

EDGWARE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Among the acquisitions of the local history collection of the Hendon Public Libraries in 1957 was a small MS. book containing an account of Edgware, dated 1817.¹ This is a booklet of 58 pages, with three more blank leaves and traces of at least two more pages (probably blank) torn out. It measures about $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. and is sewn into a cover of marbled paper. The text is regularly written, with 25 or 26 lines to the page, and is probably a fair copy made from original notes; there are, however, occasional erasures and gaps, and this is almost certainly not a second copy. This conclusion is supported by the paper, which is watermarked with the figure of Britannia and dates between 1814 and 1816.

A title page proclaims the work to be "A Brief Sketch of the Town of Edgware, Middlesex. In two Parts. Collected from various Writers, and continued, by A Resident . . . 1817". To deprecate criticism, the author added the lines:

"In Pity spare me when I do my best
To make as much Waste Paper as the rest".

He proceeded to break the pretence of anonymity by signing his preface "W.S.T."; and it becomes clear from internal evidence in the text that he was William Smith Tootell, one of the trustees of the parish charities.² The booklet in the Hendon Library is stated to be "Part 1st". It does not seem to be incomplete in itself, but there is nothing to show whether this part, "Concerning the Parish of Edgware", was in fact followed by another concerning the parish of Whitchurch (the two together forming the "Town" of Edgware named in the title).

The author, who wrote a good hand, does not seem to have had any special qualification for undertaking the history of his native place, and he excuses himself for haste and inexperience. The greater part of his sketch is, as the title page does not try to conceal, a conflation of the various mentions of Edgware by previous writers, especially Newcourt (*Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense*, 1708-10), Stukeley (*Itinerarium Curiosum*, 1724), Lysons (*The Environs of London*, 1795), Reynolds' edition of the Antonine Itinerary (1799),

Woodburn (*Ecclesiastical Topography*, 1807-11), and probably others. The historical part of his text is simply copied from these and has no independent value; but when he comes to his own time, and to events (and gossip) which came within his knowledge, he has something to contribute to the story of Edgware, which, at any rate in its later history, has been almost entirely neglected by topographers.

Edgware church was drastically reconstructed and all the fittings moved about in 1845, but Tootell's account of it, though it occupies a good many pages, adds disappointingly little to the information we already have in Lysons, *Ecclesiastical Topography*, the Historical Monuments volume on Middlesex, and the recent specialised studies on the bells (by H. B. Walters) and the brasses (by H. K. Cameron) in these *Transactions*. It is curious, however, that he gives the dedication as St. John of Jerusalem. Lysons says the same; *Ecclesiastical Topography*, however, attributed it to St. Margaret, and this is the dedication today. The alleged dedication to St. John must have commanded more local assent and not been a mere mistake if Tootell, a native and a regular churchgoer, reproduced it.³ Some space is given in the account of the church to monumental inscriptions, not always quite correctly copied, and two are mentioned which have since disappeared—Haley (1662) and Warne (1782). Others, then in the church, are now outside in the churchyard.

The following few notes on the church are worth extracting (without retaining the somewhat inconsistent capital letters and punctuation of the original):

“From the tower of this church was seen the fires in London in the year 1780, and the ascending of the balloon from St. James Park on the Grand Jubilee, August 1 1814.”⁴

“Altho' the town is situated so low and surrounded by hills on every side, yet the fire works at Vauxhall are frequently seen here from the footpath opposite the house occupied by Mr. Choppin.

“The gallery on the north side of the church was built a few years back for the accommodation of the parishioners, who were then unprovided with seats, and it is rather curious that at the present time it is let to out-parishioners, without any *inconvenience* being felt by *those* at whose instigation it was erected. It is of clumsy workmanship, and spoils the beauty of the whole church.

“Previous to the year 1795 the marble font stood in the aisle, when it was removed to a pew at the entrance of the church for convenience and its place supplied in the year 1809 by a stove.

“Formerly the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and the Belief, painted very handsomely in gilt letters on canvas, were stuck up at the altar, but for whom, or when, it was pulled down is not exactly known. It is nearly perfect in an old box in the vestry room.

“A gallery was built at the west end of the church about the year [blank] on which is painted: ‘This gallery was built at the sole cost of William Lee Antonie Esq., patron of this living, for the use of the children who attend the Sunday school instituted on Easter Day 1791 and supported by voluntary contributions’; and in the gallery was placed an organ at Easter 1816. [A barrel organ—see later.]

“The Revd John Deveil was curate of this parish several years until his death in 1808. His character is briefly tho’ justly stated on his monument, to which I refer my readers, with observing that he was endowed with a resolution and firmness of mind rarely equalled, for it is an attested fact that Mr. Deveil when abroad fought with a tiger, and mastered it.

“The present patron is John Fiatt [should read Fiott] Esq., who on the recent death of his uncle, Wm. Lee Antonie, Esq., has become possessed of a large property, and taken the surname of Lee. He was formerly at Cambridge, where he applied himself closely to study and was appointed traveller from that university, with the usual allowance of £100 per annum. Contrary to the practice of his predecessors in that honorary office, he visited the courts of Norway, Sweden, Russia and the other more northern parts, where, being much respected, he soon improved himself in the different languages, and returned to this country on the death of his uncle, and being an accomplished scholar, and proficient in so many languages, he was elected Wrangler in that university. He now resides on one of his estates in Bedfordshire.⁵

“Mr. Nicholas Fiott, for whom this living is intended on the demise of the present incumbent, is now engaged in his studies at Cambridge.⁶

“The present incumbent or vicar is the Revd Thomas Martyn, Regius Professor of Botany in the University of Cambridge,⁷ author of the *English Connoisseur*, which contains an account of whatever is curious in painting, sculpture, &c, in the palaces and seats of the nobility and principal gentry of England both in town and country. Published in 2 vols. 8vo in the year 1766, and also of a *Botanical Dictionary* republished by Millar. A curious circumstance respecting the professor happened in the month of January 1816. Several of the London newspapers stated him to be dead, which they afterwards contradicted. But a Cambridge paper confidently asserted that he was dead. There

were six candidates immediately for the professorship, and the churchwardens of Pertenhall [Bedfordshire] (of which he is also minister) actually received letters of sequestration usual on the demise of an incumbent. Nor was the curate of Edgware inactive on this occasion, for it is said that as soon as he had heard of it, which was on Sunday, the 29th, he set off immediately (after morning service) to London in order to insure if possible the incumbency during the minority of Nicholas Fiott, whom I have before noticed. However, whether this be so or not, it was certainly remarked that he was more inattentive than usual that morning, making several omissions and mistakes.

“The present curate is the Revd James Procter, who is very assiduous and exceedingly zealous in promoting christianity, and especially in enforcing the attendance of the poor at church. [3½ lines heavily erased.] His discourses from the pulpit are very earnest and impressive, although I am led to believe they are not generally approved of. He now resides at the parsonage house and has a few pupils under his care.

“I must not omit mentioning John Halsey, who saw many changes in life and particularly in this church, having had upwards of ten clerical masters. He was first introduced into this parish (thro’ being a good singer about the year 1774, there being at that time a tolerably good choir) by Mr. Totten the then rector, who made him his clerk, much against the consent of the parishioners, which situation he held for forty years within a month, when in January 1816 he was obliged to relinquish his office thro’ infirmity and age, and on the 3rd of May following he apparently with great composure departed this troublesome world, having been confined to his bed only one week. On the 8th he was buried at Edgware church by his last master, the Revd. Jas Procter, assisted by the ex-choir who sung an anthem over him and after the office was performed,

the ringers too

Now made the bells in woeful zeal

Chime forth the dumb lamenting peal.

“An inscription has been painted on oak and placed at his head, a copy of which is as follows. ‘John Halsey 40 years clerk of this parish died May 3rd 1816 aged 82 years. A faithful servant and an honest man’: the expense of which was paid by subscription.

“Mr. Robert Watkins is the present parish clerk and town crier.

“There is not, nor has been for some years, any dissenting meeting house in the parish of Edgware. On the 25 October 1798 Mr. Deveil,

understanding one was intended to be opened on the 28th, issued printed notices to the inhabitants 'to put them on their guard against the artful insinuations and designs of these itinerant preachers, reminding them that a like attempt had been made some years before, which nearly occasioned the house then occupied by a Widow Hastings to be pulled down', and it appears this notice had the desired effect."

After an account of the Atkinson almshouse charity, Tootell notes certain subscriptions raised in the parish for sundry good causes in his day:

"First in the year 1798 the sum of £38. 14. 6d. was collected in this parish for the defence of the realm.

"Without noticing the various small subscriptions in the course of ten years which no doubt were something considerable, the next I observe in the year 1809 was the sum of £11. 15. 0d. raised towards erecting a stove in the church.

"On the jubilee Oct. 25th 1809, the sum of £13. 16. 0d. was collected in this parish and distributed to the poor, being the anniversary of His Majesty's accession and commencement of the forty-ninth year of the reign [in fact of the fiftieth].

"In May 1814 a collection was made at the door of the church after a sermon by the Revd. J. W. Cunningham, Vicar of Harrow⁸, author of 'The Velvet Cushion', 'A covering for the Velvet Cushion', and 'The World without Souls', when upwards of £10 was collected towards building a Chapel of Ease at Harrow Weald⁹.

"The sum of £35 odd was paid to the fund raised for the widows and orphans of the brave but unfortunate sufferers who fell at the glorious Battle of Waterloo, which was collected after a sermon by the Revd. Jas Procter, a sum immense for so small a parish chiefly at rack rent and much burthened with poor, and especially when compared with the collections of Little Stanmore or Great Stanmore, neither of which exceeded it. But it shows that the inhabitants have suitable feelings for the sufferings of others, bad as their own condition may be.

"The liberality of the parishioners does not stop here, for in March 1816 a subscription was set on foot by the Revd. J. Procter for purchasing an organ at the sum of £35. However this organ not suiting, and the subscription increasing above expectation, it was proposed to purchase a new organ with two barrels for fifty guineas, which Mr. P. ordered down (taking some risk on himself) to the great dissatisfaction of a few, who held a dissentient voice, averring that it was bringing a very heavy

and unnecessary expense on the parish, which was already so burthen-some as to be almost intolerable. The amount collected was £62. 3. 6d., which defrayed every expense of putting up, curtains, &c. and included another barrel, making now thirty tunes. The organ was first played on Easter day 1816.

“In the month of July 1816 there was found about the town upwards of 300 poor Irish and other strangers who had left their homes to assist in getting in the hay harvest almost in a starving condition, the weather having been so very unfavourable as to prevent their being able to earn anything for many days. A gentleman living in the town hearing of this (and who is ever ready to assist the distressed, as well as to give liberally towards the promotion of any good purpose) immediately opened a subscription for their relief, and in about six hours the sum of £39 was collected, part of which was distributed to them in bacon and bread the next morning, and the remainder as occasion required.

“The total amount of the subscriptions to the Edgware Sunday school for one year ending Easter 1817 was £43. 2. 0d. Annual subscriptions have been hitherto made, but not so large amount as the present.

“Putting these several sums together it will appear that this parish has by no means been remiss either in pious or charitable donations, altho’ in the bulk it does not appear that many might have given a mite who did not give anything; and many, much more who gave but scanty, and possessing much, but as every one have a right to act as their feelings suggest to them, I shall not make any further remark on the subject.”

Tootell throws some light on the obscure question of the fair at Edgware:

“On Holy Thursday in the year 1760 a fair for cattle was held in the yard and field belonging to the house now called the George public house, through the exertions of John Spicer the then landlord of the Red Lion, by having distributed a quantity of handbills stating that all dealers &c. might come and open a cattle fair free of expense. A large fair was the consequence, but finding their horses &c. detained for the payment of toll and standing, they naturally forsook it to return no more! The pleasure fair continued as heretofore, when the bull was baited, the cocks thrown at, and many other sports practiced equally disgraceful, till in length of time it became extinct.

“Until the year 1810, when the want of amusement to the inhabitants induced a few of the principal tradesmen to form themselves into a

committee for the conducting of a fair to be held on the three first days of August, and being aided by the subscriptions of a few 'Friends of Mirth' they were enabled to bring into the field called Bakers Croach a larger quantity of cattle, shows, booths, stalls, &c. than could possibly have been expected. Thus the stillness of the place was considerably relieved, and it was observed that, though the sale of horses and other cattle was extremely dull, there were however a few merry souls present, who kept the game alive; and each evening presented a series of humourous amusements such as wheeling barrows blindfolded for a new hat; jumping in sacks for a smock frock; grinning through horse collars for tobacco; and climbing a lofty pole for a shoulder of mutton; which afforded no inconsiderable amusement to a very numerous attendance of the respectable families in the neighbourhood. The latter was to be the prize of him who first reached it. Many attempted this apparently easy task, but on reaching about two thirds of the way up the pole, they found the upper part thickly covered with grease, above which from its slippery nature they could not travel. An artful boy at length found means of counteracting this impediment and filling his pockets and the tail of his smock frock with sand after various attempts succeeded in completely doing away the effect of the grease with the sand, and thereby gaining his object, which he carried off amid the cheers of the crowding spectators. This is the diversion which in France is known by the appellation of Mats de Cocagne, when ducks are exhibited on these poles.

"This is an ancient market town and [a market] was held weekly on Thursday, but has been discontinued for many years. The market house is now converted into a free school for the children of the inhabitants of the parish of Little Stanmore. At the conclusion of the American War peace was proclaimed in this town opposite to the market house.

"A late Revd. Curate affirmed that this town enjoyed a privilege granted by Queen Elizabeth of having no soldiers quartered therein, in return for the civilities shown to her in passing through here; but this I question, as soldiers, both horse and foot, have been frequently quartered on the innkeepers for a considerable time together."

Finally, after a note on a lawsuit of 1814 about failure to repair the bridge "at the foot of the town", there are some particulars of houses in and about the village:

"At Elstree about half a mile distant from Brockley Hill is a handsome brick-built house, the property of Mrs. Rudge, occupied by

Tho. Cobb Esq., lately a banker in Lombard Street. There is a mulberry tree now growing in the garden which is at least 15 feet wide, nailed and trained to the wall, a thing rather uncommon hereabouts; it bears a great quantity of very fine fruit every year, and is rather earlier than the common mulberry.

“At the north end of the town there was till lately an old-fashioned family house, late the property of Joseph Burchell Esq., Under Sheriff of Middx. On the east side next the garden it had two very handsome apartments which were built by Frederic Prince of Wales in return for the many civilities shown to His Royal Highness by the Honble Miss Vane, who then occupied the house.

“His Royal Highness caused a new road to be made at a great expense through the grounds of the several estates on the east side of the town by which he had private access to the house without passing through the town.

“This property was sold in 1813 to Edward Simpson, Esq., of Lillypot Lane,¹⁰ straw-hat manufacturer, who has caused the house and offices to be pulled down and has erected at a greater distance from the road a handsome stucco-fronted mansion in lieu.¹¹

“Near the above is a handsome house and grounds tastefully laid out late the property and residence of Thomas Smith, Esq., who has recently sold it to a Mr. Day. The present house¹² was built about fourteen years ago by the Honble John Lindsay, who actually pulled down part of the erections at Bermondsey Spa and had the materials removed here to build this house with. It is pleasantly situate on a hill, and from the front door is an agreeable view of the town, etc.

“In 1753 there were four alehouses in this parish viz the Boot and Spur, the Leather Bottle (silenced in 1759), the Bell (silenced in 1764), and the Red Lion (silenced in 1771). In 1771 the George was licensed in lieu of the Red Lion, and in this house the courts for the manor of Edgware and Kingsbury have been since held.¹³

“By the last population returns¹⁴ it contains 100 houses, occupied by 149 families, 55 of whom are employed in agriculture, 61 in trade and 33 not so employed, and these 149 families consist of 255 males and 288 females. Total 543. So that the average is nearly 4 persons to a family.”

1 Thanks are due to the Hendon Borough Council for permitting a transcript to be made; to Mr. J. E. Walker, F.L.A., Hendon Borough Librarian, Mr.

- Harold S. Geikie, and Mr. C. F. Baylis for help in preparing these extracts for publication.
- 2 Several Tootell stones, including that of William Smith Tootell (1796-1868), are extant in Edgware churchyard.
 - 3 On the medieval dedication to St. Margaret, see C. F. Baylis, *Short History of Edgware and the Stanmores in the Middle Ages* (1957), pp. 11-12.
 - 4 The fires of the Gordon riots; and the celebrations of peace (on Napoleon's exile to Elba).
 - 5 On John Fiott, later Lee (1783-1866), see J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Pt. II, vol. ii (1944), p. 498; *Dictionary of National Biography*. The Fiotts came of an old Burgundian family from Dijon. John Lee, F.R.S., F.S.A., was lord of the manor of Hartwell, Bucks, where he built an observatory. He became Q.C. in 1864. His Bedfordshire house was at Colworth, near Sharnbrook. He was the son of the judge, Sir William Lee of Totteridge Park; hence his interest in the living and his local importance.
 - 6 He did succeed and was incumbent 1825-46: see G. Hennessy, *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense* (1898), p. 141. He was the brother of John. See Venn (as above); *Harrow School Register 1800-1911*, (1911), p. 47. It is not clear when he died; *D.N.B.* and *V.C.H. Buckinghamshire* V. ii, p. 296, say he succeeded his brother at Hartwell, but this appears to be wrong: see Burke's *Landed Gentry* (1936 ed.), p. 1343.
 - 7 On Martyn (1735-1825), see *D.N.B.*; Venn; Hennessy (whose date for Martyn's incumbency of Pertenhall should read 1804-1825).
 - 8 On Cunningham, a prominent evangelical, see *D.N.B.*
 - 9 A temporary chapel at Harrow Weald was erected in 1815 (W. W. Druett, *The Stanmores and Harrow Weald through the Ages* (1938), p. 215), replaced by All Souls church in 1842.
 - 10 Lillypot Lane, Aldersgate, was between Staining Land and Noble Street: see Ekwall, *Street-Names of the City of London* (1954), p. 158.
 - 11 This appears to be The Hill House: see *Paterson's Roads* (18th ed., by E. Mogg, 1826), p. 172. The story about the new road is puzzling. Mr. C. F. Baylis writes: "I cannot see how a new road could have been made from Hill House to fit in with Tootell's description. There is a footpath from a house in Stone Grove which was called Oakleigh, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile towards Elstree from Hill House, which used to come out in Hale Lane at the point where Broadfields Avenue now joins Hale Lane, and this path might well be all that remains of the road constructed by the Prince of Wales".
 - 12 Edgware Place: *Paterson's Roads*, p. 172.
 - 13 Mr. Baylis points out that the George ("George and Dragon" until 1714) was undoubtedly a public house much used by waggoners in the 17th century.
 - 14 The census of 1811 is meant.