

George Sweetman.

FEW men have done more than the late Mr. Sweetman in the way of making available to the local public the material at hand relating to the history of their own immediate neighbourhood. Born at Wincanton on December 24th, 1834, he spent the whole of his long life in his native town, and passed peacefully away on July 11th, 1917, amidst general tokens of respect and esteem. In "the good old days" when there was no wise and able Minister of Education to look after the welfare of the young, he was put to work when he was eight years old; but, fortunately, even then there was a small evening school at Wincanton, and he had the good sense to take advantage of it. A love of reading developed, and, after working several years with a local builder, he started business as a bookseller, stationer and newsagent, which was a much more congenial occupation. This brought him into friendly intercourse with the principal inhabitants of the district, for he was a genial, intelligent and shrewd man who readily made friends, and had little difficulty in retaining them. Moreover, he was deeply interested in everything that had to do with the well-being of those amongst whom he lived, and became an active and useful member of various public bodies. This secured him ready access to the records of various local institutions, and he thus obtained the material relating to local history, which he subsequently made good use of in his various publications. In 1871 he started "Sweetman's Illustrated Journal," which was continued nine years, and contained much interesting local information. A few years later he published a biographical notice of "Wincanton's Greatest Son — Judge Dier." Then followed a "Glossary of Words Used in and Around Wincanton"; "Fires in Wincanton, 1707-1895"; "Memorials of Win-

canton People"; "The French in Wincanton"; "Wincanton Sixty Years Ago"; "Stavordale Priory and Pen Pits"; "History of the Congregational Church, Wincanton"; "Places of Interest in and Around Wincanton"; "Notes on Wincanton Church," and "The History of Wincanton." In the introduction to the latter work, Mr. Sweetman tells us that, at the annual meeting of our Society in 1871 he heard someone say, "Wincanton has no history." This set him thinking and seeking information, the result being the collection of material which he worked up into a book of nearly three hundred pages.

But, although his publications were so numerous, he left behind many large volumes of manuscript, consisting mainly of copies of local documents, which may yet be helpful to those who are interested in such matters, as the main part of them are now in the possession of our Society.

Mr. Sweetman also did excellent work as Secretary of the Wincanton Field Club, of which he was the mainstay. He enlisted the help of neighbours and personal friends who were able to contribute valuable papers on local history, archæology, and natural history, to which he personally added many articles. Moreover, he organised a series of excursions to places of interest during several summers, and excellent lectures for winter evenings. Indeed, while he was able to undertake the management, the Club did remarkably good work.

Mr. Sweetman issued a series of little local guides, some of which ran through several editions. He also published a number of local sketches, one or two of them being vivid word-pictures of customs, thoughts and feelings prevalent in his early days. His various magazine articles, too, will long continue to be read with interest by those who know Wincanton and the neighbourhood.

It may be unhesitatingly said of Mr. Sweetman, that one of the greatest joys of his life was to gather information about the district in which he lived—its history, its people, and its institutions; and having gathered it, to pass it on to others.