

## OBITUARY

### *Professor Paul E. H. Hair, 1926–2001*

Professor Paul Hair will be remembered by members of the Historic Society as an energetic president between 1993 and 1995 and as editor of a valuable collection of essays on *Liverpool, the slave trade and abolition*, published as an occasional volume in 1976. His interest in local and regional history stemmed from a life-long interest in English social history, begun when he studied nineteenth-century coal miners as a D.Phil. student under G. D. H. Cole. His interests covered a much longer period, however, for he made pathbreaking contributions to the study of violent death in medieval England, medieval ecclesiastical history in Herefordshire, and pre-nuptial pregnancy in early-modern England, and he established, with Colin Phillips of Manchester University, the continuing project which aims at the computerization and analysis of Cheshire parish registers. His interests did not stop there. He was perhaps best known for his work on African history and European colonizing enterprises, including particular studies of West African languages and Portuguese contacts in southern Africa. His interest in exploration, the migration of peoples, and mixing of cultures made him a natural choice as president of the Hakluyt Society in 1992.

In an age of academic specialism Paul Hair's breadth of interest and sympathy with different periods and areas of the globe were exceptional. They reflected and perhaps owed something to his own personal experience, with periods spent as a Bevin boy in coal mining, studying at St John's College, Cambridge, and Balliol and Nuffield Colleges, Oxford, and teaching in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Sudan, as well as at Liverpool from 1965. His research output, a formidable number of papers published in a multiplicity of academic journals, was recognized when he was appointed to the Ramsey Muir Chair of Modern History at Liverpool in 1979. Unimpressed by reputations, he frequently took unorthodox positions on historical problems. Much of his work was original and he delighted in new approaches to the subject. His energy was considerable and after he retired his commitment to work seemed to increase rather than

diminish. He was regularly to be seen in the School of History in the University of Liverpool until a few weeks before his death.

Apart from his breadth of interest his sense of humour was a defining characteristic, and one which he did not lose even as he courageously faced illness and death. He will be remembered as a historian whose curiosity seemed boundless and whose intellectual horizons seemed to grow wider with advancing age.

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*M. J. Power*