

**WARRINGTON IN M.CCCC.LXV., AS
DESCRIBED IN A CONTEMPORARY
RENT ROLL OF THE LEGH FAMILY, IN
THE POSSESSION OF THOMAS LEGH,
ESQUIRE, OF LYME PARK**

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Warrington in M.CCCC.LXV., as Described in a Contemporary Rent Roll of the Legh Family, in the Possession of Thomas Legh, Esquire, of Lyme Park by William Beamont

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WILLIAM BEAMONT

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WARRINGTON

IN

M.CCCC.LXV.

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CONTEMPORARY RENT ROLL OF THE LEGH FAMILY, IN THE
POSSESSION OF THOMAS LEGH, ESQUIRE,
OF LYME PARK.

EDITED BY

WILLIAM BEAMONT, ESQ.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN the year 79 of the Christian era, the once flourishing and populous city of Pompeii was suddenly overwhelmed and entombed by a deep shower of ashes and scoria thrown out during an eruption of Vesuvius. From that time until less than a century from our own day, this gay city of a sunny clime, with its inhabitants, their arts, their treasures, their public and private buildings, and much of their domestic history, lay deeply imbedded beneath the black and heavy pall which had thus suddenly and unexpectedly descended upon them. But although the history of this terrible calamity had been handed down by the pen of an elegant writer, himself an eye-witness of the event, no adventurous or curious explorer appears to have attempted to discover, or resuscitate the buried city, until the year A.D. 1755. From that time to the present, the work of excavation and restoration has gone on; and the traveller, who is privileged to tread the deserted streets of this once busy city, reads, in vivid characters, what was its state and condition seventeen hundred years ago. Passing a long line of ancient tombs, the last resting places of a generation who had passed away before the eruption, and who slept in their

marble abodes, unconscious of its appalling ravages, he enters the place by one of its original gateways,—

“He stands within the city disinterred,
And hears the autumnal leaves, like light footfalls
Of spirits passing through the streets.”

Shelley, vol. iii. p. 82.

In the tracks worn in the pavements, the flint bears witness how long, and how well frequented the streets had been by an equestrian throng, before the period when the city was destroyed. He enters this or that dwelling-house, distinguished by the character of its architecture, or the richness of its decorations. He admires the splendour of the forum, the magnificence of the theatres, or the majesty of their temples; and, beholding on every side the multiplied traces of ancient and advanced art, the truth of the wise man's observation forcibly recurs to him, that there is nothing new under the sun. But the wonder and surprise which seized the first explorers of Pompeii, on revisiting its buried recesses, may be more easily conceived than described. An interval of more than fifteen hundred years was at once obliterated, and the discoverers saw before them, in all their vividness, the habits and abodes of a generation of men who were separated from themselves by the sea of many ages. Transported thus suddenly back, they were able to identify the names and abodes of the former occupants of the city; they would see and admire their domestic economy, and their skill in the fine arts; and would grow at once familiar with their streets, their trades, their religious rites, their superstitions, and their tombs!

This book, presenting to the reader Warrington as it existed during the Wars of the Roses, offers a few traits of resemblance to the recovery of Pompeii, and affords at the same time a greater number of strong points of contrast. Laid by for a period of nearly four hundred years, it is now by the kindness of its owner, THOMAS LEGH, Esq., of Lyme, offered to the Society; and, in its pages, our distant ancestry become familiar to us in their names, their occupations, their money, their habitations, their customs, and their religious worship. Theatres, and the fine arts, are found only in Pompeii, — cemeteries and tombs, are met with both there and in Warrington!

The work, of which a small portion is now offered to the Society, contains a full and minute enumeration of the particulars of the large property at that time belonging to the Leghs; from which is here extracted all that relates to Warrington, and the immediate neighbourhood. Some account of the book itself will not be out of place, before we proceed to examine its contents. The book is a small folio in size, and extends over three hundred and thirty-three pages of vellum. It is written throughout principally in the same hand, but there are occasional alterations, indicated by the colour of the ink and a variation in the writing, which must have proceeded from some other scribe. The character of the hand-writing bears a resemblance to, and yet differs from, the writing in which deeds were then written; it is a sort of law character, in undress,—such as an educated gentleman of that day, would almost necessarily be taught to use. It is strong, legible, and plain, and

minutes like the following occurring in various places, shew that it has been carefully examined by the writer. As for instance, at pages 218 and 236 of the original, we read "corrigitur istuc;" and at page 260, "corrigitur hucusque." It is bound in a strong original binding, which is probably as old as the volume; but the lettering on the back, "Manuscript relating to Lyme Estate," has evidently been added at a later period, and is probably not more than a century and a half old. With a particularity unusual in such cases, the writer has been careful to record the exact date of his manuscript. He tells us that it was begun on the third Wednesday of Lent, in the year 1465, [i.e. according to the civil and legal computation,] and in the sixth year of King Edward IV. We can only reconcile the above year of Grace with the year of the King's reign, by supposing that the writer adopted the civil and legal, and not the historical computation; for as Edward IV. began to reign, according to the latter, on the 4th of March, 1461, and as the manuscript was commenced on the 5th of March, the writer of the manuscript must necessarily have written the year 1466, unless he had been guided by the computation which we have supposed. But a passage in Hollinshed's *Chronicles*, (p. 664,) will serve to make this matter more clear:—"King Edward" says he, "was proclaimed in the year of the world 5427, and from the birth of our Saviour 1461, after our account, beginning the year at Christmas, but after the usual account of the Church of England, 1460." After all, however, there seems to have been some uncertainty in the writer's mind as to

which computation he ought to use, for in a subsequent page in the volume, where he has given a separate heading for the description of the Lyme estate, he tells us that that portion of the work was written on the 29th of March, 1466, anno Regni Edward IV. 6^o; from which it follows that he must, in this latter instance, have adopted the historical, and not the legal and civil computation.

We have no positive evidence of the actual hand by whom the book was written, nor do we know with certainty whether it was the work of the knightly owner, whose possessions it so minutely records; or of one of his two chaplains, whose names we shall have occasion to introduce; or by some Scottish agent, who betrays his country by his occasional spelling of the names of places. The adoption of an ecclesiastical mode of dating would seem to point out the profession of the scribe,—while, on the other hand, there are reasons for supposing the knight to have been his own amanuensis. Notices occur, here and there, of what he intended to do in matters, some of which are not immediately connected with his subject; and once or twice, the expression meets us, “*ut ipse dicit*,” while in an age when the statute of additions was in full force, and knighthood was punctilious of respect, he is constantly spoken of as the “said Peter,” or the “said Peter Legh,” without further addition. Hence there arises a strong presumption that Sir Peter Legh penned the work himself; a presumption which will be further strengthened by the magistrates’ forms occurring at the end of the volume,—a circumstance which will be alluded to in the sequel.