OBITUARY

LEVI FOX, 1914–2006

When Levi Fox died in 2006 his obituaries celebrated his achievements as city archivist for Coventry (1937–40) and above all as Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust at Stratford-upon-Avon from 1945 until his retirement in 1989. He had developed the Trust into a major organisation with an international reputation. He acquired new properties, including Hall’s Croft, restored the buildings, and funded and built the Shakespeare Centre in Henley Street in which the Record Office enjoys excellent accommodation. Perhaps the high point of his career had been in 1964, the 400th anniversary of the William Shakespeare’s birth. In that year Fox oversaw the celebrations in Stratford; the Centre was opened; commemorative stamps were issued; and he was appointed OBE.

Levi Fox may have become famous in Warwickshire, but his roots were in Leicestershire, and his early historical research was centred on the county, or more particularly on the late medieval earls of Leicester, who by the fourteenth century were also earls and dukes of Lancaster. Fox was born and brought up at Coleorton, the son of a smallholder of very limited means. He gained a place at Ashby-de-la-Zouche Grammar School, received encouragement from his teachers, and went on to read history at Oxford. After graduation he remained in Oxford as a Bryce Research Student and then went on to Manchester University where he gained an MA. He worked on the records of the honor of Leicester, and published on many aspects of the institution, mainly with this society. His edition of ministers’ accounts for the honor in 1322–4 appeared in two instalments in the Transactions for 1936–7 (vol. 19) and 1937–8 (vol.1 20); and a substantial essay on the administration of the honor was published in part 2 of vol. 20. His article on Leicester Castle in volume 22 for 1943 formed the whole issue in the constrained conditions of wartime. He also wrote an article on the honor for the English Historical Review which appeared in 1939, and the City of Leicester published his pamphlet on Leicester Abbey in 1938. He did not forget his native county when

preoccupied with government work in Coventry during World War II, nor in his early days in Stratford, as in 1948 the Society published *Leicester Forest*, with Percy Russell as joint author. Finally in, 1967, he completed a history of Ashby Grammar School.

Fox’s historical work began with scholarly but dry administrative studies which were characteristic of Oxford and Manchester medieval historians in the 1930s. They are thorough and authoritative works which are still consulted. His publications on the Castle and the Abbey show that he was attracted to buildings and could connect the documents with the physical remains of the past. Both of these publications were illustrated. This interest in the visual dimension continued with the book on Leicester Forest, which contained many photographs and maps, although it was his co-author who contributed the topographical sections. This book is more accessible and attractive to a wider readership than the earlier rather austere works on the honor. One can see in the development of his writings on Leicestershire the beginnings of his concern for historic buildings and their display to the public which marked the popular success of the historic Shakespeare properties in his time at the Birthplace Trust.

He joined this Society in 1936–7, remaining a member until he died, seventy years later. He welcomed a Society excursion to the Birthplace and its Record Office in 1952. Having been elected Vice-President in 1955, he served for fifty-one years. He was always interested in our activities, and sent a message of goodwill which was published in the Newsletter for spring 2000.

He was a quiet, undemonstrative man, who was devoted to his wife Jane, who he married in 1938, and his son and two daughters. He also had a very strong commitment to the Birthplace Trust, which absorbed much of his time and energy. He was involved in numerous other organisations, notably the Dugdale Society (which publishes Warwickshire records), school governing bodies and many more. He took a special pleasure in the honours that he received, which included two honorary doctorates.