

## Not Burleigh's Wa's?

As a frequent visitor to Haddington I have always been intrigued as to why such a patently un-Scots name such as Burleigh should come to give it's name to what is now a rather forlorn vennel that runs between the Hardgait and Brown's Close<sup>1</sup> exiting at Kilpair Street.

Furthermore as an engineer I was interested in the form of the half and part arches clearly of different ages and construction and as to why they had come to this state.

The short story which I unfold takes its base from original documents and observations made on inspection of the Vennel from different points.

Finally the story shows that the "Wa's" were not `walls' of modern parlance but wells which were vital to the daily life of Haddington in early times and certainly at the time of their repair in 1660 when there was no sewage or piped water provision.

Geological information is also important as the story unfolds, in that as the town of Haddington expanded, (Heuding tun: encampment by the banks of the Tyne {Saxon Origin}), the ground waters which run through sandy sub-strata, which is, in any case, a natural filter would become polluted due to lack of sewage provision and hence wells would be cut further and further away from the centre of the town to the depth of known underground waterways. Thus we have a `Brewery Court' in the Sidegait whose obvious prime need would be fresh clean water. Old wells were filled in or `capped',

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<sup>1</sup> I use the spellings from the Scottish Records Office Documents

and their sites re-discovered as Haddington has developed.

Starting from the knowledge that the `Walls, Walls or Wa's' were repaired by one Edward Right Esq., {no doubt a Waal Howker, himself} we find that the cost of carrying out the repair was £5.00.00 {Scots!} all for 36 hours of honest toil <sup>2</sup>, we can reasonably assume that as the job was to be carried out `with all due `haste an' speide' as the water supply was in danger rather than any walls of protection needing repair.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the visible remains of the Vennel, one can easily discern when viewed from the far side of the Hardgait that the supporting arch has been divided into two sections, with a supporting central wall of the adjacent building covering the left hand part of the arch. This means that the original vennel would have been twice as wide and would allow the passage of the town's water carts through to the other side of the Hardgait where the wells were situated.

Evidence of their presence was found when new foundations were being installed on the site of the `The Kings Arms ' Inn which was standing on the site at that time.

We can also surmise that if the `Wa's' were being repaired in 1660, then it must follow that the `Waal Howkers' had built the wells some- what earlier, probably a century before. One can only wonder at the skill of these early day artisans having to cut a well through

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<sup>2</sup> Please see copies of original documentation.

<sup>3</sup> `Wa's' definition from Scottish National Dictionary, Scottish Records Office.

soft sandy strata, lining the walls with stone blocks in circular fashion as they went.

On passing through the vennel, we further notice the central section of an even older arch constructed with parallel sided stones which under gravity form a stable arch-way and was the fore-runner of the later arches built with a central key-stone, noticing also that the path level has risen at this point. If this arch is extended on either side we can see once again that the vennel would be wide enough for the passage of water carts to the well site. The construction of this arch suggests that the vennel had reached that point from the centre of the town by the fourteenth century.

What then is in the name?

Accepting that anyone who could read and write was a highly-educated person, what is surprising is the number of different spellings of the name. What one can say is that the spelling of the name 'Burliegh' is relatively modern, and does not agree with early spellings as recorded by the quill pen of the 'Tresorer' who relates to Burlies, or Burlys Waal's in his records, and furthermore he uses different spellings in the documents now kept in the Scottish Record Office.

'Burliegh' no doubt arose at the time of the 'Enlightenment' when all things Scots had to be 'Anglicised', but linguistically the 'eigh' spelling literally holds no water{!} in the local vernacular or the Scots language itself. Another source of this spelling may also have arisen from the reported name of the landlord of 'The Kings Arms ' Inn but I have no proof of this by independent documentation.

Burley on the other hand, is a district of Leeds (4), and also lends its name to Burley-in-Wharfedale, a village NorthWest of Leeds and in this there may lie a connection through

the wool trade and the sheep drovers. It is also a very common surname in the Sheffield area where my Father was born.

In summary the sign on the wall of the Vennel known as 'Burliegh's Wa's' refers to an ancient right of way to the wells of Haddington, dating at least from the fourteenth century. The spelling of the name has been modernised and should be 'Burlies' or 'Burlys' from original documentation.

This small remnant of old Haddington should be preserved if only by a correct sign on the wall of any future development, and should be taken into account by those wishing to develop this ancient site and the surrounding area.

Roger Burley  
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#### Records Consulted at the Scottish Office.

B30/19 Treasurer's Accounts 1660-1678  
B30/21/12 Writs relating to Hardgait Tenements 1670  
B30/1/1 Register of Sassines 2nd Series  
B30/17/2 Guild Register Ledger 1840-1887  
B30/17/1 Burgesses and Guild Books 1835-1848  
B30/17/3 Alphabetical index of Burgesses 1700-1826 (No Burlies!)  
B30/2/2 Burgh Records Register of Sassines, First Series  
B30/22/13 May 19 1655, Documents relating to tenement in West Hardgait.

#### Haddington Library:

Robb, Janice : Transcripts from the Book of 'Counsall' 1423-1714  
19th November 1660; "Ordaines the Tres<sup>r</sup> to repair burlies walls with all convenient speid".