

Obituary—Dr. WJA Payne, 1918–2011

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Bill Payne in his typical relaxed pose in the early 1970s

We were in Southern Darfur in the far western Sudan, part of our time spent with the nomadic Baqqara studying their livestock and part of the time in Nyala with the sedentary mixed crop–livestock farmers. In Nyala, we had a basic house with electricity for about 2 h a day and water on tap now and then. In the pre-rains Sudan with temperatures of 50°C and humidity well into the eighties, we lived mainly on peanut butter, peanut oil and roast peanuts and, when not actually recording livestock growth and reproductive performance, we kept as still and inactive as possible. There exploded, into this mundane and primitive existence, in May 1973, a bouncing bundle of energy and enthusiasm known as Bill Payne. We did not know him as Bill then, but only by repute as WJA Payne, one of the authors of the authorized version of tropical livestock production, “An Introduction to Animal Husbandry in the Tropics”.

Bill had been sent to Southern Darfur by our employers as an “expert”—a word he had as much contempt for as I do myself—to oversee our work. This was not enough for Bill. He wanted to participate, typically as we later learnt, in the studies. We spent a couple of weeks doing about 3 months’ work when he announced (climatic conditions were now fearsome) that we would all—including our 3-year-old son—climb the 3,000-m Jebel Marra before he left for home. It was during this visit and 2 years later when living in Khartoum and him, at almost 60 years of age, getting me out of bed at 5 a.m. to play squash, that we learned of the background that had made the “Introduction” possible. He had held “regular” jobs in research posts in Fiji, Kenya (where he was Deputy Director of the East African Agriculture and Forestry Organisation) and in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. In 1956, he was awarded a Commonwealth Fellowship as a Visiting Professor at Louisiana State University and later had a similar post at the University of Florida, and in both these places, he had passed on and shared his knowledge with the coming generation of scientists. In the early 1970s, Bill returned to the UK whence, over the next 30 years, he undertook many consultancies in tropical livestock for UNDP, FAO, the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the British Government. He also continued to edit and write and added these to his already voluminous output of scientific publications and technical reports.

William James Arthur Payne was born in the village of Broadway in Worcestershire on 12 January 1918. Bill’s lifelong interest in biology grew out of his 1920s Cotswold childhood where he hunted rabbits and helped his uncles sell fruit and vegetables on Walsall market. He attended Prince Henry’s Grammar School in Evesham and won a Ministry of Agriculture scholarship to Downing College,

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Cambridge in 1938 where he met Selma, his lifelong companion. They married in 1941, and in 1946, Bill was awarded a Ph.D. in animal nutrition from Glasgow University.

On his “retirement”, Bill conducted his consultancy from a house in London. In 1981, however, he and Selma moved back to Bill’s natal village of Broadway. He developed a small cottage into a comfortable home and indulged his love of gardening and fruit growing—he had set up fair semblances of English country gardens in the tropical places in which he had lived and published a cookbook for tropical fruit co-authored with Selma—and developed an acre or so into a very productive patch of land. Bill was active well into the twenty-first century (he was gracious

enough to allow me to be a co-author of the Fifth Edition of the “Introduction” in 1999), but time, aided and abetted by Alzheimer’s dreadful disease, eventually took its toll. Bill died peacefully in his 94th year at his Broadway home on 15 April 2011.

A Service of Thanksgiving for Bill’s life, attended by many friends and colleagues, was held at St. Eadburgha church, only 100 m from his home, on 27 April 2011. He was cremated on 28 April. Bill is survived by Selma (his wife of 70 years), by three sons and a daughter, by ten grandchildren and by four great grandchildren. He will be sorely missed, not only by this assemblage, but also by countless animal scientists around the world.