

- of the Diocese of Norwich by John Thomas, Lord Bishop of Norwich, at his Visitation in 1872 (Norwich: Samuel Miller, 1872), 8-9; A Charge delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Norwich by John Thomas, Lord Bishop of Norwich, at his Visitation in 1879 (Norwich: A.H. Goose & Co., 1879), 10-11.
- 29 Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson*; W.O. Chadwick, *Victorian Miniature* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960); B.J. Armstrong, *A Norfolk Diary: Passages from the Diary of the Rev Benjamin John Armstrong, M.A. (Cantab.), Vicar of East Dereham, 1850-88*, edited by H.B.J. Armstrong (London: G.G. Harrap and Company, 1949) and *Armstrong's Norfolk Diary: Further Passages from the Diary of the Reverend Benjamin John Armstrong, Vicar of East Dereham, 1850-88*, edited by H.B.J. Armstrong (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1963]).
- 30 Recent works on Nonconformity in the region include: *Religious Dissent in East Anglia*, edited by E.S. Leedham-Green (Cambridge: Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1991); *Religious Dissent in East Anglia: Historical Perspectives*, edited by N. Virgoe and T. Williamson (Norwich: Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group and Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 1993); J. Ede, N. Virgoe and T. Williamson, *Halls of Zion: Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Norfolk* (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 1994); and *Religious Dissent in East Anglia, III*, edited by D. Chadd (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 1996).

SIR THOMAS BROWNE'S KNIGHTHOOD

by Trevor Hughes

In September 1671, Browne was knighted in Norwich, deservedly but unexpectedly. He was then 65 years of age, with no conspicuous activities to excite his sovereign. His earlier fame as the author of *Religio Medici* had receded. Although *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* was in its sixth English edition – to be the last in the author's lifetime – it was outdated, despite many revisions. *Hydrotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, published in 1658, gave pleasure to a select circle, but would scarcely have been read by Charles II. In medical and scientific circles, Browne was known as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and a frequent correspondent of the Royal Society, to which, however, he did not belong. Browne's knighthood came from the chance of meeting his sovereign during the progress of King Charles through Norfolk. Descriptions of the scene by modern biographers of Browne have wrongly suggested that he was a substitute candidate for this honour.¹ The phrase 'gained by default' has been used.² Yet witness accounts and records provide an accurate portrayal of these events, the purpose of this communication.

Three contemporary accounts of the royal visit exist: a poem by Mathew Stevenson; a letter from Thomas Corie, the Town Clerk of Norwich; and a report in the *London Gazette*, dated Oct 1st, from the Court at Whitehall.³ Mathew Stevenson (fl. 1654-1685), a poet of local renown, resided for the greater part of his life in Norfolk.⁴ Thomas Corie was of a family prominent in Norwich for civic offices, and his part in this narrative is that of a correspondent to Joseph Williamson, founder and editor of the *London Gazette*.⁵ The verse quotations below are from the poet whilst those in prose, without separate identification, derive from the letter of Thomas Corie. Records of the corporations of Yarmouth and Norwich refer to the event,⁶ as do state papers.⁷ The account in Echard is mainly derived from the *London Gazette*.⁸ That of Blomefield, although widely quoted, has been misread, as was noted by Ketton-Cremer.⁹

Royal visits to Norwich and Norfolk were rare, and that of Queen Elizabeth in the summer of 1578 was long remembered by the citizens of Norwich.¹⁰ Throughout a whole week a succession of masques, pageants, and banquets, punctuated with Latin orations, gave evidence of the rapturous enthusiasm of the Norwich burghers for their queen, who, on departing, exclaimed 'I have laid up in my breast such good will, as I shall never forget Norwich'.¹¹

The progress of Charles was similarly welcomed, although the tastes and purpose of this sovereign differed from those of Elizabeth. It was his first visit to Norfolk and its timing was important politically and strategically. He had recently visited Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and Plymouth. For reasons more venial than religious, Charles was considering conversion to Roman Catholicism, and he was also in the company of a new mistress. Charles was contemplating war with the Dutch, and in May 1670 the secret Treaty of Dover had been signed by his Catholic ministers.¹² The signatories of the sham Treaty of Dover later in 1670 included others, notably his Protestant minister, Ashley. Both treaties united Great Britain and France in a war against the United Provinces, which was declared by the King in Council on March 17th, 1672.¹³ What Charles gained from the secret treaty was money from Louis XIV – both immediate and deferred – in return for an alliance with France and his conversion to Catholicism. The latter condition was prominent in the secret treaty, but absent from the sham treaty. France wanted the alliance to combat the Dutch at sea and the money was to be spent on the English navy.¹⁴ Charles preferred this secret subsidy from Louis to an appeal to Parliament for funds.¹⁵

These national considerations clarify the timing of the progress into Norfolk and the visit by Charles and his brother James, the Lord High Admiral, to Yarmouth, a visit planned as early as April 20 1670.¹⁶ The visit, arranged for April 1671, had been abruptly postponed because of the death of the Duchess of York on March 31 of that year.¹⁷ State records at this time abound with expenditure on the navy, and Yarmouth was an important port in naval actions against the Dutch.¹⁸ Moreover Yarmouth, in common with many seaports, had been damaged by a great storm on September 11 and 12, described as 'the most violent storms & rains within the memory of man'.¹⁹ On September 18 many ships were reported lost in Yarmouth: 'We are already informed of fourteen sail of this town, and fear many more, beside the loss in the fishery'.²⁰

The King came to Norfolk from Newmarket, where he frequently stayed to indulge in racing, hunting, and hawking. On Tuesday 26 September the royal party of King and Queen, with many attendants, left Newmarket for Euston House in Suffolk, the splendid new house of Lord and Lady Arlington. The king's stay was enhanced by the presence of his new mistress, Louise de Kerouaille, a lovely and diminutive Breton lady who had waited on his sister Minette at Dover. This novelty was not free from international intrigue. In order to further the alliance with France and the conversion of Charles to Catholicism the lady was recommended to the king by Colbert, the French Ambassador.

On the second day (the 27th) the King, his brother James, and the Dukes of Monmouth and Buckingham set out for Yarmouth, whilst the Queen remained a further night at Euston House with her hosts and the most recent royal mistress. King and train broke their fast at the White Hart at Scole, and by 5 o'clock arrived in Yarmouth to a tumultuous welcome of canonade, cheers, and loyal addresses. The Corporation presented the king with four gold herrings with ruby eyes and a gold chain.²¹ The king knighted the Recorder and the two Bailiffs and possibly one other, since Stevenson wrote: 'They say his Majesty there knighted Four, I only wonder he did knight no more.' The town was inspected, and then the port and ships. Twelve hundred guns were fired, and Charles named a new ship James after his brother. At the banquet in the evening, Yarmouth did in the poet's words 'entertain, season providing dishes, The King of England, with

of Fishes'. Charles typically ate relish from the dish of herrings served to him: 'All pleased the King, and the King did all please'.

Norwich awaited the royals in the afternoon of Thursday 28 September at one o'clock, the reception party being the Mayor, Sheriff, and Aldermen; the Bishop, Dean, and Chapter with local clergy; and the party of Lord Henry Howard: 'Then highborn Howard waits the King's approaches, with's prancing horses, and his Prince's Coaches'. They were in some difficulty, as the King was to arrive first over Trowse bridge, whilst the Queen, coming further from Euston, would cross Cringleford bridge and possibly could be met later. As such arrangements frequently turn out, the King was late, arriving at 4 o'clock, and the recorder, Francis Corie, afforced by the sons of Lord Henry, had to divert to Cringleford bridge in pursuit of the Queen and company, who had attained 'halfe a myle' into the city. To compound their troubles it had rained for several hours. Nevertheless the King, at Trowse bridge, was welcomed by a speech from the mayor, and a present worth 200 guineas, whilst the Queen was greeted by the second company. The couple were united at the Palace of the Duke of Norfolk, to which they were separately conducted through welcoming crowds lined by 200 liverymen and 700 soldiers of the City Regiment.

Thomas Fuller described the Palace as 'Amongst private houses, the Duke of Norfolk's Palace is the greatest I ever saw in a City out of London' and praised the 'covered bowling alley, the first I believe of that kind in England'.²² Evelyn was less impressed by the architecture which he described as:

an old wretched building, and that part of it newly built of brick, is very ill understood; so as I was of opinion it had been much better to have demolished all, and set it up in a better place.²³

But for size, splendour, and luxury the house was unrivalled in East Anglia. For this munificence in entertainment Norwich was indebted to the family of the Duke of Norfolk.²⁴ At the palace, Lord Henry Howard deputised for his brother, the Duke of Norfolk, who, not in possession of his senses, lived a retired life in Padua. Henry Howard had less than a months notice of his royal guests and had '... to post hither out of Yorkshire, to prepare here for all this vast reception...'. The resources of the palace were fully engaged. In addition to the train of the King, the Queen had a retinue of 55 persons, and all were accommodated in the great Palace, where:

all the house through out was nobilie & richlie furnished with bedds, hangings, & ye apurtenances for lodging. The old Tennis-court turn'd into a kitchen, and ye Duke's bowlinge alley (which as ye know is one hundred & thirty foote wyde & one hundred & nyntyfe foote long) made into sevrall roomes for eateinge.

That night the scale of the banquet exceeded any former occasion in the Palace: 'none who did not see it can well express the splendour of it'.²⁵

Charles was busy the following day, beginning with touching for the King's evil. This condition was bovine tuberculosis, manifest as swelling of the lymph glands of the neck and arising from by the ingestion of tubercle bacilli from water or milk. It was widely believed that this condition was amenable to the touch of the king, and physicians provided certificates admitting their patients to the presence of the king. Browne frequently provided these certificates, the usual circumstance being a visit of the king to Newmarket.²⁶

The King then was driven to the Cathedral, where he was 'sung into the church with an anthem'. After his devotions, he went to the neighbouring Bishop's Palace 'to refresh himselfe with a glass of choyce wyne & sweet-meates'. After a brief return to the Duke's Palace he was conducted to the Guild Hall, where 'he had from the leads a prospect of ye City, & saw our whole Regt in armes with thier redd-coates' and showed himself to the joyous citizens who 'soe filled ye whole Market-place, as his Majesties coach had scarce roome to passe thence to the

New Hall'. The New Hall had been the nave of the Church of the Dominican Black Friars, which since the Reformation had been an assembly hall used for civic functions.²⁷ At the New Hall the King joined the Queen and 'received a noble treat from ye City', accompanied by a great reception. The response of the King was to confer a knighthood. In the words of Blomefield:

When his Majesty was at the New-Hall, he was earnest to have knighted the Mayor [Thomas Thacker], who as earnestly begged to be excused; but at the same time conferred the honour on that deserving physician Dr. Thomas Browne...²⁸

The report from the Court in the *London Gazette* reads: 'And at Norwich was pleased to confer the same honor [knighthood] on the famous Dr. Browne'.²⁹ Echard restates this as 'And before the King parted from the city, he conferr'd the honour of knighthood upon the famous physician, Dr Thomas Browne'.³⁰

The morning had so far been busy and it was now eleven o'clock.³¹ Their majesties and his royal highness and other members of the court entered their coaches to drive to the house of Sir John Hobart at Blickling, some miles to the North. There dinner was taken, the visit exemplifying Charles' diplomacy, for Sir John Hobart was a notable Puritan, and had married a daughter of John Hampden. Sir John had been a Cromwellian, supporting the Lord Protector in the County, in the House of Commons, and in the short-lived Upper House. The guests at Blickling were 'most noblie and plentifully treated' and Charles responded with a knighthood to Sir John's son. All was polite and gracious, but it was unlikely that King and Court would overnight in this puritan household. The Queen and her company returned to the ducal palace at Norwich, whilst the King and his entourage drove for the night to Oxnead, the great house of his supporter, Sir Robert Paston. So ended the Progress and the visit to Norwich which, in the closing words of Stevenson, 'Norwich strained all, that Norwich cou'd extend, Nor cou'd she more, should Jove himself descend.'

The account above quotes contemporary evidence and should be compared with that of modern biographers. Johnson gave no details of the occasion but commended the King, who 'with many frailties and vices, had yet skill to discover excellence, and virtue to reward it, with such honorary distinctions as cost him nothing'.³² This penetrating opinion exactly grasps the character of Charles, whose many foolish actions were mingled with others showing discernment. This opinion was that expressed by Joan Bennett in her study of Browne's literary merit.³³ Gosse wrote:

He was proceeding to confer this honour to Thomas Thacker, the mayor, when that worthy modestly and humbly begged that it might be given to the most eminent inhabitant of the city, indicating the author of *Religio Medici*.³⁴

Gosse also believed that the King visited Browne's house, and observed him dissecting a dolphin. This error arose from a letter of Browne to his son. Browne merely wrote 'You may remember the dolphin opened when the King was heere'.³⁵ It is the imagined incident of the mayor's decline of the honour and proposing that it be bestowed on Browne, first described by Gosse, which is so frequently repeated, by Leroy, Finch, and Huntley. Finch described a pretty scene:

The much-feted monarch had arisen to propose ... the knighting of the Mayor, Mr. Henry Herne. But at this point Herne 'earnestly begged to be excused' ... A whispered consultation produced a solution. The name of Dr. Thomas Browne was called, and all eyes turned toward the physician, whose sensitive face, framed by rich brown hair, seemed more than usually meditative as he gravely approached the King, kneeled, and arose a knight.³⁶

Huntley writes:

Toward the end of the toasts, the king, as was his custom, proposed to knight the mayor of the city, one Mr Henry Herne. But the mayor 'earnestly begged to be excused' and suggested in his stead Norwich's most famous citizen, Dr Thomas Browne.³⁷

In the witness reports that I have examined there is no evidence of this scene, and the mayor in 1671 was Mr Thomas Thacker, not Hearne who was mayor in 1673.³⁸

My account illustrates how capriciously the Stuart Kings bestowed knighthoods. Elizabeth had been frugal with honours, and there were some 500 knights on the accession of James I.³⁹ James immediately began to create knights on a scale hitherto unknown. The sale of knighthoods by the King and his courtiers was disreputable, and the rank of knighthood lost esteem. A popular jest described two walkers observing another 'the one demanded what he should be, the other answered he seemed to be a gentleman; no I warrant you, says the other, I think he is but a knight'.⁴⁰ Charles II was similarly immoderate in the number of knights he created, and on this Progress, he created four in Yarmouth and several more in Norwich. The following day, at Blickling, he knighted Henry Hobart who, at the age of thirteen, seems a young recipient – as the eldest son of Sir John Hobart he would, in any case, have expected to inherit his father's baronetcy.

Amongst this widespread knightage in the Stuart period, the number of doctors so honoured is small. William Harvey, despite loyal service as physician to three kings, did not receive a knighthood, nor did Francis Glisson, Thomas Sydenham, or Thomas Willis. Besides Sir Thomas Browne, Sir George Ent and Sir William Petty were notable medical knights, but Petty was more active as a scientist and political economist than as a physician. Opinions on the life of Charles II are divided. Mine is that, on balance – and there is a lot to forgive – he was an able king. But we must all commend his act in the New Hall at Norwich on the morning of Friday September 29 1671. The poet commended his city and his king:

And now with Norwich, for whose sake I writ,
 Let me conclude; Norwich did what was fit:
 Or, what with them was possible, at least;
 That City does enuff, that does its best.
 There the King knighted the so famous Brown,
 whose worth, & learning to the world are known.

Browne was a worthy recipient of a knighthood which was widely commended. In subsequent centuries it has commemorated an outstanding individual with both a common given and a common family name. Many have borne the name Thomas Browne, but Sir Thomas Browne brings only one person to mind.

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- 1 Biographers who have described the scene are: Edmund Gosse, *Sir Thomas Browne* (London, 1905), 160-1; Olivier Leroy, *Le Chevalier Thomas Browne* (Paris, 1931), 76-7; Jeremiah S. Finch, *Sir Thomas Browne* (New York, 1950), 218-9; Frank L. Huntley, *Sir Thomas Browne* (Ann Arbor, 1962, 1968), 242-3.
- 2 C.A. Patrides, ed., *Sir Thomas Browne, The Major Works* (London, 1977), 21.
- 3 Mathew Stevenson, 'Upon His Majesties Progress into Norfolk, Sept 28 1671', In *Norfolk Drollery* (London, 1673), 23-30 ; 'Coppie of a Letter from T.C. [Thomas Corie] at Norwich to a Friend [Joseph Williamson] in London, Norwich, October ye 2d, 1671', *British Library*, Add MSS 27,967, f 88 ; *The London Gazette* (London, 1671), No 613, Sept 24-Oct 2, 2.
- 4 *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1909), 18, 1129-30.
- 5 Robert H. Hill, ed., 'The Correspondence of Thomas Corie, Town Clerk of Norwich, 1664-1687', *Norfolk Record Society Publ.* (Norwich, 1956), VII. The letter to Joseph Stevenson, then editor of the London Gazette, is reproduced.
- 6 Relevant entries in the Yarmouth and Norwich Corporation Books are reproduced in Dawson Turner, *Narrative of the visit of His Majesty King Charles the Second to Norwich* (Yarmouth, 1846).
- 7 *Calendar of State Papers, Venice (CSPV)* and *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic (CSPD)* (London, 1939, 1895).

- 8 Laurence Echard, *The History of England from the Restoration ... Queen Mary* (London, 1707-18) vol 3, book 1, chapter 3, 281.
- 9 Francis Blomefield, *History of Norfolk*, (10 vols, London, 1805-10), 3, 413-4 ; R.W. Ketton-Cremer, 'The Visit of King Charles the Second to Norfolk', in *Norfolk Portraits* (London, 1944), 14n.
- 10 John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (3 vols, London, 1823), 2, 133-178.
- 11 Nichols, 166.
- 12 Echard, 253-4.
- 13 Echard, 294-5.
- 14 CSPV, (London, 1939), 37, 113. Oct.3rd, 1671. The Doge was informed by Girolami Alberti, Venetian Secretary in England, that the King is 'to fit out a fleet by means of a monthly assignment of 60,000 l'. Alberti suspected that Charles had received 'a considerable sum of money', enabling him to dissolve parliament.
- 15 The dissolution of parliament was announced on Sept. 23rd, 1671 in the *London Gazette*.
- 16 Yarmouth Corporation Book, April 20, 1670. Reproduced in Dawson Turner, above.
- 17 CSPD, 1671, 70, 170.
- 18 CSPD, many references in 1671.
- 19 CSPD, 1671, 480.
- 20 CSPD, 1671, 488.
- 21 Yarmouth Corporation Book, Sept.-18th, 1671 ; and CSPD, 1671, 70, 488.
- 22 Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England*, ed., John Nichols (2 vols, London, 1811), 2, 154.
- 23 John Evelyn, *Diary* (3 vols, London, 1906), 2, 334.
- 24 Described in Ernest A. Kent, 'The Houses of the Dukes of Norfolk in Norwich', *Norfolk Archaeology* (Norwich, 1931), 24, 73-87.
- 25 B.L., Add MSS 27,967, f88. Reproduced in Hill, above. Appended to Thomas Corie's letter is a list of the persons accompanying the King and Queen.
- 26 Letter from Sir Thomas Browne to his son Edward, dated Oct. 2,[1679], B.L. MS 1847, f.217.
- 27 Antony Batty Shaw, *Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich* (Norwich, 1982), fig. 29.
- 28 This text is from Blomefield, 3, 413-414, and does not state that the mayor suggested Browne as a substitute.
- 29 *The London Gazette*, 1671, 613, Sept.24-Oct.2, 2.
- 30 Echard, 281.
- 31 It was a morning, not an evening, reception at the New Hall.
- 32 Samuel Johnson, 'The Life of Sir Thomas Browne', In, *Christian Morals* (London, 1756), xxxvi.
- 33 Joan Bennett, *Sir Thomas Browne, A man of achievement in literature* (Cambridge, 1962), 22.
- 34 Gosse, 160-1.
- 35 B.L., MS Sloane 1847, f.98.
- 36 Finch, 218.
- 37 Huntley, 242-3.
- 38 Blomefield, 3, 420 ; Basil Cozens-Hardy & Ernest A. Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich, 1403-1835* (Norwich, 1938), 94 & 95.
- 39 F.J. Fisher, ed., *The State of England, Anno Dom. 1600, by Thomas Wilson* (London, Camden Soc., 3rd ser., L11, 1936) 1-47.
- 40 Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age* (London, 1980), 123.