

OBITUARIES

Robin McDowall

Robert (Robin) William McDowall, President, 1975–80, Vice-President, 1973–, Secretary, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), 1973–79, CBE 1977, died on Monday 8 June 1987, aged 73. Born on 13 May 1914, he was educated at Eton and Magdalene College, Cambridge. He read architecture and wrote his dissertation on the ‘statesmen’s houses’ of Westmorland. In 1936 he joined the Royal Commission, working under Sir Alfred Clapham as an investigator. During the war of 1939–45 he served with the Royal Engineers, spending some of his time on road construction in the Middle East and rising to the rank of Major.

Robin returned to the Royal Commission in 1946, but the destruction of historic buildings during the war and post-war development had created new and urgent needs. His early interest in vernacular architecture fitted him well for the recording of threatened buildings, a new responsibility undertaken by the Commission in 1956. He once described to the writer the use of an axe in a derelict building as a parallel to the excavator’s trowel. His work during this period led to contributions to a series of thematic publications, then an important new concept for the Royal Commission, which included *Monuments threatened or destroyed* (1963), *Peterborough New Town* (1969), and *Sheilings and bastles* (1970).

In the late 1960s Robin became responsible for the Commission’s activities in York, and especially the recording of the fabric of the Minster, where he encouraged the use of photogrammetric techniques for measuring and recording in very difficult situations. This innovation was not without its detractors, and later as Secretary of the Commission, in spite of minimal resources, he supported the application of these techniques to mapping from the collection of air photographs then being formed. Nowadays this is a commonplace procedure.

Robin became a member of the Surrey Archaeological Society in 1963 and was elected a Vice-President in 1973. He served the Society on various committees, becoming President in 1975. His quiet and retiring personality hid a wealth of knowledge and concern, often revealed to those who worked under him by verbal shafts of wisdom, and his chosen field of architectural studies provided a natural avenue leading to his involvement with, and support of, the Domestic Building Research Group and the Society’s Conservation Committee. Perhaps the best of his private publications was *Recording old houses: a guide* (1980) published by the Council for British Archaeology. At the time of his death he was revising and editing a series of church guides for Surrey. He leaves his wife Averil, four sons and a daughter. His passing has left a gap which will be difficult to fill.

J N HAMPTON

Mrs Irene Atherstone

Mrs Irene Atherstone, who died on 31 January 1988, had carried out an essential service for the Society over many years.

She joined the Society in 1972 and shortly afterwards volunteered to despatch the *Bulletin* to members. From that time until the last few weeks of her illness Irene handled this tedious task with the patience and quiet efficiency which characterised everything she undertook. No less than four successive *Bulletin* editors benefited from her dedication.

She was actively interested in all aspects of the past although possibly she favoured archaeology. She was particularly involved in the Society’s training excavation at Sutton Park, where she was invaluable as Finds Supervisor for the whole nine seasons, helping also with post-excavation work.

Her personality, as well as her efficient recording of the finds, contributed enormously to the success and pleasure of that excavation.

At the end of 1968, when she and her family were living in Mayford, Irene joined the newly formed Mayford & Woking District History Society as a founder committee member. She entered into the activities of the Society with enthusiasm; taking part in all its excavations, running its library, spending hours on research including the transcription of parish registers, and recording houses for both the Mayford Society and the Domestic Buildings Research Group, of which she was also a member.

Even during the last few weeks of her illness Irene continued to fulfil her commitments with cheerfulness and with great courage. She was happy within the circle of her loving family, and she extended that happiness outwards to all her friends in the county and local societies. She is missed by us all.

NANCY HAWKINS