After a long illness, Robin Bush, our former Chairman, died on 22 June at the age of 67. With his passing an era ended for Somerset historical studies and the Society lost one of its most remarkable and well-known members. Robin was a pioneer in making local history accessible to a wide audience, and combined the extrovert gifts of a born showman with the quieter skills of an outstandingly able historical researcher. He achieved national prominence on Channel Four’s *Time Team*.

Robin James Edwin Bush was born on 12 March 1943, the son of a schoolmaster, and was proud to claim that his ancestors were ‘wall-to-wall illiterate farm labourers’. By the age of 13 he had obtained his first reader’s ticket to the Public Record Office in London and must have cut a remarkably youthful figure in the searchrooms at Chancery Lane. Such places were soon his natural territory and allowed him to develop what seemed, to those who later worked with him, an almost uncanny instinct for historical discovery.

After a childhood spent mostly in Devon, he went to Exeter College, Oxford, in 1962 and graduated in Modern History three years later. He could at this point have chosen one of several paths. He was a stage actor of natural authority and was prominent in student productions at Oxford. He was also an operatic bass of great ability whose later performances in roles such as the Tsar in *Boris Godunov* or the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* were memorable by any standards. But history and its sources had captured him and in 1965 he took up his first professional post as an archivist in Surrey. Two years later he moved to the Somerset Record Office in Taunton, and although at first he regarded Somerset as no more than a staging-post on the road back to Devon, he remained in the county for the rest of his life.

For eight years, from 1970, he was Assistant Editor of the Victoria County History of Somerset. He also wrote and published widely in his own right, and in 1994, after three years’ research, produced *Somerset: The Complete Guide* with the photographer Julian Comrie. The title almost invited contradiction. But the book, which runs to a quarter of a million words, remains indispensable.

Robin was appointed Somerset’s Deputy County Archivist in 1978 and during the next decade became one of the best-known personalities in the West of England. He made hundreds of radio broadcasts about West Country history and reached thousands of other people through talks and lectures. A historical talk in some remote village hall was sure to draw a large audience and would quite likely be
rounded off, by popular demand, with a resonant delivery of a song from the shows. He also lectured abroad, undertaking six speaking tours in America.

Following his early retirement in 1993 he was invited by his friend Mick Aston to become part of a new archaeology-based television series called *Time Team*. He appeared in 39 episodes between 1994 and 2002 and was the presenter of eight episodes of *Time Team Extra* in 1998. Robin was the larger-than-life character, generally wearing a bow tie and a panama hat, who would set Mick’s archaeological findings in the context of the documentary evidence. That was sometimes an infuriating process for others, as when, in a programme filmed at Templecombe, he demonstrated from a 19th-century map that they were digging in the wrong place.

During these years Robin also became politically active. He was elected a Liberal Democrat County Councillor in 1997, and from 2001 to 2005 was Chairman of Somerset County Council, a role which suited his sense of history. He supported many causes relating to the arts and culture in the South West and chaired the early meetings which have culminated in the completion of the Somerset Heritage Centre and the Museum of Somerset. As Chairman he also fulfilled a long-held ambition by having the county’s coat of arms augmented. To the red dragon of Wessex were now added, amongst other things, three Saxon crowns commemorating the Anglo-Saxon kings buried at Glastonbury, golden cider apples, and a Cheddar Pink, the flower that grows uniquely on the steep sides of Cheddar Gorge.

Robin was elected Vice Chairman of the Society in 1979 and served as Chairman in 1983–4. He was a member of the Society’s Council until 2006. He was prominent in many other organisations, including the Taunton Deane Archaeological and Research Committee, of which he was Chairman from 1985 to 1997.

Robin is survived by his wife Hilary Marshall, who supported him through the illness of his last years, as well as by Catherine and Alexander, his children by his first marriage to Iris Reed. We shall not look upon his like again.

TOM MAYBERRY

Left: Trying out tobacco grown at the St Mary City, Maryland site with a replica 17th-century clay tobacco pipe; Right: At Basing House, Hants, with *Time Team* in 1999 dressed as a Civil War general (photos Mick Aston)

Pam Brimacombe’s obituary in last year’s *SANH* (p. 289) had an error that was unfortunately not corrected, for which we apologise. There it was stated that Pam Brimacombe had retired in 1997 – this should have been 1987.

Pamela Lilian Brimacombe

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