

# ANTONY F. ALLISON (1916–1996)

by PHILIP R. HARRIS



**I**N the October 1995 issue of *Recusant History* Antony Allison published a moving tribute to his friend David Rogers, who had died in May. Soon after this the symptoms of Antony's own fatal illness became apparent and he died on 2 February 1996, the eve of his eightieth birthday. So, within less than twelve months, the Catholic Record Society lost two men who had done more than anyone else to modernise the Society and transform it from what was once described as a collection of geriatric genealogists.

Increasing ill-health had prevented David from taking much part in the work of the C.R.S. for some years, but Antony was active almost until the last. Close collaborators though they were for almost fifty years, they were in some ways very different. Antony was a person of strong opinions which he sometimes expressed very forcibly, while David was a much less combative figure. Antony himself, in his obituary of David, referred to the latter's kindness to everyone, even those of whose behaviour he disapproved. When Antony disapproved he found it difficult to disguise the fact.

In the introduction to the *festschrift* which was presented to him in 1989 (*Recusant History*, vol. 19, no. 4), Antony's career was sketched. After education by the Jesuits at Mount St. Mary's, and at Southampton University College (where he achieved a London University general degree in 1936 and an honours degree in English in 1938), he worked in public libraries at Orpington and Leicester from 1938 to 1940. He then served in the Army, mainly in the Royal Corps of Signals (and for

much of the time in India), and was promoted captain before he was demobilised in 1946.

He joined the staff of the Department of Printed Books of the British Museum in May 1946 and in 1948 was promoted to the first class of Assistant Keepers. He worked on the revised edition of the General Catalogue of Printed Books, where his meticulous accuracy was of great value. He then became Superintendent of the North Library (the reading room for rare books) from 1955 to 1957, before moving to the section of the library which dealt with the acquisition and cataloguing of pre-1800 English language books. He was in charge of this section for many years until he retired early (at the age of fifty-six) in 1972. He made many valuable additions to the collections, dealt with specialised enquiries from readers and other members of the public, and listed material in the library which had not been included in the standard bibliography of English books published between 1641 and 1700.

Despite his great contribution to the work of the library, he became less satisfied with his rôle as the years passed, and so welcomed the opportunity to leave before the normal retirement age when he was asked by the firm of William Dawson and Sons to join their staff. He left the British Museum in the autumn of 1972, just before it was absorbed into the newly founded British Library in 1973. This was fortunate because, whatever criticisms he may have had of the British Museum library, he would certainly not have approved of many of the changes introduced by the new organization.

Apart from advising Dawsons on their antiquarian bookselling activities, Antony compiled six bibliographies of sixteenth and seventeenth century authors for Dawsons to publish. At the same time he supervised the compilation by Mrs. V. Goldsmith of short title catalogues of French, Spanish and Portuguese seventeenth century books. This was a remarkable output, but it took its toll of Antony's health. He was a very thorough worker, who did not react well to being required to operate to a tight time schedule. When he qualified for his Civil Service pension in 1976 therefore, he gave up his work for Dawsons and devoted the remainder of his life to his studies in the field of recusant history, to teaching at the Catholic University of Angers, and to visiting Continental libraries to gather information about the writings of English Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He also carried out two lecture tours in the Netherlands.

His interest in recusant history had developed in the late 1940s as a by-product of his study of the poets of the early seventeenth century. This had led to his consulting the Gillow collection of recusant books which was owned by the C.R.S.; he was subsequently invited to become Librarian of the Society. This happened in 1948, at about the same time that he met David Rogers of the Bodleian Library, who shared his enthusiasm for recusant books. David joined Antony on the Council of the C.R.S. and together they planned a periodical to contain the results

of original research in recusant history. This was originally published by Antony's father at his press in Bognor Regis and the first issue appeared in 1951 under the title *Biographical Studies*. It was subsequently renamed *Recusant History* and the responsibility for its production was assumed by the C.R.S. For many years Antony Allison and David Rogers were the editors and anyone who has been connected with the production of a journal knows how much hard, concentrated and continuous work is required of the editors of such a publication. Antony and David devoted much effort to re-writing articles which contained useful information but which lacked clarity. Their labours did not always gain the gratitude of those whose articles they thus improved—but this is a burden which editors have to learn to bear.

Antony and David were conscientious in their attendance at the meetings of the Council of the C.R.S. and as the years passed their views carried more and more weight. They both considered that the publishing programme of the Society needed to be re-thought in order to bring it into line with the development of historical research in other fields. The publication *in extenso* of parish registers was not attracting a larger membership, and Antony argued that not only should the Records volumes cover a wider field, but also that a separate series of Monograph volumes should be established to make available interpretative works. It took some time for the Council to be persuaded that this was a desirable development, and the then chairman was so opposed to the idea that he resigned when Antony's proposal was finally accepted.

When the increase of printing costs in the early 1980s was putting the Society's future in jeopardy, it was Antony who devised the plan of enlarging *Recusant History* and making it the Society's main publication, while supplementing it with Records or Monograph volumes when sufficient money was available to print such publications. It was his argument that a journal which dealt with a variety of subjects in each issue must necessarily have a wider appeal than volumes devoted to single subjects which persuaded the Council to make the change.

As General Editor (a post which he took up in 1963) Antony worked harmoniously with successive chairmen of Council including Cuthbert Fitzherbert and Geoffrey Parmiter. When Geoffrey gave up the post of chairman in 1982, Antony reluctantly took it on. Anyone holding such a post must be prepared to stand to some extent above the battle and compromise from time to time. When Antony felt strongly about a subject he found it hard to resist becoming deeply involved in the battle; compromise did not come easily to him. He was therefore very grateful when Alan McClelland relieved him of the burden in 1990. He would however have been greatly saddened if his ties with the Society had been severed. It was therefore a great joy to him when he was appointed one of the Trustees in 1991 and so entitled to attend Council meetings whenever he wished so to do.

His research interests lay primarily in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (He was not very enthusiastic about the eighteenth century, and expressed mild concern to the present editor of *Recusant History* when an increasing number of articles on the nineteenth century, and even the twentieth, began to appear in its pages.) His writing exhibited the qualities which he appreciated in that of David Rogers—‘precision, lucidity, order, logic, a sense of proportion and balance’. To the forty-six items which he produced up to 1989, he added seven more in the last years of his life. The largest of these was the work which he wrote in collaboration with David—a revised edition of the catalogue of Catholic books in English published between 1558 and 1640; this had originally appeared as two special numbers of *Recusant History* in 1956. The new and greatly expanded edition was entitled *The Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640. Volume 2. Works in English*, and appeared in 1994. (Volume 1, which dealt with works on languages other than English, had been published in 1989.)

The other six works were articles which were published in *Recusant History* between 1990 and 1995—a list appears at the end of this article. It is not yet clear whether he had proceeded sufficiently far with the second part of his article on Henry Holden for it to be published, but he had prepared a complete collection of texts from the records of the English Augustinian Convent of Our Lady of Syon which it should be possible to publish in volume form at some future date.

Antony was a Catholic of the old style, and he was much influenced by the training which he received from the Jesuits at Mount St. Mary’s. He was (to put it mildly) not enthusiastic about many of the changes introduced after the Second Vatican Council. In particular he regretted the disappearance of the Latin Mass from nearly all the churches in this country. For many years he made great efforts to attend places where it was still celebrated, and it was always a joy to him to be able to serve the old form of Mass when he attended the annual conferences of the C.R.S. at Oxford. Despite his reservations about some of its characteristics he did attend the new form of Mass, but I am sure that he appreciated the fact that his funeral Mass at the church of St. Richard in Chichester was unalloyed Tridentine.

Antony enjoyed music, reading walking, and a glass of wine. He was an enthusiastic and skilled gardener (another interest which he shared with David Rogers). Eventually he found that the very large garden which he had at Kenley in Surrey was too much to cope with, and he moved to a cottage at Walberton in West Sussex, the part of the country where he grew up. He and his wife Marion became well integrated in what proved to be a very friendly community.

Until the summer of 1995 he seemed, for his age, to be in good health, but in the autumn he experienced what was at first thought to be a stroke. Investigations showed that he was suffering from a brain tumour. Chemotherapy produced a temporary improvement, but then it



became necessary to operate. Further operations followed, and after a period of great pain and discomfort (when he was nobly supported by Marion, who spent long periods living at Southampton hospital where the operations had taken place), he died in Chichester hospital.

All those who knew him can attest to his invariable courtesy, which persisted even when he was enduring his painful last illness. Antony had a great gift for friendship, and the number of persons saddened by his death is large. During his long life he contributed greatly to the subject in which he was so interested, and was largely responsible for transforming it from a somewhat eccentric minority interest into one which is respectable in academic circles.

Requiescat in pace.

### ADDITIONAL CHECKLIST OF THE WRITINGS OF A. F. ALLISON

(This supplements the list in *Recusant History*, vol. 19, no. 4.)

1990

47. Richard Smith's Gallican Backers and Jesuit Opponents, Pt. III, *R.H.*, vol. 20, pp. 164–206.

1991

48. Some Additions and Corrections to 'Richard Smith's Gallican Backers and Jesuit Opponents', *R.H.*, vol. 20, pp. 493–494.

1992

49. The Origins of St. Gregory's, Paris, *R.H.*, vol. 21, pp. 11–25.

1993

50. The English Augustinian Convent of Our Lady of Syon at Paris, its foundation and struggle for survival during the first eighty years, 1634–1713, *R.H.*, vol. 21, pp. 451–496.

1994

51. *The Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640* (with D. M. Rogers). Vol. 2. *Works of English*. pp. xxxv. 250. Scholar Press; Aldershot.

1995

52. An English Gallican: Henry Holden, 1596/7–1662, Pt. I (to 1648), *R.H.*, vol. 22, pp. 319–349.

53. David Rogers (1917–1995): a memoir and a tribute, *R.H.*, vol. 22, pp. 459–464.