

GEOFFREY EDWIN RICKMAN

MA, DPhil, FSA, FBA

Roman Historian

Geoffrey Rickman, Emeritus Professor of Roman History at the University of St Andrews, was a man of great wit and humour. He was also a remarkable scholar, an inspiring teacher, a wise administrator, and a major figure in the life of two great institutions of learning, the University of St Andrews and the British School at Rome.

Geoffrey Rickman was born on 9 October 1932 at Cherāt, a hill sanatorium and cantonment, sixty-five miles from the Khyber Pass and thirty-four miles south east of Peshawar, in what was then the Naushahra district of the North West Frontier Province of British India, now the HQ of the Special Service Group of the Pakistan army. He was the third of four brothers, the second of whom died in India. When he was two years old, the family returned to England and settled in Winchester, where his fourth brother, Harry, was born. There he attended a local primary school and then, after passing the scholarship examination at the second attempt, Peter Symonds' School, a voluntary controlled grammar school for boys in Winchester. From Winchester, he proceeded with a State Scholarship to Brasenose College Oxford in 1951, where he took a First-class degree in *Literae Humaniores* in Trinity Term 1955.

After his graduation, he did his National Service from 1955 to 1957, most of which was spent in the Joint Services School for Linguists, first at Bodmin and then at a disused airfield outside the fishing village of Crail in the East Neuk of Fife. In 1957 he returned to Oxford, where he studied for the Diploma in Classical Archaeology, which he completed in one year rather than the usual two and which was awarded with distinction in 1958. His choice of the classical archaeology diploma marked a significant change in his approach to ancient history, and one which was to characterise his work from then on.

Although he had shown himself a skilled practitioner in the style of history which was then dominant, especially in Oxford, of scrupulous investigation and interpretation of the ancient literary sources, he found himself, as a result of his two years away from the world of academic scholarship, dissatisfied with it as means of discovering the realities of the ancient world. Now, and increasingly over the rest of his career, he wanted to know not only what the literary remains of antiquity could tell us, but what actually happened; and it was this that directed him towards the examination of the archaeological record. Thus, after his success in the Diploma in Classical Archaeology, he proceeded to the British School at Rome (BSR), aided by the award by the Craven Committee of the Henry Francis Pelham Studentship in 1958, to work on the granaries (*horrea*) of the port of Rome at Ostia, which was the basis for a DPhil thesis, entitled *The Design, Structure and Organisation of Horrea under the Roman Empire*, supervised by Ian Richmond.

His year at the BSR was to prove a turning point in many ways. "A different non-verbal world of effort and achievement was opened up", as he wrote later in the School's Centenary volume. Perhaps more importantly still, it was in this year that Geoffrey, returning briefly to England, married Anna Wilson, whom he had first met nine years earlier when she was a pupil at St Swithun's School in Winchester, and they took a honeymoon trip to Greece before returning to the BSR. They returned to Oxford later that year, and Geoffrey held a Junior Research Fellowship at The Queen's College Oxford for the next three years. This enabled him to complete his DPhil Thesis, which was examined by Sheppard Frere and Russell Meiggs, both of whom were to provide invaluable help in the preparation of the publications which emerged from it. The *viva* took place in February 1963, but by this time Geoffrey and Anna had moved to St Andrews on Geoffrey's appointment to a Lectureship in Ancient History. This was to be his home for the rest of his life.

When Geoffrey began teaching at St Andrews, he was a one-man department, a relatively insignificant island, overlooked by the towering cliffs of Greek and Humanity. Over the next thirty-five years he effectively created the Department of Ancient History. That is not to say that he began the department. The first lecturer in Ancient History at St Andrews was Peter Brunt, appointed to St Andrews in 1947 and later Camden Professor in Oxford, and he was followed by E.

S. Staveland and Ursula Hall, both of whom made important contributions to the discipline. Moreover, Brunt collected around him a remarkable set of colleagues, some of whom remained in St Andrews in the flourishing and supportive milieu which he established, while others went on to be equally successful elsewhere. It is no disrespect to any of these, however, to say that Ancient History in St Andrews, and the esteem with which it is regarded in the world of classical scholarship across the globe, is Geoffrey's creation.

Outwith St Andrews, Geoffrey's best known academic work is contained in two books and a series of just over a dozen articles. In terms of sheer bulk, this is not a large output; but its significance is far greater than its size. His first publication, the book *Roman Granaries and Store Buildings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), was based on his DPhil Thesis. Such works often reveal their origins only too clearly in a worthy if somewhat stilted style, more suitable for examiners than for subsequent readers, and in a relentless concentration on the topic in hand. These fears were recorded by one reviewer as he took up the book he was to review; however, as he went on to say, "it turned out to be so well written and the author so capable of drawing out the human implications of the buildings that it proved, to the present reviewer at least, one of the most interesting books read recently." (Peter Salway, 'Roman Storehouses', *Classical Review* n.s. 24, (1974), 116–119, p.117). The reviews at the time were not, of course, uniformly favourable; Geoffrey was particularly mortified by the observation by J. K. Anderson that he hoped that the 'Vale of Strathmore' would not become standard usage: "'Strath' was self-explanatory" (J. K. Anderson, *Classical Philology* 68, (1973), 234–235); but the value of the book was widely recognised both for its subject matter and for its accessibility and it was predicted that it would long remain the standard work on the topic. And so it has remained.

Nine years later he produced a second book, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), largely written up during a three-month spell at the BSR during a period of study leave. Although this is a very different book from his first, covering in a more discursive style the vast question of the provisioning of the largest city of antiquity across half a millennium, its basic approach is the same. What he attempted to do was "to produce a readable narrative, unclogged by too much scholarship but setting out a large selection of the evidence available, and drawing attention to the problems which seem to me particularly important and worth discussion." In this he undoubtedly succeeded. It was a remarkable and pioneering piece of work, the first to appear in English on its subject, and has proved its worth, both in giving access to students to the complexities of the methods, the politics and the economics of so essential a part of the life of Rome and the Roman world, and in promoting and provoking the studies of other scholars, which have become increasingly numerous in the decades since its publication.

After his work on the corn supply, it was perhaps inevitable that Geoffrey should turn his attention to the ports of the Mediterranean. Between 1985 and 2008, he published ten articles on Roman ports, with the original intention of writing a book on the subject. As time went by (and as he was increasingly engaged with the administration of his university) he became ever more aware of the immensity of his project and, although he has left copious notes as well as the typically vivid and astute accounts to be found in his preparatory publications, it became increasingly unlikely that it would ever be finished. After the onset of the pulmonary fibrosis which led to his death two years later, he wrote no more on the subject. By then he knew (though was surprised to know) the respect in which he was held by his colleagues. He had been a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London since 1966 and twice served on the Council of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (in 1970–1972 and 1988–1991), but was genuinely astonished to be elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989. He was elected to Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2001.

In 2002, in his speech at his retirement as Chairman of the British School at Rome Council, Geoffrey Rickman declared "I have been a very lucky man. I have loved two institutions and one woman in my life, and it has been my good fortune to have spent most of my life with all three – the University of St Andrews, the British School at Rome, and my wife Anna." The importance to him of the BSR has already been noted, but his support and untiring work for the School went far beyond the early years in which he found such inspiration there. A regular visitor at the School and a continuing encourager of those whom he met there, he became a member of the BSR's Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters in 1979 and Chairman of the Faculty from 1983 to

1987. He also strongly supported one of the BSR's most significant recent archaeological projects, the investigation of the site near Fiumicino simply known as Portus, the Port, and the network of ports connected to it. Following his retirement from St Andrews in 1997, he became Chairman of the School's Council in 1997 and, with the then Director, Professor Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, oversaw and enabled the most significant development of its buildings since the original construction in 1916: the library extension, a new lecture theatre and internal redevelopment and external improvement, utterly transforming the School.

At St Andrews, his acute intelligence and sense of duty, and above all his integrity, made him an outstanding administrator. When the three departments of Greek, Humanity and Ancient History were brought together in a single School in 1990, he was the obvious choice for its first Head; and two years later, he was appointed to the office of Master of the United College, which had in earlier years involved the responsibility for discipline of students in the Faculties of Arts and Science, but which now included far wider responsibilities. As such, he oversaw major changes in the university, including the restructuring of the teaching structures, and achieved them with his inimitable combination of tact, incisiveness and good humour.

As a scholar (a word he would have hated), an educator and an administrator, Geoffrey Rickman was outstanding; but that gives only a partial picture of the man. Though he always claimed to be inherently lazy, his zest for the exploration of the realities of the ancient world and for communicating them to his students, and his love for and practical devotion to the University of St Andrews and the BSR, give the lie to this oft-repeated misapprehension of himself.

He was cultured in ways that are not always those of a university professor, with a particular and abiding love of opera. He swam whenever he could (including visits to the elderly Infirmary Street baths when visiting Edinburgh as an external examiner); and he would regularly take himself down to the West Sands at St Andrews to walk up and down its two-mile length to clear his head and sort out problems, whether academic or administrative. He was a rich and complex man, and an essential part of that complexity was a simple integrity.

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