

PJ Rhodes (1940-2021)



Photo courtesy of the Department of Classics and
Ancient History, Durham University

From his friends

Peter John Rhodes (known widely as P.J. Rhodes, or simply PJR), born on 10th August 1940, died suddenly on 27th October 2021 at the age of 81. He grew up in Barnet, Hertfordshire, was educated first at Queen Elizabeth's Boys Grammar, before going up to Oxford to read Greats at Wadham in 1959. He was the first member of his family to go to university, and graduated with First Class Honours in 1963, coming top in his year.

At Wadham, one of his tutors was George Forrest, who was a great influence on PJR's early career. For his doctoral work, Peter held a Craven Fellowship, and was Harmsworth Senior Scholar at Merton College. He was also a student at the British School of Athens in 1964 and



Gasthörer and member of Historisches Seminar, Tübingen University, in 1965.

As a young scholar, Peter's own inclination had been for Roman history, but George Forrest persuaded him to undertake his DPhil on a subject in Greek History with David Lewis, who had a formative influence on Peter. Peter observed that David was a very kind man, but always gave the impression he could have written Peter's doctorate in a weekend. This experience of his postgraduate training very much shaped the way he later was to deal with his own students: always sharp and direct about weaknesses, but also unswervingly supportive, both academically as well as personally. He was also well known for the way he encouraged and supported colleagues both in the UK and around the world.

Peter's ability to mentor others, especially young, or younger, academics stands out. In a spirit that would have delighted a true Athenian democrat he met his fellow classicists with equal respect and consideration irrespective of their formal standing, whether undergraduate students inside and outside his own institution, early career researchers, or established scholars with reputations similar to his own.

Ian Worthington (Peter's first graduate student) has written:

'... he never gave up on me and taught me how to approach sources and how to ask 'the questions [I] should be asking'. He didn't mince his words when I was too fantastical: I knew I was in trouble when he opened and shut his mouth quickly a few times and started off with a 'perhaps....'. But at the heart of the tough criticism – which was never delivered disparagingly – was the single goal of making me better, of imparting how he would approach something and especially *why*. I am still reaping the benefits forty-odd years on.'

Bob Wallace, also a student of George Forrest at Wadham, says:

'Peter wrote his dissertation and first book on the Athenian Council (*Boulê*). I did the same for Athens' Areopagos Council. He once left me alone in his Durham office, where I spotted the distinctive robin's egg blue color of my *Areopagos* book. As I do whenever I see this book in other people's libraries, I flipped through the pages looking for marginalia. There were none, but this copy had been heavily read. In his brief review in *Greece & Rome* 1990: 242, Peter summarized my newfangled views of the pre-Ephialtic Areopagos and said, 'With much of this I disagree; but Wallace argues carefully and courteously, and readers may judge that his interpretation of the evidence is to be preferred to mine'.'

He was particularly concerned about supporting women in the profession. In her tribute to Peter, Liz Irwin has written:

'Peter was such a lovely person and a very good mentor to me even when I was past the age of when I ought to need one... I could come to him with any question or idea and even if he didn't agree he would give me evidence that might help my case. When he came to New York for a conference in 2013 he was so generous to our graduate students, sitting among them and listening to their work and ideas.'

Shy and reserved, Peter was a Greek historian of great distinction. He was appointed lecturer in Classics and Ancient History in the Classics Department in Durham in 1965, and

completed his DPhil in 1969, which quickly became his first book, *The Athenian Boule*. He was Junior Fellow at the Centre for Hellenic Studies, Washington, in 1978, and Member of Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton, in 1988/9. He held Visiting Fellowships at the University of New England, Armidale (Australia), in 1988, and at Oxford, Wolfson College in 1984, Corpus Christi College in 1993, and All Souls in 1998, as well as a Leverhulme Research Fellowship in 1994/5, the Langford Family Eminent Scholarship at Florida State University, Tallahassee in 2002, and Invitation Fellow for Research in Japan at the Japan Society for the Promotion of Research in 2005.

During his long and distinguished career, Peter won many awards and prizes. He was promoted to a personal chair at Durham in 1983, elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1987, was made Foreign Member of the Royal Danish Academy in 2005, Fellow of Fondazione Lorenzo Valla in 2010, and was granted the Chancellor's Medal, by his own University of Durham in 2015.

Over the course of his career, he produced thirty-nine book-length publications, and 150 chapters or articles on topics covering Greek history of the archaic and classical periods, constitutional history, especially Athenian, Greek politics, epigraphy, and historiography, as well as commentaries on the *Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia*, four books of Thucydides, two books of Herodotus, and a commentary on the Old Oligarch, jointly with John Marr, who says of Peter:

‘... he was always considerate and supportive, the ideal collaborator, always prepared to discuss issues positively, never wanting simply to impose his view on the basis of academic seniority, if it differed slightly from mine.’

In fact, a number of Peter's publications were the result of collaborations, not least the *magnum opus*, with David Lewis, although completed after David Lewis' death, *The Decrees of the Greek States*.

Another important collaboration, this time with Robin Osborne, produced other magisterial works. David Lewis had intended to revise Tod's fourth-century volume of *Greek Historical Inscriptions* and Peter, as David's literary executor, then suggested to Robin, that they take on the task together, which they did, beginning with the fourth century, and working backwards, to produce a volume on the fourth century, a second on the fifth century, and, although not yet completed, Peter had been hard at work on a third volume on the archaic period.

A number of his other publications were also the result of collaborations, not least another *magnum opus* with David Lewis, although completed after David Lewis' death, *The Decrees of the Greek States*. David Lewis had also been intending to revise Tod's fourth-century volume of *Greek Historical Inscriptions*. Peter, as David's literary executory, then suggested to Robin Osborne that they take on the task together, resulting in *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404-323* (known as RO), and then *Greek Historical Inscriptions 478-404* (OR); at the time of his death Peter had been working (again with Robin Osborne) on a third volume on the archaic period. In fact, inscriptions and epigraphy was a fundamental part of much of his scholarship, and he was a founder member of the British Epigraphic Society.



Among Peter's many and wide-ranging publications, everyone has their favourites. For many it is the commentary on the *Aristotleian Athenaion Politeia*. Loren J Samons writes:

'When Peter visited Boston University to give a lecture about ten years ago I brought my copy of his commentary on the *Athenaion Politeia* and introduced him as the author of the most important work on Greek history in the second half of the twentieth century. I admit I did this knowing it would embarrass him, as it did.'

Likewise, Stephen Lambert says:

'I was a big admirer of Peter's work well before I met him. I shall be eternally grateful to him for publishing his masterly commentary on the *Ath. Pol.* just in time to enable me to make use of it in revising for *Greats* in 1982. That was the first of many occasions on which I had good cause to admire his profound scholarship; and over the years, as I got to know him, I also grew to appreciate his personal qualities: his discreet supportiveness of younger scholars and students; his conscientious decency and humanity, in short, his dedication to following the Christian Way to the best of his ability.'

Peter cared deeply about Classics and Ancient History in the UK, both in respect of the subject area and the scholars who were involved in its investigation. He regularly attended the Norman Baynes meetings for Ancient Historians, as well as Classical Association conferences, and had a strong sense of the role of the Association in supporting not only younger scholars, but also teachers of classics in schools. As well as other offices with the Northumberland and Durham branch of the Classical Association, he was President of the local branch from 1997 to 1999, and was later Honorary President of the UK Classical Association in 2014/15, delivering his presidential address at the Association's annual conference that year in Bristol on '*Ktema Es Aiei* (A Possession for All Time)'. He was also a member of the Hellenic Society, and was for a number of years a member of the Editorial Committee for *JHS*.

Another important aspect of his career was his internationality. Many of his publications were translated into, or originally published in, other languages, including French, Polish, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Japanese and German. He was involved in a number of international projects, and held advisory roles for international editorial and advisory boards; in particular, he was a consultant for the Copenhagen Polis Centre. Over the course of his career, he gave numerous lectures and conference papers around the UK, but also in the USA, Australia, Israel, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Greece, Japan, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Ireland, France, Switzerland, Austria, Portugal, Belarus and China.

Our Russian colleagues said:

'... it should be noticed that Peter Rhodes was a wonderful person, kind and sympathetic. His delicacy towards his colleagues deserves particular mention. He never dictated his opinion, was always ready for a friendly discussion. He was able to tactfully and reasonably discuss many issues.'

Colleagues from Japan have also written:



‘We are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Peter J. Rhodes. He was a great mentor to us, and immensely contributed to the development of classical studies in Japan through his personal contacts with so many scholars there. We remember his ever-present kindness and consideration.’

Peter’s generosity also extended to colleagues visiting the UK. Greg Stanton (University of New England) writes:

‘For Australians like us Peter was also renowned for his generous hospitality, always insisting that, when I came to Durham to talk about Greek history with him, my wife and I would stay in his home. Our stay always included a visit to one of England’s historic cathedrals or homes, about which he had a wealth of knowledge.’

Likewise, Jacek Rzepka (University of Warsaw):

‘I still have in mind Peter’s talks when he guided me through Durham and Durham County every time I was there (I am pretty sure I will always see the Castle and the Cathedral, Hadrian’s Wall with Vindolanda and Binchester, Auckland Palace, Barnard Castle, and Bowes Museum and many other places in the vicinity through his insightful comments). We all learned so much from Peter, professionally and beyond.’

Peter also was co-organiser of a conference (with Lynette Mitchell) in 1995 ‘The Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece’, in Durham, and was also principal organiser of two conferences in Perm (Russia): in 2014 on ‘Deformations and Crises in Ancient Civil Communities’ (proceedings were jointly edited by PJR and Valerij Goušchin, and published by Steiner); and in 2016 on ‘One-Man Rule in Greece and Rome’. There were also two conferences organised in his honour ‘Rhodes on Rhodes’ in 2005 to mark his 65th birthday (published as *Greek History and Epigraphy: Essays in Honour of P.J. Rhodes*); unfortunately, the conference organised in Lisbon for September 2020 (to mark Peter’s 80th birthday) was deferred because of covid, but a short online gathering was held in June 2021, hosted by colleagues in Portugal, and a volume of the papers that would have been delivered in Lisbon will soon be published.

Peter, always curious, immensely enjoyed meeting new people and discovering different cultures. He travelled widely during his life, both professionally and personally. As his brother, John, noted in his eulogy given at Peter’s memorial service, the only part of the world he had never managed to visit was South America, where he intended to go once the lockdown was lifted.

Peter also had interests outside the classical world. He was a very active member of the community of University College (‘Castle’), Durham, even up to days before his death. He also sang in the College choir, and played the piano and organ. The Anglican Church choral tradition was a great love of his, which he was also able to enjoy through his membership of the congregation of Durham Cathedral.

Above all, to many of us Peter was principally a friend, always there at the end of a phone, or the end of an email. Lene Rubinstein and Jonathan Powell have written:



‘... Peter’s company was always a source of joy. We feel fortunate and privileged that he was an important part of our lives for several decades. Peter was the first to be told of our engagement in 2001, and the first to visit us after our son came out of neonatal intensive care; he remained close to our family ever since... After Jonathan suffered his stroke in 2015, Peter stood by us, always being there even during the darkest hours over the years that followed.’ Peter is survived by two brothers, David and John. He was much loved by his family, his friends and his colleagues, and will be sadly missed by the Classics community, both in the UK and internationally, but will always be treasured by them.

Peter Fawcett, one of his graduate students, says:

‘For me he was a serious man with a sense of humour. In this context I will never forget the story he told in his after-dinner speech at his festschrift on the island of Rhodes. He said that people often asked him why he signed his books and articles “P. J. Rhodes” rather than “Peter Rhodes” as might be expected. The reason dated back to when he was a student at Oxford and was reading an essay to his tutor. He referred in the essay to an academic by his Christian name as well as his surname, and the tutor asked him sniffily “personal acquaintance of yours?” Peter then resolved to sign himself “P. J. Rhodes” ever afterwards.’

It seems appropriate to end with the words of Sergei Karpyuk, Peter’s friend and colleague from Moscow: ‘Rest in peace, dear Peter, rest in peace, Professor Peter J. Rhodes.’