

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07883-2 - The Diary of John Evelyn: With an Introduction and

Notes: Volume 1

Edited by Austin Dobson

Excerpt

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THE
DIARY OF JOHN EVELYN¹

I WAS born (at Wotton, in the County of Surrey,) about twenty minutes past two in the morning, being on Tuesday the 31st and last of October, 1620, after my father had been married about seven years,² and that my mother had borne him three children; viz. two daughters and one son, about the 33rd year of his age, and the 23rd of my mother's.

My father, named Richard, was of a sanguine complexion, mixed with a dash of choler: his hair inclining to light, which though exceeding thick, became hoary by that time he had attained to thirty years of age; it was somewhat curled towards the extremities; his beard, which he wore a little peaked, as the mode was, of a brownish colour, and so continued to the last, save that it was somewhat mingled with grey hairs about his cheeks, which, with his countenance, were clear

¹ [This title of the previous Editors has been retained, although, as explained in the "Preface" to the present issue, Evelyn's records are more properly "Memoirs."]

² He was married at St. Thomas's Church, Southwark, 27th January, 1613. My sister Eliza was born at nine at night, 28th November, 1614; Jane, at four in the morning, 16th February, 1616; my brother George at nine at night, Wednesday, 18th June, 1617; and my brother Richard, 9th November, 1622 (*Note by Evelyn*). [A full pedigree of the Evelyn family follows the "Introduction" to this volume.]

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and fresh-coloured; his eyes extraordinary quick and piercing; an ample forehead,—in sum, a very well-composed visage and manly aspect: for the rest, he was but low of stature, yet very strong. He was, for his life, so exact and temperate, that I have heard he had never been surprised by excess, being ascetic and sparing. His wisdom was great, and his judgment most acute; of solid discourse, affable, humble, and in nothing affected; of a thriving, neat, silent, and methodical genius; discretely severe, yet liberal upon all just occasions, both to his children, to strangers, and servants; a lover of hospitality; and, in brief, of a singular and Christian moderation in all his actions; not illiterate, nor obscure, as, having continued Justice of the Peace and of the Quorum, he served his country as High Sheriff, being, as I take it, the last dignified with that office for Sussex and Surrey together, the same year, before their separation.¹ He was yet a studious decliner of honours and titles; being already in that esteem with his country, that they could have added little to him besides their burden.² He was a person of that rare conversation that, upon frequent recollection, and calling to mind passages of his life and discourse, I could never charge him with the least passion, or inadvertency. His estate was esteemed about £4000 per annum, well wooded, and full of timber.

¹ Formerly the two counties had in general, though not invariably, only one sheriff. In 1637, each county had its sheriff, and so it has continued since.

² In proof of Evelyn's assertion may be quoted an old receipt, found at Wotton: "R^d, the 29 Oct^r. 1630, of Rich^d Evlinge of Wottone, in the Countye of Surr' Esq; by waie of composic'one to the use of his Ma^{tie}, being apoynted by his Ma^{tie} Collecto^r for the same, for his Fine for not appearinge at the tyme & place apoynted for receavinge order of Kthood, the somme of fivetey pound I say received.
THO. CRYMES."

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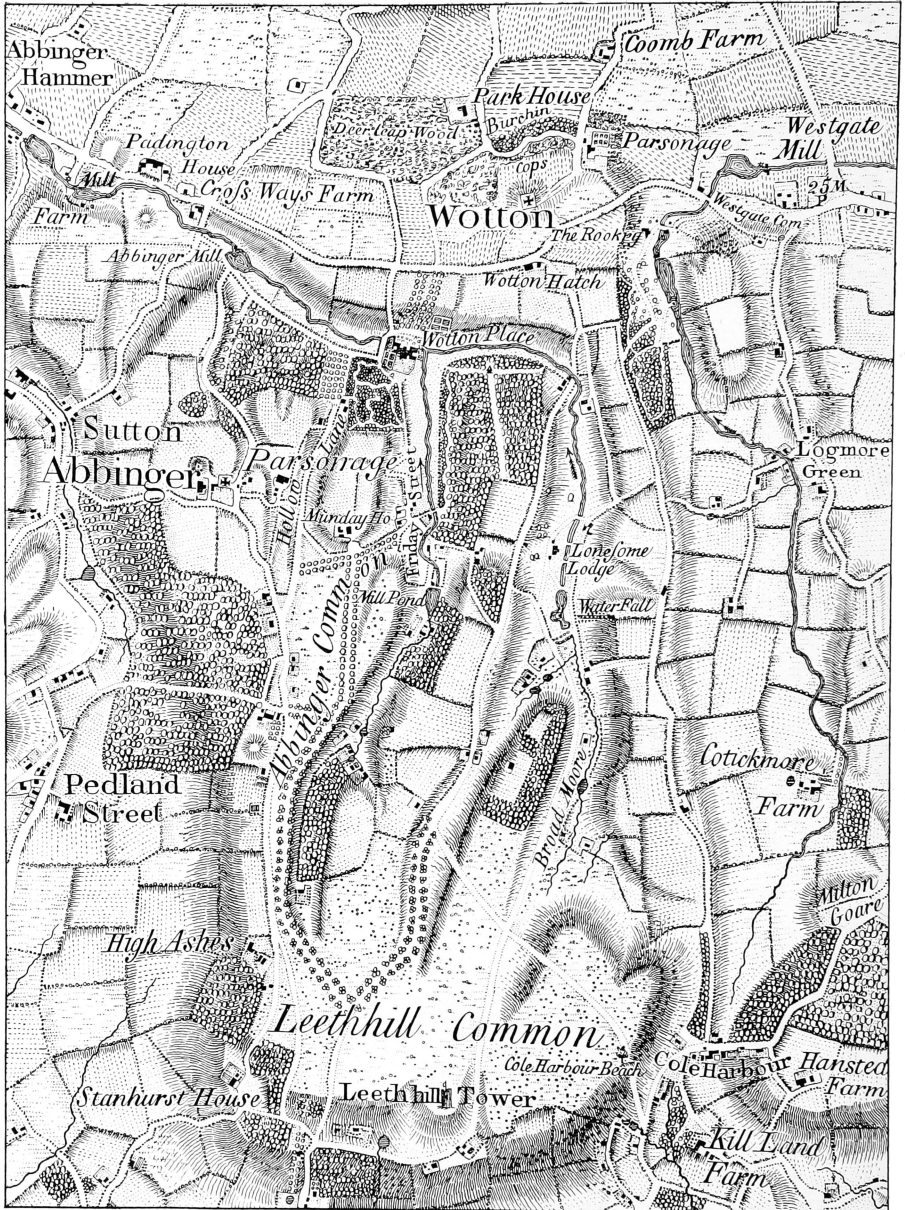
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WOTTON HOUSE, SURREY, AND ITS ENVIRONS.

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1620

JOHN EVELYN

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My mother's name was Eleanor,¹ sole daughter and heiress of John Standsfield, Esq., of an ancient and honourable family (though now extinct) in Shropshire, by his wife Eleanor Comber, of a good and well-known house in Sussex. She was of proper personage; of a brown complexion; her eyes and hair of a lovely black; of constitution more inclined to a religious melancholy, or pious sadness; of a rare memory, and most exemplary life; for economy and prudence, esteemed one of the most conspicuous in her country: which rendered her loss much deplored, both by those who knew, and such as only heard of her.

Thus much, in brief, touching my parents; nor was it reasonable I should speak less of them to whom I owe so much.

The place of my birth was Wotton, in the parish of Wotton, or Blackheath, in the county of Surrey, the then mansion-house of my father, left him by my grandfather,² afterwards and now my eldest brother's.³ It is situated in the most southern part of the shire;⁴ and, though in a valley, yet really upon part of Leith Hill, one of the most eminent in England⁵ for the prodigious prospect to be seen from its summit, though by few observed. From it may be discerned twelve or thirteen counties, with part of the sea on the

¹ She was born 17th November, 1598, near Lewes in Sussex.

² [George Evelyn, of Long-Ditton, *d.* 30th May, 1603, who had purchased it in 1579 from Henry Owen.]

³ [George Evelyn, 1617-99.]

⁴ [The parish of Wotton (Wood-town; Odeton or Wodeton in Domesday Book) "is about nine miles in extent, from north to south, but seldom exceeds a mile in breadth, and is still narrower towards the southern extremity. On the north, it borders on Effingham; on the east, on Dorking and Ockley; on the south, on Slinfold and Rudgwick, in Sussex; and on the west, it joins Abinger" (Brayley's *History of Surrey*, 1850, p. 17).]

⁵ [965 feet. It is the highest point in the county.]

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coast of Sussex, in a serene day. The house¹ is large and ancient, suitable to those hospitable times, and so sweetly environed with those delicious streams and venerable woods, as in the judgment of strangers as well as Englishmen it may be compared to one of the most pleasant seats in the nation, and most tempting for a great person and a wanton purse to render it conspicuous. It has rising grounds, meadows, woods, and water, in abundance.

The distance from London little more than twenty miles, and yet so securely placed, as if it were one hundred; three miles from Dorking, which serves it abundantly with provision as well of land as sea; six from Guildford, twelve from Kingston.² I will say nothing of the air, because the pre-eminence is universally given to Surrey, the soil being dry and sandy; but I should speak much of the gardens, fountains, and groves that adorn it, were they not as generally known to be amongst the most natural, and (till this later and universal luxury of the whole nation, since abounding in such expenses) the most magnificent that England afforded; and which indeed gave one of the first examples to that elegancy, since so much in vogue, and followed in the managing of their waters, and other elegancies of that nature. Let me add, the contiguity of five or six manors,³ the patronage of the livings about it, and what

¹ [Wotton House—an irregular brick building—has been added to at various times, but largely in 1864, when a muniment room, which also serves as a library, was built (after the design of Mr. H. Woodyer) on the site of the west wing, destroyed by fire about 1800. Sketches by Evelyn, still preserved, show its aspect in 1640, 1646, 1653, and 1704. The present owner is William John Evelyn, Esq., J.P., D.L., *b.* 1822.]

² Eight, and fourteen; and from London a little more than twenty-six measured miles.

³ Seven manors, two advowsons, and a chapel of ease (Sir John Cotton's).

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1620

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Themistocles pronounced for none of the least advantages—the good neighbourhood.¹ All which conspire here to render it an honourable and handsome royalty, fit for the present possessor, my worthy brother, and his noble lady,² whose constant liberality gives them title both to the place and the affections of all that know them. Thus, with the poet :

Nescio qua natale solum dulcedine captos
Ducit, et immemores non sinit esse sui.³

I had given me the name of my grandfather, my mother's father,⁴ who, together with a sister of Sir Thomas Evelyn of Long-Ditton,⁵ and Mr. Comber, a near relation of my mother, were my susceptors. The solemnity (yet upon what accident I know not, unless some indisposition in me) was performed in the dining-room by Parson Higham,⁶ the present incumbent of the parish, according to the forms prescribed by the then glorious Church of England.⁷

I was now (in regard to my mother's weakness, or rather custom of persons of quality) put to

¹ [“Having a piece of land he [Themistocles] would sell, he willed the crier to proclaim open sale of it in the market-place, and with all he should add unto the sale, that his land lay by a good neighbour” (North's *Plutarch*, Rouse's ed. 1898, ii. 29).]

² Lady Cotton, a widow, whom Evelyn's elder brother, George, took for his second wife, his first wife having died in 1644 (see *post*, under 11th April, 1640). After the former date, therefore, this portion of Evelyn's “Kalendarium” must have been written. See also *post*, under 8th August 1664.

³ [Ovid, *Epist. ex Ponto*, Bk. I. Ep. iii. ll. 35-36. Evelyn gives the last word of the first line as “cunctos.”]

⁴ [John Standsfield (see *ante*, p. 3).]

⁵ [Sir Thomas Evelyn, 1587-1669, Evelyn's cousin. The sister here referred to was Rose Evelyn, afterwards the wife of Thomas Keightley of Staffordshire (see *post*, under 8th March, 1681).]

⁶ [See *post*, under 21st August, 1652.]

⁷ I had given me two handsome pieces of very curiously wrought and gilt plate.—*Evelyn*.

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nurse to one Peter, a neighbour's wife and tenant, of a good, comely, brown, wholesome complexion, and in a most sweet place towards the hills, flanked with wood and refreshed with streams; the affection to which kind of solitude I sucked in with my very milk. It appears, by a note of my father's, that I sucked till 17th January, 1622; or at least I came not home before.¹

1623. The very first thing that I can call to memory, and from which time forward I began to observe, was this year (1623) my youngest brother² being in his nurse's arms, who, being then two days and nine months younger than myself, was the last child of my dear parents.

1624. I was not initiated into any rudiments until near four years of age, and then one Frier taught us at the church-porch of Wotton:³ and I do perfectly remember the great talk and stir about Il Conde Gondomar, now Ambassador from Spain (for near about this time was the match of our Prince with the Infanta proposed); and the effects of that comet, 1618, still working in the prodigious revolutions now beginning in Europe, especially in Germany, whose sad commotions sprang from the Bohemians' defection from the Emperor Matthias:⁴ upon which quarrel the

¹ This passage, and the paragraphs before and after it, were printed for the first time in the edition of 1850. A note in the edition of 1857 (p. 4) goes on to say: "Portions of the preceding description of Wotton are also first taken from the original; and it may not be out of place to add that, more especially in the first fifty pages of this volume [volume i. of 1857], a very large number of curious and interesting additions are made to Evelyn's text from the Manuscript of the Diary at Wotton."

² [Richard Evelyn of Woodcote, *d.* 1670.]

³ [The church-porch at Wotton has now been modernised; but John Coney's sketch of 1818, here reproduced, shows the window of a small room over the door.]

⁴ Evelyn alludes to the insurrection of the Bohemians on the 12th of May, 1618. The emperor died soon after, and the

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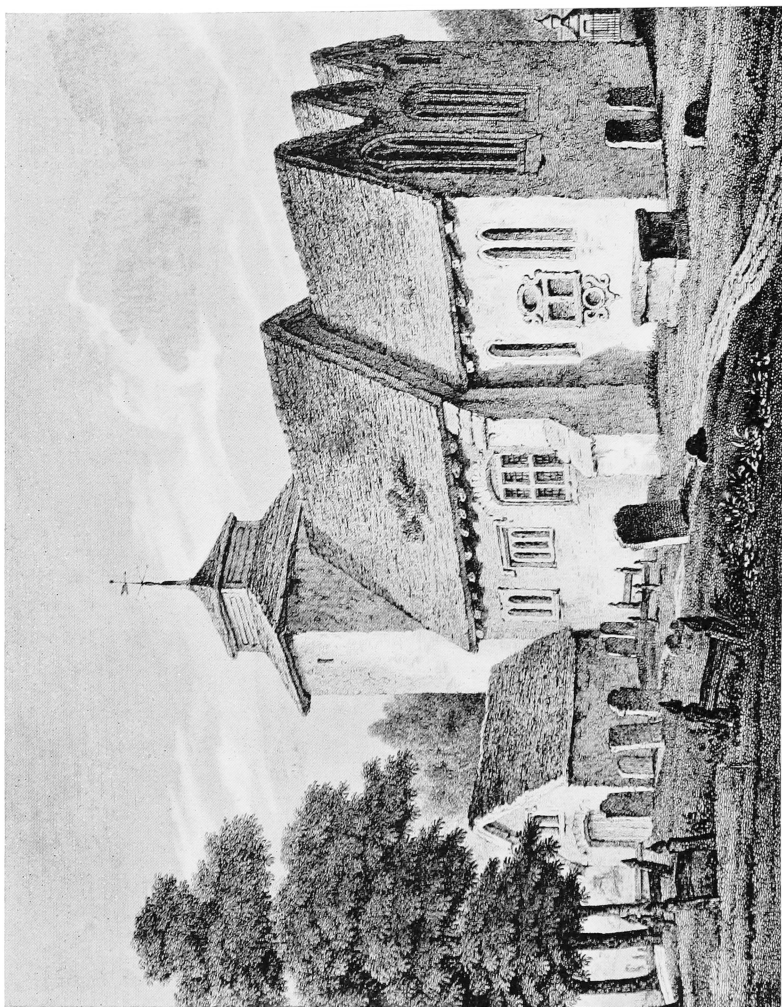
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WOTTON CHURCH IN 1818