Sidney Pollard (21 April 1925-22 November 1998)

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Sidney Pollard was a striking figure – a benign, bearded, tousle-haired patriarch in his latter years; reticent, gentle and soft-spoken but with an inner determination, sustained throughout his life, which belied his personal modesty. I suspect that many, not in Sheffield, who knew him over many years as a fellow academic (as I did) had little idea about the drama which brought him to England in 1938, aged 13, as a Jewish refugee from Vienna, leaving his parents to perish unrecorded in the Holocaust. He was equally reticent about his army service after 1943 in the Reconnaissance Corps during the campaign to free Western Europe.

Becoming an established scholar was, for Sidney Pollard, a triumph against adversity and an occasionally hostile environment. His early acclimatisation to an alien culture and language, bereft of family, started with agricultural training (he was destined for emigration and life as a Kibbutznik) – wholly unsympathetic to one who had enjoyed an early academic schooling and training in the violin in Vienna. He gained entry to LSE in 1947 after success in examinations based on correspondence courses. The economic history department (like the economics department) of LSE was then, on the whole deeply conservative (or 'Manchester liberal') with T S Ashton succeeding Tawney as professor and Eleanor Carus Wilson and A H John in senior posts. This was discordant with Sidney Pollard's deeply held radical and Marxist views (he was briefly a member of the Communist Party as a student) and he

found prejudice (not, I think, personally from T S Ashton) when needing references for an initial postgraduate scholarship (1949), having taken first class honours in his degree, and then for the first Knoop Research Fellowship at Sheffield University in 1950. By then his formidable intellectual ability and capacity for sustained hard work had been recognised, and so continued for the rest of his life. He joined the eminent radical tradition in British economic history, with G D H Cole, Maurice Dobb, Eric Hobsbawn, John Saville, Max Cole and others, making his convictions clear in his inaugural lecture as a professor in Sheffield in 1964 (the appropriate place for the affirmation of values). Commitment to a generalised Marxism was never so apparent in his main-line work in economic history, particularly in his later writings. The flow of his publications, both research monographs and wider studies, was not surpassed in his generation of economic historians for range or extent. He never compromised his academic standards and did not stint either his teaching or administrative obligations. He always made time for his students, who recognised their good fortune, and was seldom late for a dead-line. Great will-power, steady commitment, a sure sense of academic priorities and an established daily routine lay behind this large oeuvre, which continued until the last week of his life. Never was such academic achievement coupled with more personal modesty.

Sheffield became the focus of Sidney's work as research fellow and lecturer (1950-63), then as professor (1963-80) and in retirement (1990-98). He had spent 10 productive years as professor in Bielefeld (1980-90), having been frustrated by visa problems from taking a chair at Berkeley in 1971. Although he professed a personal sense of being without roots – his academic horizons were world-wide and he was welcomed as visiting professor in many countries – his work was firmly identified with the industrial culture which he found in Sheffield and from which he ranged more widely, but never abandoning local interests.

Four major themes predominated, labour history, industrialisation locally and in Britain; regional patterns of

industrialisation in Europe as a whole and a series of studies on the decline of Britain's industrial economy in the twentieth century. These form the 3-4 volumes of his collected papers being published by Variorum, of which he was able to prepare the first before his death. (*Labour History and the Labour Movement in Britain* (Variorum Collected Studies Series, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999), pp. XVI-313.

The subject of Sidney Pollard's PhD thesis was the British ship-building industry 1870-1914, completed within two years of taking his BA examinations in 1948 (this also being accelerated after entering LSE only in 1947). Publications based on this material came later because he at once identified with his new context in Sheffield, publishing various local industrial, labour and co-operative studies with a major monograph *The History of Labour in Sheffield* (1959). He then consolidated teaching material in a detailed text-book *The Development of the British Economy* (1962), from which his election to the newly established chair followed.

This set the pattern for future research and publishing strategy: detailed monograph, journal and conference-paper publications, subsequently consolidated in a broader study as the range of his work widened. His most important original insights into the operational requirements of eighteenth-century industrial firms (much wider in scope than its title revealed) came in 1965 with *The Genesis of Modern Management* which, to his lasting satisfaction, won the American Newcomen Society Prize for business history. Thereafter he concentrated on the two other major areas of interest, although he never abandoned a subject he had once mastered.

One essential message of his work on European industrialisation in the nineteenth century, summed up in *Peaceful Conquest* (1981) and *Marginal Europe* (1994) was that national economies were not the most appropriate units for understanding the dynamics of industrialisation, whether on the continent or in Britain. The study of regions, with much essential quantitative data concealed within national statistics, were the key – either regions within a single country (the North East, or Lancashire or Sheffield

etc. within England) or industrial regions spanning national frontiers, such as that based on the coalfield of Northern France and Belgium. The momentum from industrialisation, he maintained, sprang from a handful of such regions, if of differing sorts, and often they were, paradoxically, in origin amongst the poorest and outside the main political heartlands, if favoured by special resources or human skills.

Identifying with Sheffield and industrial Britain for most of his adult life, Sidney Pollard lamented Britain's decline as an industrial power, which he thought was more a consequence of mistaken policies than of some inherent inevitability (he acknowledged, of course, the need for continuing industrial transformation and resurgence). He saw the advantages which progressive modern industry could bring, if properly ordered. In *The Wasting of the British Economy* (1982) and *Britain's Prime and Britain's Decline* (1989), supported by many other publications, he inveighed against the false priorities, as he saw them, of supporting Britain's international financial and trading commitments – maintaining the value of sterling and a high exchange rate which required high interest rates and restrictive internal policies to the detriment of the 'productive' side of the economy which, he was convinced, centred on the prosperity of industry.

His introduction to a collection of articles on *The Gold Standard* (1970) put the case vigorously for contemporary as well as inter-war polices:

"Most men... attributed the golden age to the skill of the bankers rather than to its true source, the power of the British economy as a whole... Britain appeared to be turning into a rentier economy, and the City, in consequence enjoyed an undeserved respect. Fortunately the industrial power of Britain is by no means at an end, but the experience of the 1950's and 1960's is not designed to dispel the notion that, among those making economic policies, the rentier's or the banker's mentality, with its emphasis on restriction and stagnation, still holds sway." (pp. 25-6).

He argued this point several times in the national press.

Honours followed full international recognition of Sidney's academic status, coming after his retirement from the Sheffield chair: a Corresponding Fellowship of the British Academy (1988) – converted into the 'ordinary' (i.e. national) Fellowship following his return to residence in Britain: a festschrift in 1991 and an honorary doctorate in Sheffield in 1992. His personal life became more fulfilled after his second marriage in 1982, supported by the three children from his first marriage, and he found satisfaction in his re-integration in Sheffield (a move he had viewed with some apprehension) as emeritus professor. He remained active in music, walking, travel, the daily commitment to the *Times* crossword, as well as working academically to the end. Several chapters in books, written within the past year, have yet to appear, in addition to his collected papers.