

## **Alan Deyermond: a tribute by Professor Ralph Penny**

I want to speak here chiefly about Alan as friend and colleague; David [Hook] has eloquently spoken about Alan as a scholar – although in reality these two aspects of Alan's life are barely separable.

The bare facts of Alan's upbringing and education are well known: he was born in 1932 in Cairo (by chance, one might say) and educated at Quarry Bank High School, in Liverpool, at Victoria College, in Jersey, and at Pembroke College, Oxford (where he got his BA in 1953, his BLitt in 1957, and his DLitt in 1985). What is remarkable for a man who was so widely known in the academic circles of at least two continents is that Alan spent his entire academic career in our Department.

He was appointed Assistant Lecturer at very the moment that the Department of Spanish was founded at Westfield College in 1955. He was one of two members of staff (the other was John Varey). He therefore had to teach half the University syllabus in Spanish, giving lectures and tutorial on the history of the Spanish language, medieval literature, and Golden-Age poetry, as well as giving language classes in Spanish. Such a teaching load evidently did not restrict his research output, and his growing string of publications led to a readership in 1966 and to a personal chair in 1969, at what was then the very early age of 37. For a number of years he commuted between Westfield and Princeton, teaching half the year in each institution (actually it was a full semester at Princeton and two terms at Westfield), but he remained fiercely loyal to our College, and transferred that loyalty to QM when Westfield merged with Queen Mary College in 1989 to form the great new institution we now have. In the often fraught discussions over the future of Westfield (who we should merge with or whether we should seek to go it alone), Alan was a firm and active supporter of the merger with Queen Mary. His commitment to the College did not diminish after he retired in 1997: he was a familiar and active figure in the College until immediately before his death.

I worked with Alan for 43 years. He was on the panel that appointed me to the Westfield Department of Spanish (as it then was) in 1966 and I took over some of the teaching he had previously done. It was typical of Alan that he took enormous pains to read and comment on the typescript of my first book, which emerged from my doctoral thesis. A work of dialectology, oriented towards structuralist theory, wasn't the everyday reading of a Hispanic medievalist, but Alan provided invaluable guidance. He not only suggested changes of an editorial kind (matters in which, as we all know, he excelled), but also made important observations on the historical aspects of its content. (He had, after all, taught the history of the Spanish language for many years.) The book was significantly improved as a result of Alan's enormously unselfish dedication of time to a younger colleague's academic work.

This was entirely typical of Alan. His undergraduate and postgraduate students will, I know, give testimony of the enormous pains he took with their work. The same is true of many students and colleagues in other departments, including those working in the US and in Spain. Alan was a great facilitator of others' work. The amount of time he so generously devoted to editing and seminar-organizing activities is remarkable for someone whose published output was so prodigious. Aside from his published work, his most vibrant memorial is the research seminar he founded in 1968 at Westfield. Alan set up the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar and ran it (sometimes in collaboration with others) until a year before his death. It attracted scholars from all

over the UK, from Spain and other European countries, from the US and Spanish America. Discussion at the Friday-afternoon sessions was typically continued in a local restaurant (the Sima Tandoori here in Mile End Road was favoured for years, until it closed). Alan was a staunch vegetarian but took the (almost certainly correct) view that wine drinking was perfectly compatible with vegetarianism. He believed that food, wine, and fellowship (with some, usually mild, gossip thrown in) were essential parts of academic life. And his colleagues strongly supported him in this view.

From the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar sprang in due course the publications series that bears its name. Alan set up PMHRS in 1995, to publish academic writing on hispanomedievalism which was longer than the conventional article but shorter than the conventional book. He personally edited and computer-typeset almost all these volumes (now more than sixty), and then arranged for their printing, sale, and distribution, with only minimal help (and that, only in later years). All this work of Alan's was an enormous labour of love for his subject and for the dissemination of work on the Spanish Middle Ages. It was typical of Alan: I have already emphasized how he never stinted in the academic help he was prepared to give to colleagues, to other scholars, and to students.

Another aspect of his devotion to the dissemination of knowledge was the energy and commitment he brought to the journals published by our Department. *Hispanic Research Journal* would not be in the healthy state it now finds itself in without the effort that Alan devoted to its launch and its continuing life.

Alan was the most intelligent person I have ever come across, in a world where intelligent people abound. He was also fiercely independent-minded and never willing to adopt any position in which he did not fully believe. This uncompromising characteristic was unsettling for some, although it was never accompanied by public anger or rudeness. These traits, together with an astonishing memory, made him a brilliant and much-loved teacher and supervisor, as generations of students can testify. His dry wit was a help in this, as were other aspects of his humour. For many years, he was accompanied to the Department by his standard poodle, Tom, who was normally to be found in his office. On more than one occasion when Alan was lecturing on the *Poema de Mio Cid*, the episode in which the hero calmly seizes the escaped lion and returns him to his cage (thereby enhancing his personal honour) was enacted by Alan and Tom (with Tom as the lion).

Academic honours were justly heaped on Alan (although not by the State; why was he never awarded a civil honour?). He received honorary degrees from the University of Valencia, and from Georgetown University in Washington; he was a Fellow of the British Academy; and last year became one of the small number of corresponding members of the Real Academia Española. In 1994 he was awarded the Nebrija Prize, he was president of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, and of the International Courtly Literature Society (1983). Likewise, since 1985 he has been a *socio de honor* of the Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval and, since 1999, an Honorary Fellow of this College.

Alan's obvious legacy is his enormous published output, together with the seminars, book series, and journals he founded or was instrumental in founding (MHRS, PMHRS, *HRJ*). But just as importantly, his legacy is to be seen in the work of other scholars, not only those who have been inspired by his written work but those who have benefited from his willingness to devote time and energy to their work.

He is an example to us all.