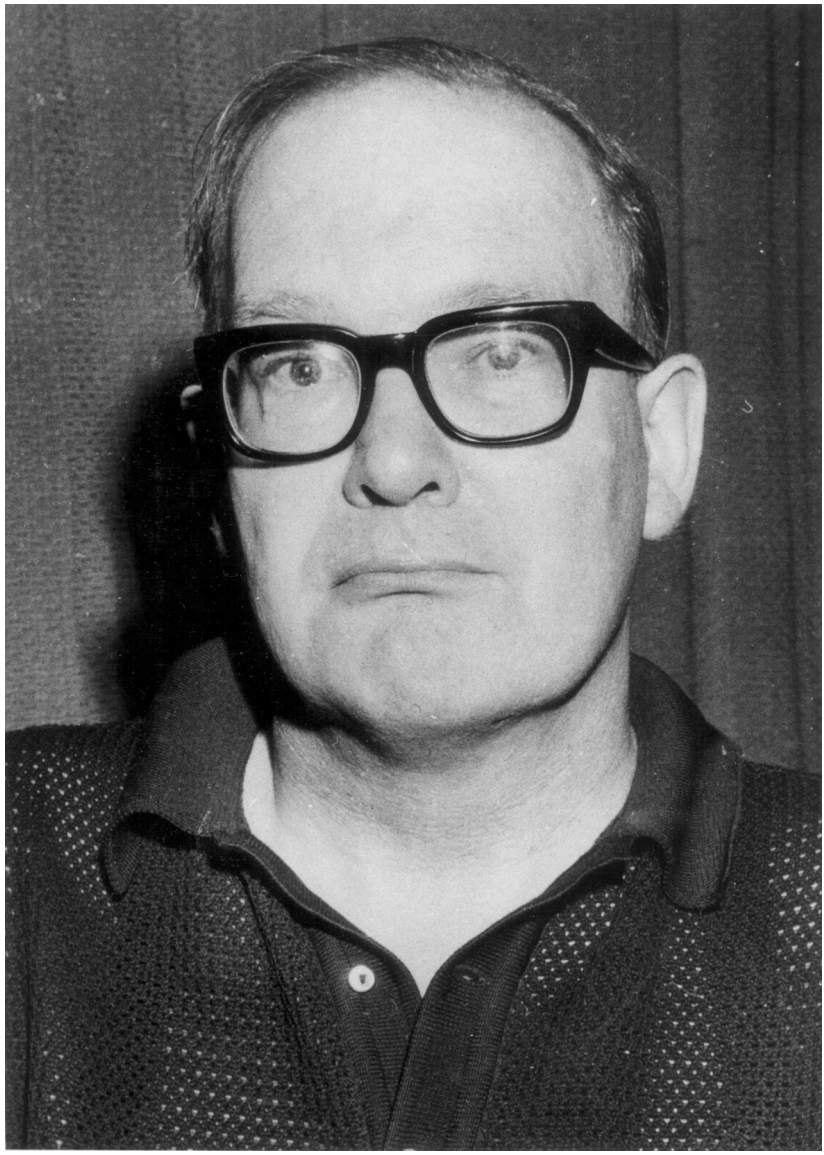

JACK GALLAGHER

John Andrew Gallagher
1919–1980

JOHN ANDREW GALLAGHER, ALWAYS KNOWN AS 'JACK', was born on 1 April (a date to which he liked to draw attention) in 1919. He was the only child of Joseph and Mary Adeline Gallagher. Jack was born in Birkenhead, a fact not irrelevant to his later career as an historian of empire. Birkenhead lay across the Mersey from Liverpool, a short ferry or train ride away. It was a boom town of the nineteenth century, flourishing with the growth of Merseyside as the gateway to Britain's main industrial districts in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands. Its waterfront was dominated by the great shipbuilding firm of Cammell Laird, and seamed with the railway lines serving its industrial plants and processing industries. It was the largest slaughtering and meat-distributing centre in Britain and the greatest milling centre in Europe.[1] Much of its population, like that of Liverpool, was of Irish origin. At the time of Jack's birth, its most famous son was Frederick Smith, Lord Birkenhead, Lord Chancellor in Lloyd George's coalition government, and before 1914, a vociferous champion of Ulster's struggle against Home Rule. For most of Jack's early life Birkenhead's economy was in steep decline, hard-hit by the slump in shipbuilding and the contraction of overseas trade. But there were, perhaps, few better places to stimulate the imagination on the causes of Britain's rise to world power in the nineteenth century and its subsequent fall.

[1] For Birkenhead's development and industrial history, S. Marriner, *The Economic and Social Development of Merseyside* (London, 1982), pp. 9, 34, 77, 132–3; P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: a Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868–1939* (Liverpool, 1981); W. Hewitt, *The Wirral Peninsula* (1922).

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Jack's origins were modest. His father Joseph had migrated to Canada before the the First World War, but returned to fight in the First Canadian Contingent. At the time of Jack's entry into secondary school in 1929, his occupation was listed as 'railway checker', counting the 'foreign' rolling stock for whose use of the line a charge would be levied. But it would be a mistake to assume that Jack was brought up in poverty in a back-to-back tenement. The family address in 1929 was 35 Dingle Road, a small semi-detached house (assuming no change in the street number since then) not a terraced house. As a small boy he attended Woodchurch Road Elementary School. Then in 1929 he entered Birkenhead Institute on a free scholarship at a time when only 11 per cent of Birkenhead children proceeded to a secondary school.[2]

An agreeable myth, retailed in Richard Cobb's evocative memoir[3] and deriving, no doubt, from Jack's own mischievous imagination, portrays Jack's schooling as a Dickensian travail, with touches of Hollywood. Jack was educated by 'rough Irish fathers' denouncing the atheism of 'Jean Jakes Rewso', to prepare for his vocation as a Catholic priest—his mother's wish. In fact, Birkenhead Institute was not a Catholic school at all. It was a grammar school founded in 1889 by a group of Birkenhead businessmen with the support of two leading Liverpool figures, Henry Tate (of the sugar firm) and Philip Holt, the ship-owner. The school was to be non-denominational. It served a growing middle-class population who could not afford the fees of Birkenhead School. The parents listed in the school records included 'window-cleaner' and 'locomotive fitter' as well as those of more solidly middle-class occupations.[4] At the time of Jack's arrival, its most famous 'old boy' was the poet Wilfred Owen, killed in the First World War. Like many grammar schools it deferred to the public school model, using a 'house' system, and replacing plebeian football with middle-class rugby in 1934. Jack throve in the school, winning scholarships and prizes. He was secretary of the Sixth Form Literary and Debating Society ('the artful appeals to imperialist and anti-fascist sentiment made by Williams and Gallagher won an overwhelming victory' its minutes recorded in 1936); editor of the school magazine, the *Visor* ('articles dealing with original topics will be scrutinised with uncommon tenderness' declared an editorial); and 'headmaster's prefect'. In 1936, no doubt with the encouragement of the headmaster, a Cambridge graduate,

[2] Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p. 298.

[3] R. Cobb, 'Jack Gallagher in Oxford', *Cambridge Review*, 7 Nov. 1980.

[4] Birkenhead Institute Records, held at Birkenhead Reference Library. I am grateful to Mrs Pauline Black for help with these.

he applied to Trinity College, Cambridge. At the age of seventeen, he won a major scholarship to the College (the only history student in that year to do so),[5] as well one of the two hundred 'state studentships' awarded in England and Wales to help meet the fees of impecunious applicants. It was a glittering prize. A photograph in the *Birkenhead Advertiser* shows a quizzical-looking Jack, already bespectacled, being 'chaired' by his peers.

Jack liked to recall his days as an undergraduate historian as a solitary commoner among the idle offspring of dukes, whose essays were as hereditary as their titles. This was an embellishment. 'Life up here is charmingly inconsequent', he reported to the *Visor* a few weeks after arriving in Trinity. 'One can be just Bohemian enough for it to be interesting and not uncomfortable.' Academically, Jack amply fulfilled the promise of his scholarship, winning more prizes and gaining a First in Part One of the Historical Tripos in 1939. What he learned from the historians in Trinity is unclear. One 'upheld the tradition of conviviality . . . when one went to his room with an essay, he would be found in an armchair, gouty limbs swathed in bandages, half the floor covered in bottles'. Another 'lectured on medieval constitutional history—unaided by any notes—with ardour and gusto . . .'.[6] A more important influence may have been George Kitson Clark. It was Kitson Clark who sent him off to buy a dinner jacket at his expense.[7] But perhaps the crucial thing about Jack's education in Cambridge was its interruption by war.

At the outbreak of war, Jack joined the Royal Tank Regiment, perhaps because the 'Greasers', as the cavalry called them, lacked the snobberies of older formations. It is sometimes suggested that he served in one of the 'special forces' or intelligence, but there is no evidence for this (the writer has not had access to his military record). Jack did fight in North Africa, Italy and Greece. For whatever reason, he did not become an officer: it is said that he refused the promotion. But there can be no doubt that the war had a powerful impact on his imagination and personality. Jack wanted his memorial to read 'tank soldier and historian'. He returned to Cambridge as a well-travelled twenty-six year old, not a callow youth from Birkenhead. Above all, perhaps, from his time in Cairo he had seen at first hand what he was later to stress as an historian of empire, the importance of Egypt in British world strategy. Jack never

[5] Records of Trinity College, Cambridge, courtesy of Jonathan Smith.
[6] See V. G. Kiernan, 'Herbert Norman's Cambridge', in R. W. Bowen (ed.), *E. H. Norman: his life and scholarship* (Toronto, 1984).
[7] I owe this anecdote to Ms Katharine Whitehorn.

ceased to complain at the neglect of Egypt by British historians. 'It must be because it's too important', he used to say.

Having secured a First in Part Two in 1946, Jack was awarded a Holland Rose Studentship by the University and embarked on a thesis. He was part of a remarkable post-war generation of research students in History at Cambridge, including Maurice Cowling, John Fage, Harry Ferns, George Grun (a close friend of Jack's), Eric Hobsbawm, Oliver MacDonagh, Roland Oliver, Henry Pelling, John Pocock, Ronald Robinson, and Eric Stokes. Jack's topic was listed as 'British Colonial Policy in West Africa 1830–1886'.[8] In fact, he never completed a doctoral thesis, having been elected to a prize fellowship at Trinity in 1948. To win that fellowship, he had written, at breakneck speed (parts of the later chapters were submitted in what looks like ball-point pen), a dissertation entitled 'British Penetration of West Africa, 1830–1865'. It was written with astonishing assurance and sardonic wit. 'Only explorers understand the feelings of explorers', we are told on page three. 'Disraeli sailed down the Nile in search of ideas, Flaubert wandered over North Africa in search of debauchery.' The choice of subject was not accidental, nor was its theme. As a schoolboy in Birkenhead, Jack would have looked across the river to Liverpool, then still the commercial capital of British West Africa. He would have seen the monuments erected by its merchant princes, including the Picton Library where he did much of his research. In Birkenhead itself, the Cammell Laird works was a reminder of the importance of the Laird family in the growth of the city, and of the leading part played by Macgregor Laird in the effort to open the Niger to British trade and influence. In Jack's dissertation it is not officials and governments who take centre stage, but the 'palm oil ruffians', the mercantile chancers who were struggling to build a new trade in palm oil to replace the old one in slaves. The decisions that mattered were made not in London but Liverpool. The major argument that emerges is the reluctance of governments at home to extend their commitments or to act at all except in moments of crisis. Here was the germ of the thesis set out on a global scale some five years later.

To read the dissertation is also to be struck by two other characteristics. The first is Jack's delight in the larger-than-life personalities who turned up on the West African coast, refugees from scandal, bankruptcy or an ill-starred affair: 'the desperate characters, broken men and men with quick fortunes to make'. The motives, stratagems, delusions and

[8] *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9 (1949), 371.

emotions, real and imagined, of the historical actors are shrewdly and entertainingly analysed. Here was that quizzical, amused view of life already apparent in the seventeen-year-old boy. The second is the absence of overt ideological influence. The point is worth making because, in several accounts, Jack appears as a youthful adherent of the Communist party. 'I was a Communist', wrote the Canadian Harry Ferns, a historian at Trinity in the year above Jack. 'And so was Jack Gallagher.'[9] Victor Kiernan, then a research fellow at Trinity, taught Jack for a time before leaving in 1938. He remembered him as 'going through a spell as a Marxist'.[10] In pre-war Cambridge, Indian students were subject to a form of official surveillance and those of Communist sympathies were discreetly organised as a 'colonial group' by Kiernan and then by other history students in Trinity, including Ferns and Jack. Given Jack's working-class origins in a deeply depressed town, the intellectual glamour of Marxism in 1930s Cambridge and the sense of impending struggle with Fascism, it is not hard to imagine the appeal that Communism might have held. But it seems unlikely that it survived Jack's time in the army. When Ferns met him again in 1949, he 'told a few jokes that showed that he had long since left the Communist Party and had begun to question the basic truths of Marxism'.[11] A remark in his dissertation makes that scepticism explicit: 'It is possible, but it is fruitless, to beat industrialism with any stick that comes to hand.' Yet, as we will see in a moment, the influence of Marx, or more precisely of Lenin, on Jack's view of empire was pervasive and subtle.

Meanwhile he had begun to lecture (the medium in which he came to excel), first on 'Europe and West Africa' in 1948–9. When his thesis supervisor, J. W. Davidson, left Cambridge for Canberra in 1950, Jack succeeded him as Lecturer in Colonial Studies (from 1950–3 as an 'Assistant Lecturer'), combining this in the Cambridge fashion with his Trinity fellowship. A vast field beckoned. In 1945, perhaps in response to the intellectual shock of the war, the Cambridge History Faculty inaugurated a new paper, 'The Expansion of Europe', to deal with 'the political, economic and cultural contacts of the principal countries of Europe—including Russia—with the remainder of the world in the period since

[9] H. S. Ferns, *Reading from Left to Right* (Toronto, 1983), p. 74.
[10] Communication from Professor Victor Kiernan, 7 Feb. 1999.
[11] Ferns, *Reading from Left to Right*, p. 316.

1400'.[12] 'The subject shall include', the rubric declared, 'exploration; missionary, humanitarian and political movements; the development of overseas trade and investment; the reaction of extra-European countries to European influence, including the effects on peasant economy of the opening of international markets; . . . the foundation of colonial empires; . . . the problems of native self-government; international relations in the colonial sphere, with the relevant military and naval history'.[13] By 1953, Jack was giving the main lecture course in the subject for the period to 1850, covering, as he put it, the 'Tipperary to Tokyo group of civilisations'. From 1954 his partner in this enterprise was Ronald Robinson (on post-1850). By that time they had published under the title of 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', a manifesto of startling originality on the pattern of British expansion in the nineteenth century, and the way that it ought to be studied.[14]

It would be otiose to précis the arguments of what is perhaps the most widely read essay on modern imperialism, whose phrases and concepts have been bandied about not just by historians but by sociologists, political scientists and students of international relations for the last forty years. But it may be useful to trace their intellectual roots. The essay insisted that the driving force behind Victorian Britain's expansion was the search for markets. Free trade was the weapon to open new regions to the products of Britain's industrial economy. Far from being limited to those parts of the world annexed as colonies, British economic ambition was world-wide. But in some places it faced much tougher resistance to the idea of an open economy than it did in others. When and where that occurred, and when the chance was offered, the British did not hesitate to act aggressively to force their way in and impose a commercial regime that was more to their taste. The key to British expansion was a common commercial purpose, but a willingness to use the most economical method to achieve the aim: 'informal' influence where possible, but, if necessary, rule. It was a brilliant insight. But, in its global sweep, and in its stress upon industrialisation as the dynamic of imperialism, it drew upon Marxism, not as political doctrine but as an account of world history. It was Europe's industrial revolution that triggered the change in its place in

[12] R. Hyam, 'The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge, 1881–1981: Founding Fathers and Pioneer Research Students,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29, 3 (2001), 80.
[13] Ibid.
[14] J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, 6, 1 (1953), 1–15.

the world. This view of world history would have been familiar to Jack's near contemporaries in pre-war Cambridge and he would have heard it from the Indian Marxists in the 'colonial group'. By the 1930s, however, the most influential version of Marx's thinking on empire was its famous reworking by Lenin to explain how imperialism had delayed the collapse of capitalism. In *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin had insisted that imperialism was not just a matter of colonies, but of imposing economic domination under a wide variety of political conditions: imperialism was not only, or simply about territorial possession. Jack's own work on West Africa, Harry Ferns's on Argentina (eventually published as *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1960)) and Michael Greenberg's on China (*British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–1842* (Cambridge, 1951)) showed the wide range of methods that the British employed to gain their economic objectives.

There were other influences somewhat closer to home than Lenin or Marx. Gallagher and Robinson would have been very familiar with the second large volume of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire* published in 1940. It contained a chapter by Charles Ryle Fay on the 'Movement towards Free Trade 1820–1853'.[15] Fay presented a panoptic view of commercial and imperial expansion, in which the search for markets carried British merchants far beyond the old limits of empire. He invented the term 'informal empire' that was central to the idea of free trade imperialism. He characterised the period of his chapter as 'an age of free trade and imperial increase'. 'We think of free trade as planless and passive. They [the merchants and manufacturers], by aid of free trade, took empire in their stride. By free trade they secured political empire, and something more, which we may call economic empire. Although imperialism was at a discount, empire itself was at a premium'.[16] Here, in embryo, were some of the key arguments that Gallagher and Robinson deployed to refute the supposed 'anti-imperialism' of the mid-Victorian age. A second prime influence may have been that of J. W. Davidson, the supervisor whose help Jack had acknowledged in the preface to his dissertation. Davidson was a New Zealander who had arrived in Cambridge in 1938, completing a Ph.D. in 1941 titled 'European Penetration of the South Pacific 1779–1842' (the similarity to Jack's own title may have been no coincidence). It was Davidson who stressed the

[15] J. Holland Rose, A. P. Newton and E. A. Benians (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire Vol. II*: *The New Empire 1783–1870* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 388–414.
[16] Fay, 'Free Trade', p. 414.

importance of relating the 'imperial factor' to its non-imperial setting, of seeing European expansion 'in the round'. 'The Imperial Historian forgets at his peril', he remarked in the preface to his Ph.D. thesis, 'that the cattle ranching of Uruguay and Australia, the fruit-growing of Honduras and Samoa, the experiments in governing non-European peoples in Java, Mexico and Uganda, and the investment of capital in India and China all form part of one great [if disorderly] movement'.[17] The similarity, even in phrasing, to the global setting evoked by Gallagher and Robinson in the 'Imperialism of Free Trade' is immediately striking. Both Gallagher and Robinson, who helped Davidson with his book on the *Northern Rhodesian Legislative Council*,[18] and was also at St John's, had good reason to be familiar with Davidson's ideas.

In the end, however, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' cannot be reduced to the sum of other men's arguments. The crispness and rigour with which it was written extracted a thesis from rich raw materials: the essential continuity of British expansion over the long nineteenth century. It added three new inventions of extraordinary significance for the study both of British imperialism and the 'expansion of Europe'. The first was the idea of 'collaboration' as the connecting rod between British expansion and the society and economy of the regions it encroached on. The terms on which the British 'collaborated' with the indigenous elites, were, Gallagher and Robinson insisted, the key to the nature of the imperial regime. Where cooperation was forthcoming and mutual advantage was perceived, Britain's interests were best served by the invisible dominance of its merchants, bankers and diplomats: this was 'informal empire', whose purpose was the same, and whose benefits similar to, the 'formal' empire of rule. Where it was lacking, an injection of force, or even of rule, was meant to induce the minimum of compliance that British interests required in any particular place or time. Implicit in this was a novel conception of colonial politics as a series of shifting and unstable bargains that might at some point unravel completely—an insight that was to reshape profoundly the study of colonial nationalisms over the next two decades. Secondly, Gallagher and Robinson advanced a much more flexible definition of the rogue word 'imperialism' than was current at the time. They famously rejected its association with territorial acquisition (here the debt to Lenin was obvious) in favour of treating it as the (variable) political input needed to secure essentially economic objectives.

[17] Quoted Hyam, 'Imperial and Commonwealth History', 82.
[18] Published in 1948.

Imperialism could now be detected as much in Britain's Near Eastern diplomacy in the 1830s and 1840s, or the negotiation of treaty ports in China, as in the invasion of the Punjab or the annexation of New Zealand. Thirdly, from their attempt to explain the baffling pattern of British interference—the willingness to leave zones of great economic importance in virtual independence while imposing colonial rule on tracts of desert or rock—Gallagher and Robinson deduced an imperial logic or system. Those who decided in London on the form and extent of Britain's commitments in any particular place were guided by their notion of Britain's *world* interests, by the vision of Britain as a global power with a 'world-system' to manage. They acquired 'barren rocks' or annexed empty sea coasts not for their intrinsic value but as the defences and outworks of the more valuable regions where trade and investment were greatest. It followed from this that an 'intra-mural' approach to a colony's history could make little sense. A colony's politics and economics were bound to be shaped by external forces and interests, by disturbance or upsets in far-distant places, or by an invisible shift in geopolitical equilibrium. Colonial history could not be written (this was one of Jack's favourite phrases) 'like the annals of a parish'. It had to be linked up to the larger movements of global and imperial history.

'The Imperialism of Free Trade' was thus a manifesto for the study of empire in a post-colonial age. Its attitude to Britain's own imperial era was neither sentimental nor celebratory. Its global compass was attuned to a post-war world whose political geography had been transformed by the revolution in East Asia, the independence of India and the spread of cold war. Its stress on 'collaboration' (perhaps an odd term to choose so close to the years of Nazi occupation) stripped away the pretence that colonial rule could be seen as purely the province of white men, or that black men had been the passive victims of fate. As a reinterpretation of Britain's nineteenth-century empire, it drew a critique, the fiercest of which came from D. C. M. Platt, an historian of Latin America, who derided the suggestion that British mercantile influence in Argentina (Gallagher and Robinson's main Latin American case) reached the level of dominance implied in the language of 'informal empire'.[19] As a master-narrative of British imperialism, perhaps its chief influence was delayed until the mid-1960s, when some of those trained in Cambridge in the 'Expansion of Europe' began to teach in their turn, when new funding arrived for 'area studies' in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and when

[19] Platt's views are most fully set out in his *Finance, Trade and Politics* (Oxford, 1968).

the all-but final collapse of Europe's colonial empires ignited wide interest in their rise and fall.

By that time Jack, again in partnership with Ronald Robinson, had produced the book that was to make both their names. His fellowship dissertation remained unpublished. Some of its findings made their way into his first published article on 'Fowell Buxton and the New African Policy 1838–1842'.[20] This displayed an interest in the role of lobbies and interests in the making of policy (heavily discounted in his later writing), a mistrust of 'enthusiasm' (a recurrent theme both academic and personal) and a taste for carefully wrought prose. Jack also contributed part of a chapter on Europe's economic relations with Asia and Africa to the *New Cambridge Modern History* (printed insouciantly under the name J. Gallacher) that drew on his earlier work on the West African slave trade.[21] Africa remained at the centre of his interests. In the early 1950s he and Ronald Robinson embarked on a study of the partition of Africa. It was, perhaps, an obvious choice (Ronald Robinson's doctorate had been on Central Africa). In the 'Imperialism of Free Trade', they had argued that much of Britain's formal empire of rule had been acquired not for the sake of its economic rewards, which were absent or lacking, but as a way of protecting more valuable regions. The grandest example of this safety-first syndrome was tropical Africa. In the history of British expansion, it was an after-thought, taken up reluctantly when the failure to do so threatened Britain's grip on the places that mattered. Africa was thus an ideal test-case for their larger theory. What made it all the more fascinating (and, as a project, all the more viable) was the electric speed with which most of tropical Africa had been reconnoitred, invaded, shared out and annexed in less than two decades. Africa was not the only case of a colonial 'scramble', but it was the most dramatic and the most complete.

Africa and the Victorians (1961) was a large-scale assault on the conventional history of the African Scramble and of European imperialism more generally. It ridiculed the claim that it was tropical Africa's wealth that attracted the attention of European governments, the British especially. It was scathing about the influential thesis, much favoured by diplomatic historians, that Africa had served as the safety-valve for the pressures and tensions of Europe's power politics. It dismissed as absurd

[20] J. Gallagher, 'Fowell Buxton and the New African Policy 1838–1842', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10 (1950), 36–58.

[21] See J. O. Lindsay (ed.), *New Cambridge Modern History Vol. VII: The Old Regime 1713–1763* (Cambridge, 1957), ch. 24: 'Economic relations in Africa and the Far East', pp. 566–79.

the suggestion that British statesmen acquired an empire in Africa to please their importunate voters, or, as J. A. Hobson had once claimed, to drown the voice of domestic grievance with the raucous echo of imperial triumph. It argued instead that Britain's part in the Scramble was the outgrowth of crisis in two African regions whose real importance to Britain derived from the fact that both lay across the sea-road to India. After 1880, British influence in Egypt and South Africa came under strain from political change. Egypt's modernisation under its own local rulers had ended in bankruptcy. The onerous terms imposed from outside to restore the state's credit sparked a revolt which, so London reasoned, threatened Britain's use of the Suez Canal. In South Africa, the rapid development of the Witwatersrand goldfields endowed Kruger's troublesome Transvaal republic with the means to disrupt Britain's grip on Cape Colony (the majority of whose whites were Afrikaners or 'Dutch') thus breaking its hold on the Southern African littoral and the main route to India. Fear of a 'proto-nationalist' regime in Egypt led to a unilateral British occupation in 1882. Fear of an all-powerful and anti-British Transvaal led London to try to squeeze it into submission as part of a 'British South Africa' and step-by-step towards the South African War of 1899–1902. It was these forward movements that alarmed and enraged the other European powers who had previously regarded their African interests with something less than enthusiasm. The result was the rush to partition the tropical hinterlands whose value had so recently seemed to governments in London, Paris and Berlin to be practically negligible.[22]

This sweeping revision of the entrenched historiography was underpinned intellectually by three powerful ideas, each of considerable methodological significance. The first was the emphasis that the argument gave to events 'on the ground' not in Europe but Africa: this was the 'local crisis'. The origins of the crises in Egypt and South Africa were not to be traced to decisions made in Europe or the new assertiveness of the European powers. They sprang from the breakdown of local regimes under the stress of economic and social change. The peculiar trajectory along which Africa entered the gravitational field of the global economy imposed intolerable pressures on many pre-colonial states. The result was not one but a whole chain of explosions that destroyed the pre-partition equilibrium. The historian in search of the causes of imperial expansion was thus better advised to sift local evidence and explore local archives

[22] See also their 'The Partition of Africa' in F. H. Hinsley (ed.), *New Cambridge Modern History Vol. XI: Material Progress and World Wide Problems* (Cambridge, 1962).

than to place too much faith in the explanatory power of metropolitan sources. The second was the idea of the 'official mind', the collective mentality ruling in Whitehall. This was the source for the routine assumptions that guided officialdom in its advice to ministers on foreign, colonial or Indian policy. It drew on a peculiar departmental 'historiography' of what had gone right and what had proved wrong. It handed down from one generation to the next the 'cold rules for national safety'[23] ignored at their peril. It was largely indifferent to purely commercial concerns, except as an adjunct to Britain's power in the world. In *Africa and the Victorians,* the 'official mind' is the calculating machine in which the costs and benefits of British intervention are soberly added up, the 'black box' from which the decisions emerged to annex or occupy, appease or delay. Its secrets were revealed in the private correspondence in which ministers debated with each other, or with their advisers, on what course to take. It was from the archive of the 'official mind' that Gallagher and Robinson claimed to deduce the primacy of strategic over economic motives in Britain's part in the Scramble.

The third key idea, already explicit in 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', was the defensive mood of late-Victorian policy-makers, and their obsession with protecting Britain's mid-Victorian gains against external rivals and internal assailants. London cared little about the small change to be earned in the tropical back-waters of African commerce. But it cared a great deal about the links in its chain of 'imperial defence', the system of naval and military power that safeguarded its spheres of commercial expansion. Annexations were tiresome, but they were often the means to avert the attrition of British world power. By the 1880s this defensive obsession was fixated on India, Britain's grandest possession, an indispensable source of military power, and the stronghold from which British trade and diplomacy could command southern Asia. This was the real arena for the struggle of empires. Seen in this light, the partition of Africa could hardly be cast as the climax of British or European imperialism. It was really a side-show. Gallagher and Robinson captured this thought in a mischievous phrase: the African Scramble was a gigantic footnote to Britain's conquest of India.

The nature of the intellectual collaboration involved in the making of *Africa and the Victorians* has been memorably recorded by Jack's two

[23] R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (1961), p. 463.

closest academic partners, Ronald Robinson and Anil Seal.[24] A visitor from Oxford in 1953 saw 'the Great Collaborators at work . . . in Jack's room. Jack head down at a kneehole desk piled with volumes beavering away at his scribbling . . . RER leaning back in a lordly proprietary way in a chair tipped back with his RAF boots on the desk with Jack sitting the other side . . . '.[25] By all accounts, Jack's penchant for travel and his dislike of getting up before noon meant that it was Alice Denny (Ronald Robinson's wife) who became the main driving force behind the book's actual completion. Much of its impact can be said to derive from the remarkable fusion of its conceptual framework with a vivid prose style, epigrammatic and witty. The deft character sketches, the evocation of mood, the depiction of place echoed the tone of Jack's dissertation. They sprang from an intense historical imagination (perhaps originally nourished by the reading of Dickens) that was fascinated by the gallery of human types and the twists of fortune that settled the fate of careers, ambitions or affairs of the heart. It was a view of life that was injected in part into Jack's teaching. In *My Friend Judas* (1959), Andrew Sinclair, one of Jack's star pupils in the late 1950s, gave a fictional portrait of Jack (thinly disguised as 'Johnson') as a tutor. 'Supervisions with Johnson are fun', says the hero Ben:

> He's really a sort of Harley Street toothman manqué. When you come he puts you in a chair, and gives you a Tio Pepe in a big glass as an anaesthetic to show you he thinks you're human and he's interested in that. Then he switches on the lamp in his cranium which must be about four hundred Whats and then some Whys. Then he leans forward and makes you open your mouth, so he can have a squint inside. He probes around with a few points from your essay, feeling out your cavities, which he's nice enough to treat as if they were depths. Then out come his pincers, but he's made you feel so the same as him, all wound-up and reasonable-doubting, that you begin to feel it *is* a wisdom-tooth he's working out of you, and that it's *yours*. And if he has to pull something all the way out of you and leave a gap, he doesn't fill up the holes with his fake teeth. He just plugs up the molars you've got with a tough lead filling so you feel they'll last out. He's a filler and a fixer like all good tutors should be.[26]

Tuition was mixed with more worldly advice. 'I am not your moral tutor', he told one moral tutee. 'I will help you out if you get into scrapes with the college. Your paternity suits are your own affair.' Always travel

[24] R. Robinson and A. Seal, 'Obituary: Professor John Gallagher', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 9, 2 (1981), 119–24.
[25] Communication from Dr A. F. Madden.
[26] Andrew Sinclair, *My Friend Judas* (1959), p. 11. I am grateful to Andrew Sinclair for discussing his memories of Jack Gallagher with me.

light but take plenty of dollars, was another injunction. Always vote against the 'unanimous' view. Keep out of the photographs. It was perhaps the willingness to be a sort of father-confessor to errant and insecure youth that made him a natural choice to be dean of the college (the 'profane not the sacred dean' he used to say), a post he held from 1960 to 1963.

In 1962, however, Jack was elected to the Beit Professorship of Commonwealth History at Oxford. He was not the first choice. The electors had wanted the New Zealander J. C. Beaglehole, the great authority on Cook's explorations. But when he declined, they agreed upon Jack, who arrived in Balliol in 1963. Oxford's History Faculty (then the 'Modern History Faculty') was very different from Cambridge's. It had far fewer teachers with interests in the extra-European world and no undergraduate course like the Expansion of Europe. It was Eurocentric, even Anglocentric. This did not deter Jack for whom Europe's history held as much fascination as that of anywhere else. His energies anyway were mainly devoted to graduate supervision: he had arrived in time for the rapid expansion of postgraduate interest in Asia and Africa and quickly acquired a large group of research students. At the weekly seminar in Commonwealth History held at Nuffield College (where Jack's principal colleagues, Freddie Madden and David Fieldhouse, were fellows) he dispensed the ideas that he and Ronald Robinson had devised over the previous decade. With this new stock of concepts, imperial history was rejuvenated. Far from being outmoded by the fall of empires, it seemed to supply the essential connection between the histories of regions, saving them from the fate (of which Jack was contemptuous) of being mere 'area studies'. Indeed, as Jack practised it, there was little distinction between imperial history and global history. Imperialism (properly defined) was the master-key to modern world history.

Even before he had arrived in Oxford, Jack's own research had begun to focus more and more upon India. This passage from African to Indian history was implicit perhaps in the central argument of *Africa and the Victorians*. The partition of Africa had revealed the British belief that India was the centrepiece of their imperial system, the quintessential component without which it would fail. Much of the rest of Jack's academic career was absorbed by the study of the Anglo-Indian connection, and its drastic impact on the shape of British world power from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The immediate problem was to explain the rise of the nationalist movement that had pulled down the Raj and with it the rest of the British imperium. In conventional histories, this

was usually explained as the outcome of British 'reform'—the prudential concession of self-rule in doses—and the irresistible appeal of the nationalist idea under the inspirational leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. But to the historian of empire armed with the concept of 'collaboration', these were clichés at best. 'Looking in from the outside is the occupational vice which bedevils Western students of African or Asian history', Jack wrote in 1962, 'even if the road to ethnocentricity is paved with the best of intentions'.[27] If India's colonial politics were to be understood, Indian politicians would have to be studied on their own terms, and, ideally, from their own sources. From about 1960, he began to work systematically on this huge new project, initially with Anil Seal, his first research student, and then with a stream of new pupils that they recruited between them. The vast archive of the Raj in New Delhi and London (a whole continent of paper) had to be opened up. The grand apparatus of Indian administration had to be reconceived as a system not so much of rule as of collaboration. The trail of politics had to be followed down into the provinces and even the districts, where the British dealt directly with Indian notables, and the real bargains were struck.

By the late 1960s a whole team of young historians in both Cambridge and Oxford was hard at work on the provincial politics of colonial India, on Muslim politics, on Gandhi's *satyagraha*, and on the political economy that British rule had helped shape. By the mid-1970s, they had begun to produce an entirely new version of modern Indian history, which quickly attracted the label of the 'Cambridge School'.[28] Like the 'imperialism of free trade', it was iconoclastic and liberating. Indian politicians no longer appeared as the selfless champions of anti-colonial struggle. They were portrayed instead as skilled and ruthless practitioners in the games of faction and patronage, the real stuff of politics at the district and provincial levels. The provincial alliances that made up the Congress, and gave the British so much trouble after 1919, were cobbled together by political bosses in an acrid atmosphere of mutual mistrust. Gandhi's ideas were treated as the foibles of a crank by many hard-nosed Congressmen, however deferential they might be in public. The real innovation in the 'Cambridge School' history was to insist that Indian nationalism was not a spontaneous growth but a response to the changing terms

[27] In his review of L. Gann and P. Duignan, *White Settlers in Tropical Africa. Historical Journal*, 5, 2 (1962), 198.

[28] The first fruits of the 'school' were A. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1968) and J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation* (Cambridge, 1973). Jack's contribution to this volume was 'Congress in Decline: Bengal, 1930–1939'.

of Anglo-Indian collaboration. As the British made more demands on the districts—to govern them more closely and tax them more heavily—Indians banded together to protect their interests. As provincial and central government loomed larger in the localities, Indians formed provincial and then 'all-India' associations to bring local influence to bear on higher authority. The British in turn aimed to win new allies among their Indian subjects, by devolving power downwards, mobilising fresh clients in the business of rule. This was the real point of constitutional reform, much of whose meaning lay in the 'small print' where votes and seats were distributed among rival Indian 'constituencies'. Imperialism and nationalism thus marched in parallel and both sides depended upon a set of shaky alliances. Neither could risk a fight to the finish. But the moment would come (as it had by the end of the Second World War) when the British lacked the means to make the bargains they needed to defend the commanding heights of the Raj.

Jack had intended to write a history of Indian politics from the First World War to the end of the 1930s, as part of a series with Anil Seal.[29] Some of it may have been written but, for obscure reasons, left unfinished. Perhaps this was partly because Jack was also engaged in writing a more panoptic account of Britain's imperial system after the First World War, one of the first fruits of which was a remarkable paper on 'Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire 1919–1922', written (probably) in 1968.[30] 'Once the British Empire had become world-wide', ran its opening line, 'the sun never set on its crises'. In the fourth and last of his historical enterprises he set out to explain why an empire that had reached its greatest extent in 1921 was near the end of its tether only twenty years later. The struggle to defend what Jack called the 'British world-system' was traced in the anxious debates of the policy-makers in Whitehall, oppressed by the burden of post-war debt, the dislike of the voters for costly commitments (a theme carried over from *Africa and the Victorians*), and the effects of depression on colonial politics. To make matters worse, the need to appease those that they thought of as the 'moderates' in India cut down the claim they could make on the sub-continent's resources, so long the pivot of British power in Asia. When they faced the three-cornered challenge to British world power in the late 1930s, they barely escaped catastrophic defeat. But from the interlocking of crises (a favourite image of Jack's) there was to be no real escape.

[29] Anil Seal's volume was meant to be the first of a series of five.
[30] It was subsequently published in *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 3 (1981), 355–68.

The first version of this was presented in a series of papers in Cambridge in the autumn of 1973. The ideas were set out in the Ford lectures in Oxford and the Wiles Lectures at Queen's University in Belfast in 1973–4. They were published (posthumously) as *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*,[31] a title that reflected Jack's characteristically paradoxical argument that the huge effort of wartime had brought a short-lived recovery of imperial strength but at the cost of incurring vast additional debts and exhausting what remained of British political influence, above all in India. By the time that he gave the Ford lectures, Jack had returned to Cambridge and Trinity. He had been privately told of his election to the Vere Harmsworth chair (of Imperial and Naval History), and he wrote to the Oxford Vice-Chancellor in April 1970. 'I have been very happy here . . . what is taking me to Cambridge is simply the sentimental pull of a place where I spent nearly twenty years of my life.'[32] Once back in Trinity, Jack soon became Dean, and shortly afterwards Vice-Master, grand vizier of the college whose Master was a species of constitutional monarch. For most of Jack's time, this was 'Rab' (Lord) Butler (Master 1965–77) with whom Jack got on well.[33] 'He gave rulings on discipline and decided protocol as to the manner born', Rab wrote about Jack after his death. 'With undergraduate representations he exhibited a remarkable patience which involved meetings lasting three or four hours. As a result, we had a large, relaxed and consultative student body'.[34] But this last phase of Jack's life was overshadowed by illness. He had been seriously ill while in India in 1970. In the late 1970s, his health declined sharply, and he had a leg amputated to arrest the effects of disease. He died on 5 March 1980, a few weeks before his sixty-first birthday. He had been elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1978.

Through his intellectual partnership with Ronald Robinson (whose powerful, astringent mind was the perfect foil to Jack's imagination), but also on his own account, Jack Gallagher was the most creative and original historian of modern imperialism. One key to his influence was his verbal felicity, in speech or on paper. From his schooldays on, he displayed an intense interest in the uses of language and the craft of writing. He was an avid reader of fiction (Evelyn Waugh was a favourite, 'his jokes are so good') and also read widely in German and French. The result was

[31] J. A. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and Other Essays*, ed. A. Seal (Cambridge, 1982).
[32] J. Gallagher to Vice-Chancellor, 7 April 1970, Oxford University Archives.
[33] See Mollie Butler, *August and Rab: a Memoir* (London, 1992).
[34] 'R.A.B.' in *The Times*, 11 March 1980, p. 14.

a style that was ironic and humorous, sometimes mocking and caustic, but never dull, repetitive or merely conventional. Jack's writing was meant to look round the corner and see a new view of the world, often surprising and comic. But he was also a product of Britain's post-war intellectual culture. He took the social sciences seriously, deploying sociology and social statistics alongside archival inquiry. Much of the strength of his and Ronald Robinson's work derived from the rigour and utility of its concepts. The academic citations of their original essay can be counted in thousands, far beyond the field of empire history. Jack saw himself as a professional and had little time for history's gentleman amateurs.

Jack was not a large man, and cared little about dress. But he had a solid reassuring presence. His eyes would gleam with barely suppressed humour and his conversation was punctuated with a throaty laugh. Jack was convivial and liked institutional life. He shone in company and was a raconteur of endless invention. But he could also seem lonely, and the references in his writings to disappointment in love were not entirely ironic. He could be very elusive and guarded his privacy. There is an entertaining correspondence in the Oxford University Archive in which the registrar of an Indian university inquired of his whereabouts (Jack had been sent the full dossier of a professorial appointment some months before). I am sorry, ran the reply, but Professor Gallagher has left Balliol without a forwarding address. Jack was not against order, tradition and civility: indeed quite the reverse. But he had an instinctive mistrust for claims to authority and loathed the parade of high principle or fine feeling. 'As often happens in English life', he once remarked of the critics of empire, 'some of the denunciators have been those whose private lives lie in ruins and who therefore set forth to rebuild the state'.[35] He had little regard for political pieties. 'Colonialism', he observed (this was after a visit to the Congo), 'is not the form of government hardest to endure, but the form of government safest to attack'.[36] He treated the demands of bumbledom and bureaucracy with a famous insouciance. 'Chuck them in the bin, Bert', he would tell the college porter at Balliol when the mountain of brown envelopes appeared at the beginning of term.[37]

By today's academic measuring tape, Jack's output was slim. He published in his lifetime a few short pieces under his name as well as the essay

[35] From his review in the *Historical Journal*, 6 (1962), 198.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Cobb, 'Jack Gallagher in Oxford', p. 21.

and book co-written with Ronald Robinson. How Jack would have fared in modern British academia, with its machine-tractor station mentality and zealous commissariat, is indeed a question. For by temperament Jack adhered to an older tradition. If he published little during his life it was partly because he spent his time prodigally in teaching and supervision. There, his influence could be drastic and in some cases life-changing. It is not to be thought of as 'delivering the syllabus' (in our inane modern phrase). To be taught by Jack was to learn how to write, to escape the familiar, and to meet a new view of life that was amused, irreverent and sceptical. 'Everybody is somebody's ghastly best friend', he would say. For many research students, it was also to find unimagined fascination in the topic they had chosen, once exposed to Jack's scrutiny. It was perhaps in the capacity to inspire the imagination of others at the highest level that Jack realised his own gifts most completely. It is for that as much as for his seminal writings that he will long be remembered.[38]

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Note. I am most grateful to all those whose letters or conversation have helped me with the writing of this memoir.

[38] In addition to those mentioned above, there is a valuable memoir by Anil Seal as the introduction to *Decline, Revival and Fall.* An obituary appeared in *The Times* on 7 March 1980. An obituary of Ronald Robinson can be found in *The Independent* of 25 June 1999. A joint memoir of 'Robinson and Gallagher' appears in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.