

A BIOGRAPHY OF

Reginald Allender Smith, FSA

Archæologist, Curator and Author, born 4 January 1873; died 18 January 1940

Reginald Allender Smith was born 1873 in Kentish Town to Thomas Smith, a commercial clerk and Maria (née Allender). His father died in 1881, and Reginald next appears in the Census of 5 April 1891 as a pupil at the Christ's Hospital School, in the City of London; he matriculated in October 1891 and, admitted as a Scholar, in 1893 graduated from University College, Oxford with a 1st class Classics degree.

He was first appointed as an Assistant Keeper at the British Museum on 4th January 1898 in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities, entering it when, under Charles Hercules Read, it still included the exhibits in ethnography. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, FSA, on 8 January 1903, his first contribution to the Society's meetings having been a paper on *Excavations at Leatherhead and Shamley Green* in 1901.

After his election and up to the time of his appointment as Keeper of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities in the British Museum in 1928 his communications make in all a formidable list, including no less than eighteen monographs in *Archæologia*, not to mention the numerous longer or shorter commentaries he added to the papers of others. His work concerned itself almost exclusively with British archæology from Palæolithic to Late Saxon times, to which section his official life was specially devoted.

If he had preferences, one was unquestionably the Stone Age in all its aspects with an especial interest in the Palæolithic period; exploration of Lower Thames deposits was among the few instances of field-work in which he actively participated.

On certain classes of disputed questions his judgment was, in a sense, a court of final appeal. In one of his later publications he returned to this favourite field, when he prepared the *Catalogue of the Sturge Collection in the British Museum, 1937*. Flint daggers, arrow-heads, stone axe-hammers all came under careful, scholarly review; one of the foundations for the study of British neolithic pottery was laid by him; in iron currency-bars and bronze water-clocks with their metrological problems he found congenial subjects; he made the subject of Roman roads in London a special interest.

Outside the Palæolithic Age undoubtedly his greatest activity appears in his work on the Dark Ages and the later Saxon period.

Amid all his other interests and obligations he found time between 1900 and 1927 to contribute no less than 24 out of the 31 *Anglo-Saxon Remains* articles which had in that period been written for the *Victoria County Histories!* In addition he wrote papers on discoveries at Mitcham and elsewhere, on *Hanging Bowls*, a valuable monograph on *Irish Brooches of Five Centuries*, and descriptions of the *Trewhiddle* hoard of late Saxon silver and of sculpture of the same period.

Little comment was ever made about him as a person, to some he seemed difficult of approach. E. Thurlow Leeds (a prominent Anglo-Saxon archæologist and Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum), one of Smith's obituarists, wrote:

"Reginald Smith's work was essentially thorough, and, though at times dry and presented in a rather didactic manner, much of it reached a high standard. Always honest and never failing to add something of solid worth to the progress of archaeological research, it seems to march at ground-level. One misses that enlivening touch of imagination, that appreciation of human values, that inspiration which would have helped to raise it to a higher plane."

Smith served as the Society of Antiquaries' Vice President from 1926 to 1929 and as Director from 1929 to 1940. Reserved, much unknown even by those who knew him best, he yet won for himself unstinting admiration for his untiring industry and readiness for service. He was a faithful member of the SoA, and in his labours for British archæology he raised his own monument of achievement.

A minor postscript to his life of inquiry and assiduous service to his fields – after his retirement, he allegedly indulged in 'dowsing' and searching along Ley Lines, an activity not normally mentioned in polite scientific circles.

Reginald A. Smith, of South Kensington, London, died 18 January 1940 in Colchester, leaving an estate worth £7300 (over £500,000 in 21st C. terms) to his brother Alfred Handel Smith.

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