

RECORD OF REMEMBRANCE FOR THOMAS BRAUN

On 24 September 2008, Oxford Meeting lost one of its most delightful, eccentric Friends. Thomas Felix Rudolf Gerhard Braun – Tom to his many friends- was born in 1935 in Berlin, the elder son of Konrad and Hildburg Braun. Konrad was an appeal court judge of Jewish ancestry, so the Brauns became victims of the Nazi regime. When the Gestapo came to arrest his father in November 1938, Tom's immediate family managed to escape to England, with the aid of English Quakers, and eventually they were able to build a new life at Woodbrooke, the Quaker college in Birmingham, though in the early months of the war Tom, still aged only 5, had to spend a miserable period separated from his family. He was educated at Bootham, the Quaker school in York, and won a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford.

Tom had a natural facility for languages. Although his first language was German, he spoke English perfectly and became expert in Latin and Greek, and familiar with French, Italian, Hebrew, Persian and, to a lesser extent, even Chinese. After studying classics at Balliol, he moved to Merton College for three years of postgraduate study. He was appointed Fellow and tutor in ancient history there in 1963, and remained at Merton as a Fellow for four decades. Tom was best known to the academic world for his publications on The Greeks in the Near East, but to his many pupils and colleagues he will be remembered for the extraordinary wit and charm of his conversation, his personal modesty and his desire to share the byways of his extensive knowledge with all and sundry.

From his parents he inherited a Quaker faith and a deep love of all that was best in German culture. Tom also inherited from his parents a deep sadness about the perversion of that culture that led to the two World Wars, and the Nazi persecution of the Jews in which many of his closest family perished. In Tom's later years, he became interested in the preservation of his family's fascinating history, and he translated some of his parents' poetry into English verse, as well as composing some German lyrics of his own.

At Oxford meeting, Thomas's vocal ministry, though not frequent, was always intriguing and revelatory, combining immense erudition with a very accessible style.

Tom had a deep love of the countryside, and as a young man acquired a ruined cottage in the Black Mountains of Wales, which he restored, and then used to share the experience of simple country life with his Oxford friends.

He had a very strong sense of good civic architecture and planning, leading to hard-fought, if not always successful, campaigns to preserve bits of Oxford that he valued. He had a wide circle of friends and pupils who came in their hundreds to the memorial service for him in Merton, at which his former pupil Emma Kirkby sang beautifully.

Anne and Christopher Watson