

RAWLINSON'S PROPOSED HISTORY OF MIDDLESEX, 1717-1720

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In 1720 Richard Rawlinson, the non-juring bishop and owner of the vast manuscript collections bearing his name in the Bodleian Library, pointed out the value of John Norden's *Description of Middlesex*, and added

"This Piece is now in the Press, with large Improvements, for which see the Proposals."

He criticised the abortive history of John Bowack in 1705

"stopp'd, as meeting with no Encouragement to proceed; nor did he deserve it, as any Person may be sensible who will examine his Inscriptions with the Originals; in which he will discover the innumerable Errors, Omissions, Additions, and Ignorance of the Author; and which will be expos'd at large, when the Antiquities of this County, now in the Press (whereof Norden is the Plan and will be publish'd with it) shall come out; but I refer my Reader to the Proposals dated Feb. 29, 1719-20, whereunto is annex'd a Specimen of the Parish of Finchley."¹

The Editor of the proposed history, as the detailed description suggests, was none other than Rawlinson himself. Since 1714 he had co-operated with the notorious publisher, Edmund Curll, in issuing a series of county and cathedral histories, later advertised as *Anglia Illustrata*, based on the work of earlier antiquaries. As early as June, 1717, Hearne confessed to his friend Rawlinson:

"I . . . am glad you are now improving Mr. Norden's Middlesex. I suppose you will only take into the Worke such Inscriptions as are material, and I do not doubt but you will endeavour to be nicely accurate."²

A few days later he added:

"Your Additions to Norden's Middlesex will be of good Use to the Publick"³ and Rawlinson admitted being responsible when in reply he sent Hearne a copy of the epitaph on

"the famous Mr Bedwell, authour of the account of Tottenham⁴ in this County (which in my description I shall perhaps reprint). . . I am mighty glad to find you are pleased with my design, and the more to encourage me in it I have met with a number of the accurate map[s] of this County, done by Norden himself, which I shall think no ill Ornament to my work inasmuch as that accurate Surveyor exceeds all who have preceded or have followed him: I diverted myself severall hours on Monday at Tottenham, where I found several very antient brass plates, which I intend to compare with Weaver [sic], who in general I find very Incorrect and Incurious, so that the more is compared of him, the less credit will be given him."⁵

It is interesting to find an eighteenth century antiquary praising so highly his Tudor predecessor "whose exact Surveys of some few

Counties, are so justly celebrated, and no less valued for their Usefulness as well as Pleasure.”⁶ One modern scholar speaking of the Middlesex survey remarked: “The remains of Norden’s project are considerable; the value, even more,”⁷ while another endorsed Rawlinson’s opinion regarding the maps which “were more original than any which preceded or followed them for a long time and embodied that spirit of independent scientific research which arose among . . . men of the middle classes in the 1590s.”⁸ They showed roads and battlefields for the first time and displayed letters and numbers at the sides to facilitate reference and identification. Unfortunately the maps dominated the text, and while Norden became more expansive when he discoursed on agriculture, noting the fields of Harrow which “so sweetly address themselves to the sickle and scythe, and Hendon wheat, “the purest in many shires and therefore Queen Elizabeth hath the most part of her provision from that place,” his account generally tended to be sketchy and incomplete.

Realising these deficiencies Rawlinson embarked on a vast programme of original research. Tottenham was not the only village he visited, for dated copies of inscriptions and records of fees for consulting parish registers enable us to trace a large scale itinerary made at intervals between March, 1717, and June, 1718.

MS Rawl, D.896, f. 58v.
 1717 Mar. 25. Hendon.
 Hadley.
 Mar. 26. South Mims (Mimms).
 Edgworth (Edgware).
 Mar. 27. Stanmore.
 Pinner and Rislip
 (Ruislip).
 Ickenham.
 Heys (Hayes).
 Southall.

MS Rawl, D.896, f. 3.
 1717 Mar. 29. Islington.

MS Rawl, B.359B, f. 19.
 April 5. St. Pancras.

MS Rawl, D.1054. Dated epitaphs.
 Islington. f. 91v.

April. 2. Clerkenwell. f. 91.

April 6. Stoke Newington. f. 95.
 April ?. Hendon. f. 97v.
 Finchley. f. 107.
 Cheswick (Chiswick).
 f. 112v.
 Bunhill Fields. f. 114.
 April 27. Stanes (Staines) and
 Bedfont. f. 157.

MS Rawl, D.896, ff. 2, 3.

Cf. MS Rawl, D.1194, f. 21.

? June [St] Pancras.
Hampstead.
High Gate.
Tottenham.
Bow nr Stratford.
Stoke Newington.
Brentford.
Isleworth.
Twickenham.
Sheperton (Shepperton).
Sunbury.
Hampton.

MS Rawl, B.359B, f. 102.

June 14. High Gate.

MS Tanner, 456A, f. 54.

June 24. Tottenham.

July 19. Edmonton.

Enfield.

July 30 (really 20). Willesdon.

Harrow on the Hill.

Greenford Magna.

Tuddington (Teddington).

July 29. Paddington.

Ibid, MS Rawl, D.1194, f. 20v.

July 29. St. Mary le Bone.

Aug. 5. Hounslow.

Heston.

Cranford (Cranford).

Harlington.

Aug. 6. Uxbridge.

Cowley.

Harmondsworth.

Stanwell.

Asheford (Ashford).

Lalam (Laleham on

Thames).

Aug. 7. Littleton.

Feltham.

Hanworth.

Norwood Chapell.

Hanwell.

Peryvale (Perivale).

1718 ? April Cheswick (Chiswick).

Hammersmith.

MS Rawl, D.896, ff. 2, 3.

1718 April 15. Drayton.

April 16. Hillingdon.

Heysse (Hayes).

Jun. 2. West Twyford.

Kingsbury.

Northolt.

Jun. 3. Harefield.

Jun. 4. Southgate.

Edmonton.

Tottenham High Cross.

Bromley near Bow.

It was probably in June, 1718, that Rawlinson informed Hearne:

"We last week finished our visitation of the County of Middlesex, and met with some fine antient papers and charters in the hands of a private Gentleman [Sir Richard Newdigate of Harefield?] which will very much illustrate the Antiquities of this County especially post Conquest . . . From the Registers of the severall Parishes, I have made considerable discoveries of many great and antient families which I shall take particular notice of. I hope shortly to begin Oxfordshire."⁹

As in the later perambulation of Oxfordshire Richard did not travel alone, for the untidy scrawl of his elder brother Thomas, the well-known bibliophile, appears intermingled in transcripts of registers and epitaphs.¹⁰

The results of the itinerary fill two large volumes,¹¹ which Rawlinson swelled by inserting extracts from the Edwardian inventories, and the liberties of Cranford, while references to Dugdale's *Baronage*¹² and Dart's *Westminster*¹³ indicated the wealth of his reading later described in the *English Topographer*. His elder brother allowed him to copy a manuscript relating to Sion House;¹⁴ he illustrated the article for Isleworth by a printed sermon preached there by Robert Grey¹⁵ and that for Hampton Court by a large print.¹⁶ Even the windows of the Inns he patronised on his travels he thought worthy of mention, noting the painted glass at the Five Blackbirds in Edmonton and that in the White Swan in Hammersmith.¹⁷

Rawlinson realised that however extensively he read and travelled, it would be impossible to compile a reliable and up-to-date history without the assistance of local inhabitants. To eliminate the vague and verbose replies of village patriarchs and "squarsons", he circulated a printed query identical in content with the one he was to use for Oxfordshire¹⁸ and based originally on the questionnaire Browne Willis distributed in 1712 for Buckinghamshire. Here was a cheap and convenient method of acquiring reliable information in a digestible form. Rawlinson explained its purpose in the preamble:

"My own Curiosity engaging me mostly in the study of our English Antiquities and having surveyed the largest Part and designing with all Expedition to finish the rest of your County, I must desire your assistance in answering the following Queries, which, as living upon the Spot you are best qualified to do, and which a Stranger (let him be ever so diligent) cannot possibly know. In this I do not propose to spare myself the vast labour of travelling into each particular Place and hope that by your favourable and instructive answers with the help of Norden (which I design for my Plan), Stow, Newcourt and other Printed and Manuscript Authorities, I shall be encouraged to attempt a Recovery of the Antiquities of your County."¹⁹

Unfortunately the general response cannot be ascertained, but several replies have survived, indicating what the early eighteenth century clergyman or gentleman knew about his immediate environment. Humphrey Hall, vicar of Hendon, apologised for his delay:

"To the Author of the Queries. I recd the Queries some time since. That they have met wth no Answers sooner is owing partly to Business and partly to indisposition. The present Answers may be follow'd wth more, if you signify to me that they com not too late, & that you expect not better Information from another hand. . . Upon the nicest Inquiry, I could never find that ye Church of Hendon was dedicated to any St. nor is any day set apart for the Celebration of a Wake. The most considerable River in the Parish is call'd Brent-Brook, which gives Denomination to a Street. It carries its Name till it falls into the Thames (& which we are tempted to be proud of) gives Name to the County-Town. The Parish has an old Charter granted by one of our Kings for signal services don by several Parishioners, by virtue whereof all the Carriages were exempted from

paying of toll, & tho' many do pay, yet there are several now living that have contested the point, & kept their money. The Charter, at least a Copy of it, is in several hands. —The most considerable House in the Parish is that which was the Abbot of Westminster's Palace, now call'd Hendon-Place. It is yet a large Fabrick, tho' but small in comparison of what it was anciently. The Walls of it are what we call Plaister of Paris. The Age of it is computed at 500 years, & yet appears light & strong. The Land belonging to it (as an Abby) is about an hundred & forty pound *p* ann. —This same Palace or Place is (& has been for some Generations) in the Family of the Nicholls's. He that last deceas'd was John Nicoll[sic], Esq., a Gentleman that took great delight in planting of Trees, by which the Estate is already considerably improv'd, & will daily become more valuable for many years to com. There are various shady Walks which are a great Ornament to the Estate, & all persons having free Access to them, a great Accommodation both to Neighbours & Strangers.

The Extent of the Parish is 8 miles, viz. from Hampstead Heath to Barnit-Common. The broadest place of it is about five miles. Tis bounded by 10 parishes, five on the Southern & Westerly parts, viz. Hampstead, Wilsden, Kingsbury, Whitchurch & Edgware; and 5 on the Easterly & Northern, viz. Finchly, Totteridge, Barnit, Shenly & Elstree. The four last in the County of Hertford."²⁰

Three quaintly spelt folio pages packed with useful information about Finchley were sent by Thomas Onyon, whose reply indicated how useful an instrument the printed Query could be:

"Your letter sent to ye Minister of this parish came with the severall queries therein safe to his hand but he being a young man and just come among us he communicated the same to me as knoweing me to be an oeld Inhabitant and a man of Leaisuere have thearfore taken paines to answer your severall queries as plainly as i can.

And first our parish of finchley has ye brook called of oeld and still brant brook Running on ye west of ye said parish. Rieves at High barnett and runs to Brentford in to ye Thames. The parishes surrounding itt are Totteridge & Hendon, West Hampstead, South Highgate and Hornsey East, Heyan Barnett on ye North.

Containes 170 houses and about 400 Inhabitants. The Confines reachis from Hampstead heath to within a mile of High barnett has a Comon of about 1600 Acres of good Land wich is noe small benifitt to itt Inhabitants. Ye soil generally a strong marly Clay not without in many places much gravile and many fine springs especially that of browns well, knowe to almost all the north parts of England standing by ye Road in ye sd Comon with a noble Conduitt newly repaired for ye conveniency of poore Travilers drinking at itt.

Markets we have for Swine every Wensday & Thursday where are great quantities of that comodity brought from most Counties in England and many from Scotland. this markt is and have bene of many years kept by Custome and no other prescription. From it Great Sums of monie are returned to many Counties.

Charters wee have one very exstarordinary wich being nowe in my hands can say something thearof. It is granted by King John from his Court of Shoram bearing date 16 June in the first of his Reigne. Renewed by Queene Elizabeth bearing date 10 ffebruary in the second year of her Reigne wherein amongst other things thear is Granted for Ever to the Inhabitants and tennants of finchley & their servants and horsis that they

shall be toll free as well by land as water over all this land of England to pich or stand or sell their wares and goods where thay please the purport of wich Charter in the behalph of my tennants i had occasion to try with the Lord maior of London some years since & was given in itt's favr.

The Land of the said parish is nowe generally meadowe or pasture though thear is some arrable and wood lands but formerly was almost surrounded with woods.

Itt is in the Bishope of London's maner who also has the presentation of the Living. The present Rector Dr Nathll Marshall presented to it by bishope Compton about 10 years since worth about 150^l p annum. One thing is very Remarkable wich is in this Towne we are all freeholders and pay but 2d p acre tith, whereas all the parishis Round us are Copyholders and most of them pay 2s. and 2-6 p acre tyth.

The Church is dedicated to the blessed virgin Mary hath in itt's Steple 5 fine bells. The Church well pewed and a handsome Gallery with a fine Organ. The Organist paid by Subscription, 15 Charity Children Cloth'd educated and put apprenticis by a voluntary Subscription of the best of the parish.

Monuments i find 4 worth noate in the Church on the North side of ye alter Black & Whitt Marble next ye alter is a Sumptuous one much Defaced by the Rougs in ye Late Civill wares or otherwise uncivill ones wich was Lord Chiefe Justice frowick in King Henry 7th Reigne. [Onyon continued to list the more important tombs, the benefactors and the local gentry, concluding:] Worthy Sr, after all my pains, this being ye best account I am able to give you of our parish is with my best wishis to all your worthy undertakings. . . ”²¹

It was not a coincidence that the specimen Rawlinson annexed to his printed Proposal concerned the parish of Finchley,

Mr. Wolfe, vicar of Hillingdon, communicated extracts from Uxbridge parish register²² and returned a useful and detailed reply to the query for Hillingdon dwelling on local murders and the “famous vine tree in ye Churchyard near 100 years old.”²³ Sir Richard Newdigate, signing himself to Curll “your servant tho’ unknown,” was a trifle suspicious of the design supported by the unscrupulous publisher:

“I received a Proposall & Queries (I believe from one who intends to write a Naturall History of Mid^x) wth no name to them; I being at present out of the County cant give him that acct desired, but I shall be in Town at Whitesontide & then I will call on you, & I desire myself to talk wth ye Author having many memorable things in the Parish of Harefield & our Family to communicate to him.”²⁴

Unfortunately the query sometimes fell upon stony ground. Mr. Brandeth of Hounslow excused himself:

“I should be Ambitious to Give my Assistance to any Gentleman who designs a Recovery of ye Antiquities of our County, but having been but a very little Time upon ye Spot, I cannot possibly answer yr Queries, either to yours, or my own satisfaction: & being at present engag'd in some affairs of my own private concernment that employ my Whole time & thoughts I want the opportunity of Informing my self of those things you have given yrself ye Trouble to write to me about.”²⁵

The proposed History of the County never appeared. After a short tour of France and the Low Countries, Rawlinson fell under the spell of Italy, returning to England in 1726 to discover that complicated family and financial problems caused by his brother's death awaited settlement. These left him no time to attend his "beloved studies" until 1735 when he embarked on the vast project of continuing Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses*. The reprint of Norden's Survey of Middlesex and Hertfordshire which appeared in 1723 while he was abroad might have made him relinquish his design, but Rawlinson never lost hope that one day his expansive collections centred on Norden would be published. As most of the villages were within reach of his lodgings in London House he was able to keep his collections up-to-date, visiting Islington in 1728²⁶, Harrow in 1735²⁷, Bromley and Poplar in 1751.²⁸ He made enquiries of Eusebius Williams in 1734 concerning the Watts book bequest to Staines parish library,²⁹ compiled an index of Middlesex inscriptions,³⁰ and kept the county in mind throughout his reading, even preserving notices about tombs nesting in the bodies of criminals hanging in chains at Edgware,³¹ the birth of a child with two heads at Paddington,³² and the dreadful fate of a drowsy Middlesex Brewer whose wayward drayhorses terminated or rather prolonged his slumbers by succumbing to the attraction of the cool waters of the Thames.³³

The obstacles to publication were more deep rooted. The year 1730 marked as it were the end of a period when the study of Antiquity flourished in England.³⁴ William Stukeley turned his attentions from progressive archaeological studies to a quaint form of Druidomania. Long before his death in 1735 Hearne who had made antiquarian publications pay confessed regretfully: "There is a continual decay . . . for which reason I must lessen the Number of Copies I print."³⁵ Not even Curll could maintain a market for antiquarian publications; Rawlinson found it impossible to get his collections for Middlesex as well as those for Oxfordshire and Eton College published solely because as he remarked ruefully, "this is not an age for encouraging any valuables." One of the last letters Rawlinson wrote referred to the manuscript history of Tottenham he had secured from Lord Coleraine's library³⁶ and he was doubtless thinking of his collections for Middlesex when he wrote to Browne Willis a month before he died: "As I follow you in years and in my grand Climacterick, I must leave them to Posterity to find them in Bodley . . . and trust . . . to some future Editors. Sic vos non vobis."³⁷

All references unless otherwise stated to Bodleian MSS.

- 1 *The English Topographer* (1720), p. 106.
- 2 MS Rawl, letters 111, f. 48, 21. June, 1717.
- 3 *Ibid.*, f. 49, 2 July, 1717.
- 4 W. Bedwell, *A briefe description of the Towne of Tottenham* (1631).
- 5 MS Tanner 456A, f. 54, 26, June, 1717. Despite his criticism Rawlinson made long extracts from J. Weever, *Ancient Funeral Monuments*, 2nd ed. (1661), in MS Rawl B.389B.
- 6 *The English Topographer* (1720), p. i.
- 7 A. L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth*. Repr. (1951), p. 50.
- 8 E. Lynam, *British maps and mapmakers* (1934), p. 20.
- 9 MS Rawl, letters 27C, f. 136, no date.
- 10 MS Rawl, D.896, f. 53 (Hendon); ff. 40-51. Thomas lent some of his transcripts to Hearne (MS Hearne's Diaries 80, f. 187) and also some concerning Edgware to Richard (MS Rawl, B.389B, f. 70v). It is possible that Curll who proposed to publish the book and printed the Query may have accompanied the brothers as he was later to do over Surrey and Oxfordshire. His notes on Hayes appear in MS Rawl, B.389C, f. 53.
- 11 Now MS Rawl, B.389B & C. There is also a scrapbook of miscellaneous collections MS Rawl, D.896.
- 12 MS Rawl, B.389B, f. 4.
- 13 MS Rawl, B.389C, f. 1.
- 14 *Ibid.*, f. 127.
- 15 *Ibid.*, f. 111.
- 16 *Ibid.*, f. 146.
- 17 MS Rawl, D.896, f. 37v.
- 18 The text is printed by F. N. Davis in an appendix to *Parochial collections made by Anthony a Wood and Richard Rawlinson* (Oxfordshire Record Society, 1929), iii, p. 368.
- 19 Only one mutilated example of the Middlesex query, except for the preamble, a line for line reprint of the one for Oxfordshire, has been found. It has to be read with the aid of a mirror. MS Rawl, B.389B, f. 4.
- 20 MS Rawl, D.896, f. 51, 20 May, 1718.
- 21 *Ibid.*, f. 33v, 7 April, 1718.
- 22 MS Rawl, B.389C, f. 71.
- 23 MS Rawl, D.896, f. 59, no date.
- 24 *Ibid.*, f. 50, 28 April, 1718.
- 25 *Ibid.*, f. 60, 20 April, 1718.
- 26 MS Rawl, D.1054, f. 115.
- 27 MS Rawl, B.389B, f. 76.
- 28 *Ibid.*, ff. 160, 164.
- 29 MS Rawl, B.389C, f. 144.
- 30 MS Rawl, B.357, ff. 34-61.
- 31 MS Rawl, B. f. 70.
- 32 MS Rawl, D.896, f. 9.
- 33 MS Rawl, B.389C, f. 156.
- 34 D. C. Douglas, *English Scholars*, 2nd ed. (1951), p. 27 seq.
- 35 *Collections* xi, 434.
- 36 MS Rawl, D.405 printed by R. Dyson in 1792.
- 37 Brit. Mus. Add. MS.5833, f. 181b 12 March, 1755. The Middlesex collections have never been published.