

Historian Allen White died on birthday



ALLEN WHITE, local historian of Christchurch for 50 years, has died on his 78th birthday.

Till Alzheimer's disease struck him about a year ago Allen dedicated his life to clarifying and adding to the history of Christchurch town and its environs.

It was he who suggested to the then Christchurch Historical Society (which soon merged with the Historical Association) that they should buy micro-films of the Priory Cartulary from the British Museum. A few years later he set himself the huge task of turning each tiny film into a full page photo. Mr. Austin Willson then began the translation of the first 300 or so charters (a third of the total) and the indexing, etc. The enormous task has been carried on by David Stagg and now by a lady in Barton. Making this vast store of information available to these scholars and others in retrospect may be Allen's most important lasting memorial.

In the early '50s he enjoyed flying over and taking splendid photos of the great Wessex Iron Age hill forts. From its foundation he gave unstinted help to the Red House Museum. He was a freelance photographer, added to a link to "The Christchurch Times," so it seems appropriate that his first publication, in 1966, was "Christchurch Photographers" (1855—1915). He amazed me with the revelation that Thomas Tapsell went out to Russia in 1908 to become the official photographer of Tolstoy's community there.

His "The Chainmakers" (1967) was a book of real significance for horologists. I still feel pleased that I was able to tell him that the children in our Milton Poor House were among those who made the tiny fusee chains for watches. The booklet is sought by experts from all over the English speaking world.

In 1970 he had the idea of a series of handbooks that would tell the story of the separate parts of the town. He called it "High Street Handbook." His centrepiece is a section of the Tithe Map of 1843, linked to the 1841 Census (the first to name the inhabitants). He also printed the 1715 estate map that I had persuaded Mr. Coventry of Barton to give to the Red House Museum. It was then the earliest-known map of the town. His booklet on Mr. Cook's "Square House" of c.1776 was published in 1971, and he saved one of the six Ionic capitals when the building was demolished in 1958. "Clingan House" was also published that year (1971); besides noting the charity Clingan set up, Allen had interesting material on the Ferrey family, etc. In 1972 Allen came with me to King's Beam, the archive store of the Customs service; in a few hours he photographed 360 pages relating to the history of smuggling from Bournemouth to Beaulieu. From those that related directly to Christchurch, he produced a fine 60 page hard-back, "18th Century Smuggling in Christchurch" (1973). About the same time he printed an historic map "Out of Poole and Solent Ports," with fine ship sketches by his father-in-law, Mr. Norbury.

In 1974 and '75 he turned his attention to the manors to the east of the actual town:— "Mudeford and Stanpit" and "The Manor of Somerford, A.D. 1140—1938." In the latter he printed as centrepiece a photo of J. C. Joy's painting of the cricket match at Stanpit in 1849. The original is at Lord's.

Allen's last three booklets are wonderfully illustrated works of solid research, based on the Tithe Map and 1841 Census, but rooted in the earlier centuries. They are: "The High Street through the Years" (1982); "Church Street and Castle Street" (1985); and "Bargates, Fairmile and Barrack Road" (1986). Besides all these publications, he also photographed town documents, Poor law records, documents in the Red House — in fact anything relevant to the history of his town.

When David Hill, Keith Jarvis, and others excavated various parts of the town he was there to record their work and discoveries with his camera. Masses of his vast collection are now held by the town library. His splendid work was recognised by the present Christchurch Historical Society which awards

"Allen White plaques" to researchers who have tried to carry on his fine work. He will be greatly missed, but his work will live on.

Allen's father had a gentlemen's outfitter's shop at Boscombe, and his mother was a member of the Langston family which had similar shops in Reading. He leaves an older brother, the Rev. Bill White and his wife. He and his divorced wife, Anne, have two daughters: Joanne (Mrs. Castle) of Hordle, and Heather who lives off Stem Lane, New Milton. There are also two grandchildren, Anne lives at Walkford. His home for 50 years was 39, Wick Lane, till he went to Wick Meads Nursing Home. He died on February 4th.; cremation was to take place at Bournemouth Crematorium at 11 a.m. yesterday (Friday).

For the last ten years his constant companion was his dog, Kim. Through their walks on Hengistbury he became friendly with two ladies exercising their pets. Since Allen became ill these ladies have been wonderful pillars of support, fine examples of Christian help.

A.L.

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Jack Dwyer, chairman of Christchurch Local History Society, and a one time press colleague of Mr. White's, writes: Allen's first job after leaving school was with Fairey Aviation at Hamble. This sparked a lifelong interest in flying. He volunteered for the RAF six months before World War Two and served mostly overseas as a photographer in the Middle East and, after D-Day, in Europe.

Following demobilisation, he bumped into Bernard Mead, editor and proprietor of the Christchurch Times and with his camera covered most of the important happenings in the town until 1960. For the next 20 years, until his retirement, he was the official photographer at MEXE, the military experimental establishment in Christchurch.

In 1992 the Borough Council chose him for its meritorious award in recognition of his diligent research, but shy man that he was, he declined to accept it in front of all the members. Instead, the then Mayor, Coun. Colin Bungey went along to the History Society's informal Christmas social and presented the award there. That was typical of Allen. He was a modest man who disliked a fuss, but we made him an honorary member and named our annual award for research work after him. He lovingly made a tremendous contribution to the town's awareness of its past.