

OBITUARY

Gerald A.J. Hodgett

Economic historian who mapped lives of monks and nuns after the Reformation

Gerald Hodgett, who has died aged 90, brought a humane spirit to the potentially dry study of medieval church records. One of the first to focus on the unpensioned plight of ex-monks and nuns after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, he understood that one incentive for ex-religious to set up house together was 'to share the burdens of housekeeping.' His own valued membership of the London club, The Athenaeum, sprang from a similar root.

Born in Nottingham, after his father's death, to a family with strong roots in the north Midlands Gerald's academic development was encouraged by his mother, a substantial influence in his life. After school and university, he taught first in Nottinghamshire and then, during the war, at Friends' School, Lisburn, Northern Ireland. Gerald had been brought up in the Presbyterian Church, but joined the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the early 1940s. In 1943, whilst at Lisburn, he was one of the ten signatories of a letter of protest about the 'dambuster' bombing raids, arguing that such an act could be 'represented in Germany as one of deliberate cruelty to the German people' and thus run counter to one of the war's expressed aims of encouraging Germans 'to play a useful part again in the life of Europe'. This early expression of interest in European cooperation was to recur throughout his life.

Gerald took up a lectureship at King's College London in 1947 and became reader in 1961. He enjoyed two periods of communal living, at the Quaker Penn Club, where he was a contemporary of John Harris, better known as science fiction writer John Wyndham, and for many years as a warden at the university's Commonwealth Hall. After his retirement in 1982, his hospitable flat near Euston was conveniently located both for the historic Quaker library at Friends House and for the mainline stations, for Gerald loved to travel. He had visited France and Germany before the war, and continued to be an avid attendee at medieval conferences in Europe and beyond. He relished his European touring holidays: travelling companions included KCL classicist H.H. Scullard and Oxford church historian Gary Bennett. In later years Gerald pursued his interests in Quaker history to the USA: he was a research scholar at the Huntingdon Library in California, and taught several terms in St Louis, Missouri. He regularly visited Hawaii and made at least two visits to Australia. Informed, eager and gregarious, Gerald was the perfect travelling companion. It was entirely appropriate that he suffered

his last, mercifully short, illness while on a regular visit to friends in Scotland for the Edinburgh and Pitlochry Festivals.

Gerald's wider interests co-existed with a lifelong academic attachment to his own corner of England, the Lincolnshire/Nottinghamshire borders. His first foray into the extensive records of the Lincoln diocese was his MA thesis on 'The Dissolution of the Monasteries in Lincolnshire' (1947), which bore fruit in his monograph *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1547-1574* (1959); one of the last was his ODNB entry for the Thorold family of Marston, near Grantham (per. C. 1492-1717), beneficiaries of the sale of monastic lands. Though his contribution to Lincolnshire's agrarian history was inevitably overshadowed by that of Joan Thirsk, his *Tudor Lincolnshire* (1975), the third in the county history series, examined all aspects of local society, from the response to the 1536 rising to the demography of book-ownership.

Gerald's views on the unhappy fate of the ex-religious, in his seminal article 'The Unpensioned Ex-Religious in Tudor England' (*Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 1962), though they did not win universal acceptance, spurred others into further archival research. He himself then took on one of the great lost monasteries of London, Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate, the first post-Conquest religious house to be established inside the City, in 1107-08, and the first to be dissolved, in 1532. The 1000 entries in its 1425-27 cartulary, listing its City properties and tenants, give an extraordinary picture of the economic lives of Londoners in the early fifteenth century. Gerald's edition and translation (*The Cartulary of Holy Trinity, Aldgate*, London Record Society, 1971), heralded as a major event in London studies, was enhanced in 2005 by the Museum of London's publication of the surviving archaeological evidence, just in time for the priory's 900th anniversary.

Gerald's writing was always accessible, and his undergraduate textbook, *A Social and Economic History of Medieval Europe* (London 1972), with its discussion of capitalism in the pre-modern textile industry, brought him probably his widest audience, both in the UK and overseas. He persuaded the young Delia Smith to write an introduction for his *Stere Htt Well, a book of medieval refinements, recipes and remedies* (London 1972), based on a manuscript in Samuel Pepys' library, now in Cambridge. He placed his writing and editorial skills at the service of the Quakers through his devoted membership of the Friends Historical Society, serving as its President in 1979 and editing its Journal from 1986 to 1996. This was just one aspect of his considerable service to the Society in over 60 years as an active Friend.

Of Sir Anthony Thorold, MP, Gerald wrote 'No doubt it helped him that he was considered reliable in religion, being described as 'earnest' in

1564...; his father, by contrast, was named as a hinderer.' A modest man, Gerald Hodgett was content to be considered reliable, but his many friends remember him with gratitude as one of life's enhancers.

Gerald Augustus John Hodgett, MA, FSA, FRHistS, economic and church historian, born 27 November 1916; died 15 September 2007

Rowena Loverance

(An abridged version of this obituary appeared in *The Times* of 3 January 2008)