

The South East Prospect of Warwick

CR351/515

The Document of the Month for July is a copy of the copper engraving titled ‘The South East Prospect of Warwick’ by brothers Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, topographical artists hailing from Yorkshire. This piece is dated 1731 and shows a wide southeastern view of the town of Warwick, with the beautiful natural landscape in the foreground. At the bottom of the engraving, there is some text detailing the history of the town and pointing out several landmarks which would be familiar to many, such as Warwick Castle and St Mary’s Church. The Priory is also included, which visitors to the County Record Office will recognise as the site that we now call home!



South East Prospect of Warwick, courtesy of WCRO, CR351/515

It is an important record in showing what this town looked like before the onset of the industrial revolution, so holds great value to those interested in architectural changes during this period. It belonged to a series of 83 large prospects of the 70 principal towns in England and Wales, which took the Bucks 28 years to complete as they ventured across both countries.¹

Although the brothers tended to focus on the man-made, we cannot ignore the appreciation of nature throughout their works, especially in more rural views, where lush fields, trees and bushes can often be seen. ‘The South East Prospect of Warwick’ is a great example of this, as the rolling hills and fields perfectly capture the placement of the town within the countryside.

¹ Sanders of Oxford, ‘The South East Prospect of Warwick’. Available at: <https://www.sandersofoxford.com/shop/product/the-south-east-prospect-of-warwick/> [Accessed on 29/05/2024]

The Buck Brothers

In total, Samuel and Nathaniel Buck produced 423 engravings of monasteries, abbeys, castles, monuments, and other ruins alongside the panoramic prospects. Some have even argued that when taken altogether, they “may be regarded as one of the most important documentary projects of the 18th century”.²

In 1719, the elder brother Samuel, was encouraged by a group of Yorkshire antiquarians (including Ralph Thoresby and John Warburton) to sketch views for the history of a county that one of them was writing about at the time. As well as this, they also

requested he showcase the more modern aspects of British life, drawing views of urban centres, such as Leeds (Thoresby’s hometown).³

Shortly after this, Samuel started attending meetings of the Society of Antiquaries and went on horseback rides around England with other members. During these rides, he started recording the various scenes with drawings of monuments and landscapes. His first moment of exposure came through his sketches of the ruins of Fountains Abbey, which were shown to a Society meeting in 1723 and led to the publication of his first set of engravings of Yorkshire antiquities and ruins (1724 & 26).⁴

The locations which Buck was sketching were arguably “in a lamentable condition”.⁵ This, however, was unsurprising, since many of them had been devastated during the Reformation, particularly when Oliver Cromwell ruled England as Lord Protector. Samuel Buck, in his own words, would ‘rescue the mangled remains’ of ‘these aged & venerable edifices from the inexorable jaws of time’ by visiting and recording them.⁶ In this way, the Bucks provided an invaluable record for England and Wales at the time. With some of these locations having seen further changes in the 275 years since they were sketched.

His younger brother Nathaniel, who was also a promising artist, began a marketing campaign that looked for potential subscribers for these engravings and

² Mostly Maps, ‘The South East Prospect of Warwick Samuel & Nathaniel Buck’. Available at: https://www.mostlymaps.com/en-GB/samuel-nathaniel-buck/the-south-east-prospect-of-warwick-samuel-nathaniel-buck/prod_17430 [Accessed on 18/05/2024]

³ The Gardens Trust blog, ‘The Bucks stopped here...’. Available at: <https://thegardenstrust.blog/2019/05/18/the-bucks-stopped-here/> [Accessed on 18/05/2024]

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ S. Buck, ‘Proposals for the publication of . twenty-four views of castles . in the counties of Lincoln and Nottingham’, 1 Nov 1726, copy in priv. coll. [Accessed on 06/06/2024]

commissioners of future works. This was well executed and would act as a solid foundation for their career.⁷

In 1727, Nathaniel joined Samuel on a 'peregrination' of Lancashire, Cheshire, and Derbyshire. The following year, the brothers announced their plan to extend the project to the remaining northern counties, but upon visiting Durham and Northumberland it was decided that these counties offered sufficient material for the following year's set of 24 engravings. In 1729-31, they travelled to the Midlands, then took on the southern counties between 1732 and 1736, as well as Monmouthshire. By 1737, they had completed their survey of England. Wales followed in 1742, completing the antiquities project.⁸

⁷ The Gardens Trust blog, 'The Bucks stopped here...'. Available at: <https://thegardenstrust.blog/2019/05/18/the-bucks-stopped-here/> [Accessed on 18/05/2024]

⁸ Heaton's of Tisbury, 'Bucks Views Antique Prints'. Available at: <https://heatons-of-tisbury.co.uk/buck.html> [Accessed on 06/06/2024]