



Photograph by Walter Stoneman, 1946

SIR CYRIL FLOWER, C.B.

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1879-1961

CYRIL THOMAS FLOWER was born on 31 March 1879 at Warminster in Wiltshire, the son of Thomas Flower, who practised medicine there, as his father had done. Thomas Flower was a cousin of Henry Fawcett, the blind Postmaster-General, whose widow, Millicent, became the leader of the law-abiding suffragists. The Flowers traced their descent from Ralph Flore of West Lavington near Devizes, who is recorded as serving as a juror in 1255-63, the family holding the tenancy of Flower's Farm in the adjacent hamlet of Worton for more than 300 years. In 1878 Thomas Flower married Jessie Susan, daughter of William Pope of Biggleswade in Bedfordshire. He died in December 1881.

Cyril Flower, an only child, went to Lord Weymouth's Grammar School at Warminster in 1887, and in 1892 won a scholarship at St. Edward's School, Oxford, where his mother took a house near the school. Here he was very happy; he 'took to rugger from the start', played the violin, and, surprisingly, 'scored a success in the school play in his first term as Portia'.¹ To his disappointment, he was not allowed to play Wolsey in his last year as he was being groomed for scholarship exams.

Flower entered Worcester College, Oxford, in 1897 as senior scholar. He 'played hard and worked hard', got a first in Moderations, and a second in Greats. He was not very happy at Worcester, but he remained at Oxford for a fourth year to attend lectures in English and History ('A. J. Carlyle's audience at Univ. consisted almost entirely of ladies, whose chaperones sat and knitted at High Table') to prepare for the Civil Service First Division Examination. On the result of the 1902 examination he was offered a post in the Public Record Office which he entered on 12 January 1903.

The Public Record Office

He found himself in a milieu of ripeness and maturity, ten years younger than the previous entrant. Sir Henry Maxwell-

¹ Towards the end of his life Sir Cyril compiled an autobiographical sketch upon which, by the kindness of Lady Flower, I have been able to draw. The quotations given here are from this sketch, unless otherwise acknowledged.

Lyte, then in his early sixties, had entered the office as Deputy Keeper in 1886, but Trice Martin, of the *Record Interpreter*, had entered it in 1861, and was a link with the first generation of Record Officers appointed under the Act of 1838; he was to continue to occupy his room, attended by his two bulldogs, until he retired in 1906. Scargill-Bird, author of the first Guide to the Records and Secretary of the Office from 1903 to 1912, entered in 1866; R. A. Roberts in 1872; Harley Rodney, E. Salisbury, R. H. Brodie, and Hubert Hall in the later 70's; C. G. Crump and Storey-Maskelyne, who had previously served in other departments, came in the 80's. Flower in 1903 was very much the young man in an office where promotion was notoriously slow.

He was 'pitchforked into the Legal Search Room' in his first year, where, in the intervals of dealing with queries concerning records required in litigation and drawing up meticulous instructions for the preparation of office copies, he had to learn to find his way about the public records and to make accurate office copies of medieval records required for production in the courts. Suits concerned with foreshore rights, tenure, and pedigrees were at the time numerous, and all junior officers were intermittently employed in preparing these office copies: excellent training, for they had to be certified by a senior as correct. Modern office copies were made by hand by clerical assistants and boy clerks. Employed solely on the routine business of copying interminably these legal documents, these young people not unnaturally became somewhat restive. They were put under Flower's personal charge in 1905, a very satisfactory arrangement; they became efficient clerks and he took a personal interest in their subsequent careers in the Office and in other departments.

Established in the Legal Search Room during these years were the young women researching for the recently launched Victoria County History, in the charge of Ethel Stokes, whose enthusiasm and unselfish dedication to the cause of historical research and the preservation of records was to be of such assistance to Flower and his colleagues in the Office and the British Records Association.

The 'stock work' which he found time to do during his nine years in the Legal Search Room was the completion of the List of Ministers' Accounts for the reign of Henry VIII, later published in the series of Lists and Indexes, and the preparation of a list for the following reigns. In 1910 he began his work on the Curia Regis Rolls, which he was to continue for half a century.

In 1912 the retirement of Scargill-Bird caused a general post. R. A. Roberts, who had been Secretary of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, succeeded Bird as Secretary of the Office; A. E. Stamp became Secretary of the Commission, and Flower took over Stamp's duties as assistant to the Secretary of the Office. Roberts retained the post of legal officer, in practice the executive officer, of the Inspecting Officers' Committee which arranged, with the departments concerned, schedules of the records which were to be preserved or destroyed. Flower, doubtless encouraged by Roberts to read for the bar to qualify for the succession to this post, had joined the Inner Temple, and had been called in 1910.

This transfer from Search Room to the Secretary's Department meant a considerable change of duties, but involved him, regrettably, in as much time-consuming routine business as did his previous post; tasks which could have been done equally well by clerical staff. Unfortunately, the Office establishment bore fewer than a dozen supplementary clerks, most of whom were engaged in making copies. Work on the Curia Regis Rolls continued, but the first volume did not appear until after the war.

Flower was married on 5 April 1910, to Helen Mary Harding Thompson, daughter of David William Thompson, an Irishman, a retired Inspector of Schools in the Punjab: 'a prelude to fifty years of happy companionship'. They resided at Ealing, in the house next to his mother's. His devoted mother died in January 1913.

The First Great War

Active during the first three months of the war as a sergeant in the Special Constabulary in the Covent Garden district, Flower had perforce to resign from this extra-Office duty when he went to the War Office in November 1914, becoming one of the three private secretaries of Wintour, Director of Army Contracts (a man of legendary energy and uncertain temper, and an exacting newly appointed chief of a Division which was having to cope with unprecedented expansion of work). He was not very happy in an office where a flair for improvisation was of more account than a legal and orderly mind, and his repeated request to be allowed to join the Army was at length granted, and he was commissioned in the R.G.A. in November 1915. After training at Kinghorn in Fife and in the south of England, he crossed to Boulogne with his battery on 17 August 1916. On 20 October, while preparing for his second tour of duty in

the line, he received severe internal wounds, his left shoulder was fractured and he permanently lost the hearing of his left ear. His splendid physique and constitution helped him to survive desperate operations. He was brought over to a London hospital in December. Passed fit for light duty in June 1917, he applied again to the War Office Contracts Branch where he was welcomed back, to become Private Secretary to H. H. Fawcett, Wintour's successor as Director of the Contracts Branch which was caricatured by another temporary colleague, Edward Shanks, in *The Old Indispensables* (1919). Flower found the established routine of the Branch more to his liking and after working hard following the Armistice on the cancellation and modification of contracts, he was demobilized in June 1919. For his services with Contracts he was awarded the Croix de Guerre, avec Palme (gazetted 15 December 1919).

1919-1938

He reported at the Public Record Office the day after he was demobilized. Welcomed by Sir Henry, he stressed the long hours he had been working, in the hope that he might be given a few days' leave. 'Ah, Mr. Flower,' was the characteristic reply, 'it will be as good as a holiday for you, working our short hours.'

R. A. Roberts retired during this year, after some 47 years' service in the Office. Ducal in mien and manner, Roberts had been as successful in dealing with aristocratic but un-co-operative owners of historical manuscripts as with the registry clerks of departments. Flower had been to some extent his protégé, and now became his successor as legal member of the Committee; and remained as assistant to the new Secretary of the Office, A. E. Stamp.

The close association of Flower with Stamp lasted from 1919 until Stamp's death in 1938, for Flower succeeded Stamp as Secretary when the latter was appointed Deputy Keeper on Sir Henry's retirement in 1926. 'Stamp was a man of peace, although he could take a very strong line' when moved. There was no noticeable change of Office policy. There was one problem which confronted them, and particularly Flower as Establishment Officer; namely, the recruitment of Assistant Keepers. The tendency among young Assistant Keepers to apply for transfer to the larger administrative departments, where prospects of promotion were livelier, caused him to ask the Treasury to allow the Office to select by means of an Interviewing Board as in the British and other Museums; and thus to break the link

with the Administrative Class Examination and prevent the drifting of young officers to whose training much time had been given in the Office by their seniors. The Treasury agreed, and forthwith assumed that the Office could now be graded with museums, with consequential loss of status and prospects. A more fortunate innovation was the arrangement for young historians to be temporarily appointed Assistant Keepers to do editorial work on the records before taking academic posts; by acquiring, over a period of two years, a working knowledge of the Office, they would strengthen the liaison between the Office and the universities. The scheme was a marked success; several of these historians have continued to do very valuable editorial work for the Office.

Deputy Keeper: The Second World War

On Stamp's death in March 1938, Flower was appointed Deputy Keeper by the Master of the Rolls, Sir Wilfrid (later Lord) Greene. The post of Secretary, declined by the senior Assistant Keeper, was offered to and accepted by Hilary Jenkinson, who since 1929 had been in charge of the Repository as well as the Repairing Department, and had previously served in the Literary Search Room; and he had been the chief architect of the recently formed and active British Records Association, of which the Master of the Rolls was President. Jenkinson's reputation as a scholar and organizer had made him a serious rival for the headship of the Office, and, though he was Flower's junior in the Office by three years, he had hoped to succeed Stamp. It could not be expected that the close association which had characterized the relationship between Stamp and Flower would continue in the new régime. There were, however, pressing matters which called for the co-operation of all members of the staff.

One was the preparations for the celebrations of the centenary of the Public Record Office Act of 1838, which took the form of a reception at the Office on 26 October 1938, attended by the Duke and Duchess of Kent; in addition to the permanent display of records in the museum there were special exhibitions of treaties, seals, maps, bindings and repairs.

The dominating problem in 1938 was the safety of the records and the protection of the Office in the event of war, and a policy of evacuating records to several repositories and of instructing the staff in A.R.P. services was adopted. Flower could not bring himself to believe that war was imminent or inevitable; and

although he authorized the assembling, in September, of two van-loads of records for dispatch to Shepton Mallet and Market Harborough, he cancelled their dispatch when he heard that Mr. Chamberlain was going to Munich—to the disappointment of those of the staff who hoped to learn something, from a rehearsal, of the difficulties of emergency evacuation. But in August 1939 he authorized the evacuation of records to begin on the day following the news of the Hitler-Stalin Pact; with the result that a hundred tons of the records selected as most valuable had been evacuated in the ten days before war was declared. Evacuation continued apace until 1941 and ceased in 1942, by which time some 2,000 tons of records had been evacuated from Chancery Lane and the peace-time repository of modern records at Canterbury to seven temporary repositories in the country: at Shepton Mallet, Market Harborough, Belvoir Castle and Haddon Hall (the Duke of Rutland was made an Honorary Assistant Keeper in 1939), Culham College, Clandon Hall, and Grittleton House, co. Wilts. Flower kept in touch with the custodians of these repositories, and arranged to visit most of them.

With the outbreak of war, the closing of the Literary Search Room and the large-scale evacuation of the records, many sections of the ordinary work of the Office came to a standstill; and the Office was organized primarily on an elaborate A.R.P. footing, with exercises which became increasingly more complicated during the first twelve months of the war. Flower—he was now over sixty—took more than his share of the arduous labours involved. During the early period he spent alternate nights in the Office; and there were not many weeks throughout the war in which he did not spend at least one night on duty, taking his turn during the 'Alerts', frequent and long and often exciting, in patrolling the roof and the four floors and stairways of a vast building. The calling-up for military service of the younger men and the staffing of the country repositories (Flower stationed an Assistant Keeper and a repository attendant in each of the seven) made serious inroads on available staff, who were organized in three 24-hour shifts. This concentration on A.R.P. duties had of course its drawbacks. He was reluctant to release officers who felt that their services could be better utilized in other departments, and the officers in charge of evacuation grudged the man-power diverted to safeguarding the building.

The Public Record Office, though situated in an area which suffered exceptionally heavily from bombs and fire, escaped serious damage throughout the war. During the first phase of

the bombing attacks the Office was hit in September 1940, but the damage was confined to a turret, and no records were lost. The many incendiary bombs which fell on or penetrated the roof were dealt with by patrolling staff, and the Office fire-fighters with their mobile equipment were able to prevent the spreading of fire from nearby buildings. The country repositories remained unscathed. The re-assembling of the records began in earnest in September 1945 (Flower was unwilling to bring them back until Japan was out of the war), and in June 1946 the Deputy Keeper was able to report to the Master of the Rolls that the records had returned safely to Chancery Lane.

Flower, who had been made a C.B. in January 1939, was knighted in 1946. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in the following year.

At the end of the war—he was now 66—Flower was a tired man, not far from a breakdown, and was contemplating retirement. The Master of the Rolls declined to accept his first offer of resignation, but accepted it, reluctantly, a year later. He retired on 31 March 1947, his 68th birthday, after 45 years' service in the Office. He was aware that, had he continued in office until the end of the year, his successor, Hilary Jenkinson, who was 64, would not have been eligible for the post.

Throughout the period of the war Flower had continued to work, albeit intermittently and frequently during his Office vigils, on the Curia Regis Rolls, and had been assisted in transcription of some of the rolls by Mr. H. C. Johnson, who was in charge of the records sent to Shepton Mallet, Mr. L. C. Hector, who was at Haddon Hall, and Mr. Charles Johnson, who had come out of retirement at 70 to take charge at Culham College.

As Chairman of a depleted Inspecting Officers' Committee he was active during the early part of the war in co-operating with departments, under pressure from the Paper Shortage Committee, in the preparation of new schedules which shortened the periods for retention of the less valuable records. And as the acting or executive member of the Historical Manuscripts Commission he was much involved in the efforts of the Commission and the British Records Association (he was Chairman of its Council) to prevent documents of historical importance being swept away in the drive for salvage. The urgent need to preserve historical manuscripts led to the formation of the National Register of Archives in 1943 as a branch of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. The Commission and the Register continued to be housed at the Public Record Office. Flower was

also a member of the Master of the Rolls' Archive Committee which submitted a memorandum to the Master of the Rolls in 1946, making important and far-reaching recommendations for the preservation of records in the counties. He remained a member of the Commission until his resignation in 1960.

The Record Office and the Commission were not the only institutions under his charge during the war period. A regular member of the famous weekly discussions over which Professor A. F. Pollard presided at the Institute of Historical Research in Malet Street, and a member of the Institute Committee from 1935, Flower was pressed in June 1939 to take over the Directorship of the Institute following the sudden resignation of Pollard. With considerable misgivings he accepted, declining a salary. His special problems were the making of arrangements for the several compulsory war-time moves of the Institute with its library and the stock of the Victoria County History, and for the appointment of a full-time successor of professorial rank. Flower resigned on Professor Galbraith's appointment as Director in 1944, and continued as a member of its Committee until 1955.

One more official activity should be mentioned. He was made a member of the Cabinet Committee for the control of Official Histories of the War, and succeeded Mr. R. A. Butler, then President of the Board of Education, as Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Official Medical History of the last war. Sir Arthur MacNalty, editor-in-chief of this History, paid a tribute to Flower's help in *The Times* of 15 August 1961.

Learned Societies

Reference has been made earlier to his connexion with the British Records Association, of which he was *ex-officio* Vice-President, and the Institute of Historical Research. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries since 1921, Flower was a member of its Council in 1929, and Vice-President, 1939-43. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1938, and likewise served on its Council and became Honorary Vice-President; and made two contributions to its *Transactions*. He became Secretary of the Canterbury and York Society back in 1906, and edited for the Society, in collaboration with his colleague, M. C. B. Dawes, the *Register of Simon de Gandavo*, Bishop of Salisbury; the final part was published in 1934. He joined the revived Pipe Roll Society in 1925, and succeeded Stamp as its Treasurer in 1938.

His earliest connexion with the Selden Society was as an editor, when he began work in 1912 on *Public Works in Medieval*

Law, based on cases taken from Ancient Indictments and the Coram Rege Rolls relating to the maintenance of roads, bridges, sewers, &c. during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II. The first volume, completed in 1915, appeared in 1917 and the second in 1923. In 1937, the year he was elected to the Council of the Society, he was asked to prepare an *Introduction to the Curia Regis Rolls, 1199-1230*. This was completed during the war years and published in 1944. Vice-President from 1941 to 1944, Sir Cyril succeeded Lord Uthwatt as President for three years from March 1949. During this period changes introduced in the constitution of the Society and its association with the newly formed Institute of Advanced Legal Studies led to increased membership and prosperity.

Publications

Passing references have perforce been made to some of Sir Cyril's publications. His first contribution was published in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* for 1905: on the Beverley Town Riots of 1381-2, based on some fifty documents originally among the Chancery Files and now in the Ancient Petitions, to which Crump had drawn his attention. He read a paper to the Society on 11 April 1942 on 'Public Records in war-time'.

His second publication appears to have been the Index of Subjects in Firth and Rait's *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, published in 1911, an index of 144 pp. Flower was a first-rate compiler of indexes, especially of subject indexes. The *Calendar of Liberate Rolls, 1226-1240*, which had been prepared by W. H. Stevenson, was published in 1916 with indexes by Flower. A. G. Little, reviewing it in the *E.H.R.*, refers to the 'admirable index of subjects' which gives 'the range of subjects and greatly facilitates research'.

His greatest contribution to scholarship research was of course his transcription and editing of the Curia Regis Rolls, begun in 1910 and continued to the end of his life. *Curia Regis Rolls, Vol. I, Richard I-2 John*, delayed by the first war, was published in 1923. In this volume he filled the gaps left by Palgrave's *Rotuli Curiae Regis* (1835) and the transcripts in vols. 14 and 24 of the Pipe Roll Society. It was welcomed by Sir Maurice Powicke in an eight-page review in the *English Historical Review*, who regretted the omission of essoins (Palgrave had included them), but proceeds: 'It is of more consequence that we at last have the texts, competently edited and arranged, for the series as it proceeds will be found essential by the student of the central

administration and the origins of Parliament. . . . The indexes of persons and places and of subjects are admirable. The latter indeed is a commentary for the use of the lawyer, the social historian and the genealogist. . . . The articles under the words action, charters courts, final concords, judgements, juries, justices, pleadings procedure, seals, warranty, writs, etc. gave an adequate impression of the importance of this volume to the historian of English law. Matter of wider interest is abundant.'¹

The second volume (3-5 John) came out in 1925; the eighth, for the years 1219-20, in 1938; the ninth (1220-1) in 1952, and the fourteenth (1230-2) in 1961. There remains in manuscript his transcription of the rolls for another twenty years, already indexed. He had been assisted in recent years by Mr. Hector, who is in charge of the Office publications, Mr. C. A. F. Meekings, and Miss P. M. Barnes.

Sir Cyril lived in Lammas Park Gardens, Ealing, from 1902, moving to the house next door when he married. He was a churchwarden, read the lessons and compiled a centenary history of the amalgamated Christ Church and St. Saviour's in 1952. For forty years he was a manager of the local Church of England Schools. In politics as in outlook he was unshakeably conservative. Among his many local activities were his presidency of the local branch of the Historical Association and of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park Museum. He was a collector of stamps from boyhood.

A regular member of his school and college Rugby teams, he played for Middlesex from 1904 to 1906: a 14-stone forward, over six foot two and 'I ran fast for a big man'. He played hockey for Oxford City, 'a successful townees club', and mixed hockey at North Oxford with F. E. Smith, 'a master of all games', and Lord Hugh Cecil, 'a really good player with a deceptive shambling gait. When he got the better of an exchange, he seemed to give a slight bow and a deprecatory smile as he went away with the ball'. His tennis was not of so high a standard; his croquet was good, but not as good as his wife's.

They celebrated their golden wedding in 1960. Despite the severe wounds he received in 1916 and the consequent curtailing of his activities, Flower retained an equable temper and remarkably good health up to the end. He died peacefully in his sleep on 9 August 1961. He was 82. On the last page of his account of his life he refers again to the 'debt I owe to my mother, my wife and my daughter'. It ends with the words: '*Laetus sorte mea.*'

DAVID L. EVANS

¹ *English Historical Review* (1924), pp. 264-72.