

Huw M. Jones, *The Illustrations for Garter Bigland's 'Historical Collections of Gloucestershire'* (Bisley, The Shermershill Press, 2011). xi + 100 pp., 19 illus. Hardback, £ 35.00 [ISBN: 9780955384141]

This was the last publication which the author saw through the press in his lifetime and exemplifies his qualities as a local historian, while reminding us of the loss suffered by the Society from his death in 2012. It describes how the illustrations for the *Historical Collections* were commissioned and produced. It is of especial interest to this Society because many of them were published in volumes 2, 3, 5 and 8 of the Gloucestershire Record Series, the Society's own edition of the *Collections*.

Because of its complicated publication history no two sets of the *Collections* are identical. Jones took a special interest in them; at the time of his death his magnificent library at Shermershill contained four sets. He also studied and collated copies held at the Society's library and in Gloucestershire Archives. However he would not have been able to write the book under review had he not acquired in 2010 three volumes of original prints. These were compiled by the Nichols family who tried unsuccessfully to continue publication of the *Collections* after Richard Bigland had had to stop due to his deteriorating financial situation, which culminated in bankruptcy, forcing the sale of his assets in 1797 and all the materials of his father's work: published and unpublished texts, prints and engraving plates. The present writer first saw these three volumes some 25 years ago when they were in a private collection in Cheltenham. Efforts to broker their purchase for the Gloucestershire Collection failed and they eventually came up for auction on the death of the owner's heir. By buying them Jones prevented their likely dismemberment. Had they been bought by a dealer, the most attractive items would probably have been stripped from the volumes, framed and sold separately, and the remainder (probably including the prints for the *Collections*) destroyed. The loss to scholarship would have been irremediable. These three volumes are now in the Society's Library.

The *Collections* were not published in the lifetime of the compiler, Ralph Bigland, Garter King of Arms, who died in 1784. His son Richard took on the task, adding up-to-date data for some of the parishes. Publication proceeded in parts, known as Numbers, each containing a few parishes issued in alphabetical order in a wrapper which also contained the prints for those parishes. When enough Numbers had appeared they were re-issued as a volume with a title page. By careful comparison of the surviving correspondence and wrappers Jones has disentangled the complex publication history of the first portion of the *Collections*, up to the point at which Richard Bigland had to suspend work on the project; the last parish issued (Newent) would have been part way through the second volume. The chronology of these issues is conveniently summarized in one of six appendices. Jones then discusses the unavailing attempts of the Nichols family to continue with publication, brought to a dramatic close by the disastrous fire at their printing house in 1808. Some ten years later the project was revived, but again without practical result, and by about 1837 the materials had found their way into the vast library of Sir Thomas Phillipps, at which point Jones's narrative ceases.

Some of this information was already available but the main thrust of the volume is yet to come, being a thoughtful discussion of the illustrations. Jones lists the artists and engravers and where possible attributes each print to its originators. Many of these plates exist in more than one state and the variants are noted. Possible reasons for their existence or for the choice of plates to publish are also considered. The narrative section of the text is

complemented by appendices describing the published and surviving unpublished plates and variants. If an attentive reader notices rare slips in printing, such as '1870' where 1770 is intended, that reader should reflect that the book went to press during a brief remission in what turned out to be the author's last illness.

This will remain the definitive study of this topic unless further sources come to light (such as the grangerized seven volume set of Bigland compiled by William Heane of Ruardean, not heard of since it was sold at Sotheby's in 1900). It is a meticulous piece of bibliographical research and a fitting memorial to the author's love of its subject.

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