

BENJAMIN MACKERELL
ANTIQUARY, LIBRARIAN, AND PLAGIARIST

by David Stoker

SUMMARY

The career of the Norfolk antiquary and local historian Benjamin Mackerell is less well known than those of his 17th and 18th century contemporaries. In addition to this work, he also performed the role of Librarian of Norwich Public Library with distinction. His contribution as an antiquary has been somewhat undervalued and he is now mainly remembered for less creditable events that took place towards the end of his life.

Introduction

The heyday of Norfolk antiquarian scholarship was not during the 1730s and 1740s when Francis Blomefield began to compile and publish the fascicles of his monumental history of the county, but rather in the two decades immediately before when a number of different scholars collected many of the materials upon which it was based. In a letter written in 1725, Thomas Tanner, the Chancellor of Norwich Diocese, refers to himself, to John Kirkpatrick, and to Benjamin Mackerell as 'a little Society of Icenian Antiquaries [which] may attend you our President at Wichingham'.¹ Tanner was writing to Peter Le Neve, the first President of the revived Society of Antiquaries in London. Le Neve was well known in antiquarian circles to be compiling a detailed topographical history of Norfolk, and had already devoted nearly thirty-five years to collecting the necessary materials.² His manuscript collections were later to be described as 'the greatest fund of antiquities for his native county that ever was collected for any single one in the kingdom'.³ They contained not only priceless original manuscripts such as cartularies, but also calendars and indexes to Norfolk records in the major series of Public Records and manuscripts in the College of Arms, together with an enormous collection of miscellaneous notes, compiled by Le Neve and his friends, and also incorporating the work of earlier antiquaries.

Thus Le Neve was not working entirely on his own. For many years he employed an amanuensis, Thomas Allen, who helped him to organise the vast collection, and dissect the collections of other earlier antiquaries into his crude 'filing system'.⁴ Le Neve also benefited from the work of the other 'Icenian Antiquaries', with whom he regularly corresponded and exchanged notes. John Kirkpatrick was making substantial manuscript collections for the history of the city of Norwich,⁵ whilst Thomas Tanner had amassed an equally valuable collection of manuscripts relating to the ecclesiastical history of the diocese and was also undertaking the revision of his monumental *Notitia monastica*.⁶ Most of all, however, Le Neve was assisted by Benjamin Mackerell, an antiquary from Norwich, who also had opportunity to travel around the county visiting parish churches and noting their funeral monuments.⁷

One noted antiquary from the same group, hitherto unnoticed, was somewhat younger than the other members. When, about 1710, Peter Le Neve had sought a guide to the antiquities of the historic borough of Thetford, Thomas Martin, a thirteen-year-old schoolboy was recommended. The elderly scholar was so impressed with the boy's knowledge of the history of the town that Martin quickly became his friend and protégé.⁸ It was on Le Neve's recommendation that Martin was awarded a Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries in 1718, when he was

only twenty-one. Thereafter, as an attorney working in Thetford, 'Honest Tom' Martin was always on the look out for documents and information relating to the origins and early history of his home town and the surrounding area.⁹ Thus, during the period from about 1710 until the late 1720s there was an active, although informal, group of antiquaries at work in Norfolk including some of the foremost scholars of their day. These men knew and co-operated with one another and between them they laid the foundations upon which the later historical scholarship of Francis Blomefield, Charles Parkin, and others, was built.

This fruitful period had come to an end by the turn of the decade. In 1728 John Kirkpatrick died, leaving the materials he had collected in the custody of his younger brother Thomas, and his valuable library and coin collection to the city of Norwich. The following year the elderly Peter Le Neve died, having entrusted his enormous antiquarian collections for Norfolk and Suffolk to the charge of his literary executors Thomas Martin and Thomas Tanner, until such time as they might be made available to the public in a suitable repository. Soon afterwards Martin married Le Neve's young widow, Frances, and the couple removed the collections to their new home at Palgrave near Diss. There they remained for the next half century, and all thought of the manuscripts being left for public use was forgotten. However, although remaining in Martin's collection, they were subsequently made available by him to many later historians of Norfolk and Suffolk.

The year 1730 saw the elevation of Thomas Tanner to the See of St Asaph in North Wales, and thereafter he was never again able to visit his adopted county, nor ensure that arrangements were made to carry out the terms of Le Neve's will. Tanner had originally intended to combine his manuscript collections with those of Le Neve, for public use in Norwich, but the fate of his friend's collection caused him to change his mind.¹⁰ His manuscripts were therefore removed to Oxford, and some were lost due to the sinking of a barge on the river Thames. The bulk were left to the Bodleian Library following the Bishop's death in 1735, much to the dismay of the Norfolk antiquarian community.

By the early 1730s only Benjamin Mackerell out of the original group of 'Icenian Antiquaries' remained actively at work on the history of Norfolk. It was rather left to the next generation, men such as Francis Blomefield, and Charles Parkin, with the help of Thomas Martin, to continue the tradition of local historical scholarship, and see the monumental collaborative history through the press.

Mackerell is now the least well known of this group. He did not achieve the reputation of Le Neve, Kirkpatrick or Thomas Tanner during his lifetime, nor since, and unlike his colleagues, he was never elected to the Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries. This was perhaps because he lacked the means to devote his life to historical scholarship, or had no patron who might secure him a suitable office in the church or College of Arms. He did however serve for a number of years as the unpaid librarian of the Norwich Public Library, where he did some excellent work in reorganising the collection, seeking out bequests and donations, and preparing and publishing a new catalogue. Apart from the library catalogue, Mackerell only published one work, a brief history of the town of King's Lynn, which appeared early in 1738, a few weeks before his death. However, it appears that he was also partly responsible for *A new and accurate map of the county of Norfolk* published in 1731, although his name is not recorded on this publication.

Benjamin Mackerell's collections of historical manuscripts were modest, particularly when compared with those of his contemporaries. Unlike Thomas Martin (who also published little) Mackerell did not play an influential part in encouraging and facilitating others to undertake works of historical scholarship. Yet he was a significant local historian in his own right, who

was respected by his contemporaries, and has made a lasting and valuable contribution to local scholarship. A number of useful works by him remain in manuscript, most notably his two-volume history of Norwich, which was completed and ready for the press shortly before he died.

What is perhaps most puzzling about Mackerell's career is that whilst his best work was left unpublished, the history of King's Lynn which was published under his name was almost entirely the work of another man. Likewise the map of the county, which he claims to have drawn, was largely plagiarised from the earlier work of the surveyor James Corbridge. Similarly the history of Norwich, Mackerell's finest achievement, although his own work, was hurriedly completed in an attempt to undermine, or at least to forestall, Francis Blomefield's own history of the city.

Family Background

Relatively little information is available about Mackerell's family and early life, and his date of birth is likewise not known, although it was probably during the 1660s. He was the second son of Alderman John Mackerell, a prosperous mercer of Norwich, who came to the city as an apprentice from Yarmouth in the mid-seventeenth century, and who died aged 85 in 1723.¹¹ His elder brother served as the Receiver General for part of the county of Norfolk,¹² but Benjamin appears to have had no equivalent official position. He is usually described as 'Gentleman', and seems to have had independent, although limited, means. Most of Mackerell's life appears to have been spent in Norwich; in the early 1720s he was close to Chapelfield House,¹³ and a decade later in the Market Place, 'opposite to the Guildhall'.¹⁴ However at least one (undated) surviving letter from him to the antiquary Thomas Birch was written from an address in London, and another written to Peter Le Neve seeks employment in the capital and offers to move his family there.¹⁵ According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he married in 1723, and had several children, although this date appears to have been derived from a mis-reading of Le Neve's diary. At least one of his sons, also named Benjamin, was old enough to act as his father's executor in 1738.¹⁶

By October 1735 he was describing himself to Blomefield as 'infirm, and unfit for everything and at this present have the gout so much in my right hand that I can scarce hold a pen in it'.¹⁷ Nevertheless another letter written to Blomefield the following December and one to Thomas Martin in August 1736 show that he was still actively involved in antiquarian research.¹⁸ The latter of these also indicates that he had recently settled in Horstead. Mackerell died in March 1738 and was buried, along with other members of his family, in the chancel of St Stephen's Church, Norwich, on 1 April,¹⁹ although his monument was no longer visible by the early nineteenth century.²⁰

The Antiquary

Mackerell's career as an antiquary appears to have begun with a fascination with heraldry, and in particular with the armorial bearings of Norfolk families. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, Mackerell made copies of hundreds of local shields, crests and mottoes, taken from stained glass windows, funeral monuments, hatchments, carriage doors, and anywhere else they might be displayed. These were then recorded using water colours on pre-printed shield blanks, and eventually bound up in a series of works which are frequently referred to as 'Mackerell's Norfolk armory'.²¹ Like most of Mackerell's manuscripts, and unlike the notes taken by many of his contemporaries, these works were painstakingly compiled and systematically arranged and indexed, making them useful works of reference both for their original com-

piler and others who came later.

The ideal position for a man with Mackerell's talents and experience would be in the College of Arms, but without a patron to recommend him, he was unlikely to achieve this ambition. However, within ten miles of Norwich, there lived Peter Le Neve, who as the Norroy King of Arms, was one of the four most influential men within the College. In 1722 Mackerell sought an introduction through his friend John Knyvett:

Norwich Chapell-feild house July the 25th 1722.

Dear Sir

This Gentleman, Mr Benjamin Mackerell is my nearest neighbour & very good freind, has a desire to waite upon you he being a great admirer of Heraldry and not having the Honour & happiness of being soe well known to you as he thinks I am, desires me to recommend him to you in this letter. I doe assure your sir he is a very good proficient in it already, and if it will please you to encourage him & show him some curiositys in your way of Heraldry, you will extreemly oblige, Dear Sir, your most humble servant
John Knyvett.²²

Presumably, Mackerell's offer of assistance with Le Neve's history followed this letter.

Thus during the 1720s Mackerell undertook a great deal of historical research on Le Neve's behalf, primarily centred around Norwich, but also elsewhere, as he accompanied his brother the Receiver General on his rounds of the county.²³ The work took account of the interests of both men. For example, two manuscript volumes, compiled by Mackerell in 1723-6, contained church notes, monumental inscriptions, together with fenestral and other arms in the parish churches of Norwich.²⁴

In return, Mackerell clearly hoped that Le Neve would ultimately use his influence to secure him a suitable post. At some time over the next seven years he even wrote to the latter at the College of Arms, to request as much.

To Mr Peter Le Neve Esqr, Norroy King of Arms Att the Colledge of Arms London.

Honour'd Sir

Having been at the Coffee-House this evening I found some Alteration in the Heraldry Office, And should take it as the Greatest of Favours might I obtain a Place therein thro' your means without which I shall not attempt it. I once had the Honour of Receiving Intelligence from you and now Humbly Beg the Favour to Inform me whether it be necessary I should be at London & will be sure to set forward upon the Receipt of your Answer for I am fully Determined If I can be fixed therein to settle my Abode there. I can Command any sume of money at an hours warning (I mean enough for that purpose). I have left my evil Custom of Reading in Bed Heartily begging pardon for my Former Miscarriage and Giving you this Trouble I remain,

Your most humble servant

Benjamin Mackerell

Pray Sir Inform me by your Answer whether you think it proper for me to be at London in a short time, for if you be not present I fear my own Endeavours would be in vain, should I attempt it.²⁵

However, Le Neve's patronage was not so easily acquired, or perhaps he was not easily forgiven for his misdemeanour, for Mackerell was never successful in gaining any office with the College of Arms.

Despite the death of Peter Le Neve in 1729, Mackerell continued to collect local materials in his own right, and in particular, to record the details of funeral monuments from local churches. For example, in 1729/30, he compiled a manuscript account of the history of St Stephen's parish in Norwich, and in 1735/6 he compiled a brief historical account of the neighbouring church of St. Peter of Mancroft.²⁶ Also, it was at this time that he appears to have become involved in map publishing.

James Corbridge's map of Norfolk has been described as 'a splendid map, made from the

first important survey of the county, and issued in 1730²⁷. Previous maps had been sketchy, frequently inaccurate, and usually derived one from another. Corbridge's map was however fairly expensive, as he had to recover the considerable costs of employing a team of surveyors to cover the county. Inevitably it also contained a few omissions and imperfections.

In 1731 two Norwich booksellers issued a rival, slightly smaller, and somewhat cheaper map, generally very similar to that of Corbridge, but without giving the name of any surveyor.²⁸ Although it identified a few more places, it was obviously pirated from Corbridge's work, and was not based upon an entirely new scientific survey of the county. Writing in August 1737 to an unknown correspondent, Mackerell claimed:

Some few years ago I published a Map of Norfolk after Corbridge had done one, and notwithstanding his boasts of his Actual Survey I that sat in my closet could take a much better survey than he did when he left out many towns. Mine was published on Elephant Paper, without my name, only to be sold by Goddard and Chase. Not that I tell you this to boast of but only to acquaint you how I come to know all of the towns in the County which I have put in an alphabetical order in the margin.²⁹

Mackerell had previously compiled an ordered list of Norfolk towns, presumably for Peter Le Neve, since the manuscript was subsequently in the hands of Thomas Martin.³⁰ However this could hardly give him the right to claim he had therefore produced a better survey than Corbridge.

Like Thomas Tanner, Benjamin Mackerell was clearly shocked and upset when, early in 1732, Thomas Martin married Frances Le Neve and the couple removed her first husband's manuscripts from Great Witchingham to Palgrave. This valuable collection contained quite a lot of his own work, and he was the single person most likely to benefit if the terms of Le Neve's will had been followed, with the collection deposited in Norwich, either in the Cathedral Registry or else the Public Library. Mackerell must have been even more upset, when, in July 1733, he read the printed proposals for a history of Norfolk, clearly based upon Le Neve's collections. These were produced by Francis Blomefield, a young clergyman from Fersfield, who was a good friend and comparative neighbour of Thomas Martin. Mackerell apparently alerted the Norwich Mayor's court to Martin's malversation, but they took no action, for, as he later wrote, 'they are no way bookish'.³¹ In any event it was a difficult situation since Le Neve had not specified which repository, and merely left it for his executors to decide. Mackerell therefore held his tongue and awaited developments, whilst continuing to correspond with Martin, and borrow manuscripts from time to time.³²

In October 1735, once it became obvious that Blomefield's history was likely to be published, Mackerell wrote to introduce himself to the young historian, and to invite him to his house when he was next in Norwich.³³ Blomefield replied and the two men met in the November, and thereafter shared a brief correspondence. The fascicles of Blomefield's history of Norfolk began to appear in the following March. However by the spring of 1737 Mackerell's bitterness and a mutual jealousy of one another began to be apparent. Henceforth there was an open rift between them.

Mackerell felt that he should undertake the compilation of the histories of Norwich and King's Lynn, using Le Neve's materials, leaving Blomefield to continue with the rural areas. During the period from March 1736 to July 1737 Blomefield had only published parts of his history covering thirty-three towns and villages closest to his home. One of the reasons for this slow progress had been a three-month period of sickness. However Mackerell pointed out that there were 822 villages in the county, quite apart from the large and historically complex accounts of the boroughs of Norwich, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Thetford. Even after making due allowance for Blomefield's sickness the rate of progress was such that the history

would take him thirty years to complete, and would prove to be an inordinately large and expensive work.

Mackerell's calculations were quite correct and his was not perhaps an unreasonable suggestion, particularly since Blomefield had already recruited one collaborator, Charles Parkin, the Rector of Oxborough. Parkin had taken responsibility, and was borrowing Le Neve's materials, for a number of hundreds in the west of the county. Mackerell also pointed out to the young historian that 'if his friend Martin had fulfilled the will of the dead I should have been before him even in Norfolk'.³⁴ Blomefield rejected Mackerell's suggestions for Lynn and Norwich out of hand, and denied that he would ever need to produce more than three folio volumes. As a result the latter publicly announced his intention of proceeding with his own publications in any event, although relying only upon his own materials, and without the benefit of those from the Le Neve collection. Blomefield refers to this dispute in a letter to Edward White of Great Yarmouth in October 1737:

You will ere long see some attempts made to undermine my work, but can tell you as a friend I dare trust, 'tis in such a manner that it is out of their power to injure it.... now 'tis given out, the work will never be finished, and if it be will cost twenty guineas, to all which I say nothing.³⁵

Mackerell's first attempt to undermine Blomefield's history was not long in coming. It related to the publication, early in 1738, of a small octavo volume purporting to contain the 'history and antiquities of King's Lynn'.³⁶ This topic may have appeared a little unlikely as Mackerell's first excursion into published history, since he had never lived in the town nor devoted much time to collecting materials relating to it. The reason for his choice is revealed in the account of the work written eighty years later by William Richards, the next historian of King's Lynn:

About forty years after the death of Guybon Goddard [in 1677], another attempt was made to produce or compile a history of this town, by a nameless person, but evidently a learned, ingenious, and industrious man. Unfortunately his attention was chiefly engaged about the churches, and especially the monuments and monumental inscriptions, which they contained. These he took no small pains with, and made fair drawings of most of them. This work he carefully arranged, and fairly wrote out. It forms a moderate folio volume, The volume was finished in 1724, and the author, it seems, died soon after.

Within a few years after his death, the work fell into the hands of Mr. B. Mackerell, who, after making a few paltry additions to it, actually published the greatest part of it verbatim under his own name, and it constitutes the bulk of that volume which has ever since been called *Mackerell's History of Lynn*. This act or achievement is disreputable to Mackerell's memory; but the plagiarism has been scarcely known or noticed till now. He makes, in his preface some slight obscure mention of the MS. but deigns not to tell the author's name, though it must have been well known to him. He also boasts of his having had free access to the *town-records*, and having "diligently searched and pursued them, for a considerable time together." For aught we know, this may be very true; but if it be so, he must have laboured to very small purpose, as all the discoveries he has been able to make amount to very little, and may be comprised within a very narrow compass.³⁷

The 'nameless person' was John Green, a little known antiquary from Lynn. He had compiled a number of manuscript descriptions of the churches and chapels in his home town, which were later bound together in a single volume.³⁸ It was a transcript of this volume which came into Mackerell's hands, and which he published, together with his own very sketchy description of the town, and other minor additions. The timing and the way in which the book was published were clearly intended as a means of retribution against Blomefield. It did not approach being comprehensive or even an adequate topographical history of what was then one of the most important ports in the country.

Mackerell's *Preface*, dated at Norwich, 5 November 1737, merely served to compound his effrontery. After outlining the contents, and making passing reference to the manuscript which 'very accidentally fell into my hands', he sought to justify the publication.

I do assure the Reader, that what is contained in this Book was not intended for a Catch-penny; but it really and truly contains only Matters of Fact, taken from the Records of the Town, and other undeniable Proofs and Vouchers which were diligently searched and perused by me for a considerable Time together: ...

... Had I intended to have made this as bulky as I could, the several Charters at length, and the Roll of the Admiralty, would have done it alone: But I hope what I have said is sufficient to convince the Reader, that the Author consulted not his own Advantage in this Book, as he might have done, but the Benefit of the Publick only.

... I can make no other Apology for this Book, than it was written by One who took Pleasure in the Composition; and flatters himself there may be several of his Taste, who may like to peruse Books of this Sort, which hitherto have met with a kind Reception. He is truly sensible what an ill-natur'd World he sends these Sheets into, (viz. to be criticis'd and censured by every One that pleases;) But as there is not one Paragraph in the whole Book but what he can produce authentick Vouchers for, he is in hopes that the candid and unprejudiced Reader will approve of this Performance: If so, then let Criticks snarl, and Censurers cavil; it is the Candid and Ingenuous that I esteem, it matters not much what is said by the Sneerer.

Blomefield was aware of Mackerell's intentions before the appearance of this volume. By coincidence he was then borrowing Green's original manuscript from Charles Squire of King's Lynn, and felt bound to write to the owner to re-assure him that he had not made it available to Mackerell.³⁹ Blomefield publicly identified the plagiarism, albeit in measured terms, five years later when he published a description of Mackerell's funeral monument. In 1749 he acquired Green's original manuscript volume and he had the further satisfaction of recording the plagiarism for posterity in more detail by cross-referring the appropriate page of the printed edition.

The appearance of Mackerell's work did however demonstrate to Blomefield that there might be a separate market for discrete histories of the individual towns in Norfolk. Mackerell was therefore almost certainly instrumental in Blomefield's decision (taken about January 1738) that he would re-issue those parts of his work relating to Thetford as a separate publication in quarto format.⁴⁰

Whilst the publication of the history of Lynn was a rather shoddy incident, little more than a nuisance to Francis Blomefield, Mackerell's proposed history of Norwich was another matter altogether. In 1737 he was far better prepared and qualified to write a history of Norwich than Blomefield, and already had substantial collections in his own right. He may also have been aware that his health was beginning to fail, and that his life was drawing to a close. In any event, the last six months of Mackerell's life was spent in a race to complete his history of Norwich and prepare it for publication. It was a race that he almost won, as is apparent from an advertisement appearing in the *Norwich Mercury* on 1 April 1738:

On Wednesday last died Mr Benjamin Mackerell, Author of the Antiquities of Lynn-Regis in the County of Norfolk, just published. He having some weeks before his Death, with very great Assiduity & Accuracy, finish'd the History of Norwich, the same is now in the press, and will be publish'd by an able hand. And all persons who intend to subscribe are desired to send their names with the subscription money, forthwith to the printer of this paper, or to his late dwelling-house in the Market Place.

Presumably there were few subscriptions forthcoming, and the family were not willing to risk publishing the complete work on speculation, since nothing more is known of the proposed publication.

The existence of this completed work, and the threat of its imminent publication, must have concerned Blomefield, even after Mackerell's death. It was undoubtedly the reason why Blomefield decided about 1739 or 1740 to abandon his original plan of working systematically through the county, and rather devote the second volume of the history of Norfolk to his account of Norwich.⁴¹

The completed two-volume manuscript of Mackerell's history of Norwich is preserved in the

Norfolk Record Office.⁴² For its time, it is a detailed, painstaking, and well-organised work, which is clearly in a state ready to hand over to a printer. It complements the more detailed account of the city compiled by Blomefield between 1741 and 1745. The first and largest of the volumes was almost totally devoted to describing funeral monuments in great detail, but the second covered a wide variety of aspects of the history of the city.⁴³ Had this work been published, it would undoubtedly have redeemed the posthumous reputation of its author. Had the two men been able to co-operate with one another, they would have produced the finest and most detailed topographical history of any city in Britain.

The Librarian

In addition to his career as an antiquary, Mackerell is worth remembering for the work he undertook in his unpaid office of Librarian of the Norwich Public Library, between 1721 and 1733, and possibly later. This collection was already more than a century old, when Mackerell was first admitted to membership in 1715.⁴⁴ The following year, he presented the library with copies of H.C. Davila's *History of the civil wars of France* and Edward Brimstone's *A generale historie of the Netherlands*, both in folio.⁴⁵

The Norwich City Library was founded in May 1608, when the Norwich Assembly set aside three rooms in the New Hall in St Andrew's parish for the provision of a library for local preachers. No funds were made available for book purchases however other than the provision of a donor's book. Gifts of books were soon forthcoming, particularly from the aldermen and other city dignitaries, and by 1617 more than one hundred and twenty volumes had been added to the collection.⁴⁶ Over the next three centuries, the library continued to operate, although its fortunes tended to wax and wane. After the initial enthusiasm following its establishment, the collection was neglected and the library shut up, until 1657, when it was revived by the Presbyterian Minister John Collinges.⁴⁷ Similarly, a further period of neglect towards the end of the century, was followed by the appointment of an enthusiastic librarian, Joseph Brett, the reorganisation of the collection, and the publication of the first printed catalogue in 1706.⁴⁸

Mackerell's early membership of the library coincided with a period when the collection was well used, particularly by the Cathedral Clergy such as Thomas Tanner the Chancellor, John Jeffrey, the Archdeacon of Norwich, or Humphrey Prideaux, the Dean. However at the same time there was a decline in the number of donations, and a general relaxation in the application of the rules to members. Mackerell later expressed his disapproval of the management of the collection, in the account of the library in his history of Norwich.

In this Library are a Great many valuable, useful & good books both antient and modern especially in Divinity; and not a few History. For some few years it has been a Lending Library and some persons have had books two or three years together contrary to an order to the contrary. There is no salary given by the City for any one to take care & the charge of the Books upon him. Only the keys thereof are left at the House of the Clark of St Andrews parish, and any man may be admitted that will but give him twelve pence a Quarter. But unless the Corporation would be at the expence of a salary for any sober discreet person to take the charge of the said books upon himself & have the sole custody of them, and pecuniary mulcts inflicted upon such as break the orders already made, there is little hopes of keeping the books there, or in any good order long together, besides this is also made up of upon the account of the trustees for the charity schools who frequently meet there, notwithstanding there are so many more convenient rooms in the said hall, especially that in which the Grand Jury meet in at every Assizes.

Persons may borrow two books out of this Library at a time but ought not to keep them above one month without giving notice to Mr Library Keeper.⁴⁹

Mackerell's opportunity to institute reform came in June 1724, when he was elected the

Library Keeper.⁵⁰ He sought firstly to tighten up adherence to the regulations by the members, and secondly to encourage more donations, beginning with his friends. Thus his neighbour John Knyvett made a donation shortly after Mackerell took office. However, his greatest coup was in persuading his friend the antiquary John Kirkpatrick to leave more than two hundred early printed books and manuscripts together with his valuable collection of coins and medals to the library. Kirkpatrick did however reserve his manuscript collections towards the history of Norwich, for the use and enjoyment of his brother Thomas during his lifetime, and only thereafter to the city.⁵¹ Had the City Library also received the Le Neve collection as the owner had perhaps intended, and subsequently the Tanner manuscripts, it would have become an enormously valuable resource for the history of the county and of the East Anglian region.

The acquisition of the Kirkpatrick volumes provided an excellent reason for the complete reorganisation of the collection, and the compilation of a new library catalogue. On Mackerell's recommendation, the Norwich Municipal Assembly set up a committee to consider the library, which in 1730 agreed to finance the publication of 600 copies of a new catalogue. In October of that year Mackerell signed two official newspaper advertisements relating to the library. The first demanded that all outstanding books should be 'returned forthwith, or else they [i.e. borrowers] would be sued for the same'.⁵² The second publicly announced the forthcoming catalogue and solicited further donations;

whosoever please to contribute any book or books to the said library, are desir'd to send them forthwith (or within 3 months after the date hereof, least it should be too late) to Mr Benjamin Mackerells at Chapel-Field House who will take care of them, and cause their names to be printed in the New Catalogue, with their several donations, and the same to be entered into a vellum book kept in the library for that purpose.⁵³

This advertisement was a partial success, since the donor's book shows a number of gifts between 1730, and the summer of 1733 when the catalogue eventually appeared. Mackerell himself donated a further thirteen titles in 1731.

Like much of Mackerell's antiquarian work, the printed catalogue⁵⁴ was orderly and well executed; a model library catalogue for its period. The books were arranged within a broad alphabetical classification scheme, and each title allocated a shelf number. The catalogue was arranged alphabetically by author with columns showing the donor's name, author, title, date (where known), format, class and number. In his introduction Mackerell mentions that the publication of Brett's catalogue in 1706 had given rise to a number of additional donations: 'for which Reason 'tis hoped that publishing and dispersing this *Catalogue* may have its well-intended design effected.' He also cited other potential advantages of its publication, 'the Magistrates, Gentlemen, Tradesmen, &c. of this City, ...by their seeing what Books are there Already, they may avoid giving *Duplicates*'. Similarly, 'those who are or shall be admitted to the Use of this Library ... save themselves many an unnecessary journey to it, in hopes to find a Book they may have Occasion for, and is not there to be met with'.

Shortly before the publication of the catalogue, the Norwich Assembly passed a number of orders 'for the better regulation of the Public Library, ... upon Pain of Exclusion from the said library'.⁵⁵ These new rules reflect Mackerell's wish for the better regulation of the collection. They allowed for the annual recall of all books, the sale of duplicates, and the election of a new Library-Keeper. They limited the number of books to be loaned and insisted on the maintenance of proper loan records. They also fixed an annual charge for using the library, and instituted additional charges for the loss of or damage to books. However, it appears that some other members of the library did not appreciate Mackerell's attempts at regulating the collection. For a brief period during the reorganisation and re-cataloguing, Mackerell was apparently

ousted from office by some of the other users.

According to the rules of the library, there should be an annual election of the members for the post of library keeper. However like many other library regulations, this requirement had been ignored for generations. On 6 December 1731 a group of members met in the library without the presence of the librarian:

Present Mr Official Clayton Mr Herne Mr Bennet Dr Francis Mr Pagan. –

Memorandum. It was then order'd by the persons whose names are above written that Peter Scott wait upon Mr Mackerell Library Keeper and desire him to meet them the next Library day they intending to proceed to the election of a new one. The time for such election being long since passed.⁵⁶

At the next but one meeting on 7 February 1731/2, William Pagan was elected Library Keeper. Unfortunately the minutes of the library do not provide any further information, and cease altogether within a year. However, on the 15 April following, Mackerell signed himself 'Bibliothecarius' in the preface to the printed catalogue, and presumably had been re-instated.

The publication of Mackerell's catalogue only dealt with the books and manuscripts in the library's collection. John Kirkpatrick's will had also left his coins and medals, although four years after his death these were still in the hands of John Custance, Kirkpatrick's executor. In particular, there was a very valuable collection of 380 Roman and old English coins, of silver, brass and copper. Having witnessed the fate of the Le Neve collection, destined for public use, but retained by the executor, Mackerell was determined that these coins should not go the same way. He therefore announced his intention of publishing 'an account of Mr John Kirkpatrick's roman and other coins' on the title page of the catalogue. Although this work was never completed, Mackerell was still actively considering it in December 1735, when he was still on good terms with Francis Blomefield. He wrote a letter describing his plans for engraved illustrations and seeking the latter's advice on the cost of production.⁵⁷

The Kirkpatrick coin collection was subsequently delivered to the City Library where it was kept in locked cases. Unfortunately, they were later subject to neglect and pilfering so that by 1840 everything of any value had been lost.⁵⁸ Likewise, the library in general also suffered a prolonged period of neglect after Mackerell's death and the books were eventually handed over to the public subscription library.

Benjamin Mackerell remains a complex and somewhat shadowy character. Although he was clearly a man with many talents he never achieved his full potential in any sphere. As an antiquary and local historian, his reputation has been largely overshadowed by those of his contemporaries, and his contribution to the study has been undervalued as a result. He is now remembered principally for the less creditable events that took place towards the end of his life when he was perhaps an embittered old man. Similarly, as a librarian he did a great deal to preserve and develop a valuable collection, although in the end his efforts were not well appreciated either by his contemporaries or those who followed afterwards.

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1. John Nichols, *Illustrations of the literary history of the eighteenth century*, 8v. (1817-1858), III., 433.
2. Letter from John Borret of Griston to Le Neve in 1696 (Norfolk Record Office MC 1/63, 64). In the same year, Thomas Smith, the librarian of the Cottonian Library, was referring to Le Neve's planned work as 'ampla & accurata comitatus Norfolciensis historia & descripto', *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Cottonianae*, (Oxford, 1696).
3. Richard Gough, *British Topography*, (1780) II, 2. The collection is described in more detail in David Stoker, 'The ill-gotten library of "Honest Tom" Martin', in *Property of a Gentleman: the formation, organisation and dispersal of the private library 1620-1920*, (1991), 96.

4. Diarmaid MacCulloch provides a good brief description of Le Neve's and Allen's methods of dealing with the historical documents that came into their collection in *The Chorography of Suffolk* (1976), 1-5.
5. Kirkpatrick's work is described by Frederic Johnson in 'John Kirkpatrick, antiquary', *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXIII, (1929) 285-304.
6. The extent of the co-operation between Tanner, Kirkpatrick and Le Neve is apparent from Tanner's correspondence with Le Neve (Nichols, III., 40-35).
7. The Hamond Collection in the N.R.O. (temporary reference no. Misc. 25) contains the following undated draft letter of introduction, in the handwriting of Thomas Tanner. I am most grateful to Paul Rutledge of the Norfolk Record Office for alerting me to this, and other manuscript references to Mackerell.

To all Rectors, vicars, Curates, Churchwardens, chapelwardens and all others within the County of Norfolk and the Diocese of Norwich whom this may any way concern – Whereas the bearer Mr Benjamin Mackerell hath kindly offered his assistance to Peter Le Neve of Great Wichingham Esq. Norroy King of Arms who hath spent several years and been at great expence in collecting materials toward illustrating the History and Antiquities of Norfolk his Native County, out of personal Respect & friendship to that learned and worthy Gentlemen and being willing as far as in me lies to promote this his publick & noble design, I do hereby heartily recommend Mr Mackerell to the kindness and countenance of all and every one of you, desiring that he may be quietly and readily permitted to view your respective Churches and Chapels and to copy the monumental or other inscriptions, the old Coats of Arms in the Windows &c and that you would communicate to him whatever shall occur to you out of your Parish Register or other papers in your keeping for the improvement of this laborious work of Mr Le Neve: which when finished will be so great use and tend so much to the Honour of this County an of every Old Family, parish and township in the same that I doubt not your incouragement of Mr Le Neve or any of his Assistants in the manner now requested by T.T.
8. John Fenn, 'Memoirs of the life of Thomas Martin, Gent.' *Norfolk Archaeology*, XV, (1904), 233-48. For a full account of Martin's career see David Stoker, 'The ill-gotten library of "Honest Tom" Martin'.
9. These materials were never published during Martin's lifetime but were eventually edited by Richard Gough, and published as *The history of Thetford*, (1779).
10. *The correspondence of the Reverend Francis Blomefield*, ed. David Stoker, (1992), 119. Hereafter cited as 'Blomefield Correspondence'.
11. George Carthew, 'Extracts from the Ms diary of Peter Le Neve', *Norfolk Archaeology*, II, (1849), 369-390, 382, and Percy Millican, *The register of the Freemen of Norwich*, (1934) 102, 232
12. N.R.O., MC 431/7, and Le Neve's *Ms diary* (above p. 388).
13. Letter from John Knyvett to Peter Le Neve, July 1722, N.R.O., KNY 887
14. Letter from Mackerell to Francis Blomefield October 1735 (Blomefield *Correspondence*, 99).
15. Letter to Birch, (circa 1730?) British Library Addl. Ms. 4313, fo.52, and to Peter Le Neve N.R.O., MC 1/88.
16. A notice to Mackerell's debtors was published in the *Norwich Mercury*, 24 June 1738.
17. Blomefield *Correspondence*, 99.
18. Blomefield *Correspondence*, 109, and Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Don. d.89 letter 46, fo.117.
19. N.R.O., St Stephen's Parish Register, and Francis Blomefield, *An essay towards a topographical history of Norfolk*, 2nd edition 10 vols. (1805-15) iv. 161. Other family monuments were in the church of St Peter Mancroft, (208-9).
20. John Chambers, *A general history of the county of Norfolk*, 2 vols. (1829), 1079.
21. These are now among the Bradfer Lawrence manuscripts in the N.R.O. (Ms. 4509A/B). There are two pairs of volumes. The larger pair contain a single engraved shield blank per page, together with crest, supporters and motto; each volume has a different design of blank. It is clear from the plate marks, that the two designs were originally printed together from the same plate. The smaller pair of volumes rather contains twelve simple wood-cut shield blanks per page.
22. N.R.O., KNY 887.
23. N.R.O., MC 431/7.
24. B.L., Addl. Mss. 12525/6.
25. N.R.O., MC 1/88.
26. N.R.O., MS 4253, and B.L. Addl. Mss 23011, and 9370.
27. Thomas Chubb, *A descriptive list of the printed maps of Norfolk 1574-1916*, (1917), 50.
28. For the circumstances surrounding the publication of these two maps see David Stoker, 'A Norfolk map piracy', *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXXVII, (1978), 123-6, and 'Prosperity and success in the eighteenth century English provincial book trade: the career of William Chase & Co.' *Publishing History*, 30, (1991), 31-88.
29. N.R.O., MC 431/7.
30. N.R.O., NNAS c3/1/1(3) 'Norfolk Towns', subsequently annotated by Thomas Martin.
31. N.R.O., MC 431/7.

32. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Don.d.89, letter 46 is from Mackerell to Martin dated August 1736, in which he seeks the loan of a number of manuscripts.
33. Blomefield *Correspondence*, 99.
34. N.R.O., MC 431/7
35. Blomefield *Correspondence*, 176
36. Benjamin Mackerell, *The history and antiquities of the flourishing Corporation of King's Lynn in the County of Norfolk*, (London, 1738).
37. William Richards, *A history of Lynn*, (King's Lynn, 1818), iii-iv.
38. Bodl. Libr, Ms. Gough Norfolk 21 (18077). This volume includes:
The history of St Margaret's Church in Kings-Lynn.... By I.G. Illustrated with divers Views, Prospects, and Draughts etc. [1724].
The Epitaphs and Monumental Inscriptions in St Nicholas chapel...1725.
The Epitaphs and Funeral Inscriptions in All Saints-Church South Lynn 1725.
The ancient foundation of St Mary Magdalens Hospital etc.;
39. Blomefield *Correspondence*, 200.
40. Francis Blomefield, *The history of the ancient city and burgh of Thetford*, (Fersfield, 1739).
41. Blomefield also published this work as a discrete history of Norwich. It is also interesting that in 1741 following the publication of Blomefield's proposals for Norwich, Thomas Kirkpatrick, the brother of the antiquary announced the publication of a history of the city. This was yet another history of Norwich which never saw publication.
42. 'The history of the City of Norwich both antient & modern', (N.R.O., N.N.A.S. Safe II 1a-b), and there is also a typescript version. (It is a tribute to Mackerell's ability to organise and lay out the text that his original manuscript is still far easier to read and use than the later typescript.)
43. For example the second volume includes accounts of the former streets and lanes, insurrections, St George's Company, Kett's rebellion, a description of the city, the election and powers of alderman, the mayor's proclamation, an account of the mint, account of the work-house, of the charity schools, the Publick library, of diversions, members of parliament, recorders, town clerks, famous events in alphabetical order, a composite index of the bishops, priors, deans, chancellors, archdeacons, prebendaries, bailiffs, mayors, stewards, aldermen and sheriffs.
44. The minute book of Norwich City Library', 9 May 1715 (N.R.O., MS 4226)
45. N.R.O., MS 4228, 'City Library Donations book'.
46. The history of the library is recorded by G.A. Stephen in *Three centuries of a city library*, (1917).
47. David Stoker, 'Doctor Collinges and the revival of the Norwich City Library 1657-1664', *Library History*, V, (1980), 73-84.
48. *A catalogue of the books in the library of the city of Norwich*, compiled by Joseph Brett, (1706).
49. Benjamin Mackerell, 'The History of the City of Norwich both antient and Modern', fo. 870
50. N.R.O., MS 4226. fol. 92.
51. Quoted from *Catalogus librorum in bibliotheca Norvicensi*, compiled by Frederic Kitton, (1883), xi-xii. Many of these manuscripts did subsequently pass into the ownership of the city.
52. *Norwich Mercury* 3-10 October 1730.
53. *Norwich Mercury* 17-24 October 1730.
54. *A new catalogue of the books in the public library of the city of Norwich*, compiled by Benjamin Mackerell, (Norwich, [1733]).
55. N.R.O., Proceedings of the Norwich Assembly 1707-45, fo. 178^b, 24 February 1732/3. "That the catalogues printed be made up 600 and paid for by the Corporacion and that one of them be kept in the Town Clerks Office and another in the City Library and that one half of the remaining number be left in the Town Clerks Office to be delivered to the members of the Corporacion and that the other half be left in y^e Library to be delivered to y^e subscribers thereto..." The new regulations were printed as a foreword to the catalogue.
56. N.R.O., MS 4226 fol. 99.
57. Blomefield *Correspondence*, 109-110.
58. G.A. Stephen, *Three centuries of a city library*, and Frederic Johnson, 'John Kirkpatrick', 297-8.