

# Himalayan Journal, Volume 24

## **OBITUARY**

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COLONEL REGINALD HENRY PHILLIMORE, C.I.E., D.S.O.

(1879-1964)

Reggie Phillimore, a Founder Member and Life Member of the Himalayan Club, died in Gulmarg, Kashmir, on 30th October, 1964, at the age of eighty-five. Born on 19th June, 1879, the son of Admiral H. B. Phillimore, he was a Queen's Scholar of Westminster, passed through the 'Shop' at Woolwich into the Royal Engineers in June, 1898, and elected for service in India in September, 1900. After serving with the Madras Sappers and Miners in Malakand and Swat he joined the Survey of India in June, 1903. Most of his service before World War I was spent in geographical surveys on the frontiers of Burma and in Assam.

Reverting to military duties as a Captain in September, 1914, he raised and trained in England an R.E. Company of 'Kitchener's Army', took it to France and later to Salonica, where he was largely instrumental in improving the inaccurate maps on the Vardar front, in helping the Royal Artillery with their long-range artillery targets and in developing their sound-ranging and flash-spotting techniques. For his war services he was promoted to Brevet Lieut.-Colonel, awarded the D.S.O., and was mentioned four times in despatches.

After the war he declined the offer of a staff appointment. His heart was in the Survey of India, which had been depleted by casualties, and he returned to work in Assam and Bengal before becoming Director of the Burma Circle in 1924. He then acted as Director of the Eastern and Northern Circles at Shillong and Mussoorie respectively before being appointed Director of the Frontier Circle from 1928 to 1930, when he assumed charge of map publication in Calcutta and for nearly a year acted as Surveyor-General of India. It was during these five or six years that I came to know him well, and we always remained close friends.

As will be seen, he had great experience of Himalayan and frontier mapping in all its varied aspects, and though never a mountain climber in the Alpine sense, he was a tireless traveller among the hills and an exacting inspector of the work of his sub-ordinates ; there was little he did not know about mountain surveys. It was natural therefore that when the Himalayan Club was formed in 1928 while he was Director of the Frontier Circle we should receive from him his enthusiastic support as a Founder Member as well as that of the Surveyor-General, Sir Edward Tandy.

Before retiring in 1934, Phillimore was stationed in Dehra Dun as Director of the Geodetic Branch of the Survey of India, which had succeeded the Great Trigonometrical Survey. This was the scientific department which in the nineteenth century had been famous under Lambton and Sir George Everest for the whole trigonometrical framework of geographical work in India. To one of Phillimore's wide technical knowledge and enthusiasm, the old historical files, then stored in the Clock Tower at the branch head-quarters, became of absorbing interest and he began to sort and sift the correspondence and detailed history of the early adventurers and surveyors since the days of Clive and Warren Hastings. He also began, as Librarian to this Club, to form the nucleus of our library.

On retirement at the age of fifty-five he and his wife decided to remain in India. It was now that he planned his great work, *The Historical Records of the Survey of India*, which occupied him during the remaining thirty years of his life, broken only during World War II, when he reverted first to military duty in Simla and later to the Survey of India in Delhi. For the first three volumes alone he studied no fewer than seven hundred volumes of manuscript letters and reports and had them indexed and de-positied among the State archives in India. He collected information at the India Office Library, the British Museum, and from records in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. He delved into genealogies and family histories, discovered descendants of the old adventurers and was able to make use of much long-forgotten material. The result was a series of five volumes of outstanding historical interest, factually exact but lightened by a human insight into the virtues and frailties of the actors in this period of Indian history. The last volume, V, which completed the history to 1861, was published in the year of his death. The various chapters dealing with the early penetration of Nepal and the Himalaya will appeal most to his friends in the Himalayan Club, as will his account of the early triangulations of Kashmir and of the high peaks.

Phillimore was happy in his service career and during his retirement in a rapidly changing India among the people with whom he had worked. Spending his time between Dehra Dun and Kashmir he remained a fount of knowledge on Himalayan matters, from which many of our members benefited. He was also an invaluable link between friends in India and Britain, and retained the esteem of many of his old Indian colleagues after 1947. On his sudden death in Gulmarg, the Indian Army spontaneously honoured him with a funeral with full military honours and undertook all arrangements for it. An escort of fifty soldiers carried his coffin to the graveside in Srinagar where the Last Post was sounded.

Kenneth Mason