

Obituary



John Averell Daniell (8th March 1916 - 1st March 2000): an Obituary

John Daniell was a member of our Society from 1951 until his death on 1st March 2000 and a member of the Committee from 1952 until 1994, serving on the Historic Buildings Advisory Panel and representing the Society on the Rural Community Council. He published several articles in our Transactions, most notably on the subject he made his own, the clock and watch makers of Leicestershire and Rutland, but also on 'Whitwick baubles', the making of clay pipes and eighteenth-century wallpapers. John was equally active in the Vaughan Archaeological and Historical Society, serving as its second Chairman from 1953/4 to 1958/9, as well as on its Committee and Research Group. He was also for many years a member of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Nationally John's interests were reflected in his regular support for the Vernacular Architecture Group and the Society for Folk Life Studies.

John studied at Trinity College, Oxford, in the late 1930s and became involved in what was to be a lifetime's pursuit, the investigation of building sites for the archaeological potential that they revealed. His discoveries were published annually and when he left Oxford in 1939 such was the gap that a case was made for the employment of a fulltime archaeologist to carry on the work.

John served throughout the Second World War as a driver with the RASC. He was proud to be a Dunkirk veteran and went on to serve in North Africa and Italy. In October 1946 he joined the staff of Leicester City Museum as Assistant Keeper, serving in that post for 35 years until his retirement in March 1981. The interests which he was to pursue throughout his career were soon apparent. Already in 1949 an exhibition of Leicestershire clocks was held, a provisional list of makers produced, and several pieces

added to the collection. This led to the publication of a major article in the Society's *Transactions* in 1951, later updated in a book published by the Museums in 1975. John was also responsible for the discovery of the eighteenth-century workshop of Samuel Deacon at Barton in the Beans and its transport to Leicester where it was lovingly reconstructed.

His other major interest was also apparent in the preparation by 1949 of a questionnaire on Folk Life, with special reference to domestic and agricultural by-gones, which formed the basis for a lifetime's collecting and resulted in a large and comprehensive collection from which both the City and County Museum Services continue to benefit.

Alongside these interests in Social History and the more recent past John never lost his interest in investigating sites for their archaeological potential and we find him being acknowledged 30 years after his pioneering work in Oxford in very similar terms in Leicester. He also had a special ability to spot evidence that others had missed, such as an incised cross-slab in the external fabric of Ab Kettleby Church, or to rediscover lost items such as the incised slabs from St Martins, Leicester described by Nichols, but removed in the nineteenth century.

However, John's major contribution was arguably in the work he did out in the community, years before the concept of outreach had been invented. In his early years, in particular, John regularly gave 30 to 40 lectures a year. Indeed they were so successful that we find the Museum refusing requests because it was impossible to meet the demand. Through this sort of work, attending sales, investigating buildings and going to see potential museum donations in people's homes, John developed a knowledge of the County second to none. Much of this was shared with members of the Society in his talk on 'Museum Memoirs' to a crowded meeting chaired by David Clarke, his Keeper from 1949-1963, on 20th February 1981. Although never published, the talk survives on tape and captures the essence of John's enthusiasm.

At his funeral in Lutterworth Parish Church on 13th March 2000 the Royal British Legion gave John a guard of honour and Professor Vaughan Grylls delivered a fond and rounded appreciation, summing up the quality that everyone who was fortunate enough to know John Daniell most remembered: 'His true passion was the everyday life of ordinary people of the past.'

Robert A. Rutland