

'The Best for the Most':

The Educational and Cultural Thought of Roy Shaw

Martin Shaw

It is fitting that Keele University is hosting an exhibition and lecture on the life and work of one of its early professors, Roy Shaw (1918-2012), who was a significant figure in British adult education, arts policy and cultural thought between the 1950s and 1990s.¹ His tenure of the directorship of Adult Education at Keele from 1962 to 1975 was the period when his work in this field, from 1946, came to fruition and which laid the basis for his groundbreaking and controversial leadership of the Arts Council, as Secretary-General from 1975 to 1983.

In this work, Roy Shaw advanced specific educational and cultural ideas, which made a contribution to the social thought of the postwar period. The first three decades after 1945 have been seen as a 'golden age' of British universities, in which an academic aristocracy (still mainly from Oxford and Cambridge) worked with other elites to make the country more sophisticated and cosmopolitan.² Yet there were other powerful forces at work: this was the heyday of university adult education and public support for the arts, and indeed the period in which British higher education expanded dramatically, shifting substantially from its original Oxbridge axis. It was, especially, an era in which intellectuals from working-class backgrounds made strong contributions, and Shaw was part of this change.

Crucially, in the intersection of education and culture, a group of thinkers emerged (which included people like Raymond Williams and Shaw's close friend Richard Hoggart) whose approaches drew on their working-class experience, both personally and generally. Shaw's ideas did this in a distinctive way; they were rooted in his movement from an economically, educationally and culturally

¹ 'Sir Roy Shaw: The Best for the Most', University of Keele, 19 September-31 October 2026 (exhibition) and 5 October 2026 (lecture by David Amigoni and Martin Shaw).

² As Susan Pederson points out ('Keep off the grass', *London Review of Books*, 48:17, 2026), this view was encapsulated by Noel Annan, *Our Age: English Intellectuals between the World Wars*, 1990, and is expanded on by Colin Kidd, *Twilight of the Dons: British Intellectuals from World War Two to Thatcherism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2026.

impoverished working-class childhood, through education, to participation in intellectual and artistic life. His approach, summed up by the title of the Keele events, 'the best for the most', aimed consistently to make ideas and art available to the majority of society who had historically been excluded from them.

Shaw's thinking, the core of which was formed in the mid-1940s, aligned him with the cultural theorists of the New Left who came to the fore in the late 1950s and 1960s, which included Hoggart and Williams but also others from other marginalised backgrounds, like Stuart Hall, who had come to England from Jamaica. Shaw anticipated and elaborated many of the seminal themes of this group, but he did not follow those, including Williams and Hall, who developed this perspective in critical Marxist theory. Rather, like Hoggart, he maintained a determined liberal, social-democratic approach, and his recognition in the field has suffered in consequence—as indeed has Hoggart's, who was better known.³

Shaw did not write a major book, and his thinking emerged in response to his work in adult education and arts policy as well as to the general challenges of mid- to late twentieth century society and culture.⁴ Yet in dozens of articles and lectures (and two short books, one edited, written after his retirement in 1983), he developed an educational and cultural philosophy which made distinctive contributions to the thought of this cohort and remain relevant today. These are the focus of this article, to which a bibliography is appended.

In Shaw's reputation, his Arts Council work has largely overshadowed his contributions to adult education—indeed, adult education in general no longer has the recognition that it had in the twentieth century—but a common approach informed his work in both fields. The slogan 'the best for the most', he pointed out in 1989, was devised in 1940 for the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the forerunner of the Arts Council, but it was relevant to education too. 'I do not usually like slogans', Shaw said, 'but this one seemed to me inspired, since it brought together in few words, two goals which are often seen as

³ Joe McGuigan, 'Richard Hoggart: Public Intellectual', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 12(2), 2006, 199-208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630600813701>.

⁴ An outline for a book, *The Common Mind: Studies in Culture and Democracy*, probably drafted in the 1970s or early 1980s, survives in his papers, but it was not written.

antipathetic—the *best*, and bringing it to a majority audience—the *most*.⁵ Yet if this ambitious idea was policy in the 1940s, by the 1980s, when Shaw led the Arts Council, it was controversial. ‘The trouble is that these days some people in the arts care only about “the best”, while others care only about “the most”’, he wrote. ‘To care for both is to put oneself at the centre of the creative tensions in contemporary culture.’⁶

It was not only ‘creative’ tensions that Shaw put himself in the middle of. He was very much a doer, and like Hoggart took on major leadership roles, which sometimes involved conflict. His ideas were developed through and in reflection on these contributions and debates. The appreciation of Roy Shaw's life and work in this paper is personal as well as academic: he was my father and this work draws on his papers in my and the family's possession as well as on published sources.

Early encounters and thought

Roy Shaw had a particularly hard childhood—he effectively lost his father at the age of 4 and his mother looked after other children in a home in Sheffield, sending him to his grandparents in a small Derbyshire mining town to be looked after; they were not close in his adult life. The only adult Shaw remembered fondly was his grandfather, who lay on the sofa singing music hall songs after his shifts at the pithead. This could have been the germ of the appreciation of the best in popular culture, which remained with him in his work.

Overall, Shaw's early years were culturally impoverished. His route to education and culture was further hampered by chronic illness, which in his late teens he was not expected to survive and which dogged him throughout his life—although he lived to 93. As he recounts in the autobiography of his early life, completed by his wife Gwen after his death, he was rescued by education.⁷ Teachers at his school in Sheffield, Firth Park, introduced him to ideas and the arts—sixty years later, he credited Anna Eker, the wife of his most important teacher, Julius Eker, with

⁵ Roy Shaw, ‘The Best for the Most’, Jennie Lee Memorial Lecture, The Open University, 15 September 1989. Emphases in original.

⁶ Roy Shaw, *Elitism versus Populism in the Arts*, London: City University, n.d. (early 1980s), 12.

⁷ Roy Shaw, *Catching the Rope: A Memoir of the Early Years 1918-1946*, privately printed, 2013.

introducing him as a pianist to the joys of classical music.⁸ They also supported him to overcome his health crises, as did the Sheffield Educational Settlement, one of a number of such bodies established in poor areas of British cities in the early twentieth century. The Settlement's director, Arnold Freeman, eventually helped him gain financial support to go to the Quaker college at Woodbrooke, Birmingham, from which he was able to go on—at 25, a 'mature student'—to Manchester University to study German and Philosophy in 1943.

Coming from a 'respectable' working-class background, but one which was largely apolitical and non-religious, Roy's early thought centred on morality. He encountered Marxist ideas among his fellow-attendees at the Settlement, but they did not appeal to him. Like many in the mid-1930s, remembering or knowing of the horrors of the Great War (in whose last months he had been born), at 17 he joined the Reverend Dick Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union and signed its pledge to renounce war. In 1935, he was able to visit Berlin as part of a school group exchange and was taken with German life and culture—seemingly unaffected by the Nazi regime although the swastika was everywhere (as can be seen from his photo album, some images from which are reproduced in the Keele exhibition).

Because of his ill-health, Shaw left school without gaining his School Certificate, and worked in a newspaper office and as a librarian. In 1939, before the outbreak of war, aged 20, he followed through on his pacifism by applying to be registered as a Conscientious Objector (CO)—although his medical condition would have secured him exemption anyway. He stated that 'all war, including defensive war, is a crime against humanity in which my conscience will not allow me to participate. ... I believe that peace can only be obtained by preparing for peace ...'; he took this to the point of refusing even civilian roles which might aid the war effort.⁹ The Tribunal, sitting two months into the war, commented: 'This man's conscientious objections amount to obsessions, which he supports by the usual arguments', but granted him unconditional CO status. A local newspaper headed its report of the

⁸ *Man of Action*, BBC Radio 3, 8 July 1978. Interestingly, Julius Eker (1902-76) was born in Manchester and had himself studied at Manchester University (he was recorded there in the 2021 census). He married Anna Pincasovich (1906-2004) in Berlin, some time after 1928, when she arrived there from South Africa. I am grateful to Judy Simons for this research.

⁹ Application to Local Tribunal for Registration in the Register of Conscientious Objectors, 17 June 1939, Roy Shaw papers.

hearing, 'He Would Halt Hitler With Books'.¹⁰ Fifty years later, he would address the Catholic peace group Pax Christi, asking 'Why were many of us so reluctant to believe the truth about the Nazi terror?' But he still suggested that over a longer period, active peacemaking could be effective.¹¹

Catholicism and *Humanitas*

Roy's conscientious objection was on secular moral grounds, but a quest for religious belief became a big emotional and intellectual focus. He was impressed by the Quaker ethos at Woodbrooke, but there he also met his first serious Catholic, an Austrian convert, Elfriede Pichler, with whom he still seems to have had contact fifty years later.¹² At Manchester, he became part of a set which was strongly influenced by Catholicism, including John McCabe, a Catholic by birth; Robert Markus, who converted in 1946; and Walter Stein, an Austrian Jew who also converted. The Catholic chaplain, Fr Vincent Whelan, was an influence, as were the philosopher Dorothy Emmet and the English literature academic L.C. (Lionel) Knights, who was already a longstanding co-editor of *Scrutiny*, the journal of the F.R. Leavis school of literary criticism, and became a life-long friend.

This group of Catholic-leaning students set up, with some support from academics, the short-lived but influential *Humanitas: A University Quarterly*, of which Shaw, McCabe, Stein were founding editors together with O.G. Dodge, who later became a medical research academic at Sheffield.¹³ The journal's brochure, replete with an endorsement from no less than Sir John Stopford, Manchester's vice-chancellor, proclaimed a crisis of Western civilisation of which the atomic bomb was a leading symptom, castigated the 'materialist faiths' that produced this, and called for Christians and Humanists together to defend the 'supra-material', i.e. spiritual and cultural, values of 'the Hellenic and Judaeo-Christian civilisations in which our own has its roots'.

¹⁰ Application to Local Tribunal (underlining in original); *Sheffield Telegraph and Independent*, 7 November 1939.

¹¹ Roy Shaw, '1939: A conscientious objector's recollections', paper presented to Pax Christi, 3 September 1989; a shortened version appeared as '1939—a conscientious objector's recollections of a world war', *Catholic Herald*, September 1989.

¹² Letter from James Crichton to Elfriede Pichler, 18 August 1992, Roy Shaw papers.

¹³ 'O.G. Dodge, University of Sheffield', <https://scispace.com/authors/o-g-dodge-4pa8he4eoq>.

Crucially, *Humanitas* argued: ‘The philosopher, the scientist, the literary critic, must see their “subject” in relation to the common problem and must learn to discuss their specialisms *in terms that have significance for the intelligent layman*. We believe this can be achieved by a broadened vision which does not involve lowered standards.’¹⁴ It is likely that Shaw drafted this passage, since it anticipated precisely his career-long concern with popularisation and his view that this does not necessarily mean dumbing down. Indeed, his article in the first issue expanded polemically on this theme, insisting that popularisation ‘must not take the form of “spreading culture” in such a way that while each may have a veneer of it, the slightest scratch will reveal a philistine’.¹⁵ But it also provided a lengthy critical assessment of cinema, arguing that it had already vindicated ‘its claim to rank among the highest of the arts’; ignoring it ‘would connive at the “levelling down” of culture, and drift towards a state of affairs in which the worst was good enough for all.’¹⁶

John McCabe, who (renamed Herbert) became a Dominican monk, remained a close friend after Shaw left Manchester, as did Walter Stein who was a colleague at Leeds, and in 1955 Roy and Gwen Shaw finally also converted. They rapidly become active members of the Catholic community in Leeds—in the following two years, Shaw developed a close relationship with the diocese’s bishop, John Heenan, although I believe they fell out later when the latter was Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. The Catholicism of the original *Humanitas* editors in 1946 could be described as broadly liberal if not social-democratic, and their beliefs could not easily be assimilated to traditional Roman Catholic orthodoxy, as would become apparent later.¹⁷

¹⁴ ‘Objects’, *Humanitas: A University Quarterly*, 1, 1, Summer 1946, inside cover. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Roy Shaw, “Art and Entertainment: Things Rank and Gross”, *Humanitas*, 1, 1, 22.

¹⁶ Shaw, “Art and Entertainment”, 26, 28.

¹⁷ After Roy’s departure from Manchester, the free-market, anti-Communist thinker Michael Polanyi became more involved in *Humanitas*: see Phil Mullins, ‘The Journal *Humanitas* as an Incubator of Polanyi’s Ideas’, *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, 48, 1, 2022, 39–51, and Mary Jo Nye, ‘Shared friendship and divided politics: Patrick Blackett and Michael Polanyi in Manchester’, in Stuart Jones, ed., *Manchester Minds: A University History of Ideas*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024, 182–97.

Adult education and Leeds

What Shaw took from his own experience and his immersion in the intellectual and cultural environment of wartime Manchester was above all the necessity of making available to others the benefits he had obtained in rising above the intellectual poverty of his working-class background. It was therefore a natural move to look for work in adult education, and the Yorkshire North district of the Workers Educational Association (WEA) offered him a job in East Yorkshire after he graduated in 1946 at the age of 28. This may not have been such a natural move for his wife-to-be Gwen, who Shaw sent a telegram to say, 'We go to the East Riding'. She had completed her first year as a lecturer in Economics at Liverpool University, a job which she now gave up to marry and follow Shaw (and to give birth to me in 1947 and later six more children). There cannot have been many women lecturing in what was then a very masculine field, so her appointment was quite a pathbreaking achievement; but she like Shaw accepted her departure as necessary.¹⁸

After the Second World War, many key young intellectuals—especially those with working-class and left-wing backgrounds—entered adult education. Stefan Collini has called this cohort of young tutors 'the celebrated generation of radical WEA tutors in the immediate postwar years', naming Hoggart, Williams and the historian E.P. Thompson as key members.¹⁹ Yet Hoggart was never a WEA tutor while Williams and Thompson were only for a matter of months each; Hoggart began and the others quickly moved into university extramural departments, at Hull, Oxford and Leeds respectively. Shaw too followed this pattern; his WEA career lasted just one year before he joined the Leeds department in 1947.

The movement into university departments of these 'WEA tutors' was not a merely institutional (re)location. Universities were expanding their role in adult education and the Leeds department, founded in 1946, quickly became an important centre in

¹⁸ Much later, Gwen would gain a second First Class degree, in English Literature, from the Open University (OU) and herself tutor for the OU. She and Shaw also wrote and lectured together, for example on Philip Larkin and T.S. Eliot, after his retirement in 1983.

¹⁹ Stefan Collini, 'The future was social', *London Review of Books*, 23 January 2025.

the field in Britain under the dynamic leadership of Sidney Raybould.²⁰ Although the WEA had worked with extramural departments over the previous half-century, Raybould himself came from a WEA background, and he continued to be a major figure within the organisation, the rapid development of Leeds in his two decades as director was marked by controversy about the nature and purposes of adult education. In the process, university courses came to be regarded differently from WEA classes—even if cooperation between the two organisations was maintained, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the WEA district secretary, Fred Sedgwick.

The debate centred on Raybould's instance on 'standards', which he identified with regular reading and written work similar to that expected in a university degree course, ideally reflected in 3-year tutorial classes. Although in theory the WEA embraced similar norms, these were considered difficult to implement even in the university provision, and with Raybould's drive to insist on them, the gap between the two providers widened even though they worked in tandem. The veteran socialist historian and extramural teacher R.H. Tawney encouraged Raybould in his commitment to university standards in a 1948 letter which the latter must have circulated to his staff; a copy survives in Roy's papers and he frequently quoted it, summarising it in his reflections almost half a century later.²¹

In describing the debate, the historian Roger Fieldhouse singles out Shaw as the member of staff who most 'unquestioningly accepted the Raybouldian orthodoxy', while others were critical or expressed reservations.²² Roy's stance reflected his opposition to 'levelling down', as well as his support for 'the idea of a university' expounded by the Catholic thinker John Henry (Cardinal) Newman in his eponymous 1873 work, a reference-point for the first issue of *Humanitas* that Shaw had helped edit.²³ But it may also have reflected his own confidence as a tutor, since

²⁰ Roger Fieldhouse, 'Sidney Raybould, Fred Sedgwick and the Early Department', in Richard Taylor, ed., *Beyond the Walls: 50 Years of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Leeds 1946-1996*, Leeds: Leeds University Department of Adult Continuing Education, 1996, 3-30; Roy Shaw, 'Recalling Raybould's Department', in Taylor, ed., *Beyond the Walls*, 31-39.

²¹ Shaw, 'Recalling Raybould's Department', p. 32. Roy's typed copy is entitled 'Extract from a letter from R.H. Tawney to S.G. Raybould, 29th September 1948.'

²² Fieldhouse, 'Sidney Raybould', 19-22.

²³ Newman long remained one of Roy's intellectual heroes; others included the Catholic martyr Thomas More; Matthew Arnold, who although certainly a Christian, was not a Catholic; and the artist Eric Gill, also a Catholic.

he later claimed to have ‘found little difficulty in eliciting written work’ in his philosophy classes²⁴—on his departure from adult education in 1975, Sedgwick would generously describe him as ‘the best tutor of the postwar period’.²⁵

Yet the Leeds-centred debate of the late 1940s and early 1950s was about more than standards; it was also about the extent to which, and how, adult education should relate to ‘the workers’ and indeed who they now were—universities and WEA alike found it easier to recruit non-manual than manual workers, who had historically been seen as the core constituency. In late 1948, Shaw and his Leeds colleague John (J.F.C.) Harrison, together with Hoggart, published a paper, ‘What are we doing?’, which echoed Raybould’s agenda, questioning the nature of the working class and that the idea of ‘social purpose’ should guide adult education. ‘The futility of the cloistered academic’ was easily seen, they argued, but it was ‘more difficult and today perhaps more important to recognise the limitations of the bustling activist’. In contrast, they advocated ‘disinterestedness’, in which the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge was the goal, and that ‘the group to whom we should be appealing will be the serious-minded who are also educationally underprivileged, which is not exactly synonymous with “the working class”’.²⁶

This was not a purely educational debate. The Cold War was underway and when Raybould linked ‘standards’ to ‘objectivity’, he targeted intellectually—but not in a disciplinary manner—the Communists in the field, who he suspected of using their classes for political purposes. However, he seemed ‘completely unaware that his own Labourist attitude was as much devoid of objectivity as those who was seeking to castigate’, Fieldhouse argues.²⁷ Shaw supported Raybould’s educational agenda and, although he was not a Cold Warrior, must have at least condoned his politics. For example, even in 1959 he was scathing about the left-wing National

²⁴ Shaw, ‘Recalling Raybould’s Department’, 33.

²⁵ Fred Sedgwick to Roy Shaw, 1975, Roy Shaw papers.

²⁶ John Harrison, Richard Hoggart and Roy Shaw, ‘What are we doing?’, *The Tutors’ Bulletin*, Autumn 1948, 8, 10.

²⁷ Fieldhouse, ‘Sidney Raybould’, 23.

Council of Labour Colleges (which would merge with the WEA in 1965), whose work 'was based on Marxist dogma rather than on investigation'.²⁸

The main person on the other side in the Leeds department was Edward Thompson, who argued that the theory of objectivity would lead to 'indoctrination', 'deny the validity of the student's experience' and 'prescribe an attitude (usually of "tolerance" or some associated response) to situations which might well demand an attitude of militancy or indignation'.²⁹ His attitude reflected his approach to history, expressed in the famous statement in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) that he sought 'to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity'.³⁰ Thompson would later expand on 'the necessary dialectic of education and experience', arguing that 'universities engage in adult education not only to teach, but to learn'.³¹

Four decades later, Shaw wrote that in the Leeds department 'we were all socialists to a man' (recruitment in the early years did not include women, he noted), and recalled 'friendly arguments' with Thompson before 1956 'about his defence of Stalin'.³² But this glossed over the conflict of the early years, when Roy, Harrison and Hoggart had themselves remarked on 'the sharpness of the present difference of emphasis' which was 'but one aspect of the general ideological cleavage in our society'.³³

Cultural studies and the New Left

²⁸ Quoted by Derek Tatton, *The Tension between Political Commitment and Academic Neutrality in the WEA*, PhD thesis, The Open University, 1987, 48.

²⁹ Quoted in Fieldhouse, 'Sidney Raybould', 21.

³⁰ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1963, 12.

³¹ E.P. Thompson, *Education and Experience*, Fifth Mansbridge Memorial Lecture, Leeds University Press, 1968, 20, 23.

³² Shaw, 'Recalling Raybould's Department', 37.

³³ Harrison, Hoggart and Shaw, 'What are we doing?', 8.

The first postwar decade was—despite the general social and educational advance—a period of cultural and political retrenchment after the upheaval of the world war, which the Cold War deepened; Stuart Hall would later call it the ‘political Ice Age’.³⁴ It is difficult not to see Roy’s stance in these adult education debates and even his embrace of the Catholic Church in 1955—years before the Second Vatican Council brought about some liberalisation—as parts of a relatively conservative period in his own thinking, even if his support for standards reflected his core liberal commitment. Indeed, Roy and Gwen even (they later told me) considered voting Conservative in that year’s general election, but after hearing their local candidate in Leeds (Keith Joseph), reverted to Labour—although much later still, shortly before her death in 2018, Gwen no longer recalled this apparent aberration.

The cultural eruptions of 1956, including the theatre’s ‘angry young men’, and the political awakening provoked by the Hungarian and Suez crises, involved changes which were significant for Roy’s thinking as well as his practice. He was not a strongly political person; he and Gwen had been Labour voters since 1945, but neither were members before I recruited them around 1963. Unlike Thompson and Williams, both of whom had been Communists (although in the latter case only briefly), Shaw and Hoggart were of the left in a broadly social-democratic way. And unlike Thompson and Williams, neither was directly involved in the core political side of the New Left or a member of the editorial boards of its journals.

However, the opening up of the left after 1956 still affected Shaw’s thinking. He shared the widespread response to Hungary (which was the first political event that I was aware of, aged 9, probably because my parents were discussing it) and Suez, about which he wrote of his ‘shame’ in a letter to Hoggart.³⁵ And the emergence of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958 was significant for him. Already in 1946, *Humanitas* had already identified the bomb as a central issue; now the campaign reactivated Roy’s pacifist beliefs, and he interpreted Catholicism in an antinuclear sense.

³⁴ Stuart Hall, ‘The Life and Times of the First New Left’, *New Left Review* 2:63, 177.

³⁵ Fred Inglis, *Richard Hoggart*, Cambridge: Polity, 2014, 203.

Although CND historian Richard Taylor (a Leeds adult educator who knew Shaw) was mistaken to say that he organised the 1959 Aldermaston march³⁶—he was not a marcher, and the organiser must have been the Roy Shaw who was a St. Pancras Labour councillor—he appeared on television to press the Christian case against the bomb. Meanwhile, his close friend Walter Stein edited a book of antinuclear essays by Catholic writers, including by the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, who had riled the Church’s hierarchy in 1956 by publishing, as a ‘Catholic’, a pamphlet opposing Oxford’s award of an honorary degree to Harry Truman (the US President who authorised the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945).³⁷

Within the Leeds department, Thompson’s rejection of Communism in 1956 largely dissolved the political barriers between him and Shaw and Stein; indeed his involvement in CND gave them a political cause in common. Whether or not it was this political rapprochement that produced a thaw, our family visited Edward and Dorothy Thompson at their home in Halifax, Edward and Roy became the ‘friendly colleagues’ that Shaw later described³⁸, and he invited him to lecture in Bradford.

More important than these political changes was the novel focus on questions of culture in the New Left, with which Shaw’s interests and growing personal connections aligned him. His 1946 *Humanitas* article had laid out a democratic and egalitarian stall on popularisation, which had continued to be a central theme of his tutorial work and writing.³⁹ This anticipated some of the arguments that Williams would make in his seminal *Culture and Society*, as well as *The Long Revolution* and *Communication*.⁴⁰ The ‘culture and society’ tradition that Williams constructed included thinkers like Newman and Arnold whose ideas were also central for

³⁶ Richard Taylor, *Against the Bomb: The British Peace Movement 1958-1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 49.

³⁷ Walter Stein, ed., *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, London: Merlin, 1961. Stein continued to be active in the second wave of the antinuclear movement in the 1980s, as I discuss in *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Agenda, 2024. On Anscombe, see Thomas Nagel, ‘What is rude?’, *London Review of Books*, 44: 3, 10 February 2022.

³⁸ Shaw, ‘Recalling Raybould’s Department’, 37.

³⁹ Roy Shaw, ‘In Defence of Popularisation’, *Cambridge Review*, 89: 2146, 29 April 1967

⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, and *Communication*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962.

Shaw, as well as Tawney, whose debt to Arnold Williams made central. In 1960, Shaw appeared alongside Williams at a conference on 'Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility'.⁴¹

Williams would say in 1959, in discussion with Hoggart, that when he felt the first impulse for what became *Culture and Society* at the end of the 1940s, he 'felt very isolated'.⁴² This was clearly a situation in which a group of thinkers from similar backgrounds, facing the situation of British society and culture after the war, developed parallel arguments without always being aware of each other's work. Hoggart valorised working-class culture in *The Uses of Literacy*⁴³ and Williams the values embedded in working-class institutions in *The Long Revolution*; many shared a concern with the erosion of these achievements by commercial mass media and Americanised popular culture.

However, there were also direct connections between some of the contributors to this movement, which grew as it took off. Shaw and Hoggart were friends from at least 1948, and there was a strong complementarity in their thinking. In his writing, talks and classes in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Shaw extended his critical approach from cinema to the press, arguing that press freedom also entailed 'press responsibility'.⁴⁴ This idea of responsibility, which was based on the fundamentally moral idea that news media must uphold standards based on truth and accuracy, anticipated Hoggart's contributions to the Pilkington report on broadcasting⁴⁵, which Shaw amplified,⁴⁶ and Shaw contributed two chapters to his television series and edited book *Your Sunday Paper*.⁴⁷ Similarly, Hoggart's famous evidence to the *Lady Chatterley* trial in 1961, arguing for the moral seriousness of D.H. Lawrence's

⁴¹ Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams*, London: Routledge, 1995, 173.

⁴² Inglis, *Richard Hoggart*, 131.

⁴³ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957.

⁴⁴ Roy Shaw, 'Press Freedom and Press Responsibility', *Red Tape*, January 1950, 113-5.

⁴⁵ Report of the Committee on Broadcasting, Cmnd. 1753, London: HMSO, 1962.

⁴⁶ Roy Shaw, The Pilkington Puzzle, *New Left Review*, 1:16, 1962.

⁴⁷ Richard Hoggart, ed., *Your Sunday Paper*, London: University of London Press, 1967.

treatment of sex, was followed by Roy's 1966 critique of the prurient 'Clean Up TV' campaign of Mary Whitehouse.⁴⁸

Roy's 1946 critique of cinema had also indicated a broad view of the arts, and therefore of the scope of criticism, which now aligned with the democratised version of F.R. Leavis's approach that informed the work of Stuart Hall as well as Williams and Hoggart. Hall's collaboration with Shaw's close friend Paddy Whannel, head of the Education Department of the British Film Institute (BFI)—for which Hall was then a part-time lecturer—to write *The Popular Arts* (1964), the first wide-ranging critical British treatment of popular culture, expanded an approach that he had helped open up. Shaw was credited for his 'valuable criticisms and suggestions' while they were writing, and he wrote a strongly supportive if gently critical review.⁴⁹

Shaw had a special interest in low humour, on which he taught but never published, including a special liking for Ken Dodd, with whom he kept in occasional contact in later life. 'Meeting Ken Dodd meant more to him than his knighthood,' my brother Phil Shaw said at Roy's funeral in 2012, telling how once he had come back from one of 'those endless Doddy gigs' saying he had laughed until it hurt for the whole four hours. The family asked for some of the jokes; 'I can't remember, I was too busy laughing,' Shaw replied.⁵⁰ This could also be the reason that the critical study of Dodd's humour, the original pretext for Shaw's interest, never appeared.

Shaw was also connected to key institutional developments. He was on the committee of Centre 42, the project to bring art, theatre and music to the working class named after resolution 42 at the 1960 Trades Union Congress, which was

⁴⁸ Roy Shaw, 'Television: freedom and responsibility, *New Blackfriars*, 47: 553, 453-65, and 'TV control and responsibility', *Censorship*, 8, Autumn 1966, 6-14; Mary Whitehouse and Roy Shaw, 'Exchanges', *New Blackfriars* 48: 557, 1967, 54-6. Shaw produced a detailed idea of press reports on CUTV from 1964-6 (papers).

⁴⁹ Paddy Whannel and Stuart Hall, *The Popular Arts*, London: Hutchinson, 1964, 12; Roy Shaw, 'Popular culture', *Adult Education*, March 1965, 303-9.

⁵⁰ Simon Hoggart, 'Simon Hoggart's week', *The Guardian*, 2 June 2012.

established by the playwright Arnold Wesker, who also became a friend.⁵¹ And through Hoggart, who set up a pathbreaking new centre—with Hall as his deputy—at Birmingham University in 1964, he had a close insight into the beginnings of institutional cultural studies in Britain.

Adult education, culture and Keele

These developments also coincided with a broader focus in Roy's approach to adult education. In 1959, Leeds appointed him as first warden of its adult education centre in Bradford; its role as 'a cultural centre for the city' was increasingly emphasised alongside its educational function, as it 'rapidly became the place where the leading issues of the day were discussed'⁵²—as I remember vividly. In 1960-61, there were 34 public lectures, alongside 18 sustained courses. 'Much of [the centre's] work was experimental', Shaw reported; even if his underlying attitudes had not changed, in practice he seemed to have moved considerably away from the ideal of 3-year tutorial classes that he had backed in the standards debate.⁵³

In 1962, having 'quarrelled' with Raybould⁵⁴, Shaw moved to Keele to direct a new adult education department there, which had taken over from the Oxford extramural delegacy in industrial North Staffordshire. This was 'one of the cradles of adult education',⁵⁵ where Tawney had pioneered university extramural courses over a half a century earlier. Shaw took over a programme—run through the WEA—which, Oxford had complained, was failing to reach the working-class population of the area. Yet as the new department expanded the provision of courses during the 1960s, it was largely to the existing, mainly non-manual-worker audience.

⁵¹ Shaw was present at the 1970 meeting at which Wesker proposed its winding up (Minutes of a Meeting of the Council of Management of Centre 42 Limited, 31 October 1970), and wrote a succinct historical account of it, 'The Rise and Fall of Centre Forty-Two', n.d. (early 1970s).

⁵² Tony Jowitt, 'A Little Bit of Leeds on Foreign Soil: the Bradford Centre', in Taylor, ed., *Beyond the Walls*, 252.

⁵³ Jowitt, 'A Little Bit of Leeds', 252.

⁵⁴ Shaw, 'Recalling Raybould's Department', 36.

⁵⁵ Martin Harrison, preface, Keele University Adult Education Report 1974-75.

Moreover, Shaw continued at Keele the combined cultural and educational approach that he had pursued in Bradford, with the department sponsoring a wide range of cultural offerings (opera, films, etc.), with many key intellectual figures of the time appearing on campus. 650 people heard Danilo Dolci, the Italian social activist and educator, give one of the lectures during the 1965-6 year.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, in the Potteries, Shaw played a role in the development of the Victoria Theatre and the establishment of BBC Radio Stoke. At the same time, he was gaining a national profile in educational and arts policy, joining the Planning Committee for the Open University, the General Advisory Council of the BBC, the Educational Advisory Council of the Independent Television Authority and the Board of Governors of the BFI.

Yet the challenge of university adult education for the working class remained. In 1963, Shaw had commissioned a Gallup poll in the traditionally mining village of Silverdale, in the valley below the university (which is 'on the hill'), and its neighbour Chesterton. This led to the sobering conclusion that the culture of the villages provided 'little room for sustained adult education activity', although there might be 'tiny pockets of interest'.⁵⁷ However, community education projects were developing elsewhere in the sector, and in 1970, Shaw launched the Keele University Community Education Project, focused initially on these same villages.⁵⁸ He claimed that he had failed to get the WEA to address the challenge of the working-class audience, and the project was accompanied by persistent tensions with it.⁵⁹

Despite the scepticism that he, Harrison and Hoggart had mooted two decades earlier about whether the working class still existed and should remain an important focus of adult education, he and his Keele colleague Linden West now argued that it did and should.⁶⁰ The Community Education Project was sustained

⁵⁶ *Report on Adult Education 1965-66*, Keele University.

⁵⁷ Roy Shaw and Linden West, *Silverdale and Chesterton: A study of two working class areas*, University of Keele Adult Education Department, 1973.

⁵⁸ A detailed and critical account is given by Tatton, *The Tension between Political Commitment and Academic Neutrality*, 258-72.

⁵⁹ Tatton, *The Tension between Political Commitment and Academic Neutrality*, 262-3.

⁶⁰ Roy Shaw and Linden West, 'Class dismissed?', *Adult Education*, 44: 6, 1972, 353-8.

throughout the decade—although its Silverdale focus was lost around the time Shaw left Keele in 1975—and Shaw would say that same year that it had produced ‘an impressive body of work in working-class areas with a high proportion of working-class students’.⁶¹

Shaw maintained his dedication to ‘standards’, proclaiming in 1974, ‘The battle for standards has been going on for a long time, and perhaps it will always need to be fought.’⁶² However, in a paper to his old department in Leeds, he urged a change of emphasis which adapted to the new realities of the field: ‘I ... don’t accept, as I once did, that vocational and liberal education are *essentially* antithetic, educating whole men alive [sic] importantly includes educating for a man’s work or profession which is a very important part of life.’⁶³ A synthesis of liberalism and vocationalism was possible; it was only *narrow* vocationalism that was the problem.

In his Keele years, the Catholicism that Shaw had embraced was also changing. The Second Vatican Council (1962-5) promised to align the Church more with the liberalism of Roy’s original Catholic milieu, and in its wake, a distinct progressive Catholicism developed in England.⁶⁴ Herbert McCabe, his fellow Dominican Lawrence Bright and others developed a radical, social and humanist theology, which was taken up by the magazine *Slant*, founded in 1964 by Cambridge postgraduates Adrian Cunningham, Leo Pyle and Terry Eagleton—who combined this theology with Raymond Williams’ idea of the ‘long revolution’.⁶⁵ Shaw was not part of *Slant* but he was generally sympathetic to these developments, if not the ‘Catholic Marxism’ for which the magazine became known.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Roy Shaw, *Adult Education: The roles of the university, specialist departments and the Tutor*, paper given to the Leeds University Department of Adult Education and Extramural Studies, 9 April 1975. This claim is supported by Tatton, *The Tension between Political Commitment and Academic Neutrality*, 265-6.

⁶² Roy Shaw, *Effective Students and Effective Teaching: The evaluation of university adult education courses*, Keele University Department of Adult Education, 1974, 3.

⁶³ Roy Shaw, *Adult Education*, 3, emphasis in the original.

⁶⁴ Jay P. Corran, *Catholic Progressives in England After Vatican II*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2013.

⁶⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958; Terry Eagleton, *The New Left Church*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1966.

⁶⁶ As a student, I was on *Slant*’s editorial board from 1965-7.

As the promise of Vatican II faded, those involved in these circles became increasingly alienated from the Church. It was 'quite plainly corrupt', McCabe wrote in a 1966 editorial in the Dominican magazine *New Blackfriars*, which prompted the 'McCabe affair'.⁶⁷ Roy and Gwen Shaw were particularly disillusioned with the Church's failure to liberalise its teaching on contraception, and left it in 1969.⁶⁸ However, Shaw would return after his retirement, and was active once more in Catholic circles in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including in Pax Christi; in 1996, he joined a delegation to Israel which included Bruce Kent, the former CND leader, to plead for the release of the nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu. However, he later left the Church again, dying in 2012 an agnostic—although to the end he would decry my own atheism as 'dogmatic'.

Arts and cultural policy

The 'creative tensions' in cultural and educational policy became more political when Shaw moved to the Arts Council. The 'golden age' was over; the late 1970s were a time of growing economic, social and political crisis in which left and right were both radicalising. By 1977, Shaw talked of having taken over 'a stricken empire' at the Council,⁶⁹ but he was able, despite considerable resistance, to introduce one crucial change in its policy, the development of an education department—forcing it to begin implementing its statutory commitment to spread appreciation of the arts and realise CEMA's original slogan, 'The best for the most', which also expressed his own philosophy. His tenure was also marked by at least one notable development in the Council's provision in the regions, the establishment of Opera North in Leeds.

However, the political tensions became very evident after 1979, in the second half of Roy's eight-year term, when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister and

⁶⁷ Corran, *Catholic Progressives*, 304-13.

⁶⁸ Gwen eloquently explains this in the film *For Want of the Golden City*, Central Television, 1984 (available via the Media Archive for Central England, macearchive.org). None of Shaw and Gwen's children remained Catholics by the 1970s; I left the Church at the end of 1966, and my brother Philip still earlier.

⁶⁹ 'In his first interview since becoming Secretary-General of the Arts Council two years ago, Roy Shaw talks to Nicholas de Jongh about running a stricken empire', *The Guardian*, 16 August 1977.

through ministers such as Norman St. John Stevas and a new Arts Council chairman, William Rees Mogg (a former editor of *The Times*), attempted to force through cuts.⁷⁰ Liberal and left-wing outrage at Conservative ideology and policies did not save the Council, and Shaw in particular, from savage attacks from some community arts organisations that lost their funding and the left that supported them. At the height of the controversy in 1981, a cartoon by David Smith in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* depicted Shaw as a boxer in a ring, surrounded by angry critics.⁷¹

Although Shaw taught Marx in his philosophy classes (his original Leeds position was a lectureship in that field), and even boasted that he sold more copies of the *Communist Manifesto* to his students than most Communists, his disagreement with Marxism as an ideology (as well as with the Communist Party) was always clear. Although he was capable of distinguishing between the ‘vulgar Marxism’ of those who urged that community arts should replace the ‘bourgeois art’ of classical literature, music, etc., and the ideas of Marx himself and more sophisticated Marxist thinkers,⁷² he was out of sympathy with the more radical Marxism which developed after 1968. He repeatedly expressed his rejection of the Marxist left in the arts, believing that the new community arts, while potentially valuable, could not generally aspire to the level of quality—indeed, artistic standards—that were evident in the best of the traditional art forms. He also applied this approach to adult education, where he saw similar views developing.⁷³

Roy’s response as he was exposed on both flanks was to reassert the principles of his democratic, egalitarian liberalism, which he did in many interviews and lectures during and after his Arts Council tenure. He had allies, but in 1982 the

⁷⁰ Thatcher did approve Roy’s knighthood in late 1979, but this may have already been in the works.

⁷¹ ‘Sir Roy’s ring of confidence’, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 5 May 1981.

⁷² Roy Shaw, ‘Carried to an extreme, a passion for democracy in the arts does led to the rejection of quality’, *The Guardian*, 30 September 1978.

⁷³ Roy Shaw, ‘Attacking the liberal tradition’, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 5 December 1980. When I became a Marxist as a student in the late 1960s; he would repeatedly tell me that I had exchanged one religion for another, although I was not a Communist. Likewise, although Shaw was not personally sexist, he had difficulty grappling with the women’s liberation movement when it emerged in the early 1970s, and often tested the feminism of younger women to whom he was introduced.

most prominent of them, Richard Hoggart, who was the Council's vice-chair, was unceremoniously ousted at the instigation of Thatcher's culture minister.⁷⁴ When Shaw recorded this fact on his retirement in 1983, in a valedictory article for the *Arts Council Bulletin*, and then repeated it in a television interview, Rees Mogg blocked publication of the article, leading Shaw to publish it in *The Observer*.⁷⁵

Thus Shaw ended his term in open disagreement with the new Conservative establishment that had hampered his leadership. In retirement in the later 1980s and 1990s, he sharpened his opposition to the commercialisation of the arts which they encouraged, through a campaign against sponsorship which he extended to sponsorship in sport and by the tobacco industry—he became a sponsor of ASH, Action on Smoking and Health. His attack centred on the fact that sponsorship was not philanthropic action, but 'a form of advertising', which distorted the activities of arts providers—he quoted the director Peter Hall as saying that seeking it involved 'a kind of whoring' by them.⁷⁶ But by the end of the century, it was obvious that this battle was lost, as providers of public goods generally integrated commercial sponsors into their business models, and the new Labour government of Tony Blair even promoted public-private partnership in core services like health.

Conclusion

The failure of Roy Shaw's campaign against sponsorship can be seen as a symptom of the wider retreat of the cultural and educational goals that he espoused and of some of the organisations he worked in. By the end of the twentieth century, university adult education, rebranded continuing education, and the WEA alike were shadows of their mid-century peaks, although the Open University continued to flourish. The Arts Council had been split into separate bodies for the nations of the UK, and today Arts Council England no longer maintains the standalone education department that Shaw established; yet a strengthened educational mission may be an enduring legacy, albeit focused more on school students than adults.

⁷⁴ McGuigan, 'Richard Hoggart', 204.

⁷⁵ Roy Shaw, 'Last thoughts of a Secretary-General', *The Observer*, 28 August 1983.

⁷⁶ Roy Shaw, ed., *The Spread of Sponsorship*, London: Bloodaxe, 1993, 11, 29; Roy Shaw, 'An Adjunct to the Advertising Business?', *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 1990, 375-80.

More generally, the cultural forces that Shaw and other New Left critics opposed in the second half of the twentieth century have strengthened in the first quarter of the twenty-first. Their concern with the US-centric commercial popularisation of culture is arguably dwarfed by the global marketplace for cultural production that the Internet has produced, now being further transformed under the impact of AI. Surviving public service organisations like the BBC appear under constant threat, as do universities.

In 2006, Joe McGuigan already raised the prospect that public intellectuals like Richard Hoggart were ‘a dying breed’ and that their ideas represented, in the new conditions, a ‘blast from the past’.⁷⁷ Given the challenges we now face, maybe this is a blast that we need, and the Keele exhibition and lecture recognise this. Roy Shaw’s ideas certainly had many inflections of the times in which he developed them, as this article has shown. But they may also have, suitably updated, a relevance for today.

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⁷⁷ McGuigan, ‘Richard Hoggart’, 207.

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