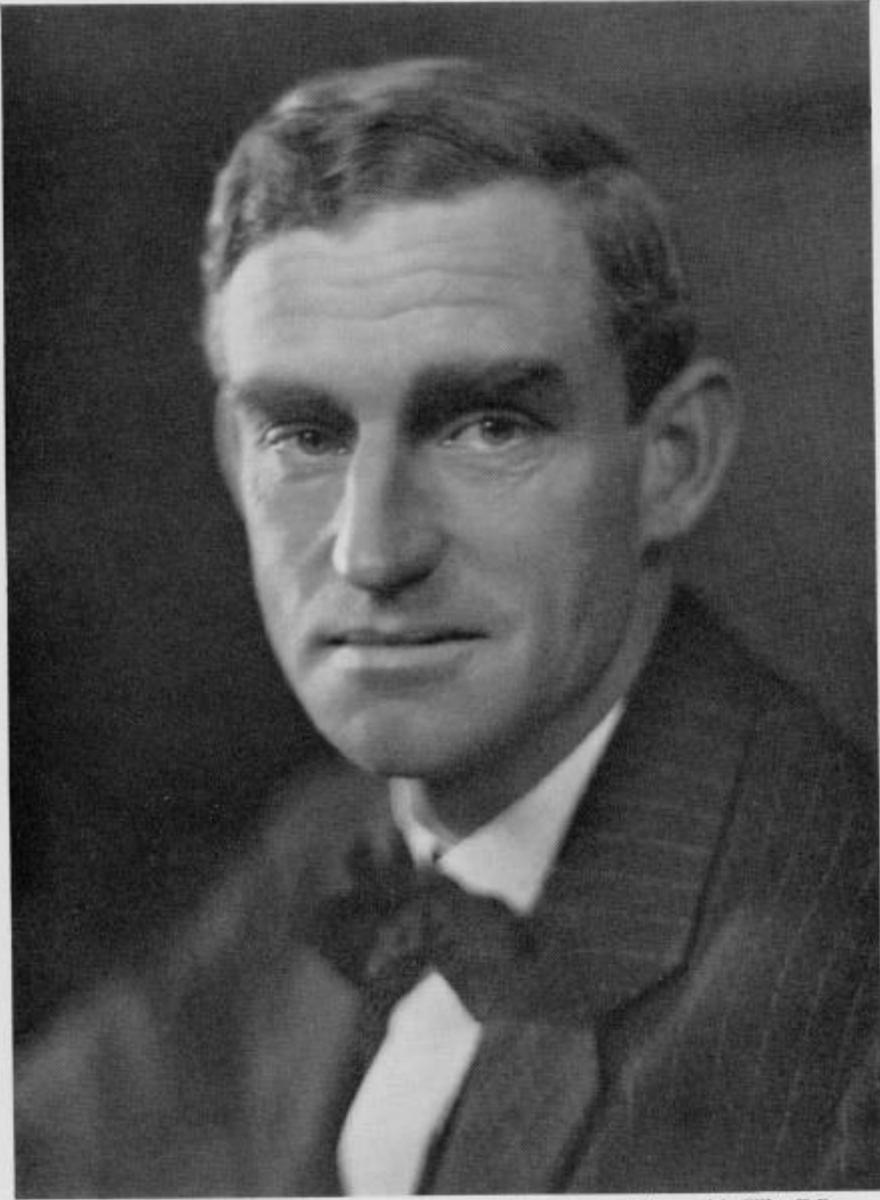


PLATE XXX



Photograph by Elliott & Fry, 1932

SIR CYRIL FOX

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1882-1967

CYRIL FOX was born at Chippenham in Wiltshire on 16 December 1882. His father was at that time a clerk in the Capital and Counties Bank, and later a branch manager, first in the Isle of Wight and later in Winchester. The family had a two-centuries long connexion with Hampshire, and Fox was always a countryman in thought and feeling. His Wessex upbringing was for him a conscious source of strength and of understanding in his work, and he attached high importance to the values represented by the rural rather than urban tradition in which he was brought up—'yeoman stock' was a phrase of commendation often on his lips.

From a preparatory school in the Isle of Wight he entered Christ's Hospital, still then in London, in 1895. It is perhaps a fitting accident that he should have gone to the same school as had William Camden, whose *Britannia* was to provide the epigraph for Fox's *Personality of Britain*, but he hated the place. 'Having no friends in London,' he was later to write, 'I never left the walled, asphalted, treeless area for the twelve weeks of each term; the place was a prison to me.' He contracted diphtheria, and further illness led to his leaving school at 16; an outdoor life was recommended and he was pitch-forked into the highly uncongenial life of an apprentice market gardener, learning to grow grapes and tomatoes in Worthing.

His story of how there the charming and slightly eccentric bacteriologist Louis Cobbett met and encouraged the 18-year-old boy with a sketch plan of Cissbury hill-fort in his bicycle-basket, has been put on record more than once. Cobbett, obviously perceiving he had met someone worthy of a better fate than that of an unwilling labourer in a glass-housed vineyard, obtained him a clerk's position in the Royal Commission on Bovine Tuberculosis at its research station, then at Stansted and later in Cambridge. Here, now in his late 20s and before war was declared in 1914, he started exploring the field antiquities of the Cambridge region. Past service in the Essex Yeomanry led to an infantry commission, but further ill health made home service inevitable; Fox married in 1916 and at

the end of the war returned to the research station in Cambridge as Superintendent of the Field Laboratories in Milton Road.

With post-war reorganization, however, it became apparent that Fox would be redundant. Never has the axe of officialdom descended with such beneficial effects for archaeology. It was suggested that he should obtain some academic qualification for a future post, and having obtained entrance to Magdalene, he approached perhaps the one man most likely to size up his scholarly potential and enjoy the curious nature of the situation, Professor H. M. Chadwick. The lovable and perceptive polymath saw the chance of a pupil after his own heart; Fox read Section B of the English Tripos in 1919 under Chadwick, who seizing the chance of exploiting an irregular academic situation to the full, thereupon had him transferred to read for a Ph.D., utilizing the material he had been collecting for some years. In 1923, the publication of his thesis as *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* placed the almost unknown Cyril Fox, almost overnight, in the front rank of British archaeological scholarship. The thesis must surely rank as one of the most remarkable ever submitted in the archaeological school of any university.

By 1923 Fox was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and had been appointed to an assistantship in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge; in the following year R. E. M. Wheeler, who had become Director of the National Museum of Wales, made the first overt demonstration of his skill as a talent-scout by inviting Fox to apply for the vacant post of Keeper of Archaeology. There were, however, complications. Fox had in the same year applied for the vacant Keepership of the National Museum of Ireland, and was indeed appointed. But the political implications of appointing an Englishman to a senior post in Dublin in the 1920s, and especially to one so fraught with emotional overtones as that implicit in the custody of the nation's antiquities, were too much for Irish pride. The nomination was refused at government level, and the national face saved by appointing a German. Cambridge also wished to retain Fox in the Museum, and he hesitated momentarily, but was persuaded to accept the Cardiff post. In two years' time he had succeeded Wheeler as Director, and remained in charge of the National Museum of Wales until his retirement in 1948.

The Museum was newly taking on its national status, and

Fox was to be caught up in a net of administrative problems of policy and planning, not least as the new building in Cathays Park began to take shape. It was during these years too that he was responsible for sponsoring, encouraging, and forcibly bringing into being what today has become the Welsh Folk Museum. He was knighted in 1935, and during his tenure of the Directorship accepted and held with quiet distinction membership, presidency, or chairmanship of various institutions and national committees, including membership of the Ancient Monuments Commissions for Wales and for England. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1940, served the Society of Antiquaries as President from 1944 to 1949, and was awarded its Gold Medal in 1952. His archaeological research had continued at full pressure during his years of administrative duties at Cardiff; on retirement to Exeter his work continued, at times in conjunction with that of his second wife, until the latter years of his life, and he died in January 1967 at the age of 84.

The public performances of a scholar on council or committee, or behind the executive or academic desk, are only of moment when scholarship shines so dimly that these alone create a *persona*. Fox was not a man of this quality. He accepted, and loyally and conscientiously performed, the official duties incumbent on his professional status, within and beyond the National Museum, but the real intensity of thought and feeling was brought to bear on his research. The output of first-class work during the years 1925 to 1948, while he was Director at Cardiff, are demonstration enough of this. His main contributions to scholarship fall under five main archaeological categories, and the diversity implied by this range gives a clue to the quality of the man, for it was never that specious dispersal of interests resulting from superficiality.

His first published paper, in 1922, was on Anglo-Saxon sculpture in the Cambridge region: at this time he had been reading for E. S. Prior the proofs of his Slade lectures on English medieval art, published in book form in the same year. *The Cambridge Region*, of course, included Anglo-Saxon antiquities of the Christian-Saxon period, but excluded monumental remains with a reference to this paper. Perhaps these precocious Saxon studies pointed the way to the first of his main research topics, that on dykes and linear earthworks of the post-Roman period. Beginning with excavations and field-work on the Cambridgeshire dykes in 1923-4, he continued, from his Welsh

vantage point, to make the monumental survey of Offa's Dyke and its associated defence systems, published in interim reports between 1926 and 1934, and reprinted as a single monograph by the Academy in 1955.

During this field-work, and indeed on the very course of Offa's Dyke itself, Fox encountered and excavated the Bronze Age barrow within an earthen circle at Ysceifiog in Flintshire. While at Cambridge, he and Lord Cawdor (then an undergraduate) had dug a barrow at Barton Mills: this was a total excavation, a very rare thing since Pitt Rivers. At Ysceifiog, Fox began the series of barrow excavations in Wales, and his studies of the cultures to which they belonged, which were to become classics of archaeological method. A group of papers between 1925 and 1928 represent only the first phase of this investigation, for a second was unexpectedly to open with the need for rescue excavations in advance of defence requirements from 1939, which produced a magisterial series of reports published between 1941 and 1943. In 1959 he published a summary of his contributions to the prehistory of Britain in the second millennium B.C. under the title of *Life and Death in the Bronze Age*.

These first two groups of detailed studies had their fortuitous link in the Ysceifiog barrow: Fox's great achievement in the early 1930s was to produce an essay in synthesis, in terms of human geography, which could provide a model of the past within which not only Bronze Age burials and Anglo-Saxon dykes could be accommodated, but the whole range of British prehistory and early history, from the beginnings of agriculture to the Middle Ages. The germ was, of course, implicit in *The Cambridge Region*, with its maps of archaeological material plotted on the natural physiographical background on a scale never attempted before, but he was now to extend his scope to cover the British Isles. In studying archaeological evidence in the museum, in the field, and on the map, he had observed a number of discrete phenomena which seemed not to be random, but rather related to some pattern, and for these observations a general theory was needed which should make this order meaningful. The basic thesis of the relationships of settlement and trade to landscape in early Britain was in fact put forward concisely in a paper of 1926, but was first presented in full to the International Congress of Pre- and Protohistoric Sciences at its London meeting in August 1932, as the first of four special lectures, given by Fox, Leeds, Kendrick, and Crawford, under the title of *The*

Personality of Britain. Fully illustrated by the supporting distribution maps, it was published by the National Museum of Wales in the same year, and in successive editions has been the work by which Fox has best been known.

The Offa's Dyke field-work in the early 1930s had also led to studies in traditional agricultural transport in Wales, for during the survey Fox's alert and curious eye was caught by cart and wagon types unfamiliar to a Wessex man, and fascinating in their implications of constructional history. Exactly at the same time Lefebvre des Noëttes in France produced his classic book on harness and land transport in antiquity; Berg in Sweden a year or two later was working on the same problem. The time was propitious for such studies, and for Fox they were becoming increasingly bound up with the formation of the Welsh Folk Museum. From rural transport to vernacular architecture was a move within a single frame of reference, and his architectural interests, constantly maintained since his early Cambridge days, were to find expression in the publication with the late Lord Raglan of the three volumes on Monmouthshire small houses published by the Museum between 1951 and 1954, and based on surveys made during the war years. In 1949 he had summarized this work in his Rhind Lectures to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Saxon dykes, Bronze Age burials, the *Personality of Britain*, the rural craftsmanship of pre-Industrial Wales, all engaged Fox's active intellect successively, but yet another field of research fortuitously presented itself when, in 1942, a great Early Iron Age votive hoard was ripped from the peat of Llyn Cerrig Bach in Anglesey in making an R.A.F. landing-strip. The period had in fact engaged Fox's attention before—he had made a study of brooch types in 1927 and published another votive find, of the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age transition, from Llyn Fawr in 1939. But Llyn Cerrig was something more portentous: the catalogued finds were over 130, and works of Celtic art were included among the bronzes. In 1946 the report on the great find came out, and was a model of its kind, to be followed by a series of papers up to 1960, summarized and culminating in a study of British Early Celtic Art, *Pattern and Purpose*, which was published in 1958.

In entering into an assessment of Fox's contributions to scholarship we must start at a point he himself would have thought significant, his boyhood in Hampshire and his early years in the Cambridge area. He was born into a south English

countryside which was still in its essentials only marginally touched by the Industrial Revolution. A couple of years after Fox's birth, George Sturt took over his father's business as a wagon-builder in Farnham which he was to make famous as a microcosm of the rural England of its day in *The Wheelwright's Shop*, a book which shared a place in the Cambridge University Press's list for 1923 with Fox's own first great work. The country crafts of wheelwright and blacksmith, thatcher and hurdler, makers of baskets, and builders of cob walls still flourished in Wessex and Cambridgeshire in the first two decades of this century, set against an immemorial agrarian background still unmechanized and dominated by horse transport. This was the world of W. H. Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life*, an edition of which was illustrated by Fox's brother-in-law, Bernard Gotch: it was also the world of Heywood Sumner, who had illustrated Wise's *New Forest* in 1882, and had come to live at Gorley in 1903, and by 1912 was digging and publishing, side-by-side with Williams-Freeman and soon O. G. S. Crawford.

'The book sprang out of and reflects an intense interest in a countryside,' Fox was to write later of *The Cambridge Region*; he hopes it 'communicates something of the excitement of discovery' and 'the delights associated with, nay inherent in, the pastime of field archaeology'. 'Intense', 'excitement', 'delights'—it is all there in three words. An ascetic technician of today might wince at 'pastime', but for Fox, whose choice of words was invariably exact and exquisite, it carried no sense of triviality. It was simply and literally how he found it best and most rewarding to pass his working time, but no one felt more deeply the overwhelming responsibility of the archaeologist in the field. When he retired, he deliberately stopped excavating because he recognized what it demanded. In a letter to me in 1948 he wrote, very characteristically,

I am sad to think I shall never attempt any more such problems; I am too old for the *intense* application—work and worry—they entail, and dare not risk the loss of evidence which partial attendance involves. I saw last year a man who has been a competent archaeologist walk off his dig because he was tired; later on I was appealed to by his staff for advice! . . . No, that sort of thing won't do for little Cyril.

The Personality of Britain is a book which has had an influence not only on archaeologists, but within the disciplines of history and geography. Brilliant and arresting in its impact a full

generation ago, it is now due for reappraisal. In an essay contained in a volume offered to Fox by his fellow scholars in 1963, *Culture and Environment*, Glyn Daniel related *The Personality* to its background of human geography on the Continent and in Britain, and not only with such as Crawford and Fleure, but with the geographers Vidal de la Blache and Sir Halford Mackinder: the former was the author of a study published in an English translation of 1928 as *The Personality of France*, and the latter originally defined the concept of the physical regions of the Highland and Lowland zones of Britain. But whether or not Fox used Vidal's work and remembered its title, Professor Estyn Evans has now put it on record that 'Fox once told me that when he wrote his *Personality* (1932) he had not read Mackinder'. The concept is not perhaps too recondite to have occurred in broad terms to Fox independently, and he must have talked geography with Crawford and others, and he was certainly the first to have applied it to British archaeology.

It is inevitable that all scientific models are framed in terms of contemporary knowledge, and today the known structure of British prehistory does not fit the Highland-Lowland concept with anything like the neatness that the picture of the 1930s could be thought to do: we would certainly give greater weight to innovation in the Highland Zone, both in terms of direct continental contacts and internal developments. While the provisional nature of his thesis as a valid model was always realized by Fox, and by most of his colleagues, *The Personality* hardened into a statement of geographical determinism, and sometimes acquired the status of a canonical text, among those in other disciplines who were unaware of changing knowledge and viewpoints in prehistory: R. G. Collingwood, who should have known better, even wrote of 'Fox's Law'.

Both in his museum policy and his writings, Fox was at pains to make it clear that his sympathies and his scholarly competence were not merely those of the prehistorian, even if it was upon these that his reputation was mainly based. He was concerned to demonstrate the essential continuity between the phases of the prehistoric and the historic past, and between them and the present. Herein I believe lay the essence of his scholarship. He was not trained as a prehistorian—indeed his great triumph was that he was not formally trained in archaeology at all. And therein lay a peculiar strength. At heart, his absorbing and continuous intellectual interest

was human craftsmanship, whether represented by a Bronze Age burial mound, Celtic metal-work, or an eighteenth-century farm-house. While working on the vernacular architecture of Monmouthshire he wrote to me: 'It seems to me that our archaeological technique, or mode of approach, is just as much needed in the 17th century A.D. as in the 17th B.C.' A countryman, he was of a generation in which the ideas of Morris, Voysey, Dawber, Gimson, and the rest were still alive and had not yet become debased. He was fascinated by craftsmanship, by techniques of manufacture, by the utilization of local materials and resources: he not only saw it all, but felt it, at once excitedly and with exquisite sensibility, and yet with the practical informed common sense of his country background. The continuity of craftsmanship from prehistoric Britain to the Industrial Revolution and beyond was his sustained theme.

He was a craftsman himself, too, both in the art of English prose, and in his draughtsmanship. He took endless care, drafting and redrafting in his triumphantly flamboyant calligraphy, to achieve cadence and balance, and to transmit on paper his own vivid excitement within the bounds of cool scholastic reason. He founded no school of archaeological draughtsmanship only because he was inimitable in the panache and *bravura* of his line. With all this went a diffidence and a modesty allied with a strongly personal charm that made him so charismatic a character. In him a robust good sense was happily combined with high sensibility, and both were lit up by a never-failing sense of humour. In his conversation and his correspondence, however serious and complex the subject at issue—aesthetic, architectural, archaeological—the spirit of fun constantly lurked, often giving point to a comment of profound insight and judgement, or illustrating it by means of a literary quotation from the stock with which his mind was stored, adroitly turned to an unexpected use. The main stream of English poetry was never far from his thoughts: he loved it and knew it well. My own first clear recollection of him, nearly forty years ago, was striding across a Welsh moorland, hair blown wild by the wind, declaiming the 'Hounds of Spring' chorus from Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*. In many ways it is no unrepresentative memory. Field-work and the zest for the chase (only Fox could have written 'better game is afoot' in the middle of an acute stylistic analysis!)—and the exuberant swing of the preposterous verse underlining the continuity from

springtime to springtime, from the classical world to our own. It was this continuity, expressed in objects and monuments made by man, within a landscape partly conditioning, partly conditioned by its inhabitants, that he felt, and feeling, explored by the disciplines of the archaeologist.

STUART PIGGOTT