

Bieler, Ludwig Josef Georg

by Aidan Breen

Bieler, Ludwig Josef Georg (1906–81), Hiberno-Latin scholar, was born 20 October 1906 in Vienna, Austria, first child of Ludwig Bieler and Antonie Bieler (née Bäder), and educated at the Landstrasser Gymnasium, Vienna, where he obtained his *Matura* (leaving certificate) in 1925. He studied classics and comparative philology at Vienna, Tübingen, and Munich, received his doctorate *summa cum laude* from the University of Vienna (1929), and later obtained diplomas in education and librarianship. During 1930–38 he worked on the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* series, published by the Vienna Academy of Letters, and from 1935 was assistant keeper of manuscripts at the österreichische Nationalbibliothek and later *Privatdozent* in classics at the University.

Because of his Jewish background, he fled his native Austria (1939) to avoid persecution after the Nazi *Anschluß*. In 1940 he was appointed visiting lecturer in palaeography and early medieval Latin to the colleges of the NUI. Apart from one spell (1947–8) as assistant professor of classics at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA, he spent the rest of his academic life in UCD, where he was from 1948 successively assistant lecturer and college lecturer in classics. Finally (1960) he was appointed first professor of the newly created chair of palaeography and late Latin, which he occupied until his retirement (1977).

His scholarly achievements are manifold. Among his many publications in classics – his primary area of training – are a critical edition of Boethius's 'Consolatio philosophiae', as well as a history of Latin literature (3rd ed., 1972). He will be best remembered in Ireland, however, for his contribution to Patrician scholarship, especially his unsurpassed edition of the *Libri epistolarum S. Patricii* (2 vols, 1952), *Four Latin Lives of St Patrick* (1971), and *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (1979), as well as a host of important papers on virtually every aspect of the Patrician documents and the history and cult of St Patrick. There is scarcely any area of Hiberno-Latin studies that he did not advance, most notably by his work as editor of the *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* series, in which he either published or made a substantial contribution to almost every volume. His Irish-Latin studies spanned the fields of palaeography, insular Latin, hymnody, liturgy, and the penitentials, of which he published an excellent edition (*The Irish penitentials* (1964)). As archivist of the NLI 1946–7, and for many years thereafter, he listed manuscripts, whole or fragmentary, from every library in Europe that contained Irish material, especially of the medieval period, and obtained microfilms of them. His only concession to the general reader was his beautifully illustrated *Irland: Wegbereiter des Mittelalters*, reprinted in English translation as *Ireland: harbinger of the middle ages* (1963). His achievements may be judged from the necessarily incomplete bibliography of 250 items and the curriculum vitae given in his Festschrift, edited by J. O'Meara and B.

Naumann: *Latin script and letters A.D. 400–900* (Leiden, 1976). But even this does not do justice to his achievements. He was a member of many learned societies and institutes in Ireland and abroad, and for many years practically epitomised Hiberno-Latin scholarship in Ireland. He was a modest and generous man with his colleagues and students. His scholarly labours on behalf of his adoptive country have not received their full recognition: perhaps more than any other scholar in the twentieth century he brought the riches of medieval Irish intellectual culture to the attention of the scholarly world, greatly enhancing its prestige. Thanks to him the study of Hiberno-Latin literature ceased to be the poor relation of medieval studies.

He married (2 May 1939) Eva Uffenheimer; in a long and happy marriage they had two children, Thomas (b. 1942) and Elizabeth (b. 1944). He died 2 May 1981.

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*WWWWW!*; *The Academic Who's Who 1973/74*; *Répertoire Internationale des Médiévistes 1971*; *U.C.D.: Report of the President, 1976–7* (retirement); *ibid.*, 1980–81 (death)