



Presidential Address to the British Academy, 1975

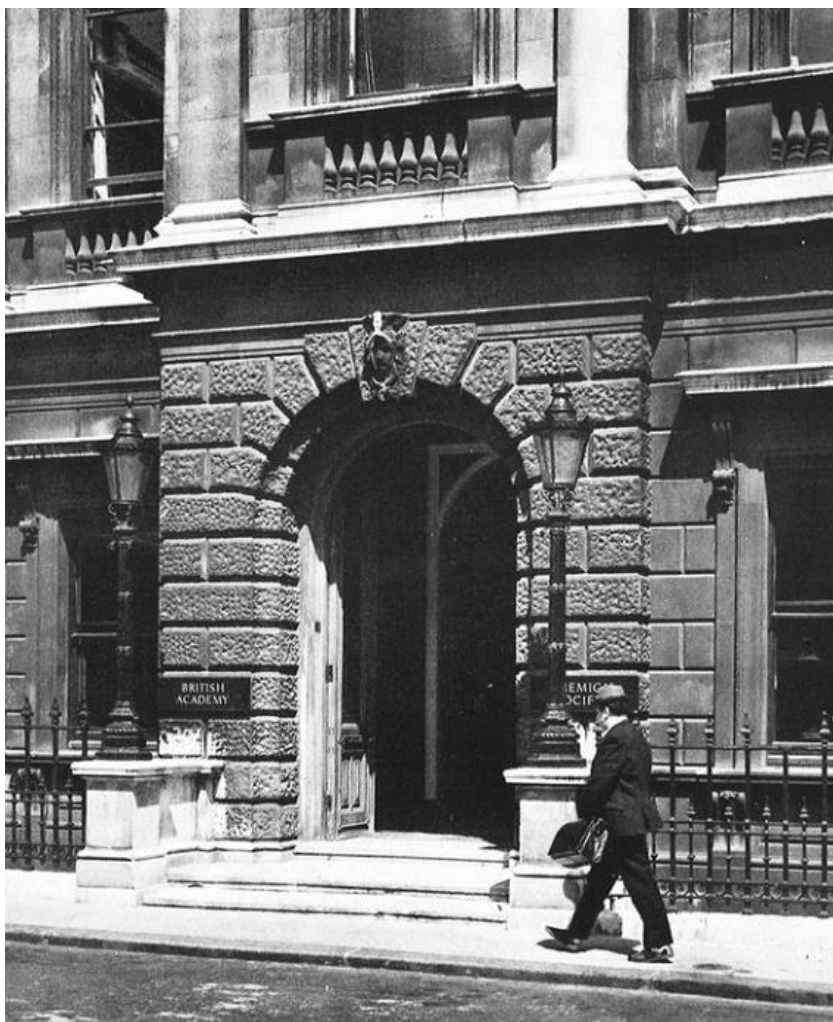
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Presidential Address to the British Academy, 1975

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The premises of the British Academy were in Burlington House during IB's Presidency

1. The traditional and proper purpose of this address is to provide a brief account of the activities of the Academy during the previous twelve months. Before attempting to do this, however, I must begin by recording the melancholy fact that this period marks the death of

no fewer than fourteen Fellows: we have lost Derek Allen, Martin Davies, Godfrey Driver, Cecil Fifoot, Max Gluckman, Ralph Hawtrey, David Knowles, Lord McNair, John Plamenatz, H. G. Richardson, Richard Walzer, Egon Wellesz, Jack Westrup and Robin Zaehner. Some of these were full of years; but others were cut off in their prime. Their deaths leave an unprecedentedly large gap in our ranks.

The loss to us is especially severe in the case of Derek Allen. He succeeded Mortimer Wheeler as Secretary in 1969 and resigned from this post in 1973, and was Treasurer thereafter. Even though a full account of his life and work will duly appear in our Proceedings, I should like to say a very few personal words about him at this gathering of his friends and colleagues in the Academy. He had a distinguished career in the Coins Department of the British Museum before the war, and as a civil servant in three ministries, during the war and after, and was a most civilised, many-sided, gentle, charming, courteous, learned, kind and altogether admirable man, with whom both I and all those who worked with him found it a pleasure to collaborate. When he was young his love was divided between Greek sculpture, quartet-playing and musical composition: he was an expert cello player, and at one time had thought of a career as a musician. His archaeological interests, which were lifelong, brought him into touch with Mortimer Wheeler in 1930. He was elected to the Academy as a distinguished numismatist twelve years ago, and six years later, in 1969, succeeded his friend and early mentor as Secretary of the Academy. He served it admirably, with unobtrusive competence, and won golden opinions among the Fellows, at whose gatherings he was always a particularly welcome figure. When the work of the Secretary grew to be a full-time task, he resigned this post in order to give more time to his numismatic work and to other activities which he did not wish to abandon, and accepted that of Treasurer. His accounts and his budget were models of clarity and concision, and his advice, in all the committees and delegations of which he was a member, was always sensible, shrewd, constructive and humane. He displayed the same qualities, I am told, as a Trustee of the British Museum, on the British Library Board, as Vice President of the Society of Antiquaries, and as the Treasurer (he was President-elect) of the Council for British Archaeology. The Academy owes him a very great deal, and I am grateful for this opportunity of paying a brief and inadequate

tribute to a man whom, although I had not known him for long, I learnt to love, trust and respect.

2. His death faced us with the problem of finding a worthy successor. I am happy to report that Professor W. G. Beasley has agreed to accept this post at very short notice: now that his appointment has been confirmed by the General Meeting I should like to express our gratitude to him and wish him very well in this by no means sinecural task.

This brings me to other items in connection with our administration.

3. *Staff*

This has been a hard year for our secretariat in Burlington House. When Neville Williams came to us two years ago, my predecessor, Denys Page, invited him to review the staffing of the Academy in relation to the work in hand and projected. He wisely postponed making any recommendations until he had been in the post for a complete year. At the end of it we learned that Miss Molly Myers, who has served us so long and so excellently, could not, for personal reasons, devote the exceptionally long hours to Academy affairs to which we had become accustomed and which, perhaps over-selfishly, we had come to expect of her. Your Finance and Advisory Committee considered the question carefully in the light of the Secretary's recommendations, and, as a result, Council made two decisions. First, to appoint a Deputy Secretary of the Academy, similar in standing to an equivalent post at the Royal Society. We recognised that though the person to be appointed should not automatically expect to succeed to the Secretaryship in years to come, he would, none the less, in virtue of his considerable knowledge of Academy affairs, be a strong candidate for the post if he wished to be considered for it. From a wide range of candidates we have appointed Mr Peter Brown, from the secretariat of the School of Oriental and African Studies, who, I am glad to say, is with us this afternoon, though he will not in fact take up his appointment until October. It is a new post, and he will in a sense be responsible for creating it. We wish him very well in it.

Miss Myers has worked for us for the last six years as Principal Assistant Secretary, though on somewhat anomalous terms. Our

second decision flowed from our wish to retain her services, if we possibly could, for, apart from her personal and social qualities, which are widely known, and much appreciated by the Fellows, her knowledge of the Academy and of individual Fellows is enviably comprehensive and intimate; and we discovered, to our satisfaction and relief, that she too is keen to stay with us. Accordingly we have agreed to recognise that from October she will be with us on a part-time basis. We have naturally decided to make proper pension arrangements for her.

Our staff is small – a dozen people compared with a hundred and eight at the Royal Society – and for this reason it is not possible to devise the kind of career structure that would be appropriate in a large organisation. Hence we tend to lose our young graduates after a few years. Miss Jane Rabagliati, who came in August 1973 as Assistant Secretary (Research Awards), is to enter the Administrative Class of the Home Civil Service, and so abandoned the early history of agriculture for work in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Miss Miranda Buchanan, for a year Assistant Secretary (Publications), has for personal reasons recently moved to Sheffield. We are exceedingly sorry to lose them both. Their places have been taken, as a result of open competition, by Miss Frances Condict from Birmingham University (Research Awards), and Miss Lindsay Duguid, formerly of Southampton University, who has had experience in Publishing, for the Publications post. All of us, I feel sure, warmly welcome them to Burlington House.

In this way I sincerely hope that we shall be strengthening the secretariat, on which we all rely so heavily, and, in particular, that the arrival of Mr Brown will relieve our hard-pressed Secretary of a number of tasks. And here let me begin to acknowledge my own personal debt to Neville Williams. When, to my great astonishment, I was last year invited by Denys Page, on behalf of the Council, to accept appointment as President, I felt, of course, immensely flattered as well as astounded, but also filled with terror. It was not modesty, either true or false, that made me protest that I was not a fit person to preside over an assembly so intellectually formidable, so critical, so well trained to detect shortcomings in fellow academics; besides, my previous experience was remote from this kind of national and international task. I shall not here dwell upon the arguments used by my kind but firm predecessor which in the end induced me to accept; but what I did then, and still more clearly

now, realise was that it was the capacities, the character, the outlook, the methods of the Secretary upon which everything in the end depended: that it was he, more than anyone else, who – like his predecessors, and especially Mortimer Wheeler – in the end shapes our activities, and determines our character and our being. It is to him that I, like every other Fellow of the Academy, go, when in need, for constant help, advice, encouragement, in and out of season; and it is he who, with unfailing knowledge, aided by a superb memory, a beautifully trained and organised mind, sharp psychological insight into the character of individual Fellows and officers, tempered, I am glad to say, by much charity and generosity, and, above all, a combination of realism and tact, steers our craft through difficult academic, governmental and international waters. If my nervous-ness has partly melted, it is due to his personal kindness and competence, and the common sense that flows from him like milk from a cow.

And while I am concerned with personalities, let me offer a bouquet – a very well-deserved one – to mark our great debt to Professor A. G. Dickens for all that he does to promote our contact with so many countries and Academies. I doubt whether many Fellows who are not members of Council, or serve on the Overseas Policy Committee, are fully aware of the burden that his activities impose on Geoffrey Dickens. In the past year, for example, he has visited Hungary and Yugoslavia. He signed a new agreement with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which extends our exchanges of scholars; and in Yugoslavia, accompanied by two Fellows of the Royal Society and Professor Hugh Seton-Watson, he laid the foundations for a future agreement with the Council of Academies. He has welcomed and looked after scholars from abroad, and attended innumerable diplomatic entertainments, at which much of his business is necessarily done. To him, too, our thanks are due and overdue. I am glad to be able to thank him in the name of the Academy for these devoted and successful labours.

4. So much for personalities. Now let me come to the life of the Academy as a whole.

The position of the Academy

The Fellows will not have forgotten the vigorous internal debate on the Sectional composition of the Academy a year ago. Council then decided to appoint a Fellowship Standing Committee to survey possible candidates for election in those areas of scholarship which did not easily fit into our existing Sectional structure. In the first nine months of its existence this Committee, under Mr Stuart Hampshire, paid particular attention to musicology, the history of science, linguistics, psychology, international relations and sociology, and it took most careful soundings for every candidate brought to its notice, whether by Sections or by individual Fellows, as well as, in relevant areas, as a result of discussion with officers and Fellows of the Royal Society. In the course of these investigations it has become aware of yet other minority interests, Byzantine studies, for example, and perhaps the history of ideas too, where (as was the case with musicology) it may be helpful to have a specialist sub-committee.

Of the twenty new Fellows elected today, thirteen have come from the Sections and seven from the Hampshire Committee. Council will, of course, need to vary the membership of this committee from time to time, and in the coming year it will be possible for the committee to make preliminary suggestions to the Sections in January, rather than in April, so that the opinion of Sections may be more systematically canvassed, and made known to the committee at an earlier stage. Both Council and the Hampshire Committee itself are most anxious to continue working closely with the Sections.

In view of the proposals for election likely to come from the new committee, I felt it appropriate to ask most Sections to exercise restraint in putting forward candidates for election this year, and I am particularly grateful to those Sections which followed this recommendation, and to the chairmen who successfully cooperated with Council in this. Next year I do not think that so great a degree of restraint will be required.

5. *By-laws*

In connection with elections to Fellowships, certain anomalies in our by-laws have come to light. The by-laws of the Academy have,

understandably, been amended piecemeal over the years. The original by-laws, and subsequent changes to them, have been made under the terms of the Royal Charter of 1902, which empowers Council to make regulations for the management of the Academy's affairs; these take effect after approval by the Privy Council. Since the original by-laws were approved in February 1903, the Academy has on eight occasions sought an Order in Council to bring in alterations and additions, the last being in September 1974. Perhaps as a result of these sometimes imperfectly harmonised amendments, certain obscurities have, if I can so put it, come to light. So, for example, procedures for taking out papers for candidates for the Ordinary Fellowship, the qualifications required for candidates for Corresponding Fellowships (and, for that matter, for Honorary Fellowships and/or for special elections under the Supplemental Charter), seem far from clear, and have caused perplexities in one or two Sections. I felt, therefore, that it was time to have our by-laws scrutinised so that they met all our requirements, and to ensure that the wording is absolutely clear and, so far as human effort can make it so, should not be capable of more than one natural interpretation. I have therefore asked Professor S. F. C. Milsom to look carefully at the text, and make recommendations which Council can study early next year, and decide whether to seek a fresh Order in Council; if it resolves to do so, it will of course circulate its proposals to the Fellows. If we are to make changes here, I would not rule out the need to seek a further Charter.

6. *Finance*

I come to the vexed subject of finance. The situation is no less gloomy for us than for virtually every academic and cultural institution in this country. Our grant-in-aid from the Government this year is £799,000, and although that sum is 14 per cent above the level for 1974–5, yet with inflation in the United Kingdom running at a much higher percentage, and the fall in the value of sterling overseas, we have been forced to cut back in real terms in many directions, and to postpone some very desirable new ventures, such as setting up our own fund for assisting academic publications. Let me remind you that 70 per cent of Academy funds are spent overseas, including our support of Schools and Institutes, whose earmarked grants count for 57 per cent of our total income. Since

we obviously need to ensure that we get the very best return on the investments of our special funds, I am glad to report that Sir Jeremy Morse, Deputy Chairman of Lloyds Bank, has accepted our invitation to become, at any rate for a period, our financial adviser.

You may well imagine how much heart-searching there was on Council and in the Research Fund Committee in allocating funds for research. We were compelled to make cuts in the budgets of certain of the Academy's own major projects, and in the work of certain of the British national committees, sponsored by the Academy, if we were to bring these under £84,000. Poverty marvellously sharpens one's power of discriminating between the essential and the inessential, between projects that are likely to bear fruit in the foreseeable future and those with dimmer prospects, between those that have a spark of real life in them, and those which move, when they move at all, at a gentlemanly and unhurried pace with the end not necessarily in sight at all. In consequence, Council has appointed a small Major Projects Review Committee which is to pay particular attention to those projects which have proved unusually costly, those which have been supported by the Academy for many years, and those with a poor publication record. The funding of one particularly expensive project, *The Early History of Agriculture*, we hope to transfer to one of the Research Councils, to which it seems more properly to belong.

We granted some £5,000 to twenty-one learned journals, of which two are new publications, the *Journal of Medieval History* and the *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, and one established periodical, the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, is to be supported for the first time. A further £61,000 was awarded from our general funds, and £9,600 from special funds, to assist precisely one hundred successful external applicants. On this occasion, only seven of the applicants who were awarded an A mark by the Sections achieved a grant. In our present financial situation we can unfortunately do no more. In this connection, it is perhaps worth remarking that while we look upon both the humanities and the social sciences as our proper field, we do tend to spend rather more resources on the former than the latter. The reason for that is all too clear: the social sciences, like the physical or biological sciences, or like agriculture, have a Research Council of their own. The funds of these Councils, or of the Royal Society, are far beyond anything that we could possibly command. But those who research in the field of the humanities have scarcely

anywhere else to turn: we seem to be, in effect, the nearest equivalent to a Humanities Research Council, since anyone above graduate level, if sufficiently qualified, is able to turn to us for aid towards a particular piece of research. Our resources, apart from the fact that more than half of them are earmarked for British Schools abroad, are minute compared to those of Research Councils in Britain or the CNRS in France or the Max Planck Institutes in Germany; so that humane learning is today the Cinderella of the intellectual life of the nation. When we are criticised, as we sometimes are, for not doing enough for the social sciences, this seems to me the sad but sufficient answer.

7. Trusts and Foundations

Yet our financial position, though severely strained, cannot yet be described as parlous. I wish to record our gratitude to the trusts and foundations that have so generously supported us. The Leverhulme Trustees have not only continued their much coveted Visiting Fellowships, but they have awarded the Academy a special grant of £20,000 over two years for a detailed study of the important pottery finds at Carthage. This research is quite beyond the resources of our own Save Carthage Committee, which, you will remember, is financed entirely by funds from the Ministry of Overseas Development. On the advice of Mr J. B. Ward-Perkins, Chairman of the Carthage Committee, Dr D. P. S. Peacock, of Southampton University, has been appointed to direct this specialised pottery unit.

And, I am happy to report, we have this year made a new and most welcome friend. We have received a grant from the Wolfson Foundation of £40,000 a year, initially for three years, to establish a series of British Academy–Wolfson (travelling) fellowships. Although the ‘Rippon’ grant for West European exchanges has, since its establishment in 1972, proved most valuable in enabling British scholars to travel to Western Europe to pursue research in a wide range of subjects, the total sum allocated by the Government for this scheme is modest, bearing in mind that it has to cover relations with seventeen countries in all branches of the humanities. Several of us, and especially Professor Dickens, who is working so indefatigably in the cause of developing scholarly contacts, are acutely aware that if these are to be developed, the arrangement cannot continue to be one-sided. We have particularly in mind the

most promising younger men and women, who have already made their mark, are a growing influence in their universities both here and on the continent, and are apt to feel isolated, and to whom this new opportunity of travel to and from the United Kingdom will, in our view, prove valuable both in terms of work achieved and in establishing personal and intellectual links with fellow scholars and institutions abroad.

These new Academy–Wolfson awards will be offered from next year in the fields of history, law, economics and political studies, particularly in their application to the history and understanding of the modern world. A new committee of the Academy, on which the Wolfson Trustees will be represented, will administer the awards, working closely in touch with the Research Councils and Academies of the countries concerned. Initially, we expect to concentrate on France, the German Federal Republic and Italy, but in time we hope to extend the scheme, and, indeed, the flexibility of the proposed arrangements, will, we hope, appeal to the Trustees. I should like to record the Academy's and my own profound appreciation of this most generous and far-sighted contribution on the part of the Wolfson Foundation for the cultivation of a rich and underdeveloped field, particularly appropriate at the time of the growth of a new relationship with the continent of Europe.

8. *Overseas*

At the same time, the work of our Overseas Policy Committee should not be forgotten. It administers the European Exchange Awards scheme, the Leverhulme Visiting Professorships, our own limited funds for visiting fellowships outside Europe, our American programme and the special arrangements we have established with Academies in Japan, Israel and elsewhere. In Eastern Europe the Academy works closely with the Great Britain/East Europe centre and the British Council. There is a constant stream of visitors from abroad to Burlington House and the Institute of Historical Research, and to a number of these we offer hospitality from the Webster Fund. These are considerable undertakings which, for instance, in an East European country would be directed by a full-time secretary with a great team of supporters; yet the Committee's Chairman, Professor Dickens, aided by the staff of Burlington House, achieves an astonishing amount.

You will recall that historically this Academy owes its birth to the foundation of the Union Académique Internationale (UAI). I have recently returned from the forty-ninth session of the Union, held at Munich in the impressive quarters of the Bavarian Academy, whose corridors alone comfortably exceed the space allocated to us in Burlington House. Professor Eric Turner presided over this assembly of representatives from thirty-six Academies. We were addressed by a representative of the newly founded European Science Foundation,¹ on which we are represented, which wishes to establish liaison with the UAI, which, in its turn, expressed its willingness to act as an advisory body, and more particularly to cooperate with it in joint projects, particularly those which involve the methods of both the arts and the natural sciences, as for instance in the fields of archaeology or linguistics, or the restoration and preservation of the monuments of the past. We were handsomely received by the Bavarian Academy, and its President, Professor Raupach, with his colleagues, performed various musical works of the baroque period for our benefit; the President himself, a distinguished economist, played exquisitely on the harpsichord in one of the Bach triple concertos. We greatly admired the versatility of Professor Raupach and his colleagues: if the UAI meets in London again, I should like to believe that the Academy could respond in kind.

Since I could not myself attend, I asked Sir Denys Page to represent the Academy at the 150th celebration of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and he will also represent us in Moscow next autumn for the postponed 250th birthday of the Russian Academy, founded by Peter the Great.

So much for the world beyond our shores.

9. *Learned Societies*

I should like to return to the plight of our own country. At our Annual Dinner in April, addressed, I should like to remind you, by the Prime Minister – the first reigning Prime Minister ever to have dined with the Academy – I had occasion to touch upon the

¹ This consists, I understand, of all bodies in receipt of government funds for the financing of what in Germany is called *Wissenschaft* and in France *les sciences*, which, unlike ‘science’ in English, has always included the humanities. It is intended to coordinate the work of such Government-sponsored national organisations and to promote joint enterprises by them in Europe.

declining, and in some cases disastrous, position of national societies in the fields of the humanities and social sciences, especially those which face ruin owing to the rising costs of accommodation and services in London, where many have their headquarters. Professor Clifford Darby, who presides over our own Learned Societies Committee, has found that the scene literally alters – always for the worse – when one is not looking. Thus the English Association is suddenly ousted from its tenancy in South Kensington; or another society finds with a sense of shock and distress that it cannot publish its traditional annual volume. The situation is bad, and changing rapidly for the worse. To monitor these changes and present a factually up-to-date report is a task beyond the Academy's own unaided resources. They affect a number of societies whose interests are on the borderline between those of the Academy and those of the Royal Society. We meet the officers of the Royal Society once a year, and on the last of these occasions we agreed to commission, jointly, an experienced and sympathetic administrator to survey the predicament of learned societies as a whole, and make a report, with recommendations, that our respective Councils could consider within three or four months. In consequence we have jointly appointed Mr J. F. Embling, CB, formerly a Deputy Under-Secretary in the Department of Education and Science, highly recommended by the Royal Society, to undertake this task. He began his work last week in Carlton House Terrace. The Steering Committee includes Professor Darby and Sir Raymond Firth. I would expect that his report would in due course enable me, jointly with the President of the Royal Society, to approach HMG for special funds to assist learned societies, and save all, or at least most, of them from decay and extinction.

10. Finally, I should like to express the hope that the discussion which we have just had, an hour or so ago, at this our Annual general Meeting, about what we can and cannot, should or should not, do – that this first exercise in some collective self-examination has proved very useful. I have myself certainly found it so. I feel sure other members of the Council will take the opinions expressed into the most serious consideration. I should like to think, too, that this exercise will be repeated annually and act as a stimulus to those activities which are our sole *raison d'être*, above all, to new tasks

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which, despite the grim financial climate, we can and should, even
with our existing resources, initiate and perform.

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