

## Harold Orton 1898–1975

On the 7th March 1975 at Leeds the death occurred in his 77th year of one of the most distinguished past members of our Association, Professor Emeritus Harold Orton. Besides having contributed to *Le Maître Phonétique* on occasion, he must be remembered in our field as having borne the chief responsibility for the excellent 1940 revision of the Ripman and Archer volume *New Spelling* which set out, with a good deal of useful statistical comment, the proposals of the Simplified Spelling Society.

Harold Orton was the son of a schoolmaster at Byers Green, a village in County Durham. As a student at Merton College, Oxford, Orton became the most remarkable protégé of Sweet's pupil Henry Cecil Wyld the historian of the English language and lexicographer. In days when the retention of a marked regional accent was yet to become unremarkable at Oxford, he acquired and ever after retained an elegant variety of the style of speech fashionable in those days, yet he could instantly and authentically revert to 'Pitmatic', as the local dialect of his childhood haunts is curiously known. He appeared on television typically light-heartedly in this vein in the month before his death, the same month as saw the publication of his (and his collaborator Nathalia Wright's) admirable *A Word Geography of England*.

This stemmed from his great life work, the *Survey of English Dialects* planned in conjunction with the illustrious Swiss phonetician (the author of the famous *Vademecum der Phonetik*) Eugen Dieth and largely carried through, after the latter's death in 1956, by Orton. The *Survey* began with a meticulously prepared 1,300-item questionnaire of phonological as well as lexical and grammatical items ultimately applied at 313 carefully-chosen rural localities by nine trained fieldworkers over a period of eleven years. The Basic Materials acquired were published in numerous volumes between 1962 and 1971: every entry was transcribed in the Association's Alphabet in the closest harmony with our Principles.

His official retirement in 1964 meant no diminution of his activities. For eight years he regularly taught the spring term at one or other of various American universities. This year he was to have presided over the Eighth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences in August at Leeds. The Leeds Department of Phonetics was set up in 1948 initially more than anything else in order to provide the training for his fieldworkers.

He will be remembered not only for his monumental scholarship but also for his kindly encouragement of younger generations, for his lively intellectual curiosity and his good humour. It is still a deep pleasure to recall his zest for life and how abundantly it stayed with him to the very end.

J W L