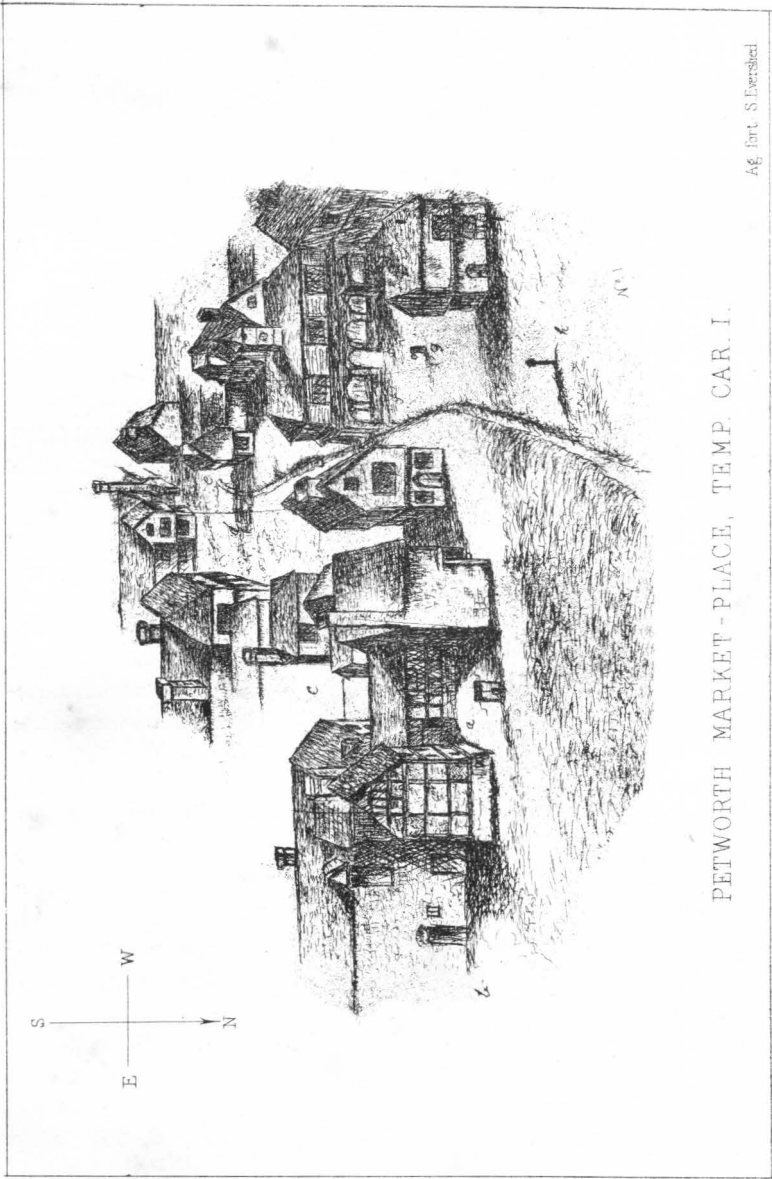


THE GREAT GEORGE INN, PETWORTH.

BY ROGER TURNER, JUN., ESQ.

I am indebted to many kind friends for the assistance they have rendered me in preparing the brief history of this once celebrated hostelry, for the Sussex Archæological Collections; of whom I must particularly mention Mr. William Knight, of this town (Petworth), from whose very interesting drawings I took the photographs, from which the illustrations are etched; and for the etchings themselves, my best thanks are due to Mr. Samuel Evershed, of Uckfield, with whom, though a West Sussex man like myself, I am not personally acquainted; but to whose talent as an amateur engraver, the Society is under previous obligations for similar favours conferred.

This holstery, which was erected in 1533, and pulled down in the months of July and August last year (1866), having been for many years discontinued as an inn, stood on the east side of the Market-place, or, as it is now sometimes called, the Market-square; it having been of late years more of a square than it was at the time this tavern was built. The Market-place is its more ancient name; for we find it so called early in the reign of Charles I. With regard to its style of architecture, it was, like most of the other houses standing in and about the same Market-place and town generally, timber framed—a mode of house construction decidedly the most picturesque, if not the most durable, of any adopted in this country, and for which the large quantity of timber



PETWORTH MARKET-PLACE, TEMP. CAR. I.

Ag. Int. S. Evershed

grown in this county would offer great facility. The plan of this Market-place, together with the style and position of the houses of which it consisted, and particularly of the Great George Inn, will be best shewn by an inspection of the general view of it, as it is represented in the etching. It shews at one view this part of the town as it appeared when the "Great George" was in a flourishing state; and up to about the year 1790, when the inhabitants of the town flocked to it for the superior excellence of the entertainment which it offered, and which was at all times to be found there. The catering of the inn was, to use an expressive phrase, borrowed from our opposite neighbours across the Channel, of the most *recherché* kind. The contents of its larder and cellar were such as could not fail to be appreciated even by epicures of the Falstaffian kind; men—

"In fair round belly, with good capon lined;"

and whose sack and egg-posset must be brewed in the most approved Quicleian manner. In short, the "Great George" was the principal house of public reception and amusement for the townspeople and strangers in the place. To any one surveying it from the Market-place, it did not present a very imposing front; still, it was large and commodious, the principal part of it being a building situated behind this, and running parallel with the part in front; the two being connected by means of a covered passage. From a pole projecting horizontally from the front, within the memory of persons now living, a square signboard was suspended, on which was depicted, in a rather rude, but at the same time bold style, the redoubted Champion of England, his rampant horse being represented as all fire and fury; and, in appearance, in the act of endeavouring to aid his courageous master in his encounter with his formidable enemy, by striking his side with his fore-feet; such enemy being a dragon-monster, into whose capacious mouth, bristling with a fearful set of sharply-pointed teeth, St. George has just thrust his gigantic spear, leaving in imagination the victory over him complete. On his head St. George had a helmet, surmounted with a large plume of ostrich feathers; and a mantle, fastened to his neck, which fell gracefully over his shoulders and body, completed

the picture. Altogether, he was exhibited to the public quite as the Sainted Champion of this invincible country should be—noble in his appearance, and fearless in his bearing.

The following references will make the leading objects of interest in the Petworth Market-place at this early date more easily recognised:—

(a) Is the Great George Inn.

(b) The alley; this was probably the skittle, or, perhaps, bowling alley; the game of bowls being, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so popular a pastime, that no inn of any note would be without such an alley. Playing at skittles was also a favourite amusement.

(c) Is the waggoner's yard; being so called because more waggons than carriages usually put up there for the night, waggons being, from the bad state of the roads, more generally adopted, two centuries ago, for the transfer of passengers and goods from one place to another, than any other mode of conveyance.

(d) Is Golden Square.

(e) Damer's Bridge.

(f) The old Market House, which was a rather long timber and plaster-constructed building, unenclosed below, but having an enclosed room above, which was devoted to the double purpose of a Town-hall and Court of Justice. Assemblies for dancing were, I believe, never held there. This room was supported by stout upright balks of timber, the braces of which, being morticed into these supports, and meeting in the centre of the space above, gave them the appearance of arches. From the roof of this building arose a square boarded turret, which carried the faces of the Town clock, and was surmounted by a weather-vane. This, doubtless from the stiffness naturally incident to old age, rarely discharged the duties of its office truthfully; and hence probably arose the proverbial saying, current years back in the neighbourhood, "as false as the Petworth weather-cock." Behind the Market

House stood one of Parson Edmond's conduits, by means of which this part of the town was supplied with water (see Vol. XIV., p. 23.) In the open space of this building the weekly corn-market was held, until it was taken down and rebuilt with stone by that liberal-hearted nobleman, the Earl of Egremont, in 1793. The new building was, like the old one, open beneath, until within a few years from this time, when, being no longer required for the purposes of a market, it was enclosed by the present noble proprietor of the Lordship of Petworth, Lord Leconfield, and the area converted into spacious rooms for the accommodation of the Petworth Subscription Reading Society, and Working Men's Institute. It had long ceased to be used as a Market-House.

(g) Is the Bull-ring; and

(h) The Whipping-post.

These two last objects of archæological interest in the old town do not speak much in favour of the intelligence and high moral condition of its inhabitants in the prosperous days of the Great George Inn. Bull-baiting, indeed, and cock-shying, are well known to have been very generally kept up as popular pastimes (see Vol. I, p. 68, note); the former in the Market-place, and the latter at the corner of the Tillington Road, even so late as the commencement of the present century, when, through the interference of the late Earl of Egremont, these barbarous and cruel practices were put a stop to.

At the close of the seventeenth and at the commencement of the eighteenth centuries, bull-baiting in Whitsun-week, and cock-shying on Shrove Tuesday, were considered legitimate amusements, particularly bull-baiting, which was annually practised at the Bear-garden, at Hockley-in-the-Hole, on Whit Monday, as appears by the following posting-bill, which is to be found among the Harleian papers in the British Museum. The date of its issue is 1710:—

“ This is to give notice to all gentlemen gamesters, and others, that on this present Monday, Whitmonday, is a match to be fought by two dogs, one from Newgate Market, against one of Honey-lane Market, at a Bull,

for a guinea to be spent ; five let goes out of hand ; which goes fairest and furthest in, wins all. Likewise a green Bull to be baited, which was never baited before ; and a Bull to be turned loose with fireworks all over him ; also a mad Ass to be baited. Likewise there are two Bear-dogs to jump three jumps a piece at a Bear ; which jumps highest ; for ten shillings to be spent ; with a variety of Bull and Bear baiting ;—and a dog to be drawn up with fireworks. To begin exactly at three of the clock.

“ VIVAT REGINA.”

Bull-baiting may have been tolerated so long as it appears to have been in this country, notwithstanding its condemnation as a demoralising and cruel practice, from the circumstance that, by a most extraordinary municipal regulation of modern date, a butcher was prohibited from killing a bull, until he had been well baited ; and whenever and wherever the flesh of a baited bull was exposed for sale, the butcher, by an old custom, was in the habit of burning a candle on his shambles. Whether corporate bodies were impressed with the notion that bull-beef is made more tender and palatable by the previous persecution to which the poor beast was obliged to submit—as the flesh of a hunted hare is thought by epicures to be preferable to one that has been killed with a gun, or snared—or whether it was the result of an anxious desire on their part to gratify the townspeople under their municipal control, by taking out of the shackled and doomed animal the entertainment which, in the course of a few hours, he would no longer be capable of affording, I am unable to determine. Both of these causes might possibly have operated so as to lead them to give their authoritative sanction to so barbarous a custom. Of the former, they are proverbially supposed to be excellent judges ; and popularity amongst those to whom they are indebted for the brief authority they possess, is not unlikely to have been with them a powerful actuating motive in this matter. Doubtless, the abolition of these brutal exhibitions, and of the whipping-post, is mainly to be attributed to an improved state of discipline and feeling, which mental cultivation, and greater self-respect, would naturally give rise to ; and this has resulted in the establishment of a Reading Society, and a Workmen’s Institute in Petworth, from whence has arisen more elevated and refined habits of thinking and acting, and a necessity for amusements of a more rational and improving kind. As the lower orders became more intel-

lectual, and the higher "in thoughts more elevate," bull-baiting and cock-shying would no longer be endured as a pastime; nor would the whipping-post be any longer needed for the purpose of public and summary punishment.

But to return to the history of the Great George Inn, the more immediate subject of my present paper, from which I have been led—I think not unjustifiably—somewhat to digress. I will here mention that some of the houses which stood about it, particularly on the western and southern sides, are omitted in the general view of the Market-place, to admit of a clearer and better idea being obtained of it, and its structure, than could otherwise have been had, and I shall now proceed to give in detail a short account of some of the most interesting parts of such structure. The inn, it will be borne in mind, was in its architectural form like the letter H; that is, it consisted of an eastern and western wing, the western fronting to the Market-place; the two being connected by a somewhat narrower building, consisting principally of a passage and staircase, and carried at right angles from one to the other, about midway.

Of the etchings, taking the general view of the Market-place as No. 1, No. 2 will give an idea of that part of the building which was to be seen from the alley (*b*); and which could not be shewn in the general view. It is intended to exhibit the picturesque old gables and chimneys of that part of the inn, the sight of which was not intercepted by the stables.

No. 3 shews the inner side of the same eastern wing—the part, that is, which faced the court-yard—representing it as it appeared after the removal of the western wing, and the central or connecting part of the building; the position of which is indicated by the dotted lines, marking the angle of the roof, &c., and shewing that this central part was not quite so high as the two wings.

No. 4 shews the eastern, or inner front of the western wing, with the arched entrance passage, leading from the Market-place into the court-yard of the hostelry. It had, as will be seen by the gable and window, a small room over it. This front has of late years been much obscured by a new front of bricks and stucco, which has been given to the adjoining

house on the northern side ; the southern end of which is shewn in the illustration No. 3, as well as in this, and which runs parallel with it.

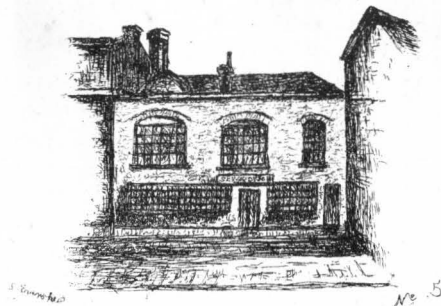
No. 5 gives the outer, or western front of the same wing—the front, that is, which is seen from the Market-place. This front has been considerably modernised, having been entirely new faced with bricks and stucco since the house has been discontinued as an inn, and the windows altered and enlarged, to adapt it to the purposes of an ironmonger's shop. The elevation of this part of the house is considerably below the houses on each side of it.

The woodcut which forms the tail-piece of my article, is a representation of one of four oaken brackets, which supported the sills of the windows of the eastern face of No. 4. It is given, not as it was originally, but as it appeared when the building was taken down ; the pattern being made good to shew its truly Sussex character. Its dimensions are fourteen inches in length, by seven inches in width. The windows of the shop in front are supported in a similar manner by six brackets in each window ; the two outside brackets being carved with an oak-branch similar to the one under consideration, but the intermediate supports being plain blocks only. The outer of these were, beyond a doubt, the brackets of the old house windows before the house was new fronted, but which have been reduced in size, so as to obtain a plain surface, for facilitating the embedding of a portion of them in the walls. Seven inches, therefore, only were exposed to view at the time of the demolition of the building. The way in which they were reduced is shown by the horizontal line.

Running north and south through the whole length of the Market-place and Golden-square, was a large open drain, which appears to have been the main drain of this part of the town, and to have discharged the filth flowing into it, and carried off by it, into a ditch at or near to Damer's-bridge. The course of this open sewer is shewn in the etching of the general plan. The sanitary condition of the town was not so much studied then as is the case at the present day. Our forefathers could tolerate what would now be looked upon as a grievous nuisance ; and infinitely preferred a surface to an underground drain, as more easily kept clean. Now, such a



EAST FRONT OF WEST WING. No. 4



WEST FRONT OF WEST WING. No. 5



EAST FRONT OF EAST WING. No. 2



WEST FRONT OF EAST WING. No. 3

Nooks of OLD PETWORTH, "The Great George Inn."

sewer as this would arouse the apprehensions of every inhabitant, and the Sanitary Act be at once brought to bear upon it.

In an old rate-book, preserved in the Petworth parish chest, and dated 168 $\frac{3}{4}$, the Great George Inn is stated to have been at that time occupied by a Mr. Remington; and the rate he was called upon to pay upon that occasion was 5d. And in the reign of Queen Anne, the "Great George" is described as the principal inn in Petworth.

It must be borne in mind, that the use of a tavern in a country town is very different now from what it was in the flourishing days of the Great George Inn. Two centuries ago there was but little travelling, and there could have been but few wayfarers to frequent it. For its principal means of support, it would depend on the town itself, and its jovial inhabitants, who then constituted a large class. Taverns of this kind were frequented by the better class of a town far more than by the lower order of the people. Business at an end for the day, here the gentry and the better class of tradesmen met in social conclave to discuss politics, or to talk of the news. And sad, I feel bound to add, were the scenes of riot and excess which took place almost nightly in what was then designated "the Upper Room" of an inn. The quaint old Earle—and here I must caution the reader against thinking that I am alluding to any one of the illustrious and potent Earls, who held the honour of Petworth from an early period, and whose names are distinguished in the annals of their country as benefactors to it, both at home and abroad,—both in peace and in war—both as statesmen and as soldiers—for this is not the case. The Earle I am speaking of was a writer of that name, who lived early in the seventeenth century, and among whose works is a small duodecimo volume, entitled "Microcosmographie; or, a Piece of the World Discovered, in Essays and Characters," of which there are about 77. The copy, from which I am about to give an extract, is described as "the fifth edition, much enlarged," and was published by Edward Blount in 1629. The eighteenth of these short essays and characters is headed "A Tavern;" and in it he gives in his quaintly facetious and plain-speaking manner, too true a picture, I fear, of the habits

and manners of the period in which he lived, and which it was his object to censure and reform. Speaking of a tavern, he says—

“It is a degree, or (if you will) a paire of stares, above an Alehouse; where men are drunke with more credit and apologie. If the Vintner’s nose be at the doore, it is a signe sufficient; but the absence of this is supplied by an ivy-bush. The roomes are ill-breathed; like the drinkers that have been well washt overnight; and are smelt, too, fasting the next morning; not furnisht with beds apt to be defiled; but with more necessary implements, such as stooles, table, &c. It is a broacher of more news than hogsheads; and of more jests than news; which is sucked up here by some spongy braine, and from thence squeezed into a comodye. Men come here to make merry; but indeed make a noise; and this musicke above is answered by the clinking of pots below. The drawers are the civillest people in it; *men of good bringing up*; and howsoever we esteeme of them, none can more justly boast of their *high calling*.

’Tis the best Theater of natures; where they are truly acted, and not plaid; and the business is, as in the rest of the world, up and down; to wit, from the bottom of the seller to the great chamber. A melancholy man would find heere matter to worke upon; to see heads as brittle as glasses; and often broken. Men come hither to quarrel, and hither to be made friends. And if Plutarch will lend me his simile, it is even Telemachus his sword that makes wounds, and cures them. A Tavern is the common consumption of the afternoone; and the murderer or maker away with, of a rainy day. It is the torrid-zone that scorches the face; and tobacco the gunpowder that blowes it up. Much harm would be done, if the charitable vintner had not water at all times ready for these flames. A house of sinne you may call it; but not a house of darknesse; for the candles are never out; and it is like those countries farre in the North, where it is as cleare at midnight, as it is at midday. After a long sitting, it becomes like the streete in a dashing showre; where the spouts are flushing above, and the conduits running below; while the Jordans, like swelling rivers, overflowe their banks. To give you the total reckoning of it; a Tavern is the busie man’s recreation; the idle man’s businesse; the melancholy man’s sanctuary; the stranger’s welcome; the Innes-a-Court man’s entertainment; the scholler’s kindnesse; and the citizen’s courtesie. It is the studie of the sparkling wits; and a cup of sherrey their booke; where we leave them.”

In grubbing up the foundations of the old hostelry, the following coins, seventeen in number, were found. With the exception of two or three, they are of no great archæological interest or value. The most worthy of notice is a Roman coin, the legend of which is partially worn away; enough, however, remains to shew that it is a coin of Victorinus, who is included by Trebellius Pollio in his list of the thirty

tyrants, who ruled in the various dependencies of the Roman State, during the time it was dismembered from the Empire under the feeble reign of the imbecile son of Valerian. Victorinus was the third that ruled the province of Gaul, having previously been the colleague of his predecessor, Posthumus. He is spoken of as a man of singularly good abilities, and as possessing many of the highest qualifications of a general and statesman. On the obverse of this coin is a well-executed head of the Emperor, adorned with the customary diadem of the period in which he lived, and the following legend:—

IMP: C: VICTORINVS: P: F: AVG:

And on the reverse is a female figure, the legend around which is illegible. This coin is a good specimen of the art of engraving in Rome, at the time it was struck, which must have been about the year of grace 268; for he met with the fate of most tyrants, having been assassinated by one of his officers, whom he had most grossly injured and insulted, shortly after he had completed his first year's reign. It was found embedded in some cement still adhering to a portion of the old foundation walls, and with which it appears to have been faced. This curious circumstance leads very naturally to the inference that this must have been Roman walling; and that the "Great George" had been erected on the foundations of some Roman buildings which had previously stood here. And when we consider the nearness of Petworth to the site of the Roman Villa at Bignor, and to the Roman Via called Stane-street, it ceases to be remarkable that Roman remains should be found in and about it. This coin is of middle brass.

The other coins found were a silver coin, about the size of a shilling, the impression of which is effaced. Of the legend, all that remains is the three letters FRA. This is supposed to have been a coin of one of the first three Edwards, but to me it appears much more likely to have been of the reign of Charles I. or II.

A copper coin, the impression of which is also nearly effaced, but having the appearance of a penny of Charles I.

Also a halfpenny of William III. (William and Mary), dated

1697; four halfpennies of George III., dated 1775; and a mill-edged halfpenny of the same reign, dated 1806.

Three farthings of the reign of Charles II.; two dated 1673, and one 1674. Also three farthings of the reign of George II., all of them of the date 1737.

Three tokens were also found; one of them was a local token of William Manser, similar to that described in Vol. XVI., p. 309, note 3; the other two were halfpenny tokens of North Wales, which had probably been left by Welsh cattle-drovers frequenting the Great George Inn.

These coins and tokens are all in the possession of Mr. William Knight.

