

In Memoriam

—

Professor Burridge Spies (5 January 1930 – 22 July 2008)¹

I met Burridge almost 35 years ago to the day when I began at the University of South Africa (Unisa) at the beginning of August in 1973. I was very dubious about coming to Unisa from Pietermaritzburg. It had a reputation very different to what I had been used to at the University of Natal and I was greatly relieved when on my first day I met Burridge and found in him a kindred spirit. We both shared a very similar vision of what history means and were politically akin.

I was a historian at the start of my academic career and was delighted to find that Burridge had been mentored by my former headmaster Maurice Geen and had both been at school with, and remained a friend of Colin Webb, my supervisor at Natal. These were men who had shaped me as a novice historian and the regard in which Burridge held them, established an instant rapport between us. It gave me someone at Unisa both to look up to and also with whom I could enjoy many stimulating discussions (and sometimes heated arguments) about particularly British and imperial history. I was impressed by his breadth of knowledge and particularly enjoyed Monday afternoons when the two of us would travel to Johannesburg in my Mini to take part in the very stimulating seminar programme run by the Wits History Department. And the dissecting of the discussions in the car afterwards.

Burridge had been educated at Pretoria Boys' High School and in the late 1940s had studied at Wits, reading History and English for his BA and completing a History honours in 1951. He was a distinguished student who was deeply influenced by the work of J.S. Marais from whom he imbibed the importance of thorough empirical research and under whom he completed his master's degree. Burridge was at the centre of a small group of budding scholars who were also politically aware of what was happening in South Africa after 1948. Because of this, it is easy to understand why he was essentially a liberal historian, concerned with the political role individuals played in the shaping of history and critical of the ideological determinism that came to mark English-speaking history in South Africa by the 1970s. Yet he was far

1. Eulogy delivered at a gathering of family and friends.

too astute a historian to believe that political issues could be looked at in isolation and his concern with social issues resulted in his path-breaking book on the Anglo-Boer War, *Methods of Barbarism?* I asked him to promote my doctoral thesis and could not have asked for a better, more perceptive and empathetic promoter.

After completing a Higher Education Diploma, Burrige returned to Boys' High where he taught until he became a lecturer at Unisa in 1967, rising rapidly through the ranks to full professor in 1978. Together with the then Head of Department, Christoph Muller, he did much to promote a solid research culture in the department and there were many among the younger staff members who regretted that he did not follow Muller as Head of Department at the end of the 1970s. His keen interest in research would have done much to ensure that Muller's legacy would have continued to flourish. Although he never became Head of Department, he provided much of the stability and leadership that the department needed. Burrige retired in 1995.

Burrige published an influential corpus of works on South African history but I believe that it was as a supervisor of master's and doctoral students that his greatest legacy to South African historiography can be found. Albert Grundlingh, Fransjohan Pretorius and Karen Harris are only three of the prominent historians whose doctorates he promoted. They, I am sure, will all acknowledge their debt to his meticulous promotion of their work.

So much for Burrige the historian and academic, but I am sure that for most of us who knew him it is Burrige the friend who we will remember. Burrige was in many ways a very private man whose life centred on his family, but he did have a gift for establishing close friendships. Noel Garson reminded me of the long-lasting friendship Burrige struck up with him at Wits and with men like Jack Spence and Bruce Murray. I was privileged to regard him as a friend from my earliest days at Unisa. He never made me aware of the age gap between us and I have many happy memories of the friendship not only between us, but which also included Marion.

We were also united by a social consciousness. In *Methods of barbarism?*, Burrige was concerned with the moral and humanitarian aspects of war. This reflected an on-going concern with moral issues in contemporary South Africa and we had many a discussion in the 1980s on the way in which the country was deteriorating morally. Burrige was fortunate that in Marion he had a wife completely committed to changing

South Africa and he supported her in her work for, amongst others, the Black Sash.

And finally, no tribute to Burrige would be complete without mention of Burrige the Sportsman. He both loved and excelled at sport, at cricket he was a provincial player and captain in the 1950s, he played provincial hockey and coached Boys' High First Rugby 15. He was a mean tennis and squash player. He however brought to sport the same humanity and gentlemanliness that he brought to the other aspects of his life. There are many of us who did not shine as sportsmen, whom he made to feel welcome members of the History Department's tennis club and whom he welcomed as members of the History Department's cricket team.

I have the fondest memories of Burrige, his courtesy and his consideration. I will always cherish the friendship he and Marion gave to me.

John Lambert
University of South Africa