



Herbert Enoch Hallam

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1923-1993

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**H**ERBERT ENOCH HALLAM was born on 28 September 1923 at Pembridge on the Welsh borders, son of a Derbyshire coalminer of radical Baptist traditions and a mother of rural Anglican background. Childhood and youth in the English midlands quickened his interest in the mediaeval past, and despite straitened means (his father died when he was five) he won scholarships to Ashby-de-la-Zouch Grammar School, where J.D. Chambers taught him, and then to Jesus College, Cambridge. There, after wartime service with the Royal Air Force, he read mediaeval history under Michael Postan and Dom David Knowles; but preferment at Cambridge at that time did not come easily to young family men with provincial accents. After taking a Diploma in Education he taught at Spalding Grammar School (1950-55) and the Loughborough Training College (1955-61). During that time he completed his doctorate at the University of Nottingham, the basis of his first major publications, *The New Lands of Elloe* (1954) and *Settlement and Society* (1965). Here he demonstrated that the drainage of the Lincolnshire fenlands had been undertaken by mediaeval communities long before the better-known 17th-century enterprises. A splendidly tenacious achievement in difficult circumstances, his early work perfectly illustrates Tawney's dictum (which Herbert never tired of quoting) about the historian's need for stout boots.

One of the first mediaeval European historians appointed to an Australian university, Bert Hallam came to the University of Western Australia as senior lecturer (1961), reader (1965), and professor (1966-88) of mediaeval history. He blossomed in this environment of sunlight, good food and wine, and plentiful microfilm. To his colleagues he was a model of untiring research productivity, although it is a safe bet that more read his admirably meaty Fontana paperback *Rural England 1066-1348* (1981) than his substantial contribution as editor and contributor to Volume 2 of *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*. The Academy elected him to the fellowship in 1972.

Although he stoutly denied that it was any part of the historian's business to chase after contemporary relevance, much of his work provides a compelling study of the expedients adopted by peasant societies as a growing population presses on marginal resources. There was a sturdy practicality about his learning. It was enlightening to hear him enlarge on how much Chaucer had meant to communicate when he observed of his Ploughman:

Ful many a fother of dung hadde he y-laide

To Bert himself it would have been apt to apply the often quoted but not quite hackneyed comment on the Clerk of Oxenford:

Gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.

Although he was probably at his most rewarding with his small third-year and Honours groups, he could deliver memorable and apparently extempore lectures to first-year students, and he produced some distinguished postgraduates. Nor did he neglect administration. As one who for several years rotated a headship of department with him rather in the manner of the two kings of Barataria, I can testify that he was always well briefed, approachable, and wryly realistic in his expectations. He did his stint as Dean and served for a while on the University Senate. But he most consciously relished his role as a representative of European scholarship in a new and growing society. It pleased him to arouse young Australians to an awareness not only of his own mediaeval England, but of the richness of Byzantine civilisation and the complexities of Latin Christendom; and he was always properly respectful of the ancient civilisations of Asia and fostered them in his Department. Reassuringly for a scholar of his long perspectives, he was also willing to ally himself with Australian historians, and in his last years was translating the diaries of Bishop Rosendo Salvado (1814-1900), the great Spanish missionary to the Aborigines who founded New Norcia in 1846; a task made formidable by Salvado's old-fashioned Galician dialect but eased by Bert's delighted mastery of computer technology.

In earlier years a sceptic and self-proclaimed Trotskyite, Bert Hallam was not really a political animal. Although all his life he was capable of stating dogmatic positions for the sake of argument, his essential humanity kept breaking through, and he is best remembered for a pleasantly quirky individualism. During his last decade he became a staunch Anglican. After retirement his wife and he found the nearest Australian equivalent to English village life at York in Western Australia's Avon Valley. Here he faced a lengthy illness with resolution and good humour, and here he died on 8 July 1993. Rejecting the contemporary preference for cremation, he was buried in the local hillside cemetery and gave instructions, faithfully obeyed, that the funeral should be followed by a generous feast. He is survived by his wife Sylvia, herself a distinguished archaeologist and Fellow of the Academy, and four children.

*Geoffrey Bolton*