

Aubrey Bailey

T. A. Bailey was a member of the Council of the AMS for over thirty years and latterly a Vice President. He died in December 2001. Here we reproduce the obituary which appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 22nd December 2001 with the permission of the Editor, for which we are grateful.

Historic Buildings Architect who was responsible for Ancient Monuments in England and Wales, Thomas Aubrey Bailey, who has died aged 89, was for nearly two decades the architect in charge of Ancient Monuments when they were the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. He was a leading expert on stonework and timber decay and preservation. He was also a Vice-President of the Ancient Monuments Society, to which he contributed enthusiastically and diligently over many years.

He was blessed with an interesting and varied career, but because of the associated publicity will probably be most remembered for work undertaken at Stonehenge between 1958 and 1964, alongside archaeologists Richard Atkinson and Stuart Piggott.

Stones that had fallen within recorded history (the earliest, 1690) were re-erected in their original location. The main 'Trilithon' stones weigh some 45 tons, and had to be encased in a further 15 tons of steel framework so they could be lifted, transversed and turned in any direction to enable precise positioning. One of the UK's largest cranes, designed to lift aircraft, was borrowed from the Ministry of Defence.

The work directed by Bailey on Britain's most famous monument caught the imagination of the media and public at the time, and in 1959 he was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire for services to the preservation of our heritage. He was always amused by the publicity, and particularly when he promptly received a letter from a member of the public in the USA. It was simply addressed 'Mr. Stonehenge, London!' The 'label' stuck for many years.

Aubrey Bailey, often known as 'T. A.', was born on 20th January 1912 in Hanley, Staffordshire, the only son of Tom and Emma. Of humble origins, his mother was ambitious for him and built up a series of fish and chip shops enabling her to send him to be educated at Adams' Grammar School, Newport.

This ambition led her to move her family to London, where Bailey obtained a junior position working for the son of the Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald. Alistair MacDonald was an architect with his own Practice, and Bailey was sent to the London Polytechnic School of Architecture, where he immediately demonstrated a flair for measurement and draughtsmanship, enabling him to progress rapidly with his employer.

During this time he developed a passion for historic buildings and in 1935 he decided to join the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Office of Works, where he subsequently completed his architectural qualifications (RIBA). His reputation for enthusiasm and competence grew, and at the outbreak of war, rather than being



Thomas Aubrey Bailey

conscripted into the Forces, the 'powers that be' used his skills in measurement and surveying to build Royal Ordnance Factories in the north of England.

Young Bailey's reputation was recognised when he was brought back to assist Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and his brother Adrian submit designs for the re-building of a new House of Commons Chamber. On the night of 10th May 1941 enemy bombing had destroyed the Chamber, and Winston Churchill had immediately vowed to re-build it 'in defiance of the Nazi Hordes'.

Bailey's unique longitudinal section through the Chamber of the House of Commons, prepared for viewing by M.P.s, was of such quality that it was Hung at the Royal Academy in 1945.

Following work on the Commons he returned to the Ministry of Works as Architect responsible for London and East Anglia, when he undertook restoration work on the Tower of London, Westminster Hall, Westminster Abbey Chapter House and many other landmark buildings. Following the nation's purchase of Audley End House from Lord Braybrooke, he arranged for its opening to the public on Easter Monday 1948. Although the opening was not publicised, word had spread and an unexpectedly large crowd visited that day. Tours had to be hurriedly arranged using available 'guides', who included the gardener and Bailey's wife. The public's taste for visiting the monuments of its heritage has been growing ever since.

In 1953 he was promoted to take charge of the Ancient Monuments Branch, with a staff of 1,400. His own speciality had become the conservation of stone and timber, but his gift was his enthusiasm and his presence. Despite the stammer which he had from the age of 13, he was able to demonstrate his expertise through hands-on example, and combined his love of motoring (and motor racing) with his work by travelling to the 300 Ancient Monuments as often as he could. He loved Armstrong Siddeley cars, owning a series of them, but since 1937 always with the same registration number - ELM 999.

In the mid-1950's much work ensued, including the repair of Wren's Abingdon County Hall which was opened by The Queen using a ceremonial key presented by him, and he was honorary architect to the Lord Great Chamberlain, the Marquis of Cholmondeley, regarding repairs to his ancestral home, Houghton Hall. Bailey was also responsible for antiquities at overseas embassies, and notably the repair of the Claudian Aqueduct in the grounds of the British Embassy in Rome.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's he became special architectural advisor to Oxford University's major Historic Buildings Appeal, followed by a similar role for Cambridge University. For his work at Oxford, he was awarded an Honorary Master of Arts degree in 1963.

More events of interest occurred throughout the 1960's. These included arrangements for the Lying in State of Winston Churchill at Westminster Hall, the Installation of Sir Robert Menzies (Prime Minister of Australia) as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports at Dover Castle, the Installation of Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma as Governor of the Isle of Wight at Carisbrooke Castle and, for Lord Snowdon, the Installation of the Prince of Wales at Caernavon Castle.

In 1956 he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and subsequently

to the Council for Places of Worship. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and a Freeman of the City of London. He had been a keen and committed Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Masons for many years, contributing as a member of the Court and especially its Craft and Training committee in the support of young stonemasons at the commencement of their careers.

Always an exceptionally active man, the thought of enforced retirement looming after 35 years of service dedicated to the conservation of ancient monuments and historic buildings was not one he could contemplate, so he took an opportunity of a fresh lease of life in the private sector specialising in cleaning and restoration. This enabled him to carry out work at the Royal Albert Hall, Canterbury Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, Selby Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral, to name but a few.

In 1977 he semi-retired, but for nearly 25 more years his deep knowledge and never-ending enthusiasm kept him involved in advisory positions, usually giving freely of his time to enhance the way in which Britain conserves its heritage.

Above all, those who knew him will remember him for recounting his fascinating experiences and his great kindness in which he always put others first. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word.

He married, in 1944, Joan Woodman Hooper, who died in 1990. They had one son.

RICHARD WOODMAN-BAILEY