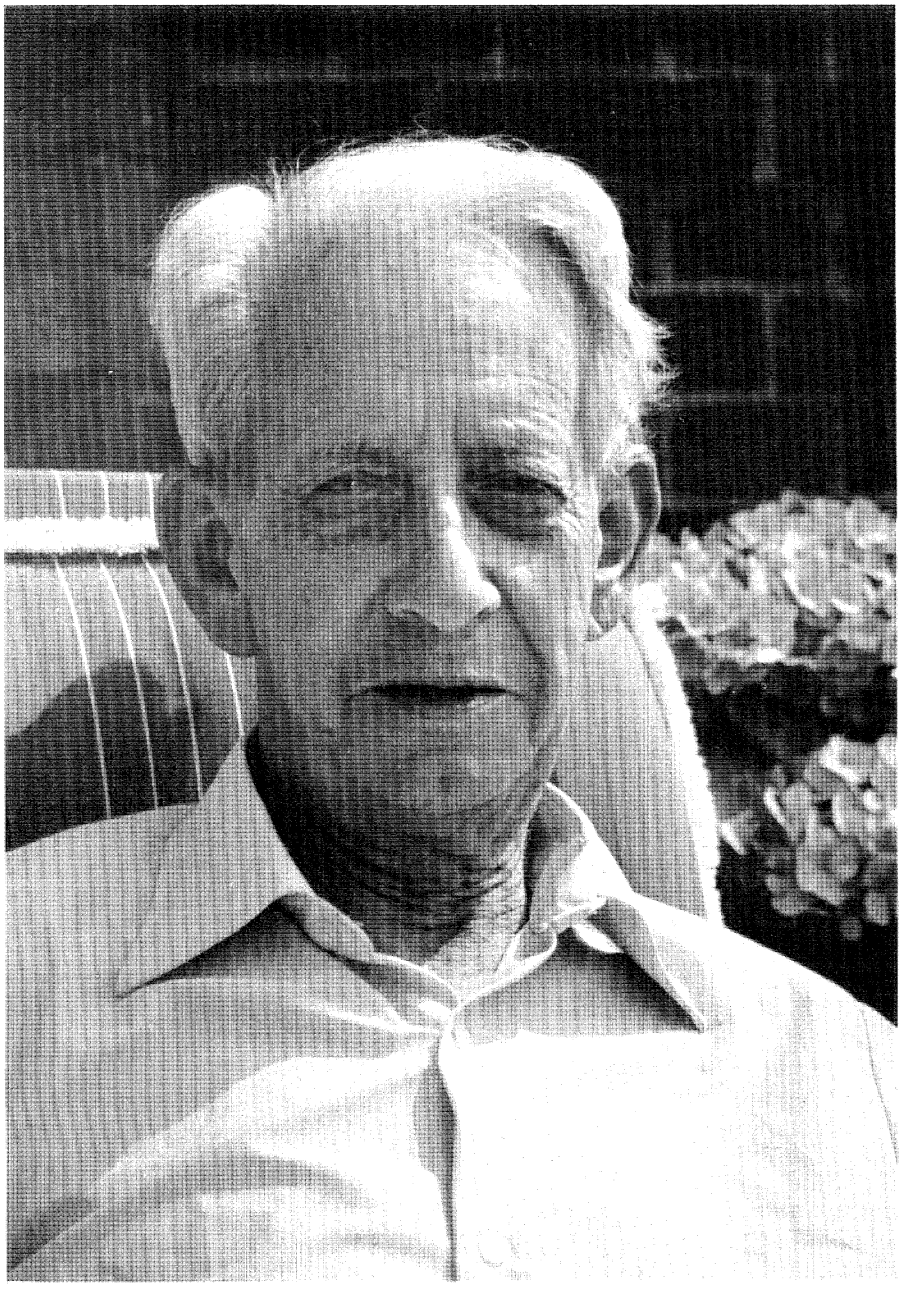
PROFESSOR P. A. BRUNT



In the year of his seventy-fifth birthday, the Society salutes Professor Peter Brunt, its President from 1980 to 1983, vigorous adviser over many years in its councils, and indefatigable contributor to the pages of this Journal. Addressing the Society in 1961 with his paper, 'The army and the land in the Roman Revolution', Peter Brunt was praised for his many and notable contributions to the Journal. Protesting that the compliment was undeserved, he was reassured that it was 'proleptic'. The forecast could not have been more apt. Over the three decades from 1958 to 1986, he published articles and review articles in no less than seventeen issues of *JRS*, amounting to some 294 pages. Many of these papers have become classics, from which our reading of Roman history now starts; as a group they have made a fundamental

impact on our study of Roman history, and lent their character to this Journal in the process. There are few Roman historians this century who have seized so unerringly the key issues, above all social and economic, of the late Republic and early Empire and marked them so firmly with the stamp of their *auctoritas*.

The old age of Camden professors is green, and it would be absurdly premature to attempt to assess the importance of Peter Brunt's *œuvre*. Since his 'retirement' in 1982, his output has continued with all the vigour and weight of earlier years. Two massive volumes, *The Fall of the Roman Republic* (reviewed in *JRS* 79 (1989), 151–6) and *Roman Imperial Themes* (*JRS* 81 (1991), 199–201), have offered far more than convenient republication of previous papers; in gathering them together and supplementing them with major new material, they have revealed the magisterial coherence and consistency of his approach and methods. Another volume, no less weighty, of the essential papers omitted from those collections (including seven in this Journal alone) could with benefit be published. Much more is on its way: a collection of papers old and new on Greek history, ranging from Herodotus and Thucydides to Plato and Aristotle, approaches publication (*Ancient Greek History and Thought*). Meanwhile a new volume is in gestation on a theme dear to him since the beginning of his career, Stoicism in the Principate.

Intimate though he is with Stoic thought, he is not easily to be identified with any philosophical creed or school of thought, *nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri*. But while he rejects approaches to history based on theory, there is a clear philosophical basis in his method: in an empiricist tradition which draws strength from the Oxford philosophical component of Greats, he believes in the methodical testing of propositions against all available evidence, in full awareness of its deficiencies (*The Fall*, 87ff.). In the logical rigour with which he pursues this project, and the mastery of the literary, epigraphic and legal sources which he brings to bear on it, he has no equal. To this he adds the gift of a head for numbers that has made him equally at home with the revenues of Rome and the revenues of Gonville and Caius. He is philosophical too in eschewing flowers of style: his style is one of perspicuous clarity, in which every word is weighed, and meaning is plain; ambiguity and evasion are foreign to it. As he presents his philosophy, its impulse is negative; he would claim that a determining factor in his research has always been the refutation of positions he believes false. But the method does not explain the choice of topics on which he brings it to bear. Since his (never completed) doctoral project under Hugh Last on the relationship of governing classes and governed from Augustus to Constantine (in which Stoicism was no more than a sub-plot), he has shown an instinct for questions of central importance (rarely coincident with those set for Greats essays, though they have changed the agenda even for those). That instinct probably has much to do with a passion for modern history dating back to his childhood; that in turn doubtless has much to do with his openness to techniques of demography, social and comparative history that make *Italian Manpower*, alongside its accessible counterpart, *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic*, such a watershed in the writing of Roman social history.

Belonging to no school, he has created no school (something which would in any case be at variance with Oxford traditions of pluralism). Yet his pupils in the profession, whether undergraduate pupils from Oriel (his own college, where he was taught by Marcus Niebuhr Tod), graduate pupils, or other scholars, young and old, from this country and abroad, whom he has so liberally helped with advice, are many, and in their various ways reveal their debt to his impact, whether their work has been on subjects close to his preferences or otherwise. He has described his own supervisor, Last, as 'awful — in the old-fashioned sense of the term'. He himself has his measure of awe, for nobody has so quick an eye for missing items of evidence and logical fallacies, and few can rival his knack of exposing the flaws in a paper — only the innocent are lulled into a sense of security by his semblance of dozing through a presentation. But the frankness of his criticism and the sureness of his control of the evidence are what, in alliance with ever-present willingness to listen, read, comment and discuss, and with the warmth and loyalty of his friendship, have made him a light by which younger scholars may set their own courses. He sees Roman history as a vast and dark cavern, lit by a few flickering candles (*The Fall*, 92): few have lit larger or more steadily burning candles than he. We look forward to the lighting of many more.

A. W.-H.