

**Robert Kerr Hannay, M.A., LL.D.,** His Majesty's Historiographer for Scotland and Sir William Fraser Professor of Ancient History and Palæography in the University of Edinburgh.

ROBERT KERR HANNAY (born 1867), the third and youngest of a distinguished group with Andrew Lang and Hay Fleming of Scottish historians for whom St Andrews was a perpetual inspiration, partook of the gaiety and ingenuity of the one and the severe exactitude of the other. He had a special claim to be celebrated in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*. For in his historical labours he required from himself and from others the disinterested spirit of scientific inquiry and verification with as little bias as is humanly possible and with as little anticipation of the result as is consistent with purposive research. The field of that inquiry and research was the abundant store of Scottish archives, particularly from the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, with which first his collaboration with Sir John Herkless in *The Archbishops of St Andrews*, then his curatorship of the Historical Department in the Register House, and lastly and chiefly his professorship in Edinburgh University and his appointment as Historiographer Royal had made him more familiar than any other historian of Scotland. He generously paid tribute to his forerunners in disentangling the complex web of the Scottish past, not least to his predecessor in his professorship, Hume Brown, for the "remarkable achievement" of his *History of Scotland*. But Hannay clearly saw that what was needed, if the record, especially for the earlier periods, was to be established with something like the completeness and substantial reliability of English or French history, was an exploration of the uncharted, and a re-charting of the fairly familiar, manuscript sources, by which alone picturesque fiction could be discredited, doubts dispelled, gaps filled, and facts proved. He not only pleaded for such a scrutiny of the *terra incognita* in his inaugural lecture on "Scottish History and the National Records," but himself did yeoman service; and many were the accepted traditions and oft-repeated statements from which he cut away the ground by proving the documentary truths. In a long series of papers in the *Scottish Historical* and the *Juridical Reviews* and other periodicals, in his introductions to *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, *The Acts of Council, 1501–1554*, and the *Rentale Dunkeldense* and the *Rentale Sancti Andree*, and in his *Scottish Crown and the Papacy, 1424–1560*, and

*The College of Justice*, he illuminated for every future researcher and for the ideal historian of Scotland who is yet in the womb of time our national institutions, civil, ecclesiastical, educational, legislative, executive, and juridical.

Not only did he labour with unflagging energy in these regions, but he fired with his own enthusiasm a numerous group of students who have branched out in many directions from him and have carried out some of his fruitful suggestions for investigation. As a teacher of history he realised the importance, particularly for his own speciality, of taking even beginners back to the raw material—the untouched documents. Into these dry bones he had the gift of breathing life because he was never a mere antiquary or pedant in the things of the past. Rather the records, faded and dusty, were by him opened out as revelations of the business and activities of men and women who were as alive in their day as we in ours, and whose individual and communal life, though necessarily viewed by him mainly for its political importance, was as real and as vital as our own.

But fascinating as Hannay was as a teacher and oral expositor of Scottish history, he was always the scrupulous scholar, never the populariser or propagandist. He belonged to the school of Stubbs and Tout. He was, as someone has said, “an historian’s historian,” one to whose foundational work succeeding teachers and students will turn for guidance, knowledge, and proof.

That work will remain for the Scottish historians of the future. But the genial, tolerant, and warm-hearted man and friend has gone. His was a mercurial and sociable nature, gay, easy of approach, generous in praise, ever ready to help and advise, modest, humorous, and humane. He loved his fellow-men, none the less for their absurdities; and that love of multi-faceted human nature was manifested by an Herodotean liveliness of anecdote of which the supply was as inexhaustible as the choice was apt.

He was elected a Fellow in 1922, and died on March 19, 1940.

A. M. C.