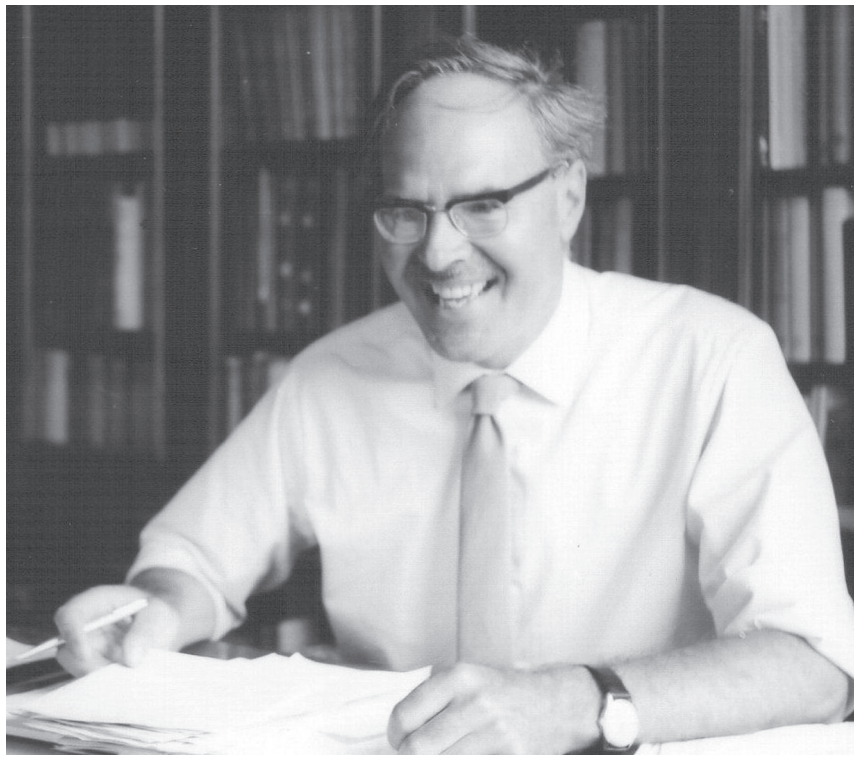

FRANK BARLOW

Frank Barlow
1911–2009

Frank Barlow was born on 19 April 1911, the eldest son of Percy Hawthorn Barlow and Margaret Julia Wilkinson, who had married in 1910. In his nineties he wrote a memoir, which is mostly devoted to describing his childhood and adolescence and his experiences during the Second World War, and which is now included among his personal and professional papers. He also kept many papers and memorabilia from his childhood and youth and he preserved meticulously his professional papers. His numerous publications include fifteen books and scholarly editions, of which many have turned out to be of quite exceptional long-term importance. He is notable above all for three outstandingly important historical biographies, for the excellence of his editions and interpretations of difficult Latin texts, and for a textbook that has remained in print for more than half a century. His interest in literature, present from an early age, and his belief that historical research and writing, while being conducted according to the most exacting scholarly standards, should be approached as a branch of literature, made him a historian whose appeal was literary as well as conventionally historical. He used biography as a means not just to understand an individual but also as the basis from which to interpret broad historical issues and to reflect on the mysteries of the human condition. In his hands, the edition of a Latin text was also a means to literary expression, with the text's meaning elucidated perceptively and imaginatively and the translation being every bit as much a work of literature as the original text. For much of his life he was a man of great energy and resilience, with a remarkably wide range of interests, both physical and intellectual.

Proceedings of the British Academy, **172**, 3–24.

Both of Frank's parents were elementary school teachers, with his mother, as was then customary, giving up work on marriage. In his earliest years, the family lived in rented accommodation at Porthill in the Potteries, between Stoke-on-Trent and Burslem, in a house that was in the middle of a terrace; the memoir records that they were prevented from buying a house by the outbreak of the First World War. On the ground floor the house had a scullery, a kitchen where meals were normally taken, a dining room and a sitting room at the front. Upstairs were two bedrooms and a bathroom. His parents would appear to have risen socially, at least to the extent of joining the professional classes, since his paternal grandfather had been a partner in a crate-making business (Barlow and Hall in Furlong Lane). Frank's father went on to be the headmaster of two elementary schools in the Stoke-on-Trent area, retiring in 1939 and moving to Rhyl, a favourite place for family holidays during Frank's childhood. In the copy of his first book, *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux* (London, 1939), that he presented to his parents, he thanked them in the following words: 'To mother and father, to whose belief in education I owe so much.'

What we know of Frank's father suggests a strong dedication to public service and a drive to self-improvement. He is described in a local newspaper article written at the time of his retirement as a genial and expansive man. An interest in science led him to take the London External B.Sc. without any access to laboratory facilities; as Frank says in the memoir, failure was as predictable as it was sad. Frank had two brothers. Alec, born soon after Frank, did not go to university; he excelled as a sportsman and remained resident in the Potteries until retirement, working in insurance. He died in the 1980s. (John) Philip, born some seven years after Frank, was called into the Navy in the Second World War and died in service in June 1943; he had followed Frank to St John's College, Oxford, where he took an outstanding First in History and then passed out top in the Civil Service entrance examinations. Both of Frank's parents lived into their eighties; Frank's mother dying in 1968 and his father in 1964.

Frank's parents were staunch Methodists. He appears to have attended services regularly with them at Hilltop Primitive Methodist Chapel throughout his childhood but, in his teenage years, to have eased himself out of what he came to see as social convention. The anticlericalism and lack of sympathy for institutionalised religion which were prominent among his attitudes in adult life, and which were rather surprisingly combined with a very sympathetic view of many churchmen, and especially of the two famous Archbishops of Canterbury, Anselm and Thomas Becket,

cannot be truly explained from his surviving papers. All that can be said is that they do not appear to have been the result of any profound spiritual crisis in adult life, but rather to have stemmed from an adolescent rejection of childhood routine and a natural irreverence that was to become familiar to many who knew him. Nonetheless, that he could write with such understanding of sincere religious belief may be a reflection of his upbringing. Frank's parents are known to have set aside a special plot of land for him to cultivate, something that he regarded as the foundation for his later passion for gardening.

Frank was educated at home by his mother until the age of seven. After attending two elementary schools, he was admitted to Newcastle-under-Lyme High School (now Newcastle-under-Lyme School) on a scholarship. His school career was formidably industrious. He liked games and was good at a number of sports, playing rugby for the school's First XV for several years, starting as a full back and then becoming a forward. The memoir records physical courage; he dived off the high board for his house because no one else would do so. He continued to play rugby to a high level after leaving the Potteries for Oxford until an ankle injury while playing for Stoke-on-Trent sent him back to Oxford on crutches and led him to reduce his participation in sport. He retained his interest in sport throughout his life, scarcely ever missing a Test match on television. He was a sergeant major in the school's Officer Training Corps, receiving a military training that he believed made unnecessary the Pioneer Corps' training he received after call-up after the outbreak of the Second World War, and which was the basis of frequently expressed pride in later life; the ramrod upright posture that he retained into advanced old age was unquestionably in part associated with respect for the disciplines of military life. He edited the school magazine and contributed extensively to it. He was writing poetry at school and continued to do so at Oxford. He was also an accomplished photographer who developed and printed his own photographs, which had often been taken during long cycling tours around the country. Throughout his life Frank kept in touch with several of his school contemporaries. It is tempting, and perhaps excessively facile, to link the interest in his subjects' early lives that is a feature of his great biographies with his own attachment to the place and people of his early years; it is at least certain that he maintained to the end enduring and active links with individuals, families and institutions he had known in his childhood and adolescent years.

In the Preface he wrote in his last book, Frank refers to 'the admirable Mr. Lush' and 'the excellent History sixth form'. Although he apparently

contemplated specialising in the sciences at one stage, history won out. In his memoir he drew attention to a special aptitude for French, and throughout his life he continued to read French literature in the original language. A visitor to the Barlow home at Kenton could view the well-thumbed volumes of Proust; a taste for that author's exploration of the nuances of social behaviour within a framework of class and institutions surely influenced the way Frank wrote history. Since his exceptional understanding of Latin is something that has impressed many who have used and benefitted from his work, it is arguably surprising that the memoir contains no mention of a Latin teacher. It is therefore likely that the qualities displayed above all in the editions and translations of the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* and *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* derived from what was, in the 1920s, a good standard education in Latin language and literature, combined with an outstanding facility for language and a personal determination to do all things well. There is a section in the correspondence in 1956 between Frank and V. H. Galbraith about the edition of the *Vita Ædwardi* of the possibility of using a translator because, as Frank acknowledged, the text was extremely difficult. Having replied politely by agreeing to think about the suggestion, Frank manifestly ignored it completely; in 1958 he received a letter from Galbraith describing the translation as 'very fine indeed'.

An undoubtedly important formative episode in his life was the cycling tour of Normandy that Frank, his brother Alec and some friends made in 1929. The diary he kept survives. Of the visit to the Tapestry at Bayeux he notes: 'I had expected to be bored by it. I was conjuring up some gloomy drab tapestry, but instead of that there was a gaily coloured embroidery on white linen. It was in fine condition and hung at a convenient height. I was very interested in it.'

Frank went up to St John's College, Oxford, on an Open Scholarship in 1930, a considerable achievement, since St John's offered few Open Scholarships at that date. He had an outstanding Oxford career. A First was followed by a B.Litt. and a D.Phil. completed at remarkable speed in times when completion rates were not a political issue. Yet, in his last book *The Godwins* (Harlow, 2002) he recalled that his undergraduate tutor, A. L. Poole, had once accused him of laziness. He commented that he considered the charge 'a little unfair', but then also said that it rankled and that he had spent many years proving Poole wrong. As Frank implies, it is impossible to believe that he was actually lazy, even more so because letters to him from Gavin Bone, Fellow of St John's and Lecturer in English Language and Literature, whose verse translation of *Beowulf* was

published posthumously in 1945, indicate that Frank learnt Old English as an undergraduate, reaching a level at which he could discuss *Beowulf* as a literary text. The incident surely has the character of a wake-up call against complacency after an outstandingly good sixth-form education. Frank continued his literary interests at Oxford, producing poetry and taking a prominent part in the St John's Essay Society, an organisation that was both literary and social. There is record of only one talk by Frank, given on 8 May 1932 with the Wildean title of 'The Prince of Darkness as a Gentleman'; the minutes of the Society inform us that it dealt with Manicheism, witchcraft and medieval belief. While at Oxford, he contemplated a career as a novelist and poet before turning to historical research. The legacy, a frequently expressed belief that history was a literary discipline, remained with him throughout his life. In later years he would offer the advice that a historian could often benefit more from reading Stendhal than from reading a history textbook.

In the Preface to his collected essays, *The Norman Conquest and Beyond* (1983), Frank described the influences on him of the three men who most shaped him as a historian: Poole, V. H. Galbraith and Sir Maurice Powicke. Poole is described as a supportive tutor who introduced Frank to Continental scholarship; Galbraith, his doctoral supervisor, as the man with whom he was regularly to discuss his work throughout his life and a patron who taught him that irreverent wit could be used to advantage. Some of his comments on Powicke are worth quoting in full, since they convey a meeting of minds and an intellectual sympathy that flourished even in the apparently formal setting of the lecture hall:

> … for me he exemplified medieval scholarship at its best. From the moment I heard him lecturing on Bibliography in the Examination Schools, casually mentioning unknown masters, recommending incomprehensible foreign titles—my notes, when I looked at them many years later, were mostly gibberish—I was entranced. His combination of technical skills, a fine prose style, and acutely subtle understanding of the most hidden springs of behaviour—he was marvellously funny on Henry III and Simon de Montfort—set a standard to which I knew I ought constantly to aspire.[1]

Frank's first experience of research was in 1933–4 for a B.Litt. that involved editions of various Durham manuscripts, subsequently published in 1945 and 1950 as *Durham Annals and Documents of the Thirteenth Century* (Durham, 1945) and *Durham Jurisdictional Peculiars* (London,

[1] F. Barlow, *The Norman Conquest and Beyond* (London, 1983), Preface. For Powicke and biography, see further David Bates, Julia Crick and Sarah Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 7.

1950). There is clear evidence in their published versions of the mature independent-minded historian; his readiness to treat charters as literary texts that were a product of their times, rather than simply categorising them as 'authentic' or 'forged', was distinctly against the contemporary grain.[2] It was, however, in the published D.Phil. thesis, *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, that Frank's qualities as a historian and the interest in 'the most hidden springs of human behaviour' were first truly displayed. Also demonstrated there is the capacity to ground an edition within the frameworks of classical influences, theology and canon law that reappears in other contexts: the scholarly annotations are outstandingly good. The edited text is well-nigh perfect and only in the ordering of the manuscripts has any need for changes been suggested.[3] In the assessment of the turbulent and, ultimately, somewhat tragic Bishop Arnulf, examples appear for the first time in a published work of the type of comment that recurs again and again throughout Frank's later writings. Thus—to choose from several passages—of Arnulf's invective against the one notable French supporter of Anacletus II during the papal schism of the 1130s, Bishop Gerard of Angoulême, Frank comments that 'it secured notice beyond its merits', while of Arnulf Frank observed 'his mind, as often with good lawyers and administrators, seems not to have been complex, and he gives little signs of originality or of greatness'.[4] These passages are followed by other interesting inferences about Arnulf's character. The insertion of the editor's personal opinions in this way—opinions that are provocative and sometimes downright contentious—immediately seizes the reader's imagination; the same technique was to be employed in *The Feudal Kingdom of England* and in Frank's lectures to undergraduates and to a wider public. The correspondence associated with the publication of *The Letters of Arnulf* reveals how Frank's literary talents were encouraged at this stage of his career by others, with Powicke, Sir Frank Stenton and Christopher Cheney, the latter two respectively President and Literary Director of the Royal Historical Society, offering especially valuable advice. A readiness to take advice on difficult matters was to remain a feature of Frank's working method throughout his life.

[2] See above all, *Durham Jurisdictional Peculiars* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 2–3.
[3] Carolyn Poling Schriber, *The Letter Collections of Arnulf of Lisieux*, Texts and Studies in Religion, vol. 72 (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, 1997), pp. xi–xii.
[4] *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, Camden, 3rd ser., lxi (London, 1939), xvi, xxi. The Camden series were (and are) Royal Historical Society editions of hitherto unpublished important historical texts.

Frank's doctoral research was funded by a Fereday Fellowship, a St John's fund available to descendants of its founder and to natives of Staffordshire. It was a relatively junior fellowship, offering neither accommodation in college nor participation in college government. It certainly did not guarantee a future in Oxford. Frank's application for, and appointment to, an assistant lectureship at University College London (UCL) in 1936 was a logical consequence of his astute assessment of his prospects. At about the same time as the move to London, Frank married Brigid Garvey, who was, like Frank, from the Potteries. Their marriage was to endure for seventy-three years, with Brigid, who was five years younger than Frank, outliving him by several months. Brigid's father was a doctor and the family were Roman Catholics of Irish origin. The flat in which they set up house in Guilford Street was within walking distance of UCL. Frank never spoke or wrote with much warmth or enthusiasm of his time at UCL, which lasted until 1940. There was a clash of personalities with the professor and head of department, the Tudor historian J. E. Neale, and Frank's time at UCL was apparently cut short on the latter's say-so. Yet links of enduring importance were formed there. One colleague at UCL was another medievalist with a distinguished future ahead of him, John Le Patourel (1909–81).[5] The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historian Norman Gash (1912–2009), another St John's student and a life-long friend of Frank's, was an exact contemporary at UCL. An informant who attended Frank's lectures at UCL has described him as cutting a flamboyant and striking figure.

Frank was eventually drafted into the Army in 1941 and was subsequently commissioned into the Intelligence Corps, spending over three years in the Far East until 1946. He and Brigid initially stayed in London while he awaited call-up and he undertook the preparation of the first of the Durham books as a way of keeping his hand in during the first months of the war; the Preface of *Durham Annals* is dated 13 June 1940 at the flat in Guilford Street. The memoir also mentions duties as a shelter warden in nearby Mecklenburg Square. Frank and Brigid subsequently moved to the Potteries in November 1940 for greater security away from the bombing of London, with the memoir noting that they witnessed Coventry burning as they travelled north. There followed a summer term as a history master at Radley School, with Frank treasuring a testimonial from the headmaster that praised his discipline. Initial army training then

[5] See J. C. Holt, 'John Le Patourel (1909–1981)', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 71 (1986), 581–96.

followed, with Frank passing out top of his group, before gaining a commission into the Intelligence Corps as a second lieutenant in the later months of 1941. His memoir describes in some detail the journey by sea to India, where he was stationed north of Calcutta (Kolkata) for over a year before a transfer to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), which is where he was when Japan surrendered. His main duties were to observe and assess the activity of the Japanese air force. After the end of the war, Frank was transferred to Singapore and employed monitoring independence movements in the Dutch East Indies. He was promoted to the rank of major shortly before demobilisation. In the memoir Frank notes that he 'decided to give his life a purpose' and taught himself German with help from a fellow officer; given how rare knowledge of German was at Oxford at the time he studied there, this was a remarkable decision to have taken.[6] He later spoke of army life as an invaluable formative phase, a time when he learnt to delegate and acquired much worldly knowledge of human beings and institutions.

On return from the Far East, Frank visited Galbraith, then Director of the Institute of Historical Research, to consult him about his professional future. At least two interviews for posts followed, leading to appointment in 1946 to a lectureship at the then University College of the South West of England in Exeter. Frank's memoir records his being interviewed in military uniform, by John Murray, the ambitious and energetic, if occasionally misguided, principal of the college from 1926 to 1951.[7] The surroundings of the Gandy Street buildings that then accommodated the six members of the History Department must have seemed a far cry from Oxford and UCL. Frank and Brigid first lived in rented accommodation in Topsham before buying a house in Devonshire Place, close to the Streatham site on which the University College was beginning to expand. Frank's and Brigid's two sons John and Michael were born during this period. There is mention in the memoir of attempts to move elsewhere, with possible openings at Durham and Oxford not coming to fruition. At Exeter, as previously at UCL, he carried a heavy teaching load comprising courses on English History 400–1500, History of Political Ideas, Ancient and Medieval, English Economic History to 1600, and a Special Subject on R. H. Tawney's and Eileen Power's *Tudor Economic Documents* (London, 1924), three volumes with which he was entirely unfamiliar

[6] On this point, Janet L. Nelson, 'European History', in Alan Deyermond (ed.), *A Century of British Medieval Studies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 71–129, at 77–80.

[7] On Murray as Principal, see B. W. Clapp, *The University of Exeter: a History* (Exeter, 1982), pp. 74–117.

before being asked to teach them. Among his colleagues were the historian of Victorian England W. D. (Bill) Handcock and the medievalist G. W. (George) Greenaway. From 1946 the professor and head of department was W. N. (Norton) Medlicott (1900–87), a man for whom Frank had great admiration and who seems to have been something of a model for him as a professorial head of department. When Medlicott left Exeter for the London School of Economics in 1953, Frank was appointed his successor after a somewhat tortuous appointments process.

It was Medlicott as General Editor of the Longmans History of England series who commissioned Frank to write *The Feudal Kingdom of England*. First published in 1955, *The Feudal Kingdom* is still in print fifty-six years later, having passed through five editions and, despite careful revision, not being greatly changed from its first edition; the book's importance, on both personal and professional grounds, was referred to many times by the participants during the 2003 conference held at Exeter in Frank's honour.[8] Frank made it clear in the Preface that his purpose in *The Feudal Kingdom* was to tell a story and this he did with great panache. Throughout, personalities and situations were evoked with compelling colour and economy. To read the two sentences—'The skeleton of an organised kingdom endured. And society took its own measures for protection.'—in the section devoted to King Stephen's reign in England, is to feel as if one is reading the prevailing orthodoxy of the early twenty-first century and then needing to remind oneself that the passage was written fifty years earlier.[9] Yet, for all the emphasis on the need to tell a good story, the reader is left in no doubt that momentous changes took place during the period between 1042 and 1216, and their general significance is explained with extraordinary clarity.

The genesis of this remarkable book is unclear from Frank's papers; the surviving notes are effectively the footnotes that the book does not have. Behind all must lie the remarkable literary talent evident from Frank's youth: the capacity when writing freely to produce clear, accessible and entertaining prose and a quite remarkable command of his subject. Teaching—above all the experience of lecturing and the ability to hold an audience, about which more will be said below—must have been an enormous stimulus. It is striking too how often the book anticipates in

[8] See further, Bates, Crick and Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography*.

[9] *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, 1st edn. (London, 1955), p. 225. It is noteworthy that the first of the two sentences survived every rewriting, but that the second disappeared in the 4th and 5th editions.

some way the opinions he expressed with greater finesse in later publications: Edward the Confessor, for example, is 'a weak man, riding—uneasily and petulantly—political storms which he could not control', who 'nevertheless left the royal powers unimpaired; and from a mistaken view of his character and piety was built a picture of a Christian king that served as an ideal until the ideal itself lost favour'.[10] Yet at times we might think the imaginative flamboyance overdone. What are we to make of the assertion that 'Most medieval reigns end in ruin. The boyhood hero becomes in time a broken old man. The unrestrained power which he has acquired in his manhood cracks through the caprice and stubbornness of his ageing brain:'[11] intended to be placed on an exam paper with the word 'Discuss' after it, perhaps? And the passage that follows it in all five editions and which in many ways epitomises Frank's approach to his sources is where, writing of King John, Frank states: 'He was a cultivated man. He died a papal vassal, a frustrated Crusader. Yet he was remembered as an oppressor of the Church, as a tyrant. The standards of the monastic chroniclers were simple and severe.'

In Frank's intellectual life, the period after the publication of *The Feudal Kingdom* was dominated by engagement with the history of England before the Conquest. *The English Church, 1000–1066* (London, 1963) was intended by Frank as the first volume of a series; Christopher Brooke recalls a conversation with Frank in which he indicated that it was his intention to produce an English equivalent to Albert Hauck's five-volume history of the German Church.[12] Subtitled *A Constitutional History* in its first edition, *The English Church* can nowadays seem old-fashioned in the light of the subsequent development of religious history; for example, it has little to say on matters such as spirituality and it only acquired a chapter on monasticism in its second edition, published in 1979. But with notable strengths on matters of organisation, education and jurisdiction, and containing potted biographies of all the major players, it made an important contribution to the historiographical rehabilitation of the late Anglo-Saxon state, a hotly debated topic in those days, but nowadays an orthodoxy contentious only in detail. Most interestingly, it set out forcefully how the twelfth century rewrote the immediately pre-1066 Anglo-Saxon past to the detriment of its reputation;

[10] *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, 1st edn. (London, 1955), p. 75.
[11] Ibid., p. 435. The passage survived through to the 5th edition, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, 5th edn. (Harlow, 1999), p. 357.
[12] Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, 5 vols. (Leipzig, 1887–1911); 2nd edn. (Leipzig, 1904–20).

William of Malmesbury, of whom Frank's opinion was much less favourable than that of many others has been since, was a particular target for him, while the writings of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin were exploited as rarely before. The second volume, *The English Church, 1066–1154* (London, 1979) was a book about which Frank at times expressed disappointment. It is nonetheless a remarkable quarry for detail, incisive in its interpretations, and as elegantly written as ever. While working on the first volume, Frank's interests were, however, diverted elsewhere to great profit towards producing an edition of the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*.

The idea of an edition of the *Vita* was under discussion with the editors of Nelson's Medieval Texts, V. H. Galbraith and Roger Mynors, in 1955. An introduction, text and translation were in existence by 1958. The fascination that this complex text exerted on Frank is evident from his papers: for example, in a typescript letter to Galbraith, dated 8 November 1958, he observed: 'This book is so madly interesting that one could reflect on it for ages.'[13] It is evident that he continued these reflections for the rest of his life, with the second Oxford Medieval Texts edition of 1992 containing changes that were unique in scale relative to everything else that Frank published; for all his other books, his standard method was to insert a preliminary essay assessing change or, at most, to rewrite selected passages without altering the basic framework. His papers contain one side of a remarkable correspondence with Galbraith about the *Vita*—Frank only occasionally kept a copy of his handwritten letters—which dealt with many of the central issues of the edition. Galbraith certainly reinforced Frank's assessment that the edition should divide the *Vita* into two books, something for which there is no warrant in the single surviving manuscript, and that he should be forthright on the matter of authorship by expressing scepticism about Goscelin's claims and arguing as forcefully as could reasonably be done for Folcard. Galbraith was, however, convinced that 'Book 2' was so different from 'Book 1' that it must in its final form date from the late eleventh century, a view that Frank rejected. It is also noticeable that the 1992 edition is less forthright in arguing the case for Folcard than the 1962 one had been; here as elsewhere, Frank became more cautious in the later decades of his life.[14]

[13] *The Life of King Edward, who rests at Westminster, attributed to a monk of St. Bertin*, Nelsons Medieval Texts (London, 1962); *Vita Ædwardi regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit: the Life of King Edward, who rests at Westminster, attributed to a monk of Saint.-Bertin*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford and New York, 1992).

[14] The *Vita Ædwardi* and Frank's edition thereof have been much discussed since 1962. Frank dealt with criticisms in the 1992 edition, but discussion has continued. For the most recent

The 1960s was a remarkably productive period in Frank's career. Contemporaneous with the publication of the *Vita Ædwardi* in 1962 and *The English Church* in 1963, he was also Deputy Vice-Chancellor as well as Head of the Department of History, a range of activity and responsibility that would nowadays be thought impossible. He, Brigid, and the family moved to Middle Court Hall at Kenton in November 1965, a house where he could indulge to the full his passion for gardening; he came to possess a knowledge of plants that was akin to a botanist's. He had passed his driving test in 1963. There are thereafter numerous stories about his love of cars and his fast—many would say excessively fast—driving. By this time, he and Brigid were enjoying holidays in very good hotels in cities such as Paris, Rome and Madrid, something they continued to do for the rest of their active lives.

The publications of the decade, which culminated in the biography of Edward the Confessor in 1970, demonstrate a remarkable command of the sources for the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. An article on Lanfranc published in 1965 has some of the qualities of the biographies to follow, although it is clear that Frank subsequently became more circumspect in his judgements of personality and character in the years leading up to the publication of *Edward the Confessor* in 1970.[15] At the same time Frank was also working on the sources for the Norman Conquest and, in 1966, published an essay on the poem the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, attributed to Guy, Bishop of Amiens, in the Festschrift presented to Medlicott.[16] The profundity of this work deserves emphasis. Frank had clearly checked the two surviving manuscripts and collated his text against them, and he tackled all the issues about the poem that were subsequently to become controversial. Along with the Dutch scholar L. J. Engels's almost contemporary inaugural lecture, the article was the first serious modern study of the poem and, together with the 1999 edition, must be one of Frank's most important contributions to the study of the Norman Conquest.

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arguments, see Simon Keynes and Rosalind Love, 'Earl Godwine's ship', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 38 (2009), 185–223, including discussion of Henry Summerson's earlier publication on the discovery of a lost section of the *Vita* in the same journal.

[15] 'A view of Archbishop Lanfranc', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 16 (1965), 163–77 (repr. in *The Norman Conquest and Beyond*, pp. 223–38).

[16] 'The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*', in K. Bourne and D. C. Watt (eds.), *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W. Norton Medlicott* (London, 1967), pp. 35–67 (repr. in *The Norman Conquest and Beyond*, pp. 189–222).

When this 1966 article is compared with Frank's definitive 1999 Oxford Medieval Texts edition, published when he was approaching his ninetieth year, it is remarkable how little his opinions needed to be revised. He took account of and carefully surveyed all the controversies of the intervening three decades. In the end, while accepting more recent palaeographical assessments of the manuscripts, completely changing his interpretation of 'the noble heir of Ponthieu' by accepting Engels's identification, and shifting his ground somewhat to make concessions to those who would date the poem earlier than 1068×1070, he changed little.[17] A remarkable file that starts in 1966, containing correspondence with R. H. C. Davis, who took a very different view of the date and character of the *Carmen*, but the stimulus of whose opinions Frank acknowledged in the 1966 article, along with all other significant participants in the debates that followed, is eloquent testimony to the thoroughness of Frank's working methods and to the courtesy with which he entered serious academic controversy. As in the case of the *Vita Ædwardi*, the elucidation of a difficult text became the work of a lifetime. From 1967 he gave a lot of encouragement and advice to Catherine Morton and Hope Muntz, who published an Oxford Medieval Texts edition of the poem in 1972, and in 1999 he defended their efforts and, in particular, their skill in establishing what he regarded as a reliable text; it is notable that he had sharp words for those who belittled their edition on the grounds that neither had held tenured academic posts. A final point about the 1966 article is that it attacked what Frank called the 'stock' synthetic narrative of the Battle of Hastings and the practice of giving priority to William of Poitiers' account; it has taken thirty years for others seriously to follow in his footsteps.

Frank played a very prominent part in the commemoration of the novocentenary of the Battle of Hastings. He also made a number of what would now be termed media appearances and gave many Historical Association lectures. His contributions generally stress that the Conquest brought about change, but change that largely occurred within the existing institutional framework, and of which the wider European dimensions needed to be taken into account. It is unlikely that Frank thought that the Conquest brought about a change for the better. The short book *William I and the Norman Conquest* was written quickly, and appeared in

[17] For 'the noble heir of Ponthieu', L. J. Engels, *Dichters over Willem de Veroveraar. Het Carmen de Hastingae Proelio. Openbare les gegeven bij het aanvaarden van het ambt van Lector in het Middeleeuws Latijn aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen op dinsdag 21 Februari 1967* (Groningen, 1967), pp. 13–14.

1965 in advance of the anniversary year. Frank did not find the Conqueror especially interesting and almost certainly did not like him—he often portrayed him as a crude and illiterate soldier; the book's Prologue reminds us that 'It is a common fallacy … that notable achievements must have involved notable men,' and its Epilogue describes William as 'a pot-bellied and blood-stained warrior, who was also a religious man and a lover of justice by the standards of the age'. Frank's attempt at a character sketch, as usual relating childhood experience to adult behaviour, is nonetheless among the more interesting attempts to describe the Conqueror's personality.[18] His analysis of William's responsibility for the terrible events that followed the Battle of Hastings is, however, always judicious.

Edward the Confessor, first published in 1970, has since its publication dominated discussion of the reign. The first of his three major biographies that were together the inspiration for the 2003 conference and the 2006 volume based on it, this book exemplifies Frank's debt to literature and can reasonably be regarded as an innovative landmark in the writing of the biographies of medieval people. Since the contract for the book was not signed until 1965, *Edward* was written remarkably quickly, so much so indeed that he met the formal delivery date required by his contract, but on the basis of a lengthy reflection that had lasted two decades. Like *The Feudal Kingdom*, *Edward* is still in print. While publications subsequent to Frank's book can offer differing perspectives on several major issues, most notably on Edward's time in Normandy, on whether Edward was ever an effective ruler, and on the implications of the unity or otherwise of the *Vita Ædwardi*, Frank's achievement in placing the *Vita* at the heart of the complex reactions of a defeated elite to the catastrophe of 1066, and, on this basis, in insisting that Edward should be viewed above all as a secular ruler with no foreknowledge of the future development of a cult of sanctity, and in whose life austere religious values and behaviour in all probability did not take a central role, remains at the heart of all serious discussion of the reign.[19]

The book's preparation involved deep thought about the writing of biography and a remarkable level of self-reflection on the interpretation of sources; it arguably embodies a less forthright, but more profound and reflective, approach to human behaviour than had been evident in Frank's

[18] *William I and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1965), pp. xvi, 11–12, 191; cf., David Bates, 'The Conqueror's adolescence', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 25 (2003), 1–18.

[19] For opinions, see Richard Mortimer (ed.), *Edward the Confessor: the Man and the Legend* (Woodbridge, 2009) and, in particular, Richard Mortimer's essay 'Edward the Confessor: the man and the legend', at pp. 1–41.

earlier work. This is above all exemplified firstly by the prefatory quotation from Anthony Powell and also by the cautious setting-out of differing interpretations and the search for revealing material outside the obvious main sources. Frank's personal papers and unpublished lectures contain remarks such as his justification of the book's length to Galbraith on the basis that the absence of sources required their thorough interpretation, and might therefore be deemed to justify an even longer book than he had written. Frank also noted the potential importance of an anecdote set in an unexpected context, a comment that has been seen as anticipating the much later sociological approach built around norms, scripts and rules. Published at a time when biography was relatively unfashionable and, arguably, in retreat under the assault from the *Annales* school of historical writing, it can now be cited as significant to the revival of biography as a form of historical writing.[20] Its negative treatment of Edward's claims to sanctity, which some found difficult at the time, also brought into the foreground Frank's drift in adolescence away from a conventional religious upbringing. While Frank was actually elected to the Fellowship of the Academy in 1970 shortly before *Edward*'s publication, the near-coincidence of the two events seems appropriate; the book exemplifies the mixture of intimidating rigour, vivid imagination and strikingly original prose that characterises his best work. That he was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature at around the same time illuminates yet again his literary qualities. He is known to have taken particular pleasure in a favourable review of *Edward* by the playwright Dennis Potter that contained comments such as 'This is a work of courage and imagination' and 'an intellectual exercise of the highest order.'[21]

Appointed in 1953 as the sole Professor of History and Head of Department until retirement, Frank's career until retirement in 1976 covered the granting of the University of Exeter's charter in 1955, the university's expansion on the Streatham site, the post-Robbins Report university expansion of the 1960s, and other changes of those times such as the advent of elected heads of department and consultative staff–student committees. He was a powerful force in the university throughout this period, important at the time of the granting of the charter and a member of the new university's first Council, and he subsequently held a series of major offices such as Dean of Arts, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Public

[20] Bates, Crick and Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography*, pp. vii–x, 12–13; and also in this volume, Pauline Stafford, 'Writing the biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', pp. 99–109, and especially at 99, 108–9.
[21] *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1970.

Orator. He rode the crest of the wave of post-Robbins growth, almost trebling in size the Exeter History Department from the nine members of 1953 by the time of his retirement.[22] Around the time of retirement, he composed several essays reflecting on the changes that had taken place during his working life. In general, he believed that the expansion of the 1960s had not harmed the basic fabric of universities; the conditions for teaching and research had, if anything, improved. While believing that authority should always be challenged and that universities were by nature turbulent places, he was less sympathetic to the social and political changes of the time: he wrote scathingly about a middle-class elite that chose to ape the working classes who, he believed, had gained little from the post-Robbins expansion. He ended the text of one of these essays with the statement that the central mission of universities was 'Fundamental Research' and 'Fearless Teaching'; both these phrases were capitalised in the manuscript.

That Frank was the dominant power within the Department of History was clear even to the author of this memoir, who was at Exeter as an undergraduate and postgraduate in the 1960s. That what he accomplished was massively to its long-term benefit is undeniable. He lived long enough to see many of those he had appointed go on to outstanding careers; one of them, the late Professor Timothy Reuter, was, along with the author of this memoir, the driving force behind the early stages in the organisation of the conference that led to the publication of the Festschrift entitled *Writing Medieval Biography* in 2006. The creation in 1959–60 of one-year tutorial fellowships was in its day an innovation that supplied an invaluable stepping-stone from the doctorate to a permanent post. He encouraged the study of archaeology within the department, expanding the number of staff from the one inherited post of 1953 to three by 1976. He ensured that members of the department had time for research and, in relation to the balance of teaching and research, he provided an example that he expected to be followed, while also being explicitly aware of what was possible. His own regular regime involved teaching and departmental business in the mornings, gardening at home or, if required, service on university committees in the early afternoon, and writing in the late afternoon and evenings. After retirement he would tease a younger generation that he had never had, nor needed, study leave.

[22] This calculation takes into account the departure of some members to form the Department of Economic History in 1963–4.

Mischievous humour of this kind was deployed in all sorts of situations in a way that was unique to him; it would usually be preceded by a mounting crescendo of laughter. He could at times be so funny that some of his sayings have remained for good in the memories of many who knew him. While even his best friends and greatest admirers would acknowledge that there were times when his irreverence and love of repartee and, at times, lack of forethought could be felt as harsh by those on the receiving end, his essential good nature was usually recognised. In general, he was a source of excellent advice on all sorts of professional matters ranging, for example, from exam marking to survival in the labyrinth of university politics. Within the Department of History he permitted and encouraged discussion, and several of its members comment on how decisions were usually reached on a consensual basis. He had a powerful sense of occasion, usually, so it is recalled, wearing a bow-tie to examiners' meetings. He lectured in a gown. He and Brigid—and in this Brigid was of crucial importance—put a strong emphasis on departmental social life. There were annual departmental dinners and staff socialised in the evenings. Frank himself enjoyed dancing. The parties for the graduating finalists at Middle Court Hall were splendid affairs in marvellous surroundings. Frank's sociability also in the 1950s included turning out for the staff cricket team, 'the Erratics', captained by his close friend John Lloyd, the University Librarian.

He was a superb undergraduate lecturer, holding his audience with ease, conveying the essence of an argument with exemplary clarity, and illuminating what for the students might have seemed obscure subjects with a cascade of (sometimes dubious) modern analogies; the anecdote about the tenth-century nunnery of Wilton as a finishing school for royal daughters regularly visited by young bloods produced by Barbara Yorke at the 2003 conference is an illustration of this.[23] Former students with no specialist interest in medieval history have remarked on Frank's manifest and exemplary dedication to first-year lecturing, an expression of what was once deemed to be a central professorial role. At Special Subject level, classes were built around reading the texts in the original Latin. Here he made few concessions, while recognising in, for example, the Preface to *William Rufus* (London, 1983 and 2000) that the students must have found the Latin of someone like William of Malmesbury difficult. His

[23] Barbara Yorke, '"Carriers of the truth": writing the biographies of Anglo-Saxon female saints', in Bates, Crick and Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography*, pp. 49–60, at 49.

approach to postgraduate supervision was similar. He taught by example and he expected work of the very highest standard, making it abundantly clear, without explicitly saying so, that nothing less would be tolerated. With hindsight, it is clear that his insistence on the regular production of research essays, on technical accuracy in several languages, and the assumption that the research student was every bit as much a member of the professional community as the most distinguished of scholars, conveyed a mixture of discipline and seriousness that was extremely helpful. Supervisions were regular and frequent and, if discussion seemed often to drift towards gardening, cars or Frank's latest book, no one was at all unclear as to what was expected. To my knowledge, all his research students completed their theses, usually within the time-limits that the modern research councils regard as mandatory—as indeed Frank himself had done.

Frank played a massive and committed part in the life of the university and the city, a role that he continued beyond retirement. He was clearly someone who was called upon when important and difficult business had to be done. He oversaw the publication of *Exeter and Its Region*, a volume to which almost every senior member of the university contributed, for presentation to the British Association for the Advancement of Science when its annual conference was held in Exeter in September 1969. He also played a prominent part in institutions such as the Devonshire Association, the Devon and Exeter Institution and the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, and, for some most memorably, successfully chaired the cathedral's Technical Advisory Committee between 1978 and 1987 when the renovation of some of the building's west front and south tower was under contentious discussion. A selective list of some of the contributions Frank made throughout his life to major academic projects that were for the benefit of others makes remarkable reading. His edition of the Statutes of Bishop Peter Quinil (Quivil) (1280–91) for *Councils and Synods*, edited by Powicke and Christopher Cheney (Oxford, 1964), on which he was working in the early 1950s, might reasonably be identified as an additional and sixteenth book. He contributed an edition of the Winchester surveys to the important Winchester project overseen by his former Exeter colleague Martin Biddle. He rescued the Exeter Episcopal Acta volumes when the two editors were unable to fulfil their obligations, and was an active and enthusiastic member of the British Academy's Episcopal Acta Committee, a project initiated by his friend Christopher Cheney; he expresses most warmly his enjoyment of the Committee's meetings in the Preface to his second volume of Exeter

acta.[24] He contributed to the 1972 and 1986 celebrations of Exeter cathedral's two most famous manuscripts, the Exeter Book and Exon Domesday, and he was later to write the Introduction to the Devon volume of the Alecto facsimile edition of Domesday Book. He took very seriously the responsibilities of the reviewer; his reviews of books are a model of rigour. Frank also benefited in significant ways from Exeter. In many of his books, he acknowledges George Greenaway for reading the manuscript in draft. The exact nature of George's contribution is unclear; a speculative suggestion made during the preparation of this memoir was that George, a profoundly committed Christian, might at times have counterbalanced Frank's religious scepticism. Other notable advice came from the Professor of Classics, F. W. (Fred) Clayton on the technicalities of Latin verse in advance of Frank's 1966 article on the *Carmen*. Frank was generous in his thanks to those who he thought had helped him.

William Rufus, first published in 1983, and for many his finest book, has in common with *Edward* the search for the man beneath the veneer imposed by monastic historians and their nineteenth-century successors. As in *Edward*, Frank sought to engage with the thought-world of lay society. It has the same magisterial command of detail combined with a clear general perspective. Although others have followed Frank in writing about Rufus, his biography dominates, and has indeed completely reshaped, modern discussion. It is a celebration of kingship in which Frank—typically—could not resist citing Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, both as a preface to the book and in the text; *William Rufus* is a portrait of triumphant kingship cut short when the king was on the verge of still greater triumphs. The book is a portrait of a military world, of the successful continuation of the Conqueror's achievements in trying circumstances, of a rather dissolute court full of witty and intelligent men, and of a boisterous, confident and clumsy king whose values were those of the soldiers whose company he often shared. In the book's 2000 edition, Frank claimed that he had been trying to write 'total history', by which he meant that he had read widely in the new kinds of social history that were becoming current in the 1970s. His claim was, if anything, an excessively modest one: his originality as a biographer was already based securely on the establishment of context, and what he was doing in *Rufus* was

[24] Frank Barlow (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta, xii: Exeter, 1186–1257* (Oxford, 1996), p. x ('Finally, I have greatly enjoyed and profited from the company of my fellow members of the British Academy Committee at our meetings in Cambridge and of my fellow editors at our periodic reunions in York').

merely extending his method to encompass up-to-date types of historical writing.

The book also enabled him to put St Anselm's life and Eadmer's *Historia* in what Frank thought was their rightful place without distorting the record; Anselm's high principles and moral sensitivity are often portrayed as irritating to Rufus and to all the churchmen who supported the king, but at the same time Frank notes Anselm's magnanimity and nobility; it was he after all who wept at the news of the king's death. If some, at the time and subsequently, have thought that Frank had treated Rufus too kindly, especially with regard to his relations with the great magnates and the rapacity of his financial exactions, the portrait remains fundamentally persuasive. It is clear too that Frank thought Rufus the most attractive of the four kings about whom he wrote most. And in the book's last sentence we have again the sort of enigmatic—and actually in its context somewhat incomprehensible—comment that managed to bring together the kinds of verdict that might have emanated from the monastic world that Frank wanted to penetrate beyond and the military world he wanted to portray: 'To deprive a hero of a hero's death was the most terrible punishment that God could inflict.'

In *Thomas Becket*, first published in 1986, Frank returned to the interests of his postgraduate years, something that in the book's Preface he said he had always wanted to do. The contract had been signed in 1973; in all likelihood the work on it and on *William Rufus* overlapped. Although there is nothing in his papers to indicate as such, it is possible that the idea of producing a non-partisan account that concentrated on the human beings in the story must in the context of the historiography of the time have appealed to his irreverent anticlericalism. As so often, Frank went immediately to the heart of the matter by quoting first of all the famous passage from St Augustine of Hippo: 'it is not the penalty which makes true martyrs, but the cause'. *Thomas Becket* is a magisterial detailed narrative, a remarkable *tour de force* especially notable for its narrative of the archbishop's long period of exile. Yet, while in its declared intention to concentrate on telling the story, Frank apparently distinguishes *Becket* from *Edward the Confessor* and *William Rufus*, the biographer who wrote those books is nonetheless very much in evidence. Frank was clearly determined to link a young man who he believed to have been an extremely intelligent, but inadequately educated, Parisian student, to the adult chancellor and prelate. The 'conversion' that has baffled every one since 1162 was to be explained in terms of psychological insecurity. After 1145 Becket was always the outsider, with the archbishopric meaning that he had at

last obtained an independent power-base; in that post 'he had all the failings of the typical parvenu'.[25]

The overall story that Frank tells is a human one: the sad and ultimately tragic quarrel between two men, both of whom Frank said he admired. With the emphasis on the people and the events, the battle of ideas that is clearly there in the *Letters* is arguably left rather to one side. While *Thomas Becket* has subsequently been judged by some to be more pro-Henry than pro-Becket, no one who reads Frank's book can be left in any doubt of his grasp of the complexity of the human, theological, moral and legal issues that the events involved.[26] The account of the events of the Council of Clarendon and their implications is a notably sensitive portrayal of a situation in which no one could control the conflicting loyalties, emotions and principles that were unleashed. And Henry is not spared criticism, above all because he pushed proposals that were manifestly unacceptable to leading contemporaries, and because of his subsequent determination to ruin Thomas. In places Frank was noticeably more sympathetic to Thomas than might be expected from the book's early sections, as in the passages that portray him as doomed by his past and a victim of circumstances; the earlier comments describing him as 'a liability, even a menace' were actually a perception of how contemporaries might have seen him, while the later comments expressed Frank's personal view.[27] Set-pieces such as Herbert of Bosham's appearance before Henry II at Angers in 1166 and Thomas and Henry's meeting for the first time after a period of over six years at Fréteval in 1170 bring out fully the drama of the occasions. And Frank's final positive assessment of Thomas conveys exceedingly well the judgement that ideas can indeed be mightier than the sword. Yet here again there is also the sense of the enigmatic that is typical of Frank; for, in giving voice to Peter of Celle through his letter to John of Salisbury, he invites his readers to ponder the eternal mystery of how the archbishop's triumph through violent death had come about.[28]

Frank became increasingly frail physically in his last years, and Brigid's retirement to a nursing home in 2002 left him vulnerable and uncertain. He was fortunate in that an old friend Marjorie Bowen agreed to care for him at home. As a result, he was able to stay at Middle Court

[25] *Thomas Becket* (London, 1986), p. 89.
[26] A different approach to Thomas and Henry is set out in Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London, 2004).
[27] Barlow, *Becket*, pp. 97, 119.
[28] *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. Julian Haseldine, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 2001), no. 174.

Hall almost to the end; he died on 27 June 2009. At his last public appearance, the presentation at the University of Exeter in 2006 of the volume of essays published in his honour, *Writing Medieval Biography*, Frank delivered a typically well-prepared speech, in which he surveyed his career and warmly thanked the friends and well-wishers who were present, as well as some who could not be. He told the audience how much he had enjoyed his life. He also joked that the gods might not have loved him; the good do after all die young. One might remark that the gods of this world had indeed loved him; to the Fellowships of the British Academy and of the Royal Society of Literature were added an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Exeter in 1981, a CBE in 1989, and an Honorary Fellowship of St John's in 2002. Arguably too, the gods must have loved someone who was still active and publishing at the highest level in the tenth decade of his life. Yet the joke also has that unknowable—except to Frank—mixture of simple wit, perversity and ambiguity with which he loved to tantalise his readers and his friends.

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