

## Lives of 1911

This talk offers a sample of the lives contained in the *Dictionary of National Biography* which I hope will illustrate British life through the twentieth century. There are various ways of selecting a sample, but I thought the simplest was to choose all those born in a particular year. I chose a year more or less arbitrarily – 1911 happens to be the year in which my mother was born.<sup>1</sup>

It turns out that there are 199 men and 39 women in the *DNB* who were born in that year. Their childhood was in the shadow of the Great War, they were at school in the twenties, and started their adult lives against the background of slump and insecurity. They reached maturity during the second war, and theirs was the generation that created the post-war world. Two-thirds of them lived beyond the age of seventy-five to see the unpicking of much of their work during the upheavals of the eighties and nineties. More than a quarter made it past the millennium. They are, by definition, exceptional people, and it's impossible to describe this or that figure as typical, but there are some themes that emerge.

The economist Alec Cairncross called his memoirs (published in 1998) *Living with the Century*, which would not be a bad title for this talk. His career represents one of our themes: from a comparatively humble background, his talent took him to the very heart of the country's governing elite as Turfholm village school, Hamilton Academy and Glasgow University led him to Trinity College Cambridge and the circle of brilliant economists around Maynard Keynes. (Another young Scot made the same journey from a working-class background to the top of the economics profession, Marcus Fleming, who in the 1960s was deputy director of the IMF.)

In 1935 Cairncross returned to lecture at Glasgow University, and also to teach evening-classes of trainee accountants, an experience that contributed later to the success of his *Introduction to Economics* – the standard textbook in the 1950s. The war took him into the Cabinet Office, the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Aircraft Production. After the war he remained in government service until becoming Professor of Economics at Glasgow in 1951. He played a part in arguing for a sensible reparations settlement with Germany, and in dismantling much of Britain's wartime system of economic controls. While at Glasgow he continued to serve on a variety of committees and commissions, including the Phillips Committee on Old Age, and the Ratcliffe committee on the monetary system. He took a strong interest in the economics of developing countries, and through the World Bank organized training for development economists. He also served on the Crofters' Commission and on the Anthrax committee of enquiry.<sup>2</sup> For most of the sixties he was at the Treasury, one of his last duties being to confront the Chancellor with the necessity of devaluation in 1967. Retiring with a knighthood, he was Master of St Peter's College Oxford from 1969 to 1976. From 1971 to 1996 he was Chancellor of Glasgow University.

Cairncross stood for the belief that the complex problems of the world could be addressed by intelligent and imaginative measures based on comprehensive knowledge. This creed, inherited from the great Victorian report-writers and reformers, was shared by others of his reforming generation. These included John Pater, who was responsible for co-ordinating the planning for the post-war health service, and Arnold France, who negotiated the new charter of general practice under the health minister Kenneth Robinson in the 1960s. Pater is said to have been held back in his civil service career by his principled resistance to policies that he felt were dictated not by rational choice but by a pursuit of 'image'.

Pater had entered the civil service straight from Cambridge in 1933, and was very much a career civil servant.<sup>3</sup> Cairncross on the other hand was recruited when the demands of total war required his particular skills in collecting and analysing information. Arnold France's career was transformed by the war in a still more dramatic fashion. He did not have a university education. For eleven years up to the war he worked, like his father, for the District Bank in and around

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1 I might have chosen all those who died in the year 2000. One immediately striking difference between the two samples is that 27 out of 236 born in 1911 were scientists, whereas only 12 out of 198 who died in 2000 were scientists. There seems to have been a slight downward trend in the representation of scientists: there were 172 scientists out of 2150 who died between 2000 and 2009; 350 out of 3309 born between 1900 and 1913.

2 Anthrax was an economic as well as medical and security issue, since the measures for controlling anthrax included regulations on the import of certain goods. (House of Commons, 28 February 1957)

3 When he came to write his book *The Making of the National Health Service* he refused to use his inside knowledge of the personalities and controversies, confining himself strictly to the public record.

Manchester. He served in the Signals Corps until 1943, when, on the basis of his banking experience, he was sent to Cairo as an economic and financial adviser. He made such an impression there that after the war he went to the Treasury as a Principal, rising to become Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health in 1964, and Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue in 1968. In this last post he oversaw the introduction of the Revenue's first computer system at East Kilbride.

Ernst Schumacher (one of the 46 lives of 1911 who was born outside the UK) was a German refugee from Nazism whose career as an economist began in much the same way as the others, only to take a very different turn later on. He was briefly interned as an alien, and then had a spell working on the land, before becoming part of a team applying statistical analysis to problems of strategy and war production. After the war he contributed to the Strategic Bombing Survey which tried to assess the effectiveness of the bombing of German war industries. He then became involved as a British economic adviser in the revival of the German economy. His concern for issues of equality put him at odds with others involved in establishing the German economic miracle. Back in Britain he was for twenty years up to 1970 the economic adviser to the National Coal Board, in which capacity he was an early critic of the new Nuclear industry, being one of the first to point out the problems of waste disposal.

At the same time his interest in Burma and India took him into the field of development economics. While he was still at the NCB and more particularly after his retirement he became a critic of the accepted wisdom that the road to development was through heavy industry and urbanisation. In India, he argued, massive industrialization would make the elite rich but would do nothing for the millions of rural poor. He advocated *intermediate technology* as the proper development path for economies such as India's. These views found more support outside the economics establishment than within. In 1966 he established the Intermediate Technology Development Group, publishing his influential book *Small is Beautiful* in 1973. Such Gandhian economic doctrines sat well alongside Schumacher's concern for the environment. He was an early advocate of organic cultivation and for six years was President of the Soil Association.

The posts held by Fritz Schumacher between 1940 and 1970 place him bang in the middle of what is loosely described as the *establishment*, the magic triangle of London, Oxford and Cambridge, where most of the power, wealth and influence was to be found. But his career points to the existence of a counter-establishment, often based in the same places and institutions, which drew on influences from outside and led in different directions and so helped to maintain the fertility of intellectual and public life.

There are 27 scientists on our list. We'll look at some whose lives illustrate the variety of backgrounds from which the scientific elite emerged.

Norman Davidson came from a middle-class Edinburgh family and was educated at George Watsons and Edinburgh University (1930-37). He studied for a year in Germany and then was briefly a lecturer at St Andrews before going to Aberdeen University in 1940, where he remained until 1946. He had a year in London (at the Medical Research Council and then at St Thomas's Hospital) before becoming professor of physiological chemistry at Glasgow in 1947. He remained there until his death from a heart attack in 1972, building his department to become one of the largest departments of biochemistry in the country. His wife was a chemist and bacteriologist, and their two daughters both became distinguished scientists, one a professor and the other a senior lecturer at Glasgow. He was appointed FRS and CBE, and after his death the new Biochemistry building in Glasgow was named after him. One of his early pupils at Glasgow has written the following:

It astonishes me that biochemistry did excite a young man as variously gifted as Davidson. But excite him it did. When I came to know him in later years, I was inclined to credit him with a degree of intuition in scientific matters which went beyond any obvious rational basis. Perhaps his decision to opt for such an unfashionable speciality was an early example of this extraordinary insight. It proved wise. The 1930s saw the first steps in the process by which a

relatively restricted sub-speciality of human physiology expanded to illuminate the whole of biology.<sup>4</sup>

Charles Dent, born in Spain to an English father and Spanish mother, left school at sixteen and studied first at an evening college and then as a full-time student at Imperial College, London, followed by medical studies at University College Hospital, where, apart from his war service, he was to remain for the rest of his career. He died of leukaemia in 1976. A younger colleague wrote of him:

Charles was an outstanding biochemist and his grasp of metabolic disturbances was far ahead of his time. He could argue, convincingly, that black was white and a few days later, equally convincingly, that white was black. One thing he taught me that stood me in good stead was that in any experiment there must be only a single variable; if there are more than this it becomes impossible to interpret the results. It is a pity more researchers do not realize this.<sup>5</sup>

Dent was a devout Roman Catholic, believing that there was no conflict between science and religion.

Kenneth Mather, son of a furniture-maker in Nantwich, Cheshire, won a scholarship to the Nantwich and Acton Grammar School where the headmaster encouraged his interest in mathematics, but steered him towards biology. I don't know whether this was because Mather lacked the aptitude for specialist study of maths at a high level, or because biology offered a safer option for a poor provincial boy. Mather got a first in botany at Manchester University, and proceeded on a government scholarship to a research institution in London, where he obtained his PhD in two years. He wrote this about his pre-war work with R A Fisher in University College, London:

My greatest gain was ... learning from him the principles and practice of statistical analysis, estimation and hypothesis testing; how to design experiments; how to wring information efficiently from data; and how to measure the amount of information available for the analytic purpose in mind.<sup>6</sup>

With the exception of six years as vice-chancellor of Southampton, Mather worked at Birmingham University from 1948 until his death in 1990, first as professor of genetics, and then as honorary professor and senior research fellow. He built up his department at Birmingham and established a unit of biometrical genetics.

In discussing the careers of these scientists I shall use three phrases associated with the scientist and novelist C P Snow: new men, corridors of power and, first of all the two cultures.

Of the six senior civil servants on our list three were economists, two historians and one a linguist. Of our twenty-seven scientists, none became an established civil servant (although many served on government committees at different times, particularly during the war). Arguably there was a dearth of scientific understanding at the highest levels of decision-making. The real problem of the 'two cultures' was not so much the inability of those educated in the arts and humanities to discuss the laws of thermodynamics, but their failure to engage with the processes of scientific thinking as exemplified in the three quotations above, in which scientists describe the intellectual foundations of their work: scientific intuition, experimental method and statistical analysis.

Davidson, Dent and Mather were what C P Snow called 'new men', brilliant scientists whose eminence in their own fields brought them official recognition and access to what Snow, again, called the 'corridors of power'. They were new also in that they were from grammar schools and provincial universities<sup>7</sup>, and part of their achievement was to build up research centres in their new disciplines outside the orbit of Oxford and Cambridge, in Glasgow, London and Birmingham. They represent the profound shift in British society that took place in the first half of the century, but also their life stories illustrate the way one generation's newness can be overtaken by a new kind of

4 Robert Y Thompson on the University of Glasgow web-site (retrieved 26 December 2014) <http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/archives/news/dunaskinnews200207/jamesnormandavidson1911-72professorofbiochemistry1947-72/>

5 John Walshe, *Copper: Quest for a Cure*, Bentham Science Publishers, 2009, p3. (Google Books, retrieved 26 December 2014)

6 Quoted in the *DNB*.

7 Nowadays even English people might hesitate to refer to Scottish universities as 'provincial', but in those days it was probably how they were thought of.

newness in the next generation. Davidson's DNB entry comments on his austere personality and devotion to the Church of Scotland, while Dent's entry emphasises his high standards of personal rectitude based upon his strict Catholicism. Reading between the lines we can imagine that they were out of tune with some of the social changes that they witnessed in the 60s and 70s. Mather's time as vice-chancellor at Southampton coincided with the student unrest of the late 60s, and it seems he did not handle the situation well; he was not, his DNB entry says, a man who suffered fools gladly.

Leslie Audus was a botanist and plant physiologist. The son of a carpenter and a seamstress, he went to Cambridge from Soham Grammar School with a scholarship. Having gained his PhD he taught at University College Cardiff until being called up in 1940. In 1942 he was captured in Jakarta and imprisoned under appalling conditions until the end of the war. While in his first prison camp he produced yeast from maize to provide a vitamin supplement. Transferred to another camp where maize was not available, he discovered a mould fungus that would both provide vitamins and also produce an easily digestible protein from fermenting soya beans. His discoveries reduced the incidence of beriberi and cut the death-rate dramatically. While in Jakarta following his release he heard the familiar sounds of Brahms on a gramophone and found that his collection of records, marked with his initials, had survived the Japanese occupation.<sup>8</sup> After the war he returned to Cardiff, to continue his teaching and research. For a short time he held a post funded by Monsanto before becoming a professor at Bedford College London, where he remained until he retired. He was, the *DNB* records, a genial and kindly man, but 'those who crossed swords with him in debate were left in no doubt how he had managed to survive the worst the Japanese could throw at him.'<sup>9</sup>

It was not only in Universities that scientists could make their mark. John Rose, Richard Schilling and Frank Kearton all worked in Industry – each spent part of his time at ICI. Rose was with the company for more than 30 years in both research and management roles. Richard Schilling was a doctor whose work as a medical officer at ICI led him (via the Army Medical Corps) to a career in Occupational Medicine, a field which he was largely responsible for establishing as a major specialism.

Kearton, the son of a bricklayer, possessed the combination of talent with entrepreneurial flair which in the era of self-made men would undoubtedly have led him to build up his own business, but instead a first class degree from Oxford took him into the world of large corporations and government. After seven or eight years at ICI he was seconded to work on the British atomic bomb. After the war he left ICI for Courtaulds, where he remained until retiring in 1975. In his time the company grew from a medium-sized concern, technically innovative but poorly managed, to a major international company. He joined the board in 1952, and in 1961 came to public prominence in the opposition to ICI's attempted take-over. This resulted in his becoming Chairman in 1962. At the same time he was involved as a government adviser on transport (he had a hand in the Beeching 'reorganization' of the railways) and on manufacturing industry. In 1966 Harold Wilson appointed him to head the Industrial Reorganization Corporation which was responsible for a wholesale restructuring of (among other things) the motor and engineering industries through mergers and takeovers – he was not a believer in 'small is beautiful'. In 1975 he was appointed (again by a Wilson government) to head the British National Oil Corporation, where he was one of the architects of the North Sea Oil industry.

Kearton was one of the public faces of what Wilson famously described as the white heat of the technological revolution. I remember hearing him on *Any Questions* where he came across as a genial sort of cove, so it was some surprise to read of his authoritarian, ruthless management style. In the context of the time it would not have seemed paradoxical to find the determined pursuit of private gain coexisting with a genuine concern for communal goals. Kearton belonged to and flourished in that brief interlude of post-war consensus when it seemed that scientific innovation, rational reform, wealth creation and fair rewards, government planning and industrial enterprise, would together bring about a new world of progress and justice.

It won't have escaped your notice that all the scientists I've mentioned so far are men. Among those born before 1911 the proportion of women scientists is roughly 8% of the total; if we look

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<sup>8</sup> This anecdote is told in his *Daily Telegraph* obituary, 14 May 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Leslie Audus died in 2011 at the age of almost 100. He therefore only appeared in the *DNB* at the 2015 update.

ahead to those born between 1912 and 1940 the proportion rises to just over 10%. It would be a long time before science was accepted as a natural field for women. We noted that Norman Davidson's two daughters became eminent scientists, but one wonders how easy it was even for him to guide them in that direction. The cleverest child in my year at primary school was the daughter of a scientist, and I remember hearing that he found it hard to find a girl's grammar school with what he considered suitable facilities. 1911 was a particularly lean year in this respect with just one woman scientist out of 27. But she was quite someone.

Mary Barber was the daughter of a physician, and herself qualified as a doctor in 1940. She worked as a pathologist and in 1947 was appointed lecturer in bacteriology at Hammersmith Hospital. She observed an increase in resistance to penicillin among staphylococci, and was the first to identify the cause.<sup>10</sup> To combat this she imposed a regime requiring use of anti-biotic combinations. There was some opposition to her views, but her policies proved effective in reducing the levels of infection. Later, when methicillin was promoted by Beechams as a wonder-solution to the problem she insisted that only by using multiple antibiotics could resistance be overcome.<sup>11</sup> MRSA is a problem that is still with us. Mary Barber's work on the problem was recognised in 1965 when she was appointed to the Royal College of Physicians, but sadly her career was cut short that same year. A devout Christian, she was a passionate opponent of the Cold War and nuclear weapons; she was killed in a car accident on her way to a CND meeting in Lincolnshire.

Before leaving the world of science we'll consider two men whose main contribution was to increase public understanding of the natural world, Ernest Neal and George Waterston.

Ernest Neal was a schoolmaster and wildlife photographer whose initial interest was in butterflies and moths. One night when out observing moths he was captivated by the chance sighting of a badger. From then on he devoted his time to badgers and their habitat, observing and photographing them. He made his first film of badgers in 1949, followed by a longer one in 1954; in 1977 he was responsible for the BBC's *Badger Watch* series of five live transmissions from a sett. By then he was the acknowledged authority on badgers, regularly lecturing on them, and producing a number of publications, both popular and academic. His interests widened, and in 1953 he published a school book called *Woodland Ecology*, and was a founder member and long-time chairman and president of the Mammal Society of the British Isles. He also contributed to the study of wildlife abroad, notably in East Africa. But it is with badgers that he will always be associated – his autobiography was called *The Badger Man*. For fifteen years from its inception in 1975 he was a member of the government consultative panel on badgers and bovine tuberculosis. His public education work led to the two Badger acts of 1973 and 1991, the first protecting badgers from hunters and farmers, and the second extending protection to cover their setts.<sup>12</sup>

On leaving school in 1929 George Waterston went into the family stationery firm of George Waterston and Sons, and remained there, apart from war service, until 1955, but from boyhood onwards his consuming interest was ornithology. At school he was remembered for his denunciation of the hobby of egg-collecting.<sup>13</sup> In the 1930s he was instrumental in setting up the migratory bird observatory on the Isle of May, and in the foundation of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. He was particularly devoted to Fair Isle, partly, it was said, because it was his first glimpse of home when he was returning from captivity in Germany.<sup>14</sup> In 1955 he left the family business and devoted himself full-time to ornithology, being Scottish officer and later Scottish director of the RSPB. In the early 1960s he wrote on the return of the osprey to Scotland. It's not clear how committed he ever was to the stationery business – in a brief history of the firm<sup>15</sup> the only reference

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10 That germs were bound to develop resistance had been recognised at the time that penicillin was first discovered and introduced.

11 See <http://www.histmodbiomed.org/sites/default/files/44862.pdf> p10 (retrieved 29 December 2014). MRSA originally stood for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus; as more and more antibiotics were tried it became Multi-drug Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus.

12 These acts apply to England and Wales. The laws protecting badgers in Scotland (2004 and 2011) are more far-reaching. See <http://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/inthewild/badgers/law> and <http://www.scottishbadgers.org.uk/legislation.asp> (retrieved 29 December 2014)

13 We are used to the way things that were accepted as normal in our youth have been progressively frowned upon over the years and have now become almost unthinkable – smoking, drinking while drunk and casual racism are obvious examples. Others include egg-collecting and picking wild flowers.

14 Waterston was captured on Crete, but repatriated in 1943 because of kidney disease.

15 [http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/George\\_Waterston\\_and\\_Sons](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/George_Waterston_and_Sons) (retrieved 29 December 2014).

to his time there is a story that when the offices were broken into the intruders were assisted by finding the keys of the safe lying on his desk – but in ornithological matters he was, the *DNB* says, ‘a determined and organized operator, who would ardently pursue an end product with keen verbal proddings ...’

The last scientist we’ll look at is a maverick, Tom Harrisson, whose early training was in the natural sciences, but who moved into ethnography. Like Waterston, Harrisson began his ornithological activities while still at school, and immediately on leaving school he took part in an expedition to St Kilda and the following year organized 1300 volunteers to conduct a census of the great crested grebe. He dropped out of university and joined a series of expeditions to Lapland, Borneo and the New Hebrides. He developed a new interest in observing people, starting with the cannibals and head-hunters of Borneo. His book *Savage Civilisation* was a best-seller, but his lack of formal qualifications and poor language skills meant that his work was not well received in academic circles. Then in late 1936 Harrisson turned to observing the poor of his own country and Mass Observation was born. Numerous anonymous observers and diarists were recruited. The idea of ‘anthropology at home’ began as a Surrealist project, but its reports on public reactions to events were eventually taken seriously by the government as important indicators of the state of wartime morale. Now they provide important source material for social historians.

Towards the end of the war Harrisson’s knowledge of Borneo was employed in support of the Australian special forces on the island, and he recruited a band of head-hunters to harry the Japanese with blow-pipes. For almost twenty years after the war until his retirement in 1966 Harrisson was government ethnographer in Sarawak. He wrote popular books and was rewarded by the Royal Geographical Society for discoveries on Borneo, but he made many enemies and was accused of smuggling cultural artefacts. He eventually returned to Britain. Renewed interest was shown in the findings of Mass Observation and he handed the entire collection to Sussex University, where it forms the core of a growing archive of diaries, memoirs and letters. The archive fulfils Harrisson’s original ideal of giving the ordinary person’s view of events as a counterweight to the official version. He himself used the material collected in 1940-41 to produce *Living through the Blitz*. In 1976, before the book appeared, he and his fourth wife were killed in a road accident in Thailand. Larger than life, troubled, unreliable in his private dealings, and dismissed by many academic anthropologists and sociologists, Harrisson nonetheless commanded loyalty from friends and subordinates, and has left a lasting monument in the Mass Observation archive.

We saw how science took Frank Kearton into business. There were, of course, other ways of becoming a successful businessman, one of which was to follow one’s father. Cyril Kieft followed his father into the steel industry, but quickly branched out on his own and by shortly after the war<sup>16</sup> he had interests in his native South Wales, the Midlands and the north-east north-west of England. Meanwhile he had turned his hobby of motor racing into a business, designing and building his own cars. He mainly competed in formula 3, but one formula 1 car was built, but never raced – it was kept hidden for fifty years. After some years of innovation and success he sold the racing business and concentrated on steel and engineering.

Cyril Lord quickly rose from apprentice in the cotton industry to managerial positions. He had a role in organizing textile manufacture in Northern Ireland during the war, and by 1945 he was in a position to start his own company, based initially on two cotton mills in Chorley. His business was hit by cheap imports, prompting him to lobby vigorously for protectionist measures. Then in the late 50s he moved over into mass-manufacture of carpets, just at the right time, when the newly affluent were seeking to furnish their homes: ‘This is luxury you can afford, by Cyril Lord,’ was one of his advertising jingles.<sup>17</sup> By the late 60s sales were falling and his firm failed, amid accusations of fraudulent share dealings. By this time Lord himself was in poor health and had moved to the West Indies, where he died in 1984.

Another entrepreneur whose name became synonymous with his product was Gordon Fraser, publisher of greetings cards. While still an undergraduate at Cambridge he launched a small press, publishing pamphlets by, among others, F R Leavis (of whom he remained a firm admirer). After graduating he continued with the press and in 1935 opened a bookshop in Cambridge. He began to

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16 During the war he continued to manage his factories while serving as a bomb disposal officer in the Home Guard.

17 In our family house and, it seemed, in everyone else’s, the cracked lino and rag rugs of post-war days gave way to carpets.

sell fine art prints and, in 1938, his first Christmas cards. Progress was interrupted by the war, and then by service in UNESCO in Paris, but by 1954 he had resumed control of his business. In the following year he began to sell birthday cards, and this led to Valentines, Mother's Day and other greetings cards. He acquired a printing works for the card business, but also used it to return to book publishing. He was killed in a mysterious road accident in 1981.

Among the half dozen or so businessmen there is one woman, Christina Foyle, who was on the board of her father's bookselling business from 1940, and managing director from 1963 until her death in 1999. She was highly autocratic, paid her employees abysmally, resisted innovations such as cash registers, and left the famous Charing Cross Road shop in a dilapidated and chaotic condition. She refused to take orders by phone, and when warned that this policy risked losing business she replied that she was too rich to have to worry about money. One might be tempted to think this attitude was rather charming, if it were not for incidents like the sacking of forty employees in the postal department for talking too loudly.

Among those involved in business are a handful of advertising executives. Advertising had been around a long time, of course. There had always been entrepreneurs with a gift for self-publicity, like Thomas Barrett of Pears Soap, and the business of selling advertising space had been going on as long as there had been newspapers, but advertising as a profession was only established gradually in the late nineteenth century. Agencies set up by pioneers like Samuel Benson and William Smith Crawford advertised themselves as well as their clients' products. They organized advertising exhibitions and conventions, and established themselves in sumptuous offices. The advertiser no longer just promoted sales but began to advise on every aspect of the business. The new science of market research was important in the process. A key figure in these developments was born in 1911, David Ogilvie<sup>18</sup>, described by the *DNB* as the 'most creative advertising entrepreneur of the twentieth century' – a nice example of advertising the advertiser. His most famous line was coined for Rolls Royce, and is said to have cost him four days' toil: the loudest noise comes from the electric clock. Another advertiser born in 1911 was Harold Thompson, 'creative marketing director' at the Lonsdale-Hands Organization, but also known as the collaborator with his sister Beryl in producing the 'Anton' cartoons.

If, as we noted, science, the civil service and business offered few places for women, what were the fields where women born at the start of the century found opportunities to excel? The options were not very different from those identified by the early nineteenth century social reformer Priscilla Wakefield: writing, the visual arts, music, needlework, gardening, accounting<sup>19</sup>, education and acting.<sup>20</sup> Wakefield might have been surprised by the female politicians (Connie Monks and Margaret McKay) and by Myrtle Maclagan (cricketer and soldier) and Yolande Beekman (shot in 1944, one of twenty or so women agents in occupied France listed in the *DNB*<sup>21</sup>), but most of the women on our list followed lines that would not have shocked her.

Connie Monks was born and lived all her life in Chorley, Lancashire. She went to the grammar school on a scholarship and became head girl, after which she trained in Leeds as a teacher. She taught until her marriage in 1937, and again during the war, but after her husband was de-mobbed she joined him in running a corner shop. Meanwhile she became active in the local and regional Conservative party, and held various positions in local government, being mayor of Chorley in 1959. She contested the parliamentary seat unsuccessfully in 1966 and successfully in 1970. In the first election of 1974 she was defeated, and did not stand again. She was remembered as an exceedingly diligent constituency MP, but made little impact in the House of Commons. Her main political interest was always in the local community, but even there her work left no lasting impression. Wider economic and social developments, the closure of the mines and most of the cotton mills, and changes in the structure of local government, transformed the town she had grown up in and which she had served. Despite her considerable achievements there is a

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18 Among the employees of his firm, Ogilvie Benson and Maher, was the one-time boy soprano Ernest Lough, born 1911.

19 Christina Foyle was not a good advertisement for this.

20 Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex with Suggestions for its Improvement*, 2nd edition, 1817. She noted that women did well in the theatre, although she believed the profession was 'unsuitable' for women.

21 She was shot along with three colleagues at Dachau in 1944

melancholy note in her *DNB* entry, recording a lonely old age and hinting at unfulfilled potential. If it's true that she did not get as far as her talents should have taken her, it's hard not to suppose that it was being a woman that held her back. We can't but remember the scholarship boys whose grammar schools sent them not to teacher training college but to Universities, and who were able to carve out careers in their own right.

Margaret McKay was Labour MP for Clapham from 1964 to 1970. Her political journey had not been straightforward. At the age of 16, as a member of the Young Communist League, she was part of a Trades Union delegation to Russia. She was convinced of the success of the first ten years of the Revolution, and later spent time in Moscow working for Comintern. Back in England in 1932 she became disenchanted with the Party and turned her energies towards supporting the Labour Party and the Trades Union movement, becoming general secretary of the Union of Domestic Workers. Her union activities were diverse, including work with refugees and writing fashion notes for the magazine of the shop-workers union. She wrote an account of her life, *Generation in Revolt*, in 1953, and in 1954 published a book on women in the trades union movement. In 1962, having for some time been at loggerheads with leading trades unionists, she left to work in public relations for Unilever. In 1959 she tried and failed to be selected as parliamentary candidate, but stood in 1964 in Clapham, and won, holding the seat at the 1966 election. At first, as though trying to prove her reliability, she concentrated on bread and butter domestic issues, but in 1965 she took part in the United Nations Convention on the Status of Women, held in Tehran. She became increasingly sympathetic to the Arab cause, which at that time was not popular with any section of the British political class. She engaged in what looked like stunts – setting up a replica of a Palestinian refugee camp in Trafalgar Square, for example, and attending Parliament in Arab dress. Her outspoken support of the Palestinians and denunciations of the Zionist lobby led to accusations of anti-semitism, while her frequent visits to the Middle East lost her the support of her constituents. She did not stand for re-election in 1970. In 1971 she emigrated to the United Arab Emirates, where she remained for the remaining 25 years of her life.

Tam Dalyell, writing Margaret McKay's obituary in the *Independent*, quoted from her autobiography:

I did not want to be a rebel. I was a normal, life-loving teenager, interested in fun, dancing, boys and art. I just wanted to live with all my being and to the full extent of my capacities but this was denied me. Therefore, in sympathy with the spirit of those years I was possessed by a frenzy for change; and since a change, any change, could hardly be for the worse, it must inevitably be for the better. The Communist Party embodied and symbolised that great change, appeared as the instrument of it, pointed the way ...<sup>22</sup>

Dalyell recorded the exasperation felt by the Labour leadership at McKay's activities, and from his own experience as an MP who took up unpopular causes pointed out the mistake she made in not paying due attention to her constituency. But he also recalled that before entering Parliament she was a 'great force on the Left'. 'I hope New Labour has room for latterday Margaret McKays,' he concluded.

While Margaret McKay left the Communist Party after a few years, others on our list lasted longer, notably John Gollan, who was general secretary of the party from 1956 to 1975. Benny Rothman of Manchester was a long-time Party member and trade unionist, but his main claim to fame arose from his other passion, fell-walking. He led the mass-trespass of 1932 on Kinder Scout in the Peak District, then strictly preserved for game-shooting. At the time the Ramblers Association did not approve of this action (organized as it was by the Communist run British Workers' Sports Federation) but when the campaign for access to the countryside was revived in the 1980s the Association recruited Rothman to the cause and used the legend of the mass-trespass as part of its propaganda.

While on the topic of Communists we might notice that the Cambridge spy Guy Burgess was born in 1911, as were the Atom spies Alan Nunn May and Klaus Fuchs. While Burgess was a professional secret agent, Nunn May and Fuchs were scientists whose work put them in possession of secrets which they seem to have genuinely believed needed to be shared with Britain's Russian allies.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in the *Independent* 6 March 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituarymargaret-mckay-1340565.html> (retrieved 1 January 2015).

<sup>23</sup> The younger brother of the economist Alec Cairncross was John Cairncross, another member of the Cambridge spy ring.

The men of 1911 who became MPs (both Labour and Conservative) lasted longer in the Commons and most of them got further than Connie Monks and Margaret McKay – more pushy than Monks, less flamboyant than McKay.

Among the Conservatives was John Hare (later Lord Blakenham), who belonged to the patrician wing of the Tory Party and was said to be unusually knowledgeable (for a politician) on agricultural matters. He was (according to a 1964 article in the *Spectator*) considered by everyone in the party to be an awfully nice chap.<sup>24</sup> It was Hare who lent his Bentley (with its hare-mascot) to John Profumo to take a drive with Christine Keeler. After he retired from Politics (following the Conservative defeat in 1964) he joined Profumo in his charitable activities at Toynbee Hall.

A very different sort of Conservative minister was Aubrey Jones. The son of a miner, he won a place at the LSE, where he graduated with first-class honours. This background (the LSE was almost entirely staffed by committed left-wingers) should have taken him into Labour politics, but Jones was of a contrary nature. He went into journalism, becoming the Times's correspondent in Germany in the period leading up to the war. After wartime service in military intelligence he stood unsuccessfully for the Conservatives in the 1945 election. He left journalism for a spell in the steel industry, and then stood successfully in the 1950 election. Despite his obvious talents he was not given a job until 1955 when Eden made him minister of fuel and power (outside the cabinet). When Macmillan took over he was made minister of supply, still outside the cabinet but with substantial responsibilities. In the reorganization following the 1959 election the ministry of supply was abolished and Jones returned to the back-benches, where he soon showed himself to be more liberal than the mainstream of the party. Under the Wilson government he was made chairman of the National Board for Prices and Incomes, where he tried to implement a rational incomes policy as part of a planned economic strategy. It all started with high hopes, but the economic plan collapsed and the incomes policy was vigorously opposed by the unions. The Board was scrapped by the Heath government. Jones became a director of several large companies, and continued to argue for a prices and incomes policy. In the 1983 election he stood as a Liberal and lost.

Apart from Margaret McKay none of the other Labour MPs on our list (Maurice Edelman, Thomas Fraser, Willie Ross, Kenneth Robinson and Tony Greenwood) had a communist past to live down, although Maurice Edelman was probably what was often called a 'fellow-traveller' – in 1938 he published a book which claimed to expose the 'inventions' of western propaganda concerning the Stalinist show trials. As a journalist on *Picture Post* during the war he wrote (eulogistically, like most people at the time) about the role of Russia as gallant ally, and contributed 'graphic and politically astute' reporting of the campaigns in North Africa, Italy and France. In the course of the war he also published Penguin Specials on Russia and the future of France – and also a book on war production in Britain – *Production for Victory not Profit!* (Left Book Club, 1941). He entered parliament in 1945 and sat for thirty years for one or other of the Coventry seats, but despite his great talents never secured a power-base and never achieved government office. Harold Wilson is supposed to have thought him more interested in his writing career than in supporting the government. Be that as it may, he undoubtedly produced a wide range of fiction, non-fiction and journalism. In the sixties and seventies his attitude to the USSR became much more critical than it had been earlier, and as president of the Anglo-Jewish Association he attacked the Soviet treatment of Jews.

While none of the British politicians born in 1911 reached the top ranks, there are two commonwealth prime ministers in our list: Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago and Borg Olivier of Malta.

Eric Williams<sup>25</sup> became active in the struggle for the independence of Trinidad in the mid 50s, and quickly rose to prominence. He became chief minister in 1956, and prime minister when independence was won, remaining in his post until his death in 1981. A fine speaker and a statesman with a clear plan for raising the prosperity of his country, but perhaps too inflexible to be

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<sup>24</sup> J W M Thompson, 'Portrait of Lord Blakenham', *Spectator* 14 May 1964.

<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/15th-may-1964/9/portrait-of-lord-blakenham> (retrieved 2 January 2015)

<sup>25</sup> There are as many as seven people called Williams on our list, including another Eric Williams – the other being the author (more commonly known as Bill) of the *The Wooden Horse*, the account of his daring, ingenious and successful, escape from a prisoner-of-war camp.

generally popular, he was in some ways a divisive leader. Before entering politics he had a distinguished career as a historian. He argued that far from being a great humanitarian measure, the abolition of slavery was motivated by the need to do away with the plantation system in order to develop more advanced forms of capitalist production. This interpretation is still widely debated.

Whereas Williams dominated the political scene in Trinidad and Tobago, in Malta Borg Olivier was always pitted against his lifelong rival, the Labour leader Dom Mintoff. Mintoff was the more charismatic of the two, but Borg Olivier was a more persistent negotiator, and it was his version of independence that won the day, and in 1964 he became prime minister of an independent Malta which remained in the Commonwealth, and was firmly in the western camp. He remained in that post until 1971, and after that was leader of the opposition until 1976.

Another leader of a former part of the British empire was Ne Win of Burma.<sup>26</sup> Ne Win was one of the thirty comrades who led the Burma Independence Army, originally in alliance with the Japanese, but later (as the Burma National Army) joining the British in expelling the Japanese. After the assassination of chief minister Aung San, the leader of the thirty comrades, Ne Win emerged as the dominant military figure in the period before independence. He initially lent his support to the civilian rule of the first post-independence prime minister, U Nu, but first temporarily in 1958, and then again in 1962 he forced Nu from office; he remained in power until 1988.<sup>27</sup> Although he hoped to be succeeded by a civilian government, the military regime he created is still in existence.

As we've seen already and will see repeatedly again, the war was the overwhelming event that affected everyone of that generation, whether in the armed services or on the home front, or indeed as conscientious objectors, some going to prison for their opposition to conscription. Apart from the special agent Yolande Beekman, there were three others on the list who were killed on active service, Kenneth Farnes (the fastest bowler of his generation, killed when the Wellington he was flying crashed in Oxfordshire), the submarine commander David Wanklyn VC, and SOE officer Arthur Nicholls. Nicholls died of septicaemia in Albania after a harrowing fortnight's journey through snow, and was awarded a posthumous George Cross for 'heroism, fortitude, courage, leadership, the will to win, and devotion to duty which has seldom been equalled and never surpassed'.

Another hero and victim of the war should be mentioned. Harold le Druillenec was a schoolmaster in St Helier, Jersey when the island was occupied. He and his sister Mrs Louisa Gould were imprisoned for sheltering a Russian prisoner-of-war who had escaped from a labour camp. Both were sent to France and then with the retreating Germans into Germany, where Mrs Gould was killed in the concentration camp at Ravensbrück, and Harold was held first at Wilhelmshaven and then in Belsen, where he was found in an emaciated state when the camp was liberated. He recovered, gave evidence at Nuremberg and was invited to introduce the King's first peacetime Christmas message, saying a few words about his experiences. Twenty years later he was honoured by the Russian government and invited to Moscow, along with other Jersey people who had helped Russian prisoners, to meet the men they had helped.

Two army officers we should mention are Bernard Fergusson (later Lord Ballantrae), who after a distinguished but highly controversial army career became governor-general of New Zealand and Chancellor of the University of St Andrews; and Fitzroy Maclean, diplomat turned soldier, and subsequently a conservative MP, writer and broadcaster.<sup>28</sup> The *DNB* likens both Fergusson and Maclean to Buchan heroes, while Maclean is also said to be the prototype of James Bond.

Seven distinguished judges were born in 1911, of whom the most notable were Lords Widgery and Scarman, both of whom were involved in high profile public enquiries. Lord Widgery's enquiry into the Bloody Sunday shootings in Derry was widely held to have been too perfunctory and his findings, which exonerated the soldiers, were never accepted by the Nationalist community. A second enquiry under Lord Saville was set up in 1998 to investigate the events afresh, and after twelve years issued a report that overturned Lord Widgery's findings. Lord Scarman also

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<sup>26</sup> Ne Win ('Brilliant Sun') was his *nom de guerre*; he was born Shu Maung.

<sup>27</sup> Aung San's daughter Aung San Su Kyi (who never knew her father) first appeared on the political scene as a supporter of U Nu against Ne Win in the early 60s.

<sup>28</sup> Maclean is reputed to have been the first to advise Margaret Thatcher that Gorbachev was the man to watch.

conducted an enquiry into events in Northern Ireland but is best remembered for his 1981 enquiry into the Brixton riots. In the Brixton enquiry he managed to avoid discrediting the police<sup>29</sup>, but he acknowledged that ‘racial disadvantage’ was ‘a fact of current British life’. He pointed to the evidence of deprivation and high youth unemployment among the black community. After his retirement, Lord Scarman continued his interest in liberty and human rights, showing himself, some said, more radical than he had appeared when still on the bench. He was prominent in the campaigns to overturn the verdicts against the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and the Tottenham Three.

Another lawyer who had a marked effect on the development of the law was not a judge but the academic jurist, Glanville Williams. Born in Pontypridd and educated at Aberystwyth and Cambridge, Williams wrote many highly influential books and articles on all aspects of the law from liability for animals to the rules of evidence or the sanctity of life. He was a powerful voice on the Criminal Law Revision Committee. In all his writings two major principles were at work: that the law should be clear and accessible, and that it should be humane. His wife was a Quaker; while he was an agnostic, his manner and way of life was quakerly. A conscientious objector during the war, when offered a knighthood in recognition of his achievements he refused on the grounds that it would be incongruous for a man who had refused to wield a bayonet should become the bearer, even if only in theory, of a sword.<sup>30</sup> Although his official positions gave him scope to influence the law from the inside, he also saw himself as a radical outsider, and was prepared to campaign in public for changes which parliament and the legal establishment were slow to embrace – such as the liberalisation of the laws on abortion and euthanasia, the procedures for taking evidence from children in sex cases and the tape-recording of police interviews with suspects.

Architecture was a contentious topic in the decades before and after the second war – to the outsider architects always seem a particularly factious profession. Both the major architects who were born in 1911, Jane Drew and Peter Moro, early identified themselves as ‘modernists’, but their working lives were less concerned with theoretical arguments than the complex problems of reconstruction, both restoring neighbourhoods destroyed by the blitz, and carrying on the interrupted programmes of slum clearance in all the big towns and cities.

Moro came to public attention with his designs for the interior of the Royal Festival Hall. He went on to design or re-design a number of major theatres, but he was also responsible for a number of civic buildings such as schools, some public housing schemes and private houses – his own house in Blackheath is described by the *DNB* as an architectural gem.

Jane Drew entered the profession at a time when women had only recently been admitted to Architecture schools, and is generally regarded as Britain’s first major woman architect. In 1941, looking forward to the new world at the end of hostilities, she and Kenneth Clark organized an RIBA exhibition on ‘Rebuilding Britain’. After the war she, like Moro, was involved in designing buildings for the Festival of Britain on London’s South Bank. She also worked on a number of public housing schemes, both in London and in new towns such as Harlow and Hatfield.<sup>31</sup> Much of her work, however, was overseas. She had a long-standing commitment to West Africa, and she and her second husband Maxwell Fry were part of the consortium (which also included le Corbusier) that designed Chandigarh, the new capital of Indian Punjab. She collaborated on two books on the special problems of building in the tropics.

The journalist Malcolm MacEwen was (like his wife Ann, a leading architect and town-planner) a member of the Communist Party until 1956. When he left the Party he also left his job on the *Daily Worker*, at which point he began a new career in architectural journalism, working for the *Architects’ Journal* and then the RIBA. Ann MacEwen’s work as a town-planner had been strongly influenced by her socialist beliefs and her aim was always to build not just houses but all the community facilities (shops, schools, health centres, parks etc) which the residents would need. This ideal was largely thwarted by budget cuts. She was also concerned about the impact of the motor car on the environment that the planners were creating, and she was one of the team

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<sup>29</sup> He concluded that the officers displaying racist attitudes were ‘bad apples’, unlike the later Macpherson enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, which accused the police of ‘institutional racism’.

<sup>30</sup> Until this story emerged after his death it was assumed by some that because of his wartime pacifism he had not been offered a knighthood.

<sup>31</sup> This suggests that she did not take sides in the controversy over whether former slum-dwellers should be re-housed in or close to their original urban localities, or dispersed outside the city.

working on the Buchanan Report, *Traffic in Towns*. Malcolm MacEwen's disillusionment with the path taken by post-war redevelopment must have been influenced by his wife's experience. Like her he saw the destructive potential of the motor-car. They moved out of London, and Malcolm began a third career, with his wife, as an environmental campaigner, opposing, for example, the plans of the Exmoor National Park authority to permit ploughing of the moorland. The MacEwens did not regard their campaigns to protect National Parks as mere nostalgic preservation, but as providing 'greenprints' for the future. Malcolm's memoirs were tellingly entitled *The Greening of a Red*.

We've looked at people who distinguished themselves in a range of professions – civil service, education, science, industry and commerce, the law and architecture – but society does not function on the basis of paid employment alone, so we'll look at three figures from the voluntary or charitable sector.

Eirlys Roberts was half-Welsh, half-Scottish, was brought up in south London and studied classics at Cambridge. Before the war she mixed in literary and bohemian circles (doing fact-checking for Robert Graves, for instance, when he was writing his *Claudius* books). Her wartime marriage ended in divorce. After the war she worked for the United Nations doing relief work in Albania, and for the treasury on public information projects. This led her to write for the *Observer* on consumer affairs, and in 1957 she joined with Michael Young and others to launch the Consumers Association and the magazine *Which?* – independent of both government and industry, funded entirely from members' ten shilling subscriptions. She believed in plain language – short words, short sentences – shops, not retail outlets, the poor, not lower-income groups. She wrote that 'there are ... spheres in which it is proper that emotion, and not reason, should operate – such as love and aesthetics – but ... buying a refrigerator is not one of them.'<sup>32</sup>

Leslie Kirkley worked in local government in Manchester until he was sacked in 1940 under the council's policy of not employing conscientious objectors.<sup>33</sup> During the war he worked for the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Leeds, where he was involved in organizing refugee relief in Greece, and later in Germany and Austria. After the war he worked in business for a few years before being recruited as general secretary of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief. During his twenty-four years at Oxfam he both built up its fund-raising activities, including the chain of Oxfam shops, and established the principle that an essential part of the organization's function was to investigate the causes of poverty and hunger, an activity which some, including the Charity Commission, regarded as political rather than strictly charitable. After retiring from Oxfam he lent his organizational skills to strengthening other charities, including Help the Aged.<sup>34</sup> Among the many honours he collected in the course of his life was the position of head shepherd of the Greek village of Livaderon.

Anglican clergyman Chad Varah was the founder of the Samaritans, the network of befrienders working all day, all the year round to provide support to the suicidal. From its origin in 1954, when it was run from Varah's parish office at St Stephen's Walbrook, the Samaritans had grown to have 21 branches in 1964, and by the time of his death in 2007 there were more than 200 branches, with some 17,000 volunteers answering about 5 million 'contacts' a year.<sup>35</sup> During the 1980s Varah became estranged from the organization he had founded, but was reconciled a year or so before he died. An eccentric and autocratic figure, Chad Varah was plainly a difficult man to work with, but he was a good communicator. His (brief) sermons are described as mesmerising, and he also wrote books, a television play and journalism.<sup>36</sup> His contribution to *Picture Post*'s 1951 series *Sex and the Citizen* was a plea for openness about sex. Whatever the non-conformists and Roman Catholics

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<sup>32</sup> I can remember the excitement among friends of my parents when *Which?* first appeared. My parents themselves were pessimistic when it came to gadgets and machines, and, I suspect, too fatalistic to believe in spending much time thinking about which brand to buy.

<sup>33</sup> Kirkley was prominent in the Peace Pledge Union, and had been granted unconditional exemption from conscription. Brought up an Anglican, he joined the Quakers during the war.

<sup>34</sup> Characteristically he encouraged Help the Aged, originally a domestic charity, to move into the international sphere.

<sup>35</sup> Other countries followed the same model and at the time of his death there were some 400 Befrienders Centres in 40 countries.

<sup>36</sup> As well as frequent contributions to *Picture Post* (see particularly his article on suicide and the Samaritans, 30 June 1956) he also wrote for the Marcus Morris comics *Eagle* and *Girl*. It is said that with his scientific background he was able to advise on aspects of *Dan Dare*.

thought, he said, the Church of England believed that God intended sex to be pleasurable. In a society where most people were not Christians he advocated compulsory counselling (from a parson, physician and psychiatrist) for couples before marriage. He justified this interference with the liberty of the subject by insisting that society had a stake in promoting stable marriage, and adding that ‘the “patients” wouldn’t need to believe what they were told if they didn’t want to.’<sup>37</sup> The *DNB* says this article caused controversy, presumably for not being sufficiently firm in its condemnation of sex outside marriage. An early promoter of what was later called the permissive society, Varah remained committed to an open and liberal attitude towards sexual matters. In the 1990s he founded an organization to campaign against female genital mutilation, and his farewell sermon in 2003 voiced support for the gay bishop-elect of Gloucester.<sup>38</sup>

The one field in which the women on our list equal or outnumber the men is music.<sup>39</sup>

The pianist Clara Watson, from the Afro-Caribbean community of Cardiff, collaborated with and then married the guitarist Francisco Deniz. Their joint career illustrates the spreading influence on British music of the African traditions, via American jazz and Caribbean and Latin American (Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese) music. Francisco’s two brothers were also prominent musicians – all of them determined to find a living away from the sea.<sup>40</sup> The same motive drove another Cardiff Butetown musician of 1911, Don Johnson, whose earliest professional engagements were as a mandolin-player with Francisco and his brother José, first in Cardiff and then in London’s Soho. He had a fine tenor voice and was in demand as a singer as well as guitarist. After a successful career that included stage, radio and television appearances, he eventually went back to South Wales and worked for five years in a steel works. This was, of course, the same community and mix of musical traditions that, a generation later, would give us Shirley Bassey.<sup>41</sup>

Singer and pianist Rita Cann (who performed as Rita Lawrence) came from a very different social and musical background. Her father was a merchant from the Gold Coast, her mother, a teacher, was English. She was born in Streatham, where the family lived until after 1918, when her father’s business interests took them to Germany. There a young black woman had to fight to be taken seriously as a music student, but Rita managed to impress her piano teacher with her knowledge of Wagner’s *Ring*. Back in London before, during and after the second war she was in demand as a singer in night-clubs and on stage, which she claimed to enjoy even though it was not the sort of music she had trained for. In 1946 she formed the Havana Sextet<sup>42</sup>, being the first black woman to lead an instrumental group at such a level. She moved in left-wing, intellectual circles, with an interest in the anti-colonial struggle in West Africa and the Civil Rights movement in America – she accompanied Paul Robeson in concerts and on record. Eventually she left off performing in public and took a job as a telephonist at the British Museum. In retirement she gave concerts for the elderly. She died in 2001 in Cardiff.

Another pianist born in 1911 was Phyllis Sellick. When she married fellow pianist Cyril Smith in 1937 they were both already launched on their solo careers. As well as concert performances they

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37 ‘A Parson puts his Case’, *Picture Post*, 10 November 1951, Gale NewsVault, retrieved 15 January 2015.

38 See the *Times* obituary, 10 November 2007.

39 It depends how we define the profession. There are 14 whose field is classified as music, of whom seven are women. One of the fourteen is the music and theatre critic Philip Hope-Wallace, and if we exclude him it leaves the women in the majority. If we were also to exclude the librettist Myfanwy Piper we would be back to equality. There are further refinements. One of the men on the list is Ernest Lough, the boy soprano, who made the famous 1927 recording of ‘O for the wings of a dove’, but as an adult was not a professional musician. But the main point remains true, that music was one of the few fields in which women had the same chance of rising to the top as men.

40 Their father, a donkeyman (engine-room sailor) fell ill at sea and died in Odessa. Francisco was on the same ship and was forced to leave his father to die alone. He was at sea for some years, and his experience led to his being called up for the navy during the war. He survived being dive-bombed and twice torpedoed. He made the most of his time on shore in America to broaden his musical experience by playing with some of the leading jazz artists.

41 That we know as much as we do about these British black musicians is due in large part to the work of the (white) writer and photographer Val Wilmer who immersed herself in their music from the late 1950s onwards.

42 Her partner Marino Barreto was originally from Cuba.

broadcast live in the early experimental days of television. At one period transmissions would end for the evening with close-ups of Phyllis's hands playing suitably soporific music. Although they continued their separate careers they began increasingly to play together, starting in 1941 with Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* at the first Promenade Concert to be held at the Royal Albert Hall.<sup>43</sup> Composers began to write music especially for them. Then in 1956 Cyril suffered a stroke which left his left arm paralysed. Friends and pupils adapted piano duets to divide the parts into three hands instead of four, while composers also wrote music specially for three hands. After Cyril's death in 1974 Phyllis continued her concert career, but concentrated particularly on teaching. She died in 2007.

Susi Jeans (born Susanne Hock in Vienna) was an organist with an international reputation as a recitalist, teacher and musicologist. Her chief interest was in the baroque but she also promoted twentieth century composers. In 1935 she married the astronomer and mathematician Sir James Jeans, a talented amateur organist. His house already contained one large Romantic organ, and he installed a second for Susi, one more suited to her tastes, the two organ rooms being well sound-proofed so that they could play without disturbing each other. Her performances, and her historical researches into baroque keyboard instruments, had a strong influence on organ-building in Britain. In 1954 she inaugurated the Festival Hall organ, significantly with a German piece, Max Reger's 'Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan'.

Another foreign-born musician (born in Paris to a Swiss father and Scottish mother) who influenced instrument-making in Britain was Carl Dolmetsch. His father, Arnold Dolmetsch, settled in Britain, first in Hampstead then in Haslemere, and established a workshop for the manufacture of recorders, a skill that had all but died out.<sup>44</sup> From the age of fourteen Carl was involved in running recorder production. As well as reproducing traditional recorders and restoring original instruments, he pioneered changes, believing that to survive the recorder needed to evolve. He wrote music for the instrument and commissioned others to do the same. During the war the workshop was requisitioned for mass production of plastic aircraft components, and Carl used this experience to develop plastic recorders to meet growing demand from schools. The production of crafted wooden instruments continued, of course. Although keen for contemporary composers to write for the recorder, he did not like avant garde music and his chief love was early music – he took part in the Haslemere Early Music Festival every year from its inception in 1925 until his death in 1997.

The composer Phyllis Tate was expelled from school at the age of ten for singing a bawdy song, and her schooling ended there. She learned the ukulele and was encouraged to undertake formal musical training. She studied composition, conducting and timpani at the Royal Academy of Music, and immediately started composing, mainly light music, some of it under pseudonyms, but she also produced a cello concerto that was performed by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and a string quartet. She disowned most of her early pieces, the first work she recognised being her 1944 concerto for alto saxophone and strings. From the 50s onwards most of her compositions were for solo voices or choirs, along with several operas, including one in 1963 written for television. She is said to have planned a musical based on Mrs Beeton's *Household Management* with the recipes set as songs.

Among actors born in 1911 there are two whose names and faces remained familiar well into the 1990s, Thora Hird and Michael Hordern. Some will also remember the roguish grin of Terry-Thomas, who still crops up when comedies like *I'm All Right, Jack* are re-played on television.

There are also two leading film-actresses of the thirties, forties and fifties, Kay Walsh and Merle Oberon, who both just missed the top flight. Of Merle Oberon the *DNB* says:

... her dark beauty and svelte appearance added distinction and star quality to the films in which she appeared. In this, she complemented the more outstanding talent of the actors who played opposite her. ... There was a smouldering energy beneath her poised appearance which threatened to break loose from all control; it never did, but it attracted and sustained the cinema audience's attention.

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<sup>43</sup> This was after the previous venue, the Queen's Hall, had been damaged by bombing.

<sup>44</sup> It's said that the eight-year-old Carl left his father's eighteenth-century Bressan treble recorder on Waterloo Station, which prompted Arnold to work out how to reproduce it.

The verdict on Kay Walsh is: 'Though she never really became a fully fledged star, she was always incisive and convincing, with a demotic appeal uncommon among English film actresses of the time.' From the fifties onwards she made the move from starring to character parts – perhaps this should be dated from her role as Nancy in David Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948). She was married to Lean from 1940 to 1949. From what we learn about her contributions to some of his films it seems that she might well have succeeded as a writer or director, but perhaps it just wasn't something that women did in those days. Both women were, in different ways, outsiders, Walsh the daughter of impoverished Irish immigrants in London, and Oberon the daughter of a Sri Lankan mother and English father. Mixed race was a problem in Hollywood, and Oberon's mother, when she accompanied her to America, was described as her maid.

Other actors on our list are known not for their acting but for other activities. Michael Brooke, for instance, is hardly remembered for his few years under contract to Hollywood studios in the 1930s, and is better known as Fulke Greville, seventh earl of Warwick. He found his aristocratic position a burden, although the family's vast art collection became his main source of income. From the thirties onwards he was selling off some of the less well-known parts of the collection, as well as parts of the Warwick Castle estate. The sell-off gathered pace under his son's management, the disposals being far beyond what was needed for the upkeep of the castle. The *DNB*'s scathing verdict is that the family's behaviour 'celebrated cash value over the idea that the landed nobility held treasures of art and architecture as an informal public trust', in sharp contradiction of the Greville motto of *vix ea nostra voco*.<sup>45</sup>

Ray Mander and Joe Mitchenson had careers in repertory in the 30s and 40s, but from then on devoted their time to collecting theatrical memorabilia – play-bills, prompt scripts, prints, figurines – they were indiscriminate in snapping up anything relevant to theatre history. The collection grew from a private obsession to be an historical resource of national importance. After outgrowing various other locations it is now housed at the Trinity College of Music in Greenwich. For actors it is, in Sybil Thorndyke's words, their 'passport to posterity'.<sup>46</sup>

Among visual artists the most important were two very different painters, Josef Herman and Roger Hilton.

Born in poverty in Warsaw, Josef Herman attended art school briefly in 1930-32 and his early works were mainly expressionist studies of peasant life in the Carpathian mountains.<sup>47</sup> Encountering anti-semitism in Poland he left shortly before the German invasion and eventually made his way to Britain, where he found a welcome amongst the wartime artistic community in Glasgow. His entire family died in the Holocaust. Josef quickly established himself on the art scene in Glasgow and London, working in a variety of media. He is perhaps best known for the series of studies of the mining community of Ystradgynlais in South Wales, where he lived and worked for eleven years from 1944, damaging his own health and that of his wife. In the 60s he suffered a severe mental breakdown for which he was given electro-convulsive therapy. He recovered and continued working until his death in 2000. 'His profoundly humanistic vision has an inspiring boldness and monumental grandeur,' the *DNB* concludes.

Roger Hilton was born in comfortable circumstances in Hertfordshire and was trained at the Slade School and in Paris. Serving in the commandos, he was taken prisoner at the disastrous Dieppe raid in 1942. After the war he followed the lead of Victor Passmore away from figurative and towards abstract painting, and quickly rose to prominence in the 50s and 60s. His work was frequently well in advance of public taste, but he was, the *DNB* says, 'a painter and draughtsman of authority, and a subtle colourist, almost unable to make marks on paper not charged with energy ...' He continued working up to his death, although largely confined to his bed for the last two years of life.

The sculptor Arnold Machin was born in Stoke-on-Trent, one of twelve children of a pottery modeller, and started work as an apprentice china-painter in 1925. It was only ten years later, at the age of 24, that he was able to become a full-time art student, studying sculpture first at Derby School of Art and then at the Royal College of Art in London. For a year in 1942/3 he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector, spending the rest of the war working for Wedgwood as a terracotta modeller. Although he went on to produce larger-scale works, his best known images are

<sup>45</sup> The eighth earl's occupation is given as 'art and property divester'.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in *DNB*.

<sup>47</sup> He allied himself with a group of 'socially aware' artists known as the Phrygian Bonnet.

two portraits of the queen – those on the original decimal coinage and on British postage stamps. The stamp image (taken from a photograph of a sculpted relief that he modelled in clay) is said to have appeared on more than 175 billion stamps, thought to be the most reproduced image in history. In 2007 a portrait of Machin appeared on a special issue alongside his queen's head. Towards the end of his life Machin found himself out of sympathy with the direction of modern art and was a leading protester against the Royal Academy's *Sensation* exhibition of 1997. Of his own art he said, 'I think that I was born a terracotta modeller. ... Whereas in stone-carving the sculpture is produced by cutting away and destroying the original stone, in work with clay one is building up and creating from the earth itself.'

Sven Berlin was a stone-carver. Born in south-east London, second child of a Swedish businessman and his English wife, he had little formal art training, and spent most of the 30s as part of a music-hall dance duo. Shortly before the war he settled in Cornwall with his dancing partner, now his wife, and devoted himself to art, supporting his family by labouring work at a tin mine. He registered as a conscientious objector (and consequently lost his job) but later signed up with the Royal Artillery and was involved in the Normandy landings. After the war he was a colourful member of the St Ives artists colony. He wrote the first biography of the naïve painter Alfred Wallis – his third wife was a distant relative of Wallis. After years of controversy in which he took the 'traditionalist' side against the modernist and abstractionist movement represented by Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson, Berlin left St Ives (with his second wife and children) on a horse drawn cart, and settled for ten years in the New Forest. He continued with his sculpture while also writing, among other books, a novel called *The Dark Monarch* about an artists colony in the town of Cuckoo, closely modelled on St Ives. The book's account of the St Ives quarrels is fiercely partisan and after protests from artists who recognised themselves it was withdrawn and pulped. When the household in the New Forest broke up he moved to the Isle of Wight before settling in Dorset with his third wife. He believed himself to have come out on the losing side in the artistic controversies of the fifties and sixties, and regarded his years in the New Forest and Dorset as an ostracism, but when he visited St Ives in the 1990s he was greeted as one of the last survivors of the vibrant and bohemian post-war days.

We've seen academics, politicians and artists who wrote books more or less as a sideline to their main occupation, but now we come to the professional writers. These include three important novelists (Mervyn Peake, creator of Gormenghast, the Nobel laureate William Golding, and the German born novelist, travel writer and memoirist Sybille Bedford); the leading playwright Terence Rattigan; and the great Gaelic poet Sorley Maclean. In addition to these major figures there were a score of other writers of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, journalism and books for children.

Some would question my classing Sybille Bedford as a major writer. She did not break new ground stylistically or belong to any school or movement. She produced only a handful of novels, consisting mainly of re-workings of her own extraordinary life. My judgement is based exclusively on her astonishing and moving first novel, *A Legacy* (1956), in which, with wit, honesty and clarity she exposes the vanished, futile life of her German father's family. Evelyn Waugh admired the book's lack of sentimental nostalgia and described it as a 'remarkable historical novel'.<sup>48</sup> As a young woman Sybille Bedford (then Sybille von Schoenebeck) was involved with an anti-Nazi magazine published in France, which brought her, and her mother's Jewish ancestry, to the attention of the German authorities. In 1935 she came to Britain and underwent a marriage of convenience, which gave her an English name and a British passport. She spent most of the war in America. In 1953 she began her writing career with *A Visit to Don Otavio*, widely regarded, the *DNB* says, as 'a classic of travel literature'. Then came *A Legacy* and a number of other novels and works of non-fiction, including an account of the trial of Bodkin Adams. After years without a fixed abode she settled in Chelsea in 1979. She lived to be almost 95.

Nor would everyone accept my estimate of Mervyn Peake. He began his career as a painter, illustrator and poet, producing his first novel, *Titus Groan* in 1946. His literary output was limited and its quality towards the end of his life was affected by his progressive illness (a form of Parkinson's disease). There's a temptation to pigeon-hole him as a fantasy-writer, but to my mind his rich prose and fertile imagination make the *Titus Groan* books among the greatest post-war novels. *Punch* is quoted in the *DNB* as describing *Gormenghast* (1951, the second of the *Titus*

<sup>48</sup> *Spectator* 13 April 1956. <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/13th-april-1956/26/a-remarkable-historical-novel> (retrieved 2 January 2015). Waugh noted a number of blemishes in the development of the plot, putting them down, on the whole, to her inexperience as a novelist.

books) as 'the finest imaginative feat in the English novel since *Ulysses*'. Horror is never far away, almost certainly influenced by his experience as a war artist among the survivors of Belsen, although already before the war his children's book *Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor* was thought by some to be 'unsuitable for sensitive children'.<sup>49</sup>

Nobody can question the status of William Golding, literary knight and Nobel prize-winner. His *Lord of the Flies* has long been adopted as a school-text, but his novels are not easy. They are densely written fables about human evil which, his admirers feel, make the work of younger contemporaries like Kingsley Amis and Iris Murdoch seem parochial and limited, flippant. He wrote in 1965:

Before the second world war I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society would produce goodwill; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganisation of society ... but after the war I did not because I was unable to. I had discovered what one man could do to another ... I must say that anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey must have been blind or wrong in the head.<sup>50</sup>

*Free Fall* (1959) is unusual among Golding's books in that it is set in the Britain of his own time, including the war. One of the things that the war taught him men could do to each other was the torture of prisoners. The book describes the horror of solitary confinement in total darkness. The prisoner stays close to the wall terrified of an unknown something in the centre of the room. The terror the hero experienced in the darkness lasts all through the book.

In Golding's novel it's an English prisoner confined in the dark by the Germans, but another writer born in 1911, G F Green, describes the same torture in a British military detention camp in Ceylon. A Singhalese prisoner is locked in the 'dark cell' as a punishment for having attempted suicide. Green (himself an inmate in the camp serving a two year sentence for homosexuality) recalls the screams of terror as the Singhalese prisoner became aware of something alive in the cell with him, something moving, unidentifiable in the utter darkness. What had happened was that the sadistic sergeants who ran the prison had introduced a frog into the cell when they brought his bread and water. They kicked the door to make him to stop screaming and then returned laughing to their mess.<sup>51</sup>

Among the other novelists listed I'll mention just two.

Gerald Kersh's novels were well-known in their time, some of them best-sellers in both Britain and America, but I've not met anyone who has heard of him. Anthony Burgess described *Fowler's End* (1957) as 'one of the best comic novels of the century', and the critic Iain Sinclair describes *Night and the City* (1938) as a masterpiece. Kersh, Sinclair says, belongs to a band of authors of lowlife fiction 'whose names are whispered among the cognoscenti like a confederation of secret masters'. Burgess and Sinclair are always great champions of the literary outsider. You won't find Gerald Kersh in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.<sup>52</sup>

Rosemary Manning is still more elusive. As well as publishing a number of novels and collections of short stories, and books for children, she was a teacher, for many years headmistress of a private girls school. Like others on the Left she had prepared for a possible German invasion by obtaining Liminal pills with which to commit suicide, and twenty years later, in 1962, used them in a serious attempt, frustrated only because a letter she had posted to a friend arrived sooner than expected. A volume of autobiography, *A Time and a Time*, written not long after her suicide attempt, was first published in 1971. Unable to face the scandal and hostility that would result from open discussion of her lesbianism, she published the book under the pseudonym Sarah Davys.<sup>53</sup> In 1980, as attitudes relaxed, she openly declared her sexuality and the book was re-issued using her own

49 *Punch*, quoted in the *DNB*.

50 Golding in his essay 'Fable' (1965), quoted in *DNB*.

51 'Military Detention' by 'Lieutenant Z', *Penguin New Writing* 21, 1947. Green was later repatriated to complete his sentence in Wakefield Prison.

52 Burgess's estimation is quoted in the *DNB*. For Sinclair's see 'You've got it or you haven't', a review of criminal memoirs in the *LRB*, 24 February 1993 (*LRB* archive, retrieved 5 January 2015).

53 She also published under the name Mary Voyle. 'Pseudonyms have played an important part in the history of lesbian literature ... protection against a heterosexual culture ...' Nicki Hastie (1989) *The Muted Lesbian Voice: Coming out of camouflage* <http://www.nickihastie.demon.co.uk/muted.html> (retrieved 5 January 2015)

name in 1982. A second autobiographical book, *A Corridor of Mirrors*, was first published in 1987, the year before her death, likewise under her own name.

Among the journalists are two of the all time greats of the profession, Marjorie Proops and James Cameron.

Marjorie Proops started as a fashion artist, and was encouraged into writing when editors noticed the quality of her captions. Married in 1935, she carried on working, and her career developed during the war, by the end of which she was appointed fashion editor, and then woman's editor at the *Daily Herald*. When the advice columnist left and she couldn't find a replacement she started answering the queries herself. In the course of fifty years as an agony aunt she was said to have corresponded with 3% of the British population, and to have saved more souls than the Salvation Army. A colleague described her advice as 'brutally frank, sexually aware, liberal to the point of illegality'. The *DNB* entry (written by Katherine Whitehorn) concludes: 'She embodied the best of the liberal spirit of the second half of her century.'

James Cameron was born in London, son of a Scots barrister and novelist. He began his working life at the age of 16 in Dundee on the D C Thomson papers, moving to the *Daily Express* just before the war. It was at the end of the war that he launched into his career as a foreign correspondent, witnessing the explosion of the atomic bomb at Bikini, the independence negotiations in India, and the brutal and corrupt regime of Syngman Rhee in South Korea.<sup>54</sup> He remained an opponent of nuclear weapons and a critic of imperialism for the rest of his life. After resigning from first the *Daily Express* and then *Picture Post* on matters of principle<sup>55</sup>, he worked for the *News Chronicle* for most of the 1950s. After the closure of the *Chronicle* in 1960 Cameron turned to television. In 1965 he boldly took a film-crew to North Vietnam. His *DNB* entry is one of two contributed by Michael Foot, and is delightfully less measured and cautious than most entries. Foot writes of Cameron's charm, passion, wit and 'matchless integrity' and says that he could 'raise journalism to the highest level of literature, like a Swift or a Hazlitt'. We can hear the voices of both Foot and Cameron himself in the description of the aftermath of the near fatal road accident in India<sup>56</sup>: 'A bundle of skin, bones, wood and wire was somehow trans-shipped back to London and there stuck together by the National Health Service and Cameron's wife.'

Had this talk been written in the early 1950s I'd have said that the outstanding writer of the cohort of 1911 was the playwright Terence Rattigan. From 1936 (*French Without Tears*) to 1956 (*Separate Tables*) Rattigan's well-made plays dominated the west-end theatre with their witty dialogue and painfully accurate anatomising of suppressed and unsatisfied emotion. But then the public taste changed. *Waiting for Godot* (1955) and *Look Back in Anger* (1956) introduced a new idiom, new subject-matter and new voices. The well-made play was out, and Rattigan's upper-middle class characters were of no interest. For more than a decade Rattigan confined himself to screenplays. In the 70s he had a renaissance, with new plays (particularly *In Praise of Love* and *Cause célèbre*) and revivals of earlier works. It's now possible to see things in proportion and to recognise the depth and humanity of Rattigan's best work, such as *The Deep Blue Sea*, *The Winslow Boy* and *The Browning Version*.

The ups and downs of Rattigan's critical reputation remind us that the *DNB* entries, like any other piece of historical writing, are affected by the point of view of their authors, moderated no doubt by the editorial team, but always moulded by prevailing attitudes.<sup>57</sup> Some entries are written by academics, others (like those of Marjorie Proops and James Cameron) are clearly written by friends and admirers. Even the question of who's included in the dictionary is to some extent dependent on shifts in ideology and fashion. So is there anyone born in 1911 whom I would have expected to see in the dictionary but who is, as yet, not there?

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54 Syngman Rhee (1875-1965), president of S Korea 1948-60.

55 The *Express's* sister paper the *Evening Standard* had published a slur against Labour minister John Strachey, and then Tom Hopkinson, the editor of *Picture Post*, was sacked for attempting to publish Cameron's reports from Korea.

56 The accident happened during Cameron's honeymoon with his third wife, Monesha Darkar. His first wife, Dundee-born artist Elma Murray, died giving birth to their first child. His second marriage, to Elizabeth O'Connor, ended in divorce.

57 This becomes very apparent when one compares some of the entries in the original late 19th century *Dictionary* with their current replacements.

One such absentee is, it seems to me, the novelist, poet, translator and critic Rayner Heppenstall, who died in 1981. He wrote some eight novels, none of which I have read, or indeed seen until very recently. He was engaged in left-wing, pacifist and literary circles before the war, but when war came he responded to the call-up and served in the army in Yorkshire and Northern Ireland. For years he worked as producer and writer for the BBC.<sup>58</sup> His novels are what is called experimental, written against the grain of the conventional plot, and often offending against public taste.<sup>59</sup> He was credited (wrongly in his opinion) with influencing the French *nouveau roman*, but he was undoubtedly an important influence on certain avant garde novelists of the 60s and 70s, including the most prominent, B S Johnson. In the last decade of his life he is said to have become increasingly eccentric in his views, and after his death seems to have been all but forgotten. The 2004 biography of Johnson makes no mention of him.<sup>60</sup> I've found it hard to get hold of any of his books, even on Abebooks, and the only one that I've ever come across in secondhand bookshops is his very readable memoir, *Four Absentees*, about four friends from the 30s and 40s. So it's not surprising that he is not in the *DNB*. But that might be about to change: I noticed the other day that his first novel, *Blaze of Noon* (1939) has been re-issued.

We began our survey with a great lowland Scot, the economist Alec Cairncross, and we'll end with a great highland Scot, the Gaelic poet Sorley MacLean. He grew up on Raasay with an inherited insight into traditional songs and stories, anger at memories of the Clearances, and a strong dislike of the Elect of the Free Presbyterian church: 'I regard their preoccupation with salvation much as I regard the careerist at present,' he wrote to a friend. He graduated from Edinburgh with a first class degree in English and became a teacher, the career he pursued until his retirement in 1972, interrupted only by war service which ended when he was invalided out of the army in 1943 having been severely wounded at el Alamein. In Edinburgh his vocation as a poet was confirmed by friendship with Hugh MacDiarmid. He believed that for too long Gaelic poetry had been rooted in the past, in past griefs and sufferings, and in the sentimentality of the Celtic twilight, and he was determined to make it a medium for addressing the political issues of his time and of the whole world. As a young man he was torn between going to fight fascism in Spain, and his personal and family motives for taking a job. This tension, and his disgust with himself for staying at home, are evident in his pre-war writing. After the war his poetic output was limited by his commitment to teaching – he ended as headmaster of Plockton High School, where he had a heavy teaching load as well as administrative duties, not to mention training the shinty team. In retirement he was in great demand as a reader of his own poetry, which reflected both the immediate appeal of his work, even to those reliant on English translations, and also the high regard in which he was held by fellow poets, including Seamus Heaney.<sup>61</sup> His poetry is bold, harsh and tender, always exciting, 'totally engaged ... [making] the blood run faster'.<sup>62</sup> Behind it all is a humorous and humane man, unreservedly committed to all the duties of life. He lived with the century, and I'll end with his prosaic and measured summary, delivered in a *Scotsman* interview in 1996:

For ill, but perhaps not absolutely for ill, the Great War. For bad, the Great Depression. For sheer amount of misery, the second World War. For good, the government of Attlee, which was continued to a certain extent by Macmillan and people like that, which did an awful lot for the good of the country, and which was undone by the government of Thatcher.<sup>63</sup>

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58 The reason why I have remembered him is that I used to listen to the wireless a lot as a child and his name struck me as unusual, so when I came across his book *Four Absentees* on a second-hand stall I picked it up.

59 The *Evening Standard* called *Blaze at Noon* an 'affront to decency', and James Agate wrote that *Saturnine* (1943) was 'a book more dangerous than bosh'. One passage that Agate objected to was this: 'Consider merely that everyone stinks of excrement and putrefaction. That goes for you and me, for the Prime Minister and the Hangman, for the Queen of England, the little princesses and the Queen Mother, for all the war-lords of Europe.' See G J Buckell, 'Rayner Heppenstall', *Context* No 18, Dalkey Archive Press ([www.dalkeyarchive.com/rayner-heppenstall/](http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/rayner-heppenstall/), retrieved 10 January 2015).

60 Jonathan Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*.

61 MacLean himself produced English versions of many of his poems. Heaney doubtless expressed his admiration many times, but I am relying on Pete Jarvis's report of hearing him say that Sorley was at the summit while he, Seamus, was still in the foothills.

62 Ronald Black in the notes to *An Tuil*, his anthology of twentieth century Scottish Gaelic verse, p 766.

63 *The Scotsman*, 24 October 1996, a month before his death, quoted in *An Tuil*, p 766. Presumably the Great War was 'not absolutely for ill' because it led to the fall of three empires, and the weakening of a fourth, the British.

Whether the judgement of history will be quite as clear-cut I don't know, but he was speaking for many of his generation.

There is a slightly different narrative which sees the break-up of the post-war consensus not as the work of a malevolent politician but as due rather to flaws inherent in the programmes of the post-war governments: the repeated attempts to modernise British industry through mergers and government planning; housing developments that took little account of the wishes and needs of the inhabitants; the pursuit of food security through the relentless industrialisation of agriculture.