

**THE JOURNAL OF WILLIAM
DOWSING, OF STRATFORD,
PARLIAMENTARY VISITORS,
APPOINTED UNDER A WARRANT
FROM THE EARL OF MANCHESTER**

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The journal of William Dowsing, of Stratford, Parliamentary visitors, appointed under a warrant from the earl of Manchester by C. H. Evelyn White

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C. H. EVELYN WHITE

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THE JOURNAL
OF
WILLIAM DOWSING,
OF STRATFORD,
PARLIAMENTARY VISITOR,
APPOINTED UNDER A WARRANT FROM
THE EARL OF MANCHESTER,
FOR
DEMOLISHING THE SUPERSTITIOUS PICTURES AND ORNAMENTS OF CHURCHES
&c., WITHIN THE COUNTY OF SUFFOLK,
IN THE YEARS 1643-1644.

A New Edition, with an Introduction, Notes, etc., by the
REV. C. H. EVELYN WHITE,
Honorary Secretary of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History,
Editor of the Society's Proceedings, and of "The East Anglian Notes and Queries."

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1749 Handing in that

It falls to the lot of comparatively few, other than those whose lives and memories are consecrated in the affections of their fellow men, to acquire and retain so widespread a reputation (in this particular case such an unenviable one) as that which clings to the name and character of that uncompromising zealot of iconoclastic fame, William Dowsing. Judging from the scanty information we possess concerning him, it may possibly appear to some, that so uninviting a character, and one we are led instinctively to condemn, is scarcely worthy of anything likely to further perpetuate his memory, beside that which we already possess in the well-known 'Journal.' But understanding that the two or three previous editions of the 'Journal' were out of print, and copies not easily obtainable; that the 'Journal' moreover, in its complete form was but little known, and where known, was for the want of a few brief notes, not sufficiently understood, I deemed the present opportunity a favourable one for adding certain information concerning Dowsing and his family connections, as far as appear to me correct and reliable. Also some further details, and sundry notes relating to his work in the character in which he is alone known, that of Parliamentary Visitor appointed under a warrant from

the Earl of Manchester, for the demolishing of superstitious pictures and ornaments found in Churches, etc., throughout the assigned District.

Of the original Manuscript of the 'Journal' nothing is known, further than the fact that it was sold in the year 1704, together with the library of Samuel Dowsing, a son of William Dowsing, to Mr. Huse, a London bookseller. It was from a transcript of this MS. made at the time, that the edition published by Mr. Loder, of Woodbridge, (4to. 1786) and afterwards a second edition, was issued in 1818. To the transcript was added:—

"A true Copy of a MANUSCRIPT, found in the Library of Mr. Samuel Dowsing, of Stratford, being written by his Father, William Dowsing's own Hand, carefully and almost literally transcribed Sept. 5th, 1704."

Mention is made in the *Suffolk Traveller* (2nd ed. p. 39) that a portion of Dowsing's 'Journal' found its way into the hands of the Editor of that work (Mr. John Kirby), but whether it was any part of the original is not clear. Up to the time of the appearance of Mr. Loder's first edition, copies could only have existed in MS., and it is not surprising that in some such copies, slight differences should be found. The 'Journal' was afterwards reprinted by Messrs. Parker, of Oxford, as a supplement to Wells' "Rich Man's Duty" and afterwards (1850) by the same in a separate form. This present edition, drawn from the several previous editions, and MS. copies, carefully compared with each other, has the several points of difference, etc., duly noted.* Loder's edition has an Introduction which is of quite sufficient interest, in its way, to merit a place here, while it may to some extent serve a like purpose:—

"TOWARD the latter end of the reign of HENRY VIII., and throughout the whole reign of EDWARD VI. and in the beginning of

* E. C. Brooks, Esq., of Ufford, with his usual kindness has placed at my disposal an interleaved and annotated edition of the 'Journal' (Loder, 1818, 4to.), with materials collected for an introduction by the late Mr. John Wodderspoon. I have occasionally availed myself of this, but as it consists mainly of notes illustrative of church ornaments, monuments, coats of arms, rood screens, brasses, stained glass, &c., and a consideration of these being outside my original purpose, I have gleaned but little fresh information from this source.

queen ELIZABETH, certain persons, of every county, were put in authority to pull down, and cast out of all churches, roods, graven images, shrines with their relics, to which the ignorant people came flocking in adoration. Or any thing else, which (punctually) tended to idolatry and superstition. Under colour of this their commission, and in their too forward zeal, they rooted up and battered down crosses in churches and church-yards, as also in other public places, they defaced and brake down the images of kings, princes and noble estates, erected, set up, or portraied, for the only memory of them to posterity, and not for any religious honour; they crackt a-pieces the glass windows wherein the effigies of our blessed SAVIOR hanging on the cross, or any one of his saints was depicted; or otherwise turned up their heels into the place where their heads used to be fixed; as I have seen in the windows of some of our country churches. They despoiled churches of their copes, vestments, anices, rich hangings, and all other ornaments where-upon the story or the portraiture of CHRIST himself, or of any saint or martyr was delineated, wrought, or embroidered; leaving religion naked, bare, and unclad."—

"But the foulest and most inhuman action of those times, was the violation of funeral monuments. Marbles which covered the dead were digged up, and put to other uses, tombs hackt and hewn a-pieces; images or representations of the defunct, broken, erased, cut, or dismembered, inscriptions or epitaphs, especially if they began with an *orate pro anima*, or concluded with *cujus anima propitiatur Deus*. For greediness of the brass, or for that they were thought to be anti-christian, pulled out from the sepulchres, and purloined; dead carcasses, for gain of their stone or leaden coffins, cast out of their graves, notwithstanding this request, cut or engraven upon them, *propter misericordiam Jesu requiescant in pace*."

WEEVER's *Discourses on Funeral Monuments*, pa. lli.

What was thought to be left unfinished, by those Persons then in Power,—the fanatical Zeal of the succeeding Century pretty fully accomplished; a reference to this JOURNAL alone, is sufficient to shew, how far the Ignorance and Obstinaey of selfish Men may be persisted in, and carried on, against the Remonstrances of sober and moderate Reason.

In the eventful days of the Long Parliament, men in the name of religion, ran to an excess of riot that ill accorded with the spirit by which they were supposed to be actuated, and of this party, William Dowling may be regarded as a faithful exponent. Those who had assumed authority, held out every encouragement to the lawless faction, to persevere in their deeds of ill, and consequently many were to be found ready to distinguish themselves

by acts of open violence. According to "*Mercurius Rusticus*" (p. 22)

"In Aug. 1641. there was an Order published by the House of Commons, for the taking away all scandalous Pictures out of Churches, in which there was more intended by the Authors than at first their instruments understood, untill instructed by private information how farre the People were to enlarge the meaning."

It may I think be reasonably supposed, that many of the "reliques of idolatry" were, during the interval of time which elapsed between the giving of this Order and the date of Dowsing's Commission, forcibly removed by the people, and that it was left for Dowsing to smite and not spare, at the subsequent period.

It was soon after the publication of the Order, that country committees were called into existence for the exercise of certain powers conferred upon them by the Parliament, in connection with this undertaking. At the instance, and under the direction of the Earl of Manchester, who received his commission as General of the associated counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Lincoln, Huntingdon, Cambridge, and Hertford, in 1642, and resigned it in 1645, William Dowsing received his appointment as Parliamentary Visitor of the Suffolk Churches. Of the five or six associations formed in the interest of the Parliamentary party, this is the only one that stood its ground.

A copy of the original Commission, formerly in the possession of the late D. E. Davy, has never I think been printed. It is as follows—

A Commission from the Earle of Manchester.

"Whereas by an ordinance of the Lords and Comons assembled in Parliamt bearinge date the 28th day of August last, it is amongst other thinges ordained y^t all Crucifixes, Crosses & all Images of any one or more psons of the Trinity, or of the Virgin Marye, & all other Images & pictures of Saints & superstitious inscriptions in or upon all & every y^r s^t Churches or Cappeles or other place of publike prayer, Churchyards or other places to any y^r s^t Churches or Chapells, or other place of publike praier belonginge, or in any other open place shalbe before November last be taken away & defaced, as by the s^d Ordinance more at large appeareth. And whereas many such Crosses, Crucifixes

other superstitious images and pictures are still continued within y^e Associated Counties in manifest contempt of the s^d Ordinance, these are therefore to will and require you forthwith to make your repaier to the seueral associated Countie, & put the s^d Ordinance in execution in euery particular, hereby requiring all Mayors, Sheriffs, Bayliffs Constables, head boroughs & all other his Ma^{ties} Officers & lovsinge subjects to be ayding & assisting unto you, whereof they may not fail at their perill. Given under my hand & seale this 19th of December 1643."

(Signed) Manchester

"To Willm Dowsing Gen.
& to such as hee shall appoint."

'From a copy in my possession, nearly of the above date

D. E. Davy.'

The destruction wrought by Dowsing in Suffolk, was by no means the only task of the kind which he performed. In the same year (1643) he visited the county of Cambridge, also the University, where he entered and defaced the College chapels, demanding of each the sum of forty shillings for so doing. This abominable tryanny is set forth in a very rare and remarkable work, entitled "*Querela Cantabrigiensis; or, a Remonstrance, by way of Apology for the banished members of the late flourishing University of Cambridge. By some of the said sufferers*" (Oxford, 1646) in these words:—

"And one who calls himself *John Dowsing* (a mistake for *William Dowsing*), and by vertue of a pretended Commission goes about the Country like a Bedlam breaking glasse windowes, having battered and beaten downe all our painted glasse, not only in our Chapples, but (contrary to order) in our publique Schooles, Colledge Halls, Libraries, and Chambers, mistaking perhaps the liberall Arts for Saints (which they intend in time to pul down too) and having (against an Order) defaced and digged up the floors of our Chapples, many of which had lien so for two or three hundred yeares together, not regarding the dust of our founders and predecessors, who likely were buried there; compelled us by armed Souldiers to pay forty shillings a Colledge for not mending what he had spoyled and defaced, or forthwith to go to Prison: We shall need to use no more instances than these two, to shew that neither place, person nor thing, hath any reverence or respect amongst them."

In Master's "*History of the College of Corpus Christi, with Continuations by J. Lamb, D.D.*" (1831) p. 47, is a further account of Dowsing's work in Cambridge. An