

CHRISTOPHER HILL PAPERS

INTRODUCTION TO THE CATALOGUE

Christopher Hill died in 2003 and his family gave his academic papers and the choice of his books to Balliol College, where he had been an undergraduate, tutor and Master from 1965 - 1978. His entry from the College Register is annexed to this introduction. A list of his works up to 1977 is included in *Puritans and Revolutionaries, Essays in 17th century history presented to Christopher Hill*, ed. by Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. He continued to write, lecture and publish well into the 1990s. A Biographical Memoir by Donald Pennington appeared in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* 130 (2005) 23-49.

The papers had to be collected from his study in Sibford Ferris at speed. The study was crowded, and material had clearly been heavily used, and rearranged frequently according to what Hill was working on at any particular moment. The arrangement of material on the wall shelves, book cases and floor seemed often by where things would fit. The papers and books were boxed and taken to Balliol, where a summary list of the papers was prepared, preparatory to more detailed cataloging.

The papers given to Balliol comprise notebooks, folders of papers, packs of notes on small cards, sheets from booksellers' catalogues (of which many are also in the folders), facsimiles and transcripts of source material, proofs, typescripts (many more of which also appear, often dismembered, in the folders, usually odd sheets, the backs of which have been re-used for notes), Hill's publications, conference proceedings, recordings and awards. There are also many theses, off-prints, typescripts and published works not by Hill.

Hill's way of using and recycling paper and research material began in the 1930s and continued for as long as he worked. He wrote in ink over pencil notes in his notebooks, he re-used school notebooks, he wrote notes and drafts on the backs of letters, cards, typescript drafts and administrative papers from various organizations with which he was associated. Some of these re-used letters and papers are of interest in their own right, though not usually relating to the subject of the folder they are in. The folder covers themselves have often been re-used and re-titled, some several times. This, with his small and increasingly unclear writing and many abbreviations, creates an appearance of impenetrable chaos. There was however discipline and order in Hill's method of working and his papers show that others considered his knowledge both wide and deep, and sought his help for references and detailed information, assuming he had a comprehensive index. He had no such index, but clearly an excellent memory for the information he held in his papers. There are series of notebooks as well as folders on particular works and topics. How he used this material is demonstrated by cross references to source notes, but his ready access to what was in all these papers came with his knowledge as their creator. The actual order of the material within the folders particularly was a work in progress – he often added material to folders over many years and probably re-organized material from the folders to suit new projects.

The transfer of Hill's academic papers to Balliol for use by others who do not have Hill's knowledge of their content and logic meant decisions had to be taken on how best to arrange them and how to catalogue them. Only original autograph material by Hill has been fully listed, Not yet catalogued are packs of small cards, leaflets, tickets etc, containing brief notes which can be hard to relate to specific subjects or projects. The items on the backs of which he has written the notes can be of their own interest though – including multiple copies of Methodist Missionary Society leaflets.

Works by others, including typescripts, theses and offprints; the proofs and published versions of Hill's own works; the recordings, awards, conference proceedings, sheets from booksellers' catalogues and the facsimiles and transcripts of source material await more detailed listing.

312 items have however been catalogued in some detail: these are Hill's notebooks and folders and a few other items and loose papers. They cover almost his entire life and have been sorted into a logical order. It would have been possible to sort them differently with equal logic, but the catalogue can be searched electronically and so different views can be achieved – for example all the folders relating to Milton can be gathered electronically. The categories chosen for the catalogue are: Early personal and miscellaneous papers; School and student notebooks; Notes on reading; and Research folders. The research folders are subdivided into: Minor publications; Work of and on Hill's contemporaries; Hill's books & major publications; Hill's Articles; Lectures; Broadcasts; Reviews; and Miscellaneous papers. Within the categories, and within subdivisions and certain series of papers mentioned below, items are listed chronologically. These categories are not always entirely exclusive – some items could have been put in more than one category - but it is hoped that they are a helpful way to organize the material.

Many of the notebooks and folders bear Roman or Arabic numerals or letters of the alphabet. When these were correlated a number of sequences emerged, including a series of notebooks with reference notes on books, mainly on 17th century English history, which Hill had compiled from the 1930s to the 1990s – items 58-116 in the catalogue. Another sequence from the 1940s relates to books on Russia and the USSR – items 117-122. The various sequences have been listed in Hill's original order. Not all the sequences are complete and presumably he kept only those parts, particularly of early material, whose contents he deemed of continuing use for his work.

Hill read very widely from an early age. Some early notebooks list his reading and he must either have skimmed some of the books or read very fast. Those writing to him about his works often remark on his wide reading and range of source works. He also learned and used other languages. Hill knew the value for a historian of reading the work of foreign historians on his own subject and period and he read widely in, and often also made notes in French, German and Russian. He was particularly interested in Russian books on the 17th century and the English Revolution. Recent translations of Hill's notes in Russian in item 130 in the catalogue are in the folder with the notebook.

Hill's habit of writing notes and drafts on the blank backs of already used sheets of paper has been mentioned above, as has the interesting nature of some of the material thus incidentally retained. Item 243 in the catalogue, a folder of material on Winstanley, contains a high number of letters of which Hill has used the backs for the notes that he has kept in the folder. They have been listed in the catalogue as they provide a good example of Hill's dealings with publishers on his own and other's behalf. These are the original letters and presumably therefore there are no folders elsewhere of such correspondence. Many other examples of such material are scattered through other folders but have only been listed in the catalogue if they seemed particularly interesting or significant. This sort of material gives an insight into the rest of Hill's world, into how many people approached him from interest in his books, how many people sought his support, whether for a personal reference, for help with their academic work, or charities and political causes wanting his money or his name. Many groups and organizations wanted him to lecture, to attend conferences and to review or assess books.

Many of those who wrote to Hill signed their letters only with their first names. Some have been at least tentatively identified from other letters or papers; others were known to cataloguer and some were supplied by an early reader of some of the papers. Where a surname appears in square brackets in the catalogue, it means it does not appear on the letter concerned and where it also appears with a question mark, the name appears as a suggestion. Anyone looking for material from or relating to a particular person should search the catalogue by Christian as well as surname, plus alternative spellings, given that signatures are not always easy to interpret.

The correspondence in these papers – both that there intentionally and that only retained through its re-use – reveal Hill's wide circle of academic contacts throughout the world, both those he had met or taught in Oxford who came from or ended up in many other countries, and those he met or worked with in other countries. There were those, like his circle of Marxist historians, whose sympathies he clearly shared and those with whom he publicly disagreed, but with whom he could correspond on cordial terms. He thrived on serious debate but was also involved in a number of acrimonious public arguments with other scholars.

The catalogue includes one folder of papers (item 245) which did not come from Hill. Item 244 is a folder of Hill papers about his plans in the early 1990s for a new comprehensive edition of the papers of Winstanley. He hoped to have David Taylor as co-editor and folder 244 contains correspondence between them. In 2009 David Taylor gave his own papers on this unfulfilled project to Balliol. They include the originals of many of the same letters as Hill's papers, so between folders 244 and 245 there is a more complete picture of the project and why it was not fulfilled, which is why Taylor's papers have been included in the collection and the catalogue.

The catalogue was compiled over almost 4 years, with a few days work at a time. Some inconsistencies of treatment and presentation inevitably crept in and while the main ones have been standardized, a few remain which it is hoped are not annoying. One example which remains is that, for items catalogued early, the subject covered in the draft sheets

whose backs had been re-used for the notes in the notebook or folder concerned was noted in the catalogue entry. This practice was abandoned once it was clear that such re-use was the fate of most of Hill's drafts and trying to reconstruct them would be pretty well impossible even if anyone wanted to. The information however has been left in the catalogue entries for interest.

As well as the box of sheets from booksellers' catalogues, which came from a drawer in Hill's desk, many such sheets are scattered through many folders. The items Hill has marked on these sheets have been noted in the catalogue, except where there were just too many sheets in a folder. In most entries the information on items marked in booksellers' catalogues has been grouped together for clarity, even though the sheets are scattered throughout the folder. Where there were very few such sheets, however, they have been mentioned as they occurred. Similarly, items of interest on the backs of Hill's notes have usually been collected together in the catalogue entry, but sometimes where there are only a few, they are noted as they occur.

Hill knew his material well and had no need to put dates on his notes and papers. The date or span of dates in the notebooks and folders is not usually absolutely clear and where dates do appear – often in the letter or paper whose back is being re-used – it is clear that Hill added things to folders many years after the main content of the folder was written. Essentially, the more question marks appear in the date column in the catalogue, the less certain is the date of the item concerned.

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