

XIII.—ROBERT CECIL HEDLEY.

By JOHN OXBERRY.

[Read on 26th January 1938.]

It was a curious but a purely accidental circumstance that on the morning of his burial in Chollerton churchyard, two portraits of our late president, Major Hedley (plate xvi), issued with the then current number of our *Proceedings*, were passing through the post office into the hands of the members of our society. One of these was a portrait of him taken in the first year of his membership, the other in the year of his presidency, a year that was destined to be his last. In the earlier he faces us, a young man of only twenty-five, but already the companion of some of the most notable antiquaries of his time; in the other we see him with his back towards us, a sturdy figure in spite of the slightly stooping shoulders the passage of rather more than half a century had given him, still intent on the pursuit that had brought him the acquaintanceship of Greenwell, Heslop, Knowles and Boyle, who are seen with him in the earlier picture. The two illustrations epitomize in a remarkable way his connexion with the society; his loyalty to it, his young manhood's eager outlook at the start, followed by an interval of silence, chiefly due to the pressure of business and to the service he gave to the military needs of the nation; then a resumption of the earlier activities, less vigorous perhaps, but not less valuable, and finally full recognition of the value of his

work for the society by the members when they placed him in the presidential chair.

That he was interested in the study of the history and antiquities of his native district before he joined the society we may be sure, for only by previous study and observation could he have fitted himself so shortly after he became a member for taking up the position of a contributor to its discussions and published transactions. We are told that this taste for antiquarian research received encouragement from early association with one of his grandfathers, Thomas Arkle of Highlaws, near Morpeth. Arkle, a native of Carrick near Elsdon, was a farmer and professional land-surveyor, and acted as land agent to several local gentlemen. He was particularly interested in all matters relating to archæology and the folk-lore of his native county, and was for many years a member of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club and a frequent contributor to the reports of its proceedings. He died in February 1886, and we can believe that his example and influence were powerful factors in determining the line of study his grandson entered upon in the early years of his manhood. Arkle's daughter, Hannah, became the wife of Ralph Hedley of Cheviot, near Hallington, auctioneer and valuer, and of this marriage Robert Cecil Hedley was born on the 25th May 1861. Though not one of the principal graynes or clans of Tyndale mentioned by Sir Robert Bowes in the year 1550, the Hedleys in numerical strength ranked second in Redesdale, and the Hedley porch in Elsdon church affords further testimony to the importance of the grayne. The branch of it to which our late president belonged has a clearly traceable descent, we are told, from a Thomas Hedley who attended a muster of the Redesdale and Coquetdale men in 1595. With so many generations of Northumberland ancestry to look back upon, Robert Cecil Hedley could truly style himself, what we know he was, a Northumbrian to the backbone.

He obtained his early education at a school at Bavington, and later studied at Craigmount College in Edinburgh. His intention when he completed his college course was to become an analytical chemist, and with that end in view he was articled to the firm of Mawson and Swan, in Mosley Street, Newcastle. But he had been accustomed to a country life, and life in a town, coupled with a sedentary occupation, began to tell upon his health, and eventually compelled him to accept the advice of a medical man and relinquish the intention of becoming a chemist for employment of a less confining character. This he found with the firm of auctioneers and valuers in which his father was a partner, the firm of Messrs. Brown and Hedley. The improvement of health that ensued proved the wisdom of the change, and until age robbed him of much of his bodily vigour, for the rest of his life he seldom had a day's sickness. First as assistant in the firm, and after the retirement of Mr. Brown, as partner with his father, and after his father's death as principal, our late president entered upon and maintained an extensive and successful business as land agent, surveyor and valuer. This profession, to one endowed as he was with an active mind and a taste for history, gave him—what no one could be long in his company without discovering he possessed—an exceptionally wide knowledge of Northumbrian places and people. From this it was an easy step, in his case, indeed, and with his associations an inevitable step, that he should seek the company of those who shared his tastes and sought like himself to penetrate the darkness that veiled from sight the peoples of the past and their doings.

He was elected a member of our society on the 28th of April, 1886, and at the September meeting in the same year, five months after his election, he read his first paper. In this he described an excavation he had made on the site of a prehistoric camp and avenue of stones on Thockrington Quarry House farm, accompanied by a plan of the site; this paper was printed in *Arch. Ael.*² XII, 155. A

few minor contributions were made by him to the meetings held in the following year, and in 1888, at the March and September meetings, his name again appeared on the monthly circulars: at the March meeting as the reader of a paper on Lordenshaw, or Lorganshaw camp as he preferred to call it; at the September meeting on Old Rothbury camp. In these two papers he acknowledged the help he had received from David Dippie Dixon, a worker in the same field, and announced his intention "to plan and describe those fortified sites in Northumberland which I may from time to time have an opportunity for surveying and examining." He follows this up with the very characteristic sentence—characteristic, as most of us will remember, of kindred utterances which fell from his lips whenever he touched upon the question of reporting the result of an excavation—that the pen of the recorder should be guided, as to the best of his ability his own would be, "by the endeavour to avoid speculation, and to bring forward the facts in each case with a strict regard to accurate observation and correct relation." To this ideal he strove to adhere. Clarity, accuracy and brevity were the qualities he aimed at attaining in the writings and reports for which he was responsible, and in his straightforward way did not hesitate, when the need arose, to criticize those who forgot these qualities and indulged in a theoretical flight that he thought was insufficiently substantiated by the facts produced. But those who knew him best will be the readiest to agree with the words of our past president, Mr. Hunter Blair, in the tribute he paid to Major Hedley's memory at our first meeting after his death, that "beneath a downright, forthright style of speech, which left no doubt at all as to his meaning, he hid the kindest of hearts and the widest of sympathies."

From our first knowledge of him as a member of our society, it is clearly seen that Mr. Hedley was attracted by what he himself, in one of his contributions, called "that

obscure but somewhat neglected period of our national life known vaguely as 'prehistoric.' " To this early love he remained faithful, and while still a young member did something towards absolving his fellow members from the reproach of neglecting this branch of archæology. It is not the purpose of a notice such as this to enumerate all the work he did as a contributor to the society's activities during his long association with it. It is sufficient to say that the papers he wrote for our transactions, though they are not numerous, are the fruit of personal research, and that their value is enhanced because it was invariably the spade as well as the pen that went to the making of them. Papers by Hedley are to be found in volumes XII, XIII, XV, and XVIII of *Arch. Ael.*, ser. 2, and to take a long leap forward, there is a useful and readable article by him on *Early Earthworks in Northumberland* in *Proceedings*, 4 ser., vol. I, p. 81. The patient labour of many years must have gone to the gathering of material for this article, and, placed where it is, it is rather apt to be overlooked, but should not be missed by anyone interested in the subject with which it deals. Its usefulness is increased by a supplementary list, alphabetically arranged, prepared by Mr. W. Percy Hedley, of the townships where earthworks have been found and by bibliographical references to them.

I spoke above of the service given by our late president to the military needs of the nation. We owe him gratitude as members of the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries. We ought not to be less grateful as British citizens for the years that he devoted at home and in South Africa to the defence of the empire. Fortunately we have as a member of our society one of his companions in arms, who shared with him in peace time and on active service the burdens and hazards of military life. This is Lieut.-Colonel G. Reavell of Alnwick, with whom Major Hedley served for some time. Colonel Reavell has kindly complied with my request to furnish a brief outline and personal impression

of the military service of our late president.

"Hedley began the soldiering side of his career," says Colonel Reavell, "in 1891, when he was gazetted to the 1st volunteer battalion Northumberland Fusiliers as second lieutenant, gaining his lieutenancy in 1895 and his captaincy in 1898. In those days the 'Greys' were spread over all the county except the lower Tyne, and the extremes were as far apart as Berwick and Haltwhistle. The companies were financed independently and seldom saw each other except in the annual camp, which lasted a week only. This meant that companies responded quickly to the individual qualities of their captains, and Corbridge company was an efficient unit. Without unduly disparaging the 'frills,' the practical side of soldiering appealed to Hedley's nature, and he took a course at the School of Musketry and was appointed battalion musketry instructor, carrying out that duty with his usual thoroughness.

"Shortly after the outbreak of the South African war, the War Office called for a volunteer company from each volunteer battalion. Though engaged to be married, Hedley immediately offered his services, and was given command of the company which he took to the seat of war.

"After a period of service in the field he was given an appointment on the staff of Sir Charles Tucker as adjutant of the rest camp at Pretoria from August to December 1900, and was commandant Hopetown district from February to April 1901.

"For his services in South Africa he was given the Queen's South African medal with four clasps. He later received the territorial officer's decoration.

"After his return from South Africa he continued in command of the Corbridge company until the formation of the Territorial Force in 1907, when he became major in the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers, which was formed from the southern part of the old 1st volunteer battalion Northumberland Fusiliers.

"He resigned in 1911, but was reinstated in October 1914 after the outbreak of the Great War, serving for the greater part in the 35th Northumberland Fusiliers as second-in-command until transferred to the staff of the 227th Brigade, in which he continued until the conclusion of hostilities."

"Throughout his soldiering career he was recognized as a thoroughly efficient officer, a good organizer, and one not afraid to take responsibility—a not too common quality."

To this it may be added as a footnote that the marriage, referred to by Colonel Reavell, of Captain R. C. Hedley, as he then was, to Miss Margaret Osborne, a Hexham lady, took place on January 24th 1900, and that a fortnight afterwards he sailed with his company for South Africa. He was twice mentioned in despatches, and when the Great War broke out in August 1914, though by this time he had reached his fifty-fourth year, he immediately offered his services. In October his offer was accepted, and he once more donned the soldier's uniform, which he continued to wear till peace was signed.

Relieved from the duties which his conscience and his patriotic feelings had led him to accept, he recommenced his attendance at the society's meetings and his participation in its discussions and other activities. He was elected a member of the council in January 1922, a vice-president in 1931, and at the annual meeting in 1937 attained the highest honour the members had to offer him, that of president of the society. To the performance of the duties of this office he gave of his best. At monthly meetings and at outdoor meetings he was regular in his attendance, helpful in his talks, careful of the society's interests, and ever anxious to further its well-being and augment its influence. As individuals and as a society we are all of us the poorer by the loss of a trustworthy friend.

Major Hedley's wife survives him and he left two

sons. The elder, Captain R. C. O. Hedley, is now an instructor at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst; the younger, W. Percy Hedley, follows his father's profession and has inherited his father's love of history and archæology.



ROBERT CECIL HEDLEY.

