

BILL HASSALL, who has died aged 81, was librarian to the Earl of Leicester at Holkham, Norfolk, and deputy keeper of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

To both libraries he brought a great knowledge of mediaeval illuminated manuscripts and of English local archives, and an enthusiasm rarely ; matched.

! For most of his long career in Oxford, Hassall worked under the keepership of Richard Hunt. Together they encouraged the development of manuscript and archive studies in the Bodleian, added to its important manuscript collections and oversaw their department's expansion in the 1950s and 1960s.

Hassall also extended the Bodleian's interest in the acquisition of the archives of local families and institutions.

His passion for English local history and his skill as a lecturer and writer in that field helped to make the subject academically respectable.

The Bodleian relinquished its archive training role in 1979, but before that Hassall had passed the burden of day-to-day instruction to other colleagues and concentrated his scholarship and energy on the construction of a vast iconographical index of pictures in illuminated manuscripts.

Aided by teams of volunteers, he created an invaluable key to the Bodleian's most celebrated collections. The production and marketing of the filmstrips and slides which accompanied this work opened up a treasure house of mediaeval art to both scholars and amateurs.

A soldier's son, William Owen Hassall was born in York on Aug 4 1912 and



Hassall: librarian

educated at Wellington and Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he read history.

By 1941, when he completed his D Phil on the cartulary of the nunnery of St Mary, Clerkenwell, he had been appointed librarian to the Earl of Leicester at Holkham in 1937. The next year he was made assistant librarian in the Department of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian.

During the Second World War he served first in the Royal Artillery — in which he declined a commission — and then in the Ministry of Economic Warfare.

Hassall remained librarian at Holkham until 1983 and at the Bodleian until his retirement in 1980.

He was for many years a leading figure in the British Records Association. From

1947 to 1976 he was secretary of the Oxfordshire Record Society, which published his *Wheatley Records 956-1956*. His edition of the cartulary of St Mary's, Clerkenwell, published by the Camden Society in 1949, bears witness to his scholarship.

Hassall's last work (with Jacques Beauroy) appeared in 1993, a massive contribution to the British Academy series of *Records of Social and Economic History — Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk, 1250-1350: the Early Records of Holkham-*, he had completed a sequel before his death.

His work on mediaeval illumination bore fruit in many publications, among them *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (1954), *The Douce Apocalypse* (1961), *The Holkham Library Illuminations* (1970) and (with his wife) *Treasures from the Bodleian Library* (1975).

Bill Hassall was remarkable for his kindness, generosity, infectious enthusiasm and his eccentricity — not least as a driver: his speed would vary according to the intensity of the conversation he was conducting, and by way of emphasis he would veer back and forth across the middle of the road.

Those invited by him to lunch at Bodley might be disconcerted to find themselves eating apples in his van parked in Radcliffe Square.

Once, when entrusted with some da Vinci notebooks from the Holkham collection and at a loss how best to safeguard such a treasure, Hassall hid them under his bed.

He married, in 1936, Averil Beaves; they had three sons and a daughter.