





MR JOHN HOLT.

Lidgiatt, Holland, Halewood, Frodsham, Bibby, Brownbill, Bulling, Maudsley, Mercer, Mollyneux, Spencer, Tatlock, Tyrer, Webster, Woods. Many of these names are still to be found in the townships.

II. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF A LATE LOCAL ANTIQUARY.

By James Stonehouse.

The etching before us represents Mr. John Holt, who, somewhat more than half a century ago, resided at Walton-on-the-Hill, near Liverpool, and followed the calling of a schoolmaster. He was a man highly respected by his neighbours, and one of those who felt a pleasure in acquiring and imparting knowledge. Mr. Holt was well known sixty years ago in this vicinity, as a man, although not nationally eminent, yet provincially and locally so, and as standing out from the common herd of his fellows. He was born at Hattersly, near Mottram, in Longendale, in 1743. There is some doubt respecting this date, as we find in the obituaries of the time that he is put down as dying at fifty-nine, while his gravestone, "that mute memento of the bye-gone time," records fifty-eight to be his age at the time of his decease.

He was originally intended for the Dissenting ministry, but he appears at a very early age to have become a member of the Church of England. He settled at Walton about 1757, and in 1761 his name appears in the church register as parish clerk, where it continues until 1781. As he is said to have dwelt between forty and fifty years in Walton, he must have received the appointment soon after his settling there. If this be the case it is somewhat remarkable; because he could not have been more than twenty years of age at the time, and it would have been contrary to law, which prescribes that none under twenty-one shall hold that office. He also held the appointment of surveyor of the highways for some years.

During the first years of his residence in Walton, he occupied one of the houses north of the church, where he followed the occupation of master of the Free Grammar school. He seems to have created, during his residence in the parish, a strong feeling of regard on the part of all his neighbours; and his kindness to his family was most commendable, in

supporting, as he did, some members of it. At one time, it appears, he was elected churchwarden, and being a loyal man in disloyal times, there is no doubt that his influence was exerted, in his own small sphere, to keep people in the right path.

On the formation of the Board of Agriculture, in 1793, Mr. Holt was appointed surveyor for the county of Lancaster, and in that capacity he drew up a Report so rapidly, and containing so much and such varied information, that he was specially noticed; and his was the first Report considered worthy of publication by the government.

In 1767 Mr. Holt married Elizabeth France, spinster, of Walton; the ceremony being performed on the 30th of April, by the Rev. Myles Atkinson, curate. Mrs. Holt was a most amiable person. Their union was not blessed by any offspring.

Soon after their marriage, Mr. Holt commenced a school for young ladies, a portion of whose education he superintended. The pupils were numerous and respectable; one of the branches of education taught was equestrian exercises, and Mr. Holt in his daily excursions, as surveyor of the highways, took with him one of the young ladies as his companion.

The school near the church was erected in 1773. Mr. Holt bought the land on which it stands, taking down a large low stone building that occupied its site. A part of the back of the present school is constructed of the stones taken from the old building. The passer by will notice that there is a vane on the top of the roof, bearing date 1794, with Mr. Holt's initials; also what at that period was a novelty in science, and a profound mystery to the unlearned—a lightning conductor. This latter may be regarded as a curiosity, for it was the first that was erected in this part of the country; in fact, one of the very few that were brought into use in any part of the kingdom.

I may here mention a rather curious circumstance, that at the time created a good deal of gossip amongst the Walton quid nuncs, in which Mr. Holt was somewhat concerned, and, as far as I can learn, it has never been fully accounted for. As the old chronicler says, "I tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

The circumstance to which I allude took place about 1790. It was the custom of Mr. Holt and some of his friends to assemble occasionally at

each other's houses, to enjoy each other's conversation. On one of these occasions, several friends, five I believe, had met together in Mr. Holt's study, when the conversation, wandering from one subject to another, at length turned upon—Raising the Devil. One of Mr. Holt's guests was Mr. Wright, then curate of Walton, who affirmed, that to raise the devil was no uncommon or difficult thing, and if they would like to see him, he would do it. An offer like this was not to be refused, and some desire being expressed to be introduced to his Satanic Majesty, Mr. Wright inquired in what shape they would wish to have him present. One suggested one shape, and another another, until one of the gentlemen present said, "let us have him as old H — s." Now this was an old man who lived near Mr. Holt's, and who was well known to them. "No," said one of the party, "he lives too near, let us have old Harry P——n," another well known old man who lived at some distance. Mr. Wright agreed to raise Beelzebub in this man's form, and, after using some little cabalistic ceremonies, and uttering a certain formula usual on such occasions, to the terror, consternation, and dismay of those present, old Harry P——n, in his grey coat, familiar to them all, stood in the midst of them. A scene of the utmost confusion ensued. The figure made a rush at one of the party, or seemed about to do so; but Mr. Holt interfered, and in the act threw down the person next to him against a chair, when the figure disappeared. Each gentleman positively averred that he saw old Harry P——n, and that he neither saw the door open on his approach, nor at his departure. Mr. Holt's servant, at the time that this piece of diablerie took place, was in the cellar directly under Mr. Holt's study, and hearing the noise and confusion, so unusual, over head, rushed up stairs to see what was the matter. On the landing place in the passage, he met his master's guests in a state of the utmost alarm. The party, of course, was broken up, and one of the guests, partly with the fright he had sustained, and partly with the hurt received in falling against the chair, was confined to his house for weeks. It may be said that Mr. Holt, to astonish, and perhaps play a hoax upon his guests, had had some understanding with Mr. Wright in this matter, but so far was Mr. Holt not in the secret of the proceeding, whatever it might have been, that he forbid Mr. Wright his house, and would never allow him to enter it again. One of the party went on the following day to the Rector of Walton, to inform him of the circumstance, and, with a dismayed look, cautioned the rector as to what

sort of man his curate was. "And so," said the reverend gentleman, "he raised the devil, did he? Well, that is a very easy matter; I can do that; shall I raise him for you?" "Oh dear, by no means," responded the worthy parishioner, "I wish you good day."

As an author, Mr. Holt has strong claims to notice among our local "Worthies." He published several works of great utility, one of which was "The Characters of the Kings and Queens of England." The first volume appeared in 1786, the second in 1787, and the third in 1788. In this work may be found arguments in favour of Societies like our own; and if our ancestors had had such associations, many doubtful points respecting the middle ages of our history would have been cleared up. At the date 1538, Mr. Holt says:—

"Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, Vicar General of Henry, ordered 'that every incumbent minister, in all the parishes in England, should keep a register of all weddings, christenings, and burials.' This is the first institution of this useful record, and by means of which most useful knowledge and interesting evidence has since been obtained on many important occasions. Their use might be further extended, namely, by registering the remarkable occurrences relative to the public concerns of the several districts."

This work was highly esteemed at the time. It is well written, and Mr. Holt has exhibited the characters of our Sovereigns in a fair and impartial spirit.

Mr. Holt also compiled several excellent little treatises for the use of his school, and wrote two works of fiction. He was also author of a pamphlet on the "*Culture of Potatoes*," which obtained for him the medal of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Sciences. He was also one of the first who drew attention to the collecting of materials for a Guide to Liverpool. In this he made considerable progress, arranging and classifying his materials in a very excellent manner. He had collected, previous to his death, a vast deal of local information of the most interesting description. His MSS. relative to the History of Liverpool, he bequeathed to his friend, Mr. Matthew Gregson, the author of the "Fragments."

Besides constantly corresponding on matters of local interest with the local press of the day, Mr. Holt was a steady contributor to the "Gentleman's Magazine," whose word at that time "was law, and whose decree was irrevocable." His initials appear to a great number of amusing and interesting articles. The account of a ramble into Derbyshire, which will

be found in *Vol. lxiii*, pp. 19 and 720, is particularly deserving of notice. He also contributed to this publication, an account of the institution of the Liverpool Athenæum, (*vol. lxx*, p. 934;) it is dated, Walton, Sept. 18, 1800. In this paper he alludes to the establishment of the Lyceum News Room. He communicated a paper (*vol. lxx*, p. 934), relative to the Botanic Garden, which was then situated at the top of Oxford-street, and extended over the space occupied between it and Myrtle-street. The conservatory stood upon the ground where now stands the Deaf and Dumb School. To this paper are appended two errata, occurring in a former one, the first to the effect that Mr. Foster, and not Mr. Taylor, furnished the designs for the Athenæum; and the second relating to a mistake about Professor Foster's herbarium.

Mr. Holt contributed also, for many years, the Meteorological Journal, which appears in the Gentleman's Magazine for the north of England, while Mr. Carey, the optician, furnished that for the south; and it is somewhat singular that after Mr. Holt's death this valuable contribution was not continued by any other hand. In the number which was issued immediately after his death, the Diary, although commenced by Mr. Holt, was finished by a friend. To these diaries he appended remarks upon the budding and blossoming of flowers, the leafing of trees, the appearance of birds, the ripening of fruit, and other interesting natural phenomena connected with country life.

In 1777 Mr. Holt undertook the great feat of a journey to London, which he appears to have accomplished in two and a half days. His diary contains some curious remarks.

Accompanied by a friend, he left Liverpool on Easter Sunday, March 30, 1777, by the "Liverpool Diligence," at three in the afternoon. They arrived at Warrington at six o'clock, where they had tea; at Knutsford at eight, and at Holmes Chapel at ten, where supper was partaken of. At two in the morning they arrived at Stone, in Staffordshire, where the landlady "got out of a warm bed, and hot us up some excellent ale." Lichfield at eight, to breakfast. Within a mile of this town the "Diligence" broke down, in the midst of a smart snow storm. Proceeding on their journey, the travellers arrived at two o'clock at Meridan, where, to Mr. Holt's astonishment, a charge was made "for fire." Daventry at six o'clock, where they stopped for the night, leaving at five the following morning.

Breakfasting at Stoney Stratford, they arrived at St. Alban's at two o'clock to dine, and at six o'clock found themselves in the great metropolis, having completed the journey in two and a half days!

Among the sights of London, Mr. Holt goes to the Public Office in Bow-street, where he sees Sir John Fielding, the brother of the author of "Tom Jones."

"Wednesday. The day of the week for transacting business at the public office, Bow-street. Called there to see the famous Sir John Fielding, whose name is so well known to us in his public capacity, as well as being brother to the immortal author of "Tom Jones," "Joseph Andrews," &c. My curiosity greatly warmed. Sir John was seated on the Bench, covered, as being Chairman. His figure venerable, not a little heightened by his fine grey locks, his person was strong and muscular, the lines of his face keen and expressive. He has a very magisterial appearance. His eyes (being quite dark) are covered by a black bandage. This is no disadvantage to his appearance, as might be expected, but to the other masterly strokes nature' has given him, presents to you a fine emblem of the figure of Justice."

He says of Bedlam Hospital:—

"The yellings and bawlings of the poor wretches under confinement, drove me from the place."

"Called at Mr. Stubbs' the celebrated horse painter, saw his inimitable productions. This was an excellent treat. Upon Romney, also, a portrait painter of high repute."

"Visited the buildings in the neighbourhood of Oxford Road; a deal of new ground has been built hereabout. Marybone Gardens at this time are in ruins, the ground intended for building upon. Walked to St. James' with an intent to see the King and Queen. Had a view of them both on the road from Buckingham House to St. James' carried in chairs, attended by a few footmen and yeomen of the guards. Not much parade or attendance. Saw them a second time, with the court officers, pass through the gallery to the chapel royal. The King is a fine person, but not a good walker: in my eyes has the appearance of majesty. The Queen seems to possess all that is amiable and agreeable, has a pleasant look; and an affectionate smile is always at the service of the gazing crowd. Yet her delicate constitution seems overpowered with something more than her strength can well support. This may probably be accounted for from her present situation, being pregnant. To the disgrace of the court, the yeomen of the guards are the rudest set of people I have hitherto met with in this town."

"After dinner took a walk to Kensington, the road crowded all the way with people going or returning. The gardens, at certain seasons, are open and free to every one out of livery, or *who does not wear leather breeches.*"

“Monday. Soon in the park again. Saw the King on horseback taking his morning ride, an exercise he is very fond of, and never, or very seldom omits when the weather is favourable. If it should rain, he takes this under cover, in a place provided for that purpose. He rises usually at seven, breakfasts, sees his family, and mounts his horse precisely at nine, upon which he continues about a couple of hours, then returns, dresses, and is ready for the dispatch of business. His dress this morning was a plain suit of red with yellow buttons, a very large hat in which was a cockade, but no other ornament. His horse, a very bony, showy black one, a bob-tail, no way decorated; a couple of footmen, and one gentleman by way of companion, were all his retinue.”

“Called on Sir Joshua Reynolds, and feasted my eyes with a sight of his excellent paintings—likewise upon Mrs. Hogarth, widow of the late famous man; saw his excellent collection of prints, and purchased a few taken from the plates of that humorous artist.”

After a peaceful, useful, and I believe prosperous life, Mr. Holt was attacked by a bilious complaint, under which he sunk. He died March 21, 1801; and if any pilgrim by the perusal of these pages, feels a disposition to stand by the good man's grave, he will find it between the old Saxon font and the door at the south-east of the church. The stone is a blue flag, broken in one portion. Mr. Holt's wife is buried in a grave by his side. The inscription on the gravestone runs as follows:—“Here are deposited the remains of Mr. John Holt, who was well known and greatly respected for the goodness of his disposition, the rectitude of his conduct, the strength of his talents, and the usefulness of his life. He was born at Hattersley, in the parish of Mottram, in Longdendale, and died 21st March, 1801, aged 58.”

In person Mr. Holt was tall, being very broad below the loins, with remarkably narrow shoulders and chest. His face was good humoured and expressive. His voice was thin, and of a remarkably high tone. He had no beard, and it has been said that he never shaved.

HANLEY and SHELTON in Staffordshire.
EAST STONEHOUSE, Devonshire.

From John Clements, Esq.

Hall's Chronicle, 4to, bl. let., cir. 1548.

From the *Author*.

The Complete Paper on Liverpool Churches and Chapels, by the Rev. Dr. Thom; reprinted from the papers of the Historic Society.

Outline of the principal Geological features of the Salt Field of Cheshire, and the adjoining districts; by Geo. W. Ormerod, Esq., M.A., F.G.S.; reprinted from the Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society, for November, 1848.

The following articles were EXHIBITED :—

The Rev. Peter Steel Dale, M.A., exhibited the Account of the Remarkable Cross, inscribed with Anglo-Saxon Runes, preserved in the garden of Ruthwell Manse Dumfriesshire; by Henry Duncan, D.D. These have been translated by John Mitchell Kemble, Esq.

Mr. Clements exhibited a curious horn book or table, used about the commencement of the seventeenth century, for the purpose of keeping an account of clothes given to the laundress to be washed. It is divided into fifteen compartments, in each of which is a circular disc, moveable on a central pivot. On one side of this is a perforation, so that the disc in its revolutions exposes figures from 1 to 12, as required. Above the various discs are written the names of the articles;—Ruffles, Bands, Cuffs, Handkerche, Capps, Shirtes, Half-shirtes, Bootehose, Topps, Sockes, Sheetes, Pillowberes, Tableclothes, Napkins, Towells. The whole is surrounded with a border of brass, studded with small rosettes, which serve as nails to fasten the horn to the wood on which the paper is placed.

Mr. Clements also exhibited a large-sized spur of iron, found at West Derby.

Dr. Kendrick exhibited the head of an ancient halberd, found in the ceiling of a house at Manchester. Nothing of the same kind is found in Meyrick; and it is supposed to be of the time of Elizabeth.

Mr. Mayer exhibited several prints, in illustration of his own paper; and Mr. Pidgeon two drawings, in illustration of that which was the joint production of Mr. Roberts and himself.

Dr. Hume announced that he had accepted the office of Local Secretary at Liverpool, in compliance with the wishes of the Committee at Grantham, for the erection of a Monument in memory of Sir Isaac Newton.

A letter was read from James Boardman, Esq., mentioning further particulars respecting Mr. John Holt. The following is the substance of it :—

In the summer of 1797, he was taken with a family party to a sale at Walton; and in the afternoon he called on Mr. Holt, along

with his friends; Mr. Holt and Mr. Matthew Nicholson being well acquainted. The members of the party were kindly received, and the conversation turned on agriculture and horticulture. Allusion was frequently made to the Bank-Hall rose, a pretty species of wild rose which formerly grew in great abundance on the sand hills, opposite to what is now the Huskisson Dock.

Mr. Holt's appearance and manner were striking. He was a tall spare man; with a peculiar voice, resembling that of the mutilated males of Italy. His clothes were large and loose, and his land boots or shoes, with high fronts, were precisely like those which may be discerned in Hogarth's prints. The parlour contained a good many old-looking books and port folios; and some articles of furniture now obsolete.

Though not sixty years ago, a ride to Walton was then looked upon as a trip to Southport or Runcorn would be at present; and a coach from Mr. Peter Tyrer's, of Suffolk Street, then the principal posting-house, was ordered to be at the door at half-past eight in the morning.

PAPERS.

I.—BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MR. JOHN WYKE, WITH SOME REMARKS ON THE ARTS AND MANUFACTURES OF LIVERPOOL FROM 1760 TO 1780.

By W. J. Roberts and H. C. Pidgeon, Esqrs.

The name of Mr. John Wyke has on two occasions been mentioned at meetings of this Society (see vol. IV, pp. 42 and 140), and as Mr. Wyke was a man of some mark in his day, and was connected with the earliest art movement in Liverpool, it may not be thought unworthy of the objects of this Society to put on record a short notice of him, especially in connexion with the state of the town at that period.

To those who now study the manners and habits of the different classes in society, it may not be uninteresting to review the great changes which have taken place in Liverpool since the time when king George III. ascended the throne. To the lover of the fine arts, it will be gratifying to trace the manner in which they have progressed since 1769, when the first society for their promotion was established in Liverpool by Mr. Wyke and his coadjutors.