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The German Historical Institute at Forty

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THE GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE AT FORTY

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The German Historical Institute London was officially opened at a ceremony on 4 November 1976. At the time, the Institute was accommodated in rooms at 26 Bloomsbury Square, and so the ceremony was held at Senate House, University of London. The founding Director was Paul Kluge, emeritus Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Frankfurt. Since his Ph.D. on British army policy before the First World War,¹ Kluge had specialized in British and Commonwealth history. On the British side, Geoffrey Dickens, Director of the Institute of Historical Research and an eminent historian of the Reformation, had actively supported the founding of the Institute. Kluge and Dickens were both members of the Association of British and German Historians that had been set up in 1968 on the initiative of Carl Haase, then Director of the State Archives of Lower Saxony, and which, since then, had been working towards setting up an Institute in London.

In Britain, many colleagues showed great openness towards the founding of the Institute, and they were also interested in academic cooperation. These British colleagues included many Jewish emigrants who were teaching history in Britain and now approached the Fellows of the new Institute and offered support. The extent to which Britain's membership of the European Economic Community but also Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* contributed to the willingness of British historians to work with German colleagues and institutions is reflected in Dickens's opening address. For Dickens, fighting against Germany in the Second World War was a formative experience. Having served as a captain in AA Command in the Royal Artillery and then, after 1945, as a brigade intelligence officer and press officer in Lübeck, he perceived the opening of a German Historical Institute in Britain as a 'symbol of that deepening trust and friendship which during these last thirty years has grown up between our two nations.

Trans. Angela Davies (GHIL).

¹ Paul Kluge, *Heeresaufbau und Heerespolitik Englands: Vom Burenkrieg bis zum Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1932).

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This friendship threatens nobody and it has grown within the context of an ardent desire for world peace and for a Europe which should truly accept the brotherhood of peoples and renounce the whole spirit of conquest.² The members of the new Institute were very lucky to be greeted by their British colleagues in exactly this new spirit of friendship and cooperation. So the Institute was immediately able to present itself not only as a centre of German research on British history, but also as a platform for intensive and exciting academic exchange.

Dickens added, however, that in future the Institute would have to look beyond bilateral relations. Its academic perspective should be European, he suggested, and contribute to undermining the Cold War: 'Likewise this new institute has been conceived in genuine scholarly exchanges, and mutual regard: not in any spirit of nationalist propaganda. It clearly seeks to display the intellectual benefits which we can give to one another, and indeed give to all men of good will and with enthusiasm for learning. Let us now look forward to that even happier day when this institute will also be readily used in a relaxed atmosphere by Russian and Polish visitors and, of course, by those coming from the German Democratic Republic. Any situation narrower than this would not satisfy our sort of idealism. The fraternity of scholarship cannot be limited to members of the European Economic Community.'³ At that time, nobody could know that in just over ten years time, the Berlin Wall would fall, that as early as 1993 a German Historical Institute would open in Warsaw, and that it would be followed in 2005 by one in Moscow – all this was as unpredictable as that in 2016 a majority of the British people would vote to leave the European Union.

From the start, the Institute took Dickens's exhortation to adopt a European perspective on the history of Britain and Anglo-German relations seriously, and it has always been open to academic exchange across all borders. Countless conferences, research projects, and publications have been devoted to international comparisons. At the same time, the Institute's research perspectives from the outset went beyond European contexts, and from the start, the Institute had the British Empire and Commonwealth, as well as the processes of

² Geoffrey Dickens, 'The Other Miracle', *Latest from Germany*, 42 (1976), 2.

³ *Ibid.* 2-3.

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decolonization and also globalization in its sights. This part of the Institute's work has been systematically expanded over the past decade with collaborative research projects on India, the opening of a branch office in Delhi, and exciting projects on African and global history.

So where does the Institute stand on its fortieth anniversary? It can certainly be proud of its achievements as a research institute and as an intermediary institution between German and British academia, supporting hundreds of young scholars from both countries and hosting high-profile academic events. The Institute's various series have published more than eighty monographs and a similar number of conference proceedings. To this we can add countless other monographs, edited volumes, and essays written by the Institute's Fellows and scholarship-holders. Many of the Institute's publications and conferences have boosted research in Britain and Germany in important ways. Most of its former Fellows hold professorships or other academic posts in Germany, Britain, or the USA.

But it would be wrong to rest on our laurels. In this anniversary year, we look both backwards and forwards. We have therefore asked two long-standing members of the Institute, Professor Peter Alter and Professor Lothar Kettenacker, who were there at the founding of the Institute in 1976 and, in their function as deputy directors, helped to influence the Institute's development, to look back at the start-up period and share with us their visions for the Institute's future. We have also asked Professor Richard Bessel, who for many years served as a member of the Institute's Academic Advisory Board, and Professor Andreas Fahrmeir, also a long-standing Board member and its current Chairman, to give us their assessments of the Institute's significance for British research on German history, and German research on British history respectively. These contributions are published here as a small, anniversary addition to the current *Bulletin*.

In our own view, where do the challenges for the future lie? We cannot yet tell what impact Brexit will have on the Institute administratively (residence permits, work permits, taxes, and so on), and as far as research is concerned, the situation is similarly unclear. Will Britain be able to 'buy in' to the European Research Area and the various European programmes for funding research? Or will it look to, and hope for, more global collaborations beyond Europe? The voices that we hear in British academia are as divided as they are in busi-

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ness. But at European level, Brexit will presumably result in more limited bilateral or multilateral cooperations with Britain assuming greater importance again. The GHIL's significance as a platform for exchange in the humanities in post-Brexit Britain will certainly not decline. On the contrary, in this context of growing bilateral collaborations, it is, therefore, most likely to increase, and in any case, the GHIL will in future remain firmly committed to its role as an intermediary institution.

Even though the Institute has a wide research agenda reaching from the Middle Ages to the present day, Brexit will certainly make us all revisit several areas of British and European history and engage with new topics and historical interpretations. The Institute's Special Research Areas as well as the new International Centre of Advanced Studies 'Metamorphoses of the Political' in Delhi, of which we are founding partners, will continue to contribute relevant research not only to our understanding of these recent events, but also to British history in general in a wider European and global context. In our endeavour to contribute cutting-edge research we will continue to cooperate with partners in Britain, Germany and worldwide in the spirit of Geoffrey Dickens's 'in genuine scholarly exchanges, and mutual regard: not in any spirit of nationalist propaganda', but 'with enthusiasm for learning'.

We are deeply grateful to all our British, German, and international colleagues who have supported us and our work over the past four decades. It is the lively academic and personal exchange with them that makes working at the Institute so exciting and rewarding and also gives younger scholars in particular a unique opportunity to strengthen their international networks. And, finally, we are grateful to the Max Weber Stiftung and the German Ministry of Education and Research for not only granting the Institute complete academic independence, but also providing us with the administrative and financial framework without which we could not do the work we are doing, let alone realize our visions for the future.

ANDREAS GESTRICH is the current Director of the German Historical Institute London.