

HECTOR CATLING (1924–2013)

Hector Catling, Director of the School from 1971 to 1989, died at home in Langford, Gloucestershire, on 15 February 2013, aged 88.

Born in north London on 26 June 1924, the youngest of four sons, Hector William Catling grew up in the West Country. As a boy he developed a passion, and the stamina, for brass rubbing, happily cycling up to 85 miles a day to track down choice specimens. This early love for seeing the past through objects would shape his choice of career. After Bristol Grammar School, he did a four-year stint in the Royal Navy (1942–6). Belatedly he read *Literae Humaniores* in Oxford between 1946 and 1951. He then began an Oxford doctorate on the Cypriot Bronze Age under the supervision of Dorothea Gray. This new direction brought him out to Cyprus for three years (1951–3) on a scholarship funded by the Goldsmiths' Company. During this period he also held the School Studentship, arriving in Athens for two months in 1951; later he recalled how, in time-honoured fashion, he was 'greeted on arrival in the Finlay [common room] with a glass of ouzo'.

He had married Elizabeth Salter in 1948, but it was only in early 1955 that they came together to Athens for the first time, when they worked on Roman pottery in the Agora. They were en route to Cyprus, where Catling, now in his early thirties, took up his first professional post as the Crown Colony's Archaeological Survey Officer. Cyprus was where some of the Catlings' happiest times were spent. It was here too that Catling's archaeological reputation began to grow. In 1956 he launched a pioneering project to map Cyprus's surface remains of antiquity by systematic field walking. With Elizabeth drawing and measuring, he and his small team of Cypriot assistants recorded – unusually for the time – such topographical features as old field-terraces and quarries. The resulting Cyprus Survey, suffused with his deep sense of place, anticipated almost all other projects of this kind worldwide.

By late summer 1959 Catling – now with a young family – was back in Oxford, having accepted a post as Assistant Keeper in the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum. At the same time he was revising the text of his DPhil, examined in 1957 and published in 1964 by Oxford University Press as the magisterial *Cypriot Bronzework in the Mycenaean World*. Two years earlier, he had begun what became a family tradition: a biennial spring trek by road, with the children, across Europe and the hair-raising roads of what was then Yugoslavia to Greece, usually with a few days in Athens, often staying with the then Assistant Director (1963–70), Mervyn Popham, an old friend from Cyprus days.

Years later, Catling would write that the Directorship had always been a professional goal: 'a long cherished, very rarely admitted ambition'. Pleased though he was to be at the Ashmolean, and profoundly admiring of senior colleagues such as Sir John Beazley, the then Lincoln Professor, he found a 'certain deadliness' in museum work. So he was primed to accept an appointment as Director of the British School at Athens in succession to Peter Fraser. Catling took up the post, in the autumn of 1971, as a seasoned all-round Mediterranean archaeologist, a world expert on Greek prehistoric bronze-work, and with a profound love of Greek lands.

His stint as Director lasted for the best part of 18 years – the longest ever. Hector's personal qualities created a particular atmosphere: his profound civility, in him almost a moral value, along with a winning combination of dignified reserve, mischievous humour, and genuine concern for student welfare, both personal and intellectual, made him hugely popular, especially with the young. Elizabeth was his unfailing helpmeet, supporting him in many practical aspects of running the School and, in particular, hosting the punishing cycle of hospitality which the Catlings saw as essential oil in the smooth working of the School, both as a community and in its relations with Greek academe and officialdom.

Catling was a far-sighted but tactful moderniser. Although respecting tradition, he saw the importance of keeping the School abreast, or even ahead, of the needs of its academic users. One of his earliest innovations was to preside over the establishment in the School grounds (1974) of a

laboratory for archaeological science, with crucial start-up funding provided by Marc Fitch, a personal friend of the Catlings. What became known as the Marc and Ismene Fitch Laboratory was the first of its kind in Greece, and it saw the rapid success and expansion of its facilities.

Another momentous novelty was Catling's decision to introduce taught courses into what had hitherto been a research centre. He fully supported the initiative of his second Assistant Director, Dr Robin Barber, in establishing a three-week summer course for British undergraduates in 1973. In collaboration with what was then the Department of Education and Science, he himself set up and directed a biennial Easter course (from 1979) aimed at refreshing sixth-form classics teachers in UK schools. This course was 'the greatest pleasure', he would say, of his time in Athens. It revealed his own gifts as a teacher, as well as his ability to recruit tutors of the highest calibre (Simon Hornblower; Oswyn Murray). These courses broadened the UK constituency for the work of the School and strengthened the case for continuing to fund it.

In 1973 Catling began a major new excavation at the site of the classical Spartan sanctuary of the Menelaion, where the School had first dug before World War I. He deepened knowledge and understanding of the Bronze Age 'mansion' here. He also found inscriptions confirming that Helen – as Herodotus relates – was worshipped alongside her husband, as well as new evidence for the shrine's Doric architecture. Here he gave many young student volunteers their first taste of a Greek 'dig'. Elizabeth supervised the kitchen. In the evening the two of them took opposite ends of the table for convivial dinners at which 'Champagne Charlie', 'Foggy Foggy Dew', and other songs from Catling's naval years were aired with gusto.

In 1986 the School celebrated its centenary. In his usual far-sighted way Catling foresaw the significance of the event for publicising the School and its work and for its fund-raising opportunities. In Athens he organised an international conference open to the public. He presided over the launching of the Centenary Appeal, with its lasting legacy of endowed bursaries to bring Greek and Cypriot scholars for short stays to the UK. With advice from the then British ambassador to Greece, the late Sir Peregrine Rhodes, to build on the momentum of the centenary, Catling also set up (1988) the Friends of the British School, with a UK branch from 1991.

On retirement in 1989, the Catlings moved to a house and garden in the Cotswolds village of Langford. Here Catling brought two major projects to publication. *Knossos North Cemetery* (with the late Nicolas Coldstream) appeared in 1996, and *Menelaion I*, covering the Bronze Age levels, in 2009. Elizabeth had completed the archaeological drawings for this last by 2000, just before her death. In her memory, the Catling family have since established a BSA fund to support excellence in archaeological draughtsmanship. Catling threw a memorable garden party at Langford to mark the publication: to thank all the contributors, not the 'vanity,' as he characteristically put it, of a launch party.

From Langford Catling served as the first Honorary Secretary of the UK Friends of the School, at first with Elizabeth at his side. Both were indefatigable in building up the UK branch into today's thriving organisation with its extraordinarily varied programme of events, from an annual London-based lecture series to fund-raising walks and auctions. For another 19 years after Elizabeth's death, stepping down only in 2011, Catling maintained his active role, staunchly supported since 2000 by Marie-Christine Keith.

For his services to archaeology Catling was made OBE in 1980 and CBE in 1989. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Athens, and was made an Honorary Member of the Archaeological Society of Athens (Vice-President since 1988) and a Corresponding Member of the German Archaeological Institute. Among his other honours, national and international, he was particularly pleased to have been made an honorary fellow of his old Oxford college, St John's, in 1986.

In March 2012 Catling was prevailed upon to attend a day of talks in his honour at Oxford. A series of colleagues described his lasting imprint on the School and on many individual lives before a packed auditorium. He was left deeply moved. As another speaker would later put it at a memorial event at the School in October 2013, Catling was 'a most remarkable person, as well as a person universally respected and held in great affection'.

He is survived by his daughter and two sons.