

THE ANCIENT MERCHANT GUILD OF LEWES,
AND THE SUBSEQUENT MUNICIPAL REGULATIONS
OF THE TOWN.

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THE date of the foundation of the town of Lewes, like the source from whence its name is derived, is involved in much uncertainty and doubt. Many conjectures have, from time to time, been indulged in by Sussex historians in their endeavours to clear up these two important points, through which it is not my intention to follow them. All that I shall say of them is that while some are specious, none are altogether convincing; they leave the archæological mind unsatisfied. Nor have I any hypothesis of my own on either of these subjects to advance with any prospect of better acceptance than that of those who have preceded me in the same field of enquiry.¹ Sufficient for my present purpose is it to be able to assert, upon the most indisputable evidence, that though Lewes is not now the largest town in the county, Brighton having of late years increased so rapidly in size as greatly to surpass it in the number of its houses, and in the amount of its population; still it is *one of the* most ancient, if not *the* most ancient of our county towns, and indisputably our Shire Town.

Situated on a narrow pass of the Novus Portus, or Newhaven Estuary, and at the point of intersection of two important Roman roads, one running east and west, and the other north and south, its existence in early Romano-

¹ See on this subject Dr. Charnock's "Local Etymology," p. 156.

British times cannot, I think, admit of reasonable doubt. And although in proof of this I am unable to adduce as positive evidence of the fact any decided Roman *indicia* discoverable in the buildings of undoubted antiquity which are to be found in it; although no red mortar is to be observed, as at Pevensey, in the construction of any part of its ancient castle walls, nor have any votive tablets been disinterred, as at Chichester, in effecting any of its street improvements; still, Roman pottery and Roman coins have been found within the precincts of the town, and in its immediate neighbourhood; and many tumuli are still to be observed on its surrounding chalk hills, indicating that the Romans had a settlement here; and where, from the nature of the ground, could that settlement well have been but upon the site of the present town?

Early in the present century—the exact time I do not recollect, nor do I find any record of the fact—a Roman urn, filled with burned bones, was dug up in the garden of the late Dr. Mantell, in Castle Place, at the foot of the lofty mound on which the keep of the Castle stands, making it highly probable that a Roman fortress was situated on this elevated spot previous to the erection of the present Norman structure. Coins, too, of Domitian, Antoninus Pius, and other of the Lower empire have been occasionally found on the same cultivated banks.²

But to come down to a somewhat later period in the history of the town, we learn, from the Saxon Chronicle, that after Ælla's conquest of the Regnian kingdom, and the establishment of the South Saxon dynasty, Lewes became the capital of the kingdom of Sudsex (Sussex), and a part of the crown demesne;³ and it was possibly on account of its importance

² A Provincial History of Lewes, published in 1819, and declared to be compiled from original documents, states that the claims of the town "to a Roman situation are indisputable; for numerous vestiges of the fortifications, military weapons, urns, &c., of that enterprising and ingenious nation, present themselves to the notice of the Antiquary. A learned friend of ours," the writer says, "for whose opinion we entertain the highest respect, considers Lewes to be the

Mutuantonis of Ravennas; and many arguments might be brought forward in proof of this conjecture. However this may be, it appears certain that in the reign of the Emperor Claudius, about A.D. 47, Lewes, together with the rest of the kingdom of the Regni, submitted to the Romans."

³ Edward the Confessor is said to have had 127 Burgesses in the town under his own immediate protection.

as a stronghold between Regnum (Chichester) and Anderida that he is said to have left a colony of his own bondmen in it; and during the peaceful reign of his son Cissa, it appears to have become a very industrious and thriving town. In the days of the Saxon rule it was undoubtedly fortified.

The earliest notice of Lewes in the works of the Chroniclers is to be found in Fabyan, which he himself styles "The Concordaunce of Stories," which was first printed in 1516, in two vols., folio. Speaking of the town in the time of Alfred the Great, he says:—

"And yn the whyle that the King with hys hoost spedde hym thytherwoarde, they, leuing the strongholdes and castell garnysskede with men and vitayll, toke agayne shyppe, and fet their course in such wyse that they landed in Sussex, and so came into the towne of Lewes, and from thence toward London; and buylded a tower or castle near unto the river of Lewes. But the Londoners, herynge of theyr doynge, manned out a certayn number of men of armys, the which, with assistens of the men of the countree, put the Danys from the tower, and after bette it downe to the grounde. Soone after the King came downe thyther, and for he thoughte that rivershould be a meane to brynge enemyes efte soone into that countrie, therefore he commanded that streme to be deuyded into dyuers stremes, soo that, by reason thereof, there where a shyppe might sayle in tyme afore passed, than a lyttell bote myght scantly rowe. Than by presence of the Kynge, the Danys were forced to flee that countrie, and thense take agayne way toward Walys. This happened in the 21st year of the reign of Alfred. (892.)"⁴

The importance and extent of its mercantile transactions in Saxon times is shown from the circumstance that, when Athelstan issued an edict prohibiting the coinage of money, except in the principal towns of his kingdom, Lewes was excepted, and permitted to hold two mints, while Chichester, the only other town of any consequence in Sussex, possessed at the same time but one. Lewes, then under the Saxon Heptarchy, must have been the more considerable place of the two.

Among the Anglo-Saxon coins found by Mr. C. Ade in a garden at Milton Street in the year 1848, of which an account is given in Vol. i., pp. 40 and 41, are some both of Canute and Edward the Confessor, struck at Lewes as well

⁴ Extensive earthworks existing on the Wallands (walled-lands) on the north side of the town are urged in support of

a not very well authenticated surmise that a battle between Alfred and the Danes was fought here.

as at Chichester; and in the remarkable find of Saxon coins at Chancton, in Washington, in December, 1866, many of different types were minted at Lewes.⁵

The site of Lewes, indeed, would naturally lead to its mercantile superiority over Chichester. Standing, as it does, on ground gradually rising above one of the most considerable of our Sussex sea estuaries, the waters of which, coming in at Seaford, and flowing past Newhaven, must, in the Roman and Saxon periods, have flowed up to Hamsey and Barcombe, if not still farther northward every tide, ships of considerable burden would be able to navigate as far as this town, while Dell Quay, the Port of Chichester, is two miles from the city.

Having, too, the great forest of Anderida stretching one hundred and twenty miles or more in length, east and west, and about thirty in depth to the north and south, and with the chalk hills overhanging it on two of its sides, and a slope, on which it is built, and on which are pastured countless flocks of sheep, its trade, in timber and wool alone, must have been very considerable. Chalk, too, which was then becoming extensively used for building purposes, and iron, which it is now clearly established was among the earliest articles of manufacture in the county, and much of which must, in Roman and early Norman times, have been smelted a few miles to the north of Lewes, would also be among its articles of commerce and exportation.

It was not, however, until the Anglo-Norman period, and the assignment of the Rape and Barony of Lewes to William de Warren, the son-in-law, and companion of the Conqueror in his invasion of this country, that the town of Lewes attained to any very high state of importance as a place of trade. Having made the castle his residence, and feeling a deep interest in the prosperity of the adjoining priory of St. Pancras, of which he and his wife were the founders, he applied himself to render Lewes a town worthy of its natural and acquired position in the county.

What that position was at the time of such assignment we learn from the Domesday Survey. We there find that previous to the commencement of the Norman era the amount

⁵ See Mr. J. C. Lucas' paper on these coins in S. A. C., vol. xx., p. 212.

of the municipal taxes and tolls paid in the borough was £6 4s., and that besides the King's there were in the town Burgesses belonging to the Abbeys of St. Peter, Winchester; and of Battle, in Sussex; to the Bishop of the Diocese; and to the Manors of Southover, Rodmell, Ditchling, Chiltington, and Allington, amounting, on the whole, to 181. These paid each of them a stipulated sum, as a consideration for the protection and other advantages they received from the lord. Other manors in the immediate neighbourhood of the town possessed Hagæ, or houses with shops, in it. Of these there were 188, each paying a sum varying in amount from about 25s. to 7d. to one or other of these manors. At these shops the tenants probably dealt, and received shelter in case of danger.

Another tax levied upon the inhabitants of the borough was, that whenever it became necessary for the King to send an armed force to sea for the protection of the coast, if he did not himself attend in person, they were obliged to pay 20s. towards the expenses of the fleet, which sum they were bound to raise by a tax, to be levied rateably on the Burgesses generally, without any regard being had to peculiarity of tenure.

Market tolls, however, for articles sold, and fines for the more aggravated offences committed within the borough were amongst the most valuable of the privileges which Lewes enjoyed from the time of its being brought under the Saxon Heptarchy. At the period of the Norman Survey the amount of revenue arising from the former of these two sources was £34, which was an increase of £6 upon their value during the reigns of Edward the Confessor and Harold. It must be borne in mind that all traders were then obliged to resort to the nearest city or town for the sale of their most valuable commodities, all persons, by a Saxon ordinance, being restricted from selling any articles above the value of 20d. in any other way than in open market; and for some centuries Lewes was the only town in Sussex enjoying, and profiting by, this privilege.

As a sample of these market tolls, the owner of a horse brought within the limits of the borough for sale, paid 1d. to the constable or lord's bailiff (*præposito*), and if sold, the purchaser paid the same; the seller of

an ox paid 0½d., and of a man 4d.,⁶ from whatever part of the Rape of Lewes he might be brought for sale. And with regard to fines arising from the commission of certain offences within the town—although the Domesday Survey mentions the sum to be paid as a penalty for each offence, it does not state the aggregate amount per annum so received, nor have we any other means of judging of its annual value. The penalty inflicted on a murderer was 7s. 4d.; on a violater of female chastity, 8s. 4d.; and on an adulterer the same; and although these penalties were usually divided into three parts, of which the King had two parts, and the Earl one, in the case of adultery committed, the Archbishop of Canterbury appears to have had a singular interest in the penalty inflicted, probably in right of his manor of Malling. The words of Domesday Book are, “*Adulterium et raptum faciens viii. sol. et iv. den: emendat homo; tantidem fœmina. Rex habet hominem adulterum;—archiepiscopus fœminam.*”

On a captured fugitive the penalty was 8s. 4d.; whenever a coinage of money took place the borough was bound to pay to every master of the mint 20s.; and thirty inhabited houses, and twenty uninhabited in the Rape paid 26s. 6d.

The fishery also of the town must, at this time, have been very extensive; as a part of the acknowledgment due from the Burgesses subject to Winton Abbey, to that Religious House, was a chevage⁷ of not less than 38,000 herrings; and those subject to the manor of Southover paid to the lord a chevage of 1,600 herrings. Besides a money payment of 22s. the occupiers of the fortyfour Hagæ, subject to the manor of Rodmell, were bound to supply the lord with 4,000 herrings annually.

Such, then, being the town of Lewes in size, situation, and the importance of its mercantile transactions, at the time of, and previous to the Norman rule, some municipal governance would have been necessary for its general good. Accordingly we find after the division of the Saxon Heptarchy into counties, and inferior districts, which, if not commenced in, were completed as early as, the reign of Alfred, the jurisdiction of the Rape of Lewes was committed to an earl or alderman, and under him were associated for the government of the town the more wealthy and respectable of the Bur-

⁶ Villains (villani) were servants in the condition of slaves. When a farm was sold they passed to the purchaser with the land on which they resided, and might be put up for sale in any public market.

⁷ A Chevage, or Chiefage, as a tribute

in money or kind paid to the Lord by his villeins as an acknowledgement that they held under him. “Chevagium,” says Bracton, lib. i., cap. 10, “*dicitur recognitio in signum subjectionis et domini de capite suo.*”

gesses. And this fraternity was called "The Merchants' Guild" from the Saxon word "gildan," to pay, as I have already stated in my account of the guild of St. George, Chichester; (see Vol. xv., p. 165) each member being obliged to contribute periodically a stipulated sum towards the expenses of such guild. Previous to the days of Alfred, merchants resident in towns had formed themselves into voluntary associations for the purposes of greater peace to themselves, and security to their property; the members of such fraternities binding themselves to protect each other against any molestation which might arise in the exercise of their callings, of whatsoever nature they might be, as well as against any encroachments on their rights and privileges as merchant-traders, and against any fraud attempted to be committed on any one of them. To meet any expenses that might at any time be thus incurred, they taxed themselves for the first raising and after support of a common fund, out of which their police expenses were paid, and pecuniary compensation was also made for losses unavoidably sustained. They also chose one of their own body to preside over them as their head, who was called "The Reve," or bailiff, and who was invested by them with considerable administrative powers, and on whom the government and charge of the town more immediately fell. According to Camden, merchant-guilds at a later period acquired the privilege of holding certain pleas of lands, and of exercising other important rights within their own towns. These guilds were originally constituted without reference to diversity of trades and occupations; but as from particular local circumstances particular trades increased in importance and in the number of their followers, the members of each trade formed themselves into separate guilds, until each had its own particular guild, and its own separate rights and privileges.

At first guilds were not formally sanctioned by law. But towards the close of the Saxon dynasty, they were become so general, that they received authoritative confirmation; and one of the first acts of William de Warren, after he was established in the possession of the Barony of Lewes, and all its extensive rights and possessions, was to grant a Charter of incorporation to the Merchant-Guild of

the town of Lewes. He also encouraged many foreigners to settle in the same town, by which means its trade was very greatly improved. As the trading corporations or guilds multiplied throughout the land, privileges and exemptions were vested in them little inferior to those possessed by the lower order of the nobility. In all pleas, with the exception only of felony and treason, they could not be sued otherwise than in their own bergmote, or guildhall, where the alderman, or his deputy, presided to the entire exclusion of the King's Judges.

The merchant-guild of Lewes continued to enjoy uninterruptedly all the rights and privileges of a chartered company until the time of William de Warren, the third Earl of Surrey, and Lord of the Barony of Lewes, who for some cause or other—probably some insult offered, or offence given, suspended such rights and privileges; and they continued in abeyance until the year 1150, when his brother Reginald de Warren, who had been invested by Stephen with the government of the Town and Rape, during the time that William de Warren was absent in the Holy Land, reinstated them in the full possession of all that this William had dispossessed them of upon the condition of their paying 20s. to the government or prefecture of Lewes.

From this time to the middle of the sixteenth century we are left very much in the dark as to the situation of the Town of Lewes under the government and control of this fraternity; owing perhaps in some measure to the supposed loss of one of the town books, from which, had not this been the case, much valuable information bearing on the later history of this merchant-guild, might doubtless have been derived. Its loss, then, is much to be deplored by archæologists; particularly by those, who, like myself, are deeply interested in the ancient history of this town.

How long after this fraternity of merchants continued to exist as a guild or corporation, we have now no evidence to show. It is probable that it did not long survive the loss of its privilege of coining money, which must have ceased towards the close of the 12th, or quite at the commencement of the 13th century; for it is not included in the writs issued during the reign of John to the moneyers, &c., in the cities

and boroughs of the kingdom. Whether the members of this fraternity owed their downfall to the concealment of a most extraordinary and atrocious murder, committed in Lewes in the reign of Henry II., as is supposed by some to have been the case, I shall not pretend to determine. Possibly it might. So flagrant a dereliction of duty and obligation, if true, could not well have been visited with a less degree of punishment.

But though the fraternity were discontinued as a corporate body about this time, they appear to have been revived under a different form, and by a different name, soon after. For in the following reign the government of the town is represented as vested in twelve men selected by the inhabitants from among the most opulent and respectable of their body, acting by two of their number, who were chosen constables, and who selected from among their townsmen as their assistants two headboroughs. We have official mention of constables as the supreme authorities of the town in the murage grant to Lewes by Henry III., dated Northampton, May 3rd, 1266, the 50th year of his reign, which is addressed to them. By this grant they were allowed to tax certain specified articles brought into the town for sale, the sum realized by which taxation they were to expend towards defraying the expenses of supporting the town walls. And the sum so received and expended by them annually is the best evidence we have of the flourishing or depressed state of the trade of the town at that time, as well as of what kind the articles principally were which were brought into it for sale.

Besides the society of the Twelve, there was also a subordinate society, called the society of the Twenty-four, from which the vacancies occurring in the society of the twelve were annually filled up at a meeting directed to be held on Whit-Monday. I have already shewn that Brighton also was, from an early period, governed by a similar society.⁸ The members of the society of Twelve, to distinguish them from those of the society of Twenty-four, were dignified by the title of Barons. This society appears to have had the appointment of its members, and to have

⁸ See "Suss. Arch. Coll." vol. ii., pp. 41, 42.

regulated the affairs of the town wholly independently of the Stewards of the Lord, and of the Magistrates. In "the great Town Book," as it was called, to distinguish it from another town book, probably of much smaller dimensions, but certainly of an earlier date, called "the little Town Book"—the book to which I have already alluded as lost, and which is stated to have disappeared from among the Town Records in a very mysterious, not to say fraudulent, manner, and which is occasionally referred to in "the great Town Book"—we have unfortunately the earliest record of the Town Municipal Acts and Regulations now remaining. It commences in 1542, and in it these two societies of twelve and twenty-four are often mentioned. Mr. Rowe, whose name is too well known as a Sussex Antiquary to need further introduction here, and whose ancestors were members of this society, and served the office of constable—in speaking of Lewes, and the two societies, says that they have existed time out of mind, and that from among the members of the society of Twelve, one, by prescriptive right, was annually chosen senior constable by his fellow members, and the junior constable by the senior, with the consent of the jury customarily empannelled on the Law-day, out of such members of the society as may not as yet have served the office, and the constables, so nominated, the Lord's Steward was bound to accept, and to swear in to a due discharge of their duty. The headboroughs were chosen by the constables—subject, however, to the approbation of the same jury. The Law-day for the choice of constables was held on the Monday next after the feast of St. Michael. All rates made for the common good of the inhabitants (*pro bono publico, et communi utilitate Burgi*) were collected by the headboroughs and disbursed by the constables, and the receipt and expenditure so made, were submitted to and examined by the society of Twelve in the month of August or September in each year, and, if found correct, passed. The principal town charges in Mr. Rowe's time were for the support of a clock-keeper and bell-ringer; for the repairs of the Market and Sessions Houses; the bridge; the stocks; the cucking stool; the pillory, and the butts; for whipping rogues; conveying malefactors to gaol; suppressing disorders and re-

straining offenders ; with the addition, at a somewhat later period, of the King's provisions of wheat, oats, coals, carriages, &c., for standard weights and measures, and for the uses and charges customarily imposed on Shire Towns. In 1551, a new bridge, built at the expense of the two adjoining Rapes, is stated in the Town Book to have been finished. The assessment on Lewes Rape towards the expenses of this bridge are recorded to have been £87 5s. 3d. And the constables' accounts for the year 1570 shew an outlay for making a new pillory for the town at the east end of the Sessions House.

The society of Twenty-four are described as ranking next after the society of Twelve in age and respectability, and as having a similar reference to it that the London Common Council have to the Court of Aldermen.

In 1557 a halberd, or staff of authority, otherwise called a partisan, was given to the town by one of its Burgesses in Parliament named Slutler, which he directs to be borne by the senior constable for the time being on all public occasions. This was lost in 1589, having been entrusted by the elder constable to an inhabitant of the town deputed to go into France in charge of provisions sent to Dieppe for the use of the French, and not brought back again.

About this time the Burgesses of the town of Lewes ceased to be paid for their attendance in Parliament. The sum paid to them for legislative duties and services was so small that they possibly no longer cared to accept it.

The earliest code of rules and regulations adopted by the society of Twelve for their guidance and direction as a governing body which has come down to us, is dated 1550, and is to be found among the Town Records of that year ; they are short, consisting of twelve items only. Still, from them we may easily collect what the laws were, to the observance of which the members were bound as a brotherhood ; as well as what the principal duties and obligations arising out of them were. These laws were required to be read over to, and to be subscribed by each constable, as well as each newly appointed member of the society on the day of his election. By them a strict attendance of each member on the constable is enforced, whenever, from any cause, such attendance is re-

quired; they define the circumstances under which a prisoner committed to ward could be bailed; and they declare their own corporate body to be exempted from any such incarceration without the sanction and consent of the rest of the society; they assign to the constables the entire power of regulating the society's supper, and decree that all money not collected by them at the close of their year of office should be lost to them—that all forfeits for inexcusable absence of the members on the Law-day should be from time time applied towards the expenses of the constables' feast, and that the old constables, upon their going out of office, should yield up to their successors the Town-box, and Town-key, and all other things belonging to the town, which ought to be officially in their keeping; and they further enjoin secrecy on each of the twelve members in all matters brought under debate at their meetings for the common weal of the town under a penalty of 10s., the non-payment of which subjected the offender to absolute expulsion from the society.

What the particular articles were which, in the year 1577, the out-going constables delivered over to their successors are to be found recorded in the same Town Book, under that date. They are as follows:—

“The Town Box with one lock and two keys, in which the Town Evidences and Records were kept.”

“The Town Seal for Vagabonds.”

What this “Seal for Vagabonds” was, I have been unable to discover. The only conjecture I shall hazard upon the subject is that it might have been a seal kept and used for the sole purpose of passing vagabonds, or vagrants, who were very numerous and very troublesome in the different towns of the kingdom at this period, from one place to another.

“One Ancient” (*ensign*, or small flag). See Halliwell, *in voc.*

“One Drum with two drumsticks.”

“The Statute Books.”

These were the three volumes of “The Statutes at Large,” which, it appears, from another part of the same book, the constables, by the advice of the Fellowship, had purchased in 1573 for the use of the borough, at the cost of 32s.

“Twelve Leathern Buckets, Two great Iron Hooks, with Chains, and Two Fire-poles.”

“One Lock and Two Keys for the West Gate.”

The West Gate was used as the Town Prison.

“A Chest with Two Locks and Two Keys, in the Town House.”

What this chest contained, or to what use it was applied, does not appear. Of the two keys, by which it, as well as the Town Box, were each of them secured, one was, doubtless, in the custody of the senior constable, and the other of the headborough.

In addition to the above we have, in a list of articles, delivered over in 1587 by the old to the new constable and headborough, “Weights and Measures,” as before referred to, which, doubtless, were kept by the society as standards, for the regulation of those used by the traders of the town. “The Partisan,” also before alluded to, “an additional Drum, and two drumsticks complete, and Two Town Books of Record—namely, the Old Register Book, called ‘Parvus Liber de Lewes,’ and the Great Town Book.”

These rules and regulations of the society continued in force until the year 1595, when it became necessary to enlarge them, so as to meet the altered circumstances of the times; and eighteen fresh articles, embodying those I have just noticed, were drawn up and subscribed by both societies, at a general assembly, held for the purpose in the Town House upon Whit-Monday in that year. They enact that, before a member of the society of Twenty-four can be elected into that of the Twelve, notice of the society’s intention to elect, with the name and position in life of the party proposed to be elected, be given in the Town House, in the presence of the constables, on the afternoon of the day preceding. The adoption of this precautionary measure became requisite in order to secure to all parties interested in the proceedings an opportunity of investigating into the character, so as to form a judgment of the fitness of the person selected for the vacancy, and to give publicity to the society’s intentions; and in case of there being an equality of votes at any such election, it is provided that the senior constable shall have a

second or casting vote. That the new members might have some previous knowledge of the duties devolving upon them, they further declare that no person shall be so elected until he has been a member of the Society of Twenty-four one full year at the least, and has, during that time, "walked in the same company on the watch of Whit-Monday with the constables, according to ancient custom and order," and has been himself constable of, or has borne the same office, or some other "of more countenance and credit" in some other town. Upon all public occasions each member of the Twelve "was required to wear a gown, or some other equally decent and comely apparel, fit for, and becoming ancient townsmen."

The articles next provide for the due discharge of the duties of the fraternity generally. When warned by the headboroughs, at the instigation of the constables, each member was required at all reasonable times and seasons to appear without unnecessary delay at the Town House at the particular time of meeting appointed by them, whether his attendance was required or not for the service of the Queen (Elizabeth) then on the Throne of this Realm, or upon the business of the town, under a penalty, unless the approval of his absence was certified by the constables, or by a majority of the society of the Twelve, of three shillings and fourpence for every such offence, to be expended in gifts to the poor of the town. To secure the good behaviour of the members, they bound themselves under a penalty of twenty shillings, to be expended in the same way, not to conduct themselves when assembled for business, or at any other time, "stubbornly and frowardly" towards each other; but cheerfully and willingly to assent to all orders and decrees, and to aid in the collection of all assessments, and in the discharge of all payments to be made, after they have been sanctioned and approved by the majority present. It was also their duty to aid and assist the constables in the due discharge of the duties of their office, whether they consisted in correcting offenders, levying and collecting rates made for the service of the Queen, for the relief of the poor, or for the liquidation of the town charges. Every inhabitant of the town, whether he was a member of either of these two societies or not, was required by the same articles to produce on Whit-Monday in a serviceable state, either themselves, or by deputy, all the furniture of armour and weapons, with the custody of which they were charged for the Queen's Service, and to attend upon the constables and fellowship with them "in the Queen's Watch and walking," according to ancient custom and order, under a penalty for contemptuous refusal of committal to the Gate or Ancient Town Dungeon, which was so called from its being situated at, or very near to, the western gate, or entrance into the town; or of the payment of two shillings and sixpence, to be applied to the use of the poor of the town at the discretion of the constables.

Admission to the Society of Twenty-four was directed by ancient custom and order to take place upon the nomination of that of the Twelve; towards whom, and towards each other, each member elected was required to demean himself

“Respectfully and well,” walking with them on Whit-Monday in the afternoon, and supping with them in the evening, displaying their armour, and doing all such things as were required of the company generally, under a penalty of incarceration in the same gate (the West Gate) for the period of three hours, or submitting to a forfeiture of two shillings and sixpence, at the discretion of the constables. The election into the society of Twenty-four was directed to take place in the Town House on Whit-Sunday after evening prayer, and to every person so elected the articles were to be read over, after which they were further required to subscribe them.

The articles proceed, in the last place, to define the duties of the headboroughs, which were as follows:—

Diligently to attend upon the constable when on duty, carrying with them at such times, and upon such occasions, the staves belonging to their office. It was also their duty to levy and collect the town rates, when called upon by the constables to do so, to carry persons to the Gate, or to set them in the stocks, as the case might be, when ordered by the constables, or any four of the Twelve to do so, and not to leave the town during their year of office without a deputy being appointed, to be approved by the constables, to discharge in their absence their duty for them. For the peaceful ordering and well-governing of the town, and for the suppression and punishment of evil doers and disorderly persons, the constables, and two of the fellowship, to be selected according to a prescribed rule and order, with others to assist them, were expected once in every week at the least, and oftener if need be, from the first day of October to the last day of March in each year, diligently to search in the night time “all inns and ale-houses, and other places suspected of bad and disorderly rule, and to punish, according to the quality of the offence committed, all lewd persons, and all disorderly frequenters of such houses as they should find there.”

These articles consist of eighteen items, which are attested by the signatures both of the Twelve and of the Twenty-four. Among the benefactions to the town was one given in 1585, by the will of Mr. John Kyme, a successful and beneficent merchant of Lewes, of two sums, to be disposed of as follows:—one of £20, one-fifth of which he directs to be lent to each of five tradesmen of the town, and at the expiration of that term to five others; the other of 40s. per annum for the five years immediately following his decease, to be distributed

by the constables at their discretion to poor housekeepers and old maids. Against loss in the management of the former of these two benefactions, either through the negligence and carelessness of these officers in not taking good and sufficient bonds and sureties for the repayment of the money so lent, or in not keeping the bonds safely after they have been duly executed, the constables for the time being as trustees, were required by the articles agreed upon for its management, to make all deficiencies good; and they were further bound by a penalty of £3 to deliver such bonds over to their successors at the expiration of their year of office, and not to keep back any portion of the money in their hands for their own use.

We learn from the Town Records that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the societies of Twelve and Twenty-four were no longer restricted to the number of members originally prescribed, and from which they derived their name, but that they often consisted of many more, on which account they were no longer described as the societies of Twelve and Twenty-four, but as "The Societies commonly called the Twelve and Twenty-four." In 1591 the Society of Twelve appears to have consisted of eighteen, and that of the Twenty-four of nearly thirty members. In 1618 it is represented as having seventeen, and in 1626 nineteen members, three new members having been elected during that year; and the list containing six names that are not to be found in that of 1618.

It was, then, probably on account of the inconveniences which were found to arise from this variable, and from this time, constantly varying number of their members, that we find among the ordinances passed and subscribed by these two societies certain articles which were concluded and agreed upon to be observed and kept for the future by the inhabitants generally of the borough of Lewes, for the better ordering and government of the same, and also for the better increase and continuance of perfect peace and unity among them, which, for the efficient working of these societies, it was desirable should perpetually remain, and which articles were confirmed and subscribed at a general assembly, held in the Town House, upon Whit-Monday, the 8th day of June, in the year of our Lord, 1595. Of these articles the third is

“Item, that the company of *Twelve* shall not exceed the number of eighteen, nor the company of *Twenty-four* the number of twenty-seven members.” This regulation, however, appears not to have been very strictly adhered to, for we find subsequent lists of both Fellowships exceeding their numbers. The item, too, is curiously enough crossed out in the Great Town Book, but at what date does not appear; it was probably found inoperative, and therefore expunged. In 1633 the number of the Society of Twelve was still nineteen, six of the preceding list being no longer members. In 1634 the members were increased to twenty-four. In 1650 four new members were elected; but as with this addition the numbers stood at twenty-one only, seven members must have left the society.

The Society of Twenty-four, too, during the same period often exceeded the number of its members prescribed by this rule. Great irregularities were perpetrated about this time by both societies, which led to much dissatisfaction and complaint in the borough. Questions frequently arose as to the legality of their proceedings, which led to a dispute between the Society of Twelve and the Stewards of the Barony as to the right of this society any longer to appoint the town constables, and two constables were appointed by these Stewards from among the inhabitants of the town generally. In 1598 John Rowe was chosen constable, who was not at the time a member of either society; still the authority of the Society of Twelve was, though not *fully*, to a certain extent recognised and submitted to, so that in 1647, and again in 1649, a vacancy having occurred in the office of constables, by the death of one of them, the members of the Fellowship were allowed to appoint a successor from their body without any interference on the part of the lord's stewards, or of the justices of the peace. In 1663, however, a constable was chosen who was not of the Fellowship; and this state of things continued, sometimes the society appointing, and at other times the lord's stewards, until the memorable year 1666, when the authority of the Society of Twelve appears, by the Town Records, to have been again set at nought; the constables' accounts having this year been submitted to the new constables and the rest of the jury, for their inspection

and approval, instead of to the constables elect and the rest of the Fellowship, as heretofore; and at the January Sessions, held at Lewes in 1673, John Brett was appointed constable of the town by an order of court. This might have happened on the application of the Fellowship, for the purpose of compelling an unwilling nonconformist to serve the office after he had been duly appointed by them. But even taken in this point of view it shews the declining authority of its members; for such an exercise of judicial interference would have been unnecessary had they still retained their former power of enforcing their own orders and directions. Everything, indeed, tends to shew that they were now vainly struggling to prolong a doomed existence. Futile endeavours were made in 1698, and again in 1706, to give renewed life and vigour to the society. All attempts, however, to revive it and its powers were ineffectual; its authority was no longer recognized or submitted to, nor were its precepts any longer regarded. The constables were now regularly appointed at the Court Leet; and they alone made and collected the rates necessary for defraying the town expenses; and in 1720 the Society of Twelve ceased to be even individually represented by the death of Mr. Watts, its last member, after having existed first, as a Merchants' Guild, and afterwards as a Society of Twelve, for a period of eight hundred years or more.

I cannot conclude without mentioning that among the bequests made in 1611 by Thomas Blunt, a well-to-do barber of the town, was a silver cup and cover, double gilt, of the value of twenty nobles, which he gave to the constables and Society of Twelve, and which is still held by the constables for the time being, and used at the annual festivities of the constables and headboroughs, as a "loving-cup."

For an illustration of this old borough relic I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. W. E. Baxter.

