

MR A.R. POWYS, CBE, FSA. AN APPRECIATION. [Probably by Littleton C. Powys]

The death of Mr A.R. Powys, secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, at the early age of 55, has caused great regret throughout the whole country, and especially, perhaps in Somerset and Dorset, which may be regarded as his home counties, for he was born in Dorchester, and at Montacute he spent his boyhood. From his very earliest days he seemed marked for the profession which he adopted. As a little child in the nursery he was never happier than when engaged in building houses upon the floor with wooden bricks. And when he grew older and went, as his brothers had done, to Sherborne School, some of the hours he loved best were spent in the workshop learning under Mr Bishop's guidance, the craft of the carpenter. In the holidays many a day was passed in a corner of the Vicarage garden building with bricks and timber a castle, in which with peculiar rites of their own, he and his sister, Marian, and his brother, Llewelyn, would welcome and entertain their guests. No boy, who was destined to be an architect, could have been placed in a home more suitable than Montacute, nor in a school with such opportunities as Sherborne. Much time was always spent with his brothers and sisters on Ham Hill; it was a splendid playground. And there from the quarries, which for centuries had yielded that wonderful stone with which the churches, manors, farmhouses, and cottages for miles around had been built, he could see for himself the stone being raised, and watch the masons skilfully carving it. And from the summit of the hill he could view dotted here, there and everywhere the village churches with their famous perpendicular towers. The buildings of Montacute itself, the church, the splendid Elizabethan house, the Abbey Farm, the old house of the Borough told their story to ears that were not deaf; and within a mile or so stood that perfect little church of Stoke-sub-Hamdon, which he always said inspired him with an enthusiasm for architecture more than any building he ever knew.

And at Sherborne, too, the old school buildings, the glorious Abbey, Cheap Street with its conduit and old houses, the lovely little Tudor house in Long Street, all had their influence upon him. And so it came about that as soon as ever he left school he commenced training for his life's work. He was articled to Mr Benson of Yeovil, and there in congenial surroundings, he learnt the principles of architecture. In 1902, when qualified, he joined Mr William Weir, of the SPAB, under whose wise guidance he was instructed in the methods of repairing old buildings. From 1903-1908 he helped in supervising the repair of churches in all parts of England. Afterwards for some years he worked in London with Mr Walter Cave and with Mr T.H. Lyon, and then in 1912 he was appointed secretary of the Society, for which, except for the war years when he served with the 4th Yorkshires from 1915-1918, he worked for well nigh 25 years. As a young man he was singularly shy and reserved, and apparently lacking in self-confidence; but gradually, through intensive study, perseverance, a fervent love of his work, and practical experience, he gained so complete a mastery over everything connected with his calling that he became sure of himself, and it could be said of him in a letter which the writer has just read: "His place in the SPAB can never be filled. His power lay not only in the fulness of his knowledge and experience, his abounding energy and devotion to the work, and his extraordinary gift of exposition; but also – and under this spell I believe everyone who knew him must have fallen – the singular charm of his personality. At the meetings of the Society for many of us his presence and his contributions to the discussions were the most forceful and most memorable element in them!" To make the principles of the Society known was to him a sacred mission; and from one end of the country to the other he would go preaching its objects. But he was not only a missionary. The buildings in Dorset and Somerset which he had visited, and about which he had corresponded, must number well over a hundred; and there are many whose repairs he himself had superintended. The tower at Langport Church, the Priest's House at Brympton, the almshouses at West Coker, Lambrook Church, the 'Pigeon Tower' at Bruton, Montacute House and cottages on the estate, the churches of Stoke-sub-Hamdon and Cucklington have all known his devoted and thorough attention; and in Dorset one may mention amongst others, the churches of Bradford Abbas, Lytchett Matravers, and Lydlinch, cottages at Sturminster Marshall, Cerne Abbas, chancels at Osborne, Trent cottages, and Winterborne Tomson Church, beneath the south wall of which his body now lies. There could be no more striking evidence of the appreciation of those who knew him and his work than the gathering together in that remote little churchyard of so large a number of members of his Society who had come at that short notice from all parts of the country, from Cornwall to

Yorkshire. After the funeral service was over one of them said to the writer: 'He has gone; but his spirit lives; and his work will go on,' and in that hope we bid him farewell.