

Brigandine head-piece, found at Davington Priory, Kent.

In the possession of Mr. Thomas Willement, F.S.A.

The perforated iron plates are drawn one-half original size.

NOTICE OF A HEAD-PIECE OF BRIGANDINE ARMOUR, FOUND  
AT DAVINGTON PRIORY, KENT.

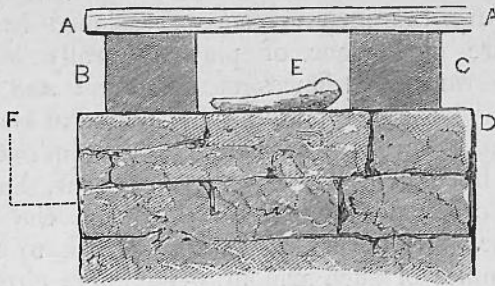
IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. THOMAS WILLEMENT, F.S.A.

TOWARDS the close of the XVth and throughout the XVIth century, the inconvenience occasioned by the ponderous nature of armour of plate naturally led to the adoption of various defences of less rigid and cumbrous description. The frequent use at that period of body-armour formed of mail or small plates of metal, quilted within a garment of linen or other more costly tissue, has perhaps been hitherto insufficiently noticed. From the perishable nature of the material we can rarely expect to meet with original examples of such armour, even under circumstances most favourable to their preservation; whilst on the other hand the scanty evidence to be gained from contemporary writers, or from the concise description in an inventory or a bequest, may scarce suffice to define the precise distinction between the brigandine and the "noble jazeran,"—the jacket of mail, the privy coat of fence, and the plated doublet.

A remarkable example of armour of plates of iron stitched between folds of linen, forming a "secret," or concealed protection for the head, has recently been brought before the Institute by Mr. Willement. Body-armour of precisely similar workmanship exists in various collections, but no specimen has hitherto been noticed, destined to supply the place of the rigid and ponderous head-piece usually worn. The circumstances connected with the discovery are no less singular than the remarkable preservation of the relic. "It was found (Mr. Willement states) towards the close of February, 1856, at Davington Priory, Kent, on the top of a wall, 2 feet in thickness and about 20 feet from the ground, the wall being composed of irregular stones, flint and rubble, probably of the time of Edward II. The cap was not imbedded in the masonry, but was found lying loose and dry, between two wall-plates which extended through the

greater part of the west front ; the roof which they carried not being older than the time of Henry VIII., (see woodcut). It is certainly a head-covering, perhaps too small for a male adult, and how could such an article find its way amongst the Benedictine nuns? Was it used in any way as a penitential infliction?"

Although of rather diminutive proportions, as observed by Mr. Willement,—the height of the cap being  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches ; the brim  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ; the diameter of the opening for the head, about 6 inches,—yet this curious object is undoubtedly a "privy



Section of Wall. Davington Priory.

(Scale, 1 inch to a foot.)

A. Gutter-plate between the Gables.  
 B. Outside plate,—Fir.  
 C. Inside plate,—Oak.  
 D. West wall.

E. Head-piece as found folded on the top  
 of the wall.  
 F. Front edge of the Gable.

cap of fence," armour for the head. We may safely assign its date to the XVIIth century, and regard it as destined to be worn within the low-crowned, narrow-brimmed hat, in vogue in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth. The form occurs frequently in the spirited woodcuts of Jost Amman, of the same period. Such a defence was obviously not suited to the perilous emergencies of actual warfare ; as a protection in a fray or skirmish, in travelling or in nightly adventure, it may have been found an effectual expedient. It is formed, as shown in the accompanying representation, of several rows of small octagonal plates of iron, overlapping each other : the brim being composed of a single row of plates of rather larger size than those used in other parts of the cap. These plates are laid between stout canvas, and quilted together, so to speak, by fine twine stitched around the plates, and through the oilet-holes in the centre of each of them. The "privy cap," thus ingeniously compacted,

possessed considerable flexibility ; and when removed from the hat it might be folded up in small compass, and carried about the person as a precaution against any sudden emergency, with almost as much facility as the skeleton cap of fence in Mr. W. J. Bernhard Smith's collection, figured in this Journal, vol. vii., p. 229, where notices of other examples may be found.

No allusion to the *secrette* formed of plates, such as the curious specimen before us, appears to have been found in the writers or inventories of the period. These caps were sometimes formed with mail, and with horn, the latter being used probably in like manner as the whalebone, *baleine*, at an earlier period. In the Inventory of effects of Sir John Fastolf, who died in 1459, occur—"xxiiij. cappes stuffyd with horne and sum withe mayle. Item, j. Jakke of blakke lynen clothe stuffyd with mayle. Item, vj. Jakkes stuffyd with horne." (Archaeologia, vol. xxi., p. 270.) We find in Palsgrave's "Eclaircissement de la Langue Francoyse," 1530,—“Cappe of fence, *segrette de maille*.” Florio, in his Italian Dictionary, renders “*Secréta*, a thin steele cap or close skull worne under a hat.” Sir John Smithe, in his “Instructions, Observations and Orders Mylitarie, &c, composed 1591,” speaks of the imperfect equipment of light horsemen, “armed with red or pied cappes and steele sculles within them ;” and he recommends that the mounted archers should use “deepe steele sculles in very narrow brimd hattes, well stuffed for the easines of their heades,” and either jacks of mail, “or else light and easie brigandines, or at least ilet-holed doublets, verie easie and well fitted to their bodies ; their sleeves chained within with maile, or else with certen narrow stripes of serecloth betwixt the lining and outside of their sleeves for the easines of their armes.”<sup>1</sup>

Although no other example of the cap quilted with iron plates has hitherto occurred, several brigandine doublets, of precisely similar construction to that of the *secrette* in Mr. Willement's possession, have been preserved. Examples may be seen in the Tower Armory, part of the old Tudor stores, as I am informed by Mr. Hewitt, and one of these has been figured in Grose's “Ancient Armour,” pl. xxvi. There is one in the Armory at Goodrich Court, which once

<sup>1</sup> Instructions, &c. pp. 198, 204.

belonged to a Kentish bowman, and is described by the late Sir S. Meyrick as a Brigandine Jacket. It is figured by Skelton, vol. i., pl. 34. In the museum formed in 1856, during the Meeting of the Institute in Edinburgh, another was produced by Mr. W. B. Johnstone, Treasurer of the Royal Scottish Academy. In this last, the form and dimensions of the oiled iron plates, the mode in which they are quilted within the canvas by external cords in straight and diagonal lines, passing through those perforations, and the general aspect of the workmanship, so closely resemble those of the head-piece from Davington, that we might suppose both to have been produced by the same artificer.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the fashion of the doublet enables us to ascertain the date of both these defences. The peculiar "peasecod bellied" form, as it is designated by Bulwer, a fashion first introduced in the breast-plate of armour in the reign of Edward VI., may suffice to fix the age as the later half of the XVIth century. Sir S. Meyrick assigned a date as late as 1590 to the doublet in his collection. Such brigandine jackets, he observes, were in the reign of Elizabeth appropriated to the bowmen. It is obvious that their comparative flexibility rendered them well suited for that purpose; and Sutcliffe, who produced his "Practice of Armes" in 1593, observes, that some now-a-days little esteem the bow, "yet, if our archers were armed with plated jackes as in time past, neither shotte could abide them in even ground, nor pikes without shotte."<sup>3</sup>

The precise distinction between various defences used as substitutes for the more ponderous armour of plate is often obscure, and I hope on some future occasion to give a more extended notice of their peculiarities. We trust that Mr. Hewitt will be enabled to complete his useful treatise on "Ancient Armour and Weapons in Europe." He will doubtless throw as much light on the difficulties which occur in our investigations of the armour of the XVIth century, as he has upon that of the earlier periods.

ALBERT WAY.

<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested, with much probability, that the term "oiled iron plates," used by Sir John Smithe, pp. 185, 204, may have been assigned to brigandine jackets of this description.

<sup>3</sup> Sutcliffe, *ut supra*, p. 163. At p.

23, likewise he mentions "Jackets of male and plated doublets;" and, p. 188, he recommends that some light troops should be armed "onely with light targets and plated doublets sufficient to beare the thrust of a sword."