ANGUS MacKAY

Angus Iain Kenneth MacKay

28 August 1939 – 29 October 2016

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1991

by

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Angus MacKay was the foremost British historian of late medieval Castile, a period even neglected in Spain when he first worked on it in his doctoral thesis. In the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s and 1980s he produced a remarkable body of books and articles focusing on social and economic topics, and above all on the complexities of frontier relations between Castile and the Nasrid kingdom of Granada. He also collaborated frequently with other scholars and his own numerous research students in what remains ground-breaking research and publication.

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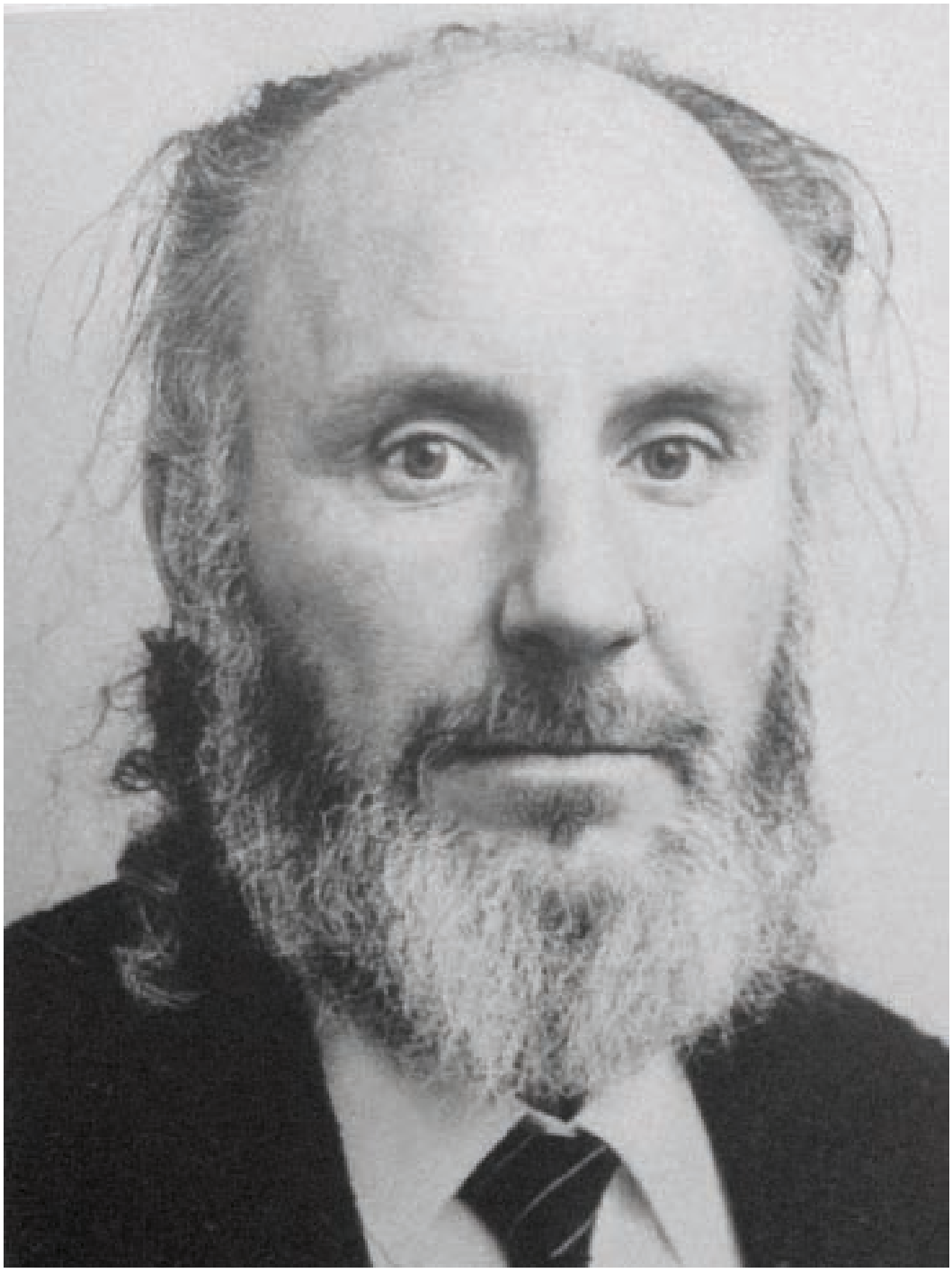

ANGUS MacKAY

The Neolithic stone circle known as the Calanais or Callanish Stones stands on a ridge overlooking Loch Roag, on the western side of the Isle of Lewis, where it has patiently endured the annual Atlantic storms since the first half of the third millennium BC.[1] The family of Angus Iain Kenneth MacKay may not have lived in its neighbourhood for so long a time, but this is where their roots can be traced, to the nearby Gaelic-speaking crofting communities of Breasclete, Achmore, Carloway, Garynahore and Callanish, all in the civil parish of Uig. It is perhaps unusual in a memorial of this sort, particularly one aimed at highlighting the academic achievements of its subject, to begin with what may seem like a lengthy focus on his family and antecedents. But in that Angus MacKay was a remarkable scholar with a very unusual background and early life experience, some attention to these is required if sense is to be made of his achievements and character as an historian.

While the ancient stones of Callanish were a striking physical presence in this landscape, the dominant local historical memories that would influence Angus's own intellectual and political development derived from the hardships faced by the crofters at the hands of a succession of absentee landlords and their factors, or land agents, who collected the rents.[2] Several of these were remembered by name in family tradition that reached back to the 1840s, along with the details of the evictions of tenantry and the clearances of townships for which they were held responsible. Lewis suffered particularly from these processes, and was the scene of a short-lived crofters' revolt.[3] Although the worst of the abuses were eliminated by the work of the Crofting Commission that reported in 1884 and the ensuing Crofters Act of 1886, the recollection of what had previously been endured lived on in a community with strong oral traditions, though no access before 1873 to more than a primary level of education, and it was passed on to Angus by his relatives.

However, although his Lewis inheritance would always exercise a powerful influence on him, he himself was born on the other side of the world, in Lima in Peru on 28 August 1939. He was the second son of Dr Neil Angus Roderick MacKay (1908–1987) and of his wife Mary MacAulay, and was always know to his family as Iain, though to most of the rest of his acquaintance as Angus.[4] The perhaps surprising connection with South America had begun with the previous generation. In the early

[1] P. Ashmore, *Calanais: the Standing Stones* (rev. edn. Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 6–17.

[2] Though the stones were not forgotten: Angus's father wrote a play about them in September 1933, while teaching in Harlow. For the definition of a croft: 'A small rented farm, especially one in Scotland, comprising a plot of arable land attached to a house and with a right of pasturage held in common with other such farms': Oxford Dictionaries, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/croft (accessed 30 May 2019).

[3] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Clearances: a History of the Dispossessed* (London, 2018), pp. 134–5, 235–7 and 321–4.

[4] His son, Angus John, indicates in the very moving funeral eulogy on his father that he was always 'Gus' to his wife.

1900s Angus's grandfather, Neil MacKay (1875–1914), who came from Carloway, had moved with his new wife, Christina MacIver, to Patagonia in Chile, to work as a hand on a sheep farm located on the Strait of Magellan.[5] Neil was the second youngest of seven or more siblings, the children of Neil MacKay (1834–1899) and Catherine Morrison (1836–1904). As his father was himself one of an extended family, whose original croft had already been divided in 1881 into several small parts, the chance of work in Patagonia offered better prospects than remaining in Lewis.[6]

The sad loss of their first son, due to the remoteness of the farm from the necessary medical facilities, led to Angus's father actually being born back in Lewis in 1908, but the family soon returned to South America, where Neil became the manager of another sheep farm, this time near the Rio Gallegos in Argentina, until forced to resign after contracting tuberculosis in late 1912. On the journey back to Lewis, their only daughter died of scarlet fever, and Neil himself followed in March 1914, aged only thirty-nine, while in medical isolation in an outhouse of his wife's family croft at Breasclete.

Left widowed with only one of her three children surviving, Angus's grandmother had to take work on the Scottish mainland as a cook and housekeeper for a succession of wealthy families, while her son remained with her family on Lewis. In 1921, an aggressive tumour, that had kept him out of formal schooling for nearly two years, resulted in the amputation of his left leg; a subject on which he later never spoke to his own sons. He always compensated very successfully for it by pushing himself extremely hard physically and was even able to ride long distances during his many years spent in South America later in his life. But for all the emotional and physical loss he had to endure in these early years, Neil Angus—Angus's father—then proved himself to be a remarkably able pupil in the Nicholson Institute in Stornoway, of which he became Dux in 1926/7, and then winner of the first Nicholson University Bursary, which enabled him to take up a place in the University of Edinburgh from 1927 to 1932.[7] There he began an Honours course in English, but switched to a broader degree covering a much wider range of subjects, from which he emerged with a prize medal

[5] I am indebted to the memoir of Dr Neil Angus Roderick MacKay written by his elder son Donald Neil MacKay, and kindly lent to me by Angus John MacKay for information on the early history of the wider family and on Angus's parents. Little or nothing seems to be known about the family or the early life of Angus's grandfather Neil (but see note 6 below), and it is his grandmother's MacIver family that dominates the historical memory of their descendants.

[6] The croft, in Garynahine, just south-east of Callanish, was divided on the death of Neil's grandfather, Norman MacKay (1798–1881), whose wife Margaret Morrison (1803–1869) had predeceased him. They had at least seven children. Neil MacKay (born 1875) may have had up to seven siblings; six are certain.

[7] The Nicholson Institute, or Sgoil MhicNeacail, was the first secondary school in Stornoway, founded by a donation from five brothers of the name of Nicholson and opening in 1873. The title of *Dux* is awarded in some Scottish schools to the highest achieving student in the sixth form.

in Latin and other prizes in Philosophy, Economics and Psychology and fourteen out of a possible sixteen First Class certificates.[8]

On the strength of his results and references, he was appointed to teach at Harlow College in Essex in 1933, a private school for about 180 boys. This had been founded in 1862 with the stated aim 'to provide a superior education for the sons of gentlemen and … to train at low charge, the sons of missionaries abroad, of clergymen similarly engaged at home, as well as orphan sons of gentlemen who have been reduced in circumstances'.[9]

It is not known if the ethos of Harlow College influenced Neil Angus's subsequent decision to look for employment as a lay missionary and teacher, or if this was a plan already long formed in his mind. Like his family and the majority of the population of Lewis, he was a committed member of the Free Church of Scotland, whose primary school he had attended. The choice of South America as his chosen place of service may have been the product of the memory of his own very early years there. Despite the loss of a leg, only manifesting itself visibly in a limp, he was accepted by the Foreign Missions Commission of the Free Church and assigned a five-year posting to the Colegio Anglo-Peruano in Lima, starting in January 1935. Founded by the Free Church in 1917, it began as a primary school but soon expanded to include a new secondary department in 1919.[10]

Neil Angus married Mary MacAulay (1899–1994), a member of another Breasclete family, whom he had long known, in the Methodist Central Hall in London on 12 January 1935.[11] They set out on the journey by sea to Peru, via New York and the Panama Canal, in September that year. It was here their two sons were born, Donald in 1936 and Angus on 28 August 1939. Their father's contract would have expired that year, but the outbreak of war in Europe in September of that year meant that he could not be replaced and had to remain in post until 1945.

Neil Angus, like his son Angus after him, drove himself hard. In addition to his work in the school, of which he also became headmaster in 1942, he worked for a

[8] This five-year, two-part, course, that no longer exists in Edinburgh, resulted in the award of two degrees: a Master of Arts and a Bachelor of Commerce; the latter was first introduced in the University of Birmingham in the early 1900s and is still offered in various universities in the Commonwealth, as well as in India and Hong Kong.

[9] http://www.oldharlovians.co.uk/history_harlow_college.html (accessed 30 May 2019). The school was forced to close in 1965, and the name is now that of a College of Further Education.

[10] For the history of the school see J. M. MacPherson, *At the Roots of a Nation: the Story of San Andrés School in Lima, Peru* (Edinburgh, 1993), especially pp. 59–91 for the period of Neil Angus's time there.

[11] There is a little uncertainty about her year of birth, as the UK Census of April 1901 includes her as aged three at the time, and the passenger manifest for the SS *Franconia* of 19 October 1946 records her age as forty-nine. Her grave marker in the cemetery in Dalmore on Lewis gives her age as ninety-five and date of her death as 21 June 1994.

doctorate on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, a degree that he received from the Universidad de San Marcos in Lima, where he also served for a time as Professor of English Literature. He gave talks on the radio on reforms in British education and advised the Peruvian Ministry of Education on the adoption of new textbooks.[12] His Spanish was said to be fluent, and it is likely that Angus's own extraordinary command of the language was initiated in these years in Peru, when the family was unable to return to Britain.

Peru may have offered a little more tranquillity than Europe at the time, though it had fought a war with its neighbour Chile that had ended in 1929, before engaging in another with Colombia from 1932 to 1933, and yet another with Ecuador in 1941. Initiated by boundary disputes, they were all at least short-lived. Within the country, the position of a foreign run Protestant school was not always easy, while the costs incurred in maintaining it, although originally expected to be self-supporting, led to periodic threats of closure.[13] These and other problems were faced by Neil Angus, before he was able to take his first leave in a decade in July 1945.[14] Returned to Scotland, in weakened health and facing the question of the educational needs of his own two sons, he decided not to return as planned to Lima, and resigned his post in 1946. Instead he and his wife joined his mother in a house in Warrender Park Road in Edinburgh, just south of the Meadows and the medieval heart of the city along the High Street or Royal Mile. They also took Angus and his brother Donald for their first ever visit to their numerous relatives in Lewis. However, it was not long before they were heading back to South America, sailing from Liverpool in October 1946 to New York and thence to Colombia, where Neil Angus had been posted as the Representative of the British Council in Bogotá.[15] He would work for the British Council for the next twenty-three years.

This initial posting was short, as Neil Angus was hoping for a longer stay in the United Kingdom while his sons received their schooling. So, they returned to Britain in 1947, where Neil Angus was appointed Director of the Latin American Department of the British Council. The family took a house in East Barnet, and Angus was sent to a local primary school, while Donald went to Queen Elizabeth Grammar. Neil Angus, who, like his son after him, never did one thing if he could do two instead, also enrolled for an external BA degree in Spanish from the University of London. He was bored by routine, and complained of its effects on his health, only to be completely

[12] MacPherson, *At the Roots of a Nation*, pp. 81–2.

[13] For example, the change of name from La Escuela Anglo-Peruviano to the Colegio de San Andrés had been forced on it by the Peruvian government in 1942, when it forbade the institutional use of names with foreign connections: MacPherson, *At the Roots of a Nation*, p. 78.

[14] The family arrived in Southampton from New York on the SS *Aquitania* on 2 September 1945.

[15] The National Archives, Kew, reference BW24.

revitalised by a demanding trip on behalf of the British Council to the USA, Mexico, Cuba and six countries in South America in 1950.

The following year, feeling their sons were not getting the best out of their education, the family returned to Edinburgh after Neil Angus applied for the post of British Council representative in Scotland. Only after his sons' school education was complete did Neil Angus return to South America for a final posting as Representative in Argentina, based in Buenos Aires, from 1956 to 1969.[16] In the meantime, the two boys were entered as pupils in The Royal High School.

Then located in its Neoclassical building on the south side of Calton Hill, overlooking Waverley Station, the school claimed an institutional ancestry going back to the foundation of Holyrood Abbey in 1128. Certainly, the school formerly run by the abbey was put under the control of the city council following the Reformation. Angus seems to have thrived, gaining a Merit Certificate in his first year, when a member of Form I 'X'. Although he is not recorded as winning any more such certificates, he remained in the same stream throughout his years at the Royal High School. This is significant because 'the "X" class was very much for the elite academic pupils'.[17] His next recorded distinction was for another, less well-known aspect of his career, as a piper or player of the bagpipes. In 1956 he was both the School's Pipe-Major and the recipient of the MacKelvie Trophy for piping.[18] He kept up with his piping at the University of Edinburgh, where he sometimes played with the Lothian and Borders Police Pipe Band.[19]

He left the Royal High School at the end of his Fifth Form Year (or Lower Sixth in the English education system), as was often the case in the Scottish educational system when a student had gained admission for a four-year degree in a Scottish university. In Angus's case, it was to read history in the University of Edinburgh, for which he was awarded a First-Class degree in 1962. While the syllabus required chronological breadth, including both medieval and modern periods but with a rather lesser geographical extension (excluding Scottish history entirely and most Spanish), Angus's interests and experience might have been expected to make him focus particularly on more recent periods, perhaps with a South American dimension.

But it was to be medieval history, particularly that of the fifteenth century, that became the focus of his academic interests, largely thanks to the influence of Denys

[16] For details of Neil Angus's career with the British Council, I am grateful to Stephen Witkowski, of the Global Information Services of the British Council.

[17] Personal communication from Alastair Allanach, honorary archivist of the Royal High School Club. See also *Annual Report of the Royal High Schoo*l for 1951/1952, Prize List, p. 11.

[18] Ibid., for 1955/1956, Senior School Awards, p. 8. I am grateful to Alastair Allanach for these pieces of information and for photocopies of the documents.

[19] Information from the eulogy delivered on his father by Angus John MacKay, 9 November 2016.

Hay (1915–1994), who had come to the university in 1945, and became the first holder of the new chair of medieval history in 1954. He was fondly remembered by many who wrote about him as a remarkable teacher, as well as a productive and wide-ranging scholar. As one memorialist recalled, 'Hay brought deflation of pomposity, enthusiasm and intense stimulation'. [20] All these were characteristics that would not only have appealed to Angus but would become the hallmarks of his own teaching style. It is likely that the undergraduate course on 'European History, 1324—1449' was the one that most strongly influenced him, as it was to the latter part of this period that Angus turned when deciding upon a topic for doctoral research, and he acknowledged that it was also Denys Hay who suggested that he should make Spain his focus.

It was, however, an adventurous choice for several reasons. First, for a future academic career in a history department, Spain was a risky choice. Very little Spanish history appeared in the undergraduate syllabus of any university, and there were few books on any period of it written in English. In the 1960s, and for some decades to come, almost every historian of Spain, especially of the medieval period, in a British university was to be found in the Spanish or Hispanic Studies department and not in History. There was also the problem of inadequate library resources for Spanish history of any kind in most British universities outside Oxbridge and London; something Angus would later remedy in Edinburgh. A few years later, he became one of the first Hispanists to find a permanent place in a university department of history, initially in Reading and then at Edinburgh.

The second potentially inhibiting factor might have been the political tenor of the government of Spain at the time, which was that of *El Caudillo*, Francisco Franco (d. 1975). Angus had developed strong views that remained with him throughout his life in favour of social equality and justice, in part deriving from the experiences of his family on Lewis and in part from his own reactions to the British politics of the 1950s. He was a committed socialist and supporter of the Labour Party, and he was not likely to find the Spanish regime of the time in the slightest degree congenial. However, it is one of the distinguishing features of his scholarship that he would put up with what might seem uncongenial in the interest of pursuing what he thought was important.

This is reflected in his choice of thesis topic, developed in consultation with Denys Hay. While his supervisor's interests and academic approach could be said to be more wide-ranging, synthesising and culturally oriented, Angus's focus was on what he regarded as the economic underpinning of the society that interested him, in this case that of fifteenth-century Castile. While clearly influenced by Marxist historians he

[20] J. Larner, 'Denys Hay 1915-1994', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 90 (1996), p. 396.

had read, he did not become one himself, any more than he became a professional economic historian. If anything, it was the work of the French *Annales* school, then becoming more widely known to anglophone academe, that made the greatest impact on his choice of both topics and methodology. However, Angus was never an uncritical follower of any school or ideology, valuing independence of thought above everything. But for his first, broadly based foray into what would become his life's work, a thesis entitled 'Economy and Society in Castile in the Fifteenth Century' proved an ideal choice.[21]

In his selection of period, however much he may have enjoyed Denys Hay's lectures on a wider chronological and geographical scale, he made another risky decision. Outside the Italian Renaissance, very little in fifteenth-century Europe, particularly in the first three quarters of it, was then attracting much scholarly interest. It was a period of weakness of royal governments, endemic warfare, social upheaval and economic decline in many if not most parts of the continent. In Spain, in particular, where a narrative of *Reconquista*, the gradual recovery of the lands lost to Islam after the Arab conquest of the peninsula in 711, had long dominated not just the academic but also the popular understanding of the development of Spanish history across the medieval centuries, the weakness and internal divisions of the Castilian monarchy under the House of Trastámara (1362–1504) made it a period of national disgrace. Obviously, this was reversed under the joint rule of *Los Reyes Católicos*, Fernando and Isabel, under whom the whole programme of recovery and the elimination of Islamic would be brought to triumphant conclusion after a long period of stasis under their predecessors. Theirs was a period that attracted much scholarly interest, in the way that the earlier decades of the fifteenth century did not, except for a very small number of independent minded historians, amongst whom Angus would find some of his closest friends.

The thesis itself, which was accepted for the award of the degree of PhD in 1970, begins with a survey, 'the evidence and the problem', the latter identified as 'the inadequate nature of historians' knowledge of the Castilian economy and society in the fifteenth century'.[22] While not as polished a piece of writing as his later published works, it presented its author's arguments with absolute clarity. Even here, from the outset of his career as an historian, Angus's preoccupation with the acquiring and understanding of all available evidence stands out, as does his clear focus on recognising the terms on which it could be used to illuminate the question he was trying to

[21] Never published, the thesis in two volumes can be accessed via https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/19953 (accessed 30 May 2019).

[22] A. MacKay, 'Society and Economy in Fifteenth Century Castile' (University of Edinburgh thesis, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 1 and 10–15.

answer. Ideologically inspired theory, of whatever kind, had no place in Angus's intellectual world, and this made him the superb historian that he was. He always gave absolute fidelity to the process of evaluating evidence, and never imposed a priori interpretations on it.

In his thesis he identified the key determinant of the politics of the Castilian kingdom in the fifteenth century as the attempts by rival families and groupings in the greater nobility of the kingdom to gain access to new sources of revenue through attempts to dominate the royal court, the Church and the towns, and then he asked 'Why, with such landed fortunes at their command, did the Castilian nobles seek so desperately to acquire royal revenues? What had happened to the Church and the towns?'[23] He recognised that the only way to answer such questions was to discover why the previous normal sources of wealth of this nobility were no longer able to sustain them, and why they were therefore driven into new forms of competition to compensate for the losses, with consequent damage to the political and social stability of the realm. For this he had to undertake a detailed study of hard economic data relating to price fluctuations, monetary devaluations and the decline of the agrarian economy. Much of what he discovered appears in a remarkable series of thirty-three appendices, providing tables of such things as the prices of barley, wheat and cloth in Seville, royal budgets, incomes and expenditure, urban corporate incomes, monastic revenues and much else besides.[24] Unlike his mentor Denys Hay, Angus relished archival work from the start, and it was always the basis for his most important discoveries.[25] Seville was a particular focus of his attention, because of the wealth of its surviving records, not least those of the Duques de Medinaceli, but his enquiries took him to Burgos, Valladolid and Santo Domingo de Silos, as well as the great Spanish central archives in Simancas and Madrid.

Although he never published the thesis in full, a reduced version of it appeared in 1981 as *Money, Prices, and Politics in Fifteenth Century Castile*, a volume in the Royal Historical Society Studies in History Series (no. 28). It stripped out most of the secondary elements in the thesis, so as to focus on the central arguments and provide an often very technical study of their evidential basis. A statement in the Introduction may be a warning to the unwary reader: 'I have constructed an equation which allows for the calculation of the price in maravedies of a mark of fine silver or gold by using the data available for the intrinsic content of coins. Thus P = xy/z where "P" is the price of one mark of gold or silver in maravedies, "x" is the value of the coin in maravedies, "y" is the number of these coins minted from one mark, and "z" is the

[23] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 14
[24] Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 554–640.
[25] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 5–10.

fineness of the coin relative to the maximum degree of purity of gold or silver.'[26] While the text is little over one hundred pages long, it is augmented by many of the tables and graphs generated by the original thesis and by an appendix of documents from his archival researches. It may not be for the general reader but is a remarkable piece of work.

The period in which he was working on his thesis, from 1963 to 1969, was marked by other important changes in his life. Most significant was his marriage to Linda Volante, whom he had first met while earning money on the side working as a waiter in her family's business, Ritchie's Tearooms in Cockburn Street in Edinburgh. They married in 1963 and immediately departed for Spain, for his archival work in Madrid; according to their son, Angus John, born in 1964, a story reached the local press that they had eloped together. Their daughter Ann-Marie was born in 1966. That Linda and her family were practising Roman Catholics also made explicit Angus's breach with the Free Church doctrines and practice in which he had grown up. Again, faith was probably not an area in which he could give unquestioning loyalty or to which he would sacrifice his independence of mind.

By this time a further change had occurred. Angus acquired his first academic position, as a lecturer in the History Department in the University of Reading in 1965. After four years there, he applied for and was appointed to a similar position in the University of Edinburgh. Here he joined a growing department, the medieval component of which was still under the leadership of Denys Hay, but with several new members of both medieval and modern sections being appointed in the 1960s. These included Anthony (A. E.) Goodman (in 1961), Harry Dickinson (in 1966), Gary Dickson and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (both in 1967), Robert Anderson (in 1969) and Michael Angold (in 1970). All of them would remain in the University of Edinburgh for the rest of their careers, and would there be joined by others, such as Robert Bartlett (from 1980 to 1986) and Tom Brown (in 1980), who contributed to the excellence of the department in this period. Angus's family enjoyed hearing his tales of the doings and sayings of his colleagues.[27]

1969 also saw the return of Angus's father from Argentina, following a complete collapse in his health brought on by overwork. In addition to his role as Representative for the British Council, he had served as honorary Cultural Attaché at the British Embassy in Buenos Aires, befriending Jorge Luís Borges (1899–1986), then Director of the Argentinian National Public Library, and other leading cultural figures in the Argentine. He was awarded the CBE in 1968, adding to a previous OBE. However, the pressures he placed on himself proved excessive, and he had to retire to Edinburgh in

[26] A. MacKay, *Money, Prices and Politics in Fifteenth-Century Castile* (London, 1981), p. 1.
[27] Angus John MacKay, eulogy on his father 9 November 2016.

1969. There, he became a leading lay figure in the governance of the Free Church, serving as a Member and often as the Convenor of several important Commissions and Committees relating to education, finance, and publications that were set up by the General Assembly between 1976 and 1986.[28] He also became closely involved with Angus's work, reading and re-reading drafts of his writing, and in the process 'saved me from many a blunder'.[29] The religious divide that had opened up between them never blunted the closeness of their relationship.

Angus's literary output was initially small, while he developed the courses he would teach, and he soon began work on his first book.[30] As one of his long-term colleagues said of him: 'Angus was devoted to teaching, his students and research.' He may have surpassed his own first source of inspiration, Denys Hay, as a charismatic lecturer, not least through his ability to talk fluently and clearly, however complex the subject, but without a single note. This was also the hallmark of his style when presenting academic seminar papers to his fellow Hispanists and other historians. A former student of Hispanic Studies, who only encountered him for a second-year half-course in Spanish History, recalls 'excellent and hugely informed lectures from which we came away with a really good coherent knowledge and clear and cogent notes. There was certainly never any danger of our not turning up at 9am on Monday. A stimulating start to the week!' Another remembers attending seminars, held in his room 'always full of research papers and books' that covered most of the chairs and even the telephone, and in which 'each time they went Angus asked them where they had got to the week before, and, once reminded, spoke for the full hour without recourse to any notes'.

As a colleague he is described as being 'always among the most lively, opinionated and open of the members of the Department. He could be choleric—I remember him storming out of a Department meeting because he considered the Chairman had been less than respectful to a colleague—but he was always collegial, intellectually stimulating and a very successful teacher (students noticed what a beautiful voice he had).' One of his former research students, from Spain, wrote 'what I personally liked most was his easy way of inspiring people to think, to be critical while being polite (his use of irony was famous and feared), and what I didn't like so much, but has helped me to

[28] *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1970-1979* (Edinburgh), pp. 91, 123 and 150, and *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1980-1989* (Edinburgh), pp. 10, 14, 31, 35, 64 and 112; see https://freechurch.org/resources/acts-of-assembly (accessed 30 May 2019).

[29] A. MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages: from Frontier to Empire, 1000-1500* (London and Basingstoke, 1977), p. vii.

[30] For a comprehensive bibliography of his work, see A. Goodman, 'A bibliography of the works of Angus MacKay relating to Medieval Spanish history and literature', in R. Collins and A. Goodman (eds.), *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence. Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), pp. xvii–xxi.

develop as a historian, was his famous sentence: "Go and read", a kind of mantra "do it yourself", which he repeated to me constantly while I was doing my PhD. Independent thinking is probably part of his legacy to his students.'

Something that attracted frequent comment, not least from native speakers, was Angus's extraordinarily good command of the Spanish language. This was not just a matter of grammatical proficiency or even of the remarkable purity of his accent, though this was a time in which even some highly learned and distinguished professors of Spanish did not think it necessary to speak like a Spaniard. The most arresting feature of Angus's command of the language was his ability to move at ease between different registers, from the earthy speech of the street and the bar to the most florid of academic discourses. One Spanish former student recalled 'his astounding knowledge of Spanish, in which he could talk and swear just like a native speaker, with almost no foreign accent', and a friend reported hearing stories from Angus himself about his years of graduate research in Spain 'where he lodged in houses of ill-repute, which further contributed to his colourful accent'.

His first published article 'Popular movements and pogroms in fifteenth century Castile',[31] which appeared in *Past & Present* in 1972, grew out of a paper he gave to the medieval history seminar that, after his retirement in 1980, would later be named in honour of Denys Hay.[32] This typified both the approaches already adopted in his thesis and the style of many of his future publications, by combining intense interest in popular movements, riots and disturbances with very specific analysis of hard economic data in the search to understand the motivation behind them. This also manifested itself in his skilful use of charts and maps to deploy those data, as in this case with a graph of fluctuating cloth prices in Seville *c.* 1400–1474, a distribution map of Jewish settlements as listed in Castilian tax assessments from 1450 to 1474, and tables of local violence and unrest and of crises of subsistence across these same decades. From this he created a masterful analysis of the social and economic pressures that led to the rise in Jewish conversion to Christianity, its consequences for the new *Conversos*, and the complex causes of the local reactions against them, triggered by the economic problems of the time and the weakness of royal government. Although his earliest publication, it remains one of his most important, as well as a signpost to the way his historical interests would develop, particularly directed at minorities and marginalised groups within this turbulent society.

[31] A. MacKay, 'Popular movements and pogroms in fifteenth century Castile', *Past & Present*, 55 (1972), 33–64. Thanks to a rogue spell-check, the title is given as 'Popular movements and programs' in Anthony Goodman's bibliography (see note 30 above), p. xvii.

[32] For an earlier and more general assessment of his publications see R. Collins, 'Angus MacKay and later medieval Spain', in Collins and Goodman, *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence. Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay*, pp. vii–xvi.

A much shorter article in the *English Historical Review* for the following year, 'A Castilian report on English affairs', typifies another feature of his scholarship: his relish for co-operation.[33] Written with his friend and colleague Anthony Goodman (1936–2016), a distinguished historian of later medieval England, this was the first of several collaborative articles; several of these were written with his research students. He also relished co-operating in publication of books, texts, and collections of essays.[34] One of the most novel of the latter was *Love, Religion and Politics in Fifteenth Century Spain*, in which he paired eight of his own articles with those written by Ian Macpherson, then Professor of Spanish in the University of Durham, thus combining both historical and literary topics.[35] Other such projects included the volume he edited with his former colleague Robert Bartlett entitled *Medieval Frontier Societies*, which focused upon one of his greatest interests, and grew out of a conference they organised in Edinburgh in 1987.[36] It included contributions focusing on Ireland, the Polish-German frontier, Anglo-Scottish and Czech-German relations, as well as several relating to Spain, such as Angus's own 'Religion, culture and ideology on the late medieval Castilian-Granadan frontier', one of his best articles on this topic.

The Atlas of Medieval History that he edited for Routledge with David Ditchburn was not published until after his retirement. It consists of short articles on a wide range of topics each accompanied by a map and covering the whole span of the medieval centuries from 395 to 1500, though with greater concentration on the last four of them. Many of these were contributed by Angus himself in the first edition, and he wrote in the Preface that he 'hoped that university undergraduates, senior school pupils and professional historians will find the atlas useful and rewarding', and that 'enlightened tourists' would also benefit.[37]

A similar need was met in his first published book, *Spain in the Middle Ages: from Frontier to Empire, 1000–1500*, that came out in 1977. It was the second volume in a series devised by Sarah Mahaffy of Macmillan and under the enormously genial and extremely helpful editorship of Denis Bethell (1934–1981). Of him Angus wrote that 'he devoted much time to helping me say what I meant, and the book has benefitted

[33] A. MacKay, 'A Castilian report on English affairs', *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), 92–9.

[34] In *Historia de Juan II* (Exeter Hispanic Texts vol. XXIX: Exeter, 1981), he edited with Dorothy Sherman Severin the surviving manuscript evidence for an abridgement of a major fifteenth century Castilian chronicle.

[35] Published by Brill in Leiden in 1988. Angus contributed chapters I–III, VII–X and XII.

[36] R. Bartlett and A. MacKay (eds.), *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford, 1989, corrected paperback edition, 1992).

[37] The original edition of 1997 has now been replaced by a much altered and enhanced second edition, edited additionally by David Ditchburn and Simon Maclean (Abingdon and New York, 2007), in which they note 'although Angus MacKay was not directly involved in revising this volume, it remains very much a monument to his own wide-ranging research and teaching', p. viii.

greatly from his constructive comments and advice'.[38] The result was a book that broke new ground and provided an English-speaking readership with a short but magisterial survey of the history of late medieval Spain; something hitherto entirely lacking. Indeed, there was nothing like it for a Spanish readership either, in the sense that it was using methodologies and pursuing interests that at the time were little known in Spain itself. It can also be said that in it he produced a remarkable and very readable overview of Spanish late medieval society that was dependent on much detailed and meticulous archival research on his part, which he did not parade in the book. As he wrote 'the use of extended references in a work of this size would be a luxury'.[39]

There are idiosyncrasies to be found in it, to be sure. Angus was not particularly interested in the period before *c.*1350, though he did his best to do justice to it in his own way. The greater prevalence in that period of ecclesiastical documents over the kind of texts he relished, such as tax assessments, tax data, and judicial records, explains his preference, and he was almost prejudiced against the even less well-endowed earlier medieval centuries. Though, as with many of his *obiter dicta*, it was never clear how far any of his casually expressed views were deeply held or merely intended to provoke the kind of intellectual argument he loved, and in which he was always a formidable debater. Such bold claims as the impossibility of a Hispanist being interested in cricket were intended to provoke, though they might just serve to give offence.

He also, intentionally or otherwise, always favoured Castile over Aragón or Navarre, as can easily be seen from the index entries for the individual monarchs of those realms. The Mediterranean-wide empire that was built up by the Aragonese is almost entirely missing from the book. But then he was far less interested in the narrative history of royal courts or their diplomatic entanglements than he was in the life of the streets or in the hard realities of making a viable living at whatever social level. Even within the kingdom of Castile itself, his personal enthusiasms always led him to cities rather than the countryside, as the archival records were better, and to Andalucia rather than the northern parts of the realm, such as the Asturias or Galicia, as this was home to the most vibrant and complex of frontier societies in the period he relished. The ambiguities in allegiances, conduct and motivation that he detected in his work on both sides in the frontier zone between the kingdoms of Castile and Granada led him to some of his best work, and to the warm friendship of like-minded Spanish scholars, such as Manuel González Jiménez and José Enrique López de Coca Castañer.

[38] MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*, p. vii.
[39] Ibid.

Some of the topics touched on in his first book were pursued in a plethora of articles that followed the publication of *Spain in the Middle Ages*, and the fifteen years between 1977 and 1992 saw a remarkable body of work on his part, that in its originality and authority thoroughly justified his election as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991. Colleagues in other areas concur; one writing that 'I would regard him as a major historian of Medieval Spain, at home with sources, allowing them to speak for themselves, but also a perceptive interpreter who understood the importance of establishing contexts', while another simply stated that 'Angus was one of the most original medievalists of the past thirty or forty years'.

At least forty-eight scholarly articles, several written in Spanish, were published by him in this period, with a handful more being written during this time but appearing in print a little later.[40] Some were contributions to collective volumes and conference papers. Amongst the most significant of them was a ground-breaking article 'The ballad and the frontier in late medieval Spain', which originated in a lecture to the annual Conference of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, of which Angus was a regular attender. Just as his analysis of what was necessary to understand the social and political conflicts of fifteenth century Castilian society led him to engage with economic theory and make himself a master of it, so did his interest in the Castilian/Granadan frontier require him to come to a better understanding of one of the most distinctive products of the period, the ballad. His intention, successfully carried out, was to identify the value of such works, hitherto the preserve of literary scholars, as sources of evidence for his purposes. He showed, with the clarity and precision for which he became renowned, that these were not the products of a diffuse popular culture, but actually the favoured entertainment of the social elite, particularly on the frontier. From this he was able to deduce that 'the hostility between Christians and Moors ceases to be such a dominating theme in the oral tradition of frontier society', with important consequences for the understanding of what united rather than what separated the two sides.[41]

This would not be his only foray into the use of literary evidence, and he wrote articles on a variety of such sources across a span of time extending from the verse *Cantigas de Santa María* of King Alfonso X *el Sabio* of Castile (1252–1284) to the *La Lozana andaluza* of Francisco Delicado (*c.* 1475–1535), a picaresque tale in dialogue form that was intended to criticise the vices of Rome in the time of Pope Clement VII (1523–34). He used them to illuminate themes that interested him, such as antisemitism, and to illuminate the lives of sectors of society ignored in the chronicles and

[40] Goodman, 'Bibliography', pp. xviii–xxi, items 3 to 53 in the section headed 'Articles'.

[41] A. MacKay, 'The ballad and the frontier in late medieval Spain', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 53 (1976), 22.

court literature of late medieval Spain. The range of topics that he covered in the publications of these years is impressive for its breadth and for the consistency of his evidence driven approach to making sense of whatever he studied. As one of his former research students has written in assessment of him: 'His contribution to frontier studies in the Iberian Peninsula has been acknowledged by generations of Spanish historians who have learned with his books and articles. His study on money and prices in fifteenth-century Castile were a spearhead in the economic studies of the medieval period in the early days after Franco's regime.'[42]

A new project based on archival research led to the publication of a book in Spanish in 1985, that was followed by a smaller scale English version, given to one of the annual meetings of 'The Historians of Medieval Spain', and then published in a volume of essays in honour of his long-term friend R. B. (Brian) Tate.[43] In this he examined the evidence for the events themselves, in the form of various depositions and witness statements preserved in the archive of the Duques de Medinaceli, and then moved on to reveal the motivations and consequences of this short-lived uprising. It is a remarkable piece of detective work that uses very localised sources to illuminate the wider context and significance of what they describe. The English version provides a succinct account of his findings, but the Spanish original publishes the documents in full.

This productivity brought its rewards in the form of rapid promotion. He was appointed a Senior Lecturer in 1981, and then a Reader in 1982, before being given a personal Professorship of Medieval History in 1985. These in turn led to greater administrative burdens. From 1985 to 1991 he served as Dean of the Scottish Universities International Summer School, organising its annual event, to which he attached great importance. He even planned to open it to students from Russia with money from the British Council.

He was strongly committed to international co-operation. In a memorial to him in the University of Edinburgh's School of History, a close colleague recalled that 'he always saw Edinburgh University as a European university and wholeheartedly embraced the Erasmus Exchange Scheme, for which he created the Coimbra group. This brought together medievalists from the universities of Edinburgh, Vienna,

[42] Ana Echevarria, personal communication.

[43] A. MacKay, *Anatomía de una revuelta urbana: Alcaraz en 1458* (Albacete, 1985); A. MacKay, 'A typical example of late medieval Castilian anarchy? The affray of 1458 in Alcara', in R. Cardwell and I. Michael (eds.), *Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Honour of Robert Brian Tate* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 81–93. On Tate, see B. Taylor and A. Coroleu, 'Robert Brian Tate 1921–2011', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 16 (2017), 303–21.

Poitiers, Siena, Salamanca and Granada, becoming a force attracting European, and in particular Spanish, students to Edinburgh.'[44]

Equally demanding, if not more so, was his appointment as Head of Department in 1990. Unlike many faced with such a charge, Angus did not reduce his commitment to research and publishing, as his bibliography for these years indicates. Instead he tried to enhance his productivity, as he had done while working on his first book, when his son remembered him working into the early hours of the morning, to 2am or beyond.[45] It has to be said that his energy did not of itself make him a natural administrator. Like his father, he was bored by routine, and had little patience with the kind of bureaucratic culture that even then was becoming ever more entrenched in British universities. What he valued he did to the best of his abilities. What he did not value might not get done, perhaps to the despair of his extremely efficient secretary. The same attitude led him, wisely or not, to accept an invitation to give weekly lectures in the University of Seville, flying to and from Edinburgh to do so. He was also preparing to write a late medieval contribution for Blackwell's multi-volume History of Spain series that would be his largest project since the completion of his *Spain in the Middle Ages* of 1977.

Rare is the Hispanist for whom a convivial discussion of a topic cannot be facilitated by a good glass of wine, preferably Spanish, and Angus was no exception. A friend and colleague recalled that 'the only piece of serious advice he gave me was over how he tackled intractable historical questions. He opened a bottle of red wine and by the time he had finished it the problem was solved.' Unfortunately, this was not the solution to the whole weight of demands placed upon him or which he himself had embraced from the late 1980s. These had been made worse by the death of his father in 1987 which, as his son recalls, 'was something he struggled to come to terms with. In one of his books he had dedicated his work to his father whom he described as "my father and my friend". Being as much of a "Scottish man" as it was possible to be, he did not communicate well emotionally and I think this, his father's death and the subsequent pressure of a range of academic activities combined to bring him low.'[46]

The exact nature of this is not easily recaptured. A colleague remembers the strange atmosphere in the Department of History one Monday morning when word got out that Angus had failed to come in, and hurried and secretive meetings were called between senior members and the administrators. In practice he was not to

[44] M. Angold, 'Angus MacKay, Professor Emeritus of Medieval History – a conspectus' (published 10 November2016),http://www.edinburgh.ac.uk/history-classics-archaeology/news/news-events/obituaries-tony-goodman-angus-makay/angus-mackay-a-conspectus (accessed 20 June 2019).
[45] Angus John MacKay's funeral eulogy on his father, 9 November 2016.
[46] Ibid.

return. A complete collapse in his health necessitated prolonged sick leave, and eventually formal retirement from his professorship nearly five years later in 1997. Looked after by his devoted family, and in particular by his wife, Linda, Angus effectively withdrew from the world of scholarship, other than providing a very brief prologue to the Spanish translation of his *Money, Prices and Politics in Fifteenth-Century Castile*.[47] His stamp collection, which he had formed over many years and which extended beyond just Hispanic issues, provided him with some intellectual stimulus.

In 2002 friends from Britain, Spain and the USA collaborated in a three-day conference in his honour in Edinburgh, though he himself was only able to attend the final ceremony, in which he was presented with the collection of essays they published in tribute to him.[48]

Verdicts on Angus the scholar are easier and more uniform than those on Angus the man. As an American friend and fellow Hispanist wrote in an obituary of him, 'Angus MacKay was a scholar of unique insights and generosity. He was also an engaging and selfless friend. His death on 29 October 2016 represents an immense loss to those who work on European medieval literature and history in general and that of the Iberian Middle Ages in particular. His absence is also one deeply felt by the many of us who knew him personally; who benefitted from his capacious intellect; and with whom he so gracefully shared his knowledge and bonhomie.'[49] Others recognised his learning and his great scholarly achievement but could find him 'difficult'. One perceptive colleague felt that Angus's originality 'required that he kept his distance'. In part this may have been prompted by his love of a good intellectual argument, pursued forcefully and vociferously; something with which some British academics are not entirely at ease. But this was integral to his personality. His son remembered 'his inability to distinguish between an academic debate to the death and a domestic discussion. He just wouldn't yield.'[50] This could make him seem threatening to those whose egos might be bruised by their favourite ideas or beliefs being assaulted. Apart from in the closeness and happiness of his home, he was probably most at ease in the company of congenial friends and his fellow Hispanists, though of not all of them did he approve. This could be at the annual Hispanist Association conferences or the more intimate setting of the yearly gatherings of 'The Historians of Medieval Spain'.[51] In

[47] A. MacKay, *Moneda, precios y política en la Castilla del siglo XV* (Granada, 2006), produced on the initiative of Manuel Gonzalez Jiménez, and furnished with an appreciation of Angus, pp. 13–15.
[48] Collins and Goodman, *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence*.
[49] T. F. Ruiz, 'In Memoriam Angus MacKay, 1939–2016', *La Corónica*, 45 (2017), 5–8.
[50] Angus John MacKay, funeral eulogy on his father, 9 November 2016.
[51] Founded by Peter Russell and Derek Lomax, this met originally in Oxford but subsequently became peripatetic around several British universities. Involving a small number of committed members, it involved four or five papers being given in just over twenty-four hours, with much time for discussion, wine and good fellowship.

particular, to be in Spain and in conversation with his close friends there was always a great delight.

In appearance, apart from a lack of concern about neatness that his family recognised as beyond remedy, he was for most of his adult life distinguished by a long, pointed beard that in repose might make him look like one of those stately Hidalgos, often Knights of the Order of Santiago, who stare enrapt out of the canvases of El Greco. But there the similarity ends, for Angus was never one for passive contemplation when there was work to be done, his eyes were rarely turned heavenwards, and his smile was more often mischievous or ironic rather than beatific.

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