

A Memoir of
George Arthur Stephen, F.L.A.,
1880—1934,

CITY LIBRARIAN OF NORWICH.

COMMUNICATED BY

PERCY MILLICAN.

George Arthur Stephen, the younger son of Mr. and Mrs. William Stephen, formerly of Elgin, was born in London in 1880 and was educated at St. Thomas Charterhouse School, London.

In 1894 he entered the Bishopgate Institute as junior assistant, and his marriage to Miss Mabel Viney of London took place in 1904. In 1906 he was appointed sub-librarian at St. Pancras Public Library, and became a Fellow of the Library Association in 1914.

He came to Norwich as City Librarian in June, 1911, and at once commenced the work of modernising the methods employed by his predecessors. In this he was eminently successful, and there can be no doubt that his unbounded enthusiasm, supported by a progressive committee and a loyal staff, had the effect of raising the standard of efficiency of the City Library to the



Photo. by E. Valère-Newby.

high level which it enjoys at the present time. His activities, however, were hampered by the indifferent housing of the Central Library. Its transference to more dignified and more modern quarters, which would have given greater scope for his undoubted powers of organisation, he did not, alas, live to see; but he had the satisfaction of extending his work to three excellent branch libraries.

To Norfolk archæologists Stephen's greatest achievement was the formation of a collection of manuscripts, photographs and printed books of local interest—regarding which it is significant that he was for many years a close personal friend of the late Walter Rye, who, by his will, gave the Public Library his exceedingly valuable collection of manuscripts.

Stephen was a member of the Council of the Library Association and was, in library circles, recognised as an expert in the technique of book production. This qualification was a valuable asset to his professional work, and enabled him to give sound advice in this direction to his many literary friends and to the Societies of which he was a member.

When, in 1931, the City Muniment Room came under the control of the Public Libraries Committee, Stephen's librarianship asserted itself once again. Through his instrumentality the city records were overhauled and the necessary work of repair and re-binding was begun. This gave him the opportunity of preparing his monograph on the Norwich Waits, which was published by our Society in 1933; and a specially bound copy of this work was accepted by H.M. the Queen for the Library at Sandringham. He was engaged just before his death on the production of a revised and enlarged edition of the *Norwich City Plate*, which, it is hoped, will be published by the Corporation.

A most useful and valued member of the Committee of our Society, he prepared with infinite care annual lists of recently published books, pamphlets and articles relating to Norfolk archæology. These lists have been printed in these *Transactions* for the past fifteen years.

An equally valued member of the Council of the Norfolk Record Society, he was placed in a competitive and, therefore, somewhat delicate position in view of the fact that the collecting of local manuscripts formed part of his professional duty. This difficulty was soon overcome, for the Corporation agreed to store at the Central Library all manuscripts belonging to the Record Society, thus making these documents easily available to the student.

Stephen was a member of the British Record Association National Council, and, just before his death, was appointed to the Council of the Society formed for the preservation of business archives.

He also arranged the excellent programmes of weekly lectures which are delivered at the Library. These lectures deal with a wide range of subjects, and his method of finding lecturers was in itself a work of art. He himself was a lecturer of considerable repute, and his last lecture, entitled "The Norwich Guildhall," was so successful that he repeated it to a crowded and appreciative audience.

Among his published works will be found the following:—

A Guide to the City of Norwich: a select bibliography, 1919.

Three Centuries of a City Library: an historical and descriptive account of the Norwich Public Library established in 1608, and the present Public Library opened in 1857.

Norfolk Bibliography: the local authors, printing, papermaking, etc., 1921.

Norwich Roll of Honour of Citizens who fell in the Great War, 1924.

Readers' Guide, Norwich Public Library, v.d.

100 Pictures of Norwich, 1926.

City Lamplighters: street lighting in bygone times, "E.D.P.," Nov., 1926.

A Bygone City Official: the Norwich Bellman, "E.D.P.," 1926.

100 Pictures of the Norfolk Broads, 1927.

Borrow House Museum: a brief account of the life of George Borrow and his Norwich home; with a bibliography, 1927.

A Descriptive List of Norwich Plans, 1541—1914 (published in *A Descriptive List of the Printed Maps of Norfolk*, by T. Chubb, 1928).

Walter Rye: a memoir, bibliography and catalogue of his Norfolk manuscripts, 1929.

Earlham Roads: notes on Local Celebrities after whom the Roads on the Earlham Housing Estate are named, with portraits, "E.D.P.," Nov., 1929.

Norwich Road-names: Mile Cross and Drayton Estates, "E.D.P." 1931.

Merry Kemp's Dance from London to Norwich in 1600: a Nine Days' Wonder, "E.D.P.," Mar., 1932.

St. Blaise's Day: Norwich Wool-combers' Processions in bygone times, "E.D.P.," Feb., 1933.

The Waits of the City of Norwich, 1933.

Stephen made an ideal public servant, approachable and obliging to a marked degree. There were combined in him absolute integrity, innate shrewdness, and a keen sense of humour. Little wonder that his circle of friends was large!

His private life was one of devotion to his family. In equal measure his public life was one of devotion to his work. Painfully jealous of the reputation of his beloved Library, inflexible and insistent when he had finally made up his mind, he recognised expert knowledge in others and was always willing to learn from their experience.

His favourite recreations were gardening and bowls, and in 1933 he was elected Captain of the Norfolk Bowling Club—a proud moment for him.

He died at his home in Norwich after a short illness on December 9th, 1934, at the early age of 54; and his death, which comes as so grievous a blow to his widow, his parents, and his two sons, will be lamented by his innumerable friends and by the Societies he served so willingly and so well.

I, for one, am grateful for his kind and generous friendship.