

THE TRUSSELL MANUSCRIPTS

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WHEN I came to Winchester nearly thirty years ago, like many others before me, I was so charmed with the ancient city that I determined to find out all I could about its past history. It was not long before I discovered that many writers acknowledged their indebtedness to the Trussell MSS., but no one knew where these writings were¹.

But there was certain information available concerning John Trussell, the author of these works. He was born about 1580, the son of Henry Trussell and his wife, Sarah (*née* Restwoold), of Billingsley in Warwickshire, though the family originally came from Northamptonshire. Of his early years very little has yet come to light; he is described in Wood's *Athenae Oxoniensis* as "sometime a Winchester scholar", but the Winchester College records do not show him as a scholar in the strict sense, though he may have been, in the ordinary sense of the word, a scholar there, as a Commoner. It is recorded that John's father, Henry, was in 1598 appointed to be Steward of the Winchester, College manor of Tilley, in Herefordshire. The pedigrees given in the Harleian Society's *Visitation of Hampshire*, 1634, and in Berry's *Hampshire Genealogies*, suggest that John Trussell had a younger brother, William, who became a scholar of Winchester by election in 1596 and afterwards graduated at New College, Oxford. He subsequently became second master at Winchester, Rector of Weeke, and a Fellow of the College in 1642. According to F. J. Baigent he lies buried in the College cloisters. Thus it is seen that John had family connections with the College, though there is some doubt as to whether he actually received his education there.

The first mention of John Trussell's name in the municipal records occurs in an account of the proceedings of the Burghmote, which, meeting on September 15th, 1606, elected him a freeman of the city. From that time he took an active part in municipal affairs for a period of forty years. He practised in the city as an attorney and held the post of Steward to the Bishop of Winchester. For the year 1609-10 he was auditor to the "twenty-four", that is, the select body of freemen on whom the Mayor occasionally called for advice. In 1612 and also in the two succeeding years he was proposed for the office of High Bailiff, but he was unsuccessful. In 1615 and 1616, however, he managed to secure election. Later he became an alderman, and was elected Mayor in 1624 and again in 1633.

During the early Stuart period, Trussell's name appears frequently in ledger books, account rolls and other records, and considerable light is thereby thrown on his professional activities. He acts as auditor, undertakes business in London on behalf of the Mayor and Commonalty, pleads in the Sessions Court, arranges leases of property, and so on. Prior to 1664, attorneys were allowed to plead at the Sessions, and Trussell had a large practice there and also in connection with the City Court. The following extract from the Sessional records shows that at least on one occasion his relations with the Justices were not at all harmonious.

Oct. 2, 1632. "an order against John Trussell, gent. forasmuch as John Trussell gent. hath latelie offered divers affronts and abuses to his Majestys Justices of the Peace of this Countie, as well here in Courte sitting on the Bench as also to many of them in private, since the last Quarter Sessions holden for the Countie, by very unseemlie speeches and uncivill behaviour towards them as they themselves have here now affirmed, and in particular for proving some of the said abuses, two of the said Justices, Thomas South Esq. and John Button, Esq., here in Court being sworne and upon there oathes severally testified as follows—that is to say, the said Mr. South sayeth the said John Trussell, having been in the Court at the last Sessions, used some unfitting speeches to one that then came to give evidence. Being there reprov'd for it by Mr. South, he, the said John, in a voice rude and unseemlie manner, threatened the witness that he would hear of it elsewhere. Mr. Button hereafter coming to Winchester to Trussells house, where the Judges then lodged, the said John spoke these words—You, Mr. Button, should have done well to have spoken the truth and not to have testified an untruth. For these unbecoming speeches, his ill carriage, and abuses, and affront of Justice, the Courte doth order and think fit that he, John, shall be bound to appear at the next Quarter Sessions, and in the meantime be of good behaviour. In the meantime, he, the said John, shall be suspended and barred of his practice in pleading as an attorney in this Courte, until further order be taken."

There are no further entries relating to this matter, and it may be surmised that the affair was settled amicably out of court.

John Trussell married Elizabeth (*née* Collis), the widow of Gratian Patten, by whom he had three daughters, Elizabeth, Anne and Mary. In 1616 he renewed the lease of his house at the east end of the Pentice in Winchester, where he was living. According to the register of the Church of St. Maurice, he was married a second time in 1634, while he was Mayor for the second time, taking to wife Mrs. Margaret Luke, who survived him and was buried in St. Maurice's Church on July 19th, 1677.

In addition to his professional and municipal duties, Trussell devoted much time to historical research and writing. He continued an old manuscript belonging to the Bishops of Winchester, written in the form of a history of the bishops of the diocese and of the bishopric, bringing it down to the time of Bishop Curle who lost his bishopric in 1645 when Oliver Cromwell took the city. This manuscript has apparently been lost.

In 1636 he published "*A continuation of the Collection of the History of England, beginning where Samuel Daniel ended with the reign of Edward the Third, and ending where Viscount Saint Albanes began . . . being a compleat history of the beginning and end of the dissension betwixt the two houses of Yorke and Lancaster ; with the matches and issue of all the Kings, Princes, Dukes, Marquisses, Earles and Viscounts of this Nation, deceased during those times.*" This book is stated to be a very considerable production and much superior to many works subsequently written on the period. In fullness and accuracy of information it is claimed to be, at any rate, comparable with Bacon's "Henry VII". In this work Trussell does not quote his authorities, but he professes to have examined not all, but the most and best that have written of these times. Differing from the chroniclers, he eschews "matters of ceremony" like coronations, pageants and "superfluous exuberances" such as "great inundations, strange monsters" and the like.

Trussell next devoted himself to the history of Winchester, and in 1642 he completed his "Touchstone of Tradition, whereby the certaintie of occurrences in this kingdom and elsewhere, before characters or letters were invented, is found out and tryed by means wherof they are faythfully deduced to these tymes, the originall of buildinge of cities, the tymes of the coronations of Kings of England their reignes, death and issues, with the epitomy of the forrest law, divided into four books, etc."

The opinion has been expressed that this work was too voluminous and too incomplete to be published. The manuscript passed through many hands until it became part of Lord Mostyn's library at Mostyn Hall, Flintshire. A few years ago the present Lord Mostyn was approached, and he was prepared to lend this manuscript to the City, but unfortunately he could not, at that time, find it. After further correspondence it was found that it had been sold by the Mostyn family at Sotheby's, London, in 1920, to a person named Lloyd. Further enquiries failed to locate it, but a letter sent to the *Sunday Times* brought a reply from a Mr. James Osborn of Yale University, who was then in Cyprus. He thought that he had the manuscript in his collection, but upon examination it was found that his manuscript, though written by Trussell, was entitled "A series of such Benefactors named from whome what

now this Citty hath first fame". This is one of the manuscripts now shown in the Exhibition^a.

It is stated in Hearne's *Collections* (Vol. 1 ; Oxford History Society, 1884) that Trussell afterwards wrote a preamble to the *Touchstone of Tradition* entitled "The Origin of Cytities". There is some doubt concerning this statement, since there seems to be convincing evidence that the "Origin of Cytities" manuscript, now in the possession of the City, is not a preamble but a copy of the first book of the *Touchstone of Tradition*, which, as already quoted in its full title, is divided into four books.

This concludes my general review of John Trussell's writings which, as you have just heard, consist of :—

1. A MS. history of the bishops up to 1645—now missing.
2. A history of the Wars of the Roses—published.
3. A MS. history of Winchester, entitled the *Touchstone of Tradition*, in four books, which is now being sought, and of which we have a copy of Book I, entitled the "Origin of Cities".
4. A MS. dealing with the Benefactors to the City, and other matters, lent by Mr. Osborn of Yale.

He himself was so infirm by 1646 that he was declared exempt from holding the office of Mayor again. His end came in 1648, the city records showing that the lease of his house was transferred to his widow in September of that year.

And now for a closer examination of the "Origin of Cities". The most detailed and interesting history of the city of Winchester is, no doubt, that written by the Right Reverend John Milner, Roman Bishop of Castabala, under the title *The History and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester*, and published in 1798 at Winchester, where the author had the pastoral charge of the Catholic congregation from 1779 to 1803. In the preface to this work, Dr. Milner says that he has had "through the favour of John Duthy Esq., the use of the Trussell MSS., written in the reign of James I, which amongst a chaos of indigested and erroneous matter, contain many useful points of intelligence". Many footnotes throughout his *History* acknowledge Milner's indebtedness to Trussell, and these often contain corrections and criticisms which show that he carefully examined his sources of information. This is in direct contrast, however, to the *History of Winchester*, published in 1773, generally known as "The Anonymous History", in which the author blindly follows Trussell without any correction or criticism, or even a suggestion that the latter may have erred unwittingly or otherwise.

There is a reference to the work of Trussell in the *Archaeological Journal* for 1860, where E. Smirke writes, "some years ago an opportunity was afforded me by a friend of reading the manuscript

history of Winchester by Trussell. It was a loose and rubbishy work, of little value. The incompetency of the author to deal with matters of historical research is patent”.

The next reference to Trussell's writings is found in the *Appendix* of the *Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Part 1, of 1874*, where one reads that in Lord Mostyn's collection there is “John Trussell's touchstone of tradition”, with the full title as already quoted. The entry here goes on to say that the first book, entitled “the origen of cityes”, is presented to the view of John, Marquis of Winchester.

In 1937, that is, eighteen years ago, Miss Annie Johnson, a well-known Winchester lady, bequeathed to the Public Library a collection of books, formerly the property of her father and her brother, dealing mainly with the City of Winchester and the County of Hampshire. Amongst them was a manuscript volume entitled “The origen of Cytities”, and “offred to the viewe of the no lesse illustrious then everye way trewlie noble John Lord Marquess of Winchester”. How this manuscript came into the possession of the Johnson family there is no evidence to show. The fact, however, that its title and dedication are identical with those of the first book of the *Touchstone of Tradition*, formerly in the Mostyn collection, raises several interesting questions.

Is this manuscript the preamble mentioned in Hearné's *Collections* ?

Is it the original first book of the *Touchstone of Tradition*, which has somehow become detached from the other three books ?

Or is it a copy of that first book ?

Here is the manuscript in question. It consists of 119 paper sheets stitched together in the form of a book, and as a cover, pasted to it, there is a parchment deed dated 1663. At a much later date, the whole has been bound in leather-covered boards. The paper, on account of age, is very brittle and easily disintegrates, and in a few cases towards the end of the book, the pages have perished at the edges to such a degree that certain words are missing.

One is inclined to the view that this manuscript is a copy of the original first book of the *Touchstone of Tradition*, for on the flyleaf there appears the following note in Trussell's handwriting : “To the right worshipful Sir John Oglander, Knight, my mutch honored ffriend—Right Noble Sir, My brother acquaynted mee with your worships desire, and I accordingly have sent the Cobby of the first parte of my Collection, and wish the reeding may more please you then wrighting doth mee att this tyme being afflicted with the podagrian infirmitye from the torture wherof to deliver and keep your worship is the prayer of your worships reall observant, John Trussell.”

Trussell divided this work, "the Origin of Cytities", into three books.

In Book I he attempted to trace the history of the building of cities, and this took him into the dim and distant past when, as he says, men lived in holes and caves. He starts by saying, "The kingly prophett David in his 127 psalme sayeth Nisi dominis custodiret civitatem, frustra vigilat qui custodit eam (unless the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain) which sufficientie may prove that Citties have been of long continuance, for that psalme was composed in the twoo and thirteth yeer of king Saule, in the yeer after the worlds Creation 1982". From this he goes on to deal with the founding of towns and the establishment of communities, giving Winchester, under the name of Caergwent, as an example. He attempts, with many arguments for and against, and by reference to some thirty ancient writers, to show that Winchester was "first rayed" in B.C. 892, "about that tyme when king Jehoram the sonne of Ahab ruled in Juda, and in that yeere when Elias was taken upp into the Clowdes, twentye one yeers after the building of the greate Temple in Jerusalem by King Solamon, etc."

He praises the site of Winchester, affirming that its name means "holy city". He writes, "the scituation of this Cittie is placed in an ayre exceedingly good, sweet, temperate and healthfull, of that clensing qualitie that fewe that come from other places to plant heer, no not one amongst forty, but att their first coming they are enter-tayned with a sharp but short fever, which so througely clenseth them from all peccant humours, that after their full recoverye, their health for the most parte uninterrupted hathe no need to challengege any healpe from Aesculapius or his schollers. I affirme yt bowldly and trewly that experience hathe and dothe approve yt that the puritie of the ayre their is sutch, that nether Physitian, Apothocarye or Surgeon did ever growe rytch by their practise in that place".

He concludes this portion by saying that in the time of King Stephen, the city possessed, besides the great monasteries, the Nunnery, the Priory and the Friaries, no less than thirty-five parish churches, whereof in his day—1644—only six were frequented. Of the church of St. Mary Kalender, in the High Street, he says, "for the space of ffortye yeers and upwards it hath been apparaunt to bee the highest rooft parishe church in Europe, ffor by all this tyme yt hath had no other cover but the skyes".

Book II deals with remarkable occurrences in Winchester from the time of its foundation to the death of Edward the Confessor. The author claims that King Arthur built his castle here, and he has a word or two to say about the Round Table. The chief events of the Saxon period are mentioned, and some prominence given to

the building, rebuilding and beautifying of the Cathedral in those times. Much of Drayton's poem concerning the duel at Danemark between Guy of Warwick and Colbrand the Dane is quoted. He adds, "Guy of Warwick in a single combatt in a meadowe grownd att this day called Hide meade, neer an other ground called Denmark mead, lying on the north side of the Cittie, did vanquishe the great gyaunt Colbrand : by whose name, a watch tower opposite to the place of fight in the wall of the Cittie, and where the picture of a great and a littell man cutt in stone remayneth att this day, is called Colbrands chayer".

In this section there is also given King Edgar's charter regulating the lives of the monks at the monastery, and King Canute's forest laws are also given at length. There is, in addition, an account of Trial by Ordeal.

Book III is a rather scrappy account of the relationship of the Norman and Plantagenet kings with Winchester. Much is said of the struggle between King Stephen and Matilda when a considerable part of the city was burnt to the ground. Of Matilda's escape from the Castle, which was under siege by Stephen, he says, "She for her deliverye was enforced to beguile her enemyes with the masculyne execution of a femynine invention which was by a fyne slight or counterfett showe of being dead, to bee suffred to passe unhurte and undiscovered, being shrowded in a coffyn of leade, her sowldyers (a truce obtayned) marching as yf they had attended her funerall. Shee escaped, ffrom whence I gather the adage that Terence used, mulieri ne credas ne mortuae (do not trust a woman even though dead) might be verified".

There is a copy of Henry II's charter to the city, which Trussell has misquoted in one or two places and has erroneously attributed to Henry I. There is also a copy of King John's charter, and a long argument trying to prove that Winchester was a corporate city with a mayor, before London had that honour.

Even if one agrees with the critics that as a piece of historical research the manuscript has serious defects, there can be no doubt that there is much in it that is both quaint and interesting. The aptness of his Latin quotations and his translations of them show that Trussell was no mean scholar. The reader cannot help but share his genuine regret at the decay and impoverishment of the ancient city, and his tremendous pride in its past glories. Speaking of the removal of the wool staple from the city in the reign of Edward III, he says, "since which tyme this so auintient and goodlye Cittie hath eveye day more and more declyned, Trade therein for the most being decayed, Trafficke in forrayne partes altogether denyed, Capping utterly least of, Clothing too littell used and povertie too much encreasing, so that nowe the Cittizens

may boast of their predecessors and tell what they were, But fewe yf any bragg what themselves are, but spero meliora (I hope for better things).

At times, Trussell appears far too credulous when quoting from earlier writers, though he does occasionally admit that he finds it difficult to accept their statements. While it may be admitted that he made mistakes when copying data from other documents, that he relied too readily on his memory when quoting from inscriptions and other sources, and that his intense loyalty to the city of Winchester naturally made him rather prejudiced, one may ask whether there is any reason why his declaration, on folio 99, "I love my deer mother well, but truth more", should not be taken at its face value³.

His final peroration is worthy of reproduction—"Thus farr and thus longe, alone without herlpe of guide or companion, fellowe or frend, have I travayled in this Rosemarie Thickett of Anticke history, to find out the first founders and expatiate the antiquitie of fower the most antient Citties of this kingdome, And if in the passage I have lighted uppon any Cornefeild of occurrences of former tymes that concerne this Cittie of Winchester, And therehence with Ruthe have gleaned after the reaper and leazed scattered ears sufficient to make a littell pooke, since Boaz was not offended with her, I presume your Honor can not iustlye bee displeased with mee to have taken some paynes to have endeavored to procure ether proffytt or pleasure or bothe to the honorable reeder to whose favorable censure and gentle correction I submyt these my Collections".

NOTES.

1. I consulted the late City Librarian, Mr. Pepper. He referred me to the then Town Clerk, who in turn passed me on to his Deputy, who was not at all pleased to see me or to hear about the Trussell MSS. Apparently, he had been so pestered with enquiries in the past that his patience was almost exhausted.

2. It has been lent by the owner, Mr. Osborn, who sent it by special messenger from the U.S.A. The latter was met at Southampton, a fortnight ago, by the Town Clerk to whom the MS. was handed, the messenger returning to the States by the next boat. One has not yet had the time or opportunity to examine the MS. in any great detail, but it contains, besides the long list of names of people who have made charitable bequests to the city, three letters written by Trussell to the Mayor about municipal affairs, a list of mayors from 1187 to 1656, which is probably the list from which the tablets formerly hanging in St. John's Rooms were compiled, and which the late Alderman Furlley proved to be, in many respects, erroneous, doggerel verse relating to the Mayor, Aldermen and Bailiffs of that time, a report of the Commission of Sewers—dealing with the navigation of the Itchen between Winchester and Southampton, and two long poems entitled "The complaint of the Castle of Winchester" and "Caergwent's lament" respectively. It is hoped that all these will receive further examination at an early date.

3. I wonder what John Trussell was like. What kind of a man was he ? It is a pity that no portrait of him has survived, as it has in the case of two of his contemporaries, who were also versed in the law, and who are now looking down on our proceedings. I refer to Edward Cole, Mayor in 1587, 1598 and 1612, and M.P. for the city in Elizabeth's last Parliament, and to Launcelot Thorpe, at one time Town Clerk, and later Mayor in 1615 and 1623, and who, by the way, was Edward Cole's son-in-law. The former looks somewhat like a sober Puritan, the latter has been described, from his portrait, as a Jacobean dandy.

Was Trussell like either of these ? From his writings, one gets the impression that he inclined towards the High Church party. As to his character, one feels that he was an aggressive, forthright individual, with a tendency to be short-tempered. There is no doubt that he was a great controversialist and dearly loved an argument, no matter how small the matter at issue. He was never sparing in his criticism, and although he displays a sense of humour many of his remarks are exceedingly tart. Obviously he was not a person to suffer fools gladly. I hope I am not being unkind if I suggest that he was peppery, pugnacious and pedantic.