

OBITUARY

Gerald Elvey

Gerald Ranking Elvey, FSA, who died on 7 November 1985 aged 83, edited this journal with great distinction from 1970 to 1980. And so much at home did he seem in the world of historical scholarship that it was hard to believe he had not swum in this stream all his adult life. But this was far from the case.

He had been a naval cadet at Osborne and Dartmouth during the first World War. Later he went up to Oxford, where he gained First Class Honours in PPE and a B.Litt., and was awarded a year's travelling scholarship by his college, Oriel. He spent an interesting year visiting Eastern European countries created by the peace treaties.

After graduating he read law, and was in fact called to the Bar—most valuable experience for an historian. But when the need arose for him to take a hand in managing the family engineering business, he felt that this was where his duty lay; and for many years his recreation was not history, but long walking tours in remote parts of Europe (he had a great gift for languages). It was not until he was about 50 that he plunged into the studies that were to occupy him so fruitfully for the rest of life.

Many people come to local history late in life and from quite other fields. Few of them stamp

their mark so firmly on the study of their county's past, or make any part of it so peculiarly their own. In this respect, and in our own day, perhaps only Professor Chibnall offers a close parallel: both self-taught medievalists with a technological background, both driven initially by an intense interest in a particular point of purely personal interest that led them to make contributions to learning of very wide interest indeed. In Gerald's case the starting point was the history of his own house, Stonewells Farm, Chalfont St Giles.

Like others before him, he found little or nothing of any use to him in print. This is the point at which many give up. Gerald's *daemon* drove him on. He taught himself to tackle medieval Latin, and to read the court hand in which it is written. He took to it all—as he once said to me—like a duck to water, cutting his palaeographical teeth on Bodley's Thoresby Deeds. He taught himself not only to read the record, but to understand what lay behind it. He thus made himself not only into an able palaeographer but into a medievalist of distinction.

An early fruit of the deepening of his scholarship and the widening of his interests was a magisterial paper in *Records*, 1960, on 'Buckinghamshire in 1086'. Other papers

followed, the last being a convincing identification of that elusive figure, Walter of Henley. But much of his learning never saw daylight: it would have been good to read the account he could have written about that brazen rogue, Elias of Tingewick.

His last published work was a commissioned family history, *The Wiggs of Mentmore*, written in collaboration with his wife. But the work for which he will be best remembered, and which puts us most deeply in his debt, is certainly his two-volume edition of the charters of Luffield Priory, published by the Buckinghamshire Record Society. Work on this, begun in 1976, extended over ten years, during which there were few days when some aspect of it did not occupy his waking hours.

He was a graceful and lucid writer, and possessed to a marked degree the ability to see beyond the bare record: to use his knowledge of the period and its institutions to draw inferences about the reality that the record murkily reflects, and piece together the hints it grudgingly lets fall.

In 1970 he joined our present President in the editorial chair, in succession to Dr Rouse. From 1975 he was sole editor, until in 1979 he proposed that there should be an Associate Editor, who should be an archaeologist when the Editor was an Historian, and *vice versa*—an initiative for which his successor has reason to

be grateful. For a few years he was Honorary General Editor of the Record Society, and in 1977 he was elected to the Society of Antiquaries, which gave him much satisfaction.

In 1934 he married his cousin, Elizabeth Roe (Betty) who survives him.

Gerald was a model editor, courteous, considerate and meticulous. He took infinite pains with amateur—and often amateurish—contributors, tactfully preserving them from blunders, and making sure, by means of penetrating questions, that they had covered the ground properly. But though he imposed his own high standards he was far from imposing his own opinions, and was happy to publish conclusions with which he disagreed if he thought they had been reached by respectable methods. He left his successor in no doubt about where his duty lay.

J.C.T.

Miss Janet Easton gave the Society long and efficient service as Hon. Secretary of the Natural History Section from 1963 to 1976. Miss Maimie Lepper, the last of a well-known Aylesbury family, was a loyal supporter of the Society for over fifty years. Other deaths recorded were Mr L. L. Boyd, Mr Herbert Green, whose work on medieval West Wycombe was unfortunately never completed, Mrs P. Harris, Mrs R. Paul, Mr R. A. C. Small and Mr. J. R. Southern.