

## JOHN MARSHAM, A FORGOTTEN ANTIQUARY

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THE scholarship of the numerous Kentish gentry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is proverbial. Frank Jessup's recent study of Sir Roger Twysden showed clearly the manner in which such a man might combine a career in both local and national politics, the running of an estate, and the production of works of great erudition. He, however, was only one of a number and names such as Lambarde, Digges, Knatchbull, and Dering come naturally to mind. It is the more surprising therefore, that Sir John Marsham of Whorne's Place, Cuxton, ancestor of the Earls of Romney, has not received more recognition in local studies. Perhaps the reason lies in that he was above all the scholar's scholar, deeply concerned with matters which, though profound, were remote from common experience, and that, despite his delinquency and sufferings under the Parliamentary party he did not 'hit the headlines' as did more colourful characters. Yet, in his day, he was accounted among the greatest of learned men and an author of outstanding repute.

The Marshams stemmed from Marsham and Stratton Strawless in Norfolk; the great-grandfather of Sir John being mayor of Norwich in 1518. The mercantile interests of the family, however, led them to London where John, son of Thomas Marsham, merchant, and his wife, Magdalen, was born on 23rd August, 1602. As a boy he proved a ready scholar and is reputed to have read and spoken Latin fluently by the age of six. Certainly by the time he had passed through Westminster School and St. John's College, Oxford, taking his Master's degree in 1625, he was an accomplished classicist to whom composition in Latin and Greek was as natural as the use of his mother tongue. It may well be, moreover, that this association, lasting six years, with the Oxford college most closely connected with the future Archbishop Laud, played an important part in determining Marsham's sympathies and outlook in the struggles ahead. Certainly he remained a royalist and churchman throughout and there is no suggestion of his toying at any time with parliamentary opinions.

His University career was followed during 1626 and 1627 by tours of France, Italy and Germany and these, too, may have added to his early interest in things Roman and may have seen the beginning of his collection of coins and medallions. During the next ten years his career in the law was established, and in 1638 he became one of the Six Clerks

in Chancery. The same period settled also his associations with Kent. In 1631 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Hammond of St. Alban's Court, Nonington, and about the same time purchased Whorne's Place, Cuxton, from Sir Richard Leveson. Marsham's success in his various spheres of activity can perhaps be judged by the fact that by the time of his death in 1685, Bushey Park, Hertfordshire, belonged to the family, while, by 1692, the Mote, Maidstone, had become the principal residence of the family.

For a period, however, Marsham's prospects were in eclipse. An open Cavalier, he joined the King at Oxford in 1642 and remained with the royalist forces till 1646, when he decided to compound for his delinquency. According to his son, Sir Robert, in a brief obituary notice, John Marsham 'adhered to the King was sequestred & plundered & lost to the value of 60,000 li. for his Loyalty'. Politically suspect, his profession was also under attack. The Court of Chancery was referred to at the Barebones Parliament of 1653 as 'a mystery of wickedness and a standing cheat', proceedings were slow, costs excessive—small wonder, then, that the court was abolished for the duration of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. Sir Robert added to his note about sequestration that as a result his father 'betooke himself wholly to his studies'.

However true this may be, it was not the end of Marsham's career. He had already appeared on the Commission of the Peace for Kent in 1640 and although removed subsequently for his royalist sympathies, his name is again found on the Commission from 1664 to 1670. He was an Assistant Warden of Rochester Bridge and, in 1660, became Member for Rochester but relinquished his seat after one year, probably because of his reinstatement in the reconstituted Court of Chancery. The Restoration also saw his elevation to the knighthood, an honour to be followed in 1662 by a baronetcy.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was during the last thirty years of his life that Sir John Marsham's principal work was done, and it was the outcome of these studies to which he betook himself that justified the appellation *le grand Marsham d'Angleterre*, bestowed on him by Père Simon.

Anyone who has been faced with the accumulation of papers left by an antiquary is aware of the special complexities which they present. Here are the notes and drafts resulting from years of study, some published, some in final form, but much in a state of chaos. Add to that the fact that hardly any items are in the vernacular and the vicissitudes of three hundred years of storage, and some idea of the Marsham papers results.

Unlike Twysden, Dering and others, the antiquities of this land were of secondary interest to Marsham. From an early date his eyes were

fixed on the Mediterranean and Middle East, and while he assisted Dugdale with the preparation of *Monasticon Anglicanum*, his real interest lay in the ancient world. The deeper he read, the more complex did the study appear, for he was quick to appreciate the difficulty of reconciling the chronology of the various lands, a matter made still more confused by the absolute acceptance of Biblical tradition.

By 1672 his major work was accomplished in the publication of *Chronicus Canon Aegyptiacus, Ebraicus, Graecus et Disquisitiones*, a vast comparative historical study over 630 pages in length. Four books were published, the fifth left unfinished along with many other treatises. A glimpse at this great Latin tome is sufficient to understand why the Restoration period rang with eulogies of Sir John. Equally, in view of changes in thinking and the wide development of new knowledge of the problems involved, it is easy to understand why this monumental work remains untouched and its author largely forgotten. When, however, one handles the original notes, follows through the various drafts and observes the precise and neat writing, not unlike that of Lambard and Twysden, the many careful deletions and alterations and, above all, the method behind the study, admiration returns anew and one appreciates afresh the struggle which Sir John must have had with his material.

Marsham was especially concerned with comparative history, chronology and numismatics. His approach, therefore, was to study each land in relation to the others of his choice, and among his drafts are many time charts of greater or less detail showing how carefully he collated information and tried to reconcile a variety of traditions. One such chart, starting, needless to say, with Adam, has comparative dating placed side by side from the Old Testament, the Julian calendar, the foundation of Rome, the Seleucid house, the Babylonians from the date of the sack of Jerusalem, and to add to the sum of information, separate tables provide dating based on the consecration of the Temple of Solomon and the dates of the Kings of Israel and Judah. The same care and comprehensive study applies whether the subject is ancient Egypt or Imperial Rome and it is perhaps small wonder that William Wotton stated that Marsham was the first to make the Egyptian antiquities intelligible. To find an English scholar of the seventeenth century carefully collating the four gospels in order to establish a satisfactory chronology of the life of Christ comes to us now as something of a surprise, yet that was the way of Sir John's working methods. His interest in coins was clearly connected with his other classical pursuits and there is little doubt that his mercantile associations in London enabled him to collect originals and to forward this study. One Henry Futter at Aleppo in 1665, wrote, 'I have procured for your Worship 373 medalls which I have given to Mr. Richard Phelips . . . to

deliver you. What you shall esteeme them at, please to pay to my Mother. I have not kept account of the Cost, by reason I bought them at so many severall times.' Futter also enclosed copies of three other coins and these beautiful detailed drawings survive. The work on coins was not published, but much was written up in various degrees of completeness and many likenesses were prepared. Sir John's collection was for its time outstanding and after his death passed to his younger son, Sir Robert.

It is hardly surprising that such a scholar should have gained an international repute. Letters on detailed points of Biblical and ancient history survive from M. Carcary, librarian to Louis XIV, and from Luke Bacher, librarian of the monastery of St. German at Paris; Isaak Vossius of Leiden, another great classical scholar, also corresponded with Sir John and revered him and Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society, was his confidant and go-between in regard to correspondence with M. Carcary. In the same obituary notice quoted above, Sir Robert Marsham wrote: 'Hee was acknowledged by Monsr. Carcary the King of Frances Library Keeper & all the learned men of Europe his contemporaries to bee the greatest Antiquary the most accurate & learned writer of his time as may appear by their testimonies under their hands & seales in their letters . . .'

While we may be more cautious in our praise, an examination of Sir John's work and the manner in which he kept his papers and prepared his evidence is sufficient to understand why such high praise was his and to deplore the neglect which has come upon him. His knowledge was limited according to his time, he never sought publicity as did Dering, nor was he a leader in the manner of Twysden, yet quietly and systematically at Whorne's Place he was preparing to open up the ancient world for his contemporaries and to provide an outstanding early attempt at the comparative history of civilizations. Though his conclusions and his dating may no longer stand the test, he can still be reckoned as one of the greatest of Kent's sons and a scholar who pointed the way to modern methods of historical research; one who can rightly take his place beside the other giants of his century.

Sir John Marsham died peacefully at Bushey Park full of years and honours on 25th May, 1685, leaving behind two sons and six daughters; the second Sir John, a student of English history, Sir Robert, like his father, a clerk in Chancery. The latter commented that his father's library 'tho diminished by the fire of London is considerable and highly to be valued for the exquisite remarques on the margin of most of the Books'. Unfortunately little remains in written form to tell of him as a person, a father, a husband. Of his scholarship we can be sure; of his personality we can do little more than guess. There is no doubt that he required of his sons the same high standard he sought for himself.

Sir Robert's obituary is factual and simple and though retaining a proper pride in the father whom he had lost, at no point does he permit emotion to break through. The draft of one letter survives, written presumably to John Marsham junior, probably at the time of the younger man's entry to the University. It is, as one would expect, a letter of advice, packed with references to Aristotle and indicating how deeply aware Marsham was of the debt the West owed to Mohammedan scholarship. The opening of the letter is worthy of quotation for it shows the fashion of thought of the great man and his endeavour to inculcate in his son a like sense of responsibility towards scholarship. 'My intention is', he wrote, 'that you should seriously consider the business you have in hand. Whilst you were at schole, it sufficet to doe your task: now you are entered into a more free way of study; your thoughts ought to enlarge themselves, not only upon the matter, but the circumstance; and not to be soe confined to the scholes, as to neglect Philologie.<sup>1</sup> When you have learned to frame a Syllogisme, and know the force of a Premonstration it will be worth your consideration to reflect upon your Author of this Art of reasoning; which actuates the Understandinge noe lesse than dancing doth the feete or fencing the armes . . .' The love of learning for its own sake was indeed the joy of Sir John Marsham. He was a hard taskmaster, but his sons did not reject him for it—this letter ends thus: 'You may also see, my care to have you employ your now most pretious time to the best advantage, that is, to the comfort of your most affectionate father.'

Sir John Marsham indeed used his time to great purpose: despite vicissitudes his house flourished and he was honoured for loyalty and integrity by his monarch; but above all he served his Muse and by her, too, in his day was honoured for his painstaking study and great erudition. Too sad that times and seasons change and the work of a lifetime passes so easily into the limbo of lost things.

*Note on the Marsham MSS.* During the past four years two groups of documents have reached the Kent Archives Office relating to the family. The former and larger group came from the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Romney and consists of a very miscellaneous collection of documents on a wide variety of subjects, including court rolls for Cuxton, but above all the notes and papers of Sir John leading up to and including *Chronicus Canon* and his numismatic work. The latter group of papers mainly relates to the first Earl and to the famous review in Mote Park in 1799, but includes a few other items, notably the obituary referred to in this article [U1300 Z10]. A group of letters from Futter regarding the 373 medals and including the drawings of coins is also in this latter group [U1300 C1/7-9 and Z11]. The letter

<sup>1</sup> Philologie: used in its original sense of love of learning and literature.

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from Sir John to his son occurs twice, both times in the larger accumulation, once on a single sheet [U1121 E5/2] and once in a small commonplace book [U1121 Z56/1]. The value of the whole collection lies partly in the military papers of the 1st and 2nd Earls, but far more in this remarkably complete collection of literary manuscripts, a type of accumulation most rare in local record offices.