



Dear Sir

Yours very truly,

John Philipson

THE LATE JOHN PHILIPSON.

A Vice-President of the Society.

IV.—OBITUARY NOTICE OF THE LATE JOHN PHILIPSON, V.P.

BY RICHARD WELFORD, M.A., V.P.

[Read on the 31st August, 1898.]

At the adjourned annual meeting of this society in February, 1890, the number of vice-presidents was increased from six to twelve. Among the members who were promoted upon that occasion to a place in the extra half-dozen was Mr. John Philipson.

It is a fact to be noted that in the eight years which have passed since then death has taken heavy toll of those whom we delighted to honour. We have lost John Clayton (1890), Dr. Bruce (1892), Richard Cail (1893), William Woodman (1895), James Raine (1896), John Crosse Brooks (1897), W. H. D. Longstaffe (1898), and now John Philipson. Of the original twelve but four survive—the Rev. E. H. Adamson,¹ the Rev. W. Greenwell, R. R. Dees, and A. S. Stevenson.

Mr. Philipson came from a good old north-country family,² which, for many generations, had its home among the English lakes. Among its prominent members figure (1) a hero of the Civil War, whose deeds of daring³ earned for him the soubriquet of ‘Robert the Devil;’ (2) a knighted representative in parliament of the county of Westmorland; and (3) a celebrated lawyer and politician, known to most of us as the ostensible ‘guide, philosopher, and friend’ of the corporation of Newcastle, but, in reality, ‘the controller, governor, and ruler of that august body.

Son of George Hare Philipson, an eminent coachbuilder in Newcastle, our friend first saw the light on the 19th of October, 1832. He was educated at Bruce’s far-famed school in Percy street, served an apprenticeship under his father to the art, craft, and mystery of coach and carriage building, married the daughter of his great teacher, Miss Williamina Bruce, in 1862, and a couple of years later succeeded his father in the management of the business.

¹ Since the above was written the Rev. E. H. Adamson has died.

² *Men of Mark 'Twist Tyne and Tweed*, vol. iii, p. 259.

³ *Rokeby*, canto vi. stanza 32.

Thus intimately associated with Dr. Bruce, it was but natural that he should be attracted by the antiquarian pursuits to which the doctor's life was devoted. He became a member of our society in 1871, and soon afterwards accepted the post of honorary auditor of the society's accounts—an office which, with a short interval, he occupied till his death on the 24th of June last. In 1876, he was elected one of the council of the society, and in 1890, as already stated, a vice-president.

Mr. Philipson's mercantile activities left him but little time for the study of archaeology or for indulgence in antiquarian research. He was 'a man of affairs,' interesting himself, first of all, and rightly so, in the history and progress of the ancient craft with which his name is identified. Next to that, perhaps, the work of our society claimed his attention. Although unable personally to take a prominent part in our investigations, he was a regular attender at our meetings, kept a watchful eye upon our business transactions, occasionally presided with dignity and tact over our deliberations, and was always in hearty sympathy with those fortunate fellow-members whose gifted leisure enabled them more fully to elucidate the story of the past and rehabilitate the wrecks of time.

Twice during his membership Mr. Philipson contributed to our literature. At the meeting in November, 1885, inspired by a discovery in the Roman camp at South Shields of objects that suggested certain appendages of saddlery, he read a paper entitled 'Roman Horse Trappings, compared with Modern Examples.' Copiously illustrated, it appears in the *Archaeologia Aeliana* (vol. xi. p. 204), and forms a useful guide down a bypath of discovery which had remained comparatively untrodden. His training and experience gave him special qualifications for this work. He was able to explain and exemplify, as few other antiquaries could have done, the historic continuity of horse trappings, and to trace a resemblance between equine adornments in our May Day processions and those which bedecked the equipage of Roman soldiers, and, possibly, the steeds of Jehu, son of Nimshi.

Two years later, when capt. T. W. U. Robinson presented us with a box of wheat and barley taken from the enfoldings of an Egyptian mummy, Mr. Philipson revived the old question of the vitality of

so-called mummy seeds. Like the case-hardened toad that lives for indefinite periods in the heart of a rock, these tough old seeds found among the *débris* of the Pharaohs are a lively source of assertion and debate. There are those who believe that grain, buried in ancient tombs and dormant for two or three thousand years, has not only germinated, but grown and ripened in this country. Mr. Philipson ranged himself among the believers. At the same time, in fairness to sceptics and unbelievers, he quoted numerous examples of failure and expressions of doubt or incredulity. A perusal of the paper (*Archaeologia Aeliana*, vol. xv.) will probably induce the reader to think that whatsoever may be the condition of the object, the subject still remains in a state of suspended animation.

In the literature of his calling Mr. Philipson's pen was more prolific. Thoroughly at home in every branch of his handicraft, he wrote with that practical knowledge which comes from daily experience and lifelong study. He was the author of the following works :—

Harness: As it has been, as it is, and as it should be, with Remarks on Traction and the Use of the Cape Cart. 24 plates and 8 woodcuts. 8vo. Newcastle: A. Reid, 1882.

The Technicalities of the Art of Coach-body Making (with numerous plans, drawings, etc.). 8vo. London, 1885.

Reports on the Carriages in the Paris Exhibition, 1889. By Artisan Reporters. Edited and revised by John Philipson, J.P., M.I.M.E. 8vo. Newcastle: Mawson, Swan, & Morgan, 1890.

A prize essay on *The Humane Method of Harnessing*. Read before the Animals Institute, London. With Portrait of the Author and Woodcuts. 8vo. Newcastle: J. M. Carr, 1891.

The Art and Craft of Coachbuilding—one of a series of technological handbooks edited by Sir Henry Trueman Wood.

Mr. Philipson's public career, apart from his antiquarian proclivities, was active and conspicuous. He was a member of the Society of Arts and of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Coach and Coach-harness Makers, an honorary member of the Carriage Builders' National Association in the United States, ex-president of the Institute of British Carriage Manufacturers, and a member of the court of arbitration for settling disputes in the carriage building industry. Locally, he was a justice of the peace for the city of Newcastle, held office as one of the

council of the Durham College of Science and of the Newcastle and Gateshead Chamber of Commerce, was a member of the Newcastle Diocesan Society, and a governor of the Infirmary, the Newcastle School for the Blind, and the Whitley Convalescent Home, and had been president of the Tyneside Naturalists' Field Club and a churchwarden of St. Andrew's. One of the notable achievements of his public life was a modification of the carriage tax, at which he laboured, in season and out of season, for ten years. His services in this direction were acknowledged at the annual meeting of the Institute of British Carriage Manufacturers in 1891 by the presentation of an address and testimonial from representatives of the carriage building trade and its affiliated industries throughout the kingdom.

An 'In Memoriam' sketch of our friend, reprinted by the family from the columns of the *Newcastle Daily Leader*, contains a paragraph in which most of us will recognize a faithful portrait, worthy to be preserved among our records :—

With the death of Mr. John Philipson there passes away one who was probably the finest representative of the best type of the vanishing generation of Newcastle citizens. Strongly individualised, he had come to seem almost singular in that old-world courtesy which was so natural to him, and so characteristic of him in all situations. Outside of Newcastle the typical Novocastrian is supposed, not always unjustly, to be brusque, abrupt, peremptory, and even rude, in manner. Mr. John Philipson, on the contrary, was an embodiment of gentleness, refinement, and self-respecting modesty of demeanour. He was a Newcastle man through and through, nevertheless, and was proud of the fact. Highly cultivated, prosperous, socially on a level with those who would choose to be regarded as gentry, he was proud of being a tradesman, as he had good right to be, for taking all England over he was at the head of his trade. He was wont to recall with satisfaction the more distinguished achievements of his firm, which, when stage-coaches were threatened by railways, took the bodies of these vehicles off their wheels, placed them on railway trucks, and thus turned out the earliest first class carriages. . . . Mr. Philipson had a high enthusiasm for his calling, and to his initiative many of the most pronounced improvements in carriage building are due. Personally he was from all points of view estimable.

Let me add, from a personal acquaintance of over thirty years, that in Mr. John Philipson were combined a warm and generous heart, a sanguine and cheerful temperament, and easy and natural manners ; that he was a pleasant companion, a considerate employer, and a steadfast friend.