

OBITUARY

Arthur Bensly Whittingham, M.A., F.S.A., A.R.I.B.A.

10th October 1901 — 9th December 1986

Honorary Life Fellow 1983-1986

Arthur Whittingham spent his life in East Anglia among the buildings and objects which he loved. Educated at Oundle and Cambridge, he held the post of Surveyor to the Fabric of Norwich Cathedral from 1932 to 1963, after which he served as Archaeological Adviser and in turn Archaeological Adviser Emeritus to the Dean and Chapter, in addition to his membership of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. He had a life-long association with the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, from 1933 as a subscribing member and from 1935 as a member of Council, holding the office of Vice-President in 1960 and becoming an Honorary Life Fellow in 1983. He was also a prominent member of the Royal Archaeological Institute, of which he was a Vice-President from 1974 to 1978.

Although an architect by profession Arthur Whittingham was first and foremost an antiquarian, an untiring collector of facts about the past and in particular about the objects of the past, from the largest tower and spire to the smallest label-stop or misericord. He pursued his interests in those places to which he had the most immediate access, so that the City of Norwich and the County of Norfolk benefited first from his research, then Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, and beyond them Yorkshire and Normandy. His attention to detail was prodigious and, combined with the sheer number of facts which he collected, was liable to produce pieces of paper so covered with annotated, extended and corrected information that the surface of the page was well nigh obliterated under the weight of the script.

Unusually among antiquarians his acquaintance with the documents, from patent rolls to obediatory accounts both published and unpublished, was as extensive as his understanding of the material evidence. This enabled him to acquire an unrivalled knowledge of the history of the Cathedral and in particular of the buildings of the Close. His plan of the Priory, produced in 1938, published by the Royal Archaeological Institute for their summer meeting in Norwich in 1948, and revised in 1975, is a model of its kind and a monument worthy of his memory. Although he published little he made numerous noteworthy contributions. Already in the 1930s, for instance, he dated the first phase of Norwich Castle to the reign of William Rufus on the basis of masons' marks occurring both there and in the presbytery of the Cathedral, and argued for Norman dates for the churches at South Elmham and Framingham Earl, all views unpopular at the time but now universally accepted.

To those who worked with him he was always courteous and helpful, especially to students, though if he thought a question or hypothesis ill-considered his response might well be on the dry side, with 'I dare say' a sure sign that one should think again. No-one who was fortunate enough to attend the outings of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society will forget his introductions to the buildings and especially the churches of the County, expositions normally delivered from the pulpit and ranging from the minutiae of wills, heraldry and moulding forms to the complexities of tracery patterns and the liturgical layout of the furniture.

The measure of the man is, however, best captured in the observation that there must be many files of scholarly research in and far beyond the confines of Norfolk with the frequent marginal note 'Check with ABW'.

E.C.F.