

ALL SOULS COLLEGE CHAPEL

**THREE TRIBUTES GIVEN BY
STEPHEN GUNDLE, GEORGE NEWTH AND
RICHARD BOSWORTH**

IN MEMORY OF

CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN

MA (Oxon), DPhil (Oxon)

4 November 1957 – 2 November 2015

Professor of Modern Italian History, University of Reading, 1987 – 2015
Fellow of All Souls College, 1985 – 1997, and 2015

Saturday, 12 December 2015 at 2.30 p.m.

Stephen Gundle

Christopher Duggan's untimely death on 2 November 2015 was a terrible loss for his family and for his many friends, as well as for his colleagues and students. Christopher was widely-respected, he was full of ideas and was engaged on new research projects. As a writer and scholar, he was in his prime. Those, including myself, who had the task of communicating the sad news to the academic world received messages of sympathy which testify to the affection and the esteem with which he was regarded. Many young researchers fondly recalled his generosity in giving them his time and support, often corresponding with them long after meeting them at a conference or summer school and writing references for travel grants and scholarships. One remembered 'this gentle scholar who, with his simple smile, immediately put me at ease, took time to talk with me about the Risorgimento and invited me to his home.' Another wrote: 'To me, he was both a brilliant sounding board for my work and a wonderful human being who went out of his way to encourage a young researcher who was trying to make his way'. His fellow Italianists admired his scholarship and his kindness. A founder member of ASMI, Paul Furlong, remembered Christopher as 'a gentle, courteous and thoughtful colleague, a rigorous scholar who was devoted to his subject, and a person without "side", to use an old-fashioned phrase'.

Christopher was born in Petts Wood, a suburb of South East London, on 4 November 1957. His father was a ship broker and his mother a nurse who later trained as a social worker. The second of three siblings, he attended Dulwich College and Westminster before reading History at Merton College, Oxford. His interest in Italy, initially for the Medieval period, began in his teens and he travelled in the country both before and after his undergraduate degree. The encounter with the great Italian historian Denis Mack Smith, who would supervise his Oxford D.Phil, was decisive in shifting his focus to modern history. Mack Smith had authored with Moses Finlay a history of Sicily and Christopher too would develop a keen interest in the island's chequered past. The topic of his thesis, Fascism's struggle against the Mafia, made ample use of the papers of Mussolini's 'iron prefect', Cesare Mori. The very first line of the resulting book (published by Rubettino in 1987, two

years ahead of the English version, which would be published by Yale with the title *Fascism and the Mafia*) asserted the intensely controversial notion that the Mafia was an idea rather than an organisation. The book was reviewed in the *Corriere della Sera* by the Sicilian novelist Leonardo Sciascia, who employed its central idea to support his idiosyncratic stand against the so-called 'professionals of anti-Mafia'. Although Duggan's thesis was later undermined by the revelations of the repentant *mafioso* Tommaso Buscetta, the debate brought him early renown. Rubettino published a new edition of the book, which included Sciascia's review, in 2007.

Christopher was elected to a prize fellowship at his supervisor's college, All Souls, in 1985 and the college would remain important to him. In 1987, he and his wife Jennifer were married in the college chapel, where their two children would also be baptised. He would return as a Visiting Fellow on two occasions, most recently in 2015. Although Oxford would always figure in his life, his entire teaching career was spent at Reading, where he was appointed to a lectureship in history in the Department of Italian Studies in 1987. He would soon rise to Reader and later Professor, before moving to the Department of History in 2013. For many years, Reading was the leading centre of Italian studies in the UK. It boasted a large Italian Studies department, whose members would include the renowned linguist Giulio Lepschy. Two distinguished historians of Italy, Stuart Woolf and Paul Corner, had held Christopher's post before him. Percy Allum was a member of the Politics Department, while Adrian Lyttelton, Richard Bellamy, Richard Bosworth, David Laven and Linda Risso were attached to History for shorter or longer periods. Over the years, Christopher organised numerous seminars and events there, some of them under the auspices of the Centre for the Advanced Study of Italian Society. These included conferences on Italy and the Cold War and on the 1948 elections.

As a historian, Christopher owed much to Mack Smith, with whom he kept in close contact and whose 90th birthday celebrations in 2010 he organised. His work is impregnated with the values of traditional scholarship; it is marked by a preference for interpretation over theory, an interest in the role of the great individual in history and by an ability to write wonderful, engaging prose. Like his maestro, he tackled big questions and engaged in prodigious

archival research. He probably also acquired from him the habits of reading very widely and working exceptionally hard.

The most substantial of his books is surely his second monograph, *Francesco Crispi, 1818-1901: From nation to nationalism* (published by Laterza in 2000 and OUP in 2002). This was an enormous piece of research which changed the parameters of the Italian historiography. Surprisingly, there had been no modern, full-length biography of this patriot, reformer and warmonger who was a key architect of Italian unification and who served twice as prime minister in the 1880s and 1890s. Indeed, despite being compared in his lifetime to Bismarck, he was a largely forgotten figure, not least because his career ended in disgrace following charges of bigamy. Duggan brilliantly conveyed Crispi's role and ideas. But he also understood the need, in a 700 page political biography, to capture the personality, to bring colour and vitality to the enterprise. The Sicilian emerges in the book a sort of Italian Disraeli, not so much for his views as for his style. A fastidious dresser who spent two hours each morning making his toilet, Crispi cultivated an oriental-style image in order to give himself greater popular appeal.

For some time after this book, Christopher thought of himself mainly as a nineteenth-century historian. However, Fascism would loom large in his later work. In 2006, he joined Giuliana Pieri and myself as an investigator on an AHRC project on the personality cult of Benito Mussolini. The topic was one that had not previously been tackled systematically, despite the huge literature on Fascism, and all of those who belonged to the project team – which included Simona Storchi, Alessandra Antola, Vanessa Roghi, Sofia Serenelli, Paola Bernasconi and Eugene Pooley – felt we were engaged on something special. It was a fruitful and happy collaboration which involved archival research, oral history, documentaries and the curation of an exhibition at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art. For five years, we shared a spirit of adventure and common purpose.

The question of Italy's unresolved relationship with its Fascist past was a subject about which Christopher came to care deeply and which he approached from a moral as well as a political point of view. His book *Fascist Voices: A Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy* (Bodley Head, 2012) was conceived and mostly written during the Mussolini project. Drawing on the

letters people wrote to the dictator over the course of his rule and hundreds of diaries, some of them published, others unpublished texts written by ordinary Italians which had been deposited years later in the national diary archive in Pieve Santo Stefano, Duggan was able to offer a particular insight into the nature and extent of ordinary Italians' support for Mussolini and his regime. The book won great acclaim and it was honoured with several prizes, notably the Wolfson Prize for History. In his review in the *London Review of Books*, Richard Evans described *Fascist Voices* as 'a magnificent book, a pathbreaking study that everyone interested in fascism, or Italy past and present, should read'. What was original about the book, he said, was that it treated fascism not purely as a tyranny or as an oppressive dictatorship but 'as a regime rooted strongly in popular aspirations and desires'.

In Italy, the book was not quite so warmly received, indeed at first it was largely ignored, much to Christopher's consternation since his previous books had won him respect. A number of explanations were possible, which included the familiar nature of some of the published sources on which the book drew, and the implication conveyed in the title formulated by the publisher Laterza – *Il popolo del duce* – that the mass of Italians had been Fascist followers. This point, it should be said, was even further emphasised by the French title chosen by Flammarion: *Ils y ont cru*. Long after the issue of popular consent under Fascism had first been debated by historians, this was still a sensitive issue. Paul Corner's book on the subject, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy*, was also published in 2012 and the two historians undertook a number of joint presentations of their works, including one at the British Academy.

In addition to his three important monographs, Duggan also wrote three more popular books. These works aimed at general readers can be found on the shelves of provincial bookstores and many local libraries. The first, *The History of Sicily* (Chatto & Windus, 1986), was a re-elaboration and extension of the text published earlier by Finlay and Mack Smith. The second, *A Concise History of Italy*, (part of the CUP concise history series) was published in several languages and went through two editions. Through it, more than one generation of students and general readers acquired a flavour of the full sweep of Italian history from Roman times to the present.

Finally, in 2007, there was *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (Penguin), another very large book, which considered the project of nation building in historical perspective, beginning with Napoleon and ending with Berlusconi. The approach was inspired by the work of Alberto Banti, who at first, Christopher confided to me, was diffident, unsure whether the book was the work of a friend or a foe. In the English-speaking world, it was widely read by many who wanted to get to know Italy better. Recently, Robert Lumley told me that he gave a copy as a gift to his brother, who later wrote: 'I have finished *The Force of Destiny* which is a genuinely good book. After reading it I feel I can begin to understand why Italy is Italy and so unlike England or France.' Christopher would have been pleased with that judgement. Though accessible and enriched with many references to Italian architecture, art and music, the book is not entirely sanguine in tone and its conclusion is infused with melancholy. It argues that the issue of 'how to construct a nation with a shared past and a strong sense of collective destiny and purpose remained almost as pressing in the age of Forza Italia as in the era of the Carbonari and Young Italy'. There is even a suggestion that the whole enterprise of nation-building might have been counter-productive, since 'the very insistence with which the project of "making Italians" had been pursued down to the Second World War had contributed to the scant belief in collective national values'.

Christopher was much in demand as a speaker and he felt the responsibility of the public intellectual. He reviewed widely, notably for the *TLS*, presented books and took part in innumerable events. He took pains to cultivate good relations with the Italian Cultural Institute (especially under the enlightened direction of Caterina Cardona) and the Italian Embassy.

At the time of his death, he had been Chair of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI) for barely one year. Founded by the Oxford historian and Fellow of Oriel College Christopher Seton-Watson in 1982, ASMI brings together scholars of modern Italy from several disciplines and a number of countries. Christopher was an exceptionally loyal member and he held many positions of responsibility in the association over a period of more than thirty years, including those of newsletter editor, secretary and executive member. He also organised a number of ASMI events, including the 2007 annual conference on the fortune of Garibaldi (organised jointly with Lucy Riall),

which is remembered for its conviviality. His commitment to young scholars was unstinting and he was instrumental in ensuring the successful transformation of the ASMI postgraduate conference into an annual summer school at which established British-based academics provided postgraduate students and recent PhDs from several countries with feedback and advice. The summer school was held twice at Reading, most recently in 2015. As an executive member, he diligently read and made notes on entries to the ASMI postgraduate essay prize and also helped select the winner of the Christopher Seton-Watson prize, which is awarded each year to the author of the best article. In his short time as Chair, Christopher engaged in a variety of initiatives, establishing new links with other British and Italian scholarly associations and organising a symposium with colleagues in France. He also organised a conference in Oxford on Italy and the First World War.

Over the twenty-eight years he worked at Reading, Christopher supervised many graduate students, a good number of them Italians. They remember him as an assiduous and caring mentor, who always took the trouble to inquire after their well-being and general happiness. Colleagues who appealed to him for help with personal matters also always found him ready to do what he could, often above and beyond any call of duty. As the sole historian in a department of literary specialists, he sometimes felt like the odd one out, yet he served a term as Head of Italian Studies. More recently, a bruising period as Head of the newly-formed School of Modern Languages chastened him. A gentle and naturally shy man, he was shaken by the extent to which changes he sought to implement aroused bitter opposition. In his final months, he struggled with severe depression and was obliged to withdraw from commitments. Yet he worked indefatigably on a large international project on the legacies of Fascism for which he hoped to secure funding from the AHRC. The bid, which was submitted weeks before his death, bore the special imprint of Christopher's intellectual passion and vision. Typically, he had wanted the bulk of the funds to support several postdoctoral fellows.

In some of the various tributes and obituaries, it was remarked that Christopher was 'very British' or, more specifically, 'very English'. Inevitably perhaps, any British student of a Mediterranean country is at risk of having this label attached to them. But there is in this comment a hint that

Christopher was in some way *more* British than some of his Italianist contemporaries. This is due first, probably, to the aura of Oxford which attached to him and, one might say, the particular aura of the unique place that is All Souls. Also, despite many years spent studying Italy, he never in any perceptible way went 'native', that is to say he had none of the traits of the Italianised Englishman: he did not drop Italian words into his conversation or emails and he was never spotted with an Italian newspaper under his arm or sticking out of his briefcase, although of course he read them. As far as I am aware, he never expressed the desire to live or work in Italy. Probably for family reasons, his trips there were short. Then there was the look. Christopher had the appearance not of the typical Englishman, but of the ideal Englishman. Although not tall, he was fair-haired, blue-eyed and good looking. Combined with his lightly-worn erudition and quiet charm, these were compelling qualities. There was also something almost boyish about him. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who went grey or put on weight, he remained remarkably ageless. Anyone comparing photographs of him taken twenty-five years ago with more recent ones could be forgiven for seeing very little difference. The tweed jackets of earlier times disappeared though, to be replaced by suits in a flattering shade of blue, almost always worn without a tie.

Christopher will be missed as a friend, as a colleague and as a teacher. His immense knowledge of Italy and his personal kindness will be remembered by all who knew him. Though his loss is deeply felt, the example he gave of personal and professional integrity, and of devoted, humane scholarship, will be honoured and treasured.

George Newth

Many years ago, when I was still a history student at Cardiff Institute and my friend and colleague Ester was studying history in Palermo, our respective parents, having noticed our growing interest in Italian history decided that a book which dealt directly with this subject was the most appropriate Christmas present for us. We both duly unwrapped a book written by Christopher Duggan: mine was his *Concise History of Italy* and Ester's the Italian translation of the *Force of Destiny*.

At that time we had not had the pleasure of meeting Christopher in person and we could not even imagine that we would end up pursuing PhDs in Italian History at the University of Reading.

As was pointed out to me by Ester, this anecdote would work better if we had both received the *Force of Destiny* as it would have perhaps signified that we were both 'destined' to end up as Professor Duggan's students. I must say I was tempted to change the story so that it would fit in with this narrative; however, such a distortion of historical facts would not be in keeping with Christopher's integrity and attention to truth as a historian.

Professor Duggan was the reason why I joined the University of Reading, just as it was why Ester, Luisa, Pat, Nicola, Jacopo and Pola, as well as previous generations of students in Italian history, arrived here.

He was an inspiration for all of us not least due to his intellectual integrity, his empathy and his lack of ideological agenda. Indeed, he was more than aware of the perils of having such an agenda and I think I speak for all of his students when I say that we feel lost without our intellectual guide.

Christopher's role was not just as a supervisor, but also as a mentor; he had a capacity to appreciate and empathize with our individual circumstances and to respond accordingly. A typical supervisory meeting with Christopher would begin with a long session in which he would make sure we were all happy within our personal lives. He would apologize to those coming from Italy for the horrible weather – and you could clearly tell that he was genuinely sorry – he would ask the younger among us whether we were

satisfied with our housing and flatmates, and would always make sure that his part-time students were not putting too much pressure on themselves by working and studying at the same time. Only after receiving our reassurance, would we begin our stimulating conversation on our research projects as well as on the most recent publications on Italian history.

Christopher always made us feel that our research was important. His wise advice was always discreet, never patronizing, and would always bring great benefit to our respective studies.

His reassuring words and guidance will be terribly missed by all his students, but we strongly believe that Christopher's legacy will continue to live in every young scholar with a genuine passion for history, and in every colleague and individual who has been touched by his generosity and great humanity.

“Only he who leaves no legacy of love has little joy in urns”, as Ugo Foscolo said in his “Sepulchres”, a perhaps old-fashioned but evergreen piece of Italian poetry.

Buried, does he not on living, with
Day's harmony to him inaudible,
If he rouse this illusion with sweet care
In friendly memories? It is heaven-sent,
This correspondence of such deep affection,
A heavenly gift for human beings; and often
This means we go on living with our friend,
And he with us, if reverently the earth,
Which took him as a child and nourished him,
Offers a final refuge in her lap,
And keeps the sacredness of his remains
From outrage of the storm-clouds and profane
Feet trampling, and a stone preserves his name,
And fragrantly in bloom a friendly tree
Comforts his ashes in its gentle shade.

Non vive ei forse anche sotterra,
Quando gli sarà muta l'armonia del giorno,
se può destarla con soavi cure nella mente de' suoi?
Celeste è questa corrispondenza d'amorosi sensi,
celeste dote è negli umani;
e spesso per lei si vive con l'amico estinto e l'estinto con noi,
se pia la terra che lo raccolse infante e lo nutriva,
nel suo grembo materno ultimo asilo porgendo,
sacre le reliquie renda dall'insultar de' nembi e dal profane piede del vulgo,
e serbi un sasso il nome,
e di fiori odorata arbore amica
le ceneri di molli ombre consoli.

Professor Richard Bosworth¹

Teaching is the place where the personal satisfaction of being a historian meets social value. Researching and writing are all very well; even administration must have a point. But teaching matters and matters viscerally. A decent democratic society will have a sense of the past and its connection with the present. It will also be critical and know that every statement ever made needs to be reviewed with those three little historian's questions: Who? When? Why? Who is the author whose words or actions ask for analysis? When exactly were the words composed or the actions done? And, as a connector between the first two questions, why? What was the intended and the actual reason for the event or comment? In being alert to such matters, our democracy needs history to be expressed and taught. Only good teaching can ensure that history eddies, as it should, across our society.

Teaching can occur at many levels: in books, articles reviews and press commentary. It is needed in postgraduate supervision. Colleagues at this memorial service have already spoken about Duggan's devotion and achievement in these areas. But the key target for a university teacher's teaching is the undergraduates, whether they be keen, excited and a little fearful in First Year or tending to the old lag in the scepticism about the formalities of university life as their degree course moves to an end. Undergraduate teaching is not there to be measured by some fatuous short-term seeker after 'targets'; it is there to be endlessly pleasurable to staff and student and to be part of a questing that lasts a lifetime.

I knew Christopher at quite a few levels. Our research patterns had many parallels. We went to the same conferences. I had the pleasure of inviting him to Australia, when I still lived and worked there, and was rewarded with hearing him teach his varied audiences there. But our relationship was at its deepest when we taught together at Reading between 2007 and 2011. We were in very many ways an odd couple. Christopher was the model of an English gentleman, whose (apparent) calm, restraint and elegance always reminded me a little of David Gower. Historians of Italy we may have been, but we were both intrigued enough by cricket to keep up to date about it. I

¹ At Christopher Duggan's memorial service I spoke without reading a text. The present version is therefore a confected version of my talk, completed a couple of months later.

was the more evidently combative Australian; not for nothing do quite a few Italian historians of modern Italy view me as a sort of Martian or perhaps 'il canguro della storiografia italiana'.

Working together, across the departments of History and Italian studies, and across the years of student life, we aimed to express humanity, as located in Italy and the Italies over the last century and a half, in its twin grandeur and fallibility. Our special site was Italy but we did not disdain the relevance of grandeur and fallibility in the presents, whether of the wider world, our students' lives and our own. Each of us knew of the danger of what might be called Orientalism, importing Edward Said's concept to Italy and its history. Each of us was after all a foreigner, I a Martian as already explained, Christopher readily viewed as an English 'milord'. Both of us had critical Italian reviewers who lamented the fact, judging our interest in their country as alien and arrogant. No doubt each of us sinned. But we were aware of the problem of viewing from 'outside' and, despite that danger, were confident to go ahead with our work and teaching, encouraged after all by the obvious fact that 'insiders' also have a natural bias and blindness. So we explored our foreign society of choice with a determination to be rigorous and a knowledge that Pieter Geyl's wonderful (Anti-Fascist) aphorism that history is 'criticism, again criticism and criticism once more' must also be directed at ourselves.

The other great joy of our teaching was 'span', a word that came into my vocabulary by reading the memoirs of the Australian and sometime All Souls Fellow (and historian of Italy 'gone wrong'), Keith Hancock. In Hancock's view what made a historian worthwhile was 'span'. So in our teaching we tried to display the span of Italian culture, ranging beyond the academic historiography in our use of primary sources from Fascist theorising to novels, film, music, popular culture and even the wry fact that the son of Giuseppe Bottai, Mussolini's most self-consciously intellectual minister, rose to be bureaucratic head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Honorary President of the Federazione Italiana del Cricket. As undergraduate teachers, Christopher and I knew that we were engaged in a mutual if divers historic compromise and also trying to teach for life. We knew, too, that we were teaching both them and us (even if I am deeply conscious of being in the red in any ledger with Christopher on modern Italian history). I am sure that a

myriad of undergraduate students, some consciously many not, still carry a little bit of Christopher as their tireless, friendly, superbly knowledgeable teacher, in their souls. I certainly do.