



*J. L. Allcock Ltd.*

ROBERT OGILVIE

## ROBERT MAXWELL OGILVIE

1932-1981

ROBERT MAXWELL OGILVIE was born on 5 June 1932 and was richly endowed by his home background. His father was reading classics at Oxford in 1914 when war broke out. Commissioned in the first month of war, he served in France and Belgium, was twice wounded and lost an arm. Returning to Oxford in 1919, he had a distinguished academic and administrative career, as Professor of Political Economy at Edinburgh University, Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast, Director-General of the BBC, and finally from 1944 Principal of Jesus College, Oxford. Robert's mother had deep roots in the Church of Scotland. Her father had held the Chair of Systematic Theology and Apologetics in the University of Glasgow. She was to become a public figure in her own right when, after the death of her husband, she was persuaded by Charles Morris, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, to become Tutor of Women Students, which led later to her election as Principal of St. Anne's College in Oxford.

There were three sons of the marriage: James, David, and Robert. All three brothers went to Rugby, which had a strong classical tradition and in Norman Saunders an outstanding teacher of classics. All three brothers won open awards in classics. David, whose main interest was in engineering, went to St. John's at Cambridge; James and Robert followed their father to Balliol and Oxford. At Rugby Robert's outstanding ability was soon recognized. He was always ahead of his age-group, and when he was 16 he had read more Latin and Greek than most first-year undergraduates and had already developed a sensitive appreciation of the Latin language. But the transition to Oxford was clouded by tragedies in the family.

On 25 July 1948 his eldest brother James was killed while climbing on the Matterhorn. Of all the family he was closest to Robert. The closeness of the bond between them was shown in Robert's first major publication seventeen years later: his Livy commentary was dedicated to James, *fratri dilectissimo*. A second tragedy followed in the next year. Robert's father, who was already seriously ill when James was killed, died in

June. It was fortunate that an aunt could take Robert to Italy for three months.

On his return from Italy he was inclined not to go back to school, but he was persuaded by his headmaster to return to Rugby for his final year as head of school. It is not surprising that, after much acute stress and strain, in the Oxford entrance examination in December he won an exhibition rather than a scholarship. For his last two terms at Rugby his classics were rested: following his father's advice he concentrated on mathematics and music. There was one further blow before he went to Balliol. This was a period when National Service was still compulsory, but the doctors pronounced him unfit for service on the ground that his heart might be overstrained. His answer, against all advice, was to walk from Oxford to Cambridge in one day.

Since most of his contemporaries were doing their National Service Ogilvie was one of the youngest members of the college and it is surprising how soon he became conspicuous. His work came easily to him and his First in Mods was outstanding; but he also played a full part in the general life of the college. His interests were wide-ranging: music was important to him, to make and to listen; his favourite relaxation was walking, preferably on mountains, not for rock-climbing, but for hard walking that physically tested him. In lighter moods he enjoyed club dinners and talking illogical nonsense in irresponsible debates. He was also a very efficient tour manager of the Balliol players, who in the long vacations presented what was alleged to be a free translation of Aristophanes to unsuspecting schools. Topical colouring based on inside information was, however, added and this could be embarrassing to Ogilvie, who seemed to have family connections with all the schools they visited. He was not an athlete but he enjoyed village cricket and the occasional game of golf with pupils.

In a sense Robert might seem to have been designed as a late Victorian or Edwardian. In politics, while the general tendency of his generation was moving to the left, he remained firmly on the right. At a time when there was a tendency to discredit success he was manifestly ambitious. When paternalism and leadership were almost becoming terms of abuse he believed in both. When the teaching of classics was under increasing pressure he remained firmly convinced that a serious study of the languages and cultures of Greece and Rome was still, even in practical terms, a fine foundation for a career, though he realized that the main emphasis in national education must shift to the sciences and

modern subjects. But few men of his year had more friends and in his last year he was President of the Junior Common Room. In this role he served his constituents well. His combination of good manners, mental agility, and firmness of purpose made him a good negotiator with the Master.

When after Mods he turned to the philosophy and ancient history of Greats, he enjoyed Plato and Aristotle and liked discussing basic political and moral issues, but he had little appetite for modern developments in philosophy. What he most enjoyed was combining his appreciation of Greek and Latin literature with a deeper understanding of the cultures of Greece and Rome. In spite of his many other activities his all-round performance in both the philosophy and ancient history papers in Greats has rarely been equalled.

The quality of his first class assured him an academic career and he could afford to evade the restrictions of a D.Phil. thesis and aim at a more ambitious goal. His choice of the early books of Livy as his field of research was a typically bold gesture. The text was notoriously difficult and the problems of historical interpretation had been aggravated by the wide-ranging excavations of Einar Gjerstad in Rome. He was aiming very high and at the start he had to face his first major disappointment: he was not elected to a Fellowship of All Souls. This was probably to his advantage. His mind was too restless and his interests too wide to flourish in an atmosphere dominated by research. Instead, in his first year, he was a Senior Harmsworth Scholar at Merton College in the congenial company of senior and junior common rooms. He next spent two years in Cambridge as a Fellow of Clare College and Director of Studies in Classics. He thoroughly enjoyed this introduction to teaching undergraduates and had the invaluable opportunity of discussing Livy problems with A. H. McDonald. When his two-year Fellowship came to an end the right opening came at the right time. With the appointment of Kenneth Dover to the Greek Chair at St. Andrews, Balliol needed a new Fellow in Classics. Ogilvie was a natural choice.

The years of his Fellowship at Balliol (1956-70) were extremely productive in teaching and research. His relations with his pupils were never confined to tutorials. He liked to see them in his home and enjoyed reading parties in his house in Scotland as much as did those whom he invited to join him: they faced a disciplined programme of concentrated study through the morning, rigorous walking in the afternoon, and in the evening relaxation and talk, followed by sleep in a barn converted into a dormitory. He was an

extremely good teacher, stimulating and perceptive, relishing high-flyers but doing as much or more for the weaker men. Many of his pupils remained his friends long after they had left Oxford. He could be more frivolous than any of his colleagues: eye-witnesses will not forget the look on the face of the Junior Dean when, confronting a riotous group of undergraduates who were playing golf up and down the staircases at midnight, he found that Ogilvie was their leading spirit. On the other hand he could also show both the manner and the substance of a *gravitas* beyond his years, aided by his great height and impressive presence.

Meanwhile he forged ahead with his own work on Livy, an author almost entirely neglected at Oxford. One of his first Balliol pupils remembers the impression made on him when Ogilvie, towering over him, waved a long arm in the direction of his massive folios of Livy with the words 'Oxonia Livium non legit'. Two articles in 1957 and 1958 on the basic problems of the manuscript tradition and on the sources used by Livy paved the way to *A Commentary on Livy Books I-V*, which was published in 1965. It was at once recognized as a major contribution to the study of Livy, a fitting companion to Walbank's *Commentary on Polybius*. Ogilvie's affection for the novels of Sir Walter Scott gave him a natural sympathy for Livy. His feeling for Latin made him a good judge of the changing moods of Livy's style, choice of words, and word-order. With his long-standing interest in archaeology he was able to absorb the results of recent excavations and to challenge intelligently some of the excavators' revised dating. He carried further the study of Livy's sources, though he may have oversimplified the pattern and one may wonder whether Livy would have accepted *libertas*, *moderatio*, *modestia*, *pietas* as appropriate titles for books 2-5. The aim of the commentary to enable the reader to understand and enjoy Livy was admirably fulfilled. His reward was a Doctorate of Letters from the University.

While the Livy commentary was still in the press Sir Ian Richmond invited Ogilvie to collaborate with him on a comprehensively revised edition of Furneaux's commentary on Tacitus' *Agricola*. F. Haverfield had begun work on a second edition, and on his death it was completed by J. G. C. Anderson in 1922. This edition served its generation very well, but in the following forty years the progress of excavation had added so much new evidence for the early period of the Roman occupation that a thorough revision was long overdue. It was a good partnership: Richmond had lived all his working life with Roman

Britain and had master-minded most of the important excavations; Ogilvie could contribute a sensitive feeling for language and style and a particular interest in the impact of archaeology on literary evidence. It was tragic that Richmond, like Haverfield, should die before the work was completed. He had written drafts of the sections on military aspects which he had undertaken, but the work on the text commentary which was to be their joint responsibility had barely begun, though many of the major problems had been discussed. It was left to Ogilvie to bring the archaeological evidence up to date, revisiting many of the sites, to complete the section on the geography of Britain, and to add photographs and plans. It was further evidence of the speed with which he worked that the new edition could be published before the end of 1967. The importance of the book is not limited to historians of Roman Britain. In no other Roman province can Roman military and civil organization be so well studied. The new edition will be appreciated by all who study Rome's empire. It must have been difficult to pack so much useful information into so small a volume, but the writing remains lucid and lively. Most of the new interpretations carry conviction and with minor corrections the edition should survive many reprints.

Meanwhile in 1966 a book in a different vein had been published. *Latin and Greek: a History of the Influence of the Classics on English Life from 1600 to 1918* is an interesting and original study of the relations between the changes of fashion in the teaching of the classics and social and political changes. The chapter on the Victorian concentration on Plato and Thucydides under the influence of Arnold of Rugby and Jowett of Balliol reveals one of the main influences on Ogilvie's development: there was something of both men in him. Two further books were published in 1969. *The Romans and their Gods* is the best introduction to the complexities of Roman religion. The slimness of this volume, the absence of references to foreign scholars in the text, and the author's generous statement in the preface that what little he had learned about the gods of the Roman world he owed entirely to Dr Stepan Weinstock, might suggest that this is a book for beginners only. In fact it fills a serious gap. With the increasing interest in the foreign cults that spread through the Roman empire the study of the native religion tends to be neglected and its importance underestimated. In a series of brief chapters, the Roman conception of prayer, sacrifice, divination, and the function of the gods and priests are explained and illustrated by a well-chosen selection of literary texts and inscriptions in the best translation available. *The*

*Ancient World* was written for the Oxford Children's Reference Library. His experience with his own three young children helped him to strike just the right note and to choose the right illustrator.

Unlike most of his colleagues, he had no distaste for administration. In the university he was a member of the General Board of Studies from 1967 to 1970, and in 1968 he served on the Hart Committee to consider relations with the junior members of the university. In Balliol he was Senior Tutor from 1966 to 1970 with the responsibility for drawing up the agenda for College meetings and guiding discussion on central issues. In his eagerness to reach decisions he was sometimes surprised by opposition to his proposals, but meetings became more businesslike.

Sabbatical leaves are normally used primarily for research. Ogilvie preferred to widen his experience. He was a Special Visiting Fellow at University College, Toronto in 1975, and in 1969 Visiting Professor at Yale. In 1969 he also went to South Africa as Hofmeyr Fellow (a Fellowship endowed by old members of Balliol in memory of Jan Hofmeyr to maintain academic links with South Africa), and with the Fellowship he combined a Visiting Lectureship at Witwatersrand University. He seized the opportunity to spread his enthusiasm for the classics by lecturing at all the South African Universities. It was typical that he also made a point of trying to understand the mentality of the Afrikaners by meeting as many as he could.

Looking back on the years of his Fellowship at Balliol one is bewildered by the range and intensity of his activities. Several factors are needed to explain it. In the first place his mind was sharp and worked fast. He was a voracious reader and had a particularly good memory. He also had the enviable gift of mental mobility: he could turn from teaching to administration to research without needing long pauses for readjustment. He had a very fluent pen. But he needed the right background, and this came with his marriage in 1959 to Jennifer Roberts. Jennifer knew Oxford from the inside at St. Anne's; she understood Robert's dedication to teaching and the extent to which she would be involved. She also knew that he had qualities beside those of the scholar. And she was right, for he was essentially a family man. He was intensely concerned with sharing with her the upbringing of their children, planting in them all a love of music and a healthy appetite for hard work. It was she also who made it possible for him to have the reading parties which she enjoyed as much as he. And by another stroke of good fortune these reading parties could be held in a perfect setting when by the kindness of Colonel

Cameron of Lochiel he was able to have a home at Errachd near Fort William, close to mountains.

In 1970 most of his friends were surprised to hear that Ogilvie had accepted an invitation to become headmaster of Tonbridge School when the natural expectation was a University Chair. The decision, however, was not illogical. He had long since decided not to restrict his career to scholarship. There could be other opportunities later. He believed firmly in the public school tradition, and the classics were strong at Tonbridge. He thought he had a contribution to make and he welcomed the challenge.

The main beneficiaries were the boys. It was natural that the senior classics should be excited by his teaching, for he had a great gift for communicating his own enthusiasm and opening up new fields. The response is reflected in a letter from Japan from one of his boys who went to Balliol to read classics:

As you may remember he was my headmaster, tutor, mentor, in my last term at school, and among many other things he introduced me to Theocritus, a poet I've always loved since.

As an instrument to break down barriers between subjects he ruthlessly exploited his friends and relations, 'inviting' them to talk (not for long) to a mixed group of seniors on any subject they chose and to submit themselves to cross-examination. Horizons were considerably widened. More unexpected was his personal concern for the younger as well as the older boys, and not only in their classrooms. His informality and sense of fun made it easy to approach him and they were amazed that a headmaster of his eminence could listen to their problems and understand them.

He was less well equipped for the general leadership of the school. His lack of experience of the problems that arise when the interests of governors, staff, and boys have to be balanced was a serious handicap, and he had had little need hitherto to delegate. He now found himself having to make too many decisions and it was difficult to sustain the pressure when so much of his emotional energy was taken up with the personal problems of individual boys. As a result he was becoming a strangely isolated figure. To ease the strain he drank unwisely. It was a shadow which would eventually dominate his life disastrously.

It was perhaps fortunate that in 1975 the Chair of Humanity (Latin) at St. Andrews unexpectedly became vacant. At Balliol he had often spoken of a Scottish Chair as his ambition, but none seemed likely to be available at the right time. He prided himself, sometimes ostentatiously, on being a Scot on both sides of his



family. St. Andrews had a long and proud history, and it was near Errachd and the mountains where to the end he was most consistently happy and relaxed. He had been at Tonbridge for five years only, but he had given a vital stimulus to the intellectual climate of the school. He left behind many good friends among staff and boys, and very many Tonbridgians will remember gratefully his impact on their lives. It is very fitting that he is to be commemorated by awards 'for the encouragement of enterprising projects in any field'.

At St. Andrews his students enjoyed his enthusiasm and he widened their interests. The curriculum was modified to give more weight to Christian and medieval Latin; he encouraged a growing interest in classical art, and enjoyed taking students to archaeological sites. Meanwhile a great part of his restless energy was spent in fighting the cause of the classics outside the University. In his first year he became a member of the Council of Trinity College, Glenalmond, and soon became a frequent visitor, popular with staff and boys, and occasionally preaching in chapel. He also became an active governor of St. Leonards and New Park, and readily accepted invitations to speak to schools, and classical and archaeological societies.

In his own writing he had rounded off his main work of the sixties by the publication while he was at Tonbridge of new Oxford texts of the first five books of Livy in 1974 and of Tacitus' *Agricola* in 1975. Several of the new emendations will remain controversial but both texts mark a considerable advance on their predecessors. In 1976 *Early Rome and the Etruscans* was published. It was the first history in English to rewrite the story in the light of a generation of important excavations, especially in Rome and Lavinium, and it was designed primarily for students to explain the interrelation of literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence. Further excavations in Latium since the book was finished require a revision of the account of the spread of Etruscan influence, but the combination of narrative and analysis is a good model and deserves a second edition. Hitherto his main work had been focussed on the early Republic; he now became increasingly interested in the writings of the church fathers and in the conflict between paganism and Christianity in the late Empire. But he continued to read very widely and his astonishing output of substantial reviews in his years at St. Andrews must have been a great relief to editors, particularly of the *Classical Review*. He could digest the essence of a book with remarkable speed and he never allowed his own convictions to obscure the author's main points.

Through the years at St. Andrews, travel occupied an increasing share of his time. He had been made a Fellow of the Societies of Antiquaries in England and Scotland (1967, 1971) and a Fellow of the British Academy in 1972. He was also an active member of the Society of Roman Studies, of which he was a vice-president. These societies required frequent visits to London. He also continued to find it difficult to resist invitations to lecture, in England as well as Scotland. He liked to communicate his enthusiasm for the classics to mature scholars, students, and to the interested public, and he enjoyed surprise visits to his friends. It was natural that he should be a popular lecturer to Hellenic travellers, but it was an unwise indulgence to cruise so often. Invitations to advise on the establishment of a new university in Malawi, and to assist in the election of a Professor of Latin in Dublin were readily accepted. This overloading of his programme left him too little time for his Department at St. Andrews and his own scholarship. But in spite of the wide dispersal of his energies he agreed in 1976 to serve as coeditor of the *Classical Quarterly*. This new commitment involved, besides script reading and editorial meetings, a great deal of correspondence. He was a good judge of promise in articles that could not be accepted, and many young scholars will remember gratefully his encouragement and advice.

In 1978 the first fruits of his work on the conflict between Christianity and paganism in the fourth century was published. *The Library of Lactantius* examined how widely fourth-century intellectuals were familiar with their classics. By a rigorous examination of the text of Lactantius he showed that most of his quotations were at second hand and that the authors whom he had personally read were much fewer than was generally thought. But the work on the larger subject made little progress. One last book, however, was completed. *Roman Literature and Society* was published in 1980. Like *The Romans and their Gods* it is well designed for students studying classics and for those who are interested in the classical world but know Latin only in translation. It is refreshing to find the first chapter devoted to the way in which authors reached their public and what effect this had on their writing; for these important questions are so often ignored. A liberal supply of well-chosen quotations illustrate and explain the correlation of literary changes with changes in the social and political climate. Not unnaturally the most interesting chapters are those that cover the period down to the death of Augustus.

Several years before his death his friends had begun to detect warning signs that he was driving himself too hard, even for his

exceptional energies, and that the strain was undermining his health. His obvious strength had always made it natural for others to turn to him for all kinds of advice, and many people were grateful for the wisdom and generosity with which he helped them in their difficulties. He was a man of many friends, but he was also a very private person, who would not talk of his own problems. His friends will always regret that they did not find a way of helping him in turn. On 7 November 1981 he took his own life. His tragic death is a cruel loss to the study of the classics in Britain. It also robs his friends of an extraordinary and irreplaceable man.

RUSSELL MEIGGS