



A.L.F. Rivet with students at Keele Hall, c. 1980.

(Photo by courtesy of Audrey Rivet)

A.L.F. Rivet (1915–1993)

Leo Rivet died on 6 September 1993, nearly two years after a very severe stroke. His contributions to the archaeology of the Roman provinces were as varied as his own career and owed much to his own wide experience of life. He came relatively late to formal archaeological posts – as did many others in his generation – but prior activities were skilfully exploited when academic opportunity opened up for his particular talents. He was outstandingly well equipped for his posts at the Ordnance Survey and later at Keele. His achievements in both institutions were not confined to his purely academic contributions, great though these were.

Rivet's interests in archaeology were first aroused by the lectures of R.G. Collingwood during his classical studies at Oriel. After a more or less catastrophic introduction to fieldwork on a, mercifully unnamed, Bronze Age site in Surrey, he participated in Wheeler's campaigns at Maiden Castle in the mid-1930s, an experience he later characterized with a mixture of admiration and irony. Immediately thereafter there was little time to develop his interest in practical fieldwork. After a brief spell as a schoolmaster in 1938–9, he enlisted as a private soldier, seeing service with the Royal Signals in East Africa, eventually with the rank of major, from 1940 to 1946. His years in Africa stayed with him for the rest of his life, colouring his view of the interaction between distant central powers and tribal politics. After five years as a bookseller after the War, the post of Assistant Archaeology Officer in the Ordnance Survey fell to him. There could not have been a more appropriate and effective holder. The following thirteen years formed what was to prove an Indian summer for the Archaeology Division of the O.S. The excellent third edition of the *Map of Roman Britain* (1956) owed a great deal to Rivet's eye for topography and as much to his developing interest in the names of places. Another important product of these years was his *Town and Country in Roman Britain* (1958), an elegantly written account of the political geography of the province which was to be plundered, and often hideously distorted, by hundreds of undergraduate essays, not least those written by students in the Foundation Year at Keele. Rivet's move to that university in 1964 at last provided him with an academic base for the rest of his academic career. Here the two major works of his mature scholarship were written: *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, produced in collaboration with Professor Colin Smith in 1979, and *Gallia Narbonensis* (1988), in which the travels and study of three decades were distilled. But his influence did not flow from publications alone. He was a leading member of this Society for many years, a member of its Editorial Committee and a Review Editor of *Britannia*. He served as our President with distinction from 1977 to 1980 and as a Vice-President thereafter. Many other bodies also enjoyed the benefit of his counsel and clear judgement, including the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), the British School at Rome, and the British Academy. For many years no conference on Roman archaeology was complete without a paper or a summation from him. His wit and humour, which could be anarchic, subversive even, were as sought after as his wide erudition. For so slight a figure he had a remarkable presence at the lectern, much enhanced by a fine speaking voice. In private, he was a highly entertaining raconteur, if occasionally baffling to those whose reading was not as wide as his. At the heart of his scholarship lay his love of words, their use and their mysteries. A stylist in both speaking and writing, he was saddened by the fall in standards at every educational level in recent times. Happily, his own monument will endure and, like that of his early mentor Collingwood, will be turned to as a model of style for many years to come.

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