

Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte, K.C.B., D.Litt.

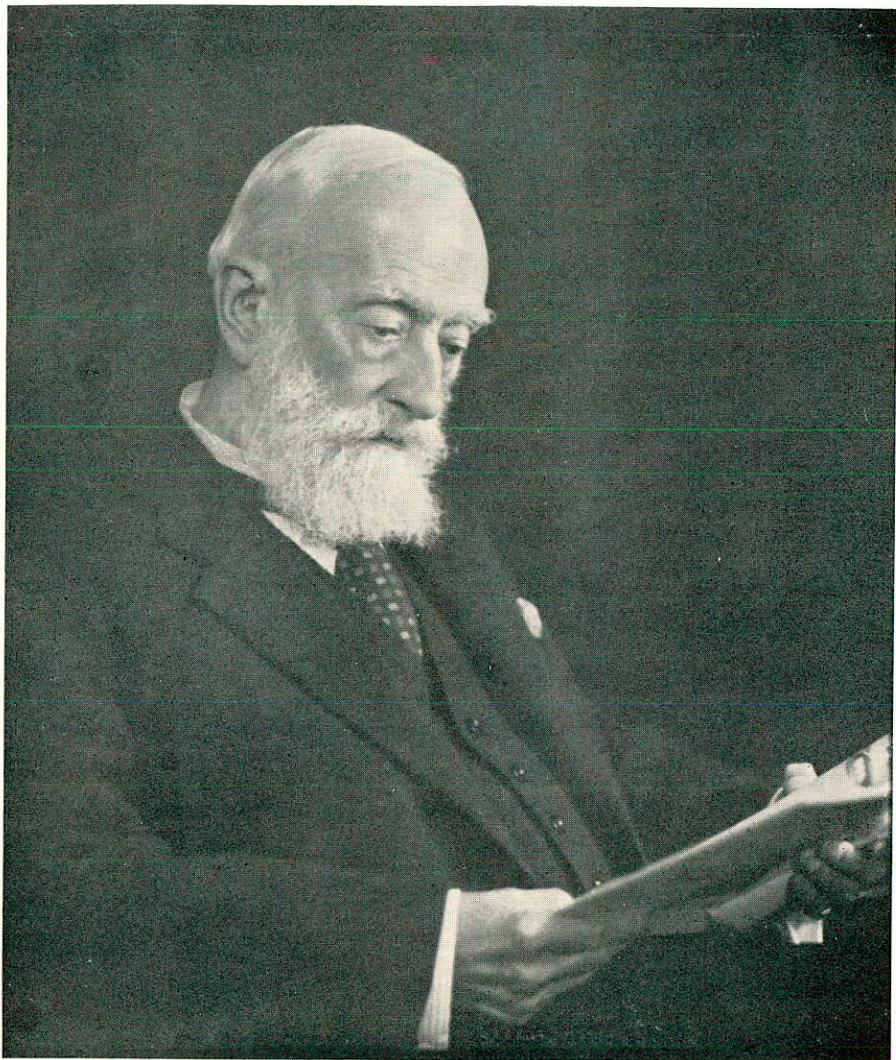
(Plate XII)

SIR HENRY MAXWELL-LYTE was staying at Dinder House when he died on 28 October 1940. He was in his ninety-third year. He had had a long and distinguished career as Deputy-Keeper of the Public Records and was a Commissioner for Historical Manuscripts. His wife who died in 1925 was Frances Fownes, daughter of the late J. C. Somerville. They had three sons and three daughters.

The following quotation from an obituary notice published in *The Times* sums up the scope and effect of Sir Henry's work at the Public Record Office :

The death of Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte has broken a link with a remote past, since in January 1886, he succeeded as Deputy-Keeper of the Public Records Sir William Hardy, who was born on 6 July 1807, more than 133 years ago. He was Deputy-Keeper until 9 October 1926 ; and his work during those forty years gave him a strong claim to be regarded as the official founder of the modern school of archivists. He found in the Record Office a vast accumulation of unsorted material, and he at once realized that little could be done to set it in order without machinery for dating and in other ways identifying this material. From this need originated the series of Lists and Indexes and of Calendars (which are still being issued) ; he convinced his Assistant-Keepers and others engaged in the preparation of these volumes that indexes in which place-names were carefully identified were of the utmost importance ; and in consequence historians have generally regarded these publications as authoritative.

Meanwhile, as these volumes succeeded one another, the process of sorting the material in the Record Office became progressively more rapid and better founded ; and the collections of writs which are being assigned to their court and terms are the sole residuum of what was an Augean stable in the middle of the nineteenth century. He supplemented these printed Calendars and Lists by numerous manuscript catalogues, which, taken together, made it possible for searchers to work with a reasonable hope either of finding what they wanted



SIR HENRY MAXWELL-LYTE, K.C.B.

or knowing that it was not to be found. In his first year of office the number of registered searchers was a little over 50,000 ; by 1926 it was more than 110,000.

The first edition of Maxwell-Lyte's *History of Eton College* was published in 1877. His *History of the University of Oxford* appeared in 1886. It was 'almost the first attempt to place the history of the University on the firm footing of fact'.

In spite of his official preoccupations Maxwell-Lyte managed to make some notable discoveries of documents for the Historical Manuscripts Commission, particularly some relating to the Civil War and the Commonwealth which had lain forgotten and neglected in an old cupboard at Welbeck Abbey. In 1909 he published two handsome volumes on the history of Dunster, its castle and its lords, the Mohuns and the Luttrells, with whom he had an ancestral connexion. The illustrations were reproduced from photographs of his own. Among his other publications were *Notes on the Great Seal of England* (1926), *Some Somerset Manors* (1931), and various Reports for the Historical Manuscripts Commission. He was Editor of the *Book of Fees*, and of various other publications issued by the Public Record Office and the Somerset Record Society. In 1897 he was created K.C.B., and Oxford University conferred upon him the honorary degree of D.Litt. He was also F.S.A. and a Fellow of the British Academy. Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte was always ready to place his assistance and trustworthy learning at the disposal of inquirers and those engaged on research.

Maxwell-Lyte was male representative of the ancient family of Lyte of Lytescary in the parish of Charlton Mackrell—a family remarkable during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for their scholarly interests. The connection of the Lytes with Lytescary had been severed in 1755, but Sir Henry had a strong feeling of local patriotism for Somerset, and in his later years he was, perhaps, the chief living authority on the medieval history of the county. He was a vice-president of the Somerset Archæological Society of which his membership was longer than that of any surviving member. He had joined the Society in 1870. Lists of the volumes which he edited for the Somerset Record Society and of the papers which he contributed to these *Proceedings* are appended to this note.

Only a few days before his death, Sir Henry had dictated part of the introduction to a new volume of episcopal registers

of which he had lately prepared the text for the Somerset Record Society.

After his retirement in 1926, Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte continued to live in London. He had an interesting collection of family treasures¹ at his house in Warwick Square, the most remarkable of which were, possibly, the series of panels of heraldic glass from Lytescary, and the portrait of his ancestor, Thomas Lyte, wearing the jewel presented by James I in recognition of the gift of a superb copy of the royal pedigree, written on vellum.

SOMERSET CONTRIBUTIONS

PROCEEDINGS, SOM. ARCH. & NAT. HIST. SOCIETY.

- Suggestions for a proposed County History*, xxxvi, i, 35–36.
The Lytes of Lytescary, xxxviii, ii, 1–100.
Outline of the Manorial History of Shepton Mallet and Croscombe,
 liii, ii, 64–67.
Obituary of George Fownes Luttrell, lvi, ii, 143–145.
Obituary of Rev. Preb. E. H. Bates Harbin, lxiv, ii, 92–95.
Burci, Falaise and Martin, lxv, ii, 1–27.
Curci, lxvi, ii, 98–126.
Fitzurse, lxviii, ii, 93–104.
Thomas Chard, Abbot of Ford, lxxiv, ii, 57–60.
The Lytes of Lytescary (Supplement), lxxvii, ii, 115–135.
Somerset Incumbents, A.D. 1354–1401, lxxviii, ii, 44–108.
The Manor of Poyntington, lxxxii, ii, 203–216.

SOMERSET RECORD SOCIETY. His name appears in the list of subscribers in first volume, 1887. He was on the Council from 1891.

Joint editor of vol. viii, *Two Cartularies, Priors of Bruton and Montacute*.

Wrote vol. xxxiii, *The Honour of Dunster*.

Edited vol. xxxv, *Beauchamp Registers*.

Joint editor of vols. xlix and l, *Register of Bishop Bekynton*.

Edited vol. lii, *Register of Bishops Stillington and Fox*.

Edited vol. liv, *Register of Bishops King and Hadrian*.

Wrote the volume, called *Somerset Manors*, published in 1931 as an Extra Series. It was a supplement to vol. xxxiii.

Was engaged at the time of his death on a final volume of Bishops' Registers—vol. lv, which will be published shortly.

¹ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xxxviii, ii, 60–65, 86–89.