

Obituary

DONALD HARDEN

Donald Benjamin Harden, C.B.E., M.A., F.S.A., Ph.D., Hon.F.B.A., F.M.A., died peacefully in London on 13 April 1994, aged 92. Born in Dublin, he was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He came to work in Oxford in 1929 as Assistant Keeper in the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum and remained here until 1956, succeeding E.T. Leeds as Keeper of the Department in 1945. In 1956 he was appointed Director of the London Museum, then sited in Kensington Palace. Together with Norman Cook of the Guildhall Museum he at once became involved in working for the union of the two museums into the new Museum of London. He served as Acting Director of this museum from 1965 until his retirement in 1970, which was, sadly, well before the museum physically came into existence in 1976.

Prior to his arrival in Oxford Harden had spent two years as a Commonwealth Research Fellow at the University of Michigan. From his participation in the University's excavations at Karanis in Egypt sprang his life-long interest in ancient glass. The publication of *The Roman Glass from Karanis* (1936) firmly established not only his own reputation as the leading authority in that field but also the importance of the systematic study of glass from excavated sites and the standards to be achieved in such a study. One of his last major achievements, when already well into his eighties, was to play a key part in the setting up of the exhibition of 'The Glass of the Caesars' at the British Museum, including the writing of the main part of the introduction to the catalogue. His publications on ancient glass run to many pages of bibliography.

In Oxford Donald Harden soon became involved in the archaeological scene of both city and county. He directed, or took part himself in excavations on sites such as Grim's Dyke in Blenheim Park, and the Roman villa at Ditchley. In 1936 he was instrumental in founding *Oxoniensia* as 'a periodical publication dealing with the history and antiquities of Oxford and its shire and neighbourhood' (vol. I, editorial). This editorial also states that 'no articles shall be published except those dealing directly with local topics' and 'original articles on any branch of local history, topography, architecture and antiquities will be welcome'. And so they have remained, being published in much the same format as that laid down by the first meticulous editor.

Harden was secretary to the Editorial Committee from 1936-1947 and remained on the Board until he left Oxford in 1956. He also served as one of the O.A. & H.S. Secretaries, was President from 1952-55 and then Vice-President until 1990.

With the coming of war in 1939 Leeds and Harden had to select, pack up, and move to places of safety the major items of the Department's collection. Harden then worked for the Ministry of Supply, returning to Oxford in 1945 as Keeper to face the major task of re-organising and re-displaying the collections. This he undertook with energy and commitment, though he was disappointed in that the proposed North-South extension did not come into existence until after his departure. He was, however, closely concerned with the planning and design of the new galleries on the ground floor which were to contain the

Egyptian antiquities. Donald's scope and breadth of knowledge were well suited to the demands of a Department which covered so wide a range of periods and civilizations. He never, however, allowed the local prehistory and history to be neglected. With no museum for Oxford or the County, and no Archaeological Unit, he regarded it as vitally important that the Department should be responsible for the recording, investigation and excavation of local sites. He encouraged the Oxford University Archaeological Society's participation in these operations, and the Department's Annual Reports are every year full of such activities. He was in the forefront of the development of the local Group of the Council for British Archaeology, and through this national organisation, of which he became President in 1950, he stressed the importance of the co-ordination and co-operation of local archaeological societies.

Throughout his museum career Donald Harden was a dedicated supporter of the Museums Association, particularly in its work for the education and training of museum staff. He was in turn Secretary, Chairman of the Education Committee, and President. He examined for the Museums Diploma, and encouraged his staff to sit for it (at that time a rare event in University museums), and to take part in the Association's activities. He was well aware that museum work could no longer be the particular prerogative of the wealthy or influential scholar, and in his Presidential Address to the South Midlands Museum Federation in 1947 (*Museums Journal*, vol. 48) he set out the need for a proper scheme of professional education and training – which has still not totally come to pass.

All through his life his concern and encouragement for young people in the museum and archaeological worlds was particularly marked. Museums were for people in Donald's view, and people had to be persuaded to come inside and see what it was all about. Visits to schools for lectures, and from schools to the museum were actively encouraged. Talks to groups from various organisations, adult classes, student discussions were all promoted. Anyone was welcome to come and see him at any time. He loved to talk. Sometimes, long after the museum had closed, he would be there in his office, eyes twinkling behind his glasses, his smile never far away, animatedly discussing the events of the day or the plans for tomorrow, quite unaware that anyone else might be ready to go home! He was a wise and caring friend, and there must be many in this Society and outside who have good reason to thank him for leading them so happily along the path towards a love and appreciation of museums and the objects within them.

JOAN CLARKE