

REES, BRINLEY RODERICK (1919-2004), classical scholar, educationist and university college principal

Name: Brinley Roderick Rees
Date of birth: 1919
Date of death: 2004
Gender: Male
Occupation: classical scholar, educationist and university college principal
Area of activity: Education; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Ceri Davies

Brinley Rees was born 27 December 1919 in Tondy, Bridgend, son of John David Rees, draper, and Mrs Mary Ann Rees (née Roderick). The family moved to Brecon, where he was educated (1931-8) at Christ College. Under the inspirational teaching of the school's headmaster, the Reverend A. D. James, he achieved outstanding success in Greek and Latin and was elected to the first Postmastership (scholarship) in Classics at Merton College, Oxford. His studies, like those of many of his generation, were interrupted by war service. In Michaelmas Term 1939 he was awarded honours with distinction in a special examination in Greek and Latin, before serving, from 1940 to 1945, in the Welch Regiment, attaining the rank of captain. On returning to Oxford he gained 1st class honours in Classical Moderations (Trinity Term 1946).

In 1947-8 Rees was assistant classics master, first at Christ College, Brecon, then at Cardiff High School for Boys, before appointment in 1948 to his first university post as assistant lecturer, subsequently lecturer, in Classics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. In Aberystwyth he was much influenced by the eminent papyrologist **Sir Harold Idris Bell**, who had recently come to live there after retirement from his post at the British Museum. Under **Bell**'s supervision he completed a Ph.D. (Wales) thesis, 'A critical study of a selection of hitherto unedited papyri' (1956), work later included in *The Merton Papyri*, vol. ii (co-edited with **H. I. Bell** and J. W. B. Barns, 1959) and in *Papyri from Hermopolis and other Byzantine Documents* (1964).

On the strength of his evident promise as a papyrologist, and in view of the resources of the John Rylands Library, Rees was appointed in 1956 to a senior lectureship in Greek at the University of Manchester. Two years later, in 1958, he returned to Wales, as Professor of Greek at the (then) University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff. He maintained his interest in papyrological studies, but the move to Cardiff saw him develop a new line of research which led to the publication of a series of articles on Aristotle's *Poetics*, its interpretation and reception. Also, his inaugural lecture ('The Use of Greek', 1961) marked an increasing involvement with the challenges facing classical studies, especially as a result of the decline of Greek and Latin as school subjects. From 1963 to 1969 he was Hon. Secretary of the Classical Association, contributed to the establishment and development of the Joint Association of Classical Teachers, edited the volume *Classics: an outline for the intending student* (1970), and wrote (with M. E. Jarvis) *Lampas: a new approach to Greek* (1970), an introductory course for adult learners. In Cardiff he also became heavily involved in university administration, serving as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1963-5) and Dean of Students (1967-8).

Rees's twelve years in the Chair of Greek in Cardiff were his longest period in any post. In 1970, to the surprise of many, he left to become Professor of Greek at the University of Birmingham, where too he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1973-5). His talent for academic administration, at a time of some turmoil in higher education, became increasingly recognized, and, in 1975, he returned again to Wales on appointment as principal of St David's College, Lampeter, the first layman to hold the post. As Dean of Arts in Cardiff he had been involved in the process which saw Lampeter admitted as a 'school' within the University of Wales (a federation of which he was often critical). Now principal, he fought hard to have Lampeter fully recognized as a constituent college of the University, a recognition which came after his retirement from the principalship.

In 1980 Rees retired early and returned to live in Cardiff, where he undertook some part-time teaching in his old department. He also had the opportunity to develop his growing interest in yet another area of research, the history of the Church in Late Antiquity and, especially, the theological debate between Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius. In retirement he published two volumes, *Pelagius: the reluctant heretic* (1988) and an invaluable translation of original texts, *Letters of Pelagius and his followers* (1991).

Brinley Rees was a scholar of unusual breadth, a first-class classical linguist, an engaging teacher and a highly effective administrator. To some there seemed an impatient restlessness about him, betokened by changes of post, of research interests, of religious allegiances. In reality he welcomed new challenges and was remarkably open to fresh ideas, often delighting more in the company of younger people than in that of the academic establishment. His contribution to the academic world in general was recognized by the award of the degree of L.L.D. honoris causa by the University of Wales in 1981, to the classical world by his election as President of the Classical Association in 1978-9, and to scholarship by the award of a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship (1984-8). His mainstay throughout his adult life was his wife Zena (née Mayall), of Leominster, whom he met when he served in the Welch Regiment and married in 1951; there were two sons, Mark (born 1954), Hugh (born 1957). He died, in Cardiff, 21 October 2004. His funeral service, a meeting in the tradition of the Society of Friends (in whose company he had worshipped for many years), was on 28 October 2004, followed by cremation at Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff.

Author

Ceri Davies

Sources

Who's who?, 2004

D. P. Davies, in *Old Breconian Association News*, 2005, 46-7

information provided by Mrs Zena Rees

personal acquaintance

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Brinley Rees](#)

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