W. OWEN CHADWICK

William Owen Chadwick

20 May 1916 – 17 July 2015

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1962

by

JOHN MORRILL
Fellow of the Academy

Owen Chadwick KBE OM was President of British Academy 1981–85, at the pinnacle of a career in which he was the longest-serving Head of any Oxford or Cambridge college in modern times (27 years), Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge in difficult times (1969–71), and Regius Professor of History at Cambridge 1968–83. He chaired the Archbishops' Commission on the relations of Church and State (1966–70), and sat on innumerable commissions and committees. Yet he found time to write 23 books and publish about 70 essays, many versions of public lectures delivered in all five continents. He was not only admired but much loved as a man of towering integrity, effortless charm and modesty.

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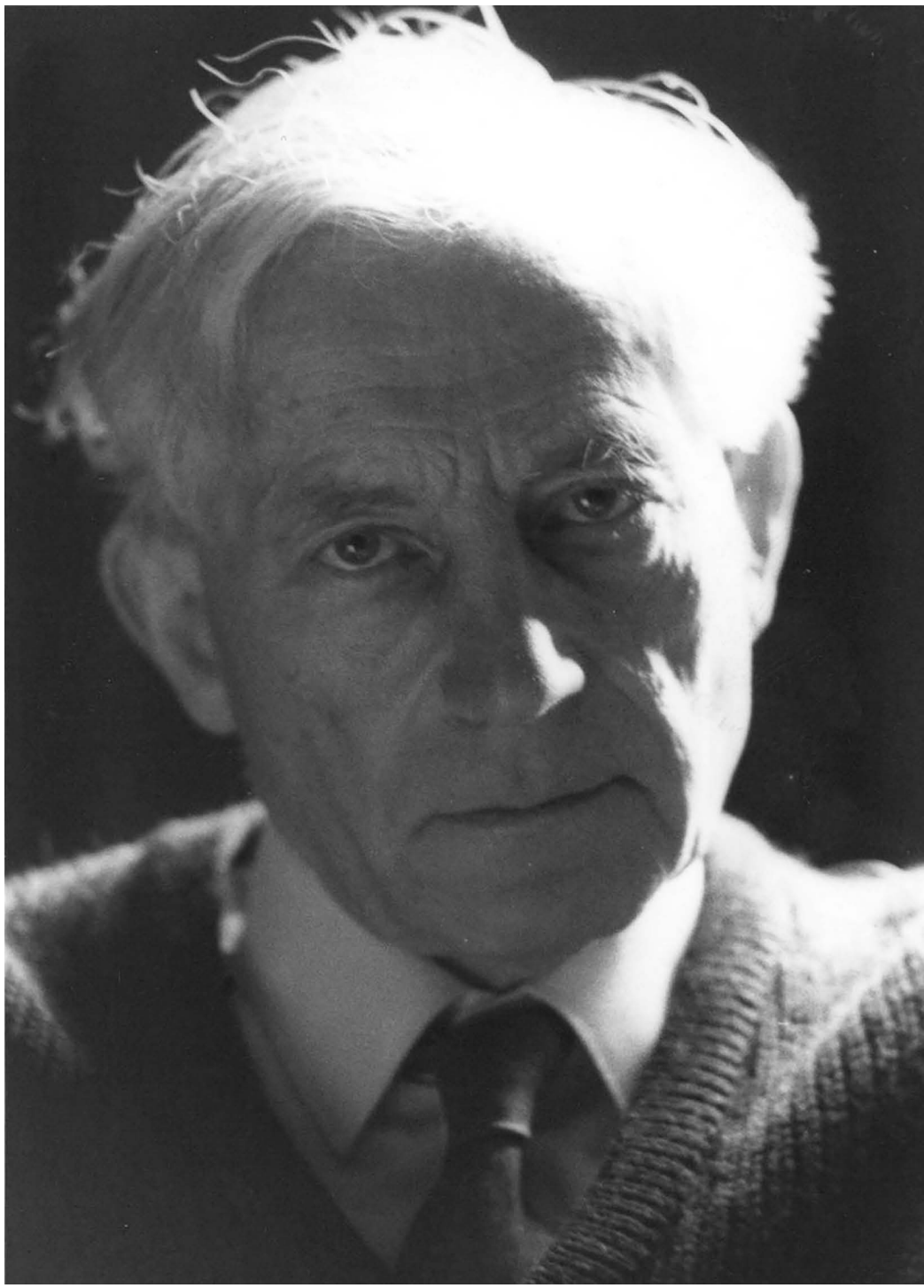

W. O. Chadwick

Not the least of Owen Chadwick's legion achievements was his service to the British Academy, which included steering it away from the rocks as its President in the early 1980s. And indeed in a career in which he was an unassuming Lord of All He Surveyed, the early 1980s was one of two mighty peaks. In 1981, he became President of the Academy, and was awarded (almost uniquely) a lifetime achievement Wolfson History award; in 1982 he was awarded a KBE (not, importantly, a KB); and in 1983 the Queen awarded him an Order of Merit, and this coincided with his retirement after 15 years as Regius Professor of Modern History and 27 years as Master of Selwyn College Cambridge, marked by many celebrations. In those three years, he also managed to publish a short biography of John Henry Newman, a long biography of Hensley Henson, and his magisterial *The Popes and European Revolution*.

The previous peak to his public career, when incidentally he and his wife Ruth were lovingly bringing up their four children, was in the years 1968–70, when he became Regius Professor, was chairing the disputatious Archbishops' Commission on the relations of Church and State (which published its report in 1970), and – in the midst of what passed for revolutionary activity in Cambridge – he served as the University's Vice-Chancellor. In those years he 'only' found time to complete and publish the (510-page) second volume of what many think his masterpiece, *The Victorian Church*. In 1968 Owen was 52, in 1983 he was 67. If we go back rather than forward 15 years, to 1953, when he was 37 years old, he was the Dean of Trinity Hall Cambridge and had published just one book, *John Cassian* (1950), a profound but slim volume (1950), and was working on a study of how the Church(es) understood change (the concept of *semper eadem*) to be entitled, without subtitle, *From Bossuet to Newman* (1957).

Rarely can a career have taken off in middle age as much as his did. On his 40th birthday, he had one book to his name. By his 80th birthday in 1996 he had twenty-two and a vast penumbra of brilliant and scintillating short publications emanating from public lectures on a bewildering variety of subjects and periods – to select five as representative as any – *Tennison and Virgil* (1968), *John Knox and Revolution* (1975), *The Making of the Benedictine Ideal* (1981), *Classical Anglicanism and Lancelot Andrews* (1987), and *Prince Albert and the University* (1997). There were many other occasional pieces, a delicious 14-page introduction to the Folio Society edition of Trollope's *The Warden* (1995) for example.[1] As we will see, he was well able to decline senior bishoprics in the Church, but not able to decline myriad invitations to contribute to good causes, especially intellectual ones.

[1] His bibliography down to 1983 can be found in Best & Beales (see below n. 11), and after 1983 has been compiled for the current author by Olivia Saunders as part of her work experience in a gap year before matriculating at Oxford.

Early life (1916–1956)

William Owen Chadwick was born at his family home in Bromley (Kent) on 20 May 1916, the third of six children of John Chadwick, a barrister, and Edith (née Horrocks). His father, who he remembered fondly, although work caused him to be absent as much as present, died when Owen was 14. He told Alan Macfarlane FBA in an interview in 2008[2] that he did not have much of a relationship with his mother, and he was repelled by her zealous embracing of Christian Science. Owen's daughter Helen told one remarkable anecdote about Owen and his mother at his memorial service. When she was widowed, she persuaded Owen to drive her round in the family car – though still aged 14 and barely able to see the road ahead. They were eventually stopped by the police and arrested. Owen was charged with driving without a licence or insurance, and his mother with aiding and abetting an offender. The magistrate fined them one pound for each offence, at which his mother expostulated 'but he has always been such a careful driver'.[3] Some embroidery no doubt, but a kernel of truth. What she shared with her children, for certain, was a love of music. Owen's younger brother Henry read Music at Cambridge and could have had a career as a professional musician. Owen was a listener with broad tastes (Bach to Gilbert and Sullivan), but was often heard to say that he did not like anything too old or too modern: Purcell to Parry was fine. He often recalled being the soloist in 'O for the wings of dove' at Tonbridge.[4] But his voice never competed with that of the choir in later years.

It was a remarkable group of siblings: his elder brother, (Sir) John, became a distinguished diplomat,[5] and Owen and his two younger brothers, Henry and Martin, were all ordained in the Church of England, Henry having an academic career almost as stellar as Owen's.[6] Martin followed him as Chaplain of Trinity Hall, but his career was arrested by chronic ill-health. One sister became a leader writer on *The Economist*, and following her marriage to a senior Australian diplomat became a speech writer for the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies. The younger sister became a physiotherapist.

[2] www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1114492

[3] Address by Helen Chadwick at the memorial service on 30 January 2016. All the addresses given at his funeral on 3 August 2015 (by Sir David Harrison and the Rt Rev. Robert Hardy) and at his memorial service on 30 January 2016 (by Helen Chadwick, Rev. Professor John Morrill and Rt Rev. Richard Harries) are currently available on the Selwyn College website: https://www.sel.cam.ac.uk/news/tributes-owen-chadwick and https://www.sel.cam.ac.uk/news/remembering-owen

[4] Address by Helen Chadwick at the memorial service.

[5] Jeremy Morris, 'Chadwick, (William) Owen, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (henceforth *ODNB*).

[6] See their entries in *ODNB* or more simply Eamon Duffy's speech at the unveiling of the plaque in memory of both of them in Westminster Abbey on 1 February 2018. The biographical memoir of Henry Chadwick by Rowan Williams FBA was published in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 166 (2010), 79–99.

He was educated at Tonbridge School where he excelled above all at rugby, and it was this more than anything else that secured him a place at St John's College Cambridge, where he matriculated in 1935. In 1937 he was placed in the Third class of part 1 of the Classics Tripos (a tribute to his dedication to rugby), and he then switched to History, being placed in the First class in part 2 of the Historical Tripos in 1938 while captaining the rugby team, and he stayed on for a fourth year and gained another First class of the Theological Tripos in 1939. He did not get starred Firsts: in the 1938 History list those went to Noel Annan, Hugh Aveling (later a Benedictine monk and historian of English Catholicism in the penal times), and Vivian Fisher (who became a Fellow of Jesus and University Lecturer in Anglo-Saxon history). In the Theological Tripos of 1939 the only starred First was awarded to Ian Ramsey, later Bishop of Durham, being elected, at least by common fame, only after Owen had turned it down.[7]

He continued to excel at rugby, gaining blues as hooker in each of his first three years. Indeed, during his first Long Vac he even went with the British Lions to play in Argentina, being hooker in the team that beat the full Argentine XV 23–0. There was a murky episode in which (there is no doubt) the rugby team wrecked a train, for which Owen (as captain) is widely reported to have been rusticated, but the details of that rustication have been unclear. In his obituary for Owen in his college annual report, Peter Linehan said that Owen was rusticated for one term, during which his Tutor met him 'in pubs outwith the University's jurisdiction [and] drilled enough Ancient History into him to secure a Third in part I Classics'.[8] Perhaps he was not rusticated but suspended from playing rugby, and he certainly did not play for the university in 1938–9 but then resumed his playing career with Blackheath and indeed England (playing one international against a New Zealand team).[9] He was very proud of being made President of the Cambridge University Rugby Club, and while later he was very reluctant to wear the insignia of the OM awarded by the Queen, he was more than happy to sport the All Blacks Tie awarded him by the all-conquering touring team in 1977.[10]

Certainly his college seems not to have taken his misdemeanours all that seriously and awarded him a travel scholarship to learn German in Germany, although events in

[7] All references to examination classes taken from the relevant special issue each July of the *Cambridge Reporter*.

[8] The threat to his career may have been civil not academic. David Cannadine tells me that a Norfolk neighbour (an admirer of Owen's) told him that he had heard that, when Owen's tutor got wind of the fact that he was at the police station and in danger of being charged, he rushed there and successfully begged the police not to charge him, on the grounds that if Owen had been charged, it would have been impossible to ordain him a priest, thereby 'saving' Owen for everything that came after.

[9] Information from most of the obituaries, but most accurately from those in *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Church Times*, *The Tablet* in the days after his death.

[10] As reported by Richard Fisher in his obituary of Owen in the Cambridge University Press in-house newsletter (28 July 2015), together with the obituary of another St John's man, Jack Goody.

and after 1939 prevented him taking it up. And in the summer of his third year, his Tutor (and historian of Roman trade) Martin Charlesworth took him on a walking holiday along Hadrian's Wall with the aim of turning his mind more to scholarship and more to God.[11] In an extraordinary four-page letter to his brother Henry, dated 7 April 1968, he asked himself the question: 'how far did Mother influence my religion.' He had rejected her fierce Christian Science 'religiosity' and found it unintelligently rational, but he was confronted by the fact that five of six children had become devout Anglicans, and three of her four sons Anglican clergymen. He described his own attitude thus: 'when I became an Anglican about the winter of 1937–8 that I was passing from a condition of apathy, indifference and hostility [and] that the element of hostility was indeed present because of my mother's religiosity.'[12] He went on to say that he felt, indeed in 1988 still felt, an outsider to the Church of England. He is strangely incoherent about whether her desire for her children to be religious, 'to believe in the New Testament and the moral teaching of Jesus', had something to do with it. Later in life, men of deep faith saw in him not so much a theologian as a man caught up with the awe of sacramental encounter, a faith far more of the heart than of the brain, and a faith that did not need too much in the way of intellectual apparatus. In a letter to Henry on 12 May 1982, about the latter's problems with getting the Roman curia to accept the recommendations of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), he wrote: 'It is curial divinity, dry, remote, uncomprehending, immured, and squeezing the juice of religion out of the grape of theology to produce a withered raisin'. However complicated the person of faith's necessary engagement with a fallen world, in exploring that person's faith, one began and ended with mystery.

It is important that Charlesworth challenged Owen's angry agnosticism about God together with his wilful ignorance about politics. In later life, Owen told the editors of his *Festschrift* that his epiphany was learning from Charlesworth about Martin Niemöller, the Lutheran pastor who stood up to the Nazis, was tried by a special court and walked free, only to be immediately re-arrested as he left the court by the Gestapo and taken as their guest first to Sachsenhausen and then to Dachau where he perished. In his interview with Alan Macfarlane in 2008, Owen went further. He was young, foolish and uninterested in politics in 1936, he told Macfarlane, and so he took no interest in violence around the Nazi seizure of power in his teens, or when in 1936, when he was 20, attention was focused on the Spanish civil war. Both sides in that conflict, he said, seemed to him equally awful.[13]

[11] Discussed in Derek Beales & Geoffrey Best (eds), *History, Society and the Churches: essays in honour of Owen Chadwick* (1985), pp. 1–8. This volume also includes a full bibliography, at pp. 301–18, of his writings down to the end of 1983.

[12] For the letters between Owen and Henry, see below n. 22.

[13] www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1114492

The violation of the rule of law in the Niemöller case, so swiftly followed by the annexation of Austria (just after he had climbed in the Tyrol and found the people delightful and contemptuous of Nazism), made him see in an instant that there was a new barbarism on the rise. He told Alan Macfarlane in 2008 that 'I thought that was the most hellish thing possible, so I suddenly woke up to Hitler … There seemed to be a curious parallel between this barbarism in central Europe and the fifth century',[14] and he made an instant connection with the state of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th centuries. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* became his constant companion. But, as he put it, while all this made many of his contemporaries into communists, it made him a Christian. There is little doubt that from then on the dilemma of public duty and private (could it be?) conscience was a nagging obsession very obvious in Owen's scholarship. He may too have been slow to grasp the magnitude of the evil (a term Owen would have owned) at the heart of Nazism. As he told Geoffrey Best, editor of his *Festschrift*: 'Niemöller looked from England like the European conscience standing on moral principle against tyranny; the freest man in Germany, despite his confinement.'[15]

The conversion to History and to God (and a scholarship from St John's following his First class in History) persuaded him to stay on for a fourth year. Within the Theological Tripos there was the option of focusing exclusively on church history. He wanted to study the late patristic period but the professor was 'ga-ga' (Owen's phrase in his conversation with Alan Macfarlane in 2008),[16] so he had a year of independent study, although no doubt Charlesworth – who was himself working on the economic history of late antiquity – gave him informal help. Unsupervised but examined, he was awarded another First. He also decided during this year to take Holy Orders, and was accepted to study at Cuddesdon, outside Oxford, the college of the Establishment and of prayer-book Catholics with deep Tractarian roots. His history of the college (a scholarly and by no means pious work) is full of frankness and affection. Even its founder, Samuel Wilberforce, is shown not to be without his vanities and short-sightedness, in part responsible for the college's difficult birth and a sickly childhood.[17]

He later said that the months following the German invasion of France, the Dunkirk evacuation and the Blitz were the unhappiest of his life. He was torn between volunteering as a soldier and staying in his Anglican seminary. Those closest to him urged him to stay put and then to volunteer as an army chaplain. He agreed but with an uneasy conscience over the consequent delay. When he was ordained in 1941, he was told by his Bishop that he must serve as curate first, and he was sent to an industrial parish in

[14] From the interview with Alan Macfarlane, www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1114492. The quotation is also to be found in the obituary by Marcus Williamson in *The Independent*, 22 July 2015.
[15] Beales & Best, *History, Society and the Churches*, p. 2.
[16] www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1114492
[17] See below n. 33.

Huddersfield. He was finally offered the chaplaincy of an infantry regiment, but again his Bishop demurred, saying that Owen needed more experience. He arranged for Owen to be a school chaplain and specifically at a college that prepared men for the sharp end of war.[18] Wellington College in Berkshire was first and foremost a seminary for soldiers, and it had lost more of its young men in the Great War than any other school (700 dead, 2000 seriously wounded). As Owen presided as chaplain there, the memorial wall was a reminder of the call to sacrifice. 'Being wartime', he later recalled, 'the boys would really want to know about eternal things and basic moralities of Christian civilisation in the face of Nazism and Communism'.[19] An interesting apposition in the first half of the sentence, and a revealing conjunction (this was in 1943) in the second. All the sermons I had ever heard him give dwelt on both the eternal verities of God and right conduct. He stayed at Wellington for four years in all, before being appointed chaplain (and soon thereafter Dean) at Trinity Hall. He was 31 and unmarried when he arrived back in Cambridge. He was to spend the remaining 68 years of his life there.

There can be little doubt that the inner turmoil of 1938–45 shaped his intellectual passions for the rest of his life: the mystery of his call to faith and to service in the Church; the push towards the harsh realities of the front line of war and concern for the poverty of so many, yet also the pull of the desert, or its modern equivalent, the ivory tower. It took time for him to feel sure that his call was to the latter, but that his mission in that comfortable calling was one full of moral and pastoral obligation. His writings were to explore how men of faith worked out their special calling. The world was a broken place and we could not act in it as though it was already the world we would like it to be. To paraphrase John Henry Newman, who Owen became fascinated by no later than his time at Cuddesdon, 'God has created [each person] to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to [each of us] which He has not committed to another.'[20] Owen was struggling to recognise what his mission was. Once he did find it, that serenity all who knew him saw in him radiated unremittingly out of him.

He spent ten fulfilling years at Trinity Hall, for the last few of them serving also as a University Lecturer in Divinity. He also met and (in 1949) married Ruth Hallward, daughter of the redoubtable Bertrand Hallward, former Classics don and Fellow of Peterhouse, then headmaster of Clifton and recently appointed Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham University. Hallward excelled in organising anything he thought needed to be organised, but happily this fell short of organising his daughters' marriages. Owen preached at the wedding of one of his rugby chums in Clifton chapel and Ruth was one of the bridesmaids.

[18] Personal memorandum provided by Sir David Harrison to the author.
[19] Mileham, *Wellington College* (2008), p. 102; for the Great War, see pp. 69–79.
[20] Easily found online, as at https://columbans.co.uk/pray/7472/the-mission-of-my-life-cardinal-john-henry-newman/

She said he had mumbled in his sermon, he replied that he was addressing the couple not the congregation. It was love at first sight. Theirs was a strong marriage of mutual respect.[21] Owen was a loving father and much more of a constant presence than his own father ever was, and he created as much space as he could for family time, and Ruth knew and understood and accepted the duties of being the spouse of a public man. He did not have to ask her to be by his side. She relished being so. They had four children together, and in addition to the Master's Lodge they acquired a lovely cottage next to the church in Cley-next-the-Sea (although in fact no longer next the Sea) as a retreat: they kept a small sailing boat at what had become next-the-sea now two miles away.

Alongside him, too, at the end of his time at Wellington and in his ten years at Trinity Hall, was his brother Henry. Henry was four years younger but, because of the disruptions of the war and because he had an accelerated degree (in music) and a shorter curacy, his career caught up with Owen's. He arrived at Wellington just a year after Owen and left for Cambridge before him, becoming chaplain of Queens' College in 1945. He left to become Regius Professor of Divinity in Oxford in 1969, the year after Owen became Regius Professor of History in Cambridge. They rose effortlessly in parallel. They were as close as brothers could be, writing to one another with great candour every Sunday afternoon for the rest of their lives. But these were intertwined lives, not parallel ones. They co-edited the exceptional Oxford History of the Christian Church; and Henry was for 30 years the editor of the *Journal of Theological Studies*, during which time he commissioned Owen to write almost 100 reviews, often four or more in a year (in 1959 it reached seven) and even in the 1970s it was rarely less than two. It is unlikely that Owen played no part in the recruitment of Henry to Wellington, and certain that he played some part in Henry's elevation to the Regius Chair in Oxford. And when Owen was asked by Penguin Books to serve as Editor for its (originally) six-volume Pelican History of the Church (later Penguin History of the Church), he asked Henry to write the anchor volume on *The Early Christian Church*. They wrote to one another very frequently, and 250 of Owen's letters survive and are in the possession of the family. They visited one another very regularly and spoke on the phone, so the content of the letters represents only one dimension of shared concerns. Family matters are constant, followed regularly from the mid–1970s by letters about the frustrations of editing the Oxford History of the Christian Church – eventually only sixteen volumes appeared (totalling 10,000 pages), although more than 50 authors promised to write for the series. The next most common element in their letters is discussion of candidates for the divinity chairs in Oxford and more particularly Cambridge, where unvarnished positives and negatives are fully explored. To a much lesser extent there is discussion of candidates for

[21] From the testimony of their children and from the detailed accounts in the 250 surviving letters from Owen to Henry.

major sees in the Church, especially Canterbury. There is nothing about Owen's time as Vice-Chancellor, and little about his time as President of the British Academy. And there is much less about Owen's time as chair of the Commission on Church and State than about Henry's time as co-chair of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, which displays Owen's disdain for the obstructive mind of the Roman curia. The judgements on important public figures are sometimes startlingly blunt, even tart. On the Secretary of State for Education:

> Yesterday I had to go to see Sir Keith Joseph. He is quick, clever; on this occasion he was charming; but perhaps he is a little 'principled' in not quite the best sense – do the 'right' policy even though the consequences are almost sure to be a disaster.

In a discussion of the three names on the shortlist for Canterbury, Graham Leonard was brushed aside, but there was a surprisingly negative view of Robert Runcie ('a light-weight Cosmo Lang' who had little ability to 'cope with' slums, race, government). He preferred Stuart Blanch (archbishop of York 1975–83) although without enthusiasm.[22] Judgements on colleagues for Divinity chairs could be much more robust.

But Henry's proximity probably helps to explain Owen's decision to move away from his first love, patristics and early medieval history, first to the Reformation, and then more emphatically to the modern period. For when he secured his lectureship in church history in the Divinity Faculty, Henry was already giving authoritative lectures on the patristic period under the title 'The early Church', and Walter Ullmann was occupying the High Middle Ages. So from the beginning, Owen lectured on the Reformation (a course of eight lectures on 'Continental Influences on the English Reformation') and gave sixteen lectures on 'Religious Life and Thought from 1830 to the present'. But at this stage his publications remained predominantly patristic and medieval. His first book was on John Cassian; his earliest essays and articles were mainly very brief, but included 'Euladius of Arles',[23] 'The origin of Prime' (i.e. the office of Prime),[24] 'The Agape in Sub-Apostolic Times,'[25] 'Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great',[26] and 'St Basil the Great',[27] and – a real and puzzling outlier – a 6,000 word piece on 'The evidence of dedications in the early history of the Welsh Church'.[28] The sign of a shift to the

[22] I would like to thank Owen's children for offering to let me read these letters (there are some of Henry's to Owen in the box as well). What I saw were photocopies of letters in the possession of Henry's family. They are not otherwise available to be read at present.

[23] Owen Chadwick, 'Eladius of Arles', *Journal of Theological Studies* [henceforth *JTS*], 46 (1945), 200–05.

[24] Owen Chadwick, 'The origin of Prime', *JTS*, 50 (1949), 178–82.

[25] Owen Chadwick, 'The Agape in sub-Apostolic Time', *Friends of Reunion Bulletin* (August 1949), 5–8.

[26] Owen Chadwick, 'Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great', *JTS*, 50 (1949), 38–49.

[27] Owen Chadwick, 'Great Pastors: I. St Basil the Great', *Theology*, 56 (1953), 19–23.

[28] Owen Chadwick, 'The evidence of dedications in the early history of the Welsh Church', in N.K. Chadwick (ed.), *Studies in early British History* (1954), pp.173–88.

Reformation period came in an essay on 'Richard Bancroft's Submission',[29] a study of Bancroft's onslaught in a Paul's Cross sermon of 1589 on Calvinist theocracy in Scotland and more generally how it proved an inconvenience to all parties. Bancroft was persuaded to be emollient without withdrawing his complaints about the superiority complex of those who embraced the Genevan way, and he also found ways of allowing both Elizabeth I and James VI to do no more than tick him off.

The handful of (very short) essays on modern subjects tended to be on specifics of church practice and discipline (an essay on 'Confirmation' in a book on *Religion in the Public Schools*, and one on better training for the ministry).[30] His 50 or so reviews prior to 1958 followed the same pattern. He was curious about many things, but not yet willing to give up his first love. Given his very clear engagement across time with the dilemmas that had faced John Cassian in the early 5th century, this is not surprising.

That study of John Cassian was subtitled *A Study in Primitive Monasticism*.[31] Scholars had passed Cassian by, having an unfortunate whiff of Pelagianism about him, but Owen was drawn to him. He dwells on his restlessness – the need to be on the move physically and intellectually, seeking protection from worldliness in Scythia, Bethlehem, the Egypian desert, Rome, Marseilles. The crux was his time with the solitary monks of the Egyptian desert, which Cassian found to be too crowded by hermits who competed for attention and the superiority of their own way of prayer. So he moved via Rome to the south of what is now France, where he found new difficulties but ended up being a crucial influence on St Benedict and on the formulation of his rule.[32] As ever thereafter, Owen could tease more than seems possible out of terse sources, noticing the implications of what they say and do not say, connections, links and above all a vivid sense of the journey of a soul.

The subtitle misleads, or at least, understates. For at the heart of the book is a chapter – by some way the longest – on Cassian's challenge to (more than a discussion, less than an argument, with) Augustine's doctrine of Grace. Owen's account of Augustine's position and of Cassian's challenge to it is as succinct a summary of an issue, now as much as then, at the centre of Christian theology. How far is grace an irresistible gift from God? Do human beings have freedom to accept or reject God's offer? Do men and women have freedom of the will to say 'yes' to God? In his dispassionate laying out of the issues as explored by 5th-century minds, one senses that this was a deeply personal issue for Owen, and it certainly becomes one for the reader. In the chapter on grace, we

[29] Owen Chadwick, 'Richard Bancroft's Submission' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 3 (1952), 58–73.
[30] 'Confirmation', in A.R. Wallace *et al.* (eds), *Religion in the Public Schools* (1948).
[31] Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (1950).
[32] See also, Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism* (1958), pp. 25–9; and for the text of the Rule, pp. 291–337.

meet Owen's gift for the bold aphorism, as in these stark sentences: 'grace springs from the desire for it'; 'Grace is not in antithesis to freedom but to laziness'; 'grace comes to all who seek it but it is hard to seek it.' Can the will to seek come only from the desert where temptation withers? Was Cambridge to Owen what Marseilles was to Cassian? Of course, Owen is interested in showing how Cassian steers between the Scylla of double predestination and the Charybdis of Pelagianism, and he demonstrates the effective evasiveness of men drawn to the pastoral rather than the abstract. As the chapter on Grace ends: 'God was at once the goal and the way to the goal … [Cassian's] moral exhortations always stressed the destination more than the aid of God on the journey' (pp. 120–6, 138).

Written as he moved to Trinity Hall, Owen's writing style, with almost all (not quite all) of its idiosyncrasies, is already evident. The very first sentence contains a subordinate clause, and these were to become fewer with time, but they enshrine the perpetual yearning to put us in a present past, an evocation of where our minds must travel to: 'In the year A.D. 378 the Gothic horsemen who rode down the emperor Valerian and the heterogeneous detachments still known as the Roman army, initiated upon the plains of Adrianople the last phase in the decline of western Roman civilisation' (p. 1). We are instantly in a frightening world of disempowerment and barbarism. The twin bonds that prevented full disintegration – self-interest and loyalty – were slipping. And this is followed by the first of thousands of piercing epigrams: 'The discovery of an honest official might cause surprise to his colleagues'. And at the bottom of page 1, the kind of startling glance across time and space with an illuminating allusion: 'the Cromwellian dilemma, present since the fall of the Republic (pp. 1–2), whether military despotism upon which government in practice rested could be not only veiled but transformed, remained unresolved', an aperçu which historians of Cromwell still need to heed just as much as do historians of the Roman Empire.

The other substantial work from these Trinity Hall years was a work that began, in all likelihood, as a piece of *pietas*, a history of the founding and early history of Cuddesdon,[33] the seminary founded adjacent to the episcopal palace of Samuel Wilberforce, bishop of Oxford, to mark its centenary. The resultant, apparently slight, 130-page volume (excluding end-matter) was not only the seed from which the two-volume 1100+ page *The Victorian Church* (1966, 1970) would grow, but it took him to the heart of the struggle for the mind and soul of the church – a struggle not over dogma or even over the perils of neo-Romanism, but over ritual of itself. In ways that point to his future work, *The Founding of Cuddesdon* is rooted in vivid, powerful characterisation of strong characters – all flawed, but some attractively flawed (Bishop Wilberforce, together with the initial principal, vice-principal and chaplain and above all the third

[33] Owen Chadwick, *The Founding of Cuddesdon* (1954).

principal, Edward King),[34] and some unattractively flawed (above all the shrill evangelical Charles Golightly; yet even he gets a sympathetic paragraph explaining his frailties as a man opposed to all change, but who was 'indefatigable, candid, well-meaning and absurd', and who 'laboured under the illusion that sharp public controversy need not loosen the ties of private friendship' [p. 67]). The book certainly discloses Owen's own liturgical preferences for order, for the 'beauty of holiness' as a seemly and unostentatious beauty. Perhaps 'noble simplicity' captures it. Bishop Richard Harries, in his reflection at Owen's memorial service, described Owen when he celebrated Holy Communion in the little Upper Chapel at Selwyn: 'an abiding image is of Owen bent over in prayer, scarcely audible, the long sentences of the Book of Common Prayer being drawn in a single uninterrupted flow; and the privilege it was to be quietened and drawn into that stream reaching out from his heart towards the source of its depths'; or more simply, from the funeral address of Bishop Bob Hardy (the first chaplain Owen appointed to Selwyn), 'Owen exemplified the traditional Anglican virtues of reticence and discretion' in chapel, with quiet praying for the matters of the day, always remembering a couple of Selwyn-formed clergy and their lives, as well as those under the power of 'fiendish dictators' and all in ways with induced inner peace. Someone who was to lead a college retreat asked John Sweet if it was really necessary to have Compline, something he described as 'monkish and medieval'. John Sweet referred the matter to Owen, who scrawled on the letter as he sent it back: 'I like monkish and medieval'. We need to hold on to these images for what follows.[35]

Master and Professor (1958–1968)

Early in 1956, months before his 40th birthday, Owen was elected Master of Selwyn College, the youngest Head of any college since mid-Victorian times. In 1958, when he was 41, he was elected to the Dixie Professorship of Ecclesiastical History. Both were startling appointments and both transformed his career.

In 1956, Selwyn was a spinster-aunt of a college: poor, poorly-regarded, and not actually a college – in strictly legal terms 'a public hostel'. It had been founded in memory of George Augustus Selwyn (1809–78), the most muscular of muscular Victorian bishops, who had walked the length of New Zealand, and who had negotiated an end to colonial war of British and Maori in a treaty notably generous to the Maori.[36] Having

[34] Later reinforced in his delightful 30-page pamphlet 'Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln 1885–1910' (Lincoln Minster Pamphlets, 2nd ser., no. 4; 1968).

[35] John Sweet, 'Profile: Owen Chadwick', *Epworth Review*, 28 (2001), 11.

[36] Conveniently summarised in Andrew Porter, 'Selwyn, George Augustus (1809–1878), bishop of New Zealand and bishop of Lichfield', in *ODNB*.

converted many of them, he returned to be a notably progressive bishop of Lichfield, and with mixed success in making Anglican converts in the Potteries. In his memory, a college was founded by public subscription principally to maintain Christian (viz. Anglican) values in the 1880s when secularisation was raging through Cambridge. By the 1950s Selwyn still had religious tests on admission and mandatory chapel attendance. It had a dedicated Fellowship with some fine scholars – Kenneth St Joseph FBA, pioneer of aerial photography who morphed from a geologist to archaeologist and medieval historian; Hugh Cott, world authority on both animal and military camouflage (as well as being a magnificent illustrator and photographer); and Leonard Forster FBA, whose range of interests across German Studies could give Owen's historical interests a run for their money. But there was work to be done to achieve any degree of parity of esteem with the 22 long-established colleges. Moves to revise its statutes were already in train, removing the loose shackles imposed by the founding fathers that gave authority to a group of bishops to endorse or not to endorse changes in the college statutes, to remove all religious tests and thus to allow the university to embrace it as a full college. Once Owen arrived, changing the statutes was the easy part; achieving parity of esteem was the hard part. At the end of his 27 years as Master it was fully accomplished.

At the time of his election, the statutes required the Master to be a clerk in holy orders. The poverty of the college and the prudence of the Fellows required them to seek a clerk in holy orders with a salary from the university. It was not a long shortlist. The Fellows originally settled on John Boys Smith, sometime chaplain and by 1956 Senior Bursar of St Johns College. But he was mindful, it would seem, that the Mastership of St Johns was due to come up and he [correctly] saw himself as a likely candidate, and so he declined. There were other Deans of colleges, but the Fellows of Selwyn moved next to Owen and he accepted. Electing a 40-year-old as Master with nearly 30 years ahead of him might have been thought rash. But the vacancy had arisen because William Telfer, Ely Professor of Divinity as well as Master, was departing to be bishop of Portsmouth, and his predecessor had departed to be bishop of Ripon. One reason why Owen was elected, as a young, vigorous all-rounder with a charming temperament, was that it was presumed that after a few years he would move on to a bishopric. The Fellows were right to think that he would be offered bishoprics, wrong to presume he would accept one of them.[37]

In the first ten years of his Mastership, his tasks, with new statutes and a clear identity as a college in hand, were to improve living conditions for Fellows and undergraduates,

[37] In their letters to one another, they reinforced one another's belief that their vocation was to work in the academic sphere, with Henry writing (11 May 1973) to say that 'suggestions to work elsewhere seem to come from kind friends and over-hopeful enemies', and a letter from June 1979 links Owen to Canterbury and lists those who think so with the concluding thought that 'Rab [Butler] thinks you should be Cantuar but thinks you will not accept.'

increase the number of graduates, and all this required a transformation of the endowment. All this required charm and a capacity for hard work. Owen rose to every challenge.

A great deal of his success lay in his accessibility. The Master's Lodge was open for anyone to wander in to see if he was around until late in the evening – only locked as he went up to bed – and was unlocked as soon as he came down in the morning, certainly by 8.30am; and he would frequently drift into the bar towards closing time and 'work the room'. At mid-morning and especially mid-afternoon, he would wander into the Old Court and ask anyone passing (especially if he had not asked them before) it they could help him make a cup of tea. He lunched most days, dined about three times a week on High Table, and sometimes dropped in for breakfast with resident Fellows. He knew everyone by name, and wrote pithy references for them that Tutors and Directors of Studies thought better than their own. So he was accessible, affable, and genuinely interested in everyone. No academic or sporting achievement by any member of the college went uncelebrated by one of his laconic postcards (my pile includes congratulations on the birth of our daughters, my promotions, my new books, and any good reviews he spotted). They contained plenty of whimsy (to a Selwyn man made a bishop after a non-too committed undergraduate career – 'Well I never! Owen'). Affectionate teasing, real empathy. When my wife died a card was sent: 'a great loss – lovely lady – so sad. O'. What else needed to be said? He wrote 20 or more of these during every Faculty Board meeting he attended, speaking little but then to great effect.[38]

He also knew all the college staff well, and he and Ruth entertained them at regular termly coffee mornings in the Lodge. He saw an important part of his ministry to be to the staff. As he explained, the chaplain cared for the Fellows and the students, he cared for the staff, which meant presiding at their family baptisms, marriages and funerals. There was a lovely but lonely man running the Tutorial Office who had taken to drink. Owen simply moved him from the office to manning the college telephone exchange where putting someone through to the wrong extension mattered less than putting someone in for the wrong exam.[39]

Owen built a college that felt good about itself, grew in confidence and indeed in pride. And from that friendliness and exceptional sense of community came academic success. To improve the strength in depth of the Fellowship, he charmed talented men (still only men) newly appointed to university posts, including by the 1970s some

[38] And a note on this: if you were in favour he signed out 'O'; you had nothing to fear from 'Owen', but frost always accompanied one signed WOC, as one to me was when I 'deserted' to Rome in 1977.

[39] Another story of his uniqueness as a Master: an undergraduate was mugged on the common behind Silver Street and his bike and a fruit cake thrown into the millpond. When news reached Selwyn that he was in A&E, Owen set out to rescue the bike, waded into the pond with bare feet, trod on broken glass and finished up in A&E with the undergraduate (from the address by Helen Chadwick at Owen's memorial service, 30 January 2016).

exceptional scholars, including (Sir) Alistair MacFarlane, a pioneer in what is now called AI, (Sir) Colin Humphreys FRS, material scientist, and Jeremy Saunders FRS CBE; two others rose to be Vice-Chancellors. Selwyn steadily rose in the inter-collegiate league tables. To drive through academic improvement, he moved the desperately reactionary Senior Tutor to the honorary but powerless post of Vice-Master, and replaced him with the youngest of the Tutors, the 33-year-old (Sir) David Harrison, later Vice-Chancellor of Keele and Exeter Universities and (11 years after Owen's own retirement) himself Master of Selwyn. Together they oversaw an expansion in the range of disciplines offered, transformed and broadened Selwyn's admissions policy, and worked in total harmony with others.

One of Owen's contemporaries at St John's had been (Sir) Humphrey Cripps, a highly successful entrepreneur and philanthropist (and owner of the most valuable stamp collection in the world – at least at the time of its sale in 2011). Sir Humphrey had been a major benefactor to the University of Nottingham while Owen's father-in-law was Vice-Chancellor. In due course the Cripps Foundation paid for new courts in four Cambridge colleges, with Selwyn in the lead – doubling the number of rooms and ensuring that all undergraduates were housed by and in the college for three years, not one of them more than 100 yards from the bar or the chapel as Owen once said. Some of the rooms even directly overlooked the university rugby pitch. By 1968, the hardest part of Owen's work to raise Selwyn's standing was completed. A few years after Owen retired, the college even topped the Tomkins Table for academic performance. That was a one-off, but it has remained in the top third most years since.

Owen's election to the Dixie Chair of Ecclesiastical History in 1958 was less startling. But he had published a lot less than others and was young for a Cambridge Chair. His Birkbeck Lectures sponsored by Trinity College, Cambridge, under the title 'From Bossuet to Newman', a study of the how the Churches grappled with the question of change in doctrine (moving away from a belief that doctrine had to be rigidly *semper eadem*), had really raised his standing and they appeared just as the Dixie electors were pondering.

One of the unusual things about the Dixie Professorship was it was held jointly in two Faculties, primarily in History, but with all the Professor's lectures cross-listed in the Divinity Faculty lecture list. Indeed, the Professor was *ex-officio* a permanent member of both Faculty Boards. Owen's PhD students were more or less equally divided between the two faculties, and this remained true after his translation to the Regius Chair in 1968.

Once installed as Dixie Professor, Owen rethought his teaching. As soon as the proposal could grind its way through the Boards and Committees, he began a final-year Special Subject on The Oxford Movement, and he combined that with part I lectures on Church and State in Britain 1829–53 (replaced, in the mid–1960s, by Church and State

in Britain since 1869). But some years he went back to his roots, with a course on The Confessions of St Augustine and another on the origins of monasticism, and then, far ahead of the shift in his research agenda, he started in 1965 to give a series of eight lectures on Church and State under Hitler, later adjusted to Hitler and Christians. Thus, in the Dixie period, the shift from the Reformation period to the modern period was realised.

His college teaching is a bit of a mystery. He obviously taught the History and patristic papers in both parts of the Theology Tripos while at Trinity Hall, and I think he stopped teaching all but final-year students (in History and Divinity) once he came to Selwyn, and for most of the time he was Regius Professor he did not have a part 2 paper other than classes for special subjects. The only glimpse that can be recovered about his one-to-one supervision is provided by (now Professor) Stephen Taylor, who took his Italy and the Papacy special subject at the end of the 1970s:

> he was robust and intellectually challenging in ways that I hadn't encountered before. All the feedback was picking apart the essay, sometimes perhaps simply suggesting things that I hadn't read and should be aware of – very much picking holes and, I felt, challenging me to do better. It could, I think, have seemed a little destructive, but it didn't seem that way, which, I think, says a lot about my earlier supervisory experiences.
>
> It was also, I suspect, very old-fashioned. The first time that I met him, we agreed that I would start with the Restoration Papacy. After a little silence, I asked whether he had any suggestions for reading. His reply was, 'Haven't you seen the Faculty reading list?' My reply was that I had, but it was very short and there was hardly anything relating to the Restoration period. He then asked me whether I had used the University Library. When I told him that I had, his response was simply, 'I find the catalogue room very helpful.'
>
> I then went on to ask whether he would give me an essay question. This produced the comment, 'I assume you are in your third year.' I confirmed that I was (which, of course, I knew that he knew), and he said, 'Well, I think you are old enough to construct your own question.'
>
> I was a little appalled that he did not want my essay in advance, and turned up to the first supervision expecting to have to read it. Rather to my surprise, he asked me to hand it over, sat behind his desk and began reading it, quickly in a very low voice. Every now and then, he would make an observation; it took me about three weeks to work out the tone of those comments to which no reply was expected (and if I did start to reply, he merely continued to read), and those for which a response was required (leading to silence, if I did not). On one occasion, I remember him commenting critically on a point that I had made. I knew that my argument a little later depended on the premise of that comment. When Owen reached that point, he looked up and said merely, 'Well, I think we know why you can't say that.'

Stephen ended his comment: 'If I could have faced learning German and Italian, and improving my French and Latin, I would have worked on the Papacy.'[40]

It is not a style of teaching one can recommend, except for those who share Owen's charisma. From what can be gleaned from his former PhD students (about 25, I think, covering all periods and places), his style was very similar. But tea was usually provided and supervisions were often in the garden.

The switch from early church to Reformation and then the 19th (and ultimately the 20th) century was in part reflected in the publishing record of the years 1956–68. If his first ten years in Cambridge resulted in the book on Cassian (1950) and the history of Cuddesdon (1954), two substantial articles and about 70 reviews, his first twelve years at Selwyn and his ten years as Dixie resulted in seven books written and two edited, ten essays (some public lectures published as separates), and more than 150 reviews. Amongst the books were *From Bossuet to Newman* (1957) weighing in at 250 pages, and the first of two volumes on *The Victorian Church* (1966), weighing in at over 600 pages, both packed with recondite scholarship but written with ease and élan.

Concealing deep reading much more lightly was his volume in the Pelican/Penguin History of the Church. He allocated to himself the volume on *The Reformation*, at 460 pages the longest of the six original volumes and – along with the earliest volume on *The Early Christian Church* by his brother Henry – the one(s) that have best stood the test of time. As a history of what theologians thought and the wars of words about what they thought, it may never be bettered. Historians ask other questions nowadays, but they also ask the questions Owen thought important, and on what Luther and Cavin thought and on their personalities, and above all on Ignatius Loyola and *his* Reformation ideas, he is transcendently good. Look at his paragraphs on Luther's confrontation with John Eck, the Dominican who tied Luther up in knots and forced him to recognise uncomfortable contradictions in himself (pp. 50–2), or the brilliantly-distilled analysis of *The Spiritual Exercises* (pp. 257–8). Such concision! The thesis and its organisation (and its hermeneutic) are enshrined in the very first sentence and was a breath of fresh air 60 years ago, and in some senses still is: 'At the beginning of the sixteenth century, everyone that mattered in the Western Church was crying out for reformation' (p. 11). Characteristically this was not only the first sentence; it was the first paragraph. The second sentence on the trajectory of reform and the same length is also a paragraph in itself. Some 500-page books have understood less than Owen's first 500 words in this book.

And then there were the editions of the key texts on *Western Asceticism* (1958) culminating with an edition of the Rule of St Benedict, and on *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* with one hundred short extracts from many authors and genres arranged

[40] Private communication from Professor Stephen Taylor to the author. He confirms that Professor Simon Dixon had a similar experience, although sometimes in the garden with refreshments.

under three headings: Faith, the Authority of the Church, and Sanctification.[41] The 50-page introduction is concerned with demonstrating that 'it was more a movement of the heart than of the head' (p. 11). It is compelling but not wholly convincing, both in its hermeneutic of continuity from the Laudians to the Tractarians, and in its playing down of the centrality of Newman. It is defined more by dread of what was happening to Faith than by a united programme. As ever the character sketches of the leaders, and especially Keble and Pusey, are vivid and startling. And as an example of that gift for aphorism, how about this: 'It was once said of [Keble] by one who had known and admired him, that he had "no go". What is the force of the criticism, if it is a criticism?' (p. 32). This leads on into a glorious paragraph which could nowadays be summarised as 'Keble suffered from imposter syndrome.'

And then there are two glorious stories that take us to the heart of Africa and then to the heart of East Anglia, and – significantly – to the heart of the Victorian Church. Both were published by Hodder and Stoughton, a publisher rooted in Evangelical Christian books but also ripping yarns (John Buchan, *Bulldog Drummond*, and *Biggles*) as well as the *Teach Yourself* self-instruction books. Which of these drew Owen to them is far from clear, and they were not in the Hodder mainstream. Thirty years later, CUP reprinted one of them in its Canto paperback series. I do not think they sold as well as most Hodder Books. But they were better than most of them too. I will give more extended treatment to these two books since they laid the foundations for so much that was to follow and the stabilising of Owen's special gifts of historical imagination and characterisation.

The first and more extraordinary was *Mackenzie's Grave* (1959). This is a largely dispassionate account of a fatally flawed missionary endeavour by the Universities' Mission to Central Africa in the early 1860s to spread Christian faith, and more particularly Christian values, along the Zambesi and its contributary rivers. Most of those who took part died from a variety of horrid tropical disasters. A few were killed. The cause for which they died was to spread Christianity, and to turn the indigenous peoples from the ubiquitous slave trade facilitated by the Portuguese and Arab traders.

The book opens with a powerful statement that anti-slavery was at the heart of mission. Although the book centres on (Bishop) Charles Mackenzie, he dies on p.106, less than halfway through the book, the rest of which is about the divisions and diversions that followed. And although the book is about Bishop Mackenzie, the brooding presence and delusions of David Livingstone give the book much of its coherence. Thus two of Owen's most telling aphorisms (and there are many) relate to Livingstone. Livingstone visited Mackenzie's grave and fashioned a more substantial cross to place on it: Owen comments: 'it is somehow symbolic of [his] relations with Mackenzie and the mission, relations always well-meaning but not always effectual, that he should have

[41] Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (1960).

erected the cross in the wrong place' (p. 176). Livingstone first heard of the death of Mackenzie and his fellow *naif*, the Rev. Henry Burrup, from and in the midst of those deeply grieving, not least Mackenzie's sister Anne ('a vine which clings as it grows') (p. 110). On hearing of these deaths, Owen tells us, 'Livingstone let forth the unsentimental comment that England would [now] send out better men' (p. 143). There are better-informed and more balanced works on the history of the missions and especially on their effects, but there is nothing better on the mindset of these muscular Christians. It took a certain amount of self-righteous individualism to go to Africa in the 1860s, with all its hazards to the interfering Westerner, and such self-righteousness and individualism were the enemies of collaboration. There is a slightly dated aura of condescension about the writing for modern tastes, perhaps, and in an attempt to look dispassionately into the minds and the souls of the protagonists there are some quite sharp assessments. On Edward Hawkins, the Tractarian priest sent as part of the second wave: 'one property or ailment Hawkins possessed, an ailment which in the event was not to be unimportant. Nature had bestowed upon, or habit had developed in him, a repellent and noxious variety of parsonical voice' (p. 112). Or Anne Mackenzie, on her warming to Mrs Burrup: 'She wrote (lying in bed with bronchitis, a blister on her chest, and a decanter of port wine on the bedside table) that Mrs Burrup was "one of the blithest and brightest beings I have seen" and admired her because she thought nothing of walking twelve miles' (p. 119).

The book is possible because so many of the principals kept diaries or journals and so many of their letters have survived, many to those who could be entrusted to keep confidential bilious outpourings of exasperation. The book is special because of the way Owen can realise the complex personalities and aspirations of his large cast of (European) characters and describe and assess their interactions. In essence, one approach was to rescue captives en route to slavery in other continents, using as much force as was necessary, and to civilise them (but how? a more difficult question). This was opposed by many of the Great and Good back home (notably Pusey in this instance) and by Bishop Tozer at the sharp end. There was to be no interference in the slave trade, no violence in the cause of right. Martyrdom not violence built the Church, thought the former; Tozer ('an ugly man with flaming red hair') (p. 194) was a business-like man who eschewed complexity. Horace Waller, disciple of Mackenzie, tried to persuade Tozer to facilitate the move of twelve female refugee slaves into the voluntary community he was building in the Highlands. Tozer refused. As Owen explains 'there was no more reason why he should take charge of these particular women than of any twelve others of the millions of African men and women helpless in the grip of tribal strife and slavery'. Women would complicate his plan for a (male) college and mean breaking abhorrent but actual laws of the region in which he was a guest. As Owen sums it up:

> The Zambesi tragedy was drawing to its climax. A group of men, for whom every romantic sentiment must be ruthlessly discarded for the sake of a sober attention to the possible, was moving up the rivers to meet another group of men who had staked their all on faith in the ideals of a dead leader, and had stayed where they were for the sake of those ideals, practicable or impracticable, possible or impossible. It was as though the mission were a pulsating body wherein head and heart had never moved in perfect harmony; and now the disharmony, the antithesis between trust and the logic, between superhuman endeavour and ordinary prudence, between faith and reason, was bringing at last its inevitable nemesis. (pp. 198–9)

And yet, after chronicling the later lives and careers of the physically and psychologically damaged survivors, even of the deranged Livingstone, Owen ends the book with an anecdote of unspeakable poignancy that readers must explore for themselves, only after reading all that goes before it.

Twelve months after the appearance of *Mackenzie's Grave*, Owen published – again with Hodder and Stoughton – his *Victorian Miniature* (1970). He had stumbled across the extraordinarily fortuitous survival of two agonised diaries of a Victorian squire and the vicar in what both thought of as *his* parish church, and who were locked in a feud, costly to both of them, over things that mattered in mid-Victorian times. The *dramatis personae*, no less a term will serve, included the newly arrived (this mattered) Sir John Boileau bart., of Huguenot and mercantile descent, and his languishing wife, the Rev. William Waytes Andrew and his overly-forthright wife, and the successive Bishops of Norwich, who would have done justice to a work by Trollope. What is miraculous about this story, told with economy and in full glorious technicolor, is its sense of *place* (a cluster of villages between Norwich and Wymondham), its sense of *time,* as the Victorian age struggled towards its apogee, and above all its warm realisation of good people trapped within the circumstances of their lives. This book has 189 pages, but only five footnotes and a one-page discussion of the sources. That said, it is deeply rooted on recovering not only the material culture of the mid-19th century but much more the mental worlds of a deeply paternalistic and deferential rural world.

Owen is magnificent in locating within his sources the revealing *mot juste*: on Boileau's encounter with a striking, starving labourer in the grim winter of 1847 – 'I felt very kindly towards this manly specimen of an English peasant' (p. 72). But even more in his own piercing assessments. On Boileau: 'It was a paternal government. And within the parish, the vicar was a morsel undigested, an intrusive power. He represented a different influence upon the parishioners, an influence which could not be controlled and was often unpredictable' (p. 74). On Lady Boileau:

> She tried to persuade herself that this fear [of her husband's censorious nature] was wholesome. It worried her that he took so despondent a view of the conduct of his household, his children, his servants. She tried to stop herself resisting him, tried to stop

> herself defending them against his severity, but found it impossible. Rarely she used, unwittingly, the legendary armour of Victorian wives, tears and hysteria; but for the most part she tried to keep herself modest, and meek. (p. 69)

On the octogenarian Bishop Bathurst's scruples about ordaining Andrew: 'He would think evangelicals to be enthusiasts, and ultra-conservatives in divinity, and to sit lightly to the rules of the Church, and to disturb parishes by their emotionalism' (pp. 20–1). And on the Rev. and Mrs Andrew after the first skirmish about Boileau's unconsidered criticisms of them for living on their own patrimony some distance from the parish, that the spat left 'a scar upon Andrew and a deeper scar upon Mrs Andrew; a scar of distrust' (p. 75).

And so for 20 years Boileau and the Andrews resented and misrepresented one another. Boileau built and maintained at his own expense a parish school which Andrew, refusing to make promises about his actions there that he thought unreasonable, and that Boileau thought entirely reasonable, was banned from entering. Boileau did not think he needed to consult or even inform Andrew before he made changes to the furnishings of *his* church, including the removal of coffins (and their contents) from the crypt to make room for himself and his family. Boileau did not take kindly to Andrew's queasiness over the guilt of a deranged man hanged for murder where the squire was the investigating magistrate, and the vicar the man who attended him in gaol; and even less to the way his children sought out Andrew's spiritual counsel. What Owen gives us is a clash of wills between a thick-thinned self-righteous squire and a thin-skinned self-righteous vicar (with an even more thin-skinned wife) in an epic storm in a teacup. It tells us all we need to know about 19th-century Ketteringham, and all we need to know about human frailty confined by oppressive morality and a blinkered view of God. It is a masterpiece.

It inspired him to write *The Victorian Church*: Ketteringham writ large. This was to occupy him for ten years and to appear in two volumes, and best considered together in the next section. Before moving on to the most momentous period of Owen's career, there is one more episode which occupied much of his time and energy across the late 1960s, the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State;[42] and one more promotion, to the Regius Professorship of Modern History.

With inexorably declining numbers of believers and worshippers, with more people worshipping on most Sundays in non-Anglican churches than in Anglican churches, questions about the need for a state church, and even for a national church, were becom-

[42] *Church and state: report of the Archbishops' Commission* (1970). I was unable to find it online, and read the 1985 reprint copy in Cambridge University Library, and read it in the light of Frank Cranmer, 'Church-State relations in the United Kingdom: a Westminster View', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 6:29 (July 2001), 111–121.

ing more insistent. There was pressure for closer relations with other Churches (specifically in the 1960s with the Methodist Church, but also the Catholic Church), which the status of the Church of England seemed to hinder. There was awareness that the disestablishment of the Churches in Wales and Ireland had led to few difficulties there, and there was the example of the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland which was a national church with complete freedom from political oversight of its governance, doctrine and worship but which retained privileges (e.g. staffing the chapel royal within the Scottish Royal Household, and in respect of the validity of marriages within the Kirk outwith civil oversight). There were fault lines within the Church about the need for modernisation and the belief of many that Parliament was more likely than the Church itself to become progressive. Was it right that no-one who was or who became a Catholic or who married a Catholic could (under the Act of 1701) be monarch? If these were some of the chronic concerns, minds were further concentrated by the rejection of a (unanimous) report calling for the Church alone to nominate bishops to the Crown rather than for the Prime Minister, after consultation, to do so, and there was concern that Parliament would inhibit the reform or replacement of the Book of Common Prayer. All this constituted a very large and very hot potato, and the idea of handing it to over to Owen Chadwick appears to have been an obvious one to the leaders of the Church.

Owen was appointed to Chair the commission on 10 November 1965 and its brief was established at the same time. However, it did not hold its first meeting until October 1966. One can safely assume that Owen played a major part in the selection of his fellow-commissioners and in setting the scope and format of the commission's work. It came to consist of seventeen members, nine clergy and eight laity, and it held 29 meetings, sixteen of them residential. It asked four of the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church to provide 'consultors', and they were invited both to make written submissions and to join the commissioners for one of their residential sessions. Some 75 individuals and organisations submitted evidence (from three professors of theology in Cambridge, to a group of self-described Christian Anarchists, and to the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society and the National Council of Civil Liberties). The report was promulgated after four years of deliberation,

Owen's brief was 'to make recommendations as to the modifications in the constitutional relationship between Church and State which are desirable and practicable and in doing so to take account of current and future steps to promote greater unity between the Churches'. The word 'modification' and 'practicable' were minatory; the final clause seemed to point to something more radical.

That said, the introduction, written in a way only Owen wrote, began with another concern: 'The first word that confronted us is the word "establishment".' It agonises over this for seven paragraphs before concluding that 'For us, "establishment" means the laws which apply to the Church of England and not to other Churches'. Beyond

dependency on the state lay questions of long-established privilege. And for some of the commission that was the problem. Should you have the latter if you ended the former?

Owen had a habit as Master of Selwyn of declaring something to be 'nem.con. but not unanimous'. That must have been his best hope from the group of commissioners he assembled. The diversity of views in the submissions (all now available at Lambeth Palace) and indeed amongst the commissioners tried even Owen's legendary ability to prevent schisms. What is clear is how thoughtfully balanced the commission was. Apart from Owen, the clerical side consisted of two bishops, two archdeacons, and two up-and-coming parish priests (one later a diocesan bishop and the other a notable Catholic convert). Each paired an Anglo-Catholic with a liberal Evangelical. The lay members were fairly inevitably drawn principally from amongst the great and good. Two MPs: the one-nation Tory William van Staubenzee, and the 37-year-old and wonderfully good-natured Denis Coe, newly elected Labour MP, a startling but excellent choice. The rest are predictable enough. The vice chair was the Earl of March and Kinrara (but in reality heir to the Dukedom of Richmond); a high court Judge; a baronet who was a born-again Christian with great administrative gifts devoted to the service of the church; and three interesting academics: Lady Mary Ogilvie, the deeply impressive Principal of St Anne's College Oxford, creating a public career for herself after many years of supporting her husband's (latterly as Vice-Chancellor of Edinburgh University), Professor Kathleen Jones, a prolific author of works in sociology and social policy, and the real outlier, Valerie Pitt, a working-class girl who followed a family tradition of uncompromising Christian socialism that even a Grammar School and Oxford education in the 1950s did not dilute – a teacher and reformer at Woolwich Polytechnic and (in the words of her *Guardian* obituary) '*enfant terrible*' of the Church Assembly (in 1967 she was the first to raise the subject of women's ordination on the floor of the Assembly). A commission of fourteen men and three women; but three out of eight of the lay members. And of course all White Anglo-Saxon Protestants.[43]

For the 1960s, none of this is surprising. More interesting since this was in the 1960s is the absence of theologians. The Regius, Lady Margaret and Ely Professors from Cambridge all submitted evidence (interestingly they were in the minority who gave oral not written testimonies), but neither they nor their ilk were appointed commissioners, and indeed Owen was the only member who had a professional knowledge or understanding of the Church's history. And amongst the more scholarly of the clergy to submit, stormy petrels predominated (Trevor Huddleston, John Robinson, David Jenkins en route to his troubled time as Bishop of Durham). I wonder if Owen thought theologians would complicate what needed to be simplified, and hinder the necessary blurring of issues.

[43] All members of the commission have biographical entries in *ODNB*.

There is irony in this committee not knowing what 'Establishment' was, for fourteen of them were the epitome of it; and the three who were not members of it were the ones who refused to sign the final report. Of these Valerie Pitt stood out. She was to write a very powerful, uncompromising, eloquent memorandum of dissent from the Chadwick Report, arguing for complete disestablishment: 'all this makes me believe that the Church not only can but must make a straight choice, virtually between the past and the future' (precisely the opposite of Owen's view that the past must be respected and must lead to real but cautious embrace of the future). Two others joined her in refusing to sign the final report – they being the two youngsters on the commission, Dennis Coe MP and Rev. Peter Cornwell. But their grounds were narrower and more hesitant, and it seems likely that if Valerie Pitt had not challenged the basic premise of the report, they would have gone along with the report with some regrets and reservations (Cornwell wanted the church to abandon its seats in the House of Lords; Coe felt that the claims to privilege vitiated the prospects of real ecumenical advance, and that the Church would benefit more from disestablishment than from the proposed modified form of establishment). Both thought that the changes envisaged would be an improvement on the status quo but not as radical as was needed.

So what did the commission recommend? After a substantial 7000-word introduction, the main sections were on relations with Parliament, the appointment of Bishops and the ex-officio position of Bishops in the House of Lords. There were much shorter sections on parish parochial church councils, territorial organisation, ecclesiastical courts, the patronage system, clergy pensions, and (mainly the appointment of) the Church Commissioners. Key recommendations were to remove parliamentary vetoes over forms of worship (but with provisos), and the making of new, or emendations to, existing canons.

On the appointment of Bishops the commission agreed to differ, and made two alternative suggestions about whether the Prime Minister would lose all say or have a much reduced say (constrained to act through electoral systems effectively appointed by the Church not by himself). On the House of Lords the commission admitted to being divided, but all but three or four accepted a reduction in the number of bishops, but hoped that there would be room for religious leaders of other Churches or Faiths to be appointed to the House of Lords as religious leaders and *ex officio*.

Almost all the other matters led to calls for greater self-determination by the Church, with decisions now made by the Church and confirmed by the Crown (and not by Parliament) – e.g. in the dividing or amalgamation of dioceses. But in general, it claimed mainly to have identified areas that 'require detailed consideration'. It is straightforward to work out from all this how much division there had been and how skilfully chaired it had been. Owen had located the long grass into which difficulties could be lobbed, he had pushed as hard as he could on the main issues. His brief had

been to find 'modifications … which are desirable and practicable'. Modification seemed to preclude disestablishment and he could do nothing to head off those pre-committed to disestablishment. To have argued for that would have split the Church and caused mayhem in Parliament. Here the advice of ecumenical observers was helpful in drawing attention to impracticalities.

The recommendations on devolving responsibilities such as forms of worship, and on the more moderate proposal for the appointment of Bishops, were accepted by the government in broad terms. The proposals on reforming the role of bishops and religious leaders in the Lords became mired in the general incapacity of the Parliament to reform itself. The final conclusion is that the report was a success. The appendix on the constitutional status of the Church of Scotland, effectively autonomous but retaining privileges, may well have been close to what Owen would have preferred. But he was never a man to stick with the desirable if it was not practicable. He delivered a report that disappointed many, but antagonised few. That is as good as debates about the nature of the Visible Church ever get.

In the decades that followed he kept a low profile on church affairs. He never became a member of Synod (although he constantly criticised it in his letters to Henry – who was a member for a significant period). Those letters showed a strongly ironical streak on relations with other churches and to intercommunion (he criticised Archbishop Donald Coggan's crass attempt to move too far too fast on his first visit to Rome, but when he was in Venice in March 1988, he presented himself for communion). In an important letter written on 15 February 1981, he told Henry that 'we should be as nice as possible to other Christian denominations', that 'I ought to allow anomalous things to happen during the generations while ministeries are being united', that 'the sacraments of Presbyterians etc are as efficacious as mine', although (oddly) he combines these with believing 'episcopacy is of the *esse* of the Church, as well as the *bene esse*.' He never expresses himself on the matter of women's ordination except to say that it is inevitable, but that it must be introduced slowly and with care to prevent schism. In his letter expressing doubts about Robert Runcie being made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1980, his qualification was that 'I suppose it is very arguable that in a looming schism … an archbishop who is a Tractarian and is known to be against it, it would help (i.e. diminish the extent of the schism) much more than an evangelical known to be in favour.' Slightly earlier (June 1978) he has admitted to Henry that he 'wish[ed] [he] was more clear in my mind about marriage of divorced persons in church as I am about the admission of women'.

His expressions of exasperation were usually reserved for the interventions of the Roman curia to inhibit the work of ARCIC[44] while Henry was co-Chair, and sharing the working papers with Owen. But he wrote a letter doubly astonishing in April 1981 about an intervention of Lord Cranborne to give parishes power to order their priests to continue to use the Book of Common Prayer. Owen loved the Book of Common Prayer, but not Parliament legislating to protect it in the wake of the revised liturgy: 'You cannot make Iscariot good by passing an Act of Parliament. You cannot make the eleven Apostles worse … I cannot think of a surer way than Cranborne's for the murder of archbishop Cranmer all over again.'

Apogee (1969–1983)

In the midst of his attempts to reform 'the Church by Law Established', but before he knew that he would have to serve a two-year spell as Vice-Chancellor at a most disagreeable time, he heard that the Prime Minister had recommended to the Queen that he be appointed Regius Professor of Modern History in succession to Herbert Butterfield. It took (almost) everyone by surprise. Although the Dixie Chair was held jointly in the Faculties of Divinity and History, he was seen very much as a divine rather than as a historian. Of course, almost everyone liked him, and the first volume of *The Victorian Church* had raised his standing as a historian greatly. But there were many with much longer and deeper backlists, and there were two Big Beasts in the Faculty of History around whom members of the Faculty polarised. Few were neutral and all assumed it would be one of them: Geoffrey Elton and Jack Plumb. But of course that meant that people at the top of the University, and any attentive Patronage Secretary, would know that trench warfare would ensue the appointment of either of them. Was there a third alternative? Some thought of Harry Hinsley, who had more graduate students than anyone else and was building up International Relations within the Faculty. But he had opponents too, some a result of feuds amongst those who had served with him at Bletchley Park. Owen certainly did not seek the Chair, and was completely surprised when he got a letter from Downing Street. Here Owen's relations with the Wilson government in relation to the upcoming report on church and state would have been a great asset. So would the views of heads of house who were also constantly consulted by government – above all Eric Ashby, the Master of Clare since 1959 and Vice-Chancellor 1967–9, who was close to Wilson and certainly spoke to him personally about the issues.

[44] Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. During Henry's time on the commission it produced significant documents, agreed by both groups in the commission on eucharistic doctrine, ministry and holy orders, and authority in the Church, all rejected in part by the Roman curia.

Ashby was from a stern Non-Conformist background, and he detested Elton's atheism and Plumb's vulgarity of life style and relentless self-promotion. Once more, not seeking something was a supreme asset. Owen did not seek the post, but neither did he hesitate to accept it. With the wisdom of hindsight, it is far more obvious than it seemed at the time that his works would be far more read 55 years later than the works, considerable as they were, of others in the frame.[45]

In July 1969 Owen sent volume 2 of *The Victorian Church* to press, and three months later he took up his duties as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge. Since no later than 1587, the Vice-Chancellor had always been concurrently one of the College heads, and for at least six hundred years down to the late 19th century, the post had more often than not rotated annually. After some decades of instability, the university settled on two-year terms. Owen was the first (and only) Master of Selwyn to be Vice-Chancellor (a sign not only of Owen's distinction but of the parity of esteem which the college now enjoyed). Of course it was a rough time to become Vice-Chancellor. His predecessor had had to deal with student 'disturbances' and demands for radical reforms in the university's governance. In relation to the latter, Sir David Harrison said that Owen never said 'no' to a student demand, and he never followed up quickly – if at all – on a 'yes'. After all, the need to consult colleges and to secure consensus amongst them provided the longest of long grass. And he recognised that students were much keener to democratise their colleges than the university. Eventually, student representation was agreed on all key executive bodies and on Faculty Boards, but with reserved business (for items where individuals were named in the papers) as well as with substantial unreserved business.

A background to all this is, of course, the student rebellion of the second half of the 1960s: mild in Cambridge compared with Paris, but completely at odds with the preceding decades, when the proctors had to deal with adolescent exuberance fuelled by alcohol. The first demonstrations in Cambridge were linked to global matters – apartheid in South Africa and the Vietnam War, with Cambridge students prominent in the London marches. The biggest of these, in November 1968, coincided with a demonstration outside the Cambridge Union against the appearance of Enoch Powell following his 'rivers of blood' anti-immigration speech in Birmingham. This continued into 1969, as Owen prepared to take up office, with a siege of a travel agent in Sidney Street promoting travel to South Africa, and a mass picket of Trinity College whose theatrical society (the Dryden Society) was planning to defy the cultural boycott of South Africa. And from this anti-Establishment mindset were now coming demands for internal reform – to the syllabus, to teaching frameworks, and to the examination system.

Owen inherited a major review in progress of the university's system of discipline. On 11 November 1969, a month into office, he presided over a tense discussion of the

[45] I am grateful to Patrick Higgins for his help with this paragraph.

Regent House (all resident MAs of the University) on a draft report on University Discipline. It dominated much of his time as Vice-Chancellor. Problems escalated on 13 February 1970 with the so-called Garden House riots, a demonstration against an ill-advised gala dinner held by the Greek Tourist Board just when reports on the repressive regime of 'the Greek colonels' were at their height. The protest by some 400 students got out of hand, and led to acts of vandalism (£2,000 worth of damage, at least according to the Garden House) and scuffles. This is in turn led to arrests, and (controversially because against convention) to the Proctors (one of whom had been hit by a brick) handing to the police a list of names of students spotted in the crowd. Unsurprisingly more arrests followed, but what the university had not anticipated was that the charges were thought better brought not before city magistrates but before judge and jury at Assizes in Hertford where the presiding judge was Mr Justice Melford Stevenson, as severe a judge as sat on the Bench (he named his house 'truncheons'). Many were acquitted, but all six of those convicted were given custodial sentences. Owen's role was to support the Proctors, but to use the incident quietly to initiate more changes to the work of the Proctors and to internal procedures for disciplining students who disrupted the work of the university or who brought it into disrepute. He also had to handle a voracious press, condemning the 'violence' but denying press reports that the students were organised by Trotskyite dons, and he also strove to ensure that none of the imprisoned students were prevented from completing their degrees after they had completed their sentences. It would seem that, although their life choices were changed, they were not blighted.[46]

Negotiating the new code through the Council, an unruly Regent House, and keeping students broadly on board, albeit having to brave an 800-strong picket during one discussion in the Senate House, and often with large and vociferous gatherings outside the room in the Old Schools where he was meeting with representatives of the Cambridge Students Union – all this taxed his charm and calm, but never distracted him. The new procedure, especially the establishment of a new appeals panel ('the Septemviri'), satisfied all those willing to be satisfied, it has stood the test of time, and is still the basis of all University Discipline fifty years on. In his masterly understated address to the university at the end of his first year of office, he spoke not of riots or surrender to mob rule, but of the overdue need to bring in a court of discipline that dealt with more than 'gaming, money-lending, bonfires and dance classes'.

The noises off stage did not distract him from overseeing some fundamental changes in the educational mission of the university – completing the major reorganisation of internal structures, with the suppression of outmoded schools (e.g. the Faculty of Agriculture), the creation of the pre-clinical medical school, the Faculty of Social and

[46] https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-varsity-protest-that-shaped-a-generation–2141131.html

Political Sciences, the creation *de novo* of the University Computing Service, and the creation of the bodies for collaboration of the university and science-based industry (the germ of what was to become the science parks). He also succeeded in getting approval for a streamlining of the central bodies of the university, and to bring more order to the 'very complex' [viz. inchoate] library system and agenda. And then, as though he was not faced by flying the university through enough cross-winds, he was faced, in the final months, with demands from the new government and its energetically unrealistic Education Secretary that Cambridge take the lead in increasing its numbers at much lower unit costs – the phrase that he noted with particular horror in his final address on leaving office was the need for more 'capacity utilisation'. Once more, the need to find where all these students would live proved to be a patch of luxuriant long grass.[47]

During his time as Vice-Chancellor, Owen had had to hand over much of the day-to-day work at Selwyn to his Vice-Master, but from October 1971 he was back to full engagement. He soon had to deal with the prickliest of contemporary thorns, the admission of women to the college. Women had studied at Cambridge for a hundred years (since the foundation of Girton [1869] and Newnham [1871] Colleges), but they had only been admitted to degrees in 1948, and there were no 'mixed' undergraduate colleges (although three 'mixed' postgraduate colleges were founded in the 1960s). So pressure for the older colleges to admit women as well as men had been mounting, and three colleges – King's, Clare and the newly opened Churchill – had voted in 1969 and 1970 to apply for a modification of their statutes to allow them to do so. The first women arrived at those colleges in 1972, and it was agreed across the university to have a three-year moratorium before any more colleges joined them. There had been discussion in Selwyn before Owen became Vice-Chancellor. He knew that a majority of the younger Fellows were in favour, but there were others who wavered, and a group of senior Fellows were very opposed and at least one (perhaps the most academically gifted after Owen) threatened to resign. Owen told David Harrison in confidence that he was in favour but the time was not yet right.[48] He perhaps wanted other colleges to show him what the problems of implementation were. He may simply not have wanted to cause a lasting rift in the Fellowship. His solution was to ask the most determined of the supporters of the admission of women to chair a working party to consider the pros and cons. That Fellow had a reliably poor judgement of the politically adroit. Owen counted on him only putting other hardliners on his working group, and to produce a report full of pros and with

[47] This discussion of Owen's time as VC is based on a thorough review of all issues of *The Cambridge Reporter* for the four years, above all his address to the University at the end of each year, personal communication from Sir David Harrison, and some of Owen's papers deposited by the family in the Cambridge University Library. And for the Garden House riots and their aftermath, Emily Chan's article in *Varsity*, for which see https://www. Varsity.co.uk/features/5211

[48] Clearly stated in a memoir to the author by the late Sir David Harrison.

no cons. As Owen had predicted this alienated the moderates. When a tense Governing Body gathered to do battle over this report, Owen for the first time said publicly that *perhaps* the admission of women was just and necessary, but *perhaps* the time was not *quite* right. Grateful Fellows grasped his proposal and deferred until a later date.

And following the successful launch of the integration of women at the three pioneering colleges, the matter came up again. Death and retirement had weakened the opposition, and the case for being amongst the earlier colleges now was very appealing. This time, Owen saw a gap and dashed for the line. Selwyn voted to admit women from October 1976, and although the Vice-Master said he would resign if the vote went that way, Owen persuaded him that he did not need to resign after all, and suggested that a good friend of the Vice-Master would make an admirable first female Fellow. This was not the end of the matter, however. A rebellion by junior Fellows persuaded Owen to set up a committee that placed a time limit on several college offices, including Vice-Master, so that the then Vice-Master did sort-of have to resign.

There were lots of ancillary issues about the adaptation of buildings, for example, about whether the rules prohibiting overnight guests in students' rooms (a rule which appeared to imply that sex only takes place between 9pm and 8am) would apply to two members of the college, and so on. Initially, the Governing Body decided that there would be no mixed staircases. Two years later, when the Dean, as Fellow for rooms, unilaterally allowed integration, I witnessed something very remarkable. Owen found out by chance during a Governing Body. I am quite certain that at that moment the temperature in the room dropped by ten degrees. Owen almost always radiated warmth. But he could also radiate chill.

Otherwise the second half of his Mastership was easy for him. The Fellowship grew from eighteen to 45, Selwyn trebled the number of graduate students in residence and found ways of integrating them successfully. Owen's retirement coincided with the college's centenary and so with major fundraising which far exceeded its target, undoubtedly a thank-you from grateful alumni. By 1980 he was becoming a bit more resistant to change and he had to fight hard to maintain some things dear to him. In particular he wished to see no further change in the statute that required the Fellowship to seek a clerk in holy orders for the Mastership. The (compromise) statute required this search, and only allowed the search to be broadened if two-thirds of the Fellows present at an election meeting voted that no suitable cleric could be found. Owen's sole argument, pressed with such moral authority that he won the argument, was that while the statutes provided for a dean to run the chapel, and a chaplain to tend to the spiritual needs of the student body (and the Fellows), it did not provide for someone to focus on the spiritual needs of the college staff. That, he said, was a crucial part of the Master's role. We all thought that he himself had demonstrated the value of this role, and most could not bear to think he would think we did not value it (even though in the bar afterwards, some wondered if

any other clerical Master would do so). Going into the meeting, two-thirds thought we should remove the clerical test; at the end of the meeting two-thirds thought (at least for a moment) that we shouldn't.[49]

Thus did he hold the Fellows in thrall. John Sweet, Dean of Chapel, wrote that '[Owen] was not afraid to say No, and to give no explanation, if to justify a decision might cause harm.' The most spectacular example of this (but one of many) was when a Fellow reported that a good friend and noted scholar had resigned from another college and was looking for a new one. Were we interested? When it came to Governing Body, we all assumed it was a shoo-in, until Owen spoke up: 'I have been given information by someone I am not at liberty to name, of a nature I am not at liberty to disclose, which makes it impossible for me to support this candidate'. No-one challenged him and after several Fellows said that was good enough for them, the proposer withdrew his proposal. You had to have seen him in action to 'feel' his moral authority.

The 1970s, with Selwyn still on the rise and his Vice-Chancellorship behind him, were years in which he took on much else, chairing the committee that oversaw the transition from the failing University College for postgraduates and undergraduates of mature years into the hugely successful Wolfson College. Trickier was his role in the establishment of Robinson College, created by the huge generosity of the man who had made a fortune out of renting out TV sets in the 1950s and 1960s. There were plenty of people who thought that Cambridge had enough traditional colleges, and needed endowment of chairs and laboratories and other things the founder of Radio Rentals was less interested in. Robinson College duly appeared and thrived.

In these years he was invited, sometimes as a scholar, sometimes as a churchman, to speak all over the world. This had begun in the 1950s when long-haul travel was not for the faint-hearted, but it took him to Moscow in an Anglican delegation to the Patriarch Alexei, and (facilitated by his brother John when the latter was ambassador there) to Romania on a fraternal visit to the Patriarch Justinian, as courageous a defender of the faith in the face of Soviet oppression as anywhere. He went twice on tours of South Africa to lecture and preach and to support the beleaguered opponents of apartheid, on the second occasion being banned from Witwatersrand University after speaking on behalf of Nelson Mandela. He was drawn to see for himself the nature of modern barbarism and he did not flinch from supporting its Christian opponents. He also went to India (and was ever after a strong supporter of the missions and of the ecumenical experiments there). He had not been well briefed before he arrived in Delhi to give the Teape Lectures, only to find out rather late in the day that the specified subject was to have been 'The Upanishads and the Catholic Church'. Nothing daunted he spoke without a text on 'the Experience of Religion' and made it appear appropriate.

[49] Personal memory checked with others present at the time.

Just as onerous were the increasing number of calls on him to give addresses to mark important occasions and memorials. A sample, illustrating the range, are 'The English Bishops and the Nazis' (Lambeth Palace, 1973), 'The idea of a national church: Gladstone and Henson' (1974), 'Charles Kingsley at Cambridge' (1975), 'The last crusade? The Church of England in the First World War' (1975), 'Acton and Gladstone' (1976), 'The British Ambassador and the conclave of 1878' (1981), and – a return to basics – 'The making of Benedictine Ideal' (one of the first Thomas Verner Moore [Carthusian monk, influential psychiatrist] memorial lectures at the Catholic University of America). His lectures in Cambridge too were more scattered and ever changing – whole series prepared and delivered only once: the History of Italy since 1797 (1977), The Fascist and Nazi epoch (1979), Appeasement in Europe, 1933–1939 (1980), The morality of War 1914–1945 (1983), German Resistance to Hitler (1981), short series on Newman (1981–3), and most startlingly – just once – 'Witchcraft, Magic, Heresy in the early Enlightenment' (1979). He gave a special subject (they usually ran for 5 years or even more) for one year only (1975–6) on 'England and the Papacy in the nineteenth century' but was unhappy with it, and he substituted for it in his last years *en poste* a special subject (3rd year option) on 'Italy and the Papacy 1814–1945' which attracted few students but changed the lives of a high proportion of those who took it (Stephen Taylor, Simon Dixon). All this represents a considerable intellectual restlessness and a permanent switch to Europe, to modern barbarism, and to Christian resistance to barbarism, especially by the popes of the 150 years leading up to the Second Vatican Council. It did little to challenge his own Tractarian Anglicanism – he was repelled by the sacramentalism and sacerdotalism of the Catholic practice but (not least because of brother Henry's revered status as the lead Anglican on the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission), he developed friendships with Catholic luminaries in Rome and elsewhere. Like Milton before him, he was beguiled by Rome and by its intelligentsia, but repelled by its pieties and hypocrisies. Still, the best of his work in the 1970s and 1980s was on the papacy.

The year 1970 saw the publication of the second volume of *The Victorian Church* (the two volumes together weighing in at 1,100 pages). In the next decade and a half, which included his four years as President of the British Academy, there were five more books – *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (CUP, 1975), *Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives* (1978), *The Popes and European Revolution* (1981), and *Newman* (1983), a sequence completed after retirement by *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (1986, but delivered as Ford Lectures in Oxford in 1981). It is hard to comprehend the magnificent sweep of these works: the archival mastery, the organisational flair, the idiosyncratic translucence of the writing, the self-effacement throughout.

None of these was straightforwardly his own choice of subject. *The Victorian Church* (1966, 1970) was commissioned in a series called An Ecclesiastical History of England

and is the only one still read. He made them his own and indeed it is likely that A & C Black were somewhat alarmed at what he delivered. The other volumes as envisaged covered the pre-Conquest period, and the periods 1066–1500, 1500–1660 and 1660–1830, all at less than half the length of Owen's book, and surely a series commissioned in the 1950s would not have ended in 1901? Owen clearly wrote a different book from the one envisaged.

Then there were the books he commissioned himself to write. In the early 1970s OUP asked Owen and his brother Henry to produce an ambitious series of single-authored books on the History of Christianity. They had all the problems that editors of series have. Authors let them down, sometimes for good reason.[50] In the end Owen was to write three volumes in the series, all because of the withdrawal (after many years) of their preferred authors. In 1981, Owen published *The Popes and European Revolution* (1981, 646 pp.). Much later he was to publish *A History of the Popes 1830–1914* (1998, 614 pp.) and, heading towards his 86th birthday, *The Early Reformation on the Continent* (2001, 446 pp.).

Nor were these the only things he felt constrained to commission from himself. The six-volume Penguin History of the Church had been envisaged as having five chronological volumes covering the death of Christ to the present (or at least 1945) together with a volume on the *History of Christian Missions* covering 1900 years. All had appeared by 1970, but the sixth volume by the missionary scholar-bishop Stephen Neill had been rather rushed, and Owen agreed to upgrade the book and especially the final two chapters. The last 100 pages were rewritten as only he could write them – to take one example, who else would have written: 'in Guyana, where Hindus were many, Roman Catholics increased faster in percentage terms than population; but that was not true of the Evangelicals' (p. 472). Who else could have noticed and featured on the final page of the last chapter that in Brazil there were more than one million Japanese by 1970, and that there were twice as many Catholics amongst the Japanese of Brazil than the Japanese of Japan!)?

Some years later, Penguin decided that 1945 might have been a good place to end in a series commissioned in the 1950s, but by 1990 a lot had happened since. Could there be a seventh volume covering that period? Owen asked lots of people who agreed it was a good idea but could not do it themselves. So he sat down and wrote it himself: *The Christian Church and the Cold War*, taking the story down to the election of John Paul II, the rise of Gorbachev, and Perestroika.

[50] Their frustrations with about thirty authors, who had agreed to write the books but not to write letters to tell Henry and Owen about their (lack of) progress, are the most irritated and frustrated element in their letters to one another across the period from the mid–1970s to the mid–1990s.

The other books from the period 1970–85, again representing, in at least two cases, constrained choices, arose from responses to invitations to give major and prestigious series of lectures – *The Secularization of the European Mind* (CUP, 1975) are his Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh (1973–4), and *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (CUP, 1986) is based on the Ford Lectures in British History delivered in 1981 – a factor which reshaped what he had to say. The odd one out and one of his most idiosyncratic books in terms of subject matter – a real outlier – is *Catholicism and History*: *The Opening of the Vatican Archives* (CUP, 1978), given as Hensley Henson Lectures in Oxford in 1976. With chapter titles like 'the record of Galileo's trial', 'the minutes of the Council of Trent' and 'the Borgia Pope', one is led to expect essays on some of Rome's less glorious moments. But in fact this is a book about how the Vatican Secret Archive was reassembled after Napoleon had plundered it, and how across the 19th century there were struggles to arrange it and make it available. It is fascinating, mesmerising to listen to, I am sure, even if it has little to do with the memory of Hensley Henson.

The Victorian Church

At the epicentre of all this prodigious outcome was what many would see as his supreme achievement – *The Victorian Church* (1966, 1970). It is not a conventional history and indeed the two volumes are quite different in nature. Volume 1 begins with the great and bitter debates over Catholic Emancipation in Ireland and consequentially in England in 1829, and then follows a loosely chronological design, taking 150 pages to reach the accession of Victoria. It is a series of set-piece accounts of a wide range of episodes in Whitehall, Westminster, Oxford and elsewhere down to 1860. Many are about politicians dictating to the church and being resisted. Others are about darkening relations between factions in the Church – from irritable co-existence to vicious abuse, verbal, legal, political. Others are about relations with other Churches, Catholics, and the panoply of Dissenting groups from Methodists to Mormons, relations which are ever-changing. Much of the context is urbanisation and how the Church of England chose to react to it. In a miraculous way, a complete picture is given through these myriad individual stories – there are eight chapters, but about 40 separate stories which are far more than the sum of their parts. And there is a 4-page summation which brings it all together (pp. 568–72). This is how Owen launched that conclusion:

> The cardinal fact of those years [1830–60] was the frightening growth of towns. There was bred a proletariat estranged from religious practice, by belief that religion was bourgeois, by shortage of churches and ministers, by immigrants from Ireland whom the

> Roman Catholic Church was too small to gather, by immigrants from the countryside whom the Church of England was too inflexible to gather, by immigrants from Ireland or the countryside too poor for any church to gather, unless here or there Strict Baptists or Primitive Methodists touched the illiterate with wildfire. (p. 568)

These were conditions, then, that touched the state as much as the church, but when they did touch the church, there was much resultant change that involved matters of theology as well as ecclesiology; and they spawned turf wars.

The second volume, covering the last 40 years of Victoria's reign, is not arranged chronologically but thematically: three chapters on the undermining of faith – science, biblical scholarship, existential doubt – followed by two enormous and sumptuous chapters on 'the village church' and 'the town church', and a third on the relations of bishop and the people of his diocese which could have been entitled 'uneasy lies the head that wears the mitre'. Two final chapters cover, first, relations with Roman Catholics, and especially relations with the two Cardinals (Manning and Newman) who so wanted to get on with one another but couldn't, and second, the inexorable growth of secularisation in the press, in the universities, in public discourse. And this volume too has a brilliant peroration, in which the changes in the language of hymns stand for changes in religious culture writ large, as the church made always valiant, sometimes unavailing, attempts to address modernity. In one of the most exceptional of all the chapters, simply entitled 'Doubt', Owen shows how the angry defiant doubt of a Lecky or Swinburne in the 1860s and 1870s had mellowed into more rueful, if-only doubt by the turn of the century.

The qualities are the same as in all his books, but now on an epic scale. Its power grows out of precision and concision. There are the laser-sharp, unsentimental, warts-and-all, character sketches of those who will play their part in the dramas; there is the magpie ear for the glitteringly apt quotation; there is the gift for synecdoche; there is easy movement between the micro and macro sides of every story. Let me take each of these in turn.

Here is how he introduces the loosest of loose cannons, Richard Whately, sent from Oxford to be archbishop of Armagh, and the greatest bogeyman to the Tractarians:

> A philosopher of sufficient eminence to be reviving the study of logic in Oxford; more ingenious than profound, but the hardest head in the university; with rough manners and huge frame, eating vast helpings at high table, smoker of many pipes, wearing hairy untidy garments, utterly unclerical in appearance, and caring nothing for convention. Whately never read books. He resolved his meditations round five or six authors … In Oxford he was known as the White Bear, and in the early morning could be seen walking the meadows with a white hat on the back of his head, a rough white coat and a great white dog, not on the paths, but scrambling through hedges and ditches and swamps. (pp. 42–3)

Not exactly Newman's cup of tea, but a man who made it easier for the Tractarians to despise liberals.

There are just so many of these: Newman himself, Pusey, Lecky, Swinburne, Melbourne, Peel, Lord John Russell, and so *ad infinitum*. But we must have one more, the deeply harrowing account of the damaged James Anthony Froude, son of an austere archdeacon and the younger brother of Hurrell Froude, brilliant and dead at 33.

> He admired the memory of Hurrell and knew he ought to have loved him. But what he remembered was Hurrell watching with approval as his father flogged him, Hurrell examining his lessons and finding them lamentable, Hurrell holding his heels over a stream and his head under water. The memory of his dead brother was a cell in the family prison. To the Oxford movement he knew that he owed the highest in his soul. And the Oxford movement was a thrall whence he must flee for very life. The young Froude is intelligible only in his love-hate. His attack on orthodox Christianity was not crude like Holyoake, shallow like Paine, academic like Strauss, rhetorical like Carlyle. Its force consisted in this: that he understood the moral power of orthodox faith and devotion, knew it experimentally, and with half, but only half, his inmost being yearned to share it. (pp. 533–4)

Phew.

And then there were the *mots justes:* 'the whig river of reform was diverted into a canal that Peel dug' (1: 129); on Newman, 'he was soon aware that the Fathers were a great pool in which swam many fish, not all savoury to modern palattes' (p. 179); or on Charles Dickens 'attribut[ing] half the misery and hypocrisy of the Christian world to forcing the Old Testament into unnatural alliance with the New' (p. 528); or on the Cambridge polymath W.H. Mill, 'who had great repute as a Tractarian leader and would have been influential if he had not preached in a medley of stutter and bellow' (p. 532).

And then there is the ear for the glorious quotation. On Manning, spurning the prospect of the Tractarians going into schism as a mutated form of Non-Juring (in response to politicians and judges telling bishops what they could not do in the Gorham case): 'three hundred years ago we left a good ship for a boat; I am not going to leave the boat for a tub' (p. 271). And more whimsically, an inimitable story which combines a wonderful quote with a wonderful gloss:

> Early in October 1847 ancient Archbishop Vernon Harcourt of York, in his ninety-second year, was walking with his chaplain across a wooden bridge over an ornamental pool at Bishopsthorpe when the bridge collapsed, and they fell into the water up to their necks. 'Well, Dixon,' said the archbishop, 'I think we have frightened the frogs' and insisted on presiding that evening at a dinner party. On 12 October he presided at a meeting in York, though somewhat paralysed in his legs and in one hand, and on 5 November, amiable and blameless, he faded away. (p. 237)

Do we detect a pre-echo of the charge of the Light Brigade? We can certainly detect an author in love with his subject.

These small things all build up intrigue in the reader, and confidence, and trust and a willing suspension of all forms of scepticism about the lightly footnoted erudition of the book. And then we turn to the big things, the struggles of non-conformists to get beyond the condescension of Anglican vicars as they sought to get their marriages registered and their dead buried in country churchyards, or of why Newman and Manning just could not get on (could it be that Manning's inspiration was Charles Borromeo and Newman's Philip Neri, two great counter-reformation saints who also tried in vain to like one another?). These volumes are in a sense one huge mosaic made up of many hundreds of bright shards of glass, the whole so much greater than the parts.

The Victorian Church represents the great pivot of Owen's writing career. *Victorian Miniature* and *Mackenzie's Grave* are experiments in synecdoche, *From Bossuet to Newman* was a limbering up exercise in the hermeneutics of change, now beaten out on the anvils of politics and urbanisation. And out of it came the next great book *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, where so many of the themes of the *Victorian Church* were broadened out. The English experience remains the spine and other parts of Europe come and go, especially as Owen explores new science, new historicism, new notions of the moral nature of man. Some things are wholly new, like the stunning exploration (in the section on social history) of Karl Marx's changing attitude to religion and religious institutions in an extended 40-page chapter; or the highly original account (in the section on intellectual history) of Voltaire in the 19th century – essentially a contrast between English and French receptions of Voltaire and Rousseau, and ending in a meditation on the fluctuating history of the Pantheon in Paris. If anything the very best comes at the beginning and the end, in the introduction exploring the unstable, elusive concept of secularisation (and many other terms); and the short concluding chapter on 'a sense of providence', exploring how major shipwrecks were explained in the press, from the pulpit, in poetry, with at its epicentre an analysis of Manley Hopkins's *Wreck of the Deutschland*. And the conclusion?

> The *Titanic* reports do show one important thing to us: a distancing of God from the detail of human disaster; a determination not to hold Him responsible for human error in the design of elaborate machinery. The trenches of 1914 to 1918 and the suffering in them insisted terribly on this notion of distance between God and human error. (p. 262)

The Popes and European Revolution; biographies of Hensley Henson and Newman

After this came the demand for more prestigious public lectures, and the need to write books that others had failed to write took over for a decade. We have already mentioned

the volume on *Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives*, given as the Hensley Henson Lectures in Oxford in 1976. After giving those lectures, his interest in Hensley Henson was piqued; and when the Dean and Chapter of Durham asked him for a memoir of someone who had been their bishop from 1920 to 1938, and who Owen himself called 'cantankerous, decisive, courageous, difficult, clear-headed, truculent – but not lovable', Owen fell in love with that unloveableness, and he produced, in the year he himself retired not a pamphlet but a 337-page biography. And either he wrote it in a rush after the appearance of *The Popes and European Revolution*, or he wrote them in parallel, and there are grounds for thinking that he did the latter.

Let us start with *The Popes and European Revolution*, published in 1981, a work that is full of puzzles.

In or around 1972 Oxford University Press commissioned Henry and Owen to edit a series of 'about' (so a dust jacket tells us) twenty volumes in a comprehensive Oxford History of the Christian Church. They must have been encouraged by the speed and efficiency with which Owen had overseen the Penguin History of the Church – six volumes all brought safely to harbour over a seven-year period. This was to be a much more fraught project. Ten volumes were commissioned immediately and thirteen by the end of the 1970s. The first volume appeared in 1976 and proved what in military terms would be called a forlorn hope. By 1992, twenty years after the commissioning, only five volumes had appeared, and by the silver jubilee of the series launch, i.e. by 1997, just seven. There was then a gush of eight new titles in the years 1998–2003 (it helped that two were by Owen), and by the time of Owen's death, 44 years from the start, there were eighteen titles in all. Of the thirteen listed in the cover of Owen's 1981 volume, the second to appear, seven never appeared, nor were most of them replaced. When Owen at the age of 85 published his third volume in the series (*The Early Reformation in Europe*), he was the fifth person to agree to write it, the others having failed to produce (admittedly in at least one case failure being due to the author's death).

The concept of the series was not, as with the Penguin, to think first of periods and then of authors, but to think first of authors and ask them what they would like to contribute. So it was always going to be a patchwork with lots of overlaps and gaps. So the first thirteen volumes would have had a volume on late medieval Spain but not France or the Empire; there would be volumes on Britain in the 18th century but not other centuries, and so on. There is much discussion in his letters to and from Henry about what he himself should write, including a letter he wrote on 15 May 1976 about whether to write a Protestant or Catholic volume. He inclined to the latter: 'I am more clued up about that at the moment, and I think more inquisitive about it and probably the strong underlying Tractarian side of me would deal with more understanding'. The case against was that it would even harder to find someone for modern Protestantism, and 'to get a non-R.C, to

write R.C. history is to send him into a forest with man-traps under every bush'. But they decided he should do it.

He had commissioned Jack McManners, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History in Oxford, to write on Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France (which finally appeared in 1998, in two volumes). So when Owen sat down to write *The Popes and European Revolution*, more than half of which covered 'the church of the *ancien regime*', he had to exclude most discussion of France, at least from that section, and focus on Germany, Spain and Italy. Of course, when writing about Revolution and Restoration, and the age of Napoleon, he had to bring France centre-stage. It makes his book a tad lopsided.

Inverting the way he organised *The Victorian Church*, the first 345 pages of *The Popes and European Revolution* consist of a series of thematic chapters ('the religion of the people', 'the clergy', 'monks and nuns', 'the office of the pope'), and then 250 pages, broadly chronological, cover 'the fall of the Jesuits', 'the Catholic reformers', 'Revolution', and 'Restoration' (1815–30). The opening chapter on 'religion of the people' is a series of brilliant vignettes from across southern and central Europe, starting with superstition and magic, witchcraft, saints, processions, brotherhoods, pilgrimage, indulgences, the Sacred Heart, and only mid-way through do we enter the church and explore sacred space through the eyes of the lowly parishioner – sanctuary, crib, ornaments and, finally, acts of worship. And the other chapters of the first half are comparably picaresque. The chapter on the suppression of the Jesuits is also quixotic, especially since a quarter of it focused on Paraguay, but it is rich and suggestive about Enlightenment imperatives. Napoleon's political and intellectual engagement with Pius VII is a special treat. But what is most striking about this book and the biography of Hensley Henson is a change of *how* he wrote. And in fact, realising that he no longer *wrote*. We now have even shorter sentences in even shorter paragraphs, often as many as seven on a page; shorter staccato sentences, linked to exempla whose connection is often oblique. Let me give an example. On p. 67, he is writing about 'the parish service'. The third (of five) paragraph (40 words) is about going to confession; the next runs:

> Spitting in church was not uncommon. In Padua diocese they provided that a spittoon should be placed on the steps of the altar, and cleaned eight times a day. This was partly caused by chewing tobacco … Even celebrating priests could be observed to take snuff, and were not thought irreverent by the people, only by priests who cared for clean linen.

This para is twice the length of the one on going to confession.

The third of six paragraphs on p. 454 is about Napoleon's changes of heart:

> This Corsican had touching faith in the power of priests to keep order. When there was trouble in the mountains above Mantua, he ordered the Bishop of Vicenza to send missionaries to preach quiet and obedience under pain of hell-fire, and remembered to make careful provision for their travelling expenses.

There is something different here in this writing from earlier. This is the moment, as he had to fit writing into his commitments to the British Academy, that he took to dictation to his wonderful college secretary Marion. He would sit with her in his office or in the garden, as she took down his words in shorthand. He would have a few scraps of paper which read something like 'Bishop of Vicenza' or 'Bishop of Como equality', and all else was in his memory.[51]

This is as good a place as any to say how he *researched*. Two things stand out in the memory of those who observed him. He did not annotate his books. In ledgers he would jot down phrases that would trigger memory for the purpose of the current project. His memory seems almost never to have led to mistakes. He would turn pages languidly but relentlessly and move on. Several archivists told me that he had an intuitive sense of what he needed to see, and worked the same way – parsing and taking the briefest of notes. And one very instructive thing about *Popes and European Revolution* is revealed in the preface, his dependence on raids on the papers of Lord Acton who, Owen says, 'collected a mass of literature in order himself to write a book about this very theme. The book never got written … he died nearly eighty years ago. But I could not have done the work without his frequent assistance' (p. v). It was Acton who led him to the bishops of Vicenza and Como. And I suspect Owen never had living research assistants, but I suspect he regularly had long-dead ones.

And so to Hensley Henson. He was beguiled by his subject, and a pamphlet became a 337-page book. Henson was everything Owen wasn't: outspoken, with a gift for making enemies not friends, and truth, and heedless about whether what he said was productive or counter-productive in his passionate pursuit of social justice. Half the bishops tried to prevent him becoming a bishop, both because there was a sniff of heresy about him (refusing to affirm unequivocally the Virgin Birth and physical Resurrection), and because he had already been rude to most of them. His speeches in the House of Lords, in which he frequently spoke dismissively of the speeches of other bishops, were often divisive, his compassion for the poor was unequalled (although he alienated the miners of his Durham constituency by opposing the General Strike). All this and the author of an autobiography based on a fundamental lack of self-knowledge or at least of self-understanding. Home educated by a bigoted widowed father, an outsider in Oxford who took a degree without membership of a college, and who was then immediately elected to a Fellowship of All Souls, he enthralled Owen who was determined to rescue him from the condescension of posterity. And, using the new freedom of dictating the book from a deckchair, Owen indulged himself in whimsy and mannerisms of speech which charm many but may irritate some:

[51] Confirmed to me by Marion Lant at a meeting on 4 May 2023.

> What his disputations with atheists taught Henson: 'You cannot defend the Christian Churches, they are indefensible; defend the Christ and you are home' (p. 46).
>
> On the Norman kitchen in the deanery at Durham: 'it was excellent for roasting oxen, less satisfactory for boiling an egg' (p. 111).
>
> On Lloyd George's decision to nominate him as Bishop of Hereford, that it was 'like sending a destroyer into a land-locked pool' (p. 130) or (rather better) 'an armoured car into an orchard of apple trees' (p. 132).
>
> On the few who supported him during the storm over his elevation from the deanery of Durham to the see of Hereford: 'Inge, the dean of St Paul's was a tower of strength except that support from Inge lost votes' (p. 136).

And a more extended whimsy on his feud with the Dean of Durham over the latter's campaign for the criminalisation of alcohol (one of several issues on which the dean denounced his bishop from the pulpit, Henson's heedless speaking truth to power being catching):

> Henson by nature disapproved of bishops and, being diminutive, specially of bishops, when they were large of stature. Welldon[52] had 6 ft 5ins of height, a waist of 63 ins, and a tiny voice. He had a rollicking gait and exploded with gusts of laughter, On a visit to the royal family, Henson was told by little Princess Elizabeth that when she went to the zoo she most enjoyed the rhinobottomimus. This became Henson's nickname for his dean. Welldon was not Henson's type of dean, and Henson was not Welldon's kind of bishop. (p. 164)

It is to our benefit that Owen dictated his later books from his deckchair.

Unloveable; but admirable. The subtitle of Owen's memoir – he was adamant it was a memoir not a biography perhaps because, despite deep research in Lambeth, Hatfield, Cambridge, Durham, Hereford (and the loan to him in Cambridge of all 101 volumes of Henson's journal), he was excusing the book's skimpy footnotes – was *A study in the friction of Church and State* – and Owen knew how bruising that could be. He deeply admired Henson's social conscience and above all the clear-eyed and immediate perception of the evil inherent in Fascism and Nazism.[53]

There was one more book – really an extended essay – published in the period leading up to his retirement, and in fact on the eve of it: *Newman: A Short Introduction* (1983, only 100 pp.), commissioned by Oxford University Press for its Past Masters series. It can have taken him little effort. He had written about Newman in several books and had formed a clear sense of him and (I think it fair to say) he admired him more than he liked him. He recognised in him a powerful intellect, and one that forced him into

[52] Before becoming Dean of Durham, Welldon had been (Headmaster of Harrow and) Bishop of Calcutta.
[53] I am grateful to Philip Williamson for improving my account of this memoir of Henson.

endless revisiting of big questions in theology and ecclesiology, who attracted admirers and easily lost friends. In 80 pages Owen offers an overview of Newman on authority, tradition and conscience (and how essential it was for them to be and remain in creative tension); he explains his centrality to the practice of theology since his time; he regrets his decision to become a Catholic, commenting on the what-ifs that could have prevented it. He treats the period 1845–54 as a period of fevered convertitis, on either side of which he tried to prevent the damaging effects of liberalism in the Church of England, and an over-reliance on authority in the Church of Rome. The book has a loose chronological structure emphasising continuities. For example, convertitis impelled him to republish his Anglican works. Owen stresses the Janus-faced approach to faith:

> in the first half of his life he wound up the Church of England to its Catholic heritage, In the second half of his life he wound down the Church of Rome – that is he sought to persuade its leaders not to push their Catholicity into fanaticism, or superstition, or irrationality, or rigid hierarchy. (p. 58)

He offers a glorious illustration:

> the second element of the average Englishman's portrait [of Catholicism] came from travel in Europe. Tourists went into a church in Naples and found an old crone superstitious and credulous before a crucifix or a statue. *This* was Roman Catholic faith … The woman in the gospel who touched the hem of Jesus's garment to be healed, she was credulous and superstitious. Christ tolerated her superstition because he saw it a sign of a simple faith. The Church would like to be free of superstition. But its bishops did not wish to root out faith by weeding up superstition. (p. 65)

This lovely book is a whimsical what-if. It reveals much of value about John Henry Newman, and even more about William Owen Chadwick. He regretted and never fully accepted the necessity of Newman's 'desertion' of Anglicanism. He once wrote to me (on my conversion) that 'I have always believed that the *ecclesia Anglicana* is the best of all churches. It grieves me when one leaves this church as when someone leaves his spouse.' One senses that in this important short life. It is important, because in the building of the campaign for Newman's beatification, Catholic scholarship had become too hagiographical and applied too much make-up. It was a recognition of a genius more flawed than Catholics were willing to see.

President of the British Academy

As he was writing this book he must have been anticipating retirement – from the Regius Chair, from Selwyn and looking forward to simpler pastimes and a manageable diary. Of course, he would have known that he would have years of advising and promoting good causes and good people ahead of him.

He was now constantly advising patronage secretaries about senior appointments in the universities and in the church. He was well qualified for this role, having turned down several bishoprics himself (I was in his hearing once when someone asked him if it was true that he had turned down 'several bishoprics including Durham and Winchester'. He gave that long laugh and said, with magnificent ambiguity, 'Winchester would have been rather nice'. And then, out of a clear sky, came one more giant and demanding job, the Presidency of the British Academy. He certainly did not seek it, but his decisive intervention in the Blunt Affair made others see him as the obvious candidate.

He was towards the end of a term as one of Vice-Presidents of the British Academy when, right at the beginning of 1980, a tempest blew up in which he was forced mainly (but not entirely) behind the scenes to play a vital part. A later President, David Cannadine, has explored the episode in an account published with the witty title *A Question of Retribution: The British Academy and the Matter of Anthony Blunt* (2020).[54] After Margaret Thatcher had outed Blunt as the fourth member of the Cambridge Soviet spy ring (violating the promise of anonymity made to Blunt in return for his co-operation),[55] a group of Fellows sought to have Blunt expelled from the Academy's Fellowship. The leader of this campaign was Sir John Plumb. Cannadine makes clear that, behind a semblance of moral outrage, Plumb was as ever seeking things beyond his grasp. Having been denied the peerage he had sought from the last Labour government, he wanted to impress Thatcher. And he saw a successful campaign as a route to the Presidency of the Academy.

Owen had had so many slights from Plumb, who loathed him for getting the Regius Chair he had so coveted, that he would have been less than human if he had not allowed some concealed animus to guide his actions. But securing the Presidency was not in his mind and certainly not in his hopes.

The careful analysis in Cannadine's book of the correspondence throughout the affair, of the minutes of Council, and the rough notes of the secretariat, and of the memoirs of those involved, leave no doubt of how much Sir Kenneth Dover, the President at the eye of the storm, relied on Owen's advice. Dover himself remembered that his Vice-Presidents (Owen and Sir Michael Howard) 'were not only sensible and cool-headed men but were also opposed to expulsion' (p. 22), which swayed him. Peter Brown, later Secretary and at that time Deputy Secretary to John Carswell, recalls that at the crucial Council meeting on 18 March 1980, Owen 'suddenly exploded, saying he loathed witch-hunts. He was emotionally very powerful indeed. I think his moral authority shone more than that of perhaps anyone else around the table' (p. 28). Carswell's rough notes of the

[54] Alan Bennett's one-act play about Blunt's treachery (National Theatre, 1988; BBC TV 1991) was entitled *A Question of Attribution*.

[55] *Private Eye* had already named him as the 'fourth man' in the Cambridge spy ring, but it had not been taken up by the mass media until Mrs Thatcher (ab)used parliamentary privilege to do so.

meeting record Owen as saying that 'fitness to [be] elected not quite the same as fitness to be a continuing member' (p. 30). (Peter Brown's notes more curtly record Owen as saying the issue was 'not proposing to elect but to diselect' [p. 30].) All this was in the presence of Plumb, also on Council. Notwithstanding this, Plumb's motion was passed by 8–7 and the matter was referred to the AGM, where after a long debate to which Owen did not contribute, a motion to move on to other business (i.e. no decision and therefore no expulsion) was passed by a large majority. Plumb who wanted the Presidency was thwarted. Owen, who did not (particularly) want it, was duly elected. This was the story of their lives in Cambridge and beyond.[56]

It cannot have been a hard choice for Council to propose the election of Owen – after Sir Kenneth Dover spoke individually to members of Council and to his predecessors as President, all but one of them heads of Oxbridge colleges – of the fourteen Presidents between Owen's election as a Fellow and his death, seven were Oxford Heads, five Cambridge Heads, the others being Lionel Robbins (1962–6) and Randolph Quirk (1985–9). His reputation as scholar and administrator went before him.

That said, there is no easy time to be President of the Academy. He became President when Margaret Thatcher was set on slashing public expenditure, and her secretary of state for Education, Sir Keith Joseph, was more inclined than Mrs Thatcher to celebrate intellectual distinction but even more in favour of slashing public expenditure. Rugby analogues would not help Owen here, but cricketing ones might, for he was a formidable batsman in his time, and he was now sent out to bat on a wicket that took a lot of spin and he set out to smother the turning ball.

The first year may have been the hardest. Margaret Thatcher was limbering up to take on left-wingery in the universities, and had set her sights on closing some particular universities and shutting down the Economic and Social Research Council. Rather assuming that the -ologists in the Academy were the tame ones who kept out the Marxists, she proposed to shut down the Research Council and hand over more modest sums for funding the -ologies, with the carrot attached of money for the Humanities too. This was a gift horse that Owen certainly did want to look in the mouth. His account of the pros

[56] This account follows closely the documentation and analysis in *A Question of Retribution*. Geoffrey Parker FBA tells me that most of those most committed to expelling Blunt, including Plumb, had worked at Bletchley Park during the war (or other intelligence services), and that they were driven by those working for Britain who were killed because of Blunt's treachery. Of course, as late as 1980, they could not divulge their wartime records. Parker identifies, amongst the most strident opponents of Blunt: Norman Gash (MI 14D), Plumb (Bletchley Park), J.M. Wallace-Hadrill and John Evans, T.B. Smith, Robert Blake, Colin Roberts, and Arnold Taylor – all discussed in *A Question of Retribution*. On the lives he caused to be lost, there is an anecdote in the book, pure Le Carré, which reads 'at a lunch at the Garrick, [John] Carswell [Secretary of the Academy] encountered Sir Michael Havers, the Attorney General, in the men's lavatory, who told him that "Blunt has blood on his hands, a lot of blood"' (pp. 91–2).

and cons in his first Presidential address at the AGM on 1 July is especially deft.[57] He began by noting that 'doubtless the views of the Fellowship on these matters were and are various'. New powers were always to be welcomed, but at what cost to self-governance, to independence, to the existing ethos and culture, at what cost to the staff. He offered the prospect of securing oversight of the allocation and monitoring of postgraduate awards in the Humanities, but due caution in respect of the rest. This at a time when he had also (with consummate skill) to negotiate the move from cramped quarters in Burlington House, where the Academy had been since 1968, to Crown Estate premises in Cornwall Terrace facing Regent's Park. There was a new mid-career Readership scheme to be introduced, the always fraught issue of mergers and de-mergers of the Academy's Sections, and a pioneering scheme for Academy subventions to facilitate the publication of new books by outstanding authors. And in the midst of all this, the head of the British Institute of Afghan Studies overseeing excavations in Old Kandahar was arrested, subjected to a show trial and convicted. The Foreign Office obviously took the lead, but as Owen revealingly told the AGM 'this is one of places where the international relations of the Academy and of its individual members have been of first importance … We also approached the Soviet Academy of Sciences'. Vital work only the Academy could do, and effective work: the Director was released.

His second address, delivered on 12 July 1982,[58] was more engaged with the question of whether the Academy should become a Research Council for the Humanities, and once more he lays out the arguments on both sides with a strong call to caution. Would it cause a shrinkage of what the Academy's existing programmes did so well? Would it be regrettable from the point of view of the public interest to shrink away from it? At the end he *seems* to lean towards accepting the challenge: 'It would be ridiculous and irresponsible to avoid doing good to the humanities solely because somebody would have to take time thinking out how best we could do that good.' And then he moves on to warm encouragement from government for the Academy to take over the management of postgraduate awards. All other areas were presented as calm. But the cut-and-thrust of debate even with supportive ministers outside the Treasury, as universities were losing one third or more of their funding, was not an activity for the faint-hearted. Experience in the heart of scrums no doubt came in handy.

The third and fourth addresses to the AGMs of 1984 and 1985 are missing from the Academy's files, so we have to reconstitute the issues from the minutes of the meetings of Council. Apart from the stress of having to find out how £69,000 was taken from the Academy's accounts by forged names on stolen cheques (with much relief when no-one

[57] The addresses are listed (and can be accessed online) for most of the years since 1903 at https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/about/presidential-addresses/

[58] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/about/presidential-addresses/

amongst the staff [or Fellows] was found to be implicated), there was slow progress in bringing about a broad consensus in favour of the Academy taking responsibility for the award of postgraduate studentships, and getting the guarantees from government both that the full costs of administering the scheme would be met and that it would not affect the grant-in-aid for existing activities. But these were still years of austerity, and the uplift in the grant-in-aid, while much more favourable than that funnelled through the UGC to the universities, was far short of the Academy's bid. Council had to face the fact that government was no friend to the Academy-sponsored Schools and Institutes Abroad and insisted on a 'value-for-money' review, while meanwhile starving them of funds. And more generally, there was enormous pressure for the Academy to become much more like a Research Council. The UGC enlisted it as an ally in lobbying government on behalf of the Humanities, and a letter written by Owen was widely circulated and influential. A 7000-word address he wrote himself on the funding of Humanities, delivered at the University of Birmingham when he opened its Humanities Centre, was further evidence of the drift from Learned Society to Research Council. In it he stressed the dangers of a one-size-fits-all evaluation scheme (REF?), the pressure on funding (greater on libraries than laboratories), on the privileging of the natural sciences over the Humanities on assumed grounds of economic and presumed usefulness, and the need to protect the Humanities from such shallow calculation of *immediate* usefulness and of political advantage. It was deeply prophetic.[59]

Council, guided by Owen, resisted pressure to become a member of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (this followed conversations with the Royal Society which was absolutely determined not to get drawn in). In fact, Owen initiated more conversations and joint conferences with the Royal Society (on 'Predicting and Predictability', on 'the emergence of higher intelligence' (not AI *avant la lettre*, but the emergence within higher intelligence in *Homo sapiens*), and a more functional discussion on future funding of the History of Science). But the neuralgic point came with the Academy's hesitant decision to take part in the UGC's 'New Blood' initiative, and in the UGC's plans to hive off part of the block grant it received for the research activities of universities (the research infrastructure, really) for competitive bids between and within universities to encourage excellence and competition – the embryo of the Research Assessment Exercise/Research Excellence Framework. The Academy, guided by Owen, backed off the latter, but did agree to assist in the ranking of candidates for the former. The scheme (to create new posts in innovative areas to recruit talented postdocs) was one the Academy could support, but being drawn into ranking candidates was another drift from its traditional role. One reason for becoming engaged was the threat that otherwise

[59] From the unlisted and unfoliated box of papers in the Archives of the British Academy, BAA/PRS/4. There are several drafts of this speech and a two-page press release related to it in this box.

Portrait of Owen Chadwick by Norman Hepple, 1984 (Selwyn College, Cambridge).

almost all the posts would go to Science. But the Academy's involvement proved controversial in its first year. The Academy was concerned that its rankings had not been honoured by the final decisions' panel appointed by the UGC, there were problems arising from Social Science applicants being assessed by the ESRC and Arts and Humanities by the Academy, with some border disputes. 'Serious differences of opinion over English' were reported, and when officers met a delegation from amongst the Deans of Arts Faculties, there were allegations of Oxbridge bias and of conservative preference. In the ensuing year, not a single post was awarded to Oxbridge. There was, then, in these years, a great deal of noise of distant thunder. Owen, as ever, took things slowly, worked for and usually achieved near consensus. His was generally agreed to be a highly effective Presidency.

There is, amongst the archives of the Academy, a box containing correspondence which he, or the Secretary on his behalf, wrote to those who had written to him.[60] There was much courteous response to the troubled and the disappointed; there were letters to at least six Chancellors or chairs of search committees seeking new Vice-Chancellors (the three names he repeatedly put forward were, it has to be said, all current or past Fellows of Selwyn); there were letters to Fellows whose feathers had been ruffled; there are replies to endless invitations that he grace some occasion or other; there is a sharp-tongued witty memorandum about a visit to the French Academy (notably ungenerous to President Mitterand), and a surprisingly blunt response to Max Beloff, seeking support during the row in Oxford over the refusal of an honorary degree to Margaret Thatcher: 'a university which is in the habit of awarding honorary degrees and failed to honour one of its alumni who becomes Prime Minister of the country, would be a corporate body consisting of ostriches'.

Owen enjoyed his time as President. It was a lot easier than being Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge in 1969.

Retirement (1983–2015)

Retirement is of course a relative concept, for no-one more obviously than Owen. He and Ruth moved out of Selwyn to their lovely house close to Grantchester Meadows, but of course he spent time in Cley-next-the-Sea where he was honorary curate, and conducted services when he and Ruth were up there. He supported but never advised successive Masters, Vice-Masters and chaplains of Selwyn, still willing to preside at the funerals of long-serving college servants who could not see him other than as 'their' Master. And he accumulated important public positions, as a member of the Royal

[60] BAA/PRS/4.

Commission on Historical Manuscripts (1984–91), as a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery (1978–94) and as its Chair (1988–94).

The post-retirement job he most enjoyed was his decade as Chancellor of the University of East Anglia (1984–94). He had played a part in its establishment, and its long-serving first Vice-Chancellor, Frank Thwistlethwaite, was born six weeks after Owen and was at St John's College as an undergraduate at the same time. It would be surprising if Owen did not have a hand in that appointment, or that twenty years later Thistlethwaite did not have a hand in Owen's. He was no ordinary Chancellor. He, not the Vice-Chancellor, gave the state of the union addresses at degree ceremonies, he got to know the staff and drifted around the campus far more often than was required or usual, but as often as was wanted, and he played (at the plea of senior management) a key role in senior appointments. 'Which of these', he asked me once at lunch, 'is the best scholar and the best man to run a [History] department' (the 'men' included some women: this is the language of 1983). He did not speak of which, if any department, but subsequently one of them (Colin Davis) returned from New Zealand to invigorate UEA, and I realised why he had asked me so vaguely about them. He was a head-hunter *avant la lettre*. He and Ruth could now travel, and they still did everything together. When Selwyn converted an undergraduate rumpus room into a rather sedate Senior Parlour in the 2000s, the Fellows decided, not only *nem. con*. but unanimously, to call it the Owen and Ruth Chadwick Room. Are there any other such rooms in Oxbridge?

He remained mentally and physically active into his nineties, but his knees became very painful, and an unsuccessful knee replacement lamed him and left him with pain and the need of sticks. This in due course led to an anecdote quoted in slightly different forms in several obituaries. The authorised version, from an eye and ear witness is this: Owen was making his way painfully on two sticks across the lawn to get to chapel. A solicitous undergraduate asked if he could help. 'Dear boy', said Owen, 'anyone who has played rugby for England knows how to fall on grass.' What finally knocked the stuffing out of him was the death of his brother Henry in 2008 (the pressure on him to preside at Henry's funeral in Christ Church cost him dear), and the slow decline into dementia of Ruth, who he sat with in her care home daily as she became lost to him. The college sought in every way to support him, for example with birthday lunches. In May 2015, eight weeks before his death, he indicated that a lunch was too much, but he came and sat in the sitting room of the Master's Lodge, as those who had been Fellows in his time shared scones, cake and tea, and were embraced in his warm non-physical embrace. Even then, he was giving us more than we were giving him. He died six months to the day after Ruth.

Thirty-two years of retirement: another six major books and a cluster of new papers on Izaak Walton, Samuel Johnson, Prince Albert, and a flurry on Lord Acton, with whose papers he was so intimate. A particular delight was a preface to the Folio Society edition

of Trollope's *The Warden* (with a mischievous attempt to identify the model for Mrs Proudie, culminating in a great Chadwickian double negative: 'There was a theory that it was Hereford because when people looked round for a shrew who was a bishop's wife, they pitched on the see of Hereford as the least unlikely'). He declined invitations to write major lives for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, but was content to write the lives of his father-in-law and of three old friends, Stephen Neill, Charles Raven and Gordon Rupp. And he continued to write reviews: eight a year on average 1983–2001 (when he was 85), then sixteen in total 2001–6, and eleven more 2006–11, with an ever tighter concentration on the Catholic Church before, during and after Vatican II, and especially reviews of documentary collections in French and German. His final publication was of a *Festschrift* in French on the modern papacy. When (metaphorically) he laid down his pen, he had just had his 95th birthday.

The six books written between retirement and 2001 were, as one might expect, a mixed bag in every sense. First came his much-expanded Ford Lectures at Oxford on *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (CUP, 1986), then a biography of a beloved friend, archbishop Michael Ramsey (OUP, 1990), which he had promised the archbishop he would undertake once the latter had died. Then came a book that Penguin said needed to be written to bring the series he had edited for them 30 years earlier up to date, and which he could not persuade anyone else to write – *The Christian Church in the Cold War* (1992), so a book written out of duty. Then came a commission he could not resist and for which he was uniquely qualified: *An Illustrated History of Christianity* (Weidenfeld, 1995). And finally, duty (and it almost shows): two more books in the series he and Henry were editing had to be written – *A History of the Popes 1830–1914* (1998), and *The Early Reformation on the Continent* (2001).

For those who do not think that *The Victorian Church* is his masterpiece, that title is most usually gifted to the first book of his retirement years: *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War*. It is a book that engages with his lifelong obsessions: the new barbarisms; the duties of churchmen and statesman in the world as it is, not as we would want it to be. It has a vast cast of characters. The apparent hero is D'Arcy Osborne, ambassador to the Holy See, a man of taste and fine judgement, without the means to support at least the former. The real hero is Pope Pius XII, whose actions and inactions became the task Owen took upon himself not to exonerate but to make sense of them.

The book is a considerably expanded (317 pp.) version of his Ford Lectures in English History delivered in Oxford in 1981. In the preface in an unusually defensive, even rebarbative, comment, Owen wrote, 'one eminent historian doubted whether the subject is English History and whether the Reverend James Ford the Victorian endower of the lectureship would have approved. But the history of England also happens elsewhere than in England' (p. viii). The eminent historian would certainly have to concede that the book throws a very critical light on the (mis)conduct in diplomacy and indeed

warfare of the British government from 1935 to 1945. If Pius XII made misjudgements, successive British Foreign Secretaries and their civil servants made worse ones, especially concerning anything to do with Italy. If the book damages the reputation of anyone whose reputation was not already in ruins (the barbarians in power) it would be Anthony Eden. And the book is unflinching in exposing the poor intelligence and worse political and moral calculation behind the bombing of Rome, other Italian cities, and above all Monte Casino. Pius XII, on the other hand, strove always for peace and the amelioration of atrocity, and he had modest successes. He was not anti-semitic, he was not frozen into indecision, he was trapped into constantly doing the least bad thing to prevent human suffering. He did indeed think of Catholics before he thought of anyone else, but he thought of Catholic people before he thought of Catholic clergy. He thought first of Italians before he thought of other nations, but he did (with reason) think he had a measure of influence for good over Mussolini. And he knew there were good Germans, some of them were masquerading as Nazis in order to attenuate the horrors. Thus he worked out that the German ambassador to the Vatican, Ernst von Weizsacker, was at the heart of a very deep secret he shared with the pope (a secret so deep that his involvement was kept from his Secretary of State and his assistants, but shared with D'Arcy Osborne), to support the army conspiracy of 1939–40 for regime change in Germany.

Based on exceptional source criticism of the records of seven governments in five languages, many of them needing to be read against the expectation that all correspondence from Vatican City was being intercepted and its codes broken, at least by the Italians, this is an exploration of all the big themes – the coming of war, the relations of all the great powers, the atrocities in Europe and far beyond, the Final Solution, the overthrow of the Axis – through the lens of Rome. It speaks to limited and distorted knowledge that informed decisions and that cost lives. And it deploys that gift, honed in all his books on English History, of the utterly brilliant character sketches, the human vulnerabilities through which his actors viewed their world and made their impossibly difficult decisions. Even Hitler, to a degree cowed in relation to the Vatican by the moral authority of the pope, did not act with the ruthlessness which otherwise characterised his actions. He might tell Goebbels that he would seize and imprison the pope and occupy the Vatican, as well as imprisoning the whole diplomatic corps and the curia – 'we'll get that bunch of swine out of there … later we will make apologies' (pp. 259–60). But when he could have done it, he didn't. Pius XII played it long, and he played it far more right than had been allowed by previous scholars. It may well have been the best thing not only for Pius, not only for the Church, but for the world. I am not competent to judge and Owen refuses to judge. That said, the *prima facie* case is made.

There are at least twenty exceptionally penetrating cameos in this remarkable book (including an especially good one of Giovanni Montini, assistant to the Secretary of

State and future Pope Paul VI), but I will just offer two: Pope Pius XII and D'Arcy Osborne, in that order. On Pius:

> His thought was subtle. But he clothed it in an envelope of old-fashioned if not obsolete rhetoric, which had the effect of making every point he made sound weaker. He grew up in a nineteenth century tradition of Vatican circumlocution, fitted it naturally, and carried it to the ultimate … Pius XII looked otherworldly and sounded otherworldly. His face was ascetic and pallid; his eyes were set deep in his head; his movements were controlled, his hands clasped. The ambassadors respected the Pope: even revered him. But as the tension mounted, they occasionally wished that his personality was stronger. They admitted him to have the quality of prudence and balance to an exceptional degree. Occasionally they wished he had less of these qualities [and so on for another crucial page]. (pp. 50–1)

And on Osborne:

> He was unmarried, tall, and slim. His hair had receded, leaving a highbrow dome, and this made his face interesting and intelligent rather than handsome, indeed at times he looked comic … He was liable to a little hypochondria. He was offended by noise, even by too loud laughter, but he was charming, and infinitely considerate. He had little money and suffered from expensive tastes. He found it hard to resist works of art of doubtful provenance. He liked his clothes, and wine, and whisky, and furniture and silver, to be exactly as they ought to be. [On his religion] Osborne was more than a mere conformist. He was wont to lift up a prayer at bed-time. If it became his duty to attend a papal Mass, he could be (although he was not always) moved in soul … At least at this stage of his life, he seldom appeared in church unless it was his duty. His mind sat loose to the orthodoxies … His dressing gown was of camel's hair, and he wore a George IV sovereign on his key-chain. He hated hats, especially the black hats affected by Anthony Eden … (pp. 13–14)

And so on for another page. The reader is then able to make sense of everything he said and did. It wasn't my favourite book of his when I read it in 1987. It is my favourite book when I read all 23 of them in order during Covid lockdown.

His next book may not have been his greatest, but it is in many ways the most glorious (and revealing) – his 420-page biography of Michael Ramsey, the 100th Archbishop of Canterbury (1961–74).[61] It overflows with affection and appreciation, a labour of love;[62] and it captures the eccentricities and mannerisms brilliantly – perhaps above all his capacity to stay silent both involuntarily and deliberately. Owen enjoys himself, and his own eccentricities of style are given free rein. In one paragraph on p. 11, there are

[61] Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life* (Oxford, 1990). Ramsey asked Owen to write this biography, but only after his death (it was completed within 18 months of his death on 23 April 1988 at the age of 83).

[62] David Smith tells me that 'Owen once said to him that Ramsey asked me to write his biography, and I said yes thinking I would go first; but then he died on me'!

thirteen sentences in thirteen lines. One-liners abound: 'Did the Church of England have so obsessed an idea with hierarchy that it liked promoting up a ladder without any snakes' (p. 90). And hundreds of extraordinary character sketches: on General Pinochet of Chile: 'we have no recorded minute of what Ramsey said to Pinochet, that wife-dominated, weight-lifting unintellectual with his chic uniform and his whiffs of eau-de-cologne and superstition' (p. 230) (though Ramsey did tell journalists that 'I bore my testimony firmly, as I always do, specifically about human rights'). This comes from the chapters which look at Ramsey's official duties around the world, of which his trip to South America was one of the most productive. It deals too with how Ramsey coped with a carelessly negative press at home, and his reforms to the Church of England (where the Commission on Church and State is discussed without any disclosure that Owen chaired it). There is compelling detail of how this man was damaged by events in his childhood, especially the death of his mother caused by the careless driving of his father, an event and its consequences told with power and compassion, which made him the distrait man he was, but one who radiated goodness and integrity in the most idiosyncratic of ways. There is a chapter at the end which captures exactly what he was like to be with. There is a thrilling chapter on his public wrestling with the great moral issues of the 1960s – the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the liberalisation of divorce laws, the abolition of capital punishment, issues around abortion and euthanasia, even the prospects of women's ordination to the priesthood, where he was driven by compassion and clarity of thinking and not at all by bumble or indecision.

This book is far from hagiography, and it identifies frailties and errors of judgement. In the end it is driven by admiration and – could it be – by a might-have-been. Ramsey had served in parishes and in theological colleges when he was called to a Professorship at Durham and then, fairly soon after, to the Regius Chair in Cambridge where he was happy. Then came the offer of the see of Durham (and en route to York and Canterbury) which, after delay and much heart-searching, he took. Did not Owen see in that decision the route (and perhaps the destination) he denied himself? There are other parallels too: in their highly distinctive and idiosyncratic styles of teaching and writing, in that mysterious gift of holding an audience entranced, and in having wives who could transform the gloomiest of old buildings (Ruth and the reception rooms in the Master's Lodge at Selwyn after the years of the ascetic William Telfer and his vinegary sister; or Joan Ramsey transforming Auckland Palace, Bishopsthorpe, even Lambeth). And there was a faith rooted not in the 39 Articles but in the Book of Common Prayer, in an evolved form of Tractarianism, in order and decency and not showiness in worship. Both were men of deep prayer. And in an extraordinary page on what priesthood meant to Ramsey, one can surely see even more clearly what priesthood meant to Owen Chadwick (pp. 40–1) (and see the throwaway line a little later that 'usually a priest matters more by what he is than by what he says' [p. 55]). This is his most glorious book because it is his most confessional book.

Within two years, he completed the volume in the Penguin History of the Church, entitled *The Christian Church in the Cold War*, the additional volume Penguin wanted for the series that had originally been commissioned in the 1950s. Penguin probably wanted something very broad on the churches since the cataclysm of 1939–45. Owen approached several scholars who all applauded the idea but declined to take it on. So what he wrote was what he knew about; and for decades I have been puzzled that he wrote principally about Eastern Europe not the West, together with excellent chapters on the Second Vatican Councils and about the moral crisis in the West. Having read *Michael Ramsey*, it is clear that it is an adjunct to that book, especially the 40 pages about Ramsey's engagement with the Orthodox, with Communist states and with Rome, and also from the long chapter on 'Britain [now writ large] and the moral law'. The first half covers Eastern Europe: the beginnings of the Cold War, the attack on / persecution of Christians, forms of popular violence, show trials, survival. The second half is entitled Western Europe, but covers the Latin West and the Greek East, and several chapters are substantially about the latter, as well as 'the West and Marxism' (within which Vatican II is situated), questions of church and state, questions of ethics (divorce, contraception, abortion, torture), as well as new liturgical movements and a vivid chapter on 'Charisma' (the charismatics, pilgrimage, saints), before returning to the election of John Paul II, and the rise of Gorbachev.

The book does have a sense – so rarely found elsewhere in Owen's writings – of being rushed. There are lots of short stubby sections, and a sense of the reading being in control of the thinking rather than the other round. And we do not find the same thrilling word portraits of the leading actors, not even Paul VI or (another hero for Owen) Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty. And the aphorisms are less crisp and witty: thus, speaking of how Communist regimes 'needed rites for the great moments of life', he writes: 'Most of these State attempts at ersatz rites were failures – sometimes ridiculous failures – for the human race knows that ceremonies have to been invented a long time ago if they are not to feel absurd' (p. 25). Still, writing this now, I found the sections on Ukraine as helpful as anything I have read on the religious background to Russian/Ukrainian tensions, and the set piece discussions of Paul VI's big decisions are sympathetic to a good man in near-impossible situations.

It may well have been a relief to turn from a dutiful response to Penguin to a liberating commission from Weidenfeld & Nicolson for *A History of Christianity* and, more than that, for an illustrated history. The introduction is dated June 1995, just after Owen's 79th birthday. It was also a book in which he had a wonderful assistant – Ruth (his regular indexer), who now assisted with finding a magnificent array of images, 230 colour and black-and-white images for the 285 pages of text, and much more than adornments, given this statement in the preface: 'the question this author asked himself was how the presentation of the gospel affected ordinary men and women, a majority of whom were illiterate' (p. 9).

The book is in six big chapters, chronologically arranged: 'Jew and Greek' (from the death of Christ to Constantine), the Christian Empire, Byzantium, The Western Church (183 pages down to Luther), and then the Long Reformation well into the Enlightenment, and the Modern Age from 1789. Each chapter is then divided thematically, and (as Christianity becomes more global) geographically. It moves effortlessly across time, space, topics. Owen is as much at ease with explaining icons and the ikonostasis as with the etymology of 'church' or Sunday, or how the New Testament came to contain the books it did and those it didn't. And there is that over-riding sense of simple, profound faith, and when he explores the agonising of theologians, he ends with the *sensus fidelium*: the theologians wrestled with the concept of the Mother of God and its implications for the doctrine of the Incarnation – 'the bishops care more about how we should look on Jesus, the lay people about how we should look on Mary. In 431 at the Council of Ephesus the bishops approved the words "Mother of God"' (p. 87). The mosaic approach of subjects interwoven works wonderfully well for the patristic and medieval periods, but less effectively for the later periods, although there are plenty of vivid and telling episodes – including the 12-page condensed account of the mission to 'the New World', the discussion of changes in the way people encountered the Bible (and not just in print) in the Reformation, the new importance of hymns, and the perils of Christian witness in Nazi Germany – all freshly minted. In the introduction, the full final sentence, the first part of which was quoted earlier, runs 'the question this author asked himself was how the presentation of the gospel affected ordinary men and women, a majority of whom were illiterate; *and in affecting them, whether the axioms about the world which they already took for granted affect the nature of their faith*.' This is an astonishingly modest statement of intent for the volume. But it says something important about Owen's own life of faith, and about the quiet witness and the importance of the safe havens, Christianity as solace and as witness against violence and greed. Here are the final two sentences, possibly the longest sentences he ever wrote and coming straight from the heart:

> Withdrawal has always been in Christianity – quiet; waiting in silence; contemplation; the ashram; the monk and the nun, whether or not they are called by those old names; the shrine, whether Catholic like Lourdes, Orthodox like Patmos, Protestant like Iona, or indeed ecumenical like Taize in Burgundy. Withdrawal has been part of the memory of life and death, and linked with the supper, communion, mass or eucharist that daily or weekly presents that life and death; the sense of eternity; the conviction of an ultimate order and purpose in the universe. (p. 284)

And so William Owen Cassian Chadwick ended his *apologia pro sua vita*.

By the mid–1990s, Owen was 80, but with three books in the previous five years, he was not slowing down. And there was one nasty itch, the failure to deliver the blue-riband 20 volume series for OUP under the title Oxford History of the Christian Church.

A quarter century after its inception, only seven volumes had appeared of the eighteen commissioned. He spent the next few years trying to cajole volumes from those whose volumes resembled Billy Bunter's postal order, and recommissioning volumes whose authors had fallen by the wayside. And to show willing – not as a shaming ritual, although in at least one case it had that effect – he announced he would be contributing two more volumes himself in addition to *The Popes and European Revolution*. In 1998 he published *A History of the Popes 1830–1914*. This lacks a preface and any explanation of how and why he had written it. He had of course taught a (final-year) specified subject on just this subject in Cambridge, and that is the simple explanation. But I am sure there were other 19th-century volumes which had not been delivered. It shows some uncharacteristic organisational untidiness. The first 400 pages are what one had come to expect – a loosely chronological account of four authoritarian papacies (Gregory XVI, Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X) in eight chapters, and then an unexplained and meandering series of shorter and shorter chapters on 'Nationality and Religion in the Tyrol', and Poland, Spain, Portugal, followed by a couple of pages on each of a random cross-section of religious orders, and finally eight pages on Catholic Universities, nine on the lack of enthusiasm for Christian reunion, and rather more on the making of saints. This might represent a mighty river ending in rather silted deltas, but still worth having.

The main part is exactly what one would expect: spectacularly detailed and well-observed character sketches (the one on Gregory XVI opens 'Gregory XVI was ugly and coarse in appearance and did not look like a pope or even a sovereign …' [p. 3]), and magnificent set-piece accounts of the great climacterics, above all the First Vatican Council, with meticulous attention to the battles behind the preparations. And of course, he makes you feel present: 'The Council opened on 8 December 1869, in a rainstorm … The floor of St Peter's was awash from dripping umbrellas and wet clothes and the steam rose. The empress of Austria, who loved to be always travelling, was stuck in the crowd and had to be helped through by the Swiss Guard; she was given a special place with five ex-kings and ex-dukes from the old States of Italy' (p. 197). How did he keep this level of detail at his disposal without a million file-cards (except in his head)?

The Early Reformation on the Continent also lacks a preface. But in this case we do know that several senior scholars had signed up and then backed out, in each case after many years.[63] So Owen, who had last thought about the early Reformation 40 years before, and written his Pelican/Penguin History that was still one of the mostly widely read on the subject, just sat down and wrote a completely different book. *The Reformation* had been broadly narrative, this new one was rigorously thematic in eighteen chapters, most of them with single word titles: death / creed / radicals / toleration / unbelief. The longest chapter title is 'marriage of the clergy'. The 12-page 'select bibliography' is

[63] As evidenced by the frustrated comments in his letters to Henry.

pretty evenly divided between works in English, French and German (and texts in Latin), but it unapologetically included relatively few works published after 1980. At 85, Owen had the energy to write, but not to absorb the latest thinking. It is a joy to read, with the endless flow of whimsy and deep learning: the very first sentences of the book read 'During the fifteenth century Germans improved the use of metals, with startling results. Guns that destroyed less inefficiently, clocks that more or less kept time, organs that played in tune, and a new way of making books easy for readers. Johann Gutenberg was an enterprising trader who made money out of pilgrims by selling them looking-glasses and polished stones. For several years he experimented with metal type …' (p. 1). Anyone interested in cutting-edge Reformation studies need not rush to read it, although as the evocation of a mental world it is wonderful, and anyone who loves Chadwickiana will cherish it.

Conclusion

Owen died between his 99th and 100th birthday on 17 July 2015. He was full of years and loaded with honours: OM, KBE, PBA, with ten honorary doctorates, an almost unique Lifetime Achievement Prize from the Wolfson Foundation whose prizes are the most prestigious awarded for History. The longest-serving and possibly best-loved and admired Head of House in Oxford and Cambridge of modern times, and the first and only Master of Selwyn to be Vice-Chancellor. We could go on, and Owen would have hated it. What was the secret? Effortless charm, true modesty, the gift of always showing that he acted *pro bono publico* not *pro bono suo*, a palpable lack of ambition combined with great self-confidence in managing all he was called upon to do. Understanding situations and resisting judging others, always seeking messy consensus rather than a forced majority. Above all a prophetic sense of inevitable futures that could be managed and not prevented.

This sense of managing change quietly, of living in the world as it is not as one would like it to be, ameliorating it as best one can, is the key to the heroes of his books and to his public life. This memoir demonstrates how he beguiles beyond death. The range of what he accomplished, the quality of mind, the calm authority, the fascination with people not with ideas, a realism that far outstripped idealism, are consistent in what he wrote and how he acted. In his writing he always strove to analyse but not to judge, and this memoir has found itself doing the same. Owen disarmed his readers and was left without nay-sayers. Reviews occasionally grumbled about omissions (not enough about Nonconformists, said a reviewer of *The Victorian Church*), but in general his reviews showed delight and awe. There is only one lengthy analysis of his writings, by Maurice Cowling in his idiosyncratic and self-absorbed study of *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern*

England, which devotes 20 pages to Owen's writings.[64] Locating Owen Chadwick in the Tractarian tradition of Charles Gore (p. 414), and noting that he inherited the mantle of Charles Smyth (who he will have known in the 1930s, and whose aspiration to write a history of the Victorian Church he took over [p. 77]), Cowling sees Chadwick as a heavyweight but underwhelming exponent of a particular Anglican tradition rooted in prayer and sacrament rather than doctrine – indeed as a believer in devotion but not zeal (pp. 423–5). Chadwick's strengths as a historian, Cowling concludes with characteristic tartness, 'is that combination of blandness, dignity and learning which have been a special characteristic of the Anglican clergy', and the word 'blandness' is repeated more than once. (His weakness, by contrast, is said to be 'an excessive regard for average opinion' [p. 414].) What disappoints Cowling is not the brilliance or scintillation of Chadwick's thought or writing, but his celebration of those willing to fudge and compromise. As he puts it, 'there is learning, decency, and adult niceness, and a faint touch of middle-class patronage. Above all there is the impression that decency, simplicity and religion can prevail' (p. 426) (in the modern age, he implies, as much as when Cassian briefed St Benedict with the barbarians at the gate of Rome). At the head of the chapter containing his discussion of (principally) Walter Ullmann and Owen Chadwick, he includes a quote from a sermon of 1966:

> I must retain my ideals among those who do not share them … I must pursue a Christian policy although I know that any or every practicable policy means compromise with non-Christian men … History has this utility: the student knows that however bad things seem to be at the moment, there were times when they were worse.[65]

The charge of blandness and of faith in Anglican politeness is not one I share; but it is worthy of reflection. Did Owen Chadwick show throughout his writings that he was shown the way by devout realists and that he despaired of devout idealists? And was he committed to fudge, or was he committed always to finding consensus, a concept alien, incomprehensible to Cowling?

One man who was clearly an inspiration to Owen was Edward King, who rescued Cuddesdon from collapse, kept the Tractarian flame alive in Oxford after the death of Pusey, and who was a much-loved Bishop of Lincoln for 25 years.[66] Owen revered him: 'the most revered and beloved of bishops of Lincoln since St Hugh. In the reredos of the

[64] Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (3 vols, 1980, 1985, 2001), 1: 413–31. For Cowling's own position, important for evaluating his evaluation, see Ian Harris, 'The Anglican mind of Maurice Cowling', in Robert Crowcroft & Simon Green (eds), *The philosophy, politics and religion of British democracy*: *Maurice Cowling and Conservatism* (2010), pp. 223–69.

[65] Cowling, p. 389, quoting from a (printed) sermon preached at Cuddesdon and entitled 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land'. The date (1966) is significant.

[66] Owen Chadwick, 'Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln 1885–1910' (Lincoln Minster Pamphlets, 2nd ser., no. 4; 1968).

Church of St Peter-at-Gowts, a figure of St Hugh with his swan is given the face of Edward King' (p. 1). He had all Owen's qualities above all the gift of self-deprecation (p. 11).[67] He was true to living out a friendship with God, but he never imposed himself. To read Owen Chadwick on Edward King is to read Owen Chadwick on Owen Chadwick.

No-one bore honours more lightly than Owen; or disliked attention being drawn to them. In the church at Cley-next-the-Sea, there is lovely Orthodox Cross with a note on the wall saying 'given by a parishioner'. It had been presented to Owen by Patriarch Alexei of Moscow on an ecumenical visit in 1956 (not that saying 'a gift from Owen Chadwick' would have been much clearer:[68] on an early visit to the pub in Cley, the landlord thought he was called John and to correct him might have caused embarrassment, so for decades he was known to some of the village as 'John').[69] When he was Master of Selwyn, it was a secret what his salary was. A committee consisting of the Bursar, Senior Tutor, Vice-Master, sworn to secrecy, decided on a yearly basis. Some young Fellows in the late 1970s were indignant and one demanded to see the file. A very frosty Bursar showed it to him. Owen did not draw any stipend, only a modest entertainment allowance. But he had told the Fellowship sometime in the 1960s that an anonymous benefactor had undertaken to pay for an annual Feast 'for college needs and gratitude'. It was Selwyn's only Feast. It turned out that the anonymous benefactor was Owen himself. It was then endowed at and for his retirement by the philanthropist Humphrey Cripps. As David Harrison testified, it took Ruth huge efforts to get him to wear the insignias of distinction for the Feast and other appropriate occasions. Much modesty in public figures is faux modesty. In Owen it was the real deal. I have no idea if he knew what a brilliant scholar he was, and that he was Regius Professor by merit, not because he wasn't either Geoffrey Elton or Jack Plumb. He sought none of the great positions he held; he gave all of himself to those great positions without stinting on what he gave as a husband and a father. How did he do it all so well? Perhaps God can do with time what he does with loaves and fishes. No better explanation is apparent.

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[67] See also: 'all his days he had been quiet, calm, retired. He was not rigid, nor viewy, nor embattled' (p. 7); 'he gave men the impression that his religion was his friendship with God' (p. 29). And much else.

[68] Anecdote confirmed by Helen Chadwick in her memorial address, 30 January 2016.

[69] A story shared with me by Owen's son Stephen.

memoir. I wish also to record my thanks to current members of the Academy staff for their assistance in identifying and making available material relevant to his Presidency.

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