

## A. B. (BRIAN) BOSWORTH

1942–2014



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Brian Bosworth was born at Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, England on 21 March 1942 and educated locally until he obtained a scholarship to Keble College, Oxford. Keble was not one of the more aristocratic colleges, and aimed to be ‘inclusive’, but nevertheless, as he used to say, he sometimes felt like Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* there. As an undergraduate he was fortunate in being tutored by a Reader in Classics and Fellow of the college, William Spencer Barrett, whose ability to analyse ancient manuscripts, establish the best readings and interpret them correctly was of the very highest order. This would certainly have helped Brian to achieve the heights of scholarship that he reached in later years.

He obtained first-class honours in *Literae Humaniores*, and settled down to working for a B. Phil degree as a preliminary to a D. Phil, though he never acquired a doctorate because Peter Cuff of Magdalen College Oxford, who visited Western Australia regularly, recommended him as a rising young scholar to Mervyn Austin, then the Professor of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Western Australia (UWA), who offered him a lectureship. He remained at UWA

from 1967 until 2007, producing an increasing number of books and articles in first class journals, while also undertaking a full teaching programme and serving as Head of Department more than once. This was in spite of his being occasionally tempted by offers of appointments elsewhere, specifically at Oxford and Harvard. He was a visiting scholar at Nottingham University, the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton (twice), All Souls College Oxford and the University of Cincinnati.

The fact that such a distinguished and internationally recognised historian remained in Western Australia did no harm to the reputation of the university that provided him with a home. A Deputy Vice-Chancellor (not a humanist), who had travelled overseas, reported on his return that he was amazed at the number of places in which, when he announced that he was from UWA, the response was that it was known because of Brian Bosworth’s work. On his retirement from UWA he moved to the University of Newcastle, and was also offered an appointment at Macquarie University in the Department of Ancient History, where he headed a group of researchers who were developing a programme for the study of the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic age.

Brian’s reputation was principally based on his work on the history of Alexander the Great, which consisted of a detailed commentary on Arrian’s *Anabasis of Alexander*, a history of the great conqueror’s campaigns (two volumes published in 1980 and 1995, the third forthcoming), and a number of books and articles examining various aspects of the life and legacy of the great conqueror. He also worked and supervised others in a less developed area of Greek studies, the history of Alexander’s successors in the eastern Mediterranean, an area in which some of his former students have made a good reputation for themselves. He began this process with another book, *The Legacy of Alexander: Politics, Warfare and Propaganda under the Successors* (2005). In addition, he demonstrated his knowledge of Roman history in a number of articles which showed that he was a balanced classicist.

Brian’s work on Alexander took a different line from the near-eulogistic portrayal that had become standard among many writers after the English-language biography of W. W. Tarn (1948). Being a man of peace himself, with no experience in or love of warfare, he

joined the New Zealand scholar Ernst Badian (who had secured a post at Harvard) in portraying Alexander as a ruthless conqueror, an interpretation that was more fully developed in two of his other major publications, *Conquest and Empire: the Reign of Alexander the Great* (1993) and *Alexander and the East: the Tragedy of Triumph* (1996). Brian's work remains as a scholarly monument because of his exceptional knowledge and control of the ancient written sources. Some of his books were so highly regarded that they were translated into other languages: Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, Greek, Turkish and Mandarin. He was also selected to make contributions to the later versions of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* and *The Cambridge Ancient History*.

At the time when Brian arrived in Western Australia, it was not normal for professorships to be held by anyone except the administrative heads of departments. But once Personal Chairs began to be created he was obviously more than worthy of this promotion, which was achieved in 1980. Not a single questioning voice was heard at the meeting of the committee that processed the application, something highly unusual.

After his retirement from UWA Brian received the title of Emeritus Professor in 2008. He continued to work at the University of Newcastle and Macquarie University, until ill health made it impossible for him to continue. His partner, Elizabeth Baynham (with whom he collaborated on several projects related to the history of Alexander the Great), together with his former student Patrick Wheatley, will undertake the completion of the third volume of his commentary on Arrian.

**JOHN MELVILLE-JONES FAHA**

Written with the assistance of Robert Milns, Elizabeth Baynham and Norman Ashton.