

Way back at the beginning of 2015 I was asked to contribute to *The Utopian Universities: the new campuses of the 1960s*, a collection edited by Jill Pellew and Miles Taylor. 'Social History Comes to Warwick' is the title I was given to write to. I sent off this, the final version, to the editors, in June 2016. It's worth remembering that it is two years old. I hadn't looked at the piece until I unearthed it as my contribution to the seminar at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research. I very much look forward to contextualising it, both as a piece of writing and as a contribution to the history of the 'new' universities of the 1960s.

*The Utopian Universities* hasn't yet been published and I have no idea if it ever will be published. Because the essay's status—and fate!—are so uncertain it should not be quoted or cited without my permission.

## *Social History Comes to Warwick*

'Isn't your father Vice-Chancellor of Wolverton University?' asked the women from the Department of the Environment, and initiated a long conversation about new British Universities ... Frances struggled, and then gave in. It was going to be boring, after all.  
Margaret Drabble, *The Realms of Gold*, 1975.

Old provincial society had its share of ... subtle movement ... . Some slipped a little downward, some got higher footing ... . Settlers, too, came from distant counties, some with an alarming novelty of skill, others with an offensive advantage in cunning.  
George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1871-2, Book 1, Chapter 11.

I think Mike Shattock, if I'm wrong to Mike I do apologise, but I do remember him saying once, you know, in the very early days, 'Actually, if we got closed down for whatever reason or we suddenly just didn't happen, the leaves would blow very quickly through here, the buildings would fall down and it ...[would be] as though it never existed'.  
Will Fitzgerald, 'Voices of the University', University of Warwick, 2015.<sup>1</sup>

### **1970: An Introduction**

Why might the story of social history at Warwick be worth telling, yet again? Is it historically significant in a way that social history at—say—York, Canada, or York in the North Riding isn't? Why ask about social history at an English Midlands new university rather than—say—one of the many redbrick economic history departments

---

<sup>1</sup>Margaret Drabble, *The Realms of Gold* (1975), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 234; George Eliot, *Middlemarch. A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-72), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965; University of Warwick (UW), Modern Records Centre (MRC), 976/5 /1/1-4, 'Voices of the University. Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015', Oral History Project, Interview with Will Fitzgerald, 15-16 April 2014. Michael Shattock was Registrar of the University of Warwick from 1969 to 1999; Will Fitzgerald was Secretary of the Warwick Students' Union in 1969 and President 1970-71. See Grace Huxford and Richard Wallace, 'Voices of the University. Anniversary Culture and Oral Histories of Higher Education', *Oral History*, forthcoming.

that became 'social and economic' in the years after the Second World War? 'The Warwick Centre for Social History', 'E. P. Thompson', and 'The Files Affair' are caught together in a perpetual *menage à trois* of the historical imagination; that's why. In the myths and stories that sustain social historians' identity—the sense of who we are and why we do what we do—there was a battle, long ago that we have to keep remembering again and again, though at this distance of time we're as uncertain about interpretation as was William Wordsworth contemplating his Solitary Reaper.<sup>2</sup>

The story goes something like this: at the brand new University of Warwick, a Centre for Social History was established; this had something—or a lot, depending on your perspective—to do with Edward Thompson, who had been appointed to the Warwick History School in 1965, two years after the publication of *The Making of the English Working Class*. Early in 1970 there was a series of student occupations of the Warwick Registry. Students protested at the continued reluctance of the University to grant the them autonomous control of a Students' Union building. During the second occupation of the Registry, in February, students opened administrative files in one of the Registry offices and found letters and other documents suggesting that surveillance was being carried out against certain university staff, and that there had been political profiling of prospective Warwick students. E. P. Thompson was

---

<sup>2</sup>'Will no one tell me what she sings?— / Perhaps the plaintive numbers  
flow/For old, unhappy, far-off things,/ And battles long ago:/ Or is it some more  
humble lay,/Familiar matter of to-day?/ Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,/That has  
been, and may be again?'. William Wordsworth, 'The Solitary Reaper', 1807.

telephoned at his house in Leamington Spa (seven miles from the University); he drove in; the papers were copied and distributed among University staff. Thompson published a burning piece of polemic on the background to 'The Files Affair' in *New Society* on 19<sup>th</sup> February. There were rapid negotiations with Penguin Books: *Warwick University Ltd*, famously written in a week, was an edited collection of participants' testimony, published in March 1970. Now the University's broken promise to students about the Union building and its management was linked to political surveillance at Warwick and in the wider community. Now questions were asked about how the University's relationship with local industry inflected its own system of governance. All the factors were now in place to allow one to imagine Warwick in its relationship with the motor industry *as* the eighteenth-century state, with Oliver the Spy in its employ;—as William Cobbett's 'It';—as 'The Beast'.<sup>3</sup> If you had a mind to do so 'the new mid-Atlantic world of the Midlands Motor and Aircraft Industry' might be mapped onto the great landed aristocracy of the eighteenth century, 'exert[ing] their power by manifold exercise of interest, influence, and purchase'. The new lords of 1970 'seem to infiltrate the command-posts of our society, including our educational institutions, not through any transparent democratic process, but quietly, in unnoticed ways', wrote Thompson. 'They apparently share with their

---

<sup>3</sup>For the government spy Oliver, used by the Home Department during the Luddite Rebellion, Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, passim; also for William Cobbett, passim; *Witness against the Beast. William Blake and the Moral Law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

precursors the same assumptions that it is their world, to dispose of by ownership and by right of purchase'.<sup>4</sup> And, if you had a mind to, you could go on making feeble jokes about whether the room you were just about to teach in was bugged, right into the new century. That particular 'social-history-at-Warwick' story ended with Thompson resigning from Warwick. He left in September 1970, but left behind his legacy in a Centre for the Study of Social History. Told that way, with that end-stop, the story is about the meeting of an institution with a great historian.

The primary source for anyone pursuing this history is the reissued *Warwick University Ltd. Industry, Management and the Universities* (2014). Its new Introduction is particularly valuable. So too is the perspective that has emerged from Warwick's Fiftieth Anniversary Oral History Project. Forty years on, some former student participants in the Registry Occupation now remember how their own politics of everyday life—attempts to change the food available in the Students' Union, its opening hours, domestic arrangements in halls of residence—were appropriated to a much grander narrative of the secret state, the inner workings of local capitalism, and political and industrial espionage. The story can then be used to understand Thompson's obsession with finding the roots of the surveillance state. None of these versions have much to say about the social history with which Thompson's reputation is so closely linked, or about the exclusions and obfuscations of

---

<sup>4</sup>E. P. Thompson (ed.), *Warwick University Ltd. Industry, Management and the Universities* (1970), Spokesman, Nottingham, 2014, p. 17.

disciplinary formation in one utopian university, between about 1965 and 1975. This chapter provides yet another, different story, to add to all the ones we possess.

*Settlers, too, ...*

This will be a lot less boring than Margaret Drabble's Frances thought a discussion of the new universities was going to be—it will make more historical sense—if I am allowed a confessional prolegomenon, of three items. The first is that from 1997 to 1998 I was Director of the Centre for Social History (CSSH) at the University of Warwick, the graduate teaching centre which Edward Thompson and many others laboured so assiduously to establish between 1964 and 1968. In 1998 it was disestablished, or dissolved, or whatever the term is for disbanding a part of a university that has formal departmental status, and its staff were transferred to the Warwick History Department from whence, in administrative and institutional terms, CSSH had come, in 1963, or 1964, or 1966 or 1968. (This chapter will explain why you have such a cornucopia of birth dates to choose from.) In my wilder and guiltier moments I know that one day, or after my days, I shall be held accountable for this—letting it go, not saving it, being responsible for its demise—before some Bar of Judgement, some Bench of Historians sitting just outside the gates of the heavenly city. This is said so that the writer can clamp down on the hyperbole *right now*; but also in order to alert the reader to her involvement in the questions discussed here. The second point is about *Middlemarch* (1871-2). I'd read it at least ten times by the time I came to live in Warwickshire in 1976. 'Loamshire' is Warwickshire in George

Eliot's historical novel, and 'Middlemarch' is Coventry. It had been the set text for the literature part of my history degree at Sussex between 1965 and 1968, though then I hadn't known these things. I *had* been on a school trip to Coventry from London in the fifth form at my grammar school, when—1963 it was—we girls were shown the industrial dereliction of the West Midlands through the train window and then walked to the new Cathedral—the new city—rising from the bombsites of the old; but I couldn't then have told you exactly where Coventry *was*: just somewhere north of London. When I arrived in Loamshire in 1976, I found *Middlemarch* an invaluable guide to the habits and manners of this little bit of provincial England, the West Midlands; to its social history, which Mark Phillips now helps us see emerging in the eighteenth century as a way of thinking and seeing the social world; the 'vicissitudes ... [the] constantly shifting boundaries of social intercourse' as George Eliot put it.<sup>5</sup> By the time I started work at Warwick in 1984, I'd read it ten times over again.

*Middlemarch* is *my* text; my Desert Island book; it is as well that the readers knows how profoundly the following account is shaped by Eliot's history of Coventry and Warwickshire in the three years leading up to the Great Reform Act of 1832. When I gave my inaugural lecture in 1996 I had good fun speaking covertly yet publicly to my audience (friends, and colleagues of some twelve years), all of whom understood how I read the plot and characters of *Middlemarch* against the Warwick story without

---

<sup>5</sup>Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment. Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820*, Princeton UP, Princeton NJ, 2000, passim, but esp. pp. 14-18.

ever saying as much. Some 'from distant counties' had just driven along the A45 (which links the East to the West Midlands), seen the cheery hoarding advertising the Middlemarch Business Park (south of the city, on its opposite side to Nuneaton, Mary-Ann Evans'–George Eliot's–birth place). It was fun, in an edgy kind of way, to quote E. P. Thompson's analysis of the period of counter-revolution and reform in England between 1790 and 1840 without naming my source, especially as many present knew exactly what it was, and remembered the extraordinary furor that had greeted the publication of *Warwick University Ltd* (1970) nearly thirty years before.<sup>6</sup> In later versions of the lecture given abroad, I could not make that kind of Loamshire joke work, though I always hoped that my audiences would listen in the comic mode. The reader should know that *Middlemarch* continues to shape my vision–comic, tragic, historical–of Warwick and Warwickshire.

The third and final introductory point, is to do with Utopia and utopianism. The fifteen-year old on the train to Middlemarch in 1963 had an idea of utopianism–had heard the term–though like the rest of the fifth form, probably, had not yet *read* a word on the topic. I think we all believed (though at the Bar of Judgement, I will not swear to what anyone believed in that long-lost time–and we could scarcely have put it this way) that we were living a kind of utopianism: that as the clean, well-fed, well-educated children of the 1944 Education Act, of the National

---

<sup>6</sup>A version of the lecture was published as 'Going to Middlemarch: History and the Novel', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 40:3 (2001), available at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0040.310>

Health service—of the welfare state—we were lucky, lucky girls. Did anyone on that trip mention that land had been acquired for a new university three miles from Coventry station? We certainly heard a lot about the new universities throughout the early sixties, not just from schoolteachers but from the press as well. At Sussex in 1965 I didn't exactly think 'I'm here—at university—because of Lord Robbins'; but I did have quite an elaborate Robbins' Story-of-the-Self, which only much later and after an actual reading of *Students and their Education*, did I marry to the idea of reconfigured human and class relations in a situation of relative material comfort; to the modest, social democratic utopianism in which I had been born and educated.<sup>7</sup>

Paragraph 810 of the Robbins Report can still make me cry, at the way in which a government report interpellates all the children of the post-War years, the gentleness with which the last plank of the welfare state is laid in place; for all that is now lost:

The young people who will be seeking to enter higher education in the years 1965/6 to 1967/8 were born in the period when the population of this country was beginning to return to normal life after the upheavals and separations inevitable in war. The trials that their parents had to undergo are in themselves sufficient reason for the country to exert itself to meet the needs of

---

<sup>7</sup>Great Britain, *Appendix 1 to the Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961-1963, Students and their Education*, HMSO, London, 1963; Great Britain, *Higher Education. Appendix 2(A) to the Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961-1963, Students and their Education*, HMSO, London, 1964. Great Britain, *Higher Education. Report of the Committee... under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961-63 ...* HMSO, London, 1968.

their children. Moreover, if great numbers of these young people are qualified and eager to enter higher education it would be gravely unjust that, simply because so many were born at the same time, a smaller proportion of those qualified should receive higher education than in the age groups coming immediately before or after them.<sup>8</sup>

To add to that lullaby of social justice, is the observation that in 1969 the lucky, lucky twenty percent of eighteen-year-olds who had made their way through the narrow gate to the golden city, became new kinds of social subject under the Representation of the People Act, which extended the franchise to their age-group. In 1970, after appeal to the High Court, students were permitted to vote in parliamentary elections in their university constituency instead of that of their parental home.

### *Coming to Middlemarch*

Did social history come to Warwick, sometime between 1963 and 1975? The origins of social history were understood as multiple; its origins and progress were frequently discussed in the post-War period. 'The "Cinderella of English historical studies" only a few years earlier, it was by the mid-1960s the "in" thing, the queen of the ball; today, more than thirty years later, it is still often regarded as the main innovation of the period', wrote Jim Obelkevitch in 2000, a few years after he had

---

<sup>8</sup>Carolyn Steedman, 'Young Women at University in the 1960s and 1970s' unpublished paper, University of Warwick, 2015; Nicholas Barr (ed.), *Shaping Higher Education. Fifty Years after Robbins*, LSE, London, 2014.

retired from the Warwick CSSH.<sup>9</sup> The *Annales* school in France has been described as one point of origin, as has the labour history undertaken in economic history departments from the 1930s onwards. An Oxbridge axis of social history has been outlined, in which Sir Lewis Namier's concerns with the psychological as well as economic factors underpinning social structure and social distinction ('what lay beneath', in Miles Taylor's nice depiction) influenced the work of historians far beyond the golden triangle, from the 1930s through to the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> David Feldman and Jon Lawrence have described a baggy, protean concept—'social history'—which for fifty years has stood in, more or less, for 'everyday life'.<sup>11</sup> After 'everyday life' was conceptualised as a field of study within the social sciences in general, says Ben Highmore, historians used the term in order 'to side with the dominated against those that would dominate ... to invoke ... those practices and lives that have traditionally been left out of historical accounts, swept aside by the onslaught of events instigated by elites'. The term 'everyday' has, he says, become a 'shorthand

---

<sup>9</sup>Jim Obelkevich, 'New Developments in History in the 1950s and 1960s', *Contemporary British History*, 4:4, (2000), pp. 125-142.

<sup>10</sup>Miles Taylor, 'The Beginnings of Modern British Social History', *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997), pp. 155-176.

<sup>11</sup>David Feldman and Jon Lawrence 'Introduction: Structures and Transformations in British Historiography', Feldman and Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp.

for voices from “below”.<sup>12</sup>

Most contemporary commentators on the genesis of social history indicated the importance of G. H. Trevelyan’s *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries: Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (1942, 1944) for popular understandings of what kind of history it was; others reminded readers that J. R. Green’s *Short History of the English People* (1874) had underpinned many early twentieth-century histories for children, teaching not ‘of English Kings or English Conquests, but of the English People’.<sup>13</sup>

Most small children educated in the state system during the first half of the twentieth-century learned more about the furnishings of a Viking long-house, the way food was cooked by medieval people, and clothes made ‘through the ages’ than they did about war and high politics.<sup>14</sup> When Victor Neuberg discussed Edward Thompson’s phrase ‘history from below’ as indicative of a new way of doing social history, he actually reviewed eight works of social history for young children,

---

<sup>12</sup>Ben Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People*, Macmillan, London, 1874, p. v.

<sup>14</sup>Jenny Keating, ‘Ideas and Advice about History Teaching 1900-1950s’, History in Education Project, Institute of Historical Research, University of London April 2011; David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, Nicola Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History. Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. The project of elementary and primary school history-teaching is described here as imperialist at best and racist at worst, but that did not prevent seven-to eleven-year-olds drawing more farthingales and porringers than they did maps of imperialist conquest. Carolyn Steedman, ‘Battlefields: History in Primary Schools’, *History Workshop Journal*, 17:1 (1984), pp. 102-112.

including the emblematic *Life in England* (1968-1970) series, 'a vivid, panoramic view of how men lived'.<sup>15</sup> Social history for children was targeted at parents as well as schools: in 1962 *Look and Learn* magazine promised 'Art, Literature, Science, People, World, and Social History—These and More are Presented in a Vivid, Authoritative Way'.<sup>16</sup> An elaborate advertisement for vacuum cleaners evoked the concepts of everyday life and (the not yet named) women's history by use of the term 'social history'.<sup>17</sup> 'Social history' had selling power for publishers who, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, advertised a wide variety of books with descriptors like: 'the piano as the "centre" for writing the social history of the last 300 years' (Nov 1955); 'a comment on social history' (Mar 1959); 'a fresco of social history' (Mar 1960); 'a delectable social history' (Mar 1961); 'a lighthearted slice of social history' (1963). There were social histories of hunting, of opera, of button collecting; readers were thought to like it and to know what kind of read was promised by the term; reviewers used 'social history' to bestow praise, as in 'a delectable social history'.

---

<sup>15</sup>Victor E. Neuberg, '... History from Below', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 June, 1968, p. 20; E. P. Thompson, 'History from Below', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April, 1966.

<sup>16</sup>A British weekly educational magazine for children published by Fleetway Publications Ltd, 1962-1982.

<sup>17</sup>'The Missing Volume. Hoover Limited', display advertisement, *The Times*, 20 Jan 1950: 'One of the most important volumes in the Social History of England has—so far as our knowledge goes—yet to be written. It will deal with the Twentieth Century Housewife and the way her life has been transformed by the introduction of scientific labour-saving devices'.

'Social History in Song' was broadcast on the Home Service (BBC Radio 4) on 19th February 1968. Material objects, events, and groups of people 'had' a social history'; social history *was* clothes, the changing shape of babies' bonnets, or the railways; Asa Briggs' first volume of the history of broadcasting 'is often social history', said one reviewer reassuringly (1961). It was frequently 'our' social history', a national and personal possession. 'The Nottingham Captain, a bitter account by Mr Arnold Wesker' was reviewed as 'a sorry episode in English social history', in 1962.<sup>18</sup> Readers of the broadsheets and the literary magazines had been prepared for understanding E.P. Thompson's 1966 proclamation that 'social history lives in the language of the commons', reported in *The Times* under the title 'History's Widening Frontiers'; to understand even (or perhaps especially) the freeborn English men and women who haunt the phrase.<sup>19</sup> The vocabulary of 'social history' was thus made familiar to

---

<sup>18</sup>'Music for Wesker Text', *The Times* 21 Nov. 1961. The play had been performed by Centre 42 at the Trades Union Festival held in Hayes and Southall. <http://www.arnoldwesker.com/plays.asp?workID=45> This 'Moral for Narrator, Voices and Orchestra' told the story of Jerry Brandreth, Oliver the Spy and the Nottinghamshire Luddites, also to be told by Thompson in *The Making* (711-733) a year later. It had been contemplated by George Eliot for inclusion in *Middlemarch*; but it was Nottinghamshire history, not easily set in Loamshire. Steedman, 'Going to Middlemarch'. Also Paul Long, *Only in the Common People. The Aesthetics of Class in Post-War Britain*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle, 2008, pp. 197-8.

<sup>19</sup>*The Times*, 9Apr 1966: 'Mr E. P. Thompson, of Warwick, declares that Labour History now feels confident enough to move onwards from the base which Cole and his successors secured'. E. P. Thompson, 'The Freeborn Englishman', *New Left Review*, 1:15 (May-June 1962 ); *The Making of the English Working Class*, Gollancz, London, 1963, Part 1, Chapter 4; Cal Winslow(ed.), *E. P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left. Essays Polemics*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2014, pp. 290-306.

parents and children of the post-War era. 'Important Decision in Social History' was a sub-head announcing the Robbins Report, 'as important as any in the social history of this country'.<sup>20</sup> Such everyday understandings of what social history was, and what it did, may well have accompanied the first intakes of students at the new universities, whether or not they studied for a history degree.

The academic origins of social history were related to these common understandings, sometimes in edgy and distancing ways. Thompson did the same work of distancing in one of the many committee papers he wrote in the long run-up to the formal establishment of Warwick CSSH: 'The very considerable advances in recent years in this country in the social studies and in sociology has been accompanied only by a piecemeal and disconnected advance in the study of social history', he said. 'In some places "social history" has scarcely advanced beyond the status of belles lettres ...', he wrote in 1965.<sup>21</sup> The task of persuasion was not only to

---

<sup>20</sup>*The Times*, 20 Nov 1963. The more social history's coming into being is investigated, the more is discovered about the women producing it: Miles Taylor, 'Genealogies of Social History', Social History Society 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, Lancaster University, March 2016; [https://www.socialhistory.org.uk/perch/resources/text\\_block/taylor-speech](https://www.socialhistory.org.uk/perch/resources/text_block/taylor-speech). This is a discovery analogous to Bonnie Smith's of 'the gender of history'. Much nineteenth-century social history was produced by women writing and being read outside the academy. Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History. Men, Women, and Historical Practice*, Harvard University Press, New Haven CT, 1998.

<sup>21</sup>'Until recently, much social history was a matter of gifted impressionism, while the most disciplined work was advanced within departments of economic history', MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, 9 Mar 1966, For the meeting of the Planning and Executive Committee 9<sup>th</sup> March 1966. Agendum 3C.

distance university social history from the middlebrow version, but also from the kind 'advanced within the aegis of departments of economic history'. Progress there had been impressive, but 'distorted by the tendency to limit study to quantitative or institutional problems'.<sup>22</sup> Ten years later (Thompson long departed from Warwick) CSSH Director Royden Harrison acknowledged the turn from labour history to social history and the special relationship between the two; but academic social history had still not lost the accent of its somewhat philistine origins, out in the wider society: social historians must guard against 'a return to the "everyday", the residual and the tedious'.<sup>23</sup> Labour history remained the more respectable endeavour well into the 1970s.<sup>24</sup>

Thompson had been appointed in 1964 as Reader in the History of Labour in the Warwick School (Department) of History, to a university that placed great emphasis on the study of industrial society and industrial relations.<sup>25</sup> Aware of his

---

<sup>22</sup>'A Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick. The Scope of the Subject', MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724 9 Jul 1965.

<sup>23</sup>Royden Harrison, 'From Labour History to Social History', *History*, 60 (1975), pp. 197-215. For Coventry, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and Provincial Philistinism, Steedman, 'Going to Middlemarch'.

<sup>24</sup>Alexander Hutton, '"Culture and Society" in Conceptions of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, 1930-1965', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2014, pp. 131-173, 207-310, *passim*

<sup>25</sup>MRC UWA/PUB/8/1/1, University of Warwick, *Bulletin*, October 1964, No. 1: 'History ... 'Reader: E. P. Thompson, BA (Cantab.) ... Mr Thompson is at present Senior Lecturer in the University of Leeds. He has been appointed to a Readership in Labour History'.

many committee audiences, he described what the School of History wanted to inaugurate 'as the social history of industrialisation, and of mature industrial societies, with special emphasis upon the "History of Labour", or the social history of the working classes.' However, he added, 'the "History of Labour" should not be taken to indicate only the history of the institution of the "labour movement" and of the trade unions, as developed by the Webbs and G. D. H. Cole'. In the proposed Centre 'the unorganised and unpolitical majority' would be paid as much attention as 'traditional labour history'. What *was* social history? The historical questions to be pursued in the Centre were the best answer: 'social tensions during the transitions to industrialism'; 'urban growth and popular demoralisation'; 'the social history of leisure'. In the future there would be 'the history of poverty and of social welfare work: of family relations, sexual codes' (there existed no 'serious social history of illegitimacy' for example) and popular attitudes to children and education. There would be 'industrial studies'; there would be work on 'racial and ethnic assimilation or antagonisms'; on "'sub-political" political attitudes and crowd behaviour' and on 'popular attitudes (and superstitions) in medical matters'. He observed that the serious history of crime had 'scarcely emerged from infancy'; a Centre for Social History would help it grow up. Comparative study was imperative, but the Centre must first establish 'a reputation for sound work in British studies'. He pointed to a

series of journals in the United States, France and Italy that showed the way.<sup>26</sup>

Appointments should be made at junior level, of young specialists in the history of industrialisation in America and Europe: 'ultimately it will be from comparative work (a comparison of labour conditions in Hamburg, Liverpool and Boston, for instance) that the unique function of this Centre will be recognised'. And, he observed, as any one writing a course proposal or grant application must, that 'a new university is exceptionally well-placed to commence such a Centre'; 'the location of the University of Warwick and the proposed work of the Centre of Industrial Studies, suggests that it will be ideally situated to initiate this work'. By such endeavours and in this environment the 'prolonged debate between historians and sociologists' might be resolved, in a sustained effort to bring 'historical techniques to bear upon problems which sociologists have indicated'. He ended his paper with a half-page discussion of 'The Centre and the Undergraduate who goes into Industry'.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Building Middlemarch***

Construction work started in 1964 on 400 acres of wood- and farmland granted by

---

<sup>26</sup>*Economic Development & Cultural Change, Comparative Studies in History and Society, Annales, Le Mouvement Social and Movimento Operaio* all showed 'how far this work has already advanced'.

<sup>27</sup>'A Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick. The Scope of the Subject', MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, 9 Jul 1965; also UWA/M/PEC/1, Oct 1965-May 1966, Meeting 20 Apr 1966, Appendix A; also UWA/Senate/ Meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> June 1965, Agendum 8B.

Warwickshire County Council and the City of Coventry. The ancient conflict between county and city (between Loamshire and Middlemarch) in the disposal of its capital (cultural and monetary) has been described elsewhere, as have the principles underpinning the architecture of the new university.<sup>28</sup> In his historical accounts the first Vice-Chancellor made much of its location and its connections with William, 1st Baron Rootes (1894–1964). Rootes was a Coventry motor manufacturer and in 1961 chair of the promotion committee set up to found a university near the city. A vision of Warwick's close academic links to industry was not his alone, but many accounts make it so. In the early years Vice-Chancellor Butterworth told many audiences about Billy Rootes being driven up the M1 assiduously studying architectural and curriculum plans as his chauffeur sped into Warwickshire.<sup>29</sup> It had been intended that he should be the first Chancellor of the new university. In his first Report to University Court in November 1965 Butterworth eulogised Rootes in the form of an obituary, telling how `versed as he was in the ways and history of Warwickshire and Coventry, and conversant with nearly all the notable personalities in the area, it was almost inevitable for [him] ... to emerge as a leader of the new

---

<sup>28</sup>Henry Rees, *A University is Born. The Story of the Foundation of the University of Warwick*, Avalon Books, Coventry, 1989; Michael Shattock, *Making a University. A Celebration of Warwick's First Twenty Five Years*, University of Warwick, 1991. For questions of architecture and building, Elain Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism. English Architecture, 1945-1975*, Yale University Press, London, 2015.

<sup>29</sup>J. B. Butterworth, 'Rootes, William Edward, first Baron Rootes (1894–1964)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [10 Feb 2016]

venture ... [H]e made no pretensions to an academic background ... [but] quickly appreciated the potential of a University taking a new look at Engineering and the Sciences in the heart of the industrial West Midlands'.<sup>30</sup>

In publicity directed at prospective students and their parents there was less about the white heat of manufacturing burning in the lands bordering the M1 south of Birmingham; for them, Loamshire was described, or Henry James's 'midmost ... unmitigated England'.<sup>31</sup> There were lyrical descriptions of a 'typical Warwickshire field and hedgerow pattern ... intermingled with woodland planting', of the 'most central county in England, with its wealth of historical and cultural traditions ... all that is characteristic of the English countryside—meadows, fine woods, quiet rivers, charming villages and many notable churches and lovely old manor houses'.<sup>32</sup>

In the Report eulogising Lord Rootes the Vice-Chancellor discussed the curriculum of the new university; he was sure there would be interest in the History degree, which included 'an unusual arrangement of the periods studied, and the

---

<sup>30</sup>MRC UWA/PUB/1/1, 'First Report of the Vice-Chancellor to the First Meeting of the University Court, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1965'.

<sup>31</sup>'There is no better way to plunge *in media res*, for the stranger who wishes to know something of England, than to spend a fortnight in Warwickshire ... the core and centre of the English world; midmost ... unmitigated England. The place has taught me a great many English secrets ...'. Henry James, *English Hours*, William Heinemann, London, 1905, p. 187; orig. 'In Warwickshire' (1877), *Portraits of Places* (1883).

<sup>32</sup>MRC, UWA/PUB/4/2 University of Warwick PROSPECTUS 1965/66; 'N. B. This Prospectus supersedes the Preliminary Prospectus issued in April, 1964'.

even rarer feature of a term of academic work at an American University, and another in Florence'.<sup>33</sup> Between the appointment of an Academic Planning Board in 1961 and the granting of the University Charter in 1965 'an academic "blue-print" of the University' been devised'. The first professors were appointed in the summer of 1963; they joined the committee to work on the curriculum to be submitted for approval to the University Grants Commission. John Hale was the founding professor of History; it was his view of the undergraduate curriculum that entranced Jack Butterworth: he frequently repeated Hales' proclamation that unlike universities 'elsewhere', History at Warwick would be characterised by 'breadth rather than chronological completeness'. There would be 'no medieval history, except in the form of an introduction to [second year studies] and no detailed study of the period 1650-1776'. Thus would be provided 'a sound and unisular historical training which appeals to the imagination'. Modern history should be taught before early modern (the 1960s descriptor was 'Renaissance'). The reasoning behind this reverse chronological arrangement was that the modern period was more familiar to

---

<sup>33</sup>MRC UWA/PUB/1/1, 'First Report ... 17<sup>th</sup> November 1965'. He also highlighted the not-so-unique interdisciplinary endeavour that was 'Enquiry and Criticism' to be taken by all undergraduates in their first year. After reams of paper used, dozens of committee meetings, three titles devised for the course, and lectures and seminars unattended 'Enquiry and Criticism' bit the dust (as Thompson might have put it—Note 58) in February 1968. MRC UWA/F/FD/1A R1000, First Degree Courses. Formation of Original Courses General Planning (Papers relating to formation of original courses); UWA/R.1051 Enquiry and Criticism Common First Year Course; Agendum 9, For the Meeting of Academic Advisory Committee 21<sup>st</sup> February 1968: 'the general feeling within the University is that little enthusiasm remains for a general studies programme of this kind'.

most students and would particularly suit those taking a joint degree or options in other departments. The aim was not to produce historians, but to 'promote reflection on the past' through discussion of the evidence on which knowledge of it was based. There would be discussion of economic and sociological approaches; reading the work of 'great historians' would be interspersed with the 'latest articles' from the history journals. The terms spent abroad (in Italy, in the US, and for a brief period in the late 60s, at some African universities<sup>34</sup>) were planned because 'history is most meaningful if it is studied where it is made. Italy was the most significant country in the Renaissance, America in the Modern world'. The function of a history department was to explore 'man's changing attitudes to sex, family and class; gaining a livelihood; the state religion and morals; environment, natural and intellectual'. There were indeed 'horrid chronological gaps' in the programme, but the advantages were breadth, and a 'world-wide' history 'in some depth'. It was a modern history curriculum for a modern world.<sup>35</sup> Anna Davin, undergraduate in the

---

<sup>34</sup>MRC, UWA/F/FD/3/2, R.1038, undated (1964-5), Memo. from VC to Registrar and Vice-Chairman, Board of Arts concerning History's four-year degree programme proposal: 'I am perturbed by the African part ... because it seems to be symptomatic of the tendency on the part of the Historians to go in for haphazard proliferation'. What ever happened to the twin foundations of America and the Italian Renaissance? he asked. I can be so certain about the twin pillars of the Warwick History vision because not only have I spent a lot of time in UWA, but because they still hold up the undergraduate curriculum: modern history is taught before early modern (Renaissance) history.

<sup>35</sup>MRC UWA/F/FD '1st Degree Courses in History' (undated); UWA/F/FD/3/2, 'History at Warwick', memo. from John Hale, Oct1964. Tony Mason has noted that 'Warwick was the only British university at that time to teach no compulsory u/g

History School from 1966-69, remembered the first year core course ('European and American History from 1776 ... introduction to, and survey of the whole period to be studied; followed by ... a core of political, social, economic and intellectual information about the period'): 'What we started with was reading one piece, it was some sort of introductory core course, taught by Edward, I think; no it was probably team taught, but anyway, reading *War and Peace* was about the difficulties of writing history, or getting a panoptic vision, and to the individual, and the impossibility of writing the history of a battle if you were there. I thought it was a brilliant idea'.<sup>36</sup>

She was encouraged she says, to draw on her own experience for long essays on industrialisation and nationalism: 'I did both of them on ... [my] Algerian experience ... which was good fun, although it was a bit difficult to find quite enough to read'.<sup>37</sup>

'Social history' did not figure in these very early plans; or rather core courses and options were not entitled 'social history', but a social history approach was

---

course in English history. Orientation of the History Dept. was European (& American) and England was, of course part of Europe'. Mason, 'Final Curtain'

<sup>36</sup>UWA /PUB/4/3 University of Warwick PROSPECTUS 1966-67; University of Warwick Oral History Project, 1069/47/1, Interview with Anna Davin 4 Feb 2015.

<sup>37</sup>It is not clear whether these were core courses, or options, or special subjects, and whether or not Thompson taught on both of them. But his teaching method is linked to Davin's memory: 'They [History staff] were all, except Edward, younger than me ... their first job. I suspect they were doing a lot of mugging up before the lecture, and over-preparing, and all the things you do when you start. Edward would tower over the others, by his passion, and his greater knowledge, and his much wider teaching experience, although it had been in adult education not university. But that was very nice, and he had a very free way of teaching, which stemmed from his adult education experience.'

implied in the descriptions of many of them, and of special subjects (final year) offered from 1966 onwards.<sup>38</sup> The Special Subject might be 'studied under the supervision of the Reader in the History of Labour', said the Prospectus for 1966-7. Edward Thompson offered 'The Transition to Industrialisation' (using 'English sources as a basis, but introducing comparisons with Lyons, Silesia and Ireland') and 'Sans-culottes and Socialists, 1791-1848' ('the artisan Jacobin tradition in France, England and America; millenarian movements; St. Simon, Baboeuf, Fourier, Owen, "Utopian" Communitarianism in America and Britain') until 1968, when the Centre for Social History became an independent entity.

Appointed in 1964, Thompson arrived at Warwick at the beginning of the academic year 1965-6. His memos and letters, promoting, haranguing, persuading about social history are preserved in administrative records for 1964-5, but he did not move to Leamington Spa and Warwickshire until the autumn of 1965.<sup>39</sup> Plans for social history at Warwick, or a Centre for Social History, emerged out of the

---

<sup>38</sup>I am very grateful for discussions with Bernard Capp, James Hinton and Tony Mason on this point about the 'approaches to history' in options and Special Subjects between 1965 and 1975. UWA /PUB/4/3-UWA/PUB/4/11. No curriculum material (reading lists and module outlines) remains from this period, it being departmental not University of Warwick Administration (UWA) material.

<sup>39</sup>He was writing to his research assistant Mr Edward Dodd from 'Hollybank, Whitegate, Halifax' in September 1965. MRC MSS 369/1-5, Correspondence &c between E. P. Thompson and E. E. Dodd; MSS 369/1/2. I, EPT to EED, 20 Sep 1965.

curriculum and financial planning period 1963-1965.<sup>40</sup> Thompson did not need to be present to promote his cause (if social history *were* his cause), and it did not have a single point of origin in him, or in his work teaching adult learners for Leeds University Extra-Mural Department, or his experience of working on *The Making*; all of that was important, but really, social history was already there. A properly materialist history would trace its origins to the economic base of Warwick University. It would understand the culture of the place—its relationships of teaching and learning and collegiality—as arising from that base, complicated by the experiences of history and social history that students and staff brought with them from the wider society. If ‘history’ is a cultural activity—‘history-in-society’ in Jorma Kalela’s formulation—then academic historians take part in it as much as do ‘ordinary people’: they operate with a historical consciousness and historical understandings made out of their own educational and childhood experiences.<sup>41</sup> At the meeting of the experiences and expectations of teaching staff and students and

---

0. Perhaps it *did* matter that Thompson was not living locally from 1963-1965. Luke Hodgkin—already head-hunted in 1963 according to his then partner Anna Davin—was given the choice of either being there ‘working out the syllabuses, and preparing the entire plan for the maths department, or having the year off and the job to come to. He chose the job to come to, so we could go abroad’. He went with his young family to a maths post in Algeria—his first job. Warwick Oral History Project, 1069/47/1, Interview with Anna Davin 4 Feb 2015. One of Luke Hodgkin’s more recent publications is *A History of Mathematics. Mesopotamia to Modernity*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

<sup>41</sup>Jorma Kalela, *Making History. The Historian and the Uses of the Past*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012, pp. 24-49.

administrators, in a highly specific locale, social history was 'made' at Warwick. It actually arrived as 'labour history', with its connotations of academic credibility.

In February 1968, in a long memo addressed to his colleagues, Thompson told his version of the tale: 'I was appointed in June 1964' he wrote; 'the Vice-Chancellor ... [and] Professor Hale and Professor Sargent were present at the interview, and large plans were sketched for developments in comparative labour history'.<sup>42</sup> Then, he recalled, from June until December 1964 'a protracted dream-sequence ensued, in which the plans were put on paper, endorsed, and the Librarian and I visited Milan to make a bid for the £1,000,000 Feltrinelli Institute Library'.<sup>43</sup> Then 'the dream-

---

<sup>42</sup>Dick Sargent founded the Warwick Economics Department in 1965; he was its first chairman, and Professor until 1973. For a later account of these promises, UWA/M/BFA/1/2, Oct 1967-Sep 1968, "101-164"; UWA/M/BFA/1/2 28 February 1968, Agendum 7: 'Graduate Work in History ... Thompson came to Warwick in the first place in the expectation that a Centre for Labour History or Social History would be formed, and Hale and he drew up ambitious plans'. See also MRC 1040/7/2/1, Tony Mason, Manuscript notes of Tony Mason's memories of Professor Royden Harrison and the Centre for Social History, 'The Final Curtain, Centre 1968-98': 'Edward Thompson once said that the idea for the Centre was roughly sketched during his job interview'.

<sup>43</sup> MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, 19 Feb 1968, EPT to History Staff , 'Another Thrilling Instalment': 'I reserve details of this episode for the narrative passages in Occasional Papers 3', added Thompson. The memo is an elegant comic turn, as well as a very angry one. In 1968 Thompson and his research assistant Mr Dodd were working on the comedy of terror expressed in the threatening letters to be described in the later 'The Crime of Anonymity' (1975). Carolyn Steedman, 'Threatening Letters. E. E. Dodd, E. P. Thompson and the Making of 'The Crime of Anonymity'', *History Workshop Journal*, 82 (2016), forthcoming. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (1926-1972), Italian publisher and businessman, collected a vast library of documents mainly in the history of international labour and socialist movements. 'Who did he imagine was going to stump up the £1m for Feltrinelli? Some Middlemarch capitalist? ... Utopia indeed!', says James Hinton; private communication, 17 Mar 2016.

sequence ended abruptly in January/February 1965, when communications dried up with Warwick, when I ceased to be kept informed of the Feltrinelli negotiations, and when I came tardily to realise that a) the University had no funds for a Centre, b) fund-raising was not being pursued with vigour or system'. All of his story—and mine, here—pivots on that economic point: *independent* funding for a centre of labour or social history, funding that did *not* come through the School of History; a constitutional set-up that allowed an independent Centre to earn its own living from the fees for charged for graduate study.

In February 1965 Thompson wrote to the Vice-Chancellor (he was keen to assure him that he only did this because his head of department John Hale was out of the country) reminding Jack Butterworth that at his appointment 'some rather grandiose plans were put forward as to a Centre for Comparative Labour History. Those were splendid (although I thought at the time that they might be over-ambitious). It was not made clear to me at the time that these were dependent upon successful fund-raising activities ... Whether there is any real acceptance by the University of the idea of the proposed Centre—whether there is any expectation of an early decision ... – I haven't the least idea ... '. He had been in post for eight months, but—'I don't want to come to Warwick if the whole thing has been based on fantasies; if in fact this is to be a determined Business University which really has very little interest in my kind of Non-Mathematical Humanology; if in fact the Centre never looks like materialising ... I think you will agree that it would be much

better to arrange a dissolution of engagement than a subsequent divorce ... I may very well be the wrong kind of person to get into a new University at this stage'.<sup>44</sup> The Vice-Chancellor's reply had been reassuring, Thompson said ('but not quite specific enough'): the Centre was 'one of the central projects in our work in Social Studies'.<sup>45</sup> Thompson replied on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, enclosing plans for a Centre that he and John Hale had worked out back in October 1964. He also asked to withdraw from the University.<sup>45</sup> He had not yet moved from Halifax; the Vice-Chancellor invited him down to Warwick: 'I underwent an interview (the first of several similar experiences repeated in the past four years) which I commenced with anxiety and concluded in euphoria, flattered by assurances as to the central importance of my work to the University and be-dazed with the glint of the vast sums of money liable to descend in the next week or fortnight into the lap of Social History. As a result of this interview I withdrew my proffered resignation and redrafted the plans for the Centre, from Labour to Social History'.<sup>46</sup> In June 1966 the

---

<sup>44</sup>Letter quoted in 'Another Thrilling Instalment', under the heading 'Even Rottener and Older History'. MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724 ,19 Feb 1968, EPT to History Staff.

<sup>45</sup>Of the Files Affair and the student occupation of the Warwick Registry in February 1970 Thompson remembered being 'later told that one file which attracted a good deal of sardonic interest was a bulky file full of [his] own fatuous and long-winded attempts at resignation'. *Warwick University Ltd*, p. 157. James Hinton points out that these letters are in the University archive 'presumably due to our decision to return them to the registry'. James Hinton, personal communication, 17 Mar 2016.

<sup>46</sup>'Even Rottener and Older'

Senate determined that a 'Centre ... be established forthwith' and that Mr E. P. Thompson be appointed to act as Director ... in the initial period'; in the Vice-Chancellor's Report for the year it was noted that 'Mr Thompson was appointed as Director of the Centre for the Study of Social History in June 1966'.<sup>47</sup>

The 1966 Centre had an advisory committee (responsible to the Board of Arts), drawn from the History, Economics, English, French, and Politics departments and the Library; but it didn't really exist in administrative and financial terms. Its Director was a member of the School of History; the graduate students who came to work with Thompson were registered in the History School; Thompson's publications were returned as History publications. A series of pronouncements by the Vice-Chancellor, made in a different rhetorical space from the one that produced Thompson's trance-like euphoria, made it clear that the Centre would have to earn its own income. John Hale approached the TUC in 1966 (and many other organisations), without success.<sup>48</sup> When new posts were proposed for Social History

---

<sup>47</sup>MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724 Extract from minutes of the meeting of Senate 15 Jun 1966; MRC UWA/PUB/1/2, 'University of Warwick. Report of the Vice-Chancellor 1965-1966'. In June 1966, in the material prepared for the quinquennial visitation of University Grants Committee for quinquennium 1967-72, it was noted that 'a number of Centres for advanced work are proposed, including Social History, Western European Studies, Industrial Studies and Education for Management, Solid State Science, a Mathematics Research Centre and a Computer Centre'. MRC UWA/PUB/8/1/5, University of Warwick, *Bulletin*, No. 5, September 1966.

<sup>48</sup> MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, J. M. Bruce Lockhart to John Hale 3 May 1966: 'Mr Lionel Murray of the TUC telephoned me today to say that he had put our request for support for the Centre ... to Mr George Woodcock, but much to his regret Mr Woodcock has been unenthusiastic'. Lockhart was a planning and development

late in 1966, Thompson reminded the Registrar that the Centre depended entirely on the number of graduate students recruited, and recommended that one of the new appointments should 'be of a Director for the Centre ... He could supervise the programme of the existing graduates. He will be heavily concerned also in planning the M.A. course'.<sup>49</sup> This was an attempt, not at resignation from Warwick University, but from directing an entity that didn't really exist. 'Did we ... acquire Edward Thompson because of a clear prior commitment to Labour History, or did our enthusiasm for Labour History arise when it was found out we might get him? Which came first ...?', mused the Vice-Chancellor in 1964.<sup>50</sup> The idea came first (of whatever it was: it was not labour history or social history or a constituted research and teaching centre until 1968). It appears that something—this nowhere place—was in someone else's mind when Thompson attended the job interview in 1963, perhaps in John Hale's mind, as he devised the curriculum for undergraduate history students.

---

officer at Warwick from 1965 to 1967. For this cast of characters there is no better guide than *Warwick University Ltd*, pp. 18-41 (though Bruce Lockhart does not figure here having left the University to join Courtaulds). John Longrigg, 'Lockhart, John Macgregor Bruce (1914–1995)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2012 accessed 11 Feb 2016.

<sup>49</sup>MRC UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, Centre for the Study of Social History Estimates 1966/7, memo from EPT 21 Nov 1966; UWA/ FICHE/R1724, Extract from minutes of the meeting of Senate 30 Nov 1966, 'Directorship of the Centre for Social History: the Vice-Chancellor reported that the Centre Committee had urged a substantive appointment to the post of Director of the Centre, at professorial level'.

<sup>50</sup>MRC UWA/F/FD/3/2, R.1038, memo from VC to Registrar and Vice-Chairman, Board of Arts, nd (Oct1964).

There were material factors to consider in the development of a particular form of modern labour history—the existence of an economics department, a planned Centre for Industrial Studies and interdisciplinary co-operation with both— but also Hale’s belief that in historical terms, America *was* modernity. There was also an anonymous donation of £215,000 for building a hall of residence in which Anglo-American understanding might be fostered, announced in 1965.<sup>51</sup> It was to be used for exchange students. The plan for a term of academic work at a US University for History undergraduates had already emerged. John Hale had been in the US earlier in the year, and now reminded the Director of the American Studies Programme at the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) that ‘in New York in the Spring, you suggested that I should send you details of our projected Centre ... We are particularly anxious to establish ... the study of the History of American Labour ... the Council might find it possible to give us a senior post’. The person appointed would be ‘work from the outset within the School of History itself[;] increasingly as the Centre developed, within the Centre ... we are ...stressing American History at Warwick ...’. From 1969 onwards History would be offering both undergraduate and higher degrees in American history, he said.<sup>52</sup> In December 1965 Hale asked the

---

<sup>51</sup>MRC UWA/PUB/1/1, ‘First Report of the Vice-Chancellor to the First Meeting of the University Court, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1965.

<sup>52</sup>UWA/ FICHE/REG/R1724, John Hale to Mr Downar [Richard W. Downar, Director of the American Studies Programme ACLS], copies to Registrar and Professor Hunter. G. K. Hunter, Professor of English Literature, and Founding Head of Department, 1964-75; Chair of the Board of Arts.

University to make a bid to ACLS 'to give us a Lectureship for 5 years at a cost of £1,625 p.a., coupled with a sum that would enable us to invite an American specialist in the History of Labour to visit us for one term in each year'. This would be 'a sound foundation from which to build up the American Labour History side of the work of the Centre for the Study of Social History': the most 'responsible and useful way for Warwick to contribute to the study of American history in Britain: by teaching it with a social emphasis'.<sup>53</sup> 'It was the appeal of such a Centre which enticed the ... [ACLS] to establish the lectureship in the History of American Labour and which brought me to Warwick for a two-year visit', wrote ACLS Senior Lecturer in the History of American Labour, David Montgomery, in yet another campaign to save the Centre (the idea of a Centre)–'at considerable sacrifice to my own income', he noted.<sup>54</sup> Both David Montgomery and Thompson taught in the School of History whilst organising the seminar programme of the notional Centre and supervising PhD students (there were no MA students until 1969). Students (undergraduate and graduate) were value; the monies allocated to departments for teaching them determined work-loads of staff. What Thompson wanted was for the Centre to be

---

<sup>53</sup>UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, John Hale to Registrar, 9 Dec 1965; MRC UWA/PUB/1/2 : 'An offer to finance a post in American Labour History was received from the American Council of Learned Societies'; UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724 Extract from minutes of the meeting of Senate 30 Nov 1966 for the appointment of the selection panel for a Lectureship in American Labour History.

<sup>54</sup>UWA/M/S/7 Senate, Minutes of the Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1968, p. 7, Letter from David Montgomery, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1968.

allocated the value of the graduate students its staff supervised and taught and to have the right of its disposal. He did some numerically febrile accounting (familiar to anyone labouring under a work-load points system) to demonstrate what the effect of current arrangements was: 'My teaching ratio is made up of: 8 full time and 2 part-time graduates equals 9 counts as 18. 15 special subject students count as, say, 7. Directing, examining, lecturing and conducting some seminars on industrialisation: about 40 students first term, about 30 second & third: say 36 divided by one-quarter equals 9 divided again by one half (to account for graduate help in seminars) count as 4 ½. Basic One [core course] lectures &c say 2. Total: 31 ½ ... I have worked harder for [this University] than I have ever worked for any institution in my life ...'.<sup>55</sup>

Thompson offered his resignation again half-way through the year 1965-6. This was withdrawn at the last minute after a subvention from the head of another department helped him obtain some secretarial support for graduate work. The Vice-Chancellor released funds donated by the Cadbury Foundation ('with a letter signifying the benefactor's interest in social history'). All of this was recognised in a Senate resolution formally instituting the Centre in June 1966; Thompson agreed to serve as Acting Director for the year 1966/7.<sup>56</sup> But it was not enough. 'Independence'

---

<sup>55</sup>UWA/M/BFA/1/2 28; UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724,19 Feb 1968, EPT to History Staff, 'Another Thrilling Instalment'; 'Even Rottener and Older'

<sup>56</sup>UWA/M/BFA/1/2 28, Feb 1968.

inscribed an economic rather than a political or ideological principle. 'Everything turns upon the disputed point of independent budgeting', wrote Thompson to the Registrar in February 1968; 'Constitutional questions rest on that point'. The head of History John Hale and all History staff endorsed 'the independent solution.'<sup>57</sup>

Members of the Planning and Executive Committee (PEC) thought that if Thompson and Hale 'could regulate conflicts of interest' between themselves, no other constitutional remedy was necessary. In Thompson's words, 'the Committee has refused to accept independent budgeting for the Centre'. PEC recommended a semi-independent solution: 'that Social History should be treated as a semi-independent division of History, entitled to submit financial and other estimates, through History, to the appropriate University committees'. 'Through History' meant no independence at all.<sup>58</sup> The way through Warwick's complicated constitutional and financial structures was to give Social History the status of a subject in its own right, so that it might become, under Warwick statutes, a unit with departmental status, able to receive funding in its own right. This is what was proposed at a meeting of the Board of Studies for Arts in March 1968, when the Board recommended to Senate that 'The Centre for the Study of Social History have the status of an independent

---

<sup>57</sup>UWA/M/PEC/3 Feb 1967-1968, For the Meeting of the Planning and Executive Committee 14<sup>th</sup> February 1968, EPT to Registrar, 13 Feb 1968.

<sup>58</sup>UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, 19 February 1968, EPT to History Staff 'Another Thrilling Instalment', sub-heading 'The Centre Bites the Dust (for the third time)'; UWA/M/BFA/1/2, Oct 1967-Sep 1968, "101-164", Board of Studies for Arts Minutes of a Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1968.

subject for the purposes of estimates and government, within the Board of Studies for Arts'; 'graduates supervised by staff appointed to the Centre, or following courses within the Centre, should count for purposes of estimates towards staffing the Centre'.<sup>59</sup> 'Social History Independent' announced the University of Warwick *Bulletin* in April.<sup>60</sup>

John Hale was worried: staff in Social History (of whose time and teaching he no longer had the disposal) *must* contribute to undergraduate teaching in History; when *his* staff taught or supervised Social History students, their efforts must be recognised through the financial 'matrix' that governed teaching time and costs across the University (both Centre and School of History should get the money its staff 'earned' by teaching students). Thompson, now effectively a head of department with a budget, was also concerned about these questions.<sup>61</sup>

At the same meetings that declared Social History's independence, the MA course in 'Labour History, 1867-1926', was approved. It comprised taught courses in

---

<sup>59</sup>UWA/M/BFA/1/2, Oct 1967-Sep 1968, "101-164", Board of Studies for Arts Minutes of a Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1968; UWA/M/S/7 Senate, Minutes of the Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1968, p.7. Senate reworded the recommendation to read: 'That Social History have the status of an independent subject for the purposes of estimates and government, within the new Board of Studies for Arts and that within this subject there shall be a Centre for the Study of Social History'.

<sup>60</sup>MRC UWA/PUB/8/2/5, University of Warwick *Bulletin*, Vol. II No. 5, April 1968: 'Senate has granted independence to Social History'.

<sup>61</sup>UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724 JH to VC 29 May 1968; VC to JH 29 May 1968; EPT to VC 31 May 1968.

comparative labour history, labour in England and the US, and 'States and Industrial Relations' ('the system of industrial relations in Britain and its central problems. An introduction to relevant economic and sociological tools of analysis, and to the legal basis of the system'). Introduced in 1969, it was the only MA offered by the Centre until the late 1970s.<sup>62</sup> By December, with David Montgomery in post, it had become clear that Comparative Labour History must arise from survey courses in both British and American Labour History. 'This is being undertaken this term by all candidates. Next term all candidates will take the comparative course'. But uncertainty in the staffing position made it difficult to 'guarantee the continuation of the M.A. in 1969-1970 ... in certain circumstances it might be necessary to introduce new options (for example, in the comparative study of early popular movements, circa 1760-1850, in France and Britain, to be taught by Dr G. Lewis and Mr E. P. Thompson').<sup>63</sup> There are nineteen of the MA dissertations produced by CSSH students between 1969/70 and 1975 in the Warwick History Department's own archive. All of them focus on the period 1850-1920; nearly all concern the organised

---

<sup>62</sup>UWA/M/BFA/1/2 Board of Arts Oct 1967-Sep 1968, Minutes of a Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1968; UWA/M/S/7 Senate, Minutes of the Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1968, p.7; UWA/PUB/8/2/5, University of Warwick *Bulletin*, Vol. II No. 5, April 1968.

<sup>63</sup>UWA/M/PEC/4 March 1968-Sep 1969. For the Meeting of the Senate 4<sup>th</sup> December 1968, Report of the Board of Studies for Arts, Agendum 11, from David Montgomery and EPT. For Gwynne Lewis (1933-2014), Colin Jones and Robin Okey, 'Gwynne Lewis Obituary', *Guardian*, 25 Jan 2015; <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jan/25/gwynne-lewis>

working class, employed or unemployed, the political organisation of labour (the SDF, the communist party, syndicalism); there were dissertations on workers' associational life, strike action in the Midlands, West and East; and in 1972 'Sylvia Pankhurst and the Workers' Socialist Federation—The Red Twilight 1918-1924', and 'Women Munitions Workers at Woolwich Arsenal in the 1914-1918 War' in 1975. The students were after all, working for an MA in Comparative Labour History with the specific date-boundaries of 1867-1926.<sup>64</sup>

What Thompson himself did by way of research during these years as he worked towards 'The Crime of Anonymity' and *Whigs and Hunters*, together and apart from his PhD students and (always) with his elderly research assistant Mr Dodd, was shift the gears of social history in consideration of crime and the criminal law in the long eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup> For both works, substantial amounts of time were spent (or wasted) by him and Dodd in pursuing what legal historians think of

---

<sup>64</sup>My warmest thanks to Warwick History for allowing me to examine the MA dissertations it holds (and which I packed away in 1998). Some of the CSSH dissertations are erroneously catalogued as PhD theses in the Warwick on-line catalogue (all Warwick doctoral theses are deposited in the MRC.). On my count, 11 of the 49 Social History PhD theses deposited between 1969 and 1975 are actually MA dissertations. If CSSH PhD students produced 38 theses between 1969 and 1975, School of History/History Department students produced 7.

<sup>65</sup>After much moving about of material (on letters, riots, poaching) between the two, both works were published in 1975: E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters. The Origins of the Black Act*, Allen Lane, London, 1975; 'The Crime of Anonymity', Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson, Cal Winslow (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree. Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (1975), Verso, 2011. Steedman, 'Threatening Letters'.

as social history's criminal fix. Mesmerized by the criminal law, by the judges making it, the magistrates administering it, the ordinary people become felons by breaking it, we too have made the same kind of pursuit as Thompson, who longed to find some writers of anonymous threatening letters *actually prosecuted* quite as much as he longed for the actual trials of men suspected of deer-poaching and bark stripping under the Black Act. He sent Mr Dodd haring after trial records in the PRO and Surrey Record Office; he went haring himself in all the country record offices of southern England and the East Midlands. We were (are?) mesmerized by the criminal law, say some, because the 'pre-eminent ... inspirational sources' for social-history research remain 'the classic studies of the "Warwick school," dating from the 1970s, 'which emphasized oppressive features of the administration of justice'.<sup>66</sup>

Edward Thompson was Director of an independent Centre for just two academic years (1968-1970) during which time he continued to teach History undergraduates. If being a member of the History/Politics degree staff-student liaison committee counts as curriculum politics, his lobbying against that 'rather large gap' called the eighteenth century can be seen in a memo from him to the Registrar in April 1969 in which he recounted how 'towards the latter part of last term there was a certain amount of discontent expressed by students in the

---

<sup>66</sup>David Lemmings, 'Introduction', *The British and their Laws in the Eighteenth Century*, Lemmings (ed.), Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2005, pp. 3-5. See also John H. Langbein, 'Albion's Fatal Flaws', *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), pp.96-120; Carolyn Steedman, 'At Every Bloody Level. A Magistrate, a Framework Knitter and the Law', *Law and History Review*, 30:2 (2012), pp. 387-422; 'Threatening Letters', forthcoming.

History/Politics courses ... not unconstructive ... I thought you might be interested in ... this report ... as an example of staff/student liaison ...'. The problem was, in his view, the provision of 'some 18<sup>th</sup> century history which would relate more closely to the earlier parts of the political theory course'. Discussing its absence had taken up 'more of the time of the Committee than any other'.<sup>67</sup>

Though his undergraduate teaching in the History School continued, the last prospectus to offer special subjects 'studied under the supervision of the Reader in the History of Labour on topics chosen by him', was for 1967-8 (prospectuses are compiled very early in the previous academic year). I can find no trace of the enticing-sounding 'Politics and Poetry in England in the Age of the French Revolution, 1791-1801', which was a new special subject almost certainly offered by Thompson for the academic year 1970-71. He had left Warwick by the autumn of 1970: he wanted to write; to get back to his 'trade as writer'; not to be overwhelmed by undergraduate teaching; he wanted out.<sup>68</sup> It has often been observed that Thompson was discreet about his reasons for leaving Warwick. Sometimes he just ... didn't answer the question when it was put to him; 'his reasons were personal', says

---

<sup>67</sup>UWA F/FD/32. R. 1038, 'Staff Student Committee on History/Politics Course', EPT to Registrar, 29 April 1969.

<sup>68</sup>'One way or another I am determined to get back to my trade as writer'; MRC MSS 369/1/4. i, EPT to Edward Dodd, 13 Dec 1967; 'Will really really try to get to London this term; inundated with new undergraduates', MSS 369/1/13, EPT to Edward Dodd 29 Sep 1969; handwritten note on CSSH headed paper;—it really did exist now.

Bryan Palmer.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the Files Affair and *Warwick University Ltd* had little to do with his final, long-threatened departure: in October 1969, the Centre just a year old (officially-speaking), the Board of Arts resolved to recommend that it 'should continue as an independent graduate school, [and] that Mr Thompson's successor should be appointed as soon as possible'.<sup>70</sup> This suggests that his resignation was in, and arrangements for the future being made four months before the occupations of February 1970. The Directorship of the Centre was advertised in December 1969, and Royden Harris was in post by September 1970.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps Thompson merely meant to relinquish the Directorship, and later events prompted his resignation. But it seems highly likely that he had written his letter of resignation before he visited the students occupying the Registry in February 1970.

'Only an independent centre can attract students', reiterated the new head of History in 1969; 'it has been remarkably successful ... the Centre is one of the prominent features of the University. Its demise could scarcely fail to demoralise within the University and to impair the latter's reputation without'. Successful? Yes, said Thompson a year after independence in May 1969. He provided the figures to

---

<sup>69</sup>Michael Merrill, 'An Interview with E. P. Thompson', *Radical History Review* (12), 1976, pp. 4-25; Palmer, *E. P. Thompson*, p. 113.

<sup>70</sup>UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724 J. J. Scarisbrick to Registrar, 24 Oct 1969.

<sup>71</sup>'University of Warwick, Readership in Social History'. The post was tenable from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1970 and carried with it the Directorship of CSSH. It mentioned the one MA, and PhD supervision as duties of the post. *The Times*, 5 Dec, 1969, p. 32.

demonstrate it.<sup>72</sup> And then again, the vast panorama of a future was laid out: exchange of North American, Australian, Panamanian and Philippino researchers in social history, not to mention the European, Latin American, African ... . `This is the plan: but of course it won't happen. What is happening at present is a boot-strapped operation, with frayed boot-laces; or, more exactly, a gamble upon upward revision of UGC arts graduate ceiling'. `Monies will be fought for between the Schools', he prophesied; `and then within them'; then `the boot-straps will snap'. In which case, why not take it back into History `as a substantial component of its regular graduate school'? The only loss would be interdisciplinary and status as an international centre. (He *was* working on threatening letters at the time.)

### *Leaving Middlemarch*

The history of Social History at Warwick reflects the social history of Middlemarch and Loamhire; a materiality and a culture intertwined, with the important structural factors of Whitehall, government policy on higher education and the UGC to be taken into account in the properly materialist, as-yet-unwritten social history of this time and place. In the novel, no one leaves; no one gets out. But you could (and can) get out of Warwick: the large majority of all universities' populations are those birds

---

0.UWA/ FICHE/REF/R1724, `Social History Ten Year Planning', For the Meeting of the Board of Arts , 28 May 1969 (this was EPT's first Report as Director):

`The growth of graduate studies in social history has proceeded as follows:

	Full-time (research)	Part-time
1965-6	3	1
1966-7	6	2
1967-8	8	3'

of passage, its students. Did Warwick's history undergraduates know of utopia? From 1969 (so the year after Anna Davin graduated though still living in the area) second year undergraduates might choose 'The Social and Intellectual History of England, c. 1500-1660', and read 'the Utopias of More and Winstanley and selected texts of Francis Bacon'. She could have encountered utopianism on Thompson's special subject 'Sans-culottes and socialists, 1791-1848' which ran from 1966, inviting reading of 'St. Simon, Baboeuf, Fourier, Owen [and] "Utopian" Communitarianism'. But all the indication are that she followed his other special subject, on the transition to industrialisation. She remembers the walk to the University from her home in Canon Park though the sweetly lost lands of content, up to 'where the administration was, maths and administration ... at Gibbet Hill cross road, more or less ... to go to the teaching block where History was, the Library, the students union ... between them, you went down across a stream, and there was a lovely, lovely woodland, in spring all blue with flowers. I was quite sad when I went back many many years later for the first time, and saw the concrete and lots more buildings, and none of that there'.<sup>73</sup> She was a young mother, living with her three small children and partner in a family home in a pleasant suburb south west of Coventry. She didn't *live* in the place of desolation: 'Desolate, sometimes this place was desolate, I mean when the wind blew and the rain rained and the mud mudded and the tiles

---

<sup>73</sup>UW Oral History Project, 1069/47/1, Interview with Anna Davin. Davin went on to study for her PhD with Eric Hobsbawm: 'we had a very prickly and difficult relationship ... Warwick seemed like golden days by comparison'.

fell, the weekends particularly a few of us had to for domestic reasons had to stay here but god it was bleak sometimes and just nothing was open. And just think about it, there was Rootes Hall and most of the main catering, even with the caff closed down so it was minimal catering at weekends ...'.<sup>74</sup> The to-be new Registrar came for his interview in July 1969: 'The whole place struck me as strange. I mean you know there were very, very few buildings and a lot of space'; and 'of course it was a lovely summer's day', when the wind didn't blow and the empty seas of mud didn't have to be negotiated.<sup>75</sup>

Anna Davin met Dorothy Thompson at a party. 'We were talking and I'd said how I was worried about not knowing how to write an essay. I hadn't been in formal education ... for eight years or something, and [Dorothy Thompson said] we could pick a subject for me to write an essay about, and then she would read it for me and make comments ... I went on the bus to Leamington ... and I remember the incredible sense of freedom, going on a journey on my own, without the three children in tow ... seeing the this hinterland of Coventry and the University, going through Kenilworth, and on to Leamington ...'. The heart always lifts as you leave; the land

---

<sup>74</sup>University of Warwick Oral History Project, 976/5 /1/1-4, Interview with Will Fitzgerald.

<sup>75</sup>MRC 974/1/1, 'Voices of the University', Interview with Michael Shattock 29th November 2012. Elain Harwood points out the tendency to photograph the new brutalism as its architects would have wished, against a bright blue sky surrounded by grass that come winter can only be apologetic. Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism*, p.

and sky open up, whether you take the No. 11 bus that still maps the terrain between Gibbet Hill and North Leamington; or drive more briskly along what is now the A46/A452. On both routes you may glimpse, through all the houses in between, on a low hill, a wooded incline—in Loamshire, the place where you are—a figure watching all of it; all that has been and will be: ‘Destiny stand[ing] by sarcastic with our dramatis personae folded in her hand’.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup>‘You could see the Crystal Palace/ If it wasn’t for the houses in between’; music hall song, Edgar Bateman, c.1894. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Book 1, Chapter 11.