

Obituary

Eric Forbes: 1933–1984

We have lost in Professor Eric Forbes a man whose example many would do well to follow. He was educated at Madras College, St. Andrews and at St Andrews University, becoming early a specialist in astronomy, in which he took a Ph.D. He lectured at St Mary's College, Twickenham, from 1961 to 1965. While there he did what one wished so many historians were able (or inclined) to do: he applied himself to the discipline of the history of science reaching Ph.D. level even though he might well have been content to base his historical work on his attainment in the practice of the science itself. The self confidence this double training gave him made him an effective writer and an equally effective teacher. He became a Lecturer at Edinburgh University in 1965, and his appointment to a personal Chair in 1978 was welcomed by his colleagues as a natural and proper recognition, as also were his election to Fellowships of the Royal Astronomical Society and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His influence was not confined to his University nor indeed to the United Kingdom. He became widely known abroad, and he was asked by the British National Committee of the History of Science to organise the XVth International Congress of the History of Science planned for 1977 in Edinburgh. He was co-opted to the Council of the Division of History of Science of the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science, and carried through a feat of management and academic diplomacy which made the 1977 Congress one of the best events of its kind ever staged. He was then elected Secretary of the Division of History of Science of IUHPS and played a valuable part in the negotiations leading up to the Congress in 1981. He also applied himself to constitutional matters, redrafting rules and statutes. As second Vice-president of the Division he contributed a great deal to its Documentation Division, organising an important meeting at Newbattle abbey in 1983.

He would have attended the Berkeley Congress as a man universally regarded, at the height of his powers and influence. As these words are being written the loss to the community of the History of Science is still fully to be felt.

London

FRANK GREENAWAY

Eric Forbes published a vast amount, he lectured throughout the world and he was involved in the activities and organisation of many learned societies. And yet he remained a devoted family man, a friendly and unassuming colleague, and a man interested in non-academic pursuits. Eric loved being with his wife, Maria, and his two children, Edgar and Andrea and he was often happiest in his domestic environment. As a colleague, and as Chairman of the History Department, he was invariably sensible, approachable, open to differing approaches and completely lacking in affectation and pomposity. In many ways a man of humanity with 'ordinary' tastes, he engaged in activities not usually associated with the famous scholar and eminent academic. In his younger days Eric was a very fine fast bowler. He played for some good teams and even had a trial for Scotland. Always physically active and liking the company of men of all social types, who also loved the same pursuits, he served in the RNVR, went on golfing holidays and loved the Munich beer festival. His commitment and energy were thus as apparent in his personal and private life as they were in his public and professional activities.

Edinburgh

H. T. DICKINSON