

# DID CHARLES I DINE IN HILLINGDON IN 1646?

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The anecdote that Charles I on his attempted escape from Oxford in 1646 stopped for several hours at a tavern in Hillingdon was given wider circulation by Daniel Lysons in his *Environs of London* in 1800 and as a result has been quoted in many places.

First, let us look at what he says:

The manor of Colham has a court-leet and court-baron, with right of free warren. The courts are held annually at an ancient public house in Hillingdon called the Red Lion, which in the year 1646 was in the occupation of John Tisdale, as appears by the court-rolls, which confirm the following anecdote, printed in Peck's *Desiderata Curiosa*, from Dr Michael Hudson's examination before the committee of parliament (in the year above mentioned), relating to King Charles's escape from Oxford to the Scots at Southwell. '...After we had passed Uxbridge, at one Mr Tisdale's house, a tavern in Hillingdon, we alighted and we staid to refresh ourselves between ten and eleven of the clock, and there staid two or three hours, where the King was much perplexed what course to resolve upon, London or northward; about two of the clock we took a guide towards Barnet'.<sup>1</sup>

Lysons was a great pioneer topographer, but his work was limited not only by his available sources and his period, but also sometimes by his own carelessness. For this particular 'anecdote' Lysons gives as his source 'Peck's *Desiderata Curiosa*'. In a footnote he says 'Vol ii, book 9, fol 2 (page 360 of 1779 edition)'.

Francis Peck (1690–1748), a Trinity man, was late in the field of Royalist writing. In these two volumes he put together documents from earlier collections. Some came from John Nalson's collection *From the Rebellious Scots 1639 to the Murder of Charles I 1649* (published 1682–3). Nalson was a strong Royalist and collected material he considered favourable to the cause. The extract used by Lysons comes from a report of a Parliamentary Committee at which Michael

Hudson, who accompanied Charles, related the events of their journey.

Obtaining a copy of Peck's edition of 1779 I did exactly what I expect Lysons did before me, looked at the excellent index for the word 'Hillingdon', and there was Lysons's extract, on the page and volume he noted. Unlike Lysons, perhaps, I then leafed through the volumes and found a few pages earlier that Hudson had made another report to a different committee under the Speaker. It was quite a different account of the same journey, and, within the same volumes there were documents of John Rushworth's *Historical Collection* which gave yet a third account.<sup>2</sup>

John Rushworth was from 1640 Clerk Assistant to the Commons and their Secretary to the Council of War. If not present at the interrogation of Michael Hudson, he would have seen all the documents.

There were also documents in Peck from the *Chronicon de Dunstable* (1733) of Thomas Hearne (1678–1735). He was yet another collector of historical documents and an antiquary. Some of these documents also refer to the journey.

Finally there was yet another account, not in the *Desiderata*, that of John Ashburnham.<sup>3</sup> Ashburnham was the King's most loyal servant, from an aristocratic family, practical and very capable. He was technically Charles's Groom of the Bedchamber. In Oxford he kept the King's accounts (published in 1830) and organised his life. Charles relied on him during the journey from Oxford. He was also with the King on his second attempted escape from Hampton Court to the Isle of Wight. Because he was unjustly accused of betraying Charles then, he wrote

an account of both journeys in 1648 to justify his actions. He was imprisoned after the Isle of Wight and kept in custody, considered dangerous, for most of the Commonwealth period so his publication had only a limited circulation. Lysons does not appear to have known of it, and its eventual republication, along with other material, did not appear until 1830, too late for Lysons.

## THE JOURNEY FROM OXFORD

Putting together Charles's journey from Oxford to the Scots at Newark may not be of the greatest historical importance, but it reveals an interesting human story.

It is Ashburnham alone who sets the scene and details the preliminaries. After Naseby the Civil War turned against Charles and in 1646 the Army was closing in on Oxford. The Governor of Woodstock (Capt Fawcett) warned the King that Woodstock could not hold out much longer and when it fell Oxford could not hold out long. Charles saw three possibilities: surrender to the Army; appear at Westminster and offer himself to Parliament in an effort to make peace; or to go to Ireland or France. M. Montreuil, Agent from the French King, was willing to attempt negotiations with the Scots Army in Newark. The Commissioner to the Scots Army in London had already agreed terms with the Queen and Cardinal Mazarin. Michael Hudson was sent on 2 April to make arrangements with the Scots at Newark.<sup>4</sup> Ormonde, his commander in Ireland, was told of these plans on 13 April.<sup>5</sup> The King did not tell the Privy Council, only Rupert and Richmond, all other negotiations having failed. Montreuil wrote to say all difficulties had been resolved. Oxford was told the King was off to London, and on 27 April (Monday) he set off with John Ashburnham. Hudson, who had been making various arrangements for the journey, met them on the way.

The legend that three people left from each of the Oxford gates is therefore unlikely since only two went out, although the story that all the gates were kept shut for five hours is likely.

What was Hudson's role in all this? Peck produced a summary of Hudson's life from Thomas Hearne<sup>6</sup>. Born in Westmoreland, he was a servitor at Queen's Oxford in 1621, when he was 16. He took his MA and Fellowship in 1630. He married the daughter of an Army captain, was ordained and held a benefice in Lincolnshire

until the Civil War when he joined the King's service. He knew the north and was appointed to the curious position of Scoutmaster General to the Army of the North under Newcastle. After Marston Moor, when the north was lost, he joined the King in Oxford and took his DD while there. Presumably his experience with the Army, of discovering the enemy's intentions and planning the way ahead, was the reason he was asked to help the King on his journey.

Hearne also says that Dr King and the Earl of Southampton left Oxford at this time. There is no further mention of them but Dr King was a parson and several accounts have Charles, wearing a cassock, riding behind Ashburnham as his master.<sup>7</sup> As one reads and puts together the various accounts, it becomes clear that the whole affair is full of subterfuge and deception.

The first part of the journey is agreed by all the accounts. They left at 3pm on the 27th and took roads roughly parallel to the Thames for Dorchester, Henley and Maidenhead. Ashburnham's account confirms this in more detail. They had a pass from a captain in Oxford and met Parliamentary troops at Benson and Nettlefield, both of which are on the road to Maidenhead. They said they were on their way to the Commons.<sup>8</sup>

It is after Maidenhead that the accounts differ. Rushworth says they turned north from there for Wheathampsted (by St Albans) and lodged at at a common inn in a little village five miles from Newmarket. No one remembered where the first night was spent. They went from there to Harboro (Market Harborough), spent one night at Stamford, arriving at Downham (Market) on 30 April, where the King stayed until 4 May. This is quite straightforward and practical and we must remember that Rushworth was the one person who saw all the documents. This also squares with Ashburnham's account.

In one of Hudson's accounts, Charles was left at the White Swan in Downham while Hudson went to Southwell.<sup>9</sup> In another account Hudson is based as Crimpleshaw, a village near Downham. On Saturday 2 May Hudson went from there to the 'Southrie' ferry (Southey?), a private way to the Isle of Ely and back.<sup>10</sup> In yet another account he stays at Melton Mowbray on 30 April with a Mr Browne and on 1 May goes to Ely.<sup>11</sup> In another account Hudson appeared with Ashburnham and the King on 2 May at 10pm and stayed (it is not clear where) until 6pm on the Lord's Day (3 May),<sup>12</sup> then went to Stamford

to stay in the Falcon. In yet another account, on Saturday 2 May the King bought a new hat in Downham and went to Ely.<sup>13</sup> All these accounts derive from Hudson and from witnesses who claim to have met him and gave evidence afterwards.

Hudson's accounts therefore differ. Of course he may have been deliberately sowing confusion by giving false information. According to yet another account the party in the early days appeared briefly on the London road looking in the London direction. A rumour spread that the King was in London which was believed sufficiently that an order to detain the King in London was issued on 4 May.

Hudson's actions too suggest that he was laying false trails. He discussed his business freely with passers-by, openly exchanged his horse, wore a scarlet coat at times, enquired at shops for the kind of hat Charles had been wearing on the first two days and made a great fuss of disappearing secretly in the fens. Had Browne's evidence been planted on him? What part

was played by Dr King and the Earl of Southampton?<sup>14</sup>

### THE RED LION AT HILLINGDON

Let us now return to Lysons in the light of all this trickery. Lysons backed up his story by saying that in 1646 'the Red Lion was in the occupation of John Tisdale, as appears in the court rolls'. There is no mention of the Red Lion in Peck, only of a tavern in Mr Tisdale's house.

In 1646, as Lysons acknowledges, the manors of Uxbridge, Hillingdon and Colham had been united in one manor of Colham. Lysons says the courts were held annually in the Red Lion. Modern historians now take this to mean that the courts were held there in Lysons's time.<sup>15</sup> None of the surviving 17th-century court records give this information. Indeed one court roll of 1646 still exists. It gives the date, acknowledges Charles I and gives a list of jurors. It does not mention a place of meeting, nor does it refer to



*Fig 1. Hillingdon Church about 1740. Burles's school was in the house with the lug windows on the ground floor just by the house on the left*

John or any other Tisdale.<sup>16</sup> A John Tisdale does appear in the Hillingdon marriage register of 1656. We know that Lysons examined the parish registers, including the marriage register, since he gives extracts from them. Is this where he obtained the name John Tisdale? There are several Tisdales there but none in the baptismal registers.

A search of the Middlesex Sessions Records gives the first reference to the Red Lion at Hillingdon in 1692.<sup>17</sup> There was one witness at Hillingdon at the time whose existence has only lately come to light. Edward Burles was the master of the grammar school there between 1642 and 1649. Having taken his MA, he was apparently tutor to the sons of Dr John Clarke, perhaps in Brentwood, who went to London and became Treasurer then President of the Royal College of Physicians. He remained Burles's patron. Burles then set up a grammar school in Bushey and in 1637 applied for his Bishop's licence as a schoolmaster in Acton.<sup>18</sup> This was later taken as a licence to serve as a priest, so he must have been in orders by then. In 1642 he had a school in Hillingdon which obviously flourished since he had three assistants. They and their families can all be traced in the parish records.

For each of the places where he served he has a preface to his later Grammar *Grammatica Burlesia*, published in East Acton in 1652 which became very well known.<sup>19</sup> In the Hillingdon preface in English (there is also one in Latin signed 'in my school in Hillingdon 1649') he relates how they dealt with the plague of 1642. He tells too of the despoiling of the parish church (St John Baptist) in the same year by the Parliamentary troops. He writes of 'driving an alehouse out of the church and the church house'. Fortunately the troops did not damage the monuments. He calls these soldiers 'limetwigs of disorder which might easily intangle spoon-feathered youth'. In another paragraph, in which he discusses the falling-off of Hillingdon in spiritual matters, he writes 'Sirs I may venture to say that some prized an Alehouse above the school-house for which this Grammar was prepared'. Was the tavern in fact above the school? Grammar schools were in the most curious places. In Bushey the school returned to a carpenter's shop. The first infants' school in Acton was a room over the town gaol; the Royal Grammar School in Colchester was at a house in Culver Street that looks like any other cottage

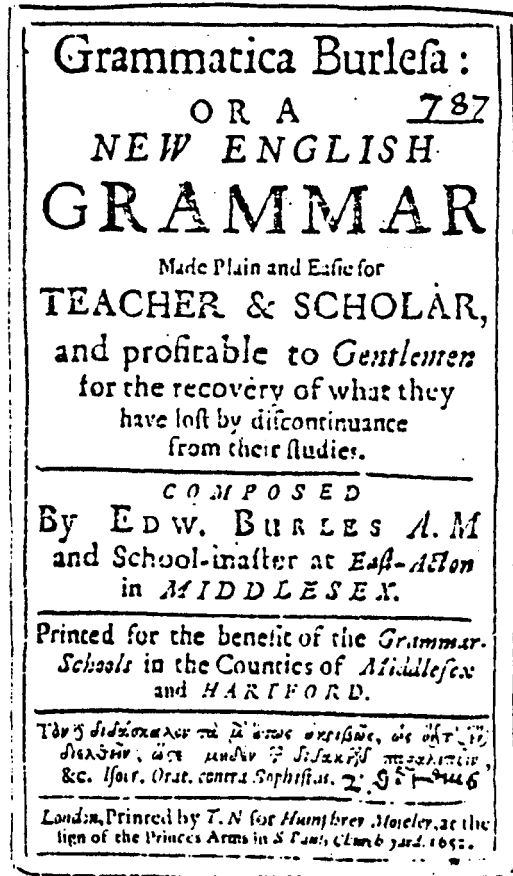


Fig 2. Title page of Burles's Grammar 1652

there. It spread down the garden in the rear and had a shopfront let in eventually to give light to the front classroom.

Burles's subsequent actions show he was a Royalist. He lived quietly in East Acton during the Commonwealth with his wife Mary until 1660 when, at the Restoration, he held benefices at Colchester and for a while was master at the Royal Grammar School at a time when Royalists and Anglicans were replacing former supporters of Parliament.

## CONCLUSION

Apart from the lack of evidence in the published accounts, there are other reasons why a visit to Uxbridge and Hillingdon by Charles I appears unlikely. Uxbridge would surely be the one place where the King and Ashburnham would have

been recognised. Just over a year before, in January 1645, the King's Commissioners and those of Parliament met at Uxbridge to discuss a possible peace treaty. For a week there was much coming and going. Among the King's Commissioners was Mr John Ashburnham, who, no doubt, was continually with the King. In addition, Uxbridge was a garrison town for the Parliamentary army and troops were quartered in the area around it which included Hillingdon.

Finally, it seems odd that Ashburnham and Hudson would make this kind of dangerous detour if they were eager to get to Downham as quickly as possible to conceal Charles.

There is another curious matter. Among the 28 documents relating to the King's journey in Peck, almost everyone who met the party was interrogated afterwards, even the barber who cut the King's hair.<sup>20</sup> Only two people are missing: a Mr Spixworth from around Downham and Mr Tisdale. Spixworth takes part in Hudson's deceptions. What happened to Mr Tisdale?

## ENVOI

The story ends with Charles's arrest by the Scots who took until February 1647 to hand him over to Parliament, and only then on condition that half the sum agreed for their services in England was handed over. Ashburnham had been given a pass to take him to Holland but was caught on 25 May. He soon found his way back to the King in Newcastle and was with him at Hampton Court for the abortive escape to the Isle of Wight. After that he was confined for most of the Commonwealth period. At the Restoration he returned to his old post as Groom of the Bedchamber to Charles II. According to Pepys he was to be found entertaining guests with his tale, when he was not saying how difficult it was to keep the new King in bedlinen since he had no money to pay his servants so they stole everything they could lay their hands on.

Michael Hudson had borrowed a pass from

his brother-in-law but was recognised and arrested at Sandwich waiting for a boat. After a number of interrogations he was released to Lord Dunfermline. Hudson's letter of thanks to Dunfermline is in the *Desiderata*. He kept out of sight until the Restoration, probably as incumbent at Witchling, Kent. Pepys met him and praised his sermon when he was Chaplain to Chatham Dockyard.

At the Restoration, John Rushworth became Clerk to the Council of State, then Treasurer Advocate. For many years he was MP for Berwick.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Lysons, *Environs of London* vol V, p152.

<sup>2</sup> Rushworth published these volumes between 1659 and 1701. They cover the period 1618–49.

<sup>3</sup> John Ashburnham's Narrative of his attendance on King Charles I, 1830.

<sup>4</sup> Nalson XIV, 118.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Ormonde, 13 April 1646 in John Ashburnham's Narrative 1830.

<sup>6</sup> Hearne in *Chronicon Desiderata*, p347.

<sup>7</sup> John Rushworth *Historical Collection* IV, i, 266–7.

<sup>8</sup> Nalson XIV, 123.

<sup>9</sup> John Ashburnham's Narrative 1830.

<sup>10</sup> Enquiry at Lynn 11/5/1646 in Nalson XIV 118.

<sup>11</sup> Enquiry of Browne at Lynn 18/5/1646 in Nalson XIV 118. It is because these two enquiries were at Kings Lynn, while others were in London, that the contradictions were not seen at the time.

<sup>12</sup> Nalson XIV, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Enquiry at Lynn 11/5/1646 in Nalson XIV 118.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Hearne *Chronicon Desiderata* p347.

<sup>15</sup> VCH *Middlesex* IV, p183.

<sup>16</sup> Court Records 1646, London Metropolitan Archives Acc 180/679.

<sup>17</sup> Middlesex County Record Society, Middlesex County Records vols 3,4,5, 1635–1701; Hillingdon Parish Registers.

<sup>18</sup> Guildhall Library 9583/1.

<sup>19</sup> Burles's *Grammatica*, like most old textbooks is worn out. The copy at the British Library is unreadable, as is the photocopy. The photocopy at the Bodleian Library, however, can be read.

<sup>20</sup> The account here wrongly reads 'Newcastle' instead of 'Newark'.