetian Renaissance with knowledge of Italian and the opportunity to travel in Italy and appreciate the art and architecture at first hand, was an essential part of Hale's vision. History had to be experienced as well as read; he himself had taken a course in surveying before embarking on the study of Renaissance fortifications, and in Venice he set himself to learn to row a *sandolo* round the canals so that he could see the city from water level as Renaissance Venetians had seen it. The Venice programme, joined by Warwick's art historians in 1975, remains a unique institution for history students in British universities, and is still guided by John Hale's vision. Few students who attend the course remain untouched by it, and Hale himself became increasingly fascinated by the city and its history. Much of his subsequent historical writing was nurtured in the Archivio di Stato in Venice and by frequent revisiting of the splendours of Venice.

In 1965 he had married again, to Sheila MacIvor, an American journalist and travel writer, and in late 1966 they moved to the Old Rectory at Aston-le-Walls in Northamptonshire to be nearer to Warwick. Late in 1966 their son, John Justin, was born. However, John and Sheila did not remain long at Warwick. The long periods spent in Venice disrupted the task of administering and building up the department, and left Hale

somewhat detached from the life of the University. Having stayed long enough to see the first intake of undergraduates through their finals, to found a Graduate School of Renaissance Studies, and to confront with sympathy but with some perplexity the first stirring of 1968 student unrest, he resigned from Warwick in the autumn of 1969. After a year at Berkeley and at the Folger Library in Washington, he was offered and accepted the Chair of Italian at University College London, in 1970.

His predecessor at University College had been Roberto Weiss whose teaching and writing had already given an historical leaning to the Department of Italian, and Hale had hopes of turning it into a broad-based centre of Italian Studies. However, the beginning of a new austerity in the university system and the difficulty of expanding a small department in these circumstances, frustrated these hopes. He took a particular interest in the joint degree of Italian with History of Art, but was unable to develop other joint degrees which could have been a way forward towards a broader Italian base. He was, however, able to tailor his ideas for student study in Venice to fit a language and literature degree by arranging for UCL undergraduates to start their year in Italy with a five-week tutored programme in Venice. He was to be head of the department at UCL until 1985 when, as part of the reorganisation of the teaching of Italian at the London colleges, he stepped aside to allow Laura Lepschy to take over and himself moved to a personal chair in the History Department for the remaining three years of his service to the College. Professor Lepschy has written a moving 'recollection' of her long association with John Hale in which, amongst other memories, she recalls his role as Public Orator of the University of London in 1981–3: 'As he took me through the preparation of his orations stage by stage, I came to realise how much research went into each piece to produce the seemingly effortless final product, so concise, informative, elegant and suave.'<sup>12</sup>

Running a small, well-established department, and doing his share of its teaching, left more time than he had ever had for the pursuit of his many other interests. Venice, inevitably, remained a focus of his attention; he became an early committee member of the Venice in Peril Fund and listed 'Venice' as his favoured recreation in *Who's Who*. He was also the moving spirit behind the unrealised proposal to establish a British Institute in Venice for researchers. It was while trying to raise funds for this project that he met the influential American patroness, Gladys Kriebel Delmas,

<sup>12</sup> *Raccordo*, a newsletter for former students of the department of Italian published by University College London, VIII (October 2000), pp. 12–14.

and persuaded her to establish a fund to support research in Venice by British and Commonwealth scholars, alongside that which she was creating for American researchers. His writing throughout this period was mainly focused on military aspects of Venetian history, the culmination of which was our joint book, *The Military Organisation of a Renaissance State: Venice ca. 1400–1617* (1984), which we had planned fifteen years earlier over lunches on the *altana* of Palazzo Brandolini d'Adda where the Warwick programme was based, and which was awarded the University of London Edmund Gardner Prize.<sup>13</sup> Hale had already been awarded the Premio Bolla for services to Venetian culture in 1982. Other academic 'distractions' during this period were an active spell as the chairman of the newly-formed British Society for Renaissance Studies (1973–6) when significant moves were made towards attracting school sixth-formers to the study of the Renaissance, and two further lengthy study visits to America, to the Davis Center at Princeton (1982) and to the Institute of Advanced Study, also at Princeton (1984–5).

Mention of his interest in reaching out to sixth-formers reminds one of his deep involvement in broadcasting and television work as a way of reaching a wider audience with his enthusiasm for all things Renaissance. In the 1960s it was the pages of the *Listener* that sparkled with his talks;<sup>14</sup> in the 1970s and 1980s his attention focused more on television, particularly with his Chronicle programmes on Venice, Florence, and Rome which confirmed a growing reputation as a successful 'television don'. His friendly and accessible manner, and ability to conjure up exciting verbal images made a deep impression. Although he had no formal training in art history, he read deeply in the subject, was an avid visitor to galleries and museums, and had a highly developed aesthetic sense. His knowledge and appreciation was not confined to the Renaissance but extended to all periods, and his writing about art developed from the popular Time-Life books on *The Renaissance* (1965) and on *The Age of Exploration* (1966), through the Phaidon book on *Italian Renaissance Painting* (1977), to specialist work on art and warfare which was a major interest of his later years.<sup>15</sup>

John Hale's enthusiasm for art collections, not only as places of

<sup>13</sup> M. E. Mallett and J. R. Hale, *The Military Organisation of a Renaissance State: Venice c.1400–1617* (Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> For details, see the published Bibliography cited in the endnote to this Memoir.

<sup>15</sup> J. R. Hale, with the editors of Time-Life Books, *The Renaissance* and *The Age of Exploration*, in the series Great Ages of Man. A History of the World's Cultures (New York, 1965 and 1966); id., *Italian Renaissance Painting from Masaccio to Titian* (Oxford, and New York, 1977).

pilgrimage for himself but as fundamental points of contact between the artistic and scholarly world and a wider audience, led him to spend an immense amount of time serving on museum and gallery committees once he became established in London. When they moved back to London in 1970, he and Sheila bought a lovely house in Twickenham, and he rapidly became a key figure in the cultural establishment of the capital. In 1973 he was invited to join the Trustees of the National Gallery, and within eight months he was elected to be their chairman, a position that he held for six years, being twice re-elected despite the fact that the normal term of office was only three. This, in itself, was evidence of how successfully he retained the confidence both of his fellow trustees and of the Director of the Gallery. The Director in this period, Sir Michael Levey, who took up the position just before Hale became a trustee, wrote movingly of the effective partnership that was forged between the two of them, and added: 'Nobody was ever less like Leo X than John, but I think he saw, rightly, that given the Chairmanship he should attempt to enjoy it.'<sup>16</sup> There can be no doubt but that he did enjoy it, not because it gave him a position of authority and influence, but because it involved him in issues which were really important to him. He remarked in one of his almost daily letters to Michael Levey, apropos of Government meanness towards the national collections, that the galleries were 'promoting one of the most inspiring and satisfying of the pleasures open to man'. Together, Director and Chairman bullied successive governments into raising the annual purchase grant from £480,000 in 1974 to £2.9 million in 1981. They persuaded the government to allow a devolution of control to the Gallery to enable it to have greater flexibility in handling its staff structure and its financial management. They expanded the collections with a succession of important acquisitions, including some twentieth-century works, which raised hackles at the Tate. They drove forward the work of the recently created Education Department and encouraged younger children to visit the Gallery. This was a development particularly close to Hale's heart, as was his deep interest in the work of the conservation and restoration department.

In a written contribution to the celebration of John Hale's life held at the National Gallery on 1 November 1999, Sir Michael Levey commented on the speed with which Hale assimilated the most complex

<sup>16</sup> Sir Michael Levey's moving tribute, from which this quotation is drawn, was read out at the National Gallery celebration on 1 Nov. 1999. Other references to the period of Hale's tenure of the chairmanship are drawn from the National Gallery archives, and from the published *Reports* of the Gallery.

matters, and on his dedication and commitment to the interests of the Gallery. This puts one in mind of one of his own editorials in the *Oxford Magazine* twenty years earlier, in which he lambasted his university colleagues for their lack of interest in university business and their poor attendance at Congregation, whilst burying themselves in the minutiae of college administration. Here lies the clue to the priorities that he imposed on a very busy life.

The success that Hale achieved with the National Gallery and the pleasure and satisfaction that he got out of it, led to him being appointed to a succession of public trusteeships. He was a Trustee of the Victoria and Albert Museum (1984–8), Chairman of the Theatre Museum committee (1984–7), a Trustee of the British Museum (1985–93), and a member of the Royal Mint Advisory Commission (1979–92). His work on the Museums and Galleries Committee continued for nine years, from 1983 to 1992, and included chairmanship of the Working Party on museum professional training and career structure, his influential report of which was published in 1987. He was also a member of the Royal Commission for the 1851 Exhibition (1983–8) and Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Government Art Collections (1983–92). He was President of the British Association of Friends of Museums (1988–94). In addition he had been elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1977, and served on its Council (1980–3) and chaired its Art History section (1983–4 and 1985–7). While many of these appointments extended into his retirement after 1988 and gave him plenty of answers to the stock question—‘What are you going to do in your retirement?’—many coincided with his later years at UCL. Here was a Renaissance *vita attiva* indeed!

A culmination of much of this activity was the 1983 *Genius of Venice* exhibition at the Royal Academy, which he masterminded with Francis Haskell and Charles Hope. This turned out to be one of the most spectacular and most successful exhibitions mounted by the Academy in recent years. Hale not only played a part in choosing the pictures but also joined in the task of negotiating with the relevant Italian authorities for their loan. As Chairman of the National Gallery Trustees he had supported Michael Levey’s reluctance to lend the Gallery’s pictures, but this had been particularly in the context of supplying them to exhibitions of a single artist’s work. The *Genius of Venice* was an entirely different proposition; here was one of the best opportunities ever to thrill the British public with a stupendous display of Cinquecento Venetian art and to demonstrate the importance of the contribution of mainland Veneto

artists. To achieve this objective he wrestled with Italian museum directors, and fulminated against the red tape and obstructionism of cultural authorities. He got most of what he wanted and demonstrated once again the commitment and determination to get his way that he could bring to projects and issues that really concerned him.

In the year following the Academy exhibition he was knighted for his services to scholarship and the arts. The Italian government had already awarded him the title of *Commendatore nell'Ordine al Merito* of the Italian Republic in 1981. In 1986 he was awarded the British Academy's Serena Medal for distinguished publications in Italian studies; in the same year he was invited to become an Honorary Fellow of his old Oxford college. In 1987 he was elected *Socio straniero* of the Ateneo Veneto, and this was followed, a year before his death, by an invitation to become a *Socio* of the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome, the most distinguished of all the Italian intellectual academies. In 1993 he was presented at a party at the Warburg Institute, of which he had been a habitu e for many years, with a *Festschrift* of Venetian studies, prepared by former students and colleagues.<sup>17</sup> It was later in the same year that his last and best-known book, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, was published to huge acclaim, winning the Royal Society of Literature award and the Time-Life Silver Pen award.<sup>18</sup>

By this time, in 1993, tragedy had struck. In August 1992, less than a month after completing the manuscript of the text of *Civilization* after four years of work, Hale suffered a severe stroke which deprived him of speech and of the use of his writing hand, as well as some of his mobility. Within a year he had recovered much of his mobility, but language and writing ability were never to return despite all the efforts of therapists, friends and above all Sheila and his family, to help him recover. He was left active in mind but unable to communicate, and the work of editing his manuscript, completing the footnotes and captions, and seeing it all through press, was taken on by David Chambers with the help of Nicolai Rubinstein at the Warburg Institute. They were determined that the book should preserve as much as possible of John's ideas and language, and should appear as recognisably the book that he had written. It was a triumph and will be discussed further below; indeed all the remainder of his life was a triumph, a triumph of dignity in adversity, of inspiring

<sup>17</sup> David S. Chambers, Cecil H. Clough, and Michael E. Mallett, *War, Culture and Society in Renaissance Venice. Essays in Honour of John Hale* (1993).

<sup>18</sup> John Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (1993).

courage and good humour. *The Times* obituary described perfectly his efforts to communicate: ‘the infinitely modulated exclamations, chuckles, and ironic groans which accompanied his enchanting smile seemed almost to amount to conversation’.<sup>19</sup> With his continued enthusiasm for visual experiences of all kinds, his ready response to whatever was said to him, his obvious pleasure at seeing old friends and meeting new people, he remained the life-enhancing person he had always been. He continued to travel with friends, returning with delight to Venice where he unerringly found his way round without help, visiting Russia for the second time, and holidaying in Egypt, Spain, and Morocco. In London he was still to be seen at lectures, exhibitions, and parties, pointing excitedly at paintings, or gesticulating theatrically to make a point in conversation. It was clear that his acting experience was standing him in good stead as he coped with the task of communication without speech, and even when he was unable to make himself understood, the flicker of frustration was always fleeting. For almost exactly seven years John lived this second life, buoyed up by Sheila’s dedicated efforts to keep his mind busy and his soul refreshed. He died peacefully in his sleep after a pleasant dinner with a friend on 12 August 1999.<sup>20</sup>

Inevitably this memoir has recalled many aspects of Hale’s life and interests which were only indirectly related to the world of scholarship. But it is time to return to his scholarship and seek to assess his standing as an historian. Three points need to be made at the start of any such assessment. First, he was a naturally fluent and skilled writer; this came from being deeply read in a number of European literatures, but was also a natural gift developed in childhood. Secondly, his published output was prodigious; he assimilated material quickly. It was said that he needed very little sleep, and gained many hours a day on the average mortal. Thirdly, he had a quite extraordinary versatility and range of interest; his publications included a children’s book and a life of Napoleon, in addition to writings about exploration, fortifications, political institutions, art, historiography, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, gunpowder, Venetian galleys, and the Medici. Inevitably, while the style and presentation remained consummate, the content ranged from brisk popularisation to the truly scholarly. Furthermore, all his work was tinged by his literary interests; his initial approach to war studies was through printed military treatises

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 13 Aug. 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Sheila Hale is completing a book describing the experience of living and coping with John’s dysphasia in the last seven years of his life.

and through public opinion about war as revealed in contemporary literature. He was particularly good at analysing and teaching texts and also had considerable skill as a translator. But as his career developed Hale began to feel the excitement of the archive historian, an excitement which had been denied him because of his quick transition from undergraduate to overworked college tutor, without the apprenticeship of doctoral research regarded by later generations as a *sine qua non* for a university academic. Thus, his later work, particularly that on Venice, was more dependent on archival research, and this tended to increase the substance and freshness of the work, but with some loss of stylistic panache.

John Hale published in three main areas: the civilisation of the Renaissance and the transmission of its cultural ideas and styles across and through societies, Renaissance warfare, and the art of the Renaissance. It was the first of these categories that both opened and closed his writing career. Although his early book on *England and the Italian Renaissance* focused on one aspect of the transmission of Renaissance ideas and style, and of the development of ideas about the Renaissance,<sup>21</sup> his belief in a distinctive and crucial phase in European civilisation as a whole was always there. Indeed he regretted that in his final book, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, he was unable to do justice to aspects of his theme in eastern Europe because of his lack of relevant language skills. There was, however, a clear shift of emphasis from his early interest in travellers, scholars, and elite cultural patrons, to a more 'Annales-style' approach, imbibed in the late 1960s and apparent in *Renaissance Europe* (1971).<sup>22</sup> Here the emphasis is on how people lived, thought and expressed themselves, at all levels of society.

In focusing on European Renaissance, both in *Civilization* and in its forerunner *Renaissance Europe*, Hale inevitably concentrated on the sixteenth century, when the advent of print and greater opportunities to travel hastened the exchange of ideas. Because he placed a good deal less emphasis on Italy as a birthplace of cultural change than Burckhardt had, and therefore devoted less attention to the early Renaissance, he could also avoid debates about the origins of Renaissance ideas in thirteenth-century Italian city societies and religious confrontations. For this he was sometimes accused of being old-fashioned and impervious to the controversies that raged amongst Renaissance historians, particularly

<sup>21</sup> See n. 7 above.

<sup>22</sup> J. R. Hale, *Renaissance Europe, 1480–1520*, in the series *The Fontana History of Europe* (1971—reissued in a revised edition by Blackwell, Oxford, 2000).

in the 1970s. He was indeed determinedly unmodish, but at the same time he went substantially beyond Burckhardt in his attempt to depict a civilization, even though the *Zeitgeist*-method remained the same. The portrayal of the 'state of mind' of a society is a notoriously difficult exercise; Hale succeeded in *Civilization* and indeed on a more limited scale in *Renaissance Europe*, in creating, in the words of John Elliott, 'a great tapestry of Renaissance Europe'. William Bouswma, writing of *Civilization* in the *American Historical Review*, commented:

It is difficult to do justice to its richness and its numerous incidental insights. The wit and elegance of Hale's style also gives repeated pleasure, as in his wry explanation of the authority of Galen's medicine: 'He was an instance of those men whose intellectual tediousness wins acclaim because of the importance of his subjects.'<sup>23</sup>

*The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* was indeed the crowning achievement of one of John Hale's principal interests. At the same time it was a beautifully illustrated book and was therefore, in a sense, also the culmination of his interest in the arts and art history. Insights into the role of visual culture and its value as a source for understanding societies, are to be found throughout his writings. In the 1960s he had produced profusely illustrated books on *The Renaissance* and on *The Age of Exploration*, and in 1977 he prepared *Italian Renaissance Painting from Masaccio to Titian* for Phaidon.<sup>24</sup> But it was the eventual linking of his artistic sensitivity to themes of war that led to his most original work in this field. In *Artists and Warfare in the Renaissance* (1990) he set out his intention in the introduction: 'My concern is to suggest how the pictorial imagination of the Renaissance responded, spontaneously or to order, to the outstanding visual and emotional aspects of warfare, the troops themselves, and the battles, skirmishes and sieges, that made up a conquering or defensive campaign.'<sup>25</sup> The book set out to contrast German realism in depicting war with Italian preoccupation with chivalric conventions and imitation of the antique. Interestingly, he attributed the contrast more to deeply rooted differences in artistic styles and in *mentalités*, than to the more conventional explanation of a more violent warfare in Germany than in Italy.

Hale's approach to this third area of his historical interests, war, arose

<sup>23</sup> *American Historical Review*, CI (1996), pp. 172–3.

<sup>24</sup> See n. 15 above.

<sup>25</sup> J. R. Hale, *Artists and Warfare in the Renaissance* (New Haven, Connecticut and London, 1990), p. viii.

from his early teaching at Oxford. The syllabus of the Italian Renaissance special subject, which he both studied himself and then taught, focused very much on the Italian Wars which followed the French invasion of 1494, when Italian military prowess was confronted by that of the ultra-montane powers. It was also the age of Machiavelli. His early writing related to warfare was therefore concerned with the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and was linked to an association between political ideas and warfare. *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* (1961) placed emphasis on the practical side of Machiavelli's experiences and its influence on his thinking about war as an inevitable part of public policy.<sup>26</sup> Hale's approach to war studies was, in fact, part of a general trend in the post-Second World War period to rescue military history from the hands of retired generals writing memoirs and war museum experts writing about armour and weapons, and place it firmly back in the mainstream of historical writing. War, preparation for war—and indeed avoidance of war, affected society at all levels; economies were largely geared to the costs of war, architecture in the Renaissance and Early Modern period was crucially conditioned by considerations of defence, images of war were everywhere. These were the themes of Hale's military interests; 'war and society' sums it up loosely, and one of his most influential books was *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450–1620* (1985).<sup>27</sup> By this time he was able to fit his book into the framework of the key debate amongst historians interested in the so-called 'Military Revolution'. For Hale, as for Geoffrey Parker, the period of change in warfare and military organisation came in the sixteenth century, not the seventeenth as originally postulated by Michael Roberts in a famous inaugural lecture in Belfast in 1958. But his emphasis was on transformation rather than revolution, and much subsequent writing has confirmed this judgement.<sup>28</sup> The work that he did in the 1960s on fortifications and the impact of gunpowder on war was already pointing in this direction, with its emphasis

<sup>26</sup> Hans Baron, in a review of *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy*, wrote: 'The book is more than a particularly able psychological analysis and a most helpful guide for the general reader . . . it advances beyond Ridolfi's synthesis in some essential respects.' *American Historical Review*, LXVII (1962), pp. 128–9.

<sup>27</sup> J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450–1620*, in the series *The Fontana History of European War and Society* (1985); reissued by Sutton Publishing, Stroud, Glos., 1998.

<sup>28</sup> One of John Hale's last articles, 'Venezia e la rivoluzione militare europea', in *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell'autunno del rinascimento a Venezia*, ed. V. Branca and C. Ossola, in the series *Civiltà Veneziana, saggi XXXVIII* (Florence, 1991), pp. 85–103, outlined the debate and stated firmly his opinions about it.

on defence quickly responding to the threats of more powerful guns, and the early dating of angle bastions in Italy.

By the time, therefore, that John Hale came to publish his first archive-based article on Venetian military affairs in 1968, he had already established a place for himself in the new military history. There followed a stream of such articles related to the main project of examining the organisation of Venetian land forces in the sixteenth century, and the responses of that organisation to changes in the international situation and in Venetian society. With Venice largely on the defensive in the sixteenth century, the focus continued to be on fortifications, but military treatises and military academies, recruiting methods, and military preparedness in the broadest sense were all scrutinised. Nor was his attention wholly concentrated on Venice; the role of fortifications in maintaining internal political control was also investigated in Florence with the Fortezza da Basso as the symbol of restored Medici power in the 1530s,<sup>29</sup> and Machiavelli's ambivalent attitude towards fortifications as key themes.<sup>30</sup> In 1977 Hale had published *Florence and the Medici*, apparently intended by Thames and Hudson to be a cultural blockbuster comparable to Nancy Mitford's *The Sun King*.<sup>31</sup> But he found himself confronted by a recent secondary literature which tended to focus on the ambiguities of the social and political role of the Medici family in the fifteenth century and therefore to modify the popular conception of the 'Golden Age of the Medici'. The result was a more complete review of the historical problems involved and a much more useful book for students and scholars.

The high point in Hale's writings on war came in the 1980s with first the publication of the collection of his essays, *Renaissance War Studies* (1983) and then the two books already referred to, *Military Organisation* (1984) and *War and Society* (1985).<sup>32</sup> Of the former, William Maltby wrote in the *American Historical Review* in 1985 that it was: 'Scholarship and writing of the highest order and the book abounds in valuable insights on all sorts of subjects, Venetian as well as military . . . above all the book provides a truly superior analysis of the military and political

<sup>29</sup> J. R. Hale, 'The end of Florentine Liberty: the Fortezza da Basso', in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (1968), pp. 501–32.

<sup>30</sup> J. R. Hale, 'To Fortify or not to Fortify? Machiavelli's Contribution to the Renaissance Debate', in *Essays in Honour of John Humphreys Whitfield*, ed. H. C. Davis, J. M. Hatwell, D. G. Rees, and G. W. Slowey (1975), pp. 99–119.

<sup>31</sup> J. R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: the Pattern of Control* (London, 1977), to be reissued shortly by Orion Publishing Group, London.

<sup>32</sup> *Renaissance War Studies* (1983), for the other titles, see above nn. 13 and 27.

problems of the age.<sup>33</sup> The breadth described here was even more apparent in *War and Society* which set out to discuss the impact of war across Europe on all levels of society. These books, together with *Civilization*, gave John Hale a very special place in the ranks of Renaissance historians.

One of the most illuminating comments made by Sir Michael Levey in his recollections of John Hale, to which I have already referred, was that he had never known anyone who could so effectively combine business with pleasure over a good lunch. That ability to mix business with pleasure, whether it was the business of scholarship or the business of cultural management; whether the pleasure was that of being with family, friends or students, or of being in stimulating and exciting surroundings, or just of enjoying good food and wine, that ability was uniquely developed in John Hale. He was an extraordinarily stimulating person because of the range of his interests and expertise, his delight in the company of friends, his willingness to share his ideas and hear those of others, and above all his warm and attractive personality. It was his essential humanity as much as his scholarship that will be remembered.

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*Note.* A collection of John Hale's papers has been deposited in the manuscript section of the University College London Library where it is currently being catalogued, and was therefore not available to be used in the preparation of this Memoir. A bibliography of his published writings is available in the volume of essays presented to him on his seventieth birthday at pages 13–23 (see n. 17 above). His life touched so many people that it has been possible to call on only a few to help me with their recollections and impressions. I am particularly indebted to Sheila Hale for her advice and guidance at every stage, and to Nicolai and Ruth Rubinstein for their comments on the draft manuscript. Others who have made notable contributions to the preparation of the Memoir, either directly or indirectly, are Sophie Hale, Pauline Playford, Rosalind Dale-Harris, Richard Lyne, Sir Michael Levey, Christopher Brown, Anthony Besch, John Walsh of Jesus College, David Chambers, George Holmes, Lauro and Julia Martines, Patricia Mallett, Robin Clifton, and Robin Okey, colleagues of both John and me at Warwick, Laura Lepschy, Ann Chisholm, Robin Harrison, secretary of the Old Eastbournian Association, Brigid Allen, archivist at Jesus College, and Bamber Gascoigne, whose moving address at the funeral service in Twickenham sparked off many memories. I am finally grateful to Sarah Quill for allowing the reproduction of her splendid portrait photograph of John.

<sup>33</sup> *American Historical Review*, XC (1985), pp. 451–2.

