

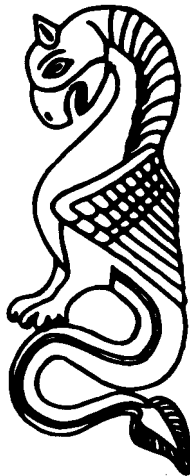
# Leeds Studies in English

**Article:**

Stanley Ellis, 'Arthur Cawley: A Biographical Note', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 12, (1981), 1-2

**Permanent URL:**

[https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=121511&silos\\_library=GEN01](https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=121511&silos_library=GEN01)



*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

## ARTHUR CAWLEY: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

By STANLEY ELLIS

Arthur Cawley graduated from University College, London in 1934. He then went to the education department of Hull University and returned as Quain Student to UCL in 1935 to be a part-time university teacher for three years and work at the same time for an M.A. His teaching was hardly part-time by today's relaxed standards and it is a shining example to today's students that, despite this teaching load, he achieved a distinction for his Master's thesis on John of Trevisa's version of Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon*.

In 1938 he went to Harvard on a Commonwealth Fellowship and then returned to England to join the British Council. Already a traveller he went as professor of English to Iasi in Rumania, and then, when in 1940 the German invasion forced him to uproot, to Skopje in Yugoslavia. By 1941 he was in Egypt, where he worked for four years, including time spent at Benghazi. The next move, still for the British Council, was to Iceland where he taught at Reykjavík. Then he must have felt a need to settle down for he returned to England, to the University of Sheffield for a year, and in 1947 moved to a lectureship at Leeds. In 1952 he gained his Ph.D. degree which he typically asserted he only completed because he was so busy telling other people what bad work they were doing for their own doctorates that he had better have one himself. His wry humour was even capable of shocking his students when to one who had asked what he meant by Romance words he replied 'Probably not what you mean by romance, Miss ———'.

During the 1950's at Leeds he was at a most productive phase as the record of his publications shows. By 1959 the call of travel came again and he left Leeds to go to the Darnell Chair of English at Queensland, Australia which he held for six years before returning to the Chair of English Language and Medieval English Literature at Leeds where he stayed until his retirement in 1979.

This second period at Leeds was again a productive one. His standards of excellence and care - 'we medievalists pride ourselves on our attention to detail' is a statement of his to a class in 1950 that has never been forgotten - produced published works in the *Leeds Studies in English* and *Leeds Texts and Monographs*, especially in the *Medieval Drama Facsimile Series* of the latter, of a high standard of production, with contents chosen with care, and with a fastidious insistence on quality. The reputation of the School of English at Leeds, which has always been shown as the publisher of these series, stands high throughout the world in

medieval studies because of his insistence on quality. When the cost of type-setting seemed likely to put the whole *Leeds Studies* enterprise out of business he insisted that cheaper should not mean shabbier productions and we can be proud today that the production of the works is still attractive in spite of being produced at much less cost.

Since his retirement he has continued his travelling, going back to America again, this time for a spell at Muncie. His contacts in libraries and universities throughout the world have always been close, personal and happy. It needed a man of his stature and standing to persuade librarians to supply prints for the facsimiles of medieval plays - for Norman Davis' *Non Cycle-Plays* volume, for example. Few others would have received permission to reproduce these materials so readily and it was surely the knowledge that the request was made in the interests of scholarship that caused librarians and authorities to respond favourably.

As head of his Department Arthur made his requirements clearly known and left his colleagues to get on with the task of fulfilling them. He was no hard taskmaster so long as the tasks were mastered and his gentle firmness and enormous helpfulness endeared him to his colleagues.

There is no doubt that retirement is already giving him time to pursue interests that administration and teaching often forbade. We will see more medieval material from him yet, and it is good to know that his endeavours to make important manuscripts easily available to modern scholars will continue. His past colleagues, associates and other friends dedicate this volume to him as a small token of their respect and affection.