

PLATE XXXI



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CHRISTOPHER ROBERT CHENEY

1906–1987

I

IF we had to name a date in modern history more critical than any other to the development of medieval studies it would be 20 December 1906. Not long after midnight, in the earliest hours of the day, F. W. Maitland died in the Canary Islands; and as the day went on Bernhard Bischoff and Christopher Cheney were born.¹

The Cheney family have been printers in Banbury for well over 200 years, and one of Christopher's earliest scholarly works was a history of the firm written in collaboration with his elder brothers John and Walter.² The Cheney family and its business have been revealed to me by the kindness of John's widow and Christopher's, Mary Cheney, both, by the book itself and by a splendid epitome of it shown me by Christopher's nephew John Cheney, the present head of the firm.³ Christopher struck out a new line for his family, went to Oxford and became a don. But in two ways he never left Banbury. First of all, it was a close-knit family. No one who visited Christopher and Mary in later life—who met their daughter and two sons, or heard him speak of them and their progress in life, could fail to know how much his family meant to him: a deep and happy domesticity was essential to his life—and it had been so too in his early years. By the same token, in his work, he was always a craftsman: he not only knew how to

¹ The date of Maitland's death is often given as 19 December; but C. H. S. Fifoot, *Frederic William Maitland, A Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 279–80, quotes a letter from Mrs Maitland written on 21 December, which establishes beyond reasonable doubt that he died on the 20th.

² *John Cheney and his Descendants, printers in Banbury since 1767*, Banbury, 1936: the authorship is only acknowledged in the preface, which makes clear that Christopher wrote most of the book, but with his elder brothers' help.

³ *Cheneys of Banbury, 1767/1967* produced to celebrate the second centenary of the firm in 1967. It is sad to record that Mrs John Cheney, the elder Mary Cheney, died in November 1987—but it is a particular pleasure to quote the charming account she sent me of the family a few weeks before her death.

fashion a book—knew far more than most of us how a book turns into print—he had a strong sense of the historian's craft, of the common task in which all must join if a job of work is to be done. Scholarly work is not for the personal glory, or to feed the vanity, of the scholar; it is not a matter of fuss or fireworks; but a craft in which one may take the same pride his family had always taken in its printing; a common task; a job to be done.

Of his childhood Mrs John Cheney wrote thus. 'Christopher's parents George Gardner Cheney and Christiana Stapleton Bateman were married in 1899. He was 39 and his wife 27 years of age. They had four sons: John born 1900, Walter Gardner 1901, Arthur Henry 1903 and Christopher Robert 1906. George Gardner and his elder brother John were then the two partners in the business.

'It was I imagine, a typical middle class business family. The parents took their responsibilities very seriously. George Gardner was a fine father, firm but kind and just. The mother with four boys was much occupied with family chores but she had been a college-trained teacher, which was unusual in those days, and spent much time in encouraging her family in reading and general educational matters.⁴ Their first schooling took place in a Dame School kept by a Quaker lady, Miss Harlock. As small boys they were very close and I have scripts of plays they wrote and performed at Christmas.

'At I suppose the age of eight or nine, the Cheney boys went on to a local Council School. From there John and Walter went away to school at Sidcot Friends' School and in due course Arthur and Christopher got scholarships to the Municipal School at Banbury. Thence Christopher, after two tries, was eventually accepted for Oxford University. This was considered a great triumph for the Banbury School, since in those days most undergraduates came from Public Schools.

'The years of the Great War imposed great hardships on the Cheney parents. The business at that time printed a lot of catalogues and engineering technical publications, and these were suspended during the war years as all engineering concerns were making military equipment. Towards the end of the war food was difficult as there was no organised rationing and it must have been a struggle to feed the family. The two older boys left Sidcot earlier than they might otherwise have done, and in 1916

⁴ In the preface to his first book, *Episcopal Visitation* (1931), he noted that his mother had read the whole of it in manuscript.

were apprenticed in the business, John as a compositor and Walter in the machine-room. There is a story that the firm was asked by the school, now called County School, for some off-cuts for a paper-chase and John and Walter were told to fill a sack for the trail-layer. This they did, putting a brick in the bottom of the sack; the poor boy who laid the trail found it heavy going and there was a terrible row about it in which I fear Christopher, a pupil at the school, was blamed. . . .

'It must be remembered that families made their own amusements, since there were neither wireless nor television. Father Cheney had been a great supporter of all musical events before his marriage and belonged to the Banbury Philharmonic Society which was largely made up of local tradesmen and did a lot of orchestral work for local concerts. This love of music was carried on through the years. John and George Gardner played cello and violin and in due course the young Cheneys either sang or played violin, cello or flute. There were lots of musical evenings and I was fortunate enough to be able to play the piano with them and to accompany my brother-in-law-to-be when he sang at Red Cross Concerts. This was much later, from 1917 onwards.

'Cycling was the one pleasure we all enjoyed, apart from a lot of long walks taken at weekends. I went out quite a lot in the summer evenings with Christopher, who was then rising eleven years. On one occasion we decided to go to Compton Wynyates, the beautiful Tudor mansion of the Marquis of Northampton. It is about seven miles from Banbury. I was a stranger to this part of the countryside and we got lost and never reached our goal. Hard words followed when I returned Christopher to his family.'

Cheney and Sons is a flourishing small business; but it was not always so. In both World Wars business had been hard to find and craftsmen few, and this was especially so in the years of Christopher's early schooling. There was little spare money for his education. Banbury is near Oxford, but in those days Banbury County School was not; it was a rare event for its pupils to go on there. In his first attempt at a scholarship, at Merton, Christopher failed; and only the patience and persistence so deep in his nature—and perhaps too some coaching from R. V. Lennard, the Wadham tutor, who lived midway between the two towns—achieved an open exhibition at Wadham the next year; he was also supported by a 'Supplementary University Scholarship' from the Oxford Education Committee, and by a much esteemed local prize, the Ewelme Exhibition. In 1927 he was Gibbs Scholar at Oxford, largely on the strength of an essay on a

crusading theme—one of the abiding interests of his teaching life—which greatly impressed his examiners; and he also became an Honorary Scholar of Wadham. He was always conscious of the hard road that led to academic success, always particularly sympathetic to others who found it hard; very marked among his qualities were his readiness to help and encourage young students who did not find their way easy—and an instinctive feeling for the underdog with which, fairly and judiciously, he was later to confront the most lordly of the medieval popes.

II

Three years of Wadham and a first were followed by three years of research under Sir Maurice Powicke's supervision. Powicke, small, dynamic and romantic, was similar in physique to Cheney, but strikingly unlike in scholarly temperament: although Powicke had a vision of what was needed in textual and historical enterprises, and inspired many younger scholars, he was not a great editor of texts.⁵ But his supervision was crucial to Christopher Cheney's development. Under Powicke's guidance Christopher was able to achieve in 1931, the first of his climacteric years, the publication of his first book on *Episcopal Visitation of Monasteries in the Thirteenth Century*; 1931 also witnessed the inauguration of a project for a new edition of Wilkins' *Concilia* whose greatest fruit was to be *Councils and Synods*, volume ii, over thirty years later; and it saw him an Assistant Lecturer in University College London—after a spell of teaching in Cairo. The post in the new secular university at Cairo came from the support of Powicke, and of the Liverpool historian, G. S. Veitch. There he first met G. W. Coopland, the Liverpool medievalist; and he was able to pursue his crusading interest by two visits to Palestine; he was later to teach a special subject at Manchester on the Second Crusade.

Robin Humphreys has described his years at UC: both the more professional side, Christopher's characteristic readiness to help all who needed it, 'whether undergraduates, research students, or other scholars', and the more domestic, including the

⁵ A notable exception is Powicke's noble edition of Walter Daniel's *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx* (Nelson's Medieval Texts, 1950, repr. Oxford Medieval Texts, 1978), in which he acknowledges, as did many editors of NMT, much textual help from Sir Roger Mynors.

austerity of UC, 'stimulating and high-minded, but making few concessions, doubtless mainly for financial reasons, to the day-to-day comfort of its staff or students. In my first few months there I had no other habitation than the general library. But Christopher, Mark Thomson, Harold Beeley and Walter Adams made me welcome to the "cubby-hole"—it was little more—which the junior members of the History Department used as a sort of common room when it was not required for tutorials, and, towards the end of term, while I was still looking for permanent living quarters, Christopher suggested that I should share rooms with him in Torrington Square. The arrangement lasted till he left London to take up the Bishop Fraser Lectureship at Manchester. The house has long since vanished, to make way for the School of Oriental and African Studies.

'Christopher and I had in common a love of music, making music as well as listening to it. Christopher was a competent violinist, better, I think, than I was a pianist. But we had a piano in our sitting room—surely it must have been hired—and we played Mozart, Haydn and Bach together. I recall, also, quartets with Christopher's brother, Arthur, to whom he was much attached, and Arthur's delightful wife, Ella. Music was in the bones of the Cheney family, certainly in those of the two younger brothers, Arthur and Christopher. . . .

'One of Christopher's interests at this time was the preparation of the family history, or, more particularly, the history of the family printing firm. I recall his search for early fly-sheets, chap-books and the like which Cheneys had printed. The book came out in 1936—an elegant illustrated volume, with the title *John Cheney and his Descendants, printers at Banbury since 1767*.⁶

The Director's Conferences at the Institute of Historical Research, distinguished meetings in the 1920s and in more recent years, were not so in the early 30s, 'and, indeed, were so insufferably tedious' (writes Robin Humphreys) 'that Christopher thought of hiring a barrel organ . . . and I think tried to do so, to play outside the conference room in Malet Street in order to disrupt the proceedings'. Humphreys thus describes his companion of the 1930s: 'I remember the pleasantness that there was about him, a kind of inner gaiety of spirit, though there were times of depression, when he turned, like Sherlock Holmes, to his violin.' A love of music was an abiding source of pleasure and comfort to him; and this mingling of two natures, happy and

⁶ As Humphreys noted, this was a collaborative volume: see p. 425, n. 2.

whimsical—set off by an impish wit—and serious, rather inclined to pessimism, went deep into his nature.

From 1933 to 1955 there alternated periods of work in Manchester and Oxford—first as Bishop Fraser Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History in Manchester (1933–7), then as reader in Diplomatic in Oxford (1937–45) and fellow of Magdalen (1938–45), finally as Professor of Medieval History at Manchester (1945–55)—with a caesura in the midst when he set himself to war work. As Bishop Fraser Lecturer he taught over a wide range, including a course for the theologians on religion and society, *c.* 1750–1830, reflecting a special interest in Hannah More. As professor in Manchester he held what was perhaps the most distinguished civic history chair in Britain, the chair Powicke had left in 1928 for his long reign in Oxford—for although T. F. Tout had held a variety of titles, it was in effect the chair with which Tout founded the Manchester history school between 1890 and 1925; a chair which amid the neglect the civic universities suffer in the 1980s now stands empty. He played there a full role, holding his own with Sir Lewis Namier, taking his turn as head of department, serving the university with notable skill as dean of the faculty of arts.

Sir William Mansfield Cooper, formerly Registrar, Professor of Law, and ultimately Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester, has described Christopher Cheney at Manchester.

‘He joined a department, which, both actually and potentially, had great strength. E. F. Jacob, Donald Atkinson and L. B. Namier held Chairs with J. Tait as honorary professor; Arthur Redford was Reader in Economic History and amongst other members of staff were Edward Hughes, Bertie Wilkinson, A. J. Grieve, Kathleen Atkinson and A. J. P. Taylor. In 1937 Cheney returned to Oxford. The Manchester team he left could hardly do other than provide stimulus to a young and developing scholar. . . . That the University itself was thoroughly satisfied with his contribution subsequent developments were to show decisively.

‘For at the end of the war the university had little hesitation in inviting him to follow Ernest Jacob in the Chair of Medieval History. Despite the hazards and exigencies of the war and the immediate post-war years, the department still demonstrated its capacity to identify scholars of potential and to offer them such opportunities as it could. Cheney’s co-professors were still Atkinson and Namier with Arthur Redford now in the chair of Economic History. Amongst the non-professorial staff were T. S.

Willan, John Roskell and G. H. Bolsover. . . . C.R.C. contributed both to the maintenance and development of Manchester practices alike at departmental and university levels. Considered and understanding change do little hurt to tradition. He was respected, admired and liked as teacher and as man—and the way could not have been easy for him. There was little of the serenity of the “ivory tower” in the whole decade covered by Cheney’s stay in Manchester . . . and the problems faced not only Manchester but every institution in the educational world. Cheney’s achievement was the greater in that his approach was invariably critical and there was never a tinge of the popularizer about him. He combined an astringency of mind with a sharpness of wit that could hurt, but with never a trace of personal venom. His influence operated most sharply on senior and junior colleagues usually to their ultimate advantage. Students, particularly the better ones, were not immune—but always with an end more pertinent to their education than the over kindly approach sometimes adopted. . . .

‘His impact on the University was wide and immediate. His heredity spoke, of course, through his interest in the University Press. His interest in that enterprise and his membership of its policy-making instrument the Press Committee was enthusiastic and continuous. His shrewdness and critical approach were quite outstanding. His capacity as a bibliographer and enthusiasm as a book-collector ensured a wide range of contacts far outside departmental and faculty boundaries.’ It brought him naturally into close contact, it may be added, with the University Library, on whose committee he served. He also made it his business to serve the local branch of the Historical Association and the Lancashire Parish Register Society; above all he was a Feoffee of Chetham’s Hospital and a stout defender of its noble library. Noble it was in quite a literal sense, for its aristocratic founders had devised the toast for the modest exceeding which concluded the Feoffee’s meetings, ‘To our noble selves’—a toast much favoured in the Cheney family circle.

‘As his unwavering independence of mind became appreciated [writes Sir William Mansfield Cooper] an increasing burden of university administration fell upon him. I have never supposed he actually enjoyed such work, or doubted that given a choice between committee room, seminar and library he would have enthusiastically opted for the teaching and the study. But there was no humbug in his make up and to what he regarded as an obligation he brought both perspicacity and industry.

'It was at this level of university administration that I had most contact with him, and I am amongst the many who are grateful. He drew few lines between the academic and administrative worlds. He was as demanding of the administrator as of the student. Casualness and indifference of approach he would not tolerate. He was unsparing of poor draftsmanship. Hence the respect he generated throughout the university in general and amongst the administrators in particular. He could have paid them no higher compliment.'

In Oxford, Manchester and Cambridge he gave many pupils the sense of academic values and historical method which inspired him. He expected of his pupils a dedication akin to his own; but they always knew that he cared deeply for their work. Dorothy Owen has described his impact on his students in Manchester in the late 1940s.

'I first saw Christopher in the early autumn of 1945 when I was beginning to make arrangements for a return from teaching to academic life at Manchester, where he had just succeeded Ernest Jacob. I came away breathless from what seemed at the time a very searching interview, with reading lists, potential topics and, characteristically, a handful of useful off-prints. Less than a year later I registered as a research student, and joined a group of seven or eight ex-soldiers, ex-teachers, and new post-graduates. The buildings, the refectories, the libraries, the town were all very crowded and we learned to take refuge in the lowest stack of the Arts Library, among the elephants [the elephant folios]. Here it was characteristic of CRC that he came in to look for us almost every day, until we reached the stage of seeking original materials elsewhere.'

In a lab this may be common form: among historians it is not so. He won their respect and admiration instantly, and in the long run from the pupils who stayed the course a devotion rarely paralleled.

'He caused us to take part in all the undergraduate activities of the history school which could in any way help us.' He played an active share in civilizing the life of the Manchester students—by securing more individual attention in their teaching and (one may add) by inspiring the planting of grass in their quads. 'I remember hearing lectures from Ellis Waterhouse, Neil Ker and, unforgettably, F. M. Powicke, and a series of visits to the Chetham hospital library. Supervisions were almost always quite informal, at his own house, and often preceded or followed by, a family tea and once at least, by a Christmas pudding stirring.

There were constant loans of books which could not be found at Manchester, of notes made by himself or others. . . . There were small gaieties too: a reception in his house after the Powicke lecture, a few tea parties got up by ourselves, even a wedding.

'Soon, too, we were being despatched to London and Oxford, fortified by letters of introduction: I first met Francis Wormald and Richard Hunt in this way, and very kind they were. All the time I at least was being urged to complete, so that I could start work on *Councils and Synods*, as I did at Michaelmas 1947, and after that I began to see the importance of what he was doing and to follow in my small way. It was then that I became really aware of the Canterbury and York Society (he was then the treasurer).⁷ On my first visit to Cambridge, I bought a very large number of Canterbury and York parts, at 6d. each, from Galloway and Porter and when I reported this he said at once: "You'll want to make up the set. Join the society." So I did! It was not until I became Secretary of the Society when he was Chairman of the Council, that I realized how all-embracing his view of his office could be. The index of one of the volumes needed much revision and he decided that no one had time to do it except himself, since he was on sabbatical leave. I toiled with him and I know it took at least a month.'⁸

In 1954 Winston Churchill raised David Knowles to the Regius Chair and in the following year Christopher was elected to succeed him as Professor of Medieval History, and Corpus elected him professorial fellow.

Jeffrey Denton was a research student under Cheney's supervision in Cambridge in the early 1960s—later to follow his paths elsewhere as Lecturer and Reader in Manchester. He too found him an exacting teacher. And Denton goes on to describe how the sense of distance between a shy student and a scholar long used to the authority of a Manchester professor slowly melted into the warm friendship which has left an archive of some three hundred letters. 'Written work of some sort was required every two to three weeks. His criticisms, appearing in lists on separate sheets, always felt devastating, and often were! It was a process of working and re-working, writing and re-writing, the sort of rigorous training in research which is extremely rare in the

⁷ Christopher Cheney was Treasurer 1942–61, and later President (1961–8) of the Society, and Dorothy Owen herself was to become Secretary and President.

⁸ *The Register of John Pecham, archbishop of Canterbury*, ii (1968), edited by the late Dr Decima Douie.

Humanities, possible only because of his bibliographical knowledge and intense interest in diplomatic. He never seemed to me to have any doubts about historical methodology. He was determined to give his students a full training in the analysis of sources, and, however dry and perhaps unimaginative such a training might seem to many, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have achieved very little without it. In 1962 and 1963 research students in medieval history could attend classes given especially for them by Knowles, Ullmann and Cheney. Knowles was serene and inspiring to be with, but little direct help, to me at least; and Ullmann overawed me with his sheer energy, and his enormous scholarship, like his personality, felt inaccessible to me. CRC's weekly classes were always well attended. He took us through every possible class of document, specifying the available editions, calendars, lists and guides. He was extremely well-organised and business-like, but taught with a light touch—and spent much of his time pulling volumes down from his shelves. The notes that I took during those classes are still useful to me. He took a close interest in all who attended the classes and had time and patience for all their problems. My self-confidence could very easily have been bruised in Cambridge. It happened to others. It is difficult to convey the sense of social and cultural deficiency which could afflict the young from northern grammar schools in the atmosphere of Oxbridge. CRC, it was clear to me very soon, had a liking for northerners—he considered them honest and hard-working—and no liking at all for social pretensions. I felt increasingly at ease with him'.

Denton's picture has been confirmed by Peter Linehan. 'No one amongst the grandees of the Faculty seemed more inaccessible when I was doing Part I in 1962–3 and on the way to his lectures at Mill Lane I would see him emerging cautiously from the main gate of Corpus and peering unimpressedly up Kings Parade. And the remoteness remained when I did his King John Special Subject in Part II. It was when I embarked upon research and was casting uncertainly around for a subject that I began to appreciate the extent of his interest in young scholars and of the trouble he would take to help them. There began to arrive the familiar sepia-coloured postcards, from the inexhaustible stock laid in thirty years before one assumed, with the title of some monograph that the bibliographies had missed or of a recent article which was just what one needed, and the brief greeting: "In view of your interest in clerical concubinage . . .". He knew what every one of the smallish group of medieval

research students was doing, would make a point of enquiring about one's progress. The summer parties he and Mary gave at 236 Hills Road provided an opportunity which was rare at the time of crossing that social divide of which graduate students are as acutely aware as their seniors are forgetful.

'Above all, he stood out as a model of systematic thoroughness, an example in his sixties of what we in our early twenties should be aspiring to. He loved work and induced a sense of remorse for one's own time-wasting existence. I recall the relish with which he informed me at the beginning of a Christmas vacation that he was looking forward to keeping his slippers on throughout the next month. But work wasn't the main thing: the latest child was much more interesting to him than the next article, and whenever we met, in the Library or elsewhere, his first question was invariably about family matters.'

In Manchester he was professor and dean in the traditional world of the provincial university, before the changes of the 1960s. He was a benevolent patriarch to his colleagues and students. When he came to Cambridge he knew that here, as in Oxford, there were no heads of department in the History Faculty, and no deans at all; that a somewhat chaotic democracy—as it must appear to a visitor from Manchester—was ruled by a quite small Faculty Board, and that a professor must exert his leadership, if at all, by personal influence, by his lectures, by the help he gave his colleagues and students. It is among his younger colleagues and his students, and in the community of his college, that his influence was most deeply felt; yet he was everywhere respected and liked as an eminent scholar and a friendly colleague—though one who looked with a critical eye on Cambridge ways and customs. But if he never forgot that there were other places and different modes, he made Cambridge his home for the rest of his life.

The full story of Christopher Cheney's election to Corpus seems not to be known, but it is clear that the personal interest of Patrick Bury had much to do with it.⁹ It is not for me to speak of the domestic affairs of his college; but it was very clear from within and without the college that the warmth and intimacy of the Corpus high table gave him a home in Cambridge in which

⁹ This has been confirmed for me by Professor John Roach; Patrick Bury himself, with whom I discussed it shortly before his death, which we much mourn, was too modest to claim the full credit, and did not indeed remember the story in detail.

he could delight and which answered to his notion of an academic community and family. And it was not only among the fellows that he sought and found friendship in the college—for he knew and helped many of its students; and it was characteristic that it was a devoted member of the college staff who first told me, in deep concern, of his final illness. He served his college nobly, as a shrewd member of its governing body and a genial presence in its society. Very characteristic was his work among its celebrated collection of manuscripts, culminating in the exhibitions he helped to plan for the Canon Law Conference in 1984. The Parker collection is universally known; but it was Christopher who put on the map the Elbing Manuscripts—the cache of books which came mysteriously to Corpus in the seventeenth century from Elbing or Elbląg in Poland; and it was he who arranged with the British Academy to finance a visit by the Czech scholar Jiří Kejř to work on them. For he perceived that they were a source of prime interest for the history of the University of Prague in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁰

Corpus, in my childhood, was supposed to be the home of Tories and high churchmen. Cambridge colleges (in spite of what is sometimes thought) commonly thrive precisely in their variety, and Christopher—though exceedingly unostentatious in matters political and religious—was neither a Tory nor a high churchman. Indeed, I think he viewed all organized religion with reserve—a view which forty years spent conversing with medieval popes and bishops and archdeacons did little to alter. But he was a man of the warmest human feelings—and if it be true that a life lived in recollected devotion to the highest standards—and in charity in many different senses of the word—is a kind of prayer and worship most acceptable to God, then he was in his own way devout. One sentence in the moving litany which Geoffrey Styler composed for his funeral struck many of us with particular force, since it related to a side of him of which we knew very little. ‘For his deep interest and generous support towards many societies working to alleviate distress, both national and local; in particular the distress of families, of the mentally handicapped, and of orphaned children: let us praise the Lord.’¹¹

¹⁰ See *Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis*, xxvi. 2 (1987), 145–8.

¹¹ Mary Cheney has told me a characteristic story of Christopher’s personal kindness from the mid 1930s, to ‘the Welsh poet Alun Lewis, killed in the East in 1942. Alun came to do an M.A. at Manchester in Medieval History. He was lonely and understandably bitter, coming from a mining valley, and Christopher helped him a lot, got him over or reduced his deep suspicion of the English, and introduced him to the pleasure of walking in Normandy.’

And churches have some particular uses. In 1940 he and Mary passed through the fine Norman portal of St Peter-in-the-East in Oxford for the central event of their lives, an event which led to a delectable collaboration in the two activities most characteristic of him: in the formation of a happy family, and in the creation of lasting works of scholarship. But I fancy he may have been pleased to hear that St Peter-in-the-East is now a library; for another of the great devotions of his life was to books, which he not only bought but read. There is a terrifying utterance of Dr Johnson to the effect that a man either reads or writes: he cannot do both. He did not know Christopher Cheney, who both wrote and read—and yet was never possessive in either. He gave books away with a generous hand; and I never knew a man more liberal in giving the fruits of his mind. *Councils and Synods*, vol. ii, was of his writing, though some texts were edited for him by Frank Barlow and Dorothy Owen;¹² yet he generously insisted on putting Powicke's name before his on the title page. Powicke indeed had inspired the project, and to Powicke he and the book owed much; but yet it was Cheney's. In the first volume, which followed it at a very respectful distance, there is also a good deal that was composed by Cheney and much more that is due to his help and criticism. When I was composing my commentary on the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 he lent me the very extensive notes he had prepared on them. I begged him to publish them, with no effect; and so I had to incorporate his work in mine—with only the modest acknowledgement that one can give in such a book.¹³

He remained steadily at work till the end of his life, serving his friends and his craft, modestly gathering honours: he became a CBE in 1984; before that FBA (1951); Honorary Fellow of Wadham College, Honorary Doctor at Glasgow and Manchester, Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, Corresponding Member of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. He died on 19 June 1987 after a short illness, mourned world-wide. As Peter Linehan has written, 'He will be as sorely missed in Berkeley and Rome as he is in Cambridge.'

¹² *Councils and Synods*, ii.1, p. viii, where it is noted that Barlow 'kindly collated and edited the Exeter statutes and *Summula* of 1287, while Mrs D. M. Owen helped in preparing the texts of the canons of London (1237) and the London diocesan statutes, and Mrs M. G. Cheney in elucidating the London archdeaconry statutes'.

¹³ See *Councils and Synods*, i.1, p. v; 2, 856, n. 2. This apart, his help was very extensive, and the text of the canons of 1195 and 1200 was edited by him for the book.

III

His first book, *Episcopal Visitation of Monasteries in the Thirteenth Century*, was a shrewd, careful appraisal of the evidence securely based on the copious English evidence and the celebrated record of Eudes Rigaud, archbishop of Rouen.¹⁴ In the preface he acknowledged his 'profound gratitude to my teacher, F. M. Powicke'; he noted that his mother had read the whole book in manuscript, and that part had been read by R. V. Lennard, the Wadham tutor who had fostered his undergraduate years, and Professor G. W. Coopland of Liverpool, whom he had first met in Cairo—a debt Cheney was to repay many years later when he helped Coopland in extreme old age to publish his last books. The book had a remarkable sequel, for it led him to friendly correspondence both with G. G. Coulton and with Cardinal Gasquet, the eminent victim of Coulton's polemics; and with Coulton he formed a lasting friendship.

From 1938 to 1945 he was Joint Literary Director of the Royal Historical Society, and accomplished a mighty, silent work of efficient editing on numerous texts and *Transactions*—which included prodigious proof correcting in the Blitz. Above all, he gave the Society and the scholarly world his *Handbook of Dates*, published in 1945. It is a work so precise that even he had much ado to find the slender harvest of corrections made in later reprints, especially in that of 1978. It is a work so succinct that whereas the *Trésor de Chronologie* of the Comte de Mas Latrie needs a pair of native bearers to carry it, Cheney's *Handbook* can almost be slipped in the pocket. Admittedly it compasses less—yet it is astonishing how extensive, and how prudently chosen and arranged, is the information it contains. The story is told that when the four editors of his Festschrift planned a meeting in the course of their duties, each entered a different date in his or her diary—a piquant illustration of how much his colleagues needed his guidance and instruction. Very recently I sent him a puzzle about Easter from a medieval chronicle being edited by a young scholar for OMT.¹⁵ Between us we had filled a large page with notes which still left me doubtful; Cheney, showing the deft touch which inspires his *Handbook*, reduced our note from four hundred words to three.

He was meanwhile Reader in Diplomatic at Oxford, and this science—the study of the form and style and structure of

¹⁴ A second, revised, edition was published in 1983.

¹⁵ Oxford Medieval Texts.

documents—inspired a whole segment of his work. *English Bishops' Chanceries, 1100–1250* (1950) was to prepare the way for *Episcopal Acta*, and it is a model study in diplomatic, a pioneer work, yet based on large foundations. In the days of Hickes and Madox British scholars had been in the forefront of documentary study, and after a long interval Oxford had earned recognition in the field earlier in this century through the work of R. L. Poole and V. H. Galbraith, before the advent of Cheney. Christopher Cheney himself had sat at the feet of Vivian Galbraith: he felt the inspiration of that great teacher, and perceived the deep knowledge and insight into documents which lay behind the brilliant, wayward, fanciful character Galbraith presented to his pupils. Christopher's work on episcopal *acta* and *Notaries Public in England in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (1972) reflected his zeal as a collector—of bishops' *acta* and notarial signs, as well as of the Cheney chapbooks. It also helped to ensure his own leading role in the Commission Internationale de Diplomatique—and to restore Britain to the lands with a reputable contribution to offer. He became a member of the Commission's Bureau, and helped to draft its proposals for international formulae for diplomatic descriptions.

His scholarship could be specialized but was never parochial, and this was most clearly shown in his work on canon law, the papacy, and the papal decretals and letters. His masterly edition of the *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England* (1953), which he edited with his Manchester colleague W. H. Semple for NMT,¹⁶ opened a series of studies which came to a splendid climax in the two admirable editions in which he and Mary collaborated: *The Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England and Wales* (1967), and *Studies in the Collections of Twelfth-century Decretals* (1979). *The Letters* set new standards in the deployment of papal letters; the *Studies* were the fruit of long friendship with Walther Holtzmann. The Cheneyes were the principal English link of the eminent German medievalist who had excavated so many of the papal bulls and decretals addressed to England; and it was Christopher's share in this Anglo-German collaboration which led to his election as a Corresponding Member of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. These *Studies* brought into the light of day Holtzmann's unpublished notes and a mass of learning which the Cheneyes added to them: for those of us who have toiled long in decretal collections it was the answer to prayer, characteristically published long before the other volumes by

¹⁶ Nelson's Medieval Texts.

other scholars which are its sequel. It grew out of the enterprises of Stephan Kuttner and his Institute of Medieval Canon Law. In 1967 Cheney contributed to Kuttner's first Festschrift—the editor, Father, now Archbishop, Stickler told me when I submitted the title of my own paper for approval that he had eighty titles already, and even one completed paper, from 'Professor Cheney, Cambridge'.¹⁷ In 1976 Kuttner repaid the debt in Cheney's Festschrift;¹⁸ and it was Cheney who inspired the invitation which led the International Congress of Medieval Canon Law to meet in Cambridge in 1984. But husband and wife have ranged much more widely in their learning than even these details may suggest, and the paper on 'William Lyndwood's *Provinciale*' (1961, reprinted in *Medieval Texts and Studies* (1973)) was not only an outstanding survey of the one great medieval canonist to emerge from Cambridge, but morticed together his two most extensive shelves of studies, linking the papacy and the *Ecclesia Anglicana*.

On 29 September 1931 F. M. Powicke gathered in the Senior Common Room at Oriel College, Oxford, the first committee of editors of *Councils and Synods*, whose task it would be to prepare a new edition of Wilkins' *Concilia*, the fundamental collection of documents relating to the law and legislation of the English Church in the Middle Ages.¹⁹ The minutes of that meeting record that 'Professor [E. F.] Jacob proposed and Mr Brooke [Z. N. Brooke, my father] seconded that Mr Cheney and Miss Major should be the joint secretaries'—a role which Cheney maintained, with Dr Major's support, until the committee was wound up in the 1960s. It also notes that 'Professor Powicke and Mr Cheney were elected editors of section B'—that is, the period 1206 (later 1205) to 1313, whose rich deposits of provincial legislation and diocesan statutes and the like made it outstandingly the most fruitful portion of the enterprise. There followed years of unremitting toil. From time to time came articles anticipating some of his findings: thus 'Legislation of the medie-

¹⁷ 'An annotator of Durham Cathedral MS C.III.3, and unpublished decretals of Innocent III', *Studia Gratiana*, xi = *Collectanea Stephan Kuttner*, i (1967), 37–68.

¹⁸ 'Gratian and Plato', in C. N. L. Brooke, D. E. Luscombe, G. H. Martin, and Dorothy Owen (eds.), *Church and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays presented to C. R. Cheney on his 70th Birthday* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 93–118.

¹⁹ What follows is based on the minute book of the Committee set up in 1931, which C.R.C. handed over to me after the publication of *Councils and Synods*, i, and personal reminiscence.

val English Church' in 1935, a magisterial study.²⁰ But my favourite remains his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Aubrey Gwynn, SJ, in 1961, 'A group of related synodal statutes of the thirteenth century', a brilliant piece of detective work comparable to the separation of Siamese twins.²¹ In 1941 he issued his pilot study, *English Synodalia of the Thirteenth Century*.

I myself first met him in the late 1940s; but I really got to know him in the 1950s when I was a novice member of the Wilkins committee. Apart from Cheney, and helpful advisers like our hostess Dr Kathleen Major, it consisted of a few young men being trained in the ways of collaborative enterprise, and a larger number of prima donnas, who had grown grey not re-editing Wilkins. The ever more elaborate explanations they gave year by year why nothing was done gave me great entertainment, and in 1956 I proposed that we celebrate the jubilee of the committee's formation. But Christopher Cheney, who thought it had been set up to do a job of work—and had spent much of those 25 years doing it—was not amused, and some years later he wound the committee up. His volume ii, 1205–1313, duly appeared in two parts in 1964; and meanwhile I had made a small beginning with volume i which Dorothy Whitelock and Martin Brett and I were eventually to complete.

David Wilkins, our eighteenth-century predecessor, had never been an admirable editor, but the fog was at its thickest precisely in the thirteenth century—for the documents themselves are especially difficult to disentangle. 'Records, like the little children of long ago, only speak when they are spoken to . . .' in the memorable phrase of Christopher's inaugural lecture at Cambridge;²² and the infinite multitude of texts, often much alike but not identical, often labelled with the wrong labels or none at all, would have baffled any but the most patient and expert of detectives. He asked me to read the proofs—a nice compliment, but a frustrating task, for there was little or no hope of adding to knowledge or finding errors he had missed. I rejoice in claiming one creative emendation in nearly 1500 pages of texts. He was not infallible, and I do not think I have ever heard a scholar utter a statement more misleading than a sentence that once fell from

²⁰ *English Historical Review*, 1 (1935), 193–224, 385–417.

²¹ 'A group of related synodal statutes of the thirteenth century', in J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall, and F. X. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), pp. 114–32.

²² *The Records of Medieval England* (1955, publ. 1956), repr. in *Medieval Texts and Studies* (1973), p. 8.

his lips—‘I am a goldmine of inaccurate information’. Yet most of the time he was simply right. I recall him telling me he once early in life made a transcript of a document in an Oxford college, with great care—only to find that the celebrated eighteenth-century antiquary and eccentric, Thomas Hearne, had been before him: and Hearne (he alleged) ‘made two mistakes, and I made three’. But the difference between them was that Hearne, who had little critical faculty, was blessed with an innate incapacity for error. Cheney’s precision was won by hard work, carefully cultivated skills, and the conscience of a scholar.

If I contributed nothing to *Councils and Synods*, vol. ii, I learned much from it—and from all my encounters with Christopher. He confirmed and deepened in me some fundamental convictions. A scholar’s work is not for his private glory or the advancement of his fame—though he may legitimately rejoice if these by-products appear. It is a job to be done for a common cause, the advancement of the scholar’s craft, the good of his community and his discipline—and by community I mean the international academic community in which Christopher’s achievement was widely recognized and which he would sometimes visit, for he enjoyed travel. Further, it was collaborative. He gave much of his life to *Councils and Synods*, founded and inspired by Powicke and intended to be a work in which many hands would join, however it turned out—and to the British Academy project for editing Episcopal *Acta*. This was based on a famous paper by Sir Frank Stenton which nourished a plan started by Norah Gurney, Director of the Borthwick Institute of the University of York, who set up a centre to collect notes and transcripts. The idea of publishing them was taken up and sponsored and put into operation by Christopher Cheney and her successor at the Borthwick, David Smith.²³ The British Academy adopted the plan to publish Episcopal *Acta*—documents issued by the English bishops between the Norman Conquest and the thirteenth century—in 1973; and Christopher Cheney himself was Chairman of the Academy’s *Acta* Committee from 1973 until 1986. Its work came off to a flying start in the preparation of two volumes of Lincoln *Acta* by Smith, two of Canterbury by Cheney—helped by the pioneer work of Bridget Jones and Eric John; and the

²³ Four volumes have appeared so far: i and iv, *Lincoln 1067–1185* and *1186–1206*, ed. David M. Smith (1980–6); ii and iii, *Canterbury 1162–90, 1193–1205*, ed. C.R.C. in collaboration with B. E. A. Jones and E. John (1986). Stenton’s paper, ‘Acta episcoporum’, was published in the *Cambridge Historical Journal*, iii (1929), 1–14.

Academy was fired to use the Canterbury volumes to spearhead the invasion of new technology amid these ancient records. The consequence was five years' delay in publication, a frustrating pause only concluded when the Academy finally turned to more traditional methods and Messrs Maney of Leeds issued the volumes, printed and bound, within a few months. Cheney's two volumes carry the *Acta* from Thomas Becket to Hubert Walter, two men whom he studied profoundly: but it was characteristic of him that it was Hubert, the run-of-the-mill archbishop, worldly perhaps, but one of the world's workers too, whose life he wrote.²⁴

Christopher Cheney's idea of collaboration was an extension of his generosity. As we wrote in the Festschrift offered to him in 1976, 'Many scholars could tell of advice freely given, of prompt and thorough criticism of unpublished work, of rare information supplied, of rare books and even manuscripts lent or given "because you'll make better use of them than I shall"'—and, be it said, of work most readily shared, when he was sure sound use could be made of it.²⁵ What disturbed him about the Wilkins committee was precisely that work was not done: for behind all that he achieved was an abundant patience and persistence; if a man puts his hand to a task, he should see it through.

I must hasten to my conclusion and to favourite areas of his work. First place must be accorded to his delightful John Rylands lecture of 1951, 'Church-building in the Middle Ages', which combined a lifelong interest in medieval churches—frequently indulged in early life, especially in Normandy—with his unique knowledge of the documents.²⁶ *From Becket to Langton* (1956), his Ford lectures, first showed to the full his power to use the documents he studied and edited to reveal the English church of the twelfth century at work—in clear, precise, elegant prose; in a language, that is, carefully chiselled to suit his craft. Over many years he made the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a special point of interest—a pursuit which forged a bond with J. C. Holt, whose coming to Cambridge to succeed Walter Ullmann in his own chair he warmly welcomed. But if there was a good deal of King John and Magna Carta in his writings, there was even more of Pope Innocent III, and especially in the masterly calendar and edition of *The Letters of*

²⁴ *Hubert Walter* (London, 1967).

²⁵ *Church and Government* (n. 18), p. xi.

²⁶ Repr. in *Medieval Texts and Studies* (1973), pp. 346–63.

Pope Innocent III concerning England and Wales, which he and Mary published together in 1967. Nine years later came *Pope Innocent III and England*, the most mature of all his works, and the sanest and most searching of all the many tracts upon Pope Innocent. The great pope lived in a fog of rhetoric; and Cheney could not avoid observing of an event early in his reign, 'Innocent showed a self-confidence and an autocratic temper observable at this time in some other activities which did not work out as he expected'.²⁷ These were not qualities which Christopher admired, and he had no use at all for rhetoric. Christopher was wonderfully kind and sympathetic—but he expected of all with whom he came in contact—pupils, colleagues, academic administrators, and medieval popes alike, for he was no respecter of persons—the same high standards he set himself. Innocent III did not escape unscathed. But he showed an insight and a sympathy with the pope and his victims alike, and a deep understanding of the way the church and the papacy worked in all its aspects which makes the book a masterpiece. Yet he will perhaps be remembered in future generations—when the monographs and the rhetoric of our day have been buried and forgotten—as an immortal editor; as one who taught us by learning, ingenuity, deep skill, and perception of how scribes worked and how manuscripts were made, and who constructed his editions by application of all this immense experience guided by a good sense, a common sense utterly uncommon and a sense of craftsmanship, which set him among the immortals. The link with Maitland and Bischoff, which would hide most of us deep in shadow, is one that he can happily sustain.

C. N. L. BROOKE

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²⁷ *Pope Innocent III and England* (1976), p. 212.

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