

CARMINA
ET EPIGRAMMATA
AUREAE AETATIS

Johannes Coates Gottingensis



Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen



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PREFACE

This collection was written over a long period – sixty years. At first, the poems were exercises set at school or university, or prize entries: one such was ‘The Scarecrow’, written when I was seventeen. Odes I-VII belong to this college period. Although not literal versions, they stick fairly closely to the original English texts.

After a gap of a quarter of a century I took up my pen again, encouraged by my good friend † Wolfram Ax. These later poems are more original, sometimes based on ideas picked up from a literary source that I admired, not always English. They have become more personal, more ‘silver’, perhaps more English in feeling over time. Sometimes more cynical – an easy attitude to take, and one well represented in Latin poetry. Too easy, I sometimes think: hence my final Ode XX with its Horatian overtones.

For inspiration, I’m indebted to my five years as a Classical Scholar at Eton College in the 1950s. Eton had been founded in 1440, shortly before the final fall of the Roman Empire, and we were often obliged to study in Lower School (as it was called), a grim place that had appropriately uncomfortable, cramped desks and benches, and – an extra bonus – centuries-old graffiti scraped into the wood by unhappy pupils. Under such circumstances, at 7.30 in the morning, breakfastless, in winter, it’s impossible not to get a special feeling for Antiquity.

Moving up to modern times, I owe a debt of thanks to my wife Gabriele (fellow lover of Latin), to † Fidel Rädle (fellow poet), to the editors of Vox Latina, who over many years published earlier versions of most of the poems in this collection, and to † Wolfram Ax. Special thanks also to Bernhard Goldmann (proof-reading), to Alexandra Rehfeld (computer skills and layout) and to Hermione Wiltshire for the re-discovery and photo of the Arundel Tomb in Chichester Cathedral, which appears in Ode V. Also again to Gabi for the photo illustrations to Odes I and XVIII, and finally to my old friend and colleague Szőnyi György (Szeged University) for his advice on the English translations.