

**A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE
LATE JOSEPH
HUNTER, WITH A
DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE**

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A brief memoir of the late Joseph Hunter, with a descriptive catalogue by Joseph Hunter

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JOSEPH HUNTER

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A
BRIEF MEMOIR
OF THE LATE
JOSEPH HUNTER, F.S.A.

WITH A
Descriptive Catalogue
OF
HIS PRINCIPAL SEPARATE PUBLICATIONS, AND
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE 'ARCHÆOLOGIA.'

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1861.

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MEMOIR,

ETC.

MR. HUNTER was born at Sheffield, on February 6th, 1783: he was the son of Mr. Michael Hunter, a gentleman engaged throughout his life in the cutlery business at that town. His mother died while he was yet very young, and shortly after he was placed under the guardianship of the Rev. Joseph Evans, the minister of a congregation of Presbyterian Dissenters with which his parents were connected. For Mr. Evans and his wife Mr. Joseph Hunter conceived the highest esteem, which continued to the end of his life. He was placed by them at a school in the neighbourhood of Sheffield, where he received the rudiments of a classical education, while he devoted all his leisure moments to the study of such works as he could procure upon historical, topographical, and genealogical subjects, and to copying all monumental inscriptions and similar remains to be met with in the churches of

the vicinity: he thus laid the foundation of that minute acquaintance with the family history of his native town and neighbourhood, of which he afterwards made such good use. Many volumes yet remain of church notes taken by him at this early age.

It was determined that he should be brought up to the ministry among the sect to which his family belonged, and accordingly, in 1805, he proceeded to a college at York, where he received his professional training under the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, a gentleman well known to Yorkshire antiquaries, and who survived till a recent period. The course prescribed to the students at this college was remarkable for the attention given to minute verbal criticism of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures: this branch of study was peculiarly suitable to Mr. Hunter's cast of mind, and he retained a lively interest in these questions long after abandoning the profession which first led him to them. In 1809 he became minister of a congregation of Presbyterian Dissenters at Bath, where he resided for twenty-four years; during this time, in addition to his professional duties, he continued his collection of materials for the history of his native town, part of which he embodied in his 'Hallamshire,' published in 1819. This was followed by

two volumes of the 'History of the Deanery of Doncaster' in 1828 and 1831. He was moreover forward in the promotion of every scheme adapted to increase the then commencing interest in the history and antiquities of our country, and was one of the original members of the Bath Literary and Scientific Institution, which is still a flourishing establishment. He was a valued member of that 'Stourhead Circle,' of which he afterwards printed some account,—a party of gentlemen residing in the counties of Somerset and Wilts, who year after year met under the hospitable roof of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, of Stourhead, to compare the progress each had made in those studies which had an interest for them all.

Mr. Hunter's intimate acquaintance with ancient writings and with the minuter details of our history attracted the attention of the then existing Commissioners of the Public Records, who determined to secure to the country the services of one so well qualified to assist in the work with which they were charged. Accordingly Mr. Hunter, being appointed a Sub-Commissioner, removed to London in 1833, and entered on the duties of his office at the Midsummer of that year. His employment was at first editing various volumes of record-learning to be hereafter mentioned. On

the reconstruction of the Record Service in 1838, he was appointed an Assistant Keeper of the First Class, and to his care were committed the Queen's Remembrancer's Records, with the especial duty of forming a Calendar of this vast mass of miscellaneous documents. From the day of its commencement till almost the day of his death this Calendar was always in his thoughts; and whatever might be his other employments, he never allowed them to interfere with the prosecution of the great work committed to him, and to the completion of which he looked forward as the reward of his persevering toil. His family frequently heard him, during his last illness, express his satisfaction that he left behind him, in Mr. Walter Nelson and Mr. Joseph Redington, two gentlemen who, having for many years been his assistants, were perfectly trained in his mode of proceeding, and competent to bring to perfection the work in which he had made so much progress. We are glad to see that the former gentleman has been appointed to succeed Mr. Hunter in his office of Assistant Keeper of the First Class.

Soon after Mr. Hunter's removal to London, much of his attention was occupied by a suit in Chancery, well known as the "Hewley Suit," in which it was sought to take from the Unitarians

the benefit of the property left by Lady Hewley in the early part of the eighteenth century, and which she destined for the support of the Presbyterians, to whom she herself belonged. The fact seems to be that the Presbyterians had ceased to exist as a distinct body, a few of their members having joined Independent or other Dissenting congregations, while the mass had insensibly passed through Arian to Unitarian doctrine. Mr. Hunter allowed that those who at the time of the suit enjoyed this property denied many doctrines which the foundress regarded as a fundamental part of Christianity; but he maintained that the Unitarians, historically speaking, represented the foundress, and that, had she then been living, she would have been an Unitarian herself. The Courts of Law, however, decided in favour of the new claimants, when the Dissenters' Chapel Act was passed to prevent stale claims of the kind being made for the future, by making twenty years' use sufficient proof, in the absence of written expressions of intention, as to the doctrines to be taught in any chapel. It is clear that, had this statute existed, the claim of the Independents could at no time have been successfully urged, for no considerable change of doctrine took place within the limits of any period of twenty years.