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PREFACE

George Yule and British History

This special issue of *Parergon* is published to celebrate the contribution to early modern historical scholarship of George Shaw Sandon Yule (1919-2000), before, during and after his terms as Professor of Church History at Ormond College, University of Melbourne (1957-77) and Professor of Church History at the University of Aberdeen (1978-1988). After graduating from Scotch College, Melbourne in 1938, Yule went on to study for an Arts degree at Melbourne University. There he had the great good fortune to be among the first class of students taking British History B (Honours), in the year that Max Crawford introduced *Puritanism and Liberty*, A. S. P. Woodhouse's recently published edition of the Putney and Whitehall debates, as prescribed text for this course. George recalled in 1998 that 'These unique documents were very close to Crawford's main historical interests ... uncovering controversies over democracy, republicanism and religious toleration between opponents who had a great deal in common, especially in the Whitehall debate, and yet were in serious disagreement'.¹ The complexity, intensity and subtlety of these arguments between the New Model Army's commanding officers and representatives of the rank-and-file troopers resonated not only with Crawford and his newly-appointed lecturer Kathleen Fitzpatrick, but also with their students. After all, the issues and conflicts canvassed in 1647 and 1649 – of freedom and authority, ideology, power, and individual autonomy – were still being played out, and on a world stage. Moreover, Crawford and Fitzpatrick were outstanding teachers; 60 years later George recalled 'the feeling of anticipation I had when I went to attend Max Crawford's lectures, and rarely was I disappointed'.² The remarkable, in many respects path-breaking, first-year course on early modern British history which they constructed during these formative years would inspire several generations of Melbourne students throughout the 1940s and '50s, including an impressive tally of graduates who later went on to publish and teach in that same field.

¹ G. Yule, 'Max Crawford, Puritanism and the Reformation', in Max Crawford's School of History, ed. Stuart Macintyre and Peter McPhee (History Department, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2000), pp. 59-62 at 62.

² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Foremost among these was George Yule, who in 1947 submitted a thesis of some 80,000 words on 'The Development of Puritanism' for the degree of Master of Arts. Soon acquiring semi-legendary status among first-year history students at Melbourne, Yule's thesis was among the earliest sustained pieces of historical research and writing on an early modern topic ever completed from an Australian base, and almost certainly the first to have been awarded a higher degree by an Australian university. Although written following a year's research at Oxford on a Rockefeller studentship, his 1958 monograph, *The Independents in the English Civil War* (whose dust-jacket and spine proudly bear the Melbourne University Press imprint) was also a trail-blazing feat for an Australian early modernist, perhaps preceded only by G. V. Portus's *Caritas Anglicana* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1912). For this was still the era of the gentleman/lady-scholar/teacher, who regarded 'publish or perish' as a barbarous American irrelevance, not a career imperative. From our current embattled, performance-monitored academic vantage point, that attitude may well seem to have more going for it than once appeared. But George's publications certainly had nothing to do with self-promoting academic careerism.

Since the 1950s our scholarly environment has been transformed by photocopying, jet flights, computers and the Internet. Graduate studies in non-Australasian historical topics are no longer a rarity in Australian and New Zealand universities. But we should not forget those who led the way in a less technologically sophisticated age. While George may never have gathered a postgraduate entourage around him, his enquiring mind and generosity of spirit touched a great many, students and colleagues alike. Among four brief tributes to George's life and work published in a previous issue of *Parergon* (ns 18:3, July 2001, pp. xi-xviii), my own expressed regret that his 'pioneering achievements have yet to receive the formal recognition of a memorial volume from former colleagues and students'. Happily, these words did not fall on deaf ears or stony ground. At the February 2003 Melbourne conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, three sessions were devoted to 'Religion, Government and Society in Early Modern England: In Memoriam George Yule'. It is especially fitting that most of the papers printed below had their first airing in that forum, given George's prime role in establishing what has become a traditional pattern of biennial academic gatherings by Antipodean early modernists. Besides the authors of papers, we are indebted to two of George's most distinguished former students, Dr Lotte Mulligan and Professor Patricia Crawford, for their eloquent accounts of his continuing influence, both as teacher

and disciplinary colleague. During his first visit to Britain in 1947 this remarkable man impressed R. H. Tawney as ‘a very attractive fellow’.³ Those seeking further perspectives should consult the compilation where Dr Mulligan’s appreciation first appeared: *A Man of Grace: Papers Given at a Symposium to Honour the Life of Professor George Yule*, ed. Ian Breward (Melbourne: Theological Hall, Ormond College, 2002). The select bibliography of George’s scholarly publications on pp. XXX-XXX below was compiled by Carol Matthews; thanks are also due to Dr Helen Payne for expert assistance.

Wilfrid Prest
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George Yule and The Craft Of History

I first met George Yule in 1950 when he lectured us in the Honours class on the political and religious thought of the ‘English Revolution’. And it was the intellectual content of his lectures rather than the flair or style of delivery which took me by storm. In fact it was only after several classes that I realized what that youthful, yet shambling figure in his tweeds with frayed cuffs and baggy trousers was doing for us, up there, in front of the lectern. He wandered about thinking aloud, ruminating about the structures of thought which informed Presbyterians, Independents, radicals and sectarians, and about the intellectual origins of these modes of thought. What he said transformed my ideas, not just about the content of history but also how it should be studied.

In particular, our class was infected by his enthusiasm for the modes of thought behind the famous Putney debates. At that encounter, between the rank-and-file and the officers of the New Model Army at Putney church in 1647, the differing war aims of its participants and their incompatible ideals for the future settlement of the kingdom were elegantly yet passionately expressed. While the text of these debates was in print it was far too expensive for us to buy. So our knowledge of them came largely from George’s lectures or from the one battered copy which the library held and which we had to fight over for an occasional hour’s read. I still have my notes from those lectures. This was, I believe, our first real experience of

³ R. H. Tawney to Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 6 October 1947: University of Melbourne Archives, Fitzpatrick Papers, Box 2.

an *empathetic* understanding of the historical actors – an understanding which we were enjoined by R. G. Collingwood to cultivate for a truly *historical* knowledge of the past.

In my ‘Life before George’ I believed in the crudest Marxist rendering of these debates and the distinctions between the various groups vying for a political place. The Revolution was about the triumph of the Middle Class against the oppressive orders of Feudalism – represented by the absolute monarchy and the House of Lords. That Middle Class was successful in challenging its historically determined enemy and at the same time succeeded in keeping at bay the nascent Proletariat, represented by some of the more extreme sects, excluding them from holding power. My ‘more sophisticated’ version of that story, I remember, included treating Presbyterianism and Independency as devious Middle Class ideologies which dressed in religious language their manifest political and social agendas to exclude the outdated Church of England and its defenders, those vestiges of Feudalism. At the same time I remember trying to differentiate between these two otherwise identical groups by seeing one – the Presbyterians – as representing the urban Middle Class and the Independents as its rural equivalent. One side of the Putney debates therefore, represented these class interests. On the other side at Putney, the Proletariat challenged the power of the landed middle class and some of the aristocracy by putting up their radical demands for suffrage and other inalienable freedoms.

Now, enter George Yule. What George did, to us sophisticated materialists, was to expose the preposterous shallowness of such analyses. In a few momentous lectures he was to enable us to see that these debates, while seeming to be about quite secular issues of political authority and obligation, the franchise and the basis of political power, were based on an entirely theological underpinning. Without an understanding of that theological framework, we would never understand what these debates meant to the speakers, the historical actors passionately and urgently putting their positions and pitting themselves against their opponents.

George himself bestrode *his* stage in the Old Arts lecture and dominated through sheer intellectual force. He seemed to ramble and to hesitate yet it was a consummate performance. The history was complex and multi-layered and you had to work at it to get the point. Nevertheless the account opened for us a view of the seventeenth century which, however much we might have fought it, was very different from our world and required special understanding. In particular, it required that we took the contemporaries’ religion very seriously indeed. For what he did for us in ‘Life after George’ was to make us appreciate for the first

time how important it was to understand the thought and action of the people of the past in ways that made sense to *them*, rather than playing games in which they would fit into our crude and preconceived mental categories.

In the 1940s and early '50s it was not easy to persuade students to look with seriousness at theological frameworks and to make them take to the notion that religion was a central concern for every man and woman of the early modern world. The immediate post-war era was a time when materialist explanations seemed the obvious and self-evidently true way of reading the world. Indeed, if people of the Early Modern era chose to express themselves in obscure and transcendental ways, then it was our job, as indeed Christopher Hill, the doyen of seventeenth-century English history, enjoined us 'to make allowances for the Biblical idiom... and try to penetrate through to the thought beneath' (*Winstanley, The Law of Freedom and other Writings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). George Yule would have none of it. We were made to take the Biblical idiom very seriously indeed, and to do so in order to understand what those men were fighting, writing and talking about at Putney and elsewhere in England in 1647-8.

In other words, we learned not only about the mental world of the protagonists during those exciting times, what mattered to them and how *they* made sense of their world; we learnt, even more importantly, to listen to the language, to understand its subtlety and its meaning within the specific context in which it was uttered. In other words, we learned how to do real history. and not to 'play tricks upon the dead' by making them say what we found relevant to our world.

Of all my teachers in those heady years 1948-51, George taught me most about the craft of history. It is hardly surprising that I chose to specialize in seventeenth-century British history and that I have studied its language and discourse ever since. And I have done so sharing George's particular interest in the theological framework which gave shape and meaning to virtually all aspects of the political and social world of the times. For what I have received from George Yule I shall always remain most profoundly thankful. He was a man whom I continued to admire and whose work went on to inform the conversation of historians. Over the years I found his work always refreshingly innovative and insightful, right to the very end of his life.

As his student, and later his colleague and fellow-academic, I remain in George Yule's debt for the rest of my days.

Lotte Mulligan
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George Yule's Continuing Influence

Throughout the 1950s, George Yule continued to inspire students at the University of Melbourne with a love of history. In 1958 I was a first-year student in a British History course with five hundred others. George paced the rostrum of the Public Lecture Theatre in the Old Arts building expounding the intricacies of the gentry: had the economic prosperity of the Protestant English gentry led to their challenge to the *ancien régime* of the monarchy in the English Civil Wars, usually then referred to as 'the English revolution'? Or was the central issue rather one of rival forms of religious belief? George's own passionate engagement with the controversy sent us hurrying to the Baillieu Library to read the latest articles by Hexter and Hill. Students had nearly worn out the library copy of his Melbourne MA thesis on Puritans and Puritanism. We also eagerly read his book, *The Independents in the English Civil War*, published by Cambridge University Press that year. There, noting that 'The English Civil War still remains something of an enigma', he explored 'the connexion between the Parliamentary Independent party and religious Independency' (p. 1), arguing that, as Lotte Mulligan has explained, religion mattered. George gave us a sense that we, even as first-year students, were participating in an international debate: historical questions about the nature of social class, economic success, beliefs and politics were proper subjects for Australian students to be involved with. Thus from the teaching of those first-year classes – George came in from Ormond to teach with Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Mick Williams, Max Crawford, Don Kennedy and Laurie Gardiner – developed many of the Australian historians of the medieval and early modern periods.

George also did a lot of college tutoring. From 1970, Phillipa Maddern recalls her very first class:

George got us started by showing us an aerial photo of part of the English countryside, with the medieval ridge and furrow still showing, and asked us to deduce what it could be. He then talked about how there were so many different sorts of evidence, and how we should critically interrogate them all. I think it was that tutorial which he finished with the dictum 'Never forget, that it's as great an historical fault to make too little of your evidence as to make too much of it.' And I never have forgotten it, though I don't say I've always borne it out in practice.

George was always willing to discuss the work he was engaged in: sometimes it was the influence of the European reformers on those in England, Luther rather than

Calvin; other times it was grass-roots religious practices, or the state of the church in Australia. He loved English parish churches, and visited them systematically, studying how the sacred space had been organized over the centuries. His enthusiasm was infectious, and was generously extended to younger scholars for their own research projects, even if they were on very different aspects of the early modern period from those that fascinated him.

One further point: Australasian scholars of early modern studies might like to remember that it was George Yule who organized their first conference in 1970. George decided that people should gather together to talk history; he invited them to Melbourne; 'it only took a few hours to organize' he told me. This meeting became the first biennial conference of AHMEME (Australasian Historians of Medieval and Early Modern Europe), which eventually amalgamated with ANZAMRS (Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies) to form the present ANZAMEMS (Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies). George was a welcome participant at these conferences and usually offered a paper, continuing to share his passion for the study of the past. I like to think that readers of this memorial volume will be participating in an on-going Australian conversation about things that matter.

Patricia Crawford
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