

MATERIALS FOR A HISTORY OF HEREFORDSHIRE.

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If the history of Herefordshire yet remains unwritten it is not from lack of materials. For the last two centuries collectors have been busy amassing stores of information for the coming historian, who, perhaps, is on that very account, reluctant to undertake so vast an enterprise. At any rate something seems to keep him back, and generation after generation passes away without even the completion of that work which Mr. Duncumb began more than seventy years ago. It is customary to depreciate his labours, and to point, as one may very readily do, to the many inaccuracies which disfigure the pages of his history. But none except those who have tried their hands upon the subject know how difficult it is to secure anything like exemption from error in tracing the descent of lands or families, and how prone the mind is, when wearied with a fruitless search, to accept with unquestioning gratitude the first plausible suggestion that is made to it. To be a good historian of a county, a man should possess a variety of qualifications. Vigorous health, studious habits, untiring patience, and a facile pen, should be his; but above all things, he should have a full purse and a vein of stubborn though unobtrusive scepticism. He will find abundant scope for the exercise of this last qualification when he enters upon the field of genealogical research, and if he retires from that field without having given offence by having uprooted or denuded of its topmost branches many a "family tree," he may consider himself a fortunate man.

But the special subject which I have to consider at the present time is not the county historian, who I fear is not immediately forthcoming, but the materials for the history, which, as I have said, exist in unusual abundance. First among these in chronological order must be mentioned the documents in the custody of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford. They have, indeed, been so jealously guarded that we are without any very definite idea as to their character, and as to the period of time to which they belong, but I have reason to believe that many of them relate to the possessions of the Church before the Norman Conquest, and that in the muniment chests will be found numerous charters and deeds of an early date brought from Gloucester at the dissolution of Religious houses. I cannot but express my earnest wish that the custodians of these most interesting and valuable records would see fit to follow the good example set them on every side, and without loss of time have them duly arranged and calendared and then thrown open to the archæologist. With their aid the historian might be enabled to fill up many a gap which now exists in the parochial and ecclesiastical annals of the diocese, and without their

aid it would be simply impossible to treat in an adequate manner the history of the county. As an illustration of the value of these Chapter Records I will briefly mention the contents of Charter No. 585, a copy of which exists in Mr. Robert Phillipps' Collection of MSS. It is of comparatively recent date, viz., the thirteenth year of Edward IV, *i.e.*, 1473-4, and relates to the foundation of a Chantry in Clehonger Church. The founder was Sir John Barre, the last of an ancient Herefordshire family, whose name is perpetuated in the designation of the Great Western Railway terminus, which occupies the site of his mansion in Hereford. The deed of foundation recites not merely the estates with which the Chantry was endowed, but it also enumerates in a most distinct manner all the founder's immediate relatives, specifying in each case the exact degree of kinship. It is obvious that such a deed as this (which I believe may be taken as a fair sample of the contents of the Chapter chests) is of the utmost value both to the local historian and to the genealogist.

Of equal, if not of greater, importance, are the Episcopal Registers, which commence with the episcopate of Bishop Cantelupe in the year 1275, and have been continued with brief intermissions from that date until the present time. It is unnecessary to specify the contents of these Registers, as they are well known, and, through the courtesy and liberality of their custodian, well used. It may be added that in conjunction with them should be consulted the Registers of the Archbishopric of Canterbury (abstracts of which are in the British Museum Library), as during the vacancy of the See of Hereford appointments are made by the Metropolitan, and particulars enrolled in his archives. That portion of the Domesday Survey which relates to Herefordshire has been reproduced in fac-simile, and forms a very interesting record of the county at the date of the Conquest. I would again suggest to the local antiquary that his time would be well employed in identifying the places mentioned in the Survey, some of which either from alterations in spelling, or from the present insignificance of the places themselves, are very difficult to recognise. A map showing the boundaries of the various lordships would be serviceable, and would prove not only how extensive were the possessions of the Church, but also how invaluable must be the records, which relate to so large a section of the county.

Next in order come the Chartularies of Monastic Foundations. Those relating to Herefordshire which are to be found in public libraries are neither numerous nor very ancient. So far as I know they include only the Chartulary of Aconbury Priory (printed in the eighth report of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records); a few relating to foundations in the city of Hereford, several relating to Leominster, one to Wigmore and the Mortimer family, and one of considerable importance to Wormesley. This last deserves to be copied, as it is rich in topographical and genealogical information, and would afford many unknown particulars about the Talbot family and the extensive parish of Dilwyn.

It is scarcely necessary to mention such obvious materials as are afforded by the Records of Knights' Fees, the Plea Rolls, the Close and Patent Rolls, and the Eschaetors' accounts. All these records are of acknowledged value to the historian, and have now been made entirely accessible to the student, who needs only the knowledge

which practice alone can give to decipher their contents and grasp their meaning. I must admit that this knowledge is not readily gained, and that a county historian ought to have a more thorough acquaintance with the legal value of these documents than is possessed by a cursory enquirer. But the genuine antiquary is not baffled by difficulties which require only patience and labour to overcome. The experience of a Surtees, an Ormerod, or a Hunter is tolerably well expressed by the verse of the Roman poet—

Multa tulit fecitque puer, sudavit et alsit,

the last two words having a decided reference to the heated atmosphere of the Museum Library and the chilling draughts of the Record Office.

Next in order we may take the Inquisitiones post mortem, which extend from the reign of the first Edward to that of the first Charles. They tell us—not always with perfect truth—what lands were held by the deceased at the date of his death and upon what tenure; who was the next heir, how related to the deceased, and of what age the said heir then was. It would not be a very gigantic undertaking to collect into a volume all the Inquisitions relating to Herefordshire, and if this volume were provided with a twofold index—one of names of persons and the other of names of places—it would form one of the most valuable books of reference which the county could possess.

The records of Fines (which begin as early as the reign of Richard I) and of Recoveries (which date from the year 1472) are of similar importance. To borrow the words of Mr. Sims, “the value of these records will be readily acknowledged, when it is considered that they prove marriages and the issue of these marriages, at a time when there were no parochial registers, and that even now they can supply the place of lost or defective parish books.”

More popular, but less trustworthy, sources of information as to the descent of family, and in some degree of property also, are the Heralds' Visitations, which in the case of Herefordshire were made upon four occasions, viz., in the years 1569, 1586, 1634, and 1683. The statements contained in them must be accepted with considerable caution. We may, of course, presume that the heads of families who furnished information to the Heralds were themselves acquainted with, at least, the names of their fathers, mothers, and grandparents; and we may, therefore, place a general reliance upon so much of the pedigrees. But with regard to the earlier generations, it would be very unwise to believe all that was written. The Herald, when he made his Visitation, was often received at great houses as an honoured guest. If he fared well, and obtained easy payment of his fees, he would not be disposed to criticise, or regard with suspicion, the statements of his host, who (perhaps with no intention to deceive), repeated the traditions of family antiquity. In some cases, no doubt, the contents of the muniment chest were examined, and the pedigree proved, point by point; but all Heralds were not so careful or conscientious (nor, we might add, so skilful) as Camden, and Glover, and Segar in these particulars. My own experience amounts to this. The pedigrees entered at the Visitations almost invariably rest upon a basis of truth; whether the superstructure is substantial or the reverse, is a question quite as easily settled now as it could have been two or three centuries ago. Our public records have been made so

accessible that we can get at the best authorities with the utmost readiness; by the evidence which they supply the authenticity of a pedigree must in most cases be tried.

We tread upon more solid ground when we come to Wills, Marriage Licences, and Parish Registers. The copied wills in the Diocesan Registry date from the year 1664, and are, of course, in very good condition; but the earlier and uncalendared wills and inventories, extending back, at least, another century, are in a disgraceful state, and are not accessible under any restriction, even to the historical student. What is wanted here is a grant of money, —£100 would probably be sufficient—to defray the expenses of sorting and calendaring these documents. There could then be no reason for refusing access to them, under such restrictions as the circumstances might justify, and we might venture to hope that they would be suffered to remain in their present depository. Every effort should be made to resist that spirit of over centralization which abstracts from the county the records specially belonging to it.

The Marriage Allegations for the last two centuries have been carefully kept in well-indexed volumes. These, through the courtesy of their present custodian, may be always consulted by those whose object is something more than the gratification of idle curiosity.

With regard to the Parish Registers of the county not much need be said. A few of the town parishes, viz., Leominster, Ledbury Bromyard, and St. Peter's, Hereford, can show well-kept books which date from the reign of Elizabeth. At Ross and Kington the earlier volumes have been lost, and in the country parishes (with such notable exceptions as Dilwyn, Bosbury, Much Marcle, Much Dewchurch and Bishop's Frome) we rarely meet with any records which go back more than two centuries. The transcripts in the Episcopal Registry are of very little use inasmuch as they are arranged not according to parishes but according to years, and although nominally dating from 1663, are extremely imperfect and much injured by exposure to damp.

Of MSS. Collections relating to the county, the most important are those of Silas Taylor, Blount, and the late Mr. Robert Biddulph Phillips.

Silas Taylor was an officer in the Parliamentary army, imbued with much the same antiquarian spirit as animated Richard Symonds, who followed the royal standard and made his church notes as he marched. Taylor was more of an antiquary than Symonds, and had also far greater opportunities for obtaining information, as he had access to the Cathedral Library and Archives (many of which he never restored), and to the rentals and other documents which were submitted to him while engaged in sequestering the Royalist estates in the county. His copious materials now form part of the Harleian Collection of MSS. in the British Museum (6726, &c.), and it may be worth mentioning that Taylor was a personal friend and frequent correspondent of Sir Robert Harley, himself no mean antiquary.

Thomas Blount of Orleton is better known as a legal writer than as a county historian, but his claim to the latter title rests upon a solid foundation. He compiled a very valuable history of all the parishes of Herefordshire, partly from the Public Records (with which he was well acquainted) and partly from personal observation. He was on intimate terms with Sir William Dugdale and Anthony a Wood, and

was not inferior to the latter in his habits of patient research. Unfortunately for us only the second volume of his MS. history has survived; the first (and probably the most important) volume was lent to Sir Robert Cornewall, and, if it be still in existence, cannot now be traced. Copies of the surviving volume (which begins with the parish of Laysters) are to be found in the Library of Mr. Clive at Whitfield and also among Mr. Phillipps' Collections at Belmont, and I need scarcely add that I have freely availed myself of its valuable contents in my notes upon the *Castles and Manor Houses of the County*.

Almost contemporary with Blount was Thomas Dingley, who resided for some years at Dilwyn, and preserved in his *History from Marble* many monumental inscriptions and ecclesiastical features which have since been swept away by that zeal for "Church Restoration," which has dealt ruthlessly with many an ancient edifice in Herefordshire.

Lord Coningsby's *History of the Manor of Marden* was compiled by Anstis, the Herald, and contains a good deal of valuable matter interspersed with not a little personal abuse which his lordship supplied. The book has become very rare, and I am not aware that there are any other copies of it in the county except those at Hampton Court, Belmont and Moreton. Far more important and extensive than any of the preceding collections are those made by the late Mr. Robert Biddulph Phillipps, and now deposited at Belmont Monastery, within an easy distance of the city of Hereford. Mr. Phillipps intended to have completed Mr. Duncumb's history, and certainly possessed many qualifications for the task. His position and influence secured for him the co-operation of most of the landowners in the county; he was allowed to inspect their title deeds and obtain information about their families and the descent of their properties which would not have been vouchsafed to a stranger. And his ample means enabled him to purchase from time to time books and MSS. relating to Herefordshire and to expend upon transcripts of wills, pedigrees, and parish registers, an amount of money which few individuals have at their command. In his library will be found the valuable notes made by Richard Walwyn in the last century, the MSS. of Hill, Brome and others, a copy of the Visitation of the County in 1634 and copious extracts from that made in 1683, some of the late Mr. Duncumb's collections, and a voluminous correspondence relating to nearly every part of Herefordshire, from which much information may be derived. While we cannot but regret that Mr. Phillipps should have left his project unachieved, we may be grateful that his collections have fallen into the hands of custodians whose care for them is only surpassed by the courtesy displayed towards those students who desire to consult them.

I must not quit my subject without noticing the additions made to Duncumb's *History*, by Mr. William Henry Cooke, a County Court Judge whose duties leave him scanty leisure for other work; were it otherwise, we might hope that in him we might find the long-looked-for Historian of the county, and that the present generation would see the adequate achievement of what has been so often begun and so soon abandoned. But the slow progress made by Mr. Cooke forbids us to indulge in any such hopes; it is scarcely probable that his pen will move faster in the future than it has done in the past, or that, unless his term of life be unusually prolonged, he will be

able to accomplish more than the completion of the *History of Greytree Hundred*. Possibly his efforts might be stimulated by the knowledge that others were working in the same field as himself, and I trust that one result of the Meeting of the Institute at Hereford may be to supply that stimulus.

These are days when most enterprises are conducted upon joint-stock principles, with limited liability. Cannot those principles be extended to the compilation of a County History? The man who might naturally shrink from undertaking so vast a work as a History of Herefordshire might volunteer to write that of the parish or hundred within which he lives, and now that distances are so much abridged, it is not necessary that the general editor should be resident within the limits of the shire. Surely by extending the area of search the right man for the post might readily be found.