



DAVID DIPPIE DIXON, F.S.A.

VII.—A MEMOIR OF THE LATE DAVID DIPPIE DIXON, F.S.A.

BY EDWARD RICHMOND NEWBIGIN.

[Read on 27th November, 1929.]

David Dippie Dixon, to whose death sympathetic reference was made at the last meeting of this society, was born at Whittingham in the year 1842, his father being William Dixon, a draper of that village.

At the age of twenty he removed to Rothbury, which was his home throughout the rest of his long and strenuous life.

His wide range of interests, which was perhaps the dominant note of his character, and which, more than anything else, made his name a household word in the locality, came at an early stage to include the study of local history, traditions, and antiquities.

In July, 1884, Mr. Dixon joined the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne and remained a member for about twenty years, being elected a member of the council in 1903. After his resignation, and indeed right up to the time of his death, he retained his keen interest in the doings of the society and continued to make frequent contributions by way of donations, exhibits and papers. A list of these, if one were able to draw it up in full, would show how many-sided his interests were. Nothing that seemed to link the present to a vanishing past escaped his attention or failed to arouse his curiosity.

Among the quaint objects he presented or exhibited were such things as old prints, ballads, pamphlets, toy books, mugs, snuffers, swords and other weapons of

various ages up to the nineteenth century, horn picks, fragments of red deer antlers, fragments of seventeenth century pottery from the long since ruined travellers' shelter at Chew Green, moulds for candles, hearth spit for cooking collops, hand wool carders, shepherd's staff with iron crook, lock and key of the old "kitty" at Rothbury, football stuffed with hay used in old Rothbury games, and many more.

Among the papers he contributed were :

"Coquetdale Notes on the Old Northumberland Militia."

"A Pre-historic Tree Burial at Cartington."

"The Jacobite Movement in Upper Coquetdale (1715)."

"The Manor of Cartington."

"Brinkburn Priory."

At numerous times Mr. Dixon acted as guide to parties of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle and others when visiting places of interest in his neighbourhood, and his descriptive notes on these occasions were always of value. Several of these are recorded in the *Proceedings*, as for instance those relating to Brinkburn Priory, Whitefield camp, Hepple Pele, Whitton Tower, Holystone and Rothbury church.

In 1915 he collaborated with Mr. Parker Brewis in preparing a report to the council on pre-Roman remains in Upper Coquetdale, and in 1887 and subsequently he worked with Major Hedley on the excavation and survey of British barrows and camps on Spital Hill, Lordenshaws, and elsewhere in the Simonside Hills.

He worked also at an early date with the late lord Armstrong and the late William Greenwell in exploring and to some extent excavating the many barrows and other pre-historic remains in which the moors about Rothbury abound, and which had never up to that time been systematically recorded. His keen pleasure in this kind of pioneering work, combining as it did his love of the

past and his love of open air life, remained with him as a stimulating memory throughout his life. As recently as May last, when he joined a meeting of the society at Lordenshaws and Tosson, he regaled the members with some of his stories of these pioneering days.

Mr. Dixon's antiquarian activities were extensive rather than intensive. They developed almost unconsciously out of his simple love of a wide countryside which he had exceptional opportunities of knowing, and which had heretofore received only scant attention from antiquarians and local historians. At the early age of thirteen his business journeys began, and these took him into the remotest parts of the Vale of Whittingham, Coquetdale and the Cheviot foot hills. His two books, *The Vale of Whittingham* published 1895 and *Upper Coquetdale* published 1903, show how well he used his opportunities.

The first of these books Mr. Dixon describes as a labour of love. In the preface to the second he asks the learned scholar and the critic to scan its pages with kindly consideration, remembering that it had been the leisure hour employment of two village tradesmen. In spite of these modest claims the books give evidence of close personal observation, serious study of records and intimate contact with those who had first hand information to give. They form a valuable contribution to local history and will be consulted as reference works for generations to come.

Mr. Dixon's researches into local antiquities and folklore earned for him the distinction of being elected sixteen years ago a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London. He contributed papers or lectures to various societies and lectured at the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society on *The Pele Towers of Northumberland*.

Mr. Dixon was a man of kindly disposition with a gift of humour and a happy knack of eliciting the confidence and friendship of others. The late lord Armstrong early recognized his worth, and the present lord and lady Armstrong have shown appreciation of his

work and personality by many acts of kindness during his declining years.

He held the position of librarian at Cragside for some time, a post which could not fail to be congenial to a man who was himself fond of books and a great reader. He is described by Dr. Edwards Rees as having been the guide, counsellor and friend of five successive rectors of Rothbury.

Among his many interests other than those with which our society is concerned one should place first those connected with his church; he served as chorister, Sunday school teacher, churchwarden and editor of the Parish Magazine; interested himself in missions, Red Cross and every other organization in which his religious, patriotic, or philanthropic impulses might find expression.

His love of the country gave him an interest in natural history and botany, and his relatives recall how the boy scouts used to come to him for the names of wild flowers. It was while he was on a solitary ramble looking for flowers during last summer that he had a fall which hastened his end.

Mr. Dixon's antiquarian activities were of a piece with the rest of his character. He had what one of his admirers describes as the "self-forgetting" disposition, and all his energies and his insatiable desire for knowledge turned outwards to the constant succession of objects and interests that attracted his notice or charmed his fancy. About these he learned all he could and gave out as he learned. Consequently he was never a specialist, but an antiquary because he took genuine pleasure in the things he wrote and talked about. And there is still room for such.