

## APPRECIATIONS OF THE LIFE OF STANLEY NISBET

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TOM BRYCE

Everyone who knew Stanley Nisbet remembers him with great affection. His sharp intellect, combined with that quiet, self-effacing manner, made his presence always rather special. Discussions, whether in formal tutorials or elsewhere, were a delight; whatever the topic, you were almost certain to view it rather differently following his input. In the 1960s and 1970s, young teachers embarking on the Dip.Ed./M.Ed. at Glasgow University welcomed Stanley's treatment of topics in philosophy and curriculum. They were always suited to the various sectors and subjects represented in his classes, perhaps being particularly appreciated by hard-nosed science graduates (like myself) still learning how to present argument in writing. Clarity of analysis was what you received from Stanley and what you tried hard to emulate. His style was engagingly straightforward; his arguments would begin with deceptive simplicity, quickly get to the core of things, and offer a convincing analysis pertinent to contemporary issues. There was no superficial camouflage or clutter; he was always straight to the point, and human values pervaded all his reasoning. A term much used to describe Stanley was 'a man of integrity'. How deserved that was.

Many have recorded Stanley's support for Jordanhill College and initial teacher education during the 1960s and 1970s in particular. Not only did he educate and influence many of its staff, he was active in forging links and relationships. Stanley was of course long into retirement when the binary divide was ended in the early 1990s and could play no part — regrettably — in the mergers which followed. He remained publicly silent about what happened, but I have no doubt was dismayed that the proposal to merge Jordanhill with Glasgow University did not take place.

His great lead in SERA and in The Educational Colloquium are well known achievements, the latter celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The minute of the inaugural meeting of The Educational Colloquium held on the 18th of January 1954 records that 91 former students of the Glasgow Ed.B. (later to become the M.Ed.) attended on the invitation of Stanley Nisbet. A further 90 were unable to attend but had intimated their wish to support its formation. The meeting's decision was to form "an association of holders of the Degree of Ed.B. of Glasgow University" and its objects were "(i) to keep its members in touch with one another, both professionally and socially; and (ii) to provide opportunities for the continued study of Education and Psychology by its members and particularly for the joint discussion and evaluation of recent developments in these fields". Amongst the signatories were Dr Ronald R. Rusk, Dr William Boyd, John Aitkenhead, Dr Margaret Clark, Philip Gardner, Leslie Hunter, Alfred Livingston, Dr Anne McAllister, James Scotland, Dr H. Stewart Mackintosh and J. G. (Ian) Morris. Over the decades, the Colloquium has served its 'objects' well with Stanley himself a regular attender into his late 80s, always able to offer a shrewd insight or ask the speaker an awkward question. I remember speaking at one meeting, with Walter Humes, about the book, *Scottish Education*, which we were some way through editing. We had still some chapters of our own to complete, not least the first and last chapters, and our own mind-set was largely on bringing about a comprehensive account for the end of the century. It was Stanley, way ahead of us all, in those pre-devolution days, who asked whether we had an eye upon a Scottish Parliament, and what might be anticipated in respect of education. Stanley was pleased that, as editors at that time, we represented both Strathclyde and Glasgow Universities. We should like to think that he would have been content with the Second Edition of *Scottish Education*, sub-titled, as it is, *Post-devolution*.

With regard to the Colloquium, this session, 2003–2004, has seen its membership formally widened to be from both Universities. Stanley would, I am sure, be pleased to read that “The Educational Colloquium is essentially an association of M.Ed. graduates of the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, although others may apply for membership”.

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#### BILL GATHERER

The supreme quality I most admired in Stanley Nisbet was, simply, his wisdom: a quiet, unassuming wisdom that yet was clearly manifest in all his contributions to our discussions. At the time I heard about his death I was reading ‘Paradise Regained’, at the passage where Satan, in his hopeless quest to corrupt the Son of Man, proposes: ‘be famous then By wisdom; as thy empire must extend, So let extend thy mind o’er all the world.’ In his rebuttal Jesus endorses only the humble wise man:

‘The first and wisest of them all professed; To know this only, that he nothing knew.’

Stanley was of that stamp: modest and tentative in debate, master of much knowledge but reluctant to parade it, for him, it seemed, knowledge was best conveyed in calm and rational exposition, as it was in his own rich writings.

I remember with pleasure his company round the table at many a SERA conference: his quiet and courteous questions, his shrewd and scholarly comments given with apparent diffidence, seeming to respect people’s intellectual integrity even when he was, in truth, opposed to the arguments being presented. Kindliness and courtesy, knowledgeability tempered with caution and consideration: these qualities were central in his teaching. His famous colloquia were influential in that they brought new, or newly prominent, information and ideas to a wide range of people, giving them a deeper understanding; and his genial chairmanship was always stimulating. I especially remember being a speaker at one – I’ve forgotten my subject but I clearly recall the happy dinner and night’s stay at the Nisbets’, their pleasant hospitality, our mutual enjoyment of hearing and telling about our families, the cosy, friendly atmosphere. I remember Stanley’s courage in bereavement and his ready sympathy with mine. I remember his quiet humour, most obviously in evidence as he enjoyed real-life anecdotes and scholarly wit; and of course his honest relish in his fame as an Esperantist and his amused patience at our efforts to tease him about it. Loved and honoured in his life, he will be remembered with real affection. A unique brotherhood in the history of Scottish education, Stanley and his brother John were shining ornaments to our profession; I hope and trust that John will continue to be so for many a year to come.