



REG DODWELL

Charles Reginald Dodwell

1922–1994

CHARLES REGINALD DODWELL, known to his friends as Reg, had a varied and distinguished career. Born in Cheltenham on 3 February 1922, one of five children, he attended Pate's School and in 1940 was admitted to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, with an Exhibition in History. Shortly afterwards his studies were interrupted by war service in the Royal Navy from 1941 till 1945. At first he was on mine-sweepers in home waters but subsequently he was posted to the Mediterranean where he took part in the landing on Sicily, and then in 1944 in the invasion of Normandy. On his own admission his life in the Navy was not a huge success as he was frequently sea-sick.

Back in Cambridge in 1945, he continued his studies with Philip Grierson and was much influenced by M. D. Knowles. He obtained a 2.1 in both parts of the Tripos, 'a class which was felt quite rightly not to reflect his ability' says Paul Binski. His interests were as much in medieval art as in medieval history, especially illuminated manuscripts. By then the field of art history in England was being transformed by the influence of Continental and especially German learning as practised at the Warburg Institute, transferred from Hamburg to London in 1933 on the initiative and under the guidance of Fritz Saxl. Dodwell was appointed Senior Research Fellow of the Warburg Institute in 1949, a year after the premature death of Saxl and so he missed the opportunity of benefiting from Saxl's great learning and wisdom, but the staff of the Institute included such medieval scholars as Hugo Buchthal and Hanns Swarzenski, who, at that time, had a part-time appointment to prepare Saxl's lectures on

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English Romanesque seals and English twelfth-century sculpture for publication. Swarzenski was a greater authority on illumination and metalwork than sculpture and so was of considerable help to Dodwell. But the greatest influence on Dodwell's development was that of Francis Wormald, at that time in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum, who was supervising Dodwell's research on the Canterbury School of Illumination, 1066–1200. The work was accepted in 1950 by Cambridge University for a Ph.D. degree and was published in 1954. After the Norman conquest, Canterbury was the leading centre of book illumination in England, produced in the two monastic houses, Christchurch Cathedral and St Augustine's Abbey. Dodwell's study gives the first detailed analysis of their sources, style, and iconography. There was nothing spectacular about the illuminations of the manuscripts under the first two learned archbishops brought from Normandy, Lanfranc and Anselm, for they were concerned with the purity of the texts rather than with their decoration, but even so the painted initials produced at Canterbury at that time were works of considerable merit. It was only from the middle of the twelfth century that much more ambitious illuminations were undertaken in such celebrated books as the Lambeth Bible, the Eadwine Psalter and the Dover Bible.

In 1953, Dodwell was one of fifty-eight applicants for the prestigious post of librarian-archivist of the ancient Lambeth Palace Library, which was at that time in a pitiful state after war-time damage by bombing. Of the seven candidates short-listed to be interviewed by Archbishop Fisher, Dodwell was the winner, although he alone had no qualifications in librarianship. However, the Archbishop was impressed by his dynamic energy, a quality which was to serve him throughout his life. At that time books, some damaged by fire, damp and in disorder were stacked in the crypt of the Chapel and had to be cleaned with the help of specialists from the British Museum. A bindery was established and the cataloguing started. Needless to say, Dodwell took particular care of manuscripts which were transferred from a damp and unheated strongroom to a new one with proper heating and lighting and the archives were moved to the old muniment room.

In spite of the heavy work-load, Dodwell continued his research and during his five years at Lambeth he published a book on *Lambeth Palace Library: A Short History* (1957), an article on a Jumièges manuscript in the British Museum (Additional MS 17739), and a short but important book *The Great Lambeth Bible* (1959), a mid-twelfth century richly illuminated manuscript, which he argued was produced at St Augustine's

Abbey, Canterbury. Furthermore, he demonstrated that the same artist illuminated a book of the Gospels written for Abbot Wedric of Liessies in Hainault in 1146. Tragically, the manuscript was destroyed in the last war when in the Municipal Library in Metz, but two detached leaves from it survive in the Société Archéologique at Avesnes. The painter of this book was evidently a lay artist, trained in England, who transmitted a distinctly English style across the Channel.

While still a student in Cambridge, Dodwell met Sheila Juliet Fletcher, whom he married in 1942. During his work in the Lambeth Palace Library, they lived within the Palace precincts where they had their first child, Jane, while David was born later. Living in London, Dodwell took advantage of any spare time to work in the library of the British Museum collecting references to medieval art in printed Latin sources with a view to publishing a book on them. But having already done a considerable amount of work, he discovered that a German scholar in the Reading Room was frequently using books he himself needed and at last it came out that they were doing exactly the same work and that the German's material was far more complete. Very gallantly, Dodwell handed over his material to Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, whose *Lateinische Schriftquellen zur Kunst in England, Wales und Schottland vom Jahre 901 bis zum Jahre 1307* was published in five volumes in Munich in 1955–60 and in gratitude this work is dedicated to Dodwell.

While still in the Warburg Institute, Dodwell was invited to participate with Wormald and Otto Pächt, a Viennese scholar, then living in Oxford, in the preparation for publication of the St Albans Psalter, one of the key Romanesque manuscripts produced in England. The book appeared in *Studies of the Warburg Institute*, 25 (1960). Dodwell's part of the book is devoted to the study of over two hundred initials with figures.

In the following year another important book was published. It was the translation from Latin of *Theophilus' De Diversis Artibus*, a treatise on the techniques used in manuscript painting, wall-painting, stained glass, gold objects, niello, enamels, repoussé, casting bells, making church organs, carving bone and ivory and many others. In a lengthy introduction Dodwell argued that it was written between 1110 and 1140 and that the pseudonym Theophilus masks the identity of the author Roger of Helmarshausen, the celebrated monk-metalworker. The book was published in Nelson's Medieval Texts in 1961 and was reissued in Oxford Medieval Texts in 1986. More recent research by E. Freise established (in *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* I, 1985, pp. 357–61) that Roger was a monk at Stavelot, St Pantaleon in Cologne and Helmarshausen and that he died in 1125. Another publication

of this period (jointly with D. T. Turner) was *Reichenau Reconsidered. A Re-Assessment of the Place of Reichenau in Ottonian Art* (The Warburg Institute, 1965). In this work Dodwell claims that the superb manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, attributed by many German scholars to Reichenau, were produced in Trier, a view not universally accepted; while Turner, more cautiously writes: 'that the claims about Reichenau appear extravagant and lack satisfactory substantiation' (p. 86).

In 1958 a vacancy occurred for the post of librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge, which houses so many Canterbury manuscripts and it seemed appropriate that Dodwell became the new incumbent and was elected a Fellow of the College. With characteristic energy he devoted his time to the library building programme and to teaching history and history of art in the College. His ambition was to teach history of art in the University but that was not to be because another Cambridge man, Michael Jaffé, a Fellow of King's College was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Fine Arts in 1956, eventually becoming Professor, and when he became Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, he was succeeded by George Henderson. Dodwell was deeply hurt, not realising that what the University needed was not a narrow specialist, however brilliant, but a teacher of wide interests and a trained art historian rather than a historian-palaeographer.

During this period he started writing *Painting in Europe, 800–1200* for the *Pelican History of Art* and the work progressed rapidly helped by a spell of a few months in 1965–6 when invited to become a Visiting Member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. The book was published in 1971 and in the same year he was successful in applying for a Litt.D. from the University of Cambridge. By then he had already left Cambridge for good since he succeeded John White as the Pilkington Professor of Art History in Manchester University, a post he was to hold with distinction for twenty-three years. In addition to being Head of the History of Art Department, he was also Director of the University's Whitworth Art Gallery, renowned for its collection of British watercolours, historic and modern prints, textiles, wallpaper, and contemporary art. The Department of Art History at that time was small and offered a joint honours degree with the English Department. Under Dodwell this was to change dramatically, helped by the government's policy of expanding higher education under the guidance of Lord Robbins. The Department was soon to prepare students for a single-honours degree becoming one of the largest in the country and attracting teachers and students of high quality.

The Whitworth Art Gallery also flourished and expanded and thanks to its new director's energy and drive several important loan exhibitions were held, amongst them *Jewish Treasures from Prague*, *Master Drawings from Leningrad*, and *Medieval and Early Renaissance Treasures in the North West*, and the scholarly catalogues serve as a permanent record.

One of the last books written by Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art. A New Perspective* (Manchester, 1982), was clearly a work of love. According to him, the Normans were the plunderers of English treasures and were artistically backward. He praises the achievements of Anglo-Saxon artists and craftsmen, singling out their lavish use of gold in manuscripts, embroideries and even in effigies such as that of the Virgin Mary which was made in the tenth century at Ely Cathedral and was of gold, silver and gems (p. 215). The *New Perspective* of the title of this book is the literary perspective based on the written sources in Latin quoted in full, so that one third of the text is devoted to them.

In 1973 Dodwell was elected a Fellow of the British Academy and from 1987 until 1990 was chairman of the History of Art and Music Section and was a member of the Academy's *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi* Committee. He also participated in the work of many other learned bodies and was president of the Manchester Medieval Society. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1960.

He suffered a stroke in 1988 which left him semi-blind. For someone involved with the visual arts and books this was a calamity, but for Dodwell it was yet another challenge which he was determined to meet, and the last six years of his life were as fruitful as the previous fifty. He taught himself to read again and his revised and much enlarged *Pelican* volume, first published in 1971 appeared in 1993, this time as the *Yale University Press History of Art* and includes new sections on stained glass, mosaics, and embroidery; much of it based not on surviving works but on written sources of which he had an unrivalled knowledge. In this difficult period of his life he was working on a book *Anglo-Saxon Gestures and the Roman Stage* published posthumously, edited by Timothy Graham, formerly Dodwell's research assistant (Cambridge, 1999).

Dodwell retired from his university appointments in 1989 and he and his wife Sheila moved from Cheadle Hulme where they had lived for many years to Taunton. He is remembered with devotion by his colleagues and friends who published a handsome book, *Medieval Art. Recent Perspectives. A Memorial Tribute to C. R. Dodwell*, edited by Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham (Manchester, 1998). The book includes Dodwell's bibliography (pp. 231–40). A very useful book appeared

recently, entitled *Aspects of Art of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1996) in which many of Dodwell's articles are reprinted. The Introduction is by Paul Crossley, who was Dodwell's younger colleague in Manchester (now at the Courtauld Institute of Art) from which, with his permission, I quote this touching paragraph:

Like his beloved Middle Ages, life for Reg Dodwell was often seen as a battle between opposing moral forces; and there are no battles without enemies. He could be peppery and dismissive. He was quick to sense opposition, particularly from his peers; and he loved a good fight. But to his staff and colleagues he was tenaciously loyal, and to those who knew him well he revealed an endearing gentleness, an infectious humour, and a surprising warmth of response. Despite his dedication to his work, his family held a central place in his life; his wife, Sheila, meant everything to him. And his hatred of snobbery, exploitation and pretension gave him compassion for human weaknesses and understanding of personal problems, however mundane. Gallery attendants, students, secretarial staff, neighbours, all remember him with affection, and will miss him deeply.

GEORGE ZARNECKI

Fellow of the Academy

Note. In the preparation of this Memoir, I gratefully acknowledge the help I received from Mrs Sheila Dodwell, Dr Paul Binski, Professor Christopher Brooke, Dr Paul Crossley, Professor Michael Kauffmann, and Professor Peter Lasko. I benefited greatly from an article by Richard Palmer, 'Reginald Dodwell, Lambeth Librarian 1953–1958' (*Medieval Art. Recent Perspectives*, pp. 224–30) and from the Introduction to *Medieval Art. Recent Perspectives* by Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham.

I had known Reg since the late 1940s while we were working on our respective doctoral theses. We met for the first time by chance in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, and subsequently became close friends, frequently travelling together to study buildings, their decoration, museums and libraries. When Reg was working on the initials of the St Albans Psalter we travelled in his small Austin to Hildesheim, to see the original manuscript there. Peter Lasko, another close friend, who was at that time the only experienced driver came as well. In 1955 Reg and I travelled extensively in France, ending at Poitiers to take part in the session of the *Centre d'Études Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale*. Reg was a frequent visitor to our house and he was a good friend of our family.