

The World of Disney

From Antiquarianism to
Archaeology

David W. J. Gill

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIVES



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion

18-24 Middle Way

Summertown

Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-827-5

ISBN 978-1-78969-828-2 (e-Pdf)

© David Gill and Archaeopress 2020

Cover image: Portrait of Dr John Disney presented to the University of Cambridge.
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website
www.archaeopress.com

Contents

List of Figures	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	vi
Chapter 1	1
The Disney Family	1
John Disney (1677-1730)	3
John Disney (1700-1771)	5
Mary Disney	5
Lewis Disney	6
Frederick Disney	6
John Disney	7
Conclusion.....	7
Chapter 2	8
The Break with the Church of England	8
The Blackburne Family	8
The Reverend John Disney	11
Essex Street Chapel.....	13
Disney's decision to leave the Church of England	14
Disney at Essex Hall	18
The final years at Essex Street Chapel.....	24
Chapter 3	25
Collectors of the Grand Tour: Thomas Hollis and Thomas Brand	25
Thomas Brand	25
Thomas Hollis.....	26
The Tours to Italy.....	28
Brand and Hollis in London.....	31
The Hyde Remodelled	32
The Hollis Bequest	39
Essex Hall Chapel	42
Chapter 4	47
The Disney-Ffytche Family and Essex	47
Danbury Place.....	47
Disney-Ffytche and Danbury Place	49
France and Italy	51
Italy and William Hillary	53
Return to England.....	55
John Disney: Cambridge, Law and Marriage	57

Chapter 5	59
Life at The Hyde and its Collection	59
John Disney, Recorder of Bridport	60
The Death of the Reverend John Disney	61
Prospective MP for Harwich and Magistrate.....	63
The Hillary Family: Divorce, Deaths and Legal Disputes	67
The Eastern Counties Railway	70
Essex Agricultural Society	71
The Disney Family.....	73
Developing the Hyde's collection.....	74
Family matters	77
Chapter 6	78
Disney and Learned Societies	78
The Chelmsford Philosophical Society	80
Chapter 7	88
The Museum Disneyanum and Cambridge.....	88
The Establishment of the Disney Chair	93
Essex Archaeological Society	97
Chapter 8	103
Going for Gold.....	103
Railway and Other Interests.....	107
Recognition	107
Final Years.....	110
Chapter 9	112
The Disney Legacy	112
Suffolk and the Disney chair	115
Archaeological developments.....	118
Conclusion.....	124
Abbreviations	125
Bibliography	126
Index	139

List of Figures

Figure 1. St Peter's Norton Disney © David Gill	2
Figure 2. Sir Richard Disney's memorial at Norton Disney. © David Gill	3
Figure 3. John Disney (1677–1730), by Robert White. National Portrait Gallery D10737.....	4
Figure 4. The Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, engraving by Giovanni Vendramini. National Portrait Gallery D14260.	9
Figure 5. The Reverend John Disney, engraved by John Basire after Guy Head. National Portrait Gallery D8486.	12
Figure 6. Thomas Brand-Hollis. Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis.....	26
Figure 7. Thomas Hollis, by Joseph Wilton. National Portrait Gallery 6946.	27
Figure 8. Athena from the William Lloyd collection. Museum Disneianum.....	33
Figure 9. Sarcophagus showing Achilles hiding among the daughters of Lycomedes. Museum Disneianum.	34
Figure 10. Sarcophagus with Dionysiac scene. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.....	34
Figure 11. Detail of sarcophagus with Dionysiac scene. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.....	34
Figure 12. Sarcophagus and cinerarium displayed at The Hyde. Catalogue of The Hyde.	35
Figure 13. Cinerarium of Marcus Upius Fortunatus from the William Lloyd collection. Museum Disneianum.	36
Figure 14. 'Atys', Museum Disneianum.	36
Figure 15. Cinerarium of Marcus Aurelius, reported to have been found near the tomb of Caecilia Metella. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.....	37
Figure 16. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius once in the Palazzo Barberini. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.	37
Figure 17. Funerary inscription of Caius Menanius Batyllus and Anthimus. Museum Disneianum.	38
Figure 18. Cinerarium of Titus Flavius Verus, from Pozzuoli. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.	39
Figure 19. Medallion of Nero acquired in Venice c. 1752. Museum Disneianum.	39
Figure 20. Head of 'Augustus' carved on a medieval arch, acquired in Naples c. 1755. Museum Disneianum.....	40
Figure 21. Thomas Hollis, by Giovanni Battista Cipriani. National Portrait Gallery D46107. 42	
Figure 22. 'Jupiter Column' found at Great Chesterford in 1803, and presented to the British Museum by Thomas Brand-Hollis. © David Gill.	44
Figure 23. Apollo. Museum Disneianum.	45
Figure 24. Memorial for Thomas Brand-Hollis, Ingatstone Parish Church.....	46
Figure 25. Danbury Place, Essex.....	48
Figure 26. The Hyde, near Ingatstone, Essex.	60
Figure 27. Memorial for the Reverend John Disney, and his grandson John, on the Disney family tomb. © David Gill.	63
Figure 28. Memorial for Dame Frances Hillary at Danbury. © David Gill.....	69
Figure 29. Inscription from Colchester. Museum Disneianum.....	73
Figure 30. Funerary sphinx from Colchester. Colchester Castle Museum © David Gill	75
Figure 31. Attic black-figured lekythos. Museum Disneianum.....	89
Figure 32. 'Hermarchus'. Museum Disneianum.....	90
Figure 33. Portrait probably of Faustina the Younger. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.....	91
Figure 34. Etruscan funerary cinerarium lid. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.	91
Figure 35. Janiform sculpture, displayed as the gift of Disney. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.	93

Figure 36. Attic red-figured column-krater acquired in Naples in 1799 or 1801. Museum Disneianum.....	93
Figure 37. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge © David Gill.....	95
Figure 38. Portrait of Dr John Disney presented to the University of Cambridge. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. © David Gill.	109
Figure 39. The Disney tomb in the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin, Fryerning, Essex. © David Gill.....	110
Figure 40. Inscription for Sophia Disney on the Disney tomb. © David Gill.....	111
Figure 41. Inscription for Dr John Disney on the Disney tomb. © David Gill.	111
Figure 42. Edgar Disney, by Camille Silvy, 1860. National Portrait Gallery Ax50666.	113
Figure 43. Detail of Paestan bell-krater (now in Cambridge). Museum Disneianum.	114
Figure 44. Detail of Attic red-figured amphora (now in Copenhagen). Museum Disneianum.	
.....	114

Acknowledgements

The heart of this study was presented as an inaugural lecture at University Campus Suffolk, now the University of Suffolk, in Ipswich on 14 May 2013. I would like to thank the then Provost, Professor Mike Saks, for his encouragement to develop this theme. My intention was to explore one of the great archaeological figures who contributed so much to the development of the discipline in the eastern counties (and indeed beyond).

My active interest in Disney started towards the beginning of my career as a member of the Department of Antiquities at the Fitzwilliam Museum. I would like to thank my then colleagues, in particular Bob Bourne, Janine Bourriau, Professor Kevin Butcher, Julie Dawson, and the late Paul Woudhuysen.

Various colleagues have encouraged me in my study of the history of archaeology, in particular Christopher A. Stray and Michael Vickers. I have valued the input from Christopher Chippindale, my former Cambridge colleague and research collaborator. Paul G. Bahn has been a constant research companion, alongside a small group of colleagues, for over 30 years. The editorial team at the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and in particular Mark Curthoys, has helped me to understand the nature and complexity of biography. Professor G.M. Ditchfield has assisted me to understand the Unitarian world in late eighteenth century England and has been generous with his research.

I am grateful to the hospitality and support of colleagues in a number of archives and organisations: Howard Hague, The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches; Adrian James, the Society of Antiquaries; Dr Roger Lovatt of Peterhouse, Cambridge; Michael Palmer, Archivist & Deputy Librarian, Zoological Society of London; Edinburgh University Library; David Littlewood of Nottinghamshire County Council; and the Essex Record Office.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Caroline for her support and encouragement in this piece of research.

Introduction

The name of Dr John Disney is celebrated in the title of the University of Cambridge Chair of Archaeology. Disney's benefaction in the mid-19th century prepared the way for the scientific study of the past. In spite of Disney's antiquarian interests, there is no obvious reason why archaeology should have inspired his interest.

My first formal professional encounter with Disney, or at least his collection of classical sculptures, was as a curatorial member of the Department of Antiquities at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Some of this material formed part of a temporary exhibition at the museum exploring the impact of the Grand Tour on the formation of parts of the classical collections.¹ I was subsequently invited to write a new memoir for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) as part of a series of archaeological lives that included Dr Winifred Lamb, Honorary Keeper of the Department of Greek Antiquities at the Fitzwilliam during the inter-war period.²

The important question is why did Disney choose archaeology as the focus for his gift? The bequest of the sculptures, along with The Hyde near Ingatestone in Essex, by Thomas Brand-Hollis to Disney's father, the Reverend John Disney, establishes the antiquarian past.³ The collection had been formed by Thomas Hollis and Thomas Brand (later Brand-Hollis) during their Grand Tours of Italy in the mid eighteenth century. Disney's uncle (and father-in-law), Lewis Disney-Ffytche, had collected material in Italy in the 1790s when he was forced to flee from France; some of the objects were displayed at Danbury Place in Essex. Disney himself was involved with the creation of the new museum in Chelmsford, the county town of Essex, as an initiative of the Chelmsford Philosophical Society. He subsequently helped to establish the Colchester Archaeological Society that evolved into the Essex Archaeological Society. Disney, like his father, was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries; he also was a member of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

An equally practical question was how did Disney come to be in a position to grant this benefaction? The Disney wealth came from different sources. First, the Reverend Disney received a significant benefaction from Thomas Brand-Hollis who had supported Disney's ministry in London when he left the Church of England; Brand-Hollis had received much of his wealth from his friend Thomas Hollis. The Brand-Hollis bequest included The Hyde, and its contents, as well as extensive estates in Dorset. Second, Disney's marriage to his first cousin Sophia meant that he inherited part of the estate of his uncle Lewis Disney-Ffytche; this in part had been derived from the Ffytche family involvement in the East India Company. Third, the Disneys had profited from their investments in first canals and then the railways; in

¹ Gill 1990c; see also Gill 1990b.

² Gill 2004c.

³ For the place of antiquarianism: Momigliano 1950; see also Miller 2007.

later life Disney was a recipient of the proceeds from the California gold rush. The model for generous benefactions to universities can be traced back to Thomas Hollis who was a liberal donor to universities in New England.

This biography ranges far from archaeological and antiquarian interests, though it touches on the collecting of the classical past in the Grand Tour, the display of antiquity in eighteenth and nineteenth century country houses, and the creation of public museums. The story emerges in the enlightenment values of republicanism, as well as the theological challenges within the Church of England during the late eighteenth century. Disney's own intellectual interests and commitments were broad and included the Zoological Society of London, the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Literature, the Society of Antiquaries, as well as the Royal Horticultural Society.

A linear chronological narrative of a biography is difficult to apply to the life of Disney. The biography starts with the Norman conquest origins of the Disney family in Lincolnshire (at the village of Norton Disney) and Nottinghamshire, and explains the family's associations with specific houses and locations, specifically Flintham Hall in Nottinghamshire, and Danbury Place and The Hyde in Essex. The account then follows the Reverend John Disney from Cambridge and ordination in the Church of England, to the resignation of his livings in Lincolnshire and his appointment as a Unitarian minister in London. It is in London that he encountered Thomas Brand-Hollis who is a significant benefactor of the Unitarian Essex Street chapel. The biography then switches back in time to the lives of Thomas Hollis and Thomas Brand-Hollis, considering their eighteenth-century travels in Italy and the formation of the collection that was displayed at The Hyde. It explores their associations with Archdeacon Francis Blackburne, the father-in-law of the Reverend Disney. The following chapter considers the Disney links with Essex: not only the gift of The Hyde to the Reverend Disney, but also his brother Lewis, who on marriage took the family name of Disney-Ffytche. Lewis had been a supporter of republicanism and purchased property in France (that was seized during the French Revolution). He and his two daughters were forced to flee to Italy. Lewis' daughter Sophia married her first cousin, the Reverend Disney's son, John, and they settled in Dorset where Disney was the Recorder of Bridport. Sophia's sister, Frances, married Sir William Hillary who later formed the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). The main Disney home became The Hyde where the Hollis and Brand-Hollis collection of sculptures and other art works were displayed. After the death of the Reverend Disney, John Disney inherited the Hyde and became involved in a number of learned societies notably the Chelmsford Philosophical Society that led to the creation of the Chelmsford Museum. Disney prepared a substantial catalogue of the classical collection that was published as the *Museum Disneyeanum*.⁴ The sculptures then formed part of a gift, the Disney Marbles, to the University of Cambridge, alongside the benefaction of a Chair of Archaeology. Subsequent to this gift Disney helped to establish the Essex Archaeological Society, one of a series

⁴Disney 1846; Disney 1849a; Disney 1849b.

of regional and county-based archaeological societies that were emerging in the middle of the nineteenth century.

This study contributes to a study of the history of archaeology, especially the transition between antiquarianism and archaeology as a scientific discipline. This was a time when there was growing scientific interest in the remains of Britain's prehistory.⁵ This is an area of research that is growing in interest.⁶ Yet Disney's perception of archaeology is far removed the range of the discipline in the 21st century. The impact of Disney's benefaction continues to bear fruit more than a century and a half later with Cambridge as one of the leading centres for archaeology both in the UK and internationally.

⁵ Marsden 1974, 48–50.

⁶ E.g. Daniel 1967; Trigger 1989; Bahn 1996; Bahn 2014; Cline 2017; Fagan 2018.