

Eric Handley



Eric Handley died on 17 February 2013 at the age of 86. He had been involved in the creation of CUCD and served as its Secretary in 1969-70, and later as its Chairman, from 1975 to 1978. He was a man of quiet energy who took his responsibilities as a teacher just as, if not more, seriously than he took his research, and for that matter, the wide range of administrative tasks he encountered. He enjoyed teaching. He enjoyed Classics, and until well into his 80s, he sought to pass on that enthusiasm to a new generation. He liked the personal contact of small-group teaching best. It was an environment in which he could discover what an individual might react to, in which he could develop a student's interest in a detail, sometimes linguistic, sometimes philological, sometimes visual, that would in turn lead to a comprehension of the bigger picture.

One thinks too of the dynamism that he, along with his wife Carol, brought to the JACT summer schools at Bryanston over very many years.

He also had an incredible memory for his students, not only those that impressed in his early years, but from throughout his career; he enjoyed staying in touch and put a lot of effort into doing so. Like many of us, he took pride in the successful ones, in whatever field they pursued, but he was equally glad to maintain links with and to encourage the less outstanding, something which is not always that easy.

Eric Handley was a prodigy, going up to Trinity College Cambridge to read Greek and Latin at the age of 16 and beginning his teaching career at UCL at the age of 19. He was nonetheless remarkable too for his modesty, his gentle humour and his kindness. The early years had not been easy: the war (the family house was bombed), rationing, the ruined state of University College and its library, teaching students older than himself just returned from military service. As he himself put it: "An essay on the Greek trireme has a certain edge to it if its author has driven a destroyer round the Mediterranean."

He was in many ways fortunate in his colleagues at UCL in the late 1940s and 1950s. He learned a lot from Eric Turner, Tom Webster and Otto Skutsch, and he enjoyed the atmosphere they created. In retrospect it is hardly surprising that he developed his underlying interests in papyrology and Greek and Roman Comedy. That the group also contained Willis, Furley, Cunningham, Kells and others gives some idea of their dynamism. Turner and Webster also demonstrated to him what could be achieved through quiet but strong diplomacy.

The mid-1950s also saw the creation of the Institute of Classical Studies across the road in Gordon Square and he quickly became a key player, well before he became its Director in 1967 (at much the same time as he was appointed to the chair of Latin and Greek at UCL). He very quickly perceived the Institute's role in fostering international relations in Classics throughout the Commonwealth and North America, but he also developed a particular interest in breaking down the isolation of colleagues in the eastern bloc. This was important work and it brought some notable successes.

The later 1960s were in fact a critical and extremely active period for him. As can often happen, the imposition of responsibilities in his two institutions encouraged him to rise to the challenge and it also became a very creative period for his research: while he maintained his interest in Plautus as a writer of New Comedy, this was the time when he established himself as a student of Menander, not only with his edition of the *Dyskolos* (1965) but with a string of articles on other plays and a substantial contribution on the conventions within which to appreciate Menander written for the Fondation Hardt volume edited by Turner (1970).

A period at Harvard in 1966 remained important to him throughout his life. It was a time at which many good scholars, including him, found the idea of the U.S. very attractive. He finally persuaded himself that he was better based in England (also for Carol's career), but he continued to enjoy formal visits abroad, for example to Princeton in 1971, to Stanford in 1977, to Melbourne in 1978, to Princeton again in 1981. All apart from giving him a broader perspective and confirming his sense of the importance of fostering international relations, these visits served to increase his energy in London, both in the department and at the Institute as well as with the CUCD.

In some ways because of this combination of his continuing dedication to students on the one hand and the needs of colleagues on the other, by the early 1980s he was becoming ever more frustrated by the growing burden of form-filling and petty administration not only at UCL but more especially at the University level as it impacted on his role as Director of the Institute. He was also very active as Foreign Secretary of the British Academy (1979-1988; he had been elected to the Academy in 1969). Although he agonised about the decision, he could not resist the temptation of moving back to Cambridge as Regius Professor of Greek in 1984.

He enjoyed being back at Trinity College, revelled in traditions and conventions, thrived in the atmosphere of small-group teaching, exclaimed at the treasures of the College and the Faculty Libraries while expressing the normal frustrations with the University Library. (For some things he continued to find it easier to go back to the Joint Library in London.) The dark days came in 1989 when he was derailed for some five months by a devastating attack of cancer. That he survived and that it was as little as five months reflected his moral courage and his wife Carol's support. He returned as alert as ever and with the same values as ever, continuing successfully until his retirement in 1994. And even then he kept teaching new generations of students until very close to the end, as well as adding to our knowledge and appreciation of Menander.

A fascinating and revealing, if brief, overview he gave of his own career at a celebration at Trinity College of his 80th birthday may be found at

[http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/show.php?dowid= 737](http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/show.php?dowid=737). A list of his publications is being included in a *BICS* Supplement dedicated to him.

The accompanying photograph was taken in 1995, on one of a series of annual visits to my excavations at the site of the ancient theatre in Paphos. It shows him thoroughly relaxed, his camera on his lap after taking photographs of some caper-flowers by his feet. He would go on to chat to those tough-minded Australian students, and they loved it.

Richard Green, University of Sydney and Institute of Classical Studies