



*Yours very truly*  
*John Brooks*

THE LATE JOHN CROSSE BROOKS  
A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

## XIII.—THE LATE JOHN CROSSE BROOKS,

A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

By SHERITON HOLMES, hon. treasurer.

[Read on the 28th April, 1897.]

The subject of this memoir, the late Mr. John Crosse Brooks, was born at Chatham on the 30th of May, in the year 1812, where his father held an appointment under government in the naval yard of that place. Mr. Brooks was the second son of a family of six, which consisted of four boys and two girls.

In 1822, when ten years of age, he was sent to be educated at the Bowes hall school, near Greta Bridge, Yorkshire, on the line of the Roman way leading over Stainmoor into Westmorland. The school was kept by a Mr. Clarkson, a rival school at the place having for its proprietor a Mr. Shaw, who, unfortunately for his reputation and welfare, became identified with the monster depicted by Charles Dickens under the name of Squeers in his novel *Nicholas Nickleby*. In his scathing description of the treatment and education at these Yorkshire schools, Dickens must have drawn largely upon his very fertile imagination, for, in a communication to the local press in 1886,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Brooks speaks in a very kindly manner of his old master, Clarkson, and says that harsh treatment in the school was certainly not the rule, though in a 'theme' which he afterwards wrote when he had been removed to a school at Chatham, occurs this passage :—

The house in which I was to become a pupil was called Bowes hall. It was large, and exhibited a noble appearance; but as to its inside comforts I must remain silent.

The dieting and accommodation at these schools could not have been upon a luxurious scale, seeing that a remuneration of twenty guineas a year covered board, education, clothing, and all other necessaries, and there were no holidays unless at the express desire of the parents. Few, indeed, of the poor boys seem to have had parents or anyone who cared for them. The letters which arrived at the Hall

<sup>1</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Courant* for 24th and 31st December, 1886.

school were chiefly for the Chatham youth, and these kind remembrances from mother and sisters were handed about and eagerly devoured by the poor little friendless boys who got no such things.

His school life at Bowes was brought to a summary close within a year of his entering, for, on his visiting friends in Newcastle, his body was found to be covered with scars and unhealed sores produced by the excessive punishments he had received. But this again he palliates, for he writes that corporal punishment was the exception in the school, and that he had never been so punished until a merciful head usher had been superseded by one of an opposite tendency when the treatment became brutal in the extreme.<sup>2</sup>

After his removal from the Bowes school he was sent to one at Chatham kept by a Mr. Giles, and it was by contact with him whilst at this school that the attention of the future novelist was first directed to the question of Yorkshire education. Dickens had just previously been educated at the Chatham school, and paid occasional visits to his old friends, selecting Brooks for a chatting companion in country walks, who, doubtless, instilled into his companion's mind the kind of life experienced at his former school. Of these interviews Mr. Brooks writes :—

On two occasions when he was a visitor at school, and the boys went into the country on an excursion, he selected me as a companion to walk with. Up to that time he had never heard of education in Yorkshire schools, and as everything was then fresh in my memory, and he took great pleasure in hearing what I had to relate, it was no great wonder that after the first day we were together that he took me for his companion on the second.

After the completion of his education at Chatham in 1830 he again journeyed northwards, but this time to the banks of the Tyne, where he occupied the double office of clerk and draughtsman in the timber-ship building yard of Mr. Wm. Rea at Walker, then situated upon the banks of a delightfully smokeless stream meandering amongst its sand spits, the banks being adorned by villas nestling in foliage, and having broad stretches of waving corn fields beyond.

But this condition of things had soon to give place to a manufacture of a different kind, for iron began to assert its superiority over timber as a building material for ships, and the yard came into possession of Mr. Coutts, an Aberdonian, whose whole staff consisted

<sup>2</sup> Communication to the local press in 1886.

<sup>3</sup> Local press, 1886.

of Mr. Brooks as book-keeper, the late Mr. Charles Mitchell as draughtsman, loftman, and engineer, and the late Mr. William Swan of Walker as assistant clerk.<sup>4</sup> The first vessel launched was the 'Prince Albert,' which was followed by the 'Q.E.D.,' the first screw collier designed to convey the coal of our northern river to the metropolis. Of this vessel Mr. Brooks became part owner, and in the year 1844 she performed her first voyage to the Thames, though from various causes her success was not great. The engine (built by Messrs. Hawthorn & Co.) was only a supplementary power to the canvas, and the speed of the vessel when driven by it alone did not exceed four to four and a half miles an hour. A careless outlook threw them hard aground on the Gunfleet sand off Harwich, where the crew had to jettison part of the cargo and wait until the following day's tide lifted them off.

We next find Mr. Brooks part owner and manager of a number of sailing vessels, which traded chiefly to the Seine, Havre, Rouen, etc., to which places he necessarily paid frequent visits; and in later life, when he had retired from more active duties, he became largely interested in steam shipping. For very many years he resided at the quiet village of Wallsend, but in 1882 he purchased the house No. 14, Lovaine place, Newcastle, to which he removed, and where he died on the 13th of March, 1897, at the ripe age of 85. Mr. Brooks remained a bachelor through life.

It remains to speak of Mr. Brooks as an antiquary. From early youth he had been a collector, and the taste was strengthened on receiving from an uncle a collection of autographs made by him. This, during the course of a long life, Mr Brooks added to as opportunity served, until it gained very considerable dimensions; and a few years before he died he presented this valuable collection to our society.

But he was also a collector of various other objects. Coins and tradesmen's tokens occupied his attention, as also did pictures, old and quaint engravings, and works of art of various kinds; and his house became a repository of things in general.

Respecting his collection of coins, etc., Mr. Wm. Norman (himself

<sup>4</sup> The yard now forms a portion of the premises occupied by Messrs. Wigham Richardson & Co.

a well-known numismatist, who was well acquainted with Mr. Brooks' collection) has kindly furnished the following particulars respecting it :—

When I became acquainted with him in 1880 he was very anxious to complete a collection of the tokens of the eighteenth century as engraved in Pye's work published in 1787, and in this he continued some years, and eventually succeeded, with one or two exceptions, in accomplishing.

In the British regal coinage he always manifested interest, and amongst his choicest treasures might be named some five siege pieces of Charles I. He also became interested in our colonial currencies, and the coins and tokens of Canada were thoroughly investigated in conjunction with Mr. Nelson.

But medals of eminent persons most certainly commanded his profound admiration, and in this he did not confine his attention to those of this country ; talent, genius, and eminence of character having always a great charm for him in any age or clime. To the Greek and Roman coinage he appeared never to attach much importance, and of late years autographs appear to have absorbed most of his time, and numismatics thus became almost, if not entirely, neglected.

He became a member of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle on March 7th, 1866, and was elected a vice-president of the society on the 22nd February, 1890.

He was an intelligent and kindly companion, and a good friend where friendship was deserved. Exact and punctilious in all his dealings, methodical and neat in all which concerned him, and devoted to a quiet, uneventful life, he cared little for the bustle of political or municipal matters.