

# Obituary

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ERNEST K. BRAMSTED



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**E**RNEST BRAMSTED, one of the earliest members of the Australian Humanities Research Council (1956) and a Foundation Fellow of the Academy, died suddenly and unexpectedly in his home at Weybridge, Surrey, on 14 May 1978 at the age of seventy-six. With his death the Australian, British and German academic communities have lost one of their foremost and highly respected scholars and teachers in the field of modern European, and especially German, history.

Born in Augsburg, Bavaria, which was also the birthplace of another exile and son of a manufacturer, Bertold Brecht (four years his senior), Bramsted studied in Munich, Freiburg and Berlin. In Munich he concentrated on Fine Arts and German and Romance (French and Italian) Languages and Literatures, in Freiburg on Philosophy under Husserl and Heidegger, imbibing Phenomenology and Existentialism at their very source. When he realized that History and the History of Ideas in particular were his true interest he moved to Berlin where Friedrich Meinecke and Erich Marcks, the one liberal and open-minded, the other conservative and traditionalist, were his principal teachers. After obtaining his doctorate he taught History and German Literature at a large secondary school in Hoechst and also became a tutor at the nearby and newly founded University of Frankfurt under the renowned Sociologist Karl Mannheim. When Mannheim was deposed early in 1933 (apart from his 'racial' disability the Hitler régime had banned Sociology from tertiary education) and went to England, Bramsted who had also been dismissed from his two positions decided to follow him. Whereas Mannheim was appointed to a lectureship at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Bramsted was awarded a research grant from the same institution. The result was, besides a second doctorate, a brilliant book entitled: *Aristocracy and the Middle Classes in Germany. Social Types in German Literature 1830-1900* (with a foreword by G. P. Gooch, London 1937; revised edn, University of Chicago Press, 1964). It was a work of seminal importance for literary as well as political and socio-cultural historians in that it X-rayed, so to speak, important works of fiction (and their authors) in order to illuminate the social and economic conditions of the period under review. By this method, applied, incidentally, in a detached and non-Marxist manner, the literary critic using it with such caution as recommended by the author, gained a new dimension for his judgement. René Wellek called the work 'an admirably clear-headed study' (*Theory of Literature*, 3rd edn, New York 1957, p. 104).

During the war Bramsted worked with the foreign service of the BBC and, on termination of the war, was appointed to the Research Department of the

Foreign Office to become joint editor of both *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry* (1949ff.) and its German counterpart *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik . . .* (1950ff.) His main responsibility was the period from 1937-45 (Series D, Vols I-IV; German edn I-V).

In 1951 he accepted an appointment as Senior Lecturer (later Associate Professor) in European History at the University of Sydney which he held for eighteen years. His work for the BBC had kindled in him a special interest in the workings and the impact of political and cultural propaganda. After a preliminary study, *Dictatorship and Political Police: The Technique of Control by Fear* (London 1945; Japanese edn, 1954), a historical survey beginning with Napoleon I, he completed in Sydney his major work in this field: *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda 1925-1945* (London 1965; German translation, Frankfurt 1971). After his retirement to England in 1971 Bramsted's research continued unabated; the range of his publications can be gathered from the Academy's annual reports. Shortly before his death he had completed, in joint editorship with K. J. Melhuish, *Western Liberalism. A History in Documents from Locke to Croce* (Longmans 1978).

Bramsted's assiduousness in meticulous research was matched by his enthusiasm for teaching. Ever since his early days as a schoolmaster he infused the warmth of his personality into his teaching. Later the wealth of his experience and the personal involvement in the momentous historical events during his lifetime informed and enlivened his lectures and inspired generations of students he taught. His standing among his colleagues in the South Pacific region was evidenced by the meeting of the Australasian Association for European History in Brisbane (15-18 May 1979) having been styled 'The Ernest Bramsted Memorial Conference' during which a former student, Dr John Hooper, delivered a valedictory address under the title 'Ernest Bramsted's Third Country: A European Historian in Australia 1952-69'.

Bramsted was made a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1972. In 1976 he was a guest professor at Macquarie University. It was then that many of his Australian colleagues and friends enjoyed his company for the last time. To the delight of his friends he was accompanied by his wife Ellen whom he married in 1941 and to whom the sincere sympathy of the Academy is extended.

*Richard Samuel*