

PLATE I. PEACOCK'S SCHOOL, RYE.

# PEACOCK'S SCHOOL, RYE, SUSSEX.

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PEACOCK'S SCHOOL, known locally as the "Old Grammar School," is situated in the High Street of Rye, and facing south-east looks almost directly up the centre of Lion Street.

The building which can be seen to-day in almost its pristine beauty, was erected in 1636, by a Thomas Peacock, or Pecocke, a Freeman and Jurat of the town of Rye.

On the 10th day of December, 1638, two years after the building had been erected, Peacock had drawn up his will, which stated amongst other things, that "he was minded and determined to found a free school in Rye for the better educating and breeding of youth in good literature," and further that he had "erected and built a house in the Longer Street (now known as High Street), which he intended should be employed and converted for the keeping of the said school."

This will further allowed for a sum of £990 to be expended in lands to create a rent charge of £32 per annum, and that a rent charge of £4 per annum out of the tenement in Rye, known as "The Mermaid," should be added to the £32, thereby making an annual sum of £36 which was to be paid to the schoolmaster after the deductions for necessary repairs to the school building.

Peacock further desired that the School premises and all monies and land for its upkeep should be vested in the Mayor, seven other Jurats, and one inhabitant, all of Rye, to be held in trust, for the sole purpose of founding a free school for the benefit of the poor of Rye.

Upon the death of Peacock, some time between 1638 and 1644, the will was declared and led to the conveyance of the property and land to the Corporation of Rye in a deed dated the 16th day of October, 1644.

Regulations were then drawn up by this body for the government of the School, and they provided amongst other things that no children should be admitted until they could read the Old and New Testament; and that when admitted they should be instructed in grammar and Latin and Greek Authors.

The first master to be appointed after the establishment of the school was Mr. Hartshorn who, according to Mr. Holloway in his *History and Antiquity of Rye*, qualified several pupils for the University.

It is now necessary to consider the documents relating to another local charity, known as the Saunders' Charity.

Mr. James Saunders, a yeoman of Winchelsea, probably in imitation of Peacock, made a will dated the 7th day of January, 1708, allowing for his personal estate to be placed out at good interest after his decease, for a period of ten years. At the termination of this period the monies were to be called in and a convenient school was to be purchased or provided, together with a "good, sober and discreet schoolmaster, who should instruct the poor children to read English and write, and cast accounts, and to teach and instruct them in the art of navigation gratis." Saunders allowed for the whole of these matters to be left in trust to the Mayor and Council of Rye, stipulating that the number of children to be educated at one time should not exceed seventy.

The will further allowed for the Mayor and Corporation of Hastings to receive yearly the accounts of the Charity School, and that if the Rye Corporation abused the trust, the latter was to be settled upon Hastings.

Mr. James Saunders died in 1709, and after waiting until 1719, in accordance with the will, the executors bought an estate in Udimore for £720. In March, 1720, the Mayor and Jurats drew up the orders for the

School. They arranged that a convenient schoolroom should be provided, and that a master should be appointed from Lady-day for three years at a salary of £20 per annum. In their second article they declared that "the founder of the school being a dissenter, and no person or persons, either of the Church of England or of the Protestant dissenters being excluded by the Founders' will from the same privilege with those of his own persuasion, no schooler or schoolers shall be required by the master to goe to any place of worship or to learn any catechism without the consent and approbation of his or their parents or guardians, soe as they goe to some place of worship on every Lord's Day."

The two Charities were at this period quite separate, but on the death of the Rev. Mr. Collett, the headmaster of Peacock's, in 1790, the Rev. Mr. William Jackson, headmaster of Saunders's was in 1791 appointed also to the mastership of Peacock's. He received from the latter the rent charge or salary of £32 and 50s. per annum and had permission to instruct the scholars admitted under the will of Saunders, in the school-house erected by Peacock, in which there were "two good and sufficient rooms fit for the purpose of keeping separate schools."

The Saunders School was now saved a rent for a school-house, but their affairs were becoming very unsatisfactory. The number of poor boys educated for six years from 1803 were as follows:—

1803, 16 boys;	1804, 14 boys;	1805, 14 boys;
1806, 16 boys;	1807, 14 boys;	1808, 15 boys.

The neglect was so glaringly apparent that in 1812 an application for redress was made to the Court of Chancery by Captain Thomas Clark, and Thomas James Breeds. The Master of the Rolls, after due consideration of eight years, gave his judgment in 1820, ruling that the two schools were to be separated and a master appointed to each. The master of

Peacock's school was to educate 50 boys, and the master of Saunders' school 70 boys.

These regulations were not to be carried into effect until the costs which amounted to the enormous sum of £900 were paid. Having been ordered to liquidate this sum at the rate of £30 a year, and the decree being dated February 8th and 10th, 1820, it would thus remain undischarged until February, 1850.

To obviate the disadvantages arising out of this costly suit, the trustees, upon the death of the Rev. Mr. William Jackson in 1828, separated the two schools, and appointed the Rev. Mr. Robert Rowe Knott, Master of Peacock's and Mr. William Stone Stocks, Master of Saunders's. Upon the former leaving Rye in 1835, the trustees appointed Mr. George Easton to the vacancy of Peacock's.

Easton, according to William Holloway in his *History and Antiquities of the Ancient Town and Port of Rye*, was required to educate 40 boys, "to whom he did ample justice, instructing those in Latin whose parents desired it." Holloway further states that "under his (Easton's) management the school is of great value to the Town. The education bestowed on the boys could not be obtained anywhere at a less expenditure than £25 each, consequently the school is worth to the parents whose children are educated there fully £1,000 a year. Thus, seeing how valuable this establishment is to the Town, and how experienced a Master now presides over it, it is only to be regretted his emoluments are so inadequate to his services."

Whether this panegyric was undeserved or whether Mr. Easton found the gigantic task too great for human labour, it is impossible to ascertain, but that he did fail in this respect is at least certain. In 1867, the assistant Commissioner visited the School, and in his report (*Sch. Inq. Rep.* XI, 258), stated that the Master (Easton), "told me he had not time to teach any grammar, and declined to have the boys examined in it. . . . Neither navigation, which is required by

Saunders' Statutes, nor Latin, which is required by Peacock's, is taught in the school."

At length, on the 9th of September, 1884, a scheme under the Endowed Schools Act, was approved by Queen Victoria in Council, and the two schools were again amalgamated under the name of Rye Grammar Schools. A new site was acquired in the Grove, and buildings were erected to accommodate over 160 students. The original building we are studying was acquired by a local syndicate for the purpose of preserving the front elevation, and it is now used as a Conservative Workmen's Club.

William Makepeace Thackeray in his unfinished novel, *Denis Duval*, mentions that young Denis trudged each week from Winchelsea to "a famous good school, Pocock's Grammar School at Rye, where I learned to speak English like a Briton-born as I am. . . . At Pocock's I got a little smattering of Latin, too, and plenty of fighting for the first month or two."

Having fully studied the history of this building we can now contemplate its architecture.

The main or south-east elevation, which is that to the High Street, is symmetrical in design, and is with one small exception entirely faced in bricks, measuring five courses to the foot. The façade is divided into five divisions or bays by four complete pilasters to the central portion, and two half pilasters where the building terminates against those adjoining it on either side. These pilasters project beyond the face of the main building, and stand upon an attic base, the lower member of which, to give a horizontal line, is run through the recessed divisions, only at a higher level. It is in this portion that the deviation from brick occurs, the lower member of the base being faced in rough random stone, with ragged irregular brick quoins.

At the two extremities of the building and level with the pavement but for the slight gradient to the latter are two semi-circular arched doorways, the one on the left facing the building serving as a means of entrance to the ground floor room, the other on the

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HIGH STREET RYE  
SUSSEX

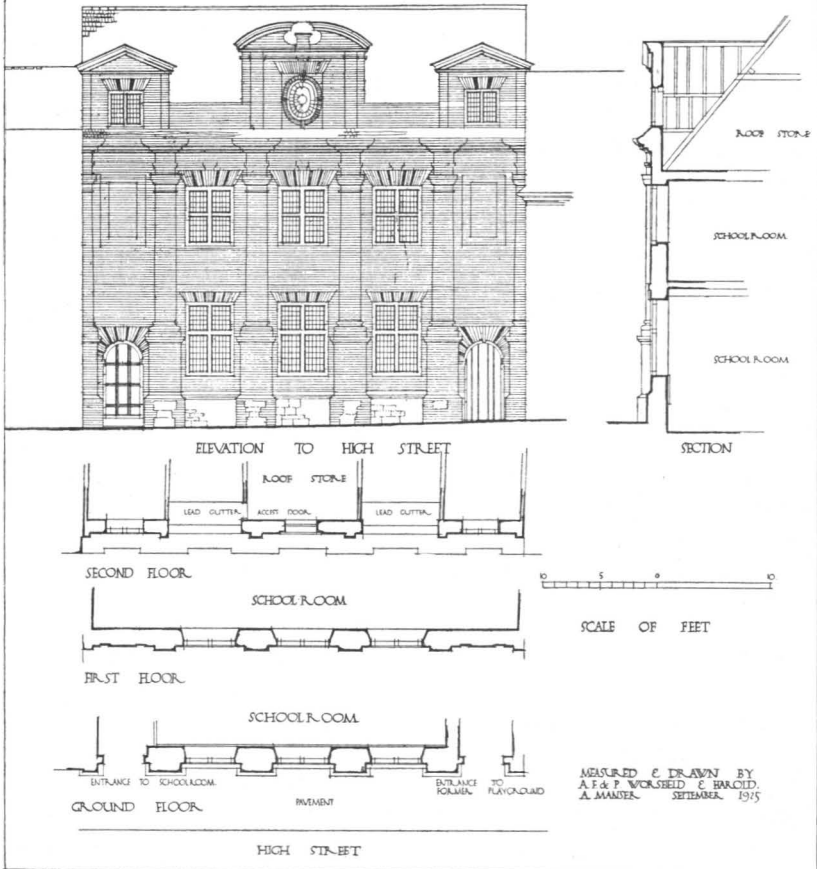


PLATE II.

right leading through a passageway to the rear of the building and to the yard. The arches are in rubbed bricks and coarse jointed, and are channelled to form alternate projecting voussoirs, and projecting key stones.

The remaining three central bays each contain a large two light transome window, with flat arches over in rubber bricks and with the same treatment as the semi-circular arches. These windows light the large ground floor room and immediately above their arches, a plain projecting brick band reduces the appearance of height to the recessed divisions, and butting into the pilasters instead of running through the width of the shaft, gives to these latter an added height and dignity.

Central over the ground floor windows are three slightly smaller ones lighting the first floor, whilst at the two extremities and central over the doorways are two plain projecting brick panels.

Immediately above the first floor windows, (the architrave moulding in fact forming a finish to the key stones) is the cornice and architrave. Above the cornice and at the two extremities of the building are two dormer windows with brick sides and splayed brick pediments over, whilst over the centre bay is another dormer window in brickwork, but carried up higher to give a culminating point to the design, this dormer having a curved brick pediment. Between these dormers and built up from the cornice is a brick parapet wall finished with a single projecting course, and cementing together as a whole the otherwise disjointed features in the design. Behind the parapet the old tile roof steeply pitches up to the ridge. The dormers besides giving added dignity to the design serve to light the store contained in the roof.

The whole of the present frames to the windows are modern, the original stone frames no doubt owing to decay having been substituted some years ago for wooden ones.

The motif throughout this building is simple and



unostentatious, the most humble of the orders, that of the Tuscan, being taken for the main theme. The architect, who is unfortunately unknown, did not trouble to adhere exactly to the orthodox rendering of the Tuscan order, but subordinated it to the exigencies

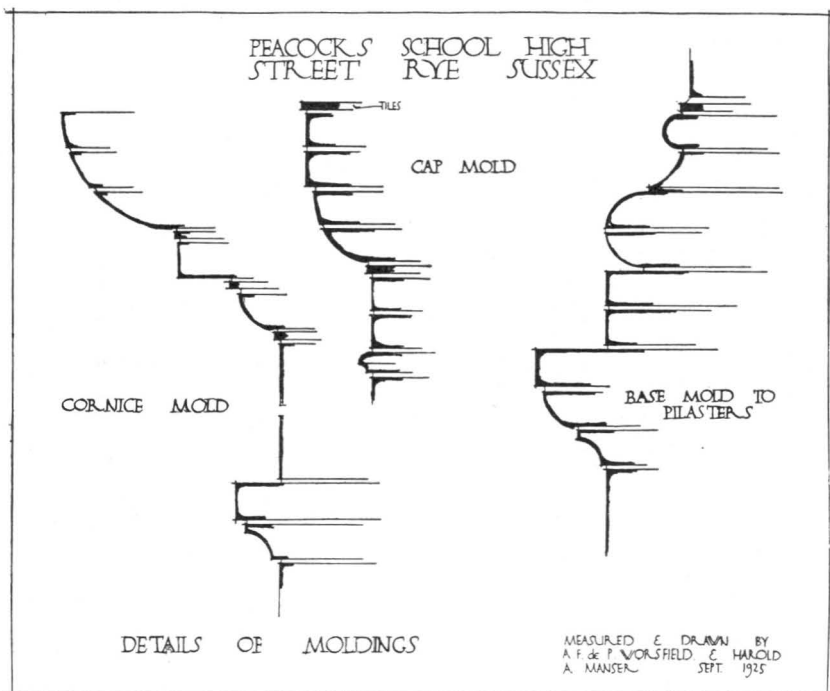


PLATE III.

of his materials. Bricks are not a suitable medium for delicate work, and realising this, the designer, with strength and originality, arranged his mouldings in generous curves, leaving them free from small and subtle members.

It is generally accepted that the revival of brickwork in this country in the reign of Henry VIII was chiefly due to the importation of workmen from Flanders where, together with Holland and Germany, the art of brickwork had attained a much earlier popularity. It is therefore interesting to observe that in East Street,

in Rye, there exists a house built of small yellow bricks and resembling what are now known as Dutch clinkers. These bricks were almost certainly imported from Holland where exactly similar bricks are to be found at Gouda, and elsewhere baked from the local river mud.

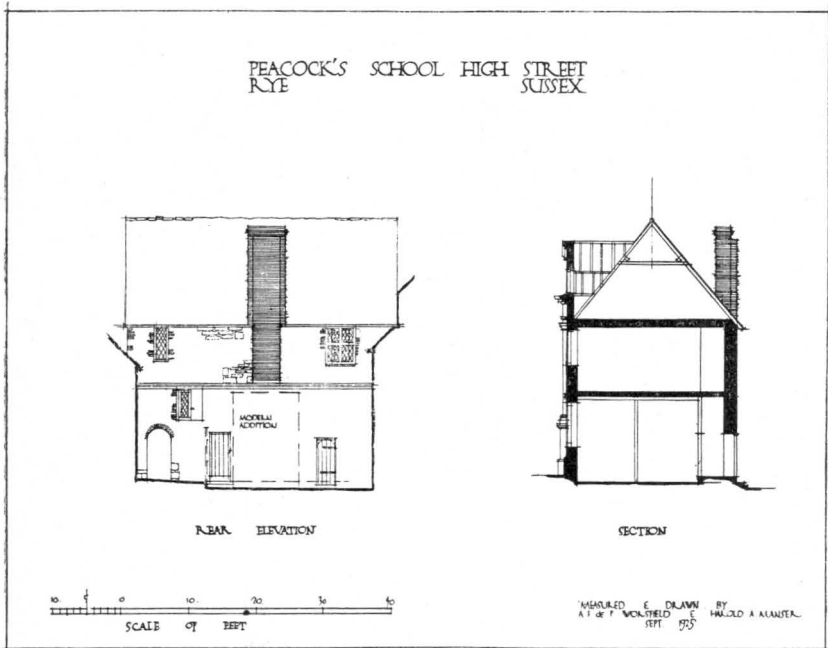


PLATE IV.

Whether the bricks for the Grammar School are Flemish or English is a matter for conjecture, but that bricks were being made in Sussex at the period when the school was erected is well known. That bricks were scarce at this period is obvious, either through the difficulties of importation from abroad or through the small number being produced in this country, for the rear elevation of the School building is completely faced with rough squared stone.

We now arrive finally at the plan and accommodation of this building. The whole of the ground floor which is 12 ft. 6 in. in height, is with the exception of



the passageway at the side to the yard, and the enclosed staircase, one large room. The walls are not built square, but approximately the room is 30 ft. 0 in. long by 21 ft. 4 in. at its widest part. Modern columns have been inserted under the old beams to assist in carrying the floor over, and the present occupiers have found it necessary to erect a lobby partition and a bar fitting. This room is lighted by the three large windows appearing in the front façade, and has two doors opening into the yard at the rear, in addition to the entrance doorway.

The first floor, access to which is obtained by means of a steep flight of stairs profuse with windows, is 8 ft. 9 in. high and is retained as one large room, measuring 37 ft. 6 in. in length and 21 ft. 9 in. in width. The additional length over the ground floor is due to this room stretching over the passageway below, and the additional width is due to the reduction in the thickness of the enclosing walls. Apart from the three large windows appearing on the front elevation, this room is further lighted by a window in the rear elevation. Access from this room to the second floor which is merely the roof space, is obtained from an enclosed staircase in one corner of the room.