INTRODUCTION: JONSON'S 'FOOT VOYAGE' AND THE ALDERSEY MANUSCRIPT

A discovery

Ben Jonson's walk from London to Edinburgh has caught the imagination and provoked the curiosity of many since it was first mooted in June 1617, a year before he set off. The journey itself was not the adventure it might have been before the Union of the Crowns, but that a celebrated and, frankly, weighty poet should choose to attempt it on foot was certainly remarkable. Most importantly, the expedition produced the encounter between Jonson and William Drummond recalled in the latter's notes of his guest's conversation and opinions, or 'informations'. The views, jests and anecdotes set down there illuminate Jonson's poetic principles, his views of his contemporaries, and the account he chose to give of himself. They are particularly beguiling for allowing us to imagine that we are hearing Jonson speak off the record, as it were, and that we can catch his conversational tone even through Drummond's editorial compressions and sometimes pursed lips. The *Informations* also provide us with glimpses of the journey itself, including Jonson's irritation at being followed – mocked, he thought – by Taylor, and his purchase of a pair of shoes at Darlington, which he 'minded to take back that far again' (ll.514–15). Such snippets have been combined with a sparse patchwork of other sources to build up an outline picture of Jonson's walk and his possible motives for undertaking it. We also know from Edinburgh records that Jonson was made a burgess of the city, and that a dinner was held there in his honour in September 1618. In his *Pennyles Pilgrimage* Taylor records meeting his fellow poet at the house of John Stewart in Leith, while Jonson's correspondence with Drummond and a dedication inscribed in a book presented to a Scots courtier reveal the names of some of his other hosts.[1] From such diverse and, in some cases, fragmentary sources, scholars such as David Masson, Ian Donaldson and

1 *CWBJ*, Letter (e), Letter 14; Knowles, 2006, 267; *CELM*, JnB 758.

James Knowles have crafted an intriguing picture of the king's poet, at the height of his fame, comfortably berthed in the capital of James's first realm in the autumn and winter of 1618–19.[2]

Such convincing critical accounts are all the more impressive given that we have always recognised that we ought to know rather more than we do. Among his notes on his guest's works, Drummond recorded that Jonson was planning 'to write his foot pilgrimage hither, and to call it *A Discovery*' (l.317). Unfortunately, this narrative does not survive, and may indeed never have been completed. Jonson must at least have had it in draft, however, since in his 'Execration Upon Vulcan' (*Und.* 43) he noted the loss of 'my journey into Scotland sung, / With all the adventures' (ll.94–5) in the 1623 desk fire that consumed some of his papers. This particular loss has become one of those gaps in the literary record that tantalise all the more for being so clearly labelled.

Unknown to scholars until recently, however, a record of the journey did survive the centuries, preserved from fire and other threats among the papers of the Aldersey family of Aldersey Hall in Cheshire.[3] These papers, now held in Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, include a manuscript containing a 7,000-word account entitled 'My Gossip Joh[n]son / his foot voyage / and myne into / Scotland', detailing Jonson's travels as far as his investiture as an Edinburgh burgess. Almost as surprising as the discovery of this account, though, is the fact that Jonson did not write it; it is instead the work of a previously unsuspected travelling companion. Influenced, perhaps, by the still-restless spectre of ungentle Ben, we have been used to thinking of Jonson journeying unaccompanied: 'I'm off to Scotland soon', he informs Shakespeare in Edward Bond's 1973 play *Bingo*; 'Walking. Alone. Well, no one would come with me.'[4] Solitariness has more reasonably been inferred from the absence of any references to a companion in the known sources. But they, by and large, fail to detail the journey, instead providing glimpses of Jonson's stay in Scotland. Until the 'Foot Voyage' account came to light, the only surviving pieces of evidence from the walk itself appeared to be a brief poetic exchange with a 'Mr Craven', recorded in a manuscript collection associated with William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, and another poem apparently presented to Jonson along the way, first noted by Mark Bland in 2004.[5]

2 Masson, 1893; Donaldson 1992; Knowles, 2006.
3 The discovery was first announced in Loxley, 2009.
4 Bond, 1974, 30.
5 Bland, 2004, 378 and 397.

The 'Foot Voyage', then, is undoubtedly a major addition not just to our knowledge of this episode but to our broader understanding of Jonson's life and the history of the period. Among much else, it can illuminate local and family histories all the way along the great north road, contribute information to the architectural history of buildings as far apart as Worksop Manor and Culross Abbey House, add significant detail to the industrial history of the English midlands and the Fife coast, shed light on the social and cultural practices of mobility and hospitality, and furnish us with informative sidelights on the high political dynamics of James VI and I's conjoined kingdoms. But it also raises a series of questions, some of which still remain unanswered, or at least open. Who was this companion? How did this account come to be written? What relation does it bear to Jonson's own writings and papers? How did this copy come to be kept among the papers of a Cheshire gentry family with no known connection to the leading writer of his age or his literary world?

In this introductory essay we focus on the manuscript witness, addressing the status of the surviving text, the provenance of the manuscript in which it is found, and – as far as is possible – the question of authorship, in order to provide a detailed context for our annotated edition of the 'Foot Voyage' itself. The three essays which follow the edited text invoke a more expansive notion of context, in an attempt to begin the process of assimilating the 'Foot Voyage' into our critical accounts of Jonson's life, writing and times. We certainly do not claim to have completed that process: there is no doubt much more to say, and much that we have overlooked. The fascinations of the walk persist, as they did, no doubt, for Jonson himself: this, perhaps, is why he came to speak of 'adventures', and of his journey as 'a discovery'. In the 'Foot Voyage' we find him unexpectedly sprung to life, startling us with discoveries of our own.

The manuscript and the account

The manuscript containing the account of the 'Foot Voyage' was deposited in the Record Office at Chester in 1985 by Mrs Beatrice Aldersey, as just one item in a large collection of papers ranging in date from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries (ref. CR 469). This supplemented an earlier collection (ref. CR 69) deposited in March 1954 by Mrs Aldersey's late husband, Captain Ralph Aldersey. The Alderseys had for some

generations been based at Aldersey Hall, just over 7 miles south-east of Chester, although the grand house itself had clearly become more of a burden than an asset by the early twentieth century; it had for a while been adapted for use as a horticultural college before being demolished some years after the end of the Second World War.[6]

The manuscript containing the 'Foot Voyage' account is in many ways an unremarkable document. It is an unpaginated, unfoliated quarto, 20.2cm by 15.5cm, bound presumably early in its history using a basic stitch along the fold. This binding remained intact until the manuscript was disbound for conservation in December 2012. Gatherings 1 and 8 are each formed from a sheet of paper watermarked with a single-handled, crowned pot, initialled 'I VA'; a sheet of paper from a stock with a watermark of very similar design, but different proportions and dimensions, was used in a letter to Nathaniel Bacon dated 30 January 1615.[7] The four leaves of the first quire are blank and still unopened, though substantially damaged, while the final leaf of the eighth has been reduced to a stub. Quires 2–7 are formed from sheets of a higher-quality paper with a Basel crozier, post horn and fleur de lis watermark, which also incorporates the letters R, G and D. The watermarks for sheets 2, 4 and 6 are close to identical in size, shape and positioning in the sheet; those of sheets 3, 5 and 7, however, while featuring the same elements, not only differ in the detail of proportion and arrangement but also show a pronounced stretching of the right-hand edge and a flattening of the lower section. In its undistorted portions, this watermark very closely resembles that of a paper stock used for a letter from John Hunt to Walter Bagot dated 6 September 1619.[8] Despite their differences, however, in both of the batches of this paper used in the Aldersey manuscript the G is contiguous with the framing shield, whereas in the Bagot letter it connects to the central crozier itself. Basel crozier watermarks of this sort are associated with paper manufactured in France as well as in Switzerland, and many with these elements originated with the Durand papermakers of western France.[9] Heawood judged paper with such watermarks to be 'much used in England, for both books and writing, between 1620 and 1650', although, as the Bagot letter shows, it was clearly available and in use before then.[10]

6 The copy of Bridgeman and Earwaker, 1899, acquired by the National Library of Scotland, contains, among other loosely inserted cuttings and letters relating to the family, a brochure for the horticultural college dating from 1931.
7 Now Folger MS L. d. 203.
8 Now Folger MS L. a. 544.
9 Gaudriault, 1995, 120–1.
10 Heawood, 1930, 273.

The persistence of a residual tie connecting the inner and outer bifolia of each gathering, evident when the manuscript was disbound in 2012, showed that the six sheets of Basel crozier paper were folded into individual quires and then opened, and that the arrangement of each quire was preserved by the scribe as he wrote. The outermost gatherings of pot paper were perhaps added at this point to act as makeshift boards, and the fact that some characters in the text are obscured by the rudimentary stitching applied to the manuscript confirms that this took place after the writer had done his work. It seems likely that the manuscript first circulated in this form, and a clear pattern of folding around the spine suggests that it was reasonably well read, or at least thumbed, by its early possessors.

The account of the walk begins with a title, 'My Gossip Iohson his Foot Voyage and Myne into Scotland', on 2.1, the first leaf of the second gathering (though the first of crozier paper), then continues over 18 leaves to 6.2v.[11] It is followed by some brief additional passages on 6.3, comprised of snatches of dialect, a jest and some supplementary notes on the properties of the healing well that the travellers visited at Pettycur in Fife (see 'Foot Voyage', Appendix 1). Leaf 6.3v is blank, then followed by 'Canesco or the sleu doggs Language', a carefully entitled and intriguing account of the commands used by masters of bloodhounds in the Scottish and English borders, on both sides of 6.4 (Appendix 2); this in turn is followed on 7.1 by antiquarian observations concerning two prominent events in York's ceremonial history and some heraldic details at the west door of the Minster there (Appendix 3). The single hand in which the account and these additional sections are written is assured and accomplished, with regular and consistent flourishes, while many of the proper names and some important, unusual or Latin words – 'Tomb', 'Epitaph', 'poetica licentia' – are written in full or in part in an elegant italic. Although there is no sign of the paper being ruled, and the neatness of the writing fluctuates somewhat, the text is for the most part consistently organised on the page. Spacing between lines is regular throughout; a wide left-hand, and negligible right-hand, margin are constant between 2.1 and 4.1v, after which a narrower left margin and slightly more generous right are consistently used. The use of catchwords, of customary contractions including 'lre' for 'letter', the relative infrequency of corrections or overwriting, and the recurrent deployment

11 As it is unpaginated and unfoliated, we have here assigned numbers to gatherings, and then to leaves within those gatherings, in accordance with the structure of the manuscript.

of line fillers also indicate the well-trained hand of a practised, quite probably professional, copyist.

Consistent with this interpretation, several instances of eyeskip, 'reverse' eyeskip and other transcription errors strongly suggest that the text of the 'Foot Voyage' preserved in the Aldersey manuscript is a fair copy; coupled with the evidence of the hand itself, this might reinforce the view that we are looking at a scribal rather than authorial rendering of the account. While other textual evidence is not completely conclusive, on balance it supports the former hypothesis. For example, the text includes some marginal and interlineal additions in the same hand that might at first appear to be authorial emendations. The three marginal notes, however, lack insertion points or carets in the main text, and so might instead be faithfully and scribally reproduced from a precedent version or copy in which they were already marginal. (In this edition we have incorporated them at an appropriate point into the main body of the text, while noting their original position in the collations.) Some of the interlineal additions clearly supply omissions made by the copyist, but while others are not inconsistent with the possibility of authorial intervention, they are also usually susceptible of other interpretations. On 2.4v, for example, a passage that concludes 'And carryed down the Markhams *etc*.' is followed by the abbreviated note, 'Mr Richardso*n*, Mr Carnaby; m. & n. e*tc*' (see modernised text, ll.136–7). This could plausibly be read either as an authorial addition, or the subsequent revision of a deliberate exclusion; however, it also makes sense as the scribal correction of an accidental omission. On only one occasion, in the appended 'Canesco', do we have strong evidence for our writer acting as more than a copyist. On 6.4, the ungrammatical phrase 'then he goeth pisses, or doeth his businesse' has been altered by erasures and interlineal additions to the somewhat less euphemistic, and still ungrammatical, 'then he goe pisse, and shitt' (modernised text, App. 2, l.3). Yet while such intervention might suggest an authorial hand at work, and is certainly more difficult to explain as a scribal correction of merely scribal error, it is also consistent with a scribe assuming, on this occasion, an editorial role. On its own, it provides insufficient support for the suggestion that the Aldersey manuscript contains a holograph copy of the 'Foot Voyage'. If further evidence were needed, we could point to errors in the surviving text that its author would surely have been unlikely to make – perhaps the most spectacular of these is the phrase '*Galeard* of Maw' (modernised text, l.549), which substitutes an intriguing dance for John Gall or Gaw, laird of Maw.

There are other features of the text which indicate that it stands at some not easily definable distance from its original. For example, on 2.3v the insertion 'now Lord Mansfield' immediately follows the first mention of 'S*i*r William Candishe' (modernised text, ll.97–8). Since this is seamlessly included in the text as copied here, it would seem plausible that the phrase was added in a previous redaction of the text. Cavendish assumed this title in November 1620 and was elevated to the earldom of Newcastle in 1628, so we are clearly justified in saying that the version in the Aldersey manuscript dates from at least two, and perhaps as many as ten, years after the events it records. It is, in fact, most probably a copy of an intermediate version itself no older than late 1620. In addition to such an interpolation, the forty-eight separate instances on which the account resorts to 'etc', usually rendered 'ec', signal sometimes abrupt elisions. On 2.1, for example, while the travellers are in Hertfordshire, we meet 'Blitheman M*aste*r of Arte who e*tc*' (modernised text, l.7), with no indication of what has here been omitted; on the road between Ayton and Cockburnspath, in southern Scotland, we learn that the travellers 'hired a guyde, having also Sir Will*iam's* man w*i*th vs and the king [./] e*tc*' (modernised text, ll.490–91), which makes little sense unless 'king' here is a truncated possessive – the king's huntsman, or something similar. More usually, these elisions do not cut across syntax or sense in quite so disruptive a fashion, and can come to seem more like an authorial tic than indicators of significant cuts to the text; nonetheless, they are plentiful enough to suggest that a fuller or more extensive redaction stands behind the surviving account. It is not possible to say whether this is a faithful copy of an already abbreviated text, or one in which some abbreviation has been undertaken.

We can nevertheless offer some conjectures on the processes of its composition from the text as we have it. The 'Foot Voyage' is written almost entirely in the past tense and shows some signs of having been written up only after the journey itself had been completed. When, for example, the author declares 11 September 'the tediousest day's journey in the whole voyage' (ll.492–3), we might think that such a judgement could only be pronounced retrospectively, and would belong to a process of final composition postdating the events described. Yet such moments are few and far between, and even this instance might instead be read as a judgement formed in relation to his experience of the days between 8 July and 10 September, rather than from a position retrospective to the entire adventure. For the most part, the account's narratorial position is maintained at a close distance to the events related, concerned to capture the

outline of what unfolded each day, without allowing itself a narratorial position removed from the daily sequence. It is, to that extent, a strongly paratactic piece of writing. At some of the more static moments, this sequence blurs: of the walkers' four-day stay in Newark we learn something about the company they kept, and that 'here were fireworks and bull-baiting' (l.87), but little of the order in which events occurred. The account of their visit to Belvoir is similarly affected, although this time the cause might have been a bout of illness suffered by the writer, for which treatment was subsequently sought at Newark. There is also a stark lacuna at York, when Jonson leaves his companion in their lodgings and accompanies Sir Arthur Ingram to Bishopthorpe – its protagonist absent, the narrative is for the most part suspended.

In its general adherence to chronological order, and the proximity of narrative standpoint to the daily rhythm of events, the 'Foot Voyage' is similar to other more or less unheralded travel writings of the era which were not printed at the time. Lexically, stylistically and in its choice of interests, it is perhaps closest to the surviving travel journals of Sir William Brereton, which record a journey undertaken through the Low Countries in 1634, and a voyage through northern England, Scotland and Ireland the following year.[12] Brereton was a Cheshire baronet, and at times his phrasings and tone are suggestively similar to those of the 'Foot Voyage' – his journal, too, for the most part, is 'a plain, unimpassioned statement of what he saw and observed'.[13] Both journals share some stylistic and grammatical irregularities, such as 'abrupt changes of construction'.[14] However, unlike the author of the 'Foot Voyage', Brereton is loquacious and detailed, while his judgements of Scotland tend to the severe.

Brereton's journals and the 'Foot Voyage' differ significantly both from well-known and other, more obscure accounts of domestic travel in the early seventeenth century – John Taylor's prose narratives, for example, or the 'Relation of a Short Survey of 26 Counties' undertaken by three members of 'the Military Company' at Norwich in the summer of 1634 – in their general lack of rhetorical self-consciousness.[15] The latter, for example, sports with the military metaphors licensed by its author's soldierly status. But, while rare, such rhetorical flourishes are not entirely absent from the writing of Jonson's companion. When he resorts to simile in describing the appearance of onlookers gazing down on the

12 *BT*; first identified as his by Edward Hawkins in his edition of 1844.
13 *BT*, vi.
14 *BT*, vi.
15 *AShS*; Chandler, 1999, is a useful modern anthology of Taylor's travel narratives.

poet's formal entry into Edinburgh – 'the windows also being full, everyone peeping out of a round hole like a head out of a pillory' (ll.527–8) – the use of a comically effective figurative ornament is all the more striking for its infrequency. (Compare, too, Brereton's more prosaic remarking of the 'boards' lining the fronts of houses on the High Street, 'wherein are round holes shaped to the proportion of men's heads'.)[16] Similarly, the stylistic élan and wry humour with which episodes of clerical drunkenness at Bottesford and Tollerton are recounted suggest a literary talent that is elsewhere suppressed or absent, and with which Taylor and the author of the 'Short Survey' are either better endowed or more liberal and confident in deploying.

For all its differences, the 'Short Survey' does offer an insight into how such travel journals were composed in its description of the three travellers taking notes in Lincoln, 'for feare our memories should beguile vs of our mornings sight'. As its editor remarks, 'appeal is frequently had to "day-notes,"…in case the reader should be dissatisfied with the information given in the completed work'.[17] Brereton's journals, too, include 'references to another book, which may have been the original journal, or possibly a different work altogether'.[18] It is reasonable to suppose that the author of the 'Foot Voyage' also relied on such aides-mémoire, and that the stylistic and syntactical irregularities it shares with Brereton's journal derive from a similarly unpolished compositional process. Given that they are mentioned in the narrative, both Brereton's and the military travellers' notes were intended for preservation, and there is some evidence that the same was true of the 'Foot Voyage'. The additional passages included in the Aldersey manuscript, clearly copied at the same time and presumably from the same or a closely related source, preserve observations and details from the journey which were not incorporated, or even drawn on, in the narrative itself. It was perhaps this supplementary quality that ensured their preservation: they show the diversity of what could catch the travellers' attention, and raise the question of exactly whose attention was being caught. As we have noted, the account is mostly silent on the companion's activities during Jonson's sojourn with the archbishop of York, Tobie Matthew, at Bishopthorpe, yet one of the appended passages consists substantially of details from York's history of archiepiscopal hospitality – it is perhaps probable that these were gleaned by the companion from his own sources, or from an unrecorded visit to the minster, but the possibility

16 *BT*, 102.
17 *AShS*, 8, xx.
18 *BT*, vi.

that Jonson himself garnered them from his learned and generous host should not be ruled out. It is, in fact, this double perspective that truly sets the 'Foot Voyage' apart from other journals of the time. It is a traveller's tale, to be sure, but unusually it keeps a sustained focus on another traveller rather than recounting, as its primary subject matter, the narrator's own experiences and impressions of the places visited. Hence, perhaps, the relative paucity of local detail in the main account, and its relative brevity – hence, too, its silence when Jonson leaves the picture at York and, again, during the companion's final week in Edinburgh.

If the central presence of 'my gossip' serves to organise the account, the picture of Jonson that emerges from it is nevertheless a product of the companion's own emphases. It is striking how little attention is paid to Jonson's conversations or to any 'informations' – to use Drummond's term – that he might have imparted along the way. There are no direct quotations, and only some fragments of reported speech. Jonson's comment on Sir William Cavendish's exceptional riding ability is the most compelling of these, given its relation to *Und.* 53 (discussed below), but otherwise we learn only of the occasional toast uttered: dining at Durham, Jonson 'entreated that *poetica licentia* he might propose a health, which was the king's' (ll.370–1), a repetition of a performance he had previously given at Welbeck, and probably a version of the grace that survives in a number of manuscript copies and is dated in one to 1618.[19]

Provenance

The 'Foot Voyage' account and additional passages are not the only contents of the Aldersey manuscript. While leaves 7.2–7.3 are blank, 7.3v to 8.3v, reversed, contain the first ten chapters from the book of Job written out in the system of 'short writing' or 'tachygraphy' devised by Thomas Shelton and published in a long succession of works and editions beginning in 1626. The notes from Job are initially written neatly and carefully with ruled margins and title lines, longhand chapter headings and fully numerated verses, although these features are omitted on later pages. There are some idiosyncratic departures from Shelton's prescribed forms, particularly concerning the placing of the tittle used to indicate a plural 's': in the manuscript this is invariably inscribed to the left of the word it is modifying, instead of to the right, hence enabling the use of a

19 *CWBJ*, 5.346–7.