

OBITUARY

MAJOR J. R. H. DOWLING

Peter Dowling died at Wrantage in 1971, aged 74 years. He was brought up in Somerset, but left it for many years when serving in the Army. He returned not only to retire, but to help the county he loved so much. This he did in many ways, as an active member of our Society, with the National Trust, as a judge of Somerset villages and, especially, as one dedicated to the cause of conservation. Though his work in Somerset was widespread over the county, the Quantock Hills were his great love. He knew them, their history, their geology and their wild life, perhaps as well as any other of his time, easily able to study them and walk them from his home at West Quantoxhead. Peter Dowling knew what was important among the mass of detailed anxieties which surround us all today. Having extracted such a point, he took action, always helped by a mind stowed with a wealth of knowledge. To illustrate this, here is an extract from a letter of his, which followed a discussion between him and the writer on attempts to save some oryx from extermination. He wrote, "I found it of intense interest as it is exactly 50 years ago — 1921 — that I shot my first animal in Africa — an oryx. I had a marvellous job at that time — on permanent safari with a patrol of the King's African Rifles in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, near Lake Rudolf, combating Abyssinians in ivory-poaching and slave-trading. The area was absolutely teeming with thousands of game including that most handsome antelope — oryx (beisa). It was necessary to shoot something every day for meat or we should have starved." His letter continues to regret his shooting of bigger game and tells how he became influenced by the great American wildlife photographer, Martin Johnson. His realisation of the need to cease from shooting was unusual in the twenties yet typical of his foresight.

Former soldier, lover of Somerset and all that county's heritage, he will be much missed.