

OBITUARY : DR. THOMAS HILTON

It is with deep regret that we heard of the sudden death at the age of 63 of Dr. Thomas Eric Hilton, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography in the University of Leicester since 1968. Tom Hilton was educated at the Grammar School, Salford, and the University of Manchester where he graduated with Upper Second Class Honours in Geography in 1935, and was awarded the degree of M.A. in 1938. In 1956 he was awarded the degree of Ph.D. by the University of London for his definitive work on the population of Ghana, based on detailed field investigation in every part of the country. During the Second World War he served in the Army: between 1946 and 1948 he was concerned with the organisation of Topographical Intelligence coverage as part of his duties in Middle East Command; subsequently he was attached to the Ministry of Defence (Joint Intelligence Bureau) in London. From 1950 to 1968 he lectured in Geography at the University of Ghana, becoming Associate Professor in 1964.

At Leicester he continued his research into tropical geomorphology and the geography of population in Africa especially in respect of land planning and resettlement projects. The latest of his series of publications appeared only a few days before his death and fittingly it was on Ghana, a country for which he had great affection. His teaching to undergraduates at Leicester of the regional courses on Africa and the Middle East reflected a close personal knowledge derived from wide ranging travel. His directorship of, and teaching for, the M.A. course on the Tropical World was a responsibility that he particularly enjoyed and his happiness with the highly motivated overseas and home based graduate students was agreeably matched by their esteem of Dr. Hilton. A man of clear principles and great loyalties, he will be much missed.

OBITUARY : DR. J. M. BLELL

John Michael Blell was born in Freetown in 1910. As his parents were among the early Lebanese immigrants, he could claim to be one of the first Lebanese to be born in Sierra Leone. His father, a leading kola exporter, decided to send his son abroad for further studies, first in Lebanon and later in Britain. John chose Edinburgh to do his medical studies, which he completed in 1937. He was the first Lebanese from what was then British West Africa to obtain a University degree.

He returned to Freetown in 1938 and opened a surgery. The Lebanese community, which had relied on Creole and European doctors until then, was much happier to consult a fellow Lebanese, who knew their language and customs. In this way he became a central figure in the community, appreciated and trusted in the medical as well as in other fields. He loved his work and, as he drew patients from all races and classes, he felt accepted and respected in the complex society of Freetown. When the end of colonial rule came in sight, he envisaged becoming a citizen of Sierra Leone, where he hoped to live for the rest of his days. Unfortunately for him, a new law of 1962 prevented Lebanese from becoming citizens, except through a naturalization procedure. He then decided to retire in Britain. In 1965 he closed his surgery and went to live in Exeter.

His contribution to the world of learning must be sought not in the field of medicine but in the social sciences. Moreover, it was, until 1975, only an indirect contribution, that is, he allowed others to profit from his knowledge of the Lebanese community. The first to benefit in this way was Marwan Hanna, a Lebanese scholar, who came to Sierra Leone in 1957 to collect material for his Ph.D. thesis "Lebanese Emigrants in West Africa: Their Effect on the Lebanon and West Africa" (Oxford, 1958). Many years later I was introduced to Dr. Blell and asked him to help me with my research. During numerous interviews, spread out over four years, I came to appreciate his excellent memory, his gifts of observation

and deduction - how many patients owed their lives to these! - and, above all, his fairness in speaking about other people: Africans and Europeans, Muslim and Christian Lebanese. He also made many useful comments on the draft of my book The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone (The Hague/Paris, 1975).

It was in this period that the idea occurred to him to publish his own recollections. He was keen to provide another source of information on Sierra Leone and the Lebanese community but he was also daunted by the problems of writing and publishing. Then, in 1975, he was invited to give a paper in Leiden at a seminar on "Asian Trading Minorities in Tropical Africa". The title of the paper was Health, Hygiene, and Medical Care of the Lebano-Syrian Community in Sierra Leone. The preparation of this paper and conversations at the seminar revived the idea of putting down his recollections. As he worked on this new project, his desire to renew contacts with the academic world increased, as was evidenced by his application to become a member of the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom. In spite of a serious operation in September 1976 he continued his writing, which was completed a few weeks before his death in May of this year. The manuscript is now being typed and plans for publication are being investigated. If all problems can be solved, a book will result which shows its readers not only many new aspects of Freetown society but also the clear insight of a talented man.

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