

JOHN BUCKNER, 1734-1824, BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

by Richard P. Buckner

Introduction

The Right Reverend John Buckner was my great-great-great-great-uncle. I was surprised to find such little evidence of his career and this stimulated me to make a deeper investigation. Very little has emerged, but the search was most interesting. My thanks are due to numerous people who have assisted me in my enquiries, including the archivist of Charterhouse, the archivist of Clare College, Cambridge, the vicar of Boxgrove and Dr. F. W. Steer.

The Right Reverend John Buckner, LL.D, was born at Goodwood, near Chichester, the second son of Richard and Mary Buckner, and the brother of Charles who later became Vice-Admiral of the White. Richard Buckner is thought to have come over from Germany with George I. He held the important position of estate agent, or senior bailiff, to the 2nd Duke of Richmond¹ and among his various duties was the oversight of the Duke's menagerie. Not only did the Duke anticipate Longleat and Woburn by two hundred years by introducing wild life to his stately home, but he also pioneered the early days of cricket.² One is tempted to wonder if the future Bishop and his brother, who spent their childhood at Goodwood, showed any promise with the bat and ball.

However, the only glimpse into the early life of John Buckner is afforded by a memorial to his father in St. Andrew Oxmarket, Chichester. We are told that Richard Buckner 'displayed the domestic and social virtues of Affection in a Husband, Tenderness in a Parent,'³ and from this we may assume that John Buckner enjoyed a happy family life. He was baptised at Boxgrove on 12 June 1734.

Twelve years later he was nominated by the Duke of Richmond for a foundation scholarship at Charterhouse. As a 'gown boy' John was educated free and on leaving received an exhibition to go up to the University. He graduated from Clare College, Cambridge, in 1755. Having been ordained deacon, 24 October 1756 and priest, 19 November 1758, he acted as domestic chaplain to the 3rd Duke of Richmond and was present at the taking of Havana in 1762. In August 1761 he became vicar of Lyminster (which he held until 1772), and from 1764 to 1766 rector of West Stoke, both Sussex parishes.

While Rector of Southwick, Sussex (a benefice he held from 1766 to 1774) he was appointed to the prebendal stall of Firlie in Chichester Cathedral in February 1768; he became vicar of Eartham on 14 November 1771 and Prebendary of Eartham the next day. In 1772 he succeeded the Reverend John King as vicar of Boxgrove, which living he held with that of Eartham until 1788 at about which time he had the cure of nearby Westhampnett. The patronage of Boxgrove is still in the hands of the Duke of Richmond and Gordon. That same year, 1772, John Buckner's mother died, aged 71, and his father followed her five years later. In his will⁴ Richard Buckner, an Alderman of Chichester, left most of his property to his second son, while two thousand pounds

¹ The Earl of March, *A Duke and his Friends* (1911), 164.

² John Marshall, *The Duke who was Cricket* (1961), 64.

³ For the full epitaph, see Lindsay Fleming, *The*

Little Churches of Chichester (Chichester Paper No. 5, 1957), 21.

⁴ Richard Buckner's will is preserved in the Buckner Family Collection. Although the Bishop's sermons were once included, they have now perished.

which had been lent to the Duke of Richmond were to be made over to Charles. No doubt Richard, a German from Westphalia, owed his position entirely to the patronage of the Richmond family, and this will become more apparent in the case of his son, John.

Little is known of John Buckner's incumbency at Boxgrove.¹ No doubt he carried out his parochial duties with the integrity and devotion of his father.² However, during this time there occurred the unfortunate incident connected with his election to a residential canonry of the Cathedral.

Dr. Thomas Hurdis³ died on 29 March 1784, and in the following August the four remaining members of the Administrative Chapter of Chichester Cathedral, in obedience to the statutes, met in the Chapter House to elect his successor. The Dean, Charles Harward, and William Webber, Prebendary of Selsey, cast their votes for John Buckner, the senior Prebendary. John Courtail and Combe Miller (Prebendaries of Ferring and Wyndham respectively) voted for George Metcalfe, the junior Prebendary of Bracklesham. The votes being equal, election was postponed. When on 11 October the same result was obtained, Courtail and Webber appealed to the Bishop, Sir William Ashburnham, to investigate the matter. The probable reason for the opposition to the election of John Buckner was political rather than ecclesiastical. The 3rd Duke of Richmond was a radical individualist⁴ and extremely powerful in the county.⁵ Using his influence he was able to fill the leading offices of Church and State in Sussex with his friends and supporters. Buckner's close association with the Duke was regarded with suspicion and distrust by the two Canons whose concern was probably shared by the Bishop who, as Visitor, summoned the members of the Chapter to appear before him in the Cathedral library on 12 January 1785. The Dean and William Webber urged the Bishop to restrain from appointing a Canon Residentiary. They maintained that this action had no precedent and that the King alone had the right, in the case of a Chapter failing to agree, to nominate a candidate to fill the vacant office. The Bishop disregarded this petition and nominated George Metcalfe. The Dean and Webber thereupon refused to obey the episcopal mandate and were immediately faced with the dire possibility of excommunication. This unedifying matter dragged on. Whether or not in an attempt to escape from the whole affair, John Buckner accepted two more livings, firstly that of St. Giles-in-the-Fields in London, and then that of Newdigate in Surrey. In 1789 his wife Elizabeth died, aged 49, and was buried in Paradise, as the Chichester Cathedral burial ground is called; they had no children. In 1792, John Buckner became Archdeacon of Chichester.⁶

The same year as the Mutiny of the Nore (1797) in which his brother Charles played a prominent but unsuccessful part in quelling the mutineers, John Buckner was elected Bishop of Chichester.⁷ He was consecrated on 4 March 1798 and administered the See until his death on 1 May 1824 but for the most part the records are silent or non-existent.⁸ All we can get is a tanta-

¹ I am indebted to the Reverend R. C. Ratcliff for searching the records.

² The Earl of March, *op cit.*, 164, 165.

³ Father of the Rev. James Hurdis, the poet; see A. P. Whitaker, *James Hurdis, his life and writings* (1960).

⁴ See A. G. Olson, *The Radical Duke: career and correspondence of Charles Lennox, third Duke of Richmond* (1961).

⁵ For another instance of power political influence in Church affairs in 1741, see L. P. Curtis, *Chichester Towers* (Yale University Press, 1966).

⁶ I am indebted to the archivist of Clare College, Cambridge, for details of the incumbencies held by John Buckner. The "canonry affair" is fully reported in T. W. Horsfield, *The History, Antiquities, and Topography of the County of Sussex*, vol. 2 (1835), 26-29, but Mr. W. D. Peckham has shown (*Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 106 (1968), 7) that John Buckner was appointed Canon Residentiary in 1785.

⁷ James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, (1966).

⁸ For such as have survived, see Francis W. Steer and Isabel M. Kirby, *Diocese of Chichester: a catalogue of the records of the Bishop, Archdeacons and former exempt jurisdictions* (1966).

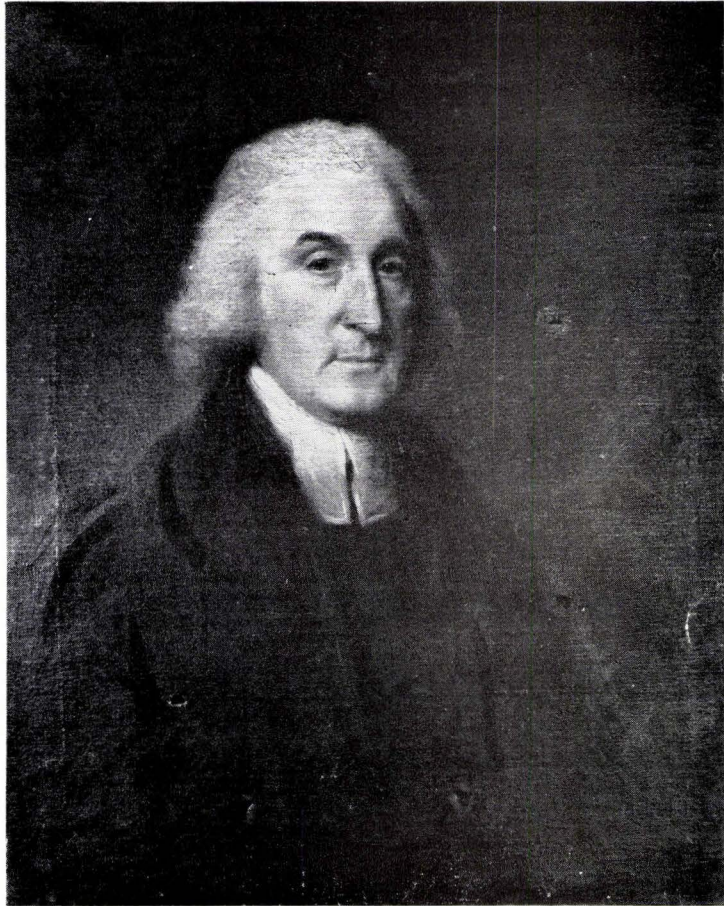


Plate I. Portrait of John Buckner by George Romney
(By kind permission of His Grace The Duke of Richmond and Gordon)

Such is all the available material relating to the episcopate of John Buckner: such scanty information can provide only the briefest of pictures. However, one is left with the impression that John Buckner was a sincere and holy man, respected throughout his diocese. He benefited from his close ties with Goodwood: he was also probably embarrassed by them. His episcopate spanned the lengthy Napoleonic Wars, a time when the nation's prayers broke through the general indifference. Although he left little mark in history, John Buckner's name will always be remembered in the list of Chichester's long line of Bishops.¹

His ring and seal are in the possession of the present writer.

APPENDICES

(Contributed by Francis W. Steer)

The Arms of the Buckner Family

In October 1966, the Rev. R. P. Buckner (the author of this paper) very generously presented to the West Sussex Record Office the patent confirming the arms used by his ancestors. This handsome document² (see plate III) measures 16 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ ins. (exclusive of the ribbons and seals) and is preserved in its original, leather-covered box together with a bill (12 Dec. 1804) for £51 5s. 6d rendered by the College of Arms for fees and paintings. The heading of the patent is elaborately and beautifully painted with the following armorial ensigns:

1. The arms of the Diocese of Chichester³ impaling those of Buckner, the shield being surmounted by a bishop's mitre.
2. The arms of Charles, 11th Duke of Norfolk, as Earl Marshal of England.
3. The arms of King George III enclosed in a Garter and surmounted by a Royal crown.
4. The arms of the Herald's College.
5. The crest as granted by this patent to the Buckner family.

The patent is signed by Sir Isaac Heard, Garter Principal King of Arms, and by George Harrison, Clarenceux King of Arms; their official seals, suspended from blue ribbons and enclosed in skippets, are not shown in the reproduction. The text of the document is as follows:—

TO ALL AND SINGULAR to whom these Presents shall come, SIR ISAAC HEARD Knight, GARTER Principal King of Arms, and GEORGE HARRISON Esquire, CLARENCEUX King of Arms, of the South East and West Parts of England, from the River Trent Southwards, send Greeting. WHEREAS The Right Reverend Father in God, JOHN, by divine Providence, LORD BISHOP OF CHICHESTER, hath, by Letter, represented unto the Most Noble CHARLES Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal and Hereditary Marshal of England, that, on an examination in the College of Arms, there does not appear any registry of the Armorial Ensigns used by his Lordship, and his Family, being "Gules⁴ an open Book between three Bucks Heads erased" And, for Crest "a Beech Tree"; and that as, according to Family Tradition, his Ancestors were established in Germany, such failure of registry may, in some degree, be attri-

¹ See also Francis W. Steer, *The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Chichester, 1813-1963* (Chichester paper No. 35, 1963) for the Bishop's interest in that building.

² West Sussex Record Office, Add. MS. 9147.

³ For a discussion of the arms of the Diocese, see Francis W. Steer, *The Arms of the County Councils*

of East and West Sussex and the Diocese of Chichester (1959).

⁴ The definitions of the heraldic terms used in the patent are:— *Current* (now usually written *courant*), running; *erased*, torn off and left with ragged edges; *ermine*, a white fur having black spots (or tails) on it; *ermineois*, a golden fur having black spots (or tails) on it; *gules*, red; *or*, gold; *proper*, in natural colours.

5. Oil painting in the Bishop's Palace, Chichester, by James Northcote, R.A. (1746-1831), in 1818.
6. Engraving of no. 5, by Samuel William Reynolds, jun. (1794-1872), of Bayswater, London, 10 December 1818 (Plate II).
7. Oil painting (present location unknown), by Thomas Uwins, R.A. (1782-1857), in 1817.
8. Engraving of no. 7, by William Holl, n.d. In some copies of J. Dallaway, *A History of the Western Division of the County of Sussex*, vol. 1 (1815), opp. p.90 instead of opp. p.37 of the History and Antiquities of the City of Chichester, where a guard was reserved for it.
9. Engraving by Thomas King, the Chichester antiquary, from his own drawing. Published 11 August 1824 and sold by W. Hodge, bookseller, and D. Gray, gilder, of East Street, Chichester. Copy in Chichester Cathedral Library.

Buckner Family Memorials

Details of the Buckner family memorials will be found in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 69, p. 196, vol. 74, pp. 185, 194, and in Lindsay Fleming, *The Little Churches of Chichester* (Chichester Paper No. 5, 1957), p. 21.

CHATEAUBRIAND, BURWASH

By David Martin

Situated about half way along the northern side of Burwash High Street, Chateaubriand appears, at first glance, relatively modern and uninteresting, for externally there is nothing to hint at the great architectural interest of the buildings (Plate 1). In fact, however, it ranks amongst the most important historical vernacular buildings in Kent and Sussex, for, incorporated into its hall are the remains of a quasi-aisle¹. Quasi-aisles are in themselves rare, there being only eight known examples in the area, but the method adopted for constructing this particular aisle is unknown anywhere else in the Weald. This alone is sufficient to make the building outstanding, but in addition it also possesses a second and earlier medieval hall at the rear of the main house. This earlier fragment probably represents the remains of Chateaubriand's predecessor, its survival being due to its conversion into a detached kitchen when the remainder of the house was rebuilt. It is now incorporated into a rear wing.

THE MEDIEVAL BUILDINGS

Layout of the messuage (Figs. 1 & 2).

In its original form the house was of five bays and contained a total of seven rooms. The western bay consisted of parlour with solar above, whilst the two adjacent bays were accommodated by the large open hall with its quasi-aisle running along the northern side. The two remaining bays were taken up on the ground floor by the usual pair of service rooms together with a small shop (?) in the south-east corner. It is usual to divide the service rooms by a partition running down the centre of the house, but in this case the partition was constructed considerably north of centre in order to centralise the service doors in the eastern wall of the hall.² The space above the service rooms was occupied by a two-bay great chamber, this being reached by a staircase in the western bay of the service room.³

Design—Exterior

Externally the building was originally quite impressive being both tall and long. The aesthetics were further improved by the introduction of a jetty and gable at the eastern end. The western roof terminal was hipped, the effect of which has however now been lost by the incorporation of the building into a long continuous terrace. In overall proportions the building was very similar to Portland Cottages (once Burwash Rectory) which originally stood almost opposite Chateaubriand.⁴

Little is known of the type of infill framing used in the external walls, as at ground floor level the frame has been largely rebuilt in brickwork whilst that at first floor level is tile-hung. It is clear however that unlike Portland Cottages it did not possess double bressumers to the upper

¹ A quasi-aisle is a 'lean to' along the side of a room used to widen it. An aisle achieves this with the aid of pillars located within the room to support the wall plate; in the quasi-aisle there are no such pillars or other obstructions, as the plate is supported from the line of the aisle wall.

² The hall was wider than the remainder of the house owing to its single quasi-aisle.

³ The location of the stair is marked by a replacement joist adjacent to the northern wall of the building.

⁴ *cf. Sussex Archaeological Collections* (abbreviated hereafter to *S.A.C.*) vol. 110 (1972), 14-30. It is likely that as at Chateaubriand the building originally had a jettied and gabled terminal at its eastern end, and not a hip as is shown in the article. The same arrangement is found further up the High Street at Shadwell Row 3 and it would therefore seem that this design was characteristic of the larger buildings in Burwash at this time.