

GEORGE LIPSCOMB, Esq., M.D.,  
THE HISTORIAN OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

(BY MR. ROBERT GIBBS.)

The late DR. GEORGE LIPSCOMB, the historian of Bucks, was a native of Quainton. His father, Mr. James Lipscomb, was in early life a medical officer in the Royal Navy; he was eldest son and heir of Thomas Lipscomb, of Winchester, surgeon, by Mary Fussell, sister of the Rev. James Fussell, rector of Hardwick, in 1738. The Rev. Mr. Fussell died in 1760, bequeathing his estate in Hampshire to Mr. James Lipscomb, his nephew and heir-at-law, and his personal property to his niece, Mary Lipscomb; she became the wife of the Rev. Francis Gresley, LL.B., who was rector of Grendon, in 1759. Thus the introduction of the Lipscomb family into Buckinghamshire. Mr. James Lipscomb married Miss Mary George, of Grendon Underwood, a member of an old and reputable family of that village; these were the parents of Dr. George Lipscomb, the historian; they resided at one period at Quainton, but subsequently at Grendon Underwood. Mr. James Lipscomb died in 1794, and is buried in Quainton churchyard, where a memorial was erected to his memory by his widow and son. It bears this inscription—

Near this place  
Are interred the remains of  
MR. JAMES LIPSCOMB,  
Surgeon,  
Who in the early part of his life served in the  
Royal Navy;  
Was present in several memorable  
Engagements by Sea;  
And at the Sieges of Pondicherry and Manilla,  
In the East Indies;  
Always conducting himself with  
Honour and Credit.  
In the practice of the Profession which,  
For nearly thirty years,  
He followed in this Parish,  
His Integrity and Humanity were generally  
Acknowledged;  
And he has left behind him the character of  
An honest man!  
He died December the 29th, 1794, aged 64.

The widow of Mr. James Lipscomb died at the "Magpie House," at Quainton, at an advanced age; she is remembered as a very superior and highly intelligent woman.

In the preface to his History of Buckinghamshire, Dr. George Lipscomb acknowledges that the originator of it was the late Rev. Edward Cooke, A.M., LL.B., rector of Haversham, whose collection of valuable and important materials formed the basis of the undertaking. This Mr. Cooke was a large contributor to several of the periodicals of his time; and though not the avowed author of any work bearing his name, is known to have afforded his co-operative assistance to many distinguished writers. He was an assiduous collector of books, and was possessed of an immense number of works and manuscripts relative to the history of his native county of Bucks, and it was by his generous beneficence that Dr. Lipscomb was able to avail himself of a vast deal of matter contained in his history. Mr. Cooke wrote a "History of Whaddon Chase," which, however, he did not live to complete. He died in 1824.

Dr. Lipscomb, notwithstanding, has the credit of the authorship of the "History of Bucks," and no one will be disposed to dispute his claim to that honour, as he devoted many years to the prosecution of it, exploring with assiduity the national records, the libraries of the metropolis, of the Universities of the United Kingdom, and all other depositories of manuscripts, charters, genealogical, biographical, and heraldic collections accessible to his diligent and respectful applications.

The publication is dated 1847, but Dr. Lipscomb had embarked in his enterprise some years previous to that date, and, as far as can be ascertained, his labour was one of great difficulty, and was performed at a great sacrifice of labour and capital. The period of the commencement of Dr. Lipscomb's task was one very different to the present. There were then no cheap postage, no rapid communication, no telegrams, no half-penny post-cards, no book post. In those days of dear postage but little information such as the author of an important work would require could be compressed into a single sheet of letter-paper, and a double sheet involved postage in an increased ratio. Dr. Lipscomb did not live to reap the fruits of his labours. From his letters it may

be inferred that his troubles were not only the usual "calamities of an author," but he had embarked in his undertaking without counting the cost, and was called upon to expend an amount of money which straitened him in his circumstances, and left him in financial embarrassments from which he never could extricate himself. In 1840 he thus writes—

"DEAR SIR,—I am under a great obligation to you for the pains which you have taken to afford me information and assistance. . . . I am sure that you perfectly well understand that it is not in my mind sufficient that the History of Buckinghamshire should be as well done in every respect as the history of any other county hitherto attempted, and that I shall not be satisfied with that, but that I am ambitious of a higher object, that the character of my work should place it foremost amongst the topographical labours of my countrymen whether of a former or of the present age.

"I am, Sir, once more,  
"Your much obliged servant,

"Sept. 30th, 1840.

G. LIPSCOMB.

Dr. Lipscomb's work is liberally illustrated with full-page and half-page engravings, vignettes, coats of arms, heraldic devices, &c. Some of the family pedigrees are of prodigious length, involving a great amount of labour, research, and cost. The outlay, as the work progressed, must consequently have been a serious one, and thus a high price per copy had to be charged to the subscribers to recoup the adventure. The purchase of the cheapest edition of the work involved an outlay of over £16, and this high price curtailed its sale. Still it found its way into the collections of the nobility and gentry, but its cost made it inaccessible to the general reader. A letter from the author shows that this difficulty was not overlooked by him. It is evident he was languishing for some return for his labour and expenditure, and he suggests the publication of a cheaper edition in smaller parts, and he writes thus on that point—

"DEAR SIR,— . . . . I feel no doubt I may confidently ask you a question which you will much oblige me by plainness and candour in your reply. . . . I wish to know your opinion of a project which has not till lately come under my consideration. I have now fast approached the completion of the third part of Bucks, and I will not disguise it from you that I think the high price of the work is necessarily a great obstacle to obtaining numbers of subscribers who might wish to possess it. What think you, then, if I should adopt the expedient of

publishing an impression of the same size in every respect and with the same embellishments (the small paper, I mean), and dividing them into weekly or monthly numbers at from three shillings to five shillings each?

"Your obedient servant,  
"G. LIPSCOMB."

"LONDON, Dec. 2nd, 1840.

A further proposition was to publish a history of the town of Aylesbury, as a separate and distinct work, but as it is probable the indefatigable author did not receive much encouragement, neither plan was carried out. In a letter to a friend at Aylesbury he asks for an opinion also on that point—

"DEAR SIR,—Assured that I may rely with confidence on your friendly feelings towards me, I may submit to you a question to which I shall be much obliged by your candid answer. Having had repeated applications to publish an octavo volume, properly illustrated, the 'History of the Town, Borough, and Parish of Aylesbury,' do you think such a scheme feasible? and could you afford me (upon terms) your co-operative assistance in it? How many subscribers, if the volume makes about eight or ten sheets (at most), do you think might be depended upon in the vicinity, and at what price might it be charged?

"Dear Sir, yours faithfully,  
"G. LIPSCOMB, M.D.

"No. 47, Wellington Street, Newington, Surrey,  
"July 1st, 1842."

On the subject of the "History of Aylesbury," he again writes:—

"No. 2, Great Smith Street, Westminster.

"SIR,— . . . . I have been preparing a very pretty and attractive vignette as the initial for the 'History of Aylesbury,' and I should have been very glad if I could have procured a copy of a slight sketch which I remember to have seen in my boyhood of the distant view of the old spire of the church on the face of clocks, made by either Mr. Stone or Mr. Quartermaine, of Aylesbury, for which I have repeatedly inquired in vain.

"Can you give me any account of old paintings or carvings in the 'George Inn' or 'White Hart,' of which my deceased correspondent, Sir Scropes B. Morland had repeatedly promised me more information than he lived to impart—the old carvings in the 'White Hart' said to have been brought from Salden.

"Do, pray, endeavour to get me a subscriber or two among your Aylesbury friends, for I am very poor, and this great work is exceedingly expensive, and exhausts all my means to the very dregs. I should esteem it a great kindness if you can get me an order even for a single copy.

"I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,  
"G. LIPSCOMB."

Dr. Lipscomb writes in a somewhat depressed strain as to his position as an author, still his work was commenced with a most flattering and elaborate list of

subscribers, including the names of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, his late Majesty King William IV., his Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dukes of Bedford, Buckingham, Devonshire, Dorset, Grafton, Marlborough, Newcastle, Norfolk, Northumberland, Sutherland, Marquises of Anglesea, Bath, Conyngham, Earls Abingdon, Buckinghamshire, Burlington, Carlisle, Clarendon, Dartmouth, Essex, Harwood, Howe, Kinmore, Lonsdale, Macclesfield, Shrewsbury, Spencer, the Countesses Bridgewater, Paulet, Sefton, a long array of Lords and Ladies, Right Hons., Hons., Barts., and most of the gentry and opulent farmers and residents in Bucks and the adjacent counties—altogether numbering about three hundred. The first part of the work is frequently to be met with in families in Quainton and the neighbouring district; the succeeding parts are more scarce, which leads to the supposition that its probable ultimate cost occasioned many of the original subscribers to decline proceeding to its completion.

The works of our most eminent historians are not faultless, and to pronounce Lipscomb's work to be strictly accurate and in every minute detail without errors, would be saying too much for it. The author himself did not hope to escape criticism on this point, but claims indulgence under the peculiar disadvantages of his having to tread the mazy wilds of antiquarian research, without a beacon and without a guide, and to explore a labyrinth hitherto unassailed. Without detracting from the merits of old Browne Willis, the Lysons, Mr. Langley, or any other local historian, I have no hesitation in asserting that Dr. Lipscomb's work will, as a local history, become invaluable as a standard of reference. To him the inhabitants of Bucks are greatly indebted for raising the history of their county from comparative obscurity.

Of the latter years of Dr. Lipscomb's life little can be gleaned. He never appears to have had a permanent residence at Quainton, but for some years resided at a little villa residence at the south end of the village of Whitchurch; here he pursued his medical practice, and was recognized as the village doctor. Eventually he left the country to reside in London. About the year 1840 his letters are addressed from various parts of the

metropolis, and it may be assumed that at this period he had no settled residence. So embarrassed became the state of his affairs eventually, that it is said a portion of his work was written within the precincts of the Queen's Bench, or whilst he was under the jurisdiction of the "Liberties of the Fleet Prison" as a debtor. He is last traced to lodgings in Westminster, where, or in the neighbourhood, he died in abject poverty and distress; the precise date of his death has not been ascertained. His wife pre-deceased him, and they left no issue. The history was not finished at the time of Dr. Lipscomb's decease, but as it was in the hands of energetic publishers it was completed by them, and the latter portions of it will well compare with the earlier published parts. The index to the work is a most comprehensive one, and displays great and laborious care in its compilation. The work is comprised in two editions, royal folio and royal quarto, and the eight parts in which it was first published form four volumes. The possession of a copy is a valuable acquisition to the library of any gentleman.

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Mr. C. LAMBORN of Bierton has sent for insertion in the RECORDS the following extract from the original in the possession of Mr. Durley of Bierton :—

“Sept: 9, 1755.

“The Covrt Cvstomes of

“The Maner of Bierton, With Hvlkett in the Covnty of Bvcks.

“We the Jvry Belonging to the said maner whose Names are hear vnder written, Do hearby present and afirm That The Ancheint Cvstomes of ovr Maner is as foloweth, namely, one years Qvittrent on Every Death or Change and no more. And Six Shillings for His Admittance and Six Shillings for the Copy, And foar pence The Cryer, and no more. And Likewise The Ancheint Cvstome of our Maner is, That There mvst be a Covrt Kept once in three years. And Likewise, That The Man and his Wife in Teaking vp together Shall pay no more than a Single Person.

“And the Ancheint Cvstome of ovr Maner is, That For a Pvrchased Covrt is paid Dovble Qvittrent, and 2 povnds two shillings To the Steward and one shilling to Every Jvryman and Double Feess to the Cryer of the Covrt, And shall pay for The admittance at the Covrt; Bvt The Copy not to be Paid for Vntil it is delivered; And Likewise That any Person may Refer taking vp vntil the Third Covrt without any Danger.

“And also that for The Poclamatione is to be paid one shilling and no more, and it is also nesassry to Be Remembered That There is no Hayott Land in My Lord Fortiscves Maner in this Parrish.

“And the Cvstome is Likewise That The Clark of the Parrish is allways Cryer of The Covrt.

	Henry Webb.	Richard Baldrick.
	Thomas Monk.	Richard Edwards.
	Wm. Stratfold.	Wm. Cox.
	Thomos Crips.	John Hoar.
The mark } Robert Holt.		Richard Hoar.
R of } Wm. Webb.		Wm. Webb, Juner.”
	Jos. Tibbett.	