

MICHAEL HICKS: AN APPRECIATION

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This collection of essays, put together in honour of Michael Hicks, well reflects his geographical compass, since the contributions range from Yorkshire in the north to Southampton in the south, and from Wales in the west to Suffolk in the east. These essays also reflect Michael's focus on the fifteenth century and on the nobility: here we have Edward IV (who was but a nobleman with a crown), together with scions of the families of Berkeley, Neville and Stafford to represent their peers. Missing from this collection is any essay focussing on Richard III, who must surely have absorbed much of Michael's attention. But what is not reflected here, and indeed could not be, is Michael's extraordinary output.

One way of assessing Michael's contribution to historical studies might be to consider his entry in the *Bibliography of British and Irish History*. Here Michael is recorded as having published seventy-five books or articles between 1977 and 2013 – that is more than two a year – and many of these items are substantial pieces of work, not mere scraps thrown to keep our Research Excellence Framework masters at bay.¹ The *Bibliography*, however, goes beyond simply listing published works: it also provides an 'author profile' which is highly schematic but still of some interest. All the publications by a particular author are subjected to analysis in a variety of ways. A colourful pie chart demonstrates that 91% of Michael's publications related to English history, 4% related to Europe and the remaining 5% covered Britain, Wales, the Channel Islands and Scotland. Another pie chart categorises publications according to their 'discipline'. Here 32% of Michael's work is classed as 'political, administrative and legal' history, 21% as 'social history'; 'religious history' and 'events' (presumably specific battles etc.) secure 10% each, and 7% is assessed as 'economic history'. The remaining 20% of Michael's output was divided between military, medical and intellectual history, sources and historiography. Yet another pie chart reveals that 50% of his output has appeared in a remarkably wide range of scholarly journals, chief among them the *English Historical Review* and *Historical Research*. These statistics and pie charts are, of course, very blunt instruments to use in assessing Michael's outstanding contribution to the study of medieval history in England in the last forty years. But the final pie chart, entitled 'Persons Covered', does reveal

¹ It should be noted, however, that although the *Bibliography* is a magnificent piece of work it can make mistakes. Michael is credited with a publication listing the Manuscript Resources of the Friends' Libraries published in Philadelphia in 1960. At that time Michael would have been twelve years old and, prodigy as he is, he is unlikely to have been surveying manuscripts in libraries, let alone American libraries, before he entered his teens.

clearly the most striking characteristic of Michael's work: his focus on biography. Here the pie chart turns into a spinning pinwheel of colours: thirty different people or families have attracted Michael's historical analysis and these are only the books or articles which focus on particular people, or have a person's name in the title. Not surprisingly Richard III and Edward IV head the chart. In addition to these 'persons' recorded in the 'author profile', in 1991 Michael produced *Who's Who in Late Medieval England, 1272–1485*, which provided very many succinct biographies of famous people of the period, and he also contributed thirty-three biographies to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: biographies which ranged from fifteenth-century queens and nobles to sixteenth-century scholars such as Sir Anthony Ashley (translator of the *Mariners Mirrour*) and John Speed, an eighteenth-century physician and antiquary who lived in Southampton.

Michael himself acknowledged in the Introduction which he wrote for the volume of his collected essays, published in 1990 as *Richard III and his Rivals: Magnates and their Motives in the Wars of the Roses*, that he had a 'natural biographical bent'. In this analysis of his work up to that date (where he incidentally laments his lack of time for his own research, yet had been able to produce twenty-three books or articles in thirteen years...), he traces his evolution from his hard-nosed assessment of magnate motivation (self-interest, self-aggrandisement and financial gain), inspired by the methodology and outlook of K.B. McFarlane, to a more nuanced interpretation of magnate motives and priorities. It was the study of the wills and chantry foundations of the Hungerford family which led him to accept that fifteenth-century nobles (especially the female ones, perhaps) did indeed have personalities, preferences and pious concerns. Reading the Hungerford chantry deeds provided him with an unexpected experience like that of St. Paul on the road to Damascus (not Michael's analogy!): he abandoned his earlier view of a cynical and self-seeking world and was drawn instead to consider the idealistic element in late medieval English politics.

Yet although Michael may, in the course of his researches, have largely abandoned McFarlane's cynical view of the motivation of the men and women of fifteenth-century England, he has always retained McFarlane's insistent focus on the archival underpinning necessary for a convincing study of the people of this period, and he has been assiduous in his search for new archival sources. This commitment to reading the archives and manuscript sources he will have imbibed from his tutor at Bristol, Charles Ross, from T.B. Pugh at Southampton where he completed his M.A., and from C.A.J. Armstrong at Oxford who supervised his doctorate. Moreover, his time working on the *Victoria County History* for Middlesex (1974–8) inevitably exposed Michael to yet further record sources. This focus on the archives, whether manorial documents or chantry certificates, has been extended to include the complex history of chronicles such as the Crowland chronicle and the somewhat unappealing family histories and genealogical rolls commissioned by English aristocratic families in the fifteenth century and later. Michael's interests and scholarship certainly embrace the antiquarian writers of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, in recent years he has turned his attention to the *Inquisitions Post Mortem*, a rich source of information about the households and landowning of those who held in chief of the king, and by promoting and encouraging collaboration between the University of Winchester and the department of Digital Humanities at King's College London he has overseen a

major research project dedicated to the online publication of the inquisitions, entitled *Mapping the Medieval Countryside*.

This focus on Michael's prodigious output and range of scholarly interests has so far ignored his unselfish work in many aspects of the historical field. He has been reviews editor for the journal *Southern History* for many years; he has written numerous book reviews himself; and three of the fifteenth-century conferences have been organised by him – at King Alfred's College, Winchester, in 1987, Southampton in 1999, and again at Winchester, now a University, in 2012. He took on the task of editing the papers given at the first two of these conferences (published as *Profit, Piety and the Professions* and *Revolution and Consumption*), helping younger scholars to revise their articles in an appropriate form for publication. Through teaching successive generations of students he has encouraged them to develop into confident and able historians. His relentless published output might suggest that he cuts corners, or shirks distracting administrative tasks, but this can never be said of him. Michael is generous to the young scholars whom he teaches and to the old nobility whom he studies. It is in response to this generosity of spirit, and as an acknowledgement of Michael's great contribution to the study of fifteenth-century England, that this volume has been compiled by his colleagues, friends and students.

