

ALEXANDER HAMILTON THOMPSON

1873-1952

By ROSE GRAHAM

Professor Alexander Hamilton Thompson, C.B.E., M.A., LL.D., Litt.D., F.B.A., F.S.A., Hon. A.R.I.B.A., died on September 4th, 1952.

He was born at Clifton on November 7th, 1873, the son of the Rev. John Thompson, vicar of St. Gabriel's, Bristol, and Annie Hastings, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Cooper, Hon. Canon of Bristol. He was educated at Clifton College from 1883-90, then for a year at Totnes School. He gained a minor scholarship in Classics at St. John's College, Cambridge, and went into residence in 1892. He read for the Classical Tripos and took his B.A. in 1895, the M.A. in 1903. His classical education was invaluable for his life work as a medieval historian and archaeologist. It is significant that his first publication, in 1898, was *Cambridge and its Colleges* (Methuen), which went into a third edition in 1910.

He did not seek a full time University post until 1919. In the intervening years he lectured for the Cambridge University Extension, and in the course of his journeys about England he found opportunity to study the buildings of cathedrals, churches and castles. In 1903 he married Amy Gosling and settled at Lincoln. It is probable that in the next four years he began his fruitful study of episcopal registers. From 1907 until 1919 he lived at Gretton, a village in Northamptonshire.

Contributions to archaeological societies began in 1905 with the first of a series printed in *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers* of the Architectural Societies of the counties of Lincoln, Nottingham, York, Northampton, Oakham, Bedford, Worcester and Leicester. In 1909 he became a member of the Royal Archaeological Institute, in 1911 he was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

From 1919 until 1921 he was Lecturer in English at Armstrong College, Newcastle, University of Durham; in 1921 he was Reader in Medieval History and Archaeology. From 1922-24 he was Reader in Medieval History in the University of Leeds, Professor from 1924-27, and from 1927-1939 Professor of History.

He acquired a unique knowledge of archiepiscopal and episcopal registers of the provinces of both Canterbury and York; of those in print and of many others in manuscript at Lambeth Palace and in diocesan registries. He became secretary of the Surtees Society in 1919, and in association with his friend, Dr. William Brown, the series of registers of the archbishops of York were issued to the year 1315. For the Lincoln Record Society he edited six volumes of Visitations of that great medieval diocese. In 1933 he gave the Ford Lectures to the University of Oxford and took as his subject *The English Clergy and their Organisation in the later Middle Ages*, which has been described as his crowning achievement.

He realised the need to print a record of the writings of archaeologists which are often scattered through the Transactions and Journals of Societies. In 1924 he contributed a list of the writings of his friends, Canon J. T. Fowler and Dr. William Brown, to the Yorkshire Archaeological Journal. He accomplished the more formidable task of compiling the Bibliography of the published writings of Sir William St. John Hope (1929).

It had long occurred to some of his friends that in the interests both of history and archaeology, and as a guide to younger scholars, it was imperative that a Bibliography of his writings should be printed. It was decided to present him with an Address and a Bibliography when he attained his seventy-fifth birthday. It was a satisfaction to the committee to learn that he had compiled a list with meticulous care. The Bibliography of 413 items was privately printed by the Oxford University Press (1948); it was preceded by an admirable Address from Sir Maurice Powicke, Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford (1928 to 1947), with the names of nearly three hundred men and women who subscribed to this act of homage. The Bibliography is in a number of Libraries in this country and abroad. Three later writings should be added:—*The Abbey of St. Mary of the Meadows, Leicester*, published for the Leicestershire Archaeological Society in 1949, 'William Beverley, Archdeacon of Northampton' in *Medieval Studies presented to Rose Graham* (1950) and 'William Alnwick, Bishop of Lincoln' in *Memorial Volume to Sir Alfred Clapham*, issued in 1952 as *Supplement to the Archaeological Journal*, volume cvi.

A project to reprint some of the scattered and less accessible papers is under consideration.

In the memoir of Dr. William Brown, Professor Hamilton Thompson wrote: 'It was not in his nature to hoard his acquired knowledge as a private possession to be used for his own ends; he regarded it as a fund of which he was the trustee, to be imparted to all who could make profitable use of it'. It was an apt description of his own character. He served on two Cathedral Commissions and on the Archbishops' Commission on Canon Law. He became a member of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in 1933; of the Ancient Monuments Board (England) in 1935. In the New Year's Honours 1938 he was created a Companion of the Order of the British Empire; St. John's College, Cambridge, elected him to an Honorary Fellowship.

In the forty-three years of his membership of the Royal Archaeological Institute he rendered great and notable service. In the course of the 1914-18 World War the Archaeological Journal fell seriously into arrears. In 1919 he accepted the office of Editor, with the heavy responsibility of collecting material. Six volumes were published before he relinquished the task he had undertaken. After his retirement from the University of Leeds he settled in London, and in 1939 he was elected President of the Institute for the term of three years; he accepted the

office for a second term in 1942. On December 8th, 1943, he gave an address to commemorate the centenary of the foundation of the Institute, which was printed in volume c of the Journal. He was often present at the Summer Meetings and was active in describing the buildings. From 1911 until his retirement from active life he was either a member of the Council, Editor, Vice-President, or President with the exception of one year, 1925.

In an appreciation of Professor Hamilton Thompson's services, Sir Maurice Powicke wrote: 'He has done as much as any man to give a strong and lasting impetus to the systematic and intelligent study of the past, on the ground and in the library. He has lived in one life the lives of half-a-dozen scholars'.