

WILLIAM SOMNER (1606-1669). PART II

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The Anglo-Saxon Dictionary

Of all the seventeenth-century antiquarian achievements, that of the clarification of the Anglo-Saxon language stands very high. Whilst keeping alive the scattered enthusiasm of an earlier generation, they set up new standards of criticism independent of contemporary controversy. 'Loving Truth (the end of all Science) for itself', Somner wrote, 'altogether unbyassed with any by-respects ... I have made it my constant endeavour ... that Truth alone might triumph over Falshood, Antiquity over Novelty'.¹

Under Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504-1575) there had been extensive studies of Anglo-Saxon historical sources and of the Old English language, conducted chiefly in the 1560s and 1570s by his Latin secretary John Joscelyn (1529-1603), and Laurence Nowell (1530-c.1570) whose friend William Lambarde (1536-1601) had published his first edition of Anglo-Saxon laws, the *Archaionomia*, in 1568, and his *A Perambulation of Kent* in 1576; such works would show the way for scholars to work on other English shires when historical writing inspired the study of Anglo-Saxon grants and charters.

Parker's endeavours were no mere planning and execution of Tudor propaganda, for he had long maintained an interest in antiquarian studies, ably surrounded by a circle of intelligent and educated clergy, teachers, lawyers and noblemen in official positions. The first publications in Old English thus owed their appearance to the language having reached a quasi-official status, guided and supported by men within high ecclesiastical and political spheres.

At the death of Elizabeth there was no published dictionary of Old English or even a published monolingual dictionary of modern English, even if there were several Latin-English and English-Latin ones published by way of stimulation and interest in the Renaissance. But modern English lexicography had neglected Old English and its forebears as of little interest. Under Elizabeth the study of Old English was linked to efforts to represent the break under Henry VIII as a return to the greater independence from Rome that the English church had known before the Conquest; new challenges from Catholics and Puritans made this more compelling and led to the need for more doctrinal support. As concern grew about Stuart absolutism, legal scholars turned to the pre-Conquest period for evidence of an ancient constitution that guaranteed the rights of freeborn Englishmen, vouchsafing their doctrines and laws.

The yawning gap in the understanding of the peoples between the Romans and the Normans had for too long lain in obscurity, their mysterious and uncouth

tongue shrouded in ignorance. A growing interest in English antiquities had drawn attention to one signal gap in the scholarly resources, namely a comprehensive and up-to-date dictionary of Anglo-Saxon, a language which had early interested Somner and one which had become a source of worry as he was writing his *Antiquities*. Texts previously inaccessible or unknown now began to be published about a society scarcely imaginable in the previous century, but which within three generations lay open and full of historical events and personalities, its language now comprehended and familiar to an increasing group of Oxbridge scholars.

Fully versed in Latin and post-Conquest manuscripts, Somner had now been encouraged to study Anglo-Saxon, the key language of antiquarianism, and one with no dictionary, by his clerical and scholarly friend of some twenty years' standing, the esteemed Meric Casaubon who had helped to give Somner's work a new and more linguistic turn, been much taken with his friend's 'sagacious wit and great industry in searching the antiquities of Canterbury with great judgement',² and was well aware that before the Restoration such linguistic scholars were few indeed, Old English more or less extinct, and the literature on it fragmentary. Indebted to Somner, he would never forget that his early linguistic studies were firmly based on his friend's support and would later incorporate an appendix of Somner's observations on the links between Anglo-Saxon and the Germanic languages into his *De Quatuor Linguis Commentationis*.

The *Dictionarium* emerged as an offshoot of Somner's major interest in the history of Kent, for whereas the *Antiquities* had dealt only with post-Conquest material in Latin, he now realised that Celtic and Anglo-Saxon texts were essential to realise his grand project. Somner would now tread an obscure and wide field, and one whose relatively few earlier scholarly predecessors he would diligently study before breaking out so memorably into new ground. Kennett fairly summarised the subject as one which 'might have exercised a Critic, sooner than instructed a Novice ... the Saxon language was extinct, and the monuments of it so few and so latent, that it requir'd infinite courage and patience, to attempt and prosecute the knowledge of it'.³ Kennett had further observations on the quality of contemporary Anglo-Saxon scholarship, praising Somner by saying that the work had been undertaken 'in the days of anarchy and ignorance when all the Professors of true religion and good literature were silenced'.⁴

George Hickes, the great Oxford Saxonist, observed that since the Conquest only two foreigners and some twenty natives had mastered Anglo-Saxon, praising Joscelyn, Somner, Marshall and Junius for their pure and correct language, but condemning Selden, Spelman and even the Cambridge professor Wheeloc, who put theirs before the world 'with faults and imperfections'.⁵

There was in fact much scattered material waiting to be assimilated: apart from glossaries and word lists which had been added to a few printed works, manuscript collections had been prepared by, for example, Laurence Nowell and Simonds D'Ewes, both of whom Somner consulted for material he had not found himself, although he was in fact more determined to work on sources either unknown to them or less fully treated.⁶ He was mindful that some earlier collections contained variations on a word for the sake of bulking out the text rather than for the utility of the reader.⁷ But the need in the mid-1600s for a complete dictionary remained paramount.

While at Cambridge Sir Henry Spelman and Jeremy Stephens had been thwarted by an almost total absence of men able to read Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and so in 1639 Spelman founded the first readership in *Antiquitates Britannicae et Saxonicae*, thereby marking a signal stage in its development as an academic subject (Anglo-Saxon studies at Oxford were not introduced until the later 1600s). Much early study was based on the seven surviving manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as an historical source whose complexities became painfully aware when it was realised that each text described the same events from a different standpoint. The first reader was the Cambridge linguist Abraham Wheeloc who had assisted him in transcribing and promised to compile a Saxon dictionary but died in 1653 before anything came of it, on which failure Kennett nicely observed that the ‘infirmary of great men to proclaim a design and so to raise and deceive the expectation of the world’.⁸ Archbishop James Ussher now recommended the stipend for his friend Somner in order that work on the greatly anticipated *Dictionarium* might proceed, and so the funds were used to present Somner with the chair in 1657.

Having been collecting source material for perhaps as much as a decade previously, the attached salary and concomitant encouragement would now signally assist Somner’s research into his most important undertaking, a work of long, difficult, profound and immense scholarship, *A Saxon-Latin-English Dictionary of the chief Anglo-Saxon words and phrases (together with Latin and English definitions of the same) collected with great carefulness from books and manuscripts, printed works and other records, both public and private* of 1659, the first of its kind and the one on which all future Anglo-Saxon dictionaries would be based. Costs towards publication had been defrayed by, among others, Archbishop Ussher. No less a luminary than the great Sir Thomas Cotton, a great benefactor to, and correspondent with, Somner gave him free access to his magnificent library and entertained him in Westminster whilst compilation proceeded, and further contributed to the expenses of publication, as did Sir Roger Twysden whom Somner visited regularly at East Peckham.⁹

Although very much the result of work at Cambridge and the concomitant stipend, the *Dictionarium* was actually printed at Oxford. Somner had personally supplied an indispensable set of Old English characters needed by the printer for the Anglo-Saxon alphabet, but the extant Cambridge printing types were too large for such a task and ongoing and long-lasting civil disorders in the area meant that the university could not afford the expense of new types. Thus, an association with the University of Oxford seems to have arisen in around 1653 and, through the offices of William Dugdale, who would also be involved in finding a London bookseller to handle sales in the capital, was encouraged by Gerard Langbaine, Provost of Queens’ College and a friend of Selden and Ussher, who provided suitable types. And so Somner, alumnus to neither university, forged a link between the first attempts at establishing Old English studies at Cambridge and the later work at Oxford.

The year of publication of the *Dictionarium* was timely, for the interest of Somner’s work to general lexicography lay chiefly in his contribution to etymology. In the years preceding the Restoration English dictionaries began to include etymologies more regularly and sometimes also offer root forms for words derived from Old English, a practice doubtless reflected in the rise of scholarly investigation into the language during the previous hundred and more years.

The *Dictionarium* comprised about 380 unpaginated pages in three dense columns with running titles extending to the first two letters of a word, containing headwords and phrases accompanied by Latin and English equivalents. At the end Somner added Aelfric's tenth-century *Latin-Saxon Grammar* (a work which had already served antiquaries for over a century) transcribed by Junius,¹⁰ now in print for the first time and a rich source on which Somner drew heavily for definitions of grammatical terms and to communicate the structure of the language. Also important as an appendix was the then unknown conflation of glossaries known as *Aelfric's Glossary*,¹¹ even if Somner found (sometimes unique) words within it that he would not incorporate into the *Dictionarium* or did but left undefined, often because he suspected scribal corruptions and so left them to the reader to 'exercise his talent in correcting or his mercy in condoning'.¹²

In an appendix to the *Dictionarium* Somner printed all of his supporters and patrons, recording his gratitude for their financial contribution and further help. The names do not have the usual appearance of a subscription list, and as the title page of the work says '*pro Authore*' (implying at Somner's own expense), we are perhaps to interpret the list more as a record of thanks, as is also shown in the dedication following the title page. The impressive list, a snapshot of the author's circle of contacts in the 1650s, is most careful to record ranks and occupations, opens with fourteen Cambridge colleges (but, tellingly, none from Oxford, and so an indication of Somner's research period during his occupancy of Spelman's lectureship), and then records 82 individuals including barons, baronets, knights, esquires, gentlemen, academics and librarians: we see such giants as Ashmole, Cotton, Dugdale and Twysden, the doctors, clergy and gentry of many Midland counties, and a final and distinguished roll-call of thirty Kentish names, among them Anthony Aucher of Bishopsbourne, four different John Boys of Betteshanger, Bonnington, Fredville and Hode Court, Thomas Godfrey of Nackington, Norton Knatchbull of Mersham, Edward Monins of Waldershare, and Henry Palmer of Wingham.¹³

The Anglo-Saxon language could at last be studied on a broader front now that it was openly accessible to inquisitive and industrious scholarly minds; it is no exaggeration to state that Somner almost single-handedly inaugurated a new epoch in Anglo-Saxon studies. Long the preserve of divines, lawyers and country gentlemen, now for a short period the English universities became the especial homes of Old English learning, firstly at Cambridge, and after the Restoration more so at Oxford, particularly between about 1660-1730.

Despite the relative paucity of predecessors there were some sources which Somner both consulted and criticised. Lawrence Nowell, Anglo-Saxon teacher to Lambarde at Lincoln's Inn (and sometime owner of the Nowell codex which contained the unique text of *Beowulf*), had written his *Vocabularium Saxonicum* in 1567,¹⁴ the first known Old English dictionary. The following year William Lambarde's *Archaionomia* appeared, a pioneering collection and paraphrase in Latin of Anglo-Saxon laws and treaties, and one highly dependent on Nowell's 'improved' translation of the original texts – but not to Somner's liking, whose style he considered too polite and elaborate, and not offering help in understanding the original language: 'This elegant and periphrastic way of rendering old records was too much like paint on the face of a wrinkled matron, or a cap and feather upon gray hairs'.¹⁵

A further source was John Joscelyn, Archbishop Matthew Parker's Latin secretary,

who had made a two-volume Anglo-Saxon dictionary.¹⁶ This was transcribed (and possibly augmented) by Sir Simonds D'Ewes¹⁷ who had allowed Somner to make further contributions to it, and on the strength of that assistance then admitted him to his own library to work on the celebrated Anglo-Saxon verse *Genesis*.

All in all, the impression is that of a concerted collaborative effort to propel Somner towards his masterpiece; but beyond this, for better philological instruction, he immersed himself in a wide variety of European languages, all the while supported by his friendships with Junius and Casaubon, both foreigners, who would have alerted him to news concerning continental books and scholarship.

The preface to the *Dictionarium*, unsurprisingly, greets Roger Spelman as dedicatee: 'to a truly noble man and one singularly esteemed by me',¹⁸ and then acknowledges Casaubon's assistance and encouragement. All possible spare time had been given to research and compilation in checking books and manuscripts, including material in the Arundel, Ashmolean, Cotton, Hatton, Selden, and Rochester libraries, during which he had consulted or transcribed the following grand roll-call: the *Abingdon Chronicle*;¹⁹ the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Wheeloc's edition²⁰ and his own transcript from the Cotton library,²¹ usefully adding the year of each entry: the work is quoted an impressive 148 times); Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (also much quoted) and *De Temporum Ratione*; Byrhtferth's *Manual*;²² Camden's *Britannia* (especially productive for place names and the Latin translations of Old English words); Dugdale's *Monasticon*; Foxe's *Saxon Gospels* (much quoted); Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*; the Saxon Heptateuch;²³ Lambarde's *Saxon Laws*; Leland's *Cygneae Cantio*; the *Liber Medicus* or 'Leech Book'²⁴ which had supplied a valuable and remarkable 95 *hapax legomena* out of 373 entries; the *Liber Scintillarum*;²⁵ Orosius's *Historia Ecclesiastica*; the *Saxon Paraphrase* (the *codex Junius*, lent by James Ussher);²⁶ the Saxon Pentateuch; the *Textus Roffensis*; Henry Spelman's *Glossary* and *Concilia*; John Spelman's *Saxon Psalter*; and Verstegan's *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*.

Somner admitted that of all the Saxon manuscripts in public and private libraries which he had consulted he had chosen not to transcribe most of them in full, having neither the time nor the leisure, but more importantly because he sensed that he would not discover many new words on account of the great diversity of subject matters and the early dates of the authors.²⁷ In his use of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and other sources he displays the strong historical interests of the antiquaries,²⁸ as well as revealing a contemporary shift of interest towards the study of Old English as a Germanic language.

Other sources included herbals and philological works, as well as dictionaries, word lists and literary sources for headwords and cognates. More quoted (679 times) than any other work is Cornelius van Kiel's *Etymologicum Teutonice Linguae: sive Dictionarium Teutonico-Latinum*. Somner also made use of Chaucer (again much quoted) to emphasise, or clarify, the relation between Old and Middle English, and Spelman's *Archaeologus* of 1626, mainly for legal terms. He further referred to 'our glossary', that is, the one he supplied for Twysden's *Scriptores Decem*, and also contemporary grammars, particularly to establish current orthography. Casaubon's *De Lingua Anglica vetere* (pages 127-406 of his *De Quatuor Linguis Commentationis*) was much consulted, and highly rated by Somner, to which 'he can add nothing'.

No less important were large numbers of chronicles including Eadmer, Ethelweard, Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, John Asser, John Brompton, Marianus Scotus, Matthew Paris, Odericus Vitalis, and William of Malmesbury, and a panoply of supplementary sources reflecting contemporary European scholarship. Notable by their absence, perhaps through inaccessibility, were the famous poem *The Battle of Maldon*, the great Anglo-Saxon codex the *Exeter Book*, and, more surprisingly, the *Nowell Codex*²⁹ which included *Beowulf*, the archetypal piece of Old English literature whose text contained the lion's share of all surviving Old English poetry.

It was soon observed that the *Dictionarium* in some ways fell short of the needs of serious scholars, the failure to name sources consistently, especially in the cases of variant forms, one of its more cogent criticisms. Somner had gone to great trouble to prepare a valid list of headwords and correct definitions, an essential task but one only as good as his sources, two of which were the dictionaries of Nowell and D'Ewes, both composite books from a variety of sources, indirectly acquired, leaving Somner ignorant of their origins and textual background. Nouns were entered in the nominative singular and verbs in the infinitive, a huge task of normalisation where his sources had appeared in oblique forms, and it was inevitable that some nouns therefore appeared under inflected forms and some verbs were occasionally misconstrued, a true reflection of seventeenth-century Anglo-Saxon scholarship. A Latin translation followed each entry 'for the benefit of beginners'.³⁰ At a time when there was no system or set of rules for determining the pronunciation of a language no longer spoken, Somner had no choice but to omit vowel lengths. Additionally, no noun genders were indicated by him, and there was some confusion and uncertainty over adjectives and adverbs when he was sometimes unable to differentiate between *-lic* and *-lice* endings. Overall, however, the great majority of headwords do satisfy the standards of modern scholarship.

In general Somner does not name a source for a headword, thereby implying that he considers the form of the headword and the meaning given are credible. In a minority of entries he appends an abbreviation (usually initials) to indicate that something is uncertain or wrong and that the blame is to fall on the source employed or the original scribe of it, the three most frequent ones being the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Liber Medicus* and the *Saxon Paraphrase*.³¹ This has the effect of making the older manuscript dictionaries of Joscelyn, D'Ewes and others still valuable because they offer a clue to the manuscript source or sources of many Old English headwords.

In the compilation Somner was greatly assisted by several of his Anglo-Saxon documents being translations of Latin originals, for example the four gospels, and thus the Latin originals were able to provide hundreds of definitions for Old English words. Lambarde had translated old Saxon laws, but not to a high standard, as Somner recorded in his introduction,³² and Wheeloc's published Latin version of the *Chronicle* he also found inaccurate, if still useful.³³ But Dugdale's *Monasticon* had also supplied many charters in translation and thereby greater numbers of Old English words which could now be defined precisely. Inevitably there still remained many imprecise definitions which could not be resolved even by his impressive battery of Anglo-Saxon sources, unreliable recent translations

notwithstanding. In the *Liber Medicus* and *Saxon Paraphrase*, for example, he was reduced to creating his own definitions rather than correcting extant ones.

Etymologies in the 1600s were something of a jungle, and would remain so until the discovery a century later that Sanskrit was closely related to both Latin and Greek, and lead to the gradual recognition of linguistic change having structured patterns affecting whole classes of words. Somner was hesitant in assigning origins to his Old English headwords, often revealing his uncertainty by stating that they were borrowed, and, if known, the authority. When seeing a headword as the origin of a Middle English one he points out a similarity in Chaucer no fewer than 125 times, observing the relevance of Old to Middle English, and thereby noting phonological and orthographical changes.

Overall, the *Dictionarium* does not provide an Old English grammar despite Somner's many perceptive observations. There had been little reconstruction of Old English grammar by his time, the one grammar with a bearing on the problem being that of Aelfric which was basically an exposition of Latin grammar along the lines laid out by Donatus and Priscian. Its tenth-century author had now provided much helpful grammatical material in the vernacular, written, as it was, for a generation of Anglo-Saxon schoolboys.

Scholars would wait until 1689 and the publication of George Hickes' *Institutiones Grammaticae* which showed great progress in attempting to reconstruct Old English grammar. In general, Somner drew on the discoveries and suggestions of other scholars for his own purposes, especially as the past century had witnessed a widespread interest in the historical study of Greek, Latin, German, Dutch, Gothic, Danish and French, as well as English; and in England there had been a desire to regulate and reform certain aspects of the language which had produced a series of texts on the subject. Just as Sanskrit allowed scholars to see more clearly the historical relationship between the Indo-European languages, the discovery of Anglo-Saxon gave English scholars a new insight into the development of their own language, and Somner was now able to make intelligent (if not profound) comments on the relationship between Old English and modern forms. In the *Dictionarium* he further brought to light hundreds of words from Old English which were still alive in the contemporary vocabulary, especially in regional dialects where he partly adopted Nowell's indications that certain words were still used in Lancashire,³⁴ an observation that would be taken up and amplified by later dialectologists.

Ever keen for the highest levels of accuracy, Somner duly completed the work with two pages of addenda and errata; but the author himself would admit that it was not error-free or complete (and in 1659, how could it possibly be?), for defects must necessarily accompany a pioneering work of this nature. Its standards of definition were inadequate according to modern thought, the abundant sense of words to be apprehended from wide reading limited by the actual supply of available books, the constant soliciting of friends and scholars for source material a permanent duty. But what need was there to apologize? The book opened a new path to the philologist and at the same time made the subject less esoteric.

The work inevitably brought criticism, both initially and later, including the great Henry Sweet who opined disparagingly in his 1871 *Introduction to King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care* that the *Dictionarium* was

‘a mere glossary without references’ but did, however, write more accurately in his *Student’s Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* that:

The great difficulty of Anglo-Saxon lexicography is that we have to rely for our material solely on a limited number of carelessly written and often badly edited manuscripts. There is no long series of native critics, grammarians, and lexicographers to help us ... The investigator of Old English as a whole ... is therefore often obliged to work by guesswork, until someone else guesses better, and to be thankful for an occasional ray of light.

Serendipitous browsing of definitions also reveals entries with extraneous comments, most particularly in connection with Somner’s intended general history of Kent – if he is spared to finish it. Under ‘abbandune’, for example, one reads, ‘But of this more fully in the future in my Kentish Antiquities, God willing that it is finally completed’,³⁵ and there are others under ‘Den’, ‘Kent’ and ‘Limenemuth’, this last in English, and explaining that it is ‘the mouth of the river or haven of Limne, whereof at large hereafter in my intended *Kentish* antiquities.’

Of the process of the composition of the *Dictionarium* we are uncertain. The very first version must have been compiled on loose sheets before being worked up into perfect alphabetical order. Nothing of this has survived but a most remarkable and precious holding at Canterbury³⁶ is the two-volume fair copy autograph text of the dictionary complete with all prefatory and appendix material as published, and including interlinings, corrections and deletions (as well as underlinings to indicate italic), again added by Somner himself. The two disbound books appear to be the very text used by the compositors as their quire signatures appear on various pages; the final printed version must surely represent one of the greatest triumphs of typesetting in printing history!

A second two-volume autograph manuscript has also survived,³⁷ considerably shorter than the first in being just the text without any prefatory or supplemental pages, or indeed the grammar or glossary, and so probably representing an earlier model for the pair just mentioned, as they contain most of the entries in the same wording but not yet in the form of the final printed version. Numerous crossings-out show Somner working towards a concatenation of entries of words with multiple orthographical references under one main entry with information about Latin and modern English meaning, inflectional forms and references. Additionally, a comparison between the two pairs of manuscripts reveals Somner trying to make the clearest possible arrangement of the meanings of a single word by giving both concrete and figurative definitions. Lemmas, too, are separated by colons rather than full points as in the later versions.

Initial sales were slow, a fact probably not unconnected with the uncertain times, and for a long period there were more copies available than enthusiasts and students to buy it. A year after publication Dugdale noted in his diary that the bookbinder ‘piled up the Saxon Dictionaries in my upper chamber, which were in number 514 perfect, and six imperfect’,³⁸ and that a year later Dugdale ‘left Ten Copies of Somner’s Saxon Dictionary with Booksellers “to try if they can sell them”’.³⁹ Stocks were later exhausted, but despite persistent demand no second edition would appear in the author’s lifetime.

In 1701 Thomas Benson of Queen’s College, Oxford, issued a revised version of

'clarissimi Somneri', *Vocabularium Anglo-Saxonicum Lexico Gul. Somneri magna parte auctius*. This was more of an epitome, a revised but abbreviated version of the first edition from which were removed numerous elements unsuited for students. The principal contributor was Benson's fellow Queen's scholar Edward Thwaites (1671-1711), whose own annotated copy of Somner still survives.⁴⁰ Thwaites was a preceptor in Anglo-Saxon, and in a letter to Humphrey Wanley of 24 March 1688/9⁴¹ declared that 'We want Saxon lexicons. I have fifteen young students in that language, and but one Somner for them all'. The second edition runs to about one hundred dense (and again unpaginated), bi-columnar pages, and included additions from Junius's papers in the Bodleian, as well as goodly contributions from the other scholars in the same college. Benson had augmented the original to the extent that 'I have expanded more than three hundred out of four thousand [entries]'⁴².

Despite these signal events, it could not be denied that even if Oxbridge were replete with Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, it would be many years before most had been located and deciphered, a situation not helped by the decline from about 1720 of Anglo-Saxon disciplines and the loss of much of the early Saxonists' expertise for most of the remaining part of the eighteenth century.

The subject gained new life and moved forward with the publication in 1772 of the *Dictionarium Saxonico et Gothico-Latinum* by Edward Lye and Owen Manning, which in turn served as a model for Joseph Bosworth's *A Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language* of 1838, and his and T.N. Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* of 1884 where Somner is sometimes still cited as a sole authority. Once regarded as Somner's *magnum opus* by his contemporaries, the field of Anglo-Saxon studies has inevitably moved on; today the *Dictionarium* stands as a foundation-piece and must yield to the *Antiquities* as the greater and more enduring work.

A Treatise of Gavelkind

Somner published *A Treaty of Gavelkind both Name and Thing shewing the True Etymologie and Derivation of the One, the Nature, Antiquity, and Original of the Others* in 1660, long after he had finished it in 1647. It was then brought forth by the encouragement of his friends, including Archbishop Ussher who publicly approved it. Here he would now bring to bear his knowledge of Anglo-Saxon to pre-Conquest material, studying the earliest customs and tenures of Kent in their original language. Paramount was his interest in legal material which would bear fruit in his most substantial and original contributions to scholarship.

Kent's remarkable and individual system of land tenure, called gavelkind, ensured the equal partition of an estate between a man's heirs rather than inheritance by the principal one, a system not always to an owner's liking and one which would cause trouble and legal expense to them until it was abolished as late as 1925. It was perhaps this system operating in his own county that drew Somner to investigate it, for in the preface he stated that his reasons for writing were: 'to know things not so much in their present as primitive state'.⁴³ Research into the subject may well have been undertaken originally as part of a wider study for his intended 'Antiquities of Kent' and, after the inevitable interruptions in developing it further, was finally resumed in 1659 but death supervened before any further publication;

the great delay had been occasioned by his own distress and ignorance of the times that ‘hated all antiquity, both ecclesiastical and civil, and doted on a new gospel and new laws’.⁴⁴ Meric Casaubon read the manuscript and trusted that publication would ensue ‘when monarchy, episcopacy and learning were restored’.⁴⁵ Here Somner’s scholarship would prevail over regional pride and romantic views of the past as he expounded the nature of feudal tenants and gave definitions of land-use terms. His text was prefaced with the Saxon alphabet and its abbreviations alongside this revealing declaration: ‘it is now full eighteen years since, by solemn promise, I became engaged to my countrymen, upon their good acceptance of certain of my labours, in behalf of our City, wherewith I then presented them, to proceed to the same, or some other such like undertaking for the County; a thing, which as I then really intended ... But being soon after overtaken by that impetuous storm [of civil war] not yet quite blown over, causing the distraction, and threatening the destruction of this once renowned Kingdom, I was necessitated to betake myself to other thoughts, chiefly how I might secure myself against the fury, in warding off the danger, of the present storm’.

A great deal of space was devoted to a discussion of the etymology of the term gavelkind itself (‘confuting what is generally received’); earlier interpretations, by such luminaries as Lambarde, Verstegen and Spelman, had favoured a derivation from three Old English words, *gife*, *eal*, and *cyn* (‘given to all the kin’), but these ignored inflexional endings, and were based on the signal feature of land being equally divided among sons or children after a tenant’s death. Lambarde had seemingly been the first to record this derivation in his *Archaionomia* of 1568, but had later in his *A Perambulation of Kent* of 1576 noted a second etymology based on land rents and services *gafol*, whence *gafolcynd* or ‘let for rent’. But Somner soon, and with characteristic incisiveness, showed from the evidence of charters that the *gife eal cyn* etymology was worthless, challenging the *cyn* element and going on to prove that this type of land tenure could be alienable outside the male line, and even also outside the main family. He further noted the existence of related compounds such as *gavelcorn* and *gaveldung* where the first element ‘will not bear the derivation of it from *Gife-eal*, without absurdity’,⁴⁶ and in a final peroration dismisses it as ‘a wrong and mistaken derivation’,⁴⁷ showing that the true etymology is from *gafol* (tribute, rent) and *gecynd* (nature, custom), entering his decision in the *Dictionarium* under *Gafel*. The work continues with four further propositions:

the actual practice of gavelkind;

its antiquity and why it is peculiar to Kent;

whether it is a tenure or custom, and if the latter, whether it is inherent in the land;

and whether gavelkind lands in Kent were devisable before the statute of wills of 32 and 34 Henry VIII.

A valuable suffix of 42 pages lists transcripts of charters mentioned in the text (including parts of the *Textus Roffensis*). He also notes which owners’ estates had been disgavelled by Act of Parliament, just as Lambarde had done in his

Perambulation. Sufficient demand led to a corrected second edition in 1726 by White Kennett, prefaced by the prelate's life of the author, revised in Westminster on 2 December 1725. Silas Taylor's *History of Gavelkind* (1663) had acknowledged Somner (even if Somner would correct his errors by marginal annotations!), and Thomas Robinson in his *The common law of Kent or the customs of Gavelkind* (1741) quoted Somner concerning the custumal of Kent.

A second marriage

After some time as a widower, Somner remarried on 1 December 1659, again in Canterbury Cathedral, to Barbara the daughter of John Dawson of Lympe, the royalist 'chief searcher' for Kent, and widow of Edward Browne, Master of the King's School from 1649-1658, whom he would have known when a pupil there. By his second wife William Somner produced four children, all baptised at the cathedral.

- 1 Barbara (1660-1675), said by Hasted [XI, 353] to have been the first child baptised in the cathedral's new font;
- 2 William (1661-1693) who as his father's heir would inherit the Castle Street family home with its garden and appurtenances after the death of his mother but actually predeceased her. After graduating B.A. and M.A. from Merton College, Oxford, he became vicar of Lyminge from 1685 until his death.
- 3 Francis (1663-1664), a full generation younger than his namesake half-brother born to his father's first wife;
- 4 John (1666-1695) was born when his father had turned 60. He inherited a family house and tenement at Chartham, succeeded his brother-in-law John Boughton as a practising surgeon at Elham, and was buried as a bachelor alongside the high altar of that church. The ledgerstone fitly records him as the son of the 'learned Mr William Somner of Canterbury'.

Maturity and last years

Now in his 60s there was surely time for Somner to look back and reflect on a life of extraordinary industry and its concatenation of many individuals drawn from legal and antiquarian circles. Of the giants of seventeenth-century writers and researchers we have already seen some goodly evidence of Somner's involvement in their lives, and how he inevitably profited by such relationships. Of lesser, but still important names, the biographer searches harder for evidence other than a passing reference or letter of acknowledgement for some favour gratefully received.

Today, other than his own works, scattered letters and manuscripts, quotations and his known contributions to the works of others form the mainstay for gaining a full picture of Somner's wide-ranging scholarly activities. Letter-writing and correspondence would have been time-consuming as he maintained his enthusiastic friendships with Cotton, Dugdale, and Spelman, and doubtless also with a host of others who would exchange knowledge and materials on selected research problems. We must presume there to have been at least occasional, if not at times regular, journeys to libraries in London, Oxford and perhaps elsewhere during the compilation of the *Dictionarium*, but thereafter, in the almost total absence

of explicit references to scholarly excursions or the receiving of like-minded guests, Sir Roger Twysden's home at East Peckham in west Kent was perhaps the only regular scholarly destination of more than a few hours' ride from Somner's beloved Canterbury.

Loss or misplacement of so many records which were kept partly in the treasury and partly in the chamber over St Andrew's chapel⁴⁸ made for a complex and messy business of restitution in Canterbury: the discreet undercurrent of conservation which had accompanied the most violent changes in the *ancien régime* manifested itself when Somner not only gave back to the Dean and Chapter the muniments and goods which he had snatched from Puritan destruction (even if, alas, with no inventory), but also placed at the disposal of the restored clergy his greatest treasure: the erudition of a lifetime lovingly spent in the investigation of the history of Canterbury and Kent. Now, when the intruders had been dispelled, he would generously volunteer instruction to those that wanted it: his long and hard-won intimate local knowledge would inform a new generation of church officials whose memories had been dulled by age, war and suffering, unsure of earlier practice and diplomatic precedent as to how the church's rightful estates and revenues, and its proud and ancient legal rights, might be recovered. 'No other private man had such influence and authority: he continued to be wise and faithful, moderate and humble – and, like his writings, free of prejudice and passion'.⁴⁹

The prevailing mood of the Commonwealth years had not favoured antiquarianism and its reverence for dead ancestors, for of course the majority of them were royalists and Anglicans. And nor was sustained research at all easy when the resolving of the present issues prevailed over slow-paced scholarship directed to the past. Under Cromwell there was a gradual lessening of hostility, but authors might still have to buy their way into print – the market would improve steadily, if slowly, until the Restoration when antiquarianism saw a return to favour. Although busy in recovering church lands and possessions, Somner did manage to help Dugdale complete Spelman's *Concilia*, and, with less success, try to progress with a general history of Kent, even if, as we have seen, all that reached print was the *Gavelkind*.

The Restoration of Monarchy

Early in 1660 Somner, still hating Richard Cromwell's military government and mindful of a dislocated church and absent king, solicited petitions for a free parliament and supported various agitations for the return of Charles II from exile. In contradistinction to the royalist conspirators who had staged the earlier 1655 rising, the pro-Restoration Kentish gentry were markedly different in character, being mostly middle-aged men and moderate representatives of old-established families: Somner himself was now 53 and, ever loyal, suffered with his monarch by choosing not to take office with the usurpers, and rejecting offers of land acquisition from the dissolved church.

A paper entitled *A Declaration of the Nobility, Gentry and Commonalty of the County of Kent* was put about for subscriptions by the old Kentish rump and led to some of the agitators being arrested. Kennett presumed that 'Somner was the chief penman, or at least the promoter of getting subscriptions, and suffered for

it'.⁵⁰ Prompt response by the authorities resulted in an order on 28 January for 'Mr Sumner the Proctor' to be apprehended and detained with his fellow petitioners in Deal castle for a few months until the Restoration.⁵¹ Charles II landed at Dover on 25 May to retake his kingdom, and then proceeded to Canterbury where he was the recipient of civic gifts including Somner 'on the bended knees of his body' as he proffered a copy of his *The Antiquities of Canterbury* (the volume, with its special extra dedicatory leaf, now resides in the Henry Huntingdon Library in California).

Since Laud's execution in 1645 there had been no archiepiscopal successor for a record-breaking fifteen years, the majority of bishops preferring to stay in hiding to avoid persecution. The administration of spiritualities had thus devolved upon the Chapter during the vacant see. Somner was appointed Registrar of the Consistory Court of Canterbury on 14 July 1660⁵² thereby taking up his father's old position, and then in October, with the aged William Juxon as the new Primate, he was appointed joint-registrar with George Juxon (almost certainly a relative?) by a deed from the Dean and Chapter,⁵³ becoming full registrar again from 1662 onwards. In December of the same year he received a signed letter⁵⁴ from his good friend Meric Casaubon, D.D., Prebendary of Christ Church, and Receiver General, appointing him auditor and deputy in his absence to collect, rents, payments and other monies for the Dean and Chapter, for an annual salary around this time of £12. An indenture⁵⁵ of 31 December 1662 deputed Somner to act for William Sherman as registrar of the Consistory Court until the end and relaxation of William Juxon's archiepiscopal visitation.

Various classes of church court records suspended or scattered by wartime would now recommence, notably the probate and instance act books, in abeyance for the whole of the 1650s, and now adding greatly to Somner's workload. All were recommenced by simply turning a fresh page with no mention being made of the intervening lacunae. But fate smiled once more when Somner was given the mastership of St John's Hospital, Canterbury, defending its and Harbledown Hospital's interests in correspondence⁵⁶ with Miles Smith, secretary to Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon. In increasing old age the Dean of Canterbury would entrust Somner with the examining of King's School boys and future university entrants.

In later life and looking back on losses of books from the cathedral library, Somner recalled that at its foundation it had been well endowed but that within man's memory it had been 'shamefully robbed and spoiled of them all; an act much prejudicial and very injurious both to Posterity and the Commonwealth of Letters. The piety of the present Churchmen hath begun to replenish it and may it have (what it well deserves) many Benefactors'.⁵⁷

In 1662, two years after the Restoration, and with some semblance of earlier and settled times, Somner wrote:

'But first (as a necessary premonition) we shall here recount and represent the sad, forlorne and languishing condition of our Church at our returne; which (in short) was such as made it look more like a ruined Monastery than a church; so little had the fury of the late Reformers left remaining of it besides the bare walls and roofe ... The windows (famous for both strength and beauty) so generally battered and broken downe, as to lay exposed to the injury of all weathers ... Many of the goodly Monuments of the dead shamefully abused, defaced, rifled and plundered ... our Houses (many of them) much impaired, some by neglect of reparations, others by

mangling and parcelling them out into tenements ... our Registers and other books, together with our Records and evidences of all sorts, seized and distracted; many of them irrecoverably lost, and the rest not retrieved without much trouble and cost'.⁵⁸

He continued by noting that expenses for materials and workmanship so far had totalled £4,148 2s. 10d., and that another £1,000 was set aside for perfecting the quire, organ, communion table with its plate &c, finally predicting that the total costs expended on the cathedral since the Restoration would be upwards of £10,000.

Now entering his last decade, his reputation was secure for his legal prowess and expertise, his linguistic abilities, his unrivalled local knowledge and his breathtaking scholarship. As acknowledged master of Anglo-Saxon studies, correspondence within an elite circle was assured, his local reputation second to none as the doyen of Kentish antiquaries, and indeed his long-standing but unofficial care of the muniments was vouchsafed and rewarded by Kennett's epithet of 'Keeper of the Archives'.⁵⁹

Somner was able to identify the many coats of arms in and around the cathedral at a glance – always a sure sign of an expert heraldist, and a good reason for his intense interest in the cathedral stained glass. Elias Ashmole (1617-1692), the Windsor Herald who planned Charles II's lavish coronation, supplied Somner with many papers and tracts, in return for which was helped with his own *History of the most Noble Order of the Garter* (1672). Thus, it is no surprise to learn that on 25 August 1663 Sir Edward Bysshe, Clarenceux King of Arms (who had probably met Somner on the 1663 county heraldic visitation and whom Somner had helped to improve his heraldry in return for supplying research papers), granted a coat of arms to William Somner (Fig. 3) and his brother John.⁶⁰ The two men, now in

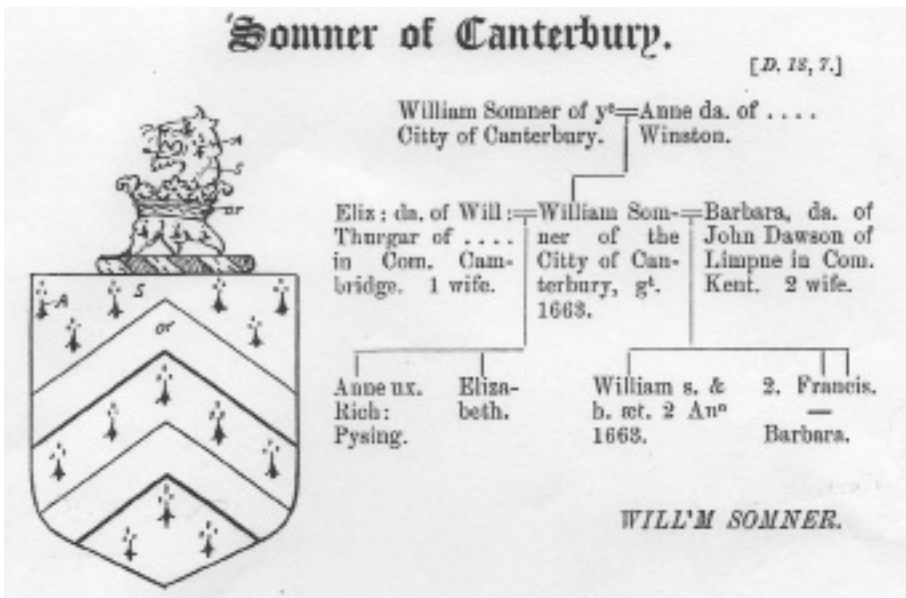


Fig. 3 Somner grant of arms from the 1663-68 visitation of Kent.

the very prime of life, understandably sought the distinction of gentility and were awarded the coat *Ermine two chevrons gules*. Unusually, although the elder, John was given a crescent as a mark of difference, perhaps to be ascribed to his brother's greater renown. More curious is that the same coat was borne by Archbishop John Bird Sumner (1780-1862) and his descendants, although standard reference works on the gentry show no armigerous ancestor earlier than his father who was born in 1748, and indeed indicate (in italics) that this coat was assumed without official authority, perhaps because William Somner the antiquary's grandson had died young in 1764 and the armorial achievement had thus failed for want of a legitimate heir.

By 1666 the ramifications of the Great Plague had spread far beyond London, for in May of that year Somner was busy recording receipts and expenditure for relief collections,⁶¹ noting that the eleven local deaneries had subscribed £486 0s. 9d., less expenses of £395 9s. 9d. incurred by travel to various local towns and London, leaving £90 11s. in hand.

Late in his working life Somner spent periods enjoying his house and tenements at Chartham, where his brother John had also acquired some land on the Stour. In the course of sinking a new well on a river bank in September 1668 some gigantic bones were discovered there by the workmen; Somner, writing perceptively about monstrous origins set against an inevitably limited viewpoint of biblical chronology, identified them as the hippopotamus (*equus fluvialis*) and wrote up his results in *Chartham News, or A Brief Relation of some strange bones there lately digged up, in some grounds of Mr John Somner's of Canterbury* (which included an engraving of the teeth), a monograph which was published just after his death in 1669, and then included by Nicholas Battely in the 1703 edition of *The Antiquities of Canterbury*.

The antiquary, writing and working to the very end, made his last court appearance as registrar on 17 March 1669. With the end not far away, he told his wife that he had never been let blood nor taken physic.⁶² He had by now let his mansion in St Margaret's St and moved, by virtue of his office as auditor, to the precincts. William Urry related⁶³ that a 1668/9 chapter library drawing of the Waterworks⁶⁴ by James Wilkie with its distorted plan of the precincts⁶⁴ is the probable evidence for Somner's residence in the old sub-prior's lodging built into the ruins of the Infirmary Hall along the brick walk pathway which ran between the Oaks and the Dark Entry. The location is clearly marked on the plan, close to the audit house. To the lifelong antiquary the location was perhaps ideal, even if the location admitted no sunlight. There he died on 30 March 1669, having made his nuncupative will⁶⁶ 'very sick and weak in body' on the very same day, hence the text being in the third person. Apart from bequests to his three surviving children and a few city functionaries, he remembered family connections in a memorandum by leaving 20s. each to the poor of the three parishes of Chartham, Christ Church and St Margaret. The residuary estate went entirely to his wife and children and was proved 8 May 1669 by his three witnesses and widow. His registrar's position now devolved to a Mr Vaughan, as mentioned in the probate document.

He was buried in the north aisle of St Margaret's church three days later on 2 April 1669, but a memorial to him was long in its creation. As late as 1693 Kennett complained of its absence;⁶⁷ at some point soon thereafter Somner's widow at her own expense commissioned a suitably inscribed memorial tablet duly recording the antiquary's scholarship, piety, royalism and rectitude (**Fig. 4**).



Fig. 4 Somner's monumental inscription in St Margaret's church, Canterbury. It reads: 'Here lies William Somner of Canterbury who elucidated the Saxon language and the history of Canterbury, both of which were obscured in darkness. Death interrupted him planning his Kentish Antiquities. He showed his duty to God with strict piety, to men by a simple honesty, to the king by a hazardous allegiance, and to his country in his immortal writings. Thus the study of antiquity moulded ancient customs. He was born 30 March 1606, spent his whole life in Canterbury, and died 30 March 1669'.

A scholar's library

On 11 June 1669 his widow Barbara sold 'certain books and a case of shelves which were my husband's in his lyfe time' to the Dean and Chapter for £100 8s.⁶⁸ Books, manuscripts, notes and papers were carried from Somner's study to the Audit House, but it was not long before the majority was consumed in a disastrous fire just a year later in 1670 – to the chagrin of generations of later scholars. But even before that disaster the books and manuscripts had been recognized as of national significance and would have immediately attracted scholars to browse Somner's holdings in canon, civil and common law, the majority with valuable manuscript annotations in the scholar's own hand. Much would no doubt have been worked on during his periods of enforced leisure when cathedral business had been suspended in the 1640s and 1650s. A fulsome list of this material was made by the Royal Commission for Historical Manuscripts.⁶⁹

The Audit House fire deprived posterity of the bulk of Somner's correspondence, a grievous loss for our knowledge and insights into his family and into his scholarly circle. Of Somner's marital happiness and the joys of children and grandchildren the records are silent: at the end he had a scattering of nephews and nieces, a wife, four surviving children, and a few grandchildren, none scholarly, and for whom there is not a single surviving comment on any of their lives. In the absence of anything to the contrary, it is tempting to see the antiquary, full of years, dying contentedly in the shadow of his beloved cathedral, his antiquarian circle, his books, his manuscripts and records, as great a comfort as the family that surrounded him.

Many antiquarians were necessarily leisured and of sufficient means to possess a working library, a distinct advantage in the days of a primitive and uncertain postal system. Loans certainly occurred, but probably more often by means of a personal visit. Books and manuscripts still extant from Somner's library afford us some idea of his own researches as well as his personal contacts and whose works he was reading or consulting.

Purchases and gifts of books, partly to help rebuild the Dean and Chapter library after the destruction of the late mediaeval one, are recorded over several decades from the 1630s. The modern library has its origins in the 1620s when Isaac Bargrave (dean from 1625) instituted a Benefactors' Book⁷⁰ which includes donations from Somner himself, all given by around 1660. Today nearly one hundred volumes are safely ascribed to him through autograph ownership inscriptions. The titles inevitably reflect his own interests and include not only most of his own works, but many he had referred to or contributed to in the course of his lifetime researches: for example, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bilson's *Perpetuall Government*, Casaubon's *De Quatuor Linguis Commentationis*, Dugdale's *Monasticon* and *Warwickshire*, Horne's *The Mirror of Justice*, Junius' *Nomenclator*, Kilburne's *Kent*, Lambarde's *Archaionomia*, Twysden's *Historiae Anglicanae Scriptores Decem*, and Wheeloc's *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Laws of Henry I*. There are other works on Anglo-Saxon history and also that subject so dear to antiquarians, chorography.

Somner often recorded the price (between 12*d.* and 25*s.*), whether new or second hand, and the year of purchase of his books. Some thirty-one volumes were gifted to him, the donors including Edward Aldey, vicar of St Andrew's, his former

headmaster John Ludd, Francis Taylor, Roger Twysden, William Dugdale, the London printer and bookseller Cornelius Bee, seven titles from his esteemed friend Meric Casaubon, and other items from local Kentish historians including Richard Kilburne, John Philipot, and John Boys who gave Somner an Italian dictionary. In all, this was very much a working library, and Somner's interest in local history is quickly recognized by his annotations in the Kentish sections of the general books about England.

Grievous as those early losses were, a reasonable corpus of Somner manuscripts still survives, nearly all in Canterbury Cathedral Archives. We still have a good idea of what did survive the fire at Canterbury, for within a generation of Somner's death White Kennett had appended⁷¹ a list of 'Mr Somner's Posthumous manuscripts, now in the Library of Christ Church, Canterbury'. This in turn was repeated and slightly augmented by Humphrey Wanley in his magisterial volume of 1697.⁷²

By its nature, the considerable quantity of (then unindexed) workaday letters, certificates and much other ancillary material pertaining to Somner's professional life is passed over in silence. *Observations upon ... Commisariaship*,⁷³ an autograph commonplace book of legal formulae, precedents, jurisdictions, privileges and so on concerning charters, commissions, the courts, clergy, petty crimes and probate is supposed to be the first fruits of his labours and the start of his study of antiquity, probably started before he reached adulthood and based upon a patent granted to Sir Nathaniel Brent (four similar mostly non-autograph ones also survive⁷⁴). A volume of sundry autograph papers⁷⁵ reveals details of church land, beadsmen and related matters, and two autograph rentals⁷⁶ of 1662-65 give interesting details about rents and arrears for the cathedral and city parishes. There are also an autograph translation of the preface to the *Dictionarium*⁷⁷ and an autograph list⁷⁸ of his own works, published and unpublished, 1660-69.

A folio paper book containing a miscellany of fourteen libelli,⁷⁹ was probably compiled by Somner and then considerably annotated by him with corrections and queries. Its provenance⁸⁰ may well be the same as that for a pair of volumes with identical and distinctive bindings,⁸¹ which were recorded by Somner as having been gifted to him by Thomas Godfrey of Hodiford in Sellindge (1585-1664), 'a great lover of learning and all ingenuity', and previously in the possession of the Kentish historian Lambarde, whose daughter Margaret had married Godfrey in 1608.

Kennett's attention was drawn rather to scholarly and literary items. Some things we may still recognize, such as 'A large collection in order to the compiling his Saxon Dictionary in 2 volumes' and 'His Antiquities of Canterbury interleaved, with very large additions' as well as copies of his own published and unpublished works, some with additions and emendations, along with assorted collections towards his unrealised county history. There are also scholia on the laws of Henry I,⁸² a discourse touching the patent of the Canterbury Commissary Court which included the origin, jurisdiction and privileges of that spiritual court; and two volumes of mostly autograph collected papers including copies of letters, transcripts from manuscripts, chronicles charters and early books, and emendations and additions to Selden and Spelman.⁸³ Kennett further records Somner's notes and emendations to Henry de Bracton, Meric Casaubon, Gervase of Canterbury, Andrew Horn, William Lisle, John Marsham, Henry Spelman, Silas Taylor, William Thorne,

Verstegan, Gerard Vossius and other authors, all highly illustrative of his broad compass of reading and interests.

A final volume⁸⁴ is of more than passing interest. Entitled *Dictionarium Latinum*, it is a fifteenth-century folio paper book of 139 double-column folios containing a copy of the contemporary *Medulla Grammaticalis* written by Geoffrey, a Dominican friar, to which Somner himself has added the Anglo-Saxon equivalents of many Latin words throughout the volume. At f.130 there is an inscription 'This is Giles Wynston's book honest man of the parish of St Dunstan's Canterbury'. Is this the same Giles Winston of St Alphege parish whose will⁸⁵ of 1602/3 was witnessed by William Somner senior, and so perhaps the grandfather of the antiquary?

Three years after her husband's death Barbara Somner was married on 6 February 1672 at Postling to her third husband (and the third with King's School connections) Henry Hannington, the rector of Elham. After his death in 1691 and some time spent living at Chartham, she returned to the confines of the cathedral precincts and the Archbishop's Palace. In November 1675, six years after Somner's death, Barbara Hannington, took delivery as administratrix of his probate inventory with the will annexed.⁸⁶ Her husband was described as being 'late of the Precincts', and the document makes for the usual fascinating reading. His home comprised blue, grey, striped, and great chambers (the latter with 23 yards of hangings worth 30s.), a little room under the stairs, study and parlour, hall and larder, buttery, kitchen and closet, and an outside woodhouse. The contents included twenty pounds of old pewter valued at 13s. 4d., a pair of virginals 40s., his purse and clothes £16, furniture £17, money in gold and silver £30, and 'all the books in the house according to our judgement' £100. Then is described his house at Chartham with its dozen or more rooms and details of debts due upon mortgage and various bonds. Barbara Hannington signed the inventory and confirmed the grand total valuation of £1,409 4s. 2d. and then proceeded to itemise the customary expenses incurred: the funeral, gloves and black bays, the tolling of the great bell, the pall and wine, physic administered to the late deceased, and sundry small debts, leading the administratrix to complain that she was out of pocket to the sum of £76 15s. 3d.

After a third widowhood, this latter of fourteen years, she died in 1705 and, at her particular request, was buried alongside her second husband, William Somner, in St Margaret's church, a stone's throw from the old family home in Castle Street. At her own expense a small memorial tablet was set up (wrongly giving the date of death as 1695) beneath her 'beloved husband' William's larger wall monument.

Several generations later, Richard Gough (1735-1809), the leading antiquary of his day, would sum up Somner's life:⁸⁷

This eminent antiquary was born on the eve of a period for which he seems to have been reserved, to rescue our antiquities from that second and more desolating storm of civil war and fanaticism which threatened them with a more sweeping ruin than the dissolution. To write his life is to write a panegyric on that study, without which the antiquities of England could hardly be discovered, or at least but imperfectly known.

That is perhaps a fair summary of a truly remarkable life which sought no fame and counted no cost in its devotion to the assiduous and diligent uncovering and recording of a nation's language and a city's antiquities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix 1 – Chronology

- 1572, birth of father, William Somner senior, at Boxley.
- c.1574, birth of mother, Ann Wynstone, at Lynsted.
- 1594, October 22, marriage of parents in Canterbury.
- 1606, March 30, birth of William Somner, antiquary.
- 1615, elected King's School scholar.
- 1634, June 12, marries Elizabeth Thurgar.
- 1638, March 20, admitted Proctor of the Canterbury Consistory Court.
- 1640, March 3, admitted Freeman of Canterbury.
- 1642, August, sacking of Canterbury cathedral.
- 1659, December 1, marries secondly Barbara Browne.
- 1660, imprisoned in Deal Castle; Registrar of the Consistory Court of Canterbury; Auditor of Canterbury Cathedral.
- 1663, August 25, grant of arms.
- 1669, March 30, dies at home in the precincts.
- 1669, May 8, nuncupative will proved.
- 1669, June 11, books and papers sold to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury.
- 1705, death of his widow Barbara Hannington late Somner.

Appendix 2 – Published and unpublished works

- 1640, *The Antiquities of Canterbury* (reissued 1661; revised 1703).
- 1648, *The In-securitie of Princes*.
- c.1650, *The Frontispiece of the King's Book Opened*.
- 1650, *Ad verba vetera Germanica* (in Casaubon's *De Quatuor Linguis*).
- 1659, *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum* (revised 1701).
- 1660, *A Treatise of Gavelkind* (completed 1647; revised 1726).
- 1669, *Chartham News*.
- 1693, *A treatise of the Roman Ports and Forts in Kent* (written c.1650s?).
- 1693, *The Goodwin Sands*.
- 1694, *Iulii Caesaris Portus Iccius Illustratus* (written c.1656).

Unpublished works

1644, *Observations on the Laws of King Henry I.*

c.1650s, *Litus Saxonicum per Britanniam.*

1660, *A Declaration of the Nobility, Gentry and Commonalty of the County of Kent* (Somner's exclusive authorship not certain).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Gavelkind*, Preface.
- ² *Life*, 20.
- ³ *Life*, 27.
- ⁴ *Life*, 98.
- ⁵ *Life*, 31.
- ⁶ *Dictionarium, ad lectorem*, 6.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, 8.
- ⁸ *Life*, 93.
- ⁹ *Life*, 126.
- ¹⁰ BL MS Royal B xxii.
- ¹¹ Oxford, Bodley MS Junius 71.
- ¹² *Dictionarium, ad lectorem* 17.
- ¹³ *Life*, 133-5 (CCAL: W2/Q-2-10). A generation later in *Roman Ports and Forts* Kennett repeated almost verbatim twenty-six of the Kentish supporters' names, perhaps to emphasise local networks of scholarly activity, some of whom at least would have sights firmly set on the elucidation and exposition of ancestry, and so justifying their present country seat.
- ¹⁴ Oxford, Bodley MS Selden Supra B.
- ¹⁵ *Life*, 63.
- ¹⁶ BL MS Cotton Titus xv, xvi.
- ¹⁷ BL MS Harley 8, 9.
- ¹⁸ *Viro Vere Generoso et mihi unice observando.*
- ¹⁹ BL MS Cotton Tiberius B i.
- ²⁰ CCAL: W/E 6.20.
- ²¹ CCAL: Lit MS C/8.
- ²² Oxford, Bodley MS Ashmole 328.
- ²³ BL MS Cotton Claudius B iv.
- ²⁴ BL MS Royal 12D xvii.
- ²⁵ BL MS Royal 7C ix.
- ²⁶ Oxford, Bodley MS Junius 11.
- ²⁷ *Dictionarium, ad lectorem* 3.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, 2, 15.
- ²⁹ BL MS Cotton Vitellius A xv.
- ³⁰ *Dictionarium, ad lectorem* 9.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, 15.
- ³² *ibid.*, 14.
- ³³ *ibid.*, 18.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, 10.
- ³⁵ *De hoc autem amplius imposterum, inter Antiquitates Cantianas, a nobis, hoc opere tandem absolute, Deo volente, adornandas.*
- ³⁶ CCAL: Lit MS E/20-1.
- ³⁷ CCAL: Lit MS C/9-10.

- 38 Hamper, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
 39 *ibid.*
 40 Oxford, Bodley MS Ballard 51.
 41 BL MS Harley 3782, f.119; quoted in Nichols (1812-15), IV, p. 141.
 42 *plus ter centum supra quatuor mille auctum reperio.*
 43 *Life*, 53.
 44 *Life*, 56.
 45 *ibid.*
 46 *Gavelkind*, 11.
 47 *ibid.*, 41.
 48 *Antiquities*, 173.
 49 *Life*, 116.
 50 *Life*, 106.
 51 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1659/60.
 52 CCAL: DCc Ch. Ant. S/406.
 53 CCAL: DCb J/Z.2.2.
 54 CCAL: DCc BB/W/12.
 55 CCAL: DCc V P/9.
 56 Oxford, Bodley MS 28183, ff. 128, 133, 137.
 57 *Antiquities*, 96
 58 CCAL: Lit MS A/15, ff.7-8.
 59 *Life*, 92.
 60 Armytage (1906), p. 152; *Grantees of Arms* (Harleian Society, lxvi (1915), p. 238).
 61 LPL: CM VI/20.
 62 CCAL: DCb J/Z/2/5.
 63 *The Cantuarian* (1949), p. 286.
 64 CCAL: Fabric XXXV.
 65 Illustrated in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XLIX (1938), 194-5.
 66 KHL: PRC32/53/464.
 67 *Life*, 102-3.
 68 CCAL: DCc LA/1/11.
 69 RCHM Ninth Annual Report (1883), Appendix I, pp. 124-5.
 70 CCAL: Lit MS E/40.
 71 *Life*, 37.
 72 Wanley (1697), pp. 223-5, 389.
 73 CCAL: Lit MS A/3.
 74 CCAL: Lit MS C/16-19.
 75 CCAL: Lit MS A/15.
 76 CCAL: DCc Rentals 17; 57.
 77 CCAL: Ch Ant M/352.
 78 CCAL: DCc LA/1/10.
 79 CCAL: Lit MS B/2.
 80 *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxv (1995), 389-411.
 81 CCAL: Lit MS E/1, 2.
 82 CCAL: Lit MS C/6.
 83 CCAL: Lit MS C/5, 8.
 84 CCAL: Lit MS D/2.
 85 See above, endnote 6.
 86 KHL: PRC18/34/85.
 87 Gough (1780), I, 443.