

Obituaries

Gilbert Allen Chinnery, M.A., F.S.A. (1925-1993)¹

by Kathryn M. Thompson and David L. Wykes



Allen Chinnery advising a researcher (Mrs A. Lenton), 1967
Photograph courtesy of the Leicestershire Record Office

Allen Chinnery, who died on 11 May 1993 at the age of 68, was a member of the Society for nearly 40 years, serving on the Society's Committee from 1955 until 1986; the last seven years as Chairman. Chin', as he was universally known, won an open exhibition to Christ's College, Cambridge, but first served three years as an engineer with the Fleet Air Arm before taking up his place at Cambridge in 1946. On graduating he took the professional archive administration course at University College, London. After a period working as a volunteer at the London Guildhall Library, he obtained his first post returning to his old College as a research assistant to Professor J. H. Plumb. The work involved arranging the manuscripts of the Marquis of

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Cholmondeley for Plumb's biography of Sir Robert Walpole. In 1953 he published a handlist of the Cholmondeley manuscripts, the results of his work. From 1952 he served as the first City Archivist for Plymouth, until his appointment as Keeper of Archives at Leicester Museum in January 1955. He spent the rest of his working life with the Leicester and Leicestershire Museums Services. During his 18 years as Keeper he saw the department grow in size and reputation. In 1973 he was promoted to Assistant Director (Human History), a post he continued to hold after local government reorganisation in April 1974, when control of all the museums, local archives, and the art gallery was transferred to the County Council. His responsibilities encompassed the combined County and City Record Offices, the Antiquities and Technological sections of the County's museums, and the Leicestershire Archaeological Field Unit. In 1982 he was appointed Deputy Director with additional responsibilities for the museum in Oakham and the Museums Service's publications programme. He retired in 1985 on his 60th birthday.

Chin made a significant contribution in two particular areas of archive work: the editing and publication of borough records and the use of archives in schools. He was a pioneer in using archives for teaching, and wrote *Studying Urban History in Schools*, published by the Historical Association in 1971. His outstanding achievement as Keeper of Archives was in editing volumes five to seven of the *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, covering the hall (council) books and papers, chamberlains' accounts and judicial records from 1689 to 1835. These three volumes, published by Leicester University Press between 1965 and 1974, continued the series begun in 1899, taking the history of the Borough to the eve of the 1835 Municipal Corporation Act. Chin brought to the task the benefit of his full historical training, but his editing was distinguished by the way in which he resolved a number of major editorial problems concerning the selection and printing of documents. In this he had the close support and advice of Professor Jack Simmons, then Professor of History at the University. In volume eight, covering the Quarter Sessions records of the Borough, he printed exemplars of forms for each type of document leaving out the common form for the rest of the records. The Chamberlains' accounts presented an even greater problem because of their enormous size. The decision was taken to print the complete accounts for the first and last year of the period covered and for six intervening years. Unfortunately, with local government reorganisation the projected plan to continue the series to the modern period under his editorship was never completed. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1968, in recognition of his scholarship in editing the Borough records. His other publications included *Victorian and Edwardian Leicestershire from Old Photographs* (Batsford, 1977) with Iona Cruickshank; *Leicester Castle and the Newarke* (Leicestershire Museums, 1981); and a *Guide to Hungarton Church* (Sycamore Press, 1983). After his retirement, he continued his research on the borough records, working in particular on the important collection of early seventeenth-century muster rolls, from which he published 'The Muster Roll for Leicester of 1608', *Transactions* (1986). His research with an evening class on medieval Oakham resulted in the publication of *The Oakham Survey 1305*, which he edited for the Rutland Record Society Occasional Publications Series (1989). During the late 1980s he became increasingly interested in the use of computer databases for archive research, developing further his work on the Leicester muster rolls. With the appointment of new editors in 1990, he undertook the task of indexing *Transactions* and was responsible for volumes 64 to 66, to which task he brought his exact

scholarship and care. Within a short time he was co-opted onto the editorial board. It was following his suggestion, and indeed after he had undertaken a considerable amount of preliminary work himself, that the project to bring the cumulative index of *Transactions* up to date was launched. He was the obvious person to co-ordinate the project with the indexer. Sadly, he died before this was possible. In 1987 in recognition of his service to the Society, not least as Chairman of the Committee between 1979 and 1986, he had been elected a Vice-President. After his retirement he found time to make an important contribution to a number of new societies. He was a member of the executive committee of the Friends of the Leicestershire Record Office, and was for some years responsible for editing its newsletter; from 1986 until his death he was chairman of the committee of the Friends. He was the first Honorary Archivist of the Rutland Record Society, a post he also held until his death.

Chin's interests were wide-ranging. He brought to all of them his gift of enthusiasm and readiness to play an active part. As an archivist he shared his learning generously, encouraging with unobtrusive help less experienced researchers and members of staff. As a valued member of this Society and of the Friends of the Leicestershire Record Office, he gave practical as well as planning assistance to projects such as indexing *Transactions* or the transcription of the Hastings letters. Despite an arthritic hip and indifferent health he loved to walk and climb, especially in the Lake District. Among his more unusual accomplishments were the making of game pies and knitting. He will be long remembered; not only for his personal contribution to the study of the history of the county but also for the inspiration he gave others to make a contribution of their own.