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JFC Harrison (1921-2018)

With the death of J. F. C. (John) Harrison, the Society for the Study of Labour History has lost not only the last remaining member of the small group that founded it in 1959-60 but also its first secretary, a past chairman (1974-81) and one of its Vice Presidents. John was also a pioneering and influential exponent of 'history from below' (long before the term was coined) and a scholar whose work enriched labour history through three powerful monographs which engaged with different aspects of the popular 'radical mind' of the nineteenth century.

John Harrison's influence also percolated well beyond the academy in further books written for general readers and students.[1] These might seem peripheral from an 'academic' perspective: but of the tributes appearing after his death two especially underline John's significance as a communicator. Both were readers' comments added to the on-line edition of the *Guardian's* obituary: reading Harrison 'helped me get an A Level in Economic History getting me out of the factory and into University', wrote the first; and second, *The Common People* 'was my first experience of "History from below" when I read it in the early 80s … the book was a revelation to me, a History about "us" - ordinary working class people through the ages'. And the comment concludes that the book 'kindled an interest in Social and Political History that has lasted the rest of my life (I'm now 57). Thank you John Harrison for the journey upon which you set me'.[2]

Both John's skill in popularising academic research and his commitment to 'history from below' were rooted in personal conviction. This developed first through political activism at school and as an undergraduate at Cambridge, and then decisively across the first phase of his academic career spent in adult education rather than a conventional history department. His autobiography *Scholarship Boy* (1995) evokes a warm, loving but far from prosperous lower middle-class childhood. He was born in Leicester in 1921, the son of William Harrison, a railway clerk, and Mary (née Fletcher), who until her marriage had been a teacher. 'Enlightenment on political matters came mainly from the *Daily Mail*', John recalled of his early years. William voted Liberal, later Labour, and Mary Conservative, 'since she assumed that that was what the best (that is, socially superior) people did'.[3] His induction

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[1] These were: *Society and politics in England, 1780-1960: a selection of readings and comments* (New York, 1965); *Utopianism and education: Robert Owen and the Owenites* (New York, 1968); *The early Victorians, 1832-1851* (London, 1971), new edition titled *Early Victorian Britain 1832-51* (London, 1979, 1988); *The birth and growth of industrial England: 1714-1867* (New York, 1973); (as editor and lead contributor), *Eminently Victorian. People and opinions* (London, 1974); *The common people: a history from the Norman Conquest to the present* (London, 1984); *Late Victorian Britain, 1870-1901* (London, 1990). All publications cited in the notes below are by Harrison unless otherwise stated.

[2] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/05/jfc-harrison-obituary (accessed 25 February 2018).

[3] *Scholarship Boy: a personal history of the mid-twentieth century* (London, 1995), p. 59.

into serious politics was initiated by Cicely and Eric Hancock. The latter taught John at Leicester's City Boys' School; he and his wife were members of the Communist Party (CP) and 'a great influence on me', John recollected, 'they introduced me to a whole way of life I hadn't known before'.[4] Through them he became involved in the local Left Book Club discussion circle. John Strachey's *The Theory and Practice of Marxism* 'particularly impressed' John and was the starting point for reading the 'classics' of Marxism-Leninism before he went up to Cambridge in 1939, having won an exhibition to Selwyn College.[5]

The Young Communist League 'didn't do much in Leicester', and Harrison seems not have sought it out when he arrived in Cambridge.[6] He did however throw his energies into the Cambridge University Socialist Club, fully aware that 'CUSC was run by the CP', taking on the secretaryship of his college branch with such enthusiasm that Selwyn wags dubbed him 'Gauleiter' Harrison.[7] His interest in modern social history derived almost entirely from the combined influence of CUSC and the Left Book Club: his undergraduate studies involved mainly Tudor and constitutional history until he was called-up in 1941. John spent 1942-5 in east Africa and Madagascar as an officer in the 17th (Uganda) Battalion of the King's African Rifles. In Madagascar his regiment was ordered to replace a mutinous battalion of the French-Creole speaking Mauritius Regiment, a little-known episode of the Second World War that John researched with his customary thoroughness when writing *Scholarship Boy*.[8]

Anyone who has read *Scholarship Boy* is left in no doubt that the most significant event of John's post-war years was his marriage to Margaret Marsh. They had become engaged just before he embarked for Africa and married just ten days after he returned to Britain in 1945. Colleagues and students privileged to have known Margaret will readily appreciate why John emphasised this turning point in his life. Marriage also imposed certain practical considerations and, with an administrative career in mind, John abandoned History when he returned to Cambridge to complete his degree in 1946. After just two terms' of study, he graduated with a First in Part II of the Law Tripos. This second Cambridge spell had entailed further separation from Margaret and the couple only established a home of their own in the autumn of 1946 when John returned to Leicester to teach at the City Boys School. However, he resigned within the year: convinced that his

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[4] Conversation with the author, 28 November 2008.
[5] *Scholarship Boy*, p. 77.
[6] Conversation with the author, 28 November 2008.
[7] Conversation with the author, 28 November 2008; Jack Ravensdale (1920-94, formerly a WEA Staff Tutor and then Principal Lecturer in History, Homerton College, Cambridge), conversation with the author, 1993.
[8] *Scholarship Boy*, pp. 107-14.

vocation lay in adult education, he applied for, and was offered, a staff tutorship in the Leeds extra-mural department.

It is difficult to convey in the compass of a few words how distinctive the Leeds department was, both for the formidable leadership of its founder Sidney Raybould, and for the array of talent that it attracted. Its academic staff included Pat Duffy (subsequently a Labour MP and Northern Ireland minister), Roy Shaw (later Secretary-General of the Arts Council) and most notably E. P. Thompson.[9] The essence of Raybould's vision as an adult educator was an insistence that university standards could and should be maintained in the 'tutorial classes' that its staff taught – almost entirely beyond the campus and largely through the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). John Harrison taught history and international relations across north and west Yorkshire and significant components of his programme were classes for North Riding farm labourers and Teesside steel workers, recruited through their trade unions. (John himself joined the National Union of Agricultural Workers.) The shifting landscape of post-compulsory education was posing a challenge to the WEA, especially to the tutorial class ideal of three-year programmes targeted at working class students; but this was work to which John was politically committed. He was a vocal opponent both of shifting University resources to shorter and more-popular subjects and broadening the social base of classes: 'what we don't want', he declared in an internal discussion paper in 1956, is 'a kind of intellectual Woolworths', with 'classes made up of, and (in subject and presentation) aimed at, middle class and professional groups'.[10]

The research he pursued complemented his practice as a teacher rather than feeding directly into it. His first book, commissioned on Raybould's recommendation, was a centenary history of north London's Working Men's College. This was the only occasion that John wrote anything like an institutional history, but two features anticipated his later historical writing. The first was that the College was an exemplar of the voluntary bodies (ranging from 'powerful Trade Unions' to 'humble Mutual Improvement groups') that had mitigated 'the worst excesses of mid-Victorian individualism, and which have characterised so distinctively the form of British liberal democracy'.[11] The second was an emphasis upon the personal experience of those who worked and studied there. John sought out and

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[9] For the department in the 1940s and 1950s, see the cumulative portrait in the biography of one of Harrison's highest-achieving students, *Joan Maynard: Passionate Socialist* (London, 2003), by Kristine Mason O'Connor; R. K. S. Taylor (ed.), *Beyond the Walls: 50 Years of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Leeds*, 1946-96 (Leeds, 1996); and Roger Fieldhouse and R. K. S. Taylor (eds), *E. P. Thompson and English Radicalism* (Manchester, 2013), especially the contributions by Fieldhouse and David Goodway.

[10] 'The future of WEA and University Work' (departmental discussion paper, January 1956), pp. 3 and 5, copy in Raybould Papers, LUA/DEP/076/2/14 (JFC Harrison correspondence).

[11] *A History of the Working Men's College, 1854-1954* (London, 1954), p. xvii.

interviewed the oldest surviving former students and staff. He also interviewed the pioneering ecologist Sir Arthur Tansley (1871-1955) about the latter's father, George. Having left school at 11, George enrolled at the College, aged 19, in 1854. Thirty years later he abandoned a successful business career to work voluntarily as a teacher and administrator there. No other single figure, aside from the College's founder, the pre-eminent Christian socialist F. D. Maurice, occupies so much of the book as George Tansley.

In his account of the Working Men's College, Harrison honed the essence of what would become his historical method: narrative thickened by analysis, always alert to the importance of individual human agency. The same characteristics distinguish his study of social reform in Victorian Leeds, built around an account of the progressive socialist and co-operator James Hole (1820-95).[12] When the local historical society for Leeds balked at publishing the thirty-thousand word manuscript, John was able to obtain a significant grant in aid of publication from the Passfield Trust. This seemingly incidental detail highlights the network of academic contacts he was building up. G. D. H. Cole had suggested an application be made to the Trust, whose members included Margaret Cole. He also read the whole of John's manuscript.[13] Harrison had selected his subject at the suggestion of H. L. [Lance] Beales, the hugely influential (but sadly hardly published) Reader in Economic History at the London School of Economics.[14] 'I came away with more ideas after half-an-hour's conversation with Lance than days of discussion with anyone else', John recalled. His carefully preserved list of research topics from one such conversation is almost prophetic of the direction that social history research into the nineteenth-century would later take.[15]

The principal publication of Harrison's Yorkshire years was *Learning & Living*, a title evoking F. D. Maurice's *Learning and Working* (1855).[16] This was a substantial reformulation of his 1955 doctoral thesis (supervised by Raybould) on religious and social influences on adult education in Yorkshire. Asked how to recast the thesis as a book, Beales had advised John to 'shake it out', meaning not merely extend the chronological range but also re-write it as intellectual and social history, throwing off any

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[12] *Social Reform in Victorian Leeds: The Work of James Hole, 1820-1895* (Leeds, 1954).
[13] University of Leeds Archives, Harrison Papers, LUA/DEP/076/2013/13, Bundle 9, Cole to Harrison, 5 October 1953.
[14] Alexander Neil Hutton, '"A Repository, A Switchboard, A Dynamo": H. L. Beales, A Historian in a Mass Media Age', *Contemporary British History*, 30:3 (2016), pp. 407-26.
[15] *Scholarship Boy*, p. 175. The list [*circa* 1951] is in Bundle 9 of the Harrison Papers at Leeds: topics include the followers of Thomas Spence, the Social Science Association, phrenology, the National Association for the Protection of Labour, Ernest Jones, and the 'history of what people read'.
[16] *Learning & Living: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London, 1961; reprinted 1963, 1994, 1996 and 2013).

institutional approach.[17] *Learning & Living* was the first history of adult education to place greater emphasis upon working people's own agency, rather than that of the state or organised religion. Researching it involved interviewing a considerable number of veteran WEA students and officials, notably George Thompson (1878-1952). The son of a Halifax radical and joiner, Thompson had joined the very first WEA tutorial class in Yorkshire in 1909. He became the first Yorkshire North District Secretary for the WEA in 1914, a post he occupied until 1945. It was Thompson who fashioned the Yorkshire WEA into 'the educational expression of the labour movement' (not all WEA districts made this explicit engagement) and in turn moulded the opinions of Sidney Raybould, whom he recruited as a staff tutor for the District in 1929 to become, in John's view, 'the true inheritor of the mantle of George Thompson'.[18]

Learning & Living was substantially revised during the year (1957-8) that John Harrison spent as a Visiting Fellow at the School for Workers run by the University of Wisconsin (Madison). He threw himself into speaking at trade union locals (branches), forming a particularly close relationship with an International Association of Machinists (engineers) local at Beloit, forty miles south of Madison.[19] Though *Scholarship Boy* is sparing in criticism of American adult education and trade unions, John Harrison's outlook shifted during this year in Wisconsin. US steelworkers were 'quite similar' to Teesside's, he told Raybould, 'but the conditions under which workers' education has to be carried on are far from satisfactory'. Unions had too much responsibility for the curriculum and the university was at times reduced to little more than a 'higher entertainment bureau. On the union side there is little awareness of the difference between education and propaganda'.[20]

Comparatively little of the ideology of British workers' education had derived from 'the traditional philosophy of trade unionism', Harrison wrote in an article for *Socialist Commentary* after he returned from America, but this was now changing. 'A greater element of bread and butter trade union studies' was emerging in British practice. Though 'still a far cry' from the US emphasis on 'training in the vocational skills of trade unionism … clearly we are already some way along the same road'. In the same article John refined

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[17] *Scholarship Boy*, p. 176.
[18] *Learning & Living*, 289-301, 342-3 (quoting pp. 291, 343). Harrison Papers, Bundle 1, notes and correspondence with Thompson and other veteran adult educators.
[19] University of Wisconsin School for Workers, *Newsletter* 16:1 (Fall 1957), copy in Raybould Papers, LUA/DEP/076/2/14 (Harrison correspondence); 'For the good of the Association: American trade unionism at the grass roots', *Bulletin of the British Association for American Studies*, 6:2 (November 1959); *Scholarship Boy*, pp. 135, 139-47 (pp. 141-7 reproduce the 1959 article).
[20] Raybould Papers, letter from Harrison, 2 August 1958.

his definition of what he perceived the essence of the adult education movement to be:

> Not intended for personal advancement but as a trust for the good of others; workers' education was not to declass the student but rather to deepen their understanding of class solidarity. Education was not a kind of fire-escape from the working class, nor (*pace* Albert Mansbridge [founder of the WEA]) primarily a means of class reconciliation.[21]

Doubtful about the viability of maintaining such an approach to adult education, John Harrison also returned from Wisconsin to a fundamentally different job as Sidney Raybould's deputy. This proved powerfully corrosive of research and writing. By 1958 John had completed his doctoral thesis, books on the Working Men's College and James Hole and most of *Learning & Living*. He had also written the centennial history of the Leeds Branch of the WEA, an article for the first volume of *Victorian Studies*, and a full fifth of the seminal collection *Chartist Studies* (more than any other contributor, its editor Asa Briggs included).[22] In addition he had contributed to a variety of publications on contemporary adult education issues.[23] However, Raybould's international reputation as an adult educator meant that he was frequently away from Leeds – in the West Indies for the whole of 1960-61, for example. John joked about the burden of administration: 'I move everything from the in-tray to the out-tray, then put my feet up on the desk and have a good read', he told Roy Shaw and Edward Thompson.[24] Even a cursory glance at the department's archives from 1958-61, however, shows that a joke was all this was. There was also an additional problem: deputising for Raybould (a 'real tyrant', John later conceded) attracted a great deal of enmity from some quarters of the department.[25]

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[21] 'Why Workers' Education?', *Socialist Commentary* (August 1960), pp. 14-16. Previously the journal of Socialist Union (the name assumed by the Socialist Vanguard Group in 1950), *Socialist Commentary* continued to be published after the Union was wound up in 1959. I am unaware that John belonged to either organisation.

[22] *Workers' education in Leeds: a history of the Leeds Branch of the Workers' Educational Association, 1907-57* (Leeds, 1957); 'The Victorian gospel of success', *Victorian Studies*, 1:2 (December 1957); 'Chartism in Leeds', and 'Chartism in Leicester', in Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959).

[23] For example: (with Richard Hoggart and Roy Shaw), 'What are we doing?', *Tutors' Bulletin* (Autumn 1948); (with Hoggart, Shaw and Catherine Reynolds), 'To what good end?', *The Highway* vol. 40 (November 1948 and April 1949); (with Hoggart and Shaw), 'Correspondence. What are we doing?', *Tutors' Bulletin* (Spring-Summer, 1949); 'Remota Justitia', *Tutors' Bulletin* (Autumn 1949); 'Correspondence. Remota Justitia', *Tutors' Bulletin* (Summer 1950); 'Adult education and self-help', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 6:1 (November 1957); 'The W.E.A. in the Welfare State', in S.G.Raybould (ed.), *Trends in Adult Education* (London, 1959).

[24] Conversation with Roy Shaw, 24 November 1992.

[25] Letter to the author, 2 December 1991. According to Roy Shaw (conversation, 24 November 1992), 'John and I were seen as Raybould's groupies, absolutely hated by some members of the department'.

John may have felt little affiliation with American adult education, but he and his family had hugely enjoyed living in Madison. In 1961, therefore, he jumped at the offer of a job in the history department there: it was a 'hand-tailored' post, he told Raybould, adding that he had come to realise he preferred being a teacher and a scholar to administration. Raybould for his part confided that he had hoped John would succeed him at Leeds, but he made no attempt to dissuade him.[26]

The fourteen years John Harrison had spent at Leeds powerfully shaped his practice as a historian – best summarised as immersive, in the sense of establishing a deep personal immersion in the *milieu* of which he was writing; and immersive also through a deep and scrupulous reading of the available source material. John's involvement in the formation of the Society for the Study of Labour History was a final flourish to this period, and he went about the task with his customary efficiency.[27] The Society had its origins in the Leeds 'Labour History Group', an informal initiative of the University's extra-mural and History departments, encouraged by Briggs (head of the latter) with Harrison taking the organisational responsibility.[28] John McIlroy neatly summarises Leeds' role in the Society's genesis as that of 'instigator and midwife', drawing together historians from Sheffield, Oxford and London and giving 'corporeality' to contemporary discussions about the need for such an organisation. These had taken place at both Leeds and among past and current members of the Communist Party Historians' Group and the contributors to the influential 1960 *Essays in Labour History*.[29] If the title of 'instigator and midwife' belongs to any one person, then it is John Harrison. 'It has occurred to me that perhaps we ought to think of broadening the whole idea', he wrote to Royden Harrison of the Sheffield extra-mural department in July 1959, 'there is obviously a need for a Labour history group or society on a national scale'.[30] Briggs, though, led a crucial air of respectability to the venture. 'The history of working people was not respectable, academically', John recalled of the Society's formation, 'that is why Asa was so important – he was respectable'.[31]

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[26] Raybould Papers, letter from Harrison, 28 February 1961; Harrison Papers, letter from Raybould (Mona, Jamaica), 5 March 1961.
[27] See the 1960-61 SSLH General Secretary's files in the University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, MSS.207/3/1/1-3, inclusive. There is a later note by Harrison on the formation of SSLH in MSS.207/3/1/2.
[28] University of Leeds Archives, Taylor Papers Box A1, Harrison to Briggs, 19 December 1958; Malcolm Chase, 'Back to Yorkshire: "Asia" Briggs at Leeds, 1955-61', in Miles Taylor (ed.), *The Age of Asa: Lord Briggs, Public Life and History in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 215.
[29] John McIlroy, 'The Society for the Study of Labour History, 1956-1985: its origins and heyday', *Labour History Review*, volume 75, supplement (April 2010), pp. 19-112 (p. 39); John McIlroy, 'Asa Briggs and the emergence of labour history in post-war Britain', in Taylor (ed.), *Age of Asa*, pp. 108-141 (p. 121); Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History, In Memory of G. D. H. Cole* (London, 1960).
[30] Quoted in McIlroy, 'The Society', p. 39.
[31] Conversation with the author, 28 November 2008.

Reviewing *Essays in Labour History*, John Harrison made almost a manifesto statement for the kind of history he strived to write:

> To date, the bulk of writing on Labour history has dealt with organisations and economic conditions, leavened with details of the struggles and quarrels of working class leaders … Yet the supreme aim of every historian, Labour or other, must be to strive to hear the people of a past age talking. No amount of economic analysis or tracing of trends can be a substitute for this. The weakness of much Labour history is that it has not yet emancipated itself from approaches and methods derived from economic history and biography; whereas the most exciting developments seem likely to be made by the social historians and the historians of ideas.[32]

Wisconsin, however, also sharpened Harrison's appetite for comparative history, an approach that shaped his next book *Robert Owen and the Owenites: The Quest for the New Moral World* (1969). Reflecting his wish to throw off approaches and methods derived from biography, John had wanted to title it *Quest for the New Moral World*. It was published thus in America; but to his disappointment the publisher of the UK edition insisted on reversing the title and subtitle.[33] It was a book that set new standards of scholarship and analysis for labour history. The immersive method was evident in a bibliography of remarkable comprehensiveness for the pre-digital age. The text laid greater emphasis on the Owenites rather on their self-styled 'social father', and also broke new ground in its attention to women, sexual relations and the family. It was of its times, of course, and only with Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (1983) did there emerge a history of early socialism and feminism that the subject demanded. But here, as in the study of Owenite communitarianism and political economy, Harrison was breaking new ground. The relentless Marxist inflexion of the historiography of socialism had rendered scholarship on Owenism, as Claeys has observed, 'of largely idle historical interest, fit for the socialist equivalent of boy scout character-building tales and not much else'.[34] *Quest for the New Moral World* explored how early socialist ideologies percolated labour movements on both sides of the Atlantic, and the regularity with which working people embraced Owenite ideals even while abandoning Owen and Owenite institutions. Though he conceded that the general unionist phase in Britain (1829-34) presented something of an exception, Harrison's essential

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[32] Review of *Essays in Labour History*, in *New Left Review*, 1:3 (May-June 1960), p. 69.
[33] *Quest for the New Moral World: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (New York, 1969); *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969).
[34] Gregory Claeys, 'Robert Owen and some later socialists', in Noel Thompson and Chris Williams (eds), *Robert Owen and His Legacy* (Cardiff, 2011), 33-53 (34).

argument was that Owenism was a secularised 'millenarian sect'. This shaped not only popular confidence that the old immoral world could be transformed by community building, but also – and more enduringly – the associational forms preferred by a whole range of radicals, especially in Britain. Sunday schools and night classes, social festivals, cooperation and even the naming of children after political heroes, were all sites of opposition to economic competition and the imposition of middle-class culture.

John Harrison described the book as 'an experiment in the writing of comparative social and intellectual history' and his introduction acknowledged the help he had 'obtained from sociological concepts and from the comparative study of ideological systems'. From a twenty-first century perspective this reads as somewhat defensive, but *Quest for the New Moral World* was very much an American book, in terms not just of its content but also its intellectual rigour. John wore this aspect of his historical method lightly (outside the introduction, it is flagged mainly in the references). His introduction went on to declare that 'the general plight of academic history today is such that the historian is surely justified in seeking help wherever he [*sic*] can find it'.[35] Reference was made above to how his Leeds years powerfully shaped John Harrison as a historian; but being an adult educator also shaped his commitment to clarity and cogency when communicating his research. Similar qualities are of course evident in the work of his Leeds colleague E. P. Thompson: both had limited patience with the inward looking preoccupations of the historical profession. John eschewed the proposition that he might ever seek election as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, for example, while academic journal articles barely featured in his published output.[36]

Even the New York edition of *Quest for the New Moral World* bears on its title page the information that the author was Professor of Modern History at the University of Sussex. This move was finalised in 1969, the year it was published, though the Harrisons remained in Madison until the late spring of 1970. It was a move about which the family were equivocal: John had actively contemplated becoming a US citizen but he was attracted to the informality of Sussex, its American-style graduate school, and its rejection of conventional discipline boundaries in favour of grouping students and staff into thematic schools. John also recognised that British history was in decline in US higher education and he had limited appetite for pursuing

[35] *Quest for the New Moral World*, pp. 1 and 5.
[36] Letter to the author, 8 March 1998. He wrote just three refereed articles, significantly all in US journals: 'The Victorian gospel of success', *Victorian Studies* 1:2 (1957), 155-64; 'The steam engine of the new moral world': Owenism and education, 1817-29', *Journal of British Studies* 6:2 (1967), 76-98; and 'The Popular History of Early Victorian Britain: A Mormon Contribution', *Journal of Mormon History* 14 (1988), 3-16.

exclusively North American topics.[37] Initially his intention on returning to Britain was 'to write the definitive history of Chartism', but he abandoned the idea on discovering that Dorothy Thompson had advanced plans for the same, also conscious that 'the work would be important for her academic career at that stage'. Instead the two pooled their notes to produce the first-ever bibliography of the movement and John moved on.[38]

More precisely, John moved back to the millenarian mentality, the parameters of which he had sketched so carefully when contextualising Robert Owen and the Owenites. The result was his final monograph, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (1979). In *The Making of the English Working Class*, Edward Thompson memorably pledged himself 'to rescue … even the poor deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity'.[39] However it was Harrison's book that truly accomplished the task. Part of the clue as to why this was so lies in Thompson's adjective *deluded*. Tracing apocalyptic religious movements from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Harrison used the beliefs of Southcottians, and the disciples of leaders such as John 'Prophet' Wroe and 'the nephew of God' Richard Brothers, as windows onto the thought and culture of 'ordinary' men and women. He inter-wove instructive comparisons with America's early Shakers and Mormons as he did so. Clearly, *The Second Coming* was a working-out of scholarly preoccupations that stemmed from Harrison's work on Owenism. However, it also reflected John Harrison's personal engagement with religion, not that he was ever an adherent of any millenarian sect – far from it. For a while in the late 1940s he had attended meetings of the Society of Friends, before returning to the 'broad church' Anglicanism of his youth; but he and Margaret (whose roots were in Methodism) found the ministrations at their parish church 'rather feeble'. Their move to Harrogate in 1955 was swiftly followed by joining the congregation at a northern redoubt of High Church Anglo-Catholicism, St Wilfred's. Whilst living in Madison the Harrisons had worshipped at a downtown Episcopalian church; but on returning to Britain they were drawn once more to what John emphatically described as 'the reality of sacramental worship', and joined the Anglo-Catholic congregation at St. Michael and All Angels in Brighton. John also served there for thirteen years as a church warden.[40]

Faith was a central part of John Harrison's self-identity. This quality made him a remarkably empathetic historian of millenarianism; but it is fair to say

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[37] *Scholarship Boy*, pp. 186-7.
[38] Letter to the author, 3 October 1999; J. F. C. Harrison and Dorothy Thompson, *Bibliography of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1976* (Hassocks, 1978).
[39] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 12.
[40] *Scholarship Boy*, p. 134.

that not all, of even his closest colleagues, shared his perspective. Edward Thompson complimented *The Second Coming* as 'far and away the best treatment hitherto of Joanna Southcott, her disciples and her followers'. But Thompson also argued that Harrison carried 'attentive sympathy to the most fatuous beliefs to the point of weakness where an ecumenical sympathy becomes merely bland'. Thompson was also frustrated that, by contrast to those whom Christopher Hill depicted in *The World Turned Upside Down*, 'most of Harrison's millenarians are intellectually wet'. Joanna Southcott and her followers' obstinate refusal to mount a 'challenge to received intellectual authority' that was either 'savage' or 'daring', disappointed Thompson.[41] Clearly, Thompson had approached the book wanting latter-day Ranters and he was reluctant to settle for Latter Day Saints. Nevertheless, *The Second Coming* was one of only five 'new and important' books, published after the 1960s, to which Thompson drew attention in his preface to the third (1980) edition of *The Making*.[42] And his original review observed – as reviewers of Harrison's work so often did – how John wrote 'with sympathy for his materials, and for the authenticity of popular experience and intellectual endeavours'.

Introducing *The Second Coming*, John Harrison presented it as 'a contribution to the history of people who have no history'. And he cited remarks made in 1886 by an old Yorkshireman on what constituted 'real history'. Those comments are worth quoting in full:

> If it is the people who form the nation, their condition socially, industrially, morally and religiously – what they do, suffer, enjoy, think and feel – is real history, far more than the story of the few who have borne titles and made laws, the benefit of which has been mostly for themselves.[43]

John Harrison wrote 'real history', and he did so with authenticity and compassion.

Malcolm Chase, *University of Leeds*

[41] 'Millenarial mutterings', *Guardian*, 13 September 1979, p. 11.
[42] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1980), p. 15.
[43] 'An old time Pudseyer', quoted in Joseph Lawson, *Letters to the Young on Progress in Pudsey during the Last Sixty Years* (Stanningley, 1887), pp. 37-8; cf *The Second Coming*, p. 1.