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978-1-108-07388-2 - Diary of John Rous: Incumbent of Santon Downham, Suffolk,  
from 1625 to 1642

Edited by Mary Anne Everett Green

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### **Diary of John Rous**

The diary of John Rous (1584–1644) was edited for the Camden Society in 1856 by Mary Anne Everett Green (1818–95). Rous kept this diary between 1625 and 1643, when he was vicar of Santon Downham in Suffolk, recording both local events and reports of momentous happenings in Britain and abroad from Charles I's accession to the outbreak of the Civil War. M.A.E. Green was educated by her father, a Methodist minister, and began research on historical topics in the British Museum Reading Room and other London archives. She was recommended to Sir John Romilly as an external editor for the Calendar of State Papers project, and was the first to be appointed: her work became the standard which later editors followed. Rous's diary is preceded by an introduction placing its author in his family and historical context, and Green's notes explicate references to the people and events described.

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EDITED BY

MARY ANNE EVERETT GREEN,

AUTHOR OF "LIVES OF THE PRINCESSES OF ENGLAND;" EDITOR OF  
"LETTERS OF ROYAL AND ILLUSTRIOUS LADIES."



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## INTRODUCTION.

THE writer of the following diary was member of a family settled in Suffolk from the time of Edward III., when Peter le Rous is named as owner of the manor of Dennington. The sixth in descent from him, Sir William Rous, was father of Sir Anthony, who purchased Henham Hall, still the family seat, and died in 1547. His son Thomas was alike the ancestor of the diarist and of the Earl of Stradbroke, the present representative of the elder branch of the family. The following pedigree is compiled from one preserved in the archives of the Earl of Stradbroke, to whom I am indebted for its communication, collated with another in the Heralds' College, and augmented by additional information from Davy's Suffolk Collections in the British Museum, and from the parish registers of Weeting and Downham in Norfolk, and of Hessett in Suffolk, the residences of that branch of the house to which the diarist belongs:

Peter le Rous, of Dennington, temp. Edw. III. = .....

Seventh in descent from him is sir Anthony = Agnes, dau. of sir Thomas Blen-  
Rous, of Dennington, who bought Henham | nerhassett, of Friends Hall, co. Nor-  
Hall; died 1547. | folk.

Catherine, dau. of = Thomas Rous, of Den = Anne, dau. and coheir of sir Nicholas Hare,  
Giles Hansard. | nington; died 1573. | of Bruisyard, Master of the Rolls.

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*a*  
*b*

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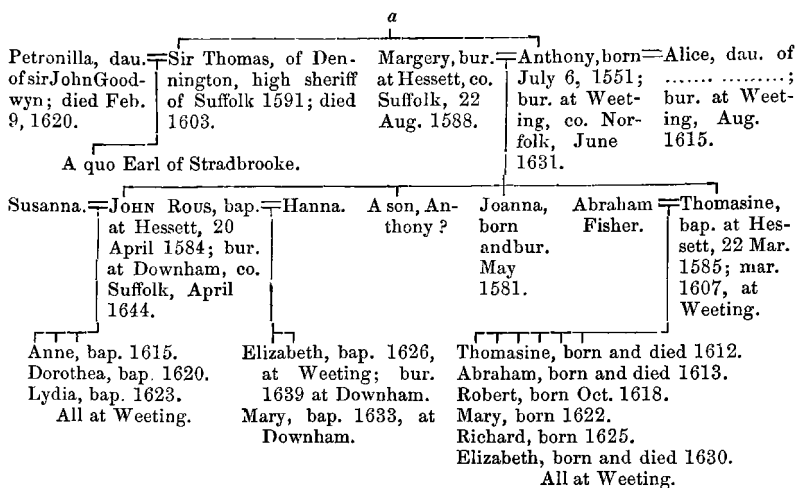
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The only tangible allusion made by the diarist to his family connections is a mention of his wife,<sup>a</sup> and the notice of the death of his father, Anthony Rous, in 1631.<sup>b</sup> His own *Christian* name does not appear throughout, but he is identified with the *John* Rous of the pedigree, by the fact that he was evidently a minister, and that in the early part of the diary he speaks of himself as resident at Weeting, whilst in the latter part he speaks of “our town of Downham;” the period of the removal coinciding with that at which we find, from the parish registers, that John Rous left Weeting for Downham or its neighbourhood. Another curious coincidence strengthens this identification,—the handwriting in the parish registers of Weeting, up to the period of the death of Anthony Rous, is precisely that employed by our diarist, as the formal hand

<sup>a</sup> P. 45.<sup>b</sup> P. 61.

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in which he copied out verses and other extracts which abound in the volume.<sup>a</sup>

Of the private history of John Rous, further than it is evolved in the diary itself, the records are extremely slight. He was born at Hessett in Suffolk, to which living his father was instituted in 1579, and his birth probably took place in April 1584, as his father records in the register of Hessett, "Johes Rous, fil. mei Anthonii Rous et Margeriæ, bap. 20 Ap. 1584." A sister was added to the family group the following year; and the diarist also speaks of his brother, of whose birth no record appears. In 1588, when little more than four years of age, he lost his mother. The date at which her place was filled by Alice, second wife of Anthony Rous, does not appear, except that it was previous to 1606, in which year he records the death of "Ann Keys, widow, sister to Alice Rous, my wife." It would appear that Anthony Rous remained at Hessett until the year 1600, when he obtained the appointment to the rectory of the united parishes of Weeting St. Mary and Weeting All Saints, on the presentation of Thomas Wright, by grant from Sir Robert Wingfield and others. A John Rous, probably a member of the same family, was rector of the joint parishes a century previously, from 1503 to 1518, the patronage then being in the hands of the earl of Oxford. Little is known of the collegiate life of John Rous. He was admitted pensioner in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1598, and took his degree of master of arts there in 1607.<sup>b</sup> Of the intermediate gradations

<sup>a</sup> For tracings and extracts from this register, and from that of Downham, as well as for much valuable local information, I am indebted to the courtesy of the Rev. F. Vyvyan Luke, the present curate of Weeting.

<sup>b</sup> These particulars are gathered from the obliging communications of Joseph Romilly, Esq. Registrar of Cambridge, and Dr. Archdall, Master of Emmanuel College.

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of his academic career no other notice is preserved; but he seems to have kept up a correspondence with his *alma mater*; for, scanty as are the notices in the diary of private persons or affairs, two allusions occur to Emmanuel College, one to the widow of a Mr. Cudworth, one of the fellows, the other to the death of Dr. Charderton, the Master of the College.<sup>a</sup> He also mentions the election of Buckingham as chancellor of Cambridge in 1626; the appearance there of the plague; the visit of the King and Queen in 1633; the suicide of Dr. Butts, vice-chancellor, shortly afterwards; and other particulars of local history connected with the town and university.<sup>b</sup> Graduation at Cambridge did not involve permanency of abode there; and it seems probable that John Rous was only an occasional resident, as from the year 1601, when he was only seventeen, we find him residing with his father at Weeting, and exercising his beautiful calligraphy, as the rector's amanuensis, in the registry books, from that period down to 1631, the date of the decease of Anthony Rous. Before that time, on September 21st, 1623, he was appointed minister of the small village of Santon Downham, now consisting only of the church and two houses, adjoining the parish of Weeting;<sup>c</sup> but he seems to have still lived with his father, probably on account of his great age and consequent infirmities, for the old man survived almost to the completion of his eightieth year.

During the period of his residence at Weeting, various domestic changes befel our diarist, none of which, however, are recorded or even alluded to, by himself. He married, became the father of three

<sup>a</sup> Pp. 80, 99.

<sup>b</sup> Pp. 3, 51, 52, 56, 70.

<sup>c</sup> The name on the Bishop's registry is *William Rous*; but the register was incorrectly kept, as appears from the date of 1627 instead of 1631 being assigned as that of the death of Anthony Rous. The burial register of Downham distinctly names him John.

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daughters, buried a first wife, and replaced her by a second, who brought him a fourth daughter. From his frequent mention of attendances at sessions and assizes, it seems probable that he held a commission, as justice of the peace.

The parsonage-house at Weeting, where he probably lived at this period, is still the residence of the minister of Weeting. "I cannot help fancying," writes the Rev. F. Vyvyan Luke, its present occupant, "that the very room in which I am now penning these lines, was the one in which a portion of the diary was written. It is a part of the old parsonage; and, though modernised externally, yet the party walls, I conjecture, must go back almost to the time of Edward I. for their date. It evidently was the 'keeping-room' of former days. Some years ago I removed the old brick floor, in order to fit it for a study; underneath I came to a thick bed of clay, embedded in which were bones of almost every description of animal used for food; beef, mutton pork, rabbits, fowls, &c. speaking most forcibly of the habits of olden time."—"At that period," he adds, "the country must have presented a far different appearance from what it does now. At present it is becoming well wooded, being inclosed some years ago by act of parliament; but then it was a wild, open, sandy heath, bordering the forest, the resort of the bustard and other game long extinct."

On the decease of Anthony Rous, his son left Weeting. It seems likely that he resided, not at Downham itself, the sphere of his duties, which was a very unimportant place, and where no trace or tradition of a parsonage-house exists, but in Brandon, the neighbouring town, several times mentioned in the diary, where in a particular building, called "the ministers' house," several of the clergy of the adjacent rural parishes took up their abode. About this period he visited

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London.<sup>a</sup> We also find an allusion to his having travelled as far as Geneva, but to the date of this more formidable journey no clue is given: he mentions it casually, when quoting, amongst other verses, a distich of his own upon “Glorious Geneva.”<sup>b</sup> In 1633, we find him again settled in his own locality; in that year is recorded the baptism at Downham of his fifth daughter, Mary, and there also in 1639 he buried his fourth daughter, Elizabeth. In 1640 he is again in London, where he mentions his attendance at St. Paul’s on the Fast-day, Nov. 17.<sup>c</sup> The interlarding of speeches in Parliament and other public matters gives rise to the presumption that he remained some time a spectator of the stirring events then daily transpiring in the metropolis. After this time, we have no particulars of his domestic history till we come to the entry in the register of Downham, which, under the year 1644, records as follows: “John Rous, clerk and minister of Downham, son of Anthony Rous, late minister of Weeting, Norfolk, buried April 4th.”

The register at Downham is not an original but a transcript, made by Mr. Knowle, curate in 1799; the handwriting of John Rous cannot therefore be traced to the close of his career, which terminated before he had completed his sixtieth year.

We now turn from the man to his works. The original diary, as it lies before me, is a small quarto volume of 176 pages, in two distinctly marked handwritings, though both evidently by the same hand, a current style used for ordinary details, and a formal one for extracts, more particularly verses. The present is evidently the continuation of some previous diary, to which he once alludes, which seems to have contained 198 folios, as the present MS. bears a

<sup>a</sup> He speaks of this visit, in 1636, as taking place “some years ago.” P. 84.

<sup>b</sup> P. 73.

<sup>c</sup> P. 103.

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foliation as well as pagination, reaching from folio 199 to 286. The diarist mentions “my first long note-book, covered with redder forrell.” He also speaks of his “notes of 1612,”<sup>a</sup> and of “a folio paper book,” in which he recorded a judicial sentence passed on four robbers; also of “my great book,” seemingly an account of Parliamentary affairs;<sup>b</sup> but of none of these has any trace been discovered. The diary does not give the impression of a work prepared for the public, but rather of a private record of facts, &c. which the writer wished to preserve for his own use. He carefully committed to paper such popular skits<sup>c</sup> and satirical verses as came within his notice, several of which, it is believed, are here printed for the first time, and some of them show strongly the current popular feeling of the times. Amongst the most curious of these productions are “The Times’ New Churchman;” “The Dialogue between two Zelots;” “The Dismal Summons to the Doctors’ Commons;” “God have mercy, good Scot;” “The Scholar’s Complaint;” and “The Mass Priest’s Lamentation.”<sup>d</sup> His own sympathies by no means went with some of these railing rhymes. On one occasion he says that he *hates* them, and only preserves them as a “precedent of the times.”

He paid considerable attention to general literature, more especially to that of a religious controversial nature, which would naturally engage the attention of a clergyman, and he occasionally inserts documents of a miscellaneous or political character; such of these as are already known in print, have been omitted, but several of those inserted are new and curious. Such is the letter

<sup>a</sup> P. 45.<sup>b</sup> Pp. 76, 113.<sup>c</sup> See pp. 8, 26, 31, 54, 80.<sup>d</sup> Pp. 78, 106, 109, 110, 115, 118.<sup>e</sup> Pp. 5, 6, 35, 37, 54, 63, 67, 70, 76, 80.

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on the death of the Duke of Buckingham;<sup>a</sup> that from the Duke of Orleans to the Pope;<sup>b</sup> and that from “the Devil to the Pope.”<sup>c</sup>

His tone of feeling on the leading struggle between monarchy and democracy was remarkably moderate. At first he looked upon the King’s character favourably,<sup>d</sup> but the current of events induced a leaning towards the Parliamentary cause. He was never a warm partizan on either side, and he freely interlards his memoranda of public events with farming notices,<sup>e</sup> on weather and crops, and the gossip of a rural neighbourhood.<sup>f</sup> He seems to have had also a *penchant* for heraldry, as the latter part of the MS. is written on paper which has evidently been intended for memoranda of coats of arms. Several of the pages are headed “Armes, whose by view,” and the margin contains lists of armorial charges, &c. with the capitals A. B. E. G. O. S. V. supposed to specify the colours, &c. Argent, Blue, Ermine, Gules, Or, Sable, Vert.

The frequent use of Latin quotations, and the insertion of Latin verses, prove that our author had a scholar-like acquaintance with that language, and he also occasionally quoted French. In fact, we may regard him as a respectable type of a country clergyman of the times, who through his “loophole of retreat” could peep at the tumultuous world beyond, “see the great Babel, and not feel the crowd,” and record the impressions, which, after the lapse of more than two centuries, are brought into unexpected publicity.

For the permission to print this MS. I am indebted to the courtesy of Dawson Turner, Esq., the well known-collector of autographs and Norfolk antiquities, to whose library it belongs, and who kindly permitted its transcript for the Camden Society.

<sup>a</sup> P. 27.<sup>b</sup> P. 77.<sup>c</sup> P. 38.<sup>d</sup> See pp. 11, 19, 49.<sup>e</sup> Pp. 24, 56, &c.<sup>f</sup> Pp. 22, 45, 56, 60, 66, &c.