



## VARIATIONS IN THE PETRE ARMS.

By S. TUCKER, Esq. (Rouge Croix).

I SHOULD have no excuse for intruding so unimportant and generally uninteresting a subject as the variation in the armorial bearings of a particular family, but for the fact that the Petres have been for more than three centuries intimately connected with the county of Essex, and that the heraldic differences to which I shall call your attention are to be met with on tombs and other memorials in this county as elsewhere, and that some trouble may be saved to future enquirers by my note of explanation. If these alterations were the caprice of the present lawless and fanciful days of heraldry, when most persons bear arms because they have been borne by others of the same name, or having no such quasi title, assume a coat of their own device, or belonging to some one else, I should not have thought it worth while to notice them, for my fear and my hope are equalized that historians hereafter will have to place no reliance on the universal and mostly nonsensical armorials of this our time. The differences in the Petre Arms, however, occur at a period in which we are accustomed to regard heraldic bearings and emblems as a sure guide, when heraldry proved of use to and now serves the purpose of the historian and chronologist. Such reasons alone seem to offer an apology for my observations.

My attention was first called to this subject, when recently at Oxford, by Dr. Griffiths of Wadham College, which College was, as you are aware, founded by Nicholas Wadham and his wife Dorothy, one of the daughters—by his first marriage—of Sir William Petre, of Writtle and Ingatestone in this county, Chancellor of the Order of the Garter, Visitor of the Monasteries, Secretary of State, and Secretary to Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary and Elizabeth. He died 1571-2, and is buried at Ingatestone.

Dr. Griffiths pointed out to me that in a portrait of Dorothy Wadham, dated 1595, the coat (No. 2) is impaled,

as for her, with that of her husband—that in another portrait of hers dated 1611, the coat (No. 3) is so impaled—and that this simpler bearing seems to have been generally used as for Petre in the various representations of the Arms in the College, either in carved oak, painted window or embroidery. I should also state that the coat (No. 2) is or was in a window of the Hall of Exeter College, as that of its great benefactor Sir William Petre. On investigation I found it to be generally asserted that Sir William Petre had an “augmentation” to his arms by Christopher Barker. There is nothing in the College of Arms to justify this, but I do find in a collection of trickings of Barker’s Grants,<sup>1</sup> the coat (No. 2) entered as if an original and not an augmented coat—it is not so stated—but that is the inference I draw from the note to the entry. That Sir William Petre bore this coat there can be no doubt. It is not on the portrait which his representative Lord Petre has been good enough to send for our local museum; but it *is* on another portrait in his possession at Thorndon, and it is placed at the side of Sir William’s name in Glover’s “List of Knights,” 1435 to 1624 (Cot. MS. Claud., c. iii. 133)—and it is on his monument at Ingatestone. In the Bodleian Library (Ashm. MS. 1121) the arms of “S<sup>r</sup> William Petre de Writtle” are most absurdly given as the coat No. 3, with the supporters afterwards borne by his son the first Lord Petre, but his right arms in correction (probably by Sir Henry St. George, Norroy King of Arms, to whom the volume once belonged), coat No. 2, are sketched in at the side. The funeral certificates of Sir William Petre and of Dame Anne his widow (the latter attested by “John Petre,” afterwards Lord Petre) are both in the College of Arms, but unfortunately the arms are not added, so that the only, yet sufficient, authority for his bearing the coat No. 2 is in the entry amongst Barker’s grants to which I have already referred. I cannot assign an exact date to the arms, but as Sir William Petre sealed some letters in 1545 now in the British Museum (Harl. MSS. 283 and 284) with the device of a crowned head, I presume he did not then bear arms; and as Christopher Barker died in 1550, they may reasonably be dated between those years.

The Harl. MS. 5846, is entitled “Creasts and Armes given by Christopher Barker, ats Garter, Knight, with some other

<sup>1</sup> E. D. N. 56, 11.

auntient armes, who died the second day of January, being Thursday, about 8 of the clock at night in Pater Noster rewe in London, a<sup>o</sup>. 3<sup>o</sup>. Edri. 6<sup>th</sup> 1550.” It has the following note on the fly-leaf:—“Coppied out of an old Booke sometime William Colborne’s, York Heralde, and of later time Rafe Brooke’s, Yorke-herald, now in the custodie of Sr Edward Dering, Knight and Baronet, a<sup>o</sup> 1632. Henry Lily.” At folio 85 of this vol. the coat No. 2 is given as that of “Sir William Petre of Ingreton (*sic*) in Com. Essex, Knight,” and this goes also to prove, not only that he had the arms from Barker, but, by there being no reference to the fact, that it was not an *augmented* coat.

I can find no earlier entry of the coat No. 1 than the Visitation of Devon in 1563-4, by Harvey (Clarenceux—D. 7, 16<sup>b</sup>), when John Peter (so spelt<sup>2</sup>) of Tor Brian the brother of Sir William, entered his pedigree of three descents. It is of course consistent with the theory of the augmentation that this may have been the existing paternal shield of Sir William Petre, and that Barker gave him the royal emblems on the chief, as a personal addition and distinction. While admitting that, however, I incline, from the surrounding circumstances, to the belief that Sir William was the first of his family to bear arms, and that he had a grant of that before referred to (No. 2). That the charges on the chief had relation to his offices and courtly connection, I have no doubt; but I believe it to have been entirely newly designed, and to have all the complications which, whether intentionally or not, Barker seems to have introduced into the armorials of that date.

I take it that Sir William was the first to bring his family into notice, and that when (still during his life) some quarter of a century afterwards Harvey visited Devon, he then and there assigned to the rest of the Petre family the same coat, shorn of those charges which had personal reference to Sir William alone. The *admission* of arms, by the simple “tricking” in on the top of the pedigree, by the duly qualified officer at the visitation, gave a complete title to arms, and such an origin is all I can trace of coat No. 1; particularly as the family did not register either their pedi-

<sup>2</sup> Sir Wm. Petre seems to have been the first of his family who changed the spelling of his name.

grees or arms at the prior visitation, just antecedent to Sir William's first prominence.

In the next (1620) Visitation of Devon, the immediate family of Sir William do not appear. They had by this time become, by the magnificent grants of lands he received, a great Essex instead of a small Devonian House ; but a cadet springing from Otho Peter of Bowhay, *did* enter their pedigree, and the same arms, No. 1, were allowed to them. I may here state that these Cadet Peters were the progenitors of a numerous and always well-positioned family resident both in Devon and Cornwall, which is still represented, and who have always (properly) borne the coat No. 1.

In 1573, two years after Sir William Petre's death, his brother, Robert Peter, Auditor of the Exchequer, had a *grant* of the same coat as borne by his distinguished brother. It is clear that Robert Peter was entitled to the coat No. 1, but at that time he had greater pride in the more complicated shield associated with his brother the founder of his family's greatness. The grant is in extenso in the Herald's College (Vin. 162, 146), and as its terms bear on my point, and are otherwise quaint and characteristic of the time, I will give it to you in full :—

LITERÆ PATENTES ROBERTI PETRE FRATRIS GULI : PETRE MILITIS AURATI  
ATQUE ORDINIS DINI GEORGIJ CANCELLARII.

“To all and singular as well Nobles and Gentlemen as others to whome these presentes shall come be seen heard read or understood I Sf. Gilbert Dethick knight alias Garter principall kinge of Armes send Greetinge in our Lord God euerlastinge forasmuch as aunciently from the begininge the valiant and vertuose actes of excellent personnes haue beene commendid to the world and posteritie with sondry monumentes and remembrances of their good desearts Emongst the which the cheifest and most usuall hath beene the bearinge of signes in shildes called Armes beinge none other than demonstrations and tokens of them. To th'entent therfor that such as by their vertues do ad and shew foorth to the aduancement of the common wealth the shyne of their good lyfe and conuersacon in daily practyse of thinges worthy and commendable may therfor recuyue due honor in their lyues and also deryue and contynewe the same successiuey to their posterity for euer. And whereas I the sayd Garter principall kinge of armes not only by myne owne knowledge but also bye the lawdable report and testimony of diuers and sondry credible personnes am truely asserteynid that Robert Peter of Deuonshyre Auditor of the receptes of the Queenes maties exchecquyre third sonne to John Peter of the same shyre and Brother to the right honorable Sf. Willm Petre knight and chaunceller of the most honorable Order of the Garter hath of longe tyme so well behaiued him selfe that he deseruith to be in all places of honor, ad-

mitted reputed and taken in the number and company of all other gentlemen. In consideracon wherof and for a further declaracon of the worthinesse of the sayd Robert Petre and at his instant request I the said Garter principall Kinge of Armes by power and auctoritie to me commitid by Leres Patentis under the great Seale of England, haue assignid deuyced, gyven and graunted vnto the said Robert Peter these Armes and creast folowinge. The feild geules, on a bend ore a cornishe choughe pp betwixt two sinquefoiles asure betweene two escaloppes argent On a cheif of the second a Rose betweene two demye fleure de lices of the feild, and for his creast two lyones heades rased endorcid asure and ore collerid and ringed counterchangid beinge situate vppon a Torse or & b. on a healmēt with mantles of gueles doublid argent as more playnlye apperith depictid in this Margent. To haue and hold the said Armes and creast etc. And he the same Armes and creast to use beare enioy and shewe forth etc. In witsesse wherof I the said Garter principall kinge of Armes haue caused these Leres Patente to be mad etc. dated the 1 of June 1573 Anno Regni Reginæ Elizabth decimo quinto.

This is to all intents and purposes a *grant*, and *not* a "Confirmation," as it is called in a small MS. in the College, entitled "Dethick's Gifts" (p. 31); and proves that the assignment to Sir William was considered as restricted to him and his descendants. Robert Peter married but had no issue, so that the coat No. 2 is limited to the descendants of Sir William, and should be the only impalement used for Dorothy in the adopted arms of Wadham College. I now come to coat No. 3, simpler and therefore heraldically better than either of the others. You will not require to be told by me that the plainer the device of a shield, the older, as a rule, it is sure to be; for as personal cognizances multiplied they necessarily became more charged, more complicated, and specially by the care the heralds had to avoid any confusion or interference with a previously known or recognized bearing. A plain shield indicated antiquity; and so it was, I presume, when John Petre, Sir William's son, was created Baron Petre of Writtle, in 1603, although he had up to that time borne his father's arms (which, by the way, are impaled for him with his wife's (Waldegrave) in Borley Church in this county), preferred to strike out not only the chief and its charges, but the Cornish chough and cinquefoils on the bend. We have no document extant authorizing this change; but that it was sanctioned is proved by the admission of the simple shield to the first Lord Petre in a MS. in the College of his date.

Having given you a reason why men should prefer plain

to complicated shields, and as a specimen of the process by which Lord Petre's wish was probably gratified, I will read you an extract from a patent by Robert Cooke (Clarenceux) in 1576, whereby, at the solicitation of Thomas Honywood, the ancestor of the present Kentish Baronet, he denuded his then coat of some of its superfluities, and made it more to the taste of the bearer. The extract is as follows:—

EXTRACT FROM A PATENT UNDER THE HAND OF ROBERT COOKE  
CLARENCEUX DATED 10 NOV. 1576.

“WHEREAS anciently from the beginninge the valiaunt and vertuous actes of excellent persons haue ben comended to the worlde and posteritie with sondrey monumentes and remembrances of their goode deseartes : Emongest the which the chieftest and most usuall hath ben the bearinge of signes and tokens in Shieldees called Armes which are euident demonstracions of prowesse and valoir diuersly distributed accordinge to the qualities and deseartes of the persons merytinge the same, which as it was prudently denised in the beginninge to stirre up and kindle the hartes of men the imitation of vertue and noblesse : euen so hath the same ben from tyme to tyme and yet is continually obserued to the entent that such as haue don comendable seruice to theyr Prince or Contrey either in warre or peace may therfore receaue due honor in their lyues, and also deryue the same successiuelly to their posteritie for euer Emonge the which nombre *Thomas Honywoode of Sende in Newington juxta Hythe in the County of Kent Esquire* being one of the berars of those tokens of honor that is to say of Armes and Crest, by just descent from his ancestors, which notwithstandinge to the knowledge of such as be skilfull in the facultie, being founde to be ouermuch intricate with the confuse mixture of meny thinges in one Shielde contrary to the comendable and best allowed maner of bearinge Armes : hath required me the sayd Clarencieulx King of Arms as well in his owne name, as in the names of his brethern and all other the descendentes from the body of *John Honywoode sometyme of Casebourne in the Countie aforesayd his Graundfather* to gratify him in the reformation therof : Wherefore in consideration of the equitie of his sayd request and in respect of his owne worthines I have thought goode to yealde them my healde in the same describinge unto them their Armes and Crest or Coignysance as followeth.”

The plain coat, No. 3, has ever since been borne, and honorably borne, by the descendants of the first Lord Petre ; and although I have noticed that others of the name use it, they can have no possible right to do so. Lord Petre's right is abundantly admitted on the College Records, and I apprehend that he might, if he chose, use the coat of Sir William Petre, as the first of his quarterings after his simplified shield.

In the Visitation of Essex in 1634, there are four descents

of Petre entered, and the simple shield, which had then been many years in use (C. 21, 92<sup>B</sup>). In the Visitation of Gloucestershire in 1623, there are four descents of Petre of Henbery and Bristol, deriving from John Petre of Penhow, Co. Devon (C. 17 129<sup>B</sup>). There is no coat entered; and in the Visitation of 1683 (K. 5, 348) George Petre of this family disclaimed his right to arms, which, as he sprung from Devonshire, and was probably of common origin with the Peters of Tor Brian and Bowhay, is some confirmation of my theory that they were not anciently entitled. In the Visitation of Bucks in 1634 (C. 26, 11), there are three descents of Peter (the attestation is "Peters") dating from a William Peter, who was born in Dorsetshire. Here again there are no arms. Lastly, in the Visitation of London in 1687 (K. 9, 22 and 162), there are pedigrees of four descents from Richard Peter of Dallow in the Co. of Devon, whose representatives produced as their arms on a steel seal the coat No. 2; but the herald detecting it as that of Sir William Petre, has added this note: "This family can have no right thereto except they prove their descent from him."

I submit that these entries of descents from west country Petres and Peters go far to show that there were no early arms, and that I am not unreasonable in my reading of the case—viz., that Sir William first had a grant between 1545 and 1550; that thirteen years later substantially the same coat was allowed to his brother, John Peter of Tor Brian and family. That to the first Lord (and from the date of his peerage only) is attributable the simple shield as now borne; and that although we can readily see how this latter became interpolated at Wadham College, even before its building was completed, the *proper* coat to be impaled with Wadham, as the cognizance of that College, is that special one which was assigned to Sir William Petre.