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## ON THE STAR INN, AT ALFRISTON.

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THE old Inn, which forms our place of rendezvous to-day, is well deserving of the attention of an Archæological Society. The ravages of time, and the innovations called improvements, effected within the last half-century, have left us very few of the domestic edifices of Old England. While almost every village of this district presents us with a time-honoured temple for religious worship, (dating in not a few instances from Norman and Early English times), a medieval dwelling-house is a rare object. The immediate locality is, however, rather richer than most others in examples of this kind. Not to mention the two monastic edifices of Michelham and Wilmington, both now occupied as dwelling-houses, we find, in the adjacent parish of West Dean, the singularly interesting little parsonage-house so ably described in Vol. III of the *Collections*, by the Reverend G. M. Cooper. In the same parish also is Charlston, a modern farm-house, but comprising some features of unquestionably Norman date. (Vide the present volume, page 46.) Here we have an inn, an "auncyent hostelrie" of considerable interest and curiosity—one which cannot fail to suggest reminiscences of medieval tavern scenes. Though not of sufficient antiquity to have afforded old Chaucer his "sop of wyn," or to have accommodated Syr John Maundevile after his long "voiage and travaile," or that other Sir John, whose memory is more strongly associated with such scenes, Falstaffe, to wit, yet there can be no question that a representative of the last-named knight, in the days of bluff King Hal, might have made himself perfectly at home here, and have deemed the Starre at Alfryston his lucky planet, if its kitchen was ruled, as doubtless it was, by some counterpart of his favourite Mrs. Quickly. Here, at certain seasons, no doubt, a jolly Benedictine or two from Battayle,

dispatched on some commission from their father abbot, touching his manor of Alciston, within the boundaries of which the house stands, found entertainment for their ambling palfreys and themselves; and here some reverend brother from Michelham, deputed to inspect the parish church of St. Andrew, then dependent upon his priory, would linger over a cup of good ale, on a fine autumnal day, like this, until he had well-nigh forgotten monastic rule. But,—

“ Old times are changed, old manners gone,”—

and the archæologist finds pleasure in making a railway pilgrimage to this interesting spot, which he can contemplate without any wish for the revival of the olden scenes and manners alluded to, but with many feelings of thankfulness that his lot has been cast in different and happier times.

From the religious symbols with which the house is decorated it has been conjectured that it was in some way connected with a monastic foundation. From the connection of Alfriston with Battel Abbey, it has been rather fancifully imagined that this building was invested with the well known privilege of sanctuary which that monastery possessed.<sup>1</sup> The antique, but now most wofully mutilated, Cross in the street, and the large size of the parish church, might seem rather to confirm the notion that Alfriston was a place of more than ordinary sanctity; but as to this Inn, I must express my conviction that it was *simply* an Inn, a house of entertainment for all comers, who could content themselves with the accommodation it afforded, and “ mine host ” by the payment of their reckoning.

A good idea of the edifice may be gained from the accompanying plate, and the decorations may be thus briefly described:—

Below the first, or left-hand window of the first floor, is a figure engaged with a dragon or wyvern. As he is devoid of wings, St. George, and not St. Michael, is probably intended, for the making of St. George a *cavalier* is an innovation of comparatively recent date, as is proved by innumerable examples. Beneath window No. 2 are two serpents with intertwined tails, supporting a kind of niche or tabernacle.

<sup>1</sup> See Chronicle of Battel Abbey, translated by M. A. Lower, p. 27.

This group appears to be merely ornamental. Under the third window is a blank shield; and to the right, near the sign-post, is a crouching greyhound. Contiguous to this there was formerly a Bacchanalian figure, with bottle and flask, but this has disappeared.

On a bracket, to the right of the kitchen window, is a figure in the costume of an ecclesiastical dignitary, mitred, and holding in his right hand a kind of orb, while his left is placed upon his breast. At his feet is a crouching animal, probably a hind, which would identify the figure as St. Giles, as a well known legend asserts that the saint's life was once saved by an animal of that species. On a similar bracket, to the right of the door, is another ecclesiastical figure, which, as it is devoid of any symbol, it is difficult to appropriate. At the head of a shaft, by the left-hand door-post, is a *fret* or heraldic knot. This device, though borne as a badge by several of our old baronial houses, does not appear to have been used by any Sussex family. The *Arms* of the Echyngams indeed were *azure, a fret argent*, and that family formerly had great possessions in the immediate neighbourhood of Alfriston, but as they had become extinct at the time of the erection of this house, the fret can hardly be attributed to them, and may perhaps be passed by as mere ornament.

The most interesting of all these wood carvings is the group forming the bracket at the angle of the building. It is composed of two heraldic animals supporting a staff, as in the accompanying wood-cut. The dexter figure is doubtless intended for a bear, and the sinister for a lion—the tail passed between the legs and thrown over the back. Between them is a staff or mace, surmounted with a coronet.

This device has always been a puzzle to local archæologists, and to none more than to myself. That the animals were intended for the supporters of some noble family there seemed to be no doubt—the difficulty lay in the appropriation. The origin of supporters is involved in considerable uncertainty. After the arbi-



trary figures introduced into circular seals, for the purpose of filling the blank spaces unoccupied by the shield, we find in sculpture a single animal grasping the staff of a banner, upon which the arms are depicted: a fine example of this kind of supporter occurs over the entrance of Herstmonceux Castle—the *alaunt* or wolf-dog of the Fyneses supporting their time-honoured banner of three lions rampant. To this single supporter succeed two animals upholding the shield—the existing distinction of peers of the realm, and of some few commoners to whom the right has been accorded. The representation however of two animals supporting a staff, instead of a shield, was, so far as my own observation extended, without a parallel, until recently, when, in turning over the thirteenth



volume of the 'Archæologia,' I found at p. 69 (in an Account of Inscriptions discovered on the Walls of an Apartment in the Tower of London, the ancient place of confinement for state prisoners) a singular carving, executed by John Dudley, son of John, Duke of Northumberland, during his incarceration, after the overthrow of his family for their daring attempt to place the Lady Jane Grey upon the throne. The resemblance between

this device and the Alfriston carving is at once apparent, and there seems to be a strong probability that the latter was executed in compliment to a member of that ambitious and unfortunate house.

The Tower sculpture (which has some accessories to which reference here is unnecessary) represents a bear, collared and chained to a ragged staff, which is supported on the other side by a lion with a bifurcated tail. The bear and staff formed, as is well known, the badge of the ancient earls of Warwick. Edmund Dudley, the rapacious minister of Henry VII, married Elizabeth Grey, a descendant of the Beauchamps, earls of Warwick, and his son John, previously to his elevation to the dukedom of Northumberland, was, in 1547, created earl of Warwick. Before the revival of that ancient title in his favour, he assumed the "bear and ragged



staff" of his maternal ancestors, and in the sculpture before us, executed by his son, the "lion rampant double queué" of the paternal arms of the Dudleys is added on the other side of the staff.

This device occurs likewise on a very singular hexagonal seal, an impression of which exists in the Hastings Museum.<sup>2</sup> This seal, which appears to have been hastily executed during the few unhappy days of the reign of "Queen Jane," bears her name and title (*Joanna Regina*), and the initials of her amiable but unfortunate husband, Lord Guildford Dudley, with the date 1553. In the two conjoined shields are the royal arms, and the bear, staff, and lion of Dudley. In this case the bear and lion have changed sides of the staff, but that this is a mere blunder of the artist is evident from the fact, that in the other shield a similar error is committed in the giving of the lions of England the priority to the fleurs-de-lis of France, for which there is no precedent.



In all the three examples the staves differ from each other. In the Tower one it is the true "ragged staff" of the old earls of Warwick; on the seal it is forked above and below; and in the Alfriston example it is plain, with a knob at top, surmounted by a coronet. There are also other discrepancies. At Alfriston the bear is not chained, and the posture of the lion's tail is different. The staff in the seal may be intended for the cognizance of Guildford. John Dudley, duke of Northumberland, married Jane, daughter of Sir Edward Guildford, and granddaughter of the Sir Richard Guldeforde, whose "Pilgrimage to the Holy Land" has recently been reprinted by the Camden Society.<sup>3</sup> This family, who originated at East Guldeford, near Rye, bore as their cognizance "a trunk of a tree, coupéd and raguled or, the points enflamed proper." It is not a little singular that two families, allied by marriage, should have borne badges so very similar.

<sup>2</sup> I have not been able to discover where the original seal is preserved. A sulphur cast of it is in the Museum of the Sussex Archaeological Society at Lewes Castle.

<sup>3</sup> Edited by Sir Henry Ellis, from the unique copy printed by Pynson. The pilgrimage was made in 1506, the port of embarkation being Rye.

The staff at Alfriston, however, is clearly neither the ragged staff of Dudley nor the raguled tree of Guildford, but a plain official mace, surmounted with a coronet.

Assuming this carving to have been executed by a mechanic ignorant of heraldic proprieties, we may, I think, with some degree of certainty assign this singular group to the Dudley family. The chief difficulty, however, in the way of such an assignation is, that they are not known to have been connected with this district. The story that Edmund Dudley, the duke's father, was the son of a travelling carpenter, whom the monks of Lewes Priory patronised and educated, seems to have been a mere rumour, first committed to history by Erdeswick, the Staffordshire topographer; but even if this were true it would not account for his device being placed at Alfriston. What is more pertinent is, that Edmund held the stewardship of the Rape of Hastings, in which he was possibly succeeded by his son, the eventual duke, after the reversal of his attainder by Henry VIII. This event took place in the third year of that monarch, but since Elizabeth, the ultimate heiress of the Beauchamp armorials and the mother of John Dudley, did not succeed to them until 1526, on the death of her niece, an earlier date ought hardly to be attributed to this carving, considered as a Dudley memorial.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the figures of saints, &c., found in juxtaposition with it, will not allow us to name a date very considerably subsequent. Indeed it is with some difficulty that I bring myself to admit the work to be later than the very commencement of the 16th century.

Our learned and valued member, W. S. Walford, Esq., to whom I am under obligations for several suggestions connected with this inquiry, thinks the group can be little, if any, later than the earlier part of the reign of Hen. VIII. Whether or not it belongs to the Dudleys, the resemblance it bears to their device seems so curious, that I trust I shall not be charged with impertinence for having brought together matters not proved to be relevant of Sussex history, especially

<sup>4</sup> If such be really the case, a question may arise as to how so insignificant a building came to be decorated with the insignia of a noble family. Perhaps the builder of it had been of the number of their retainers.

as my notions, if ill founded, may still assist some more acute archæologist in arriving at a truer conclusion.

I need hardly say that the lion placed in the angle below these figures has no original connection with the house: it was the figure-head of a vessel stranded on the neighbouring coast during the last century.

In the interior of the house there are but few features demanding attention. On the mantel-piece of the kitchen is an angel, forming a corbel. The parlour ceiling points to a period when Sussex timber was cheap, and when massive proportions were mistaken for strength. On the bracket of the principal beam is a shield inscribed with the letters *ι η ς*, one of the well-known abbreviations of the name of *Ἰησοῦς*.

I think it would be easy to show, that at the period when this house was built, Alfriston was a place of greater importance than at present. Remote as it now seems from any considerable road, it was then probably on the usual route from the eastern towns of Sussex to the city of Chichester and the monastic establishments of West Sussex. Hence the Star Inn would become a "house of call" for pilgrims and the clergy who were wending their way to the tomb of St. Richard and the episcopal see. This, combined with the influence possessed here by the abbot of Battel and the prior of Michelham, would give somewhat of a religious character to the house, and suggest the adoption of ornaments which appear at first sight rather incongruous with the objects of a road-side Inn.

END OF VOL. IV.