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OBITUARIES

Anders Ahlqvist: 17 February 1945 – 23 August 2018

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On 23 August 2018, as I was working on a plenary paper for the annual conference of the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas to be held in Maynooth in September of that year, I received the news that Anders Ahlqvist had died suddenly near his home in Finland at the age of 73. I had taken as the theme of the paper a particularly problematic term in *Auraicept na n-éces* which I knew would be of interest to Anders and was looking forward to his benign presence in the front row and to discussing the issues with him afterwards. Whatever he thought about it would have been couched in the politest and gentlest terms (at least in public). He was also a speaker's best time-keeper; when he thought that time was up (or at least that he had enough), he would ostentatiously delve into a waistcoat pocket and draw out a large pocket-watch which he would scrutinise carefully.

In this world of social-media, news of his death spread rapidly, but it was striking how uniform the response was across those who knew him in so many different contexts—one of shock at its suddenness (he was a constant and unchanging presence), respect for all he had achieved, and a real sense of loss of the kind and convivial person he was and how much more he had to offer.

Born in Sweden of Finnish nationality, the foundations of his wide-ranging linguistic abilities were laid early; his father was a diplomat and he received his earliest education in French in Cairo. After school, he was educated at Helsinki/Helsingfors University and,

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after military service in the Finnish Navy (he continued throughout his life to hold the rank of lieutenant in the Finnish Naval Reserve), he took himself off to Edinburgh (where he met his New-Zealand-born wife, Judith) for doctoral work under Kenneth Jackson, from where he moved on to the Institute for Advanced Studies in Dublin. He took up a post at NUI Galway where he remained for much of his career until 2005. That would have been sufficient for most, but in 2008 he took up the post of inaugural Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney, which he held for five years and did much to consolidate the position of Celtic there for the future.

But such a bare-bones narrative does nothing to illuminate the man and his work. The centrepiece of his published work was a very fine edition of the archaic core of *Auraicept na n-éces* (Ahlqvist 1983), a work which still remains central to all work on this notoriously difficult text. Many of his contributions sat at the interface between early Irish and linguistics, and he was frequently the person who brought Old Irish data to bear on issues in general linguistics: ‘a happy marriage of languages, linguistics and philology, is the crucial under-pinning of Anders’ scholarly contribution’, as Willy Gillies put it (2005: 15). Few of his contributions were very long, but their importance and usefulness outweighed their relative brevity. I had, on several occasions, the privilege to be an editor of his work (Henley & Russell 2014 and Hayden & Russell 2016), and while very particular about layout and phrasing, he was unfailingly punctual and observant of the stylesheet; in other words, unlike many contributors to edited volumes, he was an editor’s delight. His work has already been honoured in two *Festschriften* (Smelik, Hofman, Hamans, & Cram 2005 and O’Neill 2013), the former marking his sixtieth birthday, and the latter his special contribution to Celtic studies in Australia. Both pay ample testament to his extraordinary generosity and kindness, and his qualities as a scholar.

Anders, however, was not just a man of teaching and research; he also made a significant and long-lasting contribution to the field of Celtic more generally in his service to the community of Celtic scholars. He was a prolific editor of conference proceedings, *Festschriften*, journals, and newsletters. At a more rarified level, in 2008 he was appointed Chairman of the Governing Board of the School of Celtic Studies of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, a post he held to his death. As Secretary-General of the Permanent Bureau of the International Congress of Celtic Studies from 2003, he was an important figure in the continued success of the International Congress of Celtic Studies. Connected to that, he was delegate of the International Congress of Celtic Studies to the Permanent International Committee of Linguists (CIPL) and Chairman of the Nominating Committee of CIPL. His service was not restricted to Celtic: he was also President of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea* from 2002 to 2003 and of the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas from 2002 to 2005. These can be thankless tasks, but no subject can do without people willing to make these kinds of contributions; it seems to me especially important that he was also doing this outside the field of Celtic where he acted as a constant reminder to scholars that they should pay attention to it.

Anders cared about the subject and also about the people in it, and especially the younger scholars for whom the future can often seem precarious and insecure. He be-

lieved firmly that the next generation needed to be nurtured and supported and made to feel that their contribution mattered. While writing this, I asked some of my students and former students who knew him for their memories of him; the message was unanimous: he would always talk to them, enquire after their work, read drafts of forthcoming material if it was in his field, and respond to it gently, but firmly, and without fail encouragingly.

It is conventional to say that he will be much missed by colleagues and friends as if they are two distinct categories; for Anders, so great was his international reach and circle of friends that the former was almost certainly a sub-set of the latter. All will miss him. Most importantly, our sympathy goes out to his wife, his son Jacob, and his two grandsons.

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