

## A VICTORIAN SCHOLAR – THE REV. EDWARD BOUCHER JAMES

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When George Brannon founded and became the first editor of the Isle of Wight County Press in 1884, he determined that the new Journal should not only be a newspaper recording local events, but also be a vehicle to renew an interest in the Island's rich history.

To this event, he turned to the erudite Vicar of Carisbrooke and Rector of Northwood, Edward Boucher James. From the near beginning of the new Journal until his death in 1892, James contributed articles at frequent intervals on both Island history and archaeology.

After his death, his widow Rachel collected the Letters, sorted them into chronological order as far as subject was concerned, and produced them in a two-volume book, published by Henry Froude in 1896. The book was entitled "Letters Archaeological and Historical relating to the Isle of Wight" and includes a brief biographical preface by his brother-in-law, Sir Arthur Charles (Fig.1).

There are 359 letters in all, reproduced from the Isle of Wight County Press, but there is an overall total of 360 as a letter dated 1879 relating to Dr Thomas Arnold was added to the collection. The Book has 10 sections in all.

Section 1 entitled "First Four Centuries" contains 5 Letters.

Section 2 entitled "Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Centuries" contains 14 Letters.

Section 3 entitled "Ninth and Tenth Centuries" has 4 Letters.

Section 4 entitled "Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries" has 15 Letters.

Section 5 entitled "Thirteenth Century" has 23 Letters.

Section 6 entitled "Fourteenth Century" has 13 Letters.

Section 7 entitled "Fifteenth Century" has 19 Letters.

Section 8 entitled "Sixteenth Century" has 39 Letters.

Section 9 entitled "Seventeenth Century" has 84 Letters.

Section 10 entitled "Eighteenth Century" has 44 Letters, but in fact strays well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well – up to about 1846.

James – the most modest of men – sets out his objects in writing the articles.

*"I am but a pioneer. I am neither an antiquary nor archaeologist nor am I learned in genealogy; still less can I claim the honoured title of an historian. I have neither the skill nor the leisure to decipher the handwriting of ancient documents and I have no Bodleian or College Library such as I could consult when at Oxford....All I can say is that my heart has been in what I have written. Though an "overner" I have lived so many years on the Island that I have learned to love the land of my adoption and wished to share my attachment to it and its inhabitants by pointing out to them that their Island has a history full of deep and varied interest...my private correspondence has made me aware that many of our Island community take a most intelligent interest in the annals of the Isle of Wight."*

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James was born in Carlisle in 1819. His father was Edward James (1786-1869), an Army Officer attached to the East India Company and his mother was Elizabeth James (1797-1866). There is little reference to his father, and it may have been that he was largely absent in India during James' early life. James had at least 2 siblings, a brother, Walter, who attended his funeral and a sister Marion Elizabeth James (1830-1893) who was a minor literary figure writing poetry and five novels. They are now forgotten, but one appeared in Charles Dickens' magazine "Household Words" in 1856. Elizabeth James was a daughter, by a third marriage, of the formidable clergyman Jonathan Boucher (1738-1801). Boucher held livings in Virginia and was a close friend of George Washington and tutor to his stepson. A fervent loyalist, he was forced to leave Virginia during the War of American Independence and re-locate in England where he became Vicar of Epsom in Surrey. He contributed much to the history of his native Cumberland and compiled a "Glossary of Provincial and Obscure Words" which eventually formed part of Webster's Dictionary. He also wrote a History of the American Revolution in 1797 which he dedicated to George Washington. Although their friendship had been interrupted by the War, it resumed again in later life.

James had many famous relatives in his maternal family. His uncle was Barton Bourcher (1792-1864) who changed his family name spelling and wrote several sermons and pamphlets. Another uncle (married to a half-aunt) was Edward Hawke Locker (1777-1849) a talented water colourist. Cousins included Frederick

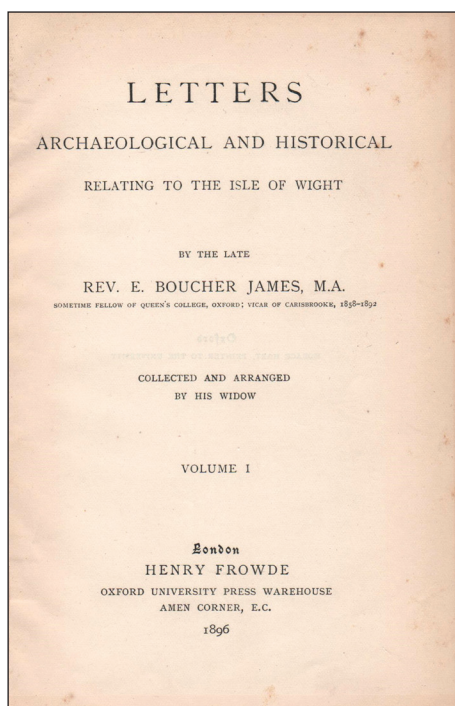


Fig.1: The collected letters of Edward Boucher James

Locker-Lampson (1821-1891), a minor literary figure, and James Boucher (1826-1906), a prominent Scottish architect. Twentieth-century relatives included Godfrey Lampson Tennyson Locker-Lampson (1875-1946) Under Secretary of Home Affairs 1923-1924 and 1925 and Under-Secretary for Foreign affairs 1925-1929 and a noted historian, and his brother Colonel Oliver Locker-Lampson who started the Blue Shirt Movement against Communism but then became a dedicated anti-fascist, arranging the arrival of Einstein into Britain in 1933.

There is a difference in records as to which school in Rutland James originally attended. The Times obituary states that it was Uppingham School, whereas the biographical account by Sir Arthur Charles states that it was the sister foundation of Oakham School. He appears to have had as a life-long friend there the famous historian Edward Freeman (1823-1892). There is some suggestion that the school was lax in its attitude to religion and to morals but possibly because of lack of family funds, he was withdrawn from the school and sent to reside and be educated privately by the Rector of Seagrave in Leicestershire, the Rev. Robert Gutch (1771-1861), another uncle married to a half-aunt.

James won a scholarship to Queens College Oxford where for the rest of this life he retained an affectionate connection – the College being known for its associations with the North Country. James described Queens as

*"my nursing mother...under whose sheltering care I spent twenty years of my life."*

In 1842 he obtained a second-class degree in Literae Humaniores, a 4-year degree based on Latin and Ancient Greek language and history and philosophy. He started a Debating Society at the College and then joined the Oxford Union. On completing his studies, James then acted as a private tutor and accompanied his pupil to Weimar. He spent some time travelling on the Continent and became proficient in French and German.

In 1849, James was appointed a Fellow and Tutor in Classics at Queens College, having been ordained as a Deacon of the Church of England in 1848. He was ordained as a Priest in 1853. He became Dean and Bursar of his College and finally in 1856/1857, he was Senior Proctor. The Rule applied that Fellows could not marry (not abolished until 1877). James had a realistic view of his position. In one of his Letters (28/8/1886) he states

*"The scholarly clerical fellows of Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge who it seems probable in a few more years will be an extinct type of the English clergyman"*.

Another academic at Queens said of James

*"I never knew a more companionable man. He was perfectly open and candid."*

During his period at Queens, James made several contributions in the form of articles on the Byzantine Empire to the "Dictionary of Roman and Greek Geography" (1854), edited by Sir William Smith. Firm friendships were established in this period with Professor Henry Morley (1822-1894) who retired to live in Carisbrooke (his wife having originated from

Newport), Frederick Dennison Maurice (1805-1872) and Arthur Stanley (1823-1881) Dean of Westminster.

In 1858, this most unworldly academic left Queens College to become Vicar of Carisbrooke and Rector of Northwood. It was in fact his second break from academia, there having been a brief Curacy at Blackheath in London in 1853. The reason was that James had met Rachel Charles (1833-1898) his future wife and he could not retain his Fellowship as a married man. Rachel was the daughter of a London soap manufacturer. Through his marriage, James acquired two more famous relatives – Sir Arthur Charles (1839-1921) one of her brothers and Sir Ernest Bruce Charles (1871-1950) her nephew – both High Court Judges.

They were married in 1861. It was a happy marriage, although producing no children. Rachel became a dutiful clergyman's wife, running Sunday schools and girls' schools and contributing much to the music of the church. After James' death she lived in Shanklin until her own death.

Carisbrooke with Northwood was the most prominent Church living in the gift of Queens College Oxford. In the Middle Ages, the Parish of Carisbrooke stretched from Brighstone and Shorwell through to Cowes and included not only Carisbrooke but Newport as well. When James arrived in 1858, the Parish of Newport had split from Carisbrooke the year before. James' still extensive Parish ran from Bowcombe through to Northwood and included Parkhurst, Hunnyhill, Carisbrooke and Gunville.

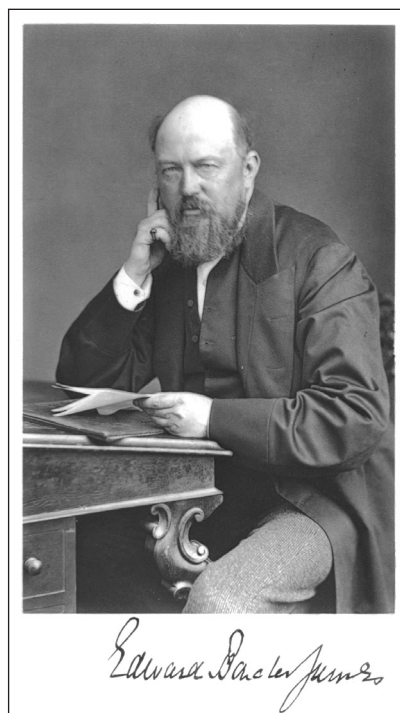


Fig. 2: Edward Boucher James

The Conventional District of St John's Carisbrooke (as it was then known) had been autonomous since 1837, but couples living in the District still had the right to be married in St Mary's Church.

Since 1645, all Vicars of Carisbrooke resided at Northwood Rectory. (The Parishes remained joined until 1924). James started off his ministry at Northwood but determined that once again the Vicar should live in Carisbrooke. He ordered the construction of a new Vicarage in Carisbrooke in 1859. James had at all times

in his ministry the assistance of two Curates – one at St Mary's and the other in charge of Northwood.

Although most at home in his study, James proved to be a devoted Parish Priest during his 34-year ministry at Carisbrooke and Northwood. He was not a party man at all. He was not attracted to either Evangelicalism or the Oxford Movement – indeed he blamed the latter for being the cause of the growth of atheism. He could write glowing accounts of the work of the evangelical clergyman, the Rev. Legh Richmond on the one hand and the “most generous of ultramontanes” in the words of Tennyson on W. G. Ward, a leader of the Oxford Movement on the other.

He was essentially a Broad Church man – akin to his mentor F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley. A tribute on his death stated that James was

*“an erudite scholar, a faithful pastor, a courteous liberal-minded catholic-souled Christian gentleman. Mr Boucher James is the model of an English clergyman”.*

The late 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw much bitterness in relationships between Anglicans and Nonconformists and between Anglicans and Catholics. James was on personal friendly terms with the Roman Catholic clergy ministering to the convents in his Parish. He also had a close relationship with Nonconformists. When the great Congregational missionary, Robert Moffatt, visited Newport, James sat on the platform with him and gave one of the speeches in his honour.

James also knew his Parishioners. He noted that old residents and children still called Carisbrooke by its medieval name – “Casebrook”. He was noted for his pastoral qualities, but it was acknowledged that he was not an orator.

It was in 1859, as work was being carried out to lay foundations for stables behind his new Vicarage, that a Roman Villa was discovered. By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Victorians were aware through documents that there had been a Roman presence on the Island, but this was the first manifestation of it in physical form. A villa was discovered at Gurnard in 1862. The villa at Brading, unearthed in 1881, was the final Roman villa discovered on the Island during James' lifetime.

The discovery of the Carisbrooke villa galvanised James into what became his main interest for the rest of his life – the promotion of Isle of Wight history. He did not take part in the excavations as such, but he made careful contemporaneous notes of the villa and the coins which were found in it. In a Letter on the villa (23/10/1886) he states:

*“the archaeologist may by the help of coins and other relics of the past along with what may be gleaned from the contemporary Latin historians and poets, draw a sketch of life and manners as they existed in what the annalists of England call the Roman era in Britain”.*

He believed that the villa belonged to a well-to-do family. He thought (almost certainly wrongly) that the villa was owned by a centurion – a fortress in an alien society and that the centurion would be like Publius in Malta at the time of Paul's visit, as detailed in the Acts of the Apostles. He conjectured that there was a minor Roman road leading over Bowcombe Down to Gallibury Bottom and Brighstone Down. He believed

the Romans quarried stone at Quarr and Binstead and that there was a small British population kept as serfs.

James' other personal contribution lay in the identification of a Papal Bull. An old building in Carisbrooke, known as “Church House”, was demolished in 1877. In a rafter, a globular piece of lead was found with figures stamped on it. James identified it as a Papal Bull – a Papal seal to a document but there was no trace of the document. James took the object to the British Museum, and it was identified as being issued by Pope Alexander IV (1254-1261).

James can only be described as a polymath. He was extraordinarily well-read. The Classics were obviously his normal fare, but he had an encyclopaedic knowledge of English Literature. He knew Anglo-Saxon, the works of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century writers and the contemporary literary giants of his day – Tennyson, Browning and Scott. He was well aware of the popular novelists of his day as well – Rider Haggard and the Americans Mark Twain and Bret Harte appear in the Letters. There is even reference to the youthful Rudyard Kipling (only 27 at the time of James' death).

James was also widely read. He had a deep knowledge of English Law and was well aware of the scientific discoveries of his time.

It has to be admitted that the Letters are not always easy for a modern reader. As a man of immense and diverse learning, he often falls into the temptation of digressing. Thus, in a Letter on the Isle of Wight in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century (30/12/1886) he refers to a writer called Eumenus of Augustodorum in Gaul. This is the modern Autun, so he cannot resist a reference to Talleyrand as Bishop of Autun before the French Revolution. He then proceeds to discuss the grandfather of Eumenus and his influence – then he brings in Thomas Carlisle and he discusses the Gauls and their “glib and voluble public speakers”. “The stern old Romans cared more for performance than long-winded speech”. By now he has got to Julius Caesar. Next, he discusses the decline of the Roman Empire until the Emperor Constantius, father of Constantine the Great. Finally, we get to the original subject, Eumenus, writing “The twelve Ancient Panegyrist” before coming to a conclusion, via a reference to Hansard, to the actual account of the re-invasion of Britain.

James was a gracious correspondent. If he received a letter expressing a view contrary to his, he would write about the contrary view and advance reasons why he preferred his own. The clergy of the day were an erudite bunch. He had debates with the Vicar of Brading, the Rector of Shalfleet (over whether the place names Thorley and Thorness denoted possible Viking settlements) and the Rector of Brighstone – all done in a most gentlemanly way.

He was also very humble. Not often, but occasionally he would get letters correcting points he had made. He would scrupulously in his next Letter, refer to the corrections. One of his most frequent correspondents was the redoubtable W. H. Long (author of the Dictionary of Isle of Wight dialect). Long corrected him on the date he gave for the Elizabethan fortification of Carisbrooke Castle. In another article on Margaret Wadham, interred in St Mary's, James stated she was the sister of Queen Jane Seymour, based on records of Sir John Oglander and Sir Richard Worsley. Long

convinced him that Margaret was in fact Jane's aunt.

Unlike modern historians, James was not averse to using his imagination. In a Letter (18/2/1888), he imagines a journey undertaken in 1299 by Robert the Priest of God's House Southampton to inspect the Manors at Werrar and Cosham belonging to the House.

*"What met Robert's eyes as he arrived in the Island? A pleasant green spot, tilled with field husbandry upon which the sunbeams shone cooled by a slight puff of wind. The houses were few, around them cackled the poultry and other livestock and there was a humming murmur from the bee-hives and Parkhurst woodland to provide fuel...The stream was then tenanted by fish...the sanitary arrangements would not have satisfied a keen-eyed inspector of nuisances for there were dunghills standing before the doors of each human dwelling. In the month of August Werrar and Cosham were cheerful enough, but in the winter their cheerfulness vanished, the cold wind whistled in at the unglazed windows and the rain beat through the ill-constructed roof: hence coughs colds and rheumatism among the cottagers".*

James was very interested in the excavations at Quarr by Percy Goddard Stone. He likened the medieval Cistercian movement to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Oxford Movement. In a Letter on Quarr (25/8/1886) he writes:

*"We can without difficulty picture to ourselves the outward appearance of the shadowy, white-robed monks as they stepped with grave measured tread over the ground where the stranger no longer hears the sound of swelling anthems or penitential psalms but only the voice of birds, winds and water..."*

He acknowledged that Abbeys attracted all kinds of men with a mixture of motives and adds drily

*"There were among them square pegs in round holes".*

It is on the subject of Quarr that James gives a rare reference to his own prejudices – in this case modern tourists. In a Letter (28/8/1886) having stated that he did not approve of tourism in Abbey sites

*"we may console ourselves for the demolition by calling to mind that Quarr is saved from being chosen for picnics or for the gambols of excursionists and trippers."*

Although he never claimed to be an archaeologist, James certainly had the eye of one. Discussing the Church of Sts Mary and Rhadegund in Whitwell (24/10/1886) he writes:

*"An archaeologist can often detect in the fabric of an English parish church where these chantries have*



Fig. 3: Memorials to Edward Boucher James in St Mary's, Carisbrooke

*been by various small remains and not infrequently by those arched recesses in the walls which are called Founders' Tombs...these Foundry Chantries the use and occasion of which are now forgotten, occasion much of the irregularity of design which may be seen in an old parish church."*

James placed most of his research on original and contemporary documents. In a Letter (7/1/1888) he derides

*"that school of critics who rely upon their own arbitrary emendations of the classical authors, not only Greek and Roman but also English such as Shakespeare and Milton, rather than upon the authority of the text of documents".*

James was very much a miniaturist and loved to pounce on little details or little-known facts. One of his last Letters relates to the Christian Family who resided on the Island for 2 generations in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The family, the most famous member of which was Fletcher Christian, ringleader of the mutineers on the Bounty, came from the North of England and James himself was related.

James contributed little of originality to his writings. His claim to our notice is that he was the first Island writer to bring the entirety of Island history, as it was then known, to a wide audience. Previous writers wrote for small circles. By writing in a weekly journal, he reached for the first time, and brought home Island heritage to a much larger audience, achieving the ambition he had set himself. The effects of his work are still apparent, and it is to him that the deep and lasting attraction of Island history first started.

Perhaps the final accolade should rest with the Edinburgh Review.

*"The portrait gallery of Island worthies is long and it is our good fortune that many of their pictures have been painted by the cunning hand. For years past his antiquaries and historical labours have delighted the natives of the Island. To his valuable contributions to the history of the Isle of Wight we desire, once and for all, to acknowledge our obligations."*

## References

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