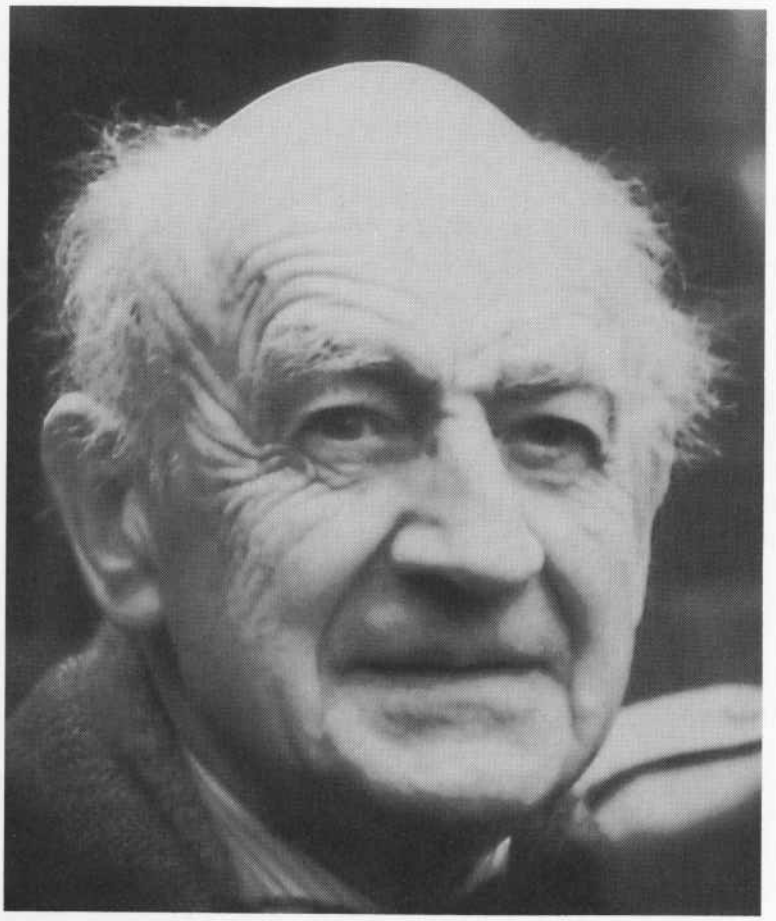

GEORGE RAMSAY

Proceedings of the British Academy, **87**, 401–414

George Daniel Ramsay
1909–1992

GEORGE DANIEL RAMSAY was born at Ballsbridge, Dublin, on 25 May 1909. He was the only child of Daniel Livingston Ramsay (1862–1946) by his second wife Emily Matilda Simpson (1870–1952). His mother came of a Somerset family that had migrated to Galway; his father, of a Scottish Protestant family, had inherited the nursery and florist's business that George's great-grandfather had established in the early nineteenth-century. The business, successfully built up by George's father, was flourishing and highly regarded, supplying flowers by appointment to Dublin Castle, and George's father was a prosperous, well respected businessman, a Justice of the Peace, a mason, and well liked as a just and fair employer by those who worked for him. In his home, however, he was a head of family somewhat on the stern Victorian model. Already a mere two or three years short of fifty when George was born, he clearly found it not easy to unbend to a small boy's level. He quickly grew impatient of George's adolescent efforts to join in the adults' dinner-table conversation — he once told him that 'I had a nasty and argumentative temper and that I should not question what my betters might say.' Such puttings-down simply drove the sensitive and precocious boy into a sulky silence. Inevitably relations with his father were never close and this seems to have bred in him a feeling of remoteness from older men that was only slowly worn away. His childhood was, however, reasonably happy although, particularly after his stepbrother was killed by a sniper's bullet on Easter Monday during the 1916 rising in Dublin, it was spent in an overwhelmingly adult

society. On the other hand he was cherished, maybe a little spoilt, by the female members of his family — by his much loved mother, his artistic and occasionally teasing aunt May, and until her marriage in 1924, by his half sister Violet Jessie (1888–1925).

Going away to Monkstown Park preparatory school began to broaden his horizons. To his surprise he found that the grown-up masters could be sympathetic and understanding. He also began to find friends of his own age. When in January 1923 he moved across the Irish Sea to Rossall he began, after a rather lonely and none too happy start, to open out more and more as he moved up the school and became more sure of his place among his fellows. His discovery of a reasonable skill at fives and squash (and later at tennis) compensated for his lack of ability or interest in more standard public school sporting activities. Reading Keats awakened him to the delights of poetry and literature. His long-practised prowess as a pianist earned him the distinction of being the only schoolboy soloist — with Liszt's Liebesträume — in the Rossall concert of June 1927, besides singing tenor in the choir. These things won him a respect that his lack of confidence still held him back from commanding and made his last few terms at Rossall thoroughly enjoyable. In later years he demonstrated his gratitude by serving for close on a quarter of a century as one of the school governors.

In October 1928 he went up to Worcester College, Oxford, and found that even more to his liking. He revelled in the unaccustomed freedom of discussion and argument of undergraduate life. He spoke in Union debates, even in his first term. He frequented concerts and theatres. He played squash and in summer a great deal of tennis. Like many of his generation he became a Socialist, canvassing for the Labour Party in the 1929 General Election. All this activity was in marked contrast to life at home during the vacations, which was increasingly lonely and lacking in companionship and conversation with anyone of his age. It did nothing at all to improve relations with his father, who was a man of few, if any, bookish interests. A family visit to Oxford provoked an explosion into capital letters in George's diary when his father, tired of sightseeing after a mere twenty minutes, decided that he had had enough of looking at 'a lot of old buildings and colleges'.

On a more serious level, under the tuition of P. E. Roberts and Vere Somerset (a music lover and accomplished composer), George began to dream of a career as an historian, if possible in Oxford. As the terms

rolled by the dreams became a goal and performance justified the dreams. In 1930 he received an honourable mention for an essay on 'The Rise of Latitudinarianism in the Church of England' for the Gladstone Memorial Prize. In 1931 a safe First Class in Schools crowned his undergraduate career. There followed six years of not inconsiderable achievement, but coupled with hopes deferred. In 1932 he won the Gladstone Prize with an essay on 'The Relations of Queen Elizabeth with the Huguenot Party in France'; he obtained his B.Litt. with a thesis on 'Cromwell and Industrial *Laisser Faire*'; his essay on Port Royal for the Lothian Prize earned a mention; and he began work on a 'History of the Cotswold (later changed to Wiltshire) Woollen Industry' for the D.Phil. degree, under the supervision of Julia de Lacy Mann, who with Eileen Power had a powerful, and warmly acknowledged influence upon his development as an historian. He attended Power and Postan's seminar at the Institute of Historical Research in London and also received valuable help from E. M. Carus-Wilson. But for two academic years, 1931–3, no research grant or academic appointment came his way—vacancies were few and competition for them fierce in the 1930s. Reluctantly he remained financially dependent upon his father. Then he won the Bryce studentship which saw him through 1933–4, and then a lectureship at Merton persuaded him that 'I feel myself settled now', though he regarded the £200-a-year salary as meaning 'a period of poverty' (it was, in fact, about the normal starting salary for initial academic jobs). The appointment, however, was only upon a yearly basis and Merton ended it somewhat abruptly in the summer of 1936. A Senior Webb Medley Studentship tided him over 1936–7 and then, just when he was beginning to contemplate the possibility of having to turn nurseryman, A. B. Emden, the shrewd Principal of St Edmund Hall, offered him a tutorship there. At last he really was settled, settled indeed for the rest of his academic life.

Then came the 1939–45 War. For its first two years George remained with growing impatience in Oxford, until in 1941 an Air Ministry offer of direct commissions for intelligence and other special duties opened his way into the RAFVR. After a brief spell at Limavady (N. Ireland), he spent seven busy months at Tiree. This was a newly-built station on an isolated Scottish island that lacked even a public house for the men's entertainment and during his spare time he took the lead in organising a 'brains trust' and other forms of recreation for them. In September 1942 he was posted to India. During his all-but-

three years there he kept a journal, running to 344 manuscript pages, more descriptive and a good deal less introspective than those for earlier and later years. His meetings with Indians, other than bearers, etc., were necessarily more limited than he would have liked, but clearly left him with doubts about their immediate readiness for efficient and incorrupt self-government. At first he found his intelligence work, at squadron and then at 224 Group, largely routine, for the monsoon season seriously restricted flying. But arrangements for the men's recreation were as lacking as they had been on Tiree. So he again used his leisure time to prod his superiors into providing educational and musical entertainment for them. He soon found himself giving gramophone concerts of classical music and talking on current affairs. By the summer he was in charge of education for 224 Group, indeed for virtually all the forward RAF units, until a full-time education officer arrived in September 1943.

The New Year, 1944, found him in Burma with a small RAF group at army headquarters, a bare dozen miles from the front line. Their aircraft played an important part in the ensuing battle. During that battle 1,000 or more Japanese troops infiltrated through the jungle and occupied a range of low hills overlooking the British headquarters from the rear and bringing them under sniper fire. At that moment George, now a Flight Lieutenant, was recalled to Chittagong and on May 1 posted to S.E. Asia Air Command headquarters at New Delhi, which in October 1944 moved to Kandy in Ceylon. Promoted to Squadron Leader in April 1945, his work was mostly writing despatches, critiques of recent actions, and monthly reviews of operations. In August, as soon as the war with Japan ended, he was sent home to discuss with the Air Ministry and the Air Historical Branch what was to be done with the great mass of records accumulated by S.E. Asia Air Command. After a brief return to Kandy he was demobilised and eventually landed back in England in November 1945.

The return to Oxford was smooth and pleasant. Except that most of the undergraduates were in their mid- or late-twenties, the first two terms of 1946 were deceptively normal. He was able to set aside two days a week for refreshing his memory for tutorials and for planning lectures and research projects ranging from German sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history to Anglo-Irish relations and to music in the eighteenth-century. His pre-War doctoral thesis on *The Wiltshire Woollen Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* had been published in the Oxford Historical Series in 1943 while he was in India.

A shortened version of his pre-War B.Litt. thesis on 'Industrial *Laisser Faire* and the Policy of Cromwell' was published in the *Economic History Review* (1st ser., 16 (1946)). Urged on by Ralph Pugh, he began to edit some sixteenth-century Wiltshire taxation records and he also began to transcribe a late Elizabethan ledger book of the London merchant Richard Sheppard. A suggestion from Courtaulds that he might write the history of their firm came to nothing by mutual agreement. At a more local level he became music correspondent for the *Oxford Magazine*, did an occasional book review for it, and by an article in it instigated a sharp controversy about the publications policy of the Oxford University Press. Service in the RAF had considerably strengthened his self-confidence.

Then with Michaelmas term 1946 the flood gates opened. The influx of ex-Service men was swollen by a renewal of the usual peacetime entry of school leavers. 'We are struggling', George wrote, 'as best we can through term here with, as far as most of us are concerned, far too much to do . . . It is difficult to snatch even a few moments for one's own reading.' The pressure of numbers was aggravated by the multiplicity of choices for shortened courses. And to cap it all, he was appointed an examiner for the Final School of Modern History for 1947 and 1948, with 1949 added a little later. This was heavy and demanding work, all the more as in 1948 he became the examiners' secretary and in 1949 their chairman. Moreover the examiners decided not to employ assessors, which meant that each of them had to 'get up' a second special subject. The examination itself entailed each examiner marking upwards of 400 scripts, and in 1947 and 1948 a fortnight examining every candidate *viva voce*. There was clearly little opportunity for research and writing until Schools were finished with and the tutorial load had sunk back to a more normal level.

The first five or six post-war years were also a time of increasing loneliness. His first Christmas at home was even drearier than usual. His father's presence was more pervasive, for he had retired after selling the nursery, where the soil was becoming exhausted from a century of intensive cultivation. His mother was recovering from a severe illness. Most of their old friends were dead. Worst of all, Aunt May had died in February 1942. With her artistic gifts, her sense of humour and fits of giggling, she seems to have been the instigator of much of such jollity as there had been in the family life. Without her, 'what was irksome in the thirties is intolerable now.' There was no one he could talk to who was not twenty or thirty years his senior and it was only his

affection for his mother that persuaded him to continue spending part of his vacations in Dublin. At this time he looked forward fairly contentedly to spending his life at St Edmund Hall, though he was a little worried about the prospect of eking out a solitary existence after retirement.

His father's death on 6 December 1946, the frailty of his mother's health, and the discovery that Oxford, too, could be a lonely place for a bachelor don, brought a sharp realisation that what he needed was not just a retirement refuge but a permanent home of his own. A home, however, implied marriage. He had been cut off from feminine society during his four years in the RAF; at home he had none of his own age; he did not dance; and at Oxford most of his friends were men and those of them who were married invited him only rarely into their homes. Two or three tentative reconnaissances came to nothing and by 1950, in one of those bouts of loneliness 'that sometimes overwhelm me,' he was lamenting that 'I have no real friend in all the world, nobody who knows all about me, though I am very friendly with a number of people . . . All I need is friendly company, especially feminine company.'

Next year, 1951, matters reached a crisis. In the summer his mother fell very seriously ill again and he remained with her in Dublin all through the Long Vacation. Towards autumn she rallied, but only to die on 28 March 1952. For George it was his darkest hour. However, by now he had made the acquantaince of a Trinity College, Dublin, economics graduate, Patricia Clarke—on 13 October 1951 he had written to Michael Roberts 'I have all sorts of things to tell you about, some of which I had rather not commit to typescript.' At the end of Trinity term 1952 he invited Patricia to Oxford for the St Edmund Hall Summer Ball. By the end of the week they were engaged and on September 10 married. At last he was settled, not just for his academic life but extremely happily for all his remaining years.

With a wife, a home, a young family—two sons and a daughter by 1961—there was no more complaining of loneliness. The introspective, self-communing journals and diaries apparently ceased. He had completed his stint of Schools examining; the amount of tutorial work had dropped back nearer to normal levels; so far no major administrative college offices had come his way, though he was long senior treasurer of the Hall's amalgamated (sports) clubs; and he had shunned, as he came to despise, university politics. He was thus able to settle down contentedly to the research and writing which he regarded as essential

accompaniments of teaching — like Chaucer's clerk of Oxenford, 'gladly would he learn and gladly teach.' He joined the small band who took regular advantage of the cheap Oxford to Paddington train fares on Thursdays to make weekly visits to the Public Record Office — each following our own chosen route from Paddington to Chancery Lane: George and myself by Central line from Lancaster Gate; Pierre Chaplais by Bakerloo, changing at Oxford Circus; and Harry Bell by bus.

Already at the end of 1949 he had begun writing what was to become *English Overseas Trade in the Centuries of Emergence*. By the end of the Christmas vacation of 1950–1 he had drafted three of the eventual seven chapters and during 1951 he completed a fourth, on 'The Smugglers' Trade', of which he read an early version to the Royal Historical Society in November 1951 (published in *Transactions of the R. Hist. S.*, 5th ser., 2 (1952)). Two of the three remaining chapters planned — 'The Rise of the Western Ports' and 'The British Atlantic Community' — would take him into fields with which he was much less acquainted and where progress might therefore be slower. Nevertheless, he was hoping to finish writing the book by the end of 1952. Getting married, selling the Dublin house, and finding one in Oxford somewhat interrupted this programme. As he wrote a little innocently to Michael Roberts announcing his engagement, 'I gather from various colleagues that I must write off the long vac. and perhaps the Christmas vac. too, as far as writing and research go.' He did manage to get his *Two Wiltshire Tax Lists, 1545 and 1576* finished and published in 1954 (Wiltshire Arch. and Natural Hist. Soc., Records Branch, vol. 10) with an illuminating introduction and excellent index.

English Overseas Trade in the Centuries of Emergence was eventually published in 1957. Its seven chapters are, with one exception, wide-ranging and up-to-date surveys based upon secondary authorities with only occasional soundings in the original sources. The exception is the already mentioned chapter on 'The Smugglers' Trade'. This is a piece of detailed research, mostly Elizabethan, that by its nature seems out of place in this company. He presumably included it to anticipate the criticism that in the rest of the book he never mentions figures for the volume of trade and to justify his belief that 'Customs statistics . . . are never for that period to be equated with the levels of trade. To treat . . . the official records of the exchequer as equivalent to trade returns can lead only to a serious distortion of history.'

That chapter apart, the book was, as he himself wrote, a *Wegweiser*.

It mapped out on broad lines the area with which his research and writing would henceforth be principally concerned and it marked a notable shift in his interests. Hitherto, apart from a lecturing concern with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany, a natural and continuing interest in Anglo-Irish affairs, and a brief toying with the history of classical music in the eighteenth century, his serious studies had been concentrated upon the West country, and more particularly upon the Cotswold and Wiltshire woollen industry. He had had, of course, to consider the clothiers and the markets and marketing of the cloth, yet as late as 1948, when he became a member of the Wiltshire Victoria County History committee and joined the Somerset Record Society, he had written that 'I think most of my life work will be devoted to the history of the West country.'

Now, however, his theme was how the export of woollen cloth, by far England's largest single export, had come during the later fifteenth and earlier sixteenth centuries to be funnelled overwhelmingly through London and the Merchants Adventurers into Antwerp. He went on to describe the breaking of that Antwerp connection, for reasons both economic and political, in the mid-sixteenth century. This made the opening of new markets necessary. These had been found at first mainly in north-western Germany and the northern Netherlands, but there were others of expanding importance farther afield in Muscovy, the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Levant, in India and the Far East. By a mixture of trading and privateering and then of colonisation, the New World across the Atlantic was also opened up. This fostered a notable revival of the western ports, especially Bristol and Exeter, Liverpool and Glasgow, although London still dominated eastward traffic. The linkage between this 'British Atlantic Community' and the expansion eastward produced a worldwide trading empire that lasted at least until the revolt of the American colonies.

From now on George's principal interest centred upon the early stages of these developments, upon the breakaway from Antwerp in the early years of Elizabeth I's reign and the part played therein by London and the Merchants Adventurers. He did not entirely forsake his earlier fields. He saw a second edition of his *Wiltshire Woollen Industry* through the press, with a small amount of revision (1965). He contributed a chapter on 'The Austrian Habsburgs and the Empire' to volume III of the *New Cambridge Modern History* (1968) and one on 'The State of Germany (to 1618)' to volume IV (1970). But his most significant publication was *John Isham, Mercer and Merchant Adven-*

turer. Two Account Books of a London Merchant in the Reign of Elizabeth I (Northamptonshire Record Society, 21 (1962)). In this he printed transcriptions of two ledgers of 1558 and 1572 and in two appendices the inventory of Gregory Isham 1558 and a life of John by his son Thomas. In a masterly 112 page Introduction he took a considerable step towards clearing the ground for his major work yet to come. Skilfully and very clearly he told the story of the life and business activity of a very typical and not over-bold Merchant Adventurer and his family; of their financial and credit practices and book-keeping methods; and of the structure and work of the Merchants Adventurers and the Mercers.

Apart from this work on Isham and the two chapters on Germany, the years between 1957 and his retirement in 1974 were among his least productive periods so far as publications went. His family, the children all being now of school age, absorbed a good deal of his attention; he always gave a high priority to his tutorial duties; and as Vice-Principal and a Fellow of increasing seniority, college business did not grow less for him. It was nevertheless a time, overlapping well into his retirement, of research in archives at home and abroad, of travel and conferences, of reading, discussion and reflection that bore fruit in his most important work, on *The End of the Antwerp Market.* This began as a proposed single large volume, so large that the Oxford University Press turned it down. George thereupon split it into two parts: Part I, *The City of London in International Politics at the Accession of Elizabeth Tudor*, published by Manchester University Press in 1975; and Part II, *The Queen's Merchants and the Revolt of the Netherlands* in 1986. It is these two volumes that reveal his true stature as an historian. They are firmly based upon the original sources in four or five languages, while taking full account of modern scholarship. With remarkable order and clarity they sort out an exceedingly complicated tale of densely entangled politics, diplomacy, and economics.

They emphasise how unfortunate it was that when Philip II left the Netherlands and returned to Spain, regular diplomatic contacts between the English and Spanish governments were re-routed through London–Madrid when their major concerns were between London and Brussels or Antwerp. Ambassadors such as Bishop Quadra and John Man only made matters worse. The differences in religion that resulted from the accession of Queen Elizabeth I made them ill-willed as well as ill-informed. It also made south-eastern England an asylum for thousands of Netherlands Protestant refugees, many of them skilled clothworkers.

This, and the ambassador's bias, persuaded Netherlands ministers such as Cardinal Granvelle that the resistance to their efforts to stamp out heresy owed much of its stubbornness, not least in cosmopolitan Antwerp, to English backing. There were economic stresses too. The shipping interests of Holland and Zeeland were aggrieved by the depredations of English privateers and pirates during the English interventions in Scotland (1559–60) and France (1562–4). The customs reforms of Lord Treasurer Winchester, begun in Mary's reign, had very considerably worsened the position of alien traders. At the same time the new, 1558, book of rates, by providing the English crown with an important enhanced income, had given it a much closer interest in England's overseas trade, that of the Merchants Adventurers' cloth exports to Antwerp in particular.

The City of London in International Politics traces very skilfully and lucidly how all these developments came together when Granvelle in 1563–4 used a severe outbreak of plague in England as an excuse to bring all trade between the Netherlands and England to a halt, in the mistaken belief that England was so dependent upon its Antwerp trade that the stoppage would bring the government to its knees, perhaps even bring the nation back to the old religion. George showed that in fact Antwerp suffered at least as badly as London, so that by the spring of 1564, upon the fall of Granvelle, the Brussels government was ready for an agreement. It was just too late. For as cloth for export had piled up in London warehouses, with depressing repercussions in the clothing counties and among sheepowners, the English government had grown increasingly perturbed by the lack of its export duties on cloth and fearful that economic distress might add fuel to religious discontents. So it had hastened to negotiate an agreement with the rulers of East Friesland to transfer the Merchants Adventurers' trade from Antwerp to Emden. The move was enthusiastically supported by a section, but by no means all, of the Merchants Adventurers. It was a bold move, as the book justly claims, but a little less successful and decisive than it maintains. For by January 1565 the Merchants Adventurers were back at Antwerp in full force.

Certainly Emden had shown the way. It had begun a loosening of the Antwerp connection and shown the Merchants that an alternative might be practicable. When the final breakaway eventually came, however, it was the result of new developments in Netherlands history and in international politics. These developments are the subject of *The Queen's Merchants and the Revolt of the Netherlands*, a book of the

same quality and scholarly standards as the previous volume and ranging even more widely. This wider ranging largely accounts for the eleven years' gap between the publication of the two volumes. It meant considerable revision and re-writing. It also led into tempting bye-ways of research that produced during this first decade of George's retirement an almost annual output of articles, some of which had only a tenuous connection with his main theme.

Among them were 'Industrial Discontent in Early Elizabethan London: Clothworkers and Merchants Adventurers in Conflict' (*London Journal*, 1 (1975)); 'The Cloth Trade at London in the mid-sixteenth-century: the Merchants Adventurers and their Rivals' (*Produzione, commercio e consumo dei panni de lana*: Florence, 1976); 'The City of London and the Republic of St Blaise in the Later Sixteenth Century' (*Dubrovnik's Relations with England: a Symposium, April 1976*: Zagreb, 1977); 'Clothworkers, Merchants Adventurers and Richard Hakluyt' (*English Historical Review*, 92 (1977)); 'The Recruitment and Fortunes of Some London Freemen in the Mid-Sixteenth Century' (*Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. (31, 1978)); 'Hamburg and the English Revolution' (*Wirtschaftskräfte in den europäischen Expansion*: 1978); 'A Saint in the City: Thomas More at Mercers' Hall, London' (*English Historical Review*, 97 (1982)); a 92-page booklet on *The English Woollen Industry 1500–1750* (Economic History Society, 1982); the very one-sided (though on a side most historians have underweighted) chapter on 'The Foreign Policy of Elizabeth I' (in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. C. Haigh (Basingstoke, 1984)); and his final historical publication, on 'The Settlement of the Merchants Adventurers at Stade' (in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe*, ed. E. J. Kouri and Tom Scott (London, 1987)). An article on 'Thomas More, Joint Keeper of the Exchange' (1982) proved too specialised and esoteric to achieve publication. In addition to all this he wrote on an average five or six reviews or short notices every year, mostly for the *English Historical Review* or *History*, and notably of contintental publications, besides summarising historical publications for the *English Historical Review* and the *Hansische Geschichtsblätter.*

Amid all this diverse activity it was 1986 before *The Queen's Merchants* reached publication. Its opening pages demonstrate that the Merchants Adventurers' return from Emden to Antwerp was not really a new beginning. It then goes on to describe how the Colloquy of Bruges failed to produce a new basis of agreement and that although trade — and the Queen's customs — flourished over the next four years,

it did so against a background of grumbling and quibbling on both sides. The Brussels government no longer wanted to see Antwerp as a free port. It continued to complain of the enhanced duties introduced in 1558 as well as of the far more ancient port dues in England. The Merchants Adventurers complained of niggling restrictions and occasional harassment. The image-breaking riots of 1566 caused them considerable anxiety and the *Queen's Merchants* details how they were beginning to loosen their dependence upon Antwerp, for example by importing linen direct from Germany and some at least of their alum direct by sea from Italy. They were also sending their cloth across to Antwerp at regular brief intervals, four shiploads at a time, instead of risking their usual two annual forty- or fifty-ship fleets as possible hostages. The arrival of the Duke of Alba in the Netherlands with the Spanish army, and his establishment of a Catholic military dictatorship there, alarmed many of them and alarmed the English government even more. But by completing the restoration of order in the provinces, he also restored market confidence at Antwerp. So the *Queen's Merchants* shows the year ending at Michaelmas 1568, despite doubts and hesitations, as one of booming Merchants Adventurers' trade and soaring royal customs.

Then came political disaster, a disaster that the book analyses with sharp clarity and firmness. Five ships, bringing Alba a Genoese loan to pay his troops, took refuge in English south coast havens from bad weather and Huguenot privateers. The treasure, some £85,000, was eventually for safety's sake brought ashore. The new Spanish ambassador in London, Guerau Despes — firmly treated as the villain of the piece — jumped very prematurely to the conclusion that the Queen was about to seize it. To deter her, he sent urgently to Alba to seize all English ships and goods in the Netherlands. Alba, with neither means nor time to check the report, could only do as Despes requested. English retaliation swiftly followed and for the next five and a half years the Merchants Adventurers' trading with Antwerp ceased. Fortunately, in June 1567 the English government, with Alba's army already approaching the Netherlands, had concluded a ten years' agreement with Hamburg to divert a part of the Merchants Adventurers' trade thither. After Alba's seizures, the whole of that trade was diverted to Hamburg, the first fleet sailing thither under strong royal navy escort in the summer of 1569. Hamburg, although it lacked some of Antwerp's advantages, proved much more satisfactory than Emden and for the next ten years it remained the Adventurers' chief continental market. The English and Netherlands governments did patch up their quarrel in 1573 and some

forlorn attempts were then made to revive the trade to Antwerp, as a penultimate chapter on 'The Agony of the Antwerp Market' describes. By then, however, the revolt of Holland and Zeeland and the establishment of the Sea Beggars at Flushing had given them control of the Scheldte, Antwerp's only way to the sea. Such attempts were therefore doomed to failure. The 1569 seizures had rung the death knell of English traffic to Antwerp and in 1582 the Merchants Adventurers finally left that city for Middelburg.

By studying these events primarily from the Merchants Adventurers' point of view, the two volumes added a new dimension to a familiar story. But they emphasised too how large was the share of the governments. And for the 1568–9 rupture they placed the blame fairly and squarely upon Despes. At the same time they emphasised how the lack (outside Venice) in those days of any trained and experienced diplomatic profession could leave a sovereign with little choice, even if he could afford the expense of an extra embassy. It was the lack of regular, level-headed diplomatic contacts between London and Brussels that caused the English to misjudge so badly Alba's attitude towards them.

The completion of this major work, and all the other activities of his first decade of retirement, by no means sated George's appetite for research and writing. He toyed awhile with the idea of a book on 'Froude, the Historian of Tudor England, and the Rise of the Professional Historian'—he had taken pleasure in praising Froude in an article on 'Victorian Historiography and the Guilds of London, 1884: The Report of the Royal Commission on the Livery Companies of London' (*London Journal*, X. 188 ff.). He also thought of going back to Thomas More. Eventually, however, he decided to concentrate upon rounding off his life's work with a small volume of about 120,000 words on the Merchants Adventurers c. 1400–1809, 'for which I have a contract.' This progressed quickly for a year or so, until in 1988 it brought him to the Imperial mandate in 1597 banning the Merchants Adventurers from Germany and the Empire. This opened up a new and 'agreeable field of endeavour', of detailed research, and soon began to take shape as a volume in its own right, displacing the broader survey. By the spring of 1991 he reckoned that he had drafted three-quarters of it and despite the brief distraction of Thomas More and the Staplers Company, he did complete a draft covering the years of the mandate's operation to 1611. Time, however, was not vouchsafed to him to

produce the final, revised, version or to submit it for publication. He died on 11 June 1992.

George Ramsay was a man whom it was easy to get to know, but by no means easy to know well. For he was essentially a very private person. Outwardly, however, he was an excellent lively companion, who loved an argument and often, one suspected, played devil's advocate to provoke debate. Add to this a sharp wit and a strong sense of humour, blended with a real kindliness and absence of malice, and it comes as no surprise that he was a most successful tutor. He was devoted to those he taught, stimulated them to think for themselves and to write at least with clarity, and remained their friend long after they had left Oxford. Beneath his sparkling outward personality there was moreover a deep rooted modesty, indeed humility. He tried hard for many years not to be called 'Doctor' in virtue of his D.Phil. and he steadfastly refused an entry in *Who's Who*. He rather despised the showmanship of the more extrovert of his Oxford colleagues. Titles and outward trappings did not impress him — he once rejoiced that he had 'no ambition for higher worldly or professional place', though he took a quiet pleasure in his election as a Fellow of the Academy in 1990. An ideal marriage brought him a wife and family who supported, encouraged, and helped him and gave him the close companionship and family life that he craved. Music, too, was a continuous source of strength and relaxation all through his life. Displaying talent from an early age and spending at least a short time most days in practising, he was an accomplished performer of concert pianist standard. He was also blessed with a mellow tenor voice that brought him many pleasurable years of singing in the Bach Choir.

R. B. WERNHAM

Note. I have been particularly helped by George's son and literary executor, Nigel, both by our conversations and by his placing at my disposal his father's diaries and journals and his files of letters, papers, etc. I must also thank Professor Michael Roberts for permission to use and quote from his correspondence with George over many years from their days together at Worcester College, onwards, and the Rev. H. E. J. Cowdrey for reading and commenting on my draft.