RANDOLPH QUIRK

Charles Randolph Quirk

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1975

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Randolph Quirk, Baron Quirk of Bloomsbury from 1994, was Vice-Chancellor of the University of London (1981–5) and President of the British Academy (1985–9). A specialist in English language studies, he became Professor of English at University College London, where he instituted the Survey of English Usage in 1960, innovative for its focus on spoken as well as written usage, and went on to lead a team of grammarians to produce the two main reference grammars of English in the second half of the twentieth century, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (1972) and *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985).

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RANDOLPH QUIRK

Randolph Quirk was born on the family farm at Lambfell, near Peel, on the Isle of Man on 12 July 1920, the youngest child of Thomas and Amy. The Quirks had farmed that land since the seventeenth century; and it was a source of some pride to RQ (as many colleagues would later refer to him, from his distinctive abbreviated signature) that his heritage was a mixture of Celtic and Norse. The name Quirk, in that spelling, is a distinctively Manx variant of a Gaelic form, seen also in O'Cuirc or MacCuirc—son of Corc, a fifth-century Irish king. He was educated at nearby Cronk y Voddy primary school and then at Douglas High School for Boys (today the upper school of St Ninian's), where he became the first member of his family to get to university. In the only personal interview he ever gave—a contribution to an anthology made for the Philological Society, *Linguistics in Britain: Personal Histories* (Oxford, 2002), from which all quotations in this memoir are taken—he reflected on how his upbringing in a farming family led him 'to be obsessively enamoured of hard work and to be just as obsessively sceptical about orthodoxies, religious or political'. His family was 'a mixture of Catholic and Protestant, of Anglican and Methodist, in an island community where self-consciously Manx values cohabited uneasily with increasingly dominant English values'. And he reflected wryly, 'if I'm an eclectic pluralist, it may simply be that the Manx in general are', recalling his fascination with the Scandinavian as well as the Celtic history and archaeology of the Isle of Man.

He was referring to one of the adjectives often used to describe his approach to linguistics: *eclectic*—by which he meant a reluctance to espouse any single theory of language, but to take bits from any theoretical approach that would be useful in his description of English grammar. It was a position very different from the linguistic climate of the times, when researchers were routinely identified by a particular school of thought—one might be a Bloomfieldian, a Firthian, a Hallidayan, or a Chomskyan, for example. While RQ had lived through all these eras, and indeed had worked with scholars from each of these traditions, he distanced himself from all of them. As he commented, 'The nice thing about eclecticism is, as its etymology proclaims, that you can choose freely and widely what you need for a particular purpose, without boxing yourself into any single (and doubtless inevitably flawed) theoretical position. It's a matter of taste and personal intellectual bent, I suppose, but I have always found it liberating to be unconstrained by the very idea of an orthodoxy.' It is a non-conforming and heterogeneous philosophy that earned him some criticism later from scholars who maintained the need for a strongly theoretically coherent approach.

It is possible to see the origins of this intellectual bent in the earliest days of his scholarly career. At secondary school he was especially drawn to the sciences, but the pull of history, language (evidence of Manx was everywhere, though not much spoken) and thus linguistic history, caused him to switch to the arts. His strong interest in language(s) is not only documented by his school performance in languages, but also

by his school prizes. At the ages of fifteen, sixteen and eighteen he opted for book prizes: in 1935 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*; in 1936 *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*; in 1938 *The Oxford Companion of Classical Literature* (as his choice for the Latin prize) and also that year *The History of England during the Reign of Victoria* (*1967–1901*)—his choice for the French Essay prize! Then in 1939 he gained the Northern Universities Higher School Certificate in English, French, Latin and History, with distinction in English, and also won the Isle of Man Education Authority's Scholarship of £80 p.a. for four years (in fact held for three years only). When he obtained a place at University College London (UCL) in 1939, he opted for English precisely because of the historical and linguistic emphasis in the curriculum there: Gothic, some Old Saxon and Old High German, a lot of Old Norse, and even more Anglo-Saxon, all in the wider context of Germanic philology, the history of the language, and palaeographical study from runes to court-hand.

The year 1939 was hardly the best time to commence a degree course, and it was soon interrupted: in 1940 he began a period of five years in RAF Bomber Command, during which he became so deeply interested in explosives that he returned to his school interests, and started an external degree in chemistry through evening classes at what is now the University of Hull. During the RAF years he was also employed as an evening instructor in English and Economics (one of the books of this period was T. S. Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909–1935*). He was also employed for three years as an instructor for explosives to air crews. Fortunately for English language studies, in 1945 he resumed his English course, spending some time in Aberystwyth (where the UCL department had relocated during the war), learning some Welsh, getting into local socialist politics and supplementing his minimal Manx grant by playing the clarinet in a local dance band. During his final two years he studied phonetics with Daniel Jones, encountered the subject of linguistics at the School of Oriental and African Studies with J. R. Firth, and became enamoured with the thought of doing research. He married Jean Williams in 1946, and they had two sons, Eric and Robin.

He graduated from UCL in 1947. In 1946 he had already been awarded the Elsie Hitchcock Prize for the most distinguished work in English philology in the Department. With his graduation he won the Early English Text Society's prize for his work on Medieval English Language and Literature. He also won the John Marshall Prize in Comparative Philology, and was given an engraved medal in silver. This is his first academic medal, going back seventy years, so UCL, which was to become his beloved college, awarded him a medal at the very beginning of his academic career! The distinction was such that he was also offered the Rouse Ball Open Research Scholarship (tenable at Trinity College, Cambridge), of £300 p.a. for three years to read for a PhD, which he declined, electing to stay at UCL. He was also invited by the Folkuniversitetet in Stockholm to spend a year (1947–8) in Sweden to lecture, but he declined this as well.

UCL offered him an Assistant Lectureship in the English Department (he became Lecturer in 1950) and the chance to write an MA thesis under the supervision of Professor A. H. (Hugh) Smith. He chose an aspect of Germanic philology that was exercising scholars at the time: whether the vowels in such Old English words as *heard* 'hard' or *feoh* 'cattle' were really diphthongs or just simple vowels plus diacritics indicating consonant qualities. He completed his MA thesis in 1949: 'Interpretation of Diphthongal Spellings in Old English with Special Reference to the Phonological Problems Presented by the Fracture Spellings in Cambridge University Library MS Ii.l.33'. And he began lecturing, his undergraduate classes including medieval literature, the history of the language, Old English and Old Norse. The teaching had an interesting side-effect: it brought home to him the realisation that traditional Germanic philology was of little assistance to students wanting to learn Old English, whereas the neglected areas of syntax and lexicology would, he felt, be much more beneficial. So for his PhD he switched to syntax, completing a thesis that was published by Yale University Press in 1954: *The Concessive Relation in Old English Poetry.* The choice was serendipitous. It coincided with a proposal by Professor C. L. Wrenn at Oxford to write an Old English grammar. Up to that point, such grammars traditionally covered only pronunciation and word structure (phonology and morphology), and Wrenn wanted this book to be different, with as full an account as possible of Old English syntax as well as word-formation. The result, *An Old English Grammar*, published by Methuen in 1955 (an enlarged edition with S. E. Deskis appeared in 1994), became a standard course book for students of Old English, at home and abroad, referred to as 'Quirk and Wrenn'.

In the meantime, there was a development that would put RQ into close contact with most leading English language scholars of the mid-twentieth century. In 1951 he was awarded a Harkness (formerly Commonwealth) Fellowship that took him first to Yale, where he met Bernard Bloch and Helge Kökeritz, visited Columbia, Brown, and Harvard (he especially valued meeting Roman Jakobson) and then to Ann Arbor, where he participated in the Middle English Dictionary project that was headed by Hans Kurath and Sherman Kuhn, and co-wrote two papers on Old English phonology with the latter. The immediate motivation was to work lexicographically on the UCL *Piers Plowman* project that had been started many years before by Professor R. W. Chambers, but of far greater importance for RQ's subsequent development was the close contact he had there with the leading Michigan linguists of the time, such as Charles Carpenter Fries, Albert Marckwardt, Kenneth Pike and Raven McDavid. It allowed him to become more acquainted with the historical and contemporary relations between American and British English and (especially through seminars that took place in Fries's home) with modes of working empirically on the syntax of unedited speech. It brought home to him the importance of the tape recorder, and the

kind of naturalistic data that could be collected especially when speakers did not know they were being recorded (through a judiciously placed hidden microphone). The technique would raise some eyebrows in these modern privacy-sensitive times, but in its day the recordings provided an invaluable corrective to what people imagined the syntax of everyday informal spoken English to be like.

On his return from the USA in 1952 he felt he needed a change from London, and two years later took up a post as Reader in the small English department at Durham, where he was responsible for developing the language courses, which hitherto had been focused on the cultural and textual history of Anglo-Saxon England. This was the period when he developed an approach to the relationship between language and literature. An early instance of this relationship is his translation of an Icelandic saga for his students, published in 1957: *The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*, edited with an introduction and notes by P. G. Foote. It led to a series of insightful papers in the developing area of stylistics, focusing on Shakespeare, Swift, Wordsworth, Dickens, T. S. Eliot and other literary greats, most of whom had never received any kind of linguistically informed analysis. He became a professor in the Department in 1958. His inaugural lecture, 'Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language', was held on 12 May 1959 and published in the same year.

The focus on the linguistic side of the relationship between language and literature and the teaching of the mother tongue came to the attention of the BBC, who invited him to give a series of broadcast lectures. This involved frequent weekend trips to London, where the BBC gave him a desk and access to its tapes and transcriptions of spontaneous speech in numerous discussion programmes. Like many linguists with a family, his children did not escape, producing data that were put to good use in the broadcasts. These lectures, where listeners often raised questions on current English usage, just as his students did in classes, made him aware of the rather unusual situation that there was no scholarly handbook on contemporary English grammar. England did not have its *Bon Usage* as the French, or a *Duden* as the Germans. Henry Sweet's *A New English Grammar Logical and Historical*, published at the turning of the twentieth century, was very dated. The modern English grammar then used as the standard reference book was R. W. Zandvoort's *A Handbook of English Grammar*. It had originally been written for Dutch students and was bilingual, but because of the great demand for a modern English grammar, a monolingual English edition was produced which came out in 1957. At that time, English grammar-writing was then in solid foreign hands, with the Netherlands and Sweden as leaders. These multi-volume works, written in English, all claimed to describe the modern language (Etsko Kruisinga's *A Handbook of Present-Day English*, Hendrik Poutsma's *A Grammar of Late Modern English* and Otto Jespersen's *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*), but they were far from being

so, being based on literary texts and having started publication in the first decades of the twentieth century.

As a consequence, during his years at Durham, RQ began to think seriously about the grammar of present-day and especially spoken English, both as an object of study and as a goal in teaching. The dual emphasis is seen in the collection of essays he edited with Hugh Smith in 1959 (London, revised 1964), *The Teaching of English*. There were so many variables to take into account that he early on saw the necessity of the computer and took a programming course with Ewan Page at Newcastle. Durham provided modest seed money for basic recording and analysis facilities, and RQ devised a long-term project for the description of English syntax. Several publishers were interested in supporting the proposal for a 'Survey of English Usage', especially Longman, and provided some basic funding for a research assistant. When in 1960 RQ moved back to UCL, as professor (1960–8, then Quain Professor, 1968–81), what he called his 'infant Survey' progressed rapidly, thanks to support from UCL provosts, the British Council (funding postgraduates and visits from senior scholars from abroad), the Ford Foundation (who brought over such scholars as Jim Sledd and Nelson Francis), the research councils and the major charities (such as Leverhulme), who were more than once called upon to help solve a Survey financial crisis. Longman set up a fellowship to fund visits from postdoctoral students, so they could use the Survey research to produce English-teaching materials when they returned home. The plans for the Survey were formally reported in a paper to the Philological Society in 1960. Annual reports on Survey progress were made thereafter, and are available for consultation in Survey archives and online: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/archives/index.htm (accessed 28 January 2019).

Several of the research assistants who worked on the Survey in those early years would later become known in various fields of linguistics, including the two authors of this memoir. David Crystal became the lead partner with RQ in devising the scheme by which the multiple systems of prosodic and paralinguistic features of speech were recognised, categorised and transcribed (*Systems of Prosodic and Paralinguistic Features in English*, The Hague, 1964); and RQ's collaborations with Jan Svartvik, Sidney Greenbaum and Ruth Kempson resulted in studies of psycholinguistic elicitation techniques and the notion of acceptability—aspects of the Survey that he felt significantly complemented the corpus analysis that was its central preoccupation (with Greenbaum, *Elicitation Experiments in English*, Harlow, 1970; with Svartvik, *Investigating Linguistic Acceptability,* The Hague, 1966; with Kempson, 'Controlled activation of latent contrast', in *Language*, 47 (1971), 548–72). The computational analysis became more sophisticated, with many nocturnal hours spent on off-peak access to the large Atlas machine in Gordon Square.

RQ directed the Survey from 1959 to 1983. The aim was to compile and analyse a databank, or corpus, of both written and spoken British English—an enterprise that went against the fashionable view of the time, with Noam Chomsky and other generative linguists arguing that personal intuition was all that was necessary for linguistic analysis. For RQ, this was not enough: to obtain a reliable account of all variations in the language, he believed one needed a wide sampling of authentic, observed language in use. Today, with corpus linguistics a major branch of the subject, it is easy to forget how daring this pioneering enterprise was, going as it did against the prevailing orthodoxy of the time—typical Quirk. And it was revolutionary in its scale: one million words—200 texts each of 5,000 words—including dialogue and monologue, and writing intended for both reading silently and reading aloud. In the modern world of Big Data, with online linguistic corpora of billions of words now routine, it is again easy to forget the enormous challenge of achieving a million-word target in a pre-digital era along with detailed accompanying annotations. The transcription of the spoken language required a huge investment of time, using heavy reel-to-reel tape recorders and repeaters, with the transcription painstakingly typed up onto small slips of paper and filed in storage cabinets while awaiting full grammatical and prosodic analysis.

The Survey took up the bulk of RQ's time in the 1960s and 1970s. His first major publication in London, making use of his BBC broadcast series, was *The Use of English* (London, 1962, enlarged edition 1968, with supplements by A. C. Gimson on English phonetics and Jeremy Warburg on notions of correctness). It was a truly ground-breaking work that stimulated innumerable readers to develop an interest in English language and language studies. Many of them (like the first writer of this memoir) would come to be able to quote from it by heart, and retell its anecdotes with impressive accuracy.

In 1972, the first large-scale work, based on the Survey's database of spoken and written contemporary English, appeared: *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (London), in collaboration with Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. Its successor, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London, 1985—with the same team and twenty-five years of joint scholarship), had a hugely increased data and research basis. Both works proved—according to unanimous scholarly acclaim—to be RQ's chief linguistic legacy. They were the first reference grammars of present-day English to be published in the twentieth century that were based on insights from modern linguistics; and the thirty-plus obituaries and personal tributes brought together on the Survey's 2018 website (https://uclsurveyofenglish.wordpress.com/2018/01/02/in-memory-of-randolph-quirk (accessed 28 January 2019)) repeatedly acknowledge the role these two books played in the writers' world, with adjectives such as 'monumental' a recurring theme. When the first grammar came out, Longman

dictionary editor-in-chief Della Summers wrote on that website: '*A Grammar of Contemporary English* was added to our reference library and immediately became the essential arbiter on any question of grammar, so much so that its approach to grammatical description was used in the new *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, and indeed it was to echo Randolph's work that the word 'contemporary' was put into the title of the dictionary.' Michael Swan similarly acknowledged the role these works played in informing the wider ELT (English Language Teaching) world: 'In producing these monumental reference guides, Randolph and his collaborators did a very great service not only to practitioners like myself, but directly and indirectly to the whole English-teaching profession.'

In the same year, 1972, RQ completed another major service to the nation. From 1969 to 1972 he was Chairman of the Committee of Enquiry into Speech Therapy Services: its Report would revolutionise the profession, not least by making it an all-graduate career and emphasising the importance of having language at the core of the speech therapist's discipline. Public recognition was overwhelming, and in 1975 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy on the basis of 'his sustained demonstration in his published works of the significant relation between linguistics and literature, by which the study of both subjects has been furthered; his initiation and expert direction of the Survey of English Usage at University College London; his service to national welfare as chairman of the Committee of Enquiry into Speech Therapy Services; his acknowledged international standing as a linguistician'.

After the publication of *A Grammar of Contemporary English* and its derivative works, the Survey of English Usage became a leading destination for scholars of the English language because of its new approach. The international impact caused queues of linguists from abroad eager to access the Survey material. Postgraduates from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, and elsewhere came to use the data for their dissertations. Professors of English Language visited, wanting to familiarise themselves with this new project in order to inform their students. Researchers spent time at the Survey to explore whether they might set up a similar research project in their own countries (and produce a grammar).

Many of the younger generation of researchers described the Survey atmosphere as unique: the help provided by the 'Survey gang' was generous, and RQ's presence was inspiring and encouraging. Every day there was a tea/coffee break when work stopped for half an hour. All moved to RQ's office (Survey staff with their own mugs, and spare mugs for visitors), brought their 5 or 10p for the tin box, and the Prof himself prepared the beverages. He returned to his desk, everyone else sitting around the table, and for (exactly) half an hour anything could jointly be discussed. At the end of the day, to clear the mind, squash was encouraged, with RQ playing anyone who could be persuaded to take him on. A close network was established, and many of the

young linguists from abroad became university chair-holders of English language in their respective countries (such as Liliane Haegeman, Sylviane Granger, Wolf-Dietrich Bald, Svetlana Terminasova and Ranko Bugarski). An international group of Surveyists came into being which in the European tradition would have been referred to as a 'school' or 'circle' (as in the Prague Circle or the Geneva School of Linguists).

At the same time as developing the Survey, RQ was taking a keen interest in the development of linguistics at UCL, and it was largely due to him that the subject grew there to become the major force it is today. During the 1960s he was part of a project to form a Communication Research Centre, and this led to 'a spot of energetic head-hunting in Edinburgh'. The result was the addition to the English department of a linguistics section headed by Michael Halliday and including Bob Dixon, Rodney Huddleston, Dick Hudson and Eugene Winter. Later, this section moved out of English and ultimately joined Phonetics to become the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics. The influence of Halliday on RQ's approach to grammar should be acknowledged at this point, as should some of the important consequences of Halliday's appointment: a large-scale project on linguistics in English teaching involving a large team of linguists and teachers during the 1960s, initially funded by Nuffield and later the Schools Council, and which had RQ's strong behind-the-scenes support; and Huddleston's project on the grammar of scientific English which ran alongside the Nuffield project between 1964 and 1967.

The international success of *A Grammar of Contemporary English* made the publisher Longman want to revitalise its dictionary publications. To this end a committee, Linglex, was set up which RQ was to chair for the best part of forty years. Della Summers describes him as 'the most formidable chair you could imagine, always nailing the point, always practical in finding a solution'. Linglex gave RQ the opportunity to stimulate and influence the study and description of vocabulary. With his knowledge of English, French, Latin, Icelandic and Swedish he had always been interested in the lexicon, semantic change and etymology, and especially in the way different languages lexicalise similar concepts. It was an interest that can be seen very early on, in his work on the *Middle English Dictionary* in Ann Arbor in the 1950s, and in the *Old English Grammar*, which includes a description of word-formation that was a new approach at the time. He taught lexicology at UCL for many years. His two major reference works are not only grammars: both *The Grammar of Contemporary English* and *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* include an Appendix on modern English word-formation—the first overview of this subject produced by a native speaker. He was a member of the Oxford Advisory Committee for the *Third Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, and was instrumental in securing financial support for the *Historical Thesaurus of the English Language* (1965–2009).

As Chairman of Linglex he was able to bring his interests in grammar, the lexicon and teaching together. When the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* came out in 1978, it was hailed as a revolution in lexicography for ELT. Until then, Oxford University Press had held a quasi-monopoly position with A. S. Hornby's *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. The new Longman dictionary developed a fresh approach that challenged Oxford's primacy, introducing a Quirkian grammatical description into the entries and using a defining vocabulary—a restricted set of some 2,000 lexical items—for the definitions. C. K. Ogden's influence (*Basic English*) is here clearly recognisable (he and C. K. Ogden were good friends).

Despite a heavy teaching and administrative load, RQ produced a steady stream of books and articles. He never forgot the need to make research available to a wider readership, and each of the big grammars was soon supplemented by an abridged text, written with Sidney Greenbaum: *A University Grammar of English* (Harlow, 1973) and *A Student's Grammar of the English Language* (Harlow, 1990). He enjoyed collaboration, evidenced by *A Common Language* (with A. H. Marckwardt, London, 1964), *Systems of Prosodic and Paralinguistic Features in English* (with David Crystal, The Hague, 1964), *Old English Literature: a Practical Introduction* (with Valerie Adams and Derek Davy, London, 1975), *A Corpus of English Conversation* (with Jan Svartvik, Lund, 1980), *English in the World* (with Henry Widdowson, Cambridge, 1985), and two books written with his second wife, German linguist Gabriele Stein (whom he married in 1984, his first marriage having been dissolved in 1979): *English in Use* (Harlow, 1990) and *An Introduction to Standard English* (Tokyo, 1993). The breadth of his interests is evident from these titles: his early historical fascination is still there, along with literary, linguistic and stylistic themes, and an increasingly global perspective on the language. Several collections of papers provide further illustration, notably *Essays on the English Language: Medieval and Modern* (which begins with a paper on Old English metrics and ends with one on grammatical acceptability, Harlow, 1968), *The English Language and Images of Matter* (London, 1972), *The Linguist and the English Language* (London, 1974), *Style and Communication in the English Language* (London, 1982) and *Words at Work: Lectures on Textual Structure* (based on the series of lectures he gave in Singapore as Lee Quan Yew Distinguished Visitor, 1985–6: Harlow, 1986).

In the 1980s his personal output slowed down, though his influence on the work of others continued throughout this period and beyond—he continued working at his office in the Survey until well into the 2000s—and his insights about gradient acceptability are still being revisited today. There were two very good reasons for the reduction in quantity. Firstly, most of his writing time was devoted to preparing the *Comprehensive Grammar*—a difficult task, given that the 'gang of four' were

geographically separated—Leech in Lancaster,[1] Svartvik in Lund—and of course in those days drafts of chapters had to be circulated by mail. And secondly, he was appointed Vice-Chancellor (VC) of the University of London in 1981, a position he held for four years ('another job, like my very first, that I didn't apply for and was in this instance very reluctant to accept'). The appointment did have one linguistic benefit, though: it meant that the occasional meetings of the four collaborators could take place in a spacious office in Gordon Square.

Why reluctant? He had been a member of the University of London Senate since 1970, and of the Court since 1972, but those were the austerity years of the Thatcher government when all universities faced severe cutbacks—in the case of London, a funding reduction of 17 per cent spread over three years—and RQ took up the role of VC in 1981 at a time when funding for universities in the UK was under continuing acute pressure. As events turned out, he was the last genuinely effective VC of London University, being as it was then still a properly functioning compound unit, with Boards of Studies approving the assignment of examiners and examination results at all levels, ensuring conformity of standards right across the institution. Moreover, since this was a time when VCs of Oxford and Cambridge were only of two-years duration and generally little more than a senior title without academic functionality, RQ was very influential and effective in the UK university sector as a whole, keeping the profile of humanities and social science high despite difficult financial circumstances. Furthermore, his tenure of the VC role was just at a time when Imperial College and UCL were urging their independence, with heavy pressure coming from the sciences; and arguably he showed considerable prescience in seeing that the only way to protect the colleges as viable units was to merge some, so that a move superficially implementing severe cuts, in the spirit of the time, had the reverse effect of ensuring the now very successful independent institutions of Queen Mary University of London (QMUL: the result of merging Queen Mary and Westfield Colleges) and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL: the result of merging Royal Holloway and Bedford Colleges), with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies as a notable further follower of this pattern, remaining very active and identifiable after its merger with UCL.

His period as VC ended with a knighthood (1985), an accolade that supplemented a CBE he had been awarded in 1976, and which would in turn be eclipsed by becoming a life peer in 1994, when he sat as a cross-bencher in the House of Lords, taking a special interest in educational issues. This concern had begun while he was VC. He records a meeting with the then Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph:

> In one of my chilly confrontations in the Senate House with Sir Keith, he told me

[1] See G. Myers, 'Geoffrey Neil Leech 1936–2014', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 16 (2017), pp. 147–68.

> bluntly that if his department had the kind of money I was seeking, he wouldn't give it to me but to where it was infinitely more badly needed. 'When were you last in any of our inner city comprehensives?' he asked. The following week he took me to one for a couple of hours, and the scales fell from my eyes. In all my years as a university teacher, I was ashamed to realise that I had never bothered to find out what sort of quality education the majority of schools meted out. Ever since, I've been trying to make restitution in whatever way I could.

As President of the British Academy (1985–9), and in the House of Lords, this is precisely what he did. In his own words:

> When I was President of the British Academy, I worked (as in so much these days, along with my wife, Gabriele Stein) at radically improving the new National Curriculum so as to ensure a better schooling 'for the many' as New Labour would say, without disrupting the kind of education expected of the growing numbers of students coming into the universities. We had some success in eradicating the emphasis on trivial aspects of grammar (such as the split infinitive) and introducing more serious attention to vocabulary, in the course of exposing the misplaced disdain for Standard English affected by many in the educational establishment.

His term as President of the British Academy coincided with an important phase in the institution's history, in which he played a key part. He was the first President to make the Academy, then in Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park, his principal academic base, becoming in effect an additional member of staff, taking over its small library as his office, and involving himself with trademark force and vigour in all its affairs. This was the more remarkable in that he assumed the presidency soon after major heart surgery (a quadruple bypass)—an event that caused great consternation among his colleagues—though the concern was replaced by amazement at the extraordinary rapidity with which he recovered, throwing himself into Academy activities ignoring all fears for his health. His presence proved immensely valuable in the daily conduct of business and in interactions with staff—he was always ready to try out and react to ideas in a wholly unbuttoned way. Interactions with members of staff and Council ranged from arguments as to the best way forward, which he didn't always win, to staff finding themselves recruited in linguistic experiments: he delighted the Secretary's daughter by treating her as an informant on teenage argot.

The period of his presidency covered the years when, with inimical conditions in the university sector, the absence of a Humanities Research Council was being increasingly felt, and though the Academy was encouraged by the government to regard itself as the next best thing, it could not offer the range or size of awards that, for example, its nearest equivalent, the Economic and Social Research Council, did in the social sciences. The Academy had already begun to assume wider responsibilities—in 1984 taking over from the Department of Education and Science the administration

of the national scheme for postgraduate studentships in the humanities, and it had begun to shape future policy in this area—and it was being called upon to involve itself more in national discussions on research policy and resource allocation, eventually to become fully integrated in the system. RQ's relations and standing with successive Secretaries of State and within such bodies as the University Grants Committee and the Advisory Board for the Research Councils were much to the Academy's advantage as he steered the institution through choppy waters.

These years also saw internal reorganisation and a major expansion in the Academy's activities, with RQ always a driving force. Apart from postgraduate studentships, there was a notable coup (1985) in the publicly funded scheme for three-year postdoctoral fellowships which, further expanded, remains to this day a principal element in the Academy's programmes. (RQ was fond of pointing out that three-quarters of the Academy's public grant went on the 'under thirties'.) To this was added a mid-career Research Readership programme—a submission to fund a top layer, as it were, of Research Professorships was unsuccessful, and had to await a later day—and a start was made in supporting what was then called 'group research', to complement the schemes for individual personal projects. These were publicly funded, an achievement in itself, but successful approaches were also made to private funders, not merely research foundations such as Wolfson and Leverhulme (which initiated support for group research projects), but also British Gas, Swan Hellenic (which agreed to finance research posts) and individual sponsors, notably Dr Marc Fitch. (One approach, which came to nothing, was to Robert Maxwell, who startled RQ initially by proposing to grant him a personal retainer as President of the Academy.) Structural change was also taking place within the Academy, as the recommendations of a review of the Section structure were implemented, intended to make the Academy more comprehensive ('representative' was the term of use) in its membership, particularly in the social sciences, and more sensitive to changing fields of scholarly enquiry, with a committee structure more closely articulated with work in universities and other institutions of higher education. The work and scope of the overseas (mainly archaeological) schools and institutes that were historically linked to the Academy also came under scrutiny, and there was a considerable growth in the Academy's international relations and contacts.

As Baron Lord Quirk of Bloomsbury, RQ joined the House of Lords in 1994, in whose activities, as ever, he combined wit with intense commitment. As he said in the Philological Society interview:

> Since entering the House of Lords, I have still further extended my interest in general educational issues to take up the disgracefully neglected matter of education and training for prisoners and 'young offenders'—the vast majority of them male and (even compared with our grossly under-educated population at large) disproportionately illiterate. In this respect too, I'm trying to make up for a happy, lucky life in the charmed circles of academia, though in another respect it's a return to an interest I indulged when I was in Durham. The Chief Constable was Alec Muir, brother of another friend Kenneth, who was Professor of English in Liverpool. Alec persuaded me to give a course of lectures for lifers and the like in Durham Gaol. I've never had more attentive and appreciative audiences!

He became a member of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology in 1998. His commitment to Upper Chamber work included the valuable support he provided in the setting up of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages in 2008, to which he went on to contribute actively, seeking to enrich children's literacy and language skills within the educational system, and doing everything possible to sustain a focus on how essential modern language skills are in economics, diplomacy, export growth—indeed, every aspect of UK life. Working behind the scenes he also made a contribution to the reciprocal health agreement between the Isle of Man and the United Kingdom in 2010.

His interest in educational matters of national importance in fact antedated both his British Academy and House of Lords days. He served on a committee looking into school examinations (the Lockwood Report was published by HMSO in 1964). He was seen as a hidden force behind the influential report of the committee headed by Sir John Kingman into the teaching of English (1988), whose impact would be seen a few years later in the National Curriculum for English. He was passionate in his advocacy of the need for young people to learn about their mother tongue, but was cautious about the teaching of grammar in schools. Grammar, he felt, should be taught well or not at all. What he really believed was missing in schools was the study of vocabulary, and it is thanks to him and his wife (also a lexical researcher) that the National Curriculum for English strongly and repeatedly emphasises the acquisition of a differentiated command of the vocabulary.

He was also very active in his ongoing support of the Wolfson Foundation, where he was a trustee (1987–2011), serving as Chairman of its Arts and Humanities Panel for many years, during which time a great deal of its investment in education matters was shaped by his energy and insight. During his chairmanship, not only was there ongoing support for history research through its Wolfson History Prize, but substantial sums were given for the care and restoration of historic buildings (notably St George's Hall in Liverpool), cathedrals (in particular, the transept of St Paul's,

London), churches (such as St Martin-in-the-Fields, London), major public gardens (such as the one at Kenilworth Castle), and libraries (including the London School of Economics, Queen's University Belfast and the British Museum for its Centre for Conservation). He also acted as a member of its Schools Panel, reflecting his deep interest in secondary education. The Academy in particular benefited from the leading role he played at Wolfson in supporting Humanities programmes over an extended period.

His reputation as a linguist made him much in demand by national bodies over and above the Academy and the Wolfson Foundation, and somehow he managed to find time to be an active presence in all of them. They included being a governor of the British Institute of Recorded Sound (1976–80) and the English-Speaking Union (ESU, 1980–5), and then vice-chair (the chairman was the Duke of Edinburgh) of the ESU's English Language Council. He chaired the A. S. Hornby Educational Trust (1979–93), the Anglo-Spanish Foundation (1983–5), and the British Library Advisory Committee (1984–97), and had periods as president of the Institute of Linguists (1982–5) and the College of Speech Therapists (1987–91) and as vice-president of the Foundation for Science and Technology (1986–90). He was a member of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art's Council (1985–2004) and of the Board of the British Council (1983–91) for whom he undertook many foreign tours, returning with detailed commissioned reports on the language situation in the countries specified. His lecture visits took him to China, Japan, Korea, Russia, South America, the USA, such Commonwealth countries as Australia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Malta, New Zealand ('in the only spell of sabbatical leave I ever had, 1975–6'), Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, Tonga, and closer to home to Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iraq, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and Yugoslavia. In him, English had an international voice.

Academic accolades were numerous. He was elected a member of Academia Europaea, the Royal Belgian Academy of Sciences, the Royal Swedish Academy, the Finnish Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was an honourable bencher at Gray's Inn, and was made an honorary fellow of the College of Speech Therapists, the Institute of Linguists, and most of the constituent colleges of the University of London. He was the recipient of many honorary doctorates: Aston, Bar Ilan, Bath, Brunel, Bucharest, Copenhagen, Durham, Essex, Glasgow, Helsinki, Leicester, Liège, London, Lund, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nijmegen, Open, Paris, Poznan, Prague, Queen Margaret, Reading, Richmond, Salford, Sheffield, Southern California, Uppsala and Westminster. The three other members of the 'gang of four'—Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik—edited a Festschrift for him, *Studies in English Linguistics* (London, 1980), in which his eclecticism is well

reflected in its thirty international contributors, including Noam Chomsky, Michael Halliday, Dwight Bolinger, Josef Vachek, Archibald Hill and Sven Jacobson—linguists who would be very unlikely otherwise to rub shoulders in the same volume.[2]

We can perhaps put RQ's achievements in perspective by recalling an earlier giant in the history of the English language. When the lexicon had developed to such a degree that there was a general public demand for an authoritative dictionary, Dr Johnson compiled the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) for the nation. Some three hundred years later, when English was on its way to becoming the world lingua franca, RQ produced what was needed: he gave the nation an authoritative grammar. As Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, Trustee of the Wolfson Foundation and a member of the House of Lords, he seized all the opportunities which presented themselves to raise the profile of the humanities and social sciences in their vital role for society. The devoted service which he gave to his country was exemplary.

When the news of his death was announced, on 20 December 2017, the public accolades were numerous, and a remarkable consistency emerged in the personal tributes listed on the UCL memorial page (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/about/quirk-memorial.htm (accessed 28 January 2019)). There is unanimity that he revitalised the scientific study of English grammar in the UK in the twentieth century, after almost half a century of academic neglect, and pointed the way towards the integrated study of language and literature. Students remember him as a charismatic, energetic and energising lecturer, recalling his clarity of expression, his wit and his gift for the apt and memorable example of language in use—characteristics reflected in the elegance of his writing. Junior colleagues recall his unfailing and enthusiastic support for whatever research topic they broached with him, generous with his time, giving them all his attention, offering incisive comments, and often following them up with a handwritten note. He launched the careers of many linguists, both in the UK and abroad, including the two writers of this memoir.

In a letter in 2000, RQ wrote to Keith Brown, at the time compiling an anthology of mini-autobiographies for the Philological Society: 'I have become increasingly convinced that my own personal history would not be worth reading and that, by writing one, I would be implying that I thought it was.' He reluctantly agreed to be interviewed, and much of the information in this memoir comes from that. The refusal to write his own autobiography was the only bad decision he ever made.

[2] That Festschrift also contains a list of his publications up to 1980, compiled by Valerie Adams.

Note: A memorial event in RQ's honour was held on 9 July 2019, hosted by the Academy.

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