



IN MEMORIAM

Alfred M. Gollin
Professor of History
UC Santa Barbara
1926-2005

Alfred M. Gollin, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, was born on February 6, 1926 in New York City, and he died in Santa Barbara, California, on October 30, 2005. His parents were Russian Jewish immigrants, and his father grew up in poverty on the edge of the Bowery. Gollin became one of the leading historians of Great Britain of his generation, and he considered his American nationality an advantage rather than a burden. He told his students that it gave him the opportunity to offer an “outsider’s” perspective that could be trusted only when it was based upon relentless archival research.

Known to his friends as Freddie, Gollin entered the U.S. army in 1943 (as soon as he reached the minimum age of seventeen). When the Second World War ended, he was serving in an armored field brigade in Germany. English universities permitted some American soldiers to study there for a term, and Gollin went to Oxford where he guarded “SS men one day” and strolled down “Oxford High Street the next.” He joked that he and his friends chose New College because they thought it to be preferable to one of the “old ones.” His experience there forged a link with Oxford University, the British nation and its history which he came to love, a link that continued for the rest of his life.

Gollin took the B.S.S. degree at what was then the City College of New York, and on the advice of Professor William L. Langer of Harvard, returned to Oxford for advanced study. While earning his B.A. in history at New College (1951), he received the Cromwell Medal (1949) and the New College Essay Prize (1950). In 1957 he was awarded the D. Phil. by Oxford for his thesis “History of The Observer, 1905-1910.” Between 1951 and 1959, he was Extraordinary Lecturer at Oxford and the official historian of The Observer. He taught British history from 1959 to 1961 at C.C.N.Y. and at the University of California, Los Angeles, before returning permanently from Great Britain to join the History Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He was appointed professor in on July 1, 1966, department chair in 1976-77, and retired in 1994.

Gollin’s research focused on the political and military history of Britain in the twentieth century. He is perhaps most remembered for a series of highly regarded books that began with *The Observer and J. L. Garvin, 1908-1914* (1960), next came his *Proconsul in Politics: a Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (1964), an administrator greatly admired by many and reviled by many others as responsible for the outbreak of the Boer War. In this book, Gollin featured his pioneering argument that the First World War in Britain brought about a political struggle of parties and ideologies over the importance of state control, the “Battle for Freedom or Control.” In 1965 he published *Balfour’s Burden: Arthur Balfour and Imperial Preference*. His interests in high politics and the origins of air power came together in *No Longer an Island: Britain and the Wright Brothers, 1902-1909* (1984) and in *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and Their Government, 1909-1914* (1989). In retirement, he continued to work on a projected third volume in this series.

Gollin’s research earned many honors and high praise from his peers. To A.J. P. Taylor, for example, he was simply “that incomparable researcher.” He was awarded the honorary D. Litt. By Oxford University in 1968, and he received numerous research grants (including no less than three Guggenheim fellowships). He was

celebrated not only in the U.S. but in Britain, where he was elected Fellow of both the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Society of Literature.

Gollin's teaching was legendary and his classes were perennially oversubscribed. He was an electrifying lecturer – deliberate, elegant and dramatic in style. He delivered hilarious one- liners utterly deadpan and with an inerrant sense of comic timing. Undergraduates, colleagues and non- professionals all became captivated by the Gollin style – almost an elevated whisper – which was the result of a childhood illness and subsequent surgery. It did not prevent him in the slightest from being heard in the largest lecture hall, and none who knew him will recall him without thinking of that rasping, gravelly, soft yet inimitable and penetrating voice. Neither will former students ever forget the beginning of each lecture: “Now let me go on with my story.” He was named Professor of the Year at UCLA in 1960; in 1971, he was elected outstanding professor by UCSB students and received the University's Distinguished Teaching Award in 1991. To his graduate students, he was a demanding and inspiring mentor who reminded them never to forget that they had chosen a profession in which writing and teaching history were complementary and even inseparable passions. He always insisted that cutting corners in research was unacceptable, and he reserved his severest censures for those he suspected of falling short of the most rigorous standards of research.

Alfred Gollin was gifted with a puckish and irrepressible sense of humor, and he displayed it to students and friends generously. Always immaculate in his appearance, he also valued remaining fit and swam regularly. He enjoyed, and was enjoyed by, a large circle of friends that extended far beyond the confines of his beloved California and the profession he served so well for three decades. A widower, Alfred Gollin is survived by his two daughters, Julie and Susanne.

J. Sears McGee

R.J.Q. Adams

Patricia and Bookman Peters Professor of History, Texas A & M University