

Obituary.

THE HON. JOHN SEPTIMUS ROE,
COMMANDER, R.N.

On Thursday last the remains of this gentleman were committed to the grave, followed by His Excellency the Governor, the Executive and Legislative Councils, the public functionaries, and as many of his fellow-colonists as the shortness of the notice of his burial enabled them to attend.

The honor of a public funeral was graciously accorded to an officer who for upwards of forty years had toiled honestly in the post of Surveyor General; and the presence of many of the colonists testified their appreciation of his worth. And it is befitting us as members of the Press to put before our readers a brief record of his services.

Lieutenant Roe, in the year 1829, having distinguished himself as a marine surveyor under Captain P. F. King, was selected to accompany Capt. Stirling to Western Australia as Surveyor General of the colony, where he arrived with his wife in the *Parmelia*, on the 1st of June, 1829. The rest of the Government staff were in the ship; and Mr. Roe's sole assistant was Mr. H. C. Sutherland, who died many years since in the post of Colonial Treasurer.

As may be recollected, land was at that time granted to persons who should introduce property and settlers in the proportion of an acre for every eighteen pence in property, and some other proportion for mankind; the consequence being the alienation in vast blocks of all the land which for many years was known to be available for tillage and pasture. Townsites had to be selected and laid out; areas of land allotted to the claimants; and thus at the very outset a huge difficulty had to be grappled with and overcome. The work was undertaken and done with the assistance of a subsequent trifling addition to the staff; and from that date till his retirement, in 1869, Mr. Roe's career was a career of honest toil, interrupted only by a visit to South Australia in 1855, and to England in 1860. He finally retired from the Colonial Service with a pension of the full pay of his rank, £600, and the commission of a Retired Commander in the Navy; leaving to his successor in office a thoroughly organised department, and the surveyed lands so accurately defined as to secure every man in the possession of his holding. And that this was a vast boon, those who are acquainted with the chaotic state of the Survey Offices of Queensland and New South Wales can tell. His surveys by sea, and his land explorations, settled once and for all the soundings, bearings, and positions of his work. And

settled once and for all the soundings, bearings, and positions of his work. And if delays attended the issuing of the title deeds, it was because his field department was numerically weak; he was responsible for the work done by his men; and among them he trained the Gregorys, who have attained eminence in their profession and that prominence in the world which would have been his had he been less devoted to the mechanical duties of his office, or more eager for fame. His hands were clean; he never used the privileges of his post unduly to his own advantage, or the advancement of his numerous family. Courteous, unimaginary, and always accessible to every settler or intending land buyer, there was no friction in his department, which never was out of gear, and never in conflict with any other department. Its records were so accurate, and the system of transfer so managed, as to make it inensibly the precursor, and we might almost say the model, of the system of land transfer known as "The Torrens system." To him the colonists owe the details of the Land Regulations up to March, 1872; and they are in their main features now in force.

His adventures as an explorer were not numerous. So far as we can learn they were, in 1830, an exploration along the unknown south coast, with Capt. Stirling, then Lieutenant-Governor, in the *Eagle* schooner, with inland explorations; in 1835 an overland journey to King George's Sound for the purpose of selecting the best line of road connecting this part of the colony with the Sound, and fixing the positions of the Rivers Hotham and Williams; in 1847, an exploration of the country north-east of Champion Bay, and on the Rivers Hutt, Bowes, Buller, and Chapman; and finally, when the prospects of the colony were at their Nadir, in 1848, he headed a party from York to explore the country thence to Cape Riche and the Russell Range, and to fix the locality of the so-called coal on the Fitzgerald and Phillips Rivers, and if possible to seek an outlet to the farthest east. On this excursion he was baffled by impenetrable thickets, since turned by John Forrest; and returned to Perth with meagre results beyond ascertaining where the country did not invite exploration, and with physical injuries which prevented other field duties on his part.

But others have profited and gained fame at his expense; for explorers have avoided thickets and arid country, whose positions he defined, and which as much needed to be defined on land as reefs and shallows at sea. His great experience was never withheld from his subordinates, for he had no jealousy; and his instructions to other explorers have contributed in no slight degree to their successes. He was by necessity the precursor of the Gregorys and Forrests, and although he had the energy and skill of Oxley, Mitchell, Sturt,

energy and skill of Oxley, Mitchell, Sturt, and others who have discovered and given to mankind the savannahs and goldfields of Eastern Australia, he trod humbly but fruitlessly in their footsteps, because there were no savannahs or goldfields for him, with his insufficient means, to find out. Still the colonists who knew him well appreciated him at his right worth; they gave him by their Legislature a handsome pension, the most they could give him, with which to enable him to spend his last days in peace. But the Home Government, whom he had served so well, in the outpost duty of science and civilization, gave him nothing but bare praise. Honor and decorations that have fallen to the lot of others were unbestowed. He had not even the meagre honor of "C.M.G." If urgent recommendations of Governors who knew his value could have got them for him, he would have shewn something more on his breast than the Medal for the Burmese War of 1826.

Thus far of his public life amongst us. Of his private life we need only mention how he and his family dispensed a hospitality from the very earliest days of the colony, which made his name truly a household word; but which his infirmity and enforced retirement of his late years compelled him to discontinue.

An obituary notice must be laudatory. For who would revile the dead? In this case there is nothing to revile, nothing to point out to be avoided, or deprecated. He has died full of years, having done his work among his fellow men with earnestness and singleness of purpose, and was, so far as lay in him, a benefactor to mankind. Western Australians will long feel the benefits of his unobtrusive services, though perhaps they will not know the extent to which they are indebted to the first Surveyor General of the colony.