

## OBITUARIES

D. T. A. PONTON, ESQ.

With the untimely death, on 17th January 1976, of Desmond Ponton the Society has lost a useful and valued member who joined as long ago as 1934. In 1953, he became the Local Secretary for Sheppey and was still active in that capacity up to the time of his death, but he will be especially remembered as the Honorary Excursions Secretary from 1955 until 1964. In his nine years in that office, he organized something like forty excursions, almost all of them successful, interesting and enjoyable (except for those marred by inclement weather which even he could not control), and some of them, metaphorically at least, broke new ground. Many members will remember with particular pleasure the series of week-end meetings which he arranged at Kingsgate College from 1955 until 1961.

Desmond Ponton was so modest in manner that his effectiveness could easily be underestimated. Not for him, as Excursions Secretary, the powerful whistle with which his renowned predecessor, Frank Elliston-Erwood, used to marshal and embus his forces; Ponton kept his flock together by gentle words and quiet gestures, and if those of us who were laggard raised his ire he never showed it. The same courteous importunity that got us back into the coaches also caused numerous houses to be opened for the enjoyment of members of the Society and a number of admirable talks to be delivered for their enlightenment.

Both in Sheppey and in the Sittingbourne area where he lived, he was active in promoting the affairs of the Society. But it was not only local members who had cause to be grateful to him for much help and many kindnesses, rendered as readily as unobtrusively. He was indeed a man who, in a remarkable degree, possessed the quality of *caritas*.

That was one reason why he was a good schoolmaster. As a boy he attended Borden Grammar School and he kept in touch with his old school throughout his life. Few of us who knew him in later years realized that whilst at College he represented the University of London in cross-country running – perhaps no bad training for an Excursions Secretary. He spent his teaching life in Sheppey, retiring from the Headmastership of Miletown School, Sheerness, in 1972.

His common-sense and wisdom were in evidence when he became an *ex-officio* member of Council and were appreciated by his fellow-members. He was not a vociferous councillor, but when he spoke he always made a positive contribution to the discussion.

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People like Desmond Ponton constitute the heart of a Society such as ours. With our sense of loss through his death must go also a sense of gratitude for all that he did to further the interests of the Society over a long period. To Mrs. Ponton, herself a member of long standing, we offer our sympathy in the loss of her husband, of whom so many of us retain the friendliest memories.

F.W.J.

### G. W. TOOKEY, ESQ., Q.C.

By the death of Geoffrey Tookey last August, the Society has lost one of its most valued and respected members. He joined the Society in 1938, became Local Secretary for Beckenham in 1952 and a member of what is now the Finance Committee in 1955.

Mr. Tookey's family has long had connections with Bromley and south-east London. Educated at St. Dunstan's College and the Imperial College of Science and Technology, he was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn in 1924 and had a most distinguished legal career; Mr. Tookey was a member of the Inns of Court Senate, 1966-69, and of the Council of Law Reporting, 1958-74.

His interests lay mainly in the field of local history, particularly of Beckenham, and the results of his research are deposited in Beckenham Library. Mr. Tookey was a founder member of the Beckenham Historical Association and its President for many years. His good-humoured helpfulness and wise counsel will be greatly missed.

A.C.H.

### H. J. BALLS, ESQ.

Mr. Horace John Balls, a member of this Society of some twenty-eight years standing, died on 17th May, 1976. Born in Swanley Village on Easter Day, 1897, he attended St. Paul's Church of England School and gained a place at a Technical School in Beckenham from which he went to St. John's College, Battersea, to train as a teacher. He then taught at the National School, Dartford, and at schools in Stockwell, Marylebone and Beckenham. He is remembered by former pupils as a firm yet kindly man, whose work never remained confined to the classroom and whose desire to acquire an accurate knowledge of nature, art and history made him a most popular and interesting teacher.

Mr. Balls joined the Dartford District Antiquarian Society, of which he was a Vice-President, in 1937, and was our Local Secretary for Dartford from 1957-1972. Throughout his life his principal interests remained the Church of England and the study of history.

Horace Balls was a sensitive, somewhat unworldly man who had many acquaintances and an enduring loyalty to his friends. His sense of humour, as with so much of his independent character, was highly in-

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dividualistic. The lives of his pupils and friends have been enriched by his inspiring enthusiasm, his ability and his skill and patience as a teacher.

P.H.G.D.

### THE HON. MRS. MARY JAMES

Mrs. Mary James, of Updown House, Eastry, died suddenly on 21st April, 1976. Born of an old Yorkshire family, Mrs. James came to live in Kent after her marriage to Major Arthur James and, apart from being a member of our Society for many years, took an active part in several excavations, at Kingston Down, Finglesham, Eastry and St. Peter's, at Kingsworthy, Hants., and Mucking, Essex. At Finglesham, throughout several arduous seasons, Mrs. James became an indispensable assistant and, with her characteristic generosity, made her home available for work on the finds and impromptu seminars.

In 1976, Mrs. James was greatly instrumental in the partial excavation of an important Anglo-Saxon cemetery, threatened by a pipeline, which had earlier been revealed by the publication of an air photograph, on land belonging to her husband at Updown itself; her death occurred during the closing stages of this rescue excavation, which was financially supported by our Society.

The Society extends its sympathy to Major James and his family for their untimely loss and records its gratitude to a most generous member.

A.P.D.

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