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With Pen in Hand, It's into the Archives for Me.

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I have seldom followed a straight road in my writings on history. Rather, I have wandered where my interests at the time led me, leading a military history friend to urge that I concentrate my forces. The one constant in my working life has been an abiding interest in diplomacy. From the research and writing of my doctoral thesis until now, I have written about many types of diplomacy over many centuries, and the interactions over boundaries of people, institutions and states remain central to my research and writing.

I am drafting this essay whilst sitting in my home near Oxford, England. The coronavirus is accelerating here (March 2020) and we do not know what is going to happen. But at least my husband and I live in a village in the South Oxfordshire countryside and can sometimes, although not very often, order our groceries online or visit the local farm shop which has a butcher selling cuts of their own beef and lamb. We have plenty of food, wine, books, and each other. But there's nothing we can do about the situation but to 'self-isolate' and wait to see if either of us develops a fever and/or a dry cough.

All of this makes me muse as to how I ended up in England, when I was born and grew up in California, and how my subsequent walking in two cultures encouraged my work in the history of Anglo-American relations. I was born, the eldest of six, in a small town where my father had also been born; my family had homesteaded in the nineteenth century, and we are fifth generation Californians. We grew up near the Sierra Nevada Mountains on a ranch with over two hundred acres of vines, as well as peaches, plums, nectarines, oranges, dogs, and children; I grew up picking grapes, tying vines, and occasionally driving tractor. (Fortunately, I was too short to pick tree fruit.) These experiences provided the background to a second, semi-professional, career in wine a number of years in the future.

In my primary and secondary school years, I always enjoyed the history classes most of all, and when I asked my father what I should major in at college, he replied that 'You've always seemed to like history'. We had maps on the dining room walls, and my father and I tramped over Civil War battlefields on occasional visits to my mother's family back east. At the age of seventeen, during a very hot summer, I came across—heaven knows how—Harold Nicolson's *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity, 1812-1822*,¹ and immediately I knew the type of history that I preferred: diplomatic history, military history, state against state. I realise that for many colleagues, this is irremediably old-fashioned, but I hold to my heart the assertion of my D.Phil. supervisor at Oxford, A.J.P. Taylor: "Mr. G.M. Young once dismissed diplomatic history as 'what one clerk said to another clerk,' and the details of diplomatic history do indeed seem of irremediable triviality; but, in fact,

¹ Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity, 1812-1822* (London: Constable & Co., 1946).

diplomatic history deals with the greatest of themes—with the relations of States, with peace and war, with the existence and destruction of communities and civilisations.”²

When I went up to Berkeley in 1966, after whiling away some time at two other institutions, I walked straight into a political situation that was wholly new to me. The Free Speech movement, which began in December 1964 against university attempts to prevent political activity near to the campus, but which was considerably more complex than that, was no longer the protest umbrella, but the atmosphere remained. My family was not well-off, and I worked for twenty hours a week during term and forty hours a week during the holidays. This was doing work that does not exist nowadays: I operated a computer that used punch cards that you were not to fold, spindle, or mutilate, for a longitudinal research project on alcoholism. Indeed, IBM told those carrying out this project that when we were finished with it, the computer was going into their museum. (I never knew if this was a joke.) I would finish my work just before 2 pm and walk over to the university, sometimes walking into a dispersing cloud of tear gas. If caught in the middle of it, I would stumble out of the gate into Telegraph Avenue, where shops would bring out buckets of water and paper towels; you took a towel, dunked it into water and covered your nose. For a minor asthmatic, this was not the most comfortable place to be.

For my first two years at Berkeley, I studied as much diplomatic history (as it was then still called), both European and American, as was available. However, I began to wonder whether I needed a theoretical underpinning, as it were. I got permission from my slightly doubtful history adviser to do a double major in history and political science and soon enrolled in a series of courses on IR with some notable professors. Sadly, this approach and I did not get along. It seemed to me then that they tended to cherry-pick from history to support whatever theory they had come up with, and although divisive bloc theory was interesting to read about, I failed to find it more useful in my work than reading primary sources. (I am no longer quite so adamant.) I was ineluctably drawn back to history, and for the rest of my political science period, I enjoyed myself with courses on legislative politics and constitutional law.

Studying the latter partly arose from my third-year historiographical seminar on the origins of the First World War, when I had a slight swerve away from history. Our tutor one day asked the fourteen of us in this seminar (I was the only woman, for what that's worth) what career or academic pursuit we planned to follow. I said history, whilst the other thirteen said law school; at the height of the Vietnam war, when educational deferments were available, this was, I suspect, not unusual. What it did to me was to make me wonder whether I, too, should go into law, and thus the following year I took the constitutional history course. This consisted of our reading sixty Supreme Court opinions and then listening to some brilliant lectures. The dawning realisation that my preferred part of the course was reading the hypotheticals convinced me that history was my intellectual and, I hoped, future academic home.

The summer after my graduation I got a scholarship to go to an Oxford University summer school for which I would receive six graduate school credits transferable back home, where I expected to go to Stanford. The school that summer concentrated on seventeenth-century British history, a topic about which, it is fair to say, I knew very little. It was run on Oxford lines, in that each of us went to two tutorials a week, for each one of which you wrote an essay and then faced your tutor by yourself, reading out your essay and then discussing it for an hour. I was apprehensive at first, but I loved it, and the day before the school finished, I took my courage in my hands and pulled on the robe of Betty Kemp, the Vice-Principal of St Hugh's College, who was running the summer school, and told her that I wanted to come back as a proper student. She told me to come and see her before I left, and I went off for six weeks, travelling around England by bus and by thumb, and showed up back at St Hugh's the day before I was due to fly back by Icelandic Airways, then the cheapest mode of travel over the Atlantic. I went to see her, hair in long braids, backpack on my back and holes in my shoes. I had what I thought was a two-hour chat with Miss Kemp and the two other history Fellows at the College but now know was an interview, and as I left, she told me that her hat was in the ring for me and to go home and apply. I did so, and then rather forgot about it—Oxford then had a golden glow about it, and how could I think that I could possibly get in?

² A.J.P. Taylor, "Diplomatic History," *Manchester Guardian*, 23 May 1939. G.M. Young was a British historian from the first half of the twentieth century who wrote on the Victorian period, e.g., *Portrait of an Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

Then came the letter in January which totally transformed my life: I was offered an undergraduate place at St Hugh's. The letter also included a reading list, from which I was to read as many volumes as possible. I was by then working forty hours a week, but I managed to read thirty-four of the books—the number is seared into my brain—which included a two-volume work on English law before Edward I by Pollock and Maitland.³ I at least now had some idea of what I would be required to do at Oxford.

When I arrived, I was told what I was to undertake. Although I had wanted to do research in English history, I had been offered an undergraduate place. This was because, I was correctly informed, I did not know anything about it. Therefore, I had to do yet another undergraduate degree first in order to overcome my ignorance. I was to be a BA Senior Status student, a category for those who had already completed an undergraduate degree elsewhere; what it meant was that I was to do the entire Oxford three-year degree course, but to do it in two years. That this was going to be challenging was made clear to me when I was given my first mediaeval history essay topic the weekend that I arrived, with the essay to be read to my tutor, Susan Wood at St Hugh's, in a week's time: 'What was left of Roman Britain in Anglo-Saxon England?' I had a number of first-rate tutors: James Campbell for later mediaeval history, Robert Beddard for early modern—he had been one of my tutors for the summer school and I asked to have him again - John Roberts for modern European history, and David Fieldhouse and Freddie Madden for British and Imperial constitutional history. Fortunately, my degree was good enough for me to be accepted as a postgraduate (British term for a graduate student). I had already discussed this with one of my tutors, Martin Gilbert, who had been my Special Subject tutor for the examination on "Great Britain and the Making of the Ententes, 1898-1907." (Gilbert wrote the final six volumes of an eight-volume biography of Winston Churchill and many other books.) I knew that I wanted to write on Anglo-American relations, and Gilbert reeled off a series of suggestions; he also agreed to become my D.Phil. supervisor. I then went back to California.

During the summer, I received a letter telling me that Gilbert was not to be my supervisor; rather it was to be the Chichele Professor of the History of War, N.H. (Norman) Gibbs. This was disappointing, not least because I did not foresee my future as that of a military historian. However, when I returned to Oxford in the autumn, I went to meet Professor Gibbs, and he told me, regretfully he said, that his load was already too heavy, and would I mind being supervised by A.J.P. Taylor instead? Would I?! Younger colleagues should know that a generation ago in the diplomatic history field, that was akin to being supervised by God. I found out later that it was Betty Kemp, who had been both my modern English history tutor and my Moral Tutor⁴ at St Hugh's and was an old friend of Taylor's, who had engineered this, on the grounds (she later told me) that Taylor would be of much greater use to me in the future than Gilbert. I suspect that she meant that when it came time for references, his writing letters on my behalf would at least get me looked at amongst the slew of applications. After that, of course, it would be up to me.

New postgraduates at Oxford were required first of all to spend a year reading in the Bodleian Library before suggesting a thesis topic to their supervisors. One of the topics Gilbert had mentioned was British missions to the U.S. during the First World War—no one knew what they all were nor how many there were nor what they all did. The idea of tilling truly virgin soil appealed to me, and as I read masses of books on the war looking for names of members of missions or of the missions themselves, I kept a list. After two months I had sixty names, and I decided that there was enough material for a thesis. In due course I trotted along to A.J.P. and told him what I wanted to do, and he told me to go see what I could find. Only after I had completed the thesis four years later did he tell me that, because it had been such a good topic but that no one had done it, a possible explanation was that there was not enough material available. Sixty sets of papers from both British and American archives later, I had proved him wrong.

³ F. Pollock and F.W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969 [1st ed. pub. 1895]).

⁴ The Moral Tutor at Oxford colleges was both your academic tutor, who helped you to decide upon your courses, and your tutors, and who read to you the reports from your tutors each term, and your personal tutor, who dealt with any personal problems. A student kept the same personal tutor for the entire 3-year degree (or for four years if you were reading classics).

A.J.P. as a supervisor took a detached but kindly interest in my work; I saw him about once a term. He could have crushed me with a sentence, but, I decided, he was the sort of man who, in earlier times, would have been kind to the servants. (I should add that, when he had you to dinner at his house, he always insisted that he alone would do the washing-up and then disappeared into the kitchen.) I myself was, I suspect, an ideal postgraduate: I was so in awe of him that, after he had asked me what I planned to do next and I had told him, I researched, I wrote and revised and polished, and then handed in not my first or second or third draft but my penultimate one. When he handed back my second chapter, he said ‘it’s grand,’ and I felt that I had been validated as an historian. Undoubtedly his approbation boosted my self-confidence.

During much of my academic career, historian colleagues in the UK and Europe have asked about Taylor’s influence on me. Mentor is too strong a word: Taylor himself preferred individuals and did not encourage a school. But influence there must have been. Power, he believed, was central in international relations. Economic power was crucial, because, at the very least, without it a state could not become a military power, and without military power a state could not become a Great Power. My own riff on this, which I set out in my first monograph, was that such a state required two things: resources and the will to power.⁵ But Taylor also believed strongly in the importance of chance and contingency, and that reaction could be as important as action. This I also believe. Consider the strong impact on Prime Minister Anthony Eden in the run-up to and during the 1956 Suez Crisis of a botched gall bladder operation and the medicines that he had to take. Certainly, important officials in the Foreign Office thought that he had become hysterical and unbalanced. The Scottish poet Robert Burns said it all:

The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men

Gang aft agley.⁶

I had won a scholarship for my first year as an Oxford undergraduate, but for the rest of the time I subsisted on some money from home—one of my sisters later told me that the family had eaten a lot of beans—but that was not enough. College helped me by convincing the Home Office not to require the Overseas Student fee; I was saved this until my final D.Phil. year, when they insisted that I had to pay at least one year’s fee. Otherwise, I worked under the radar, because foreigners were forbidden to work. I babysat, I proofread manuscripts, I worked at a private tutorial establishment (called a crammer) for 16 hours a week, and I researched in archives around the country for the Principal of my College to find the material for her family history. I also took out a student loan from the Bank of America, which seemed to consider Oxford as part of the American university system. Things became much better when I won a one-year Tutorial Fellowship at the University of Dundee in Scotland to teach seminars on European and British history from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. At the end of the year, Dundee decided to renew it for another year, but I had been called for interview for the Rhodes Research Fellowship for North America and the Caribbean and was awarded it. This gave me another three years at Oxford, during which I was able to publish three substantial articles and work on putting together a book of essays.⁷ I continued paid scholarly work on the side because the Bank of America now required that I pay back my student loan, thereby taking one-third of my Fellowship salary each month.

⁵ *Britain, America and the Sinews of War 1914-1918* (London and Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 220-21.

⁶ Robert Burns, “To a Mouse On Turning her up in her Nest, With the Plough, November 1785.” Chance did not preclude the importance of more impersonal forces.

⁷ Kathleen Burk, “Great Britain in the United States, 1917-1918: The Turning Point,” *The International History Review* 1:2 (April 1979), 228-245; Burk, “The Diplomacy of Finance: British Financial Missions to the United States, 1914-1918,” *Historical Journal* XXII:2 (June 1979), 351-372; Burk, “J.M. Keynes and the Exchange Rate Crisis of July 1917,” *The Economic History Review*, Second Series XXXII:3 (August 1979), 405-416. The book of essays was Burk, ed., *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government 1914-1919* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), to which I contributed one of the essays: “The Treasury: From Impotence to Power,” 84-107.

I then had a great stroke of luck. My thesis had been entitled “British War Missions to the United States 1914-1918,” and I had become very interested in the financial missions. Indeed, by 1918 I could track practically day by day the passing of the international financial dominance of sterling to that of the dollar. Of particular interest were the activities of bankers, particularly those of J.P. Morgan in New York and of the British branch, Morgan Grenfell. Morgan’s became the British Financial Agent for the British government when it began to purchase munitions in the U.S. in 1914. The husband of my closest friend at Oxford was a banker at Morgan Grenfell, and he suggested that perhaps I might like to come and look at their papers from the First World War, where I might find something interesting. I did. It turned out that Morgan’s had been allowed to use their own private code, a code which was sometimes also used by the War Department because the official government coded transmissions often took too long, and that none of these papers seemed to be in the Public Record Office. Uniting the work that I had done for the thesis with all of the new Morgan material enabled me to publish my first monograph, *British War Missions to the United States 1914-1918* in 1985.⁸

Later that year, Morgan Grenfell decided that they wanted a company history and asked me to do it, proposing a fee. This came at an awkward time, because I had had a baby five months before, but I invited their representative to come out to my home in South Oxfordshire to talk about it. He was late, and the time came to breastfeed her. It was quite funny, watching him trying to avert his face as we discussed it. He asked me if I would do it for a fee which was £5,000 less than he had first proposed. At that point, I didn’t really care if I did it or not, so I said no. In due course, I received a formal letter inviting me to do it for the full fee. I made two conditions: one, that I would have full access to their papers and two, that it would be published by a reputable press, not a vanity press—I wanted it to be a proper book. They agreed, and Oxford University Press agreed to publish it.

Then came twenty-two months of intense work, beginning with a crash reading period on merchant (investment) banking history and continuing with long days of research, interviewing, and then writing. Morgan Grenfell wanted to publish it in 1988, to celebrate one hundred and fifty years of existence. One day in my office early that year, whilst I was dealing with the Press’ copyediting queries, my Morgan contact came to my office to tell me that the bank had decided not to publish the book: they were in the midst of a scandal and an existential crisis—the Bank of England had threatened to withdraw their banking license if the chairman and the chief executive did not resign that very day - and decided that they wanted no publicity of any kind. I was devastated. What would happen to my academic reputation with no publications to show since the book in 1985?

I soon decided that I would publish an article carved out of the book on the nationalisation of the British steel companies by the Labour government in 1949 and their de-nationalisation by the Conservatives in 1951. I had not had time whilst writing the book to look at the papers of any of the steel companies, and I decided to do so. I found a very useful cache of papers which, combined with the Morgan Grenfell and government material that I had already collected, was too rich for a mere article, and instead I wrote a short book. It was published in late 1988, the year in which the Morgan Grenfell book had been scheduled for publication. At that time, the Conservative Thatcher government decided to carry out its own policy of denationalisation: the industry had been nationalised in 1949, denationalised in 1951, renationalised by the Labour government in 1967, and re-denationalised by the Conservatives, who called the process privatisation. My book was published in the midst of all of this, and thus I called it *The First Privatisation: The Politicians, the City and the Denationalisation of Steel*, thereby ensuring a decent number of reviews and a long extract in one of the major newspapers.⁹ Early the following year, I heard on the grapevine that a former employee of Morgan’s was writing his own history, called, suggestively, *The Fall of Lucifer*. I went to the new chairman of the bank, told him what I had learned, and suggested that my

⁸ Burk, *British War Missions to the United States 1914-1918* (London and Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1985).

⁹ Burk, *The First Privatisation: The Politicians, the City and the Denationalisation of Steel* (London: The Historians’ Press, 1988). The newspaper was *The Daily Telegraph*. The City was the City of London, the financial centre of the UK.

own book be published as quickly as possible, so that it would land in the bookshops first. They agreed, and that year *Morgan Grenfell 1838-1988: The Biography of a Merchant Bank*¹⁰ was finally published.

Thanks to these three books, I was perceived as an economic historian. I found this irritating, because, although by this point I had established myself in a small way as a financial and a banking historian, I was neither: I was, I insisted, a diplomatic historian. What I really liked was the use of finance as a weapon in foreign policy. Nevertheless, I continued to respond to invitations to speak or write or review in the history and politics of the City of London. I myself organised a 'witness seminar' or oral history seminar made up of participants in the growth of the Eurobond market in London; I also gave the introductory papers in similar sessions on the 1967 devaluation of the pound and the 1976 IMF crisis. The crisis referred to the period when Britain's financial position was such that it applied to the IMF for help, and the US tried to use the IMF as a surrogate to force changes in British policies. These led to my next book. A participant in the latter two seminars was Sir Alec Cairncross, who had been Head of the Government Economic Service. After the IMF crisis seminar, he telephoned me to suggest that we write a book together on the subject: I would write the three chapters on the domestic and international politics involved and Alec would write the three on the economics. I enjoyed this tremendously.

This was my first venture into history so contemporary that no UK government papers at all were open, and the only American ones were some of those in the President Gerald Ford collections at the eponymous Library. I had to rely rather on newspapers, early books, primarily by journalists and politicians, and lots of interviews in the U.S, the UK and Germany. In the US I had some rather candid interviews with members of the IMF mission to the UK and former members of the Bank of England as well as with a man who still worked in the New York Federal Reserve Bank. In the UK I spoke with a number of politicians and officials involved, not least those close to Prime Ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, including a disgruntled former senior Treasury official. It was the occasion of my interviews in Germany that brought home to me the importance of luck in research.

I had travelled to Frankfurt to interview the Governor of the Bundesbank, Dr Otto Pöhl, who had been the German sherpa (as he described it) dealing with these events. We had a very good session, and when we came to the end, he suggested that we go and speak to the director of the international desk. I could only pity this poor man: he had no idea who I was, nor had he had any advance notice that I would be thrust into his office. I told him what I was interested in, he said that he could not help, and, to cover an embarrassing pause, I asked him to recommend a restaurant for lunch. I went directly to it. I had been there for about ten minutes when a voice announced that Dr. Kathleen Burk was wanted on the telephone by the Bundesbank, a public announcement which did me no harm with the waiters. I was to come back after lunch. When I arrived there, I went to the international director's office, and he told me that he had opened a large cupboard, finding therein several rows of binders containing the papers on the crisis and its aftermath. We selected the most relevant and, under the guise of an interview, I recorded his summaries of many of the documents. They had never been used before, and their use revealed a whole new dimension of the crisis. Writers in Great Britain had treated it primarily as a domestic or as an Anglo-American crisis: Alec and I in our book made it clear that the ramifications spread more widely than had heretofore been realised.¹¹

This book had been suggested to me, and my next one was as well. This was a biography of A.J.P. Taylor, who had died in 1990—after, I might add, having had three *Festschriften* dedicated to him; he had also published his *A Personal History*.¹² It was unclear to me why the publishers thought that the world was crying out for this biography, but I agreed to think about it (they did not know that I had been his research student). Soon afterwards, when I was on the train to London to see the

¹⁰ Burk, *Morgan Grenfell 1838-1988: The Biography of a Merchant Bank* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Burk and Alec Cairncross, *"Goodbye, Great Britain": The 1976 IMF Crisis* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹² A.J.P. Taylor, *A Personal History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983).

publisher, I was reading an offprint of Taylor's essay "Accident Prone, or What Happened Next," published in the *Journal of Modern History* in 1977 in an issue dedicated to Taylor. I came across his comment that "Every historian, I think, should write a biography, if only to learn how different it is from writing history. Men become more important than events, as I suppose they must be. I prefer writing history all the same."¹³ Uncannily, I felt that A.J.P. had pointed at me, analogous to the scenes in books and films where an uncertain person goes to the Bible and points at a verse to find out what to do. This, plus the realisation that it would require me to survey the field in which both A.J.P. and I had worked, convinced me to take it on, and I signed the contract.

Researching and writing the book took rather longer than the publisher would have liked. In 1990, when I agreed to write the book, I also moved from Imperial College, part of the London University system and which saw itself as the UK's MIT, to University College London. Oxford, Cambridge, and London were referred to as the 'golden triangle', and I was thrown into a very stimulating environment, but one which vastly increased my teaching and administrative load. I continued to publish some substantial articles and essays and one co-authored book,¹⁴ but the time that was needed to travel to the U.S. for research in a number of archives as well as in the UK was vastly reduced. My publisher lost patience and said that they were cancelling the contract. I pointed out the amount of research that I had put into the project already, and suggested that he wait for the first chapter, which I soon sent to him. His response was that it was not commercial enough (it was partly a trade press) and confirmed the cancellation. I was effectively out in the street yet again.

What to do? I could not rapidly rescue myself with another book, as I had done in 1988. My first task was to complete the book. Then at a conference at the Institute of Historical Research in London, I ran into an old friend, Robert Baldock, the editor of my first two books and now the head of Yale University Press in London, and told him what had happened. He asked me if the book was any good. I thought a moment and replied that yes, it was—it was the sort of book that I myself would like to read. His answer was, "I'll publish it." The book, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor*, was published in 2000.¹⁵ This was followed over the months by a number of requests to write various biographies, all of which I refused. I had followed Taylor's injunction to write one, and that was enough for me. After all, who could really know the inwardness of a person's heart and mind?

One book which I had mused about writing was a book on the Marshall Plan. In 1984, I had spent two months researching at the Truman Presidential Library, working all day and spending evenings with other historians in my boarding house watching the Olympics. Coincidentally on that research trip, I discovered that I was pregnant. The following year, a week before my due date, I waddled down the High Street in Oxford to All Souls College, where I gave a paper on the Marshall Plan to an audience which included Oliver Franks. My daughter spent this period leaping about in my womb; Alec Cairncross's wife could see this and grinned at me. For a month after her birth, I struggled to turn my paper into a

¹³ A.J.P. Taylor, "Accident Prone, or What Happened Next," *Journal of Modern History* 49:1 (March 1977).

¹⁴ Burk, "The House of Morgan in Financial Diplomacy 1920-1930," in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., *The Struggle for Supremacy: Aspects of Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 125-157; Burk, "The Lineaments of Foreign Policy: The United States and a "New World Order" 1919-1939," *Journal of American Studies* 26:3 (November 1992): 377-392; Burk, "The Americans, the Germans and the British: The 1976 IMF Crisis," *Twentieth Century British History* 5:3 (November 1994): 351-369; and Burk, "American Foreign Economic Policy and Lend-Lease," in Ann Lane and Howard Temperley, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the Grand Alliance 1941-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 43-68. The book was Burk and Manfred Pohl, *Die Deutsche Bank in London 1873-1998* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1998) and in English as *Deutsche Bank in London 1873-1998*.

¹⁵ Burk, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

publishable essay for one of the *Festschriften* devoted to A.J.P., which was to be published later that year; fortunately, I managed it, scraping under the deadline wire.¹⁶

I continued my interest in the Marshall Plan over the following years, spending twenty years teaching a documents-based Special Subject with individual units on all of the participating countries. In 2000 a journal which I had co-founded¹⁷ asked me to write a review article on the subject; of course I agreed, but it took rather more than a year to produce it: it was 13,000 words long and reviewed eleven books in three languages, including every separate contribution in each book of essays.¹⁸ (I dislike reviews of such books which look at only a few of the contributions, because I can easily imagine the feelings of those whose essays have been ignored.) I also revealed that I, too, wanted to write a book on the Marshall Plan, but that I wanted to write it from the European angle, not from the American. I had been struck by the fact that one of the two most distinguished books which had been earlier published on the subject had only two entries on Belgium in the index. If looking at the Plan from Europe, what becomes central are the attempts of the European countries to co-opt American political support and to resist American attempts to impose American ideas, sometimes methods, and occasionally informal control over the various countries. Alliances were formed and unity was forged, and the American government made the same discovery as had other countries over the centuries, which was that economic power does not always translate into diplomatic power. I talked to a publisher or two, but they wanted me to write a thick monograph; I, on the other hand, wanted to approach it as a slimmer ideas book. Not being able to agree, I put the idea aside.

At this point, my agent told me that a London trade publisher wanted to publish a series of short (40,000 words) history and politics books: did I have any suggestions? I replied that I wanted to write a history of Anglo-American relations, his reply was that it was too good an idea to waste on a small book, and he invited me to write a proposal. Several drafts later, we agreed on it and he sent it off to various publishers; we considered the offers, and I signed two contracts, one for the UK and one for the United States. Then I had to write the book.

Although my strengths had always been in political, diplomatic, and financial history, I did not want to limit myself to those categories. Rather, I wanted to write as complete a history of all aspects of the relationship as I could encompass in a single book. After a Prologue on looking westward which started with Homer, I began the narrative when, as Hakluyt wrote, “In the yere of our Lord 1497 John Cabot a Venetian and his sonne Sebastian (with an English fleet set out from Bristoll) discovered that land which no man before that time had attempted, on the 24 of June, about five of the clocke early in the morning.”¹⁹ I continued with writing about all of the thirteen English colonies that decided to revolt, beginning with their foundations and then their subsequent histories, and the Revolution; this was followed by the two countries’ turbulent relationship until after the Civil War. Then I changed tack. After reading more than seventy-five memoirs of British visitors travelling in the U.S. and several others detailing Americans travelling in the opposite direction,²⁰ I wrote a chapter on travellers’ tales: what were they looking for, what did they find? I then wrote a long chapter on everyday life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, looking at the economic relationship, literary relations, religious links, the links between British and American social reformers, and popular culture. This was followed by a long chapter on the turning of the tide between 1871 and 1945, after which I turned abruptly again, telling the story of Anglo-American marital relations. I finally

¹⁶ Burk, “Britain and the Marshall Plan,” in C.J. Wrigley, ed., *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 2010-2030.

¹⁷ *Contemporary European History*, published by Cambridge University Press, first issue 1992; I was co-editor 1989-2001.

¹⁸ Burk, “The Marshall Plan: Filling in Some of the Blanks,” *Contemporary European History* 10:2 (2001): 267-294. This has been by far my most frequently downloaded essay.

¹⁹ Irwin Blacker, ed., Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation* (New York: Viking Press, 1965 [1600]), 19-20, quotation on 19.

²⁰ Copies of many of them still take up a number of shelves in our library.

completed the book with the relationship after the Second World War, ending in March 2003, when the UK became a member of the US' 'coalition of the willing' in the Iraq War. The book, *Old World, New World: The Story of Britain and America*, was published in 2007 in the UK, and in the States, with a slightly different title, in 2008.²¹

My intention was to look at the arc of the relationship from when Great Britain was the supreme global power and the U.S. the inferior to the period when the positions were reversed. When and why and how had it happened? Power was central—economic power, military power, demographic power, the power of ideas and culture, the power of affection and hatred and envy, the close availability of natural resources, and the sheer disparities in size. These powers worked both ways at different times. This book was as close to total history as I am ever likely to write.

The research and writing of the book took seven years. This may not sound very long a time for that complex a book, but it was based as well on all of my research since Oxford, on the work required to teach Anglo-American relations for fifteen years, and on the myriad ways in which I had learned to navigate the highways and byways of British culture, whilst trying to keep up with the American. In other words, I had to feel that I walked confidently in both cultures before I could write such a book. I think that I did, and do, so. After all those years of researching, thinking, and writing about the subject, I had it in my bones, and I wanted to present my ideas to the public, although I was aware that they might not care. As for my two cultures: rather than making me feel that I am neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring, I feel very comfortable in my two skins.

Nevertheless, once I had finished the book, I was tired of working on Anglo-American relations, feeling that I had nothing further to say. I turned instead to the history of wine and its culture, on which I had already published a number of footnoted articles.²² Wine had been part of my life since my childhood, and by this time I had already sat three years of the wine trade's exams and developed something of a semi-professional career in wine. After an exchange of e-mails, a journalist friend and I decided to write a book of about fifty entries on all aspects of wine, including very short stories written by my friend, whilst I concentrated on topics such as the origins of wine, why people drink white wine too cold and red wine too hot, a short discussion of comet wine, and whether you really need a wine guru. This was great fun. I enjoyed the challenge of the required terseness as well as thinking up topics; I also enjoyed collaborating with a friend revelling in both wit and a free-floating brain. Who else would write an entry on Brussel sprouts wine? The book, *Is This Bottle Corked? The Secret Life of Wine*,²³ was published in 2009 in both the UK and the US and was short-listed for an international award for the wine book of the year.

Writing the wine book proved to be a useful interlude, after which my mind turned back to history. One of the reviewers of *Old World, New World* had made a comment that continued to niggle in my brain. In the midst of a very nice review, he had commented that one element that was missing was the imperial thread. My immediate reaction was, how long a book did he want to read? (It was already 830 pages long.) My second was, even so, I didn't want to do it. But once I had completed the wine book, I began to think about it. It was a daunting topic. I had gathered, perhaps wrongly, that the field of imperial history was a snake pit, and I could imagine that some historians would think that I lacked the requisite historical

²¹ Burk, *Old World, New World: The Story of Britain and America* (London: Little, Brown, 2007); in the US, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (New York: Atlantic Books, 2008).

²² Examples are Burk, "Colonial America, the Founding Fathers, and Wine," in *The World of Fine Wine* 3 (2004); "George Saintsbury: The Man and His Glass," in *The World of Fine Wine* 7 (2005); "André Simon, Connoisseur and Peasant," *The World of Fine Wine* 12 (2006); "Was Pliny the First Wine Critic?," *The World of Fine Wine* 21 (2008); "Edward Ward 1667-1731: Wine and the Grub Street Life," in *The Wayward Tendrils of the Vine* (2011), a journal for collectors of wine books; and a number of others, the latest being "Lubricating Diplomacy: The Uses of Wine," in *The World of Fine Wine* 62 (2018).

²³ Burk and Michael Bywater, *Is This Bottle Corked? The Secret Life of Wine* (London: Faber, 2009) and (New York: Harmony Books [Random House], 2009).

background. I approached two historians in the UK who were outstanding imperial historians, and asked them separately whether anyone had ever written a joint history of the two empires? The answer was, no, this had not been done, it should be done, and I should do it. I began.

I did not want to write the histories of the British and American empires. There were already enough histories of the British empire to sink a battleship, whilst even whether or not there was an American empire was a very live issue. What I was interested was, how did the two empires interact out on the periphery: were they in conflict, did they co-operate, how and why and to what extent? It seemed clear to me that there had been an American empire from the beginning of the Republic, and thus the book begins in 1783. I decided to concentrate on the areas where there was significant contact: the Canadian-American border, China, Japan, and the Middle East. Two of the topics posed significant challenges. The problem with the Canadian-American border was that for over a century, no one knew where it was, and I spent happy hours leaning over large maps spread out on my dining room table, trying to match up what the documents said and the sketch maps they contained with the maps in front of me. The Japanese chapter was my favourite. Compared to the cartloads of books written on China in the long nineteenth century, the writings in English on Japan were relatively sparse. I found myself tracking down English translations by diplomats of nineteenth century Japanese biographies of statesmen. And as a devotee of the films of Akira Kurosawa, I positively enjoyed reading and writing about the samurai 'way of the warrior.' But all good things must come to an end, and the book, *The Lion and the Eagle: The Interactions of the British and American Empires 1783-1972*, was published in 2018.²⁴

That might have been the end of my writing about international history and the beginning of a stronger focus on writing commissioned articles on wine. But as I did so I began to think again about historical problems that I still wanted to address. A constant sub-theme in my career has been state-controlled finance as a weapon in foreign policy. Furthermore, I was no longer satisfied with concentrating on twentieth-century history. Reading the works of A.J.P. Taylor again had reminded me how much I enjoy the Great Power periods of history, a predilection displayed in my previous two books on Anglo-American relations, one beginning in the late mediaeval/early modern period, the other in the eighteenth century. I have long said that in any next life I plan to be an ancient historian, or perhaps a mediaevalist. As a result, I am currently working on a book with a working title of 'Guns and Money,' which begins in the Renaissance and ends with the current conflict between the U.S. and China. There is nothing like biting off a huge chunk.

But why continue to write? Why not relax a bit and tackle the huge pile of books on my so-called recent accessions shelf, books of ancient history, the classics, philosophy, and odd books which caught my fancy? Why not stop missing plays and concerts because of deadlines? Why not indulge more in one of my great pleasures in life, which is giving Sunday lunches or Saturday dinners to friends which last for hours and include drinking a lot of very good wine? What is involved here is self-definition: not precisely 'I am an historian, therefore I am,' but something close. And fundamentally for me, although not for everyone, an historian is someone who writes history. I particularly enjoy having *written* a book, forgetting the slog involved in getting there. And, say it not to others, but once in a while I fear that ending my writing of original history might signal the winding down of my life. Besides, there's still too much to find out about and to think about and to write about to stop now.

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²⁴ Burk, *The Lion and the Eagle: The Interaction of the British and American Empires 1783-1972* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

A.J.P. Taylor (2000), *Old World, New World: Britain and America From the Beginning* (2007), and *The Lion and the Eagle: The Interaction of the British and American Empires 1783-1972* (2018). She was the co-founder and primary editor from 1989-2001 of the journal *Contemporary European History*, published by Cambridge University Press. She judges and writes widely on wine, including the book *Is This Bottle Corked? The Secret Life of Wine* (2009) with Michael Bywater, believing firmly that only wine provides the combination of being intellectually challenging and tasting so good.