

NAXOS
AudioBooks

NON-
FICTION



John Aubrey

Brief Lives

Read by
Brian Cox

NA237812D

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|----------|---|------|
| 1 | Desiderius Erasmus 1466–1536 | 4:07 |
| | Dutch scholar and humanist, opposer of religious tyranny and fanaticism. Published the first Greek edition of the New Testament with an accompanying Latin version. | |
| 2 | John Colet 1467–1519 | 1:16 |
| | Scholar, theologian, he became Dean of St. Paul's in 1504, spending £40,000 (inherited from his father) on founding St Paul's School in 1505. | |
| 3 | Sir Thomas More 1478–1535 | 3:38 |
| | Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII who resigned after refusing to agree to the king's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Refusing to acknowledge Henry's subsequent claim to be Supreme Head of the English Church, he was accused of treason and beheaded. | |
| 4 | Thomas Cooper 1517–1594 | 0:46 |
| | Theologian and scholar, famous for his Latin dictionary, published in 1548. | |
| 5 | Sir William Fleetwood 1535–1594 | 1:16 |
| | M.P. and Recorder of London 1571. | |
| 6 | William Butler 1535–1618 | 5:52 |
| | Physician to Henry, Prince of Wales who died (aged 18) in 1612. | |
| 7 | Thomas Allen 1542–1632 | 2:23 |
| | Mathematician. Educated at Oxford, made Master of Arts in 1567. Obtained patronage of the Earl of Northumberland, but refused the offer of a bishopric from the Earl of Leicester as he preferred a life of retirement. | |

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- 8 Sir Walter Raleigh 1552–1618** 13:12
English explorer and favourite courtier of Elizabeth I. Imprisoned in the Tower of London by James I and executed after the failure of an expedition to Orinoco in search of gold.
- 9 Sir Edward Coke 1552–1634** 2:46
Judge and legal writer, most famous for his law reports which he began publishing in 1600. Judge in the Gunpowder Plot trial. House of Commons Speaker in 1593, Attorney-General in 1594, Chief Justice in 1613. Dismissed by James I in 1616.
- 10 Lancelot Andrew 1555–1626** 4:13
Dean of Westminster; chaplain to Queen Elizabeth I. Under James I he became Bishop of Chichester, then Ely and ultimately Winchester.
- 11 Thomas Hariot 1560–1621** 2:35
Mathematician, accompanied Raleigh on his Virginia expedition.
- 12 Francis Bacon 1561–1626** 8:15
Philosopher and statesman, knighted in 1603 and made Viscount St. Albans in 1621. Charged with corruption in the same year and banished from the Court and Parliament. Spent a few days in the Tower and then devoted the rest of his life to his study.
- 13 William Shakespeare 1564–1616** 3:26
English poet and playwright. His home was in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he was born. His greatest period of productivity was between 1600 and 1607 during which he produced *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* amongst many others.
- 14 Ben Jonson 1573–1637** 5:43
English poet and playwright, creator of *Volpone:or the Foxe* and *The Alchemist* amongst others.

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- 15 Sir Everard Digby 1578–1606** 0:31
Involved in the Gunpowder Plot and executed June 30th, 1606.
- 16 William Harvey 1578–1657** 12:13
Physician who discovered the circulation of the blood.
He also made important discoveries in the field of embryology.
- 17 Edmund Gunter 1581–1626** 1:30
Mathematician. Responsible for Gunter's Scale, a rule giving the logarithms of chords, sines and tangents.
- 18 Richard Corbet 1582–1635** 4:49
Theologian and bishop.
- 19 David Jenkins 1586–1663** 2:28
Welsh Judge and ardent Royalist.
- 20 Thomas Hobbes 1588–1679** 14:56
Philosopher. Wrote *Leviathan* which argues that men are selfish by nature and that to avoid anarchy they have entered a social contract, submitting their will to that of the sovereign.
- 21 René Descartes 1569–1650** 1:27
French philosopher, physicist and mathematician. Founded the science of analytical geometry, and developed the method of reasoning known as Cartesianism. In his philosophical work *Discours de la méthode* (1637) he coined the famous expression "Cogito ergo sum" (I think therefore I am).

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- 22 Thomas Chaloner 1595–1661** 3:39
M.P. for Richmond in Yorkshire from 1645-53. One of the judges of Charles I whose death warrant he signed. Cromwell called him 'a drunkard'.
- 23 Venetia Digby 1600–1633** 4:49
Daughter of Sir Edward Stanley, married to Sir Kenelme Digby who restored her somewhat dubious reputation. Her beauty was legendary and she was immortalised by both Van Dyck and Ben Jonson.
- 24 Henry Marten 1602–1680** 5:54
Licentious, scandalous, witty, this statesman became one of the judges of Charles I and was later imprisoned.
- 25 William Chillingworth 1602–1624** 4:10
Oxford-educated theologian who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1630 then back to the Church of England in 1631.
- 26 Sir Henry Blount 1602–1682** 6:45
Traveller. Published *Voyage to the Levant* in 1636, was knighted in 1640 and sided with the Royalists in the Civil War.
- 27 Sir William Davenant 1606–1668** 9:52
Said to have been Shakespeare's godson. Wrote several plays and was made Poet Laureate in 1638. Supporter of Charles I and knighted by him in 1643. Imprisoned in the Tower, but spared his life and released.
- 28 James Harrington 1611–1677** 9:00
Political theorist best known for his work *The Commonwealth of Oceana* which describes a utopian society governed by country gentlemen.

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- 29 Samuel Butler 1612–1680** 5:26
Satirist. His poem *Hudibras* (1663-1678) is a satire against puritanism and self-righteousness. He died in extreme poverty.
- 30 Sir Jonas Moore 1617–1679** 2:35
Mathematician.
- 31 Thomas Harcourt 1618–1679** 0:44
Jesuit. Executed in 1679 as part of the Popish Plot.
- 32 Abraham Cowley 1618–1667** 3:49
Poet and essayist, author of *The Mistress* (1647) and *Daveids* (1656) and secretary to the Earl of St Albans.
- 33 Edmund Halley 1656–1742** 3:28
Astronomer. He observed the great comet of 1682 (now known as Halley's Comet) and predicted that it would return. Also made invaluable contributions to the study of the moon, stars and Venus.

Total time: 2:37:43

John Aubrey

Brief Lives

John Aubrey, probably English literature's greatest collector of gossip, anecdotes and personal trivia, lived through difficult times. The English Civil War, with the downfall and execution of Charles I, dominated his life. An attentive observer of his contemporary world, Aubrey nevertheless felt himself to be an antiquarian, a collector and guardian of the values and manners of an earlier age. To his contemporaries, he failed to fulfil the promise of his youth; to us, he remains the pre-eminent compiler of the doings and sayings of the major and minor figures of the 16th and 17th centuries. To each of the figures he recalls, he adds his own particular voice – sometimes melancholic but, more often than not, wittily ribald. The voice that emerges from a reading of *Brief Lives* is that of a kindly, intelligent, sometimes querulous but always generous human being.

Born in Wiltshire in 1626, Aubrey spent much of his life engaged in lengthy, expensive legal actions against relatives, selling off bits and pieces of his estates in order to pay lawyers. He spent just four months as a student at Trinity College, Oxford, in 1642, but so enjoyed the

company he fell in with there that he never lost his affection for the town. He died and was buried there in 1697, having endured the massive upheavals of the Civil War, the regicide of Charles I and the eventual restoration of the monarchy in the person of Charles II.

Essentially a Royalist, Aubrey nevertheless had friends across the often confused political spectrum of the day. So much did he enjoy carousing with his friends that this gifted scholar and antiquarian could hardly ever bring himself to complete any of the numerous writing projects he undertook. He published only one book in his lifetime, *Miscellanies*, being far too busy hob-nobbing with the intelligentsia of the time, such as the philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

The origin of his *Brief Lives* lies in work he undertook for the Oxford scholar Anthony Wood. In 1667 Aubrey began compiling notes for Wood's *Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis* (published 1674) and *Athenae Oxonienses* (published 1691-2). By quirk of history – and Aubrey's gift for lively anecdotal reminiscences – it is

Aubrey's work which has survived in popular esteem.

The original manuscripts of Aubrey's Lives fill 66 volumes in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and other libraries; he wrote more than 420 Lives, which range in length from just two words to one of 23,000 words; many of them have little or no intrinsic interest today, being simply collections of dates and facts. His general technique was to alight upon a Life, then immediately write down everything he could remember about the individual concerned, leaving blanks for dates and facts he could not immediately recall, which were to be filled in later. Often the blanks remained as Aubrey, true to his own nature, was off onto another project, or another Life.

Aubrey himself described his Lives as 'like fragments of a shipwreck'. He was very conscious of his role as a harvester of transient life, which he hoped to preserve in the face of oblivion. He was also conscious that his jottings – occasionally inaccurate though they are – took on a particular importance, given the context of the massive social upheaval he and his memories lived through. 'So that the retrieving of these forgotten Things from Oblivion in some sort resembles the Art of a Conjuror, who makes those walke and

appeare that have layen in their grave many hundreds of yeares: and to represent as it were to the eie, the places, Customes and Fashions, that were of old Times'.

What comes through these Lives most strongly is Aubrey's own personality. Sometimes crotchety, mostly genial, Aubrey loves a joke almost as much as he loves learning. Occasionally sad – as when he recalls the funeral of a dear friend, or the wanton destruction of a rare manuscript – but usually wry, what emerges is a picture of an elderly, avuncular, kindly figure, full of regret for the absurdities and frailties of the world and humanity. One of his favourite sayings was 'the best of men are but men at the best'. What it must have been to have shared a bottle with John Aubrey, certainly one of 'the best of men'!

Notes by Gary Mead

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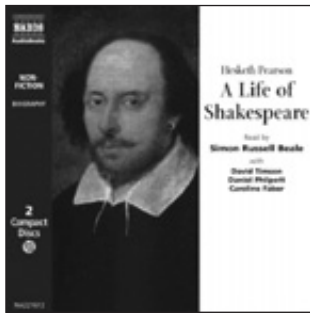
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John Aubrey

Brief Lives

Read by **Brian Cox**

William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Hobbes – three of the greatest Englishmen who ever lived. They, and many others, are here remembered by another great Englishman, John Aubrey, whose *Brief Lives* are some of the wittiest and most moving miniature portraits ever written. Aubrey – a scholar, antiquarian and close observer of both the foibles and the courage of his contemporaries – lived through the upheavals of the English Civil War in the 17th century. His little biographies are amusing, ribald, moving; a testament to the brevity of human existence and one of the most precious relics of a distant age.



Brian Cox is one of Britain's leading actors. His two Olivier awards represent highlights in decades of leading roles with the RSC and Royal National Theatre (including *King Lear*, *Richard III* and *Titus Andronicus*) though he also played Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick* on Broadway. His TV and film work is equally varied, including *Rob Roy*, *Braveheart*, *Manhunter* and *Hidden Agenda*. He is now increasingly active as a director (*Richard III* and *The Master Builder*).

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-378-4

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Total time
2:37:43