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978-1-108-07412-4 - Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprizing Biographical Memoirs of William Boywer, Printer, F.S.A., and Many of his Learned Friends: Volume 6

John Nichols

Excerpt

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(1)

ESSAYS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

REFERRED TO IN THE

LITERARY ANECDOTES

OF THE

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

No. I.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE
GENTLEMEN'S SOCIETY AT SPALDING,
BY MR. GOUGH AND J. NICHOLS.

THE progress of Literature is one of the interesting parts of History. Its connexion with the civilization of mankind, and the cultivation of the human mind, recommends it to every philosophic inquirer in a general point of view: but, considered in a national view, our curiosity is prompted to inquire into every vestige of it in our own country, and to record our obligations to every individual or body of men who have contributed to extend and enlarge it.

The first public establishment of this kind in this kingdom, after the Universities, was the Royal Society, "not by favour of the many, but by the wisdom and energy of a few*," begun at Ox-

* Memoirs of Thomas Hollis, p. 20.

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ford, in the chambers of a few Virtuosi, in the middle of the sixteenth century. It soon emerged into light under Royal patronage; and, by uninterruptedly diffusing knowledge in its regular publications, it has maintained a reputation proof against the ridicule or restlessness of a few discontented individuals.

The Society of Antiquaries, considered as a private meeting of a few learned men, is of prior establishment. But the times were not sufficiently favourable to it to keep it alive from the sixteenth to the beginning of the eighteenth century; when it was revived, with the highest lustre, by many of the greatest names in that walk of literature; and, under royal protection, it has maintained some degree of eminence.

While these two learned Societies flourished in the capital, others were set on foot in different parts of the kingdom, not subordinate to the others, but corresponding with them. Among these the GENTLEMEN'S SOCIETY at SPALDING took the lead. It may even boast a principal share in the revival of the Society of Antiquaries of London; and it outlived the lesser Societies which surrounded it, and may be said to have merged in it.

A regular communication of Minutes took place between this Society and that of the Antiquaries, particularly while Dr Stukeley was secretary to the latter. But with such care and exactness were their Minutes kept by some succeeding secretaries, that scarcely a trace of these communications remain on their books, while the Spalding Minute-books, kept by their indefatigable Founder, have preserved a variety of curious matter from the wreck of Time.

Dr. Mortimer's vanity prompted him to write the History of the Literary Societies of Great Britain and Ireland, to have been prefixed to a volume of the Philosophical Transactions. Ample memoirs of this Society were transmitted to him*; but his

* "Dr. Mortimer has for some years, and at his own instance, had from me (who had been so fortunate, by the encouragement of Secretary Addison and Captain Steele, to set up and conduct this Society)

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indolence got the better of his vanity; and these memoirs, with whatever others he obtained or compiled, are not now to be recovered.

The pleasing task of doing justice to the Literary Society at Spalding has therefore, by a train of accidents, fallen into other hands. How it has been executed must be submitted to the judgement of the impartial publick. No want of materials can be

Society) a true, succinct, historical account thereof; and also of the restoring our Antiquarian Society of London (*cujus pars non parva fuit*), under assured promise of publishing them, and so introducing the better and fuller knowledge of us to the learned world, in a dedication, preface, or preamble, to some volume of the Philosophical Transactions, wherein he proposed to give an account of all Societies in Great Britain and Ireland restored, re-established, or founded since the Royal Society; and the rather did I take the trouble at this time, as it were to be wished his present Majesty and the Parliament would so fix the Royal and Cotton Libraries as to render them useful, and put them on a permanent establishment; but, to our detriment, the Doctor has hitherto, *maugre* many solicitations I have repeatedly made to him, sometimes in person, at other times by or through members of all three (*i. e.* the Royal and Antiquarian, and this their humble, but, I thank Providence, by them respected, little Cell), injuriously neglected or deferred doing us that justice and piece of service, I may say we deserved, as some pains were taken to give him sufficient instructions for the purpose, as he himself requested, and he has had leave to model the same as Mr. Folkes might judge properest. Other Authors and Editors have long since and frequently on occasions requested, but never obtained, the copies of those historical accounts of these literary institutions, to publish. We denied them, having as it were (before the Antiquary Society was so restored) put ourselves under the protection of the Royal Society of London, from our first fixing; and had the happiness of their regard. Then Sir Isaac Newton held their chair, and my tutor Dr. Jurin was their secretary, with whom I kept correspondence. I wish you, Sir, could and would prevail at least to have these, though but in abstract, so ushered into the world: for, relying on Dr. Mortimer's honour, I have pledged my own to many men of worth, that they should so see them come forth." It appears the Society of Antiquaries were pleased with this account, and desired a copy of it; that, when it was laid before the Royal Society in 1738, they sent their Transactions, and desired copies of the Minutes every three or six months, as formerly from the Dublin Society; and Mr. Johnson understood that Dr. Mortimer prefixed it to the Philosophical Transactions for 1744; but no such thing appears.

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complained of; and it would be the highest ingratitude to withhold the tribute of acknowledgment from the present Representatives of its Founder, who, while they wish to revive it as a philosophic and experimental Society, do not attempt to conceal the figure it made on its original more extended plan.

The spirit of emulation and communication which prevailed among the Establishers; or, to speak more properly, the Revivers of the Society of Antiquaries of London in the beginning of the eighteenth century *, produced two or three congenial establishments †, whose object was to extend their en-

* This is to be understood of the first meetings of those gentlemen, eminent for their affection to the advances in the science of Antiquity, in 1707; which continued till they made a regular election of officers, 1717-18. See Mr. Gough's Introduction to the Archæologia, vol. I. p. xxv. See also Mr. Johnson's Answer to Dr. Ducarel's Inquiry, in the name of the Society of Antiquaries, 1754, at the end of the present article.

† The three literary Societies at Peterborough, Stamford, and Doncaster, are here alluded to. Of them see more in the "Reliquiæ Galeanæ," which forms N^o II. of the Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica, p. 98. The former, called "The Gentlemen's Society ‡," was founded jointly by the Rev. Joseph Sparke and the Rev. Timothy Neve. John Rowell, esq. LL. D. was its first president. Of this Society were members, Charles Balguy, M. D. of Peterborough, where he practised, and died; and Dr. Thomas Robinson, prebendary of the church 1730, and editor of Hesiod 1737. In 1743 Mr. Neve, their secretary, who was long schoolmaster at Spalding, treasurer to the Spalding Society, and thence Founder of the other, had prevailed on Bishop Clavering to bestow on them the use of the old Saxon gate chamber, in the Minster-yard, leading to his palace, for their meeting; but had not yet been able to prevail on that Prelate to countenance them with his company. They made an ordinance, that, in case their Society dropped, and their meetings were but very thin, their books and *supellex* should then be lodged in the Library of the Dean and Chapter. Dr. Thomas, their dean, and then bishop of Lincoln, was their president. The Stamford Society was founded about 1721, on the rules of that of Spalding, by John Earl of Exeter, recorder, Maurice Johnson, his deputy, Cecil and Bertie, the representatives in parliament, Dr. Atwood, his Lordship's chaplain, J. Blackwell, esq. Dixon Colby, M. D. J. Hepburn, surgeon, and Mr. Richards, who wrote for them. On the decline of this Society, in 1745, Dr. Stukeley, rector of St. Peter's, vicar of All Saints, and mas-

‡ By^l which name also the Spalding Society went, who called this their daughter. See the Reliquiæ Galeanæ, p. 404; and Mr. Johnson's letter to Dr. Ducarel, 1754, at the end of this article.

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quiries into the History and Antiquities of this kingdom by mutual correspondence.

With this very laudable view was established, in the year 1710 *, at Spalding in Lincolnshire, a Society of Gentlemen, who, in the true style of monastic antiquity, assumed to themselves the mo-

ter of Brown's hospital in Stamford, founded the Brazen Nose Society, so called in memory of the famous University there, on whose site they met weekly on Saturdays, and quarterly on the Saturday of or preceding the full moon; and adjourned in summer, for convenience of members, to Deeping. Dr. Stukeley's associates were the above members of the old Society, together with William Ash, esq. Rev. E. Bertie, rector of Uffington, George Boulton, M.D. Beaupré Bell, M.A. Samuel Buck, John Catlin, R. Taylor, Henry Lord Colrane, George Denshire, clerk of the peace, Joseph Eayre, Thomas Eayre of Kettering, John Grundy, engineer, Samuel and Roger Gale, William Johnson, esq. Edward Laurence, surveyor, George Lynn, Tycho Wing and Edmund Weaver, astronomers, John Macklin, mathematician, R. S. secretary, Rev. John Lynn, Noah Neale, esq. M. Terry, B. Ray, Rev. Henry Owen, Jonathan Sison, Robert Stephenson, Dr. William Lynn, Dean Richard Pocock, LL.D. Dr. A. Wagstaffe, Rev. W. Warburton, &c. Other literary Societies subsisted at Wisbeach, Lincoln, Worcester, and Dublin. (Mr. Johnson's Letter to Dr. Ducarel, 1754.) Mr. Johnson lived to see the Stamford and Peterborough Societies sunk into mere taverns and clubs. (Letter to Mr. Neve, 1753, *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, p. 434.) Mr. Smith of Woodstone laboured to revive the spirit of the latter in 1753, (*ibid.* p. 432.) He laments, in a letter dated August 10, 1752, that it was altered to a monthly meeting at a public house, which must reduce it to a common pipe-meeting; and in 1748 he deplored their conduct in taking in worthless books. A Society was forming in 1750 at Boston, on a literary design, successor to a book club (*ibid.* p. 432.) The Doncaster Society was held by adjournment at Blythe and Bavtry, 1746.

* This is the date on the device hereafter mentioned, p. 12. The first statutes, of which a copy is herewith given (see p. 28), date it 1712. So does Dr. Stukeley in his panegyric on the Founder. In a letter from Mr. Johnson to Mr. T. Neve, dated 1746, he says, "Such institutes in England have been so rare, that ours here, begun but in 1709-10, and fixed on rules in 1712, which it has been upheld by ever since, is the oldest we know of out of London and the Universities." *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, p. 421. See a letter of Maurice Johnson's about its progress, 1729, *ibid.* p. 52. Another, 1745, p. 418, wherein he says it had stood 35 years since its institution; and in another to Dr. Birch, 1750, he says it had subsisted 40 years. Dr. Stukeley, in his History of Carausius, I. 110, 1757, mentions it as having "now subsisted above 40 years with the greatest reputation."

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dest denomination of a *Cell* to that of London; at once expressing their relation and connexion with that respectable Body, of which most of them were also members*, and with which they kept up an uninterrupted correspondence, and communication of their Minutes, for upwards of forty years †.

This Society, which took its rise from a few gentlemen of the town, who met at a coffee-house to pass away an hour in literary conversation, and reading some new publications ‡, may be considered as one of the extraordinary efforts of an active mind, whose intimate acquaintance with the various branches of English History and Jurisprudence supported for so long a time a plan which himself had digested, and extended its views to other parts of science.

They did not confine their enquiries to Antiquities; but made discoveries in Natural History, and improvements in Arts and Sciences in general their object. "We deal," says Mr. Johnson to Mr. Neve,

* A learned Foreigner, who drew up and published a short account of the Society of Antiquaries of London, at which he was present 1730, scruples not to ascribe its revival almost entirely to Mr. Johnson: "Quum enim vir maximæ existimationis JOHNSONIUS AN. CIOIOCCXVIII Societatis Antiquariæ Acta manibus tereret ipse, et oculis subjiceret suis, ut altius illa extollere possit caput, et majorem cultum capessere, resuscitavit prope extinctam conatu honestissimo et felici admodum successu. Ab eodem JOHNSONIO majora expectare potest emolumenta dicta Societas, propterea quod adhuc superstes Spaldingi in Lincolnshire agit, ubi Mæcenas nunquam sine laude nominandus Societatem Literariam ductu auspicioque suo consecravit, cujus consors est Hans Sloane supra nobis jam celebratus eques." Kort-holt, Epist. ad Kappium de Soc. Ant. Lond. Lips. 1730, 4to, p. 6.

† They collected the history of the original of the Society of Antiquaries at London, 1735, *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, p. 62.—The last communication of Minutes to them was in February 1753, by George Vertue, their engraver.

‡ They began with the *Tatler*, then a new periodical paper; and the reading of such and other publications, as well as of MSS. intended for the press, made part of their entertainment to the last. Mr. Johnson says (see p. 2), this Society was founded with the encouragement of Secretary Addison, Captain Steele, and others of Button's club. See also the *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, 411.

1745-6,

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1745-6, "in all arts and sciences, and exclude nothing from our conversation but politics, which would throw us all into confusion and disorder."

The Founder of this Society was MAURICE JOHNSON, esq. a native of Spalding, of the Inner Temple, London, and steward of the soke or manor of Spalding*, which belonged to the Duke of Buccleugh in 1755 †; and of that of Kirketon, the property of the Earl of Exeter ‡.

Their Founder was only occasionally their President §. He was their Secretary thirty-five years, with indefatigable industry and pleasure, and filled four large folio volumes with their acts and observations ||; which, after he resigned the secretaryship to his son-in-law Dr. Green, he found time to index, and was proceeding to the Dissertations and other valuable papers, in 1750 **. These last, being original, were not bound in 1750, nor trusted out of the Secretary's hands ††.

In these volumes Mr. Johnson caused the Registrar to insert, by way of extract, but pretty fully, all the Minutes of the Peterborough Society, from its foundation, so long as Dr. Neve was the diligent and able Secretary †††, and all the first volume of those of Stamford, Societas Æneanasensis, from Dr. Stukeley, Founder and Secretary thereof, to 1736.

* Reliquiæ Galeanæ, pp. 98. 104.

† In Mr. Johnson's letter to Dr. Birch he styles the Duke of Buccleugh patron and liberal benefactor of this Society. In a letter, *ibid.* p. 55, he calls himself Counsel to the Dean and Chapter of Peterborough, perhaps having been employed by them in some occasional law-suit.

‡ Reliquiæ Galeanæ, p. 94.

§ Mr. Johnson's letter to Dr. Birch, 1750. He was elected President on the death of Mr. Lyon, 1747-8, and the Rev. John Johnson Secretary in his room.

|| A Specimen of their Minutes will be given hereafter.

** Reliquiæ Galeanæ, p. 104.

†† *Ibid.* p. 431, 432. Mr. Bogdani gave, 1744, two elegant folios, ruled for future minutes, he having been pleased to table or index greatest part of the former, and bind them up. He also sorted their impressions, &c. *ibid.* p. 61.

††† *Ibid.* p. 420.

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The first of these volumes begins in 1710, and ends in 1729. The motto to it, Ecclesiasticus, xxv. 3. "If thou hast gathered nothing in thy youth, how canst thou find any thing in thine age?"

Vol. II. 1729—1738, dedicated to Sir Isaac Newton, master of the Mint, and F.R.S. Motto, Job, xxviii. 1. "Surely there is a vein for the silver, &c."

Vol. III. 1738—1745.

Vol. IV. 1745—1748. Motto, "Antiquities, or remnants of history, are when industrious persons, by an exact and scrupulous diligence and observations, out of monuments, names, words, proverbs, traditions, private records and evidences, fragments of stories, passages of books that concern not story, and the like, deserve and recover somewhat from the deluge of time*."

The fifth volume of their Observations, which begins in 1750, ended Dec. 23, 1753.

These volumes, written in a variety of hands by Mr. Johnson himself, contain a fund of discoveries foreign and domestic, in Antiquities, History, and Natural Philosophy, interspersed with transcripts of deeds at length, anecdotes, poems, &c. and adorned with drawings, by Mr. Johnson and his daughter Anne Alethea, and others, and the marginal references very distinct.

Their plans, prints, and drawings, were arranged in 1735, and filled four great portfolios; vol. I. containing Statues and Portraits; II. Architecture and Sculpture; III. Plans, Charts, and Designs; IV. Miscellanies.

The mode of election was, by proposing the candidate during three meeting-days, and balloting for him on the third †. They had two Secretaries,

* Bacon de Augm. Scient. II. c. 6.

† According to the following form: "A. B. was, at his own instance, proposed a regular [or honorary] member of this Society, by C. D. who signs it" Two more members recommended. and the candidate was elected on the third meeting.

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and a Treasurer * ; and their meetings were held weekly, on Thursdays, throughout the year † 1712; first at Younger's coffee-house, in the Abbey-yard, then in a private house belonging to Mr. Everard; in 1743 at a house late Mr. Ambler's ‡ ; and afterwards, in an evening, in a part of the old monastery of Spalding, which was fitted up with a library and museum § ; and, lastly, in a room hired in a private house, not far from the High-bridge, where they still remain. In 1750 their meetings began at four, and lasted till ten; but their readings and shew began about eight, or somewhat sooner ||.

Members on their admission presented some valuable book to the Society; and paid twelve shillings a year, besides a shilling at each meeting. By this means they had formed a valuable library. In 1743 the Divinity part, in five large classes and one less, was given to the church and placed in cases in the vestry, where it still remains; the Grammatical, in one large class and one less, to the school, where it still is; but both reserved for the Society's use till

* Mr. Stagg, who was clerk to Mr. Johnson, is styled the Society's *Coadjutor*; and Mr. Cox, who was an eminent surgeon, their *Operator*: and in another place the *Coadjutor* and *Gardener* are united.—The apothecaries had a physic-garden in Spalding, 1745. Of the Society's *Hortus Siccus*, see the *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, p. 59.

† See the *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, p. 404.

‡ Afterwards inhabited by Mr. Johnson's son Walter, and now by his son Mr. Fairfax Johnson, who fitted up the old building in 1782.

§ See it described hereafter.

|| “ Our meetings are continued constant on every Thursday evening, and well frequented as I find it possible to make the place bear, for the number of people here or hereabouts who can be induced to attend a thing of that nature, where neither politics, in which every man thinks himself wise, can have part, nor any sort of gaming goes forward, which most young men esteem as their beloved evening's recreation. But, under God, I depend chiefly on the strength of my own children, and my near relations, whom I have taken care to train up to a liking of it from their infancy; and, I trust, will keep it up when I shall leave them.” Mr. Johnson's letter to Mr. Gale, 1743, in the *Reliquiæ Galeanæ*, p. 390.

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dissolved; and then these, and all in the meeting-room, to be for public use.

Their statutes being altered and modified according to circumstances, we have endeavoured to comprehend the substance of all in several different copies*.

The following letter, ascertaining a new fact in the life of the famous Dr. Bentley, will serve to shew how exactly the Registers of this Society were kept.

“ To William Graves †, Esq. at Fulborn, near
Cambridge.

“ SIR,

“ You seemed desirous, when at Spalding, to know when Dr. Bentley was chosen master of the grammar-school here. I applied to Mr. Johnson, who tells me his accounts of admission do not go so far back, but referred me to the Society; where, I find, we have a most minute detail of things memorable both here and in the neighbourhood. What relates to the Doctor runs thus:

About two years after [viz. in the year 1681], that great light of learning Richard Bentley [now D. D. Regius professor of Divinity, master of Trinity College, Royal librarian, &c.] supplied his place; who, being soon taken from us by the learned Bishop of Worcester, Dr. Stillingfleet, to be his amanuensis ‡, Walter Johnson, of Peter-house, in

* See pp. 28—33.

† Mr. Graves, who had been much obliged to Dr. Bentley, who pushed him forward when a young man, made him steward of the College estates, and sent a picture of the Doctor to the Spalding Society, now hanging up in the meeting-room. Mr. Graves was elected by the University of Cambridge their Commissary, 1726; which office he resigned, in a handsome manner, about 1781, when he presented a piece of plate value 50*l.* to his College.

‡ Notwithstanding this entry, the Doctor denied his ever having served the Bishop in that capacity; so it is probably a mistake for tutor to the Bishop's son. See Preface to his Dissertation on the Epistles of Phalaris, p. 78, edit. 1699, where are these words: “ I should never account it any disgrace to have served the Right Reverend the Bishop of Worcester in any capacity