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052184178X - Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870-1970

Michael Bentley

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## Modernizing England's Past

What came before 'postmodernism' in historical studies? By thinking through the assumptions, methods and cast of mind of English historians writing between about 1870 and 1970, Michael Bentley reveals the intellectual world of the modernists and offers the first full analysis of English historiography in this crucial period. Modernist historiography set itself the objective of going beyond the colourful narratives of 'whigs' and 'popularizers' in order to establish history as the queen of the humanities and as a rival to the sciences as a vehicle of knowledge. Professor Bentley does not follow those who deride modernism as 'positivist' or 'empiricist', but instead shows how it set in train, at its best, brilliant new styles of investigation that transformed how historians understood the English past. He shows how these strengths were eventually outweighed by inherent confusions and misapprehensions that threatened to starve and kill the very subject that the modernists had intended to sustain.

MICHAEL BENTLEY is Professor of Modern History at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He has edited a *Companion to Historiography* (1997) and is the author of *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (1999).

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*English Historiography in the Age of Modernism,  
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Michael Bentley

*The Wiles Lectures for 2003*



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,  
New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521602662](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521602662)

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First published 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN-13 978-0-521-84178-8 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-84178-X hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-60266-2 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-60266-1 paperback

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## Acknowledgements

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An invitation from the Wiles Trust to deliver the annual series of Wiles Lectures in Queen's University, Belfast would brighten any historian's year and my overriding indebtedness is to the Trust for that very welcome opportunity. In my own case the invitation perhaps carried an unusual responsibility. For in 2003, when the lectures were delivered, we were approaching the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Herbert Butterfield's first Wiles Lectures as *Man on his Past* in 1955; and because I was known to be working on the life and work of Butterfield, it was thought appropriate that the lectures and subsequent book could mark that anniversary. This context licensed me to talk a good deal about Butterfield, but it also implied that the printed version of the lectures should appear in 2005 and I have made every effort, with the collaboration of Cambridge University Press, to make that happen, despite inevitable frustrations in limiting the scope of the volume. As well as thanking the Trust collectively, I should express particular gratitude to Professor Peter Jupp and Professor Sir Ian Kershaw for their support throughout, and to the 'home team' at Queen's for their hospitality and enthusiasm, most especially to Professor David Hayton and Professor Jonathan Gorman. One of the extra delights associated with the Wiles is the chance to invite a panel of distinguished guests to discuss the lectures. I am enormously grateful to all those who came and would want to mention, invidiously, Professor Reba Soffer who made the trip from California and Professor John Burrow who was and continues to be a fount of encouragement. The comments, criticisms and affirmations of all these people have greatly strengthened the book, which none of them has seen and for which none is responsible.

The text rests preponderantly on archival sources and all working historians know how difficult it is to carry out scholarship of this kind when tied to professional duties in one's own institution, not to mention the writing of lectures against the clock for a fixed deadline. I was helped to navigate this problem in three ways and each has left me with an obvious debt that I wish to acknowledge. First, the Leverhulme Trust

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appointed me to a Research Fellowship in 2002–3 which freed me from teaching obligations. Second, the college in Cambridge with which I have a long association, Peterhouse, elected me to a Visiting Fellowship during that year. I am overwhelmingly grateful to the Master and Fellows for that delightful period of residence during which much of the writing was done. Third, my own University of St Andrews showed great generosity and flexibility in granting me leave of absence in order to prepare the lectures.

My greatest debt remains that owed to my wife, Professor Sarah Foot.

MB

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## Note on the text

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All books referred to in the footnotes were published in London unless otherwise cited. All quotations retain their original form and punctuation except where an authorial intervention has been marked by square brackets.

The following abbreviations have been used in referring to periodicals:

<i>A</i>	<i>Albion</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
<i>CHJ</i>	<i>Cambridge Historical Journal</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Cambridge Review</i>
<i>EcHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>Econ.</i>	<i>Economica</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>H</i>	<i>History</i>
<i>H&amp;T</i>	<i>History and Theory</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>Historical Research</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>History Today</i>
<i>HZ</i>	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
<i>P&amp;P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Revue historique</i>
<i>SdS</i>	<i>Storia della storiografia</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>Speculum</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>YAJ</i>	<i>Yorkshire Archaeological Journal</i>