



M. J. Quincy

31. 3. 1906

XI.—OBITUARY NOTICE OF THE LATE MR. GEORGE
IRVING.

By W. W. TOMLINSON.

[Read on the 28th of November, 1906.]

On the 29th of September last, after a short illness, a venerable member of our society passed away in the person of Mr. George Irving. Had he lived three months longer he would have reached his eightieth year.

Mr. Irving was born on the 27th of December, 1826, at Howgillside, in the parish of Kirkpatrick Fleming, Dumfriesshire, where his maternal grandfather, George Nelson, had a small farm. His father, James Irving, who many years afterwards farmed land at Wetheral in Cumberland, was, at this time, engaged in some branch of agriculture.

To the end of his life, the district in which he spent his early days possessed a peculiar fascination for Mr. Irving. With the family history, romance, and literary associations of this part of Dumfriesshire he was well acquainted. A paper which he read on 'The Borders: their Customs, Laws and Traditions' at the annual meeting of the North Eastern Railway Literary Institute on the 4th of March, 1858, does not seem to have found its way into print, but a paper on 'The Irvings of Hoddum,' read on the 14th of March, 1902, at a meeting of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Antiquarian Society, has been issued in pamphlet form, with a supplementary account of the Johnstones of Knockhill. During the last few months of his life he was collecting materials for a paper on the irruptions of Solway Moss in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

About the year 1843, Mr. Irving, whose parents must have been living at or near Bush Farm, near Ecclefechan, commenced his business career in the office of Mr. David Ewart, writer, in Ecclefechan, gaining, while in this situation, some knowledge of legal procedure which proved useful to him in after life. In 1847 he went into the office of Mr. James Birrell, land surveyor, of Sark Foot, Gretna, but left, about 1849 or early in 1850, to take the post of clerk and assistant to the agent on the Londesborough estates, near Market Weighton. Four years later, the North Eastern Railway Company advertised for a rent collector to reside either at Newcastle, Shields or Sunderland. Mr. Irving was one of seventy applicants, and received the appointment in February, 1855. From this date began his connection with the North of England. The duties of rent collector were gradually merged into those of estate agent—a title which Mr. Irving held officially from 1871 to the present year. He retired on the 31st of March last, after fifty-one years' service, honoured and esteemed by his colleagues. Shrewd, tenacious, and self-possessed, Mr. Irving was eminently fitted for the responsible position which he held. As an instance of his sagacity and energy, it may be mentioned that, when first appointed, he made it his business to walk over the whole of the North Eastern Railway, rendering himself so familiar with the physical aspect of the line that, on referring to a plan, he had a mental picture of the place or property delineated. It is not too much to say that he knew every bit of land through which the railway passed between the Tweed and the Humber, and could have given the name of the proprietor with the tenure under which it was held.

Mr. Irving joined the society on the 26th of May, 1886. He took a deep interest in our work and rendered good service on the council, to which he was elected on the 25th of January, 1899. Endowed with a retentive memory, he did not, perhaps, realise the full force of our motto, and, though ever ready to

communicate the results of his reading and researches, he never enriched our transactions with a paper. He contributed a few notes, one on the Merkland Cross in Dumfriesshire on the 29th of May, 1895; a second on the recent discoveries at Birrenswark, on the 28th of September, 1898; and a third on James Macdonald on the 25th of April, 1900. He exhibited, on the 29th of October, 1893, a seventeenth-century cup of laburnum wood with silver mountings, several ancient illuminated MSS. on parchment which formerly belonged to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, on the 25th of April, 1900; and a photograph of an old font in Long Benton churchyard used as a stand for a sun dial, on the 25th of January, 1906: and he presented to the museum, on the 27th of September, 1893, the fragment of a Roman altar from Greenhead, recording a dedication to Jupiter by an Aelian cohort of Dacians and, on the 31st of January, 1906, a strike-a-light, in shape like a pistol, with some original sulphur-tipped matches. He was one of the general committee appointed to make arrangements for the pilgrimage along the line of the Roman Wall in June last and took part in this famous excursion.

Mr. Irving married Mary Elizabeth Campbell, daughter of John McIntyre of Craig, Argyleshire, who died on the 30th March, 1881. Of five sons born to them, one only survives, recently elected a member of the society.