

A Description of the Epsom Well, 1662

transcribed by H L LEHMANN

Willem Schellinks, the artist who drew the only known picture of the old Epsom Well,¹ wrote a journal of his travels which exists in two manuscript copies, one in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (MS D'Orville 558), from which the following transcript of the entry relating to Epsom is taken, the other in the Royal Library, Copenhagen (Ny Kgl 5.370), which is, as far as the Epsom entry is concerned, practically identical with the Oxford copy. As to the atlas in which the drawing appears, a note accompanying the reproduction of the drawing in *Walpole Society* 35 (1959), item 27, pl 21, gives some details : it was commissioned by Laurence van der Hem, an Amsterdam lawyer (b 1621), based on Blaeu's Atlas. Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach describes it in 1711, when it was in the possession of van der Hem's daughter Agatha.² After her death it was acquired by Prince Eugene of Savoy at auction for 22,000 gulden in 1730, and came at his death with his library to Princess Victoria of Sachsen-Hildburghause, and sold by her to the Hofbibliothek (now Landesbibliothek) at Vienna in 1737.

Den 5 Junij smorgens ten 9 uuren soo wandede wij met mynheer Pelt van Kingston naer Epzom sijnde 5 mijlen quamen daer smiddaghs gingen logeeren tot een robin burd. waren daer wel getracteert. Epzom is een seer vermaerde en besochte plaets seer playsant en dat om reeden vant water niet wijt van daer gelegen in een valleij, welck tot gesontheit veel gedroncken wordt hebbende een purgerende cracht, wordende in steene kruijcken rontsomm doort landt versonden, wesende een wel, en is met een muir ront als een put opgetrocken, en is de gront met steen gepleijt. Heeft inde midden een openingh voor de springh ader uit de grondt, was het wel water daer van gerekent 10 spannen hoog en 8 spannen van de steene grondt. Dese put staet achter in een kleijn huijsken waerin enige vertrecken sijn. En comen veel lieden aldaer drincken ooch om te schuijlen voor de son. Voor dese wel wordt jaerlijcks 12 pondt sterlings voor betaelt, t'welck ainde armen uijtgedeelt wordt, en geven deggeene die daer comen om t' water te drincken soo veel aende water schepper alst haer gelieft. Heeft nu anno 1662 een old man en vrouw het in huer. Het gebruijck vant water drincke is smorgens vroegh en soo voortst tot 8, 9, 10 uure toe, nuchtere wordt het gedroncke uijt steene potties ontrent een pint houdende, sommige

On the 5th of June³ at 9 o'cl in the morning we walked with Mynher Pelt from Kingston to Epsom, being 5 miles, came there at midday, went to stay at the Robin Bird, were there well regaled. Epsom is a very famous and much visited place, very pleasant, and that because of the water which lies not far from there in a valley, which is much drunk for health reasons, having purgative powers, being sent in stoneware jars throughout the land, being a spring, and is with a wall around enclosing a raised well, and the ground paved with bricks. It has in the middle an opening in the ground for the water flow, which well water was reckoned from there 10 spans high and 8 spans from the brick floor. This well stands at the rear of a small house in which there are some rooms, and many people come there to drink, also to shelter from the sun. For this well are paid yearly twelve pound sterling, the which is distributed to the poor,⁴ and those who come there to drink the water give to the one who draws it as much as he wishes. Now in 1662 an old man and woman have it on hire. The practice of the drinking of the water is early in the morning and from then until 8, 9, 10 o'clock. It is drunk on an empty stomach from stoneware mugs holding about one pint. Some drink ten, twelve, even fifteen or sixteen pints in one journey, but everyone as much as he can

drincken 10, 12 ja 15 a 16 pinten op een reijs, doch ijder soo veel als hij laaden can. En moet men dan daer op wandele, werckt extraordinary exelent met scheijde drollige uijtcome – *probatum est*. Gentlemen & Ladijs op duijts edelmans en Juffrows hebben ijder haer bysonder rendezvous plaetse int wilt op alle gewesten haer sintenells nedersettende. Het is gebeurt dat de wel op een morgen 3 mael leedigh is gedroncken in heete en drooge soomers door dien het water dan geen voedael van bouen heeft naer uijt de benedenste deelen de grondt opwerckt en meerder kracht heft. En de lieden dit waer nemen comen dan met suecks menighte, dat het dorp t'welck redelyck is en wel 300 bedden spreijde can, noch te kleijn is, ende de lieden dar rontsomme genotsaectt sijn logement te soocke. Leggende sommige door doctors ordre daer ettelijcke weecken malcanderen int hert van de soomer dagelijcke van dit water drinkende. En veel lieden nemen naer het drinken vant water wat warm vlees zap of te ale. Hebbe hun neuens gevoeght mijn tekeningh vande voorschrene plaets.

Nota. So als wij s'avonts wel gegeten hadden met onse reijs broeder Sr. Jan Pelt soo gingen wij euen bouen sijn hoeft op een camer slap beijnonde hij beneden. En schoon wij in een seer goet huijs waren als daer door onse Landlord & Ladij van Kingstone met een brieft gerecommandeert sijnde, soo nochtans was onse Jan soo bang in sijn poort dat hij deur en vensters toe bolwerckten. Nu ontrent middernacht sijnde begint hij allarm te roepen, oock onraat, onraat als oft hij smoort worde, stootende van onderen tegens de solder en riep ons op, waer op wij verschoten en uit het bedt spronge en ginge naer beneden, doende hij een deur open en quam tegen ons op, albeuende en geheel onstelt vertelde ons hoe dat hij gehoert hadde dat jemant de camer hadde willen open breecke, en schoon hij war-da – war-da groepen hadde, niemant sprack. Door het gerucht wierdt de man ende vrou wacker, riepen mede wat daer te doen was, en ick haer seggende dat de gentelmans gemeent hadden dat daer dieuen in huijs hadde willen breecken, zoo begonnen te lachen, zijde dat een van haer verkens was uijt het

take. And one must then go for a walk, works extraordinarily excellent, with various funny results, *probatum est*. Gentlemen and ladies, also German noblemen and gentlewomen have here separate meeting-places, putting down sentinels in the shrub in every direction. It has happened that the well is drunk empty three times in a morning; in hot and dry summers when the water does not get any feed from above, but has to work up from the lower parts of the earth, and has more strength. And the people who observe this come then in such crowds that the village which is fairly large and can spread at least 300 beds, is still too small and the people are forced to look for lodgings in the neighbourhood. Some stay there on doctor's orders for several weeks continuously into the middle of the summer, drinking daily from this water, and many people take after the drinking some hot meat broth or ale. Have hereby added my drawing of the described place.

Nota. So when we had well eaten in the evening with our travelling companion Mynheer Jan Pelt we went to sleep in a room above his, he staying below. And although we were in a very good house, having been recommended by our landlord and lady from Kingston by a letter, our Jan was so afraid in his room that he barricaded his door and windows. Now around midnight he begins to call alarm, also trouble, trouble, as if he was being strangled, knocking from below against the ceiling and called to us, whereupon we shot up and sprang out of bed and went below, he opened a door and came up towards us, all trembling and entirely upset, told us how he had heard that somebody had wanted to break the room open, and although he had called 'who is there?' nobody had answered. By the noise the man and woman awoke, called out 'what was happening?' and I said to them that the gentleman had thought that thieves had wanted to break into the house, they began to laugh and said that one of their pigs had broken out of the sty and had run through the kitchen along the door of the room, and that the maid had chased it back into its sty. But he, being full of fright, did not want to stay anymore below, but crept with us in bed. The next day

schot gebroocken en was door de keucken heen langhs de deur van de camer gelopen, en hadde de meijt t' seluige wederom inde koijs geiaeght, doch hij vol schrick sijnde, wilde niet benende bliuen maer kroop by ons int bedt. En daeghs daer ain mosten wij perfors om dit perijckel te ontgaen wederom naer Kingstone toe. Den 6 Junij smorgens gingen naer de waterwell, droncken elch 3 of 4 pinten water, hadde soo veel daeghs te vooren mede gedroncke, ginge wij voorts rontsomme wandele. En ten 11 ure gingen wederom naer Kingston daer te 2 uren quame.

we had, to avoid this peril, perforce to return to Kingston.

The 6 June in the morning we went to the water well, drank each three or four pints of the water, had the day before drunk as much, we went to walk around. And at 11 o'clock we went back to Kingston, where we arrived at 2 o'clock.

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NOTES

- 1 F L Clark, *SyAC* 57 (1960), 29 and pls 2 and 3
- 2 Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach's *Merkwuerdige Reisen . . .* edited by J G Schelhorn (Ulm and Memmingen 1753-54), 3, 602
- 3 New Style, as shown elsewhere in the manuscript; the corresponding Old Style date is Monday 26th May.
- 4 In her will of 22nd January 1691, Elizabeth Evelyn, the lady of the manor, bequeathed a rent charge to produce £10 per annum on freehold land, for clothing six poor widows or women inhabitants of Epsom, forever (Epsom Charities, as returned to Parliament 1786, quoted by O Manning & W Bray, *The history and antiquities of the county of Surrey*, 1804-14, 2, 625)