



PATRICK COLLINSON

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1929–2011

PATRICK COLLINSON was the most compelling and influential historian of the religion and politics of Elizabethan and Stuart England of his generation, but he never intended to devote his life to studying the past. History was his second choice of vocation: his real passion was marine biology and he harboured an enduring fascination with the manifold mysteries of the natural world, in which he took intense delight. This was merely one of the many ironies and paradoxes that marked his life, just as they suffused and stimulated his scholarly writing. Although he was allocated the subject that made him famous by his Ph.D. supervisor, it proved a perfect fit and his research completely transformed it. Conspicuously left-wing in his politics and imbued with a radical social conscience, he nevertheless ended his career at the heart of the intellectual and social establishment: as Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge and as a Fellow of Trinity College and the British Academy. His trajectory to the pinnacle of his profession was neither standard nor direct. Energetic, restless, and tossed and turned by circumstance, he held posts at the universities of Sudan, London, Sydney, Kent, and Sheffield, before receiving the invitation to succeed Geoffrey Elton at Cambridge. The longest he spent at any single institution was eight years. A man of large stature and sparkling brilliance, the several personal afflictions from which he suffered were less an obstacle to his achievements than a fillip.

The son of missionaries who met in Algeria, Patrick Collinson was born in Ipswich on 10 August 1929. His father Cecil was of Yorkshire and Quaker stock, the eleventh in a family of twelve. Apprenticed to a clothier after leaving school, he worked as a gentleman's outfitter in Suffolk before

his encounters with the fringes of the Islamic world during a cruise to the Mediterranean inspired him to sell up his business and dedicate himself to converting the Muslims of North Africa. A few months after the death of his ailing wife, Hilda Quant, in 1927, leaving him a widower with four young children, Cecil impulsively proposed to a young Scottish woman, Belle Patrick, with whom he worked in Algeria. The pair were married in Edinburgh in 1928. She was the daughter of a fish-buyer from Anstruther, who committed suicide when she was nine after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. Brought up in an atmosphere of intense religious fervour and revivalist Baptist and Presbyterian piety, Belle was a highly intelligent girl, who was obliged to turn down a bursary to St Andrews University but later qualified as one of Scotland's first female solicitors. She never practised law, however, exchanging it for the higher duty of spreading the gospel and booking a passage to Africa immediately after passing her final exams. Her vivid memoirs of the fisher folk of early twentieth-century East Fife were eventually edited and published by the only child of her marriage to Cecil Collinson, Patrick, in 2003. He himself recalled his Scottish origins with pride and often evoked the image of his godly grandmother reading her large print bible daily to her dying day and triumphantly proclaiming that the air-raids by Mosquito planes on Berlin were a sign of the second coming of Christ. He evidently found his elderly father a rather remote figure, a stern Victorian patriarch who never went out without a trilby hat and sometimes wore spats, but he was extraordinarily close to his mother, whom he described as 'the love of my life'. She typed all his work and remained his constant adviser and guide until her final illness and death in 1972.¹

Patrick Collinson spent his early childhood in Ipswich and on a farm at Great Blakenham, where he stayed while his parents were overseas, fishing and roaming the fields. These and his idyllic holidays on the coast of Scotland, bathing and investigating rock pools, nurtured his ambition to become a naturalist. By his own account he was 'a strange little boy', distant in age from most of his older half-siblings and lacking many friends outside the household of faith in which he was raised. But he was also a child who 'longed to be famous'. The daily round of prayer meetings and emotional mission gatherings which he regularly attended left an impression, and before he reached the age of 10 he wrote and published a small

¹Patrick Collinson, *The History of a History Man: or the Twentieth Century Viewed from a Safe Distance* (Woodbridge, 2011), chaps. 1–2, quotation at p. 2. See also his preface to Belle Patrick, *Recollections of East Fife Fisher Folk* (Edinburgh, 2003), pp. vi–xvii.

evangelical magazine which was sent to missionaries in Egypt. It was anticipated that he would follow in the footsteps of his parents as an evangelist. In 1935, the family moved to north London, where his home was twice bombed during the Blitz. He found these wartime experiences alternately exciting and terrifying. He was later evacuated to the Cambridgeshire fens, where his parents ran a canteen for the armed forces. It was this eventuality that led to his enrolment in the King's School at Ely, which he called 'a place of unspeakable barbarity' and which he complained had left him poorly educated. One reason why he was initially bullied and marginalised was his disinterest in cricket and football; another may have been the large strawberry birthmark that covered half of his face, which was airbrushed out of photographs of him as an infant. Pat was so unselfconscious of this disfigurement that those who knew him very soon ceased to notice it too.²

Still intent upon studying Biology at University, he was steered towards History instead because of his weak ability in Mathematics. He failed to secure a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, but won an exhibition to Pembroke, which he took up in 1949, after eighteen months of National Service in the RAF. He was trained as a radar mechanic, a trade for which he claims to have displayed no aptitude, and posted to a base in the Cotswolds and later a navigation school near Darlington. The redeeming feature of these years was his belated discovery of hills and mountains, which ignited a voracious appetite for climbing that lasted throughout his life. At Cambridge, mountaineering, together with rowing and the activities of the Christian Union, took priority over his academic studies, at least until he moved into Part II of the Tripos. A member of a class that included another future Regius, John Elliott, he took a Special Subject taught by Norman Sykes and graduated at the end of the year with a first, winning his college's Hadley Prize for History, some of the proceeds of which he spent on a copy of his soon-to-be supervisor Sir John Neale's *The Elizabethan House of Commons*.³

Inspired by his supervisions with Roger Anstey, Collinson toyed with the idea of doing research on colonial Africa, but his inadequate background in modern history pushed him towards the Tudor school at University College London (UCL), to which he went in 1952. His decision to pursue postgraduate study was taken despite the disapproval of his father and elder brother, who thought that one degree was quite sufficient. Neale was a formidable and somewhat dictatorial figure, who exercised his

²Collinson, *History of a History Man*, chaps. 3–4, quotations at pp. 1, 22, 38.

³*Ibid.*, chaps. 6–7.

patronage in a ruthless fashion, and Collinson found him a less than satisfactory supervisor (indeed the adjectives he repeatedly used to describe him were ‘terrible’ and ‘dreadful’). He said that he did little to guide his research beyond bestowing upon him the notes of a former student, Edna Bibby, who had died before completing her MA thesis on the topic in 1929, though Collinson conceded that he always left his presence with a spring in his step and fired up to pursue fresh discoveries. Neale’s kindness to him created a bond and he grew quite fond of him.⁴ The years of research in the Public Record Office, British Library, and local record offices that followed were tremendously fruitful. Living virtually on top of the UCL History Department, where he was allocated an office, he worked until the early hours of each morning—a Stakhanovite regime that reflected the intense work ethic instilled in him from an early age by the admonitions of his father.⁵ He found stimulus and company at the Institute of Historical Research and benefited from the support of Joel Hurstfield and S. T. Bindoff, although the first seminar paper he delivered, in the presence of R. H. Tawney, allegedly sent that great man to sleep.

In October 1955 Collinson became Neale’s research assistant and his status as the favourite pupil of a historian who was heartily disliked in some circles proved something of a handicap when it came to securing more permanent employment. He was widely interviewed for assistant lectureships, but nerves and naivety took over and he failed to secure one. As something of a last resort, and against the advice of friends and mentors, he accepted a post at the University of Khartoum. His gigantic thesis, which ran to nearly half a million words, and led to the introduction of a formal word limit, was only completed and submitted when he returned to England during the summer of 1957 on leave. He wrote later of the peculiarity of ‘sorting out the affairs of Puritan preachers in Elizabethan Suffolk’ surrounded by exotic and distracting sights like geckoes, praying mantises, camel spiders, mongooses, and abdin storks. As ever, his eyes were captivated by all forms of animal life.⁶

⁴Collinson, *History of a History Man*, chap. 8, esp. p. 78. See also his comments in Patrick Collinson, ‘The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 69 (1987), 394–424, reprinted in Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays* (London, 1994), pp. 31–2; and in his eightieth birthday speech at Trinity (5 Sept. 2009): see <<https://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/show.php?dowid=730>> [last accessed, 15 April 2014]. See also his essay on Neale: Patrick Collinson, ‘Neale, Sir John Ernest (1890–1975)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31487>> [last accessed 7 May 2014].

⁵Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 77; see also below, n. 20.

⁶*Ibid.*, chap. 8 and p. 89. The thesis was entitled ‘The Puritan Classical Movement in the Reign of Elizabeth I’ (London, 1957).

It was in the Sudan, newly declared an independent republic, that Patrick Collinson lived for the following five years until 1961. He looked back with anger and regret at the ‘cataclysmic mess’ made by the British in a country which he came to love, but his experiences there, against the troubled backdrop of decolonisation and in the wake of the Suez crisis, were formative. They included his private tutorship of the son of the Muslim leader, Sayed Mohammed Osman el Mirghani, hair-raising adventures travelling in Egypt, Eritrea and the Holy Land, and expeditions to Erkowit in the Red Sea Hills, where he collected specimens of snake and lizard for the Khartoum Museum. Throughout this period, he was engaged in a lingering, long-distance, and ultimately unfulfilled relationship with Esther Moir, which remained etched on his memory. However, his disappointment in this affair of the heart was dispelled when he met and fell deeply in love with a nursing sister, Elizabeth (Liz) Selwyn, whom he married after a ‘lightning courtship’ in December 1960. Their honeymoon to Ethiopia coincided with an abortive rising against the Emperor Haile Selassie and they were passengers on a plane which had just delivered the body of a murdered provincial governor for burial.⁷

During the preceding years, Collinson had seriously considered ordination in the Church of England and secured a place at Ridley Hall, but uncertainty about his vocation and the prospect of a career teaching in a seminary led him to withdraw and instead to seek to return to academic life in Britain. He was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History at King’s College London in 1961 and the next eight years saw him begin to flower as a published historian. Soon after his arrival, A. G. Dickens arrived from Hull to take up the chair of History at King’s, and their time as colleagues boosted his confidence and extended his knowledge of the Reformation, which was the main subject of his teaching to theological students, among whom numbered a certain Desmond Tutu. Another source of encouragement and friendship was the pre-eminent historian of nonconformity, Geoffrey Nuttall. The first of his research students, Bill Sheils, recalls supervisions conducted in his partitioned-off office in the basement to the accompaniment of pile drivers and pneumatic drills.⁸

The book of Collinson’s already legendary thesis (worn out by use in the intervening years) finally appeared in 1967 as *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*. This was a landmark study of the ecclesiastical and political ramifications of puritanism, which reinterpreted it less as a subversive

⁷Collinson, *History of a History Man*, chaps. 9–12, quotation at pp. 123, 136.

⁸Ibid., chap. 13. On his thoughts of ordination, see pp. 112, 116, 128.

sectarian presence than as the expression of a reformist impulse within the Church of England determined to complete the imperfect religious settlement of 1559. If the book tracked the trials and tribulations of the Presbyterian militants who reacted to episcopal repression by calling for the abolition of the bishops, it situated this 'intransigent minority of puritan extremists' in the context of a broader and more moderate tendency, which by 1603 had become absorbed into the bloodstream of English Protestantism and constituted a kind of moral majority. The 'quiet and often unobserved revolution' effected by puritan divines and their lay supporters in England's parishes contrasted with the violent civil war which their successors were then widely credited with fomenting in the mid-seventeenth century. Collinson memorably defined puritans as 'the hotter sort of Protestants' and argued that what divided them from their conformist neighbours were 'differences of degree, of theological temperature ... rather than of fundamental principle'.⁹ This not only laid the foundation for reassessing puritanism as a sociological rather than primarily doctrinal phenomenon, but also brought it back into the mainstream. It rescued it from the grip of Marxist and structuralist analyses that saw it as a vehicle for other secular and ideological concerns. In the process the book reconfigured the histories of both Anglicanism and the dissenting tradition. It embodied and foreshadowed the shift of perspective for which he called more explicitly in an important essay published in a Festschrift for Leland H. Carlson in 1975, which castigated the distorting tunnel vision exhibited by generations of denominationally committed scholars: a shift from documenting the latter's genealogy as a collection of sects towards exploring its horizontal and lateral connections.¹⁰ Warm reviews of *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* by Christopher Hill and Hugh Trevor-Roper took the sting out of A. L. Rowse's icy contempt for Collinson's 'somewhat rebarbative subject', though Rowse did not make the more sharply edged remark that 'we must all be grateful that he has finally got it off his chest' that Collinson later attributed to him.¹¹

⁹Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1990; first pub. London, 1967), quotations at pp. 467, 433, 27, 26.

¹⁰Patrick Collinson, 'Towards a broader history of the early dissenting tradition', in Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 527–62, reprinted from C. Robert Cole and Michael E. Moody (eds.), *The Dissenting Tradition: Essays for Leland H. Carlson* (Athens, OH, 1975), pp. 3–38.

¹¹Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 145, though he substitutes 'thoroughly' for 'somewhat'. A. L. Rowse, in *English Historical Review*, 83 (1968), 833–4, declared it an excellent study, but did say condescendingly that Collinson had been at work on the topic for many years 'and has at length mastered it; for which we can be grateful—one can hardly suppose there is much more usefully to be said'. How wrong that remark would prove!

In fact, the success of the book was such that at the age of 40 he received the offer of a chair at the University of Sydney, to fill the hole left by the departure of Jack McManners to Leicester. This followed another series of ill-fated interviews for senior posts at Durham, Exeter and Manchester, for which he applied anxious to augment his modest salary and provide for the four children (Helen, Andrew, Sarah and Stephen) who had arrived in quick succession between 1962 and 1968. The momentous decision to emigrate to the other side of the world was apparently taken after consultation not with Liz, but with his mother Belle, who accompanied the family to Australia and later died there. Remembering the episode on his eightieth birthday, Pat poked fun at himself as a ‘Taliban husband’.¹² Neale, meanwhile, thought of it as the professional equivalent to convict transportation and the tone of his farewell was one of commiseration.¹³

The translation to Sydney proved both a liberating opportunity and a challenge. His gregarious personality and warm hospitality won him many friends among his colleagues and his witty lectures on Martin Luther and on the English Reformation inspired successive cohorts of able students. His non-managerial style was refreshing and he sowed the seeds for the rejuvenation of the curriculum. He relished the chance to put on innovative courses, including a Fourth Year Honours Seminar on ‘Churches, Sects and Society’, provoked by his engagement with the ‘seductive’ discipline of Sociology. It was typical of his impishness that he claimed that some signed up for the class because they had misheard the middle word of the title. This was the beginning of the interdisciplinary overtures which would become a hallmark of the rest of his career and which, his friends attest, transformed him as a historian. He built contacts with other scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including George Yule at Melbourne, and was instrumental in organising conferences that later crystallised into a more formal association of early modern European historians in Australia and New Zealand. He was honoured by his election to the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1974.¹⁴

¹²Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 147–8. Pat used the phrase ‘Taliban husband’ in his eightieth birthday speech.

¹³Personal communication from Bill Sheils.

¹⁴Collinson, *History of a History Man*, chap. 14, quotation at p. 154. His account of the Sydney years is supplemented by the recollections of Sybil M. Jack and Alison Wall in ‘Patrick Collinson: an appreciation’, which preface ‘Protestants, property, puritans: *Godly People* revisited: a Festschrift in honour of Patrick Collinson on the occasion of his retirement’, *Parergon*, NS 14 (1996), ix–xiii; and the obituaries by John Gascoigne and Sybil M. Jack in *Parergon*, 29 (2012), ix–xiv, and Ros Pesman and Richard Waterhouse in the *Annual Report of the Australian Academy of the Humanities* (2012), 25–6.

But at Sydney Patrick Collinson also found himself caught awkwardly between the demands of his position as a professor and head of department in what was still a very hierarchical institution and the aggressive and emotional demands for democratic reform swelling up from below. Some felt sympathetic to his efforts to reconcile these competing imperatives and praised the work he did to bring about change from within; others felt that the legalistic approach he adopted during this tumultuous phase in the university's history was out of character with his collegiality and with the inclusive and levelling principles to which he instinctively adhered.¹⁵ He himself found the experience extremely arduous and trying and these struggles played their part in persuading him to return to England in 1976. Other factors that contributed to his leaving Australia were the difficulty of finding time for his own research and writing and the progressive spread of the 'fungus' of postmodernism.¹⁶ But there were costs, including the sacrifice of the Collinsons' cottage retreat on a tidal creek feeding into the Hawkesbury River and Broken Bay at Patonga, where he fed his love of nature, found pleasure in bush-walking, and entertained fellow scholars and friends. Some of them described it as 'a historians' Mecca';¹⁷ for Pat himself it was a kind of paradise on earth. Back in the financial stringency of Jim Callaghan's Britain, he dreamed of it every night for a year with a profound sense of desolation and loss.¹⁸

The post to which Collinson returned at the University of Kent at Canterbury proved to be no bed of roses against a backdrop of national and institutional austerity and the serious cut in salary which taking it had entailed. But he resisted an invitation to retrace his steps to Sydney and threw his energies into making the best of his situation. He took advantage of the flexible structures of the university, which encouraged mingling and experimental teaching with colleagues in other disciplines. Here he collaborated not only with other Tudor and Stuart historians including Peter Roberts, but also with literary scholars such as Michael Hattaway, with both of whom he taught an MA in Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies. These experiences invigorated him and widened his intellectual horizons. So did the cathedral archives, which he mined systematically and which supplied illuminating material for many subsequent

¹⁵For sympathetic accounts of this episode, see the items by Jack, Wall and Gascoigne cited above, n. 14. For a more critical appraisal, see Doug Munro's review of *History of a History Man*, in *Journal of Historical Biography*, 11 (2012), 123–31, esp. 128–9.

¹⁶Eightieth birthday speech.

¹⁷Jack and Wall, 'Patrick Collinson', p. ix.

¹⁸Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 160, 163.

lectures and essays: as ever, he revelled in the disorderly detail of human lives which the depositions and defamation suits of the ecclesiastical courts revealed. Another legacy of this period was *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, which he co-edited, and which eventually appeared in 1995.¹⁹

Patrick Collinson's eight years at Canterbury were also productive ones, and they saw the publication of the biography of the 'puritan' Archbishop Edmund Grindal upon which he had been working for much of the previous decade. It was a book in which he wore his sympathies for this prelate's brand of 'Calvinism with a human face' on his sleeve and in which he openly confessed to finding John Aylmer, Bishop of London, 'an unattractive figure'. The picture he painted of Grindal's primacy was of a highly creative phase of reform in which Protestantism successfully established an apostolate at the grass roots—an era which, echoing the Jacobean preacher Josias Nicholls, he thought of as 'a golden time, full of godly fruit'. Grindal's stubborn stance in the matter of prophesyings marked a descent into failure and paved the way for the ascendancy of clerics for whom Collinson harboured a lifelong distaste (Whitgift, Bancroft, and Laud). It was a failure of critical importance for the future of the Church of England and English civilisation, which became less monolithic and more diverse, and which fostered a 'fatal tendency to ideological fracture' and 'resentful dissidence' out of which sprang radical thought and political conflict. He could not disguise a note of personal lament at the mis-carrying of the religious programme for which Grindal stood.²⁰

These years also saw a series of new accolades, notably the invitation to deliver Oxford's Ford Lectures in Hilary Term 1979, which he believed to be 'the best thing that can happen to a historian of these islands' and which seemed to vindicate the risk his family had taken in the reverse migration from Australia. A relative stranger to Oxford, he found a warm welcome there, though the qualms he felt as he looked out upon the crowns and mitres capping the drain pipes of St John's College's Canterbury Quad were emblematic of his outlook. His discomfort sprang in part from his provocative pronouncement in the course of the lectures that 'Archbishop

¹⁹Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 165–73. Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsay, and Margaret Sparks (eds.), *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford, 1995), to which he contributed chapter 4—Patrick Collinson, 'The Protestant Cathedral, 1541–1660'.

²⁰Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal 1519–1583: the Struggle for a Reformed Church* (London, 1979), quotations at pp. 11, 231, 283. In a letter to Brett Usher on 27 Oct. 1999, he wrote that he had read Usher's draft *ODNB* entry on Aylmer with 'a kind of horrified fascination. Can he have been as bad as this?': see B. Usher, 'John Aylmer (1520/21–1594)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/935>> [last accessed 7 May 2014].

Laud', an illustrious alumnus of that college, was 'the greatest calamity ever visited upon' the Church of England.²¹ Developing themes that had been implicit in his work from the very beginning, he dwelt upon the 'institutional equilibrium' of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church of England and its capacity to accommodate vigorous expression of religious voluntarism within 'its loose and sometimes anomalous structures'. Key to this were the powerful alliances forged between magistrates and ministers, dedicated pastor bishops, and the entrenchment of a preaching ministry. In exploring the struggles of the godly to restrain unruly elements of popular religion he distanced himself from the tendency to see the impulses behind the reformation of manners as a function of social antagonism and the end-product of puritan evangelism as 'class war of a kind'. The lines of fraction he discerned cut across the boundaries created by status and wealth.²² The story he told accorded well with wider revisionist tendencies that were reassessing the inevitability of the mid-seventeenth-century revolution, especially the work of Nicholas Tyacke and Conrad Russell. Hints can also be detected of the new and more pessimistic assessment of the impact of the Protestant Reformation that was emerging from the research of Christopher Haigh, among others.

Prepared for publication during a visiting fellowship at All Souls, *The Religion of Protestants* was celebrated in the *London Review of Books* (*LRB*) as 'a stirring event in the rediscovery of Early Modern England' and praised by Christopher Hill in the *Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*) for its vast learning lightly worn, its deep humanity, and scrupulous fairness to scholars with whom it disagreed: 'What a Jacobean bishop he would have made!', Hill exclaimed.²³ Collinson's election to the Fellowship of the British Academy occurred in the same year. The first omnibus collection of his articles and essays on puritanism, *Godly People*, appeared in 1983. In the preface, he spoke of himself as 'an unsuccessful escapologist': although he had laughed inwardly when Neale had told him in 1954 that 'I like to think of you spending the rest of your life on this subject' and vowed to move on to other topics as quickly as possible, the prophecy had

²¹Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 170–1. See also the preface to Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982), pp. vii–viii. The indictment of Laud is at p. 90. He was surprised to be asked to lecture on Laud at St John's in May 1995 and reiterated this judgement on that occasion.

²²Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, pp. ix, 282, 240.

²³Blair Worden, 'Rescuing the bishops', *London Review of Books*, 5/7 (21 April 1983), 15–16; Christopher Hill, 'The godly community', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4172 (18 March 1983), 257.

come true and he was still striving to understand its implications for the politics, mentality and social relations of the Elizabethans and Jacobean.²⁴

Cambridge replicated the honour bestowed upon him by Oxford by asking him to present the Birkbeck Lectures in 1981. These took the form of an exploration of 'The roots of English nonconformity' and were a fruitful variation on the themes that preoccupied him through his career. In them, he memorably described dissent as a species of ecclesiastical acne and investigated its corrosive and divisive effects in English society, though mitigated and kept in check by an aversion to separatism. Sadly, these lectures were never published and the typescript of them now seems to be lost, a casualty of the scramble to clear his room in Trinity for a new occupant as he lay dying. There were several reasons why Patrick Collinson was unable to see them to the press in the immediately succeeding years, especially the testing period during which his son Andrew was being treated for a rare form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, from which few people had previously recovered. This seriously overshadowed the Birkbecks, the first of which he delivered on the same day as a sobering meeting with the oncologist.²⁵ Collinson had only just emerged from a tribulation of his own: a terrible accident in September 1980 getting off a train as darkness fell, as a result of which he lost most of his left foot. Cautioned by the railway police for alighting from a moving vehicle, he was sanguine about the episode and adapted quickly to his disability and the prosthesis which he was obliged to wear for the rest of his life. It did little to inhibit his strenuous physical activities, though he did admit that it wrecked the balance required for punting! A letter sent to Kenneth Fincham shortly after the accident reveals that he never indulged in self-pity, displayed courage during his convalescence, and looked forward to re-entering circulation as soon as possible after his hospital stay of seven weeks. Visits were sometimes hard to arrange because he was likely to be supervising postgraduates or holding a Special Subject class by his bedside.²⁶

By 1983, things were turning sour institutionally too. The savage budget slashes of the Thatcher years began to take their toll within the University

²⁴Collinson, *Godly People*, p. xi.

²⁵Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 171–2. On the Birkbecks, see also Collinson, *Godly People*, p. 18.

²⁶Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 171–2. Letter from Patrick Collinson to Kenneth Fincham dated 17 Sept. 1980. Memories of his convalescence after the accident can be found in Christopher Brooke's reflections prefacing the first of his *Festschriften*: Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (eds.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. xv–xx, at xix.

of Kent, where the Faculty of Humanities was obliged to shed a proportion of staff and where pressure upon people to take early retirement was firmly exerted. It was in this climate of retrenchment that Collinson applied for and was offered the Chair of Modern History at Sheffield. His own Vice-Chancellor made no attempt to stop him from accepting and said, on the contrary, that he would be doing a favour to his colleagues by leaving. Although some of his friends felt that the manner of his departure from Kent was scandalous, Collinson never bore a public grudge to that university, and in so far as he laid blame at anyone's door, it was the Prime Minister's.²⁷

The translation to Sheffield in 1984 was preceded by a year of leave, half of which he spent as the recipient of an Andrew Mellon Fellowship at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. He was exhilarated by his hikes in the San Gabriel mountains and by the discoveries he made digging through the Ellesmere manuscripts and he wrote to a correspondent at home that he was in 'Abraham's Bosom', sending 'a crumb from this rich table'.²⁸ Through his exchanges with the occupant of the adjacent office, John King, the fellowship further exposed him to recent trends in literary scholarship, with which he engaged persuasively in subsequent work. The research he did in this bibliographical haven and oasis of botanical beauty in the midst of Los Angeles enabled him to sketch the blueprints for his Stenton Lecture at Reading in 1985 and the Anstey Memorial Lectures at Kent in 1986.

Signalling his turn towards evaluating the broader cultural impact of Protestantism in England, the former set forth the stimulating thesis (since revised and nuanced) that around 1580 the Reformation moved from an iconoclastic to an iconophobic phase, setting aside its early flirtation with the popular media of art, song and drama and moving into a sober middle age marked by moral rigour and succoured by Ramist diagrammatic logic and bibliocentricity.²⁹ This idea was developed further in chapter 4 of *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, which appeared in 1988, dedicated with affection and respect to Geoff Dickens 'who both led and pointed the way'. The thrust of the revised and augmented Anstey lectures was, however, at odds with Dickens's own convictions about the spontaneous, rapid

²⁷ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 172–3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 173–4, supplemented by a letter to Ken Fincham of 1 May 1984 and John King's obituary in *Reformation*, 17 (2012), 3–6, at 3–4.

²⁹ Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: the Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation*, The Stenton Lecture, 1985 (Reading, 1986).

and popular character of the English Reformation.³⁰ Its title nodded to the rival view that was then beginning to command consensus, that Protestantism was an unwelcome imposition by the Tudor state on the populace, which struggled painfully to put down firm roots over a more prolonged period; in brief, in the short term it was not a success but a failure. Collinson was prepared 'to assert, crudely and flatly, that the Reformation was something which happened in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I', and that everything before that was merely 'preparative' and 'embryonic'. It was 'only with the 1570s that the historically minded insomniac goes to sleep counting Catholics rather than Protestants'. The other chapters of *Birthpangs* were studies of its implications for urban piety and politics and subtle meditations on its side-effects: on the ambiguous role of the Reformation in the formation of national consciousness, in the history of the family and gender relations, and in the genesis of what, in keeping with Anthony Fletcher and John Morrill, he described as England's Wars of Religion. His focus, though, was not on the conflicts that broke out between King and Parliament in 1642 but on the squabbles over maypoles, Sunday sports, and church ales that erupted in its streets and the frictions created by puritans who shunned their unregenerate neighbours. He identified the antipathy between the godly and ungodly as 'the necessary mental condition' for the outbreak of fighting and in one of his most quoted lines he declared that puritanism was 'not a thing definable in itself but only one half of a stressful relationship'. The use of the term puritan in contemporary discourse was an index of 'dynamic and mutual antagonism'.³¹ This presaged the even more nominalist position he adopted in a lecture on *The Puritan Character* at the Andrew Clark Library in Los Angeles, published in 1989, and in a series of suggestive essays on the role of the theatre and popular libel in the 'invention' of this phenomenon, though he later thought of the former as an 'extreme statement'.³²

³⁰ For Collinson's relationship with Dickens, see Patrick Collinson, 'A. G. Dickens', *Historical Research*, 77 (2004), 14–23, esp. 18.

³¹ Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, 1988), quotations at pp. ix, 146, 143.

³² Patrick Collinson, *The Puritan Character: Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth-Century English Culture* (Los Angeles, CA, 1989); Patrick Collinson, 'Ben Johnson's *Bartholomew Fair*: the theatre constructs puritanism', in David L. Smith, Richard Strier and David Bevington (eds.), *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1576–1649* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 157–69; Patrick Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical vitriol: religious satire in the 1590s and the invention of Puritanism', in John Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 150–70. For his comments on *The Puritan Character*, see Patrick Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (London, 2006), p. xiii. For earlier and later statements along these lines, see Patrick Collinson, 'A comment: concerning the name puritan', *Journal of*

The themes delineated in the final chapter of *Birthpangs* were further elaborated in a later study of the ‘The cohabitation of the faithful with the unfaithful’, which turned on the counterintuitive argument that the social segregation practised by puritans committed to remaining with the Church of England was more corrosive of harmonious neighbourly relations than the formal ecclesiastical separation of nonconformists. Meeting their psychological need for antagonism and suffering, their avoidance of ‘familiar company keeping’ with reprobates was a piece of ‘adroit casuistry’ that did its ‘fair share in dividing and distracting communities and neighbourhoods which hoped to be at peace’. If the products of puritan apartheid were rarely ‘actual violence’, they were ‘potentially explosive’.³³

The emphasis in *Birthpangs* on the destabilising potential of puritan principles and piety represented Collinson’s partial shift back towards the position that fervent Protestantism was a disruptive social force. Much of his work revolved around the problem of whether or not it was ‘a solvent of parochial religion’ and ‘congregationalist in potential’, as he argued (temporarily impressed by a suggestion made by Christopher Hill) in a paper delivered at a *Past and Present* Society conference in 1966, but retracted in the Ford Lectures in 1979.³⁴ This was indicative of a man who had sufficient humility to change his mind, but also of one who found it difficult to accept that puritanism was a recipe for sedition and famously declared it to be ‘as factious and subversive as the Homily on Obedience’.³⁵ The same questions also simmered beneath the surface of his presidential lecture on ‘The English conventicle’ for the annual conference of the Ecclesiastical History Society on his chosen theme of ‘Voluntary Religion’ in 1986.³⁶

Other lectures he delivered in this period proved to be even more influential, especially his John Rylands Library lecture on ‘The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I’.³⁷ The delicious oxymoron that lay at its heart was the notion that the late Tudor polity was simultaneously a kingdom ruled over by a hereditary sovereign and a self-governing entity which

Ecclesiastical History, 31 (1980), 483–8; and Patrick Collinson, ‘Anti-puritanism’, in John Coffey and Paul C. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 19–33.

³³ Patrick Collinson, ‘The cohabitation of the faithful with the unfaithful’, in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (eds.), *From Persecution to Toleration: the Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 51–76, quotations at 65, 63, 68, 74, 67.

³⁴ See Patrick Collinson, ‘The godly: aspects of popular Protestantism’, in Collinson, *Godly People*, pp. 1–17, and note on p. 18.

³⁵ Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, p. 177.

³⁶ Patrick Collinson, ‘The English conventicle’, in William J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *Voluntary Religion*, *Studies in Church History* 23 (Oxford, 1986), pp. 223–59.

³⁷ Collinson, ‘Monarchical republic’. See also Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 189–90.

depended upon the cooperation of the crown's servants and within which there was space to wield power and indeed to resist. 'Citizens', he wrote elsewhere, 'were concealed within subjects',³⁸ and he meant this of both the privy councillors who advised Elizabeth and the humble people who took on responsibility at the grass roots. This striking conceit took its bearings from two archival finds: the document drawn up by the chief inhabitants of the village of Swallowfield in Berkshire in 1596 about how to govern their community and a memorandum written by Lord Burghley outlining where authority would lie in the event of an interregnum. The ideological roots of the hybrid species that was monarchical republicanism lay in humanism, but also in Protestant biblicism. It was in the texts of the Old Testament that the queen's advisers found the ammunition to coerce her into executing her cousin Mary Queen of Scots in 1586, a topic that he dilated further in his Raleigh lecture entitled 'The Elizabethan exclusion crisis and the Elizabethan polity', subsequently published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*.³⁹ This intriguing set of ideas was the self-confessed 'hobby horse' of Collinson's later years and it has proved to be an acorn out of which has grown a mighty oak.⁴⁰ Reflecting Collinson's belated return to the terrain once occupied by his supervisor and by the towering figure of Geoffrey Elton—the realm of politics—they have set the agenda for understanding the early modern commonwealth of England for the last twenty-five years, giving rise to conference panels, round table discussions, and a volume of essays. To the latter Collinson contributed a reflective afterword, which predicted that the paradoxical notion of monarchical republicanism might not 'have an indefinite shelf life'.⁴¹ The tide may now be beginning to turn in a fresh direction, but there can be no doubt that collectively these essays constituted a seminal intervention which injected fresh dynamism into a field of debate that had fallen into a state of relative stagnation. It is worth commenting on the ostensible tension

³⁸ See Patrick Collinson, *De Republica Anglorum: or, History with the Politics Put Back* (Cambridge, 1989), reprinted in Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays*, pp. 1–27, at 19.

³⁹ Patrick Collinson, 'The Elizabethan exclusion crisis and the Elizabethan polity', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 84 (1994), 51–92. See also Patrick Collinson, 'The State as "monarchical commonwealth": Tudor England', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 15 (2002), 89–95; Patrick Collinson, 'Servants and citizens: Robert Beale and other Elizabethans', *Historical Research*, 79 (2006), 488–511; Patrick Collinson, 'The politics of religion and the religion of politics in Elizabethan England', *Historical Research*, 82 (2009), 74–92.

⁴⁰ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 197.

⁴¹ See John F. McDiarmid (ed.), *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson* (Aldershot, 2007). Collinson's own comment is in the 'Afterword', pp. 245–60, at 258. For further discussion, see Stephen Alford, 'Patrick Collinson's Elizabethan commonwealth', *Reformation*, 17 (2012), 7–28.

between Collinson's emphasis on the latent subversion of his monarchical republicans and his insistence on the docility of puritans, though this may be more apparent than real.

Meanwhile, Collinson was enjoying his time at Sheffield, despite the renewed challenges of leading a department that had not hitherto worked well as a unit and of a university trying to find ways to reduce its spending. He helped to reform the curriculum, oversaw the merger of History with Economic History and Ancient History, secured posts that seemed in danger of being lost in the latest bureaucratic freeze, and continued to interact fruitfully with colleagues in English Literature. Always a team player willing to take his turn, his sense of humour, willingness to tell tales against himself, and unassuming and irenic style as Head were appreciated by many of his colleagues. Mark Greengrass and Anthony Fletcher speak of his arrival as 'a breath of fresh air'. They remember his gift for diplomacy and tact, the distinctive memos he typed at high speed on his battered Remington typewriter, and his prodigious appetite for work. His speeches at History Society dinners had students rolling in the aisles and he enthusiastically contributed his precious time to address local branches of the Historical Association. Tensions within the department remained, and there were those who felt that he exhibited a certain unwillingness to grasp nettles and who were rankled by his presence. Nevertheless, the impact he made in the course of just four years was out of proportion to the brief time he spent in Sheffield. He relished having the Peak District on his doorstep, which provided new opportunities for hill-walking and led to the purchase of a house with magnificent views of the Hope Valley at Hathersage, where he and Liz lived between 1989 and 2005.⁴²

Collinson's relocation to Cambridge to take up the Regius Chair in Modern History in 1988 was a worthy index of the esteem in which he was held, but he was alive to the irony that the indirect author of his troubles in Kent, Mrs Thatcher, was now responsible for his elevation to one of the top jobs in the historical profession. He was genuinely surprised and greatly flattered by the invitation. *The Daily Telegraph* heralded his appointment with the headline 'Rise of Left-Winger' and he was certainly an unexpected choice under a Conservative government and a very different figure from his predecessor, Geoffrey Elton.⁴³ Before he took up his post, Elton put him in his place by ticking him off for cramming too much into a confer-

⁴² On the Sheffield years, see Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 174–8. I have been assisted by the reminiscences of Mark Greengrass, Anthony Fletcher, and Michael Bentley.

⁴³ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 177–9.

ence paper.⁴⁴ Once he arrived relations between them were cordial and he patiently tolerated Elton's reluctance to release the reins of power, which included continuing to attend the Tudor Seminar and behave as if he were presiding. Collinson was sufficiently indiscreet to tell one of his graduate students that Elton didn't have the 'organ' to understand religion and it is clear from his own rather unsympathetic British Academy memoir that they were men of sharply contrasting temperaments. There was a degree of mutual incomprehension. Elton's lack of interest in the open air and countryside and his failure to be impressed by the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, for instance, quite bewildered him.⁴⁵ And he did not hide his disagreement with the style and priorities of the scholarship practised by 'this pugnacious historian' in his polite but uncompromising review of his last book, *Return to Essentials*, which he regarded as an embarrassment.⁴⁶

The faculty that Collinson inherited was full of frustrations. He was impatient and outspoken about the impracticalities of the Stirling prize-winning Seeley Building, admired by students of architecture from all over the world, but (still) incapable of coping with rain and extremes of cold and heat: 'for those who have to work in it, in all weathers', he wrote, 'it is not a friendly place'.⁴⁷ There were other irritations, including his thwarted attempts to bring about reform of what he saw as a conservative and antiquated Tripos. His Inaugural Lecture as Regius, 'De Republica Anglorum', was not only a powerful call for early modern British historians to explore 'the social depth of politics' and 'to find signs of political life at levels where it was not previously thought to exist', but also a critique of the artificial division between political and ecclesiastical and economic and social history enshrined in the existence of separate Tripos papers.⁴⁸ He wrote later of the need 'to put the Humpty Dumpty of the sixteenth century' back together and to reintegrate fields that had been unhelpfully demarcated.⁴⁹ He proved unable to overcome the resistance he

⁴⁴ Collinson, *From Crammer to Sancroft*, p. xii.

⁴⁵ Patrick Collinson, 'Geoffrey Rudolph Elton 1921–1994', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 94 (1996), 429–55, esp. 436, 454; Patrick Collinson, 'Elton, Sir Geoffrey Rudolph [formerly Gottfried Rudolph Otto Ehrenberg] (1921–1994)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <<http://www.oxfordnb.com/view/article/54946>> [last accessed 17 Jan. 2014].

⁴⁶ As well as the items cited above, n. 43, see his review of *Return to Essentials*, *London Review of Books*, 14/11 (11 June 1992), 24–5; Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 185.

⁴⁷ Collinson, 'Geoffrey Rudolph Elton', p. 451; Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 183.

⁴⁸ Collinson, 'De Republica Anglorum', in *Elizabethan Essays*, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Patrick Collinson, *The Sixteenth Century 1485–1603* (Oxford, 2002), p. 9. See also Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 184.

faced from entrenched interests and as chairman of the faculty, a role which he took upon himself perhaps too early in his tenure, he felt like an outsider and was never wholly effective, despite the intellectual respect which his work commanded. He sometimes lacked political antennae and was not always watchful for the devious and ill-intentioned. Collinson found the faculty a little introverted and one colleague recalls a whiff of nostalgia for the congenial corridor and common room culture of Sheffield. But he learnt not to make the mistake of speaking of how things were done in other institutions and to bite his tongue when people complained that Cambridge had problems.⁵⁰

Yet there were significant compensations. As ever, he took pleasure in his teaching and his Special Subject on 'Perceptions and Uses of the Past' produced a crop of devoted followers and some future historians, as well as the steady flow of essays on aspects of early modern historiography that marked his later years: studies of John Foxe, William Camden and John Stow, which asked refreshing and critical questions about the links between truth and fiction and interrogated the teleological myths that traditionally surrounded the subject.⁵¹ Once again he established points of contact with literary scholars, notably Lisa Jardine, Anne Barton and Jeremy Maule. He warmly endorsed the M.Phil. in Renaissance Literature for its excellent combination of training in palaeography, textual criticism and contextual history and he was a strong supporter of the interdisciplinary Early Modernists seminar which then met in an offshoot of Jesus College, Little Trinity.⁵² By contrast he did not make as much effort to forge links with the Faculty's Europeanists, including the distinguished historian of Reformation Germany, Bob Scribner.

The era in which he was Regius was a golden age for the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Britain in Cambridge, and to the Wrightsonians, Spuffordians, Skinnerians, and the New Morrill Army

⁵⁰ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 187.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–5. A number of these essays—including Patrick Collinson, 'Truth, lies and fiction in sixteenth-century Protestant historiography', in Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks (eds.), *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric and Fiction 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 37–68; Patrick Collinson, 'One of us: William Camden and the making of history', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 8 (1998), 139–63; Patrick Collinson, 'John Stow and nostalgic antiquarianism', in Julia F. Merritt (ed.), *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598–1720* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 27–51; and Patrick Collinson, 'William Camden and the anti-myth of Elizabeth: setting the mould?', in Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (eds.), *The Myth of Elizabeth* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 79–98—were reprinted in Patrick Collinson, *This England: Essays on the English Nation and Commonwealth in the Sixteenth Century* (Manchester, 2011).

⁵² Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 186.

were added the Collinsonian elect. He gathered around him a large crop of research students from the United States, Canada, Switzerland and Australia as well as the UK, which he regarded as the 'jewels' in his crown and to whom, in a gesture that humbled them (and, as he jested, almost bankrupted him in gratis copies!), he dedicated his *Elizabethan Essays*.⁵³ He was a generous and supportive supervisor, though not always a very directive one, and he let those about whom he was confident out on a long rein. More generally, his willingness to go out of his way to offer encouragement to younger scholars, especially those to whom he had no obligations, is gratefully remembered. The letters commending articles which he sent to obscure young scholars without track records were immensely cheering to those who at the end of their Research Fellowships were wondering where they would end up next. One of those to whom he wrote encouragingly in the 1980s was Diarmaid MacCulloch. He could be brusque on the phone, which was not his favoured instrument of communication, but meetings with him were filled with amusing digressions and were occasions when the cup of his learning overflowed. He too had a gift for making his students leave his room with renewed hope and enthusiasm and the many typed notes he despatched through the internal university mail service were a source of much reassurance to those who received them. He struggled to come to terms with computer technology and he never mastered email.

As an examiner, Patrick Collinson could be a stern and hanging judge. He was impatient with incompetence and severe against those who displayed intellectual deficiencies or behaved ungraciously, though sometimes compassion coloured and tempered his judgement. His role at Cambridge made him a sought-after patron and he exercised this power extensively, sometimes weighing need in the balance alongside merit. He was a candid and sometimes capricious referee and was the subject of intense resentment by a few of those whose aspirations were disappointed. He could be obstinate in pursuing his preferences in faculty appointments and he ruffled some feathers in the process. The many obligations he accrued in this regard, as in others, explain why he ruefully described himself as a 'reading professor' during his term in Cambridge, forever marking up drafts of students' work and wading through mountains of meeting and committee papers. He often rose at 5 a.m. to catch up on his correspondence. External responsibilities also crowded in: the chairmanship of the British Academy John Foxe Committee, the Vice-Presidency of the Royal Historical Society between 1994 and 1998, the formation and first

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 185; and Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays*.

Presidency of the Church of England Record Society in 1992, and membership of the History Panel of the Research Assessment Exercise. He emerged from his second bout of service on the latter ‘deeply sceptical about its rationale and likely effects’ and unconvinced of the applicability to the Humanities of ‘a model of productivity which may make sense in a laboratory but which ultimately derives from industry and business’. He was doubtful whether ‘rekindling a few spent volcanoes’ and persuading ‘some drones to become busy bees’ was really worth the cost.⁵⁴

All of this took its toll on his own work and it is notable that he had no sustained sabbatical leave and published no monographs during this period. He became, however, a consummate master of the occasional lecture and commissioned essay, many of which were later republished in his collected volumes *From Cranmer to Sancroft* and *This England*. In many ways pieces of article length, written under high pressure and fuelled by adrenalin, were the mode in which he flourished best and in which his most brilliant work found its natural home. He was also a splendid and prolific reviewer and his essays in the *TLS* and *LRB* are little masterpieces of insight and wit. He also found time to contribute several substantial chapters to the history of that puritan seminary, Emmanuel College.⁵⁵

Above all, Patrick Collinson settled very comfortably into Trinity College, at which he accepted a professorial fellowship. Pembroke had expected its alumnus to return to its ranks, but was slow to make a direct overture, by which time it was too late. He felt awkward about this decision but this residue of guilt was perhaps finally appeased after his election as an Honorary Fellow of Pembroke a few months before his death. He came to love Trinity dearly, somewhat surprisingly given his political views, and he yearned for it when he retired to Derbyshire and moved from there to Devon, avidly reading the Council minutes and delivering a highly affectionate eightieth birthday speech in the Master’s Lodge in September 2009.⁵⁶ Most of the fellows found him a delightful companion and he formed some firm and lasting friendships, though he had his detractors in college, who mistook his loquaciousness for pomposity and self-absorption and were baffled by his unwillingness to play the political games in which they engaged. He himself found ‘the C. P. Snow-style feuds’ to which Oxbridge colleges are prone of ‘marginal interest’ and was

⁵⁴ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 187.

⁵⁵ A. S. Bendall, Christopher Brooke and Patrick Collinson, *A History of Emmanuel College, Cambridge* (Woodbridge, 2000).

⁵⁶ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, chap. 16, esp. p. 180; eightieth birthday speech.

not entirely adept at the wheeling and dealing required of electors in the annual Junior Research Fellowship competition.⁵⁷

The years after he stepped down as Regius in 1996 saw no letting up of the frantic pace at which he had become accustomed to work. They were filled with multiple lectures, the Douglas Southall Freeman visiting professorship at the University of Virginia and a stint as an Honorary Professor at Warwick, not to mention honorary degrees at Oxford, Essex, Warwick, Trinity College Dublin, and Sheffield (adding to those he had already received at York and Canterbury), the receipt of three Festschriften, and the award of the Historical Association's Medicott Medal in 1998.⁵⁸ Freedom from administration and teaching enabled him to undertake and complete new projects, including an edition of manuscripts relating to *Conferences and Combination Lectures* at Dedham and Bury St Edmunds, on which he collaborated with John Craig and Brett Usher and which appeared in 2003.⁵⁹ The archive of his letters collected by Dr Usher testifies to Collinson's meticulousness as a scholar, his discovery of the joys of collaboration, and his accomplishment at the art of juggling. They reveal the breakneck speed at which he wrote his little book on *The Reformation*, a short overview designed for the lay reader, which he freely admitted came out of his head and such books as he could find on his shelf. This revealed 'his love of Luther' but he felt less affinity with the 'choleric personality' of Calvin. Reviewers were kind, but although it fizzed with ideas and was translated into several languages, including Portuguese, this was not his best work. He was disappointed that it did not make more impact.⁶⁰ More profound were his earlier attempts to situate English Calvinism in its international context in a volume edited by Menna Prestwich and the introduction entitled 'The fog in the channel clears' he wrote for *The Reception of the Continental Reformation*, the offspring of a British Academy conference he organised with Polly Ha.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 181, 196.

⁵⁸ The four Douglas Southall Freeman Lectures he gave at Virginia were published in the *Douglas Southall Freeman Historical Review* (Spring 1999). The Festschriften were Fletcher and Roberts, *Religion, Culture and Society*; Jack and Wall, 'Protestants, property, puritans: *Godly People* revisited', and Susan Wabuda and Caroline Litzenberger (eds.), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: a Tribute to Patrick Collinson by his Students* (Aldershot, 1998).

⁵⁹ Patrick Collinson, John Craig and Brett Usher (eds.), *Conferences and Combination Lectures in the Elizabethan Church: Dedham and Bury St Edmunds 1582–1590* (Woodbridge, 2003).

⁶⁰ The late Brett Usher lent me a box file of correspondence relating to the edition cited above, n. 59. Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation* (London, 2003), quotations at pp. ix, 74.

⁶¹ Patrick Collinson, 'England and international Calvinism 1558–1640', in Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism, 1541–1715* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 197–223; Patrick Collinson, 'The fog in the channel clears: the rediscovery of the continental dimension to the British reformations',

During the early 2000s he was also preoccupied by his duties as an associate editor for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, to which he contributed twenty-seven articles, including a 36,000 word entry on Elizabeth I, which later appeared as a short book. The experience of writing the life of this long-reigning monarch ('an awful sweat') made him determined to 'have no more to do with the woman' ('no-one should be allowed to be queen for 45 years') and he returned the advance of £1,000 he had received from Blackwells for a full-scale biography.⁶² What he really wanted to write, but which never transpired, was a book about the tragic story of his wife's parents' trial for the murder of a farm servant in early 1930s Kenya. Trained in an *LRB* article called 'The cowbells of Kitali', it was to be called *Black and White Mischief* and to function as an emblem of colonialism in all its deleterious effects. Perhaps he thought of it as the fulfilment of his youthful wish to pursue research in African history.⁶³

Patrick Collinson was not particularly troubled by giving up the power he had exercised as Regius, but in retirement he did sometimes succumb to feeling marginalised and he was sensitive to perceived slights and hurt by negative relationships. He felt cut off from Cambridge in the coastal town of Shaldon in Devon, to which he and Liz moved after she suffered from a stroke and a heart attack in 2005, in order to be closer to three of their four children. Always eager for gossip, in his declining years he relied upon John Morrill as his 'master spy'. Most of his final book, *Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism*, was written after his diagnosis with terminal bladder cancer, with access only to a limited library and his yellowing Ph.D. notes. This was a case of turning full circle: it is *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* viewed through the hostile lens of its chief antagonist. He regarded it as 'a kind of mental therapy' and his dogged determination to finish it before he died says everything about the stoicism and stamina that had always been part of his character.⁶⁴ Bancroft was the anti-hero of this study, which reiterated Collinson's long held-conviction that puritanism was the leavening lump, life-blood and 'vital chord' of the Church of England and a force too resilient for its most ardent and ingen-

in Polly Ha and Patrick Collinson (eds.), *The Reception of Continental Reformation in Britain, Proceedings of the British Academy*, 164 (Oxford, 2010), pp. xxvii–xxxvii.

⁶² Patrick Collinson, 'Elizabeth I', in *ODNB*, reprinted as Patrick Collinson, *Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2007). Letters to Brett Usher, 19 Oct. 2001, 29 Nov. 2001. Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, p. x.

⁶³ Patrick Collinson, 'The cowbells of Kitali', *London Review of Books*, 25/11 (2003), 15–20. See Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 197; Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, pp. x–xi.

⁶⁴ He died on 28 September 2011.

ious episcopal enemy to uproot.⁶⁵ Around the same time, on the poignant occasion on which he sat watching some of his students pack up his books for sale as a job lot, he came out with the pronouncement that Bancroft's predecessor at Canterbury, John Whitgift, was a complete 'bastard'.

The book on Bancroft was published posthumously, but Collinson's memoirs, *The History of a History Man: or, the Twentieth Century Viewed from a Safe Distance* appeared a few months before his death, though they had already been made available online via the Trinity College website.⁶⁶ He described the book as 'a picaresque chronicle of a wandering scholar in four continents' and it was less a set of reflections on his historical endeavours than a lively account of his mobile and adventurous life, with some highly confessional elements.⁶⁷ One reviewer rightly detected a degree of false modesty in his description of himself as 'a petit-maître' of the historical discipline,⁶⁸ and his presentation of his career as a chapter of accidents runs the risk of disguising his quiet ambition. He had no personal vanity and many commented upon his immense modesty and instinct for self-mockery, but he did take great pleasure in his achievements and in the honours showered upon him in later years. The presence of the autobiography (from which Collinson admitted some things had been 'deliberately omitted') is something of a hazard for his biographer.⁶⁹ It eclipses an inner complexity which his own discourse was designed to efface.

What does leap from its pages, as from his many letters and scholarly writings, is his distinctive voice, engaging personality, and lust for life in all its rich variety. His academic prose was colourful, allusive, and replete with extravagant metaphors. He had a mischievous, irreverent and sometimes macabre sense of humour. He enjoyed food and drink and was the life and soul of the parties he and Liz organised in Sydney, Canterbury, Sheffield and Cambridge for staff and students alike. He enjoyed singing lugubrious ditties, including one beginning 'Whenever you see a corpse go by', and had a repertoire of inspired shaggy dog stories which he told at his own expense.⁷⁰ Music was a passion, especially the Baroque masterpieces of Bach, and he kept and played a harpsichord and clavichord. He

⁶⁵ Patrick Collinson, *Richard Bancroft and Anti-Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2012). See the preface, p. ix, and p. 218.

⁶⁶ Collinson, *History of a History Man*.

⁶⁷ Eightieth birthday speech.

⁶⁸ Munro, review, 131; Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 52.

⁶⁹ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 4.

⁷⁰ As remarked by Sheridan Gilley in a letter responding to Collinson's obituary, in *The Times* (15 Oct. 2011). This seems to have been a trait he shared with his father: see Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 19.

was also a remarkably talented cartoonist, who doodled pictures of the sixteenth-century people he studied and produced hilarious birthday cards for members of his family. Holidays were important to him, and he especially treasured annual trips to a cottage in Connemara in Ireland in the last decade and a half of his life. Everywhere he went he indulged his insatiable curiosity about nature and he had an intricate knowledge of the habits of birds, fish and mammals that would have impressed David Attenborough. But there was also a streak of danger. Mountaineering claimed the lives of several of his friends and he himself had more than a few narrow squeaks; he was thrilled by great heights; and he had a propensity for driving at recklessly high speeds. Above all, however, Liz and his children and grandchildren were at the very heart of his world, and they spilt into every conversation one had with him.

As has already been observed, Patrick Collinson was also a man who held pronounced political views rooted in his earnest Christian socialism. He was a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a peace campaigner and anti-war activist who marched in the streets and vocally opposed the invasion of Iraq in a letter to a leading newspaper, and a supporter of the call for gay rights. He was a dedicated Christian Aid man and spent much effort pioneering Traidcraft at Hathersage in Derbyshire. The priorities of American foreign policy gravely worried him and he spoke openly of 'the intellectual and moral failure' of the United States and its allies.⁷¹ Although Tony Blair's drift from its historic principles dismayed him, he was a lifelong supporter of the Labour Party, who celebrated the fall of Thatcher at the beginning of a seminar in 1990. Shaldon proved to be a little too complacent and conservative (with a large and small c) for his liking. Nevertheless, this 'more than closet republican' found it possible to accept the honour of a CBE, diffusing the discomfort by receiving it at Trinity rather than at Buckingham Palace, where it was bestowed upon him by the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, who had been his old captain of boats.⁷² Nor can the manner in which his political outlook seeped into and shaped his historical writing be ignored: he saw the past partly through the prism of the burning issues that exercised him in the present and admitted that his portrayal of moderate puritanism was

⁷¹ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 196.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 191. He wrote that he accepted the honour as a mark of esteem for his office and the profession and that 'insofar as the queen was and is my head of state, I was happy, and proud, to receive it from her. It was how any of my sixteenth-century monarchical republicans would have responded.'

tinged with ‘*Guardian*-reading pinkness’.⁷³ Written in the shadow of the Cold War, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* draws a passing parallel between the drive against the godly and the anti-Communist initiatives of Senator McCarthy, while the original title of his last book, *The Archbishop and the War against Terror*, reveals that the international response to Islamic fundamentalism in the wake of 9/11 supplied him with a new set of spectacles. The first draft contained more than a few references to dodgy dossiers.⁷⁴

Patrick Collinson often claimed that he had no real method as a historian, beyond assembling ‘an omnium gatherum of materials culled from more or less everywhere’.⁷⁵ Fond of calling himself a ‘butterfly collector’ and ‘hunter gatherer’,⁷⁶ he relished the anecdotes and gems of evidence he collected from his forays into the archives and from the early printed texts he identified by his ritual yearly reading of Pollard and Redgrave’s *Short Title Catalogue*. He believed that ‘precious truths . . . reside in particulars’ and thought that there was ‘no substitute for *ipsissima verba*’.⁷⁷ The empirical positivism of the London school of which he was a product left a profound mark on his scholarship, though his critique of the narrowness of Elton’s vision of history reveals a recognition of the limits of Rankean thoroughness. He could not adhere to an ‘epistemology which refuses to face the fact that no historian can tell the whole truth about all of the past, and that he therefore has to select, shape, and even in some sense invent his material’.⁷⁸ He generally kept historical theory at arm’s length and his flirtations with it in Australia produced only ‘a very superficial conversion’. He jettisoned it quickly on his return to England.⁷⁹

But Collinson was by no means hostile to insights derived from other disciplines and to borrowing creatively from them. Marx’s understanding of religion as a superstructure of political and economic forces was anathema to him and Durkheim’s overly functional, but he admired the sociology of Max Weber, and found enduring value in his concept of ‘elective

⁷³ See <<http://theconventicle.blogspot.co.uk/2007/11/conventicle-q-with-prof-patrick.html>> [last accessed 14 April 2014].

⁷⁴ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 397. The original typescript title-page is in my possession.

⁷⁵ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 144. On his approach to the past, see also chap. 5 *passim*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, e.g. pp. 49, 51, 161.

⁷⁷ Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, p. 39; Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ Collinson, ‘Sir Geoffrey Rudolph Elton’; Collinson, ‘Geoffrey Rudolph Elton’, p. 441; Collinson, review of *Return to Essentials*.

⁷⁹ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 154, 161.

affinity'.⁸⁰ He thought that anthropological models of interpretation were underpinned by the unhelpful assumption that religion was a mistaken apprehension of fact, though he did engage playfully with Clifford Geertz's approach to culture and his classic analysis of the Balinese cockfight. In one essay he compared stalking puritanism to hunting the okapi in the Ituri rain forest (an apt analogy for a thwarted field naturalist) and directed practitioners of the technique of thick description to the evangelical fasts and mass communions conducted by the godly Protestants of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and Scotland.⁸¹ For all his quarrels with Stephen Greenblatt and other New Historicist literary critics, he came to agree with them about the textual character of historical documentation.⁸² Notwithstanding his diatribe against postmodernism as a fungus, his thinking did bear the imprint of the linguistic turn and of the sensitivity it cultivated to the nexus between language and reality. His conviction that puritanism was in large part a rhetorical construct owed something to this and he 'half agreed with Hayden White that the historian's task is not absolutely alien to the writer of fiction'.⁸³ Defying neat categorisation, his work never slavishly followed current trends. Instead it set them. While the elliptical and serpentine sentences in which his subtle thinking was encapsulated often puzzle students, for the initiated they yield fresh revelations each time they are read.

Finally, it is necessary to turn to the issue of Patrick Collinson's religious faith and its relationship with the work he did. His evangelical upbringing in a family of missionaries exerted considerable influence in his youth. He was baptised by total immersion at Bethesda Chapel in Ipswich in his late teens, but he never quite experienced the emotional conversion and re-awakening for which he strove during his adolescence.⁸⁴ By his early twenties he had migrated away from nonconformity towards

⁸⁰ See the discussion in Patrick Collinson, 'Religion, society and the historian', *Journal of Religious History*, 23 (1999), 149–67; Collinson, 'A. G. Dickens', pp. 22–3.

⁸¹ Patrick Collinson, 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as forms of popular religious culture', in Christopher Durson and Jacqueline Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 32–57, at 34, 50. See also Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 49; and Patrick Collinson, 'The vertical and the horizontal in religious history: internal and external integration of the subject', in Alan Ford, James McGuire, and Kenneth Milne (eds.), *As by Law Established: the Church of Ireland Since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 15–32, at 22.

⁸² Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, p. x. For Collinson's interaction with scholars in this field, see Paulina Kewes, 'A mere historian: Patrick Collinson and the study of literature', forthcoming as part of a special issue on 'Patrick Collinson and his historical legacy', ed. Alexandra Walsham, to be submitted to *History*.

⁸³ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 54.

⁸⁴ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, pp. 61, 28.

the Church of England, and he briefly thought of becoming ordained. The parish churches in which he successively worshipped spanned the spectrum of Anglicanism, from liberal to Anglo-Catholic, and unlike his father, who detested set forms of prayer, he had an affectionate respect for the liturgy. His time at King's School Ely seems to have instilled in him a fondness for the rhythms of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*, but he was sheepish about having participated in a procession, accompanied by incense, in Shaldon.⁸⁵ By his own confession, he had 'a general difficulty with Catholicism', which, not coincidentally, was also something of a blind spot in his writing. And he distrusted clergy who claimed special knowledge or understanding, even of church history.

Yet it remains difficult to gauge the nature of his piety and to measure its precise impact on his scholarship. It is noticeable that he was interested less in theology and doctrine than in the people who applied and practised it in their everyday lives. Attentive to their frailties and foibles, he took pride in being 'a kind of resurrection man'. He frequently professed that he was 'methodologically atheist' and he bridled when Eamon Duffy described him as a Protestant historian.⁸⁶ But he also knew that he was a product of his environment, the prisoner of his own past, and a child of the movements that he studied. Despite his protestation that he would 'probably run a mile from those Puritans ... I study if I met them in the street', he was, in a sense, one of them.⁸⁷ He once wrote that the 'optimum position' was to be both an insider and an outsider, and his life, career and scholarship epitomise the benefits of this ambidexterity.⁸⁸ These varied experiences equipped Patrick Collinson with a unique ability to write 'history with a human face'.⁸⁹

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⁸⁵ For his father's aversion to a formal liturgy, see *ibid.*, p. 19. And note his review of *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (2000); Patrick Collinson, 'Holy-rowly-powliness', in *London Review of Books*, 23/1 (4 Jan. 2001), 33–4.

⁸⁶ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 52. For one use of the phrase 'methodological atheism', see Collinson, 'The vertical and the horizontal', p. 25; for his reaction to the label 'Protestant historian', see Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 53, reinforced by Eamon Duffy's own recollection of Collinson's response.

⁸⁷ Patrick Collinson, 'I believe ...', *Times Higher Education Supplement* (8 July 1996).

⁸⁸ Patrick Collinson, 'Part of the fun of being an English Protestant', review of Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700* (London, 2003), *London Review of Books*, 26/14 (22 July 2004), 22–3.

⁸⁹ Collinson, *History of a History Man*, p. 52.

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