



George Frederick Elliot Rudé

GEORGE FREDERICK ELLIOT RUDÉ 1910-1993

GEORGE RUDÉ reached Australia, and his first academic appointment, in 1960, a year after the publication of his first book. He was soon a Professor of History at Adelaide, then in turn at Stirling University in Scotland, at Flinders University, and at what became Concordia University in Montreal, where he continued as a half-time Professor for ten years after 1975, dividing his time between Montreal and a hard-working retirement in England. At various dates he was a Visiting Professor at Columbia University, the University of Tokyo and William and Mary College, and until his death he was a regular visitor to the biennial George Rudé Seminar run by the Australian scholars of European history. He was a Foundation Fellow of the Academy and the recipient of too many academic honours to list in this short notice.

He was an able and popular teacher and supervisor, and head of department. He was an exceptionally likeable, courteous and affectionate man who got on well with students, colleagues and friends of every ideological colour. His Marxism was humane and undogmatic. Among his debts to Marx, 'I learned [he wrote] that the lives and actions of the common people are the very stuff of history, and, though material rather than institutional and ideological factors are primary, that ideas themselves become a material force when they pass into the active consciousness of men. Moreover I have also learned from Engels that, whatever the excellence of historical systems "all history must be studied afresh". What I never at any time learned from either of them was that history should be interpreted in terms of a narrow economic determinism.'

Rudé is a justly famous and influential historian, a thoughtful technically ingenious pioneer of 'history from below', with work in print in, at last count, ten languages. Besides dozens of journal articles and scores of book reviews he edited three books, co-authored one, and wrote eleven. Among the most notable are *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, *Wilkes and Liberty*, *The Crowd in History*, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*, *Debate on Europe 1815-1850*, *Robespierre, Ideology and Popular Protest*, and of special Australian interest *Protest and Punishment: The Story of Social and Political Protesters Transported to Australia 1788-1868*.

Eric Hobsbawm, eminent co-author with Rudé of *Captain Swing*, wrote of him in the *Guardian* on 12 January 1993: 'He asked simple questions: who were the people who actually took the Bastille? Can we discover what they thought they were doing? Why these and not others? He then went to the

archives – he was a marvellously efficient researcher – and counted, classified and presented his answers lucidly and without wasting words. By these methods he transformed the study of “the mob” . . . and as A.J.P. Taylor said of him, “put mind back into history and restored the dignity of man”. Lucid, systematic, erudite and above all – a publisher’s dream – reliable, he was an ideal author of excellent general histories and syntheses.’

Hobsbawm wrote, as his Australian colleagues would, of his humanity: ‘He loved wine and good food (his wife Doreen provided both), swimming, Piero della Francesca, eighteenth-century painting and, in his last years, music. He accepted and acknowledged criticism, often with undue modesty and invariably with good temper. The hundred failed job applications of the cold war years, the thought of what the career of a man of his patent gifts as a historian, teacher and organiser might have been but for his allegiance, left no visible trace of bitterness . . . Many more famous names will be forgotten before his major works cease to be consulted.’

Hugh Stretton