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John Aubrey  
Collected Works



Series Fifteen

*The Collected Works of*  
**JOHN AUBREY**  
(1626-1697)



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*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. Aubrey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

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Version 1

*The Collected Works of*

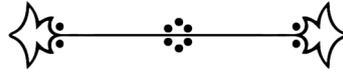
**JOHN AUBREY**



*By Delphi Classics, 2025*

# COPYRIGHT

*Collected Works of John Aubrey*



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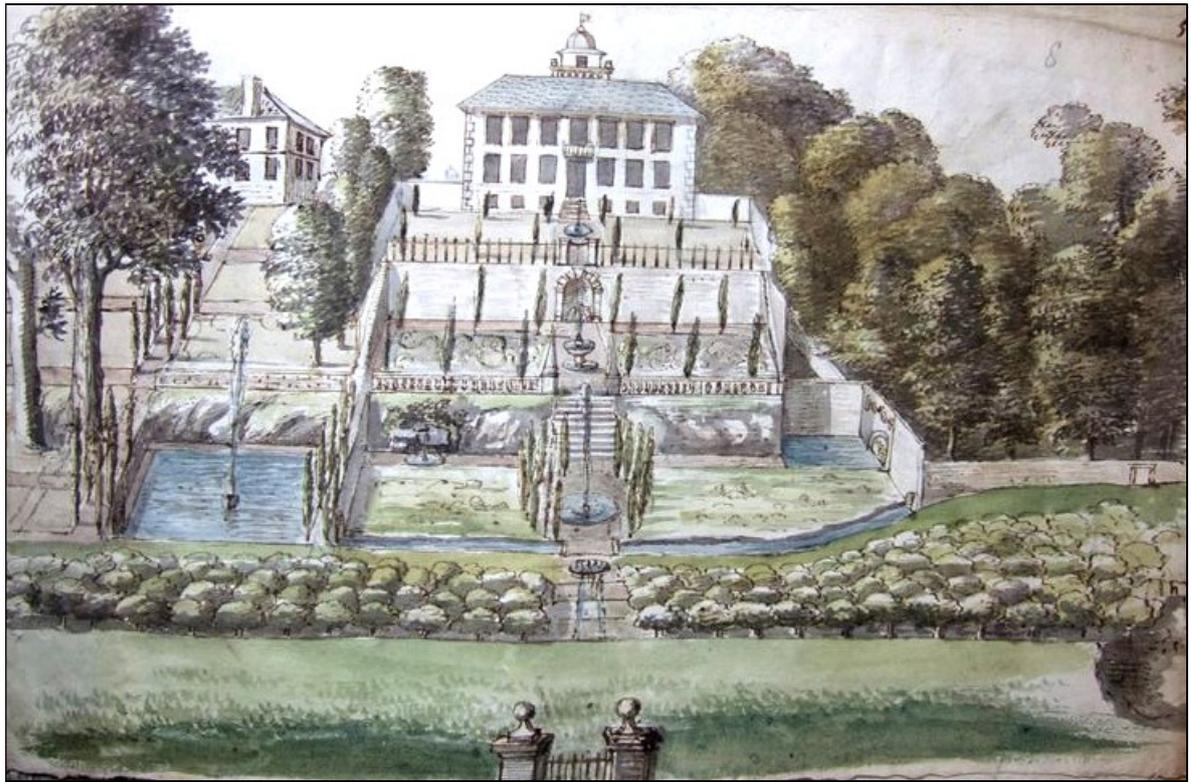
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## The Works



*Kington St Michael, a village three miles north of Chippenham, Wiltshire — John Aubrey's birthplace*



*Aubrey's drawing of Easton Piercy, his birthplace, built by his grandfather, which he inherited on his father's death in his twenties. In his forties Aubrey was forced to sell the house and land due to mounting debts.*

## The Natural History of Wiltshire (1691)



John Aubrey, a celebrated seventeenth century English antiquary and natural philosopher, was a pioneer archaeologist, who first recorded numerous megalithic and other field monuments in southern England, and who is particularly noted for his systematic examination of the Avebury henge monument. The Aubrey holes at Stonehenge are named after him. He set out to compile county histories of both Wiltshire and Surrey, although both projects remained unfinished. His “Interpretation of Villare Anglicanum” (also unfinished) was the first attempt to compile a full-length study of English place-names. Aubrey had wider interests in applied mathematics and astronomy, and was intimate with many of the greatest scientists of the day.

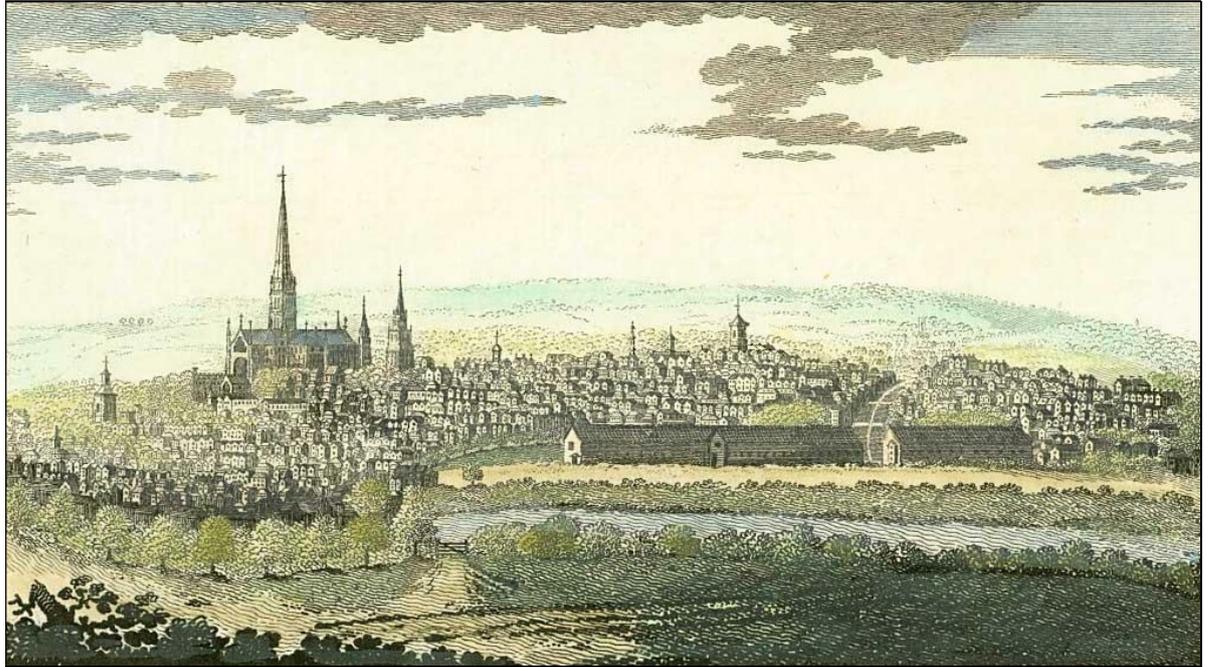
Aubrey was born at Easton Piers or Percy, near Kington St Michael, Wiltshire, to a long-established and affluent gentry family, with roots in the Welsh Marches. For many years an only child, young John was educated at home by a private tutor and was noted for being “melancholy” in his solitude. His father was not intellectual, preferring field sports to learning. Aubrey read such books as came his way, including Bacon’s *Essays*, while studying geometry in secret. In time, he was educated at the Malmesbury grammar school under Robert Latimer, who had formerly educated the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Aubrey entered Trinity College, Oxford, in 1642, but his studies were interrupted by the English Civil War. His earliest antiquarian work dates from this period. He enjoyed his time at Trinity, making friends among his Oxford contemporaries and collecting books.

In 1649, Aubrey discovered the megalithic remains at Avebury, which he later mapped and discussed in his important antiquarian work *Monumenta Britannica*. He was to show Avebury to Charles II at the King’s request in 1663. His father died in 1652, leaving Aubrey large estates, but several complicated debts. He began work on compiling material for a natural historical and antiquarian study of Wiltshire in 1656. Independently, in 1659, a self-appointed committee of Wiltshire gentry determined that a county history should be produced on the model of William Dugdale’s *Antiquities of Warwickshire*. It was agreed that Aubrey would deal with the northern division of the county.

Aubrey chose to divide the work into two separate projects, on the antiquities and the natural history of the county respectively. The work on the antiquities (entitled *Hypomnemata Antiquaria*) was closely modelled on Dugdale, and was largely finished by 1671: Aubrey deposited his draft in the Ashmolean Museum in two manuscript volumes. Unfortunately, one of these was withdrawn by his brother in 1703 and subsequently lost. He then turned to the county’s natural history. Some of his interim observations were read to the Royal Society in 1668 and 1676. In 1685 Aubrey recast the work, now modelling it on Robert Plot’s *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677). It was effectively finished by 1691, when he transcribed a fair copy. Shortly afterwards the Royal Society commissioned another transcript, at a cost of £7. In 1693 Aubrey asked his brother William Aubrey and Thomas Tanner to bring the project to completion, but despite their best intentions they failed to do so.



*Malmesbury Grammar School – where Aubrey was educated*



*Salisbury, Wiltshire, as depicted in an old print of 1789*

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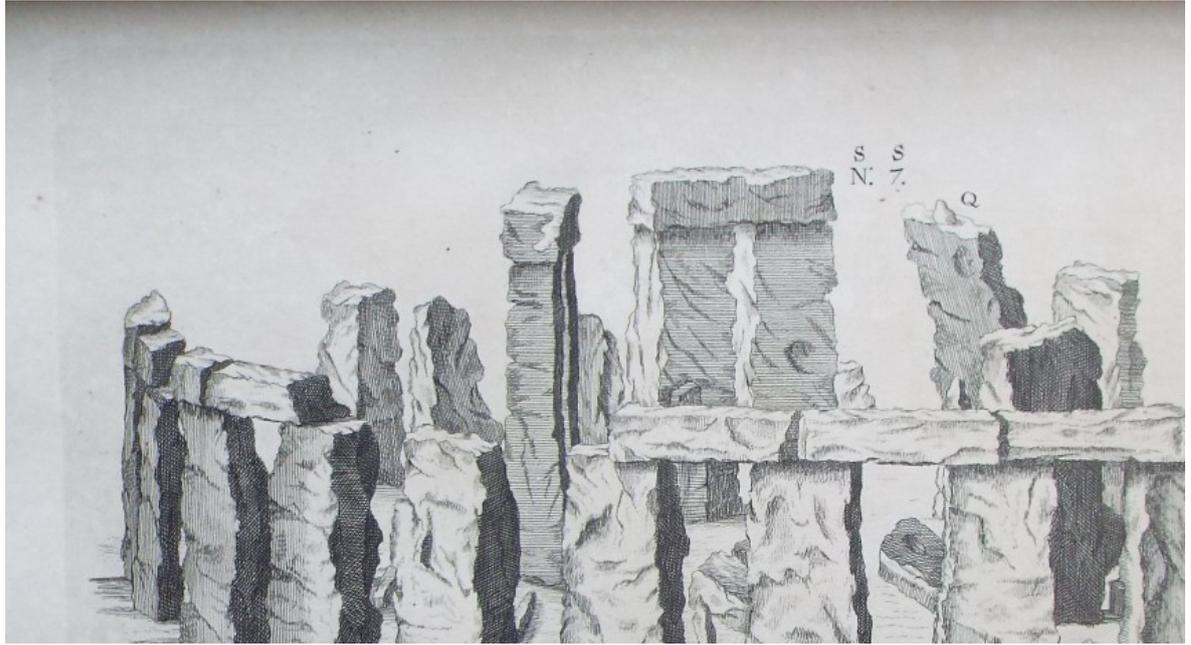
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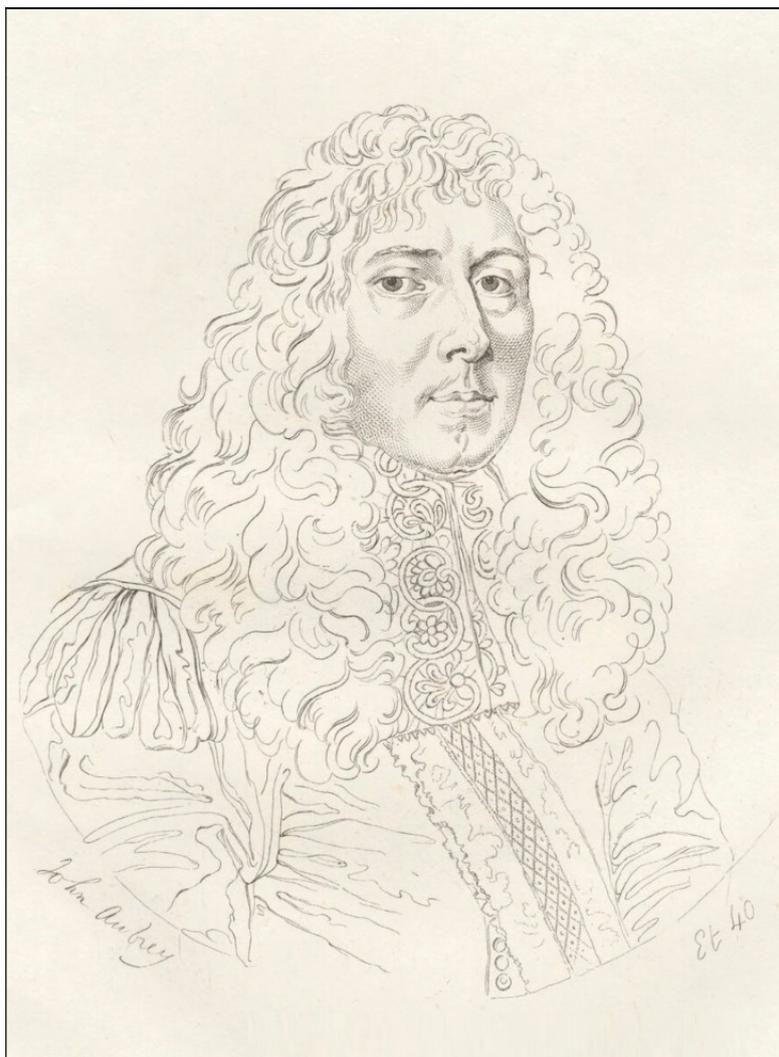
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*Depiction of Stonehenge, 1663*

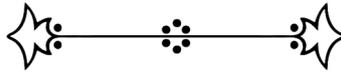


*The Aubrey holes (see an example centre bottom) are a ring of 56 chalk pits at Stonehenge, named after John Aubrey. They date to the earliest phases of Stonehenge in the late fourth and early third millennium BC. Despite decades of argument and analysis, their purpose is still unknown, although an astronomical role has often been suggested.*



*John Aubrey by Mary Dawson Turner, c. 1825*

## TO GEORGE POULETT SCROPE, ESQ. M.P.



MY DEAR SIR,

By inscribing this Volume to you I am merely discharging a debt of gratitude and justice. But for you I believe it would not have been printed; for you not only advocated its publication, but have generously contributed to diminish the cost of its production to the "WILTSHIRE TOPOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY", under whose auspices it is now submitted to the public.

Though comparatively obsolete as regards its scientific, archaeological, and philosophical information, AUBREY'S "NATURAL HISTORY OF WILTSHIRE" is replete with curious and entertaining facts and suggestions, at once characterising the writer, and the age in which he lived, and illustrating the history and topography of his native county. Had this work been revised and printed by its author, as he wished and intended it to have been, it would have proved as useful and important as Plot's "Staffordshire" and "Oxfordshire"; Burton's "Leicestershire"; Morton's "Northamptonshire"; Philipott's "Kent"; or any others of its literary predecessors or contemporaries. It could not have failed to produce useful results to the county it describes; as it was calculated to promote inquiry, awaken curiosity, and plant seeds which might have produced a rich and valuable harvest of Topography.

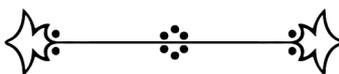
Aubrey justly complained of the apathy which prevailed in his time amongst Wiltshire men towards such topics; and, notwithstanding the many improvements that have since been made in general science, literature, and art, I fear that the gentry and clergy of the county do not sufficiently appreciate the value and utility of local history; otherwise the *Wiltshire Topographical Society* would not linger for want of adequate and liberal support. Aubrey, Bishop Tanner, Henry Penruddocke Wyndham, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, and the writer of this address, have successively appealed to the inhabitants of the county to produce a history commensurate to its wealth and extent, and also to the many and varied objects of importance and interest which belong to it: but, alas! all have failed, and I despair of living to see my native county amply and satisfactorily elucidated by either one or more topographers.

By the formation of the Society already mentioned, by writing and superintending this volume and other preceding publications, and by various literary exertions during the last half century, I have endeavoured to promote the cause of Topography in Wiltshire; and in doing so have often been encouraged by your sympathy and support. For this I am bound to offer you the expression of my very sincere thanks; and with an earnest wish that you may speedily complete your projected "History of Castle Combe,"

I am,  
My dear Sir,  
Yours very truly,  
JOHN BRITTON.

*Burton Street, London.*  
1st September, 1847.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE.



IN THE "MEMOIR of John Aubrey", published by the Wiltshire Topographical Society in 1845, I expressed a wish that the "NATURAL HISTORY of WILTSHIRE", the most important of that author's unpublished manuscripts, might be printed by the Society, as a companion volume to that Memoir, which it is especially calculated to illustrate.

The work referred to had been then suggested to the Council of the Society by George Poulett Scrope, Esq. M.P. as desirable for publication. They concurred with him in that opinion; and shortly afterwards, through the kind intervention of the Marquess of Northampton, an application was made to the Council of the Royal Society for permission to have a transcript made for publication from the copy of the "Natural History of Wiltshire" in their possession. The required permission was readily accorded; and had not the printing been delayed by my own serious illness during the last winter, and urgent occupations since, it would have been completed some months ago.

When the present volume was first announced, it was intended to print the whole of Aubrey's manuscript; but after mature deliberation it has been thought more desirable to select only such passages as directly or indirectly apply to the county of Wilts, or which comprise information really useful or interesting in itself, or curious as illustrating the state of literature and science at the time when they were written.

Before the general reader can duly understand and appreciate the contents of the present volume it is necessary that he should have some knowledge of the manners, customs, and literature of the age when it was written, and with the lucubrations of honest, but "magotie-headed" John Aubrey, as he is termed by Anthony a Wood. Although I have already endeavoured to portray his mental and personal characteristics, and have carefully marked many of his merits, eccentricities, and foibles, I find, from a more careful examination of his "Natural History of Wiltshire" than I had previously devoted to it, many anecdotes, peculiarities, opinions, and traits, which, whilst they serve to mark the character of the man, afford also interesting memorials of his times. If that age be compared and contrasted with the present, the difference cannot fail to make us exult in living, breathing, and acting in a region of intellect and freedom, which is all sunshine and happiness, opposed to the gloom and illiteracy which darkened the days of Aubrey. Even Harvey, Wren, Flamsteed, and Newton, his contemporaries and friends, were slaves and victims to the superstition and fanaticism of their age.

It has long been customary to regard John Aubrey as a credulous and gossiping narrator of anecdotes of doubtful authority, and as an ignorant believer of the most absurd stories. This notion was grounded chiefly upon the prejudiced testimony of Anthony a Wood, and on the contents of the only work which Aubrey published during his lifetime, — an amusing collection of "Miscellanies" relating to dreams, apparitions, witchcraft, and similar subjects. Though his "History of Surrey" was of a more creditable character, and elicited the approval of Manning and Bray, the subsequent historians of that county, an unfavourable opinion of Aubrey long continued to prevail. The publication of his "Lives of Eminent Men" tended, however, to raise him considerably in the estimation of discriminating critics; and in my own "Memoir" of his personal and literary career, with its accompanying analysis of his unpublished works, I endeavoured (and I believe successfully) to vindicate his claims to a distinguished place amongst the literati of his times.

That he has been unjustly stigmatised amongst his contemporaries as an especial votary of superstition is obvious, even on a perusal of his most objectionable work, the "Miscellanies" already mentioned, which plainly shews that his more scientific contemporaries, including even some of the most eminent names in our country's literary annals, participated in the same delusions. It would be amusing to compare the "Natural History of Wiltshire" with two similar works on "Oxfordshire" and "Staffordshire," by Dr. Robert Plot, which procured for

their author a considerable reputation at the time of their publication, and which still bear a favourable character amongst the topographical works of the seventeenth century. It may be sufficient here to state that the chapters in those publications on the Heavens and Air, Waters, Earths, Stones, Formed stones, Plants, Beastes, Men and Women, Echoes, Devils and Witches, and other subjects, are very similar to those of Aubrey. Indeed the plan of the latter's work was modelled upon those of Dr. Plot, and Aubrey states in his Preface that he endeavoured to induce that gentleman to undertake the arrangement and publication of his "Natural History of Wiltshire". On comparing the writings of the two authors, we cannot hesitate to award superior merits to the Wiltshire antiquary.

A few passages may be quoted from the latter to shew that he was greatly in advance of his contemporaries in general knowledge and liberality of sentiment: —

"I have oftentimes wished for a mapp of England coloured according to the colours of the earth; with markes of the fossiles and minerals." (.)

"As the motion caused by a stone lett fall into the water is by circles, so sounds move by spheres in the same manner; which, though obvious enough, I doe not remember to have seen in any booke." (.)

"Phantomes. Though I myselfe never saw any such things, yet I will not conclude that there is no truth at all in these reports. I believe that extraordinarily there have been such apparitions; but where one is true a hundred are figments. There is a lecherie in lyeing and imposing on the credulous, and the imagination of fearfull people is to admiration." [In other words, timid people are disposed to believe marvellous stories.] (.)

"Draughts of the Seates and Prospects. If these views were well donn, they would make a glorious volume by itselpe, and like enough it might take well in the world. It were an inconsiderable expence to these persons of qualitie, and it would remaine to posterity when their families are gonn and their buildings ruined by time or fire, as we have seen that stupendous fabric of Paul's Church, not a stone left on a stone, and lives now only in Mr. Hollar's Etchings in Sir William Dugdale's History of Paul's. I am not displeas'd with this thought as a desideratum, but I doe never expect to see it donn; so few men have the hearts to doe public good to give 4 or 5 pounds for a copper-plate." (.)

With regard to the history of the work now first published, it may be stated that it was the author's first literary essay; being commenced in 1656, and evidently taken up from time to time, and pursued "con amore". In 1675 it was submitted to the Royal Society, when, as Aubrey observed in a letter to Anthony á Wood, it "gave them two or three dayes entertainment which they were pleased to like." Dr. Plot declined to prepare it for the press, and in December 1684 strongly urged the author to "finish and publish it" himself; he accordingly proceeded to arrange its contents, and in the month of June following (in the sixtieth year of his age) wrote the Preface, describing its origin and progress. He states elsewhere that on the 21st of April 1686, he "finished the last chapter," and in the same year he had his portrait painted by "Mr. David Loggan, the graver," expressly to be engraved for the intended publication.

On the 18th of August 1686 he wrote the following Will: "Whereas I, John Aubrey, R.S.S. doe intend shortly to take a journey into the west; and reflecting on the fate that manuscripts use to have after the death of the author, I have thought good to signify my last Will (as to this Naturall History of Wilts): that my will and desire is, that in case I shall depart this life before my returne to London again, to finish, if it pleaseth God, this discourse, I say and declare that my will then is, that I bequeath these papers of the Natural History of Wilts to my worthy friend Mr. Robert Hooke, of Gresham Colledge and R.S.S. and I doe also humbly desire him, and my will is, that the noble buildings and prospects should be engraven by my worthy friend Mr. David Loggan, who hath drawn my picture already in order to it" This document\* shews at once the dangers and difficulties which attended travelling in Aubrey's time, and also that he seriously contemplated the publication of his favourite work.

\* [It has been already printed in my Memoir of Aubrey. A note attached to it shews that the author intended to incorporate with the present work some portions of his MS. "Monumenta Britannica"; which was also dedicated to the Earl of Pembroke.]

Neither his fears of death nor his hopes of publication were however then realized: probably the political disturbances attending the Revolution of 1688 interfered with the latter. In the November of the year following that event Aubrey's friend and patron Thomas, Earl of Pembroke, was elected President of the Royal Society, which distinguished office he held only for one year. During that period the author dedicated the "Natural History of Wiltshire" to his Lordship; and there is little reason to doubt that the fair copy, now in the Society's Library, was made by the author, and given to it in the year 1690. About the same time he had resolved to present his other manuscripts, together with some printed books, coins, antiquities, &c. to the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford; and most of them were accordingly deposited there. He however appears to have retained his original manuscript of the "Natural History," in which he made several observations in the year 1691; that being the latest date attached by him to any of the additions.†

† [Some of these additions of 1691 Aubrey afterwards transcribed into certain blank spaces in the Royal Society's copy.]

On the 15th of September in the same year Aubrey sent this work to his learned and scientific friend, John Ray, for his perusal. The latter made a number of notes upon various parts of the manuscript, which he retained till the 27th of the ensuing month; when he returned it with the very judicious letter which will be found printed in this present publication (.). He had acknowledged the receipt of the work in a previous letter, in which he says: "I have read it over with great pleasure and satisfaction. You doe so mingle "utile dulci" {the useful with the sweet} that the book cannot but take with all sorts of readers: and it is pity it should be suppressed; which, though you make a countenance of, I cannot persuade myself you really intend to do:" and then proceeds to criticise a few pedantic or "new-coyned" words, and also the contents of Chapter VIII. (Part I.) It was probably soon afterwards that Evelyn perused and added some notes to the manuscript;‡ and in February 1694 Aubrey also lent the work to Thomas Tanner (afterwards Bishop of St Asaph), at his earnest request. He seems to have become acquainted with his fellow county-man, Tanner, only a short time before this. The latter, although then only in his twenty-first year, and pursuing his studies at Oxford, had acquired a reputation for knowledge of English antiquities, and with the ardour and enthusiasm of youth evinced much anxiety to promote the publication of this and some of the other works of his venerable friend. He added several notes to the manuscript, and whilst in his possession it was no doubt examined also by Gibson. It is referred to in the notes to the latter's edition of Camden's "Britannia."

‡ [Perhaps in May 1692; when he is known to have examined another of Aubrey's works, "An Idea of Education of Young Gentlemen". — Evelyn's notes to the "Wiltshire" are thus referred to in a memorandum by Aubrey on a fly-leaf of the manuscript: "Mdm. That ye annotations to which are prefixed this marke [J. E.] were writt by my worthy friend John Evelyn, Esq. R.S.S. 'Twas pittie he wrote them in black lead; so that I was faine to runne them all over againe with inke. I thinke not more than two words are obliterated."]

Had Aubrey's life been spared a few years longer it is very possible that most of his manuscripts would have been printed, under the stimulus and with the assistance of his youthful friend. His "Miscellanies," which appeared in 1696, seem to have owed their publication to these influences; and in the Dedication of that work to his patron the Earl of Abingdon, Aubrey thus expressly mentions Tanner:— "It was my intention to have finished my Description of Wiltshire (half finished\* already), and to have dedicated it to your Lordship, but my age is now too far spent for such undertakings.† I have therefore devolved that task on my countryman Mr. Thomas Tanner, who hath youth to go through with it, and a genius proper for such an undertaking."

\* [The work alluded to still remains "half finished," being a Description of the "North Division" only of the county. It has been printed by Sir Thomas Phillipps from the MS. in the Ashmolean Museum. 4to. 1821–1838.]

† [He was then in his 71st year.]

A chapter of the "Natural History" (being "Fatalities of Families and Places"), was at this time detached from the original manuscript to furnish materials for the remarks on "Local Fatality," in the "Miscellanies."

John Aubrey died suddenly in the first week in June 1697, and was buried in the church of St. Mary Magdalen at Oxford, and from the time of his decease the original draught of his Wiltshire History has been carefully preserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, as the fair copy of 1690 has also in the Library of the Royal Society in London.

Until the "Natural History of Wiltshire" was briefly described in my own "Memoir" of its author, very little was known of it beyond the mere fact of the existence of the two manuscripts. Copying from the original at Oxford, Dr. Rawlinson printed the Preface and Dedication, together with Ray's letter of the 27th October, 1691, as addenda to his edition of Aubrey's "History of Surrey," (1719.) The same manuscript was also noticed by Thomas Warton and William Huddesford in a list of the author's works in the Ashmolean Museum.‡ Horace Walpole referred to the Royal Society's copy in his *Anecdotes of Painting* (1762); but though his reference seems to have excited the curiosity of Gough, the latter contented himself with stating that he could not find the work mentioned in Mr. Robertson's catalogue of the Society's library.

‡ [This list forms a note to the "Lives of Leland, Hearne, and Wood" (8° 1772). Though it includes the "Natural History," it omits the "Description of North Wiltshire." The latter was known previously, being mentioned by Aubrey himself in his *Miscellanies*, and also by Dr. Rawlinson; and hence, Warton and Huddesford's list being supposed to be complete, much confusion has arisen respecting these two of Aubrey's works, which have been sometimes considered as identical.]

Some years ago Sir Thomas Phillipps, Bart. contemplated publishing this "Natural History," but he appears to have abandoned his design.

A brief description of the present state of the two manuscripts, with reference to the text of the volume now published, may be desirable. The Oxford copy, which may be termed the author's rough draught, is in two parts or volumes, demy folio, in the original vellum binding.§ Being compiled at various times, during a long series of years, it has a confused appearance, from the numerous corrections and additions made in it by Aubrey. A list of the chapters is prefixed to each volume, whence it appears that Aubrey had intended to include some observations on "Prices of Corn", "Weights and Measures", "Antiquities and Coins", and "Forests, Parks, and Chaces". Most of these topics are adverted to under other heads, but the author never carried out his intention by forming them into separate chapters. Besides wanting the "Fatalities of Families and Places", taken out by the author in 1696, as already stated, the Oxford manuscript is deficient also in the chapters on "Architecture", "Accidents", and "Seates". So far therefore as Aubrey's own labours are concerned, the Royal Society's copy is the most perfect; but the notes of Ray, Evelyn, and Tanner were written upon the Oxford manuscript after the fair copy was made, and have never been transcribed into the latter. The Royal Society's manuscript is entirely in Aubrey's own hand, and is very neatly and carefully written, being in that respect, as well as in its completeness, much superior to the original. Of the latter it appears to have been an exact transcript; but it wants some of the rude sketches and diagrams with which the original is illustrated. The two parts form only one volume, demy folio, which is paged consecutively from 1 to 373, and is bound in modern Russia leather.

§ [The first volume has two title-pages. On one of them, as well as on the cover, the work is called the "Natural History" of Wiltshire; but the remaining title designates its contents as "Memoires of Natural Remarques" in the county.]

As already stated, a copy of the entire work was made for the purposes of this publication from the Royal Society's volume. The ownership of this copy has since been transferred to George Poulett Scrope, Esq. M.P. of Castle Combe, who has had it collated with the Oxford manuscript, thus making it unique.

Every care has been taken to preserve the strictest accuracy in the extracts now published, and with that view, as well as to correspond with such of Aubrey's works as have been already printed, the original orthography has been retained. The order and arrangement of the chapters, and their division into two parts, are also adhered to. At the commencement of each

chapter I have indicated the nature of the passages which are omitted in the present volume, and although such omissions are numerous, it may be stated that all the essential and useful portions of the work are either here printed, or so referred to as to render them easily accessible in future to the scientific student, the antiquary, and the topographer.

With respect to the Notes which I have added, as Editor of the present volume, in correction or illustration of Aubrey's observations, I am alone responsible.\* It would have been easy to have increased their number; for every page of the original text is full of matter suggestive of reflection and comment. I am aware that a more familiar acquaintance with the present condition of Wiltshire would have facilitated my task, and added greatly to the importance of these notes. On this point indeed I might quote the remarks of Aubrey in his preface, for they apply with equal force to myself; and, like him, I cannot but regret that no "ingenious and public-spirited young Wiltshire man" has undertaken the task which I have thus imperfectly performed.

\* [These are enclosed within brackets [thus], and bear the initials J. B. Some of the less important are marked by brackets only.]

In closing this address, and also in taking leave of the county of Wilts, as regards my literary connection with it, I feel it to be at once a duty and a pleasure to record my acknowledgments and thanks to those persons who have kindly aided me on the present occasion. When I commenced this undertaking I did not anticipate the labour it would involve me in, and the consequent time it would demand, or I must have declined the task; for I have been compelled to neglect a superior obligation which I owe to a host of kind and generous friends who have thought proper to pay me and literature a compliment in my old age, by subscribing a large sum of money as a PUBLIC TESTIMONIAL. In return for this, and to reciprocate the compliment, I have undertaken the laborious and delicate task of writing an AUTO-BIOGRAPHY which will narrate the chief incidents of my public life, and describe the literary works which I have produced. It is my intention to present a copy of this volume to each subscriber, so as to perpetuate the event in his own library and family, by a receipt or acknowledgment commemorative of the mutual sympathy and obligation of the donor and the receiver. Being now relieved from all other engagements and occupations, it is my intention to prosecute this memoir with zeal and devotion; and if health and life be awarded to me I hope to accomplish it in the ensuing winter.\*

\* [The volume will contain at least fifteen illustrations from steel copper, wood, and stone, and more than 300 pages of letterpress. A copy of the work will be presented to each subscriber, proportionate in value to the amount of the contribution. Hence three different sizes of the volume will be printed, namely: imperial 4to, with India proofs, for subscribers of 10 [pounds]; medium 4to, with proofs, for those of 3 and 5; and royal 8vo, with a limited number of prints, for subscribers of 1 and 2.]

To the MARQUESS OF NORTHAMPTON, a native of Wiltshire, the zealous and devoted President of the Royal Society, my especial thanks are tendered for his influence with the Council of that Society, in obtaining their permission to copy Aubrey's manuscript; and also to

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JOHN BRITTON.

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