



SIR ARTHUR MAULE OLIVER KT.

## XI.—SIR ARTHUR MAULE OLIVER.

BY C. H. HUNTER BLAIR.

[Read on 26th January 1938.]

Arthur Maule Oliver (frontispiece) was born in Sunderland on the 25th August 1871, the second son of William Atkinson Oliver, a solicitor of that town and of Newcastle upon Tyne. He was educated at Eastbourne College, and upon leaving school chose the law as his profession. He served his articles with alderman J. M. L. Criddle of this city, and qualified as a solicitor in 1896.

He was appointed assistant solicitor to the corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1898, and so began his long career in the administration of local government law which was to be the chief work of his life. He became Town Clerk of the city in 1907, succeeding the late Hill Motum in that important office. He married in 1905 Emily Margaret, daughter of the late Samuel Horsfield, of Springwell Hall, Cheshire, who, with three sons and a daughter, survives him. He died whilst on holiday at Bamburgh on the 6th September 1937.

During a peculiarly full and strenuous life he held many responsible public offices in addition to that of Town Clerk—these can here only be briefly mentioned. He was Clerk of the Peace to the city and county of Newcastle upon Tyne, clerk to the Public Assistance Committee of the city and to other important local authorities and committees.

He early became a recognized authority upon local government law, and served, for two years, as chairman of the law committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, as well as acting in the same capacity to the

joint committee of that association and the county councils association appointed to consider the revision of the Poor Law acts and orders. He was a member of the editorial committee of the *Municipal Review* and was also a past president of the Newcastle Law Society and of the Society of City and Borough Clerks of the Peace, as well as being a member of the standing committee for Great Britain of the International Union of Local Authorities and a member of the Permanent Bureau of the Union at Brussels.

His unique knowledge and experience were recognized by the government, and he served on various committees set up by the Ministry of Health to advise upon town and county planning and other matters relating to public health and local government policy or administration. It was well said of him by the recorder of the city that "in his particular sphere of local government he was probably the best qualified man in England and was always consulted by Whitehall in cases of difficulty or high policy." His published writings upon these subjects will be found in the bibliography at the end of this memoir.

He bore a heavy burden and did highly important public work during the Great War, and for this he was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire; later his services received higher recognition from the King, when in 1935 he was made a knight bachelor.

Foreign countries also did him honour: France by appointing him an Officer of the Academy of France, and Denmark by giving him the ancient Order of the Dannebrog. His own city was not behindhand in acknowledging his services to it. The lord mayor, aldermen and councillors gave him the greatest honour in their power to grant when on 16th July 1937 they unanimously admitted him to the honorary freedom of the city.

Such, in very brief outline, is the record of Oliver's distinguished public life, but in addition to these activities are those studies, which more particularly concern us here, to which he devoted the scanty leisure of his busy life;

these brought him distinction in a very different sphere. He was elected a member of this society on the 5th June 1901, became one of its councillors in 1909, and a vice-president in 1935. His chief interest was in the study of ancient documents and in problems of local history and genealogy. He had trained himself to be an expert in medieval palæography, and nothing pleased him more than to elucidate a difficult clause in an old deed or to succeed in fixing its uncertain date by a detailed study of its witnesses. The few leisure hours of his many professional visits to London were often spent in the reading-room of the British Museum or in the Public Record Office studying the documents there preserved in an attempt to solve some difficult problem in local history. His papers in *Archæologia Aeliana* upon the *Baronies of Bolbec*, *The family of Morwick* and on *The Muscamp, barons of Wooler* attest the value of his work upon local genealogy; whilst his definitive list of the mayors of Newcastle upon Tyne, his account of the abbots of Newminster, his lives of the members of parliament for Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne witness to his accuracy and acumen in the *minutiae* of local history. The most important result of his historical work was probably the volume entitled *Early Deeds relating to Newcastle upon Tyne*, being volume CXXXVII of the publications of the Surtees Society, of which he was a valued vice-president.

It was upon his initiative and because of his interest in the local records of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne that the Records Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne was set up. He was its first editor and secretary, and held the former office until, after issuing twelve yearly volumes, the committee ceased to exist. His help and experience were always available to the editors of the various volumes, and it was through his influence that the committee was able to publish its first volume, *The Newcastle Council Minute Book 1639-1656*, as well as *The Register of the Freemen of*

*Newcastle upon Tyne*, contained in volumes III and VI of its publications. In collaboration with Mr. Charles Johnson, F.S.A., he completed volume x and edited volume xi of the series, which both contain *Feet of Fines* for Northumberland and Durham. The former of these had been left unfinished by his son, Philip, who was not spared to fulfil in later age the promise of his youth.

Oliver was also for many years a valued member of the Northumberland County History Committee; to it his expert knowledge of local history and documents was of the greatest service.

The chief of his writings published in the transactions of this society have already been mentioned; many other lesser contributions, such as notes, translations and calendars, will be found detailed in the bibliography below.

The University of Durham, in recognition of his scholarship and of the work he had done for local history, conferred upon him, in 1929, the degree of master of arts *honoris causa*.

In conclusion may one, who enjoyed his friendship for many years and who often profited by his advice and assistance, record his unfailing courtesy and kind helpfulness; however much he might be occupied by public affairs of importance, he was always able to find time to help an enquirer, to discuss points of difficulty, or to give a considered opinion upon any problem which was submitted to him.

His death has left a place vacant in this society which it will not be easy to fill.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY.

ARCHÆOLOGIA AELIANA. Third Series.

Vol. XII. *A list of the abbots of Newminster.*

Vol. XVI. *St. Elgy's chantry in All Saints Church.*

Vol. XIX. *Deeds formerly in St. Andrews, Newcastle.*

Vol. XXI. *The baronies of Bolbec.*

## ARCHÆOLOGIA AELIANA. Fourth Series.

Vol. VII. *A second calendar of Greenwell Deeds.*Vol. XII. *A charter of Henry II to Newcastle.*Vol. XII. *Early history of the family of Morwick.*Vol. XIV. *The family of Muscamp, barons of Wooler.*

As well as many of the lives of M.P.s contained in vols. x-xiv of this series.

## NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE RECORDS SERIES.

Vol. VII. *Northumberland and Durham Deeds, from the Dods-worth MSS. in Bodley's Library.*Vol. X. *Feet of Fines, Northumberland and Durham* (completed).Vol. XI. *Feet of Fines, Northumberland, with Charles Johnson.*

## SURTEES SOCIETY.

Vol. 137. *Early deeds relating to Newcastle upon Tyne.*

## PROCEEDINGS of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Vol. VII, third series, p. 22—*On a suit in the sheriff's court of the town* and p. 41—*The Cartae Antiquae rolls.*Vol. IX, third series, p. 42—*A list of the abbots of Alnwick*; p. 78—*Deeds relating to the Side, Newcastle*; p. 100—*Letters testimonial of Ralph Carr, mayor of Newcastle.*Vol. I, fourth series, p. 237—*Deeds relating to Killingworth*; p. 302—*Deeds relating to Newcastle*; pp. 303 and 310—*Deeds relating to Kirkhaugh*; p. 309—*Deeds relating to the castle, Newcastle*; p. 324—*Translation of a Darlington rental.*Vol. II, fourth series, p. 16b—*Notes on exhibited deeds*; pp. 85, 108, 166, 170—*Notes on deeds relating to Upper Dean bridge, Newcastle.*Vol. III, fourth series, pp. 107 and 116—*transcripts of manuscripts.*

Vol. IV, fourth series, p. 25; vol. V, p. 83.

Vol. VI, p. 78, and vol. VII, p. 176, transcript of documents.

*Official Guide to Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1929, published by Andrew Reid & Co. Ltd.

## LAW PUBLICATIONS.

*The Local Government Act of 1929*, in collaboration with H. A. Hill, Barrister at Law.

Various articles in *Local Government Law and Administration in England and Wales*, edited by Lord Macmillan.

Introduction to *The Public Health Act of 1936*, by H. D. Williams, Barrister at Law.