

CHRISTOPHER BLUNT AS A PERSON

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I have been asked to contribute a few words about Christopher as a person. How did he manage to achieve so much? Chiefly, I think it was because of his highly unusual blend of personal qualities. He combined great charm and gentleness of manner with a clear vision and constancy of purpose. All the time I knew him, he was held in wide respect and affection, and this undoubtedly helped him in the furtherance of his plans.

With one sad exception, I never heard anyone speak ill of him. His personal kindnesses were many. When as a schoolboy I wanted to buy some back volumes of the *Journal*, he arranged, as I found out later, for me to buy them at half price and paid the rest himself. When someone visited him, especially if they were young, he would give them every encouragement and often they would leave with a coin or a book that he thought might interest them.

On the other hand, he could be quite firm. Some of you may remember the words of Sir Robert Clark, a former City colleague of Christopher's at his Memorial Service. This is what he said "Christopher had very high standards and his quiet insistence on these – both for himself and all who worked for him – brought considerable acclaim and success for his merchant bank. He always bore a somewhat academic and intellectual air but he was practical and could detect a rogue very quickly. With great courtesy but with equal firmness, such people were turned quickly away".

Over the years Christopher edited more than sixty volumes of the *Journal* and *Sylloge*. He was ideally suited to the task, being both thorough and meticulous. I have always thought that this was a facility that he developed as a merchant banker, proofreading the prospectuses that companies issued for raising money. These documents contain a vast amount of technical information and the accuracy required in dealing with them is similar to that needed for editing numismatic texts. What is more, he actually enjoyed it, not least for the correspondence that it opened up for him with a wide range of authors.

Christopher's ideas about the future of numismatics in this country seem to have been formed at a relatively early stage. He felt it more important to take steps to revive the family fortunes than to go through university, but he made up for this by teaching himself some European history and several of the languages, in a way which proved invaluable to him in his later work. Although he had two academic brothers, he matched them as a scholar and his election to Fellowship of the British Academy as someone without a university degree was so exceptional that I have not been able to identify any recent parallel in the Humanities.

Christopher saw clearly that there were many strands that needed to be knitted together if numismatics was to become a proper scholarly discipline, as he thought it should. This meant using editorial means to raise the quality of material submitted for publication in the *Journal*, the development of links with related disciplines, and the provision of certain basic tools for the use of students. This last category included, for example, a new edition of Brooke's *English Coins*, the compilation of a systematic record of hoards (which came to fruition with Thompson's *Inventory* in 1956) and the publication of proper records of material, which was duly brought into effect when the *Sylloge* series was inaugurated. He also saw that the administration and finances of The Society needed to be put on a firm footing, and was anxious to find new recruits to the subject who could provide future continuity since the pre-war generation had by 1950 mostly departed from the scene.

Christopher spent the rest of his life putting these various objectives into effect. He was always at ease with people, and his diplomatic approach often played a part in soothing wounded pride or circumventing obstacles. His own modesty and lack of self importance was always evident for all to see.

Christopher's thoughtfulness for others was legendary. When he learned that he was terminally ill he dictated notes on his early life, with the comment "it occurs to me that distinguished scholars must often waste much time digging for information readily available to the deceased". As his nephew the Rev. Robert Hughes, remarked in his address at the funeral "how typical of Christopher that, as his life ebbed away, he should perform one more act of courtesy to save his colleagues an unnecessary chore".

Let me conclude with two examples of Christopher's sense of humour – and indeed of his empathy with children. His successive dogs were all called Fil Hamde, which means elephant hunter in, I think, Turkish. When one of my children asked him why, he said "When did you last see an elephant in Wiltshire?"... "Well, you see it works".

When we first took our children for a week's holiday at Ramsbury I introduced the children to "Mr. Blunt". They had just been to see the film of *The Tales of Beatrix Potter*. "Mr. Bland" they cried, "are you really Pigling Bland?" "Yes" he said beaming with pleasure and Pigling was then his name to them ever afterwards, and that's even how he signed his Christmas card.