

The Cranston Lecture 2023

THE OGLIBY ATLASES: AN APPEAL

Andrea Thomas

[1 - Title]

Good evening everyone. It is great to see so many people here tonight to support the Cranston Library and a special 'hello' to those watching online. Can you all hear me?

As the title of my talk indicates, tonight I will be making a special appeal for help in restoring two of our most remarkable books, but before I get into the nitty gritty of that project, I'd like to tell you a story, and I would like to thank my fellow trustee, Sean Hawkins, who very kindly gave me many of the details of this tale from his own research.

Once upon a time ... sometime towards the end of the seventeenth century (we don't have the exact date I'm afraid), a little girl was born, called Elizabeth Holford (sadly we have no portrait either). We know very little about her parents, Henry and Mary but crucially, she became a substantial heiress. In 1709, her mother's uncle bequeathed to her the estate and manor of Bermondsey, now in south London, and then he obligingly died the next year. So in 1710, Elizabeth Holford became a wealthy landowner and thus a very desirable marriage prospect. You can just imagine the suitors circling like bees around a honeypot! Elizabeth Holford's mother had many Reigate connections and the successful suitor was a Reigate gentleman and sometime MP for the borough, Edward Thurland esquire. Elizabeth and Edward married in 1711 and had no surviving children. They lived in the mansion house known as Great Doods, which once stood in the area of the modern Eversfield Road and Deerings Road. These pictures show a later house on the same site, which was sold for development in 1906.

[2 & 3 - Great Doods of 1906]

Immediately after the marriage, presumably by the wishes of her new husband, Elizabeth's lands were put up for sale. The bill of sale has not survived but we may well imagine that Edward Thurland received a substantial cash bonanza from the sale of his wife's lands, which was certainly accomplished by 1718 and probably somewhat earlier.

If you will allow me, I would just like to say a little bit about the legal status of married women in this period. Under the law of the land, a wife was entirely subject to her husband and all her property and possessions belonged to him. Husband and wife were regarded as one legal entity and a wife could not act in her own right: for example, she needed her husband's agreement to make a will. It was possible to give a wife a legal personality of her own and to 'ring-fence' lands and property for her own use, but only if legal documents were drawn up to that effect before a marriage or an inheritance took place and this seldom happened. Not until the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, were wives given even a little bit of legal protection from the powers of their husbands, and much more followed in the 20th century of course.

Another point to note is that property usually descended in the male line and that women only inherited lands in the absence of male heirs. A marriage that produced no sons was usually regarded as deficient, and the wife was often given the blame. Unmarried women and widows did have their own legal personalities, but often found themselves short of income and therefore dependent on the charity of wealthier male relatives. Those of you familiar with the life and work of Jane Austen, who lived a century later than Elizabeth Holford, will be well aware of this I'm sure.

We have very little documentary evidence of the life of Elizabeth Holford, later Thurland, but as far as we can tell, she seems to have had some issues with her legal status. Not only were her lands sold for the benefit of her husband immediately after their marriage, but also he left her shockingly little in his will. Edward Thurland died in December 1731 and Elizabeth lived on for another eight years until 1739. In his will, he left all his money and property to his three nieces. Only towards the end of the will, almost as an afterthought, does he grant to his 'deare wife' quote: 'the moderate use of all the household goods which she

brought with her during her life' provided she continues to live in his house, and that's it. Under this arrangement, after her death, Elizabeth's household goods would revert to the possession of Edward's nieces, who in any case would be the owners of the house in which she lived as a widow. So Edward Thurland was 'graciously' giving back to his wife the use of a small portion of the property that she had given to him. Nevertheless somehow, at the time of her death, the widowed Elizabeth clearly had some money and possessions, but no lands, to bestow where she wished. In her will she left her wealth to be divided equally between two female cousins, one of whom was married. And Elizabeth's will makes it quite clear that the married cousin should receive her inheritance quote: 'to her own proper use and benefit as if she were Sole or unmarried, without the intermeddling Control or Contradiction' of her husband. Elizabeth Holford/Thurland was clearly a woman of some character, who sought to protect a younger relative from the problems that she had experienced. I feel I would like to have met her!

[4 - vols on shelf]

And there is a sense in which we can meet Elizabeth, at least indirectly. In December 1713, two years into her marriage, Elizabeth Thurland, wife of Edward, gave two books to the Cranston Library. The gift was recorded in her own name and so is likely to have come from amongst her own possessions that she brought with her to Great Doods. We may also imagine that Edward gave his permission and approved of her donation, since he had previously donated 27 of his own books at the time of the library's foundation in 1701. Another reason to surmise that the books originated in Elizabeth's own family is that they both

[5 - CAH x 2]

contain ownership marks - the initials CAH - one of which has been partially defaced. Although we do not know who CA was, the H is very likely to indicate a Holford. Each book also contains a number, which looks as if it might be contemporary with the initials: 87 and 89 as you can see. I would dearly like to know what was volume 88! Both of these remarkable books may be viewed in the chancel exhibition this evening.

The two books given by Elizabeth Thurland are among the largest and most fascinating in the library's collection. They are two volumes from a larger set of five atlases, collectively known as *The English Atlas*. The volumes covered China, Japan, Africa, Asia and America and were published between 1669 and 1673 by John Ogilby, Royal Cosmographer to King Charles II. The Cranston volumes are *Africa*, published in 1670 and *America* of 1671, so they were already more than forty years old when Elizabeth Thurland gave them to the library.

[6 - John Ogilby]

John Ogilby was a remarkable, multi-talented buccaneer of a man who, in a long life from 1600 to 1676 worked as a dancer and dancing master, a soldier, a ship's captain (briefly), the founder of two theatres, an impresario, composer, translator, printer, publisher and cartographer. He was originally from Scotland, possibly an illegitimate son of an aristocratic house, and he was formally apprenticed to a London dancing master as a boy, but in all the other accomplishments he was largely self-taught. He held the honorific, royally-bestowed titles of Master of the Revels for Ireland, Master of the Royal Imprimerie (that is, the King's Printer) and, as we have seen, Royal Cosmographer. He seemed to have had a knack for cultivating good relations with rich and influential people and he married a wealthy heiress but, like the Thurlands they had no children. It should be noted that at his death, in contrast to Edward Thurland, John Ogilby left his entire extensive estate to his wife jointly with her grandson from a previous marriage. Among his publications were his own translations of the works of Virgil and Homer and an extended version of Aesop's *Fables* - in which he wrote some new fables of his own to add to the traditional ones. As a mover and shaker in the City of London, he played a significant part in devising the coronation procession of King Charles II in 1661. The Great Fire of London of 1666 destroyed, amongst many other things, his house, print-works and entire stock of books, but he swiftly recovered his status and fortune by becoming one of just four men appointed to survey and map out the City of London in preparation for the rebuilding work after the fire. This huge undertaking seems to have spurred his interest and expertise in map-making when he was already in his sixties,

[7 - Map of London]

and here is one of the superb maps he produced at the time, with the assistance of William Morgan, his wife's grandson. As well as his maps of London and the five-volumes of *The English Atlas*, he also produced the most detailed survey and road atlas of Great Britain at the time, for which he is probably most

famous: it was titled *Britannia* and published in 1675, the year before he died. His cartographical work is still much admired today.

John Ogilby produced his maps of London and Great Britain by surveying the ground in person (with many assistants of course) but he never travelled to Africa, America or Asia. So, for his volumes on these territories he turned to the foremost European cartographers of his age, principally Dutch scholars. He freely and shamelessly took the works of these authors, translated them into English and reprinted their maps, sometimes without even changing the Dutch headings and labels. The five volumes of *The English Atlas* are thus a skilful rehash of existing European geographical knowledge presented for a British audience. Despite their immense size, the volumes were popular and hugely successful. Although they were called atlases, they contain so much more than one would expect in the modern understanding of that word. They include many maps of course, but there are also beautiful topographical, zoological and ethnographical engravings, and extensive descriptions of the countries, peoples and customs of the respective lands. Ogilby was clearly tapping into a thirst for knowledge about the wider world in an age of European exploration, expansion and empire-building. His volumes also take it for granted that far-flung territories and peoples were ripe for exploitation, and that European traders and settlers had a God-given right to appropriate the wealth of these lands for their own benefit, and in that attitude he was very much of his age.

The volume on *Africa* describes all the North African states from Egypt to the Straits of Gibraltar, then travels down the Atlantic coast, around the gulf of Guinea and down to the Cape of Good Hope, then up the east coast, taking in Madagascar, and ending in the Red Sea.

[8 - Africa title]

Here is the title page, listing all the exciting things contained in the book such as descriptions of: *coasts, harbours, creeks, rivers, lakes, cities, towns, castles and villages. Their customs, modes, manners, languages, religions and inexhaustible treasure, with their governments and policy, variety of trade and barter, and also their wonderful plants, beasts, birds and serpents.*

[9 - Africa allegory]

And here is the frontispiece showing an allegorical figure of Africa surrounded by examples of the different types of peoples and animals on the continent, with even some pyramids in the background.

[10 - Africa map]

This is the map of the whole continent, showing much more detail of the coast than of the then largely unexplored inland regions. And there are many other maps showing smaller sections of the territories in close-up.

And here are some examples of the other beautiful engravings in the volume:

[11 - Salé]

A view of the Moroccan city of Salé

[12 - Benin]

A rather fanciful depiction of a procession by the king of Benin

[13 - Animals]

And an attempt to portray some animals: an eagle, a hyena, and what I think is intended to be a crocodile!

The volume on *America* follows a similar format. It describes all the lands known to the Europeans of the day from Canada south through what would later become the USA, through Central America and the Caribbean islands and into South America, right down to the tip at Tierra del Fuego, which Ogilby calls Magellanica.

[14 - America title]

The title page again offers an extensive list of the goodies inside ...

[15 - America allegory]

Whilst the frontispiece shows an allegorical figure of America scattering riches from a cornucopia.

[16 - America map]

The map of the whole continent indicates the extent of European exploration at this point. The Portuguese and Spanish empires of central and south America are recorded in impressive detail, but Ogilby and his

Dutch sources have no inkling of the extent of the Great Lakes and the Great Plains, and no knowledge at all of the Northwest Passage, Alaska, the Bering Strait or the Rocky Mountains. Only the southern part of California is shown, which makes it look like an island. However, Ogilby was very careful to label the settlement that the Dutch called New Amsterdam, as New York - a forced transfer that took place in 1664!

[17 - Havana]

Here is a beautiful view of Havana on Cuba ...

[18 - Idols]

Here is Ogilby's idea of the worship of pagan idols by the Native American tribes ...

[19 - Llamas]

And here are some delightful llamas from the Andes. I love this picture!

So, as you can see, these are fascinating volumes, giving the reader an armchair tour of distant and exotic lands, peoples and animals. As such, we think the Ogilby volumes were often read in the library itself and were also borrowed by a range of local readers, even though the practical difficulties of getting them from the library to the home and back again were considerable. I always imagine a couple of burly servants with a wheelbarrow being in attendance! Of the two books, *America* was by far the more popular with borrowers. *Africa* is recorded in the borrowers' register only twice: taken out by Mr Benjamin Thornton in 1725 and by Mrs Gardom in 1829. On the other hand, *America* was borrowed by nine different readers in total: Mr Benjamin Thornton again in 1725 a few months before he took out *Africa*, a clergyman in 1782, a glazier in 1783, and then by six different readers in quick succession between 1825 and 1830, one of whom was Mrs Gardom again. Ogilby seems to have been very fashionable in those years - I wonder why? Some of the borrowers are identified as tradesmen of the town - such as a harness maker and a hatter as well as the glazier already mentioned. I think it is very likely that, once the books were in the home of a Reigate reader, they would have been perused by many more people than just the named borrower, and one can imagine that the volumes would have been an object of curiosity, wonder and animated discussion. They are certainly very popular with visitors to the library today.

And that brings me to the reason for this special appeal. As many of you will be aware, the library has had a rolling programme of repair and conservation work on our books running for many years - indeed you can see some of the most recently conserved books in the exhibition tonight. To a considerable extent, this conservation programme was underpinned by an annual grant from Surrey County Council, for which we were very grateful, and which used to pay for our specialist insurance premiums. This allowed us to devote all other donations to conservation work. In these straightened times the Surrey County Council grant was first frozen and then gradually tapered down to zero, so that we now receive no more money from that source. We still have sufficient funds available to pay for our insurance premiums over the next few years, and our governing document obliges the trustees to purchase insurance for the library, but our ability to fund repair and conservation work has inevitably been rather constrained as a result.

Over the last twenty years we have conserved nearly 150 of our most dilapidated books at a total cost of nearly £35,000. We have spent an average of about £230 per volume and been lucky enough to find individual sponsors for some of the more expensive projects, with the rest of the money raised from the contributions of you, our wonderfully generous supporters. At the time we drew up our list of priority books for repairs in 2004, the Ogilby atlases were judged to be in pretty good condition and did not make it onto the list. There was, of course, some wear and tear to the bindings, which inevitably comes with use over time, but in the last twenty years their condition has sadly deteriorated. The main problem is their sheer size and weight. As they have been sitting quietly on our shelves, the great mass of the two text blocks have started to sag under their own weight and this has put a strain on the integrity of the bindings and the spines, and the structure of the boards, so they are now in need of some expert intervention to repair the worst damage and to stabilise their condition to prevent further problems. Many of you know our expert conservators, Nick and Charlotte Cowlishaw, who have worked tirelessly for the library over many years and they have advised that each volume is in need of the following work:

[20 - Shoe]

- first and foremost, the construction of made-to-measure book ‘shoes’ to support the weight of the text blocks and relieve the strain of the sagging pages - here is an example of just such a ‘shoe’ made for a different, smaller book in the collection.

[21, 22 & 23 - Boards, Corners & Spines]

- secondly, repairs to the bottom edges and corners of the boards, which have started to buckle under the strain of the sagging text blocks, and to the spines which are starting to pull away from the shifting boards

[24 - Joints]

- and thirdly, repairs to the stitching and end caps of the binding, repairs to the endpaper joints and paper repairs to some of the pages

All of this work is estimated to cost £1500 per volume, so we need to raise a total of £3000 to fund the work. We normally expect to see total donations from each lecture of about £1,000 a year, so as you can see, we have set ourselves an ambitious target for fundraising in 2023. I know that these are difficult times and we are all experiencing problems with the cost of living, so I am a bit reluctant to ask you to be even more generous than usual, but I hope you will agree that the restoration and stabilisation of the Ogilby atlases is a worthy cause and I hope you may be able to offer us donations a little bit bigger than normal if at all possible. And if anyone feels willing and able to offer larger sums of sponsorship for part or even all of the Ogilby project we would love to hear from you. We always include bookplates acknowledging sponsors in the relevant volumes, so in that way our sponsors themselves become part of the history of the library.

Hilary has produced some striking red flyers explaining the Ogilby appeal, so please do take some and pass them on to your friends, family and wider connections - basically to anyone you think might be interested in helping us. And please do use the gift aid envelopes if you are eligible, because this allows us to reclaim money from the taxman! Rest assured that we are still in the position at the moment to devote all the money raised tonight to the Atlases Appeal.

[25 - Title again]

Thank you all for coming tonight to support the library and our 2023 appeal. We are very grateful for your donations large and small and for your interest in our remarkable library. Please give generously!

Thank you.