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**Roland Austin**

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## ROLAND AUSTIN, M.A., F.S.A.

Roland Austin was born at Reading in 1874 and, on completing his school education, became an assistant at the Reading Public Library. In 1896 he was made Librarian of the Public Libraries, Southwark, and, four years later, he was appointed Librarian of the Gloucester Public Library. During his long tenure of the latter post, he effected many improvements, and it may be justifiably claimed that no similar institution of its size offered the public a better service. He knew the best books on a wide variety of subjects and obtained them, and he could always tell an enquirer where to find a certain piece of information. He was author of *Some Gloucestershire Books and their Authors* and he was responsible for three important pieces of bibliographical work.

During his librarianship in co-operation with Sir Francis Hyett, he brought out a supplement to the *Biographer's Manual of Gloucestershire Literature* and later compiled his monumental *Catalogue of the Gloucestershire Collection*. It may well be that posterity will best remember him by this work.

Austin's life may be said to have been almost wholly given to his work. His domestic and family life was subordinated to it. He rose very early in the morning and would accomplish much before breakfast. There were no fixed hours or days to the time he spent at the library, and often he returned to it in the evening to work late.

When the time for his retirement arrived, he became the county's first Record Officer, an appointment he found congenial because it enabled him to handle documents in which he was greatly interested. The thoroughness, the art of organisation, of tabulation, and indexing that had characterised his work at the public library enabled the County Record Office, then a new institution, to begin on a sound and progressive basis. His unrivalled knowledge of the county and his experience as a custodian of the Gloucester city archives made him eminently fitted for the post.

He was a founder joint-editor of *Antiquity* for a number of years, and Secretary of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club from 1916 to 1919.

His association with the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society was unique. He became a member in 1908, and Local Secretary for Gloucester in 1912. He was appointed General Secretary in 1917, and held this office till 1928. He was Treasurer from 1924 to 1928 and from 1937 to 1944; Librarian from 1914 to 1951; and Editor of the Society's *Transactions* from 1923 to 1948. He was made an Honorary Member in 1928 in recognition of his outstanding services. He was Chairman in 1937-8, and President in 1939-40. No other member has ever held so many posts. As Editor he ensured that the *Transactions* maintained a high standard, and he indexed not only individual volumes, but sets of these. He also contributed a number of articles.

His services to archaeology were recognised by Bristol University which conferred on him the honorary degree of M.A. in 1927. In the following year he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and served on the Council in 1938 and 1939.

As a scholar, in many respects self-taught, he was exceptional, and made for himself a reputation that reached far beyond Gloucestershire. As a man, reserved by nature, he hated publicity. He did not suffer fools gladly, and made few intimate friends, but those who were so privileged will never forget the Sunday evenings when he sometimes relaxed from work and visited their houses for supper. It was a time of conversation, often late into the night, conversation that disclosed not only his natural sincerity, geniality, and sense of humour, but the wide scope of his knowledge and his soundness of judgment.

There is no doubt that the tragedy of his daughter's death was a great shock to him. It was a blow from which he never really recovered. He sought to hide its effects, but, by degrees, his zest in life waned, his memory faltered and finally failed. He had already achieved more than enough to ensure that the name of Roland Austin would be long remembered and honoured.

L. F-L.