

# PETER PEREZ BURDETT AND PUTTENHAM IN 1765: THE TERRIER IN CONTEXT

Rob Briggs

*A Terrier of Puttenham -  
surveyed by P.P. Burdett . 1765*

So begins the first page proper of the Puttenham parish terrier. Anyone who has read the text of the terrier transcription project page on the Surrey Archaeological Society website will have seen the basic facts about Burdett's early career: that the name is short for Peter Perez (*alias* Pery) Burdett; that he was a surveyor, cartographer and artist; and that he was a bit of a big deal in the late 18th century, at least to the extent that in recent times he has been adjudged to merit his own Wikipedia page ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Perez\\_Burdett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Perez_Burdett)) as well as an entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

Despite all of the above, Burdett's life and career are rather obscure prior to 1767, when he came to prominence by winning a Society of Arts competition (and the far-from-modest sum of £100) for the best county map for his Survey of Derbyshire. The Puttenham terrier pre-dates this by two years. Does the terrier therefore mark a significant stepping stone in Burdett's cartographic career, or was it more a case of business as usual?

## The early years

Piecing together Burdett's early life is not easy. He was born in either 1734 or 1735. His ODNB entry gives Essex as his birthplace, but another biographical study claims the same about Foremark in Derbyshire (Harley and Laxton 1974, 3). Accounts of his life also differ as to his whereabouts in the late 1750s; some contend he was living in Manchester (Plant 2016), others that he split his time between Derby and Staunton Herald in Leicestershire (Harley and Laxton 1974, 3). Perhaps he trained in the former before relocating prior to 1760. Certainly, by the early 1760s Derby had become his (main) home and Washington Shirley, 5th Earl Ferrers, his associate and sometime landlord at Staunton Herald. Peter and his first wife Hannah Burdett are depicted in a portrait painted by the Derby artist Joseph Wright in 1765 — in other words, right around the time he surveyed Puttenham parish ('Portrait of Peter Perez Burdett and his First Wife Hannah', National Gallery Prague). He is also one of the men depicted in Wright's well-known painting 'A Philosopher Giving that Lecture on an Orrery' (or variants on that title), attributed to the period *circa* 1764–66 (Harley and Laxton 1974, 3 Plate 1).

Burdett began work on the Survey of Derbyshire in 1762. The resultant map took five years to complete, testament to the fact it was based on a new survey of the entire county rather than adapting earlier work as was often the case for county maps in this period (Handford 1971, 22; Harley 1965, 56). It seems unlikely that he undertook this project without interruption for half a decade, so would have needed some sort of supplementary income with which to support himself. The Puttenham terrier would appear to represent a

short-term, but presumably remunerative, commission in this period. But what was the connection that took Burdett from the East Midlands to south-west Surrey in 1765?

### **The route from Derby to Puttenham**

The name found most often in the terrier is that of Thomas Parker. A lawyer by profession, his association with Puttenham began in 1761, when he purchased the manors of Puttenham Bury and Priory. This acquisition would have come with a fair amount of land in Puttenham parish, but that was not enough for Parker. He set about expanding his landholdings (as well as the 'mansion house' that he would transform into what is now Puttenham Priory) in a period of property acquisition that the terrier shows was already far advanced by 1765 (Dugmore 1972, 67–68, using original documents other than the terrier in the collection of the Puttenham and Wanborough History Society). There can be no doubt that this is the reason why a survey of Puttenham parish was undertaken in 1765.

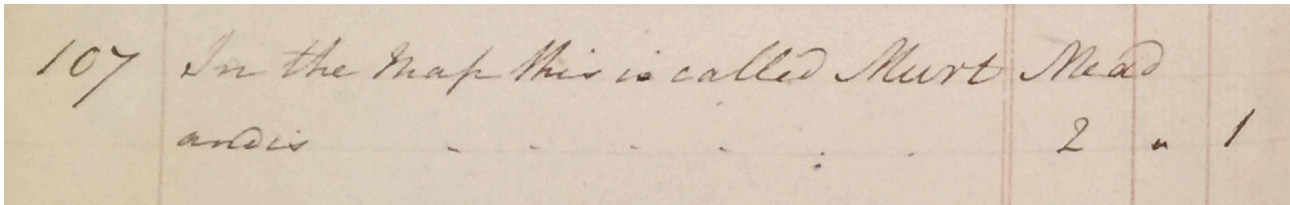
As for why it was Burdett was given the job rather than one of the many other land surveyors who lived nearer to Puttenham, the answer surely lies in Freemasonry. The 5th Earl Ferrers was Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge of England, and is considered to have introduced Burdett to the Freemasons (Plant 2016). As a result, both men would surely have had some form of contact with Thomas Parker, who, as his tomb monument in the churchyard at Seale west of Puttenham attests, was First Provincial Grandmaster of the Surrey Branch of the Freemasons (Dugmore 1972, 68). Who better, therefore, to survey Puttenham parish for Parker than a suitably-skilled fellow Freemason?

### **Did Burdett make a map — and if so what became of it?**

In the Surrey History Centre is a map of Puttenham parish dated 1816 by John Doyley of Hatton Garden in London, catalogued somewhat opaquely as having been 'copied from a survey made in 1765' (SHC reference number 5143/1; [https://www.surreyarchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/SHCOL\\_5143\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1](https://www.surreyarchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/SHCOL_5143_1_1_1_1)). It can scarcely be doubted that the 1765 survey was the one made by Burdett — this much is suggested by the fact Doyley's map copy bears parcel numbers and names that (mostly) correspond to those in the terrier. The impetus for revisiting Burdett's survey in whatever form it existed in 1816 must be that a map was needed by the Longs of Hampton in Seale as lords of the manors of Puttenham (the rights having been purchased by Nathaniel Snell, previous owner of Hampton, in 1792; the 1816 map is part of a collection of papers deposited by the Hampton Estate: for the background, see Dugmore 1972, 68, 117–18). But what should be read into the choice of words, i.e. 'survey' for 1765 and 'plan' for the extant 1816 map? Surely Doyley had not finished work left incomplete by Burdett over 50 years before?

Estate maps made in England in the 17th to early 19th centuries were often based on written surveys (or at least the information compiled preliminary to producing one), whereas the reverse was seldom the case. It also cost less to commission a written survey of an estate rather than or as well as a map, because the latter required measured survey in addition to obtaining testimony from tenants and documents, and therefore a much

greater amount of work “in the field” by the surveyor. As a result, more terriers were made than maps in the post-medieval period (Fletcher 1998, 225–26). But scattered through the 1765 terrier are enough added notes that make reference to a map as to strongly suggest that Burdett left Puttenham having made one of the parish for Thomas Parker.



*'In the map this is called Murt Mead'* — a facing page note, undated but in a different hand to Burdett's, making reference to a corresponding map providing confirmation of a field-name given simply as *'Mead'* in the terrier (detail of image Puttenham Terrier 09).

That there was a counterpart 1765 map would also tally with the contents of a letter included with the terrier as archived in the Puttenham and Wanborough History Society Muniments Room. If I recall correctly (sorry, it's been a couple of years!), this letter was written by the owner(s) of the original map, who lived in Devon, to accompany their gift of the terrier to the History Society as well as to explain that they wished to retain the map — unfortunate but also understandable given the attractiveness of Doyley's 1816 copy. Indeed, also included with the terrier is the black and white photograph reproduced to the right (and which can also be seen in the image uploaded to the transcription project webpage as Puttenham Terrier 01). It shows a map that looks a lot like Doyley's facsimile — but then again so should any faithful copy of an earlier original! On balance, and until such time as I am able to confirm my hazy recollections, it seems safe to say that it could well be an image of the original map by Burdett.



## Conclusions

The Puttenham terrier of 1765 was one of my gateways into local historical and landscape studies. So, after many years of knowing of its existence and from time to time using it for research, to find out not so many months ago that 'P.P. Burdett' was someone of the repute of Peter Perez Burdett was completely unexpected. Here was a man who would go on to win a prestigious national prize, complete a second county survey (of Cheshire, published in 1777; see Harley 1964), and gain widespread recognition as an artist. Furthermore, in 1773, no less a figure than Benjamin Franklin wrote him a flattering letter in the hope of persuading him to emigrate to America; 'I should think a Man of your Talents

a great Acquisition to the Colonies, if we could make it worth your while to remove thither' ("From Benjamin Franklin...", *Founders Online*). Burdett elected to stay put, but would end up spending the last years of his life outside of England receiving plaudits and high military rank while in the service of the Markgraf of Baden, eventually dying at Karlsruhe in 1793 (Harley and Laxton 1974, 5).

For a time in 1765, however, Burdett could be found measuring the byways and field boundaries of Puttenham parish for Thomas Parker, his client and fellow Freemason. It is extraordinary that, thanks to Joseph Wright's paintings, we know what Burdett looked like and with whom he associated at this time — albeit dressed up for situations more formal than detailed land surveying. The Puttenham terrier is not the earliest known example of Burdett's work, and is most definitely a long way from being one of the most refined, but it nevertheless attests to his skills as a surveyor, which would gain wider recognition two years later with the completion and subsequent success of his map of Derbyshire.

## References

'From Benjamin Franklin to Peter P. Burdett, 21 August 1773', *Founders Online*, National Archives, online at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-20-02-0198> (accessed 7th July 2020)

'Portrait of Peter Perez Burdett and his First Wife Hannah', National Gallery Prague, online at [https://sbirky.ngprague.cz/en/dielo/CZE:NG.DO\\_4289](https://sbirky.ngprague.cz/en/dielo/CZE:NG.DO_4289) (accessed 15th July 2020)

Dugmore, Ruth, 1972 *Puttenham under the Hog's Back* (Chichester: Phillimore)

Fletcher, David, 1998 Map or Terrier? The Example of Christ Church, Oxford, Estate Management, 1600-1840, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, **23,2**, 221–37 [online]

Handford, Charles C., 1971 A catalogue of some maps of the County of Derby, *Derbyshire Miscellany*, Supplement No. 11, 1–49 [online]

Harley, J. B., 1964 William Yates and Peter Burdett: their role in the mapping of Lancashire and Cheshire during the late 18th century, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire for 1963*, **115**, 107–131 [online]

Harley, J. B., and Laxton, P., intro., 1974 *A Survey of the County Palatine of Chester, P. P. Burdett, 1777*, Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Occasional Series, **1** (Liverpool: Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire) [online]

Plant, Alistair, 2016 Derbyshire Antiques – PETER PEREZ BURDETT FRSA, *Country Images Magazine*, online at <https://www.countryimagesmagazine.co.uk/featured/derbyshire-antiques-peter-perez-burdett-frsa/> (accessed 7th July 2020)