



ALBERT HERBERT
aetatis suae c. 60

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F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.

1875 - 1964

Albert Herbert, who died on 22 January 1964, came of a yeoman family, long settled at Whetstone, which in recent generations has been much concerned with building. Born in Leicester on 17 July 1875, third of five sons of Henry Herbert, contractor, he was educated in Leicester, received his architectural training under James Tait of Leicester, and ultimately succeeded to his practice. After qualifying and winning the R.I.B.A. Arthur Cates prize, as well as local prizes, he went to London for three years where he worked with the distinguished firm of Lanchester & Richards, enlarging his experience with holidays in Italy. On his return to Leicester he took over Tait's practice and shortly afterwards absorbed that of Charles Baker, whose offices at 18 Friar Lane he occupied until shortly before his death. His firm then moved to the large house in Upper King Street that Henry Herbert had built for his bride and where all his sons were born. Albert Herbert was President of the Leicestershire Society of Architects from 1927 to 1929 and he had a long association with the Leicester Permanent Building Society, the Leicester Trustee Savings Bank and other local concerns.

His practice covered the full range of architectural work and he executed commissions as far away as Italy and Japan, though the bulk of his work was done in the English Midlands. Notable examples are 14 Friar Lane, extensions to the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, the Phoenix Assurance Company's office in Leicester, St. Barbara's Congregational Church and Schools and the Fielding Johnson Private Hospital in Leicester.

Herbert developed a profound insight into medieval architecture and its ancillary crafts and did much ecclesiastical work. In Leicestershire alone he carried out no less than fifty-seven major restorations and embellishments; among the most important of them are: Ashby-de-la-Zouch, St. Helen's; Breedon-on-the-Hill; Claybrooke; South Croxton; Frisby-on-the-Wreak; Lockington; Loughborough, All Saints; Narborough; Quorn; Rothley; Shepshed; Swithland; Theddingworth; Thornton; Whetstone.

It is probable that the general public will best remember his work first, by the Lady Herbert Garden at Coventry; this, a commission from his kinsman, Sir Alfred Herbert, preserves a section of medieval city wall, provides small, snug homes for several elderly ladies and knits the two together with a delightful informal garden; secondly, by the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Northampton finished as recently as 1963 and thirdly, and supremely, by the work he did at Mount St. Bernard's near Whitwick. The church that he completed there recaptures true Cistercian austerity. Its central tower of local stone rises like another rock from the rocks of Charnwood; within the church he resolved one of the most difficult architectural problems—the marriage of stillness and light.

Herbert joined this Society in 1910 and was, therefore, acquainted with Colonel G. C. Bellairs, a foundation member, as well as with the Rev. W. G. Dimock Fletcher, Major W. J. Freer and others of our eminent Victorians. He began to be active in the Society in the early 1920s working in close collaboration with G. F. Farnham, A. Hamilton Thompson and S. H. Skillington, and published the first of his admirable plans — of Rothley church — in volume XII of *Transactions*. Thereafter he contributed a number of articles on medieval churches in the county, as well as on specific details, such as painted glass, Swithland slate headstones, etc. He also supplied plans, maps and drawings to illustrate papers and books by others. Among the earliest of such books was C. J. Billson's *Leicester Memoirs* in 1924 ; and the last was F. A. Greenhill's *Incised Slabs of Leicestershire and Rutland* in 1958. These plans and drawings are remarkable for their accuracy and singular purity of line, the result of constant practice. As a youth Herbert had roamed the streets of Leicester, frequently before breakfast, sketching and making measured drawings of interesting architectural features ; as a young man in London he sought the discipline of the life class. In his maturity and even in his old age he was never without his sketch book (his tailor provided a special pocket for it). And what he drew he remembered.

Herbert's great knowledge of old buildings, especially medieval ones, made him a most helpful and illuminating conductor of excursions. He seemed to read the history of a church from its stones and could always remind his audience of antiquarian and artistic parallels from other places, often far distant. Nor did any unusual feature, such as a mason's mark, no matter how obscurely placed, escape him. The total effect of his expositions was a re-creation of the whole life of the building, an experience that greatly enriched his hearers.

Herbert was elected to the committee of the Society in 1923 and remained a member until his death and he became a vice-president in 1936. For a number of years he was local correspondent for the Society of Antiquaries to which he was elected a Fellow in 1933. This association with the Society of Antiquaries enabled him to exercise a more than local influence when, in 1937, the necessity of excavating and, later, of preserving the Jewry Wall Site was hotly debated. In 1937 he was one of a small deputation which finally persuaded the City Council to preserve the site. Herbert maintained his close interest in all that concerned our Society, as long as he lived and even in his late eighties not infrequently attended meetings and excursions. He last addressed the Society at the Annual General Meeting in October 1963.

Herbert was married in 1905 to Dorothy Herbert, daughter of Dr. Arthur Reckless of Sheffield ; she died in 1937. In 1944 he married Adeline Margaret, daughter of Canon F. H. Joscelyne, sometime rector of Blaby. She survives him together with the three sons and a daughter from his first marriage.

F. E. S.