

## THE UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL FOR A HISTORY OF THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK.

By WALTER RYE.<sup>1</sup>

I do not think it would be possible to chose a more appropriate place in which to read a paper bearing this title, than the room in which we now are, whose owner, though not a professed antiquary, has been to extraordinary trouble and expense in collecting here every scrap of matter that has been printed or published relating to the county. Never since topographers began to collect books relating to the history of any one county, has (I venture to think), so complete a local collection been got together. After I had been collecting for some years, in the vanity of my heart I thought that my own collection for the county was a fairly good one; but when I saw this library for the first time I was fairly ashamed of my own, and I can undertake to say that there is hardly a tract, religious or otherwise, bearing, directly or indirectly, on this county that cannot be found on these shelves.

Everything finds a place here, whether the rare and privately printed book—the most scurrilous electioneering squib, or the printed brief and evidence relating to the most recent city litigation. The value of such a collection to the local antiquary cannot possibly be estimated; for it is easy enough to find out at all events here what has been published relating to any matter or thing belonging to our county. But my business here to day is with the documents which we shall *not* find in this library, viz.: the MS. sources for a history of Norfolk.

The subject of parish Registers is a tender one to approach. We Londoners, whose labours are often checkmated for the want of the sight of some particular register—whether it is that the parson can't or wont search for us—and whose pedigrees have grievous gaps because a former careless custodian has lost the only record that would tell us of our folk, naturally incline to the opinion that all registers should be sent up to London and kept in proper order in a proper fire-proof receptacle, and be available in five minutes without fee, instead of having to take a five hour journey and pay fees at the end of it.

Against this view I am often told that the clergy take an intelligent interest in the history of their parishes, and that it would be monstrous to deprive them of the opportunity they now have of leisurely studying their Church Registers.

<sup>1</sup> Read at Carrow Priory, at the Annual Meeting of the Institute, at Norwich, August 8th, 1889.

But I should like to ask how many of the clergy in this diocese do take an intelligent interest in this work? how many have written a line on the history of their parishes? Well, I have got the list for Norfolk and Norwich written out here and the number is well under a dozen, though there are something like 800 incumbents and I don't know how many curates.

How many of the parish Registers of Norfolk have been printed by the clergy? I will tell you, ONE, namely that of Elmham, by the Rev. A. Legge, and very well indeed has he printed it, with excellent notes and admirable indexes, an example many others should follow.<sup>1</sup> The only other Norfolk Register printed is that of Bircham Newton, which I have just issued. It, the register, was just going the way of most registers; it had gone astray, it was only a poor dirty looking little book, though it began in 1562, and was the only record of the place for nearly 200 years. It had got mixed up with the private papers of Dr. Miles Beevor, one of the well known Norfolk family of that name, who was rector here in 1835. Years and years after it was found by his kinsman Sir Hugh Beevor, who not only returned it, but first allowed me to have it copied and to print it, so that if it ever got lost again the loss would not so much matter. This I gladly and hastily did, so hastily in fact that I forgot to put on the title page the county in which Bircham Newton was situated. And so I drew on myself a mildly satirical remark from the *Athenæum* reviewer that I probably never realized the possibility that there could be any other county than Norfolk.

One city parish register [St. George Tombland], is now in the press, by Mr. Jay, but the greatest worker at registers is my very good correspondent the Rev. F. Procter, of Witton. He has transcribed no less than twenty-eight registers relating to the east coast of Norfolk, has indexed them, and then (more astonishing and excellent thing of all), has freely given them to our local Archæological Society for the use of his brother members.

Let me digress a little from the records to those who have worked at them, for there were other good workers before Mr. Procter. As to bygone workers we have had many and good.

Three hundred years ago Kemp was working hard in the county taking notes of all the heraldic bearings he could find, though (like two or three of his successors), he had a fine scorn of all who were not strictly entitled to bear arms by having previously paid for them to the College of Arms, of which he was so distinguished an ornament and agent, I might almost say traveller. Sir Henry Spelman wrote only in a general way; and the first real hard worker I have come across was another Knight, the worthy Sir Symonds D'Ewes, who tackled the wills in the Norwich Registry and produced a great thick folio vol. of notes from it, all indexed, which until quite recently, was the only attempt at a digest of the more important wills there.

But all other workers past and present, must give place to Peter Le Neve, who was simply a marvellously industrious and able man; with him there were no half-measures; he early realized that it was no use doing things by halves and whatever he did, he did very thoroughly.

<sup>1</sup> He has since been followed by the Rev. A. Michell who has just printed the register of Marsham.

A native of this county, he worked most at its history, and it is to him that Blomefield owed nearly all his material. I have said elsewhere, and I adhere to it here, that if everyone had his rights our county history would be called Le Neve's and not Blomefield's History of Norfolk, just as the Monasticon is really Dodsworth's and not Dugdale's.

Still one must not deny the just praise due to Blomefield, whose industry was very great, whose noble disregard of trouble and expense was quite magnificent, and who literally died in harness from a fever he caught when coming up to London to see some records.

But still he was neither as able nor as hard a worker as Le Neve, some of whose work I will exhibit presently.

A mass of work partly by one and partly by the other, was through the good offices of Dr. Jessopp, recently secured for our local society, and when properly digested and indexed may be of great use to our grandchildren. Another portion of the same mass came into my hands and is calendared in the descriptive vol. I am now publishing, proofs of which are on the table.<sup>1</sup> Yet another is in the hands of one of the leading booksellers of this city, who in a very public spirited way is willing to sell it to our local Society for what he gave for it, some £20 or £30; but unhappily, we are 'very poor,' we have only £300 or £400 in hand lying idle at the Bank, and the powers that be cannot see their way to complete their series, and once more practically bring the three lost sheep into one fold.

Another hard worker was "Honest Tom Martin," who wrote the history of Thetford. A mass of church notes, &c., chiefly by him are in the Norris collections, now in my library. In one of them are four pages of a very amusing diary by Tom Martin, of a short antiquarian tour, beginning 29th August, 1756, from Palgrave to Bury, Newmarket, Cambridge, &c., *e.g.*, September 12th, "Sunday, din'd at Ixworth Woolpocket, and Lay at Stanton Cock that night and ye next. Oh! how asham'd am I of such unaccountable proceedings."—In one of these excursions he was accompanied by Mr. Kerrich.

Then Kirkpatrick (one of whose most valuable MSS. elucidating the history of the streets and lanes of this city turned up the other day among the Norris MSS. and is now being printed for our local Society),<sup>2</sup> Mackerell, and Kerrich (whose grandson, Mr. Hartshorne is here to-day), were great collectors, but the greatest of all was Antony Norris whose literary executor I am proud to consider myself and whose collections were not even known to the most ardent Norfolk collectors till the other day. Unluckily he was one of those who spend their lives in laborious work and do not publish or print a line and so all their skilled labour is so much waste.

Some account of them, or rather of such of them as I have been able to secure, will be found in the catalogue to which I have before referred. He noted the Norwich Wills; no one ever has noted the wills of any county before. Here is an index I have compiled to the surnames in his notes and in those of D'Ewes and L'Estrange the very great bulk of which being Norris'. This collection by him of Norfolk armories I printed a year or two ago. This completed work covers a great slice of Eastern Norfolk—the Hundred of East and West Flegg, Happening, and Tunstead,

<sup>1</sup> It is since issued privately.

<sup>2</sup> Since published.

and a part of North Erpingham are described most minutely, and never in any county history have I seen so much absolutely new matter so carefully worked up. His collections of monumental inscriptions are most perfect. By a strange irony of fate his own monument in Barton Turf Church is the only monument in the church which is completely covered up by the organ! As compared with Blomefield or rather Parkins account of the same Hundreds the bulk of Norris is at least *ten* times as great, and nothing except Carthew's History of Launditch can for a moment compare with it.

Carthew was of a later generation, though older than any present worker, and his book—his one child as he rather pathetically describes it—is worthy of all praise. He has left no MSS. collections, however, of any note, so I need not dwell on him here.

L'Estrange, whose name is so familiar to many, was in many respects a very remarkable man. His industry was prodigious though his means and his opportunities were as few as Norris' were great, for Norris was a wealthy squire and L'Estrange a poor clerk. If he had a fault it was that he began too many things, and, of course, did not have time to finish them, but though I have only some of his MSS. I have eight thick folio volumes, of which not the least valuable is the Calendar of Norwich Freemen I printed after his death, and his voluminous notes of Norwich Wills.

Until very recently—with a few exceptions like Dr. Bensley and Mr. Beloe—both of whom know so much and produce so little, we have been very badly off for workers in the county, but since men like our President Dr. Jessop have been re-clothing the dry bones of history with flesh, by means of brilliant essays, more enthusiasm has been shown.

We have unearthed men like Mr. Creeny, who has a European reputation as an authority on brasses; Mr. Farrer, whose heraldic researches have been so laborious and so useful, Mr. Mark Knights, whose speculative history is so plausible and so interesting, Mr. Beecheno, Mr. Elwin, whose newly issued Dictionary of Heraldry, is already a standard work, and last, though very far from least, our worthy local secretary, Mr. Hudson. I don't think I am betraying any confidence when I say that six years ago, Mr. Hudson neither knew nor cared anything for antiquities. He took his degree *per saltum*. I never shall forget the surprise and delight with which all of us read his paper on the Stone Bridge.

It was so unlike its fellows, so new in its facts and so sparse in its quotations from Blomefield that I for one knew we had got a new man, who would very soon be at our head. Of his hard work on the early rolls and deeds of our city—in the course of which I may say he has discovered the only tithing roll in existence—we shall see more when it is printed, but I am sure those who are present will agree that if he keeps on as he has begun, we have, in Mr. Hudson, a man of whom the antiquaries of our county may justly be proud and whose reputation will out-live those of many who have printed more and thought less.

But I fear I have been very discursive and have been talking more of the workers and their collections than the mass of untouched matter which really forms material for a history of our County.

Of the parish registers I have spoken before, and even more interesting than they are the Subsidy Rolls; the de Banco Roll; the Fines; the

Inquisitions post-mortem, are all very interesting to the large class of men who are interested in framing the pedigrees of armigerous families, and to the smaller class who take a savage pleasure in picking holes in other people's pedigrees and detecting fudged work.

But to the student of history, and the man who honestly wants to know who were his forefathers, and does not care a straw whether his name was Bugg or Howard (the former being I may say infinitely the older surname of the two) the Subsidy Rolls are much more valuable.

They give us clues to relative sizes and population of towns, the rises and falls of commerce in market towns and manufacturing villages—the names of the obscure villagers—the nicknames now forgotten or corrupted and enable us to trace especially in our own county friendly invasions of other nations. Except for the Hundred of North Erpingham, some collections for the history of which are about to be issued, none of these Rolls have ever been printed for our county.

There is a splendid Roll for the year 1327, which, as I have said elsewhere, is a perfect post office directory of the period, containing references to 37,000 names, and if there were any public spirit in the county it should have been printed long ago. The Yorkshire Association has printed its West Riding roll for a later period, so why should not we? Our *Fines* are practically done. No other County can boast that there are complete printed and indexed calendars of its fines from Richard I, to Richard III, an elaborate printed analysis of Richard I, and John, and indexes nominum to the abolition of Fines and Reversions of this too, in spite of there being vastly more fines for Norfolk, than for any other County.

But they should all be gone through for field names, which occur but very rarely in Charters of so early a period.

Scattered all over the county in city safes, in noblemen's muniment rooms, and in parish chests are innumerable *Charters*. They too, should be annotated and indexed. No one knows of the interest and value of the information they contain. Take for example, two or three charters among the Dean and Chapter records, dated from 1257 to 1373, which refer to the sweet marsh and the *salt* marsh, at Rockland. We always have believed what geologists have told us—that the river here, in days gone by, was an arm of the sea; but this brings the fact home to us very emphatically, and leaves no shadow of a doubt. Then again, there is the case of the Monks of St. Benet, promising a herring rent to the Nuns of this very Abbey of Carrow, which, I believe, points to the same thing viz., that both rivers were arms of the sea in comparatively recent times.

Talking of St. Benet's, I may also point out, that among the Norris collection are views of St. Benet's before the mill was on, of Castle Rising with the gatehouse still standing, of stained glass now smashed and merchant marks now gone.

But the object and intent of the few words I have said to-day, is to impress on all the necessity of making the vast masses of material the existence of which I have pointed out, available for students.

This can only be done by calendaring and indexing, especially by indexing.

Now, personally, I am an enthusiastic indexer, and really do not know any pastime more engrossing, or more amusing. Every one must have

a hobby, some collect insects and some postage stamps. Both pursuits are harmless, but unless a man is a real scientist, it is far better for him to spend his time making indexes, which are of use to many, than making collections which are of interest only to himself.

There are many ways of indexing. The old way was to begin by making twenty seven divisions on a sheet of paper or in a book, and putting the names down in their proper order, which is a very good way if you don't mind wasting paper, and (as soon as any one division is full), putting the sheet on one side and taking another. The advantage of this way is that when you have done your book, you have an alphabetical index ready to your hand, and are saved the trouble of sorting out the A's, B's, C's, &c. Also you have during the progress of the work an Index which you can consult from time to time for what it is worth. Yet as a matter of fact I have never been able to satisfy myself whether this way is quicker than simply writing out the names one after the other just as they come, as fast as you can, and then cutting them up, sorting and pasting them in. Of course anyone whose time is of any value, and who can afford it, will nowadays set a type-writer to work to do the mechanical work, and sort and paste in himself, and then if of a luxurious turn of mind, have the lot uniformly re-type-written, as in the specimens I have here open for inspection.

You will observe that in having indexes copied I have taken care to begin on a fresh page with each letter, so that I can arrange all the A's together, all the B's together and so on. These, being kept in a spring backed case, can be opened up and any fresh index added. For rapidity and convenience of reference this is very convenient. So is the somewhat barbarous little volume I have here, to form which I have ruthlessly mutilated a copy of nearly every book with which I have had to do. All their indexes are bound together in one volume, and this too saves an immense time usually wasted in taking down book after book.