

George Yule's Continuing Influence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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