

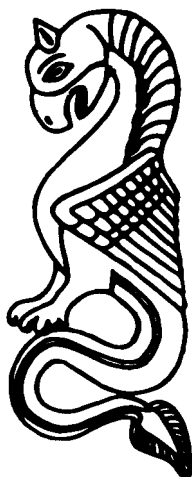
# Leeds Studies in English

## Article:

Geraldine Barnes, Lee Jobling and Naomi Robinson, 'Leslie Rogers: A Biographical Note', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 20 (1989), 1-3

## Permanent URL:

[https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=124882&silos\\_library=GEN01](https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=124882&silos_library=GEN01)



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

## Leslie Rogers: A Biographical Note

Geraldine Barnes, Lee Jobling, and Naomi Robinson

When he retired on 31 December 1987, Harold Leslie Rogers, the longest serving of its four distinguished occupants, had held the McCaughey Chair of Early English Literature and Language at the University of Sydney for twenty-two years. During that time, as the many tributes in this volume testify, Leslie stimulated teaching and research in all facets of the wide area of his Chair, which covers subjects as diverse as Old and Middle English, medieval Celtic, and modern language studies.

Leslie has remarked more than once on the accidental quality of life's events. His colleagues and friends at the University of Sydney count themselves fortunate that these events finally led him there. At more than one point, however, the path that brought him to us might have led in different directions.

Appropriately for a medieval scholar, Leslie Rogers was born in Wallasey ('Island of the Welsh') in the 'wyldrenesse of Wyrle' (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, l. 700). His academic career commenced at Wallasey Grammar School, to which he won a scholarship in his Eleven Plus examination. He was not the first distinguished medievalist to attend Wallasey Grammar, which numbers amongst its alumni Rossell Hope Robbins, and, in the field of English, A. R. Humphreys, J. D. Jump, and L. G. Salingar. For two or three generations the school had had an extraordinary scholarly (and sporting) record; many fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, professors there and elsewhere, Fellows of the Royal Society and the like may be numbered among its products. While Leslie's school record indicated that he, too, was destined for an academic career, the sudden death of his father in 1938 and the outbreak of World War II appeared to dictate otherwise. During 1941, the year of his School Certificate, the family home was bombed and rendered temporarily uninhabitable, classes were constantly disrupted by air raids and air raid precautions and plagued by shortages of books, paper, equipment, and teachers.

In that same year he was forced to curtail his secondary education in order to help support his mother, his younger brother, Gordon, and his grandmother. Leslie began his working life as an office boy with the Shell Oil Company. After a short time he became a chainman with A. Monk and Co., a large firm of civil engineering contractors, where he assisted surveyors and civil engineers in the building of petrol refinery installations, pipelines, factories, and roads. He became a junior engineer and was articled as a Student of the Institute of Civil Engineers, studying for the professional examination by correspondence course. The academic world appeared to have lost a highly promising scholar.

Leslie registered for National Service in 1942 and, on his eighteenth birthday, 4 March 1943, joined the Army. He was quickly selected for officer training and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant with the Royal Engineers. Posted to India, he joined the Indian Army and was assigned to the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners (RBSM), whose regimental headquarters were at Kirkee, near Poona. Within a year he was fluent in Urdu and had acquired some knowledge of Punjabi. Early in 1945 he was sent back to Europe to join the RBSM unit in Italy where VE Day found him hospitalized in Caserta. In 1946 he joined the famous Fourth Indian Division in Greece and was promoted to Divisional Headquarters in Salonika as an Intelligence Officer. Later that year he was sent back to India where he was involved in a diversity of activities: he took part in the quelling of the Indian Navy Mutiny, played Rugby for the RBSM, and was appointed Adjutant at its Regimental Headquarters.

Discharged in 1947, Leslie had the option of returning to his civil engineering cadetship; however, encouraged by the economist C. R. Ross, whom he had met in India, he made Oxford his next goal. After an interview with the Senior Tutor of St Catherine's, F. C. Horwood, he was offered a place and returned to academic life after an interruption of some seven years. Leslie's Oxford tutors were Professor and Mrs A. S. C. Ross, Ursula Dronke (Brown), Gabriel Turville-Petre, and F. W. Bateson. He also attended lectures by, and later got to know, Norman Davis, C. L. Wrenn, Dorothy Whitelock, Alistair Campbell, and Eric Dobson. R. W. Burchfield and Eric Stanley were fellow students. Leslie played rugby and soccer for his college and, in 1950, was Sports Editor for Trinity Term and Editor for Michaelmas Term of *The Isis*. In the summer of that year he visited Iceland, learning some Icelandic at the farm Hwílf, near Flateyri in Öndarfjörður.

Leslie's career took yet another unexpected turn when, upon graduating, he became a Staff Reporter for the Manchester *Daily Express*. Among the feature articles with his by-line, he fondly recalls interviews with Adlai Stevenson and Alec

### *Biographical Note*

Guinness. In 1952, supported by Turville-Petre, he successfully applied for a British Council Scholarship to Iceland and became a student again. He left for Iceland that summer, embarking on what was now to be an unswerving course of scholarship, but not without further blending of accident and intention.

He returned to England a year later, fluent in Icelandic, engaged to Lesley Hale, and unemployed. In late June, Dorothy Dexter went on sick leave from the University of Exeter, and Leslie was appointed to a one-year Assistant Lectureship in English in her place. On 1 July 1953, the day after his successful interview at Exeter, he and Lesley were married, with C. R. Ross as best man. Following the return of E. F. Halvorsen to Norway in 1954, Leslie was appointed Lecturer in Norse Studies at the University of Glasgow.

Leslie's long association with the University of Sydney began in 1958, when he was appointed to a Senior Lectureship in Early English Literature and Language; in 1965 he was promoted to Associate Professor, and, on 4 July 1966, appointed to the McCaughey Chair of Early English Literature and Language. During his career at Sydney Leslie has served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Fellow of the University Senate, Chairman of the Library Committee, Chairman of the Board of Studies in Music, Chairman of the Australian Language Research Centre, and Chairman of the New South Wales Higher School Certificate Syllabus and Examination Committees. On the Professorial Board, his wit, eloquence, tenacity, and unequalled knowledge of the University's by-laws are legendary.

Always saving the gentler side of his nature for his students, Leslie has been a patient and inspiring teacher. His Honours classes on *Beowulf* remain the high point of the undergraduate careers of a number of contributors to this volume. To his departmental colleagues Leslie has been an unfailing source of support and wise counsel. His *Who's Who* entry lists his recreations as music and fishing. We hope that, amongst his many other projects, he finds the time to engage in both. We wish him a long, happy, and productive retirement.