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DOI:

[10.1080/13619462.2016.1162156](https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2016.1162156)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Citation for published version (APA):

Hutton, A. N. (2016). 'A Repository, a Switchboard, a Dynamo': H.L. Beales, a Historian in a Mass Media Age. *Contemporary British History*, 30(3), 407-426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2016.1162156>

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“A Repository, a Switchboard, a Dynamo”: H.L. Beales, a Historian in a Mass Media Age

Journal:	<i>Contemporary British History</i>
Manuscript ID:	FCBH-2015-0003
Manuscript Type:	Original Paper
Keywords:	Historiography, Social History, LSE, Adult Education, BBC, Penguin Books

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i. 'The Youth of Industrialism'

In March and April 1930, a series of radio debates were broadcast on the BBC entitled 'The Youth of Industrialism'. These talks discussed the ways in which Britain had changed since the Industrial Revolution.¹ The talks responded to the prominent historiographical debates on the costs and benefits Industrial Revolution of the late 1920s, between J.L. and Barbara Hammond and J.H. Clapham.² Each week, the two presenters took opposing lines on a particular issue:

[Lambert]: Industrialism had increased the amount of free-will, the amount of imagination and desire for progress in society.

[Beales]: My case against Industrialism is that it lowers the quality of life which is available for the people as a whole.³

Listeners were encouraged to respond to the broadcasts in wireless discussion groups, and write in voicing their opinions on the matter. After the first broadcast, 219 voted in favour of industrialism and 70 against.⁴ In each of the subsequent debates Beales and Lambert took opposing views on matters, such as protectionism, government intervention, and the idea of progress, taking the subject from its inception at the Industrial Revolution up to the present day.⁵

This paper is not an intellectual reconstruction of Beales: a historian who produced no great work, and whose impact on academic debates – aside from a paper arguing that the great agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century was a myth – was negligible.⁶ Though Beales found little in the way of honour as a historian, in the conventional academic sense of publication and preferment, his numerous interventions into peripheral areas of what might today be termed 'popular history' – the BBC, mass market paperback publishing, work as a leading figure within the adult education movement, and his immense influence as a teacher and supervisor – meant that he was one of the most significant, even influential, nineteenth-century historians of the mid twentieth century.

The career of H.L. Beales demonstrates the different ways in which historical knowledge diffused to a wider audience in the age of broadcast media and mass education. This overview refutes standard historiographical approaches which focus on ideas and control of academic networks of prestige as the primary means in which the British historical profession worked.⁷ Beales, who was congenitally averse to the labours of research, writing and departmental politics (staples of any academic career), was nonetheless a key proponent of the 'Engaged Tradition' of adult education, which sought to bring socially-committed education to the millions. Beales was instrumental in establishing the discipline of social

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3 history as a subject with an importance that stretched far beyond the university. For Beales,
4 as for many others during this period, studying the history of the Industrial Revolution was
5 vitally necessary for understanding the nature of contemporary society.
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8 9 10 **ii. Biographical Sketch up to 1945**

11 Hugh Lancelot Beales was born in 1889 in Sedbergh, North Yorkshire. He attended the
12 Kingswood School in Bath where he lost the Wesleyan faith of his father, a Methodist
13 minister and an unsuccessful Liberal candidate in the 1905 General Election.⁸ Beales retained
14 much of the dissenting spirit, infused with a caustic irony, that both commended or infuriated
15 him to colleagues. Much of the later friction between Beales and R.H. Tawney would come
16 from Beales' avowed, even belligerent, secularism. Beales suggested that it was Tawney's
17 deep dislike that ultimately cost him the chair in economic history at LSE.⁹ Beales initially
18 studied medieval history at Manchester under the renowned historian T.F. Tout. He served in
19 the First World War, refusing a commission. It was only after the war, coming to Sheffield
20 University in 1919, that he came to study the Industrial Revolution. His role there was
21 specifically created to teach mature returning soldiers and to teach extramural classes to
22 steelworkers in the area and it was from this that he gained his lifelong commitment to adult
23 education.¹⁰
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33 Beales joined LSE in 1926, at a time when the school boasted such luminaries as
34 Tawney, Eileen Power, L.T. Hobhouse, T.H. Marshall, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Morris
35 Ginsberg. Beales warmed to the intellectually convivial atmosphere of the School, 'where
36 there was no kind of barrier between humble lecturers like myself... There was a free
37 exchange of views and nobody cared whether you were orthodox... You lectured as you
38 like.'¹¹ Beales possessed an anti-authoritarian streak which opposed both disciplinary
39 specialization and academic hierarchy. In an era when the British historical profession was
40 still in its infancy, Beales welcomed porous disciplinary boundaries between historians,
41 economic historians, and sociologists who all studied the effects of the Industrial Revolution.
42 Beales was just as much at home with the famous LSE 'women historians', including Lilian
43 Knowles (whose lecture style he described alternately as 'controversial', 'picturesque' and
44 'brilliant'), Dorothy Marshall, and Eileen Power (whose grace and good nature managed to
45 reconcile the social and economic history factions within the department), as he was with
46 eminent Edwardian moralists turned academic sociologists.¹²
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56 1926 was also the year that the Economic History Society was founded. The society,
57 as initially conceived by W.J. Ashley and E.E. Lipson, was a broad-based organization which
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3 counted many schoolteachers and extramural tutors among its membership and which
4 strongly attempted to reconcile economic history and theory with the social context that
5 many, such as Beales, believed was essential to understanding economic change.¹³ However,
6 the society failed as a general non-academic organization, with membership far below that
7 predicted.¹⁴ The historiographical shift of the late 1920s, most fully-represented by
8 Clapham's criticisms of the Hammonds in his accomplished *Economic History of England*
9 (1926-39), led to economic history being defined as a subject based on empirical rigour over
10 any idealistic or emotive claims. It became increasingly independent from the form of social
11 history practised by the previous generation from Arnold Toynbee and William Cunningham
12 to Tawney and the Hammonds.¹⁵

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20 Beales fell between two interpretations of history at a moment in which economic and
21 social history were rapidly bifurcating. Beales taught at the LSE Economic History
22 department which, despite the Schools' wider turn towards systematic economics during the
23 1930s under Beveridge, Robbins, and Hayek¹⁶, was still committed to social history as the
24 primary means of understanding economic change. He was, like Laski, Ginsberg, and
25 Tawney, a committed member of the Labour Party, believing that the school should
26 contribute to forming the party's policies.¹⁷ The pre-war history department was indebted to
27 sociology: sharing both lecturers and students with the department. His great friends, Harold
28 Laski and T.H. Marshall, also taught history lectures. Sidney Webb was an occasional
29 attendee of Beales' weekly seminars.¹⁸

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36 Beales' lectures were famously wide-ranging and averse to economic 'facts'. The
37 economist and educational reformer Bernard Corry remembered a petition against Beales
38 after a lecture from economists demanding more rigour: 'I remember he came in the next
39 week and said, "I gather the economists want facts." And for an hour he read out statistics
40 and then he said, "That is the last bloody fact you are getting."'¹⁹ In Beales' own words:

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45 I began to realise the...unrealities of that specialisation. Therefore one of my main aims
46 was to make the basis of historical thinking not economic but social...Turning,
47 deliberately trying to establish the roots of all historical thinking in the social not the
48 economic field, why should we accept a particular doctrine of economic thinking as
49 having a validity over any other doctrine of economic thinking. I didn't feel in any
50 sense embarrassed by the determination to take economic history into the social...The
51 economists sort of regarded themselves as having the key to the universe, and they
52 hadn't. It was one reading among many, but nobody accepted that view. I did; I set my
53 face against it, and I suppose that was one of the reasons why I tried to establish a
54 social instead of an economic context for the developments that took place.²⁰

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58 Despite these reservations, Beales produced a number of significant articles for
59 *Economic History Review* and elsewhere on the subject of 'Historical Revisions'.²¹ However,
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3 he produced no academic monograph. A month before her death in 1940, Eileen Power wrote
4 to Beales: 'I simply can't carry on the [Economic History] review without some collaboration
5 from economic historians...if scholarship is at all worth keeping up in war time I do feel you
6 owe us a contribution.'²² When applying for Power's vacant chair in 1944, Beales' tried to
7 downplay his lack of publications, noting: 'I published nothing during this period. I did not
8 feel ready to write.'²³ His letter instead provided an outline of the two books he intended to
9 write: one on the intellectual and social background of the Industrial Revolution, and the
10 second on social policy from the early Victorians to the present. Unlike the Hammonds, the
11 Webbs, G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, or even Peter and Majorie Quennell (who all
12 wrote popular social history books during this period), Beales, for various reasons, could not
13 write at any length. Beales was an economic historian by association and by subject, required
14 to participate in an increasingly-specialized academic community that had grown up during
15 his time at LSE. However, his preferences as a historian lay in teaching the history of the
16 Industrial Revolution and nineteenth century social history to as broad an audience as
17 possible in an undogmatic manner.
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29 30 **iii. Adult Educator**

31 The two short books Beales produced, *The Industrial Revolution* (1928) and *Early English*
32 *Socialists* (1933), were introductory excursions rather than original work. They reflected his
33 belief in presenting a balanced view of the subjects covered. Both books were written
34 primarily for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Beales' articles in its journal,
35 *Highway*, were synoptic attempts to balance opposing viewpoints in academic literature, to
36 make them accessible to adult students, and to suggest a more consensual approach to
37 teaching the Industrial Revolution than existed in academic circles. In one article, he noted:
38 'It is easy to suggest that something in all these analyses is true. One must add that none
39 contains all the truth. No very modern history can ever, in view of the overwhelming masses
40 of material and the virtual impossibility of objective social history, be entirely satisfactory.'²⁴
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48 *The Industrial Revolution*, which Beales' obituarist in the *Times* claimed was as
49 influential on the adult education movement as Tawney's *Equality* and *Acquisitive Society*,
50 stressed that the Industrial Revolution could be taught in any number of different ways.²⁵ The
51 tutor did not necessarily need to preach the gospel of socialism or the evolution of the labour
52 movement to appeal to a working class audience but rather acquaint them with how the
53 system of contemporary industrial capitalism had developed over the previous hundred and
54 fifty years. Once acquainted with this, they could make up their own minds and decide for
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3 themselves what was to be done. For Beales, the period could not be taught by economic fact
4 alone but through a wide range of subjective experiences of industrialism, the perceived
5 quality of life for contemporary workers (whether or not overall prices were rising or falling),
6 and their responses to social and economic change.²⁶ Returning to produce a revised edition
7 thirty years after the original, Beales felt he was only required to preface the book with a
8 short historiographical essay on recent scholarship, and a quote from *Tristram Shandy*
9 highlighting the uncertain nature of the subject: 'The reader will be content to wait for a full
10 explanation of these matters till the next year – when a series of things will be laid open
11 which he little expects.'²⁷

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18 If Beales was equivocal when it came to historical judgment, this did not impair his
19 obvious qualities as a class tutor. John Allaway, who attended adult education classes in
20 social history and local government given by Beales at Sheffield, was drawn to the subject by
21 Beales' skills as a lecturer:
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25 Beales is a first-rate teacher... who can share easily and with all kinds of men his great
26 wealth of knowledge... His humanity and urbanity, as well as his scholarship, captured
27 my heart at once. As well as an eager listener to his lectures and an active participant in
28 class discussion, I became an avid reader of the books he recommended and an
29 industrious essay writer. The years I spent under him were an inspiration.²⁸

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31 With Beales' support, Allaway gained a place to study economics at Sheffield University. He
32 went on to become Professor of Education and Warden at Vaughan College, Leicester.²⁹
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34 On moving to London, Beales continued to work as a tutor and organizer. LSE at this
35 time taught many adult students at evening classes, which Beales took alongside a number of
36 extramural classes for the WEA. Beales refused to see any difference in either the subject or
37 level that he taught, replicating the content of his wide-ranging discourses for both
38 undergraduates and adult education students. Beales later confessed that he believed the latter
39 were better suited to the message than those who had had no contact with the world.³⁰ He was
40 a key member of the British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) which published *Highway*.
41 It was through work at this institution that he was to meet W.E. Williams, who later worked
42 with him as editor of Pelican Books. Beales was one of the many tutors and organizers of
43 adult education that the movement depended. His skills as a popular broadcast historian
44 stemmed from his years of experience teaching students who demanded interesting,
45 engaging, and accessible classes.
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54 Beales' conception of the Industrial Revolution as a foundational subject for the
55 movement, which must necessarily avoid the partisan controversy it so often attracted,
56 reflected the wider educational aims of the movement as a whole. Through his teaching, his
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3 articles, and his introduction to the subject, he indelibly shaped the teaching of the subject in
4 the movement for decades, bringing to it his characteristic openness and breadth of
5 understanding. In 1963, in a survey of adult education tutors at the University of Manchester.
6 One question asked them why they had entered the profession. Alongside a desire to teach
7 adults, commitments to various social philosophies, and a broad desire to carry out
8 meaningful social work, Beales was personally listed as a reason for becoming an adult
9 education tutor.³¹

16 **iv. Broadcast Historian: Beales at the BBC**

17 Beales' work at LSE and the BIAE drew him into the early years of radio broadcasting.
18 Remarking on his first broadcast talk, on the state of roads during the eighteenth century, he
19 noted putting something together drawn from the Webbs' *Story of the King's Highway* (1913)
20 and Daniel Defoe' *Tour Thro' the Whole of Great Britain* (1724-7): 'it seemed to suit them
21 because they asked me to go again from time to time.'³² Radio broadcasting paid the princely
22 sum of £1 per minute on air, with half again if the talk was republished in the *Listener*
23 magazine: at a time when Beales earned less than £500 per year as a lecturer, rising to £550
24 when he became a Reader in 1931. Aside from the innovatory talks on 'The Youth of
25 Industrialism', Beales spoke on a variety of subjects covering both historical and
26 contemporary social problems. He reviewed, among other things, John Strachey's *Theory and*
27 *Practise of Socialism* (1936) and George Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), which he
28 applauded for eschewing Marxist and economic interpretations of class-struggle. Beales
29 declared that 'Mr Orwell's subject is the human and cultural rather than the material results
30 of industrialism.'³³ Beales broadcast several talks in the BBC's Victorian Season, published as
31 *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians* (1949), in which he spoke on 'The Victorian Idea of Sex',
32 mischievously perpetuating the myth about Victorians covering table legs.³⁴

33 Beales' most important contact within the BBC was R.S. Lambert, head of the BBC's
34 adult service from 1926 and founding editor of *Listener* magazine from 1928-39.³⁵ Beales
35 met Lambert when the two were WEA tutors in Sheffield in the early 1920s and both
36 maintained a close relationship based on their appreciation of social history as the foundation
37 to contemporary social study. Beside the 'Youth of Industrialism' broadcasts, the two
38 collaborated on an important collection, *Memoirs of the Unemployed* (1934), which collected
39 the voices of the angry, dispirited and dispossessed of the Great Depression. The book
40 combined the social mission of adult education, the analytical sociological research of LSE,
41 with the social reportage of the BBC (the memoirs were originally collected for *Listener*).³⁶

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3 Crucially, the volume sought to shift focus on unemployment from the quantitative to the
4 qualitative, and to bring home to readers that these people had something to contribute to
5 society: 'These unemployed men and women are decent people. We are losing their help in
6 building up our common life. They, like ourselves, have it in them to add their quota to the
7 common stock. Are we bound to make them fruitless aliens in their own country?'³⁷

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11 With Lambert, who was a governor of the British Film Institution, Beales produced
12 the educational film, *A Medieval Village* (1935), designed as an aid to adult education
13 classes.³⁸ The film continued the idea of the links between the past and present by looking at
14 the Nottinghamshire village of Laxton, the only place in the country to have continued with
15 the Open Fields system. The agriculturalist and historian, C.S. Orwin, once remarked to
16 Beales that the film was the impetus of his book *The Open Fields* (1938), which devoted a
17 large part of the book to a study of Laxton.³⁹

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23 Beales' extensive work with the BBC throughout the 1920s and 1930s was a crucial
24 part of his notion that history should reach the broadest possible audience without diluting its
25 content. In this, he lived up to the ideas of the Reithian Spirit that broadcasting ought to
26 educate first and entertain second, combined with the socially-committed ideals that lay
27 behind the adult education movement.⁴⁰

32 33 **v. 'Chief Academic Pilot': Pelican Books**

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35 The audiences that Beales and others sought to reach were the intellectual elite of the
36 working and middle classes, generally deprived of higher education. They were precisely
37 those people to whom Allen Lane aimed Penguin Books at. Though Lane was an astute
38 businessman before mass educator, he decided in 1937 to launch the non-fiction imprint,
39 Pelican books.⁴¹ Lane appointed V. Krishna Menon as general editor, with Beales
40 subsequently brought onto the editorial board along with W.E. Williams and the Marxist
41 scientist Lancelot Hogben.⁴² Williams was an important figure in the London WEA. As
42 Secretary of the BIAE from 1934-40 and was thus a natural ally of Beales.⁴³

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48 Beales had a knack for predicting which books had the potential of selling in editions
49 of sixty to eighty thousand plus. His longstanding links with adult education and interest in
50 the earlier history of nineteenth century educational publishing gave him a crucial insight into
51 potential bestsellers. His selection of Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, despite
52 Allen Lane's scepticism, sold out an edition of 70 000 within a week.⁴⁴ In the imprint's early
53 years Beales was instrumental in publishing the work of many of his LSE colleagues,
54 including Harold Laski's *Liberty in the Modern State*, Eileen Power's *Medieval People*, R.H.
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3 Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, and Beatrice Webb's *My Apprenticeship*.
4 Along with the Hammonds' biography of *Lord Shaftesbury*, Beales also published, in six
5 volumes Elie Halévy's *History of the English People since 1815*.⁴⁵ Halévy's book was an
6 interesting choice: an account of the Industrial Revolution published by an avowedly liberal
7 French historian, who saw England's industrial development and religious non-conformism
8 as key to its political stability.⁴⁶ The structure of the work was key to Beales' conception of
9 the period: with separate volumes giving a cumulative political, economic, social, cultural,
10 and religious account of the nineteenth century which together created an integrated account
11 of an intense period of change which denied an single overarching causal explanation. For
12 Beales, Pelican books was primarily an educational tool: 'the basic idea in my mind was to
13 give people good books in every kind of subject regardless of what the trend of them might
14 be'.⁴⁷ Pelican books was a further area in which Beales did much to promote the work of
15 others at the expense of his own.⁴⁸

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25 Whilst Beales was, in Richard Hoggart's words, Pelican's 'chief academic pilot',⁴⁹ he
26 and Williams were increasingly at odds, if not so much at the direction the imprint was
27 heading then with one another personally. If anything, their personalities were too similar.
28 Looking back, Beales declared Williams a 'liar and a thief'⁵⁰ for ultimately displacing the
29 other editors and claiming Pelican as his idea. Whatever politicking Williams was guilty of,
30 it was also clear that Beales was a difficult person to work with for prolonged periods. The
31 publisher George Weidenfield, who later worked with Beales on establishing *Contact Books*,
32 remembered Beales as a 'Falstaffian Fabian Socialist': 'Wistfully cynical and always very
33 relaxed, Beales struck me as a rather lazy man. He could be discursive and long-winded when
34 I was burning with impatience to get on, but he was full of ideas and proved a useful ally'.⁵¹

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Beales and Williams wrote distinctly uncomplimentary portraits of one another in the
1940 edition of *Penguin's Progress*, in which Williams affectionately noted his colleagues'
indolence: 'Beales likes to relax. His favourite posture is a semi-horizontal one'.⁵² Whilst
praising Beales' capabilities as a lecturer, a listener, and a drinker – 'On liquorish occasions
he can absorb so much that I have sometimes imagined his inside must resemble the deltas of
the Nile or the Mississippi'⁵³ – Williams' account highlighted clear tensions between two
very similar minds, equally committed to the idea of popular mass market education. Though
Beales' name remained on each Pelican book until 1945 (Menon and Hogben's were
removed in 1939), he was, at best, an ad hoc advisor, with Williams (Allen Lane's Chief
Advisor) firmly in charge.⁵⁴

vi. The LSE: Between Sociology and Economic History

Williams had captured something of the tensions within Beales' gadfly personality, describing him as: 'a repository, a switchboard, a dynamo, and Lord only knows what else in the literary world.'⁵⁵ Beales' special talent for promoting the work of others, whilst failing to produce work of his own, reached new heights during the war. Increasingly, he had come to associate himself primarily with the LSE sociology faculty, serving on the editorial board of *Political Quarterly* and the school's *Agenda* magazine, devoted to postwar social reconstruction.⁵⁶ During the war, when the school relocated to Cambridge, he employed the sociologists Norbert Elias and Karl Mannheim as his personal 'Senior Research Assistants', though they were given free rein to pursue their own work.⁵⁷ His short book *The Making of Social Policy* (1946) was a historical excursus into social reform meant primarily as a criticism of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944).⁵⁸ His claim in *Political Quarterly* that the 1945 General Election was irreversible, and that the Labour Party would henceforth be the sole party of government, was over-optimistic.⁵⁹ Beales remained an important part of the faculty when it was relocated to Cambridge during the war where he kept a house, regularly putting up Harold Laski, Lionel Robbins, and Friedrich Hayek when they travelled to and from London.⁶⁰

Throughout his career, Beales encouraged students to think about ways in which social theory and history interacted. A number of students, such as Bernard Crick, Oliver MacGregor, and Neil Smelser became historically-minded social theorists. Beales' work at the LSE established many bridges between social history and sociology and was instrumental in creating a non-Marxist conception of social change, rich with historical data. The work of Oliver McGregor, Chelly Halsey, John Goldthorpe, Bernard Crick and other sociologically-minded historians (or historical sociologists) owed a great deal to Beales.⁶¹

Yet Beales was overlooked by the committee which sought to appoint a new Professor of Economic History in 1944. His application criticized the subject as a whole for 'too specialized concern': 'I should like to see the range of the work of the department amplified so that any danger of the undue subordination of it to the demands of economics may be lessened. I should wish to maintain the relationships of economic history with other branches of historical study, and to strengthen its connexions with other departments of social sciences.'⁶² Beales was blocked by the committee: both for his lack of publications and his inability to work with economists.⁶³ The chair went to T.S. Ashton, an avowedly liberal economic historian from Manchester. Ashton's inaugural lecture, 'The Relation of Economic History to Economic Theory', was anathema to Beales' conception of history, explicitly

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3 allying the subject to theory: 'Economic history...is concerned with large groups: with the
4 general, rather than with the particular; with processes, rather than with events; with the
5 typical, representative or statistical fact, rather than with the unique individual fact.'⁶⁴ Whilst
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7 labelling Beales, along with Tawney and the Hammonds, as pioneers of social history, he
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9 also signalled that social history was a thing of the past, and that henceforth the department
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11 would work closely with the Economics Faculty. As Beales noted:

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13 The school was different after the war. It was different again because it got very
14 departmentalized and the economic history was one subject in many. I think that under
15 Ashton it got too close to economics it was to be in effect a theory proving body of
16 factual knowledge...His work was much better than perhaps that particular idea which
17 appeared in his inaugural lecture but the school after the war was never quite the same
18 thing.⁶⁵
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21 Ashton's wider interventions in public life were based on his prestige as a respected
22 academic. His extremely successful short introduction *The Industrial Revolution* (1948),
23 published by Oxford University Press' Home University Library (a hardback equivalent of
24 Pelican Books), put out a robust and compelling account of the benefits wrought by the
25 Industrial Revolution. He was also a founding member of the Mont Pelerin Society of
26 neoliberal economists, contributing a central chapter to Friedrich Hayek's volume *Capitalism
27 and the Historians* (1954), attacking the intellectual bias of left-wing historians.⁶⁶ Where
28 Beales suggested a variety of possible interpretations of the Industrial Revolution, Ashton
29 preferred a single one: that of cumulative economic development raising material standards
30 of living throughout society.
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34 Ashton was at the forefront of the LSE's drift away from its socialist roots in the
35 immediate postwar period, following the deaths of Sidney Webb and Laski (in 1947 and 1950
36 respectively). New faculty members including Michael Oakeshott, Karl Popper, Edward
37 Shils, and J.W.N. Watkins, along with a number of existing members such as Robbins and
38 Hayek, were committed to a tradition liberal and conservative political and economic thought
39 largely alien to Beales.⁶⁷ Beales was increasingly at odds with the school, and the department
40 which had spurned his hopes of promotion, refusing to set foot in the department after his
41 retirement: 'the school after the war was never quite the same thing. Before it was informal,
42 associative and free. Afterwards it seemed to be more stereotyped more departmentalized
43 more the subject of the administrators attention and less that of the independent teachers.'⁶⁸
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vii. A very social historian

Yet it was from the 1950s onwards, when Beales no longer spoke on the BBC or edited Pelican Books, and when he was academically marginalized, in which his influence really came into its own. Beales was a superlative (if largely unsystematic) lecturer and an inspiring supervisor: eager to stimulate and suggest new ideas and interpretations. Donald Coleman, by no means an unqualified admirer, noted:

His lectures were remarkable performances which exemplified the man. They were a compound of erudition and laziness, of immense knowledge (stemming from his private library of nineteenth century social history), and of a total indifference to formal organisation... They regularly had the same effect on his audience: the bored departed, the enquiring were hooked and stayed.⁶⁹

Such an opinion was echoed by Bernard Crick, Beales' supervisee and co-author in the 1950s, who highlighted his remarkable qualities as a charismatic lecturer: 'He wandered, like Doctor Who, all over time and space. But his lectures were the very stuff of Social History – whether or not they were called "Economic History"'.⁷⁰ Beales supervised a great number of students: never fewer than twelve and sometimes as many as twenty per year.⁷¹ His informal weekly seminar, held at the nearby Old White Horse Inn (largely as a means of spiting the department), was a central hub of social historians and sociologists.⁷²

W.E. Williams noted Beales' habit for giving others the central ideas of books he wished to write, who would actually do the research: 'I have heard him describe the dozens of [books] he would like to write, they aren't yet written. But he gives his ideas away to others. I could name here and now a score of outstanding works of history and political philosophy which were engendered in the mind of Beales and written by someone else.'⁷³ In the words of his student, the historian T.C. Barker, 'there has never been any other Economic History teacher who has been responsible for getting more books written.'⁷⁴ Beales supervised at least two hundred PhDs, with acknowledgments in over one hundred and fifty books.⁷⁵ Beales taught or influenced many prominent historians and writers including William Ashworth, Asa Briggs,⁷⁶ John Burnett,⁷⁷ Henry Cassirer (first Communications Director of UNESCO),⁷⁸ Bernard Crick, H.J. Dyos,⁷⁹ A.H. Halsey⁸⁰, J.F.C. Harrison,⁸¹ W.H. Henderson,⁸² O.R. McGregor, Harold Perkin,⁸³ Sidney Pollard (whom he co-supervised with Ashton),⁸⁴ John Saville,⁸⁵ N.J. Smelser,⁸⁶ Dorothy Thompson,⁸⁷ Alexander Wilson,⁸⁸ and the Communist poet John Cornford, who was the first British casualty of the Spanish Civil War.⁸⁹ Beales was also a key influence on Richard Hoggart, who acknowledged him in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957).⁹⁰ After reading the manuscript, Beales impressed upon Hoggart the

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3 material improvements in working class life during the twentieth century that he felt the
4 account lacked.⁹¹

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6 As Miles Taylor has correctly suggested, Beales was one of the key historians
7 instrumental in establishing British social history as an independent discipline.⁹² With Oliver
8 McGregor, he edited the first series of volumes dedicated to the subject: the Heinemann
9 Kingswood Social History Series.⁹³ Beales was a founding member of the *Society for the*
10 *Study of Labour History* and was the first President of the *Social History Society* in 1976. He
11 also served, for many years, on the editorial board for the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*,
12 for which he wrote many articles. At Beales' ninetieth birthday celebration (he lived to be
13 ninety-nine), attended by over forty professors who were his former students, the social
14 policy maker, Lord Oliver McGregor acknowledged 'when you began work, social history, in
15 this country at any rate, consisted of a demonology of capitalists and a hagiography of labour
16 leaders. You created a new subject; you created Victorian society.'⁹⁴

25 26 **viii. Conclusion: Beales as Historian**

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28 Unequivocally, Beales failed as an academic historian. On an grand scale, he failed to
29 produce work. He managed to alienate almost everyone he worked with from R.H. Tawney
30 and Lionel Robbins to W.E. Williams. Beales carried out little or nothing in the way of actual
31 research and propagated no new interpretation of the Industrial Revolution. Nonetheless,
32 Beales was an important mediator, who acted as an excellent populariser of history, and who
33 exerted an immense influence on the subject and its wider reception. His commitment to the
34 'engaged tradition' of adult education, and the importance he attached to the study of the
35 Industrial Revolution were matched by his openness of approach. He was effective as a
36 broadcaster, publisher, and teacher because he refused to see the subject as purely limited to
37 either the economic or the social, but a mixture of several factors. For Beales, and countless
38 others during this period, the industrial past underpinned the nature of contemporary society.
39 Understanding the period was vital as a means of understanding the present.

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41 Beales lived in a period which saw the huge expansion of the English historical
42 profession, and the increasing specialization of disciplines.⁹⁵ Whilst in the 1920s it was
43 simple, even natural, to be an economic historian mostly interested in social history, for
44 whom the widest possible audience was a central concern, such an existence was increasingly
45 uncommon. Beales' great failure was in producing a book which established him as a public
46 intellectual, along the lines of Tawney, Cole, or E.P. Thompson. Asa Briggs, the social
47 historian whose work as educational reformer and broadcaster, most closely resembles

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3 Beales' extra-academic career, remains a widely-respected (and prolific) historian in both
4 academic and public spheres. Beales' primary importance was behind the scenes: on various
5 editorial boards, as a reviewer, publisher, and broadcaster of other people's ideas, and as a
6 teacher and supervisor.⁹⁶ For historiographers hoping to understand the development of
7 historical thought in the twentieth century, and especially those looking for the wider cultural
8 impact of historians, Beales provides a useful counter-example to classical accounts of
9 professional specialization and the dichotomy between academic and popular history. Beales
10 is an important example of the ways in which conceptions of the past emerged throughout
11 twentieth century Britain. Without his laying the groundwork, and tireless support of younger
12 voices, the emergence of social history in the early 1960s as a subject par excellence may
13 have been far less assured.

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16 Today, the weight put on academic output – both in the study of historiography and in
17 increasingly REF-conscious history departments – risks neglecting the importance of cultural
18 and intellectual networks by which history is presented to a wider audience. In this period, at
19 least, 'impact' was implicit within the act of teaching or writing history. The categories of
20 'academic' or 'popular' historian were, and still are, more fluid and contested than is
21 commonly thought. As Beales said at his ninetieth birthday celebrations: 'you can't really
22 separate human experience into neat tabloids as we have to do in books and lectures, knowing
23 all the time that it's a pretty unreal process.'⁹⁷

24 Acknowledgments

25 My thanks to the archivists at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, at LSE,
26 to Barbara Hutton and Peter Mandler for conversations about Beales and to Stefan Collini
27 who read several drafts of this piece.

28 Notes

29 ¹ Beales and Lambert, 'Youth of Industrialism', 18. The talks appeared in the *Listener*: 'Has
30 Industrialism been worthwhile?', 12 March 1930.

31 ² Clapham, *Economic History*, vii-viii; Hammond, 'New Light', 741-6; Ramsay, 'A Socialist
32 Fantasy', 32-65; Hammond, "'Socialist Fantasy'", *ibid*, 272-92; Hammond, 'The Last Word',
33 113-6; Hammond, 'The Industrial Revolution', 215-28. On this extensive, well-covered
34 debate see Cannadine, 'Past and the Present', 139-42; Weaver, *The Hammonds*, 182-209;
35 Weaver, 'The Bleak Age', 29-43, esp. 38-40; Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 243-59;
36 Sutton, 'Radical Liberalism', 15-43; Feske, *Belloc to Churchill*, Chapter 3.

37 ³ Beales and Lambert, 'Has Industrialism', 447.

38 ⁴ *Ibid*, 447.

⁵ Beales and Lambert, 'Ought this Country'; 'That Government'; 'Self Sufficiency'; 'Little England'; 'Law of Progress'. The talks were republished in an edited form: H.L. Beales and R.S. Lambert, *The Youth of Industrialism* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation).

⁶ Beales, "Great Trade Depression".

⁷ For instance, see Cannadine, *History and Media*; de Groot, *Consuming History*.

⁸ Biographical details are taken from Bernard Crick, 'H.L. Beales', *ODNB* entry and *Who Was Who? Volume 8*; Sn., 'Beales'; Burrow, 'LSE', 39; Barker, 'Beales'; Ashworth et al., 'Beales'.

⁹ Shehadi 1/3, 1-2 [Henceforth Shehadi]. This is the transcript of an interview with Beales conducted by the student, Nadim Shehadi in the early 1980s: 'They denied me a Chair, largely because of Tawney's opposition, and later on, after a few years, Tawney, what shall I say, expressed regret to me that he had opposed my being given a Chair there, because he said. "I have judged you wrongly". I don't know what the cause of his judging me wrongly was. He was a highly religious person, but like many other people he didn't know what he really meant by the word god. Nor did I... And I never found the answer to that, and nor did he. I had a great regard for him.' Terrill, *Tawney*, 66-7. Terrill suggests that Tawney had been instrumental in getting Beales his Readership in 1931, and had been disappointed by his subsequent lack of output.

¹⁰ Economic History Society, 2010/12/7 Video interview with H.L. Beales by T.C. Barker, 1973 [transcription by Maxine Berg], henceforth Barker.

¹¹ Barker.

¹² Berg, *Eileen Power*, 140-70; Dahrendorf, *LSE*, 232-42; Berg, *The First*; Barker. Beales worked with Power, Tawney, George, and A.V. Judges to create a five-volume history of London which was never completed. See LSE History 20/2/2, Economic History, Agenda of Emergency Commission, 30 January 1931. In the 1950s Beales was again approached by T.S. Ashton to write the nineteenth century volume for the Meuthen Economic History of England series. Ultimately it was his student, William Ashworth, who wrote the volume. Berg, *Eileen Power*, 160; Ashworth et al., 'Beales', 4; Ashworth, *An Economic History*, np.

¹³ Barker, 'Economic History Society', 6, 16. Ashley taught WEA classes at Sheffield with Beales just after the First World War.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 1-4; *Living Economic and Social History: 75 Years of the Economic History Society*, Pat Hudson, ed. (Glasgow: Economic History Society, 2001); Coleman, *Economic Past*, 93-5; Berg, *Eileen Power*, 166-70

¹⁵ Kadish, *Historians*; Coleman, *Economic Past*, Chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁶ Barker; Martin, *Father Figures*, 158-9 in which he classes Beales, along with Hobhouse and Ginsberg as 'largely silent members of the progressive school of thought' which avoided the struggles over the direction of LSE; Dahrendorf, *LSE*, 188.

¹⁷ Beales was, with Margaret Cole, G.D.H. Cole, and Laski, a founding member of the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda which sought, in the late 1930s, to reinvigorate the socialism of the post-MacDonald Labour Party. Kramnick and Sheerman, *Laski*, 304-5. Cole, *Growing Up*, 144-7, 174. Beales and his wife, Taffy, were close friends of the Coles and Postgates, living in close proximity in Finchley, North London.

¹⁸ Shehadi, 4-5.

¹⁹ Corry, *Economics*, 191.

²⁰ Shehadi, 3, 15.

²¹ Beales, "Great Trade Depression"; Beales, "Basic Industries". See also Beales, 'Review of Clapham'; 'The Industrial Revolution', *History*, new series, volume 14, no. 54 (July 1929); 'The New Poor Law', *History*, new series, volume 15, no. 60 (January 1930).

²² Berg, *Eileen Power*, 170.

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4 ²³ Plant/245, H.L. Beales to Plant, 12 July 1944.

5 ²⁴ Beales, 'Owen', 160. See also Beales, 'Population', 133; Beales, 'Blue Books'; Beales,
6 'Social History', 4-6; Beales and Chambers, *Rural Economic History*.

7 ²⁵ Sn. 'Radical Historian'. Crick, who I believe to be the author, also makes this point.

8 ²⁶ Beales, *Industrial Revolution*, 1st ed., 72, 'Was the England which issued from the
9 industrial revolution the England of Charles Dickens or the classical economics (caricatured
10 as "dismal") or of Cobdenite Manchester or of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful
11 Knowledge or of the Chartists? Was it the "two Englands" of Disraeli or the tyranny painted
12 by the anti-Capitalists or the ill-shapen futility seen by Carlyle? The historian has to rely on
13 the voices which were articulate in his period, and they all sang different songs. To some
14 people in these (and any) decades England was obviously going to the dogs – the well-off and
15 the badly-off may be expected at any time to agree on this. To others, especially to those who
16 were able to force their way up the new avenues to wealth, the opposite was true. Whatever
17 the tones of the picture presented as a portrait of the new industrialism, they will be
18 composed from the varying colours of contemporary view, intermingled with the knowledge
19 gained from subsequent experience.'

20 ²⁷ Beales, *Industrial Revolution*, 2nd ed., 7, 9.

21 ²⁸ Allaway, 'Allaway', 13-4.

22 ²⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

23 ³⁰ Barker.

24 ³¹ Ruddock, 'One Hundred and Seventy', 316.

25 ³² Barker. See Beales, 'Travels and Communications'.

26 ³³ Beales, 'Aitches', xi. See also Beales and Clay 'The First Bradshaws', 19 February 1930;
27 'Industry and Trade'; Adams and Beales, 'Jeremy Bentham'; 'Parliamentary Government';
28 'Grand National'; 'Trade Union'; 'Since 1913'; 'Modern Local Government'; 'Theory and
29 Practice'; 'Cost of Coal'; 'Economic Age'; 'Englishry'; 'George Dyer'; 'Grand Dame';
30 'Science as a Solution'; 'Paradox of Progress'; 'Was there an Industrial Revolution?'

31 ³⁴ Beales, 'Sex'; 'Family'; Grisewood, ed., *Ideas and Beliefs*. The talks, organized by Peter
32 Laslett included talks by G.M. Trevelyan, E.L. Woodward, Bertrand Russell, Harold Laski,
33 H.L. Beales, Noel Annan, Julian Huxley, Jacob Bronowski, A.J. Ayer, G.M. Young, G.D.H.
34 Cole, David Cecil, H.N. Brailsford, Michael Polanyi, and Richard Crossman. On Beales and
35 the table-leg myth see Sweet, *Inventing*, xii-xiii.

36 ³⁵ Sn. 'Lambert', 9; see Briggs, *Wireless*, 133-4, 172-210; Groombridge, 'Broadcasting', 357-
37 9. Lambert, a convinced spiritualist, left the BBC under a series of incredulous events. His
38 position was deemed untenable after his successful libel action against Cecil Levita who had
39 criticized his book about a talking mongoose from the Isle of Man. This widely-publicized
40 case led to Lambert's emigration to Canada to work with CBS. Lambert, *Ariel*, chs. 9 and 10.

41 ³⁶ Beales and Lambert, *Unemployed*, 10, 52-6.

42 ³⁷ *Ibid*, 49.

43 ³⁸ Lowe, *Film*, p 28; Beales and Lambert, 'Laxton', 61-2 which includes a number of stills.

44 ³⁹ Barker; Lambert, *Ariel*, 199-201. C.S. Orwin's *Open Fields* also includes a number of stills
45 from the film.

46 ⁴⁰ For a discussion of this see Rose, *Intellectual Life*, chs. 8 and 12; Hoggart, 'Common
47 Readers'.

48 ⁴¹ Sn., 'Books and the Public', 5: 'But none of these explanations account for the production,
49 at the same price of 6d., of new editions, in the Pelican series, of such books as Tawney's
50 *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, of Halevy's great *History of the English People*, of
51 Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. These are all books which, each in its own way,
52 have helped to make the intellectual history of this century; until now mere considerations of
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cost have placed them out of the reach of most people. That now they can be bought for 6d., that is, for the price of a cheap cinema seat or a packet of cigarettes, is a fact of enormous importance in the struggle to overcome economic restrictions to knowledge ; and it is one more indication of the hunger for information, for fact, for explanation, which exists unsatisfied at the present time.'

⁴² Meredeem, *Penguins*, 79-86; Steven Hare, ed., *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970* (London: Penguin, 1995), 50-65; Jeremy Lewis, *Penguin Special: The Life and Times of Allen Lane* (London: Penguin, 2005), 112-22; Nicolas Joicey, 'A Paperback Guide to Progress, Penguin Books 1935-c1951', *Twentieth Century British History*, volume 4, no. 1 (1993), 25-56, esp. 30-2, 44-7; W.E. Williams, *Allen Lane: A Personal Portrait* (London: Bodley Head, 1973), 49-50; Cf. Barker, where Beales suggests that he was himself brought in by Krishna Menon, whose work at the India League consumed much of his time, and in turn appointed Williams as an adult education specialist.

⁴³ Meredeem, *Penguins*, 54-66.

⁴⁴ Burrows, 'LSE and Penguin', 39. Crick, ODNB

⁴⁵ Respectively, these were Pelican numbers 13, 19, 23, 48, 31, 32. *The History of the English People* were numbers 9, 16, 30, 50, 52, 69. All these volumes were published between 1938-9.

⁴⁶ Chase, *Halévy*, chs. 2 and 3.

⁴⁷ Barker.

⁴⁸ Beales edited an edition of Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* in 1939 as Pelican number 49.

⁴⁹ Hoggart, *Measured Life*, 51.

⁵⁰ Penguin, DM1294/14/1/4, Linda Lloyd Jones, interview with H.L. Beales and Mrs Jane Beales, August 1984, Penguin Archives, University of Bristol. See Meredeem, *Penguins*, 83-4, who disbelieves Beales' account.

⁵¹ Weidenfield, *Good Friends*, 119.

⁵² Williams, 'Beales', 19.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 20.

⁵⁴ Penguin DM1843/62 Eunice Frost Collection includes details of a leaving party for Beales, held 8 March 1939.

⁵⁵ Williams, 'Beales', 19, 'He has written one first-rate book – on the Industrial Revolution – but although I have heard him describe the dozens of others he would like to write, they aren't yet written. But he gives his ideas away to others. I could name here and now a score of outstanding works of history and political philosophy which were engendered in the mind of Beales and written by someone else. He is always thinking up good ideas for books – and passing them on. He is a repository, a switchboard, a dynamo, and Lord only knows what else in the literary world.'

⁵⁶ Crick, *Who Was Who?*

⁵⁷ Turner, 'Exiles', 291

⁵⁸ Shehadi, 18.

⁵⁹ Beales, 'Has Labour'.

⁶⁰ Shehadi, 16-7, 'I remember how we used to open the piano and clear the chairs out of the way, and people were dancing round the room. It was very comic. Hayek for example would take off his shoes and join in just as though he was a human being!'; Howson, *Robbins*, 343n; Kramnick and Sheerman, *Laski*, 421, 464; Dahrendorf, *LSE*, 347.

⁶¹ Kumar, 'Social Thought', 40.

⁶² Plant/245, Beales to Plant 12 July 1944.

⁶³ Ashworth et al., 'Beales', 3 'In later years [Beales'] academic career foundered. At the end of the war, everyone expected him to succeed to the establish chair in modern economic

history, but his election was blocked by R.H. Tawney whose Christian values did not tolerate Beales's open reiterated atheism.' Sayer, 'Ashton', 272-3. A substantial number of the obituaries were unclear as to whose chair Beales had applied for and failed, with many suggesting he would have been succeeding Tawney, who carried on in a personal chair until 1949. Bernard Crick even suggests Beales went for the chair in 1954, Crick, in *My LSE*, 156 when Ashton retired and was unsuccessful against F.J. Fisher, though as Beales would have been 66, this is highly improbable. Burrows 'LSE and Penguin', 39 suggests also that Lionel Robbins had a large say in blocking Beales, though claims this was Tawney's chair in 1949.

⁶⁴ Ashton, 'Economic History', 165. On Ashton see Dahrendorf, *LSE*, 232-42; Sayer, 'Ashton'; Sn., 'Ashton'; Sn., 'Thomas Southcliffe Ashton', 1-2; John, 'Thomas Southcliffe Ashton'; Sayer, 'Thomas Southcliffe Ashton'; Carter, 'Ashton'.

⁶⁵ Baker.

⁶⁶ Ashton, 'Treatment'; Coleman, *Economic Past*, 82-5, esp. 84.

⁶⁷ Dahrendorf, *LSE*, 368-9; Crick, *My LSE*, 153, 158-60, 'And when I returned, [in 1955], I found a polarized department into which I fitted firmly but uncomfortably.'

⁶⁸ Barker.

⁶⁹ Coleman, 'Letter'. However, Barry Supple, who went to LSE in 1949, disliked Beales' lectures as 'hard to understand'. He much preferred Ashton's. Supple interview.

⁷⁰ Crick, *My LSE*, 156.

⁷¹ Barker.

⁷² Ashworth, et. al. 'Beales', 4, 'One of the best of Lance's additions was the very, very informal group discussion. The gatherings most familiar to successive cohorts of students were in saloon bars: one evening a week for years in the "Old White Horse" in St. Clement's Lane and later, a little upmarket and round the corner, in "George IV". Here Chartism was replotted and a great variety of research ideas and research activities were freely exchanged in a mingling of light-headedness and erudition, lubricated for easy absorption.'; Lenderyou, 'Letter', 39.

⁷³ Williams, 'Beales', 19.

⁷⁴ Barker, 'Beales'. See Ashworth et. al., 'Beales', 5, 'Lance Beales was, quite simply, the greatest social historian and perhaps the nicest man since Sir Walter Scott.'

⁷⁵ Barker. The suggestion is that of the interviewer.

⁷⁶ McIlroy, 'Briggs', 211; Briggs, *Special Relationships*, 11.

⁷⁷ Sn., 'Burnett', 9.

⁷⁸ Groombridge, 'Cassirer'.

⁷⁹ Cannadine, 'Urban History', 204.

⁸⁰ Halsey, *No Discouragement*, 215.

⁸¹ Harrison, *Scholarship Boy*, 175-6, 'I always felt that I came away with more ideas after half-an-hour's conversation with Lance than days of discussion with anyone else...His memorial lies in the numerous acknowledgments in the introductions and prefaces to the books of his students and friends like me.'; *Learning and Living*, ix; *Robert Owen*, ix.

⁸² Henderson, 'An Appreciation', 11.

⁸³ Bailey et al., *Hoggart*, 103.

⁸⁴ Renton, *Pollard*, 17-21.

⁸⁵ Saville, *Memoirs*, 18; Saville, 'Labour Movement', 74: 'Laski and H. L. Beales were the main sources of inspiration within the large graduate body of the London School of Economics.'

⁸⁶ Smelser, *Social Change*, xi.

⁸⁷ Bailey et al., *Understanding Richard Hoggart: a pedagogy of hope*, 103, 128. The source is an email from Thompson to the authors.

⁸⁸ Wilson, *Chartists*, ix.

⁸⁹ Stansky and Abrahams, *Journey*, 189.

⁹⁰ Bailey et al., *Understanding Richard Hoggart*, 103.

⁹¹ Hoggart, *First and Last*, 147.

⁹² Taylor, 'British Social History', 156, 163, 169-70. See also Various, 'Witness Seminar' in which Beales is mentioned as a key historian of the period by H.J. Habbakuk, Asa Briggs, T.C. Barker, L.S. Pressnell, and J.F.C. Harrison.

⁹³ Books published included R.J. White, *Waterloo to Peterloo* (1957); David Landes *Bankers and Pashas* (1958); A.R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge* (1958); R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian* (1960); Carl Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (1960); R.E. Prothero, *English Farming Past and Present* (1961); Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (1961); Mary P. Mack, *Jeremy Bentham: An Odyssey of Ideas* (1962).

⁹⁴ Sn., 'Lance Beales's 90th Birthday', *LSE Magazine*, no. 57 June 1979, 4.

⁹⁵ Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*, 202-11.

⁹⁶ I am using Stefan Collini's expansive discussion of the term in Collini, *Absent Minds*, esp. chs. 1, 2, 4, 20.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Sn., 'Beales' 90th Birthday', 4.

Notes on the Contributor

Alexander Hutton has recently completed a PhD at Darwin College, Cambridge on Conceptions of the Industrial Revolution in Twentieth Century Britain.

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