

W.A.R. Wood

W.A.R. Wood, C.I.E., C.M.G. a former British Consul-General in Thailand and a member of the Siam Society died after a short illness on 21 January, 1970, two days before he would have attained his ninety-second birthday.

William Alfred Rae Wood was born at Liverpool in 1878, the sixth of eight children and the only boy in the family. He received his earliest schooling in Belgium. At the age of twelve he entered Dulwich College in London as a day-boy, and has described the three years he spent there as "very happy ones".

After leaving school Wood travelled in Switzerland and Germany, studying French and German, and returned to England in 1895 to prepare for the examination for Student interpreters in the Far East. Success in that examination brought him, in June 1896, to Thailand, appointed, as he loved to recall, to the British Consular Service by Queen Victoria. Here he lived for the rest of his life-over 73 years.

His first appointment was in Bangkok, as a Student Interpreter at the British Legation. Many of the more unusual jobs devolved upon the young Wood's shoulders: as he remarks in his autobiography, "at the age of eighteen I found myself dealing with rugged sailors from the sailing ships, drunken guests at the Ambassador's garden party, and starting a racing stable with one pony".

During the next 35 years he was at various times stationed at Bangkok, Chiangrai, Nan, Lampang and Songkhla. He was appointed Consul in Chiangmai in 1914, Consul-General in 1921 and retired in 1931. For a period he was a Travelling District Judge, in the days of extraterritoriality when European powers maintained their own courts for their own subjects in Siam.

From the first he was attracted and fascinated by Thailand and its people, which he has described with a fine sense of humour and an obvious affection in "Consul in Paradise", a lively and eclectic account of his years in this country. Wood was a frequent contribu-

tor of short stories and factual pieces to the local press, and his "History of Siam", published in 1926, was considered a standard work.

During the Second World War he was interned as an enemy alien, but in his later years dismissed this period saying that "he had forgiven everything". After retirement Wood continued to live in Chiangmai with his wife Boon Chitrapricha, whom he married in 1906, and his daughter Rose. His years of retirement were devoted mainly to the teaching of English to young Thais, an occupation which he modestly described as "not entirely useless", and which certainly won him the affection of many of the younger generation.

His death on 21st January this year much saddened the British community in Thailand and Wood's many Thai friends and admirers. In a message of condolence to Wood's widow, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said "His long life in Thailand stands as a fine example to all", a sentiment which will be shared by all who knew Wood and many who had only heard of him.

Wood was twice honoured by His Majesty King George V—he was made Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (C.I.E.) in 1919, and Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (C.M.G.) in 1929.

He is survived by his widow and two daughters.

Neil Pritchard