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CHRONICLE
of
some of the principal events
in the
LIFE, WORKS, and TIMES
of
JOHN SELDEN.

Antiquary, Philologist, Heraldist, Linguist, Jurist, Statesman, &c.

* Probable or approximate dates.

A Life of Selden does not exist: to the great reproach of the Lawyers
All accounts of him are but sketches.
Few of Selden's many works have been mentioned here, for want of space.
A list of them is given in Dr. Aikin's *Life of Selden*, pp. 197-9. Ed. 1812.

1558. Feb. 17. Elizabeth begins to reign.

Birth and Infancy. 1584. Dec. 16. JOHN SELDEN, the glory of the English nation, as Hugo Grotius worthily stiles him, son of John Selden, by Margaret his wife, the only daughter of Thomas Baker of Rushington, (descended from the knightly family of the Bakers in Kent) was born in an obscure village called Salvington near Tarring a market town in Sussex. His father . . . was a sufficient plebeian, and delighted much in music, by the exercising of which he obtained (as 'tis said) his wife, of whom our famous author Jo. Selden was born on the 16th of Decemb. 1584. *Wood, Ath. Oxon.* iii. 366. Ed. 1817.

Dec. 20. The birthplace of John Selden is Salvington, a hamlet of the parish of West Tarring, in the county of Sussex. Tarring is about two miles from Worthing. . . . The cottage in which he was born still remains. It was then known as Lacies, being the residence attached to a farm of about eighty-one acres. The date of 1601 is upon its front. *G. W. Johnson. Memoirs of John Selden,* pp. 33. 34. Ed. 1835.

1584—John, the sonne of John Selden, the minstrell, was baptized the 20th day of December. *Parish Register of West Tarring.*

Besides John there were two younger sons, who died infants, and a daughter, who married to a John Bernard of Goring in Sussex: by whom she had two sons and four daughters. They appear to have remained in humble situations. *Johnson, p. 36.*

At Chichester School. He was 'instructed in grammar learning in the Free School at Chichester, under Mr. Hugh Barker of New College [Oxford].' *Wood, idem.*

1598. Oct. 10. On the inside of the lintel of his birthplace and home "is carved a Latin distich, said to have been composed by Selden when only ten years old. . . . The following literal copy made at the time of a personal inspection [in August 1834] is submitted to the reader's judgement.

GRATVS HONESTE MIH' NO CLAVDAR INITO SEDER'
FVR ABEAS: NO SV FACTA SOLVTA TIBI.

The last character of the first line is somewhat imperfect. It probably was intended as a contraction of 'que.' In this case the literal translation is 'Honest friend thou art welcome to me, I will not be closed, enter and be seated. Thief! begone, I am not open to thee' *Johnson, idem.*

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At Oxford.

Studying, writing, and living chiefly in the Inner Temple.

1600. Mich. term. By the care and advice of his schoolmaster, Selden
æst. 15. enters Hart Hall, Oxford: and is 'committed to the
tuition of Mr. Anthony Barker, one of the Fellows,'
brother to his schoolmaster, by 'whom he was instructed
in logic and philosophy for about three years, which
with great facility he conquered.' *Wood. idem.*

'Sir Giles Mompesson told me, that he was then of
that house, and that Selden was a long scabby-pol'd boy
but a good student.' *Aubrey MSS. quoted in Bliss's
Edition of Wood; ut supra.*

1602. æst. 17. Becomes a member of Clifford's Inn.

1603. Mar. 24. James I. succeeds to the English crown.

1604. May. Removes to the Inner Temple. "His chamber was
æst. 19. in the Paper buildings which looke towards the garden,
... staire-case, uppermost story, where he had a
little gallery to walke in. He was quickly taken notice
of for his learning."—*Aubrey MSS., idem.*

After he had continued there a sedulous student for
some time, he did by the help of a strong body and vast
memory, not only run through the whole body of the
law, but became a prodigy in most parts of learning,
especially in those which were not common, or little
frequented, or regarded by the generality of students
of his time. So that in few years his name was
wonderfully advanced, not only at home, but in foreign
countries, and was usually stiled the great dictator of
learning of the English nation.

He seldom or never appeared publickly at the bar,
(tho' a bench) but gave sometimes chamber-counsel,
and was good at conveyance.

He had a very choice library of books, as well MSS.
as printed, in the beginning of all or most of which he
wrote either in the title, or leaf before it, *περι παντός τῆς
ἐλευθερίας*: ABOVE ALL, LIBERTY; to shew, that he
would examine things, and not take them upon trust,
Wood. Idem.

[Dr. Bliss, on this, says, I shall take leave to render
the words ABOVE EVERY THING, LIBERTY!
That is, liberty is dearer to me and more desirable than
every other blessing; even than life itself: a sentiment
worthy not only of Selden, but of every one who calls
himself an Englishman."—*Wood. Idem.*]

He was solicitor and steward for the Earle of Kent.—
Aubrey MSS. idem.

1607. æst. 22. He publishes his first work *Analecton Anglo-Britannicon*.
1612. æst. 27. He furnishes Drayton with notes to the first 18 Chap-
ters of his *Polyolbion* published the next year.

1614. æst. 29. He publishes *Titles of Honour*, 'his largest English,
and in the opinion of Usher, his best work.'—*Johanson,
idem.*

1617. æst. 32. He publishes *De Diis Syris, Syntagmata duo*: a
history of the Idol deities of the Old Testament.

1618. æst. 33. [Preface dated Apr. 4.] Selden publishes *The Historie
of Tithes, that is, The practice of payment of them. The
positive laws made for them. The opinions touching
the right of them.* Whereupon a needless ecclesiastical
uproar arises. Selden tells us "Having at length . . .
composed it, I committed it to the *censura* of one that
had the power of *licensing it for the press*. I left it with
him, and to his own time, and without so much as any
further request from me to him. He sent it to me *licensed*,"

with *ita est*, and *subscription of his name*. Then was it printed, and until it was wholly printed, I never had the least expression of any dislike to it from any man that had any *authority or power of command*, either in the *state*, or in the *church*.—*Omnia opera*, iii. 1456.

Dec.

The king, who had no knowledge of Selden but through the misrepresentations of his courtiers, summoned him by his secretary, Sir Robert Naunton, to appear, with his work, at the Palace of Theobalds. 'I,' says Selden, 'being then entirely a stranger to the court, and known personally there to a very few, was unwilling to go thither unaccompanied,' and consequently he obtained the attendance of his old friend and fellow-templar, Edward Heyward, of Recpham, in Norfolk, and of Ben Jonson, 'princeps poetarum,' to introduce him to the king. . . . Selden had two conferences with King James at Theobald's, and one at Whitehall, and bears testimony in several parts of his after-writings to the ability and courtesy of his Majesty.—*Johnson*, pp. 64, 67.

1619. Jan. 28.

wt. 34.

Selden however is cited before the High Commission Court at Lambeth Palace. One of his opponents, Dr. Richard Tillesley, Archdeacon of Rochester, in his *Animadversions upon Mr. Selden's History of Tythes and his Review thereof*, and Edition, 1621, triumphantly quotes the following:—

His submission because he denieth to haue beene in the High Commission Court, and for that in my *Answers to his Pamphlet* it is not so perfertly related, may it please thee Reader, here to reade it whole out of the Registry of that Court.

Vicesimo octavo die Mensis Ianuarij, Anno Domini iuxta Computationem Ecclesie Anglicane 1618. Coram Reuerendissimo in Christo patre, Domino Georgio, providentia divina Cantuariensi Archiepiscopo, totius Anglie Primate et Metropolitano, Iohanne London, Lancelot Winton, et Iohanne Roffen, eadem providentia respectivè Episcopis: Iohanne Bennet, Willielmo Bird et Georgio Newman, Militibus, in Manerio Archiepiscopali apud Lambeth in Comitatu Surrey, iudicialiter sedentibus: præsente Thoma Mottershed.

Officium Dominorum contra Iohannem Selden de Interiori Templo London, Armigerum.

This day appeared personally *Iohn Selden* Esquire, and made his submission all vnder his owne hand writing, touching the publication of his Booke entituled *The History of Tythes, Sub tenore verborum sequente.*

"My good Lords, I most humbly acknowledge my error, which I haue committed in publishing the *History of Tythes*, and especially, in that I have at all by shewing any interpretation of holy Scriptures, by meddling with Councils, Fathers, or Canons, or by what elsesoeuer occurs in it, offered any occasion of Argument against any right of Maintenance *Iure Divino* of the Ministers of the Gospell: Beseeching your Lordships to receiue this ingenuous and humble acknowledgement, together with the vnfeigned protestation of my grieffe, for that through it I haue so incurred both his Maesties and your Lordships displeasure conceived against mee in the behalfe of the Church of England.—*Iohn Selden.*"

The High Commission Court suppress his book.

This 'usage sunk so deep into his stomach, that he did

In trouble about his *Historie of Tythes*.

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In Parliament: afterwards imprisoned.

In retirement.

never after affect the bishops and clergy, or cordially approve their calling, tho' many ways were tried to gain him to the church's interest."—*Wood, idem.*

- 1619. Selden's father dies.
About this time finishes his work on the Sovereignty of the sea, *Mare Clausum, seu de Dominio Maris* in answer to Grotius' *Mare liberum*. Not published till 1635. For history of this book, see *Johnson*, pp. 207-210.
- 1621. Dr. Richard Mountagu—afterwards Bp. in succession of Chichester and Norwich—publishes his *Diatriba vpon the first part of the late History of Tythes*. King James tells Selden 'If you or your friends write anything against his [Dr. M's] confutation, I will throw you into prison.'—*Mare Clausum. See Opera Omnia*, ii. 1423.
- 1624. Feb. 12— King James' last Parliament. Selden first appearance
May 29. æt. 39. in the House, as M.P. for Lancaster. See John Forster's admirable *Life of Sir John Eliot*, London 1864, for the best account of Selden's early Parliamentary career.
- Trinity term. Selden is chosen Reader of Lyon's Inn. He refuses the office thrice.
- Oct. 21. The Benchers' displeasure is thus recorded in their Register. "The masters of the bench, taking into consideration his contempt and offence, and for that it is without precedent that any man elected to read in chancery has been discharged in the like case, much less has with such wilfulness refused to read the same, have ordered that he shall presently pay to the use of this house the sum of twenty pounds for his fine, and that he stand and be disabled ever to be called to the bench, or to be Reader of this house."—*Johnson*, p. 111.
- 1625. Mar. 27. Charles I. becomes king.
- 1626. Feb. 6—June 15. æt. 41. King Charles' second Parliament. Selden is returned for Great Bedwin in Wilts. During the session is entrusted with the 4th and 5th articles of the Impeachment of the Duke of Buckingham.
- 1628. Mar. 17. King Charles' third Parliament. Selden is member for Ludgershal. Takes part in the preparation of 'The Petition of Right.'
- 1629. Mar. 10. He and others are imprisoned for several months.
- 1632. æt. 47. The Benchers of Inner Temple rescind their order of 1624.
- Michs. Term. Selden is elected a Bencher of their Inn.
- 1639. æt. 54. The Earl [of Kent] died in 1639, without issue, and from that time Selden appears to have made the family mansions at Wrest in Bedfordshire, and White Friars in London, his places of residence. Aubrey says he married the Countess Dowager, and that 'he never owned the marriage with the Countess of Kent till after her death, upon some lawe account. He never kept any servant peculiar, but my ladie's were all of his command; he lived with her in *Cedibus Carmeliticis* (White Fryers) which was, before the conflagration, a noble dwelling. He kept a plentiful table, and was never without learned company.'—*Aubrey MSS.*
- 1640. Nov. 3. The Long Parliament assembles. Selden sits for
æt. 55. Oxford University. For his share in public transactions, see John Forster's two works published in London 1860. *The Grand Remonstrance* and *The Arrest of the Five Members*.
- 1642. May. The King being half-minded to dismiss the Lord
æt. 57. Keeper Littleton, commands Hyde and Lord Falkland

In the Civil War, both parties seek him: he inclines to the Parliament

- to report whether Selden should be offered the Great Seal. Their report was: "They did not doubt of Mr. Selden's Affection to the King, but withal they knew him so well, that they concluded, he would absolutely refuse the place, if it were offer'd to him. He was in years, and of a tender constitution; he had for many years enjoyed his ease, which he loved; was rich; and would not have made a Journey to York, or have layn out of his own bed, for any Preferment, which he had never affected."—*Clarendon, Hist. of the Rebellion. Bk. iv. 445, Ed. 1702.*
1643. Oct. 58. Whitelock in his *Memorials*, tells us: "Divers Members of both Houses, whereof I was one, were Members of the Assembly of Divines, and had the same Liberty with the Divines to sit and debate, and give their Votes in any Matter which was in consideration amongst them: In which Debates Mr. Selden spake admirably, and confuted divers of them in their own Learning. And sometimes when they had cited a Text of Scripture to prove their Assertion, he would tell them, *Perhaps in your little Pocket Bibles with gilt Leaves* (which they would often pull out and read) *the Translation may be thus, but the Greek or the Hebrew, signifies thus and thus*; and so would totally silence them."—*p. 71. Ed. 1732.*
1643. Dec. 12. On the presentation of Philip, Count of Pembroke; Selden's amanuensis, Rev. Richard Milward, becomes Rector of Great Braxted, in Essex. He holds this living until his death. *Newcourt Repertorium, ii. 92, Ed. 1710.*
1645. Apr. Oct. 60. Is one of a joint commission of both houses to administer the Admiralty.
- Aug. Is elected Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge: but declines it.
1647. Jan. 21. The House of Commons votes those members imprisoned in 1628 'for oppressing the illegalities of that time,' £5000 each. Selden is believed to have only accepted one-half.
1651. Dec. 3. The Countess Dowager of Kent dies in White Friars. *Rev. J. Granger. Biogr. Hist. ii. 375, Ed. 1775.* She appointed Selden her executor, and bequeathed to him the Friary House, in White Friars. *Johnson, idem.* The opinion that he then and thus attained his chief riches is contradicted by the fact that he was reputed a rich man in 1642.
- He would tell his intimate friends, Sir Bennet Hoskyns, &c., that he had nobody to make his heire, except it were a milk-mayd, and that such people did not know what to doe with a great estate. *Aubrey MSS.*
1653. June 11. Selden makes his will [printed in *Omnia Opera, I. liii. Oct. 68. Ed. 1726.*] He leaves the bulk of his property, estimated at £40,000, to his four executors; Edward Heyward, Esq., Matthew Hale (afterwards Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench), John Vaughan (afterwards Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas), and Rowland Jewks the elder. Aubrey says: "He intended to haue given his owne library to the Vniversity of Oxford, but received disobligation from them, for that they would not lend him some MSS. wherefore by his will he left it to the disposall of his executors, who gave it to the Bodleian library at Oxon. . . . He would write sometimes, when notions came into his head, to preserve them, under his barber's hands. When he dyed, his barber sayd he had a great mind to know his will, 'For,'

Last years, prepares for death.

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Death.

1654. Nov. 30. æt. 69.
Dec. 14.

said he, 'I never knew a wise man make a wise will.'

John Selden dies at White Friars, of dropsy. Is magnificently buried in the Temple church. His executors 'invited all the parliament men, all the benchers, and great officers. All the judges had mourning, as also an abundance of persons of quality.' Archbishop Usher preached his funeral sermon. *Wood, idem.*

We may adduce the testimony of three contemporaries:—

1. G. Berkeley, Earl of Berkeley, in his *Historical Applications and occasional Meditations upon several subjects. Written by a Person of Honour.* London 1670, p. 12. gives us the following—

Our Learned *Selden*, before he dyed, sent for the most Reverend Arch-Bishop *Ysher*, and the Rev. Dr. *Langbaine*, and discoursed to them of this purpose; That he had survey'd most part of the Learning that was among the Sons of Men; that he had his Study full of Books and Papers of most Subjects in the world; yet at that time he could not recollect any passage out of infinite Books and Manuscripts he was Master of, wherein he could Rest his Soul, save out of the Holy Scriptures; wherein the most remarkable passage that lay most upon his spirit was Titus ii. 12, 13, 14.

2. E. Hyde, Lord Clarendon, in his Autobiography, written about 20 years after *Selden's* death, gives the following character of him, in which may be traced admiration for his character and abilities; and regret, it may be sneering resentment, at his choosing the side of the Parliament in the Civil War.

"Mr. SELDEN was a Person, whom no Character can flatter, or transmit in any Expressions equal to his Merit and Virtue; He was of so stupendous Learning in all Kinds, and in all Languages (as may appear in his excellent and transcendent Writings) that a man would have thought He had been entirely conversant amongst Books, and had never spent an Hour but in Reading and Writing; yet his Humanity, Courtesy, and Affability was such, that He would have been thought to have been bred in the best Courts, but that his good Nature, Charity, and Delight in doing good, and in communicating all He knew, exceeded that Breeding; His Style in all his Writings seems harsh and sometimes obscure; which is not wholly to be imputed to the abtruse Subjects of which He commonly treated, out of the Paths trod by other Men; but to a little undervaluing the Beauty of a Style, and too much Propensity to the Language of Antiquity; but in his Conversation He was the most clear Discourser, and had the best Faculty in making hard Things easy, and presenting them to the Understanding, of any Man that hath been known. Mr. Hyde was wont to say, that He valued himself upon nothing more than upon having had Mr. *Selden's* Acquaintance from the Time He was very young; and held it with great Delight as long as They were suffered to continue together in London; and He was very much troubled always when He heard him blamed, censured, and reproached, for staying in London, and in the Parliament, after They were in Rebellion, and in the worst Times, which his Age obliged him to do; and how wicked soever the Actions were, which were every Day done, He was confident He had not given his Consent to them; but would have hindered them if He could, with his own Safety, to which He was always enough indulgent. If He had some Infirmities with other Men, they were weighed down with wonderful and prodigious Abilities and Excellencies in the other Scale."—*Life*, p. 16. Ed. 1759.

3. Rev. Richard Baxter, in his *Additional Notes on the Life and Death of Sir Matthew Hale. Kt.* London 1682. p. 40. thus writes:—

"I know you are acquainted, how greatly he [Sir M. Hale] valued Mr. *Selden*, being one of his Executors; his Books and Picture being still near him. I think it meet therefore to remember, that because many *Hobbits* do report, that Mr. *Selden* was at the heart an Infidel, and inclined to the Opinions of *Hobbs*, I desired him [Sir M. Hale] to tell me the truth herein; And he oft professed to me, that Mr. *Selden* was a resolved serious Christian; and that he was a great adversary to *Hobbs* his errors; and that he had seen him openly oppose him so earnestly, as either to depart from him, or drive him out of the Room."