

NOTES.

JOHN WILBYE, 1574—1638.

BY SIR JOHN WOOD, BART.

This year being the tercentenary of the death of the great Madrigal composer, John Wilbye, perhaps the most perfect of all the great school of English Madrigalists of the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, the B.B.C. has taken the opportunity of broadcasting his works to the world throughout the third week of February last, and many people in East Anglia no doubt listened with great pleasure to the reproduction without realising that Wilbye was born and spent nearly all his life in this part of England. So it may be of interest to members of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology to learn a few details of his life and history, particularly as a large portion of that life was passed in this ancient Tudor Mansion of Hengrave, so full of memories of yore, in which I live.

Owing to the invaluable researches of Dr. E. H. Fellowes of Windsor we owe not only the modern printed edition of the madrigals, but also most of our information of Wilbye's life.

John Wilbye, third son of a tanner of some position at Diss in Norfolk, was born in 1574. His father was the possessor of a lute we are told, thus showing the musical tendency of the family, and in his will, proved at Norwich in 1605, bequeathed this lute to his third son John.

At the age of nineteen, probably through the influence of Elizabeth Cornwallis of Brome Hall, near Diss, who married the second Sir Thomas Kytson of Hengrave, Wilbye was appointed Household Musician in this house, and remained in that position for very many years. He had a special chamber assigned to him closely adjoining the musicians' gallery in the great hall, and a tablet in this chamber now marks the fact. An inventory taken in 1602 of the furniture in the room is still in existence here. The Kytsons were great patrons of music, and a large collection of instruments were kept in the minstrels' gallery. Wilbye remained in the service of the Kytson family until the death of Lady Kytson in 1628, and during this time his two sets of madrigals were published. The first set is dated from the Kytson's London house in the Austin Friars in 1598, and the second set, probably from Hengrave, in 1609. Doubtless many of these madrigals were first tried out in the great hall here.

After the death of his patroness Lady Kytson, when the establishment here was broken up, Wilbye moved in 1628 to Colchester, where he lived till his death in 1638 in the "great brick house" of Lady Kytson's daughter, the Countess Rivers. It is said that Lady Kytson

granted him at a favourable rental an excellent sheep farm named Sextons, near Bury St. Edmunds, and from that time he ceased to write madrigals. But there is no doubt that he began to buy land and at his death was comparatively rich, and in his will dated 10th September, 1638, from Colchester, he is styled no longer "yeoman" but "gentleman." He died unmarried.

I feel sure that in concluding this short account of the life of John Wilbye my readers will be interested to know that two concerts of Wilbye's madrigals have been performed by Madrigal Societies here, one from Norwich in 1927, and the other from Cambridge in 1932, and an additional thrill was experienced by the audience and performers alike in the thought that these madrigals were being sung in the very hall where Wilbye probably first tried them out.

JOHN WOOD.

Hengrave Hall.