

of ordinary people, transformed definitions of the political. If only men, for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fully engaged in formal legislative politics and judicial decision-making, women could and did participate in a rough and ready politics of pamphleteering, public protest, and ritual expression. These community-originated forms of behavior, which became the subjects of the new labour history, have provided empirical depth to notions of class and complicated ideas of consciousness. Not accidentally, they have required a gender-encompassing agenda – one that utilizes information from every aspect of social and family life. The reward for historians of the working class has been immense: few would dispute that incorporating women and gender into their mix of evidence has enriched historical explanation. We have Edward Thompson to thank for this.

June Hannam:

I FIRST MET E.P. THOMPSON when I was a student at Warwick University in the turbulent times of 1966–70. His lectures to the first-year history undergraduates were a tour de force, a theatrical performance. He strode through the lecture hall carrying an armful of books from which he quoted at length, while sweeping back his unruly mop of hair. He then proceeded to transform our view of the world of early industrialisation with his descriptions of the moral economy of the crowd, time and work discipline and, most exciting of all, wife selling as a popular form of divorce. He encouraged us to read the novels of Thomas Hardy with a new set of eyes and to value the works of older scholars such as the Hammonds – advice which has stayed with me throughout the years.

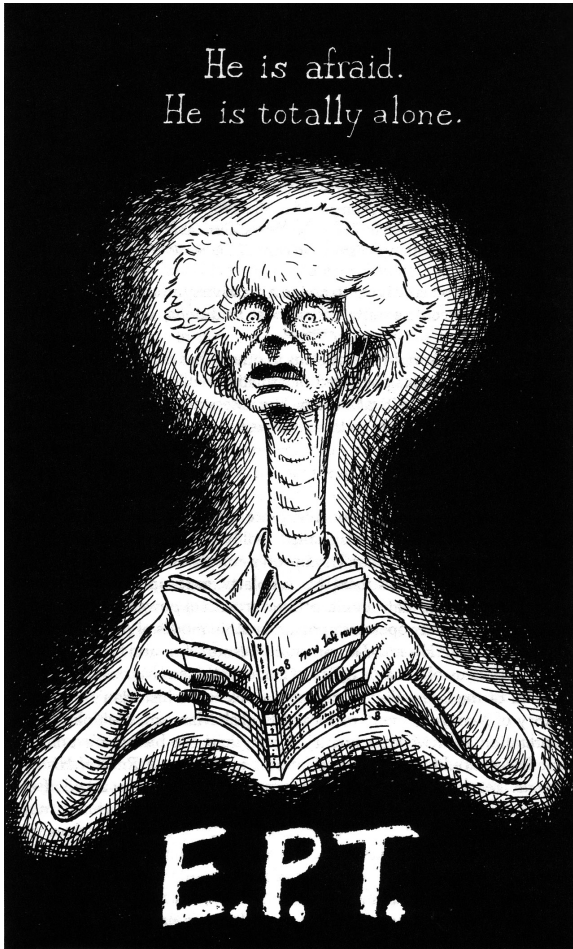
I was not taught by Edward after the first year of my undergraduate degree but he was a vital presence on the campus. In this period of student unrest against the Vietnam War and critique of the education system he gave frequent talks about his vision of current left politics – sometimes he was disconcertingly critical of the naivety of students who thought they could resist the power of the state. He also gave fascinating reminiscences of his involvement in communist and left politics and adult education in Yorkshire, which provided the context for Thompson's study of working-class self activity. What stayed with me most was the inextricable intertwining of family, politics, work and social life at this time and the importance of his friendship with the labour and left activists, Dorothy and Joseph Greenald, to whom Edward dedicated *The Making of the English Working Class*.

When *The Making* was published in paperback I can remember reading the whole book from cover to cover. Who could ever forget first reading the lines "I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete; handloom weaver...from the enormous condescension of posterity."

The approach to class as a relationship, bringing together experience and consciousness, the notion that ordinary people were significant historical actors and had complex emotions and ideas, and the importance of looking at history from below struck an immediate chord with me. I was already predisposed to be influenced by such an approach. From a working-class background, and the first person in my family to go to university, I was brought up to be a committed trade unionist and to be critical of inherited wealth and privilege. At Warwick there were numerous socialist societies exploring new ways of thinking about left politics as well as the protest movements encouraging direct action. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that I chose to study further with Thompson and stayed on at Warwick to do the MA in Comparative Labour History.

In that year contemporary politics and labour history were again intertwined. The course attracted students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds but we all took part in the sit-ins in the registry in protest against the university's links with business which formed the basis of Thompson's book, *Warwick University Ltd.* In this heady atmosphere our debates about labour history had never seemed so relevant to our daily lives. Influenced by the new Women's Liberation Movement the small number of female students began to question why we only seemed to look at miners and engineers – where were the women? Having read Edward's article on the Leeds socialist, Tom Maguire, I decided to research the Leeds Tailoresses' Strike 1889 and, as my supervisor, he gave me his full support and encouragement. Thompson could be fierce when debating points of theory with his contemporaries, but I remember him as a sympathetic, if critical, supervisor who could be sensitive when dealing with a nervous and unconfident postgraduate.

The Making, the biography of William Morris, and Edward Thompson's work on Leeds socialists – all of which I encountered at a very formative period of my life – inspired me to carry on with history research and affected how I approached my teaching in my first full-time post as a lecturer at Bristol Polytechnic. I introduced social history courses which had *The Making* as their starting point, putting up with sarcastic remarks from some external examiners because of my approach. The Tailoresses' Strike was the starting point for my long term interest in socialist women. Questions and approaches may have changed over time, but the importance of recovering lost voices and the interconnections between history and politics still remain, for me as well as for the project of working-class history.



Josh Brown