

WILLIAM BURTON'S 1642
REVISED EDITION OF THE
"DESCRIPTION OF LEICESTERSHIRE"

by

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In 1597, at the age of twenty-two, shortly after entering the Inner Temple, William Burton of Lindley, Leicestershire, began an historical and topographical survey of his native country.¹ He considered this project to be an eminently suitable pastime for a young barrister; he was to write many years later ". . . there is no study or learning so fit or necessary for a lawyer as the study of Antiquities".² When ill health cut short his legal career and forced Burton into premature retirement, his youthful hobby became his chief preoccupation. It took the form of one of the earliest county histories, which with great reluctance on the author's part only overcome by the prompting and encouragement of his large circle of friends, finally appeared in print, and indeed in English, on 20 October 1622 under the title of *The Description of Leicestershire containing matters of Antiquity, History, Armoury and Genealogy*.³

Throughout the remainder of his life Burton had grave misgivings about the hasty and premature nature of his 1622 edition. In his manuscript valediction of 1641 he wrote:

" . . . it was not with an intendment that ever it should have come to public view, but for my own private use, which, after it had slept a long time, was on a sudden raised out of the dust, and by the force of an higher power drawn to the press, having scarce an allowance of time for the furbishing and putting on a mantle."⁴

These reservations were no doubt re-enforced by the criticisms of two acquaintances at the College of Arms made in a letter dated a few months before the official date of publication.⁵

It was not surprising, therefore, that so painstaking a scholar and so sensitive a person as William Burton should almost immediately embark upon a revised edition of his book. He began by compiling a new and more detailed history of his own ancestors and their estates at Lindley, which he completed on the 25 August 1623.⁶ By that date he had left his temporary residence at Falde in Staffordshire for his ancestral home at Lindley in West Leicestershire where he was to remain until a few years before his death in 1645.⁷ There, the process of revision continued. By January 1627, Burton was able to inform his friend Sir Robert Cotton of the progress he had made:

" . . . upon the first edition of my book I was challenged by your Lady,

for that I had nothing to say for Thadingworth; *and now being almost ready for the second, having gotten some Roman, Saxon and other antiquities of good note, which will almost make the book as big again.*"⁸

This second edition was to have been a much more ambitious and scholarly undertaking than the first. It was to incorporate much more historical and archæological material, in addition to the revised and enlarged genealogical and topographical sections. This new material had been gathered from a variety of sources, including local collections like that of the Cathedral library at Lichfield and the central records, at this time deposited in the Tower of London.⁹

By the summer of 1638 Burton's self-imposed labours had been completed. He was now 63 years of age and his health was steadily failing.¹⁰ The next stages in the process of publication were set out in a letter to Sir Simons D'Ewes, of Stow-hall, Suffolk, dated 25 July 1638:

. . . . I have been so cruelly handled with the stone and colic that I fear I shall never be able to perform any long journey, and so shall not be in London at all at the setting forth of my book to the press; but have referred the whole of managing of the business to my worthy friend Sir John Lambe, knt. doctor of the law, dean of the arches, and one of the judges of the high commission-court (whose lodging is at the Doctors Commons near Paul's wharf), who will see it forward without delay; so that he is the man that will make choice of the printer, and appoint fit and able correctors. The licensing of the book belongeth to the Earl Marshall (he gave licensing for the first impression), for that it containeth matters of antiquity, genealogy, and armoury, which properly belong to the Earl Marshall; and history is the least part of the book; neither can it be licensed till Michaelmas term, and the book will not be finished (though taken in hand) before Easter term; for that it is so much enlarged, that it will rise to a treble proportion."¹¹

The final form of the revised edition was to be, therefore, three times the size of the 1622 volume. In a further letter to his persistent correspondent dated 22 October, Burton was able to state with both satisfaction and relief,

"My book is at length gone from me; and now I think in the hands of Sir John Lambe, where you may see it, and all the proceedings of it may hear from him."¹²

Unfortunately the whole project was to be overtaken by more momentous events—the outbreak of the Civil War—and had to be abandoned. What happened to Burton's manuscript is difficult to ascertain in the confusion of the next five years. According to John Nichols' researches a century or more later, the revised manuscript was seen by a Richard Gascoigne of Bramham Brigg in Yorkshire¹³ but then, apparently, it disappeared without trace.

Despite this disastrous chain of events, the ageing Burton set to work upon a further revised edition, an even more ambitious work than the last one. His revised plan was completed in 1641. It was found by a Mr. Shaw at Ingestre, Staffordshire, in 1798 and reproduced by Nichols in the Introduction to volume three, part one, of his *History and Antiquities of the County*

of *Leicester*.¹⁴ According to this 1641 scheme, the revised edition was to consist of an introduction very similar to that of 1622 with a few minor alterations and corrections. The 1622 dedication to George Villiers, earl, later Duke of Buckingham was omitted. The duke himself had long since met a violent end and the Villiers were not a popular noble dynasty in 1641. The main body of the work was to be in two parts.

The first beginning with a survey of ecclesiastical government, followed by a collection of ecclesiastical documents relating to Leicestershire and a list of writers who were either born in, or lived in, the county.¹⁵ This was to be followed by a treatise upon the secular government of the shire including a list of sheriffs, the names of the holders of land in the Leicestershire section of Domesday Book and finally a subdivision entitled "Touching the martial state of this county as it is governed now"¹⁶ that is, in Burton's own day. The second part of the projected work was to follow the pattern of the first edition of 1622 but with considerable additions.¹⁷ In his preface to part two,¹⁸ Burton gave his reasons for retaining the same format after considering the matter very carefully and in the light of other similar works.

"I now proceed to the second part, wherein I shall follow the same method I formerly used tho' some have moved me to change it for that of Mr. Camden in his *Britannia* who Imitateing John Leland in his *Cantio Cygnea* beginneth at the head of a River or Streame and see setteth downe those townes adjacent to the same; but because the Rivers and brookes in this county are few and the townes many and that I should be forced thereby to greate land leping. And for that alsoe this Alphabetical Order will fitly serve as an index or Table upon any occasion of sudden serch. I have though it best still to persist in my former course."¹⁹

One can only applaud Burton's practical good sense in this matter. The whole revised edition was to end with a long and detailed valedictory note answering those contemporaries who had criticized his earlier work.²⁰

In the event, the second, revised manuscript that Burton completed in 1642—his last—was to be a far more modest affair than his ambitious 1641 plan would indicate. The process of this final revision seems to have been completed in three stages.

The first consisted of a heavily annotated 1622 printed version with numerous manuscript additions made in Burton's own hand.²¹ This was then copied on to a new folio manuscript with further additions and corrections²² and a final fair copy made, probably by a professional scribe, with further corrections, additions and omissions.²³ In its final form, the 1642 revised edition was to be in fact a condensation of Burton's first manuscript copy. The title page read:

*A Description of Leicestershire containing matters of Antiquity, History, Armoury and Genealogy First Briefly collected and published By William Burton of Lindley Esquire. Now enlarged and amended from Public Records, Manuscripts, Leiger Books and Private Evidence and continued to the Yeare MDCXLII.*²⁴

It consisted of one, not two volumes as the plan of the previous year had intended. The single folio volume was divided into two parts. It began with a new general description of Leicestershire, of a far more historical nature than that of 1622, which mentions the Saxons, Danes and the Normans. This was followed by a list of Leicestershire castles. Seagrave castle included in the 1622 list was omitted and a new one, not recorded in the first edition, Sauvey castle, inserted.²⁵ Then followed a list of religious houses and institutions. The detailed account of the topography of the shire given in the 1641 plan and set out in the first revised folio manuscript, was omitted from the final draft. In its place was inserted an extremely interesting description of the rural pastimes of Leicestershire in Burton's own day, of great value to the social historian.

"Having given this brief account of ye profitts and commodities of ye county I shall mention ye pleasures and diversisements it affords, amongst which I chiefly reckon Hunting and Hawking ye usual recreations of ye country Gentlemen, for all which it is plentifully provided. Its woods, coppices and covers being stocked with Foxes and Pheasants and its Plains and open fields replenished with Hairs and Partridges. And tho' ye nobler Quarries of red and fallow Deer are not now so common or numerous as they have been in former Ages, Charnwood Forest having been long since, and ye chace of Leicester of later years depopulated and destroyed and most of its ancient Parks by ye frugality of their owners converted to other uses, yet those att Ashby, Donington, Gerondon, Bradgade, Bagworth the which are still remaining are amply stored and amply stored with both sorts which are as generously distributed by their noble Proprietors."²⁶

There follows a brief discourse upon the government of the county both "Ecclesiastical and Civill" with copious appended documents including *Matriculus Domini Hugonis de Welles' Episcopi Lincoln de omnibus Ecclesiis in Archidiaconatu Leicestre* (1220), *Rotule Ecclesiarum intra comitatus Leicester facta inter 1339 et 1349* and the ecclesiastical survey of 26 Henry VIII. A list of Leicestershire churches and their patrons from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century ends the section of ecclesiastical documents.²⁷

Then came the section upon civil government, this too represents a considerable modification of the 1641 proposals. There is no list of Leicestershire authors nor the proposed account of the military muster of the shire. It does, however, contain a list of knights and principal persons in the county at the end of the reign of Edward II, a list of sheriffs up to the year 1642 and the knights of the county given in Edward I's Roll of Arms and finally, a list of M.P.'s for the shire from 28 Edward I to 2 Henry V.²⁸

After a space of 2½ folios the second part of the work follows under the heading *The Second Book* which retains the alphabetical pattern of the 1622 first edition, though with considerable additions and corrections. Burton's long valedictory note set out in the 1641 plan was not included in the final version which ends with the village of Worthington. There are various additional documents at the end of folio volume with instructions to incorporate them in the text of the proposed final printed version.

Again fate took a hand. Burton himself was very old and in failing health; the Civil War was raging, making it well nigh impossible for new printing arrangements to be made. The completed manuscript probably remained in his possession at Lindley in anticipation of better times. Unfortunately, they never came for Burton died three years later in 1645.²⁹ His revised edition, and with it his historical reputation, became yet another casualty of the English Civil War.

John Nichols, who in the late eighteenth century made a detailed study of Burton's surviving manuscripts for his monumental *History of Antiquities of the County of Leicester*.³⁰ states that Burton's son Cassibelan, gave several of his father's manuscripts to his old friend and fellow antiquarian, Walter Chetwynd of Ingestre in Staffordshire. These included a copy of Burton's 1622 printed edition with considerable additions and annotations by the author himself. Chetwynd, assisted by his tutor and companion Charles King made further additions. According to Nichols the *Catalogues Manuscriptorum Angliae* (Oxford, 1695), recorded the existence of Burton's annotated copy of the printed 1622 edition amongst the Manuscripts of the Chetwynd Library; presumably at Ingestre.³¹ It was seen by a Mr. Francis Brokesby who described the volume in a letter to Thomas Heame dated 16 May 1711.³² At that time it was in the temporary possession of Charles King.³³ The writer of Nicholson's *English Historical Library* quoted by John Nichols describes a further, this time manuscript, copy of Burton's *Description of Leicestershire*:

"Leicestershire is nobly described by William Burton esq. . . . The work consists chiefly of descents, pedigrees and moot-cases: but the author was afterwards convinced of its defects; and therefore very much enlarged and enriched it with an addition of Roman, Saxon and other Antiquities . . . and the book itself, thus improved, is said to have been lately in the possession of Walter Chetwynd of Ingestre near Stafford esq; who had also other MSS of the said Mr. Burton's composition."³⁴

This, Burton's revised manuscript, was loaned by the now Lord Chetwynd to his friend Sir Thomas Cave, for it was seen in the latter's possession by one of Nichols extensive circle of antiquarian correspondents, a Mr. Ashby in 1763.³⁵ Ashby stated that there were two copies of this manuscript, "exceedingly fair". The final manuscript was in folio and had been transcribed by a professional copist in a seventeenth-century Secretary hand. It had since been bound in vellum by Sir Thomas's daughter, Miss Penelope Cave.

These manuscripts, or some of them at least, must have been returned to the Chetwynd archives at Ingestre, for in 1798 a Mr. Shaw informed the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* that during a search of the then Earl Talbot's manuscript collection at Ingestre he made a number of discoveries:

"In the same boxes was another treasure for Leicestershire, Burton's own printed History, copiously interleaved, and enlarged with various marginal notes etc. for a second edition, by the Author, as appears by his writing in the title page, and a long second Preface dated Lindley, . . . 1641 near 20 years after the first. This intended edition remaining unpublished, fell, with various other MSS of Burton, into

the hands of the above excellent antiquary, Walter Chetwynd who had not only left for my discovery a large volume of the same, with other additions in his own fair writing . . . ”³⁶

This is a clear reference to Burton's own annotated volume of the 1622 first edition, his 1641 plan for a new revision, and it is tempting to conclude from the wording of the last two lines, the final folio manuscript bound in vellum by Miss Cave. Unfortunately, Shaw does not give the date of this tantalizing “large volume”. What is beyond conjecture, is that all the Burton manuscripts were returned to the Chetwynd-Talbot collection at Ingestre. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Chetwynd-Talbot family, already earls in their own right, succeeded to the more ancient title of Earls of Shrewsbury.³⁷ The present earl, in 1962, deposited a number of his family papers in the Stafford Record Office. These included the three Burton manuscripts described in this paper. Burton's own annotated version of his 1622 printed edition, or more accurately, the greater part of it for it ends with the towns and villages beginning with the letter R, catalogued as Stafford Record Office 649/4/1. The first enlarged folio manuscript, 649/4/2 and the final “fair” manuscript 649/4/3 condensed and amended from the first and lovingly bound and illustrated by the, presumably, fair hands of Miss Penelope Cave.

NOTES

1. William Burton was born at Lindley in Leicestershire on 24 August 1575. He was taught latin by his uncle Robert Burton before entering the Grammar School at Nuneaton in 1584. At the age of sixteen he went up to Brasnose College, Oxford, graduating B.A. on 22 June 1594. About this time, he was admitted to the Inner Temple, where in addition to his legal studies, he took an interest in composing latin verse. Burton's interest in Leicestershire began as a serious study in 1597, five years later, in 1602, he published a map of Leicestershire and Warwickshire. Although in 1603 he became Apprentice-at-Law at the Inner Temple, his legal career was affected by ill-health. He suffered particularly from catarrh and what he himself described as *distillationibus rheumaticis*. These complaints forced him into premature retirement, which he spent first of all at the Burton's original family home at Falde in Staffordshire from where he published the 1622 edition of his *Description of Leicestershire*. On his father's death in 1619, Burton inherited the manor house of Lindley and took up residence there some time between October 1622 and August 1623. He appears to have spent the remainder of his life at Lindley; he was there in 1626, 1627, 1638 and 1641. It seems likely that shortly before his death in 1645 he returned to Falde, for he was buried on 6 April in the nearby parish church of Hanbury, Staffs. J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester (1795-1815)* iv., pt.ii, 646 et. passim; iii pt.I., Preface p. xx, William Burton's valediction of 1641.
2. W. Burton, *The Description of Leicester . . .* (1622), preface p. ii
3. *Ibid.*
4. Nichols, op. cit., p. XX
5. *Ibid.*, ii., pt.ii., 842; Ashmole Library, No. 840, p. 275
6. Nichols, p. 842
7. See note 1
8. British Museum (hereafter B.M.), Cotton Julius C. III., p. 168
9. Stafford Record Office 649/4/2
10. B.M., Harl. 374/63
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 374/65
13. Nichols, op. cit., ii., pt.ii., p. 844. This may have been the copy Gascoigne gave to the library of Jesus College, Cambridge
14. Nichols, iii., pt.i., pp. XVI-XXII
15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Stafford Record Office, 649/4/1
22. *Ibid.*, 649/4/2
23. *Ibid.*, 649/4/3. I should like to thank Professor Jack Simmons and Mr. F. B. Stitt, the Staffordshire County Archivist, for drawing my attention to these manuscripts
24. Stafford Record Office 649/4/3
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, unfortunately the folios are not numbered
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. Nichols, op. cit., iv., pt.ii., 647 and note 7; *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. L. Stephen (1886)
30. Nichols, ii., pt.ii., 843
31. *Ibid.*, 845
32. *The Itinerary of John Leland*, ed. Thomas Hearne (Oxford, 1769), vol. vi., 96
33. *Ibid.*
34. Nichols, ii., pt.ii., 844
35. *Ibid.*
36. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. LXVIII., pp. 920-22
37. *The Complete Peerage*, revised by G. H. White, iii., 188-90; xii., 624-5; xi., 727-30
38. I am indebted to Mr. F. B. Stitt for this information