

JOHN IVES PARODIED AS *CURIOSUS* IN 1771

by John Blatchly

Among the loose papers found in Thomas Martin's Suffolk Collections (S.R.O.B., E2/41/8-9) and now kept in envelopes, one for each volume, is a MS copy of an interesting extract of a note by John Ives, whose short career was admirably treated in our *Proceedings* for 1975 by Norman Scarfe. He complains that in the *Town and Country Magazine* for September 1771 'an anonymous wit has drawn my Character as an Antiquary under the name of *Curiosus*. I thank him not. John Ives'.

My friend John Blair at Queen's College, Oxford, has kindly transcribed the appropriate passage from the Bodleian copy of this now rare publication. On pp. 460-462 is a letter to the Editor, signed 'MOMUS, Great Queen-street'. The writer describes how, on holiday in Yarmouth, he 'found many extraordinary characters in the place, which gave me infinite delight. Three particular ones I cannot forbear introducing to the notice of the public'. After describing the first two of these, he goes on:

The third is the celebrated *Curiosus*, an antiquarian at twenty, who has spent the last three years in the unvaried pursuit of every appearance of age; and can tell within a month the date of a coin from the weight of its metal, or the age of a manuscript from the dust on its cover. Though intimately acquainted with the rise of Cataline's conspiracy, he forgets who is first lord of the Treasury; and tho' able to give the minutest account of the disposition of the Phalanx, he is ignorant of the commanding officer at the battle of Dettingen. Would you speak to *Curiosus*? He ushers you into a room entirely filled with scraps of antiquity and enjoys your admiration with the most heart felt satisfaction. *Moribus antiquis* is his favourite



*J. I. F. R. S. & F. A. S. 1774*

FIG. 4 — John Ives.

motto, and he is now learning to speak the language, and cultivate the manners of the thirteenth century. He is the perfect patron of ancient learning, which he looks upon to be superior to every thing. Gruter and Tom Hearne are with him the greatest men the world ever produced; and he would not part with his late acquired F.S.A. to be lord-viscount Bolton. He is now employed in counting the number of Roman bricks in the wall of Burgh-castle, to add, by way of appendix, to his elaborate treatise *On the Durable Mortar of the Ancients*; and to shew his skill in later biography, as well as in the more ancient history, he is preparing for the press, 'The Life and Adventures of his late worthy Friend'. But *Curiosus*, abstracted from his favourite pursuit and its attendant foibles, has a benevolence of heart that does him honour.

If Ives could not identify his assailant, it is improbable that we can. Nevertheless the description is worth quoting; for all its exaggeration it is not too far from the truth.