

Preface

‘Our most judicious Antiquary of the last age, John Leland’
(John Selden, Illustration to the *Poly-Olbion*)

Soon after John Leland became insane in 1547, hard on the heels of Henry VIII’s death, a friend wrote to the exiled John Bale to inform him about this lamentable state of affairs. This individual, who deeply regretted the loss to learning brought about by Leland’s illness, attested that ‘I was as famylyarlye acquaynted wyth hym, as wyth whome I am best acquaynted, and do knowe certenlye, that he from his youth was so earnestly studyouse and desyerouse of our Antiquytees, that alwayes hys whole studyes were dyrected to that ende.’¹ A decade earlier Bale himself had drawn attention to Leland’s scholarly nature:

Carnalibus curis alienus, tuique quodammodo oblitus, honorem spernis, spernis et diuitias, dum paruula cella sepius inclusus, aliis prodesse studueris assidue.

(A stranger to worldly cares, and oblivious to your own interests, you spurn honours and riches, keeping mostly to your little cell and assiduously strive to be of service to others.)²

This characterization of Leland as a veritable St Jerome in his study, put forth by those who knew him best, must serve to remind us that those writings we admire most, those witnesses to his constant travel that allow us to call Leland the father of English topography, derive from field notes never intended for publication: what we now know as the *Itinerary* and the *Collectanea* would have been transformed out of recognition and the notes no doubt destroyed had Leland lived longer. Our perception of Leland would have been radically different in this case, and our knowledge of Tudor England and Wales diminished: much that Leland considered incidental provides us with an intimate knowledge of the contemporary landscape, cultural and intellectual no less than geographical, seen through his sharp eyes.

If Leland’s notes are wide ranging they are also chaotic, so much so that a variety of subsequent scholars, from soon after his death almost to the present time, have claimed that his writings have been pilfered by others: Thomas Hearne, his eighteenth-century editor, proclaimed with good reason that ‘all

¹ *Laboryouse journey*, sig. Biiiii^v.

² This description appears in the dedicatory epistle to Leland in Bale’s *Anglorum Heliades* (BL MS Harley 3838, fol. 4r). It is printed in W. Huddesford, *The Lives of those Eminent Antiquaries John Leland, Thomas Hearne, and Anthony à Wood*, 2 vols (Oxford 1772), 1. 84–7.

the Antiquaries of note since his time have drawn very many of their materials from him, tho' oftentimes without acknowledgement'.³ The notes, so independent one from another, were, almost by nature, vulnerable to incorporation into other narratives, and Bale's recasting of Leland's 'New Year's Gift' as *The laboryouse journey & serche of Johan Leylande for Englandes antiquitees, geven of hym as a neue yeares gyfte to Kynge Henry the VIII in the xxxvii yeare of his reygne, with declaracyons enlarged* represents only the beginning of a long tradition.

Nevertheless, in spite of their spontaneity, the notes do not reveal the 'real' Leland lurking behind them. Composed as private aides-mémoires, they remain cryptic as signposts to his character and feelings. The same is true of other remains. Even the lost eighteenth-century bust at All Souls College, the engraving of which has been reproduced over and over again, is based on a classicizing fictional recreation of what he may have looked like: 'as the bust before us shews a countenance emaciated, furrowed with wrinkles, and bearing every indication of premature decay, it probably represents Leland at that calamitous period, in which the affliction of losing his royal patron having been superadded to the extreme grief with which he had witnessed the barbarous destruction of the conventual libraries, his corporeal and intellectual faculties sunk into ruins beneath the stroke'.⁴ Generations of scholars have read into these remains and produced their own images of the man, be it protestant polemicist, religious conservative, dabbler, madman, or father of modern topography.

Even though it was the project nearest completion and the only one organized into a coherent narrative, *De uiris illustribus*—Leland's proto *Dictionary of National Biography*—has, like the others, suffered from being excerpted rather than considered as a unity, its evolution within the constraints of Henry VIII's cultural revolution ignored. My edition in all its complex and sometimes tedious detail sets out to remedy this gap, and to unpick the strands that run through the text. It is my contention that our understanding of what Leland set out to do becomes very different once we probe the different phases in the construction of *De uiris illustribus* and examine why he never managed to bring it to a satisfactory completion.

The genesis of this edition has been a long and complex one. As long ago as the late 1970s I had considered writing some sort of an account of Leland—I was not sure the form it would take—and I gave a talk in Toronto which I called, not very originally, 'John Leland: the King's Antiquary'. Fr Leonard

³ *Original Letters of Eminent Literary Men of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. H. Ellis, Camden Society, o.s. 23 (London 1843), 355. As John Chandler observes in an unpublished paper: 'It [the itinerary] is not a finished piece of work intended for publication. All Leland's contemporaries and disciples recognized this and, rather than trying to make it publishable, quarried it for their own purposes'.

⁴ W. M. Wade, *Walks in Oxford*, 2nd edn (Oxford 1818), 39. In an unpublished paper presented at All Souls College in 2000 I demonstrated that the sculptor was Louis François Roubiliac and that he used his famous likeness of Alexander Pope as a prototype.

Boyle was in the audience and afterwards he came up to me and said: 'There's the title for your next book. Think of us (i.e. the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies) when you are ready to publish it'. Almost a decade later David N. Dumville drew the attention of Caroline Brett, then at Girton College in Cambridge, to a scribal copy of Bale's epitome of *De uiris illustribus* at the Burgerbibliothek in Bern—a copy which, as it turns out, brings nothing new to the textual history (although its present provenance is highly suggestive)—and recommended that she undertake a new edition, along with a translation, for Oxford Medieval Texts. Dr Brett subsequently took a position in the History Department at the University of Exeter and during this time she made a transcription of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Top. gen. c. 4, Leland's autograph, as well as a translation. She worked on an introduction, started the process of annotation, and prepared a rough index. Soon afterwards Dr Brett married and resigned her post; children came along and her academic interests shifted as well.

Meanwhile, I had been editing Leland's booklists and had also published editions of some of his poetry. By now I was planning to write a full biography, once, that is, I had managed to sort out the autograph remains and to elucidate their relationship to early copies by John Stow and others of lost materials.⁵ In 1990 Dr Brett and I had conjointly written an introduction for a reissue of John Bale's *Index Britanniae scriptorum*, originally edited and published in 1902 by Reginald Lane Poole and Mary Bateson. We enjoyed collaborating and Dr Brett suggested I take over the Leland edition. At this point in Australia, she kindly sent me her floppy discs and I transferred them to my computer. It all seemed plain sailing and we looked forward to a speedy completion.

After I consulted Leland's holograph I began to be concerned about how the parts fit together, why there were so many blanks, why the hand changed so radically among (and even within) entries, and why so much had been deleted. As a result of these concerns I retranscribed much of the text, always checking against Dr Brett's earlier version, and realized, as I point out in my introduction, that a close analysis of the manuscript reveals a complex pattern of composition. I also came to the conclusion that there were in effect two distinct phases of activity, one before the closing of the monasteries and one afterwards, and that the point at which Leland wrote an entry influenced in the most general sense its meaning. Leland's views on the past, like those of his contemporaries, changed significantly after the break with Rome. Likewise I concluded that his deletions, sometimes even trivial ones, were important to an understanding of his changing intentions. The process of unravelling the manuscript was a long and arduous one and consumed more than one research leave.

⁵ See my 'The Manuscript Remains of John Leland, "the King's Antiquary"', *Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship* 2 (1985), 111–20.

The translation posed problems of its own. Leland lived during the years when the printed book was coming to replace the manuscript as the preferred means of written communication. In a work made up in large part of lists, Leland seemed sometimes to be describing the contents of a work and sometimes giving it a title as one would with a printed book. In many cases, moreover, there is no English equivalent for the technical terms used in his descriptions. Nor is it always possible to catch the flavour of the circumlocutions he used when describing the various stages of a university career in the middle ages or when charting ecclesiastical preferments. There was also a large discrepancy between passages written in a polished humanist style and those composed in haste and seemingly unrevised: Leland had not managed to impose a uniformity of tone. How much smoothing out and standardizing should one do in rendering the text into English? Not a classicist, I began, nevertheless, tinkering with the translation Dr Brett had sent to me. That used up more research time and—as Leland himself said about the German edition of Joseph of Exeter (c. 217)—I began to fear that the original translator might not recognize her child in its deformed state. Dr Brett was, however, accommodating and accepted the major rewriting of her translation. Ultimately, I do hope that our efforts have meshed together and that even Leland himself, that sternest of critics, would not be too distressed by what has been produced, although he, of course, would not have understood the need for an English crib.

The original introduction was relatively short and followed the format mandated by Oxford Medieval Texts. There is very little left of that first succinct document in what follows. As I became more and more immersed in the edition I found that further information was required to help the reader make sense of Leland's text. I had come to Leland through his booklists and I continue to believe that the lists shaped the original text and that they are key to understanding Leland's motives. I have redated them to an earlier period than has normally been assumed for their compilation, and a great deal of the introduction is devoted to an analysis of their sequence. Likewise I try to pinpoint precisely when Leland wrote each entry and how he came to rethink his mission after he returned to *De uiris illustribus* in the early 1540s. The incomplete nature of the text, the crossings out and rephrasings, give us an insight into the developing processes of his mind and provide us with an insider's reactions to the general political situation during the years when the 'Roman pontiff' was overthrown and the modern church of England came into being. The *De uiris illustribus* in its evolving form is more than the grandfather of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; it is a living record of the turbulent shifts and changes of Henry VIII's reign.

Even in its incomplete form, the last of four planned books never even begun, *De uiris illustribus* is a long work. The present text and translation occupy more than eight hundred pages and the introduction nearly a hundred and fifty. Some time ago, therefore, I decided that the discursive analytic notes

that would accompany each entry required a volume of their own. As well as describing Leland's sources of information these will, I believe, act as a kind of key to the copious extracts from medieval manuscripts that make up the bulk of the notes edited by Thomas Hearne in the eighteenth century as *Joannis Lelandi antiquarii De rebus Britannicis collectanea*, and will provide a context for them. The second volume will, in fact, go a long way towards showing the manner in which these notes came into being and how Leland planned to use them. Much of the research has been completed and it should appear within two or three years. Complementing the notes will be full and detailed indices for both volumes: these will fill out and greatly expand the simple list of names of authors found at the end of the text and translation.

De uiris illustribus can be described as many things, but it is emphatically not a medieval text and it never fitted comfortably into the OMT series, whereas it stands in close relationship to the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues. Approximately two years ago the Publications Department at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto established a series entitled 'British Writers of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: Editions, Translations, and Studies'. Edited by Anne Hudson, Richard Sharpe, James Willoughby, and myself, it can be seen in many ways as an outgrowth of CBMLC and a companion to Sharpe's *Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland before 1540* (1997). The series will also include the national and bibliographical histories compiled by the early antiquaries such as John Bale and John Prise. Leland's *De uiris illustribus* is a natural first contribution, and I was greatly relieved when Matthew Kempshall, then the general editor of OMT, agreed (gratifyingly with some reluctance) that this was the logical venue for *De uiris illustribus*. Fr Boyle must be smiling from above.

In the most recently published volume in his study of *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales*, Anthony Emery has observed that 'Leland's acute observation, indefatigable inquiry, and persistent research made him an ideal recorder'.⁶ An ideal recorder he may have been, but this same urge to record meant that he found it virtually impossible to bring his multitudinous projects to fruition, and he has exercised a malign influence on potential editors, who have found his notes intractable, his near contemporary William Harrison, for example, complaining that he obfuscated on purpose to throw succeeding generations off the scent. Bale abandoned his edition of *De uiris illustribus* even in epitomized form; Thomas Tanner a century and a half later never managed to complete his; and Anthony Hall's, as I shall show, is lacking in many ways. Leland was contemptuous of Polydore Vergil for taking thirty years to bring his *Anglica historia* to publishable form. As I look back over some twenty years of concerted effort on the first volume of this project I wonder if the master

⁶ *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300–1500 3 Southern England* (Cambridge 2006), 697.

would have been more forgiving of me than he was of his Italian rival. It has been a long process and I can only hope that the results have warranted the effort. Whatever else, I can state, as did Thomas Hearne when he completed his edition of the *Itinerary*, that in spite of the ‘abundance of Difficulties’, ‘publishing and preserving this Work of Mr. Leland’s’ has been ‘one of the great Happinesses of my Life’.⁷

During these years of intensive research on Leland I have been assisted by many individuals and can only single out those who made the most substantial contributions, even though there are many others who have helped me along the way. My chief debt is to George Rigg, who has carefully read the whole translation and made many improvements to it. Likewise, Anna Burko devoted long hours to checking introduction, text and translation. My fellow editors—Anne Hudson, James Willoughby, and Richard Sharpe—read through the whole introduction more than once and helped me clarify my thinking. They have been consistently encouraging, generous in the long hours they were willing to devote to this project, and perceptive in their comments. I profited especially from Dr Willoughby’s careful editing of the introduction. I have had many stimulating conversations with Tom Freeman about Leland and Bale, and he also persuaded me to speak about aspects of *De uiris illustribus* at several conferences; he is a born facilitator. During the year I was the Leverhulme visiting professor to the English faculty at Oxford I gave four public lectures on Leland, and these have been incorporated into my introduction. I am very grateful to Vincent Gillespie for making an application to the Leverhulme Trust on my behalf and for welcoming me so warmly to the faculty. Richard Copsey made available to me his transcription and translation of Bale’s *Anglorum Heliades* and he also read a draft of the introduction. Colin Tite, who provided shelter when I was working in the British Library, has read the introduction and he has also acted as sounding-board for my ideas ever since the beginning of this edition. John Chandler, Oliver Harris, and Philip Schwyzer have generously shared their expertise with me over the years, and all three have also gone over the introduction, contributing very useful new information and correcting errors. David Wallace read a draft of the introduction and translation while researching his BBC Radio 4 documentary on John Leland: he made a number of useful suggestions, but above all his enthusiasm for the project spurred me on. Richard Ovenden was an ever helpful presence at the Bodleian and was keenly aware of the importance of the Leland manuscripts to the collection. For specific details, especially as they concerned titles and technical terms, I have been aided by David Bell, David Carlson, Jeremy Catto, Greti Dinkova-Bruun, Joseph Goering, Donald Logan, Betsey Price, David Rundle, Dana F. Sutton, the late D. F. S. Thomson, and Rega Wood. I have benefited from the expertise of many scholars, librarians, and friends—these are overlapping categories—on

⁷ *Itinerary*, ed. Hearne, 9. iii.

other points: Anne Barton, Sarah Bendall, Claire Breay, James Clark, William J. Connell, Julia Crick, Ann Dooley, Theodor Harmsen, Bill Harnum, Ann M. Hutchison, Martin Kauffmann, Simon Keynes, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, F. Donald Logan, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Peter Marshall, David McKitterick, Nicholas Orme, Nigel Palmer, Lee Piepho, Richard Rex, Anthony Shaw, Jonathan Smith, David Starkey, Rod Thomson, Jennifer Thorp, Fred Unwalla (who also oversaw the intricacies of the publication process), Naomi Van Loo, David Way, and Daniel Woolf. I likewise thank my graduate assistants at York University, most recently Simon Marmur, who checked references for me. The anonymous readers for the press gave an earlier draft a careful reading and provided me with very useful guidance. The staff at Duke Humfrey have got 'my' manuscript out in advance on the occasions when I had only a short time in Oxford; they have kept it on reserve for me over long periods when I was working on it on a daily basis, and they have taken an interest in what I was doing. It has made my time in the library an altogether pleasant one, even in the depths of winter when the radiators, at least to my North American sensibilities, appeared to give off no warmth.

I have been fortunate to be at York University while I have been working on this book. My research has been enthusiastically supported by the chairs of my department, by deans, and by university grants, including the Walter Gordon Leave Fellowship. During my research leaves I have enjoyed hospitality, including accommodation, from a number of colleges and could not have spent so much time in England without this: Trinity College and Christ's College in Cambridge; All Souls College, Magdalen College, and Oriel College in Oxford. Lady Margaret Hall and Wadham College have both extended dining rights to me.

Jean Hoff of the PIMS Publications Department has been a superb editor: as she worked her way through the material she has shown herself meticulous, learned, and often inspired in her suggestions. Above all, she has been enthusiastic and has made me feel that there might be other readers like her. She was ably assisted by Megan Jones. John Waś undertook the typesetting and, like Jean Hoff, identified some quotations that I missed.

Michael Lapidge received his Ph.D. from the Centre for Medieval Studies in Toronto several years before I arrived, but I heard much about him from other students and admiring professors. When we finally met in 1983 he was welcoming personally, helpful academically, and energetic from the beginning in promoting my career. He has written references for me since 1985 and has never complained or shown himself impatient. He had faith in this edition right from the beginning and saw its wider implications. Over the years he and Jill Mann have provided me and my wife with companionship and more meals than I dare to count. Above all, he has been an inspiration to me, an ideal towards whom to aspire. I am honoured to dedicate this book to him.

