

## VISIT OF MR ROGER ELLIS

BY P. WALNE, M.A., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.

The news that Roger Ellis is to pay an extended visit to Australia in 1967 to conduct seminars in archive administration, to address the 14th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia and to visit as many Australian archive repositories as possible comes as a very pleasant surprise to his colleagues in the United Kingdom. There can be few better qualified, by breadth of experience and knowledge, to be Britain's first archival ambassador to the Antipodes.

Mr Ellis is not unknown to those Australian archivists, whom we in Britain are delighted to see from time to time, but to the majority he must be little more than a name attached to an office, and it is with particular pleasure that I respond to your Editor's request for an open letter of introduction, as it were.

Born in 1910 at Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, Roger Ellis comes from a family formerly settled in Leicestershire as farmers, who since early in the last century have diversified their country life with extensive interests in the coal mining industry, Liberal politics, Banking and the old Midland Railway. After his education at Sedbergh School, Mr Ellis went up to King's College, Cambridge, where, in intervals from the exertions of rowing in his college's first boat, he gained a first in the Classical Tripos, and subsequently carried out research in classical art and archaeology.

In 1934, he entered the Public Record Office as an Assistant Keeper. Thirty years later, on his election as President of the Society of Archivists, he delivered his first Presidential Address to the Society in which he dwelt upon the earlier years of his career and this, better than anything else, will give the reader an insight into the P.R.O. of those days. On the outbreak of World War II, Mr Ellis enlisted as an infantryman serving first in the Manchester Regiment, and then in the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, in which Regiment he was commissioned. After regimental and General Staff duties in England, he was posted in 1943 to North Africa, and in 1943 and 1944 was in action with his regiment in the Garigliano valley and before Monte Cassino. In 1944, he became "Spearhead Monuments Officer" to the 8th Army and was concerned with vital rescue work on Italian Archives. From Italy, he went on similar duties to Germany, where he was closely connected with the discovery and salvage of the archives of the German Foreign Ministry.

On demobilisation, Mr Ellis returned "like a homing pigeon" to the Public Record Office, where being promoted to Principal Assistant Keeper in 1954, he served until 1957, when he became Secretary to the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, his present post.

Mr Ellis's services to archives extend well beyond his onerous official duties. From 1947 to 1957, he lectured on Archive Administration at the School of Librarianship and Archives at University College, London. He was founder-Editor during the same years of *Archives*, the periodical of the British Records Association, and has served on the Association's Council and other Committees. In 1960, he became a Vice-President of the Society of Archivists and since 1964 has been its President. Since 1956, as Chairman of the Society's Technical Committee, his particular interests in document repair, archival binding and sigillography have found full practical application. As a Fellow of both the Society of Antiquaries of London and of the Royal Historical Society and member of their Councils and Committees, he has served to link the keepers of archives with two of the most influential bodies representing their users.

Lest it be thought that archives are his whole life, Mr Ellis's services to the cause of Anglo-Italian cultural relations, his love of travel especially though not exclusively in Italy, his interest in art and especially the drawings of George Romney, in whose house in Hampstead he now lives, all prove otherwise. If at any time in Australia, he strays and cannot be found in an art gallery, his hosts are advised to discover where the nearest veteran or vintage motor enthusiast hides his treasured vehicle, Mr Ellis will be the other one under the bonnet, discussing the finer points of *real* motor cars.

It remains only to wish Mr Ellis well — and Mrs Ellis too, who hopes to accompany him — on a visit which cannot but fail to be of the greatest mutual benefit and to strengthen the links between the profession in both countries.