

- - M E M O I R - -

JAMES BISSET, Senr. J.P. - Mem Inst. C.E. - Mem N. Saw. Inst. - Mem S.A.A.S., of Beauligh, Kenilworth, near Cape Town, South Africa, was a descendant of the old Scottish family of Bysset, now Bisset, originally an Anglo-Norman name belonging to a family who came into Scotland about the reign of William the First and obtained large estates in the province which now forms a portion of Inverness Shire, and in 1230 Sir John Bisset of Lovat, the then head of the Bisset family, founded the Priory of Beaulieu, now Beaully in Ross Shire, which gave name to the small rivers which flow past. In 1258 Sir John Bisset died without male heirs of his own body, leaving his Estates to his three daughters the eldest of whom married David Graham thereafter designed of Lovat. The Second daughter became the wife of Sir William Fenton of Beaufort, and the third of Sir Andrew de Bosco. After Sir John Bisset's death, Walter Bisset became the recognised chief of the family, and in 1364 he assumed the name of Bisset of Lessendrum in the Parish and Barony of Dumblate, County Banff - Lessendrum being a portion of the Bisset Highland Estates, partitioned in 1368 between the Fentons and Chisholms, one third being acquired by the Frizels, now Frasers, and the remaining two thirds by the Fentons and Chisholms before mentioned, the former by the peaceful Act of Marrying a Bisset lady, while the Priory of Beaully with its Barony, Town and lands, were acquired at the dissolution of the Monasteries in 1575 by Hugh Lord Fraser of Lovat from Walter Abbot of Kinloss, and last Prior of the Monastery of Beaully, for certain sums of money, and other reasonable causes, and to which family it still belongs.

Mr. James Bisset, the subject of this Memoir, was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1836, his father being the late Mr. W. Bisset, who was well known in those days as prominent politician,

City Councillor, and Master of Mortifications. Mr. Bisset was the last survivor of his family. He had five brothers and three sisters all of whom have passed away. He was married in 1862 to Miss E. M. C. Jarvis, daughter of the late Hon. H. C. Jarvis, M. L. C., of Cape Town, and is survived by his wife, six sons and one daughter. Two of his sons are practising as Barristers at Law - two as Attorneys and Notaries, and two as Government Land Surveyors. His daughter, Mrs. H. R. Beard, being also a resident in the Cape Peninsula.

Mr. Bisset began his Engineering training in 1853 under the late Professor C. B. Shelly, of the London University, and with the now extinct but at that time eminent Engineering firm of Messrs. Fox Henderson & Co. of Birmingham and London, and was for several years engaged by that firm as an Assistant Engineer in charge of works for the Crystal Palace, Sydenham Station, for the London and North Western Railway at Birmingham, and Great Western Railway Paddington Bridge for East Kent Railway at Rochester, Iron Roofs for the Royal Arsenal and Sliss at Woolwich, and Bridges for the Swedish Government, and Swiss and Genoa Railways - and in December, 1858 he became a member of a small staff of Pioneer Railway Engineers who arrived in Cape Town by the Royal Mail Steamer Athens (Capt. Strutt) consisting of Mr. W. G. Brouwer, Chief Engineer, and Messrs. Bisset, Priestly, Roberts, Taylor and Young, Assistant Engineers. These gentlemen, of whom Mr. Bisset was the only survivor, were sent out from England by the late Sir Charles Fox, C.E., to establish and construct a line of Railway from Cape Town to Wellington, a distance of about 55 miles, for a Company called The Cape Railway and Dock Company, and on the 31st day of March, 1859, the first sod of the first Railway was turned at Salt River by His Excellency the late Sir George Grey, at that time Governor of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. The first line of Railway

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was built under contract by the late Messrs. B. & I. Pickering, after the type of the then existing Railways in England with a gauge, or width between the rails, of 4' 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " , and a concession or guarantee from the Cape Government of six per cent on the cost of construction while, simultaneously with this, another short section was built from Cape Town to Wynberg, a distance of about nine miles.

In 1871 the Government of the Colony became desirous of extending the Railway System, but finding the extension of these lines with the monopoly of access to the entrance to Cape Town a serious and difficult obstacle to overcome, ultimately purchased the Company's interest in the undertaking in order to secure direct control over its construction and working. After the purchase was effected the battle of the gauges began, the 3' 6" gauge being finally adopted on a point of economy as the standard of all future lines, the gauge of the Wellington Railway being subsequently reduced in width to meet this requirement. In January, 1861, Mr. Bisset was appointed to inaugurate, design, and construct the first line of Horse Tramway for passenger traffic, not only in the Cape Colony, but shortly before their introduction in England, the line of Tramway ran from Cape Town to Sea Point and was shortly followed by a similar undertaking at Port Elizabeth - a mode of conveyance that after a successful and remunerative service of over 35 years to the public and its shareholders has in turn been replaced by the Electric Tramways now in use.

On completion of the Railway Work from Cape Town to Wellington, Mr. Bisset was engaged in Cape Town for nine years, in business on his own account, as an Engineer and Architect, in the laying out, designing and construction of Roads, Mills, Machinery and Buildings of an important character, for public and private purposes, for several of which he was the successful competitor and prizeman, the

D. R. Church at Graaf Reinet, Town Hall, Congregational and Trinity Churches at Port Elizabeth, and Gill College at Somerset East, being among some of the public buildings designed by him, and was further engaged about this time at the instance of the Directors of the Wynberg Railway Company to inspect, inquire into, and report on the construction cost and working expenses of the undertaking with the view of enabling the Company to negotiate with the Government for its purchase and taking over, and in July, 1871, Mr. Bisset was appointed by His Excellency, Sir H. Barkly, Governor of the Colony, as Resident Engineer of Harbour and Public Works at Port Elizabeth, and in October of the same year was further appointed to inaugurate and direct the laying out, designing and construction of the first 69 miles of Railway in the Eastern Districts, running from Port Elizabeth 3' 6" gauge, and on the departmental system and reclaimed from the foreshore of the Harbour by the construction of a sea wall 4,200 feet long, the ground necessary for the Terminal Station and its approaches. Mr. Bisset also took a leading part on behalf of the Government in the inauguration and supervision of the Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage Railway and in August, 1873, was also engaged by the Government to inaugurate the first line of Railway in the Midland districts, namely from East London to King Williams Town, and in 1874 was entrusted with the important duty of inspecting and fully reporting on the construction and condition of the Uitenhage Railway with the view of enabling the Government to negotiate for its purchase and taking over after completion, and was further engaged in 1879 to inspect and report upon the practicability of working advantageously for Railway purposes the Forests situate in the neighbourhood of the Knysna and Tzitzikama, the result of which was printed and approved of by the Government and Parliament, and at a

Later date was entrusted by the four Suburban Municipalities of the Cape Peninsula with the sole Engineering Control and direction of the important Arbitration proceedings for the purchase and taking over of the Suburban Water Supply, Ways and Works, the success of which was publicly recognised by all the Municipalities concerned. Shortly after this date Mr. Bisset retired from the active pursuit of his profession, subsequently devoting the major portion of his time and attention to Municipal and other matters of local interest, and was approached on more than one occasion to enter Parliament as one of its representatives. He afterwards held a seat for many years as a Member and Chairman of the Hospital, School, and Municipal Water Boards, and was for six years Mayor of the Municipalities of Wynberg and Claremont during which period he was instrumental in placing the Water Supply of the first-named Municipality on a sound financial basis and in obtaining for it a grant of land from the Government which has now been converted into a public Park, and also obtained for it the honour of being the first Municipality in the Cape Colony to establish the Electric light for street lighting and household purposes. Mr. Bisset was also a member of the Government Advisory Board for the suppression of Plague, and received from the Municipal Council of Claremont, in his capacity of Mayor, an address eulogistic of the successful measures adopted by him for the suppression and stamping out of that dread disease throughout the district, and was also instrumental during the War in raising a body of some 300 men in Claremont for Service with the Peninsula Defence Force, in which both he and his six sons took an active part, and for which services Mr. Bisset was gazetted to the Military rank of Major,

and during a subsequent visit he made to England in 1902 was, through the Adjutant General of the Forces, honoured with a Command not only to attend the Coronation Ceremony of King Edward the 7th but also the first Levee held by His Majesty at St. James Palace, London. Shortly after his return from England in 1902, medical advice and failing sight ultimately compelled him (Mr. Bisset) to give up all his public offices and appointments and exchange a long life of strenuous exertion for that of comparative retirement.

BEAULEIGH, KENILWORTH,  
near CAPE TOWN,  
DECEMBER, 1913.