

RICHARD KEITH SPRIGG

Richard Keith Sprigg was born on March 31st, 1922, and educated at Oakham School, Rutland, and at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he obtained 1st class honours in the classical Tripos Part I in 1942, and was awarded his BA in 1944. Since this was war time, Sprigg had joined up, and his years at Cambridge were (briefly) interrupted by a course in military Japanese for Royal Air Force cadets at Bedford, and a short introduction to aspects of Air Force Japanese held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. This latter proved to be a turning point in Sprigg's career, as through it he first became acquainted with John Rupert Firth, the head of the Phonetics and Linguistics Department at SOAS, who was running the course. From 1944-1946 Sprigg served in the Intelligence Branch of the R.A.F. in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Japan, and on demobilisation was awarded a scholarship which enabled him to return to SOAS in 1947 to study the phonetics of Sino-Tibetan languages. Appointment to a lectureship in phonetics soon followed in 1948, and Sprigg set about the study of Burmese. His first spell of study leave in 1949-50 took him to India (Kalimpong) and Tibet (Gyantse), where he began the serious study of spoken Lhasa Tibetan. It was in Kalimpong that Keith Sprigg met his future wife, Ray Williams; the occasion of their wedding at Melton Mowbray in 1952 was appropriately marked by the presentation of a ceremonial Tibetan scarf by one of his Tibetan assistants. In the early fifties, he produced the first of many subsequent publications on the Lhasa dialect of Tibetan, adopting the innovative prosodic phonological approach of his mentor J.R. Firth. He also began to study Lepcha, and used the opportunities offered by his next study leave, in Nepal in 1955-56, to make preliminary investigations of Newari, Limbu, Sherpa, Tamang and Bantawa Rai. A further period of study leave in 1964-65 took him to Pakistan, India, Sikkim and Nepal, and enlarged his acquaintanceship with the languages of the area, including the Balti and Golok dialects of Tibetan. These field trips have resulted in a rich and steady flow of scholarly publications, which so far shows no sign of drying up. In November 1987 his outstanding contribution to this area of study was recognised by his election to an Honorary Membership of the Linguistic Society of Nepal - an honour accorded only twice before to scholars of world distinction, Professor Sir Ralph Turner and Professor Kenneth Pike.

David Bradley, Eugénie J.A. Henderson and Martine Mazaudon eds,
Prosodic analysis and Asian linguistics: to honour R.K. Sprigg, 1-5.
Pacific Linguistics, C-104, 1988

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Alongside his special concern with the Tibeto-Burman languages, Sprigg has maintained and developed a keen interest in phonetics and in Firthian prosodic analysis, as is abundantly reflected in his publications. He was appointed to a Readership in Phonetics at SOAS in 1968, and was awarded a PhD by London University in 1969 for his thesis on the phonetics and phonology of spoken Tibetan, and a Litt. D. by Cambridge University in 1982 for his contribution to Tibeto-Burman phonology.

Never an 'armchair linguist', in addition to his extensive research in the field, Keith Sprigg's work has taken him as visiting professor or lecturer to universities in India and Sikkim, and to international conferences in the US, USSR, Hungary, Thailand and several West European countries. In 1980 he resigned from his post at the University of London to take up residence in Kalimpong, but happily those of us who believed he had 'retired' have been proved wrong! Keith Sprigg has continued his travels and scholarly investigations, and still delights and stimulates his colleagues with talks and the publications to which they give rise, much as the sound of his bagpipes used to enliven departmental Christmas parties!

The contributors to the present volume wish to express to him some degree of their admiration for his scholarly achievements and their affection for him as a friend.

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