

OBITUARY

SIR MONTAGU SHARP, V.L., K.C.

WE have, as a Society, been fortunate in our Presidents, and ever since we lost Sir Edward Braybrooke we have enjoyed the keen leadership and co-operation of Sir Montagu Sharp. He died recently at the age of 85, after an extremely busy life of public service, devoted in the main to the administration of justice, the protection of bird life and the government and archaeology of Middlesex. When he retired from some of his public offices in 1934, his portrait was painted and hung in the Middlesex Guildhall, Westminster. Lord Rochdale, Lord Lieutenant of the County, and Patron of our Society, referred to him on that occasion as "scholar, lawyer, historian, administrator, soldier, archæologist, ornithologist, dispenser of justice, educationist, sportsman, Englishman and friend."

He was a bencher of Gray's Inn and took a very keen interest in the life and history of the Inn. It was a pleasure to accept his hospitality at two big functions in the summer of 1939, when the Inn was looking at its best, and it never occurred to anyone present that disaster lay ahead.

He was the son of Captain B. Sharpe, R.N., and at one time was a considerable landowner in Newfoundland. He was born at Hanwell Park, now covered with houses; and lived for many years at Brent Lodge, Hanwell, which, after his first wife's death, he gave to Ealing as a public park.

An active Freemason, he was keen on local hospitals, an honorary Colonel in the County Regiment, and rose to be Chairman of the Middlesex County Council.

He was efficient though somewhat severe as an administrator of justice, occupying important posts in Middlesex Quarter Sessions from 1896 to 1933. His Latin scholarship was always keen, and he emphasised, perhaps too assiduously, the influence of Roman customs and traditions on the development of London and Middlesex. But, however much you might disagree with his conclusions, it was impossible not to like this courteous, urbane, hardworking Londoner, who was only too ready to place his time, money and industry at the disposal of any good

cause. He attended our Council meetings and the more public meetings of our Society with commendable regularity, and every year at an annual gathering gave us the benefit of his latest researches into Roman Middlesex or Middlesex in Domesday Book. He was successful in getting a memorial erected in Brentford to commemorate the crossing of the Thames by Julius Cæsar. Lady Sharp has generously given to our Society a valuable selection from Sir Montagu's library, and a number of copies of his volume on *Middlesex in British, Roman and Saxon Times*.

WALTER GEORGE BELL

SOMEONE once suggested that the safest way to be remembered is to write an authoritative book about London, or to leave behind a collection of drawings of the great metropolis. Well, as long as folk are interested in seventeenth-century London, they will rely on Walter Bell's magnificent researches into the story of the *Great Plague* and of the *Great Fire*. It does not seem an exaggeration to prophesy that his histories of these two epoch-making disasters will never be out-dated. Here is a great triumph; but Walter Bell's researches extended still farther, and his story of *Fleet Street*, where he spent so many years of his literary life in the service of the *Daily Telegraph*, is also a masterpiece.

Other books, less scholarly, perhaps, but equally accurate and informative, were *Unknown London*, and *More about Unknown London*, in which he tells us about forgotten heroes or unvisited shrines. One of his best papers is that on Smithfield, where he commemorates very sympathetically the martyrs who met their fate by burning under the Tudor régime, especially during the reign of Mary, which he calls "the most hideous reign" in English history. *London Discoveries* revealed many historic dramas, of which we needed to be reminded; and some of London's outer ring of suburbs had their historic background depicted in *When London Sleeps*.

Walter Bell was a most generous scholar of London history, and was always ready to place his vast erudition at the disposal of less experienced researchers. You only had to ask and his help was immediately available, without the slightest sense of patronage or superiority. He had all the humility of the real scholar.