



## PAUL ADDISON : A TRIBUTE

GORDON BROWN

Paul Addison, who died in January after a long illness bravely endured, was not only one of the finest historians of his generation, but a humanitarian whose great personal humility was matched by a personal warmth, an endearing geniality and an unimpeachable decency that made him admired and respected by all who knew him. I am one of many who feel privileged to have benefited from his teaching and his wisdom, and to have been able to count him as a friend.

His best-known works – *The Road to 1945* (1975), *Churchill on the Home Front* (1992) and *Churchill : The Unexpected Hero* (2005) – are the result of more than fifty years of historical research since he graduated from Oxford in 1964, and all will stand the test of time. His last book, *The Spirit of the Blitz*, co-edited with Professor Jeremy Crang, published posthumously, and which recounts the inside story of Mass Information, the unit that secretly monitored the state of popular morale during the Second World War, will reinforce his already considerable reputation.

Paul's other great attribute – his personal kindness – will also never be forgotten. When I visited him a few days before he died, he was honest about how much weaker he was than he had wanted his friends to know, and he was realistic – not angry or bitter – about the fate that had befallen him. Indeed, he had lost none of his interest in the world around him, debating that very day whether he should do an interview sought by the former Labour leader Ed Miliband for his *Reasons to be Cheerful* podcast about the relevance of 1945 to the present day. 'Now my batteries are flat and I do not expect to keep body and soul together for much longer', he said in his last email to me. But moving on to write of the good that many people whom he knew were doing, he ended with the words, 'there is hope'.

I first came across Paul more than 50 years ago. I had just completed several weeks in hospital and then in recuperation after a sports injury had damaged my eyesight; so I arrived at Edinburgh University months after term had started and I must have appeared quite lost when I turned up at his history tutorial. Paul had just started as a lecturer and was, I suspect, almost as nervous as me; but quickly he

communicated a love of history and a touching concern for all his students that made him popular among all who were taught by him. Like his own tutor, A.J.P. Taylor, Paul wanted history to reach a large popular audience – and not because it had been dumbed down, but through the exciting insights that came from good research and through the brilliance of its exposition. And Paul used to the full his gift for conveying his thoughts in cogent prose and with judgements that were always unprejudiced and balanced. So, two years later, he was the lecturer to go to when I was editor of the University newspaper, *Student*, and was looking for a historian who was also in touch with the contemporary world to review the 1960s in a special edition to commemorate the end of the decade.

Paul was always ready to give frank advice, but was never anything other than fair. Having marked down an essay in which I had too rigidly adhered to the literal text of the question, he gave me advice which I never forgot: to use questions as a springboard for your ideas and arguments, and never allow them to be a straightjacket that imprisoned you. I took his advice again in 2009. Just after the financial crisis broke, I received a letter from Paul, who advised me to pay for the recovery plan by putting up the top rate of tax. Mindful, from his study of the Second World War, of the importance of shared sacrifice, he argued we should act quickly to avoid the accusation that the least well off would suffer disproportionately from the unemployment and hardship that the crisis would bring.

Paul never talked about his family background, until the moment he handed me the family history that he had completed a few months before his death. In it he painstakingly tracked his mother Pauline's family back centuries, but also revealed the financial and other pressures she faced as she brought Paul up. From that experience, however, flowed Paul's well-known compassion for others and his commendable sensitivity to the feelings of the people he met, all of which was enhanced by his wonderful marriage to Rosy, who shared his interests in history, art and culture, and so lovingly cared for him as his cancer spread

A few years ago, just before Sir Martin Gilbert suffered the stroke from which he never recovered, Paul and Rosy, Martin and his wife Esther and Sarah and I enjoyed a wonderful few hours, at my home in Fife on what was a beautiful warm summer evening; unusual because the Scottish weather was so good that we were able to sit outside until late in the evening. That night I learnt again at the feet of Paul and Martin as they dissected our country's history: a discussion I remember so clearly that it makes me even more aware of the great loss to us all, now that their voices are silent. At that time, Martin was embarking on an additional project he never completed – to write the story of my time in government – but that night I became more aware of the importance of history and good historical research. For while

history never repeats itself, we can learn enough from it to avoid many of the mistakes made in the past. While Paul was too modest to say so, his work provided memorable insights that achieved that. And by us learning of what went right as well as what went wrong, we can – as Paul said in that last letter to me – genuinely say that ‘there is hope’.