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THE GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE LONDON AND GERMAN RESEARCH ON BRITISH HISTORY

ANDREAS FAHRMEIR

It is obvious, of course, that this attempt to describe relations between the German Historical Institute London and German research on British history is highly subjective. Given that the GHIL has produced more than a hundred volumes in its various series, and taking into account all the reviews and articles that have appeared in the *GHIL Bulletin* and the numerous books which its Research Fellows have published elsewhere, rather more differentiation (and a great deal of research) would be required to present a definitive picture. And given the GHIL's long-standing and close relations with other German historical area studies which relate to Britain or the British Empire (whether organizations such as the German Association for the Study of British History and Politics (ADEF), the Centre for British Studies at the Humboldt University in Berlin, and the Prince Albert Society, or university history departments in Germany, where much work on Britain has been and is still being done) it is no easy task always to differentiate the GHIL's role precisely from that of other individual or collective actors. Finally, and this is the most important limitation, any brief, broad-brush sketch will not do the GHIL justice because it must, in part, suppress what is most valuable about the Institute, namely, that it allows individuals to undertake research distinguished by its originality and distance from dominant trends. In this narrative, this means, for example, that studies of Empire, which, over the last forty years have gone in very different directions and thus cannot easily be subsumed under one of the Institute's programmes, are not visible enough.

If we look at the research primarily on British history undertaken at the Institute or published by it, and take these limitations into account, then two main areas of interest emerge. The first one is, fairly obviously, Britain's international relations with Germany, which is therefore almost equally divided between the GHIL's contribution to research on Germany and on Britain. The main emphasis has been,

Trans. Angela Davies (GHIL).

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again unsurprisingly, on the most intense conflicts, that is, the First and Second World Wars, the run-up to each, post-war planning, and the occupation periods in both cases. In addition, research has been done on Britain's relations with the world of German states before unification in 1871, in particular, the edition of reports by British envoys to the German states in the nineteenth century, and on English foreign policy in the Middle Ages. Beyond this, the GHIL has always been a place for reflecting on the state of the history of international relations in general. It has held conferences on new methodological and theoretical approaches to the history of international entanglements and on the everyday practices of diplomacy. And it has produced pioneering publications on political aspects of the cultural history of foreign policy.

The second main area of interest which, it is my impression, covers much of the work produced at the GHIL, is an offspring of the *Sonderweg* debate. The main issue here is not the diplomatic, military, or mass media origins or causes of conflict and cooperation between Britain and Germany. Rather, work in this area has looked at the specific qualities of British and German political structures, ideas of the state and constitutions, systems of social security (and social control), social organization, ideas of nation, ways of organizing and encouraging research, and more strongly in recent times, forms of cultural understanding and self-confidence that in Germany made the political catastrophe of National Socialism possible, while in Britain they strengthened resistance to totalitarian challenges. Many of the studies produced at the GHIL, and under its influence, have drawn direct comparisons. Others have contrasted research findings based primarily on a German or continental European example with a British perspective, for example, on criminality, poverty, and deviance, on the development of political programmes and semantics (especially in relation to national movements and the staging and legitimization of rule), or the constitution of social groups such as the aristocracy and the middle classes, along with their role in politics.

In both areas, the research undertaken at the GHIL reflects wider movements in the field, for example, in questioning what has long been considered established about the 'Anglo-German antagonism' at sea, or in the press before 1914; in the transition from social history to more cultural history approaches; in the ever increasing openness towards comparisons that go beyond Europe (not least the spe-

cial attention paid to supporting projects on India in recent years); and in opening out the temporal framework within which the structural peculiarities mentioned above must be seen to beyond 1945, a period when the differences to be explained cannot, of course, be described so easily.

This embedding in wider debates makes it difficult to identify specific approaches that go beyond the individual choices of researchers and could be termed a GHIL house style. The GHIL has never had a monopoly on implicit or explicit Anglo-German comparisons, or on the thematic and methodological themes mentioned above. And the research on British history undertaken or published by the GHIL forms part of a large and lively field that is only to a small degree influenced by research in Germany. Any attempt to make a judgement about what initiatives in this context emanated primarily from the GHIL, were picked up by it from elsewhere, or even brought there from other areas would rightly be highly controversial.

Yet it seems to me that, in the German context, the density of the empirical material on which the studies originating at the GHIL draw, and which is thus made available for future research, is a quality that stands out. This results, naturally, from the conditions which the Institute can offer its Fellows—scholars often have the chance to spend several years (rather than a few months) researching in the archives—but also from the close dialogue with an academic culture whose methodological and theoretical concerns and approaches differ from those in Germany. Thus a focus on new empirical insights can help to facilitate an Anglo-German dialogue.

That disjunctions in the research interests of German and British scholars have had a significant impact on the contribution made by the GHIL is also clear if we look at the areas in which the Institute's research profile in British history has been more low key. Given the UK's role in transforming the world through industrialization, this could apply to economic history, which must surely count as one of the most internationalized branches of history, and one in which the synchronization of approaches and preferred methods across borders is far advanced.

It is also possible that a concentration on Anglo-German comparisons with an end point in contemporary history has helped to reinforce the obvious focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After all, it is less clear what the study of historical periods before the

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existence of a 'state' that was comparable with other 'states' could contribute to the central research themes, especially as the extent of entanglements, connections, and mutual influence between England and Germany were less obvious and therefore seemed less central in the early modern period and the Middle Ages. The GHIL has made important attempts to identify Anglo-British themes for these periods and, in general, to address the issue of common cycles in the history of Britain and continental Europe, thus questioning certain assumptions about British peculiarities. But against the background of the Institute's many research activities, these initiatives are perhaps a little less prominent than others.

Regardless of whether the *Sonderweg* debate experiences a renaissance (possibly, under the impact of Brexit, taking a different tack by focusing on British peculiarities, as Bernd Weisbrod has already suggested), or whether, after the renewed debate on the First World War, the history of international relations is resurgent, especially in Germany, and perhaps therefore gains more ground at the GHIL again, the central research questions that have shaped the GHIL will certainly remain relevant—and that is good news. At the same time, there is a chance to look at areas which, against the background of the Institute's traditions, might seem to be relatively new.

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