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THE EMERGENCE OF EDWARD HASTED AS HISTORIAN OF KENT

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It was in Tudor times that the county came to the fore as an important administrative unit, and it is therefore not surprising that the notion of a study of Britain, to be made shire by shire, should have been born around the same time. John Leland appears to have been the first to suggest such a history. As a clerical scholar he was sent on a tour of monastic and collegiate libraries by Henry VIII, charged to bring the work of ancient writers 'out of deadly darkness to lively light'. Leland's tour resulted in a dictionary of British writers, many of them chroniclers, and Leland himself was inspired by their accounts – and also no doubt by their contradictions – to begin his own enquiries into the past of the British Isles. In 1545, following a second tour begun six years earlier, he proposed to the king that he should undertake to write a history of England county by county, with Wales and the smaller islands of the realm treated similarly.

But Leland's proposal was never to be put into execution. Leland became insane and died shortly thereafter. The first person to bring out a survey of the British Isles, county by county, was to be William Camden, the first edition of whose *Britannia* appeared in Latin in 1586. The very first single county history, however, had already appeared ten years earlier with the publication, in English, of William Lambarde's *Perambulation of the County of Kent.*

Lambarde's *Perambulation*, full of little ironies and sly digs at the clerical life, and the monks in particular, has echoes of the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais, and can still be read with enjoyment today. The perambulation, or walk, has remained a popular framework for a topographical description, whether in emulation of Lambarde, or simply because it allows writer and reader to savour more fully the pleasures of a varied landscape, such as we have here in Kent, with its long coastline, wooded and valleyed Weald, enchanting openness of Romney Marsh, or rolling chalk downs. Lambarde certainly kept to the promise of his title:

> Thus have I walked about this whole Diocese: now therefore let me cutte over to Watlingstreete, which I will use for my way to Rochester, and tell you of the places that lye on each side. But first heare (I pray you) of Stouremouthe, and Wingham, which be in my way to Watlingstreete.[1]

Apparently meandering, embroidered with legends and accounts drawn from some of the oldest chronicles, of which he himself believes hardly a word, Lambarde's account is as sharp as a needle. Here is the death of Earl Godwin as told by Ealred, Abbot of Rievaulx:

> While the king and Godwine sate at the table, accompanied with others of the nobilitie, it chanced the cupbearer (as he brought wine to the bourd) to slip with the one foote, and yet by good strength of his other leg, to recover himselfe without falling: which thing the Earle earnestly marking, said pleasantly, that there one brother had well helped another: Mary (quoth the King) so might me mine, ne haddest thou been Earle Godwine: casting in his dish the murder of his brother Alfred, which was done to death at Elie by the counsell of Godwine ...Hereat the Earle was sore moved, and thinking it more than time to make his purgation, tooke a morsell of bread into his hand, and praying (with great and vehement obtestation) that it might choke him, if he by any meanes caused the slaughter, or consented thereto, he put the bread into his mouth, and was immediately strangled therewithall.[2]

Clearly, too good a story to omit, but counterbalanced by Lambarde with an account of the Earl's death due to more natural causes.

More frequently, Lambarde leavens his tales with a light irony. Thus in the section on Hyde (Hythe), in discussing the shortest passage between England and France: '...if Edmund Hadhenham, the penner of the Chronicles of Rochester, lye not shamefully, (which thing you knowe how far it is from a Monke)...'.[3]

The following century was to witness the appearance of two more histories dedicated to the county of Kent, those of Richard Kilburne and of Thomas Philipott, which both appeared in 1659. Apart from some general matter, forming an introduction and a conclusion in the Philipott, and given by Kilburne only at the end, both these works are arranged alphabetically by parish. This makes them easy to consult, but militates against a general reading of them for pleasure. Philipott, with a single folio volume as opposed to the small quarto Kilburne, is undoubtedly the fuller of the two, but neither Philipott nor Kilburne is able to match the style and wit of Lambarde.

Philipott and Kilburne held the field for many years, and it was over half a century before a new history of the County began to appear. This was the work of Dr John Harris, who planned a major history in five parts or books. He seems to have begun it rather late in life, however, and by the time of his death in 1719 only one volume was in process of publication, containing about half the material he had pro-

posed. It does, however, contain a topographical survey of the County, arranged, like the Philipott and the Kilburne – and largely based on their material – in the form of an alphabetical account of the parishes. Harris's single volume also contains general accounts of the geography and history of the County, of various charters, usages and customs, including gavelkind, and the ecclesiastical history of Canterbury.

The ecclesiastical history of Rochester and all the religious houses in the County was to have figured in a second volume, together with accounts of the County's eminent men and its natural history, and the same volume was also to have contained a history of the Royal Navy in Britain – sparked off, no doubt, by the presence in Kent of the four principal dockyards of Chatham, Deptford, Sheerness and Woolwich. Harris's plan was an extensive one – perhaps over-extensive – and it is likely that death saved him from the embarrassment of having to abandon it.

There is no doubt that the eighteenth century was the era in which topographical writing came into its own. The Society of Antiquaries, founded in 1707, was as interested in the antiquities of its own islands as in those from elsewhere, and acted as a stimulus to the researches of many individuals who realised that the history of their own localities was fascinating and deserved probing in depth. Attempts such as these naturally raised many questions which had to be answered, and it would seem to have been in this century that the questionnaire was formalised, being used as early as 1712 by Browne Willis in Buckinghamshire, as well as in the 1730s by the Revd Francis Blomefield for a work on Norfolk and by John Hutchins for his history of Dorset – which latter work would only appear thirty-five years later, a year after its author's death.

In 1755 the *Gentleman's Magazine* reprinted a highly sophisticated set of questions which had been circulated by the Society of Antiquaries and 'proposed to gentlemen in the several parts of Great Britain, where they reside, with a view of obtaining from their answers a more correct account of the antiquities and natural history of our country, than has yet appeared'. Such a result would undoubtedly have been obtained had all the gentlemen approached been omniscient enough to answer all the questions. Question 29, for example, desired to know what were the day wages for labourers in husbandry, and what for carpenters, bricklayers, masons, tilers, etc., and Question 34 asked: 'are there any Roman, Saxon or Danish castles, camps, altars, roads, forts or other pieces of antiquity in your parish?'[4] There were ninety-six such questions to be answered, forty-seven of a general nature, thirty-eight on natural history, plus an additional ten if your parish lay on the coast. And a final poser rather begged the question by asking anyone living in a city to provide an outline history of it.

It was around this time, and amid this atmosphere of serious research, that Edward Hasted, a 'young antiquarian' as someone was to dub him, now entered the field as a would-be County historian. He, too, was to make use of the questionnaire, but only to a limited extent: the vast correspondence he initiated in connection with his *History* contains many examples of his hand-written questionnaire, which made modest, although precise, demands on the knowledge of the recipient, with queries relating mostly to the ownership of land. For Hasted's *History*, unlike those which had preceded it, was to map out a new line of enquiry: it was to be concerned primarily with the way in which the very land of the county of Kent had been owned and passed down through the ages – and it would thus give at the same time a brief glimpse of the many thousands of people who had inhabited that land.

The path of the county historian was a dangerous course to choose, and one that was littered with pitfalls, but Hasted was to survive, and to succeed where many others failed. In his introduction to the excellent *Guide to English County Histories*, M. W. Greenslade, himself an editor of the VCH *Staffordshire*, recounts how:

> The pursuit all too often proved to be the ruin of health and wealth. The founding father himself, John Leland, went mad, and John Norden soon found himself struggling with poverty. Sampson Erdeswick (d. 1603), Staffordshire's first county historian, was remembered at the College of Arms, according to Anthony Wood, as 'being often-times crazed, especially in his last days', while another Staffordshire historian, Stebbing Shaw (d. 1802), succumbed to the stress of research and financial worries with his History only half finished. The Revd Benjamin Hutchinson circulated proposals for a history of Huntingdonshire in 1792 after 30 years' work but died mad in 1804. ...Charles Gilbert seems to have put his history of Cornwall before his pharmacy business, and he was declared bankrupt in 1825. George Lipscomb, who published a four-volume history of Buckinghamshire between 1831 and 1847, found it too much for him: part of it is said to have been written while he was in the Fleet for debt, and the last volume appeared posthumously.

And the list goes on, Greenslade concluding that 'well might the Herefordshire historian C. J. Robinson in 1877 include among the qualities of a county historian vigorous health and a full purse'.[5]

It is against such a background of frequent failure, financial disaster, and madness or premature death that we have to measure the vicissitudes of Edward Hasted's life. The Kentish historian did not escape financial disaster: his incarceration, when it came, was not in the Fleet, but in the King's Bench prison, where he spent seven long years. This, however, was not, as is often assumed today, as a result of criminal proceedings against him for debt, but simply because his

creditors had taken out a writ against him: imprisonment in a debtors' prison in the eighteenth century lasted for as long as it took to reach an accommodation with one's creditors. The solution, when it came for Hasted, was relatively simple – and ultimately restored the family's estates to the Hasteds. It is quite incorrect to suggest, as a recent writer has done, that Hasted lost the estates: it was within his lifetime that the descendants of Thomas Williams were ordered to return the property, which had been fraudulently retained, although it was not until the historian had been dead ten years that the case was finally closed, by which time legal costs meant that the main beneficiary of Hasted's will, his eldest son the Revd Edward Hasted, can have received little more than two thousand pounds.

The historian's health also suffered from the close application which was necessary to books and documents, and there was certainly a period, after the appearance of Volume II, when he seriously considered giving up the project. It was around this time that he made an extended stay in Tonbridge, apparently for health reasons, where he seems to have encountered the young girl who was to become his mistress and companion for the next thirteen years.

Hasted, a name which implies both the man and his work, has suffered from over-hasty judgements thrown off by those pursuing other goals. The writer's bicentenary study, *A Scholar and a Gentleman: Edward Hasted, the Historian of Kent*, examines the whole Hasted saga and finds a very different gentleman from the one usually portrayed, and a gentleman who in many ways epitomises his century which was, above all, a century of great learning. Considerable learning was what Hasted had – he had been given an excellent education as a boy – and he put this freely at the service of his country and his County, both in the many time-consuming duties he performed in voluntary local administrative posts (as a Justice of the Peace, commissioner of the land tax, commissioner of sewers, turnpike trustee, etc.), and in his *History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, to which he gave virtually all he had.

The resulting picture is of a most likeable man – how can we describe otherwise a man who made and kept friends throughout his life, and who himself wrote, when in the depths of misery in the King's Bench prison: 'this comfort indeed I have, and it is no small one, that in that fallen situation which in general carries the loss of every friend I have found hardly one who has not afforded me every assistance and attention'. The two doctors, William Boteler and William Boys, are well known as his friends, but there were many more who were equally close, including John Thorpe of Bexley, Osmund Beauvoir, headmaster of the King's School in Canterbury, the learned Andrew Coltee Ducarel,

the antiquarian Bryan Faussett, and still others. Indeed, it seems likely that, due to a combination of work on his *History* and work on a number of voluntary administrative bodies, Edward Hasted, in the 1770s and 1780s, had more friends than anyone else in Kent. His industry was both admired and encouraged: 'if I can be of further help, you may command me', is the way in which letters to him frequently ended. There seem to have been few in the County who were not happy to add their mite of information to the vast storehouse which Edward Hasted was accumulating and setting in order.

But if there were many friends, there must have been one or two enemies. We can see from the extant reviews that the *History*, when it appeared, was well received by all but a minority of the press. It is regrettable that it is this minority view which is often quoted today – and the more so, since it seems to have been inspired by malice rather than to have been based on sound critical grounds.

Numerous myths have grown up around the historian and his work which need to be combated. How, for example, is it possible to see in such a man someone who had 'high and mighty' ideas about himself and his family, as one writer has ill-naturedly – and mistakenly – claimed? In the Anecdotes Hasted describes his father as someone who was happy to devote himself to the common weal, and to be of service wherever he was needed, and the son tried to keep the same ideals before him. Without going so far as to quote Philip Larkin, one may very definitely say that Hasted (and his sister) suffered severely from the character and bearing of their mother. Hasted describes her as so snobbishly inclined that she had few if any friends: 'my mother, poor woman, had an excessive pride, which predominated on every occasion and made most people rather disgusted with her acquaintance, which they of course rather avoided than otherwise'. The excessive pride and a certain frivolity, perhaps even a flirtatiousness, which accompanied it, was to make life a misery for at least two members of her family: her disapproval of Hasted's wife, as someone without standing or money, introduced from the first a discordant note into his marriage; and the company into which the teenage Anne Hasted was introduced led to an elopement and marriage with an unsuitable partner which could only spell disaster for her: 'it was a love match on her side, to accomplish which she totally disgraced and ruined herself'.[6]

It is quite possible that her son was himself a victim of this pride, and that the eventual estrangement between Hasted and his wife was attributable, in the first place, to the tensions created in his domestic life by his mother: mother and son and family were by then living in one and the same house, and in leaving his wife Hasted was also leaving his mother.

There are many other areas in which a closer look at the evidence contradicts the myth which envelops much of the life of the Kentish historian: he was not, for example, the dunce at figure-work he is sometimes made out to be; Thomas Astle, far from being his 'mentor', as has been claimed, was younger than Hasted, a social climber, and appears to have been a rather untrustworthy friend; Hasted was a scholar of stature able to work from original documents: at the time he was writing there were few, if any, 'transcripts' to which he could have had recourse, while his use of the relatively limited number of secondary sources available was measured and acknowledged: naturally there are some items of information which figure in several or all of our Kentish histories – but Hasted did not simply 'lift' passages, and is very far from being a 'scissors-and-paste' historian.

A work of this length – the *History* contains well over two million words, all of them dealing with facts – is not going to be without some errors. But one should beware of automatically imputing them to Hasted: he was dependent on the information he received or found. Thus his copy of Domesday Book, for example, was merely a manuscript one – there was no printed text when he began work – and to shake one's head over the supposed shortcomings of the County's historian with a 'Hasted tripped up badly' or 'Hasted makes curious mistakes at times', because he says that there is no entry in Domesday for Kennington, is a criticism that should be laid at the door of the man, Alexander Farley, who attested Hasted's copy as an accurate one. Hasted himself did not simply accept the fact that Kennington did not appear as a full entry in his copy of Domesday, but actually commented on its absence in a pencilled note at the back.

A myth of recent growth is that of the 'second editor'. As is pointed out in *A Scholar and a Gentleman*, however, there is not a shred of solid evidence that anyone other than Hasted oversaw the (relatively minor) alterations and amendments to his work which were to figure in the second edition. That we have a second edition at all, in a smaller format than the original very heavy folio volumes, which has made the work 'user-friendly' over two centuries for the County at large, and not just for scholars in the British Library, seems to be due, yet again, to Hasted's genius for friendship. An early patron, the earl of Radnor, had made the historian acquainted with John Barlow, an engraver and book-illustrator, and Barlow was to become an intimate friend during the King's Bench years. He himself lived in the vicinity of the prison, and records seem to show that he was an inmate of it at some time, possibly more than once. It seems very likely that it was Barlow, with his greater knowledge of the book-trade, who suggested a second edition in octavo format, for which he would supply –

probably, given Hasted's penurious state, without charge – a number of vignettes.

The author of *In Quest of Hasted*, John Boyle, found it difficult to believe that one man could accomplish so much, particularly when incarcerated in a debtor's prison. But this was an era of Herculean tasks, particularly in the field of literature, often performed in unpromising situations and, as Hasted once commented to Thomas Astle, describing the conditions in which he was writing from an inn: 'on bad paper, worse pens and ink'. The suggestion of a second edition probably came as a godsend to Hasted, providing a worthwhile and demanding occupation to fill what would otherwise have been the empty days of his long incarceration. It may even have preserved his sanity. At all events, it is possible to state categorically that Hasted, in prison, was perfectly capable of effecting the minor alterations which were made to his text, whether these were in the form of cuts or the insertion of details: one should not lose sight of the fact that up to only seven years previously he had been a man whose life-style had ensured that he knew most corners of Kent like the back of his hand, and that he continued to correspond with many of his early informants.

In the light of the work which Barlow did for Hasted, both on the fourth volume of the folio edition and throughout the second edition, it is not difficult to understand Hasted's affection for him, and the choice of the engraver, finally, as his executor. Barlow was a worthy collaborator on the great project, and should be remembered by the County along with William Boteler, William Boys and John Lyon, all of whom gave Hasted considerable assistance, particularly when he was obliged to live abroad.

But however much assistance his good friends provided, it was Hasted's hand which ordered and wrote up his information, his mind which conceived and carried through a plan that could encompass the history of one of the largest of English counties with a formality which is worthy of Domesday, and a grace which is the legacy of the eighteenth century. His was the reading, his the research, his the 'parochial visitations' – which brought him, as an unlooked-for reward, the friendship and esteem of perhaps more Kentish men and men of Kent than anyone else in the County enjoyed at that time.

NOTES

[1] W. Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent* (1576; reprint of 1825 edn, 1970, Bath), 236.

[2] Lambarde, 98.

[3] Lambarde, 162.

[4] *Gentleman's Magazine*, 25 (1755), 157-59.

[5] M. W. Greenslade, 'Introduction: County History', in *A Guide to English County Histories*, ed. by C. R. J. Currie and C. P. Lewis (1994; 1997), 20.

[6] *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 26 (1904), 289, 285.

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