

## OBITUARY

### Professor Colin Michael Wells

Colin Wells was a distinguished classicist, archaeologist and historian. Over a career of some 45 years he authored or edited four books and more than 120 articles and reviews on the Roman frontier and army, the social and economic history of the empire, ancient Carthage and the African provinces. He passed away on 11 March 2010, at Bangor in North Wales in the company of his family, following a brief illness.

The work for which Wells will be most remembered is *The German Policy of Augustus: an Examination of the Archaeological Evidence* (Oxford 1972). He was widely acknowledged as the leading English language scholar on the Roman army and frontier in Germany.

His second book, *The Roman Empire* (Fontana/Collins 1984, 2nd edition, Fontana 1992, Harvard 1995) was a lucid introductory survey of the Roman Empire from 44 BC to AD 235, reaching a wide international audience and groundbreaking in its combining literary and archaeological evidence. His vignette of the town of *Castellum Tidditanorum* in Algeria in the volume is particularly memorable, and perhaps the only overview of this important site to be found in English.

Wells was born in West Bridgford, Notts, England on 15 November 1933. He went up to Oriel College in 1952, but after Mods went on leave to do national service. He achieved the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, and was commissioned to the Royal Artillery (41st Field Regiment, RA) serving in both Egypt and Germany before returning to Oxford where he received his BA degree in 1958 and MA in 1959. He subsequently served as Lieutenant, South Notts Hussars Yeomanry, RHA.

In 1960, he married Kate Hughes, daughter of the novelist Richard Hughes. They raised two sons, Christopher and Dominic.

Colin Wells earned his DPhil in 1965 under the supervision of Sir Ian Richmond, Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire. His thesis, "The frontiers of the Empire under Augustus," was chiefly devoted to the German and Danubian provinces, but also included the frontier in North Africa, foreshadowing his later interest in Carthage and Rome's African provinces.

Wells began his academic career at the University of Ottawa in 1960, rising to the rank of professor before resigning his position in 1988. While there,

he served as chairman of the Department of Classical Studies/Département des Etudes anciennes, Vice-Dean, and editor of *Echos du monde classique/Classical News & Views*.

In 1988, Wells took up the first T. Frank Murchison Distinguished Professorship of Classical Studies at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas where he taught and served as departmental chair until his retirement in 2005. It was, as he later described it, "quite a cultural and climatic shift!"

Colin Wells loved North Africa. In 1976 Wells was invited to join the Canadian team preparing to participate in the UNESCO Carthage excavations. In 1978 he became director, initially with the late Edith Wightman, of the Second Canadian Team at Carthage, Tunisia. Fieldwork focused chiefly on the excavation of the Theodosian Wall and later the Odeon Hill. Although the final report on the excavations, which concluded in 1986, remained unfinished at the time of his death, Wells published more than two dozen articles and papers on the important work of the project. This was followed from 1990 to



1992 by new excavations at the site of the Odeon, funded by Trinity University.

Shortly before his death, he wrote in the preface to a planned monograph on the Roman Army for the Association of Ancient Historians, “Not until after *The German Policy of Augustus* had appeared did I turn my attention away from Roman Germany and the Roman army. It was as I was casting about for something new that I was asked to join the Canadian team preparing to dig at Carthage, and eventually, when we split up into two separate teams, I ended up directing one of them. This is why, for the last thirty years or so, I have probably published and lectured more on Roman Africa than on Germany or the army.” Among his African publications the edited volume, *L’Afrique romaine: les Conférences Vanier 1980/Roman Africa: The Vanier Lectures 1980* (Ottawa 1982) stands out as an especially noteworthy contribution to the field.

Colin Wells was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, Corresponding Fellow of the the Deutsches Archäologisches Institute, Visiting Lecturer and Fellow at Oxford and Brasenose College (1973–1974), and held Visiting Professorships at Berkeley (1978) and Strasbourg (1990). He was also a member of the Association of Ancient Historians, the Archaeological

Institute of America, the American Philological Association, the Classical Association of Canada, *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautores* (for which he served as president for six year), the *Limes* Congresses, and the Society for Libyan Studies...

Upon retirement, Wells moved to Domjean in Normandy where he continued to write, the latest publications being a series of articles on Caesar’s campaigns in Normandy in 56 BC. He also began work on a brief history of the Roman army in the West for the Association of Ancient Historians, and was planning a book on the Hellenistic world.

Colin Wells was a warm, intellectually curious, and humorous man with wide-ranging interests. His fluency in French was a source of particular pride to him and he had a deep affection for Francophone culture. His fondness for cricket was well-known. Wells loved poetry, particularly the works of Horace, Vergil, A.E. Housman and Rudyard Kipling. He had many friends and showed genuine affection for them, as well as many of his former students. He will be deeply missed.

He is survived by his wife Kate, sons Christopher and Dominic, grandsons Theo and Sam, and step-mother Phyllis.

R. Bruce Hitchner