

British Academy Centenary Monographs

The British Academy is celebrating its Centenary in 2002. As part of the programme of events surrounding the Centenary, the Academy is publishing a series of major monographs to demonstrate the vitality of British scholarship at the start of a new millennium. The Academy's Publications Secretary, **Professor Fergus Millar FBA**, describes this series, in the context of the overall publishing programme.

A question which is sometimes (indeed quite frequently) asked is 'What does the British Academy actually *do*, other than arranging to elect more Fellows of the British Academy?' The question is a reasonable one, but there are many different answers to it, as can be confirmed for a start by a visit to the Academy's splendid premises at 10 Carlton House Terrace. Part of its function is hosting a large number of meetings, lectures, colloquia and conferences, some arranged by itself, others by a variety of learned bodies. A very significant part relates to the support via research grants of the work of individual academics in the UK.

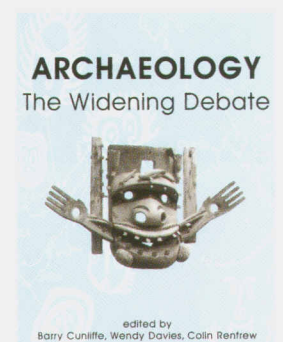
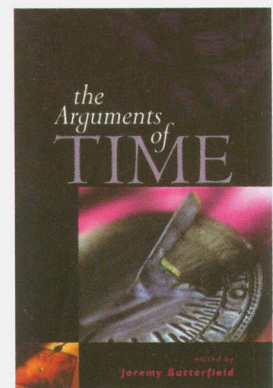
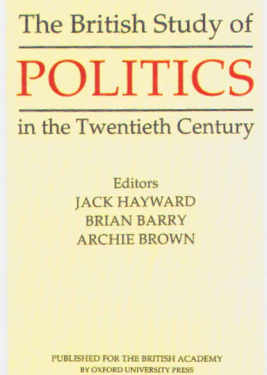
With Postdoctoral Fellowships on the one hand and the Academy Research Projects on the other, we move from merely facilitating the work of others to actually funding posts or running programmes which without the Academy would not have been there at all. Postdoctoral Fellowships and Academy Research Projects are also two examples of areas where the Academy goes beyond making research possible to offering the possibility of publication – a very beneficial possibility, since the Academy's small but efficient Publications Office, with two full-time staff and one part-time, publishes some 20-odd volumes in any one year, and does so on a basis which is financially self-sustaining. The Office makes all the arrangements with freelance editors and printers, and determines design, price and print-run. The books are then sold and distributed, by a very satisfactory arrangement, through Oxford University Press.

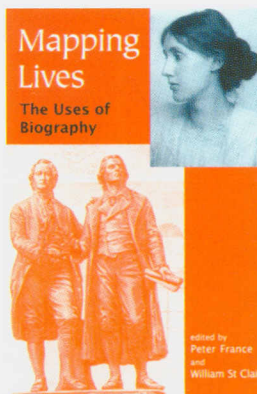
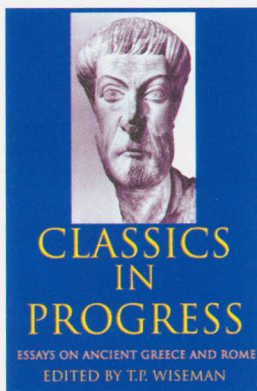
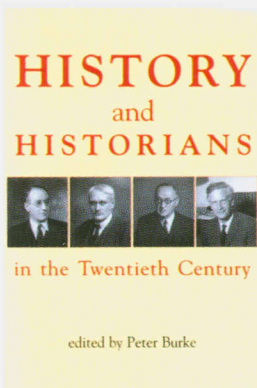
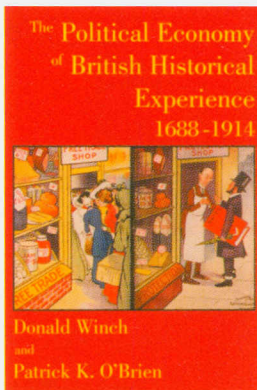
The Academy of course is not a general publisher, even of academic books, and does not publish unsolicited books, even by Fellows. All of its quite extensive and varied publication programme is in some way an organic expression of the collective activities of the Academy as a learned body. Thus, as regards the 30 or so Postdoctoral Fellows elected each year, there is no obligation to publish with the Academy; but there is an annual competition run by the Publications Committee, which results in three or four varied and interesting monographs each year, on topics varying from the rituals of death in Victorian England to studies of the practice of music in China. Similarly, there is no

obligation on Academy Research Projects to publish through the Academy. But twelve of the Projects do, resulting in long series of beautifully-produced volumes, from Early English Church Music (so far in 42 volumes) to Records of Social and Economic History, also amounting so far to 42 volumes, in two successive series.

It is worth stressing both the fact that the Academy fosters long-term collaborative work which by its nature could not be carried through by individuals, and that it is able to publish the results in extremely fine-looking volumes. Both of these facts will be in evidence during the Academy's Centenary celebrations in early July, when there will be a large-scale display of the Academy's publications at 10 Carlton House Terrace (and Fellows and guests will have the opportunity to place orders for volumes). Since the Academy's publication programme reaches back to the early years of the twentieth century, it should be stressed that the technology for reprinting out-of-print volumes is making very rapid progress. In essence, it will soon be possible to obtain copies of many of the Academy's publications right back to the beginning. Since one function of an Academy is to be the vehicle for the preservation of memory, these technological advances are of very great significance.

One series of the Academy's publications formerly had precisely that, and only that, function, namely the (then) annual *Proceedings of the British Academy*, made up of the texts of named lectures delivered at the Academy on the one hand, and of memoirs of deceased Fellows on the other. The full and often very personal records of the life and work of Fellows form a priceless set of glimpses of social and intellectual history, and not least as in part a reflection of forced emigration from Europe in the middle of the century, with its incalculable effects on British academic and intellectual life. Since the early '90s, however, while volumes of Lectures and Memoirs continue, the series of *Proceedings* has been augmented by edited volumes on particular themes, nearly all arising from conferences or colloquia organised by and at the Academy. Examples are *Victorian Values* of 1993 (vol. 78), edited by T.C. Smout; *Alexander Pope: World and Word*, of 1998





(vol. 91), edited by H. Erskine-Hill; or *The Origins of Human Social Institutions* of 2001, vol. 110, edited by the current President of the Academy, W.G. Runciman. These volumes contribute, therefore, a significant part of the answer to the (entirely legitimate) question as to what the Academy *does*: it arranges the meetings at which the papers are originally delivered, and publishes the results. Since 1992 the Academy has produced 23 volumes of this type in the Proceedings.

These remarks, designed to sketch in the background, are a necessary preliminary to taking a look at the extra feature which distinguishes the Academy's current publication programme, the Centenary Monographs. These too are designed to be organic reflections of the work of the Academy. All of them are collective volumes, edited by one or more Fellows of the Academy, and designed to reflect a wide range of the different fields of study, in the humanities and social sciences, which the Academy represents. They are also designed, characteristically, to function as vehicles either for reconsidering how particular fields of study have developed in Britain over the century of the Academy's existence, or for debating how the relevant field of study looks now, what problems confront it and where its future lies.

It was never intended to bring out the whole group of volumes, fifteen in all, at a single moment, and in any case to attempt to do so would have placed an impossible burden on the Publications Office. So publication will in fact have been spread over a period of four or five years. Two volumes were produced with admirable speed in 1999: *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Jack Hayward, Brian Barry and Archie Brown; and *The Arguments of Time*, on philosophical issues presented by the concept of time, edited by Jeremy Butterfield. Two others appeared over the winter of 2001/2: firstly, *A Century of British Orientalists, 1902-2001*, edited by C.E. Bosworth, a beautifully-produced set of biographical studies of commanding figures such as Harold Bailey, the two Drivers, father and son, and Arthur Waley, drawn mainly, but not entirely, from Academy Memoirs (see page 37); and secondly, *Archaeology: The Widening Debate*, edited by Barry Cunliffe, Wendy Davies and Colin Renfrew. As the title hints, the purpose is both to reflect the world-wide scope of present-day archaeology and to encapsulate current arguments about its principles, methods and results. The tone is set by the first sentence of Barry Cunliffe's introduction: 'This book is a celebration by

archaeologists world-wide of the strengths, the energies and the sheer intellectual excitement of their discipline'.

It is easy for anyone who has any acquaintance with the gratuitous pressures on contemporary academic life (a subject which might have deserved a volume to itself) to imagine that getting all these collective volumes ready for the press has not been easy. But at the moment of writing, at the end of 2001, four more volumes are complete, and two more are expected shortly. Given the fragile, indeterminate and controversial nature of the political structure of Britain as it now is, it may be allowable to draw particular attention to one of these, *The British Constitution in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Vernon Bogdanor.

The four which have been received will offer between them a remarkably varied view of different fields of study. *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, edited by Peter France and William St Clair, offers a strikingly contrasted set of studies of biography, from Christian hagiography to Freud, Sartre and film. *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Peter Wiseman, presents an equally varied set of approaches, beginning with 'Contemporary Poetry and the Classics' by Oliver Taplin, and including 'Socrates on Trial in the USA' by Malcolm Schofield.

History and Historians in the Twentieth Century, edited by Peter Burke, plunges into one of the most heated of contemporary debates: what, if anything at all, justifies any claim to be able to write a truthful account of events in the past? A number of different specific fields are also surveyed, from Art History to 'Disease and the Historian'. Finally, of the volumes which we expect to form part of the display at Carlton House Terrace on 3-5 July, comes *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688-1914*, edited by Donald Winch and Patrick K. O'Brien, a sweeping set of surveys of major themes, under five headings: 'The View from Abroad'; 'Land Tenure'; 'Empire, Free Trade and Protection'; 'Fiscal and Monetary Regimes'; and 'Poor Law and Welfare'. The volume will be a major contribution to interchanges between economists on the one hand and economic historians on the other.

Advance information on another six volumes will also be available for display in July, as will a historical record of the Academy's Fellowship by its Secretary. Those who attend the Centenary will encounter ample evidence that the Academy does indeed do something.