



Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and the institutional developments around which they cluster which forms the basis for a social history of ideas, an exploration of the three historical communities of antiquarianism, archaeology and history, and of the divisions between them which by the close of the century had crystallised so clearly.

In the 1840s in particular, organisations devoted to historical pursuits began to determine, as much through strength of numbers as intellectual endeavour, the course of historical activities and scholarship.<sup>1</sup> The success of the early printing clubs of the 1830s gave the impetus for the foundation of both local societies and of new national bodies designed to promote an interest in the past. Before long some of that individual initiative had passed into the hands of the state and in the 1850s government began to undertake a whole host of historical projects from the long-awaited erection of a central record office to the publication of items too specialised and costly either for the more usual commercial consideration or for the printing clubs with their limited funds. Soon after, history won academic recognition with the creation of university history courses particularly at the ancient universities and the slow expansion of both the professorial and the tutorial ranks. The reforms of Oxford and Cambridge ushered in by Liberal governments in the 1850s and 1870s alongside the foundation of new civic universities created a new niche for historians, as did government's acceptance of the responsibilities of at least some areas of record administration. Here, in the new Public Record Office in Fetter Lane, were to be found history's first truly professional class. It is the civil servants responsible for the classification of national records and much of their calendaring who may lay claim to the title of the earliest of professional historians.<sup>2</sup> They were followed, of course, by the university professionals, those who taught, lectured and researched the subject in a specifically academic context.<sup>3</sup>

These institutional changes stand out as central to the socially-based questions addressed in this work, and the precedence thus accorded them has exercised a profound influence on the materials used. The rejection of a textual approach for one stressing organisational development arose because of the many important institutional changes occurring throughout this period. 1838 saw the passing of the act establishing the need, if not the funding, for a general record office as well as the foundation of one of the most successful and tenacious of the new printing clubs, the Camden Society. 1886, when this episode somewhat artificially ends, was the year in which the *English Historical Review*, the first voice of the new professionals, appeared. In the fifty or so intervening years, individual and state enterprise had ensured that antiquarian, historical and archaeological pursuits remained interests of national proportion and substance. The minute books of local societies, the papers of

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ben-David in his *The Scientist's Rôle in Society. A Comparative Study* (New Jersey, 1971) maintains that science was similarly determined and at roughly the same time (p. 170).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5. <sup>3</sup> See Chapter 6.

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

Record Office administrators and of self-taught archaeologists, and the early records of university history have thus variously provided the raw materials around which this work has been structured. It is the relation of the individual to the community and of the community to the institutions created by it which forms its substance.

The absence of two celebrated figures of nineteenth-century historiography – Thomas Carlyle and Lord Macaulay – deserves comment. Strictly, neither come within the definitions which these historical communities would have laid down for themselves, but were more accurately part of an older tradition of essayists and reviewers. Though both are remembered as authors of great and influential historical works, neither was ever part of the wider historical community but found their associates and friends rather in literary and political circles of a more general kind. In absenting themselves from communion with like-minded men, and in their deliberate distancing from historical institutions, they themselves dictate their exclusion from detailed mention in the following chapters.

## II

The relationship between science and history in Victorian culture has ramifications far wider than a simple similarity in their organisational growth. New and challenging conceptions of time initiated by scientific and technological innovation profoundly affected the Victorian historical perspective. The radical alteration in perceptions of time and speed induced not only by the introduction of faster travel and communication, but also by an increasingly quantitative approach to work and leisure governed far more by clocks and public time, forced Victorian intellectuals to reconsider accepted notions of continuity and change. In such a context, history was to acquire powerful human appeal as the intellectual mechanism whereby time could be measured and evaluated. The transition from myth to history was an uncomfortable and often painful process which involved very centrally the questioning of assumptions about universality and permanence.<sup>4</sup> New conceptions of time began to prompt, albeit gradually, questions relating to the idea of relativity and of truth as a function of human history rather than an unchanging and simple value.

Historical continuity is both the inductive guarantee that respect for precedent builds more lastingly than abstract theories, and also the content of the myth by which that respect is sanctioned and inspired. At its most emphatic, the myth presents the national history and identity as the continuous self-renewal and development of a spirit.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> M. I. Finley, 'Myth, Memory and History', *History And Theory* iv (1964–5) 3, pp. 281–302.

<sup>5</sup> J.W. Burrow, "'The Village Community'" and the Uses of History in Late Nineteenth-Century England', in *Historical Perspectives. Studies in English Thought and Society* ed. N. McKendrick (London, 1974), 255–84 (p. 267).

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

This was the Victorian dilemma; history throughout the century was the standard-bearer of an ultimately fixed universe governed by good Providence, but the seeds of doubt sown in the first instance by science were further questioned by the direction of the new historical disciplines. Most significantly, the archaeological discoveries which challenged received theories of the age of the earth, and the new higher criticism which sought to distinguish myth from inspiration and looked for historical verification of the life of Jesus, bespoke the collapse of this fixed and timeless code. At the same time the Victorian fascination with the past was peculiarly preoccupied with posterity. The urge to preserve and to pass on a heritage legitimised by the contemporary motivated the development of the Victorian historical consciousness. The belief and faith in progress which this implied fostered a strongly teleological approach to history, such that it became, ironically, the gospel of heritage, nullifying the less palatable conceptions newly prompted by its study.<sup>6</sup> It could thus justify simultaneously both an obeisance to the past and an invocation of the future. Ideals were not submerged but redefined. For the proclamation of the triumph of English progress, wedded to the imperialist ambitions of a strong commercial and naval nation, the focal point of that ideal was shifted from the vision of ancient Greece as the ultimate pinnacle of human perfection to the rougher-hewn powers represented by a Gothic and Teutonic inheritance. Teutonism provided a Christian alternative and ideal.<sup>7</sup>

National ideals were thus prominent. The three historical communities all shared a strong sense of national duty and of national pride, revelling in the bygone feats of their country. Interestingly, it was not this nationalism which eroded the strength of the provincial cultures which had created so strong an institutional framework around the county archaeological societies. They were diminished in stature rather by the centralisation concomitant upon professionalisation, and indeed shared with the *aficionados* of the metropolis and the universities a firm belief in the innate superiority of their own island kingdom.

Tradition and change were thus both justified within a single historical perspective in which the security of class interests suggested by the shared religious and political opinions so characteristic of the historical communities at this juncture helped articulate a consensual image and intellectual conception around which they could cluster. It was this coalescence of community and class that prompted perception of their common experience as binding and correct, as possessed of an authority and a code of practice largely unspoken but nonetheless powerful. History proved a consistently popular pursuit precisely because of its seeming ability to provide a framework for justified beliefs; the action of selective memory governed the historical topics

<sup>6</sup> H. Meyerhoff, *Time In Literature* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1955) p. 97.    <sup>7</sup> See Chapter 4.

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

5

most appropriate to the institutions and ideals dominant in Victorian England.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis in historical and antiquarian work thus focused primarily upon a recreation of the English past, although the new archaeology did not follow quite the same path. The pioneers of excavation were principally active in the Middle East, uncovering sites familiar to their fellow countrymen primarily through the Bible. Despite clamours for a greater concentration on national antiquities, indigenous archaeology found far less public approbation. The activities of barrow diggers and Roman numismatists tended to attract less attention than the exotic and sensational finds unearthed in Mesopotamia. These latter discoveries could be accounted for within the traditional time-span, and their consequent authentication of Biblical narrative necessarily lent them weight and favour.

It was the archaeological work closer to home which was challenging the fundamentals of time and of religious belief. Discoveries in the south of England and in France suggested the need to extend backwards ideas about the age of the earth.<sup>9</sup> Thus, like the new history, archaeology was simultaneously a subject which presaged far-reaching intellectual changes and yet supported the ideology of progress so vital to the maintenance of Victorian values.

Crucial to an understanding of the following chapters is a strong denial of any 'presentist' perspective. Neither the professionals – the historians and the archaeologists – nor the antiquarian community acquire their latter-day interest or importance from a desire to trace the development through them of our modern forms of study. To see in the historical studies of the nineteenth century no more than the nascent germs of our own thinking would be a collective egoism of massive proportion. The task of the historian can never be to pronounce arbitrary judgments on the relative merits of past scholarship. Our function is to understand the nature and context of that scholarship and the circumstances under which changes in it come about. This work seeks to illuminate neglected corners of Victorian culture, valuable in extending our understanding of a complex and confused world. The historical disciplines clearly exerted a fascination over Victorian England and it is that rather than a desire to unfold, Whig-like, the origins and appearance of present and doubtless transient forms of historical scholarship, which informs the subject of this study. The simultaneity of the threat posed by new and relative conceptions of time and of the confidence afforded England by expansive reference to the past and to progress suggests the central rôle which history played in the Victorian consciousness, a rôle which must be explored not just through textual but through individual, collective and institutional manifestations.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Developments in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague, 1978) and Roy Strong, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?: The Victorian Painter and British History* (London, 1978). <sup>9</sup> See Chapter 4.

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886*

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

This work has thus concentrated first on an analysis of the social location of many historical practitioners – their education, their employment, their religion – and second on the organisations and institutions in which they gathered. It was within this framework that the widening gap between amateur and professional in the historical field was realised. The emergence of new professions was a characteristic trend in nineteenth-century Western societies; as well as the creation of new types of employment largely spawned by the needs of a market economy, many of the older professions began to create the élite conditions we now associate with professional standing. Attempts to limit entry to these avenues of employment through more stringent training and qualification provided both a sense of community and of status for those within. The class symbolism of such developments did not leave Victorian intellectuals untouched, and the particularly public rôle played by history in promoting national and Christian pride guaranteed that those engaged in such pursuits were prey to this quest for public prestige and recognition. Intellectual developments cannot thus be considered except within the wider context of social and political structures and it is therefore necessary to attempt to determine the change in status over time of each of the individual historical communities within the spectrum of developing professionalisation.

The structural changes of intellectual institutions are nonetheless only of interest to the historian of ideas insofar as they throw light upon the status and state of knowledge in society and this study is thus concerned at base with the interplay between intellectual debate and the institutions created by it for its own survival. The significance of these institutions leads inescapably back to the immeasurably important phenomenon of professionalisation and the marginalisation of specific groups and interests consequent upon it.

The starting point of this work, then, is the enduring appeal of history in its many manifestations throughout the Victorian period. It explores the new institutional bases of the discipline alongside the ideology of its debates and, in doing so, seeks to examine the impact of professionalisation on the re-defining of the intellectual boundaries which were so successfully to distinguish the academic and the dilettante, the metropolitan and the provincial, the professional and the amateur from this time on. Its importance lies not merely in the alternative proposals it offers for redefining and categorising early professionalisation, but at a different level, in its attempts to seek new and empirical ground for the history of ideas; if the marriage of ideas and institutions seems now more convincing, and an additional basis for intellectual history secured, then this study will have proved itself worthwhile.

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and  
Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2

# Community and consensus

... must they live unsung  
Because deaf ears flap round them?  
(W. S. Landor, To Layard, Discoverer of Nineveh)

### I

Antiquarian, historical and archaeological studies of the past attracted a body of enthusiastic and committed devotees throughout the nineteenth century who, whether able to involve themselves full-time or only in their leisure hours in these pursuits, formed a highly motivated self-taught élite on familiar and friendly terms with one another and sharing a common body of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Historical interests in the broadest sense maintained a steady popularity amongst the literate classes of nineteenth-century England, with their propensity for involvement in the activities of both local and national organisations committed to these subjects.

The social dimension of intellectual pursuits has in recent years received attention, in particular from historians of science who have argued that the public value of a subject and the social status of its proponents have often served to influence its achievements.<sup>2</sup> In the case of history, the seeming homogeneity of its practitioners, both in their social standing and in their views of the subject, suggest that intellectual considerations cannot be divorced from an investigation of social position. Who, then, were the men who sustained the many historical and archaeological societies of the period, who exploited the newly systematised records of past government, who published campanologies and

<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Kargon developed this notion of the 'devotee' in his book *Science in Victorian Manchester: Enterprise and Expertise* (Baltimore, 1977) pp. 32–5. He saw them as 'savants' representing the transitional stage between gentlemen of leisure and professional scientists. See too Morrell & Thackray (1981) and Roy Porter (1978) cited below.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ben-David, *The Scientist's Role in Society. A Comparative Study* (New Jersey, 1971); Kargon, *op. cit.*; J. Morrell & A. Thackray, *Gentlemen of Science. The Early Years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Oxford, 1981); Roy Porter, 'Gentlemen and Geology: the emergence of a scientific career, 1660–1920', *Historical Journal* 21 (1978) iv, pp. 809–36; S. Shapin & A. Thackray, 'Prosopography as a Research Tool in History of Science: The British Scientific Community 1700–1900', *History of Science* xlii (1974) pp. 1–28.

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886*

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

county histories, chronologies and collections, accounts of barrow digging, of medieval costume and of church architecture? Countless were tempted to exhume the treasures hidden between the covers of their local parish register, buried deep in the nearby tumulus or turned up by the spade of the rail builders. Amongst them there are indubitably those who stand out by virtue of their commitment to and participation in historical studies, those whom Alan Macfarlane has dubbed 'the historically visible minority'.<sup>3</sup> Their lives, at least, open up to the historian some idea of both the social and intellectual factors which brought them involvement in historical studies. Although such categories are of necessity an artificial construct, there are six broad areas in which nineteenth-century antiquarians, archaeologists and historians tended to concentrate their energies.<sup>4</sup>

The easiest to resurrect are, of course, those publishing in these fields.<sup>5</sup> There were also those who derived their livelihood from the subject in some way, such as the record and archive administrators, and those employed in related work in museum departments. At a later date, posts in history and archaeology began to proliferate in universities and equivalent institutions. There were also those who were active in archaeological and historical societies; often with multiple membership of such bodies and there were the many collectors – of books, manuscripts, antiquities, coins and the like. Those who fulfil the conditions of at least one of these categories – and there were many whose activities spanned them all – form the basis for an investigation into the link between their social background and their historical activities; 'to inquire after these individuals [. . .] and to understand how friendship, intellectual ambition, curiosity, career and competition' rendered them the foremost proponents of their chosen fields both at that time and for posterity.<sup>6</sup> It is Macfarlane's contention that 'the methods of studying small, delimited, sets of people or other objects is of fundamental interest to many disciplines', and not least to the historian seeking the relationship between a discipline and its social environment.<sup>7</sup>

Richard Altick's early study of the class basis of nineteenth-century British writers establishes a series of common characteristics shared by most writers. Overwhelmingly male and middle class, they were largely university educated – particularly at Oxford and Cambridge which, until quite late in the century, continued to dominate English élite education – and often boasted a

<sup>3</sup> Alan Macfarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge, 1977) p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> Other commentators have used similar constructions to define their inquiries – Shapin & Thackray, *loc. cit.* p. 12; Francis Galton, *English Men of Science: their Nature and Nurture* (London, 1874) pp. 2–3.

<sup>5</sup> Ancient History is specifically omitted as bearing more relation to the traditional classical studies of the day. Ancient and modern historians espoused distinctly different attitudes to the text – see Chapter 6. <sup>6</sup> Morrell & Thackray, *op. cit.* p. xxii. <sup>7</sup> A. Macfarlane, *op. cit.* p. 24.

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Community and consensus*

9

professional standing as well.<sup>8</sup> The English historical, antiquarian and archaeological communities thus quantified revealed a similar bias. The active élite was almost all male.<sup>9</sup> A high proportion were graduates of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, more with Oxford than with Cambridge degrees. Together, these graduates account for 44% (88) of the total sample of 201. They were, of course, all Anglican, as were most of those who did not boast a university education; Dissenters, Catholics and other non-Anglicans form a very small proportion of the total. Of those whose religion is known, 62% (124) were Church of England and there were a further 28% (57) of whose religious beliefs no evidence could be found. Many took holy orders, though not all were practising clerics; 16% (32) of the sample were attached full-time to livings;<sup>10</sup> 8.5% were connected with the legal profession and a surprisingly high 7% (14) were in commerce or trade ranging hierarchically from bankers to publishers and stationers, a miller, a grocer and a wine merchant. There were also a few Members of Parliament – 6% (12) of the total. Thus as in Altick's far larger and therefore more statistically reliable sample, the dominance of the professional sector of the middle class – architects, artists, organists, surgeons, military officers and engineers – is indisputable. A small number earned their livelihood from their historical pursuits, and there were a few whose private incomes allowed them to devote themselves more or less full-time to their studies without urgent need for remuneration. For the majority of the enthusiasts, however, these were the occupations of their leisure hours.<sup>11</sup>

The sample also establishes the central rôle of the institutions in which these men met and conversed with one another – 40% (80) of the total were Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of London, although from the 1880s on the proportion drops substantially. A similar number were known to have been

<sup>8</sup> R. D. Altick, 'The Social Origins, Education, Occupation of 1100 British Writers, 1800–1935', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 66 (1962) vi, 389–404.

<sup>9</sup> Those few women who were active in these fields are highly individual and interesting women, and include the founder of the Egypt Exploration Fund, a government State Papers editor and the justly renowned Harriet Martineau. By virtue of their minority status they warrant little mention hereafter. Additionally, there were women members in many of the local archaeological societies. In general, they suffered an inferior status, were rarely permitted a vote on the society's council and frequently paid a smaller membership fee in consequence.

<sup>10</sup> The large number of Oxford and Cambridge graduates may help to explain the high incidence of ordination. Fellowships at Oxbridge colleges were only tenable in tandem with holy orders until 1882. Francis Galton's survey of 1874 showed seven out of every ten of his sample to be members of the established church (p. 126).

<sup>11</sup> Again, Galton's conclusions are similar. In his sample, one-third had been Oxbridge educated, one-third at the Scots, Irish or London universities, and one-third had received no university education at all (p. 236). His findings regarding their professions also roughly correspond: of the 107 who answered his questionnaire, he found 11 lawyers, 6 clerics, 6 teachers, 7 bankers, 21 merchants, 15 manufacturers, 9 noblemen and private gentlemen and a single architect. Not surprisingly, his sample showed more medical practitioners: 9 compared with the historical communities' 2 (p. 22).

Cambridge University Press

0521530504 - The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886

Philippa Levine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

active in various of the county, printing or specialist societies of the period (43%: 87) and their number shows little diminution over time.<sup>12</sup> The picture is similar to that in nineteenth-century scientific communities. As well as Galton's survey of 1874, the recent work of Morrell and Thackray shows most of their 'gentlemen of science' to be university educated, active in a number of scientific societies, and in practice if not avowedly in principle, jealous of their Anglican supremacy. 'No Jews, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists [. . .] were to be found among their number.'<sup>13</sup> Roy Porter too found a similar association between intellectual dominance and social acceptability among nineteenth-century geologists.<sup>14</sup> The scientific and historical communities were for the most part distinct, but clearly drew on the same professional and respectable segment of Victorian English society for their participants and in the context of the 'cultural pluralism' that marks this period their similarities seem appropriate.<sup>15</sup> (See Appendix I.)

The three historical fields were further cemented by the gradual creation of an intellectual genealogy or 'intellectual aristocracy'.<sup>16</sup> Francis Palgrave, first Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, married the daughter of Dawson Turner, an East Anglian antiquary. Turner himself was a banking partner of another Norfolk antiquary Hudson Gurney. Palgrave's successor at the Public Record Office, Thomas Duffus Hardy, was a nephew by marriage of Samuel Lysons, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and author of *The Romans in Gloucestershire* (1860) and various other antiquarian publications. James Orchard Halliwell, Shakespearean scholar and founder of numerous antiquarian societies, married – albeit without her father's consent – Henrietta, daughter of the eccentric Sir Thomas Phillipps whose vast collection of books and manuscripts was legendary and whose private printing press was responsible for a substantial proportion of nineteenth-century editions of early manuscripts. One of the daughters of historian E. A. Freeman married archaeologist Arthur Evans, excavator of Minoan civilisation on Crete and son of Sir John Evans. Edward Bond, founder of the Palaeographic Society and both Keeper of Manuscripts and Principal Librarian at the British Museum married the eldest daughter of the Rev R. H. Barham, author of the satirical *Ingoldsby Legends*.

This genealogical connection is traceable not only in patterns of marriage but between generations. Thomas Duffus Hardy's younger brother William succeeded him as Deputy Keeper at the Public Record Office. John Gough Nichols inherited not just a profitable printing business but a taste for

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 3 pp. 65–6 for details of post-1880 society membership figures.

<sup>13</sup> Morrell & Thackray, *op. cit.* p. 26. <sup>14</sup> R. S. Porter, *loc. cit.* p. 817.

<sup>15</sup> I. Inkster, 'Aspects of the history of science and science culture in Britain, 1780–1850 and beyond', in *Metropolis and Province. Science in British Culture, 1780–1850*, ed. I. Inkster & J. Morrell (London, 1983) pp. 11–54 (p. 25).

<sup>16</sup> Noel Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in *Studies in Social History. A Tribute to G. M. Trevelyan*, ed. J. H. Plumb (London, 1955) pp. 234–87.