



*By permission of the University of Nottingham*

FELIX OSWALD  
1866 — 1958

## FELIX OSWALD

1866 — 1958

THE Society lost one of its most distinguished members by the death of Doctor Felix Oswald on November 3rd, 1958, his ninety second birthday. He had been an honorary member since 1913 and a vice-president since 1930.

In early life he travelled extensively (as a geologist) in Turkish Armenia, Central Africa and the Caucasus, and was awarded the doctorate of science by London University for his thesis (which he subsequently printed on his own press) on the geology of Armenia. But he had always been interested in Roman archaeology, and when he came to Nottingham as probate registrar he was at once attracted by the site of Margidunum on the Fosse Way. With the support of the late Mr. F. W. Dobson he was able to start digging there, and so began an excavation which occupied twenty six years of his life (1910-36). Soon, he was living on the site in an army hut procured after the 1914-18 war, spending all his summer leisure hours in uncovering the walls and ditches of the settlement, and the winter months in arranging and reconstructing the pottery he unearthed. It was an almost awesome spectacle to stand on the lip of the vast cavity he had dug with his own spade, and those who visited him and heard him talk about his work as tea was served in the hut, amidst a seeming chaos of cinerary urns and piled trays of broken pottery, had a rewarding and arresting experience.

The results of it all were published in our own *Transactions*, in numerous articles contributed to other learned periodicals, and in several reports printed by the University of Nottingham, which further recognized his work by creating for him an honorary readership in Roman studies. In sum, his work constituted the greatest contribution which has yet been made to the history of Roman Nottinghamshire. If the progress of our knowledge of the period has revealed some limitations in his handling of the site and of his interpretations, and if it may eventually prove worthwhile to re-open the "dig", that in no way detracts from the merit of what he achieved almost single-handed, and in the spare-time of a busy official life.

He had a special interest in the pottery of his period, and in the potters who made it. With remarkable skill he reconstructed dozens of jars and bowls from shattered fragments which he had found. Examples of these in the Margidunum collection, which is now housed at the University, bear striking testimony to his clever fingers and untiring patience. His methods might not always win the approval of the expert, but it was a performance of which, as an amateur, he had every reason to be proud.

When he retired in 1936 he went to live at Solva in Pembrokeshire, and it was there that he died. Only those members of the Society whose memories of it go back over twenty years can now recall the lectures he delivered to it, or picture the short stalwart figure chatting eagerly about his finds to some interested fellow-member. They will hold in kindly memory the infectious enthusiasm of the man, his unfailing readiness, when approached, to share his knowledge and experience, the modest, friendly manner in which he always cloaked his erudition, and the charming touch of old-world courtesy that distinguished all his relationships.

Below his unassuming exterior, Felix Oswald was a man of fine and unusual gifts. To the Thoroton Society his scholarship brought repute, and he will hold a foremost place in the ranks of those who have laboured to retrieve and elucidate the history of Nottinghamshire. All who care for such things will remember his effort and his example with gratitude.