A NINETEENTH CENTURY CHESHIRE HISTORIAN: JOHN PARSONS EARWAKER, 1847-1895

by B. E. Harris, M.A., Ph.D.

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The first volume of J. P. Earwaker's East Cheshire Past and Present was published in 1877. Earwaker was one of Cheshire's foremost historians and antiquarian collectors. The Chester Archaeological Society has particular reason to honour him. From 1887 until 1892 he was Honorary Editorial Secretary to the Society, and he remained a member of the Council until his death. His printed books, notes, transcripts and original manuscripts relating to Cheshire were purchased after his death by the first Duke of Westminster, who presented the collection to the Society. Since the Society's Library and manuscript collections have been placed in the custody of the Chester City Record Office, their value to the local historian has increasingly been appreciated, and this is especially true of that part of the collections which belonged to Earwaker.1

Earwaker's Career

Earwaker's personal papers are not known to have survived. Published accounts of his career may be supplemented by other sources to make it possible to describe the more important aspects of his life and work, though many questions remain unanswered.2

His father John Earwaker was born c. 1820 at West Meon in Hampshire. As a young man he moved to Manchester. He was a friend and business associate of Richard Cobden, M.P. (1804-65). John and his wife Louisa, who came from Petersfield in Hampshire, prospered. In 1848 he was described as a warehouseman,

¹To celebrate the centenary the Chester Archaeological Society held a reception on 4 November 1977 at Chester Town Hall. An exhibition of Earwaker Manuscripts was produced by the Chester City Record Office. This paper is an extended version of a lecture given then. The catalogue of the exhibition was the work of Miss A. M. Kennett, Chester City Archivist, and myself. Miss Kennett is jointly responsible for the description of the Earwaker Collections in this paper, and I am most grateful for her help with its other sections.

²The following paragraphs are based (1) on obituaries of J. P. Earwaker which appeared in J.C.A.S., new series, vol. 5, 1895, pp. 317-21; Manchester Faces and Places, vol. 6, 1895, pp. 152-4; Manchester Guardian, 1 Feb. 1895; Rhyl Record and Advertiser, 1 Feb. 1895; Abergele Visitor and Colwyn Bay Gazette, 9 Feb. 1895; and Dictionary of National Biography, 1st supplement, vol. 2, pp. 172-3; (2) on Slater's Directory of Manchester, 1848 and 1850; (3) on the census returns for Chorley in 1851, 1861 and 1871, available on microfilm in the Cheshire Record Office; and (4) on information kindly supplied by Earwaker's grandson, Mr. G. A. M. Hollis. Other references are specified. For a portrait of Earwaker see the Manchester Faces and Places obituary and T.L.C.A.S., vol. 13, 1895, facing p. 143.

but in 1851 as the manager of a warehouse and a calico printer. The census returns of 1861 and 1871 describe him as 'merchant' and 'cotton merchant'. Before 1851 the Earwakers were able to move from Campanile Cottage, Cheetham Hill, to the expanding residential area of Alderley Edge. Twenty years later their neighbours included a Member of Parliament, three solicitors, and an East India merchant.

From the census returns of 1851, 1861 and 1871 it is evident that the Earwakers had at least twelve children between 1847 and c. 1864. The eldest was John Parsons Earwaker, born at Manchester on 22 April 1847. He was sent to a private school at Alderley Edge, and afterwards spent a year and a half at a school in Germany. In the session 1862-63 he became a student at Owens' College, Manchester, where he obtained various prizes and certificates, especially in the sciences. He took the London University matriculation, but in 1867 he was admitted as a pensioner at Pembroke College, Cambridge.³ Shortly afterwards he gained a scholarship at Merton College, Oxford, where he obtained a first class B.A. degree in Natural Science in 1872. He took his M.A. four years later. His early ambition to become a barrister is said to have been frustrated by his father. In 1874, after undertaking some coaching work at Oxford, he returned to Alderley Edge.

At Oxford Earwaker became interested in archaeology. By December 1871 he was Honorary Secretary of the Oxford Archaeological Society, and a year later he read a paper to the Royal Archaeological Institution.⁴ In 1873 he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and temporarily appointed Deputy Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.⁵

Between 1870 and his death in 1895 Earwaker produced much published work. He was particularly adept at material of the 'notes and queries' type favoured by nineteenth century antiquarians. He contributed fifty seven items to *Notes and Queries*. Between 1878 and 1885 he sent many items to the *Cheshire Sheaf*, and in 1891 he became its Editor. From 1875 until 1879 he edited *Local Gleanings relating to Lancashire and Cheshire* which appeared weekly in the *Manchester Courier*. *Local Gleanings* became a monthly magazine in July 1879, but 'owing to the editor's engagements and his subsequent removal from Manchester' it was discontinued after twelve issues.⁶

Longer papers by Earwaker were published in the transactions of various local historical societies. In 1887 he was elected Honorary Editorial Secretary of the Chester Archaeological Society and during the next five years he edited four volumes of its *Journal*. They included his own papers on the muniments at High

vol. 2, p. 374.

*Notes and Queries, 4th series, vol. 8, 1871, pp. 545-6, 560-1; Archaeological Journal, vol. 30, 1873, pp. 1-9.

⁵ Manchester Guardian, 12 June 1874.

³ Calendar of Owens' College, Manchester, 1863-64, pp. 59, 60, 79; 1864-65, pp. 58, 59; 1866-67, p. 93; 1868-69, p. 103; 1869-70, p. 102; J. A. Venn, Alumni Cantabrigienses, part 2, vol. 2, p. 374.

⁶ Preface to bound vol. of Local Gleanings Magazine, p. iii.

Legh, the records of two ecclesiastical parishes in Chester, and the four Randle Holmes of Chester.

East Cheshire was Earwaker's largest work. It was planned before he left Oxford; he wanted it to be on an even more ambitious scale than was eventually possible, and promised to include lists of local fauna and flora. The price to subscribers was two guineas a volume. The subscription list for the first volume contained more than 650 names, and more than a hundred extra subscribers were mentioned when the second and larger volume appeared in 1880. In 1890 the History of the Ancient Parish of Sandbach was published at the instance of C. H. Rickards whose family had lived in the parish. At the time of his death Earwaker was working on the History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary-on-the-Hill, Chester, which had been commissioned by Founders' headed by the first Duke of Westminster. The work was completed after Earwaker's death by Canon R. H. Morris, author of Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Reigns.

Earwaker shared in the growing contemporary interest in the study and publication of original records. In 1878 he was among the members of the Chetham Society who founded the new Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. He held the post of Honorary Secretary from its foundation until his death. He obtained permission for the Society to print lists of wills proved at Chester. This was hailed as a coup, and G. E. Cokayne, Lancaster Herald, wrote to him after the first volume had appeared: 'I do not think there is any work that has been at any time, or that could be now, more useful'. Earwaker edited transcripts of some of the wills for the Chetham Society. In 1882 Manchester Corporation entrusted him with the task of preparing an edition of the Manchester Court Leet records. It appeared, in twelve volumes, between 1884 and 1890, and was followed by three volumes of Manchester Constables' Accounts.

Societies interested in local history recognised Earwaker's work. He served on the Councils of the Chester Archaeological Society, the Chetham Society, and the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. He was a founder member of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society in 1883, and inevitably became a member of its Council shortly afterwards.

Personal and Political Life

⁹ The Times, 4 June 1875.

In June 1875, at Teignmouth in Devon, Earwaker married Juliet, daughter of J. G. Bergman. Both before and after their marriage Juliet worked with Earwaker, executing most of the illustrations for his books. In acknowledging her help and encouragement in the preface to the first volume of *East Cheshire*, Earwaker pointed out that Juliet's work had saved him the cost of employing a professional artist. One of her drawings for the *History of St. Mary-on-the-Hill* was executed in March 1895, two months after Earwaker's death. Juliet's work included sketches

⁷ Macclesfield Courier, 15 Nov. 1873. ⁸ Letter in Earwaker's copy of Wills at Chester 1545-1620, R.S.L.C., vol. 2, 1879, issued 1881, C.A.S. Library, A1102.

of buildings and of architectural details, and the coats of arms which illustrated the pedigrees.

By August 1876 the Earwakers, who had first lived at Alderley Edge, moved to Withington, in the southern suburbs of Manchester. In 1881 they moved once more, to Pensarn near Abergele in Denbighshire. There Earwaker took a leading part in local politics.¹⁰ He became Chairman both of the local Conservative Association and of the Pensarn and Abergele Local Board. When Abergele Urban District Council was formed early in 1895, he was proposed as its first Chairman; the voting resulted in a dead heat, and he asked to be excused from standing, partly because he expected to be away from Abergele later that year, but mainly because of ill health. He had, in fact, been suffering from a digestive complaint since the previous September.

Earwaker and his family were also prominent in the social life of Pensarn and Abergele. He promoted the local Lawn Tennis Club. His three daughters entertained an audience 'during the somewhat long interval' between two halves of a dramatic entertainment at Abergele in October 1892 with 'five or six charming pieces on their violins'. In religion Earwaker was a devout supporter of the Established Church, and served as Churchwarden at Abergele.

A question to which I have found no satisfactory answer is how Earwaker managed to support his wife and his family of six children; to travel widely in Cheshire and Lancashire; and to purchase the books and manuscripts in his collection. As his father's eldest son he might perhaps have expected a substantial inheritance, but John Earwaker survived his son, and had his own even larger family to maintain. Juliet Bergman, as an eighth child, could have had little hope of inheriting a family fortune. It was said after his death that 'families of ancient lineage and descent have frequently requisitioned his services to tabulate the contents of their archives, and to arrange their records'.12 We do not know whether he received any payment for these services.

In September 1894 Earwaker began to suffer from a digestive complaint. He attended a meeting of the Abergele U.D.C. on 14 January 1895, but his condition deteriorated, and he died on 29 January. The cause of death was diagnosed as perforation of the bowel. Earwaker had not yet reached his forty eighth birthday.

The Earwaker Collections

Like those with whom he associated, Earwaker avidly collected materials which related to his interests. When his collection was catalogued in 1895, 2,321 printed items were listed, together with manuscripts, pamphlets, and engravings.¹³ As early as 1876 Earwaker described his aims as a collector; 'making a certain county

See reports in Abergele Visitor and Colwyn Bay Gazette, 21 Jan. 1893 — 16 Feb. 1895.
 ibid., 15 Oct. 1892.
 Rhyl Record and Advertiser, 1 Feb. 1895.

¹³ Catalogue of the Library of the Late John Parsons Earwaker, 1895, produced by Albert Sutton, Deansgate, Manchester: two copies in C.A.S. Library. ¹⁴ Notes and Queries, 5th series, vol. 6, 1876, p. 483.

my speciality, and collecting everything . . . that relates to it, and helps to illustrate its history and the lives and works of its many worthies'.14 Three years later his collection was important enough to be mentioned at a meeting of the Library Association at Manchester.15

After Earwaker's death his collection was sold. The items relating to Lancashire were bought by William Farrer, another leading member of the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. After Farrer's death the Manchester Public Library purchased them from his widow, together with Farrer's own notes and manuscripts. No record was kept of which of the Farrer papers were originally Earwaker's.16

The Cheshire material was bought, apparently for £650, by Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, first Duke of Westminster (1825-99), for the library at Eaton Hall.¹⁷ Soon afterwards the Duke presented it to the Chester Archaeological Society. There was some contention over whether the gift was intended for the Society or for the Grosvenor Museum; the argument was resolved when the Duke wrote to confirm his gift to the Society.18

In 1969 Earwaker's transcripts and manuscripts, with the other manuscripts belonging to the Society, were transferred from Chester Public Library to the Chester City Record Office. In 1972 the Society's Library was also transferred to the Town Hall.

(i) The Printed Books

In 1976 the Chester Archaeological Society's Library contained about 6,700 volumes.¹⁹ The catalogue of Earwaker's library printed in 1895 listed 848 items under the heading 'Cheshire'. Even after eighty years of further accumulation, about one in eight of the Society's books had belonged to Earwaker.

When the Society acquired Earwaker's books, they were given a special bookplate which stated their provenance and acknowledged the Duke of Westminster's gift. In later years many of the volumes were rebound, and their special bookplates were replaced by the Society's standard bookplate. As a result, it is often impossible to identify a particular volume in the Society's Library as Earwaker's. Some of the books contain Earwaker's own notes concerning their rarity and printing history. Earwaker's copies of his own works are especially easy to identify, because they include both his own additions and corrections and notes, newspaper cuttings, and relevant correspondence whether stuck in or loosely inserted.²⁰

Earwaker's collection included most published work on the history of Cheshire and of places within the county. There were, for example, copies of Daniel King's Vale Royal, Sir Peter Leycester's Historical Antiquities, and the Cheshire part of

¹⁵ Transactions and Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Library Association, 1879, pp. 58, 145.

16 Manchester Public Library, List of Papers of William Farrer, Class L1.

¹⁷ Manuscript note on cover of C.A.S. Library, A3762.

¹⁸ J.C.A.S., new series, vol. 6, part 3, 1899, pp. 401-10.

¹⁹ Chester City Record Office, Report of the City Archivist on the year ending 31 March 1976, p. 6. ²⁰ C.A.S. Library, A744, A1102-8.

the Lysons' Magna Britannia. Most of the guide books to the city of Chester published during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were represented. Earwaker sought copies of works written by natives of Cheshire, and by authors who at some time obtained offices within the county. Among the earliest are the late sixteenth century works of Thomas Newton of Butley; of Newton's The Old Man's Dietarie, 1586, Earwaker commented, 'This tract is of very great rarity. There is no copy in the British Museum, and only a fragment . . . in the Bodleian'. There are many works by Bishops of Chester, by other clergymen, and by local schoolmasters.

It is obviously difficult to provide, in a short space, a satisfactory impression of the value or character of the collection. Earwaker once described how he searched for new additions to it in a London bookseller's attic where there were 'thousands of pamphlets'. He bought books from other collections; several had belonged to George Ormerod (1785-1873), author of the *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. Earwaker's library was not large by the standards of the time. In 1879, for example, Superintendent Gee of the Manchester Police possessed between 6,000 and 7,000 volumes, specialising in 'the minor and obscure English poets'. E. R. G. Salisbury of Chester had built up a collection of 18,000 volumes on Wales and the Marches. Powertheless, Earwaker's collection is of great value to students of Chester and Cheshire history. Some of the books in the Society's Library most frequently in demand by members of the Society and by searchers in the Chester City Record Office were Earwaker's.

(ii) The Transcripts, Notes and Manuscripts

When Earwaker's manuscript collection was listed by the Chester City Record Office it was divided into two groups which were respectively given the references CR 63/1 and CR 63/2. The size of the task which faced the Record Office may be gauged from the fact that the list, produced in 1972, consists of fifty nine typescript pages, containing 1,143 items. Moreover, many of the individual 'pieces' consist of large bundles of documents, the detailed listing of which has yet to be completed.

The first group is described as 'mainly . . . J. P. Earwaker's collections for . . . his printed works'. In general the items are transcripts and notes made by Earwaker himself, together with supporting material such as newspaper cuttings, drawings, and photographs. Much of the material relates to places described in *East Cheshire* and the *History of Sandbach*, but there is also a great deal relating to other places in the county. For example, a folder containing material on Bucklow Hundred (Ref. CR 63/1/7) includes a full transcript of a list of Cheshire freeholders in 1445, of which only the Macclesfield portion is printed in *East Cheshire*. Summaries of most of the Cheshire inquisitions post mortem, arranged under reigns (Ref. CR 63/1/226), were copied from those made by Faithful

²¹ Notes and Queries, 5th series, vol. 6, 1876, p. 484. ²² Trans. and Proc. of Libr. Assoc., 1879, pp. 145, 147.

Thomas earlier in the nineteenth century.23 There are some thirty volumes of transcript of parish registers and churchwardens' accounts. Among printed material in this part of the collection are some eighteenth and early nineteenth century Chester newspapers, and fifteen local Acts of Parliament.

The other group, CR 63/2, consists of 878 individually listed items, mainly original records. Many are deeds, which have been arranged both topographically and under families. The earliest is a charter of Ranulph III, Earl of Chester (d. 1232); most are of the fourteenth century or later. The largest accumulations relate to Macclesfield, Newton by Daresbury, and Northenden. There are court records of Adlington, Macclesfield, Peckforton, and Sandbach, and churchwardens' accounts of Alderley and Goostrey. Records relating to the history of the county as a whole include the county sheriff's account for 1559-60, the feodary's account for 1576, and a lieutenancy book covering the period 1625-42. Several items call for more detailed comment. There are seven manuscript volumes compiled by the antiquary John Booth of Twemlow (d. 1659); most contain transcripts of deeds, but there is also valuable material on the mize, Cheshire's early tax assessed on its townships, and one of the volumes contains a long poem on the deeds of the Norman Earls of Chester. Several large bundles of documents relate to the Done, Crewe, and Arderne families who were closely involved in the area around Tarporley and in the administration of Delamere Forest. A substantial collection of Macclesfield Borough records complements Macclesfield records in the Public Record Office and elsewhere. Pictorial material includes the 'Cheshire Sketches' of Peter Broster of Chester, many of which were published in the Gentleman's Magazine. There are also more than a hundred drawings of Eccleston Church and Eaton Hall, mainly by the architect William Porden (c. 1755-1822).

In 1910 James Hall, author of A History of Nantwich, was asked by the Council of the Society to undertake a preliminary investigation of the Earwaker Collection. His findings were printed in the Journal, but are too vague to be of use. A few papers published in the Journal have drawn attention to individual items.24 Before a professional list was produced by the Chester City Record Office in 1972, it is hardly surprising that the value of the collection as a whole remained unappreciated. It is now being extensively used for current research. For example, three of the four sections of Volume II of the Victoria History of Cheshire, now in the press, contain references to the Earwaker Manuscripts.

Earwaker's Contribution to Cheshire History

Shortly after Earwaker's death his friend John Paul Rylands described him as 'one of the first of those whose persistent habit of giving and requiring the authority

²³ The relationship between the two sets of abstracts was discovered by Miss D. J. Clayton,

²⁴ J. Hall, 'The Feodary's Returns for Cheshire in the 18th Elizabeth, 1576', J.C.A.S., new series, vol. 17, 1910, pp. 19-54; P. H. Lawson, 'The Commonplace Book of John Crewe of Utkinton, co. Chester, c. 1640-50', ibid., new series, vol. 26, part 2, 1925, pp. 133-53; J. S. Morrill, 'William Davenport and the "Silent Majority" in Early Stuart England', ibid., vol. 58, 1975, pp. 115-29.

for any statement has set an example which has made the old style of inaccurate "traditional" local history a thing of the past'.25 Earwaker gained a reputation for accuracy in transcription. He had little patience with workers whose standards he considered lower than his own. Sometimes his comments on their work were unduly sarcastic.26 On the other hand, he was said to be very willing to help other historians, and many of his contributions to Notes and Queries and the Cheshire Sheaf were answers to others' enquiries. Fellow authors acknowledged the help he had given them.27

Earwaker particularly disliked the new edition by Thomas Helsby of Ormerod's History of Cheshire, which was being published while he himself was working on East Cheshire. He described it as 'a so-called new edition . . . obviously so only in name . . . lamentably deficient in those corrections and additions, which could only be supplied by the author himself from the fulness of his local knowledge'.28

It is equally easy to criticise Earwaker's own work. He sometimes made errors of detail, particularly in the interpretation of his sources. One such error which has passed into historical currency is his list of the supposed Fitton contingent at the battle of Bloreheath in 1459. It is based on a mis-reading of an entry in the printed calendar of Palatinate records which Earwaker used.²⁹

General criticisms may be levelled against his methods, as revealed in his published work. His copious quotations from original sources, usually in translation, would be much more useful if we knew whether they were full translations or abstracts of the sources. He did, as Rylands pointed out, give sources for most statements of fact, but not in a form which makes them easy to verify. That is particularly true of the records of the Palatinate of Chester which he used extensively.

To a modern reader Earwaker's approach seems old fashioned. Like earlier antiquarians he concentrated on genealogy, the descent of manors, and the history of the Established Church, to the exclusion of economic and social history, the development of local institutions, and non Anglican religious bodies. This deficiency was realised at the time; in particular, his choice of the sub title Past and Present for East Cheshire seemed at variance with the work's bias. Earwaker tried to meet this criticism by saying, 'My only object in making use of the word "present" was to place on record what remains of the past are to be met with at the present time'. He even argued that the modern history of Stockport and Macclesfield would be 'interesting only to a few'.30 The same criticism may, of course, be directed against Ormerod's work, even in the new edition of 1882, and

30 East Cheshire, vol. 2, pp. xx-xxi.

 ²⁵ ibid., new series, vol. 5, part 3, 1895, p. 250.
 ²⁶ e.g., Cheshire Shieaf, 1st series, vol. 1, 1880, p. 579; Notes and Queries, 5th series, vol. 1, 1879, pp. 11-12.
 ²⁷ J. Hall, History of Nantwich, 1883, p. xv; R. Head, Congleton Past and Present, 1887,

p. xix. 28 East Cheshire, vol. 2, p. xxiv.

²⁹ ibid., p. 2; 37th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, 1876, Appendix,

against the early volumes of the Victoria Histories. It does not diminish the value of these works, but makes them frustrating for a reader with a more modern approach.

Estimates of Earwaker's character must rely on what was said of him after his death. Geniality and courtesy were said to have been his leading characteristics. The Chairman of the Abergele U.D.C. said that 'there was no member more courteous and gentlemanly', and the Rhyl Record described him as 'the beau ideal of a chairman — courteous and impartial, yet firm and resolute'.31

Perhaps through over generosity, he took on too many tasks, with the result that some of the ventures in which he was involved were short lived. The monthly Local Gleanings magazine and the second series of the Cheshire Sheaf each lasted only one year. By 1892, after he had been Honorary Editorial Secretary to the Chester Archaeological Society for five years, the Council was complaining that the Journal was appearing irregularly.³² The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire failed to maintain its early efficiency. The meetings required by its rules were not held, and annual reports failed to appear. By 1895 the programme of publications was two years behind schedule. Such failures were not the result of indolence but of over commitment, for Earwaker's output of work was large.

After Earwaker's death his family moved away from Pensarn. His sons became engineering apprentices on the Clyde, and his widow died in Surrey in 1924.33 Earwaker was accorded an impressive funeral at Abergele Church, attended by almost the entire Urban District Council. Nevertheless he seems to have left little permanent mark as a local 'worthy'. When questioned, aged inhabitants had never heard of him, and a search of the churchyard failed to reveal his grave.³⁴

³¹ Abergele Visitor and Colwyn Bay Gazette, 16 Feb. 1895; Rhyl Record and Advertiser, 1 Feb. 1895.

³² *J.C.A.S.*, new series, vol. 5, part 1, 1895, p. viii. ³³ Ex inf. Mr. G. A. M. Hollis.

³⁴ Abergele Visitor and Colwyn Bay Gazette, 9 Feb. 1895; the entry of Earwaker's burial in the Burial Register was found for me by the Rev. M. C. Donaldson, Vicar of Abergele.