

# Obituary

FRED H. CROSSLEY, F.S.A.

By the death of Fred H. Crossley on January 6th, 1955, the country in general and Cheshire in particular lost one of the most remarkable men of our time and one of a type which is fast disappearing in these Welfare State days. A Yorkshireman by birth, he came to Cheshire in 1887 and learned farming in the hard way on a farm near Knutsford. He has left us a picture of his life at this time in his "Cheshire" in the *County Books* series. The artistic genius which was in him and which the uncultured life of a farmer's boy could not suppress found its outlet when the wife of the Vicar of Over Tabley started a carving class for the lads of the parish in the village schoolroom. Young Crossley proved such an apt pupil that in a short time he was instructing the others. The next step was part-time study at the Manchester School of Art until in 1898 he left farm work and took a post under the Cheshire County Council to teach drawing and wood carving during the winter months in the villages round about. All this time he was reading every book he could lay hands on and storing up what he read in his capacious and orderly memory. Besides books, he studied buildings all over England, making careful drawings of their architectural details; later on his camera took the place of his pencil. The result was that he gradually amassed an unique collection of twelve thousand negatives and five thousand slides, which are now deposited at the Courtauld Institute. The former were greatly in demand for illustrations and in recent years there can have been few books on buildings or architecture published without some of the photographs bearing the familiar initials "F.H.C."

Fred Crossley's connection with the Chester Archæological Society began when he joined it in 1916. In March, 1920, he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, in 1921 a member of the Council of this Society and in 1923 he was giving four of the lectures out of a total of nine. Unfortunately these were never printed in the *Journal*. By this time he had already published his work on the Stalls and Screens in Cheshire in the *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* and this led to a more detailed study of the churches, which he embodied in a series of papers published in this *Journal* during the 'thirties. Three more papers on Cheshire Church Furniture followed, in the *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*. All these when collected together, as it is much to be hoped they will be, will constitute an invaluable collection, indispensable to future historians. Wales is similarly indebted to him for papers on Screens, Lofts and Stalls which appeared in *Archæologia Cambrensis*.

Crossley's attitude to mediaeval church architecture was influenced by his admiration of the perpendicular style—the only purely English style which exists—and a secondary object in his study of Cheshire churches was to combat the strictures which the Victorians (notably Ruskin and Sir Gilbert Scott) had heaped upon it,

and to restore it to its rightful place as one of the styles to be admired and to be proud of. All this was of course subsidiary to his real work which was going on all this time and may be seen in the churches and buildings of the neighbourhood and beyond, for his services were in demand far beyond the confines of Cheshire. Good examples of his work may be seen in the screens at Bunbury and at Littlemore near Oxford, in the restoration of the church roofs at Gresford and Cilcain and in his last and perhaps his greatest work, the refectory roof in Chester. For several years before he died a service was held in the refectory at his request, on the anniversary of the dedication of the roof, and all the craftsmen who had taken part in the making of it were invited to attend.

It is probably by his writings that he will be best known and remembered, though these, apart from the articles already mentioned, were most of them written at the very end of his life. He first appeared before the general public in 1929 when in collaboration with F. E. Howard he produced *English Church Woodwork*, published by his friends, the Batsfords. Then followed *English Church Monuments*, *The English Abbey* (1935), *English Church Craftsmanship* (1941), *English Church Design* (1945), and last of all *Timber Building in England* (1951) written in his old age when his sight was failing so rapidly that he had to rely on a friend to read the proofs for him. This is probably the finest piece of work he ever did, embodying as it does the practical experience and the careful study of a life time. The bibliography at the end contains the names of ninety-four books.

There is one other book which stands in a class by itself. Towards the end of the War he was invited to write a book on Cheshire for the *County Books* series. It was an invitation that appealed to him very much, for he was given an absolutely free hand to write what he liked. As he said in his preface, the book was "to display the predilections and pleasure of its writer in a county in which he has lived for over sixty years, not only lived but loved, as it were indeed his own." And so he lets himself go and reveals himself unreservedly. Here we see his love for the past, his regret for the passing of the England of his youth, his dislike of anything that hastens that passing, his half-humorous criticism of all officials, people, he said, who are "sweeping history as rapidly as possible in to the dustbin." Herein is revealed one of his characteristics—his Yorkshire forthrightness and bluntness. Absolutely straight himself, he was not afraid to condemn anything mean or dishonourable in others, and no doubt he made enemies thereby. But he had many loyal friends who recognised his worth and admired his character, his integrity and above all his generosity. He was ever ready to share his hard-earned knowledge with the genuine seeker after truth, and he was generous with his money too. He was one of those happy souls whose work was also their hobby; money was necessary but that was not what he did the work for. It was love of truth and beauty which drove him on and kept him working up to the very end. We "shall not look upon his like again."

R.V.H.B.