

XVII.—WILLIAM PERCY HEDLEY  
(1902-1970)

*C. Roy Hudleston*

The death of William Percy Hedley M.A., F.S.A., of Stewards House, Simonburn, on 13th May 1970 has deprived the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle of one of its oldest and most distinguished members and his friends of one who was the most lovable of men. No one was better company. Great charm of manner, a keen sense of humour and an unfailingly sunny temperament combined to make him a welcome figure in any gathering. Those closest to him knew that for the last eight years of his life he was living on borrowed time. Though he made amazing recoveries from a series of heart attacks it was only too clear that they had taken their toll and the final attack struck him down when he was on his way to Newcastle to attend a meeting of one of the Society's committees.

He died therefore, as he would have wished, in harness and until the end he was carrying on his work as a land agent and engrossed in his leisure time on his *Northumberland Families*, his *magnum opus*, which will be a lasting memorial of his great gifts of scholarship and learning. Of the first volume of this work Professor G. W. S. Barrow has truly said, "Itself the devoted labour of one man's lifetime, it will be used and enjoyed for many lifetimes to come."

Northumbrian through and through, Percy Hedley was born at Corbridge on 7 February 1902, the younger son of Major Robert Cecil Hedley F.S.A., a descendant of the Hedleys of Monkridge, who was president of our Society in 1937. From him he inherited his life long interest in antiquarian matters, specialising first in the fields of geology,

archaeology and numismatics, and finally in genealogy which became his all absorbing interest.

He was educated at St. Bees School and was later a student at Armstrong College, Newcastle, before joining his father in the family firm of Messrs R. Cecil Hedley, founded in 1840. He became principal on the death of his father and in this capacity over many years he managed the estates of several of the leading Northumbrian families. He was acknowledged as one of the leading authorities in England on forestry and the care of woodlands.

Undoubtedly his long and close association with the old county families he served quickened his interest in their family history. It also gave him access to their muniments of which he made full use in the compilation of *Northumberland Families*. Close study of these documents showed him how inaccurate and inadequate many printed pedigrees were and he set himself the Herculean task of producing authoritative accounts of all the old Northumbrian families.

The work progressed to the stage where publication was possible and steered by a committee set up by the Society of Antiquaries, Volume I of *Northumberland Families* appeared in 1968 and was enthusiastically received. Volume II was in the press at the time of his death, but he did not live to see its appearance at the beginning of this year. He had almost completed Volume III, and the committee hopes to be able to issue this volume in due course. Work on Volume IV was also well advanced, and in addition Mr. Hedley left a very large collection of notes, which will, it is hoped, make it possible to complete the whole of his projected work.

In his task he had the unfailing help and support of his wife, who typed and re-typed the drafts in his beautifully clear handwriting and also gave much assistance in the compilation of the excellent indices to Volumes I and II.

In addition to *Northumberland Families*, Mr. Hedley contributed many papers to *Archaeologia Aeliana*. He also wrote for the Transactions of the Cumberland and West-

morland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society and was author in collaboration of a *History of the Cookson family* published in 1967.

He was only 20 when he was elected a member of the Society of Antiquaries in 1922. In 1930 he became a member of Council and he was elected a vice-president in 1951. In 1954 he became President, serving until 1956.

He filled this office with outstanding success, presiding over meetings with characteristic urbanity and tact. Under his direction business was transacted with speed and efficiency.

It was fitting that during his presidency the University of Durham honoured him in 1955 by conferring upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts. After he relinquished the presidency he was a regular attender at Council meetings and served on several of the Society's committees. His contributions at meetings were invariably helpful and to the point.

He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1933. He was also a Fellow of the Geological Society and of the Royal Numismatics Society. Apart from these activities he was appointed a magistrate in 1946 and was proud of his appointment as Warden of the Dilston Marches, when the manor court of Corbridge was revived. It seems likely that he was the last holder of the office.

Mr. Hedley married in 1935 Ora, daughter of the late Mr. George Heslop of Monkseaton. As has been said, she ably supported and helped him in the preparation of *Northumberland Families* and other publications.

