

HERBERT FINBERG:

An Appreciation

HERBERT PATRICK REGINALD FINBERG, we are told, was born at Rickmansworth on 21 March 1900. The fact seems as authentic as any in history, although the sprightly figure of spring 1970 taking his constitutional in Chiswick Park might seem to contradict bare chronology; and, indeed, no one would be better placed to outwit us all in a matter of dating than he who for so long pitted his wits successfully against the deceivers and the self-deceivers, the forgers and improvers of Anglo-Saxon charters.

It was provident of him to arrange to be born so neatly poised between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries: to inherit the developed tools of nineteenth-century historical criticism and to be in time to take advantage of the motor-car—chauffeused by his wife, Joscelyne—as a means of penetrating the countryside that the charters delineated, and of arriving at distant bases from which their explorations on foot could begin. It was provident to be the son of the biographer of the artist, Turner; for, in so far as talents are inherited, he was guaranteed a lively appreciation of the significance of the painter's visual scene as well as the skill of narrative biography. It was also provident to arrange to be born at Rickmansworth, then poised between town and country: for Herbert Finberg, urbane and unmistakably a man of Town libraries, Town clubs, and Town restaurants, was destined to spend the formative years of his working life away from London in the Cotswolds and at Welwyn; and in his second life at Leicester to expound with conviction the doctrine that History is the biography of Little Places as well as of Great Men; to become Head and then Professor in a Department of English Local History set in the very middle of the grassy Midland shires, while retaining a toehold if not a foothold in West London suburbia.

This special number of *THE AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW*, made up of essays by Herbert Finberg's friends, colleagues, and fellow students, celebrates the seventieth birthday of an English local historian. It should be noted, however, that Finberg the historian is far from being the whole of Finberg. The 'Bibliography' that follows this 'Appreciation' gives slight clues to these other lives outside History. At Oxford he studied not History but Greats, and his earliest interests were in philosophy and literature, as the publications of 1925 and 1926 indicate; and there is said to be a manuscript of an unpublished book from this period lurking in some Chiswick cupboard. Long before the emergence into public print of Finberg the historian in 1941 and 1942, there had been another career of distinction in publishing and book production where the

art interests of his father emerged again in the creative artistry of the printed page. Like Tawney and Housman before him, Finberg had been prevented from post-graduate studies by the examiners' view of his Finals papers although, like Tawney and Housman, he had the later satisfaction of contemplating the predictive quality of a Finals class from the elevated position of his own professorial Chair. Thus the young graduate found himself in a provincial workshop, the printing establishment of the Shakespeare Head Press, directed by Basil Blackwell and Bernard Newdigate, then at Stratford-upon-Avon. From Stratford he moved to Chipping Campden, and there founded his own press, the Alcuin, in a barn. His ambition was to demonstrate that one could live in the twentieth century, taking advantage of the techniques of mechanized printing, and yet achieve high and imaginative standards: from Finberg at the Alcuin Press came the Housman *Poems* in 1929, but all forms of jobbing printing were undertaken. It was at this time also that he became interested in handwriting, as the 1929 item in the 'Bibliography' indicates, achieving an elegant personal hand: on an envelope in brown ink it immediately distinguishes the sender and softens the impact of even the sharpest critical comment. In the age of typewriters one of the few pleasures remaining to a printer must be to set up a piece from Finberg in his manuscript. So far as I know, he types nothing.

In 1935 the Alcuin Press moved to Welwyn Garden City but then encountered the depression in 1936, and Finberg went to work as a director of The Broadwater Press Ltd, where he remained until 1944. In this period the Twickenham *Pope* was launched. At the end of the war he became editorial director of Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, no doubt attracted by the prospect of liturgical publishing for Roman Catholic use, but with a fine oecumenical toleration he also took on advisory work for Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd, H.M. Printers, designing for them the *Coronation Service* of 1953: on the secular side he advised the then Ministry of Works from 1944 to 1948, and takes particular pride in the format of the *Post-war Building Studies: Housing Manual*. Although he ceased to be a director of Burns Oates in 1949, a connection continued, and it was from this press that his *Manual of Catholic Prayer* came in 1962, winning the *Prix Graphica Belgica* in 1965. It should not have surprised me, therefore, when Herbert Finberg visited Leeds some time in the 1950's, and I introduced him to the Brotherton Librarian as "Dr Finberg, the topographer", that I was misheard and stayed to overhear a long technical conversation between Dr Page and Dr Finberg, the typographer.

The second career, the one which this volume celebrates, begins in Dr Hart's bibliography with the short article in *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* in 1941, when Finberg had already passed forty years of age. The unsuspecting agent of the transformation seems to have been Mrs Finberg. In 1933 Finberg married Joscelyne Payne, and together they became interested in

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table, but in fact his two bases were used for a double ration of historical enterprise. At Bosworth Richard III had wondered if there were not two Richmonds in the field, but from 1952 to 1965 an observer might have been pardoned for thinking that there were even more Finbergs in the field. The 'Bibliography' shows that it was the period in which he consolidated his own reputation with his work on early charters; and it was the period when (drawing perhaps on his own observations of warfare between critical scholars and of warfare between academics and administrators) he set out to challenge the old assumption that in the Saxon invasions the victors had succeeded in annihilating the vanquished without trace. Finberg's own philosophy of local history placed little weight on the local discipline for 'illuminating' national history, a 'propaedeutic value', as he once dubbed it. "To treat it as an introduction to or a contribution to national history is to invert the true relationship between them." Yet in the historiography of the illumination of the so-called Dark Ages Finberg has assured immortality for the name of one rural Gloucestershire community, Withington.

But the 'Bibliography' which records the scholar's output in the Leicester years (1952-65) necessarily omits, or gives light emphasis to, the other side of the headship of a Department of English Local History, that of entrepreneurship. Here scholar, printer, publisher, and businessman were fused in a succession of enterprises and initiatives. These very pages are the result of one of these enterprises: his editorship of the REVIEW after the Agricultural History Society was founded. Another enterprise, the series of *Occasional Papers of the Department of English Local History*, shows Finberg as the discerning patron of publication, the list of contributors having more than one future Reader or Professor, including the successor to his own Chair. In his *Gloucestershire Studies* (1957) he enlarged the size of the two-man partnership that had produced *Devonshire Studies* five years earlier, and five years later he edited and contributed to a symposium on History itself, the Finberg element being 'The Approach to Local History'. As the diligent reader of the 'Bibliography' will also see, Finberg has never subscribed to the view that a scholar's work, once published in article form, should thereafter blush unseen: in *Lucerna*, in *Local History—Objective and Pursuit*, and latterly in *West-Country Historical Studies* he has made available within hard covers and among the 'proper books' of libraries the majority of his own historical writing that had first appeared in periodicals or become out of print.

But the greatest enterprise of these years was undoubtedly the initiation of *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*. One hopes that among Finberg's fragments of autobiography he has recorded the saga of its making. At times, confronted by the idiosyncrasies of university presses and university contributors he must have thought that it was easier to engineer the making of the

English landscape than the making of an Agrarian History. Yet Volume IV has shown that within a decade a grand idea could be translated into a grand reality. His friends and admirers rejoice that his current objective and pursuit, aided by the patrons of his Cambridge post-retirement fellowship and his Leverhulme Emeritus award, is to edit and also to contribute to the volume that will chronologically be the first of the *Agrarian History*.

The thirteen years at Leicester, first as Reader and then as Professor, continuing and extending the work of Hoskins, the first Head of the Department, saw Finberg—if one may paraphrase Falstaff—not only as enterprising in himself but the occasion of enterprise in others. Some of this was engendered in colleagues and graduate students. Alan Everitt, a contributor to this volume, was colleague and successor in the Chair; Joan Thirsk, another colleague of those Leicester years, was to succeed Hoskins in the Oxford Readership and Finberg in the editorship of the AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW: and thereby to contribute to and to edit this volume of appreciative essays. As patron of younger scholars Finberg sponsored the annual John Nichols prize in English Local History, a Leicester award but competed for nationally: some fruits of this enterprise will be seen in the *Occasional Papers*. Being himself an amateur historian for so many years, Finberg still retained a close interest in training and improving the standards of amateurs in local history. His work for the Standing Conference on Local History is one aspect of this interest; the John Nichols prize, open to all comers, professional and amateur, is another; the pronouncements on the nature of local history brought together in the 1967 volume are another, an attempt to stimulate thought and action by definition and example; and alongside the solemnities (not over-solemn, however) of these public occasions, there is also that highly recommended piece of calculated and mocking didacticism, 'How Not to Write Local History'.

This particular appreciation of Herbert Finberg, historian, scholar, and friend, is confessedly less than a full appreciation of the man whose portrait faces our title-page. It has dealt only cursorily with his creative work in printing and fine book production, and it would not be appropriate in the context of this REVIEW to treat a further aspect of his work, integral to the man, that of Roman Catholic exposition; although the 'Bibliography'—as complete as could be achieved in the semi-secrecy of a *Festschrift* project—indicates his published work in the field of liturgy and apologetics. This appreciation is also written by someone who has come to work closely with Finberg only in very recent years and who has not had the advantage of the long or intimate contact possessed by some of those who have made other contributions to this volume.

This *Festschrift*, it is intended, will be presented to Professor Finberg on 25 September 1970 at a dinner at Sadler Hall, Leeds, organized jointly by the British Agricultural History Society and the University of Leeds. Leeds is the

table, but in fact his two bases were used for a double ration of historical enterprise. At Bosworth Richard III had wondered if there were not two Richmonds in the field, but from 1952 to 1965 an observer might have been pardoned for thinking that there were even more Finbergs in the field. The 'Bibliography' shows that it was the period in which he consolidated his own reputation with his work on early charters; and it was the period when (drawing perhaps on his own observations of warfare between critical scholars and of warfare between academics and administrators) he set out to challenge the old assumption that in the Saxon invasions the victors had succeeded in annihilating the vanquished without trace. Finberg's own philosophy of local history placed little weight on the local discipline for 'illuminating' national history, a 'propaedeutic value', as he once dubbed it. "To treat it as an introduction to or a contribution to national history is to invert the true relationship between them." Yet in the historiography of the illumination of the so-called Dark Ages Finberg has assured immortality for the name of one rural Gloucestershire community, Withington.

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third of Finberg's universities, where he came in retirement to a humble but honourable part-time appointment. Since my own interest in the subject of petty medieval boroughs sprang from Finberg's earlier treatment of them in Devon and Gloucestershire, it was peculiarly fitting that his retirement from Leicester in 1965 should have coincided with a moment when I was far enough advanced in my study of medieval town plantation to see that a complete handlist of all medieval boroughs, organic and planted, would be a useful service to urban history; at that moment also I took on a stint of internal academic administration, and, in some measure of compensation for my diversion from research, the University of Leeds made funds available for some assistance in compiling this handlist: and so the Doctor of Oxford and the Emeritus of Leicester became Part-time Research Assistant of Leeds, *serviens servientium*.

Since this 'Appreciation' has now edged itself towards the border of personal involvement, I cannot resist pointing out that the strenuous bibliographer who seems to have pursued Herbert Finberg so zealously down the corridors of time has missed one contribution to our education that is worth mentioning because it relates to another Finbergian Objective and Pursuit, the enlivenment of provincial field work by critical examination of the cellars and tables of country inns. What is the missing reference? In the ceremonial dress of scholarly footnoting it would read, 'Raymond Postgate, ed., *The Good Food Guide, 1969-1970* (1969), p. 304, *sub* South Zeal, and see also p. 280'.

To get one's name as an approver into the footnotes of the *Good Food Guide* may seem as difficult as getting into *Who's Who*. What shall we say of a man who has succeeded not only in getting into the *Guide* twice but also in being directly quoted on the authenticity of an inn's claim to be 'twelfth-century'? It was, one must note, the historian's call of duty which clearly led H. P. R. F. to South Zeal, for is it not one of the petty medieval boroughs of Devon, with twenty burgesses *apud la Sele* in 1315?

On 25 September his hosts will acknowledge this service to the by-ways of local scholarship, for they intend to invite him to exercise this one of his many crafts, and to choose the wine for his celebration dinner.

M. W. BERESFORD

H. P. R. Finberg: A Bibliography

THIS bibliography includes all Professor Finberg's published writings, with the exception of book reviews, letters, etc., of less than one page in length.

Abbreviations: *AHR* Agricultural History Review
DCNQ Devonshire and Cornwall Notes and Queries
EHR English Historical Review
TDA Transactions of the Devonshire Association

1925

'Francis Thompson', *English Review*, xli, pp. 822-31.

Axel, by Jean Marie Matthias Philippe Auguste, Count de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, translated into English by H. P. R. Finberg, with a preface by William Butler Yeats, 296 pp. Edition limited to 500 copies. Jarrolds Publishers (London) Ltd.

1926

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1929

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1937

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1939

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1941

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1942

'The Cartulary of Tavistock', *DCNQ*, xxii, pp. 55-61.

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'Bounds of the Devon Stannaries', *ibid.*, pp. 121-3.

'Manumissions by Ordgar', *ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

1943

'The House of Ordgar and the Foundation of Tavistock Abbey', *EHR*, lviii, pp. 190-201.

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1944

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 'The Bounds of Abbotsham', *ibid.*, pp. 201-2.
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1945

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1946

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1947

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 'St Michael's, Brentnor', *Tavistock Ruridecanal Magazine*, xxxviii.
 'The Devon-Cornwall Boundary', *DCNQ*, xxiii, pp. 104-7.
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 'The Borough of Tavistock: its Origin and Early History', *TDA*, lxxix, pp. 129-53. Reprinted in *Devonshire Studies*, 1952, and *West-Country Historical Studies*, 1969.

1948

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1949

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1950

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1951

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1952

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1953

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1954

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1955

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1958

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