



Jane F. Gardner (1934–2023)

by Peter Kruschwitz

Jane F. Gardner, the eminent Roman social and legal historian, died on 28 January 2023 in Reading, Berkshire, the town where she by that time had lived for some sixty years. Jane was born 10 March 1934 on the (then) southern outskirts of Glasgow, just behind Hampden Park Football Stadium. When she retired from being a Professor of Ancient History at the University of Reading in 1999, Jane was able to look back on a distinguished career that might seem anything but likely given her family background, her childhood experiences, and her upbringing in wartime and post-war Scotland.

Jane's early life, from her birth to the Mid-Sixties, is documented in an autobiographical sketch that was published in a volume edited by R. Goldman, *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of the Education of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children* (1968). In this sketch, titled by her married name, Jane Mitchell (pp. 124–141), Jane speaks in great detail of her childhood and youth as well as her university experience. The piece is a most rewarding read in and of its own right, as some quotations from it, below, will demonstrate.

The *Breakthrough* volume collects narratives of working-class 'breakthroughs', success stories that happened against the odds. In Jane's case, it might be very tempting to follow this narrative. In reality, however, matters were a lot more complex.

Jane's father was a re-married widower, who was born in 1896 as one of nine children of a night-watchman. He had left school at the age of twelve, and he worked as a railway carter and lorry driver for London, Midland and Scottish (L. M. S.) Railways, then as the foreman of a goods-station on the west side of Glasgow, and eventually as 'salaried staff'. Jane's mother, born in 1900 and without secondary education, was the second of sixth children, who from an early age had to look after her side of the



family. The marriage was mixed, i.e. Protestant-Catholic, and both parents were Tory voters. Several members of the family lived in the narrow space of a four-roomed family home, including Jane's half-brother, two uncles, and an aunt.

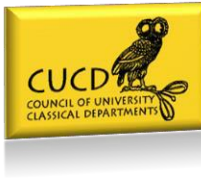
However, two things stand out to me from Jane's account of her early life: first, her uncompromising self-discipline, especially – but not only – when it comes to her schooling; and second, the palpable support of her family and their pride in her achievements in the face of the limited means that they were able to provide. Both aspects are perhaps most aptly summarised in what might at first seem like a minor story; but this episode, at least to my mind, summarises much of the person that Jane was to become:

In the third form, with a number of class-mates, I was entered for the Hutcheson Trust Bursary, a competitive examination open to all the schools in Glasgow and district. I came first in this examination, and I knew that I would have to try to do the same later in the University Bursary Examination. I suffered agonies of anxiety before the examination, as I felt that the reputation I had won at school would now have to be maintained against unknown competition.

The prize was a grant of £15 a year for the remainder of my attendance at school. My parents had already applied for, and been allowed, a Corporation maintenance grant of £22 a year. This was not tenable together with the Bursary, and so there was a family conference. My mother said firmly that the honour was what counted, so we let the grant go and accepted the Bursary. The first instalment of £7 10 0 was spent on a bookcase, which I still have. My father, on his rounds, searched in all the second-hand shops till he found it, a large and splendid glass-fronted mahogany case.

(Breakthrough p. 135)

With her family providing space and, within their abilities, resources and positive encouragement, Jane was able to 'largely self-educate', as she has it, and to emerge from school to enter university education. Helped by a Ferguson Fellowship, Jane started to read Classics at the University of Glasgow in 1951. After four years of hard work, Jane completed her Master's in 1955 with a First-Class degree.



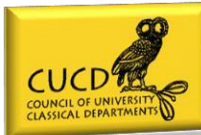
Unlike in other subjects at the time, a first degree in Classics did not give Jane the opportunity to move into a higher degree at Oxbridge. Consequently, Jane chose to read for another first degree in Classics at Oxford. Based at Lady Margaret Hall, the college for which she had great affection until the end, Jane graduated with a double First in Literae Humaniores. It was this time at Oxford, in particular, that allowed Jane to develop and to mature in every way. Or as she put it in her autobiographical sketch:

I think I first began to mature at Oxford, and this brought a number of personal difficulties, most of which were more or less satisfactorily resolved, helped by the fact that the first five terms' work had a great deal in common with what I had done at Glasgow. I was aware of class differences, but this gave me no feeling of social inferiority. I was unimpressed by affluence, or the fact that some students had been to an exclusive public school. Had I myself come straight from school, I might have been more easily overawed; but with a First-Class Honours degree to my name, I felt I had my own claim to status.

(Breakthrough p. 139)

In addition to her academic development, Jane always saw Oxford as the place that allowed her to develop intellectually, culturally, and as a political being. There she was introduced to left-wing circles, which led to her breaking away from the Tory-voting tradition of her parents and becoming an active Labour supporter, even getting involved in supporting her local community in the Reading Council for Community Relations (latterly known as Reading Association for Racial Harmony: 1964–80). There, at Oxford, she found kindred spirits intellectually, as well as individuals who led her to appreciate the arts and music.

At Oxford, Jane also developed a cultural open-mindedness towards contemporary forms of art and music that characterised her life to come. In fact, Jane acquired some decent pieces of art for herself, and she would always comment on new exhibitions, art catalogues, documentaries, and the like, whenever there was a chance: in doing so, she eschewed tedious displays of superficial cultural snobbery, but sought for meaning and profundity instead.



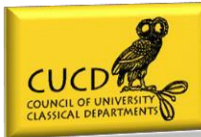
Throughout her life, Jane was a connoisseur of the fine arts as well as a keen traveller, and she numbered precisely these two elements among the most painful losses in her life when she became increasingly immobile in old age, going from semi-mobile to Reading-bound to department-bound, to housebound in her last decade. On many occasions, however, she would indulge in extensive memories of past travels across the world, and investigate in great detail whether my own experiences during travels matched hers. I remember how she once told me how sad she was that her colleague Dr Tim Ryder, who was only a few years older than Jane, was still able to travel the world while she, due to her impairments, was not (Tim had joined Reading after the closure of Hull's Classics Department in 1990). It was not so much a matter of jealousy to her as it was wistfulness over what she once was able to do and now was denied by some fate. In her later years, books, art catalogues, and TV documentaries (which she avidly watched and reviewed in conversations) had to supply her with access to a world whose physical experience had become impossible all too soon.

After her time at university, Jane relatively quickly moved into a teaching and university career – something that was strongly encouraged by her mother as ‘she would be glad when I was earning, and could do something to pay her back’ (*Breakthrough* p. 139). Her first appointment took her to University College Cardiff, where she was an assistant lecturer. She also spent some time teaching in schools: she taught Classics and English in Forest Fields Grammar School, Nottingham, and then Classics at Kendrick Girls School, Reading. At the University of Reading, she first became a part-time teacher (1963), then an assistant lecturer (1964), and eventually a full-time lecturer (1966) in Classics. This is where her autobiographical sketch in *Breakthrough* breaks off:

I am now married, and a university lecturer. I am becoming progressively more articulate, but I feel I have still a long way to go.

(*Breakthrough* p. 141)

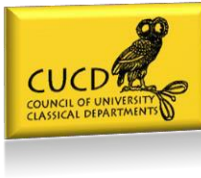
A long way still she went.



Unlike Jane's university career, which was only about to take off at this point, her marriage to – as Jane herself writes – 'a carpenter's son, a first-generation grammar-school boy from Stratford-upon-Avon, with whom I found I had a lot in common' (*Breakthrough* p. 140), did not survive for much longer; it is my understanding that it was Jane who ended it. Though Jane did occasionally drop some hints to me about a special someone in her life (whose death preceded hers by a number of years), Jane always remained very private about what she regarded as her private life.

Since I arrived at Reading almost ten years after Jane's retirement, I have no personal experience of Jane as an academic teacher. I have it on good authority, however, that she was perceived not only as eminently knowledgeable and passionate about her subject, but also as an exacting and meticulous instructor with a genuine care for her students' intellectual and subject-specific development, just as much as for her subject area itself. This did not mean that Jane simply continued traditional teaching styles in her classroom, and her general interest in pedagogy continued well into her retirement years. I remember that when I offered a course on 'Alcohol Consumption, Abuse and Addiction in Antiquity', Jane very much wanted to join any session with student presentations, commenting copiously, helpfully, and most supportively on the students' collective and individual achievements as well as – in private – on what she thought about developing the inclusive pedagogy of the course.

Jane's interest in transformative forms of teaching and research very much remained alive until the end, as she would regularly ask for the rationale and methodology of didactic decisions at Reading, volunteering a plethora of useful information about previous approaches, source material to include, and her own experiences. She was very much the department's living memory of approaches past: for example, she gave a much-enjoyed overview of the department's long-standing approach to innovative and material-culture-based teaching on the occasion of a gift of a tablet and stylus to the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology. Jane had been the curator of the Museum for more than a decade and a half (1976–92) after the death of Annie Ure, the late wife of Percy N. Ure; Percy's appointment in 1911 had laid the foundations to Reading's Department of Classics

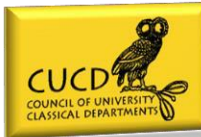


Graduate students would inevitably meet Jane in what had become the ‘postgraduate room’ of Reading’s Classics department (where Jane used to come to socialise, to check her e-mail, and to collect her snail mail, which – like her – was still coming to the department on a regular basis). These graduates were sometimes taken aback: not only by her keen interest in their own research projects and her provision of information and feedback on virtually any area of the field of Classics, but especially by her division of the academic world into ‘grown-ups’ (which they were emphatically not) and ‘youngsters’. Some, undoubtedly and perhaps understandably, felt uncomfortably belittled by that label, though from many a conversation with Jane I know for a fact that this was never her intention – quite the contrary. ‘Youngsters’ to her was a protective label – a term for those who were still learning and not absolutely required, though exhorted, to know.

Jane’s approach to the ‘grown-ups’ was rather more unforgiving. Her way of expressing criticism, especially during conferences, workshops and seminars was feared by many (and always anticipated by the members of Reading’s Department of Classics). Her manner was combined with a Glaswegian bluntness that is easily appreciated by a Berliner such as myself, but not always by everyone in the South-East of England: to undergo a ‘Janing’ was a baptism of fire.

It was easy to confuse Jane’s inquisitive comments and direct feedback with rudeness and unkindness, but to do so meant to misjudge her intentions. Academic kindness, without a doubt, is a virtue. There is no need to destroy anyone, and no-one can, or ought to, know everything. Being supportive is part and parcel of what we all should do. At times, however, the notion of kindness gets mistaken for unconditional leniency towards sloppiness in one’s academic work – and Jane most definitely would have none of that, at least when it came to the ‘grown-ups’.

There never was any actual malice or cynicism in the post-presentation exchanges that I witnessed (including when I was at the receiving end of her criticism): rather, it was a deeply held care for the subject and its continuous improvement and development, demanding of everyone to treat it with respect and attention to detail. In fact, Jane was never kind to herself when it came to even the smallest mistakes:

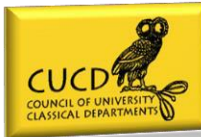


sometimes my inbox was overflowing with emails from her, all sent within a couple of hours, that went from 'Subject: (insert some subject here)' to 'Noch einmal (insert subject here)' to 'Und noch einmal (insert subject here)' to 'Another thought on (insert subject here)' to, eventually, inevitably, and invariably 'ARRRRGHHHHH'. In short, Jane deeply cared, but she cared about substance and the subject first, and feelings second – and she certainly never held herself to a lower standard than anyone else.

Jane's own becoming a 'grown-up' coincided with her appointment to a full-time, permanent position in Reading's Department of Classics in 1966 – a period of consolidation and transformation for the department following its post-war re-organisation. Jane served the department for more than 30 years, eventually being promoted to Senior Lecturer (1988) and Professor (1993); and even in retirement, she continued to accompany and shape it for another quarter of a century as an emeritus professor.

Reading's Department of Classics in the post-war period was marked, initially, by the appointment of J. M. R. Cormack. Before he later moved to Aberdeen, Cormack served as Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Acting Vice-Chancellor at the time when Jane was appointed in the early 1960s. His early colleagues included Alan E. Wardman, R. Deryck Williams, Fred Robertson, and John A. Crook. Other new faces joined the department around the same time as Jane: Arthur W. H. Adkins, John Creed, J. G. Landels, and K. D. White. Of these, Adkins was a pupil of another former Reading scholar, C. J. Fordyce, who subsequently taught in Glasgow. Reading's department was an almost exclusively male environment in the 1960s, certainly at the beginning of the decade. Its research, rooted in a strong collective interest in material culture, focused especially on areas such as Greek Epigraphy and Historiography, Greek (Aristotelian) Philosophy, Latin literature and epic, Ancient Technology, and the Roman Economy. In this context Jane had to establish herself and develop her own academic profile, which, in terms of published outputs, took her until the early 1980s. Its roots, however, go back to a much earlier stage.

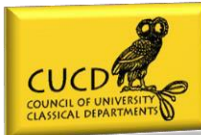
Her first major publication appeared in 1967, then under her married name of Jane F. Mitchell: her translation of Caesar's *Civil War, together with the Alexandrian War, the*



African War, and the Spanish War, by other hands in the Penguin series – the first of her two Penguins, which both remain in heavy use to the present day. Her second Penguin edition was the revised translation and edition of Caesar's *Gallic War* ('The Conquest of Gaul'), initially prepared by S. A. Handford and revised by Jane in 1982. These two Penguin editions represent, *pars pro toto*, Jane's great commitment to the dissemination of Classical scholarship beyond the confines of academia and the field in a narrow sense. Jane also co-published *Ben Jonson: Catiline* together with W. F. Bolton (1973). More importantly, however, Jane published a volume on *Roman Myths* in the British Museum Press's *The Legendary Past* series (1993) – a book that was subsequently translated into several other languages. Furthermore, during her career Jane gave talks to schools, local branches of the Classical Association, and so on. Remarkably, she was also a volunteer teacher of Greek and Classical Studies at Working Men's College, Camden, London (1979–81), where she gave weekly lectures.

Following some early work on consolatory writing, also published under her married name in *Byzantion* 37 (1967) and *Hermes* 96 (1968), Jane reverted to her maiden name of Gardner and began to devote her academic career to the subject she became best known for: Roman social and economic history, with particular emphasis on, and regard for, Roman law as a tool for historical research. This is most clearly, but by no means exclusively, seen in her three landmark monographs: *Women in Roman Law and Society* (1986: a German translation was produced by Kai Brodersen and published in 1995), *Being a Roman Citizen* (1993), and *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life* (1998). In addition, one must mention *The Roman Household. A Sourcebook* (1991), the product of Jane's long and fruitful collaboration with Thomas Wiedemann.

Jane's work was ground-breaking, especially in the area of legal and economic history of women in ancient Rome, not least because it drew on the widest possible range of literary and documentary sources, including inscriptions and papyri. It is deservedly listed among the classic works in this area, next to the works of Beryl Rawson, Susan Treggiari, and others.

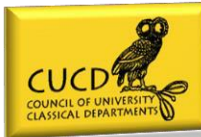


Secretly, Jane always expressed a certain dread that, with her work, she might be associated with the now burgeoning field of (Ancient) Gender Studies: 'I'm a social and legal historian, dammit,' would inevitably be her conclusion to any such rant. Gender Studies had, of course, become somewhat of a hallmark of a new generation of scholars in Reading's Department of Classics, as it continued to evolve throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Jane did not, of course, object to their research or to them as individuals and colleagues. Rather, she was of a generation of scholars who, trained in a more positivist, language-based tradition of primary source research, felt that with more conceptual and theory-laden research came a certain terminological laziness. In that vein, I shall never forget how my proposed use of the term 'negotiating' in a working title was instantly trashed by her as 'lazy Cambridge speak'.

Roman family and inheritance law, as well as matters of citizenship and slavery, very much defined Jane's final major works in the late 2000s and early 2010s. After that, Jane's scholarly outputs came to an eventual standstill, partly due to her declining physical condition. Intellectually and academically, Jane's judgement remained sharp as ever, and many a scholar has benefitted from that, many of them without ever knowing. Jane continued to serve her discipline as an anonymous reader of books for Cambridge University Press, and she carried out this important duty with great diligence and meticulous attention to detail.

There were several important milestones that defined Jane's long and distinguished academic career. It would be tedious to list them all, not least as a recital of awards and recognitions says so little about Jane herself, her work, and her life. The two milestones that were the most significant to her were ones that not only recognised her scholarly achievements, but also forged and advanced long-term friendships. In both cases, these friendships went significantly beyond the exchange of academic pleasantries and resulted in lasting personal connections with her colleagues and their partners.

A first moment of great importance in Jane's life was the award of an honorary doctorate, the D. Litt., by the University of Oxford in 1999, just ahead of her retirement. In addition to the honour that the degree itself carries and the much-deserved

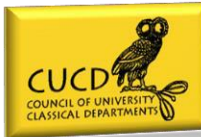


recognition of her work, the higher doctorate gave Jane the opportunity to take part in what is arguably the world's slowest procession, the Oxford Encaenia, and also in the subsequent lunch gathering at All Souls College: a most welcome opportunity for some 'social life and gossip' outside Reading, and an even more welcome opportunity to catch up with former Reading colleague, All Souls Senior Research Fellow, and dear friend Jim Adams, whose recent death was a severe blow to Jane.

A second moment of great importance was her involvement in the creation of what was then called the International Centre for the History of Slavery (now: Institute for the Study of Slavery) at the University of Nottingham. There, following her retirement from active duty at Reading, she became a Special Professor in the School of Humanities in the Classics Department (1999–2002), to work with Thomas Wiedemann. A lasting fruit of their collaboration, in addition to the aforementioned sourcebook on the Roman household, was their co-edited volume *Representing the Body of the Slave* (2002), which appeared a year after Wiedemann's premature death. Jane maintained a lasting friendship with Thomas Wiedemann's widow, Margaret, with whom she continued to exchange emails on a regular basis.

There is no shortage of delightfully, sometimes downright hilariously, entertaining anecdotes from Reading's Classics Department that involve Jane. The most notorious and long-lived concerns 'The Handbag Wars' (which, depending on one's source, may never even have happened). I have not witnessed any of these episodes myself, as they took place before my time at Reading, and I therefore shall pass them over, as mere hearsay, in silence.

No summary of Jane's life would be complete, however, without mention of her infamous driving skills. Before the view from the Classics wing of HumSS (Reading's labyrinthine "Humanities and Social Sciences" building, now "Edith Morley") had been blocked by a new building, there used to be a campus car park that was conveniently located just outside the department. A long time before Jane's entering the building, her arrival would be known to everyone in the department. She notoriously used first gear at virtually any speed on her way from home to campus and back, and any planned manoeuvre to occupy a parking bay would inevitably result in her fabled



twenty-seven-point turn, eventually allowing her to inch into her preferred parking space.

When I moved to take up my lectureship at the University of Reading, I first lived in a small flat situated halfway between Reading's Whiteknights Campus and Jane's own house, in the suburb of Lower Earley. Senior friends of mine had advised me, time and time again, against taking up her offer of giving me a lift, and for months I had managed to heed their advice. (There was the odd joke that she might even resort to her cane, rather than her foot, when applying the brakes: I can confirm, however, that this never happened, at least not while I was in the car with her.) Inevitably, the day would come, however, on which refusing the offer of a lift would no longer be an option – and sure enough that day did come, eventually. I climbed into her white Vauxhall, Jane shifted into first gear, and off we went. To be honest, until that moment I only had a relatively vague idea of just how fast a car might possibly go in first gear – it was rather alarming, and, without a doubt, all of the Greater Reading area must have heard the noise of Jane's engine. Her turn, as we left Campus onto Pepper Lane, was on the generous side. As we finally made it onto Pepper Lane, Jane asked me if I didn't agree with her just how friendly everyone was in Reading traffic, waving at her in admiration for still driving at such an advanced age. My interpretation of the nature of said 'waving' was considerably less favourable than Jane's, but I chose not to set the record straight.

With Jane's failing eyesight and physical strength, however, driving her own car was soon no longer a safe option. After her Vauxhall was damaged beyond repair following a small accident (which, fortunately, did not result in any major injuries for anyone involved), she acquired another car – but she did not get much mileage out of it anymore. Admittedly, as late as 2018, at the age of 84, she applied for renewal of her disabled parking badge – incidentally, this was the only time, regrettably, when she allowed me, an amateur photographer, to take her picture. Needless to say, she hated the picture with a passion, even though I felt that it conveyed much of what I saw in her – as much as is possible in a photograph taken for an official purpose. Only shortly thereafter, however, and as a true credit to the hard persuasion skills of my successor to the post of Head of Department, Jane surrendered and sold her car, and she never drove again in her life.



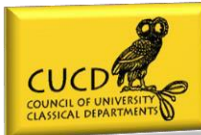
Her autobiographical piece of the 1960s made it apparent that Jane had never been an entirely healthy person. Already when I first met her in person in 2007, she walked using a stick, usually a crutch rather than a cane, and the clack-clack-clack of this crutch could be heard in the department's hallway a long time before Jane herself appeared. Jane remained reasonably mobile until the mid-2010s, though often in terrible pain from fused vertebrae and other afflictions. The loss of her car, however, was a caesura in Jane's life and her ability to take part in the life of the department – something that terrified and saddened her more than she would let on. Getting a taxi sounds like an easy solution, until you realise that you also have to get to, into, and out of said taxi (and that you are entirely at the driver's mercy).

Always the most pragmatic one of us in the department in such matters, Eleanor Dickey quickly found the solution that allowed Jane to keep coming into, and moving around in, the department: a wheelchair was acquired and permanently stored in the department, to await Jane's arrival, to help her continue her presence during papers and other gatherings, to join us for post-presentation dinners, and to support her back into the taxi home. This extended Jane's regular presence in the department by several years, until around 2019, when Jane's visits became increasingly infrequent until she became virtually housebound.

In her autobiographical sketch, Jane wrote with her customary clarity and sense of humour about her time at Oxford:

At that time, I must have been pretty insufferable. I used my college for little more than eating, sleeping and working. I discovered later that some of my contemporaries were girls with whom I could have developed valuable friendships, but, at the time, the place grated on me, and I refused to explore its social potential. I felt there was altogether too much emphasis on social life of a frivolous kind, particularly among the girls of the 'debby' set. I didn't envy them; I knew the difference between sweet sherry and dry and I didn't give a hang about the social significance of this. I preferred beer and politics.

(Breakthrough p. 140)



By the time I got to know Jane, she had moved on from enjoying her politics with beer to having conversations over a glass of red wine or, occasionally, a hot toddy. But her not giving 'a hang' about symbols of status or about gifts that she deemed meaningless, including chocolates and flowers, persevered.

Of course, dismissive comments she made about any such frivolous things had to be taken with a pinch of salt, for it did not necessarily mean that efforts went unnoticed or unappreciated (or that they were not even expected to some extent). One year, I had foolishly forgotten to post my proper Christmas card to her on time, so I chose to send her an electronic one in addition, with a conventionally pleasing aesthetic and uncontroversial musical tune to accompany it. I shall refrain from reproducing her review of the e-card, though delightfully and colourfully worded, in this – or any other – forum: let us just say that I never forgot to post a proper and carefully chosen snail-mail Christmas card to her in good time again. While this response might have seemed disastrous to others, I was not in the least bit surprised by the fact that her next email to me, sent one week later for Hogmanay, opened to a rather different tune: 'I hope my previous e-mail didn't upset you. I didn't intend to appear churlish. I did appreciate the intent.'

The most exacerbating part of Jane's final years, no doubt, was the inability to remain an active and visible part of the department to which she had devoted the largest part of her life, for reasons both academic and social, as Jane thrived on stimulating debate, whether it was serious or merely lighthearted or, ideally, both. When the late Peter Parsons visited Reading to give a research seminar, we all went for the customary post-seminar dinner with him. Peter and Jane sat next to each other, and it was the material for an evening of glorious entertainment. As this was when Peter, following his retirement, had only just recently moved out of his college, he gave a very tongue-in-cheek report of how his transition from college life to independence had gone. He took great delight in telling us about such adventurous events as preparing his own porridge for breakfast. The most remarkable debate ensued: Was porridge made with water acceptable, or did it have to be milk? Should porridge be creamy or chewy? Was it ever acceptable just to stuff the bowl into the microwave? This was, without a doubt, the closest we ever got to witnessing an unrehearsed, yet pitch-



perfect live performance of Statler and Waldorf, and the two of them brought the house down with laughter.

Being denied intellectually stimulating exchange grated heavily on Jane, and it was not easy for her to accept that her needs could not always be met, especially during term time. Not seldom emails of the 'RSVP please' popped up in my inbox (and, unfortunately, that was only partly because of my own abysmal track record of answering my emails). So Jane was all the more grateful for regular visits to her home on weekends, not only by myself prior to my personal Brexit in the autumn of 2019, but especially also by Emma Aston and Andreas Gavrielatos, as well as her kind and deeply caring neighbours – for which, and for whom, she continually expressed her profound gratitude to me. At the same time, as I was told, when her carers tried to persuade her to sign up for a 'befriending scheme', Jane had them know that she was not *that* desperate: she would require *intellectually stimulating* conversation! And with that, until her end, she required for herself what she was always generously and copiously willing to offer to anyone who wished to benefit from it.

Her absence will be sorely felt, and Reading will be a poorer place without her.