

Obituary

DR R. A. SKELTON

It is with the deepest regret that we record the premature death of our President on December 8th 1970, following a road accident. After a long career at the British Museum in the Department of Printed Books as Superintendent of the Map Room, he found time in retirement to promote and encourage many activities, not least those in connection with our Society. He was at all times approachable, informative and quietly enthusiastic.

His interest in the Society was no doubt at first a local one. He lived at Street Farm, Tilford, and one of the last papers he wrote was a lucid historical appraisal of Tilford Green, which is proposed as a Conservation Area. As a member of the Society's Council in 1955 he succeeded Mr Bernard Rackham as our representative on the Library, Museum and Arts Committee of the Guildford Borough Council. When the Society's Library Committee was reconstituted in 1958 he became Chairman and for some years directed the expansion of the Library following the Margary gift. In 1961 he was elected a Vice-President of the Society.

From 1962 onwards Dr Skelton paid visits, some lengthly, to the United States, where his researches and lectures culminated in his most controversial published work, his contribution to the Yale University study of 'the Vinland Map'. His geographical and cartographic researches earned him the gold medal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (1965) and later an Honorary Doctorate of the University of St John's, Newfoundland (1968), and the Victoria Medal of the Royal Geographical Society (1970). In 1967, after relinquishing his work for the Hakluyt Society, of which he had been Honorary Secretary for twenty years, he resumed the Chairmanship of the Library Committee of our Society, at a time when the Library began to acquire additional space and new equipment, and could slowly develop. He located an important collection of Surrey drawings and engravings which the Society was able to purchase through the Margary Fund.

In 1968 he succeeded Miss Kathleen Kenyon as President of the Society, and thereafter devoted more and more of his time and attention to the Society's progress. The organisation and the committee structure came under review and were gradually adapted to deal with new problems in conservation and planning. Committees were encouraged to make more contact with outside bodies and special mention needs to be made of the Conservation Committee. Here, thanks to hard work and to the delegations led by Dr Skelton, useful and amicable relations have been established with the County Planning Officer of the Surrey County Council for the recording of sites of archaeological importance and other matters of interest to the Society. All this

work will continue and form a lasting memorial to Dr Skelton's enterprise during his all too brief Presidency.

The Council tenders its deepest sympathy to Mrs Skelton, and to his daughters. Mrs Alexa Barrow carries on her father's interest as clerk of publications and assistant treasurer of the Hakluyt Society.