

Brian Shefton

Mr Chancellor,

The Ashmolean in Oxford, the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge, the Shefton in Newcastle, the British Museum; all boast Greek collections graded A+ at the recent assessment and worthy of priority funding. They are national treasures but they are not all the same. While three of them have been the subject of investment for centuries, the Shefton, here in Newcastle University owes its existence to an indomitable character and a couple of hundred quid start up funds in the 60s. The character in question is, of course, the eponymous professor, Brian Shefton.

Brian began life in 1919 in Cologne, Germany, the son of Professor Isadore Scheftelowitz and his wife Frieda. He was removed from his school, the Apostelngymnasium in the summer of 1933 and taken by his parents to England to escape the gathering darkness of Nazi oppression. His academic ability carried him to Oriel College Oxford from whence he graduated in 1947. His progress had been interrupted by military service, during which he anglicised his name. He spent his first three years as a graduate travelling and studying in Greece then spent 5 years in the Classics department in Exeter before being appointed in 1955 as a lecturer at Newcastle in Greek Archaeology and Ancient

History. He remained a member of our University staff until his retirement in 1984, having been elevated to the personal Chair of Greek Archaeology in 1979.

Brian married his Swedish wife Jutta in 1960 and they had one daughter, Penny. But Brian's family is far bigger. His irrepressible personality and phenomenal memory for students' names and faces has ensured his continued interaction with a wide selection of younger colleagues all over the world. Since retiring, Brian has continued to publish and travel but during his academic tenure he did not follow a traditional route. It is perhaps fortunate that Brian did not have to live in the straightjacket of the Research Assessment Exercise as he preferred to spend time developing the Greek collection rather than writing books. His methods were often imaginative but, so far as we are aware, always legal. His persistence could be challenging. His colleague, Margaret Wright, the librarian lived in dread of books arriving from around the globe with a message to the effect that Professor Shefton had advised that he thought the University of Newcastle would wish to own this or that splendid tome, together with an invoice.

Those wishing to read more about Professor Shefton's career might like to visit the Shefton museum section of the University website where they will find a section devoted to the career of its founding father, assembled in honour

of his 80th birthday under the delightful name, “The Life of Brian”. I have no doubt this would have appealed to Brian’s well developed sense of humour, something the website does not convey. I spoke with his long term colleague Lindsay Allison-Jones in our Museum of Antiquities, where she is the curator I hasten to add, and she recalled a particular dinner party at Brian’s house when he was dispatched by Jutta to bring a splendid multi-tiered cake from the kitchen for dessert. In his haste he tripped on the carpet as he entered the room, causing the top layer of the cake to describe a Frisbee-like path through the air before coming to rest supported by its strawberry topping on the carpet. Brian found the event highly amusing and collapsed in fits of laughter. I’m unsure whether this is an illustration of Brian’s *joie de vivre* or his wife’s saint- like tolerance.

Mr Chancellor, when it comes to the stuff of which a university is made, there’s nothing like a steady predictable member of staff and Brian Shefton was and is nothing like a steady predictable member of staff. Rather he is the stuff of which great academic institutions are built; imaginative, bold and irrepressible. There can be no more fitting recipient of our Fellowship and I commend him to you.

Citation by Professor John Burn