



EDWARD RICHMOND NEWBIGIN.

VI.—EDWARD RICHMOND NEWBIGIN.

By C. H. HUNTER BLAIR.

[Read on 30th October 1940.]

Edward Newbigin (plate xi) was born at Alnwick on 5th September 1862; he married, in 1905, Ellen daughter of John Affleck of Newcastle upon Tyne; he died at Newcastle 24th May 1940.

He was the second son of James Lesslie Newbigin of Greenbatt House, Alnwick, and his wife Emma daughter of Henry Francé of Friars Goose House, Felling upon Tyne. He was educated at a "dame's school," and afterwards at Alnwick Grammar School; upon leaving there he spent a year in the family of a German pastor near Berlin with the intention of entering the chemical trade, then largely in German hands.

With this intention he was apprenticed, in 1878, to the firm of Scott Bros., and so began his lifelong work upon Newcastle Quay, but the decline of the chemical trade was already beginning, and in 1882 he entered the office of the Backworth and West Cramlington Coal Co., then controlled by his uncle Edward Eccles, with whom he remained until 1896, when he began business for himself. The venture was successful, and Edward Newbigin soon controlled an extensive business as shipowner, shipbroker and coal exporter, trading under the style of E. R. Newbigin Ltd. and the Newbigin Steam Shipping Co. Ltd. In later years he added the trade of a ship-store merchant and controlled a ship-repairing yard carried on at Friars Goose;

the home of his maternal grandfather; he also had a controlling interest in the Batey Metallic Packing Co. Ltd. In addition to the heavy and responsible work of his own companies he held directorships in other large concerns and filled important offices in associations connected with the coal and shipping trades. He was a vice-president of the North of England Shipowners Association, and its chairman during the difficult period 1914-1918; in those years he also held responsible positions in the Admiralty and in the Ministry of Shipping. He was also for many years a member of the Blyth Harbour Commission. These heavy commercial responsibilities did not prevent Edward Newbigin from taking a full share in the social and public life of the city. He was an original member and for many years upon the executive committee of the Tyneside Council of Social Service, honorary secretary of the Newcastle Sailors' Society for more than forty years, and honorary treasurer of the Newcastle Voluntary Tuberculosis Care Council. His public work was recognized when, in 1914, he was placed upon the commission of the peace for the city.

In politics he was a Liberal, *sans phrase*, and in his earlier years both spoke and wrote for that cause; he was for many years a member of the Newcastle Liberal Club and served for long, as librarian, upon its committee. He was by upbringing and conviction a member of the Presbyterian Church of England; a founder and manager of Jesmond Presbyterian Church; he was ordained an elder in 1910 and fulfilled faithfully, until his death, the duties of that responsible office. He was also a member and for some years a vice-president of the Newcastle and District Free Church Council.

Edward Newbigin's chief recreations were reading, walking, rock-climbing and gardening. His interest in literature was apparent from his early Newcastle days. He was from the first an enthusiastic member of the Tyneside Students' Association connected with the University Extension Lectures, then a great intellectual force in the north.



A little later he contributed papers to the Presbyterian Church Literary Society and to other reviews and publications. He was fond of telling how he laid the foundations of his taste for ancient history when, as an apprentice, he read through Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* during hours of idleness caused by a long strike in the coal trade. At that time also he, with the present writer and a few kindred spirits, met weekly at each other's houses to study the less well-known plays of Shakespeare. This later developed into a general reading circle which, after nearly fifty years of vigorous life, still flourishes.

Walking—hiking was not then invented—he had delighted in from his schoolboy days, and I well recollect long walks with him over the Alnwick moors, when “all the world was young.” I think his introduction to the moors and hills of Northumberland was in the early eighties of last century, when together we spent some days tramping over the Cheviots and sleeping at shepherds' cottages in the then remote and solitary valleys. I still remember his youthful interest in the “camps” we saw, and how we had to turn aside to examine, with probably more enthusiasm than knowledge, Old Rothbury, Lordenshaw, Tosson Burgh, Greaves Ash, and others, now forgotten by me, in the valleys of Coquet and Breamish. It was during this walk that a successful scaling of the Drake Stone above Harbottle must, I think, have been his first attempt at rock-climbing: a sport he followed much in later years.

He was an early member of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake district, and many of his holidays were spent enjoying that dangerous but exhilarating sport. He also did some climbing in Switzerland, and few of the less spectacular, but none the less difficult, crags in Coquetdale were unconquered by him.

Gardening became a favourite pastime after he made a country home for himself and family on the hillside west of Rothbury. The house was placed at the foot of a steep bracken-clad and boulder-covered hill which he made easily



accessible by stepped and rocky paths winding precipitously upwards. He fought a long and in the end successful fight against the obstinate intrusive bracken, replacing it by trees and ornamental shrubs, suitable to the soil and climate, interspersed with heaths and rock plants of many fine varieties; he did, in fact, on a smaller scale, at Glenview what the first lord Armstrong had done to the formerly bare, bleak hills around Crag-side.

Such were the many interests of Edward Newbigin's long and active life; it remains to tell of his activities more closely connected with the work of this society. He became a member in May 1900, on the same day that I was elected, and I can still remember the serious discussion we had as to whether, being both on the sunny side of forty, we were yet sufficiently aged to join the band of grave antiquaries who then carried on its work. He was elected a councillor of the society in 1927 and became a vice-president ten years later. He did not at first take any active part in our work, but he was continuously studying the monuments of the prehistoric period scattered over the hills and valleys of North Northumberland; the results of this were to be his chief contribution to archæology. He was more particularly interested in the stone circles and avenues, the standing stones and the strange rock carvings found on the moors in the Rothbury and Wooler districts; he discovered and described in *Proceedings* and *Archæologia Aeliana* many hitherto unknown groups of these carvings. He also studied the "hollow ways" apparently connected with the "camps" as well as the deep parallel trackways sometimes found near them; these, he was able to show, were of more recent date.

He was a member of the prehistoric committee of the *Northumberland County History*, and wrote the sections in volumes XIV and XV describing the standing stones, carved rocks and trackways in the districts contained in those volumes.

He was also a member of the Ancient Monuments Com-



mittee, of this society, whose secretary, Mr. H. L. Honeyman, has sent to me the following appreciation of the important work he did for it :

" Edward Newbigin was interested mainly in the prehistoric period and it was therefore natural that he should join the Ancient Monuments Committee when it was first appointed. It can safely be said that the list of monuments in Northumberland would have been much shorter had it not been for his discoveries and for the generosity with which he placed his time, his car, and his camera at the disposal of the committee. No man since George Tate has added more than he to our knowledge of cupmarked rocks in Northumberland. He discovered many examples hitherto unrecorded, but he resolutely refused to theorize about them, maintaining that it was first necessary to ascertain their number and position and to record their varying characteristics. His interest in 'camps' and his unwillingness to accept unexamined theories led him to study the 'hollow ways' sometimes found near them and previously too readily accepted as made for and by their inhabitants.

" It soon became clear that this was not so, and after he and I had tramped for many a mile 'o'er moors and mosses mony' among the hill-tops between Aln and Blyth he was able to show that the tracks formed part of a large-scale traffic route and in their present shape cannot be earlier than the thirteenth century, though the prevalence of prehistoric remains along it indicate that the route was of very ancient use.

" For such researches there could be no more congenial companion than Edward Newbigin and I have many happy recollections of our adventures in the days when we thought no holiday complete unless we had been soaked to the skin at least once, and had been well bitten by his hated enemies the *trombidia* which lurk in the bracken upon our hills."

He became a member of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club in 1928, contributed to its *History* and often acted as guide at its meetings upon prehistoric sites.

He excelled in field-work: it was in that his love of nature and his keen powers of observation found expression, for it required such gifts as well as tenacity of purpose and sobriety of judgment. These were the qualities which made him so admirable an archæologist and serve as an example for those who will follow him.



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