

Eulogy delivered at Evensong in Durham Cathedral on 14 July 2023

Anthony Harding

Friends, Colleagues and Students of Rosemary Cramp; Ladies and Gentlemen

It seems ironic that I should be standing here today to talk about Rosemary, as she was always the one who was invited to deliver the eulogies at funerals of her friends and colleagues – and nobody did it better than her. My former Durham Colleague Dennis Harding said, when I mentioned I was to give this talk, “I do not envy you the responsibility! I would feel her gimlet gaze over my shoulder”. Many of us will have felt that gaze, and quaked under it.

Nevertheless, it is an honour and a pleasure to have the chance to remember with you a person who was by any measure not only remarkable, for both her character and her many achievements, but also someone we remember with enormous affection.

Rosemary came from a farming background in Leicestershire, and her family was always very important to her, especially the loving relationships she had with her mother and her sister Margaret. She would always say at Christmas and other holiday periods, even after she had been in Durham for many years, that she was “going home”, by which she meant going down to stay with her family in Leicestershire. The following generations were also very important to her, and she followed the progress of her niece and nephew, and their children and now grandchildren, with great interest.

Rosemary loved children, and they responded to her – she never talked down to them; she was very generous to them – certainly to my children, and no doubt to yours as well. It’s a shame she never had children of her own; but then she seemed not to want to be in a position to do that. She had so many friends, male and female, that her life didn’t have room for one person who would have made that possible. Once when I made a frivolous remark about her marrying someone, she said “Oh no, after all this time of avoiding it!”. So I think she was happy to cultivate her friendships, which more than filled her life.

So instead of a family life of her own, she devoted herself to scholarship, especially that of the Anglo-Saxon world, to teaching, and subsequently, as she became better known, to a great range of roles in the public sphere. They have been enumerated in the obituaries that have appeared since her death, and I will only mention one here that seems to have been passed over: she was on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art from 1994 to 2003, a job that she greatly enjoyed. Her CBE in 1987 was a direct result of her work as a Commissioner on the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, as well as on the equivalent body for Scotland, and as a Trustee of the British Museum, while her DBE in 2012 was for her scholarship, most importantly her great project, the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture.

I only came to know Rosemary when she appointed me to a lectureship in the Department of Archaeology at Durham in 1973; she was in her mid forties then, so there is a great deal of her earlier life that I only know of at second hand, and a few of you present will know more of

those earlier years than I do - probably not so many of you, as she has lost a lot of friends in recent years. Over the 17 years that we were colleagues, and in the years since 1990 when I was appointed to her chair and she remained an active member of the Department, she guided me and helped me at times of difficulty, put up with me at times when I was being awkward, and encouraged me when I was uncertain about my next life steps. In this, I am sure that I am only echoing what you yourselves experienced from her. Certainly she supported all her colleagues and friends; I was one of a group at Durham who became known as Rosemary's babies, and we all went on to other roles in the profession, not least because of the support we got from her.

Many of you will have been her students, and it is obvious from the number of you present that you remember her with respect and affection. Of course Rosemary was someone whose proverbial bark was far worse than her bite. I am sure you remember what tutorials with her were like (of course I only know this at second hand). For a start, you had to sit in the armchairs opposite her desk, and you sank deep into them, while she sat upright high above you. Woe betide you if you were not properly prepared, or you spoke hesitantly! She could be pretty tough on you in those situations, especially (I am told) on girls. She could be impatient in such situations, but never unkind. And if you talked to her outside those formal settings, she will have taken a kindly interest in you, and remembered you. Her memory for people was amazing; she kept in touch with students from years before, and remembered them and their histories. Everyone, especially those who shared her passion for the Anglo-Saxon world, was supported and encouraged, and often went on to make their mark in the archaeological or heritage world.

This is not to say that her tutorials and lectures always ran smoothly; Rosemary herself would admit in honest moments that there was an element of chaos in her life, which was simply the result of her taking on so much. When personal computers came in during the 1980s, like me she acquired one of the new Amstrad machines, which helped her somewhat but also caused her much frustration. I remember her phoning me at 9 pm one evening with the words, "Anthony, I think I have done something rather stupid"

If you were with Rosemary in a meeting or a lecture, you would soon discover that she had an unerring gift of homing in on the really important part of any debate. Even if the topic was not one in which she had special knowledge, she could immediately see what was important and what was merely incidental. Rosemary did not just sit on committees, she did something about it when serving on them. So her membership of so many national bodies was no mere excuse for a trip to London or Scotland: she was highly active in them, and gained the confidence and appreciation of the other members of them. It was this gift which made her such a natural choice for the many bodies on which she served. She was not awed by title or rank; those who possessed them soon came to appreciate her qualities, and many became her friends.

Throughout the time we were colleagues, Rosemary was always exceedingly busy. But it is hard to really appreciate the full extent of the frenetic pace at which she lived her life, especially during the 1970s and 80s. A typical week might involve a set of lectures and tutorials on Monday and Tuesday, a trip to London on Wednesday, a day at Jarrow on Thursday to work on setting up Jarrow Hall or arrange the next campaign of excavations, and a visit with one of

the heritage organisations around Scotland on Friday and Saturday. She would often be in the office until 8 pm or later, working on papers or talks she had been asked to give, or preparing lectures. If not, she might entertain guests or friends at home, regularly cooking extensive meals; and even in her current home in Leazes Place, after she left the rather small house in Church Street, the kitchen was tiny. None of these things seemed to faze her, however. Her hospitality was famous; she enjoyed a social occasion, and was never more at home than making sure everyone was happy. I do remember that this solicitude to guests could sometimes get carried too far; when she took guests in to dine at St Marys, they sometimes had to be wary lest they got gravy poured on their dessert in her eagerness to look after them.

In the University, she and Eric Birley created the Department of Archaeology, and when she was appointed to the Chair in 1971, she set about expanding it, so that by the time she retired it was a major player, and the number of students taking degrees in the subject was growing fast. She was keen to bring in new areas of the subject, to make a well-rounded department. Chris Cagle reminds me of her commitment to archaeological conservation, appointing a lecturer in the subject, and setting up a lab and later a contract with English Heritage. She was always keen to see material from her own excavations properly conserved, but her interests went much further: in the context of the Cathedral, the conservation of St Cuthbert's coffin and the dating of the north door were both projects in which she was involved – and I remember her horror at the removal of the original Sanctuary Knocker without archaeological supervision, the first time it had ever been removed from the door – which has been radiocarbon-dated to the 12th century. She had a long association with the Cathedral, though she was never, as I have read in one of the obituaries, Cathedral Archaeologist; she served on the Fabric Advisory Committee as archaeological consultant. She was also on the Church of England Advisory Board for Redundant Churches for many years.

Her faith was of course very important to her, though she never rammed it down people's throats. She was a long-time member of the congregation at St Cuthberts; she served on the Historic Churches Committee of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, where her presence was effective and much appreciated.

Rosemary was a larger than life figure – I remember when we visited her in the care home in Market Harborough where she spent time recuperating after breaking her leg a few years ago, hearing her long before we saw her – and such persons are often the subject of anecdotes; she was no exception. I will restrict myself to just one, which illustrates the way in which her busy life meant she sometimes got things a bit mixed up.

Eric Cambridge and I went to a performance of Richard Strauss's *Salome* in the Theatre Royal Newcastle. As you may know, this opera, based on the play by Oscar Wilde, is very explicit in its last scene, where Salome holds the head of John the Baptist in her hands and sings passionately to it. On the way out, we were surprised to see Rosemary with a distinguished Chinese visitor, her host in China a few months earlier, sitting a few rows behind us; they were both clearly shell-shocked, perhaps not surprising, since both play and opera had originally been banned in various cities for many years for its subject matter and for blasphemy; nor would the musical language have appealed to Rosemary. The visitor was obviously rather

surprised to find that this was the sort of entertainment the English liked to enjoy on a Saturday evening. It transpired that Rosemary thought they were going to see *Cosi fan tutte*.

I expect we all have our stories about her; but when we remember her through them, it is never with malice, always with a mixture of amusement and affection.

How do we sum up the life and character of Rosemary Jean Cramp, DBE, CBE, FBA, FSA, and the way she influenced us and the many other people whose lives she touched? She had that gift of being truly interested in those she interacted with; she enjoyed a good laugh and told a good story, though it was never malicious; it was as much the way she told the story as any intrinsic wit in the words she used; her own self-deprecating chuckle made others laugh. She was a faithful friend who rejoiced in her friends' good fortune and sympathised in their distress. While she was justly proud of her achievements, she was never arrogant about them. Her manner could appear brusque to those who did not know her, and she did not gladly tolerate fools or self-servers, but not far beneath that surface was a warm and kind personality, bubbly and amusing, always ready for a laugh. She was truly one of the most remarkable persons most of us will ever know.

Rosemary, we miss you and we thank you for letting us share a part of your long and busy life.

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