PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

JANUARY 1938–JUNE 1939

VOLUME XXXIX

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Published for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society
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OBITUARY

WILLIAM MORTLOCK PALMER, M.D., F.S.A.
1866–1939

By the death of Dr Palmer the Cambridge Antiquarian Society has lost one of its oldest and most valued friends.

Palmer, who had hitherto enjoyed a robust constitution, underwent a serious abdominal operation in 1936 but made a splendid recovery. He continued in his usual good health, except for what he humorously called a graveyard cough, until he was suddenly stricken down with a cerebral haemorrhage on October 19, 1939. He never regained consciousness, and died a few days later.

Born in Meldreth in 1866, he was educated locally, and at the age of fifteen was apprenticed to Mr A. Sidney Campkin, chemist of Cambridge. There he remained until he was twenty-one, when he entered Charing Cross Hospital as a Medical Student. He took the M.R.C.S.Eng. and the L.R.C.P.Lond. and the L.S.A. in 1892. Immediately after qualification he became Resident Obstetric Officer at the hospital. For some years after that he acted as Surgeon on one of the P. & O. Liners. In 1900 he settled down at Linton as a country doctor, and worked a very extensive practice. In 1907 he became an M.D. of Durham, and in 1935 was given an honorary M.A. degree by the University of Cambridge, and was elected a member of the High Table at Pembroke College. He continued in practice for twenty-five years at Linton until his retirement in 1925. But he still continued to live at "Richmonds", his old house next to the bridge. In 1933 he became a Justice of the Peace for Cambridgeshire.

Palmer was much beloved in Linton. He took the keenest interest in everything that was going on, especially in the Village College, and in the diet provided at small expense for

children who came from the neighbouring villages. He had been a cricketer in his younger days, and played both cricket and football for Melbourn. Later in life he was President of the Linton Cricket Club and was generally to be seen on the ground when there was a match going on.

He was a good friend to the children. Almost my last impression of him is at one of the children's tea parties which he gave every year in his beautiful garden. I can see him now, a large man with a smiling face, holding out a stick in his hand to the end of which was suspended by a string a paper bag of sweets and biscuits. One by one the boys, who were blindfolded for the moment, took a whack at the place where they believed the bag to be, and got a prize if they hit it. While Palmer loved the children he did not neglect the old people, and he regularly visited the Institution almost every Sunday.

Palmer was a great friend to Sir Cyril Fox when the latter first came to Cambridge and commenced his field work, and he paid all the expenses of the excavation of the Fleam Dyke which they jointly undertook in 1921 and 1922. Fox found Palmer "an excellent companion with his benign humour, his wide knowledge of his own world, rural Cambridgeshire, revealed in a thousand anecdotes told on the grassy bank of the dyke, and his keen grasp of a subject which lay somewhat outside his own researches". The friendship thus begun became close. Fox, who was much the younger, learnt to call him Uncle Palmer, and recalls the delightful tales and talks at "Richmonds", the joy of "poking about Linton and the surrounding villages and learning the history of old houses and old householders". "Most of all" (he writes to me) "he remembers Palmer with gratitude and affection for taking him for a holiday to Italy after an illness."

Palmer was often to be found in summer sitting in his garden, working away at some old documents with a wireless set discharging jazz music alongside him, and surrounded by his dogs.

He was an excellent field botanist and knew all the rare plants of the district and where they grew, and in his garden were many flowering shrubs which one seldom sees elsewhere. The annual tea party, already mentioned, was held in conjunction with a wild-flower show which he started for the children of the village school and at which he gave prizes for the best collection.

He was a foundation member of the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Archaeological Society. He joined the Cambridge Antiquarian Society in 1901, and for the greater part of the time after that he was a member of the Council. Only his residence at a distance from Cambridge prevented him from becoming President. He contributed many valuable papers and monographs of local interest.[1]

His principal study, however, at least in the later part of his life, was Archaeology—or rather he was, I think, what we may call an Antiquary rather than an Archaeologist. I mean his interest was more in people than in buildings, and rather in documents than in stones. He loved to hunt out the story of the man who in, say, the seventeenth century, lived in the old house at the corner of the street. But he had a wide and scholarly knowledge of the history of Cambridgeshire, and more particularly of its documents and records. William Cole of Milton and Layer and other local antiquaries were his heroes. *The Monumental Inscriptions of Cambridgeshire* was one of his principal productions; and he did valuable work on the Borough Documents for which he received an Address of Thanks from the Town Council. He restarted the *Photographic Record of Cambridgeshire* which Dr Allen had begun but which had been allowed to lapse from want of support. But Palmer's energy infused new life into it, and to his continued interest and exertions its success is mainly due. He was always keen to see that the communications made to

[1] It is hoped to publish a bibliography of Dr Palmer's writings, which Mr J. H. Bullock is now preparing, in the next volume of our *Proceedings*.

the Society should contain what he considered a due proportion devoted to the antiquities of the county, and was rather jealous of papers on foreign subjects. Yet he did not limit his attention to local matters and he visited Egypt, Palestine, Greece and Italy, some of these places more than once.

Palmer was an antiquary, learned mainly in local history; but he was also a man of wide interests. He was a most valuable friend to the Antiquarian Society and to the Borough, beloved by all who knew him. And it will be long before another will be found to fill his place.

LOUIS COBBETT.

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