

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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It will be a cause of great sadness to many members of the society to learn of the death of Arthur Brown, President in 1974, and several years a council member, which took place on Sunday 29 July at the age of fifty-eight. Until the Friday nine days earlier, Arthur had been in sparkling health, and had entertained a number of friends to lunch that day in the staff club at Monash University where he held a chair in the Department of English. During the following week he was kept at home by severe flu, but in his last characteristically cheerful telephone messages had expected to return to the University on the Monday; however, on Sunday morning he died in the Dandenong hospital of a cerebral haemorrhage.

Arthur Brown was a scholar of exceptional gifts who made distinguished contributions to the study of English mediaeval and Renaissance drama. The respect in which his skills as an editor of early texts was held is shown by his having held the Presidency of the Malone Society for some years and edited a number of its reprints. It is hoped that a full bibliography of his writings will appear in a future number of the *Bulletin*. At the time of his death, he was involved as a collaborator in an almost completed edition of the York cycle of mystery plays, while simultaneously working on a critical edition of the complete works of the Elizabethan dramatist Thomas Heywood for the Clarendon Press. The press has unfortunately been obliged to abandon this edition, though it is hoped that a group of scholars at the University of Toronto may eventually supply us with a Heywood. In keeping with the distinguished tradition of textual scholarship of the English Department at University College, London, where he spent the greater part of his academic career, Arthur possessed outstanding skills as a palaeographer. No mediaeval or Renaissance hand held the slightest terror for him. In his work on the York plays, he was able to correct numerous misreadings by earlier transcribers, some of which had fraudulently found their way as nonce words into the OED, while with Heywood, notorious for his slovenly hand, Arthur took an almost boyish pleasure in being able to extract meaningful words from what to others were mere blotches and squiggles. Scorning the aid of typists, he prepared his press copy at a battered portable with his eyes glued on the exemplar. His power of sustained concentration was such that he rarely bothered to

repeat a collation of variant texts, knowing from experience that he would have identified all the discrepancies the first time.

Arthur was an enthusiast for everything to do with books and their manufacture. After he took up his appointment at Monash in 1973, having earlier occupied chairs in both English and Library Science at University College and spent seven months as a visiting professor at the University of Sydney, he lent his support to a proposal by Wallace Kirsop for the creation of a bibliographical laboratory in the basement of the new stack extension. This has developed into the present generously equipped seminar and printing area in which, under Brian McMullin's direction, a tradition of Monash private-press printing has begun to develop. One of the present writer's most pleasant recollections of Arthur is of a trip with him and Col French of the library to the yard of Simsmetal, the scrap dealers, where rumour had spoken of an ancient treadle press awaiting its turn to go under the crusher. This was retrieved and added to the Monash collection.

However, it was not Arthur's enthusiasm for printing, nor his distinction as a scholar, which led to the religious centre at Monash being packed to the doors for his funeral service on 3 August, but an innate kindness and consideration for others, allied with a rare gift for making and keeping friends. Arthur Brown was a deeply sociable man who possessed the gift of inspiring sociability in others. In academic life, where the air is often filled with the clashings of highly-strung egos, this was an asset of immense value. His very presence in the chair at a meeting seemed to have the effect of diffusing a spirit of friendly reasonableness. His attitude towards administrative matters was one of a gentle *laissez faire* which impatient souls tended to find exasperating; yet even in the hurly burly of university politics it would be hard to say that politeness and the assumption of mutual goodwill proved any less effective as means of persuasion than the more aggressive methods preferred by some others.

Arthur will be respected by future members of this society as a scholar; but those of us who had the privilege of knowing him will also remember him with deep personal affection. In that we will not be alone. Among the wreaths at his funeral was one from the Monash security men, whose card read simply 'Good-bye old friend'. The following lines by one of his students, Eleanor Ham, pay tribute to him in another of his capacities — that of a kindly and attentive teacher who never made any student feel less than a human equal. But they apply to all of us who in any way have learned from him.

We will be your family
and not just for the day
you moulded us smooth
judiciously knocked off the rough corners.
The pattern may not have been yours
(we are diverse as the birds and the fishes).

In our clay you set your thumb-print.

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