

Colin Jones: fox and hedgehog historian of France

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Colin Jones is one of the most prolific and wide-ranging historians of France today. In the more than twenty books and sixty articles he has published thus far in his career, he has considered both Paris and the provinces; the lives of ordinary people and those of elites; social practices and material culture as well as discourses and the emotions. His work spans the early modern and modern periods, and the themes he has treated run the gamut from sex work, charity and consumption to medicine, art and gender. It is not only the breadth and interdisciplinarity of his work, however, that has attracted the attention of scholars and the general public. It is also the liveliness of his writing. The verve and sensitivity with which he approaches the past are reminiscent of the late eighteenth-century Parisian *flâneur avant la lettre* Louis-Sébastien Mercier and his ‘thick description’ of city life. Mercier’s *Tableau* of the capital provides a rich source for much of Jones’ writing, inflecting his microhistorical methodology and colourful approach to his many and varied subjects.¹

The range of Jones’ oeuvre sets him apart in the profession. Most historians are what Isaiah Berlin playfully called (referring to novelists) ‘hedgehogs’: they devote their entire careers to interpreting their subject through the lens of one big idea or framework—for eighteenth-century France these might be discourses, literary culture, public opinion, finances, commerce, colonialism, high politics, gender and sexuality. Jones, by contrast, resembles Berlin’s ‘fox’. He sniffs his way around French history, ‘moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves, without [...] seeking to fit them into [...] a unitary inner vision.’² Jones’ two most recent books illustrate his fox-like dexterity. *Versailles: Landscape of Power and Pleasure*, published in 2018, takes readers on a multientury journey through one of France’s most iconic *lieux de mémoire*, exploring how its functions and meanings have changed, from Louis XIV’s use of it to express his supremacy

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1 Colin Jones, ‘Meeting, greeting and other “little customs of the day” on the streets of eighteenth-century Paris’, *Past & Present*, supplement, 4 (2009), 144–71.

2 Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History* (London, 1988), 1–2.

and domesticate the nobles to its more recent uses for tourism, film and modern art.³ With *The Fall of Robespierre: 24 Hours in Revolutionary Paris*, published three years later, readers are thrust onto the restive streets of Revolutionary Paris, where lethal factionalism and public opinion combine to determine the fate of Robespierre, the National Convention and, indeed, the French Revolution itself.⁴ The range of themes and chronology covered by the two books is striking: the first offers a *longue durée* story of a royal palace; the second, a microhistorical deep dive into the street politics of a single Revolutionary *ournée*.

Amidst the diversity of Jones' work, recurrent interests are discernible, most notably, 'history from below', entrepreneurship and analysis of the practical impact of cultural production in varying forms. Jones' relentless pursuit of answers to the ubiquitous question of change over time frequently sees him crossing the chronological boundary between the Old Regime and the Revolutionary era, weighing evidence of rupture against signs of continuities across a longer *durée* than most early modernists or Revolutionary scholars dare to travel. A commitment to exploring the conditions and experiences of ordinary people owes much to Jones' formative years at the University of Oxford in the late 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the influence of the Marxist-humanist E. P. Thompson was at its peak. Jones, however, did not have to look sixty miles up the M40 from Oxford to the University of Warwick, where Thompson taught and where Jones would eventually take up a position in 1996, to find inspiration for this approach. He encountered two excellent historians of eighteenth-century France at Oxford, both of whom were pursuing their own, non-Marxist versions of 'history from below': his PhD supervisor Richard Cobb, Fellow of Balliol College, and Olwen Hufton, a professor at the University of Reading when she gave a talk at one of Cobb's seminars that Jones attended. Although Cobb and Hufton were both skilled at bringing to life obscure individuals they found in the archives, Cobb was drawn to idiosyncratic oddballs, those who defied categorization. Despite some ambivalent 'fellow travelling' with Albert Soboul in his early career, Cobb came to reject sociological categories such as 'class', viewing them as rigid abstractions that obscure 'the extreme individualism of social movements.'⁵ Hufton was more willing to extrapolate from her case studies of individuals and draw conclusions about social groups. She was also a more disciplined institutional historian than Cobb. Although she was not primarily known in that category (she was better known for her analysis of the early modern 'economy of makeshifts'), she was fairly systematic in her approach to institutional forms of poor relief.⁶ Arguably, Hufton had the greater influence in Jones' early work.

Jones followed Hufton's general approach to institutions in his early works on charity, poor relief, hospitals and patients. His monograph on *bienfaisance* of 1982 and his collection of essays on hospitals and medicine of 1989 balance traditional social history methods (they are chock-full of tables, graphs and statistical maps) with a burgeoning cultural analysis.⁷ He departed from Hufton, however, in his more optimistic view of poor relief. A stoic gloom runs across Hufton's work on the topic. People are portrayed as doing their best to get by in a Malthusian world, without much success. Her view of Revolutionary welfare was especially dim: the system, she concluded, 'had no existence in anything other than the rhetoric of politicians.'⁸ Jones offered a more uplifting interpretation, forcefully countering the Enlightenment notion of hospitals as 'gateways to death' in his article on 'The social function of the hospital', co-written

3 Colin Jones, *Versailles: Landscape of Power and Pleasure* (London, 2018).

4 Colin Jones, *The Fall of Robespierre: 24 Hours in Revolutionary Paris* (London, 2021).

5 Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789–1820* (Oxford, 1970), xviii.

6 Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France: 1750–1789* (Oxford, 1974), especially the second part.

7 Colin Jones, *Charity and Bienfaisance: The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region 1740–1815* (Cambridge, 1982); Colin Jones, *The Charitable Imperative: Hospitals and Nursing in Ancien Régime and Revolutionary France* (London, 1989).

8 Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992), 86.

with Michael Sonenscher.⁹ Jones agrees with Hufton that the French Revolution of 1789 did not succeed in establishing an enduring system of public welfare, but he, much like Isser Woloch, portrays revolutionaries' efforts to create such a system as anticipating the twentieth-century welfare state.¹⁰

Another mark of Hufton's influence on Jones appears in his attention to the historical role of women. Hufton was among the pioneers of women's history in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and Jones recalls the 'rapt' excitement in the room when she delivered a paper on poverty and women in one of Cobb's seminars in the late 1960s.¹¹ The impact is clearly evident in Jones' many works on the Filles de la Charité who had been nursing the patients and inmates of France's hospitals since the seventeenth century and continued to be an effective force on the scene up to and after the French Revolution. Jones' 1989 *Social History of Medicine* article connected three significant issues in hospital, medical and gender history.¹² Arguing that the nursing sisters should be recognized as medical practitioners, Jones demonstrated that care and cure were not antithetical in early modern hospitals, and that the sisters performed traditional acts of cure whilst also acting as physician, surgeon and apothecary. They made decisions about diet and regimen, carried out surgical acts such as bloodletting and ran hospital pharmacies. To Jones' mind, the sisters 'contributed in no small measure to the better management of hospitals but also to their "medicalization"'.¹³

Jones' argument resonated with Monica Green's contemporary calls for historians of gender and medicine to rethink the categories and definitions of medical acts and practice in order to locate premodern female medical practitioners in the archive.¹⁴ In a very real sense, Jones' article, whilst not a call to action like Green's, does exactly what Green was seeking in reimagining and recentering the work the Filles de la Charité were doing. It also prefigured more recent efforts by Mary Fissell and Sara Ritchey to recast care within and outside of hospital settings as medical work.¹⁵

Whilst the level of attention paid to women's history admittedly ebbs and flows through Jones' oeuvre, women, where they do appear, are not only considered as social and political agents but also as potential producers of new discourses. This perspective is manifested most strongly in Jones' early research in the 1980s but returns again in his more recent work on Madame de Pompadour, female libertines and, most recently, the duchesse d'Elbeuf.¹⁶ His 2012 Presidential Address to the Royal Historical Society, on libertine women of the late *ancien régime*, deftly reconciles two strands of feminist historiography that have often been seen as antithetical—one focussed on experience, the other on the discourses through which experience is constructed. He argues that the 'boom–bust' experiences of libertine women over the course of their careers provided them with the intellectual equipment and personal insecurities that made an articulation of women's rights conceivable and desirable. Several famous advocates of women's rights

9 Colin Jones and Michael Sonenscher, 'The social functions of the hospital in eighteenth-century France: the case of the Hôtel-Dieu of Nîmes', *French Historical Studies*, 13 (1983), 172–214.

10 Isser Woloch, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820s* (New York, 1994), esp. Chapter VIII: 'The rise and fall of Revolutionary *bienfaisance*', 237–65.

11 Colin Jones, 'Olwen Hufton's "Poor", Richard Cobb's "People", and the notions of the *longue durée* in French Revolutionary historiography', *Past & Present*, 192, supplement 1 (2006), 178–203, esp. 179.

12 Colin Jones, 'Medicine in France on the eve of the French Revolution: Sisters of Charity and the ailing poor' *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1983), 339–48.

13 Jones, *The Charitable Imperative*, 15.

14 Monica Green, 'Women's medical practice and health care in medieval Europe', *Signs*, 14 (1989), 434–73; Monica Green, 'Documenting medieval women's practice', in Luis García-Ballester, Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga and Andrew Cunningham (eds), *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death* (Cambridge, 1994), 322–52.

15 Mary Fissell, 'Introduction: women, health, and healing in early modern Europe', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82, (2008), 1–17; Sara Ritchey, *Acts of Care: Recovering Women in Late Medieval Health* (Ithaca, 2021).

16 Jones, *The Charitable Imperative*. See also Colin Jones, *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress* (London, 2002); Colin Jones, 'French crossings IV: vagaries of passion and power in Enlightenment Paris', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23 (2013), 3–35; Colin Jones, Alex Fairfax-Cholmeley and Simon Macdonald (eds), *The Letters of the Duchesse d'Elbeuf: Hostile Witness to the French Revolution* (Liverpool, 2023).

during the Revolution—Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Etta Palm and Claire Lacombe—grew out of this libertine world and Jones invites us to contemplate the connections between these entrepreneurial courtesans and Western feminism.¹⁷

Jones' scholarship between the 1990s and early 2020s shows attributes of both the fox and hedgehog. In fox mode, Jones began writing and editing broad overviews of French history for a general audience: a cultural atlas, an illustrated history of France, an anthology on the 'age of cultural revolutions' in England and France, an overview of *ancien régime* and Revolutionary France and a history of Paris.¹⁸ Working in particular with Roy Porter, director of the Wellcome Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London, he also explored Michel Foucault's impact within the history of medicine, especially with regard to the assertion of power both discursively and through institutions and social structures.¹⁹ By the mid-1990s, Jones consolidated another long-standing interest: consumption in eighteenth-century France. This shift may have been owed to his collaborations with Roy Porter, who himself was turning to questions of consumption, as well as to his colleague at the University of Warwick, Maxine Berg, who was preparing an edited volume on the history of consumption, to which Jones contributed.²⁰ Manifested most strikingly in his 'Great chain of buying' article, Jones' critical re-examination of the significance of medical advertisements within *ancien régime* France led him to fundamentally revise scholars' assumptions about the nature of the bourgeois public sphere and the origins of the French Revolution.²¹ In doing so, Jones formally merged the two key strands of his historical interests, in both medical and Revolutionary history.

Jones' abiding interest in those two strands led him, fox-like, into numerous other avenues of historical enquiry, each of which contributed not only to enhancing understandings of eighteenth-century French culture, but also of the analytical potential offered by cultural history more generally—indeed, Jones played a key role in the early 2000s in redefining and clarifying what cultural history was, and what it sought to achieve.²² Striking amongst these ventures are his frequent forays into the visual and material world of eighteenth-century France (and beyond), which have also ensured him a standing in the field of art history. Perhaps most prominent was his work for the exhibition *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress*, held at the National Gallery, London (the show travelled to London from Munich and Versailles).²³ Rather than creating a conventional multiauthored catalogue, Jones produced a single-authored book. It situated works from the exhibition, together with other images, in the context of Pompadour's extraordinary career and her broader political, social and artistic milieus. Examining Pompadour in relation to varied modes of Rococo self-fashioning and assessing her contributions sympathetically yet not uncritically, Jones' book returned a sense of historical depth and complexity to a subject who has at times appeared little more than the sum of her representations.

17 Jones, 'French crossings IV'.

18 Colin Jones and John Ardagh (eds), *Cultural Atlas of France* (New York and Oxford, 1991); Colin Jones, *Cambridge Illustrated History of France* (Cambridge, 1994); Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman (eds), *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: England and France, 1750–1820* (Berkeley, 2002); Colin Jones, *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon (1715–1799)*, (London, 2002); Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (London, 2004).

19 Colin Jones and Roy Porter (eds), *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body* (London and New York, 1994).

20 Roy Porter and John Brewer (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York, 1993); Colin Jones and Rebecca Spang, 'Sans-culottes, sans café, sans tabac: shifting realms of necessity and luxury in eighteenth-century France' in *Consumers and Luxury in Europe 1650–1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester, 1999), 37–62.

21 Colin Jones, 'The great chain of buying: medical advertisement, the bourgeois public sphere, and the origins of the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), 13–40.

22 Jones' contributions to cultural history are manifest throughout his publications, but perhaps came to a head most explicitly in his inaugural contribution to the journal *Cultural and Social History*: Colin Jones, 'Peter Mandler's "problem with cultural history", or is playtime over?', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 209–15. For an example of Jones' moving beyond traditional social histories of medicine and insisting on analysis of the impact of cultural production as well as of cultural expressions, see 'Plague and its metaphors in early modern France', *Representations*, 53 (1996), 97–127.

23 Jones, *Madame de Pompadour*.

One image in the book, by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, foreshadowed a major project on the Saint-Aubin *Livre de caricatures*, in collaboration with Waddesdon Manor, near Aylesbury, in whose collection the *Livre* resides.²⁴ Primarily the work of the embroiderer Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, the *Livre* is a small, scurrilous collection of comic and satirical drawings made over many years and involving the participation of family members and friends. Pompadour was a frequent target, and the book was produced in secret under conditions of heavy censorship. The project brought together many characteristic Jones themes, investigating questions of luxury and consumption, introducing a colourful cast of characters, and as always combining rigorous research with a deftness of touch. Full of puzzles requiring careful decoding and humour traversing both elite and popular production, the *Livre* is a quintessential Jonesian subject.

Like *Madame de Pompadour*, too, the *Livre* was preoccupied with questions of physiognomy and appearances (often deceptive), which resurfaced with force in 2014 with the publication of *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris*.²⁵ Taking its cue from a self-portrait by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, shown at the Salon of 1787, in which the artist appeared with her lips parted in a smile revealing her teeth, Jones drew out the revolutionary quality of this seemingly natural form of self-picturing. From a small and, on the face of it, unremarkable gesture, a history of this most ineffable of physical responses emerges. The smile, we learn, was a product of the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, and its transformation coincided in fascinating ways with the French Revolution, where it stood opposed to the ‘old regime of teeth’. Smiles, in Jones’ telling, were also material, registered in painted canvases and enabled by the practices of eighteenth-century Parisian dentists. Yet the Revolutionary smile—‘natural’, progressive(?) and egalitarian—was ultimately short-lived, displaced by the spiky-toothed monsters of Gillray or the scream of the scaffold. By the end of the 1790s it had all but disappeared—Napoleon’s gloomy mien followed—and it was not until the twentieth century that figures in public life shed their stern demeanours and learnt to loosen up a little. Is this, then, a book about painting or about carnivalesque tooth-pulling? Or is it about caricature, the physiognomic schemas of Lavater and his contemporaries or perhaps even photography? Is it about gender, or about laughing, or about denture-making? Is it about the French Revolution, or can it tell us something about smiling now? The answer of course, is that it is about all of these things, and that as is so often the case Jones’ elucidation of a brief moment in the Revolutionary decade tells us a history we did not know we needed to know, but which now appears indispensable.

Taken together, these books, and most especially the latter two, are far more than ‘just’ art historical. Both Saint-Aubin and *The Smile Revolution* are the products of a wide-ranging expertise capable of synthesizing a vast array of different areas of enquiry to develop masterful cultural histories that have significantly enhanced understandings of eighteenth-century French culture and society. What unites these works further, and something that is also apparent in so many of Jones’ other publications (not least his *Past & Present* articles ‘Pulling teeth in eighteenth-century Paris’ and ‘Meeting, greeting ... on the streets of eighteenth-century Paris’, two precursors to the Smile book), is the wit and good humour with which those histories have been communicated.²⁶ Without ever shying away from making larger and more serious points, Jones’ sheer enjoyment of his subject matter and its broader significance shines through very strongly throughout his oeuvre.

Whilst Jones was taking these fox-like excursions across French history, he also entered what might be called a ‘hedgehog’ moment, a period when he undertook to fit the vast and

²⁴ Colin Jones, Juliet Carey and Emily Richardson (eds), *The Saint-Aubin Livre de Caricatures: Drawing Satire in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 2012).

²⁵ Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 2014).

²⁶ Colin Jones, ‘Pulling teeth in eighteenth-century Paris’, *Past & Present*, 166 (2000), 100–145; Jones, ‘Meeting, greeting, and “other little customs of the day”’.

complex topic of the French Revolution's origins into 'a single central vision', influenced, in part, by his development of the new cultural history.²⁷ In a series of articles and essays published between 1991 and 2000, he argued that the Revolution's abolition of privilege and promotion of civic equality and civic professionalism was owed to the expansion of commerce, consumption and the market-driven dynamics of the public sphere.²⁸ In the first instalment of this thesis, 'Bourgeois revolution revived: 1789 and social change' (1991), Jones drove a coach and horses through revisionist historiography.²⁹ Since the 1960s, revisionists had been arguing that the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century was underdeveloped and lacked class-consciousness. Merchants and industrialists aspired to join the nobility, we were told, not topple it. Moreover, the national deputies of 1789 were largely professionals, lawyers and venal officeholders; they were thus creatures of the *ancien régime*, not the industrial capitalists called for by the Marxist script. By the mid-1970s, with the Marxist interpretation in tatters, a second wave of revisionism came along, led by François Furet, Mona Ozouf and, a bit later, Keith Baker.³⁰ They put aside socio-economic considerations altogether and focussed on political ideology and discourses, especially the democratic, utopian and proto-totalitarian discourses inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Jones was unpersuaded by this evacuation of the socio-economic from accounts of the French Revolution's origins. He did not reject the study of 'discourse' but sought to connect it to the socio-economic changes brought about by increased commerce and consumption, which swept across eighteenth-century France, penetrating bastions of privilege from the inside—the professions, the guilds, venal-officeholding and agriculture. This rapid marketization of society gradually conditioned people, with or without vested interests in *ancien régime* institutions, to reimagine social relations in a less vertical and more horizontal manner. Hierarchy and corporate identity gave way to equality and civic mindedness. Jones offered an extended case study of this process in his co-authored book with Lawrence Brockliss which shows how market forces and entrepreneurialism put pressure on the privileged medical institutions of the *ancien régime*.³¹

This bold reinterpretation of the Revolution's origins (Jones self-deprecatingly referred to it as 'foolhardy') poked a giant hole in the post-bicentenary consensus about the demise of the bourgeoisie thesis.³² There was some ambivalence, however, as to whether Jones sought to revive the 'bourgeoisie' as a class (which Sarah Maza dismissed as 'a return to an old-fashioned paradigm') or to depart from the Marxist preoccupation with 'class struggle' by shifting attention to the problem of *bourgeoisification*—a process encompassing people from all levels of society: nobles, workers and peasants as well as the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie.³³ The degree to which Jones sought to 'revivify' Marxism is also unclear. In 'Bourgeois revolution revived', he repeatedly pointed out the ways that revisionists and post-revisionists had either caricaturized or misconstrued the Marxist interpretation, and in 'The great chain of buying', he chided 'discourse' historians for borrowing Jürgen Habermas' framework of the public sphere whilst ignoring his (Marxist) contention that it was fundamentally 'bourgeois'. In doing so, 'they

27 Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 1–2.

28 Colin Jones, 'Bourgeois revolution revived: 1789 and social change', in Colin Lucas (ed.), *Rewriting the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), 69–118; Jones, 'The great chain of buying'; Jones and Spang, 'Sans-culottes, sans café, sans tabac'; Jones, 'Pulling teeth'.

29 This phrase is taken from one of Jones' later articles: Jones, 'The great chain of buying', 14.

30 François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge, 1985); Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990); Mona Ozouf, *L'homme régénéré: essais sur la Révolution française* (Paris, 1989).

31 Colin Jones and Lawrence Brockliss, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1997); Jones, 'The great chain of buying'.

32 Jones, 'Bourgeois revolution revived', 78.

33 Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 52.

have effectively cut the German scholar off at the knees.³⁴ Yet, Jones gradually distanced himself from the Marxist interpretation, as can be seen in the declining references to Marx and Marxist scholarship from the mid-1990s on. Whereas cognate terms for ‘Marx’ appeared fourteen times in the 1991 article ‘Bourgeois revolution revived’, they appeared only once in the next instalment, ‘The great chain of buying’, of 1996. Was this a reflection of the neoliberal zeitgeist of the mid-1990s, which left any argument containing even a whiff of Marxism open to ridicule? A decade later, Jones’ break with Marxism appeared to be complete. His 2007 paper responding to Maza’s critique of his ‘bourgeois’ thesis, which he read at a conference in honour of Isser Woloch at Columbia University, carried the pithy yet revealing title: ‘Bourgeois baby, Marxist bathwater’ Ironically, William Sewell has recently ‘revivified’ Jones’ thesis but with the Marxism re-added. Drawing on Moishe Postone’s reading of Marx’s early work, Sewell argues, citing Jones along the way, that the idea of civic equality in eighteenth-century France grew out of the egalitarian implications of the commodity form and market exchanges.³⁵

If Jones’ thesis about a rising bourgeoisie was not immediately incorporated into overviews about the Revolution’s origins (it was even abridged in his own overview, *The Great Nation*), it was widely appreciated.³⁶ ‘Bourgeois revolution revived’ was reprinted in two different anthologies of leading work on the French Revolution, influencing young scholars at the time, who itched to see the socio-economic reincorporated into accounts of the French Revolution’s origins.³⁷

The hedgehog who pioneered a sweeping ‘bourgeoisification’ thesis of the French Revolution’s origins nevertheless remained at heart a fox. Perhaps the most distinctive feature running through all of Jones’ work is his ability to bring together a wide range of different historical methods to develop holistic interpretations of the past. These approaches extended his influence beyond the relatively siloed literature of *ancien régime* France, French Revolutionary studies and the history of medicine and into that of cultural history more generally.³⁸ In the twenty-first century, Jones has thus written or edited books on topics ranging from Paris, Versailles and Dickens to libertinism, satire and smiles. An interest in, and commitment to, developing microhistorical techniques runs through many of his publications. Taking up the baton from scholars such as Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg and Michel de Certeau, Jones has also incorporated some of what was best in their work: the capacity to tell a good story about individuals with a novelist’s eye for details.

If reflections of Hufton appear in much of Jones’ earlier work, those of Cobb and the aforementioned microhistorians loom large in his *The Fall of Robespierre: 24 Hours in Revolutionary Paris*. Although clearly a work of microhistory, the book makes no mention of theory or historiographical schools. Unlike earlier work, there is no Habermas, no Foucault, no Barthes, no ‘bourgeoisification’, no ‘emotives’ (William Reddy’s concept). Cobb once accused historical theorists, and specifically the *Annales* School, for ‘expressing silly ideas sillily.’³⁹ Had he lived to read it, he would have found no such ‘nonsense’ in *The Fall of Robespierre*. Much like Cobb, Jones tells a story about people, predicaments and concrete conditions. Contingency and agency drive the narrative; discourse and structure hover quietly in the background. Details, painstakingly culled from the archives over more than a decade, make the story of 9 Thermidor vivid: hour-by-hour weather conditions; the amount of sunlight trickling into narrow streets at certain times of the day; the din of carpenters pounding on wood in the courtyard below Robespierre’s

34 Jones, ‘The great chain of buying’, 16.

35 William Sewell, *Capitalism and the Emergence of Civic Equality in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago, 2021).

36 Jones, *The Great Nation*. The section conveying this ‘commercialization’ thesis is concentrated between pp. 349–63.

37 P. M. Jones, *The French Revolution in Social and Political Perspective* (London, 1996), 71–100; Gary Kates (ed.), *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies* (London, 1998), 159–91.

38 Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 74–97.

39 Jones, ‘Olwen Hufton’s “poor”, Richard Cobb’s “people”’, 188.

window; the stench of blood wafting throughout the city; the precise movements of smugglers, spies and plotters, furtively scurrying across the city. Jones is the ‘Revolutionary’ and ‘urban’ answer to Marc Bloch, who was famous for grasping the ‘sounds and smells’ of medieval peasant life.⁴⁰ He is the modern Louis-Sébastien Mercier.

As of this writing, Jones, the fox, has left revolutionaries behind to venture off, with Alex Fairfax-Cholmeley and Simon Macdonald, into the world of the counter-Revolutionary duchesse d’Elbeuf, whose translated letters were published in English in autumn 2023. What defines Jones’ work for all of us is his skill as a communicator—through his writing and lecturing he has infected wide and diverse audiences (academics, students and the wider public) with his own enthusiasm and passion for eighteenth-century French history. His writing is characterized by wit, playfulness and sheer enjoyment of his subject matter (even, or perhaps especially so, the grislier topics). Where will this grand *fromage* of French history’s creative magic take us next?

This *festschrift* began life as a series of conference panels planned for presentation in 2020. We pivoted to a two-day virtual workshop in July 2021 hosted by the Centre for Early Modern and Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of Warwick. The event ended with a spontaneous outpouring of gratitude from the many friends, colleagues and former students present. It is never possible to include everyone who has worked with or been mentored by a senior scholar in a *festschrift*, but that is especially true in Colin Jones’ case. By way of acknowledging Colin’s extraordinary marriage of scholarship and academic citizenship, his seemingly limitless generosity and mentoring of junior scholars and postgraduate students in particular, we include here an overview of some of the common themes which came out of that conversation and subsequent exchanges with numerous former students and colleagues.

Throughout his teaching career Colin acted as an informal as well as formal mentor for generations of French historians in the UK, France and the USA. Colin’s generous doctoral supervision has extended from transatlantic phone calls delivering guidance and encouragement on first conference papers in the days before Zoom, to regular supervisions that continued even when he was on research leave and later following an institutional move. For many of us Colin made our existence in academic space possible on both sides of *La Manche*. The opposite of a gatekeeper, Colin made us all feel that we ‘belonged to a community of historians.’ Colin offered friendly and inclusive supervisory support to nontraditional first-generation students with ‘zero awareness of how academia worked’, and those more used to the collegiate settings of museums, as well as good-humouredly supporting atypical dissertation topics and research. Colin acted as a rigorous but kind and cheerful external examiner and *membre du jury* for countless doctoral vivas in France and the UK, always supportive of the candidate and constructive even if there was intellectual disagreement.

Treating postgraduate students (both those working with him directly and those at other institutions) as friends and peers he continues to be a source of advice and guidance for navigating everything to do with French history and the academic world. Chance encounters on the metro line 13 on the way to the Pierrefitte Revolutionary archives and in the café outside the ‘Old BN’ on rue Richelieu and at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, resulted in daily lunches, introductions to senior scholars and archival staff, and the sharing not only of his extensive knowledge and deep understanding of *ancien régime* and Revolutionary French archives, but also in him cross-referencing names for students when he worked in other places and finding sources for them. Colin has encouraged many of us to apply for grants (Entente Cordiale) and jobs, writing endless letters of recommendation, and walking us through the application and interview process in both the UK and the USA.

40 Lucien Febvre, *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York, 1973); Bryce Lyon, ‘Marc Bloch: did he repudiate *Annales* history?’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 181–91, esp. 185.

Colin's good humour, allyship and mentoring extends to junior colleagues and early career researchers. Despite his extraordinary dynamism (hair-flying), and terrifying opinions on productivity (academics should be able to publish a book every three years) for many 'he was and remains, a great ally and a good friend'. Spontaneous office conversations about book projects helped colleagues work through problematic issues and blocks.

Colin is always ready with advice on a new project, publishing, last-minute references, book blurbs, access to his vast network and tips about the best wine bar in Paris (La Tartine), and the best place for couscous (Chez Omar). He is also noted for his rendition of 'I did it my way' with Hal Cook on a *bâteau-mouche* in Paris at the 2005 European Association for the History of Medicine conference! It is to Colin's version of academia that we subscribe, and to address him in the manner he often signed off his emails, tripping over the CAPS LOCK, we would like to say: 'Thank you, cOLIN'.