

BARGRAVE

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This is the date always given based on letters (see Cooper)

(1610?) - 1680)

DR. JOHN BARGRAVE AND HIS COLLECTION

One of the most unusual of the many treasures at Canterbury, in the care of the Dean and Chapter, is the Bargrave Collection. This small, private museum of a much-travelled seventeenth-century gentleman will have been in the Cathedral Library for three hundred years next year.

Dr. John Bargrave himself belonged very firmly to Canterbury and its immediate neighbourhood. His father, another John, came from a long line of tanners and yeomen at Willesborough, just outside Ashford, whom we can also trace at Wye, Faversham, Dover and, eventually, at Bridge and Patrixbourne a couple of miles south-east of Canterbury. This earlier John seems to have fought as a mercenary in the Dutch Wars at the end of Elizabeth's reign. He invested in the early stages of the colonisation of Virginia. One of his brothers, Captain George, commanded a ship sailing there, and another, the Reverend Thomas, left his Sussex rectory to go out as a minister to the colonists. A much younger brother, Isaac, went out to Venice as embassy chaplain and rose rapidly in the church to be Dean of Canterbury from 1625 until his death in 1643.

The older John Bargrave prospered, perhaps by some unrecorded military exploit like a lucky capture of a wealthy enemy, whom he could ransom, or a bit of quiet piracy. Or perhaps his wife, a London merchant's daughter, was something of an heiress. He built a country house at Patrixbourne and gave it the Latin name *Bifrons*, "the two-faced" or "double-fronted". Here the younger John, our collector, grew up with an older brother and three younger sisters. He went to the King's School in the close and on to Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he obtained a fellowship. In his fifties, our John returned home to Canterbury as a Six Preacher and then Canon until his death in 1683.

But John Bargrave's collection has nothing at all to do with Canterbury. It has to do with almost the whole of the known world of his day. There are specimens from America, Asia, Africa and from most parts of Europe, France, Germany, Austria and, above all, Italy, but none from Britain. Not many of the individual objects are of very great intrinsic merit: of fifteen antique figurines, four seem to be genuine, eight are fakes, while the remaining three are doubtful. Continental nobles and princes often had an ornate mountain of silver ore from the Tyrol. Bargrave brought home a sensible small pocket-sized lump. But he took the trouble to write down the story, vividly bringing to us more than three centuries later the day in November 1656 when he got the lump. As an example of his many stories, it is worth quoting in full:

"At Hall, near Insprugg in Tiroll, among the hearts of the Alps, I had the curiosity to be droven in a wheelbarrow almost 2 miles under ground, to see the labourers there in the gold and silver mines belonging to the Archduke of that country. It was horrid to go thither, and more horrid to see, but they told us the Emperor and the Empress, and all the royal house of Austria use out of curiosity to go thither. I and my companion having on canvass frocks to keep us from the wet and filth, we having a mountain of the Alps 3 or 4 mile high over our heads, and a

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1615/16 - 1618
(1642? 05?)
See Cooper

Robert

1680?
(See DNB
Cooper etc)

Jane Crouche

KS 1623-26
four sisters (?)
(See Visitation
Book)

torrent of water under us, and a bridge of boards most of the way. When we came into the vast high vaults, where hundreds and hundreds of men or Vulcans were at work, one of the overseers (a genteel person), out of courtesy, would have let us see their art by blowing up a part of the mine by gunpowder; but we durst not venture it. This stone is a piece of the ore they digg out of those mines, out of which, by the force of fire, is extracted the silver and the gould, being separated from the dross, which is there cast up and down into great hills near the places where the fornices for melting are."

This vivid tale takes us back, not only to Austria in the 1650s, but also to the prebendal lodgings in the close at Canterbury, now Linacre House of the King's School, and, as we read the words, we can almost see John Bargrave's twinkling eyes as he told and retold his visitors how he preferred not to experience an underground explosion in the mines, while this lump of ore from the actual mines was passed from hand to hand.

In this intensely personal quality, Bargrave's collection seems to be unique. It is unique too in other ways: there still survive several early lists of objects as well as Bargrave's own handwritten catalogue. Various specimens, such as little chunks of stone from the Colosseum or the Arch of Constantine at Rome, are still wrapped in the actual scraps of paper in which Bargrave wrapped and labelled them in 1647. Others still have the stands on which they stood on his shelves. Four of the bags and purses and ten of the little pill-boxes in which Bargrave packed his souvenirs still remain today. These lists, labels, stands, early containers and collectors' tales give the collection a unique completeness that cannot be matched in this country and may prove to be unmatched abroad.

John Bargrave's one wild adventure, to Africa, took place when he was fifty-two, just settled at last as a Canon of Canterbury, after fourteen years wandering and touring on the Continent as a travelling tutor. He was sent out to the piratical port of Algiers to ransom captured British seamen and merchants. He took with him £10,000 in foreign coin and came home with 162 Englishmen whom he had "bought slave by slave from each particular Turkish patron, as one buyeth horses in Smithfield." This trip also produced a number of touching mementoes. The collection still contains the portrait of the Dey of Algiers, a miserable piece of work artistically, but painted by an Italian slave-painter while Bargrave was negotiating with, and slipping extra bribes to, the Dey. A pair of long boots and three pairs of slippers represent local Algerian crafts. The ransomed slaves' gratitude is marked by a most remarkable set of North American Indian ceremonial costume, brought back probably from deep in Hudson's Bay by some early voyage of exploration. And finally the wildlife of Africa is there in the form of a dried Chameleon, which died from lack of flies on the voyage home.

Almost every object that was in Bargrave's house when he died in 1683 survives today. For three centuries they have been kept in the Cathedral Library in three small cabinets. One cabinet had belonged to the learned Meric Casaubon, an elder colleague of Bargrave's on the Chapter. Another very like it was made for Bargrave in Canterbury in

about 1670. The third must have been made for the Library soon after 1685, to house the objects from Bargrave's study-shelves. Many of the specimens are in astonishingly good condition.

But alas, the collection cannot be freely visited because of the risk of deterioration. An illustrated handlist, *The Gentle Traveller*, has been published and may be bought for £1 from the Cathedral Library. Study of the collection is under way, with the help of a generous grant from the British Academy, and a detailed account will be published. One day, we must hope, suitable premises will become available for this amazing and unique reminder of a never-quite-forgotten Canon to be displayed to the public under suitable lighting and atmospheric conditions.

DAVID STURDY.