

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY
MODERN FRENCH HISTORY IN BRITAIN

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PIERRE CARON, who had been *Directeur des Archives de France* and who had an incomparable knowledge of the French records, both in Paris and in the Departments, for the revolutionary period, used to tell me, rather sadly, that I had come too late to the study of the French Revolution. According to him, and I have no doubt that he was right, the golden age of revolutionary studies had been in the period before the outbreak of the First World War. Certainly, in terms of the sheer volume of publications, the twenty or thirty years before 1914 illustrated an almost obsessive preoccupation with the history of the Revolution, especially in the local context, on the part both of friends and enemies of the Revolution. For few of the historians could be described, as M. Caron might have been described, as uncommitted historians. The centenary celebrations of 1889 can be taken as the starting-point of this stream of publications, many of which included collections of documents, the correspondence of revolutionary authorities, and the minutes of clubs and committees.

The *Centenaire* was no doubt the main stimulus from above; and it reached down to nearly every one of the fifty thousand or more *communes* of France. Every *bourg*, pretty well every village, had its *comité du centenaire*. The very structure of provincial France at the time favoured a historicism both intensely enthusiastic and very personal, almost intimate. For it was in the smaller places, towns of from five to ten thousand inhabitants, that the memory of the Great Revolution would have the most direct meaning. For one thing, it would be emphasized in the surnames of the leading inhabitants, so that each participant in the events of the revolutionary period, whether as a committed terrorist, or as an equally committed opponent of the Revolution, or, finally, as a prudent *attentiste*, would be endowed with a name and a face, an address and an occupation, even with a personality. The French Revolution was no doubt a world-shaking event; but its most living dimension is that of the *bourg*. This preoccupation, especially on the part of republicans, with a revolutionary past that, in terms of rural or small-town

memory, was still both recent and almost palpable, was stimulated by the relative *lack* of mobility of the population of many of these places.

Concern for the local history of the Revolution was as firmly anchored in municipal institutions and in the local calendar, as well as in the very inbred pride of 'communalism', as such annual junketings as the *comices agricoles*, or, in a place like Dourdan, the charmingly evocative *foire de Ventôse*. It is ironical that a political event that above all made claims to universalism, should have had its most devoted commemorators in the immobile societies of small market towns, the inhabitants of which, more surely than any national historian, with his observatory in Paris, felt instinctively that the Revolution had been above all about *local* issues, and that the proper dimension for its history was Roissy-en-France or Marseille-en-Beauvaisis. With most *archives communales* stacked with documents, minutes, correspondence, requisition orders, registers of *l'état civil*, it could, too, offer a durable escape from the boredom of a semi-rural existence. The French Revolution was a more profitable, because more abundant, option than *les fouilles gallo-romaines*, because in most places the attics and cellars of *mairies* could be relied upon to yield a much richer harvest than a recalcitrant and parsimonious sub-soil.

Printing costs in the years between the 1880s and the First World War remained very low, so that quite small communities, bodies with limited resources, and dependent on the voluntary subscriptions of their members—seldom more than a hundred or two—could afford the small luxury of a journal, appearing several times a year. It was during this period that there proliferated all over France a brave network of *sociétés d'émulation*, *société historique et littéraire de . . .* and so on. Few places can have been without some such body. Each would publish a *bulletin*, in which the doctor, the veterinary, the *instituteur*, the *curé*, the *notaire*, the *inspecteur des hypothèques*, and the *pharmacien* (all occupations especially prone to historical speculation and research) would vie with one another in the pleasure of seeing themselves in print. Some of these *bulletins* contained little more than a list of the members present at each meeting, but a lot of them published articles and documents of great value. The importance of their place in local life would be suitably emphasized by the holding of a *banquet annuel*, or it might be called a *banquet commémoratif* if it were held, as it often was, on 21 January (an attractive date in any case, as it would enliven that gloomy

month), the menu of which would be illustrated, in Beardsleyesque *fioritures*, by a local artist. Scholarship was of course not the only preoccupation of most of the members. There was also the prospect of the award of the *palmes académiques*, as much prized in such communities as *le mérite agricole*. The former, oddly, was a clerical mauve, the latter, a verdant green: both would offer balm to their holders.

The angle of vision adopted by most such publications would be much what one would expect from such local authorities lacking in a more general knowledge of the history of the revolutionary period and of revolutionary institutions, and thus incapable of a comparative approach to their own subject. It was both intensely local, not to say loyal, and often repetitive and long-winded to the point of banality. It would be difficult to convince the historian, let us say of Dourdan, that there had existed a club and a *comité de surveillance*, let us say in Étampes, or that the great republican feast days had been celebrated, with drearish and repetitive pomp, based on a standard formula of orthodox rejoicings, in a score of other *communes* of the Hurepoix. Nor would he be aware that enthusiastic republicans had dug up cellars for saltpetre, that devoted women had stitched up former church linen to make bandages or waistcoats for the local volunteers, in as many other places. It was as if the standard institutions of Revolution and Terror had to appear unique to the chosen town of study.

The result, not unexpectedly, was that, a hundred years after an event which was supposed to have consecrated the national unity of France, these local studies reveal above all the startling survival of 'municipalism', of local rivalries and inter-communal jealousies. Whereas, in the Year Two, those who ran the local club would have been principally concerned to obtain for their town some small material advantage—a new bridge, a market, a court—in the 1880s and 1890s those who were *writing* about the Terror would be claiming for their own town a more vigorous and better Revolution, a more distinguished, devoted, and energetic set of revolutionaries, and a greater awareness of the significance of national events than in any other locality of the District.

Local histories written in this period often read like a prize-giving, a roll-call of revolutionary honour. Whatever the event, OUR man is always there: there is, let us say, a Dourdannais among the *Vainqueurs de la Bastille*, there is a woman from Dourdan on the march to Versailles, a soldier from Dourdan

witnesses the Flight to Varennes and reports home that he has recognized the royal couple, two more Dourdannais write home that they have taken part in the attack on the Tuileries, three more describe the campaigns in the Vendée, a cattle-merchant from Dourdan happens to be in the Hôtel-de-Ville on the morning of 9 Thermidor, at the very moment of the arrival of Barras, a soldier from Dourdan is present at the Camp de Grenelle at the time of the insurrection, and so on. It is as if the devoted local historian were looking through the wrong end of the telescope. There must always be a man from his team in Paris, where all the important things are happening. The no doubt much more important, much more significant things that are happening in his own town, under his very nose, are either omitted altogether or are placed into a false, pseudo-Parisian perspective. Part of the trouble is that such historians are constantly at pains to illustrate the participation of their own community in *outside* events. The result is that the true significance of *inside* ones is often lost. If one can boast a couple of regicides, a member of the crew of *le Vengeur*, and a juror on the Paris Revolutionary Tribunal, why then bother with some tawdry lawsuit that runs through much of the Revolution, some running quarrel between a *curé* and his *vicair*e, or the weekly Saturday evening fights between the young men of the quarter on this side of the stream, and the young men of the quarter on the other side? Such things, these worthy men would argue, were the trifles of *la petite histoire*.

The years before 1914 were no doubt the most fruitful for the local historiography of the Great Revolution. But Pierre Caron was perhaps unduly pessimistic in what he said to me. For happily *l'érudit local* did not disappear with the 1914 War, though a great many were killed in it, just as the War took an even heavier toll of *chartistes* and archivists. Most of these local reviews also survived, though generally on a more reduced scale, at least till 1939. The Vichy interregnum, so hostile to any revolutionary studies, and concerned to eradicate all memory of the first Revolution, resulted in the disappearance of most of them, while bringing a brief revival of interest in agrarian studies, at least on the level of popular folklore (the régime itself claiming to represent a return to ancient peasant values). But, with the Liberation, a number were revived, and there were even one or two new creations, including the important *Annales de Normandie*, founded by a medievalist who had returned from Mauthausen, and the extremely enterprising *Présence Ardennaise*.

In the 1920s and 1930s local history also acquired a new, wider dimension, for it was during these years that some of the most systematic histories of the Revolution in the Departments were written. The Department was no doubt a less satisfactory unit of study than the more living *commune*; and histories of the Revolution in this or that Department would inevitably tend to write themselves in terms of a rather dreary succession of predictable events and unavoidable institutions. It would be very much a political and institutional approach, as if nothing or no one could exist outside the set cadres of official revolutionary institutions. There would not be much room, in such fixed accounts, for those on the move, for those who lived outside, below, or beyond institutions, revolutionary or otherwise, and none at all, save perhaps in terms of a food riot, or of a fracas over the removal of church bells, for women. Yet, granted their relative dullness and lack of imagination, such studies contain much that is still valuable, at least at the level of the *chef-lieu*, which is generally that from which they are written. We learn from them at least a great deal about the hopes and intentions of revolutionary legislation, even if they are little informed about its implementation, especially in the smaller and more remote localities. The general effect is certainly to make, for instance, the Terror appear far more effective than it really was, and to make the whole revolutionary period more uniform, more coherent, and more nationally conscious than it really was. The Department was a very recent and still artificial unit, particularly in terms of mentality, of the awareness of belonging to a specified geographical area: how soon would people be describing themselves as *Seine-et-Oisians*, a barbarism at the best of times, and how would one describe an inhabitant of the Seine-et-Marne or the Eure-et-Loir? For the historians of the 1930s, the Department *was* indeed very much of a collective reality, inspiring a strange and rather touching loyalty. But by then it had been in existence for a century and a half. It was not so during the Revolution. The creation of the Departments represents an administrative convenience and a geographical compromise, as well as an act of faith in the new institutions, rather than a reality in the minds of ordinary people. And so it follows that, historically, the Department offers a significant cadre for straight political and administrative history: the number of volunteers, the amount raised in taxes, the yield of requisitions in grain and fodder, the number of deserters, the names of deputies to successive assemblies, the study of the

notables and the largest taxpayers, the personnel of the civil and criminal courts, the number of arrests and death sentences, the proportions of juror and non-juror priests, the survival, through the troubled years, of political and economic élites. The Department has about it a certain administrative frigidity. It hardly exists at all in terms of mentalities, which will follow much older, more secret, less obvious routes, and will discover an identity in quite different territorial units, these themselves varying according to occupation. The horse dealer, pedlar, and cattle merchant will have his mental world circumscribed by roads and markets, the riverman will think in terms of a totally different, much more extensive, geography: the *marinier* from Condrieu will regard Lyon, Villefranche, Mâcon, Chalon, Saint-Jean-de-Losne, and Gray as within his ken, that of the valley of the Cure will think of Paris almost as a suburb. The bandit will be familiar with the rocky, arid hills of the Lubéran, but he will hardly be aware of which Department or Departments they are situated in, while, for the poacher, or the poor woman concerned with the gathering of dead wood, the Department, in its vast, non-visible extent, would be far too large to be anything more than a vague abstraction of which they might become aware only when confronted with officialdom, something too to go on a letter head, between two Cupids holding up an escutcheon, if one could read even that much.

After the War, the Department rather went out of fashion as a unit of research for French local historians. The experience of the Resistance movement had reminded many university teachers and schoolmasters of the survival of much older geographical areas: les Causses, le Lubéran, le Vercors, and so on, many of them old bandit areas of the eighteenth century, or areas of *insoumission* and desertion under the First Empire. There was nothing like a *maquis* to bring across to townsmen on the run the comforting recesses of *ancien régime* malefactors, smugglers, bandits, and cave-dwellers. The Department would then be revealed as an artificial administrative unit, as a map on the calendar issued annually by the P.T.T. This semi-rejection of the Department can partly be explained by the newer sociological preoccupations of many French historians. A study, for instance, of criminality during the revolutionary period can better be placed, at least during the Terror, in the smaller, more meaningful unit of the *District*. Walking or riding criminals and bandits are unlikely to operate in the whole area constituted by a Department, but they might be well entrenched

within the bounds of a given District, or, even more likely, they would operate on the border between *two* Departments, so that, their operations completed, they could always withdraw without too much difficulty behind the judicial border offered by the existence of a different central criminal court. Crime and banditry and white terrorism seldom respect the integrity of a Departmental unit; on the contrary, they seek out areas in which one Department runs into another.¹

Thus post-war historiography, while not entirely rejecting the fixed and immobile cadre of the Department,² has sought out other units more capable of illustrating human currents, geographical specializations, and social mobility. Some of this change of emphasis can also be explained by alterations in the French educational system and a new administrative pattern of research. A Department suited in many ways the vast demands of a *thèse d'État*: a *professeur de lycée*, teaching in a *chef-lieu*, could spend fifteen or twenty years in his local record office; the material would be there, awaiting him almost on his front steps, many *lycées* being situated in *chefs-lieux*. Even if this system often resulted in a wait of twenty years or more before promotion to University teaching, it did at least have the advantage of ensuring that Departments that contained no universities would be afforded often as exhaustive a coverage as those that did. It was in this manner that such Departments as the Ain, the Allier, the Loire, the Lot, the Puy-de-Dôme were subjected to systematic investigation, at least at the political and administrative level.

Since the Liberation, however, the *doctorat d'État* has no longer constituted the only path of entry into the university

¹ Two Oxford researchers, Richard Maltby and Wendy Mann, the former working on the Drôme, the latter on Vaucluse, have discovered that the areas of maximum criminality are to be found on the borders of the two Departments, in the neighbourhood of Montélimar. A third researcher, Justin Wigoder, studying criminality in Champagne, has noted that similar conditions often prevailed in the border areas between the Aube and the Haute-Marne.

² Dr. Gordon Clack, for instance, has made a valuable pioneering study of one of the foreign Departments of the French Empire, that of the Mont-Tonnerre, with its *chef-lieu* in Mainz [Mayence]. There is still much work to be done on the foreign Departments, especially the Belgian ones, with which some of my own recent work has been concerned, for the Directory period. The foreign Departments offer a useful unit for the examination of the varied, complicated, and by no means necessarily hostile, relationships between *occupants* and *occupés*. It is much to be hoped that Dr. Clack's example will be followed by others. His D.Phil. thesis is as yet unpublished.

profession. The younger generation of French historians has often proved unwilling to spend years in the provinces in *lycée* teaching. This has further accentuated the Parisian bias of a great many historical studies, as well as imposing service in the galley ships of group projects. The result has often been that the individualism of the great monographs of the inter-War years has tended to give way to mass-produced *travaux d'équipe*, reflecting the preoccupations of an all-powerful *directeur d'études*. Furthermore, as far as the French Revolution is concerned, there are no more *grands maîtres*, following the death of Georges Lefebvre, himself too much of an individualist ever to have thought of forming a 'school' and who consequently cannot be said to have left any disciples. In Toulouse, it is true, Jacques Godechot has succeeded in maintaining a lively school of revolutionary studies in the South-West, but it is difficult to point to any notable pupils either of Marcel Reinhard or Albert Soboul. Young researchers with academic ambitions have gone to other centuries and to more currently fashionable subjects.

The result is that the French Revolution is now almost extinct as a research subject in France. In so far as this represents the definitive end of a very long period of cult, of witnessing for the cause, this is no bad thing. French history can well make the economy of a Mathiez. Better no work at all on the French Revolution, than that the subject should become an act of faith and a form of personal identification. Revolutionary studies have hardly been advanced either by the succession of French female historians who have fallen in love with the dead Saint-Just, or by the dreary industry of *babouvisme*. And it is likewise useful to have been able at last to escape from the narrow, artificial, and distorting limits imposed by the so-called revolutionary era, as though the years 1789 to 1794 existed somehow in suspension, were more important than previous or later ones, as though too, man, if not woman, had been reborn overnight in 1789 and had died, in a vast national *suttee*, with Robespierre on the night of 9-10 Thermidor. (Robespierre did quite well as it was, taking some one hundred and fifty people to death with himself; and this posthumous monument seems more than he deserves.) The disappearance of the French Revolution as a sort of laical religion has at least secularized the subject and has had the advantage of enabling the younger historians, most of them not French, to take the longer view and to peer over the boundaries thus set by several generations of conventional

French historians, republican or clerical, and pantheonized in the mind of every French *lycéen* by Malet and Isaac.

I am not, of course, making any special claims for the current position of French revolutionary research in *this* country, though I do not think there is any harm in blowing other peoples' trumpets, when there is an occasion such as this to do so. European history in general has seen a startling development in many British universities; and, in recent years, Oxford itself has become a major centre for research in French nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, in French politics, as well as in the history of Russia, Poland, India, Africa, Latin America, the Near and Far East. Oxford possesses a Modern German History seminar that is the best of its kind in this country. As far as European history is concerned, I think this new departure (for it is one) owes much to the creation of schools of European studies, combining, in a proper ratio, history, literature, and language. Something of the kind, though the combination is a clumsy graft rather than a considered effort at integration, now exists at Oxford and those who read History and French are normally given the possibility of spending their third year in France. In my experience, even this rather hybrid school has already had the most promising results. In this respect, we are both more fortunately placed, and much better prepared, than most American students of history. The Continent is readily accessible, and the organization, let us say, of the Oxford D.Phil. course enables the researcher to spend really long periods at his place of research: not just a year, but two, or three, or even more: the time, anyhow, to cover his material in depth, the time, too—and this is perhaps even more important—for him to allow his material to dictate to him a change of subject, total or partial, midstream. For little valuable work can be completed in a single year; and a research project that may seem excellent in Oxford or in Princeton may not stand up to the hard facts of the contents of the *dépôt* in Châlons-sur-Marne.

Furthermore, the standard of modern-language teaching in our schools has improved enormously since the War. *French Without Tears* seems to belong to a lost age, as indeed it does, and a good thing too. Most English students, once at university, are already reasonably equipped to penetrate the assumptions and allusions hidden in the linguistic wealth of a national culture; and most would agree that history and literature are inseparable as cultural subjects. We have not made the mistake in this country of attempting to make the source material of

modern French history available to as many students as possible, by filtering it through the deforming medium of translation. What would a translator make of the prose of General de Gaulle? How would he render the occasional flashes of military humour, the ever-young *verdeur* of a certain military vocabulary? How to find a trio worthy of *la rogne, la hargne, et la grogne*? And what to make of the many *gaullismes*? Braudel, it is said, has been translated into English. But what translation could ever catch the characteristics of *le style braudélien*, the idiosyncrasies of those sudden and vast geographical swoops, a terse style invocatory of climate, heat, and smell, of spices and sea winds, of fatigue and distance and wonder, verbless sentences that explode in spluttering word pictures, like huge fireworks, formless phrases that wander, like runaway horses, over the vast Hungarian plain? Braudel writes often like a seer, but we can only see what he has seen through his own eyes, and in his own incomparable language. His book is a work of literature. So there is no short cut to the appreciation of the sources; and Robespierre translated simply is not Robespierre.

In a recent review of one of my books in *The American Historical Review*, Professor R. R. Palmer, whose angle of vision is very far removed from my own—he deals in Atlantics and Continents, I deal in provincial horse-markets—after upbraiding me for concentrating on trivial and unimportant people, and for encouraging my pupils in similar self-indulgence, asks himself what has happened to the history of the French Revolution in Oxford since J. M. Thompson. I will attempt, in the rest of this lecture, to give him a detailed answer. But first it would be fair to remind Professor Palmer that I do not hold a monopoly of the subject, even in Oxford, which, at the moment, is quite remarkably well provided with specialists in the period as varied as Jack MacManners, primarily a historian of the Church, Colin Lucas, who has taken local studies to grass-roots level, and Geoffrey Ellis, the leading specialist on the market economy of Alsace under the First Empire. And, of course, there are many *other* centres of research in eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century French history in such places as Dr. Zeldin's seminar in St. Antony's College, Professor Johnson's London seminar, as well as in Reading, Manchester, Glasgow, St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Newcastle, York (where French history is especially well represented), Brighton (where there is a thriving School of French Studies happily combining history and literature), and Leicester, but not, I am sorry to say, Cambridge.

Secondly, in the expression of his fears for the future of the subject in my own university, Professor Palmer assumes for myself a degree of influence over my pupils that, given the eighteenth-century Polish structure of Oxford, indeed a confederation of independent dietines, I could not possibly possess, nor wish to possess. I think part of the trouble may be that Professor Palmer seems to be confusing Oxford with Yale or Princeton, both universities with which he has been associated in positions of authority, and *myself* with *himself*. For I suspect that much of the criticism of the manner in which he believes research in French history, at least in my own period, is being conducted in Oxford springs from what he regards as a lack of any general discipline, an absence of methodology, of unity of purpose, the unconscious inability to distinguish between the significant and the trivial, the refusal to ask, much less to answer, general questions, the shying away from the wide sweep, the rejection of comparative history, the pessimistic or lazy belief that there can never be total history. He even makes the revealing comment that those who work with me must be *enjoying* themselves, as I myself appear to be, in the company of my assorted army of individualists, bandits, drop-outs, lonely people, eccentrics, cranks, and other unimportant persons. It is an interesting sidelight on the Professor's view of research that for him any suggestion of enjoyment must be an indication of frivolity and facetiousness. If then I can assure my American critic that there is indeed no general plan, no collective orthodoxy, and that there is nothing in common between those who have at one time or another attended my seminars, or done research under my supervision, apart from these trivial facts themselves, namely that we have often been together in the same place for the same purpose, then I will at least have achieved a negative but useful result.

Perhaps I am overstating the case for diversity. For I do believe that the various historians to whom I wish to refer later, in relation to the work that they have produced or are at present undertaking, have a number of things in common. The most important, and to me the most admirable, is a certain feeling of humility and awe when confronted with the original text, with the evidence itself, such as it is laid out before them, in a large minute-book bound in parchment and probably originating from a monastic institution, in the brown-edged *procès-verbaux* of a long-drawn-out cross-examination, in the often unconscious humour and marvellous spontaneity of reported speech, in the

fading ink of a barely decipherable list of names and objects, in notes jotted down on playing cards in faded pencil, in a lock of fair hair contained in a letter found among the papers of a victim of the Terror, in the solid series of registers of a municipality, in the semi-literate minutes of a village *conseil général*, in the meagre inventory of the possessions of a *suicidé*. It is the willingness to *listen* to the wording of the document, to be governed by its every phrase and murmur, to explore behind every allusion, to read and read again in an effort to discover what is being hinted at, to attempt to put reported speech into live speech, so as to *hear* what is actually being said, in what accent and with what tone: in short, the creative imagination that can give life to language, and to see a situation as it is being described. What I have in mind is that necessary initial approach to research that a very great French historian, who spent much of his long life in records of every description, Jean Meuvret, used to describe as *le respect du document*: a feeling of humility, certainly, but also of mounting excitement and often of pure joy.

From this essential state of mind will arise other qualities which I have been delighted to discover in all those with whom I have associated, and that have come quite naturally to them: first of all, the rigid adherence to the manner, words, and order in which the document has been formulated, so that the work of the historian may be likened to that of the textual critic—and this is why former *chartistes* generally make the best French historians, especially at the present day, when they are often the *only* ones to employ a comprehensible historical language: and, even more important, the readiness constantly to be guided by the material. Historical evidence has not been conveniently placed in the way of the swift-footed historical *entrepreneur* to provide him with ready answers; and documents are not units in a meccano set. They are there because they are there, and they are all that the historian has to go on. He may *think* that he has a subject; but *they* may disagree, and may suggest to him that he should undertake another one. Although, in France, departmental and municipal records are subjected to a uniform system of indexing, in existence now for over a century, that is often the only thing that *is* uniform about them. They will differ widely in quantity, completeness, and content. Here they may speak at length of crime and banditry, there of family stress and broken marriages and domestic violence, here they may illustrate minutely the many roads to bankruptcy, there they

will inform in detail on land sales, here they will offer the living witnessing of the *fait divers* of a personal tragedy, in the form of a petition that reads, in its picaresque and human qualities, like a novelette, there they will spell out the collective assumptions of institutions and administrations, here they will refer to the attitudes of the *gendarmerie*, there of their habitual clientèle, those on the wrong side of the law, seldom indeed will they speak of both at once. And, in their disunity, variety, and unevenness, they are likely to defy the best-laid schemes, the most elaborately formulated group projects. When the time ultimately comes, and the young researcher sits, for the first time, in his *dépôt*, before his open box or his minute-book, it is a relationship of only two: himself and his material. And it is the latter that will always have the last word. No amount of preliminary guidance, of planning, will make any difference to that fact. In human terms, the research-historian is generally as lonely as the long-distance runner; but he need not be lonely, because he has his material for daily company, he has to live with it, and be informed by it. When his elder daughter died, Georges Lefebvre told me: 'J'ai perdu ma seule amie, il ne me reste que mes documents.' This was not an empty metaphor, but a bald and sad statement of fact.

I do not wish to labour further what must be an obvious point: that this is a two-way relationship between the researcher and his material and in which there is little room for a third party. In this country at least we can do without that superfluous bureaucrat of history, self-imposed in France, or the product of the centralism of research through such monopoly bodies as the C.N.R.S.: *le directeur de recherches*. The best that the supervisor can do is to suggest that one area may have been less worked on than another, or that a particular town may possess abundant municipal records. If several of my former pupils are at present engaged in work on crime and banditry, it is entirely by their own choice. I certainly have not sought to impose that, or any other, subject upon them; and already they are tackling the problem, in its local context, in a much more systematic and exhaustive manner than I have ever done in my own very tentative and perhaps somewhat literary approaches to the subject. Ultimately there is no better preparation for research than research.

Norman Hampson, who, like myself, was a pupil of J. M. Thompson, recently reminded me that perhaps the principal lesson that one retained from tutorials with that urbane revolutionary was that the French Revolution represented above all

a series of clashes of personalities, that it was about *people* rather than about classes, that, for instance, Girondins and Montagnards, *hébertistes* and *dantonistes* were not ideological football teams, but loose groups of individuals with rival ambitions, greed for power, conflicting temperaments, and varying degrees of virtue. Thompson was that no doubt old-fashioned sort of historian who believed that history should be well-written, and that it could often be best illustrated through the life of an exemplary individual: and no single man could witness better for the contradictions, the nobility, and the paranoia of Revolution than Maximilien Robespierre. It was more than time to return to that remarkable man, and to reconsider the endless debate between vice and virtue, possibilism and impossibilism; and this is what Norman Hampson has recently achieved in a biographical *tour de force* of great elegance and clarity, in the form of a sort of public debate on the subject of that everlastingly debatable individual.¹ Another historian, Hugh Gough, has just completed the life of a wandering academic and revolutionary journalist, Jean-Charles Laveaux:² it is the history of the Enlightenment, in its seedier, more spongeous aspects (for Laveaux had to teach French for his supper in a series of minor German courts), and then of the exploitation of the public events of the Revolution, first in Strasbourg, a city upon which adventurers of many nationalities descended like crows from the outset of the Revolution, then in Paris, to forward the personal ambitions of a man who, for fifteen or twenty years, had been little better than an insecure usher and an educational lackey. Nearly all the researchers with whom I have been in contact, in Wales and in Oxford, have this in common: a belief that history is, and should be, about people, and that it is a principal purpose of the historian to make these people, whoever they are, come to life, express themselves in their own words, through their own assumptions.

Colin Lucas's comprehensive study of the Terror in the Loire³ is enlivened and illuminated by the personality of the impossible Javogues; in many respects, Javogues *was* the Terror in the Loire, his personal role was fundamental. Nor can such

¹ Norman Hampson, *The Life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1974).

² Hugh Gough, 'Jean-Charles Laveaux: a political biography', unpublished D.Phil. thesis recently submitted for examination.

³ Colin Lucas, *The Structure of the Terror: the Examples of Javogues and the Loire* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1973).

a cranky, eccentric individualist witness for the general body of *Représentants en mission*. Javogues was unique. Further south, likewise studying the proliferation and composition of the institutions of the Terror, in the Aveyron,¹ Peter Jones has emphasized the importance, as a *maître-ès-révolution*, of a local deputy, Louchet, who, in letters from Paris to the Rodez club, kept his compatriots regularly instructed as to how they should interpret the confused events of the capital in the course of 1792 and 1793, and as to what action they should take in consequence.

In the Gard, Dr. Gwynne Lewis has amply demonstrated that the persistence of the White Terror in that sanguinary Department,² over some twenty-five years, can largely be attributed to the fanaticism of a single man, Froment, and to the devotion of a couple of thugs who were at his beck and call. Alan Forrest, in Bordeaux,³ Martyn Lyons, in Toulouse,⁴ have both illuminated local commitments to federalism, not merely in terms of class and quarter, but in those, too, of the influence of *notables, parlementaires*, members of the clergy, ship owners, and wine growers. In Bordeaux, three-quarters of the population were dependent, for employment, either on the wine trade, or on that in colonial goods. Whatever direction the wine growers and the sugar merchants took, most would have to follow, if they knew what was good for them. It is significant that, in Dr. Forrest's study, the *one* element of the population that succeeded in remaining almost entirely outside federalism were the poor inhabitants of the *faubourgs*, pedlars, market-gardeners, itinerant traders in rabbit-skins. Dr. Lyons not only illustrates the predominant influence of the *parlementaires*, as the principal employers of labour: he shows how, collectively, the Toulousains succeeded in closing their ranks and in excluding interfering strangers from prying into their business, by using, in their presence, the local dialect, often in song. In a third study of federalism, William Scott, in his book on Marseille,⁵ has

¹ Peter Jones, 'The Revolutionary Committees of the Aveyron during the Terror', D.Phil. thesis in course of completion.

² Gwynne Lewis, 'The Second White Terror in the Gard', D.Phil. thesis to be published by The Clarendon Press.

³ Alan Forrest, 'The Federalist Crisis in Bordeaux', D.Phil. thesis to be published by The Clarendon Press, in the Oxford Historical Monographs series.

⁴ Martyn Lyons, 'The Revolutionary Committees of Toulouse', D.Phil. thesis to be published by the Cambridge University Press.

⁵ William Scott, *Terror and Repression in Revolutionary Marseilles* (Macmillan, 1973).

demonstrated the fundamental role of local educated élites: men of law, merchants, ship owners, men in the spice trade, soap and oil manufacturers, in inducing the Sections to go over to federalism, and that this role was fully recognized by the repressive authorities, who generally acquitted those who could not read, reserving their wrath for those who could.

Richard Andrews,¹ an American historian who has worked in Oxford and who possesses great literary gifts and a marvellous feeling for the topography of Paris, has succeeded in the very difficult task of combining series of personal case-histories of Sectionary leaders: *juges de paix*, *commissaires de police*, and members of the revolutionary *comités civils*, influential bodies dealing out a great deal of patronage and relief, the importance of which has been greatly underestimated by Albert Soboul, with the collective pressures of environment, overcrowding, quarrels between neighbours, the relations between the character of a quarter and the break-up of marriages, the predominant trade specializations of a given area, and an exhaustive presentation of all available statistical evidence: the number of householders, of wine-shops, of lodging-houses, the age-structure of a quarter, the number of bachelors and spinsters, life-expectancy, and rates of birth and death. The outstanding individual is thus firmly and convincingly placed in his chosen background as he follows those who, in the course of the Revolution, emerge as members of political élites, from the time of their arrival in Paris—for few are native-born Parisians—from the north-east, the east, and the centre, generally fifteen or twenty years before the Revolution—time enough to acquire a reputation in the village world of the quarter—through each stage of the Revolution. The result is a study of great vivacity, humour, and imagination, and of much greater historical penetration than Soboul's somewhat lifeless regiments of *sans-culottes*, all of them at once responsive to the promptings of their Marxist drill-sergeant. Dr. Andrews has studied his personnel *dans la durée*, and not just in the sudden stillness of an exceptional crisis and under pressure from the collective orthodoxies of the Year Two. The result is that a great many militants whom Soboul does not hesitate to define as typical *sans-culottes* in social and economic terms emerge as men of substance, many of them former *citoyens actifs*, even *notables*. Taking their lives from the time of

¹ Richard Andrews's study of the leading personnel of three Paris Sections is shortly to be published in French by Mouton et Cie, of Paris and The Hague. It is based on his D.Phil. thesis.

their arrival in the capital, he has been able to give full scope to gradualness, to habit and to respect, as elements of the growing influence of men well known in their quarters and whose exemplary family life has contributed further to their repute. One of the indirect results of this approach is to emphasize *the continuity*, in terms of careers, between the *ancien régime* and the Revolution, though the Revolution, as a result of the special claims of newly formed institutions, often tended to speed the upward ascension of many people who had previously been stagnating in their professions or trades. His work is the most remarkable current example of the combination of detailed statistical evidence, the social topography of a given quarter, the influence of environment on personal and collective behaviour, and the sophisticated and imaginative use of carefully selected and brilliantly interpreted personal case-histories. Each of these admirably composed mini-biographies witnesses not merely for one man, but for a whole category of recently formed élites, most of them within a definable age group between thirty-five and fifty.

Displaying similar qualities of imagination and compassion, and with the addition of a gentle humour that the rather sombre Andrews seldom allows himself, Jack McManners,¹ Olwen Hufton,² and Paul Pressley,³ another American who has worked at Oxford, in their presentation of individuals, are likewise human historians of great force. McManners has a ready eye for the foibles, eccentricities, pettinesses, and ultimate heroism of many of his priests and canons, while Dr. Hufton is especially expert at rediscovering the aspirations and grievances and small pleasures of those, mostly very poor women, who are too ill educated, too confused to give them clear written expression. She is as aware of the *frenesie* of leisure as of the enormous burden of work. Paul Pressley, in his study of the university personnel of the Restoration period, mostly sexagenarian priests and monks, has likewise shown great skill in the use of such material; and

¹ Canon McManners is the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford. He has published books on ecclesiastical society in Angers at the end of the eighteenth century, on the French Revolution and the Church, and on Church and State in nineteenth-century France.

² Olwen Hufton, whose thesis on eighteenth-century Bayeux was published by The Clarendon Press, has a book appearing with the same publisher on Problems of Poverty in eighteenth-century France.

³ Paul Pressley submitted a D.Phil. thesis on educational personnel in Restoration France. He is at present engaged in further research on the personnel of *lycées* and *collèges* with a view to publication.

some of his accounts of educational entrepreneurs and adventurers, as they depart with the furniture and the food, are hilarious as well as revealing of the highly uncertain economic and social status of the average small town *collège*.

At an entirely different personal level of society, three young historians, John Rogister,¹ Martin Mansergh,² and John Hardman,³ have succeeded in pursuing, through the highly allusive language of the Court, the recalcitrant personalities of Louis XV and his grandson. John Hardman, thanks to a minute dissection of the conventional language of the Court, a language which was deliberately designed to appear to say what it did *not* mean, or to reveal as little as possible, has even succeeded in giving an identity to the highly elusive Louis XVI, enveloped, whenever he was not driven out into the open, in *les silences du Roi*. The work of all three political historians is a very good example of the problems set by a language calculated to be hermetic. Each has submitted himself to such a long familiarity with his material: the subtle arguments of *parlementaires*, the hints and allusions of court gossip, the circumlocutious interventions of intermediaries, the majestic evasiveness of kings, that one has the feeling that they themselves have been deeply affected by these delicate exercises in the concealment of conflict and that they, too, have acquired both the prudence and deep subtlety of the *milieux* about which they write. All three have admirably succeeded in penetrating a manner of speech and writing that was never meant for all to read. I have referred frequently to this importance of language; and it could nowhere be better illustrated than in the studies of historians who have completely *renewed*, or even *created*, the political history of the last two reigns of the *ancien régime*: an enterprise so daunting that, before them, no French historian had made the effort thus to cross the wall of silence and allusion.

So much for history about human beings. I believe, too, that those researchers to whom I have referred also have in common, to a greater or lesser degree, another quality that, in my opinion, is essential to the historian: the feeling for place, for ambience, the

¹ Dr. Rogister's D.Phil. thesis on the Court conflicts of the 1750s is to be published by The Clarendon Press in the Oxford Historical Monographs series.

² Dr. Mansergh has written an unpublished D.Phil. thesis on the *Parlement Maupeou* of 1770.

³ Dr. Hardman, who is the editor of the second volume of *French Revolution Documents* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1973), is the author of a D.Phil. thesis on Ministerial Preferment under Louis XVI.

sense of topography, that happy combination of History and Geography (plus something else as well) that, under the old *agrégation*, used to be the characteristic of French historians of Lefebvre's generation. Of the works that I have mentioned, the three that best illustrate this capacity to *see* are those of Colin Lucas, Alan Forrest, and Richard Andrews. Dr. Lucas has himself explored every corner of the Loire, been up every mountain, followed every valley, has seen his hill-villages in the summer and under snow, has experienced the extreme physical discomforts of this mountainous and recalcitrant area, and has succeeded in recreating an eighteenth-century sense of distance, very different from our own, because it is that of a walking and riding age. He is aware of the prevailing winds, and, like the Foréziens about whom he writes with warmth and understanding, he too is aware that no good is likely to come out of the Auvergne, neither man, nor beast, nor rumour, nor weather. Like Javogues himself, he keeps a wary eye to the south-west, to the great barrier of Le Pilat. He is aware, too, of the likely channels of communication, and, if necessary, of retreat and escape; he knows where the road to Paris pulls up steeply, where, in consequence, highwaymen and bandits are likely to lie in wait for the mail-coach; he is constantly on the alert for the dangers that may come in from Lyon, having learnt that federalism rode in from there at the beginning of the crisis. He is conscious of the ancient and bitter rivalries between small market towns for which the possession of an administrative centre may make all the difference between relative prosperity and total deprivation; he knows in what quarter of Roanne the rivermen are likely to live, and how much water there is likely to be in the shallow, swift-running Loire at a given season. Within each of his small towns, he can judge which people are likely to live where, and thus he is able to reconstruct the geography of work and leisure, neighbourliness, friendship, and marriage. He has spotted the likely meeting place, on the *Cours*, of the female servant or *brodeuse* on her day off. And having spent years working in Saint-Étienne, he has come to appreciate that inbred town, cut in two by the Rue Longue, and has become accepted by the Stéphanois, unaccustomed to visitors from outside. He can relate the geography of the past to that of the present, quoting from *Le Monde* on the subject of the protest made by the inhabitants of some mountain village at the threat of the closure of a branch-line that had enabled the villagers to come down to the town in the plain on market days and weekends.

Alan Forrest has done equally well by Bordeaux and its poor *faubourgs* and shanty towns beyond the gates of the city. He has firmly placed each section of the population in its accustomed milieu, differentiating between the visible recent luxury of the Quai des Chartrons and the Cours Torcy, and the medieval and Renaissance squalor of Sainte-Croix and Pey-Berland; and he can appreciate the central importance of les Quinquonces as a meeting place in leisure, and as a magnet for riot and tumult in times of political or social unrest, the vast open space being situated on the frontier between the quarters of eighteenth-century elegance and the equally recent slum houses of poor artisans and watermen. Les Quinquonces is as important to one's understanding of the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bordeaux as would be *le Cours* and les Brotteaux to the histories of Marseille and Lyon during the same period.

Like the Bordelais themselves, Dr. Forrest is constantly aware of the proximity of the great river, the principal source of wealth and employment, the visible indicator of the collapse of the port's economy in times of naval blockade, for when the Gironde is empty of shipping, then the Bordelais will suffer, but also the carrier of infection, epidemics, and pestilential smells, seasonal flooding, the invasion of the riverside quarters by armies of rats, the miasmatic waters rising, especially during the annual February floods, in the basements of the cathedral quarter and of Sainte-Croix and Saint-Louis. The necessary accompaniment to any of Mauriac's doom-ridden novels, set in the sultry summer heat, is the dank smell of subterranean channels of stagnant water, now the very smell of a city slowly dying.

The river also dictates the principal channels of movement, from east to west, forcing the travellers across the single great bridge, which thus becomes a constant centre of rumour and a starting place for tumult, a bridge of even greater importance than the Pont-Neuf in Paris or the Pont de la Guillotière in Lyon, enjoying the monopoly of linking the Entre-Deux-Mers to the peninsula between the Gironde and the Dordogne. The far bank is like a foreign land, inhabited by strange people, *au teint basané*, perhaps coming down from the higher Pyrenees, from les Landes or les Causses: tinsmiths, pedlars, gipsies, the floating population that in the nineteenth century would enable well-to-do Bordelais, and even substantial peasants from the Gironde, to buy their sons out of the army, through the system of *remplacement* that flourished as nowhere else in this traditionally unpatriotic town. Politically, this was a population

almost unaffected by federalism, for it was so poor as to be outside the economic and social solidarity of the city itself. In Bordeaux, as in the Toulouse described by Martyn Lyons, but more so, there is a right and a wrong side of the river, the difference being that, in Bordeaux, the distance between the two banks is so great that the underprivileged inhabitants of the far side are seldom tempted to invade the town, while *le bon bourgeois bordelais*, on a Sunday excursion, is unlikely to be tempted to explore the Savagery of Nature and to reflect upon Primitive Man, on the low-lying far bank. In Toulouse, on the other hand, those who live on the marshy, unprotected south bank of the Garonne—armies of lackeys, sedan-chair carriers, domestic servants—will cross the river daily, to work in the *parlementaire* and ecclesiastical quarters on the north bank, and, in times of stress, to invade its markets and pillage its town houses.

In this respect, the *carte Michelin* can still be an indispensable guide to the historian of the eighteenth century, provided that he mentally eliminates the *autoroutes*. But the best witnesses are his own eyes. English researchers, not being unduly pressed for time, are given plenty of opportunity to familiarize themselves with the shape of a city, with the distances between various central points, and with the irremovable facts of geography (though, as in Lyon, with the construction of the road tunnel under la Croix-Rousse, some of these facts can in fact be removed). Dr. Forrest once told me that, living outside Bordeaux, in Talence, during the events of May–June 1968, and having to walk each day into the city, he was able to acquire something of an eighteenth-century sense of distance and movement. Another researcher, Peter Jones, who succeeded in integrating himself into the isolated community of the small town of Rodez, a place seldom visited by tourists, by playing rugby for one of the *rodézien* teams, wrote to me on the subject of an 11 November procession which followed exactly the same itinerary as those of the *fête-dieu* and the *jour des morts* of the pre-revolutionary period. Even the names of most of those participating in the Armistice Day celebrations were familiar to him from the records.

It is this awareness of local continuities, derived only from familiarity, that seems to me to be the peculiar strength of much of the work that I have been describing. These historians have put down roots in the communities in which, for a time, they have lived, and I do not think it is a matter of indifference that, at the present time, anyone walking into a local French *dépôt*

d'archives is almost certain to come across a young Englishman, already well *au fait* with the unpredictable whims of the local archivist, well able to cajole his way into the secret alcoves of the *dépôt* itself. Research abroad is an experience in itself that almost always enriches the researcher, revealing in him unsuspected depths of patience, diplomacy, and persuasion. The sound that I most like to hear is when a local archivist tells me: 'un des vôtres est passé par ici, il est devenu excellent joueur aux boules.' There is plenty more to it than just looking at archives; the evenings and the weekends have to be filled in, there are social obligations to be met, and social ties to be formed. A town has to be witnessed over months, through the seasons, for the pattern of its collective life gradually to become comprehensible.

These common features I like to think represent the particular contribution of a group of mainly Oxford historians to an understanding of the social history of eighteenth-century France. But, in insisting on them, I may appear to be suggesting that there has grown up in some way an Oxford 'school'; and this would be unfair both to the researchers with whom I have been in contact, and to myself. It would also leave unnoticed the very wide diversity of subjects that have been, or are being covered, and that includes the Society of United Irishmen and France,¹ the economy of Alsace during the Continental System,² the life of Jewish communities during the revolutionary period,³ French feminist movements in the early twentieth century,⁴ family stress in Rouen during the Revolution,⁵ sport and class in late-nineteenth-century France,⁶ women and marriage during the same period,⁷ or, as a long shot, and it is a very long one, the effects of the French Revolution on Java.⁸

¹ Miss Marianne Burns is at present engaged on a D.Phil. thesis on the relations between the United Irishmen and France under the Directory, the Consulate, and the Empire.

² Dr. Ellis, who is a Fellow of Hertford College, is at present revising his D.Phil. thesis for publication with The Clarendon Press, in the Oxford Historical Monographs series.

³ Michael Shepherd is at present completing a D.Phil. thesis on the Jewish communities of revolutionary France.

⁴ James Macmillan is at present completing a D.Phil. thesis on French feminist movements at the period of the First World War.

⁵ R. G. Phillips is at present engaged on research in Rouen, using the papers of the *tribunaux de famille* in the Archives départementales de la Seine-Maritime.

⁶ Richard Holt is completing a D.Phil. thesis on this subject.

⁷ Miss Elizabeth Glass is completing a thesis on this subject.

⁸ Peter Carey is completing a D.Phil. thesis on a religious and agrarian rising in Java in 1825–30.

It is in this very diversity of interest that resides the surviving strength of our historical tradition, not merely in Oxford, but in the seminars conducted in other universities. If I have spoken almost exclusively of what is being done in my own seminar, it is not an effort to advertise its wares, but merely because I am well acquainted with its members and their work, and because I believe it can witness for the remarkably encouraging state of Modern French History in this country. I do not see then why I should not end on a tone of national optimism, especially at a time when we are so often being reminded by others, or are reminding ourselves, to use a French expression which has now become somewhat inappropriate, of our own *portugalisation*. Most of the historians to whom I have referred are fairly young, the oldest hardly forty; their presence in British universities, including a powerful colony in Scotland, their enthusiasm for their subjects and for the demands that they make on the individual researcher, a stranger in a strange land faced with the effort of becoming a friend in a familiar one, their ability to communicate their sense of adventure to others, seem to provide a reasonable guarantee that well-written and readable research in Modern French History can look forward to a profitable future over here. I wish I could be equally optimistic about the present state and the future of Modern *English* History in *France*, and that I could point to a modern Guizot, a modern Halévy. But that is another subject, and this is not the place to draw invidious comparisons, however satisfying they may be to the British historians of Europe.