

David Dymond, M.A., Ph.D., Hon. D.Litt., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S., President: An Appreciation

David Dymond was a passionate advocate for the work of record societies. He joined the Council of the Suffolk Records Society in 1966 and was president from 2012 until his untimely death in 2021 at the age of 88. He was general editor of Volumes XXXIV to L (1992–2007). During his tenure volumes were published on documents from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, demonstrating his competence over a broad span of history. In 2007 he inveigled me into completing *Wills from the Register 'Baldwyne', Part II: 1461–1474* (Volume LIII), commenced by Peter Northeast, and compiling the indexes to it. He was also a diligent editor of several texts: not only *The County of Suffolk surveyed by Joseph Hodkinson, published in 1783* (Volume XV, 1972) in our main series and *The Charters of Stanton, Suffolk, c. 1215-1678* (Charters Volume 18, 2009) in our Charters series, but also *The Register of Thetford Priory* (2 volumes, jointly Norfolk Record Society and the British Academy, 1995 and 1996) and *The Churchwardens' Book of Bassingbourn 1496-c.1540* (Cambridgeshire Record Society 17, 2004).

David began his professional life as an investigator in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, initially based in York. His work ranged way back in time: subjects of his early articles (published outside the RCHM) include bridges in Roman Britain, hillforts and prehistoric implements. His extensive knowledge of buildings and building work comes across in many of his other publications. Tucked away amongst them are two short edited texts giving details of medieval building craftsmanship: 'A fifteenth century building contract from Suffolk' (*Vernacular Architecture* 9, 1978) and 'Five building contracts from fifteenth-century Suffolk' (*Antiquaries Journal* 78, 1998).

He was a vice-president of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. He wrote six articles in its *Proceedings* and indeed his last book was published by the Institute. *The Business of the Suffolk Parish 1558-1625* (2018) outlines the wide variety of activities that occurred in early modern parishes. The discussion of the changing role of the parish and its officers is based on his own research in original parish records and some published transcripts, and also his knowledge of church buildings. It is a model publication that sold out almost immediately. He explained to me that he had forbidden a long print run; perhaps, for once, he was wrong.

David was also well known as a local historian outside his adopted county of Suffolk partly due to his various roles in the British Association for Local History (BALH), including council member, chairman and vice-president. He edited *The Local Historian* from February 1976 to November 1982 and had several articles published in it, including his last ever article, 'The game of camping in eastern England' (*TLH* 51, January 2021). (Camping, a notoriously rough East Anglian game, was a cross between football and rugby.) His own style of writing was clear, concise and informative, and he provided sage advice to others on how to write, principally through his book *Writing Local History: A Practical Guide*, first published by BALH in 1981, and revised and expanded in 1999 and 2009 as *Researching and Writing History: A Guide for Local Historians*. That this guide has been reissued twice is testament both to its popularity and to its enduring usefulness. My favourite

section is that on how *not* to write: David's gentle yet probing digs at various historians (from all academic levels) who were too verbose, used obscure jargon or wrote what was, in effect, nonsense, highlight the need for clarity when writing. Two particular pieces of his advice are always worth remembering: the little word 'the' is overused and can often be deleted without changing the sense of what is being said; inanimate objects or abstract concepts cannot express emotions or move in any way.

David was known to many more through his role as staff tutor in Local and Regional History for the University of Cambridge's Board (now Institute) of Continuing Education (UCICE) from about 1993 to 2007. I first met him on a fieldtrip to Ashwell (Herts) in the summer of 1994 and then again in November 1994 as one of the tutors on a weekend school entitled 'Unrest, riots and rebellions', organised by Mark Bailey. Unbeknown to me, this weekend was to shape my own development and interests as a local historian. I still have my notes on his session 'Leisure and social control', which covered, amongst other things, camping. These notes conclude 'games of camping in fenlands spread over the area, [they were] cover for breaking drainage mechanisms etc - "political protests"'. Some years later a study of early modern riots against fenland drainage formed part of my PhD. David was one of the tutors who ran the UCICE Master of Studies in Local History. It is not too dramatic to claim that his informative and authoritative teaching changed the lives of many Master of Studies students. One told me 'He certainly helped mould the course of my life over the past two decades and has left a valuable and lasting legacy of local history and historians'. Both while a tutor and afterwards, he was often to be seen beaver away in the University Library and would engage in lengthy conversation during breaks in the tea room. He was a good listener who, despite his own vast experience and knowledge, was happy to seek information and advice from others, particularly on how to access sources newly available online, and he was always interested in others' research projects. I remember talking with him about local historians in terms of the 'professional' *versus* 'amateur' debate: some of that discussion reappeared (with due acknowledgement) in his arguments in 'Does local history have a split personality?' in *New Directions in Local History since Hoskins* (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011).

David was always willing to give talks to historical societies. In April 2005 he spoke at the 8th Triennial Conference of the Richard III Society, 'Richard III and East Anglia: magnates, guilds and learned men'. As many (but not all) attendees were only interested in a certain monarch and his immediate circle, David's talk on ordinary folk and their involvement in 'Socio-religious guilds of the Middle Ages' was quite an eye-opener. This new light on late-medieval life was, nevertheless, much appreciated and was subsequently published in the *Proceedings* of that conference.

The esteem in which David was held was manifested practically in 2020 when he was honoured with a Festschrift entitled *Shaping the Past: Theme, Time and Place in Local History* (University of Hertfordshire Press, Studies in Regional and Local History, Volume 18). Some contributors were colleagues in various organisations, many were his former students. The subjects of their chapters, ranging in time from the early thirteenth to the early twentieth century, reflect the depth and breadth of David's own scholarship. The appendix listing his publications has no less than twenty-three books and fifty-eight articles. (Two articles were published subsequently.) The planned launch in St Edmundsbury cathedral was cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions but several

contributors were able to join David and Mary in their lovely garden, where he was given a presentation copy. Although it had not been possible to keep the book a secret, David was genuinely pleased to receive it and spoke of his delight and pride in being so honoured. UHP's representative commented that 'it was a real privilege to come along to the launch of the book and meet him in person, such a lovely man with an obviously brilliant sense of humour. I'm so pleased he got to see the book in published form'.

Given all of the above it is not surprising that David had numerous professional and academic qualifications and awards. As early as 1964 he was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London. He was also a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and in 2017 the High Sheriff of Suffolk awarded him a Certificate of Recognition for his hard work and service to the county. In 2000 he had received a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge by submission of published works (principally his *Register of Thetford Priory*) and also an Honorary Litt.D. from the University of East Anglia for services to history and education in the region. It is entirely fitting and deserved that he was Dr David Dymond twice over. More than that, he will be remembered as a gentle man and gentleman.

Heather Falvey September 2021

