



John Aubrey's "Brief Lives": Gossip from the 17th Century

John Aubrey

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John Aubrey (12 March 1626 – 7 June 1697), was an English antiquary, natural philosopher and writer. He is perhaps best known as the author of the *Brief Lives*, his collection of short biographical pieces. He was a pioneer archaeologist, who recorded (often for the first time) numerous megalithic and other field monuments in southern England, and who is particularly noted as the discoverer of the Avebury henge monument. The Aubrey holes at Stonehenge are named after him, although there is considerable doubt as to whether the holes that he observed are those that currently bear the name. He was also a pioneer folklorist, collecting together a miscellany of material on customs, traditions and beliefs under the title "Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme". He set out to compile county histories of both Wiltshire and Surrey, although both projects remained unfinished. His "Interpretation of Villare Anglicanum" (also unfinished) was the first attempt to compile a full-length study of English place-names. He had wider interests in applied mathematics and astronomy, and was friendly with many of the greatest scientists of the day.

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, thanks largely to the popularity of "Brief Lives", Aubrey was regarded as little more than an entertaining but quirky, eccentric and credulous gossip. Only in the 1970's did the full breadth and innovation of his scholarship begin to be more widely appreciated. He published little in his lifetime, and many of his most important manuscripts (for the most part preserved in the Bodleian Library) remain unpublished, or published only in partial and unsatisfactory form.

This kindle edition of *Brief Lives* contains 132 biographies and a navigable Table of Contents.

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