



W. Geoffrey Arnott, BGS 1940-1947

Emeritus Professor W Geoffrey Arnott, MA, PhD, FBA, died on 1 December 2010 aged 80.

Born in Bury, Lancashire, in September 1930, Professor Arnott was appointed Professor and Head of the then Department of Greek in 1968. He came to Leeds from a post as Senior Lecturer at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, having previously held academic appointments at the University of Hull and Bedford College, University of London. His undergraduate years had been spent at Pembroke College, Cambridge, of which he was a Scholar.

He graduated with a First in Classics in 1952 and won the Porson Prize for translation into Greek verse. He was awarded his PhD by Cambridge in 1960.

Professor Arnott was a scholar of international distinction. His central research interest was in Greek drama, notably the comedy of the later fourth and third century BC. He was a world authority on the Greek comic playwright, Menander. With more than one hundred plays to his name, Menander is regarded as the leading writer of his era and the forerunner of much modern comedy from Shakespeare onwards. His work was highly influential in antiquity and a number of his plays were later adapted for the Roman stage by Plautus and Terence. However, the works of Menander were largely lost from human knowledge in late antiquity and his reputation as a comic playwright survived almost entirely through occasional quotations in ancient authors. This situation changed during the last century with the excavation of papyrus texts of at least a portion of his works. Between 1979 and 2000, Professor Arnott completed a three-volume edition of Menander, based on detailed study of the papyri and providing both translations and detailed commentary. Each of the three volumes attracted high praise on publication, not only for making the fragmentary texts that survived more accessible but also for the penetrating elucidation of the texts and the dramatic conventions of the time that they provided. In 1960, Professor Arnott also produced a translation of Menander's *Dyskolos* (The Misanthrope), the one comedy to have survived in its entirety. His book *Menander, Plautus and Terence* (1975) explored in detail the influence of Menander on his late Roman successors.

In 1996, Professor Arnott published *Alexis: The Fragments. A Commentary*, a volume in the Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries series. This work of extraordinary scholarship, running to some 900 pages, had its origins in Professor Arnott's doctoral dissertation (which had itself been singled out for commendation by the examiners for its scope, learning and thoroughness). With its detailed interpretation of the language, meaning and style of Alexis, of the dramatic background and of the relation of the material to the social and political history of the time, Professor Arnott's commentary represents a highly important contribution to the study of the development of comedy in the fourth century BC, and also of the development of the Greek language.

Professor Arnott's scholarship was not confined to the field of comedy. He also made notable contributions to the study of Euripides, Hellenistic poets, the Greek novel, Aristaenetus, Athenaeus and the ornithology of the ancient world. The last of these reflected his lifetime interest in bird watching in many parts of the world. In 2007, he published *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z*, the definitive study of Greek ornithological knowledge in classical antiquity. The book is dedicated to the members of the Leeds Birdwatchers Club, of which Professor Arnott was president from 1981 to 1984, and the local group of the RSPB.

Reflecting his international reputation, Professor Arnott was in constant demand as a lecturer at a whole range of overseas universities.

He held a number of visiting appointments at universities such as Princeton, British Columbia, Alexandria, Queensland and Bologna, and was a Visiting Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, in 1987-88. He served as a member of the Classical Journals Board from 1970 to 1994 and of the Board of Management of *Greece and Rome* from 1981 to 1989. He was elected a member of the Italian Society for Classical Antiquities in 1981, and as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1999.

Apart from his extensive departmental commitments in, initially, the Department of Greek and, later, the School of Classics, Professor Arnott took a keen interest and involvement in several Library committees and chaired the Charles Morris Hall Council for a number of years. He served for extended periods as the University's representative on both the Court of the University of Hull and the Governing Body of St Peter's School, York. Professor Arnott retired from his Chair in 1991, when the title of Emeritus Professor was conferred upon him, but, as the dates of many of his publications indicate, his scholarship continued to flourish unabated in the years that followed.

Professor Arnott is survived by his wife, Vera, and their daughters Alison, Hilary and Rosemary.

J R GAIR - Obituary received from the Department of Classics, Leeds University