

OBITUARIES

DENTON DENTON-COX, FRICS, FRTPI, FRSA

Denton Denton-Cox, former County Planning Officer for Somerset and former Chairman of this Society, died peacefully at his home in Staplehay, Trull, on 5 September 1994. He was 81.

Mr Denton-Cox was born in 1913 and grew up in Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire, where his father was a member of the coast guard service. At the age of 16, having considered a career in the navy, he decided instead to serve articles as assistant to an architect and surveyor in his home town. His energy, determination and ability were soon apparent, and by intensive part-time study he succeeded at the age of only 21 in passing the final examinations of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Posts in Norfolk and Birmingham followed, and it was in Norfolk that he met his future wife, Mollie. Shortly after the outbreak of war he joined the Royal Armoured Corps and learned how to drive tanks at Tidworth Camp (an experience, some said, which coloured his way of driving ever after). Later he gained his commission in the Royal Engineers and spent the greater part of the war in Iraq and southern Persia where he was responsible for a wide variety of construction projects.

The post-war years saw great reforms in planning legislation as the country struggled to rebuild its fabric and its economy. County councils became the new planning authorities under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, and the task that now needed to be done was prodigious. It was in the context of these changes that in 1950 Mr Denton-Cox was appointed deputy to R.W. Dale in Somerset's recently-created County Planning Department. He was largely responsible for overseeing preparation of Somerset's first County Development Plan and for the massive work of survey and analysis that it entailed. The Plan, which was praised by the government as one of the best-documented it had ever seen, served as the basis of planning policy in the county for the next twenty years. In later years it was also Mr Denton-Cox who was responsible for appointing Somerset's first Archaeological Officer and who introduced urgently-needed new policies on such matters as gipsy sites and Mendip quarrying. He became County Planning Officer in 1972, and held the post until his retirement six years later.

Mr Denton-Cox's love of his adopted county expressed itself in many ways, not least in the splendid garden he created at his home in Staplehay. He was President of the Friends of Quantock for seven years and a member of many other local organisations. He was elected to this Society's Council in 1967 and was its distinguished and energetic Chairman from 1979 to 1983, as well as being the author of its rules and standing orders. He was a passionate champion of the Society and fought for its interests whenever he saw them threatened. In his last Chairman's report he urged the Society to find many more members, to expand its activities in the realms of publication, education and field investigation, and to define its role with the confidence and clarity that would be needed

for survival into the next century. Almost his last service to the Society was to be a warning voice against too-hasty plans for moving the Society's library.

Both Somerset and this Society owe a great debt to Denton Denton-Cox, whose legacy of achievement will long survive him. To his wife and family we offer our sympathy in their loss.

T.W.M.

EDWARD HUGH DESMOND WILLIAMS, OBE

Commander Desmond Williams, a past President of this Society and former Chairman of its Historic Buildings Committee, died after a long illness on 2 December, 1994.

Desmond Williams was born on 20 June, 1909, at Dudley, West Midlands; but his family had West Country roots and since he spent most of his life in the region, he can be claimed as a West Country man. His family moved briefly to Tasmania when he was young, his father dying prematurely soon after their return to England. The young Desmond Williams's first choice of career was accountancy, but early in the 1930s he decided instead to join the Royal Navy.

Desmond was accepted at the officer training college at Devonport, and it was there that he met his future wife, Doris Farrar, herself the daughter of a naval officer who was killed in the First World War. They married in 1932 and had one daughter, Hannah. Desmond qualified as a naval engineer and was soon on tours of duty to the West Indies and the east coast of America. Returning to Britain, he undertook further training at the Greenwich Naval College; but as the war became imminent, he was serving with the Admiralty in Whitehall.

Desmond Williams was amongst the first contingent of staff to be relocated to Bath in 1939 but was not destined to remain in a desk job. With the rank of Commander (Engineer) he was, after a frank exchange of views with Admiral Vian concerning supplies, made partly responsible for planning the amphibious landings at Salerno during the Italian campaign. As a member of General Eisenhower's 'Operation Torch' team he was involved with further amphibious landings at D Day. For his contribution to these vital operations he was awarded the OBE. The landings were not the end of Desmond's war, however, and he continued inland with naval and marine commando forces, reaching Germany and subsequently Denmark. Two remarkable photograph albums record his service and war years. The albums contain many relaxed snap shots of such legendary leaders as General Eisenhower, Field Marshall Montgomery, and Admirals Ramsay and Vian, indicating Desmond's proximity to these senior officers. After the war his experiences qualified him to produce an official résumé entitled 'Planning Amphibious Operations' in the *Journal of Naval Engineering*.

When the war ended Desmond returned to Admiralty duties in Bath, but during the Korean war was once more mobilised as Chief Engineer on HMS Unicorn which was charged with patrol duties off the Korean coast. Returning safely to Bath, he retired from a distinguished naval career in 1957. Commander Williams did not settle comfortably into civilian life, and after a brief period as the senior engineer with Stewart and Lloyd's of Corby, Northamptonshire, he decided to retire on his naval pension. In 1960, he and Doris moved back to Somerset to settle in Keeper's Cottage, Low Ham, where they lived happily until Doris's death in 1979. Desmond moved for a while to Norton St Philip before settling in his last home at Bishops Lydeard.

During retirement Desmond, who had always had an interest in history and antiquities, briefly contemplated learning more about archaeology, but soon found his true second vocation as an enthusiast for vernacular buildings. Desmond's work greatly enriched this

Society in a specialist field and added immeasurably to our knowledge of Somerset's vernacular buildings. From the early 1970s, he was an active member of the Vernacular Architecture Group, to whose journal he contributed many notable papers, often highlighting previously little-known aspects of architectural history such as church houses, or providing interpretations of house details such as curing chambers and malting and corn kilns. With Ron Gilson, another of the Society's pioneering buildings experts, he provided much early recording and analysis of roof forms in Somerset houses. He wrote regularly and prolifically for publications such as *Period Homes* magazine on aspects of architectural history but never felt compelled to gather what he knew into a specialist book. His commitment was to research and recording (over 2,000 houses and many farm buildings) but this did lead to his organising walkabouts and giving lectures. His lectures were always illustrated with superb slides, his early interest in photography having remained undiminished. In addition to his work for the Society and the Vernacular Architecture Group, Desmond acted as a consultant and correspondent to the Council for British Archaeology on applications for listed building planning consent, covering a wide area of Somerset. His expert opinion formed the basis for the addition of many more buildings to the statutory list. In 1981 he was elected President of this Society in fitting acknowledgment of all that he had achieved in the study of Somerset buildings.

Desmond's surveys, copies of which are deposited in the Somerset Record Office, will remain invaluable sources of information for present and future owners, local authority officers and students of vernacular architecture. For his reservoir of expert knowledge, for his analytical powers of interpretation, and not least for his uncompromising, single-minded dedication to the subject, he will be sorely missed.

CHRIS SIDAWAY and PAM BRIMACOMBE

LESLIE VALENTINE GRINSELL, OBE, MA, FSA

With the death of Leslie Grinsell on 28 February 1995, the Society lost one of its most distinguished members. Leslie Grinsell, who was born on 14 February 1907, joined the Society in 1952 and served as its President in 1971–2. He was for many years a faithful attender at meetings of Council, and at the time of his death was one of our five Vice-Presidents. He cared deeply about the Society, and remembered with respect and affection the Society's most outstanding former servant, Harold St George Gray, whom he first met in 1932. Leslie Grinsell wrote and published prolifically, and the Society is fortunate that his work on the Bronze Age in Somerset is so prominently recorded in earlier volumes of these *Proceedings*. In accordance with his wishes, Leslie Grinsell's ashes were scattered in the midst of Bronze Age barrows on the Mendip Hills. Members of the Society attended the ceremony.

The following appreciation by Nicholas Thomas appeared in the *Times* on 25 March 1995, and is here reproduced by kind permission:

'Leslie Grinsell grew up lonely and unfulfilled. It was his discovery of prehistory among the ancient field monuments of Sussex that changed his life, starting him on a 69-year road of discovery and publishing for which, in 1972, he was appointed OBE, having received an honorary MA from the University of Bristol a year earlier. His life's work was to record every Bronze Age burial mound in southern England, measuring, classifying and mapping them. A huge corpus of meticulously published data is his permanent memorial.

Starting in about 1926 and armed with rucksack, timetables (he did not drive), notebook, tape and folding rule, this self-taught archaeologist went into the field every weekend from spring to autumn. The admission that several months elapsed before he discovered the tape's retractable metal winding handle showed what a loner he was. By 1944 he had made more than 12,000 barrow visits and surveyed and published ten counties. After retirement in 1971 he added Somerset, Avon, most of Devon, Kent and Herefordshire, with supplements to several earlier surveys.

At his death, the work extended from Norfolk to the Tamar and the Welsh Marches. The records he drew up were not just a matter of dimensions and classifications (for which his early bank training was priceless). He additionally included barrow names and folklore, early published references, details of finds and the state of the monuments. *The Ancient Burial Mounds of England* (1936, 1953, 1975) remains a classic work. In the course of this pilgrimage Grinsell rediscovered countless barrows and a Neolithic causewayed camp. A visit to Stonehenge, within hours of Atkinson's discovery of carvings there, soon led to his own discovery of the series of engraved feet on a burial slab in the barrow at Pool Farm, Mendip, which is now a remarkable exhibit in Bristol Museum.

Leslie Valentine Grinsell was for 19 years a bank clerk with Barclays and for 20 more a curator at Bristol Museum. But it was his intensive study of prehistoric burial mounds that made him pre-eminent in British field archaeology. Yet, apart from three paid years working on his survey of Wiltshire barrows for the *Victoria County History* (1957), Grinsell's considerable contributions were made in his spare time. Field archaeology was not a total preoccupation, however. Other interests motivated his enthusiasm: folklore, place names, numismatics, Egyptology, and piano playing, teaching and lecturing, drawing, sketching, photography, love of the countryside and "the tonic properties of the air".

Grinsell's fieldwork was not limited to these islands. A wartime posting to Egypt as an aerial photographer (he had been a pioneer in this field) led inevitably to a Grinsellian survey of the Pyramids (1947) and, during his last years, his annual Christmas holiday to the larger Mediterranean islands spawned *Barrow, Pyramid and Tomb* (1975, 1977; Italian edition 1978). Grinsell was fascinated by medieval British coins. His studies of the mints at Bath and Bristol are major contributions to a specialist field, in which, like Egyptology, he made himself an expert.

Leslie Grinsell's circle of friends included several women but he eschewed personal attachments. Only when working for organisations such as the Prehistoric Society, or in his painstaking help given to anyone with similar interests, did he betray that deep, selfless generosity which, with those flashes of wit and the shy smile, made his friendship so valued. Had he married, he might not have achieved what he did and we would know so much less about the past.²