

Patrick Edwards (1933–2025)

**by John Wilkins, with Ruth Edwards
and Dominic Rathbone**



Glynn Patrick Edwards died in Aberdeen on September 27th at the age of 92. He was an accomplished philologist who loved ancient literature to the end of his life. To us his colleagues he was kind, affable and supportive even when facing the greatest challenges as Head of Department.

Patrick was born in Shrewsbury on June 23rd 1933, and educated at the Priory Grammar School for Boys and Christ's College, Cambridge. After National Service with the Royal Artillery in West Germany, he took an MA, and then a PhD at Cambridge with Sidney Allan and John Chadwick, before being appointed Lecturer in Humanity at the University of Aberdeen in 1960, after only two years of research.

Patrick later contributed to Chadwick's *Festschrift*: 'Meaning and aspect in the verb ΟΠΥΙΩ', in *Studies in Mycenaean and Classical Greek Presented to John Chadwick*, edited by John T. Killen, José L. Melena, and Jean-Pierre Olivier (Universidad de Salamanca, 1987) [= MINOS XX-XXII] 173–181. There were further philological notes: 'ἄλασιν', *Glotta* XL (1962) 196–198, 'Φοινικός (= *Punicus*): a neglected lemma?', *CQ* 27.1 (1977) 230–235. His major work was *The Language of Hesiod in its Traditional Context* (Oxford 1971).

Patrick became Head of Department during one of the most turbulent decades in the 500-year history of Greek and Humanity at Aberdeen. His predecessor, the ancient philosopher John Rist, had given the University an ultimatum: he would resign if some posts of retirees were not filled. The University did not relent, John Rist resigned, and the Department, now of Greek and Humanity combined, was reduced to four, with additional support from Philosophy and Theology. This was the first of the cuts to Universities in the 80s.

First year students loved Patrick's affable and humorous teaching style, which recruited many into the MA Classics programmes. Finalists were delighted with his teaching of Classical philology. Eilidh Macleod remembers, 'Every time [in 2025] I open my copy of Colin Macleod's edition of *Iliad* XXIV I am transported back to the little room where the departmental library was housed, and where we studied this text under Patrick's kindly tutelage in the winter term of 1983. I have the fondest memories of those happy days, and happy memories too of reading Sappho, Vergil, and Ovid in Patrick's class. He was a true scholar and gentleman'.

The Department was an early supporter of Classical Civilisation as a degree, thanks to Patrick's far-sightedness, together with his colleague Andrew Lintott. Himself a distinguished philologist and Andrew a historian, they could see that insufficient students were forthcoming in Greek and Latin, not least because Aberdeen City Council had suppressed Classics in City schools (it survives in Grampian Region and in the private sector). Students were now taught in Greek, Latin, and English, as needed. This visionary move did not save it from the second round of cuts, when the government established the review known as the Barron Report, whose remit was to

streamline the teaching of Classics in Universities. The committee recommended a number of closures, some of which were resisted. Patrick submitted an article to the *CUCD Bulletin*, 'Do they really know what they are doing?' In the end, the government subjected only philosophy to such a purge: perhaps Patrick's voice was heard.

Nevertheless, under the leadership of the Principal of Aberdeen, George McNicol, the University still decided to close six departments, three of them language-based: Classics, Scandinavian Studies, and Russian. Patrick as Head of Department bore the brunt of this decision and led the defence of the department. Colleagues at St Andrews and Edinburgh loyally explored possible transfers to them but the Department decided that nearly 500 years of Greek and Humanities at Aberdeen – both with Regius Chairs – should not be terminated. Remember that for centuries Scotland had four universities to England's two. Admirable support came from the Arts Faculty and from Classics Departments across the UK, but to no avail. When, as a result of these pressures, a young colleague died tragically in 1988, Patrick, a man distinguished for his decency, modesty, kindness, and sense of responsibility towards younger colleagues, was overwhelmed.

He was later able to continue his studies in neo-Latin and religious inscriptions in churchyards such as at Aberdeen's St Machar's Cathedral, and in Greek Art. He had taken the Latin teaching tradition in Aberdeen back to 1256 in 'Aberdeen and its Classical Tradition', *Aberdeen University Review* 51 (1986) 410–426. On Greek Art, he had co-written with Ruth B. Edwards 'The Wodehouse collection of ancient pottery from Cyprus', in *Aberdeen University Review* 47 (1978) 308–313.

In 1998 he became the 22nd Geddes-Harrower Professor at Aberdeen, an endowed Visiting Professorship in Greek Art which did survive the cuts. His six lectures, 'Exploring the Past in a Northern Light: Stages in the Rediscovery of Greek Art and Civilisation', allowed Patrick to continue his long interest in Greek Art and Archaeology which he had studied and taught for some decades. He spoke of Geddes at Olympia, Harrower at Delphi and Knossos, and later finds in Asia Minor, Thera, and Vergina, reminding Aberdeen's citizens of Scotland's long devotion to the Ancient World, beyond the Athens of the North. He included Bishop Elphinstone's ventures into the

Mediterranean, along with those of Lord Elgin. Patrick wrote an article on Elphinstone, a Glaswegian who founded the University: 'William Elphinstone, his college chapel, and the second of April', in *AUR* 51 (1985) 1–17.

Patrick is survived by his wife of more than 60 years, the Rev. Dr Ruth B. Edwards, a fellow Cambridge Classicist and Senior Lecturer in New Testament Greek at Aberdeen, with whom he wrote several articles including 'The meaning and etymology of *Poinikastas*', *Kadmos* XVI.2 (1977) 131–140. Patrick and Ruth combined too in much extramural work in Classics, notably for the Classical Association of Scotland and for In-Service Training, such as a paper on Greek temples, which a colleague described as 'breath-taking'. Ruth recalls his generous support for other scholars, often those with less good Latin than his. Ruth cared for him devotedly in his frail but bright-eyed final years. In old age he loved to recite long passages from *Agamemnon* in Greek, having been a student member of the chorus in the Cambridge Greek play. He kept a copy of Virgil's *Eclogues* beside his bed before he went briefly into a care home. Ruth remembers a recent moment when Patrick, often confused about what was said in English, took over a recitation in Greek from one of his visitors, having been taught the 'Direct Method' by Peckett (of Peckett and Munday, *Thrasymachus*). Such recitation of Greek had always been important to him, particularly in the Greek and Latin Reading Competitions held in local schools. He is also survived by their children, Hilary and Nick, whom Dominic Rathbone remembers proudly searching for their father's *Hesiod* when Dominic first dined at their house soon after joining the Aberdeen Department in the early 80s.