



VERONICA WEDGWOOD

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Cicely Veronica Wedgwood

1910–1997

FEW BRITISH HISTORIANS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY have commanded so wide a readership as Dame Veronica Wedgwood and few have enjoyed so fully the admiration of both the general reader and the academic community—even though some of the latter were slow to recognise her true quality. All through her working life she wrote out of an intense enthusiasm for her subject and a compelling desire to communicate it to as broad a public as possible. Her love of it was kindled by her first history lesson (how many of us can say that?). ‘I was six’, she recalled; ‘a world of inexhaustible possibilities opened before me—real people, real things that had really happened to them.’ On the walk home from school that day she was frustrated at failing to get her nurse to share her passionate interest in Caradoc’s confrontation with Caesar.¹

Her next major discovery was that the past was accessible through the actual words written or spoken by men and women long departed, and through their records of their transactions, some preserved in printed books, many still awaiting the excitement of discovery in archives. Original sources possessed a unique excitement for her; even in earliest adolescence a vast History of England was taking shape in a growing pile of pencil-written 200-page pads. She took so much pleasure in self-expression, and wrote so swiftly and naturally that she was clearly born to be a writer; three novels and a play were among her early juvenilia. But she found her real *métier* in making sense of the immediate records of the past, and much as she enjoyed telling a story it was more satisfying to her, from quite an early age, when it was a true story about real people. Later, when she had polished her literary skill to a

¹ ‘The velvet study’, in *History and Hope: The Collected Essays of C. V. Wedgwood* (1987), p. 12.

pitch rare indeed among modern historians, narrative remained her supreme gift, and it has won many readers to a love of history. Conrad Russell has recorded how, at the age of eight, he took her *William the Silent* from his parents' bookshelves—the first history book he had ever read—and found that once embarked on it he could not put it down.² Sir Roy Strong and John Morrill too have testified to the part that her books played in awaking a passion for history in them.

Cicely Veronica Wedgwood was born on 20 July 1910 at Stocksfield in Northumberland. Her father, Sir Ralph Wedgwood Bt, was for sixteen years chief general manager of the London and North Eastern Railway. She must have been one of the last survivors of those proprietary days to hold a free railway pass, which was a blessing to impecunious student history societies, to whose invitations to lecture she responded generously. Her mother Iris (*née* Pawson) was a novelist and travel-writer, and she was the great-great-great-granddaughter of Josiah Wedgwood the potter; her brother was deputy chairman of the family firm until 1966. Hers was a rich cultural background. Ralph Vaughan Williams was her father's cousin and dedicated his London Symphony to him, and she herself formed an enduring love of music and opera. History was in her genes, as well as the urge to write, for her uncle Josiah Wedgwood MP (later Baron Wedgwood) found time among his multifarious activities and interests to play the chief part in founding the official *History of Parliament* and to write its first two published volumes. Veronica helped him with that work, and later made one of her rare departures from early modern history, art, and literature in order to write his biography.

She grew up in London, and after early years at Norland Place School in Holland Park Avenue she was educated privately by governesses under the loving and enlightened supervision of her parents. She became particularly devoted to one governess, a Swiss lady who nurtured not only her love of history but her natural skill in languages. She thought of herself in retrospect as 'a cross, difficult, lumpish child',³ but a child whose father sought to curb her runaway pen by advising her to write history, and for whom a birthday present of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* proved to be an intellectual landmark, was no ordinary pupil. In due course, after short spells at the Sorbonne in Paris and with a German family in Bonn, she went up to Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, where she graduated with first class honours in Modern History. Unusually she opted to submit a BA thesis, and it sealed her success. A. L. Rowse was one of her tutors, and he remembered her as his first outstanding pupil. It is interesting to speculate on where her next steps might have taken her if it had been as

² Conrad Russell, 'C. V. Wedgwood', broadcast talk on BBC Radio Three, 8 August 1995.

³ 'The velvet study', p. 14.

normal then as it is now to proceed from a distinguished first degree to supervised research directed at a higher one. She would probably not have taken that course, for her vocation was to become a writer rather than a teacher, and for the kind of writing she had in mind, scholarly and disciplined though it was, the formal training of a D.Phil. was not necessary. Then and later an academic career was open to her, but she decided against it. She wanted more independence than a heavy and regular load of teaching would have allowed her; and for all her gift for friendship she was at the core a reserved and private person whom the collegiate life might not have suited. She did some tutoring at Somerville, but she soon left Oxford and went to live in Bloomsbury.

Literary work with a flexible time-table went better with her commitment as a writer than fixed hours of lectures, seminars, and tutorials would have done, but she worked very hard all the same. She undertook various editorial tasks for Jonathan Cape, but her main employment was with Lady Rhondda's weekly periodical *Time and Tide*. The volatile Lady Rhondda, who exhausted her personal fortune in keeping it afloat, was a notoriously difficult person to work for, and Veronica was dismayed at being designated her successor when she died in 1958. She strove very hard, though in the end unsuccessfully, to keep the debt-ridden paper going. But though she wrote many pieces for *Time and Tide* and devoted considerable time to it, she can never have thought of it as her main occupation. Only four years after graduating she published *Strafford*, her first book—and that was after a considerable amount of rewriting under the guidance of J. E. (later Professor Sir John) Neale, who gave her much valued advice on its structure. *Strafford* had an immediate success both with professional historians and with the broad reading public, and it deserved it, for it was not only beautifully written, with a profound sympathy for its subject, but it was based on a wider range of sources than any previous biographer had used, including the important Fitzwilliam manuscripts. The book was essentially a vindication of a man towards whom the whig historians had shown a hostile bias; Veronica responded warmly to Strafford's undoubted idealism, his strong affections and loyalties, his belief in order and authority when both were being unworthily undermined, and his devotion to the hard work of administration amidst a regime in which 'the Lady Mora' too often held sway. But she gradually came to see that she had taken him too much at his own valuation. Partly because of the new accessibility after the last war of many unpublished Wentworth family papers, and partly through the work of her fellow-historians J. P. Cooper, Hugh Kearney, and Gerald Aylmer, she came to appreciate that she had underestimated the scale on which Strafford had enriched himself in the public service, the unscrupulous nature of the means whereby he had done so, and the ruthlessness with which he had pursued and brought down his political opponents. With typical intellectual

honesty she decided to revise her whole appraisal of him. It was not only fresh documentary evidence, convincing new work by fellow-scholars and a maturer knowledge of the ways of the world that led her to so. During the quarter century between the writing of her first book and of her second, the world experienced most of what was worst of both fascist and communist dictatorship, and most westerners (hard-line ideologues excepted) adopted a far more critical stance towards unbridled self-aggrandisement, a cavalier attitude to due legal process, and the sacrifice of the rights of individuals to the supposed interests of the state. There were many refugees in England after the war, the victims of totalitarianism, and Veronica took a strong interest in their plight. She helped many of them privately, and from 1950 served on a committee 'to inquire into cases of deprivation of British citizenship'.

So when *Thomas Wentworth First Earl of Strafford 1593–1641: A Revaluation* appeared in 1961 it was not so much a revision as a new book, despite its incorporation of much from the earlier one. As well as being considerably longer, it is more nuanced, better-balanced, and surer-footed amongst the tangles and intrigues of Caroline politics. Strafford emerges as an altogether more complex and interesting figure than in the first version, his failings faithfully acknowledged but his finer qualities and ideals justly appraised. His worst faults, as she sees them, were his inordinate ambition and his lack of judgement in human relationships; his final tragedy was to a great extent of his own making. In the latter respect he had much in common with his master, about whom she was to write so affectingly in *The Trial of Charles I*. Her concluding assessment of Strafford is no less moving, as well as penetrating, and it crowns one of the classic biographies of an early modern statesman.

Both *Strafford* and *Thomas Wentworth* were dedicated 'To A. H. P.', in the latter case to his memory. He was Veronica's maternal grandfather, Albert Henry Pawson, 'whose love, wisdom and knowledge [she wrote in the later book] had surrounded my childhood'. 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' he had asked her teasingly when she first immersed herself in Gibbon.⁴ It is good that he lived long enough to be abundantly answered.

Only three years after *Strafford*, and when still only twenty-eight years old, she published one of her longest and most ambitious books, *The Thirty Years War*. It was and always will be a daunting subject—daunting in the inescapable density of its detail, in the complexity of its diplomatic history and its military campaigns, above all in the mass and variety of sources that need to be mastered if the treatment of it is to have any claim to authority and originality, as Veronica's most decidedly has. She possessed the linguistic equipment, as well as the scholar's judgement and the sheer industry required, for she was

⁴ 'The velvet study', p. 16.

fluent in French and German and could read Spanish, Italian, Dutch, and Swedish. She achieved not only an original and independent synthesis, but she presented the war (or wars) with a structural lucidity and a narrative gift for which two generations of students and teachers have blessed her. She has been criticised for seeing the war as ‘essentially a German conflict’ and underplaying the involvement of the Scandinavian and western powers, and also for overstating its ultimately negative character: ‘the outstanding example in European history of meaningless conflict’, she called it in conclusion.⁵ Perhaps her view of it was darkened by the looming shadow of another German war. At any rate the critic whom I have cited described her book as nevertheless a classic, and so it is.

Only a year after the publication of *The Thirty Years War* she fulfilled a commission to contribute a short biography of *Oliver Cromwell* to the Brief Lives series. Its modest scale precluded any real originality, but it was well done, and worth the revision and augmentation to which she treated it for a new edition in 1973. Her main labour during the darker years of the Second World War was devoted to *William the Silent* (1944), which ranks as one of her major (as well as most popular) achievements and won her the James Tait Black prize. It remains as exciting as the youthful Conrad Russell found it, and it does full justice to a heroic subject. It is grounded in a thorough knowledge of the complex politics of Spain, the Low Countries and western Europe generally, and it has introduced thousands of English-speaking readers to the story of the revolt of the Netherlands. Although it is inevitably subject to the limitations of a biographical approach to so large a historical theme, its narrative drive is as strong as in any of her works. Occasionally, as in *Strafford*, its very real eloquence tips over into eulogy (at least for this reader), and though William was a far less flawed character than Wentworth, the even finer studies that were still to come would be the more compelling for their relative restraint.

Veronica was by this time much in demand as a reviewer, and this and her editorial work were not the only demands on her time, for she was a skilled translator. Her English version of Karl Brandi’s massive *The Emperor Charles V* appeared in 1939, and that of Elias Canetti’s *Die Blendung*, likewise translated from the German, and published in England as *Auto-da-Fé*, in 1946. In the latter year she also brought out *Velvet Studies: Essays on Historical and Other Subjects*. She was a most polished essayist, whether on the scale of a brief editorial or a full-blown article. Some of these pieces, perhaps most memorably ‘Cavalier poetry and Cavalier politics’, reflected her strong interest in seventeenth-century literature, especially where it inter-

⁵ Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years War* (1984), pp. xv, 216–17; C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (1938), p. 526.

reacted with contemporary political issues. Others like 'Two painters' (Van Dyck and William Dobson) bore witness to her abiding love of the fine arts, which early visits with her father or maternal grandfather to the great art collections in continental Europe had awoken, and which the many hours she spent in the National Gallery and other great collections at home and abroad had constantly kept alive. At least three substantial articles signalled a preoccupation with the English Civil War, for she was already laying the foundations of her major work on the Great Rebellion. She garnered a later harvest of essays and addresses in *Truth and Opinion* (1960), and she republished what she wanted to save of both collections, along with some later articles and talks, in *History and Hope* (1987). Some of these papers convey an idea of her qualities as a lecturer: lucid, shapely, beautifully turned, with an easy command of the listener's attention, but modest and unrhetoical. A few contain some of her rare and brief snatches of autobiography, and some of the most absorbing are those in which she speaks of her own craft. One of the most memorable of the latter is 'A sense of the past', which originated in 1957 as the first Leslie Stephen Lecture (at Cambridge) to be given by a woman.

Meanwhile in 1949 she contributed a short book on *Richelieu and the French Monarchy* to the Teach Yourself History series edited by her old tutor and now close friend A. L. Rowse, and in the following year a survey of *Seventeenth Century English Literature* to the Oxford University Press's Home University Library. The former was a typically stimulating and judicious text for students of all ages, the latter a triumph of lucid compression that at the same time succeeds in communicating some of her own enthusiasms. She was publishing a book a year at this stage, for *The Last of the Radicals*, her biography of her uncle Josiah, came out in 1951, and *Montrose* (in the Brief Lives series) in 1952. Both are written with affection, but in *Montrose* she resists any temptation to over-romanticise a temptingly romantic subject and places the man and his exploits firmly in their historic context.

By this time she had won not only a national but an international reputation. *William the Silent* was translated into Swedish in 1946, French and Dutch in 1947 and German somewhat later. With characteristic generosity she donated her early royalties to the relief of Dutch victims of the German occupation, and Queen Juliana admitted her to the Order of Orange Nassau in 1946. *The Thirty Years War* was also widely translated and enjoyed a particular success in Germany, whence she received the Goethe Medal in 1958. At home she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1947. Her standing in both literary and historical circles was bringing her not only recognition but responsibilities, which she shouldered gladly and always took seriously. The hard work that she did for the English Centre of International PEN led to her being made its President from 1951 to 1957. She was also President of the English Association in 1955–6, and of the Society of

Authors from 1972 to 1977. For twenty-five years, starting in 1953, she was a member of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. She served with a special enjoyment two terms as a Trustee of the National Gallery, from 1962 to 1968 and from 1969 to 1976, and she was on the Advisory Committee of the Victoria and Albert Museum from 1960 to 1969.

She was appointed CBE in 1956, and she became Dame Veronica when she was raised to DBE in 1968. Her public honours were crowned when she was admitted to the Order of Merit in 1969, and she was its senior non-royal member when she died. Lady Margaret Hall made her an Honorary Fellow in 1962, and in the same year she accepted an appointment as Special Lecturer in University College London. Only the British Academy was conspicuously slow in recognising her achievement, for it did not elect her a Fellow until 1975. An attempt to explain (though not to excuse) that delay will be made shortly. Recognition in the United States was signalled, though not for the first time, by her membership from 1953 to 1968 of the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton, which offered her blessed spells of uninterrupted research and writing. In America she was also elected an honorary member of the Academy of Arts and Letters, the Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Historical Society, and the American Philosophical Society. Harvard and Oxford are among the many universities on both sides of the Atlantic which conferred honorary degrees on her.

In 1955 she published the first instalment of what she probably intended to be her magnum opus, though she was far too modest to use such a term about her own work. She planned to write at least three volumes with the general title of *The Great Rebellion*, spanning the whole period of upheaval in Britain from the initial Scottish revolt to the Restoration. The first volume was called *The King's Peace 1637–1641*, and it displays her artistry at its height. It begins with a memorable picture of Charles I's dominions and peoples on the eve of the troubles, and of the king and the minister who strove to rule them. It is not the sort of account that a professional social or political historian would have written, but it is valid (as well as vivid) in its own right. The book is dedicated to G. M. Trevelyan and it is written in his tradition, combining strict scholarship with a keen awareness of the interests of the general reader, though Veronica excels him here in literary grace, while probing the sources at least as deeply. Her narrative flair takes wing with the National Covenant and the Scottish wars, and the *dramatis personae* of 1640–1 are superbly delineated.

Three years later came the second volume in the work, *The King's War 1641–1647*, a fully worthy successor to the first, and incidentally by some way her longest book. It was ahead of its time in the skill and care with which it counterpointed English and Scottish history; Veronica would have been amused by the current insistence that Britain was involved in 'a war of three kingdoms', as though this was a new discovery. She showed as sure a touch in describing

military campaigns and battles as in unfolding the political developments, but that came as no surprise. She had long enjoyed walking over battlefields and reconstructing for herself the manoeuvres of armies over them, and as early as 1945 she had written a perceptive paper on 'The Strategy of the Great Civil War'.⁶ I vividly remember taking part with her and Norman Gibbs in a BBC radio feature of the early 1960s on the battle of Marston Moor, in which we recorded our descriptions together on the field itself and then discussed the engagement and its consequences in the studio. Her knowledge and judgement in matters military were impressive, but it is her imaginative grasp of what it was like to come to push of pike or sustain a cavalry charge that carries the reader through the detailed story of the wars.

In the reviews of these two volumes, many academic historians as well as literary critics recognised their high artistry and their true scholarship. Yet in academic circles generally they were received with a certain reservation. Veronica's way of writing history was out of fashion in academe during most of her writing career. University historians in Britain, continental Europe, and America mostly felt their main task to be to search for comprehensive explanations of large-scale developments which transcended the personal and the contingent, and the kind of explanation that they most favoured was the economic. What Veronica, with centuries of precedent to justify her, called the Great Rebellion had become the English Revolution, and it was almost a dogma that real revolutions are by definition social revolutions. For a generation and more after the Second World War, Marx's model of historical causation was immensely influential, and even those who reacted against Marx tended to proffer an alternative that was equally deterministic: witness the controversy in the English-speaking world as to whether the driving force behind the English Revolution lay in the rising gentry or the declining gentry. There was also a cult of the quantifiable—'cliometrics' or 'serial history'—which yielded and continues to yield valuable results, but becomes excessive when it depreciates the study of historical phenomena which cannot be precisely measured. Another powerful influence was that of the *Annales* school, with its emphasis on structures and trends rather than particular events, its concentration on the *longue durée*, and its elevation of analysis over narrative. No serious historian, least of all Veronica, would deny that the contributors to *Annales* widened the scope of historical enquiry very significantly, or that the major works of Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, to name only two, are masterpieces. But the school's relegation of traditional political narrative to an inferior category of *histoire événementielle* was a typical piece of Gallic intellectual arrogance, and in late years there has been a wholesome reaction against it. So there has against a less reputable assumption, mainly unspoken, that professional (i.e. academic) historians should communicate in a

⁶ Reprinted in *History and Hope*, pp. 122–5.

language and vocabulary intelligible only to their fellow-workers at the coal-face of specialised research, or at least only to serious students. A certain tendency to look down on 'fine writing' is, one hopes, a thing of the past.

Veronica was of course fully aware of the great debates over historical causation and over the historian's proper task, and she was by no means indifferent to them. For a while after graduating she was a member of R. H. Tawney's economic history seminar at the Institute of Historical Research. Of theories of history, she wrote in 1946,

I have had many, even for some years the theory that in the interests of scholarship it is wrong to write history comprehensible to the ordinary reader, since all history so written must necessarily be modified and therefore incorrect. This was I think too much against my nature to have held me long.⁷

We can only be thankful that she had the strength of mind to follow her bent and practise her craft in the manner for which she was supremely gifted. History for her could never be just the preserve of specialists, because a knowledge of the past is something to be desired by all readers with an intelligent interest in the human condition. What moved her most to write was a desire to convey her own feeling and excitement over past events to those who had not the time or the skill to gather their knowledge of them, as she did, from the original sources, and to convey it in the form of a narrative. Most people who read history for pleasure and instruction have come to love the subject through books of the kind at which she excelled; some knowledge of *what* happened in the past normally precedes a deeper curiosity as to *why* it happened, and how it fits into a larger pattern of historical development. But she was very much more than a *vulgarisatrice*, and she was not always given due credit for the thoroughness with which she studied her sources or the many new insights she derived from them.

She never claimed that her own manner of writing history was superior to that of others, or that it answered all the questions that a reader might put to the past. Questions of long-term causation and *les grands courants de l'histoire universelle* were not her *métier*, but she did not consider them unimportant. Her understandable revulsion against the dogmatism and bad manners that some academic historians were displaying in the so-called gentry controversy led her to pass over the interesting social and regional differences in the pattern of allegiance in the Civil War; indeed she is distinctly thin on the question of why people of all ranks chose to side with king or parliament, or did their best to avoid committing themselves. But her own justification of her method deserves to be read, in the introductions to both *The King's Peace* and *The*

⁷ *History and Hope*, p. 16.

King's War and in the memorable essay on 'The sense of the past', written while working on the latter, in which she discusses the historian's 'attempt to make the imaginative leap from our own epoch to an earlier one'.⁸ She credits the Romantics from Sir Walter Scott onward with a largely new attempt to bring the reader inside the minds of people in an earlier age, with all its differences of mindcast and physical circumstance, and to present the events that befell them with all the immediacy that they themselves experienced. She herself set out to tell the story of the Great Rebellion 'in such a way as to bring out the hourly urgency and confusion through which contemporaries lived', without posterity's knowledge of what was going to happen next.⁹ Rather than focus on underlying causes, she preferred 'to give full importance and value to the admitted motives and the illusions of the men of the seventeenth century', aiming 'to restore their immediacy of experience'.¹⁰ She admitted that this approach had its limitations, but she saw drawbacks in the methods of her critics:

Before history can be put into a coherent perspective it is often necessary to clear away the misinterpretations and the half-knowledge by which contemporaries lived. But the application of modern methods of research, together with modern knowledge and prejudice, can make the past merely the subject of our own analytical ingenuity or our own illusions. With scholarly precision we can build up theories as to why and how things happened which are convincing to us, which may even be true, but which those who lived through the epoch would neither recognise nor accept. It is legitimate for the historian to pierce the surface and bring to light motives and influences not known at the time; but it is equally legitimate to accept the motives and explanations which satisfied contemporaries. The two methods produce different results, but each result may be a fair answer to the particular question that has been asked. They become misleading only if either is accepted as the whole truth.¹¹

She would not concede that her method totally neglected the historian's duty of explanation. 'A narrative history, a description of what happened and *how* it happened', she contended, 'often answers the question of *why* it happened.'¹²

One of the great virtues of her mature work was its impartiality. She wrote with such sympathetic understanding of what motivated the leading figures on both sides in the Civil War that although her own inclinations lay towards the parliament's cause there was quite a widespread popular assumption that she was at heart a royalist. She was aware of this, and it mildly irritated her. But she had such an acute sense of the tragedy of the king's fate in the aftermath of the Civil War that the story of his trial and execution took on a life of its own

⁸ *History and Hope*, p. 416.

⁹ C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's War 1641–1647* (1958), p. 11.

¹⁰ C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's Peace 1637–1641* (1955), p. 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹² Wedgwood, *The King's War*, p. 11.

for her, and she decided to devote a separate book to it. *The Trial of Charles I* appeared in 1964, and it is hard to regret her decision, for nothing of hers is more beautifully written or finer in its insights into character.

I have devoted considerable space to her writings on the Civil War period, because although she never completed *The Great Rebellion*, what she did write of it (including *The Trial*) has a strong claim to be her finest work, and it prompted her to reflect and write about her craft as a historian as no previous undertaking had done. It is a matter for profound regret that she did not carry the story of the Interregnum to its conclusion, and one can only speculate on the reasons for her failure to do so. It can hardly have been the mixed reception of the first two volumes by some academic reviewers, for she was too strong-minded to be seriously discouraged by criticism, and the response by the public to which she mainly addressed herself was enthusiastic. It is even less likely that she found the world of the 1650s uncongenial, for when she was chosen to give the first Neale Lecture at University College London in 1970 she took as her subject 'Oliver Cromwell and the Elizabethan inheritance',¹³ and not long after she revised and augmented her short life of the Protector. A brief piece on *Milton and His World*, published in 1969, was also sympathetically concerned with the 1650s.

It may be that when she tried to pick up the threads of *The Great Rebellion* she found that her separate publication of *The Trial of Charles I* presented her with problems of presentation, since she would have to tell a considerable part of her story twice, but her introduction to *The Trial* shows that when she wrote it she still fully intended to carry the main work through to the Restoration. She was, however, repelled by the acrimony with which academic historians continued to wrangle over the causes and significance of the English Revolution, and her reluctance to become involved probably helped to put her off continuing her great project until the dust had settled somewhat. She had many other calls on her time to distract her, and she had no reason in her fifties to doubt that she had many more years of full intellectual vigour ahead of her. In addition to all she was doing for various organisations devoted to the interests of writers in general and historians in particular, she was much in demand as a lecturer. Between publishing *The King's Peace* and *The Trial of Charles I*, she gave the 1956 presidential address to the English Association (on 'Literature and the historian'), the 1957 Fairclough Lecture in Leicester University (on 'The common man in the Great Civil War'), the Leslie Stephen Lecture of the same year and the six Clark Lectures of the following one, all in Cambridge, the Northcliffe Lectures in University College London not long after, and the Foundation Lecture of 1963 in Birkbeck College (on 'History and hope'). All these had to be prepared for publication; how many other talks she gave—

¹³ Reprinted in *History and Hope*, pp. 317–35.

unpaid of course—to branches of the Historical Association and to historical societies in both British and American universities is past reckoning, for she generously accepted invitations whenever she could.

It was in this period too that she virtually rewrote *Strafford* as *Thomas Wentworth . . . A Revaluation*. She revised her Clark Lectures for publication by the Cambridge University Press in 1960 as *Poetry and Politics under the Stuarts*, and it is one of the most engaging and illuminating of her shorter books. Its subject is the poetry inspired by public events and public figures, and it is almost as much concerned with the popular verse of the broadsheet ballads as with the polite literature of the court and the country houses. It opened up the study of the Caroline court masques and courtly verse as a key to the mentality of Charles I's government in the 1630s, a topic that has since become something of a growth industry, and without exaggerating their significance (as some since have done) concluded that their adulation and artifice did help to close the king's mind to the harsh political realities that were soon to confront him. Veronica was also ahead of the field in recognising the remarkable talents of Marchamont Nedham, and she made an interesting case that popular balladry declined in quality in the later seventeenth century, just when sophisticated political satire entered upon a brilliant age.

History and literature were for her inseparable subjects, and the history of painting was interlinked with them. In 1967 she published a short book on *The World of Rubens, 1577–1640*, and she followed it eight years later with an expanded version of her Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture at Birkbeck College, on *The Political Career of Peter Paul Rubens*. Rubens spent lengthy periods at the court of Charles I in the role not only of an artist but of a diplomat.

Apart from another public lecture, on *The English Civil War in Perspective* (1978), only one more book was to come from her, though she published a revised edition of *The Trial of Charles I* in 1980. After an unwonted pause in her output she decided to write a concise history of the world, an undertaking which proved even more onerous than she had anticipated. She managed to complete the first half of it, extending to the mid-sixteenth century, and it appeared in 1984 as *The Spoils of Time*. I confess that I have not read it, so I would certainly not wish to imply any judgement of it, but many readers must share my regret that she took on this very demanding project before she completed *The Great Rebellion*. One would give so much to read what she had to say about the Putney debates, and the rule of the Rump, and the conquest of Ireland, and the character of the Cromwellian Protectorate, and the experience of the royalists in defeat, and the commotions which culminated in the Restoration. As it was, she completed neither that work nor her history of the world, for by the mid-1980s a cruel crippling of her intellectual powers was beginning to put research and writing beyond her capacity.

It is matter for gratitude that she remained herself during a decade and more in which the academic world fully caught up with the wider reading public in recognising her outstanding merit as a writer and a scholar. This was registered through a succession of honorary degrees, through her belated election to our Fellowship, and by the publication of a Festschrift in 1986. The contributors to *For Veronica Wedgwood These: Studies in Seventeenth-Century History* included historians as diverse (and in some cases as opposed!) as Christopher Hill, J. H. Hexter, A. L. Rowse, Maurice Ashley, Ivan Roots, and Roger Lockyer, while essays by Sir Roy Strong and Oliver Millar bear witness to her standing in the history of art. It ends with a valuable bibliography by Jaqueline Hope-Wallace.

None of these honours made the slightest difference to the innate modesty, indeed the true humility, with which Veronica faced the world. She was a quietly devout Christian, and the beauty with which she read the lessons in her parish church is well remembered. She was never narrowly tied to her own subject—if a combination of world history, literature, and art could ever be narrow! She loved reading outside her own field, poetry especially, and music and opera were part of her life. She also much enjoyed cooking, for she was a charming hostess as well as a delightful guest. She had many friends, and she made more by her personal generosity to people in need, whether refugees or fellow-writers fallen on hard times. For many years she shared a house in St John's Wood with the critic Philip Hope-Wallace and his sister Jaqueline, and after Philip's death in 1979 Jaqueline remained her companion for the rest of her life. They had a flat in London, but spent more and more of their time at the cottage that they shared near Alfriston in Sussex.

It was a tragedy that Alzheimer's disease caused her fine mind to lose its powers far ahead of her strong physical constitution. She lost not only the capacity to read and to work, but after a time even the ability to speak. The devoted care that Jaqueline Hope-Wallace gave her all through those silent years is beyond her friends' praise, but more than one of them has remarked that sufferers from her illness retain certain essential traits of character even when their cognitive powers are disabled. Enough remained of Veronica's grace of mind, her inner serenity, and her capacity for affection to make her circumscribed life bearable both for her and her devoted companion, whom (perhaps alone of those near to her) she never ceased to recognise.

It is surely not fanciful to see this nobility of character shining through in her books. They are permeated by her response to all that is generous and magnanimous, her compassion for history's victims, and her sympathy in judging the failings of those (such as Charles I and Strafford) whom her honesty compels her to reckon responsible for their own fates. It is doubtful whether any other British historian in her time has awoken a taste for serious history in so many readers who might not otherwise have come to the subject.

Yet she always practised her craft with rigour, and it seems not inappropriate to end by quoting what she had to say on the vexed old question of whether history is an art or a science: 'All sciences are devoted to the quest for truth; truth can neither be apprehended nor communicated without art. History therefore is an art, like all the other sciences.'¹⁴

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Note. For information and comments I am greatly indebted to Miss Jaqueline Hope-Wallace, Mr Richard Ollard, Lady Wedgwood (Dr Pamela Tudor-Craig), and Dr John Morrill. I have also drawn freely on the obituaries in the national newspapers.

¹⁴ 'Art, truth and history' (1958), in *History and Hope*, p. 261.