



MARJORIE CHIBNALL

# Marjorie McCallum Chibnall

## 1915–2012

MARJORIE MCCALLUM MORGAN was born on 27 September 1915 in the farmhouse at Preston, on the river Severn near Shrewsbury in Shropshire. She was baptised in the parish church of St Lucia, Upton Magna, although the farm was ‘almost within sight of the church’ of St Eata, in the next parish of Atcham, where Orderic Vitalis had been baptised in 1075.<sup>1</sup> In her ‘Memoir’, published in 2005, she says she ‘was born into a family that had farmed for generations’.<sup>2</sup> Her father, John Christopher Morgan, born at Acton Burnell, Shropshire, in 1882, and her mother, Maggie Morgan, born in County Durham in 1885, were second cousins, sharing a great-grandfather, George Morgan (1788–1861), who in 1851 was farming at Tudhoe, County Durham. His two eldest sons, John Morgan (1818–99), who by 1851 was tenant of a substantial farm at Frodesley, near Acton Burnell, Shropshire, and George Morgan (1821–87), who farmed at White House in County Durham, were the paternal grandfathers of Marjorie’s parents.

Marjorie’s childhood was spent at Preston-on-Severn, and later she told a friend that her mother’s farmhouse kitchen was ‘always full of animals’. In her first book, *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (London, 1946), a study of the medieval rural economy, she shows her familiarity

<sup>1</sup>M. Chibnall (ed.), *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1968–80), 1, p. v, and 2, p. vi.

<sup>2</sup>Except where otherwise noted, quotations in the text below are taken from this ‘Memoir’, which forms chapter 53 in Jane Chance (ed.), *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (Madison, WI, 2005), pp. 747–58. Together with a bibliography of her writings to 2000, it was the only document she lodged at the Academy for her obituarist. All her other papers were destroyed at her request.

with the seasonal rhythms of the farming year and the practicalities of land management. It is dedicated to her mother and father. Her only sibling, her brother Thomas Christopher Morgan, who was her elder by a year, took over the tenancy of the farm on his marriage in 1941, and their father then moved to the Grange, a farm in Upton Magna. Later, Marjorie and her family spent holidays at the two farms. Her father died in 1959, aged 77, her mother in 1976, aged 91, and her brother in 2004 at the age of 89.

As a young girl, Marjorie knew that she wanted to be a writer: her first compositions were mostly poetry. Among the women of her family, only her maternal grandmother, Jessie McCallum, a Highlander from the Isle of Arran, had had a career other than child-rearing and housekeeping: she had been a primary-school teacher before her marriage. Marjorie assumed that in adulthood her own life would centre on home and family, and her writing would have to be squeezed between household duties. But her parents believed in education for women (later, as a county councillor, her father was to serve on the Education Committee of Shropshire County Council), and in 1923 she was sent to the local girls' grammar school, the Priory County School for Girls in nearby Shrewsbury. Her schooldays were happy. There were some good teachers, including a 'brilliant history mistress'. Marjorie went into the sixth form and took Higher School Certificate, though without any clear idea of what she would do thereafter. Rather to her surprise, she gained distinctions in English, French and History, and won a State Scholarship, thus relieving her parents, at a time of agricultural depression, of the expense of university fees: 'The doors of Oxford were open to me.'

Initially she hovered between English and History, but by the time she submitted her application she had decided on History, with Somerville College as her first choice and Lady Margaret Hall (LMH) as her second.<sup>3</sup> At her successful interview at LMH, with the History Tutor and Vice-Principal, Evelyn Jamison (1877–1972), a 'most remarkable woman', Marjorie was encouraged and strengthened in her decision to read History. Miss Jamison, a distinguished medievalist with a particular interest in the Normans in southern Italy and Sicily, 'was probably the most brilliant and certainly the most beautiful academic woman in Oxford at the time'.

At this stage, however, Marjorie's historical interests lay in modern history. Awareness of the misery and poverty brought about by the First World War and the subsequent economic depression kindled in her, as in

<sup>3</sup> LMH Archives, Education Registration Forms vol. 10.

many of her contemporaries, a 'passionate idealism' and a desire to work for international peace and understanding. When presented with a choice of special subject, she opted for the most modern then available, Europe 1815–1914.

At the end of her first year, in the summer vacation of 1934, Marjorie went to Germany for six weeks, to learn the language and study German literature as part of her work on nineteenth-century European history. Her stay in Hessen was a life-changing experience: 'it was, I think, in Germany that I first began to see the past in the present'. Hitler had become chancellor in 1933 and it was while Marjorie was in Germany in the summer of 1934 that the President, Field Marshal Hindenburg, the last guardian of the old Germany, died on 2 August. Hitler immediately combined both offices, and as *Führer und Reichskanzler* was able to begin to implement the Nazi programme in full. Returning to Germany the following summer, Marjorie was shocked by the cruelty and anti-semitism that had been unleashed. She read *Mein Kampf* in the full original, very different from the bowdlerised translation available in England. She saw the distorting power of propaganda and longed to rectify its evil influence 'by teaching people the true history of the past and training their minds to be critical': 'My growing interest in the Middle Ages now appeared ... as a way of promoting peace and tolerance.'

In her second term at Oxford, she had enjoyed the 'electrifying experience' of being taught English medieval history by the inspirational V. H. Galbraith (1889–1976) of Balliol. He had impressed on her that 'history was "not anything you read in books; it's a habit of thought. In time you won't even be able to look at a chair without seeing its history"'. On her return to Oxford at the beginning of her third year, following her second German trip, Marjorie chose a medieval special subject, 'Church and State in the Time of Edward I', which was taught by the Regius Professor, F. M. Powicke (1879–1963). She was enthralled by the subject, for which Powicke used both theoretical sources, such as the treatise *De regimine christiano* by the theologian James of Viterbo, and practical administrative records, including the archiepiscopal register of John Pecham. Within a few weeks, Marjorie knew that she wanted to go on to medieval research. Miss Jamison 'was encouraging, with the proviso "of course you will need to get a First"'. Fortunately I was able to clear the necessary hurdle.'

Marjorie consulted Vivian Galbraith about research. He warned her of the sheer nastiness of life in the Middle Ages and of the difficulties of finding one's way through masses of documents, 'the long dark tunnel' of research, but he also gave her a glimpse of the intellectual rewards.

Maurice Powicke's advice was more low-key: the subject he suggested for her B.Litt. was a study of 'Christ Church, Canterbury, and the *sede vacante* jurisdiction of Canterbury during the thirteenth century'. Marjorie completed her thesis in one year. Although in many ways the discipline of working with ecclesiastical documents was to underpin much of her later work in the field of law and administration, she decided in 1937 that it was not the kind of topic on which she wanted to spend her life. For her research as an 'Advanced Student' she would move into another sphere.

Her supervisor for the B.Litt. had been W. A. Pantin (1902–73: Oriël), an ecclesiastical historian with a special interest in the Benedictines. He it was who drew her attention to a formulary in a Cotton manuscript (Domitian A xi) which concerned the relations between the Norman abbey of Le Bec-Hellouin and its English priories: thus she was to identify a fruitful subject for her next piece of research. Indeed, the relations between England and Normandy and the history of the Anglo-Norman realm in all its aspects were to dominate her work for the rest of her long life.

At an early stage, the search for manuscript material took her to France, where, supported by research scholarships, she spent the year 1937–8 in Paris, working in the Bibliothèque Nationale and attending lectures by Gabriel Le Bras (1891–1970) at the Sorbonne and by Étienne Gilson (1884–1978) at the Collège de France. She also worked in departmental archives and libraries in Normandy. At Caen, 'sitting in the glorious nave of the Abbey of Saint-Étienne, I began to feel certain that one day I would study the history of the men who were able to build such churches'.

On her return to England she started work on the great collections of charters and manorial records produced by Bec's English priories, which in the fifteenth century had passed, with their lands, into the possession of the royal foundations of King's College, Cambridge, Eton College, and St George's Chapel, Windsor. In Cambridge she met Helen Cam (1885–1968), Fellow of Girton College, who introduced her to two of the leading economic historians of the day, Eileen Power (1889–1940), Professor of Economic History at the London School of Economics (LSE), and her husband Michael Postan (1899–1981), Professor of Economic History in Cambridge. Marjorie became an enthusiastic member of their famous seminar at the Institute of Historical Research in London, encountering there for the first time the methodology of economic history and the influence of the *Annales* school. In 1939 the Oxford authorities agreed to register her study of 'The English priories and manors of the abbey of Bec-Hellouin' for the D.Phil. degree, without further residence in Oxford, to be supervised by Eileen Power.

The outbreak of the Second World War changed everything. Postan went to work as head of the Russian section of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and Eileen Power went with part of the LSE to Cambridge. Marjorie, having volunteered for war service, and hoping to be called up, took Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) training, and was working in a short-term job as a night-nurse in the Royal Salop Infirmary, Shrewsbury, when she heard the devastating news of the sudden death of Eileen Power on 8 August 1940, at the age of 51.<sup>4</sup> She returned to Cambridge a little later, and Postan took over as her supervisor, but was not often available to see her: he had his war-work to do, and, unlike Eileen, he was not the type of supervisor to give regular and detailed guidance, but rather was 'immensely stimulating, pouring out his ideas' and leaving 'his students to use them as best they could'.

The book which developed out of the thesis, *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, published by the Clarendon Press in 1946, is written in her characteristically clear, judicious and authoritative style. Its primary focus is administrative, tracing how the authorities at Bec regulated the lives and observances of the monks living in the abbey's English dependencies and controlled the exploitation of the English estates. Five years later a companion volume was published, *Select Documents of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*.<sup>5</sup> For Marjorie this was an invaluable introduction to the editorial art, and the book became a set text for Postan's Special Subject in the Historical Tripos, on English rural society in the thirteenth century.

A significant factor helping Marjorie to organise her research material and find her own lucid style of exposition was her experience of university teaching. In 1941 she was appointed temporary Assistant Lecturer in Southampton University College.<sup>6</sup> The city of Southampton had suffered heavy bombing, in which the hall of residence where Marjorie was to live, Highfield Hall, had suffered serious damage, and air-raids continued during her first year there. The Faculty of Arts was small, and Marjorie found herself teaching not simply medieval but 'almost everything in English, European and American history, as well as giving short courses to RAF cadets': 'It was a baptism of fire: I hope my pupils learned as much as I did.' She particularly enjoyed teaching the cadets, working backwards from the present day in order to trace the conditions that produced the

<sup>4</sup>Sixty years later, Marjorie wrote a profile of Power, in Chance, *Women Medievalists*, pp. 310–21.

<sup>5</sup>Camden Third Series, 73 (1951). Significant new material was identified much later, which Marjorie edited as 'Comptus rolls of the English lands of Bec (1272–89)', in *Camden Miscellany*, xxix, pp. 1–196, 409–16, Camden Fourth Series, 34 (1987).

<sup>6</sup>Southampton University Archives, MS 1/MBK7/2.

Fascist and Communist regimes. In her spare time she was finishing her thesis, which was submitted and approved for the D.Phil. in 1942.

By 1943 student numbers at Southampton had fallen drastically, but just as Marjorie was about to volunteer for an educational commission in the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), a vacancy for an Assistant occurred in the History department at the University of Aberdeen. With Powicke's encouragement, she applied and was appointed 'on the spot' at interview with Professor John Bennett Black (1883–1964), the Elizabethan historian. She began at Aberdeen in the autumn of 1943 and remained there until 1947, being promoted to the newly established post of Lecturer in Medieval History in 1945.<sup>7</sup> In 1946 she built on the 'conspicuous success' with which she had taught Medieval European History by instituting a new course in Medieval British History.<sup>8</sup> One of her students (later an ambassador) recalled how in her early days at Aberdeen Miss Morgan was 'very shy and very new . . . and ready to blush, but when in the classroom a first-rate teacher'.<sup>9</sup> The historian of the Aberdeen History department comments that 'her students were expected to think for themselves as she discussed subjects with them, and, after adjusting to the intellectual shock, most did so, to their own considerable benefit. Of no other member of the department can it be said that some students wept on hearing of her decision to leave.'<sup>10</sup> Professor Black was to be a life-long friend, godfather to Marjorie's first child, Mary, in 1948, and dedicatee of her edition of John of Salisbury's *Historia Pontificalis* in 1956—'dominorum amicorumque karissimo'. He had hoped she would succeed him in the chair of History at Aberdeen. Indeed, Marjorie had begun to take on the role of a historian of Scotland, stressing her McCallum antecedents, and writing a paper on 'The organisation of the Scottish Church in the twelfth century', in which she showed a complete mastery of the early records of Scotland so far published.<sup>11</sup> She would have been happy to have stayed at Aberdeen.

'Fortuna, however, had other ideas for me.' In March 1947 Marjorie was approached by the Fellows of Girton College who were looking for a medievalist to share the teaching with Helen Cam for two years and then

<sup>7</sup> Aberdeen University Archives (AU), L Per Aa P23 Min Senatus Minutes, p. 436, 12 Oct. 1943, and p. 181, 11 Dec. 1945.

<sup>8</sup> Doreen J. Milne, *A Century of History: the Establishment and First Century of the Department of History in the University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1998), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> AU, MS 3620/1/49, Interview with Sir John Adam Thomson (member of British Diplomatic service 1950–87, ambassador to the United Nations 1982–7).

<sup>10</sup> Milne, *Century of History*, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, 29 (1947), 135–49.

succeed her,<sup>12</sup> and around the same time she became engaged to Albert Charles Chibnall (1894–1988), Professor of Biochemistry at Cambridge. Events moved swiftly. At Aberdeen the Senatus Minutes of 13 May 1947 record that Miss Morgan ‘would be leaving to take up another appointment’.<sup>13</sup> At Upton Magna church on Wednesday 4 June, ‘very quietly’, Charles and Marjorie were married.<sup>14</sup> At Girton on Tuesday 10 June Dr Cam suggested to the appointments committee that Mrs Chibnall, whose possible appointment to a non-resident lectureship had been discussed earlier in the year, should be so appointed, although ‘Mrs Chibnall is at present away from Cambridge’. On Thursday 12 June, however, she was back in Cambridge, attended for interview, and was duly appointed. Her letter of acceptance is dated 17 June.<sup>15</sup>

In the space of a few weeks, Marjorie’s life had changed utterly. She moved into her husband’s large house, Madingley Rise (now the Bullard Laboratory), just outside Cambridge, near the Observatory. Charles was a widower, twenty-one years her senior, with two daughters, Joan aged thirteen and Cicely aged eleven. Kate, his widowed and bed-ridden mother (born 1866), also lived in the house until her death in April 1948. Marjorie had met Charles, an accomplished amateur medievalist, through their mutual friend Vivian Galbraith, on whose recommendation he had consulted her on questions relating to the medieval open fields of his ancestral Buckinghamshire village, Sherington.<sup>16</sup> He had proposed marriage after only three meetings: much later she called this ‘retrospective love at first sight’.<sup>17</sup> In 1950 their son was baptised John Vivian, after Galbraith. Charles has been described as being ‘for a quarter of a century . . . the central figure in British protein chemistry, itself, for the first time, at the centre of protein chemistry in the world’.<sup>18</sup> His tenure of the chair of Biochemistry came to an end on a triumphant note, when he presided over the First International Congress in Biochemistry in Cambridge in 1949. ‘Madingley

<sup>12</sup> In the event, Helen Cam left after one year, on her appointment as the first Zemurray Radcliffe Professor of History at Harvard.

<sup>13</sup> AU, L Per Aa P23 Min Senatus Minutes, p. 476.

<sup>14</sup> *The Times*, 5 June 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Girton College Archives (GC), AR 2/5/6/1/10.

<sup>16</sup> His work was published later, *Sherington: the Fiefs and Fields of a Buckinghamshire Village* (Cambridge, 1965, reissued 2012). On his life and career, see R. L. M. Synge and E. F. Williams, ‘Albert Charles Chibnall. 28 January 1894–10 January 1988’, *Biographical Memoirs of the Fellows of the Royal Society*, 35 (1990), 56–96. After his death in 1988, Marjorie had a window restored in Sherington church in his memory.

<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, obituary, 12 July 2012

<sup>18</sup> Synge and Williams, p. 57.

Rise rose to the occasion: Marjorie and ACC lavished their hospitality . . . Most memorable, perhaps, was the farewell morning, with stirrup-cups of champagne on the carriage sweep.<sup>19</sup> After his retirement in 1949, Charles continued to work in the 'Protein Hut' in Tennis Court Road, as well as pursuing historical research in his spare time.

At Cambridge, Marjorie was an exceptional teacher—kind, generous, courteous, but also rigorous in requiring students to examine and assess the evidence for themselves. Since her death, many former pupils have sent recollections in tribute: 'I remember her meticulous criticism of essays, [demanding] precise justification for everything that one wrote . . . "can you say that? can you prove that? what is the evidence for that?"'; 'I revered her and am remembering now how she gave me a sense that she believed in me, even when I might not have deserved it'; 'Going into a supervision with Mrs Chibnall was like entering a medieval world where she knew all the characters personally. With her gentle high-pitched voice she always tried to find the best in my work however inadequate it was.' One student, later a professor of philosophy, writes: 'it wasn't until I began to work on late medieval logic texts that I noticed that I was beginning to (try to) pay meticulous attention to detail in the way she had always recommended in classes on gobbets.' Students from her earliest years at Girton remember the birth of her two children, Mary and John, born in 1948 and 1950 respectively, and how she conducted supervisions in the Stella Maris Maternity Home.<sup>20</sup>

Marjorie shared Charles's delight in giving generous hospitality. There were memorable 'Tripos Teas', which allowed exam-stressed undergraduates to relax at her home, either at Madingley Rise or later in Selwyn Gardens, with strawberries and her own home-made cakes. There were picnics on motoring tours of historic places in East Anglia: 'she took us on that Ascension Day picnic in the middle of Prelims, to the East Anglia wool churches . . . I recall the food, all individually packed in cardboard cake boxes.' There were At Homes in Girton, with drinks and canapés. One strictly teetotal student wrote to her parents about one such party, after the College Feast in 1955, at 'Mrs Chibnall's, where again it was a bit embarrassing as there was no alternative to champagne.'<sup>21</sup>

Marjorie's career at Girton lasted from 1947 to 1965. She was elected a Fellow in 1953, and on the resignation of her senior colleague, Jean

<sup>19</sup> Synge and Williams, p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> See the affectionate obituary in *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 2012.

<sup>21</sup> GCPP Bishop 2/1/1.

Lindsay (1910–96), in 1960 she became Director of Studies in History. She supervised Girton undergraduates, and some students from men's colleges, for papers in medieval English constitutional and economic history, medieval European history, the history of political thought, and medieval intellectual history. In the university, from time to time she took over Postan's Special Subject, on English rural society, and in the early 1960s she gave short courses of lectures for research students. Letters in the Girton Archives refer to her hopes of a University Lectureship—in 1947, 1949 and 1953–4. Other letters attest the high opinion of her scholarship and teaching among senior members of the History Faculty.<sup>22</sup> Her two books had been extremely well reviewed in academic journals.<sup>23</sup> But 'after two or three applications for university posts' had been turned down, she realised that 'I could carry on as a fellow and lecturer at Girton, but I would have no official standing in the history faculty.' 'It was very disagreeable' to recognise that in Cambridge, which had not allowed women to take their degrees until 1948, there was still considerable prejudice against women, particularly married women. So although at Aberdeen she had 'participated fully and equally in the work of university lecturers and was paid the same salary as a man', and although her three predecessors as Fellows and Directors of Studies in History at Girton had all held university lectureships, Marjorie gradually came 'to appreciate that, though socially men stood back and opened doors for women to pass through, professionally they slammed them in their faces'. 'I chose not to hammer on a closed door but to build on what I had: my fellowship and teaching at Girton and my experience of editing and translating medieval texts.'<sup>24</sup> She now embarked on an edition of one of the longest and most important of medieval texts, the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, and in 1965, feeling that she would never complete this work if she continued teaching, she resigned her fellowship to give herself full-time to her edition and translation of Orderic.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> GCAR 2/5/6/1/10 (Personnel).

<sup>23</sup> e.g. David Knowles in *Economic History Review*, 16 (1946), pp. 147–9, David Douglas in *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), pp. 117–18, and Norma Adams in *Speculum*, 27 (1952), pp. 540–2.

<sup>24</sup> The obituarist in *The Times*, 12 July 2012, evidently unaware of her 'Memoir' and ignorant of the ethos of the 1950s, resorts to misogynist clichés and thus belittles her dignified silence—'her refusal to ape the stridency of her more "political" contemporaries'.

<sup>25</sup> Marjorie's recollections of her career, especially her teaching at Southampton, Aberdeen and Cambridge, are recorded in an interview conducted by Kate Perry, then Girton archivist, on 27 May 1997 (GCOH/2/3/27/5). Marjorie abbreviated some of this material for her 'Memoir', written soon after 2000.

Preliminary to discussing Marjorie's major work, a word is needed about her early association with the series of Medieval Texts initiated by Nelson's and later taken on by the Clarendon Press. The idea of launching a series of Latin medieval texts with parallel translations came about towards the end of the Second World War through the friendship of H. P. Morrison (1875–1971), Managing Director of Nelson's publishing house in Edinburgh, and Vivian Galbraith, Professor of Medieval History at Edinburgh from 1937 to 1944. Having enlisted R. A. B. Mynors (1903–89), successively Professor of Latin at Cambridge (1944–53) and Oxford (1953–70), to monitor the Latin texts, Galbraith set about recruiting historians to provide translations and commentaries. He naturally called on Marjorie, his former pupil, and she was soon enlisted for John of Salisbury's *Historia Pontificalis*, which describes at first hand some of the decisive events of the years 1148–51, and is especially important for its narrative of the council of Rheims in 1148. This history, which she subtitled *Memoirs of the Papal Court*, occupied her research time in the early 1950s. The Nelson's series had been launched 'for the general reader and for undergraduates . . . who are not experienced in medieval Latin',<sup>26</sup> but as time passed the aim shifted towards printing original critical editions, with historical annotation and introductions at a deeper level, intended for an academic readership. The *Historia Pontificalis*, published in 1956, together with the first volume of *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, edited by C. N. L. Brooke, which had appeared the previous year,<sup>27</sup> marked a milestone in the development of British medieval textual scholarship—and in John of Salisbury studies. Historical interpretation became an essential part of the editor's task. In the space of a mere thirty pages, Marjorie's masterly introduction to her edition set John in his historical context, explored the writing and sources of the *Historia*, and assessed its historical value.<sup>28</sup> Her elegant translation is worthy of one of the great Latin stylists of the Middle Ages.

Marjorie enjoyed the challenge of translation, the process of immersing oneself in a text, teasing out the meaning, and thus getting to know the writer: she wrote to a friend, 'Translation is the most exacting form of

<sup>26</sup> Preface to C. Johnson (ed.), *Dialogus de Scaccario* (Oxford, 1950).

<sup>27</sup> This edition was largely the work of Christopher Brooke, revising the text and translation initially provided by W. J. Millor and H. E. Butler.

<sup>28</sup> In 1984 she was to revise and expand her comments on 'John of Salisbury as historian', in M. Wilks (ed.), *The World of John of Salisbury* (Studies in Church History, Subsidia, 3), pp. 169–77, reprinted in M. Chibnall, *Piety, Power and History in Medieval England and Normandy* (Aldershot, 2000).

interpretation I have ever met.<sup>29</sup> In July 1954 she had almost finished her work on John of Salisbury when she received the letter rejecting her final application for a university lectureship in Cambridge. She did not wish to apply for posts outside Cambridge: 'there was something I wanted to do more, which could be combined more easily with the supremely happy marriage that tied me to Cambridge.' The day she received 'the last discouraging letter', she wrote to Galbraith, offering to edit the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, 'which I had been hankering to do for some time'. He replied immediately and enthusiastically, 'It is the book of books that Morrison wants done or started before he dies.' A letter from Morrison himself followed four days later: 'You have a double portion of my blessing ... it was Orderic who founded the Medieval Texts series!' As a young man, Morrison had met Delisle in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and was thus a living link with the last edition, in which Delisle had collaborated fifty years earlier.

Orderic was born to an English mother in Atcham, Shropshire, in 1075, and at the age of ten was handed over by his father, a Frenchman (possibly a Norman), to become an oblate monk at the Norman monastery of Saint-Évroult, where he lived until his death in c.1142. He had a good education there, became a scribe and librarian of the monastery, and in c.1114 began his massive *Ecclesiastical History*, which eventually comprised thirteen books covering the period from the birth of Christ down to the year 1141. It was edited in five volumes in the middle of the nineteenth century by Auguste Le Prévost (1787–1859) and finished in collaboration with Léopold Delisle (1826–1910).<sup>30</sup> It was a rare book, of which there were only two copies in Cambridge libraries. Marjorie was a few years into the project before she obtained her own copy, delightedly cabling 'CUPIO' to a bookseller in Seattle. It was to take twenty-five years to complete her edition and translation. After 1965, with her resignation from Girton and the family's move to Millington Road (where she had an excellent new study), she was able to devote uninterrupted hours to the work and made rapid progress. During that time, she joked, it seemed as if she saw more of Orderic than of her husband. Charles was whole-heartedly supportive throughout and the edition was dedicated to him.

Marjorie decided to start publication at the point where Orderic himself had begun to write, with books III and IV, charting the rise of Normandy,

<sup>29</sup> Letter to Edmund King, 26 Sept. 1973.

<sup>30</sup> *Orderici Vitalis Ecclesiasticae Historiae Libri Tredecim* (Société de l'Histoire de France, Paris, 1838–55).

the conquest of England, and the early history of the abbey of Saint-Évroult. The first volume of the *Ecclesiastical History* to appear, volume 2, was published late in 1968 by the Clarendon Press.<sup>31</sup> By this time Nelson's had been acquired by the newspaper proprietor Lord Thomson of Fleet (1894–1976), who promptly closed down the Edinburgh printing works and moved the publishing house to London. After an uncertain period in the mid-1960s, it became clear that the new owner had no interest in maintaining the Medieval Texts series. Marjorie was in despair, until Galbraith (by now Regius Professor in Oxford) and Christopher Brooke (who had joined the General Editors in 1959) were able to conclude negotiations with Oxford University Press, which accepted the series, henceforth Oxford Medieval Texts (OMT). Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History 2* was one of OMT's earliest publications. The remaining volumes came out over the course of the next twelve years: 3 in 1972, 4 in 1973, 5 in 1975, 6 in 1978, and the final volume, 1, with its Introduction to the entire work, in 1980.<sup>32</sup> Mynors and Galbraith retired in 1974, and Brooke was then joined by Michael Winterbottom and Diana Greenway. Marjorie was the model contributor to the series. Her typescripts were impeccable: as the Public Orator said at her Honorary Litt.D. ceremony, 'she edited it so perfectly that her own text needed no editor'.<sup>33</sup>

Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* is unusual among medieval chronicles for the purity of its text. All but two of the thirteen books survive in the author's holograph, preserved in two manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale.<sup>34</sup> Reading the *History* in Orderic's own hand, observing his orthography, and noting his revisions and additions, gave Marjorie a special insight into his process of composition. In her edition she retained the holograph's punctuation, which she recognised as a guide to the reading aloud of the rhythmic and rhyming prose in which the whole work was composed.<sup>35</sup> As far as possible, her translation followed the sentence structure of the original and mirrored Orderic's often dramatic style. The *Index Verborum*, created by computer through advances in technology

<sup>31</sup> Some of the first copies to be issued bear the correct date 1968, but further copies, sent to the binder a little later, were dated 1969, which has passed erroneously into many bibliographies.

<sup>32</sup> Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* is now available online.

<sup>33</sup> 'tam perfecte edidit ut editore ipsa nullo egere uideatur', 24 June 2002, reported in *Cambridge University Reporter*, 3 July 2002, online at <[www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2001-02/weekly/5891/15.html](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2001-02/weekly/5891/15.html)>.

<sup>34</sup> For the two books (VII and VIII) not preserved in holograph, most of the text was available in copies deriving from the lost manuscript.

<sup>35</sup> This is discussed in a fruitful section of the Introduction, 'The Historian's Workshop', *Ecclesiastical History*, 1, pp. 100–10.

during the period Marjorie was working on the *History*, enabled her to chart Orderic's use of language, and in her translation to take account of its subtleties.

The historical commentary demanded much of the editor. Identifying Orderic's varied sources led Marjorie into a searching textual analysis in order to unpick the patchwork of material, both literary and documentary. She became fascinated by the interdependence of chronicles and charters in the eleventh century, publishing an article on the subject in 1976,<sup>36</sup> and illustrating Orderic's use of charters, especially *pancartes*, in the Introduction to volume 1.<sup>37</sup> But tracing Orderic's sources for books I and II, the life of Christ and the history of the early Church, was a task in which Marjorie took little pleasure. In 1960 she had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade at least one former pupil to take it on. Although eventually she identified the texts which Orderic used, she never wholly embraced the first two books, and they finally appeared, in volume 1, drastically abbreviated, consisting for the most part of references to the sources from which Orderic had taken passages or made summaries, with marginal page references to Le Prévost's full edition. The French historiographer, Bernard Guenée (1927–2010), although very appreciative of the superb Introduction to volume 1, expressed 'une certaine tristesse' that after a quarter of a century's work, the new edition did not replace Le Prévost's text in its entirety.<sup>38</sup>

Marjorie was more at ease when dealing with the history of the Normans—in Normandy and England, and in southern Italy and the eastern Mediterranean. The *Ecclesiastical History* is of inestimable value for its information on the Normans in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, and also for its insights into the mentality of contemporaries, especially the lay aristocracy. Marjorie's commentary goes to the heart of Orderic's testimony, interpreting his narrative in the context of the full range of available sources. But the constraints of an edition, even on the lavish scale afforded by OMT, did not allow her full rein to explore 'the world of Orderic' in its many aspects. A separate book on the subject had

<sup>36</sup>M. Chibnall, 'Charter and chronicle: the use of archive sources by Norman historians', in C. N. L. Brooke *et al.* (eds.), *Church and Government ... Essays Presented to C. R. Cheney* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 1–17 (reprinted in *Piety, Power and History*).

<sup>37</sup>*Ecclesiastical History*, 1, pp. 63–77.

<sup>38</sup>*Annales*, 38 *année* (1983), no. 1, pp. 184–5. For some interesting comments on the historiographical significance of books I and II, see Amanda Jane Hingst, *The Written World: Past and Place in the Work of Orderic Vitalis* (Notre Dame, IN, 2009), pp. 20–1, 81–4, and chap. 6, especially pp. 118–19.

been suggested to her by Morrison in the 1950s, and was on the ‘back-burner’ throughout, finally published by the Clarendon Press in 1984 as *The World of Orderic Vitalis*. There, in her own words in her ‘Memoir’, she was able to reflect on how Orderic’s ‘great book brings in every aspect of the life of the monks and knights whom he knew, from liturgy and monastic studies to warfare and castle building, from the lives of saints to epic songs’.

Orderic did not totally dominate Marjorie’s research in the 1970s. Somehow she found time to write several articles. She contributed no fewer than twenty pithy entries on Shropshire religious houses to the *Victoria County History of Shropshire*, 2, published in 1973: for Marjorie, the Shropshire lass, these pieces probably provided light relief while coping with typescripts and proofs of Orderic. Her continued interest in the connections between Norman abbeys and their English dependencies produced more publications, most significantly her edition of *Charters and Customals of the Abbey of Holy Trinity Caen*.<sup>39</sup> These documents, relating to the abbey’s English lands, had been brought to her attention over forty years earlier by Eileen Power, to whose memory the volume is dedicated.

Marjorie was not a recluse during these productive years. A new chapter in her life opened in 1969, when she was invited to become a Research Fellow of Clare Hall, a college for graduates and visiting faculty (founded in 1966); in 1975 she became a full Fellow.<sup>40</sup> Clare Hall was to provide her with support and stimulating companionship for over thirty years. Marjorie was naturally collegial: she led lively discussions over daily lunch, attended evening meetings and dinners, and for a short time in the 1980s she acted as Praelector, conducting graduands with great dignity at degree ceremonies in the Senate House, where she was noted for her impeccable Latin pronunciation. Her interest in medieval law and legislation, which was reflected in much of her writing (as also in her enthusiastic membership of the Council of the Selden Society),<sup>41</sup> led to her being called upon to draft the college statutes, which were approved in 1984. The Festschrift to honour her seventieth birthday was presented at a splendid lunch in Clare

<sup>39</sup> *Records of Social and Economic History, new series*, 5 (London, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> For Marjorie at Clare Hall, see Eric Ashby, Richard Eden and Ekhard Salje, *Clare Hall: the Founding and History of a College of Advanced Study*, pdf at <[www.clarehall.cam.ac.uk/history](http://www.clarehall.cam.ac.uk/history)>.

<sup>41</sup> She joined the Selden Society’s Council in 1979 and served as Vice-President from 1987 to 1990, attending whenever she could; if prevented for any reason she sent detailed comments on the agendas. On being dissuaded from resigning in 2005, at the age of ninety, she wrote to the secretary: ‘I am glad now that you didn’t allow me to resign, as a new hearing aid has greatly improved my ability to take part in discussion ... I enjoy my membership of the Council and would have missed it.’

Hall in 1985,<sup>42</sup> and to celebrate her eightieth birthday in 1995 her colleagues arranged for the vocal ensemble known as Gothic Voices to perform Anglo-Norman songs in the Hall.

Also during the 1970s, despite her demanding research programme, Marjorie was deeply involved in supporting girls' education, a cause close to her heart. An old members' record-form which she completed for Girton in 1976 reveals the extent of her work in this area. Under 'Previous voluntary work and service on committees' she entered: 'Governor of Cambridgeshire Girls' High School; Governor of Cambridge Grammar School for Girls; Executive Committee, Governing Body of the Girls' Schools Association'. Under 'Present' she entered: 'Chairman of Governors, Perse School for Girls; Chairman, Millington Road Nursery School Trust'.<sup>43</sup>

The Perse Girls' School had a special place among Marjorie's interests. Initially her contact was as a parent, for at the time of her marriage, in 1947, both Joan and Cicely were pupils, and later Mary also attended. In 1964 she became a governor, nominated by Girton College, and she served as Chairman of the Governors from 1972 until 1978. The period of her chairmanship was peculiarly difficult. In 1975 the government announced its decision to phase out direct-grant schools, and it was clear that there was no place for a small selective girls' school in Cambridge's maintained sector. If it was to survive, the Perse had to become wholly independent. Marjorie presided over this historic change, launching a major fund-raising initiative (the school had been without endowment), and conducting negotiations with the Charity Commission, the Perse Boys' School and other bodies. Her clarity of mind, precise exposition and foresight helped navigate the school through the transition and set it on the path towards a secure future.

The steady publication of successive volumes of the *Ecclesiastical History* encouraged a growing scholarly interest in Anglo-Norman studies, which was further promoted in 1978 by the establishment of the annual conference at Battle, close to the site of the battle of Hastings. The founding genius was R. Allen Brown (1921–91), Professor of History at King's College London, who invited Marjorie, as a leading scholar in the field, to give a paper at the inaugural conference. She delivered an address on 'Feudal society in Orderic Vitalis',<sup>44</sup> and thoroughly entered into the

<sup>42</sup> Diana Greenway, Christopher Holdsworth and Jane Sayers (eds.), *Tradition and Change: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Chibnall* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> GCAR 2/5/6/1/10 (Personnel).

<sup>44</sup> *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 1 (1979), pp. 35–48, 199–202.

Battle spirit, becoming a mainstay of the conferences thereafter, sometimes giving papers, but more often simply being available for discussion and the exchange of ideas. In 1987, when the conference, meeting at Caen, visited Saint-Évroult, Marjorie proposed the toast to Orderic, before the monument which commemorates him. The yearly meetings of the Battle conference cohered round the presence of the charismatic Allen Brown, who chaired every paper, and when he became terminally ill the conference might have collapsed. It was Marjorie who then took on the directorship: she was so much a focus of Anglo-Norman studies that she was the one person who could take on the central role at a critical time. She directed the conference, and edited the proceedings (*Anglo-Norman Studies*), from 1989 to 1993, convening the memorable meeting at Palermo in 1992. Her last attendance at Battle was in 2006, when she was in her ninety-first year. A photograph and a print of Battle Abbey accompanied her to her room in the nursing home where she died.

One of the attractions of the Battle conferences was its internationalism: scholars from the British Isles were joined by colleagues from Europe, and from the southern and western hemispheres, especially from the USA. Marjorie was fond of America and Americans. Charles had spent two years working in New Haven in the 1920s, and she had accompanied him on subsequent visits to the USA, enjoying the Huntington and other libraries, and the chance to meet and discuss with medievalists. In 1996, in her eighty-first year, she accepted an invitation to lecture at the annual Colloquium in the University of the South at Sewanee, in Tennessee. She relished the intellectual stimulation of the gathering and loved the campus, with its 13,000-acre 'Domain' of forest, meadows and lakes.

Meanwhile, Marjorie maintained the French connection which had begun in her time as a research student. Her bibliography includes at least fourteen articles written in French for French publications, the first in 1955 and the last in 2000.<sup>45</sup> Throughout her life she maintained her interest in Bec, attending and reading papers at conferences on its most illustrious abbot, St Anselm: she gave a lecture in Canterbury cathedral in 1993 to mark the nine-hundredth anniversary of his elevation to the archbishopric, and travelled to Rome in 1998 for the celebration of his *Cur Deus Homo*—the last Anselm gathering she would attend. She cherished also her association with the University of Caen and the colloquies on Norman studies at Cerisy-la-Salle: her attendance at these meetings was

<sup>45</sup> A full bibliography of her publications up to 1985 is in Greenway *et al.*, *Tradition and Change*.

valued for ‘son erudition . . . son dynamisme et son humour, mais aussi sa grande modestie, qui la rendait si accessible aux jeunes chercheurs’.<sup>46</sup>

As she showed in both teaching and informal discussion, Marjorie was committed to making her learning accessible. She responded speedily and helpfully, and without condescension, to queries from members of the public, as well as students, teachers and academics.<sup>47</sup> After the publication of the *Ecclesiastical History* and its companion piece, *The World of Orderic*, she began to write general books for the wider world. The first of these, *Anglo-Norman England 1066–1166* (Oxford, 1986), traced the development of government and feudal institutions in England after the Conquest: intended for students and teachers, it was clear and precise, an object-lesson in the pragmatic appraisal and use of historical evidence. Blackwells launched a series entitled ‘A History of Medieval Britain’, of which *Anglo-Norman England* became the first volume, and Marjorie the General Editor of the other nine. Several years later, in a second general book, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest* (Manchester, 1999), exploring the historiography of the Conquest, she dissected some of the concepts which she considered too large and vague, such as ‘feudalism’ and ‘empire’. The third of her general books followed quickly, *The Normans* (Oxford, 2000), in which she enlarged her focus, both chronologically and geographically, and included a study of ‘the Normans in the South’, a tribute to her revered tutor at Oxford, Evelyn Jamison.

In January 1988, two weeks short of his ninety-fourth birthday, Charles Chibnall died peacefully after a brief illness. He had seemed indestructible, recovering from some serious illnesses in his final years, including chest infections, a broken leg, and a brain haemorrhage, but his heart had been severely weakened, rendering him house-bound for the last eight months of his life. After his death, Marjorie wrote to two friends: ‘Charles was a wonderful husband, and since we did not find each other very early in life we were indeed fortunate to have forty years of supreme happiness.’<sup>48</sup> She did not feel able to write any history for a year, but instead immersed herself in the practicalities of clearing and selling the large house in Millington Road and moving to a delightful second-floor flat

<sup>46</sup> *Bulletin de l’Ouen*, 34 (July 2012), p. 1, a brief memorial note.

<sup>47</sup> A remarkable example is her reply to an enquiry from a campaigner against a proposed Bexhill bypass in 1995, about the sites of Duke William’s camp and the battle of Hastings, in which she gives a masterly survey of all the historical evidence, <[www.secretsofthenormaninvasion.com/corresp/chibnall.htm](http://www.secretsofthenormaninvasion.com/corresp/chibnall.htm)>.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to the author and Jane Sayers, Jan. 1988.

at the very edge of Cambridge, off Barton Road, with views of the countryside.

The first book published after Charles's death was her biography of *The Empress Matilda* (Oxford, 1991), a project she had been nurturing for some years, having given her Prothero Lecture in 1987 on 'Matilda and church reform'.<sup>49</sup> It is dedicated to Allen Brown's widow, Vivien, 'in memory of Allen who was as indomitable as the empress'. The book was the first in English to study Matilda's career as a whole, her German experience being given full weight. Arguably it is Marjorie's finest book. The writing bears the hallmarks of her mature style, especially her subtle analysis of sources, differentiating what was believed at the time, and what was thought later, from what probably happened. Matilda, the designated heir 'who happened to be a woman', is treated with sympathy and some admiration. Marjorie comments on contemporary criticisms of the Empress, that 'what might have passed in a man for dignity, resolution and firm control were condemned in her as arrogance, obstinacy and anger'.<sup>50</sup>

Soon after the publication of *Matilda*, Marjorie took on another text for OMT. *The Waltham Chronicle* recounts the foundation and early history of the secular college which was established by Earl Harold on the eve of the Norman Conquest. Its only complete printing was in a scarce edition of 1861 by William Stubbs. Leslie Watkiss (1928–2013), a retired schoolteacher of Classics, who lived in Waltham, had transcribed and translated the text, but a historian was needed to provide the introduction and notes. Marjorie enthusiastically agreed to collaborate on the volume, which appeared in 1994. In a BBC television programme just before publication she stood beside Harold's supposed tomb at Waltham and told the chronicle's moving story of how Harold's *handfast* wife, Edith Swan-neck, who knew the 'secret marks' on his body, identified him among the heaps of the dead after the battle of Hastings.

The final volume which Marjorie edited for OMT was *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers* (1998), bringing to completion an unfinished project of her friend, the late R. H. C. Davis (1918–91). This life of William the Conqueror was written by a chaplain in his household and is a fundamental contemporary source for the Norman Conquest. It was quoted at length and annotated by Orderic, so its text was very familiar to

<sup>49</sup> *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 38 (1988), 107–33; see also M. Chibnall, 'The Empress Matilda and Bec-Hellouin', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 10 (1988), 35–48. Both these articles are reprinted in *Piety, Power and History*.

<sup>50</sup> Chibnall, *Matilda*, p. 97.

Marjorie. She revised Davis's draft translation and wrote the introduction and notes: characteristically, although hers was the major part, she insisted that Davis's name precede hers on the title-page.

Marjorie's exceptional scholarship was recognised in various awards and honours. In 1970 her old college, LMH, gave her honorary membership of the Senior Common Room for four years. Girton elected her to an Honorary Fellowship in 1988. In 1979 she received an Honorary D.Litt. at Birmingham University, and an Honorary Litt.D. at Cambridge was conferred in 2002. An OBE was awarded in 2004. But for Marjorie the most pleasing of honours were to be elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1978, and a Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America in 1983. She never took any membership or obligation lightly, so she threw herself into the British Academy's affairs with gusto, attending meetings and lectures, writing two biographical memoirs (of Eleanora Carus-Wilson and Dominica Legge),<sup>51</sup> and, after Council decided in February 1994 that the annual *Proceedings* needed an academic editor, Marjorie volunteered, and edited three volumes of Lectures and Memoirs, 87, 90, and 94 (1994–6).

With her fine golden hair, startlingly blue eyes and high fluting voice, Marjorie Chibnall was unforgettable, impressing all who met her with her brilliance, sincerity, and generosity of spirit. Her list of publications (eighteen books and more than eighty articles) extends over seventy-two years—the first article appeared in 1939 and the last in 2011. Her final public lecture, a sympathetic, somewhat motherly, account of 'William Rufus: the king and the man', was given in Winchester Cathedral on 12 October 2000. She said her goodbyes to the Battle conference in 2006. After a heart attack in 2008 she was lovingly cared for at home by her family until in 2011 she decided to move to Broomgrove Nursing Home in Sheffield. It was there that she died peacefully on 23 June 2012. A memorial service was held in Girton College Chapel on 1 March 2013.

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*Note.* I am indebted to members of Marjorie Chibnall's family—Joan, Cicely, Mary and John Chibnall, and her nephew Stuart Morgan—for help and encouragement in writing this memoir. I am also grateful for the assistance of many friends and archivists. Jane Sayers and Edmund King gave much support and advice throughout, and both kindly lent their collections of letters from Marjorie. Christopher Brooke (NMT/

<sup>51</sup> *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1982), 503–20, and 74 (1988), 389–403, respectively.

OMT), Gill Sutherland (Perse Girls' School), Victor Tunkel (Selden Society), and Ann Williams (Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies) all sent invaluable memoranda. Material in archives was made available to me by Mary Sabiston (University of Aberdeen), Jacqueline Cox (University of Cambridge), Hannah Westall (Girton College Cambridge), Oliver Mahoney (Lady Margaret Hall Oxford), and Chris Woolgar and Sarah Maspero (University of Southampton). Former colleagues and pupils who sent reminiscences include: from Aberdeen Dr M. B. Gauld and from Cambridge E. J. Ashworth, Wendy Childs, Nicola Coldstream, Richard Eden, Christopher Holdsworth, Marie Lovatt, David Luscombe, Sandra Raban, Susan Ridyard, Julia Roskill, Pamela Taylor, Christabel Sworder, and Stephanie Waller. Quotations from Marjorie Chibnall's 'Memoir', in Jane Chance (ed.), *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (© Board of Regents of University of Wisconsin System, 2005), pp. 747–58, appear by kind permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.