**Queen’s Heritage**

175th Anniversary Podcast

It’s funny how reading a line or two about somebody can set you off in entirely the wrong direction. I remember seeing somewhere or other that the first professor of Logic at Queen’s was dismissed from his post in 1849 only a few months after he’d taken up the appointment. The reason was “persistent failure to turn up to his classes”! His name was Robert Blakey and I didn’t think much of him. I dismissed him from my mind. He *was* the author of a number of books …. on fishing, and even compiled a volume of angling songs, but that just confirmed me in my judgment. Blakey obviously preferred fish to philosophy.

How mistaken that judgment was! It turns out that Blakey was a prolific philosophical author as well as a radical journalist. And he wrote the first serious history of political thought, a work that has recently been made available again as a classic reprint as recently as 2019. That’s over a century and a half on. So too, by the way, was his *Hints on Angling, with Suggestions for Angling Excursions in France and Belgium* – that’s if you would like to take that up after Covid!

Dr Stuart Mathiesen, until recently a postdoctoral fellow here at Queen’s, has done some research on Blakey and he explained to me just how influential his work actually was.

When he could be dragged away from his rod and reel, Stuart told me, Blakey played a crucial role in keeping the ideals of the Scottish enlightenment relevant in Victorian Britain. But he was also remarkably influential in Europe at a time when British philosophy was considered provincial. Early subscribers to his work included the French, Belgian and German monarchs and he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Jena.

Stuart has emphasised the importance of Scottish philosophy in the thinking of Blakey. And it had an even greater influence on his successor, James McCosh who arrived from Scotland in the early 1850s to take up the chair. McCosh made a name for himself as a pioneer of experimental psychology and as a moral philosopher. But he was also a devout Free Churchman and adopted stances that not everyone was happy with. He became the foremost reconciler of the theory of evolution and Christianity, and at the same time supported the religious revival that broke out in the north of Ireland the very same year as Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was published – 1859. Later, when he left these shores, it was to take up the Presidency of the College of New Jersey. Under his leadership it was transformed into the world-leading Princeton University. In fact if you visit Princeton you will not only find a McCosh Hall – a venerable lecture theatre that is currently being renovated – but you’ll also see the Queen’s flag and crest displayed in the campus chapel.

From these early days it’s clear that the Queen’s was connected into a global network of scholarship. Good universities need to bring together the local with the global more than ever. For as someone has said, ‘the global is local at every point’. Universities need to introduce students to global themes; and the best work that’s produced locally needs to be made globally visible. Queen’s has always sought to do that. And two figures stand out in my mind as terrific examples.

No one did more to bring knowledge of the landscapes of Ireland to the world than the geographer, archaeologist and historian Estyn Evans. In works like *Mourne Country,* and *The Personality of Ireland,* Evans showed how the universal was manifest in the particular. By depicting the personality of place in rich and compelling ways, Evans brought local landscapes and ways of life to global audiences. The distinguished American scholar, Donald Meinig, had this to say of Evans’s artistry. Evans has made Ulster and Ireland “so deeply a part of his life that he has made himself an indelible part of our understanding of them. Who could ever know Mourne Country except through Estyn Evans? The personality of the place has taken on something of the personality of its student”.

If Estyn Evans brought Ireland to the world, the anthropologist John Blacking brought the world to Ireland. It was during his army service in Malaya, that he became interested in musical traditions worldwide. It turned into a lifelong passion. At Queen’s he established a whole new discipline – Ethnomusicology, and with it a musical museum with instruments gathered from around the world. Blacking brought global music to Belfast. In 1975 he published his seminal work seeking to answer the question, how musical is humanity? His answer was clear: inherent musical ability is a defining characteristic of being human. On his death in 1991 one writer observed: “We have lost one of the greatest ethnomusicologists and educators of the century. But his legacy lies in the enormous number of people from all parts of the world who are all the more for having come into contact with him and his work”.

Estyn Evans and John Blacking exhibited the virtues of a genuinely interdisciplinary outlook. They crossed the boundaries between science and the humanities; they worked the fertile ground between geography and history, archaeology and architecture, anthropology and music; they studied the particular to disclose the universal. They represent the very best of what any truly great university still ought to be.

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