

WILLIAM PHILLIMORE WATTS PHILLIMORE.

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William Phillimore Watts Phillimore was the eldest son of William Phillimore Phillimore (formerly Stiff), B.Med., of Snenton, Nottingham, the medical superintendent of the county asylum there, and Mary Elizabeth his wife, daughter of Benjamin Watts, of Bridgen Hall, Bridgnorth, Shropshire; and he was born at Nottingham on 27 October 1853.

His patronymic was really Stiff - the Stiffs and the Phillimores were both old families of clothiers, resident for many generations at Cam in Gloucestershire - but Dr. Stiff assumed the name of Phillimore by royal licence in 1873, his great-grandfather, Thomas Stiff of Cam, having married Ann, daughter of Jonathan Phillimore of that place.

Having been educated privately, he entered Queen's College, Oxford, 31 May 1873, and in 1876 took a Second Class in Jurisprudence, and graduated B.A. In 1880 he became M.A. and B.C.L., and the same year was admitted a Solicitor.

It was whilst an undergraduate at Oxford that his interest in genealogy developed. He had the advantage there of the splendid collections in the Bodleian Library and the library of his own college, of which he made good use. His vacations were largely spent in Gloucestershire, working up the genealogies of the Phillimore, Stiff, and other kindred families. In early life he contributed papers to Jewitt's *Reliquary* and similar publications.

His best known book is *How to Write the History of a Family*, which appeared in 1887. This was quickly out of print, as also a second and enlarged edition; and a supplement was issued in 1906. This book proved indispensable to all genealogists who were working up pedigrees and family history, and a new and revised edition, brought up to date by the inclusion of new sources of information that have been opened up during the last ten years, would be a real boon to genealogists.

Phillimore's strong point was his far-sightedness and aptitude for starting new societies. He possessed great organising ability, and set on foot many schemes which are still at work, showing the need there was for their existence. The first of these was *The Index Library*, which he originated in 1887, and which is now better known as *The British Record Society*. The object of this was to print the calendars of wills stored in the various probate registries, and indexes of various classes of public records. It has however also printed certain records themselves, e.g., the Inquisitions Post Mortem for Gloucestershire and Wilts. At the present time it has issued nearly fifty volumes.

In 1894 he commenced to print the marriage registers of various counties. The marriages only were extracted from various parish registers, and printed in volumes of about 150 pages, at the price of 10s. 6d. a volume. This venture has proved very successful. About thirty counties have been taken in hand, and some 200 volumes have been issued, comprising over 1,200 parishes. In this work he was fortunate in securing the cooperation of a number of local enthusiasts who copied their local registers. The success of this scheme has been greatly forwarded by the labours and industry of Mr. T. M. Blagg, whom Mr. Phillimore took into partnership some years ago. These volumes are not indexed, but Mr. Phillimore's intention was to print one general index to the marriages for each county as soon as all the registers for that county had been extracted and printed.

Other Societies initiated by Phillimore were the *Scottish Record Society*, which started with his printing certain calendars of Scottish wills and records in 1896; the *Thoroton Society*, for printing Nottinghamshire records, in 1897; and the *Canterbury and York Society* for printing the episcopal registers of the dioceses of England and Wales, in 1904. All these societies are still being diligently

carried on, showing that their work was really needed. He also was active in the foundation of the Shropshire Parish Register Society, and the Staffordshire Parish Register Society, and for some years edited the publications of both societies.

Notwithstanding all this work for societies, a constant stream of books and pamphlets emanated from Phillimore's pen. He compiled various family histories: *Some Account of the Family of Holbrow*, in 1901; *The Family of Middlemore*, the same year; pamphlets on the Watts family, the Finmore family, etc, and at his death he had been for some years engaged on a big history of *The Family of Phillimore*, a work in which Sir Walter Phillimore was much interested, and it is to be hoped that this book will one day see the light. He also had in view a series of volumes of County Pedigrees - pedigrees not limited to any one class of society, but of this series only one volume was printed, "Nottinghamshire, vol. i," in 1910; the second volume was well in hand at his death, and will in due course be issued.

It is impossible to enumerate all Phillimore's writings - they fill many pages in the British Museum Catalogue. But amongst the most useful of his works not already mentioned are: *Pedigree Work*, 1900; *Heralds' College and Coats of Arms regarded from a Legal Aspect*, 1904; *The Law and Practice of Grants of Arms*, 1905; and *Changes of Name*, 1906.

With such a mass of work continually going on, and with so many irons in the fire, it is not to be wondered at that at times his work got into arrear, and Societies were compelled to appoint other editors of their publications, to ensure the usual output being issued to their members. Phillimore was sadly overworked, and had far too much to do, more than any single man could accomplish.

The custody and preservation of local records was a great hobby of his, and he drafted several Bills dealing with their safe custody. In 1897 he came prominently into public notice through the "Shipway Case," when wills and tombstones were forged in order to prove a pedigree, and it was due to Phillimore that the fraud was unmasked.

For some time before his death he resided at Berkhamstead, and latterly at Gerrard's Cross. His health failing, he was taken to Torquay to recruit, and after an illness of several months' duration he died there on 9th April last. He was interred on the 15th April in the family vault at Bridgnorth, by the side of his father and mother, the present writer officiating at his interment. He had married in 1887, Miss Jane Graham, a lady of Scottish descent, and has left his widow and one son, Mr. Wilfrid Henderson Phillimore, surviving.

Of Phillimore's work it is impossible to speak too highly. There is no living genealogist who is not indebted to his publications, and who will not render a tribute of gratitude to his memory for what he has done. He literally died in harness, working laboriously up to the last. He was always ready to afford assistance to others, out of his stores of knowledge. The present writer has had a personal friendship with him for nearly forty years, going back to early Oxford days. For some of the facts in this memoir the writer is indebted to an obituary notice in *The Athenaeum*, of 19th April last, but it is mainly from personal knowledge that this memoir has been compiled. He has left a gap which it will not be easy to fill.

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