

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

“The past may be forgotten, but it never dies. The elements which in the most remote times have entered into a nation's composition endure through all its history and help to mould that history, and to stamp the character and genius of the people.”

Thomas William Hazen Rolleston
(1857-1920)

The cultural historian who attempts to write anything about British history and civilization is confronted with two serious dilemmas. First of all, even a comparatively short description and analysis of basic historical factors would consume many volumes. To write about the mighty force of the events, processes and cultural achievements which have emanated from Britain to the rest of the world over the ages is an even larger task. Secondly, he encounters the problem of a subject about which little new can be said, at least from the traditional point of view generally accepted by official historiography. British historiography, however, suffers from internal British evaluations, excluding the external views of foreign historians. And here is the chance to reveal and analyse what has been overlooked by native British scholars.

This monograph attempts to examine some selected issues which are crucial for British history. It consists of fragments of my earlier publications together with previously unpublished full lectures, now arranged chronologically in order to form a somewhat new historical, and at the same time, cultural narrative. Most of this monograph's chapters were first delivered at different intervals in the years 1991-2014 as a series of regular lectures under the title „Selected Aspects of British History and Culture.” Then they were repeated during consecutive academic years, each time updated with new elements and thus they matured until they gained their final form. At least in some respects they ventured to introduce new information or new interpretations of earlier knowledge. Some of them were separately developed and became the basis of two of my former books published in Polish: *The Origins of Civilization in the*

British Isles (*Narodziny Cywilizacji Wysp Brytyjskich*, 1995) and *A History of British Culture* (*Dzieje kultury brytyjskiej*, 2003). In the present monograph I use some fragments of these books in a new English language version, because they have never been published in English before (except two chapters: on *Archaic Celtic Poetry* and *From 'ga' to Heptarchy*). Thus, some of them closely follow the Polish texts in English, while some appear in loose, paraphrased form. But the main bulk of this monograph contains chapters which are based on original lectures delivered in English and never before published either in English or Polish versions.

All of them, although to different degrees, are enriched by new discoveries, not always my own, but always used to update my narrative. For instance, a number of my earlier works explained the presence of the Celtic people on the British Isles through migration. Now I present a more differentiated view of prehistoric Celtic Britain. Thus, I have included a new thesis which accepts the possibility of the existence in the Isles of pre-Indo-European peoples and moreover, their possible influences on Celtic tribes – both those groups arriving in Britain and those remaining on the European Mainland. Also, recent excavations carried out in Poland by two Polish archaeologists: Małgorzata Talarczyk-Andrałójć and her husband Mirosław Andrałójć, extended the known range of Celtic civilization into the Kujawy Region in Central Poland, further than was previously realised by Western celtologists. Although this does not pertain directly to the British Celts, it has allowed me to present the general character of Celtic culture in a new light.

Careful readers may also observe that among the chapters on Celtic culture, two are almost entirely devoted to Ireland. This may not seem justified in a book with the adjective “British” in its title. In addition, in Ireland, especially among Roman Catholics in the north, whatever is named “British” is often confused with the term “English” and associated with resentment towards the English as the enemy from the neighbouring island. On a popular level it has been largely forgotten, however, that the words *British*, *Britain*, etc. in terms of their etymology are, in fact, of Celtic origin. Secondly, in all atlases known to me, the entire North Atlantic archipelago, which includes Great Britain and Ireland, is still named the British Isles. Furthermore, in the course of the development of civilization in that area of the world, Irish and British cultures have overlapped and intertwined to the degree that the history of one of them cannot be

understood without the other. All of this, in my view, fully justifies and makes it rational to include significant elements of Irish history and culture in the book.

In all the chapters of this monograph I have also tried to enrich my narrative with elements of new interpretations and sometimes create new hypotheses or even, at least in some cases, discover new facts (although this is quite difficult when taking into account the exhaustive coverage of all aspects of British culture found in the numerous works of British and American historiography). Nevertheless, I was bold enough to suggest a new hypothesis concerning the lack of English protagonists in the Old English epic, a problem not solved for decades if not centuries. Also, I attempt to suggest that the medieval Five Boroughs and later Seven Boroughs, were in fact the first European union of trading towns, preceding by a few decades the Hanseatic League. In the history of English sport, it seems to me that I was able to add new information concerning the etymology of the fair play concept. So far it has generally been accepted that the first usage of the term was introduced by William Shakespeare in his two dramas: *The Tempest* and *the Life and Death of King John* and almost simultaneously by James Balmford in his *Short and Plaine Dialogue concerning the unlawfulness of playing at cards* (1594). I found, however, after some research, that the term appeared for the first time much earlier than the end of the 16th century. Perhaps the first time it was used in literature almost 200 years earlier in the late medieval poem *The Siege of Jerusalem*, although in a slightly different form: *faire play*. This poem was well known to English literary historians but nobody had extracted the mentioned term from it just for its specific linguistic use in an ethical context.

The academic character of the lectures and the necessity of providing students with a deeper context for the raised matters inspired me to explain the typical events and processes of British culture against the background of wider phenomena in European cultural history. Thus, such an event as the Sepoy Mutiny and the well known picture of Vasily Vereshchagin, showing the moment of killing the leaders of the rebellion by attaching them to the mouths of guns, comprised wider information about anti-war painting in the European tradition, such as Jacques Callot's prints on *The Miseries of War* (*Les Misères de la guerre*) or Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* (*Los Desastres de la Guerra*). Monographs discussing specific topics do not always concern themselves with extending their content to wider questions of similar and simultaneous cultural develop-

ments and traditions in other cultures and contexts. I have never encountered any work on the history of the East India Company and the Sepoy Mutiny furnished with the anti-war context or anti-imperial art or literature. I have tried to escape in a number of other places such a narrow attitude by providing the reader with a broader context in terms of the depth of the described and analyzed factors and processes. The careful reader, even the one well acquainted with British cultural history, will easily find such fragments of the monograph in which I do not follow precisely the traditional canons of British historiography.

Composing a monograph from a series of academic lectures has a very long tradition and is certainly not my invention. It allows the lecturer to test the views and content of a future book before publication by seeing students' reactions and understanding. This quite frequently allows the possibility to consider and include their suggestions and even improvements! Some of my lectures were attended by students of different faculties and even schools, such as the Institute of History at Adam Mickiewicz University, the Academy of Music, the University of Economics or even the Banking School, all in Poznań. I never will forget the visit of a group of some 15 students of architecture from Leszno State Vocational School, willing to extend their knowledge of British matters. A series of four lectures was delivered on the invitation of the Department of English at the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, and two for the Institute of English Cultures and Literatures at Silesia University. My lecture on British sport and the origins of fair play was honoured by becoming an inaugural speech for the Postgraduate Course in Sports Management of the Faculty of Management and Social Communication at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Such diverse audiences provided me with different types of reaction and sometimes quite energetic discussion of theses within my lectures. The final part of my lecture on the *History and Concept of Freedom in British Civilization* (now a chapter of this book) is one of the most controversial areas, due to recent public fears concerning electronic surveillance and „The News of the World” affair known also as “Murdochgate.” I will never forget my lecture in which one girl substantially corrected my rather outdated views on some aspects of Britain's medieval culture in such a competent way that I was completely surprised by her knowledge and convincing argumentation. We, academic lecturers, sometimes forget that in the audience sit our successors and that sooner or later their knowledge will exceed our own.

It is not my purpose to write and analyse a full chronological record of the most important historical events in this monograph. In the history of British civilization they are too numerous. The present work is not a regular history but pays attention only to some selected issues in the cultural history of Britain (and also partly the British Isles) which seem of special importance. These selected problems are in my opinion highlights of British cultural history, the very moments and factors when cultural, not just political, legal or economic factors, take the centre of the British stage.

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