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David Jesson-Dibley

Shirley Watters

DAVID JESSON-DIBLEY'S first acquaintance with the Friends of Coleridge was in 1993 at the Kilve weekend when he gave a paper exploring how "those geniuses of Hazlitt's starry-eyed youth, Wordsworth and Coleridge, never exactly his friends, became his enemies". The argument is even-handed, but shows David's sympathy for Hazlitt's forthrightness. This was followed at Kilve 1995 by a characteristically worded "*Asking questions of the Ancient Mariner*" on Saturday morning, and in the evening by *Brandy is for Heroes*, an amusing dramatisation of the meeting of Keats (played by Duncan Wu) and Coleridge (D J-D).

David's life was a literary one. As Head of the English Department at Christ's Hospital, he wrote and directed a celebration for the Quatercentenary of the school. When he left in 1967, wanting more time to travel, write and lecture free-lance, he handed the job over to Reggie, and they remained in friendly contact ever since. A fuller account of his life is sure to be printed in *The Blue*.

His publications include editions of Robert Herrick (1980) and Leigh Hunt (1990) for the Fyfield Books series of the Carcanet Press, and a novel *Earth-Bound* (1995), a suitably punning title for a modern allegory. He also contributed to the Norwich Series of Study Tapes and lectured in the Extramural Department at London University.

He was a founder member of The New Bridge, a voluntary body concerned with the reform and aftercare of offenders. This was of great importance to him, and he devoted a lot of time and energy to prison visiting, giving all kinds of support to those being released. The words of Leigh Hunt's son about his father could be attributed to David, whose aims, too, had been "to promote the happiness of his kind... and to open more widely the door of the library". His own reading was wide and open-minded. For *Bulletin 27* he wrote a most interesting review of Ken McGoogan's account of the life of Samuel Hearne – to whom Coleridge was briefly introduced by his maths teacher at Christ's Hospital, William Wales, and who was the source of Brian Edwards' account of the effect of witchcraft on the Oby negroes, referred to in 'The Three Graves'. And he was preparing to review Nick Roe's *Fiery Heart, The First Life of Leigh Hunt*, a vivid and original account of Leigh Hunt's early years, taking the book into hospital with him while undergoing dialysis, when more serious illness overcame him. But it signified his interest in the man, and his openness to new ways of looking at a figure he felt he knew quite well. We will miss the review, but most of all we will miss the reviewer.