

LIKE ALL GOOD IDEAS, IT GREW . . .

"Richard Gough and the History of Myddle" was the title of an interesting project arranged by the Tutor Organiser for North East Shropshire, Mr. Colin Taylor, on behalf of Salop Education Committee.

Every week a group of people specially interested in Gough's work, or in the village itself, met to study Myddle in its his-

torical aspect, basing their discussions chiefly on the history. That was the original idea behind the project but like all good ideas it spread itself towards wider horizons.

The group hopes to publish a new edition of the "Antiquities and Memoirs of Myddle" in an attractive and more readable form, as the present and only available edition published in

1875, though invaluable to students, lacks appeal for the ordinary reader.

Members of this group live in Myddle, with the exception of Mr. F. Wycherley, of Grinshill, who has always been very interested in the work, Mr. D. Foxall, of Shrewsbury who has family connections with the village, and Mrs. V. Bamfield who has studied the history for many

years and who is the group leader.

From the beginning it was, says Mrs. Bamfield, a most exciting and rewarding project, and many half forgotten incidents of interest have been revived. The group is to display its activities and the resulting findings — including a new discovery of importance — at this year's West Midland Show.

FOUND — AFTER HALF A CENTURY

A rare and valuable manuscript vanishes. It remains lost in spite of all efforts and inquiries for 50 years. Then, an unknown benefactor writes, out of the blue to say she has it and feels it should return to its native county.

Sounds like a plot for a pre-space-age treasure seeker story. But it isn't. It happened in Shropshire not many months ago. Truth is stranger — and all that.

The manuscript in question was "Antiquities and Memoirs of Myddle" by Richard Gough.

It was known to be in the county of Shropshire in 1915, when it was in the possession of the Bickerton family. They had acquired it by inheritance — Richard Gough's sons and grandson all died, his

daughter Anne married John Palin of Baschurch, and their daughter married Samuel Bickerton, of Lee Brockhurst.

There are Bickertons living in Shropshire still, but any who could be contacted were not able to claim any relation to the Goughs.

Many people who know and love Gough's great work were convinced that the original had not been destroyed, only mislaid, and it was tantalising to think that, tucked away in some old box was the book written in Richard's own hand.

Then during the spring of 1965, Salop County Council received a letter from a Mrs. Bickerton in Hertfordshire. She was moving house, and felt that the old book in her possession belonging to her husband's family should return to the county to which it belonged. After due investigation to establish its authenticity, the book was bought with a grant from the Walker Trust.

Court hand

It is lodged in the County Archives Office, and is available for anyone to look at on request.

On the outside it is nothing much to look at, measuring 12ins. x 8ins. and bound in cardboard covered in marbled paper of a late date that has faded to an almost uniform grey.

Inside there are more than a hundred pages of Gough's good decorative court hand, the kind much used for engrossing deeds at that period. It is clearly mid 17th. century, which is the period in his childhood when Richard



Librarian Miss Gillian Kinsey with the precious book.

Gough would have learned to write. The use and style of the many abbreviations make it a little difficult for the uninitiated to read.

The paper is thick, of good quality and in excellent condition, a proof that Richard made his ink well and of fine ingredients. The recipe books of the period are full of ways of making ink, and it is clear that Richard did not fall into the trap of adding soot or any other blackening agent, which would have rotted the paper long before now. As it is, every page is complete and undamaged.

Richard enjoyed drawing as well as writing, and though he showed no particular skill for this, there are some attractive borders and margins decorated in "doodle" patterns, and a frontispiece which obviously gave him much enjoyment as did another page later on in the book which contains a primitive profile portrait very possibly of himself.

There is a charming family tree of seven generations, each name enclosed in a circle that looks as if it must have been drawn round a penny, and culminating in an eighth name standing proudly on its own. This is the Richard

Gough by the side of which the grandfather has proudly written "my grandson" and with whose death in 1737 the male line of the family was to become extinct.

Richard the elder worked extremely hard at his book, though it is not, unfortunately, known how long it actually took him. He did his own indexing, which differs very slightly from the printed version.

The book is inscribed on the fly-leaf Richard Bickerton, Newton on the Hill Parish of Myddle in the County of Salop 1802. It may have been this owner who had to have the book rebound.

Mrs. Bickerton also sent another book to one of the admirers of her husband's ancestor. This is a small charming volume bound in calf and decorated with a rose surmounted by a crown and the letters M.V. It contains a record of the Gough charities kept more or less consistently from 1669 to 1904.

Veronica Bamfield



A primitive profile portrait, possibly of Gough himself.

into the past

little son with the "green ribbons at the waist of his coat."

Gough, the "respectable freeholder" who wrote a priceless treasure

Richard Gough was a Salopian who, in 1700, wrote the book which is one of the county's greatest treasures.

The author is described in a biographical note of 1807 as being "a respectable freeholder living in occupation of his own property — and possessed of endowments of a very different description from those we generally meet with in that line of life."

This condescension possibly refers to the fact that for many years Richard was a servant in a gentleman's household. Half a century later another writer described him as "a man of some genius who must have received a good classical education."

We know nothing more about the author except what he tells us through the descriptions of his forbears, his own families and himself in his work "The Antiquities and Memoirs of Myddle."

The book has been published twice; privately in 1834, in an edition that was known to be incomplete, and again in 1875 when the editor had access to the original manuscript.

Richard was born in 1634 and his long life took him through five reigns and the Protectorate to his death in 1723 three years before that of George I.

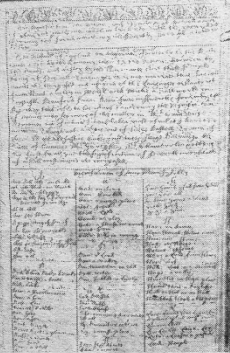
Vivid

His book known locally and affectionately as "Gough's History of Myddle" is a splendidly lively work carried out to an original plan. He made a plan of his parish church pew by pew and then wrote the stories of the families entitled to worship from them.

He was blessed with acute powers of observation, an absolutely photographic memory and a tolerant understanding of humanity.

In the thousands of stories, sad, gay and often extremely scandalous there is never a word of malice.

The turbulence of Civil War, the iron-grey dreariness of the



A page in Gough's own decorative court hand.

A peep into the past

Commonwealth and the rejoicing when the King came to his own again seem only to heighten his affectionate sympathy with his fellow creatures.

Nothing escaped the vivid touch of his quill. As a boy he remembers the Rector as a man "naturally addicted to passion" but "of a discerning spirit to discover the nature and disposition of persons" though the parish clerk comes under justifiable criticism as "he can read but little, sing but one tune of the psalms and can scarce write his name or read any written hand."

Young Richard witnessed a skirmish between the Parliament party and the King's men in his predominantly Royalist village, and remembered as an old man a strange character who sojourned with the Rector "having evidently been dispossessed of his benefice" and who "always wore even while preaching a dagger at his girdle underneath this upper garment."

"Lovingly"

He nearly always speaks tolerantly of the young, even of the three naughty girls who made a plot to poison their husbands. Only one succeeded and she took fright and ran away but was "arrested upon a holiday, dancing on the top of a hill in a company of young people."

A relative of his own married her husband when they were "both so young they could not make passing thirty years between them — they live lovingly together and have many children."

Richard himself was happily married with seven children two of whom died in infancy. Then came the sad day when "my dear wife died at Shrewsbury where she went to take physic" and he mourns her with a touching little



A primitive profile portrait, possibly of Gough himself.

Walker Trust

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Richard's aunt who "was so extreme fat . . ."

little son with the "green ribbons at the waist of his coat."

The exploits of most of the characters are local and do not take them much further afield than Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth, or Ludlow, though there is one splendid swashbuckler imprisoned by the Turks in Constantinople who returned alive to ride round the markets and fairs singing ballads of his own making about his adventures.

The Wycherleys supplied a certain worldly sophistication lacking in other families. One was a playwright with a noble patron in London, one made an exceedingly sharp property deal, and another died for love.

"Extreme fat"

Great names decorate the pages. There is Prince Rupert whose headquarters were in the Holloway Hills not far away, and the dreaded Judge Jefferies who owned property nearby. County names like Corbet, Kinaston, Onslow, Clive and Hill, as well as the names of respectable householders whose families have lived in the neighbourhood before Gough was born and who live there still.

My favourite character of all is Richard's own aunt Katharine who "was so extreme fat that she could not go straight through some of the inward doors of the house but did turn her body sideways, and yet she could go upstairs and down again as nimble and tread as light as a girl of 20 or 30 years of age. This perhaps to some may seem idle to think of, but indeed I thought it a very strange thing."

In that last sentence lies Richard's secret. For him nothing is too idle to think of and the whole of life was a very strange thing.

epitaph. "Too good to live with me, and I not good enough with her to lie."

Perhaps it was his content with his own lot which made him so compassionate for the vagrant poor who presented such a problem to every parish in those days. There is a haunting story of a luckless young woman who wandered from place to place with a young baby wrapped in a "piece of green say apron" and accompanied by a "little boy of two or three years old in a whiteish coat with ribbons about the waist of the coat."

She left the baby in the dark of the night on the Rectory doorstep, and Richard himself was concerned in tracing her and her