

JRM: inspirational colleague, teacher, scholar and friend

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Ronnie was a generous and distinguished contributor to academic teaching, research and publication as well as to the theatre community more widely. He inspired generations of students and scholars, developing resources and a scholarly framework for the interdisciplinary study of European renaissance and early modern culture and of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in performance in their own time and today. My contribution to the Focus section of this “special issue” offers a necessarily selective overview, from a personal viewpoint, of some of his wide-ranging passions and achievements that can, perhaps, serve to contextualise the Focus contributions from Ian Brown and Ines Aliverti below as well as Ronnie’s tireless contribution to advancing the study of “Performance and Spectacle in Early Modern Europe”.

An overview

Born in Belfast in 1937 Ronnie attended the Methodist College, becoming the first pupil from his school to gain entry to the University of Cambridge where he was both an undergraduate and postgraduate. He later talked about his opportunity to study Yeats under the guidance of T. R. Henn, an experience that nurtured Ronnie’s love of poetry of all periods, while M. C. (Muriel) Bradbrook was to inspire his engagement with the study of Elizabethan and Jacobean performance. Under her supervision, his postgraduate studies focused on Thomas Middleton, his research taking him to Florence, Venice and Siena as well as more widely around Italy – inspiring his fascination

with the Italian language as well as that country’s art, architecture and, of course, performance. On completing his doctorate at St Catharine’s College, Cambridge, Ronnie’s first university post was as a Fellow of the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham (1960-1962), before joining the staff of the English Department at the University of Edinburgh, becoming head of the department in 1976-1977 – a time recollected, in this Focus section, by Ian Brown. Ronnie moved to Stratford-upon-Avon, with his wife Eithne and their children, when he joined the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Warwick in 1977 as a Professor and then Chair. He served on numerous academic committees within Warwick including years as Chair of the Board of the Faculty of Arts and as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (1982-1987). He was Chair of the School of Theatre Studies for two years and Director of the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance (originally the Graduate School of Renaissance Studies) for many years from the 1980s to the late 1990s. He also took up roles as a visiting research fellow at Jesus College, Oxford (1987) and Magdalen College, Oxford (1991).

Ronnie’s love of theatre permeated his teaching and research and was reflected not just in his numerous publications and editorial roles but in his contribution to the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), the Drama Panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain, chair of the Arts Council’s Drama Projects Committee and member and then chair of the British Council’s Drama and Dance Advisory Committee. (See Ian Brown’s article.) He was a member of the academic committee for the reconstruction of Shakespeare’s Globe in Southwark, London, a trustee of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, a member a member of the Board of the

Birmingham Repertory Theatre, a Governor of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and a member of the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (formerly Board).

As Director of the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance, Ronnie was determined that postgraduate students would benefit from being a part of an interdisciplinary grouping for teaching and research at MA and doctoral level. I joined Theatre Studies at Warwick as an early career lecturer in 1978, following doctoral research at the Shakespeare Institute, and was soon asked by the department to represent them in the development of the then Graduate School of Renaissance Studies. I worked alongside colleagues from a wide range of humanities disciplines to develop this MA and doctoral research grouping. As the Graduate School became the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance I worked alongside Ronnie to convene numerous interdisciplinary conferences at, among other venues, Warwick, Warwick in Venice, and Columbia University New York. Ronnie actively promoted international partnerships with the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari, the University of Paris-Sorbonne and the University of Tours. Under his directorship, the Centre developed European academic exchange programmes (ERASMUS and SOCRATES) with colleagues and postgraduate students in Venice and Paris. Ronnie's own frequent contributions to conferences of the Société Internationale de Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur la Renaissance (S.I.R.I.R) at Paris-Sorbonne, and his subsequent publications on aspects of Renaissance literature and performance, were recognised by the French Ministry of Education and Culture in 1992 when, much to his delight, he was made a 'Chevalier' of 'l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques'.

Developing resources for research

The brief overview above conceals much for which Ronnie came to be appreciated within the scholarly community at all levels. He worked to teach and inspire, to guide and encourage and to develop a strong sense of collegiality among students as well as among academic staff. He was constantly ready to embrace new developments in scholarship, realising that any research could only be reliable if the resources upon which it drew were themselves

developed to the best possible standards – whether in terms of access to, and the ability to decipher, manuscript sources or in the application of sound editorial principles to texts. Beyond this, in the wider context, Ronnie saw as a necessary basis for study and research an interdisciplinary perspective that, for example, sought to understand dramatic texts in the context of performance in their own time as well as reaching different audiences across later centuries with the same urgency of debate that the innovative texts originally engendered.

It is not surprising, then, that Ronnie's work on renaissance theatre built on the approach of G. K. (George) Hunter (a founding professor of English at Warwick), with Hunter's insistence on editorial and scholarly standards, and on the internationalism of theatre practice. This led to Ronnie's detailed editorial work as a general editor of the multi-volume Revels Plays editions of Elizabethan and Jacobean texts (Methuen and Manchester University Press). He was also a founding editor of the *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* series (Manchester University Press), on which I worked with him on many volumes as associate editor – volumes that looked increasingly to international performances. Ronnie was convinced that study of theatre and performance should be interdisciplinary and international – and that no academic study could replace engagement with live performances and with the people who made them, both on stage and behind the scenes. Together we taught international summer schools during the Edinburgh Festival in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the Festival itself invited increasing numbers of companies – large-scale and small – from international touring shows to experimental fringe performances. The summer schools were open to the general public as were the Open Studies courses we taught about Shakespeare in Performance for Warwick in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Making space for theatre and performance

It is important, here, to realise that the discipline of Theatre Studies, emerging in the mid-1950s, was itself evolving through the years in which Ronnie was working at the University of Edinburgh, becoming a structured discipline (as indicated by Ian Brown) and challenging a more conventional,



long established tradition of the analysis of play texts in departments of literary studies. Both Ronnie and I saw the advantages of performance studies in an academic environment as a way of crossing what were often perceived as rigid disciplinary boundaries within (as well as beyond) faculties of arts and humanities. We were fortunate that the University of Warwick developed its own Arts Centre as well as being in close proximity to towns and cities with a strong theatre heritage. Ronnie embraced all these developments with his customary energy and enthusiasm.

In the late 1980s and into the 1990s we collaborated with theatre practitioners and creative teams, consultants and curators on various exhibitions exploring theatre spaces and performances. The first of these was with the Royal Shakespeare Company and the curatorial team of the Mead Gallery in the Arts Centre at the University of Warwick on an exhibition celebrating the development and construction of the RSC's Swan auditorium in Stratford (consultant architect Michael Reardon) and of the first three years of performances in that space. To document the process and to make it accessible we co-founded a small publishing company, Mulryne and Shewring Ltd., with its first publication being *This Golden Round: the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan* (1989). In 1995 we published *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre since 1958*, with consultant editors Iain Mackintosh and Michael Reardon, to accompany a major British Council touring exhibition on theatre spaces to document the exhibition of the same name launched at the National Theatre, London (June 1995), and subsequently seen at the Quadriennale in Prague before touring in two versions across the world. In 1997 we worked with Andrew Gurr as advisory editor to document the many years of research and practical process that led to the opening in that year of the fulfilment of Sam Wanamaker's vision to reconstruct Shakespeare's Globe in Southwark: *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt* (Cambridge University Press in association with Mulryne & Shewring). In 1999 we published *The Cottesloe at the National: 'Infinite Riches in a Little Room'*, with technical editor Jason Barnes and very much in collaboration with Iain Mackintosh and the National Theatre; Iain, working with John Bury and Richard Pilbrow, brought this studio theatre into being and Jason,

as Production Manager, nourished its work through many iterations of the space. During these years Ronnie's increasing engagement with Shakespeare on the international stage was reflected, too, not just in his active contribution to the International Shakespeare Association and its World Congresses but in our edited collection of essays from Japanese, UK and international contributors in *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Making space for festival

All of these performance-related activities sat naturally alongside Ronnie's engagement with European Festival Studies. In the late 1990s Ronnie led Warwick's successful application for funding from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Board for Warwick's Centre for the Study of the Renaissance to host the AHRB (later AHRC) Centre for the Study of Renaissance Elites and Court Cultures, chairing this Centre for three years and leading one of its interdisciplinary research programmes with a focus on court and civic festivals of the European Renaissance, a project that resulted in a 2-volume, large-format publication making available to readers the texts of court and civic festivals, transcribed, translated and annotated with scholarly introductions, *Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe*, General Editors J. R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Margaret Shewring, Associate General Editors Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (Aldershot, UK and Burlington VT: Ashgate in collaboration with the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2004; e-book 2010). He also led the creation of a website, in collaboration with the British Library, to make more than two hundred and fifty festival books from the Library's collection available in searchable, digital format [www.bl.uk/treasures/festivalbooks/homepage/html]. Again Ronnie prioritised resource enhancement and accessibility from the outset, developing and co-organising conferences at Warwick and at the Warburg Institute (University of London) as well as two EURESCO-funded conferences in Lucca, Tuscany.

On his retirement from Warwick in 2004 Ronnie was made Professor Emeritus. He

remained an active scholar, editor, conference convenor and participant. As a co-founder of the Society for European Festivals Research he continued to collaborate in conferences in Warwick, Venice, London, Bergamo, Mons and Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He particularly enjoyed collaboration with the European Science Foundation's PALATIUM research network. As a founding general editor of the European Festival Studies, 1450–1700 series of publications, with Margaret Shewring, Margaret M. McGowan and, more recently with Marie-Claude Canova-Green, he encouraged interdisciplinary research in an increasingly international context for students, doctoral and early career researchers and more senior scholars, collaborating in research networks with curators, archivists and performance practitioners. Ines Aliverti's Focus article documents in detail the range of research networks, groups and individuals with whom Ronnie was involved and among whom he was much trusted as generous, loyal, tireless and inspirational.

Stratford-upon-Avon: King Edward's School, Guild and Guildbuildings

In Stratford he continued in his various roles at Holy Trinity Church, where he was involved in the leadership of services, a church warden, a Chair of the Friends of Shakespeare's Church and a President of the Choral Society as well as actively engaged in the restoration of the Beckett Chapel and the creation and development of St Peter's Chapel. He continued, too, his role as Chairman of Governors and later as a Trustee of King Edward VI School in Stratford. His enthusiasm and determination also resulted in a collaboration between scholars of history, archaeology, education and performance studies, archivists and experts in architecture and restoration, to publish an edited collection of research into *The Guild and Guild Buildings of Shakespeare's Stratford: Society, Religion, School and Stage* (Ashgate, 2012), while working tirelessly to secure funding to enable the Guildhall to be restored and historic elements within it conserved. As the process began he worked with everyone involved, hosting seminars and devising and contributing content to a DVD and accompanying notes that could be used to help the volunteers,

enabling Shakespeare's Schoolroom and the Guildhall itself to become a significant heritage destination in the town (opened 2016). Much of his research into this building is summarised in its guidebook, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom & Guildhall*, by J. R. Mulryne and Andrew Burnet with Margaret Shewring, designed by Jamieson Eley and published by Jarrold Publishing, a division of Hudson's Media Ltd., Peterborough, UK.

See: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/centrestaff/rmulryne/publications>, for a selective list of Ronnie's many, diverse publications.

Ronnie's energy, his generosity in encouraging others and his love of theatre and performance, music, dance, scenography, poetry, languages, architecture, art, history and material culture have been an inspiration to many.

Notes

In the days before communication between colleagues in academic contexts became shaped by the requirements of emails, Ronnie usually signed off on correspondence with colleagues as JRM. The memory of this persists amongst some who worked with him.