

## LEWES A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

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SOME 87 copies of the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser and Lewes Journal*, printed by W. & A. Lee, and dating from 1788 to 1793, having been presented to our Library by Dr. Woodward, formerly a member of our Society, I have gleaned from their columns the following extracts, which I trust may be deemed sufficiently interesting to the readers of our "Collections," as throwing some light on the life, manners and customs of Lewes and the neighbourhood, a century since, to warrant their appearance in the form of a note.

The first selection conveys the inference that our old town was to have been honoured by the presence of His Majesty George III. as a near neighbour.

Monday, June 15, 1789.—"The accounts in the London Press of the early part of last week, that the King would certainly go to Bishopstone were premature. That Lord Pelham has made an offer of it to his Majesty is certain; but whether it will be accepted or not as yet remains a doubt. Bishopstone is a delightful situation, and for advantage of exercise, and convenience of sea bathing, we think no spot can excel it. Besides the aromatic herbs, with which the downs that surround Bishopstone abound, impregnate the air in a manner that cannot fail to vivify and invigorate nature."

The following will show that his son, George, Prince of Wales, was a frequent visitor to Lewes:—

Monday, July 16, 1792.—"July 15th His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales honoured Lieut Col. Newton with his company to dinner at the Colonel's house, in Southover near this town. His Highness arrived here at six o'clock, and we never saw him appear in better health."

Monday, July 23, 1792.—"The Prince of Wales on Monday breakfasted with Lt. Col Newton at his house in Southover. His Royal Highness visited this town the three first days of last week."

Monday, Aug. 13, 1792.—"The weather proved highly favourable to our Races; but the company was not so numerous as might in consequence have been expected. On Friday and Saturday the

Prince of Wales appeared on the course, and his presence spread a glow of satisfaction, and pleasure over every countenance. His Royal Highness on both days honoured Sir Ferdinando Pole with his company to dinner. Lord Egremont and other noblemen were of the party."

Lewes, Sept. 24, 1792.—"On Wednesday His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales accompanied by a French gentleman, came in his curriole for an airing to this town; and immediately after returned to Brighton."

Lewes, Sept., 1793.—"On Saturday His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales honoured Lieut Colonel Newton with his Company to dinner at the Colonel's house in this town. Lord Cardigan, Mrs. Fitzherbert, Miss Pigot &c &c were of the party."

The old custom of "strewing" the archbishop, and his gifts on the occasion of administration of the rite of Confirmation are curious.

July 12, 1792.—"On Thursday the Archbishop of Canterbury confirmed at Buxted; and on Friday his Grace visited and confirmed at the Cliffe near this town. An excellent sermon was preached on the occasion by the Rector of Isfield, his Grace's chaplain who took his text from the 4th chapter of Timothy, verse 15 'Meditate upon these things.' The Archbishop gave two guineas to some poor old women who *strewed* him, one guinea to the clerk of the parish, one guinea to the organist, and one guinea to the ringers. After dinner his Grace accompanied by Lord. Sheffield left Lewes for Sheffield Place."

In another notice of a confirmation by the Bishop of Chichester, the writer appears to have made an error in his calculation of the possible number of candidates.

Lewes, Monday, July 30, 1792.—"On Thursday next the Lord Bishop of Chichester will confirm at this town at St. Ann's Church, when it is thought that his Lordship will administer the Church rite of confirmation to *many thousands*. The Bishop sleeps on Wednesday night at Glynde-bourne and will be here in good time the next morning."

The "state," not to say grandeur of Judges of Assize and Sheriffs a century ago, contrasts strongly with the severe simplicity of the present day.

Monday, July 20, 1789.—"The Judges of Assize on the Home Circuit being both Chiefs, they will be seen come into Lewes in more than usual state and to which the appearance of our Sheriff will add much grandeur. The Judges suite consists of two Marshals, two Cryers, two Trainbearers, two Cooks, two Butlers, two Coachmen, two Postillions, two Grooms, two Marshals servants, one Porter, and two Tipstaves."

Monday, Aug. 17, 1789 (*re* Prince of Wales' Birthday).—"The Sheriff for this County Sir Ferdinando Poole Bt was escorted to Bright-helmston from Lewes by his Javelin Gentlemen—these in the uniform of Buff and Blue made a gay and respectable appearance—At the Prince's house they set down their Sheriff—then repaired to the Green, a little from the town, where the Prince's Marquee, and two or three others were fixed. Upon the Prince's arrival there, they surrounded him, and gave him three cheers;—which he noticed in the most gentlemanly manner."

Monday, July 12, 1790.—"On Saturday last Colonel Pelham gave a turtle dinner at the Pelham Arms, in this town, to Sir Ferdinando Poole's late Javelin men, in return for the dinner given by them on the late Sheriff's going out of office, and on account of it's being the birth day of the Hon. H. Pelham his brother. After dinner many loyal and constitutional toasts were drunk, and the evening was spent with the utmost conviviality."

In crime and punishment we have the reverse side of the picture in the two next extracts, and we obtain a piece of information as to the locality of the "dread whipping post."

Monday, Oct. 10, 1791.—"Last Monday night a poisonous mixture was maliciously thrown into the dog kennel of Mr. John Chatfield (Tanner) of this town, by which six fine hounds, belonging to the Brookside Hunt, were poisoned and found dead the next morning."

Monday, July 23, 1792.—"Last Monday Henry Allcock was whipped at the cart's tail through this town, for stealing a sheepskin the property of William Iffard, of which he was convicted at our last General Quarter Sessions. The same day William Westbrook for stealing two shirts; and John Saunders for stealing a Jackass, were whipped *at the market post*. The former was afterwards discharged; but the latter was taken back to his old apartment in our house of correction, to be flogged a second time on that day three months."

The establishment of a Market in Lewes appears to have excited much interest in the town and neighbourhood from the notices here given:—

May 25, 1789.—"At a Meeting held in the Town Hall of Lewes on Wednesday the 20th day of May 1789, Francis Whitfeld and John Martin Constables Resolved—That a General Market for all kinds of Provisions, and other marketable Commodities, to be held every day (except Sunday) will be for the general good of the Town. Resolved Unanimously, That a Market for Live Stock, twice a Month, will be for the general good of the Town and Neighbourhood. Resolved that Nine or more of the Inhabitants and Householders within the Borough, paying Scot and Lot, be a Committee, to carry the above Resolutions, for the Establishment of a Market, into Execution, and that such Committee do meet on

Whit Monday at Six O Clock in the Evening, at the Town Hall; and afterwards on each other Monday, at the same Hour and Place."

Monday, June 22, 1789.—“At a meeting of the inhabitants of this Borough (Lewes) held at the Town Hall on Monday last, on the subject of the intended Market &c, it was resolved that the Select Committee be empowered to stake out a portion of ground in the Castle Yard, necessary for erecting a market place thereon, and to treat with the Proprietor for the purchase of the same.”

Monday, Feb. 6, 1792.—“Lewes Market. Notice is Hereby Given. That a Meeting of the Commissioners (appointed to put in execution ‘An Act for enlarging and extending the powers of the present prescriptive Market within the Town and Borough of Lewes, in the County of Sussex, and removing the same to a more convenient place within the said Town and Borough, or within the precincts of the Castle of Lewes aforesaid’) will be holden at the White Hart Inn, in Lewes aforesaid, on Monday the 27th day of February instant, at Six o’clock in the evening, for the purpose of executing the Contracts with the different Builders; also for securities for money borrowed on the credit of the tolls of the said Market; and also for other special purposes.

Lewes. Feby 5. 1792.

W. B. Langridge, Clerk.”

The removal of the old Sessions House, a confined and most awkwardly placed building, and the erection of the County Hall are chronicled as under:—

Monday, July 9, 1792.—“It is with pleasure that we can announce to our readers, that the removal of the Sessions House grows every day more probable. After the County Meeting the subject was introduced at the Star by Mr. Pelham, and warmly adopted by most of the company. A very capital plan of the intended building was produced, and is left in the hands of C. Gilbert Esq of this town, whose exertions have been in a very great measure promotive of this laudable undertaking. The estimate is £1700. From this are to be deducted £400 the sum at which the materials of the present Sessions House are estimated. The subscriptions on last Wednesday towards erecting this public and popular business (*sic*) were £50 from His Grace The Duke of Richmond; £50 from Rt. Hon: T. Pelham; £25 from R. Barwell, Esqre, and Sir Richard Hotham has promised to become a subscriber. It is intended to submit this measure to the consideration of our Magistrates at the ensuing Quarter Sessions, and we doubt not of the unanimous support of that Bench in favour of an undertaking which is no less necessary, than universally wished for.”

The Thespian art seems not to have enjoyed a very successful or prolonged existence in the county town, although at that period the theatre must have been one of the principal amusements of our ancestors.

Monday, Aug. 17, 1789.—“Theatrical Intelligence. Mr Fox with a spirit and perseverance has at length established a Theatre in this town (Lewes). It was opened by license on Monday Evening last. The neatness if not elegance of the building is a pleasing proof of the Managers zeal to procure public patronage, and it appears to be the public wish, that his laudable efforts may meet with the success they deserve.”

Monday, March 12, 1792.—“The lovers of dramatic entertainment will be well pleased to hear, that Mr. J. Palmer, of the Haymarket theatre has taken the Brighton and Lewes Playhouses. Such a manager and such a performer must give those Houses a degree of respectability and attraction very seldom attached to Provincial theatres.”

Lewes, July 16, 1792.—“The Nobility and Gentry are respectfully informed, the Theatre at Lewes will open this present Monday with An Occasional Address to be spoken by Mr. Palmer, after which will be performed, the Comic Opera of ‘Inkle and Yarico’ Inkle by Mr. Palmer. To which will be added a Comedy called The Lyar. Boxes 3/-. Pit 2/-. Gallery 1/- To begin at Seven o’clock. Plans for the Boxes to be taken at Lee’s Circulating Library, and of Mr. Thomas at the Theatre.”

This was on the occasion of the re-opening (and re-decoration of the Theatre) after Fox’s death. Palmer was of the Theatre Royal, Haymarket.

Monday, Sept. 3, 1792.—“Last week at our Theatre the public were twice entertained. On Thursday King Richard the Third. The part of Richard by Mr. Palmer, in which he acquitted himself so well, that we affect not to deal him the justice he deserves. The audience was fashionable but we are sorry to say not numerous.”

Lewes, Sept. 24, 1792.—“The performance for Palmer’s benefit at our theatre this evening promises to be productive of very much entertainment to the audience as Mr. Palmer, Mr. Palmer Junr. (from the Haymarket Theatre) and Mr. Parsons (from the Drury Lane House) are all to make their appearance in the ‘Surrender of Calais,’ and the ‘Critic.’ Several boxes are already taken, and should the weather prove favourable, we are pretty confident there will be scarcely an unoccupied seat in any part of the house.”

Old Gabriel, whose solemn tones had warned the townsmen of Lewes of the swift flight of time for very many long years, had, for the reasons given below, been silent for some 30 years, and whose voice had been last heard when tolled for the funeral of George II. in 1760, was now about to be hung in its present position. The anticipated pleasure of once more hearing their well-known monitor seems to have aroused a jubilant feeling

among the burgesses, which finds expression in the notices of the Press.

Lewes, Monday, July 30, 1792.—“Gabriel our great town bell, which has been silent ever since the death of our late King is this morning to be fixed in the tower built for that purpose, at the entrance of our new market-place, the idea of first filling it with punch is therefore given up.”

Lewes, Oct. 15, 1792.—“Gabriel our old Town Bell is positively to be hung to-morrow morning, in a handsome Tower erected for that purpose, at the entrance of our New Market Place. The above Bell was cast in the reign of Henry the Eighth whose bust it bears, and has not been heard since the death of our late King, for whose funeral it was tolled, and soon after taken down with the old Tower (a part of the broken Church of St. Nicholas) that contained it.”

The announcement of the opening of a new bank by the firm of Whitfeld & Co. reads strangely to those who for many years have been wont to think and speak of our time honoured institution as the “Lewes Old Bank.”

Monday, July 13, 1789.—“We mentioned in a former paper, that a new bank at Lewes, would speedily be opened under the firm of Whitfeld, Comber, Molineux, and King. The business is now transacting at their Banking House, which is completely fitted up for that purpose.”

It is most devoutly to be hoped that if in the future some ardent archæologist should dis-inter the bones of the “faithful servant,” recorded below, they will not be ascribed to the period of the Battle of Lewes, or regarded as the relics of the favourite Norman war horse of De Warenne.

Monday, June 29, 1789.—“Mr Cooper, Brewer of this town had a horse died last week that was upwards of thirty years old. The body of this old and faithful servant (who was ten years in the service of the late Mr. Chester) was very decently interred in the Castle Yard, where plenty of strong beer was distributed to the gravediggers and bearers on the occasion.”

The building trade in the locality of Lewes appears to have been remarkably brisk at the close of the last century, to judge by the following announcement:—

Monday, April 2, 1792.—“So great is the rage for building in this town and neighbourhood, that among all the brick kilns within two miles round there cannot be got a quantity of bricks sufficient for finishing our Bell Tower within the limited time. It were to be wished the Committee for inspecting that public work, would

cause it to be built to the elevation necessary for the free expansion of the sound of the bell. If not raised above the proposed height of 40 feet our curfew we fear, will not be sufficiently audible, for the roofs of the surrounding houses must stop the undulation of sound."

In these days of rapid locomotion and cheap fares, the expense of travelling by road between Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven, in the advertisement here given, is very striking, and accounts to some extent for the stay-at-home propensities of our forefathers.

Monday, June 18, 1792.—"Seaford & Newhaven. Diligence Sets out from the Pelham Arms, Seaford at six o'clock in the morning every Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and arrives at the London Coach Office, Lewes, in time for the London Coach, and waits for the return of the London coach Places may be taken, and Parcels taken in at the Pelham Arms Seaford; White Hart, Newhaven; and Coach Office, Lewes.

— Fares —

From Seaford to Lewes, each passenger	3 <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>d</sup>
From Newhaven to Lewes, do	2 <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>d</sup>

Newhaven, June 16.

William, Pope.

From the question and answer given below, our earliest printed History of Lewes appears to have been in active preparation and to have excited much interest.

Monday, June 11, 1792.—"To the Editor of the intended History of Lewes &c I have seen your proposals for publishing a History of Lewes &c and approve of the plan; but for the satisfaction of myself and some friends who intend to subscribe to the work, beg you to inform us of how many Numbers, it is to consist; at what time you commence with the Lords of Lewes, and whether they are given without interruption to the present day. I have John Portmarus's Letter concerning the demolition of St Pancras' Priory, and Thomas Wike's account of the Battle of Lewes. If they be worth your Acceptance, request you will signify the same in your next Lewes Journal. I am Sir with wishes for your success in so laudable an undertaking, Your very humble Servant Philarchaios. Brighton. June 9. 1792.

"W. Lee thanks Philarchaios for his kind offer; but hopes very soon to show him and the public that the best use has been already made of Wikes and Portmarus. As to the Queries, W. Lee begs leave first to inform him that the Work has been set for ten Numbers; but there being reason to think that some very interesting communications may occur before the work is finished; he will not limit himself to less than twelve Numbers, at the same time he thus publicly engages, that it shall not make more. The Lords of Lewes are given from the Conquest without any interruption, and with all attainable certainty from the commencement of the Saxon

Dynasty in this part of the Island. Any further favours from Philarchaios will be thankfully received."

The good people of our town seem to have appreciated the good things of this life, and to have enjoyed dainties which are now almost unattainable in these degenerate times. Such an announcement as under is calculated to make the mouth of a gourmand water.

Aug. 23, 1790.—"Advt. Fresh and *potted Wheatears* daily, and Venison on the shortest notice at the White Hart, Lewes."

The large influx of refugees at this time seems to have called forth the sympathy and proverbial hospitality of our countrymen in favour of the unhappy sufferers. At the same time it aroused in the minds of many a fear that the supply of provision might run short and high prices prevail.

Monday, Sept. 17, 1792.—"Those who are desirous of promoting an hospitable reception of the unfortunates who are cruelly driven from France, and land on the Coast of Sussex, are requested to meet at the Star Inn, in Lewes, on Thursday next at 12 o'clock."

Lewes, Sept. 24, 1792.—"There was a Meeting at the Star in this town on Thursday (20th) Lord Sheffield in the Chair, for the purpose of concerting the best means of uniting the exertions of this county in favour of those who by unexampled barbarity are driven on our Shores. Gentlemen attended from different parts of the coast to give information of what had been done. It was well observed at this meeting that the arrival of these unfortunate people was not a matter of choice. That if we refused or rejected relief to them in their distressed situation; it would bear an everlasting reproach on the national character, which had been famed for generosity and humanity. That the notion of causing a scarcity could not seriously be believed by any man of reflection. That if ten times the number should arrive it would be imperceptible in the consumption of provisions within this island. That the rise in meat had taken place before they had arrived in any number, and that the increased rise in the price of corn; happens of course in consequence of the alarm of a bad harvest. It was further observed that on the return of three or four regiments from our foreign garrisons, that no man ever pretended to be alarmed on the account of a scarcity of provisions. It does not appear that more than 11 or 1200 have landed in Sussex, and that almost all of them go to London."

The last extract records, in the brief space of an advertisement, what was probably the last scene in the history of one of our stately Sussex homes, once a ducal



residence, but now, alas, swept entirely away and become a thing of the past.

Monday, Oct. 8, 1792.—“Bishopstone Place. To be Sold by Auction by Verrall & Son. On Monday the 15th instant at Bishopstone Place in the County of Sussex. A variety of Household Furniture formerly the property of His Grace The Duke of Newcastle Consisting of 12 choice old feather beds and appurtenances, sundry old tables and chairs, dairy and brewing utensils, a large wind up roasting jack which carries five spits, three copper boilers, two stew pans, five pork tubs, and about fifty lots of kitchen furniture. Also about *twenty thin cheeses*. To begin at 10 o'clock in the morning.”

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