NOTES FOR A BOOK ON SIDNEY BALL, SOCIALISM, AND OXFORD POLITICAL ECONOMY

1. R. H. Tawney--Tawney was influenced by Bishop Charles Gore; Tawney made a case for ethical socialism along the same lines as Ball did; Tawney was involved with Toynbee Hall;

2. Ruskin College--

a. After the Ruskin strike, a Central Labour College was established and had a home at a dwelling which was rented from St. John's College and in 1911 St. John's told CLC that they had to vacate. Craik, W. W. 1964. The Central Labour College, 1909 - 29. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

b. Ball was a member of the Executive Council of Ruskin College and was involved in the Ruskin College strike.

c. Ball had wanted to bring Ruskin College into closer contact with Oxford; but misinterpreted as wanting to have the University take over Ruskin; Ball wanted the closer contact as a way to stimulate the study of economics and the other social sciences.

3. Workers' Education--Ball and A. J. Carlyle were interested in WE;

4. Group of Oxford men associated with Ball

a. A. J. Carlyle--he wrote for the Church Socialist Quarterly which was the organ of the Church Socialist League; became interested in social questions while a curate at St. Stephen's, Westminster; was a lecturer in politics and economics at University College; secretary to the Committee of Economics; had a belief in the cause of personal freedom; passion for justice to the depressed made him a Christian socialist; replaces Faulkner so in 1893 he becomes a Fellow of University College and is also elected as Chaplain; in 1895 he becomes vicar of two churches and so gives up fellowship but still remains chaplain

b. A. H. Johnson--was at All Souls in 1890 and tutored Furniss; taught political history; he died in 1927; description in Furniss (48-51)
c. H. W. Blunt

d. G. H. Wakeling

e. A. J. Jenkinson--killed by a fall while climbing

f. C. J. Faulkner--maybe, but a radical, associated with Morris; dies in 1893 and is replaced by Carlyle

5. Background

a. T.H. Green

b. Rise of Socialism in the 1880s--Guild of St. Matthew started in Oxford in 1885 by Henry C. Shuttleworth and F. L. Donaldson of Merton;

c. Henry George movement--Progress and Poverty was pushed in Oxford in the mid-1880s;

6. Christian Social Union--

a. Ball promised to support the founding of the Economic Review (1890); ordered Economic Review from the beginning

b. Ball published numerous articles and reviews in the Economic Review

c. Ball was a member of the Oxford CSU, 1910-1913 membership lists incomplete; however not a member from 1890 - 97

7. Activities at St. John's College and the University

a. In 1909, the President of St. John's retired and there was an election. The sides in the election were the clericals who had as their candidate the historian of the College and the radicals back Ball and included among the Radicals was J. L. Stocks (an old-fashioned radical of the Manchester Guardian circle). It was clear that the election would be close and might leave lasting bitterness. So both sides agreed to look for a neutral candidate, who would be a stop-gap until passions died down. H. A. James became President. Mabbott, J. 1986. Oxford Memories. Oxford: Thornton's of Oxford Ltd. pp. 43?

b. Took interest in the Serbian Committee in Oxford; Serbian Relief Executive
c. Set up the Essay Society

d. Set up the Mansel Society, which afforded opportunities for his pupils in Lit Hum to discuss philosophical questions.

e. Ball induced students to work for and at Toynbee Hall; he also introduced his students to Barnett and others who were at Toynbee Hall. They would come to his room and give talks which Ball made open for those interested in the social movement in East London etc.

f. Ball organized the Social Science Club with the help of committed student secretaries, arranged meetings at which guest speakers lectured on subjects of current interest. The Club emerged from the talks in Ball's rooms with regard to the establishment of Toynbee Hall. "The matter entailed some relatively detailed discussions held at Ball's rooms at St. John's, concerning the most effective means of dealing with urban poverty, with the result that it was agreed to continue the discussions of this and related problems on a regular basis, and in greater depth. These discussions took the form of a loosely organized study group, described by Ball as possessing 'no definite organization, no membership. The meetings are composed partly of graduates and undergraduates, partly of townsmen and workmen. I try to make the subjects as definite and practical as possible, and to get people to introduce them who really know them and can teach us. We listen to the discussion of a subject by those who know it.' Unlike debates at the Union, college societies, or the political clubs, the subjects were introduced by guest speakers with some special knowledge of the topic. Their presentation was followed by comments made by 'just a few who have some definite knowledge of the subject...and then things resolve themselves into a talk--people asking questions so we have no speaking for speaking's sake. The next week (in someone's private rooms) we talk it over among ourselves, members looking up fresh facts and the like in the meanwhile. Generally someone will read a short paper, consisting of facts collected by himself or derived from different trustworthy sources. We also discuss at these less formal meetings different papers or notices bearing on social topics that any of us have seen during the week.' Ball stressed the pragmatic orientation of the discussions. The subjects chosen for discussion were neither overly theoretical nor too technical. 'We avoid everything wide and vague if we can, confining ourselves
Ball's aim was not propagandism but knowledge of facts and actual difficulties. For the obstruction to the progress towards socialism in Oxford is not so much want of sympathy as of elementary knowledge. The Club was in fact a list of names of Oxford men interested in social questions who would be invited to meetings organized by Ball, usually to be addressed by a guest speaker. It was a potential source of recruitment for organizing undergraduate support for the settlement scheme as well as a meeting ground for young men who shared an interest in practical approaches to questions of social reform.

Social Science Club was for the practical study of social questions--met in winter term 1887, 1884

g. Ball advocated for a School of English Language and Literature at Oxford; wanted advanced degrees earned by research; advocated the organizing of teaching by faculties instead of by colleges; admission of women to full membership of the University; involved with the University Reform Association; his main interest was to make Oxford a research-oriented university looking at new subjects, especially political economy/social sciences--social questions

h. Ball was also involved with College reforms, such as abolishing compulsory chapels and setting up a committee structure to deal effectively with the new circumstances when the soldiers returned to college after WW I.

8. Founding Toynbee Hall


Ball met Barnett in 1875 (1st year) at a party organized by Gertrude Toynbee. During his stay Barnett was able to interest some of their hosts in their East End work; and Barnett gave a talk to undergraduates on the problems of the East End, poverty and people. & this would have included Ball (p. 45)
Ball was a member of the Palmerston Club (1884) whose aim was the consolidation of the Liberal Party in the University of Oxford. (p.63) Activity of the Club was in part to listen to papers; Club sometimes met in Ball's rooms. Ball was one of the original members and promoters of the Club. Remained a member until at least 1906. Was also a member of the local Liberal Club.

Gell felt that the money in the Toynbee Memorial Fund could be used for establishing a settlement in the East End. Ball was one of the first converts to Gell scheme. Gell and Barnett drew up a detail plan about the settlement and Barnett presented it in a talk on 'Settlements of University Men in Great Towns' on Nov. 17 1883 in Ball's rooms at St. John's College. (pp.226 - 228)

Ball started Social Studies Club during Michaelmas 1883 possibly as an extension of the settlement meetings in his rooms in November (p.229)


Following the November meeting, several others were held. In Feb 1884 a committee was set up including Ball and they quickly obtained some property on which to erect Toynbee Hall.

9. Work on WEA/Oxford

a.At a meeting on 25 August 1903, the WEA received public recognition from the representatives of nearly all the Universities and a large number of labour organizations. Ball was the host on that occasion. He welcomed the delegates to St. John's College and provided hospitality for them there. [Previously, Mansbridge went to Ball in April 1903 to tell him about the formation of the WEA, and Ball saw that it was a good idea.] It is fitting that the name Sidney Ball should be so intimately associated with the beginnings of the WEA in Oxford, for he never failed throughout a long University career to welcome and to assist those who had progressive causes at heart. He held out both hands to help young enthusiasts on their perilous ways. He added his ripe wisdom to their energy, and so things happened as they should and adventures were sped on to their goal.

b.At its 1907 summer conference, the theme was What Oxford can do for Working People; and a resolution was passed for
the establishment of a joint WEA-Oxford U. committee that would examine the relationship of the University to the higher education of working-class people. Ball gave a talk "What Oxford Can Do for Workpeople" which helped introduce the subject of the committee, i.e. the establishment of University tutorial classes. [Ball also stated that what was wanted of Oxford was not an education as a means of livelihood but as a means of life.] This was suggested to Ball by Tawney. Ball was also appointed to the Committee on Working-class Education. The Committee recommended the establishment of tutorial classes.

10. Founding Barnett House


b. Ball was chairman of the Council which ran Barnett House—he took the greatest interest in promoting through its agency an interchange of views on the principal social questions of the day, and he succeeded in securing the services of most capable speakers, recognised authorities on the subject with which they dealt.

c. The meeting on Nov. 17, 1913 empowered a committee to raise money to obtain a house as a centre for social and economic study. Ball was a member of the committee. An appeal for funds was headed "Social Studies in Oxford: Memorial to Canon Barnett". Money was quickly obtained. The House was opened 6 June 1914. In 1916 Barnett House was incorporated and Ball was elected as the first President.

d. Barnett House immediately took in (1914) the University Tutorial Classes Committee, which was a joint committee of the University and the WEA; later by 1918 came the Oxford Social and Political Studies Association. The Barnett House also began establishing an economics and social science library—the first of its kind in Oxford.

11. Fabian Society

a. Found Oxford University Fabian Society in 1895 which stayed in existence until 1915; this was due to the fact that Ball was the permanent president and therefore provided
the continuity needed for the student society to survive over succeeding generations, especially through the difficult years at the turn of the century. The OUFS succeeded in 1915 under the influence of the Guild socialism.

b. Was a member of the Fabian Society from 1886; became involved with the Executive Committee (1907)

c. Ball invited Fabian speakers to Oxford from at least 1892.

12. Worked on Political Economy

a. Member of the Oxford Economic Society (founded in 1886-91)

b. In 1903 Ball was a member of the Committee of the Trade League of the University, City, and County of Oxford

c. Member of CEPS 1904-11, 16-18; offered informal instruction in ET and HET, others

d. Memorial as to Economics May 19, 1902, Ball signed it.

e. Member of the Oxford University Political Economy Club, 1890 - 1918.

f. 1914 was the Vice-President of the Economic Section of the British Association

g. Around 1881, Ball was not studying socialist economists but French economists; Ball at this time was trying to combine the organic view of the State with individualist economics

13. Other

a. Helped organize (first president) the first meeting of the City of Oxford, Juvenile Organizations Committee (April 1918), its purpose being to form a link between the numerous institutions that have worked independently of one another for the welfare of the young.

b. Ball helped initiate (first president) the Oxford Citizens' Association, designed to inspire Oxford citizens with a sense of responsibility for the composition of the City Council and for its output of work.

c. Described as an advanced Liberal because was a member of the local Liberal 300 and a member of the Fabian Society
d. Ministry of Labour

e. American Universities Union

f. Ball carried on Green/Toynbee's work in Oxford and it was his special part to maintain and extend the relation of Oxford with the social movements of the last 30 years in England. He was able to do this partly through the health and energy of his interest in social questions, and through a sympathy which only enlarged and deepened his scientific judgement of the economic aspects of them, partly through his genuine friendship with men of all sorts and conditions.

g. Ball was a member of the Oxford University Home Rule League (1887) which was founded in support of a form of Irish self-government and in opposition to Coercion Acts.

h. Ball was a member of the National Church Reform Union (1882) [following Toynbee] which aimed at national moral regeneration through the democratization of the Church of England's government at the parish level, which would lead to the greater involvement of communities in church affairs. The Union sought to introduce the ideal of democracy through corporate social action at the community level into church reform with the belief that, despite all its shortcomings, the Church of England as a national institution had a vital role to play in ensuring the moral progress of the nation.

i. As a student (1877) he organized an Oxford Union debate on the abolition of the poor law at which Barnett spoke.

j. Many of Green's students laid less stress on his moralistic individualism than on the humanitarian and egalitarian attitudes stated with such intensity in his ethics. This was the case with the early Idealist Fabians such as Ball and D. G. Ritchie, Gore and Holland, and the founders of the CSU.

k. Ball was a Hegelian following Green— that was what he taught; his primary interest was ethical and political. The first years after his degree were spent almost entirely in arduous original study, both of metaphysics and economics. Soon after he began his career as Fellow of St. John's, he felt the attractions of the Socialist movement, and his centre of gravity shifted somewhat from the purely theoretic to the more practical speculations.
and thought. Farnell, L. R. 1918. "Sidney Ball as a Teacher." The Oxford Magazine 36 (June 7): 306 - 308.

1. Ball probably went to hear Henry George when he spoke in Oxford in March 1884

m. Membership in other groups: Oxford Interdenominational Council for Social Reform, Political Philosophy Club; Labour Co-partnership Association

n. Was an A. Kahn traveling scholarship for 1910-11

o. Ball hosted numerous Social Conferences at Oxford—-one with Tom Mann, another with Beatrice Potter (Webb)

14. Writings

a. The Moral Aspects of Socialism—-an important article acknowledged by those at the time; certainly an important pamphlet within the Fabian literature. The pamphlet dealt with the ethical issues of socialism. It sold well as a Fabian pamphlet.

b. Mostly book reviews in Economic Review and Economic Journal

Farnell, L. R. 1934. An Oxonian Looks Back. London: Martin Hopkinson Ltd.

Comments on Sidney Ball

"These and many other Exonians made for me a happy and inspiring community of friends; but with none of these, except Napier, was my intimacy so close or so long enduring as with Sidney Ball, classical scholar of Oriel, whose name is perpetuated in Oxford by the lectureship founded in his honour. I was a year his senior; and had been elected in 1875 to a club called 'The Raleigh', which was partly a very modest wine-club and mainly an essay-society, meeting once a fortnight to read and discuss an essay after a moderate enjoyment of wine and dessert. Its members were drawn from Exeter, Trinity and Oriel. There one evening--as I remember vividly at this moment--I met Ball and was at once fascinated by the radiant charm of him and the smile that lit up his face. It was friendship at first sight; and as we were working on the same lines we became bosom-companions both in our studies and in our sports. We remained thus to the end;
though in his overburdened last few years I think I counted
less for him than he for me.

He was known so widely that it may be of interest to
others to record what he was like in those early days. He
came up from Wellington as Scholar of Oriel in 1875, a typical
public-school athlete and prize-boy, being a fine runner who
won the Freshman's Mile; also a most promising scholar, more
mature in thought than most men of his age and with all the
Victorian enthusiasm for high literature. He was as sensitive
as a Victorian girl in matters of delicacy; but he had the
wildest humour, the most reckless devil-may-care gaiety, and
an irresistible laugh that would sometimes shatter the most
solemn occasions. It nearly got us both into serious trouble
in the crowded theatre of Dresden by exploding over the
comical appearance of the brown-paper dragon in Wagner's
Siegfried. (p. 56) Any untoward adventure, such as upsetting
in the dangerous Isis swollen with the winter-flood, was sheer
delight to him. Naturally he was one of the most popular men
in the University; and one met every type of undergraduate in
his rooms, which were often consecrated to high talk on
philosophy and literature, sometimes also to exhibitions of
weird gymnastic in which he excelled. I did not discern in
him then any strong trend towards social-political thought or
activity; as a student he had the same enthusiasm as myself,
for literature, philosophy and open-air adventure. Our
literary guiding-star at that period was Matthew Arnold; and
our common devotion to him certainly quickened and deepened my
enjoyment of his poetry, which has not waned with old age. We
had the passions and antipathies of the Romantic School; but
Poetry was our second goddess, Philosophy being our first.
For we were both equally the devoted pupils of Green, and the
votaries of German idealism: and, perhaps, in equal degree,
we were both 'masters of the inintelligible'. Yet this
mastery and his good scholarship did not win him a First in
Greats, for his nervous health had been overstrained, and he
nearly collapsed during the examination. It was a great
surprise and disappointment to his friends when his name
appeared in the second class; for he had obtained a First in
'Mods.', and in his fourth year he was regarded as one of the
most promising students in philosophy. But his career was in
no way marred by this accident. He continued his enthusiastic
study of philosophy at Gottingen under Lotz (1880) [W. J.
Ashley met Ball at these lectures]; and in 1882 he was elected
to a Fellowship at St. John's and charged with the
philosophical teaching of the College. His later career
concerns the history both of his College and the University;
for his best energies were devoted to the reform of both. The
value of his work in his own society can best be appreciated
by one who can contrast the St. John's of today with the St.
John's of 1874, when it was the stronghold of a torpid clericalism. As regards his University activities, of which I have given a sketch in the biographical account of him arranged by Mrs Ball, his story is closely interwoven with my own; for through nearly all our period we were fellow-fighters."

In 1889, Farnell persuaded Ball to join the 'Mounted Infants' as a way to save the Oxford University Volunteer Corps. "Ball, an advanced Radical, I secured by insisting that it was his easiest way of wiping off the slur that attached to his party of lack of patriotism. He was a fair horseman, but even playing at killing men went against his gentle nature; and as he was liable to be paralysed with laughter in the heat of a complicated manoeuvre, I allowed him to desert." (p. 150)

Farnell spent a winter-vacation with Ball in Berlin. (p.159)

In 1887 Ball had an accident: "For long [Ball] had been in a state of great mental depression, and was at that time in a doctor's home; where owing to the incredible carelessness of the doctor he had unconsciously picked up a loaded pistol in the dark and inadvertently shot himself. For some days he was lying between life and death....Ball pulled himself out of the valley of the shadow; and then went a health voyage from which he returned plump and stalwart and entirely in wholesome mind: the bullet had healthily occupied his thoughts with something tangible." (p. 210)

In 1893-1914 period: Ball and Franell were on the Classical Board and they pushed for the reform of the two classical examinations; but vested interests were too strong and the votaries archaeology became suspect. So Strachan-Davidson got them off the Board. (p.268)

Miltant dining club: formed in 10 Feb. 1889 at a meeting in Exeter College; dined together once a term and had value as a combative organisation (p.270); "The ideals and aspirations of our club were reflected in most of the measures discussed at these meetings, for which Ball and I were mainly responsible. We had two chief objects in view--the encouragement of research, and the integration of the higher teaching under a university system in which the professoriate and tutoriate might work together; we advocated the abolition of prize-fellowships, the pooling of the separate tuition-funds of the colleges (or of a large portion of them) and the independent authority of Boards of Faculties in the appointment of inter-collegiate lecturers. It was at one of these conferences that
the plan for creating a General Board of Faculties, to be realised some years afterwards, was adumbrated."

Also see


