BRUCE WERNHAM *Sam E. P. Jerrett*

Richard Bruce Wernham
1906–1999

BRUCE WERNHAM was born on 11 October 1906 at Ashmansworth, near Newbury, Berkshire, the son of a tenant farmer. As a child he did jobs on his father's farm, and during the General Strike in 1926 he would display the skill of rolling milk churns on the platforms of Paddington Station. His grandfather's tales of village life in the 1840s and 1850s—of a time when corn was cut by hand with a scythe, and quite a lot of ploughing was done by oxen (indeed Wernham remembered the team of oxen in the farm next to his father's)—first stirred his interest in the past. At the age of eight Wernham read Anson's *Voyage Round the World*, 'a wonderful book'. He attended St Bartholomew's Grammar School, which he remembered with affection all his life, serving as Governor from 1944. In 1925 he went on to Exeter College, Oxford, and took a first in Modern History in 1928. He returned to study towards a D.Phil. There were no lectures or classes for graduate students in such matters as palaeography or diplomatic, and supervisors, Wernham later recalled, 'seldom did much to help'. His chosen theme was 'Anglo-French relations in the age of Queen Elizabeth and Henri IV', a subject that would remain at the centre of his interests for the rest of his life. After a year, he moved to London in order to work on the State Papers in the Public Record Office and the British Museum. Oxford accordingly found him a supervisor in London, Professor John Neale at University College, then preparing his classic biography of Queen Elizabeth, 'a very marked change', Wernham noted, from Oxford. Neale had recently succeeded A. F. Pollard, himself the authority on Henry VIII, who had moved on as founding director of the

Proceedings of the British Academy, **124**, 375–396.

Institute of Historical Research in the University of London. Pollard gave Wernham a part-time job at the Institute. 'I was now in the care of the two leading Tudor historians of the day', Wernham recalled. Much later Neale would thank Wernham 'whom I am proud to number among my pupils' for reading the proofs of *The Elizabethan House of Commons*; Wernham would in turn thank Neale (in what Neale described as 'your golden words'), 'the kindliest and most stimulating counsellor and friend since my earliest ventures into Tudor history' to whom he owed 'my deepest obligation'.

Wernham's first acquaintance with the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane came early in October 1929. He found it 'pretty terrifying'. No one had ever told him anything about sixteenth-century handwriting, and even a volume of State Papers, France, presented 'terrible problems': 'I could hardly read a word'. A kind presiding officer in the Round Room found time to help him, by showing him the basics of secretary hand and some French hands. By the end of his first day Wernham had managed to read a page or two. And evidently he quickly acquired a mastery of the records.

Such was Wernham's promise that in 1930 he was appointed to a newly created post at the Public Record Office. A. E. Stamp, Deputy Keeper of Public Records, had become concerned that the number of editors working on Record Office publications was dwindling: the output of calendars and historical publications had halved since the First World War. Stamp successfully cajoled the Treasury 'to try the experiment of offering temporary employment to a small number of young scholars, anxious to equip themselves to follow an academic career as teachers of history by acquiring through the medium of editorial work a knowledge of archives and original sources'. It was hoped that anyone appointed would, at the end of two years, be 'no mere palaeographer or laborious expert of a single class, but stand possessed of an adequate general knowledge of the various and often intricate strands from which sound history may alone be written'.[1] Wernham was the first such appointment, for two years, at a salary of £200—the basic salary laid down for successful entrants into the home civil service—which he thought by no means unreasonable at a time when 1*s*. 9*d*. (9p) could buy 'a quite palatable' three-course meal at Slater's in Holborn.

Wernham was mentored by S. C. Ratcliffe, who had an 'encyclopedic knowledge'; and two newly appointed Assistant Keepers, Charles Drew

[1] *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 8 (1930), 90.

and Leonard Hector, and Bernard Wardle, appointed the year before, became lifelong friends, as later did two already established Keepers, J. R. Crompton and Harold Johnson. The 'new boys' lunched together in various hostelries on Chancery Lane. They went to Henry Wood Promenade Concerts in the old Queen's Hall and on several walking holidays, doing 20–25 miles a day at some 5 miles per hour (as Wernham calculated by surreptitiously timing them between milestones). His first year was spent in what he recalled as 'a most instructive sampling' of the main classes and sub-divisions of the PRO's records from Domesday Book onwards: Chancery, Exchequer, King's Bench, Common Pleas, Wardrobe, Requests, Star Chamber, Augmentations, Wards, even Papal Bulls. 'It was', Wernham recalled, 'an experience that any young historian might have envied'. Wernham felt no regret that he had abandoned his thesis: 'one of the wisest decisions I ever made': 'what would I have got comparable out of another year working for a D.Phil.?' But Wernham had already struck gold: his discovery that William Davison, though sent to the Tower as the scapegoat of Mary Queen of Scots' execution in 1587, continued for three years to share the profits of the Signet Office, led in 1931 to his first appearance in the *English Historical Review*. A year later he was invited—a remarkable recognition for a young scholar—to read a paper to the Royal Historical Society (duly published in the *Transactions* for 1932) on 'Queen Elizabeth and the siege of Rouen, 1591'. In many ways that paper set out the agenda that he was to pursue for the rest of his life: many completed theses have accomplished less.

Then Wernham gradually began to earn his keep in the PRO by calendaring Elizabethan Patent Rolls (those for 1563, eventually printed in 1960) and Wards' Feodaries surveys, doing his stint of weekly floor inspections (including checking the strong rooms to see that they were free of rats and mice), and 'writ picking' up in the Tower ('a filthier job than any I had done on my father's farm', involving trying to save what he could from sacks of rotten, powdered bundles of writs). One afternoon, Wernham recalled, he had stood in for a presiding officer in one of the search rooms: 'happily no one had any awkward questions'. From October 1931 he began to spend more and more of his time editing for the Elizabethan *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign*, so returning to the subject of his abandoned thesis. At this point the editor of the Foreign Calendars had had 'a bit of a tiff' with Neale and felt that the PRO did not support him properly: so he resigned. And then when Wernham's two-year temporary assistantship ended on 30 September 1932, at the age of twenty-six, he was appointed editor of the Foreign

Calendars, and spent the next year working in Chancery Lane wholly on the Calendars.

In the same year appeared *England under Elizabeth (1558–1603): illustrated from contemporary sources* (1932), jointly edited by Wernham and J. C. Walker, a set of printed sources for undergraduates, with a lengthy bibliography, but without any introductions to the documents. That Wernham should have compiled such a work suggests that he had university teaching in mind, even though the affectionate tones with which he recalled his full-time years in the Public Record Office and the lasting friendships that he made there suggest that he would happily have made his career there. In October 1933 Wernham was appointed to a lecturership at University College London, where Neale was professor. And soon afterwards, in April 1934, Wernham was elected a Lecturer and then a Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford. The PRO appointed him an external editor—paid at an hourly rate—of their Foreign Calendars. And from the start Trinity formally allowed him to spend a day a week in term time in the Public Record Office. So every Thursday, the day on which the rail company offered cheap day returns at 5*s*. (25p), he joined the little band of Oxford historians who made the journey—though the routes they took to get to Chancery Lane once in London diverged, Wernham and George Ramsay walking down to Lancaster Gate to take the Central Line, Pierre Chaplais taking the Bakerloo Line to Oxford Circus and changing there, and Harry Bell going by bus.[2] Wernham found the weekly day trips to London 'provided useful cover when I was getting acquainted with my future wife: the College must have been impressed by how late I seemed to be working at the PRO' as he habitually returned by the last train just after midnight. Isobel MacMillan, whom Wernham married two days after war broke out in 1939, was a Canadian of Scottish descent from Vancouver. Wernham's remarks in his obituary of his friend and colleague George Ramsay about how marriage rescued him from loneliness hint at how much his own marriage meant to him and what happiness it brought.

In March 1935 Wernham completed his first *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign*, volume xxii, diplomatic correspondence from the summer and autumn 1588, above all concerning the Netherlands. In it he provided full and detailed summaries of several hundred letters now in the Public Record Office. In his preface he offered a magisterial survey of Queen

[2] Pierre Chaplais did not come to Oxford until 1957: the conflation is Wernham's, see his memoir of George Ramsay, '1994 Lectures and Memoirs', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1995), 401–14.

Elizabeth's policy towards the United Provinces. The volume appeared in 1936. By September 1939, despite his Trinity commitments (he was Senior Tutor), Wernham had prepared the next volume (and made 'quite a decent start' on the one after that), summarising, indeed often offering very nearly full transcripts of, 743 documents covering the first seven months of 1589: only the introduction covering England's relations with the Netherlands and France was not yet complete. The war, however, intervened, and it would not be till 1950 that the volume was published.

Wernham volunteered for the Royal Air Force but was not deemed medically fit for active service. On 31 December 1941 he joined the Photographic Interpretation Unit at Medmenham, Buckinghamshire, where his role was to study aerial reconaissance photographs and advise Special Operations Executive about suitable landing sites for their agents. There was some leisure for reading: he listed Garrett Mattingly's *Catherine of Aragon*, C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, an edition of Margery Kempe ('a wearisome early 15-century mystic with semi-sexual visions and "dalliances" and frequent "weepings and wailing boisterously"'), Veale's *Frederick the Great* ('a typical and strongly-influenced by fascism whitewash and rather superficial and bogus psychological hype'). In October 1943 he was transferred to the Historical Branch of the Air Ministry in London and, alongside firewatching duties, was commissioned to prepare a history of Bomber Command from 1914. His reading in his spare time included Blunden's *Cricket Country*, Hardy's *Return of the Native*, Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and Clive Bell's *Civilisation* ('a cheap smart aleck sort of book'). He aimed to restrict his smoking to five cigarettes and three pipes a day. On many days there was noisy bombing. In just over a year he produced a text of some 140,000 words, 'elegantly written and impeccably scholarly' (Noble Frankland) on *The Pre-War Evolution of Bomber Command*, dealing with the period to 1938, never published but now accessible in the PRO (PRO AIR 41/39). He was then put under pressure, and again as late as February 1949, to take his account further and produce a full history of Bomber Command during the war. But Wernham was anxious to return to teaching and to the sixteenth century. He was acutely conscious 'how rusty the war years had left me on much of what I would be teaching'. Maybe he also sensed just how difficult it would be to write an official history that was both honestly critical but remained acceptable to politicians and air chiefs. But, remarkably, he was to remain involved in a different way. One of his pupils at Trinity, Noble Frankland, who returned to Oxford after having served for two years as a navigator in Bomber

Command, went on to secure a post in the Historical Branch of the Air Ministry, and from January 1949 prepared an Oxford D.Phil. under Wernham's supervision on Bomber Command in the Second World War. In 1950 Frankland was commissioned with Sir Charles Webster to prepare the official history of what was termed the Strategic Air Offensive: Wernham would review the ensuing four volumes, published in 1961, in the *Oxford Magazine*.

Wernham's influence was indirect but considerable. Frankland warmly acknowledged his debt to Wernham's teaching. Moreover Wernham's style of teaching—regular meetings, a succession of encouraging and probing questions—allowed students to feel that they had worked out their ideas for themselves without quite grasping how far their tutor had by his questions set them well on their way. In his typescript prepared by 1945 Wernham had seen how 'Bomber Command was the supreme expression, and its operations were the first test, of an official established British belief that, for an unmilitary island power closely neighboured by great continental military states, an "independent" Air Force is an essential weapon of defence', before going on to note that 'how difficult an operation effective long range bombing on the grand scale was in fact to prove, few people had yet realised'. That was in miniature the conclusion that Webster and Frankland would reach in *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939–45* (4 vols., 1961). Wernham explained in his review how the received view was that Bomber Command had been starved of money before the war and was consequently too small to achieve effective results, but that as it gradually expanded, it became more effective, sapped German strength and ultimately played a decisive part in the allied victory. Frankland and Webster showed that far from being a revolutionary innovation, air power was subject to the same general principles as those governing the conduct of armies and navies. For the most part the results of bombing were disappointing; not till the German fighter force was confronted and air superiority established did bombing make a decisive contribution. The idea that bomber aircraft might by destroying industries and communications and morale cripple hostile armies and fleets grew out of but was not really tested by the experiences of 1914–18; in 1944–45 they came close to doing just that. But earlier on the belief that 'the bomber will always get through' proved misguided: German fighters prevented daytime bombing; night-time bombing was wildly inaccurate; poor weather and industrial haze made navigation difficult. All that could be attempted was systematic obliteration of Germany's major cities, and even that proved difficult. But once Bomber

Command with the help of the Americans had established air superiority which they did in 1944, it was more successful. Yet instead of concentrating on focused attacks on oil targets, transport and communications, Bomber Command continued to see general area bombing as the most decisive action that it could take. With victory in sight, such destruction and terror 'became an embarrassment to the conscience', Wernham noted, concluding that Bomber Command 'for most of the time fought the way it did, not from choice, but because that was the only way it could fight at all when it alone could fight'.

At the end of the war, Wernham had been keen to return to teaching and to the sixteenth century, and to enjoy family life (Isobel and he had often been apart during the war; their daughter Joan was born in 1943). He evidently had thoughts of preparing a textbook on the Tudors and early Stuarts for Blackwells (entries in his diaries show him drafting in October 1944 and reaching chapter viii by 1949) and a course on Queen Elizabeth for Eyre and Spotiswoode, but these projects remained unfinished in what were busy years. In 1948 he served as an examiner in Finals. He completed the volume of the *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign* left unfinished in 1939, preparing a monograph-like introduction, and also published substantial related articles on the Portuguese expedition of 1590 in the *English Historical Review* in 1950. Then in July 1951 he was elected Professor of Modern History and moved to Worcester College. Inevitably, much gossip, not all of it flattering or true, attended such an appointment. It was said that Lewis Namier was being strongly supported, but also vehemently resisted. Alternatively it was suggested that A. J. P. Taylor, who had just published *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, and Hugh Trevor-Roper, biographer of William Laud and reporter of *The Last Days of Hitler*, were the leading contenders, but that those who supported the one absolutely refused to accept the other; then Wernham, who at that point had two *Calendars*, albeit with substantial introductions, one jointly edited collection of documents and some articles to his name emerged as a candidate who could secure a majority. Wernham held the chair for twenty-one years until his retirement in 1972.

The post, like other professorships, was in many ways an anomaly within the Oxford Modern History Faculty. Its statutory obligations were to give a limited number of lectures and classes annually, with special attention to the needs of graduate students, but the professor was not expected to take undergraduates for tutorials. At once that cut Wernham off from the daily round of college tutors and in a sense the heart of academic life in Oxford. Such a post might, however, appear to offer an

opportunity to any scholar whose ambition was to devote himself to research and writing. But, as Wernham's diaries make plain, if that was the purpose underlying the position, it was not easily realised. Conscientious, not to say perfectionist, preparation of the one or two lectures or classes that Wernham gave took up several days each week in term time. As a supervisor of graduate students he was notably generous of his time, as Tom Barnes, Professor of History at the University of California at Berkeley recalls, offering weekly supervisions in which his pupil would be subjected to seemingly casual but in fact pointed interrogation. Wernham was involved in college and faculty meetings, in organising visits by distinguished historians from abroad (Braudel was a notable catch), in examining graduate students, and assessing theses for publication in the Oxford Historical Monographs series (on each of which he might spend several days), in giving occasional papers to college history societies, in serving on committees of learned bodies (such as the Wiltshire Victoria County History), in presiding over the Oxford Historical Association. Wernham meticulously recorded the time he took on tasks such as external examining—no less than 107 hours in 1962 and an astonishing 164 hours in 1963 (not counting the time spent travelling or the examiners' meetings themselves) when external examiner at Southampton. A miscellany of such activities together took up most of term. Even his Thursday trip to the PRO was often forgone. His diaries show that it was only in seventh or eighth week, once he had delivered his final lecture, that he would return to listing the State Papers or to writing his next book. Once he had taken family holidays in the vacations, that typically left him six or seven weeks in the summer for sustained work on the papers he was editing or his book. On the former he would spend perhaps four, five or six hours a day. On the latter he would write in long hand anything from 400 to 2000 words a day, mostly at the lower end of that range; returning after he had completed one chapter to re-writing the one before. No study leave was available to him in these years. When he went as Visiting Professor to the University of South Carolina in 1958 and to the University of California, Berkeley in 1965–6, both assignments involved demanding, if stimulating, teaching.

In all these years Wernham had been continuing to work on the State Papers, Foreign. But after the war Sir Hilary Jenkinson became Deputy Keeper of the PRO, and in the words of an Assistant Keeper (as Wernham wryly recalled), 'change and D.K. in all around we see'. Jenkinson wanted to reform and to cut the costs of the Calendars. In his preface to Wernham's *Calendar* published in 1950, Jenkinson announced

the termination of the series. Progress with the *Calendar*, given the increasing quantity of papers in the 1590s, would inevitably be slow; and the 'swollen costs of printing' made some more economical method of publication 'urgently necessary'. Accordingly, a series of Descriptive Lists would be prepared, with indexes to 'the Subjects and to the names of all Persons and Places occurring in the Documents, even when these are not mentioned in the printed version'. The aim was 'to indicate in as condensed a form as possible all the information contained in each paper'. At first Jenkinson wanted to limit the description of each document to ten or twelve lines. Wernham thought that this would be 'disastrous'. The documents that he was studying dealt largely with matters of diplomacy, strategy and defence, 'where it is often of first importance to know not only what A said to B in general terms but what he said in detail, just how he said it, and just how B replied'. With the 'tacit connivance' of Howard Johnson, in charge of editors, Wernham 'began an exercise in damage limitation'. After a good deal of experimenting, Wernham invented what he rightly described as 'an almost completely new kind of publication', echoing to some extent the Dutch *Resolutien der Staten-Generaal*, intended to preserve the essentials of the old Calendars yet not too flagrantly to disregard Jenkinson's aims. By the time Wernham had completed the first volume in this way—amid other concerns—Jenkinson had retired and the new head of editing raised no objections. Wernham confessed that 'I sometimes feel twinges of regret for the old Calendar', but, he maintained, at least the *Lists and Analyses* give as much detailed information, if in a rather potted form. And the disaster of a complete abandonment of any publication had been staved off.

Wernham's method involved a tripartite structure. The *List* is just that: giving writer, recipient, date, length and folio numbers. There was an Index of persons, places and things. The crucial novelty is the *Analysis*. Its purpose, as Wernham explained, 'is to provide a consolidated summary, in a more or less narrative form, of all the information about any particular event or topic that is to be found in the S.P. Foreign as a whole'. These summaries were arranged in geographical sections, mostly by country. Savings of space were achieved by very brief summaries of documents giving the same information. In the first volume, the list runs from page 1 to page 90; the analysis from page 91 to page 454, in the sixth volume, printed in smaller type, the analysis goes from page 63 to page 291. Such substantial Analyses were clearly not what Jenkinson had had in mind: his proposed Descriptive Lists would have been far briefer. If Wernham had been unable to hold out

for the continuation of the *Calendars*, nonetheless his *Lists and Analyses* rather subverted Jenkinson's designs.

The first of the *List and Analysis* volumes appeared in 1964, the second in 1969, the third in 1980, the fourth in 1984, the fifth in 1989, the sixth in 1993, the seventh posthumously in 2000. The labour required in preparing such analyses was immense. The first volume dealt with 1,344 papers, the second with over 1,300, the fourth with 1,192, the fifth with 1,437. The documents had to be selected, read and transcribed, précised, edited, indexed, collated. In effect the analysis amounted to a monograph in its own right. Everything, including the indexes, was Wernham's own work, except for translations of documents in Spanish and Portuguese. What would now be done—if it were done at all—by a team of researchers was here done by one man amid the various duties of college tutor or professor, or the tribulations of retirement. It is a remarkable achievement. Wernham calculated that each paper would on average take well over an hour to edit. During his career at Oxford he tried to devote some 50 or 60 days a year, say 300 hours, to the task. And that meant that a volume dealing with some 1200 to 1400 papers could hardly take less than four or five years to prepare. And how long publication then took depended on the printers—Wernham lamented the 'not always happy choice' of printers and remembered a volume that demanded repeated revises of both galleys, page proofs and even final print-offs. All that, Wernham admitted, was an apologia for his slow progress. In 1993, at the age of 87, he conceded that with some 5,600 papers to go before Elizabeth's death on 25 March 1603, his 'youthful dream' of completing the calendar for the reign would have to remain a dream. 'There is a certain limited measure of satisfaction in getting so far in the past sixty years', he noted, 'but I am not quite sure that I can see myself finishing the job!'. Nonetheless he did embark on and complete a further volume that would be published after his death.

Not everyone welcomed the *List and Analyses*. Reviewing volume ii in *Archives*, 9 (1969–70), 204–5, Geoffrey Parker praised Wernham, 'in whose high critical standards and scholarship we can place absolute confidence', but answered in the negative his question 'whether a *List and Analysis* describes its chosen documents accurately enough to allow a serious student to know whether or not any one of them contains information which he will want to know in full'. Ideally, Parker urged, we should have a full calendar; failing that, just a simple listing of documents. The uneasy compromise of the *Lists and Analyses* was not worth the expense and infinite time and trouble of preparation. Wernham would have agreed that the ideal

was a full *Calendar*, but he passionately believed that the ingenious compromise that he had devised and elaborated was eminently worthwhile.

Wernham saw himself as continuing a long tradition of the editing of documents. As professor of modern history, he offered classes on what he characteristically described as Tudor handwriting (rather than palaeography) and informal lectures to new graduate students on the sources for English history, beginning with the Stuart antiquarians driven by contemporary political needs. What was crucial was the Victorian state's assumption of responsibility for publishing its records. 'The development of history as we know it would have been impossible', Wernham maintained, 'without the full and free access to records of the state'. Historical writing would have remained no more than 'a string of more or less disconnected anecdotes' all but impossible to verify. Now historians could set each document in its proper context, see it as part of an administrative process, understand why it was made; and so get a lot nearer its true meaning, to 'scientific' assessment of the evidence. 'All history is to some extent guesswork; not all evidence is recorded; but by knowing the documentary context in this way, we can reduce the proportion of guessing, we can get a higher probability.' From the late 1850s had begun what Wernham regarded as 'the great era' of official publication organised and directed by the Public Record Office. Calendars of State Papers were intended to list and to show their chief contents: some series, especially the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, became much fuller (and included material from outside the PRO). Wernham rightly saw the 'sum total output of calendars since 1856'—unmatched by any other country—as 'pretty impressive'. Wernham passionately believed that such editing remained invaluable and indispensable. Why summarise documents in a printed book? Would not a serious historian go straight to the original sources, or to photocopies, or to 'those horrid microfilms'? And had not printed calendars introduced distortions of their own by making historians think them adequate substitutes for the originals? Had not such publication put the editor between the historian and the sources, 'done him out of the sensitive intuitive understanding that can only come by, as it were, laying one hand on your heart and the other on original manuscripts?' Of course he agreed that consulting originals was essential. But he was 'nil mystic about manuscripts': it did not much help to know that Elizabeth's hand appeared on one or if the spray shaken off Drake's beard stained it. And Wernham's justification for the preparation of calendars of summaries of documents was in the first place practical. Time in the

archives was precious (Wernham perhaps recalling his more or less regular Thursday trips to Chancery Lane). And some sorts of questions, especially factual questions about names, dates and places—for example was anyone trying to buy Secretary Walsingham a suit of armour in the Netherlands in 1588?—can more speedily be answered if the sources are in print and supported by an index than by searching through hundreds of original folios. But Wernham also offered a larger argument. Historians need peripheral vision, not too narrow a gaze. They acquire this by browsing, perhaps in a not very concentrated way, through large quantities of not very directly relevant material. Very few scholars can afford to spend time in the archives on this 'half-throttle, half-aimless browsing': 'the sort of thing to do at the end of the day with feet up'. It was in any case hard to take in manuscripts by paragraphs. That moreover ruled out microfilm, useless when, as so often, the original documents themselves were faded or damaged, or even photocopies: you need print if you are to read fast and a lot.

In the 1960s Wernham voiced his concern at the drying up of the flow of printed calendars, lists and indexes which between the late 1850s and the outbreak of the Second World War had made the public records more accessible. The reason usually given was economic: the rising cost of editing and printing had made publication of calendars on the old scale, indeed any scale, almost impossibly costly. He had accepted that explanation and had resigned himself to hoping at best for 'just an occasional dribble of bare duplicated typescript lists'. Making a virtue of necessity, he had tried to convince himself that his predecessors had too often been corrupted by the riches of the printed resources. But detailed analysis of rates of publication suggested a rather different explanation to him. He tabulated the output of medieval calendars, modern calendars and lists and indexes, showing that in the years 1900–14 91 medieval calendars, 75 modern calendars and 34 lists and indexes were published; between 1946 and 61 the comparable figures were 19 medieval calendars, 39 modern calendars and no lists and indexes, and (as he pointed out) the comparison was misleading because many had been prepared before the war. Wernham noted that in the years 1900–9 J. L. Gairdner and R. L. Brodie published eight volumes of the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*; W. A. Shaw eight volumes of *Treasury Books*; Mahaffy seven of the *Irish State Papers*; J. Daniell five of the *Domestic State Papers*; A. B. Butler five of the *Foreign State Papers*; Atkinson three of the *Domestic State Papers* between 1900 and 1905; H. F. Brown three of the *Venetian Calendar*s to 1905. At least as many editors must have been employed to produce the sixty-one medieval

calendars. And that comparison led Wernham to conclude that the real reason for the dearth in record publications was that 'governments are not now giving the PRO the money to recruit the staff or the full-time editors to keep up an output such as the 19th century was able to afford'. (In 1968 Wernham absolved the PRO itself from blame: the PRO had to cut its coat according to the cloth 'and one suspects often the cloth will hardly turn into a mini-skirt'). And, devastatingly, Wernham went on to point out that far from being 'a simple case of government economy in hard times', the scale of publication of official histories of the First and Second World Wars and Foreign Office Documents suggested strongly that government money had been transferred to a different historical field. It was understandable: 'there was much to be said for getting our word in first'. But the time had come to 'remember that Britain's history began before 1914'.

But if Wernham was a great and ultimately prolific editor, was he, in the words of Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'an archivist not an historian'?[3] Certainly Wernham was deeply committed to the archives. And there was indeed an antiquarian streak about his interests, not least his acute sense of place, and his concern to know the local histories of places. His surviving diaries (more or less complete from the early 1930s), not reflective diaries, but much more than appointment diaries, recording as they do each day the number of tutorials he had taken, the number of lectures given, committee meetings attended, the number of essays he had marked, the number of letters that he had written, what he had read, the number of hours he had worked on the *Lists and Analyses*, the number of words of his next book that he had written—together with the maximum and minimum temperature and a brief characterisation of the weather ('cleared snow from garage but could not get car out for snow'; 'almost as bitter a day as I can remember'; 'very heavy rain and tornado near Leighton Buzzard'), as well as matters small ('stray cat had two kittens in middle of lawn') and large ('serious trouble in Korea') reveal an orderly and classifying mind. And as he himself was to observe, 'I have been a late developer as proper books go'. Was this inappropriate for an Oxford professor of history? Should he have left the task of editing and listing to junior scholars and to full-time archivists and devoted himself instead to writing? University historians living under the shadow of Research Assessment Exercises (which Wernham deplored as inimical to scholarship) are struck by how unnecessary publication was evidently felt to be in the Oxford of the 1950s and 1960s. Of course, Wernham had lost

[3] Hugh Trevor-Roper, personal communication to author, Feb. 2002.

vital years to the war—he was 33 when it began, and 39 when he returned to Trinity. In the early 1950s he wrote a good many entries for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. There were several scholarly articles (significantly stimulated by invitations for special occasions, notably an essay on Thomas Wilkes's mission to the United Provinces in 1590 in the Festschrift for Hilary Jenkinson, Wernham's bête noire, a paper on Elizabethan war aims and strategy for Neale's Festschift). A great deal of Wernham's energies went into preparing lectures that were never published. A set on 'The Netherlands 1559–1715', entirely rewritten a year or two later, reveals a remarkably detailed command of Dutch history, with shrewd analysis of the disparate nature of the different provinces, of the emergence of some sense of Netherlandish community, of the international dimensions, of the internal social relationships. In retirement in 1979 at a summer school in the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, he gave a set of lectures on England under the Tudors and Stuarts 1485–1688 that reveal a talent for synthesis and clear exposition, including lectures on 'The Reformation under Henry VIII: why so little effective opposition?', 'Criticism and opposition 1585–1618', 'Charles I's "Personal Government" 1629–40'. Others have hurried into print on much less. Throughout the 1960s much labour also went into the thankless task of editing volume III covering 1559–1610 of the *New Cambridge Modern History* which eventually appeared in 1969 (a disappointingly uneven collection, but probably an impossible assignment to pull off).

A famous review that Wernham wrote in these years reveals a razor-sharp mind. He had examined Geoffrey Elton's London Ph.D. thesis in December 1948. In 1956 he wrote a devastating critique of the book into which it had been turned, *The Tudor Revolution in Government*.[4] Elton's claim seemed to Wernham 'to rest upon a rather debatable interpretation of the relationship between Cromwell's work and the developments which went before and came after him'. Elton failed 'to distinguish adequately between government and administration': the break with Rome and the dissolution of the monasteries necessarily led to an increase in bureaucratic activity. But that, Wernham insisted, 'was administration not government'. What mattered was how the state's expenditure was monitored: and here the very close involvement of Cromwell was more a matter of 'personal' than of 'bureaucratic' government. Elton had not shown that there was any fundamental change in the way the king's council operated. Many of the administrative developments after Cromwell's fall reversed

[4] *English Historical Review*, 71 (1956), 92–5.

rather than extended them: 'Cromwell was rather the last exponent of Henry VII's methods than the father of the Elizabethan exchequer'. And, most perceptively of all, Wernham questioned Elton's view of the relationship between Henry VIII and Cromwell. 'Because the king was not much addicted to writing—and after all, why keep a secretary and write letters yourself?—it is much too easily assumed that he was, if not a mere cipher, at least in only remote control': Wernham pointed out that Elton cited Cromwell submitting to the king 'a whole string of quite minor details' and concluded that these suggested 'that it was the minister and not the king who did as he was told'. Wernham's concluding remarks deftly but courteously summed up his scepticism. 'It is thus difficult not to feel that this book may have exaggerated the supremacy and extent of Cromwell's influence no less than the novelty and revolutionary character of the administrative changes of the time. And this, unfortunately, must leave us still in doubt as to the true significance of the developments to whose unravelling Dr Elton has devoted so much painstaking and ingenious research in so wide a range of often difficult and specialised sources.'

But Wernham disliked academic polemic. He thought the heated controversy—'the stupid family feud' between Oxford historians—over the gentry a distraction ('where have all the gentry gone?', he asked after the hue and cry had subsided). In an appreciation of Elton written when he was ninety, Wernham generously supposed that the young Elton's ambition, stimulated by Sir John Neale, had led him to exaggerate the significance of the interesting information that he had presented in his thesis—in which there is no mention of any revolution. 'Through force of circumstance his apprenticeship in Tudor history had been brief and distracted', Wernham noted: 'it is hardly surprising if in an over-eagerness to make his mark he allowed the depth and excellence of his research to tempt him a bridge too far in the conclusions he drew from it.' Where K. B. McFarlane, with whom Wernham had discussed the book, saw it as all but pernicious, Wernham thought the debates that Elton provoked his greatest contribution, given that they broadened and deepened understanding of early Tudor administration and compelled historians to look at late medieval and early modern English history as a whole. Significantly Wernham thought Elton's not being a native born Englishman, not having family roots in England partly explained his lack of interest in foreign policy or matters of national defence. Striking and characteristic here is Wernham's generosity in seeing the best in Elton's work and excusing its limitations: yet in his review he had cut right to the heart of the failings of Elton's book. Having made his point, Wernham had moved on,

rather than writing his own book on the subject. Elton kept on shouting, and the *Tudor Revolution in Government* dominated the field. When Penry Williams critically reviewed Elton's Ford Lectures, *Policy and Police* (1972) in the *English Historical Review*, Elton responded, somewhat pained, that he never had much luck with the *EHR*, but at least, he assured Penry Williams, 'you are a specialist, unlike Wernham who reviewed me twenty years ago', a remark Wernham would never have made about anyone who adversely reviewed a work of his.

The best justification of Wernham's approach is that all his calendaring proved to be the groundwork for his eventual books. The first, published when he was sixty, *Before the Armada: the growth of Tudor Foreign Policy 1485–1588* (1966), did not quite clinch the point. It was a very decent superior textbook, well-written, clearly organised (it has the flavour of those older schoolbooks that had summaries in bold type indented in the text), but measured against the highest expectations, something of a disappointment—until it is re-read in the light of his subsequent books, when it appears as a necessary contextualisation of his core interest, England's relations with Spain, France and the Netherlands from the late 1580s to the late 1590s. To make sense of what was happening then, especially what was new, Wernham felt he had to begin earlier. But he did not have space to develop arguments or to offer detailed reasoning when he disagreed with other scholars, and some of his claims, especially in the first part of his period, are questionable (for example his emphasis on Henry VIII's plans for the marriage of his daughter Mary). But there was much of value, for example his development of his earlier insights 'into the effect of prevailing west winds on naval strategy: the advantages enjoyed by any invader from the south-west, and the difficulty of supplying English fleets on duty in the channel'. 'An understanding of seamanship is as desirable an attribute in diplomatic historians', C. S. L. Davies remarked, 'as the use of boots by economic ones.'

Those who did not know Wernham well might have supposed that *Before the Armada* was his swan-song, and a touch muted at that: sound and sensible, but not always exciting. In 1966, a few years before his retirement, he had bought a house in Hill Head, on the coast between Southampton and Portsmouth, (where Isobel and he had begun going for weekends from the early 1950s) with magnificent views over the Solent to the Isle of Wight (and indeed in his final year at Oxford, he lived the life of a commuter). Like many academics giving up their college rooms, he needed to get rid of books for which he would not have space at home; for some, the news that he was selling his books symbolised a wider with-

drawal from scholarship. Such gossip could not have been more wrong. For on 15 July 1967, a year after the publication of *Before the Armada*, he began planning his next book, *After the Armada*, and in January 1968 he began writing: by August he had written 7312 words. In March 1969 he returned to chapter 2 and wrote 8620 words by 16 April. By September 1969 he had finished chapters 3 and 4. A year's illness halted progress until January 1971, when he was able, for once, to write during term. Nine chapters had been written by the time he retired in 1972. And once in Hill Head, he settled into a remarkable routine of active scholarship, carefully making a room on the landward side his study so that he should not be distracted from his work by the stunning views. He divided his time between work on the *Lists and Analyses* and on *After the Armada*. From 1974 he taught on a summer school in the University of British Columbia, his wife's home city. Then in 1975, Thomas Barnes, whose Oxford D.Phil. on Somerset in the 1630s he had supervised in the 1950s, invited him to give Una's Lectures in the University of Berkeley, California, published in 1980 as *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy 1558–1603*. In effect these were the Ford Lectures that Wernham was (presumably) never invited to give in Oxford. Here he demonstrated his command over the sources, together with a subtle understanding of their strengths and weaknesses: 'how the abundance of incoming letters to the government, compared with the relative scarcity of outgoing, can distort our picture of the making of decisions'. Wernham also confirmed his talent as a polemicist, taking issue with Charles Wilson's Ford Lectures delivered in 1969 arguing that Queen Elizabeth's failure to intervene in the Netherlands in the late 1570s was dangerously mistaken. Elizabeth had a policy, more hers than anyone else's, even if shaped by circumstances, Wernham maintained. He believed that Wilson underestimated very seriously 'the depth of the divisions, religious, social and political, within the United Netherlands and the strength of the particularist motivation of the movement', while he overestimated William of Orange's control over the radical Calvinists in Flanders. Intervention in 1577–8 would have provoked Philip into a trade embargo at least, war at worst. Elizabeth's interventions from 1585 were, for Wernham, far more defensible: quite unexpectedly the French monarchy was close to collapse and France in danger of falling under Spanish control, with incalculable risks for England.

Lectures delivered and written up, Wernham returned to his labours on the *Lists and Analyses* and on his next book. By 1981 *After the Armada* was complete. Cape, who had published the twice-reprinted *Before the Armada*,

now turned down the sequel. Fortunately Oxford University Press stepped in: they would take it if Wernham took no royalties, and cut his text by 20 per cent, which he duly and quickly did. *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe 1588–1595*, published in 1984 when Wernham was 78, is by any standards a masterly book. It offers a detailed narrative, on a grand scale, of the evolution of foreign policy and of the military and naval campaigns of those years, weaving what Geoffrey Parker rightly describes as 'a single great tapestry'. The events covered were complex and various, denying their historian a simple integrative theme. Wernham's handling of such intricate and complex material is a model, compellingly readable, constantly but effortlessly relating details to larger issues. His central aim was to show the importance of the continental and military side of the war against Spain as against the more fashionable emphasis on its naval and oceanic aspects: the soldiers who served in Normandy, the Netherlands and Britanny achieved more—and cost more—than did the exploits of Hawkins and Drake. Wernham's narrative forcefully brings home the multiplicity of concerns of Elizabeth and her advisers; the hectic press of events; the limitations on her freedom of action ('the trouble in the sea war was that a sixteenth-century government lacked the power to harness this private enterprise, operating primarily for profit, to a national strategic purpose'); the difficulties of obtaining reliable information, not least on the intentions of allies, as well as those of enemies ('one of the greatest difficulties that faced all sixteenth-century governments was the difficulty of assessing accurately their intelligences about their neighbours and enemies'); the war-weariness, induced by years of heavy financial demands and impressment of men for no immediately obvious victories, seen in parliamentary reluctance to grant taxation in 1593. Queen Elizabeth emerges as the dominant force in these years, willing to embark on aggressive actions, notably the ill-fated attempt on Portugal in 1589, Willoughby's expedition in support of Henry IV later that year (which 'did more than a little to make possible Henry IV's famous victory at Ivry in March 1590'), and the despatch of the earl of Essex in support of Henry IV's siege of Rouen in 1591, until from late 1591 Elizabeth returned to a more defensive policy, in particular to prevent Spanish dominance of Brittany. 'Although her more ambitious offensive plans and enterprises came to nothing, she and her Dutch and French allies did prevent Spain from establishing its control over the whole of western Europe, from acquiring the crown of France and destroying the Dutch republic. In this defensive achievement Elizabethan England had played a very considerable part.'

Geoffrey Parker criticised Wernham's dependence on a single source: the records of Elizabeth's government, and especially its diplomatic correspondence. Wernham's account of military events would, he urged, have benefited from use of the archives of Brussels and Simancas. A question mark in Wernham's copy of Parker's review against the point that 'Parma's numerous unintercepted letters on the subject [of the raising of the siege of Rouen in April 1592] to Philip II are overlooked' suggests that Wernham was not altogether convinced. Wernham did supplement English sources by reference to some transcripts from foreign archives and some printed Spanish and Dutch sources. And such criticism prompts an obvious response—how much it is reasonable to expect any historian to cover? Wernham insisted throughout that he was not writing the history of international relations in Europe as a whole but rather giving an account of how things appeared to Elizabeth and her advisers, and for that the sources in which he had immersed himself were more than sufficient. Penry Williams's verdict was heart-felt: 'to comprehend fully the achievement of Mr Wernham in the research and writing that went to produce this splendid book, one must work . . . on the period after 1596, when we no longer have his guidance. To do that is like walking in hill country where no ordnance survey maps are available. The sense of deprivation is severe, even alarming. one can only ask, selfishly, for more.'

And that is what Wernham gave, undaunted by the death of his wife Isobel in 1986—his diaries record his daily visits to see her mostly asleep in hospital in the last year of her life after an incapacitating stroke. He was involved in the Hill Head and Stubbington Local History Society intended 'to promote interest and enjoyment of history and instigate research into local history and encourage social intercourse between persons interested in such matters', serving as its President from its inception in 1987, and supporting it financially: historians whom he invited to give lectures were astonished to find audiences of sixty or seventy. He continued to work on the *Lists and Analyses*. But his main labours were devoted to *The Return of the Armadas*, which he began on 28 October 1985 when he was 79 and completed on 25 June 1992 at the age of 86: it appeared in 1994 when he was 88.

The Return of the Armadas: The Last Years of the Elizabethan War against Spain 1595–1603 dealt with the renewed naval wars between England and Spain and with the rebellion in Ireland that threatened to give the Spanish a golden opportunity. Once more Wernham offered (in Simon Adams's words) 'a lucidly, even effortlessly, written account of

military operations and diplomacy';[5] 'a carefully crafted and superbly integrated narrative which illuminated the relationship between strategic debate, diplomacy and military and naval operations' (Cliff Davies). Moreover Wernham gave special attention to the role of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, both in naval campaigns, especially against Cadiz in 1596 and the abortive 'armadas' of 1596 and 1597, and in a rather different role against the Irish rebels, showing the interconnectedness of foreign policy and domestic politics. His portrayal of Essex and Elizabeth is a substantial political study in its own right.

After the Armada and *The Return of the Armadas* are two monographs that would be impressive at any age: they are a remarkable achievement for an historian long in retirement. The verve and freshness of the writing vividly convey Wernham's own continuing intellectual excitement. It was not surprising that these books led to his election as a Senior Fellow of the British Academy in 1995 at the age of 88. They amount to an ample vindication of his life's commitment to his chosen field, and of the judgements of those who had long before elected him to his lectureship, fellowship and chair. If he had not been a prolific publisher while in post, in that he was typical of his time. But what was remarkable and unusual about him was the depth and sustained focus of his commitment to scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s: patient, painstaking, cumulative, and now, in long years of retirement, distilled into two volumes of grand narrative of lasting value. Nor was that all: he continued preparing a further volume of the *Lists and Analyses* and at the age of 91, a few months before his death on 17 April 1999, he wrote an essay on 'English Combined Operations during the Elizabethan War against Spain 1585–1603' for a collection edited by David Trim and Mark Fissel.

Since 1964 Wernham had regularly attended the Senior Historians Conferences at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park. In 1995 he was asked to give a short talk on 'how and why we study history'. His reflections show how his writings were the product of a larger engagement with his subject. He remembered young men going off to fight in the First World War and returning to the village injured. He came of age 'in the comparatively warm glow of the middle 1920s' and experienced 'the devastating disillusionment of the 1930s and early 1940s'. 'I have lived through all but a few years of what must be one of the bloodiest centuries in human history.' So he had not studied history 'out of any high-falutin' notion that I should thereby make the world a vastly better place': the

[5] *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), 421–3.

historian was much more likely to ask 'when will they ever learn?'. Nor had he been unduly motivated by 'positions of not inconsiderable emolument'. He denied that he had a method of working and writing that could be called a method. He worked carefully through as many of the main sources of whatever he was going to write about as he could cope with, taking very full notes of all that seemed relevant and then going over and over them to piece the story together till he began to get some idea of it in its wholeness. He swelled that out with as much rather casual 'reading round' which he did with the sort of half-sleepy attention one gives to television, jotting down a note now and again of anything that particularly caught his attention. Wernham feared 'all that is very old-fashioned and ordinary, but I am no philosopher'. When he had been invited to give the talk, his first reaction had been 'what the hell can I say about that'. But his credo bears quotation:

> What has always fascinated me has been the enormous complexity and multiplicity of the subject, what Thomas Hardy rather lugubriously called 'the mournful manysidedness of things'—the way in which over a particular period of time and a particular area (in my case it has been predominantly the sixteenth century and Western Europe), how in that period, that region, a multitude of influences criss-cross, interweave, interact, clash and conflict to produce a movement of change, to produce tensions that eventually burst out, often as the result of some comparatively trivial accident—that Henry III of France had a wrist that was just not strong enough to deflect the assassin's dagger . . . Some comparatively small accident that makes an eruption possible and causes the whole process to lurch off on a somewhat different course. The attraction and the challenge of history to me is to try to see all that as a whole, and to see also not only what people of the time saw in the main area of their vision but also what they saw out of the tail of their eye, in their peripheral vision—to see all that in its wholeness, 'to grasp the scheme of things entire'—that is for me the appeal and challenge of history.

That explained why almost all Wernham wrote was in narrative form: 'that I find so far—maybe some day I'll discover a better way—is the best, indeed I might say the only way of trying to convey this sense of wholeness, of simultaneous multiplicity producing movement and change. Even by narrative you can of course never really convey that wholeness fully—you still have to take things one at a time—but it is enormous fun trying to do it and you can in the narrative way convey a real idea of movement and some idea of wholeness.'

Wernham's experience of writing a narrative of Bomber Command had strengthened such sentiments. In some ways that and his historical interests interacted more broadly. In an unpublished talk on 'Elizabethan Sea Power and 20th century Air Power', Wernham reflected on the

similarities in the ways that men thought about them. The rulers of the realm faced similar revolutions in matters of national defence, showed similar foresight in planning novel ways of dealing with them, but also similar lack of foresight in applying novel methods and in realistically assessing their likely effectiveness.

On Bomber Command, on Elton's Tudor Revolution, on the merits of Elizabeth's foreign policy, Wernham was bold and incisive in his interpretations. But without hiding his views or pulling his punches in his books and reviews, he nonetheless managed to avoid the rancorous exchanges that so characterised so many early modern historians. Indeed in conversation he was remarkably generous about other scholars' work and never spoke ill of other historians, above all never questioning their motives. He unhesitatingly offered both Geoffrey Elton and Charles Wilson hospitality when they gave the Ford Lectures in Oxford. Michael Maclagan, the medievalist at Trinity, remembered him as 'the most kindly and agreeable friend and colleague for whom a man could wish'. Wernham appreciated his good fortune. If he had been called up at once when he volunteered for service in 1941—his commission was delayed on medical grounds—he would have been on a ship that reached Singapore just in time to be captured by the Japanese and spent the war in a prison camp. If he had stayed just a few minutes later when visiting his wife in Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading a few days after his daughter Joan had been born in 1943, he would have fallen victim to German bombs when walking through the town centre. He was grateful for the opportunities that he had been given—the post in the PRO, the fellowship at Trinity, the professorship of Modern History—and never envious of the successes and honours of others. Throughout his long life he took an intense and simple pleasure in his learning, teaching and writing. And he was delighted when at the age of 88 he was elected to the Academy in 1995.

G. W. BERNARD
University of Southampton

Note: I should wish especially to thank Bruce Wernham's daughter and son-in-law, Joan and Sam Jerrett, for allowing me access to unpublished papers, notes and diaries, from which quotations and information in the text above have been taken, and for their generous hospitality. I should also wish to thank those who have shared their impressions of Bruce Wernham with me, including James Campbell, the late Michael Maclagan, Noble Frankland, John Fraser, Thomas Barnes, David Trim, Cliff Davies, Penry Williams, Kevin Sharpe, the late Hugh Trevor-Roper and Geoffrey Parker.