

Introduction

The Lansdowne collection of manuscripts, now held by the British Library, includes four volumes of Journals kept by John Warburton (1661/62–1759), and an indirectly related volume of sketches. Warburton was a collector of excise, an antiquary and, from 1720, Somerset Herald at the College of Arms. His travels upon government business brought him into contact with both the landed gentry and their houses, while his antiquarian interests tempted him to study the churches, castles and ruined monasteries that lay on or near his circuit. Warburton was also aware of the growing number of counties that had already had their histories published, and of the rising demand for illustrated works on architecture and topography, and in his enthusiasm he felt that a generously conceived work on Yorkshire would repay the heavy costs of publication. His first venture was a new map of the county, eventually published in 1720–21, but his larger project failed, almost certainly because he underestimated both its magnitude and the eventual cost. In an age of appalling road conditions, the very size of Yorkshire was a great obstacle, to say nothing of its long history. One entry in the Journal reveals an admiration for Dr. Plot whose *Natural History of Staffordshire* was published in 1686, and Warburton cites the qualities he felt needful for anyone who attempted such county surveys:

“To slip such opportunities of making a Usefull Collect(ion) in Ord(e)r to the Compiling of a Chronograph(ic) discrip(tion) of the Kingdom as A Person must have who makes An actual Survey of a County he Ought to be well skilled in Heraldry In Order to the discovering and discribing the bearers and their Arms that occurs in on An Castles Churches Monuments and to be well read in English Etc. the genealogic(al) Descents and Pedigrees of Familys. He should also be very skilfull in Architecture gardening Statuary and Mekanincal Powers In Order to the right Judging and truly describing of the Beautys and deformities of all Publ(ic) Edifices Gardings Statutes Engion Works He must likewise understand Staticks Hidrastatics and have a Natural Philosophy that he may know the gravity and be the more Able to Jud(ge) of the Affections Motions and Operations of all Natural Bodys.

“He must also be very perf(ect) in Designing and drawing In perspective and a long experience in the knowledge of the famous Painters In Order to the right Judg(ment) distinguishing Original from Copies and to be able to give A true representation of such matters as merit a particular discription. He must likewise be very knowing in the true value of Books and MS. and all natural and Artificial Curiositys And last of all He must be of a have Health and Vigour and Resolution to bear up against all the Fatigue and Inconveni(ence) that must attend a Person that is every day expos’d to the unsertain Opinion of New Faces.” (f 179v)

Warburton’s limitations included an inability to draw and engrave to the necessary standards, and he chose to employ the young painter, Samuel Buck (1696–1779). He also carefully recorded lists of those gentlemen and clergy whom he felt most likely to encourage his projects, noting their names in accordance with the villages or towns in which they lived. In York itself the chief inhabitants were grouped by streets, together with a note as to their place in the social