

ENLIGHTENING BRITISH POLITICS: A TRIBUTE TO ANTHONY KING

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ABSTRACT:

Anthony King, latterly Essex County Council Millennium Professor of British Government at the University of Essex, died in January 2017 after a short illness. This article pays tribute to his work and reflects on his contribution to both the study of British politics and the British study of politics.

KEYWORDS: Anthony King; British Politics; Political Science

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INTRODUCTION

Rarely is the death of a political scientist remarked upon in Parliament. Yet, the passing of Anthony King, who died on 12 January 2017 at the age of 82, was accorded just such a distinction. Responding to a point of order from Ian Austin MP, an alumnus of the University of Essex, Speaker John Bercow, another former student, described King ‘as one of the most distinguished political scientists of this generation. He was a brilliant teacher, he was an outstanding communicator ... and he was a prodigious and illuminating writer’ (House of Commons Debates, 16 January 2017, col. 686). If the tribute was partly a reflection of his former students’ successful political careers, it was very largely a reflection of his enormous influence on generations of university students and the broader study of British politics.

Tony, as he was known to his friends and colleagues, was a rare beast in British political science. He was a first-rate scholar, influential writer and committed teacher. He was respected by and known to generations of senior politicians and policy makers. And he was a familiar face to the public through his media work and especially his election-night broadcasts. Moreover, if King was a rare beast, he was, to coin a phrase he liked to use, a ‘big beast’. He was a Fellow of the British Academy, a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Member of the Academia Europaea. He was also the recipient of a Political Studies Association Special Recognition Award (2007) and the Sir Isaiah Berlin Prize for Lifetime Contribution to Political Studies (2015). I was certainly familiar with him and his work long before my time as his PhD student at Essex in the early 2000s.¹ By then he had been a major figure in the discipline for nearly four decades and was

Essex County Council Millennium Professor of British Government. Physically and academically, he was still going strong.

Tony King's death provides an opportunity to reflect on his contribution to both the study of British politics and the British study of politics. He enlightened our understanding of this island's political system for over 50 years, motivated and supported other researchers, and contributed directly and indirectly to the development of a discipline. This tribute examines King's legacy and recognises his many contributions. It first offers a brief survey of his academic work before considering the preoccupations, insights and methods that characterised it. A final section identifies his broader service to British politics and political science.

OF FOXES AND HEDGEHOGS

In his overview of Britain's twenty-first century political system, *The British Constitution*, King (2007) devoted a chapter to earlier political writers who had done much to define its traditional constitution. Invoking the distinction made famous by Isaiah Berlin, he suggested that A.V. Dicey was an intellectual 'hedgehog' who saw 'one big thing', parliament's absolute legal sovereignty. Sidney Low, by contrast, was a 'fox' who wrote about 'many things' in his analysis of how politics and government were really conducted. Throughout his own academic career, King displayed fox-like characteristics. To quote his description of Low, 'he saw, and was curious about, many things' (King, 2007, p. 23).

Much of King's wide-ranging curiosity can be traced to his early childhood. Born in Toronto in 1934, his relationship with his native Canada was ambiguous, to say the

least. On the one hand, he wore his Canadian identity lightly. He said little about the place and gave the impression of regarding it as a cultural and historical backwater. On the other hand, he never renounced his Canadian citizenship and never took British citizenship, despite having lived in Britain for almost the whole of his adult life. Perhaps it was possible for a man of his generation to be British by dint of being Canadian. Perhaps his residual Canadianness gave him some useful distance when writing about the politics of his adopted home. Perhaps his Canadianness was a useful device to reassure his informants of his objectivity. It was difficult to be sure. But if the man had long ago removed himself from Canada, it was impossible to remove entirely Canada from the man.

After graduating with a BA in History and Economics from Queen's University, Ontario, King first travelled to Britain as a Rhodes Scholar in 1956. He read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford, before going on to write a DPhil on the British Liberal Party under Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and H.H. Asquith (King, 1962). The pull to study politics had undoubtedly crept up on him. He had once wanted to be a newspaper reporter—at the age of 12, he had provided a sports column for a local newspaper—before realising that an academic life would enable him to consider political questions from a greater distance. His abilities might well have taken him south of the border to the United States, where political science was in the throes of the behavioural revolution. Instead, parental connections and interests—his parents had travelled to Europe after the First World War and had an affinity for its cultures—led him to Britain.

King began his academic career as a research fellow at Magdalen College, where he stayed for several years. In 1966, he was successfully recruited by Jean Blondel, the founding professor of government at the new University of Essex. The decision to move to one of the new 'plateglass' universities (Beloff, 1968) had been a difficult one. King had no particular love for Oxford, which he found stuffy and complacent, but there was also much uncertainty in joining a new institution. On King's first visit, the Wivenhoe Park campus had been shrouded in fog. He had also been surprised to hear a ship's horn: Colchester was still an international port at this time, and boats sailed in from across the North Sea. But there was something about Essex and the local countryside that clicked with Tony. He would remain there for the next half century, teaching and writing long past the official age of retirement. His last book was published less than two years ago (King, 2015); he was working on another at the time of his death.

King's fox-like tendencies were already becoming apparent during his first decade as a professional academic. After finishing his doctoral thesis, he collaborated with David Butler on two Nuffield election studies, those covering the 1964 and 1966 elections (Butler and King, 1965; 1966). The series was by now well established. So too was the basic format, although the 1964 study was notable for its attempt to open up the 'black box' of party strategy and examine how senior politicians understood and conceptualised elections and voters, and how this affected their behaviour. The decade also saw the publication of an article reviewing the state of comparative party-politics scholarship (King, 1969). Taking issue with the functions frequently ascribed to political parties, King argued that the empirical evidence did not fit with the theory. Parties were not unimportant, but their systemic importance in terms of

mobilising voters, recruiting leaders, organising government and developing policy, among other things, was overstated.

King's work on the 1964 and 1966 elections meant that he was ever after associated with psephology, that branch of political science concerned with the empirical study of elections and voting behaviour. He maintained that association during the 1970s, writing a short book on the 1975 referendum (King, 1977) and contributing chapters to the first of the *Britain at the Polls* series of books. He would later assume the editorship of this series. Yet this decade also saw King move onto new areas, as well as becoming more explicitly comparative in his work. British politics always loomed large, of course, but Britain was often just one case among several. King was growing especially interested in the quality of government. In one three-part article, he sought to describe and explain differences in the role of the state across five countries, including Britain (King, 1973a; 1973b). Looked at in the round, the United States was the outlier when it came to the provision of public services, and it was so in large part because of prevailing ideas. Writing some years before the 'ideational turn' in political science, King (1973b, p. 418) argued that: '*the State plays a more limited role in America than elsewhere because Americans, more than other people, want it to play a limited role*' (emphasis in original).

The importance of ideas was also apparent in a short but seminal article on 'government overload' in the 1970s (King, 1975a). Britain, King suggested, had become harder to govern over the past two decades, in part because citizens had come to expect and demand that the state should address an ever wider range of problems: 'Once upon a time man looked to God to order the world. Then he looked to the

market. Now he looks to government' (King, 1975a, p. 288). Britain had also become harder to govern because the state's capacity to deal with problems it faced had simultaneously declined. As a result, government policies were more often failing, and public confidence in government had diminished. At the time, King's thesis did much to popularise the concept and narrative of overload, which in turn foreshadowed the Thatcher government's attempts to roll back the frontiers of the state. For this reason, the article remains essential reading for students of British politics in the 1970s and 1980s. It also anticipates more recent work on political disaffection and 'expectations gaps' in Britain (see Flinders, 2012).

In addition to his comparative interest in the role of ideas, the 1970s also saw the development of King's interest in the executive branch of government. His contribution to the multi-volume *Handbook of Political Science*, which was the only chapter to be written by a political scientist based outside of North America, provided a comprehensive and incisive survey of this field (King, 1975b). Britain again served as one of the principal cases, anticipating King's subsequent work on the prime ministership. The same chapter also critiqued traditional notions of executive-legislative relations, a subject that King (1976) would develop in the leading article in the first issue of *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. 'Modes of executive-legislative relations', a seminal work in the field, compared their forms in Britain, France and West Germany. In the case of Britain, what arguably mattered most was the 'intra-party' mode and relations between the government and its backbench supporters. As with so much of King's work, the point, once made, was obvious. But the point first had to be made. As with his work on overload, this article too remains essential reading.

King's work continued to cover further ground in the 1980s. At the start of the decade, he published 'The rise of the career politician in Britain – and its consequences', yet another paper that helped to popularise a now-established term (King, 1981). For King, career politicians were defined by their psychological attachment towards politics, not their pre-parliamentary experiences or backgrounds. They were 'hooked', so to speak (King, 1981, p. 250). King further observed that the proportion of such politicians in senior positions had grown in recent years. While most of the top jobs in British government had always been held by career politicians, it was now the case that virtually all senior ministers were career politicians by inclination. Moreover, the consequences of this long-term shift could be seen in the changing behaviour of ministers and MPs. Career politicians were likely to be more active but not necessarily more careerist. Career politicians were just as likely as not, contended King, to pursue policy over office.

British politics in the 1980s were, of course, dominated by one personality, Margaret Thatcher, and King contributed to the burgeoning literature on the subject in a number of essays. In the second edition of *The British Prime Minister*, King wrote about Thatcher's style as prime minister, emphasising the distinctive approach she took to the job (King, 1985). If most prime ministers were generally content to keep the show on the road and enjoy power for its own sake, Thatcher stood out by wanting to direct and shape almost the full range of public policy. For King, it was this, rather than her ideological disposition per se, that made her such a fascinating and unusual figure. King would return to the subject in an original paper that considered Thatcher's credentials as a social, psychological and tactical (or behavioural) 'outsider' (King,

2002b). He would do so yet again in an empirical study of her use of the power of dismissal (King and Allen, 2010). Both studies reaffirmed her distinctiveness when compared with other holders of the post.

King's interests in the 1990s continued to cover new ground. He had, for some years, been researching the British prime ministership more generally, and a number of articles and chapters duly appeared. These included a still useful overview of the office (King, 1991), a study of the British prime ministers' power and influence within government compared with that of other European chief executives' (King, 1994a), a study of ministerial autonomy in British government vis-à-vis the prime minister (King, 1994b), and a sceptical examination of leadership effects on the 1992 general election (Crewe and King, 1994). King (2002a) would revisit this last subject in greater detail with a broader study of 'direct' and 'indirect' leadership effects across a number of liberal democracies. King had long planned to write a book-length study of prime ministerial styles, and was working on one at the time of his death. Sadly, he was only able to complete the introduction and three chapters of *The Job at the Top*. It promised to be a definitive study. The absence of such a book remains a glaring omission in the literature on the prime ministership.

King's most significant academic output during the 1990s was his account of Britain's short-lived centrist party, the SDP. Co-written with his long-time friend, Ivor Crewe, *SDP* did exactly what its subtitle suggested: it provided a detailed history and analysis of the Social Democratic Party's birth, life and death (Crewe and King, 1995). In researching the book, the authors benefited from their friendships with many of the *dramatis personae*. They had provided encouraging advice to the party's founders on

the prospects facing an insurgent party—a rare example of tangible ‘impact’ by political scientists—and they had followed its development closely. Indeed, the idea for the study was hatched over a glass of wine in Crosby after Shirley Williams had won the Merseyside seat in a by-election. The resulting book, which drew on first-hand observations, archival material, memoirs, press coverage, survey data and countless interviews, provided a compelling narrative of the party’s emergence, organisation, supporters and ultimate fate. Its conclusion about the whole enterprise was severe. The project had ‘ended in such total failure, making no discernible impact’ on British politics (Crewe and King, 1995, p. 470).

After finishing *SDP*, King continued to be curious about many things. The 2000s saw him turn his attention to the aftermath of New Labour’s constitutional reforms. King was invited to deliver the Hamlyn Lectures in 2000 at London’s Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. These were subsequently published under the provocative title *Does the United Kingdom Still Have A Constitution?* (King, 2001b). Reviewing the recent changes to Britain’s political system, King concluded that the power-hoarding logic of the traditional constitution had broken down; but institutional arrangements were by no means consistent with a power-sharing logic either. Rather, the country was now ‘power-fractionated’ (King, 2001b, p. 99), its constitution no longer derived ‘from certain fixed principles of reason’ (King, 2001b, p. 101).

This basic argument would be developed at much greater length in *The British Constitution*, a magisterial survey of the subject (King, 2007). The book sought to provide for the early twenty-first century what Walter Bagehot had provided for the late nineteenth, an exposition of how the constitution actually worked. Over 14

chapters, King considered the form and nature of Britain's traditional constitution and how it had changed in recent years. There were no textbook chapters on parliament or the prime ministership and cabinet, but there were wonderfully insightful essays on the impact of EU membership, growing judicial activism, the evisceration of local government, the spread of devolution, the changing civil service, the growth in the use of elections and referendums and changes in the composition of the House of Lords. Each chapter was essential reading for anyone in the respective fields. Each took advantage of King's extensive knowledge and understanding of the country's politics. Reflecting on the scale of change that had occurred in the previous years, King urged caution on any would-be reformers. The constitution was more complicated than it had been, and it was also more unstable. Politicians were advised to learn its dynamics before pressing ahead with any further changes (King, 2007, p. 363). As Britain looks to leave the European Union, the central message resonates as strongly as ever.

In the 2010s, King turned his attention to yet new ground. His last significant work in the field of British politics was again co-written with Ivor Crewe. Published in 2013, *The Blunders of Our Governments* was a chronicle and analysis of major British policy failures. For King and Crewe (2013, p. 4), a blunder was:

an episode in which a government adopts a specific course of action in order to achieve one or more objectives and, as a result largely or wholly of its own mistakes, either fails completely to achieve those objectives, or does achieve some or all of them but at a totally disproportionate cost, or else does achieve some or all of them but contrives at the same time to cause a significant amount of "collateral damage" in the form of unintended and undesired consequences.

The book surveyed a number of prominent blunders, including the Thatcher-era ‘poll tax’, the Major-era Child Support Agency and the Blair-Brown-era Millennium Dome and expansion of tax credits. It then sought to identify the general causes of government blundering, including human errors and systemic failings, before offering some possible remedies, not least a call for greater deliberation in the policy process.

Blunders drew heavily on political-science concepts but was written primarily for a wider audience. Some scholars, expecting more in the way of original social science, were disappointed, yet such criticisms missed the point. The book was meant to engage the public and practitioners. It was meant to have some impact. Given its subject matter, the book was inevitably entertaining, and this partly helps to account for its success. In Britain, at time of writing, it has sold over 50,000 copies. Whether or not the book encourages policy makers to act with greater deliberation is another matter.

A SCHOLARSHIP OF DISCOVERY

One of the characteristic features of King’s academic work on British politics has already been alluded to: his fox-like curiosity about many things. He wrote about Britain’s changing constitution, its ministers and prime ministers, its parliament, its party system, its electoral institutions and practices, the scope of government activity, its elites and the quality of its government. He also wrote about politics in other countries, most notably the United States. In *Running Scared*, for example, King (1997) pursued his interest in politicians’ motivations and considered how frequent elections and primaries caused American politicians to campaign too much and govern too little. In *The Founding Fathers v. the People*, King (2012) explored the

fundamental tension between the ideas of eighteenth-century constitutionalism and radical democracy as manifested in American political practice. Comparing them to tectonic plates, King (2012, p. 204) thought the two traditions would ‘continue to creak, grind and groan’, but that the system would avoid a major violent earthquake. With Donald Trump now in the White House, that prediction is likely to be tested to destruction.

But in addition to the breadth of topics that King wrote about, what else defined his work? One obvious characteristic was his preference for what Charles Ragin (2000, p. xiv) calls the ‘logic of discovery’ or ‘research that involves a dynamic interplay between theory and data, with the primary goal of generating new insights’. While King had been a proponent of empirically-oriented scholarship and what Bernard Crick (1959) derided as the American science of politics, he was never wedded to the ‘logic of testing hypotheses’. Theory always informed his writing, but it was usually kept ‘below decks’, as he sometimes put it. Instead, he took delight in opening up for inquiry topics of real importance, such as career politicians’ motivations or the dynamics of executive-legislative relations. Accordingly, his articles often included apologetics as typified in his study of ideas and public policy: ‘this paper represents the beginning rather than the end of a period of research; it is intended to start trains of thought, not stop them’ (King, 1973a, p. 291).

Another characteristic of King’s work was his open mindedness to various methodological approaches. He tended to avoid statistical analyses, not least because there was rarely reliable data to address the substantive questions that interested him.² But he was happy to employ quantification in cases where what mattered could be

measured, such as different forms of prime ministerial dismissal (King and Allen, 2010). In social-science speak, his approach could be characterised as ‘case-oriented’ qualitative research, where he tended to focus in-depth on a smaller number of cases, regarding each as an interpretable whole (Ragin, 2000, p. 22). To this end he took full advantage of his extensive contacts in politics and used the strategy of ‘soaking and poking’ to great effect (Fenno, 1978, p. 249). Lunches at London’s Tate Gallery, in particular, were an opportunity to find out discretely what was going on in governing circles. Interviewees would be soaked with wine; they would then be poked with pre-prepared questions. This approach would undoubtedly struggle to secure funding or ethical approval today, but it was hugely effective. King understood politicians and knew what they were thinking.³ He tended to have his finger on the pulse. Much of his research was consequently of live concern to policy makers.

If there was an obvious relevance to much of King’s academic work, there was also a large measure of accessibility. It helped, of course, that he was an excellent writer and speaker; he was not an academic who left his readers or audience confused. But the apparent simplicity of his arguments was also the product of an unnerving ability to identify and articulate essential points. He could see both the detail and the big picture, and liked both to highlight puzzles and bring into focus what might otherwise have remained hazy. His relatively short article on ‘overload’ in British government is a case in point (King, 1975a). Most political scientists would have struggled to say so much in so few pages. Many would have confused matters with jargon.

A further characteristic of King’s work has just been alluded to: his awareness of the bigger picture. In one sense his academic background as an historian helped him to

identify and appreciate the significance of recent developments. Taking stock of Britain's changing place in the world and evolving constitution; for example, he lamented the profound mismatch between what voters thought they were holding British governments to account for, and what governments could be held to account for (King, 2007; 2015). Sometime his sense of history meant he resisted academic fashions. He disliked talk of 'presidentialisation' in British government on empirical as well as conceptual grounds. As he liked to point out, William Gladstone and David Lloyd George had been huge celebrities in their day.

In another sense, King was well placed to locate British developments in a comparative context. Despite being best known for his work on Britain's political system, King saw himself as a comparativist, albeit one who wrote a great deal about his chosen country of residence. When he wrote about the British parliament or prime ministership, he was also mindful of the German bundestag and chancellor, or the French national assembly and president. This outward-looking mindset both enriched his understanding of British politics and helped him to address questions that might otherwise have gone unasked.

Finally, King was aware of the big picture in a normative sense; he was always concerned with the 'so what' question in his academic work. The rise of the career politician was an interesting development, but just as important were its consequences. Likewise, different prime ministerial styles were interesting for their own sake, but they were also important for their potential impact on the conduct of government and public policy. Indeed, for a political scientist frequently classified as a psephologist, King was above all concerned with the quality of government.

Elections were a means to an end, albeit an important means; good government was the end. To emphasise this point to first-year students, he would open his series of lectures by showing images of Lorenzetti's 'Allegory of Good and Bad Government'. Throughout his career, King was always keen to encourage contemplation and reflection on how Britain might be governed better.

A PUBLIC POLITICAL SCIENTIST

King's academic work was only one part of his broader contribution to British politics and its study. Although he had no political ambitions of his own, he enjoyed close friendships with leading politicians. Occasionally he found himself on the periphery of political events. During the 1960s, he had been party to one of the plots hatched against Harold Wilson. As noted earlier, in 1980 he and Ivor Crewe had briefed Shirley Williams and others about the prospects facing a new party just before the Limehouse Declaration and the launch of the SDP.

Politicians appreciated King's understanding of their work and tended to trust him. In 1994 he was invited to join the newly created Committee on Standards in Public Life, then known as the Nolan Committee after its first chairman, Lord Nolan, a law lord. He remained an active member of the committee until 1998, and, together with its second chairman, Lord Neill, played a major role in drafting the report that led to the creation of Britain's Electoral Commission. In 1999, he was appointed as a member of the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords, chaired by Lord Wakeham. It was, in his own words, 'a very frustrating experience' (King, 2000, p. 125). The Commission was given a challenging remit and charged with an almost

impossible task. Nearly two decades on and the prospects for serious Lords reform are as remote as ever.⁴

If service on the Wakeham Commission was frustrating, King's long-standing and loyal service to the University of Essex's Department of Government was extremely rewarding. Having been recruited to the department by Jean Blondel, he succeeded him as its second chair. Under his initial three-year stint, the department continued to grow and develop. Working with Blondel, Brian Barry and Ian Budge, and later Crewe, King helped to build a department that, within a few years, had acquired an international reputation for excellence. King's professionalism, hard work and intellectual rigour helped set the tone of what was expected. He was also one of the driving forces behind the department's tough recruitment and tenure policy. Appointees needed to be on the top of their game and able to publish cutting-edge research in the best outlets. If not, they were unlikely to survive. King remained an active presence in the department for the rest of his career. He turned down offers of jobs in more glamorous institutions and was always on hand to offer advice and help. The department's enduring pre-eminence is a reflection, in part, of his leadership by example.

Along with Brian Barry, King was also one of the founding editors of the *British Journal of Political Science*. Launched in 1971, the journal sought to provide an outlet in Europe for papers more in keeping with empirically focused US-style political science. Barry and King's efforts were bitterly resisted by senior members of the Political Studies Association (PSA), who opposed the Americanisation of British political studies and sought to protect the position of their own journal, *Political*

Studies. The PSA even lobbied Cambridge University Press not to publish the journal, arguing that its title could give the misleading impression that it was somehow the Association's official journal. Following a fruitful meeting between them and Sir Frank Lee, the chairman of the Press Syndics, Barry and King were allowed to proceed (see Weale, 2010, pp. 19-20). To this day, the *BJPolS* remains one of the leading international general journals in political science. King played a major role in its success. He was an active editor and helped establish the journal's profile and reputation by encouraging leading US political scientists, many of whom he knew through the conference circuit, to publish in it. He also established the policy by which the journal's editors made the final decision on accepting or rejecting papers. Referees' recommendations could be, and sometimes were, rejected.

If King was an institution builder, he was, above all, an educator. He was a committed and compelling lecturer, and an attentive if demanding tutor. He took his teaching responsibilities seriously, and he also took students seriously. If students ever complained about something, he reckoned it usually meant it was because they had cause to. He even convened an extra-curricular study group at Essex for the best politics undergraduate students, which met regularly to discuss books and political developments. One of the more memorable features of Essex graduation receptions was King hanging out with the group's now former members; they were eager to carry on the last class discussion while the professor beamed with a teacher's pride in their achievements. King was also an extremely attentive and thorough PhD supervisor. He could be savage with his red felt-tip pen as he edited and corrected draft chapters, as the present author can testify, but he was always supportive and encouraging. A number of his former students, notably Michael Moran, Michael

Foley and Elinor Scarbrough, would go on to establish very successful academic careers of their own.

For those outside of the academy, as well as those within it, King was also well known for his media work. He wrote countless articles for newspapers and magazines, and his regular *Daily Telegraph* commentaries on Gallup and later YouGov survey data were a must-read for students of British politics.⁵ Towards the start of his academic career, he was also an occasional presenter on radio and television. The transcripts of some of his early forays were even published as books (King and Sloman, 1973; King, 1974). Yet King was perhaps best known as an election-night pundit on BBC television, where he would provide measured and insightful comments on the night's developments. He could somehow find a simple way of telling a complicated story even in the early hours of the morning. On the night of Tony Blair's first win in 1997, King famously suggested that New Labour's victory was less of a landslide and more of an asteroid strike on the planet. It was a vivid and typically effective metaphor.

Whether on television, in the lecture theatre, in departmental meetings or on the conference circuit, King would make his presence felt. He was larger-than-life and a strong personality. He could be disconcertingly tough in his academic judgements, but he possessed enormous generosity of spirit and was a diligent reader and editor of other people's work.⁶ He was also tremendously loyal to his friends and possessed an infectious and surprisingly mischievous sense of humour. Meanwhile, his knowledge of politics, history and current affairs was always slightly intimidating. He sometimes gave the impression of knowing at least something, and usually a great deal, about

every topic of conversation. Spending time with him was like spending time with a walking academy. Yet he was also infinitely curious about the world and took delight in acquiring knowledge and new insights. He had a great love of music and travelling and would happily talk about both subjects, preferably over a good meal. Being around him was never dull.

Even in his 80s, King had been in robust health. His death, a result of complications following heart surgery, came as a shock and surprise. The many tributes on social media and television, as well as in newspapers and in parliament, were testament to the very great regard in which he was held. Few rivalled him in his understanding of British politics or his ability to articulate ideas with clarity and panache. His passing has deprived British political science of one of its great scholars and arguably its greatest communicator. His many friends will miss him dearly.

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¹ In addition to drawing on my own personal recollections, I would like to thank John Bartle, Ivor Crewe, Gavin Drewry, Pete Kerr, David Sanders, Donald Searing and Albert Weale for their insights and/or comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² In this sense, King was undoubtedly sympathetic to Philip E. Converse's (1964, p. 206) words of wisdom on 'the doctrine that what is important to study cannot be measured and that what can be measured is not important to study.'

³ While being open minded about methods, King thought it very important that political scientists spoke to and knew active politicians. He would sometimes remark that when he asked rational-choice theorists how many politicians they actually knew, the answer would almost always be zero.

⁴ In addition to his membership of these official bodies, King also convened the 1999 Scottish Election Commission and chaired the RSA Commission on Illegal Drugs, Communities and Public Policy between 2005 and 2007.

⁵ Mindful of their academic potential, King (2001a) took pains to preserve the wealth of Gallup data for other scholars' use. He also ensured that many Gallup questions resurfaced on the standard YouGov questionnaires, thereby extending the coverage of this valuable time-series data.

⁶ To offer just one example of the gratitude shown by others, David Butler and Donald Stokes (1971, p. 10) warmly recognised his contribution to *Political Change in Britain*: 'We must reserve a pantheon for Anthony King who laboured through four successive drafts of our manuscript, offering searching but always constructive criticisms.'

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