

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Annalia Dubrensia

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1923, Vol. 45, 155-164

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ANNALIA DUBRENSIA.

BY SIR F. A. HYETT.

(Supplemental Notes to a Paper Read to the Society in 1888.)

THE paper bearing this heading, which I wrote 35 years ago, has recently, at the instance of Mr. E. A. B. Barnard, and with the kind permission of the Council of our Society, been reprinted in the *Evesham Journal*. I naturally took the opportunity of revising and adding to it in the light of knowledge acquired since its appearance. I have been asked by the Editor of our *Transactions* to embody some of these amendments as an addendum to the original communication in vol. xiii, pp. 103-117, of our *Transactions*.

In case any readers of these notes are unacquainted with the nature of the little book entitled *Annalia Dubrensia*, I will mention that it contains thirty-three poems written in honour of Robert Dover ("Captain" Robert Dover, as he was called by courtesy), and of certain games and sports, described on the title-page of the *Annalia* as "Olimpick Games," which he had founded or revived at the very beginning of the seventeenth century. These games took place in Whitsun week, on a hill in the parish of Weston-sub-Edge, which is still known as "Dover's Hill," and were continued annually (except during the Commonwealth) for 250 years. While under the supervision of Robert Dover their fame spread far and wide, and they were carried on with "great spirit" in the reigns of Charles I and Charles II, but their character deteriorated in the time of the Georges, till their ill-repute occasioned their dissolution in 1852. I touched on this deterioration in my paper (pp. 107-8), but I was then unaware that

they were in a fairly healthy condition within a quarter of a century of their discontinuance. A writer in *The Mirror* of June 10th, 1826, in answer to a query whether Dover's Meeting was still kept up, says:—

“ I assure you it is, and although it is not countenanced by persons of such rank and consequence as it was some half century ago, it is still a great holiday for all the lads and lasses within 10 or 15 miles of the place, and is attended by great numbers of gentry and people of respectability in the neighbourhood.”

After stating that these games had been instituted by Robert Dover in 1600, and describing Dover's Hill, the writer proceeds:—

“ At the southern extremity of the hill is a thick wood, called Weston Park; under the shade of the trees on the borders of this wood the booths are built, and the principal sports are carried on (on the Thursday and Friday in Whitsun-week), they consist of single-stick (in Gloucestershire called backsword), wrestling, running, jingling, morris-dancing, and other sports of minor importance. On Friday the sports conclude with a horse-race for £50. . . . There are generally about twelve couple play at backsword, the prize is a guinea each couple, eighteen shillings go to the victor and three shillings to the vanquished. The prize for wrestling is a handsome silver cup. . . . I believe these sports are partly supported by subscription and partly by a sum of money that was bequeathed for the purpose. That they are very ancient may be adduced from its being asserted in an old work which I have read, that the immortal Shakespeare was sometimes a spectator of these games (being celebrated about 10 miles from the place of his nativity), and that many of the scenes of his comedies were taken from Dover's meeting, especially the wrestling scene in *As You Like It*.”

A more important addition which I made to my paper

relates to the date of the early reprint of the *Annalia Dubrensia*. I will remind readers, who have not vol. xiii of our *Transactions* at hand, that this reprint is, at first sight, a facsimile of the original, for which it has not unfrequently been mistaken. It is printed in type of the same character and (within a minute fraction) of the same size. Lines and words are in the same positions on every page, and the date on the original title-page, 1636, is repeated on that of the reprint. There are many differences between them to which I have called attention (pp. 111-113), and I need not repeat. There is no dated water-mark on any leaf of the reprint, and I have failed to find any entry of its publication at Stationers' Hall. At the time my paper was written two dates, separated by more than 100 years, had been suggested as the time of its appearance, by editors of nineteenth century editions of the *Annalia*. Vyvyan assigns it to "about 1680," and Grosart to 1794. I have given my reasons (p. 114) for suspecting the accuracy of both dates. In 1904, the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Errata Volume, p. 102) gave 1700 as the date, but did not give any authority. I can now show conclusively that 1680 and 1794 are certainly wrong and that 1700 may be right.

The only clue (as far as I know) for arriving at even an approximate date is to be found in the words, "Dr. Dover thought it his duty to perpetuate the Memory of that Good Man his Grandfather," which appeared in the reprint and were not in the original. There can, I think, be no doubt as to their meaning. The perpetuation of Robert Dover's memory was to be effected by reprinting the *Annalia* and this was done by a grandson of Dover's who was a doctor. If we can identify the grandson we may at least learn the period in which the reprint must have appeared.

Robert Dover had only two sons, one who died in infancy

and one who survived him. John, the survivor, was born in 1614, and after serving as a captain in Prince Rupert's army, he settled at Barton-on-the-Heath. Captain John Dover had three sons, two of whom, John and Thomas, attained manhood. John matriculated at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1661, and died in 1725; and Thomas entered at Magdalen Hall in 1680, "aged 16,"¹ and died in 1742. It must have been one or other of these two grandsons of Robert Dover who was the progenitor of the reprint.

Vyvyan thinks that it was John, whom he erroneously calls "Dr." Dover. John left Oxford in 1665 without having taken a degree, he was called to the bar in 1672 and practised till 1684, in which year he was ordained. He never distinguished himself in either profession, but he has earned for himself a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as a dramatist. We know enough of his career to feel sure that he never had an honorary degree, either of LL.D. or D.D., conferred on him. I think Vyvyan's suggestion must be rejected on the ground that John cannot have been "Doctor" Dover.

With his brother, Thomas, this is otherwise. He obtained a B.A. at Oxford in 1684, and a M.B. at Cambridge in 1687. In 1696 he was a medical practitioner at Bristol, where he remained till 1708. For the next three years he was at sea on a privateering expedition under Captain Woodes-Rogers. He was admitted a licentiate of the College of Physicians on September 30, 1721, and he practised in London till 1728, when he left it for a time, but returned and resumed practice there in 1731. From that date (according to the *D.N.B.*) he lived in Arundel Street, Strand, until his death in 1742. I think, however, that this is a mistake and that as stated in the *British Medical Journal*, of March 22,

¹ So in Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses*, but in Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, pt. 1, vol. 2, p. 59 the date of baptism is given as 6 May, 1662.—Ed.

1913, the closing years of his life were spent at Stanway, in the house of his friend, Robert Tracy. There is an entry in the Stanway Register that he was buried in the family vault of the Tracys there on 14 April, 1742.¹

There is hardly room for doubt that the grandson who wished to honour the memory of Robert Dover was Thomas and not John. When I first came to this conclusion I thought that the reprint of the *Annalia* must have appeared between 1721 and 1742—that is, between the year when Thomas acquired the right to style himself “Dr.” Dover and the year of his death. If this is correct all the three dates under consideration must be ruled out. But on second thoughts I think it is not impossible that he was spoken of and called himself “Dr.” Dover when he was an unlicensed practitioner, and if so the reprint may have been issued in any year between 1696 and 1742. This makes 1700, the date given in the *D.N.B. Errata*, possible, but it still excludes Vyvyan’s and Grosart’s suggestions.

Dr. Thomas Dover was an interesting character, and his name still lingers amongst us. It is familiar both to the man in the street and to the man of letters. The first prescription of “Dover’s Powders” is to be found in his famous book, “The Ancient Physician’s Legacy to his Country,”² and he it was who, when he was serving under Captain Woodes-Rogers, found on the island of Juan Fernandez the ship-wrecked sailor who has been conjured by the genius of Defoe into “Robinson Crusoe.” In reprinting the *Annalia* he certainly did something to perpetuate his own fame as well as that of his grandfather.

I asked in my paper (p. 105) the authority of a statement that at the opening of the games “a yellow flag was unfurled on the battlements of the portable castle, and a

¹ In Venn’s *Alum. Cantab.*, as 15th April, and by Nixon (letter of 13 Feby., 1924) as the 20th April.—Ed.

² It was dedicated to his friend Robert Tracy.

bugle was blown to summon the quality." I find that the summons by "yellow flaggs" is spoken of in Thomas Sanford's poem, and by "Bugle horne" in that by Robert Griffin.

Twelve copies of the *Annalia* were, according to *Book Prices Current*, sold by auction between 1889 and 1921 (some described as "first editions" and some as "imperfect"), which realized prices varying from £1 1s. to £31. The copy which realised the latter sum was a very fine one, and it was subsequently advertised in a bookseller's catalogue at 50 guineas. I have never seen an unbound copy of the *Annalia Dubrensis*, but two copies of it, the property of Sir Francis Newdigate-Newdegate of Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, were advertised for sale on 22-23 January, 1920, by Messrs. Sotheby, in a catalogue in which they were described (Nos. 91, 92) as "unbound." They were not put up for sale, but sold privately to a purchaser (reported to be an American), whose name was not disclosed.¹ These are the only unbound copies of this work of which I have ever heard.

In addition to the works which I have previously recommended to readers who desire further information respecting Robert Dover, his family or his games, I should like to draw their attention to Dr. J. A. Nixon's articles in the *British Medical Journal* of March 22nd, 1913, and the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, of June, 1913, and also to another work (from which I have quoted), viz.:—

¹ The Arbury Hall Library was purchased by G. D. Smith, the well-known bookseller of New York, whose death occurred a few months later. Selections from his stock were sold at the Anderson Galleries on 11-12 November, 1920 and among them was one of the copies of the *Annalia*, which was described (catalogue, p. 19, no. 85), as "'rom the Arbury Library, with label" and bound in "crushed brown levant morocco, gilt edges, by Rivière." It was sold for 120 dollars (*American Book Prices Current*, 1921, p. 26). This copy and many others of the books from Arbury Hall were thus bound before they were despatched from London.—Ed.

The Last Records of a Cotswold Community: being the Weston-sub-Edge Field Account Book for the final twenty-six years of the famous Cotswold Games, hitherto unpublished, and now edited with a study on the Old Time Sports of Campden and the Village Community of Weston, by C. R. Ashbee; of which 75 copies were printed at the Essex House Press in 1904.

I hardly did justice to Robert Dover on my first acquaintance with the little book which was called into being by his public-spirited exploit, and I fear that what I then wrote may have conveyed a false impression of a fine man. I should like to remove this, if I can, and if a few words on such a matter are not out of place in these pages.

I must plead (by way of excuse for a mistaken view) that hyperbole often arouses suspicion, and that when I read that Dover's Games compared with—

The best [pastimes] that Greece ere saw. . . .
Are but meere toys.¹

and that certain incidents in Grecian history are to the same sports—

Such as a glymiring Taper to the Sun.²

and found extravagances of this sort on almost every page, it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that I regarded the eulogies of Dover as mere adulation. But on reading the book again, I am satisfied that the admiration of the writers for Dover, although much of it is clothed in tawdry garments, is absolutely genuine, and we may gleam something of his character from what they tell us. The greatest of all the contributors to the volume, Ben Jonson, after expressly dissociating himself from those who would draw comparisons between the Cotswold and the Olympic Games, goes on—

¹ Robert Durham.

² William Durham.

But I can tell thee Dover, how thy Games
 . . . advance true Love, and neighbourhood,
 And doe both Church, and Common-wealth the good.

This gives the keynote of the whole situation. It was a sense of the value of healthy amusements, and amazement that Dover should have been able to establish them systematically, notwithstanding the steadily growing opinion that "there is no mirth but what is Sin" (as is pointed out in one of the poems), which occasioned a delight, so exuberant as sometimes to express itself in a sequence of superlatives.

Michael Drayton (second in rank as a poet among the contributors to Ben Jonson alone) harps on this string. He opens his poem thus:—

Dover, to doe thee Right, who will not strive,
 That dost in these dull yron Times revive
 The golden Ages glories; which poore Wee
 Had not so much as dream't on but for Thee ?

And towards the end of it he says:—

Wee'l have thy Statue in some Rocke cut out,
 With brave Inscriptions garnished about;
 And under written, *Loe, this was the man,*
 DOVER, *that first these noble Sports began.*

The success of the venture depended entirely on the manner in which "these noble sports" were conducted, and for this Dover seems to have been alone responsible—

By whose sole industry; a Second Birth
 Is given to honest Pastime, harmlesse Mirth.

is what John Trussell (a writer on history, who had been Mayor of Winchester in 1624) says of Dover in the second poem.

There is a consensus of opinion among the writers in the *Annalia* that these sports were carried on with scrupulous propriety, and this must have in those days required ingenuity in organising, and vigilance of no common order, seeing that many a Puritan was on the look out to detect in them something which he could

denounce as disreputable. Had any of them done so, we should doubtless have had a parcel of tracts similar in character to those which were subsequently written by "The Cobler of Gloucester."

William Basse, in the 16th poem, speaks of Dover's Hill when the sports were going on as a place—

Where no vaine Card, nor witching dy
Doth Gamster strip, of lands, or clothes,
No impious mouth, makes blushing sky,
Reverberate with thundring oathes.

And in another poem we read—

No oath's, nor curses, to infect the Aire;
No fightings, quarrells.¹

One writer says the games are "linked with modestie"; another speaks of them as "Sports and harmlesse Merriment"; and a third tells Dover that there is "good decorum in thy mirth."

The following lines² perhaps point to precautions which undoubtedly must have been taken to insure this "good decorum":—

In mid'st whereof, doth shining stand,
Thy Castle built, for solace sake,
Which is so well, with vertue man'd,
That vice, dare no approaches make.

Another trait in Dover's character which should be noticed was his kindness to animals. While coursing was going on he would not allow a hare to be killed if it could be avoided. This is probably what is hinted at in William Basse's poem:—

And Grey-hound is, for Coller tride,
More then for death of harmlesse Hare.

If the writers of the passages I have quoted were sincere, as I believe them to have been, we may reasonably infer

¹ Ferriman Rutter.

² William Basse.

that Robert Dover was a man conspicuous for breadth of view, practical ability, and kindness of heart. It is hardly to be wondered at that Nicholas Wallington should have been able to tell him that he—

'nere could see

That creature yet, that ere spake ill of thee.