

BURES OF ENGLAND AND BURR OF NEW ENGLAND.

By CHAUNCEY REA BURR. New York. 1926.

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This is an interesting work. The account of the De Bures family, though incomplete, is correct except in certain respects which will be presently indicated. The pedigree of the Burr family of New England, starting from a certain Richard Burre of Canfield, Essex, seems also adequately documented.

Yet after careful perusal it is impossible to resist the impression that the genealogical history of each family should have formed subjects for entirely distinct volumes. The value of the book is diminished rather than enhanced by the writer's endeavour to show, on peculiarly insufficient evidence, that these families are in some way connected.

It appears from the prefaces that the origin of his theory is to be found in a Visitation of London in 1633-35 which records a claim by one "Humphrey Burre, merchant taylor," to bear the De Bures arms—a very slender basis indeed; for, as every student knows, the decadence of the Heralds' methods during the stormy 17th century was probably greater than at any time in the College's long history.

In this instance a Herald gives as his excuse for accepting these arms the statement that Mr. Burre has a "scocheon" on which they are painted "from his auncestors out of Somersetshire." Yet we learn from the next paragraph that it was his father only who had gone to live in Somerset, his grandfather and forbears having been Essex people. (It must be remembered, however, that the American Burrs are not alleged to have any connection with Humphrey's family).

Now the name of Burr and Burre occurs centuries earlier than this date, not only in Essex records but all over England; and never, so far as the reviewer can ascertain, do its bearers make any claim to the arms of the Norman family De Bures until the latter had sunk into extreme obscurity or died out.

To do the author justice, he does not make any absolutely clear-cut claim to descent from that family, but wisely confines himself to giving what he considers "possible lines of descent" aided by such remarks as "there is good reason to think the Burrs of Hingham, Mass., are descended from the Bures of Suffolk." In the Pedigree also (Chart 5) with commendable prudence, he marks the presumed junction of the Bures and Burr family with a dotted line.

But on examination of this "possible" pedigree we are immediately confronted with serious difficulties. For the Richard Burre of Canfield, above-mentioned, is represented on Chart 5 as a descendant of Sir Andrew 2nd son (see Chart 2) of the Sir Robert de Bures who died in 1331 and whose celebrated brass lies in Acton Church.

Five generations, correctly given, intervene before we arrive at Andrew 2nd son of William Bures of Foxearth. (At about this date the family began to drop the "De.") It is this Andrew, according to Pedigree B, who is the only member of that family who could possibly be the parent of Richard Burre. And it is at this point in Pedigree B that the name Bures becomes Burr and so continues right down to the name of the compiler.

Unfortunately for his claim, if Andrew Bures was indeed the father of Richard Burre, the troublesome fact emerges at once that Richard would become, on the decease of his "father" Andrew and of his first cousin Henry Bures of Acton, a possible heir to the Acton estates of the Bures family (see Note on p. 17).

Henry of Acton died in 1528, leaving no son. His four daughters by his wife Anne Waldegrave inherited as co-heiresses almost the whole of his property.

Is it to be supposed that Richard Burre then or at any other time left the home of his family at Foxearth, four miles from Acton, and set up as a yeoman at Canfield thirty miles away? This would be one of the things not done in days when the higher gentry were still a sort of caste.

Here we may pause to consider one of those unexpected happenings which sometimes brighten the pursuit of old forgotten far-off things and make them for a moment "palpitate," as the French say, "with actuality."

Anne the 3rd daughter and co-heiress of Henry Bures of Acton married Edmund Buttes of Barrow and lived during her latter days with her daughter, Lady Bacon, at Redgrave Hall, Suffolk. She did not die till 1609 and was certainly living there when John Burre, grandson of Richard, arrived in the parish of Redgrave from Canfield, Essex.

So that if the notion of his descent from Andrew Bures has any basis of truth, the domestic situation should become very interesting. Here is John Burr, born in 1558, directly descended from Sir Robert Bures of Acton, in the role of a humble neighbour, though a 2nd cousin, of one of the ladies in actual possession of the estate he should have succeeded to.

Ought we not to be able to dig up some recognition of this relationship or find at least that the Burrs stick to the De Bures coat-of-arms? It is disappointing to have to record that nothing at all dramatic happens. The Burrs do not bear those *or any other arms whatever* and things go on quite happily till 1633, when Jonathan (son of John), a parson of puritan views, grows disgusted with the Anglo-Catholicism of King Charles and emigrates to Dorchester, Mass.

His cousin, Simon Burr, described as yeoman, of Hingham, goes with him and becomes the ancestor of the compiler of this book.

Now what can be the explanation of the facts tacitly admitted; even in this book, (1) that Richard Burr, whose parents' home was four miles from Acton and who was himself in the running for the succession to that property should not appear among the claimants and (2) that, when his grandson John became a neighbour of his cousin who did succeed to it, he should not claim or bear the arms of his father Andrew Bures or any other coat?

It is the simple one—not only to be deduced from the descents illustrating this book but strongly confirmed by the reviewer's study for many years of the De Bures pedigree—that Richard Burr was not and could not have been the son of Andrew Bures.

There is no evidence that the latter ever had a son or even a wife, and good evidence, as his name cannot be discovered in any will of the period, that he was dead even before the birth in 1502 of Henry the actual successor to the Acton estates.

There are some errors in the account of the real De Bures family which should be corrected:—

1. In Chart I the ancient mistake is repeated that Joan de Bures who married Sir Richard Waldegrave about the year 1362 was the daughter of Silvester de Bures. She was really a de Sutton and the young widow of Sir Robert de Bures.

2. On p. 8 this lady's marriage to Waldegrave is incorrectly given as occurring in 1392.

3. Again on p. 8 and Chart 2 this lady is described as the "daughter" of Sir Richard de Sutton. It is impossible that Sir Richard could be her father as they were born within ten years of each other, and no "Joan" is mentioned among his children in his I.P.M.

4. The Editor should not have allowed the insertion of "The Honorable" before the name of this and other ladies' names, even if he supposed them to be daughters of Peers. It is an addition which, as most people know, did not come into use until quite modern times.

5. It is not correct, as stated on p. 1, that Sir Robert de Bures "who died in 1331" was the "first outstanding man of his family." Its members had held high office under Henry I. and for the succeeding two centuries.

6. The Waldgraves of Bures did not, as inferred on pp. 15 and 25, remain Papists after the Reformation.

Other arguments in support of the Burr connection, such as that Bures was sometimes spelt Buer and Buers and that Burre was sometimes spelt Bur, seem to be hardly worth putting forward; nor does the reproduction of a seal, incorrectly described as an "heraldic seal," found on a legal document dated 1693, with which a certain Simon Burr of Rehoboth, Mass., is concerned, strike us as impressive. Because the seal contains a lion, probably meant for the official British lion, within a twisted ring, we are asked to take it as evidence of some connection with one of the two lions in the De Bures coat! The ring might by some slight effort of imagination be supposed to represent the twisted tail of a lion, but even then the seal would only have some prophetic significance.

The Burrs of America have evidently a very respectable pedigree of their very own. Why waste time and money on vain imaginings and in producing out of ambition for a more distinguished descent the sort of evidence here set forth?

It leaves us indeed in the lamentable position of the aunt of Mr. Hilaire Belloc's Matilda. When she

" Attempted to believe Matilda,
The effort very nearly killed her."

If the Burr treatise were the only one of its kind no one would trouble to complain, but there is a very large output of similar claims as ill-based and as unsuccessful. And we reflect, yet once more, upon the singular mental twist which can cause so many members of a community founded (with the exception of a few younger sons of English gentry) by a religious bourgeoisie, whose spiritual home is a republic based upon man's equality in birth, to become possessed with so vast a passion for grasping at any kind of connection, however vague, with the "effete aristocracy" of Europe.

Meanwhile for this worn-out institution, as for that of monarchy, the public voice of God's own country continues to raise its perennial hoot of scorn; and so, all unwitting, adds to the gaiety of nations.

BURES, SUFFOLK.