

Roger Dawe

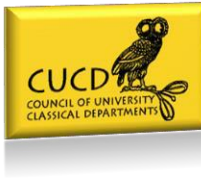
by Nicholas Lane



Roger Dawe enjoying lunch with James Diggle and Neil Hopkinson. Photograph courtesy of Nicholas Lane.

Roger Dawe was born in Bristol in 1934, where his father was an academic at the University. The Dawe family home was, as Roger liked to relate, in Beaconsfield Road, where Archibald Leach, later the actor Cary Grant, grew up.

Roger was educated at nearby Clifton College before going up to Caius College, Cambridge. There he graduated in the first division in both Parts of the Classical Tripos and won the Porson Prize 'at a time when it meant something', according to a junior colleague. He was made a fellow of Caius before obtaining his Ph.D. and he retained a lifelong fondness for his alma mater.



His doctoral research (and his vintage Bentley) took him to various seats of learning in Europe inspecting the manuscripts of Aeschylus. This work was important in confirming that the then popular methodology of creating family trees of manuscripts and judging readings based on their perceived 'value' and relationships, was misguided.

From the outset Roger showed willingness to challenge orthodox views and he did so with gusto. His writing style combined the precision of Sherlock Holmes and a wicked sense of humour. He could be harsh in his judgement of those who should have known better, but he also showed great kindness to those less well equipped to defend themselves. Had he chosen a different career path he would have made an outstanding trial lawyer and cross-examiner. Roger became a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1963, and the following year his first book, explaining his Aeschylean research, was published. In a review of this volume T.C.W. Stinton concluded that there is "no doubt that [Dawe] has done a notable service to Aeschylean scholarship". In 1965 Roger published a repertory of conjectures on Aeschylus, updating the appendix to Wecklein's edition. His early work enabled his teacher and later friend, Sir Denys Page, to produce a new Oxford text of Aeschylus on a firmer footing. Roger went on to pay homage to Page by co-editing his posthumous *Further Greek Epigrams*.

Having done not a little for the text of Aeschylus Roger turned to Sophocles and produced a three-volume study of his text and three editions of the German Teubner Text. He also edited a collection of essays on critical reactions to aspects of Sophocles since Riccoboni. With Sophocles, whose company Roger found especially congenial, he proved to be a bold critic at the height of his powers. Of the Teubner text Hugh



Lloyd-Jones (and Lloyd-Jones and Dawe did not like each other – anyone wishing to learn how not to write about an incumbent Regius Professor may profitably consult *PCPS* 15 [1969] 109) wrote “Again Dawe makes a large contribution to the improvement to the text; again the new manuscript information results in many improvements, but even more are due to the alertness and acuteness of the editor. ... To read through the text and the volume of studies is a stimulating experience, and even where Dawe does not convince he often has the merit of drawing attention to a real problem”. For students, Roger produced a commentary on the most famous of all Greek tragedies, the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. His publications earned him the highest degree bestowed by Cambridge University, the D.Litt.

Roger’s travels took him on visiting fellowships to Harvard, Illinois and Boulder, Colorado. He had a special affection for holidays in Portugal. It was during an early visit to Vienna that he met his future wife, Kerstin, who was pursuing her own studies there. He immediately fell in love with this Swedish beauty (although at the time, according to Roger, his ‘Swedish extended to “May I have a cup of tea?”, but not much further’) and they soon married.

Roger and Kerstin moved into a modest house in Cambridge. Two children, Simon and Susie, followed, and as the family expanded they moved into a substantial house in Bulstrode Gardens. A child-friendly white Volvo Amazon replaced the Bentley (although for some reason the normally unsentimental Roger kept its spare tyres in his garage). The fabulous Bulstrode garden gave Roger and Kerstin great delight and, even after Kerstin passed away in 2000, Roger kept their shared horticultural passion alive—latterly with the help of his gardener, Rachel.

His Sophoclean critical studies will remain of lasting importance and he now takes his



place in the pantheon of brilliant editors and emenders of classical texts. It was fitting that at a 2007 symposium celebrating the bicentenary of the greatest of all critics, Gottfried Hermann, Roger produced a succinct discussion of Hermann's editorial technique. Roger's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, an edition of *Philegelos* (a collection of Greek jokes), and valuable notes on the texts of the *Scriptores Erotici*, reveal his versatility as a classical scholar. But for all the hardcore philology Roger took as much, if not more, pleasure teaching Polish immigrants English as he did undergraduates Greek.

In his spare time Roger was an avid reader and a fan of P.G. Wodehouse. Perhaps his greatest enthusiasm, though, was opera. He was equally in his element with *HMS Pinafore* or Verdi's *Otello*, but Mozart's *Don Giovanni* always came top. Roger was not keen on sport, except tennis. When Grand Slams were on TV, callers were met with the brusque answer phone message 'This is not Roger Dawe, but please leave a message'. He was a devotee of *The Saint*, but it will now never be known whether he auditioned for the role of James Bond.

Roger's rapier wit sometimes courted controversy and he was not one to curry favour in the interests of career advancement. He could also be inscrutable, perhaps inevitably preferring cats to dogs, and for Roger, all cruelty to animals—which included homo sapiens, but excluded certain classical scholars—was quite intolerable. Away from his academic persona, Roger was an unpretentious family man, his two grandsons being the apple of his eye. He was a big man physically and he also had a big if frail heart and lusty appetite. He will be much missed by those who appreciated his rare qualities.

Roger David Dawe, b. 15.9.34 Bristol, d. 16.02.20 Cognac, m. Kerstin Marianne Wallner (deceased), is survived by his two children and two grandchildren.