

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY JOURNEY
THROUGH SURREY AND SUSSEX.

BY

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DR. JOHN BURTON, D.D., born 1696, died 1771, the author of this record, was a well-known, and somewhat eccentric, classical scholar. He was a member of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, a Fellow of Eton, and from 1766 to 1771 rector of Worplesdon in Surrey, a living in the gift of Eton College. Here "he sometimes resided," and died in 1771. He has the credit of getting the road between Worplesdon and Guildford improved. He was, as we shall see, a critic of roads. In 1752 he published *Iter Surriense et Sussexiense*, which contains two different accounts of a journey from Oxford, by Henley, Windsor, Hampton, Kingston, Banstead, Oekley, Horsham, to Shermanbury in Sussex; and thence to Lewes, Brighton, Shoreham, Findon, and Chichester. One account is in Greek, the other in Latin. The Greek is much the fuller, and the more topographical in interest. Indeed, the only additional detail supplied by the Latin is that he was accompanied by some one whom he calls "Little John" (Johannulus), and that the old gentleman at Shermanbury, a visit to whom was the object of his journey, was in some sense his *parens*, and that his mother also resided there. His own father had died when he was a boy; this was his step-father, the Rev. John Bear, rector of Shermanbury, 1711 to 1762.

The work is addressed, in the form of a letter, to William Greenaway, Vice-Principal of Hart Hall, Oxford. The style is not, as one would expect, Herodotean, but it is in Attic Greek, extremely good and idiomatic, if

I may presume to express an opinion. Quotations, especially from Pindar, often altered for the occasion, are thrown in. Dr. Burton cannot have expected many people to read the original. It is in the library of the Surrey Archæological Society, but neither are many of our members likely to read his Greek, which, moreover, is printed with contractions to render it less easy. But besides the personal reflections, which are not uninteresting, it throws such light upon the conditions of travel in what was evidently considered a strange country, that I think it not unworthy of translation; though I must apologise for some probable want of success in rendering the Doctor's highly-idiomatic Greek into equally idiomatic English. The whole would be too long for our pages—part of it belongs rather to a neighbouring Society's sphere, part of it is not topographically interesting. I start with him on Surrey soil. He is very brief upon the well-known and civilised route from Oxford to Kingston; still briefer at the end, from Shoreham to Chichester.

The journey was evidently taken not long before 1752, but long enough for ironworks, and an ironmonger's shop, which he saw at Lewes, to have been closed before he published the account. They are mentioned in the text, and their closing is referred to in a note. It is after the birth of Christopher Buckle's children in 1742 and 1745, and before the death of his wife in 1751. From Ewell he seems to have followed what I think is called the Downs road, which runs still through open fields, from near Ewell Station on the Brighton line straight towards Banstead. He turned to the right on the brow of the hill, seeing Banstead Church on his left, and went, I think, out of his way to overlook Epsom Racecourse, from the high ground near Tattenham Corner. The old straight racecourse on Banstead Downs was disused about 1740, according to Salmon's *History and Antiquities of Surrey*, and the "orbicular course" at Epsom, which had existed when Toland wrote thirty years earlier, had quite superseded it. The old Epsom course started in Langley Bottom,

out of sight of the place where the Grand Stand is now, and came round the Warren into the present course on the top of the hill, and went right round from the present winning-post to Langley Bottom again. It was adapted for running four-mile heats. He clearly did see a race meeting. I wonder if he timed his journey on purpose for it?

He went thence to the hospitable mansion of the Buckles. His host was, I feel sure, Christopher Buckle, who was born in 1711. His father, also Christopher, was alive; he died in 1759. The father built Nork House in 1740, and resided there, and gave up Great Burgh to his son. It is here that Dr. Burton was entertained. His host was not an old man, and had young children and a wife. The Doctor rode next day across Walton Heath, and passed the Windmill south of Tadworth. He came to the brow of the hill, but his ecstatic description of the views is not merely as seen from there. He rode westwards along the high ground to Box Hill, for he saw the Box Wood, and the mountains which so astonished him are clearly the broken, western slopes of Box Hill, with Ranmore and Norbury opposite, and Redlands, Broad Moor and Leith Hill beyond. He descended probably where old maps show a track, still existing, to the road north of Burford Bridge. I suspect that he did not ride through Dorking; he does not mention passing through it. Turning off to the right, rather south of Burford Bridge, is a road which Ogilby's map marks as the road to Guildford. It goes through Bradley Farm and straight up the hill to Ranmore. But near Bradley Farm it throws out a branch to the south-westward. This, as the Bradley road, was a public road repaired by the parish, as the Dorking Highway Accounts of the early nineteenth century tell us. It led past the west end of Dorking, as the limits of the town then were, by Vincent's Lane to the Coldharbour road, which he certainly reached. The line is no longer than that of the road going through Dorking, and he no doubt had a local guide who, for some reason, preferred it.

Thence, at all events, he went up the old high road from London to Arundel, up Boar Hill to Coldharbour. It was a shocking, steep ravine, quite impassable for wheels, and so remained till the 19th century, but it had the advantage of not going through the clay, as the apology for a road over the Holmwood did. The latter was made passable for wheels only by an Act of 1755, after which date it superseded the old road over the hills to Horsham. But in the Act of 1755 provision is made for coaches drawn by six or more horses, so that we may presume that the road was not very easy.

The Doctor's course on the top of the hill is a little doubtful. The old high road, such as it was, went below Coldharbour Church, then of course not existing, where its line is marked by a ravine, in which I have seen a cow bogged up to her body, down Highland Hill, to the *east* of Broome Hall, to the Stone Street.

All the roads have been completely altered at various dates, and finally in 1898. But this was a villainous way, and from what the Doctor says about his airy route up in the sky, I suspect that he avoided it, with local advice of course, and went by the road to Abinger, the same that now goes above the school at Coldharbour, right over the top of the hill to the dip just before the summit where the Tower is now, then down to the left through Windy Gap and round the hill to where the road leads down by Leith Hill Place and Cocks Corner to Ockley. The Tower did not exist, but the height over which he passed is not much less than that on which the Tower stands. This route certainly seems to offer more opportunity for those meteorological phenomena which he describes than any lower way. But what were the roads like, when it was advisable to go round about and up to 914 feet above the sea in order to keep upon the sandy soil as long as possible? From Ockley his route through the remaining few miles of Surrey was plain sailing, upon the Roman road, except for its brief digression at Okewood Hill. Through Sussex I do not propose to follow him, except in some short passages where he may speak for himself.

A reflection occurs to one, suggested by late anxieties and by his account of the roads. If, during the 1745 rising, a French force had been thrown upon the coast of Sussex, clearly they could not have marched upon London, with guns and baggage, unless, turning one way or the other, they had seized either the Dover or the Portsmouth roads. There was some consolation for cockneys cut off from London *super mare*.

It was in the same year (1755) that the Turnpike Act, 28 Geo. II, c. 45, made the good road from Epsom, through Dorking, to Horsham, and the Act, 28 Geo. II, c. 37, made the Brighton road *viâ* Sutton, Reigate and Crawley. It was not till 1807, by Act 47 Geo. III, c. 25, that the better Brighton road, *viâ* Croydon, Merstham and Reigate was made as a turnpike road.

ITER SURRIENSE ET SUSSEXIENSE.

Crossing the Thames for the last time, we come to Basilipolis (Kingston on Thames), and thence, as our purpose was, we set out to traverse the hilly parts of Surrey, on our road to Sussex. We came, accordingly, towards the neighbourhood of Banstead, and already the spire of the church was visible to the left, a landmark conspicuous to the sight from a great distance. On our right was a plain, hollowed out as it were, and wonderfully smooth, an ideal galloping ground for horses, wherefore it is the most famous place for horse races.

No doubt you have heard of the racecourse at Epsom? It happened on this very day that, "In listed space, of all that England horse-loving contains," the noblest and the greatest throng were gathered there.

Justly would you have marvelled at seeing such a crowd. All the people, men and women, old men and children, from the villages of the country round about, are hastening thither as to a fair. Yea more, from London flows a wave of countless and mingled multitudes. There throng together all that is most fashionable and noble—ploughmen and mechanics, the wealthy and

the moneyless, as well as the disreputable of both sexes. There was a wonderful equality among the crowd; yet was I struck by the contrast of the more well-bred show and assumption of the gentry with the turbulent uproar of the mob.

Oh! for a poet of the school of Pindar to celebrate in worthy strain these Olympic or Isthmian games of ours! He might, in melodious verse, immortalize the strength of the untiring steeds, and the ageless glory of the victorious horsemen. To me, indeed, as you may imagine, the whole thing seemed wonderful, as I overlooked it from a brow. For straightway with the starting of a race the whole plain became alive. There was a mighty rush, now this way now that, of men pushing with all their force. It seemed like an army in confusion, and thousands fighting in disorder. Horse, foot and chariots, were now turned as if in flight, and then again as if pursuing.

Lower down, on the edge of the plain, we saw Epsom, a well-built and populous village, formerly highly-celebrated for its medicinal springs, which are said to be both astringent and purgative. Perhaps they are both; at any rate, the leading physicians here prescribe them as both. But now this medical fame has waned, and those who sojourn here are not invalid water-drinkers, but valiant wine-bibbers and gamblers, followers of all sorts of sport and pleasure.¹

But it was now time to turn up to the left, where we entered a well-cultivated and wooded country, thickly planted with oaks, ashes and beeches; the abundance and order of the plantations clearly shewing the hand of wealth. There on the top of the hill we turned about to enjoy the view over a boundless expanse of country stretched out east, and west, and north. We saw

[¹ The Medicinal Well at Epsom was closed 1706 to 1727 by a Dr. Levingston, who obtained a lease of it, and who opened a harmless well and Assembly Rooms of his own nearer the town. Though the old well was reopened, Epsom never regained its medicinal fame. It continued as described by Dr. Burton; but Epsom salts could be made elsewhere.—Ed.]

numerous villages scattered upon the plain, and all along towards the Thames, upwards and downwards, very many palaces of private gentlemen, and towns touching towns, up to the vast metropolis herself.

This day were we bound to thank Zeus Xenios (the God of Hospitality) for bringing us to the door of a man most worthy and most hospitable, the most highly esteemed in those parts. He received us in the most kindly manner. He was a gentleman of noble and liberal character, one above the common level, of varied pursuits and interests. He understood agriculture, cattle breeding and horse rearing; but at the same time could hold his own in any society in which he found himself. He lived in frugal elegance, and was versed in all the accomplishments of a gentleman, so that one might fitly apply to him the words of Pindar: "May a kindly God inspire my further prayers, for greatly would I praise him, as delighting in the nurture of coursers and in the cherishing of guests, and with honest heart promoting the peace of his neighbourhood."

How can I refrain from praising such a house-master as this? I noted his goodness and courtesy, the good order of his servants, the praiseworthy respect of his children for their parents, as paid to those whom they ought to obey, and the reciprocated affection which treated the children as friends and companions. I was delighted at the sight, and exclaimed, happy father with such children, and happy children, indeed, with such a father.

The good doctor here digresses, at rather tiresome length, upon the ingenuity and care with which Mr. Buckle, of Burgh, provided against the want of water upon his dry uplands. How he collected the rainfall and irrigated his fields. It is needless to say that he quotes Pindar again upon it, the opportunity is obvious, ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, water is the best. These men are, he says, "most Pindaric." He concludes with the prayer, "Oh! Zeus, who presideth over friendship, the

“home, and hospitality, protect, I pray thee, for ever,
“the home of the Boukelidai.”

We will, therefore, skip some six pages and follow Dr. Burton upon his journey.

The next day we departed, as we intended, and continued our ride southward, turning round to look once again upon this hospitable abode. We left the enclosed country and came upon high and open ground, bare and treeless, all an uncultivated waste. “No fruitful, cattle-feeding pastures, but one dreary plain of untilled soil “we traverse in disgust.”

A wilderness yields always an unpleasing and a sorry sight; for as the first of philosophers (Aristotle) has remarked (in the Rhetoric), “What is vague and “indeterminate gives no pleasure, for all men wish to “see some end to a prospect.” Frequently have we recognized the truth of this reflection, but never more so than on this present journey. In riding two or three miles we saw nothing but this same prospect, all uninteresting and dreary. There was nothing worth seeing or recounting. Yet an object there was, that monstrous giant whirled by the wind. He was not the hundred-handed Briareus, but he who turns his four arms of more than human compass, a worthy object for the attack of La Mancha’s knight—Don Quixote. We advanced as quickly as we could over this unpleasing country, anxious to exchange it for a better, beguiling ourselves with such fancies to allay the dulness of the way, till of a sudden we found ourselves upon the last brow of the hills. Then, what a prospect, how extensive, and how varied! What wonders and delightful vision met our eyes! There were hills reaching to the sky, with awful and terrific ravines between them.¹

[¹ Compare the raptures of another 18th-century traveller, who, from Leith Hill, saw “the roaring waves of the Atlantic through a chasm in the mountains.” In other words, caught the glint of sunshine on the Channel over Shoreham Gap.—Ed.]

Here were the shaggy brows of towering mountains, here their bare and precipitous sides or slopes clothed in trees. The sheep seemed to hang upon the steeps, as if treading the air. Nor were the wonders less of the plains beneath, which seemed like chasms scooped out of old by an Almighty Hand. How could I fail to be filled with awe, gazing on such wonders; how could not my mind be exalted when I felt myself the lord of such a sight? The sea was some twenty-five miles distant, but hidden by the seaside hills of Sussex, as by a wall of partition.

The intermediate country is a plain, all open to the view from this height, and most pleasing. The very hedges and fences of the fields made an agreeable impression of good order, and the various colours of the vegetation gave a picturesque diversity to the scene and added charms to the prospect.

There are two ways of descending from this point. Of the two roads one goes on the left to Reigate, and one on the right to Dorking. Both lead down into the Weald of Surrey (*εις την Κοιλο-Σουρρίαν*), as it is called, and so into Sussex. The same is a miry country, and a rich soil, feeding many oxen, not hilly nor rough, as we could see, but not easy to pass on horse-back nor even on foot. So bad indeed is it as to have become proverbial, so that what is most impassable for horses, and quite impossible for wheels, is said to be like a Sussex road. Nor is the adjacent part of Surrey in one whit different from it in kind. The surface is fairly flat, and free from stones, but impervious to moisture, and lets none pass through. Yet, wet though it be, we saw neither streams nor rivers. Still, a river there is, not far off either, but eluding the eyes and hard to trace, called the Mole. Like that animal it sometimes works under ground, then reappears, and falls at last into the Thames almost over against Hampton.

On the western slope of this mountain is an object of curiosity, with which, as you like pretty things, you would be pleased. It is a considerable space of ground

covered thickly with box trees, unusually fine and tall. They do not grow confusedly nor scattered about as in a natural wood, but are set in ranks in an orderly fashion and disposed as in a park.¹ From each side are paths and entries provided for the gratification of people of taste. Nor were our eyes only pleased, but our nostrils too. For box trees emit both an agreeable and a disagreeable smell at once; and everywhere was diffused a sort of ill-smelling fragrance.

In short, all this region appeared to us most remarkable. All around was mountainous, wild, and awful; places fit for the dwelling not of husbandmen and of herdsmen, for it is unreasonable that hard-working men should perish with hunger in such surroundings, but fitter for those wonder-working and air-nourished poets who weave a thousand legends about Helicon and Parnassus.

Hard by the Mole again appears, winding through the valley. This we crossed, and bending to the south-westward, came to a mountain called Leithe [Leith Hill], the highest in all that country, higher indeed, as it appeared, than the clouds. Perhaps you will think that I am romancing; but, my dear Sir, with my own eyes saw I this great wonder. For as I held on my way, surmounting these heights, in the words of Homer, I was "Reaching to heaven with my head, yet upon earth going." Already meseemed to be passing through the sky, and treading the air, looking with disdain upon the whole earth stretched afar, with nothing of all it had to show hidden from my gaze.

But the wide and varied landscape which I was viewing was all at once hidden from the sight. For the south-west wind, arising from Bramber, drove together the shower-bringing daughters of the darkened air, and cast a thick mist over all, covering the country towards Dorking with a great storm of rain. Yet I, traversing

[¹ There is little doubt that the box is indigenous. It is at least as old as the 13th century here, and there is no reason why it should not be native, like the Bearne Wood—that is, the Box Wood—which gave its name to Berkshire.—ED.]

the highest ground, suffered nothing, nor was I in the least wetted, but saw the clouds some ten yards below me carried by the wind against the projecting shoulders of the hill, dissolving into dewy showers, and scattered in a copious downfall upon all the country round about. I meanwhile in mid-air, as from a watch tower, myself untroubled, saw all below clouded over, dark and stormy. Above the sky was clear, and the sun at his meridian shone brightly down upon us from a cloudless sky.

What of this, you may say. But listen to what an unexpected phenomenon appeared; you would have been delighted to see it. For as I stood upon the height, all down below upon the left, lying at my feet as it were, you must picture as covered by this veil of cloud, dark and drifting. On this tossed surface shone the sunlight commingled with the moisture, making a wonderful sight. For the dropping clouds receiving the rays so thrown upon them shone with prismatic colours, so that the whole cloudy field was bright with the hues of the rainbow. In fact I saw innumerable rainbows, stretched like spiders' webs across and across, as by a cunning hand. They were not lofty, over-arching bows, but to one from our point of vantage seemed to be stretched upon the plain of mist below, wavering from side to side and following me as I proceeded.

I, a poor ignoramus, marvelled greatly at this unexpected and wonderful sight. You, with your curious knowledge of the secrets of Nature, may be able to explain it to me. For my part I was content to return thanks to the sun and to the mountain nymphs for escaping a wetting as I traversed my lofty road. As I descended towards the south my good luck continued. The clouds rolled away, like the curtain from before the stage, and all was again serene. Congratulating myself upon my good fortune I proceeded at leisure, wondering at the streams which rushed down from the hills and accompanied us on either side in our descent.

We came next to a village in the plain, where the chief man of the place, who was by habit and profession

an entertainer of strangers,¹ after looking at us seriously and feeling our coats, expressed his wonder at our being dry. How, Sir, he said, have you managed to come here unsoaked through such a downpour? My good man, I replied, I am come neither over the plain, nor yet from the clouds, but, as I think, by a heavenly route, escaping the bolts of Zeus Ombrios (the God of Storms), let down like the god who descends in a theatre, and quite ready for dinner.

This village is called Lithostrotos.² Clearly it is so named from being excellently paved, a rare and valuable feature in a stoneless country. This road was, in fact, a public military way, made by the Romans some 1,500 years ago. It went from Arundel, and the stations on the coast, to the capital of the Trinobantes [London]. A great deal of it has disappeared long ago, owing, as it seems, to the rustics, who annexed these public works from greed of acquisition, and broke it up to build their walls. This part is left, about four miles long. Time has not ruined it, but it remains firm and hard, a lasting monument of public spirit. It is a reproach to the rest of the country, for it stands as a single example of a road fit for riding and easy to traverse. On consideration it is easily recognised to be no work of the natives, for their united energies were never equal to such a performance, but a most valuable achievement of the all-ruling race.

You will ask, whence this hardness, and how was this great mass of stone found in a stoneless country? You will be surprised to hear that the hills furnishing the stone are far off to the south, and that the seashore furnished this great mass of materials. The proof lies in the stones, the sand, and more in the various seaweeds and shells, which are to be found even now in the line of its remains. According to the local story,

[¹ No doubt the landlord of the "Red Lion" at Ockley.—Ed.]

[² Stone Street. Ockley was the name of the church and manor. What is now called Ockley, the village on the Green, used to be called Stone Street.—Ed.]

the stones were conveyed from the coast by the hands of thousands of soldiers, who industriously passed them on, and so completed the difficult work.¹ When I consider the Romans I cannot but praise their great aims and magnificent conceptions, in many respects, and not least in their care for public works, especially when I am following their pavement in these days of ours. For immediately upon leaving this I fell into the foulest ways, in a most decidedly savage and miry country. A stranger like myself could not tell whether it was meant for the home of men or of beasts; and as for the roads, they were the most detestable, Sussex roads in short. No one would think them to be thoroughfares, or high roads, but rather occupation roads or cattle tracks, everywhere trodden by the feet of cattle. We on our horses had to go backwards and forwards like cattle, constantly advancing and returning, following the windings of the ways. Nor now, though it was summer, had the roads lost the characteristics of winter weather. The wet still lay upon their clay surface, or sometimes bursting suddenly from below clogged us on our journey. By this slippery and uneven going our horses could hardly keep their legs, but slid and floundered along, making slow progress in imminent danger of falling.

So rode we, some ten miles, with no dust certainly, but with plenty of water, till we saw appearing not far off on the right a lofty spire, shingled, of timber-work in imitation of stone. This which we saw was Horsham, the capital of all those who dwell in the woods of the Anderidae, an ancient and populous place. There is built the common prison, and the court house; and thither come all the folk once a year to the assizes, and also weekly to the market. There London dealers buy fowls innumerable. This did not appeal to us so much, though we found the chickens very acceptable

[¹ This popular tradition is not true. The road goes over river gravel containing flints in places, and from these flints, and from flints from the chalk, it is largely made. See Topley, *Geology of the Weald*, p. 381.—ED.]

to us as travellers; but here in the midst of the clay there was actually a sandy stretch of country good to ride over for some four miles. There is also here a treasure of wealth rare in this country, a stone quarry, whence they dig flat stones which they use instead of tiles for roofing their houses.

Dr. Burton rode from Horsham through part of St. Leonard's Forest, his highly-prized sandy stretch of land near Horsham, to Shermanbury, where his step-father lived. He was rector.¹ Thence he went to Lewes, and back along the Downs to Brighton, Shoreham and Chichester. The details of his Sussex journey belong rather to the Transactions of the Archæological Society of that county, nor is he always minutely topographical in Sussex. He has some severe things to say about the intelligence of the inhabitants, and he continues to execrate the roads.

A few passages may be quoted: "The women are not ill-looking nor badly dressed—but why are the oxen, and the pigs, and the women, and the other animals among the Sussex folk, so very long legged? Is it not from the difficulty of drawing their feet out of this clay soil, so that by dint of this continual drawing their muscles are stretched and their bones elongated?" He maliciously uses the Greek idiom, which enables him to speak of "the women and the other animals," as Xenophon, in an historic passage, spoke of "the sheep and the other camels."

Brighton he found being washed away by the sea: "The aspect of the village towards the seaside was very pitiable. For on every hand we saw deserted houses, and the traces of ruined walls . . . for the waves, dashing violently upon the shore, undermine and destroy the foundations. . . . To counteract

¹ Mr. Nicholson, Secretary of the Sussex Archæological Society, has kindly told me that the Rev. John Bear married Mrs. Burton, the Doctor's mother.

“ this danger they have contrived a device whereby
 “ strong wooden barricades are erected, strengthened
 “ by posts, reaching down from the beach towards the
 “ sea, some three hundred yards long, and about a
 “ furlong apart or rather more.” It is the earliest
 description which I know of groynes. This was written
 about ten years before Brighton began to become known
 as a sea-bathing resort. Here they lodged in a bad
 inn, and were kept awake by the noise of the sailors,
 and still more by the fish-wives. “ Frequent about the
 “ house was muddy-footed Thetis daughter of the old
 “ man of the sea”—an intentional variation from the
 Homeric “ silver-footed Thetis.”

Of Shoreham he writes: “ Riding from Brighton some
 “ six miles we came to Shoreham, where the river Shore
 “ falls into the sea. The place is not attractive to look
 “ at, but it is a port, with shipping, and a Custom
 “ House and revenue officers. It is moreover a Borough,
 “ electing two Members to the House of Commons.
 “ This is the chief source of pride to its inhabitants,
 “ and more than this, men do say that every seven
 “ years they grow rich by the disposal of these votes.”

He found the river difficult and even dangerous to
 cross, and went up to Bramber, the nearest bridge, and
 so to Findon, and thence to Chichester, which he does
 not describe. To us it appears an omission that he takes
 no notice of New Shoreham Church. But he never
 mentions any building for its architecture, and church
 towers are to him only landmarks. Probably, if he had
 any taste at all, it was similar to that of the German
 baron who half a century later said that the English
 landscape was very beautiful, only unfortunately every
 village was disfigured by a barbarous Gothic church.
 His name for the river is noticeable, the Shore. The
 Soar is a Leicestershire river, and Shore may well be
 the real name of the Shoreham river. Doubts are, I
 believe, thrown on the antiquity of the name Adur by
 which it is now known.