

Medieval manorial rolls, nineteenth century newspapers, personal memories: recollections of the contributions of historian Ian Keil.

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It is a great pleasure to be invited to contribute to the newly established *Loughborough History and Heritage Website* by sharing my memories of my husband's teaching and research. Writing this also gives me the opportunity to record my thanks to family, friends, colleagues and students who sent cards and comments to me when he died in October 2012. They described their memories of Ian and gave insights into his ways of sharing enthusiasm for history.

Those who knew him best wrote about his career in teaching and writing history with a retirement focused on local history, collecting information and publishing with colleagues. He was also remembered for his encouragement of others and his willingness to share and discuss findings and to read other people's historical work in progress, local or not. He sometimes talked of his mind as a 'dustbin of disconnected facts'. If so, it was a dustbin with an excellent system of filing and retrieval! Here I outline his career including an account of how, through his involvement in projects to share his memories of being a child during World War Two, he was transformed from the collector of history to becoming history himself. Ian talked about the potential for writing about this and I have drawn upon the notes I made at the time. I conclude with a quotation which Ian prepared for his funeral ceremony.

Born in London, Ian was brought up in Warminster, Wiltshire, a town set in a landscape which held reminders of many historical periods. Stonehenge was a stop on a regular bus route across Salisbury Plain to Salisbury with its old town and great cathedral. Important shopping was done in Bath with all its Roman remains. There were easy walks to villages with medieval churches. Ian enjoyed everything about school, arts and sciences. At eleven, he passed the scholarship examination for Trowbridge High School for Boys and travelled there daily by steam train. The history teaching was excellent. Nonetheless, however interested in history, boys were usually encouraged into science, and to take civil service entry examinations as well as try for university. Ian had to argue the case for taking arts A levels, with Latin as an extra. He was successful. In fact, more reading and preparation in his spare time was no problem for him; he was born with a heart murmur that excluded him from games. The height of his sporting achievement was helping to put up cricket scores.

In the Sixth form he sat the competitive examination for the T. H. Green Scholarship at the University of Bristol, and was offered the choice of reading English or History. Of course, he chose history and, inadvertently, entertained the interview panel that made the final recommendation. When asked by David Douglas, Professor of History, which side he would have supported in the Civil War, Ian answered Roundhead (emphasising the commitment to Parliamentary government), having no awareness that Professor Douglas was an ardent royalist.

Happily, the comment proved no bar. He thoroughly enjoyed his undergraduate course, particularly the courses on medieval England, and made friendships with students on his course and at Wills Hall of Residence which lasted all his life. He was offered an extension of his scholarship for postgraduate study and chose *The Estates of Glastonbury Abbey in the later Middle Ages*, as his doctoral topic.

After the Dissolution, the monastic rolls relating to Glastonbury Abbey were moved to the archives of Longleat House, Wiltshire, not far from Warminster. Lord Bath's resident Librarian gave access to serious scholars. She herself was very knowledgeable and, over tea one day, she told Ian about the rumoured links between the Dissolution of the monasteries and the nursery rhyme *Little Jack Horner*.¹ As for access to the archives, there was no safari park to be negotiated in the late nineteen fifties; there was a bus route but a long walk from the gates to the house. At the Warminster Post Office, it was known that Lord Bath liked to have his post before breakfast at 8 am; Ian's father knew the postman and asked him to deliver Ian (together with flask of tea and packed lunch) in the post van at the same time. The stable hands told him the short cut to getting home: through a field of cows to get to the main road and the bus stop. Ian calculated that he unrolled several miles of parchment working in the archives.

Ian was able to publish articles about his Glastonbury research, and they are still consulted currently.² However, there were very few academic jobs in medieval history in those days. Ian completed his thesis and continued to analyse and publish about his research but he only taught medieval history as part of introductions to the social and economic history of the nineteenth century, first at the University of Liverpool and then at Loughborough University, in both cases in the Departments of Economics. Understanding the Industrial Revolution and British contributions to the structure and organisation of the world of the twentieth century was given priority.

In recollecting Ian's time at the University of Liverpool, I record the only occasion I know when he decided *not* to share his historical knowledge. I hope it will make you smile rather than feel shocked. It happened in 1957, when he had just been appointed Tutor in Social and

¹ The nursery rhyme 'Little Jack Horner' was said to be about changes in land ownership after the Dissolution. Could the 'plum' pulled out of the pie have been the deeds of one of Glastonbury's richest estates? See Wikipedia on the nursery rhyme for the debate about evidence.

² Examples:

Ian Keil (1960) 'The Garden at Glastonbury Abbey: 1333-4' *Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, CIV.

Ian Keil (1961-62) 'Building a Post Windmill in 1342' *Transactions of the Newcomen Society*, XXXIV.

Ian Keil (1963) 'Profiles of Some Abbots of Glastonbury' *Downside Review*, LXXXI.

Economic History. At the beginning of the university year, he joined his new colleagues in the Staff Common Room. Asked how his research analysis was going, Ian enthused about a rare find, which he was writing up for one of his first publications. It was an account of the seeds - garlic, onions, herbs - purchased for the garden of the Abbot of Glastonbury for the season 1333-4. One of the professors (specialist area, the economic structure of 19th century trade to and from Liverpool) lowered his *Financial Times* and asked if he'd found any record of growing potatoes. The room fell silent. Deciding it would be too embarrassing, and not a good start to his career, to correct such a senior person in front of all his colleagues, Ian managed a tactful reply: "Not so far". His colleagues breathed again, hid their smiles, and stored the story for retelling. In fact, I was told the story when I was introduced to Ian the following year.

The late 1950s and 1960s were a time of considerable expansion in education. Ian moved to Loughborough when it expanded its courses and moved towards University status. (For those interested in changes in income: in moving, he doubled his salary from £550 to £1,200 per annum.) The demand for university places also increased. New buildings for teaching and research, student halls of residence, appeared and the campus expanded. Working in the Universities of Leicester and of Aston in Birmingham during the 1960s, I too was aware of the priority given to all that was new, and remember somebody saying that Britain was becoming "an Empire on which the concrete never set". All a sharp contrast with what was happening in Europe where restoration was often priority.

Ian enjoyed his work in the Department of Economics. The emphasis was on teaching and he had excellent colleagues, Chris Wrigley and Colin Heyward (both of whom became Professors at the University of Nottingham) Dr Joyce Ellis and Dr Andrew Wilson, also teaching history within the Department of Economics. He established a firm friendship with John Martin, a student who himself became a University Lecturer. In due course there was also a separate Department of History, incorporating historians from the former Teacher Training College. However, the period of expansion did not last and there was competition over resources and student places. By 1990, history was no longer a subject offered at Loughborough and historians moved elsewhere. Ian chose to take early retirement, though he worked part time for three years to make sure that the final history undergraduates in the Department of Economics had the appropriate support.

In retirement, Ian was able to expand the interest in local history which was established when he first arrived in Loughborough. He had joined the *Loughborough Archaeology and History Society* and always enjoyed and participated in their programmes of talks and outings. He became Honorary President in 1977 and was usually the writer of the reports on meetings sent to the Loughborough Echo for publication. Others will know more than I do about the contributions to LAHS and local history of specific individuals and the many friends Ian made amongst its members. The records of the names of members and committees, the outings and lectures organised over the years indicate the contributions of

Brian Williams, Ernie and Sheila Miller, Bryan Page, Wallace Humphrey, Don Wix, Anne Tarver, Malcolm Hill, Janet Slatter and provide a starting point. Several of them, Wallace Humphrey and Don Wix in particular, had long standing interests in local history and were the ones who collaborated with Ian in research and publications. Their contributions were made in exhibitions as well as publications and I have made a list of some of them in the Notes.³

In contrast to those days, local history research has become increasingly popular, no doubt stimulated by the interest in family history. Writing this in 2014, newspapers, radios and screens are full of examples of the outcomes of studying accounts of World War I. They are not only accounts of it as a battle between rival powers but also individual stories of those named on village war memorials as well as those who survived to return home to a changed world. The high profile of these studies and easier access to local history information has influenced topics chosen for education at both primary and secondary schools.

It was this trend which gave Ian his first experiences of being an older researcher who was becoming history. It made a good story at home after a day of research. For example, some school pupils visiting the County Record Office at Wyggeston once asked him what he was looking for as he sat at the newspaper records. When he said he was looking for articles about Loughborough Hospital's new building in the time of Queen Victoria, one girl asked if he remembered that time. How to give the 'time line' and explain that people who look old can still be counted as part of recent rather than ancient history?

³ Local history examples:

Don Wix, Wallace Humphrey and Ian Keil (1988) *Loughborough Past and Present*, Ladybird Books.

Wallace Humphrey, Ian Keil, Mervyn Walters (1988) *Loughborough 1888-1988: The Birth of a Borough*.

Collected by Ian Keil, Wallace Humphrey and Don Wix (1992, reprinted 1992) *Charnwood Forest in Old Photographs*.

D. Wix and I. Keil (1992) *The First Three Hundred Years: History of Rawlins School*.

Collected by Don Wix, Pauline Shacklock and Ian Keil (1992) *The River Soar in Old Photographs*.

Ian Keil (1994) 'The Local Economy – Economic History to 1900' in *Loughborough and Its Region*, published on the occasion of the British Association Meeting at Loughborough.

Ian Keil and Don Wix (1996) *In the Swim, The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994*.

D. Wix and I. Keil (2002) *Charnwood Silver Jubilee, 1974-1999*.

Authors: J. Brownlow, G. Low, E. T. Keil, I. Keil, J. Slatter and D. Wix; Editors: Ian Keil and Don Wix (2006) *The Story of Loughborough Dispensary and Hospital, 1819-2003*

There had also been the invitation to share memories initiated by Peter Crooks, Chairman of the *Loughborough War Memorial Trust*. Amongst the range of work completed was the publication *Growing Up In World War Two*, a book focused on exploring family life during wartime and aimed at school children. Ian and I both provided some text and a photograph. The photograph of Ian (p.20) shows him, aged about eight, in the garden mixing food scraps with grain for the neighbour's hens. Below the image, readers were asked to think about answers to the questions: *Why did so many people keep hens during the war? Do you help out by doing chores?* Looking carefully, it is possible to see the way the house window was criss-crossed by strips of paper to prevent any bomb damage shattering the glass and causing further damage.⁴

Then, towards the end of 2011, we recognised that we were history! Ian was asked, in a very polite email from Trystan, my sister's older grandson, whether he would give him some help with his history homework. He agreed readily. He had helped before and knew that if he did not know the answer, he could advise where to look it up. However this time the question was altogether different. Trystan's form (final year Junior School) had been studying World War Two and had a project, of their own choice, to complete over the Christmas holiday. Some of Trystan's friends had already decided to make models of tanks and air raid shelters, or to draw Spitfires. Trystan wanted to write about what it was like to live in a society at war. Was it true that we were actually old enough to remember, and, if so, would we answer questions about it?

How could we refuse? Ian was born in 1933, and I was born in 1935 so that we were both old enough to have some memories of the time. We wrote some notes and these were the basis of Trystan's questions. I have focused on Ian's contributions.

Ian's notes began with the fact that he was 5 years old when the war began on 3 September 1939 and had his sixth birthday just over a week later on 11th September. He was already attending the primary school in Warminster and, after passing the entrance examination, attended the Trowbridge High School for Boys from September 1944.

He made notes of *Air Raid Precautions*, for example, gas masks, sirens, blackouts for houses, air raid shelters, barrage balloons, awareness of the Bristol Blitz (searchlights could be seen trying to find enemy planes), the noise of German aircraft (their engines were usually air cooled and so sounded different from RAF planes). There was also information about *Rationing* (the amounts available per person), Ration Books and Clothing coupons, allocations of fuel for cars and fuel for the house.

⁴ Memories of World War Two: *Growing Up in World War Two* (2005) book organised as part of an exhibition at Loughborough War Museum in the Carillon Tower, by Chairman of the Museum Trust, Mr Peter Crooks. The project was winner of the Leicestershire County Council Heritage Award for Best Special Project in 2006.

Apart from the rules and regulations which applied, Ian also wrote about personal experiences, such as *Seeing War Damage* (crashed planes and bombed buildings in the city of Bath). He wrote of evacuees and the importance of *Shared Accommodation*. The Keil household shared their house with military personnel: first a Grenadier Guards Captain who had won the Military Cross for bravery at Dunkirk and whose batman (described by Ian as "a soldier servant who cleaned and looked after all the officer's equipment") showed him how to shine shoes to Guards' standard. The second was Father Macnamee, Roman Catholic Padre (priest) who had the rank of captain. His batman came and collected him by Scout car to take religious services on the growing military encampment on Salisbury Plain. The Padre also showed Ian how to play the game *Fox and Geese*.

Also mentioned were *Identity Cards*, *Removal of Road Signs*, and the vast Military Camp on Salisbury Plain (with Canadian soldiers from early 1940, and, in 1942, the first American soldiers, with their clear division between black and white troops in terms of rank and tasks carried out).

Ian ended his notes with the story of going to visit his mother's parents in August 1945 in Sussex, until then a military zone and forbidden to visitors. They witnessed, and Ian, aged 11, saw for the first time, a traditional Sussex bonfire and torchlight procession for victory over Japan and the end of the war.

His grandmother's sister put out the flags she had bought to mark the end of the *Boer War* in 1903. Her display showed two union jacks, one with a portrait of General Lord Kitchener, the other showing General Lord Roberts, heroes of the Boer War. Japan had been an ally in WWI, so the general display included the flag of Imperial Japan! My guess is that only Ian noticed.

It was interesting to read the specific questions and answers chosen by Trystan for his project report.⁵ They give insight to the selections made by the reporter and may well highlight what he thinks will be of interest to the reader. Ian's replies also reflect his memories and adult understanding of his childhood experiences and what he thinks will be of interest to the person asking the questions. As a historian, he was also aware that he might have edited out some information.

Trystan's school has a **Gold Book**. It is a permanent record of high achievement in work and/or effort at school. The school has more than 700 pupils and the school assembly recognises those who achieve an entry. It was a great pleasure for us to know that Trystan's project was recorded in the Gold Book. It was also a great pleasure to undertake what felt like time travel and to be recorded as history. Ian was already aware of different perspectives on recording history and we discussed our

⁵ My sincere thanks to Trystan Figuères who allowed me to select quotations from his project to include in this memoir.

good fortune at being part of this version where, unusually, points could be clarified and explained further by the original recorder of the account.

To encourage further historical research and to help others as he had been helped, Ian set up a Keil Scholarship in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Bristol. The award continues. As Ian had requested, the scholarship is awarded to the strongest applicant regardless of the period of history they wish to study. This year, for the first time, the successful Keil Scholar is studying medieval history.

Ian prepared almost all of the words for his Humanist Funeral Service. His *Thoughts about Life and Death* seem an appropriate conclusion to this memoir:

“For the historian death is a familiar, inevitable dimension to the lives of the humble as well as the prominent. Few people can expect to be remembered for centuries even as hazily as Alexander the Great, Alfred the Great, Shakespeare or Napoleon Bonaparte. The most we can hope for is that those who have met us and enjoyed our company, or learned from us, will comment kindly should our name be mentioned.”

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