

(11:21); hence from the very nature of creation Browne may conclude: "All things began in *order*, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the *ordainer of order* and mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven."

Browne could not know in 1658 that he would live for another 24 years. As though *The Garden of Cyrus* is actually his final work he joins it, like a snake swallowing its own tail, to his first work, for in the *Religio* he had written:

"I beleeve the world growes neare its end, yet is neither old nor decayed, nor will ever perish upon the ruines of its own principles. As the worke of Creation was above nature, so its adversay, annihilation. . . . Now what force should bee able to consume it . . . without the breath of God . . . my Philosophy [meaning natural science] cannot informe mee. [The beginning and the end] . . . rather seem to manifest the method and Idea of the great worke of the Intellect of God . . ." (p 117).¹

So I end my discourse with the Norwich statue of our beloved Browne, to remind ourselves that though every physician faces death, life is his greater concern. Browne in stone contemplating the ashes of the dead is part of the romantic reading of him in 1905, stemming from Coleridge, Lamb, and De Quincy. For 77 years an awed public had gazed at Browne's skull in a glass case in the hospital museum. Literary criticism of Browne from Walter Pater, Ernest Dowson, Leslie Stephen,

and Edmund Gosse pictured him as quaint, fussing around with antique trifles while sounding his melancholy organ notes. George Saintsbury even scanned the whole final chapter of *Urn Burial*, and included its author in a chapter entitled "Antiquaries" for *The Cambridge History of English Literature*.

Today, surely, we realise that Browne's brilliant mind, measured energy, and unwavering Christian faith go far beyond this. Hence, I am bold enough to prophesy that twice every century until the last syllable of recorded time, this City of Norwich will rethink and recelbrate the life, work, and death of its universal citizen.

Portions of this oral presentation receive more scholarly treatment in forthcoming publications: *The Garden of Cyrus as Prophecy*, in *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne: The Ann Arbor Tercentenary Lectures and Essays*, ed C A Patrides (University of Missouri Press); and the Lushington material in *Modern Philology* (University of Chicago Press).

Reference

- ¹ Patrides CA, ed. *The major works of Sir Thomas Browne*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977.

Browne 300: Festival at Norwich

STEPHEN LOCK

Volume 2 of the *BMJ* for 1905 contained no fewer than 10 entries devoted to Sir Thomas Browne to commemorate the tercentenary of his birth. Foremost among these was an address given at Guy's Hospital by none other than Dr William Osler, then Regius Professor at Oxford, who dealt with the man and his writings, concluding that "mastery of self, conscientious devotion to duty, deep human interest in human beings—these best of all lessons you must learn now or never; and these are some of the lessons you may glean from the life and from the lips of Sir Thomas Browne." The length of Osler's address (5½ pages in small type) was almost equalled by a description of the ceremonies at Norwich: the unveiling of Pegram's statue next to St Peter Mancroft (the church where Browne worshipped and where he is buried); the Memorial Service in the same church; and a luncheon at the Blackfriars Hall.

Reading the accounts of speeches by all the assembled worthies, I was struck by how much styles have changed in three-quarters of a century. The emphasis of Browne 300—last week's splendid festival held in Norwich to commemorate the tercentenary of his death—was on informality. True, there was a certain amount of necessary seriousness: an opening ceremony and a memorial service with a sermon by the Dean of St Paul's and lessons read by the Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, and the President of the Royal College of Physicians. But last week the dignitaries wore neither gowns nor top hats, and Dr Anthony Batty Shaw, the festival's energetic moving spirit, had ensured that there was street theatre, performances of Purcell's *King Arthur*, and an exhibition

of commemorative pottery—not to mention a Tercentenary Peel rung on the bells of St Peter Mancroft, that masterpiece of a parish church with its famous roof and stained glass.

Browne, Norfolk, and Norwich

Part of Browne's appeal to us today as a man is that he quietly continued cultivating his family, his profession, and his own interests in an age that resembled our own: violent, threatening, and bewildering. Norwich, where he lived for the last 40 years of his life, was then the second largest city in England, and, though in supporting the Puritans it had been on the winning side of the Civil War, it had felt its effects—slump, unemployment, conscription, and heavy taxes. The Cathedral had been sacked by some of the townsfolk and St Peter Mancroft seriously damaged in "The Great Blow," an explosion occurring when some gunpowder had ignited in a nearby arsenal being looted by the mob. Even when Charles II had been restored to the throne, Rachel Young reminded us in the session devoted to Browne, Norfolk, and Norwich, there had been the Great Plague and subsequent near famine, averted only by a timely glut of herring at Yarmouth.

Thus violence and potential disaster had continually been in the background of Browne's life at Norwich. Nevertheless, he had also found the time to be active as a naturalist, Ted Ellis showed. In an age when Norfolk was still largely a neglected and straggling wilderness he had become the first complete naturalist, interested in everything: badgers, beetles, butterflies, fish, fungi, and seeds, to mention only a few. The first to mention in print the existence of the Norfolk Broads, by keeping a bitterne in his backyard, Browne had typically disposed of the myth that the bird produced its boring sound by putting its bill into hollow reeds, mud, or water.

Continuing this theme of scientific curiosity, Anthony Batty



Bronze statuette of Sir Thomas Browne, by Henry Pegram.

Shaw pointed to the close links between Browne as a naturalist and as a physician. True, he had had no reputation as a teacher; true, his medical research, into coagulation and embryology, had come to little—though he had been the first to use the word laboratory, since shorn of its “e.” Nevertheless, Browne had achieved greatness through being a good physician; having studied at Montpellier, Padua, and Leyden, he had anticipated by centuries the concept of continuing medical education, buying new editions of medical texts as they came out and subscribing to the monthly sheets of the *Transactions of the Royal Society*. In Norfolk folklore handed down from generation to generation, Sir Thomas had been thought very highly of; he had been called into consultation by other doctors, sometimes for members of their own families; and he had been asked to contribute prefaces to several books written by his medical colleagues.

The Grand Tour in his youth had done much to enlarge Browne's intellectual interests, Victor Morgan maintained, though even before this he had been the typical product of two recent revolutions in English life—social (giving rise to a “pseudogentry” of a leisured and cultivated class), and educational (which, for secular and religious needs, had produced in Britain proportionately more university graduates than there were to be again until after 1918). Sir Thomas had been a true virtuoso, with eclectic and diverse interests—in collecting (books, medals, coins, and plants); in linguistics and languages; and in rarities.

Exhibitions and tradition

The last two of the four exhibitions—Books by Norfolk Doctors; The Life of Sir Thomas Browne; Sir Thomas Browne, his Family and Friends; and Browniana—will continue until 12 September. The third of these, staged in Norwich Castle, is unique in that it brings together for the first time all the known portraits of Browne, from sources as rich and diverse as Chatsworth, the Royal College of Physicians, and Pembroke College, Oxford. That entitled Browniana is held in the elegant long gallery of the Dean and Chapter's Library above the cathedral cloisters. Here are not only copies of writings by

Browne himself, his son, and his friends, but also some of his letters, documents relating to the Royal Society, and a catalogue of his library, with copies of some books in the same editions as those he owned. A particularly imaginative feature is the carrel devoted to Sir Thomas's children, with murals and tape-recorded readings of some of the documents about them.

Perhaps everybody should admit their own blind spots: that Stockhausen's music or Pollock's paintings, say, are beyond them. As a personal view, although objectively I see their merits, I still dislike Gesualdo's madrigals or Guercino's paintings, and likewise, until last weekend, I must now confess to having sided with Edmund Gosse—who, in his *English Men of Letters*, had protested against Browne's fondness for long and pedantic words—and having wanted to replace longer words with shorter ones or to put indignant editorial question marks in the margin.

But Gosse had also compared Browne's style to “light shot with all the elements of the spectrum, flashed out against a firmament of romantic gloom,” and Browne, I discovered, is best approached by hearing his words spoken—which reveals both their sense and their music. This for me was one message of last week's festival, and I must go back to his writings. Another was the strong sense of tradition in Norfolk and Norwich, reassuring in a week when hospital ancillaries were imperilling the health of patients in our hospitals and the effects of a threatened national railway strike seemed likely to ensure that Britain would be in an even worse position to pay them or the nurses better, let alone achieve the standards of medical care available in the rest of the civilised world. If some of the punks and skinheads on Hay Hill who jeered at the street theatre representation of the plague were the descendants of the mob who sacked Norwich Cathedral, so also had been five patients seen by Dr Batty Shaw in his professional life descended from patients known to have been treated by Sir Thomas himself.

St Peter Mancroft, where flowers chosen for their medical connections decorated Sir Thomas's tomb and elsewhere, and where the Tercentenary Peal was rung, had been the first place to record a true peel (Gransir Bob Triples, on 2 May 1715 by the Norwich Scholars). Sir William Osler had done much to revive the interest in Browne, and there in the audience at Professor Huntley's Tercentenary oration (p 43) was not only one of Osler's disciples and friends but the foremost Browne scholar of our day—Sir Geoffrey Keynes, at 95 still hard at work on his literary projects, to whom the audience rose in homage.

Finally, to return to the beginning of this account, even the *BMJ* can claim a minor role in the Browne story. Among others, in 1905 it pressed for Browne's skull to be returned from the museum at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital to St Peter Mancroft. Seventeen years later this was done—which, given the Great War and the delays in the English system—was a satisfying result. Is there any chance that something the *BMJ* is campaigning for today will be put into effect in 1999?

An illustrated booklet, *Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich*, is available from Dr Batty Shaw at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, Norwich, Norfolk, NRB 5SR, price £1.50.

A patient who was diagnosed as having persisting grade 3 sarcoidosis wishes to work in either Saudi Arabia or South Africa. Would the increased sunlight have any effect on the sarcoidosis?

Grade 3 sarcoidosis means the late radiological stage 3 of diffuse pulmonary infiltration without hilar adenopathy. This is a late stage, often with pulmonary fibrosis, so the overseas sun would be beneficial for his chest disease. As the disease is also relatively inactive the sun would not contribute unduly to abnormal calcium metabolism.—D GERAINT JAMES, consultant physician, London.