

LONDON SIGNS AND INSCRIPTIONS

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London signs and inscriptions by Philip Norman

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PHILIP NORMAN

**LONDON SIGNS
AND INSCRIPTIONS**



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BY
PHILIP NORMAN, F.S.A.

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
HENRY B. WHEATLEY, F.S.A.,
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INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE been asked to write a short introduction to this volume of the Camden Library, and I do so with great pleasure.

The subject of sculptured signs is one of considerable interest, to which too little attention has hitherto been devoted, and the treatment of this important section of London antiquities could not have fallen into better hands than into those of Mr. Philip Norman, who has devoted many years of patient labour to the search for these signs, which are often found in very out-of-the-way localities. Mr. Norman possesses one most important qualification for the task he has undertaken, in that he is an accomplished artist. He is thus doubly well equipped both as an antiquary and as an artist.

It will, I think, surprise many readers to learn that so much is still left to us, and I hope that the attention drawn to some of the signs which have

disappeared of late years may result in the discovery of their present hiding-places. Some years ago there was a curious sculptured sign over the entrance to Bull Head Court, Newgate Street. This represented William Evans, Charles I.'s gigantic porter, and Jeffrey Hudson, the Queen's dwarf. When King Edward Street was widened this sign disappeared. If it be still in existence, we may hope that, in course of time, it may find a home in the Guildhall Museum, where so many interesting relics of old London are preserved.

Painted signs, which were once almost universal, were suddenly cleared away by the Act of Parliament of 1762, but these sculptured signs remained because they were a part of the houses to which they were attached, and they only pass away when the houses are rebuilt.

As the reader casually turns over the pages of this book, he cannot fail to be struck by the variety of objects which have been represented on the signs. Many of these may be considered as marks of ownership, and the crests and coats of arms of the City Companies are frequently found as signs.

In connection with the aesthetic revival there has been a considerable reappearance of signs in different parts of London, mostly of artistic iron-work; but although this helps to relieve the dull monotony of many streets it is not a custom that

would be popular if it became universal. There can, however, be no objection to the more general adoption of artistic sculpture on the fronts of houses. When an old house is rebuilt, its story (if it have a story) may with advantage be graphically represented on the front of the new one. This has been done in some cases, and an extension of the custom would add to the beauty of the streets, and increase the interest of the passer-by in the almost forgotten history of his own town.

It is a satisfactory thing that the relics of former fashions of decoration should be registered for the information of those who desire to keep themselves in touch with the history of the past. Even in this materialistic age there are many who love to live in imagination in a former age, and a sculptured sign or inscription on an old house will often help them to do this.

For centuries London was remarkable for its gardens, but this has been changed at the end of the nineteenth century. Considering the great value of land in 'the City,' I suppose it cannot be a matter of surprise that almost every bit of garden or green place has been swept out of existence, but I think every lover of London will sympathize with the protest against this tendency which concludes Mr. Norman's book.

I do not, however, wish to keep the reader longer

from learning what the author has to say, and I will only add that this volume will form a most useful and agreeable addition to the extensive literature which is gradually growing up in connection with the ever-increasing world of houses and men which is known as London.

HENRY B. WHEATLEY.

OPPIDANS ROAD, N.W.,

March, 1893.

