



**Australian
Academy of the
Humanities**

Alan Sorley Henry FAHA

1936 – 2022

Professor Alan Sorley Henry, who was elected as a Fellow of the Academy in 1993, died in early January 2022 in St Andrews, Scotland just short of his eighty-sixth birthday following a long and painful illness. He had returned to St Andrews after resigning at the age of sixty from the chair of Classical Studies at Monash University in 1996, a position he had held for 24 years, following a combination of ill-health and difficulties at the university. At the University of St Andrews, his alma mater, he was almost immediately appointed Honorary Professor of Greek in 1997, a position he held until his death. He remained a Corresponding Fellow of the Academy.

Alan Henry was born in Ayr, Scotland, in 1936 and studied at the University of St Andrews where he gained a Master of Arts with first class honours in 1957 and a PhD in 1964 for a thesis entitled *The Language of Attic Inscriptions, 323–146 BC (excluding ostraka & vases)*. He also gained a Diploma in Education from Queen's College in Dundee in 1958, and so would be one of the very few senior academics in Australia who also held formal teaching qualifications. Just prior to completing his doctorate he took up an appointment in 1963 as lecturer in Classics at the University of New England. He was quickly promoted to Senior Lecturer and then Associate Professor and additionally served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts in 1972. While at UNE he also became Secretary of the then Australian (now Australasian) Society for Classical Studies (1970 – 1972) which itself had only been formed a few years earlier in 1966 with Alan being one of its foundation members. That showed his involvement in and service to the subject beyond his own institution (similar to his service as Dean of Arts at UNE) which continued throughout his career. That in turn led to his

appointment in 1973 to Monash University in Melbourne to become its second Professor of Classical Studies after David Rankin (1965–1972).

Sadly, Alan was also to be the last professor of Classics at Monash. Monash, which as a modern university had opened in 1961 quite deliberately without a Classics department, soon gave way to pressure from other Arts departments (notably English, History and Philosophy), for the inclusion of Classics as an essential element in any worthwhile Arts degree. For a while under both David Rankin and Alan, Monash developed into the largest Classics department in Australia, teaching complete degree courses in Classical Civilization and Ancient History as well as Latin and Greek. Yet after a few years of a halcyon existence at Monash, when the Classics full-time teaching staff rose to number a dozen, troubles started. University finances began that long era of ever greater threats. In 1996 the then Dean of Arts at Monash announced that “her preferred option to a big cut in funds would be to close the Classics department” (The Age 14/5/1996). In the same article Alan Henry’s response was that the dean’s approach reflected an emphasis on the “bottom line” rather than academic priorities, with her concentrating on small enrolments in Latin and Greek, subjects that still remained essential for the serious study of Classical Civilization and Ancient History where the numbers were stronger. The Dean’s decision together with his increasing ill-health led to Alan’s resignation at the end of 1996 and the effective closure of Classics at Monash two years later. The happier news is the reinstallation of a much smaller Classics programme at Monash in the last few years.

During his tenure at Monash, Alan also served as President of the Classical Association of Victoria for just over a decade (1986–1996) as well as becoming a Council Member of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens. His initiative led to the establishment in Melbourne of the Monash Friends of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens which enabled Monash graduate students to spend some time researching in Greece. The AAIA also brought scholars out to Australia and Alan made sure that they now included Monash in their lecture tours as part of his programme to enhance the presence of Classics in suburban Melbourne.

Alan's most significant contribution to international scholarship lay in the fields of Greek philology and epigraphy. By dint of painstaking and systematic collation he analysed formulaic expressions in Greek decrees of the Classical and Hellenistic periods from Attica. His meticulous scholarship has contributed significantly not only to vexed issues of the chronology of these texts but also to our understanding of the workings of the mature Athenian democratic system. He was an acknowledged expert in particular of Athenian honorific decrees and the formulae of the prescripts to Athenian decrees. It is an indication of his standing in this difficult field that he was invited to collaborate with a small band of international scholars to produce volume 30 of *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* in 1980.

On either side of that contribution, he published two important monographs of purely his own work: *The Prescripts of Athenian Decrees* (Brill, Leiden, 1977) and *Honours and Privileges in Athenian Decrees: The Principal Formulae of Athenian Honorary Decrees* (Olms, Hildesheim, 1983) as well as more than fifty articles that he placed in learned journals of the highest international standing, such as *Chiron*, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, *Classical Quarterly*, *Classical Philology*, *Hesperia*, *Rheinisches Museum* as well as being a regular contributor to and supporter of Australia's main local classics journal *Antichthon* which likewise has a strong international reputation.

His two monographs are aimed at a small specialist audience, each work having its own limited objective, "to trace the development of the prescript of the decrees passed by the Athenian boule and demos", and "to assemble and analyse in detail the evidence for the wording employed to express the award of honours and privileges in Athenian state decrees." In each case he saw the need to establish the texts of inscriptions accurately (no easy task) before wider issues could be explored. As one reviewer put it, his books are "on a limited topic for specialists and will not find many readers. ... He has done a useful job and has done it well and those who seek to restore fragmentary decrees will

need to add this to their stock of references.” Another reviewer noted that “Henry has done a great deal of hard and accurate work, and he often exposes and improves on unsatisfactory restorations of texts,” with another concluding that “this is a book which no editor of Athenian honorary decrees can afford to overlook.” Several reviewers, while acknowledging Alan’s meticulous scholarship, his thoroughness, his massive labour and his sharp linguistic sense, do complain that his focus in the books is too limited and criticise him for not including more interpretations on wider issues. For Alan dealing with those wider issues would have detracted from the specific objective of his books and could be dealt with more appropriately elsewhere, and indeed were dealt with in his numerous articles in various scholarly journals on a wide range of issues. These also included articles on various topics away from epigraphy, notably several on each of the major Greek dramatists (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes), another of his interests, but the books needed to concentrate exclusively on precisely their difficult subject matter.

Although Alan would never have claimed to be an archaeologist himself, his work in supporting the AAIA in Australia did lead to his participating for several years in an Australian excavation at Torone in Chalkidike in northern Greece under the auspices of the AAIA. There the AAIA was able to exploit Alan’s epigraphic expertise by getting him to write an initial volume for their work, published as *Torone - The Literary, Documentary and Epigraphical Testimonia* (Athens Archaeological Society 230, 2004) but which, as the title implies, covers much more than just epigraphy, with chapters on the history, geography and topography of Torone, and on its natural history and resources, as well as sections on epitaphs, inscriptions, linguistic phenomena, mythology and proverbs. Overall, it provides a wonderfully rich introduction to the excavation of a remarkable site. Sadly, Alan was too ill to correct his manuscript at proof stage, so this had to be handled separately.

On top of his research interests Alan remained deeply committed to the teaching of Ancient Greek and this led to his combining with his colleague

Gavin Betts to produce *Teach Yourself Ancient Greek*, a highly successful textbook through which many have been able to acquire the language, and which has gone through several reprints; to this they added a supplement in 1989.

As a former colleague reports, Alan was always a generous host and Departmental members enjoyed many delightful meals at his house, especially with the visitors brought out by the AAIA and enticed to Monash by Alan. Martine, Alan's wife, was a wonderful cook, besides herself being a Classicist of note. That same colleague adds, "Alan was a born Scot and, as a graduate of St Andrews, was thus one who had been exposed to the thorough learning of the Scottish tradition. Yet he bore this lightly: he had a delightful sense of humour and fondly took on any part in the most bawdy readings of Aristophanic comedies that Clio, the students' Classics Club, put on. There was nothing of the 'God-Professor' attitude in Alan. He was easy to get on with, treated staff well and the tea-time occasions of chatting with us all in the staff common room could be most enjoyable."

Alan Henry was a gifted scholar whose research has made a lasting contribution to the study of Greek epigraphy and the resultant interpretation of aspects of Athenian democracy but who also, as a devotee of Classical civilisation, will be remembered with affection as someone who contributed much to his department, to the Australasian Society for Classical Studies, to the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens, to the Classical Association of Victoria and consequently to the whole field of Classical Greek studies.

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