

SHORTER NOTICES

DOCTOR THOMAS BROWNE

by Paul Rutledge

As if in time for the quatercentenary of the birth of Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682) a hitherto unknown letter from him, as doctor rather than philosopher, has come to light among the Frere Manuscripts in the Norfolk Record Office, that extensive collection of antiquarian papers assembled mainly by Peter Le Neve (1661–1729) and Tom Martin (1687–1771).¹ It was filed by Martin among papers relating to unrelated Brownes and so has remained unnoticed, even though Le Neve had marked it ‘Sr Tho: Brown of Norwich his hand’.

The letter is worn at the edges and the date is lacking, but as it is addressed to Mrs Hare of Brunsthorpe (now Broomsthorpe in Tattersett) it must fall between 1668–9, when her husband John Hare acquired the Broomsthorpe estate, and Browne’s death in 1682.² Mrs Hare was Susan, daughter and coheir of John Walpole of Broomsthorpe and her husband was a cadet of the Stow Bardoph family.³ Their children were John Hare (c. 1668–1720), Richmond Herald and antiquary and a fellow herald of Le Neve’s,⁴ and there were daughters Anne and Elizabeth. It is not clear which daughter was Browne’s patient on this occasion.⁵ In the following transcript angle brackets indicate deletions and asterisks insertions, and the use of capital letters has been modernised.

To the honord Madame Hare these present, Brunsthorp.

Honord Madame,

I am sorry to understand your daughter is fallen ill & hath had a cough for above a fortnight & now lately rayseed a litle blood. There <are> *have been* many obstinate and lasting coughs in many places and there are many still which notwithstanding <I hope> are like to do well in good time. I am glad Dr Edwards doth sometimes visit her and I shall bee ready in my utmost assistance. I am necessitated to bee here to day at four or five a'clock and my horses are not at present in case to performe such a journey, butt out of my great respects unto so worthy good freinds I have taken the best <order> *course* I could to wayt upon you to morrowe and in the meantime have sent a thinne syrupe by your servant of which to give her 2 spoonfulls every 4 howers, and a plaster to be applied to the mould of her head, the hayre being shourn or clipped very close on that part. Shortly, my humble service to my honord friend Mr Hare. I rest, honord Madame, your most humble servant,

Tho Br[owne]

Written on the back of the letter, in a contemporary hand which is not Browne’s, is the following medicinal recipe. Benign by 17th-century standards, it either represents self-help by the Hares or a recommendation by Browne.

A receipt for shortness of breath & swelling of the body & all inward dise[ases]. Take rosemary, red sage, balme, time, unset hysope, pennyroyall, of each one an handfull, figgs, raisons of the sunne, pruens, of each one pound, anneseeds and lycoris of each one ounce. Boyle them in three pints of beere and as much running water till one quart be consumed, then take them of the fire and stamp them all together, then put thereto a pound of the best treacle & stir them well <treacle> *together* and let them stand and settle, it must be boyl’d very softly. Take of yt halfe a pint in a morning fasting and fast an hour after, and as much an hour after supper when you goe [to bed] and so conten[ue] [words illegible] and cause [words illegible]. But be sure to keep your selfe warme. With this drink the Doctor did cure all manner of inward diseases, and use noe other thing, doing therewith such great cures that he, being but a plaine man & no schollar, was countet of some a wisard, and left it to his daughter who got her living with it, & left it to a friend.

Browne’s letter indicates his county-wide practice among the gentry and his willingness to visit distant patients — Broomsthorpe is nearly 30 miles north-west of Norwich.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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1. Norfolk Record Office, Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society Collection, C3/7.
2. Francis Blomefield, *History of Norfolk*, vol. vii (1807), 6–7.
3. Blomefield vii, 6–7; NRO, Norris's Pedigrees, Rye MS 4, 373.
4. Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Papers of British Antiquaries and Historians* (The Stationary Office, 2003), 92.
5. The Tattersett parish register which might show their ages is lacking for this period.

AN IMPORTANT INDENT FOR A LOST BRASS AT ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, EAST BARSHAM

by Ron Fiske

During a recent visit of the Society to East Barsham church our attention was directed to a large stone slab bearing the indent of a lost unidentified brass (Fig. 1).

The indents clearly show the outline of a man in armour complete with footrest, sword and mercy-sword while, beside him, below a separate section which might have accommodated a helm or crest (see later), is the outline of a much smaller figure, also in armour, with a single sword at his left hand side. Above the figures are the outlines of two shields, and at the sides of the larger figure are indents for what appears to be symbols of the Order of the Garter. The whole is framed in a typical crocketed canopy within a border, which probably accommodated an inscription with corner embellishments perhaps for figures of the four evangelists.¹ Authorities on monumental brasses have suggested the memorial dates to the late 14th century.²

The presence of the garters, almost certainly denoting a knight of that order, and of the two figures would seem to make identification easy, but despite this no real answer or suggestions have been forthcoming to date.³ However, after some investigation in collaboration with Charles Farrow, the conclusion has been reached that the indented slab once held a brass commemorating Sir Thomas Felton, K.G., and his son of the same name. It is further believed that the slab was removed, probably after the dissolution of the monasteries, from the nearby Priory at Little Walsingham where, by licence dated 9 May 1385, the territorial and financial arrangements were made for a chantry and mass light for 'Joan [daughter of Sir Richard Walkfare and wife of Sir Thomas, K.G.] for her soul after death and for the souls of the king's father, the said Thomas de Felton, Thomas his son, and others' in the 'chapel of St. Anne newly built by the said prior and convent'.⁴ The inclusion of 'the king's father' is, at first sight, unusual, but the king's father was in fact Edward Prince of Wales, Felton's illustrious patron and war lord who had died in 1376. Sir Thomas himself died without male heirs on 2 April 1381.⁵

There are two varying pedigrees of the Norfolk Feltons.⁶ One lists only the three daughters and coheirs of Sir Thomas Felton, K.G., and makes no mention of Thomas their brother. The other, compiled by T.C. Banks, does include him and this is confirmed in the aforementioned licence. His exclusion from some pedigrees, and the lack of information about him, suggests that he died young and, with the death of his father, brought the male line of the family to an end, which provides ample reason for his unusual inclusion on the brass.

If the above suggestion is correct then one would expect the two shields on the brass to represent the father and son. That to the dexter (left as viewed) would bear the Felton arms (*Gules, two lions passant Ermine crowned Or*) probably impaled with those of Walkfare for his wife