



ERIC WALTER HANDLEY

C.B.E., F.B.A., Hon.R.A.

1926 – 2013

On January 17, 2013, Eric W(alter) Handley, Regius Professor (emeritus) of Greek in the University of Cambridge, passed away at the age of 86. He was a Fellow of the British Academy (1969), Member of Academia Europaea (1988) and of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters (1996); Honorary Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1993), Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens (1995), Foreign Member of Societas Scientiarum Fennica (1984), Dr. *honoris causa* of the University of Athens (1995); and Visiting Lecturer at Harvard University (1966), Visiting Member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (1971), Visiting Professor at Stanford University (1977) and at the University of Melbourne (1978), Visiting Senior Fellow at Princeton University (1981). He was one of the greatest British Hellenists in the second half of the twentieth century.

Born in Birmingham, E.W.H. attended school at King Edward's School for boys on a scholarship, and another scholarship enabled him later to take up the study of Greek and Latin at Cambridge, in

1943. Many years later he would remember with affection his “inspiring teacher in palaeography” in Trinity College, Robert Getty, who recommended him to the Dept. of Classics at University College London, where he was appointed to a lectureship in 1946, before he was even twenty. UCL was to become his academic home for the following thirty eight years, until his return to Cambridge as Regius Professor of Greek at the University (1984–94) and Fellow of Trinity College (1984–2013).

It was in UCL, however, that the young lecturer developed his extraordinary abilities in teaching and engaging in original research, at first under difficult circumstances as the college tried to recover from the great damages it had suffered during World War II, later in a lot happier and stimulating environment. E.W.H. was lecturer in Greek and Latin until 1961, then Reader (1961–67), and afterwards Professor of Greek and Head of the Department (1968–84). To that position he succeeded T.B.L. Webster, the preeminent ancient theatre specialist, who had joined UCL in 1948 as Head of Classics. In the same year, E.G. Turner, the distinguished papyrologist, also joined UCL, followed by Otto Skutsch, an expert in early Latin poetry, a little later. Young lecturer E.W.H. could not have found himself in better and more inspiring company. In the words of the late Prof. John Barron, his “precocious talent and formative years had brought him by some departmental osmosis to mirror the best qualities of both Webster and Turner.”*

The budding palaeographer developed into an accomplished papyrologist, and the first major result of his work in the field of literary papyrology was *The Telephus of Euripides* (with John Rea, 1957). But the author that soon attracted his attention was Menander, the greatest dramatist of Hellenistic times, whose works survived only in papyrus fragments. Webster had published his *Studies in Menander* in 1950 (followed by *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*, 1953) a few years before it became known that a complete play of the renowned poet, *The Dyskolos* (*The Grouch*), had been discovered. Upon the play’s first publication in 1958, a flood of editions, discussions, attempts to supplement the gaps of the text, and so forth, followed. E.W.H. was,

* “The Vision Thing: The Founding of an Institute”, *BICS* 43 (1999) 35.

then, invited to do a new edition of the play with commentary. When his work came out in 1965 (*The Dyskolos of Menander*, London and Cambridge MA), it was so successful that, if truth be told, it wiped out all earlier editions of the play and secured its author a lasting international fame (the visiting lectureship at Harvard was extended right after its appearance).

Fragments of Menander, a few large ones (*Aspis*, *Dis exapatôn*, *Misoumenos*, *Samia*...) and many more small and difficult to read/understand, continued to come out in the following decades, and kept E.W.H. busy. I have no space here even to list his publications of such fragments, not only from Menander but from other poets, or unattributable, also. Suffice it to refer to vols. 50, 59, 61, 62, 64, 66, 68, 73, 77 of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* series (published between 1983 and 2011), or vols. 12, 16, 24, 26, 29, 31 of *The Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* (1965 to 1984), which include a great number of his contributions. It should be mentioned in this connection that the Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, was Webster's brainchild. It was founded in 1953, and the first director and editor of its *Bulletin* was E.G. Turner. *BICS* was launched as local publication in 1954, but soon achieved the status of an international journal. E.W.H. succeeded Turner to the directorship of ICS and the editorship of *BICS* in 1967. He also succeeded Webster to the chair of Classics at UCL in 1968, and served with distinction the two neighbouring institutions until 1984, when he left for Cambridge.

A necessarily short obituary cannot do justice to a lifetime's work of a great scholar, but I can mention here only a few of his inclusive, often far reaching, interpretations of important aspects of ancient drama: *Menander and Plautus: a Study in Comparison*, his inaugural lecture at UCL (1968) that cast a bright light on Plautus' sources; "The conventions of the comic stage and their exploitation by Menander," in E.G. Turner (ed.), *Ménandre* (Geneva, 1970), 1–42; "Plautus and his public: some thoughts on New Comedy in Latin," *Dioniso* 46 (1975) 117–32; "The Bodmer Menander and the comic fragments," in A. Hurst (ed.), *Relire Ménandre* (Geneva, 1990) 123–48; "Aristophanes and his theatre," in J.-M. Bremer (ed.), *Aristophane* (Geneva, 1993), 97–123; "Acting, action and words in New Comedy," in P.E.

Easterling and E. Hall (eds.), *Greek and Roman Actors* (Cambridge, 2002), 165–88; *Images of the Greek Theatre*, with J.R. Green (London, 1995, Greek tr. 1996, German tr. 1999). All the above studies (and several others) have certain common denominators: They examine and codify the conventions of drama in relation to its performance to the extent that the latter can be reconstructed from the texts themselves and evinced by archaeological research. The aim of such studies is, on the one hand, to recognize the poetics of drama and theatre and, on the other, to understand the place and function of drama in the historical, social and intellectual context in which it was produced. E.W.H.'s contribution to P. E. Easterling and B.M.W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature I* (Cambridge, 1985), 355–425, 773–83, brings together all the strands of his long-time involvement in the study of ancient drama into an admirable, all-inclusive, monograph on Comedy.

In addition to his being an exceptional scholar, E.W.H. was also an exceptional teacher. As a person he was gentle, unpretentious, considerate, and generous to students and colleagues alike.**

The late Professor Handley is survived by his wife, Carol M. Handley, a classical scholar also, formerly Head of Camden School for Girls, and later tutor in Classical languages in Cambridge.

G. M. SIFAKIS

** The reader is invited to look at a delightful autobiographical account, entitled *Lampada tradam*, that was delivered by E.W.H. on the occasion of the celebration of his 80th birthday at Trinity College (<http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/show.php?dowid=737>).

[The following tribute to E.W. Handley from his former pupil, friend and collaborator, Professor emeritus J. R. Green of the University of Sydney, is reprinted below from the programme of the funeral, which took place on January 29, 2013. *Logeion* wants to thank Professor Green and Mrs. Carol M. Handley for agreeing to have it published here.]



A BRIEF APPRECIATION

I, like many of you here today, feel lost. Eric Handley played a large part in my life since I first met him in September 1955. In the following three years, he taught me a lot of Greek, showed me its intricacies and subtleties, but, more importantly, taught me in his own gentle way to love the language and the culture of which it is a surviving part. In the years since then our relationship changed, almost imperceptibly, and instead of being just a teacher, he became an educator and then someone more like an older brother, always ready with but never pressing good advice, always perceptive, always to be relied upon.

He knew more Greek than anyone else of our generation. It showed in conversation, but lastingly in that wonderful series of articles on fragments of papyrus, with their carefully-thought reconstructions and suggestions. He was a major force in bringing Menander back to life and in introducing both scholars and a wider audience to his style as a writer and as a theatre director. But especially as his more recent work showed, Eric's interests and abilities were not confined to Aristophanes and Menander. Many many people took their academic problems to him and he always came back with considered answers, never hesitating to spend serious time on them, never prioritising important people over the apparently unimportant, the clever over the slower. He put enormous effort, more effort than anyone I have ever known, into helping others. And it seems never to have been a burden.

Many of our contemporaries develop a big picture of some aspect of the ancient world and then find the evidence to help their cause. It was not so with Eric. He was conscious that life, ancient and modern, is made up of myriads of details, events large and small, interactions, misconceptions, and that they are very often contradictory. His instinct was to sift through them, to weigh their relative importance, their part in a complex total, to build the bigger picture through analysis of fine detail.

It was also somehow typical of Eric that he loved gadgets. He could at times be seen walking round Trinity with a leatherman attached to his belt. It was part of a broader spectrum of practical interests, his love of good-quality tools (witness his and Carol's work on their house in Kentish Town), of cameras and photography (he had an excellent eye), of good motor cars (he drove with *élan*), of the rescue of papyri from mummy cartonnage, and more recently of image enhancement for the reading of palimpsests. It was perhaps an extension of this practical sense that fostered his fine sense of the absurd. One could quote many expressions of it, but on one of his visits to our excavations in Paphos (where he was a hero to the students) he went for his afternoon walk along the beach and brought back a piece of broken drainage pipe preserving two and a half letters of the manufacturer's mark. He made a straight-faced formal presentation of it along with a hysterically funny written analysis.

His formal *cv* speaks for itself but it is worth recalling that part of the reason for his returning to Cambridge in 1984 was his frustration with the burden of petty administration in London. It was in a way ironic that he had barely arrived when, as Chair of the Faculty, he became deeply involved in Stage 3 of the new Faculty building. This he found worthwhile administration and he put his heart into it, in the same way as he did for the British Academy and for the UAI, not to mention all his achievements for individuals.

There will be no one here who has not at some point been touched by his help and his generosity. We have been so fortunate to know him.

J. R. GREEN