

ARTHUR JAMES BEATTIE
MA (Aberd, Cantab)

Arthur James Beattie, Emeritus Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, died after a short illness on 20 February 1996, aged 81. He was born in Belize, British Honduras, on 28 June 1914, son of a mahogany buyer, but his family moved to Scotland on the outbreak of war, when his father enlisted in the army. He was brought up Montrose where he attended the local Academy, and he retained a great affection for the town during his life. Going on then to Aberdeen University, he graduated MA with first class honours in Classics in 1935, and proceeded from there to Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, where he gained a first class in both parts of the Classical Tripos examination. He was awarded a Wilson Travelling Fellowship from Aberdeen, which enabled him to make his first of many journeys to Greece, and laid the foundation of his knowledge of both the modern Greek language, and of the topography of that country (and of Turkey also) at a period before the war when such travel was comparatively uncommon. This was to prove of great benefit to his subsequent academic career, which however was then interrupted by war service, when, after two years in the Royal Artillery, he was seconded to military intelligence at the War Office and attained the rank of Major. At the end of hostilities in 1945, as a staff officer in the military government, he took a prominent part in denazification procedures in the German universities, particularly Göttingen, and so formed close relationships with a number of German scholars, which proved fruitful on his return to civilian life. He took up his fellowship at Sidney Sussex College, and was a university lecturer in classics from 1946 to 1951, when he was appointed to the Greek chair at Edinburgh in succession to Sir William Calder. In 1957 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

He held the Greek chair for thirty years until his retirement in 1981, and indeed was latterly the senior professor of the university and last holder of the chair before the amalgamation with the other classical departments into a single unit. His earliest publications in the classical journals evinced his deep knowledge and interest in the early Greek lyric poets, Alcman, Alcaeus, Sappho, and especially Pindar who, along with Aeschylus, was probably his favourite author, and on whom he lectured with enthusiasm and authority. In departmental teaching he never failed to undertake a full load, and in the Arts Faculty at large he was a formidable and skilful administrator. His Deanship of the Faculty coincided with a period of prosperity and expansion in the universities, and he played a leading role in developing the range of subjects, taking particular interest in minority languages, especially those of the near East, and in establishing the teaching of Chinese. At one time a Trustee of the National Library of Scotland, he was also chairman of the University library committee from 1957 to 1962, and was regarded by many as a strong candidate to succeed Sir Edward Appleton as Principal of the University.

With a flair for taking a long-sighted view of changing educational patterns in both schools and universities - he was an enthusiastic and successful chairman of governors of Morrison's Academy in Crieff from 1962 to 1975 and governor of Sedbergh from 1967 to 1978 - he anticipated the need for radical changes of emphasis in the teaching of the classical languages which were coming under increasing pressure in most school curricula. In 1966 he instituted a beginners' course in Greek at Edinburgh, which has gone on to have ever-increasing importance in the maintenance of linguistic competence in the subject. He also promoted for a number of years a summer school in ancient Greek, and set up the course in Classical Literature in Translation, which has continued to flourish among MA degree subjects at the university.

Having for several years continued to travel to Greece in summer vacations, sometimes taking with him groups of students, he was also eager to institute the study of the modern, as well as the ancient, tongue, which has led subsequently to its introduction as an option in classical honours. He was instrumental too in obtaining generous grants of money from the Greek Ministry of Culture and Science in Athens to make possible the purchase of a nucleus of modern Greek books for the library, and also arranged periodic visits of scholars to give lectures or seminars not only on the classical, but also the Byzantine and modern periods of Greek culture. He was the first president of the Scottish Hellenic Society of Edinburgh and Eastern Scotland, and in 1966 his close relations with Greece resulted in his being made Commander of the Royal Order of the Pheonix by the Greek government.

Within the world of classical Greek scholarship, he became a controversial figure in the late 1950s and 1960s when he emerged as the leading opponent of the decipherment of the Cretan and Mycenaean Linear B script proposed by Michael Ventris in collaboration with the Cambridge scholar John Chadwick, who had once been Beattie's pupil. He put forward the reasons for his disbelief in lectures, and particularly in substantial articles in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (1956) and in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung* (1958), and had support from a number of scholars in Britain and on the continent whom he invited to Edinburgh to discuss the problems. The early death of Ventris in a tragic accident at this very time undoubtedly had some effect in alienating the two sides in the dispute, and on the whole the adherents of the decipherment have subsequently prevailed. In later years he was known to be studying Greek place-names, exercising his expertise in both philology and topography, but regrettably this research seems not to have been completed. His life-long interest in Natural Science (in his Aberdeen days he had for a time acted as a demonstrator in zoology) resulted in his having in particular an expert knowledge in his favourite hobby of ornithology.

Arthur Beattie remained a bachelor, and to those who did not know him well could appear rather austere, even withdrawn, though with unflinching courtesy and a dry wit. In the surroundings however of the New Club (where he resided for some thirty years) and the Scottish Arts Club he was always a convivial companion, and he will also be remembered with affection and gratitude by former colleagues and by a large number of Edinburgh classical graduates, whose subsequent careers he always followed with characteristically detailed knowledge and recall.

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