

PROFESSORS OF LATIN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL 1884–1988:
PHILOLOGY, HELLENISM AND THE PROFESSIONALISATION
OF LATIN AT ENGLAND'S CIVIC UNIVERSITIES
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The story of Latin and its professors at the University of Liverpool (UK) is not only of intrinsic interest for its procession of prestigious figures and their scholarly achievements, but can also tell us much about the surprisingly slow emergence and gradual professionalization of Latin as a distinctive field of study in the UK, from the late Victorian wave of new university foundations to the late 20th century.¹

KEYWORDS

Latin, Greek, Classics, UK higher education, Liverpool University, Postgate, Walbank, Brink, Austin, Rudd, Cairns

Latin and the Origins of the University of Liverpool

The origins of the University of Liverpool can be traced back to several institutions already in existence in the early 19th century, but the modern institution edges into being in the late 1870s and early 1880s, with the grant of a charter in October 1881 to Liverpool University College.² Matthew Arnold gave the opening address at the first

¹ In telling this story I am profoundly indebted to Chris Stray, chief authority on the history of Classics in the UK — and author of an authoritative contribution on one of the early holders of the Liverpool Latin chair, John Percival Postgate (forthcoming). The present contribution was delivered as the second Postgate Lecture at the University of Liverpool in 2014. The material help and assistance of the following is also gratefully acknowledged: Adrian Allan, the late Ian DuQuesnay, Tom Harrison, John Henderson, Stephen Hinds, Niklas Holzberg, the late Niall Rudd, Richard Tarrant, and above all Tony Woodman (whose 2024 paper in this journal may usefully be read alongside the present paper). Sincere thanks are due also to the two anonymous peer reviewers who offered helpful criticisms and further food for thought.

² For the broad background of change in English higher education in the period 1870–1920, see Lowe (1987), and specifically on the origins of Manchester, Leeds and

full session of the College, on 30 September 1882. The first Principal of the College, G.H. Rendall, combined his post with the Gladstone Chair of Classical Literature and History; in 1884 his chair became the Gladstone Chair of Greek.³ Incorporation of the College into the newly created federal Victoria University based in Manchester was soon sought. Rendall reported to Senate in November 1882, after consultations with the Victoria University, that ‘in order to meet the requirements of the University it would be necessary, as a first step, to provide a Professor of Latin, a Professor of History, a Lecturer in Geology and Mineralogy, an additional Demonstrator in Chemistry, and some further assistance in Mathematics’.⁴ The substantial funds necessary to raise the posts specified by Rendall were raised by May 1884, and the College was formally incorporated into the Victoria University on 5 November 1884. The first Professor of Latin — of whom more in due course — had meanwhile been appointed with effect from 1 October 1884.⁵

The post of Professor of Latin is entwined with the origins of Liverpool as a University, but equally the creation of a Chair of Latin was part of a new wave within the broader study of Classics itself.⁶ We may think of the institutional study of Latin as a thing of great antiquity, stretching back well into the Middle Ages, yet Latin as a humane discipline possessed a low profile until a surprisingly recent date — at least in a specifically English context (matters were very different in Germany). In the early 19th century to its enduring shame England had only two universities (we are still feeling the effects); Scotland had four. Both Oxford and Cambridge possessed a Regius Chair of Greek: Cambridge since 1540, and Oxford since 1541; but Oxford did not have a Chair of Latin until 1854, and Cambridge did not endow theirs until 1869.⁷ The creation of a Chair of Latin at the University of Liverpool only

Liverpool universities, see Burstyn (1988). On the foundation of Birmingham University, see Ives, Drummond and Schwarz (2000).

³ Kelly (1981) 1–60.

⁴ Kelly (1981) 63

⁵ Kelly (1981) 63–4

⁶ For the close connections between the foundation of universities outside Oxbridge, the shift towards Latin (away from Hellenism), and the move towards subject specialism, see Stray (1998) 227–32.

⁷ The Chair of Humanity (i.e. Latin) at Glasgow, for example, stretches back to at least 1682. Matters were little different in Ireland: the Regius Chair of Greek at TCD was founded in 1761; the Chair of Latin in 1870. But the matter is slightly more complex than I present it here: for instance, Owens College — the predecessor of Manchester University — had a Chair of Latin from its foundation in 1851, held by J.G. Greenwood (concurrently with the Chair of Greek), later Principal of Owens College and the first

fifteen years after Cambridge at the very moment of the foundation of the University is part of the story in which Latin language and literature as disciplines start to come of age in England. If we now think of Vergil's *Aeneid* as an established classic of incontestable stature and grandeur, this was certainly not the view of many critics in mid-Victorian England. Gladstone — whose name was associated with the Chair of Greek at Liverpool — could in 1858 declare that the *Aeneid* was 'more like the performance of a trained athlete, between trick and strength, than the grandeur of free and simple Nature' and that Virgil 'does not sing from the heart, nor to the heart'.⁸ Gladstone preferred the 'primitive' and Romantic originality of Homer. It is only in the last third of the 19th century that views such as this begin to be challenged, and that Vergil — helped along by such advocates as Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson — began to be studied more widely at universities. Prior to that the study of Vergil tended to be confined to (elite) secondary level education.⁹

The creation of a Chair of Latin at the University of Liverpool in 1884 is part of that story, part of a new wave determined to give the study of Latin a higher institutional profile in England. That wave is everywhere in evidence at other civic universities as they come into existence in the later 19th century.¹⁰ What gives the Chair of Latin at Liverpool added interest is the simple fact that it has been held by some of the most

Vice-Chancellor of the (federal) Victoria University. But Owens College did not become part of that University until 1880.

⁸ Harrison (2007), who provides context for Henry Nettleship (third holder of the Corpus Chair) and his promotion of Vergil (building on the work of his predecessor Conington) in the last third of the 19th century, and for his attempts to introduce the German research 'method' — concentrating on textual criticism, and linguistic and stylistic analysis — into an Oxford obsessed with examinations and prose and verse composition.

⁹ Stray (2015) — where information on the progress of teaching Vergil in secondary level education is also provided.

¹⁰ The expansion of colleges (later universities) outside Oxbridge coincided with an agricultural depression which limited opportunities for new staff at Oxbridge (since many colleges depended on rural rents): hence the need and willingness for young graduates to move to these new institutions; see Stray (forthcoming). A.S. Wilkins is first Professor of Latin in Liverpool's sister institution in Manchester from 1880; Edward Sonnenschein is appointed first Professor of Greek and Latin in 1883 at the institution that would later become the University of Birmingham; and E.V. Arnold becomes first Professor of Latin in Bangor (a now forgotten centre of Classics) from 1884. On Sonnenschein see Stray (2004). A.S. Wilkins remains better known as the author of a substantial commentary on Cicero's *de Oratore* and editor of Cicero's rhetorical works in the *Oxford Classical Texts* series, not to mention an edition of the *Epistles* of Horace still in use up to the 1970s. There are entries on Wilkins both in the *ODNB* and in R. Todd (ed.), *Dictionary of British Classicists* (2004).

distinguished figures in the field in the last one hundred years. I review below not their institutional achievements, but rather their achievements as scholars, hoping to gain some insight into the history and development of Latin as a field of study in the UK from the late 19th century till the late 20th century.

The list of the holders of the Liverpool Chair of Latin between 1884 and 1988 is as follows:

1884–1909	Herbert Augustus Strong	106
1909–1920	John Percival Postgate, FBA	107
1920–1932	David Ansell Slater, FBA	109
1932–1945	Sir James Mountford (Vice Chancellor 1945–63)	111
1946–1951	Frank Walbank (later Rathbone Chair of Ancient History & Classical Archaeology, 1951–77), FBA	112
1951–1954	Charles Brink, FBA	113
1954–1968	R.G. Austin	115
1968–1973	Niall Rudd	117
1974–1988	Francis Cairns	119

H.A. Strong

Herbert Augustus Strong (1841–1918),¹¹ like several other figures on this list, passed through the University of Glasgow at an early point in his career. Glasgow had had a Chair of Humanity (i.e. Latin) since at least 1682: almost two centuries before anyone in England had thought to introduce the same. At the age of 30, Strong was appointed to the Chair of Classical and Comparative Philology and Logic at the University of Melbourne. In ill-health by 1883, he was granted leave of absence by Melbourne and returned to England, and took up the post in Liverpool in 1884.¹²

Prof. Strong's publication record is typical of its era in one important sense. This was a time when the study of language *per se* (rather than literature) was accorded great prestige. This was also a time before 'Philology' broke apart into 'Linguistics' on the one hand and a whole range of single-language specialisms on the other (of which Latin and

¹¹ Source: G.R. Manton *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 6 (1976) 209–10.

¹² Various *Testimonials in favour of Herbert A. Strong, M.A.* — now held in Glasgow — suggest that he applied for the Chair of Greek at Glasgow in 1875; for the Principalship of the College of North Wales in 1884; and later for the Chair of Humanity at Edinburgh in 1891. On the university of Melbourne, see Selleck (2003).

Greek were just one part).¹³ Alongside contributions of an obviously classical nature, Strong produced a series of books on other Indo-European languages, including an adaptation of a standard work, originally German, entitled *Introduction to the Study of the History of Language* (1891), plus — in collaboration with the Liverpool Chair of Teutonic Languages, Kuno Meyer — an *Outline of a History of the German Language* (1886), and *An Historical Reader of Early French* (1901), and so on.¹⁴

J.P. Postgate

The next holder of the Chair, John Percival Postgate, is something of a transitional figure, since he shared Strong's interest in Indo-European languages, but other aspects of his work look forward to the increasing specialization of the Humanities, and in particular to the on-going establishment of Latin literature as a field of study all of its own. Before arriving in Liverpool in 1909, Postgate combined duties as classical lecturer in Cambridge with the post of professor of Comparative Philology at University College London, until 1910. (The duties of the latter post appear not to have been too taxing.) He produced grammatical and linguistic works, ranging from his *New Latin Primer* of 1888 to the introduction written for C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards' *Meaning of Meaning* of 1923.¹⁵ Postgate also published an impressive series of Classical works on which his reputation rests today, namely editions and commentaries of the major Latin poets, including Propertius, Tibullus, Lucan and his most ambitious work, the *Corpus Poetarum Latinorum*.

¹³ For philology and the humanities, see Turner (2014).

¹⁴ On Strong's personal side, I owe the following piece of information to Adrian Allan (*per e-litteras*), former University Archivist at Liverpool: 'Consulting copies of University College Magazine and its successor *The Sphinx* for another purpose — the creation of a bibliography of the history of the University — I was interested to read what Prof. Postgate's predecessor, Prof. Strong, had to say about "The Education of Women" (*UCM*, Vol. V, 1890, pp. 8–14) — revealing that if he had a daughter he would deem it "unwise to place her in a position where she is led to regard the attainment of academical distinctions or even the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake as the sole object of a girl's life", women having to "remember ... that they are intended to be wives and mothers". One receives a different impression of Prof. Strong on viewing his portrait or on reading such as the account of one of his annual Latin Socials, in October 1906, with draughts, chess, cards, choruses, songs and an ample supply of refreshments provided (*The Sphinx*, Vol. 14, No.2, p.33).'

¹⁵ We shall see this *New Latin Primer* again soon: its main — and ultimately triumphant — rival was B.H. Kennedy's *Revised Latin Primer* also of 1888, set to be revised once more by one of Postgate's successors at Liverpool.

(Postgate was general editor of this enterprise, which aimed to make available in two volumes modern critical texts of every Latin poet between Ennius in the second century BCE and Juvenal in the second century CE.) Characteristically of the age, the emphasis is on work of a textual critical nature: the study of Latin *literature* is still in its infancy, despite the efforts of W.Y. Sellar (1825–90) and others.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear from Postgate's publishing career that Latin is emerging as a distinct area in its own right. I have already mentioned the break up of 'Philology' into 'Linguistics' and a range of single-language specialisms. Now is the time to say something about its causes.

Since at least the middle of the 19th century, there had been a move to challenge the dominance of Greek and Latin as the pre-eminent fields of study. And no wonder: such learning — thanks in part to the fact that England had only two universities, both of them overtly religious in character — was strongly associated with 'an oppressive social hierarchy represented by the college dons of the Oxbridge Anglican establishment'.¹⁷ To develop the study of other fields was thus to challenge this hierarchy. Despite the work of characters such as Strong (whose work crossed the boundaries between Greek, Latin and a range of other languages), we find Indo-European philology — i.e. 'Linguistics' — gradually developing as a rival field. This rival field even possessed its own queen of languages to steal the crown of Greek, namely Sanskrit. In the 1890s a whole series of subject associations — such as the Modern Languages Association — were established to promote non-classical subjects. All of these things were part of 'a more general movement towards the construction of a university curriculum of separate specialist subjects, which challenged the old dominance of mathematics at Cambridge and of Classics at Oxford'.¹⁸

This is the context in which Postgate belongs. It was not just in the Universities that things were changing. The 1902 Education Act — the first major instance in England of state intervention in secondary school education — gave notice that Greek and Latin would be removed from their position of dominance within the curriculum, and much greater space would be given to science and modern languages.¹⁹ One result was the foundation in 1903 of a new association to advocate the interests of

¹⁶ Sellars was author of several ground-breaking volumes, including *The Roman Poets of the Republic* (1863), *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age* (1877) and *Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (1892) — all frequently reprinted.

¹⁷ Stray (2004).

¹⁸ Stray (2004).

¹⁹ Stray (2003) 5–7. For Postgate's own reaction to the 1902 Education Act, see Postgate (1902).

Greek and Latin: the Classical Association. One figure who played a leading part in its foundation was in fact Postgate, first Honorary Secretary of the Association (1903–6) and later President in 1924–5, just after he had retired from Liverpool. The age of subject specialism was under way.

Why did Postgate come to Liverpool in 1909 after 25 years as a Fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge? First, an intuition, correct, as it turned out, that A.E. Housman would get the Cambridge Chair of Latin (which finally fell vacant in late 1910).²⁰ Secondly, the (frankly) enormous salary. In 1907 the Cambridge chair carried a salary of only £300, although this was subsequently raised to £800 after Housman's election. In Liverpool, meanwhile, a professorial salary was fixed at £500 a year, plus a share in student fees, which could amount to anywhere between £600 and £1000.²¹ In other words, Postgate could rely on a salary of more than £1000 a year: well over three times that on offer in Cambridge in 1909. Postgate also felt himself to be on 'a mission', bringing Classics to the industrial and commercial north.²²

D.A. Slater

From Postgate we turn to the perhaps rather less well-known figure of David Ansell Slater.²³ Like Strong, Slater held a lectureship at Glasgow early in his career, followed by the Chair of Latin at Cardiff in 1903 and then the Chair of Latin at Bedford College in London in 1914. In 1920 Slater then accepted the Latin Chair at Liverpool. One clear attraction — apart from the cash — must have been the identity of its previous incumbent, who was by then 'a scholar of European reputation'.²⁴ Slater continued in the trajectory begun by Postgate, moving ever further away from the multi-disciplinary interests of an earlier era and ever deeper into Latin as a specialist subject. Like Postgate, Slater's strengths lay in textual criticism, and while at Liverpool he published, in 1927, the book which

²⁰ On Housman and Postgate, see Hopkinson (2009).

²¹ Stray (forthcoming).

²² Stray, *ODNB*: Postgate, John Percival; Stray (forthcoming). While at Liverpool, Postgate produced several works, including one which is still in print and widely used to this day: the Loeb Classical Library text of Tibullus. And in general, one might add, while his other works are rarely read in their entirety today, his name can frequently be glimpsed at the foot of the page of today's critical editions of Propertius, Tibullus, and other writers, where his conjectures are still frequently cited and discussed. Upon his death in 1926, Postgate's bequest came (eventually) to Liverpool, bringing a sum of £27,000.

²³ Garrod (1939).

²⁴ Garrod (1939).

established his reputation and won him his FBA election: *Towards a Text of [Ovid's] Metamorphoses*. In the evaluation of Richard Tarrant, leading authority on the text of Ovid's great epic poem,²⁵ Slater's work is invaluable, because in it he '... tracked down three manuscripts that were of primary value for constituting the text, thereby nearly doubling the number of essential manuscripts. [Furthermore] the text [of the *Metamorphoses*] that [the book] proposed to print was radical for its time in departing often from the readings of the oldest manuscripts and in adopting conjectures, both his own and those of previous scholars'. It is some indication of the vastness of Slater's subject — and of the importance of his pioneering work — that no fully authoritative text of the *Metamorphoses* would appear until 2004.²⁶

²⁵ Richard Tarrant, *per e-litteras*, whose generous fuller estimation reads: 'After getting the commission to do the OCT of the *Metamorphoses*, Slater spent a number of years delving into the manuscript tradition and made several significant discoveries. First, he found in the Bodleian some editions of Ovid into which Nicolaas Heinsius had entered collations of numerous manuscripts not known to editors in Slater's day. (The other Heinsian collations had ended up in Berlin and did not come to light for another few decades.) Using the information provided by Heinsius, Slater then tracked down three manuscripts that were of primary value for constituting the text, thereby nearly doubling the number of essential manuscripts. The text that he proposed to print was radical for its time in departing often from the readings of the oldest manuscripts and in adopting conjectures, both his own and those of previous scholars, Heinsius in particular. Had it appeared as an OCT it would have had a profound impact on the textual study of the Met. Unfortunately, Slater's material was too abundant to fit into the confines of an OCT apparatus and he did not have the will or inclination to abridge it. The unique solution adopted was to publish the apparatus alone, with a lengthy Latin preface. Although that format, and the rarity of the book, has limited its circulation, Slater's apparatus has been an indispensable resource for all subsequent editors, myself included; it is in fact still useful for any scholar who wants to see a more generous citation of manuscript evidence than I was able to accommodate in the apparatus of my edition'.

²⁶ That text is the Oxford Classical Text of Tarrant (2004). In fact Slater, while at Liverpool and during his retirement after 1932, planned to complete a text of the *Metamorphoses* for the same OCT series; but it was not to be. See Garrod (1939) for the story.

Sir James Mountford

In his retirement, Slater continued to live at Hoylake on the Wirrall.²⁷ Meanwhile, a successor had been appointed: James Mountford, Professor of Latin 1932–1945, knighted in 1953. Mountford came to Liverpool after a stint as Professor of Latin at University College Aberystwyth (1928–32) and before that at Cornell in the United States (1924–7).²⁸ His early career saw him publish on Greek music and on the ancient commentary traditions which surround Terence and Vergil. He also revised, in 1930, the standard Latin grammatical textbook (still in use) known as *Kennedy's Revised Latin Primer*. Postgate, albeit dead only four years previously, would hardly have been pleased with this aspect of his successor's work, since it contributed to the further eclipse of his own *New Latin Primer* (of 1888), despite the fact that Postgate's book was perhaps the better volume.²⁹

However, unlike Postgate and Slater, we cannot fit Mountford into a narrative of growing specialization and the growth of Latin as a subject for teaching and research. And for one reason: in the words of the entry on Mountford in the *Dictionary of British Classicists*, 'Mountford was one of those classicists whose scholarly output was cut short by a move into other fields'. Mountford, after a stint as Dean of the Arts Faculty (1941–5), became Vice Chancellor of Liverpool, immediately after the war, between 1945 and 1963. In a volume published in 1996 to commemorate the centenary of the Faculty of Arts at Liverpool, Richard Lawton — Professor of Geography between 1970 and 1983 and Dean of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies (1977–80) — calls Mountford 'arguably the most able of the University's Vice-Chancellors to date'.³⁰ Mountford was certainly fortunate to guide the University for just under two decades immediately after the war, and to retire in the year in which the Robbins report came out: the moment that marked the acceptance of plans for decisive increase in the number of students and of universities in the UK from 1967 onwards. In the words of the official

²⁷ Garrod (1939) 351 adds 'Hoylake, as he first knew it, was an unpretending fishing village; the Mersey tunnel had not yet let in the world, but sea-scape and landscape could be seen as Turner saw them. But now old things were giving place to new.'

²⁸ For these and other career details, see the entry for Mountford by C.A. Stray in R. Todd (ed.), *The Dictionary of British Classicists* (2004).

²⁹ See Stray (f'coming). For Mountford's involvement in the revision of another textbook of this kind (*Bradley's Arnold*) — on which Frank Walbank also collaborated — see Walbank (1992) 156–7: it is still in print. To understand this aspect of a scholar's publishing activity, we must not forget the vast schools market, where Latin remained a compulsory subject for many until 1958.

³⁰ Hair (1996) 113.

historian of the University up to 1981, '[l]ooking back from the stressful years that followed, the Mountford era seems one of peaceful and untroubled progress, a 'honeymoon period' as Mountford himself once called it, in which money flowed freely from the coffers of the state to finance university development'.³¹

Frank Walbank

A very warm portrait of Mountford emerges from the various memoirs left by his successor in the Chair of Latin: Frank Walbank.³² Walbank (the first of the holders of the Chair of Latin that I actually met) shares with Mountford the quality of being hard to fit into a narrative about the development of Latin as a subject. But for somewhat different reasons from Mountford. For Professor Walbank was no Latinist — as he himself cheerfully admitted. Rather, as his obituarist Peter Garnsey put it in the *Independent* in 2008:

Frank Walbank ... was one of the greatest ancient historians of the 20th century. For around half a century he defined and dominated the field of Hellenistic history. Above all he was the unchallenged expert on the Greek politician and historian Polybius, who composed his history of Rome around the middle of the second century BC. Walbank's magnum opus is the monumental three-volume Historical Commentary on Polybius — a project launched in 1944 and completed in 1979 — which is widely regarded as the finest commentary ever composed on a historical author from antiquity.³³

Walbank would go on to hold the Rathbone Chair of Ancient History from 1951 to 1977. Yet, as he himself records it in his memoir *Hypomnemata* (1992), being elected to the Chair of Latin in 1946 was 'one of the great moments of my life'.³⁴

³¹ Kelly (1981) 291.

³² Walbank in Hair (1996) 101–5, and Walbank (1992). Extensive archival material on Walbank is held at the Sydney Jones library at the University of Liverpool, including his inaugural lecture as Professor of Latin, 'The Roman Historians on the Roman Republic' (1946); see Zucchetti (2021). See also the British Academy obituary by Davies (2011).

³³ *Independent*, 28.10.08. On the Polybius commentaries, see Henderson (2013).

³⁴ His exemplary handling of a tricky question at the interview for the chair — as he records it himself — is also worth quoting: 'The interview went reasonably well, but I was a little disturbed when Mountford, who was in the chair as Vice-Chancellor (somewhat anomalously, since it was his chair that was being filled), asked me what

Walbank was not quite not a Latinist. Not only did he nearly end up working on the Roman historian Tacitus rather than the Hellenistic Greek historian Polybius;³⁵ he was also the author of a publication on Latin poetry. He relates how, soon after his arrival in the Department of Latin at Liverpool in 1934:

Mountford started a regular staff seminar group to read Virgil's *Eclogues* ... Later we went on to the *Georgics*, and as a result I wrote an article, later published in the *Classical Quarterly*, in which I was given considerable help by Mary [Walbank]. It was entitled 'Licia telae addere' and dealt with a passage in the *Georgics* describing the setting up of a loom; most editors had shown a deplorable ignorance of what the words meant and how a loom actually worked. This article was subsequently to be of quite unforeseen importance in my career for when, many years later, I was a candidate for the Chair of Latin, it was quoted to my advantage as evidence that I was a genuine Latinist and not simply a historian in disguise (which of course I really was).³⁶

After relinquishing his Chair of Ancient History and the post of Dean of Faculty of the Arts in 1977, Prof. Walbank retired to Cambridge, where he had been a student in the late 20s and early 30s. (It was in Cambridge that I met Professor Walbank, while myself still a graduate student, in perhaps 1990 or so.)

C.O. Brink

The next incumbent of the Chair was one of the century's most formidable Latinists, Charles Oscar [Karl Levy] Brink, who held the post for three years in the early 1950s. Brink was of German Jewish descent, and liked to style himself an émigré, although 'refugee' might be nearer the mark, given the relatively late date (1938) at which he left Germany (where, of course, his employment had been terminated). At that date, Germany led the world in terms of the rigour and professionalism of its research and research methodology, and Brink is part of that generation of German-

my reaction would be if I were appointed now, and later a chair were to come vacant in the near future in, for example, Ancient History. This was no hypothetical situation, since Ormerod was due to retire in about five years' time. Apparently my non-committal answer to this question was thought to be satisfactory' (Walbank (1992) 203).

³⁵ For the story of the miscommunication with Syme — then in Turkey — that led to work on Polybius rather than Tacitus, see Walbank (1992) 194–5.

³⁶ Walbank (1992) 154–5.

Jewish scholars who immeasurably enriched and even transformed the study of humanities, including Latin, in this country with the new standards and expectations which they brought with them.³⁷ Other members of this elite band include Otto Skutsch, who found employment first in Manchester, and then as Professor of Latin at UCL from 1951; and Eduard Fraenkel, Professor of Latin at Oxford from 1934.³⁸

Thanks in part to these giants of the field, the post-war decades began to witness a remarkable efflorescence of Latin studies. We find above all a new seriousness and self-confidence about the study of Latin poetry as literature — alongside more the traditional interests in language and textual criticism found so abundantly in the work of previous incumbents of the Liverpool Latin chair. Indeed in his inaugural lecture delivered at Liverpool, Brink ‘argued that a professor of Latin ought to concern himself not only with the Latin language and the culture from which it sprang, but also with the question of what made a particular “great” Latin poem “great”’.³⁹

After some time spent in Oxford and St Andrews, Brink came to Liverpool in 1951 — although he may already have passed through in June 1940 on his way to internment on the Isle of Man as an ‘enemy alien’ (from which he was released in October 1940). Brink’s main interests for much of his career were in ancient literary criticism, and the series of prolegomena and commentaries that he would produce on Horace’s poems on the art of poetry — the second book of *Epistles* and the *Ars Poetica* — are those on which his reputation rests today. Brink’s work on the *Ars Poetica* is a case of the unfathomable commentary meeting the inexplicable text; but what keeps readers coming back for more is the fact that it does indeed take the *Ars Poetica* seriously as a poem, and not as a thesis that has been made to scan as a bunch of hexameters.

In the early 1950s, all this was still in front of Brink, and the first volume in the Horace series would not appear until 1963 (and the third and last in 1982). However, Brink’s time in Liverpool did produce one notable piece, which was the outcome of collaboration with his predecessor in the Chair of Latin. For Walbank appears to have inspired

³⁷ See the essays in Crawford, Ulmschneider and Elsner (2017).

³⁸ Otto Skutsch (Manchester University 1939–51) was in fact offered the Liverpool Chair in 1951 before he rejected it in favour of UCL. The Chair was then offered to Brink; see Jocelyn (1996) 332.

³⁹ Jocelyn (1996) 333: the title of the inaugural was *Imagination and Imitation* (publ. 1953). For Brink’s inaugural lecture at Liverpool as, in fact, taking issue with Housman — the Elephant in the Room, here — and the latter’s notorious rejection of literary criticism in favour of more purely textual studies, see Jocelyn (1996) 333 (cf. op. cit. 334–5 for the similar tenor of Brink’s Cambridge inaugural).

Brink to work on Polybius, and together they produced an important article which demonstrates the ‘basic unity of Polybius’ treatment of the Roman constitution⁴⁰ in the sixth book of his history.

R.G. Austin

Brink left Liverpool in 1954 to travel in the opposite direction from Postgate, since in that year he had been elected to the Cambridge Chair of Latin. The next incumbent of the Liverpool Chair — R.G. Austin (1954–68) — is apt to seem a figure from a much earlier age, before even that of Brink.⁴¹ This is partly the product of training, partly of age. Brink was in his early 40s when he accepted the Liverpool chair, while Austin was nearly a decade older (after an earlier career which partially replicated that of Slater, with a post at Glasgow and the Chair of Latin at Cardiff).⁴² Training and method also play their part: Brink was part of the introduction of German research methods into British classics, while Austin was a product of a 1920s education which still valued prose and verse composition as the height of scholarly achievement.

Austin shared one vital thing with Brink, and in his own way his scholarship — although less rigorous and profound than Brink’s — has been in its own way just as successful. Austin’s reputation rests, above all, on four commentaries on Vergil’s *Aeneid* (Books 1, 2, 4 and 6), two of which were published while in post at Liverpool (and two just after).⁴³ In his preface to his commentary on Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Austin asserts:⁴⁴

I felt that there was room for a commentary which should try to show something of Virgil’s method, thought, and art to a type of student for which the existing editions were not designed. ... [Such students] need to be reminded that Latin literature is not something hermetically

⁴⁰ R. Todd (ed.), *Dictionary of British Classicists* (2004) 106; cf. the account of Jocelyn (1996) 333–4.

⁴¹ The official historian of the University of Liverpool says as much — from an institutional viewpoint — when he writes: ‘Austin more than anyone typified the old tradition [in terms of teaching and research]. “This has been a tranquil year,” he wrote in his report for 1966–7. “Student numbers continue to be satisfactory, and there was sound quality in the new entry”. We can imagine him sitting back contentedly, and reaching for his Virgil. But already change was in the air’ (Kelly (1981) 352).

⁴² For Austin’s career, see Henderson (2006) 11–13, R. Todd, *Dictionary of British Classicists* (2004) s.v. Austin, R.G. (by C.A. Stray).

⁴³ Although the work on the first (*Aeneid* 4) was completed in Cardiff; see Austin (1955) v, Henderson (2006) 48.

⁴⁴ Austin (1955) v. For context and commentary, see Henderson (2006) 22–3.

sealed, but it is related to other literatures that form part of many degree courses. They need to be shown Virgil as a poet, with a poet's mind, not as a mere quarry for examiners.

This is what he shares with Brink: a confident determination to treat Latin poetry as literature. Here we must not forget the long shadow cast over the study of Latin by A.E. Housman, who dealt only with textual criticism and had notoriously refused to discuss poetry as literature (despite himself being a published poet).

It is perhaps true that Austin could take his enthusiasm for all things Latin too far at times. It is said that as Head of Department he was rather too fond of reminding his Hellenist colleagues of 146 BCE — the catastrophe that marked the Roman conquest of Greece.⁴⁵ But this in itself nicely encapsulates the buoyant confidence that Latinists could now feel about their subject. A darker aspect to this new confidence was the situation in the schools: the increasing rarity of Greek at secondary level since the 1920s meant that most classical students in Britain were now taking degrees in single honours Latin.⁴⁶ The reinvention of British classics — where students could routinely learn Greek and Latin from scratch at tertiary level — was thirty years away.

At any rate, it is the motivation and design of Austin's commentaries — as outlined in that preface — which has ensured their longevity. In some respects they are beginning to show their age; but they have not yet been superseded and are still in print and in use to this day wherever Classics are taught in the Anglophone world.⁴⁷ Austin's commentaries on Vergil (and Cicero) are in fact the subject of separate study in a monograph published in 2006 by John Henderson entitled *Oxford Reds* (an

⁴⁵ Henderson (2006) 13 n. 16.

⁴⁶ For the full story, see Stray (1998) 271–97 ('The Realm of Latin, 1920–1960'). Cf. Henderson (2006) 27–8, 'A truth borne on post-war "teachers", however uncongenial to "scholars", for the majority of students outside Loxbridge now took degrees in Latin only (chizz) and British universities only abolished bloody "Compulsory Latin" in 1958 — the "last remaining institutional prop for the study of Classics in school"' (Stray (1998) 277).

⁴⁷ And not just in the UK: a colleague at a university in Germany tells me they are his preferred Vergil commentary for his graduate seminar (although he much prefers the days when a German classicist could safely ignore anything written in English — long gone, of course). For Austin's commentaries in the context of subsequent research into Vergil, see Henderson (2006) 68–9.

allusion to the maroon boards in which these OUP volumes, and others like them, were originally bound).⁴⁸ In the judgement of Henderson:⁴⁹

Roland Austin set the standard for the ‘practical’ commentary in English on texts from the Latin canon. ... ‘R.G. Austin’ really did name for me what ‘Latin’ means, his Virgil commentaries *were* (it so happens) my teachers in Latin scholarship as ... school student and ... undergraduate through the 60s.

Austin may have published all four of his Vergil commentaries while in post at Liverpool or in retirement immediately after. But why was only one both begun *and* published while in post? The answer is found in a letter written to his editor at OUP, dated 10 March 1957:⁵⁰

I fancy that my [commentary on Book] II will have to wait till I retire. I have never found a place like this for continuous hard work, and heaven knows when I can squeeze proper time again — but I shall do my best.

And when Austin finally came to retire in 1968, there was considerable debate within the institution as to whether another Professor of Latin should be appointed. It was only when an unfriendly voice from Geography pointed out — as an argument for discontinuing the post — that “There is no Professor of Latin at the University of Salford”, that the matter was settled. The post was advertised immediately.⁵¹ Yet there was a warning here that Latin would have to justify its existence in the modern university.

Niall Rudd

Austin was succeeded by Niall Rudd in 1968: something of a coup for the University. Horace’s *Satires* are a mainstay of the classical curriculum today, and indeed remain a rather fashionable area for research. This was

⁴⁸ In his review of Henderson (2006) in the *TLS* for 9.02.07 (p. 8), Oswyn Murray asserts ‘All the four authors he investigates [Austin, Fordyce, Nisbet senior and junior] belong to a notorious cabal, the Balliol–Glasgow mafia, whose origin deserves explanation’.

⁴⁹ Henderson (2006) 9, 13 (continuing: ‘And they all parade, where it cannot be missed, a dedicated mission to teach the lesson that Roman culture meant to teach ‘Latinity’ as its lesson. Austin explains how his authors teach the formation of the responsible person by education’); cf. *op. cit.* 38.

⁵⁰ Henderson (2006) 54.

⁵¹ Niall Rudd, *per litteras*.

arguably *not* the case in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Rudd began to publish on the *Satires*. In 1966, while he was in Toronto, CUP brought out a substantial book which gathered his thinking on Horace's *Satires* together under one cover, and it is no understatement to say that it created something of a sensation when it was published. It is still in print today with Bristol Classical Press.⁵² In particular, Rudd represented a new way of thinking quite different from that evident in the work of Austin and Brink, although sharing their confidence in Latin as a literature. Spending the years 1958–68 (at Toronto) in North America were crucial here.⁵³ For Rudd was part of a new wave of thinking sweeping into Classics in the 1960s from nearby subjects such as English, a wave that demanded the application of fresh critical approaches to provide insights into classical texts. If Austin had been open to the idea of pointing out connections with other literatures, Rudd was determined to import the *methods* used to study those other literatures.

The line to be drawn with the past was well summed up in the introduction which Rudd wrote in 1972 (the year before his move to Bristol) for a collection of essays from the Classical journal *Arion*, where he looked back on the strengths and (more usefully) the weaknesses of the old-fashioned classical student:⁵⁴

They will tend to assume that in a given context a word or phrase has a single meaning which can be discovered and demonstrated by logical argument; for them ambiguity is a sign of sloppy thinking if not of actual deceit.

This was heresy in some quarters in the early 1970s, although such ideas had been around in the humanities since at least the 1920s.⁵⁵ Rudd's break with the past would be evident in other ways too. His subsequent book publications would take in further collections of essays on a range of subjects, especially satire and (at least a decade ahead of its time) the later classical tradition; but there would be no major commentary before his 1989 CUP edition of Horace's *Epistles* Book 2 (including the *Ars Poetica*) — a return visit to the vineyard in which Charles Brink laboured so long⁵⁶ — and his magisterial edition of Horace's *Odes* 3 for OUP with

⁵² Rudd (1966) and later reprints.

⁵³ For an account of his time there, see Rudd (2003).

⁵⁴ Rudd (1972).

⁵⁵ See Eagleton (2022) on Eliot, Richards, Empson and others.

⁵⁶ In the preface to the commentary — which belongs to the CUP 'green and yellow' series, which happily caters for both students and critics alike — Rudd explains the need for a return visit to these texts with a new commentary: 'The virtues of that

Prof. Robin Nisbet. The writing of commentaries characterized the work of Postgate, Walbank, and Austin as well as Brink. In the 1960s the commentary format was perhaps beginning to feel too much like the past: not open enough to the influences coming from other fields, where commentaries were more rarely written (except, for example, in New Testament studies and related Biblical areas). In due course, the format would undergo re-invigoration, above all from the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics ('green and yellow') series.⁵⁷

Francis Cairns

Rudd's successor Francis Cairns — another Liverpool chair of Latin with Glaswegian connections (having obtained his first degree there in 1961)⁵⁸ — represented a different direction in terms of critical thinking, from the moment of his appointment in 1974. Cairns' research achievement is unassailable: author of over 180 articles on an extraordinary range of subjects, from classical Greek epigraphy to Renaissance Italy and beyond, editor of 19 volumes of the *PLLS* series, and writer of five authoritative monographs (but, so far, no commentaries). The core of his work has always concerned the Augustan poets, especially Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, and Vergil. His first monograph — *Generic Composition* — of 1972, love it or loathe it, has influenced even those who have not read it.⁵⁹ But

massive and meticulous work are well known. It remains and will long remain, the standard study ... But these same virtues entail certain drawbacks. [Price being one of them. Another one is ...] ... some readers (including the present editor) occasionally find the sophistication and subtlety of Brink's exposition rather daunting' (Rudd (1989) vii).

⁵⁷ Gibson (2021).

⁵⁸ Cairns belongs to the 'Glasgow–Balliol' mafia identified by Osywn Murray (2007: above n. 48), having obtained B.A. Lit. Hum. at Balliol in 1963 after leaving Glasgow. Subsequent posts include: Lecturer in Humanity, Edinburgh (1966–73); Chair of Latin, Liverpool (1974–88); Chair of Latin, Leeds (1989–99: Research Professor, 1999–2001); Professor of Classical Languages, The Florida State University (2000–). Perhaps I can be permitted one personal memory of Cairns (who was very kind to me at the very start of my career, at Manchester in the early 1990s). Arriving at Cairns' Birkenhead house to discuss revision of an article, I suddenly spotted — to my momentary horror — the severed head of a large doll at a window on the first floor. I cried out 'What in the name of God is *that*?'. '*That*,' said Francis, looking upwards, 'is much cheaper than a burglar alarm'.

⁵⁹ This book argues that ancient poets composed by reference, whether negative or positive, to a series of conventions, later formalized in ancient rhetorical theory, which applied to the subject matter they chose to handle. *Generic Composition* went on to create an entire climate of opinion within the field in the 1970s and 1980s.

just as important as any of this was the Liverpool Latin Seminar, which ran for ten years between 1975 and 1985.⁶⁰

Following the expansion of Universities in the 1960s, a lot of new, young staff had been appointed to departments of Classics all over Britain. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of the young appointees to Latin posts were beginning to achieve a reputation for their research, both nationally and internationally. There appears to have been a feeling abroad that ‘redbrick’ universities — a term invented at Liverpool — could improve matters for themselves, and that a seminar culture would help things along.⁶¹ Oxbridge had the numbers to sustain naturally self-reinforcing seminars; but was not notably welcoming to outsiders. London had (among other things) the Roman Society, which served much of the south-east of the country. Outside London and Oxbridge, numbers of staff with Latin interests were high in the aggregate, but relatively low within individual institutions: a whole generation of bright, ambitious Latinists found themselves (apparently) with no one to talk to.

Someone had the bright idea of running a series of peripatetic seminars for Latinists outside Oxbridge and London. No one I have spoken to can quite remember when it started; but what is clear is that the seminar was named *Boreas* — the Greek name for the north wind — and that it began in Newcastle with David West and others, met at least once in Leeds, and seems to have fizzled out, perhaps after a proposed meeting in Scotland never came to fruition.⁶² It was now that Cairns seized the initiative: just one year after his appointment to Liverpool in 1974, he started up the Liverpool Latin seminar. Liverpool was in many ways ideal, geographically, since it could draw on a greater density of nearby classicists than could (for example) Newcastle. And there were of course the social events on Friday evenings after the seminar at Cairns’ roomy house in Birkenhead, where participants could stay over, and — when they had recovered from the home-made wine the next day — could continue informal discussions on the Saturday and beyond. It is clear from those who attended the events — which happened roughly five or six times a year and were funded throughout by the University of Liverpool

⁶⁰ The history of *Boreas* / LLS cries out for out for a separate account of its own. For a short outline history of LLS, see *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* (1985) 5.491–502, also *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar* (1998) 10.391.

⁶¹ For a history of Britain’s great civic or ‘redbrick’ universities, see Whyte (2015).

⁶² Francis Cairns, *per e-litteras* adds: ‘perhaps David West deserve[s] more credit for Seminar *Boreas* than [is] given to him [here]. Unfortunately I cannot recollect whether he initiated Seminar *Boreas* or simply continued it when it was liable to lapse. I do know that at least one Seminar *Boreas* meeting was held after the Liverpool Latin Seminar was in action’.

— that there was tremendous intellectual excitement generated by these occasions.

Cairns left Liverpool in 1988, just as the long-term effects of the Thatcher-era cuts to university budgets were beginning to become clear. The University made no attempt to fill the established chair, and preferred to leave it vacant. The view represented by the assertion that ‘There is no Professor of Latin at the University of Salford’ appears to have prevailed. Latin was apt to appear a thing of the past in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, it was around this time that Classics began to reinvent itself in the UK, by acknowledging the fact that fewer and fewer students were studying Latin or Greek at school, and by embracing the highly successful American model for the subject. In other words, make provision for your students to learn the ancient languages *ab initio* upon arrival at University, and — while they are learning the languages — introduce them to the literature and history of the ancient world by teaching them through translations of the classical texts. The success of the venture can be measured by the eventual promotion of Bruce Gibson to the established Chair of Latin in Liverpool.⁶³

Envoi

The history of the Chair of Latin at the University of Liverpool has much to tell us about the emergence of Latin as a distinct field of study and its professionalization in the UK over the course of the twentieth century. The lack of women is depressingly characteristic, of course. That history also contains the usual deviation: the Professor who became a Senior Administrator (Mountford), not to mention an anomaly no longer current in the UK: the brilliant academic awarded an established Chair in a field not their own (Walbank), in an age of a scarcity of professorships. Professors are hardly the whole story of any Department, much less of the profession as a whole. But they can tell us much about what senior administrators in universities of the day valued in the intellectual leadership of their Departments of Classics. The story of the Chair of Latin at Liverpool charts a clear professional course, as Latin moves out of the shadows of philology and Hellenism, and towards the embrace of its own texts and literature as objects worthy of independent study at the highest levels. The parallel between the rise of Latin and the growing stature of England’s great civic universities is only too clear — at least until the 1980s and the arrival of Thatcher. On the more purely intellectual level, Postgate marks the break from the late Victorian philology of Strong,

⁶³ With whom I am often confused (we have not made differentiation easy).

while Postgate's own concern with the textual criticism of Latin texts is carried forward by Slater. The arrival of Brink emphatically underlines the new standards set by German-Jewish refugee scholars for the study of Latin literature in the postwar era. Brink hardly lacked an interest in textual criticism, but his most enduring contributions have been to the comprehension of the text rather than its establishment. Austin represented an older insular tradition of the literary study of texts, but shared with Brink a preference for the format of the commentary: their commentaries on Vergil and Horace remain landmarks in the field. Rudd brought with him the new thinking of North America and a serious interest in literary criticism, expressed in articles and monographs, that would emphatically be continued by the enormously productive and equally influential Cairns. Thereafter the story of the Chair of Latin at Liverpool would falter, only to rise again.

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