KEN HALEY

Kenneth Harold Dobson Haley
1920–1997

KENNETH HALEY (Ken to all who knew him) was a shrewd, prudent and highly respected historian of British and Dutch political history in the second half of the seventeenth century. Personally, he had the hallmarks of the burgher statesmen of the Low Countries rather than the gossipy courtiers of Restoration England, but he wrote with clarity and perception about both, and had the insight to realise that neither could be properly interpreted in this period without an understanding of the other.

Ken was not a Yorkshireman by birth (he was born in Southport on 19 April 1920); but in every other respect of culture, conviction, and consistency he inherited and embodied the mantle of Yorkshireness. He was brought up in Huddersfield, a town which managed to be a bastion of Liberalism and Dissent well into the 1930s. Both had been epitomised in the Huddersfield Liberal MP, Joseph Woodhouse, editor of the *Huddersfield Examiner*, one of that distinctive breed of northern newspapers and a great Liberal engine in its own right. Ken was educated at Huddersfield College from 1931 to 1938, where Asquith had previously (if only briefly) also been a pupil. His enduring love for the game of cricket began in Huddersfield; so too did his commitment to Methodism, a conviction that would subtly inform every aspect of his domestic and professional life thereafter.

From Huddersfield, Ken went, like Asquith, to Balliol College, Oxford, to read modern history in 1938. Balliol's reputation for admitting undergraduates from a wide range of backgrounds was never greater than at that time. Amidst public school scions from Eton and Harrow, Rhodes Scholars from Cincinatti, and classicist sons of

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Whitehall mandarins (Kenneth Dover), there was also Roy Jenkins from Abersychan (Asquith's biographer, now Lord Jenkins of Hillhead and Chancellor of the University of Oxford), Denis Healey from Bradford Grammar School, and two fellow undergraduate historians whose intellectual interests would closely match Ken's. From King's School Macclesfield came Donald Pennington, later Fellow and tutor in Modern History at Balliol, and from Maidstone Grammar School there was Ivan Roots, who became Professor of History at the University of Exeter. Both Pennington and Roots would remain his friends and, in due course, become distinguished specialists too in the political history of the seventeenth century. Balliol would retain a unique place in Ken's affections and it was with a sense of the triumph of a historical detective as well as of genuine outrage that he unmasked an individual who had applied for a research fellowship in the University of Sheffield's Faculty of Arts in the later 1970s, claiming (fraudulently) to be a graduate student at that college.

The Second World War interrupted Ken's undergraduate studies. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1940 and served as a sergeant in the Middle East forces in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine for four years from 1941 to 1945. His commanding officer used to introduce him as 'my sergeant with the Balliol education' and it was whilst keeping accounts in the Middle East that he acquired the facility (dazzling to his younger colleagues) to total and average rows of examination marks at sight in his head. His war-time experiences were not lost completely from sight in his later historical studies. His suspicions of seventeenth-century French diplomacy possibly owe their origins to the unedifying jostlings between the Free French and the Vichy French in Syria and the Lebanon in these years, neither willing to countenance the aspirations to independence that were running so high in Beirut and Damascus. He certainly reflected on the role of rumour and uncertainty that seized the Lebanese capital in the political tergivisations of these years as a way of understanding the climate of panic which gripped London during the Popish Plot.[1]

In 1945, he returned to Oxford and Balliol where, with the good

[1] 'I once had the curious experience of living through a revolution, admittedly only a minor one, which lasted for about forty-eight hours while I was stationed there [Beirut]; and I shall not forget the wild rumours which found credence in the absence of any news, official or otherwise. They made it easier to understand some of the sillier rumours of the Popish plot period.' K. H. D. Haley, *The Study of the Past* (Inaugural Lecture, University of Sheffield, 1963), p. 9.

fortune to have Richard Southern and Christopher Hill as his tutors, he took a First in 1946. This was followed by a B.Litt. (completed in 1951) under the supervision of Sir Keith Feiling, whose work on British foreign policy would become the starting-point for much of Ken's subsequent research and publication, although it was G. N. Clark, then the Regius Professor, who advised him to learn Dutch and find a Dutch subject for his historical research. His debt to Feiling was particularly evident in his first work, *William of Orange and the English Opposition, 1672–4*, published in 1953.[2] He later regarded this book as merely a prologomenon to his monumental work on the Earl of Shaftesbury, which he had begun to research two years previously. The latter was conceived in the mould of Andrew Browning's political biography of the Earl of Danby, the second and final volume of which came out in 1951, the year Haley began work on Shaftesbury.[3] *The First Earl of Shaftesbury* finally appeared seventeen years later in 1968, a huge book (767 pages, 31 chapters) and a substantial achievement. Shaftesbury had defeated historians for a century. His career in politics spanned some of the most complicated thirty years of modern English history; and those complexities were in the process of creating volcanoes of historical controversy and revisionism. Shaftesbury's historian would require all the clarity of exposition and steady nerves often displayed by the individual he was studying to carry conviction. He did, and reviewers of differing persuasions were unanimous in accepting it as an enduring contribution to the study of later seventeenth-century British political history.

These two works reveal the essence of Haley's approach to the study and writing of history. He was an archival historian and warmed to the imaginative pleasures to be derived from working with documents. He recalled the 'twisted misshapen characters of the Earl of Clarendon' that reflected the gouty fingers of the writer. He loved the 'clear, heavily sanded, sprawling hand' of Sir William Temple, delighted in the tidy meticulousness of John Locke's handwriting (rather like his own, in fact) and was frustrated by the minute and illegible writing of Sir Joseph Williamson. He recalled the particular pleasure he had in realising that what seemed to be the routine correspondence between merchants was in fact being used as a cover for the activities of enemy agents in which

[2] It was later translated into Dutch as well as reprinted twenty years after its first appearance.
[3] A. Browning, *Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby and Duke of Leeds*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1944–51).

the parcels of 'fine goods' referred to in the letters were, in reality, propagandist pamphlets to be smuggled into England from the Low Countries.

Beyond these pleasures, entirely real but incidental, lay the true purposes of the historian's activity for him, and these involved explaining the complex processes of historical change. Haley did not care for the stratospheres of metaphysics in such matters. In the well-established English liberal tradition, he studiously avoided grand theories, and the equally grand gestures that tended to accompany them. Although he had no predispositions against the newer disciplines of the history of ideas or economic and social history, he claimed no specialism in them and, in any case, they did not allow him the space to do what he did best; namely, deciding the point where the documentary evidence would no longer justify the formulation of a generalised statement. Haley was remarkably shrewd in sizing up the value of a historical source and conservatively prudent in the use of his sources in general. Part of his value as a Restoration historian was that he did not particularly warm to the gossipy, opportunistic and inquisitive Pepys (who hated Shaftesbury), just as he realised the substantial limits of the embittered Clarendon as an objective source for Restoration political historians.

If asked, he would have probably agreed with the proposition that he liked best the writing of good analytical narrative and good biography. Neither was in vogue by the time *Shaftesbury* appeared, and Ken could never be accused of following a fad or a fashion. Christopher Hill had dismissed analytic narrative ('anyone can write narrative history'!) and Geoffrey Elton, appointed to a personal chair in Cambridge five years after Ken acquired his chair, was far from alone in these, the great days of *Past and Present*, in not believing in historical biography. For Ken, however, the historical canvas was most challenging when devoted to portraiture, and his specialist works are all Gainsboroughs of the genre—whether of Peter Du Moulin, William Temple, Charles II, or Shaftesbury himself. He was firmly of the view that the study of an individual in relation to his times threw valuable light on them, that person's influence upon events and other individuals at work within them. Convinced that questions of motivation were overwhelmingly complex, he sought to study them in the individual, rather than the group, and through an analytic narrative of events, in the hope that sound and verifiable conclusions would emerge, conclusions that would stand the test of time.

Have they? The weaknesses of biography are the reverse of its

strengths. Able to answer the small questions at the level of the individual (and to do so often definitively in the case of Haley's specialist works), it fails to do more than illustrate the larger questions that historians must confront at the level of corporate human activity. It can sometimes reveal the preoccupations or subjective assumptions of the biographer as well as the subject. Although Dryden's epitome of Shaftesbury as 'False Achitophel' had already posed the question of political consistency, there is something very revealing about Haley's own remarkable consistency of historical focus in his insistent quest for that very quality in his biographical study of him. It is fatally easy, too, for the biographer to overstate the centrality of the individual he is studying to the events in which he is involved. And, although Haley's study still contains one of the best political histories of the Popish Plot, the Exclusion Crisis of 1679 and its aftermath, that extraordinary finale to Shaftesbury's career as a minister, it could hardly provide a complete explanation for the political culture which gave rise to the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. We have had to await Mark Knights's study of political society and culture to have such an explanation.[4] On the other hand, Haley did not overestimate the significance of Shaftesbury's role at that moment. He provided, in fact, a much more sensitive account of Shaftesbury's overall significance in these events than that offered by J. R. Jones in 1961, where Shaftesbury was presented as the first modern 'party leader'.[5] It has been Jones's view, however, that has tended to be reiterated.[6] It has taken the work of a historian of ideas to re-emphasise Haley's picture of the complexity and evolution of events during that period, and his conclusion that Shaftesbury was not always a central player.[7]

Ken's Yorkshire roots were doubly reinforced a year after he began his B.Litt., firstly by his appointment as assistant lecturer in Modern History at the University of Sheffield in 1947 and then, six months later, by his marriage to Iris Houghton of Rotherham, a St Hilda's College graduate whom he had met at the Oxford John Wesley Society. Sheffield was still then, as Orwell had unkindly described it, 'the ugliest city in the Old World' and, at the university, he joined a department of three academic staff which had been headed by George Potter since 1931.

[4] Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678–1681* (Cambridge, 1994).
[5] J. R. Jones, *The First Whigs* (1961).
[6] e.g., in Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises* (Princeton, 1986).
[7] Jonathan Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677–1683* (Cambridge, 1991).

Honours students were not numerous, but the Intermediate students numbered over a hundred. Ken had a heavy load of teaching and (twice a term) of essay marking. Those who remember him from that period recall his appearing in the department laden with stacks of marked essays; and students taught by him then have not forgotten the exceptional care with which he looked through their work, returning it promptly and adding lengthy and well-directed comments and advice. Attendance at lectures was still compulsory, even for the ex-servicemen who swelled the ranks of students at this time. He later recalled, in a speech at a dinner to mark the centenary of the department in 1979, how the attendance register for his lectures recorded the presence of Cardinal Richelieu, Axel Oxenstierna and Count-Duke Olivares as amongst his audience.

Ken showed no signs of wanting to leave Sheffield and, made a lecturer in 1950 and a senior lecturer in 1960, he was promoted to be Professor of Modern History there in 1962. As he recalled in an Inaugural Lecture which he compared to a wedding (appropriately for a seventeenth-century political historian the event was scheduled to take place on 30 January 1963, the anniversary of Charles I's execution), he took great pride in following in the footsteps of Charles Harding Firth, who had given the first lectures on modern history in the University College of Sheffield eighty-three years previously. And alongside Firth, there were the memories of the Elizabethan historian, J. B. Black, who had been in Sheffield, as well as those of the classicist Appleton, whose desk Haley inherited in the university. Traditions, however, were a diminishing asset in the post-Robbins world of provincial universities in the 1960s. The expansion in numbers of staff and students which it entailed brought with it considerable difficulties and he viewed the process with mixed feelings. The department found itself housed mid-way up a newly built Arts Tower and, a year after his appointment to the Chair, his colleague Sidney Pollard was made Professor of Economic History which resulted in the creation of a separate department for that subject. Expansion brought with it younger colleagues too and demands for change in the syllabus and in methods of teaching. Although Ken was by no means a power-broker, he was notoriously shrewd in his appointments and various individuals serving in Chairs in Sheffield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, St Andrews and Oxford witness to the fact. But bright, young colleagues challenged Ken's vision of a history syllabus delineated by the pre-eminence of British History and courses in which lengthy, well-tailored

political narrative could take pride of place. He in turn regarded lectures as the essential teaching medium with seminars being, outside the special subject, something of a young lecturer's whim, to be humoured but satisfied only in moderation. Ken was fortunate in having Professor Edward ('Ted') Miller and, later, Professor David Luscombe as senior colleagues in the Medieval History chair to act as discreet lightning conductors and to disperse highly charged academic particles at vital moments.

None of Ken's colleagues, however, ever doubted his scholarship, integrity, liberal motivations, or the enormous sense of responsibility he brought to the department in Sheffield. Generations of students were invited in turn to coffee evenings with Iris and Ken at their home. Comments on student record cards after these events indicated how dedicatedly Ken was concerned with the personal development of the undergraduates in his department. He supervised relatively few research students, although one of them, a Yorkshireman like himself, John Kenyon, followed in Ken's footsteps, writing first a distinguished political biography of a late seventeenth-century statesman before becoming a specialist in English seventeenth-century political history and eventually a fellow Academician. Ken was particularly proud of the department's week-long vacation course to Attingham Park (more recently, Cumberland Lodge) which he never missed, although trudging around historical sites can have done his painful arthritis no good.

In the wider academic community, Ken gave a good deal of time to the Historical Association, of which he was a Vice-President for many years. He regularly attended its conferences, contributed to its publications series, and was the most assiduous of supporters of the local Sheffield branch.[8] He was a member of the Anglo-Netherlands Mixed Cultural Commission from 1976 to 1982 and of the William and Mary Tercentenary Trust from 1985 to 1989.[9] He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1987. Although he was not often the first to speak at Senate or Faculty in the University, his interventions were always

[8] His publications for the Historical Association were: *Charles II* (HA Pamphlet, 1966), *The Historical Association Book of the Stuarts* (HA with Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973) and *Politics in the reign of Charles II* (HA Studies Series with Blackwell, Oxford, 1985).

[9] It was in this context that he contributed to the American exhibition catalogue for the tercentenary with an article on 'International Affairs', published in R. P. Macmillan and Martha Hamilton-Philips, *The Age of William III and Mary II: Power, Politics and Patronage 1688–1702* (Williamsburg, 1989), pp. 35–48.

well-timed and invariably shrewd. He was a good Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the period from 1979 to 1981. His historical writing did not completely evaporate during these years of professorial responsibility. In something like six months he wrote the text for his book on *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (Thames and Hudson, 1972), a work by which he would be perhaps best known to the general public, a well-judged introduction to Dutch society and culture in the Golden Age. The text reflected his abiding affection for things Dutch, and when he hosted the Anglo-Dutch Colloquium in Sheffield in September 1979 (and attended its sequel just outside Amsterdam in 1981), he was at his most relaxed, enjoying the joke with his Dutch friends that the coach which broke down on what was then the Zuider Zee was run by a firm called 'D-Tours'. His affinity with the Netherlands always evoked a warm response from his many Dutch friends and colleagues.

Ken fought, as David Luscombe put it in an obituary notice 'an unremitting battle against physical infirmities', although it was a battle that was hardly ever announced to the outside world. He suffered badly from arthritis and from the side-effects of the steroid treatment to control it. He also had very poor eyesight and, in 1973, he was told by the specialists that his condition would lead to certain, if not imminent, blindness. The Vice-Chancellor of the University, Hugh Robson, immediately gave him his first ever research leave of absence for a year in order to complete the research for his book on Sir William Temple and de Witt. He retired early in 1982 and was able at least to complete the first volume of this work, which was published in 1986.[10] The work summed up the consistency of his research and approach to the writing of history; a work on the frontiers of Dutch and English political history in which an individual is deftly placed in the warp of political events through the consistent recourse to the original documentation. The second volume was in preparation when he became almost wholly blind and unable to complete it. He insisted on the destruction after his death of the manuscript drafts to the chapters that had been written. The onset of diabetes in later life compounded his physical infirmities but he found he could keep his mind active through computer chess and he continued to enjoy the sounds of the canals and the inimitable smell of Dutch coffee and cigars during visits

[10] K. H. D. Haley, *An English Diplomat in the Low Countries: Sir William Temple and John de Witt, 1685–72* (Oxford, 1986).

to the Low Countries. His last published piece was an article on William III and the palace at Het Loo.[11] In many respects, although he never published on the period beyond the Glorious Revolution, his scholarship had been devoted to explaining how the unlikely union of the Netherlands and the English crown could possibly have worked in the late seventeenth century. His wife Iris gave shrewd, devoted and loving support throughout a very happy marriage. She survives him, as do their two daughters and their son.

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[11] K. H. D. Haley, 'William III as builder of Het Loo' in John Dixon Hunt (ed.), *The Dutch Garden in the Seventeenth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington DC, 1990), pp. 3–11.