

## OBITUARY – Sir Anthony Williams, KCMG – 1923–1990

Sir Anthony Williams was born in 1923 and educated at Oundle School and Trinity College, Oxford where he read PPE before entering the Foreign Office in 1945. He spent the whole of his career concerned with foreign and diplomatic affairs and his first posting was to Prague in 1946. He served also in Uruguay, Egypt, Washington, Moscow, Rome as well as in London. In Egypt his tour of duty was interrupted by the 1956 Suez Crisis and as a result he found himself at the United Nations in New York where he began his association with human rights issues. He spent periods in Geneva as the British delegate to the Human Rights Commission; was a UK delegate to the 18 Nation Disarmament Conference and until his death he was involved in the Conference on Security and Confidence Building in Europe (CSRE) which meets in Helsinki.

His first post as Ambassador was to a very troubled Cambodia in 1973, and then after a period in Rome as Minister he became Ambassador to Libya in 1977 when his interest in the Society began. During his service in Tripoli he and Lady Williams were extremely approachable and considerate, and added a graceful dignity to all the occasions in which they were involved. Visitors from London were given considerable support when passing through and benefited greatly from the advice which was available at the Embassy. He was in Tripoli at the time when Olwen and Charles Hackett lived in Misuratah and later moved to Tripoli themselves; and they enjoyed warm and useful exchanges on Libyan studies at the Residence. Sir Anthony's diplomatic skills were put to the test in Tripoli as tension between the two Governments was on occasions evident. Nevertheless the period of his tenure there was a productive one for the Society and for academic and scientific liaison between Libya and Britain. During the period from 1977 to 1979 important fieldwork was carried out by Society members especially at Islamic sites on the Gulf of Surt as well as at sites from earlier periods in Benghazi and in the south of Libya in the Wadi al Ajal. In these projects as well as in the Society's active publication programme Sir Anthony always showed a keen and informed interest.

The most testing responsibility of Sir Anthony was his next posting to Buenos Aires (1980–1982) where he was Ambassador in the period leading up to the hostilities with Argentina in 1982. He served with distinction there both before the Falklands crisis when he advised London on the deteriorating position and throughout the period of rising tension when he related closely to the large British community in Argentina. After his return to London he resumed responsibilities on human rights affairs and these issues also engaged him during his very active retirement.

In 1987 he became President of the Society for Libyan Studies and those who have served on Council since its foundation in 1969 can say with confidence that he was an exceptional president who chaired the Council meetings of the Society with consummate skill and good humour. He was very skilled in spotting the moment when it was possible to strike an acceptable consensus and he possessed a rare and persuasive fluency in summarising the best way forward. We shall miss more than can be expressed his exquisite courtesy, his fine intelligent humour and his serious concern with the furtherance of the Society's academic aims. These were the special things which he shared with us in the Society, and we grieve that these and all his other warm human qualities are now denied to us and to all those with whom he continued to work so energetically in other areas. We especially appreciate the loss suffered by Lady Williams and by his son and daughter.

*June 1990*

*J. A. Allan*