



*Colin Horne*

*Photographer: Michael Lim*

## Colin Horne (1912–1999)

Colin Horne will be remembered with warm affection by all who knew him. He was a courteous, kindly man of high principles, with a sharp but never malicious wit. He regularly attended the Academy's functions until over eighty, and when no longer able to make the journey his thoughts were with us. I had long discussions with him before November's meeting about the candidates to be considered by the English Section, and he wanted an account of the Symposium afterwards. On November 10 we talked about it on the telephone, and I passed on greetings from friends. The election of Philip Ayres, an Adelaide graduate, to the Fellowship pleased him. He died on November 19, shortly after his eighty-seventh birthday. With typical forethought he had arranged his own funeral several months previously, choosing the hymns and the readings (of course from the Authorised Version) and nominating the speakers.

Colin grew up in Bendigo, where his father was a commercial traveller in groceries. At sixteen he won a scholarship to Melbourne University, but prevented by the cost of board from taking it up, he became instead a pupil-teacher, and after two years went to Melbourne on a teaching scholarship. At school and university he was distinguished in athletics, at sprint and long-distance running and as a boxer. He was runner-up for a Rhodes Scholarship, but won the Aitchison, which took him to Balliol in 1935. In 1939 with an Oxford first and a B.Litt., which he earned as Balliol College's War Memorial Student, he was appointed lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast; in the same year he married Margaret Parsons. In 1948 they moved to Leicester University with their growing family, and from there he was appointed Professor of English in Adelaide.

His department consisted of four lecturers and a tutor, but he came to the Jury Chair at a fortunate time: 1957 was the year of the 'Murray Report', and its implementation began a golden age for Australian universities. In 1958 four lecturers were appointed, and within a few years the full-time staff had risen to twenty-two. He retired in 1977, when the Dawkins demolitions had not begun: today the department is reduced to fourteen with no comparable drop in student numbers. In that period of rapid expansion, when university jobs were not hard to get, Colin picked the best people. Seven became professors; five were elected Fellows of the Academy—three before he was himself, in 1972.

Colin readily accepted outside obligations that he thought appropriate. He joined the Friends of the State Library in 1958, served on its committee for twenty-one years, and was its president for twelve. In 1959–62 he

chaired a Committee of Enquiry into the Arts in South Australia: its forward-looking report was put on the shelf by Tom Playford, but may have influenced the Dunstan days that followed. He was Patron of the S.A. English Teachers Association from 1960 on; in the same year he joined the Writers' Week Committee of the Adelaide Festival and was its chairman 1969–74. He was a committee member of the International Association of Professors of English (1965–83); President of the Australasian and Pacific Society for Eighteenth Century Studies (1976–80); and Vice-President of this Academy (1977–79); and he was President of the Mount Lofty District Historical Society (1980–91). All this was done with quiet efficiency and never for his own aggrandizement. In 1979 he was made a Member in the Order of Australia 'for services to education and literature'.

Colin contributed to two books to honour the retirement of old friends: *Augustan Worlds* (1978) for Arthur Humphreys, his Professor at Leicester, and *Comedy* (1993) for Peter Dixon, Professor of English at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London. Peter was the first person Colin appointed to the Adelaide Department, and it was his first university post. This suggests a tradition, and the eulogies in both volumes contain much that applies equally to Colin himself.

The fact that [he] was there in the centre for so long, wholly without rancour or malice, held the department remarkable steady. I never knew of his making secret deals or using sly devices. . . . He kept on being fair. . . . There are few Heads of Department . . . who give themselves as much week-by-week teaching as their junior colleagues. . . . [It probably led to] a minimum seventy-hour week, not counting coffee- or meal-breaks or other respites.

(Richard Hoggart on Humphreys)

In Colin's early days, when post-graduate scholarships were hard to come by, he insisted that full-time tutors should do *less* teaching than their senior colleagues. They had to get their careers founded on good research and publication; to some it was quixotically generous even then.

No-one was ever taken for granted; everyone's contribution was valued; all ideas could be discussed. As a result . . . the Department was an exceptionally united and happy one.

(John Chalker on Dixon)

Chalker also quotes Roger Ellis, 'now a senior member of the English Department of the University of Wales' on the quality of teaching and the good spirit of the Adelaide Department. This chimes with Margaret Clunies Ross's generous comments in the *Adelaidean* (20 September 1999). She recalls that

It was a marvellous time, and the [English] Department was full of life: one of the best things about it was that it was not doctrinaire, it did not espouse a particular critical line.

I see this reinforcement of a humane and honourable tradition of academic life as Colin's greatest contribution.

The paper on *A Tale of A Tub* in Peter Dixon's Festschrift seems to be his last scholarly publication—though he continued to give occasional talks for several years thereafter. His first was in *Notes and Queries*, 30 January 1943. The fifty-year catalogue is impressive: there is a succession of articles in the best journals on eighteenth century studies, and many reviews of scholarly books on the same area; there are others ranging from Elizabethan literature to the Victorians, and a number on education. The young lecturer wrote contributions for the left-wing *Tribune* in the forties; in the sixties there is a series of reviews of Australian writing for the *TLS*, and there are numerous articles for Australian newspapers and non-academic journals on matters of general educational or cultural importance. He was 'an eighteenth century man' and he valued good sense and decorum, but his intellectual interests were wide.

Although he came to Adelaide at a time of hope and progress in universities, Colin's personal life was less happy. Within a few years of their arrival his wife Margaret developed cancer and in 1962 he was left a widower with four sons, the youngest only eight. He carried the burden with the steady thoroughness he brought to everything—and the warm affection of his sons and their families is a tribute to this—but he felt the loss deeply and was a sad man for several years. Then, as his son David said at the funeral, 'His marvellous fortune was meeting Cynthia after this loss' and he married again. In later years he became a more stylish dresser, and it suited him, since he remained slim and upright until very late in his life. His wit and charm and good sense made him an admired public figure. Always, though, he remained modest and diffident of his own achievement; he did not think of himself as exceptional. Hard work, intellectual rigour and concern for the welfare of others was, for him, normal human behaviour. He expected it of his students and colleagues, and, because of his own example, those expectations were more often met.

*F H Mares*