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Introduction

THE VIEW FROM 1955

THIS IS THE STORY of a golden age—and its discontents. It examines Britain's Oxford- and Cambridge-based intellectual elite, the research and teaching staff of the two universities—known colloquially as the dons—by way of a series of interlinked episodes, controversies and themes. The experiences of wartime endowed this elite with a confident worldliness which enabled its members to participate in public debate and to take a lead in the general culture of the UK during the decades after 1945. That is the focus of the book. However, its final chapters also explore the waning of this golden age. The dons were knocked off their pedestal by a series of unwelcome developments, including student protests in the 1960s and early 1970s. Later, some dons, both on the Right and, less predictably, on the centre-Left, were involved in the rise of Thatcherite attitudes, largely out of a concern to maintain standards. But there was no safe haven for the old values. Thatcherism consciously strove to tame the universities and to nurture an entrepreneurial culture hitherto stifled and suffocated, so Thatcherites alleged, by the mandarin anti-industrial attitudes fostered in Oxbridge (the shorthand used to denote the two medieval English universities).[1]

Why do—or did—the dons of Oxford and Cambridge matter? They comprised a crucial component in British cultural life, distinct from the literary intelligentsia of the metropolis yet close enough to London to contribute to broadcasting and the press. The dons played a central role in the intellectual life of the nation, not only through scholarly publication but also through education and the shaping of opinion more broadly. As late as 1945–46 around 20 percent of the UK student population was at Oxford and Cambridge.[2] Moreover, the nation at large was captivated by the supposed glamour of

Oxbridge, and the media obsessed with it. A succession of television dramas featuring the ancient universities—*The Glittering Prizes* (BBC, 1976), *Brideshead Revisited* (Granada TV, 1981), *Porterhouse Blue* (Channel 4, 1987)—entertained a population that had no particular interest in higher learning but was intrigued by the mystique of Oxbridge. There was also something exceptional about the relationship of Oxbridge dons to the British establishment. The dons taught the country's rulers.

The fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges played a massively disproportionate role in educating British elites, not only the country's politicians but also its judiciary and the senior civil servants of the bureaucratic state. In 1950, 60 percent of senior civil servants in the highest ranks had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge, as well as just over 80 percent of civil service entrants at assistant secretary or above admitted through open competition.[3] Of the United Kingdom's postwar prime ministers through to the 1980s, Clement Attlee, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, Harold Wilson, Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher had all been educated at Oxford. Indeed, from 1960 until his death in 1987 Macmillan held the ceremonial role of Oxford University's chancellor. It's estimated that a third of the UK's cabinet ministers in the twentieth century had been educated at Oxford alone.[4] A telling example of the incestuousness at the apex of British public life arose in the early 1970s when the retired Oxford don Sir John Masterman, having been repeatedly blocked by the authorities from publishing an account of the intelligence activities of the wartime XX committee, which Masterman had chaired, decided to evade these restrictions by publishing in the United States with Yale University Press. The three senior figures who met to discuss the problem—Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the foreign secretary; Sir Denis Greenhill, the permanent secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and Sir Dick White, the former head of MI5 and MI6—were all former pupils of Masterman at Christ Church, Oxford. Douglas-Home's assessment of the situation captures the easy relationships prevailing between members of the establishment and the dons who had educated them: 'If I can't trust my old tutor, who can I trust?'[5]

However, the relationship between Oxbridge and the political elite was not a simple one-way process of education and intellectual formation. Many of the leading politicians had at one time been dons themselves, and those with a connection to All Souls College, Oxford—a prominent nursery of politicians with an atypical roster of fellows in public life—remained quasi dons of a sort. In Wilson's Labour Cabinets, the former dons included the prime minister, Patrick Gordon Walker, Richard Crossman, Anthony Crosland, and Lord

Longford, as well as Douglas Jay of All Souls; in addition, Wilson's economic adviser, Thomas Balogh, was a fellow of Balliol College, Oxford.[6] Similarly, Thatcher's Cabinets contained three fellows of All Souls—Quintin Hailsham, Keith Joseph and, briefly, William Waldegrave—while a fourth, John Redwood, was head of the Downing Street Policy Unit. The most spectacular example of this curious entanglement between dons and politics was Rab Butler—who served variously as education secretary, chancellor of the Exchequer, home secretary, foreign secretary and acting prime minister between the 1940s and 1960s; the son of the master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, he started out his career as a don himself at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and on his retirement from frontline politics became master of Trinity College, Cambridge. Many figures from public life, senior civil servants as well as politicians, trod a path similar to Butler's, returning later in life to positions as heads of college in Oxford or Cambridge. Indeed, Butler was one of several education ministers in our period—secretaries of state for education as well as their junior ministers responsible for the universities—who had been fellows of Oxford colleges, alongside Crosland, Hailsham, Gordon Walker, Norman Crowther-Hunt,[7] Joseph, Waldegrave and Robert Jackson, followed by John Patten, a former don in geography at Hertford College, who was secretary of state for education between 1992 and 1994 in John Major's government.

These links with the upper strata of the English establishment shaped the self-image and aspirations of the dons, which were closer to the preindustrial ideal of gentility than to modern technocratic values. One contemporary insider thought that an Oxbridge fellowship belonged 'to the traditional gentle society of England, as much as any country estate or regiment of the line.'[8] In varying degrees dons aped the manners of the social elite that they taught, priding themselves not only on their academic expertise but also on their refined appreciation of the finer things in life.[9] The close interconnectedness between Oxbridge and the establishment marks out the dons as something different both from intelligentsias in other countries, which were so often anti-establishment in character, and from the pervasive idea of the intellectual as a nay-saying outsider, 'a spirit in opposition, rather than in accommodation'.[10] In England, by contrast, academic prestige was closely intertwined with social status. The dons of postwar Oxbridge were not so much an independent adversarial intelligentsia as something more akin to an estate of the realm.

This account of the dons takes the form of an intellectual history, though, as we know, 'intellectuals' at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge long disdained the label, and indeed happily joined in the English practice of deriding

the species.[11] Nevertheless, as Stefan Collini has observed, in England 'a tradition of self-satisfied hostility to the *idea* of "intellectuals"' coexisted with a broader 'respect for intellectual activity'.[12] Oxbridge dons, however, were not only esteemed for their learning but also attracted deference of a social kind, belonging as they did to one of the citadels of the English establishment. In some respects, the dons operated in a corporate sense as an extension of the governing class. As such, the dons constitute a highly unusual caste, one whose primary activity was cerebral but which distinguished itself sharply from the 'free-floating', highbrow countercultural intelligentsias of the Continent.[13] Nor did dons much care to identify themselves with their fellow academics in the United States, who followed their vocations, it seemed, with a professional, po-faced pomposity, lumbering gait and woefully unnecessary seriousness, which would have been altogether out of place in postwar Oxbridge. Style mattered, indeed was inseparable from substance and achievement.

A further distinction pertained to England's universities. Oxford and Cambridge were widely recognised—both by Oxbridge dons themselves and by outsiders—as a thing apart from England's newer nineteenth- and early twentieth-century universities, which were known collectively and often pejoratively as 'Redbrick'.[14] Despite the variety of institutions and locations encompassed by 'Redbrick', mid-twentieth-century commentators were condescendingly dismissive of these new universities as nonresidential city-based institutions; too crassly utilitarian in their offerings and lacking either the communal ethos of collegiate life or Oxbridge-style one-to-one tutorials which might impart polish to their graduates. Of course, the residual quasi-aristocratic aspirations of Oxbridge provided the yardstick—social and cultural as much as intellectual—by which Redbrick was so harshly judged.[15]

However, the term 'Oxbridge' conceals, perhaps, as much as it reveals. For there were significant differences—not immediately observable to the outsider—in the way that the two historic universities conducted their affairs. Both were collegiate universities, each an ensemble of self-governing colleges, alongside which a further distinct entity, the university, brought a measure of coherence to the whole. The colleges and the university were technically autonomous corporations, the latter governed by the democratic aggregate of all the dons in each university. Moreover, each entity provided different kinds of academic services: the colleges provided in-house tutorial teaching for undergraduates individually or in pairs, while the university organised lectures, formal classes and examinations. Nevertheless, the balance between college autonomy and the guiding hand of university authority was different in each

institution. Cambridge had 'a stronger and more independent centre than Oxford', largely because of Cambridge's earlier and more engaged response to the demands of laboratory-based science disciplines.[16] As a result, the university in Cambridge was able to exert considerably more central control over the colleges, not least as academic employment was oriented towards the needs of the university. University chairs and lectureships were highly prized, but college teaching fellowships unsupported by the university were less well remunerated, financially burdensome to the colleges, especially the poorer ones, and often proved something of a frustrating cul-de-sac for academic ambition. In Oxford, by contrast, most posts on the arts side were held as Common University Fund lectureships. These were in effect dual appointments where the university and a college imposed distinct contractual obligations on the academic and each paid a proportion of the stipend. Additionally, professorial chairs in Oxford were tied to particular colleges, unlike in Cambridge, where professorial postholders were not so circumscribed in their choice of college affiliation. On the other hand, such differences were much less obvious than the shared characteristics of the two collegiate universities, which were broadly similar in form and function and utterly different from any other institutions of higher education in the UK or farther afield. Indeed, if 'Oxbridge' is to any degree a misnomer, so too are both 'Oxford' and 'Cambridge', for, according to one informed contemporary observation in 1964, 'there [was] much more variability *within* each University than there [was] between them.'[17] This was because each of the individual colleges within the two universities had its own distinctive stamp and spirit, customs and traditions, flavours and subcultures (supported in some cases by their own very significant endowments). Nevertheless, from the interwar era Oxbridge arguably became a 'real entity', with a growing interchange of academics between the two universities, and the beginning of twinning arrangements between sister colleges, starting with the alliance of the two Corpus Christi colleges in 1926, Merton and Peterhouse in 1930 and New College and King's in 1931.[18]

Notwithstanding these minor caveats about the subtle differences between the two ancient universities, Oxbridge was irreducibly itself: as untranslatable into European or North American or English Redbrick terms as the Inns of Court to other countries' legal professions or the undogmatic, doctrinally promiscuous Church of England to more sharply defined species of denominational Christianity. Indeed, it is part of this project to tease out the social and cultural strands of Oxbridge life that bore no comparison whatsoever to intellectual life elsewhere.[19] Not that Oxbridge was an unchanging entity: far from

it. The book attempts to capture Oxbridge at a particular moment of only a few decades duration, when the dons enjoyed high prestige, freedom and confidence, though when some of the threats to this blissful existence were becoming visible, sometimes already pressing.

Once upon a time dons had been a quasi-monastic class: almost entirely celibate (apart from heads of colleges and holders of professorial chairs), largely in holy orders, and compelled to subscribe the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Oxford and Cambridge universities had been glorified seminaries. However, the Universities Tests Act of 1871 opened all offices to non-Anglicans, except those explicitly tied to holy orders. A few individual colleges had begun to amend their statutory provisions against marriage from 1869; then further general reforms between 1877 and 1882 allowed fellows of Oxbridge colleges to marry. These changes helped to transform a body of ecclesiastics (or notional would-be ecclesiastics required to take holy orders within a few years of assuming their fellowships) into something very different: an embryonic academic profession.[20] In 1814, 9 percent of Oxford fellows were engaged in educational activities; by 1900, the proportion had risen to 58 percent.[21] However, the shadow of the profession's semimonastic pedigree was never entirely effaced. A century later it was not uncommon for those unmarried dons living all year round in college to reproach married colleagues for their nonresidence: the 'good college man' was the one who sacrificed his life, often his own research, and his family, if he had one, to provide wraparound tutorial and pastoral supervision to his young men. The establishment of the first women's colleges in 1879 also gave rise to another new phenomenon, the female don, though it would take longer for women to be integrated properly into the operations of the two universities. The gradual disengagement from the thrall of the church gave rise to new freedoms for the dons. Nevertheless, worldliness came upon the dons gradually, until the demands and opportunities generated in the Second World War wrought a more complete transformation.

Indeed, the book attempts to capture a short-lived moment in the corporate life of England's cultural leadership, what—after a coinage by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1830—is sometimes called its 'clerisy'.[22] In Coleridge's formulation, the term, which encompassed the parochial clergy and schoolmasters of the nation, as well as the scholars based in the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge, was assigned to what was, broadly speaking, an endowed establishment entrusted with the maintenance of civilised values and higher truths. However, the loosening of the Church of England's monopoly over public life altered the character of the clerisy, displacing the authority of the

traditional spiritual order: Anglicanism found itself challenged first by competing denominations and then by the forces of secularism and indifference. The fact that one particular subset of the Anglican clergy, the fellows of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a partly secularised corps of professional academics created the possibility of a new kind of clerisy. But the processes of detachment and secularisation were slow and piecemeal. Oxbridge in the first half of the twentieth century still bore a marked Anglican countenance. As late as 1947 Sir Walter Moberly, a former fellow of Merton and Lincoln Colleges at Oxford and chair of the University Grants Committee, which oversaw funding of the universities on behalf of the UK Treasury, still conceived of the university system in terms of an ethical mission grounded in a 'Christian-Hellenic' cultivation of the whole person, however 'diluted' the specifically Christian element was in practice. Indeed, he specifically contrasted the 'honoured'—if notional—position of religious observance in Oxford and Cambridge college life with the spiritual 'impoverishment' of Redbrick instruction.[23]

The Second World War had, however, hastened change. A new, more properly secular Oxford- and Cambridge-based clerisy would reach the zenith of its influence as a significant and autonomous body in the aftermath of the war. It enjoyed, moreover, access to powerful new modes of communication in the broadcast media. The secular clerisy was also energised by infusions of new blood—most obviously grammar schoolboys but also nonbelievers and Jews—from outside the conventional public-school-educated Anglican upper and upper-middle classes. The calibre of the dons was higher than before, their self-confidence enhanced by wartime service; something that equipped them for an amphibious life, on the public stage as well as in the academy. Nevertheless, the golden age of this worldly secular clerisy proved of very short duration, a matter of a few decades at most. Various shocks—external in the form of government intrusion and demands for accountability; internal in the form of student protest—disturbed the authority of this secular clerisy. By the late twentieth century, the secular clerisy of the dons had lost much of its worldly standing and corporate authority, vacating any pretensions to leadership or to shaping a national conversation. An academic vocation had become a professional job like any other, one carrying with it, paradoxically, the taint of a secular otherworldliness. Nor has any other group since—certainly not journalists or the technocrats who staff think tanks—adequately assumed the role of the nation's higher conscience.

In the late 1940s, there were eight hundred or so academic staff at Oxford and seven hundred plus at Cambridge, which rose to just under three thousand academics in Oxbridge as a whole by the early 1970s.[24] Between 1945 and 1970 most Oxford college fellowships doubled in size, some nearly tripling; for example Balliol College went from twenty-three to fifty-seven fellows.[25] There was a similar story of growth in Cambridge. Given these numbers, it is impossible to recover in any serious or meaningful fashion the intellectual lives of the thousands of dons in the sciences as well as the humanities who worked in Oxbridge during the third quarter of the twentieth century. What the book aims to do instead is to focus its attention on the intellectual leaders of this highly distinctive academic elite. It eavesdrops on the most prominent members of this influential cadre, almost exclusively in the humanities and social sciences: those who were prepared to participate in debates within the public realm, not only about their own disciplines but also about the relationship between disciplines, about the character and role of the universities as national institutions and about matters of much wider public concern. There is a fluid cast of central characters, several of whom were scholars of international distinction: among the philosophers and political theorists, Isaiah Berlin and Elizabeth Anscombe; among the historians, Hugh Trevor-Roper and J. H. Plumb; and among the social scientists, Edmund Leach and Bryan Wilson. We shall also consider some impressively versatile figures who achieved prominence as both scholars and academic administrators, including Noel Annan, Herbert Butterfield and Mary Warnock, as well as the gifted and supremely entrepreneurial Peter Laslett, a trailblazing pioneer in two distinct fields of historical study as well as an energetic educational reformer. However, the book also includes figures drawn from a variety of disciplines and roles, including eminent jurists, theologians, classicists, literary critics, and a specialist in eastern religions, Robert Zaehner. Most of the book's main protagonists appear in more than one chapter and provide a central organising spine for the study as a whole. However, the narrative model is that of a roman-fleuve, with characters and networks moving in and out of focus, from wings to centre stage, as individual episodes unfold. Although a comprehensive survey of the entire class of Oxbridge dons is beyond the volume's remit or this author's capabilities, it is hoped that by teasing out the views of the dons from several different angles of approach, this book captures something greater than the aggregate of the individuals it targets.

I should also address at the outset certain matters of tone. It is hard enough to write sympathetically about an elite, not least about an elite group which

was predominantly male, almost exclusively white and whose leaders sometimes expressed opinions from which our own generations recoil. In addition, any author dealing with Oxbridge has to navigate a treacherous course between the seductive myths and journalistic clichés associated with these two universities and the disconcerting reality that some of these supposed legends are grounded in practice. Indeed, it has been a far-from-uncommon sport among dons to play up to media expectations, and one historian of a Cambridge college warns that Oxbridge stereotypes have 'often been fostered as assiduously by those within the two universities as by those outside.'[26] There are further problems to address. I knew personally a few of the people about whom I write and have long admired the work—and especially the style of the scholarship—of many of the protagonists in this book. I remain acutely conscious of the danger that the register might on occasions appear collusive or overly reverential. Indeed, there is the deeper complication that I always endeavour—as a necessary act of historical imagination—to see the world in some degree through the eyes of my subjects. On the other hand, some of the snobberies, pettiness and crusty attitudes exhibited by the postwar dons now seem preposterously archaic; and it is hard at times to suppress the odd snicker or even snort of derision when confronted by their foibles. Dealing with the lives of recent generations, and especially with figures one has known personally, presents larger than normal challenges to the scholarly ideal of austere objectivity. But it would be wrong if such imperatives in the humanities led us to suppress entirely our all-too-human response to the near past, which means here—hopefully—a balanced mixture of due appreciation, respect for one's forebears, gentle ribbing and hints of satire. Otherwise, it becomes that much harder to capture for the general reader the personalities of individual dons.

This book takes the form of a collection of thematic chapters, each taking its point of departure from an episode, individual or controversy as a means of opening discussion of a major topic pertinent to the experience of Oxbridge dons. I have tried as far as possible to concentrate upon topics which have not so far attracted much attention, or to approach more familiar subjects from a fresh angle (such as student protests viewed from the perspective of the dons). The attention of historians has, understandably enough, focussed on a narrow canon of issues which tend to recur in the literature on modern British intellectual life: the role of intellectuals in the cultural cold war,[27] the supremacy of ordinary language philosophy, the two cultures debate, and the New Left's thesis that England lacked a proper intelligentsia. The dominance of ordinary language philosophy—in Oxford especially—and the uninhibited and

satirical assault upon it launched by Ernest Gellner created a furore at the time,[28] and it continues to be a topic of considerable fascination.[29] Ordinary language philosophy depended on the insight that many philosophical problems arose as a result of confusions about the uses of everyday words. Linguistic analysis presented itself as a method of unblocking awkward obstructions in this field, with implications too for other areas of enquiry, including, as we shall see, political theory and theology. To its critics, however, ordinary language philosophy seemed to be an evasion of fundamental first-order problems by way of a flight in the direction of second-order concerns about linguistic usage. Gellner, its foremost critic, though based at the London School of Economics, was himself a Balliol-educated philosopher, who would decades later become professor of anthropology at Cambridge. Gellner wrote several spirited essays on the topic, which he expanded into a controversial book-length treatment, *Words and Things*, in 1959. Ordinary language philosophy, he argued, was nothing more than the 'Higher Lexicography', a platitudinous enterprise that eschewed value judgment, smothered issues of consequence and was as such ultimately uncritical of accepted norms. To these strangely passive 'usage-idolators', linguistic precision appeared to matter more than the stance one adopted with respect to the external world.[30] More vitriolic still in contemporary intellectual life was the debate over the two cultures, the idea advanced in 1959 by the scientist-turned-novelist C. P. Snow of a growing gulf within the educated classes between the achievements of modern scientists and an arts-based intelligentsia which was functionally illiterate in the physical sciences, ignorant of the most basic concepts. There followed a belligerent response in 1962 from the Cambridge literary scholar and secular jeremiah F. R. Leavis, which provoked in turn a rejoinder from Snow.[31] A further major controversy erupted in the mid-1960s when Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, leading figures in the British New Left, launched a critique of the deformations and peculiarities of English life, including the stunted development of anything resembling an intelligentsia. In particular, they bemoaned the absence in England of a sociologically directed intelligentsia and as a corollary the bluntness of any critical edge in its intellectual life.[32] However, their analysis was seriously questioned on the wider Left itself by E. P. Thompson.[33] In due course, the supposed absence of an adversarial, socially engaged intelligentsia became itself a central feature in British intellectual history.[34] These standard topics will not command centre stage in what follows. Rather, I have deliberately chosen to broaden the canon, to focus on other topics which provoked plenty of contemporary comment and controversy but have not loomed as

large in the offerings of historians. Nonetheless, the familiar themes do surface from time to time as part of the surrounding context or as noises off.

The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, as well as British higher education more generally, have also inspired a vast literature, whose primary focus is institutional—structure and organisation, the workings of committees and commissions, changes in curricula, relations between universities and their constituent colleges and between universities and the state.[35] All of these surface here where relevant, but they do not constitute this volume's primary fare. What's missing from the literature is any serious attempt to treat the dons as intellectuals first and foremost. It is the main intention of this volume to capture something of the intellectual interests and range, the manner, the style, the idioms of the donnish caste. The volume's case studies include the strange accommodation forged between Anglicanism and agnosticism, and even with what was, for the most part, a politely diffident atheism whose exponents acquiesced in the maintenance of college chapels and chaplains. Some of the loudest and most unrestrained attacks on the conservative complacency of Oxbridge came from a subset of Roman Catholic dons, intellectuals whose very being lay outside the gravitational field of the wholly or partly secularised Anglican consensus. We shall also examine donnish attitudes to the rise of the social sciences, and in particular the rather different receptions enjoyed by social anthropology—recognised as a close cousin of classics and history—and by sociology, whose addition to Oxbridge curricula was long resisted as akin to the admission of outright barbarism. Nor shall we ignore the lure of abroad, particularly of America and France, one emblematic of wealth, the other of a society where academic prestige seemed to be celebrated unreservedly in intellectual, not merely social, terms. Relations with France and America will be examined through the lens of the donnish response to the cult of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and its aftermath, both episodes providing poignant case studies of Oxbridge attitudes and intellectual styles. In addition, we shall examine the phenomenon of donnish 'overassimilation' to supposed establishment norms, donnish responses to the student troubles of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the turn to a kind of proto-Thatcherism which these protests engendered.

That there was something odd about the dons of Oxford and Cambridge—not simply as a set of quirky and eccentric individuals but collectively, structurally

and institutionally—came firmly into focus in a pair of influential essays published in 1955. The authors, who wrote largely independent of one another, were the American sociologist Edward Shils and Noel Annan, then a fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Shils would later become a don himself, as a fellow of King's (1961–70) and then as a fellow of Cambridge's oldest college, Peterhouse, from 1970, posts held jointly with his chair at the University of Chicago. In 1962 Shils established the specialist journal *Minerva*, whose remit was the sociology of knowledge and the study of higher education, which he edited from 1962 to 1994. Annan, an intellectual historian and part-time devotee of sociology, maintained a similarly keen eye for the structures and doings of the world of higher learning. In their essays of 1955, Shils and Annan depicted an unusual state of affairs in modern English culture: a body of intellectuals which, far from constituting an intelligentsia of the continental type, was profoundly integrated into the fabric of English society and its established institutions. The fellows of the colleges of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were—for all their insight, wit, intellectual penetration, ingenuity and sophistication—complacently uncritical upholders of the British establishment.

In an article first published in *Encounter*, entitled 'The Intellectuals 1. Great Britain' (and later republished as 'British Intellectuals in the Mid-Twentieth Century'), Shils detected something highly unusual in the British intelligentsia of the mid-1950s.[36] 'Outside the China of the mandarins,' he proclaimed, 'no great society has ever had a body of intellectuals so integrated with, and so congenial to, its ruling class, and so combining civility and refinement.' However, British intellectual life had not been like this during the 1930s. Back then British intellectuals had experienced 'alienation', feeling more powerfully drawn to Moscow—as well as to Paris—than to the home counties of England. What had changed in the interim? What explained the 'extraordinary state of collective self-satisfaction' evident in the English intelligentsia of the mid-1950s? Shils argued that these interwar dissatisfactions were themselves a blip, and that the deployment of intellectuals in the service of the state during the Second World War had restored the 'residual loyalty' of an intellectual class whose normal instincts were far from 'oppositional'. The war had alleviated any interwar pangs of alienation, primarily because the war, Shils contended, had given 'much more for intellectuals to do as intellectuals.' It was not only scientists who had been absorbed into the war effort and given high responsibilities but also historians, economists, linguists, philosophers and other humanities scholars. Otherwise unworldly academics had 'found hospitality in official circles, in the Cabinet offices, in the Ministry of Information, in the Political

Warfare Executive, in the BBC, in military intelligence, in the War Office Selection Boards'. Significantly, these institutions 'provided an appreciative audience for the intellectuals in their intellectual capacities', and, moreover, provided a sharp and telling contrast with the intellectuals' perception during the 1930s of the supposed anti-intellectualism of the authorities. Such perceptions had gone: 'How could a society which maintained the Third Programme [the highbrow BBC radio channel], the Arts Council, the British Council . . . be regarded as lacking in sympathy for intellectual things?' A Labour government, and then a mild Conservative administration which acquiesced in much of Labour's achievement, led to the 'evaporation of ideology'.

However, as Shils noted, there was something 'deeper' at work here than the state's wooing of academia. He perceived the 'vindication' and 'restoration' in the postwar era of 'the culture associated with the aristocracy and the gentry'. In England the bourgeois spirit had never attained preeminence over 'aristocratic-gentry culture', the former being long associated with philistine dissent and provinciality. Thus, when oppositional values withered during the war and its aftermath, it was not to the claims of the bourgeois ethos that the intellectuals succumbed but to the altogether brighter charms bequeathed by a landed ancien régime. This meant, Shils contended, that the 'reestablishment of amicable and harmonious relations' in the postwar era 'between the intellectuals and British society' was tantamount to 'the unification of the intellectuals with the other groups of the ruling elite'. Britain was no longer governed by 'an active aristocracy', but its values had been transmitted 'to certain institutions allied to those classes', including the civil service, parliament, the Inns of Court, the Church of England and the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Put another way, Shils explained, the war had created opportunities for many young men of ordinary backgrounds to 'be schooled as officers and gentlemen' within the postaristocratic culture of the armed forces. On the part of such 'marginal persons', Shils noted, there prevailed 'a tendency towards "overassimilation"—becoming more genteel than gentility requires'. The patriotic attachment to Englishness of the postwar English intelligentsia involved bowing down to the idols of the culture associated with the privileged elite of the home counties, to its food and wine, to its lifestyle aspirations—'cultivation, affluence, worldiness, and ease'. In effect, Shils argued, the postwar intelligentsia had reattached itself 'to a sector of the upper classes'.

Annan's account of the making of the English intelligentsia provided a measure of reinforcement for the thesis advanced by Shils. In his influential

essay 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', Annan situated what he called England's 'aristocracy of intellect' in a web of 'family connexions' and intermarriage. Whereas most intelligentsias tended to be 'shiftless', England's was 'unexcitable' and a force for 'stability'. Family history helped to explain 'the paradox of an intelligentsia which appears to conform rather than rebel against the rest of society.' After the abolition of celibacy restrictions for college fellows, Cambridge witnessed the emergence of a distinctive caste of intermarried donnish dynasties. This grew out of previous patterns of connection and alliance within a high-minded reformist bourgeoisie, an 'aristocracy of intellect' which had developed from the early nineteenth century. The dramatis personae included the Trevelyan, Huxley, Darwin, Adrian, Mayor, Butler and Keynes families, as well as sundry other clans. Interconnection did not fully inhibit freethinking or social criticism, for a shared high-mindedness underpinned these matrimonial networks. They were generally progressive in orientation, but the families were not entirely wrapped up in academic life, and their members moved 'between the worlds of speculation and government'. Thus, these interrelated intellectuals did not constitute an uncritical grouping, and they took occasional potshots at social phenomena of which they disapproved; but as a caste this intelligentsia bore the unusual stamp of what Annan termed a 'proconsular tradition' and an 'English habit of working through established institutions'. They were grounded and gradualist, willing to work with rather than against the grain of English tradition. 'Here,' proclaimed Annan, is 'an aristocracy, secure, established, and, like the rest of English society, accustomed to responsible and judicious utterance and sceptical of iconoclastic speculation.'[37]

The essays of Shils and Annan chimed with another coinage of the period, the use of the term 'establishment' to describe the network of public schools, Oxbridge, higher civil service, the Church of England, and professions which dominated English society. Although the term appears in a *New Statesman* review of 1953 by the celebrated Oxford historian A.J.P. Taylor,[38] it resurfaced with greater fanfare in 1955 in an opinion piece by the journalist Henry Fairlie. Commenting on the reappearance in Moscow of the missing Cambridge-educated Soviet moles Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, Fairlie invoked 'the establishment' to explain how these two double agents had got away with things for so long. Fairlie defined the establishment to mean not only 'the centres of official power' but also 'the whole matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised'. Power in England, Fairlie insisted, was 'exercised socially'.[39] Oxbridge—like the public schools and the Church of

England—comprised the warp and woof of what another journalist, Rayner Heppenstall, called England's 'southern-squirearchical' tradition.[40] Indeed, according to Denis Brogan, the professor of political science at Cambridge, in a self-congratulatory review of Raymond Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels* (1955), it was because England's social elite was so 'closely integrated' that the dons of Oxford and Cambridge were in fact 'more in touch with reality' and less 'silly' than their academic counterparts in France—despite the public fuss the French media made of intellectuals, which created the opposite, highly misleading impression.[41]

The analyses of Shils and Annan paved the way for a polemically charged debate about whether England was a stolidly conservative land without a proper intelligentsia, or at least without the sort of intellectuals who mattered—radical sociologists, Marxist political theorists and the like. In 1955 Peter Laslett was already urging traditional humanistic scholars to recognise the ways in which sociology—hitherto viewed as an alien and unwelcome intruder into English academia—might enrich historical understanding.[42] However, the battle for the acceptance of sociology at Oxbridge would last for years. Not that academic life in postwar Oxbridge was frozen in anti-intellectual rigidity. For instance, 1955 saw the formation of the British Association for American Studies, at a conference hosted at University College, Oxford.[43] Complacency and conservatism did not preclude change and innovation; indeed, the self-confidence that came from being part of the English establishment was a driver of curricular development and academic outreach.

Annan was himself a spectacular exemplar not so much of his own argument as of Shils's: here was a don supremely integrated into the world of governance and administration but one who did not put down his scholarly pen when he assumed the cumbersome duties of administration. In spite of the reams of turgid administrative documentation which he absorbed, Annan kept pace, effortlessly it seemed, with developments across a wide range of academic disciplines and was to be recognised, certainly by the end of life, as a major pioneer in the field of modern intellectual history. Annan had already demonstrated his administrative capacities in his service on the British Control Commission in Germany at the end of the war when he played a prominent role in the de-Nazification process and in the seeding of a new democracy. Notwithstanding his burgeoning interests in intellectual history, Annan's first university post in Cambridge between 1948 and 1966 was as a lecturer in politics. He had already been elected a fellow of King's in 1944 and remained a fellow until his elevation to its head, the provostship of King's, at

the precociously early age of thirty-nine in 1956. A decade later, he left King's to become provost of University College London. He had already been elevated to the peerage the previous year. His combined role as an administrator and legislator did not entirely absorb his energies. He served as a trustee of Churchill College, Cambridge—the nation's war memorial to Winston Churchill—from 1958 to 1976, as a trustee of the British Museum from 1963 to 1980, and on the Public Schools Commission from 1966 to 1970.

In sheer sprezzatura across a range of activities and in his enduring insight in shaping a new field, Annan was utterly individual; but among dons he was not alone as an establishment man willing and able to shoulder major administrative burdens. Nobody carried heavier burdens than Oliver Franks. A fellow in philosophy at Queen's College, Oxford, between 1927 and 1937, then professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow, Franks had a spectacular career as a temporary civil servant during the war, rising to become permanent secretary at the Ministry of Supply by 1945–46.[44] In 1946 he returned to academic life as provost of Queen's but was drawn into Marshall Aid negotiations through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and played a role too in the setting up of NATO. In 1948 he was lured away from Queen's to become British ambassador to Washington. On his return from the States, he became a director of Lloyd's Bank and was its chairman from 1954 to 1962. At which point, elevated to the peerage, he returned to academia, becoming provost of Worcester College, Oxford. His life of public service was far from over. He had been admitted to the Privy Council in 1949 and was the go-to man when matters of sensitivity ruffled Whitehall. He chaired the Committee on Official Secrets in 1971–72, sat on the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs in 1976 in the wake of the *Crossman Diaries* affair, served on the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee between 1976 and 1987, and was pressed into action once more in 1982 to chair the committee reviewing the government's handling of the run-up to Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands and the subsequent war.[45] Franks's predecessor as provost of Worcester between 1946 and 1961, Sir John Masterman, had played, as we have seen, a central role during the war in running the XX system of counterintelligence. During his time as provost, Masterman chaired the government-appointed Committee on the Political Activities of Civil Servants in 1948 and sat on the Army Education Advisory Board between 1952 and 1956.

Something as untranslatably English as 'Whig' principles—a liberalism firmly rooted in tradition—sustained the dons' nonideological big-tent establishmentarianism, suggested W.J.M. Mackenzie in 1961. A Scot born and bred,

a don first in classics and then in philosophy and politics at Magdalen College, Oxford, before becoming professor of government at the University of Manchester (later moving back to Scotland to a chair at Glasgow University), Mackenzie was a perceptive insider-become-outsider. Mackenzie recognised the peculiar 'dream' of the 'English intellectual': 'to be commensalis [sharing the pleasures of the common table] and socius [fellow] in a great foundation, a freeholder in the inheritance of scholarship'. In this, he argued, 'the Whigs still rule'. Oxbridge colleges were self-governing entities which prided themselves on being 'democratic' establishments, yet by excluding women and employing servants, practised a kind of 'oligarchy'. Who, Mackenzie asked, 'would not choose to be a Whig?' Not that Oxbridge was 'exactly an evil'; rather, it was 'just a "thing", an element in the extremely odd flavour of English society.'[46]

In the immediate postwar decades, another factor exacerbated Whig peculiarities. This was the dominance of ordinary language philosophy, especially at Oxford, where the training of most philosophers was initially classical and philological, though it was also a presence at Cambridge via the legacy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Linguistic philosophy transmuted—or seemed, to its critics, to transmute—real world contestation over values in areas such as politics and religion into mere questions of language, into nothing more rousing or inflammatory than crossword puzzles. In his book *The Vocabulary of Politics* (1953), T. D. 'Harry' Weldon, a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, noted that philosophers had become aware that many of the problems with which their forebears wrestled unsuccessfully 'arose not from anything mysterious or inexplicable in the world but from the eccentricities of the language in which we try to describe the world.'[47] Ordinary language philosophy seemed to douse the flames of ideological controversy. Diffidence, hesitation and understatement were the order of the day. In 1956 Laslett, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, opened a volume of essays, *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, with a famous and unusual editorial lament: 'for the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead.' There were various reasons, Laslett believed, why 'winter has set in for the political philosopher'. For Marxists and social scientists, ideas were less interesting than social and economic structures. On the other hand, philosophers—under the influence of logical positivism and then ordinary language philosophy—had 'called into question the logical status of all ethical statements'. As political philosophy was a subset of ethics, this raised doubts about the intelligibility and coherence of the discipline formerly labelled political philosophy.[48]

Relaxed acceptance of the benefits of establishment was not the sole distinguishing feature of postwar donnish life. There was also access to a wider world. In previous eras, dons had combined a nonadversarial posture with cosy comforts, introversion and insularity. What made the postwar situation different was that a complacent lowercase conservatism coincided with greater access to the press, the radio and television. This was a new kind of complacency, one with a megaphone at its disposal. The dons had abundant access to the media, not only the newspapers and the numerous intellectual magazines—the *Spectator*, *New Statesman*, *Listener*, *Twentieth Century*, *Time and Tide*, and *Encounter*—but also the various outlets of the BBC. Indeed, at the start of his career as a history don, Laslett combined his Cambridge fellowship (first at St John's, then at Trinity) with a role as a talks' producer on the Third Programme. Laslett maintained close, if sometimes strained, links with the BBC[49] and was later able to harness his broadcasting prowess to recruit hundreds of amateur volunteers to assist the demographic researches in parish registers of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Family Structure that he set up with Tony Wrigley in 1964. Not that the hotline ran only between Cambridge and the BBC. In the course of the academic session 1955–56, including vacations, *Oxford Magazine* recorded that forty-seven different Oxford dons had spoken on the Third Programme, most frequently the political scientist Kenneth Wheare and the gifted historical communicator and controversialist A.J.P. Taylor.[50] The prolific prototype of the media don, Taylor was a staple feature in the 1950s of both press and television: reviewing in the serious papers, such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Observer*, writing in popular outlets like the *Sunday Pictorial* (forerunner of the *Sunday Mirror*) in the early 1950s and the *Sunday Express* from 1957, appearing on the BBC programme *In the News* between 1950 and 1954 and ATV's *Free Speech* from 1955. In the late 1950s, Taylor also started to give televised historical lectures, famously delivered without notes, for ITV. He would remain a stalwart of press and television into the 1980s.[51]

There were deeper connections with the media and arts establishments. Masterman sat on the BBC General Advisory Board between 1952 and 1959 and then switched over to the other side, from 1961 to 1967 chairing the Educational Advisory Committee of ATV, which held the regional ITV franchise for the midlands. Annan was not only an ebullient and assured broadcaster on TV and radio, a fluent and vivacious communicator in the London weeklies and eventually an ornament of the *New York Review of Books*; he also chaired the Committee on Broadcasting between 1974 and 1977, which recommended

the creation of Channel 4. Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius professor of modern history at Oxford and later master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, was a director of Times Newspapers between 1974 and 1988. Anthony Quinton, variously a fellow of All Souls and New College and president of Trinity College, Oxford, sat on the Arts Council and the Peacock Committee on the future of the BBC during the 1980s, reviewed for the *Times*, *Listener* and *Financial Times*, and was the long-running host of BBC Radio 4's Round Britain Quiz from 1974 to 1995. The dons were guardians too of the nation's major cultural citadels. Annan was a director of the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden between 1967 and 1978 and chairman of the board of the National Gallery between 1980 and 1985. Isaiah Berlin, a fellow of All Souls and then New College, later the founding president of Wolfson College, Oxford, sat on the board of Covent Garden 1954–65 and again 1974–87 and was a trustee of the National Gallery between 1975 and 1985.

The connection between Oxbridge and the media was already firmly cemented by 1955. Hard as it is now to believe, a Cambridge don was TV Personality of the Year in 1955. The award went to the archaeologist Glyn Daniel, a fellow of St John's College. Daniel was equally at ease in Cambridge and in the wider world, enjoying to the full the opportunities available to the postwar don, from the traditional pleasures of the college cellar and table to the new avenues of communication offered by television. Daniel's principal area of research was prehistoric chambered tombs, but he had a wide range of interests in archaeology more generally, including the history of the discipline. He became editor of the archaeological magazine *Antiquity* from 1957, archaeological adviser to Penguin Books, and general editor of two of Thames and Hudson's book series, 'Ancient People and Places' and the 'World of Archaeology'. In due course Daniel became Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge and served as president of the Royal Anthropological Institute. But he also found a much wider public via radio and television. He lectured on BBC radio and developed programmes on aerial photography with BBC Bristol. Starting in 1952, he was the chair for seven years of the popular BBC TV quiz programme *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?*, which also ran concurrently from 1955 with another BBC programme on which he appeared, *Buried Treasure*. Daniel delivered five lectures on the history of archaeology which were broadcast as half-hour television programmes on the BBC in December 1965 and published in 1966 as *Man Discovers His Past*. Daniel was also heavily involved in independent television, as part of the original franchise team for Anglia TV, and served as a director of that ITV station from 1959 to 1981, advising it on

historical and archaeological programmes. Daniel's versatility as a communicator extended to another happy hunting ground for dons, the detective story. Given their enticing puzzle element, detective stories were among the most conventional of approved donnish interests.[52] Under the pseudonym Dilwyn Rees, Daniel authored a series of detective novels, including *The Cambridge Murders* (1945), which feature an archaeologist hero, Sir Richard Cherrington, fellow of the fictional Fisher College, located somewhere between St John's and Trinity. Daniel appeared on BBC Radio's *Desert Island Discs* in 1981, a measure in itself of public recognition. Indeed, Daniel was sufficiently well known to the general nonacademic public that he was able to sign up with a lecturing agency and addressed public audiences across England and Wales. Among his pupils in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge was Prince Charles, and the Welshman and the Prince of Wales developed an enduring rapport outside the classroom. In 1981 Prince Charles wrote the preface to Daniel's festschrift and was present at its launch. Daniel presents a vivid example of a don enjoying both tremendous popular reach in various media as well as firm connections with various parts of the establishment.[53]

Oxbridge between the 1940s and late 1970s was, of course, a predominantly masculine world. Most colleges were restricted to men, until a gradual opening of male colleges to women during the 1970s, culminating in a near-universal bonfire of gender restrictions around 1979. However, there were also a small number of women's colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge. How far did the experience and outlook of women dons diverge from those of their male colleagues? At one level, of course, male clubbability was different in its idioms, rhythms and—sadly—extremes of offensive behaviour. Arguably, the most uninhibited and outspoken opponent of establishmentarian consensus was a woman, the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe. This was partly because she was a Roman Catholic in an Anglican milieu, but her gender also played a significant part in her willingness to transgress the expected norms of the postwar consensus. Nonetheless, Anscombe was a vivid and dramatic exception. Many female dons had engaged in war work, whether in the women's branches of the armed services or as temporary civil servants, and they too bought into the prevailing postwar ideology of understated establishmentarianism. Very few male dons were quite as securely entrenched in the governing establishment as Dame Lucy Sutherland. Born and brought up in South Africa, Sutherland had come to Oxford for a second undergraduate degree as a historian after a first degree at the University of Witwatersrand. She took first-class honours

and became a fellow of Somerville College in 1928. Sutherland built up Whitehall connections during her time as a temporary civil servant at the Board of Trade during the war. In 1945 she moved across north Oxford to the principalship of Lady Margaret Hall, which she held till 1971. In the interim—and on top of a distinguished body of work on eighteenth-century political and economic history—she served on various government bodies, including the Committee of Enquiry into Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films, 1949; the Royal Commission on Taxation of Profits and Income, 1951; and the Committee of Enquiry into Grants for Students, 1958. Her colleague at Lady Margaret Hall, the seventeenth-century historian Anne Whiteman, was a similarly staunch pillar of the establishment. As well as being a committed academic politician in Oxford, she was also a justice of the peace. Both Sutherland and Whiteman were also involved in university expansion, at Kent and Warwick respectively.

In the next generation, Dame Mary, later Baroness, Warnock—a fellow at different times of both St Hugh's College and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and later mistress of Girton College, Cambridge—played a similar role, not least as someone able to bring philosophical insights to thorny topics of public concern. She sat on various government bodies tackling subjects such as special education, environmental pollution and animal experiments and chaired the committee of enquiry into human fertilisation. She too had a strong link to the media, sitting on the Independent Broadcasting Authority between 1973 and 1981, and being a prolific contributor herself to the press, especially through her regular columns in *New Society*. Rosemary Murray, a fellow of Girton in chemistry and later founding president of New Hall and Cambridge's first woman vice-chancellor (1975–77), was a member of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (1971–81), a director of Midland Bank (1978–84) and an independent director of the *Observer* newspaper (1981–93).

Nor should we forget another gendered category: the spouse of the don. Commensality—eating at common table in college—was a quintessential element of donnish life, and one that included dinners as well as lunches, even for nonresident married fellows. Mackenzie identified the wife of the don as a special category of the excluded, remarking that 'the cold collations of north Oxford on the evenings of college feasts' had their place in the 'folklore' of donnish life.[54] Indeed, two wry commentators on donnish life noted that while some dons were married, 'they like to pretend that they are not.'[55] Ronald Knox, a former fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, and then the university's Roman Catholic chaplain, recalled a remark supposedly overheard at All

Souls in the immediate prewar period: 'How curious it would be if the Day of Judgment came at a quarter to eight on a Sunday evening, to find all the dons carousing in hall, and all their wives eating cold shape at home.'[56] But after the war, spousal pressures made it ever more difficult to maintain the ideal of quasi-monastic commensality, and it was hard to be married and remain the supposed paragon of the loyal, socially involved tutor.[57] Instead, a suppressed cold war would long prevail between spouse and don, or between spouse and an indifferent and demanding college. Occasionally, matters would erupt into the open. In 1968 Menna Gallie, wife of the Cambridge professor of political science and fellow of Peterhouse W. B. Gallie, complained in the pages of the dons' own magazine that fellows' wives constituted an unacknowledged 'guilty secret'. Why, she wondered, were wives made so unwelcome: 'What the hell are the colleges trying to do? Break up our marriages?' But she was conscious that in raising a complaint she was doing no more than 'shaking a puny fist at a remote, indifferent universe of dons that sees me through a claret glass darkly'.[58] On the other hand, Annan's discussion of advantageous interdynastic marriages within the intellectual aristocracy highlights the significance of spouses in eras when the university world remained heavily masculine.[59]

Ironically, things were, if anything, worse in the women's colleges. In the early 1950s, Warnock found the female fellowship of St Hugh's particularly unwelcoming to a young, married woman don; marriage was deemed incompatible with commitment to the ethos of residential education.[60] Miss Eleanor Plumer, the martinet principal of what would become St Anne's College, Oxford, informed one lecturer: 'If you *must* have children, kindly ensure that you have them in the University Vacation.'[61] Over the decades married fellows ceased to be outliers in the women's colleges. However, by the 1970s, when coeducation was on the horizon, the women's colleges were more protective of their status as single-sex communities than the men's colleges. Eventually gender equality and the two-career household (often, indeed, the two-don household) would bring an end to an uneasy postmonastic compromise.

The sexual deformations of Oxbridge life provide much of the sly matter of allusion in J.I.M. Stewart's 1955 novel *The Guardians*. Stewart, a don in English literature at Christ Church, Oxford, peered below the ranks of the more worldly dons to explore the sad underside of college life, from the subdued malice of high-table conversation to the feuds, snobberies and eccentricities engendered by its strange 'semi-monasticism'. Stewart also indicated how the neutered scholarly preoccupations of men—especially single men—trapped in elite all-male institutions could so easily curdle into outright misogyny. For

many dons, it was an 'aquarium world', he contended, swimming within the confines of the college, only occasionally looking out at real life through the windows of a glass prison. That was why some small-minded dons became so obsessed with the trivia of college protocol, such as when it was permitted, if ever, to shake hands with a colleague.[62] Stewart himself was a don of a very different stripe: a success in the wider world, in addition to his literary scholarship the author of both novels under his own name and bestselling detective stories under the pseudonym Michael Innes. Lawrence Stone, an early modern historian and between 1950 and 1963 a fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, from which he escaped to Princeton, pondered the 'malice and hatred' typically found in an Elizabethan village and concluded that the only 'modern equivalent' was 'the Oxford Common Room.'[63]

There were, to be sure, other islands of irritation within the vast ocean of donnish complacency. Thomas Balogh published a bilious essay in the *Universities Quarterly* in 1955 with the provocative title 'Oxbridge Rampant'. Here Balogh—an undeceived Hungarian émigré—counterposed the unworldly substance of Oxbridge education to its claims for worldliness. The 'administrative capacity' which Oxbridge-style education produced was empty froth, nothing more than a bizarre combination of character-building and 'purposefully useless, somewhat dilettante erudition.' Vocational training and technical knowledge were taboo; instead, the formal education peddled at Oxford and Cambridge 'developed dialectical powers rather than knowledge of the world and its problems'.[64] In the longer run, Balogh turned out to be a rather lukewarm supporter of change, coming to the realisation by the mid-1960s, when faced with bureaucratically minded reformers at Oxford, that the crenellated privilege of autonomous colleges was what permitted outspoken mavericks like himself to flourish.[65]

Nevertheless, in 1955 Balogh spoke for a minority discontent within Oxbridge life, though one which did not amount to anything like the Leftist counterculture of the 1930s. These internal critics were disparate in their concerns and rode their own individual hobbyhorses. Their criticisms tended to be particular to Oxbridge and were not general denunciations of wider society of the sort advanced by the Communists in the 1930s. The course of the war, and the alliance with the Soviet Union from 1941, had ended that ideological breach. There were few Communists in postwar Oxbridge, and by the 1950s the political intensity of the 1930s had largely vanished.[66] Arguably, wartime experience also provided a platform for the manifestly self-confident worldliness of so many postwar dons. Or was wartime nostalgia simply a balm for

intellectual insecurity? In the course of the wider debate in 1955 about England's conformist intelligentsia, James Joll, a fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, argued that it was precisely because dons were so 'uneasy about their status' as intellectuals, to the point of denying 'their calling', that so many of them 'look[ed] back with a certain regret to their wartime days on the Staff or in the Ministry'.[67]

Reflecting on the 1950s from the era of student troubles, Peter Wiles, by then a professor at the London School of Economics but previously an Oxford don at first All Souls and then New College, recognised the late 1950s and early 1960s as 'the golden age of the don': 'He researched, he published, he broadcast, he travelled, he sat on Royal Commissions.'[68] Yet, although the student troubles certainly vexed the dons as a caste, their privileged access to public life continued through to the arrival of the Thatcher administration in 1979. Indeed, the flow of peerages to dons continued at first under Thatcher, and not only to identifiable Conservatives such as Trevor-Roper and Quinton but also to Max Beloff, a member of the Liberal Party until 1972. Annan himself reckoned that 'the golden age of the don' ran from 1945 to 1975.[69] The story told in this book brackets the golden age of the dons, by including both an account of the role played by dons and future dons in the Second World War and a discussion of donnish complicity in—as well as reservations about, and opposition to—the rise of Thatcherism. Crepuscular hues are unavoidable. The reformist tendencies and pressures which brought an end to ancien régime douceur de vivre were, at least in some measure, present throughout, as were donnish reformers, though, unsurprisingly perhaps, the influence of Whig grandees was more evident among the dons than a radical Jacobinism. Notwithstanding Annan's later retrospective identification of a thirty-year golden era, as early as 1961 he was already conscious that the enemies of the ancient universities and their privileges were massing for an attack.[70] Never, it seems, was there an Edenic age of the don without some serpent lurking in the long grass.

This book's central argument—echoing and expanding upon that of Shils—is that the participation of dons and future dons in the Second World War created an unusual buoyancy in the academic elite, a confidence that as men (and sometimes women) of the world they could participate beyond the academy as intellectual, aesthetic and ethical leaders in the life of the nation. Such

opportunities were most fully available to those generations that had seen wartime service. The cohorts of dons which followed did not have a well of wartime experience on which to draw for confidence and standing. Moreover, Oxbridge came under attack from various quarters, but particularly at first from the Left, as a bastion of privilege. The student revolt of the late 1960s and early 1970s made a serious dent in donnish self-assurance. Besides, opportunities were narrowing. The BBC's Third Programme—the radio channel whose tone, matter and contributors were strikingly donnish[71]—had as a result of two waves of reforms in 1967 and 1970 turned into Radio 3, which was more of a classical music station with limited space for talks in its schedule (though a sprinkling of dons did still appear on the network).[72] There were fewer outlets too in intellectual-cum-political weekly magazines (several of which amalgamated or disappeared), which had once served as outlets for donnish essayists. Eventually the coming of Thatcherism—both its penny-pinching economies and its aggressively philistine tone—deflated donnish ebullience.

Yet for the couple or more decades while it lasted, the golden sunset of the dons—a gradually encroaching dusk notwithstanding—offered that fortunate generation an amplitude of life, a public stage, a robust self-assurance, and a verve, elegance and grace both in mode of life and mode of expression. In retrospect, it is the swish of donnish style—not, of course, the style of their decidedly baggy tweed jackets and other inelegant garb but of their discourse—which is so characteristic of that caste, yet even when captured on paper so evanescent. The dons tended to regard flamboyance as showing off, except in the field of conversation, where suavity, elegance of expression and verbal pyrotechnics seemed almost de rigueur.[73] Glyn Daniel in his novel *The Cambridge Murders* (1945) captured the highly contrived kabuki of high-table discourse: 'you rarely said what you believed or believed what you heard, and all conversation was an exercise in dialectic and repartee rather than a considered statement of opinion.'[74] Academics in England's Redbrick universities (predominantly in northern industrial cities) considered their own somewhat 'plain' mode of communication, with students from backgrounds that left them 'a little suspicious of irony, paradox, verbal play', to be sadly shorn of the 'flippancy', 'persiflage' and 'games with words' so characteristic of Oxbridge dons, or assumed to be.[75] Nothing desiccates as rapidly as another generation's wit. Nothing vaporises so completely in the historical record as modes of address and conversational gambits. Yet so much of donnish life was conversation—informally with colleagues, formally at meetings, in tutorials

with students. All that has gone and can never be recovered. The most the historian can do is to retrieve snatches of prose, often from contemporary donnish journalism, which give some indication of the flavours of that lost world.

Complacency did, of course, breed a kind of insular arrogance, not least about the horrors of Redbrick, which was widespread and has become a cliché of anti-Oxbridge diatribes; but in some dons it fostered a confidence that from their secure citadels they might make a contribution to the wider educational uplift of the nation. There is a corrective story to be told about the paternalistic, philanthropic initiatives which flourished in postwar Oxbridge. Social and intellectual confidence begat academic snobbery, but we should not forget the good works to which it also gave rise. The difficult post-Thatcherite decades put paid to the old snobbishness but had a more devastating effect on the benign outreach so characteristic of the late 1940s, '50s and '60s, now forgotten in an era of interuniversity competitiveness. Nevertheless, the nagging sense remains that it was an unquestioned sense of superiority which made so much altruism—so much condescending paternalism—possible in the first place.

One successful academic who made a conscious attempt to escape the suffocating effects of the Oxbridge fug was the historian Eugen Weber. A Romanian-born émigré, Weber saw the supposed enchantments of Cambridge through an outsider's eyes. After research at Cambridge, which included a stint teaching for Emmanuel College, Weber made his escape to the United States, where he would enjoy a distinguished career as a French historian at UCLA from 1956. Looking back in 1958 from his new American berth, Weber had no regrets about leaving Oxbridge. To be sure, American universities had a crude 'production-line approach' to education and learning, but the openness to new ideas and the relaxed self-criticism which went with it were vastly preferable to 'the under-cover manoeuvring' of Oxbridge's 'other-directed society', where manners, it seemed, 'were invented to hide brains' and there was, alas, no talking 'shop in the mess'. Indeed, the Oxbridge don seemed to him psychologically warped and stunted. 'We could do,' Weber added, 'with a study of the Oxbridge Organization Man, his code, his neuroses, anxieties, and covert, overt or frustrated aggressions.'[76] I am not sure this is that book. My aim here is not to venture on a Freudian grail quest for the inner don but more modestly to say something about the distinctiveness of the intellectual style, idioms, concerns—and blind spots—of postwar Oxbridge. But if psychological quirks do now and then peep out from behind the gown or beneath the mortarboard, so much the better.

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