

Obituary Notice

Sir Henry Churchill Maxwell-Lyte, K.C.B., D.Litt., F.B.A., F.S.A., died 28th October 1940. Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte was born in 1848; he was admitted to this Society in January 1879, before many of the present Fellows were born; he was Deputy Keeper of the Public Records from 1886 to 1926, and his predecessor was born in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

He was always open to new ideas, and he went by air to Basle on the first stage of his annual holiday when he was ninety years old; but he was in most respects typical of the age to which he belonged. His manner was courteous and dignified; it was unnecessary for him either to praise or blame those who worked under him, as a subtle variation in his manner made it clear whether or not approval was conveyed. He enjoyed public dinners and receptions; but the condition of his attendance was that he should not be called upon to speak. He was slow to anger, but was an able controversialist; on one occasion he got the better of a Royal Commission and made it clear that some of its members in their ardent local patriotism had made statements which the facts of the case did not support.

His four chief works, published at long intervals, reflected his loyalties. He wrote a history of Eton in 1877, of Oxford University in 1886, and of Dunster in 1909; and his book on the Great Seal appeared in 1926. All four combined accurate research and general interest; but possibly owing to the nature of their subjects the *History of Eton College* was the most readable and his *Notes on the Great Seal* made the smallest appeal outside the circle of specialists.

He was devoted to his ancestral county of Somerset; and within a few weeks of his death he was at work transcribing the register of a medieval bishop of Bath and Wells.

His appointment as Deputy Keeper of the Public Records was probably the result of the great ability he showed as an Inspector under the Historical Manuscripts Commissioners, for whom he made several Reports and also discovered a valuable collection of manuscripts in a ducal stable.

For the next forty years his life's work was the reorganization of the Public Record Office. Since 1838, when the Public Record Office Act was passed, documents had been continuously transferred to the building in Chancery Lane, some in orderly, others in disorderly collections. By 1886 disorder had the upper hand, and the leeway was considerable. Sir Henry proceeded to evolve system out of confusion by publishing a series of calendars and lists of the classes which were not disarranged and by using the material contained in those series to determine the date and nature of the unsorted material. This twofold process of publication and arrangement is still proceeding. The former need never cease so long as archives accumulate; but the end of the latter is within sight; and it is due to Sir Henry's scholarship and energy that this is the case.

He served on the Council of the Antiquaries and was a Vice-President. He contributed one or two papers, and in earlier days he often used the Library.

C. T. F.