

MEMORIAL

Jonathan Osmond (1953–2014)

JONATHAN Osmond graduated from Queen's College, Oxford in 1975 with a First in Modern History and Modern Languages, and went on to St Antony's College, where he worked with Anthony Nicholls. He also studied at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich before gaining his D. Phil in 1987. By this time Jonathan was established as a lecturer at Leicester University, but his fascination with German history, culture, and language had begun before his student days, and his increasingly specialized work on aspects of modern German history was always part of a larger passion. Jonathan's first book, *Rural Protest in the Weimar Republic: The Free Peasantry in the Rhineland and Bavaria* (1993), arose from his doctoral dissertation and set a path for the first phase of his research activity, which focused on agrarian society and politics in twentieth-century Germany. He was in Berlin in November 1989, when the Communist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) collapsed with astonishing and unpredicted rapidity, and Jonathan used his first-hand observation of events and significant actors during that remarkable historical transition to inform the valuable *German Unification: A Reference Guide and Commentary*, which he published in 1992.

After promotion to the chair of Modern European History at Cardiff University in 1994, Jonathan played a leading role as one of a small group of English-speaking scholars doing pioneering work on the GDR, then a neglected area of modern German history, but one offering exciting opportunities with the opening of hitherto closed archives. After publishing on the important topic of land reform, Jonathan helped to turn Cardiff into one of the centers in Britain for the wider study of politics, society, and culture in the GDR. Together with Patrick Major, he edited *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71* (2002), which brought together contributions from established scholars in Germany, Britain, and North America, as well as from a number of younger researchers.

Jonathan was also a gifted teacher. Generations of undergraduate and postgraduate students at Leicester, Cardiff, and elsewhere have benefited from his encyclopedic knowledge, his wide cultural horizons, and his calm good judgment. He

combined meticulous attention to detail with penetrating insight and generous humanity. Many of his former students will remember with affection the extra care he took with such seemingly small matters as references and letters of introduction. As a conference or seminar speaker he could hold an audience's attention in a way many others will envy. I remember well a research seminar in Cardiff when, mixing ideas about painting, music, war, and politics, Jonathan spoke brilliantly, without interruption, for nearly twice the scheduled forty minutes. No one complained or left early.

Jonathan's commitment to collaborative academic activity and his calm but meticulous approach to all of his work made him well suited to academic leadership, and from 1996 to 2006 he was Head of the School of History and Archaeology at Cardiff. From 2007 to 2012 he served as Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students and Learning at Cardiff, and in this role he helped to drive through a number of important structural reforms affecting the University as a whole. He took a particular interest in the Cardiff University library system, and played a major part in 2010 in helping to secure a collection of some 14,000 rare books spanning the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries that was otherwise threatened with dispersal. These strategic administrative roles did not deter Jonathan from research and teaching, and he enjoyed spells as a Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Humboldt University in Berlin, as Visiting Professor at the Central European University in Budapest, and as a Research Fellow of the Humboldt Foundation at the University of Potsdam.

A thread running through Jonathan's career was his love of travel and international collaboration. His extensive international contacts helped prepare him for a major role in the CLIOH project, founded in 1999 with the ambition of "building a European cultural space" and providing a common forum for the development of a collaborative approach to history teaching in universities across Europe. With the growth of the European Union, this body evolved to take on a special role in seeking to integrate the newer member countries and those on the European periphery into a more established academic community. Together with Ausma Cimdina Jonathan edited two of the nine volumes published in the CLIOH Workshop and CLIOH Workshop II projects, and he was an ever present figure at the group's meetings. Between 2005 and 2012 he served on the Management Group of the CLIOHRES.net European Network of Excellence.

By this time, though, Jonathan's attention had turned to the subject that pre-occupied him in the final phase of his academic career: art and painting. He brought a love and passion for the visual arts to his close study of GDR painting, travelling to visit and speak to artists who had lived and worked in East Germany, and seeking to place their work in a longer continuum of German and indeed European cultural history. He spoke on German visual culture at many conferences in Europe and North America, and even on the RMS Queen Mary 2

traveling between the two continents. He published articles on Socialist Realism and other aspects of German visual culture in scholarly journals in Germany and in Britain, and he became an established exhibition reviewer for *The Art Book* and *The Burlington Magazine*. In the last year he was working on what would have been a highly revealing contextual study of the painter Horst Schlossar. Many of us were privileged to hear him speaking on individual paintings and painters in Cardiff and elsewhere at academic conferences, and to benefit from his ability to relate insights from worlds of European culture seemingly remote from one another chronologically, geographically, and thematically. It is profoundly sad and disappointing that the prospect of Jonathan bringing together his panoramic knowledge of German culture and history in a larger study of modern German painting has been frustrated by his untimely death in June 2014.

Jonathan leaves a legacy not only in his publications but also in the memories of his students and colleagues, who benefited from his kindness, learning, and wisdom. Before his death he established a special collection of press cuttings, archival materials, and books relating to GDR society in the University Library at Cardiff: this will no doubt benefit future students and researchers, and it is hoped that a trust fund will be established in his name.

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