James Pickering, who passed away on October 6th 2004, made an unrivalled contribution to our understanding of Leicestershire’s archaeology by using many of the skills he learned as a fighter pilot to study the landscape from the air. He carried out hundreds of hours of reconnaissance over the Midlands and took tens of thousands of photographs which he then made freely available to national and local archaeologists. His work was recognised by the presentation of a Silver Trowel at the 1986 British Archaeological Awards.

Jim was born on June 4th 1915 into a Hinckley family and was educated at Wyggeston Boys School in Leicester. He was destined to take over the family printing firm and it is characteristic of him that, on finishing school, he went on to study the business in Germany where the most modern technology was being introduced. He stayed in Dresden and absorbed something of the intellectual culture of that place and time; he also attended the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. His time in Germany was pleasant, and he made life-long friends there but recognised that the underlying evil of Nazism made war inevitable. On his return to England he joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve.

At weekends he learned to fly Tiger Moths at Desford Aerodrome and then progressed to more modern aircraft. He earned his wings as a Sergeant Pilot in April 1939. Although he was one of ‘the few’ he was destined to miss most of the Battle of
Britain, instead he and his Hurricane were sent on convoy to the Mediterranean to reinforce the beleaguered island of Malta. This did nothing to improve his chances of survival, as for the next eight months he and his dwindling band of compatriots flew sorties against overwhelming numbers of enemy aircraft. Jim was the last survivor of the pilots who flew the Gladiator Biplanes 'Faith, Hope and Charity'; he was always self-deprecating about his part in this famous episode of warfare.

Eventually, getting the chance to leave Malta he was almost immediately in more trouble – flying into Athens just before it fell to the Nazis. After another lucky escape he became one of a select group of pilots who delivered aircraft to the Middle East and Far East theatres of war. New planes were assembled at Takoradi on the Gold Coast and flown across the jungles and deserts of Africa to Egypt. This was outback aviation and survival depended on rigorous planning and precise navigation. On one occasion Jim took the opportunity to deliver an aircraft much further along the line flying over the Himalayas to the American Volunteer Force in China – a major pioneering achievement at that time.

In late 1942 Jim joined the Western Desert Air Force and for a while in the spring of 1943 he was flying a captured Italian bomber and delivering men and equipment to the front. It is testament to his abilities that he was able to supervise the overhaul of this machine, and write a set of flying instructions for it, starting from first principles!

In June 1943 he returned to Britain and a new role as a test pilot on Spitfires and Mustangs, which gave him an unrivalled knowledge of the landscape as he flew sortie after sortie over the length and breadth of the country. Later, after D-Day, he returned to the fray in France, Belgium and Germany. His experiences as a pilot shaped his work as an aerial archaeologist. It was not just the hours spent in the air but also the wide variety of flying and remarkable degree of independence and individual responsibility that he was able to exercise.

After the war Jim was fully involved in business, specialising in printed packaging. He kept his pilot’s licence up to date and did a great deal of flying for the RAF Reserve, training students at Newton near Nottingham and on summer camps elsewhere. At times he had his own aeroplane, including a spell flying the amazing Wallis Autogyro. He had long had an interest in archaeology – his uncle Arthur was Leicestershire’s first prominent prehistorian – and he began to photograph sites and correspond with other interested practitioners, notably Derrick Riley and Arnold Baker. For many years he had a villa in Cyprus and was involved in measures to conserve the island’s rich archaeological heritage.

Because of the success of his business he was able to retire early and concentrate on the search for crop marks. During the months of June, July, and August he would fly as soon as conditions were suitable; nothing was allowed to take precedence over this work. The hot, dry summer of 1976 in particular saw him clock up over a hundred hours in the air as crop-marks appeared in ripening cereal fields all across the country.

He followed his interest in archaeology by attending classes at Vaughan College and Alan McWhirr remembers that he was part of his Certificate in Archaeology class in the 1960s/70s. He continued his studies and later wrote many papers on the
results of his aerial surveys. He only contributed one brief note in *Transactions* on the results of his surveys in the Midlands during 1981 (*TLAHS* 56 (1980–1) 100–3). He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1974.

I first met Jim in 1979 when I had just been appointed to the post of Assistant Archaeological Survey Officer for Leicestershire and he offered to take me on a flight to see crop-marks at first hand. Between then and 1996 I was privileged to go along on many flights each year. It was part of Jim’s creed that, once in the air, if conditions were good, one should make as much use of the day as possible, so these flights could cover a lot of country. We ranged from Flamborough Head to Ross on Wye, Northampton to Tadcaster, Shrewsbury to Skegness, taking up to three hundred photographs on a flight, interspersing cross-country transfers with sudden flurries of photography, during which we would descend in orbit after orbit to get the best views.

We would spend perhaps four hours in the air before arriving back at Leicester – invariably on time. Another of Jim’s skills was his ability to time a flight, assessing the variables of wind and weather in a way that seemed almost magical. Safely down, we would head for the bar and three or four glasses of Scotch well diluted with water. Even in his late 70s he had remarkable stamina and enthusiasm. For several summers he went as a guest of Otto Braasch to Germany and Hungary, flying long sorties across newly-accessible parts of central Europe.

His research project went on for almost forty years its legacy being a huge volume of information, chiefly about Prehistoric England. In 1986 we jointly published a summary of known crop-mark sites in Leicestershire, by which time Jim had found and recorded 190 sites, compared with at total of less than 50 found by all other practitioners. In total he found over 200 most of which, without him, would probably never have been recorded. To this figure should be added hundreds more sites in twelve other surrounding counties.

Jim went on to become, as he put it, an ‘Unidentified Flying Octogenarian’ before making his last flight in 1998. Typically, he made the decision to ground himself, giving up his Pilot’s Licence in 2000.

After a lifetime of action and adventure Jim did not adapt easily to being housebound although he continued to study his air photograph collections and reply to a wide range of correspondents on the subject. He contributed memoirs to several books on war-time flying as well as attending a number of ceremonial gatherings of war-time fighter pilots.

He freely admitted that the war had given him remarkable experiences which, combined with his considerable intellectual gifts and his own money, he used in the service of archaeology. Some found his brusqueness rude but he was unfailingly generous with his time and material to anyone who had a genuine interest in the pursuit of knowledge. He is survived by his daughter, Penny, son Guthrie, and grandson James. His wife, Wanda, died eight months after him in June 2005.

Jim had been member of this society for many years and was so at the time of his death.

R F Hartley
Rupert Evans, past Chairman of this Society and distinguished long-serving member of the History Department of Leicester University, died on 23 November 2004. Virtually his whole life was bound up in some way or other with the Midlands. He was born in Birmingham on 24 November 1920 and educated at that city’s King Edward VI School where he was a Foundation Scholar, and then as an Exhibitioner at St John’s College, Oxford. Wartime service in the Royal Armoured Corps (11th Hussars) in North Africa and in the Italian and post D-Day northern European campaigns interrupted his studies which were completed after 1945. In 1947 Rupert embarked on a forty-year connection with Leicester University seeing it grow from a small university college with a handful of tiny departments offering London external degrees to the large and notable centre of higher education it has become today. Appointed as an assistant lecturer in 1947, he was promoted to lecturer in 1959 and then senior lecturer in 1965. Along with his medievalist wife, Babette, and long-serving Professor, Jack Simmons he did much to personify all that was best in a department noted for its teaching and concern for its students. He

* I am indebted to Dr David Wykes for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this obituary.
served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1982 to 1985 and retired from the University two years later. A cine-film of Rupert and Babette’s wedding in 1948, attended among others by Principal Attenborough and his wife and by librarian-poet Philip Larkin, forms part of the University archives. (Rupert liked to claim that one of his ‘marriage vows’ was that he agreed to take over from Babette the History Department’s political thought course which she loathed teaching!) A golden wedding celebration for the couple was, appropriately, hosted by the University in June 1998. Unsurprisingly the University was well represented at his funeral service on 2 December 2004 and affectionate tributes were paid to him by former colleagues and past students at a well-attended memorial event held in Leicester on 26 February 2005 jointly organised by the School of Historical Studies in the University and by the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society. That there were so many common denominators in the speeches made by the twelve contributors to that event was itself eloquent testimony both to shared perceptions of Rupert and to the respect in which he was held. Speaking from knowledge acquired at different times and in different situations the various contributors all recognised basically the same qualities – his kindness, helpfulness, warm-heartedness, good humour, his encyclopaedic range of learning, and the complete absence in him of artifice, hidden agendas, and prickly edges. Rupert Evans was always so utterly true to himself and unfailingly considerate in his dealings with others. Long into retirement both he and Babette loyally attended University degree congregations, special lectures, and seminars and took great pleasure in actively participating in a special orientation programme provided for incoming Americans on study abroad in Leicester.

Spending his entire academic career at Leicester University, Rupert Evans became chiefly notable as an effective teacher of his subject. Appointed in an age when university staff were expected to range widely, he lectured in such a way that generations of students came under his spell in lively and insightful courses on modern British and European history and on political thought. His lecturing style, not heavily reliant on notes and blending the formal and informal, was spiced with the slightly mischievous good humour that was one of his hallmarks. His long-running special subject on the French Revolution became a firm favourite. As a supervisor of postgraduate students, many of them specialising in the history of the Midlands, he offered wise support and friendly encouragement.

His only single-authored book was a volume on Government (1964) which became part of Jack Simmons’ Visual History of Modern Britain series. This displayed with great clarity Rupert’s capacity for taking on a big subject and for effective generalisation. It also showed what a keen eye he had for the significant detail and how skilful he could be in providing pithy verdicts on complex issues and problems. ‘The Exchequer’s long and tenacious memory’, he wrote when offering the briefest of overviews of medieval administration, ‘enabled it to act as a searching guardian of royal rights, but its elephantine procedures and pachydermatous indifference to the promptings of time involved its accounting in years of delay’ (p.4). On Tudor government, by contrast, this was his verdict. It ‘displayed a centaur-like mixture of absolutism and constitutionalism, order and
liberty: on the one part the formidable revival of royal power, the process of centralisation and national consolidation at the expense of medieval fractionalism; on the other the revival of the common law, the vital development of Parliament, the reinvigoration of local institutions’ (p.37). When dealing with local government Rupert used Leicester, unsurprisingly, to provide many of his examples. Beneath a photograph of Leicester’s town hall under construction in the 1870s is the comment that the delay in building such a municipal edifice had ‘the fortunate result that this accomplished design by F. J. Hames avoided the Gothic exuberance which might have been obligatory ten years earlier’ (illustration 180).

Rupert Evans wrote, more expansively, about Leicester and Leicestershire in masterly contributions to volume IV (1958) of the *Victoria County History* (‘Parliamentary representation since 1835’) and to the British Association volume on *Leicester and its Region* edited by Norman Pye (1972). Articles on Leicester and Leicestershire appeared in the *Transactions* of this Society between 1949 and 1998 and in 2001 he published a full and affectionate obituary of his friend and colleague Jack Simmons. Two of Rupert’s articles in *Transactions*, his introduction (1949) to his transcript of the 1669 Conventicle Returns (a find in itself) and his study of Leicestershire Quakers (1952) provide in part a prosopographical and social analysis long before such an approach became fashionable. His much later article on George Fox (1996) best reveals Rupert’s scholarship. It is characteristically well researched and with some new material, but he got to the heart of George Fox with a critical new insight into his early career and later reputation much more effectively than some of the more bulky recent biographies. Rupert broadcast on Radio Leicester and was part author of a small book on *The Growth of Leicester* (1970) which brought together the talks first given on that medium. His most recent publication on Leicester history was an account of John Biggs (1801–71), hosier and political reformer, and his two brothers which appeared in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). (Rupert’s interest in the Biggs family was first evidenced in an article in *Clio*, the short-lived magazine of the University History Society in 1971 and in a longer version published in this Society’s *Transactions* in 1972). Only one of his publications was linked with his French Revolution special subject at the University and even that was couched in terms of its Leicestershire ramifications. (‘The French Exiled Clergy in Leicestershire from 1792’, [with Bernard Elliott], *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 64, 1990). In only one other publication did he stray outside Leicestershire altogether, and that, a short, co-authored contribution with Babette to volume III (1970) of the *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, had not taken him far away geographically. Very occasionally Rupert reviewed books, taking on for example in 1978/9 for the journal *Literature & History* two volumes in the Pinney edition of the *Letters* of Thomas Babington Macaulay – one of Leicestershire’s most illustrious sons! – and Joseph Hamburger’s edition of the rediscovered text of Macaulay’s *Napoleon and the Restoration of the Bourbons*.

Others can speak with greater knowledge than I possess of his twenty-year tenure as Chairman of this Society’s Committee. He also gave long and devoted
service to the Historic Buildings Panel for Leicester and Leicestershire, serving as co-ordinator of the Panel’s work from 1982 to 2003, and was for many years a J.P. in Leicester. He was also Hon.Treasurer of the Friends of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland from 1984, when the group was founded, until shortly before his death. ‘Service’ came to him easily and naturally. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1980.

Rupert Evans shared with his wife Babette a wide range of cultural interests. Opera, drama, country-house visiting, conference-going, and foreign travel all excited him. In later years the inseparable husband and wife duo became well-known and much-loved tour manager and guide respectively for Swan’s Tours both in this country and further afield. In this sphere, too, no less than in his University teaching Rupert’s deep and wide-ranging fund of knowledge and amusing anecdotes and his bubbling, innocent, enthusiasm, warm good humour and unassuming nature inspired both lasting respect and affection. The infectious sound of his laughter, often associated with his own playful self mockery, will be for so many one of their abiding memories of this kind, unassuming, and approachable man.

The death of Babette Evans on 3 May 2005, only a few months after that of her husband Rupert, truly marks the end of an era for the University of Leicester, where she served as Assistant Lecturer from 1946, then Lecturer (1948–62) and Senior Lecturer (1962–82). Leicester was her third post. Her first was a temporary appointment at Bedford College, London, then in wartime exile in Cambridge and headed by the formidable Professor Lillian Penson (1896–1963). Her initiation to Cambridge life was eased by the fact that Babette had the good fortune to be invited to stay for the duration with Professor G. M. Trevelyan and his wife at Trinity College. The hoped-for permanent post at Bedford College not materialising, Babette moved on to a lectureship at the teacher training college at Lincoln, then to Leicester where she was already on the staff when the first Professor of History, Jack Simmons, was appointed in 1947. Rupert arrived soon afterwards and he and Babette were married in 1948. Babette was the first woman lecturer to stay on in the University’s employ after marriage, just as she was the first woman to be appointed Acting Head of Department (1953 and 1962) and Sub Dean and Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1975–8 and 1978–81 respectively). She was Head of the History Department between 1973 and 1975.

Babette and Rupert Evans in so many ways symbolised the History Department, taking a keen interest in their students and wholeheartedly involving themselves in the extra-curricular agenda. The university, without question, was their life. Initially Babette and Jack Simmons were obliged to carve up the teaching of the entire University of London History degree syllabus between them. Rupert’s appointment in 1947 brought some welcome relief in that respect and as other new staff joined the department, Norman Scarfe and Geoffrey Martin among them, the crushing burden of teaching was eased. Babette continued to teach the early sections of the medieval history course along with her special subject on Roman Britain, which she had been obliged to work up from scratch when she first arrived.
at Leicester. This course, which had a long and successful shelf-life, attracted some
of the Department’s best students. She was an able lecturer, presenting her material
cogently and with such stately delivery and perfect enunciation that her hearers’
note-taking was almost effortless. Tutorials with her could be intimidating as well
as stimulating. She expected high standards, in presentation no less than in
research, and was content with nothing less. For me, a student in the History
Department from 1962 to 1965, Babette seemed to bear a strong resemblance, and
not just facially, to Queen Elizabeth I, and since she remembered me from my
interview there seemed from the outset to be, in my eyes at least, a special bond
between us. Long after they had both retired Babette and Rupert were still loyally
attending special events at the University, research seminars, and degree
congregations. For a number of years they contributed to a special orientation
programme for incoming American students. For several years also Babette was a
much loved leader in this country and in France for Swan’s Tours, with Rupert in a
supporting role as tour manager. Babette was in her element in such settings and
careful advance reconnoitring of the sites to be visited ensured that nothing was left
to chance. Not surprisingly lots of good stories stemmed from these activities and
for years afterwards they were still regaling friends with them.

Babette Evans (née Roberts) was born in London on 29 November 1917. She
was educated at Christ’s College, Hertford and then at Royal Holloway both as an
undergraduate and then as a PhD student under Hilda Johnstone (1882–1961),
one of the first of the women professors in the London university system. Babette’s
mother, from whom she inherited her indomitable spirit, was a leading figure in
East End Labour politics and was Mayor of Stepney in 1935–6 during some of the
ugliest incidents in Mosley’s anti-semitic blackshirt campaign. The ‘tough’ side to
Babette’s character no doubt owed much to these early experiences and later, as a
woman in the man’s world of higher education, being strong-willed was surely a
necessary reflex.

The unrelenting demands of teaching meant that lectures and tutorials always
took up the lion’s share of Babette’s time although she self-evidently relished the
lecture room and enjoyed administrative responsibilities when they came her way.
The Faculty of Arts under her direction was run as a tight ship. Though not
massively productive as a researcher, research was always part of Babette’s
agenda, and in retirement very noticeably she published much more than she had
done previously.

Her London PhD thesis became her first, and indeed only, full-length book,
appearing in 1947, with an appreciative preface by G. M. Trevelyan, as St.
George’s Chapel Windsor Castle, 1348–1416. A Study in Early Collegiate
Administration. It remains the standard work in its field. Thorough, methodical,
systematic, clearly structured, attentive to detail, and beautifully written, it has all
the hallmarks which continued to be associated with Babette as an academic. St
George’s Chapel continued to pre-occupy her throughout her life. This was
evidenced in a chapter on the College’s fifteenth-century financial problems which
she contributed to St George’s Chapel, Windsor in the Late Middle Ages (2001),
edited by Colin Richmond and Eileen Scarff. Her latest essay in this field –
'Litigation for Proprietary Rights: the case of the obstinate vicar' – has been posthumously published in N. Saul (ed), *St George’s Chapel, Windsor in the Fourteenth Century* (2005) and shows her still at the height of her powers. She stole the show, it seems, at the conference which gave rise to the book. The major project on St George’s Chapel on which she was known to be working for many years, regrettably, remained unfinished at her death.

She was a perfectionist, of course, which meant that for her to be satisfied with the end product endless polishing and re-working were needed. But in addition to this Babette often selflessly put aside her own research in order to help others; she was always unstintingly generous with her time. She read and commented on the work of so many former students and others who approached her for help and guidance and for very many years she acted as a reader of articles submitted to the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*. Her active involvement in this society, incredibly, ran for almost six decades, and for years she painstakingly arranged the History side of the Society’s lecture programme and served on the Society’s Committee. The most substantial diversion from her own work in recent years, however, was the *festschrift* she edited for her old friend and colleague Jack Simmons and which appeared in 2003 as *The Impact of the Railway on Society in Britain*. Far removed from her own field, Babette nonetheless launched herself enthusiastically into this project and, since Jack died as it was nearing completion, it took on added significance as a memorial to him. The vast amount of time she devoted to this book, characteristically, is not advertised in the final product but all who contributed to it were left in no doubt about the exacting standards which Babette brought into play to achieve such a satisfying and elegant tribute to the real founder of the academic study of transport history in this country.

Soc. LXVI (1992), 105–20). Similarly Babette only published one article in the field of her long-running Roman Britain special subject, a festschrift contribution for her old friend Graham Webster, whom she had known since her time lecturing at the teacher training college in Lincoln. (‘Pottery and History’ in A. C. Anderson and A. S. Anderson (eds), Roman Pottery Research in Britain and N. W. Europe. Papers presented to Graham Webster, BAR International Series 123 ii (1981).

Babette also wrote a number of sympathetic and insightful obituaries of friends and former colleagues – Hilda Johnstone, Eleanor Cottrill (former Leicester archivist), Monica Jones (long-serving Lecturer in the English Department at Leicester), and Daniel Williams of the History Department, to name but a few. Occasionally she reviewed books on medieval historiography for the journal Literature & History and on local history for the Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society. She was elected Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1949 and of the Society of Antiquaries ten years later.

In retirement Babette and Rupert were able to indulge their long-standing interests in opera, theatre-going, and in visiting churches and country houses. No life members of English Heritage and the National Trust can ever have extracted more value out of their membership than Babette and Rupert. Those organisations must now prepare themselves for a statistical down-turn. Those who shared with them the delights of such outings will recall three invariable features: the quasi-military campaign planning that underpinned such visits, the famous and plentiful picnics that accompanied them, and the invariable tendency to arrive at the last scheduled building of the day at the approach of closing time. Not easily overawed in such situations Babette’s well-practised powers of persuasion were deployed, and nearly always succeeded, in gaining admission even as doors were being shut. Babette and Rupert scarcely ever failed to see a Shakespeare production at Stratford. Even in the last year of their lives, when their health was sadly failing, they just could not miss ‘Macbeth’ and ‘King Lear’. Re-visiting such great tragedies allowed them, for a time at least, to step outside their own personal misfortunes.

Babette and Rupert were inseparable from each other and it was deeply touching to see how she cared for him in his final illness, struggling out of hospital herself to be with him as he was dying. The two of them had a great gift for friendship, exercised most frequently through the extended network of the University. Babette remained loyal and helpful to former students and took a keen interest in their career development. She was a prolific and efficient correspondent, writing always in her elegant longhand since typing and word-processing were new-fangled accomplishments that passed her by; she always kept technology at arm’s length. A number of these former students became firm friends and were admitted with open arms to the eccentrically-run Evans household in Knighton Grange Road and to Babette and Rupert’s ever-active and cosy socio-academic and cultural world in which lapsang souchong tea, choice cakes, and tea-loaf were dispensed with bounteous liberality.

R. C. Richardson,
University of Winchester
Staff and students of the History Department of University College, Leicester, 1952. Staff seated left to right, Rupert Evans, Babette Evans, Jack Simmons, Norman Scarfe.