

## Obituary

RON FOWLER, 1915 - 2001



Ron Fowler died from cancer, aged 85, on October 27th 2001: he had been Chairman of the Bedfordshire Archaeological Council since 1971. He was also Chairman of the Manshead Archaeological Society from 1962-1985 and its President from 1993-2001. From 1970 he chaired South Bedfordshire District Council's Arts Committee.

Ron was born and raised in the village of Felton, Northumberland, and educated at nearby Thurston village school, the Duke of Northumberland School at Alnwick and at King Edward VI Grammar School, Morpeth, between 1928 and 1934. In 1934, aged 19, he joined the RAF, serving at RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire as an air-crewman. He qualified as a wireless operator in 1937 and an air gunner in 1938. Ron trained with RAF 44B and 50B squadrons, flying active operations in 1940 with 44 squadron. He also trained as a navigator, rising to the rank of Sergeant and being awarded the British Empire Medal. Injury brought an end to Ron's active service and he was seconded to Allied Air Training in Ottawa from 1942-44, serving at RAF Greenwood in Nova Scotia as a wireless operator trainer. He subsequently served at RAF Signals Group HQ between 1944-46.

Following his discharge from the RAF in 1946, Ron trained to be a teacher at Drake Hall College, Stafford, from 1946-47. It was at about this time that Ron's enthusiastic amateur archaeological career began as a volunteer digger on a series of excavations on Hadrian's Wall and at Corstopitum (Corbridge), Northumberland.

He moved to south Bedfordshire in 1948 and took up a teaching post at Sundon Park County Primary School, Luton, lodging in Toddington and Sundon. In 1950 he took up residence with his family at a house in Harlington Road, Upper Sundon, where he was to live for the rest of his life. Ron had married his first wife, Dorothy, in 1940. They had three daughters, Ann, Tessa and Deborah, and a son, Paul. Ron also taught at Beechwood Junior School, Luton, and Ickniel Lower School before becoming headmaster at Downside Lower School, Dunstable, from 1959 until retirement in 1981. He then went on to work as a part time lecturer at Dunstable College for 10 years.

He qualified as a Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music (LRAM) in 1952 and of the College of Preceptors (LCP) in 1954. Ron had also qualified as a lawn tennis instructor in 1949! He spoke fluent French and as well as holidaying in France, took a sabbatical there in 1967. He was awarded his Bachelor of Education (external degree) in 1974.

Ron's first wife died in c.1967. He met Jackie, his future second wife, on a Manshead Society dig at Friary Field in Dunstable. They married in 1973 and had a daughter, Katy, and son, Daniel.

Ron had joined the Manshead Archaeological Society in 1960 and worked on the Society's major excavations at Puddlehill and Friary Field. He also directed a dig on a Roman villa at Chalton. He was also actively involved with the Society's voluntary work, such as scrub clearing on Totternhoe Knolls, and with the many social events it organised. As Chairman from 1962-81, Ron brought his organisational and management skills to the Manshead and helped secure a permanent headquarters building for the Society. After his Chairmanship he was elected a Vice President of the Society and in 1992 chaired the Society's 40th Anniversary Conference at Ashton School in Dunstable. In 1993, at the age of 77, Ron was elected President and became, once again, actively involved in archaeology. He gained permission for the Society's fieldwalking programme around Sundon and worked on trial excavations at a Roman site on Chalton Cross Farm and on the site of Sundon House. Ron was a knowledgeable local historian and had researched and set up exhibitions on Sundon's history at the village church. He worked on a medieval earth-

work survey at Sundon as well as fieldwalking and footpath surveys of the parish.

As Chairman of the Bedfordshire Archaeological Council Ron presided over its meetings for 30 years with great patience, pragmatism and humour. He pulled together the diverse and sometimes competing interests of the amateur and professional groups represented on the Council. He also ensured their work was reported to and published by the Council. To his credit, Ron was responsible for the Council publishing 19 volumes of the Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal or

Bedfordshire Archaeology between 1971 and 2001, including two volumes (15 and 20) dedicated to the work of the Manshead Society.

Ron was an inspiring, charismatic and generous man with unflagging enthusiasm. He will be remembered for his valuable contribution to Bedfordshire archaeology.

*(Compiled by Ren Hudspith with the assistance of Ron's wife, Jackie, and members of the Manshead Archaeological Society)*