

OBITUARY

MICHAEL VALENTINE BRITON RIVIERE, T.D., M.A., F.S.A.

President 1983-4

Vice-President 1973-83 and 1984-97

Michael Riviere died on 10 May 1997. Of Huguenot stock, he was the son of a Norwich doctor and the grandson of Briton Riviere, one of a family of well-known 19th-century artists. He graduated from Oxford in 1939 and was commissioned into the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry. Taken prisoner in Crete in 1941, his attempts to escape led to imprisonment in Colditz Castle. During his incarceration he wrote some moving poems, two of which ('Eichstatt 1943' and 'Oflag Night Piece, Colditz') found places in recent anthologies of War Poems. In prison camp he also studied brewing. On his return to civilian life he practised this with distinction, becoming a director, successively, of Steward and Patteson and Watney Mann. In subsequent years, his later poetry led to a reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement to rate him among the most distinguished poets of our age.

On his return to Norfolk he became deeply involved in many aspects of the cultural life of City and County. Among these we may take pride in his active membership of our Society. He assumed the editorship of *Norfolk Archaeology* in 1965 and in a challenging preface contrasted the 'laborious scholarship' of the Early Renaissance with the creativity of later writers who turned 'material into art'. It was this theme which inspired his own work, and is reflected in his own contributions to the journal during the eight years of his editorship. His interest in the Society's activities never ceased, and in his last years a kindly telephone call from Dilham signalled his appreciation of the changed format of *Norfolk Archaeology*.

Michael Riviere was a man who preferred to work behind the scenes. It is, therefore, important to reflect upon the extent of his contribution to Norfolk life beyond the confines of our Society. His active support of the Art Department of Norwich Castle Museum, his enterprising work as Secretary of the Friends of the Museums (particularly in developing the Rotunda), his early appreciation of the importance of Dragon Hall (together with the role he played in ensuring that it passed to the City for care and conservation) and his very active, generous and influential Chairmanship of the Centre of East Anglian Studies of the University of East Anglia have, perhaps, not been sufficiently recognised by those beyond his immediate circle.

In his poem 'Eichstatt 1943' he assessed himself as a 'pull-punch, moderate fellow'. Fortunately not everyone agreed. As a soldier he was mentioned in despatches and received the Territorial Decoration. He was elected to Fellowships of the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society of Literature. The Norfolk Record Society elected him as their President. He was invited to read his poems by BBC Radio 3. Finally, in 1986, the University of East Anglia conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.

His later years were spent in an appreciation of his homescape at Dilham, but he missed little of events in the world beyond; his interest in the continuing cultural life of Norfolk was unfailing to the end.

Based on an appreciation by AHS