

# Duncan Mennie

## Memories and Anecdotes

Duncan Mennie was born a century ago - on 19 January 1909. In 1937, he started as a lecturer at the then King's College in Newcastle.

In 1959, he was appointed professor.

In his inaugural address "*German Language*" in *University German Studies in Britain: A rethinking of some aspects*, he reflected on the state of the discipline in a still relevant way.

From the Inaugural Lecture of the Professor of German and Scandinavian Studies delivered at King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne:



"When we talk about "German Language" we think about three different kinds of things: first: speaking, reading, and writing German the way an educated German does these things, second: translating German into English and English into German, and third: knowing and thinking about the German language, most often with a strong stress on its history."

The first Lektorin who worked in the German Department was **Martha Lortsch**, geb. Stockmeier. She writes about how she came to be employed in Newcastle:

"I first met professor Mennie in 1948 when he took the trouble to come to Germany to make sure that I would be suitable for the lecturers job. The house of my parents had been requisitioned at the time by the British Occupation Forces. So he spent several days in the tiny flat where I lived with my parents.

Apparently he was satisfied with what he saw, gave me the job and supported and helped me in all circumstances all through my time in Newcastle. He as well as Flora Mennie became a dear friend of me and my family and we shall never forget either of them."

**Angus Fowler**, nephew to Duncan Mennie's wife Flora, writes:

"Martha Lortsch ist in Schleswig am 26. Februar 1922 geboren, in Stade aufgewachsen, wo sie Schülerin von Else Alpers war. Martha studierte im 2. Weltkrieg in Marburg, war Schülerin dort u.a. von Max Kommerell. Nach dem Krieg hätte sie Sekretärin des ersten Ministerpräsidenten von Schleswig-Holstein werden können, zog es aber vor, Duncan Mennies Angebot anzunehmen und wurde erste Lektorin aus Deutschland nach dem Krieg in German Department 1948-1951 und heiratete am 9. Dezember 1950 den Lektor für Französisch André Lortsch."



**Anthony Stanforth** studied in Newcastle in the 1950s. After completing his undergraduate studies in 1960, he returned to Newcastle University in 1965 as a Lecturer, later becoming Senior Lecturer and Head of the German Department. He left Newcastle in 1981.

In the celebratory Issue of our German@Newcastle newsletter, he writes on the experience of being a student 50 years ago:

“Duncan Mennie and the German Department in Newcastle Professor Mennie designed the timetable to ensure first year students had a 9.00 am lecture every day to get them out of bed – and he took note of who wasn’t there.”

**Anthony Waive** studied in Newcastle in the 1960s. He then did his PhD in Lancaster and is now Senior Lecturer in German Studies.

He writes on how a factory's workers son from Leicester was inspired to pursue German Studies:

Unserem Lieben Lehrer  
zur Erinnerung  
an die Schüler des Gymnasiums  
Westerstede  
Herzliche Grüße  
Edelgard Durscha

In 1961, I became Lector of German for the third term of the academic year 1960/61 at the Department of German, King’s College, University of Durham. Head of the department, which was situated in Newcastle, was Prof. Duncan Mennie.

Working under Prof. Mennie was quite different from what I knew from Kiel University. Here, there was a professor who worked with us (the members of the staff) and talked to us as a primus inter pares. As a teacher, Prof. Mennie was particularly interested in students from working-class families. Thus he, who had an academic family background, tried to make their way into an academic life and into school life easier.”

**Ludwig Scharbau** who was a Lektor in 1960/61 and 1963/64 writes:

“Postcard to Anthony Waive by the pupils of the Gymnasium Westerstede “I’m offering you a conditional place to read German at Newcastle. I believe you’ll make a good honours student, Mr Waive.” With these words Duncan Mennie concluded my interview with him in December 1963.”