

W. A. Pantin: In Memoriam



BY the death of William Abel Pantin on 10 November 1973 the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society has lost one of its most enthusiastic supporters over many years and its warmest friend. Educated at Westminster and Christ Church, he took a 'First' in History in 1923. After holding the Bryce Research Studentship he first made his name as an Assistant Lecturer and as Bishop Fraser Lecturer at Manchester University (1926-33). His first two years at Manchester overlapped with the last two of F. M. Powicke who was Professor of Medieval History. Powicke was to exercise a strong influence over Pantin's historical studies for the rest of his life. Powicke himself was translated to Oxford in 1928 as Regius Professor of Modern History. Pantin was to follow him to Oxford when he took up a tutorial fellowship at Oriel in 1933. By a happy coincidence the Regius Chair was attached to the same College. In the meantime Pantin had won the Alexander Prize of the Royal Historical Society in 1929 with an essay on 'The General and Provincial Chapters of the English Black Monks, 1215-1540'. His concern for the history of the Benedictine Order in England was never to leave him. His interest in ecclesiastical history resulted in a series of articles in learned historical journals. This work was to culminate in the Birkbeck Lectures for the University of Cambridge (1948) and his notable book, based on them, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (1955)—easily the most illuminating book on that difficult subject.

But two more intimately Oxford themes had also exercised their magnetism on him. The first was reflected in a contribution which he made to the first volume of *Oxoniensia* (1936)—'College Muniments—a preliminary note'. Oxford archives

had begun to fascinate him. This fascination was to lead in 1946 to his appointment as Keeper of the University Archives and to a series of delightful annual reports which he made to the University on the stewardship of his office. These reports he was happily persuaded to make into a book—*Oxford Life in Oxford Archives* (1972). They showed how he always envisaged the people behind the documents and could summon them back to life with wit and with imaginative scholarship. Moreover, he never lost sight of the overriding importance of publishing the documents of Medieval Oxford. An opportunity to play a leading part in this had already come to him in 1940 when he took over the task of General Editor of the Oxford Historical Society from the Reverend H. E. Salter. This is not the place to appraise his contribution to that society. It is enough to say that he was to maintain the high standard which Salter had set. He could not have expected to equal Salter's efforts. Pantin, unlike Salter, was a busy tutor. Moreover costs were rising and Pantin's years included the hiatus of the Second World War. But under his editorship 17 important volumes were published, nine of which he edited or partially edited himself. They included Salter's magnificent *Survey* of medieval Oxford, house by house, message by message. Two days before he died he presided over a meeting of the committee of the 'O.H.S.' at which he surveyed the work in hand. He has left a programme in good order—a quiver full of arrows. The evident vigour with which he conducted the meeting may well have represented a final overtaxing of his strength. But it was a flare-up of the flame before the end.

The second Oxford theme which he pursued was the history of the architecture of its buildings, those of the town and of the University alike, houses, hotels, inns, halls, 'Schools', colleges. Almost as soon as he arrived he found himself, not only a member of the Editorial Committee for *Oxoniensia*, but also of the Sub-Committee for Old Houses. His position was well put in an article which he wrote for *Oxoniensia*, II (1937), on 'Recently Demolished Houses in Broad Street, Oxford'. The article concludes, 'But it will not be enough to take a few snapshots of the prettier pieces. These old houses deserve to be studied as systematically and as seriously as Ostia or Knossos or Ur'. This striking realization of the need to record and, if possible, to preserve the old buildings of Oxford proved to be a guiding light for the Society for the rest of his life. Of his many publications on Oxford buildings probably the most important, apart from that on the Broad Street houses, were on 'The Golden Cross, Oxford, part I', *Oxoniensia*, XX (1955), and on 'The Clarendon Hotel, part 2', *Ib.*, XXII (1958); everything he wrote was illustrated by his own drawings and plans. His draughtmanship was remarkable and near professional. At the same time he undertook (with Mr. Spokes) an almost unending series of inspections of the buildings themselves with a view to their being scheduled for the Commission on Historical Monuments.

For five years (1959–1964) he was President of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society. When he resigned he continued to be a regular attendant at most of its meetings, always enlivening discussion or answering a paper with an ebullient freshness, humour and courtesy. His bubbling joyousness, combined with a real integrity, made 'Billy' Pantin a rare character of the Oxford scene who will be as greatly missed as he was deeply loved.

J.R.L.H.