



Photograph by Walter Stoneman

SIR ALFRED WILLIAM CLAPHAM, 1944

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1883-1950

ALFRED CLAPHAM'S reputation is securely enshrined in his two volumes on English Romanesque Architecture and his more general treatise on the same period throughout Europe. In them is distilled a lifetime of patient research, acute observation and study of the buildings themselves, intimate consultation with other scholars, and comprehensive reading, the whole being presented with a degree of discrimination and judgement that has won unqualified admiration. But Clapham's services to the history of medieval art and archaeology are much wider and more extensive than this, and his genius for his chosen vocation reveals itself progressively in the successive steps of his career.

He was born 27 May 1883 and was the youngest child of the Rev. J. E. Clapham and his wife Elizabeth Hutchinson.¹ He had two brothers and a sister. He started with two advantages. His father used to take his family to all parts of England on their annual holidays and this induced him, with his sister as his companion, to visit every historic site within reach. After leaving Dulwich School, although denied a university career, he received the practical training of an architect, an invaluable preparation for his future work. When I first met him in 1907 at his home in Radlett, Hertfordshire, I found that he had visited most of the monastic sites in the country, and although he had made as yet no archaeological contacts he was obviously destined to achieve great things.

I have never known anyone who has set out to equip himself with so much decision, certainty, and thoroughness for his calling. His appetite for reading was insatiable and being conscious of the lack of academic training, he set himself to absorb the classical authors, great and small (in translation), and assimilated the works of men like Pausanias, Bede, Giraldus, Leland, and Stow. The dates of emperors, popes, kings, and caliphs found easy and permanent lodgement in his mind and his strong historic sense became remarkably objective and balanced. Above all he acquired a flair, almost a second sight, for divining the extent and location of the hidden foundations

¹ He deposited at the College of Arms his own notes on his family which derived from Yorkshire.

of vanished buildings and the secrets concealed within those that were still above ground.

The first excavation which he carried out was that of Lesnes Abbey, reports of which appeared in the *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* in 1910, the completed work being issued in book form in 1915. During 1911 and 1912 he assisted the Victoria County Histories and investigated a number of parishes in Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Worcestershire, and Yorkshire.

About this time, the six or seven years before the First World War, he and I were in daily contact and I enlisted his help on the work of the Survey of London in which he joined with enthusiasm. He contributed to it at a later period (in collaboration with Miss M. Reddan) a valuable study of the Church and Priory of St. Helen, Bishopsgate (published 1924), and wrote a felicitous note on our venerable chairman Philip Norman when he died. He and I also started a series of contributions to the *Architectural Review*, which was published in book form under the title of *Some Famous Buildings and their Story* (1913), in which Clapham's papers showed his grasp of the fundamental principles of research into building history, giving them abiding value.

In 1911 my friend Sir George Duckworth was seeking a technical editor for the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), to which I had been giving occasional help, and I had the pleasure of introducing Clapham as the ideal candidate; he joined the staff in 1912 and assumed his new duties in 1913 and, although the war made a tragic interruption, it was soon clear how important a part he would eventually play in this great enterprise. It was in 1913 that he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Clapham obtained a commission in the Royal Sussex Regiment and saw service first in France, from which, after being invalided home, he went to the Near East where his unusual knowledge of places and things gained immediate recognition on the intelligence staff. It was in the intervals of his duties in Palestine that he made his remarkable investigations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, which were published, with a large coloured plan, in the first number of the *Antiquaries Journal* (1921).

When the Royal Commission resumed its work after the war, Clapham showed his peculiar capacity for marshalling the enormous aggregation of material required by the county

inventories and for giving them coherence, consistency, and significance. His sectional prefaces in which he brought to the surface the outstanding and essential facts of the survey were admirable patterns of what such guiding memorabilia should be. Always objective in his approach he had the faculty of making his subject illuminate itself without one's being conscious of the light he himself was imparting. For the first time London architecture was comprehensively recorded (within the limits accepted at that time by the Commission) in five volumes, which included the memorable survey of Westminster Abbey. The County of Essex was described with equal thoroughness in four volumes, in which the local characteristics and peculiarities were clearly defined, and the County of Huntingdon was issued in one volume.

In 1921 Clapham joined the Royal Archaeological Institute and in the years that followed he took a leading part in the reorganization of this Society which has proved so vigorous a school for the study of historical architecture as well as more remote antiquities. He undertook the interpretation of the principal buildings at the Summer Meetings and he set the standard for the production of the informative programmes, that for Canterbury (1929) being of superlative excellence. It was in the year of this meeting that Clapham became Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, a position he filled with distinction for ten years till he succeeded Sir Frederic Kenyon as President in 1939. The interests of the Society were always deeply felt by him and he had the difficult task of guiding its destinies during the war years. The Society has had more eloquent presidents but none more devoted to its work or more competent to comment with the right degree of approval or criticism on the learned contributions made at its meetings. He received his knighthood at the close of his term of office and the Society conferred on him its Gold Medal in 1948. He had been made C.B.E. in 1932, the year in which his lecture on 'The Renaissance of Architecture and Stone-carving in Southern France in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries' was published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, to which he was elected Fellow in 1935.

In 1933 Clapham succeeded Sir George Duckworth as Secretary of the Royal Commission, retaining his editorial control, and he occupied these joint offices until his retirement in 1948, when he was appointed one of the Commissioners. He had completed the surveys of Herefordshire (in three volumes), Westmorland, Middlesex, and the City and University of

Oxford, as well as preparatory work on Dorset and Cambridge, where during the war he resided and worked in chambers at Trinity.

In 1945 Clapham was elected President of the Royal Archaeological Institute and presided over the meetings at Lincoln (1946) and Salisbury (1947). Those who were privileged to take part in these architectural feasts will not readily forget the pleasure and profit they afforded. The Institute has had a distinguished line of presidents but none, I venture to think, who were more learned than Clapham in architecture, more genial in comradeship, or more approachable by the humblest student of the arts. Clapham, like Hamilton Thompson, contributed of his best to these meetings over a period of some thirty years and put strength and vitality into this admirable school of sound scholarship.

Perhaps the most important service of Clapham's later years was the support he gave to founding the Council for British Archaeology. The need for such a co-ordinating body was patent but the organization of a united front among so much diversity was not an easy matter. Elected as its first President in 1944 he saw it through the painful process of its birth, and it is due largely to his tact and persistence that it owes its present secure position. Clapham, unlike many men who rise to distinction, had no enemies, he had friends everywhere. Men like John Bilson and Baldwin Brown and of course his nearer contemporaries at home, in France, at the Congrès Archéologique, and even farther afield were eager to exchange their views with him. His contributions to learned societies were numerous and always distinguished; though he conserved his powers by limiting the field of his own specialized studies there were no such limitations to his interests or to his knowledge. Nor were there any limits to the generous service on which his friends could count. I have scores of notes he sent me on his travels of matters that concerned my own researches. It could be said of him that in the pursuit of knowledge he spent his days and in the company of its devotees he found his pleasure and delight.

A chronological bibliography of all his published papers and books completed by Miss Vera M. Dallas is given in the memorial volume of the *Archaeological Journal*, the supplement to volume cvi (1952).

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