

JOHN NORDEN'S 'DESCRIPTION OF SUSSEX' 1595

by John H. Farrant

John Norden, the surveyor and topographer, prepared a 'Description of Sussex' in 1594-5 as part of his projected 'Speculum Britanniae.' The map which it was intended to accompany was published in 1595, but the 'Description' remained only in manuscript and is now known in a holograph fragment and in an almost complete copy of 60 or 70 years later. The background to, and the contents of, Norden's 'Description' are discussed.

I

John Norden (1548-?1625) is remembered as a surveyor, a topographer and a devotional writer. In the first two roles he was the author of a partially completed 'Speculum Britanniae,' for which he probably conceived the plan in the late 1580s. Edward Lynam has suggested that Norden 'had noted that Camden's *Britannia*, being in Latin, was not for the general public, that Saxton's maps showed no roads, had no index by which places could be easily found, often included three or more counties on one sheet and that both works were large and heavy tomes. He determined to write a series of brief county chorographies illustrated by small but practical maps, to be published in duo-decimo books easily carried in the pocket.'¹ By 1591, the first part, 'Northamptonshire,' was completed in manuscript (though not printed in Norden's lifetime) and helped him to procure, through Lord Treasurer Burghley, the Privy Council's endorsement of his project. He finished 'Middlesex' by early 1593 and published it at his own expense in the following year. Draft and presentation copies of 'Essex' are dated 1594. Probably in mid or late 1594 Norden perambulated Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire, perhaps visiting the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands as well; but, as for 'Essex,' the descriptions found no patron nor publisher. The maps, though, found sponsors, and were engraved and printed, those for Surrey and Sussex being dated 1594 and 1595 respectively.² No copy of the printed map of Hampshire in its original state is known to survive. For dedication and presentation to the Queen, Norden prepared a composite volume entitled 'A Chorographical description of the severall Shires and Islands of Middlesex, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Hamshire, Weighte, Garnesey, & Jarsey, performed by the traveyle and veive of John Norden, 1595.'³ Maps of the three islands were inset on the same sheet as Hampshire and were accompanied only by 'A brief commemoration.' The descriptions of Middlesex and Essex were abridgements of those

¹ Edward Lynam, 'English maps and map-makers of the sixteenth century,' *Geogr. J.*, vol. 116 (1950), p. 15. Except as stated, this section is based on W. L. D. Ravenhill, *John Norden's manuscript maps of Cornwall* (Exeter, 1972), pp. 11-23, which provides the fullest available account of Norden's work on the 'Speculum.'

² The only known copy of the Sussex map is in the Library of the Royal Geographical Society, but has been reproduced twice in facsimile: E. Heawood

(ed.), *Reproductions of early engraved maps in the collection of the Royal Geographical Society, II, English county maps* (1932), sheet 8 and pp. 10-11; and H. H. Margary (ed., with introductory notes by R. A. Skelton), *Two hundred and fifty years of map-making in the County of Sussex: A collection of printed maps, published between the years 1575 and 1825* (Lympe and Chichester, 1970), pl. 3b.

³ British Library (hereafter abbreviated to B.L.), Add. MS. 31853.

previously written, and 'Surrey' may also have been abridged from a fuller text,¹ but no evidence to the same effect for Hampshire and Sussex has been found.

In the following year he sought to answer criticisms of the sections already prepared in *Nordens Preparative to his Speculum Britanniae*. In 1597, 'Hertfordshire' was presented to the Queen and to Burghley, and published at Norden's expense a year later. Official support for the 'Speculum' was discontinued in 1598, but Norden worked on 'Cornwall' up to 1601 and revised it for presentation to James I in, probably, 1604. In addition, a description of Norfolk written c. 1598-1610 has been attributed to him; there are references in 1666 and 1720 to a manuscript description of Kent (which might have accompanied a version of his map of Kent published in the 1607 edition of Camden); and he may have revised 'Northamptonshire' in 1610.²

For the last 20 years of his life, Norden was a highly regarded surveyor in both public and private employment who also published, in 1607, an important textbook for his profession, *The Surveyors Dialogue*. For this he drew on information collected for the 'Speculum,' and indeed even in the third edition of 1618 all the information on specific places in Sussex had appeared in greater or less detail in the 'Description' of 1595. His known work in Sussex comprises the following surveys:

the manors of Byworth, Warningcamp, Adrington, Middleton, and Withdean; Tortington Priory; Binsted Farm; for Sir John Spencer, 1606 (National Library of Wales, MS. 5112E; West Sussex Record Office, Add. MSS. 1983, 2030, 2031 (reproduced in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 44 (1901), opp. p. 147); Petworth House Archives, 3566).

the manor of Old Shoreham, for the use of John Dackomb, esq., Master of Requestes to his Majesty and Surveyor General to Prince Charles, 1615 (Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Rawl. Essex 29); and, by virtue of Prince Charles's commission, 1616 (Corporation of London Record Office, R.C.E., box 4.3).³

(with his son John), the manors of North Bersted and Aldwick, Preston (near Brighton), Falmer and Chesworth, by virtue of a deputation of Sir James Fullerton, Surveyor General to Prince Charles, 1617 (British Library, Add. MS. 6027).⁴

In 1612, Norden was appointed, with Alexander Nairn, to the office of Surveyor of the King's castles, forts, parks, lodges, forests, and chases in the counties south of the rivers Thames and Severn, but none of his work in this office which is identifiable in published sources was in Sussex.⁵

¹ R. A. Skelton, 'John Norden's map of Surrey,' *British Museum Quarterly*, vol. 16 (1951-2), pp. 61-2.

² C. M. Hood (ed.), *The chorography of Norfolk, an historical and chorographical description of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1938). Sylvanus Morgan, *Armilogia sive Ars chromocritica* . . . (1666), p. [240]. R. Rawlinson, *The English topographer* (1720), p. 79. Lyman, p. 20.

³ A contemporary list refers to a further survey of Old Shoreham in 1620: B.L., MAPS 198.c.50, f.13, photocopy of Cambridge Univ. Lib., MS. Mm.3.15.

⁴ Extracts from North Bersted and Aldwick printed in D. G. C. Elwes & M. A. Lower, 'Additional notices of the parish of South Bersted,' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (hereafter abbreviated to *S.A.C.*), vol. 25 (1873), pp. 117-18; the statement that Sir William Burrell owned a volume of Sussex surveys

by Norden seems to be based on a misreading of B.L., Add. MS. 5689, f.30; Burrell owned surveys by Thomas Marshall, 6 James I.

⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1611-18* (1858), p. 158. References may appear in H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The history of the King's works*, vol. 4 (forthcoming). Published examples of Norden's work as surveyor of royal forests and of private estates are: H. Sumner, 'Norden's survey of mediæval coppices in the New Forest 1609,' *Proc. Hants. Field Club & Arch. Soc.*, vol. 10, pt. 2 (1929), pp. 95-117; J. C. Wilkerson (ed.), *John Norden's survey of Barley Hertfordshire 1593-1603*, Cambridge Antiquarian Records Soc., vol. 2 (1974); *Orford Ness. A selection of maps mainly by John Norden*, presented to J. A. Steers (Cambridge, 1966).

II

The holograph of the descriptions of the five counties and three islands which was presented to the Queen in 1595 was presumably placed in the Royal Library. It was perhaps removed early in the Civil War when, it was later reported, one of the King's officers removed many books from there and from various royal offices; topographical works may have been of especial interest in the circumstances of the time.¹ By 1666, this manuscript, a copy or another version was in circulation, as Sylvanus Morgan² announced 'that he had and can still procure several Pieces of John Norden, his SPECULUM BRITANNIAE, viz. Kent, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, the Isles of Whight, Gersey, and Garnsey,' presumably with a view to publishing them. The list of counties and islands is identical with the contents of the Queen's volume, except that Kent stands in the place of Middlesex which had already been printed. An owner of the Queen's volume in the 18th century removed the maps, and probably the title-page and dedication as well. These passed through different hands from the text, and in 1881, immediately before acquisition by the British Museum, only two maps (Essex and Hampshire), title-page and dedication were reunited with an incomplete text. What is missing from the text is the last page of the description of Essex and all but the last page of the description of Sussex (which follows Essex and not, as the title suggests, Surrey).³

However there is a complete copy of the text in the Northamptonshire Record Office, as Finch-Hatton MS. 113.⁴ The copy appears to have been made for the antiquarian Sir Christopher Hatton (Baron Hatton of Kirby). Hatton was born c. 1605 and died in 1670; he lived abroad between 1648 and 1656. We may surmise that the copy (which includes the same dedication and other preliminaries) was made from the Queen's volume, between 1656 and 1670. Comparison of the remaining Sussex page with Hatton's copy shows the contents to be identical except for numerous differences in spelling. These could be the result of rapid copying and are not conclusive evidence that another version was used. Neither the maps nor the two 'plots' of Hastings pier which are referred to in the text (and are thus another loss from the Queen's volume) were copied into Hatton's volume.

Historians have been aware of Hatton's copy for over a century as it was listed by the Historical Manuscripts Commission in its First Report⁵ among the manuscripts of the Earl of Winchilsea and Nottingham, as 'A Corographical Description of some Counties by Norden.' That it contained a complete 'Description of Sussex' was noted by L. F. Salzman in 1934 or 1935, a few years after its deposit with the Northamptonshire Record Society by the Trustees of the Earl of Winchilsea. Salzman supplied Norden's copy of the inscription of a brass at Arundel for Mrs. C. D. Davidson-Houston's paper on 'Sussex monumental brasses.'⁶

The 'Description of Sussex' fills 46 unnumbered pages in Hatton's copy compared with an estimated 12 pages in the Queen's, as it has been transcribed in a large hand with generous spacing. The contents and their arrangement follow a similar pattern to other counties' descriptions:

¹ Ravenhill (1972), p. 4.

² Morgan, p. [240]. There is no reference to manuscripts by Norden in the sale catalogues of either Morgan's books, 5 April 1693 (B.L., S.-C. 1033 (13)) or of his heraldical manuscripts sold as part of the library of Josiah Jones, 3-8 Dec. 1759 (Bodleian Lib., Vet A5.e. 1269).

³ *Catalogue of additions to the manuscripts in the British Museum in the years 1876-1881* (1882), p. 236.

⁴ I am grateful to the Chief Archivist for supplying me with photocopies, for information on the manuscript's provenance, and for allowing publication of extracts.

⁵ H.M.C., *First report* (1870), appendix, p. 31.

⁶ *S.A.C.*, vol. 76 (1935), p. 64.

pp. 1-7, general topography of the county; lists of boroughs, market towns, rapes and hundreds; shrieval and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

pp. 8-37, 'AN ALPHABETICALL table of the Citties, townes, parishes, Chappells & hamletts within Sussex': a gazetteer of places marked as such (and a few others) on Norden's published map, with references to the map's grid (numbered from west to east and lettered from north to south, at two mile intervals), and, for some places, alternative names and spellings, etymological derivations, and historical and topographical information.

pp. 37-42, 'Howses of Name for the moste parte which are in Sussex with the moste parte of their present possessors': a gazetteer of houses of the nobility and gentry, with grid references and, for the majority, the names of the occupiers.

pp. 42-46, 'An Alphabeticall Cattalogue of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of accompte for the most part, and of suche as in regarde of their wealth, usurpe that Title within Sussex, with their howses and present aboade': list of owners and occupiers, with names of houses.

The 'alphabetical table' which fills over half of the 'Description' names 364 places with their grid references. The great majority of these are to be found on the printed map, marked by the symbols in the map's key for market towns, parishes, hamlets, castles, chapels (though the symbols for castles and chapels have been transposed in the key), and religious places.¹ Also included are three houses, one mill (the symbol for which is not in the key) and five 'cities' (which are shown in profile on the map); Bulverhithe lacks any symbol on the map. The gazetteer of houses contains 138 places with grid references, mostly marked with the symbols for noblemen's houses and the houses of gentlemen, etc. But the list also includes a parish, three hamlets and a religious place. The last section, the catalogue of nobles and gentry, was probably intended to be an index to the gazetteer of houses, though names houses which are not in the gazetteer but are on the map. Conversely not all the houses in the gazetteer are in the catalogue.²

In addition there are places marked and named on the map which do not feature in the 'Description': four parishes, six hamlets, one chapel, two watermills, five parks, and six lodges in Ashdown Forest (with their special symbol), and the three named beacons. A few symbols on the map have no place-names belonging to them.

Of more interest are those places named with grid references in the gazetteers but not appearing on the printed map. These are, in the 'alphabetical table,' Derrington (grid reference k22), Fisher (m10), Forestrow (b32), Littlington (l42), Shelvestrode (a34), Westminston (h32) and Woodcote (k8); and in the list of houses, Barehorne (j51), Betchington (l44), Hidnye (k49), Luetington (k4), Moatehowse (g36), and Parrocke (b34). These omissions are the strongest evidence that the manuscript map in the Queen's volume to which the gazetteers presumably corresponded differed from the map as engraved. For the engraved map, Norden seems to have substituted Plumpton and Frog Firl in place of Westmeston and Litlington. Possibly he deleted Barnhorne, Hydneys, Lordington, Parrocke, and Betchington, as being too insignificant: the first three are recorded today as deserted medieval villages, the fourth is a possible one, and the last (in Friston parish) is a lost name. The same may apply to (in their modern forms) Fisher, Woodcote near Westerton, Moatpark Farm in Little Horsted, and Shovelstrode Farm, except

¹ Norden's use of symbols is discussed in E. M. J. Campbell, 'The beginnings of the characteristic sheet to English maps,' *Geogr. J.*, vol. 128 (1962), p. 411-15.

² The catalogue has been augmented by information from the gazetteer and printed as J. H. Farrant, 'Noblemen and gentry in Sussex in 1595', *Sussex Family Historian*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Dec. 1977), pp. 69-72.

that the last appears in the corner of Sussex printed on the map of Surrey and so could be an erroneous omission from the Sussex map. Forest Row may have been wrongly omitted by the engraver, as the map has an unnamed symbol in the right place and as it is named on the Surrey map. Durrington's omission is not readily explicable.¹

In two other respects the gazetteers (and so the manuscript map) differ from the printed map. First, in 53 instances the grid references do not tally. Some two-thirds can be ascribed to errors in copying (e.g., where an odd number is given, as the map's grid uses even numbers only), but 18 of the discrepancies are as between adjacent squares. Insertion of the grid lines was one of the last stages in the engraving of the plate, and the engraver could find that the lines did not fall in relation to the symbols exactly as on the manuscript from which he was copying. Eleven of the discrepancies relate to the lines between letters j to n and numbers 32 to 36.² Secondly, about 40 per cent of the place names in the two gazetteers are spelt differently (even allowing for the alternative versions given) from the names on the map. The majority of these differences are slight: the omission of an 'e' or the use of 'ie' for 'y' which could arise from the copying of Hatton's scribe and of the engraver. But others are more substantial, e.g., Chittingfeylde (gazetteer) for Chittingle (at g40 on the map), Chiltinge for Chilmington (g32), Kerdeforde for Cardeforde (e14), Eauforde for Iford (j34), Patchinge for Patcham (k18), and Rattingleane for Rallingdean (k32).

The 'alphabetical table' contains 368 entries, excluding cross references. Four of these do not include grid references: Beakesbourne, Bognore (Bognore Rocks are named on the map), Brappole and Dimsdale river. Of those with grid references:

150 have grid references only;

86 also have one or more alternative place-names or spellings of the place-name;

44 also have place-name derivations;

27 also have derivations and alternative names and spellings;

57 also have topographical and/or historical information, usually with derivations and alternative names and spellings. In many instances the place-names and the alternatives are not matched exactly by examples in Mawer and Stenton, *The place-names of Sussex*, but they are usually close to given examples and do not seem to represent distinct forms.

Norden's place-name derivations do not render necessary a wholesale revision of Mawer and Stenton, but do have a curiosity value as the first attempt at analysis of Sussex names. His usual practice is to translate the place-name into Latin, thus illuminating the elements in it; sometimes the Latin version is translated back into English. Several elements recur with the same Latin equivalent. Thus 'ton' is 'villa,' as in Clayton, Hangleton, Houghton and (South) Heighton, which are, respectively, 'villa argillacea clayish or Lutosa dirtie, so rightlye called,' 'Anglorum villa,' and the last two are both 'villa alta' (because they stand on spurs projecting into river valleys). Among the more fanciful derivations is, for Kingston Bowsey, 'forte a bibendo,' i.e., boozy. In his *Preparative* of 1596 Norden wrote at some length on place-name elements and explained the problems of their study arising from the corruption of pronunciation

¹ G. R. Burleigh, 'An introduction to deserted medieval villages in East Sussex,' *S.A.C.*, vol. 111 (1973), pp. 64, 69, 78. E. W. Holden, 'Deserted medieval villages,' *Sussex Notes & Queries*, vol. 15 (1958-62), p. 315. A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton, *The place-names of Sussex*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1930), p. 420.

² W. L. D. Ravenhill, 'The missing maps from John Norden's survey of Cornwall,' in K. J. Gregory & W. L. D. Ravenhill (eds.), *Exeter essays in geography in honour of Arthur Davies* (Exeter, 1971), pp. 95-6.

in common use. He took many of his examples from Sussex; thus: 'Manye wordes take name of the quallitie of the place, and mispronounced by custome, as Tarring for Terring, arrival or landing, Fering, transporting. Sometime we find names in England given of the French, and mispronounced, as Blackboys for Blancboys, white woode'¹

Most of the topographical and historical information (other than that encompassed by place-name derivations) falls into a limited number of categories. First, there are references to events in 'national' history, especially the Saxon invasion (Almanington, Chichester, Maresfield and Shoreham) and the Norman Conquest (Battle, Bulverhithe, Hastings and Pevensey). Secondly, events in their own history are mentioned for a few towns (Brighton, Chichester, Rye, Shoreham and Winchelsea). Thirdly, standing or ruined buildings in about twelve places are named, often with the present or former owner. Fourthly, monumental inscriptions from Arundel, Lewes and Wiston have been copied, along with seal inscriptions from Shoreham. Lastly the presence of markets is recorded.

What were the sources of the information which Norden gives? For historical information, he clearly draws on Camden's *Britannia* (first published in 1586) which, for instance, provided the references to Bede's Ecclesiastical History under Bosham and Selsey and a quotation about the site of Battle Abbey from William of Newburgh.² Holinshed's *Chronicles* were probably also used, e.g. for Jack Cade's capture at Heathfield and French firings of Rye in 1377 and of Brighton in 1514 and 1545.³ For comments relating to his own day, Norden seems to have relied mainly on personal research and observation. The list of places for which he gives more than the slightest contemporary information leaves little doubt that he traversed the county from east to west or vice versa. If he entered from Hampshire, he probably did so at Emsworth and passed to Chichester, a plan of which was inset to the map of Sussex. From there he may have made a detour in the direction of the Selsey peninsula, Bognor and Aldingbourne, on his way to Arundel. He then took the downland ridgeway until he descended to Wiston, at the north foot. Passing through the Adur gap at Bramber, he came to Old and New Shoreham from where the road took him through Hangleton to Brighton. His route then lay inland to Lewes, where he noted down the Magnus inscription differently from Camden.⁴ After a visit to Malling he returned to the coast at Eastbourne and then Pevensey. Hastings was reached by riding along the beach. Winchelsea came next and, passing west of Camber Castle, he came to Rye. A boat across the Rother took him to Guldeford and into Kent.

As he travelled, he found more or less helpful informants. At Arundel, he seems to have had an enthusiastic guide to the sights of the town, while the inhabitants of Hastings impressed on him their need for a pier. One of Lord Buckhurst's agents (perhaps Thomas Marshall)⁵ probably told him about the Sackville estates, and the information was carefully noted, for Buckhurst was a signatory of the Privy Council warrant of January 1594 ordering local officials to assist Norden and, later, was a patron of the engraved map, on which his crest appears.

No definite source for the 'catalogue of the noblemen and gentlemen' can be suggested.⁶

¹ *Nordens preparative to his Speculum Britanniae* (1596, repr. 1723), pp. 19-23; passage quoted at p. 21.

² W. Camden, *Britannia* (1586; edition of 1695), cols. 167, 168, 175.

³ *Holinshed's chronicles* . . . (1587, repr. 1807-8), vol. 3, pp. 227, 602, 848; vol. 2, p. 715.

⁴ But precisely as reconstructed by D. W. Pye, 'The Magnus inscription,' *Sussex Notes & Queries*, vol. 16 (1963-7), pp. 181-4.

⁵ Who compiled *The Buckhurst Terrier 1597-1598*, ed. E. Straker, Sussex Record Society, vol. 39 (1933), p. 1.

⁶ But see other lists in M. A. Lower, 'Sussex gentry in 1588,' *S.A.C.*, vol. 1 (1848), pp. 32-7; F. W. T. Attree, 'Lists of Sussex gentry at various dates' *S.A.C.*, vol. 39 (1894), pp. 106-16 (for 1570 and 1634 lists); and C. E. Welch, 'Sussex gentry in 1630,' *Sussex Notes & Queries*, vol. 16 (1963-7), 45-8.

This evidence that Norden made only a single traverse of the county suggests that his map of Sussex was not based on a comprehensive personal survey, which would have required excursions into the Weald. Ravenhill considers that Norden's map of Cornwall was, with little doubt, a 15 per cent. reduction of Christopher Saxton's map, that Saxton had used triangulation and that, using the intersecting lines from Saxton's already established stations, Norden added details and made corrections.¹ No technical comparison has been made of Norden's Sussex map with Saxton's map of 1575, but if such a method sufficed for the much more elaborate survey and description of Cornwall, a more refined method is unlikely when Norden was covering several counties in a year.

Norden's 'Description of Sussex' does little to compensate for the county having no Lambarde or Aubrey to record it as did its neighbours Kent and Surrey. It was the intended companion of the map which was the basis of county maps until Richard Budgen's survey of Sussex was published in 1724. Beyond that, it is perhaps best regarded as an example, from an early date, of the journal of a traveller through Sussex. William of Worcester had not entered the county on his recorded travels. John Leland left a few notes on Sussex, useful only for Petworth.² Camden's route was similar to Norden's, but his published account was briefer and made no pretence to covering the whole county.³ After Norden's day, Lieutenant Hammond's journal of 1635 is the only one known before Celia Fiennes made two brief excursions into Sussex, c. 1694 and 1697. John Macky's journey of 1714 was authentic, but Defoe's 'Tour,' allegedly made in 1722, may not have taken place. Only from about 1730—when the Sussex section of Thomas Cox's *Magna Britannia* appeared—are there topographical accounts in any number.⁴

¹ Ravenhill (1972), pp. 25-30.

² L. Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The itinerary of John Leland . . . 1535-1543* (1907-10), vol. 4, pp. 92-3.

³ Camden, col. 167.

⁴ L. G. Wickham Legg (ed.), 'Relation of a short survey of the Western Counties (1635),' in *Camden Miscellany*, vol. 16 (1936). C. Morris (ed.), *The journeys of Celia Fiennes* (rev. ed., 1949). J. Macky,

A journey through England, in familiar letters, vol. 1 (1714). D. Defoe, *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain*, vol. 1 (1724), letter II; see J. H. Andrews, 'Defoe and the sources of his Tour,' *Geogr. J.*, vol. 126 (1960), pp. 268-77. T. Cox, *Magna Britannia et Hibernia, antiqua et nova*, vol. 5 (1730).