



Presidential Address to the British Academy, 1977

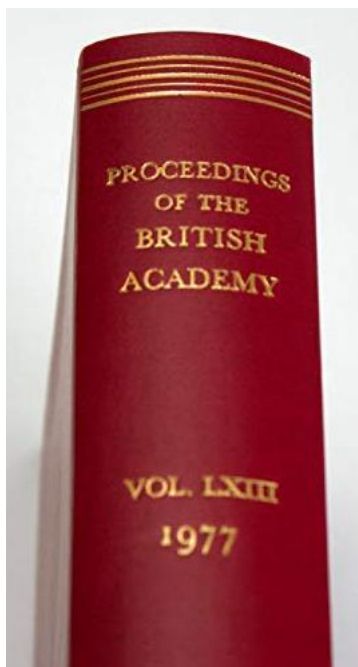
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Presidential Address to the British Academy, 1977

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I BEGIN, as is customary, by expressing our sorrow at the death, since we last met here, of nine Fellows: Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson, Professor R. R. Darlington, Dr M. H. Dobb, Sir Goronwy Edwards, Professor V. H. Galbraith, Professor H. G. Johnson, Lord Radcliffe, Sir Edward Robinson and, finally, Sir Mortimer Wheeler.

Mortimer Wheeler seems to me to have done more for the Academy than any Fellow, living or dead, save perhaps the founders themselves. He was commemorated by Sir Max Mallowan in a vividly expressed and most memorable address at the memorial service for him in November last year, and his principal achievements are recorded in our Annual Report for 1975/6. I hope to say something about what his personality and services to the Academy meant to us at our dinner this evening, so I shall say no more about them here; they will surely be remembered so long as this institution is in being. A full obituary account will, of course, be published in our *Proceedings*. The shadow that had been cast by the death of his

successor, Derek Allen, whose passing we mourned last year, was deepened by his own death, which followed so soon afterwards.

In the course of this year, too, we have suffered the tragic death of Allen's successor, Neville Williams, who died before his time in January in Nairobi while engaged upon work for the Academy. There is very little that I can add to the full and memorable tribute paid to him by his lifelong friend, the Foreign Secretary [of the Academy], Professor Geoffrey Dickens; but I should like to put on record what every Fellow of the Academy, I am sure, knows – that no better or nicer man, nor one more deeply devoted to our interests, more effective in promoting them and in encouraging others to do so, can ever have rendered service to the Academy. His death was a terrible blow to us all, and particularly to those who worked closely with him, as I, most happily, did. His wisdom, sagacity, tact and humanity were unique assets to the Academy, and saved me, and perhaps others, from errors and oversights which we might otherwise easily have perpetrated. I know that these qualities, as well [2] as his lively imagination, his charm, his friendliness, and his generous heart found a sympathetic response far outside the walls of the Academy – among the members of the learned bodies, and government departments, with which he dealt. The tributes to him, both from institutions and individuals, sent to us here, were singularly warm and heartfelt – far beyond the conventional condolences it is usual to extend on such occasions. He was the first Secretary not to have been a Fellow of the Academy, and more than justified his choice by my predecessor, Sir Denys Page, and the Council. I am glad to report that Professor Dickens has agreed to write his obituary for our *Proceedings*.

The death of Neville Williams imposed a heavy burden upon our administrative staff. The Academy owes every one of them a debt of gratitude for their devotion and efficiency. It has been a hard time for everyone, for none more so than the Acting Secretary, Mr Peter Brown. He rose to the occasion wonderfully. His qualities of understanding, tact, unflappable good humour and excellent judgement have proved of immense value during a difficult time, and have earned him the admiration of us all. It is a source of great personal pleasure to me to be able to say this, and to offer our thanks to him – to Molly Myers, to Michael Evans – to all who have worked with them so well.

II *Finance*

I now come to one of the centres of our concern, the crucial topic of finance. This year is the first of a new triennium, and we have been waiting with the usual mixture of hope and fear for the announcement of the government grant. I am glad to say that the triennial system under which the Academy's needs are assessed and which is essential for our future planning, although it is under considerable strain, has not – at any rate as yet – collapsed, unlike the quinquennial system for financing universities. After some, probably unavoidable, delay, the Academy was informed that its grant for current expenditure in the coming year was to be £1,590,000, with 'indicative figures' for the rest of the triennium. It is clear that this will provide for virtually no significant expansion of our activities, and that we shall consequently have some difficult decisions to take in determining future priorities. Even with the increase, in monetary terms, in the grant over that of last year, we shall, I fear, have to postpone, or even abandon, for a time at any [3] rate, some important developments which we had hoped to finance. But it would be wrong to end on a gloomy note. The fact that, in these hard times, we can record an increase in our grant, is a cause for gratitude, and I should like to pay a warm tribute to the sympathy and understanding shown by the officials of the Department of Education and Science to the Academy and its activities throughout the long period of detailed and complicated negotiations.

Of our new grant, £772,000 is for the Academy's own needs. The increase over the grant for the previous year is more apparent than real: it is partly accounted for by inflation, partly by different methods of bookkeeping. For example, the arrangement by which the British Council funded certain of the Academy's exchange programmes, principally with Eastern European academies, has been brought to an end; and from this year we assume financial responsibility for all our activities in this area. The grant also includes the Small Grant Research Fund in the Humanities, which in 1976/7 had been provided by the University Grants Committee, but which is now to be transmitted through the Department of Education and Science. Nevertheless, the government grant does enable us to continue with our proper activities; there are no

crippling cuts, and this is surely a source of deep satisfaction. Council has accepted the advice of Sir Jeremy Morse, our honorary financial adviser, to entrust the management of our investments to Lloyds Bank, of which he is the Chairman, and this, we hope, will achieve a higher level of income, and maintain the capital value of our funds.

£818,000 is provided for the current needs of the overseas Schools and Institutes (and sponsored societies). This represents an increase of 40 per cent over the comparable figures for 1976/7. The Department of Education and Science has, I am glad to say, accepted the argument that the Schools have been under-compensated in the past few years for the disastrous fall in the value of sterling and for abnormally high rates of local inflation in some of the countries in which they work. I am glad to say that the Department has been able to find some money designed to reverse the trend. However, in view of the prevailing financial stringency, our plans for creating a new Institute in Amman have had to be shelved for, at any rate, one more year. The DES has, however, agreed to look again at this scheme, and to review the whole level of the funding of the Schools in the light of the guidance they receive from [4] the Academy's own Standing Committee on the Schools and Institutes; the need for and importance of the task performed by this Committee seems to me to be clearly demonstrated by the Academy's responsibilities in this field.

III The British Institute in South-East Asia

In this connection, I am happy to report that a very well-attended meeting was held in Burlington House to mark the first complete year of operations of our Institute in South-East Asia, in Singapore. This is the only one of our overseas Institutes to be directly administered by the Academy. The Institute has a vital role to play in advising research workers of the opportunities open to them and the correct procedures to be followed in South-East Asia. The Director, Dr Milton Osborne, has successfully overcome the initial difficulties with which such beginnings are often attended, and we ought once again to record our appreciation of the help he has received from the British High Commission, the Government of Singapore, and local institutions. His recent experience underlines the need, the increasing need, for foreign scholars to think in terms

of cooperative research with an institution, or an individual scholar, working in the territory of his interests. I should like to acknowledge with gratitude the contribution to the running expenses of the Institute made by the Academy of the Social Sciences of Australia, in addition to that made earlier by the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Our gratitude is also due to the William Waldorf Astor Foundation for a most generous grant towards visits by British scholars to the Institute.

IV Academic Publications

I reported last year that in our submission to the Government we included an urgent plea for substantial support for academic publications, and suggested that one of the ways of doing this might be interest-free loans for individual works of scholarship, repayable over a period of years. The Department of Education and Science made it clear to us, however, that at present they were in no position to support a major activity of this type, and therefore that it would be best if we tried to mount a separate exercise, parallel to that for help to the learned societies. While these discussions were in progress, the Academy was approached by Mr George Watson, Fellow of St John's [5] College, Cambridge, who felt concern about the difficulties faced, in particular by younger authors, in securing publication of their work. He generously offered to make available a substantial sum of money if the Academy would agree to encourage library scholarship by means of a fund for the subvention of publication. This fitted admirably with our own lines of thought about this problem. The Academy accordingly accepted his offer with gratitude, and made a matching grant from its own funds to set up this scheme. In view of Mr Watson's own scholarly interests, there is a clear preference for literary work, but the new fund is not confined to it. The Publications Committee, acting on the advice of Section subcommittees, has made the first awards from this fund. We look on this as a pilot scheme, and hope to use the experience so gained as evidence for the best way to meet a crying need, since sooner or later we shall again have to return to the Government for help on overcoming the steeply rising obstacles to the publication of scholarly work.

In this connection, I must report that Dr Robert Shackleton, who has given a great deal of time and labour to the work of the

Publications Committee, of which he has been chairman, has found it necessary to resign his post owing to other scholarly commitments; he is to be succeeded in December by Professor Michael Wallace-Hadrill. I need not remind you that this Committee is one of critical importance, since its work lies at the heart of the Academy's interests, and those of the entire world of British learning.

V *Learned Studies*

In the autumn of last year the *Survey of Learned Societies*, commissioned by the Royal Society and the British Academy, and undertaken by Mr J. F. Embling, was published and circulated. It contained an analysis of the responses to a questionnaire circulated to 315 societies, together with recommendations for assisting the societies with some of the more acute problems confronting them in their activities. In the Survey three areas of concern were singled out for special attention: publication, accommodation and libraries. Basing themselves on this report, the Presidents of the Royal Society and the Academy addressed an appeal to the Secretary of State for Education and Science for additional government resources designed to help these societies, and in particular to enable earmarked grants to be [6] made where the need seemed greatest, and to provide professional advice on technical matters such as VAT, printing methods, costing and sales promotion of journals and publications, which some of the societies plainly needed. The reply of the Secretary of State, although sympathetic, made it plain that in these hard times there was little hope of additional government funds. Discussions with the DES continue, but in the meanwhile approaches are being made to private foundations for funds which would permit the appointment of a specialist adviser on the kind of technical matters I have mentioned, since, in our view, this would enable some societies to make considerable economies. In order to keep the general situation under review, the Royal Society and the Academy have jointly established a new standing Committee charged with concern for the welfare of the learned societies.

VI *Research Awards*

The major new task undertaken by the Academy during the past year has been the administration of the Small Grants Research Fund in

the Humanities. I believe that the Academy was right to agree to assume this extra burden in response to the University Grants Committee's initiative, and that the importance of this fund within the academic community is out of all proportion to its size. In purely scholarly terms it can be seen to have met a real need in assisting areas of study which have not been strongly enough supported in the past from public funds; nor should its contribution to the morale of hard-pressed scholars be underestimated.

We have sought to devise a set of administrative procedures which combine efficiency, simplicity and dispatch, without compromising the high standards that we expect of Academy-supported work. In the first year of operation we have received 169 applications, and we shall have made awards (one further meeting of the awarding committee is still to come) to some 125 scholars. Each Section whose area of scholarship falls within the terms of the scheme has appointed a subcommittee to consider the applications in its field, and the subcommittees have on four occasions scrutinised and assessed applications. Subsequently the Research Fund Committee, which includes the chairmen of each Section, met to make awards. Its task is to issue guidelines on questions of principle and policy, to ensure that the standards of the applications recommended for awards [7] are reasonably uniform, and to look at the financial costings in a standard way. At each of its meetings the Committee has had the benefit of the presence of observers from the UGC's Arts Subcommittee.

During this first year, the scheme has been wholly financed by the UGC to the extent of £125,000. As a consequence, applications have had to be restricted to staff in post at university institutions which are in receipt of UGC funds. Next year the scheme is being extended as a result of contributions to the fund by the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, and the Scottish Education Department, which bring the total fund up to c.£200,000. This important development means that from now on all staff in polytechnics and other institutions of higher education throughout the UK come within the fund's orbit. The essence of this scheme – to make non-renewable grants of up to £1,000 to support particular pieces of research in the humanities by individual scholars – remains unchanged. Building on experience we have gained from the first year of operation, we have now set about attracting a greatly increased number of applications.

The addition of these new funds makes the total sums available to the Academy this year for the direct support of advanced study by means of research awards above £500,000. From our own funds and from our Special Funds we have been able to make grants to 112 applicants. As for our own Academy research projects and committees, following the report of the Major Projects Review Committee, they were asked last year to submit much more detailed reports and estimates so that their work and progress could be more effectively monitored by the Sections. For the first time for some years, the total financial requirement for Major Projects was less than in the previous year. We have, I am particularly glad to report, been able to increase both the size and the number of grants made in support of learned journals, and thereby to give a measure of assistance to the learned societies, since (as was shown by the Survey of Learned Societies) this is one of those areas where help is most urgently needed.

VII *The Wolfson Fund*

Last year I reported on the first elections to British Academy Wolfson Fellowships in history, law, economics and political [8] studies. Our intention has always been to allocate the generous grant from the Wolfson Foundation in roughly equal proportions between British scholars wishing to undertake research on the Continent, and Continental scholars anxious to study in this country, for periods between three and nine months, the main emphasis being placed on younger scholars. We recognised that during the first year of operation it might prove easier to appoint British scholars of high quality than to identify and attract their continental peers; and, of the eighteen Fellowships offered last year, twelve were to British scholars. This year the scheme was extended, so that it now covers ten Western European countries, and in making awards we have deliberately reversed last year's imbalance, with the result that of twenty-four Fellowships offered, seventeen have been to Continental scholars. I should add that it has not always been easy to make adequate arrangements for the reception of these visitors to Britain, in particular to find accommodation, appropriate academic surroundings, useful academic contacts, and the like. This has placed a considerable strain on existing administrative resources. I wish I could anticipate alleviation of this situation.

It is not desperate, or even serious, but it still tends to create awkward problems.

VIII *Overseas*

I now turn to our foreign relations. It is perhaps not generally appreciated how great is the burden placed upon our Foreign Secretary, Professor Geoffrey Dickens, and how devotedly and scrupulously he watches over the development of our foreign programmes. The past year, for example, has seen the conclusion of an important new agreement with the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. The agreement, which is the most detailed and extensive of all our agreements with the academies of Eastern Europe, provides for exchange visits of ten scholars per annum in the humanities and the social sciences, for varying periods of study and research, to a total of fifteen man-months. The new arrangements came into effect in April, together with expanded agreements with the Romanian, Polish, Bulgarian and Japanese Academies. We have also set about placing our relations with French scholarly institutions on a more satisfactory basis.

IX *Award Procedures*

Like most human arrangements which pursue a particular purpose, but at the same time remain responsive to changed [9] conditions, new demands and new opportunities, the Academy's methods of providing research grants have, over the years, developed in various directions, in part owing to different rules which govern different types of funds. Such historical development by unpredicted accretion and adaptation to new needs is not, indeed, at all haphazard, but does, at times, generate anomalies, and needs periodic re-examination, coordination and rationalisation.

Thus, at present, most applications for research grants are submitted to the Sections, which make recommendations to the Research Fund Committee, which, as I have reminded you, includes the heads of all Sections. These recommendations are made at the spring meetings of the Sections, that is, once a year. Grants for research overseas are decided upon by the Overseas Policy Committee, which is differently constituted: it coopts its own members and meets under the chairmanship of the Foreign Secretary, four times a year. The applications for Small Grants in the

Humanities are scrutinised in the first place by Sectional subcommittees, set up by the Sections concerned with the humanities, and their recommendations go to the Research Fund Committee, which, in consequence, is, like the subcommittees, required to meet four times a year if the reasonable needs of university teachers are to be satisfied.

Grants made from funds earmarked for specific purposes are administered by ad hoc committees created for the purpose; so are the grants from funds dedicated to broader purposes, e.g. those made by the Thank-Offering to Britain Fund or the Wolfson Fund. A degree of diversity is made inevitable if only by the fact that in the case of special grants by foundations or societies, made to the Academy for specific purposes, representatives of the donors are, it seems to me quite rightly, made members of the grant-giving committees, a requirement which does not apply to the allocation of funds to which no special considerations apply. Moreover, qualifications for the eligibility of candidates for various types of grants differ: thus the UGC, in accordance with its rules, has had to impose criteria narrower than those normally applied by the Academy, while the Wolfson Foundation requires some limitation of subject and of countries in which research is to be conducted. In this connection I must report one change which the Council has recently adopted: to apply the same formula for eligibility for research awards as that which now determines eligibility for the Ordinary Fellowship. Henceforth, applicants for research awards will be expected [10] to be normally resident in this country; there will be no reference to nationality or citizenship.

While some differences in the rules of award are therefore to some degree unavoidable, it seems to me that we need a clear account of our award-giving procedures, both for our own benefit and that of the applicants and their sponsors, if our policy is to be – and to be seen to be – consistent, just, well administered, and making the fullest use of the expert knowledge of the Academy. Consequently, I have requested the Acting Secretary, Mr Pete Brown, to prepare a memorandum on our grant-giving arrangements which can then be considered by Council and all the Sections.

X *Union Académique Internationale*

In June this year the 51st Session of the Union Académique Internationale was held in Greece in the Academy of Athens. The British Academy participates actively, through established Academy committees, in seven of the enterprises of the UAI: the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, the Medieval Latin Dictionary, the *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, the *Tabula Imperii Romani* and the *Fontes Historiae Africanae*. This year the Academy recommended the adoption of a new enterprise – the Critical Edition of the Complete Works of Voltaire – as a project under the patronage of the UAI. The Academy also played its part, though Professor Turner, in the revival of the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* now to be based at the University of Leiden under the direction of Professor H. W. Pleket.

The session brought to a close Professor Eric Turner's three-year tenure of the Presidency of the Union. He has filled this office with great distinction, as anyone who has seen him in action in this forum will readily testify. The president of such an international body is called upon to display very considerable gifts of leadership, tact and diplomacy, both in giving firm guidance in matters of scholarship, and also in representing and, where necessary, reconciling differing national approaches and points of view. The UAI (to say nothing of the Academy) owes a great debt of gratitude to Eric Turner for the energy and the wisdom that he has brought to the direction of its affairs, a debt which, I am happy to say, was handsomely acknowledged, both in the public proceedings of the General [11] Assembly and in the expressions of tribute paid privately by the delegates.

XI *Secretaryship of the Academy*

I should like to end this account by extending a most warm welcome to our new Secretary-to-be, Mr J. P. Carswell, who is about to leave the public service after a very distinguished career in the Department of Education and Science and the University Grants Committee, whose chief executive officer he is. Like his predecessor, he has found time to write works of history, highly admired by professional experts in his field. He will, I believe and hope, find this institution to be in a very reasonable state of health and vigour. We all wish

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE BRITISH ACADEMY, 1977

him – and ourselves – much happiness in his work with us and for us in the coming years.

30 June 1977

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